

# Dance

## MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY

By MAY KESLER

*Inlets* (a New York Premiere). Fog fills the stage. It's hardly perceptible, the dim lights catching only the glimmer of someone's blonde hair and shimmering skin. Flickers of movement begin to fill the background as the lights come up, the stage encased in subtle shadow. Morris Grave's design of a large silver coin emerges on the backdrop and the sounds of something like gurgling water seep from the theatre walls.

It's more subtle than what Cunningham works are generally like. There's a sensuous quality, bits of slow softness dispersed between the quickness. Dancers stop, looking at the sky, or spin, arching back with arms behind their heads. The shiny coin reflects the lights and sparkle of their silver necklaces as it imperceptibly traverses the backdrop. There's a distance to the whole piece as if it were a reverie, making it feel as though if you reached out to touch it, it wouldn't be there. It slips through your fingers, its timelessness accentuated by a sudden blackout, Merce's silhouette frenetically turning against the background of the silver coin.

*Imperceptible Continuity.* It's in the undetectable movement of *Inlets'* silver coin and the black shaded gray backdrop and the tiny spots of color around the ankles of dancers' tights. Dancers slip pieces of costume on and off during a dance, changing from black tights to black sweatpants, putting orange legs or one blue knee on for one entrance, taking it off on the next. It's like watching a kitten grow into a cat, silently becoming more mellow and sleepy. It's about processes of change, about bringing to consciousness something that was always happening, but the awareness wasn't present that made the difference crystalize.

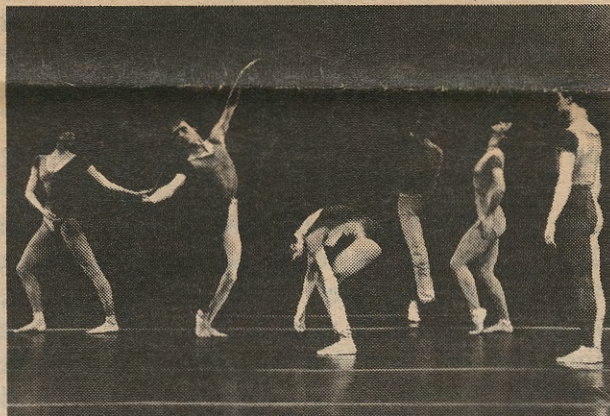


Merce Cunningham in Solo (1973)  
(Photo Jack Mitchell)



Merce Cunningham, Morgan Ensminger, Ellen Cornfield in "Squaregame."

Cunningham's dancers each have unique qualities—they "... provide the continuity; the action of movement is expressive, but what it expresses is determined individuality." They hold you in the lifts that suck the girl's body in and hold her fragile and weightless, in the sharp turning torsos and heads that linger in their quickness. It's curious, too, watching dancers develop that quality. I remember watching Robert Kovich three years ago, when he was new in Cunningham company. Seeing how steeped he was in the freshness of this way of dancing, he had this amazing back and danced as if he intended to *be* Merce someday. Later there was the uniqueness of his own



Merce Cunningham and Dance Company in "Inlets."

dancing, spellbinding, and quietly, unobtrusively intense, as if he intended to be Robert Kovich someday, as he is now. Chris Komar is like an eagle, strong yet expansive. Louise Burns is light and free despite the bound flow of Cunningham's choreography. She sings when she dances, and it is a joy to watch.

*Expanding Change* Both Torse and *Exchange* (a premiere) had the poetic aura of a vibrant alive painting. The subdued colors of the dancers' tights faded into the stark gray background like the strokes of an impressionist's landscape. *Exchange* was like that too, only more so. The costumes were black leotards faded into gray or muted yellows, red and blue. The backdrop was black, faded—imperceptibly—into gray. Dancers fall into each other's arms or slowly spin together, or are picked up like fragile eggshell. Merce stalks like an alerted deer. Dancers touch each other (in *Inlets* they touch themselves—shoulders, heads, thighs) and quickly run off to complement another's motion. They follow each other's trails and lapse into sustained slow motion. The quickness is still there, but it's kept

more in the background, so that when Merce comes forward creating his own pulsating space, the streaks of color come alive behind him.

He says his dances are based on elements of chance—whatever transpires between dancers and musicians and designs is left to the perception of the viewer. Those moments now appear like pieces of shattered glass falling together, as if someone had made time go backwards.

But then, that's what Cunningham's dances are about.



Merce Cunningham and Dance Company in "Squaregame."

★ ★

## DAVID GORDON PICK UP CO. WITH VALDA SETTERFIELD

By KITTY CULNANE

The bare stage has four blue squares taped to its floor. Two blue metal, folding chairs are placed on the upstage squares just before the performance begins. David Gordon and Valda Setterfield enter, approach the audience. Stoic and smiling, motionless, downstage of the squares, they stand—looking into the audience. In a moment, they return upstage; this time their backs are to the audience as a taped monologue of Mr. Gordon's voice begins.

He describes how his idea for *Chairs* began. He chalked in a grid of twenty-five squares in the hallway of his building. As tenants, deliverymen, guests, entered and left, erasures were made on different sections of the grid. At one point, the janitor surprised him and the entire grid was gone. He remarks at the end how he now finds it difficult to break the habit of sleeping in the hall; it became necessary for him to discreetly observe the motions of the persons incurring erasures.

The dance begins. They slide off the chairs, roll, walk, fall, glide. There is always a connection to the chair. Low movements indicate more complete erasures of the grid, higher movements, less traffic. At one point, the chair is slipped through and over the head, like a piece of clothing; later it is manipulated with the legs, abstractedly. The chair takes on different elemental qualities. One time it appears fluid; other times it is distinctly solid.

