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Sara Pearson: The Orson Welles Of Dance?

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If anyone needed proof that Sara Pearson was fully recovered from her debilitating bout of several years with Hepatitis, it was all laid out for us by The Pearson Dance Co. (Sara and Jerry) during their season, May 29 through June 1st at the Nikolais/Louis Dance Space, 33 East 18th Street, Manhattan. Indeed, Mrs. Pearson could be well on her way toward becoming the Orson Welles of dance, having here conceived Linear A/Linear B, as well as directed and choreographed the 70 minute work and dance in it as well.

This husband/wife team, married sixteen years, have gathered around them some first-rate performers—Karin Levitas, James Murphy, Patrik Widrig, Tim Harling, Susie Goldman, Susan Kline. On one of those horribly hot, humid nights in late May-early June, the theatre was packed and not a soul made a move to leave before it was over.

A wonderful stage set, near the back at our left, resembled a 3-tiered scaffold. A mound of clothing lay in a multi-colored heap. Crouched about were the dancers, suggesting a crowd of happy-go-lucky, young inquisitive monkeys, playful, energetic, frisky, while at the top level, we found Sara Pearson, a sort of "head" monkey. Sara has created here with lots of muscle, boxcar loads of imagination, a work that has the dancers seemingly animal-like at one moment, then reverting to humans with typical human characteristics. They lope, hop, swing in balletic and modern movements that joust with each other, in steps that keep cadence with the staccato, percussive thumps and high-pitched whines. My notes remind me that Ms. Pearson even created some of the music.

There is a mesmeric quality to the forward-pushing rhythmic and movement; arms move through metronomic sweeps and semaphores, shoot up in drumstick plumes. Legs geyser to left and to right or stipple the floor with tiny patterns. It is a very physical work and physically demanding, ambitious, vivid and totally exhilarating. It is, in its way, an open-ended piece and perhaps other audience members saw different things than I did. Those beautifully-trained bodies grasp the various supports of the bamboo structure, swing, climb, descend, hang by one arm while watching a solo or duet.

Each performer has a solo designed around his/her special qualities and at one point, we watch the rehearsal group on film, while Jerry Pearson stands at the side reading to us about Linear A/Linear B, with the aid of light supplied by struck matches. Or Jerry seems to have passed out, lying on the floor, while Sara circles him, again like a curious little creature, checking him out—his heart beat, his pulse, even examining his head as though probing for heaven knows what.

Sara and Jerry are capable of performing anything, no matter how difficult, as are indeed, each member of the group. One remarkable section lowers four heavy ropes, with nooses at their bottoms, and the ape-like characteristics become evident in seemingly wild, though very carefully structured swings, runs, lifts, that sweep them past one another, avoid collision by a hair's breadth. They race, are carried along with feet off the ground by the sheer momentum. What seems out of control is in actuality carefully crafted, wonderfully free, thrilling to watch. How drained they must all have been at the close but what an event of sheer joy. Sara and Jerry have taken a giant step forward in their artistic growth, something which cannot be said for too many of today's choreographers. We were given much to think about, to recreate in our own minds as we searched for various meanings layered throughout. Simian rites? Man's inhumanity to man? The goodness in folks? Make of it what you will, it was a gorgeous evening.