

**FILM REVIEW / *Moment of Light* illuminates
the triumphs and the misery of a ballerina**

The paradox of Evelyn Hart

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Music and Dance Critic

STAGEHANDS mill about behind the drawn curtain, listening to the muffled tumult beyond. Suddenly a pale, spindly figure flashes through the curtain, as though propelled by the applause, and blurts out the news in fractured *franglais*: "*Il s'aime moi!*"

That scene, caught by a backstage camera, is one of the few moments of release in Gordon Reeve's new film *Moment of Light: The Dance of Evelyn Hart*. Reeve's film, which receives its Toronto premiere tonight, is a concise, unapologetic portrait of an artist for whom the only alternative to perfection is misery.

The film is not a biography of the usual cradle-to-stardom sort. There are no archival photos, no interviews with family and colleagues, no shots of the diva at home. Reeve's camera simply follows its subject through a few months of her life, recording the difficult rehearsals, the frequent tears, the periodic attempts by the hollow-eyed prima ballerina to explain her intense link to her art. The film that results is a pointed reminder that diva means goddess, and that goddesses have been known to demand human sacrifice.

Hart's intended sacrifice is herself, as she graphically tells us early in the film. Her ambition, she says, is to experience the dissolution of her flesh and sinews into the dance, leaving only the pure light of the creative imagination. The imagery is mystical, but also disturbingly descriptive of anorexia nervosa, the "ballet disease" of which Hart is a well-known victim.

The film also captures an important paradox of Hart's character, her peculiarly selfless form of self-absorption. In another early scene, she is shown being briefed by a ballet mistress on the wishes of choreographer Uwe Schultz, who is standing a few metres away. A voice-over tells us that Hart will no longer suffer Schultz to speak to her directly, on account of artistic differences. "Unless I can do things my way, it just doesn't work," she says later, as though complete personal autonomy were a given in a thoroughly collaborative art like ballet. It's a classic diva

attitude, yet Hart seems genuinely innocent of a diva's grandstanding egotism. She just wants the show to be perfect, wants it so single-mindedly that her desire seems almost impersonal.

Reeve shows Hart at work with major companies in Munich, Paris and Winnipeg, where she is the reigning star of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. His eye lingers perhaps too lovingly over the backstage grit and strain of ballet, and draws too near to bodies in performance to be a useful witness. Schultz's lovely Mozart *pas de deux*, for instance, gets chopped off at the knees. But Reeve has a strong sense of the image that reveals character, and packs a lot of information into an hour.

Moment of Light, a co-production with the NFB, Telefilm, Vision TV and the CanWest Global network, will be shown tonight at Toronto's John Spotton Cinema as part of the Moving Pictures festival of dance films, and at Winnipeg's Centennial Concert Hall on Oct. 29, during a gala fund-raising event for the RWB. TV distribution has yet to be sorted out, but given the high quality of the film and the celebrity of its subject a visit to the small box seems inevitable.

Also in the Moving Pictures festival is a cache of dance films from England, Germany, France and Canada. A few standouts among the handful I saw on video this week are *Codex*, a whimsical set of invented antiquities by Philippe Decouflé, to be screened tonight; and *Waterproof*, an underwater ballet by Daniel Larrieu (directed by Jean-Louis Le Taccon) that is as much about the refraction of light as it is about the disposition of the body (tomorrow, at John Spotton Cinema). The festival also features two films by DV8, a much-talked-about British company known for a form of violently erotic dance theatre that recalls the work of Jean Genet and Kenneth Anger. They'll be screened tomorrow at the JSC and the Rivoli.

Moving Pictures, a festival of dance on film and video, continues through tomorrow.