

# Dance

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## BOSTON AFTER DARK ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Then there are things, most average that stubbornly remain beyond human understanding: relationships and the passage of time, for instance. David Gordon, New York's in-vogue and untitled choreographer (he refuses terms like postmodern and avant-garde), has "constructed" (his word) a dance about just such intangibles for Concert Dance Company, Boston's most polished group of contemporary dancers. Set to Bach's Suite No. 1 for Unaccompanied Cello *Passing Sentence* begins simply enough, its three couples engaged in placid duets that respond to the placid whirls in Bach's music. They all wear T-shirts with single words printed on both sides (here, no, why, good, less ...). But at the first rise in the music, the dancers dash and spin into a follow-the-bouncing-ball line that says "what's hers now is his now or what's his now is hers more or less or else." It's the only coherent sentence, or rather sentiment, the dance will give, but it works like a passkey to the dance's, and Bach's, universe. The phrases that can't help turning up as the dancers change partners throughout the rest of the work are non sequiturs, and they point up the non sequiturs of emotion that reside in Bach's melancholy music, the measures that speak to us in loaded monosyllables: now, then, joy. Gordon is playing with "universals" and these synchronize the dance — which consists of interlocking arcs, spheres, orbits, some as slim as a tight pirouette, others as centrifugal as an ice-capades grand finale, complete with the guy on the end racing to keep up — and even turn up in the dance's imagery. In the first section, when the men pick up the women at the waist, the latter's arms and legs poking out at different angles, it's as if they were wielding compasses. And in the final section, both men and women drop sideways in open, X-shaped figures, and they're like falling stars. But perhaps the most beautiful moments come mid-dance, when the six dancers, hands linked, perform a sarabande, stepping against, over, and around one another. In

their deliberate, shadowless precision they could be the galaxies, for a moment hauling up their weight, dipping and gliding in an astronomic dosido. The title, *Passing Sentence*, has one literal meaning and many figurative ones. So, too, does the dance.

Meg Harper's *Upon Dreaming of the Death of the White Buffalo*, also new, uses the movement canon of Merce Cunningham, but with a tighter, more studied formalism. Eleanor Hovda's *Ariadnemusic*, a wash of environmental squeaks, upstairs thumps, and crystalline hums, finds the dancers standing upright, wafted about like cilia. Actually their activation is internal; they move in rigid, labyrinthine lines of rhythm and repetition. The dance is solemn, almost glum, and because it's airtight, its parts so burnished, there's no warming up to it. But you couldn't call it cool: driven, and full of glinting parts, it looks hot, like metal in the sun. Harper's saying something about the technological age, but thankfully the message is refracted beyond cliché. *Dreaming* is an exercise in pattern void of recognizable context (isn't that what dreams actually are?). In this work of focused inanimacy, the gentleness with which the dancers handle one another is surprising. Harper's dance has the permeable skin of a dream — we remember its human touches — even as it leaves a metallic taste in the mouth.

Hannah Kahn's *Crest* is a long-winded essay in lyricism set to Schumann's Piano Quintet in E Major; nevertheless it was energetically performed. Tedium incarnate is Martha Armstrong Gray's *Bitter Scent*, from the interminable Turkish folk poems (sung) to the insatiable menace of six lonelyhearts at cotillion. Take the six chairs away and there might be a dance; as it is the pretension thickens in Gray's deadpan look at the Jealousy, Lust, and Meanness that seethe beneath decorum. Seen it before? Me too. □