

## DANCE REVIEWS

By SUSAN REITER

David Gordon, at the American Theatre Laboratory, 219 West 19th Street. (closed).

The works presented by David Gordon contained many of the elements associated with the more "avant garde" choreographers. He used distinctly unpretty, workmanlike movement, and his dancers often spoke, or stood still for long periods of time. But Gordon projects such sincerity and friendliness that somehow his work seems to invite the audience in rather than push them away with intellectual high-handedness. Gordon is certainly clever; he is also frequently mocking and downright charming—the charm is sometimes a calculated aspect of his stage persona.

The program notes he supplied for the ATL performances emphasized his interest in "changes in context" and the reuse of material in new ways. The works on the program all evidenced this interest, since each had evolved from an earlier work.

"Chair" (formerly "Chair—Alternatives 1 through 5") was a duet for Gordon and Valda Setterfield. As performers, they complement each other wonderfully. He looks slightly befuddled, almost goofy, as if he is constantly being surprised by what he finds himself doing, while she is earnest, dispassionate, almost diabolically calm.

In "Chair," which opens with a florid piano recording of "Stars & Stripes Forever," they entered in brightly-colored outfits which made them look like they were ready for soccer practice. They stood very still, staring at the audience, until the music ended. Then they seemed to begin the dance, but soon paused up-stage with their backs to the audience, while Gordon's voice on tape described with dry humor the elaborate process he used to create the dance.

When they started to move again, this time to begin the dance proper, each launched into marvelous, extended side-by-side solos which were more duets with chairs, performed in silence. They worked in canon, Setterfield a few beats behind Gordon. The solo took them through what must be every possible way of arranging a human body on, in, under, around and through an everyday folding chair. The movement was absolutely continuous, one position blending right into the next, and they performed it with an air of almost haphazard nonchalance.

They both reached the conclusion, walked downstage, towelled off their faces and stood still in the places where they had begun. A second version of the movement sequence followed, most of which looked similar to the first version but often wasn't. Setterfield inserted a hesitating, back-and-forth indecision at certain points, while Gordon proceeded calmly and methodically.

For the third and final version, both performers "la-la"ed their way through "Stars and Stripes Forever" for the entire duration of the movement. It was funny on a

# David Gordon Inviting The Audience In



David Gordon in *Not Necessarily Recognizable Objectives*

basic level—the dance took on a very absurd aura—but also funny in the different ways they vocalized. Gordon was rather off-key and sloppy, enthusiastically trying to reproduce bombastic orchestral effects in appropriate places. Setterfield, maintaining her resolute calm, was musical,

even lyrical. When they finished, they stood facing sideways while a full band recording played the tune.

Gordon's new work, "What Happened," uses seven women and evolved from solo material originally used as part of "Wordsworth and the Motor." The performers

—Setterfield, Jane Comfort, Susan Eschelbach, Irene Grainger, Margaret Hoeffel, Molly McGuire and Christina Svane, wore demure white outfits. The work consisted of narrative fragments which they delivered with overly literal movement accompaniment. It was difficult to focus

on more than one or two of them at a time, so one could not be sure if they were telling parts of the same story. Certain fragments appeared frequently, and occasionally several of the performers would work in unison, then drift back to their separate paths.

Without being able to follow the narrative line continuously, one could still realize that rather than proceeding along purely logical lines, the narrative often took off on a new path based on the double meaning of a word. Logic became less and less of an element, particularly when at one point all seven women were intoning the "to be or not to be" speech from Hamlet, complete with lumbering, angular moments.

"Mixed Solo," the final work, followed "What Happened" without a pause. An excerpt from Gordon's clever, fascinating work from last spring, "Not Necessarily Recognizable Objects," it stands up very well on its own. Gordon's concept here was to perform a deliberately pedestrian, unfinished-looking solo while the other performers undercut his presumably egocentric intentions with dry, haughty, and often hilariously on target commentary. On second viewing, it was almost as interesting to observe the commentators, who did an expert job of sounding distant and disdainful, as it was to watch Gordon's self-admitted "shy boyishness" as he stepped into the spotlight. After he finished, the solo was repeated by Setterfield, Martha Roth, Stephanie Woodard and James McConnell. Taking it at different speeds and using the space in individual ways, they revealed more possibilities and varied qualities. Whereas in their earlier roles as mock-critics they had voiced doubt as to whether Gordon knew what he was doing, their subsequent interpretations of the material showed he most certainly did.