

By Deborah Jowitt

DAVID GORDON/PICK-UP COMPANY. At Dance Umbrella at Camera Mart/Stage One (December 4 to 9).

THE ROYAL DANISH BALLET. At the Royal Opera House, Copenhagen, Denmark. August Bournonville centenary performances of *Napoli*, *A Folk Tale*, *Far from Denmark*, *The King's Guards on Amager*, *The Kermesse in Bruges*, *La Sylphide*, *Konservatoriet*, and pas de deux from *Flower Festival in Genzano*.

One of the points of almost anything by David Gordon is that whatever you see or hear is likely to refer to something else that you've seen or hear—maybe a minute ago, maybe somewhere else years back. These facts twang together intriguingly in your mind. In *The Matter (plus and minus)*, 22 people in any old clothes parade slowly across the front of the Camera Mart stage. Homage a Paxton, perhaps? But most of these people are well-known dancers, the clothes have been "selected and coordinated by Suzanne Joelson," and the music belongs to the endless Act IV entrance from Petipa's *Bayadere*. "Aha!" we say, even though we don't know what we mean by "aha!"

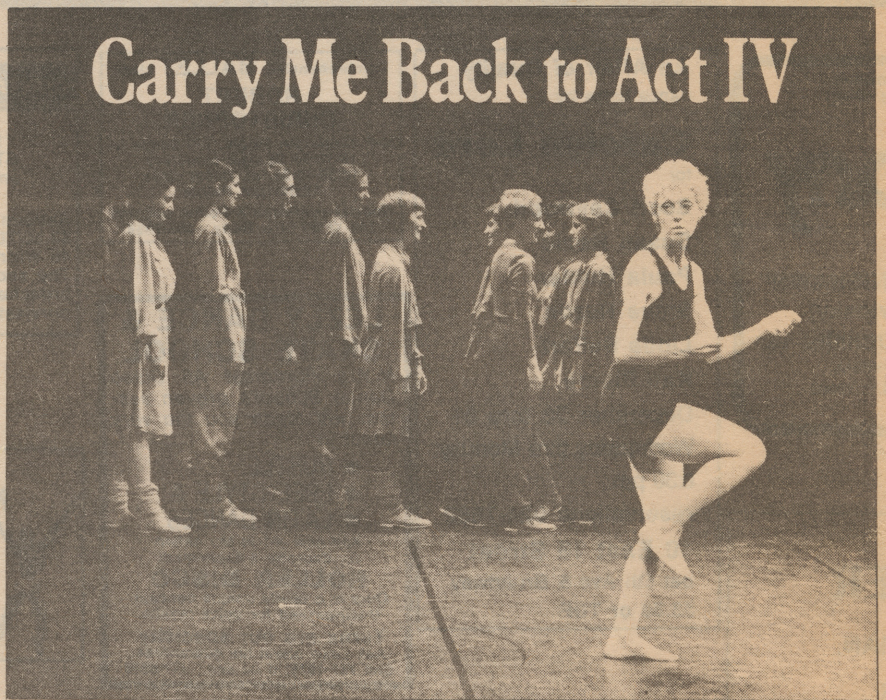
This new work of Gordon's, shot through with old works by Gordon, seems to be a lot about posing and about fitting yourself into molds made by others. Two groups of dancers form identical tableaux; then individuals from group 1 walk across and relieve individuals in group 2 until there is no group 2, only group 1 where group 2 used to stand. Once, the whole group stands frozen like mannequins after closing time, then goes away, changes clothes, and returns to recreate the same scene in nightclothes. A nice, fumbly solo of Gordon's is repeated ad lib by the group during intermission while such well-known items as *Amazing Grace*, *Deuce Coupe*, *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring*, balalaika and bagpipe music color our perceptions of style. At the end, the whole group joins Gordon in his nervewrackingly minimal descent to the floor (*Mannequin*, 1962), but at the very end, Valda Setterfield is hoisted limply aloft by several men while the last somber chords of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* toll.

Setterfield also performs a quiet catalogue of poses drawn from Muybridge photos, while we hear her and Gordon on tape, arguing amicably about the fine points (heard and seen poses aren't in sync). And she and Gordon perform a beautiful duet which consists of their assuming in a matter-of-fact way some tenderly erotic pose; they hold for a second, then one slips out leaving the other still molded, then they move to another pose. Meanwhile slides show us different angles, and two couples provide a simplified version of the same kind of thing.

There are complete, and unreasonable, sets that are put up, only to be taken down. Two people are lifted by the group and, aloft, solemnly change shirts. The chorus keeps charging in, washing over the area (perhaps freezing momentarily) with completely neutral businesslike attitude to no visible purpose. Even a sweeper (Ain Gordon) stops so long between strokes of his broom that you lose any idea of intent. I missed the *dancing* I usually like so much at Gordon's performances. And the intimacy. But the deadpan gloss on the history of the dance keeps stirring in my head.

DANCE

Carry Me Back to Act IV



LOIS GREENFIELD

Valda Setterfield in "The Matter (plus and minus)"