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## CLEVELAND OVERNIGHT

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# Story of earth's birth, rebirth thoughtfully told

By **WILMA SALISBURY**  
PLAIN DEALER DANCE CRITIC

Connecticut choreographer Judy Dworin drew upon multicultural sources to create her poetic dance theater piece, "MA."

The evening-length work, presented on Cleveland Public Theater's Women's Voices/Women Dancing series, told the story of the earth's creation, destruction and rebirth in a clear and simple manner. Masks suggesting prehistoric creatures, singing reminiscent of American Indian chants, stage traditions from Japanese theater and percussion techniques of contemporary composition were smoothly blended into a moving statement about the beauty and regenerative power of the earth.

Friday night's performance began late because of the difficulty of seating an overflow crowd, and the production opened with its weakest sequence: a painfully slow setting of the stage by Dworin, who placed buckets of water around the performance space, and harpist-composer Jocelyn Chang, who filled three plastic bags with garbage that was strewn across the stage. Their boring tasks were accompanied by a recording of repetitive folk singing.

The production got into gear when the lights went down and arms began shooting out of an earth mound like growing stalks. Legs followed, and then the central figure made her dramatic entrance. A monumental goddess, she moved slowly, caressing the voluptuous breasts that created the Milky Way, swinging the enormous womb that cradled eggs of fertility and squinting through the slanted eyes of her great primordial head.

Her progeny (three dancers disguised in smaller versions of the goddess' heavy mask) playfully scampered over the earth mound and discovered organic objects that functioned as farming tools. Directed by the protective goddess,

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**DANCE REVIEW**  
JUDY DWORIN PER-  
FORMANCE ENSEMBLE

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the happy creatures played like monkeys, crawled like insects, swam like fish, stretched their wings like birds and danced in a circle like Renaissance graces.

All was radiantly peaceful until two masked men in black ravaged the goddess as she was releasing her eggs. Brandishing long bamboo poles, they imprisoned the progeny, decapitated the goddess and dumped the garbage onstage. Brutal and shocking, the devastation was gradually overcome as Dworin picked up the pieces, sang a mournful chant and shrouded the broken goddess in black. The progeny first painted their faces white, then washed their skin clean as they resumed their joyous dancing. The goddess, undiminished, shed her shroud, lifted the primordial mask to her face and took up Dworin's wordless song, sung like the breath of life. As the renewed goddess lifted her voice to the heavens, the progeny built shrines from the garbage and lighted votive candles.

Accompanying the wordless narrative was atmospheric music performed on harp, flute and percussion by Chang, Michael Leese and Tony Steve. When the male musicians became masked pillagers, the music stopped.

A thoughtful statement that expressed love for the earth and belief in the indestructible power of the feminine spirit, "MA" brought together the collaborative talents of mask designer Leslie Weinberg, sculptor Mary Barringer, set designer Tom Manion, sound designer Jim Penndorf, lighting designer Blu and dancers Kathy Bortek Gersten, Angela Grano, Lisa Matias Serrambana and Nicole Sistare. All are members of the Judy Dworin Performance Ensemble of Hartford, Conn.