

Chicago

Chicago Tribune, Friday, May 31, 1985

Gordon dancers find perfect balance

By Richard Christiansen
Entertainment editor

The engagement of the David Gordon/Pick Up Co. this weekend in Chicago is a major event in dance here, a chance to see the unique work of the home company of a choreographer who is both ingenious and a genius.

At the MoMing Dance and Arts Center, which is presenting Gordon's New York-based troupe as part of its 10th anniversary season, the program consists of two recent works, each one illustrating the inexhaustible inventiveness and the acute perception of the nature of dance that characterize Gordon's work.

The two pieces are at the same time slick and profound, casual and precise, lighthearted and deeply moving.

It is Gordon's particular gift to be able to translate complex esthetic theories into direct, accessible terms for his audiences. His work is avant-garde, but it's also great entertainment.

The company's eight dancers, including the burly, mustachioed Gordon and his porcelain-doll wife, Valda Setterfield, are accomplished technicians well schooled in the steps and gestures of classical and modern dance. But Gordon doesn't have them "dance" all the time. They watch from the sidelines, talk among themselves as they go through their routines, wipe their noses or their foreheads

David Gordon/Pick Up Co.

A program of two dances, "A Plain Romance Explained" and "My Folks," constructed by David Gordon. Opened May 30 at MoMing Dance and Arts Center, 1034 W. Barry Ave., and plays again at 8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Length of performance, 1:40. Tickets are \$10, or \$8.50 for MoMing members, students and senior citizens. Phone 472-9894.

THE DANCERS

David Gordon, Valda Setterfield, Keith Marshall, Dean Moss, Janice Bourdage, Chuck Finlon, Kenneth Kirkland, Kay McCabe.

in unison, dart about in confusion, slouch off stage with their hands in their pockets. And then, wonder of wonders, they blossom into delicately turned pas de deux and swirling ensembles, moving from the everyday into the extraordinary.

That is the impulse behind "A Plain Romance Explained," a witty exploration of dance that opens the company program. The piece, which occasionally has the full troupe scurrying around and chattering about what steps they are going to do next, is a further, poignant study of the dancers' hectic world that Gordon examined in his earlier "Framework"; and it is set to piano music by John Field, the 19th-Century composer whose work Gordon also used for "Field, Chair and Mountain," the dance he created this season for American Ballet Theatre.

In this tender and loving piece, as the dancers relate to each other, find their directions, set their goals, then glide without a hitch into Gordon's intricate dance patterns, the connections between

the rhythms of life and dance become startlingly, abundantly clear.

"My Folks," which ends the evening, is an almost constant stream of surprise and joy, a celebration of Gordon's [and dance's] roots and a tribute to the contemporary inventiveness of his choreography.

Set to the irresistible ethnic music of the Klezmer, with its wailing winds and propulsive rhythms, the dance merges the energetic humor of folk dance with the sophisticated moves of modern dance.

Its central device is the ever clever use of a series of diagonally striped sheets in black, white and red. Picked up and carried by the dancers, in solemn page or antic lope, these sheets are used progressively as curtains, veils, blankets, skirts, trampolines, tents, canopies, slingshots and, finally, grand trappings for a spectacular final tableau. At one point, the cloths even become conveyances in a silhouetted desert caravan.

A great one in the deployment of props, Gordon has here constructed a whimsical, wonderful invention.

The dancers' smiling delight in their colorful tricks is mirrored in the pleasure the piece gives its audience. It's happiness throughout, a bit like watching all at once a tremendous magic show and an exuberant wedding reception.