

Feld Ballet shows discipline and precision

By CORINNE ABATT

During the summer Meadow Brook Festival, there has traditionally been one series of performances by a ballet company. A year ago, it was the American Ballet Company with Leslie Brown who was still fresh in most people's minds as the star of "The Turning Point." And the audience size for Miss Brown and company were tes-

timony to the power of the movies. Unfortunately, last weekend, no one from The Feld Ballet had recently scored in a touting film, so the opening night was a trifle sparse. But, those who did attend — maybe they were aware of Feld's reputation as a choreographer or maybe, they just liked ballet — were treated to a well-packaged, precision performance that was practically all pure dance. No ex-

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tras like sets or elaborate costumes, just the performers on stage. It was almost a test — could these dancers capture the viewers' attention, so that any extras would have been a distraction?

This isn't to say there were no costumes, simply that they were an extension of the dancer rather than the other way around. For example, when companies like the Joffrey or the San Francisco Ballet do "Romeo and Juliet" or other period pieces, the costumes have to be handled, the trains properly flopped around. Headresses swing back and forth and hopefully, still stay in tact. The costume handling is part of

the choreography. Well, there was none of this to worry about with the Feld company opening night — and only a couple of times in the third ballet "A Footstep of Air," were any props even used. In this, a group of Beethoven's folk songs with lyrics, a shepherd's crook, a hobo type stick with a bundle and a sword were worked into the choreography like Fred Astaire's cane or Ray Bolger's hat.

But, in large measure, Feld dancers come on stage with muscle, movement, timing and an endless flow of choreography. This latter, in fact, is one of Feld's strong choreographic stamps — the movements are satisfying because of sustained action and reaction movement. There simply are no breaks, abrupt or otherwise. The stage is bare only at intermission.

Feld's ballet, "Harbinger," is done to the Prokofiev Concerto No. 5 for Piano and Orchestra. This one was minus orchestra, but the beauty of the music for dancers was still there. Like the composer's music for "Romeo and Juliet," this is powerful, dramatic, full of demands and contrasts that call for robot-like precision. Feld and company responded with clarity and crispness that was a joy to see. When 14-16 dancers were on stage together, out across the stage and closing up together, the discipline bright to mind an accordion or ocean waves against a beach.

Lined up across the stage for a curtain call at the end of "Harbinger," the dancers in slim pastel costumes looked like crayons in a box.

Feld took music by Brahms for the ballet "Intermezzo." A classical type presentation, using three couples. This romantic, lyrical ballet offers each of the couples a chance to show skills. Feld's signature of flow, precision and unbroken symmetry was always visible. There are no breathtaking leaps or lifts that defy gravity — simply excellent movement that locks the eye to the dancers on stage.

"A Footstep of Air" added the balance and humor to round out the program — but, then, it would be a crime to choreograph a group of earthy, rollicking songs like these and not have fun with them. And so, "Sally in Our Alley" is a coy, winsome, flirtatious lass, "Peggy's Daughter" exudes carefree, country charm and the delectable swordman, danced by Feld himself, who, more often than not, ended up with his sword in the wrong hand, was a delight.

As piano accompanist, Peter Longiaru was effective, particularly during the Brahms when he was on stage with the dancers to create a salon effect.

Community Calendar

COMMUNITY DANCE

Thursday, Aug. 9: Dance, with music furnished by Farmington Community Jazz Band, begins at 8 p.m. in Building J, Orchard Ridge Campus, Oakland Community College. Dance is sponsored as a public service by Farmington Area Arts Commission. No charge. (See feature article on the band in this issue of Suburban Life.)

THUNDERING HERD

Friday, Aug. 10: Bus leaves the Farmington Community Center at 7 p.m. for Meadow Brook Music Festival's performance with Woody Herman

and His Thundering Herd and singer Della Reese. Package priced tickets at discount rates, \$16 each, includes transportation and a seat in the pavilion, though the center, 477-8404.

NIGHTCAP WITH MOZART

Friday, Aug. 10: Nightcap With Mozart series continues with "Music for Violin and Guitar," with Misha Rachlevsky on the violin and Chris Birg on guitar, at 11 p.m. in Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 Woodward, Blufffield Hills. Ticket price of \$5, at the door, includes wine, concert and conversation with the artists after the performance.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Saturday, Aug. 11: "Beauty and the Beast," continues Summer Children's Theatre Festival at 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. in Building J, Orchard Ridge Campus, Oakland Community College. Admission of \$1.25 asked at the door for all ages.

ARTS COMMISSION

Tuesday, Aug. 14: Farmington Area Arts Commission regular monthly meeting at 7 p.m. in Farmington Hills City Hall, 31555 11 Mile Rd. Open to all interested persons.

