

## SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

### Spectrum Dance Theater's 'War' debuts at the Moore Theatre

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By **KARY WAYSON**\_SPECIAL TO THE P-I

If you think of a phrase of movement as a figure of physical speech, then what does Donald Byrd's new dance say? I recently had the great luck to sit in on a rehearsal of Spectrum Dance Theater's production of Byrd's "Interrupted Narratives/War," which will have its world premiere at the Moore Theatre Friday and Saturday night. Spectrum lives inside a gray brick building on Lake Washington, a building that for some inexplicable reason I've long believed to be so exclusive that I was surprised it had a front door. Anne Derieux, the company's executive director, met me there and led me up a steep flight to a large open studio strewn with folding chairs and clustered with dancers in leotards.

"She introduced me to Byrd, who sat at the controls of a stereo system plugged into a mirrored wall. I sat down quickly and nervously, feeling strangely chastened by Byrd's imposing presence. The dancers huddled in what looked like a kind of pre-game prayer, and then the work began.

"Interrupted Narratives/War" is a simple and yet profoundly emotional investigation of U.S. soldiers' lives lost in Iraq. The dance works strenuously, sometimes frantically, to personalize abstract facts in order to reconstitute and humanize the heart-numbing death statistics of the current war. It's difficult and essential work. As a large part of their preparation for the work, Byrd asked his dancers to research the histories of soldiers from Oregon and Washington who've died. Says Byrd, "I think when people are human beings and not a statistic or number, then I think we behave differently."

Or at least we feel more. I know I did, sitting there cross-legged in my metal chair, spellbound as I watched the dancers rehearse. It is true that the body conveys information that is not expressible through language. It asks and answers, but not with words. In this way, Byrd's "Interrupted Narratives/War" gives its audience a chance to make meaning from movement. Toward the end of the piece, watching what looked like an ungainly ballet, feeling the floor shake, listening to the dancers' labored breathing, I realized that I too had become physically and emotionally invested in the lost lives of so many dead. Byrd's work had acted as a physical incantation, an embodiment of individual lives lost. By the end of the dance, it was as if he had brought them home.

*Kary Wayson is a Seattle writer and poet whose work recently appeared in "Best American Poetry 2007."*