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Upstaged ^[1]

Helen Shaw

Excerpt:

Sweet and retro American Document kicks up its heels



^[2] Here's a puzzler: How do you revive a work when you don't know what it looked like (entirely), and when the choreographer is long dead? One answer is complete, even conceptual, re-evaluation. For instance, when the Martha Graham Company wanted to revisit Graham's *American Document*, they chucked faithful reconstruction out the window. The company invited Anne Bogart's SITI company into the process, taking traditional preservation methods — watching film snippets and decoding Graham's notes — and weaving them together with SITI techniques. New elements (like Chuck Mee's Whitman-heavy text collage) exist alongside Graham's familiar athletic, hieroglyphic vocabulary, and the result went on display on Tuesday. While there's an enormous amount of fun in it (a lithe dancer tries to stuff bearish Leon Ingulsrud into an arabesque, Kelly Maurer twinkles as she is hoisted hither and yon), the real excitement should be at Saturday's show. Then, the company and Bogart will screen the archival snippets and render the collaboration process transparent. The sweetest parts of *American Document* occur when we can see the clear delight the two groups take in each other: SITI's rigorous physical methods mean that a few of them (notably Akiko Aizawa) blend into the Graham dancers, and the Grahamies acquit themselves uncommonly well when called on to speak or act. But while it's a pleasure to experience the groups' unexpected synergy, the

good feeling doesn't generate a lot of electricity. That comes when you see how Bogart's humanism jostles against Graham's angular myth-figures, how much Bogart's work (palpably kind) sets off Graham's dramatic absolutes (no room for kindness). That dynamic will be easiest to see in the lecture-cum-performance on Saturday, so I suggest you get your tickets [here](#) [3].

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