

Giving It The Old College Try

In program notes of the April 20-21 presentation of the Barnard College Department of Dance, "Tharp/Sugar Salon/Gwartzman," Katie Glasner, who danced with Twyla Tharp Dance in the 1970's, summarized her role at Barnard (where she is the Assistant Chair in the Department of Dance) as "passing on the legacy of dance in every way possible." She does this, she states, by teaching, lecturing and meeting "scores of prospective students and their families." Buried in the program, those words were a beacon of light as I watched three contemporary choreographers, Yanira Castro, Ivy Baldwin and Daniel Gwartzman, struggle to create interesting work and provide an outlet for a range of dancers. In the end, it was left to Tharp who, with *Eight Jelly Rolls*, demonstrated that simplicity is not simplemindedness.

Castro and Baldwin benefited from a new program called "Sugar Salon," a collaboration between Barnard College and Williamsburg Art Nexus (WAX). They each had a summer residency at Barnard, free space and adjunct professorships during the spring semester to make a new piece on the students themselves.

In *Pamela*, Castro, using an electronic warbling score by Stephan Moore, dressed the eight dancers in shorts and jackets. Tentatively stepping on stage and off from the right wing, it's nice to see so many young, fresh dancers at once. After their teasing start they gobble up the pulse, running, jumping, and swinging. Still testing being half on and half off the stage they retreat, laughing. Returning with just white underwear and blouses they hop, bounce, writhe, twist, bend, and have a good time.

Also, about fifteen minutes, *Smoke* with music by Justin Jones, (using some Pink Martini) is a little too similar to the previous piece. Here the eight dancers are joined by two comic relief characters. Johanna Kirk, later featured in Tharp's piece, stands out in the crowd. The other student dancers, Samantha Allen, Michelle Castroverde, Lauren Holloway, Lea Howe, Arianne Richard, Kelly Rodal, Rachel Salman, Tara Willis, Emily Bock, Lorene Bouboushian, Siobhan Burke, Becky Chaleff, Elise King, Annie Malcolm, Kate Ryan, and Rebecca

Tropp (as well as the resident lighting designer, Rhonda Rubinson and costume designer Belinda Lagasi) all do a good job but don't appear as comfortable as the dancers in the second half of the program.

Gwartzman seemed to be going for something different in his *Field*, to Philip Glass. Here a new group, with Jessica Bacon, Julie Bakshi, Sarah Chien, Anna Collura, Patrick Faurot-Pigeon, André Feigler, Jenia Gorton, Mandy Hackman, Emily Hayden, Elena Hect, Emily Miller, August Pozgay, Anna Schön, Leda Ward and Chaleff wore silky, primary color pants and tops, with some in pointe shoes. Whether it was Glass' always-wonderful pulsing rhythm or the seemingly edgier intensity of the dancers, the piece was more complete and more completely danced, though pointe work is always tricky when the audience does not feel secure about the dancer's skill.

Barnard can be commended for taking the risk of giving three choreographers room to spare and giving their students a professional outlet. Along with several other dance departments in the New York area, Barnard's effort to expose its students and audience to Tharp's artistry paid off. *Eight Jelly Rolls*, premiered at Oberlin College in January, 1972 — 35 years ago. With music by Jelly Roll Morton and The Red Hot Peppers, played and recorded by Dick Hyman, it's hard not to like what you're hearing, and watching. Katie Glasner went way beyond her own personal mission statement, passing on the minute details of the slinks and turns that fill *Eight Jelly Rolls*. Still looking fresh, it was performed with authority by Tamara Clarke, Emily D'Angelo, Elisa Davis, Renuka Hines, Johanna Morris, Elena Williams and the stylish Kirk Williams, Hines and Clarke had fun, and were meticulous, in their solos, duets and trios but the ensemble, well-rehearsed, kept the choreographer's total vision tight. Tharp is not afraid of repetition, pauses, the well-placed look, an isometric shoulder lift, a clear gesture. She's not finished yet, but we have so much to learn from what she's produced already — and what better place to learn than at college!



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