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SUAREZ, JUDITH. The Sisterhood. A video tape of the dance is available for consultation at the Walter Clinton Jackson Library at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. (1975) Directed by: Dr. Lois Andreasen. Pp. 26.

The Sisterhood is a dance for nine people. The central idea is that shamans, who exist in primitive hunting communities, have special intuitive powers they use to help the tribe communicate and that they are able to have their souls take flight into the spiritual realm. The first section, accompanied by drum music, deals with the shamans going into a trance state and then giving the tribe a communicative symbol. The Wourinen String Quartet begins the second section, as the tribe performs a territorial search and a new shaman is born from within the tribe. Section three is the initiation of the new shaman by the other shamans and the dance of flight of their souls into the spiritual realm. The lights are of medium intensity with blue border lights in the first section with a special light of a warmer color on the shamans as they begin their movements. As section two begins the lights dim, with the special warm light used each time the new shaman comes to center stage. The last section also has lights of medium intensity, and ends with the shamans in the warm light with the border lights on and all other lights very low. The costumes of the shamans are red leotards and tights with yellow and orange streamers attached to their heads, wrists and one knee. The tribe is costumed in black leotards and tights with a nylon stocking covering their heads. The new shaman wears a purple tie-dye leotard and tights and a stocking covering her head which she removes after becoming a shaman.

The choreographer's concern is with demonstrating that shamans use their intuition in creating symbols, which they give to the tribe in order for the tribe to communicate to one another. The choreographer also wishes to demonstrate that the shamans are elite and separate from other tribe members because of the special gifts with which they are considered endowed.

The title The Sisterhood was selected by the choreographer because of the subject matter involving women shamans and because of the use of women dancers. Women are often considered to be natural shamans as opposed to men. These special women form an elite group within their tribe because they are believed to possess superior perceptual powers.

APPROVAL PAGE

THE SISTERHOOD
"

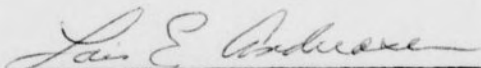
by

Judith Suarez
"

A Thesis Submitted to
the faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
1975

Approved by


Thesis Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of
the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North
Carolina at Greensboro.

Thesis Adviser

Lois E. Oubre

Oral Examination
Committee Members

Virginia Moomaw
Arthur B. Henkins

June 19, 1975
Date of Examination

MUSICAL ANALYSIS

Section I:

Bambala Drum Music - Counted in eight groups of eight beats.
1952 - Folkways Records and Service Corp. (Folkways FE 4427)
Score Unavailable (Recorded in Belgian Congo in 1951 by Leo A. Verwilghen)

Sections II and III:

Counting done by characteristic notes of the instruments.
Second and third movements of String Quartet by Charles Wourinen (Turnabout TV-S 34515)
C. F. Peters; 373 Park Ave. S.; N.Y. 10016
Date of publication unknown

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THE SISTERHOOD

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THE SISTERHOOD

The shaman, a unique man or woman who exists within certain societies, is believed to possess creative thinking powers beyond that of the average person. Women are often considered to be better shamans than men because of their superior perception.¹ A trance state is necessary to heighten the shaman's sensitivity and is usually brought about by a dance accompanied by the rhythmic beating of a drum. It is in the trance state that the shaman's soul is believed to leave the body and travels to the spirit realm in order to raise the souls of dead animals, speak with the controlling elements and to receive creative direction from the "helping" spirits. The shaman also dramatizes and dances myths of the community, many times using self-made poetry. Methods of theatricality are freely utilized in the production of these myths, such as lighting, costumes and properties. The shaman also works in painting and sculpture, all of which are important in giving the tribe's culture visible form. They serve their community much like the contemporary psychologist and are considered capable of joining a person with their lost soul and at times are called upon to "suck out" the evil spirit that causes physical sickness. Members of the tribe go to the shaman to know the future and because of the knowledge possessed by the shaman as well as the natural perception with which they are believed to be endowed, they are able many times to be helpful in foretelling what will happen. Shamans are men and women who are separate from their community because of their visionary

lives, brought about by the trance through which they draw the creative forms necessary to their civilization.

