

September 16, 1999

DANCE REVIEW; Urgency as a Foil for Meditation in an Obscure Myth

By JACK ANDERSON

The first part of "Home for the Naked" was called "Home" and its second and final scene was called "Naked." But no one ever appeared nude. And it was hard to guess what home was supposed to be for the restless people in this hourlong work, which Ellis Wood presented on Tuesday night as part of the Carnival series at Dance Theater Workshop.

Watching the production was like listening to impassioned conversations in a foreign language. But because of the intensity of Ms. Wood's choreography and the conviction of her dancers, the mysterious body language seemed always on the verge of comprehensibility. Its emotional urgency was certainly inescapable.

Daniel Stebbins's set included boulderlike shapes on which dancers stood or sat and hanging panels adorned with tangled lines resembling branches. Scott Westerfeld's taped score contrasted spurts of insistent instrumental sounds with sustained vocal phrases.

Ms. Wood's choreography had its own contrasts. There was an abundance of brusque forceful movement for six women (Melanie Aceto, Monica Bill Barnes, Wendy Blum, Jennifer Phillips, Raegan Wood Sanders and the choreographer). Unlike these vibrant figures, Laurence Rawlins, the one man in the cast, seemed almost spectral, moving in slow motion as if in a trance. Yet he was by no means a feeble presence, for near the end of the piece he appeared to heal a dancer by pouring water from a bowl on her.

If the women were people committed to vigorous action, Mr. Rawlins could have been a meditative penitent or mystic. Their choreographic interactions might well have been episodes from an unfamiliar myth. And if one did not know who the characters were, Ms. Wood made sure that one realized that their actions were important.

Her production will be repeated next Thursday, on Sept. 24, and on Oct. 2 and 3 at Dance Theater Workshop, 219 West 19th Street, Chelsea.