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Lunges and Tumbles Become Fluid Movement, Both Sparing and Lush

With the temperature around 12 degrees on Friday night, it was hard not to indulge in some grim “this better be worth it” muttering to self while heading ever fur-

DANCE REVIEW

ROSLYN SULCAS

ther west toward the icy Hudson River air and the Merce Cunningham Studio. And, as it turned out, it was. The Boston-based company Kelley Donovan & Dancers showed “Borrowed Bones,” a new work by Ms. Donovan notable for its fluid, sensuous movement; skillful structure; and evocation of a self-contained yet somehow expansive world.

Developing a movement vocabulary isn’t much of a concern

Kelley Donovan & Dancers
Merce Cunningham Studio

A choreographer bucks a trend, concentrating her work on pure dance.

among contemporary choreographers right now, but Ms. Donovan bucks the trend both by making work with a noticeably personal style and by ignoring the temptations of text, speech or film.

Instead, “Borrowed Bones” is that rare beast, spotted only occasionally in the downtown dance savannah: a pure dance work that’s actually full of dance. It’s so pure that Ms. Donovan almost ignores her music — a subtle mix of electronic scores briefly permeated by voices — but provides more than enough of her own rhythmic dynamics to carry the piece.

At the beginning Ms. Donovan appeared alone, her first movements a compelling indication of what was to come. Larger-bodied than most professional dancers, she turned that into a sculptural asset through her gorgeously fluid, strongly rooted movement. Curving her arms — elbows leading the way — through space, rippling her body into coiled lunges, tumbling fluidly across the floor, Ms. Donovan felt like a force of nature

Remarkably, that impact didn’t disappear as she ceded the stage to her dancers. Some of the stylistic elements and choreographic motifs apparent in her solo — the



Members of Kelley Donovan & Dancers, which is based in Boston, performing Ms. Donovan’s “Borrowed Bones” at the Merce Cunningham Studio.

rolling, sliding floor work; the quick folding-in arms; the almost classical pirouettes; the jumps into arabesque crashing to the floor — recur throughout the

work. But Ms. Donovan knows how to make her dancers (all excellent) emerge as individuals, how to weave variation into her move-

ment and how to use counterpoint to keep our eyes and minds active. In several group sequences she set slow, weighted movement against faster, athletic

floor work, building the pace, then seamlessly dissolving it and dispersing the dancers.

In its calm segues between large groups and small, intimate

solos and duets, “Borrowed Bones” was both economical and lush, never a moment wasted or exceeded. Ms. Donovan should come to New York again, soon.

MAGAZINE DANCE

VILLELLA COMES HOME

Can a dance company enjoy a homecoming over a thousand miles from home? In the case of Miami City Ballet, yes, and rousingly so. When the 23-year-old ensemble makes its Manhattan debut at City Center Jan. 21–25, it will show off a style that, bred in New York, now flourishes in the subtropics. Credit MCB's founding artistic director and former New York City Ballet luminary Edward Villella, on whom Balanchine devised many memorable roles. With crisp phrasing and smooth musicality, the dancers give personal shine to Mr. B's gold standard. The first program pairs Balanchine (*Symphony in Three Movements*, *La Valse*) with Tharp (*In the Upper Room*). The second is all Mr. B (*Square Dance*, *Rubies*, *Symphony in C*). See www.nycitycenter.org or www.miamicityballet.org.

—Guillermo Perez



Yoko Higashino

©Banni, Courtesy Japan Society

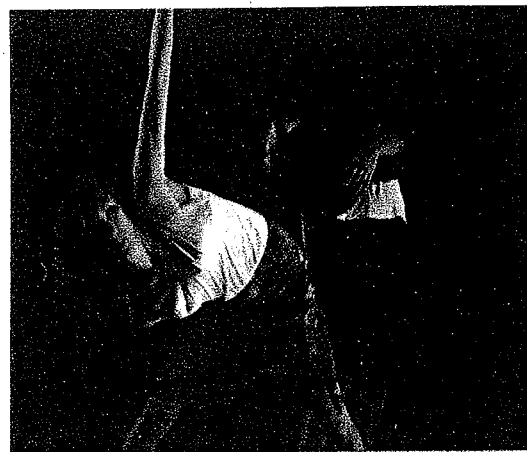
A Showcase Expands

The Japan Society's Annual Contemporary Dance Showcase is an excellent primer on what's hot in dance in Japan. And now, with Phase 2: Japan + East Asia, broader Asia. Five companies run the stylistic gamut. The male Ko & Edge Co. is a highly regarded practitioner of butoh. The company chelfitsch (a play on selfish?) riffs on the contemporary Japanese obsession with infantilism. Yoko Higashino's troupe (above) takes a collaborative approach that combines movement, music, and image. Jang Eun Jung Dance Company represents Korea, and from Taiwan hails Wind Dance Theatre, begun by Cloud Gate member Wu I-Fang. Jan. 9–10. See www.japansociety.org. —Susan Yung

BONES & CITIES

Kelley Donovan's best works are all about transformation. Tempering strength with vulnerability, she can turn sharp edges into soft corners with sensuous fluidity. The new *Borrowed Bones*, at the Merce Cunningham Studio Jan. 16–17, mines her sense of transformation as she struggles with the concepts of "acceptance, impermanence, and letting go." (She left her longtime job at MIT and sold her house in order to move freely between Boston and NYC.) The evening-length work, which features 18 NYC-based dancers, is grounded in Donovan's merging of classical modern dance with rich visual imagery.

www.geocities.com/kdonovan02139. —Karen Campbell



Randall Coltura, Courtesy Donovan

MONDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2007

Donovan's troupe lets go kinetically

By Karen Campbell

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Kelley Donovan's compelling new 30-minute dance "Inside of the Ending" is about letting go, about accepting impermanence. But you don't get that from any grand dramatic contrivance or narrative structure. It's subtle, organically woven into the very fabric of the movement. You can see it in the way the dancers begin the dance, a phalanx of nine walking slowly, almost trancelike through the space. One by one, they peel off to do their own thing. Each explodes into bursts of frenetic energy, with different variations of spins and falls, arms jabbing and legs kicking, until, as if they've gotten something out of their systems, they fall back into that slow deliberate walk. This time, however, each is on his/her own path.

You can also sense the underlying context in gestures that come back time and again in slightly different contexts — a defiant thrust of the fist, bent arm anchored at the elbow, or meditation hands (thumb to middle finger) that reach forward and down as the back deeply arches. It's a move that looks like both centering and surrender.

The choreography has the idea of letting go embedded into its very aesthetic. You can see it most sharply on the choreographer herself, who disappointingly makes only the shortest of appearances in this work, but enters midway like the eye of the cyclone that has been generating movement all the while. She is like a double helix in motion, constantly flipping perspective. She seems to reach out and coil inward at the same time, her body twisting and spiraling, arms curving forward and back with quick shifts of dynamics. Ma-

Kelley Donovan & Dancers

At: Dance Complex,
Friday night

ny of Donovan's dancers do an excellent job finding a similar kinetic flow, especially Bec Conant. She takes the idea into slow motion with a solo of deep bends and reaches, arms curling behind the head as the body moves forward, and an arabesque that dips with breathtaking abandon into a penché to the floor. In a few spots, however, there are just too many dancers on the stage (the piece features 20 in all, including Donovan) and the busy blur detracts from the purity of focus.

