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DANCE REVIEW

Expression and Energy Explode, But Meaning Remains Elusive

By JACK ANDERSON

Energy helps make dance the exciting art it is, and Von Ussar dance-works exploded with energy Thursday night at the Joyce SoHo. But energy isn't everything, and there were many moments when Astrid von Ussar's choreography had more physical excitement than emotional

eloquence.

Ms. von Ussar was at her most expressive in "The Search Goes On," one of three premieres she offered to taped collages. This was a solo for Nasha Thomas-Schmitt, a guest artist who was formerly a member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Ms. von Ussar, born in Slovenia, teaches at the Ailey School, and she and Ms. Thomas-Schmitt clearly collaborated harmoniously.

The solo was filled with slow, tentative and often effortful steps, and the intensity of the steps and Ms. Thomas-Schmitt's stage presence made the piece a convincing depiction of a struggle both spiritual and physical.

The other new works were for hyperactive groups. "And Nothing but the Truth" sent its cast scurrying, thrashing and writhing through episodes suggesting desperation and menace until the choreography caused the dancers to collapse in the finale. And there were wild racings and slides across the floor as people kept regrouping in "Enter My Silence."

Three dances from the troupe's repertory depicted romantic encounters: "Hearts Divided," "Time Shows No Face" and "Three Ways to Love." But because dramatic motivation was not always apparent in either the new or the older works, Ms. von Ussar and her unquenchably vigorous dancers provided viewers with much to watch, but not enough to ponder.