

# WRSU 88.7 FM

THE ONE AND ONLY

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FINE ARTS REVIEW---DANCE

MAHAR BENHAM & COYOTE DANCERS at Marymount

Air Dates: 11/14-11/20/94

Founded in January of 1993, Coyote Dancers is the progeny of Mahar Benham. Formerly of the Martha Graham company, Benham is the director of the Graham School's Children's Program and is on the faculty at Marymount Manhattan College and the Ailey American Dance Center. On stage, she disproves the "those who can't, teach" cliché rather soundly. Believe me, she can!

I recently caught a program of her works performed by her and her company at Marymount's Great Hall, and there's a lot to recommend here.

The opening piece, TERRA, was set to music by Purcell and had a distinctly neoclassical flavor to it, with a number of spectacularly lovely cascade effects executed by the twelve dancers in the piece. Benham clearly possesses a cool command of a large canvass.

Benham, herself, dances the solo DEVACHAN. The often intensely dramatic angularity to her movements, aided by a stunning balance and extension, should make this a signature piece for her.

THE ONE has a choreographic structure as complexly baroque and emotionally stirring as the Bach partita to which it is set. Soloist Vasco Giovanelli rises to the challenge with some gasp-inducing feats of altitude achievement.

The quirky "MAHER...IT'S DONALD" is danced by Benham to a looped recording of a cryptic 'phone message. Both her dancing and her choreography are, at turns, sensuous, vibrant, and pensive.

EMANATING THE ESSENCE, a female duet, seems a hybrid of Graham and Ailey with the best aspects of both synergistically charging both the piece and the two knockout dancers. Karen Kopf and Maxine Sherman are a match both in technique and charisma.

Finally, we come to Benham's masterwork of the evening. SIAPAPU: THE LAND WHERE YOUR EYES FIRST OPENED, is a sprawling, roiling panoply of the human spirit. Inspired by the Bagavad Gita, and danced by no fewer than seventeen men of ages varying from early teens to early '70's, the effect here is kaleidoscopic. At times, a bit too busy, it nevertheless vividly renders a process of transcendence and spiritual renewal. Although the work never loses a solid ensemble feel, it is possible to single out Rael Lamb for kudos. Lamb, as "the Visionary," exhibits a take-you-by-surprise agility and projects a fiercely-felt inner passion that make him visually galvanizing.

This is not a perfect company. While uniformly competent, the troupe varies greatly in virtuosity (something not entirely unprecedented in a company less than two years old). But, Benham so obviously has the imagination and vision to shepherd them, that Coyote Dancers should be garnering more and more attention in the coming months and years. For WRSU-FM, this is John Michael Koroly.