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DANCE REVIEW

No Toe Shoes, but Goofy Innocence and Quiet Sensuality

By JOHN ROCKWELL

By now, everyone who is interested in dance or even mildly curious about dance knows the drill: six evenings, five companies or artists per evening, \$10 a ticket anywhere in the 2,750-seat City Center. It's Fall for Dance, which made a big splash in its debut run last year and now seems to have become something of a marker at the outset of a new season of dance.

Tuesday's opening was predictably eclectic, although, despite the

Fall for Dance City Center

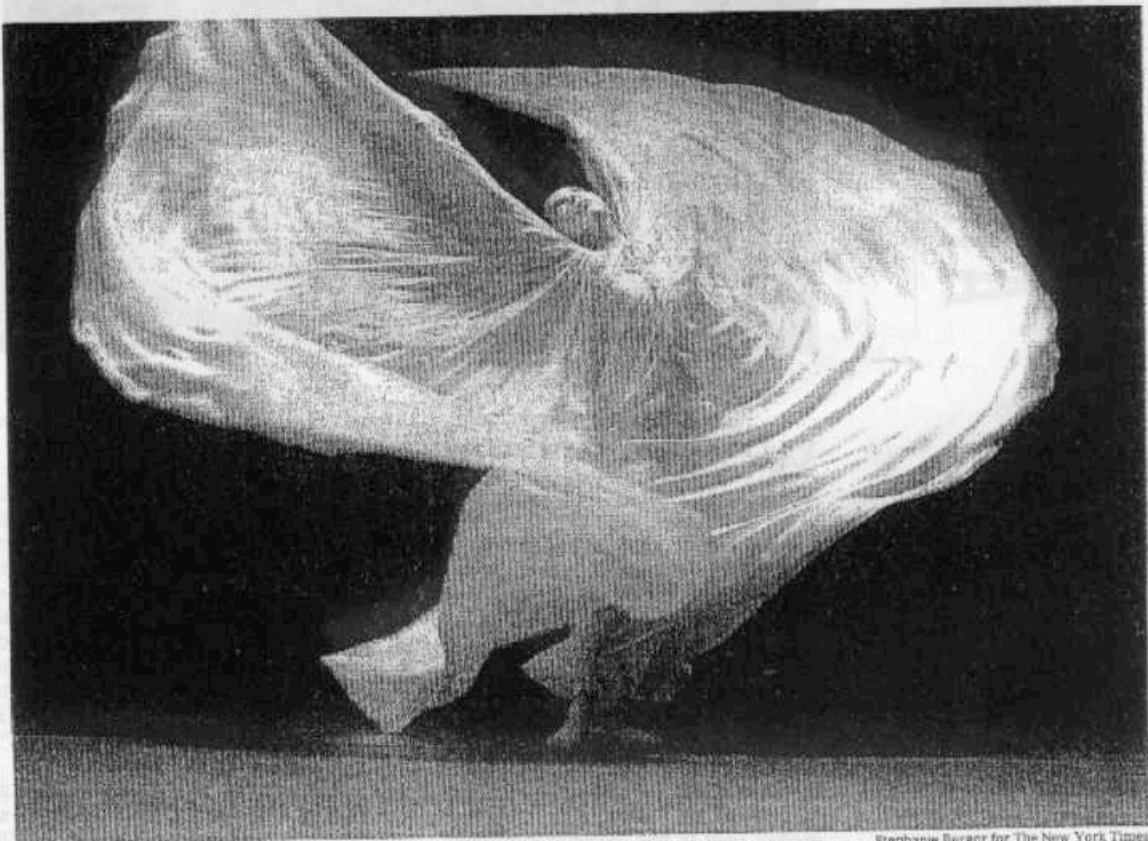
presence of the Ballet de l'Opéra National de Lyon, there were no toe shoes. But this relatively short Fall for Dance program — 90 minutes and out — was predictably exciting, too.

This kind of sampler can be judged as an agglomeration of separate performances or as a whole, in which case criteria of pacing and contrast come into play. With the longest piece on Tuesday's program only 20 minutes, you can't come to any conclusions about any one company. Quick hits are the order of the day.

This was especially true of the opening segment, by the New Zealand male modern-dance sextet Black Grace. The men hummed and chanted and rocked and leapt about in a piece called "Minol," inspired by Samoan dance. But this was only the slightest hint of what Black Grace can do. For more of Neil Ieremia's choreography, you'll have to go to the New Victory Theater through Oct. 9.

Bill Irwin, with his rubbery Joe E. Brown face and vaudevillian charm, would make a piquant contrast with anyone. (His appearance was also a sharp contrast with his recent Tony-

Fall for Dance continues through Sunday at the New York City Center, 131 West 55th Street, (212) 581-1212; www.nycitycenter.org.



Stephanie Berger for The New York Times

Jody Sperling in "Dance of the Elements," which was excerpted as part of Fall for Dance on Tuesday.

winning run in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?") "Untitled," juxtaposing his loose-limbed shuffling and a string of one-liners with a mind of their own on a television monitor, was full of personality and sweetness.

But the greatest dramatic contrast of the night, and a real coup de théâtre, came with the transition from Mr. Irwin to the Lyon company, from goofy innocence to dark, rigorous sensuality.

The company was ably represented by two of its dancers, Dorothee Delabie and Amandine François. They have absolutely beautiful bodies, which needs mentioning because they appeared in William Forsythe's "Duo" in sheer tops and black shorts. Austerely formal, the dance played against Thom Willems's uncharac-

teristically hushed music: distant piano with an occasional daub of strings, recorded or synthesized. The music was so quiet you could hear the dancers' steadily purposeful breathing. The movements were sometimes identical, sometimes mirror images, sometimes in counterpoint. The effect was grave, serious and erotic.

After the intermission, Jody Sperling came on for two portions of her "Dance of the Elements." This is one of her tributes to the pioneering modern dancer Loie Fuller, who, before Isadora Duncan, mesmerized audiences with her masterly deployment of rippling fabrics. Michelle Ferranti designed a costume made of 80 yards of white silk. With two long sleeves extended by pointers in each hand to make angel wings, Ms. Sperling

caused the fabric — lighted blue for "Water" and red for "Fire" — to shimmer and twirl and undulate. Whether a whole evening of such ripplings could sustain interest, I know not. For a sampler, it was perfect.

The program ended with Philladanco, which has just completed a run at the Joyce Theater. Its offering, Ronald K. Brown's "Gate Keepers," supposedly portrays six "soldiers walking toward heaven," according to the program. It looked like a seamless blend of militaristic movement and positions ("at ease," especially), fashion vogueing and African tribal dance. Wunmi Olaiya's insistent dance-club music sustained a steady energy. The effect, for all the supposed intimations of on high, was as disturbing as it was compelling.