Just as shamans are separate from other people because of their unique gifts, there exists within our culture an elite group of women, who might be called a sisterhood because of the common cause to which to which they are dedicated, again the interpretation of the culture in which they live. In the study of women as shamans, the investigator found parallels within our contemporary society, in the persons of Mary Wigman and Martha Graham. Both can be considered members of an elite group similar to that of the shamans which has been depicted in the dance choreographed by the investigator as a "sisterhood." Both Graham and Wigman are charismatic personalities on and off the stage and belong to the sisterhood which knows no time nor country; they are joined with other women artists who have given themselves to art.

Mary Wigman, innovator in modern dance, started her studies with the Dalcroze School, where she grew discontent because of the restricted technique. She was feeling the need for absolute dance which Dalcroze's methods did not satisfy. Wigman continued her studies with Rudolph Von Laban and although influenced by him, she was still searching for a new type of expression. Through perseverance and inward search, she struggled against emotional and physical poverty to create an expression of her own. Kirstein writes that, "By concentration on movement for its own sake, she felt she could intensify the emotional aspects of dance to an unlimited degree."² Wigman also believed in artistic intuitive powers as indicated by her statement, "Thinking has really nothing to do with dance."³

Martha Graham, like Mary Wigman, has revolutionized artist's thinking through the medium of modern dance. She had a way with movement even as a child and is one who was truly "called" to the profession. After studying and dancing with Denishawn, she struck out on her own, in rebellion to what she considered artistic restrictions. In the years that followed her cleavage with Denishawn, she augmented her vocabulary, constantly adding new dimensions to her movements. In her choreography Graham reached inside the mind and gave form to the human emotions in new and innovative ways. She says of Night Journey, "The action takes place in Jocasta's heart at the instant when she recognizes the ultimate terms of her destiny."⁴ She is one of the first choreographers who dug deeply into the American spirit to produce such works as Frontier, American Document and Appalachian Spring. Graham struggled against scorn from a public who did not understand her work, but she kept going and produced a monument of choreography and a powerful technique. She states that, "The body is an instinctive, intuitive, inevitable mirror revealing man as he is."⁵ It is with her body that Graham much like Wigman created dances, guided primarily by intuition.

Intuition, which is the power or faculty of attaining knowledge without evident rational thought,⁶ coupled with the desire for expression, is the step before artistic creation. Marcel Duchamp explains further about intuition, "All his artistic execution of the work rest with pure intuition and cannot be translated into self-analysis, spoken or written or even thought out."⁷ The shaman and the artist both use intuition in their acts of creation.

The form in which a work of art will become is not always planned by the artist. Helen Tamiris, dancer choreographer, would have only the vaguest and faintest idea of what she wanted to do when she began rehearsals.⁸ In the work of Jerome Robbins, renowned choreographer, many times one thing would grow out of another, taking on a different form than what he originally intended.⁹ Graham stated when reflecting upon Balanchine's work that the "music passes through him; and in the same natural, but marvelous, way that a prism refracts light, he refracts music into dance."¹⁰ These modern day artists do not go into a trance-like state which is necessary for the shaman to operate; however they have similar intuitive explorations. The shaman is also said to be filled with inner light, which the investigator believes can also be said for many of the great artists of our civilization.¹¹ In the dependence upon intuition, the shaman and the artist are placing their trust in an unknown spiritual world. Jerome Robbins says, "We dare to go into the world where there are no names for anything We get our hands into that world just a little bit."¹²

Many times the artist and shaman have inward conflicts which force certain forms to emerge. These forms may emerge as cave paintings done by the early shamans depicting men dressed as bulls fighting. The shaman in this way gave form to the conflicts which were in his mind.¹³ He might not have even realized what the conflicts were; he only knew that he must give them shape. Graham, in the investigator's opinion, developed a movement vocabulary, which expressed her inward struggles in a sometimes distorted, yet plastic shape. Only through creation can

the artist feel a total completeness, and intuition inspires the creative process.

One of the roles of the shaman and artist is to interpret the basic feelings of their culture. The shaman who exists in a hunting culture, is concerned with animals, the source of livelihood for the people in the community. One of the jobs of the shaman is to communicate with the spirits of animals and render them available for killing. One way the need was satisfied in certain early primitive societies, was through cave drawings, which were often abstract and fantastic in form. For instance parts of animals were combined, such as the antlers of a deer on the head of a panther or the antlers might also be the legs of another animal.¹⁴ The shaman might abstract the animal so much that it was unrecognizable or he might have given it a very geometric form.¹⁵

