



Photos by GARY FRIEDMAN / Los Angeles Times

White Oak Dance Project's "PastForward: The Influence of the Post-Moderns" features Deborah Hay in "Single Duet" with Mikhail Baryshnikov.

# Tracing Postmodern Steps

An adventuresome-as-ever Baryshnikov and his White Oak Dance Project offer a retrospective of 20th century choreographic innovations in 'PastForward' at UCLA.



White Oak Project dancers Emmanuèle Phuon, left, Rosalynde LeBlanc and Raquel Aedo perform with Baryshnikov in "Chair/Pillow," part of the troupe's "PastForward" program at UCLA's Royce Hall.

## Dance Review

By LEWIS SEGAL  
TIMES DANCE CRITIC

Enlisting Mikhail Baryshnikov's seven-member White Oak Dance Project and more than 50 performers from the local community, "PastForward: The Influence of the Post-Moderns" is at once the great millennial dance festival that no one in Southern California has seen fit to mount and an exciting experiment in cultural reclamation.

In two partly different UCLA programs running through the weekend, some of the key innovations of 20th century modernism are being traced back to their roots in lost creations by New York's alternately freewheeling, rebellious, obsessive and anarchic Judson Church and Dance Theater choreographers of the 1960s and '70s.

Inside and in front of Royce  
Please see White Oak, F16



# White Oak: Troupe Traces 20th Century Postmodern Steps

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Hall, all the bottom-line strategies that once sent plenty of dance audiences and critics fleeing into the night reign again, newly revived and still as provocative as ever. Minimalism. Structuralism. Endless Repetition. Everyday Movement. Task-Oriented Choreography. Dances Anyone Can Do.

And you know what? The simple honesty of this work looks awfully appealing compared to the desperate narcissism, salesmanship, emotional grandstanding and empty virtuosity of much Big Deal contemporary dance these days. And that, of course, is why it originally came into being: as a rejection of corruption in the dance world, a way of starting over.

As written and directed by Judson alumnus David Gordon, the Wednesday edition of "PastForward" fielded loving reconstructions of vintage pieces by postmodern icons Simone Forti ("Scramble" and "Huddle"), Steve Paxton ("Satisfyin' Lover" and "Flat"), Lucinda Childs ("Carnation"), Yvonne Rainer ("Chair/Pillow" and "Talking Solo") as well as Gordon himself ("The Matter").

Videotaped introductions by Charles Atlas adroitly summarized conceptual and historical issues, and simultaneous video projections frequently offered the audience multiple views of a dance: theatrical and technological.

More than a diversion, the cameras and screens reflected a central if under-acknowledged premise of Judson postmodernism: its filmic sensibility, one unmatched by any generation of choreographers before or since. Looking at "PastForward," you could see dancers translating concepts of montage and specific editing techniques (freeze-frames, voice-overs) and, most of all, staging one movement documentary after another in all those ordinary-people, ordinary-movement pieces.

Arguably less successful: an effort to show the ongoing potency of postmodernism through recent or newly commissioned works by Gordon ("For the love of re-

hearsal"), Childs ("Concerto"), Trisha Brown (an excerpt from "Foray Forêt") and Deborah Hay ("Exit" and "Single Duet").

Here the lure of Baryshnikov's enduring mastery derailed some ambitious premises. Gordon, for instance, gave the ex-Kirov virtuoso a star solo full of unorthodox, brilliantly executed foot-placements in the middle of "rehearsal," an otherwise focused and unassertive group study of where the life of a dancer ends and dance as an art begins.

Worse, Hay's "Duet" turned out to be one of those unfortunate juxtaposition-of-opposites that American choreographers have been laying on Baryshnikov ever since Alvin Ailey's "Pas de Duke" nearly a quarter-century ago. You know the moves: Two stars from different firmaments, both alike in dignity, trade riffs in a kind of convivial crossover summit, with guest Hay still looking game and enjoyably quirky at 58 but no match for her spectacularly deft and fast-moving 52-year-old partner.

Indeed, as a born-again postmodernist, Baryshnikov seemed to be having the time of his life, banking his fires to be a team player in several older pieces—and even interacting with the locally recruited "Matter" walking-corps. But also periodically cutting loose, as in the volcanic "Concerto" with his exemplary young White Oak colleagues, Raquel Aedo, Tadej Brdnik, Emily Coates, Rosalynde LeBlanc, Michael Lomeka and Emmanuèle Phuon.

His sense of adventure still shames our complacency and conservatism as an audience, reminding us that artistic freedom was reason enough for his coming to America in the first place and is now reason enough for him to gamble on re-creating a generative force in the dance-culture that he found when he got here.

• *The White Oak Dance Project performs "PastForward" tonight and Saturday at 8 p.m. in Royce Hall on the UCLA campus in Westwood. \$30-\$60. (310) 825-2101.*

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