



## SHEN WEI

October 7, 2016

Certainly "Neither", as premiered at BAM, offers an experience that stretches the imagination, and tantalizes one with a series of enigmas. The audience in the Howard Gilman Opera House first encounters Shen Wei's black and white Untitled No. 1, an oil and acrylic painting on a linen that extends the length of the stage, as commissioned by BAM and the Performing Arts Center at Purchase College. Three white currents surge up on the left, charge down in the middle, and thrust up again on the left of this stormy canvas, fanciful and rich with implications. Wei's design talents gush throughout this hour long work, encompassing a set with nine arched doors, three to a side, that once opened throw a half moon light, his costumes, the final ones being plastic tents that rose to a cluster, and his choreography for 11 dancers.

Morton Feldman's 1977 score with a searing soprano solo and orchestra and Samuel Beckett's 87 word libretto, projected periodically on the back wall of the set, carry this impressive work. At times, "Neither" feels nightmarish, with two of dancers, Cynthia Koppe at first and later, less frantically, Zak Ryan Schlegel, trapped in a tic, with their long loose hair and limbs flaying. Koppe seems cast as the victim left to squirm in an endlessly repetitive cycle on the floor while the others march as one past her. A man finally gives her hand to pull her back into an upright rhythm, but he then pulls her back slowly into the light. Emerging from stage right, encased in plastic, she floats upward until she drops at the top of the set, whereupon a near naked man appears.

The choreography astonishingly evolves with the dramatic turns of Feldman's "anti-opera," with the dancers often moving in unison in threes or noodling on independent paths with a limpid, boneless flow. Founder of China's first modern dance company in 1990, Wei designs with an almost impersonal remove as though literally following the words of Beckett "till at last halt for good, absent for good from self and other," the dancers having surrendered to an unknown.

EYE ON THE ARTS, NY - Deirdre Towers