

# VILLAGER ARTS & LIFESTYLES

## See the Sea

### DANCE

#### SEE LEVEL

David Dorfman Dance at The Kitchen, 512 W. 19 Street, Feb. 26-Mar 8, Wed-Sat at 8 p.m.; Feb. 28 at 12 noon and Mar. 8 at 2 p.m. (212) 255-5793, x14.

#### BY DAVIDA SINGER

Chances are, you have a few notions about modern dance. But leave those preconceptions behind when you go see David Dorfman, which you should.

Now 40-something, short-limbed and thick of trunk, Dorfman appears more aging footballer than choreographic magician, with his own hot (7 Bessie awards) touring company.

Dorfman grew up outside Chicago, Illinois, watching "The Lawrence Welk" variety show on T.V. "Religiously," he says. As a child, he played the accordion, but was also a baseball jock turned business major before finally submitting to his passion for dance in his 20s, a place from which he has seemingly never looked back.

Starting with the idea that "anyone can and should dance if they have the inclination," Dorfman's multi-media, text-based creations often include video, groups of non-professionals drawn from the community in which the performance is taking place (from "at risk" youths to carpenters, to corporate execs), and his trademarks of Dorfman's childhood: instruments, athleticism, and general "goofing off."

A week before the New York premiere of "See Level" at The Kitchen, Dorfman took time out to elaborate on his latest piece and his very personal art.

Your work has often been described as dealing with the individual within the community. Is that true for "See Level" as well?

Yes, and here it's an expanding community. This is my first New York season with four people, so there are some formations that divide space into three, duets, four-somes, plus a solo of mine. To me, it's about who we are with and who we are against. We all make those choices. It starts with the self—always reaching out or reflecting—and then the other. Then it grows outward to the community, locally, in the country and the world.

I was talking with the visual designer (Samuel Topiary) last week, about the strong feeling here of interaction—first on a micro level, then on a macro one. And how do people lead, follow? Where do we go for safety, for intimacy, and where do we put blame?

Has the recent political climate affected what you've created here?

The 2000 election was on my birthday. How depressing! I felt the world and our connection and ownership had drastically changed on that day. It stuck with me, and from then it's been a gradual boil. I began using images of backward running circles, and folksy images (like the polka) in a murky time, plus wishful movements. I spoke with people in Europe, while working there, about their perceptions of us, so this became about "the other". Where to put blame and how we act on it. Personally, I think a lot about how I fit into the dance world, and the world in general. If I can dance my heart out, then it's as real as anything else. In the larger picture, there's the joy of movement and expertise, so it doesn't matter what someone's shape is. What matters is the honesty, the pure intent.

How do music, video and text figure into those goals?

I have a background of playing accordion, sax, and keyboards. But when I started dancing seriously in my 20s, I hadn't played any instruments for years. Revisiting instruments was like going to an old toy chest and taking out everything



David Dorfman at The Kitchen.

that was dormant. I like the role and tone of music combined with dance. In this piece, there's live electronic music, and we use text. Ironically, I'm not speaking a word—I usually do—but I've given ideas to company members that they've pursued and developed.

There's an intro, plus two talking duets. The intro has a metaphor for the body as a nation, and there's a parody of meditative text. It begins: 'Imagine your body was the coastline of a nation.' It's about how we relate to each other as people, then as countries. The visuals are just beautiful. There's rolling ocean, landscape of dirt, windmills like flowers, and snow with an eerie, icy feeling. The costumes are like mini-nations themselves (white linen, with green texture for forest or jungle, and browns for rivers or canyons), so each person becomes geography, a map.

Your work has been described as "serio-comic". Would you describe this new piece that way?

Yes, I'm always trying to find both sides of an issue, and to exaggerate things. In "See Level", the text/dance mixes are certainly funny. We examine extremes and that becomes funny.

Does "See Level" have a particular punch to it?

That's funny, because there is an actual punch scene, and it's something poignant to me. Jennifer (Nugent's) eyes are closed, she's punching into space, and says: 'I'm everything. I'm nothing.' Then Joe (Paulson), without her knowing, steps in and ducks the punch. I like it as an image. It's almost a mild, thoughtful aggression. My goal is always that an audience member be involved experientially. I hope the audience can think about their own behavior. There's a lot of risk and trust here. Or they can hope to avoid other ideas they see, like utter decay. This certainly connects today with the Iraq situation. Perhaps a more feminine model would help us now, and a compassion for everyone around us.