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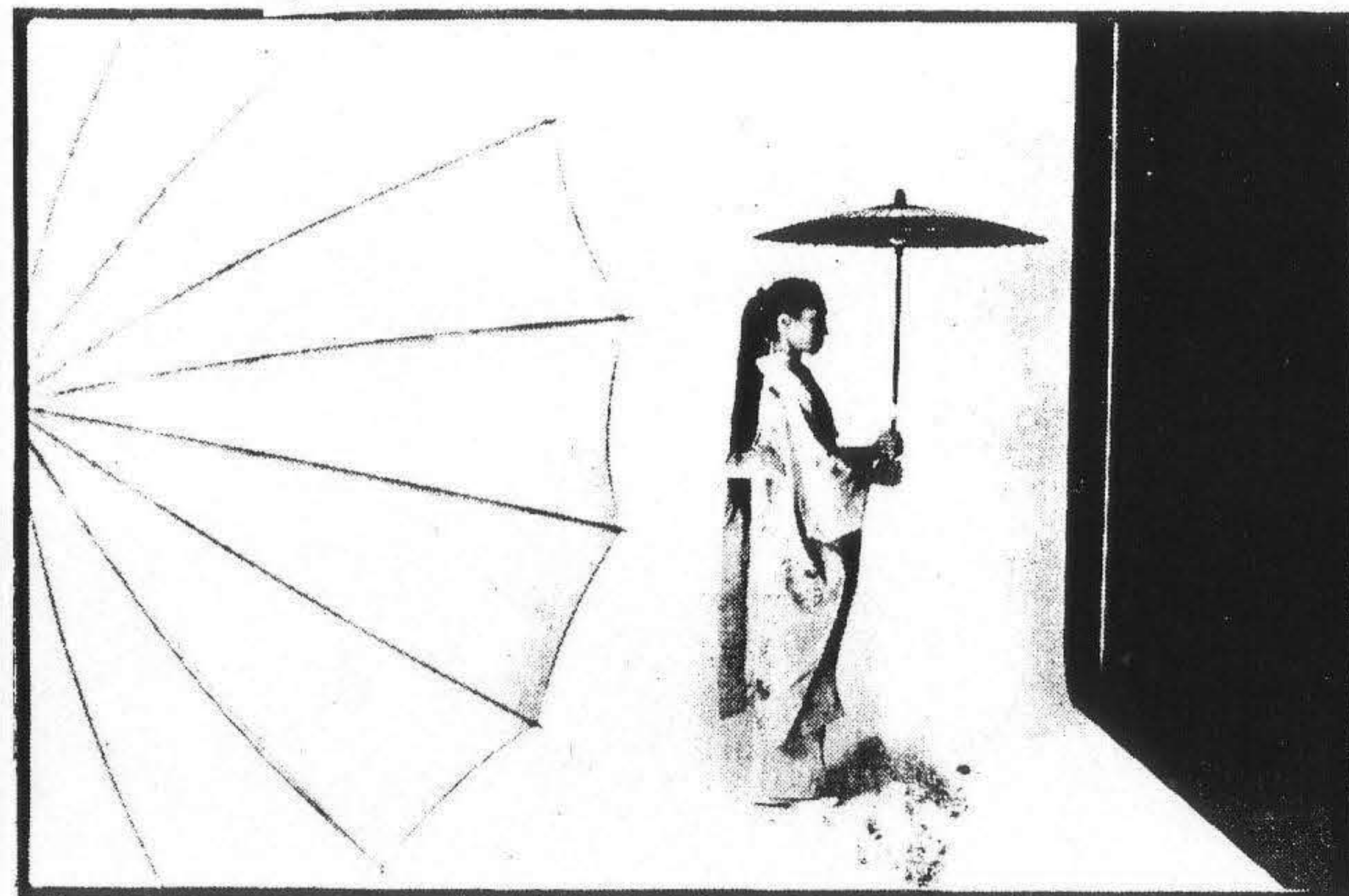
Thirteen Dancers

Special Section (P. 83)

The Spirit Moves

Technical prowess is thrilling. But dancers grip our imagination through something more: through the ways their understanding illuminates the physical statement. How this happens is individual and, maybe, finally unfathomable, but somehow disparate qualities of personality and spirit, intelligence and warmth, seriousness and showmanship have to unite with movement in performance.

