

## Stage Beat

# Narratives

By Steven Winn

### The stagebeat:

• Delta Carnival's weekend sampler program at the Margaret Jenkins Performance Space spread a rangy tripod across the dance/performance art terrain: one highly abstract *ars pro artia artis* piece, one narrated parable, and one essay in pure choreography.

The most successful effort by the group, which was founded at Duke University in 1974 and operates under the auspices of the Synergic Foundation for the Arts, was the last, a spare but suggestive dance piece set to the piano preludes and "Lullaby" of George Gershwin.

Four dancers, in increasingly complex combinations, meet, hesitate, embrace and part, in Suzanne Manning White's "Private Lives." Their movements are elegant, often subtle — a quarter turn of the head, a self-conscious settling onto a chair — but teasingly suggestive of more profound social interactions. Hints of allegiances, loyalties, betrayals and reconciliations float across this civilized round of musical chairs, yet all is muted, faintly desperate: a woman swings her hair in a wild arc as a couple looks away; a man skates out of range of the others. The ending is ambiguous, yearning, unresolved, all in sweet counterpoint to Gershwin's drooping "Lullaby."

Sandy Lynch, Michael Kenna, Barbara Chrest and especially Larry McQueen move with poise and a delicious sense of hesitation giving way to sudden urgency.

"Discarnate Landscape," which premiered this summer at Herbst Theater, opened the program, and there were winning effects throughout. Woven into a fabric of tinkly instrumental music (by Doug Goodkin), operetta-style vocals (composed by Michael Ching, beautifully sung by Suzanne Manning), and some shimmering lighting and silk property effects is a thread-like through-line about a self-fascinated painter

(George Chrest).

Although the program disowns any "literal explanation," this work, created by David and Suzanne Manning, plays with the idea of the artist's interaction with life. There's a magically moving painting, a scene where the painter scribbles away at his notes, and an amusing moment near the end when the dancers turn to picturesque mannequins, which he hefts about and jimmies into place.