





Photo: Spencer Tunick

**024**

OPEN 24 HOURS

*Press Play to Start* with Pam Tanowitz, Kim Olson and Sara Green.

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Press Play to Start  
brochure,1992

## PAMSCRIPT

Dan Siegler

*I sat down with Pam Tanowitz in my recording studio, to ask her a series of questions I have been curious about for these many years. Some of her answers were a surprise, some I already knew, but thought her explanations would be entertaining for others to read. Pam is a deeply eccentric human being who could pass as the most normal person you know. Our creative partnership is coming up on twenty years, with the domestic one a few years behind. Her endless depths of workmaking ability are still a closely guarded mystery. I still maintain that there is a hint of the sacred as an undercurrent in her choreography, a claim she staunchly denies.*

*The best artistic work is hard to explain. It hits you somewhere inarticulate. You feel moved, but not pandered to, led but not forced. You understand something like an emotional truth, but in a nonlinear way. Abstract art is always the most potent, because it leaves open the most possibilities. Pam's work moves from instinctive to cerebral, from ice-cold technique to comedy.*

*I often wish audiences could get to see the work multiple times, as I do, because each time I see it something new is uncovered. There's so much rich detail, it's hard to take it all in in one sitting.*

*Composing music for Pam has been the easiest and the most challenging creative relationship of my life. Easy because I know I will find my way, since her movement vocabulary is in my bloodstream at this point. Challenging because she is always pushing herself and so, you have to push yourself. You can't rely on the same tricks that might instinctively get you through another gig.*

*This dialogue is a representation of a conversation that has been going on between us for many years, without words. It is as essential to our relationship as air and water, or in Pam's case, Advil and seltzer.*

**DS- Do you think you would have become a choreographer if your mom didn't take you to ballet classes when you were a kid?**

PT - I didn't go to ballet classes. I started with modern. I started out with modern when I was ten years old. I came to ballet late.

**Can you think of an early memory of feeling the enjoyment of dancing when you were a kid?**

Oh yeah. I used to dance in our living room with my sisters and we'd pretend to perform to an imaginary audience and then we'd try to drag our mom down to look at the show we just put together.

**Can you remember the show?**

No, I can't remember the show. We used to just put on records, like *Really Rosie* and *A Chorus Line*.

**Were you the choreographer?**

Probably. I was probably bossing my sisters around.

**How do you teach new dancers to move the way you want them to move?**

A lot of times I've already seen the dancers dance. I've had one audition my whole career. I usually know them or watch them in class or see them in a show, so I already have some idea and I've already fallen in love with them in some way. So that's three quarters of the battle. I dance a lot in rehearsals. I move. I try to coach them in what I'm interested in and where the accents are, how to perform a movement. I'm also interested in what they bring to the table. So I wouldn't ask them to be in the rehearsal with me without knowing that in advance. So I know what certain dancers are going to breathe life into. It's really a collaboration in a lot of ways, between me and the dancers.

**How do you get dancers of disparate technical backgrounds to dance in your style?**

What's important for me is not that I have 5 of the same dancers that do it the same way. What's important to me is that the approach is the same. So while they might have very different training, there is a through line to how they approach the movement. So that way their own personalities come through, but it's still clear.

**If you could perform your work at any specific site in the world, not a theater, where would it be?**

Saks Fifth Avenue.

**Why don't you make work that is explicitly based on other artistic work?**

When I start off with an idea like 'this is based on this' or 'this is about this,' it doesn't really bode well for me. I'm inspired by parts of things, an image from a movie or a line of a poem that I read, but it wouldn't be that the whole dance is based on that poem.

**So the process of being inspired by another work of art doesn't inspire you to create a**

**work of art. It just fuels your particular energy to focus on your own work?**

Correct. Because I like to try to figure out what they're doing, so for example, you know I love the French New Wave filmmakers. It's not that I want to make a dance that looks like their movie.

