

# Fast/Forward

Reviews/Articles

1986-2001

# Morris breaks the rules with elegance and fun

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## Dance review

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By Robert Merritt

Times-Dispatch staff writer

Nothing is quite what it seems with the Mark Morris Dance Group. Just when you think you've got them figured out, they do something that completely reshapes the possibilities of dance and you start all over again.

Performing last night before about 400 people in the first of two concerts to conclude the Fast/Forward series at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the 12-member company continually offered challenges. And, in the process, they showed why they're the hottest modern dance ensemble in the country.

There were four works on the program, each drawing from an entirely different source and an entirely different set of rhythmic rules — traditional Thai music, country and Western songs, Hopi Indian chants and, in the second half, Vivaldi's "Gloria."

The 30-year-old Morris, who formed the group in 1980 and does all of the choreography, acknowledges the rules, but the rhythms are a challenge. Anything that hints in the least bit to tradition is only a tease for the eclectic movement — unique, unprecedented and joyful movement — that the rhythms inspire.

Not only has Morris brought elegance back to the sharp edges of modern dance, but he's also brought back the fun. Combining a strong sense of ballet with a full appreciation of all that modern dance has experienced between Martha Graham and Twyla Tharp, he finds his own way with humor and a new set of kinky values.

"Celestial Greetings," which opened the program, is a perfect teaser. The Thai music is filled with anticipated images, rhythmic repetitions and, in Morris' mind, all sorts of possibilities. Using six members of the group, he captures the spirit of Asia, the forms of its sculpture, the fluid lines of the music and he does it all using modern dance idioms.

And that certainly sets the stage for "Deck of Cards," in which nothing is what it seems. Using the songs of Jimmy Logsdon, George Jones and the title cut by T. Texas Tyler, he opens the three movements with a toy truck, operated by remote control, dancing around the stage.

The second movement is about a honky-tonk girl, but who's dancing on stage — it's Morris, wearing a skirt, flipping around his long hair and creating a comic vignette of pure melodrama. And in the third, dancer Donald Mouton plays a soldier explaining how a deck of cards served as his prayer book in the field; he's in uniform, only he isn't wearing any trousers.

"Strict Songs" carried things a step further into the realm of the abstract. Building on Hopi chants, the ensemble moves in and out of narrative context. The chants draw up moody images of ritual, but the dancers quickly move beyond this, expressing pure movement as if they are robotic machines designed for this purpose.

"Gloria" not only capped the evening but also seemed to be the culmination of Morris' eccentricity. The music conjures up religious symbols, and Morris plays with this. He gives you all the symbols you could ever want, but he caresses them with movement so elegant and so pure that it is mesmerizing.

The concert will be repeated at 8 p.m. today.

# Anthony Davis serves gourmet jazz during 'Fast Forward' performance

## MUSIC REVIEW

By Afi Scruggs

News Leader special writer

--Richmond's jazz palates, accustomed to hearty helpings of mainstream jazz, stopped short at the gourmet meal served last night by Anthony Davis at the Virginia Museum's Fast Forward concert series. Davis and his group, Episteme, dished up an elegant salad of classical and Afro-American idiom, spiced with South Indian and African influences and tossed into a uniquely individual expression.

The instrumentation of Episteme: J.D. Parran on flute, B-flat and contra-bass clarinets; Marty Erlich on flute, B-flat and bass clarinets; David Miller on bassoon; Shern Guibbory on violin; Abdul Wadud on cello; Gerry Hemingway on percussion and Davis on piano, speaks more of chamber music and string ensembles, almost as if Davis had turned his back on the saxophone and bass required of any self-respecting jazz band. He, instead, uses the essence of jazz, its polyrhythmic and improvisational freedom, as the foundation to support a classical facade. It is jarring in this context. One listener complained that he couldn't tell when the musicians were playing from the score or from their heads, a tendency especially obvious in "Wayang No. IV," when the woodwinds almost interrupted the improvisations between the strings and piano. One wonders, though, if the creative license would have rankled had Dizzy Gillespie or Lionel Hampton been on stage.

Davis resists attempts to label the music he creates,

considering it the product of his search to "find his own voice as an artist." Critics, however, are notorious for categorizing and one is tempted to move Davis' compositions from the realm of jazz into that of art-music.

For as art, truly great art, obligates the viewer to look, then Davis' music demands the hearer listen. Not nod a head, or pat a foot, but listen to what is being played. And the rhythmic complexity inherent in his compositions, proof of non-western influences, prevent easy reliance on beat or tempo.

"Undine," the first composition in the roughly 90-minute performance, proved a perfect introduction to Davis' musical concepts. Program notes described the piece as a "composition in three sections." To those in the audience, it seemed the musicians filed on-stage silently, tuned up, and launched into what became an amoebic mass, flowing where it would, never losing its coherence or unity. The composition's fluidity almost obscured the mathematical patterning of the tempo, especially as Gerry Hemingway's percussive touches punctuated, rather than pushed the other musicians. More familiar to the audience was "Crepuscule with Nellie," by Theolonius Monk. Davis learned "the use of silence" from this piano genius, a lesson he has obviously mastered. Davis' strategic pauses surrounding the theme turned "Crepuscule" into the love song Monk must have originally intended.

Tonight's performance features the overture from "X," Davis' opera based on the life of Malcolm X, the black leader. A creation of the opera was a family effort; Davis wrote the score, his brother Christopher wrote the scenario and cousin, poet Thulani Davis wrote the libretto. The performance begins at 8, at the Virginia Museum Theatre.

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# Sankai Juku: glory, power, beauty

## DANCE REVIEW

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by Frances Schools,  
News Leader special writer

With three curtain calls, a standing ovation and thunderous applause, there was no doubt that the 1,400 people attending last night's performance of Sankai Juku at the Carpenter Center were impressed.

The Japanese group performs in the Butoh style, an art form that developed in the post-war era of the 1960s as a new method of expression, less restrained than the ancient forms of Noh and Kabuki.

Ushio Amagatsu, the artistic director of this group, and four other dancers obviously have mastered this demanding form of expression. Every movement is in slow motion, requiring great stamina and control of every muscle in the body.

The program is a visual wonderment with the dancers dressed in white, their bodies covered in a chalk-like substance. The stage is set in black and white: egg-shaped objects are placed around the stage and four gongs are suspended around a large pool. A lighted background reflects the ripples in the pool, and later becomes stark black as the mood becomes more intense.

There are seven scenes in the 90-minute program. The visual beauty of the set and the mesmerizing movements of the dancers are dramatically enhanced by the hauntingly spell-binding music of Toichiro Yoshikawa and Yas-Kaz.

The performance presented last night as part of the Virginia Museum's Fast/Forward series, is titled, "The Egg Stands Out of Curiosity — Unetsu." The egg-shaped sculptures could be interpreted to denote life and creation, but the dance also portrays death and destruction.

Amid the almost ritualistic movements and images created by the dancers, are also dramatic astonishments of special effects created by two cascading waterfalls — one of water and one of sand. In the final scene of the performance, Amagatsu stands under the waterfall of sand, writhing grotesquely as if the burdens of the world are coming down upon him. Dramatically, the falling water is darkened so that only the sound is heard.

In an earlier segment, the four dancers move through the water, lie down in it and then continually rise up only to fall again repeatedly. Perhaps they are overcome by the tediousness of life itself.

Whatever the meanings the group conveys, the overall effect is one of beauty and awe. Internal expressions and emotions are felt through each movement and the powerfulness of this dramatic performance seemed to touch everyone who witnessed it.

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# arts & leisure

**DANCE**



## Fabulous Fragments

**Bits and pieces of works by the legendary Merce Cunningham illuminate a lifetime of artistic pursuit.**

*by Cheryl Pallant*

**Merce Cunningham, one of the 20th century's great artistic pioneers, brings his dances of distinction to Virginia for the first time in 30 years.**

**T**here's no telling exactly what will be on the dance card on Oct. 26 and 27 when the Merce Cunningham Dance Company takes to the Virginia Museum

night. Others, however, find it more trying. Painter, collaborator, and past resident designer Robert Rauschenberg has said of working with Cunningham and composer John Cage: "[It was] a most ex-

choice of music, a decision that early on distinguished him from other choreographers. Typically, dissonant soundscapes orchestrated by Cage, which included a wide selection of gears and

# Merce Cunningham 'Event' engaging and exhilarating

BY ROY PROCTOR

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

The 16 young members of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company offered amazements aplenty when they took their first Richmond bows Saturday night in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts' Fast/Forward performance series.

The chief amazement, however, was Cunningham himself. Now 77 and hobbled by the infirmities of age, the modern-dance legend shuffled onto TheatreVirginia's stage in the closing moments of his 90-minute, intermissionless "Event." He sat on a folding wooden chair.

As the electronic music that had propelled the evening continued to screech, boom and zoom, Cunningham's hands began to move, then his arms, his legs, his head, his torso. He grinned at the audience, eliciting a laugh. Then his mouth formed an "O," the sort of "O" a dying man manages when his death rattle begins.

Just when you thought Cunningham might have expired, he climbed to his feet, and his feet were not all

that began to dance. His hands, his arms, his head, his torso got into the act until, finally, he was dancing with the chair, making intimate communion with it as if it were that link with humanity that defies death.

It was an exhilarating, triumphant moment by any standard, but my death-and-resurrection interpretation of what Cunningham was doing is just that — an interpretation. Others may have seen it quite differently. That would have been all right with Cunningham, who believes our response to dance should be emotional and open-ended.

Call Saturday night's "Event" — and presumably yesterday afternoon's "Event" as well — the expansive landscape of Cunningham's genius. As has been his practice for more than 30 years, each "Event" is tailored for its performing space.

Saturday night's "Event" offered complete works and excerpts from other works among the almost 200 Cunningham has created since he founded his namesake company in 1953. It also offered parts of what Cunningham termed a "work in progress" before coming here.

Which was which? It was impossible to tell. Cunningham had woven elements from his half-century of

choreographic creation into a seamless fabric, and the program identifies neither the dances nor the music played by three musicians in the pit.

The dancers are fit and beautifully disciplined. Cunningham is famous for using "chance" as a choreographic principle. His dancers, however, appear to leave little to chance as they perform solos and dance in dozens of combinations, most often barefoot in skintight outfits varying in color and design, but at one point in red tennis shoes and "coveralls."

Cunningham was a major figure in the modern-dance revolt against the expressive codification of ballet, but his dancers often seem most charming when they are making sly comment on ballet.

He insists on the independence of music and dance, but you aren't long into an "Event" before realizing that not just any music will do. Cunningham's dances don't amount to a visualization of music, but an affinity of mood between music and dance gives many of his works their power.

Funny and sad, rollicking and pensive, Cunningham's Saturday night "Event" throbbed with the fullness of life itself. Like any great work of art, it was capable of making receptive spectators feel more alive.

**DANCE  
REVIEW**

**L** of Fine Arts' stage. What we do know is that Cunningham's "Events" will be a collage of fragments from the nearly 200 works created by one of this century's dance pioneers.

Which dances specifically will be performed in "Events" is a decision left to the last minute — well, almost. In the final days before the company arrives in Richmond, sections of dances as well as entire works will be pieced together based on the theater's dimensions.

With such short notice, dancers may find reason to panic, but Cunningham's company is long used to his montaging that changes city to city and sometimes night by

cruciating collaboration but most exciting and real because nobody knew what anybody else was doing until it was too late."

Cunningham bases his aesthetic in discontinuity. "Everything is discontinuous," he explains in a recent phone interview. "Even what we think of as continuous is fragmented. It's just that phenomena like TV and 19th-century novels create a convention of continuity. Really, continuity is nothing more than what came before and what comes after."

His sense of time explains as well his

**Merce  
Cunningham  
Dance Co.**

Fast/Forward

Virginia Museum  
Theater

8 p.m. Oct. 26

2 p.m. Oct. 27

\$22

367-8148

gizmos, which were used to liberate dance from its shackles to music's melody and timing, one determining the direction of the other.

Favoring contrast, Cunningham says, "I prefer two independent things to go on at once. It's much more lifelike. One is not shaped by the other. They coincide in the same way that a tree with moving leaves coincides with a child passing by. ... The impressions are left up to each spectator."

Despite an abundance of haphazardry and fragmentation, his dances are actually

# ENTERTAINMENT

## Jones/Zane works astounding, appealing

### DANCE REVIEW

By Frances Schools  
News Leader special writer

Anyone who includes a dog in the opening moments of a performance has won the hearts of at least half the audience. That is exactly what Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane and Company did Saturday and yesterday at the Virginia Museum Theatre.

In a prologue prior to the presentation of "The Animal Trilogy," the dog, a local pet making its stage debut, was part of a scene where the dancers were lined up onstage with Zane; the dog; and later, Jones, standing in front. There was no music, the dancers disappeared one at a time, and the stage was left bare. Whatever the purpose, this bit accomplished one thing — it tweaked the imagination and set the stage for an evening of dance unlike any other. It also captured the fancy of the other half of the audience.

This company performs like a group of hyperactive individuals in perpetual motion. They fill the

stage with movements and actions that are often astounding and always appealing. The only difference is that each of these movements is precise, demanding and always captivating.

Jones and Zane have created choreography that overflows with originality. Movements are frenetic, strong, and constant in their direction. They call it post-modern, but no matter what they term it, it predicts a future direction of dance movement.

The three parts of this work are called, "How to Walk an Elephant," "Water Buffalo: An Acquired Taste," and "Sacred Cow: Lifting a Calf Everyday Until it Becomes an Ox." But these are merely names. There is no semblance of animal movements that can be easily interpreted. If they are there they are lost in the excitement of the movements.

Each of the dancers is an equal. There are no stars. Of the two co-artistic directors, Jones dances throughout the program; Zane appears only briefly. Not only are the dancers equal in talent, they are equal in gender. There are no separate male/female roles. The females appear strong and masculine; the males can be soft and feminine in their

moves. Each shares the strength of each movement and the effect is one of unity and completeness.

Conlon Nancarrow has fashioned a musical score that jolts with its loudness but mesmerizes the listener. It is cacophonous, and its sound fits perfectly with the whirlwind of movement taking place onstage.

The sets are simple but effective. In the last sequence, a conveyor runs across the back of the stage to offer the dancers another level on which to perform. Through use of this element as well as a set of stairs, the dancers are able to work several stage elements at the same time.

This is not a dance group that can be analyzed and dissected as to the meaning of its works. But it is a dance group that is the wave of the future, exciting and vibrant. There is no need to understand, just enjoy. Its excitement is contagious.

Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane and Company is the first in a series of performances to be presented in the Fast/Forward series by The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. The program will offer new directions in contemporary music, dance and performance art.

# ARTS & LIFESTYLE

## MULTIMEDIA

# The Machinery Unplugged

**Laurie Anderson works to make technology feel human.**

by Cheryl Pallant

**T**he productions by pioneering multimedia artist Laurie Anderson are well known for being highly wired. An animatronic parrot, a musical tie, video clones and voice synthesizers are only a few of the numerous high-tech enhancements that make their way into one of her shows.

... It [technology] could be improved by becoming easier to use and more transparent, if it could go in our shoes or in different places."

Having attended her share of computer shows and listened to salespeople threaten potential customers with being left in the digital dust if they don't buy the latest gadgets, she recognizes that there may be

therapies for guess who — people who have used too much technology. She explains darkness as not knowing. "Sometimes it's a great pleasure. It's not fear. I don't equate light with enlightenment. ... Enlightenment is the ability to understand that nothing really matters. It's such a brief time we're here. Everything changes, nothing is permanent, especially yourself. ... The most important thing is to understand other people's lives as much as your own."

While many put inordinate confidence in the glories of computers, Anderson reminds us about our equally powerful imaginations — easy to haul around, adaptable to any type of plug, upgrade never even mentioned by salespeople. "I'm not trying



High tech has its uses says Laurie Anderson, but must be used correctly.

# Chouinard's works are visual, visceral

BY JENNIE KNAPP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**M**arie Chouinard's choreography is an abstract contemplation of how the human body is shaped by forces great and small: primal impulses, the Big Bang, the beat of life. Her building blocks are not arms, legs and feet, but bones, muscles and skin as well as the tissue that connects the physical being to the life force that sets it in motion.

A retrospective of 11 solos from the 1970s through the 1990s was presented at a sold-out, single performance at FastForward, providing a supportive audience with the

**DANCE REVIEW**

opportunity to examine the growth of a remarkable artistic career. The 2½-hour program moved from shock-oriented

**COMPAGNIE  
MARIE  
CHOUINARD**

**AT: Virginia Museum  
Saturday night**

performance art pieces to more visceral and, later, intellectual works that incorporated interesting electronic scores and spoken, or muttered, text.

Chouinard's works are strong, dynamic expressions of inner states. But instead of appearing deeply personal, they resonate on a cosmic level. For her, the body is archetypal rather than individual and all of its movements are celebrations of life. Chouinard suggests that there is magnificence in such mundane activities as urinating or washing hair. In the dross of daily activity lies the essence of truth.

Carole Prieur, Lucie Mongrain and Elise Vanderborght, who performed the pieces created by Chouinard for herself, made them their own.

The first five pieces from the late 1970s to early 1980s were quieter and more contemplative than later works. In "Cristallisation," Prieur embodied the vibrations of sounds produced by the plucking of metal bars on what looked like a rack from a barbecue grill. Mongrain extended the connection between music and body in "Dimanche Main, Mai 1955" when her body-running and jumping in place became the tongue of a church bell.

"Mimas, Lune de Saturne," introduced one of the evening's prevalent themes: the nearness of death as an impetus for living. Tall, rangy Prieur conducted her daily activities in the presence of a skeleton, with whom she shared an apple. As she moved, its jaws, chewing sounds — and possibly an appetite for life — followed. Prieur dipped her head into a tub of water, then shrieked as she whipped her hair ritualistically in great arcs about her head. Beads of water flew off like sparks and suddenly the act of washing hair was full of mystery and awe.

Three dances from the mid- to late-1980s emphasized androgyny. "Earthquake in the Hartchakra," an alternately silly and terrifying piece, ended with the dancer floating off stage in a conflagration. Vanderborght's was an alien creature in red body paint, clanking metal, and a breathing tube attached to her head in "S.T.A.B. (Space, Time and Beyond)." Amplified moaning and breathing accompanied her fetal, ground-skimming movements.

Some of Chouinard's pieces worked viscerally, others visually. But one dance combined both to extraordinary effect. Mongrain was part man, part woman, part beast, part machine in "L'Après-midi d'un Faune," a nod to Nijinsky's iconoclastic work of the same title, which set off firestorms of protest in 1912. Loud electronic rumbling suggested the stirring of desire in an agitated beast. Mongrain walked in profile looking like an ancient Greek frieze. She had one padded thigh and a hat with curved horns. With a simple anatomical adjustment, a horn became a phallus used to fulfill a passionate impulse to merge with a beam of light.

Chouinard's newest works from the 1990s dealt with light and dark, emblems for life and death. Prieur's hands pecked at each other like birds, in "Etude Poignante" before this primal creature was consumed by light.

From the bizarre vocalizations to dramatic lighting to the stylized animal movements, this was an evening of consummate originality. Chouinard is an artist who takes you to the edge of the visible and he known to a place where mystery is more revealing than reality.

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**Richmond Times-Dispatch**

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MONDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2000

# Spoken Hand

*Drum ensembles  
are in rhythm with  
various traditions*

BY CLARKE BUSTARD  
TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

**“I**n the beginning was the drum.” Dizzy Gillespie’s famous phrase is about another creation story, that of music.

As Gillespie and many others have heard it, music is built of rhythms. Some rhythm pattern — perhaps made by clapping hands or patted on a piece of animal skin, or maybe first noticed in a phrase of speech — inspired a prehistoric human to make up the first song.

The rhythm made it memorable, so it could be repeated. With repetition, musical composition was born.

