

THE WELL-TEMPERED STORY TED SOLOTAROFF

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Again I ask myself, why I should feel any guilt in this matter. I am in no way responsible for the situation in South Africa and there is probably nothing I can do about it. Yet I do feel guilt, and I believe it a good thing that I do, good at least for my moral health. Still more, if my guilt were multiplied a hundred thousandfold something might happen, there would be an alteration and an alleviation of the crime and, yes, let us say it, the sin.

Is this transcript or "documentary" by Messrs. Fenton and Blair who staged it a play? It is. It so rivets our attention that there is throughout complete silence in the house; it strikes home as almost no printed testimony could. This might not occur were the cast less dramatically capable.

The actors wear little or no makeup: they do not attempt any strongly marked histrionics: they are facts in the flesh. Besides Fritz Weaver, whose words impress us with the quick thinking and the ready eloquence in the use of language of the South African lawyer Sidney Kentridge, there are utterly persuasive impersonations by Martin Shakar, Carl Low, Philip Bosco, Jess Osuna, John Vennema. In fact everybody is exactly right. □

DANCE

NANCY GOLDNER

David Gordon used to be the cutup of the improvisation group, Grand Union. When the others were turning sour or getting stuck in some dead-end gag—or dance (sometimes it was hard to tell the difference)—it was always David (first names only with the Grand Union) who came up with a cute distraction. If his ploys didn't work, his boyish voice and manner were imparting good cheer. It was no small thing to impart. In his latest venture, performed by what he calls the David Gordon/Pick Up Co., a tape of his voice instructed us not to be disarmed by his boyishness. At heart, the tape said in its charmingly boyish voice, he was an egomaniac like all the other choreographers. He had created a solo for himself and, although he was aware of the incongruity and injustice of inserting a solo into a group endeavor, he was going to do it. Then he shyly stepped forward and with a flicker of a smile announced in live (modest) voice that he was now going to do his solo. As the tape had told us they would, the other four dancers commented on his solo; this was to let them participate in

the dance and was a way out of the political bind. They proceeded to comment. "Isn't it interesting that he begins without beginning?" "Do you think it's possible that he doesn't know what's on his mind?" "I don't." "You don't what?" "Mind." "Aren't his rhythms . . . primitive?" "Why yes, they're universal." "Why aren't his sneakers a darker blue, to match his trousers?"

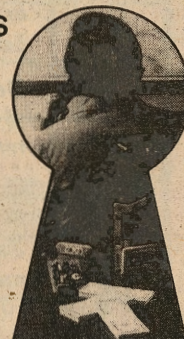
David's solo really wasn't any more harebrained than a lot of other solos one sees, but it was a fitting excuse for the group to hit on just about everything that needs to be said about perambulations of this sort and about the people who find cause to comment on them. Gordon casts a deliciously skeptical eye on the avant-garde 1960s tradition in which he worked, and the deadpanned intonations with which he and the group speak and move add humorous irony. Nevertheless, he is still bound by those traditions, so much so that the tie undercuts his skepticism as much as the group commentary undercut his solo. The flatness of speech and movement is affected enough to inform us that the performers know they're performers, even though they're pretending not to be. Fine.

But after fifteen years of use, flatness is stale as a theatrical device. Much of the concert was concerned with blurring the distinctions between stage life and real life. As a plot device, this too has been wrung dry. As the dancers were moving about they would repeat phrases from rehearsal: "Oh, I went wrong"; "let's go back to the beginning." The dance began with a taped voice listing all the accidents that can befall performers; many of them were enacted as the dance progressed. In one sequence, David and Valda Setterfield read from a script pasted on the wall, its dialogue and accompanying action containing a built-in dead-end that sent them right back to the top-line. The cleverness with which backstage hassles and front-stage drama, preparation and execution, commentary and commentary on commentary were fused puts Gordon and company notches above other would-be wits; in fact, Gordon often is witty. Yet the preoccupation with real/unreal as the subject for a dance seems to be the crucial dead end. And that was an item nobody commented on, in words or in motion.

