

theater/dance reviews

T & T Trio*The Drake Theater*

T & T Trio, the Virginia-based ensemble made up of Cynthia Thompson, Kate Trammell and Shane O'Hara, is a refreshingly attractive and likeable-looking modern dance/theater group who even seem to enjoy what they are doing. However serious the theme of a work, they never wallow in angst,

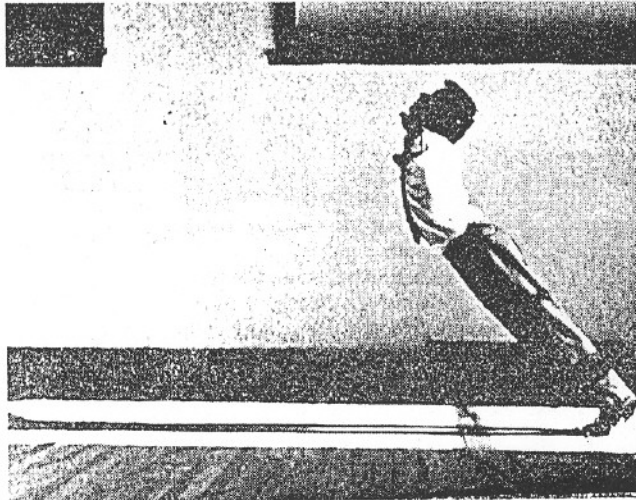
dreariness or that grim earnestness that pervades so much contemporary dance. They maintain an undercurrent of wry humor, and their use of text never obscures motion.

The Trio is not new to Philadelphia, having last performed here in 1989-90, when Trammell and O'Hara were members of ZeroMoving Dance Company. T&T had existed as a duo for several years before, which no doubt accounts for a sense of natural communication when the two women perform on their own. The small, lean, dark-haired Thompson is a perfect foil for the taller, broader-beamed, blonde Trammell, and vice versa, especially since their expressive faces alternately contrast with and match their

physical types. Their dancing and even their basic movements are flexible and versatile.

Their collaboration with the dark-haired, rubber-faced, flashing-eyed O'Hara, a coiled spring of kinetic energy, not only creates a special balance between him and the two women, but sets off all three against each other in often unexpected ways. This is evident, of course, when the whole trio dances one of their own works, as in O'Hara's new *The Gauntlet*, in which the three move with and against one another in eccentric yet somehow inevitable ways, and saunter off separately at the end as if spontaneously. Their special relationship is also apparent in the striking contrasts yet subtle similarities among their choreographies.

Even when doing pieces by someone else, the three inspire each other's creativity. Deborah Riley's *Are You There*, commissioned this year for Thompson and Trammell, is clearly built on them. While reminding me of other dance-visualizations of the hopes, fears, joys and doubts of two lovers or friends, this work is unusual in its extreme variety of embrace, tentative to tangled,



Shane O'Hara of T & T Trio.

and its patterns of offense and defense. Most striking is its use of facial and verbal interchanges that seem drawn from the dancers themselves. Accompanied and at times prompted by taped words, nature sounds, guitar and Scarlatti, *Are You There?* had only one flaw: it was too long.

Thompson projected a figure both funny and pathetic in her new solo *Fallen Belle*. After entering with temporary ele-

gance wearing a cocktail dress and an immense white chiffon hooded cloak with endless train, she emerges from it in ever-increasing and despairing clumsiness, and spends the rest of the piece trying to regain her lost grace and balance and the now-unmanageable length of chiffon.

An intriguing item on the program was the witty yet disturbing 1957 *Indeterminate Figure*, by Daniel Nagrin, part of O'Hara's ongoing project to learn and perform the works of this modern dance pioneer. A tape collage (also by Nagrin) begins and ends with a falling bomb and uses heartbeats, clarinet and dripping water, while O'Hara deftly mimes a silk-pajama'd man doing everything from tightening a recalcitrant faucet to dancing the tango.

Though even an excellent group such as T&T Trio strikes me as occasionally derivative (as does so much of the dance avant-garde), they at least bring a strong personal touch, a positive aura, and, yes, originality.

— Susan Gould