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DANCE REVIEW

Powerful Reserve and Innocent Emotions, With Costumes by Mother Nature

By JENNIFER DUNNING

Daniel Léveillé's "Modesty of Icebergs," which opened last night at the Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church, is a dance that could have been painted by Balthus. Six figures inhabit a mysteriously changeable space, awkwardly at ease and not yielding the unfathomable reserves of their secrets. But at the same time, there is a great simplicity to the five men and one woman, all nude without self-consciousness, and to their simple, homemade-looking moves. The straight-up jumps, sometimes up to shoulder sits, are the action of small boys at play.

Bodies flatten into the floor they lie on, the way legs open into a split. Arms circle back and hold as chests puff out. At first there is a whiff of amusing male bravado to that repeated gesture, but by the end it has become poignant. A chin abruptly

'Modesty of Icebergs'

St. Mark's Danspace

coming to rest on a leg at the end of the piece is just a shift of the head, but it is immensely loving in a child-like way. Why is it that such recognizable emotions glint through the pure physicality of "Modesty of Icebergs"?

Mr. Léveillé has been choreographing in Montreal, where his company is based, since 1976, which probably accounts in part for the quiet authority of this hourlong piece. His performers (Frédéric Boivin, Mathieu Campeau, Stéphane Gladyszewski, Emmanuel Proulx, Ivana Ilicovic and Dave St.-Pierre) are both anonymous and sentient, as well as physically daring, and they never call attention to themselves. And the distant sound of even-rhythmed Cho-

pin piano music that accompanies the dance has a similar modesty. Most of all, though, there is the subtle, exquisite lighting design by Marc Parent.

Light changes almost imperceptibly, some of it softly fluorescent, coming from the floor and high above. At times the dancers look like strokes of pale or clay-green light. Pools of soft shadows provide them with places to rest. In one central passage, all six bodies are piled neatly atop one another, and neither they nor the light moves or changes in any way, almost daring the viewer to glance away in fatigue. Mr. Léveillé and his collaborators have made a dance that lives in each moment. There is no point in paying attention to whatever appears to join those moments. For once there is truth to the kind of overwrought statement of intent that seems to accompany just about every dance these days. Out of these discrete elements, Mr. Léveillé has truly created a dance that communicates the "extraordinary effort required to simply live."

The program repeats nightly through Sunday at 8:30 at St. Mark's, 131 East 10th Street, East Village.