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Gordon: A string of stunning visual images

DAVID GORDON/PICK UP COMPANY - Presented by the Harvard Summer Dance Center, at the Loeb Drama Center, Cambridge, last night. Program repeats tonight and tomorrow.

By Christine Temin
Globe Staff

The sound of garbled conversation gets us one toe into the water of David Gordon's fascinating new

DANCE REVIEW

"Transparent Means for Travelling Light," given its premiere last night at Harvard, where the New York based post-modernist and his company have been in residence for two weeks. Next comes the first of a string of stunning visual images: Gordon, his back to us, being transported up to stage level on a platform rising out of the orchestra pit.

Throughout the work, Gordon's designs for both movement and stillness, John Cage's disjointed score, and Power Boothe's "visual circumstances," as the program calls them, interpenetrate, one affecting the others. Gordon arranges a row of blaring portable radios down the center of the stage: They form an invisible wall, momentarily preventing a dancer from crossing the space. Decor comes and goes, adding to a

sense of flux and disruption: A backdrop of bricks and windows gives way to one of columns and lavish drapery; later comes a cartoonish drop featuring a cosmetics bag exploding its contents. Dancers come and go as well, often picking up each other's movements along the way, or slowing their momentum to sculpt each other or to set one of their number off on a different course. Dancers and decor merge in one memorable instant when a metal rod, usually used to hold lights or scenery, descends from the rafters and a couple of dancers hook themselves onto it as it begins its return trip.

However intriguing its formal elements, the dance is not lacking in human interest. In one particularly tender section, four young men partner the incandescent, white-haired Valda Setterfield, manipulating her delicate limbs with reverent care. Meanwhile, the bearish figure of Gordon watches from the place where the wings would be if the set had them: The lack of wings exposes the performers as they wait and watch, increasing their vulnerability. Gordon occasionally butts in and is repelled back to the sidelines until at last he is successful in reaching center stage and gen-

tly separating Setterfield from her cavaliers. The six younger dancers then surge over the stage in a single long tide of movement whose sweep engulfs everything from rabbit hopping to a moment when three dancers lie on the floor and raise their feet, which become seats for the other three.

The last image of the dance is exquisite. The performing space which has stretched to include pit, rafters, and sides of the theater, is suddenly narrowed, as a large archway descends to frame the sight of Gordon holding Setterfield, who curves her body around him.

Also on the program was "Four Man Nine Lives," in which four men straddle, twirl, swing, slide and even sit on a single folding chair which anchors the dance. This work, to western standards such as "Back in the Saddle Again," is undermined by its own cleverness. In "My Folks," the most accessible and moving of last night's offerings, Gordon uses folk dance steps, Klezmer band music, and lengths of striped cloth to explore his Jewish heritage. Despite the familiarity of these separate elements, "My Folks" is totally without cliché or sentimentality.