
The Joffrey Ballet: *Astarte* as Theatrical Gimmick, Trend Setter, and Work of Art

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The morning after the world premiere of *Astute*, Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* proclaimed the ballet a “milestone” and possibly the prototype for the theatre of tomorrow. His initial reaction to *Astarte*, coinciding with that of most critics, was mixed. While *Astarte* was obviously “pure theatre,” it seemed to most knowledgeable critics “pretty impure dance.” Audiences, however, were wildly enthusiastic and have remained so up to the present.

The creation of *Astarte* was a profoundly significant event for the Joffrey Ballet and for theatre in general. Until the ballet’s premiere in 1967, this group had been regarded as just another smallish, promising ballet company with perhaps more than its share of luck, both good and bad. *Astarte*, the first “psychedelic” ballet, established a reputation for the Joffrey Ballet as a company capitalizing on current trends; created a new, young, “with-it” audience for ballet; legitimized several avant-garde and popular culture devices by using them in an Establishment theatre and an Establishment art form; and, by its precedent, perhaps made possible the creation of multi-media and rock ballets and operas. In the nearly ten years of its existence, *Astarte* has passed from being a ballet of and about its time, through a period of datedness, to being a ballet of both its time and all time.

This paper summarizes critical opinion of *Astarte*, refuting the adverse criticism; assesses the influence which *Astarte* has had on ballet repertoire; and then attempts to predict its future as an enduring work of art.