

COLLECTING

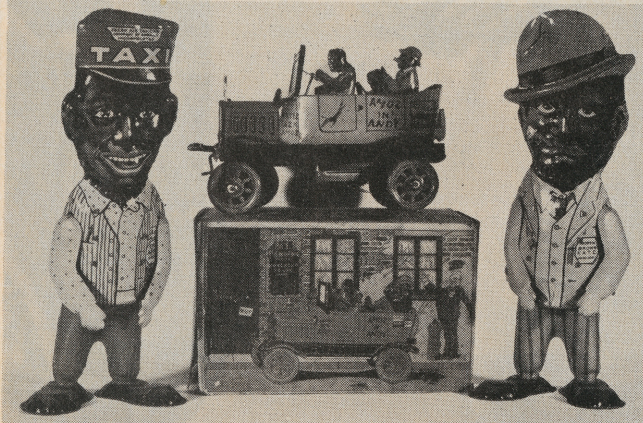
By Judith Goldman

Toys for
grown-ups

More than one collector would willingly pay \$4000 for "Popeye in the Rowboat with Oars and Rudder," if the tin toy could be found with oars and a rudder. It isn't just Christmas. A growing number of people hoard playthings. Some pursue lost childhoods. For others, toys hedge inflation.

Ten years ago, major auction houses didn't deign to handle toys; this year, PB Eighty-Four's toy sales expect to gross between \$600,000 and one million dollars. In five years, toy prices have increased 50 percent. Toy fanciers are spending over ten million dollars—a conservative estimate—on: cast-iron milk trucks, fire engines, games, Popeye, Barney Google, Robbie the Robot, and anything signed "Walt Disney."

Although a woman owns the largest collection of toy cars and trucks, most toy collectors are men who concentrate on one kind of toy, manufacturer, or period (antique toys made before 1930, old toys produced prior to



Depression fighters: tin toys from the 1930s, such as these Amos and Andy figures, warm the heart—and hedge inflation.

1950, and new toys spawned by *Star Wars*). Toys seldom attract generalists. Acquirers of Mickey Mouse do not necessarily buy Minnie. Devotees of tin toys seldom accumulate games; and experts consider certain toys with vast followings—dolls, toy trains, and miniatures—separate collecting fields.

Fashions in toys reflect the movies, TV, and the ages and occupations of the collectors. Artists fancy Mickey Mouse. His shape inspired Claes Oldenburg's sculpture; illustrator and writer Maurice Sendak, who oversees a vast Disney collection, was born in 1928, the same year as Mickey. Vintage Mickey's are hard to come by; the Old Master work of the old-toy world, a vintage Mickey can cost more per ounce than gold.

Tin toys from the 1920s and '30s made by Ferdinand Strauss and Louis Marx are giving Mickey a run for his money. The generation that grew up on Sunday funnies pay high prices for former heroes. A 1930s' "Little Orphan Annie" windup recently sold for \$240 at auction. The musical *Annie* revived interest in the toys that once cost 99¢; and news of Robert Altman's forthcoming *Popeye* film, featuring Robin Williams and a Jules Feiffer screenplay, has skyrocketed the muscle man's

market. ("The great advantage of tin toys," according to collector Robert Lesser, "is that they can't be faked. Cartoon images are owned and protected by newspaper syndicates and tin has been outlawed as a material for toys.")

A myriad of toys are available for under \$100. Space toys from the time of Sputnik on remain reasonable. Collectors, who stay ahead of the market, concentrate on today's toys. In twenty years, when this year's toys are collectors' items, they'll reveal a society long on information, short on fantasy, where one didn't need a partner, real or imaginary, to play a game. Even chess sets come programmed to play with you.

Current toys bound for future auctions: "2-XL," the robot with a personality, who tells jokes, answers questions, and plays music (\$85); "Sir Galaxy," a radio-controlled robot that can be ordered (around \$100). But the 7½-inch, white plastic "Artoo-Deetoo" (R2-D2) from *Star Wars* is, at \$16, probably a better buy. Given a choice, I'd bypass robots and "relevant" games—like "Endangered Species, The Wildlife Survival Game,"—and put my money on the big-eyed, silver-haired "Miss Piggy" puppet (\$17). In the year 2000, she'll be an icon of zany inelegance, proof that some people still knew how to play.

