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Dance

Pick Your Community

There's No Business Like Show Business

by **Deborah Jowitz**

April 16 - 22, 2003

Risa Jaroslow makes works about communities you can imagine living in. People who inhabit them dance together; they also know when to leave one another alone and when to step in to help. They can be feisty or serene. I love the fact that three women come to assist Rashaun Mitchell down from Michael Phillips's shoulder after a frisky duet, the same way they earlier took Eun Jung Gonzalez from her perch on Mitchell after a courtship dance. You can see Jaroslow's homage to shtetl life as well as her contemporary sensibility in the juicy, playful, tender movement of *Fiddl*—performed to Alicia Svigals's fine klezmer score and expanded, for its premiere in the Harkness Dance Project's season at the Duke, from a trio to a quintet.

The community in the new *Strings Attached* is delineated by the recorded memories of female musicians (including the choreographer's bassist mother) making it in the man's world of 20th-century America, and by the four women who play Diedre Murray's richly tuneful score for harp, violin, viola, and cello. Designer Perry Gunther stretches five miked red cords from floor to ceiling for strong women (Rachel Bernsen, Elise Knudson, Jessica Loof, Laura Peterson, and Nicole Sherman) to strum. Clint E.B. Ramos's costumes help convey their tricky status: pants, jackets they shed and don, high heels that must be cast aside.

There are bits of pantomime—Peterson and Sherman enter in tails and give each other a bluff handshake—but the precarious positions in the music field and the sisterhood that the narrators describe are conveyed mostly by the press and tumble of the choreography. The women watch Loof almost disapprovingly as she moves tempestuously on the floor, then pick her up and dance her into a good mood. Peterson lands in a dive on Knudson's shoulder and falls sensationally off. Their actions and physical dialogues are as fluent, variegated, and disciplined as the melodies we hear and the unseen musicians they embody.