

BY KOTHAI P. KUMANAN

**T**HE ALBERTA BALLET demonstrated its development as a ballet company dedicated to dance excellence February 13 at Rebecca Cohn Auditorium. Celebrating 25 years of professional dance, the company provided the audience with an evening of variety, ranging from graceful, romantic pieces like "Lyric Dances" to rich, intense pieces like "Bolero."

**DANCE**  
*Alberta Ballet*  
Rebecca Cohn Auditorium

The evening began with "Vertex", a poem of what we are, what we see, and what we feel in a world full of unrealized dreams. Choreographed by Ali Pourfarokh, the driving force behind Alberta Ballet, the piece is set in stark, futuristic terms. Beginning with a dramatic air, as the dancers look up at an object passing overhead, Vertex shows Pourfarokh's preference for the contemporary idiom with its fluid movements contrasted by the continuous change of dancers on stage. Costumes by Laura Cassless, featured grey body suits with red trim that tended to look too Star Trek-ish.

Moving the evening into a more neo-classical stream, "Miss Julie" was an absolute treat for those with traditional tastes. Based on August

Strindberg's play of the same name, Birgit Culberg's choreography mixes pathos and humour brilliantly in keeping with Ture Rangstrom's score.

Now 40 years old, "Miss Julie" portrays the social calamities resulting from a forbidden affair between a sexually repressed, aristocratic woman (Barbara Moore as Miss Julie) and a lusty, young valet (Jay Brooker as Jean, the butler).

Moore was artistically infallible as she moved subtly from the haughty, teasing girl of the manor to the desperate and dishonoured woman, supported by Brooker's strong, confident movement on stage.

The antics of the Three Gossips (Patricia Maybury, Charissa Leigh, Daniela Sodero) and the Three Peasant Men (Dennis Lepsi, Krzysztof Starzewski, Greg Zane) lent a light flavour as well as adeptly delineating the social class distinctions.

Igal Perry's "Bolero," set to the music of Maurice Ravel, was a dazzling end to the evening. Incorporating a brooding atmosphere, the dancers step systematically across the stage, arms to their foreheads. The powerful richness took the audience by storm.

The new Alberta Ballet, resulting from a merger of the Alberta and Calgary City Ballets last year, proved with its diverse, yet strong performance, its ability to stand as a top Canadian ballet company.

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**Dedication to Excellence**

Alberta Ballet's "Bolero"



PHOTO: LESLIE WAGNER

BY JULIE LUOMA

**S**TONE. In German, Stein. Joan Orenstein plays an earthy Hagar Shipley in Neptune Theatre's production of *The Stone Angel*. Not the nurturing Earth Mother type, but the surviving, solid-as-a-rock type.

**THEATRE**  
*The Stone Angel*  
Neptune Theatre

Hagar Shipley wasn't written as a nurturing figure. The production is based on Canadian Margaret Laurence's novel by the same name.

Hagar is a survivor, a prototype of the pioneer generation. She has a granite shield, like the women who came out of this type of survival. They grew up in the pioneer atmosphere of Presbyterianism where the law of the land was: don't trust anyone, work hard ("pull yourself up by your bootstraps," lectures Hagar's father), and don't sin. Sex was only talked about and done if absolutely necessary in Hagar's world.

In her struggle for independence, Hagar spent a lifetime trying to disregard "appearances" in search of a real life. She defied her father to marry a man with a reputation ("Never a bell rang out on my wedding day"), bore him two sons, left him to his self-destructive ways, and then came back in time to see him die. She settled in their house and grew old with the heartbreaks of losing her favorite son and watching her possibilities slip away from her.

Margaret Laurence's novel is hailed as a Canadian classic for its honest observations about the human wilderness Hagar lives in and represents. Hagar's survival is at great cost to herself and to those around her. The play, try as it might, loses much of the intensity and intimacy of Hagar's perspective and in the novel, giving the play-goer little more than a peek at a very interesting struggle to make a life.

"Under the stone, inside, she's a passionate, thinking, throbbing woman," Orenstein says of Hagar. "The book has a sense of struggle for self-realization, and, at the end (with Hagar's death) some understanding and some realization."

