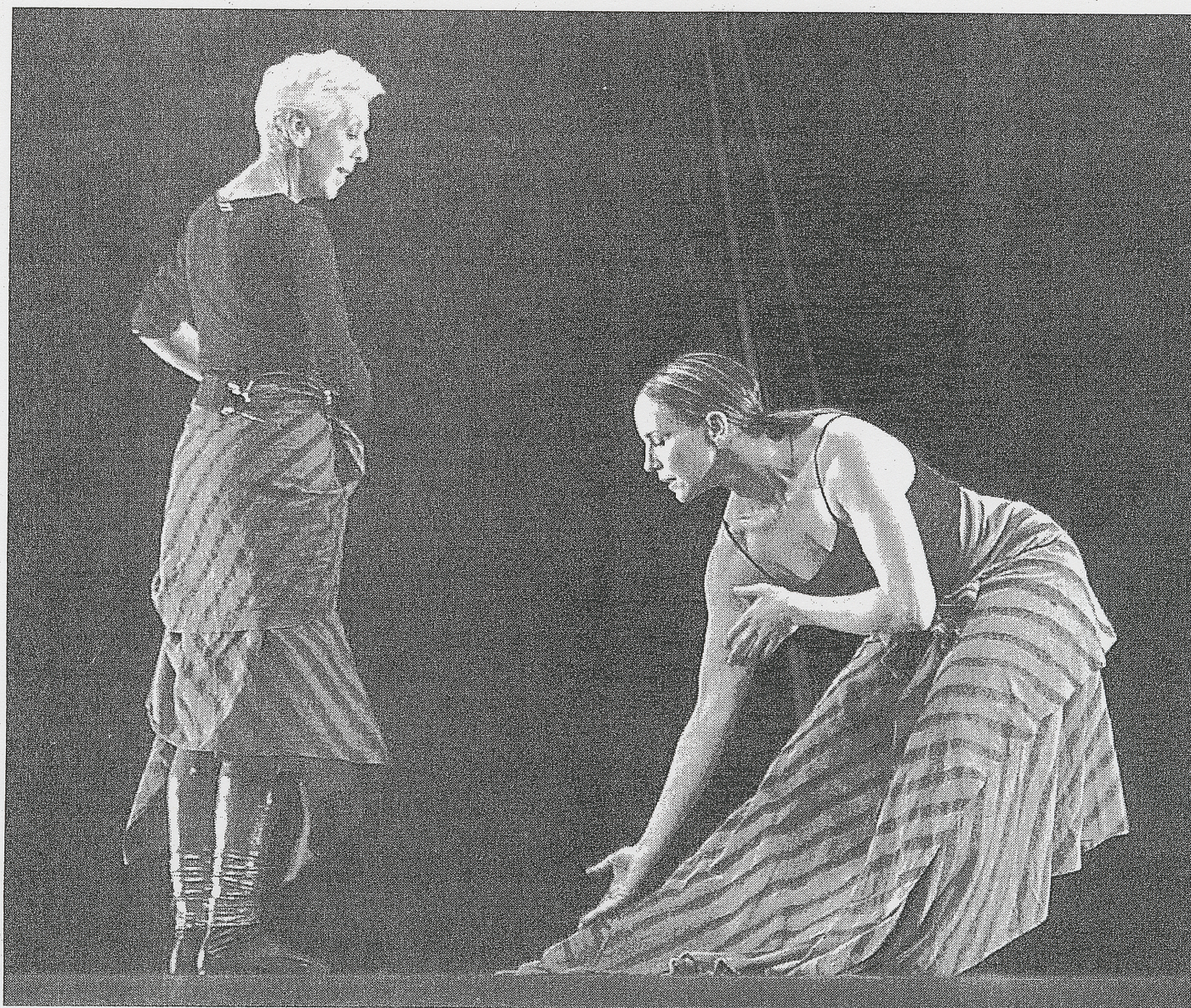


SPOLETO
2004 PICCOLO

Valda Setterfield (left) and Karen Graham dance in the Pick Up Performance Company's production of "Couples" in the Emmett Robinson Theatre at the College of Charleston in a rehearsal Thursday. WADE SPEEDS/STAFF

Relationships inspire the dance

BY JUDY WATTS
Of The Post and Courier Staff

When David Gordon and Valda Setterfield return to Spoleto Festival USA this year, it will be their fourth appearance. Past audiences have learned to anticipate innovative and enigmatic productions by their Pick Up Performance Company.

