

# Intriguing program from Danceworks

Danceworks, Toronto's indispensable window on contemporary dance, threw back the shutters on its 67th presentation at the Betty Oliphant Theatre last night, with a black-tie gala and one of the more intriguing programs of its recent history.

Through the co-operation of America's National Performance Network, the new dance series was able not only to introduce the city to the work of New York choreographer Tere O'Connor, but reunite it with one of its own finest dancers, Peggy Baker, and for one night only, enliven the environs of Jarvis St. with the one-woman phenomenon known as Molissa Fenley.

The over-all theme linking these program components was the billing *The Neo-Romantics*, an acknowledgement that all three figures belong to the branch of post-modernism that shops freely and casually in the department store of traditional technique, human emotion and at least intermittently recognizable form.

Baker personified the link, dancing works by O'Connor, Fenley and Mark Morris with the combination of virtuoso technique and human commitment that has long made her a special figure in our dance life.

In O'Connor's *Person Project*, which was receiving its premiere, she wore a scarlet cocktail dress and danced in silence, exploring space, testing it, foot stomping, arm sculpting and twisting and turning through it.

Save for a brief moment on her back, she remained upright, proceeding through a linked chain of phrases involving little repetition. She was the person, the dance was her project.

In *Nursing The Newborn Pig*, which was also having its premiere, and *Grounded Angel Triptych*, O'Connor himself took to the stage, a lithe, slim figure joined by five other dancers in the first case and two others in the second.

Notwithstanding the appar-



**Dance**

**William Littler**

ent absence of the promised porker, the first of these works turned out to be an especially attractive exercise in the post-modern specialty of reconciling the appeal of innovative gesture with the assurance of formal balance.

In language terms, O'Connor made elegant sentences with verbal non sequiturs. By taking steps from ballet and the arcadian infancy of modern dance as well as his own imagination, he always gave the viewer a hint of familiarity to cushion the voyage into newness.

The various movement phrases seldom seemed to relate to each other, thereby producing a freshness of look. And yet they were often performed in unison (sometimes in silence, sometimes to a fragmentary score ranging from baby talk to quotations from Mahler) by couples who were themselves deployed on the stage in formally attractive patterns.

*Ten Suggestions*, a solo choreographed by Mark Morris for Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Project, turned out to be a fey, playful piece, about as substantial as the foam on a glass of ginger beer, but as Baker cavorted with hoop and chair and pith helmet, she made it very much her own.

In the premiere performance of *Inner Enchantments*, however, she was joined by its choreographer, New York's Molissa Fenley (she will dance the piece as a solo tonight through Saturday), a smaller, more compact figure, who joined her in a sensual exploration of space, producing — for this night only — a wonderful mirror study of not quite twins.