



ENTERTAINMENT

Bobaks garner Order of Canada

Long time Fredericton Artists are recognised by fellow Canadians

By Carla EKY Lam
Brunswickan Entertainment

Molly Lamb Bobak and Bruno Bobak, on the night of their honorary reception were jovial, jolly and well . . . in good spirits.

Add to the list upbeat, happy, unpretentious, natural. None of this black cynic artist business here. These two original Official War Artists are a picture of modesty and happiness. They have worn time well.

In Bruno's own words: "Everybody seems to think that artists go through life with a great struggle, the truth of the matter is in my case and I think in Molly's case as well - I don't think we have struggled at all anywhere along the way."

On Saturday evening at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery (BAG), a large group of friends and members gathered to toast Molly and Bruno's appointment to the Order of Canada (the highest honor awarded to civilians for exceptional merit and achievement in any area).

The gallery was opulent as always, with tables embellished with violet, daffodil, tulip and crocus blooms and clay pottery. The reception was warm and personal despite the massive turnout which totaled 400 midway through the evening. The feeling of genuine pleasure seemed to be emanating from the subjects of the night's proceedings and was

contagious. The evening turned out to be a warm reminiscing of the couple's contributions and roots within the community and abroad. The atmosphere was courtly informal the crowd responsive and congratulatory - the speech-making jocose and brief.

I managed to get a mini-history through the introductions, greetings and thanks of the speakers: Ian Lumsden-gallery director, Andy Scott-Fredericton York Sunbury MP and Dr. Colin Mackay-former President of UNB and founding member of the Board of Governors of BAG. As they recounted dates, names and titles - with anecdote and humor - although they were impressive, my attention was drawn to the modest-looking couple sitting by the podium. By deduction I gathered that the almost coy looking, gentle-eyed man must have been Bruno, and the slender, graceful woman next to him - Molly. Their humble posture hinting almost of coyness reminded me more of timorous, amorous classmates than the established artists that they are.

The official proceedings concluded with the presentation of a gold pin of the gallery to the artists and Bruno's words of acknowledgement. He included in his thanks Group of Seven artist/teacher Arthur Lismer for introduction and encouragement when he was 10 years old, as well as Mackenzie King for conscripting him to the army where his artistic seeds took

root and he eventually met Molly. Endearingly, he recalled spending "every night doing drawings of my bunkies. Around five bucks for every portrait, ten charcoal portraits every night. They would send them home to their mothers and girlfriends" (Bruno Bobak Selected Works 1943 - 80).

This artist couple share a long and illustrious history both military and civilian. Emerging from quite disparate geological locations - he was born in Wawelwka Poland (1923) and she in Vancouver, B.C. (1922) - the pair's histories run surprisingly parallel and converge upon military involvement. He enlisted in the Canadian Armed Forces in 1943, was second lieutenant in the and became Canada's youngest Official War Artist. Similarly, Molly joined the Canadian Woman's Army Corporation (CWAC) in 1942, became lieutenant and was appointed Official War Artist with the Canadian Army in Europe. Bruno and Molly were married in 1945 and have two children: Alexander and Amy.

In the 1960's Molly and Bruno were introduced to Fredericton through the gates of the University. It was Dr. Colin Mackay, President of UNB, who "wooed them from the lotus land of the West Coast to New Brunswick."

Bruno took up post of UNB's resident artist and both he and Molly eventually, in turn, became Directors of the Art Centre. That's why you'll



Bruno and Molly Bobak were recently named to the Order of Canada.
photo by Mike Dean

probably recognize their traces around campus. Molly's work is memorable as those impressionistic, faceless crowds that you, nonetheless, know are people. Bruno's work is best described as expressionist and distinctively "character and color based" when compared with his wife's more subjective works.

Studying art in Vancouver and Toronto respectively - the couple have made Fredericton their home for the last 35 years. During this period they have established themselves

contributing to the local, national and international community. Deeply connected with the University and artistic community in Fredericton you've almost certainly heard their names.

At present, a selection of both artists grace the new Marian McCain Atlantic Gallery wing of the BAG and an exhibition of drawings by Bruno may be seen at the UNB faculty club. This talented couple have certainly made their mark on this city and vice-versa in a reciprocity of inspiration and fruition that constitutes history.

Alberta Ballet bounds through town

Calgary troupe put on a superb show at the Playhouse



by Mary-Kathryn Whitney
Brunswickan Entertainment

Last weekend the Alberta Ballet provided Fredericton with a superb way to spend a Saturday night, brought to the Playhouse courtesy of the Onstage Series.

The Ballet, based in Calgary, has existed for 30 years and boasts a company of 18 dancers and two permanent apprentices. The current Artistic Director, Ali Pourfarrok, has lead the company since 1988 and his interest in neo-classical ballets, contemporary classics and innovative new works has injected a freshness into the well-respected dance company. The commission of work from Canadian choreographers shows the company's commitment to Canadian hopefuls.

One such commissioned work was performed Saturday. *Quest*, choreographed by Crystal Pite, with music by Bach, proved to be my favourite piece. The perils of romance were expressed in six parts, with a decidedly comic perspective. Subtle body movements and facial expressions that often accompany romance were heightened with an elegant flair, and the

piece poked fun at gender stereotypes that delineate chivalry.

Although humorous, the dance lost none of the beauty that goes hand-in-hand with skilful performance. Especially wonderful and surely difficult to effect was the slow motion race that two male dancers performed in a fierce competition for a lady's dropped handkerchief. The audience loved it!

The cyclical nature of the quest for love was neatly used to end the piece, as if to remind us all of our common follies in matters of the heart.

Pourfarrok's own work, *Butterfly Dream*, was performed next, with music by Canadian contemporary composer Marjan Mozetich. This work was not so much a story as it was a mixture of movements inspired by the music and by a short Taoist poem about a man dreaming of being a butterfly.

The piece was performed with a surrealistic gentleness that called to mind the graceful movement of butterflies. Watching the dancers make synchronised movements in harmony with the music, it was easy to forget just how much strength, control, hard work, and years of training go into each tiny movement and pose. The end result was

nothing short of amazing and wonderful to watch.

The final showcase piece performed was a one-act adaptation of the Bizet opera, *Carmen*, choreographed by Giuseppe Carbone.

Although definitely enjoyable and beautifully executed, I must admit that the story of *Carmen*, the free-spirited, femme fatale, appeared rather hurried. The extreme passions involved -- love, hate, jealousy -- seemed to be stunted by the shortness of the piece, and as a result, the scenes lacked cohesiveness. Even considering this, the piece was a pleasure to behold and showed the dancers' great talent.

Especially remarkable was Barbara Moore in her role as *Carmen*, and it became apparent why she was chosen for the title role. I would be remiss if I did not mention that the costume design for *Carmen* was especially lovely and fitting for the piece, owing to Paul Daigle who was responsible for costume and scenic design.

All in all, last Saturday was a nearly perfect evening and thanks must go out to the Alberta Ballet and to the folks who organise the Onstage Series for bringing in such high quality dance companies.