

THE TECH ARTS SECTION

Committed cast collects kudos

by William Schaffner

Commitment, Abby. Commitment. There are two types of people of value on the face of this earth, those with a commitment and those who require the commitment of others.

—Abigail Adams, quoting John Adams, in 1776



Dan McGillicuddy as John Adams

photo by Scott Tobias

The Musical Theatre Guild production of 1776 is a show of great value, because every person on stage, in the crews, and in the orchestra pit has a commitment to the production. The general enthusiasm of the cast, the ability of the orchestra to play under the singers and not drown them out, and the beauty and simplicity of the directing gives this show a flair that was sadly lacking in several previous MTG musicals.

1776 is the story of the birth of American independence, from its beginnings in May and June of 1776 to the signing of the Declaration on July 3rd (not July 4th). John Adams, the "agitator" from Massachusetts and the main proponent of independence, is masterfully portrayed by Dan McGillicuddy. He manages the huge part skillfully, although his duets with his wife Abigail are forced and his voice tends to become a little hoarse after seven songs. Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration and America's outstanding statesman, scientist, lover, poet, farmer, and (it seems) violinist, is executed with ease by Dick Michel. It's a pity that he was not choreographed and directed as the pivotal character he is meant to be. John Nichols, who plays Benjamin Franklin, is a serious problem, though — his makeup is hideous; he is thin; and he shows no evidence of either having gout or being 78 years old.

The show has only two parts for women — Abigail Adams and Martha Jefferson. Abigail needs to be quick-witted and intelligent, not the dullard that Mary McDonald, the script, and the funeral orchestra underscore conjure up. Gayle Ehrenhalt would bring Martha to perfection if only the Southern accent was dropped and she sang a little more forcefully; yet I doubt that the original Martha Jefferson was as charming.

Jeff Schwartz, as John Dickinson, gives the best performance of his MIT career. His voice carries in Kresge better than any of the rest of the cast's, and he

is blustery enough to steal the show. Casting Mark Morris as Edward Rutledge was probably the best thing Carol Livingstone did for the production; his solo near the end of the show gives the audience a chance to see a truly professional actor.

On the other hand, one feels that Erland van Lidth de Jeude was miscast as Richard Henry Lee, if only for the fact that he should be singing opera professionally someplace far away from MIT. And Bill Smith, who has proven his acting competence in other productions, should have been given a larger part — one more suited to his talents than that of James Wilson, the delegate from Pennsylvania who almost prevents Independence.

The set for the production was designed by Ms. Livingstone before she became director. It is not only ideally suited to her blocking, it is one of the best executed sets that the MTG has built. The lighting, designed and executed by Robert Resnick, is imaginative and utilizes a moving spot, something the Guild has not recently done. The directing is competent; Ms. Livingstone seems to have more talent as a director than as an actress.

The show as a whole has two major flaws — the choreography and the orchestra. The problem of the choreography does not lie with Janet Howe, or with the meagre dancing talent she has available, but with the music and the story itself. The plot has few places for major dancing scenes, and even those are not given the treatment they deserve.

The pit orchestra, under the management of Debra Deutsch, is one of the best in a long time. It is the fault of the music director, Eric Ziering, that the orchestra does not hold together in many places, and that some of the songs (notably the Adams' duets) sound like a requiem. Ziering is a freshman, and he has a lot to learn. However, 1776 is providing him with the experience he needs to develop his directorial talent and hopefully correct his poor technique.

1776 at MIT is one of the best productions to be seen in recent years. It is a good, college quality show that is worth seeing. It is not as good as it could have been, but it points the way for future MTG musicals.



Emmanuelle (Sylvia Kristel) and Bee (Marika Green)

Emmanuelle emancipates eroticism

by Gwen Ivy

In an attempt to prod the viewer across a sexual frontier, *Emmanuelle* explores the antithesis of social convention. Presenting a series of extreme and possible shocking episodes, the movie hopes to counterbalance the sexual inhibitions so deeply ingrained in most of us. The episodes cover a spectrum of erotic encounters: from spontaneous to calculated, from tender to violent, from selective to indiscriminate, from private to public, and from heterosexual to homosexual. The film aspires to demonstrate that a person may become capable of attaining conscious sexuality without guilt by confronting these extreme forms of eroticism uninhibitedly.

