

The Lively Arts

THE PLAIN DEALER

TUESDAY
NOVEMBER 10, 1998

Choreographer gives his soul to performance

By WILMA SALISBURY
PLAIN DEALER DANCE CRITIC

Some dancers bare their bodies for the audience. David Dorfman bares his soul.

In his revelatory performance Saturday night at the Ohio Theatre in Playhouse Square, Dorfman delved deeply into his psyche. He examined his inner life in prose and verse. He played the accordion and saxophone, sometimes while lying on his back or balancing on his shoulder. He danced with speed, force and athletic physicality. He shared the stage with the five collaborative members of his New York company, David Dorfman Dance. Before the curtain rose, he welcomed the audience and talked about the pleasures of his five-day Cleveland residency, which included a performance project with student athletes from Hathaway Brown.

The opening work, "Gone Right Back," introduced the company in a text filled with double-entendres and a movement vocabulary that ranged from pedestrian steps to gymnastic feats. All dancers portrayed them-

DANCE REVIEW

David Dorfman Dance



David Dorfman Dance from New York

selves and addressed one another by name. Tom Thayer, the central figure, was stuck in one spot like a grotesque scarecrow. Initially, he ignored or rejected offers of help. But eventually, he accepted his colleagues' concern and asked to be moved, literally and figuratively.

Curt Haworth nonchalantly picked him up, turned him over, rearranged his limbs and patted him on the back. Jeanine Durning frantically begged him to join the group and ultimately got a positive response. Lisa Race invited him to dance but later went off on her own, walking on her hands and seeking her own space. Hetty King, a quieter personality, held her own among the strong individuals.

The wild accompanying music was partly taped and partly played by Dorfman, who periodically rushed into the fray and interacted with the dancers. Starkly lighted and costumed in loose gray clothes, the performers expressed complicated relationships through intimate partnerships and telling words. Although the piece went on too long, it contained plenty of compelling material.

Dorfman put himself in the spotlight in "What I Know About Cats," a solo for man and accordion. Wearing a huge Afro wig and standing in front of an old slide projection of himself, the balding 43-year-old plumbed the depths of his self-absorption in a long and rambling monologue that touched on feelings of anger and isolation, yet turned to humor when the emotions got too fierce. More performance art than dance, the stunning work was relentless in its honesty.

The evening ended with "A Cure for Gravity," an ensemble piece that offered yet another challenge for performers and audience. The intense dance was set to excerpts from Joe Jackson's "Heaven & Hell," an experimental album that layers elements of classical, rock, jazz, world and folk music. While Jackson's lyrics focus on the seven deadly sins, Dorfman's choreography strives for heaven with close embraces, difficult lifts and human pyramids. The dancers, costumed and lighted in the bright red of eternal fire, cannot conquer gravity, of course, so they repeatedly fall to earth.

Because of its visual and aural complexity, the 40-minute work created a feeling of sensory overload long before the final uplifting image. Nonetheless, many audience members stayed for a lively post-concert discussion with Dorfman and the dancers.

The thought-provoking concert was part of the new "Move It Out!" Series co-sponsored by DanceCleveland and Cuyahoga Community College.