

Smooth evening of new work

## Dancing between humour and art

J. BRETT ABBEY

Toronto Choreographer Peggy McCann has always found humour in life's everyday events. In the past, her bright, funny and likeable presentations of dance have often left her audiences wanting more. It is no wonder so many people turned out last weekend at Harbourfront to witness the premiere of four new pieces of McCann artistry.

And she once again proved it possible to work in and inhabit an area of space somewhere between humour and art. However, while McCann's simple (occasionally obvious) choreographic endeavours require her dancers to add more personality than technique, some of the programme lacked the vibrant energy that so typifies McCann's work.

For *Better or For Worse*, a light entertaining look at couples opened

the programme on a solemn note with a look at the individual thoughts of couples kept secret from their partners. While one couple's arms extend to embrace, another couple's arms reach out to strangle each other. The humour is implied in the situation. Unfortunately, the dancer's neither build upon nor react to it. *Dance for Janice*, on the other hand, revitalizes the performance by presenting a solo danced by Janice Dulak. It was a smooth and rhythmic entertaining look at 'life in the fast lane'—appropriately demonstrated.

Not until the presentation of *Sans Souci*, is a little of the McCann spark seen. Once again she demonstrates her ability to mobilize everyday objects. In this instance, she makes use of two benches, and a rather large black box in a situational look at the reflections and dreams individual ladies have upon hearing

the same song in a nightclub.

Dancers Kim Frank and Joan Phillips orientate themselves in, around, and on top of two benches with the versatility and imagination that has so characterized McCann's effective use of inanimate objects. Here, too, both dancers add the touch of personality that substantially creates a unique balance between humour and art. As for the black box, dancer Danielle Belec's seductive use of technique and enhancement virtually seduces the box into following her every movement. *Sans Souci* simply is McCann and her dancers at their best.

The final piece on the programme, *Class of '62*, examined the various pretensions and feelings of a late '50's rock and roll generation. At this point McCann's female cast of dancers are joined by three male dancers (who it would seem are) used only to create a balance between male and female participants at a dance. It will suffice to say that the male dancers paled in comparison to the females.

Containing little more than a series of jitter-bug, disco and slow dance steps, *Class of '62* is reminiscent of many past attempts at depicting this era in history. There has been no significantly new approach added to McCann's view, nor any visible signs of giving an otherwise overworked era in history, new vitality.

Still, McCann and dancers managed to fill the evening with simple, sometimes humorous expositions on everyday life. Although not entirely on par with her past exploits, the new works do find ways under your skin, thus making an empty evening enjoyable. Combine this with the rhythmically smooth and technically exceptional talents of company dancer Danielle Belec and the result is very satisfying.

## Dance at York: A Fine Madness



York dancers in early rehearsals of modern dance classic.

W. HURST

The York Dance Department presents its annual Spring Concert in Burton auditorium, from March 24 to 26, at 8:00 p.m. There is a special matinee Friday, March 25 at 2 p.m. Most choreography is by both faculty and students; all performers are students. However, a highlight of this year's concert should be *Water Study*, which was first performed fifty years ago. The choreography, by dance pioneer Doris Humphrey, has not only stood the test of time; it is recognized as a *classis* piece of twentieth century dance art. There is no musical score so the dancers, all women, must rely on a sensitivity to one another's movement dynamics. That the York Dance Department has been allowed to mount this work is a testament to the excellence of its programme, and the talents of its students. Each admission of \$2.50 will be donated to the Dance Scholarship Fund.

## Lab experiment fails

W. HURST

*Faces of the Moon*, a one-woman show at the Actor's Lab, raises many questions: For example, how did a play so poorly realized make it to the stage?

The text, by Richard Nieoczym, is the foremost of many problems. Presumably about a Japanese-Canadian woman's search for self, the script draws from the Bible, pop poetry (school of Rod McKuen) and occidental simplifications of oriental philosophies. In a 15 page 'interpretation' of the play, Jinnie Kim suggests that the playwright tries "to activate a sharper awareness of female self and to offer another way of life for women." How very generous of Mr. Nieoczym. Aside from this presumptuous offer, the writer has only sporadically given the actress, Dawn Obokata, material with which she could sustain a performance. Otherwise, the material is, confounded by endless proclamations that the woman will no longer be a victim or whore or slave etc., etc., Curiously, there is little else than polemic. Nieoczym fails to offer "another way" unless the passive, stilled woman at the end of the play is the example of new-found life.

Dawn Obokata's performance rises above the script but not very far. Given a variety of personae and roles, she doesn't slip out of character, she leaps. Portraying an aged and, of course, wise Japanese woman, Obokata is bent and slow, one moment but bounding into the air, the next. Her voice, in this passage, is an approximation of age not imitation or representation. In another section a speech about the very real biblical debasement of women is only that: a speech. The ravaged pain and scorn is never evident in the monotonous vocals or smooth body movement. Chants and songs are delivered in a Western musical form, not in the Japanese pentatonic scale.

However, Obokata does glean moments of great theatrical power from the script and her use of props is especially deft. She seems to have a self-consciousness that has transcended to quiet self-awareness. Unfortunately, she cannot overcome this stillness when necessary. Working with a red scarf and scythe, her body responds in a quality stillness which is without tension, sublimely attuned to forthcoming action. However, her slash at the scarf is sluggish when it should be swift.

The staging is an arrangement of shrines and sites of experience, with each area invoking particular revelations. With the audience interspersed among the sets it could

be possible to break the boundaries of traditional staging. This does not happen. Movement seems obligatory instead of deductive, although the sets are beautifully compact and each has a distinct aura.

Perhaps, particular sets spurn Obokata to reach into herself and produce the occasional intense moment. In her passages are as a young woman ignorant of her body and abandoned to her ignorance, Obokata is extremely focused and vital. Also, sustained, long steps across the stage, with an accompanying recitative, are done with a very real presence—a breathing, flowing sincerity.

*Faces of the Moon* was presented as a full-blown theatrical production when it is, at this point, only at a workshop level. Dealing with sexual politics and the feminist equivalent of racial memory is fraught with peril for both writer and performer. Nieoczym and Obokata are taking up the challenge prematurely. *Faces of the Mood* needs much editing and a firmer hand behind it. Now it has only good intentions and sparks of what is possible.

## Surreal creation has power to change

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difficulty speaking English and questions were translated by Susana Wald. The discussion was lengthy, partly because of interest but also because of a language barrier. However, Zeller did clearly outline the problems artists must face in some nations. He said that the suppression of surrealism "is not a question of belief or rights, but politics." In some places, surrealists cannot hang their work, they cannot publish magazines or books," Zeller suggested that the reason for these problems "is 'surrealism cannot be domesticated.'" He continued, "Authoritarian societies devour us. The principle of pleasure in surrealism is not accepted." When asked if this isn't true of all art he replied, "I feel that surrealism is especially dangerous because it has no pretense of making a literary school or a painting school—there is an effort to cause total change."

Wald added that, "surrealism wants and allows for complete freedom." She argued, however, that this art form "does not teach anyone rebelliousness unless it comes from within."

According to Zeller, "Creation is the power we hold but we have no control over the finished material once it is consumed."

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