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DANCE REVIEW |

Fascinating Rhythm, Among Other Things

By JACK ANDERSON

Rod Rodgers was always fascinated by rhythm. This choreographer and teacher, who died in 2002, was also fascinated by much from formal patterns in space to the warmth of human emotions.

The Rod Rodgers Dance Company honored him in "Don't Tell Me Who I Am," on March 26 in the Annex Theater of La MaMa. Rodgers was represented by "Wayfaring Stranger," in which David Browne appeared to be on a spiritual journey, and "Jazz Fusions," in which groups moved in a free-and-easy manner through many rhythmic and dynamic changes.

Two other choreographers offered pieces. Sean Curran's "Amadinda Dances" acknowledged the company's love of rhythm. Mr. Curran created this ensemble work to recorded music by Tigger Benford for the amadinda, a wooden xylophone-like instrument from East Africa. Its clear tones let complex rhythms preserve total clarity.

The choreography was also clear and complex. There were many tiny movements for hands, arms and feet, as well as vigorous skips, whirls, and hip and shoulder shakes. The patterns were intricate, but never forbidding.

Kayoko Sakoh's "Mercy Street," to recordings by Peter Gabriel, got off to an endearing start when a little girl (Brianna Riley) leaped from the audience into the protective arms of Mr. Browne. The group choreography that followed evoked communal solidarity.

"She Sayings and Soul Songs" united past and present. At the time of his death, Rodgers had begun to choreograph this suite, which featured songs by Nina Simone, and it was finished by Kim Grier, the company's present artistic director.

Ms. Grier let powerful currents of movement surge through her body in her solo to "Like a Woman." And in "Message from..Nam," in which Geri Allen's score incorporated excerpts from an anti-war speech by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., fervent arm gestures by Ronald Burton and Mr. Browne became declarations of conscience.