

Guys don't do ballet, it's just something you don't do.

A.B.C.'s Caron dancing to fame

by Susan McLaughlin

Warm, confident, and vivacious, the Alberta Ballet Company's lead male dancer, Claude Caron, is a delightful and amiable person, brimming with French Canadian charm. Caron is the sort of individual who puts you immediately at ease. He has a friendly, pleasant, take charge sort of manner that is laced with a surprising modesty.

Originally from Baie Comeau, Quebec, Caron laments that there was little room for the Arts in his native small town. "Guys don't do dance or any Arts there, it's sad in a way because there is so much in Art to discover and enjoy." In Baie Comeau, a guy "goes into sports, works for a big manufacturer, drives a big car, and drinks beer in the tavern." Caron's bitter description of his small town helps to reveal how provincial, narrow-minded attitudes can be difficult to live amongst.

There was evidently a great stigma attached to the notion of a male dancing in Baie Comeau, and macho, medieval attitudes seemed firmly in place. "I couldn't tell my friends that I was a dancer for the longest time, they would have hung me up by my toes." Caron laughs, but there is a serious, regretful quality in his voice as he remembers. "Guys don't do ballet, it's just something you don't do."

It has been said that Caron had a tumultuous youth filled with problems. Some claim he was a rebel (considering his description of life in small town Quebec, it is easy to understand why) who used sports and dancing as an outlet for his frustrations. Caron himself says that he was dating a girl who encouraged him to get involved in ballet. Whatever the reasons however, Caron began to pour a tremendous amount of energy into dancing in his late teens and he showed a natural aptitude for it.

Prior to attempting ballet, Caron had been involved in a lot of sports and he considered himself to be in good shape. He still sounds surprised when he recalls his first ballet lesson. "The day after my first class, I couldn't walk; ballet was totally different than any sport I'd done before and I realized I'm not in shape at all, this is really hard."

Fortunately, Caron was both flexible and musical so things improved after that first dreaded class and he continued to study ballet. His first teacher recognized his obvious talent and suggested that he join the Eddy Toussaint Dance Company in Montreal. The Company was offering scholarships so at 17 Caron decided to give it a try. "I didn't have any idea I wanted to be a dancer; being in Montreal without my parents was the main goal and taking class came secondary."

Despite this seemingly flippant attitude however, Caron showed tremendous progress in his dancing technique and after only two months he was put in the Company for the first show as an apprentice. In only six months, Caron became a professional member of the Company.

From then on Caron's career blossomed and he travelled and performed throughout Eastern Canada, Martinique, Mexico, and Guadeloupe. He appeared in a National Arts Center performance in 1981 and then joined the Cleveland Ballet in the U.S. as a soloist.

Caron joined the Alberta Ballet Company in 1982 and during the Company's summer residency in Banff, he was coached by such great names as Brian Macdonald, Laura Alonso, Eva Von Gensey, and Christopher House among others. Claude performed in several leading roles in A.B.C.'s many shows until he was promoted to the position of principal dancer in January 1986.

What is it like to be the lead male dancer in the Alberta Ballet Company? Exhausting. Caron works eight or nine hours a day at least six days a week and he trains and rehearses nearly that whole time. Trivia buffs may like to know that Caron goes through 25-30 pairs of shoes per year and, "at forty dollars a pair that gets a bit expensive."

Caron claims that a dancer's schedule does not allow for much of a social life. "Our contract is for 43 weeks and we are on tour for 32 weeks, living in hotels and eating in restaurants all the time. You don't have a lot of time to know or meet people outside of ballet. Most of the people we hang out with are in ballet. It is a closed circle and we understand each other."

Caron admits that he is proud and happy to be in the position of principal dancer and

remembers, "it was a goal 11 years ago", but Caron doesn't have a superiority complex about being lead male. Caron detests the arrogance and snobbery of some individuals in the dancing profession as a whole and he reflects, "I've seen a lot of dancers who are very, well you know (he snubs his nose) you can't talk to them or help them and they don't want to help you."

Caron believes that people like that start to go downhill because they stop learning.

