



Pudding of memories

Cathy Weis' newest "Electric Haiku" is a rich and varied collection that juggles opposites with humor.

By [LORI ORTIZ](#)
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ELECTRIC HAIKU

Choreography by: Cathy Weis in collaboration with the performers.

Includes individual dances: "A Bad Spot Hurts Like Mad" (2001); Electric Haiku: Calm as Custard (2005)

Dancers: Cathy Weis, Scott Heron, Jennie Liu, Diane Madden, Jennifer Miller,

with appearances by Jonathan Berger, Sandra Burns, Elizabeth Ward..

Music by: Zeena Parkins.

Production design by: Scott Heron, Kelly Horrigan, Danny Michaelson, Howlpop.

Art direction by: Scott Heron, Kelly Horrigan, Danny Michaelson, Howlpop.

Set design by: Clare Dolan, Alessandra Nichols, Geoffrey Nosach, Phil Marden.

Costumes by: Scott Heron, Kelly Horrigan, Danny Michaelson, Howlpop.

Lighting design by: Jennifer Tipton.

Live Sound: Steve Hamilton.

Cathy Weis's ongoing project "Electric Haiku," this time carries the subtitle "Calm as Custard." "It feels like we all need to be calmer," says Weis in the post discussion. "And I like custard," she adds. The pleasure principle is at work in full force at Dance Theater Workshop on opening night.

Outside the theater Jennie Liu wraps herself in fluorescent barrier tape. 'Is she all right?' asked a worried would be passerby. Liu dances on the DTW stage in "A Bad Spot Hurts Like Mad," while multiple recorded images of her 'perform' on a painted backdrop stage by Clare Dolan. We're transported to a dive along Route 66, where Scott Heron laments the loss of 'Helen' as she pounds him with an oversized fan decorated with a drawing of her face. He slips away while Jennifer Tipton's dramatic lighting eclipses on the backdrop and darkness dominates.

The premiere "Electric Haiku: Calm as Custard" is a collection so rich and varied that it's probably best as an evening length piece. Weis sets the standards at the start, telling us that movement, for her, originates where the feet connect to the earth — and that her ear guides the dance, cued by Scott Hamilton's Pied Piper sound. (It begins with barking and a blood-curdling scream).

Scott Heron removes voluminous pants to begin his splendid solo, revealing shaped underwear that balloons out around his pelvis like a tumescent tutu. He balances in arabesque on a bench, his supporting foot the subject of a giant pixilated image on the backdrop — a rare perspective. He ends reeling and spinning to avoid a tiny toy plane, aggrandized to threatening proportions in the camera's lens. In a later vignette, Heron is pierced through a tall hat by a rod, and dances with a camera fastened to a board. It projects a stationary image of his hand or ear that balances his energetic and convoluted dance.

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In a dark duet with a Chinese flavor, Jennifer Miller and Weis wear long red gowns. They travel with a rickshaw that carries a glowing bundle under a gauzy sheet — the only light onstage. To the sound of crying, their arms swipe in a sort of martial art ritual. They abandon the cart and complement each other in an appealing duet. While a performer interrupts by checking ticket stubs in the

audience, the duo negotiate with Hamilton on how to bring this "Haiku" to a close. With Miller's sonorous groan, the dance dissipates in jest, but some unspeakable weight is transported that forms the substance of a poignant memory.

Weis's monologues, 'I hate that when everything's going well, and then...' are not just humorous divertissements, but transitions that eloquently seam the dance. She works her Kentucky charm, and we're calm as custard. Her multiple sclerosis was diagnosed in 1989. Now 'a beautiful swan diver and Margaret Thatcher occupy two sides of my body that don't quite mesh.' But in her cataclysmic solo, fears and memories congeal. A large screen on wheels turns faster and faster, catching her image and visualizing her dance.

Weis's MS is just one Haiku. "It's part of me." She's out there presenting issues of mortality, of consequence for us all. It's balanced with humor that manages to look unforced. But by the end when balloons are handed out at the door, the jollity is almost painful. The juggling of opposites is the crux of Weis's high quality dance-theater, originating in her unique perspective and coral of friends and collaborators.

Trisha Brown veteran Diane Madden's penultimate "Haiku" completes the piece. Her stark solo surprises with a crescendo of hidden precision when she meets her own on-screen image in a pas de deux. A strong silhouette of her legs disappears under Tipton's guillotine blade of darkness before the quartet returns in Western attire for a valedictory musical revue.