

Yanira Castro + Company dances the drama and horror of catastrophe in *Beacon*, an off-site Dance Theater Workshop production staged at the Brooklyn Lyceum. I saw the final performance on the bitter cold January 23 evening after the blizzard.

In Castro's efforts to adapt the Lyceum for *Beacon*, she focused largely on engineering the viewing conditions. The former public bathhouse is being used as a theater for music, comedy and dance. Roderick Murray installed three sections of bleachers Castro calls "Witness boxes." Though the choreographer intends for us to experience the dance alone, separating us from companions with separate doors to the right and left, the crowded bleachers actually create an almost uncomfortable intimacy with fellow theatergoers. But a sense of isolation at the theater is antithetical. I think that's why some of us go. Loneliness is all too common.

Plexiglass windows surrounding us obscure the full view at first. But a spotlight on Pamela Vail reveals intense concentrated movement. Through her gauzy robe we can intimate her nakedness. She's statuesque, evoking classical Greece. Don Siegler's electronic-acoustic score blows a cold sounding wind on the buff Vail. A chorus of Olson, Nancy Ellis, and Marya Wethers wear Albert Sakhai's long black form-fitting coats with tails that reiterate floppy moves. They zipper up the front—and unzipped to reveal gray, slightly tattered organly undergarments. Dark curls are piled on each dancer's heads and this odd, uncanny sameness somehow foreshadows atrocity.

Olson screams and the three, in equine poses or runs, gnash their teeth or drop their jaws. Reaching over an extended leg, Olson's supporting leg is

solid and any instability is expressed in her shivering hands. The punishing pose conveys a fearsomeness that does not include fear for the dancer's strength or safety. In this way, Castro is able to charge her pure movement with emotion.

Without warning, the Plexiglass panel between the witness box and the performing area crashes away. We're suddenly face to face with the near nude and the contagious anxiety. Confused by the conflation of references—ancient Greek and contemporary tragedies, and noir films—we respond only to the moving bodies and not necessarily to the sources of inspiration. At times the dancers stand at the foot of the stage as if facing our judgment. Vail drops her robe and her head, then raises herself up, extending an arm. Her clenched fingers are more anxious and angry

than powerful. "Listen," Olson warns us in a whisper at one of the strategically placed microphones, which the dancers relate to with exceptional grace and precision.

The element of surprise is part of *Beacon* and works in concert with the charged emotions and beautiful formations. It's not really a 'beacon of hope' and left me neither uplifted nor released. But the aftershocks of the short (40 minute) piece proved important elements. I felt privileged to be part of the community that saw *Beacon*. Even empowered.

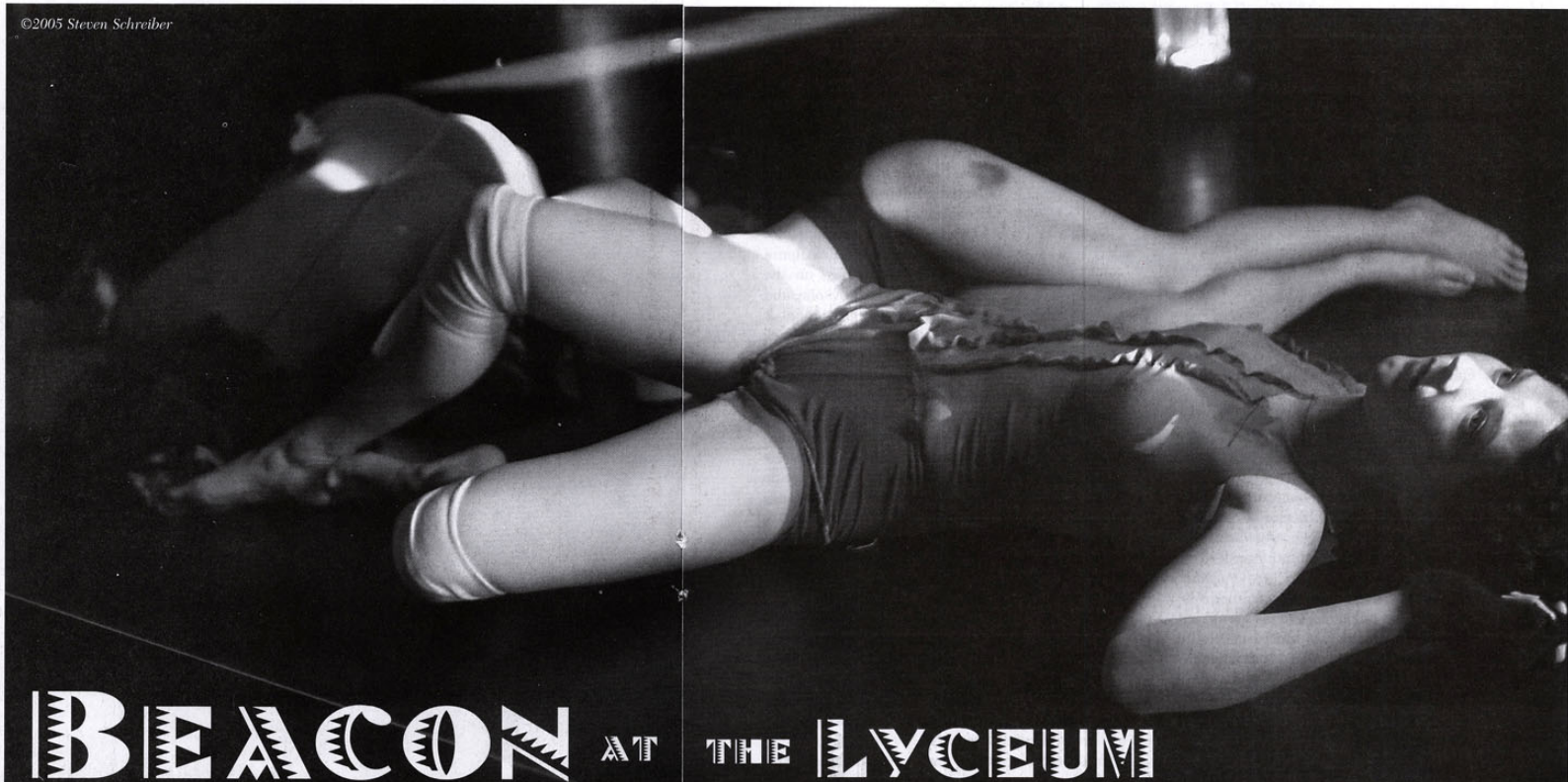
Naturally, lighting has a prominent role in materializing the concept. Murray's succinct solutions add to the stark and chilling atmosphere. And a startling emotive effect is achieved when his edging of glaring fluorescents cut on, lighting the way for a climactic

incident, its horror expressed in the trio of women running open-mouthed. The black coat tails flapping trip them up. Nancy Ellis is caught between Wethers and Olson who drag her and finally lop a substantial lock of her curls, which they leave on the floor like a discarded souvenir.

The choreography, with its visually evocative formations and precisely combined stage elements, creates a sort of ghastly theater of degradation not unlike the awful scenes replayed on the nightly news. The statuesque formations break up and Olson and Wethers sit against a wall panel with legs kicked out, looking up as if for salvation. It's an understatedly conclusive ending. And *Beacon* is a prayer amidst wartime atrocities and tsunami devastation. [♫]

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BEACON AT THE LYCEUM