

the village VOICE

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Fecundity and Death

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GUS SOLOMONS JR. At Theater of the Riverside Church (November 12 to 16). *Steps #9: Raw Meet* and excerpts from *Con/Text*.

EIKO AND KOMA. At Brooklyn Academy of Music's Lepercq Space (November 18 to 23). *New Moon Stories*.

DAVID GORDON / PICK UP COMPANY. At Brooklyn Academy of Music Opera House (November 19 to 22). *Transparent Means for Travelling Light; The Seasons; My Folks*.

The David Gordon/Pick Up Co.'s season at the Joyce last year worried me. Wanting to admire Gordon's shift to shortish dances and a proscenium stage, I found myself wishing I were back in some loft theater having an intimate, evening-long visit with his elaborate mind and plainly put dancing. Although the new dances were well made, witty, they didn't have the wily charm of the old talking/dancing pieces; neither could you say of them, "David Gordon Conquers Proscenium, One Hand Tied Behind Back!"

Practical considerations—larger audiences, more possible performances and commissions, more money—make performing in traditional theaters desirable. The problem becomes how to change without changing.

Gordon's company's concerts as part of BAM's Next Wave Festival introduced Opera-House Gordon, and I couldn't have been more delighted. He seems to have figured out a lot in a very short time (except, maybe, that three long pieces make a very long evening). I didn't even miss the witty talking—usually such a vital ingredient in Gordon's work. Barring a briskly funny taped monologue by Valda Setterfield about the unpleasant aspects of seasonal change, which acts as a prologue to *The Seasons*, not a word is heard all evening.

The program begins with an ingenious spectacle—an homage to John Cage, three of whose compositions accompany

Transparent Means for Travelling Light. We hear a jumble of sound, and the pit elevator rises slowly to the level of the stage, bearing Gordon (back to us) and uncountable radios and television sets—all playing. When Gordon steps off and walks upstage, an avenue of drops rise two by two, and the flashing, blaring electronic orchestra sinks back down into silence and darkness.

For a while, Dean Moss dances alone on stage, falling a lot, against a backdrop half-colored by yellow light (Robert Seder provided the imaginative lighting). Moss is wearing a skirt, as I remember—one of the ambiguous costumes Gordon favors (these made by Lyn Carroll). During the ensuing trio for Moss, Chuck Finlon, and Valda Setterfield, I note how Gordon has broadened the range of his movement, without yielding to virtuosity or losing his everyday manner, note too how lively and complex his contrapuntal effects are. The section ends with a surprise: an iron pipe is lowered from above and pulled up a way with one, then the other of the men hanging from it.

There are a lot of beguiling events. Other dancers slog on like performing elephants, reaching a hand between their legs to hold the hand of the guy behind, making quite a little dance of stepping over the linked hands. Four men lift Setterfield in fancy ways, while Gordon runs on repeatedly to pull one or the other of them away. They always return to their job, as if they know better than he what this dance is all about. Setterfield skitters through sideways several times—a runaway mosquito. There's a witty, sexy dance for Karen Stokes, Shona Wilson, and I forget which two of the men (Moss, Finlon, Keith Marshall, and Robert Wood), with Gordon and Setterfield dancing in the background with their customary rueful tenderness. At the end,

the drops descend, and Gordon's left alone against a narrow rectangle of yellow.

The dance is elegantly structured, but in a relaxed and confident way. Early Gordon pieces invited you to see how they worked—almost insisted that you do so. This one's underpinnings lie low.

That's true of *The Seasons* too. We begin with summer—dancers spreading airy pieces of white fabric on the stage for an urban rooftop sunbath, couples idly making out. But nothing makes an insistent point; the events blur into each other, float away, rebound off each other with easygoing elasticity. The musical collage by Chuck Hammer is cleverly jokey (three notes of Vivaldi, a snatch of Mendelssohn a velvety voice hymning "Summer in the City" for a split second). Santo Loquasto's filmy add-on costumes keep changing color and style. Gordon and the other splendid performers (Cynthia Oliver and Karen Graham Quinn join this one) take us through autumn and winter (funny, wonderfully simple ice-skating to bombastic snippets from *Les Patineurs*) and spring and back to lazy summer.

My Folks (1984-85) looks very different from the piece I saw at the Joyce. I can't be sure whether Gordon has added or subtracted choreography, but I am sure that his attitude has changed. Was he worried, last year, that the klezmer music, the manipulations of Power Boothe's handsome swags of striped fabric, the steps reminiscent of Russian-Jewish folk dance could be construed as sentimental? Perhaps. So we saw what seemed like endless, studiously cool fabric play. Now we see a subtle, but vibrant postmodern take on a Jewish family party, an anniversary maybe, with Gordon wearily, happily patriarchal and Setterfield the charming, busy-footed hostess-celebrant. ■