

# Valda Setterfield & David Gordon

By JERRY TALLMER

**T**HE DANCER'S LIFE IS as grinding as that of a prizefighter, maybe more so, and both Valda Setterfield and her husband David Gordon are modern dancers. Yet Valda Setterfield runs a six-room West Village floor-through with equanimity and the help only of "someone who cleans once a week—hopefully."

Also, to some degree, the help of her husband.

"The kitchen work used to be mine," she says, "but in the past two or three years, not that I've made demands, it's become very much ours." Miss Setterfield is the cook and Mr. Gordon chops up vegetables and shares in the marketing and the like.

She not only cooks, but, when company comes, she does it in "an old gold-lame '30s evening dress which doesn't show the grease spots" and enables her to feel utterly relaxed. "It was incredible to me," said Gordon, "to discover my wife a *guest* at her own dinners."

He also finds her dinners incredibly eatable.

"One of the reasons that Valda's such a good cook is that she has an idea of the qualities and weights of things from various cuisines that work well together—"

"—and colors and textures," she said. "If there's a lot of cream in one thing, there won't be any in another. I mean," she tossed off drily, "nobody seems to get ill on my cooking."

Valda Setterfield is originally English, from Westgate-on-Sea, a tiny town about 20 miles from Dover. Her parents, Valentine and Eileen Setterfield, still live there. "For a long time they owned a dairy which my father inherited. He really wanted to be a golf pro. Now he's sec-



Post Photo by Frank Leonardo

## Relaxing in the West Village.

retary of a golf club, in offices that were built in 1084 and are mentioned in the Doomsday Book."

She was 5 when World War II broke out, and "each time a bomb dropped" she was shifted to another school—17 of them in all, ending up at Godwin Girls' College "which was not a college in the American sense" and where she took up dancing. After three further years at the Rambert School of Dance, London, and yet further study with the noted Audrey de Vos, she learned of the work of an American dancer named James Waring, and

she hied herself off to these shores to join Waring's company.

Also joining Waring at around that time, the early 1960s, was David Gordon, who had traveled a quite different route. The son of Sam and Rose Gordon of this city, he had gone to "all the schools on the Lower East Side when it was not the East Village and uptown was 7th St. and Av. B," then to Seward Park HS "where you have to be tough but not as tough as today." As a fine-arts major at Brooklyn College, Gordon joined the modern-dance club—"They

were glad to have any man"—and, through that, met Waring.

So they were married, David Gordon and Valda Setterfield, although in their first duet "David complained I was too heavy to lift"—she is 5-foot-7½, tall for a dancer, but not heavy—and are today the parents of Ain Gordon, going on 13, a boy they both have every admiration for and whose first name is Scottish-Lithuanian because, says his father, "we each had to get the family thing off our shoulders."

Modern dance in America is an inbred, cross-fertilizing society, and the Gordons have danced together and separately and with various others, she since 1965 with Merce Cunningham and he most lately as member of a new group called "The Grand Union." This Thursday through Sunday she and the Cunningham company "have what's called a season, which is four performances at the Brooklyn Academy," while her husband's outfit starts a two-month run April 1 at the Dance Gallery, 242 E. 14th St.

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David's father runs the mailroom for a publishing company, his mother is a bookkeeper, "and they don't in the least understand what

I do or what Valda does." Once, years ago, they came to see him dance "and my father's only concern was that I remove the stage make-up as quickly as possible." Valda's mother, on the other hand, came to see her daughter dance at Sadler's Wells "and said it was the most wonderful night of her life."

In days past the David Gordons used to have 20 people in at Christmastime for a dinner "of Victorian proportions, taking two weeks to prepare," and based on the lifestyle of one of her aunts. "Six salads, five desserts," said Gordon. Six salads? Of what sort? Mrs. Gordon thought hard and came up with four of them, anyway. "Raw artichoke heart, cut very very very fine, looking Japanese, a squeeze of lemon on each slice. Mushroom and shrimp. Grapefruit and spinach. Potato and mussel. And each with a separate dressing."

That's over and done with, however, and now they like to have dinners for six in the six green canvas-backed chairs around their table.

"I've become quite into Indian cooking," said Mrs. Gordon. "When we were in England we used to eat marvelous little meat-filled pastries called *samosas*,

which I've learned to make." Mr. Gordon: "We used to make a lot of jokes in London about 'that's *samosas* best thing I ever ate.'"

Main feature of a meal starting with *samosas* would be *Patrani Machhi*, or Fish Baked in Leaves, as adapted by her from "A Taste of India" (Houghton Mifflin), by Mary S. Atwood. The important details, said Mrs. Gordon, are that the coconut in the recipe be *unsweetened* and that the spices be fresh. She buys her spices on Carmine St., her meat on Bleecker St. "My butcher's my dearest friend."

Accompanying the fish would be green beans fried lightly in oil, with mustard seed and cumin, and a salad of spinach and red peppers "or anything that looked agreeable in the market," in a dressing of lime juice, cayenne, honey, salt. Topped off with an Indian dessert "that David, who's a real chocolate freak," is willing to accept in place of chocolate. It's *shrikand*, made of yogurt, rosewater, saffron, cardamom, sugar.

There'd be white wine for those who want it, but with this meal Valda Setterfield prefers beer. "Our meals take a very long time," she said. "We don't do anything else. We eat and we talk."