

Royal Winnipeg Ballet: sparkling jewel in rough setting

By Charlie Krig

The next time I attend a Lincoln Community Concerts program, I'm going to wear sunglasses and earplugs.

Undoubtedly, that will decrease my enjoyment of the performance, but at

least I won't be disturbed by insensitive, unappreciative audience members as was the case Saturday night.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet performed superbly in five dances, ranging from classical to modern ballet.

Unfortunately, it was difficult to absorb the dancers' expertise while surrounded by unruly children running in the aisles, loud conversations between hard-of-hearing people, popcorn munchers, popcorn bag cracklers and slamming doors.

But the dance company surpassed the interruptions with precision matched only by the Pennsylvania Ballet's appearance last year in Kimball Recital Hall.

Festival opened the evening with bright, snappy choreography, perfectly coordinated lighting and colorful costumes. Kerry Duse conducted the 15-piece orchestra in a Flavio Venturini composition that Duse arranged. The result was sublime.

Oscar Araiz (choreographer of *Festival*) torpedoed the senses with two more works, *Adagietto* and *Women*. The first used motion as an abstraction for love with the movement framed by an ebony stage and accented with cool blue lights.

Women emphasized forceful, dynamic movement and was arranged on a cut from Grace Slick's *Manhole* album. The five ladies' sensuousness, frustrations and anxieties broke out of the dance with long, loose hair and white costumes resembling nightgowns.

The theme of repressed sexuality was coupled with stark white lighting. The austere scenery was sufficiently potent to hold the audience in astonished silence.

Others were offended enough to walk out of the performance.

A typically classical Balanchine creation, *Glinka Pas De Trois*, satisfied those who expected more "traditional" ballet. Balanchine painted graceful motion on

music by composer Mikhail Glinka and the trio of dancers gave grand and stylish performances.

There might have been an ulterior motive for placing *Rodeo* last on the program. People who disliked the modern works repeatedly commented that the title sounded more promising than the first selected. It delivered what they expected.

The entire company wore polychromatic cowboy costumes, with scarves and hats to emphasize the motion and mood. Choreographer Agnes de Mille incorporated some down-home tap and square dancing that immediately elicited spontaneous applause.

The production's resemblance to the movie and stage versions of the musical *Oklahoma* undoubtedly was a factor in its acceptance, as was Aaron Copland's western style music.

In retrospect, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet was a treasure. Each solo performance (of which there were too many to mention here) was a gem set in a golden crown of composition. Superior orchestration and technical help offered substantial support.

But, in consideration for the dancers, Pershing Auditorium and the audience were only remotely prepared for a production of this style and accomplishment. It revived the realization that Lincoln needs an adequate performance hall for major companies.

In addition, the performers deserve sophisticated audience members who attend the arts for cultural appreciation, not as a social event.

