

## arts/entertainment

# Houston director brings varied ballet to Kimball

By Christian Thompson

The Houston Ballet has made the grand jete into the arena of international ballet corps. Last year, the Houston Ballet made its premiere in New York and its international in Mexico City. Much of the ballet's recent rise to international acclaim is due to the energetic efforts of the company's artistic director, Ben Stevenson, who joined the Houston Ballet in 1976.

Stevenson received formal ballet training at the Royal Academy of Dance.

After his training he danced with the Royal Ballet and eventually rose to the position of Ballet Master for the company.

Since then, he has co-directed the National Ballet in Washington, D.C., and has become internationally recognized for his innovative choreography.

Stevenson will be directing the Houston Ballet when it performs in Lincoln at Kimball Recital Hall, beginning Thursday.

"You see," he said, "the Jones Hall (where they perform in Houston) is shared

with many other performing artists. It's terribly crowded, so touring becomes very important to the company. After all, performing is what it's all about."

When asked if he has a particular composer or period of music that he likes to draw on for choreographic inspiration, Stevenson said, "I like to draw on as many sources as possible. I guess I really don't have one particular composer that I favor over the others."

The Houston Ballet's repertoire represents Stevenson's penchant for variety. The troupe performs everything from the classic "Giselle" to modern rock-ballets. Stevenson said the company's repertoire was largely classic until several years ago.

"I like to experiment as much as possible with dance," Stevenson said. "Although our repertoire is still heavily based on the classics, we really do more new modern works than any other American company."

Stevenson said his choreography has been greatly influenced by the growth of modern dance. He cited Bob Fosse as an innovator and an influential creator of the non-traditional dance movement.

"In America," he said, "they expect you to cough up the classics. Actually, I prefer to do original works. This doesn't mean that the result will be any good, but the experience is more rewarding."

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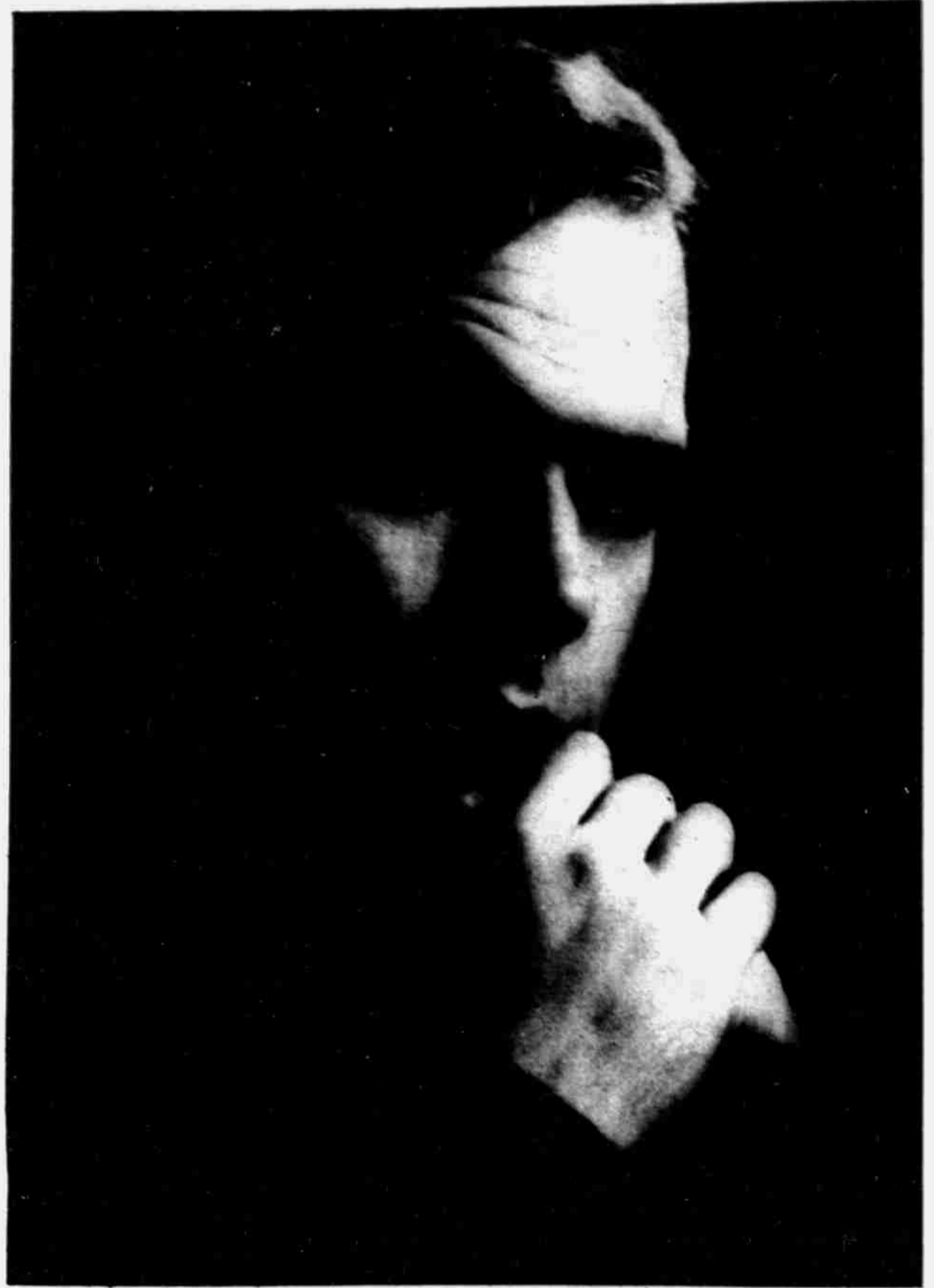


