

David Gordon company at the Emelin

By Georgette Gouveia

Only about 40 people turned out to see the David Gordon/Pick Up Co. Saturday at Mamaroneck's Emelin Theatre, a shame since the five-member troupe offered a scintillating, thought-provoking program of Gordon's works.

Gordon, who took part in the first performances at New York City's Judson Memorial Church, a hotbed of experimental dance in the early 1960s, is fascinated by how movement, language and music are perceived, either separately or with each other. His works clearly indicate that each of these takes on a different quality when combined or juxtaposed with the others.

This is one of the themes of "Chair." Four small squares marked by fluorescent orange tape form a larger square on the stage floor. A recording of John Philip Sousa's "Stars and Stripes" is heard. The classical piano version of this piece is so dramatic, it sounds more like Tchaikovsky than Sousa.

After the music ends, two dancers enter, carrying brown metal folding chairs. They place the chairs on two of the squares and stand on the squares in front of

them. After a few seconds, they look at each other, twist to the floor and then begin a series of movements involving the chairs. They walk on them, lie on them, slide down them, kick them and put them over their heads, like restless children who don't know what to do with themselves.

The sequence is repeated three times with noticeable variations, including one dancer being replaced before each repeat.

In the last repeat, two dancers sing "Stars and Stripes" without the words. There is something hilarious about two people trying to sing a march, complete with trumpet flourishes, while performing contortions with chairs. It's like running and talking at the same time. But the real revelation in this section is the way the music and the movements are suddenly transformed. The music gives the movements a unity they didn't have before. The rhythm of the up, down, in and out movements and the percussive sound of chairs snapping shut and banging on the floor emphasize the music's drive.

Gordon's pieces work on many different planes. "Chair" is also an unspoken contest where the rules constantly change, much like life.

The first half of the program consisted of three works.

"What Happened" is a brilliant, uproarious piece that points up the rhythm and complexity of language as well as the confusion surrounding eyewitness accounts of traffic accidents. "Close Up," which juxtaposes rock and Chopin, acrobatic couplings and tender embraces, has an erotic, photographic quality.

In "Dorothy and Eileen," two women act out a competitive mother-daughter relationship as they describe their mothers' jealousy towards them.

Gordon, his wife, Valda Setterfield, Susan Eschelbach, Margaret Hoeffel and Keith Marshall performed expertly, which isn't easy to do when you are moving and at the same time reciting texts that do not necessarily make sense in a traditional way.

The dancers had an arresting stage presence. Gordon, with his straight black hair, mustache and intense eyes, and Ms. Setterfield, with her fine features and bobbed white hair, looked like '30s movie stars.

The dancers' loose-fitting pants and shirts, in an odd assortment of stripes, were attractive and ideal for movement.