

A poke at macho athleticism

by Riccardo Sala

Robert North's *Troy Game* was the first of a trio of pieces staged by the National Ballet of Canada, along with Jiri Kylian's *Forgotten Land* and George Balanchine's *Symphony in C*.

Staged to the strong, throbbing beat of Bob Downes' Brazilian folk songs "Batacuda" and "Shadow Boxing Solo," the eight male dancers of *Troy Game* threw themselves into their roles with athletic abandon.

It was a lighthearted piece, with Homeric emphasis on folly rather than tragedy. A gentle greenish-yellow

What have we done to deserve this?

FILM

High Heels
 directed by Pedro Almodovar
 starring Victoria Abril and Marisa Paredes

by Pedram Fouladianpour

Like Jean-Jacques Beineix, Pedro Almodovar belongs to a group of young European film directors who blend pop culture with personal integrity and a distinct cinematic style.

Almodovar's films, including *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, which he calls an "updated neorealist film," *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* and *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, are known for their intensity and absurd sense of humour.

High Heels, Almodovar's current release, is the story of Rebecca (*Tie Me Up!*'s Victoria Abril), a broadcast journalist who is to meet her mother Becky (Marisa Paredes) after many years of separation. A man whom they both know is murdered, and they both claim responsibility as an act of self-sacrifice.

Almodovar's objective is obvious: to examine a mother/daughter relationship, an issue loaded with emotion. Unfortunately, he betrays his plot in many ways.

Almodovar disrupts the emotional development of some scenes with humour. It is unclear whether Almodovar is parodying these feelings or is trying to ironically comment on them. In either case, the director leads his audience into ambiguities without explanation or elaboration.

High Heels bears some resemblance to certain films by director Ingmar Bergman, including an obvious homage (Rebecca quotes an entire scene from *Autumn Sonata*). In addition, it contains some elements which have been taken out of a Hitchcock film.

Another interesting aspect of *High Heels* is Almodovar's use of colour. Every shot is painted with different kinds of vibrant colours, making the images a joy to see. Unfortunately, there is little justification for them.

There are some hidden elements in the film on which Almodovar regrettably refuses to expand. One of these is the omnipresence of the camera, or the media in general. Rebecca's confession takes place in front of a studio camera. Almodovar also calls attention to the monitoring of these people's deepest relationships by the camera. But the film does not attempt any on-going analysis of the role of the media.

If nothing else, *High Heels* is probably the first European film that is advertising for a corporation (in this case, Chanel).

THEATRE

Troy Game
 choreographed by Robert North
 National Ballet
 O'Keefe Centre

hued backdrop, against which the dancers were highlighted, mirrored the moral ambiguity of folly.

The dancing was generally good and spontaneous. If there were any faux pas, they were covered over with the improvisation constantly at play in the piece.

According to the programme, *Troy Game* "pokes fun at muscle-flexing and macho athleticism while celebrating its virtuosity." It mocked the more exaggerated forms of male ostentatiousness, such as boxing and adolescent jock roughhouse play.

Troy Game was the light part of the mixed bill, before the National Ballet waded into more serious wa-

ters with Kylian's *Forgotten Land*. Thematically, the harsh environs of Britain's North Sea coast in Kylian's piece are a far way away from the jungle evoked in North's work.

Six couples took the stage for *Forgotten Land*, led by a couple in black, Karen Kain and Graeme Mears, who commenced with their pas de deux, followed by a grey couple, then a red one, and so on. All along the dancers were accompanied by Benjamin Britten's evocative and sensitive *Sinfonia da Requiem*.

The mixed bill ended with Balanchine's 1948 work *Symphony in C*.

The pas de deux of Gizella Witkowsky and Peter Ottmann started off the first movement, the Allegro Vivo. The ballet was danced to French composer Georges Bizet's 1855 work, *Symphony No. 1 in C major*.



Paul Winston, Nicholas Khan and William Marrie star in choreographer Robert North's *Troy Game*, which "pokes fun at muscle-flexing and macho athleticism while celebrating its virtuosity." The piece was on a triple bill with Jiri Kylian's *Forgotten Land* and George Balanchine's *Symphony in C*. photo by Cylla von Tiedemann



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