

ARTS



photo Angela Wheelock

Cossackette exhibiting grace of the Russian dance.

Kasatka Cossacks...

Lack of spontaneity detracts - a little bit

Kasatka Cossacks
SUB Theatre
Oct. 27, 28, 29.

Review by Richard Watts

Last weekend's performance by the Kasatka Cossacks of London, England was a well arranged, well paced performance of Slavic folk music and dancing. Unfortunately, the show was often marred by dance segments lacking in enough technique to hold one's interest, and performed with too little spirit to evoke any emotional responses.

Perhaps the biggest fault with the performance stems from the division between folk, and professional art. Unless the artists are very, very good, professional interpretations of folk art can result in a loss of the boisterous spontaneity that makes folk expression, of all nationalities, so very special.

Perhaps my disenchantment with the dancers arose from the preconceptions I took with me. I was expecting wild athletic dances, complete with kicks and flips, all performed in crashing heavy boots. Instead, the dances were often too balletic for my tastes, and too often performed without any real feeling.

The exceptions were the Ukrainian and Cossack segments which concluded the first and second halves of the performance. In these the audience got what it had come to see, athletic leg kicks and spins and spectacular leaps and spins.

In addition, these segments were memorable because the women dancers came out of themselves and performed their parts with enthusiasm. To give the women their due, many of the dances seemed designed to feature the women as little more than pretty backdrops to the male athletics.

Perhaps to make up for this, the repertoire included two dances which featured only women: a gypsy solo, and a Moldavian dance with four women. The gypsy soloist, however, suffered from a lack of feeling in a dance which called for seductive sensuality. The dance performed by all four women was a simple little step, which might have worked out, except once again, none of the dancers appeared to get into it.

Overall, however, the performance was a nicely arranged package of Slavic folk music and dance. After each dance sequence the dancers would exit leaving the stage to the musicians. The musicians would then play music readying the audience for the change of mood which accompanied every new dance segment.

The musicians, consisting of a singer, a percussionist, an accordion player, a guitarist, and two balalaika players, conjured some beautiful melodies. The balalaikas in particular proved themselves instruments capable of producing a wide range of musical moods and feelings.

The singer, Janos Kurucz, was excellent. Singing in a strong Russian bass, Kurucz took the audience from boisterous Russian drinking songs to mournful steppe melodies. An especially nice touch, although you wouldn't credit it, was Kurucz's performance of 'If I were a Rich Man' from *Fiddler on the Roof*. Sung in English rather than Russian this popular song connected the North American audience with Russia through easily recalled images extracted with a familiar tune.

Along with the music the colorful costumes made the performance an enjoyable one, by heightening the visual impact of the dancers' performances.

Symphony doesn't quite click

Edmonton Symphony Orchestra
Uri Mayer, conductor, Andre Michel Schub, piano
Jubilee Auditorium Oct. 28

review by K. Arthur

The Friday night ESO concert gave us performances of two stalwart works of the romantic repertoire - Rachmaninoff A Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, and Also

Sprach Zarthusra by Richard Strauss. It came as no surprise that the performances of these two highly popular works were very well received, but ultimately they lacked the distinction necessary to make them memorable.

In the Rachmaninoff, Mayer and the ESO were partnered with the American pianist Andre-Michel Schub. Mr. Schub was the first prize winner in the 1981 Van Cliburn Competition. He is certainly a powerful and impressive player, but in spite of some brilliant playing, the concerto cannot be counted as a success. It ran into trouble at the very beginning. Mr. Schub and Mr. Mayer had difficulty coming to an agreement on the opening tempo of the *moderato*, leaving the orchestra to catch up with the soloist. Throughout the first movement the violas and cellos sounded uninspired, leaving the beautiful, far flung melody sounding undernourished.

The nocturne-like second movement *adagio* needs a sense of ruminative yearning which it did not receive from the soloist. Indeed, throughout this and the third movement *allegro* Schub's playing was technically precise and, at times, exciting, but both Schub and Mayer seemed unresponsive to the atmosphere and poetry of the music.

Richard Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarthusra* contains the never-to-be-forgotten opening chords used to open Stanley Kubrick's film 2001: A Space Odyssey. Mayer's rendition of the opening was riveting in its clarity and impact, the organ and orchestra achieving an excellent balance. Throughout the rest of the piece the ESO played with much greater enthusiasm than during the Rachmaninoff, contributing thick and powerful string sonority as well as opulent wind and brass playing. Mayer's conducting was competent and well controlled, but the sense of mystery so crucial to this piece of music was not readily conveyed. Mayer is a good Straussian, but I missed those special insights that can make his performances idiomatic and exciting.

Excessive moralizing disrupts continuity

Educating Rita
by Willy Russell
Citadel Shoctor Theatre until Nov. 26

review by Wendy Hawkins

I went to *Educating Rita* expecting to see an updated version of *Pygmalion*, or *My Fair Lady* without the music. I got what I expected and the result is mediocre.

Educating Rita is a modern play about the intellectual transformation of a lower class English hairdresser into an intelligent, articulate, educated woman. While the initial reaction is often *what a cheap rip-off of Pygmalion-My Fair Lady*, the play does, on the surface, have possibilities.

Rita is a 26 year-old married woman who decides that there is more to life than buying dresses or going to the pub. She decides to attend the Open University where she is tutored in Comparative Literature by Professor Frank Bryant, who is a problem drinker. As expected, Rita brings a breath of fresh air into Frank's life.

The problems with *Educating Rita* are mostly in the script. The play is sometimes contrived and heavy-handed. It is presented in short scenes which are often disruptive to the sense of the play as a whole. The scenes are often too short to get a true sense of Rita and therefore her transformation from hairdresser to educated woman is somewhat strained. The play annoys in that it tries to present a tiny nugget of wisdom in every scene, and

this becomes very monotonous.

The play does have some great lines, though, and is generally pretty funny. It introduces several interesting themes, but none of these are explored adequately. One of the best things about the play is how it manages to, in some sense, pinpoint the problems of the working class.

It is also a good play in that it shows how a woman comes to make her own choices whereas in *My Fair Lady* anybody could have been picked off the street to be transformed, in *Educating Rita* it is Rita who makes the choice to change herself and her life.

The set design by Richard Kent Wilcox is fantastic. If you ever become bored with

the play you can always size up the set; there are dozens of details to look at.

John Bayliss as Frank Bryant is understated. Very little change takes place in his character throughout the course of the play and it is rather hard to believe that there was ever a time when he was not totally won over by Rita. His performance is pleasant and humorous.

Rita is played by Marcia Kash and she is hilarious on occasion. Her miniskirts and dyed hair at the beginning are wonderful. The general transformation is a little hard to believe, but that is more the fault of the play as opposed to the fault of Kash. Her performance is generally very good.



photo Angela Wheelock

Marcia Kash (Rita) chats with John Bayliss (Frank Bryant) while Johnny Walker (bottle on table) listens