

DANCE

Joni enjoys rousing debut

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CALGARY HERALD

Just how good is Alberta Ballet's new show? Well, let's just say Dancing Joni & Other Works was easily good enough Thursday to leave most of the opening night audience rockin' out into the night dazed, dazzled and near delirious with delight.

REVIEW

Alberta Ballet presents *Dancing Joni & Other Works* through

(Well, maybe not quite. But almost any way you look at it, it's a real stunner.) The evening



Grant Black, Calgary Herald

The Fiddle and the Drum, Alberta Ballet's collaboration with Joni Mitchell, opened Thursday at the Jubilee.

that concludes with a haunting cortege. But it was undoubtedly the premiere of *Dancing Joni* that most of Thursday's near-sellout crowd had braved the cold to see and hear.

To an emotional soundtrack of nine Mitchell songs (including two very af-

fecting new ones) about the darker side of life on Earth, Alberta Ballet artistic director Jean Grand-Maitre has fashioned mini-ballets that in their own way match Balanchine for sheer abundance of movement and rich inventiveness.

Mitchell's recurring video imagery

(of moving clouds, polar views of our world, a global view of Africa, military scenes, Busby Berkeley dancers, and so on), projected on the giant drum-like screen suspended mid-stage,

seems precisely attuned to her text and music.

The movement of the dancers, based on a neo-classical vocabulary inflected by styles ranging from macho athleticism (*Sex Kills*) to Broadway (*The Beat of Black Wings*) to hip hop and urban dance (*If*), is multi-layered, taking its cue sometimes from the pulse of the music, sometimes from the groove, but always from what is being sung — literally at times, though never for too long.

There's a kind of intense energy, alternately grim and bright, laid over the dark beat of this powerful unity of visual art, music and dance — and the dancers are awesome — that puts you in mind of someone fiddling while the world around them burns.

To top it all off, the encore was an energetic re-mix of the irrepressible *Big Yellow Taxi*, its famous refrain, "Don't it always seem to go/That you don't know what you've got/Till it's gone," not exactly applicable here — because in the case of *Dancing Joni*, we know exactly what we've got.

And we don't want ever to see her go.