

Bringing out the best in the Boston Ballet

By Jackie Coleman

The Boston Ballet's second annual Choreographers Series wasn't a chance for unknown choreographers to get discovered. Presenting works by artists already established in Boston or elsewhere (including John Cranko, no less), the event hardly qualified as that. But the air of excitement often generated by experiment still managed to charge the Boston Center for the Arts, where the Boston Ballet, in dancing the 11 new pieces, was in some ways discovering itself.

A piece like Ze' Eva Cohen's "Goat Dance," in addition to being interesting and unlike the Boston Ballet's usual repertory, drew mature performances from the young company and revealed the mode of dance to which longtime-soloist Tony Catanzaro is perhaps best suited. A ritualistic dance about the human life cycle as turned by virility, "Goat Dance" 's evocative stances and quick rushes of essentially non-balletic movement elicited concentration and feeling from the company, and a pleasing intensity from Catanzaro. Their technical deficiencies were never seen as they moved, barefoot, through the geometricized arm-and-leg positions to strange Middle Eastern rhythms. Catanzaro, free from the rules of classic dance that sometimes seem to inhibit him, was able to suggest male sexuality from his first prance.

Company protegee Deirdre Myles rose to the challenge of an acting part in John Cranko's decidedly balletic "Pas de Deux from Romeo and Juliet." The self-involved ecstasy of young



Tony Catanzaro rehearses "Goat Song."

love was in the unabashed arc of Myles's body and in the very tilt of her head — her arms clasped around it — as Romeo lifted her high. Juliet's first kiss visibly changed her so that she no long-

er resembled the child who'd dreamt of Romeo at the ballet's start. In this Series, Myles also began to discover herself as somewhat of a sex kitten in Charles Neal's "Yin and Yang"

and Ron Cunningham's "Saturday Morning."

Elaine Bauer was the lightest, sweetest breath of innocence and spring as the child of virility in "Goat Dance." Before, she had been unvaryingly shy as a performer. "Piosenki," by the Ballet's resident choreographer, Lorenzo Monreal, offered Laura Young a complex of steps with Woytek Lowski that inspired her to her strong, fluid best.

This is not to say that the company was, bar none, superb. The normally confident, stirring Lowski looked literally shaky handling Young in "Piosenki," while Mark Johnson as Myles's "Romeo" almost ruined the piece by not properly answering his partner's passion or even technique. Then there were a few male corps members so clumsy and uninspired they took the company's professionalism down a notch. Nevertheless, the bad dancing was rarely uncomfortable to watch.

A piece that did nothing for the dancers except show their limitations (and the worst of the lot, anyway) was Martha Armstrong Gray's "Flowering Into New Battles." It put into Oriental peasant pajamas Anamaria Sarazin and Tony Catanzaro, who slowly kung fu-ed (or so it looked at times) to an electronic but Far Eastern-sounding score by Stomu Yamash'ta. The inscrutable minimalistic choreography made it impossible to tell what, if anything, Gray was trying to express. The dancers weren't given enough to do and didn't have the energy to carry off what they were given.

Where a choreographer may actually have been born was in "Saturday Morning" by Ron Cunningham. Boston has seen some of his work before, but mostly children's ballets and nothing as good as this. This ballet about adolescents getting their sexual identifications straight was funny. It started with bathrobed, knee-socked teen-aged girls and pubescent boys in sweat suits, who stood over two ostensibly naked lovers violently copulating on the floor. The kids continued to fantasize about sex at what may have been a slumber party and football practice until — zappo! — their ideal role-models emerged: Wonder Woman and Captain America. To tell the whole story would spoil it. The choreography is harder to remember but was inventively subordinated to the plot until the last third, which was weaker conceptually, too.

So very little of the Series was without some pleasure. Even the inexpertly designed plotless piece, "Classical Symphony" (a string of virtuoso feats passed off as a ballet), was enlivened by a light ending in which the female corps exited (purposely) without the lone male dancer. The number was also given spirit by company members in the audience who hooted spontaneously at Myles's successful unsupported arabesque and at presumably infrequent technical accomplishments by other dancers. What with the enthusiasm and the developing skills of dancers and choreographers, the Series has taken shape as an annual dance event that is sometimes rough but often exciting.

Donald Curran