

National ballet still has a long way to go

THE National Ballet Company made its debut of the season at the Rudaki Hall on Tuesday night and received a very mixed reaction from a capacity audience. The programme, divided into two parts, consisted of three short sketches and one long ballet.

The occasion also provided an opportunity to see the Opera Orchestra's new conductor, Loris Tjeknavorian, at work for the first time.

Tjeknavorian seemed to have succeeded in knocking the orchestra into shape. He proved a fairly good conductor but there was nothing sparkling about his method and leadership. In other words, he proved right those who have all along believed that Tjeknavorian is a highly talented composer but not an outstanding conductor.

This is, of course, partly because the pieces Tjeknavorian was conducting, although difficult — especially in the case of Rimsky Korsakov's "Sheherazade" — were not particularly appealing to a man who is a creator rather than a performer of other people's work.

The first ballet "Les Sylphides" with Chopin's music was disastrous from every point of view. At no point did the dancers succeed in harmonizing their movements with the music. The solo dances and the pas de deux were much better than dances in which the whole ballet corps participated.

The company, despite its recent efforts aimed at improvement, still suffers greatly from the basic weakness of its corps de ballet. And here the women are far behind the men in the group. The grand waltz that concluded the piece was particularly unsatisfactory turning a highly romantic piece into a series of unintended farces.

The pas de deux from "Don Quixote" with Minkus' music was the best part of the whole programme. This was a real tour de force for the tiny ballerina Haydeh Changizian and her energetic and graceful partner Jamshid Saghabashi. Miss Changizian has succeeded in establishing herself as one of the brightest hopes of a company that somehow seems incapable of elevating its stand-



HIGHLIGHT OF THE EVENING — Haydeh Changizian and Jamshid Saghabashi doing a pas de deux from "Don Quixote."

ards. The warmth, humour and fiery elegance that the two dancers succeeded in bringing to life in the short piece provided all the salt and pepper that a generally tasteless evening had to offer.

The pas de quatre that followed reminded many people at the hall of the Lido. But even the ritual throwing of the provocative garters was not there. Anna Heaton's choreography seemed aimed at "a quick kill" as far as audience appeal was concerned. She seemed to have decided to make us lose our breath at the very first glance of the four mysterious ballerinas appearing against a sky-blue background.

But the experience turned out to be as cold as the embrace of a seal. This was unfortunate because the orchestra did rather well with Cesare Pugni's colourful, though superficial, music.

The supreme disappointment, however, was yet to come. It came with "Sheherazade," a work that, if examined carefully, is more suitable for pantomime rather than ballet. The fake orientalism and the contrived "mysteries" this inexplicably

popular work seeks to convey allow precious little scope for any individual dancer to come across. The success of any performance depends on the strength of the corps de ballet.

And this, precisely, was what our company could not offer. The sets, the costumes and the make-up also helped make the performance heavy, artificial and generally drab.

Even good dancers like Changizian, Amin Taati and Saghabashi did not succeed in doing their best.

Much had been expected of Tuesday night's performance in view of recent efforts by the company. No doubt all the people working for the company tried their best. But their best was still not good enough mainly due to faulty judgment in choosing the programme.

It would, perhaps, be better for the company to be content with performing short sketches that require only a few dancers for the time being. Most members of the corps de ballet are good at an amateur level. To make them undertake professional performances is to expose them to much criticism for which they are hardly responsible.

It might take us a number of years before we have a strong and professional corps de ballet capable of offering major works. We can wait and so should the company's leaders.

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