Some of the oldest continuing traditions of music — those of West Africa and the New World diaspora into which Africans were transported, and that of the Indian subcontinent — come together in the Spoken Hand Orchestra, an ensemble that will perform in Richmond this weekend as part of the Virginia Museum’s Fast/Forward series.

In addition to giving concerts for adults and children on the TheatreVirginia stage at the museum, the orchestra will present a free drumming workshop at 11 a.m. tomorrow at Fulton Hill Studios, 1000 Carlisle Ave.



**The self-contained ensembles within the orchestra start with a core idea, then work together to develop harmonies.**

Fast/Forward usually presents the newest in music and other performing arts, not the oldest. Spoken Hand combines both. “We’re grounded in traditions,” Lenny Seidman, the group’s co-director, said last week, “but we’re playing in a contemporary concert format.”

The ensemble traces its roots to the 1993 Philadelphia Africamericas Festival, which concluded with a massive parade and street festival in North Philadelphia.

“All kinds of music and dance, all

kinds of artistic activities,” Seidman recalled, “culminating in a spectacular ceremonial event where 40 drummers came together, performing from seven different drumming traditions from Africa and the Americas. It was like a religious ceremony — quite beautiful, quite moving.”

After Seidman played in the last festival in 1996 (it lapsed for lack of funding), he approached another of the participating drummers, Daryl Kwasi Burgee. “to

PLEASE SEE DRUMS, PAGE C2 ▶

Richmond Times-Dispatch  
May 5, 2000

# Meditation on change remarkable

BY JENNIE KNAPP  
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

A sense of brooding isolation hangs over the late summer afternoon that finds four characters slouched on their cottage furniture, a cicada symphony droning in the background.

Dressed immaculately in white, the three women and one man could be self-absorbed visitors from a Chekhov play waiting fitfully for something — anything — to happen.

Something remarkable does happen incrementally over the next 90 minutes of the wonderfully strange dance-theatre work

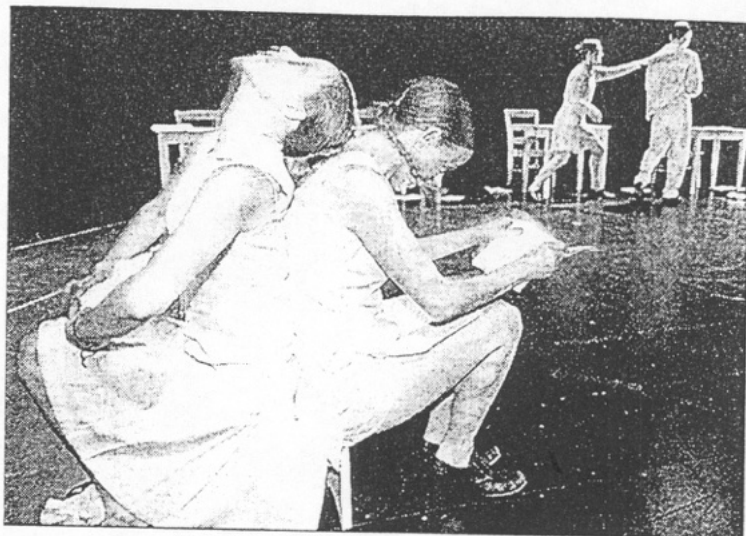
## DANCE REVIEW

### SEPTEMBER SEPTEMBER

BY: 33 Fainting Spells  
AT: Virginia Museum of  
Fine Arts on Saturday

“September September” presented by the Seattle-based company 33 Fainting Spells at the Virginia Museum of Fine Art’s Fast/Forward series. It is a visceral awareness of how change undermines the best efforts of memory to stop time.

Conceived and directed by two unrelated company members with the same last name — Dayna and Gaelen Hanson — “September September” layers dance with music and text in a work framed by fragments of voice-over narration. Style shifts as rapidly as mood, looking cool and cinematic in one sequence or boisterous and vaudevillian in another.



Gaelen Hanson and Peggy Piacenza (both in foreground) and Dayna Hanson and John Dixon perform in a scene of “September September.”

Hanson and Hanson bring a high level of wit to their meditation on the subject of change. It shows in their attention to physical detail: an exaggerated facial expression or the metaphorical importance that ordinary objects assume. Take, for instance, the woman with her refreshing drink who becomes sodden and bereft as she sucks on a wedge of lime. Or the statue of a horse that evokes a clip-clopping of hooves similar in sound to the tick-tock of an inescapable clock.

The choreography, which meanders at times through its abstract subject, is nevertheless haunting in its after-images. Most memorable are the dancers embodying aspects of a race horse, pawing and pacing the floor, or writing letters to themselves then autopsying the paper carcasses of their thoughts.

The image of red roses recurs after they are introduced as part of a golden summer. In the final sequence — set in autumn — the bloom is literally off the rose and on the bodies of female dancers in gloriously creative costumes designed by K.D. Schill and Anne Siems.

While cleverly used for the most part, an overabundance of props clutters the piece and threatens its coherence. Similarly, performers (Peggy Piacenza, John Dixon, Hanson and Hanson) spend more time doing things than developing character. Piacenza, Dixon and Gaelen Hanson are deliberate and impassioned in their ambiguity and, as a result, indistinct. By contrast, Dayna Hanson, stands out for the flapperesque fury of her dancing and her consistently affable mien.

Kyle Hanson’s eerie compositions support the nostalgic remembrance of things past. This is especially so at the end. Stilted by their costumes, the female dancers vibrate their arms into a blur at a banquet table where the single male dancer appears in a horse head.

The beauties and the beast continue to grapple with memories spontaneously triggered by events but without the strain between their physical and emotional natures. In a final gesture, the performers look backward as they walk through the audience, out a door and into the mist.

# Tone Poems

Alto saxophone great Oliver Lake combines music and poetry in "Matador of 1st and 1st."

by Peter McElhinney

**O**liver Lake has long been known as one of the premier jazz composers and musicians of his generation. He was a founding member of the groundbreaking World Saxophone Quartet and has led a wide variety of creative ensembles, working with everything from string quartets to steel drums. Lake's playing will share equal billing with his poetry in his one-man show "Matador of 1st and 1st" when he performs for the Virginia Museum's Fast/Forward series Saturday, March 31.

"Matador" is a multifaceted collection of pieces: words, songs and instrumental compositions, each reflecting an aspect of Lake's intelligent, often bemused perspective. "It's culled from my experiences as a musician, as a family man and from my travels," Lake says. "Once you become a poet you expose yourself, so this performance is pretty much me."

Lake recalls playing behind poets before he began to write his own poetry. But "Matador" is far from a typical poetry reading. "It is a theater piece, totally memorized, with three or four costume changes," Lake explains. "The performance lasts an hour and 10 minutes pretty much evenly divided a few minor modifications — removing dated references to the Clinton White House, for example — the show is unchanged.

The strength of "Matador" lies in Lake's combination of cutting insight and kindness. The title piece is a good example. It focuses on a street person who challenged traffic at a corner near Lake's home in the East Village. "He would attack cars," Lake recalls. "I would see him standing in the middle of the intersection, then he would run up and jump on someone's hood, spinning and dancing around. Cars would pull over, trying to avoid him."

Lake envisions a quixotic integrity behind



out; his sharp wit tempered with a willingness to laugh at himself.

Lake's playing, on flute, and soprano and alto saxophone, is woven throughout the performance. Without the ability to play chords like keyboards or strings, wind instrument solos are a melodic high-wire act. The music ranges from blues, to free jazz, to polished miniatures. His approach is often compared to the great '60s alto player Eric Dolphy, who alloyed experimental expressionism with familiar elements of the jazz tradition. Each short instrumental is as focused, personal and full of feeling as the text.

"Matador" is only one of Lake's many

"Everything I have wanted to be involved with I have been able to do," Lake says.

But "Matador's" demands and intimacy are unique. "I am on full time," Lake says, "except when a cassette plays while I change jackets and hats." (Of course, it is him playing on the tape.) The result is a multidimensional portrait of the artist as philosopher/entertainer — and as a matador, sidestepping oncoming expectations with a light-footed grace. **S**

*Oliver Lake performs on Saturday, March 31 at 8 p.m. at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Tickets are \$12-\$18. Call 340-1405.*

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# Character portrayal is real, haunting

BY ROY PROCTOR

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

**F**rom his high-security penthouse to the no-security crack house associated with his violent demise, the title character in "A Huey P. Newton Story" approaches the character complexity we associate with Shakespeare's tragedies.

Newton founded the Black Panther Party with Bobby Seale in Oakland, Calif., in 1966. It advocated

## THEATER REVIEW

### A HUEY P. NEWTON STORY

**TODAY** at 8 p.m. at TheatreVirginia in Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2800 Grove Ave.

**TICKETS:** \$18

**CALL:** (804) 367-8148

Smith's Obie-winning portrayal of Newton lies in his ability to capture so many conflicting colorations and resolve them in a character that is real and haunting.

From his opening improvisation, in which he engages his Richmond audience in an irony-laced discussion of the U.S. presidents born in Virginia, Smith distills Newton's character without ever falsifying it in this Fast/Forward presentation in TheatreVirginia at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

Newton held a Ph.D in social philosophy, knew his "Macbeth" backward and forward, and could tell the difference between Rachmaninoff and Bob Dylan and appreciate them both. He also spent years in jail, bore its scars, smoked incessantly and increasingly relied on the cocaine that led to his being gunned down 10 years ago in Oakland.

From the beginning, Smith's Newton is woozy — and woozily eloquent — as he sits in a spotlighted wooden armchair under a cloud of smoke that gives him a radiance at some points but threatens to envelop him at others. He speaks as a machine-gun shoots, just not as loud, and often stutters as he spins his harrowing tale.

"A Huey P. Newton Story" is essentially a one-man show, but its power is enhanced immeasurably by Marc Anthony Thompson's live sound design. Thompson stands at the light-and-sound console at the back of the house, frequently banter with Newton and, with sonic booms and other disconcerting sounds, knows how to jar any audience out of its complacency.

Last night's small audience accorded Smith a standing ovation. Smith, along with Thompson, responded with an illuminating question-and-answer session. Then, like any good pastor after a Sunday service, Smith greeted every patron with a handshake and a smile at the door.

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Richmond Times-Dispatch  
Saturday, May 1, 1999

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# Dancer bares body, soul in 'After Eros'

BY JENNIE KNAPP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**D**ancer/choreographer Maureen Fleming stretched and curled like an invertebrate animal through "After Eros," a hypnotic performance of Japanese *butoh*-inspired dance that transformed her body into living sculptures.

While shaping herself ever so slowly into abstract images, Fleming was nude. To this she added a spiritual nakedness that underscored the honesty of her work and made it so compelling.

*Butoh* is about baring the soul and drawing the viewer into an inner world and the effect of last night's performance was hallucinatory. "After Eros" resulted from the American choreographer's recent discovery of information about a childhood accident in Japan that should have left her immobile.

The performance marries the story of Fleming's car crash to the myth of *Psyche* and *Eros* and sets up (a not altogether successful) parallel between Fleming's transcendence of fate and *Psyche*'s trials.

The first two works in the program offered the strongest choreography. In "The Sphere," Fleming creates a feeling of being frozen in time. Surrounded by darkness, she emerges in a column of radiant light. Her knees bent, her torso tilted, she reaches backward at a glacial pace until her hands reach the floor and her torso forms a thin white circle, like a moon in eclipse. The piece takes only minutes, but time loses its meaning in the eternity in which Fleming is poised on half-toe, suspended in midair behind herself.

In "The Stairs," the most dramatic work of the program, Fleming reduces movement to its essence in stillness. Plunging headfirst down a black velvet staircase, the dancer glides through several barely perceptible rotations. The piece carries the psychic power of a recurring dream with no beginning and no end.

A projected video of the dancer in a collage of contortionist moves had the flavor of Georgia O'Keeffe's changing images of flowers. Most of Fleming's pieces ended with a look of simple grandeur. Distilling shapes to their most basic, Fleming endows them with a primordial vitality. Just as arresting as her body sculptures is the process of transformation she undergoes to achieve them.

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## DANCE REVIEW

### AFTER EROS

**WHERE:** Virginia  
Museum of Fine Arts

**WHEN:** Last night,  
repeats tonight

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Richmond Times-Dispatch  
Saturday, March 20, 1999

# In the nude at museum, dancer offers sense of freedom, discovery

By Julinda Lewis-Ferguson

The poster for Maureen Fleming was provocative. It showed the dancer/choreographer wearing a suit and standing on her head.



Julinda

But last Friday's performance — part of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts' Fast/Forward series — was even more startling.

Perched on a pedestal, Ms. Fleming began by arching her nude body into an excruciatingly slow backbend. She danced for an hour, often in the nude, and without intermission.

Her four-part work, "After Eros," was inspired by Ms. Fleming's recent discovery of details related to a childhood spinal injury that should have left her immobile.

Instead, she has developed an extraordinary command of her body, a combination of gymnast, dancer and contortionist.

A white American born in Japan, Ms. Fleming's movement vocabulary is based on

the Butoh tradition — a Japanese art form using meticulously slow movement and striking visual imagery.

In "After Eros," she attempts to draw an analogy between her own life experience and the Greek myth of Eros and Psyche.

About 270 people were in attendance. Most were awestruck as Ms. Fleming twisted and stretched her body into one seemingly impossible position after another, often silhouetted in a dim light that made her appear to float.

Forget all the literary illusions. Ms. Fleming, who performed to an often hypnotic, sometimes annoyingly repetitive sound collage of music by Philip Glass and Somei Satoh with live piano accompaniment by Peter Phillips, is best experienced simply for her use of the human body as a moving sculpture.

In "The Stairs," section, she is suspended upside-down on a flight of black stairs. She turns imperceptibly, creating a visual tableau in which she appears to float.

Yet she can move quickly, as she proves when she emerges dressed in Ninja black and swinging a huge sword that flashes like lightning in the neon glow of the light.

Ms. Fleming's use of sound and light creates a total environment where the rules of time and space do not apply. She also incorporates video and film. At one point, she dances with her own larger-than-life image.

Throughout the hour-long work, there is a sense of freedom and discovery. Ms. Fleming ends in a majestic stance, her back arched and arms extended like the prow of a ship.

Unless one has seen the Japanese husband and wife team of Eiko and Komo — a dancing duo noted for their unhurried and deliberate movements — there are few in this country to which Ms. Fleming can be compared.

Her work is certainly not to everyone's liking. In fact, many of those in attendance were students of dance or yoga. And a few, apparently thinking the program was over, left during a pause.

Visual arts lovers may be interested in Ms. Fleming's abstract compositions of human body, light and fabric.

As for me, a former student of some of the more obscure dance venues of New York City, I found it a beautiful and thought-provoking marriage of cultures and art forms.

Richmond Free Press  
March 27-19, 1999

## DANCE

Preview

## Bodies of Evidence

Ronald K. Brown delivers his movement with a message By **Gia Kourlas**

Choreographer Ronald K. Brown gives his dancers an unusually difficult task every time they step onstage: to illustrate the joys and traumas of their own lives—whether from the present or the past—through movement. Brown's predominantly African-American troupe, named Evidence after the first solo he created in 1985, explores how individuals are the product of their ancestry. That message is still the choreographer's artistic credo.

For his season at the Joyce Theater, beginning Tuesday, Brown has put together a program of three poignant works, which question the facades of glamour and fame, spirituality and materialism, as well as the misdirection he sees in many young black men today. But Brown's dances never turn into sermons; while the social and political issues he addresses are rich tools, the movement—a vibrant combination of modern and African dance, ballet and hip-hop—is always the dominant force in his work.

*Ebony Magazine: to a village, set to a score by British composer Wunmi Olaiya, is a satirical look at the power that glossy magazines hold over society. "I'm kind of saddened by people's fascination with fame," Brown, 33, explains. "In one section, the dancers are beauty-pageant queens on a runway, and they really cut it up. The message for people is to find a deeper sense of their own identity—to return to a simpler way of being connected to others."*

"Upside Down," an excerpt from the longer work *Destiny*, is less linear than *Ebony Magazine*. It pits a group of spiritual people against materialists, evoking a kind of organized chaos. Using African-inspired movement, dancers lunge and leap in different directions, striking the air with their arms

while wiggling their hips and shoulders to a score by Malian singer Oumou Sangare and Nigerian composer Fela Anikulapo Kuti.

"Basically, we're trying to find a sense of peace in life," says Brown. "Some people think money is going to do it; others think that spirituality or living with simplicity will. What's interesting is that when I was staging it, the dancers kind of fussed about their roles. The ones I designated as spirit people thought, 'Are you saying I don't have any drive? And the assertive, material people said, 'You don't think I have a spiritual side?' But we *all* have both; it just needs to be in balance. That's what this journey is about for us on earth. That's the conflict of life!"

Born in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brown was six when he began studying creative dance at a Police Athletic League summer program; at 12, his dream was to study at the Dance Theatre of Harlem, but on the way to an audition for the company's summer program, his mother went into labor with Brown's younger brother. He took it as a sign,

and for the next several years focused his attention on journalism before discovering modern dance at 18 and studying with Mary Anthony and Anna Sokolow.

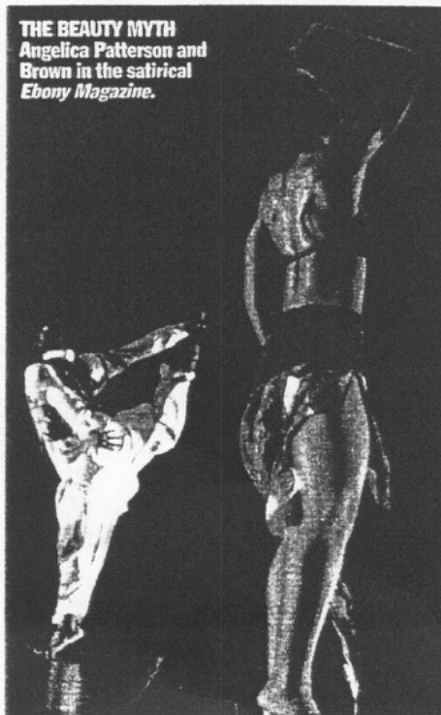
Although he didn't realize it at first, Brown choreographed the final piece on the Joyce program, *Water*, for his younger brother. After he began dreaming frequently of water, Brown called Cheryl Boyce Taylor, a Trinidadian poet with whom he had planned to collaborate. "I told her, 'Water is all over my life right now—let's think of a piece that's about cleansing.' The next day, she sent me ten pages of poetry."

It soon became apparent to Brown that what he was feeling—the need for purification—was a direct result of observing his brother's behavior. "My brother moved in with me when he was 17, after my mom passed away," Brown recalls. "He didn't want to do anything. No high school—I had to make up the Ronald Brown GED program, you know?" Brown laughs. "We always had a very sweet relationship, but all of a sudden, it became *violent*. I had to tell him to leave the house. He played Nintendo all day long. I finally said, 'Look, I work all day—you're not working, you don't go to school! You barely do any studying. Take out the garbage, man!' He said, 'Don't get mad—just remind me.' I feel there's this generation of men who don't want to get on track."

Taylor, who has a 28-year-old son (the rap artist Phife, formerly of A Tribe Called Quest), expresses the same concern in "WATER Water," a poem she composed for Brown's dance: "what are the names of our sons (the sons we loved but failed to protect... their fractured smiles/heavy-vined like morning glories under the brown wreckage of their eyes." For the performance, Taylor will read "Water" onstage.

"I've memorized it!" she exclaims. "I wanted to be free to move with the dancers, just in case Ron gave me any movement. But after I saw them dancing, I was, like, 'Forget it! Oh, my God. I cannot move like them!' She pauses, breaking into a fit of laughter. "That was a little fantasy for a while—that he'd give me one or two steps."

**Ronald K. Brown/Evidence performs at the Joyce Theater Tuesday 28 through October 3.**



**THE BEAUTY MYTH**  
Angelica Patterson and  
Brown in the satirical  
*Ebony Magazine*.



**SPIRITUAL RENEWAL:** Ronald K. Brown/Evidence dance troupe will perform "Water," a metaphor for birth and baptism, tonight.

