

# San Francisco Examiner

## A dance of locale-motion

By Allan Ulrich  
EXAMINER DANCE CRITIC

**A** WEEK IN which featherless swans are running rampant across the Opera House stage tearing at their tulle is not a week in need of any additional grandeur. In fact, it's just the sort of week in which the loose kinetic wit and unpretentiousness of David Gordon and his Pick Up Company seem like balm to the weary veteran of the choreographic wars.

So, the arrival Tuesday of the nearly completed version of Gordon's "United States" for a week's stay at Theater Artaud emerged even more liberating in reality than it did in prospect. Gordon, who shuns the word "choreographer" when describing his profession, has visited the Bay Area on a regular basis during the last decade, and the piece that Gordon presented Tuesday with 11 members of his Pick Up Company is the end product of one of the more ingenious artistic projects of recent years, an epic, postmodern collage.

Four major sponsors (in California, Minnesota, New England and New York) co-commissioned "United States"; their reward was



David Gordon and his Pick Up Company offer a multicolored slice of the United States in dance.

seeing an extensive portion of the piece inspired by their geography and popular culture. In addition, several other tour sites provided sufficient backing to earn them smaller sections.

In fact, almost no dance presenter in the country seems untouched by this work. This week's

engagement of "United States" comes to you thanks to a consortium of Cal Performances, the Lively Arts at Stanford and San Francisco Performances.

When Gordon visited here last year, "United States" had evolved to include the "Minnesota" and "San Francisco" sections. Tuesday,

the Pick Up Company gave the local premiere of the "Pounding the Beat and Slaughter" (the New York section) and "Sang and Sang and the Final Frost" (consisting of parts of "San Francisco" and "New England").

"United States" is unique, in the manner in which it allows its cre-

ator to build his own biography out of sound effects, oral material and music traditionally associated with or suggested by different locales. Any fragment will tell you as much about Gordon and his current pas-

**Wednesday evening**

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◆ GORDON from B-1

### The United States inspires a dance

sions and obsessions as has any piece he's brought here in years.

In the pair of sections introduced last year, one relished the heady mood shifts. And one delighted in Gordon's endearing method of constructing "United States" from disjointed material, assembled on wonderfully mixed tapes by Chuck Hammer.

Gothamites apparently took umbrage at the New York section, because it did not treat the town with objectivity, a state Gordon apparently recognizes as illusory. What he's done in "Pounding the Beat and Slaughter" is to evoke urban street life in all its grimy abrasiveness and squalid beauty.

The sound track features rap artists and a police radio report about a crime in progress. It extracts laughs tastefully from a suspect who dies at the scene of a crime, and another who tries to rob a bank on a holiday. It confronts us with sirens, street noises and other sonic stimuli to urban jitters.

The dancers dress either as policemen, swinging enormous billy clubs, or as ladies of the evening with slit skirts. In this jungle, you're either the hunter or hunted. The performers favor military formation, menacing routines with the clubs and an odd, sidling trajectory that almost becomes the signature movement. The scene explodes in violence, headlights and dancers in boxing trunks.

Then, in the midst of this display of authoritarianism, Gordon and wife, Valda Setterfield, launch

one of their inimitable duets, generally a highlight of a Gordon work, not because of the intricacy of the steps, but because of the depth of the mutual affection suggested in the clasped arms and slow, supportive gait.

This new duet recalls a similar episode in the "Winter" section in Gordon's earlier "The Seasons," but a surprise awaits when Richard Rodgers' "Slaughter on 10th Avenue" music starts booming from the speakers. Of course, Gordon knows that it was written for an earlier Balanchine ballet, and so do the dancers, who slip into arabesque. The music inspires an endearing Fred-and-Ginger number with the requisite dips and swirling routines.

The San Francisco section still seems like a sharp, if protracted spoof about this town's need for

self-glorification. Gordon assembles six songs about San Francisco from the likes of Judy Garland and Jeanette MacDonald, and the ever ironic Setterfield silently mouths the lyrics, while assuming ironic attitude poses with a cabbage rose pinned to her waist.

Gordon segues into a synthesizer version of the finale of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 17. Then, the haunting finale unfurls to an interview with Robert Frost. The late poet comments crustily about "falling into step with the procession," a direction that Gordon, thank heaven, has never taken.

Program I will be repeated Saturday and Sunday. Program II, consisting of "Mozart, Memories and the First Front" and "Words, Music, Wildlife and Weather," will be given Wednesday through Friday.