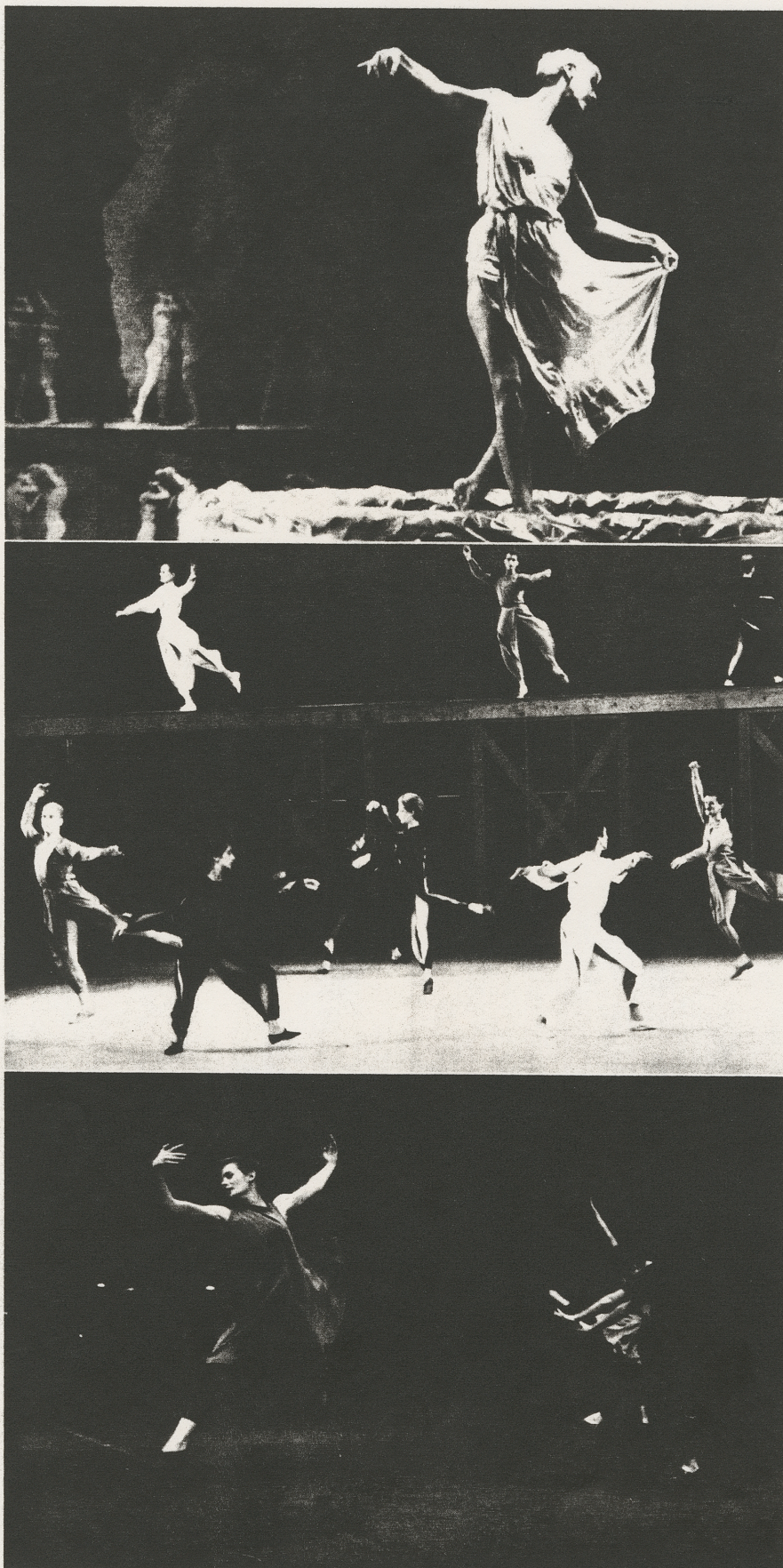


REPORTS



Crests of the Wave: Valda Setterfield poses in David Gordon's contributions to The Photographer (top), Lucinda Childs' company revealed in Available Light (middle), Molissa Fenley at full speed (bottom)

BROOKLYN

Any performance involving more than one person, on- or offstage, is of course a collaboration. But embellish the word, do a little time-traveling, and it could easily lead you to Paris at the high times of the Ballets Russes, to Moscow during the excited, pre-bureaucratic days of the revolution, to Black Mountain College in the late 1940s and to Judson Church in the early 1960s, among other Modernist summits. It is this large, generous, ambitious, delirious, international, historical sense of the word that the Brooklyn Academy of Music and all those involved with the now-annual Next Wave Festival had in mind when they decided on collaboration as the theme for the 1983 season.

