

DANCE VIEW/Jack Anderson

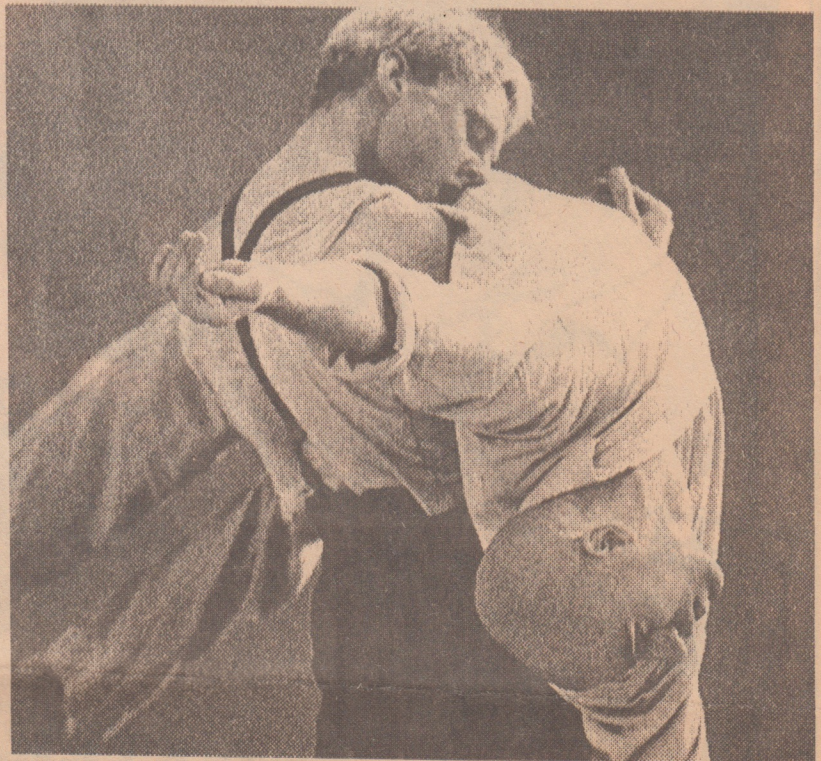
When Explosive Energy Drives Home a Point

NOW YOU SEE IT, NOW you don't. That could be said about the movement in many works by contemporary choreographers who send dancers hurtling through space. Images often flash by so rapidly that one may not be sure how to interpret them. Ambiguity may even be part of a dance's point. Yet, when employed skillfully, speed can convey its own message.

Two groups that recently offered strenuous and ambiguous choreography were London's DV8 Physical Theater, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and the New York-based Stephen Petronio Company, at the Kitchen. While their presentations differed markedly, these troupes share a love of explosive energy.

DV8 features collaboratively devised choreography by its members: Lloyd Newson, who is also its artistic director, and Nigel Charnock, Liz Ranken and Michelle Richecoeur. Together they invent deliberately rough movement inspired by real-life situations, and it comes as no surprise to learn that Mr. Newson has been trained as a psychotherapist.

In its New York debut program, the company roared through emotionally



Eleni Leoussi

DV8's Lloyd Newson and Nigel Charnock in "My Sex, Our Dance," performed recently at BAM—choreographic violence

intense scene with apparent spontaneity. But looks were deceiving. DV8's mayhem is as carefully staged as the duels in a Shakespearean play. The choreographic violence reflects DV8's obsession with the ability of people to be humane one moment and beastly the next. Gestures of love, hate, suspicion and trust keep forming and dissolving until it becomes hard to tell them apart.

Much of "My Sex, Our Dance," a duel for and by Mr. Newson and Mr. Charnock, was based upon the implications of a handshake: the way the clasp of hands can be either a sign of affection or a prelude to a tug of war. After shaking hands, the two men struggled with each other in a bone-bruising choreographic depiction of a stormy homosexual relationship.

Of course, heterosexual relationships can be equally tumultuous. Yet, one scene concerned a problem that may specifically afflict gay men. While Mr. Newson and Mr. Charnock danced out their passions, a man and a woman sat, as if idling away an afternoon, at a cafe table in a cor-

ner of the stage. Because they appeared oblivious to the men, the couple could have symbolized how ordinary life still goes on around us even when we are ensnared in personal imbroglios. Eventually, Mr. Newson and Mr. Charnock started to embrace. Just then, however, the woman laughed — and the two men cringed. Presumably, she wasn't laughing at them; she even may not have realized they were there. Nevertheless, because the men took that laugh as an affront, the incident revealed how gay men, who are often the victims of prejudice, may be especially sensitive to anything that can seem a taunt.

"Deep End," DV8's other offering, examined the interplays and rivalries between men and women. At first, the dancers looked sobersided, and when Ms. Ranken burst into laughter, she was shunned by her companions, who obviously thought her uncouth. Although everyone tried to be self-reliant, individuals kept collapsing and other dancers had to pick them up. What's more, the afflicted dancers found that dependency could

be fun. Thus, when men toppled over, they delighted in flailing helplessly until an obliging woman propped them up again.

Such demonstrations that adults are really big babies were often amusing. Yet, "Deep End" came to a chilling conclusion as a frustrated man threw himself against a wall — an image recalling ballet's most famous dance of frustration: the tormented puppet's solo in "Petrouchka." For DV8, adults are not only big babies, they may also be puppets sent jerking through life by psychological forces beyond their control.

Mr. Petronio's dancers can be equally agitated. Yet, their ability to make sudden, complex and well-timed dynamic changes suggests that Mr. Petronio believes that unruly energies can be creatively channeled. In "Simulacrum Reels," for instance, states of tension often come to harmonious resolutions. If these resolutions are only temporary and the dancers soon find themselves swept along by new waves of energy, they

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are never totally inundated by them. Mr. Petronio loves curious titles: consider "AnAmnesia," which received its New York premiere. The title is an invented word formed by yoking "amnesia" (a loss of memory) with "anamnesis" (a recalling to memory). However, the dance was not a clinical study of memory problems but an exuberant work to a jazzy score by Peter Gordon. It suggested the difficulty we may have in assimilating the multitudinous things we see about us. Choreographic shapes shifted constantly. And although dancers kept hanging on to one another by their necks, shoulders, legs and ankles, one could not always be sure whether they were doing so in a spirit of cooperation or competition.

Justin Terzi's backdrop was dominated by the images of enormous hands and a man peering through bespectacled eyes. The hands helped emphasize the dance's intricate partnering. The portrait was adapted from a photograph of Mieczyslaw Szczuka, a Constructivist painter of the 1920's. But Mr. Petronio has said in an interview that what fascinated him and Mr. Terzi about Szczuka was not his art but the intensity of his gaze in the photograph. Dancegoers also had to stare hard if they wished to fathom "AnAmnesia."

The choreography of both Mr. Petronio and DV8 speeds along. You'd best keep a sharp eye. But what you see is definitely worth watching. □