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One pair of dancers with faces worth taking note of are David Dorfman and Dan Froot. Mr. Dorfman is the kind of guy who is always saying that everything is going to turn out O.K.; his face is relaxed, assured. Mr. Froot is excitable; he's pretty sure things won't turn out O.K. In their sometimes hilarious skitlike duets, they play off each other's faces the way more technical dancers play off each other's virtuosity. (They give their final two performances in the Altogether Different series today at the Joyce Theater in Manhattan.)

Outstanding dancers can illuminate the intention of a choreographer, thus helping all the pieces of a puzzle fall into place. Regina Advento in "Masurca Fogo" (1998) epitomizes Pina Bausch's surreal choreography and fantastical dreamlike vision. The opposing elements of irony and pleasure meet in Ms. Advento's Cheshire cat grin.

Greg Zuccolo in Tere O'Connor's "Choke" (2000) carries his flickering mood into every movement. His mouth drops opens like a child's, his eyes shift mischievously, his nose wrinkles. The constant sense of commotion on his face borders on a kind of sublime brattiness, which matches the dance.

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater dancer Bahiyah Sayyed-Gaines's face in "Sweet Bitter Love" (2000) is tender, full of emotion. When she looks directly at the audience and then allows her large sloe eyes to close, you can feel the sweet sorrow on her eyelids. Her face recalls the sensuality, the profound womanliness of Carmen de Lavallade, who choreographed the piece.

Even when the face is barely in evidence, it has its effect. The tap dancer Savion Glover hunkers down, hiding his face, much like Gregory Hines before him. In doing so, he resists the baggage of early tap dance, which often expected black dancers to perform amiably for white audiences. Head down and dreadlocks flying, Mr. Glover sends out more rhythmic sparks than most tap dancers who perform "for" us.

Kei Takei often holds her face skyward, so we hardly see it. And when her face becomes visible, it looks as impenetrable as a mask. But the intensity of that mask commands rapt attention.

For dancers, no less than actors, faces are part of the expressive equipment. But dancers rarely receive formal lessons in acting. Rather, their faces reflect what the whole body is feeling and doing. This kind of total involvement is what Ms. Forti calls "the dance state." The dance state is energetic, emotional or spiritual, depending on what zone the dancer has an affinity for. Once a dancer crosses over into that state, her or his face naturally takes on a new vitality. Each dancer enters a distinctive world of nonliteral meaning. For spectators, the face is a key to that meaning. □