The ideas behind it are what interests me. So, they're attacking the foundation of how we perceive film before they started making films. They broke down narrative, they used different color filters, everything from the technological aspect to the storytelling was open. Or if I read a Paul Auster book for example, and he mixes up the structure so you don't know where you're reading. Is it the beginning? Is it the end? Who's the narrator? Those are the things that get my juices flowing.

**So in a way what you're saying is that your piece could be based on a film by Louis Malle or it could be based on a dance by Merce Cunningham, but you're not explicit about it?**

It could be all of those things. like in *Be In the Gray With Me*, we did a section I called 'the trailer section,' which was done in front of a curtain and I got the idea of a color saturated section from a Godard movie, *Pierre Le Fou*, certain parts of the film are all red or all green. That was the inspiration. So it wasn't that I was making a dance about that movie, it was an image that stuck with me and in that same dance I also referenced Rose Adagio from *Sleeping Beauty*. I can go down the list. There are things there that are inspired by things I love.

**How many times have people asked you if you watch "Dancing with the Stars?"**

A million. Mostly family members. I've never seen it.

**The Beatles or the Stones?**

I want to say the Stones, but I think Beatles.  
I'm just not that cool.

**Why are you afraid of nature?**

I just don't really feel comfortable there and my nose gets clogged up and I don't feel like I'm my best Pam there.

**Why do you cover your ears, instead of your eyes when you're watching a scary movie?**

Because then I can see what's going on so I don't miss anything but it's not as scary because I've muffled the sound.

**You say that as if it makes sense.**

Yeah, it's obvious!

**Will you ever dance onstage again?**

It's possible in a solo, but I would not put myself next to my dancers. They're fantastic dancers...and I'm out of shape....I would have to go to a boot camp or something....(after a minute) I'm not saying no, but it's not as interesting as making dances. Making the dance is the most important and interesting thing to me. I loved performing when I did perform. But what really got me excited was making dances, being in the studio, being in the process. I could be in the studio all day, every day for the rest of my life...and never do a show.



ANDREA M

If Pam Tanowitz had been baptized into dance as an infant, Merce Cunningham and George Balanchine would surely have been standing on either side of the font, ready to serve as godfathers. Tanowitz's

## Images Built of Simple Movement

Jason Collins and Maggie Cloud of Pam Tanowitz Dance, at the Joyce.

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### Critics' picks

## ►► DANCE: Pam Tanowitz

Show-stealing choreography makes a comeback. By **Gia Kourlas**

After a performance at Dance Theater Workshop in the Tanowitz was approached by Viola Farber. The free-spirit Cunningham dancer (and Tanowitz's teacher at Sarah Lawrence College) told her: "Now don't start making dances you think they want to see."

It was a warning. She didn't want Tanowitz to let her rigor slide into something cute or, worse, sacrifice form for fashion. It never has. In the ensuing years, I've watched Tanowitz as she's plugged along with unrelenting devotion, producing dances in which choreography is the star. This, defiantly, is an old-fashioned pursuit: Today, much contemporary dance is about creating atmosphere at the expense of innovative movement—an approach that's quickly becoming tedious, in inexperienced hands. But Tanowitz, who has been snubbed by fellow choreographers and producers for years, is tougher than she looks.

