

# NEW YORK

OCTOBER 19, 1987

## Dance/Tobi Tobias/ **ABIDING PASSIONS**

Mikhail Baryshnikov...

Here he is, accessible as never before, albeit at one remove.

His latest TV venture is *David Gordon's Made in U.S.A.*, a *Dance in America* project of abundant intelligence, wit, and charm, directed by Don Mischer. Gordon has constructed three pieces that feature Baryshnikov, only one of which, *Murder*, a gory spoof originally made for ABT's repertoire, disappoints. The other two, designed expressly for the television medium, contain more subversive originality than one could glean from a year of steady box watching.

*Valda and Misha* is a dancing-as-walking and talking duet for the Russian-born Baryshnikov and the English-born Setterfield (Gordon's wife and muse). The verbal exchange, filled with Gordonesque double meanings, is ostensibly autobiographical, revealing how two of the world's most engaging émigré artists arrived at where they're at. Gordon doesn't miss a trick. Rather than glossing over it, he points out the fact that the exquisite Setterfield is considerably older than Baryshnikov (at one point, she dandles him on her lap) and displays frankly the element of erotic possibility in their en-

counter. He gives Baryshnikov's virtuosity the only possible challenge left to it by having the dancer sketch a couple of his fabled feats in slow motion. And in case anyone was planning to accuse the post-modernist Gordon of being co-opted by the Establishment, a central role in the piece is given to a cheap metal folding chair, a signature prop from the days when Gordon was admired only locally.

The chair is also prominent in the brilliant TV *Nine Lives*, where Baryshnikov and a handful of members of Gordon's Pick-Up Company become knockabout clowns in a loopy Western. Bodies intertwine, tumble, jostle, and cantilever off one another, as if competing for possession of the TV screen's tiny space or perhaps reconstructing as a single, multi-limbed organism of several minds. Set against corny old cowboy songs, the action has a gorgeously quirky rhythm that may have been inspired by Baryshnikov's genius for timing; in turn, the laconic cool that makes his delivery so beautifully funny owes a lot to the Valda of the previous piece, who remarks, moving all the while with casual elegance, "Having a baby took me by surprise, but it seemed simpler to continue." (Friday, October 23; 9 to 10 P.M.; Channel 13.)