Another way in which the shaman believes in contacting the animal spirits is through dance, in which he goes into the underworld and speaks to the souls of animals, or will even become the animal itself. The drama is an artistic production in which the shaman uses the drum to get into a trance. Also the use of beautifully carved symbolic instruments, masks, costumes and theatrical devices, such as dim lighting, being physically bound in a dramatic position and ventriloquism are incorporated.¹⁶

Much like the shaman, the dance artist uses theatrical devices to help provide form to interpret the inward expression. Lamentation, which was created by Graham in 1930 and considered one of her greatest works, was done seated on a stool with Graham costumed in tubing which

restricted her movement. She writhed within the tubing, causing dramatic tension, which communicated agony to the audience. Her intuitive use of tubing helped make the dance more dramatic because of the tension created between the body and the costume. Graham was not acting out lamentation; she was lamentation, just as many times the shaman becomes the animal.

The shaman also must give form to nature and appease the forces of nature. Again, drawings of symbolic renderings of these forces are part of the shaman's equipment; the drum, rattles and other instruments are used, but it is mostly the communication with wind, rain and storms through dance that help the psychological state of the tribe and give them confidence for the future.¹⁷

Mary Wigman, also inspired by the forces of nature, choreographed Storm Song in 1929 as a presentation of what she felt was a storm. She danced both aspects: that of the storm itself and the human reaction to the storm. In Wigman's own recollection of the dance she states:

"Above the swinging gestures of the arms, the light fabric swelled and was blown up and turned into cloudy images, stirring and drifting away only to tumble down like a torrent, rippling and slowly becoming smooth; then, during short moments of rest, the dancing body again received its human proportions and shivered under the onslaught of the storm."¹⁸

In Storm Song Wigman could possibly have given shape to her inner storm or she might have been interpreting the feelings of the discontent in Germany at the time, or it could have been a combination of both.

The masks of the shaman are probably one of the most dramatic examples of how the shaman's intuition is used. They are incorporated in the artistic productions and their importance in most cultures is a

vital part of the shaman's trade. The Eskimos believe that the shaman's masks are intended to reveal the time when there was no difference between men and animals.¹⁹ They are usually made of fantastic shapes and are often grotesque. In showing the dual nature of man and animal, one side of the mask may be of an abstracted animal and the other of a man in stylized form. Many times there is one mask which opens to reveal another mask on the inside indicating dual nature. Masks of the shaman's "helping" spirits or the forces of nature are also created through shamanistic intuition. The mask helps the shaman to go into the spiritual world where he wants to travel in order to communicate with the spirits, or to become that part of nature or that animal he wishes to become.²⁰

Many artists have used the mask, but perhaps we might say that Nikolais uses the mask or covering the whole body the most intuitively as the mirror of our times. Nikolais believes that the greatest gifts given to people are the ability to think in terms of abstraction and the ability of transcendence.²¹ From these gifts he derives his imaginative powers. In many of his dances the performers wear masks or mask the entire body, which is part of his concept of total theatre. Just as the Eskimo believes that the mask reveals a time when there was no difference between men and animals, so Nikolais in his use of the mask and properties makes an individual, "A lovely but minor part of his environment."²² The belief that humanity and nature are a part of each other is present in modern and primitive cultures, but the artists have given the idea an entirely different shape.

After extensive study of shamanism, the choreographer created the dance The Sisterhood in an attempt to give form to shamanism. Numerous published materials concerned with the topic of shamanism point out that the shaman could be considered the first professional artist. It is the purpose of this dance to demonstrate that the shaman communicates symbols to the tribe, which the tribe in turn, uses to communicate with each other. The birth of a new shaman within the tribe and her initiation into the sisterhood of shamans and the flight of their souls into the spiritual world are also dealt with in the dance.

In The Sisterhood, the shamans are the elite by virtue of their spirituality and intuition, giving them the power to create symbols. They are dressed in red leotards and tights with long yellow and orange streamers hanging from their head, wrists and one knee. They wear nothing covering their heads indicating their perceptual abilities and their unity of purpose; giving form to culture of the tribe through the creation of symbols. The tribe's entire heads are covered with nylon stockings, and they are dressed in black leotards, symbolizing their lack of spiritual vision and their dependence upon the shamans for their cultural expression. The new shaman, costumed in purple tie-dye leotard and tights, indicating she is destined for shamanhood, quickens with visionary life. She removes the stocking symbolizing her newly gained status as a member of the sisterhood. She is then initiated by the other shamans who by a ritual place a collar of yellow and orange streamers around her neck and raise her from her seated position. All four shamans then dance with predominantly aerial movements, symbolizing their spiritual flight. Through the dance of flight

the shamans acquire the magic and secrets of their profession and the basis of their creative explorations.

