

Les Grands Ballets Canadiens

BY JANET FRENCH

Les Grands Ballets Canadiens exploded in the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium on October 15th. This first date of their current national tour treated Haligonians to an unforgettable evening of choreographic splendor.

The evening featured major works by three renowned choreographers. Les Grands Ballets opens with Gioconda Barbuto's *Piccolo Mondo*, a captivating and highly co-ordinated piece.

Inspired by the phrase "small world we live in," *Piccolo Mondo* features intricate patterns and turbulent interactions. There is so much action and interplay in this piece that, at times, it is difficult to catch all of the different scenarios occurring.

Barbuto's piece is hypnotizing, for there is never a dull moment. The exchanges between solos and ensemble dance are done with brilliant smoothness, so one barely notes the transitions.

Dancer organization is sharply coordinated, yet unpredictable — out of a mess of movement, five perfectly paired couples of women and men will spontaneously appear.

Next, the audience is tantalized with the Kevin O'Day's playful contemporary piece, *Slow Smoke*.

Performed to music which is vaguely folk-country plus a dash of blues, *Slow Smoke* is a surprisingly sharp exploration of lethargy. Divided into six sets, the dancers taunt and abuse each other in this dark, smoky number.

Slinky and flirtatious, O'Day's work gives rise to heaps of physical humor without sacrificing immaculate ballet technique. Despite the nomenclature, *Slow Smoke* is quick and clever, extracting titters and giggles from the audience at times. O'Day has certainly produced an entertaining work, and Les Grands Ballets performs it flawlessly.

The performance concludes with *Chez la duchesse*, a choreographic triumph of Septime Webre. This Texan choreographer has stormed the United States with his creations, having worked with the American Repertory Ballet and moving on now to artistic directorship at The Washington Ballet.

Complex and bustling, *Chez la duchesse* takes us back in time with classical costumes. Also divided into six parts, this work explores the personal interactions of classic times, with contemporary movements. Notable in this work is a pas de deux performed by Nanci Crowley and Olivier Wecxsteen. Crowley is a stunning dancer, and melted beautifully into all of her movements. *Chez la duchesse* also includes an impressive set with nine male dancers, which was highly dynamic. Les Grands Ballets Canadiens are particularly impressive because of their strong set of male dancers. It is rare to see a company exploit men for more than merely tools in

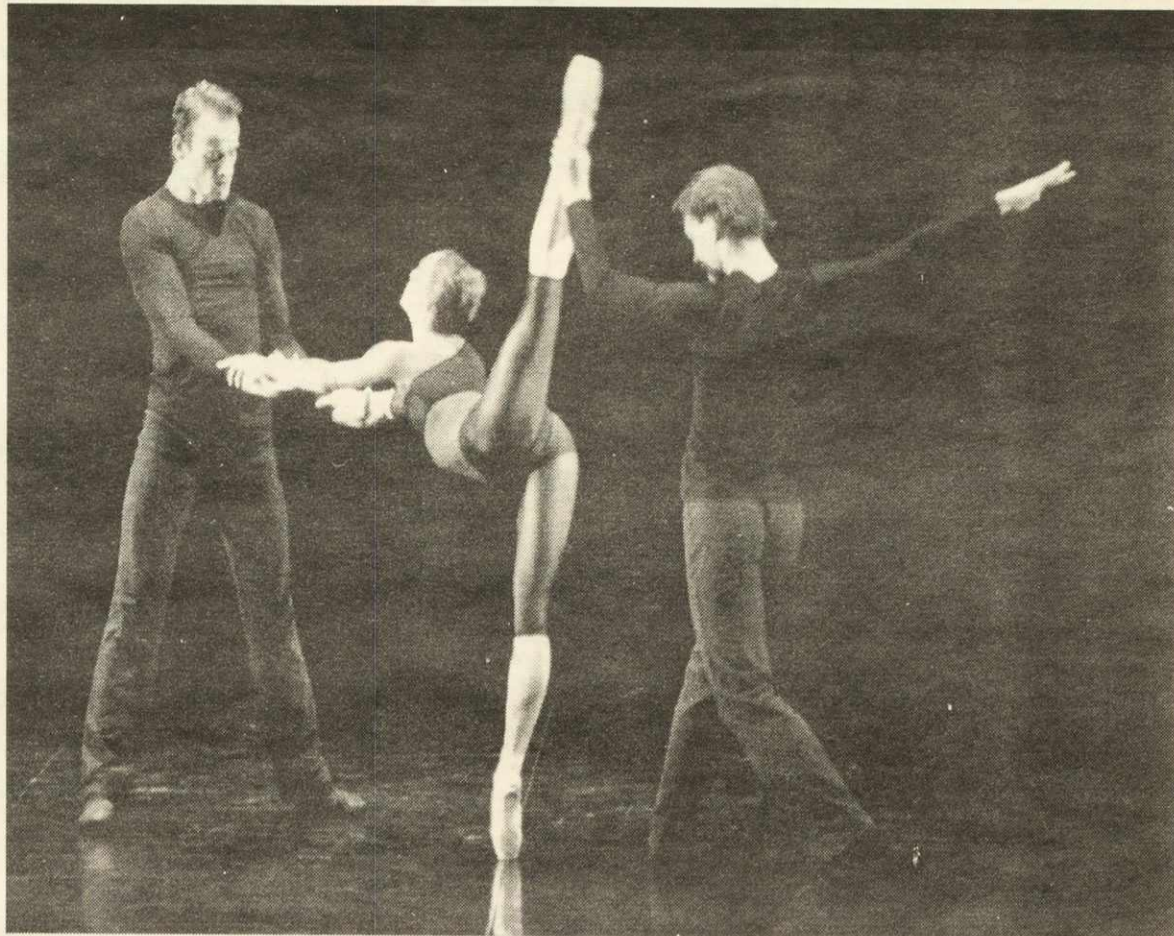
a pas de deux.

