

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

A History Lesson on Postmodern Dance

DANCE REVIEW

WHITE OAK DANCE PROJECT. "PASTForward." Artistic director, Mikhail Baryshnikov. Directed and written by David Gordon. Lighting by Jennifer Tipton. Videotape by Charles Atlas. Choreography by Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Simone Forti, David Gordon, Deborah Hay, Steve Paxton and Yvonne Rainer. Seer Tuesday at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. Through Saturday.

By Sylviane Gold

MIKHAEL BARYSHNIKOV, Fred Astaire and Tina Turner singing "River Deep, Mountain High" — any evening that delivers all of the above is going to be OK by me. But the "PASTForward" program that runs through Saturday at the Brooklyn Academy of Music gets even better, packaging these surefire elements with an engaging history lesson about the pioneers of postmodern dance and a moving celebration of the extraordinary within the ordinary.

Along with some 50 Brooklynites of varying ages, shapes and sizes, Baryshnikov and the members of his White Oak Dance Project are bringing back to the stage some of the go-for-broke experimental choreography of the '60s and '70s. The civilians — darting by one another in Simone Forti's "Scramble," strolling calmly across the stage in Steve Paxton's "Satisfyin Lover" and, most remarkably, parading with slow dignity to the music of "La Bayadère" in David Gordon's "The Matter" — are in some ways more crucial to the evening than the extraordinary talents of Baryshnikov and his seven accomplices. Because at the heart of the revolution instigated by the choreographers who began performing at Manhat-

tan's Judson Memorial Church in 1962 was a preference for the pedestrian over the theatrical.

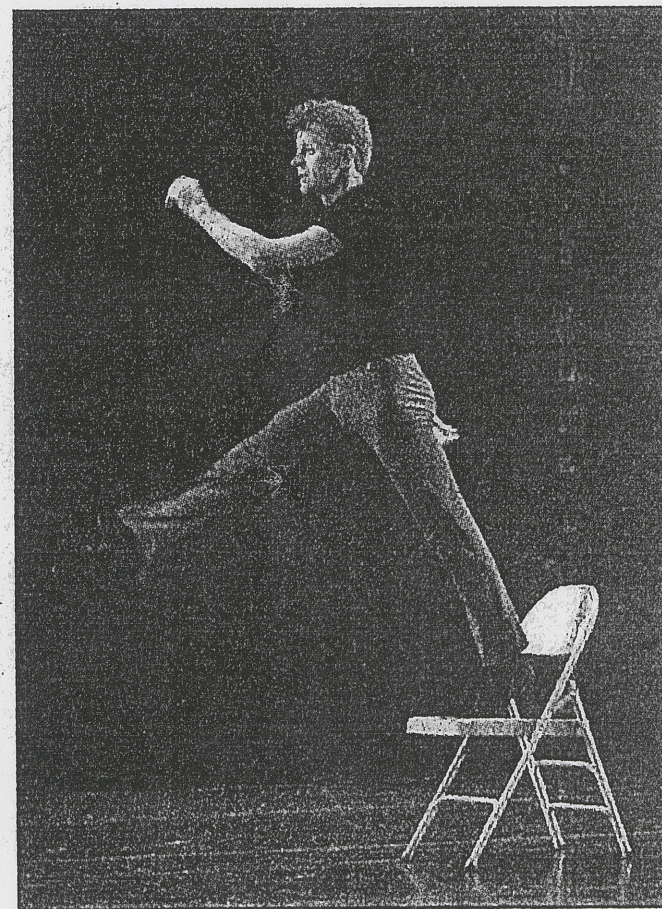
So there's a certain irony in this undertaking — ballet's most famous virtuoso reviving these simple and sometimes random pieces by Trisha Brown, David Gordon, Lucinda Childs, Steve Paxton and some of the other legends of the Judson Dance Theater. But the evening also includes recent pieces by these choreographers, giving Baryshnikov the opportunity to participate after the fact in the dance upheaval he missed the first time around.

What's amazing about the program at BAM — in addition to Baryshnikov himself, of course, exuberantly clambering over a chair to "Stars and Stripes Forever" in a new solo by Gordon or mesmerizingly taking off his clothes and putting them on again in Paxton's 1964 "Flat" — is the sheer physical dynamism conveyed in choreography that is sometimes as spare as spare can be. In Gordon's 1975 "Chair/two times," the dancers sit on metal folding chairs, and then the chairs sit on them. In Yvonne Rainer's 1970 "Chair / Pillow," the dancers calmly manipulate the items of the title to the driving rhythms of Ike and Tina Turner. In Childs' 1964 "Carnation," Emily Coates slowly inserts foam hair curlers into the collapsible wire strainer that she's put on her head.

Not all the works allow the dancers to sit down, and Childs' breathtaking "Concerto," to music by Henryk Mikolaj Górecki, is a veritable marathon.

And did I mention Fred Astaire? He shows up — briefly — in the program's filmed introduction, when Baryshnikov recalls what he knew of American dance as a 16-year-old ballet student in Russia. It would seem to have been enough. ■

Sylviane Gold is a regular contributor to *Newsday*.



Newsday Photo / Bruce Gilbert

Baryshnikov rehearses "Chair Into 2000" for "PASTForward."