

York's dedicated dancers are facing a long road ahead

Story and Photos
By Paul Stuart

Today's general arts students are not vigorously attacking the books with a determined jut to the jaw and eyes alight with ambition. A BA is just an inevitable step on the road to an unknown future. Then there are the professional students—law, administrative studies—who, good children of the work ethic, are willing to endure awesome workloads now, for a day when the future will rain down dollar signs. But there are those who hear another call. Like the fine arts majors, and among them, the dancers.

arts building, the dancers goad their bodies into the leaps and arabesques, which they hope will come a little nearer to perfection. Unlike their fellow students in more conventional studies, fine arts students are gambling.... the age-old apprentice's gamble that one day all the hard work will amount to something more than sweat, exercise, and a good physique. It isn't easy. Out of about 55 first year dance recruits, perhaps 15 or 20 will be around in 1982. The demanding combination of a combined course of academic and studio work takes its toll. "If they're not together as people, they

usually fall apart, it will blow them to pieces," says department chairman Yves Cousineau of his program. Cousineau, as an instructor and an administrator, is charged with the responsibility of putting the odds in his students' favour, when they strike out on their own. He is well acquainted with the path they have to follow. Born and educated in Montreal, Cousineau became an actor in the early '50s. "I was infatuated with theatre. A friend pointed out dance to me. With some people they move and you say they're good dancers —it's there."

That's the way it was with Cousineau and he became a dancer. His real progress began when, "I found a teacher in the full sense of the word, who would not only instruct me, but made me realize that what I needed was not infatuation, but love." In 1953 he joined the National Ballet of Canada as a corps de ballet member; when he left the company in 1972 he was principal dancer. Cousineau, whose gray-flecked beard does not quite match with his youthful bearing, described a dancer's life in an interview last week. "For a company in rehearsal, works — a class for the whole company — begins at 9:30 am. From 1:00 to six, you rehearse — in my day that went five and a half days a week. The dancer is asked to learn two to three ballets at once — improve them, change them. At the end of the day you are totally exhausted, physically, emotionally and artistically. You're left feeling like a knick-knack. A professional athlete would understand very well what a dancer goes through." It all becomes more difficult on performing days. "You're already good, but you have to adjust to whoever you're dancing with, in all sorts of difficult conditions."

"Performance," says Cousineau, "is the culmination of what you're about. It is exposing the innermost, the truly so; speaking out with movement. Sometimes you reveal too much. Once you start playing there are moments of truthfulness—moments *verités*. Suddenly a role has got hold of you—you ride it; these are the greatest moments. But this happens only when you have really mastered the media you are working in, and have understood what the vocabulary consists of." It's up to York's 11 full and two part-time dance instructors to help the students learn that vocabulary. For Cousineau, to teach, is to learn. "My biggest discovery in teaching was that I had to relearn everything in order to give it to them. You know the way but you've got to dissect it for them — instruct and coach them."

York has produced a number of dance graduates who've done pretty well; to name a few:

- David Le Hay, principal dancer with the Grand Ballet Canadien (Le Hay had his first ballet class at York with Colusineau, who says he "had to hold him back or he would go too fast.")
- Karen Duplessis, of the Toronto Dance Theatre.
- Debra Mercer, of the Denver Civic Ballet.

What draws the talented to York? "The big thing about York is that the ballet teachers come from major ballet companies," said student Caroline Smith. Among them is instructor Sandra Caverly who gives mini-classes based upon the Danish system of dance Bournonville. "And York offers a lot of other things—dance therapy, notation and criticism," she added. "We don't have many dance critics in Canada, I can count them on one hand. Historians, archivists all that has to be built," says Cousineau.

York's wide curriculum is an alternative to those who are committed to dance but are not cut out to be performers. Asked if her parents didn't pressure her to go into a less exotic career, like maybe accountancy, student Jane Beharal, who will be auditioning for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet in a few weeks, replied:

York dance department chairman Yves Cousineau.



plying his trade in the '50s. "Today you have more respect for dancers as regular working artists from the community at large" he remarked. Twenty years ago "there were no grants or awards, nor was there an unemployment insurance category for dancers. You could be a shepherd, but you couldn't be a dancer," said Cousineau, almost straight-faced. In his early years with the National Ballet there were times when there was no money for the payroll, but everyone worked anyway. "When you were a member of a struggling company, you were working for a cause. Dancers were a little bit like gypsies," he recalled. "Even today some of the principal dancers are rather like gypsies." But times have changed. Even football and hockey players are turning to ballet instructors for help with their coordination, running, leaping and landing. Had Bobby Orr studied ballet in high school, he might not have had to retire.

Caroline Smith points out that since the advent of Rudolf Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov, who have very masculine styles of dancing, the public has had a less stereotyped view of male dancers. So it would not appear as though the ballet class of '78 is taking the sort of leap into the unknown that Yves Cousineau made in 1953, but dance grads must still, as Cousineau says, "cut out your way through the world. We're not a job finding organization." He is confident about the prospects of his students, describing them as "a very exciting, hard working, and curious group." Has he encountered any geniuses among his York students? "Many brilliant, but no genius," he replied with a smile. This drew vehement disagreement from a group of advanced dance students who were told of the comment after a class last week. "He hasn't been coming to class enough," said one, and they all agreed.

There will be a presentation of works-in-progress made by York dance students in Burton auditorium, December 13 at 2 pm. Free admission.



Advanced dance students in a morning studio.

