



**NEWSNOTES DANCE
BLOG
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EDITOR**

Janis Brenner & Dancers - 5 Decades II

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Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church

By Mark Kappel

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In 2009 Janis Brenner celebrated five decades as a performing artist and choreographer at Joyce Soho. The success of those performances prompted Ms. Brenner to return to the Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church from April 7-9, 2011, to present 5 Decades II, a second retrospective of Ms. Brenner's performing and choreography career which emphasized that there is more to come.

5 Decades II was another excellent survey of modern dance. Brenner's major contribution to the evening was the world premiere, *The Mind-Stuff Variations*, a collaborative work with her company members, choreographed to original music by Jerome Begin. Inspired by William James' "Mind-Stuff Theory", Brenner's piece was a synergy of dance movement and spoken word -- filled with humor and thoughtfulness.

In this program Ms. Brenner was seen as a performer in two solos, *Seraphic Songs* and *Pastorale* from Mary Wigman's *Swinging Landscapes*. These contrasting solos -- *Seraphic Songs* being ritualistic and spiritual, and *Pastorale*, with flowing choreography -- defined Wigman's contribution to modern dance and Brenner's commitment to prevent these dances from becoming merely museum pieces.

In 1976 Murray Louis created a full-length *Cleopatra* for the Royal Danish Ballet and on this program, Kyla Barkin and Aaron Selissen danced one of the duets from this unique piece. This duet for the mature *Cleopatra* and the young *Marc Anthony* was an example of Louis' signature sculptural choreography.

The remainder of the program was devoted to Ms. Brenner's work as a choreographer. The duet from Ms. Brenner's *Pieces of Trust* was danced by Sumaya Jackson and Chris Ralph with the appropriate intensity, and the ensemble of Kyla Barkin, Esme Boyce, Janis Brenner, Sumaya Jackson, Christopher Ralph, Aaron Selissen, and Chen Zielinski danced Ms. Brenner's popular *HeartSTRINGS*. This absorbing evening of dance was illuminated by the excellent lighting designed by Mitchell Bogard.