

ENTERTAIN

MEAT

So we lack culture, eh?

MEAT at the ballet

When I first saw the National Ballet ten years ago, I was stunned by the sheer size of the company; I knew it was going to be big, but I must say, I was totally unprepared for the spectacle that I witnessed. And I don't necessarily mean the performance.

I, along with a crew of twenty-five or so other miscreants, was called in to do the set up, run the show, then strike it. This, in a more understandable fashion, consists of: a) unloading four (you had to be there) forty-five foot long tractor trailers, b) laying the dance floor (imagine a rubbery, vulcanized vinyl jellyroll, that when stretched out, measures forty feet in length, three in width, but thankfully, only about an eighth of an inch thick, just packed full of the most resilient molecules money can buy...times twelve.), c) rigging over a hundred and fifty lights, running all the necessary cable and manning the 'picker' while the head electrician focuses them, d) hanging all of the masking (the black curtains that keep the audience from seeing things that it isn't supposed to), and hanging all the soft goods (scenery that is painted on cotton drops and is used either as a background, or sometimes, is cut into shapes

and hung at different intervals from front to back, to enhance the illusion of great depth and distance on the stage), and also hanging hard scenery, which could consist of rooftops, ramparts or just about anything relegated to being 'flown' as opposed to being rolled, onto the stage during a scene change, e) preparing all of the props, from the very smallest rings and baubles to the most gargantuan trees imaginable, f) sorting, steaming and distributing, quite literally, hundreds of shoes and costumes (they aren't all tu-tus), g) setting up an orchestra in an unbelievably small space (you're gonna put them where?!), and then milking it so that everyone in the audience has the opportunity to experience the labours of the musicians, as they accompany a vision which compels.

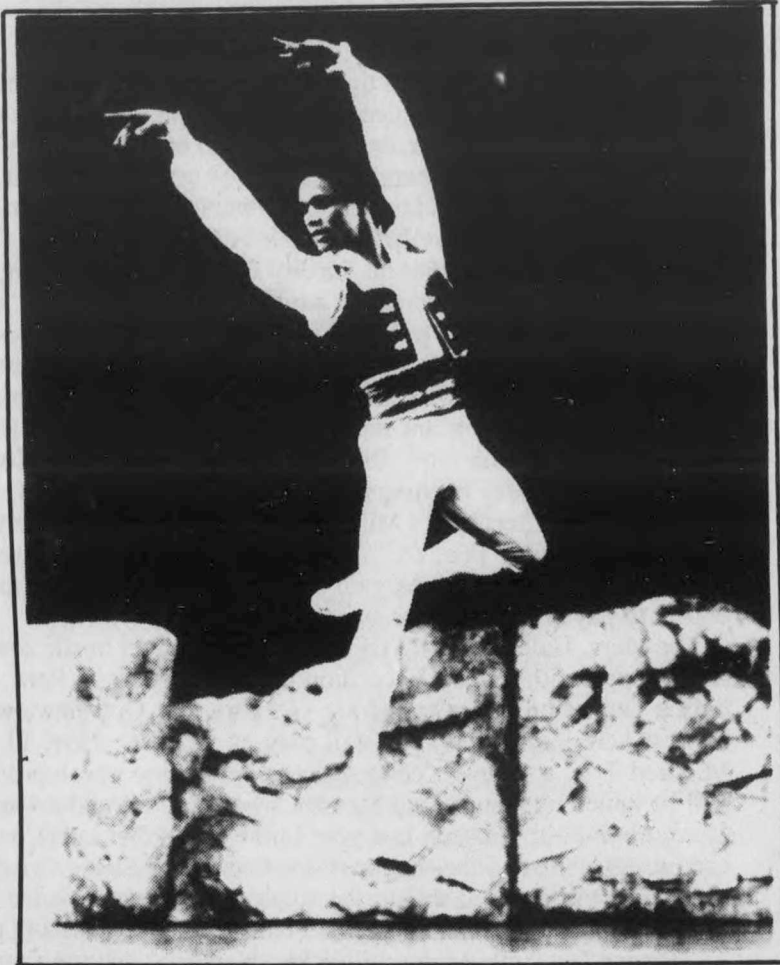
I had never seen them before, and quite honestly, I was pretty dubious about the whole thing, I mean really...ballet? I didn't happen to have the fortune to get a show call for that particular production, but I could see the show, if I wanted to watch from up in the grid. I checked it out, would've been a fool not to, people were paying over twenty bucks to see it... it must be...at least...interesting.

