



LE GROUPE DE LA PLACE ROYALE

Le Groupe de la Place Royale was founded in 1966 by choreographer Jeanne Renaud and current artistic Director Peter Boneham. In 1977, a year before the company moved to Ottawa, it began experimenting with adding voice and sound to the dancers' performing activities. These experiments involved collaborations with vocalist Pauline Vaillancourt and composers Claude Vivier, Bruce Mather, Morton Feldman, Gilles Trembley, John Plant, and others. The meshing of movement, voice and music has since become Le Groupe's trademark in its performances in Canada, the United States and Europe.

Andrew Timar and Tina Pearson talked with director Peter Boneham, vocal coach Mark Harada and dancer/musician Michael Montanero in Toronto in April.

Andrew: Both Tina and I have been working with dance regularly—

Mark: You compose for dance?

Tina: We've both been working with dance in many different ways, composing, or making scores for pieces— Andrew started a group called the Music-dance Orchestra, and I've been working with Toronto Independent Dance Enterprise. In these groups, we've started to use the voice in movement, and to think of the musicians' movement more as a resource.

Mark: What other groups in Toronto have been working with voice?

Andrew: None in a very direct or open way. The only other group that I know of is Terminal City in Vancouver.

Peter: They're very different from where we are.

Andrew: In what way?

Peter: Well, they experiment with sound and using voice, but it's not taken as a main direction. It's an experiment where people can use sound, but they don't say: this is where I want to go with using voice— it's all: we're using voice. But anyone can use voice, everyone has a natural voice. But how are you going to use it? And how are you going to train to get that use out of it?

Andrew: Yesterday Tina and I were commenting on how effective— how many years a group has to work to develop the kind of ensemble that Le Groupe demonstrated, which was impressive in that there wasn't any weak link in terms of the musical background. Everyone was able to switch very quickly from one thing to another and the integration between the music and the dance— to be able to remember all the musical things as well as all the movement things— was effective.

Michael: A lot of contemporary composers have said that they preferred to work with a company like ours rather than with musicians who have preconceived concepts about what the music is. The way they approached our musicality was to use things that we knew physically and to apply those to the music involved. All of the people in the company have had some musical training though— most of us play piano, and have had some theory.

Andrew: I think we're familiar with some of the frustrations that can come out of working with dancers; just the simple idea of communicating musical concepts— you use a language; you say rhythm— and it means something totally different to a dancer than it does to a musician.

Tina: One of the reasons we were both commenting on the evidence of your working together for a number of years is that in our own work we've never

had more than a few months to work with the dancers to develop something. With T.I.D.E., we were doing a lot of rhythmic work, and we found that we couldn't get them to easily understand our rhythmic concepts— we were working with cross rhythms, and rhythmic modulation— there was some basic difference just in the understanding of what rhythm is, that we didn't realize in the beginning, and that eventually came out in the work.

Peter: Voice has been part of our work almost from the beginning— but the whole musical concept of the company hasn't been seen by pounding and doing rhythm— the way we used music, was always on the structure of the music, not counting out beats and making rhythms— our 1-2-3-4 wasn't necessarily their 1-2-3-4...

Michael: There was one particular problem, though, with some of the percussion work, and that was that dancers are taught to dance on top of the music and the preparation that they take to do the movement will make them arrive on the count and I found that the tendency was to anticipate the preparation and come so fast into the beat that it constantly had that speeding up quality. It took a long time for people to be able to play comfortably with the percussion instruments.

Andrew: What does that have to do with?

Michael: To move a whole body takes a lot more energy than to move a mallet. The energy level is quite different. We have done really rhythmical pieces— we worked with José Evangelista on a piece where there were 102 small percussion instruments. The rhythmic patterns and changes were very complex— we used a metronome, it had to be that close. The movement was sometimes with the rhythm, sometimes against the rhythm...

Mark: That was a piece where the performers were not playing and/or singing at the same time as dancing— they either did one thing or the other. But still it was a bitch in terms of change of focus— they're beating their bodies out on the stage, and

FLOSSLE AND RAKE

Illustrations: a dance score by Jenifer Mascal,
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