

# Calendar

## Emotional Cockroach Dance

### Butoh Performance

**A**lthough a *butoh* performance can be slow-paced, the training for it is strenuous," said Kathleen Pierce, a *butoh* student for three years. "You have to be able to hold positions. So you do a kind of tai chi. You get pushed to your physical limit. By the time I reach the creative exploration, my hair and clothes are sopping wet. It's *butoh* boot camp."

Pierce was speaking on the day before she was to meet the plane of her *butoh* teacher, Diego Piñón, who was coming to San Diego from his home in Mexico City, as he does several times a year, to conduct *butoh* workshops. This weekend, as usual, he will also perform. Pierce herself performed a couple of

weeks ago. "Three of us presented a show at Southwestern College. We

actually got paid, and were very excited by that. That came out of our working with Diego."

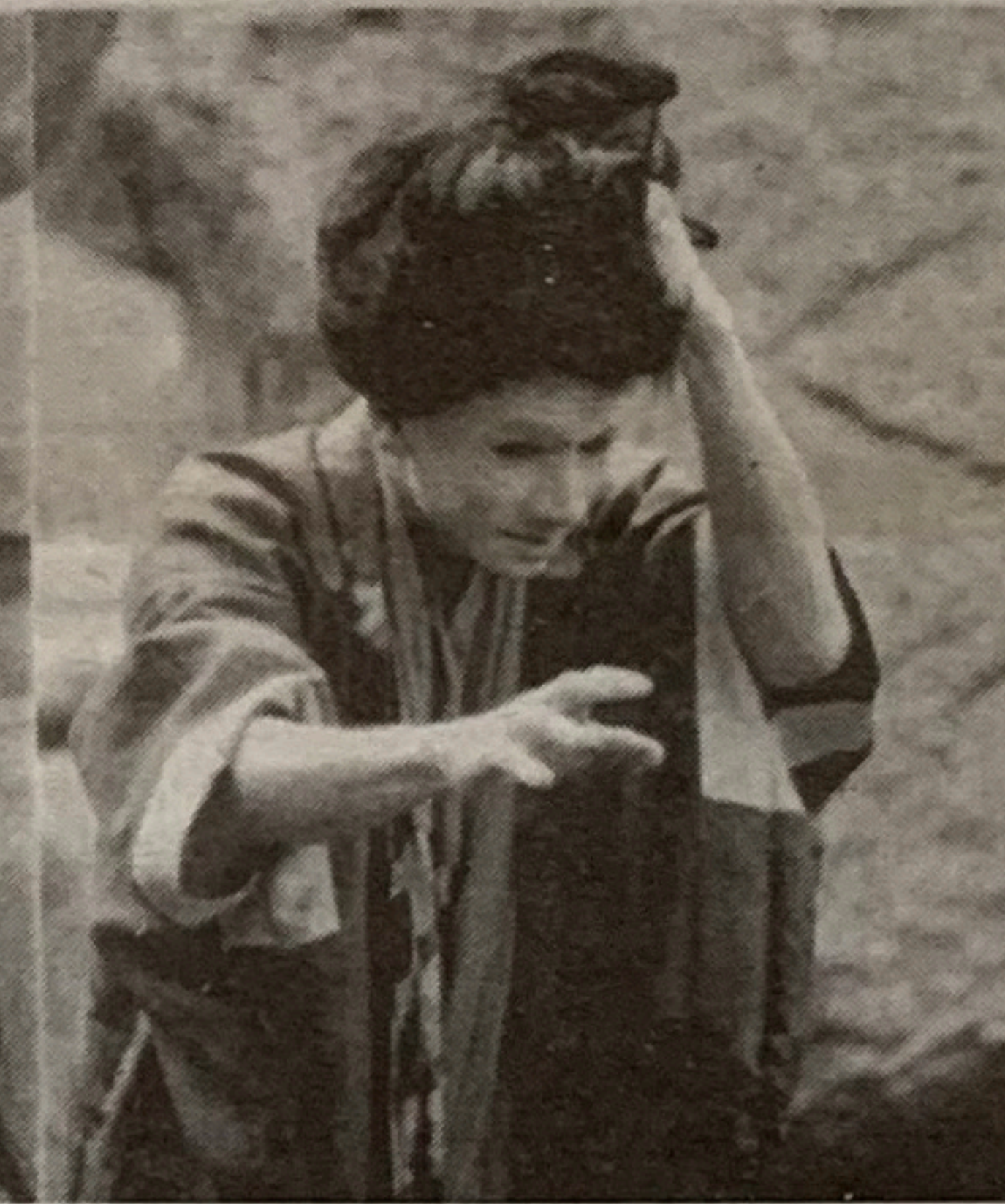
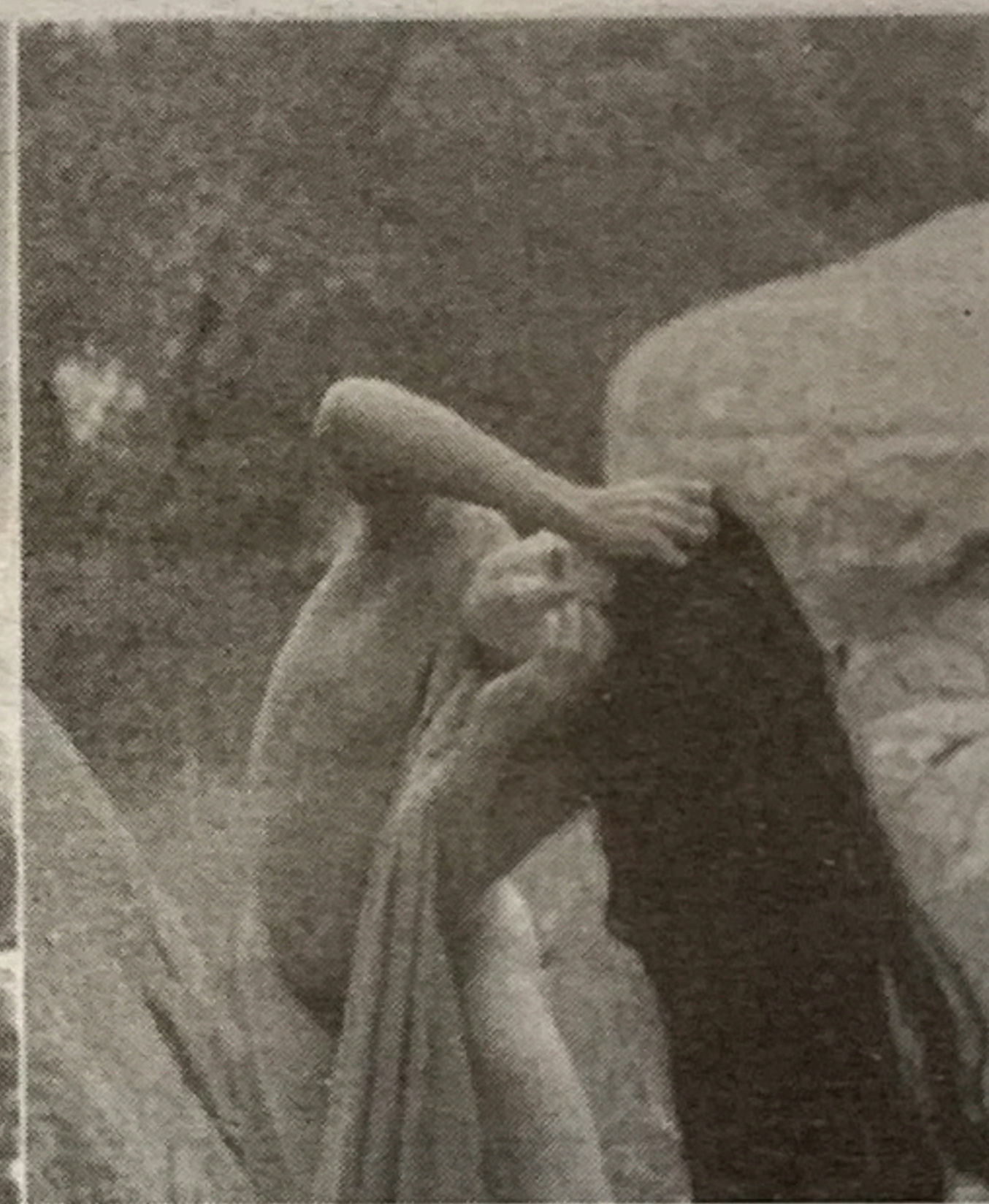
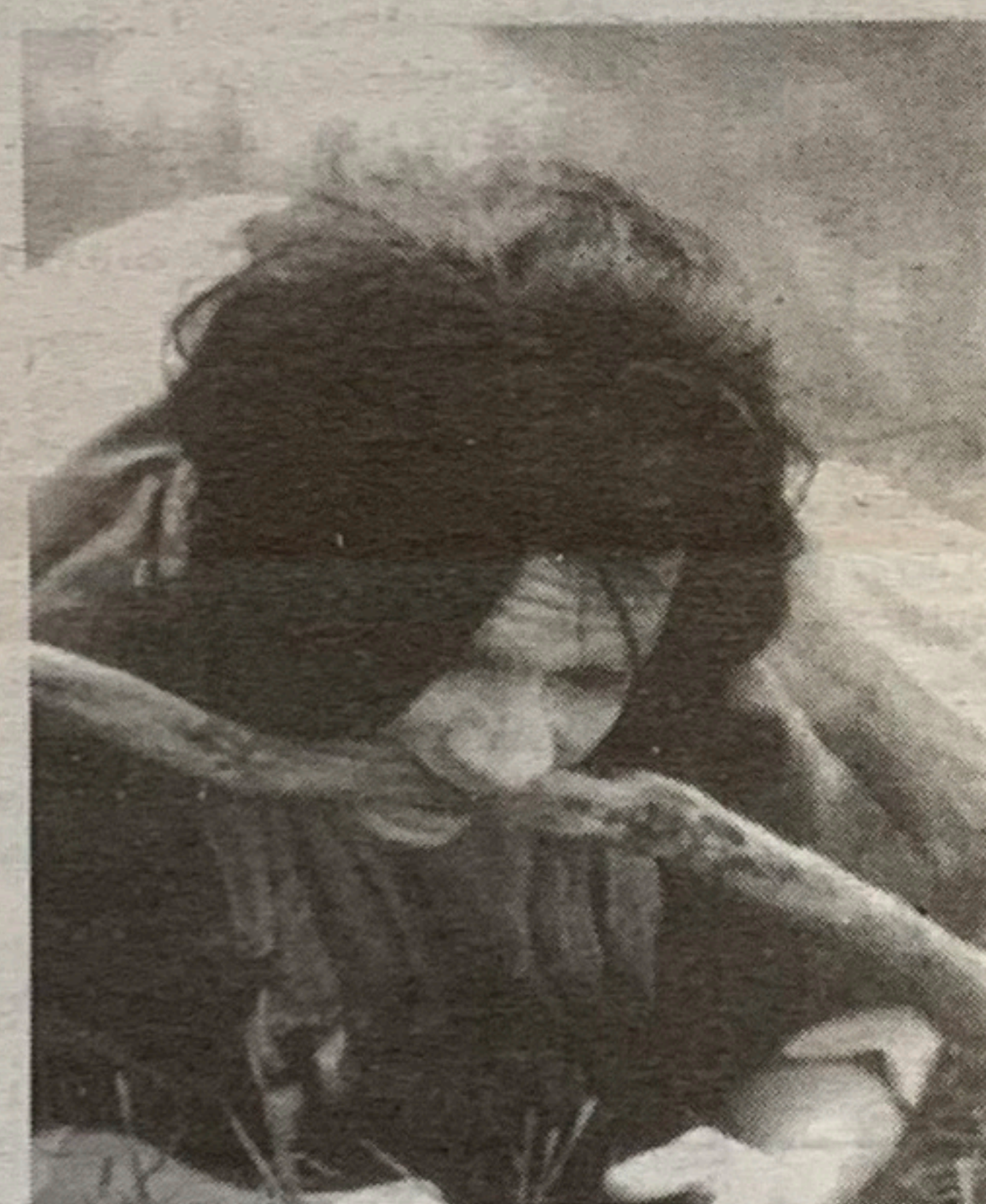
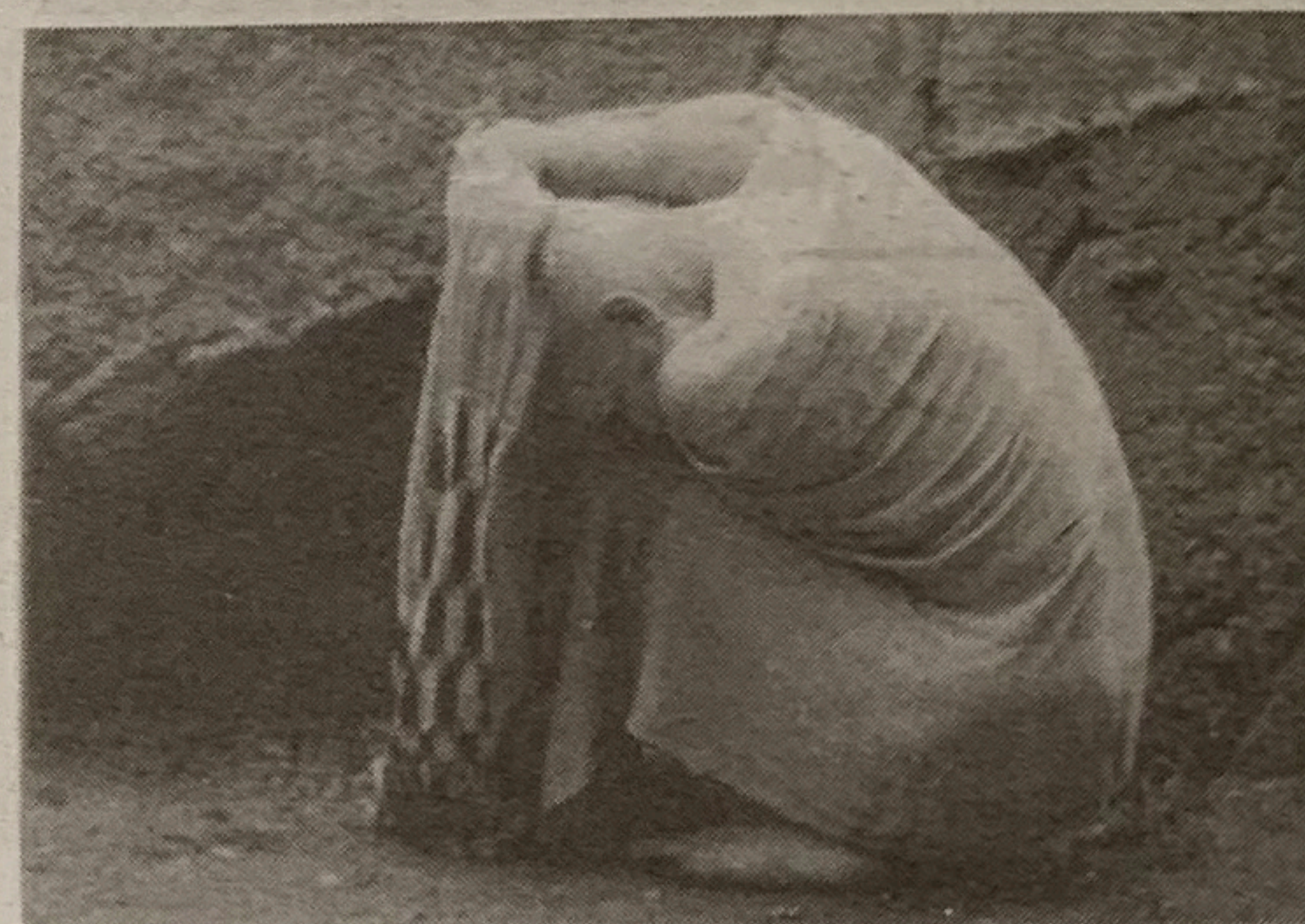
For their piece "Windsong," they wore *butoh*'s traditional white body paint, along with what Pierce described as "almost prom dresses," except that the skirts were plastic. "That gave a shimmery quality to the movement," Pierce said. "The tops were white lycra and bare-shouldered. And yet another woman did a piece wearing ballet tights and leotard, with a sweater pulled down over them. She sat at a little table with a lit candle and cup of coffee. It was called *Missing*. She expressed profound loneliness, even though there wasn't a lot of movement."

