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## Baryshnikov takes bold steps in new work

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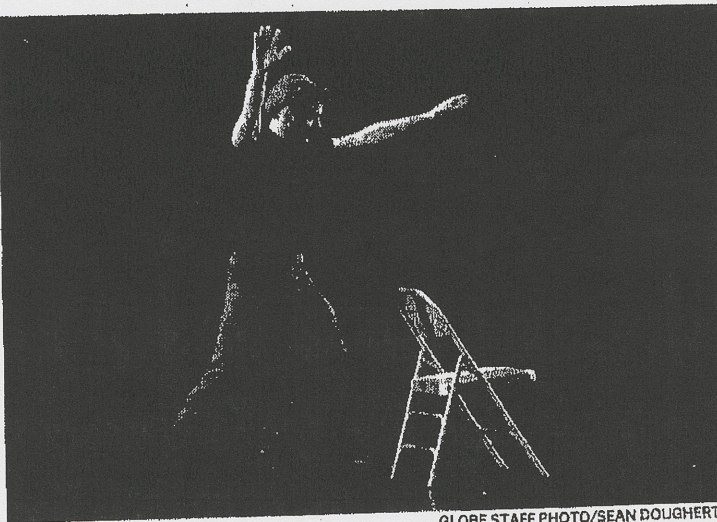
Mikhail Baryshnikov performing to music by another Russian, Leon Minkus: That's hardly unexpected. Baryshnikov, Minkus, and dozens of civilians who have not necessarily ever set foot on a stage before: Now that's a shock.

### Dance Review

It happened last night at the Shubert, where Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project presented "PASTforward," which included the overture to "The Matter," set to the "Shades" music from Minkus's "La Bayadere" and constructed in 1979 by David Gordon. "Constructed," mind you; not "choreographed." With that one assertive word Gordon summarizes the attitude of the Judson Dance Theater, a radical movement born in a Greenwich Village church in the 1960s, when Baryshnikov was still perfecting his pirouettes in St. Petersburg.

Judson choreographers were devoted to including nondancers, performing in untraditional spaces, mixing media, avoiding conventional technique, dancing before the official "performance" and during the intermissions, and being rather dogmatic if not downright sour about the whole thing.

Baryshnikov has, over the past couple of years, devoted himself to reviving old works by Judsonians



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/SEAN DOUGHERTY

Mikhail Baryshnikov performing "Chair Intro 2000" last night.

and commissioning new ones.

Last night's program answered two questions: How have the Judson dances held up? And, at 52, how has Baryshnikov? The choreography is a mixed bag, definitely dated in some cases yet not ripened enough to revere. "The Matter," though, was wonderful, with Baryshnikov and Keith Sabado in the background, acting as prop-meisters and cleanup crew, their gestures workmanlike. A procession of ordinary folks in the foreground crossed the stage solemnly, as if en route to heaven.

Baryshnikov's segue into modern dance has been shrewd. He does *not* stand out in this crowd. Honest. He conscientiously avoids

ballistic projection, retreating into the task at hand. As no conventional display of technique is required, he offers none. Were I to nominate a "star" from last night, it would be Emily Coates in Lucinda Childs's 1964 "Carnation," wearing a colander on her head as if it were a veil of lace, and making sandwiches out of sponges and spongey hair rollers.

Today's dance world is bloated to the point of bursting, bent on ever-more-extravagant productions. It's a world where the title of the 19th-century classic "Le Corsaire" gets changed to "The Pirate" purely for box office appeal. Against this backdrop a dance called "Flat" is welcome for its

sheer lack of pretension. Steve Paxton choreographed it in 1964; Baryshnikov danced it last night. Dressed in a greige business suit, he gradually removed his clothing, hanging it on sticky patches on his skin, becoming a walking closet.

Closing the gap between audience and performers was part of the Judson creed, observed last night during the intermission, in Simone Forti's "Huddle," with dancers in a droopy pile echoing the clusters of people standing and chatting in the aisles.

Documentary videos and mundane metal folding chairs tie the program together. It's startling when there's actually music involved. And it's funny to hear Baryshnikov describing Judson in a thick Russian accent. The chorus of local recruits who appear in several works come in all shapes, sizes, races and ages: It's Humanity 101.

Judson was a seminal movement. Choreographers including Twyla Tharp and Bill T. Jones are indebted to it. And the dance public is indebted to Baryshnikov for reviving it. Because of his clout, he is the only dancer who could.

### PASTForward

Performed by the

White Oak Dance Project

At: the Shubert Theatre, last night;  
program repeats through Sunday