

Coyote Dancers

Attitude

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Surely it is a reflection of Maher Benham's multiple professional interests that this presentation was more engaging than many one-choreographer modern dance evenings. As a teacher Benham currently divides her time between the Martha Graham School, Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theater and Jivamukti Yoga Center. This substantial program seen at the Sylvia and Danny Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College in June beautifully encompassed the inherent variety of approaches to movement she has developed.

Most striking were the spiritual/inspirational pieces. *Angels of the Presence* had Trobrien Pollard as a kind of creator figure infusing life-giving force into three couples against a starry background. Benham developed a fluid movement to reflect William Blake's mystical poetry set for tenor and slightly dissonant strings by Quentin Chiappetta, musical director for Coyote Dancers. For this performance Kaleidoscope String Quartet was joined by vocal soloist Benjamin Sosland. Benham's customary device of creating a pair of opposing groups of dancers in separate parts of the stage is put to especially good effect in this poetic paean to nature. Luigi Roncalli used leotards pierced by well-placed openings in a different pattern for each dancer. Two standouts among the six-person ensemble were Ariel Bonilla and Daniel Cordoso. *Night of Light* for



eight women in white dresses to show off their long flowing hair joined the suggestion of the earliest days of modern dance with Isadora Duncan to the clarity of synchronized swimming. *Stapupu* for men aged from 17 to 76 was the ideal counterbalance—a thoroughly contemporary feeling with its unabashedly masculine energy. In this piece Benham establishes an atmosphere of ritual in which authority and traditions are passed from the older generation to the younger one, just like with our dance heritage. Led by Dudley Williams as *The Visionary*, nineteen men demonstrate the diversity of experience possible within a traditional setting; Daniel Bernard Roumaine's sound design and percussion performance in the pit lent authenticity to the scene. An arrow-shooting movement is a liberally-used motif; the dancers have designs painted on their chests and left upper arms, courtesy of Fred Hatt and Mark Chamberlin.

Benham appeared in two solos that highlighted her sharp, energetic modern dance style. Dressed in a black dress over pants South-Asian style (costume by Roncalli), she skimmed pockets of bright light (design by Mark O'Connor) on the stage while maintaining judicious audience contact

for *Gone Again*. In *Maher, It's Donald* she beautifies herself while listening to messages on her answering machine. Relieved of the amusing sound backdrop, this piece could become a remarkably creative duo for her and a Thonet chair. Another piece in this modern vein for two couples seemed dated because of the musical setting of Beethoven piano music. *The Dream* appears to be a look at intermittently contested relationships, but Nixon Beltran's costumes layer on an inscrutable message.