

Dancers go east to double worlds

■ LAST NIGHT

Stupa

★★★

By Peter Chin. Until Saturday at Harbourfront Theatre Centre, 231 Queens Quay W. 416-973-4000

SUSAN WALKER
DANCE WRITER

Without knowing what a stupa is, one would be hard-pressed to make much sense of Peter Chin's latest piece of dance theatre. To quote Oxford, a stupa is "a round, usually domed building erected as a Buddhist shrine." Images of roundness, especially wide open mouths, abound in *Stupa*. Reference is made to such a structure in the monologue performed by Piotr R. Biernat. He is a young monk raised by wolves; his job is to sweep the ground around the stupa. He knows that he introduces disorder into the orderly lives of the monks.

An earlier monologue, spoken by Carolyn Woods, is that of an archeologist. Her task is to reconstruct rituals from forgotten cultures, especially those in which creativity, intuition and mysticism are prized. A third character, voiced by Susanna Hood, is an architect. She talks about her fantasy structures. Compared to a 16th-century cathedral in Mexico built on the ruins of Aztec culture, these are sacred spaces.

The speeches are inserted into a complex series of ritual movements. Yvonne Ng enters first doing a version of a Chinese sleeve dance. But things become at once more animalistic and more ceremonial, as two men arrive leading two creatures on four legs. Yves Candau and Mark Johnson perform a heavy-footed duet, circling around the stage, arms swinging and heads turning in unison.

A live musical ensemble combining Asian and Western instruments plays an ever more cacophonous score. As the music rises in volume, with siren sounds and pounding on kettle drums, the dancers grow more frenzied. They speak in an artificial incantatory language. The men's deep growls become more insistent, like the sound of human didgeridoos.

While all this goes on, Katherine Duncanson meditates on a stool, rotating at intervals to face the sacred four directions.

Perhaps more enjoyable in the abstract than in the actual, *Stupa* makes a bridge between inner worlds and outward expression, sanctified spaces and wild nature, body and spirit.



Yves Candau strikes a pose to ponder in *Stupa*.