# Sense of spirituality's all there in Evidence

## DANCERS, FROM THE

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Rennie Harris have absorbed — and they feel free to use — a range of artistic and physical forms, from formal concerns to explorations of individual heritage, from expanded hip-hop to pop dance and women's issues.

## DISPARATE VIEWS

They may share a common African heritage, but they deal with it very differently. Their sense of freedom to acknowledge their blackness — or not — is different from an earlier generation that had to deal with prejudice, clichés and segregation.

"I don't think this current crop of choreographers feels that sense that I have to uplift the race," says Maurine Knighton, executive director of 651 ARTS, a Brooklyn arts organization that will present a black dance series this spring. "The only thing I think is consistent about them is their strong sense of individuality, and that's one of the most exciting things about them."

After all, "what is black dance?" asks Joan Meyers Brown, director and founder of the 30-year-old Philadanco, a leading black repertory company that will appear next month at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts. "Is it dance performed by black people? Is it dance about the black experience? Is it dance by black choreographers?"

"When Philadanco starts doing nonclassical stuff, people see always wanting to know why we don't shake our booty... If an artist finds their art within themselves, it doesn't have to come from their heritage or their surroundings. It

## IF YOU GO

Ronald K. Brown/Evidence performs tonight at 8 at Caleb Auditorium, 5400 NW 22 Ave., Miami, 305-639-2350. Tickets \$20, \$15 for students, seniors, through Ticketmaster (305-359-5885, Dade; 954-523-3309, Broward) or box office.

can be whatever influences them."

Which is exactly how Brown, 33, incorporated his own variegated experiences. He grew up in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a poor neighborhood in Brooklyn, where his family had a Pentecostal church at which Brown taught Sunday school. He took dance classes as a child and wanted to be a dancer, changed his ambitions to writing as a teenager, but went back to dance and started studying in New York at 16. At 19, he started dancing with the modern dance companies of Mary Anthony and Jennifer Muller.

At the same time, he formed his own troupe, Evidence, and along the way studied African and Afro-Caribbean dance — later travelling to Africa to study. He also danced in clubs and absorbed hip-hop.

"I loved learning different techniques but I still wanted to move in a way that was comfortable and felt natural," Brown says. In 1994 he met a choreographer from the Ivory Coast who was trying to fuse traditional and contemporary dance. That freed Brown to mix his own sense of himself, as someone who grew up with MTV and post-modernism, with the instinctive connections he felt to identifiably African ways of moving.

## FREE SPIRIT EMERGES

"I realized, 'OK, African dance is evolving and there is a contemporary sensibility to it. Both exist — there is nothing contemporary without its roots in the past and tradition. It just made sense. Once I stopped worrying about authenticity, my body just put it together.'"

What has remained conscious is the spirituality that permeates his work, which comes from his religious upbringing — though he is no longer a practicing Christian. In "Water," which Evidence will perform tonight, water is a metaphor for birth, baptism and spiritual renewal. In *Ebony Magazine*, Brown's text talks about the emptiness of materialism and the need to find a spiritual center.

## SENSE OF PEACE

"Even when I stopped going to church every Sunday, taking care of your spirit was always imperative," Brown says. "I try to create contemporary rituals so that the dance helps you experience... the sense of peace when you realize what it means to be godlike, what responsibility you have in terms of your relationship to God."

Which, in a way, brings him around to the spiritualism in Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*, the definitive classic of black modern dance. It's a connection Brown acknowledges.

"For me," he says, "the rhythm and the spirit are the priority."

Jordan Levin is *The Herald's* dance critic.

## DANCE

Speed  
Junkie

**Dancer Stephen Petronio shows no signs of slowing down.**

by Cheryl Pallant

**S**tephen Petronio admits to being an addict. Throughout his career as a choreographer, speed has dominated his dances. To say his dancers move fast is an under-

statement. Feet move, legs zip, heads dart, and bodies race in a sensual blur. Petronio wouldn't mind if his dancers were so quick that they disappeared into a flash of light. On Saturday, Feb. 7, the Stephen Petronio Company will tempt the boundaries of physics in a program of three works as part of the Virginia Museum's Fast/Forward series.

"I'm bored by slow. I love the aggression of speed. It's sexy," explains Petronio in a rapid fling of words. "I just like to take things to their extreme limit."

The polyrhythmic "Lareign" is one such piece. With techno-rock music composed by longtime collaborator David Linton, eight dancers go from absolute stillness to full speed with hardly a breath in between. With so much movement that is frenetically charged and dazzling, Petronio is well aware that audiences may not get to see everything. "It's so like life. We grasp after something, but before we know it, it's gone."

In "#3," created in 1986 and since recognized as a signature work, Petronio performs solo and, despite his penchant for

speeding through space, here he doesn't move from one spot, though the upper part of his body makes up for the inertia of his lower half. While he is rooted to the floor, a collage of images that include the likes of Frank Sinatra and Marilyn Monroe are projected onto him to music by Lenny Pickett of "Saturday Night Live."

In his newest work, "Rebourne," completed within the last several months, Petronio departs from his usual attack of motion and explores slower pacing and elongated movements. It's not because of his age, he explains; he's now 41 and many a dancer's body would be demanding a gentler tempo.

"Maybe I'm maturing, but I don't feel the need to crase and invent myself each year," he says. "I'm looking at myself differently ... and stretching the perception of speed." He has also chosen an unlikely pairing: instrumental work by the Beastie Boys and a piece by Indian-British composer Sheila Chandra, one rhythmically pulsing, the other slowly droning. "Instead

of two elements fighting each other, they coexist on different planes," he says.

"Whereas the '80s were about shock, the '90s are about form. That's where the true revolution is. Shocks are important culturally, but I'm more interested in the negative and positive space of bodies, the architecture of forms. I used to want to be the fastest, the newest, the slickest, but I find that sometimes radical discoveries are microscopic."

Does that mean that he's given up his speed habit? "I love speed. It's part of me. Even if I can't do it, I

can always get my dancers to move fast, but honestly, I don't know what's next. Dance has to be contagious. It's got to be alive and grounded in the moment. ... As long as I continue to find ways to challenge myself. I need surprises." This habitual user has no plans of going cold turkey yet.

On Thursday, Feb. 5 at 7 p.m. company member Gerald Casel will talk about the Stephen Petronio Dance

Company's creative process in the museum's auditorium. On Saturday, Feb. 7 at 2 p.m., the company will present a free open rehearsal. **S**



BEATRIZ SCHILLER

**Stephen Petronio will tempt the boundaries of physics in the three works he will present at the Virginia Museum.**

**Stephen Petronio  
Dance Company**

Virginia Museum of  
Fine Arts  
8 p.m.  
Saturday, Feb. 7  
\$19  
367-8148

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# Petronio trades on his immense presence

BY ROY PROCTOR

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

American dancer-choreographer Stephen Petronio's eight dancers leapt, spun, lunged and whirled their way with incredible speed Saturday night on Theatre Virginia's stage at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

It was Petronio himself, however, who commanded the most rapt attention in this modern-dance offering in the Fast/Forward performance series.

He did so while standing in place.

In the last of the two sections of the opening "Rebourne," the bald, muscular Petronio assumed a god-like aura as he entered slowly while

his dancers, dressed in shiny black embellished with wispy material, did their seemingly frenzied thing to his right.

Just as slowly, Petronio, harnessed to a cord that ascended out of sight, leaned forward until his body was virtually horizontal in this work that was being offered in the U.S. for the first time since it premiered last fall at New York's Joyce Theatre.

After intermission, Petronio, in his early 40s, again traded on his im-

mense presence, to say nothing of his expressive abilities, in his signature "Solo #3."

Bare-chested and dressed in baggy black pants and black shoes, the spotlighted Petronio barely shifted the position of his feet. Instead, he let his head, shoulders, arms, fingers and, above all, torso do the dancing in a beguiling mixture of narcissism, seduction, anguish, gravity and levity.

If Michelangelo's "Bound Slave" marbles ever came to life, they might well comport themselves like Petronio in "Solo #3."

Petronio's largely airborne company, which often seems to draw more inspiration from George Balanchine than Martha Graham, is known for its speed and energy. But

that's hardly the only source of its power.

In the first, Petronio-less section of "Rebourne," the considerable dramatic tension was rooted in dancers who could not have danced more independently and variously at first, then strove more and more to dance in tandem as the work proceeded.

In the closing "Lareigne," the diaphanously white-clad company performed what its publicist succinctly and aptly suggests is "a post-modern play of angels."

The fury of many passages was not just punctuated but articulated by passages of extreme calm. The mystical feel of this abstract work was heightened by the dancers' awareness of a strong but eerie light shining on them from the wings.

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## DANCE REVIEW

### STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY

AT: Virginia Museum  
on Saturday

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Richmond Times-Dispatch  
Feb. 9, 1998

## MUSIC

# Back to Africa

**Legendary jazz bassist Reggie Workman reworks a Coltrane original for the Virginia Museum.**

by Ames Arnold

Jazz bassist Reggie Workman likes to keep the music breathing, ever-growing and alive. Lovers of Workman's brand of free-form, fluid jazz will have the rare chance to hear him on Saturday, June 6, when he and his ensemble perform at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

In addition to his own works, Workman is slated to present a new arrangement of John Coltrane's "Africa Brass," which uses 19 players and a gospel choir. This orchestral piece is considered one of Coltrane's major works and Workman was there for the original 1961 recording sessions. Despite its rank as one of 'Trane's best, "Africa Brass" has rarely been performed since it was recorded. The Virginia Museum commissioned Workman to rearrange the original and bring the com-

position back to the public for three East Coast dates.

Margo Crutchfield, the museum's associate curator for 20th-century art, worked for two years to raise money for Workman's commission. She then presented the idea to Workman.

"I've been interested in Reggie's work for a long time," she says, explaining that the limited performances of the new work will give audiences an unusual opportunity. "It's really a very rare thing."

Richmond's Unity Choir, led by Bert Boisseau, will perform with Workman in Richmond

and at a performance in Washington.

Workman's open-ended yet carefully crafted style of music grew out of his early exposure to rhythm and blues and jazz as a youth. Born in Philadelphia in 1937, he first learned to play piano. But listening to both the pop and experimental sounds of the times, Workman chose the bass as his musical pursuit. He played around town in the mid-'50s, learning the ropes in a variety of jazz and blues styles, and he moved to New York in 1958. He made his first recording runs on the avant-garde jazz tradition of the '60s, yet he veers from mere repetition by creating wholly new musical experiences. Throughout his career, Workman's music has been nurtured by the roots of free-form jazz but has grown ever-charged with a visionary's integrity.

In addition to the Saturday evening show at the museum, Workman will discuss his new arrangement of "Africa Brass" during a free question-and-answer session on Friday, June 5, from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m., in the museum's theater. **S**

### Reggie Workman Ensemble

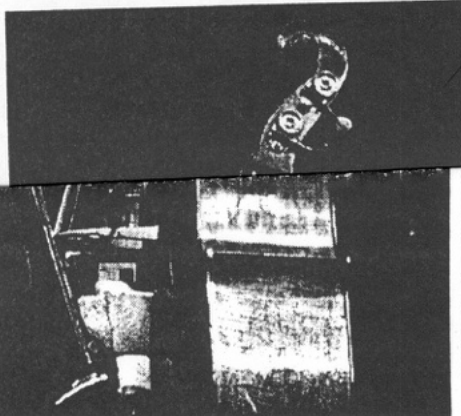
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

8 p.m.

Saturday, June 6

\$12-\$18

367-8148



**Reggie Workman will offer a rare performance of John Coltrane's "Africa Brass" at the Virginia Museum.**

# 'Free jazz' soars in celebration

BY CLARKE BUSTARD  
TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

**R**eggie Workman's revival of John Coltrane's "Africa/Brass" project, which premiered to a full house Saturday night at the Virginia Museum, echoes a birth cry of what became known as "free jazz."

The program is billed as a "Celebration of an African-American Legacy." It sounds at least as much like a demonstration of the distance free jazz has traveled in the past generation.

Coltrane's "Song of the Underground Railroad" and "Africa" and Calvin Massey's "The Damned Don't Cry," all played in original "Africa/Brass" sessions, are the highlights of the production.

Charles Tolliver transcribed the recorded arrangements and conducted the concert, featuring a 19-piece orchestra and Bert Boisseau and the Unity Gospel Ensemble, a 13-voice Richmond group.

The orchestra sported such novel (for jazz) instruments as harmonica and French horns. It boasted two players from the original Coltrane sessions, bassist Workman and trombonist Julian Priester, among other jazz elders — most notably, pianist John Hicks — and three children of Coltrane contemporaries, cellist Nioka Workman (Reggie Workman's daughter), saxophonist Zane Massey (son of Calvin Massey) and bassist Mathew Garrison (son of Jimmy Garrison).

The energetic peak of the program was "Underground

Railroad," Coltrane's take on the traditional gospel shout. Tolliver set a blistering pace; the Unity singers and saxophonists Mario Escalero and Marcus Strickland responded with heated spirituality.

Workman's "Martyr's Hymn" was a showcase for Boisseau's old-style spiritual moans, answered in kind by the choir and Escalero on flute.

"Africa" showed comparable intensity as its chantlike pattern built up volume from the ensemble and passion in successive solos by pianist John Hicks, flugelhorn player Jimmy Owens, and saxophonists Escalero, Strickland and Zane Massey.

Strickland, a tenor saxophonist, was most often cast in the role originally played by Coltrane, and measured up in both technique and character — remarkable in a musician who's just 19 years old.

The 14-minute "Africa" was considered very long when it was recorded in 1961. The slightly longer version performed Saturday sounded almost terse alongside Workman's "Variation of III," "Suite Tristan" and "Fast/Forward."

They were characteristic of a free-form improvisation that threatens to cross the line into aimless noodling. All three open in discursive, ritualized preludes — swirling flourishes, really — that suddenly give way to brief statements of melody over a swinging bass line, then revert to more flourishes that gradually wind down.

It's a workable device for demonstrating instrumental technique, sometimes for creating novel harmonies, sound effects or instrumental combinations. It has ceremonial undertones that signal important or profound thoughts and feelings. But as a purely musical statement, it seems emotionally detached.

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## MUSIC REVIEW

### REGGIE WORKMAN

AT: Virginia Museum  
Saturday

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# Ann Carlson interprets life

BY FRANCES SCHOOLS  
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**A**nn Carlson is a performance artist, but she once responded to that reference by saying, "If there's a name to put on it, something's wrong."

And although it may not be categorized, the work does intrigue. It is both enigmatic and simplistic in its interpretation of life.

In Saturday's final offering of the Fast Forward series at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Carlson presented four solo works. Two — "Visit woman move story cat cat" and "Sarah" — are from her "Animals" series, in which she incorporates live animals in the performance.

Opening with "Sarah," she got audience members into the mood of the evening by having the narrator ask them to wave their arms about. Before a pedestal bearing a goldfish swimming in a bowl, she undulated broadly and seductively while the narration implied that she was a large fish performing in an oceanarium to the amusement of humans but perhaps to her own boredom.

"Visit woman move story cat cat" was a more intriguing piece, as a nude Carlson moved out onto the stage on all fours. Inspired by the

relationship between Koko, the gorilla who learned sign language, and her pet cat, Carlson emulated the primate movements. She interacted with a kitten, showing the love that Koko had for the feline friend. The dignity and quiet emotions of the gorilla were perfectly presented.

"Sold" brought humor to the program as Carlson glided onstage attired in a billowy bridal gown and positioned herself atop a box. With a mixture of auctioneer and evangelist, she delighted the audience with witty, often acerbic, banter, reminding us that life should not be taken too seriously. While often performed with others onstage, "Sold" was presented here as a solo.

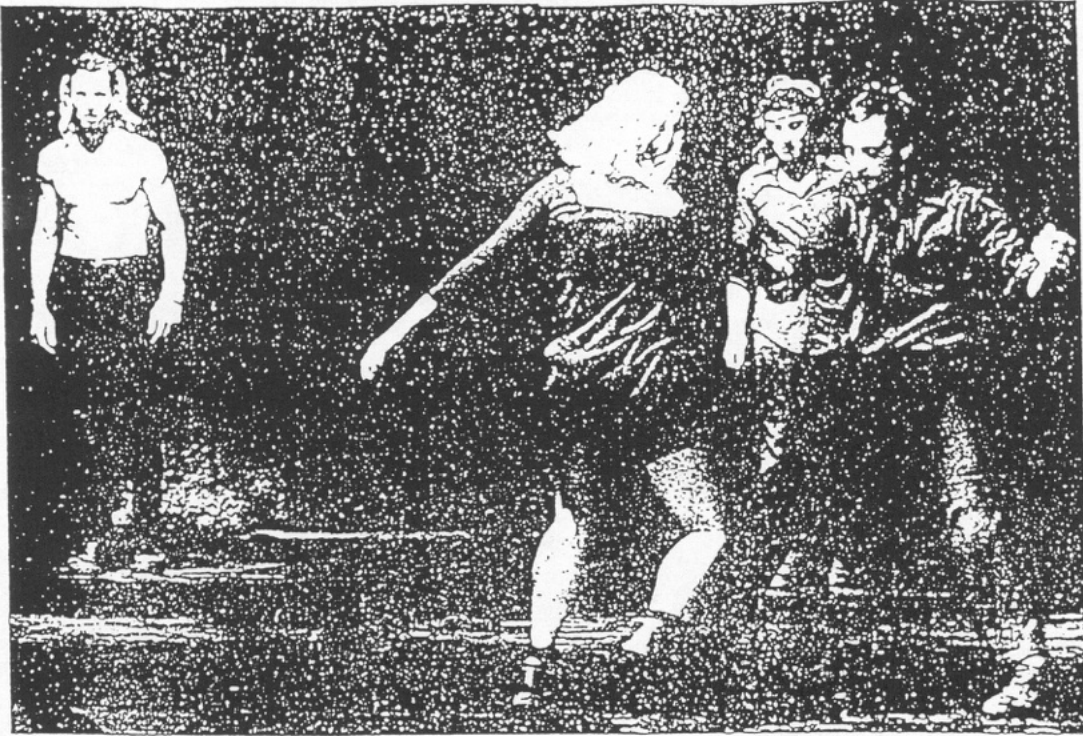
The program ended with the somber "Blanket." In this piece about dying, Carlson shuffled onto the stage as an old woman. A score by Andy Kirschner incorporated music and dialogue to recall events in the life of the woman. She responded to the score, often delving back to childhood memories. She looked often at her watch, giving the audience the time — reminding us that life grows short.

At the end, she fell, then carefully righted herself to shuffle off into the darkness.

Carlson's performance may not be for everyone. But her views on life are thought-provoking, turning the ordinary in life into events to ponder.

## DANCE REVIEW

Richmond Times-Dispatch  
May 13, 1996



OCTAVIO RUBSE

AMERICAN PREMIERE. Alienation and violence find powerful choreographic expression in "Mountains Made for Barking," performed here by Belgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus and his Ultima Vez ensemble.

## 'Mountains' is unsettling, but it's also exhilarating

BY ROY PROCTOR  
TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

**B**elgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus and his Ultima Vez ensemble came and went in 90 unbroken minutes Saturday night in the American premiere of their "Mountains Made of Barking" in the Fast/Forward performance series at TheatreVirginia.

It'll take the packed Fast/Forward performance series audience 90 times 90 days to sort through what hit them. Even then, they won't be able to tell for sure in recalling a work that Vandekeybus has dubbed "an unintelligible network" and added, "That is its power."

Whatever hit them, "Mountains" is an artistically seismic occurrence.

Although "Mountains" is based in dance, it makes liberal use of film (projected on a giant backdrop), the spoken word (in English and several other languages), music (frequently throbbing) and acting.

