

Ballet Ys dancers risk ignominy working for a new company, in addition to passing up better money than the \$130/week they make.

Dancers are people

by Jackie Critchley

On Friday and Saturday nights, the audience at SUB Theatre got a look at one of the new directions in Canadian dance.

The Toronto based Ballet Ys, formed in 1971, is a young company small in size and finances, but despite these restrictions, it produces something unique and refreshing.

In the words of Gloria Grant (co-director), the dances are "down to earth, gutsy." The company wants to portray what's affecting people now and the ideas they are communicating between themselves.

She sees one of the problems with modern dance as it being too esoteric. The dancers are not people but objects. Audiences are often left in the dark, as companies pursue their own whims, claiming audience comprehension is unimportant.

Ballet Ys seeks to retain audience identification with the dancers, and uses this to give a strong presentation of current ideas. The dancers as in traditional 'fairy tale' ballet, retain their personal identities as human beings, (male and female), in trying to communicate new themes.

However, contrary to tradition, there is no *corps de ballet*, or lead dancers. Each member of the company is a soloist, exhibiting individual strength and weaknesses.

The company challenges the dancers, trying to push them beyond their capacity, encouraging them to do just one more pirouette, or jump a few inches higher.

Contrasts is a dance which explores this union of natural feeling for dance with the intensive discipline of the ballet technique.

The dance demonstrates some of the restrictions of the ballet technique alone, the mechanical repetitions, the male dancer in a purely supportive role, as he struggles in an awkward position to hold aloft the showpiece ballerina, retaining her rigid pose. Then we see the dancer gradually evolving to a larger vocabulary of movements as his physical limitations decrease, and using this for greater freedom of self expression.

Combining the best of ballet with the best of modern dance is what Ballet Ys is all about. Using the strength gained from ballet they free it from its traditional

rigidity and create a new mode of expression. "Virtuosity is not their goal, the message is more important than physical feats," says Ms. Grant.

The dance *Nelligan*, perhaps best exemplifies some of the company's ideals. Performed by Noble Barker and Kathleen Trick, it is based on the life of a Quebec poet who destroys the thing he loves most — his art.

The choreography is tight, the dancers superb technicians, and the piece itself beautifully moving.

Ballet Ys commissions choreographers to do original works, and to set them with the company. The choreographer can start with a piece of music as in the dance *Echoplex*, which is based on a musical device with which the musician reproduces a sound phrase in repetitive patterns or in simple echoes. Or, as in *All That Wasted Shame*, which deals with three levels of women coping with their sexuality, the dance can be based on an idea.

Dancing is a risky trade both physically and financially. Out of the five major ballet companies in Canada — three are traditional.

Ballet Ys is one of the two smaller modern ballet companies.

