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WILLIAM CHAPPELL

*Ker-Seymer-London*

Best Wishes  
to Rudolph Hayes  
from William Chappell  
Dec. 1948.



STUDIES IN  
BALLET

BY  
WILLIAM  
CHAPPELL

JOHN LEHMANN-LONDON

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*“The dance is more than a mere symbol, however great the significance it as such possesses. It is the dance, and the dance alone, which brings out in full measure all the essential and fundamental properties of the human organism; its delicacy and its strength, its intelligence and its skill, brain and body working together in the achievement of beauty through the very substance of the human animal. A Shakespeare or an Einstein, and many an athlete, may overwhelm us by some special prodigious manifestation of strength in art or intellect. But here alone we may properly exclaim: What a miracle is Man! The dance is the final justification of Man, and the justification of whatever Power it was that made Man.”*

*The Significance of the Dance  
from “My Confessional”*

HAVELOCK ELLIS

For  
My Mother

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WILLIAM CHAPPELL

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## STUDIES IN BALLET

effect was the same whether we had been undergraduates, business men, coal miners, shopkeepers, leisured people or ballet-dancers. The past, and one's own personal past in particular, had become a legend in the mind.

In the same way the news from the ballet world that reached me periodically had taken on a legendary quality.

The descriptions of the fresh triumphs of the ballet company with which I had worked until the outbreak of war; the reports of the clamouring, crowding audiences; the louder, longer applause. The bigger ballets . . . the better ballets?

Even stranger, far more unreal, shining with that particular gloss that only America gives to the theatre, was the information on the ballet from the new world.

From the new world, but not in new terms, the articles, the captions beneath the photographs, describing in rhapsodical print the successes of dancers and choreographers with whom I had worked in pre-war days, and who now, happily removed from European chaos, were flung skywards on the wind raised by a shriek of adulation, even more piercing and hysterical than the note which had so often shocked my ears in England. These articles had the familiar nonsensical ring, but the pretentious clichés seemed to have less meaning than ever. It struck me as fabulous; not so much the extremes of success, as the mere fact that it was going on at all.

But it was true. Ballet was booming.

I regarded the signs and portents of that boom thoughtfully, not altogether happily. It would set me pondering as I lowered my tent flap against the heat of midday, and lying naked and sweating on my rickety camp bed, lit by a sultry amber glow of sun beating through the canvas, I laid down a book, or picked up an out-of-date magazine, and turning the pages noticed here a beautiful foot, there a perfect arabesque; somewhere else a photograph that made it a pity false eyelashes were still obtainable.

Here were dancing Gods and Goddesses. Strip off the lashes, the elongated eye shading, the glittering silken costumes, and what would remain? Dancing charladies and dancing bank clerks?

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“What,” I said to myself, “is the essence of dancing? I do not find it, not as I know it, or at best only very occasionally, in these books and periodicals. What is the distillation of the Ballet? A perfume so fleeting and delicate, yet so pervasive that it can stir the most unexpected people to frenzy. Why should it inspire its worshippers with such fanaticism? And above all fill them with this strange conviction of a positively divine right to expound their views, with no first hand experience and little knowledge of this most specialized of all theatrical arts?”

Amongst this ever growing library of books on the art of dancing I could think of only a handful that had value or permanence, and these were produced either by careful research workers, or by those really entitled to write with authority as dancers, choreographers and maîtres de ballet.

There were Noverre and Carlo Blasis; Karsavina’s enchanting *Theatre Street*, and the dry logical-statistical and inaptly titled *Invitation to the Ballet*, by Ninette de Valois. Certain, but only certain, scholarly works by Cyril Beaumont (the interest in these was mostly factual), and the simplest, most satisfying, of Arnold Haskell’s many books, the *Pelican Ballet*. It seemed a sadly small proportion of all that was published.