"I don't leave her absolved. For me, it's not a gentle close. It's a crack, a beginning of the understanding, of what her life has been."

"I don't think survivors are necessarily nice people. They do things others don't approve of, or they're selfish. Heroism isn't necessarily something that is admirable. Hagar survives but brings down a lot of people in her wake."

What is it in Orenstein that casts her in these women-survivor roles? Orenstein is a dominating, aloof person herself. She has made a firm decision not to talk about anything nearing the personal and refuses to talk about herself or her theatrical history.

On stage, it's obvious why Orenstein is playing out Hagar's memories. Regardless of whether she's actually lived it or just read about it,



Joan Orenstein in *The Stone Angel*.

PHOTO: GEORGE GEORGAKAKOS

Orenstein compellingly portrays the poetic and grim reality of Hagar's life and Laurence's world view.

Orenstein's voice is particularly striking as she plays a Hagar who's still solid and deliberate at 90, resisting her son's and daughter-in-law's wishes to put her in a "home." Hagar is still greedy for control, hungry for independence and thirsty for self-knowledge.

Orenstein's Hagar is as sympathetic as she is gutsy, groaning and rolling her eyes when the preacher comes her way. Hagar takes a rye sense of humor and sarcasm into her battle. She throws worn-out old tantrums to have her way, and is amazed her son and daughter-in-law never wise up to what is going on. "Who'd have thought a person had so many vitals?" she asks herself, reflecting on her physical breakdown. Her feisty determination shines through a grim, stoney expression, making us sure we recognize this cranky, stubborn old woman.

And the twist for the actor of this narrative is that Hagar must re-enact as well narrate the dramatic parts of her past. Orenstein is less convincing playing Hagar as a little girl, although she is very believable re-

membering it. Especially in thoughtful moments such as those when she strokes her now grey hair, amazed at how life changes, for she was once a raven-haired beauty.

What memories flood Hagar's mind in her final days? She married to be free — "foolish I might have been, but never silly." Here we feel the contradictions in her antagonistic relationship with her husband, Bram. You sense the stirring he sends through her heart. But we also share Hagar's pain as she chastises herself, — "When did I ever speak the heart's truth?" — knowing that her passion did on occasion rise to his, but she never shared what could have brought them closer together.

Hagar tells these stories on a barren set, almost discomforting in its openness and emptiness, where a granite frame around the set and a suspended stone angel — from her mother's grave — are a bleak reminder of how hearty you have to be to survive. She wears a white nightgown and rich red shawl through such shocking transitions as going from lying with her new husband on her wedding night to waking out of her reverie on an x-ray table.

The Stone Angel got a standing

ovation opening night. Other than Marsha Coffey's bordering-on-New-Age music seeming too romantic for Hagar's bleak and often rewardless world, the production is well done.

The main players in a solid cast include: John Dunsworth as the less-favoured son, Marvin; Deborah Allen, his complaining and downtrodden wife; Joan Gregson, as Hagar's snooty friend, Lottie; Richard Donat, as her magnetic husband Bram; Peter Outerbridge as her son John, torn between his abilities and Hagar's dreams for him; Jim Mezon, the bumbling preacher; and Joseph Ruten, as Hagar's demanding father.

Hagar's is a story of the struggle to be independent from all these other characters, until the very end. But it's also about the need to tell what is going on inside this woman, to declare her identity to the world. Words and love could have been bridges between her and her loved ones. But she burned them.

It is a poignant reminder that there is more to surviving than being rock hard in the face of pain — never be weak, not ever, for one moment, as Hagar says. A real woman isn't made of stone. Only an angel is. An angel of death.

**STAGES**  
*Theatre Festival!*

The Dalhousie Theatre Student Society and the Dalhousie Arts Society are proud to present the **Three Stages Theatre Festival**. This exciting three day event will feature a series of one act plays written, directed, and performed by Dalhousie students. At 8 p.m. on **March 12, 13 and 14** three non-traditional theatre spaces in the Life Sciences Building will play host to this theatre extravaganza. Tickets are \$2 for an evening or \$5 for three nights. Theatre passes and tickets are available at the door or can be picked up the week prior to the festival in the Dalhousie SUB. For further information, please contact the **Arts Hot Line, 494-2146**.