

DANCE

By Diana Scott

Distant Voices Coming Near. Choreographed by Judy Dworin. With Kathy Borteck Gersten, Kelly James, Tim Martin, Lisa Matias. Music by Julie Lyonn Lieberman and Paul Zimmermann. Lights by Blu. Costumes by Eleanor San San Wong. Set Piece and Tress Sculpture by Angus Moss. Artspace at ECA, New Haven.

The least publicized of several dance events that took place in New Haven the weekend of Oct. 6-7 was the one that left the most indelible impression. Hartford-based choreographer Judy Dworin's *Distant Voices Coming Near*—a superbly integrated collaboration prominently featuring her five-dancer ensemble, musician/vocalists Julie Lyonn Lieberman and Paul Zimmermann, and lighting designer Blu—drew a relatively small crowd of seasoned dance-viewers to the Educational Center for the Arts. There was no coughing in the silent places and were no early defections during the uninterrupted, hour-long performance. Save for the final, slow and somber-to-ecstatic transformational solo, virtually nothing could have used editing. If anything, this intense and spare dance had room to grow.

Dworin, who heads Trinity College's Theater and Dance Department, has in previous work bridged the somewhat academic distinctions that traditionally separate "dance," "theater," "literature," and "music." In *Dr. Charcot's Hysteria Shows* (1988), she collaborated with Trinity English

professor Dianne Hunter and theater professor Lenora Champagne on a dance/drama incorporating text, based on antique photos which had documented different stages of hysteria, taken in a 19th century French insane asylum for women. Also that year, in her own *Lighthouse*, she suggestively drew connections between tumultuous inner states of being and larger natural forces, using simple movement, a haunting naturalistic soundscape by composer Andre Gribou, Blu's lighting and a splendid, resonantly introspective text she pieced together from poetry, essays, historical diaries and her own writings.

In *Distant Voices*, however, words fall away (except for a voice-over of indistinct whispers, more connotative of human-ness than denotative of meaning). Musicians, elevated with their exotic fabricated instruments on Angus Moss' table-like set piece and sculpture (upstage left), at times initiate, at times sustain or delicately support the piece's flow.

Program notes give few clues to the content of *Voices* (although press notes highlight the themes of birth, evolution and transformation, and commonality in "being-hood" among humans and other forms of natural life).

The "story," in fact seems almost incidental to the work's success, although it's the aspect most easily captured in words. Six sections, entitled "Beginning," "Shaman," "Ancestor," "Mother and Child," "He," and "She," flow into one another so continuously that it is difficult to discern

Creaturehood in Common

Judy Dworin's ensemble dances to *Distant Voices*

where one ends and the other begins.

The opening moment has only darkness and light—intensely focused at the stage's center, from a close elevation (a box on stilts). This lasts a long moment and dramatically fades. An opening quartet has Dworin and dancers Kathy Borteck Gersten, Kelly James and Tim Martin watching over a motionless figure (Lisa Matias), whose sporadic, arching contractions and draw them in from four corners; her subsequent lifelessness disperses them. Light plays on her articulate spine, knit shoulders and rounded calves; this is the woman born before her time and pushed back into the womb until the propitious moment for her rebirth, ushering in a new age of awareness.

Some of the most riveting moments of this elemental drama evolve from seemingly insignificant movements expressed to their fullest: the accelerating, primitive undulation of a low-hunched dancer's hind quarters; two concentric, crouching forms locomoting like primates coupling tenderly; the unison, trance-like torso reaches-and-swings of the quartet, accompanied by unfamiliar, appealing sounds of a birdcage-like bowed instrument.

Dworin's supine body with lifted chest, arms held wide and head arching backward toward the audience is a powerful focal gesture of generative openness. Once standing, limbs angling in oddly integrated movements, she's magically transformed into an insect. Kelly James as the "ancestor" is

palpably attuned to external stimuli, reaching for intangible help, as musicians simulate a sustained wail. Wonderfully concentrated in a muscular crouch, he's released in a hurtling, cartwheel trajectory, and propelled by fear through an intense sound-landscape.

Kathy Borteck Gersten's inwardly-focused, seated rocking/rolling balances give way to other-creatureness. Crouches become jumps and leaps at a profound level of coordination. This is a choreographic breakthrough: the beginnings of a movement vocabulary not imposed on the dancers but coming from a deeper level of internalization. Continuous movements speak with frustrating subtlety and directness here, eluding the descriptive power of words. The dance links us, as if through a muscular memory, with our pre-human origins.

Tim Martin, whose clearly human solo begins with coy smiles and sheepishness, neatly manipulates a box which is, in turn, platform, football and drum on which he virtuosically beats a complex rhythm with his off-bounding feet, before throwing off a circle of leaping barrel turns. Lisa Matias' final, emergingly-nuanced rebirth solo seems a bit tacked on, after all this, but ends, literally, on a high note, in a series of wide-armed runs, caught balances and whirling-dervish wonderment.

Distant Voices will be performed Oct. 19 and 20 at Charter Oak Temple Cultural Center in Hartford (232-5225).