

Extemporary Dance/The Place

Clement Crisp

American Suite, which is the title of Extemporary Dance's new programme for the spring, is an evening of trans-Atlantic modernism. David Gordon has made—the cult word is “constructed”; never “choreographed”—*Bach and Offenbach*, while Viola Farber provides *Winter Rumours* and *Take Away*. I suppose that one fair success (*Winter Rumours*) out of three in an evening such as this is not a bad score, though there are factors militating against the evening's chances in the clothes that Craig Givens bestows on the dancers. I never cease to be amazed that the New Dance crowd feel so urgent a need for glumness in design. They come on stage looking their worst in costumes baggy and dreary, or down-right bellicose in their sexual ambiguities: they appear to have dressed while on the run from an Oxfam shop.

Bach and Offenbach lasted for 40 minutes, or was it 40 hours? Its cast, pounding and pacing over the Place's dance area, touched and passed, and fell repeatedly into each other's arms in the sacred procedures of Contact Improvisation. Ideas were stated, repeated, turned in diverse physical permutations, as Bach's first cello suite was

played live, to be followed by Offenbach's two cello suite, which was put through an electronic blenderiser to no happy effect.

The movement went on and on, relieved by the sure dancing of Jon Smart and Sharon Donaldson, both one-time B.P. Apprentices with the company, and examples of the excellence of the new generation of British contemporary dancers. The piece itself is to be suffered through.

Viola Farber, formerly with Merce Cunningham's company, is a creator of unexpected effects, of danced pianissimos that are broken by abrupt sforzandos of action, movement bursting out of sustained phrases like a sudden cry. *Winter Rumours*, set to seven Russian folk-songs (also performed live), shows white-clad dancers held in poses which give way to physical exchanges that are by turns conversational or abrasive in temper. There are little soliloquies of dance that catch the eye by their unexpected angles, their quick twists and flickers of dynamics. This is an individual, allusive and witty style, and even at its most disjunct it yet holds together because of Miss Farber's control of the language.

(I was reminded at times of Stevie Smith's poems). Odd to report, then, that the second Farber piece, *Take Away*, should prove so flat. Extemporary's publicity alleges that it is a “wicked parody” of dance stereotypes. It may be that its cast fail to point any of the jokes, but all I managed to see was a group of dully dressed performers bustling about while the grinding banalities of Clementi's *Gradus ad Parnasum* rattled on.