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Chelonia Dance Ensemble [Review of a performance of the Chelonia Dance Ensemble]

Curtis Carter
Marquette University, curtis.carter@marquette.edu

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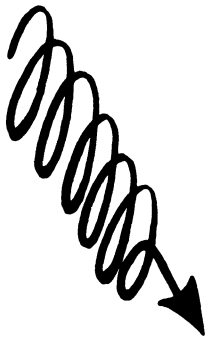

CHELONIA DANCE ENSEMBLE

March 23-25, 1979

A new company has joined the growing dance movement, thanks to the efforts of Geri Houlihan and her associates. The Chelonia Dance Ensemble which performed at Beloit College on March 23-25, includes Ms. Houlihan, artistic director; Lee McLeod and Raimonda Pierce who also choreographed works for the concert; and other dancers from the Beloit area. The concert included "Baroque and Blue," "Night Watch," and "Suite Hungarian," all choreographed by Ms. Houlihan; "October Dance" by Ms. McLeod; and "Cosmic Message" by Ms. Pierce.

"Baroque and Blue" plays on the division and reunification of modern dance and ballet. Two groups of performers begin dancing in their separate ways, apparently in the spirit of agon, or a contest. As the dance progresses, the group rivalry diminishes, and the two groups merge. The intent is to suggest the fusion of modern dance and ballet. While the treatment of the theme is somewhat simplistic, the piece does explain the current state of dance to an audience unfamiliar with its recent changes. Ms. Houlihan's choreography is unpretentious, well within the capabilities of the dancers. Each group, the modern and the ballet, demonstrated the respective styles with ease and clarity. The two styles are successfully integrated in the movement, but the conceptual basis for this

blending of styles is less clear. As I perceived the development, the reduction of the two styles was toward modern dance. The dance world at large has not decided how the two are to be integrated. There can be many solutions of which this piece is one.

"Night Watch" was danced by Anna Bergstrom, Geri Houlihan, and Lee McLeod. This four-part piece, set to the music of Alexander Scriabin, explores the moods of night, emphasizing the contrast of day and night. Ms. Houlihan conveyed the depth of her insights and movement skills with understatement throughout the dance.

The final piece,"Suite Hungarian," was based on folk dance, and incorporated local folk dancers into the scheme of the dance. This dance was a fitting choice for the Beloit community where there is considerable activity and interest in ethnic dancing.

The concert was well conceived, and maintained interest throughout. It succeeded in using the available resources in the Beloit area, to great advantage, and with sensitivity to the values of the community.

Prior to coming to Wisconsin, Ms. Houlihan danced with major companies in New York and in Europe. She has danced with, for example, the Metropolitan Opera Ballet, Paul Sanasardo, Manuel Alum, and Lar Bubovitch. She is currently artist in residence at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

By Curtis L. Carter