

Fonteyn, troupe a disappointment

The New London Ballet played to a packed house Friday night at the Jubilee Auditorium and demonstrated, among other things, that cultural appreciation is very much alive in Edmonton.

Unfortunately, because of the atrocious sound and the inadequate lighting and also in part due to the deficiencies of a highly mobile tour group, the evening was on the whole disappointing.

The company consisted of five pairs of dancers, and, of course, the incomparable, legendary Margot Fonteyn. Her partner for this tour was a young man of very dynamic intensity, Hans Bosl, who rose to fame with the Bavarian State Opera Ballet.

Missing was an orchestra adequate to the music or any settings at all for the classical pieces which ruined the potential effect that they could have had.

The first of three acts consisted of an adaptation of Beethoven's Piano Quartet No. 1. I don't know if the dancing was a good interpretation of the music though because all I could hear was a tinny tinkle of piano and squeak of string from the tape (yes, they taped it). The first two sections did not look particularly inspiring, however. The virtual absence of sets

contributed to the apparent meaninglessness of it all. The last section of the quartet was quite the opposite though. Titled 'Palaid de Danse', it appeared very innovative and was a successful mimical representation of the dance hall's of the 1930's. The slinky, pseudo-sophisticated foolishness of the age was beautifully recreated and for the first time the audience came alive and the applause began to roll out. The first part of the Act was foreboding of the destructive wing lighting to come however.

The Sleeping Beauty pas-de-deux introduced Margot Fonteyn and Heinz Bosl. Fonteyn was - well, Fonteyn. Practised, elegant and flawless. It seemed though that she is not as electric as she once was, the radiant smile is a little fixed, the leaps and promenades too smooth. But she was dynamic. Heinz Bosl recreated the part of Prince Florimund to perfection but appeared a little restrained, perhaps to avoid crowding his partner.

It was here that the absence of setting was most glaringly obvious though. The brilliantly costumed pair were to be dancing a pas-de-deux at the celebration of their wedding and the music was written by Tchaikovsky to be both intense

and joyful. The orchestra was incapable, because of its size, to give the music the power it deserved and the elegant, gorgeous costumes were meaningless against the unrelieved white backdrop.

The second act was the turning point of the performance. Folk Songs, a site set to folk singing looked very evocative and poignantly emotional but the taped music again was inaudible and the lighting chancy at best. The unexpected highlight was the following set, a breathtaking pas-de-deux from Le Corsaire. Andre Prokovsky, who choreographed the innovative Beethoven and Folk Songs set, danced a difficult and spirited solo entry and then he and Galina Samsova finished with a vigorous duet. Prokovsky's confident, almost arrogant manner suited the part perfectly and Samsova's dynamic response was spectacular.

Act III had to be a success and it was. Fonteyn and Bosl made their second appearance of the night and gave a hauntingly beautiful interpretation of the famous Balcony Scene from Romeo and Juliet. Fonteyn's age was not apparent here, her portrayal of Juliet was probably as lyrically lovely as legend has it. Bosl's characterization of



Margot Fonteyn

Photo by Norm Selleck

Romeo displayed his intensity of emotional expression and the excitement and suspense of the clandestine meeting radiated from the stage. Once again, though, I could have cheerfully crucified the technicians who were chasing the pair around the stage with the spotlights.

And the finale, the full group dancing another Prokovsky adaptation of Verdi's Sicilian Vespers. This was the most involved performance of the evening, the dancing was superb and once again Prokovsky and Samsova drew applause as they spun in open and closed pirouette. Again though, the music was inadequate and the sets nonexistent.

My overall opinion? I saw some beautiful ballet but I wish it could have had a tenth of the backing it deserved. I'm not a purist but the music Friday night called for a symphony orchestra not a skeleton crew. Another fundamental necessity of ballet is the careful and creative designing of sets. When both are inadequate then the

story that the ballet is to tell disappears and all that is left is dancing for the sake of dance.

Another pressing problem is the Jubilee Auditorium sound system. I couldn't hear the Beethoven or the Folk Songs sets because the music was taped and no-one seems to be able to get sound out of the sound system.

And I hate excerpts. Bits and pieces of ballet are like bits and pieces of rock opera, musicals, plays or symphonies - they are useful for teaching the uninitiate various points about the art in question but that is all.

But the audience loved it and the dancing itself was truly spectacular. I suppose that the audience Friday night was either more forgiving or less demanding than I was, but the applause was genuine and there was a lot of it. And when an audience gets to its feet and gives a pas-de-deux five curtain calls I definitely think that it would be receptive to a full scale ballet production. The audience on Friday night certainly deserved it.

Michael MacNeil

American Graffiti just rocks on

American Graffiti will soon enter its twelfth month at the Varcona, and according to the theatre's manager, Mrs. Pritchard, it's still going strong.

Graffiti has met with exceptional success, only to be equalled by "The Sound of Music" which ran for two straight years. However, *American Graffiti* has had two showings a night, whereas "The Sound of Music" had only one, placing the two side by side.

In view of the film's content, one must certainly ask why this is so. Graffiti is not a great Hollywood extravaganza, nor does it boast a list of big name performers. The script is neither deep nor intricate, and despite its nomination for best supporting actress, it doesn't call for, or receive, exceptional acting.

The show is rather a loosely structured portrayal of one night's happenings in Smalltown USA. It is light entertainment set to the backdrop of some of the greater rock and roll hits of the era.

The fact is that Graffiti

triggers a wave of nostalgia which swept the country with the bulk of the viewers begin from 17 to 30 years old. Mrs. Pritchard claims that the reason they come is to remember the days of hobby sox, kiss curls, cruisin', bitchin' babes and boss hot rods. Other points in its favour is that it contains no crude profanity, sex or violence. In an age of glitter rock and bluey movies, she feels that Graffiti offers a glimpse of real life.

Whatever people's feelings about Graffiti, the show is soon to die. Despite fair crowds still attending on weekends, it is to be scrapped in favour of the Varcona's new showing of "The Adventures of Rabbi Jacob."

And despite the show's shortcomings no one can deny its inherent success, for, as Mrs. Pritchard says: "There seems to be a '62 in everyone's life, ever mine and I'm over fifty now." No matter what the critics deem this must certainly be so, as almost 155,000 people have seen it in its twelve month stand in Edmonton.

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