

Antic Moves Mixed With Lyrical Effects

By JACK ANDERSON

Elisa Monte often choreographs cheeky dances brimming with nervous energy. And cheeky works can be seen in the programs her company, Elisa Monte Dance, is presenting at the Joyce Theater this week and Sunday. But on occasion, Ms. Monte lengthens her antic choreographic phrases to create lyrical or even elegiac effects. Her two new pieces are in this mode.

"A Woman's Way (To Nancy, With Love From Tom)," which received its world premiere on Tuesday night, could be called an early Valentine greeting from Tom Klingenstein, the company supporter who commissioned the piece, to his wife, Nancy Perlman. The lyrical choreography, to pulsing recorded music by the David Chesworth Ensemble, pays tribute to female beauty.

Jennifer Hardy, alone onstage at the start, is soon joined by other dancers who surge in and out, touching her and then letting her go. Dancers sway quietly in and out of unison. Women in brightly colored skirts by Karen Young are lifted with loving care. There is a tender duet for Nicole Dalia and Marden Ramos. This pleasant choreographic love letter concludes with Ms. Hardy raised in triumph above everyone else.

The one-act premiere shared the evening with "Vejle," a duet collaboratively choreographed by Ms. Monte and David Brown in which Kevin Ferguson and Fabrice Lamago kept separating only to reunite, and two cheeky group compositions, "White Dragon" and "Dreamtime."

Wednesday night's program was entirely devoted to the world premiere of "Via Sacra," in its complete form. Ms. Monte began this three-act work to recordings by Bang on a Can and Peter Zagar in 2001, when she was planning a dance about personal grief. But the disaster of 9/11 intervened shortly after, inspiring choreographic meditations on universal loss. Each act in "Via Sacra," which is named after a temple-lined street in ancient Rome, was originally staged as a separate piece and bears its own title. And most of the production is elegiac.

In the ensembles of the first act, "The Way It Was (Lost Things)," dancers in costumes of muted colors by Ms. Young seem to search for something irretrievably lost. An angular twitching solo for Mr. Ramos suggests spasms of grief.

The second act, "The Way It Is (Psyche's Journey)," does not literally retell the Roman myth about the young woman who desperately searched the world to find her lover, Cupid. Rather, the entire company wanders as if bewildered through a theatrical landscape dominated by a glittering silver backdrop by Kira Lynn Harris. But in the finale, "The Way It Should Be (Light Lies)," dancers move with a newfound sense of aspiration and exaltation.

Away From Darkness Into Radiant Light

By JENNIFER DUNNING

You can go home again, at least in modern dance. That was the subliminal message of a glowing performance by Elisa Monte Dance this week at the Joyce Theater. Ms. Monte has re-established her company as the single-choreographer troupe it was at its founding in 1981. As a result, there is a fresh, vital new look to her work, particularly in her new "Light Lies" and in her signature "Treading."

Works that once looked dark and turbulent, sometimes for no apparent reason, now look like way stations on a long path of light on which dancers travel in mostly understated perpetual motion and recurrent patterns.

Superficially, the dances recall the minimalism of Laura Dean and Lucinda Childs. But Ms. Monte's heart-on-her-sleeve humanism breaks through. One of the revelations of the program on Tuesday, one of two in the Joyce season, is the consistency and thoroughness of her aesthetic, thrown into new relief here as if a suddenly opened window had cast her choreography in brighter light.

"Light Lies," commissioned by the Josef Albers Foundation, pays homage to that Bauhaus visionary and influential teacher of American artists.

The piece does not attempt a physical replication of Albers's rigorous experimentation with light and color within geometric frames and his investigation of the nature of perception and illusion. Its opening imagery of white-clad dancers in motion in a shimmering bluish-white field of light is not that dissimilar to the effect of Ms. Monte's 1987 "Audentity," also on the program.

Soon, however, "Light Lies" begins to build as a whole with the exciting energy of the music and of the men's spinouts and circlings, punctuated by briefly held crooked-body poses that in one case suggest grazing birds. The eye and mind are ready for the surprising moment when a dancer peels out into a sudden soft pool of green light.

Other light pools appear for the dancers to move into momentarily, with the intense colors sometimes shifting only slightly in tinge in a palette that seems to have been inspired by Albers's "Homage to the Square: Apparition." Clifton Taylor, the lighting designer, creates the effect of color that simply wells up in the air, like mist, rather than from the sides or above.

There is much to enjoy in the staging, nuanced motion and the impressive dancers' individuality, particularly in a surprising little jewel of a solo moment for Nicole Corea. "Light Lies" might benefit from a slightly more emphatic ending. But Mr. Taylor and Ms. Monte have successfully approximated the contained throb of Albers's color.

The cast also included Po-Chieh Chen, Kevin Goodwine, Bafana Solomon Matea, Dawn Pignuola, Bradley Shelver, Ted Thomas and Natalie Turner. "Light Lies" is set to music by Michael Gordon, David Lang and Julia Wolfe.

Ms. Turner and Mr. Goodwine gave the sensual "Treading" a newly luminous and meditative look that worked.