## **ENTERTAINMENT**



Historian Laurie Dennett, author of A Hug for the Apostle

Photo Elaina Oeto

## From France to Spain for MS

nterview by Elaine Ostry

neever had an idea grab me with such force," says Laurie Dennett earnestly. This is understandable. The idea of walking a medieval pilgrimage route in order to raise money for multiple sclerosis research is not one you think of every day.

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Dennett did not let this idea fade in her mind. It came at a good time for her to enact it. Dennett had just been laid off her positon as an archivist for a telecommunications company in London — with a year's pay. "The goods had called my bluff," she says.

Dennett immediately began to solicit funds and contacts for her charity walk. 3,000 of the biggest companies in the U.K. contributed to the project. Dennett used the contacts of her late father, Wally Crouter, the famous Canadian radio announcer, to establish a media link with Canadians.

The purpose of the walk was not only to raise money for M.S. but awareness of the disease. M.S. is known as "Canada's disease.", as 50.000 Canadians suffer from it — "one of the highest statistics in the world," according to Dennett.

The disease has special meaning for Dennett; her mother suffers from it. "M.S. affects different people differently," Dennett says. "It's hard to live with. The uncertainty of it is so destructive."

"M.S. is a cause in which every day counts," states Dennett. She did not seem to have wasted a single day. While establishing the necessary contacts, Dennett began to prepare herself physically for the walk.

"I would walk a tube route [in London] in a circle," Dennett laughs. After three to four months of training, she embarked on her journey, walking an average of 20 miles a day. Walking itself was not difficult: "It's getting up the next day and doing another 20—that's the killer."

The pilgrimage route from Chartres, France to Santiago de Compostela, Spain was the third most popular route during medie-val times, after Rome and Jerusalem. "100,000 people a year used to travel the route in the Middle Ages," says Dennett.

Pilgrims travelled to Santiago de Compostela because St. James was supposed to be buried there. "He was the first apostle to be killed," Dennett comments, "and his followers smuggled his body back to Santiago [where he had preached after Christ's death]."

The route from Chartes to Santiago de Compostela is 1,000 miles long. Dennett walked this length in ten and a half weeks, from March 30 (Easter Sunday) to June 10, 1986.

The terrain of the pilgrimage route changes from region to region. I walked along the Loire Valley, "sup Sennett, "where there were flat lands and forests." Then she reached the Pyrenees, which climb to 3,500 feet. Crossing into Spain, she reached Burgos, which has "a flat, treeless, stath beauty," and Leon, "a barren, reddish-golden-brown land with a brilliam blue sky."

Dennett describes Samos, further west on the route, as paradisical: the country is lush and "covered with flowers." "Spain is the second most mountainous country in Europe," she states. By Santiago, the mountainor et 4,000 feet high — so the pre-walk training was crucial.

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"In France, the route is not so well-known," comments Dennett. "But in Båsque, the route is still respected — it's still such a living thing."

Dennett walked "absolutely alone," sans entourage, except for the two weeks she walked with two old men from Carrion, who wanted to walk the route before they died. "I hadn't realized how much joy there was in other people's company," she says. "After being on the road for two weeks with somebody, you're friends for life."

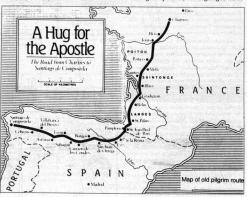
Finally Dennett arrived at Santiago de Compostela and visited the famous cathedral there. There is a statue of St. James in it: "each pilgrim gives it a hug at the end of the journey." Hence the name of her book written from her travel journal, A Hug for the Acostle.

"Hundreds of people made the walk a success," Dennett states. The walk for M.S. raised \$60,000 in the U.K. and \$30,000 in Canada. But most important, it raised awareness of this disease, which still has no cure.

"M.S. is not a high profile disease in Spain," says Dennett. But one result of the walk was that "volunteers started two new support groups in Northern Spain, In Santiago, a very rich lady set up a chair (a professorship) in medicine there specializing in research into

M.S. The idea that "grabbed" Dennett one night has grabbed the attention of others, resulting in increased funds for M.S. research. A good idea, but "you've got to fall in love with it," says Dennett. "Unless it's a midnight inspiration, it's not going to work."

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## New Demons casts spell



La La La Human Steps: "...decadent images in the dancing..."

Photo Edouard Lock

New Demons La La La Human Steps SUB Theatre

## review by Rosa Jackson

a La La Human Steps shocked and amazed a captivated Edmonton audience once again this year with their latest production, New Demons.

Edourd Lock's company of daring, devillsh dancers leaped, twisted, rolled, and threw themselves across the stage; maintaining a frantic pace broken only by short intervals of varied humour.

A "multi-media" production, New Demons was a collection of artistic forms, including ultra-modern dance, intriguing music, and unusual visual art to name but a few. These elements were pieced together effectively: although the focus was on the dancing, and the remaining segments served the somewhat obvious purpose of allowing the dancers to catch their breath,

The dancers demonstrated incredible style and strength, tackling, choreography which would defeat the less skilled and courageous performer. Some moves were over-used, but not to the point of making the dancing any less exciting. There were unique features: a man being lifted and carried by a woman, two men dancing together, and some snakelike movement by Lock in contrast to the sharpness of the other dancers' style. The expressive and dynamic Louise Lecavalier seemed best suited to this type of dance, while the more serious Francine Liboiron added a balletic touch.

The theme of the show, man's unity with nature, was expounded upon in a number of ways. For some obscure reason, Lock chose

to read out of the book The Game Birds of North America (1897) as an introduction to a film segment in which the dancers themselves seemed to fly. At one point, a giant metal sculpture of a lion was brought onto the stage, and the performers sang their rendition of 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight'.

However, the show depicted not only nature but also the present state of society. There were decadent images in the dancing, and the dancers' feverishness and confusion reflected the way many people go through life in the 1990's. The traditional dress and song of the singer, Priya Khajuria, was in opposition to the skintight black outfits of the dancers and the synthesizer music composed by the West India Company. There was even a "rock 'n' foll" piece, performed by guitarist Alain Bertrand.

. Strangely, Khajuria's mystical strains did not seem out of place in this futuristic show. Her singing added a new and beautiful dimension to the production, creating an almost religious atmosphere.

The show also contained amusing moments, such as when a Punch and Judy Show (which could only be appreciated by the French-speaking members of the audience) was performed out of the lion's mouth, and when Lock lay on a bed of (tall) nails, saying, "if this were an allegory for memories, they'd be painful memories."

Occasionally, I felt that Lock overdid the cuteness in the comic interruptions, and as a result they verged on being gimmicky. On the whole, however, the show was well composed and accessible even to those who don't know, nor wish to know, the meaning of the phrase "modern dance". It contained moments of awe-inspiring magic which made it a memorable experience.