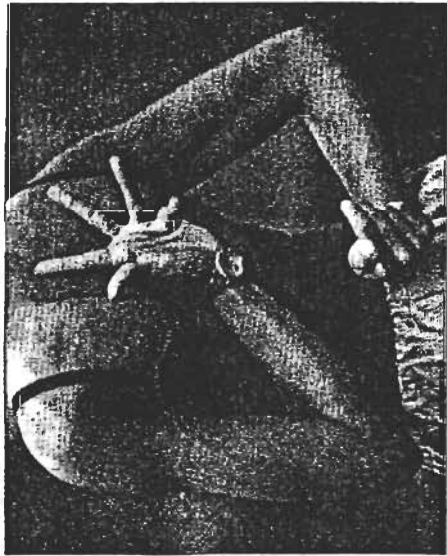


LIVING & ARTS

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GOOD SIGN: Renna Hidalgo, a New World School of Arts Junior, expresses herself in dance during a rehearsal.

A moving Experience

Dance changed David Dorfman's life. Now, he's trying to use it to do the same for others.

BY JORDAN LEVIN
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David Dorfman is not someone you'd pick out in a crowd as a dancer. At 44, he's balding and chunkily — if solidly — built.

A business major in college, he had his first job as a management consultant. In high school he played baseball, and though he wanted to dance, he didn't dare.

"I was a jock who wanted to try out for West Side Story, but I was afraid I would fail or it would mean I wasn't a 'real guy,'" he says. "So I played in bands and was the class clown."

He didn't wander into a dance class until his junior year in college. And four more years passed before he admitted that dance was what he really wanted to do.

By then he was 23, an age when most professional dancers are well into their vocation. Yet despite the late start, he went on to build a career as an acclaimed choreographer and solo performer in New York.

He has never forgotten how dance can change a life, or the way someone thinks of himself.

"I always remember that anyone could change at any point," Dorfman says as he digs into curried



PHOTOS BY CHICK FADELY / HERALD STAFF

REFINING THEIR RAWNESS: Choreographer David Dorfman's newest attempt with nondancers has him working with young people.

No roles barred for 11 young hoofers

► DORFMAN, FROM 1E

chicken and jerk pork at a Jamaican restaurant in downtown Miami. An omnivorous kind of guy, he couldn't decide between the two — so he ordered both.

In Miami, Dorfman is offering the possibility of change to 11 young people, some from inner-city projects — and most of whom never imagined themselves as dancers. This weekend they'll perform with Dorfman's company in a concert that will wind up the Florida Dance Festival.

The project, called No Roles Barred, is Dorfman's latest effort working with nondancers.

Over the past eight years, he has made dances with athletes (the Out of Season project) and families (Familiar Movements), with computer technicians, stockbrokers and battered women. And though the kids in this project come from a local nonprofit program called the Non-Violence Project, they could be from any part of society.

Dorfman is fascinated by the ways nondancers express themselves in movement, and the emotions and ideas that spring from them as they do. To him, it's life offered up raw and whole.

"It represents the world," he says. "The world is not all 25 and perfect bodies, except maybe in South Beach. The world is beautiful, it's ugly, it's defamed and passionate and cruel and nasty and completely joyous."

"When you get people from all walks of life, I think they reflect that a little more."

The daily three-hour

rehearsals Dorfman has been holding since the Dance Festival began June 19 bring a slightly chaotic, happily familiar atmosphere to a small, windowless studio at the New World School of the Arts. Two of the Non-Violence Project kids — Matthew Tyson, 8, and Torrian Seay, 11 — really are in Dorfman's company enjoying mothering and big brothering them.

Lined up, the budding troupe is an up-and-down zigzag of colors and heights, but the children listen intently to Dorfman, frowning with concentration or grinning excitedly as they go through a sequence of big rhythmic strides before falling into each other's arms with excited shrieks.

PUSH, PUSH

Dorfman works tirelessly to coax more movement, more words, more energy out of them.

"That was great," he tells a startled Johan Gonzalez, 15, who took a giant bow before

anyone else moved.

If the kids had no idea what to expect, they're enjoying the experience thoroughly. Where they once said they were going to "the thing," they now proudly say they're going to rehearsal.

FUNDING ISSUE

The five boys participating came out of a program the Non-Violence Project runs at New Haven Gardens, the Liberty City housing project where they live. It may be their last chance to dance; the Non-Violence Project's New Haven center, which included computer classes and other art and self-esteem programs, has been on the verge of being shut down for three months because the Metro-Dade Housing Authority grant that funded it has not been renewed.

What they're experiencing in the meantime has been emboldening and eye-opening, allowing the boys to do things they would never do in their neighborhood.

"The only time I say what I feel is when I don't feel like

going to school or going to work," says gangly Theodis Davis, 15. "This uses up all our negative energy. We can't get mad after this 'cause we already expressed how we feel."

"We ain't got nothing to do where we live," adds Charlemagne Benjamin, 15, who hopes to become a rap singer. A Nitcracker performance three years ago is the only dance he's seen; the other boys have never seen live dance at all.

