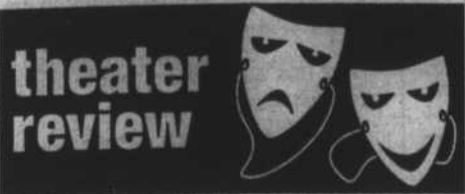


## Audience finds dance troupe's tribute stale



When the principal dancers of the New York City Ballet come to town, you expect to see an extraordinary show.

The audience at the Lied Center on Friday evening were treated to something just a little less than that in a "Tribute to Balanchine."

All of the dancers were very good, and there were some moments of great passion and intensity—particularly parts of Stravinsky's "Agon." The troupe—which also performed Saturday—were talented professionals.

But, with a couple of exceptions, audience reaction was a little lukewarm.

It was ballet, which makes for problems with some viewers, and it was Balanchine—which causes problems for others.

Ballet is not for everyone—not even for everyone who likes dance.

It's a very traditional, even stodgy, dance form. Things change very slowly in ballet.

While dance was going through a revolution in the jazz age, ballet remained almost untouched.

In the modern and post-modern era, ballet has experienced something of a crisis: How to retain vitality within the limits of the form.

George Balanchine was an innovator in his day, producing choreography to pop tunes like "Embraceable You" and "I Got Rhythm" by George Gershwin.

He amazed old-school critics of ballet by introducing to the dance's rigid forms a little of the graceful swing of old soft-shoe routines.

He was a maverick in a medium that resists change emphatically.

But some of his work has not weathered well.

It's not entirely his fault. The enormous impact of his innovative style carried over to other, less formal styles of dance.

In the middle of the 1970s it was possible to tune into any of the numerous "variety shows" and see the spiritual ancestors of today's Fly Girls churning through the big production number that every such show required.

In any given TV-watching evening, you would experience several Balanchine moments.

Certainly it's no fault of Balanchine that his work was successful enough to be copied by every two-bit choreographer in the country.

Still, it makes it difficult to watch the original with any sense of freshness.

The Balanchine style has become associated, through no fault of his, with a great deal of formula, mass-produced work.

It is of course possible to watch Balanchine's

See **BALLET** on 10



The Millions play to a full house at The Edge on Saturday night with new guitarist Benjamin Kushner. Also pictured is lead singer Lori Allison. William Lauer DN

## A fresh Million Band's second album, 'Raquel,' reflects major changes



By **Matt Woody**  
Staff Reporter

Lincoln's The Millions are back—with a new album, a new label, a new band member and a new outlook.

Bassist Marty Amsler said the changes were the result of hard lessons the band learned in the last few years.

The first lesson had to do with the band's major label debut, "M is for Millions."

The record, which was produced by Terry Brown and released in 1991 by SMASH Records, wasn't exactly the album the band wanted to make.

"It was more of what the label wanted and what Terry had in mind than what we did," Amsler said.

By the time the record was completed,

Amsler said all of the songs had "the same kind of vibe."

When the band broke with SMASH and began to shop around for a new label, finding one that would let them do their own thing was of major importance, he said.

The band signed with Dream Circle, a record label based in Hamburg, Germany.

"We went with the one that would give us the most freedom," Amsler said.

The band recently completed its first album for the label, titled "Raquel."

The artistic freedom the band members were given shined through in the completed project, Amsler said.

"I would say it's more of a representation of what we are as a band," he said.

"We really saw eye-to-eye with them on capturing the songs and the band. It wasn't this huge sales-oriented production."

Lead singer Lori Allison said the album benefited from the lack of corporate pressure.

"The energy is flowing a lot freer. It's a lot more raw, a lot more versatile," she said.

Part of that energy comes from the band's newest member, Benjamin Kushner.

“*The energy is flowing a lot freer. It's a lot more raw, a lot more versatile.*”  
—Lori Allison  
lead singer

“*Kushner, who joined the band last April, plays guitar along with Million's guitarist Harry Dingham III. Originally, the band had intended to use Kushner as a guest soloist on the album, Amsler said. "He just added so much to the band and the recording that we had to have him," he said. "He and Harry really play off each other well. They just really click together well," Amsler said. Allison said Kushner brought an added*

See **MILLIONS** on 10

## Willis' 'Distance' strikes target despite its predictable script



### Striking Distance



Bruce Willis returns to the big screen, and guess what—he's a cop. "Striking Distance" is Willis' latest effort to return to the box office glory of his "Die Hard" days. This time he's Tom Hardy, a fifth-generation cop in Pittsburgh, honest and honorable to the end...

... which makes him more than a little unpopular with the other members of the police force.

His first claim to defame among the force was his testimony against his cousin/partner on a police brutality charge. The second was an accusa-

tion against the force that sent him down to River Patrol.

The story begins in 1991, and Pittsburgh women are being terrorized by the Little Red Riding Hood Killer. Tom, then a detective, is sure the killer is a cop, or a former cop. The killer knows too much about the way the police operate and too much about police procedure.

En route to the Policemen's Ball, Tom and his father get involved in a high-speed chase. His father ends up dead, and the suspected serial killer gets away.

When a bum is brought in as the suspected killer, Tom protests, saying that the charges are trumped up—he's sure the force is hiding one of its own. He makes accusations and is demoted to River Patrol.

Two years later, Tom's battling alcoholism when he's assigned a new partner—Jo Christman (Sarah Jessica Parker).

At about the same time, bodies start bobbing up in the river and Tom's

sure the same killer is at work again. He starts snooping around on his own, much to the chagrin of the homicide division.

The acting on the whole is good. Robert Pastorelli does a great job in a role that is a complete departure from his part as Eldon on "Murphy Brown."

Parker is fine, but she's really just window dressing—what else could she be in another male-oriented action flick? At least she gets to keep most of her clothes on.

But Willis is in top form. He's charismatic, wry and sarcastic. The trademark smirk only pops up occasionally. His real trouble is getting bogged down in bad scripts.

"Striking Distance" isn't a bad story. It's actually kind of involving the first 30 minutes or so. But the climactic fight at the end lasts a little too long, and the romance is a little too predictable.

But then again, that's to be expected from an action movie.

—Anne Steyer



James Mehling/DN