

# Entertainment

At McLaughlin Hall

## Baroque dance captivates modern viewers

By MARION KERR

As I watched the Baroque Dance Ensemble perform in McLaughlin Hall last week, I began to wonder, am I being taken back to the late 17th and 18th century or, is a very elegant part of that time being brought to me. I wondered if a 20th century audience in McLaughlin Hall was responding with mere interest and wonder at dance that's refreshingly different, and missing a richness and meaning in the dance that an 18th century audience would understand easily.

The program opened as Shirley Wynne, the Director of the Ensemble, discussed the process of reconstructing dances and talking through a demonstration of steps and moves we were to see later in whole dances.

### DECODE NOTATIONS

After studying paintings and literature of the period (writing on dance, theatre and even writings in such bizarre places as police

records where often mention is given to street performances that got out of hand), one must try to decode the various methods of notation that different choreographers used to record the steps and shapes of their dances. Once the steps are understood one uses the information on attitudes of the people to add style, to add the right quality to the movement.

The movement in Monday's performance had a very definite quality. The dancers carried their bodies erectly, almost proudly. They were nobles, dressed as such and moved as such. The women could not help but carry themselves nobly for their torsos from waist to underarm were encased in tight-fitting busks or whalebone bodices which only allow for a slight tilting of the torso. While the upper body was held, the feet were very busy. Footwork was quick and complex but very close to the ground with low, small jumps and balance on demi-pointe with the heels only three inches off the ground. The hands were used in a

'caressing the air' motion as they rotated, curled and flexed from the wrists, with thumbs and index fingers held close together. There was an element of surprise, a tossing quality to much of the movement, as sudden changes in direction or transitions from quick, light footwork to suspended, sustained poses were used.

### BETTER THAN WORDS

Throughout the program eye contact, facial expressions and gestures were very expressive. In the demonstration portion of the program, Wynne, literally translating some of the gestures used, showed how a tilt of the fan or a steely-eyed look could say things as well as or better than words.

In the final piece, Suite for Diana and Mars, the very readable facial expressions were eliminated as the dancers donned masks. The characters were expressed through movement qualities and my questions about the performance were answered.

Yes, I could be a 20th century spectator and still be moved by an 18th century program. Movement is a timeless, universal means of expression.

Wynne first studied to construct

an understanding of the life in the movement of dances as they were done, and when reconstructing the dances she then translates that life into terms of 20th century understanding.



## TFT takes challenge with Brecht's first

By KIM ECKLIN

Any successful play must be able to fuse the gap which occurs in the transition from the reality of the written word to the illusion of the stage. Baal does not make this connection.

Brecht wrote Baal, his first play, in 1923 at the age of 25. We witness a young playwright exploring techniques and ideas in the play which are as yet hesitant and unconvincing. He tries out recursive imagery using motifs like "weak knees" and "water", but the images are not molded and recreated as the play progresses, thereby losing the rich anaphoric allusion of which they are capable.

He experiments with a variety of ideas, yet no clear connections or resolutions are made. Early in the play young Baal points to an anatomical chart of a woman's body hanging in his attic room and declares that "there are no mysteries". His prolific poetry, on the other hand, depends on elipsis for meaning. The play only borders on achieving Brecht's intention as described by Sartre. "What Brecht wanted was to provoke what Plato called the source of all philosophy, that is wonder, by making the familiar unfamiliar."

Baal poses interesting challenges to the director who must deal with the transition to the illusion of the stage. In the play, Brecht is beginning to work with characters

who change roles and narrators who address the audience. However, in this production many of the character transitions are undeveloped and unclear. Too often a character has nearly finished his first speech before the audience realizes he has changed roles. Characters at times only partially address the audience, leaving it unsure as to whether the speech was intended as a soliloquy.

The set, which is a round crab-like structure with sliding panels, is a little over-bearing on the small Toronto Free Theatre stage. Nevertheless, it works very well both as supportive symbolic device and has versatility for rapid and diverse scene changes which are smoothly effected by the actors. A clever murder scene is executed in darkness, illuminated at intervals with bursts of match-light and, at the beginning of the third act, we see Brecht experimenting with montage, juxtaposing scenes separated by short blackouts. Saul Rubinek, playing Baal, controls long poetical speeches to maintain an energetic pace. Of the actors who play several roles, Arnie Achtman is particularly most skilful in clearly distinguishing his parts, and consistently contributes comic touches to his scenes.

Baal is a play of process; interesting as early Brecht but not yet epic theatre. It runs at Toronto Free Theatre until March 27.



Broadway in Atkinson, the Department of Theatre presents the preview of its final production of the year *Separate Tables* by Terrence Ratigan: this Monday at 7:30 in Atkinson's Studio. Performances will run the remainder of the week, Tuesday through Saturday at 7:30 p.m. with 2:00 p.m. matinee performances on Wednesday and Friday afternoons.

All are invited to attend. Tickets are free and can be picked up at Burton Box Office, Monday through Friday between 10 and 2 p.m.

Sorry folks: The Excalibur contest has been indefinitely suspended due to unforeseen circumstances. Apologies to those who have submitted responses.

E.L.

## Selections from the Eskimo Art Collection of The Toronto Dominion Bank

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