

Journey to the interior

By VALERIE LAWSON

"If you don't like yourself, it's difficult to share yourself with the public," said Jir Kylian on Friday. The words, directed at performers, struck a nerve with the audience in the Capitol Theatre who attended an hour-long forum with the choreographer.

Many were dancers, former dancers or teachers, who questioned Kylian following an open interview with ABC Radio's Arts Today presenter, Nell Schofield. Kylian was both witty and wise about the art and mechanics of dance.

"Your body has 274 hinges," he said. (It sounded so precise no one challenged him.) "We are made out of hinges" so we can move in "limitless" ways.

And the use of voice in his works? "Vocal music is a primary artistic expression of a human being." He liked the cello, too, as it is "an abstraction of the human voice." And the shape looked like a human body.

What was the role of an artistic director? "Making a community, making people stick together. There is no school for choreographers. So they are basically all amateurs. Artistic directors are even more so. They must be diplomats, politicians, psychiatrists, and have great anatomical knowledge."

And what about the emphasis on youth, sexiness and dance? Kylian, who formed a company for dancers over 40, recalled Margot Fonteyn's words on Romeo and Juliet.

The ballerina said she couldn't dance Juliet until she was older and could then understand the depth of that love.

"Plus," said Kylian, "I think older people can be very sexy."

It was George Balanchine who started the craze for youth in ballet. When dancers turned 22, "he was looking for 17 year olds."

What kind of dancers did Kylian like? "Blue-eyed blondes low flying angels," he joked. But, seriously, "people with integrity and musicality who are not afraid of creativity."

His own choreography: "80 to 90 per cent of it is duets." The inspiration was the "electricity" between the two dancers which came in rehearsal. "I am not very good at sitting at home thinking up ideas. Choreography is more painful for me as I get older. You have to find it from the interior, from relationships."