



Jody Fabso Cassell in *Dance and Movement for your mind and body* (photo courtesy of the artist).

The twelve dances in the third Modern Atlanta Dance (MAD) Festival deepened the impression that Atlanta has enough clever choreographers and sufficiently skilled dancers for Atlantans to keep up with modern and postmodern dance currents. Seven of the twelve dances presented here had satisfying choreographic structures. The remaining five had either intriguing texture or some enjoyable dancing.

The most successful creation was the Kris Cangelosi Project's *Twisted Faith*, choreographed by Cangelosi in the Alwin Nikolais style of humorous control. Five dancers portrayed four marionettes and their puppeteer. The puppeteer created various movement qualities with her arms and torso—bouncy, mechanical, flowing, jerky, calligraphic, conversational. As if on strings, the four marionettes bounced, mechanized, flowed, jerked, exercised, and mimicked in response, with nuances indicating that the puppeteer's strings weren't fully taut. The beauty of *Twisted Faith* was in the intricately precise connections between the puppeteer's movements and the split-second delayed marionette's responses, plus classic Nikolais attention to supportive details of music, costumes, and props.

The most imaginative choreography was in Dance Force's *Heartaches*, Anonymous by choreographer Douglas Scott. The five dancers played cowpokes in a 1940s musical comedy country saloon. They strode about using full-bodied movement to show exaggerated emotions from broadside to loveliness to ambivalence. They collied, hefted, and Climbbed one another with wordless mechanics that fooled the eye into thinking that they felt no strain in the most strenuous, weight-bearing postures. At times, the ran-

dom striding devolved into a marching line leading to the dance's most striking highlight: chairs tossed to dancers in back without looking—the chairs caught in unbroken stride, with perfect fluidity each time. The only deficiency in *Heartaches*, Anonymous is the air of inauthenticity often inherent in modernist spoofs of regional traditions.

Two dances successfully exemplified what performance art theoretician Nelson Howe would call "problem dances." That is, the choreography solved a self-imposed limit on the dancers' movements. In *When The Mind Hears*, Dana Phelps-Marschalk and Kim Kirkpatrick played interacting non-bearers constrained to eyelock no matter how their bodies tried to scamper or scud away. Each rapidly shifting mood presented a witty solution to the problem. In *This Dear Told Me To Dance*, Jody Fabso Cassell worked in and with a stretchy dress, getting into some creative postures. In my favorite, she was on hands and knees, balancing the wadded dress on her back, as if sampling the most memorable poses from Kei Takei's *Light*.

Three solo choreographers successfully celebrated emotional moments. In *Essences* (*Wading Dance*), Sandi Walker danced several short solos that focused on her husband, who was seated in a straight-back chair. The charm was in the equal attention of one to the other—of she dancing throughout the stage and of her turning his head deliberately to follow her. Walker's movements demonstrated what a good choreographer can do with a chunky body. Gayle Doherty's *Random Thoughts On the Path to Serenity* was a diptych whose recorded declaration "I am not a princess anymore" dramatically

Modern Atlanta Dance (MAD) Festival

Agnes Scott College
Decatur, Georgia
February 7 - 8

Pilobolus

Georgia Institute of Technology
Atlanta, Georgia
February 28 - March 1

linked two very different movement explorations for a late-middle-aged body, the link creating the interest. Louise Ruyton Barth's *Talking Surgical Blues* is another entertaining work from her repertoire of well-integrated, witty talking dances about serious life events.

Although the overall choreographic structure was not interesting enough to engage the intellect, two choreographers created intriguing textures in which it was fun to feel the moment-to-moment movement flow. Lori Teague's *Speak*, danced by six dancers of *Moving In the Spirit* dance company, was a continuous stream of truly innovative movements, especially the very creative use of shoulders and upper chest, which gave a strong presence to each of the dancers. Rebecca Bobele's solo *One Over One*, danced by Martha Edwards, showed an engaging variety of shudders, scoops, and still-arrangings, all from a posture coiled as if ready to spring.

The three remaining dances were of limited choreographic interest. Two featured excellent, sensuous dancers. Travis Gatling's athleticism—especially his jumping—sufficiently animated Jerlyann Warner's *My Cantata*, most notable for its distinctive African-steppings and twists well-knitted in a modern dance exercise. Sue Schneider is usually one of Atlanta's most intellectually satisfying choreographers, but her *Rapture* for three members of her Core Performance Company (formerly Several Dancers Core) was mostly a modern exercise with excessive balletic movement for three beautifully sensual dancers. Gabrielle Mertz' *Black* for a quartet of dancers from Ondine and Company was even more overtly balletic than *Rapture*. The four danced in leggy ballet style with arms and upper bodies flapping after. They avoided eye contact even when partnering. Balletic movement usually doesn't work in modern dance because it looks foolish without the fulfillment of ballet's leaps and other gravity-defying movements. Still, *Black* showed Mertz' exceptional skill in moving dancers throughout the stage with frequent entrances and exits.

Bryan Sherman, Decatur, Georgia