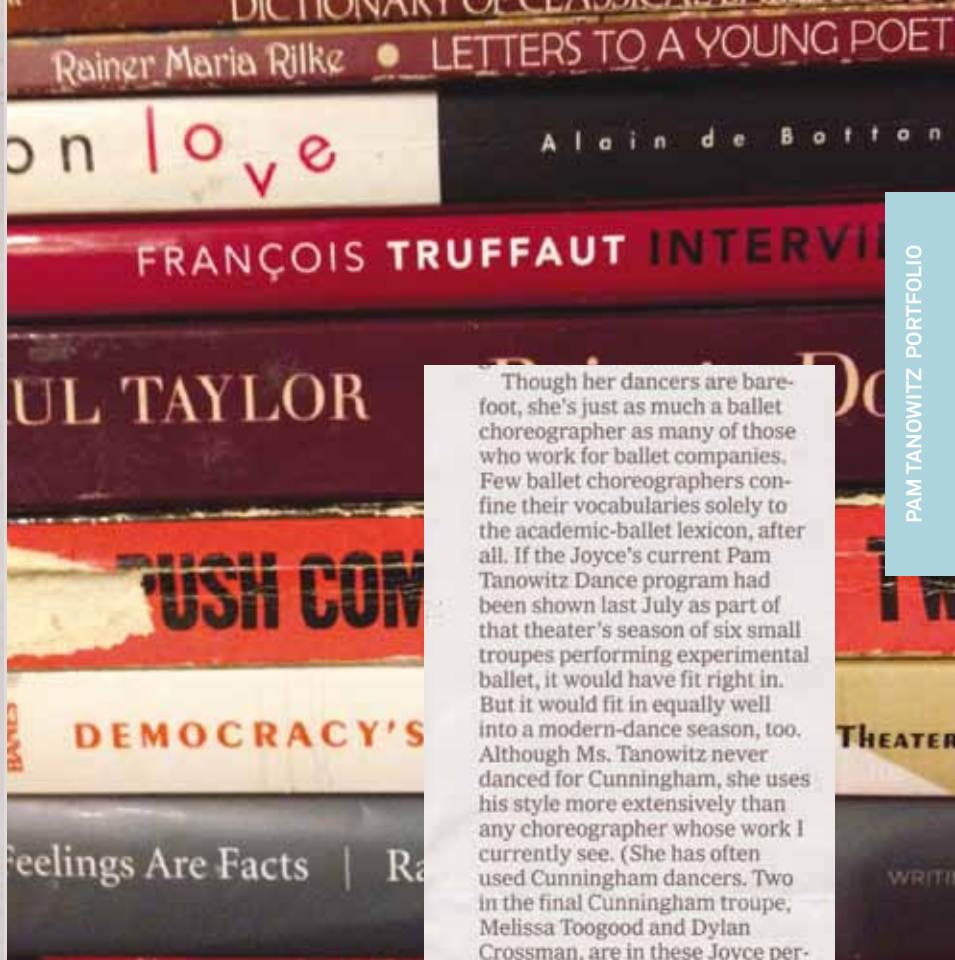
She did experience a few false starts, though. For some time after

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OHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES



Though her dancers are bare-foot, she's just as much a ballet choreographer as many of those who work for ballet companies. Few ballet choreographers confine their vocabularies solely to the academic-ballet lexicon, after all. If the Joyce's current Pam Tanowitz Dance program had been shown last July as part of that theater's season of six small troupes performing experimental ballet, it would have fit right in. But it would fit in equally well into a modern-dance season, too. Although Ms. Tanowitz never danced for Cunningham, she uses his style more extensively than any choreographer whose work I currently see. (She has often used Cunningham dancers. Two in the final Cunningham troupe, Melissa Toogood and Dylan Crossman, are in these Joyce performances.)

Review, Page 5.

