

Dance

David Gordon

Sadler's Wells

What is David Gordon up to? Perhaps the programme by his Pick Up Co. at Sadler's Wells last night, opening the Dance Umbrella season, is part of a process of development towards a different style. If so, there is a way to go before achieving the physical daring, the humour or the human feeling of his best old works.

Sadly, it seems to me more likely that, busy making new works for other companies all over the place, he has simply short-changed his own group. None of the three new works he has brought is as exciting as what he did for Extemporary Dance Theatre last season, nor as ingenious as his piece for the Paris Opera's experimental group.

Nine Lives opened promisingly with a sole for Gordon,

sitting, lying, standing or contorting on, around and under a chair. Stockier nowadays, he lacks the bravado of a similar exercise at Riverside five years ago, but it is still moderately entertaining. After that, however, just more of the same, and more and more, for his younger, more lithe but less compelling group.

Music and words from old Gene Autrey and Buck Rogers westerns provided the soundtrack, always breaking off when one got interested. The last 30 seconds, when the three women echoed soundtrack gunshots by rapping their chairlegs on the floor, then sat demurely crossing their legs while the five men lay around like corpses, was fun.

Offenback Suite, played none too rewardingly by two cellists, just meandered through various eccentric combinations of simple steps, most of the time studiously ignoring the music. The main interest was wondering whether it was meant to be funny.

My Folks had the most enjoyable music of the evening, recordings of klezmer groups, the Jewish all-purchase entertainment music of western Europe. It had the best dancing, too, in Valda Setterfield's solo of quick, skittering steps all over the stage. Gordon's long-time partner in dance and life, she still has a style, energy and ability to surprise which the other dancers lack. Her slow duet of folk steps with Gordon (slide side, slide front, careful and deliberate) was an attractive contrast.

Too much of this work, however, comprised merely the manipulation of lengths of striped cloth. Protracted long after the points of allusion to shawls, canopies and so on had been made, this dragged down the movement into a dreary sameness and provided an anticlimatic, almost static finale.

Costume note: drabness is obviously in this year.

John Percival

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