

Canada is bush league; artists are ignored

By TED SIMPSON

For the past several years I have been peripherally involved in the Canadian arts. Many of my friends and acquaintances are artists from varying disciplines. They are not amateurs and in other countries would be welcomed as consummate professionals. In Canada they are ignored or treated shoddily and ultimately resign themselves to a lifetime of anonymity. They are our most neglected human resource.

Over a year ago I terminated eight years of teaching to dedicate my time to working for a small dance company. For some time I and a number of other Canadians had been excited by the work of a Yugoslav-born former principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada. Marijan Bayer is a dancer with a professional career behind him which has spanned sixteen years and principal status with many of the world's most renowned ballet troupes, including Maurice Béjart's Ballet du XXe Siècle, Le Grand Ballet du Marquis de Cuevas and the South African Ballet. He has worked with such internationally famous choreographers as Roland Petit, Anton Dolin and Robert Helpmann. His teachers have included Maria Fay and Rosella Hightower.

Upon retiring from the National Ballet of Canada, this man established a ballet training centre which visiting examiners from England, after travelling across the country, considered to have one of the best standards in Canada. In fact they took some of his own teaching methods back to England with them.

Forming his own ballet company, he choreographed original ballets which people loved to watch and he took young Canadian dancers who had little hope of joining the ranks of this country's

major ballet companies and turned them into solidly enjoyable performers. These young Canadians responded fully to this man's work, learned from him what they would never have learned elsewhere in Canada and finally dedicated themselves to staying on with him regardless.

It seemed to those of us who had been following his progress that this country was crying out for a choreographer with his experience, ability and popular appeal. With that in mind we banded together to help form a permanent dance company and do whatever we could to enable these young people to stay on with him. We were not new to ballet and we felt we recognized a strong potential.

However, from the outset there was a flaw; we were naive and idealistic enough to believe there must be something wrong with the artists themselves who had been traditionally unable to get anywhere staying in Canada. It appeared to us that Canadians had shown themselves ripe for a flourishing of the arts within these borders. We are still convinced we are right. In fact, it seems that Canadians are ready for a cultural breakthrough.

What we did not know when we started out was that this country's cultural development is overseen by philistines and Northern rustics whose only commitment is to getting votes or prestigious political appointments.

We have gone hats-in-hand begging to receive funding for this group. The fact that we were refused by everyone neither surprises nor particularly disturbs me. I didn't expect immediate success. However, I did expect to be treated seriously and given fair consideration by people with better critical ability.

It was exasperating to find that wherever we went we were met with undisguised condescension

toward our enthusiasm and obtuseness in not realizing beforehand that the real name of the arts funding game in Canada is Politics.

The Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, the LIP and Wintario programs don't want artists on their doors; they want con-artists. Semantics wins the day as the only artistry called for is a lawyer's talent for wording applications in such a way that they meet with the most absurdly provincial set of criteria ever devised by politicians in their infinite ignorance of the arts.

In fact, if you didn't live in this bleak cultural tundra, you might even get the impression that Canadians are saturated with homegrown artists. Every question we were asked by even the most receptive representative of an arts funding body was geared to getting rid of us.

As for the Canadian news media, which one might reasonably expect to be of some help, one is met consistently with undiluted indifference. The standard attitude is: "So who wants to read about Canadian artists?"

What I have read in the past leaves me with the impression that there isn't a single "major"

Canadian critic who knows nearly enough about the area he is covering. Our critics lack both a perspective on the arts in Canada and a context within which they can fairly assess developing Canadian talent. They feel no sense of responsibility to the development of Canadian performing talent. They give only perfunctory coverage often laden with invective or else come off sounding like effete academics out only to perpetuate their own careers.

It's hardly reassuring to find their names listed among the adjudicators for various council grants. Their hastily acquired prejudices have been expressed repeatedly in print and practically never have they been taken to task for them.

The Canadian Government recently announced a cutback in its arts funding program. Meanwhile, anyone who comes along with some half-baked, slickly packaged excuse for a community social service is a shoe-in for large sums of money.

The assumption is, of course, that only a small minority of Canadians is interested in the arts. Well, that minority is a constantly growing one and we also vote and pay taxes. Not enough of our tax dollars can be spent nor

enough attention paid to Canada's delinquents and drop-outs.

However, anyone here who tries to do something constructive can afford to be ignored and put off. I worked briefly for the Ministry of Correctional Services where the saying went that "The squeaky wheel always gets the grease." How true that appears to be.

Supposedly, sports is the Canadian forte. The athletes of this country have held the spotlight long enough and now it's time to give our artists a crack at bringing prestige to Canada. A nation's culture has greater and longer lasting impact anyway. "Rocket" Richard, Bruce Kidd and Nancy Greene are all but forgotten history. Johann Strauss, William Shakespeare, Leo Tolstoy, Ernest Hemmingway and Charlie Chaplin have not been forgotten.

Canada's only chance for true immortality lies with her artists, not her athletes or her politicians. And she will remain bush league so long as her artists are ignored and frustrated.

It's time the blame were laid squarely where it belongs - upon politicians, large corporations and news media, all of which by acknowledging only established artists are paying mere lip service to the developing arts in Canada.

York NDP'er loses exec. race

By JAY BELL

Barry Edson, chairman of the York NDP club failed in a bid to capture a position on the provincial executive of the New Democrats. The winner of the by-election to be the youth representative on the executive was Steve Krashinsky, chairman of the U. of T. NDP club.

One Party member at the convention, held at the Royal York last weekend, suggested that Ed-

son would probably have done much better had he not taken such a strong stand on the right of York's NDP club to affiliate directly with the Party.

The decision reached during the convention to refer to the NDP constitutional committee the issue of university clubs affiliating with the Party has been interpreted as a means of preventing the sort of affiliation envisioned by Edson.

The decision by the delegates effectively leaves the status of the York club and similar university clubs in an organizational limbo. The York club will now be forced to explore the possibility of affiliating with an NDP riding association, with a consequent loss

of status.

Asked about why more than two thirds of the delegates seemed to oppose university NDP clubs, Edson said, "There is no hiding the fact that a large number of delegates are still afraid of ultra-left radicals infiltrating the university clubs."

Apparently in response to this, the York club has included in its constitution a clause intended to prevent radicals from joining the club.

Edson is confident that the device provides the Party with an effective means of barring undesirable extremists from membership.

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