

THE LAWRENCE DAILY

# JOURNAL-WORLD



Sunday

September 11, 1988

Lawrence, Kansas

152 Pages • Vol. 130, No. 255

50 cents

## Pick Up Company surprises, delights

The David Gordon Pick Up Company concert on Saturday was wonderful and warm-hearted, filling the Crafton-Preyer Theatre stage with ever-shifting images.

The pieces were three sections from the ongoing project, "United States," for which Gordon is creating parts based on various regions, states and cities around the country.

The works were funny and romantic without a trace of sentimentality. "Minnesota," "New England" and "San Francisco" evoked a life in these United States that is various and ever-changing, where people are constantly coming together in support of one another while pursuing their own avenues.

The motion never stops as the ensemble melts into unison movement, which dissolve and re-form, almost imperceptibly. Classical gestures and ordinary movement flow together effortlessly.

**THE DIFFERENCES** between the California city and the Midwest state are ones of geography, of city and country, of time. While not the land of stereotypically sturdy Scandinavians, Minnesota is the land of rural strengths of home and hearth, of rambunctious growing up: Men and women run lightly together, bounding and rebounding in some game.

It is a place to come home to. At the close, Suzanne Weil talked of returning home to Minneapolis, or going to see Garrison Keillor, or attending openings at the Walker Art Center. Valda Setterfield ends the story of an old-time square dance: "I never was the same again." Minnesota people have, she says in words and motion, the "organic capacity to be anywhere and everywhere and always be at home."

The picture of San Francisco is one of an urbane present; of jazzier life, a faster pace. Minnesota is the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra playing Mozart; San Francisco is Carmen McRae, Tony Bennett, synthesizer and jazz as well as Mozart. It is brighter clothes, with baggy pants for the men, loose skirts or pants for the women; in the Midwest, sweats, shorts, overalls are the costume.

**THE DANCERS** of Minnesota are closer, holding one another more firmly by wrists and waists. Three dancers circle in to hug one another while their partners pull them back; the pattern reverses and repeats. In San Francisco they

### Views and reviews

are holding hands, often seeming never to let go. The bodies in San Francisco go faster, too, and are more angular, like Robert Longo's full-length portraits of wind-blown men in suits, arching back and up.

"New England" wove through the works, represented by fragments of a taped talk by Robert Frost, bracketing the two sections and opening and closing the concert.

After the first taped remarks by Frost, the company humorously mimics reactions to the words or reflects his discussion of poetry. He says "no," the dancers shake their heads. On "confusion," they put a hand to their foreheads and mouths drop open (throughout, mouths are nearly as much in motion as the rest of the body). As Frost says, "nothing so composing as composition," the dancers come together for a formal portrait, ending the first half of the concert.

**THE SOLO** dances by Setterfield also gently framed the works. Wearing a white country skirt, Setterfield opened "Minnesota." While a tape of her round, softly British voice read passages by various writers — including Minnesota poet Carol Bly and Meridel LeSueur — she might have been a farm girl wandering dreamily about the country, with curved arms outstretched from the shoulders, her feet ever on the edge of a skip. The voice-over talks of rural life, of how children were raised.

In San Francisco, Setterfield is in bright pink with ruffled flowers; and is more a part of the company. Solo, she breaks into a tap-dance shuffle; her arms are up in strong diagonals.

I thought of the company as players rather than dancers. Their work was at once highly theatrical, but very graceful and natural. They reveled in their moves, making it look easy and playful.

Throughout it all, the players are constantly touching one another, pushing, pulling, lifting each other. Weight is seen but not felt in action and reaction.

On the surface, Gordon pulls no punches. Dancers are in plain view before making entrances. The movement is casual, repeating in endless variations. But it all delights and surprises.

— By Carolyn McMaster  
J-W Arts Editor