

Winter's Friends offer fluid dance

by Keith Miller

fluid dancing which de-emphasized classical ballet form was the highlight of this weekend's SUB ballet performances with the Alberta Contemporary Dance Theatre and Tournesol. Contemporary Alberta Theatre performed four pieces: *Ancient Aires* and *Dancers: A Celebration, Overlay, Islands of Infinity* and *Portrait*. Guest artists, Carole and Ernst of Tournesol, rounded out the evening with *Keep Going* and *The Third Day*. The two artists appeared in a program titled "Winter's Friends." In viewing "Winter's Friends," one was always conscious of watching "dance theatre." In this type of theatre, classical movements of ballet are abandoned and are put on equal footing with what may be sheer grace, rather than grace. Loosened form can often encourage creativity and the Alberta Contemporary Dance Theatre choreographers have taken advantage of this opportunity. "Winter's Friends" made one especially aware of this theatricality of dance. Costumes ranged from the ghostly wrappings of *Portrait* to the avant-garde satin tie and *Portrait*. The sets, when



Members of the Alberta Contemporary Dance Theatre in SUB Theatre.

photo Keith Miller

present, were typically sculptural. They may have inspired the whole dance as in *Overlay* or they may be the thematic structures around which the dance focuses. In *Islands of Infinity* the sculptures formed galaxies, where "beings" are found playing within them, surviving the cataclysmic changes of the galaxy, to re-emerge within a new order. The music of "Winter's Friends" was generally impressionistic and sensual. Pieces like Ravel's Concerto in G Major in *Portrait* and the spacy material of Dionne and Bregent in *And...The Third Day* lend themselves well to a quiet

freedom of movement within the dance. It seems an abomination that one is supposed to be so boisterous as to clap at the end of such works after being relaxed throughout. I prefer the idea Ken the Fool brought to campus two years ago where one hummmmm — not hummed — instead of clapped at such performances.

The whole production of "Winter's Friends" was intensified as the dance theatre began to incorporate the audience into itself. Ernst Eder, in *Keep Going*, brought the house lights up near full as he spent time pondering

the audience and, equally, forced the viewer to take in the reactions of those around him. It was an exceptional attempt at exploring dance theatre by including the audience as one of the fundamental parts of the production.

As much as theatre is a strong point for the Alberta Contemporary Dance Theatre, its dance is weak. Although welcomingly exuberant in the dynamic portions, there is either not enough strength left for the poise required in the classical movements requiring grace, or not enough stress put on it by the

choreographers. *Ancient Aires and Dancers: A Celebration* was glaringly indiscreet in this area. The dance seems out of tone with the rest of the production in the first place and its lack of synchronization and clarity accent this.

Alberta Contemporary Dance Theatre has something very tenable to offer Albertans, showing great potential in engaging the viewing mind and "being", but they must become professional in every aspect of their art in order not to interrupt the nuptial mechanism.

Music dept. plays flawed flute

by J.C. LaDalia

The university's department of music performed Mozart's *Magic Flute* on Jan. 26, 28 and 29, in conjunction with the performing arts department of Victoria Composite High School. It was an admirable undertaking though the results were not satisfactory as the music department's impressive *Così fan tutte* of two years ago, it was a respectable effort involving many problems. The biggest disappointment was Alan Ord's frenetic staging, which continually reduced Mozart's work to vaudeville. Thus the Three Spirits were given elaborate comic gestures though the music they sing clearly tells us this is inappropriate. And they and the Three Ladies were choreographed in the manner of the grotesques of other-worldly dramatic creatures. The apogee of the frenzy, as would be expected, was the oft-repeated role of Papageno, the peacock, whom (I fear) many will respond to (in his earthy fallible short-sightedness) more than we do to the idealistic Tamino, who, once set upon his quest, is unswerving. The interpretive error lay in not believing that Papageno is quite amusing and lovable just as Mozart created him. To turn him into a mincing, boo-hoing little fellow instead of a naive but ordinary young man reduces the charm, exuberantly healthy (sometimes rueful) humour of the role to the level of *The Beverly Hills Cop*. This tendency to milk the opera for laughs reveals an ultimately condescending and cynical attitude toward the audience, who, it is assumed, can't "understand" the opera if not brought down to their level. Ironically, among the most amusing scenes were the static ones in Act II involving Papageno and the priests. Each

scene deployed the men in different patterns, bathed in a yellow light which created an impressive and appropriate image.

There were also a few miscalculations in costuming. A hero dressed in green tights and maroon boots has more to overcome than serpents and ritual tests. And Pamina's spike-heels (very impractical for trials by fire and water) rather suggested Sandra Dee playing Madame Dubarry. On the positive side the Three Spirits had a buoyantly mystical appearance, and the Three Ladies, priests, and chorus made striking visual impressions.

