

# The Chairs Takes a Seat

David Gordon's highly anticipated dance premiere won't make it to Spoleto

BY LEAH CATALANO

Spoleto Festival organizers have bad news for anyone who was looking forward to pulling up a pew for writer and choreographer David Gordon's spin on Eugene Ionesco's 1958 play *The Chairs*: it won't be hitting the Holy City this year after all.

"We just couldn't get the piece up and on its feet in time for the Spoleto Festival," says Gordon over the phone from his home in New York. "The first rehearsals for the show have been postponed until September, and *The Chairs* is going to open at the Barbican Theater in London in November instead."

"David and I talked about [the production] on and off over the last year and a half,"

says Spoleto general director Nigel Redden. "And I recently had lunch with him to find out how things were going. And he said it was not going as quickly as he'd hoped. Then he called a few weeks later and said, 'It's not going to be ready. What do you want us to do?' My response was, 'Look, we believe in you as an artist and we'd like to be as helpful as possible. It's disappointing you won't be able to present *The Chairs*, but what do you suggest we can present instead?'"

"We're going to be doing something completely different instead," explains Gordon. "For the last several years, I've made a new work every year, and I'll be showcasing excerpts from all of them in this performance."

Entitled *Couples*, the dance theatre production comprises scenes from three of Gordon's most recent and successful productions: *Private Lives of Dancers* (2002-2003), *Dancing Henry Five* (2004), and *Family\$Death@Art.COMedy* (2001).

"The audience will see a suite of works from each piece, primarily duets and trios," continues Gordon. "Valda [Setterfield, Gordon's partner of 40 years] and I are in these, along with the rest of the company: Karen Graham, Scott Cunningham, and Tadej Bridnik. The performance itself will last just over an hour."

And despite the relatively short notice, the task of incorporating three

works into one production won't be too hard an endeavor, says Gordon.

"I'm fairly good at programming," he explains. "I put things together so that they flow very cohesively, even though they may be scenes from several different works. There are certain subject matters that flow throughout all of my works — the humanity of performance, mostly — and I have a sense of how to keep that going even while picking from several different pieces. There won't be any jumping around."

Audiences who had been looking forward to the inventiveness and novelty of Gordon's take on Ionesco's work won't be disappointed, says the writer, director, and choreographer, despite the fact that the works featured in *Couples* aren't as new as his version of *The Chairs* would have been.

"I hope the audience comes to see something they've never seen before," he says. "As a viewer, when I go to see a piece of art, I hope I'm going to see something I've never seen. Obviously, there are things you have seen before, that you go and see again. But even those are different every time you see them."

"It would be nice if inspiration and creativity turned on with a switch, and it would be nice if funding worked the same way," Redden observes. "But they had expected to get some income from sources that did not in fact come through. And they kept us apprised of this. But in the end it just didn't happen. I wish I could say this were the first or the last time this kind of thing will happen, but of course it's not."

Festivals like Spoleto, says Redden, which present a lot of premieres, "inevitably involve a certain amount of risk. Things are stretching, people have to create things. I believe in David. We've worked with him in the past, and I'm sure we'll work with him again in the future."

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