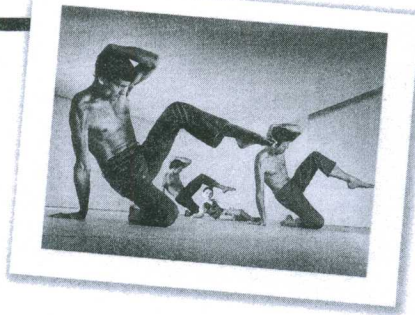
Set to a collage of electronic noise and muttering, "Inside of the Ending" is a somber piece, and like many of Donovan's dances, it doesn't so much develop as unfurl in a fluid stream of energy subverted by quick changes of mood and dynamic, like a flow of water interrupted by something passing through it, the flick of a finger or a whole hand. Where the piece ends up is not so different from where it started.

In celebration of the company's 10th anniversary, Donovan invited current and former dancers with her company to contribute works as well. Works by Melissa Gendreau, Heather Bryce, and Conant were engaging if not memorable, and all were given energetic, committed performances. But the only one that seemed fully formed was the appealing "The Shape of a Day," a duet choreographed and performed by Allison Vinal and Kelly Collins that had a visceral rhythmic punch as it contrasted crisp, sharp-angled slices of arms and legs with controlled and deliberate shifts of weight.



Twisting, spiraling movements, and quick shifts of dynamics filled the Kelley Donovan & Dancers performance Friday night.

Dance



WONDERBOY
Revisiting the
Haight in the Days
of Harvey Milk.

STICKS AND BONES

KELLEY DONOVAN AT THE DANCE COMPLEX, JOE GOODE AT NORTHEASTERN

BY MARCIA B. SIEGEL

⌚ Kelley Donovan's *Borrowed Bones* at the Dance Complex last weekend featured Donovan and nine accomplices in 40 minutes of intense dancing. The piece transcended the ordinary in a couple of important ways. First of all, Donovan's movement, as attested by three solos studding the piece, is lush and lyrical. Few choreographers today have such a clear sense of space and continuity.

The dancers carve out curves and curlicues with their arms, and their bodies, flexible, ready for change, follow these pathways. Everything — their shoulders, their navels, their eyes — seems equally capable of leading the way through space. Even when they fling out unpredictably, you feel they always know where they're going. Movement can come from any source in the body and continue out in generous whipped spirals or sinuous curves, thrusting drives or rolling falls. Once initiated, the energy seems inexhaustible; any body part can take over and go off in another direction.

These highly articulate bodies are also highly energized. Donovan and the dancers aren't just making shapes, they're moving with a sense of variable momentum. They can begin a phrase with a sudden spurt, then let the energy dribble down to a crawl. They can suspend a gesture with a long, luxurious delay, then drift into something else. They can be striding along, then pitch forward onto one knee, splay out flat, and scramble up again before you see how it happened. The only time the momentum gets broken is when it's unexpectedly impeded by another dancer.

Persons hurl themselves at other persons who sturdily absorb the impact. Or someone will arrest a partner's movement by grabbing him or her in midair. But the lifting and holding can be soft and yielding, too, as one partner scoops up another and continues her momentum. Two women team up to carry a man along with them.

As interesting as Donovan's movement is, it's not entirely preoccupied with individual action. Her other special gift is for composition, the building of patterns in time and space. Her own solos provide material that gets expanded and elaborated on by the other dancers, so you recognize a swing of the arms, an arch of the back, a falling forward, as it recurs, marking the dance's identity. The language resembles the original gestures less as the dance evolves, but it still feels familiar.

Little group interactions begin to coalesce as the dancers come and go. Persons pick other persons up and carry them off unprotesting. A woman dances a solo in counterpoint with a tight group

of women who fall into almost accidental synchronization with her. When the solo woman accelerates into a series of turns, the group splinters apart, as if struck by a laser beam. Another group leap in a circle around another solo dancer. All these motifs collect gradually and dissipate almost as soon as you recognize them.

The dancers don't give signs of personal engagement with one another even though their contacts may be intimate — but because of the built-in movement connections, the potential is there. At some point, the music — which, consisting of sounds from various sources, has been puttering along in the background — grows slightly more specific. Voices and a guitar are strumming chords, clearing throats, as if getting ready to start a song. The dancers seem to be finding a beat in this and getting ready to dance to it. Then the preparation stops and the dancers run off, and the lights go out.

⌚ After Donovan's overflowing physicality, the movement of Joe Goode's Performance Group from San Francisco, at Northeastern University's Center for the Arts Saturday night, seemed brainy and controlled. Joe Goode is not one of those dance-for-the-sake-of-dance people. The works of his that I've seen are engaging mixtures of theater, movement, popular culture, and politics, with the choreographer often holding things together as a folksy, singing-talking anchor man.

Excerpts from a 1996 work, *Maverick Strain*, opened the program. This is a spoof of movie-Western conventions, though you never get very far into Joe Goode's jokes before the ground gives way. Goode welcomes the audience with a chat about the company's national tour, and he strolls out like Roy Rogers, warbling a song. The four men and two women dancers gallop down the aisle and dance up on the stage as ropin', ridin', fightin' cowboys and Indians. They're all as fake as three-dollar bills.

The women begin a conversation of barroom clichés, and they're joined by two men who might be looking for an evening's fun. The talk

circles back on itself, pointless, familiar, and the characters shift on their chairs with each line, into poses that appear to go along with the dialogue but soon congeal into further clichés. The same conversation repeats, with the same gender-specific poses, like a movie running for the second time, but now the roles are reversed, the men perching coyly and crossing their legs, the women leaning back and draping their elbows over the chairs. What better platform than the Western for exploding the stereotypical American male and female?

After scenes of unconvincing mayhem ("He's daid, paw. I shot 'im," says one character, staring down at the crumpled form of another), there are endless slow-

motion fights that melt into embraces. The action seems copied from classic movie footage, like the poses in the bar. Joe Goode ruminates in song about how "Ah gotta find mah way to the other side of the day somehow," with the rest of the cast swaying and waving their 10-gallons in unison behind him. Then he strides out through the audience, head held high, hips only a little bit swishy.