Caron doesn't hide his light under a bushel and he is definitely confident, but he has it in perspective.

He appreciates the simple things in life; he truly values the home life he shares with his wife. He holds some down to earth philosophies. Caron has a sensible outlook on life. He genuinely tries to avoid the dirty politics that can make a career in the Arts so unpleasant. "I try never to compare myself to another dancer, especially in the same company because it is a vicious circle — it can get very vicious."

Caron's goal is to get better and to improve all the time. "It is a personal goal that I am always running after. I can always be better, not better than someone else, but better than myself. I may jump higher than another guy, but he may turn better than me, we are all good to an equal level with different possibilities."

Caron doesn't really have an idol, but he admires a lot of people for their work. "I respect people who work hard, no matter what their field. I don't respect people who aren't honest and it is easy not to be honest in



Lead dancer Claude Caron

Arts. Caron avoids unhealthy competition and he respects the talents of all the dancers in the Company. If A.B.C. ever decides to

The Big Sell: cashes in on delivery

The Big Sell
Theatre Network
til Nov. 2

review by Rachel McKenzie

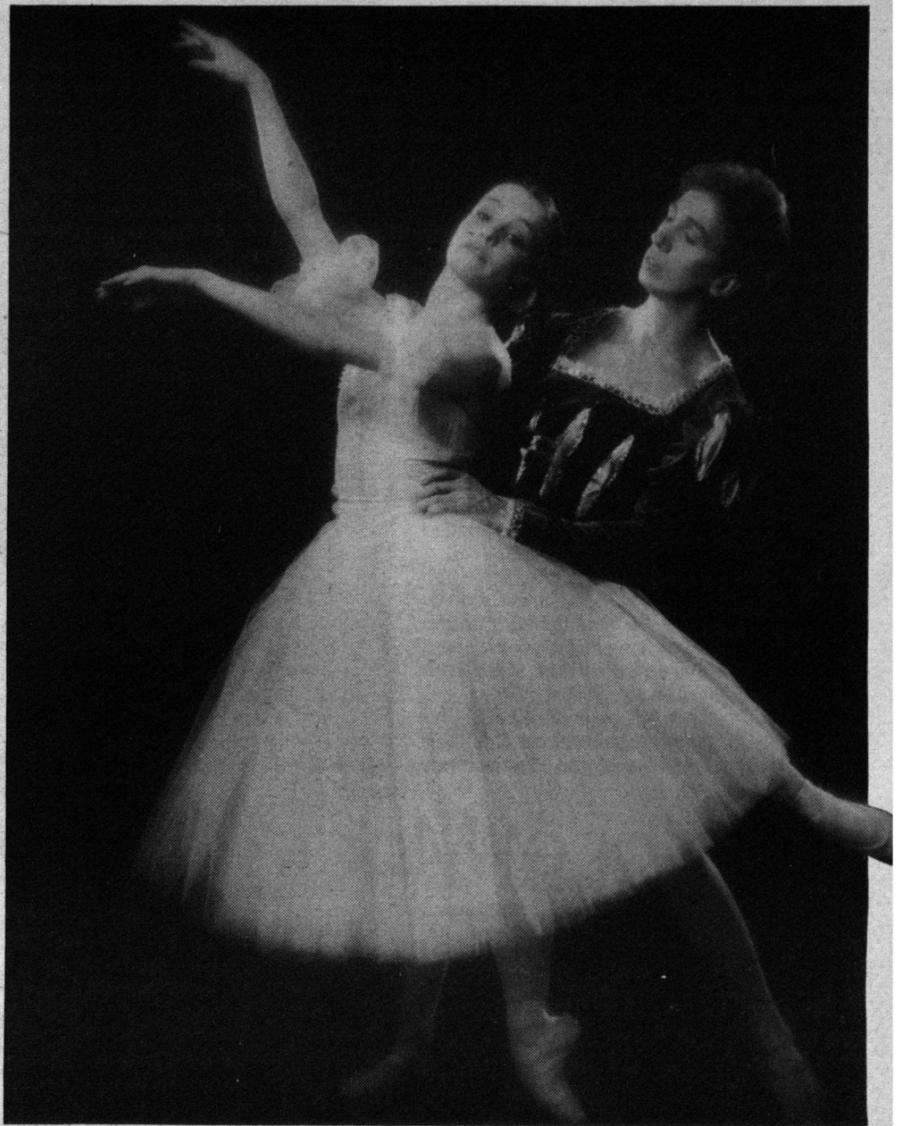
Theatre Network opened its twelfth season with *The Big Sell* by local playwright Lyle Victor Albert; with music and lyrics by Bev Ross.