There were also the numerous beautifully-produced pictorial volumes, whose value as ballet bibliography it was difficult to assess. Exquisite, carefully chosen, the photographic illustrations might eventually have historical interest, but while they presented a picture more realistic than the nineteenth ballet prints, they failed in some way to evoke the atmosphere of the modern ballet world as convincingly as the engravings of unreal sylphs, with feet as narrow and pointed as a pin, reproduced the spirit of the dancing of their period. Perhaps, because the modern ballet covered too wide and varied a field for it to be possible to present a complete picture of its activities.

Far removed from the ballet world, I felt I now had a clearer view of its whole territory, and inspired by my dissatisfaction with what I had read and seen, I began to consider the possibility

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of making some personal (let me stress the adjective) observations on dancing and dancers.

I went so far as to make notes, but before I first put pencil to scraps of paper I paused to regard the project with suitable solemnity.

“If,” I told myself, “you intend to write about the ballet, and if your attitude towards the bulk of the literature of dancing is so Olympian, it is essential that you list your qualifications.”

Soberly I added up any pertinent reasons I might have for raising my voice or flourishing my pen.

1. I had been a dancer myself.
2. I had worked with English and Russian companies.
3. I had suffered in ballet class under Rambert, de Valois, Nijinska and Sergueef.
4. I had created roles in ballet and performed in most of the classics.
5. I had worked in the same corps de ballet with Lichine, Shabelevsky, Jasinsky, Verchinina and Ashton.
6. I had partnered Karsavina, Lopokova, Markova, Fontcyn, Argyle, May and Brae.
7. I had a wide and practical knowledge of ballet design and costume.
8. I knew dancers as people as well as performers.

So far, so good.

I made another list, even more soberly, of the reasons against my producing so much as a word.

1. I was just as liable to personal prejudice as those against whom I had mentally fulminated.
2. I was vague about dates and prone to inaccuracy.
3. Ballet had made its strongest impression on me during my formative years, the late 1920's and the early 1930's. My inclination in favour of the creations and influence of that period might be over-emphasized.



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4. I had far too many hates.
5. Too much had already been written about the ballet anyway.

Checking my list I was quick to find excuses that overrode the reasons against my speaking.

Firstly, my personal prejudices. A book from an ex-dancer about dancing must (I told myself) be personal if it were to have any flavour. Then there was my vagueness about dates and my liability to inaccuracy. Unless I wished to act as ballet historian, and I had no desire or intention of doing so, these faults had little importance.

My leaning towards the late and post-Diaghilev period must have some interest for those who never saw the creations of that time.

And what were my many hates?

Pretentiousness. Technique without artistry. Affected symbolism. These first three dislikes of mine seemed to have justification.

So I had an answer sufficient if not fully satisfactory to each of my reasons against writing, until I reached the last on the list.

Too much had already been written. This was a fact so overwhelming that for a moment everything in favour faded away behind it. Could I possibly add to the torrent of useless print of which I had been mentally complaining?

I should not, possibly I could not, be instructive or comprehensive. I wished—and perhaps I should be attempting the impossible—to picture in words that essence, the intangibility of which I had realized and wondered at, the subtle atmosphere of the ballet world I had found so ignored in its literature. That blend of suburbia and arcady; of school room and green room; of limited horizon and infinite distance.

I felt also a desire to peel off the disguising surface of that over-worked commodity, glamour, which has been laid in dripping, sticky masses over the ballet by its indiscriminating adherents

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and to show that beneath that glutinous covering there is a bone structure plain, well-built, and pleasing in itself. I wanted to describe its infirmities and its visions; some of its needs, and to show, even if incompletely, what dancing is, and what it is to be a dancer.

### II

There once existed in a dream world, a female character, brought into being with many others, by the fertile and capricious imaginations of Frederick Ashton and Robert Helpmann, during the pre-war days of the Sadler's Wells Ballet Company.

