

# THE KITCHEN VIDEO MUSIC DANCE PERFORMANCE FILM

512 West 19th St. (Btwn 10th & 11th Aves) New York, NY 10011

Reservations: 255-5793



FAST TRACK

DOWNTOWN

## The Mama of Dada Theater

**T**HIRTY EXHAUSTED people crowd the Performing Garage on Wooster Street, home of a theater company called the Wooster Group. As the group—known for its controversial multimedia performances and for launching such film actors as Spalding Gray and Willem Dafoe—prepares for its four-part retrospective (which begins tonight at the Kitchen, at 512 West 19th Street), Elizabeth LeCompte is looking for a place to talk. LeCompte, 39, the group's director, steps over a sleeping assistant. "We're not trained to do theater," she says. "We're philosophers."

LeCompte, who studied art at Skidmore, works like a painter—appropriating stage classics, and combining them with artifacts and autobiography. *Route 1 & 9* mixes *Our Town*, a faked Chifton Fadinan film about that play, a porn movie, and a party based on the routines of black comic Pigmeat Markham. Much of the play is performed in blackface.

Staged in 1981, *Route 1 & 9* was hailed as a critique of stereotypes and condemned as racist. "I don't know whether it is or not," says LeCompte. "I can't answer that in a society riddled with racism." *Route 1* has been disavowed by the New York



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State Council on the Arts, one of the show's backers.

In *... Just The High Points ...*, first performed in 1984, LeCompte took on *The Crucible*, having the actors speed up the lines until they were unintelligible. Arthur Miller threatened to sue, and closed the production. Now LeCompte has layered other lines over Miller's, so his cannot be heard ("But I know that they're there").

A third play, choreographed with Peter Sellars, borrows from Lenny Bruce, Flaubert, Bergman, and a man "trapped in a hotel room with his theater

troupe. They've done something wrong"—not unlike the group. "But this is a comedy, and our troubles are not funny."

LeCompte credits the group's survival to its independence from the theater scene: "I never had any interest in it." Rather than rely on outside producers, the group bought its building. Now the company is surviving the success of Gray and Dafoe (with whom LeCompte lives). And she remains confident: "Nothing could destroy us—not even years of bad reviews." AMY VIRSHUP