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Josefina Baez and Jenny Bass

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"When visual images can not distract you anymore, then comes knowledge," says

Josefina Baez in "Dominicanish," the movement-monologue she created and performed at Dance Theater Workshop on a shared bill with Jenny Bass' "My Affair With the Teacher." Ironically, Baez confounds her own wisdom and offers a work so rich in visual (and aural) distractions that we are too aesthetically bewitched to contemplate meaning. While we hear references to Billie Holiday, New York City zip codes, "brutality in blue," and Soul Train, and realize the piece is inspired by a Dominican woman's encounters with American culture, we prefer to look and listen, rather than think and feel.

Baez is a gripping performer. As she speaks in Dominicanish--her self-coined language of English, Spanish, and nonsense words and syllables blended into rhythmic poetry--she underlines her text with gestures, steps, and stances derived from Indian dance. Cleverly choreographed, the angular clarity of the Eastern movement vocabulary somehow attunes our ears to a heightened hearing of the precision and musicality of Baez's speech. Though her words, often-times, make no sense, her flawless diction, agile face, and eloquent hands are arresting. Deliciously gratifying to see and hear, Baez presents her thoughts in a rapid, piecemeal fashion that inhibits analytic reflection, and maintains a sour attitude that grows tiresome and elicits little empathy.

An Uptown ballet audience of Balanchine devotees was needed to suitably savor Bass' magnificent presentation--a series of impersonations of the great choreographer's favorite muses. Using verbatim text from interviews published in Robert Tracy's book *Balanchine's Ballerinas*, Bass masterfully adopts the signature attire, accent, inflections, and mannerisms of Felia Doubrovska, Tamara Toumonova, Violette Verdy, Allegra Kent, and Suzanne Farrell. Her portrayals are so persuasive as to convince us we are actually hearing these illustrious stars speak, in private conversation, of their glorious adventures with Balanchine. Unfortunately, Bass' tour de force performance was under-appreciated by its Downtown audience, which appeared impatient with this fascinating journey through ballet history.

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