

# Royal Winnipeg Ballet lives on the joy of dance

After reading reviews from all over Europe praising the joyful, small-company vitality of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, I was looking forward to their return to Edmonton for confirmation of this new versatility and self-assurance. Their performance here September 15 and 16 fulfilled many of my hopes.

The second evening, which I attended, would have been an admirably balanced and educatory performance if *Intermede* had been more successfully presented. According to the program, *Intermede* "is a free visual representation of the music,"



photo by Dave Hebditch

## COMFORT FROM A DEAD MOTHER

... in the dream dance of a murderess

which "consists of theme and harmony". The program further explains a correspondence between chords and keys in music and pictures in ballet, which makes the ballet sound like a series of tableaux.

The performance confirmed this impression. *Intermede* consists of dancers taking a position, then moving and striking another uninteresting posture.

That the work was bad may have been due to the last-minute substitution of two of the three men in the ballet and a lack of rehearsal. The dancers seemed constantly out of step. Only a

surprise *pas de deux* (by Winthrop Corey, who is very tall and thin for a dancer, and Petal Miller, who is short and stocky) proved interesting.

The music by Cimarosa and setting were adequate, as were the costumes, which appeared to be basic practice costume. What should have been a well-designed ballet of clear-cut, beautifully-placed, classical dancing failed to excite me.

The company fulfilled its reputation throughout the rest of the evening. Prima ballerina Christine Hennessy was perfect in the technically demanding *Don Quixote Pas de Deux*. Her turns and poses were all crisp and strong; her "Spanish" arm, wrist, and hand movements, and her continual flirting with her partner and the audience were completely delightful.

Her partner, David Moroni, was very strong and impressive, beginning with a dramatic leap from the wings but ending, unfortunately, obviously exhausted. Aside from one ugly, but difficult lift, and two or three attempted balancings by the ballerina, this *pas de deux* was a demonstration of excellent dancing rather than the technical acrobatics I had feared.

## Fall River Legend

Agnes de Mille created *Fall River Legend* in 1948 to express the feelings of a lonely, warped individual forced to the murder of her parents by a strange and repressive upbringing.

Drawing on the facts of the famous Lizzy Borden case, de Mille simplified the plot to effectively create a ballet. When Lizzie's mother dies, her strait-laced father marries a strict, unemotional woman. Lizzie is thus excluded from a normal, happy life as typified by the colorful choir scene, until the parson falls in love with her.

Her step-mother scares the parson away with stories of Lizzie's mental abnormalcy, the result being her withdrawal into loneliness and the eventual murder of her parents. When the community discovers the crime, she is offered no comfort but that attempted by the parson. Even her dead mother will not accept her.

The ballet opens and closes with a gallows, and moves in a flashback to Lizzie's childhood, adolescence and adulthood. As The Accused, Christine Hennessy watches the actions and emotions of Petal Miller, who plays Herself as Child. She clearly expresses her agony as an onlooker at the death of her mother and mistreatment by her step-mother. Complex feelings for her father's house are seen in her dancing through and around it and her strange, awkward poses as she clings to its framework during much of the early action.

Later she has similar dependent, sometimes obscene lifts and supports with her father and the pastor. Following the murder, she erupts in a frenzy when the pastor attempts to support her, and then gains an exhaustingly tense control, standing completely rigid, only her hands clutching and unclutching.

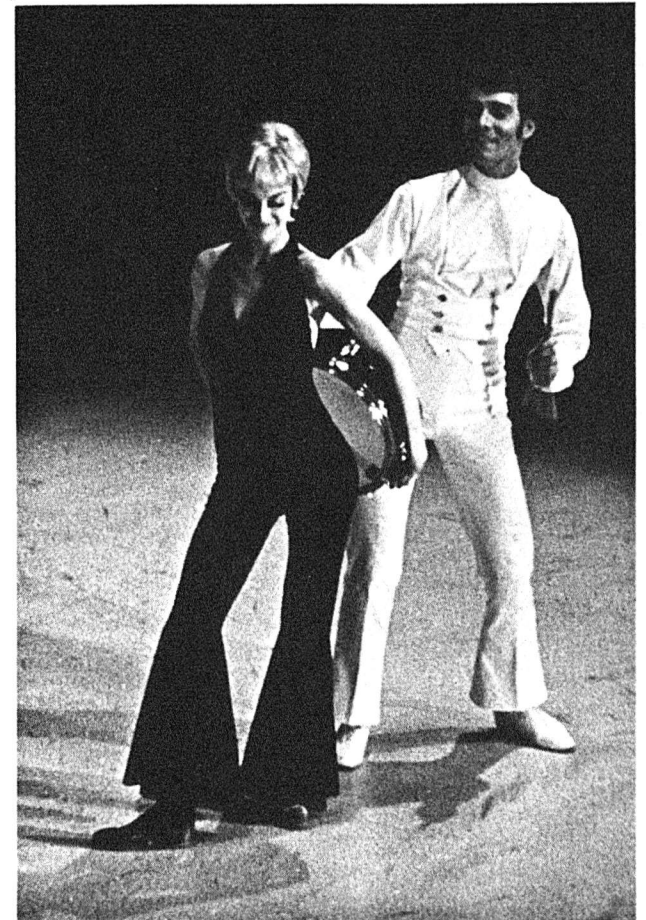


photo by George Drohomirecki

## VARIATIONS (ON STRIKE UP THE BAND!)

... dancers drumming up a storm

I found most of the scenes so effective that I forgot that I was watching dancing. Several of the earlier scenes with the townfolk moved too slowly, but Christine Hennessy's superb acting and dancing provided the intensity needed to make this a moving drama.

*Variations (On Strike Up the Band!)* closed the evening well. The dancers got to ham and the audience laughed. The costumes were great—men in white jump suits with tails, women in slinky, low-cut black pajamas. I thought Anna Maria de Gorriz and Winthrop Corey as double bass were the most appealing, although Teresa Bacall did beautiful things with her shoulders as the violin. However, Richard Rutherford's jazzy little drum dance became boring after being repeated twenty or so times.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet is a wonderful thing to see in this dance-starved city. It is a pity we cannot see them at least once a year—as many lucky American audiences do.

—NANCY HENWOOD

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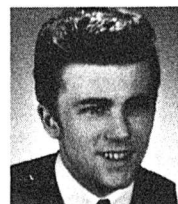
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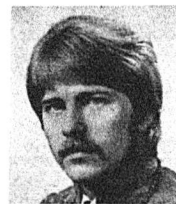
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