

## A long dance show, with lots to appreciate

By Allan Ulrich  
EXAMINER DANCE CRITIC

**B**ERKELEY — David Gordon's Pick/Up Company may have enjoyed the distinction of offering the longest postmodern dance concert of the season on Friday and Saturday evenings at UC-Berkeley's Zellerbach Auditorium. But, in dance as elsewhere, everything is relative, and the running time of 2 hours, 40 minutes seemed negligible considering the wealth of glorious, provocative, infinitely touching moments the program provided.

Gordon's movement theater pieces have been part of the artistic vanguard for more than two decades. Although all the dances on last weekend's Cal Performances-sponsored program dated from the last two years, it was possible for a canny viewer to spot the progress of Gordon's work and the trajectory of his personal life, too.

The revised version of "My Folk," seen at the Herbst Theatre last year, was, on Saturday, every bit as disarming in its distillation of Gordon's Jewish-American heritage as it seemed nine months ago.

Of the two 1986 pieces offered in their Bay Area premieres, "Transparent Means for Traveling Light" seemed to look back furthest. On the other hand, "The Seasons," the final and most immediately appealing work on the bill, found Gordon at a moment of consolidation.

Any moments of dissatisfaction with Gordon's visit came from the size of the hall. None of the works looked as if it had been conceived for a stage the size of Zellerbach

("My Folks" suffered least). The 10-member company solved the problem by not really filling the entire space and by stripping Zellerbach of its black side curtains. Watching Gordon offstage watching his company onstage became one of the minor pleasures of the evening.

Gordon has abandoned talking in his dance constructions, but the ironic overlay continues to pervade his work. But irony has its limits: With all the musical jokes in Chuck Hammer's brilliant collage score for "The Seasons," it's amazing how much the lingering sensation of the

piece is one of fluid, unambiguous, even abundant lyricism.

In the only words uttered all evening, Gordon's British-born wife, Valda Setterfield, on tape voices her opinions on the wanderings of the sun: "I hate winter. Who needs frozen snot?" she inquires in her crispest tones.

She prefers spring, but what we see is a group of dancers obviously enjoying a summer day, a tapestry of leisure activities unfolding across the stage like a scroll. A jogger dashes around in shorts. Setterfield lays a blanket for a picnic, and the cast takes turns sunbathing.

Few other dance makers working today reveal Gordon's extraordinary gift for hiding a tight formal plan under an apparently casual surface. As the seasons flow by, the performers acquiesce to the demands of nature. They gradually add trousers to Santo Loquasto's gleaming white shorts at the approach of autumn, then they don filmy cloaks as winter blows through their marrow. Hammer's

score segues from bits of "Summer in the City" to "Autumn in New York" to snatches of Vivaldi (via koto orchestra) to Tchaikovsky's "Winter Dreams" Symphony to Meyerbeer's "Patineurs" ballet music to "The Rite of Spring."

Gordon effects his transitions magically, mainly through dynamics of movement and the manner in which his performers relate to each other as the mercury plunges. He offers the wit of a Setterfield solo which borrows from what we know of Nijinsky's choreography for "The Rite of Spring" (yes, it happens during the Stravinsky music). He returns us to the summer sun worshipers at the end. But, in the middle comes a duet with Setterfield. You don't have to know they've been married for 25 years to find this slow, deliberate, arm-in-arm canter around the stage one of the more haunting episodes in contemporary dance.

At times, "Transparent Means for Traveling Light" seems an homage to Merce Cunningham. You get that impression from the three John Cage scores ("Credo in Us," "Rozart Mix," "Collection of Rocks #2"), and the opening sequence, as the orchestra pit laden with TV sets rises and a dancer confronts an empty stage.

Yet the piece soon evolves into a study of dancers interacting with their ever-changing theatrical environment. The accoutrements include Lyn Carroll's bizarre costumes, (skirts and peekaboo tops for the men), Robert Seder's unpredictable lighting, rolling pipes and rearranged curtains create an atmosphere of odd insecurity.