The Big Sell presents us with the hypothetical situation of Fort McMurray in the year 2006 — after all of that oil has finally run dry. The newly elected government — conservative to the very colours — wants to keep it all quiet and has appointed a task force to examine the situation.

Their problem — what do you do with a city that basically does not have any reason to exist anymore? The solution is presented in the form of Franklin Bigalow, a big PR director from T.O. — that mythical city somewhere east of Brandon, Manitoba. Bigalow is hired to sell the entire city to the highest bidder. During his investigations, he meets the curator of the Fort McMurray Interpretive Complex Ms. Billie Hammer who is convinced that all of Bigalow's secretive business must finally mean the start of Alsands!

Well, did this critic buy *The Big Sell*? Yes, I have to admit that for two hours, I was reasonably well entertained.

A real selling feature of this musical is the cast. Given the small size of the theater, they are able to encourage a certain amount of audience participation which can be quite effective in a musical production. By the end, most everyone was singing along to "Oh give



choose a different male lead? Claude replies, "If someone comes along who is better, I wouldn't feel less wanted, and I'd have someone else to look up to and learn from."

After 11 highly successful years in the business, replacement doesn't seem likely for Caron. He is a success and he has finally even told his friends back in Baie Comeau that he is a ballet dancer. His eyes sparkle a bit as he recalls the reaction of his friends when they discovered the truth about his career. "They were quite excited and they said, 'You're a star.'" To this Caron simply replied, "No, I'm not a star, but I'm good at it; I make good

money, and it is my life."

Things to watch for — The Alberta Ballet Company is celebrating its Twentieth Anniversary this year, so there will be some especially exciting performances. Claude Caron will be dancing in every ballet and we can look forward to an exciting new premiere as well as a special ballet choreographed by Brydon Paige, which will celebrate his tenth anniversary with the Company. If the preview that I had during A.B.C.'s rehearsals at Arden Theatre last week is any indication of what the upcoming season will be like, we are all in for a fantastic surprise.

us one more oil boom, and we promise not to piss this one away!"

The team of Earl Klein, Alison Wells and Diana Kuzyk as the government task force are really good. Each of these actors also plays several other roles in the musical showing a real flexibility. They radiate a lot of enthusiasm which could be taken for "over-acting", but given the satiric nature of the musical, I found that it added to the humour.

I liked the idea of doing a musical/play with strictly Alberta content, but I felt that in many ways the humour became very restricted. Having lived in Alberta for most of my life, I can laugh at a lot of the jokes. What disturbed me though was how non-Albertans or those new to Alberta would react to it. Sometimes I felt that the content bordered on becoming an inside joke. While I am all for regional content, I certainly do not think that a kind of universal theme should be sacrificed. Surely, there are Fort McMurrays

in every part of the world.

Special credit must be given to Rhonda Trodd for her singing abilities; however, it appeared that her songs were somehow misplaced. She is the girl whose heart belongs to Fort McMurray. She is trying to convince Frank that people live in Fort McMurray, not merely because of the oil, but because they genuinely like living there. This assertion however is not proven by her sentimental songs that seem to dwell on the theme of poplars in the fall and how they stand tall. It is as though Bev Ross wanted the song in the musical and Albert had to write it into the play somehow.

All in all, the musical is an interesting look at the changing attitudes of Albertans in a once true blue province. The play is an opportunity to laugh at Albert's rather cynical view of government bureaucracy — who know's, we might even give the liberals a say in the next election!