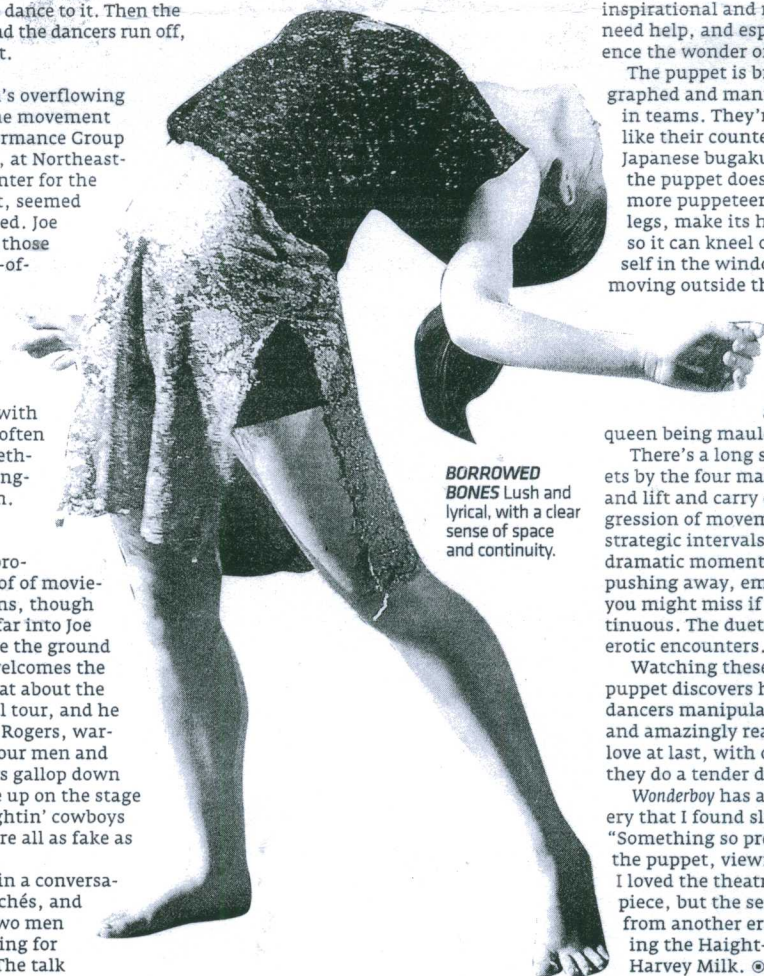
The company's newest work, *Wonderboy*, features a waist-high puppet designed by Basil Twist. This character sits in a window and watches life go by in the street but can't move of his own volition. "I am just sticks and paper," he says, but maybe that's his excuse for his fear of commitment. It takes the whole company to animate this figure and tell his story, which in the end turns out to be inspirational and naively sweet. We all need help, and especially love, to experience the wonder of life.

The puppet is brilliantly choreographed and manipulated by the dancers in teams. They're completely visible, like their counterparts in traditional Japanese bugaku. Depending on what the puppet does, it takes one or two or more puppeteers to move its arms and legs, make its head nod or tilt, fix it so it can kneel or sit cross-legged by itself in the window frame. Standing or moving outside the window, the dancers speak its lines and enact the romance and roughness passing by: love scenes, a woman screaming at her husband, a drag queen being mauled by an invisible trick.

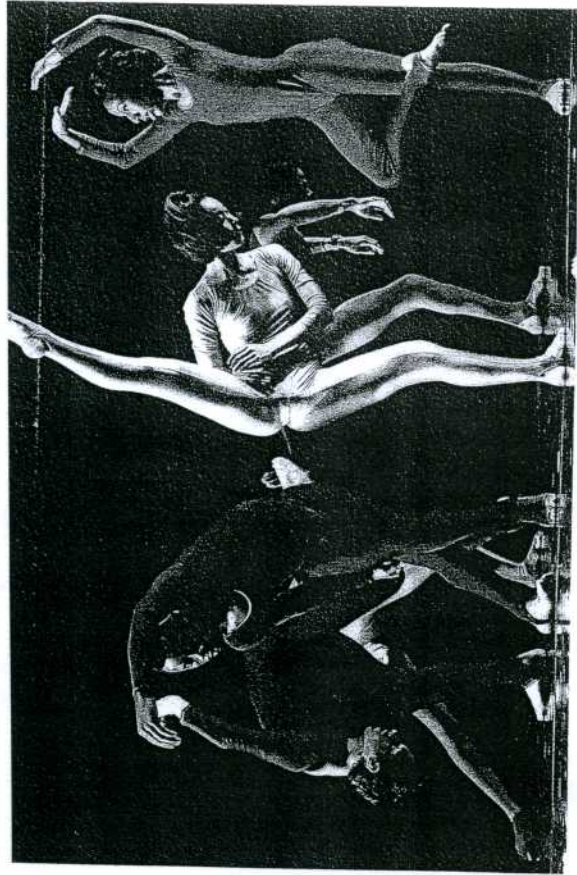
There's a long series of strenuous duets by the four male dancers. They hold and lift and carry each other, but the progression of movement is interrupted at strategic intervals, so your eye lingers on dramatic moments of surprise, grasping, pushing away, embracing, caressing that you might miss if the dancing were continuous. The duets have atomized into erotic encounters.

Watching these passing scenes, the puppet discovers he's gay, and all six dancers manipulate him in a triumphant and amazingly realistic dance. He falls in love at last, with one of the dancers, and they do a tender duet together.

Wonderboy has a tone of rapt discovery that I found slightly unconvincing. "Something so precious, so real!" coos the puppet, viewing the men's duets. I loved the theatrical ingenuity of the piece, but the sentiment seemed drawn from another era. It was like revisiting the Haight-Ashbury in the Days of Harvey Milk. Ⓞ



BORROWED BONES Lush and lyrical, with a clear sense of space and continuity.



Garth Fagan's "Mudan 175/39," left, at the Joyce Theater; Kelley Donovan's "Borrowed Bones," below, at Merce Cunningham Studio.

ROSLYN SULCAS

Leading Bodies, Stirring Imaginations

CREATING a dance involves much more than inventing steps for dancers. It needs a judicious eye for visual and spatial effect, a sense of timing and an instinct for building attention, for varying the mood and creating an overall theatrical arc that draws an audience into the world of the dance. Thinking about my favorite dance watching moments of the year, I realized that they all involved a sense of wonder at the skill with which the choreographers had woven these elements into a whole, making every aspect of a dance feel not just necessary, but inevitable.

1. William Forsythe's 1984 **ARTIFACT** is a four-act ballet that evokes both traditional 19th-century form (characters, narrative, a large corps de ballet, the equivalent of a "white" act) and Balanchinian abstraction. Brilliantly performed by the Royal Ballet of Flanders in Ludwigshafen, Germany, in November, it showed itself also as a viscerally thrilling celebration of classical dance and a demonstration of the way that Mr. Forsythe has extended that vocabulary and changed our expectations of what a ballet can be.

2. A dazzling lesson in theatrical craft was

offered by Big Dance Theater's **COMME TOUJOURS HERE I STAND**, an adaptation of the screenplay of Agnès Varda's 1962 film, "Cléo From 5 to 7," presented at the Kitch-in in October. As they show us a self-absorbed actress making a film, the choreographer Annie-B Parson and the director Paul Lazar reflect on the nature of film and live theater by creating both of those forms before us. It's funny, thrilling and utterly deft.

