

Dance/Tobi Tobias

AT HOME WITH THE GORDONS

“...Two new works: David Gordon’s splendid, witty *Framework*; Peter Martins’s *Réjouissance*, deft but overorganized. . .”

David Gordon’s SPLENDID NEW PIECE, *Framework*, recently performed at D.T.W.’s Bessie Schönberg Theater, concerns itself with matters both abstract and personal, indeed domestic. As usual, Gordon has his Pick Up Co. talk as they move, calling one another by their real first names, and although the script serves first to create verbal-visual puns, one gradually comes to feel one is eavesdropping on the ongoing saga of the dancers’ real-life lives.

This effect of intimacy exposed to the public gaze is intensified by the fact that Valda Setterfield, the silver-haired star of Gordon’s company, is his wife, and acknowledged as such in performance, overtly and covertly. There is nothing quite so bright and well rounded in Gordon’s work as the material he makes for her and the duets he dances with her. In *Framework*, where he also has an important duet with Margaret Hoeffel, we are not at all surprised to hear at another juncture in the script about how the group once visited the Gordons’ place and David and Margaret went into a private huddle and Valda was miffed. David and Valda remain perfectly matched, of course, because their “characters” are complementary: his movements and speech deliberately blunt and matter-of-fact, hers graceful, self-contained, serene.

Setterfield opens *Framework*, quietly doing her daily barre exercises, a study in exquisite solitude. The six members of the ensemble intrude, via an incessantly ringing telephone, whereupon she takes the audience into her confidence with a very funny monologue, delivered deadpan in her soft, British-accented voice, on a private person’s difficulties with people. The theme of privacy returns again and again—Gordon will turn a theme variously to the light as if it were a faceted crystal—most tellingly when we hear each performer recite a fusillade of prying questions he has been

asked. Interestingly, the inquiries that seem most intrusive—offensive, assaultive even—are those not about personal life but about work; you can tell the trapped respondent is an artist.

The more abstract parts of the work have to do, as the title says, with framing. Visiting the Gordons’ establishment, the

back through the frame, escaping into the third dimension like an elusive sylph. The pace of the work is quick and light, like the wit that permeates it, and that easiness contributes a great deal to one’s pleasure.

PETER MARTINS CALLS HIS LATEST WORK for the New York City Ballet *Réjouissance*, after the last of the Bach selections to which it is set: the Suite No. 3 in D Major and, also from the Suite No. 4 in the same key, two bourrées and two minuets. The rejoicing is of the most chaste and formal sort, recalling the final passages of Balanchine’s *Chaconne*, in which serried ranks seem to celebrate in a celestial court. The movement looks, and often is, as simple as can be. Suzanne Farrell (who was princess to Martins’s prince in *Chaconne*) opens the piece by walking forward with a modestly bowed head, then elaborating her dance only with the lift of an arm, the dip of a pliant knee, a grave revolution in arabesque. The footwork throughout the piece is as delicate as that of mountain goats, picking their way through rocky terrain; the partnering is so gracious and reticent, couples hardly seem to touch.

More than ever, Martins displays a masterly sense of organization. He deploys three six-member sets of ladies, grouped according to size and color-coded—small women in white tunics, medium in peach, tall in pale blue. Each party has a ballerina to lead it, respectively Farrell, Lourdes Lopez, and Valentina Kozlova, and each ballerina is matched with a cavalier—Joseph Duell, Leonid Kozlov, Adam Lüders. A supplementary phalanx of six men enters halfway through. The little ensembles, which tend to stick together in groups of three and six, are paraded through every possible permutation, and the soloists interact with them accordingly. This patterning, deft and subtle though it is, and no doubt what Martins hears in the mu-



“The other woman”: Gordon and Hoeffel in *Framework*.

ensemble create the necessary furniture and entries with angled, joined arms. Soon a series of large, empty picture frames is introduced; an individual dancer or a piece of the group action then commands our attention simply because it is focused in the defining rectangle. From skeletal framing, Gordon progresses to solids and three dimensions. Ingeniously angling one frame and a panel that fits it exactly, he and Hoeffel peer ominously at each other across ephemeral architectural structures: windows, sliding and folding doors, rooms, closets, cages, crawl spaces, and looming corridors. When Gordon lovingly frames Setterfield, who is picturesque even in her most pedestrian moments, she slips forward and