

# Kudelka: Ballet from the inside



by Marion Frazer

James Kudelka is 21. This in itself is not an earthshaking matter, but when viewed in conjunction with other facts: that he is a first soloist for the National Ballet Company, has choreographed for seven years and has attained a degree of skill at that art sufficient to admit one of his ballets to the Company repertoire, Kudelka's youth is remarkable. In a recent interview with the *Gazette*, Kudelka offered a glimpse of ballet from the inside. His discussion brought ballet a little out of the realm of ethereal fantasy and into the practical world. It is a career, with as many hassles, hazards, money worries and rewards as any other. If

it is set apart, perhaps this is because ballet, a physical art form depends on the ability of the mind and the imagination to create with the body. Kudelka spoke entertainingly of his methods, particularly in regard to his new ballet, "A Party" (performed very successfully in the Cohn Friday night).

The creation of "A Party", as Kudelka describes it, was really exciting, a case more or less of spontaneous generation. Relates Kudelka, "The idea actually came on me very quickly. In two days I went from no idea to a scenario. I was working on another ballet altogether... and when I'm working on ballets, I always have extra music around to listen to when I get tired. My music that night was by Benjamin Britten. I just heard one little thing in it that reminded me of someone in the Company. From there, I found more and more things that reminded me of people and I came up with a running story."

For those who have not seen "A Party", it is a 'dramatic' as opposed to an "abstract" (plotless) ballet. Kudelka's "Party" is a display case for "types" ("The Shy Girl", "The Boring Couple" "The Chic Couple" etc.) yet there is subtle interaction among the "party-goers" which develops both their personalities and a plot. The party situation is strikingly familiar and becomes increasingly involving as the piece progresses. People drift from partner to partner; the "Shy Girl" is hurt by a callous playboy; incidents occur which the participants may or may not wish to remember as the party goes on. Kudelka's choreography is particularly remarkable for its incorporation of "body language" we recognize as "party" into the medium of ballet.

Speaking of his methods, he remarks, "I often go against the music. If the music is mad, crazy, I go against that and move smoothly. Characterization comes from the shape of the body- not necessarily what the face is doing because only the people sitting in the front rows can see the face. The test of a ballet is whether the people in the back rows can get the nuances." He was probably sitting in a back row Friday night trying to gauge audience reaction. Especially as his ballet was designed to be performed in a much closer environment than the "Cohen's- a church!"

"A Party" was originally a "Workshop" production. The National Ballet allows three weeks for its members to plan and perform their own creations. It's budding choreographers are given student stage designers, a fairly reasonable budget, a small theatre (or church) to perform in and their choice of any dancer in the company to dramatize their productions. (Obviously, if eight productions are asking for the same dancer, something's got to

give in- hopefully, not the dancer..)

Says Kudelka, "Usually people are quite willing to do workshop 'Cause it's- not a bad thing to do. More of the dancers work during the workshop than they do during a lot of other periods and its a creative process, which is always exciting. We're learning a new ballet and that's what we're always screaming for- to learn new ballets."

Some may wonder how dancers "learn" a ballet. How, for instance, do we know that "Swan Lake" is always going to be composed of the same movements? Usually, Kudelka tells us, a new ballet is simply taught by someone who knows it. For example, Nureyev came up from New York to teach his new version of the "Sleeping Beauty" to the National Ballet.

Dances can, however, be "written down." The National Ballet uses a form of recording called "Bemish notation" for its new ballets. It is also used by physiotherapy to describe unusual movements for remedial purposes. Apparently a "quick" form of describing dances, it has "The Sleeping Beauty" down in a mere "couple of volumes". (A longer form, "Labin" notation, would "probably fill an entire library" though it is extremely precise.) There is one "Library" of ballets in England, though none as yet in Canada.

Unfortunately, a choreographer cannot "copywrite" a ballet. There is constant borrowing (and stealing). Kudelka was a little rueful about this. "I couldn't help feeling a bit apprehensive when I saw my ballet going into the repertoire and I had not protection for it." It is "nice," of course, that dancers should be thought to be such generous artists that they would simply hand over their work to add to the general corpus. Still, if we want to see good new materials perhaps it might be inspirational to aspiring choreographers to know that they have some control over what happens to their work.

Everybody likes the Classics, but we are lucky that the National Company provides some incentive (in the form of well organized Workshops) to encourage new art. An entirely different situation, reported Kudelka, is existent in Britain. "There are people in the



company now", he told the *Gazette*, "from the Royal Ballet in London, we can't believe that we have this, that it's done on company time. They have to apply to an organization in England and they get a minimum amount of money. Dancers have to volunteer to do it and they come in after hours, so you very rarely get any principal dancers." Perhaps this contrasting situation indicates an unusual openness in our National Company to new material. As choreographers must first be dancers, it seems reasonable to seek fresh talent among members of the ballet companies. If James Kudelka's in any way typifies the kind of ability likely to be surfacing in the next few years, Canadian ballet has a lot to look forward to.

**YEARBOOK 77**  
**COME AND JOIN US**  
**THURSDAY,**  
**OCT. 14, 7.30 p.m.**  
**YEARBOOK ROOM,**  
**3rd floor SUB**

**APPLICATIONS ARE SOLICITED**  
**FOR THE**  
**POSITIONS OF OMBUDSMAN**  
**and ASSISTANT OMBUDSMAN**  
**SUBMIT APPLICATIONS TO:**  
**CHAIRMAN OMBUDSMAN COMMITTEE**  
**RM. 124 ARTS & ADMINISTRATION BLDG.**  
**APPLICATIONS CLOSE OCT.15/76**



UN ONE  
**DINNER DOLLAR**  
**PICCADILLY**

THIS NOTE IS LEGAL TENDER  
 BETWEEN 11:30 A.M. and 7:30 P.M.  
 EVERY DAY IN **OCTOBER, 1976**  
 CUSTOMER'S NAME AND ADDRESS MUST BE  
 FILLED IN ON BACK. VALID ONLY TOWARDS  
 THE PURCHASE OF A ROAST BEEF DINNER (1 per dinner)

NOT VALID IN CONJUNCTION WITH OTHER PROMOTIONS OR MEALS ALREADY DISCOUNTED OR OFFERED AS A SPECIAL.