



Ike Morgulis

The York Dance Ensemble performing SPLIT IMAGE.

dancers deliver more than lunchroom fare

by Nancy Levene-Frerichs

There is something about watching dance in a lunchroom that makes me feel uneasy.

Nevertheless, on November 16 in Winter's dining hall, a performance arrived courtesy of the York dance department. The York Dance Ensemble, a pre-professional repertory company, is headed by artistic director Donna Krasnow. The Ensemble is composed of third and fourth year dance majors and is designed to give students experience performing a repertoire over time. The Ensemble also tours different cities and venues which, again, is vital preparation for life in a professional dance company.

In providing students with this chance, Krasnow has addressed the radical difference between the professional and non-professional dance environment, and is to be commended for this often overlooked recognition.

The first piece, *Split Image*, was choreographed by Krasnow with music by Steven Castellano and Edward Zaski, recent graduates from the York music department. It is an examination of the complexities of the community; more specifically, the tension present between the individual and the group. This is a powerful theme and inherently difficult to depict.

Krasnow understands this challenge. The piece begins with a group of dancers who disperse, some ending up in smaller groups, others dancing solo; the constant being their changing relations. The choreography is interesting and innovative, but it is at the level of interpretation that some difficulties emerge. The problem is this: the individual is always forced to resolve tension between the demands of the community, and the demand to be an autonomous individual. Where he or she comes out on this problem is extraordinarily interesting. I felt the dancers fell short of grappling with this. They moved from group to solo and back with an ease that

undermines the impact of the piece.

Moreover, I was struck by the fact that, while in a group, the dancers barely looked at one another as if to suggest that the group, as a category, can barely conceal the solipsism of its members. This is simply not the case. The community is a constitutive part of human existence, and a strong notion of individuality will recognize this.

The dancers should have been clearer on the importance of relationships in the groups, such that the memory of this could remain even as they were dancing alone. Again, this is difficult and subtle, but I think the choreography can sustain it and, indeed, is lacking without it.

The second piece, a duet entitled *For Some We Loved*, was by choreographer and dancer Philip Drube of the Toronto company Dancemakers. The piece is a slow moving meditation on relationship, and the slowness leaves

a lot of room for the interpretive problems of this complex issue. However, the dancers are hard pressed to enliven the choreography and what little room the choreography allows, the dancers virtually ignore.

In this piece, the couple, after having mildly struggled with whether they want to be together or not, embrace and then, inexplicably, the woman leaves.

This could have been interesting had we known what constituted the relationship in the first place. But we don't, so the leaving has no meaning and its difficult to care one way or the other. The two dancers, Susan Lee and Blake Martin, are evidently unaware that not only can movement not stand on its own, but when the movement is this weak, it is the content that must shine. Relationship and love do not merit such lacklustre treatment.

The final piece was a comedy, *Devil in the Drain*, by York faculty member Holly Small. It's a lively work which relies on the dancers ability to portray aggression in

absurdum. The dancers deliver well, even though the piece is singularly one dimensional. I'm willing to believe that is the point.

The 10 dancers on the programme were, in general, strong and well-rehearsed, a testament to Krasnow's commitment to train dancers at university.

And what of my lunchroom unease? Notwithstanding my basic feeling that the province of art and that of consumption are fundamentally distinct, The York Dance Ensemble performed admirably given the striking limitation. In short, I was engaged enough to forget, for a time, my surroundings and the encroaching banality of lime jello.

Anyway, it is only the "truly" avant-garde, or the postmodern something-or-others that would choose this venue above another as a statement about the banality of all human projects. This was not the case.

As a chance for young dancers to perform, the lunchroom will have to do.