



Solar Powered, But Not Always Sunny *Dance*

By HELEN SHAW
August 8, 2006

Considering how heat has sapped our strength lately, whether by literally browning out electricity or by simply leaching off our good humor, it's a bit radical to regard solar power in a positive — ahem — light. But out at Solar 1, the city's only stand-alone solar-powered building, sunshine gets the smiley face again. Sure, the building's end of Stuyvesant Cove Park looks surprisingly like an access road for the FDR Drive, and the organization's outdoor dance festival Solar Powered Dance had to compete with the roar of every environmentally unfriendly diesel engine in the city, but somehow it managed a plucky, graceful event amid all that grimy asphalt.

The first piece, by Emma Cotter's group Rettocamme, did little to reset the time machine from the '90s-era Indigo Girls music that opened the show. Ms. Cotter's piece featured four women in white eyelet blouses and pigtail braids performing elemental, weaving patterns that seemed almost Shaker in their simplicity. Drifting about to Alon Nechushtan's whale song, their Belated Empathy proved a restful examination of choral movement. If the dancers' vocabulary seemed a bit limited and their faces rather earnest, their calm introspection made up for their shortcomings.

Perhaps best forgotten was "Passing It Off as Euphoria," the solo by Chris Ferris, an awkward affair by which even she seemed disappointed. Ostensibly, her goal was to explode everyday movements through exaggerated leg scratches and abstract shrugs. Instead, she crawled about seeming to throw a mock tantrum. Even after her bow, she tossed her hands up in frustration at the audience. I can only say: right back at ya.

In contrast to her belligerence, Meryl Green and Dimitra Reber, who have danced together since 1957, performed "At the Present Time ... With History" like it was a benediction. Enormously distinctive dancers — Ms. Reber was soft and grandmotherly and Ms. Green was like a sharpened blade — their work seemed like an ongoing conversation about how best to radiate joy.

Standing — or rather, moving — head and shoulders above the rest, Maré Hieronimus's self-titled group performed her "four solos: spark/ridge/perch/till." The overlapping pieces each had a signature prop. In one, a dancer dressed in schoolgirl pinstripes held a little red toy airplane; in another, the striking Sharon Mansur tied her hands into knots with a length of fishing net. There was no attempt to explain the objects' function, but just like the score by William Catanzaro, in which the audience could hear dogs barking and helicopters circling in the distance, the dancers seemed to tell distinct stories that were only just beyond our comprehension. All four moved beautifully, but Ms. Hieronimus, who finished the program, elevated the evening to something breathless, converting a series of uncomfortable positions into zen meditation.

The lone discordant note in the program (perhaps it was telling that the performer was also the only male dancer of the evening) was Adam Scher, a technician with gorgeous barrel turns who has danced with the Met. His "Waltz of a Hipster" grafted the gum-chomping aggressiveness of a disgruntled teenager onto occasional loops of acrobatic extravagance. Sulking into the audience, tugging on his T-shirt, which read "Die Hipster Scum," he let his pounding soundtrack (by Nada Surf and the Free Design) do most of the work for him. Punk and ballet are nearly impossible to marry, so though he occasionally landed a leap flat-footed, the man's grace was simply too ingrained to ruin.

Solar 1 has lofty goals — namely, to survive and flourish to become Solar 2. The festival reflected some of those dreamy ambitions and occasionally grubby realities — Tamar Rogoff and her curatorial team only had patchy success in attracting top-tier talent. But before that multistory, green arts space arrives, this smallish, one-story room will have to suffice.