

dance: With David Gordon, Casual Movement Can Be Choreography



David Gordon in section of "NNRO."

(Another story on dance, page 7.)

By PAMELA REASNER
Assistant Features Editor

For a dancer, David Gordon quibbles a lot about semantics.

Just as he doesn't use movement in quite the same way anyone else does, he doesn't use conventional words to describe his work — and doesn't like it much when other people do.

David Gordon and wife Valda Setterfield will dance at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Fifth and Shady avenues in Shadyside, tomorrow and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2:30 p.m. as part of the "Center Show."

"They always say I'm theatrical and funny and experimental," he notes ruefully. Pshaw.

"In the debate on theatricality... Gordon stands in favor of spectacle." — Sally Banes, *The Village Voice*.

"Theatrical — I have trouble with that word," Gordon says. "I have a feeling that my work is very theatrical. But how can anything not be theatrical that is done in a theater for an audience? Somebody performing something for you becomes theater. I use lights, slides and probably music — not necessarily the way somebody else might use them — and that's all part of theatricality."

"Mr. Gordon is not only a choreographic intellectual, he is a comedian." — Jack Anderson, *New York Times*.

SETTERFIELD

"I don't think I make humorous works — I don't set out to. I don't build for laughs," Gordon says. Yet humor infects his work.

"For me, making a work is a lifeline, everyday occupation, so that lifeline, everyday thoughts become part of the material," Gordon begins to explain. He draws a picture of attending a funeral and in the midst of grief noting that someone present is wearing the most outlandish hat.

"You feel you should not be noticing absurd things. Suddenly you're in the midst of a joke when you didn't think you'd find humor," he says.

"I think life is like that. For instance, you don't know that I'm walking around in my bathrobe while I'm talking to you. (I didn't, honest). This is the way humor gets into my work. I don't build for laughs. I incorporate what amuses me, what amazes me, what I like to look at."

"If all experimental dancers were as talented, pleasant and entertaining as David Gordon..." — John Percival, *London Times*.

Is Gordon experimental? That would seem to be like asking if Mikhail Baryshnikov can dance. But to Gordon, experimentation implies taking a tentative step beyond what is traditionally known or assumed. And he never knew or assumed anything.

"I didn't break away from traditional dance and do other work," he explains. "I entered dance quite by accident in college. I was studying to be a painter. The first dance person I met was James Waring and the second Merce Cunningham. That was the first dance I saw and knew. I entered in

the middle of what was called avant-garde."

If experimental means "new," Gordon wouldn't have it any other way. "I don't understand art imitating art as if no person has come between one and the other," he says.

If experimental means too unconventional, too avant-garde, too weird — that's not Gordon either.

"What I can say about my work generally is that I use a wide range of material — verbal and/or other sound material and movement," he says. One can almost picture a wry smile as he adds, "I have the feeling that if I thought of doing it and putting it together that it is not so far removed from the human brain to not be recognizable. I have faith in the intelligence of my audience. I don't feel peculiarly unique."

Some critics have commented that Gordon often includes movement so casual and ordinary — and repeated so often — that the dances don't seem choreographed at all, that the dancers seem to be making mistakes.

"I have the feeling in my own work that I set up casual performance behavior in a formal structure," says Gordon. "So if the audience is fooled for some amount of time it is not fooled forever and enjoys the time when it discovers what's been going on. I keep a tension between casual behavior and the formal situation because it's an interesting kind of tension."

Though he agrees in theory that any human movement can be considered legitimate material for choreography, he says the outcome ultimately "depends on talent."

"Take any movement. If you don't have any idea of what to do with it, it will come out like" — he searches for an analogy — "a not well-cooked meal. Classical material in the hands of an inept artist doesn't get better. Ordinary material in the hands of an adept person can become classic."

Gordon maintains his Pick Up Company in New York, but will be appearing here with his wife, Valda Setterfield, in solos and duets.

They'll be performing pieces choreographed since 1974 — "Interrupted Circle" from the larger "Not Necessarily Recognizable Objectives" (or "NNRO"), "Close Up," "Chair" and a new work called "Double Identity, Part II."