3. In his new **MUDAN 175/39**, shown at the Joyce Theater in October, Garth Fagan responds to the complexity of musical pieces by Zhou Long, Tan Dun and Lei Liang with a subtle physical intelligence, layering and building his movement motifs over the work's episodic structure. The clear spatial architecture of "Mudan," its sculptural beauty and energetic articulation of speed and elevation show Mr. Fagan at the height of his powers.

4. Although "Polyphonia" is his best-known Ligeti work, Christopher Wheel- don's **CONTINUUM** is just as good. Created for the San Francisco Ballet in 2002 and shown by his own company, Morphoses, during its fall season at City Center, "Continuum" deploys eight emerald-green-clad

dancers in varying, beautifully constructed configurations: We hear unexpected rhythms in the spiky music; we are continually surprised by the boldness and strangeness of his images. Everything about Mr. Wheelton's crisp geometries and nuanced human connections is both surprising and just right.

5. Tere O'Connor's new **WROUGHT IRON FOG**, which had its premiere at Dance Theater Workshop in November, is both abstract and strangely specific in its evocation of human behavior. Gestures and encounters offer fragmented and fragile meaning, while emotions seem to well through the bodies of the five dancers. Like a skillfully constructed poem, "Wrought Iron Fog" takes us invisibly through its subtle transitions, leading us into a world of its own.

6. On a freezing night in January, Kelley Donovan presented **BORROWED BONES** at the Merce Cunningham Studio. Fluid, sensuous movement was disciplined by Ms. Donovan's remarkable feel for creating variation, using counterpoint to keep our eyes and minds alert and seamlessly assembling and dispersing her dancers. Pure pleasure.



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DANCE

Issue of 2007-01-08

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NEW YORK CITY BALLET

The eight-week winter repertory season opens with thirteen performances of "The Sleeping Beauty," staged by Peter Martins in 1991 (in honor of Lincoln Kirstein, who co-founded the company with Balanchine). It is still the company's most lavish production, as befits what the critic Andrew Porter, in these pages, called "the grandest, fullest, and finest achievement of classical ballet," set to the second of Tchaikovsky's great ballet scores.

KELLEY DONOVAN AND DANCERS

The Boston-based choreographer and her company of seventeen eager, unseasoned women dancers present "It's All Forgotten Now," an evening-length exploration of cycles of change. Set to a buzzing-and-clicking sound score, the dance moves in circles, spatially and structurally. The Eastern-tinged movement is serpentine, always twisting back on itself, but only in the solos for Donovan herself—a big, beautiful mover—does it come into sharp focus. (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 781-420-3893. Jan. 5 at 9 and Jan. 6 at 8.)

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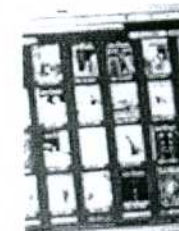


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Don Hogan Charles/The New York Times

Blair Bodie, left, and Laura McComb in "It's All Forgotten Now."

A Tale Spins Toward Peril, Steps by Subtle Steps

Kelley Donovan's "It's All Forgotten Now" stood out from its first moments for its precise and subtle shifts in dynamics. And this new work, presented by the Boston-based

**JENNIFER
DUNNING**

**DANCE
REVIEW**

Kelley Donovan & Dancers on Friday and Saturday night at the Merce Cunningham Studio, steadily built to a quiet climax by means of those shifts alone.

Program notes described the 45-minute piece as an exploration of transformation, decay and memory. Those large themes could well have been present. But the great pleasure of "It's All Forgotten Now" was the way it used movement not merely to fill space but to create an organic narrative with its own inherent linearity.

Ms. Donovan, whose work has not been seen much in New York City, appears to trust the expressive power of movement alone. Every element of the new dance highlighted the dynamic shifts that told its story, from the fluid atmospheres created by the delicate power of the score, by Stephen Cooper and Punck, to the lighting, by Brian Jones. The cast of 17 women inhabited the stage simply as sentient, supple bodies, dressed in costumes that they designed with Sarah Chapman. Their earth tones

Kelley Donovan & Dancers

Merce Cunningham Studio

and simplicity gave them the look of a community.

But the best part of "It's All Forgotten Now" was the confidence with which Ms. Donovan plotted the piece, sending the dancers on and off stage and spinning them into unexpected clusters, solo moments and enclosing circles. Subtle variations in speed in

*A company trusting
the expressive power
of movement alone.*

the pushing, driving choreography helped to create the sense of an approaching climax.

Toward the end the dancers' bodies arched back a little as they fell, rose and fell again, giving them a look of near-ecstasy at moments. Faint sounds of thunder, rain and sea surge, tucked into the muted clicks and rumbles of the score, added to the feeling of unarticulated perils to come. The orderly choreographing of disorder is no small feat, but Ms. Donovan and her collaborators pulled it off.

2007

DANCE

The right moves in a cold artistic climate

By Thea Singer
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

The year in dance had a distinct Odette/Odile cast to it — the dual good/bad role at the heart of the most popular of classical ballets, "Swan Lake."

There were magical developments, leading local presenter Maure Aronson, executive director of World Music/CRASHarts, to enthuse in a recent interview, "Dance is very robust in Boston — experiencing a renaissance, if you like."

But there was also a cold, dark side to the year, with midsize local troupes not so much drowning, like the Swan Queen and her lover, as frantically treading, well, air. "My image was a Bugs Bunny character running off the cliff and hovering and waiting to see if the Boston funding scene would come up and meet us and support us," said Snappy Dance Theater artistic director Martha Mason recently. "But the foundations just don't seem to care."

The year began auspiciously in January, at the Institute of Contemporary Art's glowing new building. That's when CRASHarts kicked off a series of dance performances in the ICA's new theater, with its walls of glass framing Boston Harbor. Choreographer Stephen Petronio's ricocheting yet tender "BLOOM" burst onstage in the theater's first full concert. Other odysseys of the imagination there included Aszure Barton's roiling "Les Chambres des Jacques," performed by Les Ballet Jazz de Montreal, in Boston for the first time in 20 years, and the Bebe Miller Company's dusky multimedia "Landing/Place," Miller's treatise on the now-grounding, now-disorienting role of locale in our lives.

All told, says Aronson, his organization saw its audiences for dance jump, on average, from 65 percent capacity in 2006 to 81 percent capacity for 2007. Total dance ticket sales rose from 11,003 in 2006 to 13,886 in 2007.

On the other side of the Harbor — way on the other side — Boston



MICHAEL J. LUTCH FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The Mark Morris Dance Company performed "Looky" at the Institute of Contemporary Art.

Ballet was living a fantasy of its own, in Spain. This summer the troupe, led by artistic director Mikko Nissinen, toured abroad for the first time since 1991, performing in seven festivals around the country over a six-week period, to enthusiastic reviews and often sold-out houses. It presented two programs: "Classic Balanchine," including the elegiac "Serenade," Balanchine's first work choreographed in the United States, and August Bournonville's version of "La Sylphide," the quintessential Romantic ballet whose authenticity was assured by the exquisite staging of Sorella Englund, a former principal with the Royal Danish Ballet.

