

Ballet a breath of fresh air

by Sylvia Kaptein

Friday night's performance by Les Grandes Ballets Canadiens was like a breath of fresh air to the many ballet lovers gathered at the Cohn to watch them. This relatively young group (founded in 1958) was full of sparkle and infectious enthusiasm; every movement showed how much they loved the dance.

The troupe has gained recognition across Canada as being "not as classically conscious as the National Ballet and not as deliberately contemporary as the Royal

Winnipeg Ballet". This was definitely true of Friday's performance, when the program ranged from light classical to some very modern pieces.

The performance opened with the classical "Allegro Brillante". Beautifully danced and costumed, this piece brought to mind the light gaiety of a spring day. George Balanchine's choreography was certainly shown off to great advantage.

After this, in the very charming "Aureole," the dancers reached a pinnacle in the

joie de vivre characteristic of the whole performance. Anyone still cold after the "Allegro Brillante" could not fail to be thrilled by the fluid grace and extreme joy shown by these five dancers.

"Lines and Points" was the one disappointment in the evening. Although well executed, this monotonous selection brought to mind a gymnastic display rather than a ballet dance.

"Exsultate Jubilate" recaptured some of the performance's previous charm in an unusual piece danced to a

choral selection by Mozart. The vivid red costumes and unconventional movements of the adagio were especially noteworthy.

The evening's conclusion was a dynamic performance of the new version of "Firebird", created by Maurice Bejart. Once again, the colors of the tunics were remarkable—navy blue and a contrasting flaming red.

Costuming throughout the program was imaginative and unique, ranging from delicate gossamer skirts and bare feet to ankle-length velvet gowns

for the women, and from bare torsos and tights to everyday trousers for the men.

Lighting was also consistently well done, and deserved special praise in the adagio from "Exsultate Jubilate" and in the "Firebird."

Altogether, Les Grandes Ballets Canadiens gave a vivacious and captivating performance. Their few technical imperfections were easily overlooked by the enthusiastic audience who realized they had witnessed a very fine ballet company in action.

Bearded lady's reflection

by Glenn Walton

There she is, rising full-blown from the Atlantic off Peggy's Cove, a Venus, rough-edged and scarred, but workable. She wakes, and fixing her eye on the bare rock, bellows: "This is some right nice place." Maybe she will kick banks into the harbour, maybe she will survive the energy crisis and rent increases. Maybe the fishermen and the coal workers, the steelworkers and the carpenters, the single parents and the housewives, the gay men and women, and the communist movements will survive along with her. Maybe, just maybe, Nova Scotia will keep its natural beauty and its hands clean. *The Bearded Lady's Reflection* was written as a reflection of that survival.

—James MacSwaine, author / performer

It is the middle of the night. A frail figure lies on a bed, in a practically bare set. Struggling with a nightmare, until the torment awakens her, she sits up. At first she looks confused at her surroundings until a pair of eyeglasses are grasped, and put on. Her face lightens with recognition. Here is the old familiar room, with its table and mirror, around which she, the Bearded Lady is about to spin, for our benefit, her tale. It is a story of horror and pride that she lived because she wanted to be different. "Let's have a good look at you," she mimics. "Let this century have a good long stare," as, lovingly, she strokes her chin before the mirror. Did all the bearded ladies of the past, at times worshipped, stuck into circuses, feel as beautiful, as lovely, as she?

Who is the Bearded Lady, and why won't she shave? The question demands rephrasing: Why should she? Jim MacSwaine, Halifax author, performer, and Lebenskuenstler, the question. MacSwaine, termed by one reviewer as 'the closest equivalent to Renaissance Man' we've got, must be one of Nova Scotia's great renewable natural resources and therefore worth cultivating. He writes, sings,

acts, designs and performs puppet shows; and he does them all well. Someone should build a theatre for him, and let him tinker to his creative heart's content. In *The Bearded Lady's Reflection* he has invented a character who has learned the value of anger. At the end of the play, when the B.L. tells us of a confrontation she had in a supermarket with a woman who has been rude to her, she has the audience, cheering her side on as she carries the struggle into the marketplaces of the nation. "I rammed her with my shopping cart," she relates, "and when she was down I threw a carton of eggs on top of her. Her eggs! Anger is a precious gift, and should be cultivated."

Between the first awakening in the night and the eggs in the supermarket, MacSwaine guides us through the episodes of a life plagued by harassment and the stigma of eccentricity. Life ain't easy for a girl with whiskers. When she was fourteen, the Bearded Lady's father broke her arm in a fight, ostensibly over money. The real reason was that she refused to shave. When mother died, she was left at father's mercy. Their relationship, a mixture of 'smouldering hate and confused love,' ends in rape and his suicide. The weapon of death is—of course—a straight razor.

Rejected by society, and by a family interested only in position and wealth, she retreats into a world of fantasy, that is, she admits, "somewhat melodramatic, but true." MacSwaine makes good use of his rich poetic imagery: rocks and ferns dream, a pot of flowers hides the predatory tiger, and moments of great tenderness arise out of potentially traumatic meetings: The B.L. discovers her mother in bed with a female lover, and instead of experiencing rejection, she is joyously welcomed by the two women. What is it like to kiss a bearded lady? "The first kiss always hurts," [her husband complains,] but that is the extent of his complaint.

MacSwaine's basic concern

in *The Bearded Lady's Reflection* is that of oppression. We are all bearded ladies in one way or another, and the oppressors are dark

mysterious beings living in subterranean hollows, but are out there lurking in the 'normal, the complacent, the banal.' Oppression hides in money, in pollution, in the speeches of politicians and the rows of identical suburban houses. If we are to survive with the Bearded Lady, we must recognize it.

And if we have to kick banks into the harbour, combat rent increases and conserve energy, we'll have to do it together.



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