

# entertainment

## Thakkar's dance: total surrender

By Diane Ngui-Yen

On Thursday night in Burton auditorium, well-known teacher and performer, Menaka Thakkar, along with her musicians from India, charmed her audience in a three-hour recital of the Indian dance styles of *Bharatanatyam* from South India and *Odissi* from East India.

The stage was dark except for a small flame of incense burning. There was just enough light to make out a richly decorated altar with a brass sculpture of an Indian deity, frozen in an exquisitely balanced dance pose. A few minutes later, the stage was bright and all eyes were riveted on a small figure in a dazzling costume performing amazing feats of dance genius with a grace, elegance and ease which was hard to believe. Thakkar had once again brought to life the ancient Indian classical dance style of *Bharatanatyam*.

The first half of the programme demonstrated three dance items in the *Bharatanatyam* dance style in which Thakkar combined pure dance movements with mime. The mime or 'nritya' is expressional dance movements performed with highly stylized movements of the body. The dancer tells an ancient story from Indian mythology and tries to convey the different moods of the main characters and how they interrelate with one another.

Through movements of the hands, eyes and neck, for instance, a forest scene with two lovers playing games with each other is depicted. The dancer plays all the parts and is therefore constantly changing roles throughout the dance. Thakkar's clear hand gestures and compelling facial expressions had the audience chuckling one moment and silently grieving for the heroine the next.

One of the most beautiful dance items in this part of the programme

was the *Padam*, the expressional dance piece, in which Thakkar told one of the many stories of Krishna - one of the most popular gods in Indian mythology. The story is told of Krishna eating mud when he was a little boy. His mother on finding him tells him to open his mouth and show her what he has been eating. When she does look into his mouth, however, instead of seeing mud, she sees the whole universe, and is completely overwhelmed. Accompanied by the hauntingly beautiful voice of Mrs. Meera Seshadri, Thakkar became mother and then child with such fluidity and intensity that it was easy to forget that she was only acting a part.

In the second half of the programme, Thakkar performed the very soft and almost delicate style of *Odissi*. Unlike the straight and angular lines of *Bharatanatyam*, *Odissi* allows the dancer's torso more freedom of movement. Thakkar's eyes would look coquettishly out at the audience and then back to the ground as her body and hands moved gently from a static, sculptural pose to a precise execution of a pure dance sequence.

Thakkar's musicians, here from India to accompany her on her tour of Canada and the USA, all proved to be competent and outstanding performers. The only musical piece performed between dance items was

an exciting drum duet between Guru Kelucharem Mohapatra, who played the pakhawaj, a two-headed drum from North India, and T.K. Ramakrishnan, who played the mrdangam, a two-headed drum from South India.

The final dance, *Mokhya Nata*, was explained as a total surrender of the individual to the Absolute, a



dance which freed the soul from the body. The drum beats were fast and frenzied, but they were executed with such ease that they seemed to become an intangible force compelling the dancer to become one with them. It was a fitting end, and it allowed a very satisfied and intoxicated audience to leave knowing that they had seen a very rich and dynamic part of Indian culture.

## The word is Love

By Colin Smith

A sardonic treat was in order for those that dropped in on York Cabaret's production of *Smile When You Say 'I Love You'* last week.

Conceived and directed mainly by David McCann, the revue was a scattershot assemblage of musical set-pieces (some serious, most satirical), comedy black-outs, a few dramatic soliloquies and dashes of intellectual graffiti — all loosely revolving around the thematic line (paraphrased): "Isn't it funny how two people can be completely apart when saying the same thing..." The rhetorical question, though hardly cerebral, was wisely left unanswered, although the end number offered a glimmer of hope among the savage idiocies of everyday affairs.



The revue was heavily laced with absurdist overtones. Against a backdrop of white the four cast members (Suzanne Bennett, Paul Harrington-Smith, David McCann and Charlotte Moore) energetically, often deliberately maniacally, paraded their highly-polished material. Dressed to the nines in tails and evening gowns, the four became tragic pawns to the circular motif of their subject; in that all of the actors' movements were circular and diffused, dialogues often went nowhere, and their minimal stage was forever cut off at the wings with a nicely understated symbolic use of the spotlights (green and red used particularly well). Amid all this high-energy performance sat musical director Jamie Pearl — a

gently absurdist figure to the cast, as he sat (also dressed in tails) smack in centre stage background at his piano (with a vase on top and three red roses in it, yet) providing the foursome with their music.

There were some imperfections, noticeably with the handling of the material. Herrington-Smith's monologue on role confusion suffered from abundant theatricality, as did his and Bennett's stint as a pair of giggly honeymooners embarrassing each other right and left with persistent sexual double entendres. A more realistic approach would have helped those two vignettes get their point across more effectively.

