

A smaller Houston Metropolitan Dance Company brings maturity to stage

By **MOLLY GLENTZER**
Houston Chronicle

Houston Metropolitan Dance Company continues to reinvent itself. Surviving a nasty split last fall in which half the dancers left, the troupe that performed Saturday at Cullen Theater was more compact but also more mature. The program reflected a thoughtful metamorphosis; even the tap number was a lament.

The Met suddenly looks a lot like other contemporary dance companies in town. This is no coincidence: Houston modern

dance choreographers Jane Weiner, Sonia Noriega and Michelle Manzanales were among the dance-makers.

The Subtle Cho, excerpted from Eddie Ocampo's *Dark Kalpa*, stood out for its sharp, "Zen jazz" contrast and good use of percussive music by Andy Mitran and Andrea Parker. Joe Celej, Marlana Walsh and Brittany Wallis were excellent as the fitful Buddhas, completely in command of the dance's snappy head, arm and shoulder movements, hip swivels and ramped-up yoga poses.

Weiner's guest appearance in her signature *Night Moves* solo

Dance review

by Mark Dendy and Lawrence Keigwin was another highlight. The first two sections, to Nina Simone songs, make the littlest, silliest gestures powerfully turbulent. Then comes the killer, to Joni Mitchell's *Both Sides Now*, when Weiner curls up on the floor, quaking with her back to the audience. Raw and awesome.

Tapper Al Lowe put emotion into his coolly sophisticated number, *Celebration A.L.J.* He's a big guy with pleading eyes and won-

derfully frenetic feet. The dance began as a trio, with Celej and Shawn Lester. They seemed like three guys in a loft, getting ready to go out for martinis. But Lowe's big, final solo was full of pleading arms and eyes to the heavens. A white rose seemed to represent a missing person. And at the end he cried, "Where'd you go? ... Rest in peace. ..."

Weiner's *Altruistic Planes* (part one — *prepare the cabin*) made good use of the stage space for seven dancers (Celej, Ashley Cole, Leigh Ann LaBorde, Lester, Wallis, Walsh and Fiona Wolstenholme). The opening had prom-

ise: Five dancers stood facing the back as two soloists introduced a hand gesture inspired by ground-crew signals to pilots before take-off. Larger movements erupted into an abstract dance that was pleasingly complex.

Manzanales' *mirari* trio for Burgess, Wallis and Walsh had a nice twilight mood, with twinkling "stars" (tiny hanging mirrors) and blue light. Their scooty feet and winsome hand gestures were intriguing, but the message was muddled. The dynamic didn't change in the dance's two sections, set to Philip Glass and Sainkho Namtchylak music.

Celej premiered his for the Met, *Ah, Satan tasha*. As enigmatic as drome title, it looked like a drug trip for five all-girls in cut-up bluejeans. Rolling Stones music vichy. Cole performed *Devil's Playground*, a dance about the frightful looking in the mirror. Jason's *Halo All Over Me* surprised. The Met scrapped planned premiere by Manbrano, according to a "due to the political climate this time."