

Dance: Pooh Kaye's 'Wild-Fields' in Durham

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Special to The New York Times

DURHAM, N.C., July 11 — The American Dance Festival has had a history of supporting experimental dance, starting with the founding of the Bennington College Summer School of Dance by Martha Hill, in 1934, to which the festival traces its beginnings. The original school and performing program gave four modern-dance pioneers — Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman — a place and time to work, with students and their own dancers, on new choreography.

Today's festival performs a similar function with its Young Choreographers and Composers in Residence Program. And the heart of the festival has been its adventurous support of new work like that presented on Wednesday at the Reynolds Theater at Duke University, where the festival is held.

Pooh Kaye is coming into her own these days as an exponent of new dance in New York. Working with an anarchic, "wild-child" persona, she has created dances in which she and her company, Eccentric Motions, thrash, crash and dive through space,

even chewing on wood timbers in one potent piece.

In "Wild-fields," a festival collaboration with Michael Kosch, who composed the score, Miss Kaye takes a great leap forward in the evolution of a distinctive movement style, crystallizing intense, wayward energy and upended locomotion in a pure-dance piece that doesn't draw on personality or props but fills the stage with stark, crisp patterns executed with playful insouciance.

A game for six women, "Wild-fields" uses the floor to propel its dancers into tumbles, catches, abrupt bursts of flight and, most characteristically, forward motion on all fours. The dancers gather like clotted notes on a page of music, laughing and puffing occasionally, then disperse into lines of bodies that cut boldly across the stage space. There are moments of arresting dramatic tension: a pause before a touch or topple; the reflective, articulate wave of five fingers.

Altogether, "Wild-fields" is a tightly designed, extremely accomplished work, well danced by Miss Kaye, Claire Bernard, Amy Finkel, Ginger Gillespie, Jennifer Monson and Sanghi Wagner.

The arbitrariness of "Wild-fields"

has its own inherent logic. Stephanie Skura's "Climbing the Waltz" just looks arbitrary. The cute title gives the genre away, though Frank McCarty's score does include a snatch or two of waltz music, as well as a few moments that promise much in their wacky humor before they are abruptly silenced.

A popular choreographer and performance-artist in New York, Miss Skura has assembled laundry-line dance here, predicated on the assumption that incongruity is of automatic interest. The chic items on display on this laundry line include frequent blackouts, wandering musicians, meandering chit-chat, broken runs and feints, and sudden entrances and exits. It's all almost a waste of Fred Holland, Lisa Kraus, Yvonne Meier, a particularly gifted dancer, and Miss Skura, four performers whose worth is suggested tantalizingly in snatches of solos and duets.

"Forty Arms, Twenty Necks, One Wreathing," choreographed by Mark Morris to a score by Herschel Garfein, is a dark provocative group work in which Mr. Morris chose to use 16 students from the festival classes, in the Bennington tradition, as well as four good soloists from his

own company. "Forty Arms" may be taken as powerful, if slightly too long, dance full of sharp visual imagery, created by stretched and crooked limbs and the framing, churning stage patterns that occur with the juxtaposition and mingling of soloists and chorus. More interestingly, the new dance can be seen as Mr. Morris's look back at Bennington.

The student group's held poses here are strikingly reminiscent of the heroic gestures and groupings caught in photographs from Bennington's first years. The fact of four soloists calls to mind the first four Bennington choreographers, though only Mr. Morris's solo summons up their work. And if an overall look of pure geometrics owes much to post-modernist dance, a last line of four bodies, planted into the floor with fists giving weighted arms their slow momentum, evokes the powerful, earth-borne commitment that distinguished the Bennington four.

"Forty Arms" needs work. It now lacks focus. But it is a rich and even poignant addition to Mr. Morris's and the festival's repertoire of new work.

The soloists were Erin Matthiesen, Guillermo Resto, Penny Hutchinson and Mr. Morris. Mark Litvin's strong lighting designs added much to this memorable program.