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A Nightmare in Search of Six Characters

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Mark Dendy has moved from go-for-broke physicality to more carefully considered-seeming choreography and on to acting in his long, rich career in dance. His "Dream Analysis," seen in January at the Joyce Theater, tied those threads together with daring sleight-of-hand. In the full-evening piece, which reopened on Thursday night for a three-week run at Dance Theater Workshop, a young gay dancer and his psychotherapist, who is in drag, talked their way through a nightmare inhabited by two Martha Grahams, two Vaslav Nijinskys, Judy Garland, a demented Southern mother, an even nuttier aunt, the dancer himself, two sadistic dance teachers and characters from ballets Nijinsky created or performed in. Astonishingly, they are all played by a cast of six.

"Dream Analysis" had audiences cheering and critics polishing superlatives. But Mr. Dendy was reportedly dissatisfied with the piece and has reworked it. Much remains of the first version, including several unforgettable images. The two Marthas still echo each other from either side of a dressing-room mirror. Later, the two Nijinskys pierce the mirror frame in silent conversation. The stage is often a maelstrom of darting, racing, striding icons and eccentric mortals. And Mr. Dendy sows his script with telling comments by Graham and pathetic observations culled from the mad Nijinsky's diaries.

Though he calls "Dream Analysis" a "dance musical," it has moved closer to a dramatic play and is both more and less compelling.

There are now the seeds of a more direct (and talkier) analysis of gay life in America and the arts of psychotherapy and the dance in this phantasmagoric comic spectacle. A poignant, chilling monologue occurs about two-thirds of the way through, turning "Dream Analysis" on its head and setting it off on a more solemn and affecting course.

"I wish I had something," the dancer Eric Henley, played by David Drake, says achingly of his failed life. Suddenly, his relationship with the therapist becomes a life-and-death battle rather than a talk fest. And Henley becomes a genuinely tragic, though hopeful, creation.

Mr. Drake, whose theater credits include the writing and performing of "The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me," moves very well but is a little too sophisticated and mature to be entirely believable as a teen-ager. He is heart-rending, however, as the wiser, sadder Henley. The therapist and crazy Aunt Winnifred, both played by Bobby Pearce, are more

demure and motherly than before. Slipping into Garland routines, Mr. Pearce is most believable as Dorothy, though sadly he never gets to sing "Over the Rainbow."

Lawrence Keigwin is pure impish animal vitality as a high-energy Nijinsky. Playing the Priestess's Reflection, Richard Move looks more like the dancer Janet Eilber than like Graham, but he is a comically adroit and graceful presence throughout. Antonio Ramos slips in and out of a variety of roles like a small, furry wolf.

Ultimately, however, this is Mr. Dendy's show. For all the laughs, his sendup of Graham and dance in general is highly informed and tenderly idealistic. He becomes Graham, Nijinsky and the crazed mother in acting so acute one wishes at times that he played all the roles. And although the program credits list several collaborators, Mr. Dendy's genius is clear in his decision to end "Dream Analysis" with a bounding, nuzzling pure-dance duet for the Nijinskys. Exquisite in concept and performance, with Mr. Dendy and Mr. Keigwin a perfectly matched pair in terms of size and mischievousness, the duet clears the palate and closes the evening on a note of healing repose.

"Dream Analysis" was written by Mr. Dendy with Dr. Ronald L. Vereen and the performers, with Mr. Dendy and Kevin Malony co-directing. It was choreographed in collaboration with Mr. Keigwin, Mr. Move, Lisa Dalton and Mr. Ramos. The lighting is by Kevin Adams, with sets by Jeffrey Wallach, wigs by Stanley Tines and costumes by Liz Prince, Kitty Boots, Connie Fleming and Pilar Limosner. The sound design, a fluid weaving of popular and concert music, is by Brett Jarvis.