"The Spoleto audience is a very interesting and specific kind of thing for us," says Gordon. "Residents and nonresidents are sitting side-by-side in the house. They are all people coming to see what's in the festival. We never know how many people from the past and how many total strangers we will encounter."

Gordon, a multiple off-Broadway theater award-winning writer, director and choreographer, will perform with Valda Setterfield, his partner and wife of more than 40 years. Their relationship is as much inspiration as it is part of the dance.

"When you work and live with someone for more than 40 years, the things that you are fondest about each other grow and the things that irritate each other grow as well. All those things become material for a work in progress," says Gordon.

"Couples," a program especially designed for Spoleto, is comprised of three dancing and

talking suites from Gordon's recent works that include "Private Lives of Dancers," (2003) "Dancing Henry V," (2004) and "FAMILY\$DEATH@ART.COM edy" (2001).

"We were originally scheduled to do 'The Chairs,' but the circumstances of art and economics made that difficult to deal with at this point, so we will do it in the fall."

"Couples" explores the relationship of couples as their lives grow together.

"The dancers who work with us are married or have partners. You walk into rehearsal and the dancers are talking to each other about what happened last night, then you cut it off and begin the work of the day. What happens if you don't cut it off, if you observe? That is what inspired 'The Private Life of Dancers,'" says Gordon.

Gordon describes the piece as trios and quartets making their way into duets.

"There are pairs of people dancing and talking together in a very lifelike way, he said. "It is why I chose to do 'The Chairs' next because it is also about couples and their negotiations and longevity."

Although none of the components of "Couples" has been performed at Spoleto Festival before, they have been seen in

whole or part in New York, Chicago and London. The most recent excerpt included in "Couples" is "Dancing Henry V," based on Shakespeare's "Henry V" and featuring the William Walton score and some of the dialogue from the Lawrence Olivier film.

"The French lesson between two women is used for a duet. The wooing scene between Henry and Catherine is used for a trio," Gordon says.

Also performing are Karen Graham, Scott Cunningham and Tadej Brdnik.

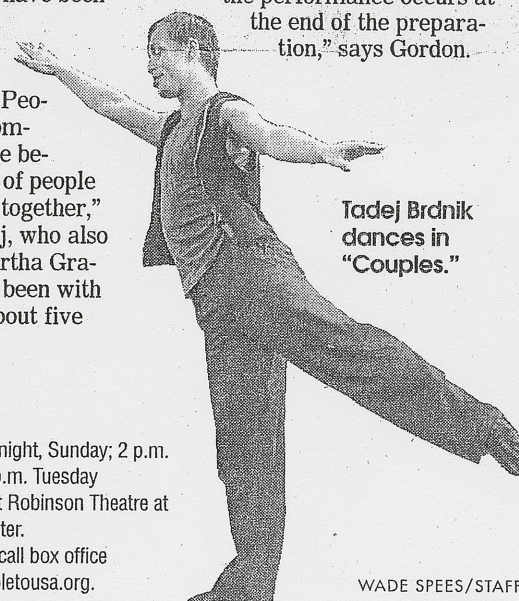
"Scott and Karen have been dancing with the Pick Up Performance Company for about 17 years. People stay with the company for a long time because it is a family of people who enjoy working together," Gordon says. "Tadej, who also dances with the Martha Graham Company, has been with this company for about five

years."

"Couples" marks a return to Charleston for Graham and Cunningham. Their initial performances were at the 1991 Spoleto Festival in "The Mysteries and What's so Funny," a play written by Gordon with movement by Philip Glass.

Gordon sees the "Couples" as simultaneously dramatic and comic.

"It is full of movement and verbal communication connected to the music. Sometimes it seems like a preparation for a performance, and sometimes the performance occurs at the end of the preparation," says Gordon.



Tadej Brdnik dances in "Couples."

IF YOU GO

WHAT: "Couples"

WHEN: 6 p.m. tonight, Sunday; 2 p.m. Saturday, Monday; 8 p.m. Tuesday

WHERE: Emmett Robinson Theatre at the Albert Simons Center.

TICKETS: \$25; call box office 579-3100 or www.spoletousa.org.

WADE SPEEDS/STAFF