

# dance roundup

Notes on recent dance shows By GLENN SUMI

## Danny's hits and misses

The ads for **Danny Grossman Greatest Hits, Volume 1** show at the Premiere Dance Theatre (January 25-28) featured the choreographer posing like a latter-day Rembrandt.

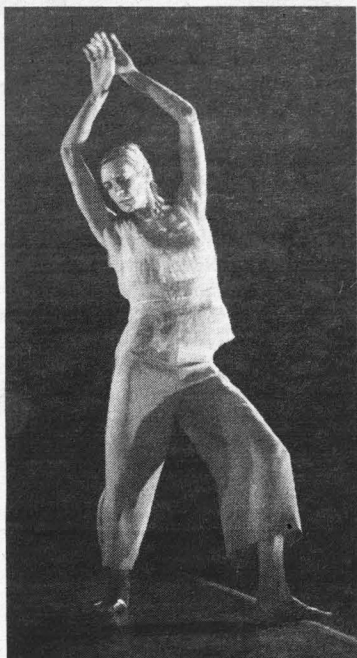
If only all the dance on display were equally masterful.

Grossman's best at playful, cheeky works full of bold theatricality. The opening piece, 1976's *National Spirit*, proved a timely parody of wartime nationalism.

Moving to a Sousa march, Grossman's nimble troupe – outfitted in red, white and blue – performed regimented steps, allowing for occasional clown-like subversion worthy of Chaplin or Keaton.

Other highlights included *Curious Schools Of Theatrical Dancing: Part 1*, a bravura solo with biblical echoes danced by **Eddie Kastrau**, who celebrated 20 years with the company. Kastrau also paired with **Mairéad Filgate** in the classic duet *Higher*, a whimsical look at human connections danced to and around a ladder and a couple of chairs. But I've seen stronger performances that make the movement, choreographed to Ray Charles songs, seem effortless and full of abandon.

Also on the bill were 1998's turgid *Passion Symphony*, a campy take on sexuality and Catholicism that's so overdone it resembles a Charles Ludlum satire. The program ended with *La Valse*, an ambitious but obvious look at class structures.



Peggy Baker mesmerized crowds with *The Heart Moves*.

## Saucy Sasso

**Julia Sasso's *The Betrayal Project*** (January 31-February 4), her sophomore full-length dance, added some much-needed passion to the winter dance scene, even if the heat quickly dissipated.

Sasso explored different kinds of betrayals, mostly focusing on power struggles and sexual gambits. What was astonishing was how quickly Sasso and her five terrific dancers

(**Michael Trent, Ray Hogg, Darryl Tracy, Molly Johnson and Neil Sochasky**) managed to shift tones. A playful scene could morph into something dangerous; an erotically charged moment could suddenly become violent.

It's too bad Sasso felt compelled to add other elements. Using apples in a piece about betrayal is too cute for words, and speaking of words, we could have done without the rumbly and ramblings that the dancers occasionally moaned.

Loved the imaginative use of harmonicas, however, and the suggestive sets that evoked shadows and the forbidden.

## All the right Signs

**Yvonne Ng** is growing in leaps and bounds as a choreographer. Although the program notes for her fascinating diptych, ***Signs*** (February 8-11), included slightly pretentious poetry and ramblings about the "creative process," the show itself was clear and direct, full of ravishing, memorable images.

The first piece, *Paper Women*, was full of spontaneous touches – bursts of painterly, Degas-like tableaux of young girls dancing and haunting sounds that resurrected memories of childhood schoolyards.

Ng hasn't romanticized the past. At one point, her dancers planted their feet firmly on the ground, their backs to us, resembling sumo wrestlers. At another, they squirmed on the ground, becoming reptiles, the evocative score full of menacing jagged edges.

There was room for playfulness, too, especially in an improvised scene where two authority figures barked out orders to the dancers.

The second piece, *Emerald Lies*, was a bit more focused in its themes of bullying and victimization.

**Susan Lee** captured the paradoxical bossiness and insecurity of the alpha female who preys on a sacrificial victim (**Kate Holden**) while others look on.

A repeated image of hands around a face was particularly haunting, and



Dancer **Kate Holden** (front) stood out in **Yvonne Ng's** terrific diptych ***Signs***.

as the ostracized girl, Holden performed a riveting solo to perfection. Kudos to Ng for using multimedia elements effectively, especially bells.

Ng still needs to tinker with the piece's ending. The final moments come too abruptly – disappointing after such a well-paced show.

## Heart-breaking

The sound of a baby crying in an audience is usually annoying, but at Krishna's Mouth, the opening piece by **Peggy Baker** in her recent ***The Heart Moves*** program (February 9-12), it blended right in.

Baker danced her new solo while continually repeating the story of the baby Krishna crawling on the ground and grabbing a pile of dirt in his mouth. If anything, the baby cries on Sunday's performance heightened the piece's tension. Baker's hypnotic movement didn't hurt, either.

Her work in **Paul-André Fortier's** existential little 1983 piece *Non Coupable* was equally mesmerizing.

The program's strongest work was the finale, **Doug Varone's** *In Thine Eyes*, a duet Baker danced with **Larry Hahn**.

Varone's ornate, neo-classical dance was full of sculptural, wildly geometric movements and an emotional arc that seemed to be about the possibilities of human connection.

The pair triumphed and offered something we hardly ever see on-stage: two dancers over 50 who have earned every step they take.

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