Boston audiences, too, had a chance to see both of these impeccable danced programs, as well as Maina Gielgud's elegantly pared-down production of "Giselle." It's been six years since Gielgud's abrupt resignation as incoming artistic director of the Boston Ballet, and her strengths as a choreogra-

pher will far outlive that controversial blip in her career. Her "Giselle" shone, limning in stark detail the mid-19th-century classic's themes of betrayal and the redemptive power of romantic love.

Yet in dance, aesthetic triumph — even on an international scale — doesn't necessarily mean money in the bank. As the Globe reported this month, Boston Ballet ended its most recent fiscal year in the red, with an \$800,000 deficit.

Celebrity Series of Boston presented a strong dance program in 2007, including Belmont-bred Sean Curran's heart-stopping "St. Petersburg Waltz" and Paul Taylor's at turns furious and melancholic "Lines of Loss." But the absence of an international ballet company such as the Kirov on the roster was a stark reminder that the 69-year-old organization had pushed through its first year with neither a title sponsor nor the dance partnership it had kept for five years with the Citi Performing Arts Center, formerly the Wang

Center for the Performing Arts.

Across the river in Cambridge, Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre enjoyed a string of successes. In the spring, Mateo went out on a limb, premiering his first full-length repertory ballet, "Salome Dances for Peace," a sprawling three-act piece inspired by Terry Riley's charged minimalist score for strings. This winter, the group's "Nutcracker" ticket sales are up by 40 percent over last year. But the big news may be that the company received a \$100,000 grant from the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Charitable Foundation to fund the capital expenses in the first phase of an ambitious new initiative: Mateo's Dance for World Community, a five-pronged extravaganza comprising a website, festival, conference, publication, and youth programs. The project aims to build collaborations between the dance community and groups working on campaigns involving the environment, health care, education, and human rights.

The Boston Dance Alliance, headed by Ruth Birnberg since 2005, was also thrilled to receive its first National Endowment for the Arts grant — \$10,000 that kicks in next month — to advance audience development. Under Birnberg's leadership, the organization has quadrupled its budget, to \$250,000, and increased its membership by 50 percent.

Yet the changing status of two major home-grown contemporary-dance troupes, Snappy Dance and the Bennett Dance Company, cast a long, Odile-like shadow on the city's dance scene. In late spring, for its 10th anniversary celebration, Snappy Dance combined its edgy acrobatic vocabulary with computer-generated animations to present "String Beings" for 13 nights at the Boston Center for the Arts' Virginia Wimberley Theatre — an unheard-of run for such a company in this town. Co-presented by CRASHarts, the show drew an audience of 3,500, says Snappy executive director

Thea Singer's picks

Paul Taylor Dance Company, presented by Celebrity Series of Boston at the Citi Shubert Theatre

Boston Ballet, "Giselle," at the Citi Wang Theatre

Mark Morris Dance Group, "Looky," at the Institute of Contemporary Art

Bebe Miller Company, "Landing/Place," presented by Celebrity Series of Boston at the ICA

Sean Curran Company, "St. Petersburg Waltz," presented by Celebrity Series of Boston at the Tsai Performance Center

Boston Ballet, Larissa Ponomarenko in "Brake the Eyes," at the Citi Wang Theatre

Ballet du Grand Theatre de Geneve, "Loin," at Jacob's Pillow

Stephan Koplowitz, "(iseea)," presented by Summer Stages Dance at the ICA

Kelley Donovan & Dancers, "It's All Forgotten Now," at the Dance Complex

Stephen Petronio Company, "BLOOM," presented by CRASHarts at the ICA

Jurgen Weiss. Yet with all but one of its 30-plus grant applications turned down, artistic director Mason must shift to a lower gear: transitioning Snappy from a full-time company to one that works on a project-by-project basis.

Christine Bennett, also choreographing in Boston for 10 years, rang a similar knell for her troupe. In October, she announced her resignation as artistic director of her company, whose future remains uncertain. "In the past six years, my shift toward administrative and management tasks has hindered my ability to create new dances," she wrote to the dance community in October.

To me, she was more blunt: "I was tired of wearing all these hats," she said. "Had I been able to see the light at the end of the tunnel — the ability to hire a managing director — I might have kept going. But the funding is just not there for a managing director for companies with budgets of under \$250,000 a year."

Choreographer delights in extraordinary show

By THEODORE BALE

Kelley Donovan's distinguished "Visceral Threads" answers a pressing question in contemporary choreography. How does one remain deeply expressive without resorting to obvious narrative?

DANCE REVIEW

Seen last night at Dance Complex in Cambridge, the 40-minute premiere is an extraordinary turning point from an artist who has been finely honing her choreographic skills for more than a decade.

Kelley Donovan & Dancers, at Dance Complex, Cambridge, last night; runs through tomorrow.

"Visceral Threads" is aptly titled, since the events are simultaneously intuitive and strikingly cohesive.

It's as if Donovan retreated to the studio with her talented company of seven young women and said, "Let's take a few emphatic movements and exhaust their every detail."

This is how many accomplished artists work, restricting the material and fearlessly forcing their invention.

And it's this very characteristic that separates Donovan from many of her peers in the local dance community.

There's nothing worse than a dance that moves haphazardly from one vague idea to the next.

A taped lecture by Buddhist writer Edward Brown along with music from composers Phil Kline, Brian King (a longtime collaborator with Donovan), Punck, Wyatt Purdy and The Hafler Trio provide a mesmerizing atmosphere for "Visceral Threads" to progress.

Sarah Chapman's elegant costumes in shimmering black with a touch of netting here and there (a different outfit for each dancer) add an evident nostalgic glamour.

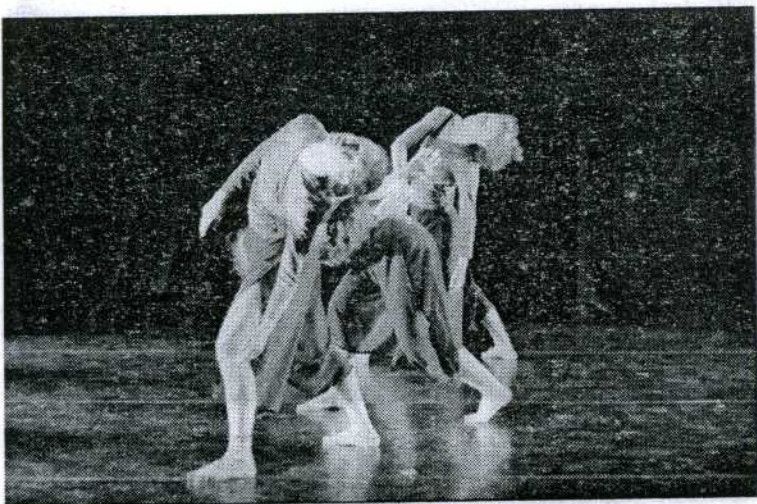
Paul Marr's expert lighting helps define the transitions between scenes.

