

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

A HEARST NEWSPAPER

APRIL 28, 1989

DANCE

Gordon's bit of danced Americana could be a sort of financial pioneer

By Jon Blake

Special to the P-I

Several years ago the federally funded Dance Touring Program ended, cutting many of the smaller dance companies adrift, without supporting mechanisms to get them on the road.

David Gordon's "United States" is a work in progress whose genesis might show the way back on stage for these fiscal orphans.

This bit of danced Americana is a patchwork quilt artistically and, perhaps more importantly, financially.

Gordon persuaded 27 organizations, the University of Washington's Meany Hall among them, to produce and then present his dispersed, country-spanning dance.

Commissioning new works is hardly the usual focus of local performing arts presenters. But, then, the presenters must have products to present, so why not be producers too.

In this light "United States" is not only art but part of new product testing.

What we get is a two-part, smoothly performed American collage, taking us from the dust bowl Midwest to oh-so-sophisticated San Francisco.

Review

The Pick Up Company performing David Gordon's "United States." University of Washington's Meany Hall. Additional performances tonight and tomorrow night at 8.

The performers are seen mainly in ensemble, with only the briefest of solos.

Often drawing on contact improvisation for kinetic character in the dancers' interactions, the work does not have wildly dramatic effects. There are hardly any large leaping patterns, for example.

There are numerous brief sections — the first half lists 17 — and the sound score mixes with the dance, creating a sort of contrapuntal effect.

This works best when the dancing is not subsumed by the score. The reel and square dance sections, for example, are inventive and yet true to their sources.

But the narratives, John Cage-like collages of weather forecasts, Oregon lumber mill histories, and a chilling presentation of a massive debris flow in Los Angeles, monopolize the attention.

Perhaps it is the specificity of language or the narratives' strict linear progression that demands near total attention.

The sections performed to songs fare much better. Here, the rhythmic flow of the lyrics seems naturally to bring forth the evocative movements.

This is especially the case in the work's second section.

In a nice twist to the usual New Yorker's view of U.S. geography, Gordon has focused almost all of the work's ending on San Francisco. He finally comes back to New England to close with a portion of Robert Frost's famous comparison of writing poetry to playing tennis.

It remains to be seen if this model of dispersed commissioning will catch on. But what can be seen tonight and tomorrow is an engaging sampling of U.S. culture as seen/heard and transformed by Gordon's particular choreographic vision.

Much credit must also be given to researcher Roger Oliver for his selection/collection of aural artifacts.