**NSPACE PROJECT**

presents **City/Dans:**

**PAM TANOWITZ DANCE**

in  
*The Blue Bamboula*  
*Grand Bamboula*  
*Pendant*  
and *Storage*



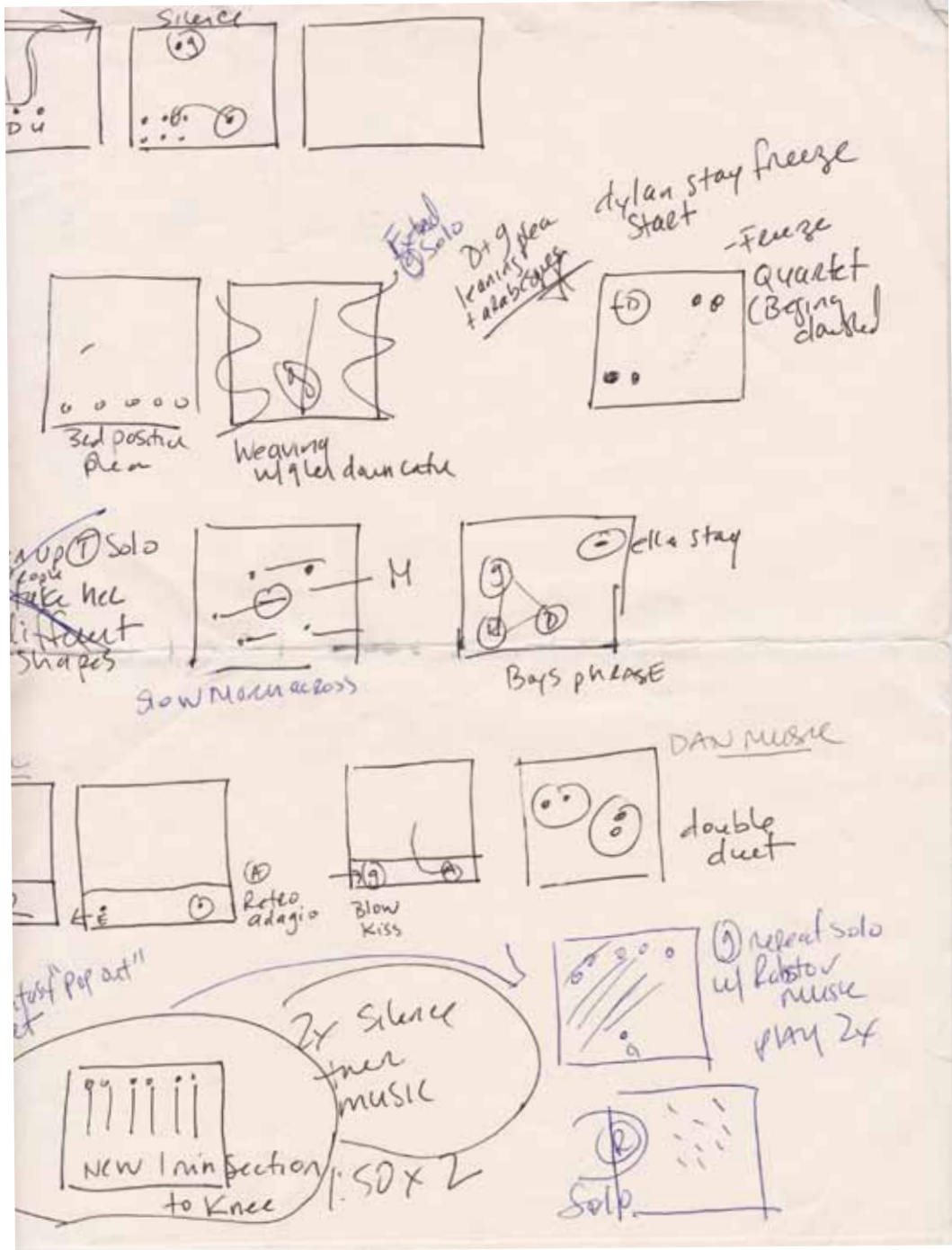
I grow up w/Betty Grable & Betty Hutton in movie musicals, Bob & Ray on radio, Sid Caesar, Carl Reiner, Imogene Coca & Your Show of Shows on TV & Milton Berle as Carmen Miranda.

8 library books a week & not 1 play, dance or music concert, no museum or gallery but I'm a Visual Arts major in B'klyn College in 1956 & study w/Ad Reinhardt & Max Ernst's son Jimmy & I meet up with contemporary choreographer James Waring who studies w/Antony Tudor

& knows London West End actor, singer & dancer David Vaughan who knows Lincoln Kirstein & studies @ S.A.B. w/Merce Cunningham & advises Brit dancer Valda Setterfield who studies w/Marie Rambert to try the US & introduces her to Jimmy & NYC Ballet dancer Ruth Sabotka, divorced from Stanley Kubrick, who needs a roommate & Valda moves in & poses for painter Rafael Soyer and cleans dance critic Edwin Denby's flat & Jimmy introduce her to me & me to Merce & to Merce dancers Carolyn Brown & Viola Farber who study ballet w/Margaret Craske & to dancer Remy Charlip who writes & draws children's books & I hear music of John Cage, Morty Feldman, Mozart, Mahler & Fannie Brice & see art of Mucha, Cy Twombly, Ray Johnson, Kurt Schwitters, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns & dances of Balanchine, Cunningham, Robbins, Merle Marsicano, Katy Litz, Busby Berkeley & Laurel & Hardy.

