

Olympics best chance for Orchesis dance group

by Rosa Jackson

Since its inception in 1963, the Orchesis Modern Dance Group has provided dancers of all levels with the opportunity to enhance their skills and to perform in a variety of choreographed numbers in its annual productions.

This year, the Orchesis dancers were offered a once-in-a-lifetime experience: the chance to perform in the Olympic Arts Festival in Calgary. As a member of Orchesis, I travelled with the group to Calgary for what proved to be a long but rewarding day.

Unfortunately, our group was not able to stay in Calgary for the week-long dance conference which our show was a part of — too many of us had commitments to work and school. Dancers and choreographers from all over the country had come to Calgary to share their perspectives on dance, but we were limited to catching glimpses of their work being rehearsed.

At 9:00 a.m. we left for Calgary. Piling into the bus, most of us were too tired to be very excited about the show, but as we got closer to our destination, the atmosphere became more and more lively. Junk food was passed around and devoured, and energy food (i.e. bran muffins and fruit) brought by the more health-conscious among us was rejected.

We made a quick stop in Red Deer, where a few cups of coffee gave our spirits an extra boost, and for the remainder of the ride we chattered (and ate), joked (and ate), and sang (and ate).

By the time we arrived at Calgary's University (a campus where the buildings don't clash!) I felt ready for a siesta, but we had a full schedule of rehearsals planned for the afternoon. Two dressing rooms accom-

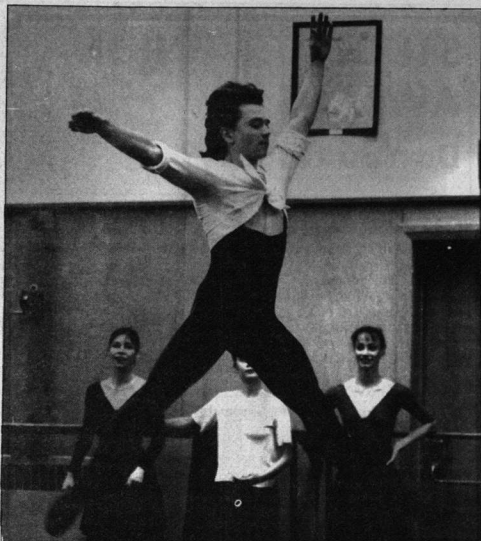
modated our group of about forty, and we soon made the space our own; scattering our bags, costumes, make-up, and, of course, food on every available surface.

Our first concern was the size of the stage — unfamiliar dimensions would cause confusion and possibly collisions. As we poked our heads through the theatre door, we met with a surprise: on the stage was a group of bare-chested men of assorted size, shape and age, all wearing black spandex tights. At various intervals, one or more of them leaped through the air or emitted strange wailing noises. This must be art, I thought.

The stage was much smaller, and much stickier, than what we had been used to practicing on, so the afternoon was a period of adjustment. It was also the first time that I had seen any of the other Orchesis numbers. I was impressed by the distinctiveness of the pieces: each has a theme or style which sets it apart from the rest.

The show consisted of both humorous and serious numbers, showcasing the work of universities and colleges from throughout the country. Because the piece which I was performing in, "oh Yeah", was last, we had a long wait before going on stage. For dinner we walked to the newly built University of Calgary's Students' Union building, which is reminiscent of West Edmonton Mall or the W. C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre. Back in the dressing room, choreographer Vanessa Harris commented, "I have never seen so many dancers eat so much junk food in my entire life!"

We were not allowed to watch the pieces preceding ours, but we could hear their music and the audience's reaction to them. The audience went hysterical over the shirt-



Orchesis in action

Photo: Rob Galbraith

less men, but I later heard that their number was not intended to be funny. An African style piece performed by the University of Calgary was also extremely popular, and the Orchesis numbers were all well received.

When the time finally came to perform

our dance, I found myself more excited than nervous. After the long wait, we were glad to be on stage at last. Those six minutes made our long hours of rehearsal worthwhile.

Orchesis will be performing at SUB Theatre, February 5th and 6th.

Tabackin Trio play Suite

by Mike Spindloe

Leew Tabackin, a firmly established favourite with Edmonton jazz audiences who, by his own count has been here "eight or ten times since 1980," is back in town once again. He plays the Yardbird Suite for four nights as part of a Canadian mini-tour, which also includes appearances in Saskatoon and Vancouver.

