

But the path has been long and arduous, from the pioneering days of Celia Franca, who came to Canada from Britain to found the company in 1951, to its present international status under the direction of Reid Anderson, who became artistic director in 1989.

Leading Ballet School

Part of the National's success has been based on the work at the National Ballet School, which has provided the company with many of its most distinguished dancers. Located in Toronto, the school is an independent, private, residential and day school that offers an integrated program of academic studies and dance instruction to some 150 students.

Founded in 1959 as a necessary adjunct to the National Ballet of Canada, it is widely regarded as one of the world's leading ballet schools. Its students have distinguished themselves as prizewinners in a number of prestigious international ballet competitions, and its graduates — among them such renowned artists as Veronica Tennant, Karen Kain, Frank Augustyn, Kevin Pugh and Martine VanHamel — can be found in leading dance companies the world over.

Keeping Dancers Happy

The school and the company have sustained each other over the past three decades, feeding off each other's success. The higher the achievement and recognition of the company, the better the dancer eager to train in the school. At the present time, however, things

seem to be filled to overflowing. The National already has too many principal dancers for the number of performances it can reasonably offer in a given season. This has put increasing pressure on the administration to seek out new creative opportunities for its leading dancers.

One way Anderson has met this challenge is by offering the opportunity to participate in choreographic workshops. This provides both an outlet for creativity and an opportunity to appear before the public at performances other than those scheduled for the full regular season. This situation, however, is not new. Karen Kain, the company's most highly acclaimed principal dancer and a graduate of the school, has left the company on several occasions to work with other international ensembles. In doing so, she has also enhanced the National's reputation while benefiting directly from the experience.

From the beginning, the National was to be a classical company, and it is still the only Canadian company to present the traditional full-evening ballet classics. Its repertoire has, nevertheless, grown to meet evolving tastes and now embraces contemporary works. The company also encourages the creation of new ballets.

In addition to its regular seasons at Toronto's O'Keefe Centre and alternating tours across eastern and western Canada, the National Ballet performs in virtually every major dance centre in the world. ♦

Ooooh! La La La

What does one do for an encore after choreographing a show for David Bowie? Edouard Lock is facing that question as he resuscitates his La La La: Human Steps ensemble, which has been in limbo since last December.

Moroccan-born Lock, 35, who founded his troupe in 1980, put everything on hold when he began choreographing the David Bowie show, now on its world tour. There were two temptations — the chance to work with Bowie and create the kind of mega-production which that entailed, and the opportunity to recoup the financing Lock had put into his own dance company.

The Bowie tour started in Canada in March 1990, moved to Europe and then to the Far East. For the show, Lock created an elaborate display of images on 35-mm film, most of them of a black-and-white David Bowie, costumed exactly as he is onstage. The film was tightly synchronized with Bowie's live performance and the images were projected onto a gargantuan screen hanging at the front of the stage. Performing both in front and behind it, Bowie

would interact with huge images of himself singing, dancing, and even floating upside down. Some projections were of La La La's whirling-dervish "prima ballerina," the platinum-blond Louise Lecavalier, who also made live appearances at some of the performances.

On the eve of the tour, Lock described the show as "a painter's look at rock." Unlike his usual post-punk choreography, the material for the Bowie tour did not "deal with the 'ooohs' and the 'aahs' of the crowd." Rather, Lock adds, it tried "to draw the audience onto the stage, instead of pushing them reeling back into their seats."

The mainstay of La La La is the unique Lock dance style: frenetic, high-energy movement characterized by bodies crashing and swirling through the air, on stage and against each other.

All that Lock needs now is to come up with 80 minutes of original work to keep his troupe going for the next three years. Chances are, he will come through — he always has in the past.

