VOICE ARTS '79

The Vanguard

Innovators to Watch

LOIS GREENFIELD

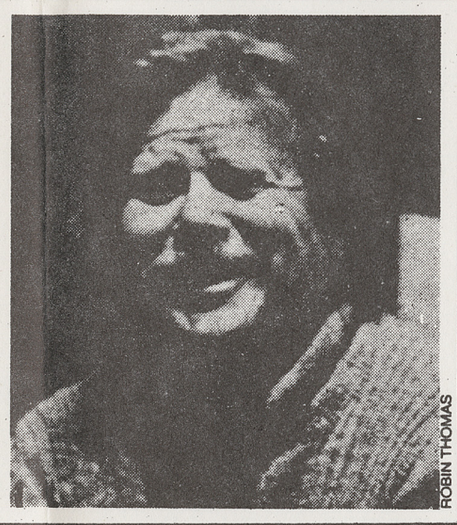
Douglas Dunn

Lean and fine-boned, dancer-choreographer Douglas Dunn has been making riveting pieces for about five or six years. In 1974's *Performance-Exhibit 101*, he didn't move at all—lay corpselike on a platform amid a warren of beams that filled his loft. The viewer who wandered in during the daily four hours that Dunn lay immobile seemed an intruder, exposed in Dunn's mute, unseeing presence. The astringent intensity of his *Gestures in Red* (1975) demonstrated the exhaustiveness of Dunn's structured movement investigations. Thoroughly satisfying, and concrete as a toothache, *Gestures in Red* was a puzzle and *appeared* to be extremely personal: the flair, the exactness, the savor and shape of its small movements were so distinctly his own. Dunn's best work is marked by cleanness, severity, and riskiness. In *Lazy Madge*, his "ongoing choreographic project," Dunn loosened the choreographic structure so that the dancers could perform set solos and duets in improvisational arrangements. Abstract, pure dance, *Lazy Madge* was brimful of suprises—sudden diversions, grips and collapses, near collisions, changes of direction, speed, weight. And it ate up space.

A few weeks ago, in Paris, I saw his newest work, *Coquina*. It hums with energy like a powerline. There's no letup in tension, yet there's no pressure: The air onstage is never thick, but rare. It's like looking at a singular, perfect relic of an unknown civilization. At dinner afterward, we talked about cromlechs, stone circles, the strangeness of anciently worked stones that have been heaped, carved, abandoned. How alien yet familiar they are. You can go among them, feel their patina, see them in their natural lights and seasons. They talk to you and you hear. You don't know what they're saying, but you hear. Like Dunn's dances.

—Burt Supree

Fred Neumann



ROBIN THOMAS

Fred Neumann forces the question: Is Mabou Mines infinitely deep? As an actor, Newmann has been the bedrock of humanism within that abstract theatre company. *The B-Beaver Animation* was built on his uncomfortably large, befuddled-father body and his portrayal of the Opener in *Cascando* nearly stole the show. Neumann as actor represents the foibles of the world—he is bigger than life and clumsy for it.

This season Neumann has re-emerged as director, following the path of JoAnne Akalaitis. He is adapting Beckett's early novel *Mercier and Camier* for the stage in a thoroughly unsentimental, conceptual way. What is remarkable about Neumann's production is how visual it manages to be. At its first workshop performance this fall, the production was full of narrative emphasis: David Warrilow on videotape looking like Beckett and sounding like a Caedman recording (in his Parisian days, Neumann was a dubbing actor and it shows in his altering of vocal tones for different characters); Bill Raymond playing a small Laurel to Neumann's Oliver Hardy is matched by shadow play which sets enormous images against tiny ones; and an observer who floats through the set on roller skates. Chalk up another Mabou project worth looking out for. *—Terry Curtis Fox*