Coherent plot is in short supply in a work based on hallucinatory imagery — alienation, violence and, above all, seemingly futile attempts at physical and spiritual purification through scrubbing until the body and soul cry out in agony.

The purification theme is struck early as a bare-chested man scribs furiously, writhes on the stage floor

and cries out as arms and legs began to emerge from the bottom of a black backdrop.

Soon the stage is exploding in movement. Vandekeybus and his nine fellow dancers don't just approach each other. They dash into each other, hurtle past each other, leap at full throttle from motionless positions on the stage floor.

Surprises abound in amazing bursts of energy that are intricately worked out and totally disciplined against frequently dramatic settings in lighting that could hardly be more arresting.

Vandekeybus' vision frequently conveys a people-bite-people world, as exemplified in a segment in which a woman struggles to tell a story to the audience while being pursued by a man intent on biting her legs as she dashes between microphones at opposite sides of the stage.

The purification motif finds its most startling expression in a scene in which three nude men scrub while standing in basins, only to find dirt cascading on them and leaving them dirtier than ever, while a man laughs maniacally at the top right corner of the proscenium arch.

"Mountains" is unsettling, to be sure, but it's also exhilarating. When art comes down to the creatively horrific and bizarre, Vandekeybus is a true heir to his Low Country forebear, Hieronymus Bosch.

### DANCE REVIEW

# Leading clarinet charge

*Don Byron's complex beat: personal, political time*

BY HARRIET McLEOD

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

**D**on Byron lays critical claim to the title of most inventive young clarinet composer in the country.

The 37-year-old, dreadlocked, South Bronx-born, classically trained musician, who performs with his quintet at the Virginia Museum Thursday, busts genres with double fists of musical skills.

He is equally interested in Franz Schubert as in Duke Ellington, in Mickey Katz as in Olivier Messiaen. He defies the prejudices of the scholars of his instrument, even as he rejects being looked on as a jazz cat. He has reflected and provoked the

new respect for the clarinet in modern jazz, and although he occasionally plays baritone sax, he feels no need to double on saxophone per tradition.

His conversation on the phone from his home in New York is as inspired and nonstop as his swooping, surprising, humorous playing — and interrupted several times by call waiting, to which Byron says “Oops, beep.”

Quotes will be long.

“When you’re around clarinet pedagogues,” he said, “and they decide, think, or hear that you’re into jazz, you’re not going to get all the information you need to get trained to play two notes on the clarinet. I never really had that Bryant Gumbel image to make people believe that I was a classical musician.

“The way that most people approach music is kind of social. When

somebody decides to play Latin music and they’re from the Midwest, they move into a Spanish neighborhood, they learn Spanish, they try to marry a Spanish woman, they eat Spanish food . . . The current young lions’ jazz stuff has a lot of that. I’m not a free improviser type . . . I don’t hang out with those folks, and I don’t necessarily think that the social thing is that important.

“As the only child in a family, everything I’ve investigated I’ve done in this alone way. When I first started playing salsa music, it was alone in my room, trying to figure out what was going on with the rhythms.”

Byron’s father played bass in a calypso band. His mother was a pianist. He was taken regularly to jazz clubs and to the symphony. Into clas-

PLEASE SEE BYRON, PAGE J3 ▶



DEBORAH FEIG-GOLD

**GENRE BUSTER.** The classically trained musician and composer Don Byron has inspired new respect for the clarinet in modern jazz.

# Byron's clarinet musical mastery

BY HARRIET MCLEOD

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

**D**on Byron, dreadlocked, bespectacled lord of the clarinet, and his deconstructed quintet brought a smart, funny set of instrumental mastery, great ensemble playing and fine jazz heat to a Virginia Museum crowd brought in from yet more miserable weather.

## MUSIC REVIEW

Byron has liberated the clarinet from any notions of licorice-stick sweet swing. A full-body player, whose moves range from conductor's figures in the air to ax-like chops to half-kneels, small jumps and shouts. Not counting what's coming out of the clarinet — diamond-fine technique — using the range of the instrument, doubling, holding breathless soft tone. He also rocked out.

He led off with an outside "Goldfinger"; charged through Ornette Coleman.

"Sex/work (Clarence and Anita)" was sensual and rhythmic, broken by squeals of pain, subtle percussive fills and fat guitar notes, to which Byron added, "Ahhh!"

The tune's about the sexiness of work. "Menial labor, not paper pushing or software development," he said.

For Stephen Sondheim's "Not A Day Goes By," drums and bass created an undertow beneath a snapping guitar solo. Clarinet made melody on a distant shore, before falling down into full-bore party dance music — we're way out beyond the breakers now.

On his own tunes "Next Love" and "Tuskegee Strutters Ball" Byron's composed doubled riffs on pianos and guitar, or on bass and piano, served as a bed for him to improvise on. No matter where he went, there was glory in his far-from-traditional structure.

Byron's co-conspirators were the unshy pianist Uri Caine, who played beautiful stride and walking bass, reached into the piano to pluck the strings, pounded the key case; guitarist David Gilmore, who had fine solos but took an unnecessary rock star turn with sampler and delay; wonderfully musical and strong bassist Beldon Bullock; and muscular drummer Dion Parson, introduced by an amused Byron as "introverted."

# Merce Cunningham 'Event' engaging and exhilarating

BY ROY PROCTOR

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

The 16 young members of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company offered amazements aplenty when they took their first Richmond bows Saturday night in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts' Fast/Forward performance series.

The chief amazement, however, was Cunningham himself. Now 77 and hobbled by the infirmities of age, the modern-dance legend shuffled onto TheatreVirginia's stage in the closing moments of his 90-minute, intermissionless "Event." He sat on a folding wooden chair.

As the electronic music that had propelled the evening continued to screech, boom and zoom, Cunningham's hands began to move, then his arms, his legs, his head, his torso. He grinned at the audience, eliciting a laugh. Then his mouth formed an "O," the sort of "O" a dying man manages when his death rattle begins.

Just when you thought Cunningham might have expired, he climbed to his feet, and his feet were not all

that began to dance. His hands, his arms, his head, his torso got into the act until, finally, he was dancing with the chair, making intimate communion with it as if it were that link with humanity that defies death.

It was an exhilarating, triumphant moment by any standard, but my death-and-resurrection interpretation of what Cunningham was doing is just that — an interpretation. Others may have seen it quite differently. That would have been all right with Cunningham, who believes our response to dance should be emotional and open-ended.

Call Saturday night's "Event" — and presumably yesterday afternoon's "Event" as well — the expansive landscape of Cunningham's genius. As has been his practice for more than 30 years, each "Event" is tailored for its performing space.

Saturday night's "Event" offered complete works and excerpts from other works among the almost 200 Cunningham has created since he founded his namesake company in 1953. It also offered parts of what Cunningham termed a "work in progress" before coming here.

Which was which? It was impossible to tell. Cunningham had woven elements from his half-century of

choreographic creation into a seamless fabric, and the program identifies neither the dances nor the music played by three musicians in the pit.

The dancers are fit and beautifully disciplined. Cunningham is famous for using "chance" as a choreographic principle. His dancers, however, appear to leave little to chance as they perform solos and dance in dozens of combinations, most often barefoot in skintight outfits varying in color and design, but at one point in red tennis shoes and "coveralls."

Cunningham was a major figure in the modern-dance revolt against the expressive codification of ballet, but his dancers often seem most charming when they are making sly comment on ballet.

He insists on the independence of music and dance, but you aren't long into an "Event" before realizing that not just any music will do. Cunningham's dances don't amount to a visualization of music, but an affinity of mood between music and dance gives many of his works their power.

Funny and sad, rollicking and pensive, Cunningham's Saturday night "Event" throbbed with the fullness of life itself. Like any great work of art, it was capable of making receptive spectators feel more alive.

## DANCE REVIEW

## MUSIC

## Daring Diva

**Diamanda Galás dives into the dark corners of her voice and psyche to produce music of uncommon power.**

by Cheryl Pallant

**D**iamanda Galás is anything but mild. Her rare and often raw multioctave voice goes where few singers dare. Warbling, cackling, ululating, shrieking, this operatically trained diva challenges listeners with a voice that plummets primal depths and soars to dizzying heights. With blues, gospel and jazz songs, and lyrics by writers such as Charles Baudelaire, Galás launches the Virginia Museum of Fine Art's Fast/Forward series with her haunting intensity on Sept. 18 and 19.

Often criticized for her preoccupation with darkness and death, she believes her performances are life-affirming, a way to balance the entirety of life, not just its niceties but also its distressing emotions and situations. Her Greek heritage partly explains how the dark empowers her. "The daemons in the Greek culture were ferocious goddesses, feared but real," she says. "You have to have one claw in the dirt and one in the heavens. Pavarotti is standing deep in the soil. That's why he's able to

make this profound sound; he has the deep resonance, the woofer and the tweeter. He's got that combination, and that to me is what life is."

Galás has had her share of suffering, including the loss of her brother to AIDS and her own struggle with hepatitis C. "I've dedicated my life to telling the truth about the things I see," she says. "What is considered the dark side for many people is just life. Everyone knows someone with Alzheimer's or someone with cancer. ... If I were to pretend that these things weren't happening, that would be rigorous. But to sing about such experiences and make them a transformative thing, that makes your life transcendent."

Her own transcendence comes, in part, from producing an incredible range of sounds that would readily destroy the untrained voice. Such sounds wake her up and move her out of depression. To sing long phrases, she learned circular breathing and initiating sound not from the vocal cords, but from the skull. "You keep pushing breath through that resonance area and then you're home free," she explains.

Singular talent like hers is easily misunderstood and rarely supported. "Anyone trying to go out and do anything really great has to do a lot of work on their own," she says.

"[The industry] is more interested in creating trends. ... The big music magazines pimp little girls who don't know how to sing, who don't know how to do anything except wear slippers. Yet there [are] so many talented women out

there nobody knows about."

Galás' performance here in 1994 sent many with sensitive eardrums out the door; that difficulty has been remedied by scheduling the concert in the Virginia Museum's theater, not in the acoustically poor auditorium. Auditory considerations in check, fear not her dark image. Galás actually cherishes her Richmond audience; she remembers fondly being unable to finish a

**Diamanda Galás**

Theatre Virginia Stage

8 p.m.

Friday and Saturday, Sept. 18-19

\$14-\$19

367-8148



song during her last local performance because the audience's laughter broke her up. "I lectured the audience," she says. "I said this is a very important song and you destroyed it and I can't possibly sing it now and I hope you feel better. I adored them." Adoration notwithstanding, you still many want to bring some cotton for your ears, just in case. **S**

**An operatically trained singer, Diamanda Galás produces sounds that would destroy an untrained voice.**

Style Magazine  
September 15, 1998

# Athletic voice flexed in fascinating exercise

BY HARRIET McLEOD

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

**S**inger Diamanda Galás stunned an audience of about 350 at the Virginia Museum's Fast/Forward concert Saturday night with the sounds that came from her throat.

All in black, on a black stage lit only by a small music light and a spotlight on her face, Galás accompanied herself with a technically fine classical touch on grand piano. She played spare minor chords or rumbling seismic runs and figures — a soft underbelly to her large, often hard, voice.

Her athletic instrument has many shades, timbres, colors and inflections, all of which she moved to, from and between with ease on gospel and blues songs arranged more around drama and vocal exercise than melody.

For "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord," she introduced an edgy alto, spitting it out like an old lady, with huge vibrato.

Her high notes had a saw-tooth edge. She used fast-repeated piano notes as overlapping harmonies with her voice to weird and beautiful effect.

Her voice made "Balm in Gilead" an anguished tone poem — chanting from a minaret, changing to a soul wail, changed midnote into an angelic choir soprano.

When she reached stratospheric heights, she warbled and then screamed the vibrato-filled notes,

bringing pressure to eardrums throughout the hall. Her high notes were to be appreciated more than enjoyed.

Otis Rush's "My Love Will Never Die" had a fingernails-on-blackboard quality that slipped into chanteuse purring. Willie Dixon's "Insane Asylum" was tortured with rippling almost-boogie piano, introduced by a wonderful scat and finished with ritual abandonment — she gabbled in tongues — that took blues to a far more primitive level than the Delta swamps have seen.

"Now, it's time for a crowd pleaser," she whispered, and started Diana Ross' "My World Is Empty Without You." Her treatment seemed dragged through a Valium-induced stupor, its time warped like a Salvador Dali clock.

Crowd laughter broke her up, too. "Oh, forget it," she said.

"Cris D'Aveugle" was a melismatic piece of existential French cabaret. "Gloomy Sunday" was sung in a trance or a roar.

Galás, whose material on other stages has had her bloody on a cross, or trapped like an insect in a cage, is also an AIDS activist.

She has more than three octaves in easy grasp, and a full palette.

Why doesn't she sing straight melody? Why didn't Dali paint straight lines?

Two complaints in an otherwise fascinating evening: Lyrics were indistinguishable for the most part, and the museum's auditorium was too small for Galás' volume.

## MUSIC REVIEW

# QUEEN OF PAIN

## Artist/activist Galas shrieks, hisses and sobs the agony of outcasts

BY HARRIET McLEOD

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

**A**vant-garde singer Diamanda Galas has a classically trained voice that stretches 3½ octaves and is strong enough to break glass. Don't call it operatic. She says she approaches singing like Mike Tyson going into the ring. Call it a dangerous voice.

Galas performs Saturday and Sunday nights for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts' Fast/Forward series.

When she opens her mouth to sing, out comes a torrent of agonized screams, shrieks, shouts, sobs, caterwauls, hisses, death gurgles, moans, unintelligible babbling and hypnotic chants. With Galas' black eyelids, sunken cheeks and wild hair, the effect is haunting and hallucinogenic.

Unlike a jazz singer, which she has been, she is not mimicking a saxophone. Unlike a primitive, which she is not, she is not mimicking an animal. "I'm an animal myself, so I don't have too much trouble with that," she said matter-of-factly from her home in New York. The telephone interview showed a different persona — friendly, witty, sardonic — from her stage one.

On stage, she's seen as an orator, a terrorist, hideously beautiful. She is *not* a performance artist, she said, a term she defines by its original meaning of visual art produced on the spot before an audience. Onstage, Galas is intense, and she makes listeners nervous.

Her original musical pieces take place in suspended wire cages. She lies bare-breasted and bloody against a crucifix. She draws text from liturgical

writings (which she calls "an articulate language of despair") including Leviticus and Revelations from the Bible and from the writings of French essayist and poet Charles Baudelaire.

"If I use Leviticus, it's because it's a book of law which defines the geography of a plague mentality. It defines the context in which people with AIDS have to live, in which people with leprosy have lived."

She mixes in influences from Duke Ellington and John Coltrane, avant-gardists because they already knew so much about music, she said. And she adds some of her Greek and Turkish family background: "It's a very strong death culture," she said.

Her music is about the pain of people who have been outcast by society, specifically the mentally ill and people with AIDS. It's also about the tortured, oppressed, caged. What's in the cage is "animal, snake, woman, male, transvestite, black,

### FAST FORWARD

#### WHO

Diamanda Galas

#### WHAT

"Insane Asylum": A selection of gospel and blues songs on voice and piano (Recommended for adult audiences)

#### WHERE

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts auditorium

#### WHEN

8 p.m.-Saturday (sold out) and next Sunday

#### COST

\$10-\$12

#### INFO

367-8148

# Avant-garde and on the edge, Galas expresses conviction

## ▼ GALAS FROM PAGE J1

white, who cares?" she said.

But "the primary people I work with are women," she said. "I see most women as being goddesses."

Galas is a prominent AIDS activist, the first artist to produce a major original musical work about the epidemic "Masque of the Red Death Plague Mass" in 1984 — an indictment of those who see AIDS as divine retribution, those who shun its sufferers and those who do nothing to help.

She was one of the members of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) to stage a "die-in" at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York in 1989. Her knuckles are tattooed with "We are all H.I.V. +" (she is not) and she calls AIDS "homicide."

"People have this mortality fear," she said. "There's a lot of real willful stupidity in this world. There's so much to do . . . I do my one very small thing. Another person does hers, and another person does his. Flannery O'Connor — wasn't she from your part of the world? — said 'hard-headed people need be met by acts of violence.'"

Galas brother, playwright Philip Dimitri-Galas, died of AIDS in 1986.

"I talked to somebody in one of the psychiatric professions who said that time is really an overrated quantity in healing," she said. "That's something that the Greek culture respects very much is that the concept of death is not something trivial. It's not something to be getting over. It's something to respect."

Galas grew up in a musical Greek family in San Diego. A prodigy, she played piano from age 5 and performed Beethoven's First Piano Concerto with the San Diego Symphony at age 14. She spent some time in San Francis-

co's jazz world and avant-garde underworld. In the mid-1970s she started doing solo vocal performance with her back to the audience, in mental institutions.

"They were very severe in the sense that I wouldn't start the performance until I felt that it was being kicked out of me . . . Part of my discipline is being able to be a vocal medium for every strong emotional experience. I've never had compositional training. I've had to depend on my instincts. What I live with is what the music is."

At the Virginia Museum, she will perform, with voice and piano, her more "traditional" stuff, she said, from an album called "The Singer."

The songs are gospel and blues songs she likes: "Balm in Gilead," Willie Dixon's "Insane Asylum," Otis Rush's "My Love Will Never Die," James Carr's "At the Dark End of the Street," Screamin' Jay Hawkins' ("a genius," she said) "I Put a Spell on You" along with her own "homicidal or psychotic love songs."

"I've had a very unbalanced view [of love]," she said. "[The songs are] all from the perspective of someone who falls in love and burns the man's house down ultimately. That's my more sarcastic side . . . There are a lot of people who are very sick who have a very strongly developed sense of sardonicism and humor. That's what keeps them alive. It's like 'With these pale hands, gather chrysanthemums.'" She laughed.

The blues she does become the tragic chronicles they were at their writing.

"Songs that I like are dirges," she said and laughed again. "They're not the lighthearted blues stuff. I like the epic ones, the ones that tell stories about bloodshed and things like that and tragedy . . . It's not about a nostalgic reality."

Galas' current project is an album being produced by John Paul Jones, formerly of Led Zeppelin. She's working

**OF OCTAVES AND OVERTURES.** Diamanda Galas says, "Part of my discipline is being able to be a vocal medium for every strong emotional experience."

on a new stage piece about schizophrenia. She said she spent some time in a mental hospital. "We won't go into that," she said. "I don't want to be too revealing."

