

Dancing To The Beat Of The Big City

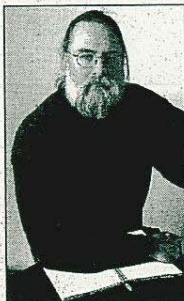
JMU's annual New Dance Festival, kicking off the new school year's performance season, is usually good. This year's concert was exceptional. The overall level of the work, both conceptually and technically, was frankly stronger than we have any right to expect, this far from the big city.

Part of the reason is that the big city came to us, in the form of Rebecca Lazier's New York City-based "Terrain" dance company. This group performed two pieces, bracketing the program.

The first, "Transparent Body," was both coolly cerebral and physically deft. Set to a score that alternated between lyrical and dissonantly experimental, the choreography remained unusually sensitive to the music. Renee Archibald and Rommel Salveron were eye-catching for their solid athleticism, sensitive contact dancing and tight unison work. Perhaps the only odd note came from the weird, wadded yellow appliques on the otherwise close-fitting, dark blue costumes. These were probably intended to mirror the clashing elements of the score, but functioned instead as an illogical distraction.

the highlights:

And the evening's piece-of-resistance was Shane O'Hara's "Biting My Tongue." This long, semi-solo, performance-art dance has been years in the making, and has recently attained a level of power and maturity rare to the dance world.



the roaming reviewer

jeff hoodock

Terrain's other piece, to close the show, was "Serenade," set to Tchaikovsky's lush "Serenade for Strings in C Minor." This was real eye candy, featuring timed, balletic arpeggios and technically fine ensemble work. Stylistically, this little company suggests a more muscular, grounded, modern take on the lyrical beauty of Paul Taylor's choreography.

Ting-Yu Chen's solo work, "falling moon," a "structured improvisation" based on a Tang dynasty poem, was a fascinating mixture of force and delicacy. The dancer-choreographer mixed subtle, sensual insinuation with abrupt, martial arts inspired moves, to a haunting *shaku-hachi* score. Her work is inspired by her training in Chinese opera, and has surprising dramatic pow-

er.

JMU dance professor Suzanne Miller-Corso and Katrina Toews reprised Toews' "Self-Portrait," a swirling, fiestily interactive duet. This piece has only become more polished over time, and inspires a lot of thought about the multiple, sometimes conflicted nature of "self."

Another JMU dance professor, Cynthia Thompson, takes the prize (by a nose) for the evening's most courageous offering. She danced "God Side," choreographed by Shannon Hummel. The piece calls for the comic timing of Lucille Ball and the dramatic presence of a tragic protagonist. The dancer wrestles with an ill-fitting, flimsy dress that doubles for the tyranny of a youthful image. In time, she finds herself able to abandon

self-consciousness, by first reverting to childish immodesty. In the end, fully adult now, she slowly takes off the dress and exits the stage, covering her nudity.

And the evening's piece-of-resistance was Shane O'Hara's "Biting My Tongue." This long, semi-solo, performance-art dance has been years in the making, and has recently attained a level of power and maturity rare to the dance world. On one level this work is blatantly political, exploring one man's deeply frustrated need to speak out against an America headed in an insane direction. On another plane, though, the work shows the amazing power of art to speak lucidly with the elements of pure emotion.

The musical score to this piece, and some of the "dance," is provided live on-stage by Mitchell Mercurio. He plays guitar, percussion and microphone as O'Hara dances, tells stories and emotes. The blend of satire, pathos and frenetic, furious movement builds inexorably to a sustained, severely dramatic plateau.

So, if you weren't there, you missed it. But there should be other chances, soon, to see products of this excellent dance scene. Stay