Donovan started things off with a purposeful solo on a strict diagonal path, one of her preferred trajectories on stage.

At a rapid pace, she swooped and turned as if digging her way through some imaginary jungle setting.

When she disappeared, the other dancers arrived to repeat the same material in a temporal shift, perhaps 10 times as slow, and eventually in canon.

One of the many positive attributes of Donovan's unique style is that certain material is often quoted before its complete source is revealed, and the pleasure in watching comes from thinking in circular, rather than linear, patterns.



STEPPING OUT: Kelley Donovan & Dancers perform a three-night run at Dance Complex that ends tomorrow.

**GET INSIDE THE
BOSTON HERALD**

Shadow and light

Choreographer Kelley Donovan explores hiding and revealing in new show

By D'lyne Plummer

Kelley Donovan and her newest group of eight talented dancers will perform *Visceral Threads*, a full-length dance piece in early November. The title of the piece came to Donovan in an unusual manner. Unlike her previous choreographic themes spun from hours of research, the upcoming performance is equal parts Buddhist thought and feminine strength and has been brewing in Donovan's brain for months. In a truly collaborative fashion, her all-female dance ensemble has harnessed each other's energy into a 35-minute piece that offers unlimited variations on the themes of transcendence and revelation.

Donovan, who has choreographed locally since 1990, formed Kelley Donovan & Dancers in 1997, although the current iteration of dancers is a relatively new mix. A graduate of Bradford College with a degree in creative arts, Donovan has studied choreography with Mark Morris, Bessie Schönberg and Deborah Jowitt, and received the Eisenhardt Dance Award in

1988 and 1989 for her work as a student choreographer. Her productions have often incorporated original music and colorful collaborations with poets, composers and visual artists, and have been performed at colleges, festivals, and concert venues. Her choreography often draws upon experiential themes like metamorphosis and growth, albeit with unique results.

Her first steps towards a new piece began each time with a similar method. Relying on the improvisational skills of her dancers, Donovan presents a cryptic menu of themes and images with which she asks her ensemble to run—perhaps even literally.

"For [*Visceral Threads*] I gave my dancers images and phrases like *slow motion*, *underwater*, and *hidden then revealed*." From this series of vague challenges "the dancers start to make a phrase," says Donovan. "And gradually we find a way to transform the movement."

Images of vulnerability are expressed as upper back arches. Themes of personal transformation are communicated as serpentine movements. The circularity of the work implies a spiritual sensibility. Before you know it, the visceral aesthetic begins to communicate ideas that transcend physicality.

Since her company first performed over eight years ago, the concepts of transformation and impermanence have held firm in her choreography. Her solo "Changing Skin" used the imagery of a snake as a metaphor for internal change. Her ensemble



Dancer/choreographer Kelley Donovan's newest work premieres Nov. 4.

piece "Small Shifts" focused on the small, subtle changes that are constantly taking place in our lives every day.

A few months ago, the drawing board consisted of a title and an inspiring lecture by Buddhist writer Edward Brown that spoke to the various facets of "self" and the themes of personal discovery and awakening. Both literal and figurative ideas of personal transformation are presented within the dance's evolution as the women slowly and dramatically unwrap and reveal their own athleticism. Her all-female crew, as much in its current incarnation as the previous one, offers a multitude of energetic crescendos. Through athletic feats, the

group explores the physical and emotional relationships between bodies and between women.

"These women are so incredibly strong. They can lift and carry each other across the stage," said Donovan. "While this is not a necessarily a new thing, audiences are still surprised to see it."

The concept of things hidden and revealed, a theme known all too well in the gay community and therefore to Donovan herself, is paramount in *Visceral Threads*, a title itself that implies the shared experience of something common, instinctual and real.

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Donovan

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Costumes created by Donovan and Sarah Chapman pivot on the theme as well, with blue and shiny material covered in layers of black nylon acting as a translucent shell. Composer, singer and musician Brian King, with whom Donovan has worked since 2003, creates an ambient sound collage for the show mixed from statements by Edward Brown in his inspirational lecture, "Facets of Self."

After college, Donovan danced for companies in Boston and Cambridge, which collectively only offered a handful of choices. "By '94, '95, however, it began to pick up," said Donovan. "Now there's a thriving dance scene." In 1994 Donovan was an artist in residence with the Abydos Movement Collaborative and The Artist Foundation at the State Transportation Building, where she put on lunchtime performances and a full evening-length collaborative dance work made specifically for the Transportation Building. She also danced for Peanut Butter and Jelly, a dance troupe that caters to children. But by the end of that year, a debilitating foot injury left Donovan unable to walk on two feet for over a year.

With the help of homeopathy treatments, Donovan is able to dance again, but continues to pace her work around her physical needs.

"For a while there was a lot of what we called one-legged solos," Donovan said with a laugh. "Now my work is little more balanced." Donovan continues to dance with her ensemble and maintains her penchant for improvisational solos.

It is not certain when the piece Donovan and her dancers have been crafting fully realized the image the choreographer originally conceived for it. Then again, as Edward Brown proposes in his lecture on Zen, realization does not happen as you think. Realization comes forth far beyond your thinking.

