

Weekend

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MULTIMEDIA REVIEW

Voices, Video and Dance, Conversing on Emigration

By JENNIFER DUNNING

Something happens in Gabri Christa's "Dominata." That cannot be said of a great many dances these days, full though they may be of steps and gestures, pure movement or large themes. But Ms. Christa and her grittily individualistic dancers manage to transform the black-box stage of Dance Theater Workshop, where her DanzAisa company opened on Wednesday night, into a Caribbean streetscape, and to evoke the state of mind of a Caribbean transplant to New York.

The hourlong piece, which will be performed through tomorrow, gets off to a worrying start as Ms. Christa, in bright pink with long pig-tails, begins to declaim in disjointed phrases that sound like a sampling of Anna Deavere Smith and Maya Angelou. She seems to be ruminating on emigration, and once the text becomes a conversation with Latasha N. Diggs, "Dominata" takes off. Ms. Diggs is a rich-voiced wonder whose West Indian lilt is mesmerizing. And her cooing, nuzzling scenes with Justice Dilla X, a sensuous, almost menacing force of nature, are among the best in the piece.

Everything works in this multimedia dream of a past that has become both exaggerated and muted with time. Erik C. Bruce's darkish lighting suggests little streets, plazas and a neighborhood bar where the

regulars gather to play dominoes and comment lazily on life. Through this remembered landscape, nine performers drift and congregate in brief but meaningful encounters.

They sidle into momentary dances, in a loose conga line, a laid-back soft-shoe male quartet and, best of all, a dance for a woman and three men that makes stunning, stylized use of lurching bodies and stolid tables. Ms. Christa, a modern-dance choreographer, performer, writer and filmmaker from Curaçao who trained in Amsterdam and New York City, has a way of making dance and theater happen without seeming to lift a finger.

She is also lucky in her collaborators, among them the dancers Niles Ford and Nathan Trice, co-choreographers of "Dominata," and performers who include Alysia Ramos, a subtle mix of frailty and toughness, and Gen Hashimoto and Julio Arroyo, with Marcel Stomp wandering in and out as a dominoes-playing tribal elder with eloquent salsa hips.

Ms. Diggs wrote the text. The funky, casual costumes were designed by Liz Prince. Atmospheric video by Marilys Ernst is woven seamlessly into this rich fabric, along with music by Burnt Sugar, the Arkestra Chamber and the Yohimbe Brothers. The video includes a stylish clip of a pair of bare feet dancing around a row of wine bottles.



Niles Ford holding Gabri Christa in Ms. Christa's "Dominata."