

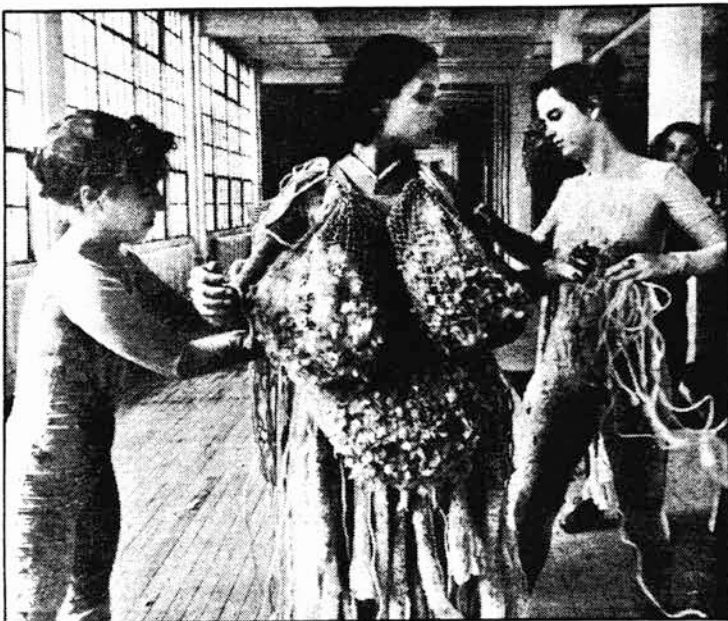
HARTFORD
Advocate

October 4, 1993

Vol. 20 No. 14

DANCE

By Janet Reynolds



Goddess spell: exploring shamanism and transformation myths.

LACY PHOTO

MA And POP

Dworin performance ensemble explores pre-history

At first all that's visible from behind the tan mound center stage is kicking legs. Then, slowly, a flesh-colored dancer rises. On her head sits a large, Easter Island-ish mask. Long braided pieces of yarn mutate octopus-like from her sides. Two large yarn orbs serve as breasts.

The large goddess weaves her way toward the kicking legs. As she tops the mound, she stops and, after slowly, sensually stroking her milk-laden orbs, she leans gently down and squeezes them as if to fill a bucket. The three creatures, whose legs now lie quiet, stare in wonderment.

Welcome to the world of MA. It's a world in which Mother Earth once reigned supreme, yet today she stands threatened by humans who neither recognize nor appreciate her fertility, abundance and regenerative powers. It's a world you can enter this Fri-Sun., Oct. 22-24, as the Judy Dworin Performance Ensemble performs MA at the Cathedral Theater in downtown Hartford.

MA's origins come from ensemble director Judy Dworin's interest in shamanism, goddess cultures and transformation myths. Last year she traveled to Taiwan, South Korea, Bulgaria and Malta to research the piece, attending shaman rituals along the way. The result is MA, a melange of ancient myths with a 20th-century twist. Dworin calls MA "a myth for today. It's an affirmation of the feminine voice and fertility and life cycles and tries to bring that to today," she adds, referring, at least in part, to MA's contemporary environmental warnings.

If you know Dworin's work, you know MA is not really a departure for this West Hartford native. Since the ensemble's founding in 1990, many of her choreographies have focused on contemporary issues, especially those dealing with gender and the environment. MA, in fact, is the last in a trilogy of dances dealing with spirituality.

It would be a mistake, though, to pigeonhole Dworin as a PCC—politically correct choreographer. Her

shorter works in particular are known for their quirky humor. She likes to use text in her performances as well. "I don't like the idea of having a sort of stamp," she says.

To that end, Dworin often uses unusual live music in her performances. In this particular one, her own voice is the main instrument. Alternately sing-songy and chant-like, it sounds a little like what meditation might be if a swami met a Native American doing a tribal dance. In fact, Dworin says meditation is her inspiration. "The voice in the piece is almost like a voice of the goddess in the spirit world," she says.

Which is not to say there isn't room for some improvisation. "It's very much coming from the moment," Dworin says, adding that she's singing with the goddess's movements, "and yet there is a similarity each time."

MA is unusual in another aspect as well—its costuming, particularly the masks. Vaguely prehistoric, almost animal/human mixes, the masks simultaneously communicate the innocence and the darker side of MA's themes. Leslie Weinberg, resident costume designer at Wesleyan University, is the creator.

But as distinctive as MA and Dworin's other works are, her ensemble is surprisingly democratic. "The people in the company are real participants in the process of creating," Dworin says. Getting dancer input is so crucial to Dworin, in fact, that it's one of the gauges she uses to decide if a performer can join the small troupe. (Right now there are four women besides Dworin, although another woman is due to join after this performance.) "It's not just that they can move well," she says, "but that they have a creative intelligence that becomes a part of the work."

Performances begin at 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday, 2 p.m. on Sunday. Tickets are \$12 for general admission, \$8 for senior citizens, students and Dance Services Network members. Call 232-5525 for reservations. ■