

# Unsafe Unsited Review Bay Area Guardian, S.F. 1995

Performances by activists, the  
Royal Ballet, and the Opéra  
Ballet de Lyon feed the dance-  
hungry. By Rita Felciano

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DANCE

## Ballets and banquets

JUNE WAS a month for flying high on dance. Both the Royal Ballet and the Opéra Ballet de Lyon presented works that simply lifted you out of your seat. Lyon's punk *Romeo and Juliet* was as hard-edged as it was heart-breaking. Its *Central Figure*, by American choreographer Susan Marshall — a wistfully crystalline homage to one of Marshall's dancers who had died — was about as classical an elegy as I have seen on stage. And while the Royal's overstuffed Fabergé egg *Swan Lake* came awfully close to being camp, the company more than made up for it in the subtle shading of Frederick Ashton's *A Month in the Country*. But the company really kicked into gear in Ashley Page's *Fearful Symmetries*, a fulminating rhapsody in which the

astounding Irek Mukhamedov partnered no less than three ballerinas.

Like good food, these works slowly but surely trickled into your bones; all you had to do was accept their nourishment. They were created by choreographers whose shaping intelligence was recognizable every moment of the performance. These are artists and thinkers who know exactly what they want to say and have the technique and sensitivity to translate their ideas into the bodies of dancers. So why is it then that *Unsafe, Unsited*, a piece that had no choreographer, could be just about as satisfying?

*Unsafe, Unsited*, performed at Laney College (July 1) by Keith Hennessy, Ishmael Houston-Jones, and Patrick Scully, three gay activist-performers, was about as far removed from the ballet stage as a dance can be. *Unsafe* can hardly even be called a work, since it changed with every performance, held together by common sensibilities and, no doubt, basic parameters.

Based on contact improvisation,

the performance lacked precision and clarity. But what was lost in terms of shaping control was gained in intimacy. The performers didn't so much present you with an object as invite you in to become part of what was going on between the three of them. And what an exceptional trio they were — Houston-Jones, rounded and soft, moving

as if floating in ether; Scully, the giant with a poet's sense of language; and Hennessy, the trickster of earnest politics.

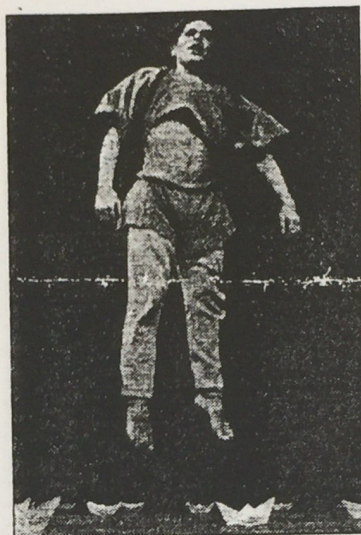
They first appeared in business suits, each in his own circle of light. The evening then evolved primarily as a series of duets with constantly changing partners. The games these performers played with each other could turn dan-

gerous at any moment. They engaged in a spitting contest, licking the saliva off each other, which was uncomfortable to watch not only because of the social taboos it broke, but also because of what we have come to fear about the exchange of bodily fluids. The performers threw themselves full force at each other as if to knock each other over.

Yet there were also moments of tenderness and hilarity: Hennessy trying to take his pants off while standing on his head; Scully skidding buck naked across the wet floor as if on a frozen pond. Above all this was an evening of vulnerability. But then, that's reality.

This weekend two other dancers, Arturo Fernandez and Jose Navarrete, are bringing their own (gay, Latino) perspective to what it means to live a life on the margins. ■

**Arturo Fernandez** (Left Coast Dance Theater) and **Jose Navarrete** (Los de Abajo Dance Theatre) perform Thurs/13, 7:30 p.m., and Fri/14, 8 p.m., Laney College Theater, 900 Fallon, Oakl. \$15. (510) 762-BASS.



Floating: Jose Navarrete interprets a life on the margins.