

Small, Linda



Valda Setterfield and David Gordon in Gordon's *What Happened*. See a review on page 106. (Photo: David Fullard)

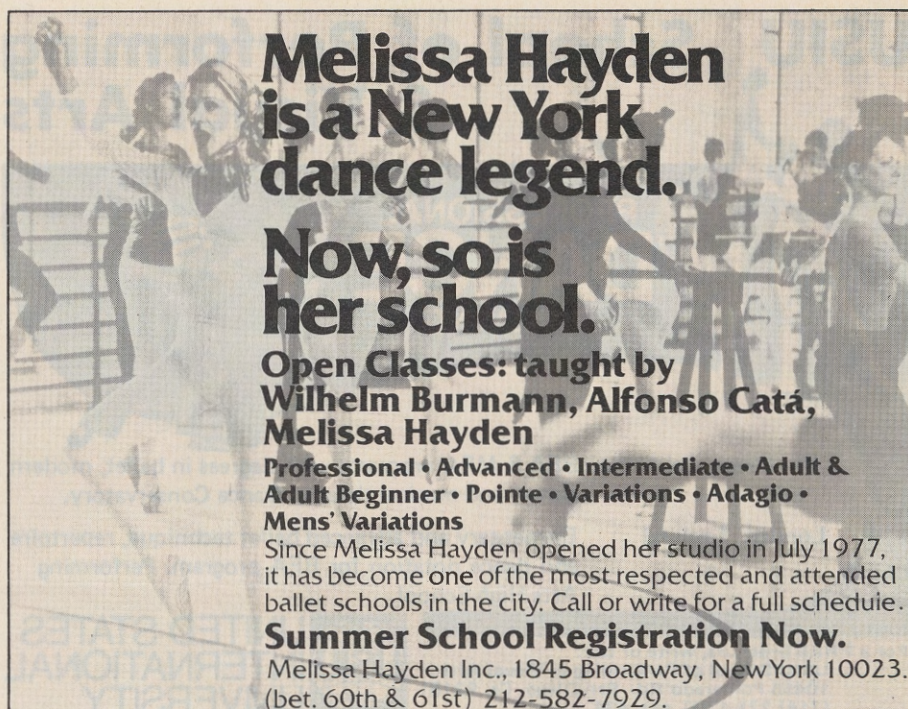
But elsewhere he depicts character tellingly, contrasting in *Bullfight*, for example, a self-congratulatory matador and a shy bull, and in *Central Park* a whole cast of strollers.

Kudrov's particular contribution is to go beyond adeptness in character portrayal, and the illusionism of French classical mime, to a sense of gravity's inexorable pull as a metaphor for the tragic view of life. By his own route he has arrived at one of the basic tenets of the great modern dance pioneers.

Lois Bewley's "Informal Concerts: New Works," at the American Theatre Laboratory, September 6-10, with American Ballet Theatre's William Carter as guest artist, was dominated by a fin-de-siècle kind of literary romanticism, with its attraction to death and decadence. Bewley often looked like an Aubrey Beardsley character, all wisps and tendrils. In *Three Songs of Henri Duparc*, she wandered around, looking down and waving her arms while singing. At the end she removed her elaborate kimono and drew it over her like a shroud. In *Covenant* she did a Juliet-and-the-poison, attraction-and-fear dance around a knife.

Carter, who, with Bewley, was a founding member of the First Chamber Dance Quartet, gave to the concert his customary warmth and dignity, imbuing all his movements with significance. In the solo Bewley made for him, *Letters from Composers*, he conveyed spacious, solitary surroundings in his broad gestures as Chopin, the weight of his sorrow as Schubert, and joyous love in his soaring runs as Schumann.

In their duets, Carter's generosity as a partner never failed. *Six Dances* (Schumann), however, was supposed to be windswept, but the choreography was cramped and sketchy. This was the only piece with Bewley on pointe, and her technique looked careless. *Close Encounters*, the one satiric piece on the program, fared bet-



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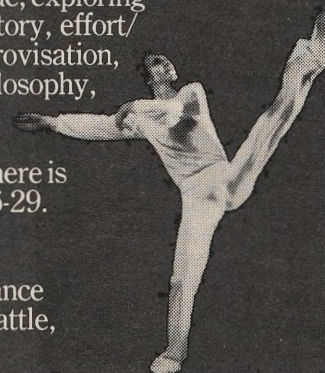
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dience whooped at the derring-do, but I was turned off by the readiness with which they cheered this superficial portrayal of these two suicides.

Most of us know **Robert Small** (no relation to this writer) from the Murray Louis Dance Company. Lean and sinuous, he is a performer of astonishing flexibility. His own choreography (shown at American Theatre Laboratory, September 14-17), although uneven, reveals him to be intelligent and full of humor, if somewhat diffident.

