

ARTS

York Ensemble dances into Toronto community

By JUDIE SNOW

The newly-created York University Dance Ensemble (YUDE) provides upper-level dance majors with an opportunity to experience the pleasures and pressures of belonging to a professional modern dance company.

YUDE was launched last fall, but it had been planned for years as part of the dance department's major curriculum changes. The department invited external reviewers to suggest improvements. They recommended that the creative and performance aspects be strengthened to better appeal to fourth-year students.

YUDE furnishes students with an intensive experience, explained Artistic Director Donna Krasnow, similar to a professional company, although the programme tends to emphasize the educational aspect of dance. Students are taught positive work habits, proper warm-up techniques, and what to expect in the professional dance world. Also, students get an academic credit for participating in the Ensemble, but auditions are required and the work load is intense.

Krasnow, an assistant professor of dance, obtained a dance degree from the University of California at Berkeley, and pursued teaching, choreography, and performance. In the late '70s, she formed her own dance company in San Francisco, and in

1980 she began working in the Limon technique, named after choreographer Jose Limon. Limon's 25-year-old work, *Choreographic Offering*, one of the first modern dance pieces to be staged in the Soviet Union, is performed by YUDE.

The group's varied repertoire is a collaborative effort of many artists, which allows students to contribute to other aspects of the company. Steven Castellano and Edward Zaski, both York students, created the music for two pieces, and Daniel Belanger acted as student choreographer for some of the pieces.

Krasnow sees the group as a "diplomatic force" through its involvement in the York Outreach Program, which entails performances by the Ensemble in schools and

communities. YUDE also gives lecture demonstrations on training techniques and mock classroom demonstrations.

Krasnow described the experience of the Dance Ensemble as exciting, and despite the problems inevitably faced by a new company, she asserted that the rewards are "overpowering."

YUDE has a busy touring schedule over the next few months, including performances in Sudbury, Ottawa, and London. In addition, over half the pieces featured at the York Dance Department show, *Spring Dance*, will be performed by the Ensemble.

The show is being held at the New Betty Oliphant Theatre on March 16, 17 and 18.

Glendon's Soprano



BABAK AMIRFEZ

This is not a photo of anything that might vaguely be considered a bald soprano, but more likely Casper the Ghost come to life. Yet that is exactly what it is: a photo of a bald soprano.

Such is the illogical nature of Eugene Ionesco's play *The Bald Soprano* and such was the nature of Theatre Glendon's rendition of it last week. The play was a chasm of confusion, something between irrationality and banality. Like any other play in the absurdist tradition, *The Bald Soprano* left the audience scratching its head in bewilderment.

With the Glendon show, however, the audience was at a loss as to whether or not the play's incomprehensibility lay in Ionesco's mind, or in the acting of the students. Perhaps in one's own mind, Ionesco might suggest.

Glasnost film: "Thirsty" politics

By STEVEN PAGE

Yuri Iliencko's films are political.

But they are also masterpieces of Ukrainian black-and-white film.

So it was doubly-pleasing that two of his films were featured at a symposium on *glasnost* — the new policy of openness in the USSR. The Royal Ontario Museum, in conjunction with Stong College, presented the works as part of its Soviet Cinema series. The venue was packed and ROM added a second screening for the excess crowd.

A Spring for the Thirsty and *St John's Eve*, two political films Iliencko directed, had never been screened in North America before 1987.

The first film shown was Iliencko's 1965 directorial debut, *Spring For The Thirsty*, a story of an old, Ukrainian man and his struggle with age, lost love, and the new Soviet presence in his beloved Ukraine. Almost entirely silent, and devoid even of background score, *Spring For The Thirsty* is a black-and-white tour de force.

Iliencko's prior experience as a cinematographer is evident in his mastery of the black-and-white medium. His stark, bleached-out images create a real sense of pathos and emotion in themselves, juxtaposed with the old man's sad tale to create the perfect mood for the film.