Between late September and early December, eleven productions were staged. In six of these, sets, costumes, music, choreography and performances were to be equal partners—united by theory, interdependent in practice. To this end a cornucopia of well-known and younger vanguard choreographers, directors, composers, architects, painters, sculptors, set and fashion designers and performers were asked to pair off, consider one another and come up with something new.

The opening production in the series—just about everything having to do with it—unfortunately incriminates many people who should have known better, including Philip Glass (composer), Joanne Akalaitis (director), Robert Coe (book), David Gordon (choreographer) and Santo Loquasto (set designer). *The Photographer/Far from the Truth* refers to Eadweard Muybridge, the eminent Victorian whose visual records of human and animal motion helped to advance evolutionary studies, and whose life involved a crime of passion, the murder of his wife's lover, of which he was acquitted. In Act I this life was evoked in assorted scenes and *tableaux vivants* that were unabashedly conventional—pre-Modern—in construct, yet managed nonetheless to be utterly remote in dramatic effect. There was very little music in this section, just a lot of deadly, stentorian language, some ugly, cramped stage furniture and one rather pretty set piece involving blue lighting, black umbrellas and candles. Act II consisted of Glass' music performed by Glass' Ensemble sans Glass, and a prosaically assembled slide show of Muybridge's wonderful photographs was projected rhythmically onto scrims. The music was, by default, the strongest ingredient in this gangling production, though it lacked Glass' usual astringent energy and in several passages sounded mushy. Act III was Gordon's dance piece, based on the physiognomies

and movements of Muybridge's subjects. It had a lightness of spirit that was elsewhere missing, but this part of the proceedings looked so terrible—with its grab bag of little stagy costumes, and Valda Setterfield (Gordon's wife and principal interpreter) positioned *en baigneuse* on a mound of pink plastic—that lightness of spirit must here be taken to mean something close to bargain basement. Yet this was an expensive production, and I do not remember ever sitting in a theater as aware of cost and waste.

Trisha Brown first collaborated with the artist Robert Rauschenberg on *Glacial Decoy*, which was presented at BAM in 1979, then a year later with the sculptor Donald Judd on *Son of Gone Fishin'*, which remains in her repertory and was performed on her program. Her company now works as a beautifully fine-tuned group-machine whose individual parts seem to in- and exhale the choreographer's characteristically naturalistic, throwaway movements. *Set and Reset*, the piece commissioned for this season, included a set by Rauschenberg made up of three pyramidal scrim structures that were raised toward the proscenium and onto which flickering images of crumbling industry were projected. A score was commissioned from the performance artist Laurie Anderson, who performed it with the saxophone player Dicky Landry.

Set and Reset, though by no means a botched effort, didn't quite work. The raised pyramids looked very heavy, dramatically compressing the space onstage, and the fast-moving images seemed to goad the dancing into a frenzied pace. Anderson's atmospheric, existential, droning incantations were also heavy, but slow, and they tugged against the otherwise prevalent speediness. Brown stretched her vocabulary somewhat for this piece, offering, for example, one daredevil, well-fielded leap, but this movement and others, executed with aplomb by Brown herself and the company dancers, did not seem innate. Brown's choreographic style is intellectual and her delightfully fey sensibility carries more punch in less cluttered surroundings, with no music or else music of a more delicate sort—for instance the lilting tune that backs up the hilarious "conga line" section of her 1977 *Line-Up*, also on the program. The unavoidable topicality of Rauschenberg's fleeting imagery (echoed on the dancers' loose-fitting clothing) and of Anderson's arty, "new wave" sound seemed to trap the movement.

