

DANCE REVIEW

A Mixed Marriage of Ghosts and Jazz

By JENNIFER DUNNING

Zhongmei Li specializes in the merging of styles that range from the traditional dances she learned in her native China to the Western modern dance she studied in New York. In her new "Portrait Enchantress," the centerpiece of a program presented by the Zhongmei Dance Company on Saturday night at the Brooklyn Center at Brooklyn College, Ms. Li pushes that goal to the limits. The dance is set to a new jazz score by

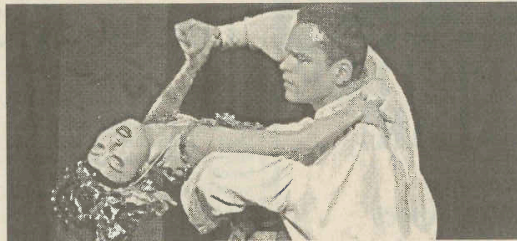
Wynton Marsalis, music that is just about as far from her roots, and as fashionably multicultural, as it is possible to get.

Ms. Li tests herself additionally by submitting to a collaborative process that can be harder than setting dance to already existing music. Sadly, "Portrait Enchantress" too often looks like a dance afloat in a commissioned score.

The piece, inspired by a traditional Chinese ghost story, gets off to a promising start and ends as strikingly with an ingeniously distilled state-

ment of theme. The woman (Ms. Li) is seen posing on a small stage within the stage, as if glimpsed mysteriously in a window or on a canvas. She is dressed in a black cloak that she holds up at one end. The line of her body and the cloak, opened slightly for a glimpse of rich colors beneath, have an inviting Art Deco quality.

The middle section of the piece, which unfolds on a stage proper shared with four musicians from Mr. Marsalis's ensemble, soon becomes numbingly decorative. In the guise of a fox, the woman flows into a pro-



Ellen Crane

Zhongmei Li and Dirk Platzek performing in "Portrait Enchantress."

tracted love duet with a fixated human (Dirk Platzek). Creeping fox-like creatures add variety. But

though the dancing is first-rate, Ms. Li's vocabulary is not inventive enough here to support a duet of this

length and thematic simplicity.

To her credit, Ms. Li makes full use of the stage space but does not stoop to interaction between musicians and dancers.

The costumes were by Danese Smalls. Husheng Jiang designed the scenery. The music was performed by Spike Wilner, Dave Glasser, Carlos Henriquez and Jaz Sawyer. The program also included "The Butterfly Lovers," choreographed by Ms. Li and Jianming Zhang, with Ms. Li and Vernon Scott heading the cast, Weiya Chen's "Emperor Quin Calls on His Soldiers" (with Richard Chang, Pawel Cheda, Zhang Tai and Yuji Yoda) and Ms. Li's "Autumn Reverie" (with Xiaolan Lang, Joanna Fabiszewska and Huei-Lee Wei).