

They've Got Rhythm

June Blooms: Tribeca to Chelsea to Lincoln Center

By Deborah Jowitz

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On MTV, singers purr and snarl their sexuality. Nothing abashes them; even damaged by love, they expect—no, deserve—our desire. Nicholas Leichter borrows that confrontational stance, just as he flirts with street dance and hip-hop bravado, but he subverts them all with questions about racial and cultural stereotypes.

In solos like his new B.A.P. (Black American Psycho), he seems to be shattering—struggling to define his image even as he demolishes it. When Mary J. Blige starts to wail, Leichter jerks on the floor like a swatted bug. His gestures smack and snatch at air; his exaggerated facial expressions rearrange themselves every second. "I take what I want" wars with "Fuck it all!" Recostumed onstage by a bored Clare Byrne, he hits bottom—staggering around in a fur coat and cowboy hat, waving a bottle and releasing the smell of beer into the tiny Flea Theater, where his company will be on view through July 1.

Angels of darkness: nicholasleichterdance at the Flea through July 1 photo: Pete Kuhns

In a funny film by Amy Larimer and Paul Sullivan, Leichter tackles a coming-apart dance group. His wonderful performers—Byrne, Daniel Clifton, Holly Handman, Justin Jones, Amy Larimer, and Will Rawls—take on dysfunctional personae that make company life a nightmare. Brian McCormick, as Leichter's shrink, attempts to cure the disorders (Byrne carries socks around, never thinking to put them on her feet), but the backsliding is fearsome. In the end, Leichter congratulates his great ensemble; the camera pans down to reveal rabbits hopping around his feet.

Clothes can be metaphors. In a revised version of the 1999 *Worth*, when the dancers, posturing in skimpy black slips, strip to white underwear, the discarded clothes snarl around their feet and impede their progress. And in *Undertow* (2000), to music by Björk, the four men wear gender-ambiguous black jackets and long skirts to scabble their way into caterpillar lines. Rawls, braced and standing, struggles to roll Jones up his body. It's as if these men are being sucked together and washed ashore.

Throughout the fine new *Free the Angels*, the dancers stay close even as they rocket around in black-and-white outfits by Olu-Orandava Mumford. Erik C. Bruce's lighting has the punch of club effects. Stevie Wonder singing those old pop tunes pulls people into couples and trios. They dive and connect and tangle as if by contagion or sheer proximity. Elation and anger bed down together. Yet the dancers seem always cognizant, human, vibrantly individual. Leichter allows them to reveal themselves.