

In The Choreography

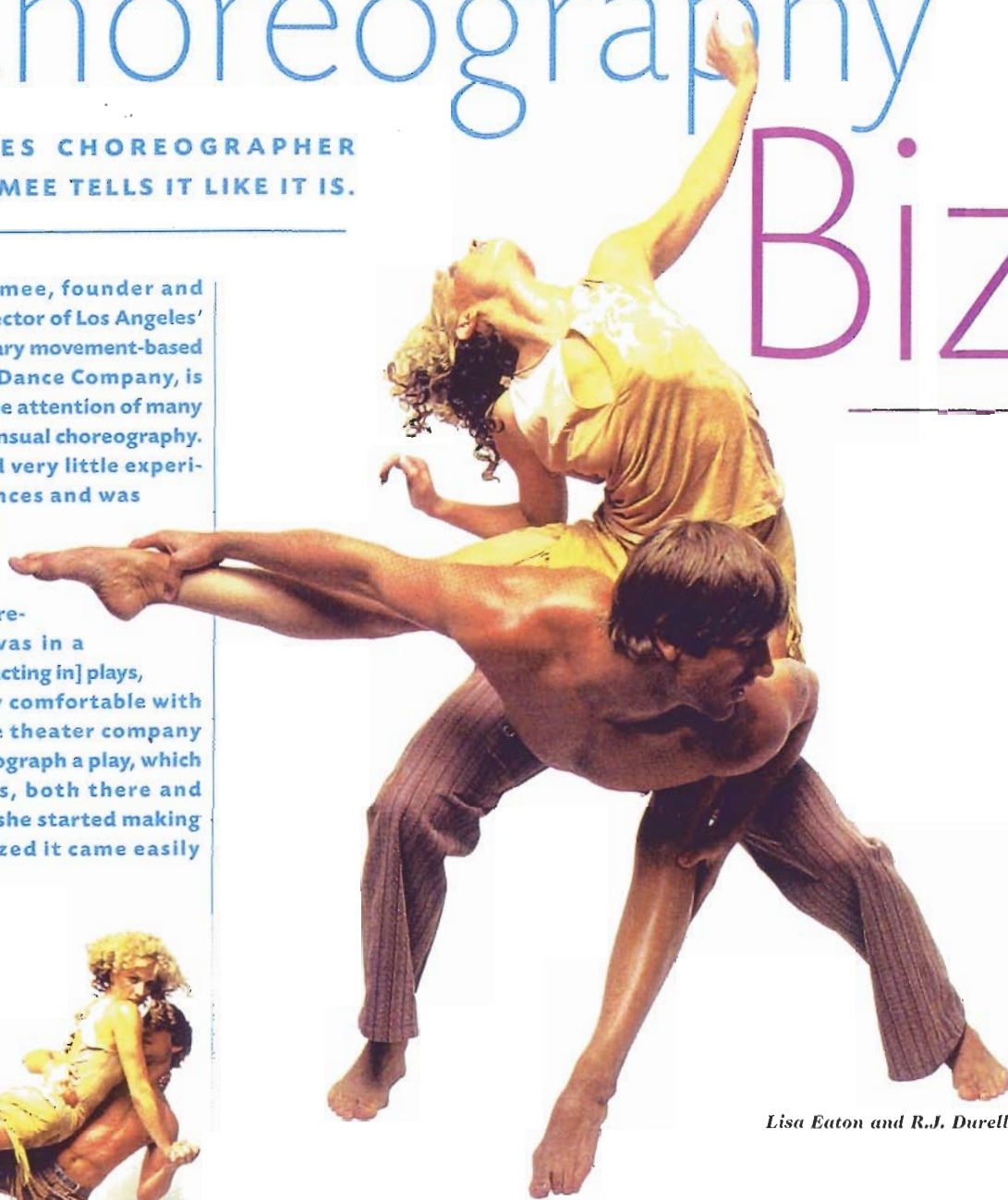
LOS ANGELES CHOREOGRAPHER
KITTY MCNAMEE TELLS IT LIKE IT IS.

Kitty McNamee, founder and artistic director of Los Angeles' contemporary movement-based Hysterica Dance Company, is grabbing the attention of many for her exciting, sensual choreography. McNamee had had very little experience creating dances and was known primarily as a dancer when she stumbled upon her first choreography gig. "I was in a theater company [acting in] plays, but I wasn't really comfortable with it," she says. "The theater company asked me to choreograph a play, which led to more plays, both there and elsewhere." Once she started making dances, she realized it came easily to her.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL HORTA



Lisa Eaton and R.J. Durell



Lisa Eaton and R.J. Durell

WORKIN' IT

Through her theater connections, McNamee got more commercial choreography gigs. "One of the people I met in the theater was shooting a movie and hired me to choreograph it," she says. Soon she was choreographing TV specials, setting movement for movie stars such as Lily Tomlin and choreographing benefit shows.

Even though McNamee was finding chore-

ography jobs, getting established was a difficult process. "It was hard to break in and get the big jobs," she says. While commercial work can be lucrative, McNamee found it creatively stifling. "In a commercial setting I have to water down what I'm doing to serve the director or the piece and minimize my creative contribution," she explains.

This feeling of being repressed inspired

McNamee to go back to her first love, concert dance. "I wasn't satisfied waiting for someone to give me a gig. I had so much I wanted to express, so I gave myself the power to work when I wanted. It gave both me and my dancers an outlet."

Her journey to artistic director started with baby steps in shows that consisted of collaborative works by different choreographers. "We would just show up and dance. At that point, the risk was minimal," she says. "And that way I could figure out what I wanted to say through my dance and how I wanted to say it."

Erin Giraud



Ryan Heffington and Erin Giraud



RISK-TAKER

The days of offering one piece in a collection of many were McNamee's training ground. Now she performs evening-length works at large, prestigious venues, works with a publicist and has landed an agent. Producing contemporary concert dance in L.A. can be an uphill battle because of the strong commercial dance scene, but McNamee manages to keep ascending. She enjoys participating in benefit shows for the both the charity work and as an avenue for others to see her company. And

it's through others fortuitously seeing her work that McNamee booked her agent. She also acquired a grant to help fund *Hysterica* and got L.A.'s EDGE Performing Arts Center to donate rehearsal space.

But McNamee's success hasn't come from her efforts alone. She acknowledges her dancers as the backbone of her creations. Each member is technically strong with dynamic onstage

personalities. R.J. Durell, who has trained with American Ballet Theatre and toured with Cher, says, "I enjoy dancing for *Hysterica* because it creates a balance for me. It keeps me artistically satisfied and technically challenged."

Staying true to your own voice is high on McNamee's list of success secrets. "People [used to] see my work and ask, 'What is that?' and I would have to say, 'That's dance!'" **DS**

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