

Ballet not so grand

One might have predicted that Les Grands Ballets Canadiens would present an exciting rendition of *Romeo and Juliet*. Premiering at Festival Canada in 1973, the blurb goes, choreographer Brian Macdonald combined "the original poetry with music, sculpture and dance." But from the moment that the Montagues and Capulets rushed on stage to do each other in, one knew that such optimistic hopes were not to be fulfilled. The starkly modern sets, although fine in their own right, clashed with the sumptuous costumes. The Renaissance music, again a fine innovation in itself, provided an even background tone that the dancers could rarely transcend. There was little sense of dramatic confrontation so evident in Shakespeare's play. In fact excerpts from the play read over loudspeakers were often more exciting to hear than the movement was to watch.

The production suffered from lack of focus, particularly in the first half. The choreographer, by trying to say everything, deprived the audience of the single viewpoint that would have resulted in an aesthetic coherence. Character was suggested by costume rather than movement and little sympathy was evoked for the hero. Incessant activity - numerous entrances and exits, the too acrobatic pas de deux in the balcony scene - only wearied the viewer instead of creating the much-needed emotional impact.

The second half was more successful. The voices distracted less from the dancing - except in the final death scene which would have been more powerful had it proceeded in silence. Individuals had a chance to make a coherent statement - as Lady Capulet did in her mourning scene. Romeo and Juliet's wedding-night scene was beautifully conceived

with an interesting use of the sculpture as a bed. Here Annette Av Paul expressed the lyricism that would come to a climax in the final scene. Unfortunately her isolated tremors only spoiled this quality and one wished that this foreshadowing of tragedy had been used and exploited more fully at another time - for instance when Juliet learns of Romeo's fate and the carnival character of death becomes her partner.

In general, this dance lacked a clear idea of just what it was supposed to convey and of how the various media were to be disciplined to serve this end. What could have been a powerful assault ended in numb confusion. The distances between classical and modern ballet and mime were not successfully bridged. Shakespeare's words and Macdonald's dance rarely complemented each other but competed. If an image of the Renaissance was to be evoked, why the modern set and why not dance patterns based on traditional ones? There were many chances to increase focus and impact by increasing the use of symbolic images. The tragedy of personal desires thwarted by social conventions could have been emphasized with more obvious contrasts of the jesting and carnival scenes with those of death. But this was not possible within the restrictions imposed by remaining faithful to a sequential narrative.

The second dance, *Tam Ti Delam*, was much more satisfying. Much of this was due to Gilles Vigneault's music, whose vitality the dancers were able to match. Unhampered by costumes, they had greater opportunity to display their technique with Macdonald's more cohesive, clear and dynamic choreography. The arbitrary division into six movements provided a logical

variety of group and duet dances. The acrobatic display and square dance patterns evoked a village hall setting that needed no amplification by extraneous details. John Stanzel's comic characterization of an old Quebecois provided unifying transitions throughout the dance. Although less profound and complex than the first work, this one's direct emotional appeal and concise organization created a more immediate response and ultimately, made it more memorable.

C. Geddes



Watergate in French Canada? So claims *Rejeanne Padovani*, a film that focuses on a dinner party to give a cynical view of Canadian politics. The highly praised work is part of Edmonton Film Society's International Series, and will be shown on Mar 10 at SUB Theatre, 8 p.m.

Orchestral but not spectacular

Last Saturday evening at the Jubilee Auditorium, the Edmonton Symphony, under the direction of Pierre Hetu, presented a program which had been advertised as an "All-Orchestral Spectacular" and which featured music of Schumann, Tchaikovsky, and Shostakovich.

The first half of the program consisted of two compositions which had been inspired by literary works: Schumann's Overture to Byron's dramatic poem *Manfred*, and Tchaikovsky's Fantasy-Overture *Romeo and Juliet* based upon Shakespeare. The *Manfred* Overture produced an antiseptic effect, completely purged of any element that could be classified as dramatic. The opening syncopations lacked intensity and impact, the trombone and trumpet outbursts (near the end of the overture) sounded curiously restrained rhythmically and dynamically, and the bowed tremolos which pepper the string parts seemed insufficiently energetic.

The performance of the *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy-Overture can best be described as passionless. Mr. Hetu once again displayed his inability or unwillingness to distinguish between *piano* and *forte* dynamics; and the effect once again was monochromatic. He

also ignored many of Tchaikovsky's explicit instructions regarding articulation, thus depriving the work of much of its eloquence. Never has the duel scene been treated so cautiously in my presence; an amateur fencing club using blunted swords would have sounded thrillingly orgiastic by comparison.

