

THE Arts

The New York Times

SATURDAY, JUNE 11, 2011

Multitasker Reverses the Aging Process

Well before just about every choreographer on the planet declared their allegiance to multidisciplinary work, Meredith Monk was creating pieces that defied characterization in their use of song, speech, movement, film and images.

ROSLYN SULCAS
DANCE REVIEW

In the early-to-mid 1960s, when Ms. Monk was part of the radical group of artists beginning to show work at the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, she was already using dance as just one component in her layered pieces — and not always a large component at that. And yet the movement that she does use is so specific and deliberate, so fused

“Education of the Girlchild Revisited” continues through Saturday, at the 3LD Art and Technology Center, 80 Greenwich Street, near Rector Street, Lower Manhattan; (212) 924-0077; dancetheaterworkshop.org.

with her vocal meanderings and strange, mystic world of archetypes, that it becomes an inextricably important part of the whole.

That’s clear in “Education of the Girlchild Revisited,” which opened at the 3LD Art and Technology Center on Tuesday, a final

Going from crone to innocent child, with movement and song.

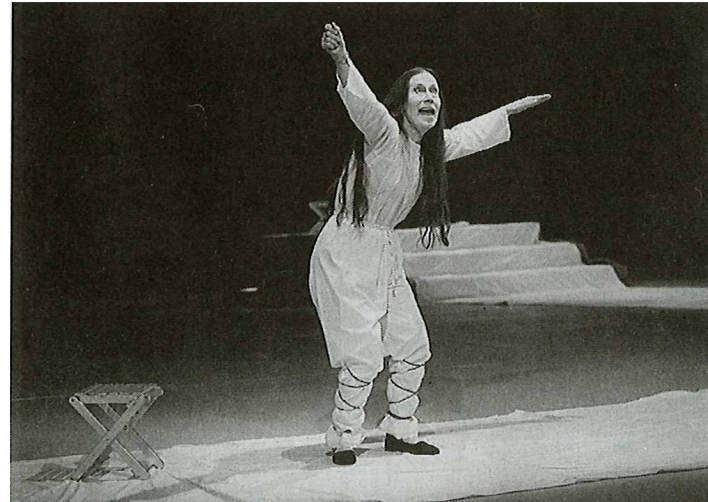
off-site offering by Dance Theater Workshop before it becomes New York Live Arts in September. Here, Ms. Monk resurrects parts of one of her most important pieces, “Education of the Girlchild,” which began with a solo in 1972 and was expanded into a full-length version in 1973.

That solo begins the evening,

with Ms. Monk seated on a dais wearing a white bobbed wig and white dress and pants, her face powdered and slightly turned away. She is slumped over, inanimate for a while before very slowly turning her head, her expression blank. She lifts a hand, regards it as it shakes and, as piano music starts to play, she begins to sway slightly, as if the sound evokes a past life.

When Ms. Monk sings, the repetitive refrain sounds like “dying,” but the song heralds a rebirth as she descends the steps with ineffable little gestures of the hand. As she follows a path of white cloth, Ms. Monk sheds the years, removing glasses and wig, uncannily transmuted herself from ancient crone to defiant adolescent and innocent child, singing in a wordless baby babble as her stooped shuffles become skips and hops.

Like much of Ms. Monk’s work, the solo is perhaps more powerful in its post-performance reso-



OZIER MUHAMMAD/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Meredith Monk updates one of her multidisciplinary works in “Education of the Girlchild Revisited,” at the 3LD Art and Technology Center.

nance than in the moment. While it’s happening, it often seems prosaic, repetitive, nonsensical. Afterward, Ms. Monk’s luminous delphic presence, her extraordinary vocal range, with its growls, squeaks and burbles, and its ear-

ly-music purity of delivery, are almost overwhelmingly memorable.

The same is true of the second part of the evening, “Shards,” which combines sections from various works from 1969 to 1973,

including parts of the “Girlchild” ensemble. Here, Ms. Monk performs with longtime members of her ensemble, Ellen Fisher, Katie Geissinger and Allison Sniffin, moving among three synthesizers placed around the stage. (Each time they finish at one, Ms. Monk and a singer ceremoniously cover it with fabric.)

The bizarre and gorgeous sounds of their voices, combining rhythmically over rocking keyboard phrases, are sometimes mesmerizing, sometimes boringly repetitive. (A bit like life.) But toward the end, a marvelously minimal dance — just hops, skips and twirls, with slight bends and turns of the upper body — from the four (Ms. Fisher is extraordinary here) reveals a joyous theatricality that seems to contain all of life itself. And Ms. Monk’s final monologue, an evocation of old age, of feisty life slowly slipping away, is indelibly brilliant.

“I’ve got my memory,” she croaks triumphantly. “I’ve got my philosophy.”

Indeed.