

# The New York Times

April 20, 2008

## Arts & LEISURE

### Teen-Speak Found In Translation

By CLAUDIA LA ROCCO

PUTNEY, Vt.  
**N**UMEROUS languages were flying around the sumptuous theater at the Putney School in late February, when the choreographer Yasuko Yokoshi and her mostly Japanese crew were having their first tech rehearsal with nine students from the nearby Brattleboro Union High School. Japanese and English were the most obvious, but also in the mix were technical jargon, conceptual dance terminology and, most insular of all, the giggling, near-wordless communication among teenagers.

Ms. Yokoshi had ambitions of being a bilingual secretary when she left Japan for the United States in 1981, at 20. Instead she has become a translator, one who deals in cultural exchanges of a strangely epic sort. Her latest work, "Reframe the Framework DDD" (dance-docudrama), repositions "Framework," a 1984 dance-theater piece about social communication by David Gordon, a genre-defying postmodern choreographer who had an early, lasting impact on Ms. Yokoshi.

"Reframe" plunges into the complex society of present-day Vermont teenagers. Using conversations culled from their daily lives, taped interviews, everyday movement and a large frame that the dancers maneuver onstage as a literal framework for their interactions, the piece examines the often inscrutable hows and whys of communication among American youngsters as they navigate their high-pressure world. It is also a meditation on the ways an ephemeral art is reinterpreted from one generation of choreographers to the next.

Nearly two years in the making, "Reframe" will have three performances in Manhattan at the Kitchen, beginning Thursday. And then, as Ms. Yokoshi said, "it disappears."

In early 2006, while visiting Marlboro College in Vermont to give a lecture on kabuki, she talked to a group of teenagers who were taking classes at the Brattleboro School of Dance and was amazed by the directness of their questions. "They don't think of dance in an analytical, conceptual way at all," she said. "Because of that, they try to watch dance as it is."

"Something clicked" when she met

# The New York Times

April 20, 2008



GREGORY CHIRIN

these students, she said. While “looking out the window” on the train back to New York, she decided she would work with them to reimagine “Framework.”

Ms. Yokoshi inadvertently fell in love with dance her first year in the United States when she took a class at Dean College in Franklin, Mass. (She later transferred to Hampshire College in Amherst.) When a badly twisted ankle prevented her from dancing at a summer workshop, she enrolled in a choreography class with Mr. Gordon (after looking up “choreography” in the dictionary). What she encountered — a rich mix of language, performer-manipulated sets and deceptively pedestrian-looking choreography — amazed her. Seeing “Framework” sealed the deal.

Nearly a quarter-century later Mr. Gordon is the astonished onlooker. His wife and longtime collaborator, Valda Setterfield, will dance her original “Framework” solo at the Kitchen at Ms. Yokoshi’s invitation. Ms. Setterfield, who no longer takes the daily ballet classes that made it pos-

sible to do the sustained, legato movements, has reworked the solo, in keeping with the idea of reframing.

This reframing entailed the teenagers’ shaping their own spoken text and figuring out how to fashion Mr. Gordon’s choreography into movement that suited them. Mr. Gordon said he had agreed to the project because Ms. Yokoshi did not want to reconstruct his dance, but rather to “rethink it in terms of this moment.”

The teenagers’ concerns of the moment are extraordinarily rich and varied; they

## *Students adapt choreography by shaping their own words into movements.*

include the perils of lecherous teenage boys, the raptures and anxieties of close female friendships, and the relentless pressure to achieve. Moments of high silliness tangle with poignant dispatches. One performer’s suicide attempt is rendered, heartbreakingly, in language taken from e-mail messages.

Yet “Reframe” is not community art, as one formerly supportive foundation dismissively called it in rejecting Ms. Yokoshi’s grant application. Her work de-

mands sophisticated performing skills. The dancers must constantly refashion their relationship to material that stems from their lives but now has a life beyond them.

“We’ve changed so much over two years,” said Nicole Thomas, 15. “Things that were very much us a year ago aren’t really us. To try to keep a connection to that is hard.”

“Reframe” has involved numerous, budget-draining treks to Vermont for Ms. Yokoshi and a dizzying in-progress showing in New York last year that plunged the students into the exotic world of contemporary dance (complete with a Baryshnikov sighting). Ms. Yokoshi — who has nearly 70 videotapes documenting this extraordinary, at times fraught, encounter — described it as her most intensely difficult but rewarding project. For audiences one reward is the chance to peer into the normally hidden lives of teenagers, as translated through a fiercely imaginative choreographic process.

During the long afternoon at the Putney School the students were both rambunctious teenagers and serious performers. Video of them played on a large screen at the back of the stage, their thoughts and experiences writ large for all to see. The students gave it a few long looks. Then they ignored it, in favor of whispered conversation among themselves.

### ONLINE: VIDEO

➤ The making of “Reframe the Framework DDD”:

[nytimes.com/dance](http://nytimes.com/dance)