One might call "Double Identity" a premiere, but Gordon wouldn't. Semantics again.

"I don't like to use the term 'premiere' because I reuse materials," he says. "It's a new work that I'm working on for performances in New York and I thought it would be good for an audience to see it before it's done in New York."

By "reuse" Gordon means taking whole segments of choreography and doing something new with them.

"I don't necessarily change the work — I don't change the things in it. I will place the whole 10 minutes' worth in another setting or turn a duet into a group piece. Or the music will be changed out from under it."

"I find this a pleasant and economical way to work. This way I don't have to do repertory till it comes out of my ears and I don't have to abandon things right and left."

German Opera Schooling Is Tie That Binds Stars

By CARL APONE
Press Music Editor

Pittsburgh Opera's production of "The Flying Dutchman" will mark the local debuts of conductor, stage director and heldenbaritone who are all solidly schooled in German opera. The Heinz Hall performances are tonight and Saturday night at 8.

Conductor Stefan Minde was born in Germany and conducted opera there before coming to this country in 1969 at the invitation of Eric Leinsdorf to take part in the Berkshire Music Festival at Tanglewood.

He went on to become assistant director of the San Francisco Opera. Currently he is music director of Portland Opera, which features many Wagnerian operas, and appears widely as guest conductor with opera companies in this country and Canada.

In addition to Minde, stage director Ghita Hager and tenor Leif Roar are part of the local "German connection." Miss Hager was born in Latvia and educated in Germany. Her career has embraced many facets of operatic theater — dancer, choreographer, assistant director and now director at opera houses in Europe, Canada and the United States.

Roar, who sings the title role, was born in Copenhagen and was a member of the Dusseldorf Opera company from 1967 to 1974. He has also sung with opera companies in Paris, Rome, Milan, Moscow, Chicago, San Francisco and New York.

Singing the role of Senta will be the Metropolitan Opera's Johanna Meier, who turned in an outstanding performance last season in the local production of "Ariadne auf Naxos."

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THE JAZZ SINGER PG
EAST NORTH Today at 1:30, 7:40 & 9:50

A CHANGE OF SEASONS R
WEST NORTH Today at 1:30, 7:40 & 9:40

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SEEMS LIKE OLD TIMES

PG

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THE MIRROR CRACK'D A12:15, 4:15, 6:15, 8:15 & 10:15 (PG)

NINE TO FIVE A17:45 & 10:00 P.M. (PG)

POPEYE A1:30, 3:40, 5:45, 8:00 & 10:00 (PG)

ANY WHICH WAY YOU CAN A1:30, 3:30, 5:45, 7:45 & 9:45 (PG)

SCANNERS A12:00, 4:00, 6:00, 8:00 & 10:00 (R)

STIR CRAZY A17:30 & 9:45 P.M. (R)

THE FORMULA A17:30 & 9:45 P.M. (R)

A CHANGE OF SEASONS A18:00 & 10:00 P.M. (R)

SEEMS LIKE OLD TIMES A18:00 & 10:00 P.M. (PG)

ORDINARY PEOPLE A17:45 & 9:55 P.M. (R)

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THE ELEPHANT MAN A17:30 & 10:00 P.M. (PG)

MOUNTAIN FAMILY ROBINSON A17:30 & 9:50 P.M. (G)
PRIVATE BENJAMIN A17:45 & 9:45 P.M. (R)

NINE TO FIVE A17:45 & 10:00 P.M. (PG)

SCANNERS A17:30 & 9:50 P.M. (R)
MOUNTAIN FAMILY ROBINSON A17:00 & 9:00 P.M. (G)
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STIR CRAZY A17:45 & 9:45 P.M. (R)

MOUNTAIN FAMILY ROBINSON A17:00 & 9:00 P.M. (G)

SCANNERS A18:00 & 10:00 P.M. (R)

SCANNERS A17:50 & 10:00 P.M. (R)

STIR CRAZY A17:40 & 9:45 P.M. (R)

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