

DANCE

Preview



POOL HOPPING Scott Heron expresses his theatricality in *The Water*.

Heron chic

In his new work, Scott Heron flows with *The Water* By **Gia Kourlas**

Scott Heron sees the world through a special set of eyes. Or perhaps he's just invented a universe of his own liking. His beautiful dance-theater works, with their extravagant costumes and sets, create a dreamy, surreal paradise or a frightening hell, depending on your point of view. In the opening scene of *The Water*, which will premiere at P.S. 122 on Thursday 6, Tanya Gagne, dressed as a policeman, is perched high atop a trapeze bar. Heron is in drag from head to toe, wearing a gaudy black wig, a Mexican wedding dress and high heels. After Gagne shoots Heron dead, Cathy Weis, another bizarre character (at one point, she's a clown; at another, a country-western singer), is choked with loud sobs when she pulls the wig off his head by a rope attached to its top. The effect—both haunting and hilarious—serves as a perfect mirror of Heron's own witty, fastidious brand of dance-theater.

For *The Water*, Heron, 37, has gathered an impressive cast of performers that reads like a who's who of the downtown dance scene. Their participation isn't due to Heron's fine recruiting efforts, but to each dancer's desire to work with him. "Everyone in this piece asked to be in it, and I didn't

say no to anyone," Heron says. "That was one of my conceptual constructs." In addition to Gagne, whom Heron met while performing in Jennifer Miller's *Circus Amok*, and Weis, whose work he also appears in, the choreographer showcases the talents of four other wonderful dancers: DD Dorvillier, Jennifer Allen, Cydney Pullman and her nine-year-old daughter, Zane Fraser.

"This piece makes me realize that most of my work has focused around me as a solo artist," Heron explains. "I've invited other people to perform in my dances, but they've tended to function as secondary characters. This brings up my whole relationship with choreography: I think choreography is the most ridiculous thing. I can't figure out why people make it, and now I'm making it on these people."

For Heron, sequential individual movement doesn't have meaning on its own. "I work from an internal story process," he says. "The idea of saying, 'Raise your arm, hop over there and repeat it backward' seems ridiculous to me."

The Water stems from Heron's decision to spend some time outside the city. Two years ago, he relocated to a Tennessee commune about 80 miles southeast of Nashville. "It's part of the Radi-

cal Faeries, which is the spiritual, hippie wing of the gay movement," he explains. "I fell in love with living out in the woods." When Heron is there—he now stays for nearly half the year; the remainder is spent in New York or on tour—he lives in a barn surrounded by 250 acres of land. The original idea for *The Water* was sparked last autumn when Heron discovered a beautiful creek and videotaped it.

In the piece, water repeatedly serves as a metaphor for the passage of time, both in the movement, which ripples from one side of the stage to the other, and in Leslie Ross's water-influenced score. The work also features several bizarre settings that converge on one another. A variety of garish '50s lamps hangs from the ceiling of the living-room area, along with a Persian rug and television sets that screen the water video. Dorvillier sits in the back of the living room—she, or rather her head, is the centerpiece of a flower-covered shrine. Later in the piece, Pullman and Fraser embark upon a clever and aggressive tap dance, with the latter dressed up as a little boy in a suit.

"At one point, we went a little far with Cydney as the mom and Zane as the son—I had them slow-dancing, and Zane got really uncomfortable," Heron recalls. "She wouldn't tell us why; we finally realized it was getting too twisted sexually." As young as Fraser is, she performs with a focused maturity that intensifies when she fires a gun, lending the work a timely political edge with a reference to recent school shootings.

It's hardly surprising that Heron was an art student before he discovered dance in the mid-'80s; the sets he conjures are obvious remnants of his past life as a visual artist. But the captivating images he transfers to the stage, especially in *The Water*, can be credited solely to his remarkable imagination. "I don't want to say that it's a dream world or a world of the subconscious," he says with a sigh. "But it sort of is. I want to create an unknown place. Part of it has to do with my love of theater, where I think anything is possible; it's like a game. The absurd parts are funny, but they also disengage the mind from ordinary life. Dance and theater are about inhabiting new places."

Scott Heron presents *The Water* at P.S. 122 Thursday 6 through April 9.

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