Section I. The curtain opens with three dancers, representing shamans, standing back to back, forming a circle in the center of the stage; and six additional dancers indicating the tribe are posed upon stage left. The shamans begin rolling their heads as they go into a trance, and gradually each dancer moves away from the center stage with movements of increasing tempo. Individual patterns of vibratory movement, such as a V shape, a Y shape, and a V shape created with the arms together framing the face, characterize the dance.

The six dancers, representing the tribe, move slowly into a circle surrounding the shamans. As they fall under the spell of the shamans, their arm movements become purposeful and the shamans perform around their perimeters towards the encircled tribe, demonstrating their ability to give strength to the tribe. The shamans exit stage left and the tribe remains united in a closed formation at the center of the stage.

Section II. The tribe, under the influence of the shamans, perform movements of increasing tempo and complexity. The dancers, representing the tribe, move slowly into a circle surrounding the shamans. As they fall under the spell of the shamans, their arm movements become purposeful and the shamans perform around their perimeters towards the encircled tribe, demonstrating their ability to give strength to the tribe. The shamans exit stage left and the tribe remains united in a closed formation at the center of the stage.

General Description

Section I The curtain opens with three dancers, representing shamans, standing back to back, forming a circle in the center of the stage; and six additional dancers indicating the tribe are posed upper stage left. The shamans begin rolling their heads as they go into a trance, and gradually each dancer moves away from the center stage with movements of increasing tempo. Individual patterns of vibratory hand movements, rapid feet, strong torso swings and a V shapes created with the elbows together framing the face, characterize the dance.

The six dancers, representing the tribe, move slowly into a circle surrounding the shamans. As they fall under the spell of the shamans, their arm movements become percussive and the shamans perform strong abdominal contractions towards the encircled tribe, demonstrating their ability to give strength to the tribe. The shamans exit stage left and the tribe remains huddled in a closed formation at the center of the stage.

Section II The tribe, still under the influence of the shamans, perform hysterical, longing arm gestures after which they roll in different directions representing a primitive search for territorial identification. Once they have reached their particular space, they begin to investigate by stretching out, pulling away and pushing their bodies into the ground. They also run in circular patterns with either one hand or both hands touching the ground, and they try to make space above themselves by

"pushing" gestures over their heads. The new shaman interrupts their search, rolling downstage center followed by convulsive tremblings, all of which the tribe watch with intense interest. She gradually rolls downstage right and the tribe looks at her curiously because of her strange behavior. Using the V shape that the shamans created in Section I, the tribe reach out for each other and communicate. They rise from the ground and form two tight formations and then in these two formations, reach out to one another. Again the new shaman interrupts this activity by rolling to the center of the stage, trembling and convulsing. The tribe circles her in an awkward fashion, on their hands and feet, as she lies huddled up after her outbreak. The tribe move in various patterns close to the floor, and form the communicative V shape with their legs, putting their knees together, while lying down, but the power of the new shaman calls them back to the center of the stage, where she is lying inert. They move toward her on their knees with percussive movements of the arms, and standing in unison, move vigorously up, down and side to side. With rapid feet and vibrating hands, they move upstage and drop to the ground as the new shaman suddenly raises her head and the rest of her body, removing the stocking, in a series of stark actions, she too performs the V shape after which she moves into the center of the tribe; then around them making heavenward gestures. She creates her own shape, which is a circle around the head made with the arms. The tribe receives it by repeating it and touching their palms with hers as she lies in a recumbent position. The tribe moves upstage left with their arms in the new

circular pattern. The new shaman performs a series of leaps and repeats the same heavenward gestures until she reaches center stage where she slowly sinks to the ground, exhausted by her first efforts of shamanism. The tribe looks at her from their corner; then leaves spiritually satisfied from their experience.

