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Spoletto **Overview**

By Robert Jones

Ballet, 'Renard' Rank Among Festival's Finest

Saturday was a grand day for the festival: so many performances no one person could possibly catch them all, two emphatic triumphs, one failure, one super-scandal that probably will have Charleston talking for years to come: (welcome to the JoAnne Akailitis/Ken Russell fan club, Eiko and Koma!).

Triumphs first. The Royal National Ballet of Spain and the David Gordon/Beni Montresor production of Stravinsky's "Renard" seem sure to stick in the memory for years to come. This being the festival's 10th Anniversary year, a fact that tempts one to reminisce, I daresay the Stravinsky and the Spaniards will go into my own memory book alongside such treasured events as, to name only three, the *Zulus* (1977), the premiere of Jiri Kylian's "Sinfonietta" (1978) and the Ballet Eddy Toussaint de Montreal last year.

Igor Stravinsky's "Renard" is, perhaps, not one of the major Stravinsky works, but after the loggy longeurs of "Lord Byron's Love Letter" that preceded it, it made the same kind of effect an ice-cold needle-spray makes after a day in the humid Charleston sun. The orchestra is small, aggressive, bristling with Stravinsky's spikiest rhythms and scored in a highly exotic way (a cymbalom is included in the orches-

tration).

The tale is a bit of froth about Renard, the legendary fox, and his adventures with various luckless fowl. The music is what counts, and in this case Mark Stringer drew enormous color, vitality and accuracy from the small Stravinskian band in the pit. The equally little group of singers — two tenors, two basses — sang with matching energy, acting up a storm as they did so (no small feat with such complicated music and action).

If it weren't for Mr. Stringer's performance in the pit, I'd say the real heroes of "Renard" are director David Gordon, designer Beni Montresor and lighting designer Marie Barrett. Together they've stripped down the Dock Street stage to nothing but a white backdrop, then filled the entire stage space with immense balloons, all in eye-aching primary colors, made to suggest hugely swollen animals. The white-clad performers hoist these wondrous critters aloft on poles, making them behave like animated dirigibles from some particularly fabulous planet. Meanwhile, lights turn the sky and the animals into all sorts of vivid colors that somehow seem to illuminate Stravinsky's music as never before. It's dazzling to see, dazzling to hear.