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Nan Melville for The New York Times

The Collage Dance Theater at the "Laundromat" on Elizabeth Street.

DANCE REVIEW

Performers Conjure Life, Loss and Lint Traps

By JENNIFER DUNNING

Spend a sweltering summer evening in a Laundromat on the Lower East Side? Were Heidi Duckler and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council mad? A spokeswoman for the council, a co-producer with the River to River Festival of Ms. Duckler's "Laundromatinee" on Saturday night, murmured reassuringly that the free program was only 15 minutes long. That seemed even nuttier, though that meant that a show could be added to accommodate the huge overflow audiences. Could it be New Yorkers who had lost it?

But what a surprise: these 15 minutes had nothing to do with fame and everything to do with an insouciant evocation of women's hard, hard lives. Ms. Duckler and her Collage Dance Theater, founded in the mid-1980's in Los Angeles and making its New York debut, perform in spaces where people live and work.

"Laundromatinee" was created in 1988 for the Thrifty Wash Laundromat in Santa Monica. In Manhattan it unfolded, so to speak, at the Laundromt, as the sign read, on Elizabeth Street between Spring and Kenmare Streets, where the washers and dryers were adorned with familiar scribbled "out of order" signs for the occasion, and the proprietors shyly peered out from a back room.

As a weary, doggedly oblivious

Laundromatinee

River to River Festival

stage housewife washed, dried and folded her clothes, dancers raced through a piece that was funny, occasionally dark and strangely poignant. Laundromats are becoming rare in gentrified urban neighborhoods, as the program notes pointed out. To music that included "Stand By Your Man," red cleaning rags and shapely legs appeared and disappeared from behind the washing machines.

The dancers peeled off several layers of summer cotton dresses and slips, which looked particularly fetching on the gangling man among them. They skidded along the narrow aisles in laundry carts and down the folding table. There was a pas de deux and a solo that consisted of sliding on the red rags. Legs kicked out from inside the dryers, and one small dancer was shut in for a moment like a tumbling load of clothes. But "Laundromatinee" had an overall shape, building to something much more developed than madcap pranks.

People waited outside as the evening's first audience, who had stood against the walls and sat and stood on washing machines, poured out onto Elizabeth Street. "Who's in there?" a young woman asked a friend as they passed by. "Angelina Jolie or something?"