



## THE NEW YORKER

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### GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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#### DANCE

If you are a young child with immortal longings to dance on a Broadway stage, chances are you study dancing at one of the schools associated with a big-time New York City company. If, however, you are a young child who longs to perform in the work of postmodern choreographers and performance artists at theatres and studios in Chelsea and points south, you are probably taking a class with Ellen Robbins at Dance Theatre Workshop. Over the past few years, her students have often appeared with Remy Charlip, as well as with Tamar Rogoff, Melanie Slater, Wendy Perron, and Marta Renzi. The Limón Dance Company's recent revival of "Day on Earth" also took a pair of Ms. Robbins' students (one for each of two casts) for performances at New York's Joyce Theatre, as well as on tour to France and Yugoslavia.

We caught up with Ms. Robbins and her pupils recently at one of the annual year-end recital programs she produces at D.T.W. On this occasion, eleven of the twelve pieces were choreographed by the ten- or eleven-year-old dancers who performed them. (The last group piece was by Ms. Robbins.) The only similarities we could see among the numbers—apart from the fact that it was a program of solos and trios—were that every child seemed to be performing freely, as herself, and that every child had taken on the task of shaping a real construction called a dance. Since we rarely find both these elements conjoined in the adult performances we attend at D.T.W., we asked Ms. Robbins how she did it. She described an intensely monitored, yearlong process of improvisation, whose point is to give a child a sense of emotional control over the dance he or she performs. From that, Ms. Robbins believes, come initiative, curiosity, appreciation of artistic structure, and an appetite for responsibility. The goal is to educe from the children the sense—and the look—of spontaneity. "When I was a child, I used to dance around my living room," Ms. Robbins said. "To me, when the dance is not separate from the dancer but is the dancer herself, swimming in her own juices, that's real dancing."