

Warm: A seasoned pair dance their story

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David Gordon and the Pick Up Performance Company create a delightfully intimate world in *Couples*, a three-part work that finished its run at Spoleto Festival USA on Tuesday.

It's part dance and part theater. Movement combines with dialogue to form a window into the relationships portrayed in a series of dances assembled for the festival.

The company was originally supposed to present *The Chairs*, but the piece was not ready, and so Gordon compiled suites from some of his recent works - *Private Lives of Dancers*, *Dancing Henry V* and *FAMILY\$DEATH@ART.COMedy* to form *Couples*.

It's an intriguing juxtaposition.

It begins with Gordon performing with Valda Setterfield, his real-life wife and dance partner of more than 40 years. They're going through the motions of yet another morning together, with Setterfield asking questions and Gordon replying in terse, one-word answers.

Then they begin moving up and down the stage together, with a minimalism that allows the audience to listen to recorded interviews with married dance partners about their lives together.

In other scenes, they are joined by the rest of the company - Tadej Brdnik, Karen Graham and Scott Cunningham.

Once again, the focus is on the domestic life of dancers, with conversations ranging from buying a couch to food poisoning. Then the conversations begin to overlap and merge into a dance performance. It's quite a compelling piece, full of humor and affection.

Dancing Henry V is based on Shakespeare's *Henry V* and features William Walton's score and some of the dialogue from the film version with Laurence Olivier.

Setterfield and Graham start out in a duet, with Setterfield as Catherine's maid, giving her mistress a French lesson. Then we see Henry wooing Catherine in a duet that's charming and romantic.

FAMILY\$DEATH@ART.COMedy begins with a nuanced duet between Setterfield and Gordon and eases into a trio among the younger dancers and then ends up again with just Setterfield and Gordon, inching their way from the back of the stage to the front, accompanied by a driving piece of music. It's like witnessing the march of time.

Couples is innovative, warm-hearted and humorous enough to appeal even to those who aren't fans of avant-garde dance.

And watching older dancers such as Gordon and Setterfield perform alongside the young company members is a treat.

The older couple may not display the athleticism of their younger counterparts, but they have plenty of charisma to make up for whatever they may lack in youthful agility.