

Dance show and Toller

by Charlene Van Raalte

It is called "a totally new entertainment experience" and "the best of theatre, dance, music, mime and free skating". Believe it? Last weekend I saw it - **The Ice Show** - and I must admit that the reports are true.

It is a new Canadian art form. Toller Cranston and twelve champion skaters electrified three full houses at the Halifax Forum on October 1st and 2nd. Each of the soloists and dance teams were skating for the first time as professionals, and it is obvious that this talented group wants to make a dramatic entrance into the skating circuit. Simply stated, they are

elevation of the self which we call art. But these moments in the program are rare and the remainder is typical of the external, showy style of competitive dance skating.

The most theatrical piece, the Russian opera "The Bolt", is a story of love, terror and war in which the hero (Cranston) dies in the end. The other dramatic offering, "Scheherezade", is taken directly from dance tradition. Bob Rubens skates in Nijinsky's role as the favourite slave. These moments were as exciting and moving as any experienced during the National Ballet.

From an artistic point of view, **The Ice Show** has several short-



attempting to turn a sport into an art. Since they are calling themselves "dance" skaters, this group is inviting analysis from the dance point of view.

The juxtaposition of **The Ice Show** with the National Ballet of Canada (at the Rebecca Cohn auditorium Sept. 29 - Oct. 2) allowed an interesting comparison of skating — the fledgling, with ballet — for the established art form. Since the National is probably technically the best company in Canada, the skaters might well suffer by the comparison. But in general, they did not.

The moves performed by dancers and skaters are so similar that they allow a useful means for contrast and comparison. There is a difference in terminology; the elegant dance language is French, ballet having originated in the French court. But similarly flying camels and axles are equivalent to arabesques and tours en l'air. Toller Cranston's ability to execute difficult manoeuvres rivals that of any ballet soloist. Within their own spheres, and especially considering that the skaters are moving across a slippery surface on thin blades, the two companies are probably technically equal.

In contrast to the repertoire of movement of the dancers, however, that of the skaters is quite limited. This will undoubtedly change with the evolution of dance skating, but it seems that these skaters could offer a much more varied range of choreography.

Artistic dancing, an expression of the human condition, is more than technical manoeuvres. Unfortunately, in dramatic expression most of the skaters do not equal the dancers. The solo skaters (Toller Cranston, Gordon McKellen, Bob Rubens and Kath Malmberg) often demonstrate the inner emotion and

comings which should be mentioned. The flow of mood between the pieces was inconsistent. The tragic opera, "The Bolt" immediately followed the jazzy "Colonel Boggie". This speedy juxtaposition of feeling and style creates confusion and imbalance in the mind of the sensitive viewer. In addition, the tempo of the program tends to be too much on the high energy end of the range. I would have appreciated more of the serious, more of the adagio. The costumes, like the choreography, are examples of a basic problem — too much of the same old skating stuff for something called "dance".

Such criticism is probably unfair because Cranston et.al. are not performing for a dance audience, but a sports minded skating audience. The performers obviously are aware of their spectators expectations and give their viewers what they come to see. In attempting to turn dance skating into an art, these skaters are in the interesting position of creating a new Dol.

What an opportunity these skater-artists have for creating an adoring following. I can see a public equal to that of the Russian ballet - a populace who love their performers, who stomp and yell at curtain calls, who flood the stage with flowers. I much prefer this gutsy gratitude than demure affect of the black tie Rebecca Cohn crowd. The folk at the Forum gave the deserved standing ovations. They were as exciting to be amongst as the performers were to watch.

Clearly there is more to Cranston's appeal than his ability as a skate-dancer. Firstly, Canadians are very fond of their skaters and Toller is one of the nation's best and certainly the most flamboyant. He is also sexy.

Like Nureyev, Cranston is phys-

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ically exquisite and therefore is much admired by the ladies (and the men). Toller's entrance in **The Ice Show** illustrates the Cranston come-on and is one of the best parts of the program. The other skaters are individually introduced with spotlights and big music - all

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