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It's growing, flowing, Gone!

By CLIVE BARNES

KAROLE Armitage might have used a more encouraging tense than Armitage Gone!, the name of the troupe that opened its season Tuesday at the Joyce Theater.

Perhaps Armitage Newly Arriving! could have done the trick. But whatever the name, her new program is far out and altogether terrific.

When Armitage — a Wisconsin native who

has a bigger reputation in Europe than here -- started her company nearly two years ago, I

showed her with ill-disguised contempt.

The laugh's on me. The new and quite different program at the Joyce is fascinating and her enlarged company of dancers all extremely accomplished, making me happily eat humble pie.

Choreographically, Armitage, once a student of the School of American Ballet, talks a totally individual dialect of its founding father, George Balanchine — at least the Balanchine of "Episodes" and "Agon." Hers is classically slanted — though there's no pointe work — with a faultless accent that stresses musical dynamics.

The world premiere was the hourlong ballet

"Ligeti Essays," set to music by the great Hungarian composer Gyorgi Ligeti, who died last year. Much of it was composed before he came to the West in 1956, and has a strong folkloric base.

It is eerie, macabre stuff, clusters of sound, whether vocal or instrumental that erupt in Armitage's sparse stage pictures suggesting a bleak emotional wasteland like a Samuel Beckett play.

Yet the simple, fluid invention of the dance grasps the mind as it fuses with the

explosive clusters of Ligeti's musical imagination.

The program had opened with a brief light-hearted joke, "Pig," with a gigantic porker (an inflated balloon costume by Jeff Koons) and a ballerina, the first porcine pas de deux since Nureyev danced a TV duet with Miss Piggy on "The Muppet Show."

It ended with another handsomely danced and brilliantly conceived piece, this time to another Hungarian, Bela Bartok, a shortened version of Armitage's "Time Is an Echo of an Axe Within a Wood." It had a succinct beauty of time and space that belied its pompous title.

DANCE REVIEW

ARMITAGE GONE!

The Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Ave., between 18th and 19th streets. (212) 242-0800. Season runs through Sunday