The most solid vocal contributions began with Lary Benson as Tamino. He is a perceptive musician with a strong, attractive voice, which was used intelligently throughout, and though his acting was somewhat wooden, Taminos frequently are (because of the nature of the role.) The Three Ladies (Jennifer Scragg, Jill Lockwood and Kathy Megli) were delightful, singing with beautiful freshness of tone, and blending well. Judith Holswick as Pamina, began tentatively (her top notes were a problem in her "Man and Wife" duet with Papageno), but her performance grew steadily in vocal and acting conviction so that her great Act II aria "Ah, I feel it" was beautifully negotiated, and the pathos intensely conveyed.

Randal Lecky (Papageno) sang accurately, but the voice seems small and not really appropriate for large operatic roles. Sandra Gavinchuk (Queen of the Night) coped very well for a young singer with an impossible coloratura part. Her manner was strikingly imperious and the voice is agile, although the top notes simply were no there. Lothar Bachman's Sarastro, while not the most commanding or vital of bass voices, nevertheless sang his sonorous role more accurately than several professional Sarastros who come to mind, and added a certain

dignity to the production.

A number of vocal problems may be attributable to opening-night jitters, and one hopes this is true, as well, for the orchestra and chorus. In any case, entrances were frequently ragged or just not there and both the St. Cecilia Orchestra and the Concert Choir are capable of more polished performances than were delivered. Most of the solo

instrumental passages (trumpets, bassoons) were very well played. The Liederkrantz German Male Choir, who sang the priests, should have joined the Chorus of People at Act I's close, as tenor and bass sections were not sufficiently audible.

The audience—whether parents and friends of the cast and crew, or simply opera and Mozart lovers—were deeply ap-

preciative and there was none of the restless coughing that frequently mars EOA performances. And to know that so many young musicians and performing arts students have been engaged in learning and living with a musical masterpiece (rather than a Broadway musical of little importance) is enough to dispel many reservations of the actual performance.

Live blues — John Hammond

by Keith Layton

On Friday, Jan. 21, I spoke with John Hammond and caught his final set of the evening. The following is the resulting review—interview...

"Blues as an art form boils down to the essence of the music and the words...the power and intensity...delivered in a myriad of ways...subtle...full of life...it has a sense of timelessness..." — John Hammond.

The release of a new album coincided with John Hammond's stint at the Grand Central Station supper club in the Grand Hotel. With the new album on the Vanguard label (John Hammond: Solo) he is picking up his career where he left it, with new directions in mind, some ten years ago.

"I wanted more commercial recognition...to record in a band context...Not commercial in the popular connotation — I was still playing blues...Vanguard wasn't the label for that...they're a company interested in documenting the music but they don't promote it..."

So began Hammond's search for a wider audience. He went first to Atlantic, then Columbia, and finally Capricorn with seven albums coming out of the various arrangements. At this point he tired of dealing with the record companies' pushing "artists into various things...getting pushed around by managers...agents..." and the

general lust for success. The whole process culminated last spring in Hammond's returning to Vanguard.

Hammond sums up the musical philosophy behind his return to Vanguard in the statement "It's acoustic country blues that really makes it for me." Certainly he is one of the few people, black or white, carrying on that form of music.

Hammond cites performers of the Mississippi Delta as his major stylistic influences. People like Son House, Blind Boy Fuller, Robert Johnson and Leadbelly who travelled throughout the rural south in the thirties reflecting their lives and times in a music renowned for its rough-hewn feeling and intensity.

While Hammond works out of the Mississippi Delta flow, to pin his style down to that of a particular artist would be a mistake.

"The harp is more an accompaniment to back up songs I do — same with guitar."

Hammond's style is that of a purist country bluesman and that "essence," as he puts it, is put across in all the songs he does. While a good deal of his repertoire is based on songs written by original Delta blues exponents he doesn't limit himself to them. His opening song of the second set on Friday night was Little Walter's *You're So Fine*. The song emanates from a wealth of material Walter did in an amplified, band context during the mid-fifties. It lost little of its

power in Hammond's delivery. He reworked the song — his harp, guitar and vocals falling into both the song's inherent rock and roll feel and the country blues idiom.

In addition to Hammond's stylistic consistency he is a better than average technician. Along with a good voice (though lacking in roughness it has the necessary inflections) rhythmic sense, his guitar and especially his slide playing have the lyrical and dynamic qualities so necessary for the subtlety and intensity of the music to be conveyed.

His harp playing shows a great deal of control in most areas. Like most users of harmonica holders however, his tone is lacking a bit.

With Hammond's musical togetherness, and the stage togetherness that comes with his many years of experience, one would expect his live performance to be wonderful and exciting. It probably could have been, but it wasn't. Without wanting to stigmatize the clientele of the Grand Central Station, there were enough of them who were, for whatever reason, less than appreciative of Hammond. This kind of situation always detracts from the experience of those wanting to listen and very likely that of the performer as well. Dining lounges aren't the place for country blues, it seems. Hopefully Hammond will return someday and appear in a situation more suitable to his music.