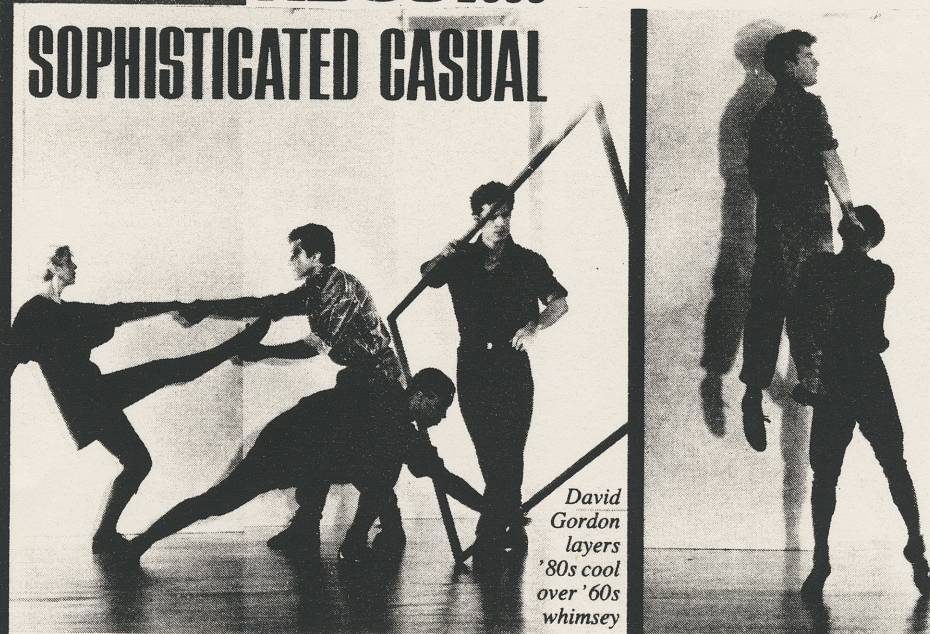


VOGUE

**PEOPLE
ARE
TALKING
ABOUT...**

DANCE ...

SOPHISTICATED CASUAL



David
Gordon
layers
'80s cool
over '60s
whimsey

It still seems like a wild idea for both the American Ballet Theater and the Dance Theater of Harlem to have invited choreographer David Gordon to make new pieces for them this winter, even with so many of Gordon's fellow avant-gardists now creating for ballet companies (Twyla Tharp for the New York City Ballet, Laura Dean for the Joffrey, Lucinda Childs for the Pacific Northwest Ballet). Gordon, forty-eight, is more associated than any of his colleagues with the exaggerated casualness of the great 'sixties dance revolution—the idea that raw and whimsical life can be transmuted instantly into art. He was a key member of that glamorous, improvisatory collective, the Grand Union, and his own work reproduces its vision of a seemingly random combination of dancing, clowning, recitation, and real-life “scenes” played out in deadpan. How, even his loyal audience wonders, will he be able to convert his nonchalant chamber style into opera-house scale work for ballet dancers?

The answer lies in Gordon's most recent pieces, which open up to show what may be going on beneath the casual surface. Gordon's evening-length *Framework* (done in 1983) ostensibly described a dance company's chaotic and intimate rehearsal life. There were phones ringing and dancers traipsing through what was clearly supposed to be the home of the choreographer and his wife. But the imaginary life of the company was also given its due. In Gordon's

duet with his wry dancer Margaret Hoeffel, the two manipulated a life-sized frame and a sliding panel in a thousand ingenious ways, generating clear, troubling images: a man waiting in a doorway; a woman closing herself inside—figures in a half-suggested story. And this duet was echoed in another longer one for Gordon and his elegant wife and partner, Valda Setterfield, in which the empty frame, held and twirled by Gordon, was articulated by Setterfield's classical poses within it. Gordon has invented a style that layers a seemingly spontaneous surface over a more controlled subtext, reaching into what T.S. Eliot called “the logic of the imagination.”

In a sense, Gordon's choreographic career has proceeded backwards. He hasn't built his pieces on dance steps. Instead, he has used shifting theatrical color or mood as his organizing principle. But that principle requires the authority of a choreographer, the single most difficult thing for Gordon's anti-formalist, anti-hierarchical generation to accept about making dances. Gordon has used his suave and mournful-looking self onstage to thoroughly examine the role of the choreographer *vis à vis* his dancers. In his wry, ironic acceptance of this role, he has brought himself back, with his avant-garde idiom intact, to the classical enterprise of a Balanchine or a Martha Graham. Having got his onstage human equations straight, now he can go on to make dancing—for any-sized company, for any kind of dancer.

—ELIZABETH KENDALL

CHRIS CALLIS