

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



The Joy of Movement with Anna Halprin and Group Motion

by Lisa Kraus

Picture an old woman painted white, hair matted with straw, folded into a hollowed-out spot of earth with grasses waving above. She moves glacially, tenderly, with eyes closed. The voiceover proclaims a love for “this old body.” It is old in the same way trees are old, as the landscape itself is old.

Anna Halprin’s enduring connection to nature took firm root as she chose West coast over East in the 1950’s. Her outdoor dance deck in Marin County California was a locus of discovery for such luminaries as Merce Cunningham, Simone Forti and Trisha Brown. In *Breath Made Visible*, Ruedi Gerber’s 2009 documentary screened in Philadelphia Dance Projects’ Motion Pictures series, Halprin states her case for dance that is not separate from nature or “the way things really are”. Shot as she was nearing ninety yet astonishingly vital, the film is deeply inspiring for its depiction of the sweep of her inspired dancing life and singular, visionary path. Rather than being allied with any school or “style,” Halprin seemed to gather devotees around her who became her playmates in investigating what lay at the limits of our conventional definitions of dance. All that encompassed inviting an examination of the body as a sensorial/emotional experience made manifest, a place to explore the dynamics of psychology, of disease and healing, of division (as with the explosive black/white relations of 1960’s Watts) and community.

To see, near its close, her ‘Seniors Rocking’ dance, with its fifty or so seniors in rocking chairs on a sundrenched swath of grass abutting the sea, and to hear these dancers’ ecstatic proclamations about how important dance is for them, one feels Halprin has given a gift of empowerment to many through her art.

Philadelphia’s venerable Group Motion was also featured in the screening with Djuna Wojton’s short documentary giving a window into the group’s Friday night improv sessions. Here too, dance is a revelation for all kinds of folks: as a way to connect, to feel free and whole. Unifying “body, mind and spirit” is how they put it. Group Motion, like Halprin, is on to something that’s ‘moving’ on every level.

Breath Made Visible and *Group Motion/Friday Night* screened by Philadelphia Dance Projects “Motion Pictures” series at The

Performance Garage, October 5. No further performances. <http://www.philadanceprojects.org/>

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