

Moving Pictures

Small Towns/Big Dreams has a cinematic feel to it

By Paula Clements

Small Towns/Big Dreams: Directed and designed by Anne Bogart, choreographed and performed by Belinda Mello, Jill Esterson, Brian Jucha, Susan Milani and Rachel Wineberg. At Thornes Market, Aug. 17.

Anne Bogart likes to work fast. She explains that "these dangerous times require urgent expression and the motivation to keep putting out work." This month, she had two different performances going on the same week; both were directed by her, but one was a dance and the other a play. Werner Fassbinder, the German filmmaker, also liked to work fast, producing 40 films in little more than a decade—he is one of Anne Bogart's favorite artists and most important influences. After learning of Fassbinder's death in June, she decided to dedicate the next two years of work to his memory.

The dance, "Small Town/Big Dreams," is loosely based on one of Fassbinder's early, low-budget, black-and-white films called *Katzelmacher* in which a group of people do little but sit around in a small town. A Greek immigrant arrives, posing an imagined



Dance for a small town, designed by Anne Bogart, created and performed by Belinda Mello, Jill Esterson, Brian Jucha, Susan Milani and Rachel Wineberg. (Peter Peirce photo)

threat to the local men, who think he will try to seduce the women. But this never happens. The film mostly shows the townspeople walking, talking, passing the time of day. Likewise in "Small Town/Big Dreams" nothing much seems to happen, but by the end you've seen quite a bit.

"Small Town/Big Dreams" is a dance

designed by Anne Bogart with the movement created and performed by Belinda Mello, Jill Esterson, Brian Jucha, Susan Milani and Rachel Wineberg. Bogart says that when she works on plays it always feels like she's making dances, but this is the first time she's worked exclusively with dancers. The group subtitles their piece, "A Live Film Com-

position in Black and White."

The dance space in Thornes Market was set up with two flats spread apart and standing a couple of feet in front of, and parallel to the back wall. This long, narrow strip of space created between the flats resembled a movie screen. Because of such limited space there was a sense that every movement should be necessary, no action wasted. A solitary dancer tended to move very little but whenever he or she was joined by others, an interweaving of movement was generated. The interactions between the dancers followed very clear rhythms, somewhat like the back-and-forth responses and interjections of a heated conversation. One part suggested a silent movie, partly because the lights were flickering like an old projector, but also because the movement seemed sped-up in an absurdly humorous way.

Though the piece was divided into a number of sections, there was an overall continuity that broke only with a lighting change or the interjection of music. In the beginning, the five performers were scattered in front of the wall, hardly moving. All they seemed to be doing was waiting, but that in itself was fascinating to watch. People seem to reveal the most with the smallest movements. Those little shrugs, twitches or head tilts of everyday become a mysteriously dramatic language in the context of a performance. When someone shifts her gaze, you can see that something has shifted in her mind as well.

In a later sequence the audience was drawn into the performance in a different way. Three people walked slowly, each with head lowered and one hand covering an eye. They quietly recited words, some of which were audible: Prospect St. . . . Bridge St. . . . South St. . . . Lyman Rd. . . . their movement and their steady remembering was quite beautiful and

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from Page 12)

tempted the viewer to map out imaginary routes along the familiar sounding Northampton street names. The scene ended abruptly when the three disappeared behind the flats.

Throughout "Small Town/Big Dreams," there were many reminders of, and references to the real world of streets and towns. In one part, Susan Milani and Rachel Wineberg were sitting on a "street-side" bench like two young best friends who are masters of distending time. One minute they were bored and distracted, emitting long sighs. Time seemed to stand still for them. The next minute they were engaged in a feverish contest to put their shoes on in unison fashion. Time accelerated to keep up with their enthusiasm.

Ironically enough, the murkiest parts of the dance were the most dancelike. From the outset, the emphasis was on subtle motions, gestures and facial expressions, and these generally were clearest. Despite, or perhaps because of the subtleties of the choreography, the work as a whole possesses an openness that makes the dance available to the audience. The performers, too, have an openness about them that reveals something of their personalities. Bogart herself rarely performs in the works she designs or directs, and instead sees herself as "the ultimate audience" of her work. But she also seems more than willing to share that role. In "Small Town/Big Dreams," a different kind of space appears in front of the viewer, inviting personal, individual associations and visions.

Once when Fassbinder was asked about his prodigious output he said somewhat cryptically, "I make films in order to stop wars from happening." Anne Bogart's interest in "urgent expression" seems connected to attaining openness in both performances and the world outside. Perhaps it is in this vein that her work is illuminated by Fassbinder's remark. □