

# Maria Formolo: committed to modern dance

Interview by Rosa Jackson

**M**aria Formolo is an engaging woman with an incredibly extensive background in dance. She has been in the business for twenty-one years, despite the hardships and setbacks inevitable to choosing a career in the performing arts.

In speaking with Formolo, it is evident that her commitment to and love for dance is strong. "Financially, it's always a struggle," she says, but adds that "it's very interesting, and I really enjoy the people I work with".

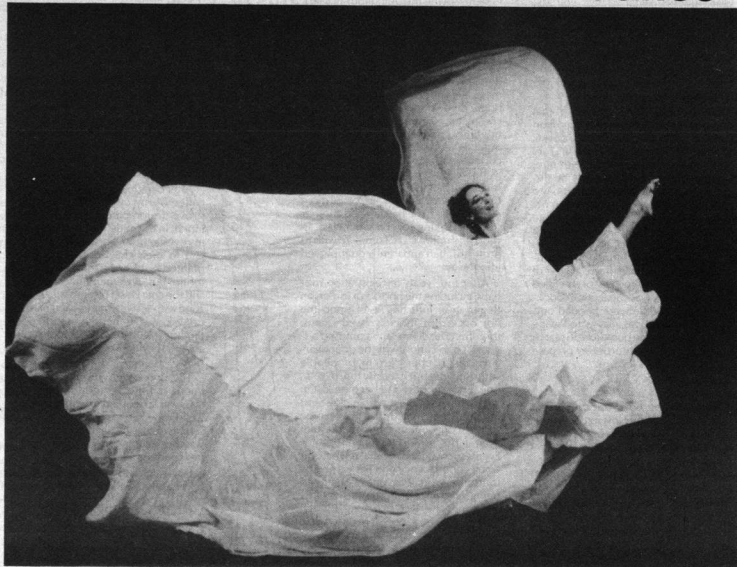
Formolo was originally trained in classical dance, but soon her interest turned to modern dance, an area which she has brought recognition to throughout Canada. She was brought up in Michigan and began her professional training in Chicago, earning a Bachelor of Arts Theatre Degree while studying dance. She can justifiably consider herself an artist in many respects, having credits in the visual arts as well as in theatre and dance.

During a visit to Expo '67, Formolo met the modern dance company "Le Groupe de la Place Royale", and decided to move to the city to become one of its original members. When the opportunity to go solo as a choreographer came up in 1974, she took it; characteristically adding to her new responsibility with further projects in the city. "I worked for the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians doing video, and I sponsored a lot of dance", she says.

"I really enjoyed Regina," says Formolo, but she does not regret her move to Edmonton. "I like Edmonton very much", she says. "It has a very fine theatre community, and dance is coming — slow but sure."

Formolo is excited about her latest production, *Midnight in Mundare, Smalltown Suite*, which is an unusual combination of theatre, dance and music. She said that the concept of the show arose when she heard music composed by her friend Roger Deegan which was called "Midnight in Mundare." "I said, let's do a whole idea around the small town theme."

Because many of the cast are from small



Maria Formolo has been dancing for twenty-one years.

towns, they are enthusiastic about the project. "We're exploring the poetry of the land... aspects of life that are passing from existence," says Formolo. She says that the show itself does not have a particular theme, but "each of the poems has a message".

How does she feel about performing at

the Nexus Theatre? "It's an interesting challenge to work in such a small space", she says. "I'd like to keep developing it and working on it [the show] so I can open it in its final version at the Fringe, then nationally and internationally."

Performing in other countries is one of the

aspects of her career which Formolo enjoys the most. She has travelled to the Northwest Territories, Japan, China, and New York to name but a few places, and hopes to continue doing so. However, she is also very serious about her teaching. "I hope to balance touring with teaching", she says.

held my interest where it might otherwise have lagged.

In opposition to the wild costumes of the dancers was the almost exaggeratedly plainly dressed actor, John Rivet, who read poetry. He has a pleasant speaking voice, but because of the generally confusing atmosphere created by the show, I found it hard to concentrate on the poems and was left wondering what their relation was to the rest of the production.

