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Review/Dance

Focusing on Ice Skating's Choreographic Aspect

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

The affinity between ice skating and theatrical dancing came to the fore again in an unusually creative evening presented on Friday night by two Canadians, Gary Beacom and Gia Guddat. The program also featured new solos by John Curry, the former British Olympics champion.

The entire evening at the indoor Sky Rink, 450 West 33rd Street, was under the auspices of the Ice Theater of New York, a nonprofit skating company formed in 1984. Although the group's aim is establish a new repertory on ice, its presentations are not limited to its own members.

Among the performers were one of the group's founders, Moira North, and its artistic director, Rob McBrien. But other guests included the well-known American ice-dance team of Judy Blumberg and Michael Seibert, who offered a continuously changing beautiful embrace while skating to Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings."

The creative edge that marks Mr. Beacom's extraordinary performances — completely different from what one usually sees in skating — points to the direction in which Ice Theater can play a unique role. This is not commercial skating, and yet it has a ready audience, willing on this occasion to sit tightly packed atop bleachers and to jump to its feet for a lusty ovation at the end.

As a skater, the 28-year-old Mr. Beacom works against expectations.



John Curry performing in "Attila" with the Ice Theater of New York.

In place of the usual glamour of male skaters, he favors a casual, knowing scruffiness. Mr. Beacom's costumes may range from checked shirts and jeans to hepcat gear with slicked hair and dark glasses, but he remains the same basic anti-hero. A member in the audience called him skating's Jack Nicholson.

Much of this impression has to do with his personal skating style, which exploits both a low-slung weighted

shifting thrust that creates a hunched look and its opposite, an elongated body that seems devoid of cartilage. At times, Mr. Beacom seems to turn into Raggedy Andy, his legs dangling in boneless fashion upon the ice; at other times he is a piece of molasses constantly stretched into one twisted image after another.

At all times, he is interested in exploring movement. By his own account he has been inspired by the modern dancers Susanne Linke and Margie Gillis. Certainly, he owes little to any stylist but himself.

This writer first saw him and his partner, Gia Guddat, two years ago with the company directed by the British skaters Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean. The same solitariness Mr. Beacom conveyed in a solo then was seen now in the opening solo, "Between Steel and Ice," choreographed to Darcy Guddat's sound score, which was created to match the rhythm of footwork performed earlier by Mr. Beacom on videotape.

The remarkable aspect is that very few conventional skating moves are ever evident in his own choreography or the pieces choreographed with others. Mr. Beacom is interested in inventing new ways of moving on ice, and much of his impetus is propulsive: he runs, skips, jumps, walks and entangles himself in a knock-kneed knot, even doing so to bird sounds in "Alberta Biography," choreographed by Frank Nowosad. Most of the time, he is amazingly off balance.

There is always something askew in his world, and as pungent humor this perspective came cleverly into

play in "Don Quixote," using Minikus's music for the grand pas de deux in the ballet. Choreographed by Mr. Nowosad and the performers, the duet created images at odds with the ballet associations. Mr. Beacom is lanky and ironic, Ms. Guddat petite and exuberant. When she scooted ahead of her partner, he latched onto her until both skated in unison.

"Please Clarify; A Four Part Suite," in which Ms. Guddat (who also performed her own virtuosic rock-music solo, "Let It Go.") passed through Mr. Beacom's life as a hipster (hurt on the inside, cool on the outside), shows how experimental work transcends all media. The jazz music was by Bob Wilbur and Kenny Davern, the choreography by Mr. Nowosad and the skaters.

Mr. Curry remains his incandescent self. His solos, "Attila" and "Der Rosenkavalier," used operatic music by Verdi and Strauss with purity and simplicity. It is always a pleasure to see Mr. Curry's lyrical elegance.

Matthew Nash, a modern-dance choreographer, created an effective trio in "Dusk" that could be a gloss on Nijinsky's "Jeux." Ms. North and Nina Newby excluded Mr. McBrien from their picnic and their affections. The piece was sharp but tasteful, imaginatively if unexpectedly skated to one of Astor Piazzola's tangos. This experimental and enjoyable program was completed by Mr. McBrien's "There's a Somebody" with Ms. Newby, Ken Moir and Michael Tokar. The Ice Theater of New York is onto something, and it deserves greater support.