The role of women at York grows as the seventies draw to an end

By Kim Llewellyn

York University has borne witness to a sudden, bold growth in women's consciousness over the last three years. International Women's Year, 1975, was the year when the women's movement shook the psyche of the York community and its influence on practices and attitudes still continues. At the present time, the Women's Centre in the Behavioural Science Building is in its third year of operation, the Presidents advisory committee on the status of women, set up at the same time, is still active, the Osgoode Women's Caucus is going strong, an interdisciplinary program on women's studies is running in Atkinson and, if that weren't enough, a student council women's committee has just been created. Women in all of these groups agree that after three years of a strong feminist presence on campus, the community is more conscious of discrimination against women, although there still are problems. As Lois Sparling of the Osgoode Women's Caucus put it, "In the early 70's women had to put up with a lot of chauvinist bullshit. But that has died down because it is not acceptable behaviour any more and our focus has turned to other matters." Sandra Pyke, advisor to the President on the Status of Women says, "York is a reasonably receptive environment to women. The issue is to make it outstanding in this area. I think it has the potential. There is a high level of co-operation in all areas of the university towards women's affairs." "There are problems on occasion," she adds. "Women tend to experience some problems interacting with the male population at York." Judy Posner, sociology and coordinator of Women's studies at Atkinson is more hesitant about women's progress. "A lot of discrimination in salaries has been resolved. But we can't assume that no discrimination exists. For sure, there are all kinds of subtle discrimination at York. It occurs among the faculty, especially when a female faculty

member is the only woman in her unit. It occurs in graduate studies. Different stereotypes function in the classroom. I don't think these situations have changed that much."

"And," says Posner, "there is a fear that the other women's groups on campus are going to be curtailed in the next few years." Posner's fears were founded on the reality of the demise of two projects in recent

months. *Breakthrough*, York's feminist magazine, bit the dust last February because of lack of funds. The Women's Resource Centre on the first floor of the Administrative Studies building locked its doors for this school year because of an absence of interest in running it. But the women's groups still in operation on campus are running full steam ahead. A summary of their services follow. **WOMEN'S CENTRE** "Women need a space to call their own," says Mimi Mekler, coordinator of York's Women's Centre in room 102 of the Behavioural Sciences Building. "It helps to sit down in a supportive type of atmosphere." The centre, which houses the Virginia Rock library for women, is open from 9 am until 7 pm Monday through Thursday, and open 9 am to 5 pm on Fridays. Some of the weekly activities sponsored by the centre are a lesbian women's group meeting on Mondays from 3:30 to 5:30 pm, mature women's group meetings on Mondays from 1 pm to 3 pm and Thursdays from 3 pm to 5 pm, film on Mondays at noon and 6 pm, and lectures at Thursday noon. During the week preceding International Women's Day in March, films, lectures and demonstrations will be sponsored by the centre for the entire York community. **WOMEN'S COMMITTEE** Under the leadership of Vanier's Bonnie Brown, the CYSF Women's Committee was started this year to:

- Investigate organizations on campus such as the Women's Centre, the Daycare Centre and Harbinger
- Discover if there are areas at York in which women's interests are not represented (eg. campus night security)
- Provide information on women's affairs members of the York community.

"We want to make people aware there is a political body at York interested in women," said Brown. "In order to do that we have to do something that is big." In January the committee is sponsoring a lecture series dealing with topics such as



Mimi Mekler of the Women's Centre.

"Addiction", "The Obstacle Course to the Top", "What is a Working Woman", and "Is There a Woman in the House." The group is also planning to hold a symposium on rape at York in late February. **WOMEN'S CAUCUS** Since its inception several years ago the Women's Caucus at Osgoode has been active in feminist issues on and of campus. For one and a half years now, members of the group have become involved in educational work at emergency hostels (eg Stop 86, Interval House and Anduhuan) where homeless women reside. Most of the women are battered wives, native women, or young people on their own for the first time. The group teaches on topics such as tenant and welfare rights, family law and employment standards. Its members are currently producing two video tapes on Landlord and Tenant Law and Welfare Law, to be used as educational aids.

Caucus members also give legal aid at the Vanier Centre, a provincial correctional institute for women. The major endeavour of the group for this year was a symposium held at OISE on rape and prostitution. The symposium was centred around the new bills, C-51 and C-52, C-52 deals with tightening up the laws on soliciting which the caucus opposes. The caucus belongs to the National Association of Women and the Law. **ADVISORY GROUP** Out of the task force report presented to the Senate in 1975 came the office of Advisor to the President on Women's Affairs at York. The first woman to occupy that office was social science professor, Jane Haynes. During her 1976-77 term she compared salaries of men and women on campus evaluated the inequities in salaries of men and women employees of the university. Her successor, Marian Shepherd, former associate dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, focussed her attention on the professional and managerial group of women at York. This year's advisor to the President, psychology professor Sandra Pyke, has been concerned with the mature women students who attend York University. There are, according to Pyke, 5300 mature women who attend York, 1500 of them day students. On Mondays, from 1 pm to 3 pm in the Women's Centre, Pyke leads a group for these women. Pyke's office issues questionnaires on the status of women at York, and presents a report to the President at the end of every school year. **WOMEN'S STUDIES** Women's studies at Atkinson is open to Liberal Studies majors as an interdisciplinary program. "All the courses in the program have some sort of sex role content," explains Judy Posner. Courses include "Images of Women" by film lecturer Robin Wood, "Concepts of the 'Male' and 'Female'" by humanities lecturer

Diana Cooper, "Psychology of the Family" by psychology lecturer Judith Katz and "Sociology of Aging" by Posner. Social Science courses "Women in Canada", "Male-Female Relationships" and "Feminism and the Women's Movement" round out the program. "I think there should be an option for women's studies just as there is for other things," says Posner. "It is obviously a very

central issue in terms of today's society. It's a reasonable thing to take." Today at 12 noon Laura Sabia, former Chairman of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, first president and founder of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and billed by the centre as "feminist extraordinaire", will be speaking at the centre.

