

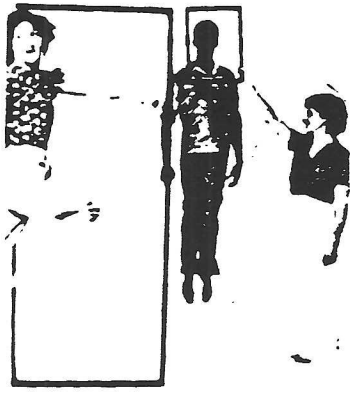
DANCE DIARY

By Jennie Schulman

Martha Bowers' Dance/Theatre Etc.

Many a catchy name has been conceived by contemporary dance companies. In too many instances, however, they turn out to be mere come-ons. The name *Martha Bowers Dance/Theatre/Etcetera* seemed quite fitting, though, judging from the varied program Ms. Bowers' company presented at the Pineapple Studios theatre called *The Field*.

Blue Heaven seemed to be an eternal triangle but with a different slant. Two women are battling over one man. One seems to be a child intent on retaining all her father's love to the exclusion of any other woman in his life. The other woman could be his inamorata or even his wife, who struggles to no avail for his love—for the child-like creature is relentlessly possessive and evil.



Members of Martha Bowers' Dance/Theatre/Etcetera.

Linda Rivera

Ms. Bowers has conceived powerful choreography in her dance drama, some of it notably acrobatic for the trio involved: Florence Benevento, Clare Maxwell and Scot Willingham. The child is the cause of some real knock-about tactics. Also, her manner of gliding out of the other woman's attempts to embrace and pacify her were among *Blue Heaven's* most galvanizing moments. At the conclusion of the dance there are no winners. The three fall back in utter despair, worn out by their efforts to combat a hopeless situation.

In *Martial Dances*, utilizing Mozart's *German Dances* and music by Scott Lehrer as accompaniment, Martha Bowers seemed to juxtapose martial artists against dancers in a classical mood. This worked where martial artists Priscilla Gilmore, Jacqueline Madden, Betty Rothstein and Maggie Rush were concerned. They were exhilarating in their virtuoso displays of Karate, Tai Chi Chuan and Kung Fu. For their opposites, while Ms. Bowers did not actually utilize ballet per se, she did employ tutus and tights and a sort of classical aura.

The latter hardly registered, as some of the dancers seemed downright klutzy. Perhaps this was the choreographer's intention. Quite possibly she meant to convey that the classical martial arts of the Orient are more than a match for Western dance. Whatever her intentions, the one art form compared to the other was like a lush Oriental banquet juxtaposed with hamburger and fries. Given a choice, who wouldn't choose the former?

Inspired by the poetry of Thomas Moore, Martha Bowers created *In Calm Recline*. She brought in Muriel Manings, a dancer prominent in contemporary dance companies of the '40s, '50s and '60s, as guest artist to portray an elderly woman recalling life's vicissitudes as well as its glories. Ms. Manings is currently dance coordinator at Queensborough Community College. Under the circumstances, quite understandably, Ms. Manings contributions were minimal. But dancers Ron Dabney, Suchi Branfman, Ms. Bowers herself and Scot Willingham succeeded in illuminating the lyrics of the great Irish poet.

We were particularly charmed by a duo performed by Ron Dabney and Scot Willingham which alternated between violence and tenderness, in many ways embodying the spirit of Ireland.

The set by Charles Flickinger and Michael Davis, consisting of windows with imprinted circles of colored glass, added a sort of contemporary stained glass window effect which served as a most effective background.

Currently, Martha Bowers is a teaching artist for the Lincoln Center Institute and will be traveling to Ireland in May to direct a project based on the life of St. Brigitte. Judging from the strong program realized here, she is certain to be a favored cultural ambassador.