

Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done

Aileen Passloff, David Gordon, and Valda Setterfield reflect on James Waring's composition class

AILEEN PASSLOFF: My name is Aileen Passloff. I've danced for as long as I can remember. I don't remember not dancing.

Dance Associates was an idea of David Vaughn and James Waring. They invited a group of people to meet. And that's already revolutionary because in those days ballet dancers hung out with ballet dancers, modern dancers hung with moderns, musicians with musicians, etc. But neither Jimmy nor David put people in boxes, nor did they put dancing in boxes. It was big. It was universal. It was for everybody.

DAVID GORDON: My name is David Gordon. When I met Jimmy, I was in college. And he said, "Are you a dancer?" And I said, "No." And he said, "You must come and audition for my company." So I did.

SETTERFIELD: My name is Valda Setterfield. I took classes with Jimmy Waring. The thing I remember mostly was not even so much what people did, it was what we talked about.

SETTERFIELD: Some of the people in there weren't dancers at all. They were poets or other people who Jimmy met.

PASSLOFF: Actors and writers. They were people of very different levels. There were some people, you know, technically very skilled, and other people who were just busy learning the right foot from the left foot.

SETTERFIELD: They were formal dance classes, but they never emphasized anything that was physically distorting in any version, which is what I had come from in England. And they never hurt, and I don't think anybody ever got injured.

GORDON: The beginning of every class was the same. Jimmy had a pack of newspapers and magazines to tell you where things were that you should go and see. What things were happening, and the names of people who you should start listening to.

Jimmy's intention was to teach about everything. Everything that was possible. This person does this. This kind of thing is happening here.

SETTERFIELD: The wonderful thing about all those conversations was they went on as long as they needed to go on. So that everybody either understood it sufficiently or disagreed or agreed. It was a larger way of thinking.

PASSLOFF: He taught me how to always say yes. Always look. Always listen. Always taste. Always feel. It was a point of view that I teach from, that I dance from, that I work from.

GORDON: Jimmy took me to see the work of Philip Guston in The Museum of Modern Art and I saw somebody called T. C. Jones who did drag on Broadway.

GORDON: Jimmy gave me long-playing records. And so I have the Fanny Brice record, which I still own. And I saw all the Laurel and Hardy movies, all the W. C. Fields movies.

PASSLOFF: It was accepting that funny is as good as serious. That ugly is as good as beautiful.

GORDON: It was about the intention to use the things of our lives. The power of putting two unlikely things together is part of the making of art. All art.