



Les Grands Ballets: dancing the night away

BY JANET FRENCH AND
TAMARA BOND

Les Grands Ballets Canadiens entertained crowds at the Rebecca Cohn Amphitheatre on October 3 and 4. However, many students wouldn't even think about attending the ballet, clinging to stereotypes they have held since they were six years old. To combat these stereotypes, and any misinformation picked up along the trails of adolescence, the Gazette sent two reporters to cover *Les Grands Ballets Canadiens*: Janet French is an experienced dancer with a well-rounded knowledge of contemporary and traditional dance; Tamara Bond represents the other ninety-nine percent of the student population.

The experienced viewer, Janet French: Witty, sharp and lively, is the best way to describe the performance of *Les Grands Ballets Canadiens* in the Rebecca Cohn on October 3rd and 4th.

Lawrence Rhodes, artistic director of *Les Grands Ballets Canadiens*, certainly put together a spectacular combination of pieces for the company to perform. The lineup of pieces performed included the modern-contemporary pieces *Duende* and *Soldier's Mass*, the typically classical "pas de deux" from *Don Quixote* and ended off with a balletic, yet atypical potpourri of pieces called *Desir*.

Duende proved to be a bit playful, reminding the world that a graceful dancer need not have pointed feet all the time. The choreography in most of *Duende* was nothing short of excellent. It was unpredictable, with virtually no repetition of moves, and performed with technical perfection.

The program states that *Duende* literally means "elf or fairy" and this idea was created by the music, costume and lighting. However, the darkness of the stage and drab music somehow took away from the lively dancing. With better lighting and music, the mood could have been

created just as well and made the dancers more visible at the same time. But overall, this piece was so well performed that even the people there to see the hard-core classical ballet couldn't help but love it.

The first time viewer, Tamara Bond: If you were a first time watcher, the opening dance was very surprising. They weren't on their toes and they didn't look like Karen Cain in *The Nutcracker*. There was a definite modern element. Arms

what with all the endless strings of foutes and pirouettes that the dancers made look like second nature to them. However, the person sitting next to me was right when she whispered "that guy looks like a peacock", because dancers are instructed to hold themselves up high in these lively classical pieces and yes, it did look rather silly. Still, the piece was clever and very amusing.

Tamara: Although the performers of *Don Quixote* looked really strong

director did a terrific job portraying the idea that an army may assimilate individuals into a seemingly homogenous collective, but the grief of war still touches every man individually. The choreography was danced with passion but was still amazingly synchronized for the most part, which is a difficult and impressive feat. The one big flaw with this piece was its excessive length. Although it was engaging and intense, the same message could

their starving children. It felt like their story. Although the same actions were occurring on the stage, different groups or individuals performed them at different times. It gave the effect of a group struggling through a horrible fate; each in their own way.

Janet: When the last piece, *Desir*, came on, it was evident that they had saved the best for last. What made *Desir* so appealing was its compromising quality between contemporary dance and classical ballet. The costumes were vibrant shades of red, pink and purple and the mood was lively without being corny. The one confusing aspect of *Desir* was that the director seemed to give the most talented dancers the least number of solos. Despite this disproportionate distribution of solos, it was all well-done and virtually flawless. The timing in these pieces was so critical and the dancers just nailed the clever choreography in an effortless manner. It was different, it was catchy, and it held your interest.

Tamara: *Desir* did remind me of the dancing done by Karen Cain. I loved it! There were amazing lifts, twirls and splits. The balance and timing of the performers was amazing. I didn't want the piece to end. Skirts swirled and dancers smiled and I smiled. When it was over I wanted to watch the dance again.

Although my first ballet was not what I had expected, I liked it and I would love to go again. Some interesting facts I learned were that dancers are not short little people like I had expected and that ballet comes in many forms with many faces.

Janet: All factors considered, this company was astounding. It was amazing to see the degree of technical perfection that they have achieved. I can honestly say that this is one of the most impressive dance performances I have ever seen. An impression was created that this company rehearses more than most do, merely from observing their synchronicity and complete understanding of the pieces they perform. There was something in this performance for people of all interests, and such universality is what made it truly majestic.



