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DANCE REVIEW

Memories That Everyone Can Relate To

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

Janis Brenner and Dancers packed the ground floor of a building opposite Grand Central Terminal on Thursday night: the performers in casual attire looked both like the pedestrians who peered at them through windows and the spectators seated inside on folding chairs.

Rarely has a choreographer invited an audience to identify so strongly with her dancers as Ms. Brenner did here with creative flair. The empathy was no accident. In "The Memory of All That," the 90-minute piece she presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, Ms. Brenner's theme was the kind of recollection common to all. The performers spoke of parents, grandparents, school days and childhood experiences. Their everyman image was furthered by the fact that they ranged widely in age and dance training.

The cast even seemed to be improvising, which it did while speaking and moving in a deceptively natural style.

The concert was the first of four free events that will focus on improvisation. Performance on 42d, the producing arm of the Whitney branch in the Philip Morris building (120 Park Avenue) calls the series "Impulsive Behavior."

Improvisation as a compositional device is one thing. Improvisation by dancers in performance is frequently a bore, if not a nightmare. Ms. Brenner, however, runs a tight ship, and her disciplined cast, allowed to improvise only within set structures, was prepared to deliver a number of set pieces.

Many of these were touching, especially when soloists spoke of close relatives who were seriously ill. There was also the hurt recalled by Luis Tentindo, moving with cartilage-free fluency, of being falsely accused by an art teacher of defacing a painting. Carlo Pellegrini juggled as he remembered how his father, murdered by a business associate, had wanted him to go into business. Now he hoped his father would be proud of him - he is a business consultant, who uses juggling as a teaching device in executives' seminars.

By having her dancers move as they talked, Ms. Brenner theatricalized experiences that in another context might be too confessional for comfort. The trick was that either the movement or speech could be improvised, sometimes simultaneously. At other times, a dancer delivering a set speech might be carried, free form, by a partner or group.

That Ms. Brenner (who appeared briefly) had choreographic motifs was clear. In the beginning, each partner hung on to the leg of another. The company's regular dancers (Kyla Barkin, Marisa Demos, Sherri Heilman, Kun-Yang Lin and Mr. Tentindo) were especially compelling in the wrestling-style holds of Ms. Brenner's choreography, with its emphasis on opposing use of energy. But equally compelling was the projection of the guest artists, who included Mr. Pellegrini, Con-suelo Gutierrez, the young Emma Teitelbaum and especially Alice Teirstein and Bob Gainer, who tumbled in and out of a comic reunion.

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