In a subculture of French diplomats stationed in Thailand (in the larger context of a hypothetical Thai society), Emmanuelle, newly arrived from Paris,

sets out on what is at first only a random exploration of sensuality. She is influenced in this by her husband Jean, who believes "jealousy is a thing of the past," and who tells her she's free. Several of the French women also influence her; for example, one friend comments "Our only enemy here is boredom; we ward it off by making love." This friend soon introduces Emmanuelle to homosexual pleasures. Thus the scene is set for Emmanuelle's experience of a new sexual morality.

A sage of this new morality is an older man named Mario. Emmanuelle becomes apprenticed to him at the urging of her husband and friends. The goal of Mario's teaching is not merely eroticism, which he defines as "an art which helps to harmonize the soul," but rather to go further than eroticism — to "pass through the physical to get to the other." The "other" is never clearly defined, but Mario prescribes some first steps to get there. We must abolish "the law of couples, the fear of conscience, conformity, taboos, turning away from life, and lies. We must make love without restraints," even to the extent of being indiscriminate in the choice of one's partner. "We must eliminate subterfuge to the profit of lucidity." His teaching is graphically illustrated to a musical accompaniment characteristic of many tripe-X films; this choice of music unfortunately somewhat vitiates the film's philosophical impact.

There are hints in the film of an awareness that it's sexual position is so extreme as to be anathema to most viewers. For example, during an intensely antagonistic scene of sexual relations, the camera focuses on an open magazine which reads "Help is on the way." In another scene, at a cocktail party, a woman snaps at Mario "You're disgusting? all you talk about is screwing!" Ironically, although this is true on a superficial level, we soon find that Mario is much more concerned with a state of mind than merely the actions of the body. Thus, even though the film may push sexual behavior to its limits, using sex to challenge conventional morality in much the same way that *A Clockwork Orange*, for example, used violence to challenge behavioral conditioning.

Although *Emmanuelle* at times appears to be a male sex fantasy, exposing female nudes right and left with barely a glimpse of the male torso, it is nevertheless beautifully photographed and is a welcome attack on common sexual attitudes. At the Charles Cinema and the Circle Theatre.

Boston Ballet balanced

by Stephen Owades

The Boston Ballet presented a varied and interesting evening of dance at the Music Hall on Thursday evening, March 13. The most recent version of Shostakovich's music for *Hamlet* received its American premiere with choreography by the Boston Ballet's Lorenzo Monreal, and the program also included Balanchine's setting of Bizet's *Symphony in C* and *The Abyss*, with music by Marga Richter and choreography by Stuart Hodess.

Balanchine's *Symphony in C* requires, above all, perfect ensemble from the *corps de ballet*. This kind of thing has long been reputed to be a weak point of the Boston Ballet, but though Balanchine's own New York City Ballet has more ease and more nearly flawless unanimity, the Bostonians were by no means inadequate.

The synopsis of *The Abyss* printed in the program is as follows: "Alone together in the sunlight of late afternoon, a very young couple becomes lost and encounters strangers. Then fear, violence, madness . . . the abyss." Not exactly a promising beginning, and indeed the rape/mugging did not make for effective dance. The aggressively modern score, relying heavily on thumping percussion during the attack sequences, was unimaginative and annoying.

Hamlet was the undeniable high point of the program. It is difficult to convey a

taut, dramatic plot in dance without sacrificing balletic values, and it is a great tribute to the music, the choreography, and the dancing that neither story nor dance was in a subordinate position. Woytek Lowski's subtle evocation of Hamlet's emotional conflicts was absolutely magnificent, and Deirdre Myles captured the incorporeal essence of Ophelia perfectly. The choreographer, Lorenzo Monreal, took the role of Claudius, investing the King with suitable pomposity, and Elaine Bauer conveyed Gertrude's inner turmoil effectively. To all concerned, a resounding bravo—may this *Hamlet* soon be repeated for those unlucky enough to have missed it in March!

The final series of the Boston Ballet's current season will take place on April 10-13 at the Music Hall (Thursday through Saturday evenings at 8 and Sunday matinee at 2:30). The programs for the series will include the world premiere of Agnes de Mille's *Summer*; *The Road of the Phoebe Snow*, which uses jazz music by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn; Balanchine's *Serenade*; two *Pas de Deux*; and the children's ballet *Raggedy Ann 'n Andy*—check the newspaper ads for individual programs. Discounts on the higher-priced tickets are available through the TCA office in the MIT Student Center. For further information, contact the Boston Ballet at 542-3945.