Tabackin, who plays tenor saxophone and flute, is appearing with his trio, which includes Dennis Irwin on bass and Bill Goodwin on drums. Although Tabackin is no stranger to a variety of jazz formats, he enjoys playing within the format of a small group, saying that "with only three players on stage we must complement each others playing, which requires a high level of concentration and communication." He adds that "people seem to empathize with the trio concept," perhaps because that onstage communication is also very apparent to the audience.

Tabackin began playing at an early age, taking up the flute in junior high school and

then tenor saxophone at about age 15. He studied at a music conservatory in Philadelphia before doing a stint in the U.S. army which ended in 1963. After basic training, however, his army duties included playing in a concert band and forming a jazz group, which he says, "I got out in the nick of time," just before the U.S. began sending troops to Vietnam.

He worked out of New York until 1972, playing live and recording with a number of different people and then moved to Los Angeles, where he was a member of the Tonight Show band from 1972 until 1976. Tabackin refers to this as simply "a very boring experience," citing a lack of variety in the performance opportunities. He remained in L.A. until 1982 and then once again moved back to New York where he and his band have based themselves since.

Tabackin has recorded a large number of albums over the years, in a number of formats ranging from Big Band to small ensemble. His latest, as a member of a quartet under the name Angelica, was

released two years ago and featured Randy Brecker, Danny Richman and Ray Drummond.

When asked to describe his own musical style, Tabackin proves elusive yet makes sense without committing himself. He believes that "if you describe it you end up putting limitations on it." However, his approach was definitely influenced by the well-known players of his youth in the 1950's, including people like Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane, but Tabackin also "made it a point to investigate the history of the music to find my own place in it and come to terms with my own approach."

With refreshing modesty he claims that "if I'm lucky I'll be able to add something to the existing jazz tradition." Tabackin also prefers an acoustic setting, saying that "music is meant to be performed that way. What I do is the antithesis of commercial music like Kenny G."

Arriving in Edmonton in the middle of what will probably be the coldest period of the year doesn't faze him. "I'm used to it now," he laughs, "from playing here every winter for the last four or five years."

The Leew Tabackin Trio began their four night stand at the Yardbird Suite last night, Admission Thursday is halfprice for students.

Spirit of mountain Ascent

by Jerome Ryckbost
from a conversation with Frank Moher

Frank Moher's latest work was inspired by an accidental find. *The Third Ascent*, as the play is titled, is based on the life of Henry Stimson, an American with considerable influence at the White House during World War II.

"*The Third Ascent* originated by accident. I stumbled on a really small piece of information," says Moher.

"At the time of the discovery, I was writing a film about Chief Mountain — a mountain just south of the Alberta-Montana border which Indian legend says has spiritual power. While researching this film in the library of the nearby town of Cardston I came across an interesting fact about Stimson in the card files.

"I know Stimson was an Ivy-League American, and Secretary of War under President Roosevelt. The Cardston records showed that Stimson came up to climb Chief Mountain, and for the same reason the Indians do: it's a spiritual thing.

"I had a suspicion that he may have had something to do with the bomb, so I looked into it. He basically squired the A-bomb from conception to dropping.

"That contradiction — this supposedly spiritual man who did this horrific thing — that's what inspired the play," says Moher. "It was just absolute luck that I put the two

together."

Moher read all he could find about Stimson. "Genuine interest made me look further. The literature was very self-serving. It talked about what a peace-maker and statesman Stimson was, praising his foreign policy. And yet — when has American foreign policy ever been benign? Never. So how much of a peacemaker could this guy have been...?"

The more Moher read, the more Stimson's character emerged. "Stimson is an amazing study of contradictions. He was a highly moral man, incredibly idealistic."

Moher explains that Stimson fell into dis-favour after the second World War. This may be why Stimson climbed Chief Mountain again, 30 years later, says Moher. "Perhaps he felt the luck had worn off, or possibly it was to purify himself for future life." Indian legends say climbing Chief Mountain is 'good medicine.' "You bring good medicine away with you."

Moher's *The Third Ascent* centers around Stimson's activities, both in the White House and on Chief Mountain. Though the play is somewhat political, Moher says he doesn't use his writing to push his own ideas. "I don't see playwrighting as a form of self-expression. What's important is that I give expression to the community. It's trying to function like... like a social worker."



Leew Tabackin — flute in hand