

## Gillis presents modern dance

review by Rosa Jackson

It would be difficult to describe Margie Gillis in a nutshell. But if I were to name the most outstanding quality she displayed in her solo dance show, it would be courage. The themes she dealt with and her manner of tackling them were both powerful and disturbing, and she left the audience stunned.

Gillis' first number, "Roots of the Rhythm Remain", demonstrated at once her unusual talent. Although for several minutes she did not move from one spot, her sinuous, snakelike movements and Egyptian silhouettes were mesmerizing. Against the red spotlight which was projected behind her, she had the appearance of a tribal priestess. The music, by J.F. Fabiano, was rhythmic and repetitive, and she moved so perfectly with it that it seemed to be her heartbeat. In choreographing this number, Gillis drew on a number of images and dance forms, combining them into something uniquely her own.

The second number, "Prayer", was brief, but strangely moving. Gillis was dressed entirely in black, and appropriately enough knelt throughout the piece. Her waist-length hair was let loose and she used it effectively as part of the dance. What saved this piece from being boring was Gillis' expressive face; she seemed to sway, along with her torso, from belief to disbelief, from innocence to disillusionment. The piano and string music, by Eugene Friesman, gave the piece an air of sadness.

Following "Prayer" was "The Little Animal", a piece about birth and awakening. Gillis really did resemble a small, wild creature seeing the world for the first time as she crawled along the floor, struggling to get up. The music, again by Friesman, was far from cheerful; but this piece did have its humorous moments, such as when Gillis used mime in "pulling" herself up from the floor, and when she lay on her

back, waving her arms and legs.

The next piece, "Give Me Your Heart Tonight", with music by Shakin' Stevens, provided some much-needed comic relief. Gillis wore a flouncy skirt with frilly underwear, and lay on her back as if in a restless sleep, constantly tossing and turning. Her writhing movements and unlikely poses drew laughs from the audience. Anyone who has spent a night half awake, half asleep, thinking about an infatuation

...a small, wild creature seeing the world for the first time...

could relate to this number.

The concluding piece of the first half was the most thought-provoking of the evening. Gillis slowly emerged onto the stage, naked from the waist up, with her arm covering her breasts. Her head was covered by a piece of cloth with eyeholes, and she wore a ballet tutu. To Mendelssohn's "Nocturne", Gillis played the part of a ballerina crippled by age to the fullest, looking like a tragic farce of a Degas painting. Her struggle was painful and drawn out, and so uncomfortable was the audience that there were moments when a few uncertain chuckles interrupted its dead silence. Gillis' exit, however, was truly hilarious, as she gave the illusion of a satin ballet ribbon being a walking stick.

The show's second half was on a lighter note than the first. To Tom Waits' song, "Waltzing Matilda", Gillis danced as if with a partner. Her broad, sweeping movements were a release from the previous numbers in which her movement was confined to a small area. In this piece, she showed both the joy of love and the



Modern dancer Margie Gillis presented a show which was too eclectic for some at SUB Theatre Friday and Saturday night.

sorrow of loneliness, as her dance partner seemed to disappear from her arms.

The next piece, "How the Rosehips Quiver", was the longest of the show, and the most charming. Gillis danced with such enjoyment that it was easy to see why she has made dance her life; the music seemed to overpower her and take control of her body. This was especially apparent in one part of this number, when she was sitting and "watching" some country dancers, obviously longing to join in, and suddenly her legs started to do the steps while her upper body did not move. Gillis looked at her legs as if in great surprise, and soon her whole body began to dance.

At the end of the piece, she twirled around in a circle, arms extended, to the tinkling sounds of a music box.

The last number, "Slipstream", was an amazing display of energy and acrobatics. Gillis' movements were so frenzied that her loose, flowing hair, glowing red, looked like fire. The music, composed by Bach, provided a fitting dramatic background. It was a breathtaking finale to the show.

While Gillis' performance showed great vitality and skill, it did have limited appeal. A number of the audience members left after the first half, yet those who stayed gave her a standing ovation. Gillis' form of art is challenging, but ultimately rewarding.

## Comedy, murder and music make *Haunting Melody* a good bet

*Haunting Melody*  
Theatre Network  
September 22 - October 9

review by Ron Kuipers

Edmonton has a reputation for being an oasis of fine drama in a veritable theatrical desert. Far removed from such theatre centres as Broadway and Stratford, theatre thrives in this city like it does nowhere else in North America. A great deal of the credit for Edmonton's successful theatre scene should be given to a growing chain of small theatre companies willing to produce new plays and develop local talent. Theatre Network is one such company, and they opened their 88/89 season with a hilarious musical comedy entitled, "Haunting Melody."

The play is authored by two native Edmontonians, Murray McCune (who also writes music), and Marianne Copithorne. These two are not strangers to Edmonton's theatre scene, as both have

appeared in numerous local productions. Talent in other areas does not remain untapped either as the director, Stephen Heatley, the set and light designer, Daniel van Heyst, and the costume designer, Kerry Hackett, are all recent Sterling Award winners.

The story is basically a "play within a play." Three has-been actors are mysteriously summoned to an abandoned theatre to reperform a production that ended in the tragic (if not comical) death of the lead actor. Along the way, the play manages to poke fun at everything from method acting to the spirit world of the eccentric Shirley Maclaine. The theatre erupts into laughter during such moments when Maggie (played by Copithorne), puffing on a cigarette, searches for her horoscope: "Taurus...Gemini...Ah, here it is: (hack hack) Cancer!" The play revolves around the identity of the mysterious stranger (by the way, not the most lively guy in town!) who has summoned all of them to the theatre. In the process of reperforming the play, the audience is whisked off on a

zany, comically-offbeat journey in which the actors end up assessing their past and judging themselves and their present situations.

A production this successful does not survive on the strengths of the script alone.

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Special mention should be given to van Heyst who has created a wonderful, eerie set. The set is one of the most technically complex that I've seen at Network (but they may just have me fooled), and is interestingly manipulated by the actors during the performance. The music and songs are very charming as well, helping to

move the plot along. Yet Network still insists on showcasing the musician on the set, a habit which I find rather distracting and annoying.

For a musical, one expects the "mysterious stranger" Jonathan (played by James Downing) to have a much stronger singing voice. He sort of sounds like a cross between Roger Whittaker, Bruce Springsteen, and Neil Young. I also have to admit that, despite her many proven talents, Copithorne's voice is a tad irritating. Even the character Joe (played by McCune) exclaims, "When Maggie (Copithorne) squeaks, she's a seagull!" I'm sure some of this is purposeful, but her voice starts to get on your nerves after a while. But the bright spot in this production is definitely McCune, who gives a spectacular performance; he absolutely shines. At times pathetic, at other times just silly, McCune has us rolling in the aisles constantly.

All things considered, "Haunting Melody" is a good bet for a night's entertainment. It's a lot of fun. Theatre Network works hard to impress its audience, and it usually succeeds. Take a chance and see what Edmonton's theatre community has to offer. I don't think you will be disappointed.

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