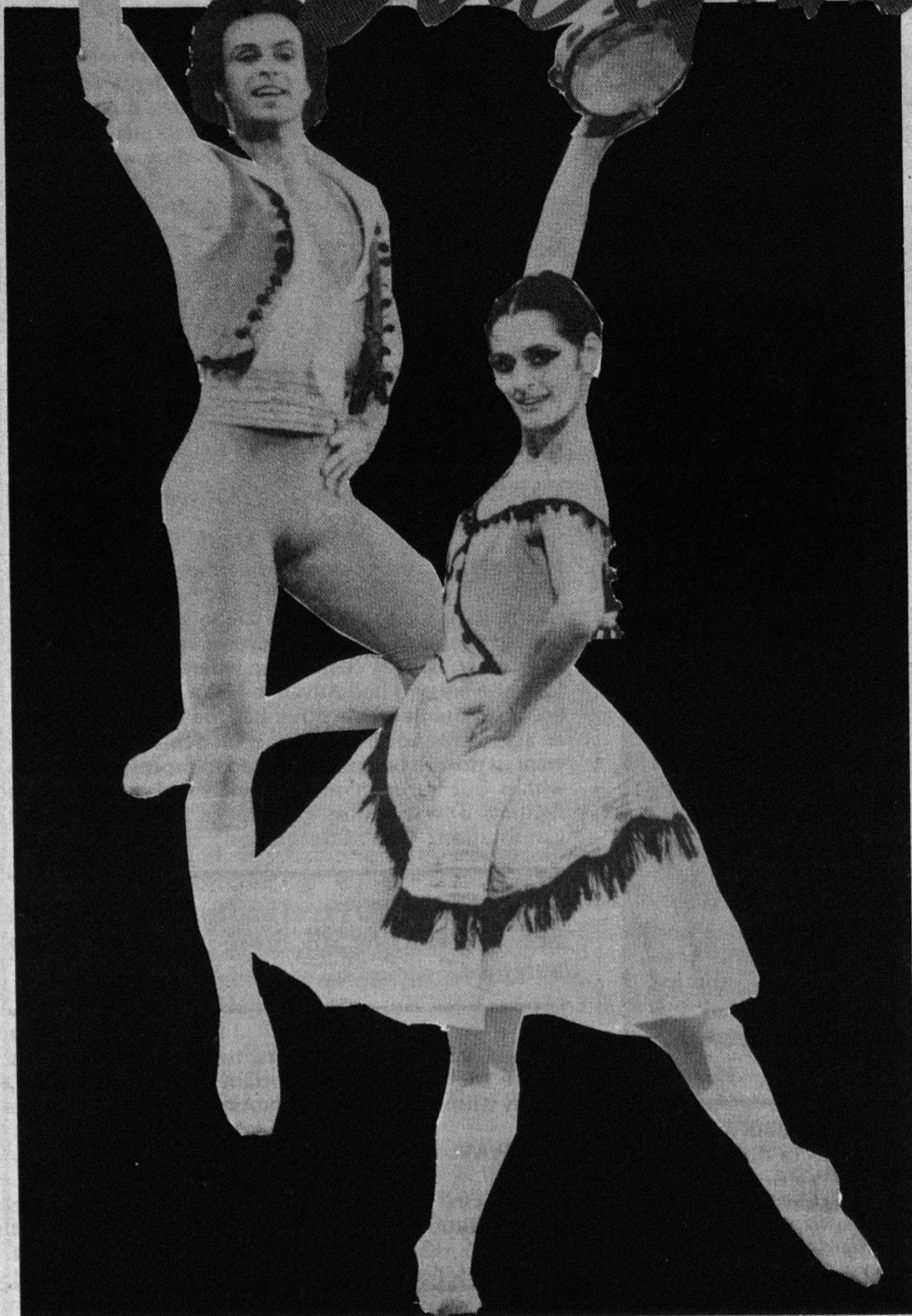


ARTS
Don Quixote



Woeful Countenance upstaged

Don Quixote
National Ballet of Canada
Jubilee Auditorium September 25 and 26

review by Christine Koch

The National Ballet Company's touring production of *Don Quixote*, performed Sunday and Monday evenings, was overall a disappointment, both in terms of choreography and of interpretation of Cervante's greatest work. To do the Company justice, however, their production was modelled after that of the late nineteenth-century original by Marius Pepita and Alexandra Gorsky.