So when I meet Pam Tanowitz whose dances easily reference & acknowledge her balletic & contemporary techniques & enjoy unpredictable & logical & illogical connections to music & phrasing & indulge the pleasurable result of radically rethinking stage space I smile & I am at home & grateful.







(1)  
 Rashaun Mitchell  
 and Anne Lentz, Love  
 Storyless, Danspace  
 Project, 2004. Set by  
 Cecily Brown, photograph  
 by Tom Brazil.

The through-the-looking-glass effect extended to the ballet idiom that Tanowitz has adopted – and tweaked – more thoroughly here than before. She has displaced the accents just enough that you suddenly wonder what exactly ballet is and whether these moves qualify: philosophical musings that add to more immediate joys.

She invokes a range of references – from 19th-century ballet to New York modern dance figures – while dissenting from central aspects of their style. Some dances say simultaneously yes and no to Marius Petipa, others hail and farewell to Merce Cunningham, and there’s often a strong suggestion of “This is not Mark Morris.”

## Dance in Review

### ■ Evening of breezy sassiness ■

#### Open 24 Hours Dance Company

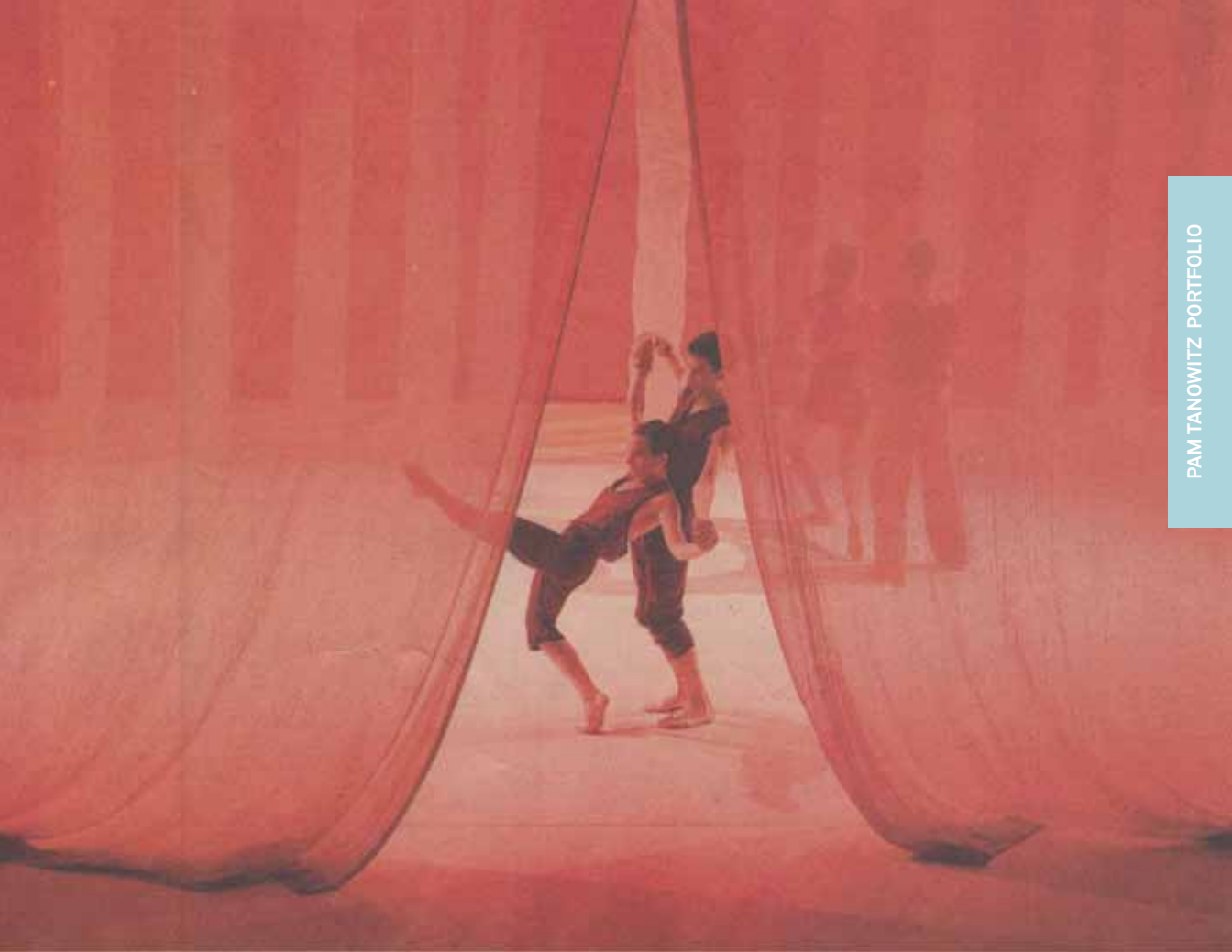
CBGB's Gallery 313

The works that the Open 24 Hours Dance Company present Wednesday night were jam-packed with choreographic virtues and virtuosity. The virtues were strong enough to arouse curiosity about what Tanowitz, the group's young director, will create next.

Ms. Tanowitz knows how to

Balanchine Studio —

A ballet is a construction —  
 a product of experience, taste, and knowledge.  
 filtered through an extremely fine sense of  
 craftsmanship + imagination  
 all in response to the provocation  
 of music.



JOSHUA S. ALTMAN FOR THE NEW YORK

ylan Crossman are part of the cast of nine dancers in Pam Tanowitz's "Be in the Gray With Me," which had its premiere at Dance Theater Workshop.

## linguist Who Dares to Mess With the Classical Vocabulary

to match their talent, danced with the lyrical, intelligent intensity required by Ms. Tanowitz's fierce choreographic imagination. It didn't hurt, either, that they looked fabulous in Renée Kurz's stylish, variously designed pewter-colored costumes.

