



(Staff Photos by Stephanie Harvin)

David Gordon/Pick Up Company rehearses for performance.



Gordon (right) coaches Valda Setterfield.

David Gordon Spurns Theory

By JAMES A. MARTIN
Post-Courier Reporter

There is no message, no theme, no theory in the works of the David Gordon/Pick Up Company, according to its artistic director.

"I have no theory," says David Gordon, 46, when asked to describe his dance company. "And if I knew what type (of dancing) it was, then I would only be making the dances I made last year."

"I'm not interested in classifying it, I'm interested in doing it and letting other people classify it if that's their business. It's not my business."

It's all very uncomplicated, Gordon says of his work. "There is no kind of message. I start a piece of work, we work on it, I end it, I present it. It's that simple."

Some critics and observers have tagged his work "avant-garde" and "post-modern." Others, says Gordon, have simply classified it as "no good."

Clearly, it is not traditional. His six dancers walk, run, flop across the stage, play musical chairs and roll over one another in a criss-cross, repetitive pattern of dialogue and movement.

"But Gordon is at heart a vaudevillian, a weaver of yarns, a composer of riddles, a magician confounding expectations," one critic wrote after a Pick Up Company performance at the Smithsonian.

The New York-based company was formed in 1980 almost by accident, according to its founder. "I didn't really form this company," Gordon says. "I formed something called a 'pick up' company, which was going to allow me to work with new people all the time and when I finished a project, the other people would go away and then new people would come for the next project."

"Then, these people all said they wanted to stay and so this pick up company isn't a pick up company. It is, in fact, a group of people that I work with quite regularly."

Gordon says he doesn't choreograph a work, he "constructs" it. "I say I construct it, put it together. I don't call it choreography partly because I don't call what I do dancing."

"Sometimes," he adds, "ideas start in your head like ideas about anything else, and you go into the studio to work on those ideas and some other ideas come along and displace them entirely. Sometimes you go into a studio without an idea in your head and there you all are together and you say, 'Well, why don't we form a line?'"

Gordon often appears in his own works. "It depends upon the work," he says. "Sometimes, the piece is complicated enough that it's hard to be both in it and put it together, so I take myself out. But I'm generally in some percent of it."

In a program note, Gordon writes that his work often consists of collage. When asked about this, he explains that a new piece might contain bits and particles of past performances.

To use his analogy: "It's like if you have a plant, and you take some shoots off the plant and put them in some other pot of water and it starts to grow roots and it starts to make some more plants."

It is important to adapt a work around the space in which it is to be performed, Gordon believes. "We performed at the Smithsonian, and the stage is sort of shaped like a rowboat and there's a lot of things you can't do on a stage like that."

"I pick out the things that function best for a space — sometimes it means turning something around, something that has been done by two couples into a situation where it is only done by one couple. I try to keep the work as flexible as it can be so that we can function in as

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Pick Up Company Takes Dance Back To Greek Roots

By SUSAN ELLENBAST EARLE

REVIEW

The David Gordon/Pick Up Company opened Thursday night to an initially interested audience at the Garden Theatre. Gordon, a choreographer with a revolutionary cause, is taking dance back to its roots in Greek theater where the spoken word is included and intertwined into his dance works. This creates a picture that strikes the audience with a humorous effect that requires additional concentration, not only by his Pick Up Company when combined with movement, but also by the audience.

This dance experience is performed with finesse and precision and, even though the works are lengthy and redundant, the energy and the style designated by Gordon to look much like natural movement are sustained throughout the performance. Valda Setterfield, an immigrant from London in 1958, is

the pivotal point of the company. Gordon utilizes her cool and floating adagio style, a direct contrast to the energetic other performers.

The major work on the concert is "TV Reel," (1982), a 45-minute pun on television set to music: "Call the Uh-Oh Squad," by Robert Ellis Orrall, "Millers Reel," conducted by Gunther Schuller, and "This Time," by John Cougar. The work is an accumulation of what Gordon has been doing for the last six years. It is a history of the Pick Up Company, a day-to-day account through movement in which the dancers are constantly interrupted by chance entrances and exits and changes in environment. For example, the "Where's Susan?" section of

"T.V. Reel" begins with Setterfield instructing each dancer where to stand. The question is answered, "In California," but she is off in the wings.

Next we hear about Keith and Susan's relationship. Then we watch Susan circle her love. Margaret enters and hugs Keith. "Uh-Oh!" remarks Valda, "She loves him, too?" The piece fits together like a puzzle, leaving the audience never sure when the last clue will be put in place with words covering movements covering words. All seven dancers are distinct real-life personalities.

Unfortunately, none of the actors appears to be well-trained as a dancer. Each set of circumstances is theme/variations and seems not fully developed, which leaves the audience hoping for any new initial movements. The use of the square-dance reel and fall/recovery are so overused that the message of human relationships gets lost.

The second piece performed, "Changing Horses," (1983), is another "post-modern" (post-mortem?) work. Not only are the costumes (clothing) apparently purposely unattractive, but the monotonous voices and clipped phrases, not to mention the continual heel-to-toe pedestrian foot movements, make this exercise quite boring. The performers looked at the floor continuously, and the dancers seemed more concerned with their next movements than with carrying out the motion in progress. With the exception of Susan Eschelbach, I have seen more interesting, more graceful "pedestrians" at the county fair. If Gordon's life and work are as inseparable, perhaps he should see himself and his life and work as they really are ... boring and repetitious.

(Susan Ellenbast Earle is a dance professor at the University of South Carolina.)