



The Winnipeg Ballet dancers in Rondo, Part II of John Neumeier's trilogy Pictures.

under the coaching of a local teacher. We would be gone a month and return only a few days before opening. Who were they anyway and who was Spohr? I'd not heard of one of them. A company that has to practice in a dirty restaurant!

I relaxed a little when I saw that the rehearsal discipline never lessened, but rather intensified over the week, when I noticed that they practiced between rehearsals and improved themselves, and when at regular intervals strong cups of grand British tea and digestive biscuits were slipped to me. . . .

Winnipeg is absolutely self-contained. Very little seems to happen. . . . Yet this provincial cut-off town boasts a good symphony, a fine ballet company, and one of the three best repertory theatres on the North American continent. No middle-western city in the United States, with the exception of Chicago, had until ten years ago comparable cultural organizations. Even our capital, Washington, DC, did not. The Manitobans, however, did.

"How is this possible?" I asked a flour miller, one of the patrons.

"Well, you see," he explained, "we live one hundred and fifty dollars away from anything, and so we figured we'd just have to do these things ourselves."

So they did. . . .

Male recruits were given twenty-five dollars a week to live on, free tuition but no salary. Females who lived at home were paid nothing; in fact, they were charged for the privilege of rehearsing. . . . One of the boys, Arnold Spohr, was a six-foot-three-inch Winnipegger. . . . Spohr is the son of a Lutheran minister and naturally

he had never seen any dancing. He loved music and his broad-minded father permitted him to train very thoroughly in this field. But he was also an athlete and able on the baseball and basketball fields. . . .

They started with one performance a year at the Playhouse Theatre, an excellent old vaudeville house, but with a stage too small for dancing. They now have four annual tours in Canada and the United States, and regular tours off the North American continent. . . . They started with a few clamorous and faithful mothers as audience. They now have a subscription list of 8,000 and usually sell out.

They began with one piano. Today they use the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. . . .

Spohr is a conscientious, not to say finicky, rehearsaler. Never mind if the group is only going to have one performance in Saskatoon or Moose Jaw, the dancers are rehearsed as though it were for Covent Garden, and in those deserts of time and space this requires fortitude. . . .

The Canada Council and the provincial government help them in many ways but so does their city.

"Why are you so interested?" I asked Sol Kanee. "You're not interested in the young girls; you're not interested in the boys; you haven't composed some bad music you want used; you have no daughter to foist on the company. Why do you work night and day for them?"

"Who could help it?" he replied.

And there it is. The citizens of Winnipeg support the company because it is fine and because the citizens are neither surfeited nor corrupted. They still take joy in beautiful things. . . .