

DANCE

CANADA

Best foot forward

Dance takes steps in the right direction

By Lindsay Vanstone

Dance in Winnipeg last year leapt from the traditional to the new to the unexplainable.

Shows at such diverse venues as The Gas Station Theatre, The West End Cultural Centre and Assiniboine Park gave us the independent, modern dance production *Bernard*; two sold-out performances by eight dancing and singing monks originally from Tibet; 180 competitors prancing about at a highland dance competition and flamenco drama.

Such an array of events pushed the limits of what Winnipeg audiences will accept as dance

ahead and beyond the traditional fare offered by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and even the Contemporary Dancers.

The Fourth Festival of Canadian Modern Dance, held at the end of last May, is partly responsible for expanding the tastes of Winnipeg dance fans. By bringing in the likes of Montreal's tantalizing Montanero Dance, the festival developed an audience appreciative of contemporary Canadian dance. This acceptance has benefited both the audiences and the festival's host, the Contemporary Dancers.

"Our company is coming into its own style. We're trying not to compromise our style; to take chances, to challenge the audience... to push our work and the festival's so that visiting companies don't have to compromise their styles," said Tedd Robinson, artistic director of CD.

The Contemporary Dancers, celebrating its 25th anniversary

Carmen de Torres danced her own torrid flamenco adaptation of *The Unfaithful Wife*.



this year, also presented a workshop last January, a full-length piece choreographed by Robinson called *Blind Angel* in April. They started the 1988-89 season last November with four, 20-minute works in one evening.

Attendance went up to 17,000 from 13,000 the year before for the company while the number of subscribers remained at about 950.

Just when those figures seemed about to provide CD with the resources to offer even more, a steady corporate supporter withdrew the \$3,500 to \$7,000 it had previously been spending for each of the last 12 years.

Tobacco companies, in this case Du Maurier, promised to stop sponsoring the arts if they would no longer be allowed by law to display their advertising at cultural events. The federal government brought the legislation in and the tobacco money was out.

Robinson said the money will be missed.

"Sometimes the art form we work in becomes popular (but even then) we couldn't support ourselves. We need support from government and foundations."

Robinson and company can take a bow for making modern dance popular in Winnipeg.

An offshoot of this popularity was *Bernard*. Independently produced and choreographed by Algeron Williams (a member of the CD troupe), Fiona Drinnan, Karen Kuzak, Bruce Mitchell and Murray Darroch, this experimental piece, played at The Gas Station for two

In between that time, the troupe jaunted off on a seven-country tour of Asia/Pacific, took it on the road in Ontario and the midwestern United States, taped *The Big Top* and still found time to please the folks at home with a mixed repertoire.

An era ended for the ballet last May when artistic director Arnold Spohr left after 29 years, to be replaced by Henny Jurriens. Spohr richly deserved the commendations bestowed upon him by the city since Winnipeg's ballet is world-class and he must be credited with success.

Not to overlook the dancers; second soloist Mark Godden won the Clifford E. Lee Choreography Award for his ballet *Forms of Distinction*, performed by the RWB's senior students at Ballet in the Park and at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa.

Joanna Ivey and Nadine Lerner, two RWB school grads, successfully auditioned for a ballet company in Basel, Switzerland and Evelyn Hart, principal dancer in the company, was whisked off to Denmark to do *Swan Lake* with the London Festival Ballet.

For the ninth year running, the RWB ended their fiscal year with a surplus, a modest \$1,561, despite losing a chunk of revenues from Du Maurier.

Joe Wilder, president of the RWB, said the tobacco money amounted to as much as \$200,000 in some years and its loss is just part of "a continual battle."

"It hasn't hurt the program, but it's hurt our revenues. The program goes on," Wilder said.

"There's no reason to believe business or corporations are that altruistic (to sponsor the arts without being allowed to advertise)... everybody wants a bang for their buck."

Judging by the quality and quantity of dance offerings in the past year, Winnipeg audiences are getting bigger bangs for smaller bucks.

nights last September.

The Gas Station also staged another independent work, but this time the dance was flamenco drama. Based on a poem by Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca, *The Unfaithful Wife* was adapted to flamenco by Carmen de Torres and her husband.

Predicting flamenco will become more and more popular in Winnipeg, de Torres said the stories and body language used compare with ballet.

Likening her art form to ballet is a smart move as perennial favorites The Royal Winnipeg Ballet capped off a watershed year with the coast-to-coast broadcast of their new Christmas production, *The Big Top*.

The year began on the right foot when the ballet moved into a brand new building in January and then completed all the fundraising for capital costs in December.



What Tedd did next at CD.