If you have experienced *butoh* in the past, you may not want to repeat it. Even Piñón's San Diego-based manager, Charlene Penner, admits that some of it resembles what you might encounter on a psychiatric ward. "That can be *butoh*," said Penner, who performed with Pierce at Southwestern, "but that's not Diego's *butoh*."

*Butoh* originated in Tokyo in 1959 with a now-famous performance during which a dancer simulated sex with a chicken. Japanese culture was suitably shocked, as *butoh*'s co-origins, Kazuo Ohno and Tatsumi Hajikata, had intended. It wasn't shock for shock's sake.

"*Butoh* was called 'Dance of Darkness' or 'Crippled Dance,'" said Pierce. "It originated after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when the artistic community was searching for ways to express their horror."

Rounded backs, stooped shoulders, contorted limbs, crossed eyes, and open



Diego Piñón performing Broken Nostalgia

mouths became some of *butoh*'s trademarks. Painfully intimate emotions were routinely expressed in mimed stories. Movements could be hypnotically slow or manic and agitated. Musical accompaniments were anything a dancer chose, or nothing at all.

"*Butoh* is an art form in which everyone finds their own story and follows their own path," said Pierce. "Having a teacher is common, but ultimately it's a very individual expression. Even today *butoh* is still underground as an art form in Japan. It's more popular in Germany than Japan. Culturally, Germans are very open to it. Many people around the world have taken in *butoh* and adapted it."

The San Francisco strain, she noted, is called "mo-bu"—modern *butoh*. It's often a more theatrical than spiritual experience for the audience. She recalled a performance where dancers, dressed as cockroaches, fought over a dessert with women in the traditional white body paint, while men with blackened faces sang opera.

"Diego remains true to traditional *butoh*," said Pierce of Piñón's Mexican

adaptation. "It doesn't have to be flashy. I've found that the most profound spiritual exchange between performer and audience can take place with the least amount of flash."

"The Mexican strain is unique to him," she added. "When I watch him, I can see an Aztec Indian hunched in front of a fire." Yet she also described a *butoh* performance by Piñón that consisted of him carrying a huge bouquet of flowers on his back while trailing a "very rich, vivid ribbon" that was attached to his wrist. "With this ribbon falling slowly behind him, he crossed the whole stage." According to Pierce, the piece was about Piñón's repressed sexuality.

On Saturday and Sunday the 44-year-old Piñón will incorporate into his performance elements that some people may interpret as drag. For a piece called *Broken Nostalgia* he will wear two costumes: one is something from his mother's closet; the other is a Japanese kimono that he received as a gift during his last trip to Japan to study with *butoh* co-ordinator Ohno. He will also wear a Japanese woman's wig.

The musical accompaniment will

range from recorded marimba to a Japanese aria.

"Younger dancers struggle with *butoh*, because they still want to look beautiful," said Pierce, who is 53. "I danced for many years when I was younger. When I came back to dance in my late 40s, I started with ballet, then moved on to modern, then began *butoh*. *Butoh* is not so much about how high you leap. It's more about what you're communicating to the audience. Baryshnikov, you know, switched from ballet to modern, because it held more possibilities for him as he aged. Kazuo Ohno gave a *butoh* performance in New York about a year ago." This year Ohno will be 95.

— Jeanne Schinto

**Diego Piñón,  
Butoh Mexicano Ritual Dance  
Saturday, May 26, at 8:00 p.m.  
Sunday, May 27, at 7:00 p.m.  
City Heights Urban Village  
Performance Annex  
3795 Fairmont Avenue  
\$17 (\$20 at the door);  
students \$10 (\$12 at the door)  
619-429-7444 or 760-789-2053**

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