

## Audiences awed by Toller and Company

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Toller held his audience spellbound. He had collapsed on the ice in a dramatic portrayal of death. The crowd seemed to hold its breath in awe, until the solitary figure, clad in black, slowly rose. The thunderous applause which followed reverberated around the arena.

This past Tuesday and Wednesday nights at the Aitken Centre, Toller Cranston, known as "the Nureyev of the ice" along with 12 other Olympic and World Championship skaters treated local audiences to an ice show, that was unique in its style and presentation.

Cranston, six times Senior Men's Champion of Canada, three times world free skating champion and Olympic Medalist, had the same awesome effect on the audience that he always has. When he appeared on the ice, the people were so still, you could hear the blades of his skates slicing through the ice surface. No other skater in the world can touch him. Russia calls him the "Skater of the century", Germany calls him a "genius on ice", in Canada he is a living legend (although he was not appreciated in

Canada as he should have been until Europeans accepted him as a world championship skater).

His lithe, muscular body can bend and stretch into positions a gymnast would envy. He glides on the ice and mimes stories as theatrical as the most dramatic play and as fluid and sensuous as any ballet.

Of the other 12 skaters in "The Ice Show", the foremost crowd pleaser was a young male skater, Gordon McKellen, Jr. McKellen, whom Dick Button calls "the Chaplin of the ice", displayed powerful skating and superb jumping ability. His amusing antics tickled the crowd's fancy. The fans clapped ceaselessly with boisterous enthusiasm.

Also appearing several times as a solo skater was Bob Rubens, who sailed around the arena with a style similar to that of Cranston. The slow sadness of his skating and the intense facial emotion portrayed by Rubens as he interpreted the song "Feelings", drew ecstatic response from the spectators.

Female soloists Kath Malmberg and Elizabeth Freeman captured the crowd's sentiments with their many delicate and strong movements.

Canadian dance champions, Barbara Berezowski and David Porter, who excited Europeans during the 1976 Winter Olympics, made up one of the four starring dance teams.

The other teams consisted of: Candace Jones and Don Fraser, Canadian Olympic dance skaters; U.S. Olympic Medalist dance champions, Colleen O'Connor and Jim Millns; and Emily Benenson and Jack Courtney, Benenson a triple gold medalist at 15 and Courtney a six time world roller skating champion, turned ice skater.

True champions, these pairs danced to various forms of music from honky-tonk to disco, and from classical to rock, to the enjoyment of the audience.

The excellent choreography was accentuated by the superb lighting and dazzling costumes, some valued as high as \$1,000.

The audiences' delight with the professional performances climaxed with two standing ovations, one for the troupe ensemble, the other when Cranston made his final solo skate.

Toller Cranston and "The Ice Show" continues its tour in Halifax tonight and tomorrow night and from there on to Ottawa.



Photos by Steve Patriquen