

Trio: J Sand, R Frank, S Leightnam © Julie Lemberger



Earth Mother

Lydia Johnson says she founded her company in 1999, after “mothering her 3 children full-time.” Her 2006 New York Season at the Ailey Citicorp Theater reflects her maternal experience.

Fill with warm, loving relationships, it was a nice contrast to some of the aggressive doom and gloom artistic visions around town. Johnson is not living in a fantasy world though. Her choreography has a grounded matter-of-fact quality them seems rooted in how we really move around.

In Conversations (... like breathing ... like flying) started the program with a complicated title, but was very straightforward. Performed with calm strength by Jessica Sand, Kerry Shea, Justin Bates and Dartanion Reed, it was a signature piece.

Conversations represented well Johnson’s use of sculptured body lines, ever-changing port de bras, and attachment to gravity. The dancers were dressed in simple white and black, their affect was subdued and like its score, Phillip Glass’ *Violin Concerto*, the choreography had an inevitable feeling, rolling along seamlessly from solos to duets. Lighting changes (by Jim Oakley throughout the program) altered the color and mood from red to blue, from bright to shadowed from icy to hot, but didn’t change its dynamic.

Gentle, affectionate embraces and shapes were etched in a small space. Sand and Reed were particularly luscious in their dancing. Through its spiritual lifts, smooth partnering and calm flow this *Conversation* embodied Johnson’s visceral and earthy motif.

For a campy contrast, *The End of the Movie*, performed to music by Cake, featured Sand and Stein along with Kerry Shea as a trio of somewhat jaded, sexy, lonely-hears waiting around for something to happen. Sitting on or draping themselves over a trio of benches in skimpy black pants and tops and high-heels they moved their arms and legs in time to the catchy tune, almost falling at times but not losing contact with their perch. Looking at their watches, the three, separately, cross legs, put their heads in their hands and it all ends in this clever mingling of beautiful legs and benches.

Coda was larger in scope, taking of Beethoven’s third movement of *String Quartet No. 15*. Presented as a “hymn of thanksgiving” it opened with three trios, again dressed simply, this time in purple or gray skirts with black tops. This premiere showed Johnson’s interest in and capacity for spatial design though some of the movements become repetitive, and less locomotive than I yearned for. Towards the end, a group of seven young girls moved across the stage. The effect of including the children was perhaps to bring in an unconscious dynamic. They moved in a less steady and sustained rhythm than the adult dancers but their hesitant grace of pre-adolescence freshened the mood of the overly serious adults.

The second premiere, *Falling Out* was for seven dancers and chairs. Johnson’s sculptural eye was active her presentation of tableaux and shaping of the individual dancer’s movers. She never quite caught up to the propulsive and urgent quality of Glass’ *Symphony No. 3*. I like the way she uses stillness, an here, the repetition of phrases and postures supported the pictorial image. The chairs were moved to suggest groupings of people and in a duet by Shea and Bates we sensed some of the drive inherent in the music. In the end he embraces her. She’s flinging her arms but they’re touching tenderly. Johnson is grappling with the sometimes difficult task of creating an exciting dynamic with conflict. I praise her search.