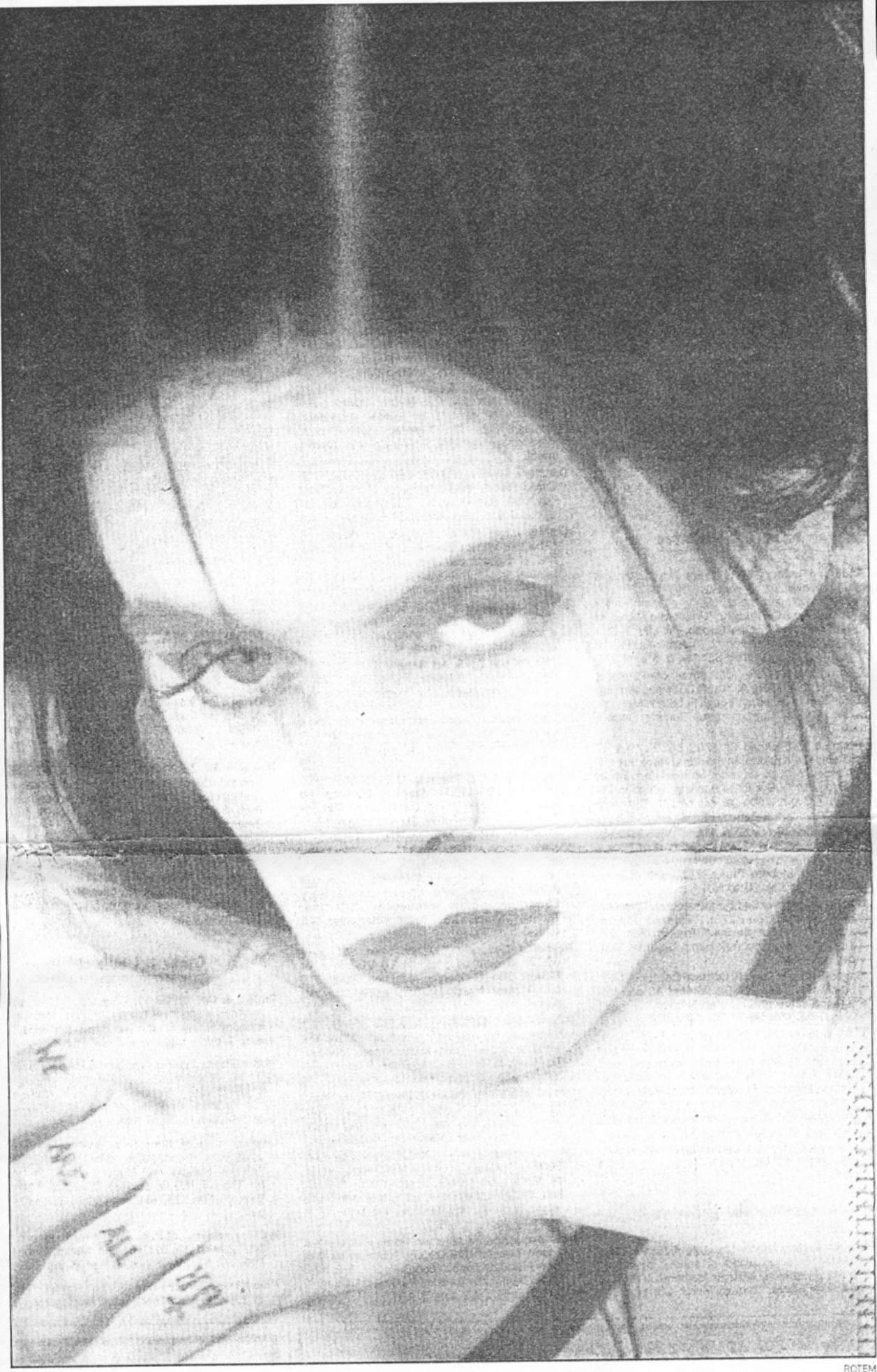
If she scares people, or they don't "get it," she said, "I don't care. I do it anyway. If you think I'm crazy, guess what? That might be the truth! Now what are you gonna do about it?"

"I could work in a gas station. I could work in a bank. I'm up there for an hour. I have to say a hell of a lot in an hour. I have to say things in a very condensed way. So it's

very intense in that way.

"People could get the impression that I was willfully morbid. NO. Wellll, maybe sarcastically morbid. I think that anyone who has anything to say has a lot of stories to tell and has a lot of visions of the world."

*Diamanda Galas will speak at a free "Meet the Artist" program at 6 p.m. Friday in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts auditorium. The program is open to the public, but limited to 40 participants. Call 367-0822 for reservations.*



ROTEM

**GALAS AFFAIR.** Diamanda Galas performs Saturday and next Sunday at the Virginia Museum.

## Fagan dances highlight unique choreography

### DANCE REVIEW

By Frances Schools  
News Leader special writer

The most important aspects of a performance by Garth Fagan Bucket Dance are Fagan's vitally alive choreography and the control and disciplined technique of his dancers.

Last night's performance before an audience of 850 at the Carpenter Center was presented by VCU Dance and the Virginia Museum's Fast/Forward Series. The program featured five works, all unique, exciting and each utilizing the music to the fullest.

A surprise on the program was "SOS," a new work presented in honor of VCU and performed to a wonderful Miles Davis recording. The women of the company, garbed in eclectic costuming, played off the music with movements that often mimicked the notes of the magical horn of Davis.

The most dramatic work was "Oatka Trail," movingly performed by Steve Humphrey, A. Roger Smith and Norwood Pennewell, to the haunting music of Antonin Dvorak. This was a solemn piece of exhibiting movements of unbelievable control. Fagan's choreography makes the most of the slow, methodical movements, flowing smoothly, then suddenly interspersed with a staccato

movement, a fluttering hand that breaks the spell yet blends perfectly with the slowness of the other movements.

Two other pieces, "Prelude" and "Time After Before Place," exhibited the elements of Caribbean rhythms and blues beats prevalent in much of Fagan's work. Here we see the controlled movements mixed with precisionlike gestures, turns so rapid that the arm movements become a blur, native beats that begin with just the feet and then build to a frenzied crescendo as the music swells. The excitement generated is spellbinding.

Closing the program was "Traipsing Through the May," a marvelous tongue-in-cheek takeoff of classical and early modern movements danced to the music of Antonio Vivaldi. The dancers had a marvelous time hamming it up, over-emoting with wonderful expressions, and dramatically sweeping across the stage first in billowing chiffon costumes and then in brilliantly colored briefs and tops.

But through all of the hilarity of the piece, so cleverly executed, there shines above it all the magnificence of Fagan's choreography and the wonderfully talented dancers that comprise his company. This is a company of strength and originality. Fagan has created movements that are unique with not a weak spot anywhere. His dancers and his choreography sparkle from beginning to end.

# Final dance delivers winning touch

## Dance review

By Robert Merritt  
Times-Dispatch staff writer

An old adage insists that you should always leave them laughing and last night at the Carpenter Center, just when it appeared that the Garth Fagan Bucket Dance was too remarkably precise ever to be truly funny, the dancers pulled out all the stops and delivered the winning touch.

By the time the dozen got to "Traipsing Through the May," the fifth work on the 2½-hour program, Fagan's celebrated uniqueness was already a proven fact. And along with it the amazing athleticism and poise of the dancers had grown into a source of pure wonder.

Fagan and his dancers are what modern dance is all about — or at least what it should be about. Fagan hasn't invented anything all that new but he has interpreted dance in a fresh way, drawn from an interna-

tional arena of influences and established a vocabulary that is physical and muscular, fluid and sharp, a style of dance that permits each of his dancers to establish a unique personality while serving the whole.

The program, presented under co-sponsorship of the Virginia Museum's Fast/Forward Series and Virginia Commonwealth University's Cultural Heritage Series, opened with "Prelude," which has become the standard introduction and manifesto to the Fagan style of dance.

"Prelude," like nearly everything Fagan has created, is almost an autobiography of the creator. This work presents each dancer as a unique part of the whole, shifting from the jumps and spins and syncopated footwork of African dance, through the softened percussion and undulating torsos of strong Afro-Caribbean influences, and finally into the modern realm of Martha Graham with an urban twist.

All of these things are Fagan. A native of Jamaica, Fagan toured

Latin America with the Jamaican National Dance Company, moved to New York to study not only with Martha Graham but also with modern pioneers including José Limón, Mary Hinkson and Alvin Ailey. Then came directorship of the Detroit All-City Dance Company, a professorship at the State University of New York and the beginnings of the Bucket Dance through teaching a handful of untrained dancers from the inner city of Rochester.

These elements unfold on the stage not only through the celebrating didacticism of "Prelude" but also through the masculine trio "Oatka Trail," and even in a new piece, "A Short Handle on Time" previewed here for the first time.

The brilliance of the company de-

fies description; they simply seem to be believed. On a bare stage, with simple and colorful Jamaican-influenced costumes (usually designed each to celebrate the movement, establishing poetry only to break the wild, but ever-controlled

And then they came to "Through the May," a 24-minute piece to music by Vivaldi through the courtly dance, Greek and Hollywood silent movie romantic and theatrical

It is unfortunate that only one performance attracted about 1,000 people

# Writer-actor weaves spell

## Stage review

By Robert Merritt

Times-Dispatch staff writer

The monologues of writer-actor Spalding Gray are amazing things. This man, armed with little more than a dramatic voice, sits on a stage and talks to an audience for 90 minutes. And it works. Everything about it works, and there's no rational explanation.

Last night, in the first of two performances to open the Fast/Forward series at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Gray sat behind his wooden table, sipped from his ever-present glass of water and performed the piece he calls "Terrors of Pleasure," a painfully funny autobiographical account of buying the worst house in America.

Gray fans will be thoroughly familiar with the work. It is one of the monologues that was published soon after the success of "Swimming to Cambodia," which won off-Broadway Obie Award honors and was made into a film of the same title. And it was also translated into an HBO special.

Watching Gray perform it, however, is an experience all its own. To watch this man weave a spell over an audience, to have them laugh and moan with every gesture of his voice, with every insane — but universally understood — experience he relates, is to gain a new understanding of both theater and acting.

"Terrors of Pleasure" is, to put it mildly, a very funny story. It tells of a New York city boy who buys a house in the Catskills and suffers the humiliation of discovering that he is the grand champion in the rush of fools that are born every minutes. Every discovery about the house

drags him closer to total spiritual ruination, and he turns it into a celebration of the universal Catch-22, that Twilight Zone reality where anything that can go wrong does.

But Gray's art goes beyond being a great fool and living to tell about it. And it goes beyond his wonderful abilities as a writer. Sitting on the stage with his few absurdly simple props, he goes where few actors would dare and proves himself a master.

His monologue is a one-man show where the lonely character is not a man of fame and fortune, but simply a lowly actor, a man who experiences the world in all its uniqueness and sees that which makes the journey universal.

He is part supreme actor, part stand-up comic (except that he's sitting) and a storyteller par excellence. He rambles, rarely looking at the notes that are before him on the table, and while he may stumble here and there (last night he almost had the pipes freezing on July 4th) his voice is a bravura instrument; it rises and falls, it whispers and screams, it races ahead and slows to a crawl. It even does sound effects and throws in an occasional surprise visit from the chimney sweep, the plumber or a Jehovah's Witness.

When it ends, the audience can never forget "the little house that cried." But more than that, the audience can never forget the power of the man who sits behind the table and talks.

Gray will return at 8 tonight, when he performs his latest work, "Monster in a Box." The monologue, which he is fine-tuning for a November opening at New York's Lincoln Center, is described as picking up where "Swimming to Cambodia" left off, tracing his adventures from Los Angeles to Moscow to Nicaragua and back.

# ARTS & CRAFTS

## MULTIMEDIA

# The Machinery Unplugged

**Laurie Anderson works to make technology feel human.**

by Cheryl Pallant

**T**he productions by pioneering multimedia artist Laurie Anderson are well known for being highly wired. An animatronic parrot, a musical tie, video clones and voice synthesizers are only a few of the numerous high-tech enhancements that make their way into one of her shows.

... It [technology] could be improved by becoming easier to use and more transparent, if it could go in our shoes or in different places."

Having attended her share of computer shows and listened to salespeople threaten potential customers with being left in the digital dust if they don't buy the latest gadgets, she recognizes that there may re-

therapies for guess who — people who have used too much technology. She explains darkness as not knowing. "Sometimes it's a great pleasure. It's not fear. I don't equate light with enlightenment. ... Enlightenment is the ability to understand that nothing really matters. It's such a brief time we're here. Everything changes, nothing is permanent, especially yourself. ... The most important thing is to understand other people's lives as much as your own."

While many put inordinate confidence in the glories of computers, Anderson reminds us about our equally powerful imaginations — easy to haul around, adaptable to any type of plug, upgrade never even mentioned by salespeople. "I'm not trying



High tech has its uses, says Laurie Anderson, but it must be used correctly.

Your programs are excellent  
and an important asset  
for the museum!  
Katharine

20 THE RICHMOND NEWS LEADER, Monday, February 25, 1991

## Dance troupe bizarre, yet brilliant

### DANCE REVIEW

By Frances Schools  
News Leader special writer

If it is true that "timing is everything," then Wim Vandekeybus and his troupe have it all.

Saturday night, as part of the Virginia Museum's Fast/Forward series, this European group presented 75 minutes of one of the most grueling and exciting performances to visit this city in quite a while.

The stage of the Virginia Commonwealth University Concert Hall was covered with large, wooden squares. Enter the nine performers, one or two at a time, calmly surveying the audience and each other. They throw darts at the floor, parry with each other, and that is as calm as it ever gets. For then the masochism begins.

They hurl their bodies onto the floor, roll and tumble about, throw themselves at each other, and in general, seem intent on seeing how much punishment their bodies can take.

The title of this performance is "Les Porteuses de Mauvaises Nouvelles" or "The Bearers of Bad News." The work is supposed to show how people respond to disasters and how they bring calamities to each other.

The program, however, is best appreciated if one does not try to interpret meaning, but rather enjoys the humor of the episodes and marvels at the physical dexterity of the performers.

These are not dancers in the true sense of the word, but highly skilled gymnasts whose every move has been remarkably well-choreographed by Vandekeybus.

Along the way were many amusing moments. Most amusing was a large, white slab suspended at one edge of the stage. With a burst of flame, a man removes the slab and places it on a burner, revealing that the slab is frozen. He melts it, beats it and thaws it to reveal a shirt, which he places on another man. Hard to describe but hilarious to watch.

Other moments included a sleight-of-hand shell game, recitations in various languages of stories begun but never finished, a string set on fire as the performers quickly moved to escape it and items of clothing suspended from the ceiling and later donned by performers.

Throughout all of the activity, the floor had been removed bit by bit, squares stacked about, and the performers climbing, jumping upon and leaping from them.

The entire evening was one of bizarre behavior — awesome, brilliant and comical. The agility of the performers was breathtaking and fascinating to behold. It cannot accurately be described.

You had to be there.

# Drum orchestra follows tradition

## ▼ DRUMS FROM PAGE C1

see if we could make something permanent out of what had been these one-shot deals." Burgee became the orchestra's artistic director.

"We approached the Painted Bride Arts Center, which agreed to

### A WORLD OF DRUMS

**IN:** Spoken Hand Orchestra

**AT:** 8 p.m. today and tomorrow, Virginia Museum (\$10-\$18)

**PLUS:** Children's concert, 2 p.m. tomorrow at museum (\$3)

**INFORMATION:** (804) 340-1405

become our home base and primary support center," Seidman said by phone from his home in Philadelphia. "The center commissioned us to develop new works for two concerts, gave us rehearsal space and administrative support."

The Spoken Hand Orchestra began in December 1996 with 40 players divided into seven *batteries*, or self-contained drumming ensembles.

"Over time, as the musicians found out how they could deal with the discipline and sacrifices of regular rehearsal and developing a composed repertory," the orchestra settled into its present configuration of 15 drummers in four ensembles, Seidman said.

Three of the ensembles play in styles with African roots:

■ A West African group centered on the djembé, a family of drums Seidman likened to the more familiar kunga (or conga drum), "but with wider heads and a much louder sound and awesome dynamics. The three bass drums are quite stunning."

■ An Afro-Cuban ensemble rooted

in the cajon, which Seidman described as "boxes [derived from] wooden fish crates that Cuban slaves used for drumming."

■ A contingent playing music from Brazil, where African, American Indian and Portuguese musical influences melded in the samba.

Spoken Hand's fourth *batterie* plays tablas, the drums of traditional and classical music in India.

"Between the tabla and the other drums, the musical traditions are quite different. The rhythms are very, very different," Seidman observed.

"The commonality is that all these traditions arise out of ceremonial and religious practices. That spiritual connection is the glue that holds everything together.

"Each of us has had to learn something about a drumming tradition that initially was very foreign to his background and experience," he said, "and to honor that tradition as we're working in our own tradition.

"The core idea for a piece will come from some individual drummer. Then, each *batterie* will develop something that harmonizes with that core idea. Each ensemble contributes to a greater sound from within its own tradition.

"The more we hear and the more detailed we get with rhythmic figures and phrases, the more refinement takes place, the better the greater sound merges."

The distances, geographical and cultural, between Senegal, Cuba, Brazil and India are vast, Seidman acknowledged, "but when you get down to it, rhythms are rhythms. And it's beautiful and rewarding to make discoveries about how seemingly disparate traditions can be integrated."

Call Clarke Bustard at (804) 649-6362 or e-mail [cbustard@timesdispatch.com](mailto:cbustard@timesdispatch.com)

# Street dance is dance of life

## *Troupe's bursts of athleticism defy laws of nature*

BY JENNIE KNAPP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**F**or 75 heated minutes you are a black male in contemporary urban America, shackled by poverty and prejudice and running as fast as you can from an early grave.

### DANCE REVIEW

## RENNIE HARRIS

AT: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts last night

TO BE REPEATED: 8 o'clock tonight

You are led along the way by Philadelphia-based hip-hop dance troupe Rennie Harris Puremovement, whose blazing bursts of athleticism defy the laws of nature

and fill you with a feeling of superhuman transcendence.

Through hip-hop, Puremovement has transformed street dance into a dance of life.

Like life, some of the dances on the program are messy and ram-

bling. But Harris brings artful shape to his solo performance of an excerpt from "Endangered Species." While chased by a gunman, the dancer's life flashes before him.

Set to the amplified breathing of a winded runner, the dance showcases Harris' extraordinary "popping" technique, a slow-motion movement style that gives the impression you're looking at someone through a strobe light. In a flashback, Harris recalls being abused as a child. He morphs into a monster who looms over the audience.

As in most of the dances, guns, drugs and violence are central to "March of the Antmen," also choreographed by Harris. Five men enter with invisible guns, on a search-and-destroy mission. A drive-by shooting takes the life of one of them. As the dancers circle the slain figure and carry him off, they project the hopelessness of living in a neighborhood under the siege of gang warfare.

The program ends in celebration with "One Love." Bare-chested dancers unleash abundant male energy in contests of athletic prowess. When you think you've seen it all, a dancer brings out a mat, places it center stage, and whirls through breathtaking multiple pirouettes — not on his feet, but on his head.

It is spectacular to watch those beautiful, strong, confident bodies wheeling through the air, indifferent to the pull of gravity and the risk of injury. But Harris' troupe isn't here to entertain with circus tricks. They put sculptural handstands, head spins and belly slides in the service of art.

Harris' great contribution is to show how hip-hop emerged from street life as a celebration of African-American survival from the slave ships to crime-ridden inner cities. As with any provocative art, you enter this performance at your own risk of being offended and edified.

# Poets' performances peaked as eve progressed

BY ROY PROCTOR

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

**"Real Live Poets!"** started well enough last night in the Fast/Forward performance series at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

After the four New York-based poets introduced themselves briefly in this showcase of '90s urban poetry performance, Jamaican-born, Brooklyn-honed Everton Sylvester took the stage for an extended set.

The lowest-keyed of the four, Everton dwelt on his Caribbean roots, his adopted American heritage and the cultural incongruities involved. "Your idea of multiculturalism is Japanese on Monday ... Caribbean on Wednesday but not too spicy, please," he told the apprecia-

tive crowd seated cabaret style in the museum's Marble Court.

Then "Real Live Poets!" got better.

It could have been argued that Sylvester "read" his poetry. There

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## REVIEW

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### REAL LIVE POETS!

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AT the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts last night

was no question that Obie-winning playwright-actress Dael Orlandersmith, resplendent in gold braids, was performing — indeed, living — hers as she assumed many voices to convey the trauma endured and fortitude required to survive on the meaner streets of New York City.

Then "Real Live Poets!" got downright amazing.

Tracie Morris, dubbed the Queen of Hip-Hop Poetry, left mere words far behind in a dazzling display of nonverbal sounds and intricate rhythms she created not just with her mouth but tapped out on her body and achieved through other means.

The amazement continued with the final poet, Emily XYZ, who, joined by fellow artist Ann Elliott, explored the two-voice side of her poetic output to splendid effect.

The two women soloed, spoke in unison and created grand duets of soaring cacophony at the service of the urban themes that had been paramount through the evening. Indeed, they turned themselves into the verbal equivalent of a virtuoso piano duo.

Orlandersmith's more literary-

based poems may read as well on the page as they appear on the stage, but the same could not be said of the others. That's no insult, either. These poets are expanding the realm of the vocally possible.

Poetry grabbed a lot of ink in the early '90s when these "street" poets and others found their voices and appreciative audiences in the Nuyorican Poets Cafe on Manhattan's Lower East Side and similar venues in New York.

