

Monologue Of The Soul — A Review of Spring Concert

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**A Concert Impression for
Ballet Technique I: Marlene Skog**

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While the Spring breeze once again decorated the world with lovely colors, Margaret H'Doubler Performance Space at Lathrop Hall presented the UW-Dance Program Spring Concert on April 22-24, 2004. Featuring a number of distinguished artists, this concert boasted a great sampling of a rich variety of themes and artistic styles, like many different kinds of flowers blossoming in the Spring.

Choreographed by Yin-Wen Yu, Peggy Myo-young Choy and Edi Gbordzi, the opening piece *Spirit Soaring* was a combination of Javanese dance, Chinese ribbon dance and African dance. With its striking costumes and colorful ribbons, danced to live music by Edi and al., this piece was dazzling, like brilliant fireworks (Ms. Marlene Skog's words). If we say *Spirit Soaring* is choreographed with the audience's entertainment in mind, then Collette Stewart's *Wave Packets* set to Dove's music is a monologue of the soul. Especially in the solo part, Collette used her body in an amazing way. Suspend, jump, handstand, shoulder roll..., she created an atmosphere of nature: wave, ocean, sky, earth, with among them an undisguised soul, a seagull hovering under the blue sky. The repeat of the theme in the group part emphasized such effects. *Mary's Secret* had a heart-lightening humor, *Becoming We* was a cute piece depicting close relationship, while *Drawn* vividly depicted a stressful status.

In this paper, I will compare and analyze two interesting pieces: guest artist Dan Wangler's *Plod* and Ruth Solomon's *Neerdorf*. Coincidentally, both works are set to music by 20th century Russian composers. Both try to convey the music, interpret the music with dance. Yet they are totally distinct with regards to theme, style, structure and movements.

Firstly let's compare their themes. *Plod* was a visualized resounding symphony, a dance interpretation of Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony*. To watch this piece was a delightful experience — you could “see” the music! Starting with a single violin, a few instruments added in, then the theme appeared, a chorus, slow again, a little graceful duet, the theme reappeared.... A parallel to the strong music and incorporated humor and irony in the movements, this piece was powerful and splendid. A happy and heart-lightening tune pervaded in the air. It was Spring, youth and life.

On the opposite, *Neerdorf* was winter, suffering and desperate. The performers were limited to a narrow space, which was symbolized by the chair. And they were “watched”. I felt the heaviness and sorrow. And even such feelings were not allowed in such an oppressive environment. It reminded me of one of Picasso's painting in the Metropolitan Museum — *Scream*. I wonder when the day will come that every human being in the world can breathe, sing, laugh, cry and live freely?

Secondly, the movements. In *Plod*, there were mainly two types of movements: the random and the strict. Both types of movements are light and happy. The former was represented by the body or limb shaking, and the latter by a set of lyric phrases and their variations. Just like there are all kinds of instruments in an orchestra, those different types of movements complemented each other in harmony.

Compared with *Plod*, the movements in *Neerdorf* made more use of the floor in a heavy way. I felt the gravity and the burden — a power dragging you down. Repeatedly a dancer falls on the floor, and is dragged along it. There were also frequent abrupt moments in the movements. Both create an atmosphere of uneasiness. Some movements were very bold and shocking, for example, the one where each dancer swung her chair, playing with the momentum. Given the size, the weight and the irregular shape of the chair, this sequence was challenging.

Thirdly, choreographic structure. Having eleven dancers, *Plod* had a good basis to play with. There were solos, duets, trios and bigger groups. With the clear movements and well-defined space division, even such a big number of dancers didn't seem crowded or untidy. Instead, it sharpened the contrast among different groups regarding the variation of movement theme and group size. Another interesting aspect was that the number of the dancers on stage kept changing, just like not all the instruments are used simultaneously in a symphony.

Compared to *Plod*'s ever-changing structure, the structure of *Neerdorf* was more regular. Most of the time either all of its eight dancers were in a group, or they were divided into same size groups, each doing the same phrase. Such structure served its heavy-hearted theme well — it magnified the strength of this piece. Especially when the three dancers swung the big chairs at the same time, where upstage in the background some dancers were lying on their back, being dragged along the floor. Together it created a soundless scream.

In both pieces, music played the role of the soul. Or we can say both dances were the choreographers' interpretation of the music they are set to. Because of the evocative

nature, the music lends itself well to expanding movement vocabulary into the dances. The movements and the music are closely connected, when I thought of one, the other came into my mind as well.

The success of those works couldn't have been achieved without the students' devoted performing. Although traces of "trying" and uneasiness still could be found, their commitment made up for it. Each movement was accomplished seriously. They especially demonstrated a great job in the partner work. For example, the lyric duet in *Plod*. The rich interaction between the two dancers made it real, smooth and touching.

The Spring Concert ended days ago, yet the movements, music, settings and those evoked feelings still linger in my mind. They touched my heart because they were sincere and frank. Not only were they a feast to the eyes, they were also nutrition to the soul.