

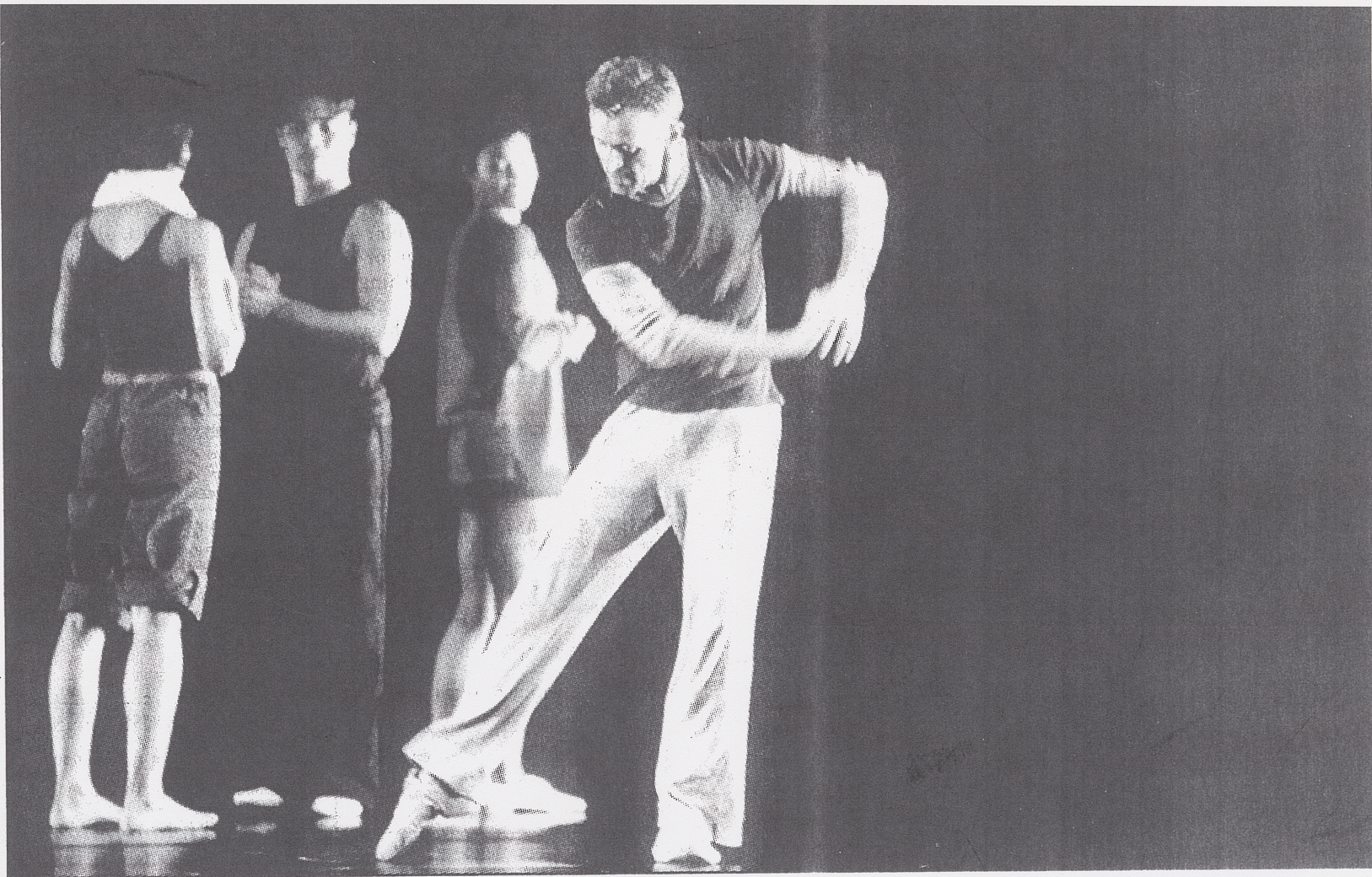
Monday afternoon

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DALLIES



David Gordon's "For the love of rehearsal," performed by the White Oak Dance Project, begins with standard ballet poses and stretches on a bare stage.