Section III The three shamans from Section I enter one at a time in aerial patterns. The second shaman places a collar of yellow and orange streamers around the neck of the new shaman. By all three shamans touching her ritually, and raising her from her seated position, she is now officially initiated into the sisterhood. They dance in leaping and jumping patterns, utilizing strong off-center torso turns with the body in an open position. They reach a frenzied condition and run from one corner of the stage to another with rapidly vibrating arms. Reaching the center of the stage, they continue to shake and vibrate throughout their bodies very softly; lowering to the ground and rising. As they reach their original positions, where they began Section I, they circle with their eyes heavenward. With trembling hands and slight abdominal movements they drop their torsos once more before raising their bodies, with trembling arms, to the spiritual world. The curtain closes as the lights dim except for the light on the group of shamans.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 M. A. Gzaplicka, Aboriginal Siberia: A Study in Social Anthropology (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 243.
- 2 Lincoln Kirstein, Dance (New York: Dance Horizons, Inc., 1969), p. 305.
- 3 Mary Wigman, "The Philosophy of Modern Dance," Dance as a Theatre Art, ed. Selma Jean Cohen (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1974), p. 152.
- 4 Margaret Lloyd, The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance (New York: Dance Horizons, Inc., 1974), p. 44.
- 5 Martha Graham, "A Modern Dancer's Primer For Action," Dance as a Theatre Art, ed. Selma Jean Cohen (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1974), p. 158.
- 6 A. Merriam and N. Webster, Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Massachusetts: G. and C. Merriam Co., 1974), p. 607.
- 7 Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," The New Art, ed. Gregory Battock (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1973), p. 46.
- 8 Daniel Nagrin, "The Creative Method of Tamiris," Focus on Dance V, ed. Miriam Gray (Washington, D. C.: American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, 1969), p. 9.
- 9 Deborah Jowitt, "Back, Again, to Ballet," The New York Times Magazine, December 8, 1974, Sec. 8, p. 33.
- 10 Bernard Taper, "Balanchine is a Prism that Refracts Music into Dance," The New York Times, November 17, 1974, Sec. 11, p. 1, col. 1.
- 11 Carl-Martin Edsman, Studies in Shamanism (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1967), p. 28.
- 12 Jowitt, op. cit., p. 109
- 13 Andreas Lommel, Shamanism: The Beginnings of Art (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967), p. 128.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.

¹⁶Edsman, p. 74; Czaplicka, p. 281.

¹⁷Lommel, p. 140.

¹⁸Mary Wigman, trans., The Language of Dance (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1966), p. 60.

¹⁹Lommel, p. 107.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Alwin Nikolais, "No Man From Mars," The Modern Dance: Seven Statements of Belief, ed. Selma Jean Cohen (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1965), p. 64.

²²"Environments for the Human Figure," Theatre Crafts, November/December, 1970, p. 10.

PHOTOGRAPHIC DATA

Video Tape

Distance of Camera to stage:

Thirty-eight feet, ten inches.

Lighting:

Regular studio lighting with additional stage lights. Additional lights: PJ spots at each leg except upstage right where there were none because of excessive natural lights and upstage left where there were two PJ spots to balance the other lights.

Camera make and number:

Sony Video Camera AVC-3650.

Lens:

f/1.9 12.5mm.

Process:

Stationary.

Tape:

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Videocorder:

(Deck) Sony VC AV 3650/CV200.

Sound:

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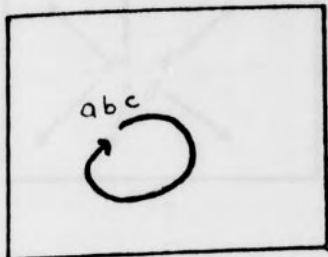
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Close Up:

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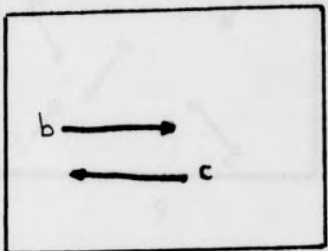
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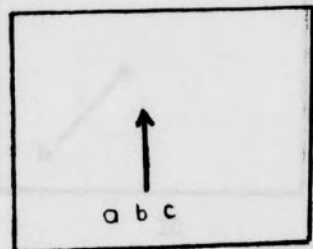
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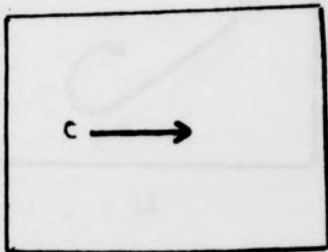
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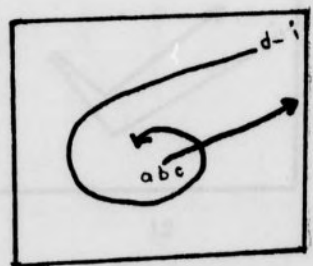
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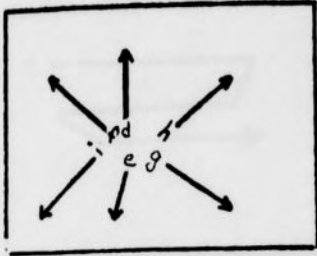
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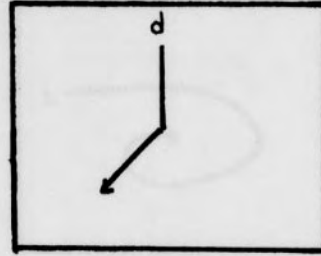
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NINE DANCERS ARE LABELED a-i