When it comes to movement languages, Ms. Tanowitz is a fluent multilinguist, interweaving

"Be in the Gray With Me" runs through Saturday at Dance Theater Workshop, 219 West 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 924-0077.

various styles and quoting from particular passages in a pleasingly unforced manner. "Gray" delves into and plays with Cunningham technique. (The three male dancers are Cunningham members or alumni.)

It also delights in the bounding, weighty buoyancy of moderns like Paul Taylor and Mark Morris. (Mr. Morris, too, figures in several dancers' bios.) The performers at times walk with deliberately heavy, pedestrian strides. And one memorable passage evokes the Rose Adagio in "Sleeping Beauty," though sex

### Be in the Gray With Me

Dance Theater Workshop

But these are academic observations, and there is nothing academic about this work, which seems longer than its 55 minutes, in a good way. There are many moments of dance drama, details you barely catch before they are gone, just as the performers slip in and out of the six doorways cut into the three walls of white plastic sheeting that constitutes

the set.

The set also serves as another sort of canvas, for Philip Treviño's textured, ever-shifting lighting design. (Ms. Tanowitz channels spatial wizards like Trisha Brown and Twyla Tharp in her use of margins, though she explodes the wings, to make the in-nards of the theater a part of the piece.)

But there is room to breathe among the details. Ms. Tanowitz well understands that choreography, as often as not, is an art of subtraction, and she neatly avoids busy work.

herself over, whether in mood or in rhythm, to the work's multilayered music, which draws from rich sources, including the composers Vladimir Martynov and in a collage-like electronic score Dan Siegler. The giving over in turn allows for resistance and subversion, creating a sort of static that averts mere prettiness.

