

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

David Gordon's dancers are a real pick-me-up

Review

By JAMES WIERZBICKI

Globe-Democrat Music/Arts Editor

The very name of choreographer/dancer David Gordon's Pick Up Co., which he says is "permanently temporary" both as an organization and as a concept, suggests casualness. So do the dancers' costumes, which are merely well-chosen street clothes. And so does the movement vocabulary of Gordon's so-called "post-modern" choreographic style, which is made up largely of walking, falling, running and the simple shifting of weight from one leg to the other.

But there's nothing truly casual about his compositions. The two works he presented Saturday evening at the St. Louis Art Museum auditorium were in fact as complex as anything one is likely to see in the more obviously formalized worlds of ballet or conventional modern dance, and that they often had the appearance of being improvised only attests to the panache with which they were executed.

Gordon's 1982 "T.V. Reel," which took up the first half of the program, is a pun-filled 43-minute essay on personal relations. A dancer who says "I'm falling in love" immediately topples to the floor, and the next few minutes are an exploration of the falling motion; a male and female performer observed to be "going around together" start spinning in tandem, and the modified dervish gesture is picked up by the others; the dramatically rendered phrase "it's over" triggers a series of leap-frogging activity, and so on. Every time the soap-operaish dialogue reaches a conclusive point of absurdity, the dancers break out in a version of the Virginia reel, and the sequence grows increasingly delightful with each of its half-dozen or so repetitions.

The 30-minute piece that came after intermission, cryptically titled "Soft Broil and related work" (1980), seemed to be a metaphor for the working out of problems both professional and personal. It opened with a tightly choreographed *adagio* duo by Nina Martin and Paul Thompson, and after about five minutes a few more dancers came on stage to contrast the couple's sensuous *pas de deux* with fast-paced variations on an embrace. It all got very busy, and just when it felt as though there was too much for the eye to take in, the soloists began a dialogue about a misunderstood step. The ensemble dancing and banter that followed took many directions, but most of it centered on the theme of jockeying for position, psychologically as well as physically.

A 7-year-old who sat behind me giggled through all of this, and after the show most of the adults were beaming. Gordon's witty juxtapositions of stumbling and bumbling with precise shifts of position are in equal measures intriguing and endearing, and they say a lot not only about their creator's compositional craft, but also about what apparently is his warmly humanistic personality.