

Reluctant Aggie on his toes

Ballet is tight performance

By LYLE LOVETT
Battalion Reporter

"One-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three," the count resounded backstage.

Undoubtedly recognizing me from the lost look on my face, a man said, pointing to the auditorium seats, "see those guys out there? That's where you're supposed to be."

"One-two-three, one-two-three," the count continued.

Dancers filled the stage. They stretched, kicked, and pointed their toes to the cadence. I made my way across stage right, trying to pick a safe course through the thinly clad bodies.

When I reached my cohorts, two were in a trance-like state of attention watching the dancers' every movement and the other was asleep.

"One-two-three, one-two-three," I caught myself nodding to the count.

With every passing minute I found it harder to believe I had agreed to the assignment — to do a story on the Houston Ballet's performance in Rudder Auditorium Wednesday night.

"But Boss," I pleaded, "I don't know the first thing about ballet."

"That's okay," he said, "we don't want you to review the performance. We want you to be in it."

Waaaaait a minute. Be in the performance? On stage? In tights no less? Me? No way. Not this Aggie.

So there I was. The ballet troupe was in afternoon rehearsal and I waited with three unsuspecting souls to find out exactly what a "super" is supposed to do.

After rehearsal, the ballet master explained our function. It turned out that "super" — short for super-

numery — is ballet lingo for extra. We were, he said to be palace guards and would have to do nothing more than stand still during the prologue and Act III, except for an exit during the prologue. Simple. I felt a lump in my throat. We were led backstage to try on costumes. There was no turning back.

A young man with a limp showed us to the men's dressing room. He said he was recovering from knee surgery to correct an injury received dancing two months ago.

Nobody told me it would be dangerous.

He pointed to some brown tights on a table.

Experiencing life is wearing a pair of ballet tights. The label in mine read men's size C. After putting them on, I figure I'm a D or an E.

Nonetheless, I was experiencing something not everyone has the opportunity to experience. I was actually backstage in the dressing room of a professional ballet company. Standing there in my tights, I tried to suppress feeling self-conscious and began to look around.

There were 15 or 20 dancers putting on make-up and costumes. But the atmosphere was not one of somber professionalism. It was more like the locker room from what I remember of high school track.

Jokes and insults from the company's younger members flew around the room and one fellow had a small radio-controlled Indy-style toy car that ran up and down the hall.

A voice over the intercom called, "ten minutes to places for the prologue of the Sleeping Beauty."

One dancer quipped, "And now the National Anthem."

There was limited laughter.

In place at the back of the stage, I waited for the overture that was to

signal the beginning of the ballet and began to mentally prepare for my part. The view was good. I could see all the dancers' backs. I wouldn't miss a step. I tapped a ballerina on the shoulder and asked her to demonstrate the proper stance of a guard. She laughed.

The stage was very dark. Dancers jumped and glided, doing last-minute warm-ups. They looked nervous. My hands began to sweat.

"Ready everybody, this is it," the intercom voice said.

My heart pounded. The music began and the curtain rose.

The first five minutes were a delight. I stood proud and still, imagining myself a guard at Buckingham Palace. The next five minutes weren't bad, but weren't as delightful. I quit thinking about the Buckingham guard and started thinking about my feet.

Along with the too-small tights, I'd been issued a pair of too-small shoes which began to cut off circulation to my toes. After what seemed to be an hour, the guards exited. Relief.

Act III was more of the same, only that time my feet succeeded in going completely numb.

The experience, however, was well worth the pain. With my new qualifications, who knows? I might even turn pro. My only regrets are that I didn't get to stand farther downstage and that I didn't get to see the ballet from out front. It must have been beautiful.



Guarding 'The Sleeping Beauty'

Battalion reporter Lyle Lovett was a "super" in the Houston Ballet Company's performance of "The Sleeping Beauty" Wednesday night. Lovett played a palace guard to get an inside view of the performance.

Battalion photo by Ed Cunniss

New med center may open in '82

The College of Medicine is planning to build a medical sciences building across from the College of Veterinary Medicine on Highway

The Medical school will house seven basic science departments. Each department will be provided space for administrative functions, as well as research and teaching space, White said.

The school will have an electron-microscopy suite, which eventually will house two electron microscopes for research.

White said architects are presently working on the preliminary design.

"We are hoping to have it completed and ready for students by fall, 1982," White said.

Most of the money for the project will be provided by the Permanent University Fund. All money for the project is provided through the University system, White said.

At the June meeting of the Board of Regents, \$155,000 was allotted for design planning of the building. The estimated total cost of the project is \$16 million.

The building will have 96,212 net square feet, said Mike White, facilities planner for the College of Medicine.

It will be smaller than most medical colleges in Texas. It is designed to accommodate a total of 200 medical students (per class) and 25-30 graduate students, White said.

White said there are 32 students in the College of Medicine

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