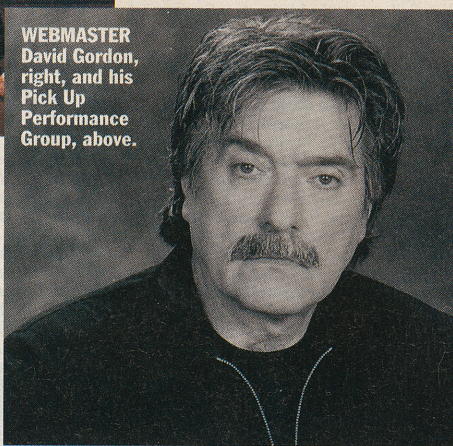


DANCE  
Interview

WEBMASTER  
David Gordon,  
right, and his  
Pick Up  
Performance  
Group, above.



## Family matters

David Gordon creates a world of intimate and intelligent hilarity By **Gia Kourlas**

**D**avid Gordon may not be a new name in either the dance or theater worlds, yet his work is consistently and gloriously fresh, and he melds text with movement effortlessly. In the program notes for his latest evening, *FAMILY\$DEATH@ART.COMedy*, which will be presented at Danspace Project beginning Friday 5, the choreographer poses several curious questions: "Is one person talking and dancing a duet? Or two solos? Does touching the audience matter?" He sets up universal, wickedly humorous situations about mysterious smells, pet care and dressing mishaps; wedged in between are gorgeous sections of full-out dancing, including a tender (but not soapy) duet between Gordon and his wife, the actor and dancer Valda Setterfield.

The second premiere on the program, *For the Love of Rehearsal*, was created for Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project's "PASTForward" tour, of which Gordon is director. (The White Oak program features new and old dances by seven pioneers from the 1960s' experimental Judson movement and will be presented at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in June). That type of thing doesn't usually happen, as companies are quite propri-

etary about what they allow other groups to perform, but Baryshnikov told Gordon "the piece would look good in the church, so why not?" That says as much about Gordon as it does about Baryshnikov.

**Time Out New York: What is the meaning behind the strange title of your new piece?**

**David Gordon:** [Laughs] I've come to live in a world, now, in which all advertisements end in "dot-com" ways of getting to them. And I pay attention to how people describe their product in their name dot-com. I thought, What are the things I deal with? I deal with relationships, and no matter how many ways I go at it, I don't seem to get tired. I think the dancers become a family. Money is very tight right now in the art world. You have to think, Can I afford to do this? It's also about the idea of death or the end, a lifetime spent making art—and it is about the joke. Comedy. So all of that is part of it. I have never really thought of dancing as disconnected from the world I live in or the life I lead.

**TONY: Why is there such an interest in the Judson era? Does my generation romanticize it?**

**DG:** Sure. When Misha asked me to do "PASTForward," I said I didn't think so. I think it's very ironic that

a Russian ballet star is the keeper [Laughs] of postmodern dance. It's very bizarre. I eventually agreed to direct the program, but he curated it. I came in contact with some of my Judson peers for the first time in many years. I saw relationships between works that I was not so conscious of back then. I've always functioned as a loner. Once the first Judson performances were over, I was not one of the people in the basement working on everybody's piece.

**TONY: Did you set out to make something as personal as Family?**

**DG:** That's an odd question, because I think some of the most personal work I ever see is Merce Cunningham's work. You can't re-

ric and holding it up against the couch and saying, "See, it'll look like this." [Laughs] But a lot of my beginning interest came from going with Arlene to see Balanchine.

**TONY: How did you, as she wrote in "Discussing the Undiscussible," her New Yorker article about Bill T. Jones and victim art, escape "being trapped by the logic of '60s permissiveness"?**

**DG:** I'm too perverse to get trapped anywhere, because as soon as I see the door closing on some thought process, I squeeze through, saying, "But what if?" I can't allow a conclusion that is infallible or immovable.

**TONY: What was the first dance you saw that captivated you?**

**DG:** I think the first dancing that I saw was as a child. Movie musicals were one of the things my mother thought was safe. The professional dancing I saw was when I met Jimmy Waring, with whom I had begun to work, and he introduced me to Merce Cunningham and New York City Ballet. I sort of wandered blithely into both the avant-garde and the very sophisticated palette of work because of people I met who were doing what is now called mentoring, only then I didn't know what that was. I was the recipient of it.

**TONY: Do you go to many dance performances now?**

**DG:** I might go to a number in a row. Sometimes, I go to the movie store on Tower cheap days and rent all the movies I won't pay eight or nine dollars to go and see, but which keep me tuned into what anybody thinks is going on. I do the same kind of thing—going to a bunch of performances in a row—at downtown venues like Danspace Project and P.S. 122. [Pauses] I am impatient with work that isn't thoughtful. As soon as I begin watching and realize that I'm looking at the work of somebody who will do anything that they think of next or who haven't understood that that's what they're doing, I find it really boring. I think I like movies better than dancing.

**TONY: Do you have any Fred Astaire in your dance video collection?**

**DG:** Oh, yes. I have all the Fred and Ginger movies. When you first began to be able to buy video, I thought, This is absolutely amazing. I can have this in my house and sit with my remote, saying, "Show me that again, show me again." [Smiles] It's sort of like heaven.

**David Gordon and the Pick Up Performance Group perform at Danspace Project Friday 5 through January 14.**

move yourself from the making of the work—somewhere in there are your sensitivities and sensibilities and emotional responses. The discussion-slash-arguments that occur in this piece don't all have to do with me. They're things I hear, like the part that goes, "Is that what you're wearing?" Sometimes you hear people in the subway saying, "And then he said to me, 'Is that what you're wearing?' And what did he want me to wear?" [Laughs]

**TONY: What is your favorite dance book?**

**DG:** Wow. That's a weird question. I don't know that I have anything like that. I think if I were to name what I've read parts of more times, it's the writing of Edwin Denby. [Pauses] Arlene Croce's *The Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers Book* was a great book about movies, about dancing, about stars.

**TONY: Does Arlene Croce still affect your work?**

**DG:** The greatest effect she had on my work was just to witness her enormous and passionate love affair with dance related to music. It caused me to think more intensely about the connections. I used music like taking a swatch of colored fab-