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GIVING BACK THE LOVE

Artistic community pays its respects to painter Sam Maitin, noted for his humanism

BY ROBERT JOHNSON

The word "humanist" arises often when friends and colleagues of the late Sam Maitin recall this artist's life and work. It came up again Saturday when Access to Art presented "An Evening of Dance & Film" in Maitin's honor, at the Middle Township Performing Arts Center, in Cape May Courthouse.

Maitin (1928-2004) loved people: He loved children, like the young cancer patients in Philadelphia who helped pick the colors for a hospital mural; he loved his family; and he loved his community enough to campaign for peace and social justice.

So although Maitin was an abstract painter, it makes sense that Barbara Beitel, the director of Access to Art, would commission choreographers to honor his memory with dances in which people scamper among the biomorphic shapes of Maitin's pictures, and other people embrace and support one another.

The premieres included "Sam Maitin: Celebration," a documentary film by Craig Rinkerman, choreographer Susannah Newman's fantasy video "Sam's World" and "He Walks on the Wings of the Wind," a dance choreographed by Carolyn Dorfman. In this last, members of the Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company shared the stage with a frisky passel of local dance students.

Reflecting Maitin's unpretentious aesthetic, playfulness and informality abounded throughout the evening, interrupted once by Dorfman's "Cat's Cradle," a somber dance woven from the songs of a Holocaust victim. Yet here, too, an appeal to conscience meshed with Maitin's concerns, and the theme of remembrance seemed appropriate. Likewise, the intimacy of the sculptural groups that open Dorfman's "Pastorale Pause," and the ingenious way they rotate to uncover new perspectives all seemed relevant, although Dorfman did not choreograph "Pastorale Pause" with Maitin in mind.

The scale and luminosity of the screen glamorize Maitin's abstract forms and his feathery, fresh colors in "Sam's World." Yet the most delightful aspect of this 12-minute video dance is the way Newman and her technical collaborator, Charles Bandla, have animated these borrowed shapes. In the first segment, they become mischievous creatures who interact with the dancers, nudging and pursuing them, popping out and spinning.



Subsequently Newman layers images so that her dancers seem to enter the paintings. This mysterious environment has no floor or other solid boundaries, but seems draped with curtains of some transparent fabric that are dyed, like distant galaxies, with brightly colored energies. Here dancers and paintings are composed

of the same stuff, and different forms of art seem to share on essential nature.

Dorfman also creates an ingeniously layered environment in "He Walks on the Wings of the Wind," where the dancers manipulate folding screens that organize the space. These latticed screens by Christine Martens both reflect colored light and allow the changing hues of the backdrop to pass through.



Wearing color-splashed costumes by Russell Aubrey, some dancers freeze against the screens while others move, creating dynamic oppositions and cleverly changing focus. The piece opens with a solo in which Jon Zimmerman, seated on a piano stool, seems to gather inspiration with a heroic, sweeping gesture. His second gesture allows this energy to spiral through his body, establishing a circular motif.

The dance builds steadily with acrobatic partnering (message: we can fly if we all work together), leading up to a fun-filled ending where kids pelt the audience with colored hand-socks, then encourage viewers to follow the leader, conducting a multi-hued symphony of gestures.

Pianist Aurelia Mika Chang and violinist Michael Ludwig provided the sprightly accompaniment, performing works by Bach and Mozart.