

Critic's Notebook

Dance, Music and Stage, Triply Complex Mating

By JACK ANDERSON

BY a fascinating coincidence, during the week that Rina Schenfeld, an Israeli modern dancer, offered a concert of solo dances in the Lepercq Space of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, "Victory Over the Sun" was at the Academy's Carey Playhouse. Both events implied something about man's relationship to the environment, and each came to a different conclusion.

The revival of "Victory Over the Sun," the Russian Cubo-Futurist opera of 1913, was one of the curiosities of the academy's Next Wave festival. Actually, it was not an opera at all, but a spectacle that prefigured contemporary multimedia experiments. Yet, although it was theatrically sophisticated, some of the philosophy it expounded seemed naive.

A visionary fable with text by Aleksei Kruchenykh and music by Mikhail Mathushin, it depicted the conquest of the sun by a band of revolutionaries, their victory symbolizing a triumph over nature, time and ordinary reality. What remained was a totally mechanized manmade utopia. The revival's reproduction of Kazimir Malevich's original designs of 1913 and the jerky movement devised by Robert Benedetti and Larry A. Attaway, the director and choreographer of the Brooklyn version, made characters resemble robots or cogs and pistons of a cosmic machine. Nature, the work suggested, must be subdued or destroyed.

Given today's ecological concerns, that seems a cavalier attitude to take toward nature. Similarly, in this nuclear age, one can only shudder to hear the revolutionaries proclaim, "The world will die, but we will live forever!" Of course, all this is allegorical, and one revolutionary does say, "Our light is within." Still, I wonder whether any of these revolutionaries would think of praying "Lead, kindly light."

Miss Schenfeld often looked kindly upon her environment in solos with such names as "Threads," "Silk" and "Sticks" that involved the manipulation of objects. In "Sticks" she made herself part of a continually changing series of designs by holding and bending pliable sticks, and the forms the sticks assumed ranged from purely geometrical figures to shapes resembling fish, hearts, flowers, fountains and stalks of grain. She let a piece of fabric swirl about her in "Silk" and, in one striking sequence, it became, first, a shroud in which she was buried, then the swaddling clothes from which she emerged reborn.

At times, she dominated the objects; at other times, she let them dominate her. More often, however, she was in harmony with them. And, always, she appeared to be carrying on a choreographic dialogue with the objects and the space around her.

I think I'd rather live in the world of Miss Schenfeld's dances than in the utopia of "Victory Over the Sun."...



Isacov Agor

Rina Schenfeld dancing at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.