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culture

Grands Ballets' whirlwind dance wins Latin raves

BY LIONEL MARTIN

HAVANA — It was what one Cuban critic called a "magic evening" at the Garcia Lorca Theatre in Havana. Cuban audiences, serious ballet-goers since Cuba has a world-renowned company of its own, knew no bounds to their enthusiasm for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. So insistent was the acclaim that the normal unfolding of the ballet had to be interrupted for the repetition of the particular dance that had called forth the cheers.

The Canadian dancers seemed to exceed their normal performances like athletes who call forth hidden reserves to break records: "We weren't dancing, we were flying," said one of the dancers. The audience was enchanted by the rich Quebecois folklore of Brian Macdonald and Gilles Vigneault's Tam Ti Delam. The name of the ballet comes from the "tam-ti-delam, tam-ti-delam" repeated over and over as a Quebec dance call between instructions, like "swing your partner to the right."

The French-Canadian fla-

vor of both the music and choreography captured the Cuban audience with its lively visual arrangements and its exciting musical rhythms. Brian Macdonald, artistic director of Les Grands Ballets and choreographer of Tam Ti Delam, described his creations as "patterns from square dancing, male athleticism, jig step, pure speed and the joy of classical technique combined to, hopefully, inject you with a little of the spirit of Quebec."

Another Canadian ballet that held the audience in its grip was the somewhat mystical Carmina Burana, with

music by Carl Orff and choreography by Sernand Ault. It was Ault who did the innovative rock ballet *Tommy*.

Carmina Burana has its lyrical and delicate moments, but the Cuban audience was hypnotized by the eerie spectacle of a dancer, Robert Dicello, made up as a swan, dangling from what looked like a barbecue spit. The dance inspired five minutes of unrestrained applause.

Nine weeks on the road, before the "magic evening" here in Havana, Brian Macdonald had told me that the 53-person troupe were "weary".

They came to Cuba after a nine week tour of 10 nations of Latin America: Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Mexico.

"There was a period after Brazil," he recalls, "when we had eight performances in one week in three countries. That was just a killer, what with the travel and the shows and the altitude and the drastic changes in temperature."

Rave reviews of Les Grand Ballets helped spur the company on. The newspapers of Caracas, Venezuela all acclaimed the company. The

English daily Journal wrote that they "had had a tremendous reception everywhere in Latin America." La Prensa of Lima, Peru called the ballets "stupendous" and spoke of the "surprising technical purity of the corps de ballet."

In Brazil, the house was oversold by 20%.

The external affairs department estimates that more than 100,000 people saw performances during the 17-city tour. With six of the nine ballets performed being Canadian, the tour represents a major leap of Canadian artistic achievement into Latin America.