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Dance in Review

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School of Hard Knocks *La Mama E.T.C.*

Yoshiko Chuma's 10-year-old modern-dance company is called the School of Hard Knocks, a name that usually seems to refer to the kind of all-out, sometimes explosive dancing that is her choreographic style. But Ms. Chuma's movement style, fragmented and arbitrary in an iron-willed way, can be rough on the viewer's mind and concentration. But in her "Jo Ha Kyu," a work in progress presented on Thursday night, music takes precedence over dance.

At this point, the new work is overburdened by the unusual instruments on which Tan Dun's score is played, which include large bowls of water lighted from underneath and smaller vessels that are lowered, gurgling, into the bowls from time to time. The title of this collaboration between Ms. Chuma and the composer refers, in fact, to a musical term in Noh theater.

The choreography is less interesting than the musicians' actions, at least until the law of diminishing returns begins to operate. Ms. Chuma typically alternates gentler, more lyrical individual movement with churning ensemble races across the stage. There are some electric group encounters center stage, and some pushing wedges that stab the air for a female trio.

The dancers are as electric, in a cast made up of Sarah Baud, Susanne Brian, Anders Christiansen, Erica Huggel, Tuomo Kangasmaa, Helena Nicolopolou, Peter Pleyer, Yasuko Yokoshi and Rocky Bornstein, who stands out for the delicacy and force of her attack. The musicians are Regina Bellantese, Bruce Gremo and Paul Guerguerian. The lighting was created by Michael Mazzola and Michael Stiller.

"Jo Ha Kyu" was dedicated to the memory of Harry Whittaker Sheppard, a bespectacled, much loved downtown performer and choreographer who died this year. His ghost was present, as quietly vivid as Mr. Sheppard was in life, throughout "Suspicious Counterpoint," which he danced in its 1990 premiere and which completed the program.