In *Available Light*, commissioned by and first performed at the new Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Lucinda Childs Dance Company had a

set with greater dynamic potential. Designed by the architect Frank Gehry, it was a big, wood-scaffolded structure, with a side-stage ladder and five supports. It opened the stage, emphasizing both height and depth, and gave the choreographer many ways in which to layer and circulate the dancing. Childs' deep aesthetic seriousness sometimes has a martial quality to it, a quality Childs let loose in numerous strategic groupings on this structure, and which was further emphasized by Ronaldus Shamask's red, white and black, quasi-Suprematist costumes. Dancers appeared as sentinels on the upper echelon, while others regrouped, entered, exited, ascended below. The Chinese ballet, *Red Detachment of Women*, was apt, at moments, to pop into one's mind—indeed, the influence of classical ballet in general was more evident in *Available Light* than it has been before in Childs' work, in perfectly-performed, if non-pointy jetés, bourrées and turns. John Adams' score, with alternating Oriental and Wagnerian motifs, was romantic in feeling and at times rather portentous. Childs' solemnity and earnest discipline here seemed a wee bit childlike. *Available Light* did not have the luminous, exalted drive of *Dance*, a 1979 BAM collaboration by Childs, Philip Glass and the artist Sol LeWitt, but it did reflect the intelligence of Childs' rigorous vision.

Since 1971, Carolyn Carlson has worked in Europe, first at the Paris Opera and, since 1980, at La Fenice, in Venice, where she formed her own Dance Theater, and where *Underwood*, her offering at BAM, was first created. Long a maverick, Carlson has a dramatic vision linking her more tightly to, say, Agnes de Mille, than to her contemporaries Brown and Childs. This collaboration is also unusual in that it has been able to evolve continuously over a period of time. With choreography by Carlson and Lario Ekson, music by René Aubry (Carlson's husband), set and costumes by Frederic Robert and Michel Zimmerman and lighting by Peter Vos, *Underwood* was elaborately staged and beautifully integrated. Visually, it was spectacular—a moody, lyrical, expatriated bit of adulterated Americana. Carlson's dancers are about the best-looking to be seen anywhere, Carlson herself and her partner Ekson are both fantastically expressive dramatic performers, and there was not a stage-moment that didn't, for one reason or another, seem poetic. *Underwood*, however, was but a lovely pastiche, endlessly evocative, yet emotionally and intellectually disconnected. In one instant the movement reminded one of De Mille's choreography for the musical *Carousel*,

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then of Nikolais, then of Cunningham, then of an eighteenth-century traveling theatrical troupe—perhaps Watteau's *Italian Musicians*. The set, too, at different times suggested a painting by Magritte, a Wyeth landscape, a Spanish village, a rural American porch and attic. Mythical elements and anecdotal ones were presented without distinct inflection. Dreamy girls in filmy nightgowns seemed frozen in a perpetual adolescence—perhaps, like the characters in *Spoon River*, they had died long ago. Carlson is something of a genius at the lyric dance phrase, and Aubry's sweet, fleet music frames such moments well—it would have been hard-hearted of one not to like *Underwood*, for it was very tender-hearted, but very, very nostalgic—maybe Carlson should come home more often.

If "Next Wave" means the youngest wave, just cresting, then Nina Wiener and Molissa Fenley were the freshest starfish to land on the beach, via undertow. Wiener's *Wind Devil*, with music by Sergio Cervetti and a set by Judy Pfaff, is a full-length poetic dance piece, not altogether unlike Carlson's *Underwood*. Wiener, who has worked with Cunningham and with Twyla Tharp, is a very lucid choreographer with a taste for extremely fluid movements—knees were functioning like

pliant reeds, not mechanical joints, throughout *Wind Devil*. Wiener's personable and proficient dancers use the floor as much as they do the higher altitudes, and her aqueous phrases unfurl in a loopy, boneless, biomorphic series of contacts. Cervetti's music flared securely in and out of these gatherings. Pfaff's decor—a semitropical assortment of fronds, sliding panels, rotating fans and a high platform that suggested a teahouse—was the most sensitively designed set in the series. Neither intrusive nor disengaged, it made a graceful world out of BAM's nicely-scaled but atmospherically neutral Lepercq Space (Brown, Childs, Carlson and *The Photographer* played in the Opera House). At one point, Wiener herself performed, as though in private, behind a scrim on the "teahouse" platform, and thereby concluded *Wind Devil* with the evanescence and openness of a haiku.

