

## Arts &amp; Leisure



Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Neil Greenberg, left, and the dancers, from left, Paige Martin, Caitlin Cook, Ori Flomin and Antonio Ramos rehearsing at the Kitchen.

## Not About AIDS. It's About Moving On.

By JOSEPH CARMAN

JUST off the Bowery in a studio warmed with portable heaters, the choreographer Neil Greenberg was mapping out dance phrases with Paige Martin and Antonio Ramos. As the taped voices of Ray Charles and Betty Carter sang "Baby, It's Cold Outside," the dancers executed wavelike movements that gradually accelerated and spun outward, chasing space even as the music faded out. This new work, titled "Construction With Varied Materials," will have its premiere on March 7 and will run through March 10 at the Kitchen in Chelsea.

The cast includes Caitlin Cook and Ori Flomin as well as Mr. Greenberg. As the title suggests, he is reworking older dance material into a mix with new choreography.

It has been seven years since Mr. Greenberg, 41, stirred the dance world with his moving "Not-About-AIDS-Dance," a work inspired by what he calls the "horrible cluster of deaths" of his brother and friends from the virus. In that piece, he disclosed that he was H.I.V. positive and, with his eyes rolled back, quietly moved his finger in the air as a text projected on a wall behind him read, "This is what my brother Jon looked like in his coma." Since then, Mr. Greenberg has sustained good health and moved on with his art. "From my point of view," he said, "every piece has been an outgrowth of the piece before, and the working process has been a continual growth of methodology."

Mark Russell, executive director of the avant-garde space P.S. 122, recalls first seeing Mr. Greenberg in the early 1980's "dancing in an 8-by-4-foot space at the rear of the bar" at King Tut's Wah Wah Hut in the East Village. "Even then," Mr. Russell said, "his choreography had a really spiky movement to it. It had a lot of energy and braininess. He was taking what he saw in the performance-art world, which was a sort of self-confessional mode, and making it work with dance."

In Mr. Russell's view, Mr. Greenberg's work has deepened in the last few years. "He's let go of the slides and the text a bit and is working more with music," he said. "The movement is more complex, and he is able to put more and more of his heart into it. I think Neil is one of the smartest men making

dances right now."

Some of the new maturity in Mr. Greenberg's choreography may have been a result of his recent collaboration with Mikhail Baryshnikov on two works for the White Oak Project, "Tchaikovsky Dance" and "MacGuffin, or How Meanings Get Lost." Much of the choreography from "Tchaikovsky Dance" is now being recycled into "Construction With Varied Materials."

"When I was watching Misha dance the 'Tchaikovsky' material different times over, it was remarkable how free he was in his relationship with the music," Mr. Greenberg said.

For Mr. Baryshnikov, who learned the choreography by watching Mr. Greenberg's improvised movements on videotape, the process was innovative. "Neil's choreographic language is layered with dramatic and narrative abstraction," he said. "As an audience member, I am anything but disinterested."

### Neil Greenberg shows a new maturity in his choreography, mixing music (Betty Carter, Tchaikovsky) and silence.

His performances are full of ideas and information. Even his more pure-dance pieces on the surface have a very personal and authentic message."

Taped improvisation has always been at the core of Mr. Greenberg's work, although unlike his mentor, Merce Cunningham, he now improvises to music as well as to silence. (Mr. Greenberg danced in the Cunningham company for seven years, starting in 1979.) "I improvise because it is much more interesting movement and more physically complicated than manufacturing combinations of steps in my mind," Mr. Greenberg said.

In "Construction With Varied Materials," he alternates portions of a Tchaikovsky string quartet with silence and intersperses the vocal duets of Ms. Carter and Mr. Charles. (Both the classical and jazz compositions share an unexpected soulfulness.) "The material has a different weight at different times, a different meaning so that context really does become part of the meaning," he said.

As with Mr. Cunningham's work, there is never a

literal narrative. The juxtaposition of movement and music, however, can evoke a nonlinear drama, sometimes dreamlike in quality, while the projected text may read simply "hop-scotch phrase" or "Tchaikovsky material."

Given his fascination with context, it is no surprise that films, particularly those of Kurosawa, Fellini and Scorsese, have had an impact on Mr. Greenberg's choreography. On the March program, he will revive "Sequel," a dance that had its premiere last year at the Altogether Different Festival, to the music of Bernard Herrmann's score for Alfred Hitchcock's "Vertigo." Using cinematic techniques like freeze frame, slow pan and flashback, he translates the resourcefulness of film editing to the stage.

"In film you can look at the same scene, but with a different camera, like in 'Rashomon,'" he said. "There is something rich in that moment for me, showing different events from different points of view."

In "Sequel," lighted with dramatic flair by Michael Stiller, four dancers perform separate phrases to the love music from "Vertigo" and then repeat those phrases at the end in silence, as a sort of flashback. "That is why to me it's not boring to see the same piece of material again," Mr. Greenberg said. "Repetition is not necessarily repetitive."

The actor Steve Buscemi, known for his offbeat roles in movies like "Fargo," first met Mr. Greenberg in their performance-art period in the East Village and has admired his film-style creativity for years. "When I watch his work, I always wish I was up on stage with him," Mr. Buscemi said. "For some reason, I can relate to his movements. There is an intensity mixed with humor, which I like."

Mr. Greenberg's dances feature expansive and lyrical movement, florid use of the arms, a facile use of rhythm and a generous use of stage space. Despite those qualities, and the fact that he has worked with one of the dance world's greatest classicists, it is odd that no ballet company has commissioned a work from Mr. Greenberg, whose fundamental training was in ballet and Cunningham technique.

"My affinities for movement are not that different from ballet," he said. "I think my improvisation process finds how big movements are amplifications of pedestrian movements." He also insists that the process is uncomplicated. "What direction my hand reaches," he said, "is the place I go." □

Joseph Carman, a former dancer with American Ballet Theater, writes about dance.