



**VARSITY
THEATRE**
13TH AND 4TH STREET S.E.
331-2492

DANCE

MICA Series Strikes Sparks

by Caroline Hall Otis

Gorgia Stephens daubs colors into the fabric of an evening with a deft, inventive brush. Her gifted touch was responsible for the off-the-wall wit and the audience's enthusiastic reaction to "Subjects and Objects," two evenings of dances presented at the Ozone Studio last weekend.

This performance marked the first of six "Studio X" events to be sponsored by the Minnesota Independent Choreographers' Alliance (MICA) this year. The "Studio X" series is intended to showcase works designed and/or performed in unusual spaces, or collaborations between choreographers and/or other artists. The requirements for participation are minimal—almost anyone with an interesting idea can put it to the test—and the free admission means nobody has a gripe if things don't work out all that well. Fortunately, that wasn't much of a problem last weekend.

Stephens put considerable energy into her role as "coordinator" of the evening. This was most evident in

the wacky scene changes in which dressed-up performers trooped on between each dance to manipulate a variety of objects—including a chair, ladder, shirt, boxes, spoons, newspapers, etc.—in a variety of ways. For example, a woman in an 1930s-style black velvet coat and cloche hat carefully spreads a shirt on the back of a folding chair and sits down to read her newspaper, only to move the chair upstage, remove the shirt, re-sit, fold up the paper, pick up her chair, and exit. Similar little tableaux materialize and metamorphose throughout the space until all the people disappear, taking their stuff with them. Following Stephens' lead, each performer approaches these absurd tasks with an earnest job-to-be-done attitude to create incongruous, low-key craziness.

Stephens' two dances are like that, too. Accompanied by her own taped sound montage and running Gertrude Stein-esque patter, *Heart and Pole* (danced by Stephens on Friday and Wendy Morris on Saturday) takes lightning-quick jabs at baton twirling, top hat and tails routines, and a number of other ideas. Morris, incidentally, is the only local choreographer who

parallels Stephens' wit and originality. The two differ in that Morris tends to plumb the depths of a single humorous concept in each of her works, while Stephens veers off on wild tangents that somehow make perfect sense. Both are smart and funny ladies.

Another high point of "Subjects and Objects" was an untitled dance choreographed by Laurie Van Wieren and Tom Carlson in celebration of their wedding last August. This exploration of wedding rituals—the clothing, primping, bravado, and nerves—and the foibles of coupledom, is sweet, funny, and a touch unnerving. Carlson, formally dressed in satin tails, or rather "tail," begins the dance as a self-admiring mirror hog, then chases, catches, and plays with his limp tail (yes, there do seem to be some sexual overtones here) before he strips down to a genuine penguin suit and waddles around, his face wreathed in silly grin. In the meantime, Van Wieren is fussing with her petticoat and tiara, practicing her gracious lady smile, looking worried and/or hysterical. The dance ends after the pair embrace and nag each other gently on the importance of main-

taining clear communication.

Patrick Scully, who has returned to the Twin Cities after his self-indulgent "A Personal Good-Bye" performance last summer, delivered yet another pretentious improvisation in this concert. While climbing, lifting, and otherwise fooling around with a ladder, Scully moans and groans about his unpleasant reception in South Dakota. Small wonder. I wish Scully would channel some of his great magnetism into more focused material.

The program closed with two clumsy yet festive trio dances by Maria Genne. The first, set to a musical rendition of an Hillaire Belloc Cautionary Tale, featured a few witty takes amid childish movement and a heavyhanded moral; a slide projection of a mushroom cloud appeared during a line about how men shouldn't play with dangerous toys. The second comprised a sincere and enthusiastic reading and dancing out of Hug Ball's Dadaist poem "Karawane." The dancers gave the rhythm nonsense words and patterns the all. I kinda got into it, too . . . in the whole concert, in fact, than to Georgia Stephens.

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