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Dance in Review

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Primal Human Tales, Hinted at but Untold

'Langsam in der Sorge'

Dicapo Opera Theater

Lydia Johnson is a true original whose choreography repays close attention. The new and recent dances she presented on Friday night at the Dicapo Opera Theater were fascinating in the way they isolated and reworked components of classical ballet technique. But absorbing it all was sometimes wearying.

"Langsam in der Sorge" ("Slowly, With Sorrow") is a beauty. The group work, set to soaring music by Hindemith and performed on a stage scattered with folding chairs, is a perfect introduction to Ms. Johnson's unusual style. Arms fold and extend in a flow of broken, mysteriously evocative gestures, with hands touching the body gently. The body line is long and lean, but there is a touching near-gawkiness to the poses the dancers move through.

The stream of dance rises and falls subtly with the music, in part because of the ways Ms. Johnson moves her dancers about the stage and places them, often meditatively, on or beside the chairs. Fleeting duets and solo passages are embedded in the flow, and the shifts from unison to individual choreography add to the texture. There is no discernible narrative, but you sense the unfolding of some fundamental human story.

Ms. Johnson's elegiac new "Untitled," a group work set to plangent music by Henryk Gorecki, was just as mysterious and almost as compelling. Again there is the sense of a buried primeval narrative. At first the dancers seem to have stepped out of Antony Tudor's "Dark Elegies" and its rituals of grief, in part because of the women's drab skirts. About midway through, dancers suddenly reappear in modern-day leotards. Chains of young girls race decorously through a segment whose rush is as wild as the music. And always there are the small, potent gestures for the arms that establish both formal pattern and dramatic nuance.

The program also included "The Right Allocations," whose cast featured three charmingly funky teenaged boys, and the dry new "Three Part Variations for Four," set to Bach performed by Steven Masi on the piano.

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