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Timeless Red: Ellis Wood (left) as a Victorian go-go dancer.

ELLIS WOOD DANCE
DANCE THEATER WORKSHOP,
NEW YORK, NY
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Reviewed by Susan Yung

Ellis Wood's two-part premiere, *Hurricane Flora*, is a riotous, satisfying, female *Lord of the Flies*. One reason is the visceral desperation, the barely contained abandon, in Wood's choreography. Energy explodes from torsos, courses through limbs, and shoots out fingers splayed, reflexively, like a child's. Another reason is the work's operatic *tanztheater* melodrama, which pitted the dancers against one another.

The first part, "Air," began hauntingly, with eight women scattered around the stage, whispering urgently to themselves. A tableau worthy of Delacroix followed—Leslie Johnson

swept into an arabesque at the center of the clustered group, while some pulled her forward and others restrained her. Johnson confronted a persistent demon, at one point invoking a higher authority as she knelt with one leg extended high to the side. Composer/violinist Daniel Bernard Roumain accompanied recorded tracks of himself in music that moved through repeated, modulated phrases, doleful sonorities, and chugging funk, setting the tempo and mood.

In "Earth," six dancers carried trays of cut flowers that emitted a sickly sweet scent. Jennifer Phillips and Claire Benton paused to sniff their posies, then swooned and collapsed. The six others cradled their bouquets and waddled on their rears to form a line, each occupying a circle of light. Then the women became increasingly feral, stepping on others like conquests and walking on all fours bearing riders on their backs. They broke into two groups, each team handling Phillips and Benton like battering rams, dropping them face first into piles

of flowers. The piece ended with the cast hurling fistfuls of flowers toward the audience; eventually the air was thick with flying flora, some of which reached the back of the house.

Also on the bill were *Timeless Red*, a mystifying piece from 1998 that featured Wood as a taunting Victorian go-go dancer, plus a yogi and three fierce women with chairs. This work, with its ear-splitting score, merely diluted the impact of the premiere. Wood also danced a solo, *Stella*, which demonstrated her muscular and linear prowess in deep pliés and stretched limbs and used suspended relevés as fulcrum-like, kinetic punctuation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
www.wooddance.net