

D A N C E

CHARACTERS, CHARACTERS

Pamela Sommers

Pat Catterson
Westbeth Theater Center, Nov. 7-9

Pat Catterson is a woman of characters. Her danced portraits of crazies, clowns, flakes and dreamers go far beyond first impressions and outward appearances, revealing themselves to us by degrees, ushering us into their strange, unhinged worlds and then losing control before our eyes. And the intensity of their ever-so-brief stage lives turns them into slightly absurd, romantic symbols of humanity gone astray.

Eight of these memorable characters (excerpts from the choreographer's *Please, Just Take It One Life at a Time*), wandered, swung, boogied and crumbled through Catterson's recent program at Westbeth. There was "Wanda" (Renee Wadleigh), a tough-as-nails waitress on

the verge of collapse. Decker out in dark glasses, a tacky pink uniform, red lipstick and tap shoes, Wanda puffed a cigaret while beating out a frenzied, stop-and-start tap rhythm that abruptly chronicled her mental instability.

"Fred" (Doug Spirduso) also fell apart. A tight-assed, commuter type, *Wall Street Journal* in hand, he sat high off the ground on a wooden swing. "Any phone messages for me?" he asked an invisible secretary, as his rigid, suited form arced back and forth. "I'll get right on it, sir," he droned repeatedly, then dived off his perch to sprawl flat on the floor.

Then, to the strains of "There She Is, Miss America," we met "Betty Jean" (Amy Spencer), addled housewife, lugging an ironing board across the stage. Suddenly she stripped off her bathrobe to reveal a silver lame bathing suit, clambered onto the board and proceeded to pose like a 1940 pin-up girl. Our new Miss America then turned her ironing board into a diving board, launched into a series of hilarious

swimming motions and completed her reverie by dragging her precariously tilted body and board off into the sunset.

Perhaps the most haunting of Catterson's portraits was "E.J.," a slide show that focused on a mystical, made-up woman (Catterson) standing before a window. With each new slide, E.J. assumed a different pose in relation to the window, donned various pieces of exotic fabric and showed us bizarre, colorful designs she'd drawn on parts of her body. Next the pensive, poetic lady took flight; one powerful slide captured her in midair, buoyant and bedecked. What followed, then, was quite shocking: E.J. sprawled out dead on the street, far below the open window.

Catterson's striding, slashing, whirling, leg-heavy style worked exceedingly well within the characterizational format, and most effectively in solo.