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UWM's WINTER FEST; A MIXED BAG OF DANCE

BY CURTIS L. CARTER

For the second year the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has sponsored a Winter Festival of dance featuring primarily local dance groups. This year the festival, which ran December 8-9 included THE CHICAGO MOVING COMPANY and for the first time also featured a Folk dance group.

The showcase concert, December 9 included performances of DANCE OPUS (formerly THE CHAMBER DANCE THEATER), THE BAUER DANCE ENSEMBLE NA LESA BULGARIAN FOLK ENSEMBLE, and CHICAGO MOVING COMPANY. The previous evening's concert had consisted of performances by the MILWAUKEE BALLET, KO THI, DANCE CIRCUS, and U.W.-STEVENS POINT DANCE THEATER.

Under the direction of Richard Dickinson, Dance Opus VI performed "Four Sea Portraits," choreographed by Dickinson to music of Benjamin Britten. The four sections of the piece, "Dawn," "Sunday Morning," "Moonlight," and "Storm" were built around a mood of emptiness reminiscent of a Hopper painting. A quality of searching continued throughout the piece. The choreography was in the style of abstract modern ballet. It was entirely too timid for the music, and lacked a tight struc-

ture that might have saved it from a certain pointless wandering. The dancers looked good, despite their recent struggles to overcome managerial difficulties incurred under their former name. If Dance Opus VI is to become a viable force in Milwaukee, however, the company must have better choreography.

THE BAUER DANCE ENSEMBLE, together with the musicians called "To Be Consumed," performed "Iridescent Crystal." The same lyrical, yet economic style of modern dance that has been recently moving Ms. Bauer away from the stark Cunningham influence prevails in this work. Apart from Ms. Bauer, the dancers are not yet of professional quality. In this instance they had heavy competition from the musicians who not only played but stood up and moved and whirled their ropelike instruments for certain sounds that were called for in composer Jeames Pease's score. The music was interesting in itself, but if I were the choreographer I would be concerned about the distracting activities of the musicians who literally blocked the view of the dancers at times.

CHICAGO MOVING COMPANY performed Bill Evans' "For Betty," set to Vivaldi's "Concerto Grosso in D." The dancers raced across the stage in this piece, churning their arms in a windmill ef-

fect. Their strident movements were obvious to the point of being boring. It would be unfair to form an opinion of the company based on this performance. I did not, however, see anything that would move me to drive to Chicago to see them perform.

It was especially interesting to see NA LESA BULGARIAN FOLK ENSEMBLE in the context of a theatrical performance of modern dance. The dancers perform folk dances from various regions of Bulgaria, and their work has been seen through the years in the annual Folk Festival of Milwaukee. The Bulgarian dancers are very skilled, and their dances are colorful. They performed "Dorbrudzanska Suita," "Trakijska Suita," and "Svadbarska Rucenica," each representing different regions of Bugarua.

Despite their appeal, the setting seemed inappropriate. The dances were not intended to be performed in a theatrical environment. They would be very fitting at a community festival and could be enjoyed much more there. The forms are too repetitious, compared with ballet and modern dance, to warrant the close attention that we normally give to theatrical dance. The level of skill required to do these dances is high, but it does not have the same aesthetic impact that comes from modern dance or ballet as art forms. This is not to say that the folk

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dances are inferior to the art dances, but their function is not realized when they are abstracted from the community where they express the distinctive ethnic values of their culture.

The experience of seeing the group on the stage was beneficial because it helped to clarify some of the differences between folk dancing and theatrical dance. I can enjoy both, but they appeal to different interests, and they require different environments.

The Winter Festival provides a much-needed service to dance in Wisconsin. It, together with the annual showcase concert of the state dance conference, sponsored by the Wisconsin Dance Council, offers a good measure of creative dance in the state.