

the village

VOICE

SEPTEMBER 22-28, 2004

Dance

Festivals and games in 18th-century France and in the postmodern, multicultural village

Seeing Gabri Christa's *Dominata* is like coming upon a street alive with activity and rich with laughter and color. The street could be in New York; in Curaçao, where Christa was born; in Amsterdam, where she trained; or in Cuba, where she once ran a dance group. Her heritage runs through her body as she stands in a spotlight undulating, twisting, swinging

her hips, tossing her arms, and speaking in several languages. In a vibrant red outfit by Liz Prince, her hair in two long braids, she's both a gorgeous woman and the bright, mischievous child she must have been.

Intermittent text by Latasha N. Diggs strikes the ear the way street conversations do: Questions, vocalizing, and poetry surface from and sink back into fine music (on tape) by Greg Tate's witty jazz group Burnt Sugar the Arkestra Chamber. Memory is a theme. The question Christa poses to Diggs (another beautiful woman and powerful singer), "How come you never asked me why I came here?" is answered, or not, at the end with "one of those things"—barely heard as the lights fade on the group talking softly around a table.

The unifying motif is the game of dominoes. Marilyn Ernst's large, soft-focus video images of players are projected willy-nilly on

translucent white drapes. Erik C. Bruce's lighting features dots and spotlight pools. There are always people sitting at one of the several movable white tables, where the chink of the tiles serves as light percussion. Kibitzers egg on a slo-mo bout. Four magnificent men (Niles Ford, Nathan Trice, Gen Hashimoto, and Julio Arroyo) spell each other in "matches"—on the tables, on the chairs, expanding the notion of competition into robust but always watchful dancing. (Ford and Trice collaborated with Christa on the choreography.) While Christa and Alysia Ramos settle down to a game, Justice Dilla X prowls like a snake in the Garden. He's all insinuating, woozy sugar in a wonderfully sexy spoken-sung dialogue with Diggs. When she lilts, "I remember his rock candy," he counters, "Be careful of remembering."

Christa and Ford perform two duets—her

catlike coiled softness a to-die-for contrast to his big, warm, loose strength. In the first one, Diggs, who's been asking questions as if to herself, begins to circle the dancers, angrily yelling the queries at them ("Why do you want to wash my feet on Sundays?" "Why do you need to wear this ring?" are two I recall), while their bodies shudder and twitch in response. The concluding exhausted embrace paves the way for their later, sensual floor duo.

Gradually Marcel Stomp (Christa's father) enters the action. In a panama hat, with a lazy, get-down roll to his hips, he leads an unruly procession of carnival revelers that periodically coalesces into order. *Dominata* is a rich stew, its ingredients layered and then stirred. Are Christa's ideas always clear? No. But by the end, I'm about to burst with happiness.

GABRI CHRISTA DANZAISA
Dance Theater Workshop
September 15 through 18

DOWN MEMORY'S BUSY STREET

BY DEBORAH JOWITT