



—photo by Steve Makris

## Ballet season tired rerun Nutcracker and Swan Lake not enough

The National Ballet of Canada apparently has 70 ballets in its repertoire, but this is just hearsay for Edmonton audiences. Once again Edmontonians had the opportunity to see the National Ballet perform *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker Suite*. Both ballets are charming, indeed, but familiarity is starting to breed a little contempt, if not for the ballets themselves, at least for the National Ballet Company which seems to haul out these two old faithfuls every time it goes on tour.

The ballet season opened this year on Thursday night with *Swan Lake*. The criticism that the National Ballet always does the same thing is alleviated somewhat by the fact that the *Swan Lake* presented this year was a rather different ballet from the one we've all seen. Eric Bruhn provided the company with a new choreography that transformed the old fairy tale, with its heavy gothic and supernatural overtones, into a more modern interpretation of the basic story with emphasis on psychological realism and an attempt at a kind of universal symbolism.

The corps de ballet was particularly weak in the first scene. Individual members performed nicely, but the dancers failed to func-

tion adequately as a chorus. There were too many errors in timing and spacing. Since Bruhn's choreography places a good deal of emphasis in the chorus, the weak performance of the corps de ballet damaged the effect of the opening scene.

Miss Martine van Hamel gave a technically brilliant performance. Her role as the Black Swan in the first scene of act two was more suited to her personality as a ballerina than her role as the Swan Queen, since she lacks the lyrical quality generally associated with the role.

The Prince Hazaros Surmejan seemed to have an off night. His balance was often shaky, and he could not approach Miss van Hamel's high technical standards nor even her emotional performance.

A rather disappointing factor in the ballet was the role of the Black Queen. She did little but walk around the stage with arms outstretched. She evoked less terror than the smoking mists which rolled around the Prince as he sought the abode of the swans—which pretty well takes care of the atmosphere of the Ballet.

The main impression the ballet left was one of lavish opulence, owing largely to the magnificent

costumes and the overpowering sets.

The ballet season in Edmonton closed Friday night with *The Nutcracker Suite*. The first act was choreographically dull—consisting largely of blatant mime and a good deal of parading around the stage—and technically sloppy. The second act was a good deal better. Miss Veronica Tennant as the Sugar Plum fairy and Jeremy Blanten as the Prince gave exquisite performances.

Costumes and sets were again impressive and effective, and helped to provide fairy-tale enchantment, an enchantment which was somewhat less than total.

Unfortunately, Edmontonians have little opportunity to see professional ballet or other kinds of dance, and I, at least, am grateful to the National Ballet for coming almost annually to Edmonton.

The full attendance at both nights of the ballet perhaps indicates that Edmontonians are now more eager to appreciate this sadly neglected art. Moreover, it may provide a hint to the National that they might safely try out something new the next time they come through.

—Lynn Weinlos

## recordings

**THE ELECTRIC FLAG:** Columbia CS 9714

Representing the more conservative element in modern music, the Electric Flag combines soul and big band jazz and comes up with a very polished sound. Its personnel consists of ten musicians, with such notables as Harvey Brooks, Buddy Miles, Herbie Rich, John Simon, and Stemsy Hunter (Mike Bloomfield is no longer in the group).

Their second album is quite impressive. It is not greatly different from their first one (*A Long Time Coming*: CS 9714) except for the fact that here the arrangements are more sophisticated, and the absence of the Mike Bloomfield imagination is noticeable. The distribution of the vocal solos among four of the members makes for a greater variety in vocal style than in their first record. The two most noteworthy cuts are *My Woman That Hangs Around This House*, a slow ballad with some extremely imaginative improvisations on the tenor sax by Herbie Rich, and *With Time There is Change*, a more progressive composition which demonstrates Stemsy Hunter's splendid vocal control. (It is unfortunate that this is the only cut on which Stemsy Hunter sings, since he seems to be the best singer in the group).

As a whole, the Electric Flag should appeal to everyone who likes good jazz or soul-blues.

**THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO DON SHIRLEY:** Columbia CS 9723

Don Shirley is not an ordinary jazz pianist. His trio consists not of the classical piano-drums-bass combination, but replaces the percussion with a cello—and it comes off brilliantly. Though not quite reaching the high standards of his first Columbia album (*Water Boy*: CS 9196), the classical piano touch, the intricate harmonic expansion, and the pronounced influence of the Negro work song are still there, thus identifying as unmistakably Don Shirley. One unusual thing on this album is the fact that on some of the selections, the Shirley trio is backed by a full orchestra, including drums.