Innocence versus experience: *Les Grands Ballets Canadiens* recently visited the Cohn. Photo by Michael Slobodian

weren't arched in perfectly smooth half circles and movements were sometimes quick and jerky. At times I felt like I was watching some really great break dancing. Not all ballet is dainty and docile. The stage looked like a Cirque du Soleil performance. It was great!

Janet: The "Grand pas de deux" from *Don Quixote* was as cheesy and lively as was expected. It was impressive how well this "pas de deux" was performed technically,

and the ballerina could stand on her toes for what seemed like forever, it just was not as exciting as the first dance. As for the peacock comment, I couldn't help it.

Janet: *Soldier's Mass* was a compelling piece, performed by 12 men, that was touching and perhaps a bit depressing. The choreography itself was quite brilliant and had lots of "special effects" in it, created by the shapes and configurations that the dancers were in. The dancers and the

have been conveyed in a much shorter time. Still, some eyes in the crowd were not dry afterwards, particularly those who had lived through wars themselves.

Tamara: This dance reminded me of *The Men of the Deep*, a group of Cape Breton coal miners who sing sad songs about coal mining and hard times. When the coal mines stopped paying its workers, the workers went on strike and ended up fighting in the second world war as a way to feed

Sexual Perversity at Dalhousie Arts Centre

BY NEIL FRASER

On October 15th, a Dalhousie Theatre Department production will both entertain and challenge its audiences, says dramaturge Natasha MacLellan. *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* — a controversial play by David Mamet — runs from the 15th to the 18th of this month.

Mamet is the writer of such plays and films as "Glengarry Glenross", "American Buffalo", and the "The Edge", which is in theatres now.

Sexual Perversity in Chicago is about two friends, Bernie and Danny, Danny's girlfriend Deb, and her roommate Joan. The characters lives are missing

something, so they go out and try to find love, but find sex instead, and mistake one for the other. According to Mamet, "[I]t is a play about insight...It's about four different ways of dealing with or failing to deal with insight." All of these ideas come through in the straight forward dialogue between the characters.

The controversy surrounding this play arises from the dialogue between Bernie and Danny. They talk about girls, using vulgar and obscene language. This is not a play for children or the politically correct.

Natasha MacLellan says that many people hear the words and just dismiss the play as

misogynistic and meaningless, but "...he chooses every word he writes. The dialogue is very fast paced and everything is important".

Mamet creates a persona separate from himself that exposes the way people think, in order to force people to think. Mamet said, "If you say 'cunt' or 'cocksucker', what you say influences the way you think, the way you act, not the other way round."

MacLellan hopes that this play "...will challenge people's immediate reactions. Their immediate reactions will be that it is sexist and offensive, but I like to give Mamet the benefit of the doubt."

Although most of the people

involved in this play are Dalhousie students, there is a guest director involved. Emmy Alcorn has been imported from the Mulgrave Road Theatre Society, located in Guysborough, where she was the artistic director. One point that distinguishes this play from others is it's small cast of four characters. MacLellan said that everyone is enjoying the tightness that this brings to the production. The fourth year theatre students playing Bernie, Danny, Deb and Joan are Brett Delaney, Richard Davidson, Jessica Bastow and Tiffany Jamieson-Horne, respectively.

The scenes are sometimes very short, some only a couple of minutes long, perhaps reflecting the characters inability to concentrate on one thing for

very long.

The nightmare in set design, caused by the short scenes, was overcome by placing all the sets on the stage at one time and using lighting to illuminate the locations of the characters.

While this play may keep some people away because of its content, it will probably attract many more. Nothing sells better than the taboo. *Sexual perversity in Chicago* combines the worlds of art and sensationalism in a way that should draw many people to the Arts Center next weekend. There will also be an open colloquium, sponsored by the theatre department, discussing the relevant themes of the play. Call the department for details.