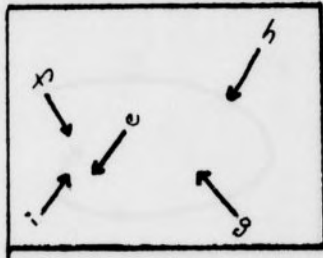
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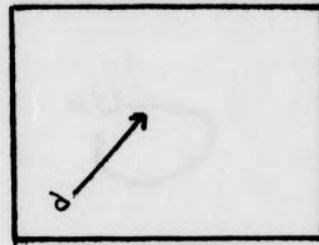
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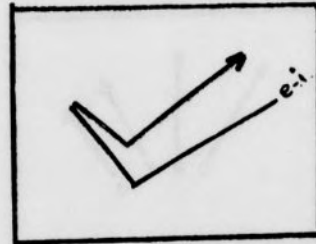
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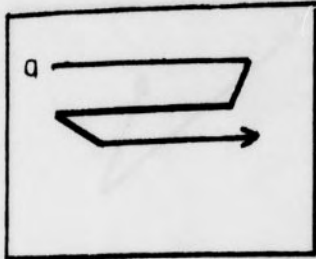


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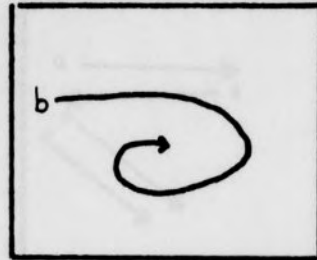


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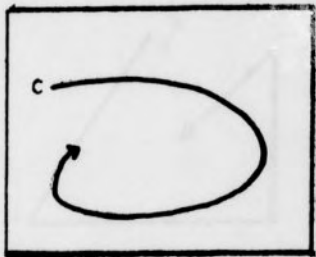
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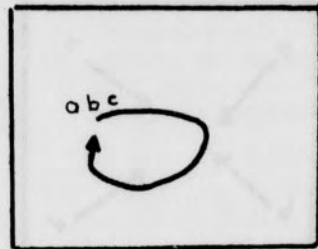
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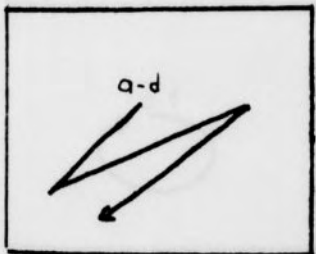
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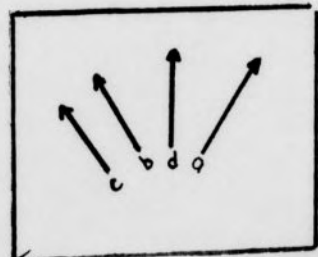
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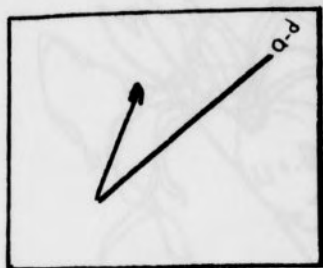


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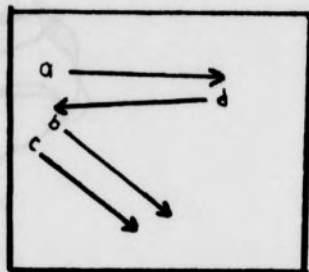