The excitement they generated then has died down, but this tour and the prevalence of poetry "slams" — competitive poetry performances such as the one sponsored by the Fast/Forward series earlier this week — shows that poetry honed in hip-hop, rap and other urban rhythms is more than a fad.

Richmond Times-Dispatch  
Saturday, November 22, 1997

ANCE

# isky Business

st/Forward artist  
n Carlson soars at  
e Virginia Museum.

Cheryl Pallant

mitating a gorilla or an infant's cry may not be skills to lead off a resume, but these and other abilities are just what multimedia artist Ann Carlson carried off with startling dramatic effect in "Anning of Solo Work" for the Virginia Museum's Fast/Forward series performance 11. Using an expansive range of vocations, a collage of words and sounds, movement and music, soloist Carlson rarely shed alone on stage.

In the tender "Visit woman move story cat," the unclothed Carlson portrayed herself as Koko the gorilla befriending a man who is later taken away. With the grace and ease in which Carlson embodied primate mannerisms, scratching, swinging and running about, interspersed with

dancerly leaps and tumbles, it was easy to confuse woman and ape. The similarities were furthered in her coddling the kitten with maternal attentiveness, placing it on her chest, delighted by her furry companion.

Carlson reached comedic heights in "Sold." Dressed in a wedding gown and parading onto a platform on center stage, she dropped her bridal demeanor and assumed the voices of auctioneer and preacher. With "a bride's eye view," she got the audience raising their hands, buying gestures and feelings, while she rapidly fired off comments about Richmond, Newt Gingrich, the fact that any woman can buy a wedding dress, a stream of consciousness with comic juxtapositions. Eventually she yelled "Sold!" followed by "Let us pray," and then conducted the audience in a series of hallelujahs before returning to her verbal torrent.

In "Blanket," an elderly woman meandered step by step across the stage while a collage of words and sounds from herself and a recording collapsed linear time. A crying infant, a babbling child, a vengeful teen, an announcer reporting on McCarthy hearings and John Lennon's death created a textural landscape that defied linear sense and suggested a more privately meaningful logic.

Whether portraying woman or animals as playthings or showing us how easily we



**Multimedia artist Ann Carlson**

participate in consumerism, her work, often funny, was also quite serious and poignant. What gave it weight was her commanding stage presence, her empathy, and her willingness to risk comfort for aesthetic ideals. **S**

# Ann Carlson interprets life

BY FRANCES SCHOOLS  
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**A**nn Carlson is a performance artist, but she once responded to that reference by saying, "If there's a name to put on it, something's wrong."

And although it may not be categorized, the work does intrigue. It is both enigmatic and simplistic in its interpretation of life.

In Saturday's final offering of the Fast/Forward series at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Carlson presented four solo works. Two — "Visit woman move story cat cat" and "Sarah" — are from her "Animals" series, in which she incorporates live animals in the performance.

Opening with "Sarah," she got audience members into the mood of the evening by having the narrator ask them to wave their arms about. Before a pedestal bearing a goldfish swimming in a bowl, she undulated broadly and seductively while the narration implied that she was a large fish performing in an oceanarium to the amusement of humans but perhaps to her own boredom.

"Visit woman move story cat cat" was a more intriguing piece, as a nude Carlson moved out onto the stage on all fours. Inspired by the

relationship between Koko, the gorilla who learned sign language, and her pet cat, Carlson emulated the primate movements. She interacted with a kitten, showing the love that Koko had for the feline friend. The dignity and quiet emotions of the gorilla were perfectly presented.

"Sold" brought humor to the program as Carlson glided onstage attired in a billowy bridal gown and positioned herself atop a box. With a mixture of auctioneer and evangelist, she delighted the audience with wit, often acerbic, banter, reminding us that life should not be taken too seriously. While often performed with others onstage, "Sold" was presented here as a solo.

The program ended with the somber "Blanket." In this piece about dying, Carlson shuffled onto the stage as an old woman. A score by Andy Kirschner incorporated music and dialogue to recall events in the life of the woman. She responded to the score, often delving back to childhood memories. She looked often at her watch, giving the audience the time — reminding us that life grows short.

At the end, she fell, then carefully righted herself to shuffle off into the darkness.

Carlson's performance may not be for everyone. But her views on life are thought-provoking, turning the ordinary in life into events to ponder.

## DANCE REVIEW

Richmond Times-Dispatch  
May 13, 1996



OCTAVIO IURBE

AMERICAN PREMIERE. Alienation and violence find powerful choreographic expression in "Mountains Made for Barking," performed here by Belgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus and his Ultima Vez ensemble.

## 'Mountains' is unsettling, but it's also exhilarating

BY ROY PROCTOR

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

**B**elgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus and his Ultima Vez ensemble came and went in 90 unbroken minutes Saturday night in the American premiere of their "Mountains Made of Barking" in the Fast/Forward performance series at TheatreVirginia.

It'll take the packed Fast/Forward performance series audience 90 times 90 days to sort through what hit them. Even then, they won't be able to tell for sure in recalling a work that Vandekeybus has dubbed "an unintelligible network" and added, "That is its power."

Whatever hit them, "Mountains" is an artistically seismic occurrence.

Although "Mountains" is based in dance, it makes liberal use of film (projected on a giant backdrop), the spoken word (in English and several other languages), music (frequently throbbing) and acting.

Coherent plot is in short supply in a work based on hallucinatory imagery — alienation, violence and, above all, seemingly futile attempts at physical and spiritual purification through scrubbing until the body and soul cry out in agony.

The purification theme is struck early as a bare-chested man scrubs furiously, writhes on the stage floor

and cries out as arms and legs began to emerge from the bottom of a black backdrop.

Soon the stage is exploding in movement. Vandekeybus and his nine fellow dancers don't just approach each other. They dash into each other, hurtle past each other, leap at full throttle from motionless positions on the stage floor.

Surprises abound in amazing bursts of energy that are intricately worked out and totally disciplined against frequently dramatic settings in lighting that could hardly be more arresting.

Vandekeybus' vision frequently conveys a people-bite-people world, as exemplified in a segment in which a woman struggles to tell a story to the audience while being pursued by a man intent on biting her legs as she dashes between microphones at opposite sides of the stage.

The purification motif finds its most startling expression in a scene in which three nude men scrub while standing in basins, only to find dirt cascading on them and leaving them dirtier than ever, while a man laughs maniacally at the top right corner of the proscenium arch.

"Mountains" is unsettling, to be sure, but it's also exhilarating. When art comes down to the creatively horrific and bizarre, Vandekeybus is a true heir to his Low Country forebear, Hieronymus Bosch.

### DANCE REVIEW

Richmond Times-Dispatch  
Monday, Nov. 6, 1995

# Leading clarinet charge

*Don Byron's complex beat: personal, political time*

BY HARRIET McLEOD

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

**D**on Byron lays critical claim to the title of most inventive young clarinet composer in the country.

The 37-year-old, dreadlocked, South Bronx-born, classically trained musician, who performs with his quintet at the Virginia Museum Thursday, busts genres with double lists of musical skills.

He is equally interested in Franz Schubert as in Duke Ellington, in Mickey Katz as in Olivier Messiaen. He defies the prejudices of the scholars of his instrument, even as he rejects being looked on as a jazz cat. He has reflected and provoked the

new respect for the clarinet in modern jazz, and although he occasionally plays baritone sax, he feels no need to double on saxophone per tradition.

His conversation on the phone from his home in New York is as inspired and nonstop as his swooping, surprising, humorous playing — and interrupted several times by call waiting, to which Byron says "Oops, beep."

Quotes will be long.

"When you're around clarinet pedagogues," he said, "and they decide, think, or hear that you're into jazz, you're not going to get all the information you need to get trained to play two notes on the clarinet. I never really had that Bryant Gumbel image to make people believe that I was a classical musician.

"The way that most people approach music is kind of social. When

somebody decides to play Latin music and they're from the Midwest, they move into a Spanish neighborhood, they learn Spanish, they try to marry a Spanish woman, they eat Spanish food . . . The current young lions' jazz stuff has a lot of that. I'm not a free improviser type . . . I don't hang out with those folks, and I don't necessarily think that the social thing is that important.

"As the only child in a family, everything I've investigated I've done in this alone way. When I first started playing salsa music, it was alone in my room, trying to figure out what was going on with the rhythms."

Byron's father played bass in a calypso band. His mother was a pianist. He was taken regularly to jazz clubs and to the symphony. Into clas-

PLEASE SEE BYRON, PAGE J3 ►



DEBORAH FEIN GOLD

**GENRE BUSTER.** The classically trained musician and composer Don Byron has inspired new respect for the clarinet in modern jazz.

# Byron's clarinet musical mastery

BY HARRIET McLEOD

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

**D**on Byron, dreadlocked, bespectacled lord of the clarinet, and his deconstructed quintet brought a smart, funny set of instrumental mastery, great ensemble playing and fine jazz heat to a Virginia Museum crowd brought in from yet more miserable weather.

## MUSIC REVIEW

Byron has liberated the clarinet from any notions of licorice-stick sweet swing. A full-body player, whose moves range from conductor's figures in the air to ax-like chops to half-kneels, small jumps and shouts. Not counting what's coming out of the clarinet — diamond-fine technique — using the range of the instrument, doubling, holding breathless soft tone. He also rocked out.

He led off with an outside "Goldfinger"; charged through Ornette Coleman.

"Sex/work (Clarence and Anita)" was sensual and rhythmic, broken by squeals of pain, subtle percussive fills and fat guitar notes, to which Byron added, "Ahhh!"

The tune's about the sexiness of work. "Menial labor, not paper pushing or software development," he said.

For Stephen Sondheim's "Not A Day Goes By," drums and bass created an undertow beneath a snapping guitar solo. Clarinet made melody on a distant shore, before falling down into full-bore party dance music — we're way out beyond the breakers now.

On his own tunes "Next Love" and "Tuskegee Strutters Ball" Byron's composed doubled riffs on pianos and guitar, or on bass and piano, served as a bed for him to improvise on. No matter where he went, there was glory in his far-from-traditional structure.

Byron's co-conspirators were the unshy pianist Uri Caine, who played beautiful stride and walking bass, reached into the piano to pluck the strings, pounded the key case; guitarist David Gilmore, who had fine solos but took an unnecessary rock star turn with sampler and delay; wonderfully musical and strong bassist Beldon Bullock; and muscular drummer Dion Parson, introduced by an amused Byron as "introverted."

# Eclectic performance art, music highlight Fast/Forward series

BY CLARKE BUSTARD

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

**B**elgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus and his 12-member troupe Ultima Vez will open the 1995-96 season of the Virginia Museum's Fast/Forward series Nov. 4 in "Mountains Made of Barking," a dreamlike collage of film, speech, music, sound and movement on the experiences of a blind dancer.

The program will be staged in the Virginia Museum Theater.

The museum's new-art series will continue Feb. 8 with a concert by Don Byron's Vanguard Jazz, featuring clarinetist Byron and his quintet in the museum theater.

New-music composer Paul Dresher, whose media include experimental opera, dance, film, video, and orchestral, chamber and electronic music, will present "New American Landscapes" featuring an ensemble of eight musicians in a concert April 20 in the museum's Marble Hall.

The series will conclude May 11 in the museum theater with performance artist Ann Carlson, best known for her staging of Philip Glass' "Hydrogen Jukebox," presenting "Mirage," a performance installation she has been developing for three years.

All four performances will begin at 8 p.m.

Each artist or group will present free related programs, including:

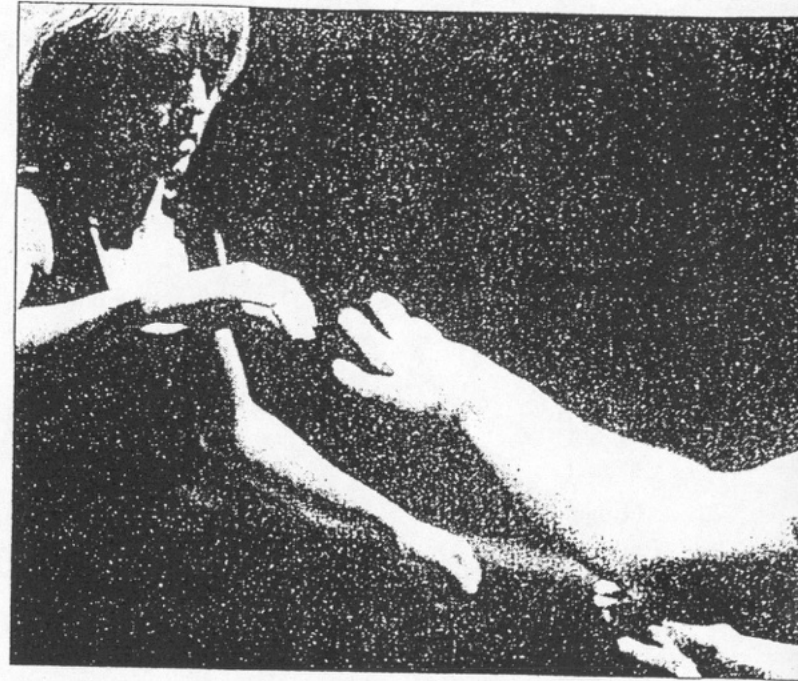
- Vandekeybus and Ultima Vez in a lecture/workshop at 6 p.m. Nov. 3 in the museum auditorium.
- Byron and his quintet in a workshop on jazz and klezmer, the East European Jewish folk style, at 7 p.m. Feb. 7 at Parham Pavilion, 501 Parham Road. The program is cosponsored by the Richmond Jazz Society and the Or Atid Congregation.
- Dresher and his ensemble in a lecture/workshop at 3 p.m. April 20 in the museum auditorium.
- Carlson in reception and discussion following her May 11 performance in the museum theater.

The series is underwritten by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation in partnership with the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the NEA, the Mobil Foundation, WCVE-FM and US Air, with additional support from Philip Morris Companies Inc.

Season tickets are \$56 (\$50 for museum members and students), and may be purchased at the museum events ticket desk in the main lobby.

Single tickets, if available, will be \$15 to \$17, and will go on sale Oct. 10.

For more information, call (804) 367-8148.



**MULTIMEDIA.** Wim Vandekeybus and his troupe, Ultima Vez, perform at the Virginia Museum.

Your programs are excellent  
and an important asset  
for the museum!  
Katherine

20 THE RICHMOND NEWS LEADER, Monday, February 25, 1991

## Dance troupe bizarre, yet brilliant

### DANCE REVIEW

By Frances Schools  
News Leader special writer

If it is true that "timing is everything," then Wim Vandekeybus and his troupe have it all.

Saturday night, as part of the Virginia Museum's Fast/Forward series, this European group presented 75 minutes of one of the most grueling and exciting performances to visit this city in quite a while.

The stage of the Virginia Commonwealth University Concert Hall was covered with large, wooden squares. Enter the nine performers, one or two at a time, calmly surveying the audience and each other. They throw darts at the floor, parry with each other, and that is as calm as it ever gets. For then the masochism begins.

They hurl their bodies onto the floor, roll and tumble about, throw themselves at each other, and in general, seem intent on seeing how much punishment their bodies can take.

The title of this performance is "Les Porteuses de Mauvaises Nouvelles" or "The Bearers of Bad News." The work is supposed to show how people respond to disasters and how they bring calamities to each other.

The program, however, is best appreciated if one does not try to interpret meaning, but rather enjoys the humor of the episodes and marvels at the physical dexterity of the performers.

These are not dancers in the true sense of the word, but highly skilled gymnasts whose every move has been remarkably well-choreographed by Vandekeybus.

Along the way were many amusing moments. Most amusing was a large, white slab suspended at one edge of the stage. With a burst of flame, a man removes the slab and places it on a burner, revealing that the slab is frozen. He melts it, beats it and thaws it to reveal a shirt, which he places on another man. Hard to describe but hilarious to watch.

Other moments included a sleight-of-hand shell game, recitations in various languages of stories begun but never finished, a string set on fire as the performers quickly moved to escape it and items of clothing suspended from the ceiling and later donned by performers.

Throughout all of the activity, the floor had been removed bit by bit, squares stacked about, and the performers climbing, jumping upon and leaping from them.

The entire evening was one of bizarre behavior — awesome, brilliant and comical. The agility of the performers was breathtaking and fascinating to behold. It cannot accurately be described.

You had to be there.

# Museum's Fast/Forward invited to join NPN group

Fast/Forward, the Virginia Museum's experimental performing arts series, has been asked to participate in the National Performance Network, joining similarly innovative programs in New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and 10 other U.S. cities.

The National Performance Network nurtures the work of experimental and minority artists in dance, music, theater, performance art and puppetry by providing touring and residency opportunities nationwide, according to Margo Crutchfield, one of the organizers of the Fast/Forward series for the museum's 20th century art department. Administered by the Dance Theater Workshop of New York City, NPN has received major grants from the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts through its dance and inter-arts programs.

"The avenues of communication forged by the network will enrich and invigorate both the artists who travel to new regions and the communities of artists and concertgoers that receive them," said David White, executive director of the Dance Theater Workshop.

By joining NPN, "the Virginia Museum has made an unprecedented commitment to experimental programming," Miss Crutchfield said.

The additional support for the "often risky" Fast/Forward series, which played to sold-out houses in its inaugural season last year, means the Virginia Museum will be able to expand greatly its number of concerts, she said.

The first of the seven Fast/Forward concerts will be "Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane & Co.," in residency here Sept. 2-8. In their public performances Sept. 6 and 7 at 8 p.m. at the museum, the company will present a preview of "Animal Trilogy," which will receive its world premiere at the International Dance Biennale in Lyon, France, and will be included in this fall's NEXT WAVE Festival

at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York.

Other artists to be presented in the series will be announced later, and advance season tickets will be sold beginning Aug. 1, Miss Crutchfield said.

## DANCE

# Dancers inhabit space, leave audience gasping

## DANCE REVIEW

By Frances Schools  
News Leader special writer

They fly through the air like speeding bullets and land with an impact that makes the audience gasp. They are Elizabeth Streb Ringside Inc., six performers who astound, amaze and truly confound with what they do.

Last night in the Marble Hall of the Virginia Museum, the group performed their amazing feats while the audience watched, mesmerized and astounded. Is it dance, gymnastics or just plain masochistic behavior? Whatever you wish to label it, it provides a performance that leaves even the audience exhausted. Streb's unique choreography embodies movements in which the dancers hurl themselves against the floor, against walls, clamber over metal bars and dive into space from a platform. Each time they move, one is certain they will either crush a bone or knock each other out. But somehow they survive and don't seem to be any the worse for wear.

Ms. Streb says she is attempting to define space and movement. She wants to inhabit space, to travel through it, emphasizing the motion. Some of her dancers are trained gymnasts, others are dancers, but to accomplish the feats Ms. Streb demands of them, and of herself, they need the talents of both.

While one may wonder why they don't injure themselves from the tremendous impact with which they thrust themselves through the air to smash against a wall or mat, it is all due to having extensive knowledge and control of their bodies. When they hit, they have learned to hit with their muscles, not the bones.

The dancers — Paula Gifford, Jorge Collazo, Christopher Batenhorst, Mark Robison and Gary Lutes — have all mastered the timing and ability to hone the body to handle the impact of the exhaustive and demanding maneuvers required. Their performance requires tremendous strength and body control and they seem to gain strength from each other in knowing that each will be in the right place at the right time.

By "milking" the structures, the sounds made from the impact of each body is amplified, making it even more intense. And since the dancers take verbal cues from each other on when to move, no doubt the sound aids them, also. With no music to accompany the

dancers, the sounds of the thudding bodies becomes an integral part of both the movements and the overall feel of the works.

But without music or any seeming direction, why don't they make mistakes? They do, and that is part of the excitement. Each performance is different because the dancers always have the potential to miss a move. They rely on those cues from each other and a second sense about when and where to move. This potential for error adds to the excitement and keeps the danger and challenge ever on the minds of both dancers and audience.

