

□ Plain and simple. Black and white. Open and direct. All of these companion adjectives readily apply to the art of David Gordon. His methods and materials are unapologetically obvious. You could almost liken the physical and verbal inventions he concocts to a process of show and tell. Almost, because what keeps Gordon's work from being elementary or pedantic are the constant twists of his artistic intuition.

In November (10-14), Werkcentrum Dans from the Netherlands presented Gordon's *Big Eyes (Grote Ogen)* at Dance Theater Workshop's Bessie Schönberg Theater. Joining the Dutch company to present this work were Gordon and his Pick-Up Co. The delicate, fresh Dutch dancers were dressed in white, the bigger, more mature Americans in black. It was a bilingual ballet that kept both companies more or less self-contained and indicated Gordon's usual generosity to his performers. Probably because the foreign dancers were so unknown to him, Gordon acted the sensitive host and presented them in a gentle, warm light. He worked his own dancers with more familiar, definite tasks, as would a challenging teacher. The mix made for a kind of zany, benign Tower of Babel experience.

In December (3-20 also at DTW) Gordon and the Pick-Up Co., with Valda Setterfield, presented his newest work, *Trying Times*. Gordon's now familiar company of six dancers was amplified for this piece by five additional performers. And there were "visual devices by Power Boothe" and some Stravinsky music (*Apollo*). *Trying Times* is probably Gordon's most ambitious work to date. For the most part it flipped from chatty monologue and dialogue to formal prop manipulation and informal body maneuvers with the sleight of hand timing of a card-sharp. *Trying Times'* cast of thirteen was equally and distinctly credible as stagehands, confidantes and corps dancers. When the second half of this work (mostly duet inventions accompanied by *Apollo*) reaches its musical apotheosis, Gordon becomes the object of a mock trial conducted by the dancers and defended by Setterfield (his wife). While this scene uses all the props and performers from the whole work, it turns somewhat awkward in tone. The related accusations and pleadings—about the post-modern movement and Gordon's part in it—have a super-sensitive, personal edge. For all its witticisms Gordon's courtroom repartee sounds heavy with polemical problems.

The non-video version of *T. V. Reel* (also seen during this season) is filled with personal resonances, too. But these individual features increase the depth of the sentiments, not the weight. What Gordon has given Valda, Susan, Keith, Margaret and Paul to show and tell us is something amusing and touching. In *Reel* the artist's work is speaking, fully; in the trying part of *Times*, the artist tries speaking for the work, sort of. ROBERT GRESKOVIC