In fact, the ballet is *Don Quixote's* only nominally. The Knight of the Woeful Countenance, the imposingly tragicomic figure of literature, is here relegated with his squire Sancho Panza to the role of shuffling buffoon, droll accessory and mere spectator to the more important tale of romance with which the ballet primarily concerns itself. The Don seems to serve only as an excuse, as it were, to bring to the stage the pair of lovers Kitri (Veronica Tennant) and Basilio (Raymond Smith).

These though very minor and transitory figures in Cervantes' novel, monopolize the choreography and drama with their Romeo and Juliet type story.

Their dancing was, to be sure, almost

flawless. Tennant was exquisitely graceful in her solos, and Smith was strong and virile.

Their *pas de deux* likewise were harmoniously and precisely executed. Their virtuoso performances, however, appeared uninspired, and were uninspiring. The music is partly to blame. The orchestral score, by Ludwig Minkus, though not unpleasant, lacks the melodic and instrumental variation, as well as the imagination and sensitivity which characterizes, say, Richard Strauss' symphonic interpretation of *Don Quixote*.

But this production was not without its high points. The sets were splendid, from the bright and boisterous village scene to the simple, yet evocative forest, populated by dryads.

In the many ensembles, from the skirt-swirling gypsies and flamenco dancers to the cape-twirling matadors, the interaction of bright yellows, reds, oranges, pinks, blues, and violets was kaleidoscopic in effect, and truly spectacular. The audience was very appreciative, and *Don Quixote*, almost gratuitous though he appeared, drew much laughter.

It was a production with two quite disparate elements contending to be uppermost. And it was the failure to resolve this conflict which stalled the complete success of the ballet.

Play succeeds in spite of weak portrayal

The Lark
Jean Anouilh
Citadel Shctor Theatre

Review by Wendy Hawkins

If you're a "live-theatre person," dig out your wallet and get tickets to *The Lark*, currently playing at the Citadel. The play is beautifully written and director Nicol Williamson leaves few flaws in the performance.

The Lark, by Jean Anouilh, is an eloquent and beautiful account of the life of Joan of Arc, and, for the most part, the Citadel's production does justice to the play. The costumes and set design by Richard Kent Wilcox are excellent and the acting is good. Nichol Williamson, in particular, gives a fantastic performance as the Inquisitor and Robert de Beaudricourt. Fine performances were also given by Geoffrey Saville-Read (Beauchamp), Peter Curtis (Cauchon), Robert Seale (the Promoter), Ray Dooley (the Dauphin) and Judith Mabey (the young Queen).

The characters portrayed are weak — foolish, greedy, cynical, cowardly. This is not out of place since it serves, or should serve, to make Joan a stronger, more dominating character. In a world of mediocrity she stands out. The play works with paradoxes and juxtapositions, often in a very funny way. For example, there is a scene in which Joan manages to evade to the lecherous hands of Robert de Beaudricourt while convincing him that it is his idea to send her to the Dauphin.

This brings us to the only fault in the play, which is the performance of Andrea Weber as Joan of Arc. Anouilh creates many characters chock full of weaknesses and this is a perfect background for Joan of Arc — a woman who, despite the circumstances, remained true to herself and her voices — an extraordinary feat.

Weber does not make Joan believable in this sense. Joan comes across as a sort of Judy Garland in a Judy Garland-Mickey Rooney movie: "Gosh, gee Mickey. I'll

make the costumes and you can write the show and we'll put it on in the old barn and all the little kids can help, too." While it is possible to believe that Joan could deceive the Dauphin and many others with the cute country girl bit, it is impossible to believe that she could use this "one for the Gipper" attitude with a battle worn soldier.

It is written that Joan was a quiet, pious, serious, gentle girl and that these qualities

persuaded people her voices were real. Weber does not give the important spiritual quality to Joan — it is impossible to believe this Joan hears voices. Obviously there was something more to Joan, and this does not come out in the play.

