

# NOTICE SHOULD BE PAID



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**by BRENDA DIXON GOTTSCHILD**

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LEAH STEIN DANCE COMPANY

PAINTED BRIDE ART CENTER PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

DECEMBER 7-9, 2000

Leah Stein is always lovely to watch: long, lissome, reminiscent of a young Trisha Brown, but quieter and more contemplative. Unlike much of what passes for good dance these days, Stein's choreography is not gimmicky, wordy or showy--it's all about movement. She has built a reputation on the immediacy of tactile contact, the sensitivity of dancer to dancer, and on working in site-specific outdoor environments--parks, woods, canals, empty lots.

She opened her fine program of new works dancing a solo. *Triptych* begins in silence, establishing movement as the first cause and reason for being, and this pattern occurs in each of the evening's works. A light mood and gentle, almost meditative humor are other keystones of Stein's release technique, contact improvisation-inspired choreography. *Raw Footage* was danced on opening night by Heather Dougherty (substituting for the injured Roko Kawai), Josie Smith and Stein. In a sublime second movement, Smith--prone on the floor of the nearly black stage--serenely rolls downstage, her body dissected by Troy Martin O'Shia's slatted lighting design that cuts the darkness. Then Dougherty unhurriedly enters, carrying Stein upside down on her back so that Stein's pale, long legs and pointed feet extend above Dougherty's head like oversized antlers. Innovative body imagery creates mood and replaces narrative in these dances.

Also in the company are Toshi Makihara and David Forlano, talented composer-performers who have worked with Philly's finest dancers over the past decade. They are fabulous in *Dua Dua* (an improvisation created and performed by Stein, Kawai, Makihara and Forlano), bringing to the stage their dancing energy in musician bodies. They make "music" from plastics, pipes, wheels and other found objects. The two dancers devise especially ingenious ways to resonate this soundscape with their movement.

*Cirque*, commissioned by the Painted Bride center, was choreographed for nine performers, two specifically--Darla Stanley and Leslie Dworkin. The piece emanates a great sense of care. Silence and space are as important as activity and sound. Jumps land in soft, deep squats; slides on the floor are smooth and sustained; runs are lightfooted. Running in circles is an organizing factor that generates energy. The atmosphere is charged by these alert, nimble, tactile movers. Nothing is gratuitous or decorative. Near the end, as the dancers lie face down on the floor, Forlano and Makihara stride across the

stage, playing single notes on the percussive instruments that are suspended from the ceiling. It's a lovely moment.

Stein has brought a special presence to Philadelphia dance culture since the late 1980s, forming her own company in 1997. The greater dance community should take notice.

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