

March 3, 1998

Womanstrength

BY DEBORAH JOWITT

ELLIS WOOD (playing this Saturday and Sunday in DTW's Carnival series) was, like Johnson, a gymnast, but she's danced from babyhood (her parents, Marnie Thomas and David Wood, performed with Graham). She moves like a healthy young animal—springy, with strong legs and a long back that ripples like a cat's when she crawls on all fours. Her choreography combines athleticism and impulsiveness. But she's also dramatic; her face tells tales. In *After Darkness*, she seduces a semi-circle of lightbulbs into glowing by stroking them or dancing hotly among them. At the end, all go out, but the central one—the one she carried in under her dress—lights up. Clear action, fuzzy symbolism. She ends an interestingly weird duet, *In Shadow*, to terrific Lou Reed songs, by kneeling on the back of her crouching friend (Wendy Blum) and giving us a charming smile.

Wood's works are charged with a drama that's fascinating but elusive. *Grace*, dedicated to her mother, and *Timeless Red*, dedicated to her father, have the kind of authenticity that comes when choreographers plumb their own experience, but Wood treads a rickety line between the obscure and the too

explicit. In *Grace* (performed by Wood, her sister Reagan Wood Saunders, Blum, and Molly Rabinowitz), loving playfulness turns into impatience and desperation. A lesson in calm given by one sister (perhaps representing a parent) also involves the pointing of imaginary guns. In *Timeless Red*, certain images stand out. Blum, Yasmeen Godder, and Jennifer A. Philips sit on chairs, quietly shaking their heads. Rabinowitz, in a red wrapper, stands on her head for what seems like an eternity. Marisa Lopez, atop a box in a long red dress, captures Philips when she ventures too near and shakes her head for her. Wood's pieces are eventful. She's telling juicy stories, but they leave me shaking my head.