

the village

VOICE

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On the Road

BY ELIZABETH ZIMMER

SARA PEARSON AND COMPANY. At Nikolais/ Louis ChoreoSpace (November 13 to 15). *Journal Entries.*

If a choreographer has inner resources, she can transform the most mundane or traumatic aspects of getting on, along, or by into engrossing theater. Sarah Pearson has such resources. She finds formal means to say even casual things.

Capable of crafting intricate, abstract dances, in *Journal Entries* she's attempting the personal, the verbal, the dramatic. This work uses an ensemble of 12 performers to detail journeys across landscapes literal and psychic; she's been doing a lot of traveling.

A dozen pieces whipped by in this intermissionless concert, some of them fragments of ritual. First a man, and later a woman, shook a burlap bag of flour, laying a trail from one side of the stage space to the other. The concluding group work resembled a statement by Kei Takei's *Moving Earth*, as the dancers stomped and breathed together in an effort to forge community.

Like the hand-printed program notes, the event had an intimate feel which rarely grew mawkish or obscure. Pearson

seemed to be exploring every avenue of a new neighborhood, the common places and the strange. She dragged out a washtub and nattered at us as she scrubbed and hung the laundry in *You're Sounding Like Your Mother*; the tone of desperation in the text was emphasized when she suddenly set fire to the clothes. Some of her dances were gestural one-liners, sufficient to drive home a single point. Others explored human behavior with a relentless focus. In the *Interview Duet*, she manipulated, poked, and picked at an inert man lying center stage, trying, and failing, to get a rise out of him. This piece, and a couple of others, were credited as collaborations with Jerry Pearson.

The sounds accompanying the action were drawn from a range of world music, including pygmy and aboriginal chants as well as local contemporary music, some of it by Pearson herself. Serious but never labored, the program kept you glued to the "pages" of this journal, often personal, sometimes observant and reflective, as in *Water Duet* for Patrick Widrig and Britt Whitton, who rolled together upstage in one of the few pure movement exercises.

A couple of women behind me, obviously choreographers themselves, gossiped the whole time; when the concert ended, one of them opined about the difficulty of working with "untrained dancers." I was brought up short—not for a moment had anyone on the stage struck me as less than perfectly qualified for what he or she was asked to do. The ensemble was formed fairly recently, but formed it is, and appropriately used to amplify and extend Pearson's journey of discovery of herself and her craft. A surefooted theatrical expression, confronted with new and private territory, reveals in this artist depths of possibility. The ensemble presents itself as people whose capacities include dancing, at home and on the road. And home, it seems, is always on the road. ■