In last night's performances of "Airlines," "Little Ease," "Float" and "Rebound" (created with a grant from the Virginia Museum and others), Ms. Streb and company traveled through space, defied and used gravity, accomplished seemingly impossible movements.

In "Airlines," the dancers move like wild donkeys over a structure of 15-foot scaffolding. "Float" finds the dancers hurling themselves from scaffolding onto a large, foam mattress. They leap one at a time in rapid-fire order, go five abreast, and each time manage to both terrify and hypnotize the audience.

"Rebound" (in two parts) finds the dancers within an 8-foot-by-10-foot boxlike structure in which they hurl themselves against the wall, walk the walls, stack themselves up like dominos and defy gravity as they maneuver about. There is even some tricky work with a large stick.

"Little Ease" is a solo work for Ms. Streb, who explores the possibilities of movement within a severely limited space of a small box. She bangs loudly with her body against the box, scuffles and struggles, testing her endurance against the confines of the limited space. One wonders why she would subject her body to such punishment, but that's what this is all about. She is testing those limits of movement and space.

This is not a performance for everyone. It is exhausting to watch, thrilling to experience, and certainly different from anything else being done today. If you are looking for an event in which the performers give their very all, the dancers are performing tonight at 8.

Bear in mind that these dancers are not trying to impress you with their abilities; they are, instead, challenging themselves to achieve movements that test their personal fears and capabilities. What an experience:

## ENTERTAINMENT

# Kodo makes a big bang here

### Music review

By John Wirt

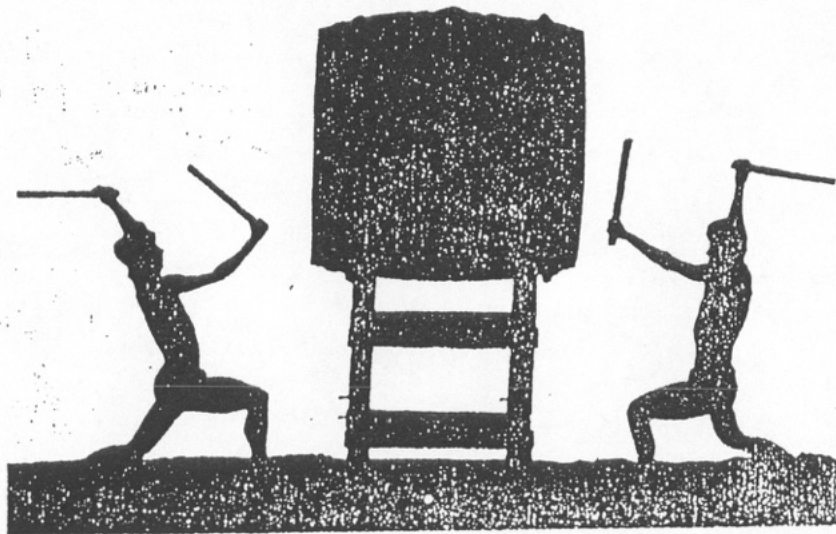
Special correspondent

The early evening thunderstorm that hit Richmond on Saturday proved a fitting prelude to a performance by Kodo, a Japanese musical-theater troupe revolving around the primal throbbing of taiko, the ancient tribal drumming of Japan.

Repeating a scene that occurred in cities throughout the U.S. since Kodo began its North American tour three months ago, the group thoroughly entertained a sold-out, enraptured house at the Virginia Commonwealth University Performing Arts Center. To better meet demand for tickets, the concert hall's orchestra pit was filled with 69 additional seats.

This Virginia Museum "Fast Forward" presentation proved an aural and visual delight as the young 14-member company performed its virtuoso 90-minute program and three encores with drama, subtlety and unbridled joy.

The sounds Kodo produced ranged from the sharp noise of the wooden clackers to the plaintive whine of the bamboo flute to the thunderous boom



of the 900-pound odaiko, the largest of the ensemble's traditional taiko drums.

Among the concert's visual treats was the blur of the musicians' heavy sticks pounding vibrant percussive sound. The sight and sound of Kodo's powerful, athletic drummers was mesmerizing.

Further visual pleasure was provided by the brief, delicate performances of two costumed female dancers. Another theatrical aspect of the group was a tendency to build selections gradually,

as one, another and finally other members walked on stage with instruments in hand.

While the 11 pieces in Kodo's program included bamboo flutes, stringed instruments, dance, singing and shouting, the heart of the performance was the passionate intense playing of the drums.

Kodo's percussion pieces were executed with marvelously varied dynamics in seemingly perfect ensemble. "Chonlima," which translates to "One Thousand League Horse," featured a quartet of drummers playing okedo and shime daiko drums center-stage as two drummers behind them played larger miyadaiko drums.

Performing with frenetic speed, the drummers in front seamlessly

traded rhythms between each other, creating a hypnotic effect among receptive listeners.

The name Kodo translates to both "heartbeat" and "children of the drum." The concert program for Saturday's show states that the company's name also "expresses not only the sound of a mother's heartbeat as heard and felt from within the womb, but also the desire to play the drums purely, with the heart of a child."

And so Kodo did.

# Drums and dancers are impressive works of art

## MUSIC REVIEW

By Randy Hallman  
News Leader staff writer

The big drums themselves are things of beauty, made of the luminous red wood of the zelkova tree, the swirling grain deep under glistening shellac. The largest, the *odaiko*, was about the size of a Volkswagen, with foot-square medallions on each side where handles big as castle door-knockers were mounted.

That drum and a score or so more, some no larger than a small snare, are the primary instruments of *Kodo*, a Japanese music-and-dance troupe of 20 young people. Saturday night they played a jam-packed Virginia Commonwealth University Performing Arts Center as part of the Virginia Museum's Fast/Forward series.

The range of sound was remarkable, from the din of wooden clackers — more piercing than the noise of a stock car race, marginally less so than that of a heavy-metal rock band — to the delicacy of bamboo xylophones and flutes.

And always the drums, now rolling like the distant thunder of a far-off fleet of prop planes, now overwhelming with pure power.

The troupe danced around and played the drums with a boundless and contagious enthusiasm. The audience was thoroughly caught up in

the verve of the performers.

The showiest piece featured the ponderous *odaiko*, a drum that would give the University of Texas a run for its claim that its bass drum is the world's largest. Two men, naked except for the briefest of loincloths, their sinewy bodies like art in themselves, pounded away on opposite ends of the drum. One droned a steady backbeat while the other improvised. Around them four drummers joined the session with smaller drums.

The traditional story, according to program notes, is of a baby who, upon hearing the thunder of the big drum, dropped into a peaceful slumber. Some baby, that. The power of the sound made sleep the furthest thing from one's thoughts. When the drummers stopped, the ringing of the final note lingered fully half a minute.

Perhaps the most captivating of the pieces in the 90-minute show was the *Chojugida*, a slapstick dance of masked players — first a growling man, then a monkey, a snake, a frog, a lizard, a strutting bird and finally *Dracula* himself.

The audience was reluctant to let the evening end. Sustained standing ovations brought the troupe back for four encores, exhausting the repertoire to the point that the troupe finally taught the audience a simple clapping rhythm.

They could've drummed all night.

# ARTS & RECREATION

## PERFORMANCE

# A Brighter Shade of Gray

**Monologist Spalding Gray talks up fatherhood in "Morning, Noon and Night."**

by D.L. Hintz

**W**hy would you possibly want to listen to a guy spend 90 minutes telling you about his day? It sounds like some nightmare bus trip from hell, right? Well, if the guy happens to be Spalding Gray, it's no nightmare. In fact, critics who have seen his new monologue, "Morning, Noon and Night," have called it "luminous" and "exhilarating." And on Oct. 29, you will have a chance to decide for yourself when he brings it to Richmond to kick off this year's Fast Forward series at the Virginia Museum.

The new monologue covers only a single day in Gray's life. But it's a day full of moments that define fatherhood for Gray: having a sexual interlude interrupted by a Tickle Me Elmo

Gray burst into the national consciousness in 1987 with Jonathan Demme's filmed version of the monologue, "Swimming to Cambodia," a rollicking, wryly comic account of his experiences while acting in Roland Joffe's "The Killing Fields." With "Swimming" and subsequent works such as "Monster in a Box" and "Gray's Anatomy," Gray essentially invented a new form of performance art that has been imitated frequently since, most prominently by Eric Bogosian.

But many people still don't quite understand Gray's work. The 58-year-old award-winning "theatrical diarist" still bristles when people assume he just gets up and rambles on about his life.

"When critics talk about me 'free associating' or call [one of my performances] a 'chat

**"Morning, Noon and Night"**

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts  
Theatre Virginia stage

# ENTERTAINMENT

## Jones/Zane works astounding, appealing

### DANCE REVIEW

By Frances Schools  
News Leader special writer

Anyone who includes a dog in the opening moments of a performance has won the hearts of at least half the audience. That is exactly what Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane and Company did Saturday and yesterday at the Virginia Museum Theatre.<sup>1</sup>

In a prologue prior to the presentation of "The Animal Trilogy," the dog, a local pet making its stage debut, was part of a scene where the dancers were lined up onstage with Zane; the dog; and later, Jones, standing in front. There was no music, the dancers disappeared one at a time, and the stage was left bare. Whatever the purpose, this bit accomplished one thing — it tweaked the imagination and set the stage for an evening of dance unlike any other. It also captured the fancy of the other half of the audience.

This company performs like a group of hyperactive individuals in perpetual motion. They fill the

stage with movements and actions that are often astounding and always appealing. The only difference is that each of these movements is precise, demanding and always captivating.

Jones and Zane have created choreography that overflows with originality. Movements are frenetic, strong, and constant in their direction. They call it post-modern, but no matter what they term it, it predicts a future direction of dance movement.

The three parts of this work are called, "How to Walk an Elephant," "Water Buffalo: An Acquired Taste," and "Sacred Cow: Lifting a Calf Everyday Until it Becomes an Ox." But these are merely names. There is no semblance of animal movements that can be easily interpreted. If they are there they are lost in the excitement of the movements.

Each of the dancers is an equal. There are no stars. Of the two co-artistic directors, Jones dances throughout the program; Zane appears only briefly. Not only are the dancers equal in talent, they are equal in gender. There are no separate male/female roles. The females appear strong and masculine; the males can be soft and feminine in their

moves. Each shares the strength of each movement and the effect is one of unity and completeness.

Conlon Nancarrow has fashioned a musical score that jolts with its loudness but mesmerizes the listener. It is cacophonous, and its sound fits perfectly with the whirlwind of movement taking place onstage.

The sets are simple but effective. In the last sequence, a conveyer runs across the back of the stage to offer the dancers another level on which to perform. Through use of this element as well as a set of stairs, the dancers are able to work several stage elements at the same time.

This is not a dance group that can be analyzed and dissected as to the meaning of its works. But it is a dance group that is the wave of the future, exciting and vibrant. There is no need to understand, just enjoy. Its excitement is contagious.

Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane and Company is the first in a series of performances to be presented in the Fast/Forward series by The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. The program will offer new directions in contemporary music, dance and performance art.

## DANCE

# Hot, Hip and Conscious

**Bebe Miller and Rennie Harris confront social issues with an explosion of dance.**

by Cheryl Pallant

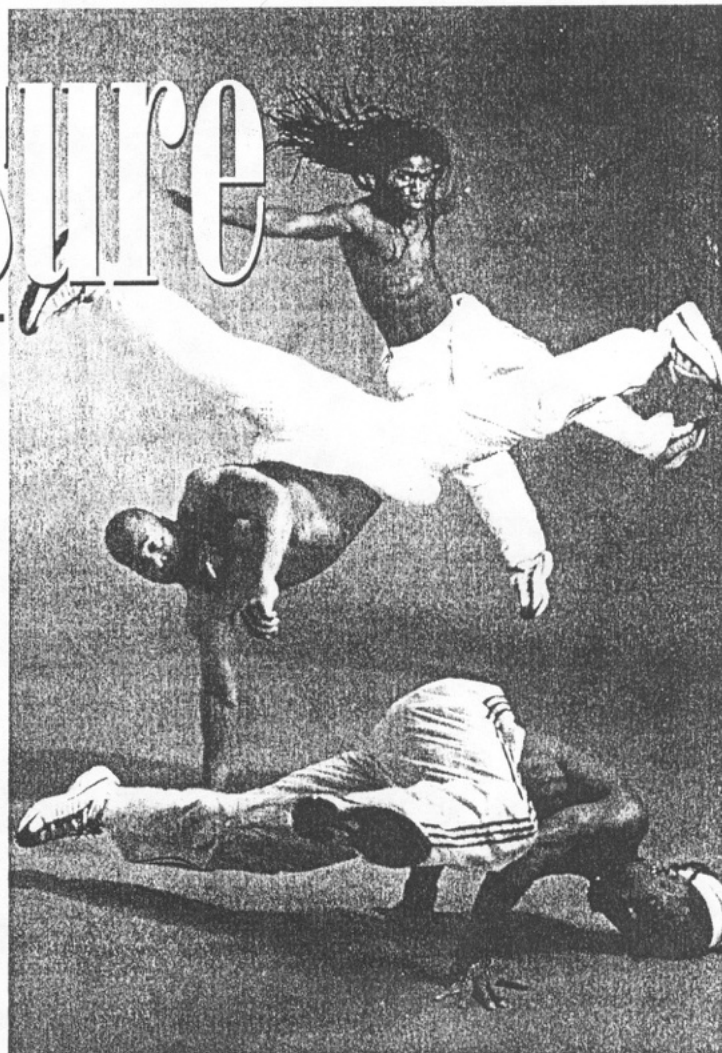
**H**ip Richmonders who are swing dancing all across the city may want to look to Bebe Miller and Rennie Harris for clues to the next dance wave. The Bebe Miller Company and Rennie Harris Puremovement, two nationally-known dance groups with divergent

styles and equally dissimilar missions, will provide several days of high-energy choreography this week. Both hailing from urban centers — Miller from New York and Harris from Philadelphia — these virtuosic performers will stun audiences with their athleticism, grace and passion. Miller's modern movements and Harris' hip-hop stylings might even inspire some swingers to throw off their zoot suits in favor of something more up-to-date.

In addition to their performances — Miller and Company at Grace Street Theatre on Nov. 11-12 and Rennie Harris Puremovement at the Virginia Museum Nov. 13-14 (with a special \$20 combination ticket available for both performances) — both artists will share their technique during master classes at Virginia Commonwealth University's Dance Center as part of Hot, Hip and Conscious, a week-long community dance event sponsored by VCU and the Virginia Museum's Fast/Forward series.

Miller sees herself as a rarity in the modern dance world, a black woman in a field otherwise largely dominated by whites. Although not a new insight, only recently did she feel compelled to explore the issue. The result is her most recent work "Going to the Wall," which she and her troupe will perform, along with her work "Blessed."

To explore race and identity, Miller adopted a diversity training exercise from choreographer,



**Rennie Harris Puremovement raises hip-hop to the next level with catapults, spins and other contortions that seem impossible to execute.**



**Bebe Miller Company explores racial issues in "Going to the Wall"**

Ishmael Houston-Jones. Participants separate and group according to shared experiences or traits such as hair color, education, race and interests. Company members looked at who stood across the room and who stood nearby. Discussion followed and a year and a half later "Going to the Wall" was created.

Miller sees the dance, full of shoves, pulls, clustering, and separating as a "depository of company lore."

"We came up with movement metaphors for the stories and talks from our group experience," she explains.

Performed to the music of Don Byron, movements are punctuated by words as dancers mumble about their grouping and isolating experiences. "I wasn't trying to solve anything," Miller says. "I wanted to look at what it feels like to be in one group and not another."

Miller's exposure to modern dance came at an early age, around 5, when her mom took her to dance classes at the Henry Street Settlement in the Lower East Side of New York. There she learned the work of Alwin

Nikolais through his partner, Murray Louis. Though she stopped dancing as a teen-ager, her interest resurfaced during college when she attended a master class with Merce Cunningham and was inspired by his abstract technique.

"Blessed," the second work of Miller's program, is danced to the music of the Australian women's a cappella group, The Cafe of Salvation. Whereas "Going to the Wall" involves much pelvic movement, thrusts, leaps, and pulls, "Blessed" frequently relies on arms, bent elbows and fluttering fingers. Lifts and near collisions of bodies parallel the spiritual melody of the music.

The common thread to Miller's often emotional work is "how we listen to each other."

"I think that's why there's so much touching in my dances," she says. "I'm really interested in developing a visceral response."

Hip-hop, breakdance, house, locking, and the Brazilian dance form *capoeira* govern

*continued*

## ARTS & LEISURE

much of the work by Rennie Harris Puremovement. The self-taught Harris recalls that dance and music were always included in family gatherings, barbecues and school functions. "It's part of the culture," he says. "I can't remember a time when it wasn't around. ... It goes back to tradition ... an expression of life, a dance for the crops, harvest, a birth or a death."

By 14, Harris had formed his own group to compete against fellow dancers. A year later, the Smithsonian Institute identified his work as "Philadelphia folk" and asked him to teach. Though he pursued dance, primarily through teaching, it wasn't until his early 30s that he decided to claim dance as his career and discuss the importance of hip-hop. "Hip-hop picked up where the civil rights [movement] left off," he says. "It's a rebellion against society."

For Harris, dancing is nothing short of a religious experience. Although a majority of the movements require athletic skill, he dismisses any attempt to categorize it as sport. "When you call it that, you're just covering up the true meaning — worship," he says. "That's why so many places outlawed dance. [Dance] moves people deeply, so others tried to control it, said it was the devil's work."

Rennie Harris Puremovement's devility is glorious, particularly when the dancers regale with catapults, spins and other contortions that seem impossible to pull off. Upper body strength is imperative for this five-man troupe; that and a willingness to take risks. Although members each have their own training techniques, Harris takes umbrage with those who denounce their methods as nontraditional or those who call it "street." Humbly, he describes the dancer's muscular builds and astounding skill as, "It's just kinda what we do."

A few pieces involve text and minimize movement, however, the majority of the show, which includes "Gestures," an excerpt of "Endangered Species," "P-Funk," "March of the Antmen," and "Students of the Asphalt Jungle" draws from the

### Let's Boogie

**As part of "Hot, Hip and Conscious," the Virginia Museum and VCU are offering a variety of free dance events:**

■ **Master class with Bebe Miller, Monday, Nov. 9, 7 p.m. VCU Dance Center, Studio 203.**

■ **Hip-hop lecture/demonstration with Rennie Harris Puremovement, Thursday, Nov. 12, 5:30 p.m. at Theatre Virginia Stage at the Virginia Museum.**

■ **Hip-hop master class taught by Rennie Harris Puremovement, Friday, Nov. 13, 11 a.m. at VCU Dance Center, Studio 203. Open to the public 12 years and older.**

rhythms and movements of hip-hop. "It's all from traditional African culture," Harris explains. "We do the camel dance, the ring dance. [The term] hip-hop comes from Cab Calloway, described as a "hep cat," who was constantly 'hip-hopping' around." **S**

**Bebe Miller & Company**  
Grace Street Theater  
Nov. 11-12  
8 p.m.  
\$10-\$15; free to students with ID  
828-2020

**Rennie Harris Puremovement**  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts  
Nov. 13-14  
8 p.m.  
\$10-\$17  
367-8148

BEATRIZ SCHILLER

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# Threadgill's multilayered orchestrations

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## ▼ JAZZ FROM PAGE H1

clave of Goa on the country's west coast. "I live in New York, too," he said in a telephone interview from Goa, "but when I'm out of the States, this is home. It's a nice place — simple, easygoing.

"You've got someplace you like to go on weekends, don't you? This is mine. Just a longer commute."

Threadgill, whose former expatri-

ate base was Holland, said musical interests did not draw him to India. But he's a musical multiculturalist of long standing; his ensembles commonly mix Western and non-Western instruments and playing techniques, and his compositions defy geographic or ethnic labeling.

