

SHOW BUSINESS

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WOOD DANCE

Ellis Wood
At Tribeca Performing Arts Center
Review by Julia Holland

Choreographer Ellis Wood seems to have been born with a silver spoon in her mouth—at least in the dance world. Her parents, Marni and David Wood, were members of the Martha Graham Company and went on to teach at University of California's Berkeley campus, where Wood received her undergraduate degree and numerous awards.

In addition to the best kind of introduction and training in the dance world that a modern dancer can imagine, Wood trained as an Olympic gymnast. It is this combination of a dramatic Graham training and a fiercely aggres-



A scene from the dynamic Wood Dance.

sive physical background that makes her choreographic work a fusillade of brilliant, strong movement.

Wood defines a very personal sense of rhythm with her choreography. Only after an evening of four pieces does her ebb and flow of arrhythmic and rhythmic musical choreographic choices become routine. Though her strong sense of music allows for a rewarding coordination of music and dance periodically, she also tends to stray from the strong pull of the music, as in one of her latest works, *Feeling Lila*. Using Bjork's beat-heavy trip-hop, the choreography does not give itself up to the infectious beat, the music and the movement taking on complimentary roles.

With *Timeless Red*, Wood makes the leap to choreographic genius. Flanked with a brilliant and suitably abstract sound score by Scott Westerfeld and Jonathan Pascoe, *Red* is a full fledged dance-theater piece of European style, complete with individual characters, a chorus of dancers, humor and dramatism. A sound byte announces the "Mystery at the Insurance Office," where the constant ticking of music is

reflected in performer Sara Joel's head, which shakes "no" over and over again. Michelle LaRue, Jennifer Phillips and Kristine Willis, uniformly childish and seductive in Christian Grant's textured white slip dresses, form the chorus. The three often move in unison, in close proximity to each other; they band together like close childhood friends at the schoolyard. Their movement, like all of Wood's choreography, vibrant and full, filled with lulls and peaks. LaRue, Phillips and Willis drag folding chairs through the space, and several times pile onto one chair, seemingly all part of one many-headed and multi-limbed pulsing creature.

The star of *Timeless Red* is a controlling lady in red, played by the precise and dramatic Marisa Lopez. Perched on a six-foot pedestal in the back corner, Lopez oversees the chorus of dancers and the stationary troubled head-shaking figure, played by Joel with almost demonic delight. Wearing a wide collared evening gown of bright red satin, Lopez presides over the stage with the attitude of a magician. She very pointedly lifts her arm one at a time and the chorus members follow suit by lifting their legs one at a time. Lopez also keeps the regular time of the repetitive music with her hips, at one point causing each dancer to pulse as well.

The artistic level and the development of character achieved in *Red* is rare and extremely rewarding. Glimpses of artistic genius are also found in Wood's solo, *Funktionslust*, and in *Fractured*, a duet for Wood and Jennifer Phillips. Wood is a brilliant performer and a fearless mover and she chooses company members who are vibrant movers as well. Her choreographic work is stronger when she does not perform, as in *Timeless Red* and *Feeling Lila*. And yet her performances are so strong that a concert with some works performed by Wood is a thrilling combination of choreographic and physical intelligence.



Choreographer Ellis Wood.

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