This woman—one of a crowd of semi-solid ghosts, who, in those far off lotus-eating days, inhabited our private world, each being endowed with the detailed characteristics appertaining to real people, having names, habits, ways of dressing, and ideas of taste all their own—this particular woman, a Mrs. Beesley, lived, if I remember rightly, in Birmingham, and was a ballet fan of the most ardent variety, who thought nothing of paying a special visit to London for every new production. She had a predilection for a phenomenal form of technical monstrosity known as tap-on-the-points. She also cared deeply for *Swan Lake Act Two*.

Apart from her eulogies concerning these two widely differing forms of the balletic art, there was a certain monotony about the opinions she freely expressed to us at the stage door after the first night of a new work. She rarely, if ever, appeared to receive any satisfaction from the ballets she saw, and invariably preceded her criticisms with a phrase so personal to her that it had made us almost convinced of her existence. "H'm m-m-m," she would say, in the dry adenoidal tones with which Robert Helpmann had endowed her. "Seem to have seen it somewhere before."

That the foibles of this imaginary and eccentric character could have any bearing on the work of the contemporary writers on the ballet might appear a far-fetched idea; but, in possessing strong personal opinions, a destructive rather than a constructive attitude,

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and a tendency blithely to dismiss work that did not happen to appeal to her own taste, while she overpraised her pet dancers and choreographers, she bore a strange resemblance to many of the new team of writers on the ballet whom I found, on my return to England after the war, accepted as authoritative critics on this most specialised of the arts.

If one can place faith in the dictionary definitions of the word "critic", Mrs. Beesley had strong claims to be regarded as a perfect example.

"Critic," the dictionary says. "One who pronounces judgment on any thing or person (esp. a censurer or caviller)."

"Criticism," the dictionary continues. "The action of criticizing, or passing (esp. unfavourable) judgment upon the qualities of anything."

To fulfil these functions, most of our ballet critics in company with the estimable Mrs. Beesley, bend all their best endeavours.

There are, however, further definitions.

"Critic. One skilled in literary or artistic criticism."

"Criticism. The art of estimating the qualities and character of literary or artistic work."

Though I may hesitate to say that dramatic, literary, musical and art critics fail to measure up to these requirements, I am prepared to state categorically that ballet critics, taken as a group, fall lamentably short. To be "skilled" implies, at the very least, a working knowledge of the art under criticism, and, at the very most, a complete and practical understanding, joined to a life-long study and a practising intimacy.

Disraeli once said: "You know who the critics are? The men who have failed in literature and art." This somewhat sweeping statement at least suggests people who had attempted to penetrate the mysteries of the subject on which they were expressing their opinions. If I could feel that the popular lady novelists, the politically minded young women, the dramatic producers, and the rest of the enthusiastic writers and reporters who go to make up the new school of ballet criticism, had ever attempted to dance,

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or tackled choreography, even to the extent of failing at either of those exacting occupations, I would hold my peace. The fact of failing would be unimportant compared with the fact that they had tried, personally and physically, to master some of the intricacies of the art of ballet, an art of so special a nature, that only living and working in and with it can give the knowledge necessary to write of it with understanding.

A theoretical and bookish education in ballet is not enough. Nor, alas!—is a passionate enthusiasm. Were these attributes sufficient, every vociferous character in the gallery audience could be accepted as fully qualified to enter the critical field.

The audiences and the critics are, I am sure, devoted to the ballet, yet to listen to remarks overheard in the interval, or to read many of the notices of a ballet performance, one might often imagine that more pain than pleasure was being experienced; or is it merely a facet of the many sided British talent for gloomily enjoying intense mental or physical discomfort?

Literary critics are writers; they understand and practise, brilliantly, capably, or boringly, the art of the written word, and can therefore be fairly said, in greater or lesser degree, to be in a position to pass judgment on other writers.

The drama consists of the written and spoken word. Many dramatic critics have been playwrights themselves and there is, in addition, something of the actor hidden in practically every human being.

