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'Blood Doctor' a blending of styles

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Keith Goodman makes dances that bare his soul. And the soul he shows his audience is subtle, complex and mysterious.

"Blood Doctor," the concert of new and repertory works that opened last weekend and runs again Thursday through Saturday, incorporates both mainstream postmodern/contemporary choreography and work shaped by Goodman's ethnographic dance studies in the African Diaspora. It's a peculiar combination and characteristic of Goodman's work.

The first half of the program – Jan Van Dyke's 1980 "Double Times," Liz Lehrman's "M-1 Tank," and Goodman's own 1995 "Shadow" – illustrates several significant threads of the last 25 years of American dance. Van Dyke's work evokes cool formalism: the use of repetition and shifting tempos, the juxtaposition of ordinary movement and a dance-technical vocabulary, the movement's ambivalent relationship to its ambient Brian Eno score, the performer's ease and detachment.

Lehrman embodies the tough, talky social consciousness that has marked much performance work: live and recorded text plus music, a rough-and-ready movement vocabulary, visible transitions and obvious effort, all treated with irony and wry wit.

Though neither dance feels like a museum piece, neither has nearly the power and presence of "Shadow," a duet about intimacy and distance in relationship that Goodman made for himself and Jesse Berdine.

When Goodman and Berdine premiered the piece, the tentativeness of their performance emphasized their differences

– dark and fair, assured and tense, average height and tallness – and the danger of the dance's partnering. Two years later, their performance of the piece emphasized the intensity of their silent communication, their uncanny ability to breathe and move as one with so few cues from the score and ambient sound. This time "Shadow" emphasizes the tension. The performers' psychic bond is more intense than ever – the partnering is faster, crisper, scarier – but they each complete phrases in their own time, sometimes in unison, sometimes not. Threat underlies playfulness. There's more force to the grabbing, to the thrusting away. Each time Goodman and Berdine perform "Shadow," the dance's emphasis shifts, but it remains an image of human relationships both truthful and artful.

"Three Fathers" and "God of All Gods," both from 1997, with Berdine, Goodman, Habiba Addo, Mimy Fiaindratovo, David Oury and Nichole Stewart, are similarly reshaped and re-emphasized.

"Blood Doctor," the evening's premiere, differs markedly from "Three Fathers" and "God of All Gods." On the one hand "Blood Doctor," is more theatrical – fully staged with elaborate props and set pieces, more suggestions of narrative, character and action. But "Blood Doctor" is also more ritual – with candles, greenery, processional and recessional, libations and toasts, movements suggesting invocation or incantation. "Blood Doctor" is ultimately more ritual than theatrical, looking into the psyche where contemporary myth is being made. Enigmatic, paradoxical, evocative.