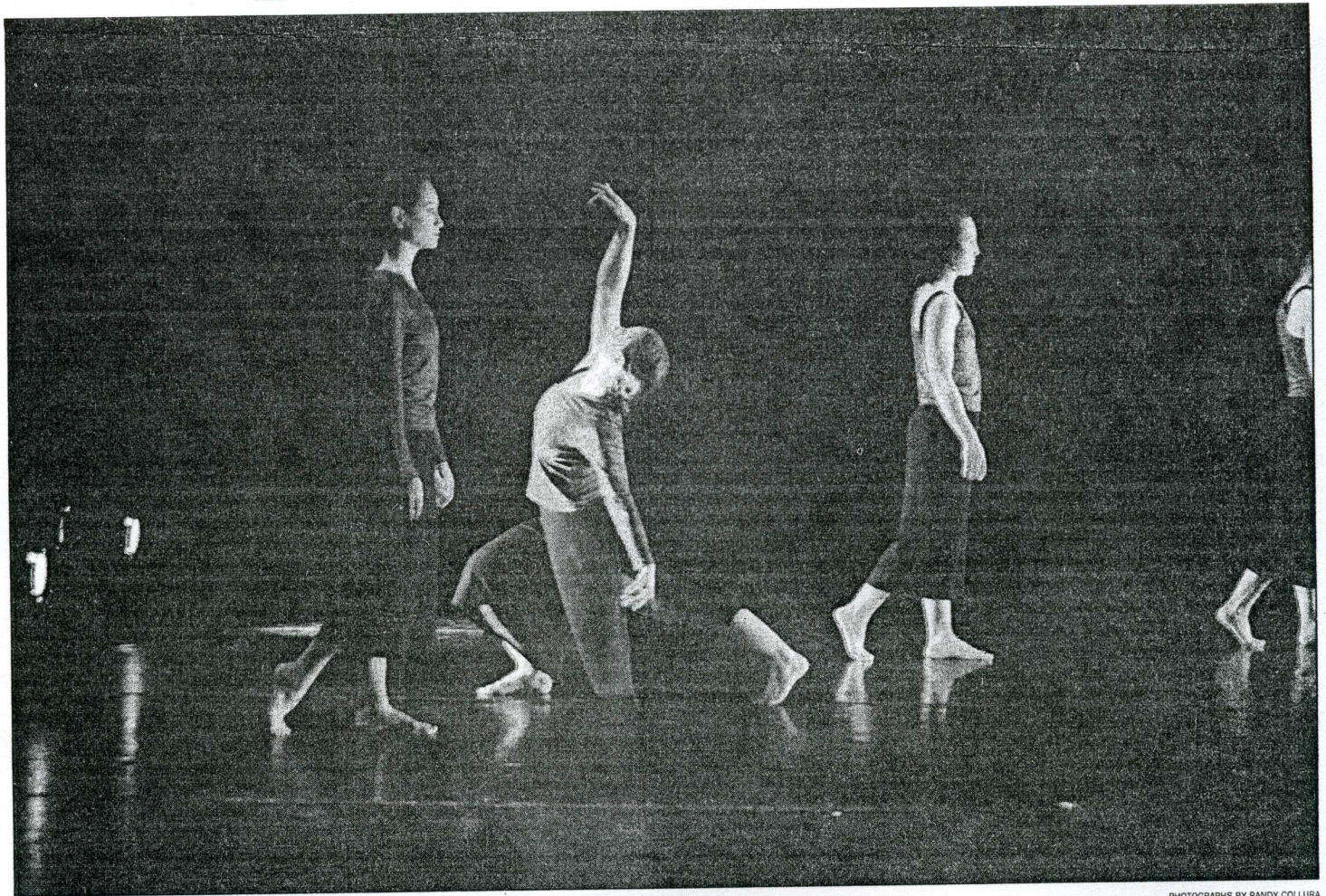
Kelley Donovan & Dancers will perform Visceral Threads November 4, 5 and 6 at the Dance Complex in Cambridge.

PHOTO: RANDY COLLURA



Female dancers from the Kelley Donovan Ensemble will perform innovative pieces in Visceral Threads.

The *spirit* of transformation



PHOTOGRAPHS BY RANDY COLLURA

Kelley Donovan & Dancers perform in 'Gaining Ground,' which premiered this year at the Cambridge Multicultural Arts Center.

Kelley Donovan presents new work at Dance Complex

By Theodore Bale
CORRESPONDENT

Most of Kelley Donovan's distinctive dances have unlikely origins. Her signature work, "No Such Thing as a True Story," began with a sound and text collage from composer Brian King as well as writings by the renowned Buddhist practitioner Pema Chödrön. The inspiration for Donovan's newest piece came earlier this year, quite simply, while she was getting a massage.

Donovan's massage therapist has a boyfriend who happens to have a friend in Austria named Monika Stadler, a composer and jazz harpist who is well known in Vienna. When Donovan heard Stadler's latest CD during her massage therapy session, she was "struck by its gentleness," as she put it, and decided it would be the perfect point of departure for a new ensemble work for her all-female dance company. The result is "Small Shifts," Donovan's latest effort and also the title of her upcoming concert Oct. 1-2 at the Dance Complex in Central Square.

Since her company first performed in 1997, the concepts of transformation and impermanence have become major themes in Donovan's innovative



'Small Shifts' on stage at the Dance Complex

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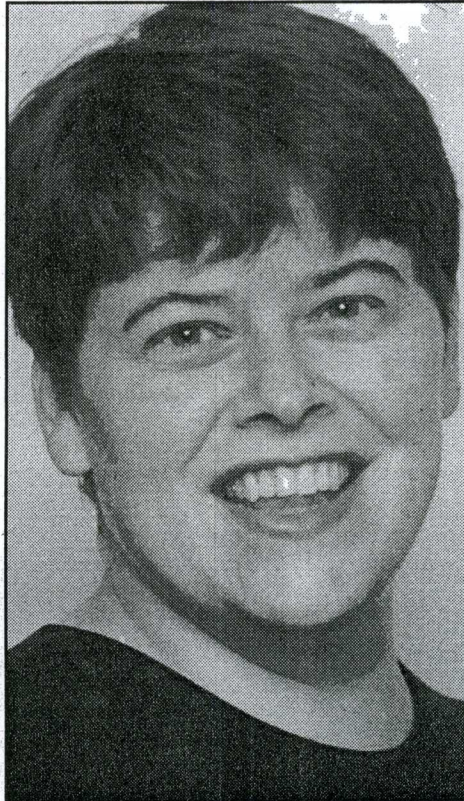
choreography. Her solo "Changing Skin" uses the imagery of a snake as a metaphor for internal change. Many of her ensemble pieces focus also on physical and emotional conversion, and she says that her newest work is about "the small subtle changes that are constantly taking place in our lives every day."

Meaning, however, is rarely literal in her dances. Of "Small Shifts," she says that "patterns evolve into duets as dancers lead, then follow; touch, then quickly part, their rapid movements melding into intricate phrases to evoke forgiveness, letting go, circularity, unwrapping the self, approaching, retreating, gradually progressing through the space."

Donovan says that all of her ensemble work is made in a collaborative spirit with the performers, and that her company creates "contemporary dance which highlights muscular effort, suggesting images of relationships among women, physical and emotional." And when she's starting out working on a new piece, she always begins the first rehearsal with a similar process.

"I give the dancers two things," said Donovan. "I give them a series of movement images, such as traveling side-to-side, changing levels and other things that will give some structure to create movement. Then I give them lots of other images, such as reaching behind one's self, that sort of thing. I give them these kind of cryptic tasks, along with some emotional imagery to address the specific movement structures. Then I see what they come up with, and the results are always interesting."

For example, Donovan asked dancer Melissa Caddle to "be under the gaze of others, aware of their eyes," and to "be ambivalent about being seen." She asked her also to create movement "emanating from the core, coming



Kelley Donovan

in and out of a vulnerable state." The sequence was so satisfying that it became a lengthy solo within the finished version of "Small Shifts." Caddle is also the featured performer in another premiere on the program, "Awake," set to a score by Somei Satoh.

Donovan says that she's trying to get away from the standard ballet vocabulary, as well as what she calls "the standard modern dance look." She might take several weeks with her dancers to develop a particular phrase, adding sharp accents or changing the overall shape of

the phrase. Sometimes, she will take parts of two very different phrases and merge them to get an entirely different look. Ultimately, she strives for a style where "everything is connected and coming from the same material."