A musical critic is able to read a score, and has usually had a complete musical education. All this is very right and proper. One may cavil at their various opinions; one cannot cavil at their right to express them. But, can anyone of our ballet critics perform the simplest *entrechat*, hold a correctly placed *arabesque*, or perform with 'brio an *enchainement*, or any of the other technicalities of the dance, whose terms they so courageously scatter through their writings on the ballet? I doubt it; and doubting it, I can only regard with sadness and humiliation the fact that the majority of editors and publishers appear to consider the art of

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the ballet, which, in its best forms is an art of the highest nobility, a subject open to almost any writer of sensitivity and to many wholly devoid of it. A subject requiring no particular knowledge, no authentic background, only a fondness and an enthusiasm.

It is not enough to be fond of the ballet. I would go so far as to say I am no longer fond of the ballet. It is easier to be fond of it as a spectator than as a citizen of its circumscribed and highly individual world.

The worlds of art, music, and letters are vast and open to many and varied talents. The world of ballet is tiny—tiny and mysterious, and only its inhabitants can know it thoroughly.

I will listen with more interest to the opinions of the lowest member of the corps-de-ballet, than I will to the nicely chosen and erudite words of many established ballet critics, for I know that the young dancer has been, time and again, through the boredom and physical misery of classes and rehearsals; has known the exhilarating pleasures of a successful performance; and has been part of the gestation and creation of the work of living choreographers.

Knowing all this gives one a faint right to be as assertive and didactic as many writers on the ballet, but, knowing intimately and personally the life and the sensations of being a dancer, then one must try to avoid being didactic and assertive, merely describing, and sometimes attempting to analyse, the different aspects of dancing and dancers as carefully as lies in one's power. Under these circumstances, perhaps some form of truth can be arrived at.

In his exquisite book *Early One Morning* Walter de la Mare, speaking of books on childhood, says: "The only human being competent to reveal what any child is, is that child himself, but even he can only reveal what he is in part, and he cannot share his being."

I wish I possessed the grace, the wit and knowledge, to have thought of saying that about dancers, and books on dancers, for it is perfectly applicable.

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In conclusion, let me quote my favourite description of—can it be a ballet?—critic, from a dialogue in *The Club* by James Puckle.<sup>1</sup>

The Father speaks. “By a CRITIC, was originally understood, a good judge; but now with us, it signifies no more than an unmerciful fault finder; two stops above a fool, and a great many below a wise man. . . . The laws of civility oblige us to commend what, in reason, we cannot blame. Men should allow others excellencies, to preserve a modest opinion of their own. . . . It is the distemper of would-be-thought wits, with an envious curiosity to examine, censure, and vilify others works, as if they imagined it gave them an air of distinction and authority to regard them with an air of contempt. . . .”

I could wish, also, I had thought of that for myself.

<sup>1</sup> “The Club”. In a dialogue between father and son. London. Printed for the author, James Puckle, 1711.



# CHOREOGRAPHY

I

## THE CREATORS OF MOVEMENT

*“Dancing and building are the two primary and essential arts. The art of dancing stands at the source of all the arts that express themselves first in the human person. The art of building, or architecture is the beginning of all the arts that lie outside the person: and in the end they unite. Music, acting, poetry proceed in the one mighty stream; sculpture, painting, all the arts of design in the other. There is no primary art outside these two arts, for their origin is far earlier than man himself; and dancing came first.”*

HAVELOCK ELLIS, *The Dance of Life*

**T**HE PROFOUND AND ILLUMINATING PARAGRAPH from Havelock Ellis quoted above, might easily be a description of the art of choreography; and any person who reads and understands it, is on the way towards understanding the mysteries and complexities contained in the work of the great choreographers.

I should like to be able to creep inside the brain of a great choreographer. There, I know, I should find myself in the company of the muses, sitting close to one another murmuring their most wonderful secrets, for the choreographer is painter and sculptor, forming living frescoes, breathing statuary, with his dancers' bodies. He is musician, making melody with the rhythmic movements of his dancers' feet. He is designer and

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architect, inventing patterns and building shapes from human material. He is author, poet, and actor, telling stories and expressing the emotions of life through the medium of his dancers' limbs and faces.