The choreographic works chosen by Les Grands Ballets seem to have common threads. All three pieces placed obsessive emphasis on leg extensions and intense 'pas de deux' interplay.

Also, the ensemble sets were extremely busy, and so many different things were going on that it was impossible to catch it all. It feels like something has been missed when you only watch the pieces once.

Although the choreography is varied and unique, the outstanding aspect of the performance is the company themselves. If this company was a mathematical equation, the whole would be greater than the sum of its individual dancers. Every last performer in Les Grands Ballet Canadiens is tuned in and flawless, and the result is a product that weaker companies are incapable of producing. Not only are the dancers necessarily strong and flexible, but they possess a mesmerizing collective fluidity.

The only disappointment of the evening was the apathy of the crowd, whom seemed to have no concept of the talent they beheld. Considering that this calibre of dance comes to Halifax so rarely, there was a notable lack of enthusiasm. Sadly, the audience also failed to acknowledge the outstanding talents of principal dancer Nanci Crowley, who



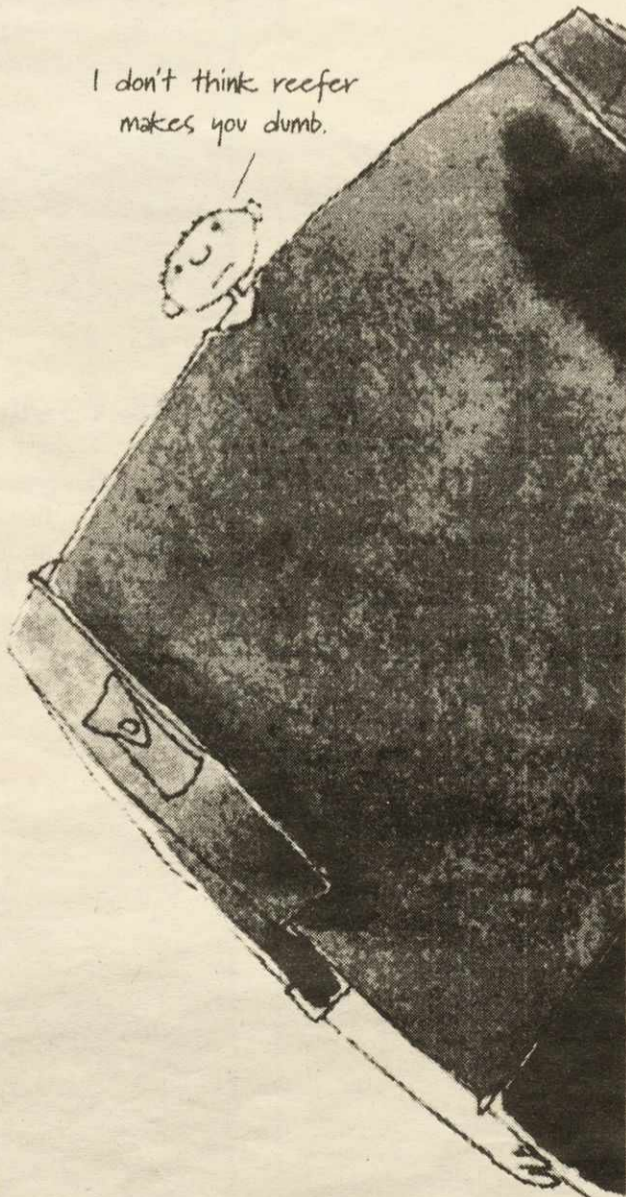
Flex: choreography by Les Grands Ballets Canadiens

received only polite applause.

The judgement of the audience was poor, but the talents of Les Grands Ballet Canadiens are quite the opposite. The three selected pieces were captivating, and there was not one dull moment in the entirety of the performance. The only regret is that Halifax received one showing only, for it is possible I would need to see these pieces ten times to catch all the action. However, one thing is clear the first time around — Les Grands Ballets Canadiens set the standard for the quality of dance we should see in Canada.

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