They also stand outside of normal time frames: "I don't want to thumb my way through an encyclopedia of life in the name of art. It's already

been done," Threadgill said in a 1995 interview with *Musician* magazine. His avant-gardism, if that's what it is, is both futuristic and historical.

Cultural labels "keep music in a straightjacket," he said. He stopped calling his music jazz "because it has become a limited concept.

"A number of people and institutions have seen fit to box the term in, to make jazz a museum description.

Historically, it was never that. It was a music wide open to new forms and musical ideas — until recently, when people sought to control it from an industrial or philosophical point of view.

"Rather than fight them, I just say, 'I'm not doing that.'"

To this musical citizen of the world, "all instruments, Western or non-Western, go together. All forms or styles can say something together. It's just about knowing how to put them together — just the ability of an orchestrator."

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# ENTERTAINMENT

## Kronos electric — in more ways than one

### MUSIC REVIEW

By J. Daniel Huband

News Leader special writer

An electrifying performance, so to speak, closed the Fast/Forward Series last night at the Virginia Museum Theatre.

The Kronos String Quartet presented several contemporary works and was joined after intermission by composer-keyboardist Terry Riley.

Last night's performance exuded the character the Kronos has now become famous for: Dispense with traditional concert attire, look a bit rough or otherwise unusual, amplify the instruments and bring heretofore non-concert music into the concert hall. Thus, the so-called "crossover effect" begins.

An unassailable rhythmic control and vitality permeated Kevin Volans' laconic, minimalist statement "White Man Sleeps, Dance No. 1." Subtle textural manipulations overcame the work's questionable structure.

Tom Darter's arrangement of Thelonious Monk's "Round Midnight" offered violinist David Harrington a chance to wail in the jazz. And he did — but never with total abandon. The other members of the quartet also seemed right at home by supporting Harrington with a luscious, yet pensive, sound.

Astor Piazzolla's "Four, for Tango," as striking to watch as to listen to, allowed a keen, swift ensemble to grab the audience. The ethnic musical flavorings and the quasi-Bartókian string writing added to the effect.

The Kronos Quartet displayed its almost uncanny ability to seem in control throughout the various episodes of musical rhetoric in Peter Sculthorpe's Quartet No. 8. The unity of ensemble was just as impressive in the loosely structured sections as it was in the tighter ones.

But the individuality of violinists David Harrington and John Sherba came across, too, as did the personalities of violist Hank Dutt and cellist Joan Jeanrenaud. Yes, this union of teamwork and individuality, carefully controlled, makes chamber music.

Alvin Singleton's "Secret Desire to Be Black" consisted of a few simple ideas which gradually unfolded. During the piece's high point, the music strongly recalled a style of music written during the 1920s which attempted to emulate the grinding sound of the magnificent machine. Singleton's "machine music" was propelled last night with massive energy from the gears of the Kronos' instrument.

The truly electrifying moments — perhaps shocking to some — followed in Kaija Saariaho's "Nymphaea," a work which requires the direct

amplification of the string quartet. The atypical sound patterns, novel and intriguing at first, became rather tedious, because the content of the work was not supported by a cogent formal design. Nevertheless, the ensemble performed the essay with conviction, and many coloristic flourishes could be appreciated.

A testament to the Kronos Quartet's commitment to modern music — of all kinds, by the way — is that the musicians have cultivated relationships with so many composers and have commissioned nearly 200 works. Last night, one product of this enthusiasm became apparent when Terry Riley joined the group to play the keyboard parts of his "Crow's Rosary," an extended essay in nine sections.

His synthesized sounds, sometimes mystical and at other times humorous, used a tuning system that is alien to most 20th century ears. The quartet blended with Riley effortlessly and sounded particularly in accord in the less rigid passages of the work.

Riley's eclectic musical language, drawing from various ethnic sources, traditional sources and popular culture, seems so comfortable for the Kronos. But why not? These adventurers, we hope, will continue to explore and expand the possibilities of the medium. And audiences will continue to be electrified — in more ways than one.

## THE CRITICS' PICKS FOR 1987-88

Choices of The Richmond News Leader music critics for best performances of the 1987-88 season:

- **Best Orchestral Performance** — The Richmond Symphony under George Manahan in Serge Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5 Feb. 27 and 29 at Carpenter Center for the Performing Arts.
- **Best Concerto Performance** — Robert McDuffie, violinist, in Samuel Barber's Concerto for violin and orchestra with the Richmond Symphony, conducted by Peter Bay, Jan. 23 and 25 at the Carpenter Center.
- **Conductor of the Season** — George Manahan, music director of the Richmond Symphony, for a season of accomplishment.
- **Best Choral Performance** — The Richmond Symphony Chorus, prepared by Dr. James Erb, with the Richmond Symphony, led by George Manahan, in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D minor March 26 and 28 at the Carpenter Center.
- **Best Solo Recital** — Leontyne Price, soprano, Oct. 4 at the Carpenter Center and Roy Hamlin Johnson, piano, April 17 at St. James's Episcopal Church (tie).
- **Best Operatic Performance** — Giacomo Puccini's "La Boheme" by Virginia Opera Dec. 9 at the Carpenter Center. Randolph Locke, in the same opera, and Marilyn Mims, soprano; in Mozart's "Don Giovanni" were named best soloists in opera.
- **Best Chamber Music Performance** — The Kronos Quartet May 19 at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.
- **Best Crossover/Jazz Performance** — Bobby McFerrin Feb. 29 at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

Richmond Newsleader June 25, 1988

# Ensemble touches all bases

## Music review

By Clarke Bustard  
Times-Dispatch staff writer

Toward the end of Black History Month, the Art Ensemble of Chicago came to town last night to give a black music history lesson unencumbered by words.

In the first of two Fast/Forward-sponsored concerts at Virginia Commonwealth University, the avant-garde jazz quintet played a seemingly stream-of-consciousness set of about 70 minutes.

The Art Ensemble — trumpeter Lester Bowie, saxophonists Roscoe E. Mitchell Jr. and Joseph Jarman, bassist Malachi Favors Maghostut and drummer Famoudou Don Moye — touched all the appropriate ethnomusicological bases in a program billed as "Great Black Music — Ancient to the Future," more or less in historical order.

They presented one long number that began with trumpet and saxophone meditatively floating atop percolating African rhythms, then ranged through blues, boogie-woogie, be-bop and balladry, with frequent excursions into highly abstract horn solos, duets and trios

and one thunderous march break on percussion, finally closing in straight-ahead jazz. Lights rose and faded as one sequence gave way to the next.

Their bandstand was a curio shop of instruments — drums, bells, gongs and gourds alongside electronic keyboard, kettle drums and horns. The rhythm section wore stylized African garb and face paint; Bowie wore a white lab coat; Mitchell wore an updated zoot suit in studded silver.

Bowie's trumpet breaks were technically awesome, his special effects of instrumentation striking. Saxophonists Mitchell and Jarman were more abstract and garrulous — maddeningly so when they got stuck in a soprano-baritone duel of scales and arpeggios that lasted between five minutes and eternity.

Mitchell, Maghostut, Jarman and Moye sampled the percussion collection frequently and imaginatively; Bowie finally joined in on a bass drum that for the better part of the hour had sat mutely at stage center.

The early show's near-capacity audience applauded the jazz solos, took in the rest with either fascination or bewilderment (the facial expressions in my vicinity were unusually hard to read) and jumped up for a standing ovation at the end.

## FAST/FORWARD ON TV AGAIN

Tickets for "Book of Days: A Music Concert With Film" by composer-singer-filmmaker, director/choreographer Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble, were sold out by mid-October. So the Virginia Museum has decided to broadcast portions of the Nov. 19 Fast/Forward performance.



The concert, which will be held at the VCU Performing Arts Center, is expected to air in April on WCVE, Channel 23 in Richmond, and possibly on other stations around the state.

This will be the second time a Fast/Forward concert has been televised live around Virginia. Last season, one hour of jazz vocalist Bobby McFerrin's sold-out concert was aired live. Monk's concert will be taped, notes one museum official, "because her performance is so complex and there is so little rehearsal time that they'll need to edit it."

—L.A.B.

Style Magazine  
November 1, 1988

Friday, April 20, 1990  
Richmond Times-Dispatch

# Daring dance group makes risky moves

By Molly Carpenter  
Times-Dispatch staff writer

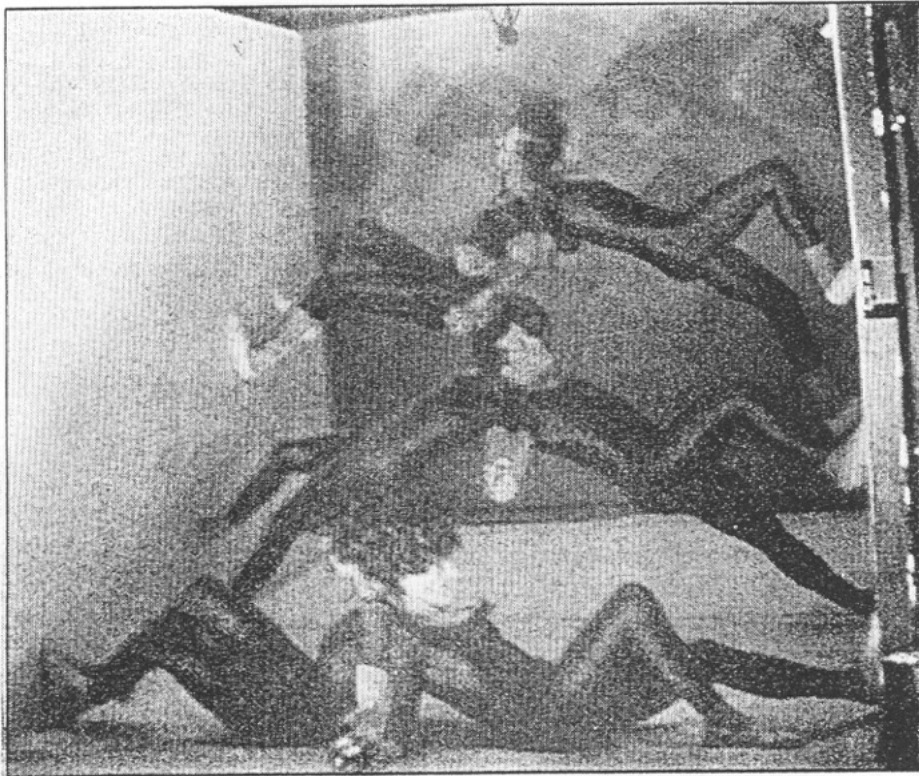
Bodies slam against one another, bounce off walls, sail through the air and hang upside down. There are no elaborate costumes, no props, no musical score. This is modern dance from the unique perspective of Elizabeth Streb Ringside Inc.

The Virginia Museum will wrap up its

1989-90 Fast/Forward season with performances by this energetic dance group at 8 p.m. today and tomorrow in the museum's Marble Hall.

Performances by this six-member troupe have been described as exhilarating, hair-raising, hypnotic, mesmerizing, shocking and terrifying. The dancers go far beyond traditional leaps and twists to

Continued on page 3, col. 1



**BALANCE OF POWER** — The six dancers of Elizabeth Streb Dance Inc. move within parallel walls in the new work, "Rebound."

# Dancers take risks in moves

Continued from first page

take daring dives into the floor, collide into walls and sail through the air, seemingly out of control.

What's behind all that motion is Ms. Streb's singular exploration of movement, testing the limits of dance and space with feats of power, risk and endurance. Most of her pieces involve a structure of some kind — walls, a framework of pipes, a box — that defines the area in which the dancers will move.

"Some people refer to the equipment and structures as a limitation that I place on the dancers and myself, but I think of it in terms of questioning the space I'm gonna be using, rather than thinking you walk into a room and you have every inch of space in that room," Ms. Streb explained by telephone earlier this week.

Ms. Streb formed the dance group in 1985, starting out with herself and three dancers and adding two more two years ago. Unique in her field, she has received a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, and won a New York Dance and Performance Award (Bessie).

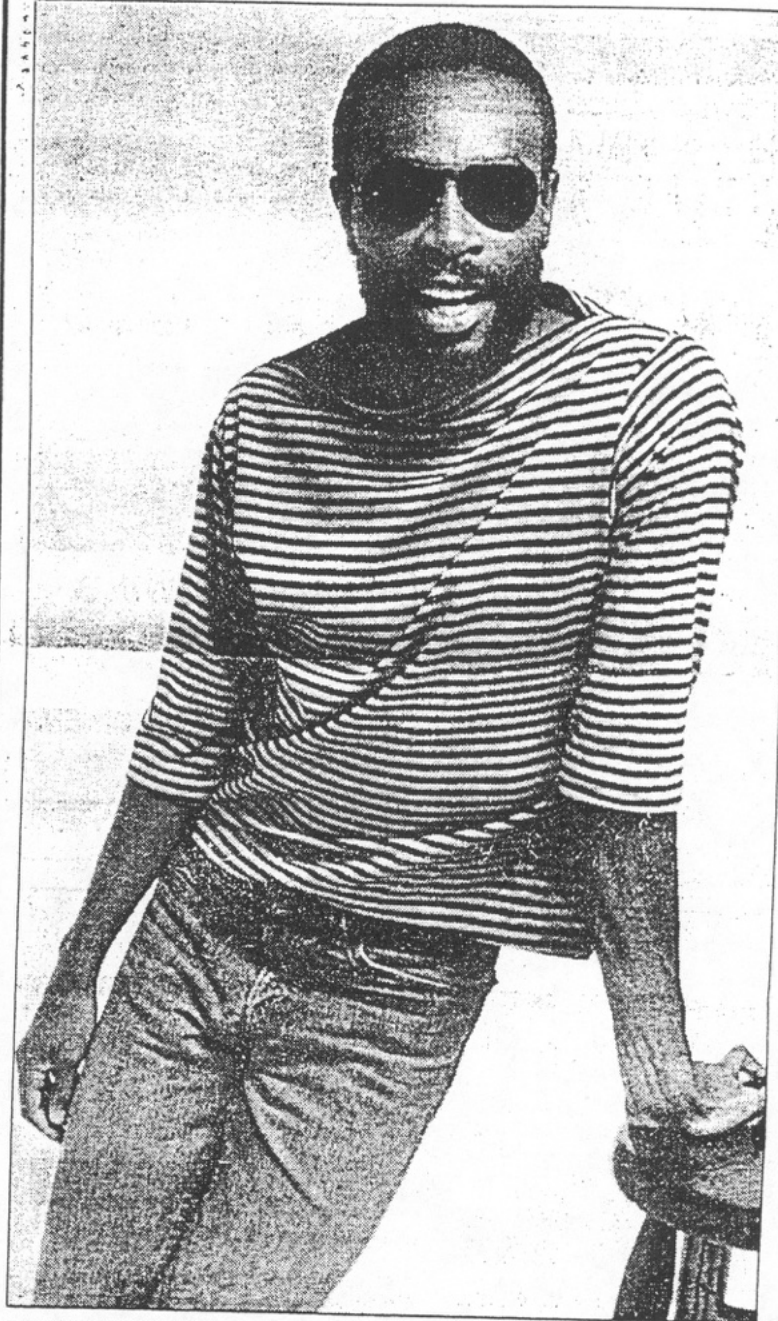
For the Richmond performances, Ms. Streb will perform in two pieces: the solo work, "Little Ease," in which she moves within a box not much bigger than her body, and in "Rebound," a new work in which six dancers will move within an 8-by-8-foot structure. Also on the program will be "Airlines," in which the dancers move on a one-dimensional grid of pipes, and "Float," in which the dancers jump off a scaffold and land in a pit of mattresses.

"My experience is that it's a real commitment to perform this work. It's not about memorizing something and displaying perfection because the work is built around being able to challenge yourself at every point ... Each moment requires such complete concentration and you're so dependent on the other people in the company. ... I think that the demand to be present every single second is hard for humans."

And while every movement is choreographed and rehearsed, there's an element of the unexpected in every performance.

"There are moments when you'll see some of us succeed and some of us fail and some of us having a harder time than others, just like a little society of humans. I am not trying to demonstrate brilliance or perfection. I'm just trying to show actual human endeavor. ... The mistakes are part of it and as beautiful, ultimately, as the moments when you actually can do phenomenal things."

*Elizabeth Streb Ringside Inc. will perform at 8 p.m. today and tomorrow in the Marble Hall at the Virginia Museum. Tickets are \$16; \$14 for members and students. Details: 367-8148.*



**LEAP YEAR VOCALIZING** — Innovative vocalist Bobby McFerrin will appear in the Fast/Forward series on Feb. 29.

# *Series stays on fast track*

**By Clarke Bustard**  
Times-Dispatch staff writer

From the start, Fast/Forward, the new music and dance series of the Virginia Museum, has been about different drummers, the non-conformists and experimenters of the arts.

Lemon Oct. 20 and McFerrin Feb. 29, all in the Virginia Museum Theater. Kodo is due March 26 in the concert hall of the VCU Performing Arts Center. Kronos and Riley will close the season May 19 in the marble hall of the museum's West Wing. All performances will begin at 8 p.m.

## ENTERTAINMENT

# McFerrin is beyond modern

### Music review

By Clarke Bustard  
Times-Dispatch staff writer

In the year 2020 music lovers will be able to drop a microchip into their digital audio toaster-ovens and brown and serve the soulful, whimsical, ironic, hip, wondrous sounds that, way back in the 1980s, their grandparents could only hear from the tongue-clicking, chest-patting, feet-slapping, sweating, crooning, swooping, squeaking one-man band known as Bobby McFerrin.

And that's something you needn't envy your grandchildren for. Because the sounds wouldn't be so wondrous if they didn't emanate from a man who makes them up as he goes along, bounces them off other people and conjures some more from his and their energies.

McFerrin, a miracle in improvising vocal form, vocalized last night to a roaringly appreciative full

house in the Virginia Museum Theater. The first hour of his 90-minute performance, part of the museum's Fast/Forward series, was aired live to a statewide public-television audience.

And what did he vocalize? What didn't he?

McFerrin ranged from "The Old Lady Who Swallowed the Fly," Bach's "Air on a G String," the Beatles' "From Me to You" and "Blackbird" to "Round Midnight," the "Peter Gunn" theme, a "Wizard of Oz" medley, "The Star Spangled Banner" and the Mickey Mouse song, filling the spaces in between with nameless sound montages of field hollers, spirituals, blues, be-bop, ring games and Gregorian chants, alone and with a crowd that tuned onto his musical wavelength speedily and sympathetically.

The audience clapped, finger-popped, harmonized and counterpointed along. Debra from the front row took to the stage to sashay along to "Thinking About Your Body," and volunteer voices came on down to form an impromptu chorus.

The improvisational feat of the evening had to be the suavely jiving ditty McFerrin scratch-cooked from the first names of five people in the second row.

McFerrin used his body like a squeezebox, waist-bending, slow-kicking, arm-crooking and otherwise moving to mime his sounds.

Some of the movements energize the voice; others serve mainly as visual complements to tone. Whichever, not many singers can maintain such perpetual motion and stay as securely in pitch.

Picking highlights from this feast of virtuoso vocalese is tough, but two numbers, the spiritual "Inch by Inch" and "The Star Spangled Banner," sung to a crowd that had been rollicking and was suddenly hushed, plumbed musical and emotional depths and proved that McFerrin has much more to offer than respiratory acrobatics.

Fast/Forward is supposed to be about modern art. McFerrin's art is beyond modern, as old as the human voice, as new as the next moment.

# THE Calendar

## Glassy-Eyed

Composer Philip Glass' "1000 Airplanes on the Roof," a science fiction music-drama, takes off Sunday at the Carpenter Center as the latest in the Fast/Forward performance series. Thursday, the Virginia Museum screens the film "A Composer's Notes: Philip Glass and the Making of an Opera." See Music and Museum listings.



# HIGHLIGHTS