BREADMAKE FOR CHILDREN

Tuesday, Aug. 14: Breadmake for Children includes lecture on total health and making whole grain bread for baking at home, at 7 p.m. in Farmington Seventh Day Adventist Church, 29831 Ten Mile Rd. Registrations requested by calling the church office, 477-9507.

JUNIOR GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP

Tuesday, Aug. 14: Metropolitan Detroit Junior Walter Hagen Golf Championship semifinals for boys and girls, 13-18 years, at Glen Oaks Golf and Country Club sponsored as a benefit for American Cancer Society. Applications will be sent upon request by calling the cancer society, 557-5353.

ALCOHOL AND WOMEN

Friday and Saturday, Aug. 17-18: Two day seminar, "Alcohol and

Women," designed for the woman alcoholic and the female social drinker who may be concerned with her alcohol usage, runs from 5 p.m. Friday to 5 p.m. Saturday in Mercy Center, 11 Mile and Middlebelt Roads. Fee of \$40 includes private room and all meals. Registrations and inquiries taken by Jean Peterl, in the center, 476-8010.

Club Circuit

WELCOME WAGON CLUB, of Farmington, schedules a summer morning coffee to welcome newcomers to Farmington and Farmington Hills.

Sue Abbey will host the event beginning at 10 a.m. Tuesday, Aug. 14, in her house at 26593 Greybourne Trail, in Kimberley Subdivision.

The coffee is open to all persons who have lived in the area for less than a year.

Those wishing to attend are asked to call Bev Cornell, 553-8974.

PIONEER WOMEN, Israel Chapter, honors new members and their sponsors at a dessert luncheon, beginning at 1 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 18, in Labor Zionist Building, 28555 Middlebelt Rd., Farmington Hills.

Guest speaker for the day is Ruth Miller, president of Pioneer Women, Great Detroit Council. Entertainment will be furnished by pianist Rosalyn Kraus.

Persons who wish to become a member of the chapter are asked to contact Lee Wagman, 967-3257.

From the Wine Press

RICHARD WATSON



Merlot becomes new red aristocrat

For centuries the wines of Bordeaux have been dominated by the regions of Margaux, St. Julien, Pauillac, St. Estephe and Graves. These regions are uniformly dependent on the Cabernet Sauvignon grape for their excellence.

Other grapes are used to soften, tend or color the Cabernet, but in themselves they have generally been considered lesser grapes and for generations were not considered worthy of being the chief ingredient for any release. Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Merlot and Petite Verdot are the most prevalent.

However, as recently as 40 years ago a new region of France attained strong recognition rather suddenly. This one made its wines chiefly from the Merlot grape. Today, St. Emilion and Pomerol are as esteemed as the wines of the Medoc and have far exceeded most red Graves in reputation.

A similar set of circumstances recently occurred on the California wine scene, although the time span involved is remarkably compressed. Fifteen years ago there were but two acres planted to Merlot. In 1969 there were 120 acres. Today there are 4,450. These figures support the idea that there has, indeed, recently been a Merlot explosion.

Much of the Merlot wine, (a taste said to be herbaceous and tea-like, lacking the peppery bite of Cabernet, and having softer tannins) from these acres is now going into blending with Cabernet Sauvignon releases.

This follows the great traditions of the French who blend varieties considerably more than Californians have traditionally done. The availability of Merlot in recent years is doing much to enhance the quality of California Cabernets. Indeed, it is heavily responsible for the greatness of the 1974 vintage releases, making an otherwise monstrous wine that year more drinkable.

But the reason we are aware of this

development of this grape from California is its increasing use as a varietal release. I vividly recall the anticipation we felt the Sterling Vineyards' '69 Merlot in the mid-70s.

We really had little benchmark for anticipating its taste. From that solo effort we now have a great many vineyards issuing vintage dated Merlot, all blended with some other red but all distinctive and different than Cabernet Sauvignon. They should not be drunk before they have matured at least four to five years, so the '74s and '75s now on the shelves should be coming around nicely. Look for a taste not unlike Cabernet, but generally softer and lacking in toughness. There should be subtle layers of flavor.

Any of the following would make a good introduction to Merlot:

Martini (generally light and gentle), Sterling (huge), Rutherford Hill, Stag's Leap (very lush), Chappellet (very big), Souverain (excellent value), and Veldecrest (light and pleasant). Or you can try Almaden and LePauvre (Pope's second label), the pride of Washington State, and that of Chateau Ste. Michelle. All are available locally.

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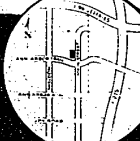
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