But Ms. Tanowitz does not seem to know quite where "Gray" should end, and the last few sections feel less sure, less inevitable. Still, as the work's title suggests, clarity needs some

The authority with which the choreographer Pam Tanowitz orders time and space in "The Wanderer Fantasy" is something rare, but there's an offbeat quality to it. On more than one level the work, now at Danspace Project, puzzles the mind. Yet

☆ ✓ Pam Tanowitz DANCE! B9

### Moving Forward Resolutely, But With Wit and Surprises

Pam Tanowitz's "Forevermore" began with a solo performed by Posy Knight in which movement

Forevermore

## PAM TANOWITZ: CLASSICAL REIMAGININGS

Cassie Peterson

I recently had the pleasure of stepping into a Pam Tanowitz rehearsal/ world. And what an extraordinarily complex world it was...

When I arrived, Tanowitz and her dancers were diligently working on the first section of her newest work, “The Spectators.” The rehearsal space was calm and quiet; tightly controlled, yet relaxed. There was an energetic orderliness to the space that she and her dancers had created together. Inside of it, Tanowitz was confident and contained like a horse whisperer, cueing each dancer by saying their names, and then watching closely for the subtlest of details. It was a private dialogue, barely audible to an outsider. Yet, as I watched, it quickly became evident that Tanowitz is a champion of movement. She embodies a deeply committed somatic knowledge and an unequivocal love for the steps themselves, the discipline, and the rigor associated with traditional dance forms. Tanowitz is a devoted craftsman and a formidable part of a long dance lineage.

Tradition: an inherited, established, or customary pattern of ideas, action, or behavior.

Experimentation: the testing of an idea

Tanowitz’s work sincerely exists somewhere between these two defining, artistic standards. She is well versed in formalism while setting it up in a contemporary framework, making her work exist as a kind of experimental homage to classic forms. Of her unique vision and methodology, Tanowitz says:

*These explorations of time-honored, codified movement vocabularies allow for new forms to be born from what has already come. I attempt deconstruction to arrive at a new place – a new way of seeing and most importantly, a new way of understanding the human being in movement.*

“The Spectators” breaks down formalism whilst simultaneously preserving it. The piece works to carry recognizable traditional movements into abstraction through a series of subtle, striking movements. It’s a kind of classical dance, re-imagined.

During the rehearsal, I was sitting in a chair, transfixed by the seamless laboring of these dancers. Together and alone, her dancers emit a string of shapes and designs, with a kind of cunning(ham) precision. My

attention was held captive by their relentless control and beauty. Tanowitz's movement logic is both voluminous and austere with a barely contained virtuosity, brimming beneath every moment. Her work is careful but strong. Narratives slip in and out and a deep, textured emotionality persists.

There are so many crucial elements that make up a Tanowitz world. Each element is held in place and supported by one another – creating a complex aesthetic ecosystem. “The Spectators” is a mature mixture of solo and ensemble work that boasts elaborate steps, formations, and complex lifts, all foregrounded by a minimalist soundscore. The end of section one features a beautiful solo that concludes with a dancer powerfully stomping her feet into the ground, with the rest of the ensemble drumming along – a crescendo moment that brings the whole piece into a seductive, percussive unity. It's moments like these that make “The Spectators” rich with varying emotional tones. There exists a kind of latent tension and yearning, an unquenchable desire to belong inside of this particular Tanowitz world.

Balance is a good word to describe the entire work. There is an innate balance between form and experimentation, between the rigor and risk of each movement. There is balance between solo and ensemble material, a balance of live music and movement. “The Spectators” is sensorial and textured yet, minimal and cerebral. It is an exercise in both technique and emotionality. It features innovative physical geometries, creating images of bodies, methodically carved out in space. It all comes together to create an eerie equilibrium that will haunt you.

Pam Tanowitz: *Classical Reimaginings* by Cassie Peterson was first commissioned and published by New York Live Arts as part of the 2012/13 Context Notes program.