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WEEKEND / THEATER, MUSIC

Dance essay gaining steam

David Gordon and his Pick Up Company, part of the Harvard Summer Dance Series, at the Loeb Drama Center, last night through tomorrow.

By MAGGIE LEWIS

ON THE MARK: David Gordon's Pick Up dance company was at the Loeb Drama Center last night, through tomorrow.



"DAVID Gordon's United States" is an ongoing work. Minnesota, New England and San Francisco were heard from when the David Gordon-Pick Up Company danced in Boston last night, but as the work goes on it will gather 28 regions' worth of material, funded by the regions themselves. Then the whole work will be presented at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival in December.

Gordon has always been good at weaving intriguing voices and dancing together. In last night's work, he had several accents — in both sound and meaning — to work with.

Perhaps the best combination of talk and movement was a solo by Valda Setterfield, which opened the evening. She danced to a tape of herself reading another writer's musing on how rural children can't take criticism because they haven't had enough praise. The talk compares a suburban and a rural child being corrected in a piano lesson. The writer wonders how to make the rural child see that the piano teacher isn't just something to defend herself against like piranhas when swimming. Setterfield seemed to be both the piano teacher and the child. She moved expansively in sweeping steps across the stage, bending with a thoughtful look in her eyes when the subject of discipline came up.

Somehow she not only portrayed the ideas, she also made a watcher hope the rural child would discover discipline and through it the joys of Mozart. Then Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 17 in G Major started to play, the stage filled with dancers, and the onlooker was hooked. Disciplined, as it were.

Sometimes the dance and the voice were even more closely paired. A tape of Robert Frost discussing his work was played in three different segments. His voice was mimed as closely as if it had been a song. When he mentioned confusion, the dancers put a hand to their brows. When he mentioned stretching (the reader or a point), they yawned and stretched. When he hemmed, hawed, and repeated himself, they repeated the movement, making his rambling, mumbled words seem as lyrical as his poetry.

Some voices were intrusive. In the San Francisco Segment, the singing styles of Tony Bennett, Carmen MacRae and Judy Garland, crooning that city's praise, were so aggressive the dancers just seemed to be running to catch up with them.

The evening ended with another poetic response to Frost, who discussed revision, saying he far preferred poems that came when he was doing well and didn't have to revise. If it weren't for moments like that, he said, "I'd just stop." At that point the dancers froze.

David Gordon does best when he's working within a solid form.