

BACKSTAGE

January 18, 2002

CAROLYN DORFMAN DANCE COMPANY

Reviewed by Phyllis Goldman

Self-presented at the John Jay College Theater

In a letter to the Dorfman Company patrons and friends (included in the program), Carolyn Dorfman explains in touching words her motivation in creating "The Klezmer Sketch" (reviewed here last year) and adding a next chapter, "The American Dream" (new this year). Both were presented recently at the John Jay College Theater under the title "Mayne Mentshn (My People)" and dedicated to her parents, who are Holocaust survivors, making a remarkable evening of theatre.

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Dorfman has handled this difficult material with great insight. She has maintained a succinct narration to her story. The connected family, seen celebrating a traditional Jewish wedding, is a happy one. Then she lets us leave for intermission—worried. As the first piece ends, there is a warning call, an ominous play between lighting changes and expressions on the dancers' faces. The dancers huddle in a group suggesting an angled piece of sculpture. There is the awful knowledge that soon it will be destroyed.

In "American Dream" (part two), the dancers have entered a new life in

America. The costumes are flowery and gay; the music – composed, arranged, and

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adapted with flair by Greg Wall – lifts the spirit. The immigrants acclimate to new ways, beautifully defined by one segment tucked in the middle of the piece: an exchange of words between dancers that is a translation of Yiddish to English, a duel of language superbly carried off by Deirdre Smith and Pamela Wagner. This sassy word game allows Dorfman to best express the changes facing the displaced person – "old country to new country." It is a charming interplay set in a well-structured choreographic work.

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Binding both pieces is a figure in a hat and overcoat weaving in and out as a reminder that Americanization does not totally exorcise one's roots. Perhaps the group has found freedom, but within them remain everlasting ties to the past.