

Arts & Leisure

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 1991

DANCE



Jim Blanc and Peter Kope in Rick Darnell's "Brides of Frankenstein"—Its tomfoolery implied that men need not be unremittingly solemn in all-male dances.

DANCE VIEW/Jack Anderson

Men in Dance: Moving Beyond Muscularity

WHEN TED SHAWN decided that he wanted to be a dancer, one of his fraternity brothers at the University of Denver exclaimed, "But, Ted, men don't dance." That was back when both the century and Shawn were young, a time when, if many respectable Americans even admitted the possibility of male dancers, they assumed that such men must be idlers or profligates. Or worse. And today, vestiges of such dark suspicions still linger.

Shawn, however, refused to be intimidated. He did become a dancer, and in 1914 he married Ruth St. Denis, one of the most charis-

**It's time to
emphasize
choreographic
qualities other than
athleticism.**

mands of dancing to those of athletics. Shawn created athletic choreography for his own all-male company, the Men Dancers, which



Jim Blanc and Peter Kope in Rick Darnell's "Brides of Frankenstein"—Its tomfoolery implied that men need not be unremittingly solemn in all-male dances.

DANCE VIEW/Jack Anderson

Men in Dance: Moving Beyond Muscularity

WHEN TED SHAWN decided that he wanted to be a dancer, one of his fraternity brothers at the University of Denver exclaimed, "But, Ted, men don't dance." That was back when both the century and Shawn were young, a time when, if many respectable Americans even admitted the possibility of male dancers, they assumed that such men must be idlers or profligates. Or worse. And today, vestiges of such dark suspicions still linger.

Shawn, however, refused to be intimidated. He did become a dancer, and in 1914 he married Ruth St. Denis, one of the most charismatic figures in early modern dance. The next year they founded their influential Denishawn school and performing company. Until his death in 1972, Shawn involved himself with a multitude of choreographic projects but remained a leader in the crusade to make dancing an honorable career for men.

Shawn, who would have been 100 years old on Oct. 21, helped form present-day attitudes toward male dancing. Although most remain sound, some urgently need revision. That was made clear in "Men Dancers: The Ted Shawn Legacy," the program of all-male dances presented late last month at the Joyce Theater by the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, which Shawn founded and directed.

It was no surprise that most of those dances were athletic. Virtually every apologist for male dancing has likened the de-

**It's time to
emphasize
choreographic
qualities other than
athleticism.**

mands of dancing to those of athletics. Shawn created athletic choreography for his own all-male company, the Men Dancers, which toured from 1933 to 1940. More recently, gymnastics has pervaded productions by Pilobolus, the choreographic collective whose works were also represented at the Joyce.

Although Shawn relished theatrical display, he was a serious choreographer. That was evident at the Joyce in revivals of two of his works: "O Brother Sun and Sister Moon" (1931), a portrait of St. Francis, and "Kinetic Molpai" (1935), Shawn's most celebrated ensemble piece for his Men Dancers. If, today, "Kinetic Molpai" looks self-consciously strenuous, the choreography's emotional fervor and contrapuntal patterns make for more than an exhibition of muscularity. Inspired by ancient Greek ceremonials, the work is a ritual of life, death and rebirth in which Shawn used athleticism to express spirituality.

Today, however, athleticism dominates so many all-male dances that it can be accused