Fenley was the cannonball of the series. *Hemispheres* looked, sounded, felt utterly, undeniably new. Fenley and her two female dancers have different, "newer" bodies than any others seen here, the results of an intensive, six-month training program that Fenley devised. They are muscular—a little like the body-builder Lisa Lyons—a physique which amplifies endurance, the sheer staying-power necessary to get through Fenley's mostly high-speed, staccato, nearly violent thrusts of movement. Fenley's idea of dance is thoroughly urban: she, Silvia Martins and Scottie Mirviss stalked the stage and hurled themselves about it like druids of Avenue B. There is a vestige of Jerome Robbins in Fenley's style and one could also, a bit perversely, see *Hemispheres* as an inspired, end-of-the-world update of Balanchine's *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue*.

The three dancers performed on a bare stage. Francesco Clemente's "visual element" was a series of loose, printed drawings that members of the audience perceived (or didn't) at will. These drawings—sophisticated, stylized fragments of autoerotic and engaged sexual images—provided a male "presence" absent among the dancers and a strong, idiosyncratic aesthetic parallel to the dancing. Anthony Davis' music, too, coexisted and conversed with the dance, instead of propelling it. Davis' orchestral sound, like Fenley's choreography, is simultaneously wild and educated: one moment of almost academically avant-garde (bohemian) sound followed by a long, Dionysian surge like a rampage through the subway system. The dancers' "off the racks" clothing, from Rei Kawakubo's 1983 summer collection, was dark, stark and well-suited to Fenley's urban-mythic energy. This cresting wave may prove tidal. LISA LIEBMANN

□ The most eager anticipation about Tulsa Ballet Theatre's debut at Brooklyn College (Nov. 11-13) centered on the "Hand of Fate" pas de deux from Balanchine's 1932 *Cotillon*. This fragment had an air of authenticity. The depth and drama of its unique classical inventions could hardly be by anyone else. It's one of those Balanchinian encounters where the man is drawn to the woman and given pause, simultaneously. Set to a moody passage of Chabrier, a man approaches a woman whose mysterious meaning comes out of her dancing. She is a dark-toned ballerina (in the original production she wore black tights and toe shoes as well as the black dress and gloves reproduced here). She communicates in moves that are clear but quite complex. The young man achieves an intimacy with her, but it is in formal, unrestful terms. Their face-to-face moments include passages where they rest their heads on each other's shoulders, again and again, alternating sides; it's a kind of braiding image that looks at once tender and tense. When the woman circles close around him through a series of grand battement rond de jambe moves, he assists them with both a promenade and a lift against the small of his back; he is engulfed by circles within circles. The motif of the crescent moon that sits on her head as a talisman becomes complete as the duet ends with the man and the woman side by side circling the circles formed by their port de bras, clockwise and counter-clockwise, with punctuated flicks of turning-over wrists as further elegant but unsettling capstones. Melissa Hale and Matthew Bridwell were appropriately youthful, even if dramatically immature.

The company's other novelty was *The Four Moons*, a dance recalling a 1967 showcase that "brought together for the first time four of Oklahoma's celebrated ballerinas of Indian descent." The present version, with choreography by company director Roman Jasinski, is danced by four young dancers. Whatever the original created by four choreographers did for its stellar cast is now lost, and Jasinski's work is full of deliberation and calculation that make his young dancers look uneasy and somewhat inept.

When the same dancers were cast by Jasinski in either his *Convulsions* (to Anton Rubinstein) or *The Seasons* (to Glazunov), the results were much happier. In both works, the company's open, unaffected classical abilities were appropriately displayed. The heavy hand of the decor in *Seasons*, and of some of the individual inventions throughout both works, does not prevent the company from showing off its reliable schooling and eager manner.

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