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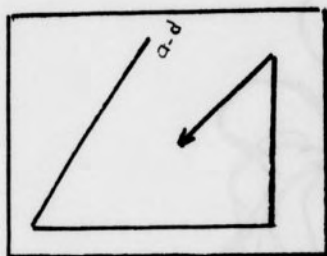
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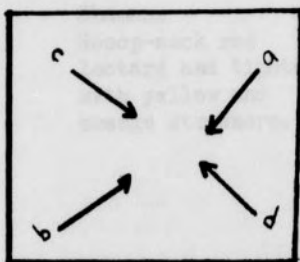
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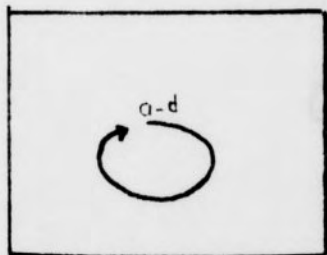
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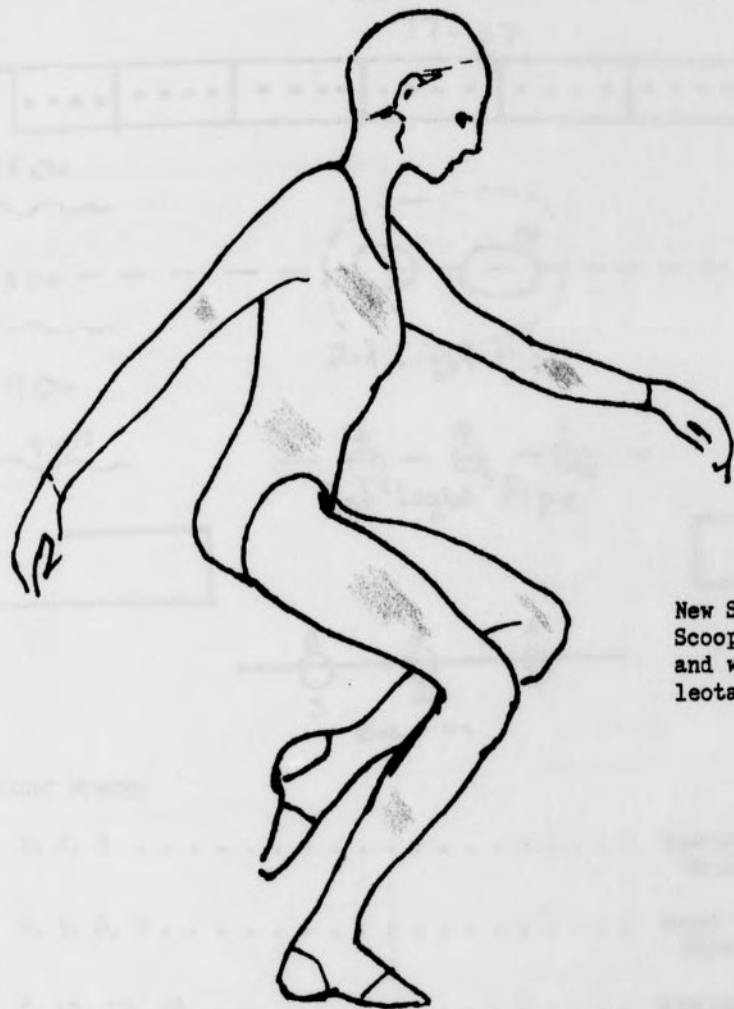
COSTUMES



Shamans -
Scoop-neck red
leotard and tights
with yellow and
orange streamers.



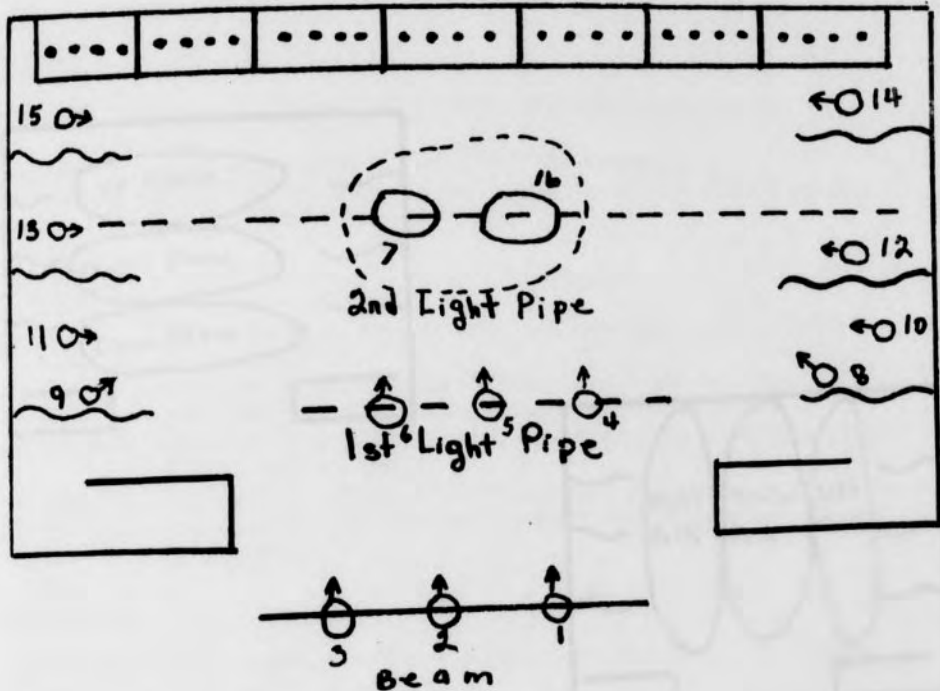
Tribe Member -
Scoop-neck black
leotard and tights
and nylon stocking
covering head.



