

# The New York Times

## Arts & Leisure

Sunday, June 23, 2002

DANCE

JENNIFER DUNNING

### The Fruit of Lessons Grabbed Along the Way

**T**HADDEUS DAVIS of DanceGalaxy was astonished when he was asked by Medhi Bahiri, the company's co-director, to create a ballet. "I was like, 'What?'" Mr. Davis recalled, laughing.

Now Mr. Davis's first piece of choreography, a quartet called "Once before, Twice after," will be performed when DanceGalaxy opens its New York season at Symphony Space on Tuesday. Set to contemporary music, it is a fast, high-energy work full of big movements. He will also dance with the troupe in a program that includes works by William Forsythe, Sarah Slipper and Stanton Welch.

Mr. Davis, 34, who grew up in Montgomery, Ala., began his dance training to perfect his high school football skills. He arrived in New York in 1993, after graduating from Butler University in Indianapolis.

From the start, he poured himself into New York dance. "I had no friends," he said. "I had no time to socialize. I worked at McDonald's and waited tables, then I'd go to the Lincoln Center library and watch all the dance videos." In class and rehearsals the next day, he danced what he had seen on tape.

Mr. Davis went on to perform with the

---

**Having studied the trade of dance here and there, Thaddeus Davis creates his first ballet.**

---

Dance Theater of Harlem, Donald Byrd/The Group and Complexions, a company founded by the former Alvin Ailey dancers Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson. He joined DanceGalaxy in 2000.

There are few opportunities today to learn the trade of dance in the old way: by long-term association with established modern-dance companies and the artists who founded them. Dancers must grab what they can, wherever they can. At Dance Theater of Harlem, Mr. Davis studied, with the guest choreographer Alonzo King, the importance of focusing hard on the work of making dances. With Mr. Rhoden, it was about "how far can we go before we say maybe we should come back."

Although he was not accepted after audi-

tioning for Mr. Forsythe's Frankfurt Ballet, Mr. Davis stayed around Frankfurt, picking up pointers from Mr. Forsythe and his dancers. Most of the dancers were working on projects of their own. "They were in a creative environment, therefore they were being creative," Mr. Davis said.

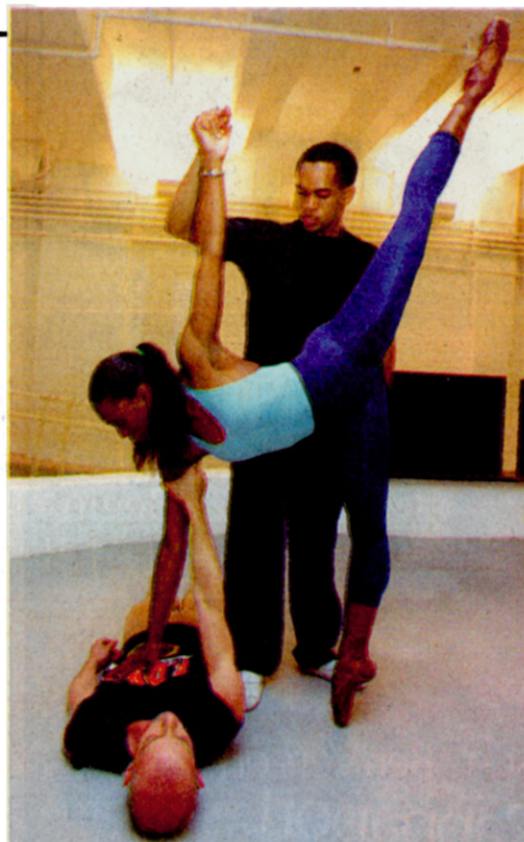
But Mr. Davis's greatest influence has been Mr. Byrd, who named Mr. Davis a creative assistant last season. The Byrd company is closing because of financial difficulties, but Mr. Byrd left Mr. Davis a considerable legacy. Teaching class and restaging Mr. Byrd's dances for several years, Mr. Davis was inspired to begin working intensively on his own choreography.

"It has been such an incredible thing working with Donald," Mr. Davis said. "All the things I thought of, he'd say, 'Well, go ahead and try it.'"

"It took me a long time to admit to myself I wanted to be a choreographer. I was a little bit intimidated."

Part of the problem was his feelings for all of the choreographers he has worked with. "I had such a respect and love for them," he said, "as human beings and artists."

JENNIFER DUNNING



*Thaddeus Davis, top, rehearsing his "Once before, Twice after" with Tanya Davis-Wideman and Erik Wagner, fellow members of DanceGalaxy.*

Marilynn K. Yee/The New York Times