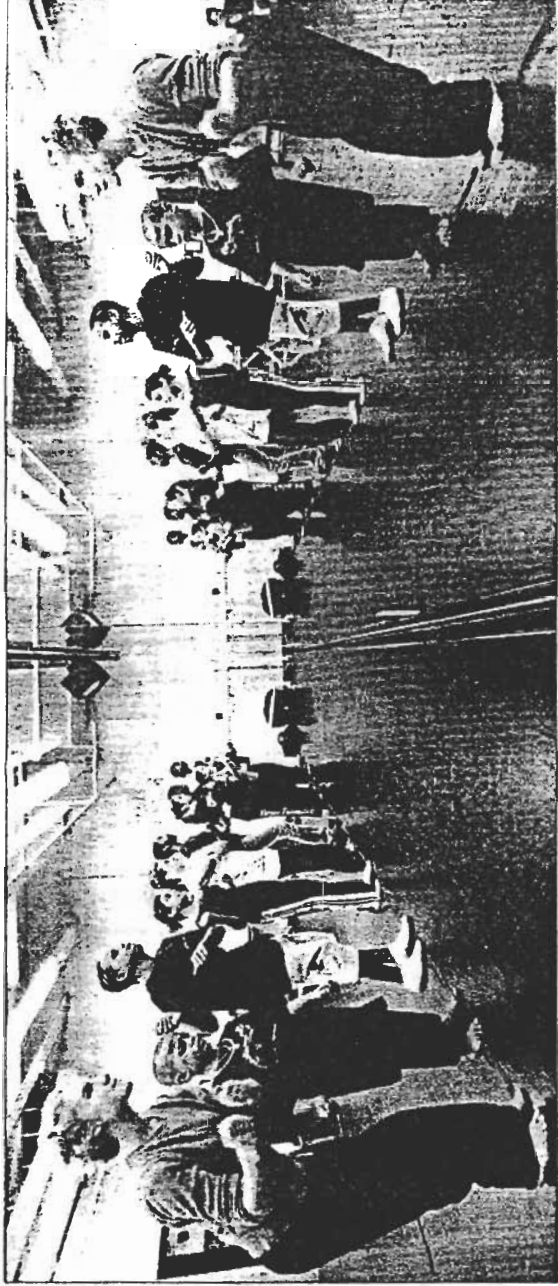
"People sell drugs, needles, they roll dice," Benjamin says of their neighborhood. "I never thought about doing anything like this. They do dance I've never seen before. They tell us how to tell our feelings in sign language."

ENJOYING CHANGE

Gina San Martin, the Non-Violence Project worker who is supervising the kids — while performing alongside them — says she's seen a change in attitude already.

"They've gone from not caring to respecting and enjoying it," she says. "It's exciting and new. They've never performed or looked at an audience before. I think it gives them a sense they can be something or someone."

A dance studio is more familiar turf for the three girls from Glades Middle School, two of whom already study dance. But even they are thriv-



CHICK FADLEY / HERALD STAFF

GETTING READY: Dancers are reflected in the mirrors at the New World School of the Arts, where they are in rehearsal for a concert this weekend with David Dorfman.

IF YOU GO

The David Dorfman Dance Company will perform "No Roles Barred" and two pieces by the company at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the Colony Theater, 1040 Lincoln Road, Miami Beach. Tickets are \$20, \$15 for students and seniors at the box office or by calling Ticketmaster at 305-358-5885 or 954-523-3309.

ing in the more open atmosphere.

"There's no right or wrong answer here," says Lorena Inclan, 13. "Whatever you make up, no one laughs at you."

RIGHT CLIMATE

That's exactly the kind of environment Dorfman wants to foster because it allows the kids to offer the kind of genuine, unplanned movement he hopes to shape into powerful dancing. Dorfman's pieces often play on stereotypes or word games — he's interested in the ways that movement can show feeling, or meaning.

The workshop gives him that in a rawer form. "You're seeing change before your eyes," Dorfman

says. "Everything is there, the concentration, the growth in the moment. I really like that."

"As dancers, I think sometimes we take things for granted. These folks are putting every ounce of concentration into doing this, and it's new and that newness is amazing."

The three New World students in the project — aspiring dancers used to technique, class and professional ambition — echo Dorfman.

"It's good to see what nondancers put into it," says Candace Roscoe, 17. "It inspires me. It's fun to have new ideas."

They have their own minds and you tell them one thing and off they go and you're like 'wow,'" says Reina Hidalgo, 20.

WILL IT WORK?

It falls to Dorfman to shape all this raw material into something that will entertain, and communicate to, an audience. And he seems edgy and confidently curious about how it will all come out.

"I don't want sympathy votes either," Dorfman says. "It's not enough to be cute. It has to be crafted, it's gotta have inner meaning."

"I want the stakes to be high. Otherwise why bring people to the theater? I want to put life onstage."

Jordan Levin is *The Herald's* dance critic.