

The Nikoiais/Louis Dancespace was hot in more ways than one that weekend when May pretended to be August. *Linear A/Linear B*, conceived and directed by Sara Pearson, choreographed by Sara and Jerry Pearson (with special assistance by Karin Levitas) is an ambitious, sprawling work so full of vivid moments, wit, odd images, and exhilarating movement that the audience is charmed. It seems to me that the Pearsons have taken a large step forward in integrating their interest in legend and human drama with the aptitude for spatial design and abstraction their Nikoiais training endowed them with.

My admiration doesn't stop me from wishing that some sympathetic director would confront Sara Pearson (maybe her own alter ego) and ask hard questions, like "What does this section mean to you?" "Did you put this in because you like it, or because you thought you needed a group dance here?" "What is your role, and did you set out to star yourself, or did it just happen?" "You had a powerful, slightly mysterious ending; what were your reasons for going past it to a finale (admittedly a thrilling one)?" The theme of "language" that can be decoded and language as yet indecipherable, of motion that clearly reveals emotion and motion that is ambiguous is a pretty wide open subject; you can make just about anything fit, but that's not the same thing as making everything really fit.

Some of the actions are so rich that I yearn for deeper, more thoughtful connections. For instance, the piece opens with a stunning image of tribal communion and individual eccentricity. Sara P. is crouching on a platform atop a tall, rickety bamboo platform (by Brian O'Neill), furiously hurling clothes to the floor. The other dancers crouch on struts below her, staring upward. Not long after this, she stretches out on the floor and watches the others clamber and pair off, freezing warily and briefly in poses that make you think of kids trying out erotic or competitive moves. The image of a connected group is so strong that it's almost shocking to see a bunch of people

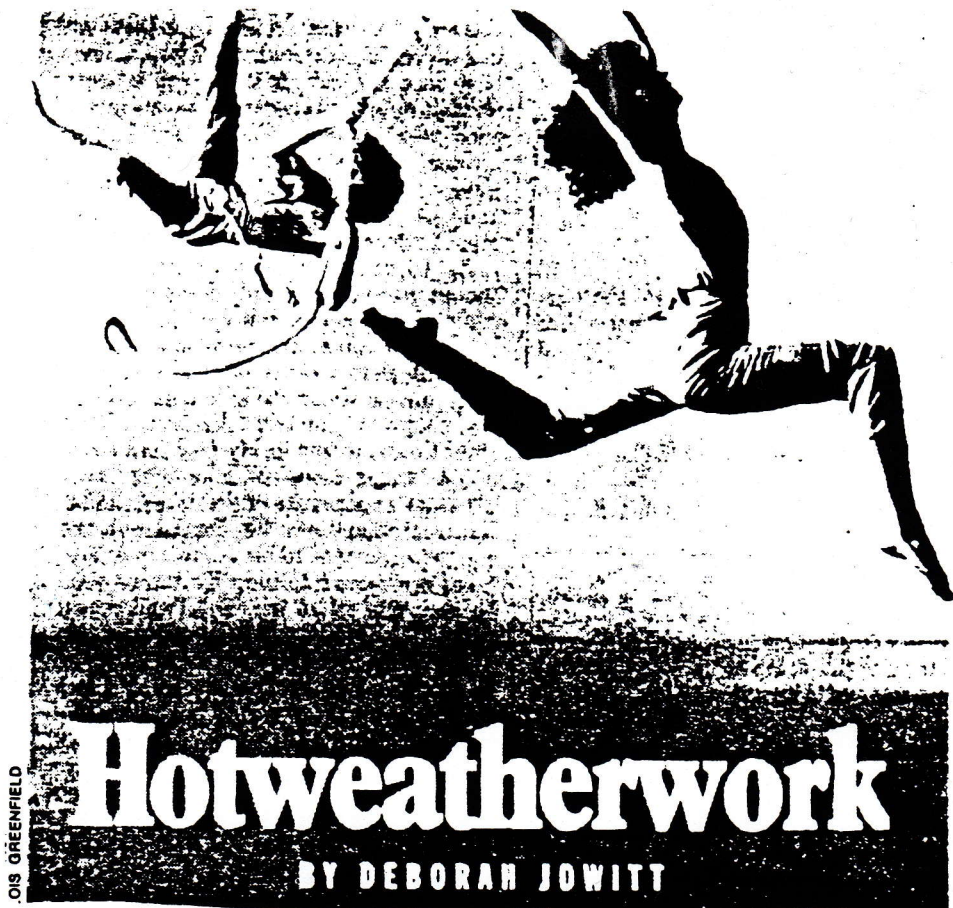
leave the stage without a backward look or forward impulse, as if some balletmaster had needed to clear the way for the next item. And it's even odder that a lot of time goes by before the other principals (J. Pearson, Patrik Widrig, and Karen Levitas) are brought to your attention as individuals. Certainly you notice them as dancers along with Susie Goldman, Tim Harling, Susan Kline, and James Murphy. But their prominence (and Widrig's potent, intelligent presence in particular) is almost unaccounted for until a section in which each dances alone, when they speak of curiously misleading signs or enact rituals whose meaning has been lost. (Levitas, for instance, tells dances of 19th century girls working horrifyingly long factory shifts who would stand on their sewing tables during their break to try to feel daylight from the one overhead source, and who'd dance from machine to machine winding scraps of colored thread between their toes.)

I'll tell you more. While we look at mysterious black-and-white film scraps of the performers in moments from the dance, Jerry P. haltingly reads to us about *Linear A* and *Linear B*, by the light of matches he patiently keeps striking. Sara P. checks out the inert Jerry P.

While we hear an insanely thorough questionnaire read (accompanied by Bill Buchen's "The Sound of Numbers Crunching"), she, rapid and inquisitive as a squirrel, checks his pulse, listens to his heart, crawls around him, looks in his mouth, pretends to slice open his head and squint into his brain, ends holding him in her arms. The dangerous mix of bizarre factualness, jokes, and tenderness works almost perfectly because of her performing.

There is some remarkable, vibrant solo dancing by Sara P. The shapes and rhythms of what she does at all times suggest the activity of human thought and emotion, and show a smart, bold woman with a decidedly wild streak. (Was it only last year I was thinking that the Pearsons were hampered by smoothed-out rhythms?) There are solidly crafted ensemble pieces, and a couple in which the performers swing on the four fat ropes that make up part of the decor. You can imagine how thrilling it is to see them race on, grab ropes, swing in huge arcs, barely avoiding collisions, drop off. The ropes can be climbed too, and in the section I thought was the end, pairs of performers keep swinging on and snagging on Sara P. as she stands there, as if they were cumbersome children whose weight she had to deal with.

Within this bold, juicy, flawed work, there's a finer and deeper one visible. ■



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