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Theatre enCorps and Efva Lilja

Holds no memory and Using the Eye in the Middle of Your Head

The Place, London. May 2-3, 2006

Ever since an exchange to the University College of Dance in Stockholm, I have wondered why there is so little formal exchange between Swedish choreographers and the UK.

The city is a breeding ground for new, exciting work. There is a House of Dance, Opera House, Modern Dance Theatre, Culture Centre, Dance Centre and Blue. There's also a Dance Museum.

When Isadora Duncan first wowed Stockholm audiences in 1906, the Swedes were rapt. A year later, Anna Behles founded the Plastikinstitut and dance became a permanent fixture.

The modern dance scene prospered under the overseeing eye of the mothers of Swedish dance – Birgit Cullberg and Birgit Akesson. In the 1980s it exploded with choreographers Per Jonsson, Kenneth Kvarnström, Birgitta Egerbladh, and Efva Lilja.

Lilja set up her company Efva Lilja Dansproduktion in 1985 and quickly became known for her experimental, site-specific works in trees, bunk beds, snow and ice, a library, a clinic, a rock club, a slaughterhouse and a rubber factory.

Last summer she was invited by choreographer/dancer Ana Sanchez-Colberg of Theatre enCorps to participate in The Place's 'Choreodrome' project.

The double-bill shown at The Place on May 2-3 arose from conversations about memory; the story of the body and physical expression within boundaries set by the aging process.

Holds No Memory is a gestural solo for Sanchez-Colberg. Resulting from a team of artists including a sociologist, a philosopher, a social gerontologist and a doctor of economics, the aim was to reveal how experience and memory can be physically expressed through movement.

Perhaps slightly self-indulgent/egotistic, she does well to keep the attention of her audience, right down to the wiggling of her toes.

With swan shadow puppet hands, smiles and spitting out bad memories, she pinches parts of her body, clenching muscles and convulsing.

Solace is often found in stillness – after flinging repetitions, Ek-ian mutterings and pawing at her body – tension dissimulates to leave a fatigued wreck, breathing heavily. Repetition and monotony snaps into running or rolling across the stage, with pirouettes and even a pliÉ or two thrown in to the mix.

There is an intense, almost neurotic emotionalism. The performance succeeds in the expression of this raw emotion and the connection with her deeply personal journey.

Using The Eye In The Middle Of Your Head features 65-year-old Kari Swylan and 69-year-old Jan Abramson. It is an intelligent, sensitive piece about two characters – their relationship, fears and desires.

Swylan, an ex-Cullberg ballet soloist, sits on the floor rubbing her hands over her body from feet to neck, dwelling on her breasts and washing the movement upwards and back down to her feet. She writes secretive messages on the floor or in the air with her fingers, and makes wide sweeping

gestures, as if collecting her memories and experiences in bundles in her arms.

Abramson rolls an invisible bubble that he pushes away, gives a little dandy hop-skip and whistles a tune. He removes his suit and stands in white pants, breathing hard. His near naked vulnerability is combined with unbearable laughing metallic voices. It is a physical image that we are rarely presented with and it is a powerful statement.

They look intensely at one another and the audience with amazement and fear, their gazes as charged as the relentless electro-acoustic music. It strikes a chord in me somewhere that no other choreographer has ever managed to reach.

Hereís hoping that Liljaís sensitive, challenging and engaging choreography has stuck a flag in the summit of recognition. Perhaps now itís time to realise that Swedish contemporary dance is a highly exportable product.

By Katie Phillips