

## Lines in the Snow

**M**argie Beals, buffeted by the deaths of dear ones, transforms her grief in *Pathways*, a series of danced monologues (remaining shows are March 28 through 30, at the Loft Theatre). She evokes, in words and movement, a young female cousin and four men (her father, a cousin who committed suicide, and a dance critic and a choreographer, both taken by AIDS), until they practically stand before us; she speaks in their voices and her own. Wearing an exquisite bias-cut burgundy velvet dress by Sally Ann Parsons (when you look at a single artist for that long, her costume becomes a major partner), she throws herself into their crises and their calm, out their windows and into their minds; at one point, startling for a woman of 59, she drops into a split.

How do you review what is essentially a memorial service? You don't, exactly; you just urge people struggling through this decade's fusillade of loss to see it, renew themselves, let her touch their tender places.

—ELIZABETH ZIMMER

# We Shall Not Be Overcome

## African American Ensembles Join Forces

BY THOMAS DEFRANTZ

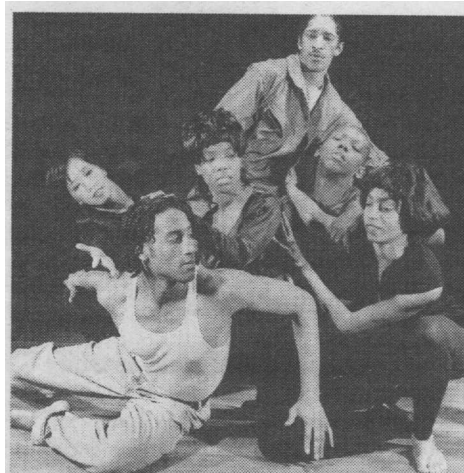
**T**he lean and hungry look many black dancers presented in the '60s was a tactic to incite action, in the honored tradition of social-protest art. Nowadays, they ain't acting; they *hungry*. In this period of shrinking subsidy, four undervalued companies have formed CODA/NY, a coalition addressing collective organizational, aesthetic, and political concerns.

The CODA (Coalition of Dance Artists) groups worked together during the heyday of the Harlem Cultural Commission's Dancemobile project, begun in 1967, which brought dancing to borough streets on the back of a flatbed truck. Eleo Pomare Dance Company was on Dancemobile's original outing; Rod Rodgers Dance Company ran a preschool series for Dancemobile in 1968; Joan Miller's Dance Players was formed in 1970 by a sister who'd danced with Rodgers; and Delores Vanison, director of Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company, once danced with Pomare. For 30 years they've shared artists, composers, and audiences; now they claim kinship as warriors against shriveling funding and flickering visibility.

For these artists, downsizing began with decentralization. "We used to be presented by regional dance academies

and colleges in Cleveland, Philadelphia, Denver," Rodgers explained. "Those presenters no longer exist." Decentralization grants allowed the academies to expand and become full-fledged companies, forcing smaller, independent artists to slug it out for New York audiences and funding. After the dance boom busted in the '80s, the situation worsened. According to Rodgers, today's funding climate rewards media spin more generously than longevity; an annual operating budget above \$50,000 and below \$1 million becomes a liability: "Funders overlook the 'middle passage' artists. My company hasn't had prominent visibility in years. We aren't big box office or an 'issue of the moment' company. But we're making new work which reflects the black experience."

The ravages of HIV rank high on the list of concerns driving Pomare: "AIDS has devastated an entire gen-



A pool of resources: dancers from CODA

DAVID A. FULLARD

hopes CODA will allow for more-adventurous collaborations, and provide a showcase for work somewhere between the blatant theatricality of Dunham and Ailey and the eccentric individualism of postmodernists like Bill T. Jones and Ralph Lemon: "We're going for a community-based linkage between artists and audiences, to reflect our truths in dance. Some people saw Ailey's work as the logical end to a conversation about socially relevant black dance artistry. We didn't."

These choreographers started out in the '60s, during the fiery revisionist battles of

Uptown's Black Arts movement and Downtown's Judson Dance Theater. While those efforts played out and softened into middle age, the artists of CODA have only begun to fight. Says Rodgers, "The classicism in our work doesn't exhaust the possibilities of harmony, of rhythm, of humanitarian concerns. To me, these possibilities cannot be exhausted." **V**

Eventually, CODA may operate like a regional troupe, sharing the burdens of administration and space rental while expanding funding possibilities. For now, the companies retain independent status, studio spaces, and bookings. Rodgers

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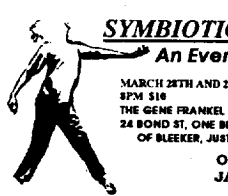
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