

David Gordon Pick Up Company

A Refreshing View of Language, Movement

By Marilyn Tucker

The David Gordon Pick Up Company, which performed Friday and Saturday at Zellerbach Playhouse, Berkeley will take the most mundane of movement as well as verbal phrases, mix them up, rearrange them, add and subtract.

Everything is constantly changing, although the changes are related, and all the while, Gordon is homing in relentlessly on a target, which makes his dances exceedingly clever as well.

In their outward simplicity as well as their seeming spontaneity, Gordon's dances — he calls them movement pieces — offer a most refreshing outlook on the relationships of language to movement. There always is some kind of ironic, intellectual game at work, which shows a brand of humanism otherwise almost unknown in dance.

Valda Setterfield (left) and David Gordon in 'T.V. Reel,' a movement piece constructed by Gordon for his Pick Up Company

In "T.V. Reel," a long work performed without the television screens, which in recent New York performances revealed alternate versions of the same dance, dancers are talking constantly, exchanging words, passing them on, even as they switch places, hug, embrace, fall down, catch, push, pull. It all seems to be about looking for love, finding a partner, changing partners, and the non-stop narrative word-play serves the intent. When one of the dancers is groping about with the idea of "falling in love," she falls down, only to be caught and pushed back up again.

The visual framework of "T.V. Reel" is casual social dancing, mostly a buoyant version of square dancing held up by the repetition of Gunther Schuller's "Miller's Reel." The entire company of seven participates, and Gordon makes a belated appearance. It was predestined that he should take Valda Setterfield, who is actually Gordon's wife, as a permanent partner and lifetime lover and glide off into the night with her. It was the sweet climax we'd all been waiting for.

Gordon served his special brand of wry in three shorter works. He and Setterfield danced a "Close Up," in which their poses, clinches and embraces of one kind or another were matched up with screened images of a David and Velda from another time and era doing exactly the same thing. But how different it all seems, how funny, touching and sad, this business of reliving memories.

The juxtaposition of language and movement was at the heart of "Double Identity," a diverting trio for Keith Marshall, Susan Eschelbach and Margaret Hoeffel, as themselves and as each other — when they exchanged places. When Susan is held aloft, Keith stops

us cold with "Susan, don't stay up too long," and, alas, when Susan falls down, it is "Susan, the fallen woman" we see.

By his quick intelligence, Marshall transforms the ordinary, giving it a stunning focus. In "Dorothy and Eileen," Sutterfield and Hoeffel perform gymnastic exercises, body massage and manipulation, contact improvisation of mind-boggling sameness and dullness. All the while, they are talking of their mothers, the "Dorothy and Eileen" of the work's title, trying to assess whether their mothers' lives would have been more challenging and stimulating, given the choices of today's woman.