When David did his uncharming solo he was still being charming. Nobody commented on that either. I find this omission strange, for David's charm is still the basic component of his choreography. Although the disintegration of the Grand Union has not freed Gordon from 1960s themes or structures, performing

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STILL LIFE WITH GRASS, FUR AND AIR AT THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

*Between the surfacing Blue whale and Hope
diamond there's a hallway of collected
suns and small arrested hearts.*

*Deep in this corridor I can't comprehend
flared nostrils drained of forest breath
or mountains dying in panorama
behind this figment of a caribou.*

*He stands so quiet and elegant, full
of summer grass, but with such an easy eye
turned away from the plain.*

*Caribou family, come be wary
in the light, be quick—
breathed and supple. Live always
on the verge of stretching
your legs, threaded with flight.*

Katherine Soniat

under his own aegis has given him a wider field in which to exercise his personality. He no longer has to be type-cast as Peck's bad boy. His self-knowing naiveté and seemingly spontaneous acuity of timing have a freshness they could not have when they were reactive. Performing on his own also permits him to join with Valda Setterfield, who can reveal here as she could not when dancing with the Merce Cunningham Company a talent for whimsy as sure-footed as Gordon's. With the severe-looking Setterfield playing headmistress to burly Gordon, and then in a flash outwitting him with a well-placed pause and out-charming him with a smile, they are the Hepburn-Tracy team of dance. The dance was called *Not Necessarily Recognizable Objectives*. The title could well apply to the daffy script they followed, and well be the cause of their problem with it. Some of the other objectives in the dance were equally not recognizable and equally daffy, but the *modus operandi* was certainly all too recognizable and, frankly, pooped out.

Gordon and Setterfield are two of the many stellar personalities of the Judson Church scene who performed in James Waring's productions during the 1960s. If that iconoclastic and violently rebellious movement, headquartered at the Judson, could be said to have had a den mother, James Waring was it. Anyone who was anybody participated in his dances. They would be performed a few times, some of them were taken along by soloists who found jobs and security in other cities, and many of them died. Waring himself died in 1975 at the age of 53, leaving behind an enormous body

of work scattered about in the minds of devoted friends. Many of them are determined to keep Waring's work alive. A few months ago the Joyce Trisler Dance Company presented his rendition of *The Phantom of the Opera*. For two weekends in late April a virtual Waring festival took place at the Judson. This activity is no doubt triggered by personal loyalty and just might be in canny response to the growing interest in what is called our "dance heritage." The Judson Church movement has barely been laid to rest, but in this age of instant history it already has a mellow aroma and Waring is already pantheonized its elder statesman.

The first Waring program consisted of group works to the music of Joplin, Mozart, Stravinsky, Joseph Lanner and some popular songs written between c. 1840 (Gottschalk) and 1926 (J.P. Johnson). The second program was solos, to Beethoven (the *32 Variations in C Minor* and first movement of the *Moonlight Sonata*), Debussy, Christian Wolff and Satie. Waring's romp through musical literature is a measure of the open-mindedness that probably enabled him to work with all the eccentrics of the Judson era. That attitude was also the nicest part of the current concerts. Behind it was a bunch of dances smelling, I'm afraid, like wilted roses.

In a sense wilted roses are the subject of Waring's dances—the vaudeville entertainers who aren't quite as dazzling as their costumes and smiles, the astounding trapeze artist with dainty feet and sensi-

tive heart (based on Barquette, the female impersonator), a forlorn snowflake, the would-be ballerina, or simply a dancer of small, simple amplitude, fluttering her fingers and shoulders, floating to one side of the stage and across to the other. As with Gordon and all products of the Judson school, the tone is ironic and the way you get the tone is by flattening: the ironing-board technique. Gordon flattens the voice and body's natural inflections. Waring flattened out the music; he had the most literal-minded ear I've ever encountered. Those who find his dances amusing or witty or knowing (or however it is you describe the bitter-sweet weariness of the *boulevardier*) will point to that literalness as the key to Waring, just as they might ascribe his parodic-affectionate investigation of style to the flat relief in which he presents trademarks of style. They are right. It's just a question of whether the calculated deflation develops into an inversion of itself in performance or whether it sticks to its face value. To this viewer, who has seen little Waring and was out of town during the Judson's most flourishing days, Waring's laconic doodlings feel like laconic doodlings. I enjoyed it when a bashful handyman presented an ineptly vigorous cancan dancer with a flower pot filled with asparagus, although it was not so much the timing of the presentation as the prop itself that caused amusement. I even think that *32 Variations in C Minor*, performed by the excellent Ze'eva Cohen, is an exciting solo, exciting for its duplications of heroic gesture and exciting in the way it imitates everything in Beethoven, including the variety and robustness. As for the rest of it, I could not distinguish between the wilt of the steps and dancers and Waring's wilted comments on them. □

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