

# The Washington Star

Monday, January 29, 1979

## Pat Catterson's dances link to her dancer parents

By Abby Wasserman

Special to The Washington Star

Introducing a program of solo dances with a home movie of your parents dancing ballroom specials on a Loogootee, Indiana backyard patio takes some kind of *chutzpah*. And tying the movie into your first number, a "duet" between a live and a filmed performer, takes some mighty careful knotting.

New York choreographer Pat Catterson, performing "Keepsake" this weekend at George Washington University's Marvin Theater, showed it could be done. She is a shinningly creative artist, and a gutsy crafts-woman with a fine theatrical sense. "Keepsake" expresses Catterson's sense and appreciation of the threads linking her work to her dancer parents'.

Echoing ballroom partnering, she dances side by side with a life-sized filmed image of herself. In unison and in counterpoint, she and her *doppelganger* (white face and arms undulating softly in a dark studio) mirror one another. The music - Bach's 6th Cello Suite - is opulent and melancholy. Subtly, the juxtapositions of the dance imply innumerable relationships - past to present selves, parents to children, Indiana (homely maybe, but reassuring) to New York (splendid and lonely).

"Serial II" (1975, updated 1977) is composed of 36 fragments, in chronological order, from dances Catterson composed over an eleven-year period. Surprisingly, the dance is seamless as a Tai Chi sequence. It is also laced with humor and punctuated with touches indicating Catterson's interest in reversal (an effort no doubt aided by film and video), and in breaking movement into segments which she re-cements in unexpected ways.

Catterson gravitates towards inanimate partners - the filmed dancer, a bar stool, a window. In Part II of "Someone Old New Borrowed Blue"

(1973), it's an upholstered armchair on castors.

Catterson must have spent hours fooling around with armchairs before she honed this dance, for no motion is wasted. Rarely letting go of the chair, she clings, hides, flails, pouts, rocks (slowing her motion as though on a dying carousel). Calliope music, a carnival air. At some point, the chair seems to come alive.

The program's major work, "Please, Just Take It One Life At A Time" (1978), is a characterological tour-de-force. Catterson has created six people: James - outgoing, generous; Arthur - reptilian, hunted; Helen, posturing floppily between pubescence and maturity; Miss X, dancing orgasmically in a disco and then left alone, drained, in the street; Jelly-bean, tapping belly-down on a bar stool; And Esther Jane, E.J., jumping out of a Manhattan loft and splattering colored veils all over the street.

Catterson's Esther Jane sequence is composed of color slides - no live dancing - taken in New York, and "elegy" is written all over it. Catterson, dressed in veils, her body decorated with planets and stars, courts the window, curling into it, stretching across it, leaning, hunching. At night, she sits on the ledge, looking out. This is the story of a suicide, with all the attendant ambivalence and despair.

The program concluded with five tap dance numbers. Her tapping was clean, clear and altogether expert, but she had no lightness. Catterson, concentrating on her feet, has neglected the rest of her body and her face, which may be expressionless in modern dancing, but must be mobile for tap. Her tapping lacks heart.

In two nights of performances, Pat Catterson's audience numbered barely more than 100. Maybe Washington will lay out a bigger welcome for her next visit. She is a generous and satisfying performer, as much for her humanism as her originality.