Here are 13 dancers who, in their own ways, put it all together.



Ito: "I try to do as an essence."

Sachiyo Ito

APRIL 27, 1982

IMAGES of Sachiyo Ito—snapshots, memories, visions evoked in an afternoon's conversing in a small windowless office in NYU School of Education's Dance Department, where Ito got her MA and where she now teaches Japanese and Okinawan dance.

(1) Sachiyo Ito is six. Her grandmother has taken her to her first Kabuki performance. She is nagging her mother for lessons, shaking her shoulder. The mother, a film producer in a Tokyo television company, says "Wait, wait ..."

(2) A year later, Sachiyo is studying privately, as is the custom, with a teacher at the Hanayagi School. Twice a week—at first for only 15 minutes, later, perhaps for an hour. No warmups. No explanations. The teacher demonstrates; the pupil fol-

lows. The pupil performs; the teacher watches. Maybe she says, "Something is wrong. Go home and think about it." Good point to keep in mind: "Watching someone else's lesson is also a lesson."

(3) A snapshot of a dancer made ~~an~~ as Tomoyakko, the bumbling servant of a samurai. Bald head fringed with black hair, white face with fierce black lines painted on it, solemn expression. But this man barely comes up to the shoulder of the smiling woman posing with him. It's Sachiyo Ito, aged 12.

(4) Sachiyo usually plays female roles, so this is an occasion to remember. She's waiting to take off her Tomoyakko makeup and put on female costume. Time's running out. But her forgetful mother has had to rush out and buy a piece of white silk so—it is customary—her daughter can imprint her made-up face onto the cloth, which can then be framed and displayed.

(5) Sachiyo the rebel? At 18, she passes the audition which will certify her as a teacher and a dancer. She can now call herself Oen Hanayagi. But Sachiyo also studies at the Fujima School, where the teachers are closely associated with the all-male Kabuki Theater and where acting is stressed. (She will not, of course, perform in the Kabuki Theater where all female roles are played by men, but in shared concerts around Tokyo, in which gender seems of no consequence: men play men, women play women, and vice versa.) Her boldness is unheard of: "If you take under one teacher, you should follow her for the

(6) Sachiyo is studying English at the university. She gives dancing lessons at the Tokyo American Club to the wives of officers, businessmen, diplomats: "I became aware how much dance can talk about our traditions, our history and religion, the way we, the Japanese people, are."

(7) Connecticut College, summer of 1972. A gracious invitation from a couple she met in a Tokyo theater lobby, and Sachiyo has arrived in the U.S. with visitor's visa, one-way ticket, wig box, and kimonos. A first brush with ballet, with Graham Technique: "I couldn't understand why people say Martha Graham is very close to Japanese dance. So difficult. So strenuous!" Every Wednesday evening in an empty dining room with its windows open to the hot green New England night, Sachiyo Ito—delicate, reed-slim, with long black hair—teaches us Japanese folk dances entrancing in their refinement. Pantomiming a hard-working Japanese fisherman, she passes a hand lightly across her brow, first to the right, then to the left. "Sweat, and sweat," she explains.

(8) April 1974, Japan House. Ito dances *Sagi Musume*, a dance dating from 1762. The "white heron maiden," one of the many ill-fated heroines of Japanese theater and poetry, waits and waits for a lover who never comes, walking in tiny halting steps, her head wobbling gently as if her

slim neck can scarcely sustain its weight. Later, enduring the torments of hell, Ito trembles and cowers and writhes on the floor, stunning the audience with her unforeseen power.

(9) In the NYU office, Ito speaks of a coming performance. She and Janis Pforsich have a program that juxtaposes Japanese court dance style with that of the French baroque. She has a commitment to crossing cultural boundaries, through teaching, through performing, and by choreographing dances she calls "modern," although she performs in kimonos and to music of koto or flute. She mildly decries the East-West blends of some choreographers as "peripheral": "I shouldn't too much open big mouth, but I try to do as an essence, not just as appearance." It's universals she wants to deal with: "... not only Japanese or American. We all come to a same spot, but we express