



CHOREOGRAPHER: Fernand Nault watches as Atlanta Ballet dancers practice one of his w

dance this piece right. I think
y have it."

Atlanta Ballet at the Atlanta
Civic Center, Ralph McGill Boule-
vard and Piedmont Avenue. 8 p.m.
Thursday-Saturday; 2 p.m. Sunday.

*Tickets: \$4-\$30.25 with discounts for
senior citizens and students. Avail-
able at Atlanta Ballet box office,
477 Peachtree Street (noon to 5
p.m. weekdays), SEATS, Turtle's
Record stores, Civic Center box of-*

*fice on performance
calling 892-3303. Tailg-
day, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. in
Civic Center parking
disc jockeys, contests
aways during the party*

Canadian choreographer brings varied works to Atlanta Ballet

■ **The Atlanta Ballet.** Salute to Fernand Nault Atlanta Civic Center.

By **Helen C. Smith**
Staff Writer

Fernand Nault, the 66-year-old resident choreographer of Montreal's Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, frolicked around like a kid Easter Sunday looking for gaily decorated eggs at the family home of Atlanta Ballet dancer Anne Finch.

"I'd never done that before," says Nault, with a twinkle of eternal youth in his eyes. "We don't have egg hunts in Canada. It was lots of fun."

On Easter 17 years ago, Nault's newly created dance to Stravinsky's "Symphony of Psalms" was given its most unusual and memorable performance. It was performed in street clothes at St. Joseph Oratorio, a large Catholic church high on Montreal's mountainside.

"The archbishop had seen it in a workshop and asked for it," says Nault, who was born in Montreal and brought up Catholic. "It was the first time a dance had ever been done in the church and it was considered very avant-garde to do so. But it belonged there since it is such a spiritual work. I almost feel insulted when there is applause."

Now Nault is in Atlanta to bring "Psalms" to the Atlanta Ballet dancers, who will perform it and Nault's "La Fille Mal Gardee" Thursday through Saturday. The Atlanta Ballet Orchestra, under the baton of John Naskiewicz, will accompany both ballets. A 160-voice choir composed of singers from Georgia State and University of Georgia choruses will play the "Symphony of Psalms," composed by Igor Stravinsky in 1930 and dedicated to "the glory of God and the Boston Symphony on its 50th anniversary." Nault, inspired by the music and its message, created a dance to the symphonic work in 1969.

The spirituality of the work may surprise Atlanta dance audiences, who know Nault best for his "Carmina Burana," the spectacularly earthy dance the Atlanta Ballet performed two years in a row several seasons past. The company will reprise it next year. Some will also remember the Atlanta Ballet's 1980 production of Nault's version of "La Fille Mal Gardee," a delightful comic dance about an unchaperoned French peasant lass with mischief on her mind.

But then, Nault is a man of many dimensions. Little escapes his interest.

Dealing with mischief comes easily to the French Canadian, whose eyes twinkle a lot, even when his face looks solemn. He tells funny stories, makes little jokes — his English sprinkled with French bon mots — as he clucks around the dancers like a protective mother hen.

"A sense of humor is important," says Nault. "But I always get what I want."

What he wants is that each of his works, different as they are, be

done meticulously in the style he wishes. No one seems to mind his perfectionist streak. The Atlanta Ballet women, who apparently adore him, plant lots of kisses on his cheeks, and the men joke around with him with ease.

"I admire Fernand tremendously and hold a lot of respect for his work," says the ballet's artistic director, Robert Barnett, about his friend and colleague of many years.

Nault has choreographed more than 50 works and performed for 20 years (1944-1964) with New York's American Ballet Theatre (ABT), dancing works by the greatest choreographers with the creme de la creme of dancers. Some of that time, Barnett was dancing with George Balanchine's New York City Ballet. They were — and still are — the two most prestigious ballet companies in the country.

When Barnett decided to do an all-Nault program, he specifically asked for "Psalms" in order to show off his friend's "great versatility and constant experimentation."

The contrasts are indeed extreme. The ribaldness of "Carmina," the fluffiness, even silliness, of "Fille," the spirituality of "Psalms" attest to that.

"They're worlds apart," says Nault of the two works on this week's program. "'Fille' is light and frothy. 'Psalms' is very spiritual, and even though it has a full chorus, audiences shouldn't expect another 'Carmina.' It's quite the reverse of that. In 'Psalms,' everything is simple and as bare as possible. Twelve stools for the dancers, tights for the men, unitards for the women, that's all — except the great music and the sculptural movement of the dancers that looks so simple but is very difficult."

Not only has Nault been friends with Barnett for years — since their respective dancing careers in New York were in full flower — but he knows other principals in the company well. Both prima ballerina Maniya Barredo and Mannie Rowe, the Atlanta Ballet's ballet master, were once dancers with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. Nault doted on both, casting them in many of his dances.

Of Ms. Barredo he says: "She's one of the greatest 'Filles' of all; she tops Alicia Alonso [Cuba's prima ballerina assoluta, with whom Nault danced at ABT] and everyone else I can think of." Nault pauses, and then to make sure his point is taken, adds: "That's a big compliment."

A great "Fille" is "petite, mischievous, pouty, playful, with incredible technique," and, according to Nault, Ms. Barredo has it all.

Nault is also high on Rowe, whom he chose to dance the title role in his dance version of the rock opera "Tommy," which played Canada, the United States and Europe on a successful tour in the early '70s. He also cast him as the lead male soloist in the original version of "Symphony of Psalms," which was videotaped for Canadian television.

This time around, Rowe, who is

no longer dancing, is tutoring the two Atlanta Ballet dancers who will alternate the role: Edmund LaFosse and Thomas Shoemaker.

"It's very exciting to be passing it on and see them do some things I wish I had done — a certain look, for instance," says Rowe.

As Nault sees it, "Psalms" represents a projection of faith through the imagined faith of an anonymous congregation of a dozen people and one male soloist who has achieved a higher level of grace. The dance mirrors Stravinsky's intent, which, according to conductor Naskiewicz, was "not so much to express his own faith, as the religiosity of others."

Says Nault: "The 12 dancers on the stools are *not* the apostles. They're just ordinary folks. The lone man is quite removed from them, much like a man standing in the back of the church and saying humbly 'I'm not worthy of being here.' But in reality, he is more sensitive to God, more uplifted, more enlightened than the others. I tell the dancers you have to have belief in something — belief in man, belief in God, belief in *something*, in order