It was. The ballet, they come to town every second

fall, eh, and I've seen each of the shows. I've seen the most incredible thunder and lightning storms, in the darkest of night with pixies prancing, the wind howling in the air, and the stark, ominous strings of the basses rumbling in the distance, the baneful hint of timpani, reverberating, just beyond earshot...I've seen the sun rise in the most captivating fashion. I've seen dancers suddenly appear way up in the air, and I'm forced to wonder how it was done even though I already know, but it looks so good that I can't help but be enraptured with the innocence of its execution.

My point, I guess, is that I've seen some pretty interesting things happen when the ballet people come around. Over the years they have changed their show format, from bringing in impossibly huge productions which dwarfed the venues, to doing excerpts from these shows, which are designed to work within the tour venues, and to avoid financially breaking everyone involved in the process.

I realize that there has been some opposition to this change to format, but I do not tend to agree with the arguments I hear, but then, I've only been watching the ballet for ten years. The ballet still holds a



Yes, as a matter of fact it is a cucumber...

magical lure, and maybe that keeps me from seeing its alleged shortcomings. I am aware however that the National Ballet touring company includes some of the hardest working people on the planet. They have never disappointed me and I'm confident they never will. It's true that they're only bringing two trucks this year, but what counts is the magic that's

created on stage, and not some neat, technical trick, packed in a box, to be hauled out night after night.

This year the company will perform excerpts from 'Concerto for Flute and Harp,' 'Steptext,' 'Don Quixote' and 'Dream Dances.'

The show takes place at 8:00 p.m. this Friday and Saturday in the Playhouse.

Dr. Vic's Picks

Record Reviews by Dr. Vic Hedges

FEAR OF SONIC PIXILATED YOUTH

I have a good friend who is making a bit of a name for herself in the New York art world. Her work would be classified, I think, as abstract-expressionist/neo-pop by anal-retentive people like myself who have to categorize everything. Now, I'm real happy for my friend (we'll call her Ann, because that is her name) but the truth is that I don't get it at all. Perhaps I'm not mature enough. I can't figure out what this stuff she produces is about, and I wonder how long she can continue to make anti-art statements based on irony. I guess I just don't understand the references or precedents or something. What is the appeal?

Which brings me to today's reviews. I must admit that I don't understand the appeal of much of what graces the CHSR playlist. I don't get hardcore; it may well be the finest music ever produced, but I'll be damned if I can understand it. This bafflement

even extends to the more accessible garage-trash bands like Sonic Youth and the Pixies. Now, before the alienated black-clad hordes accuse the good doctor of being an old turd who swings out to Dan Hill and Chicago, I'd like to state that, although I admire the sensitivity of those guys, I enjoy a good garage band as much as anyone; from the Velvet and the Stooges to the Replacements. But, silly old fascist that I am, I do like a tune - a hummable, danceable, drinkable structure to get the toes a tapping. This does not appear to be a prerequisite with most hardcore -- trash/thrash artists.

Now, I don't want to be this way. I sound like my father did 15 years ago when he caught me in front of the mirror wearing my sister's makeup and underwear while singing along to "Personality Crisis" off the first New York Dolls album -- an event that scarred me deeply. So I decided

to really give this stuff a chance to put me on the headphones and attempt to pick up the subtle nuances that had been escaping my fungus-encrusted ears. I chose as my first subject the new Sonic Youth album GOO, mostly because it has such a great title. The reviews I had read of the album suggested that even though this was their major label debut, they had not compromised their sound -- which in simple English means that they had remained quite raw.

It started out well. The opening track "Dirty Boots" had a solid underlying structure, while the thrashing guitar careened about harmlessly but tunelessly. I began to relax, to feel good about myself. I was going to understand; to be one with this 90's kind of music. Then it started -- the white noise, the mutant offspring of "White Light White Heat, the benzedrine horror that can

sterilize frogs at 200 yards. The vocals are emotionless, ironic (the last refuge of scoundrels?) but quite humorous. There is structure, and almost all the songs are anchored by a bit of a tune, especially "Kool Thing," "Mote" and "Disappear." But the piercing wail of the guitar sends me scrambling back to my Paul Desmond cocktail jazz albums. I'm sorry, but I failed - I still don't understand.

I was a bit more familiar with the work of the Pixies, and had enjoyed much of it. Songs like "Age of Mutilation" and "La La Love" were nice raw pop numbers that one could swing to and not feel threatened by, although there also was alot of nasty thrashing about. Their new album *Bossanova* continues in much the same vein, with catchy but slippery and sloppy songs like "Velouria," "Allison" and "Dig for Fire." These follow the brutality of "Rock Music," which confuses

and pains me. I was surprised by the number of rather ominous, tense songs like "Is She Weird," "Ana," and "All Over the World." These reminded me of early Cure played by drunks, which is high praise indeed.

So your correspondent remains unconverted to the Sonic Youth cause. But I do feel comfortable with Bossanova, and recommend it to those who enjoy that sort of swamp thing.