# Once a star, always a star

## White Oak troupe benefits from Baryshnikov's luster

By Allan Ulrich  
EXAMINER DANCE CRITIC

**B**ERKELEY — Last week's exhilarating visit by Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project added up to a lot more than another superstar-inspired and subsidized chamber dance company, and, yes, I am alluding to Cal Performances' previous dance attraction, Julio Bocca's Ballet Argentino, which was exceedingly palatable but not exactly stimulating.

The works White Oak revived

and commissioned from choreographers who flourished during the Judson Church era in the 1960s and 1970s, compiled in a sequence dubbed "PAST Forward," resolved themselves into paradoxes and contradictions that no one who ponders dance aesthetics can fail to confront.

The second program of the tour, seen Saturday evening at UC-Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall, introduced four previously unseen works. Two — Yvonne Rainer's "Talking Solo" and Lucinda Childs' "Carnation" — were revivals. White Oak commissioned the others, David Gordon's "For the love of rehearsal" and Deborah Hay's "Single Duet."

I kept wondering Saturday about the responses of dance his-

tory students who arrived at the performance brimming with their instructors' bromides about Judson (referring to the church at 55 Washington Square, New York, where it all started July 30, 1962). And I wondered, too, whether recreating that era at almost four decades' remove, even with the choreographers' input, is not a task as Herculean as restoring a lost August Bournonville ballet from the 1850s.

You can reassemble the steps of Judson; you can't revive the *Zeitgeist*, even though all those SoMa folks keep trying. That Baryshnikov at least made it possible for us to think again about the origins of American postmodernism when he might have trekked out to the coast with the standard cutesy showstoppers speaks volumes about the quality of his artistry.

You only have to watch Baryshnikov at work to sense the paradox. He was rarely absent from the stage Saturday, delivering solos and duets and melding with the ensemble in a manner that most 52-year old dancers might consider unseemly. Now, we were told that the idea of Judson (and its affiliated Grand Union, which goes unmentioned) was to strip dance of its emphasis on virtuosity and a codified, systematized manner of moving.

Alas, for the tenets of Judson, Baryshnikov remains an incomparable dancer, whether in action or in repose. The piece Gordon "constructed" (his own term) in "For the love of rehearsal" (to movements from Bach's Unaccompanied Cello Suites) begins with standard ballet poses and stretches on a bare stage. Baryshnikov enters in sweats, toting a water bottle, sits on the side in one of Gordon's omnipresent folding chairs, and commits himself to the dance late in the game. His seven-member company is a superb unit, but as soon as Baryshnikov launches a little heel-toe trajectory, you sense that this is something special.

Then, Hay's exquisitely meditative "Single Duet" deposited the choreographer and Baryshni-

kov on stage and explored the tension that derives from watching the same lexicon articulated by a modernist and an outstanding classicist, both cued by self-generated grunts and squeals. Hay is surprisingly audience directed. The more self-absorbed Baryshnikov can't hide his gorgeous épaulement, he can't disguise his magnificent turn-out and he can't conceal his instinctive response to music. At the first notes of Morton Feldman's spare piano score, you can see his body responding almost involuntarily to the sound.

When, near the end, Hay and Baryshnikov really do seem to engage in a duet, they appear to reach a kind of consensus beyond mortal comprehension. They, after all, are speaking in a secret language, and you manage to catch just a few of the words.

Rainer's 1963 "Talking Solo," which she reconstructed as part of the larger "After Many a Summer Dies the Swan," stars Rosalynde LeBlanc and the phenomenal Michael Lomeka, who declaims a Vladimir Nabokov about the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly while moving through a marvelously spare and telling solo. This kind of routine clutters local performance spaces, but Rainer trumps them all. Lomeka is a droll speaker and he is also a stunning mover, and all those rippling arm gestures and compact leaps relate insidiously to the monologue.

The rules of physical comedy haven't changed much since Childs fabricated "Carnation" for herself in 1964. The terrific Emily Coates sits in a chair and, in silence, conjures a parable of domesticity from kitchen objects, a wire basket and assorted sponges and rollers. As the dancer transforms this paraphernalia, the absence of overt histrionics lends extra zing. What a generation ago was a piece about prosaic process has come down to us as a diverting little gem about the imaginative possibilities of the everyday. As a metaphor for "PAST Forward" project, "Carnation" was just about perfect.