

April 24–30, 2008



GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS Vermont dancers rehearse *Reframe the Framework DDD*.

My generation

Yasuko Yokoshi heads to Vermont to *Reframe a David Gordon dance* for high-school students.

By **Gia Kourlas**

As Yasuko Yokoshi now sees it, the seed for her 2006 award-winning *what we when we*—a postmodern retelling of Raymond Carver's short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" using traditional Japanese dance—was planted in the '80s. She had just taken a workshop with David Gordon, who had recently presented the premiere of *Framework*, the 1984 dance that led to her decision to become a choreographer.

All of this relates to her newest production, *Reframe the Framework DDD*, which seems on the surface a decided departure for the Japanese experimentalist. Using teenagers from the Brattleboro School of Dance in Vermont, Yokoshi recontextualizes Gordon's *Framework* for a new generation. "I've been thinking a lot about this: Why was it that when I was making *what we when we* I thought of *Framework*?" she says. What she realized she was thinking about was

Gendertalk, a quartet she created following the Gordon workshop. "The essence of everything in that piece, which was about the ambiguity of human presence, was in *what we when we*," she explains. "The compositional structure—it was almost frightening how close it was."

In *what we when we*, Yokoshi worked with an all-Japanese cast; for her next piece, she says, "I wanted to work with nonprofessionals, with a younger generation of dancers. All Americans next time. Enough Japanese."

While lecturing in Vermont, Yokoshi visited the Brattleboro dance school; in anticipation, students had watched a tape of her work *Travel Theory* and were somewhat mystified. "These kids asked me so many questions: 'Is that you? What were you thinking when you were doing that?'" Yokoshi recalls, laughing. "Immediate questions. And I had this kind of theoretical talk planned. On the way home, I decided to work with those kids. They were very honest and sincere and totally curious. The fact that they don't know the history, they don't know anything about art per se, but have a love and passion—that's a great combination to make work together."

Reframe the Framework DDD (the "DDD" stands for "Dance-Docu-

Drama") incorporates personal stories from the cast. As in the text-heavy original, performers dissect their lives as they move, all the while deftly manipulating large wooden frames. Yokoshi's multilayered interpretation is a formal homage to Gordon's masterful dance, as well as a pointed glimpse—humorous and bittersweet—into the lives of the Vermont teenagers (the repeated phrase *filtered by mom* figures in frequently). But the choreographer is also testing the boundaries of what is acceptable "art" outside of New York. And to underscore her point about how culture and history are transferred to subsequent generations, the high-school cast will be joined by Valda Setterfield, who was in the original *Framework*. "They will meet for one day before the show," Yokoshi says. "For that moment, for that encounter, I think I am making this work."

But above all, Yokoshi is questioning her approach as a choreographer. In *what we when we*, she controlled everything. "I was asking myself: Is art about controlling?" she recalls. "For this, I wanted to do the opposite. What happens if I let the piece ride by itself on the honesty and purity and sensitivity of the dancers? That was my philosophical quest as a maker—

because I was tired of my obsessions."

On another level, the project was a response to the reality that while *what we when we* was a critical success, it couldn't find a touring life. "Presenters said, 'That sounds great, but your work is not for my audience,'" Yokoshi recalls. "I think that in traveling all the way to Vermont, I wanted to learn about audiences. People love dancing; but the art—not so much. I wanted to bring what I do into their system, to see what they would do with it. I had to shift; they had to shift. See, the thing is, the kids know exactly what I'm doing. They understand."

Performer Sarah McKinney, 15, recalls that the first time she watched a tape of Gordon's dances she found it somewhat boring. "I thought it was just one weird piece, and I never really understood it—until we performed at APAP [Association of Performing Arts Presenters] two Januaries ago, I didn't get it," she says. "I thought ours would be the only piece with text, but then I saw that every piece was kind of out of the ordinary. And I liked it. I'd never been exposed to anything like that around here. It's opened up a whole new world of dance for me."

Reframe the Framework DDD is at the Kitchen Thu 24–Sat 26.



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*** Yasuko Yokoshi** *The Kitchen*, 512 W 19th St between Tenth and Eleventh Aves (212-255-5793, ext 11; thekitchen.org). Subway: C, E to 23rd St. 8pm, \$12. Yasuko Yokoshi reimagines David Gordon's 1984 *Framework* with a group of high-school students from Brattleboro, VT, in *Reframe the Framework DDD*. See "My generation," page 118.