

ballet in edmonton

rita joe: unostentatious but flexible

Candace Savage

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet is late. It's already ten minutes since the man in the lobby with the little bell warned everyone into their seats. Finally the house lights begin to dim, and somewhere across the auditorium a group calls out a long "Hurrah", (like children at the movies who've been waiting all afternoon for the cartoon) as the more sedate clap to welcome the conductor, and you know already that everyone has come prepared to go home happy and amazed.

(We should have come in a more reflective mood, for these dancers can do more than dazzle. They bring new images for our subconscious store, an enlarged convention of human movements and postures and an intimation of the future to this dance-poor city.)

But the program responds to our carnival mood. The Pulcinella Variations (choreography: Michael Smuin to music by Stravinsky) is a light-hearted seven-part dance which either keeps the stage brilliantly full of people or indulges in unexpected pranks.

The dancing is angular - like the backdrop - a snake of blue prisms receding into the distance towards the top of the set. There are somersaults, pratfalls, hand clapping and piggy backing. Once a chain of seven dancers lurch across the stage, each right hand grasping a left hand coming up from between their neighbours' legs.

In part three, the Minuetto, Madeleine Bouchard rolls across the stage on the bodies of six male dancers, who as she progresses, run around to the other end of the line to be rolled over again.

Perhaps most unconventional of all is the silent dance at the beginning of part six, the Minuetto. For two or three minutes, there is no music, and women from the corps dance to the sound of their own shoes.

The corps de ballet is not perfect: there is an occasional lack of coordination or a quivering of strained muscles. But the dancing is more precise and certainly more energetic and strong than what we are used to seeing in Edmonton.

The company is particularly effective in "Rondo", a five-part dance by John Neumeier which, according to the program notes, combines music by Cornyshe, Bark and Rabe, Mahler, Mortensen and (believe it or not) Simon and Garfunkel in "the classical rondo form: A-B-A-C-A" by alternating instrumental and vocal music.

The ballet is about convention: the segments of order we build in our reality. A graceful classical section ("Convention Found") is brutally juxtaposed with the weird and perverse "Breaking Convention". The lights suddenly change so that blue costumes of section one turn dull green; then from both sides of the stage dancers in red drag themselves across the floor on their stomachs, sometimes arching their backs like inch worms.

The "blue" dancers, still standing begin to sway while "red" dancers execute a slow "hesitation march" around them. A male dancer is hoisted on to a woman's back. Others begin briskly stroking their bodies with their hands; a few begin hopping across the stage, punching with their fists.

The movements are not intrinsically ugly; in fact, we will see similar ones in "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe". But they are unusual and uncoordinated, disordered and disturbing.

Part III, "Convention Spoiled" is a return to blue and to the controlled, coordinated dance of Part I, except that one dancer refuses to take part, alternately sitting with his back to the audience or lying down as two couples and a lone woman dance around him



polish mime:

In contemplating the POLISH MIME BALLET THEATRE one wonders why Henruk Tomaszewski, the founder, would choose mime. Mr. Tomaszewski explains it this way. "After all, the entire contemporary art may serve as an example of the devaluation of the word. Words are becoming a sort of gibberish and are losing their communicative function. The artists are seized with embarrassment, benumbed by a sense of timidity when faced with a necessity to convey real emotions by means of words. But certainly man has not ceased to feel. Hence, the rebirth of pantomime is the result of the devaluation of the word, for "(.) in the field where words capitulate, movement disappears. Movement which by-passes the touchiness of words and shows what words are afraid to show.

"Destroying Convention" follows, once again in red, but this time adding violence to the disorder. There is much jerking and wrenching of necks, stomping and slashing and dragging of limp bodies. Once they form a human sandwich: two horizontal bodies held a couple of feet apart. The space between them is filled with shoulders and rolling heads.

The monstrous and the ridiculous are tightly linked.

Finally, "Convention Desired", a graceful but tenuous dance with the sway of rock and roll dances, to the tune of "Scarborough Fair".

Now, for those who came to see "real" ballet, a virtuoso piece, Corsaire Pas de Deux (1899), choreography by Alexander Gorsky, and spectacularly performed by Petal Mieler and especially by Sylvester Campbell. A display of seemingly effortless pirouettes and magnificent arabesques, but, to my mind, a disruption of "themes" of the program.

So far the performance has been visual: images in time and space. But "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe" deals in illusion and evocation. Anne Mortifee's music is pleasant and appropriate, the use of film as a backdrop effective except that, because it is also moving and very large, it dwarfs the dancers.

This dance, an adaptation of George Ryga's play which was performed last year at Studio Theatre, is less splendid and less intriguing than what preceded it. But the two principal dancers, Ana Maria de Goriz as Rita Joe and Salvatore Aiello as Jamie Paul, adapt skillfully to the personalities they are portraying; their dancing is simple and unostentatious but flexibly gay or sensuous or rebellious as required.

The choreography is less expressive than that in "Rondo" for example. Rita Joe, in particular, doesn't adequately express her anger and frustration and fear. The whole thing "works" because what the dance doesn't convey, the words of the speakers and singer do.

In any case, by the time they are finished, the company has taught you a sense of loss and disillusionment: and that is a significant accomplishment after an evening of provocation and razzle-dazzle.

an experience yet to come

Tomaszewski is engaged in a task which is a difficult one to say the least. He is setting out to synthesize the theatre. As in any synthetic process the simple statement (in this case pantomime) is actually neither complete, nor is it true. Thus, he seeks a globular theatre, a spherical concept of the theatre in which motion - the essence of his theatre - is enacted in three dimensions and in time and therefore requires a three-dimensional space. Man is the central point of the globular theatre and everything that is happening - happens around him, on different levels. Man is surrounded by the theatre and he should feel the movement even while he is motionless himself. Tomaszewski goes on to say, "When I am saying globular theatre with man as its central point I

don't, of course, mean placing the spectators in the middle of the stage nor surrounding the audience by a panoramic stage. I have in mind something more basic: man, being attacked from all sides by the theatre, man becoming the central issue of the spectacle - the Alpha and Omega of the whole art of theatre."

Edmonton audiences will have an opportunity to participate in this theatre Tuesday, February 20 at the Jubilee Auditorium, an opportunity which should not be missed.

Tickets are available at Mike's Ticket Office.

SUB ACTIVITIES FOR YOU

STUDENT CINEMA

- Theatre, 2nd floor

- FRIDAY, JANUARY 26 - CISCO PIKE with Gene Hackman and Kris Kristofferson. Show times 6:30 and 9:00 p.m. Tickets 50 cents in advance at Information Desk, \$1.00 at the door.

- SUNDAY, JANUARY 28 - THE LAST PICTURE SHOW, academy award winner with Cloris Leachman. Two shows - 6:30 and 9:00 p.m. Tickets 50 cents in advance at Information Desk, \$1.00 at the door.

MUSIC LISTENING

- main floor

- free - good choice of records

ROOM AT THE TOP

-7th floor

- Chick Roberts stars on FRIDAY and SATURDAY, JANUARY 26th and 27th at 9:00 p.m. Tickets are 75 cents in advance at Info Desk, \$1.00 at the door.

GALLERY - main floor

- FRIDAY, JANUARY 26th, 12:00 noon - WIZARD - 50 cents admission at the door.

- Fontaine's "THE CREATION" JANUARY 29th - FEBRUARY 9th - art exhibit with live music and quadrasonic sound.