

The Hartford Courant.

Established 1764

Dworin's 'Tunka' is earthy, mystical, moving

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Special to The Courant

Saturday, May 9, 1992

The Judy Dworin Performance Ensemble presented "Tunka," a dance/theater work Friday night at the Cathedral Theater that acted as an environmental siren call, echoing performance artist Rachel Rosenthal's recent performance at the Wadsworth Atheneum.

■ Dance review

Derived from the Lakota Sioux word meaning "the rock that was there when the earth began, that will still be there at the end of time" "Tunka" is a multi-dimensional work that calls upon the talents of a variety of artists to achieve its ends.

The work consistently and eloquently spoke through the sound of chanting, the rattling of clay orbs, the beating of drums and the recording of rhythmic breathing. The original score was composed by percussionist Glen Velez of the Paul Winter Consort; sound design was by Jim Penndorf.

In the past, Dworin's work has incorporated spoken text, but here the "text" was a marvelous compilation of voice and percussion that was stunningly broken in the end by the sound of Dworin's own voice, unrec-

orded and live, reverberating through the theater.

The visual equivalent of the chanting were the rattles, hand-crafted by artisan Chris London, and placed in various positions around the hardwood floor. Although made of clay, the rattles resembled rock, primal elements of earth, gifts from the shaman, waiting to be discovered and studied.

The piece, developed in collaboration with the dancers, was performed with dignity and grace by Kathy Borteck Gersten, Orion Duckstein, Kelly James and Lisa Matias Serrambana. The four dancers entered the stage dressed in identical brown suits, genderless in their sameness, and proceeded to greedily hoard the shaman's perfectly placed rocks. In a vividly effective scene, Duckstein hides the rocks in his shirt until his compatriots find out and ravish him of his goodies; their actions appear to be both violations and caresses.

At its best moments, the piece plays out such opposing images at once. There are times when a collapse is release, and when it is defeat. Such a heightened moment is Duckstein's collapse when he finds himself bereft of treasure. The others give up their hoarded goods and place the rocks on his prone body, like so many funeral roses, weighing

it down — both tribute and protection at once.

The performers steadily moved closer to the earth as they eventually stripped down to their skivvies. There were times they resembled primordial ooze crawling out of the muck. There were leap-frog patterns in which the dancers leapt and pulled themselves forward. At another moment, the dancers worked in unison, backs to the audience, shaking the rattles in outstretched hands, as the songs of birds were heard.

Dworin took on the role of the shaman, in an eerily evocative costume. Designed by Leslie Weinberg, the costume used a crown of twigs, hiking boots, a crooked cane, macramé mask and bits of burlap and found fabrics, in a swirl of earthy beiges and brown. Dworin walked slowly, leaning on her cane, placing the rocks just so. There was one rock, however, larger than the rest, egg-shaped with a slightly gold color. It was present at the beginning, was never moved during the performance and remained even after all the dancers had left.

"Tunka" will be performed again tonight at Cathedral Theater, 45 Church St., at 8. Tickets are \$12; \$8 for students and seniors. For information call 232-5525.