

The Philadelphia Inquirer

IN PERFORMANCE

Review *Dance*

'This Is What Happened' at the Painted Bride on Friday

By Marilyn Jackson
FOR THE INQUIRER

If you've ever had to explain a suspense-thriller to your movie companion, you could appreciate the subtleties of *This Is What Happened*, the whodunit by dancer/choreographer Neil Greenberg, that premiered Friday evening at the Painted Bride Art Center.

His collaborators, Zeena Parkins and Elliot Sharp, remixed snippets of Bernard Herrmann's music for the emperor of suspense, Alfred Hitchcock, which Greenberg spattered like bursts of adrenaline-

charged relief throughout his hour-long series of mostly silent dance sequences.

The choreographer, a Merce Cunningham dancer for seven years before he formed Dance by Neil Greenberg in 1986, is among many now working with filmic elements. Think of Sean Curran's *Five Points of Articulation*, which projects title cards onto the backdrop recalling silent film, or Headlong Dance Theater's *St*r W*rs*.

But while he draws inspiration from film and uses projected text, Greenberg has extended his signa-

ture devices beyond dance theater into narrative throughlines. His 1997 work *Part 3 (My Fair Lady)* — the last part of a trilogy that began in 1994 with his Bessie Award-winner *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* — has been described as brooding. This is not a word that would be applied to the brand-new *This Is What Happened*.

The title suggests an explanation, but the dance — featuring Greenberg, Justine Lynch and Paige Martin — wryly wends through Hitchcockian twists and turns. Martin lunges across the stage, her eyes

full of cryptic meaning, her hands pushing and clawing the air as a sentence on the wall reads "Don't believe her, she's lying." When Greenberg and Lynch join her, they repeat each other's hip revolutions. Their limbs stretch apart, expanding their torsos as they spiral toward and away from each other. Curved surveillance mirrors, one in each of the back corners and another hung like a third eye over the audience, reproduce their images.

Each dancer slips off stage, in turn, to change costumes. Greenberg reenters and, back to the audi-

ence, peels the straps of his tank top down from his shoulders. He takes three steps as catlike as any Kim Novak ever took. Lynch comes back in a soft, reddish dress. She is as ungainly as Tippi Hedren, her hands fluttering around her head like birds. The backdrop flashes "something is happening to her." When she turns her back to the audience and repeats Greenberg's off-the-shoulder movement, her walk suggests an automaton, more like a drugged Novak.

Greenberg's subtext-laden choreography is thrilling to decode, even if you don't get all of it.