

DANCE DIARY

By Jennie Schulman

Dancing on Solid Ground

I must confess that I went to see Coyote Dancers at The Sylvia and Danny Kaye Playhouse on Sept. 17 thinking, "This group founded by choreographer-artistic director



Daniel Greenhaus

The Coyote Dancers

Maher Benham has only been in existence since 1993, so don't expect too much." But my initial glimpse of the company in "Terra" completely enchanted me. The dancers performed so harmoniously that you would have believed they had been around indefinitely.

"Terra," performed to music by Henry Purcell, turned out an elegiac work in memory of Judith Brown. Inspired by Ms. Brown's paintings and sculpture, this could also be seen as a paen to earth's bounty, for the abundant glorious movement seemed life-affirming. Costumes in varied pastel shades, designed by **Russ Volger**, flattered all the dancers.

A trio for **Maher Benham**, **Carlos Fittante**, and **Marc Weiss**, titled "The Crossing" and performed to music by Beethoven, was inspired by these words of Chief Seattle: "There is no death. Only a change of worlds." The trio may

be in limbo, about to make the journey to the other world, or to journey into each other's emotions. It's a complex work, indeed—one that reaches several climaxes, though I could have wished for a bit of pruning.

Three couples are involved in "Passion Flowers: Journey to Ecstasy," performed to a new score by **Quentin Chiappetta**. For a change the work turned out to be exactly as indicated by the title—a study in the violent aspects of love.

One of the most profoundly moving solos seen in many a day was "Maher, It's Donald," which the choreographer performed. Maher is seated, attempting to put on makeup, when she is interrupted at intervals by voices. One of these is the hesitant voice of a fan or close friend, making superficial mouthings to which she moves in abject misery. This cascades to a crowd voicing insincere dialogues, which finally drive the dancer to fold into herself, lost in total madness.

Perhaps this was a personal statement of a dancer's torments, but it could very well be the portrait of any artist (performing or graphic), who strives for recognition but is constantly frustrated by lack of understanding on the part of unfeeling hordes.

The pas de deux "Under My Skin" saw Ms. Benham and **Bernd Michael Teichmann** in exotic sculptural studies that mirrored the exigencies of love. We were reminded of Rodin's wonderful sculptures on the serene aspects of the subject; we couldn't help thinking that the sculptor would have approved of Ms. Benham's stunning patterns.

"Bràithrean Triuir: Brothers Three" saw a rather ingenious creation which was performed with abundant verve by **Ian Betts** and **Hef Daniel**. The Scottish theme had two rival siblings vying with each other in dance as well as efforts at domination. The third brother accompanies the two dancing brothers on the Scottish bagpipes.

Ms. Benham introduced variations on a Highland Fling that resulted in the novel, most welcome work. **David Watson** was the lonely piper brother.

Speaking of the truly unusual, "Sipapu: The Land Where Your Eyes First Opened," a work conceived by Maher Benham for 17 men, formed a highly satisfying conclusion to the program.

Inspired by words from the Hindu epic *Bhagavad Gita*, the choreographer chose wisely in her utilization of veteran dancers **Ted Dalbotten** and **Stuart Hodes** as The Sages and **Daniel Maloney** as The Polestar. Ages of the males ranged from the teens to the 70s, since the story deals with fathers, grandfathers, sons, and grandsons "On the field of Truth, on the battlefield of Life." There were masterful performances by **Ian Betts** as The Warrior, **Tadej Brdnik** as The Seeker, and **Hef Daniel** as The Visionary.

Maher Benham's work stems from Martha Graham's influences. The great lady, we felt, would have been proud of Benham.

Jennie Schulman is Dance Editor for Back Stage. If you wish to submit material and information regarding your dance performances for her consideration, send all materials to Jennie Schulman, Dance Editor, c/o Back Stage, 1515 Broadway, 14th fl., NYC 10036. Include a contact phone number.

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