

DANCE

M A G A Z I N E

Hysterica Dance Company
John Anson Ford Amphitheatre
Los Angeles, California
July 5, 2002
Reviewed by Donna Perlmutter

It doesn't take a practiced eye to see that Kitty McNamee is a natural. Her choreography for Hysterica, now in its fifth year as a thriving Los Angeles troupe, looks like the real thing: a mix of what works for her dancers, the pop-culture reference points she shares with them and an out-sized talent for that most elusive gift, originality. You see it in how steps and structure grow from an underlying narrative based on contemporary European motifs.

But don't expect easy classifications. While the aura McNamee conjures is eclectic, she takes her material from the stream of movement we see on music videos and yes, from the ballet language. The difference, however, between what she does as opposed to the work of an artless mix-and-match usurper couldn't be clearer than in her new piece, "Sticks and Stones."

Here we get sly intimations of ballet technique: dancers using their well-oiled turnout in partnered duets and solos, not to mention their stretched feet, high arches and beautiful extensions. But as they go through the various vignettes, set to Matthew Sims' wide-ranging score, there are all sorts of uniquely expressionist movements making up the various scenarios and commenting on their absurdity -- two women doing a fast, unison tip-toe march with bent knees, for instance.

Eroticism is central to McNamee's aesthetic. It propels the action and interaction. It parallels Sims' music, as much in the electronic soft-rock numbers as in the string quartet adagios. It explains the bare-legged, barefoot freedom, even Grant Krajecki's exercise-chic costumes. And, not least, it quite unself-consciously invites the audience to witness a practicum of pleasure between choreographer and dancers.

But "Sticks and Stones" lacks in coherence what a stronger storyline or theme might give it. The piece opens with a couple, positioned upstage, sitting at home on their cozy couch -- he engrossed in his laptop, she singing songs (badly and off-pitch). What subsequently transpires before them could be seen as her fantasy. Which is fine. And the dancers -- especially Erin Giraud and Tara Avise, who powerfully articulate the drama with their perfect legs, technique and emotional truth -- carry the whole thing off.