

Partners

There's nothing magic about it, no suspension of the laws of physics. It's a simple matter of gravity addressed by art. Or is it the other way around?

Warmed and ready for workout, Susan presses up en pointe and picks her way across the floor, a stilted shore bird selecting a foraging spot. There's an air of expectancy.

"Show him the way they used to do it," Bill suggests, referring to the traditional manner in which ballerinas moved from floor to toe.

She stops for a moment remembering the process, straightens resolutely, then hops bird-like onto the tip of one toe where she teeters a moment, then steadies with the help of the other foot. It looks acrobatic and painful, but more than these, it seems contrived and lonely, an isolated event left to dangle in space.

"Balanchine had his dancers do it differently," Bill remarks, and as if with relief, Susan returns to the floor, assuming a pose with feet pointed in opposite directions.

"He had his dancers go up from plie," he continues, the explanation trailing her action by several counts. The difference is amazing both in terms of activity and effect.

Before, the act seemed explosive and singular, but here there is a continuum of motion--incomplete in itself--belonging to whatever is to come next. In this case, the *whatever* is a series of transitions from floor to toe whose focal point is not in rise or the stretch or the line, but in their possibilities.

And that's what it is. Right there in the midst of a three-inch ascent lies the difference between the gymnast and the artist. It's not an event at all, rather it's an awareness; a delicate shading of purpose and role in which the ballerina becomes that which is ageless in all of us.

In that shadowed world between myth and profanity, Susan picks up an invisible gauntlet to do battle with unseen forces...fragile and vulnerable, yet champion and conqueror. Like Bach's Chaconne withstanding the thunder of ages with four strings, varnished box, and a bow, she puts herself in harm's way and, in that instant allows us to see into the heart of the matter.

"This girl," Bill says to as if to distinguish her from the periphery. This girl, has just launched blindly into space tempting oblivion without regret. She is for an instant that soaring link of spirit that breathes life and meaning without which, there would be nothing for that man to anticipate...to sense...to gather from the air. Without this girl there would be no such instants...no such world. This girl, indeed.

A flicker of memory marks her rise on point... an innocent swaying forward and aft ... then forward again to break the bonds of balance. Three darting sixteenth beat stabs of toe-on-board bring her to the brink of flight. She rises, floats, descends -- a cascading parabola whose precise architecture describes the limits we know but fear to seek.

The catch is strong and sure and gentle, ordained where physics blends with destiny. It has to do with momentum, mechanics and vectors. It resonates in the whispers of poets; soft echoes of scuffed hardwood floors and smudged mirrors of another age. But for this girl and that man it is...

"Not bad," he says guiding them both back to the present. "Let's try it from the other side."