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# Entertainmentgame

edited by Cynthia MacGregor

## THE FLIP SIDE

Some songs, it is hoped, are destined to become hits. And then, of course, there's always the other side of the record. **Something** has to go there. Examples of less-promising sounding songs are requested for this ENTERTAINMENT game's entries. Anything is acceptable: disco, C&W, ballad, etc., as long as it sounds like a loser.

"Groundhog Day Rag"

"A World Made of Tinfoil"

"When It's Poison Ivy Season in Penobscot"

"Disco Donkey"

Hopefully, we haven't used any that, unbeknownst to us, really exist! The way things are these days, you never know. Anyhow, let's see the kind of nonsense your fevered brains can turn out. Mail your Flip Side nominations (entries for ENTERTAINMENTgame #7) to Cynthia MacGregor, ENTERTAINMENTgame Editor, P.O. Box 62, Planetarium Sta., New York, N.Y. 10024. Deadline for this game is November 2. As usual, the winners will get record albums. None of the songs above are contained thereon!

...and the winners from ENTERTAINMENTgame #5:

The game: a tongue-in-cheek sampling of events we might expect to see in the new season, on or about the boob tube: The Winners:

A new entry in mid-winter will concern three young schoolteachers in an unnamed

tropical country, on a Peace Corps-type program. They teach kids, and solve local mysteries that come up, as a sideline. Because of the climate, they wear abbreviated clothing. Of course, they are young, trim, and very buxom. The show will be billed as a mystery/comedy/drama. What it really will be is a jiggle show.

—May L. Edwards, Jamaica

Johnny Carson will occasionally host the Tonight Show

—L. Spencer, Brooklyn

And the runners-up:

The shows ENTERTAINMENT's Murray Richards cites as worst in his Jaded Eye column will achieve the highest Nielsen ratings, proving, once again, either something about the general viewing public or something about the validity of the Neilsens, we're not sure which.

—Rose Shaughnessy, Brooklyn

Christmas specials will include a Sonny & Cher & Greg family hour.

—Bill X. Smith, Long Island

All three networks will announce a Second Season, bigger, better, greater and all new. The entries will all look like rehashes of the trash that's showing on the "First Season."

—Mike Riley, NYC

Former President Nixon will make a guest appearance on Let's Make a Deal. An advance copy of his second book will be the zonk behind Curtain Number Three.

—R. Spencer, White Plains

A new entry in the Saturday morning cartoon department will make its bow in January, called "Mork's Cousin Grork Meets Josie and The Pussycats in Outer Space."

—Nate S. Andrews, Philadelphia

## A TOUCH OF TENDER by Sherry SUCH IS LIFE

Old...

Sitting at his grandparents' table that he  
refinished,  
Staring out the windows he put in  
Staring at the locust tree grown  
very old  
within his time.

Watching seasons change  
Feeding birds  
Planting flowers  
Where his wife had them.

Summer, and the house vibrates  
With the shouts and laughter  
And love of grandchildren.  
They leave.  
Silence!

He hears and sees the seasons pass  
outside the window  
Reading—reviewing old pictures,  
new pictures—  
Older—  
Gone.

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The dancers finish the form. They return to their original positions. Mr. Gordon mops his face with a towel; Ms. Setterfield states at the audience. They begin the dance—same form, and yet various movements seem to appear for the first time. Different moments are remembered, intriguing sections from the first set are forgotten.

The third rendition of *Chairs* is accompanied by circus music hummed or sung by the dancers. The innate humor of the piece is markedly heightened by this addition. They finish replete with taped circus music and stand in nearly the same position as originally, but profile. The end.

A group of dancers assemble on the stage. They stand in varied spatial relationships to each other, facing the audience. Certain ones begin to speak, a kind of story, a non-sense story.

Actions accompany the words; each part of the story appears to have its own little action. Soon each dancer is speaking the story, describing the action; the individual's blend and contrast, never quite combining into choral symmetry until the very end, where Hamlet's soliloquy becomes the unifying text for all the dancers, and the piece ends.

Part Three begins with a group of dancers assembled, punctuating a solo Mr. Gordon is performing, with comments one might hear from aspiring dancers watching a master teacher perform. The performers are

not unaware of the satire they are creating, neither is the audience or the performer. He, in fact, has prefaced the piece with another taped monologue describing his ambiguous feelings regarding the ego-reinforcing position that performing a solo necessarily implies.

The solo is performed. The soloist exits. Various members of the group begin performing the solo, at different tempos. Valda Setterfield is left performing the last part of David's solo on the stage—alone. This is how it ends.

Each of the three pieces distinctly express a further step in the evolving process of David Gordon's work. Although *Chairs* always has been and remains my favorite, his new pieces contribute to the intrinsic processes of his early work. The fidelity to a basic mode that evolves, splinters, contrasts and returns, provides a nearly monotonous format that, paradoxically, always remains stimulating.

Mr. Gordon describes this in his cover notes, "I support changes in context, the freedom to re-examine, to alter, to abandon materials or to re-use them for a good laugh at myself and the world. Keeping the options open extends the life span of a work and my interest in it." I will look forward to the next David Gordon performance for its wit, intelligence and humor.

David Gordon/Pick Up Co. with Valda Setterfield, Sept. 26-Oct. 1 at 8 p.m., at the Dance Theater Workshop, 219 West 19th St., New York, N.Y. 10011.

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