

Zing! Pop! Zap! — bringing the fifties to life

BY JANET FRENCH

The simplistic, happy-go-lucky feel of the fifties is brought to life in *Zing! Pop! Zap! The Don Gilles Project*. Described as "a retrospective of 1950s theatre dance", *Zing! Pop! Zap!* features the choreography of Andrea Leigh-Smith and none other than Don Gilles himself. The

performance ran from Oct. 23 to 25 at the DANSpace on Grafton.

Chances are that you may not have heard of Don Gilles, but are likely familiar with some of his past co-workers. Gilles' past experiences include dancing with the Sadler-Wells Theatre Ballet, choreographing the *Wayne and Schuster* show for twenty years and working with Gene Kelly in the

movie *Invitation to the Dance*. Gilles has also choreographed for Norman Jewison, The Janet Baldwin Ballet, The Royal Winnipeg Ballet and The Royal Ballet of Canada, and has since retreated to Cape Breton to retire from the stage.

Zing! Pop! Zap! was indeed reminiscent of the fifties, as it merged the energy and the humour

with the choreography and costumes. Yet somehow the performance differed from what I had expected. Between the numbers, there was a large amount of video footage, both of Gilles' career highlights and interview clips.

It appears that the choreography had been inspired by the performances of the past, as shown in the video clips. However, peculiar dramatic twists were added to the recreated vintage choreography. For example, in "Doodlin", a quirky and bright piece, the cheerful smiles and lively choreography were transformed into the amusing and dramatic scenario of the dancers losing control over their own feet as they became possessed. The result proved to be eerie but hilarious.

Another notable piece was "Nut #", an exploration of movement to voice. The dancers moved about the stage not to music but to onomatopoeia which they were shouting. It was a bit like watching four well-synchronized mental patients, and was highly comical. Thus, the origin of the performance's title, *Zing! Pop! Zap!* became obvious.

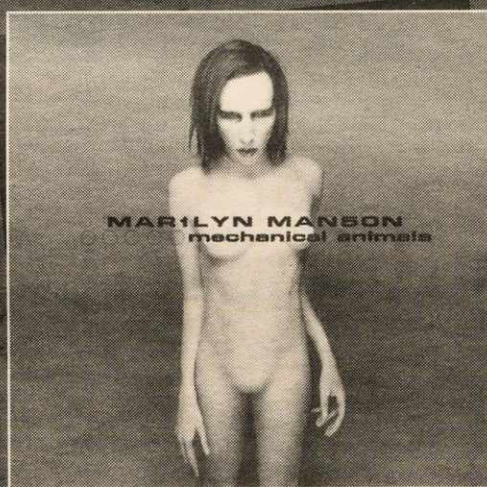
The program also included some sly and sexy pieces, reflecting the emergence of such choreographic style in the 1950s. Performed to our favourite old tunes, "Fever", choreographed to Peggy Lee's original and "Panther", danced to the "Pink Panther Theme", exemplified the sort of piece you would see on a television variety show in the fifties.

A confusing aspect of the performance were the "Interludes", which were brief solos by the dancers that conveyed a more mellow,

contemplative mood. The "Interludes" seemed out of place in this show, and may have existed solely to give the dancers time to change costumes. The video footage was also somewhat out of place. Often the video was included in the interlude, with the dancer watching attentively or imitating the authentic performances. Although the tapes were interesting, there were too many, too often. It distracted the audience from the magic of live art.

To conclude, the dancing was dandy and the choreography was brilliant. Nothing less would be expected from Gilles, the historical dance veteran, or Leigh-Smith, the once Joffrey Ballet scholar. It was merely the discontinuity of the performance that distracted the audience and prevented them from feeling as if they had travelled back to the fifties themselves.

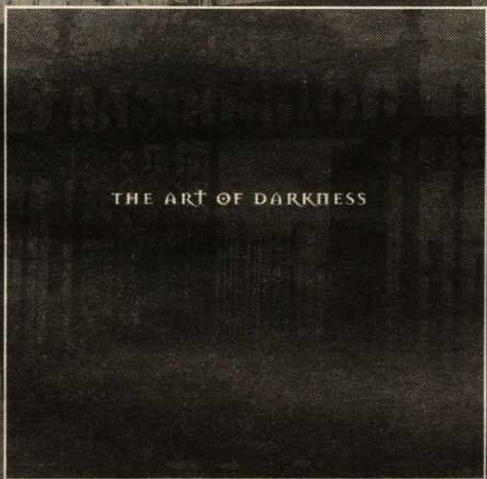
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