



J E A N N E R U D D Y  
D A N C E

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by Marilyn Jackson  
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**Two World Premieres at Performance Garage**

Jeanne Ruddy's Performance Garage was the site of two momentous world premieres Wednesday evening—Ruddy's *Lark*, a clean dive into nonnarrative dance, and guest choreographer Martha Clarke's *Sandman*, a fearlessly cheerless contemplation of subhuman creatures.

*Lark's* five dancers stood in Jeffrey Wirsing's sleek, pewter-colored costumes like figurines, breathing life into themselves, then became carefree young people dancing with courteous, baroque-inspired mannerisms but in modern movement idioms. Ruddy allowed herself one or two of the contraction/releases emblematic of her years with the Martha Graham Company, but overall the choreography was fresh, snappy, and filled with light humor.

Composer Ellen Fishman-Johnson, commissioned by Ruddy, subverted Haydn's *String Quartet No. 5 in D major* into a sprightly, complex 21st-century score whose swirling arpeggios harmonized well with the choreography. In the hoedown-inflected third movement, Ian Dodge, looking tipsy on May wine, added a merry-andrew expressiveness to its comedic trio.

In Clarke's disquieting *Sandman*, these genial, quicksilver dancers were transformed into zombies in masks, hospital gowns, and soiled underwear (again Wirsing's design). Rick Callender, hooded in a brown paper bag, chalked the stage with street drawings like those in photographs by Helen Levitt, one of Clarke's three photographer muses for this work; Ralph Eugene Meatyard and Diane Arbus are the others.

Arthur Solari strung together his sound design—steam hissing, watery splashes, bells tolling—with snippets of John Lurie (*Lounge Lizards*) music and a two-or-three-beat pulse that sometimes added up to five but always added up to a doomsday atmosphere. The movement was crouched, creeping, still-framed, the look Goyaesque, Inquisitional.

Callender and Dodge ravaged, drowned, or strangled Thayne Alexandre Dibble, Janet Pilla, and Christine Taylor by turns. Callender reappeared as a water bug and devoured the raggedy beauty Meredith Riley Stewart. Dodge, in a thong and a butterfly mask, looked reptilian, writhing in a rainbow of light by Peter Jakubowski (who lit both works).

Dark humor appeared sporadically. Taylor, wearing rubber bird claws on hands and feet, made herself comfortable on a "nest" of shredded paper. When she relaxed into the classic pose of the Dying Swan, it was an oxymoronic image for the ages. Armed with slim reeds, Callender and Dodge engaged in a swordfight, the thwacks on their paper-bagged heads sounding deadly.

Ruddy called the program *Juxtapose*—and she took a risk pitting her dancery *Lark* against Clarke's highly theatricalized *Sandman*. But it paid off as the audience bridged the gulf enthusiastically.