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OSLUND & COMPANY DANCE

Reviewed by Martha Ullman West

Conduit Studio

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Mary Oslund knows where she is going and she knows where she has been. But until her April concerts, she has not presented reconstructions of previous work, which show her substantial following how each piece fits into the continuum of her development as a seasoned artist. The premiere of *9 Red Steps* and the reconstructed excerpts from *Reflex Doll* and 1998's *Terrifying Grace* are the work of an artist who continues to explore and expand on a vision of dance as an expression of nothing less than the human condition.

9 Red Steps, set on eleven of the city's most interesting contemporary dancers, is a series of duets, trios, and quartets linked by small gestures—a hand slapping at a thigh, a slashing arm, gentle rubs, and generous extensions of the limbs. As intricately textured as a thicket of branches from different trees, the richly detailed piece connects emotionally with the viewer in ways her previous work, often intellectually detached, doesn't. Nevertheless, duets in last year's *Behavior*, in which the dancers carried each other in cherishing embraces, did point in this new direction.

9 Red Steps is visually stunning, the dancers in loose-fitting, rust- and gold-colored costumes that keep the audience connected with the emotional content in ways that the harsh white garb of *Terrifying Grace* does not. In that work, excerpted for these concerts, the choreographer's command of pattern and the

arrangement of dancers in space remains impressive, as does the hard-edged aggression of much of the movement, in which Oslund's schooling in Cunningham technique and contact work come into play.

Margretta Hansen danced the anxiety-ridden solo (originally performed by the choreographer) with nerve endings exposed, her movement rounded where Oslund's was angular, but her attack just as compelling. Equally riveting was a duet by Carla Mann and Jim McGinn, both of whom are tall and long armed, executing the wide and open generous movement with shape and style.

The trio from *Reflex Doll*, created in 1996, made a witty bridge between the opening and closing pieces, the old-fashioned dolly undergarment costumes as amusing as ever, the dancing by Neena Marks, Hansen, and Katherine Gray proclaiming loudly that women and dolls are not the same.

9 Red Steps has some of the wit of *Reflex Doll*, especially in a duet danced by Michael Barber and Daniel Addy. And Oslund's exploration of group dancing in *Terrifying Grace* also comes into play. This concert ought to tour; Oslund is uniquely unafraid to fuse the head and the heart.