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DANCE REVIEW

## A World of Competitions and Desires With No Exit

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“Blind Spot” is something of a misnomer for the 2003 dance by Pavel Zustiak that opened at Performance Space 122 on Wednesday. What he offers is far more encompassing.

Joe Levasseur’s spooky, even menacing, design floods the space in a low haze, broken only occasionally by raw white lights. It is hard to make things out in this world, but its four inhabitants would struggle to see under any circumstances. Their desperate, conflicting desires (for connection, for domination, for peace) drive and harry them, sending them sprawling, whipping their bodies about in propulsive turns or running nervously with strange, staggered gaits. Furtive embraces quickly become grappling wars. Manic competitions with no clear goal are interrupted by meditative solo dances, which bloom only briefly in Mr. Zustiak’s hothouse.

The work opens with Yo-el Cassell alone, engaged in a one-way communication with the audience using sign language. He smiles, but you do not quite trust him or the shadowy shapes that appear to lurk in the background.

Mr. Zustiak’s set encourages unease. A semitransparent fun-house mirror casts strange reflections. Plastic sheeting bifurcates the theater, forming a membrane through which the dancers pass and engage with one another, as if confronting versions of themselves. Lighting effects let the shadows of other dancers appear through the plastic; they are troubling in their stillness, like silent, anonymous witnesses.

But what are they witnessing? What starts as a thriller turns into black, sometimes painful, comedy (aided by a varied, driving score designed by Mr. Zustiak and including compositions by Yann Tiersen and Stephen Pompougnac). Gina Bashour, with her forceful, sensual presence and inscrutable eyes, is a powerhouse. Ashleigh Leite seems a broken, slatternly rag doll, complete with disheveled blond wig, grungy boxing wraps and a lost, vacant stare. The men (Mr. Cassell and Anthony Whitehurst) are vacant too, emotionally elusive creatures with equally elusive needs.

The work doesn’t always maintain its power; Mr. Zustiak sometimes slips into overused tropes like hysterical laughter or a motif in which one person urgently seeks the embrace of a passive partner. But in its darkest, most uncomfortable moments, it gets under your skin, and needles. There is no way out of this sensual but oppressive “Blind Spot.” Even if there were, its occupants wouldn’t know where to look.