

NEXT WAVE FESTIVAL REVIEW/DANCE

At the Creation, a Tender Adam as Eve's Rescuer

By JACK ANDERSON

When Eiko and Koma presented the world premiere of "River" in 1995, they immersed themselves in the Delaware River. But when it received its New York premiere on Wednesday night, the Japanese-born dancers performed in shallow water on the stage of the Majestic Theater at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Surely no one missed a real river. Theater is an art of illusion, and Eiko and Koma are sensitive and imaginative dancers and choreographers. "River" evoked the creation of the world and the flow of life in slow stately movements that ultimately attained an almost biblical grandeur. Although "River" lasted only 75 minutes, it became a vision of eternity.

At its start, the houselights dimmed. Then, in what proved to be a marvelous theatrical touch, nothing happened. No lights brightened onstage. Silence filled the theater. Because there were no sounds, sights or movements for a long time, one was reminded of how the creation story in the book of Genesis declares, in the King James translation, that "the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Out of this nothingness, creation came to pass.

As Jeff Fontaine's lighting slowly and almost imperceptibly illuminated the stage, two shapes grew visible, moving in the water with slight splashing noises. The bodies were those of Eiko and Koma. But they were so hunched up that it was initially difficult to determine if they were human. Then Eiko lifted her upper body out of the stream and gazed about her like some newborn being.

Across center stage in this production, which the dancers designed, ran a stream of water. Surrounding it were two low riverbanks, one downstage, the other upstage, where the members of the Kronos Quartet assembled to play an unhurried, melancholy and poignant score by Sōmei Satoh. When the first musical tones broke the silence, it was as if the spirit of creation had spoken.

The dancers kept disappearing and returning. Wearing a long robe, Koma stood on the downstage shore patiently waiting while Eiko made swimming motions in the stream. Then he reached out to guide her toward land, lifted her and finally cradled her in his arms with seemingly infinite compassion.

Some choreographers might have



Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Eiko, left, and Koma are accompanied by the Kronos Quartet in a performance of "River."

ended a piece here, and it would have been a beautiful conclusion. But "River" continued in an even more eloquent manner.

Eiko repeatedly slipped back into the water and Koma always served as a saving presence, once supporting her with the aid of a sculptural construction by Judd Weisberg that resembled a tangle of tree branches. "River" made creation an endless process, and its choreographic majesty suggested that, in addition to symbolizing evolution on earth, its waters extended from the material

An eternal process after a long evocation of an initial void.

to the spiritual realm.

It was possible to recall the words of an old hymn, a hymn that asks "Shall we gather by the river?" and

goes on to describe that river as a "crystal tide forever flowing by the throne of God."

It was an appropriate hymn to come to mind in Brooklyn, for it was written in 1865 by the Rev. Robert Lowry, the pastor of Hanson Place Methodist Church, a congregation that still exists, only a few blocks away from the Brooklyn Academy.

"River," part of the Academy's Next Wave Festival, will be repeated tonight, tomorrow night and Sunday afternoon at the Majestic, 651 Fulton Street, Fort Greene.