

A must-see greatest hits of movement

By Miriam Seidel
FOR THE INQUIRER

The Judson Dance Theater began in a New York church in July 1962. The experiments that started there — making dances with ordinary movements and largely banishing storylines, music and emotional expression — had an explosive effect in the world of dance that continues today.

Now, the ever-questing Mikhail Baryshnikov has had the audacity and smarts to stage a sort of greatest-hits Judson anthology, banking on his star-power to get mainstream dance audiences to sit through some of this still-challenging work.

"PASTForward," performed by his White Oak Dance Project and volunteers recruited from the community, succeeded in rubbing these works clean of their legendary patina, showing them as they are: many still fresh, some brilliant, some dated, all thought-provoking. It's a must-see for dance lovers.

After an introductory film by Charles Atlas, Baryshnikov started Wednesday's opening-night performance with a gift for his fans: an upbeat, Cagneyesque duet with a chair, updating an earlier piece by choreographer David Gordon, also the evening's director.

Steve Paxton's 1967 *Satisfyin Lover* gets to the Zen heart of what he calls "pedestrian movement." As a long line of regular people walked slowly across the stage, replicating the unthinking ease of pedestrians, their movements came to look new and meaningful, achieving a humble profundity. Simone Forti's similarly simple, delightful *Huddle* and *Scramble*, also using untrained local performers, were

White Oak Dance Project

Baryshnikov Productions, in association with the University of the Arts and Dance Affiliates, presents "PASTForward."

When: 8 tonight and Saturday.

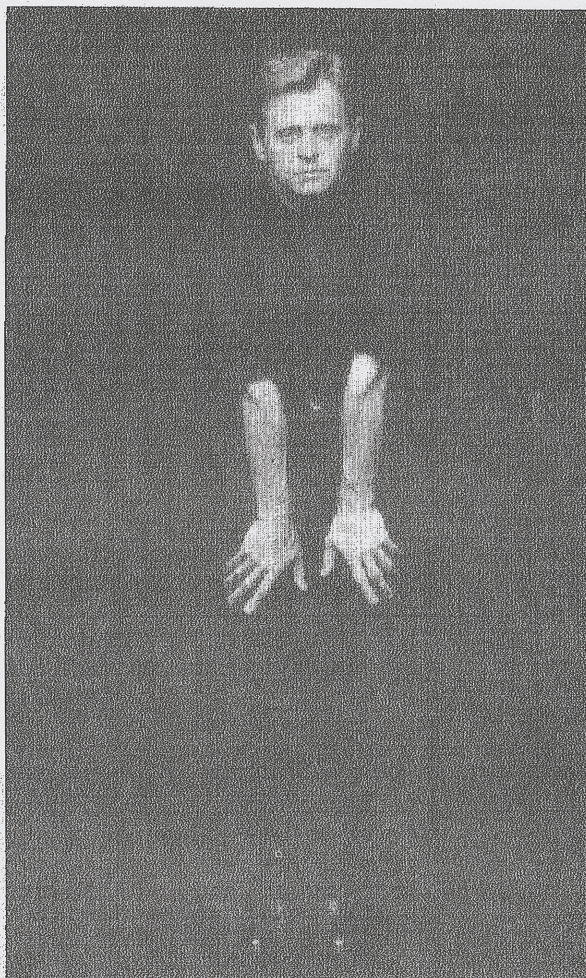
Where: The Merriam Theater, 250 S. Broad St.

Tickets: \$26 to \$56; students \$15.

Phone: 215-732-5446 or 215-336-1234.

Web:

www.whiteoakdanceproject.com.



YASUHIKO SHIROTA

Mikhail Baryshnikov and his White Oak Dance Project present "PASTForward," an anthology of the Judson theater's challenging work.

somewhat lost in the intermission and preshow periods.

Trisha Brown's *Homemade* (1965) is another striking work, eerily prescient of much interactive theater today. Baryshnikov performed the solo with a film projector strapped to his back. His discreetly evocative movements, reenacting a personal memory, were echoed in the projected video image — a previous performance of the same movements — that hovered behind him, slightly out-of-sync and as distant and out-of-reach as the memory itself.

More complex, later works by some of these choreographers — Brown, Deborah Hay, and Yvonne Rainer among them — had a different vibe and created some jarring notes. But the finale with White Oak's eight dancers, Lucinda Childs' *Concerto* from 1993, moved with a demonic, clockwork energy that was irresistible. And ending here felt right in another way: Most of these choreographers have circled back toward music and other theatrical conventions, but with the infusion of findings from the long-ago Judson lab.