

Modern dance at the Rebecca Cohn

by Edd Hansen

Dance enthusiasts in Halifax were fortunate recently - that is, fortunate if they saw the **Danny Grossman Dance Company** in town recently.

The November 12th performance of the Grossman Company at the Cohn showcased Danny Grossman's inspirations from a variety of perspectives. The show was divided by two intermissions, each of the three acts comprising both high entertainment and serious religious/ideological statement.

The first piece ("National Spirit", 1976) celebrated the American sports ethic, with brightly coloured athletic costumes, and even more brightly arranged American march music. This number set us up for the other group pieces during the evening, revealing incredible energy and timing in impossibly dangerous (to the observer) floor patterns, and a combination of stylized movement and subtle mime that was a delight to behold.

This whole was in counterpoint to the next piece, a Danny Grossman solo, "Curious Schools of Theatrical Dancing: Part I" (1977). The dancer, captive in his stage and his choreography, is represented by Grossman with the face of a madman; his body and movements show a tortured strength and intensity amplified by those same qualities in harpsichord accompaniment. The dancer represented is reminiscent of the mountebanks in old Europe, stolen and disfigured in childhood to augment their entertainment value.

The next act started with rousing ragtime and sexual farce. "Nobody's Business" (1981) used the excitement of Jelly Roll Morton's and Joe Turner's music of the same title to accompany a piece with reversal and inversion of traditional gender/dance roles; this piece

truly showed that comedic timing is art, not simply a facet of art.

Although there were some silent spots in the audience during Grossman and Glynn's 'pas de deux', after this very clever piece the amassed reacted as if it had come upon the Holy Grail.

In this they anticipated the next work, "Ecce Homo" (1977). Inspired by Michelangelo's marble and oil impressions of the passion of Christ, Grossman accomplished what many fail to do in such an endeavour; bring the motifs to life and make them change, and change again, with transitions as visually fascinating as the motifs themselves. Here we had tortured Biblical images - awed, dragged and thrown by preternatural hands.

After the second intermission, the work some of the audience had been waiting for, the one that had launched the D.G. Company, was presented. A man, a woman, a step-ladder, and two chairs - "Higher" (1975) was true to the programme notes: "...celebrates control, sex, humour and athleticism." Beginning with Ray Charles' "Let's Go Get Stoned", the music, from sultry to swing, beautifully accompanied the comedic presence of the female (for whom the piece could be renamed 'Eyes of Pamela Grundy') and the magical anti-gravity movement of the male, Randy (Invisible Wires) Glynn.

This work must be seen live to prove that it's not done with mirrors. For those of you who have only seen it in last year's NFB dance spectacle "Gala", life's tough; there's more of the piece than was in the film - some of it was eliminated in the film's editing.

The last choreograph of the evening was also the most moving and powerful. Penderecki's "Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima" set a bizarre, eerie stage for

Grossman's "Engdangered Species" (1981) (for International Disarmament). Here, using terrifying, agonized images, three tortured factions are depicted: two warring and one victimized; the conflict ended, of

course, in Pyrrhic victory and horror. This piece could stand alone, especially since all memory of the rest of the show receded as "Species" was being performed.

Grossman's company lived up to

and surpassed the reputation preceding it, proving modern dance in Canada to possess some of the most creative intelligence in the performing arts. As the tuxedoed couple to my left remarked, "What nice pieces those were".

Hitchcock film action-packed

by Anya Waite and Bea Renton

North by Northwest, Alfred Hitchcock, 1959, USA, colour, starring Cary Grant and Eva-Marie Saint, with James Mason.

North by Northwest, Hitchcock's highly popular film which played at Wormwood's last weekend, follows Roger Thornhill, an American advertising executive, through a series of wildly varied adventures when he is mistaken for a Russian spy. It is a captivating film, enjoyable, and not without a certain dated charm.

Examining the film more closely, from a modern perspective, however, certain flaws can be detected. There are severe faults in technique and some loopholes in plot structure: Thornhill is kidnapped and imprisoned in a room with a phone he never uses; the police never bother to find out that the wife of a UN delegate whom they are questioning doesn't really exist at all; it is never really clarified why Thornhill is suspected in the first place. Some of the scenery is fake, including a Chicago streetscape and a styrofoam Mount Rushmore.

Looking at the film in the context of its time, though, these flaws, detectable by the modern film-goer, are overlooked or forgotten. The clichés embody only a singular charm and wit.

Perhaps the role which presents the greatest challenge to the

present-day viewer is that of Eve (Eva-Marie Saint). A sad, emancipated and beautiful female, she is subordinated and manipulated, a lovely young blond unhappily involved in a wicked world over which she has no control. She is a sexual device around which some of the most interesting plot twists occur, and, as such, fits well into the mood and outlook of the film. She does little to gain a reality which holds true in a modern outlook.

One of the most critically acclaimed scenes, where Thornhill is attacked by a mysterious airplane, is an example of what Hitchcock called pure "bravura". Here Thornhill is alone in anonymous countryside, threatened, with no possibility of help. In an article on the film, Hitchcock said the scene attempted to show the struggle of one man, alone, facing the unforseen and undefinable. Confronting fear and helplessness, he is exposed on a flat plain with only corn stalks as cover.

This scene seems unique in its seriousness; it is riveting and technically highly skilled. Its true depth can easily be missed in the flow of such a buoyant and humorous movie. Some of the vagueness might possibly have purpose, then - perhaps the threat to Thornhill was purposely undefined so the focus would be on him as a man dealing with the threat, rather than

the threat itself. However, this threat, finally, is defined. Hitchcock's words, as well, looked at the film in retrospect as one of his most popular works. He could conceivably have wanted to add, belatedly, a deeper meaning than he originally intended.

In **North by Northwest**, one is faced with a barrage of fifties stereotypes. Yet being aware of them does nothing to reduce the drive and effectiveness of the film; rather, their very comfortable presence shows the undeniable skill and gusto with which it was made.

It is the solid performance by Cary Grant and some good moments by James Mason which tide the film over any rocky sequences. Thornhill is portrayed as the strong, resourceful ideal of his time.

The film itself is not on par with some of Hitchcock's other efforts. It is not as intelligent as some of his probings into the psychology of crime, but it is certainly more humorous.

North by Northwest is full of action and suspense; it deserves to be seen. As a fifties film, it is great fun, but it doesn't bear up to too much modern scrutiny. It is unavoidably true that in places gusts of laughter engulf the viewer of the eighties, over jokes which were certainly not intended by Hitchcock in 1959.



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