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New Acts

Wednesday, November 3, 1982

LE TROUPE MAKANDEL (14)
Songs and Dance
60 Mins.
Soundscape, N.Y.

The recent exodus from Haiti has been accompanied by bitter tribulation that continues for most of the refugees. But the ceremonial music and dance brought here by this newly-arrived folkloric troupe has a passionate, celebratory joie de vivre. Presented by musicologist Verna Gillis at the Soundscape performance space, Le Troupe Makandel performed Haitian religious voodoo rites with fiery exuberance.

Using hand-held percussion instruments and tom-toms, the troupe's musicians create a percolating musical foundation redolent of African rhythms. Five principal singers (two male and three female) and a contingent of dancers create swirling perpetual-motion dance patterns to the backdrop of vibrant call and response chanting. Most impressive was the troupe's ability to sustain an apparently frenzied but actually well-controlled level of steadily rising energy.

The dancers' supplicatory gestures and ceremonial interactions (elaborate handshaking, passing of a giant cigar, a bottle of spirits and several machetes) were clearly symbolic of spiritual communality. Other voodoo rites involving the drawing of chalk lines on the stage, and offerings on an altar were open to interpretation in the absence of program notes, but never failed to be colorful and exotically entertaining. —Rich.