The rest of the show, however, was as tight as a wino on a Saturday night, and offered up many memorable sequences: a hilariously pungent satire on psychoanalysis in general and Harbinger in particular; Moore's recitation of a section of Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* leading into a musical debunking of marriage; a dramatic bit by Bennett, McCann and Moore dealing with the one-night stand; McCann and Moore's risqué version of "Let's Misbehave"; and even some religious slander, with the two women kneeling on the apron, operatically hamming up a hymn while making fun of their singing styles.

Lastly should be mentioned the ambitious triple counterpoint that contains the essence of the show. Through body positioning the foursome's energies are directed out at the audience and away from each other, making the simultaneous mixing of Gates' "If", Croce's "I'll Have To Say I Love You In A Song" and John-Taupin's "Your Song" a touching and melancholy moment that lingered well after the house lights went up.

## 60 students on project

# The biggest drawing of all

By Andrea Doucet

"Artists are like mountain climbers. They do something because it is difficult to do, because it is a definite challenge." So says Bruce Parsons, in connection with one of the largest pieces of contemporary art in the world, *York Palms*.



Bruce Parsons

This colossal drawing of palm markings of 16 York students was the brainchild of Bill Vazan, an internationally known Montreal sculptor. It was completed last week between Keele St. and the graduate residences under the direction of Vazan and Parsons, the co-ordinator of York's graduate visual arts program.

Ten graduate students and over 50 undergraduates participated in the project. While the painting stage began only last Tuesday, the creative process goes back to August when Vazan came to survey the area, before pacing it a month later.

Last week the land was staked and studied, and a square grid system was set up for imprint references. The students, armed with paint rollers, demolished no less than 54 gallons of water-based white paint in completing the groundwork.

According to Parsons, the project can be perceived on four planes. On a physical level, the art lives as an "earth work" painted on the field. Secondly, someone who is actually "in" the painting can feel its universal message which joins the human element with nature.

With regard to the fact that the work will not last until spring,



Bill Vazan

Vazan preserved its essence by photographing it from an airplane 1000 feet above the ground.

Finally, the event will be captured on a film comprised of video tape, photographs and movie slides.

Between its presence on the land and the documentation of it on film, Vazan's earth work also touches upon the concepts of time and space.

The visual arts department brings artists to York from the country's five regions during the year. This year, two students, Carmelo Arnoldin and Jim Adams, proposed Vazan's name.

The class' initial idea was to construct a sun calendar atop BOG hill (in front of the Ross building). Due to a lack of time, the students opted for a drawing that would equal three football fields in size.

The work was completed Sunday when Vazan photographed his work (and the students') from fifty perspectives aboard an airplane piloted by professor Harold Schiff of U of T's department of aerospace science.

When he touched ground again, Vazan exclaimed that *York Palms* looked much better than he had expected.

"I just didn't think we would get it done," added Parsons. "This accomplishment was a Herculean task for us."

## AGO series lets you look at dance

*Looking At Dance-Live, On Film, As Video* at the AGO is already two weeks into its six week program, but it's not too late to do some looking.

Selma Odom, a dance historian in York's dance department, selected and annotated the films for *Dance and Film*. Some of the upcoming screenings are:

- Wednesday November 2, 5:30 pm: *A Dancer's World* (Martha Graham, 1957); *Anna Sokolow Directs "Odes"* (David Parker, director, 1972).

- 7:00 pm: *Incense* (Ruth St. Denis, 1953); *Air for the G-String* (Doris Humphrey, 1934); *Lamentation* (1943); *Appalachian Spring* (1958),

*Flute of Krishna* (1926), (all Martha Graham).

- Thursday, November 3, program of Asian Dance Theatre; 5:30: *Amakudari* (Japan), *Trance and Dance in Bali* (Indonesia), *Chinese Theatre*.

- 7:00 pm: *Komai, Shimai*, (Japan), *Bala* (India), *Three Dances from Cholla-Do, Korea*.

Upcoming films include York dance department chairperson Margaret Dale's *Mirror from India, Singin' in the Rain, Margot Fonteyn, Norman McLaren's Pas de deux*, Merce Cunningham's *Walkaround Time*, and Russian productions of *Swan Lake* and *Giselle*.

On each Wednesday and Thursday for the next four weeks, a dance videotape selected by Peggy Gale will be presented. The tapes will be shown continually from noon to 10 pm in the AGO's lecture hall:

November 2, 3: Tapes by Visus; performers include Margaret Dragu, Odette Oliver, Judy Jarvis.

November 9, 10: Tapes by Matthew Speier; Linda Rubin. November 16, 17: Tapes by Paul Wong, Don Druick, Terry Riley

November 23, 24: Tapes by Joan Jonas, Simone Forti, Douglas Carbert, Visus. Videotape shows are free

with gallery admission.

*The Lokking at Dance Live* shows include:

November 2: David Earle and Danny Grossman with members of the Toronto Dance Theatre

November 3: Sara Rudner Performance Ensemble

November 9: Trisha Brown Company

November 10: Charlotte Hildebrand, Le Groupe de la Place Royale

November 17: Missing Associates

All performances are at 9 pm. For information on any events, call 361-0414.