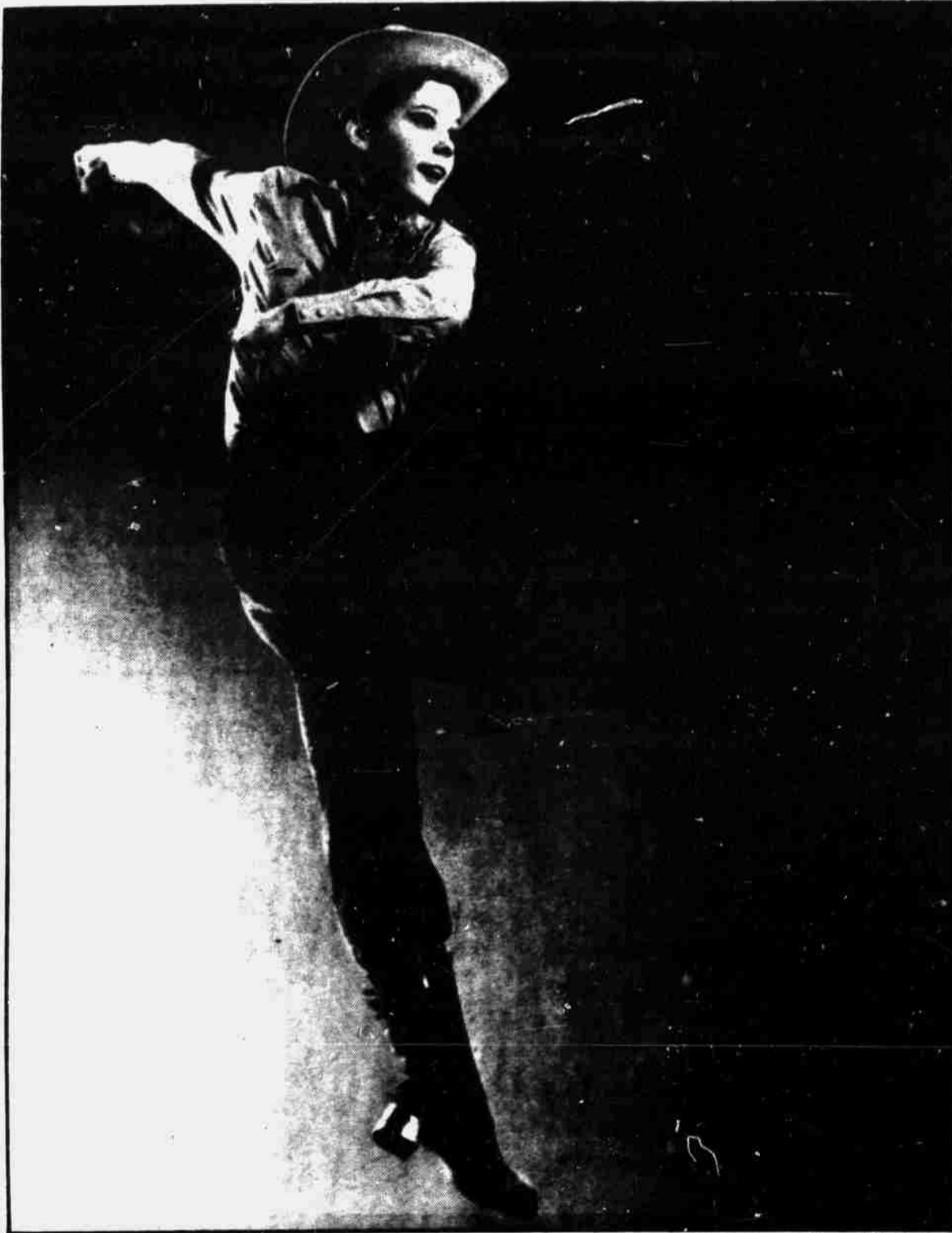


Photo courtesy of The Royal Winnipeg Ballet

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's Bonnie Wyckoff performs in *Rodeo*, choreographed by Agnes de Mille with music by Aaron Copland.

arts and entertainment

Energetic performance belies slippery winter complications

By Casey McCabe

For Larry Raspberry and the Highsteppers, a two-night stint at Lincoln's Royal Grove was just another in a hectic tour.

To complicate matters, the band was caught last week in the country's worst weather and was unable to leave Ohio in time to make their scheduled Thursday opening.

But if the ordeal was a strain on the 30-year-old Larry Raspberry, you could not tell it by his active stage performance.

Looking resplendent in a long white tuxedo top, cut-off blue denims and no shoes, Raspberry was energetic as he took the stage by storm with his rock antics.

Touring like this can get pretty harrowing," said Raspberry in his thick Tennessee accent. "Being exposed to midwest winters is a thing in itself.

"It's taxing to drive all day and night, slide off the road or whatever, and then get on stage and work.

"The justification for it all comes from playing our music and putting on a good show."

The High Steppers have been with Raspberry since 1972, but the band only has played with its current lineup since last summer.

The band has opened for such acts as The Ozark Mountain Daredevils, The J. Geils Band, Black Oak Arkansas and Head East.

But, according to Raspberry, the band was pulled from the Ozark Mountain Daredevil tour after only one show because they played "too high energy" music which

contrasted with the Daredevils' style.

The exposure helped the band gain a following and sold some records for them, although they never were able to become popular on their own. Raspberry admitted the current tour is out of necessity.

"We play for a living, so we have to play the market that supports the band," he said. "And that happens to be dances, bars and sometimes a small concert. We're hoping to land a record affiliation in the near future."

Larry Raspberry and the Highsteppers play uninhibited rock, with a firm base built upon early influences like Chuck Berry and Little Richard. Raspberry said it is his duty to inspire the crowd by coaxing people to dance and clap their hands.

Most songs are original compositions from the band's two albums, *High Steppin'* and *Fancy Dancin'* and *In The Pink*. Some more memorable selections are "Jive Ass", "Rock and Roll Warning" and "Baby Get Out of Bed."

While hard rock is the obvious force behind the band, Raspberry said playing danceable music often is a necessity. The band members, all Tennessee natives, listen to such artists as Billy Joel, Boz Scaggs and the Commodores.

"If you heard the band a year ago, you could see the changes that have taken place," Raspberry said.

"We've become a guitar band, and little harder-edged. If the people accept what they hear, we think we've been sincere about our music."

Woodwinds recital Tuesday

Two instructors in the UNL School of Music will present a free, public recital Tuesday at 8 p.m. in Sheldon Art Gallery Auditorium.

Gary Echols, bassoon instructor, and Robert O'Boyle, oboe instructor, will play three pieces: *Quartet in D Minor*

(from *Tafelmusik*, 1733) by Telemann, and *Concerto for Bassoon in E minor* (F. VIII No. 6) by Vivaldi.

They will be accompanied by Harvey Hinshaw, David Van de Bogart, Priscilla Parson, Gay Kohl, Brenda Manuel, Marilyn O'Boyle, Maureen O'Boyle and Ronald Arden.

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