



the village  
**VOICE**

June 30, 1998

## Janis Brenner & Dancers

By DEBORAH JOWITT

SAY "NICE" IN relation to an artist, and people think you're engineering a subtle put-down: *nice* as in fussy, respectable, or bland. But Janis Brenner's work is nice in several happier senses of the word. Her choreography - - definitely agreeable, delightful at times -- is also nice as in "having or showing delicate accurate perception," and in being fastidiously crafted. Put it this way: Brenner is in control of her material, but that doesn't damp her imagination. More remarkable these days is the fact that each dance, or section thereof, has its own identity, its own vocabulary. The way partners in the previewed *heartSTRINGS* keep rushing exultantly across the floor, one dancer scooping the other up into a sort of battering-ram position, appears in no other work.

Nor does the lovely motif of a seated performer embracing a comrade's leg. On the *Rim of Thought*, a solo for the wonderful guest artist Kate Johnson, is the most lyrical piece on the program -a meditative courtship between Johnson and the air. Gently gathered in and released, it seems to blow her upward too.

*A Matter of Time* (1995) juxtaposes four paired dancers: Carl Fink, Sherri Hellman, Anne Sellery, and Laurie Shayler. What's absorbing, and unique to this work, is how for a long time one member of each couple does the same movements, but her partner responds differently. It's always gripping when a simple formal conceit illuminates our daily grind. This quartet is buoyed like all the dances on Brenner's concert, by Mitchell Bogard's gorgeous lighting, and by David Karagianis's sensitive, breathy score.

The music for the 1996 *What About Bob* is more segmented and disruptive. What *about* Bob, indeed! What might Dylan think, hearing his songs intoned by William Shatner to attractive background music? (Try saving "jingle jangle morning" with heavy thoughtfulness.) Fortunately, Brenner also favors us with Dylan's own singing. And her choreography is excellent. Formations, manners, and robust steps suggest a country dance party, but the best sections are intimate: a teasing trio in which Shayler keeps eluding Hellman and Sellery, and a loving duet for two men, Luis Tentindo and the glowing, Kun-Yang Lin, that employs some of the mechanics of classic male-female pas de deux and makes them look as natural as breathing. Brenner gently takes Tentindo away from Lin and nestles against him -- a small woman who can also jump like a startled grasshopper. Nice!

Reprinted from *The Village Voice*, June 30, 1998