

Modern dance group integrates environmental art into social comment

Last Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Edmonton dance followers had the opportunity of observing or participating in an exciting dance performance, two lecture-demonstrations—one on improvisation and the other on choreography, and two public classes, all presented by The Murray Louis Dance Company. This represents Edmonton's first real exposure to a professional modern dance company.

The performance in the Jubilee Auditorium on Thursday evening was fairly well attended, largely because of last minute box office sales to university students. It was a performance to which I had looked forward for many weeks and, now that it is over, I am looking forward, hopefully, to many more modern dance programs.

However, my reaction to the three works which were presented was one of confusion, caused not by any confusion I found in the dances, but by my lack of exposure to this kind of theatre.

The first dance, "Proximities",

demonstrated the lyrical possibilities of modern dance. Each part of the dance had an unbroken flow of movement completed only when it was time for a new group or movement to begin. The first pas de deux was an especially beautiful example of the rhythm and vitality present in the work.

The dancers maintained personal contact with the audience throughout, expressing their amusement or pleasure at the actions of the dance in their faces as they walked off or on the stage. The audience, too, began to feel happy recognition of the repeated bending step or delight in a soft turn.

I thought there were two faults in "Proximities", however. Too often, movements of dancers across the stage, and the end and beginning of phrases seemed to be dictated by the music rather than the logic of the movements themselves. A few times I felt the dancers were concentrating too much on their individual dancing when they should have been more related to the whole group.

The unity, simplicity, and joy of the dance were enhanced by the plain bright yellow leotards worn by the dancers and the attractive, simply-patterned slides projected on the back of the stage.

Unfortunately, recorded music was used throughout the evening. In the Jubilee Auditorium this means the music blares down from the ceiling at the audience, accompanied by annoying scratching and buzzing noises. This effectively ruined the music for "Proximities" which was by Brahms. But it almost enhanced the effect of the electronic music, voices, and sounds used for "Intersection", and did not spoil the canned quality of the music for "Junk Dances."

"Intersection" was a much more complex work than "Proximities". It opened with the stunning effect of four dancers in weird, tall-hatted, paper streamer costumes completely integrated into the backdrop slide of a colourful castle ball room, and ended with the man, Murray Louis, disappearing into a slide of a downtown city street at rush hour.

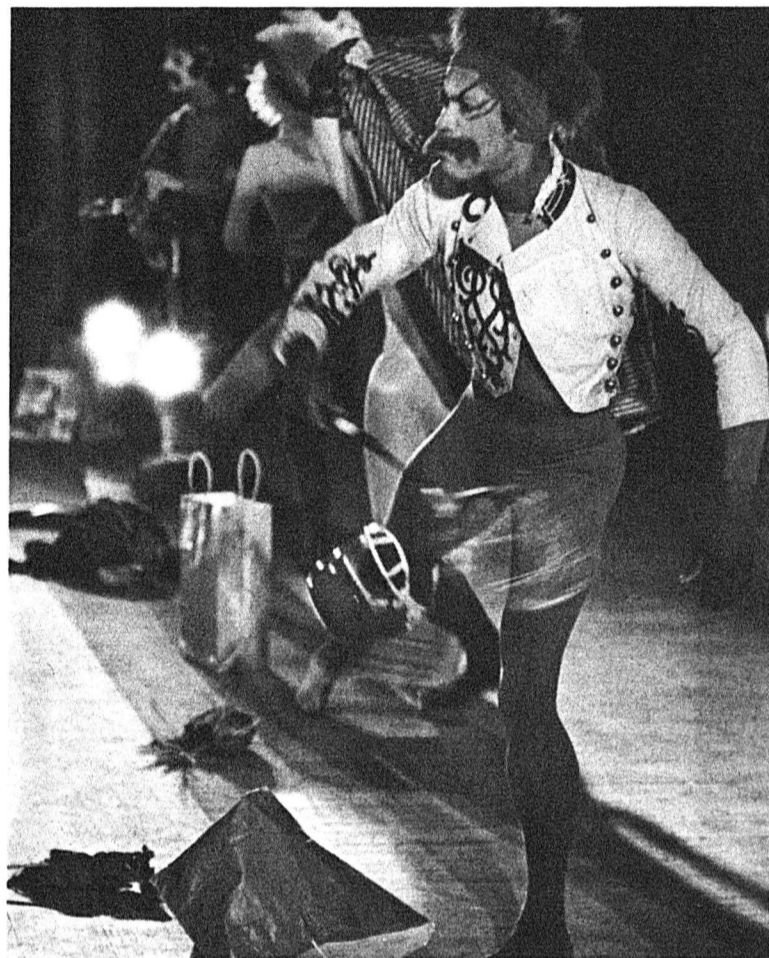
Many other slides of scenes were used, from Egyptian sculpture against the clear sky to modern American landscape, presenting changing comments on the dance in progress.

Much of the effect of the strangeness of the four inhuman characters was lost because of poor lighting. Most of their slight movements and their almost continuous pawing actions with their red mittens were hidden.

The man was brilliantly portrayed. From his nonchalant walk behind the weird figures on their pedestals in which he pauses to move his head in a quizzical and yet fearful manner, to his seemingly free runs and leaps following a square on the stage, the impression remained consistent.

His enjoyment of a stick of gum when he gleefully throws the wrappers away and then sits down, chewing away, in the midst of figures who slowly strike him on the head made me think of Charlie Chaplin. Even his blind collisions with the stage curtains served to build tension as well as laughter in the audience.

After such a concentrated work, I was hoping for a free, powerful release of energy. But instead, the



—Dave Hebditch photo

CANNED MUSIC BLARED DOWN

... on the junk dances below

company presented "Junk Dances", a laughing look at the customs of our way of life.

The audience thoroughly enjoyed the campy work, especially the sketches by Phyllis Lamhut. She skilfully performed as the sexy doll in a teasing dance, wearing enormous platform-soled, ankle-strapped shoes and flirting with the skeleton of an umbrella in a mechanical pas de deux in which she controlled Murray Louis, and in a long eyelash-flapping, mouth-flapping recital of the day's woes.

The group's dance with brilliant shopping bags out of which they

happily pulled all manner of clothing, which they wore for the final group sketch, made the work light and amusing, except that the same bewildered walk across the back of the stage used in "Intersection" forced the audience to think about what it was seeing.

Aside from the feeling that this group of six dances would have communicated better on a smaller stage, in a shorter auditorium, and the knowledge that I would have gotten more out of the performance if I had the chance to see modern dance more often, I found the presentation by the Murray Louis Dance Company fascinating and enjoyable.

—Nancy Henwood

Studio Theatre opens season with Strindberg's Dance of Death

The Department of Drama's Studio Theater will open its winter season Friday, October 24th, with its production of August Strindberg's *Dance of Death, Parts I and II*.

Edgar, a captain in the army (Walter Kaasa), has systematically alienated himself and his wife, Alice (Mickey Macdonald), from society on their remote island outpost. Aware that he is dying, and unable to penetrate to the meaning of his life and nature, Edgar baits and taunts his wife and friend in a final attempt to maintain some hold on life.

Part II of the drama is rarely performed, although it presents

Strindberg's resolution of the situation in which his characters find themselves. Edgar's and Alice's children appear, providing a counterpoint and parallel to the lives of the three elder characters. They embark on lives dazzled by the beauty and ecstasy of young love. When death finally comes to Edgar, it provides an ultimate peace both for him and for those he leaves behind.

Dance of Death runs each evening from October 24 to November 1, excluding Sundays. Free tickets may be obtained by presenting students' union cards at the office of the Drama Department, second floor of Corbett Hall.

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