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Dance: 'Private Lives,' Chamber Drama by Synergic Theater

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

THE appeal of mixed-media, nonverbal theater has been particularly strong among experimentalists in dance, drama and the visual arts.

The Synergic Theater, a company from Durham, N.C., that made its New York debut Wednesday night at the Marymount Manhattan Theater, falls well within this current. Nonetheless, the group, which performs through tomorrow night at the theater at 221 East 71st Street, speaks with its own fresh regional accent.

With Suzanne White Manning as artistic director and choreographer, and David Manning, as company director, Synergic Theater aims for an accumulation of layered imagery that, at its best, offers new insights into familiar situations.

"Private Lives," seen in part at Duke University in 1976 and then completed in 1979 in San Francisco, where the Mannings lived for four years, is a terse, excellent chamber drama, with a dramatic situation Harold Pinter could have invented. Marjorie Scheer and Jack Arnold portray houseguests of Ann Deloria and Bryce Wagner,

whose troubled domestic situation comes to light through Mrs. Manning's broadly-outlined choreography and stage blocking.

The unstated undercurrent finally rises to the surface as the husband and

female guest reach out to each other. It is clear why the wife needs consoling. Mrs. Manning's movement vocabulary, totally undancelike, is shrewdly sharp in its stylized body language and set to Gershwin.

"Birthday," with Mr. Manning's text recited on tape or projected on a

screen, is more ambitious. Five characters are described — usually inside an enclosure while performing a solo. But not all are meaningful with respect to one other. Mrs. White is the protective mother of a retarded boy who goes fishing, and the locale is defined as Greensboro, N.C. Somehow the central device of discussing birthdays to tell us something about the characters remains only a pretext. Nonetheless, there are some striking visual images, as in Jay Gill's pier for the boy.