

# Through the open window



BY STACEY WEIGHTMAN

Gwen Noah has been giving total strangers a sneak peek at one of her most private activities.

The Halifax dancer has been working on *The Last Show* for several months and has presented the piece as a *work in progress* at

three local university art galleries. At these noon hour performances the audience was invited "to share the creative process...to look through an open window...to see dance creation at its most raw and tender state. And to bring [their] lunch."

I had the opportunity to attend

## A sneak peek at Gwen Noah's *The Last Show*

the last of these performances on February 15 at the Dalhousie Art Gallery. After having interviewed Noah a few days earlier, I was curious to see the piece that she had described as "The end of a cycle...a full circle, so to speak." This is the last self-produced and self-performed piece that Noah will do. She will stop dancing, and enter into a new dimension of her contemporary dance career.

The idea of a *work in progress* performance intrigued me as well. *The Last Show* was still in the process of being created when I saw it. In fact, the music for the piece had just been chosen.

After her first introduction by Art Gallery director Mern O'Brien, Noah, dressed more for aerobics than a dance performance, spoke briefly to the audience about the piece and explained that she would like their feedback when the performance was over.

The performance began very slowly — as if Noah was learning to walk — but soon the music sped up, as did the controlled frenzy of the dancer's movements. The music stopped but the dance went on: Noah's movements decelerated until she reached a state of calm. The music started up again and the dancer continued,

crouched down low, with her arms in a sleeping position. The music appeared to be pulling Noah off-center, trying to remove her from her safe and comfortable haven. The music paused again, and then repeated itself. Throughout this piece Noah displayed not only grace and agility, but also athleticism and a deep passion for her work.

As Noah's level of energy increased throughout *The Last Show*, so did my own; when her movements relaxed, I too felt myself relaxing. Despite the somewhat ominous title of the piece, the dance, as Noah describes it, is filled with "joyful bursts of energy. [It] deals with adversity and springboards into playfulness." All of these emotions were visible in the performance.

From the numerous audience comments that were received — and from my own opinion — I would say that *The Last Show* was well accepted. Noah often asked questions about particular elements of the dance, such as the music and the way in which it was repeated. That's Gwen Noah — working to perfect her piece right up to the moment of its performance. No wonder she's tired.

Noah will be performing the finished version of *The Last Show* along with two other repertory works — *John Wayne is Dead (1994)* and *Take Heart (1993)* — this coming weekend as one of the final performances of the *Local Currents Atlantic New Dance Festival*.

## Modern dance marathon

### PERFORMANCE

Showcase #2 and #1

Local Currents Atlantic New Dance Festival

The Local Currents Atlantic New Dance Festival began last Thursday, kicking off six days of original creations by Atlantic Canada's professional contemporary dance producers. I learned many things from my five hours at the Sir James Dunn Theatre on Saturday, where I took in Showcases #1 and #2. One of the main things is that contemporary dance is not always as beautiful and graceful as people expect dance to be. I think this is why people are so often apprehensive when they first see contemporary pieces; they do not always understand it and they do not always see it as they do "traditional" dance.

Showcase #2 — which was first — opened with Lee Saunders performing her piece *Hyoide*. This piece began with the movement of a large cocoon-like ball of paper with which Saunders appeared to have a symbiotic relationship. A metamorphosis occurred and Saunders emerged looking much like a butterfly. After shedding her gold lamé skin, she returned to the darkened stage and began squawking like a bird. During this time she used everything possible for movement — her hands, feet, hair, shirt, and body. She then became a beast, growling and moaning like a primal creature. Another change and Saunders returned for one last time, hopping all around the stage before returning to the safety of her cocoon.

Next came Lorien House-Coulson in what was one of my favourite dances of the evening. She performed two pieces, *Pretzel Logic* and *Pentecost*, but it was her dramatic entrance that grabbed my attention. She began her piece walking down through the audience, shrouded all in white like the Virgin Mary. After striking a prayer-like pose on the stage, Coulson fell forward and began the sensual movements of *Pretzel Logic*. Rolling and twist-

ing around on the ground, she demonstrated her great flexibility to the rhythm of some great bluegrass music. Her second piece, *Pentecost*, was a very innocent yet provocative piece walking the line between the sweet virgin and the seductress. I not only enjoyed her movements as well; her costuming and her choice of music as well; it made it all the more enjoyable a performance.

