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DANCE REVIEW; Mind, Body and Spirit, With the Biggest Focus on Spirit

By JENNIFER DUNNING

There seems to be little interest today in creating dances that express spiritual themes. But three choreographers mined the vein -- to a capacity audience -- on Sunday afternoon in "Dances of the Spirit," a program in the informal Sundays at Three: Jewish Voices series at the 92nd Street Y.

Two dances stood out, with one by JoAnne Tucker, who represented Judaism, and one by Lynn Parkerson, representing Catholicism. Ms. Tucker's "Heroic Deeds," danced by her Avodah Dance Ensemble, distilled community need in a quartet as stark as its score by Ives.

Isolated dancers made solitary journeys. Eventually all but one dancer interacted supportively. The dance built to a poignant moment when the hymn "Rock of Ages" filters through the score. "Heroic Deeds" was performed by Andrea Eisenstein, Jessica Sehested, Danielle Smith and Kerrie Thoma.

Ms. Parkerson began her improvisational solo "Gloria Patria" with a translation of the prayer into American Sign Language, gradually moving her arms, hands and entire body into wider expanses of space and motion. There was nothing overtly religious about the dance, yet it was an innately spiritual embodiment of grace. These and the other dances by Ms. Tucker and Ms. Parkerson also had a physical and emotional rootedness reminiscent of modern dance of another era.

Ms. Parkerson's other works were performed by four members of her Dance at Holy Trinity troupe (Elizabeth Fernandez, Tomilko Magario, Rhea Roderick and Aaron Nichols).

The program was completed by "Heartland," by Kara Miller Esposito, representing the Protestant church, and set to American folk and early gospel music. Despite the engaging guest actor, Elizabeth Hueling; a dance soloist, Margaret Plaza; and five other Omega Dance Company members, the piece was essentially a flow of stale, unpersuasive images of "church ladies" and other powerful women.

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