The story bases itself around an old well-keeper obsessed with his impending death, and dreams about his past in a series of poignant vignettes. At the outset of the film, the old man is in front of a wall covered with old photographs. In his struggle to block out reminders of the past, he turns them around. Then, in his struggle to block out reminders of the present, he turns the mirror around as well. However, his

attempts are in vain; from here on in he is swamped with memories.

Some memories are truly abstract — simply montages of drinkers from his well: a businessman who puts his whole face into the bucket, a farmer who uses the water to cool his brow, and a pair of beautiful young brides who take short sips of the water, and can't help smiling ever so demurely.

Other memories are brash political statements — the Soviet army brings this drought-stricken village a statue of a soldier, then drinks the last of the well water. Obviously, this is a metaphor for the Soviet draining of Ukrainian culture, expressed in the tears of the elderly villagers.

Truly an imagistic film, *A Spring For The Thirsty* is heavily laden with images of water, horses, and airplanes. All are perhaps very obvious images, but their impact is great.

The most effective vignettes features a visit by the old man's family, who are waiting for him to die. Upon their arrival, he insists on seeing the contents of their car's trunk. In it, he finds his own funeral wreath. One son could not make it to the gathering, but sends a tape-recorded message instead. Symbolically representing all that is new and unwanted about the Ukraine, he offers to purchase the old man a new-fangled enamel bathtub. An airplane flies overhead. The old man is asked to record a reply, but when handed the microphone, all he can do is cough.

The film is dotted with scenes of the old man sleeping in his coffin, preparing for the big day. However, the movie ends with a note of hope — he destroys the coffin, and uses the wood to rebuild the well, the spring for the thirsty.

What makes Iliencko's debut such a success, however, is his masterful use of the camera and the black-and-white medium. Every shadow, every nuance, every stare is perfectly mea-

sured and calculate, making this avant-garde film one that could very well find a place outside the art houses, although not next to *Top Gun* at the video store.

The second film of the evening, Iliencko's 1968 adaptation of Gogol's *St. John's Eve*, proved not to be the same sort of artistic success as *Spring For The Thirsty*. Thoroughly surrealistic in its approach, the story was very difficult to follow as the chronology was broken up, repeated, then broken up again. Our young cossack hero tries to win the love of a rich man's daughter. He is befriended by an evil spirit (who sounds like a joke store Bag Full O'Laughs), who tells him that he can get all the gold he desires, if he kills a young boy. Our hero does this, and then has to deal with it. He finally dies, and his wife tries to get the crying statue of the Virgin Mother in Kiev to resurrect him.

The artistry that Iliencko displayed in the first film is severely limited by his use of colour film. The subtle nuances and moods created by black-and-white film are simply lost with colour. Trickery, such as red and green negative shots, painted cows, cuckooing priests, and Cinemascope are limiting.

Like much surrealist cinema, *St. John's Eve* is marred by slapstick and cheap Benny Hill-like fast-motion photography. Still, the film has its merits in showing the conflicts between Gypsy culture and that of the Orthodox church. It is not every day that one has an opportunity to see such a film. *St. John's Eve* is worth reading.

If Yuri Iliencko is any indicator, there is a real wealth of talent, both in past and present catalogues, of the slowly-drawing Iron Curtain. Hopefully, more of the Soviet avant-garde will be made available to North American audiences.

YUCSA: bearpit bash

By CATHI GRAHAM

The York University Chinese Students Association (YUCSA) is celebrating Chinese New Year with the York community tomorrow. Events for the event, including dance, music, painting, and Kung Fu demonstrations will take place in the West Bearpit on Friday beginning at 11 a.m.

Vice-President of YUCSA, Andy Chow, said that although events have been difficult to organize "when you don't get any money from the school," he looks forward to sharing his Chinese culture with fellow students and the greater York community.

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Lessons of the British Left

A discussion with

Leo Panitch

Leo Panitch teaches Political Science at York University. He is an editor of *The Socialist Register* and author of *Working Class Politics in Crisis*.

Chris Bambery

Chris Bambery is a leading member of the British Socialist Workers Party and author of *Ireland's Permanent Revolution*.

Friday February 10, 7:30 pm Sandford Fleming Bldg., Rm 1101 University of Toronto

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