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DANCE REVIEW | YOKO HIGASHINO/HIROAKI UMEDA

Human Machine, on the Go

By GIA KOURLAS

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There wasn't much left to the imagination when a pair of contemporary choreographers, billed as two of Japan's brightest young stars, presented United States premieres at Dance Theater Workshop on Thursday. While different in approach, the choreographers Yoko Higashino and Hiroaki Umeda were driven by similar concerns: to showcase the body as a piece of machinery.

Mr. Umeda's effort was the more successful. In his engaging "while going to a condition," he stood in silhouette, scarcely veering from his original position: feet planted firmly apart, with his head lowered in a gentle bow. Geometric strips of black-and-white lines flickered behind him on a large screen, synchronized to an electronic score, which despite sharp dips into crackling static was as rhythmical as a fervent drum solo.

But more potent than the score or the gimmick of the visual scenario, both designed by Mr. Umeda, was the way the slippery movement manifested itself in the choreographer's body. Like a tin man with oil flowing freely through his veins, Mr. Umeda mirrored the pulsating score with an accumulation of motion, starting with his feet and rising gradually to overtake his buckling legs and rubbery torso.

In "Alarm! - zero hour edition," Ms. Higashino based her choreography on the notion of collage. The work for six performers (including Ms. Higashino), set to electronic music by Natiho Toyota, featured a steady stream of images, which focused on the subversive impulses that naturally arise within a strict, fast-paced society.

A topless dancer walked across a red carpet with a brown bag covering her head; a robot, made of a tricycle contraption with a blond wig and a pair of sunglasses, spun in a circle; a headless nude woman ran in place on a narrow video screen; and a trio of men frolicked in unison, wearing nothing but underwear and bunny ears.

For all its eye candy, "Alarm!" lacked cohesiveness and seemed dated in both its frenetic, robotic movement - legs and arms flailed at awkward angles, but with too much grace to appear truly feral - and in its calculatedly random stage design. The piece hinted at rebellious behavior, yet absent from Ms. Higashino's choreographic machine was an engine to

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Yoko Higashino and Hiroaki Umeda perform at 7:30 tonight at Dance Theater Workshop, 219 West 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 924-0077.

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