

Citadel's latest crab study — the female moults

by Beno John

Crabdance (playing at the Rice Theatre, Citadel, until Jan. 22. Directed by Malcom Black)

*In the spring time, giant Alaska crabs lock claws and drag each other over the ocean floor. The female moults. Copulation follows. The male remains to guard the female until she's grown a new shell. From the preface to **Crabdance** by Beverly Simon.*

Simon's preface to her play **Crabdance** sets the tone for an

exciting play. The dancers in this production intertwine within the complex field of human passions, as ritually and as instinctively as the crab. Humanity often refuses to acknowledge this basic aspect of itself and this serves as one of the central themes of the play. **Crabdance** weaves around an older woman, Sadie Golden, played with a controlled brilliance by Florence Patterson.

Sadie, once married, is now a woman searching for love and companionship, with a long list of suitors possessing various attractive features to choose from. The first in the play is a nervous young uninitiated salesman

peddling the Book of Knowledge who invites himself in through the open door of Sadie's house.

The salesman, Leonard Mochuck, is the young man who saddles his faith on knowledge, and considers it the foundation of human achievement. But his conviction has one glaring limitation; his belief in intellect is accompanied by a poor understanding of human emotions. He is out of touch with his feelings; this manifests itself in his failure to deal with specific situations, which in this case happen to be Sadie's sexual overtures.

He finds it hard to assert



Highrise does the hustle.

photo Grant Wurm



Sadie meets Dickens.

photo Grant Wurm

himself, unless he relies on the textbook lines that define his function as a salesman. The result is an inarticulate parody of self-assurance, and Thomas Hauff who plays the part, is convincing. He stutters, cringes and sweats his way through his 'first time', and portrays Mochuck's estrangement with a stilted, stammering vocabulary of speech and action.

Sadie's second suitor, Dickens, is also a salesman, but he is older, and his bag is the sale of condiments. He is the sensualist, and makes his entry with a briefcase that has a shape which demands phallic associations. He is in touch with his emotions to the point of being selfish; he demands all the attention, his self-interest blinds him to the needs of other people.

Dickens is played masterfully by Roland Hewgill; he develops his character to contrast nicely with that of Mochuck's.

Maurice Good plays Highrise, the third suitor. Unfortunately he lacked the same control and restraint exercised by the other two central male characters. Good overdoes the part of the modern hustler easily

understandable, for stereotyped 'dude' comes across as hyperbolic at times. This is partially due to the script, which does little to define Highrise's character.

The most serious flaw in this well-acted play lies in the script for the most part, and this is the culmination of the play. The bizarre ending of the play is haunting, and gripping, but is only justified by the precise construction of the rest of the play. There is something of an architect in Ms. Simon in the way she builds up the emotional **Crabdance**, but I think she loses it in the last ten minutes of play. The ending is too deliberate and too contrived; it has the implication of gimmickery in the way it leaves the audience bewildered. There is nothing in the script that prepares you for this as a result, the symbolism and surrealism are lost.

Crabdance for the most part is what drama should be: action, excitement, and entertainment. Above all it is immediate, and lacks the self-consciousness of most of the theatre these days.

ESO celebrates 25th anniversary

by J.C. LaDalia

The Edmonton Symphony Orchestra celebrated its 25th anniversary this past weekend with a program featuring its own players as soloists. While not a triumph, it was still an excellent idea and provided a well-balanced program.

Following a powerful rendition of "Happy Birthday" we heard Johann Stamitz's Clarinet Concerto in B-flat, one of his best-known works. It is an attractive, amiable work which needn't have been played so rapidly. Whoever wanted it at that tempo, Maestro Hetu and/or Charles Hudelson the clarinetist, the final movement's *presto* provided little contrast with the opening *allegro moderato*.

Hudelson played splendidly throughout with a firm, nutty tone, and the tempi were no problem for him, but the orchestra did not articulate phrases as clearly as they would have at a slightly slower pace.

One cannot judge Hudelson's ability to convey deep emotion as the Stamitz contains none. Perhaps some day he will play the Mozart or Nielsen concerti for us.

The Mozart *Sinfonia Concertante* for Violin and Viola (K. 364) followed. This wonderful work was played at well-judged tempi, and the orchestra's performance was fine, with brass and winds in polished form. The soloists, while obviously intelligent musicians, had some difficulties. Marlin Wolfe (violinist) has a sweet, full tone but he was either nervous or has a rather nineteenth-century conception of his part. Whichever the case, there were several rough attacks, fluffed notes and blurred runs which, in Paganini or Vieuxtemps, might have seemed dramatic but in Mozart were misplaced.

The violist, Nicholas Pulos, has a rich but not robust tone, and what we heard was lovely. Unfortunately there was a fair amount we could not hear. The

beautiful *andante* suffered from not being shaped in a continually developing manner; the *legato* lines were not always sustained, nor was the soloists' give and take of phrases sufficiently compelling.

After intermission we heard two works by Benjamin Britten, whose death last month (December 4) marks the end of an era in English music. Although Britten wrote much of his music for particular musicians (such as Peter Pears, the tenor) they have been eagerly taken up by others

outside the Britten circle. The *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*, a cycle of six English poems, is a virtuoso work, which is why it appeals to performers. It was excellently performed by David Astor (tenor) who has considerable control and ability, demonstrated in his negotiation of "This ae Nighte," and the runs in "Queen and Huntress," which were as precise as I've yet heard them. His understanding of the

frequently subtle texts was evident throughout.

Astor's vocal quality is not the most attractive; he does not have a rich, beautiful tone as does, say, Robert Tear (who often performs the work in England), but neither does Peter Pears, for whom it was written. In any case Astor has complete control over the instrument he does have. The program stupidly neglected to include the texts so that much of the audience had little idea what was being sung. It is pointless to argue, that, being sung in English, it should have been comprehensible: with a string orchestra, a horn, and poetic diction throughout, one cannot understand all. The audience's appreciation would have been more complete if the program had fulfilled its function.

David Hoyt's horn was skillfully played. The prologue for horn solo could have been smoother, thus preparing for the first song's tranquility. More anguished force is wanted in "O

Rose, Thou Art Sick." Otherwise everything was the in a most difficult work. And the result was the most searching music of the evening. The soloist played superbly, with particular incisiveness in the relentless "This ae Nighte," and with considerable purity in Keat's song.

The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra (*Variations on a Theme of Purcell*) was a delightful conclusion. The ingenuity of the work always amazes me. A set of 13 variations with a fugue designed to demonstrate each orchestral instrument sounds like, and their unique qualities. Originally used in an educational film with narration, it is an inventive and exhilarating work which is quite instructive even in the concert hall (see numerous comments testing the piece for hearing in two minutes what the ESO can do, as a symphony orchestra).

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