

Out for Change

By Eva Yaa Asantewaa

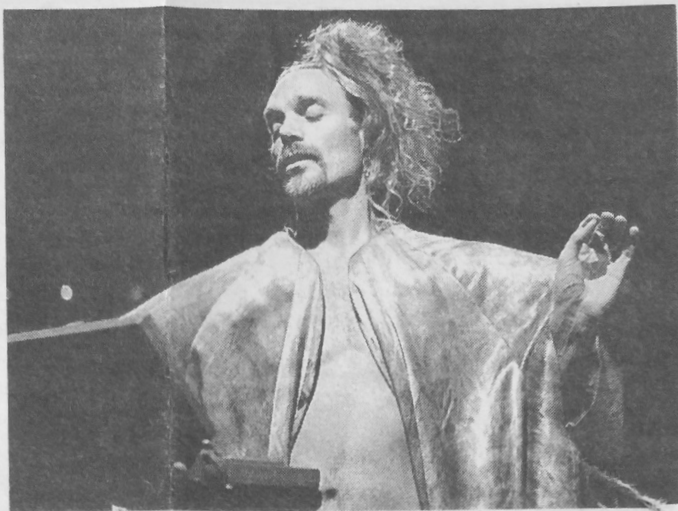
Patrick Scully

Queer Notions

Dance Theater Workshop

September 17 through 19

At the end of the opening night performance of *Queer Notions*, Minneapolis-based dancer/performance artist Patrick Scully asked his audience if it was clear that his duet with Chris Aiken and Aiken's solo had been improvised. Surely everyone had glanced at the program notes. Could the real question be: Do ad-libbed dances require us to look at them in a unique way? Scully's answer might be found in the duet, *Common Denominator* (Or *Improvisational Duet* #82). Here, describing



TOM BRAZIL

Patrick Scully in *Queer Thinking*

the trick of seeing "the pebbly texture on a grainy surface," he advised, "Let your eyes relax."

Scully and Aiken opened *Common Denominator* by sitting in the lotus pose, but something about their physical closeness made them quickly shed serenity. They became mischievous boys trying to scare each other when

they should be sleeping. A mysterious tapping came from somewhere in the building—apparently unplanned and serendipitous. It's the evil, high-heeled woman upstairs, Scully suggested, pulling his somber voice lower. Creeping after the smaller, skittish Aiken, Scully scrunched his lanky body

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into a bearish shape: "Let's go get her." We had slipped into an intriguing netherworld where the partners were brothers or lovers or make-believe shamans trying on animal skins and dangerous power. The way to experience this fluid region—as dancer, as viewer—is to give up control.

For his solo improvisation, *Critical Mass*, Aiken chose an Islamic trance-inducing *Qawwal* by master singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Kahn. Kahn's voice, piercing yet supple, animated the dancer, who turned boneless and snaky, then electrified and spinning with arms like arched and slicing sickles. The power that fused with Aiken

and moved him like a toy was aggressive, yet seductive, always musical. The dance ended long before we could be sated.

The entire program plays with transformation as a kind of change that intensifies what is most essential and unchanging. In the performance piece *Queer Thinking*, Scully's alter ego, Tanya—named for Patty Hearst, who also flipped a few personae in her time—struts the space, her male equipment unforgettable and well within reach beneath her leopard-print microskirt. Under her cascade of blond hair, Tanya is basically sane, sensible Scully with a tad more looseness in the neck and more elegant busyness about the left hand. No matter what

Scully's stage of dress or undress, the same Northern climes voice delivers all of *Queer Thinking's* conversational text—a combination of coming-out story, fag-bashing war story, and manifesto of an HIV-positive man and "recovering autophobe."

Of course, not all change is salutary; not all letting go is freely chosen. In *Too Soon Lost*, Scully recounts the swift evolution of places he has lived, worked, and played—where a greengrocery might become a nickelodeon and then an artist's studio. The neighborhoods of his past—and his fallen friends—seem to us like pages ripped out of a diary. The more he talks, the closer he gets to the blank sheets. ■