

16/Dance

25 And Over

Janis Brenner and friends celebrate success and survival

BY EVA YAA ASANTEWAA

Janis Brenner threw a spiffy anniversary season bash at Danspace Project, marking 25 years of creativity as a dance and vocal artist, and even the tech crew changing light gels between dances seemed fastidiously choreographed. A proponent of decidedly theatrical, expressive modern dance, Brenner is a class act all the way and has the chops to back it up.

In her four nights at St. Mark's Church, Brenner also welcomed and paid tribute to beloved companions along the path, like Meredith Monk whose joyous voice rang out on opening night via a videotaped performance. Choreographer Murray Louis, in whose company Brenner danced from 1977 to '94, was called out front to receive a chocolate cake for his 80th birthday. But the best treat was the handsome dancing by Brenner's peers and company members past and present.

The show included the New York premiere of Brenner's theatrical version of "Lake," originally a 2006 video by Marisela La Grave featuring



JULIE LEMBERGER

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Janis Brenner reunited with former Murray Louis dancers Robert Small, Sara Pearson, Betsey Fisher, Michael Blake, and Peter Kyle in a charming excerpt of Louis' "Porcelain Dialogues."

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Lindsey Dietz Marchant and Jason Dietz Marchant. La Grave's video portraits washed over the sanctuary wall, showing the Marchant's looming, rain-drenched faces, and another image of Canada geese paddling by a shore where the dancers slept. Suddenly the couple suddenly vanished from the video shot only to reappear live before us in a pool of soft light.

As Jason remained motionless and turned away from his partner, Lindsey proceeded to spool out an aria of varied, opulent, and ecstatic movement. When she placed a folded note by her heedless partner's side, he merely glanced

in its direction. Then suddenly black-out! The piece—all of 10 minutes—was over.

In Brenner's "Shun-Woa," updated from the 1994 original, guest soloist Kun-Yang Lin emerged from a huge copper-colored silk skirt that nearly encompassed the entire floor and revealed the vertebrae of his spine, each one singing with aliveness. Every movement, right down to the minute flexing of his finger joints, fairly crackled with electricity. He rose, twisting fabric around his lower body, lengths of the radiant cloth dripping from his wrists, and turned movement into monumental sculpture and rushing elemental energy. Mitchell Bogard's

lighting brought out every sensuous surface and shadowy depth.

"Solo for Janis" (1997), created by Richard Siegal in collaboration with Brenner, offered a gently self-mocking, prism-like display of Brenner's physical plasticity, quirky comedic bent, and impressive vocal talent. Unassuming entrances and downright dorky exits punctuated the action, ending in a scenery-chewing demise with the longest death rattle in recorded history.

Brenner reunited with former Murray Louis dancers Robert Small, Sara Pearson, Betsey Fisher, Michael Blake, and Peter Kyle (replacing the late Daniel Shapiro) for a charming revival of the second movement of Louis's "Porcelain

Dialogues." Katherine Fisher took a glamorous solo turn in "Contents May Have Shifted..." (2002), Brenner's aerodynamic homage to her teacher, the late Alwin Nikolais.

"A 'Peace' For Women" (2000), danced by Kyla Barkin, Katherine Fisher, Nigel Campbell, Brett Perry, Carolyn Rossett, Kendra Samson and the Dietz Marchants, concluded the two-hour evening.

No one seemed to mind that Brenner's lovely and generous fête ran later into the night than most Danspace Project shows. Consistent achievement and survival in this risky business are cause for all of us to cheer.