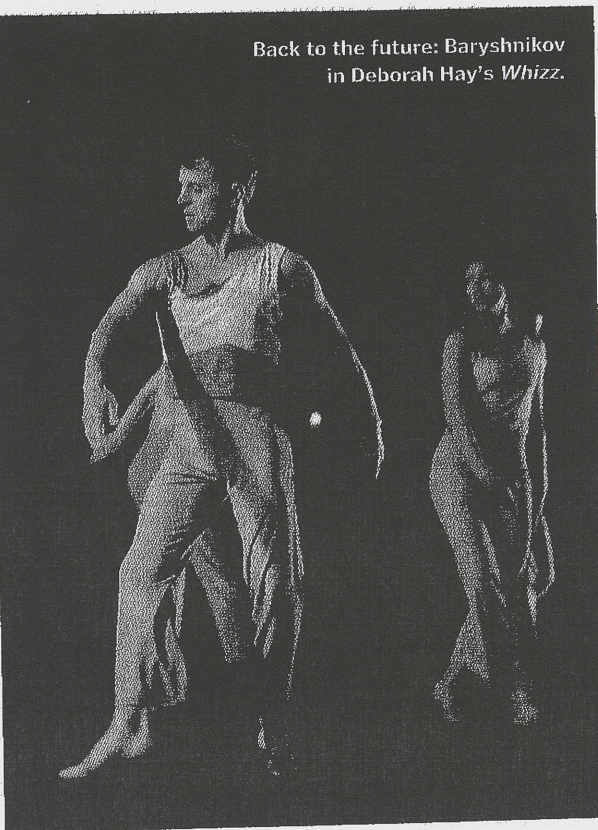


# Forward Glances

Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project packages the revolutionary works of the Judson Movement—and while some are still dull, many seem as fresh and inventive as ever.

**M**IKHAIL BARYSHNIKOV'S **White Oak Dance Project** touched down lately at BAM with the canny new program it's touring, "PastForward." The punning title proposes the relevance today of the Judson Movement, commonly held to mark the birth of postmodern dance. Working out of the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village in the sixties and early seventies, a symbiotic bunch of radical artists rejected the kind of highly wrought artifice essential to, say, classical ballet and the dance theater of Martha Graham in favor of the pedestrian. Fascinated by the ordinary (and not a little self-righteous, once their explorations became a crusade), they turned their back on refined codified technique; obligatory musical accompaniment; storytelling; the opera-house luxe of elaborate costumes, scenery, and lighting; the desire to please and entertain—indeed, almost all the blandishments that draw the general public into the theater. And this is where Baryshnikov's problem lay when he attempted to resurrect the iconoclastic material that so appealed to his rebel streak.

While it's true that a number of the dances preserved from those revolutionary times still seem inventive and refreshing, lots of them were dumb and dull in their day and remain so, their self-indulgence evident all these years later. What's more, a goodly percentage of the pieces that remain thrilling are likely to thrill only that segment of the audience susceptible to dance that is as much intellectual as it is visceral—athletic and sensuous. Well, Baryshnikov is a helluva smart guy, and he did the only thing there was to do with this stuff. He packaged it. He took works by key Judsonites—Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Simone Forti, David Gordon, Deborah Hay, Steve



Back to the future: Baryshnikov in Deborah Hay's *Whizz*.

Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer—persuaded some of them to make new works to stand alongside the historical evidence, and got the best folks in the business to turn the stuff into a show. Gordon shaped and directed a production that set the specific dances in a matrix of old film, videotape, and photos, adroitly designed by Charles Atlas and accompanied by voice-over from the artists that is both informative and fun. The result is new-minted, bright, and zippy, ready for a TV special, which may well be coming.

If "PastForward"—of necessity—commercializes its subject, it romanticizes it, too. Like the dance scholar Sally Banes, who has written exhaustively and marvelously

on the Judson Movement, Baryshnikov first knew it as history. He wasn't there while it was actually happening, and his distant perspective intensifies the glamour factor. He also celebrates Judson as a sociological phenomenon. Beyond its specific correctives and innovations, most of which have since duly been incorporated into mainstream theater, Judson appeals as a group effort, a spontaneous collaboration of people with talent, energy, and daring earnestly serving a common cause. With "PastForward," Baryshnikov offers us Judson—in all sincerity, I think—as a piece of American mythology.

**White Oak Dance Project**

"PastForward"; at BAM.

**School of American Ballet Workshop Performances**  
At Julliard Theatre.