

# Dancers justify semi-professional status

## Alberta Ballet

The Alberta Ballet Company is now semi-professional. The performances February 25 and 26 in SUB Theatre demonstrated that it has dancers that deserve this investment. The ten female and four male dancers easily fulfilled the demands of all the dances except the first, "The Land of Snow".

Unfortunately the dancers are not technically capable of the effortlessly elegant dancing necessary to the presentation of the closing scene of Act One from "The Nutcracker". The girls in the corps moved their arms like automatons and their lines of bourees, or small smooth steps on point, across the front of the stage look like a painful struggle. The four couples danced fairly well and the brief pas de deux, danced by Denise Ridgeway and Larry Dill on the first night was quite enjoyable, although Larry attended his partner rather awkwardly.

The jazz ballet, "Then . . . Here and Now", choreographed by Eva Von Gencsy and Michel Boudot was performed in Edmonton this summer by the choreographers with the Banff School ballet company. It was excellently danced, in a shorter form, by our ballet company. In particular, Merrilee Hodgins, in the opening number and in her solo "Loneliness", and Larry Dill in his solo in "Group Spirit" gave the audience the exciting, cat-like feeling of jazz. This was lost in the end of the ballet. The choreography for "Love", danced by Merrilee Hodgins and Allan Douglas, was unromantic and unsensual, making them just two people dancing.

All of the six "Divertissements" presented were enjoyable; two were good.

"Vivaldi for Four," choreographed by Larry Dill, was four girls doing steps in unison and counterpoint, forming nearly static geometric patterns. Although this is not original, it was effective and different from the rest of the evening. The two front girls, who were (I think) Denise Ridgeway and Teri Willowbough, danced softly and clearly. Teri was particularly flowing and graceful.

"Chanson de Matin", choreographed and costumed by Ruth Carse, enabled the audience to enjoy the graceful, clear, well-coordinated dancing of Merrilee Hodgins and see some more traditional ballet.

The most complete and effective presentation of the evening was "Pastel Abacus". This was created and choreographed by James Clouser (who also choreographed "The Land of Snow") especially for the Alberta Ballet Company. It makes use of seven episodes to the songs of Sonja Zarek, Fred Neil, and Jim Webb to develop the personalities of each character and build to the inevitable conclusion. All of the roles perfectly fit dancing of the different members of the company. The powerful dancing of Larry Dill in "Everybody's Talking", the loose and agile dancing of Rick Wakal in "That's the Bag I'm In", and the intense, withdrawn dancing of the introverted girl, (portrayed by Helen Skakoon), firmly established the mood of this modern ballet.

The last presentation, "Polovtsian Dances" from Prince Igor, was choreographed for the company by Ruth Carse. It is meant, I believe, to enliven the evening with character dancing, action, color, and send the audience home happy. But it appears to me to be messy and pointless. The constant repetition of the leaps and gestures of the warriors,

the jumping and stomping of the Polovtsian maidens, and the seductive undulating arms and arching backs of the Persian slaves who continually approach and then attempt to escape the warriors, leads to boredom.

Aside from the "Polovtsian Dances", the performance was highly enjoyable and worth attending. I was disappointed by the small audience which contained almost no university students. Do we only support campus dance organizations? The calibre of the dancing by the Alberta Ballet Company was much higher than that of any other local, or provincial, dancers I have seen. I hope that more imaginative personal works similar in scale to "Pastel Abacus" will be added to the repertoire as the company matures.

## Showcase '70

"Dance Showcase '70" used the SUB Theatre on March 4th. It was a monotonous, combined recital presented by the Alberta Professional Teachers' Association. There were four interesting, very brief modern dance sketches, three reasonable bits of ballet and one terrible one, and a lot of stuff which should not be called jazz or character.

Most of the teachers in the categories of tap, jazz, and character, used ideas and choreography completely unsuitable to the age of the dancers. Most alarming, however, was the appearance of the Alberta Ballet Company, as guest artists, performing the least meaningful or original work, "Polovtsian Dances" from Prince Igor. It's one thing to watch your young son and daughter attempting to correctly perform a routine and another thing to be bored or insulted by strangers with many more years of training!

—Nancy Henwood

## records

EVERYTHING AS NICE AS MOTHER MAKES IT: THE NICE (Immediate IMOCS 102)

Take your 10 favorite rock albums, your 10 favorite jazz albums, and your 5 favorite classical or easy-listening albums; put them all together and you've got The Nice. Never in my life have I ever heard so much different music in one album. To call this group eclectic would be an understatement.

For example, in the first cut on side 1 (*Azrael*) you hear what is basically a hard rock song with a touch of Rachmaninoff boisterously inserted on a honkey-tonk piano, an Oscar Peterson style jazz riff, and even a smidgeon of be-pop vocal harmony.

Tim Hardin's "Hang On to a Dream" shows a great sensitivity to the feeling that Hardin tries to communicate. Keith Emmerson's piano work here is brilliant. He has to be one of the most talented pianists in popular music.

"Diary of an Empty Day" is fancy, and the excerpt from Lalo's symphony *Espanol* comes as a shock.

Their excursion into blues "For Example" starts out as a combination of Deep Purple and Blood, Sweat, and Tears, then resolves itself into something more original. The sudden insertion of a trumpet seems quite well prepared for, and it leads quite convincingly into a terrific jazz waltz.

Side 2 is recorded live. "Rondo '69" is a Dave Brubeck classic done with a driving trainlike rhythm.

Bob Dylan's "She Belongs to Me" bears only a superficial resemblance to the original. The Nice turn it into a totally original blues thing, complete with intrusions of the Magnificent 7 theme, and an ingenious baroque insert—with a touch of soul.

The Nice may be a show-off group; but they definitely have a lot of talent to show off. Rest assured that this record is going to stimulate a lot of controversy among enthusiasts of pop music.

Based on this album, I would say that The Nice (along with Jethro Tull) rank as one of the most imaginative and musically talented groups in the pop music business. THE LETTER: Brian Browne (Capital SKAO 6305)

The Brian Browne Trio have matured greatly since their first two albums. In their latest release they are much more together than in their previous two. The trio is backed by a small orchestra (Sounds-Orchestra style).

A Canadian jazz pianist, Brian Browne has gained some recognition internationally. The record is Canadian produced and recorded in Toronto.

Besides a 10 minute version of the title song, the album includes "If I Were a Carpenter", "Hi Heel Sneakers", a beautiful medley of "A Salty Dog" and "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band", "What the World Needs Now is Love" (which is almost totally unrecognizable), "Games People Play", plus two pretty good Brian Browne originals.

Though not particularly imaginative, it is a very pleasant album for people who enjoy light jazz.

—Larry Saidman



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