The youthful Shostakovich *First Symphony* - he was nineteen when he composed it - concluded the program. Personally I find this symphony, as with much of Shostakovich, charming but otherwise redolent of facile sterility. Apart from the rather cold and dry punctuations in the brass, I am most convinced by the near passion of the third movement (*Lento*). For a program of this sort (that is, a showcase for the ESO alone), this symphony was a discreet choice in that it allowed many first chair musicians the opportunity to display their abilities the work abounds in solo material.

The evening performances were solid and clean but one departed, partly due to the choice of program, with the impression: "Orchestral" yes, "Spectacular" no.

F. N. Crory

Keaton and the Cameraman on campus

The Cameraman was Keaton's first film after moving over to MGM and forsaking his own studio and, although you couldn't tell it from this movie, the decision to go over to one of the big studios proved Keaton's downfall.

One of the most talked-about but least-seen of all

Keaton's features, *The Cameraman* has Buster, as a sidewalk tintype photographer, switch over to a movie camera in order to please his girl (Keaton is *always* doing things to please his girl). Trying to get news footage to sell to MGM, he runs into all kinds of disasters. He gets launched with a boat whose launching he's trying to photograph, and gets caught in the middle of a tong war. The latter sequence contains remarkable passages in which Keaton, attempting to film a deadly street-fight as it's happening, asserts the prerogative of all directors and tries to rearrange the reality in front of the camera to his greater aesthetic satisfaction.

Keaton has for years lived in the shadow of Chaplin as a silent-comedy actor/director. Over the past couple of years all of Chaplin's features (with one or two exceptions) have been re-released and even shown on television; but of Keaton's output we get only crumbs - an odd showing of *The General*, or, if we're lucky, *The Navigator* or *Sherlock Junior* - from his 12 feature films.

It's a pity about Keaton's relative neglect, because in his own way, he is Chaplin's equal, and that's saying a lot. Where Chaplin is always, even the midst of his most vulgar scrapes, something of a poet, Keaton remains down to earth at all times. In fact Keaton's films are perhaps the supreme example of *physical* cinema in history. Of course Keaton was always known as "The Great Stone Face", but the effectiveness of his immobile but never inexpressive countenance depends very much on the manic activity of the rest of him.

It's astonishing in these days in which every sort of impossibility is accomplished

on the screen with editing, double exposure and back-projection, to see Keaton doing the impossible with no strings attached. The typical Keaton sight-gag occurs in a single shot, with the whole of Keaton's body visible: no funny business with the camera, only in front of it. If he hadn't been one of the movies' greatest comics, he could certainly have become their greatest stuntman.

Keaton is perpetually obsessed with objects, with machines, in his films and with good reason: he is their master. With people he has more difficulty. Whenever he has to woo his girl in the front parlor, catastrophe is the result; but if he has to save her from being swept over the falls or run over by a train no problem.

The Cameraman is virtually Keaton's valedictory film. After it he never again had control of his own project, and one of the greatest of all cinematic geniuses faded ignominiously from view.



This Thursday the Graduate Students of English continue with their "Great Directors" Series with Buster Keaton's 1928 feature *The Cameraman*. Shows are at 4:00, 6:30, and 8:30 in the Humanities Building Audio-Visual Centre (Room LT-1). Admission is \$1.00.

Z.Z. don't top Chilliwack

by Nanke Phledge

6,000 concert fans were at the Kinsman Fieldhouse to see what was billed as the best rock'n roll to come out of Texas since the death of Janis Joplin and 6,000 fans went home without seeing it. What everyone did see was ZZ Top, who fell short of their crowd's anticipated expectations.

It wouldn't be fair to only blame the band. The sound system was noisy, and the Kinsman Fieldhouse is far from being perfect to host concerts in. The only real treat at Tuesday's performance was the return of Chilliwack.

Chilliwack again served as an excellent warm-up show. In their professional style they moved through eight numbers and played for a solid hour, including their encore. Their songs were all from the latest *Riding High* album, with the old crowd favorites Raino, Groundhog, and Lonesome Mary being thrown in for good measure.

The only disappointing thing about Chilliwack is the frequency with which they appear in Edmonton. Any group who tour through Edmonton as often as they do suffer from familiarity. Nevertheless, Chilliwack must be credited

with giving the concert fans their money's worth. They are a great band.

ZZ Top is not a great band. Other than having a drummer who played his eight drums and four cymbals like he had two or three sets of arms, the crowd saw little else that would induce them to buying a ZZ Top album. Their songs were tedious, their stage antics trite, and their vocals were weak. The cowboy

outfits were certainly unique, but who goes to a rock concert to see fancy duds on dudes?

Brimstone Productions sponsored the show, and did a good job of attracting a near capacity crowd. Brimstone runs their productions very efficiently with very few screw-ups. The only mistake they made this time was in selecting a band, and they don't make that mistake often.

