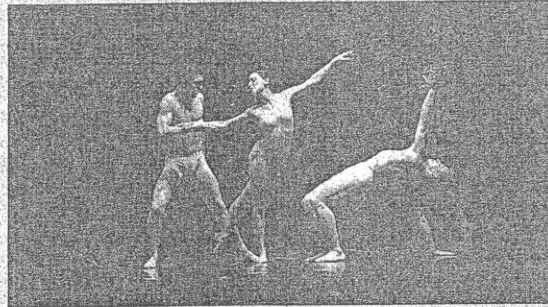


Light/The Holocaust & Humanity Project

Bass Concert Hall, April 1

No swastikas. No jackboots. No guns. No ghettos. No boxcars. No barbed wire. No showers. None of the images we have come to associate with the Holocaust were anywhere to be seen in Ballet Austin's *Light/The Holocaust & Humanity Project*. And yet this new ballet by Stephen Mills still managed to convey a sense of the profound suffering and devastation of those who experienced that dark stain in human history. The key was Mills' translation of the familiar acts and symbols of the event into poetic equivalents, visuals and movements in which the brutal treatment of the Nazis' victims and their torment is distilled into some theatrical essence, as when the corps of dancers were isolated in small rectangles of light out of which they could not move and in which they stripped to their underwear. Eventually, all of them moved into a single cramped rectangle of light, leaving more than a dozen pools of light behind, empty



save for the small clump of clothing in each. We didn't see the ghettos, the trains to the camps, or the empty homes of the innocents herded from them, but we *felt* them, felt the humiliation of the violated in the dancers' undressing, the vulnerability in their nakedness, the distress and dread in the crush of bodies writhing in the confined space. The choreography was often spare, stark, as were the settings by Christopher McCollum and the lighting by Tony Tucci, but the bareness in no way diminished the power of the moment. If

anything, it amplified it, offering us distilled experience, primal emotion.

Mills did not give us only the despair of the Holocaust. Taking his cue from those who survived the devastation, he rounded it with life. He opened with a striking duet at the foot of the Tree of Life, Margot Brown and Jim Stein, appearing all but naked, as if they were Eden's first couple, reveling in their physicality, the sensuality of life. They were followed by the company in street clothes taking the stage with the exuberance of youth and the unified spirit of community and family. This gave way to the bleak sequences mentioned above, but this was followed by dances on the far side of that event, dances which acknowledged pain and loss but in which the dancers came together again, offering one another support and solace and hope. Mills' sense of this was nowhere clearer than in the figure of a woman, portrayed by Karen Kuykendall, who appeared periodically to offer comfort to a younger woman who suffered through the event. As she reached out to Allisyn Paino, who communicated such pain in Friday night's performance, you could sense the light spreading from the future to the past, a light guiding her to life beyond the tragedy and sorrow, a light to the rest of the world.

— Robert Faies