

Synergic Show Touches Feelings In New Places

A Dance Review

By ELIZABETH LEE

Synergic Theater is up to its old tricks. And a few new ones, too.

The theater's tribute to Giorgio Ciompi and Frank Smullin, Durham artists who died last fall, took place Sunday at Reynolds Theater and featured works in which these artists had participated.

Suzanne Manning's *Lullaby* is one of those choreographic gems that you can see over and over and still want to see again. You can never absorb all the nuances in its movement and the work has an energy unique with each performance.

When new cast members appear, subtle transformations can make a strong impact.

Joining Jack Arnold and Anne Deloria this time around were Michael Kenna and Carol Fike, both of whom provided a sharp clarity and crispness. The heightened intensity of this performance was enhanced by the Ciompi Quartet recording of the George Gershwin title music, a rendering in which the strings seem alive.

PIPE DREAMS, a beautiful, starkly simple sculpture by Smullin, is the final performer in the dance *Pipe Dreams*. A small cardboard shape opens the work. Brian Babski and Susan Settergren walk on and examine it. Ms. Manning comes out and begins to dance, exploring with her limbs and the lines of her body the spatial

and dynamic aspects of the sculpture.

Anne Deloria and Carol Fike bring more cardboard shapes, carving the space, reflecting the shapes, finally giving these pieces to Brian and Susan, who construct a sculpture from them. On tape, Smullin describes the thinking that went into his work as we watch the construction of a cardboard model. What we learn from listening is the underlying mathematical complexity and physical capacities. What we see in the sculptures, dancing and building are the exterior forms of exceedingly complex and invisible anatomies. Magic, not so simple after all.

BIRTHDAY contains its own fascination. You can see it many times and still not see it all. It cannot be conceived in mathematical terms, nor reproduced in any of its parts by another medium, nor expanded by addition. Yet the structure which underlies it, the chronology of life itself, seems at first as inexorable as the physical principles of sculpture.

We are born. We mark the passing of each year with a "birthday," unless we are Astra (Ms. Deloria) who is allowed only a 12th birthday because there were so many kids in the family. We have a last day, unless we are Billy Ryan (Lee Connor), who

hops off his funeral bed in wonder.

Through a proliferation of images and a deliberate confusion of character and performer, make-believe and reality, creators Suzanne and David Manning communicate a serene disregard for time while acknowledging the distress with which many view its passing. Astra changes from infancy to old age and back several times in the piece. Connor's sensitive performance makes Billy Ryan, a boy who never grows up at all, especially endearing. Mrs. Manning plays the torn and uncertain Mrs. Ryan with superb certainty.

Synergic Theater thrives on paradox, the ineffable, the inexpressible, the uncertain, the possible, the potential. Using an unusual minimalism or an exaggerated overabundance of stimulation or some new untried, untested method, it inevitably gives us something new to think about or touches our feelings in some new place.