Photo courtesy of Kimball Recital Hall

Ben Stevenson

## Old scripts, new titles pull in sit-com profits

The scene: The executive offices of National Television Network, Inc. It is the annual Board of Directors meeting before announcement of the new fall network television line-up. Despite the air conditioning in the plush office, there is a lot of sweating going on in the room.

The program director, a small, ferrety guy named Witcomb, opens his briefcase. "I'll bet you're all waiting for me," he says. The silence in the room indicates he is correct.

"Okay!" he says, with forced enthusiasm, "Here it is, the National Television Network Fall Line-up for 1981. Ta-da!"

pat clark

Witcomb unravels a chart showing the NTN schedule for premiere week. The chart draws no "oohs" and "aahs" from the members of the board, only a few puffs on some cigars. Finally one of them, a portly, balding sort named Thurbridge, says, "Okay, try to sell me on this bilge."

"Bilge?" says Witcomb, half-joking. "We expect this fall line-up to be brighter and better than ever, with more of the stars, more of the shows that you want to see." "You sound like our ads," says Thurbridge. "I want to know why I should like this line-up."

"Because it features a galaxy of stars?" asks Witcomb. "Nope," says Thurbridge, as the others nod their agreement. "I do not care who we put on the air and who we don't."

"Because we feature more provocative dramas, more hilarious comedies and a better movie schedule than any other network?" asks Witcomb.

"Wrong again," says Thurbridge. "Because our news coverage is the most up-to-the-minute available?" Witcomb asks.

"I read a newspaper," says Thurbridge. "If you want to know the truth, I don't watch any television."

"Then you must be wondering how much money we will be able to make off of the new schedule."

"Now we're getting somewhere," says Thurbridge. "For me, television is no more entertaining than blue-chip industrials or pork market futures. In network television, we like to emphasize the industry part of the entertainment industry."

"What you are here to do is explain to me why this line-up is more profitable than last year's."

Witcomb takes a minute to fold up his chart and shove it back in the briefcase. He can hear the sound of pencils tapping on the table. Finally he draws a deep breath.

"We have thought about this aspect of our operation for some time," he says, "and we think we have a plan to insure greater profits than ever before."

"Spill it," says Thurbridge. "Let me ask you this," says Witcomb. "What is the cheapest way to create network programming?"

"Same as always," says Thurbridge. "Use a formula plot, hire a beautiful but heretofore unheard of actress, and sell a lot of advertising time."

"That worked well before," says Witcomb, "but we've got something even better for this year."

