(BAM), they connected four separate pieces into a mesmerizing integrity – Night Tide (1984), Beam (1983), Shadows (commissioned last year by BAM), and Elegy (1984). The settings were spare: a narrow shelf of dark floor; a blocky ridge constructed from a support, a tarpaulin, and drizzled earth. Late, an inch of water is added, giving the floor a glassy brilliance. Costumes are of two sorts: Painted rags reminiscent of familiar garments (pedal pushers, a kimono), or, for the sections in total nudity, attentive lighting by their longtime lighting designer Blu, their only other collaborator.

One can quickly summarize the action. In Night Tide, one of the nude pieces, performers are at opposite ends of the stage. They lift their haunches so that their backs assume the shape of a tumescent plant or phallus; then the people emerge from the illusion, embrace quite chastely, and part.

In Beam (on the ridge), we see Koma, and scrambling up into view in painful slow-motion, eventually Eiko; he elevates her in his arms; she reaches upward enigmatically, and slides backward until she trickles away from him out of sight, leaving him solitary.

In Shadows, essentially a solo turn for Eiko – a world class performer, the real star of the pair – we see her advancing, trembling, in a gown; as Koma appears nude in the spectral air behind her she lowers herself in an amazing continuity of distortions to the ground and spreads her entire body open, her weight balanced on a point in her lower spine and the outside of two toes; he reaches her, encircles her waist with one arm and her throat with another; impossible as it sounds, she relaxes without losing shape in his arms.

In Elegy (nude) the two lie at opposite ends of the stage, they attempt to rise, to turn; grow still. Each "story" comes with a bit of characteristic sound at a diplomatic decibal level – crickets, bubbling liquid, chiming bells. About mid-way through, as Eiko is straightening her body from a doubled-over position, unpeeling the flesh of her chest from that of her thighs, she glances out from her new erect vantage point and screams. It's a short, harsh message and, thanks to its timing, an utterly terrifying one, too.

I would never have believed that the art of this couple could be taught, but their trio for CoDanceCo, Broken Pieces, persuades me that it can. Given its premiere during the company's performances at Dance Theater Workshop (October 17, 19, 23-26), Broken Pieces featured CoDanceCo members Nancy Duncan, Danielle Shapiro, and Eileen Thomas: it made all of them look transparently beautiful, elastic, and mysterious. In fact, it made them look like different dancers from any other piece in which they appeared.

The plot is the familiar meeting/parting, but with three women – one taller than the others – the images acquire a new dimension of sorority and maternity. At one early moment, an act of stretching causes their breasts to escape their pink bandeau tops, and the unexpected appearance of the nipples has the effect of a child's magic trick, expertly performed. Broken Pieces is the first work Eiko and Koma have made for another group – the first, one hopes, of a series.

The CoDanceCo season was filled with thoughtful work – by Ralph Lemon, Charles Moulton, Susan Marshall, Bebe Miller – but only about half had theatrical power over its entire length, like Broken Pieces. All the pieces were responsibly presented, but few of them pleasantly.

The dancers are sleek and fleet, but they move as if they feel they should be slightly ahead of where they are – they don't seem at one with their choreography. The dancers' upper bodies especially are stiff, and no one has full freedom of the upper back and neck. Their intelligence comes across more fully than their dancing.

Mindy Aloff

New York (USA)

New Works by David Gordon

It has been fascinating so watch the development of David Gordon's work in recent years – his entry into the world of bigtime ballet (two works for American Ballet Theatre, one for Dance Theater of Harlem) and the accompanying changes in the nature and presentation of his works for his own Pick-Up Co. Two years ago, the group had never performed in a New York City venue larger than Dance Theater Workshop, and the offhanded intimacy of its presentations were part of its charm. Last November found the Pick-Up Co. performing in the vast, elegant Brooklyn Academy of Music Opera House – a radical change of venue, yet one to which Gordon adapted with skill and invention.

As was already evident from his May 1985 season at the Joyce Theater, Gordon has to a large extent forsaken his devotion to verbal dexterity to concentrate more exclusively on the physical. Now that a large number of his artistic progeny are filling lofts with text-oriented dances, he has moved on to a different approach. There is a subdued virtuosity at work in his recent pieces – not in terms of any blatant bravura in the dancing so much as in the dexterity of the groupings and the cooperative joint endeavors. He can be kinetically deft and witty in the same subdued manner he once played nimble games with his texts.

Gordon's works reveal a restraint and honesty; they retain an informal charm and there are still flashes of an affectionately humorous tone. They avoid the artificial; even the showier moments – such as Valda Setterfield's fleet-footed, frisky solo in My Folks – are presented in a matter-of-fact way. When they are less successful, the pieces can verge on dryness. But Gordon is astute in his choice of collaborators – notably the designers Power Boothe and Santo Loquasto – and brings an increasingly keen theatrical sense to his work.

