

REVIEW

# Gordon, dance company pick it up

By Julie McLeod

**D**avid Gordon has fully returned to the field of dance, as evidenced by his concert with his Pick Up Company at UCSB's Campbell Hall recently under the auspices of Arts and Lectures.

The post moderns in the early '60s rebelled against the rigid modern techniques of the Graham, Limon and Humphrey era (remember when they rebelled against the rigid ballet?) In their rebellion, they stood still and used minimal and pedestrian movements and played with props and dialogue and slides.

Now, after all of that exploration and finding themselves, they are one by one returning to pure dance as their mode of expression — Laura Dean, Paul Taylor, Trisha Brown and David Gordon. They are also choreographing for big ballet companies . . . it's the hottest item to have post moderns in the ballet repertory.

There has been a distillation. Gordon's movement is lovely and free. It flows with momentum. Energy subsides into nothingness from wild phrases of motion. Dancers perform movement phrases in their own breath timing, rarely coinciding with another. Sometimes one's eye doesn't know where to go, there is so much kaleidoscopic action going on, like everyone talking at once. Your eyes rest on one dancer, then flit to another until they connect in a rare unison section, or disappear. It is all part of the internal timing of each piece. Even the unison portion has variations of individuality from dancer to dancer. They are not the faceless dancers of the ballet corp.

All three works in this performance were similar in structure and length. They were set to collaged music, pieces strung together, artfully, by Chuck Hammer.

"The Seasons" was danced in white. Summer had them in "undies," skimpy leotards and white jazz shoes. As the piece developed, layers of more white were added through the winter section and stripped again to the summer. The piece seemed to be a reflection of Valda Setterfield (Gordon's wife). A large cloth was laid on the floor for her to sunbathe on. Motion slowed in the hot summer white light. A gauze draped dancer was slowly carried across the stage on another's back as a vision in the heat. The score was breathtaking, with mandolins tinkling above a scratchy base, shifting into old popular renditions of "Autumn in New York" cacophoniously juxtaposed against Nat King Cole singing "Autumn." The dancers whirled and stood, time-suspended, in handstands.

Winter, in the dimmer lights, had each dancer holding a large gauzy panel, looking like winter angels traversing the stage. Gordon, with Setterfield, took reaching, deliberate steps on a long trek. The piece wound its way back to summer again.

"Four Man Nine Lives" was a zany dance for four men. Dressed preposterously in striped pants, too long plaid shirts, vests, wide ties and hats, they got more mileage out of a folding chair than actually exists. They flipped and flopped, leaped into the air to fall

soundlessly into the floor, played tricks on each other (grab the chair before they sit — fall.), sat on each other's knees, tossed each other in the air . . . you name it. It had a feel of the old silent movie kind of comedy . . . deadpan, slapstick, falling down, but dearly underplayed. Even the music was a giggle . . . "Back in the Saddle Again" and "Tumbling Tumbleweeds."

"My Folks" had a rich depth. It was a tribute to Gordon's Jewish family with the qualities and style of Chassidic dance. Open arms were held in a high curve, knees lift with flexed feet. The dance seemed to come from an internal energy. The music was the Klezmer band, a group which has

made a contemporary hit out of the Eastern European Jewish music of the last century. Gordon carried his prop involvement through with the visual designs of Power Boothe in the form of large pieces of striped fabrics in reds, blacks and whites. They served as canopies, garments, items to roll up or twist into, as garlands between two people. They became barges to haul dancers down the Nile, or at the end, layered out to drape a delightful family portrait. A section with Gordon and Setterfield used a single panel to connect a couple in their dance through life together, evoking images of a Jewish marriage canopy or a bedspread.

The costuming was wonderful.

it looked like it came from Second Avenue second hand stores, all in black, with wonderful textures of satin, lace and taffeta. The men wore long pants and dresses. The effect was both logical and ludicrous. The use of thematic material was in no way literal, but was filtered and distilled to essences.

The three pieces had a sameness of structure and timing and were all constructed (Gordon chooses to construct, not choreograph) within the last few years. It would have been a nice balance to include some of his earlier post-modern work.

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David Gordon and his Pick Up Company use pure dance as their mode of expression.