"I was hanging around in the archives," Witcomb continues. "I noticed that we've got piles and stacks of old television shows sitting down there. We've also got hundreds of titles for shows that we never used. So, why not put new titles on the old shows!"

Thurbridge cracks a smile. "I like it. Think it'll work?" "Sure," says Witcomb. "Nobody has any idea what they are watching now, so how are they going to know that they've seen it already? No production costs, no scripts to buy, just profits."

"It's great," says Thurbridge. "You know, you were right the first time. The new NTN line-up is brighter and better than ever."

## 'Onliness' mingles earthiness, insight

By Scott Kleager

Poet Dave Smith's first novel, *Onliness*, could possibly be the best since John Irving's *The World According to Garp*. It just might be better. For starters, the style Smith employs — sentence structure, conversation characteristics, etc. — is so much different from Irving's that it seems the two are headed in separate directions. Smith's style shouldn't be termed better than Irving's, just different.

### book review

Many contemporary novelists are geographically centered, artistically. That is because their styles are focused upon a specific area of the country, usually the author's own. A particular type of people, who hang around together, usually speak the same way and tend to be class-specific. Where the voice in Irving's *The World According to Garp* is middle class for the most part, Smith's *Onliness* is the voice of the poor. Hence the difference in narrative style.

The result is that *Onliness* exhibits an earthiness that most other novels lack today. Since most of us live relatively comfortable lives, the novel holds special interest for us.

Respect goes to Mr. Smith for publishing a glimpse of that part of rural, southern Everytown most of us have never experienced. We meet the protagonist, Billy Luke Tomson, in "the living room of his momma's trailer, looking at his momma lying drunk on the floor," in the third line of the book. Then comes the Bowie Garage, the central setting for the novel, a greasy little shack with no bath or shower, and an open commode for a bathroom.

#### Tough as life

The talk is as tough as the life. But what we might call "rough language" is what millions of Americans call "normal." There is the habit all the characters have of forgetting auxiliary verbs, as Billy's granddaddy exhibits early on when he says, "You going to the Coast Guard!"

Throughout the novel Smith consistently spells words used in conversation in such a way that the Southern, rural vernacular — sometimes black, sometimes white —

comes smoothly and naturally out. "Course ittis some wants to put a shopping center in here and don't give a frog's spit what is pretty and what ain't," says Tom Zucold, 70-year-old white owner of the Bowie Garage.

There occurs an incredibly vivid example of black vernacular, circa 1981, from Clifton, who lives across the road from Billy and Tom Zucold: "... but Clifton not 'fraid of no honky white man, special not some ancient dude, even if his uncle Lionel the Drill say that old honky got some reason and rep too, and he tell Momma ain't no reason to worry cause he a stone dude himself."

Author Smith is constantly creative. *Onliness*, as a result, is refreshing from front to back. For example, because he can't afford a new door, Tom Zucold hangs up a Cadillac Eldorado door instead, because: "... everybody knows a Cadillac is about the finest they is in cars and I figger that'd be true for a door too."

#### Killer Tree

The old man calls rotted-out old cars that he wants to fox-up someday "processes." A tree standing in front of the Bowie Garage, on the edge of the highway, is called "the Killer Tree" because several people have smashed into it and died. Billy's mysterious girl friend is named "Promise Land," and her sister "Hope."

*Onliness* uses the "education of the innocent" motif to exemplify its themes. The reader knows practically nothing about Billy Luke Tomson; as Billy learns, the reader learns.

It is also *eine Bildungsroman*, which teaches the philosophy of "onliness." Billy must find that single, elemental core which is his soul, his onliness, before he can find freedom from Tom Zucold, the only father he has ever had. The combination of earthiness and philosophical insight make the novel a singular experience.

Tom Zucold's creeping madness, which engulfs everyone in the end except Billy, is done about as well as it can be done. He suffers from a persecution mania that comes on him slowly, steadily, accompanied by appropriate changes in speech and actions.

The novel is violent and explicit at times, but not overly so. Yes, Mom, you can go ahead and read it. It is doubtful, though, whether Dave Smith will appear on the *Today* show, for there is little here conducive to author worship. The book probably won't develop a cult following, as some have these days, but just the same, *Onliness* is educational, finely crafted and honest.