He made brilliant use of the Opera House's expansive stage facilities in Transparent Means for Travelling Light, a dark and quirky new piece first seen at Harvard last summer. From his ironic showstopper of an entrance – rising up through the orchestra pit on a platform laden with television sets and other electronic apparatus, but with his back to the audience and his moment-of-arrival flourish nothing more than a mundane walk upstage – he arranges the stage, stripped of its wings, into layers and segments through crafty, exciting use of drops and lighting.

Accompanied by three John Cage sound assemblages (two older ones plus another commissioned for this work), the dancers engage in lively physical banter, often suggesting competition or muted hostility. The dark and deliciously decadent costumes by Lyn Carroll – a mixed bag of raggy garments, garters and odd leggings – add to the strange, disorienting atmosphere. The businesslike nature of the activity does not hide its somewhat jarring nature. Dean Moss grabs hold of a horizontal pipe as it rises into the air and dangles from it lazily. Setterfield is manipulated by four men in what looks like a slowed-down version of the "Choleric" section of Balanchine's Four Temperaments while Gordon (mostly an outsider and onlooker during this piece) keeps appearing to yank one of the men offstage, only to have his efforts ignored as the dancer immediately returns to his place. Meanwhile, Setterfield continues to go through her paces blithely, oblivious to whether she has four partners or one at any given moment.

As the piece continues along its intriguing, puzzling way, the stage picture changes shape and focus as drops fly in and out and dramatic lighting shifts are employed. The final apotheosis has Gordon suddenly hemmed in as the expansive, open stage is abruptly cut down by extended wings flying in on both sides. Soon only a small upstage area is left visible, with Gordon standing within a pool of brilliant yellow light.

The Seasons, a brand new work, was a rambling, affectionate assemblage of images and sounds associated with the annual cycle. It opened with a clever, elegantly phrased monologue in which Setterfield delivered her dry, perspicacious points of view on the various seasons. The dancers then wafted through an extended vignette of summer indolence, accompanied by Chuck Hammer's dense sound collage, studded with such musical reference points as "Summer in the City", "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Summertime." In due course, we were given autumn, winter and spring, with appropriate layered variations in Santo Loquasto's adaptable filmy costumes (a wittier and more interesting assortment than he came up with for Jerome Robbins' The Four Seasons).

The piece was amiable, but too low-key and diffuse for its own good – especially when placed at the end of a fairly lengthy evening. its most memorable moment came during the winter section, when Gordon and Setterfield slowly, cautiously, almost effortfully high-stepped along a repeated circular path accompanied by the brisk, jaunty strains of Meyerbeer's music for Les Patineurs. Always capable of conjuring up an underlying poignancy through the simplest of means, Gordon and Setterfield here suggested the sadness of recalling youthful vigor from an older, wearier vantage point, of being left out of more vigorous and hardy activity. Nonetheless, exiled into their private world apart, they evoked a contentment and calm satisfaction.

The highpoint of the nicely contrasting program was the revised version of My Folks, Gordon's inventive and exhilarating tribute to his Jewish forbears set to Klezmer music. While it is difficult to identify just what Gordon has altered in this piece, it felt more elegantly structured and clearly focused. Witty and touching, evoking a sense of family through ritual as well childlike playfulness, My Folks, picking up on the somber as well as the wild aspects of the music, is a terrific, enriching experience, paying homage to a specific tradition and at the same time touching universal chords.

Susan Reiter

New York (USA)

Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane at the BAM

Though the dance segment of the 1986 Next Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music started off with the almost impossibly high standard of Merce Cunningham's marvelous Roaratorio, it continued, over its three month duration, to show dance work of consistently high quality, with compelling creations by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Mark Morris, Eiko and Koma, and, to a slightly lesser extent, David Gordon. But, while, there were also some real low spots – a messy, misfire from Michael Clark and a monument to theatrical incompetence by Molissa Fenley, the absolute nadir of the festival, and arguably of contemporary dancing today, was the final dance event presented by BAM. Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane & Company's presentation (December 3-6, 1986) of The Animal Trilogy contrasted with Cunningham's Roaratorio as agony does to ecstacy.

Carryings on in the guise of original dance work are not new to the contemporary dance scene. Louis Falco did this kind of thing in the early 70s and Jennifer Muller did her version, somewhat worse than Falco's, during the late 70s. Now Jones/Zane are supplying the 80s with a related kind of awfulness. The elements consistently involved here are seemingly rigorous motions in the name of strict dance invention, and seemingly outré trappings in the name