A new work, *Variation On A Place/with Themes*, follows the short, rolling beats of Maureen Wiley's piano piece. For all the eccentricities of his movement style—clearly an inheritance of Louis-Nikolais, a combination of nonhuman bonelessness, sharp reflexes, and sharper imagination—he is always responsive to music. With self-consciousness, one peers into *Fascia, Solo*, and *Variations*, windows on private spaces from which the engaging choreographer/performer never looks out.

The *Bach to Bach* duet with Diane Boardman is slightly more open—a nice, sunny dance which borrows from the structure of a classical ballet pas de deux. *I'm Confessin'*, which Small made with Diane Elliot, follows the progress of a cute mating dance—she, worried, contentious, always looking for the nearest escape hatch; he, clinging—to Thelonius Monk's light-handed versions of tunes like "These Foolish Things." These two works, though warm, are not as probing as Small's solos.

The new *Minerva* reveals nothing more than Small's talent for mime. As a wizard, he unwittingly infuses life into Margo Allman's sculpture of the goddess of wisdom, a pale, broadly-carved stone face atop a conical form. It glows pinkish, orangey, or bluish-green—with lighting—as the panicky wizard attempts to undo his work. Eventually, he becomes her oracle and goes mad, drawing the spirit out of the stone—now stark white—and into himself for a short while, a communion that is quite a bit like love.

David Gordon, of **David Gordon/Pick Up Co.**, with his interchangeable, evolving dances, his healthy sense of humor about himself, and his "not necessarily recognizable objectives," is one of the easiest of conceptual choreographers to take. It would appear that Gordon doesn't view his ideas or their products with didactic seriousness. Performed at American Theatre Laboratory, September 26-October 1, *What Happened* is not exactly new; it has its roots in *Wordsworth and the Motor* where it was a solo, first, then a duet. Lately, as a group work, it is spilling over into *Mixed Solo* (where Pick Up Co., gently but deftly, lampoons Gordon the choreographer and performer, among other things—such as dance critics.) You see how it is—constantly shifting, never settling. Gordon wishes his dances a long, interesting life.

What Happened involves a story, or maybe a few stories, the pieces of which are entrusted to several storytellers—the dancers—who tell it in scrambled and repeated phrases, gestures, and sign language. The sounds of the street—motors and car horns—which open the piece, establish the aural urbanscape.

Women in white sports clothes tell about what may be a traffic accident and its aftermath. Or a few accidents. And what's this about a monkey? And Hamlet's monologue? It gets so that one waits for certain words and gestures to be shuffled around and come out on top again. Because the story tellers are moving more or less at once, this is a Silly Symphony of a story. Just as soon as you think you can piece it all together—and, for a while, that does seem to be a rational thing to do—one dancer or another will cacle weirdly (the sound, a pun, to accompany the word "which") and put the whole thing into absurd, and delightful, perspective.

Romantic, semitropical Louisiana, with its mixture of cultures, was Marleen Pennison's childhood home. In her "Short Stories from the South" (shown at the American Theatre Laboratory, October 5-7), **Marleen Pennison and Dancers** present slices of universal life within this lush setting. Pennison's French Quarter tourists (*Fat Monday*), children at play (*River Road Sweet*), and even the neighborhood eccentric (*Porch Song*) are simply people having a good time, each in his or her characteristic way, and they could be doing it anywhere.

It is music that creates the atmosphere of the region—Cajun folk songs, Creole ballads, and black jazz. In *Hurricane Warning*, the music lures three people (Pennison, Peter Bass, and Thomas Wilkinson) from the task of securing their house against the hurricane that is headed for Louisiana's vulnerable coast. Music lifts them out of their situation, if only briefly, for a good-natured raucous dance, before the storm closes in.

In *Tante Jeanne*, Pennison knits quietly in her darkish, Victorian room, tapping out a ladylike rhythm while a funeral procession and band, playing black and blue dirges to the cemetery, red hot jazz on the way back, passes in the street outside her drawn venetian blinds. It is safe for Tante Jeanne to concentrate on a rhythm that evokes some pleasant memory, unsafe for her to give herself over to the outpouring of emotion expressed by the music of the street band. In Pennison's entertaining and thoughtful dances, the music is everywhere. Happily or unhappily, it touches the lives of everyone.

Bill Vanaver, Livia Vanaver, and their company of musicians and dancers, the **Vanaver Caravan** (American Theatre Laboratory, October 12-15) take us from the American South to thirteenth-century European courts to villages of the Caucasus. Some of their material is inspired by the Vanavers' travel, some by their contact with immigrants here in the United States. The troupe is on more stable ground when it presents traditional music than when it creates dances around this wonderful music. Livia Vanaver's dances (here, *Run Carrot Run/Kopanitsa*, *Don't Blink*, and *Ladies' Court Dances*) are pleasant but inconclusive. Yet, there is nothing tentative about the company's passionate renditions of ethnic music and song—in native languages and accents—and the joy they bring to, say, traditional clog dancing.

Happily, a new work by Livia Vanaver, *The Earth Will Have Its Own*, has been well produced and attractively costumed. Perhaps

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