MORE COLLECTING:

PB Eighty-Four, New York, sells old toys, trains, music boxes, mechanical banks and other childhood treasures on December 5 and 6. The best places to find old toys are specialty shops: for example, New York's Second Childhood, a tiny toyland where a Doberman pinscher guards the door. Search toy shows, and read about toys and shows in *Antique Toy World*, published monthly from Chicago (subscriptions, \$10 a year).

DANCE

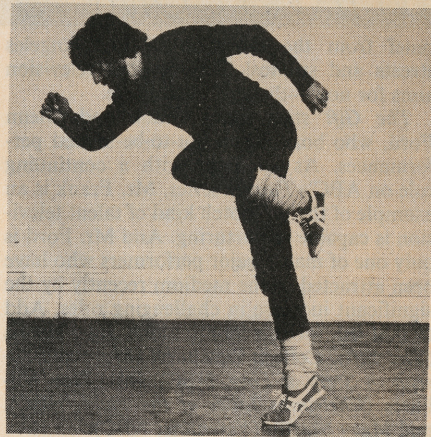
By Holly Brubach

David Gordon—
words to dance by

Just why it is that words and movement seem at odds by nature remains a mystery. As a score, words—whether spoken or sung—often overshadow the dancing. But in David Gordon's dances there is no contest: he makes words and movement work together, each commenting on the other. This month, under the auspices of the Dance Umbrella, Gordon and his wife, Valda Setterfield, with the Pick-Up Company, will present *The Matter*, December 4, 6, 8, and 9, at Camera Mart/Stage One in New York. (At Margaret Jenkins Studio, San Francisco; Dec. 30-Jan. 30.)

Gordon is by no means the first choreographer to explore the relationship between speaking and dancing. Kenneth King, for

one, has made dances about subjects so diverse—and specific—as the World Trade Center and Susanne Langer's philosophy. But King, however interesting a dancer, is a



Choreographer David Gordon: he tightrope-walks the line between words and movement.

semeiologist at heart, more fascinated by relationships between words themselves than between words and movement. Among others, Twyla Tharp has at times made good use of song lyrics—the Beach Boys score for her *Deuce Coupe II*, for example—to set up humor, with movement that elaborates on the song. George Balanchine is notoriously wary of words—both spoken and printed—and the power they wield over movement, the way a program note or a lyric, even a remark in passing, can "pin" down a dance and all its possible interpretations to a single meaning. As Balanchine makes ballets "about" music and dancing—and the relationship between them, David Gordon makes dances about words and movement—and their relationship. Though both choreographers walk a line between two subjects, the fact is that, faced with the decision, both come out on the side of the dancing. In Gordon's case, this involves making the movement as specific as the words, then doing an about-face and revealing the words to be as ambiguous as the movement. In *What Happened*, the dancers act out their speeches as they recite them, with each word assigned a movement: Arms cradle an imaginary "baby," a handshake signifies a friend. It is when a hand drawn over the face comes to stand for "avail," and eye for "I," that we are made aware of the discrepancy between what we see and what we hear. Some words have the exact same sound but different meanings; it's all a question of context. As is dancing.

In *Wordsworth and the Motor*, Gordon leads us through Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy, movement for word, with pantomimed "slings and arrows." Fine, until the last line—"Aye, there's the rub," an oh-my-aching-back rub—when Shakespeare's high-flown poetry is shot to the ground.

What makes all of this so charming in performance is the deadpan delivery, the dancers' seeming unconcern with the meaning of their speeches. That, and Gordon's ingenuousness—he walks the line between words and movement the way kids tightrope-walk a curb to test their balance.

MORE DANCE:

"From Hollywood to Harlem," tap dancing by some leading exponents—among them The Nicholas Brothers, famous for their "step" routine—with Dizzy Gillespie and Joe Carroll making music. Brooklyn Academy of Music, Dec. 29, 30.