

TRISHA BROWN COMPANY. At City Center (September 17 to 22). Premiere of *Lateral Pass*, with visual presentation by Nancy Graves; also *Glacial Decoy* and *Accumulation with Talking plus Watermotor*.

The people behind me were advising each other as to the best hotels in Singapore and Bangkok. I took it as a sign that Trisha Brown had hit pay dirt. If so, it's high time.

The Trisha Brown Company's season at City Center—its most ambitious yet—"was made possible" by grants from government agencies, from organizations the likes of AT&T, Exxon, Philip Morris, and from unlisted individual contributors. To me, such support seems not only well-deserved, but reasonable. I've often wondered why more people with adventurous taste in painting and sculpture—and bank accounts to support that taste—don't put their money on adventurous dance. If you like Rauschenberg, why not make dances like Brown's thrilling *Lateral Pass* possible, instead of kicking in a few thousand for a "new" *Romeo and Juliet* and stopping there? When I win the lottery (note the confident syntax), she'll be high on my list of ways to spend money—somewhere between Get A New Apartment and Upgrade My Weed-Eater.

Those of us who've seen Brown perform in lofts ranging from ample to parlor-size and from handsome to grungy, in opera houses, parks, gyms, museums, and city plazas, can appreciate the grace and intelligence with which she designs—or accommodates—her work for each space. Because of the size of City Center, she performs her solo, *Accumulation* (1971) with *Talking* (1973) plus *Watermotor* (1977), wearing a chest mike. She makes no attempt to downplay its ability to amplify everything within range, so the dance has a new accompaniment of small rustles and creaks and thumps—a busy, wordless account of the dancing.

The solo in its present form is not only dazzling, it's a fairly profound lesson in the way Brown's mind works. Spectators might not notice, or care to notice, that Brown is alternating between two dances—keeping her place in each one. In many cases, it's not all that easy to separate the two: *Accumulation*, an accumulating list of fluid moves, picks up some of the plunging, bolting-about wildness of *Wa-*

termotor, no matter how hard Brown tries to keep it plain, keep it anchored. But all of us can hear how she's also telling two gently droll stories—putting mental place markers in "A", while she nudges "B" a little further down the track. We can hear her waffle ("holding on 'B'"), almost lose her place, pause to gather her words, while one or the other or both of the two dances races on. So, even though Brown's adroit performance masks the treacheries of switching between two dances, we can infer them.

For me, the most stunning thing about *Glacial Decoy* (1979) is not the constant drift of dancing which one, then two, then four performers shape into ripples, bubbles, spurts; nor is it the procession of black-and-white photographs by Robert Rauschenberg that move a cargo of distant landscapes and intimately perused objects across the backdrop. These two elements are stunning, of course, but what particularly delights me is Brown's vision of the dance as wider than the stage. When Irene Hultman is negotiating a silky course stage left, her movement has to carry her offstage before Lisa Schmidt can appear from the right wing. It's as if they have to maintain a constant distance from each other, and that distance is so large that we rarely see them both. The unoccupied middle of the stage becomes an invisible force that pushes one away and pulls the other on. But when Vicky Shick and Diane Madden dance together, there is very little space between them and a great deal around them. City Center being a very wide stage, Brown momentarily adds Carolyn Lucas to the picture when the final strung-out quartet of women in their white, pleated parachutes of dresses begins to move who knows how many feet to the left. Can Hultman be all the way to Sixth Avenue by now? And unbeknownst to us, was Lucas performing the whole dance in the lobby of the Hotel Wellington, waiting for the piece to shift far enough left to bring her into our view?

I sensed that some members of the opening night audience found *Glacial Decoy* "difficult," perhaps because no music accompanies it, and no talking either. But the premiere, *Lateral Pass*, induced only delirious approval. As well it might. Let me give you the landscape first. The Peter Zummo orchestra (Mus-

tafa Ahmed, percussion; Guy Klucsevsek, accordion; Arthur Russell, cello; Bill Ruyle, marimba; Peter Zummo, trombone) plays four of the *Six Songs* that make up the commissioned score. However tightly structured, Zummo's music has a looseness to it; you could almost believe it was being improvised. It's rather delicate, sweet-tempered, with clear rhythms emerging in the last two songs. Perhaps because of the accordion, it makes me think fitfully of street musicians.

Part of Nancy Graves's "visual presentation" descends from above at various points in the dance. Two-dimensional

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shapes like bright maps of small countries drift down, then, some distance in front of these, silver wire figures that look as if they might be as-yet-unfilled-in outlines of other countries. Sometimes these are hanging so low that dancers must construe their steps horizontally and stay close to the floor. Last to arrive are slashes and arches of yellow tape. Graves has dressed the performers in all sorts of outfits, and these keep changing. Now Brown's wearing a short pleated cape over a jumpsuit; next time we see her, she's gotten hold of a subtly gaudy black-over-color skirt. Diane Madden's little tutu is now around the hips of her blue unitard, now around her neck, as if she were a trained poodle; later she discards the ruffle for a snaking magenta tube that attaches to her in various spots. Graves's bold and ingenious designs make me think more of Matisse than of Graves, and it must be, in part, this association that gives the stage the festive look of an oddball circus. Beverly Emmons underlines this with vividly colored but never garish lighting, which, like the clothes, keeps altering.

The dancing is altogether extraordinary. Years ago, Brown used the word "dilemma" in connection with her works; in the interview with Yvonne Rainer that appeared in the *Voice* a couple of weeks ago, she spoke of "calamities." Well, this work is full of beautiful and essentially peaceful calamities. Not only does the dancing wind about the bodies and burst out of them in completely surprising

tilted from time to time so that what formerly went up has to go down, what went right careers left, and a dancer performing a step designed as a solo acquires an agreeable, but perhaps unwieldy partner.

Unlike most of Brown's dances, *Lateral Pass* shows you single dancers or units of dancers working for a while, before a change of personnel signals another section. This gives it a rather calming legibility to offset the wildness. Also unusual for Brown are the pauses—some of them quite long—that occur occasionally to give us eye-rest. New too is the way she features her superb dancers. Here is Warshaw, the compact yet fluid acrobat soaring on his rope; here is Madden, impishly pensive in a pause-studded solo while Shick and Hultman lie face down on the floor, bouncing restively now and then. The solo for Hultman brings her robust lyricism to bear on Brown's style. Stephen Petronio makes you understand its uncanny coordinations; the steps pour through his body as if they're slipping around a maze, with new pathways opening up where you'd have sworn there was no exit. Brown points out something calm and contained within Shick's gift for complexity, gives us time to admire how her gaze considers paths that her supple, wide-ranging limbs may or may not take. New company members Lucas, Schmidt, and Lance Gries are, as is to be expected, featured less prominently, but they too assert their individuality.

Your mind can move backward and forward in this dance. When Shick steps into a pose, profile to us, bent leg lifted behind, body canted forward, and then slowly stretches out to display a straight horizontal line, you can remember Madden much earlier, stepping into the same position, but not expanding it. Most of the time, however, your thinking tumbles and puddles around with the dancers. When is a canon not a canon? Who was that woman he was almost dancing with and where did she come from? And is it true that Trisha Brown can sit down on water, lie on air? Things get really dazzling toward the end, when an increasing number of dancers swing through what seems to be counterpoint, but could be canon, and anyway they keep switching parts, so your eyes veer where you didn't expect them to, and the universe does spin, it really does, and we're all flying around and around sideways, not a bit sick and very happy. ■