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Philosophical Dance

"Thin Air"

Donna Uchizono Company

Dance Theater Workshop

New York, NY

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by Lisa Rinehart

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Ever fearless, Donna Uchizono explores the abstractions of Buddhism and quantum physics in "Thin Air," a heady conceptual piece with just enough dancing to keep it grounded (and, I might add, fascinating). Uchizono likes to immerse herself in something -- a place, an emotional experience, an idea -- then riff on it in unpredictable, and pleasantly inexplicable ways. In "Thin Air," Uchizono concentrates on perceptions of reality by way of juxtaposing the corporeal qualities of dance with the theoretical realities of video. Video images are projected on two dimensional surfaces to create an illusion of sculptural depth, while projections on a dancer's body flatten her curves into a blank canvas. If this sounds potentially boring, it's not. Uchizono has a visual artist's eye for composition, and a performance artist's sensibility for engagement. This means that while much of the piece's movement is minimal and repetitive, it's evocative of Uchizono's current interest -- the parallel between the conundrums of physics, and the Buddhist tenet that the world doesn't exist in the way we see it. Stay with me here -- did I mention there are several ladders, a sheet of opaque plastic manipulated from nimbus cloud to rubbish wad in a series of transformations worthy of art installation status, and a very cool score by Fred Frith? Such is Uchizono's palate; quirky, layered, visually arresting, and intimate as a stranger's diary.

The piece begins with three quivering apparitions projected on the house curtain, and the nebulous tone is set. Julie Alexander, Hristoula Harakas and Antonio Ramos perch, Mount Olympus style, on tall ladders above a plastic sheeting cloud cover. It might