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DANCE

ESSE AFICIONADO

At the Merce Cunningham Studio

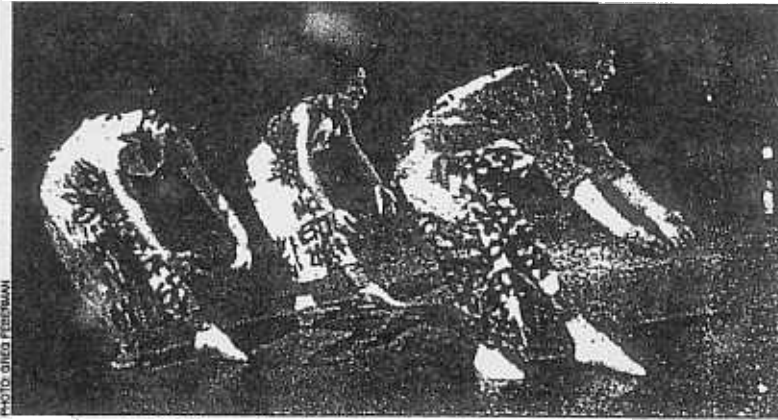
Review by Julian Fisher

The Esse Aficionado Company was able to fill the Merce Cunningham Studio for the final performance of their four-show run. This was especially moving because the studio is on the West Side; the program is dedicated to all the victims of the September 11th attacks and that energy is still pulsing through the area.

The most impressive aspect of this company is the dedication that the dancers and choreographers, who are also dancing, bring to the pieces. Gina Graham, Maki Morinoue and Veronica De La Rosa choreographed all the ballets. I am guessing that these three energetic women are the driving

breaking up and gathering at some other point in the ballet to create vivid images.

Graham's other two pieces, "Four Bases" and "History," provide strong highlights. "Four Bases" consists of two couples dancing in light brown unitards. The group patterns are consistently good throughout "Four Bases." The two male dancers, Kevin Bachman and Mahdi Shah, provide strength and compliment partners Morinoue and Rosa. However, the piece has no lifts or jumps. At moments like that I realized that all the pieces are lacking some very dynamic elements. The original score by John Convertino is a bit grinding but fits the mood of the ballet. "History" is the program closer and features the three choreographers dancing to the music of their choice, as stated in the program. The three women are covered in heavy white body paint and black



Maki Morinoue, Veronica De La Rosa and Gina Graham close their ambitious program with "History".

force behind the company. Unfortunately, they have no website and there was no material at the performance to provide any information about the choreographers, the company, the director or what guides them.

Despite their slight disorganization, the ballets and dancers are quite professional and proficient. A deep sense of vitality pulses through them as they execute their movements and the choreography possesses true creative sparks that flare up throughout the performance.

The hour-long program features four ballets with two funny snippets of dance named "Inter..." and "...ruption." These two-minute ballets, choreographed by De La Rosa, provide excellent comic relief while eliminating some of the down time between the longer ballets. In "inter..." four girls come out in swim caps, goggles and cut-off unitards. They start competing in a slow motion race to the front of the studio. The whole audience was laughing during this time and some of those creative sparks were flying during this piece.

The opening piece, "To Roam the Earth," by Graham, entails intricate group patterns and good lighting. At one point, a female dancer is perfectly lighted in the middle of a circle of dancers. This image is still in my mind, like many other moments throughout this piece—it's a gift from Graham to the audience. The group patterns are constantly moving in unison,

streaks. A feeling of Australia and the aboriginal culture immediately popped into my mind. The piece is fun but lacks a certain excitement that closing pieces need.

The ballet "Portrait," by Maki Morinoue, is extremely fitting for this time. It opens with everyone in white shorts and a white backless shirt. The music, "Piano Phase" by Steve Reich, lulls you into a type of hypnotic trance by continually playing the same keys over and over and over again. The dancers are floating in and out of patterns while executing soothing arm gestures. They often face the back of the stage and seem to be running through a maze with the energy of lost souls. As I was watching the endless stream of patterns my attention drifted to the tragedy of September 11th. My feelings of loss and despair in the city were being brought to the surface in "Portrait." Morinoue does a fine job with music selection, choreography and thematic content.

If you ever go to see Esse Aficionado, you will find a young energetic company that is inspired by its choreography. At points the program almost falls into the realm of the amateurish but this vitality keeps them looking professional. Morinoue, Graham, Rosa and their dancers provide a performance worthy of the audience's applause.

