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A Gentle Reminder of the Devastation of AIDS

It's been a while since I witnessed a piece about AIDS that was really affecting. Now, Janis Brenner's new *Dancing in Absentia* at Joyce SoHo treats the ongoing tragedy with sensitivity and respect. Instead of thrusting gruesome statistics in your face, or portraying melodramatic scenes, it lets the ongoing AIDS tragedy speak for itself.

The piece began with Brenner and Michelle Rosen singing a refrain: "I lost my sock, I lost my umbrella, I lost my father, I lost my breath." At this last loss, the six dancers turned their backs to us and indicated expanding and deflating lungs—a serene way of depicting the panic of losing your ability to breathe. The dancers respect our privacy and the privacy of all those we knew who lost their lives.

The duet for the two men of the company was really moving. The soft extended lines, tender touching, and occasional sudden holds or grabs brought out the compassion in the two dancers, Aaron Selissen and Moo Kim.

At certain times photos of male dancers who died of AIDS were projected onto the upstage screen and tumbled away or dissolved or broke up into a thousand little pieces. The two-dimensional photos became ghosts.

I saw images of men I had known and was fond of: Ulysses Dove, Harry Sheppard, and Robert Joffrey. And there were many, many more.

Dancing in Absentia, subtitled *Dedicated to all the artists lost to the AIDS epidemic*, wasn't the kind of piece you sob over, but it did trigger that sadness that blankets us when we remember all the friends and fellow artists we've lost.