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Dworin troupe looks at motherhood

By TONY ANGARANO
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“Her Past & Future Lives,” the program presented by the Judy Dworin Performance Ensemble at the Wadsworth Atheneum’s Aetna Theater on Friday night, offers a woman’s perspective on the many meanings of motherhood. Dworin’s concepts and choreography reveal an artist totally in touch with her nature; yet through music, movements and memory she has created works that transcend gender.

From “Distant Voices Coming Near” (1990), Kathy Bortek Gersten performed “Mother and Child,” a solo of stunning impact. With her long locks veiling her face, Gersten embodied birth as a regenerative process. First seen lying on her back, she intertwined arms and legs with expressive dexterity before rising majestically. In collaboration with Dworin, Gersten has devised a physical tour-de-force that evoked Words-

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worth’s poetic observation about the child being “father of the man” but from a maternal point of view.

In “When the Rains Came,” Dworin dramatically depicts the abuse of Mother Earth, using Chernobyl as the subject. Set to the haunting music from “Temple of Remembrance,” the work provided theatricality through the recorded narrative by Krassimira Boikovska, black umbrellas, black and white costumes by Karin Schneider and lighting by Blu. But Dworin’s inventive choreography and concept provided the inventive force. Performed by Gersten, KC Chun, Sarah Franklin, Alison Malloy, Lisa Matias Serrambana and Melissa Sylvester, also identified in the program as collaborators, “Rains” persuasively made art of politics.

The revival and revision of “Bessie” honored the life of Dworin’s grandmother, a woman whom she

credits with the “affirmation of the body natural.” A multi-media work using vintage photos, old songs and contemporary movements, “Bessie” glorifies a “turn-of-the-century babe” representative of many American women quietly and bravely seeking “lives of their own” in a cruel world.

In its revised form, “Bessie” is a tighter, stronger work. The staging includes Dworin, as narrator, recalling her grandmother as scenes from her rich, but difficult, existence are re-created in song and dance. An ensemble piece that emphasized the Dworin dancers’ response to the choreography and its meaning, “Bessie” also featured Sean Maloney, an engaging artist with real presence, as the several men in her life plus the stage-savvy, 6-month-old Alyssa Ciera Serrambana in her professional debut.

The Judy Dworin Performance Ensemble will present “Her Past & Future Lives” at the Wadsworth Atheneum’s Aetna Theater today at 4 and 8 p.m. Information: 527-9800.