"What's wonderful about this particular group is that they are so fast," said Donovan. "They can process material so quickly that I can go through 10 ideas in every rehearsal and throw seven of them away. Sometimes you work for a half-hour just to see what something looks like, and you run out of time and use stuff that you wouldn't have used if you'd had more options. So I really feel like we are keeping the best of our material."

After seven years cultivating her company and building repertory, she laughs and admits that she has no idea where she's headed.

"There's no manual for what your choreographic career entails," said Donovan. "It's not like going to medical school, and then doing your residency, and then doing other things. As a choreographer, you don't really know what the next step is," she added, laughing.

And the effect her work has on her own psyche continues long after it's performed. "I'm still determining the meaning of a work when it's being presented, and even months later," said Donovan. "In this piece, there is the theme of shifting, spatially, which is very literal. I'm not sure if it comes across on an emotional level. It seems more abstract, but I've been staring at it for three months now, so it's hard to tell. Maybe, it's more vulnerable than the other pieces we're doing right now," she speculated. "There are so many shifts right now in my own life, that I felt the title was appropriate."

Tickets to "Small Shifts" are \$12/\$15 and can be reserved by calling 781-321-6188. For more information about the program, visit <http://web.mit.edu/kdonovan/www/>.

Community Plaza to be dedicated Oct. 2

Cambridge and the Inman Square Business Association will celebrate the completion of Velucci Community Plaza Saturday, Oct. 2, with a day of enter-

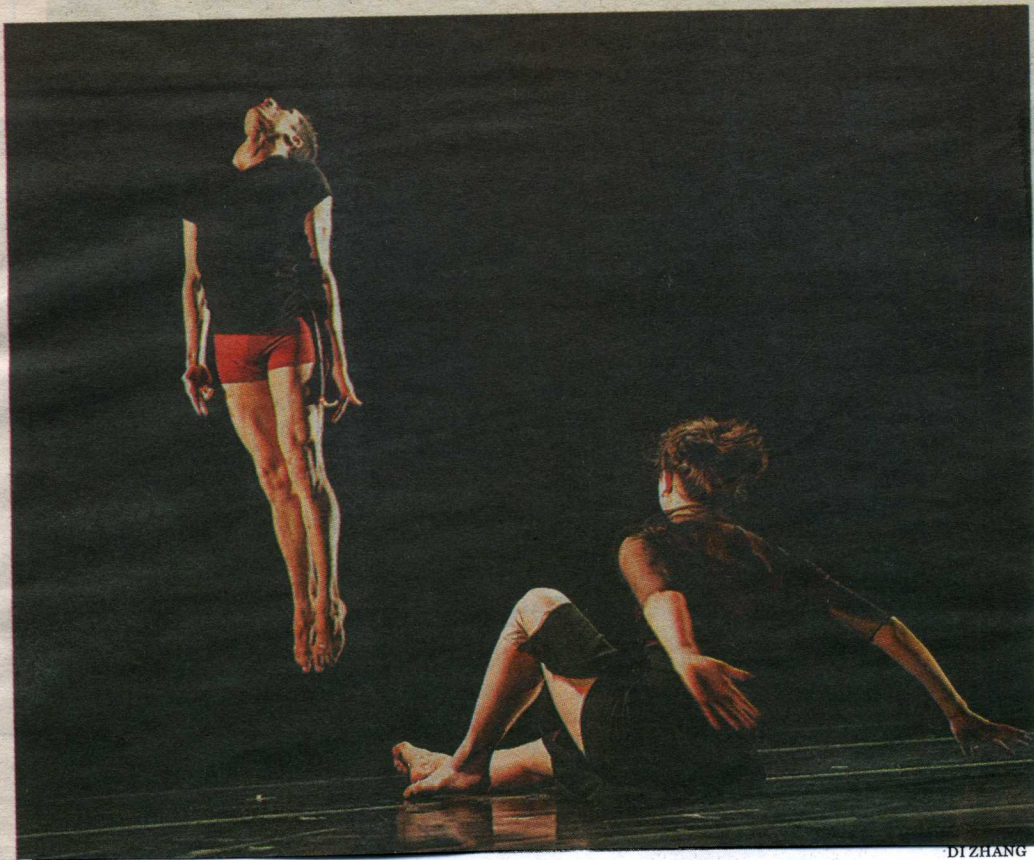
the heart of Inman Square, where Cambridge Street intersects with Hampshire Street in mid-Cambridge. The reconstruction of the plaza is a part of large-scale

Inman Square.

The design includes three granite planters placed in asymmetrical formation with wood platforms on top for seating; a

white birches have been planted to create a shade in the center of the park.

"Fall for Inman Square" schedule is:



DI ZHANG

Kelley Donovan & Dancers performing "Made of Paper" in New York.

Kinetic 'Paper' cuts through gravity

By **Karen Campbell**
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

CAMBRIDGE — Choreographer Kelley Donovan knows about impermanence and transformation, the themes of her latest work, "Made of Paper." After years as one of the most vibrant choreographers on the Boston scene, she moved to New York, regrouping with a new set of dancers. Yet she still maintains close ties here, coming back periodically to teach and present new work.

Sunday night's "Made of Paper," performed with five New York-based dancers at the Dance Complex, continues Donovan's exploration of change and its impact. The 15-minute piece aesthetically resembles her previous works "Borrowed Bones" and "Triadic Memories," both of which were represented with brief excerpts. Donovan's abstract movement unfurls in great kinetic waves of motion punctuated by moments of stillness, but nothing ever quite settles. Sharp angles and slicing limbs segue into liquid curves and coils with startlingly ephemeral

DANCE REVIEW

KELLEY DONOVAN & DANCERS

At: Dance Complex,
Sunday night

al shifts of weight and energy. Even a simple walk forward and back seems on the verge of becoming something else — a backward lunge, a reach and a turn. Repeated gestures, like a hand drifting down from the face, fingers fluttering, change context with each iteration. The play of gravity is fleeting, mercurial, often with energy sent in multiple directions at once — a leap with the body moving forward while a leg kicks backward, a head dips, an arm arcs sideways.

What seems new in "Made of Paper" is an increased interest in unison movements among the five dancers. (Donovan makes it a sextet, but mostly dances in brief interspersed solos.) In addition to duos and trios that form and dissolve, Donovan creates ensemble unisons and big group patterns with overlapping layers. It gives the move-

ment collective power and heft amidst individual phrases that connect and disconnect almost before the eye can register them. I hope she continues in this direction.

Though Donovan's new dancers are excellent, there was some lack of precision in some of the unison work, perhaps partly due to the last-minute absence of an ailing dancer. But in truth, no one captures Donovan's aesthetic the way she does, showcased most effectively in the solo from "Triadic Memories." A lush, full-bodied mover with a palpable sense of elasticity, she dances with a sensuous fluidity and impeccable clarity of focus.

The concert also included company member Cori Marquis's solo "Lion's Share." Marquis really knows how to use space, beginning her work pressed flat against the back curtain before working the floor with stretches, falls, and contorted balances. When she arose, great arcing swoops and spins that played with weight suspended and luxuriously released sent her bounding about the space.