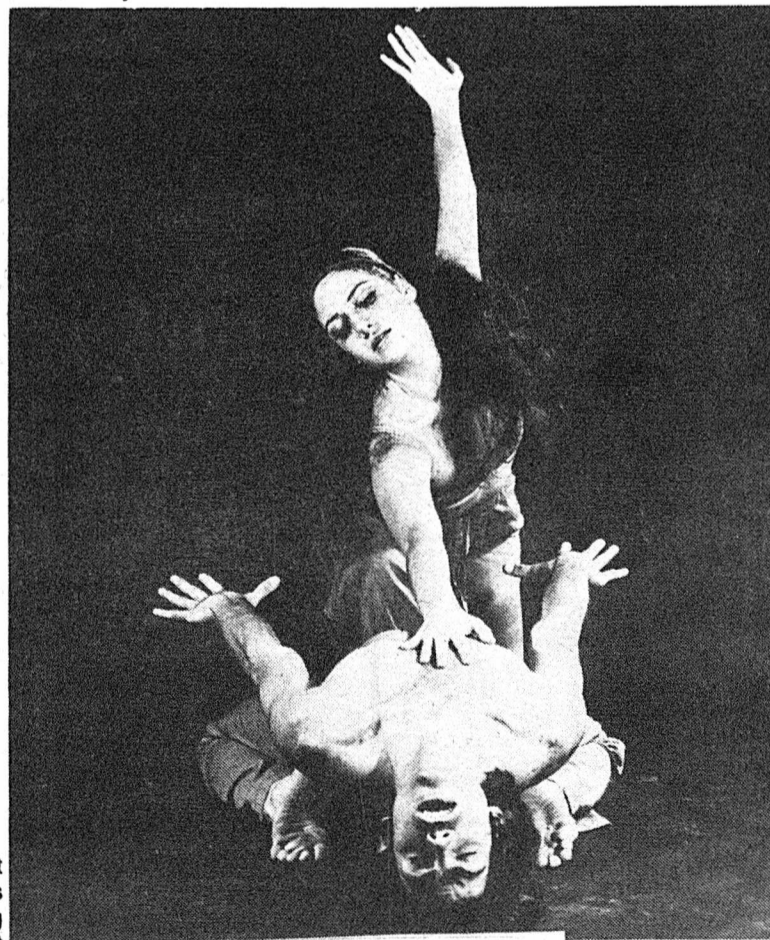
Many Canadian ballet

dancers train with the big company schools, and then go on to join the company. Few good professional dancers are willing to risk ignominy in a relatively new company.

Ballet Ys six dancers are from the States. They are all highly trained professionals who could be earning more than the \$130.00 a week they now make, elsewhere. However, the company offers them challenge and a chance to experiment. As Gloria Grant put it, "I became bored with the typical ballet co., not doing new work all the time." She has stayed with the company, working it to its present form because she feels there are so few opportunities for dancers in this country, especially if they want to try something new.

The company is financed by the government, and makes about 30% of its budget from box office returns, but finances are tight, limiting the company to six.

Injuries occur about once a week and can put a dancer out of action for ten days, which in this small company can be disastrous. Dancers must continue to work despite injury which slows the speed of recovery. Ballet Ys takes its own dance floor when it goes on tour to help prevent injuries from occurring.



Ballet Ys attempts to challenge the dancer

Soloists leave audience limp

by Art Burgess

Stars of the Bolshoi Theatre came and went quietly last Thursday, playing to a handful of classical music aficionados in the SUB Theatre.

Violinist Ruben Agaronyan and Soprano Makvala Karashvili produced a musical evening that was both varied and excellent. Their programmes leaned heavily on Russian works by Mussorgski, Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev, although Agaronyan opened the evening with a sensitive reading of Beethoven's Violin Sonata No. 5 in F which was clear, crisp and wonderfully articulated.

This collaboration with accompanist Mary Ann Arutuian was well received by the sparse audience. The twenty-six-year violinist gave us a Romance by Rachmaninoff — the *Daisies*, Prokofiev's march from the ballet *A Love for Three Oranges* and left us limp with his encore, Basilli's *Laronda de la Tunis*.

Ms. Karashvili is a robust, dramatic soprano in the Wagnerian manner. She dominated the whole building with her rich full soprano. Her programme dipped deeply into the well of Russian folk song. She sang a Ukrainian Hopak by Mussorgski, a lament — *The Stars Where are You*, then Rachmaninoff's love song *I Love You*.

All of these were delivered in

a hauntingly beautiful soprano with just a bit of the slavish melancholy. And, just when one was beginning to suspect a kind of inverted nationalism from all those Russian songs, we were electrified by seven Spanish dances by Defoli. They sparkled!

In an encore which was a *tour de force* on its own, Ms. Karashvili gave us Puccini's moving aria from *Tosca*. One has difficulty conceiving how this consummately non-Italian soprano could manage the change in manner and delivery needed for a convincing *Tosca*. But she did. In a memorable few moments we were treated to a moving, emotive *Tosca* which by itself was worth walking through a blizzard to experience. Ms. Karashvili is a formidable artist, both in appearance and delivery. She not only sang superlatively, she was able to elicit the emotion of the lyrics and hit you with them, hard.

It was a pity that such musical brilliance was expended on so few. And particularly ironic that within a short walk, some 1600 students, with their radios turned to the local "rock pile," all totally of this musical happening going on so near but so far out of mind.

This concert was part of the CANSOV concert series which tours young award winning artists from the Montreal International Competition. Both Agaronyan and Karashvili are gold medal winners from 1973.



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