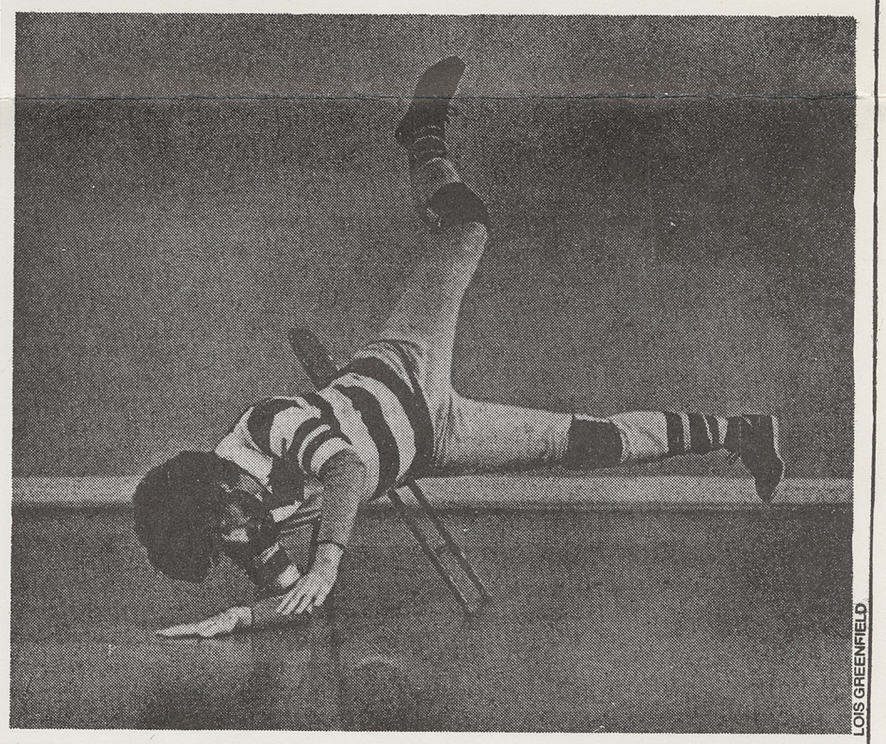
Many think of David Gordon as the gloomy and lovable *enfant terrible* of the Grand Union—elaborately making on Nancy Lewis a dress of paper leaves that both of them seemed to know wasn't going to work out, or singing in a sad, furry voice songs that nobody much liked. But Gordon, since 1960, has been a choreographer as well as a witty dancer and on-the-spot inventor of performance.

"Sometimes I look down, and sometimes I look up," he says with pleased surprise to the audience for his *Not Necessarily Recognizeable Objectives*. And up and down it has been with him. His *Mannequin Dance* was one of Judson Dance Theater's acknowledged classics, but in 1966 he stopped choreographing for almost five years, depressed by the hostile reaction to his *Walks and Digressions*.

Since 1974, with his wife Valda Setterfield and a small group of dancers known as David Gordon's Pick Up Company, Gordon has been brilliantly defining himself for us—illuminating his early work in the process. Working in repetitive patterns with words, actions, sometimes music, sometimes props, he sets up exhilarating tensions between elaborate structures and mundane tasks, pristine order and shambly movement, between what we see and what we assume it to mean, and then—suddenly—what else it can mean.

Intellect and imagination pervade his works. Cunning and a respect for the uses of absurdity give them their distinctive cast. One leaves a performance of his spare—minimal, if you like that word—pieces feeling as if one's brain has been tickled in a serious and seriously enjoyable way. *—Deborah Jowitt*

David Gordon



LOIS GREENFIELD

KAREN MANTLO

Talking Band

The Talking Band, a five-member company composed partly of Open Theatre veterans, focuses on the basic theatre problem of how to perform words—especially how to harness the emotive values of vocal and instrumental sounds to underscore the meanings of texts. The group began four years ago working on short stories, poetry, and songs, and has gone on to develop collectively two very fine full-length pieces: *Worksong*, a semi-documentary ode-to/critique-of work and money in America; and *The Kalevala*, based on the lyrical, acrid epic of Finland. The Band has by now evolved a distinctive theatre style—highly presentational, visually spare, and aurally rich. Using sensitive orchestrations of voices, body percussion, and traditional and homemade instruments to transmit feelings and experiences to their audiences, this group is wonderfully out of step with the current stage trend toward post-modern anti-emotion. The Talking Band is currently completing a five-week run at the Theatre for the New City. *—Eileen Blumenthal*

PERFORMING ARTSERVICES, INC.
463 WEST STREET • NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10014
PHONE (212) 989-4953