New Shaman -
Scoop-neck purple
and white tie-dye
leotard and tights.

STAGE AREA FOR LIGHTING

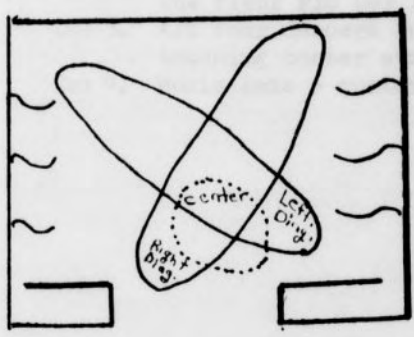
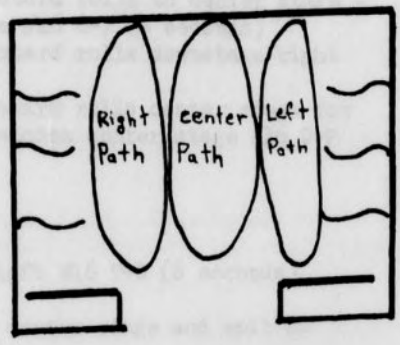
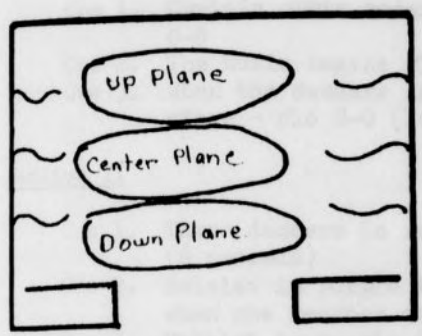
17-37



LIGHT NUMBER

1, 2, 3	Special Lavender Roscolene No. 242
4, 5, 6, 7	Steel Blue, Roscolene No. 854
8, 10, 12, 14	Special Lavender, Roscolene No. 242
9, 11, 13, 15	Steel Blue, Roscolene No. 854
Special 16	Flesh Pink, Roscolene No. 226
Borderlights 17-37	Steel Blue, Roscolene No. 854

LIGHTING DESIGN



CURTAIN, LIGHT AND MUSIC CUES

Section I

- Cue 1. Curtain opens moderately, #16 and borderlights
0-8
- Cue 2. The music begins #1-15 0-8 (16 seconds)
- Cue 3. When the dancers in red move out of the circle center
stage - #16 8-0 (10 seconds)

Section II

- Cue 1. Three dancers in red exit upstage left - #1-15 8-6
(6 seconds)
- Cue 2. Soloist in purple tie-dye leotard rolls to center stage -
when she reaches center stage #16 0-7 (4 seconds)
- Cue 3. Soloist in purple tie-dye leotard rolls downstage right
#16 7-0 (6 seconds)
- Cue 4. Soloist in purple tie-dye leotard rolls center stage for
the second time - when she reaches center stage #16 0-7
(4 seconds)

Section III

- Cue 1. First dancer enters upstage left #16 7-0 (6 seconds)
#1-15 6-10 (6 seconds)
- Cue 2. All four dancers form circle center stage and roll on
the floor #16 0-7 (6 seconds)
- Cue 3. All four dancers form close tight knit circle with backs
touching center stage #1-15 8-0 (10 seconds)
- Cue 4. Music ends - curtain closes, moderately fast.

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