

# From A to Z, Lizenbery dances giftedly

By Anne Marie Welsh  
Arts Critic

Every student of dance history should be so lucky as to have Gregg Lizenbery around. The program of male solos he danced at San Diego State last night is both a living record and a homage to modern dance tradition, from trailblazer Ted

## Dance review

Shawn to today's Mark Morris.

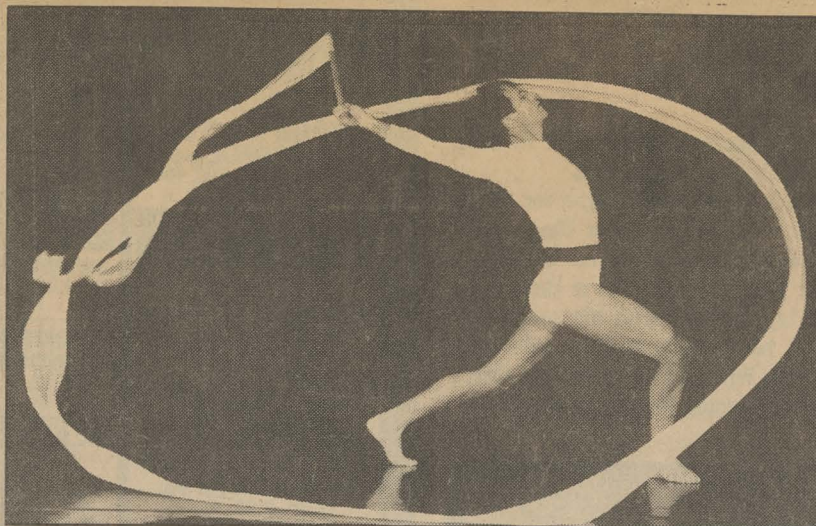
But because he is a dancer of special gifts and a wide stylistic range, Lizenbery's program has more than academic appeal.

Titled "Men Dancing," the show includes dances from eight choreographers and four branches of the modern dance family tree: the pietistic early modern work of Shawn, Barton Mumaw and Jose Limon; urban demi-character pieces by Daniel Nagrin and Donald McKayle; the motional expressionism of Murray Louis; and most effectively last night, two witty post-modern pieces, a spoof on Twyla Tharp's glib eclecticism and a series of three exhilarating solos choreographed by Morris.

Connecting all this — and providing the time for Lizenbery to make costume changes — was a running narrative ticking away the historical changes of 50 years. Actor Thom Benedict provided most of these bridges by appearing as a soldier called to various wars, a flower child refusing one of them, and finally a video-nut Yuppie.

Some of the connective tissue strained to hold together the muscle and bone of the program, though much of it was strong, helpful in establishing context, and entertaining enough.

The most striking thing about the choreography was the similarity of impulse in so much of this work, a kind of naive streak linking Shawn to someone as contemporary as Murray



Gregg Lizenbery in performance.

Louis. There were also surprises of a more positive sort, in Shawn's "I Walk With Thee My Lord," for instance. Here the male half of the Denishawn team seemed a far more inventive and subtle choreographer than in previous reconstructions of his work.

Nagrin's 1948 "Strange Hero," set to Stan Kenton boogie-woogie, extended Lizenbery into dramatic territory where, falling just short of caricature, he sketched the short life

and violent death of a Jimmy Cagney street-type.

Also dramatic, though more abstractly so, was McKayle's new "Twilight," a brief, impressionistic work passionately performed. Lizenbery seemed to rev himself up for an outstanding performance of this work, one rich in dynamic gradations, perhaps because the celebrated, vitally attractive McKayle was in the audience.

The spoof called "FAD" was too long by about a third, but that per-

haps was part of its point. This dance by Karl Schaffer contained all the loose-limbed clichés of dance in the era after the Judson Church rebellion of the '60s, including an inability to find the inevitable ending for the text, the discontinuous movement, the perpetual tasks, and the exhausted performer.

Lizenbery took just the right deadpan approach to the material.

The evening's most unexpected treat came in the Morris solo that closed the program. Set to traditional Middle Eastern music, "I Love You Dearly" is completely characteristic of the choreographer who has definitely inherited the modern dance mantle from such grandfather figures as Ted Shawn.

Without directly imitating Morris, Lizenbery managed to adopt both the audaciously low-key manner and the rubbery style of Morris himself in the performance. The infusion of song and folk dance feeling came like a sudden burst of sunlight on a gloomy day.

With such riches on hand, it may be ungenerous to ask for more. Still, the school of Martha Graham was not represented on this program, an oversight probably accounted for by Graham's notorious protection of her dances.

Still, choreographer Paul Taylor is the one modern true to her in his fashion. One of his solos would have been welcome, as well as something from Merce Cunningham and Erick Hawkins to round out the evening.

In a perfect world, all the great living choreographers would give their permissions, and Gregg Lizenbery would have the stamina to dance them all.