The play still succeeds however. Anouilh shows how "man is a mass of contradictions." *The Lark* is a study of the attitudes of the "knowing wink", the

"good-ol'-boys" and the "just among friends" mentality versus the sincerity of humanity shown in Joan. It is important to

note that Joan was not canonized for her military skill. She was canonized for the virtue of her life and her faithfulness to God. She refused to say yes. As she says in the play, "...it is my right to say no and go on believing." *The Lark* shows this very well.

Wit and sentimentalism don't gel

Tighten the Traces/Haul in the Reins and The Boat
By Robbie O'Neill and Leo Kennedy
Workshop West Theatre until Oct. 2

Review by Norman McNeill

Tighten the traces and haul off the braces, Raggedy Joe the Tin Can Kid is coming.

Robbie O'Neill of Nova Scotia presents the heart tugging tale of Leo Kennedy in Workshop West's production of *Tighten the Traces/Haul in the Reins*. Leo, born with cerebral palsy, is determined to live life to the fullest, and he does so with a smile and a shake.

O'Neill and musician Ronald MacEachern effectively use their Maritime roots to create an informal audience/stage atmosphere, and that, "God love their hearts," feeling certainly helps this production along.

O'Neill's portrayal enjoys a certain credibility. However, the production thrives on repetition. Leo's struggle to live and love is reiterated in a variety of forms, some of which are truly amusing; Leo recounts how a policeman mistaking him for a drunk throws him in a cell for the night. Leo responds, "If you're gonna wait fer me ta sleep this off, ya might as well

throw away the key!"

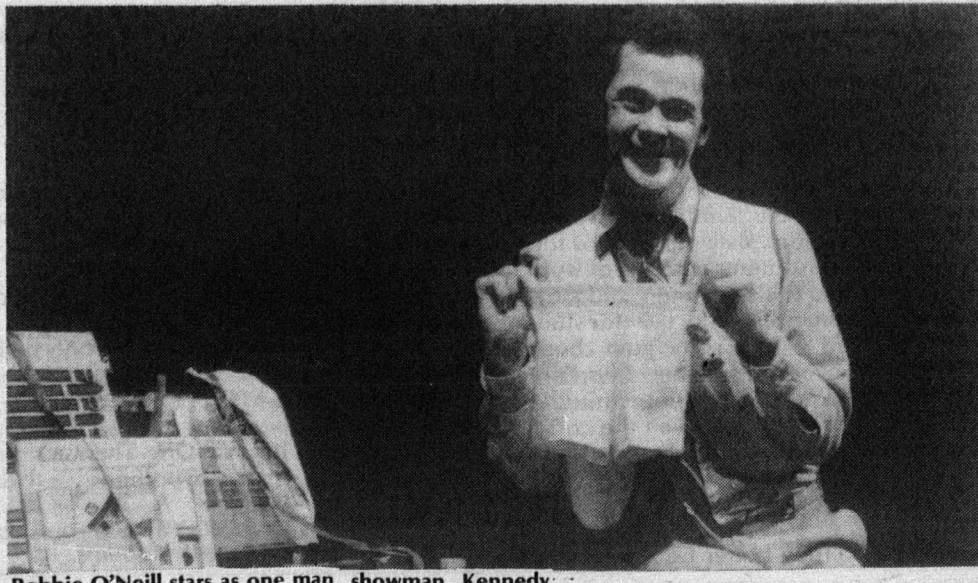
Schmaltz, however, accompanies the wit. Ronnie, the guitarist/fiddler sings one particular ditty entitled "One Step at a Time." Get out the Kleenex, folks; I wonder if Steven Spielberg penned this tune?

So there it is: definitive wit juxtaposed with base sentimentalism.

Along with *Tighten The Traces*, O'Neill MacEachern presents a one-act soliloquy entitled *The Boat*. Here we have the

unfolding tale of family conflict spurred on by cultural tradition in a Cape Breton fishing community.

The monologue is poetical with huge heaps of intense visual imagery pile on. If one listens closely the emotions cannot escape the impact meant for them. There is no dramatic action here, unless watching O'Neill smoke cigarettes is the stuff of action. The radio would have been a far superior medium for *The Boat*.



Robbie O'Neill stars as one man showman Kennedy

photo Bill Inglee