Most outstanding are Don Shirley's renditions of *When the Saints Go Marching In*, *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands*, and Bob Dylan's *Blowin' in the Wind*. Honorable mention should be given to his *Trilogy*, an interesting combination of three well-known gospel tunes.

It's a good album, but if you're interested in hearing The Don Shirley Trio at its best, buy the *Water Boy* album instead.

**VAN MORRISON:** ASTRAL WEEKS: Warner Bros. WS 1768

Van Morrison has come a long way since his first big recordings of *Gloria* and *Here Comes the Night*. Now on his own, he is singing material which is considerably quieter, yet considerably more soulful. Most impressive about the LP is the free-flowing, almost a-rhythmical acoustic guitar accompaniment, supplemented by a subtle saxophone, flute, percussion and bass, which enhance rather than overpower Van Morrison's vocals.

The disadvantage of this album is that until you familiarize yourself with each individual selection, the album could become rather monotonous. This problem, however, is shared by most high quality folkblues LP's.

**THE BEST OF CARMEN DRAGON—ALBUM 2 (Capitol SP 8687)**

It does not bother me in the least to hear Gene Autry singing *Home on the Range*; nor does it bother me to hear Carmen Dragon and the Capitol Symphony Orchestra playing excerpts from a Wagnerian opera. But it definitely would bother me to hear Gene Autry singing Wagner; and in the same way, it actually does bother me to hear Carmen Dragon conducting the Capitol Symphony Orchestra in a relatively straight-forward version of *Home on the Range* as he does in this album. If this is the best of Carmen Dragon, then I would not want to hear the worst.

Now don't get me wrong—I think that Dragon is a brilliant conductor of classical music. However, he does seem unable to blend simple music into a large orchestral setting. *Turkey in the Straw* does not sound like a hoe-down song; *Black is the Color of My True Love's Hair* is no expression of passionate love; *America the Beautiful* ceases to be a song of patriotism, and *The Carnival of Venice* doesn't even suggest an Italian celebration. Instead, it is all reduced to the level of sameness characterizing dinner music. No conductor with the musical talent of Carman Dragon should ever stoop so low.

Though there are points of interest in the album, for the most part it can be filed under "S" for schmaltz.

—Larry Saidman

## Truelove on the lone prairie — Girl Crazy showing during VGW

The cultural life of the university will be revealed to VGW guests February 6 to 8, 12 to 16 as Jubilaires present their production of George Gershwin's *Girl Crazy*.

The plot of *Girl Crazy*, written in the early thirties, betrays the simple approach to life and love of the depression years: boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl. This inspiring saga is fleshed out to the point of Dickensian complexity with local politics, stern horse play, and the trimmings of the American dream.

More specifically, *Johney* (sic), played by Jim Dearden, is a very bad western actor, and has left movies to live a real life horse opera in Arizona. His own true-love is Molly (Elaine Christensen), the pistol-packing post-mistress of Custerville. Then (complication) Kate (Anne Wheeler), another unsuccessful thespian and former love of *Johney's*, arrives with her (complication) ex-husband/accompanist, Zolie (Gorden Gordey). Molly persuades *Johney* to run for

sheriff of the town, which (complication) is in the grip of the nefarious villains, Snake Eyes and Doc. Then, at the critical moment, *Johney's* old agent comes along offering him (complication) a new show and success in the BIG TIME!! From here, the plot thickens and thickens.

Will Sam win over *Johney*? Will *Johney* win the election? Will Kate win *Johney*? Will Zolie win Kate? Can anybody win? We hope so. And what about Molly? Never mind Molly, what about Doc and Snake Eyes?

The original *Girl Crazy* starred two relatively unknown girls named Ginger Rogers and Ethel Merman, the latter of whom gained her famous theme song, "I Got Rhythm," from the show. The musical comedy was resuscitated and rewritten as recently as 1958; Jubilaires' production will follow this revised show.

The director of *Girl Crazy* is Vic Sutton; Larry Dill of Toronto is choreographing the production. Tickets are available in SUB.