*Midnight in Mundare, Small Town Suite* is an ambitious project and one which, given time and better space, could perhaps work. At this stage, it is a collage which attempts to provide insight into life in a small Alberta community, but does not succeed.

## Midnight in Mundare: blatantly weird

*Midnight in Mundare: A Small Town Suite*  
Nexus Theatre  
Run ends January 22

review by Rosa Jackson

**I**f the unexpected and bizarre appeal to you in theatre, the Formolo Dance Association's latest production, *Midnight in Mundare, Smalltown Suite*, is for you.

If, however, you find blatant, unashamed weirdness somewhat irritating, you will probably not enjoy this show. Although I could appreciate the company's attempt to create a form of art which is out of the ordinary, I did not find the end result particularly meaningful or worthwhile.

While the concept behind the production, to explore a theme through a combination of live music, dance and acting is an interesting one, the cast was not quite able to pull it off. The production's most significant flaw was that it lacked unity and cohesion, so that even its entertaining moments were lost

amidst the confusion on stage. Taking into account the fact that the production I saw was a dress rehearsal, I must add that the actual performances may be far more polished.

I began to have my doubts about this show at the very beginning, when the dancers entered the stage dressed in white spandex outfits which could only be described as bags. They covered the dancers from head to toe, giving them the appearance of ghosts; or, if you used your imagination, of melting marshmallows.

Later, there were even more outrageous costumes, including another spandex number (this time, a black tube), a wedding dress worn with purple ankle socks, and a spiked and feathered headdress which shed.

Maria Formolo is definitely a talented dancer, and at times when the costumes were toned down and therefore unobtrusive, her performance was exciting to watch. The show's second dancer, Maryanne Grotski,

also demonstrated her skill as a performer. Unfortunately, the stage at the Nexus Theatre, where the show is being performed, is so tiny that the dancers were allowed little freedom in their movement. They did manage, however, to turn the piano and the piano bench into effective props.

The music, composed by Roger Deegan, was one aspect of the show which I enjoyed. Much of the time, it was bright and cheerful, contrasting with the strangeness of the dancers. The fiddle player, Amelia Kaminski,

## 'Prince of Polyester' shines

David Lindley and El Rayo-X  
Idyl Tea  
Dinwoodie

review by Tracey Rowan

**D**avid Lindley, whose reputation as a versatile session musician is unmatched, proved Friday night that as a live performer he takes a back seat to no one.

He and his band, El Rayo-X, put on one of the tightest and most entertaining shows to hit this city in a long time.

The very full house at Dinwoodie reacted instantly to the first chords of "Twist and Shout" and continued to show their approval for such familiar reggae-flavoured tunes as "Talk to the Lawyer", "Pay the Man" and "She Took Off My Romeo".

Early in the first set the "Prince of Polyester" (referring to Lindley's stage attire) introduced his extremely talented sidemen as representing the "Church of Ska and Reggae", recently formed because "we need a tax advantage".

The Reverend Willy Smith, a veteran of the 60's band Motherjode and a Bob Dylan tour amongst others, appeared to be the coolest member of the band with a Ian Strathclyde placed on his keyboard until the extended

version of "Papa Was a Rolling Stone" — when he really let his magic fingers fly.

Drummer Walfredo Reyes showed his fine form in a mesmerizing drum solo during "Brother John" which also featured guitarist Ray Woodbury's reggae twitch and energetic playing.

The second set ended with a blistering version of the hit "Mercury Blues" which sent the crowd into a frenzy. The encore of "Do You Wanna Dance/Bye Bye Love" proved a highlight as the crowd sang along with the chorus of the Everly Brothers classic. Look for good things to come from this reggae-blues-cajun-carrbean-rock-and-roll-influenced artist as a new release is planned for the spring.

Local band Idyl Tea was the supporting act and sounded much tighter than its last Dinwoodie appearance in September. Despite a rather heavy bass mix at the sound board, the trio played a good, mostly electric set interspersed with a couple of acoustic, folksy "mishmash" tunes that are well suited to the strong vocal harmonies. While the cover of the Everly Brothers' "Cathy's Clown" went over well, the highlight of the set was easily "Eyes Down", a melodic song from the band's debut EP.



"Maria Formolo is definitely a talented dancer..."