Renée Penney, the next performer, did not dance so I'm not quite sure how she fits into the festival. Nonetheless, she put on a fine performance. Penney's comedy piece *Buffet* was a hilarious monologue given by Carmel, a woman obsessed with dessert. As the act progresses we discover that food is really a metaphor for the decline of the relationship between Carmel and her lover. Even, Penney's second piece, was a comedic look at a smart-talking Newfoundlander Eve in the Garden of Eden and the problems she must face.

Lois Brown and Anne Troake's *The Invisible Woman/Graphs of Love* didn't really possess any dance in it with the exception of a couple of skips and Troake lying down on the ground. The piece dealt with a variety of things, from a comedic look at the male anatomy to more serious issues, such as dealing with rape and how

the use of journal writing can help to heal one's soul.

Showcase #2 ended with a performance by Andrea Leigh-Smith & The Irondale Ensemble Project entitled *The Visions Of Simone Marchand*. Through the use of a Brecht-style performance, the audience is told the tale of Simone Marchand, a twelve-year-old girl from France whose heroic acts save her village from the Germans and from acceptance by the Bourgeoisie. Leigh-Smith played the twelve-year-old wonderfully; her grace and strength made for the perfect combination. With its slide projections, narration, song, and dance,

this piece was a great way to wrap up Showcase #2.

I was sceptical about my ability to make it through another three hours of performances, but after a quick rest it was off to Showcase #1. The first performer, Judith Scherer, performed excerpts from her work *Island*. In the first excerpt — *Winter, Night* — Scherer emerged ninja-like, all covered in black, her cold, bleak movements matching the season in the title. Emerging in black again, this time in a swimsuit with the sounds of the beach surrounding her, Scherer's movements mimicked those of someone entering the water and the feelings that overcome them.

Next was Anne Troake's *The Blue Trio*, which was performed by three women dressed in blue. At first I found the repeated motion of their movements a little slow, but as their rhythm built up — much like that of a military march — I began to enjoy the piece and the simplicity of its movements.

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## the box

► Strange Adventures, the Halifax comic shop featured last week in the Gazette, recently won a Previews Catalogue/DC Comics **best comic shop** contest. The store will appear along with Sean Jordan — the writer of the winning contest entry — in an upcoming DC comic. The March issue of Previews has the full story. Not bad for a store nestled underneath a lingerie boutique.

► The Dalhousie Art Gallery is screening films exploring the theory and practice of modern painting and sculpture during March. The first film of this series is *Masters of Modern Sculpture Part One: The Pioneers*, a look at artists including **Rodin, Degas, Matise, and Picasso**. It will be shown Wednesday, March 6 at 12:30 and 8:00 p.m. in the gallery, located on the lower level of the Dal Arts Centre. Admission is free, but donations are accepted.

► The second mainstage show of Neptune Theatre's reconstruction season opens this Friday at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium. *Our Town*, the **Pulitzer Prize-winning** play about life in a small New England town, is directed by Neptune's Linda Moore with a cast 20-strong that includes Robert Seale, Walter Borden, and Cliff Le Jeune. Performances are at 8 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, with matinees Saturday (5 p.m.) and Sunday (2 p.m.). Call 429-7070 for ticket information.

► Painter Wayne Boucher will open his exhibit, *Surfacing*, tonight at the **Dalhousie Art Gallery** with an illustrated lecture. Boucher, who paints in oil and acrylic, has had his recent works described as "mysterious and sensuous." The show's opening reception and Boucher's presentation will begin at 8 p.m.

► Vagabond is presenting an **all-night rave** this Saturday from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. at Café Olé, 1192 Barrington Street. Hosted by the unique Andrew Duke of CKDU's *Cognition Audioworks*, the night will feature Chicago and Detroit House, Techno, and Trax. Call 422-7132 for more information. You can listen to *Cognition Audioworks* Wednesday's at 7 p.m.

► *Together by Circumstance*, featuring the works of Michael Lexier, is being presented at the Saint Mary's Art Gallery until March 22. The show is mainly made up of recent works by Lexier featuring "photo-based serial imagery exploring communities of circumstance — based on ties of family, work and education — as well as aspects of the life cycle and masculinity." The main gallery space will contain *A Portrait of David*, an installation of actual size photographs of different Davids from ages one to seventy-five. Kind of like an artsy version of "These are the Daves I Know." The Art Gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday at noon, closing at 5 p.m. on the weekends and two hours later during the week.