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ENTERTAINMENT

DANCE REVIEW

A Vast Field of Movement

MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY. "Field and Figures" (New York City premiere). "Rainforest," "Grange Eve." all choreographed by Merce Cunningham. Tuesday night at City Center. Varied repertory through Sunday.

By Janice Berman

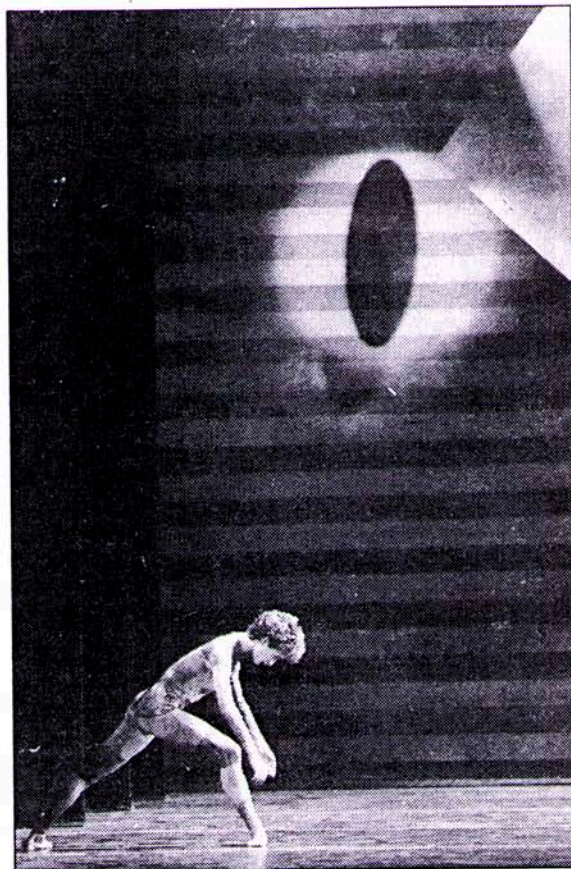
THERE'S JUST ABOUT nothing missing from Merce Cunningham's stunning "Field and Figures," which had its premiere Tuesday night. It has every member of the company (except for Cunningham himself), an appropriately inscrutable vocal and electronic score by Ivan Tcherepnin, and one of the most beautiful sets of the season, designed and lit by Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzler.

The work, commissioned by the Walker Art Center of Minneapolis and the Cunningham Foundation, has a certain otherworldly aura. A golden cut-out moon not only whirls and casts a shadow that looks as though it's in eclipse, but also seems to be hovering over the audience. Perhaps that effect is caused by the broad grey-green horizontal striping of the backdrop. At one side of the stage are three vertical red reeds that move gently. The stripes and reeds are echoed on some of the dancers' leotards, which also boast reflective specks of blue.

There's no plot here — per Cunningham dicta, all is random — but the set almost suggests one, as do the few words that emerge from the score, which is titled "The Creative Act — Heterophonies on a text of Marcel Duchamp." The dictionary says that heterophony is the independent variation on a single melody by two or more voices. The voices pop out of speakers at opposite ends of the theater and they're saying things like "osmosis" in between far more peculiar sounds.

The title "Field and Figures" refers not only to the striped background and the dancers before it, but to the field of movement as well.

An interesting, interdependent grouping of relatively still figures can be broken by the interspersal of a chain of figures, or perhaps a single figure, in an unusual motif. Some dancers come romping across the stage, one arm scooping, feet in an antic run. Others fill the stage with grand jetes; in a sense, that series of moves in itself might be said to be setting up another field. What we're watching here



Newsday / Erica Berger

A scene from 'Fields and Figures'

is richly complex, its delight intensified tremendously by the competence of the dancers.

As has been increasingly the case with Cunningham works in recent years, there's a strong temptation to suspect an interlock between design and music and choreography. What else can one think when one of the dancers, Victoria Finlayson, is borne in a cruciform pose by two of the male dancers and the angle of her body seems to echo the angle of the red reeds? Curiouser and curiouser. / ■