Choreography at its best, is the most comprehensive of the theatrical arts, needing greater knowledge, taste, and sensitivity in its practitioners than any other form of creative work for the theatre.

The possession of the essential talents is only found in a limited number of the people who have produced ballets during this century. There are many highly gifted, and a quota of slickly efficient dance producers, but, if we are considering choreography, as an art, which it only becomes when seen in its highest forms, then we are restricted to considering the work of merely half a dozen people. Fokine, Massine, Nijinska, Balanchine, Ashton, and Antony Tudor. To these I would add De Valois and Helpmann were it not for the fact that they come finally and most completely under the heading of brilliant theatrical producers rather than authentic dance designers. They are both capable of exciting and imaginative theatrical effects but they lack the genuine plastic sense that stirs the emotions of an audience solely with the delight and originality of movement. Watching work by De Valois and Helpmann, I find I am stirred by the situations, or the combinations of characters, involved in the movement, rather than by the movement itself.

It is as continually incredible to me that any new shape can be formed with a human body, as that any new harmony of musical sounds can be conceived, yet, as each new work by a great choreographer makes its appearance, I am once more surprised, enchanted, even sometimes deeply moved on seeing an unexpected position of limbs, placing of feet, arms and head or method of travelling from one spot on the stage to another.

For the audience there are two main aspects of the choreography of a ballet, each different, each equally true. One is the deep, frieze-like pattern seen from the stalls and circle, where the lines



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and shapes made by the dancers are seen from a direct unforeshortened angle, and the interest lies in the beauty of the forms shown each as a separate design overlaying one another, and also in the dramatic action and the facial play. The second aspect is the view from above, from the gallery of the theatre, or as seen by the men who work in the flies above the stage. This view has an effect like the design of a mosaic laid out below one's feet and can be judged as pure flat pattern, for it reveals the actual crisscrossing and curving lines marked out on the floor by the movements of the dancers' feet as they travel about the stage.

Observed from this angle, the ballet becomes dehumanized and abstract, and makes apparent at once the ability of the choreographer in fully using the spaces of the stage.

To take a famous and obvious example, the decorative quality of the choreographic pattern of *Les Sylphides* can only be completely appreciated when viewed from above, when the balanced arrangement of its scheme of straight lines, curves, and circles crossing, meeting and flowing into one another becomes immediately apparent.

Should you be able to see a ballet firstly from above and secondly from an angle straight ahead of the line of sight you would be seeing it more or less as the choreographer worked it out, for the first view gives the pattern of the dance on the ground, the next, the intricate shapes of the positions and gestures that go to make up that dance.

Most choreographers have a rough idea (some a very complete one) of what amounts to a ground plan of the dances that go to form a ballet before they work out the actual steps. These ground plans are the foundation on which the architecture of a ballet is built, and they are an essential part of it. They may completely alter their shape during the progress of rehearsals, but they are always there, and their design is highly important, for however interesting the steps and positions invented for the dancers they must lose half their value if they are executed in the same formation throughout a ballet. It is only in a strictly classical ensemble



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such as the *Grands Pas des Fées* from the prologue of *The Sleeping Princess* that an almost unchanging ground plan is permissible.

Apart from the foundations of his dances the modern choreographer is above all interested in the movements purely as movements. Whatever his theme, whether it be a complicated scenario with many diverse characters, or an abstract ballet where the dancers represent only dancers, everything is finally subordinated to the choreographer's inventive capacity and pleasure in movement. His story, if story there be, will be told in the links between dances, initial gestures of mimeing, the meeting and parting of certain figures, a few explanatory poses, the position of heads and arms. The rest will be and should be dancing for dancing's sake, made up of movements that have arrived out of the fund of plastic imagery in the choreographer's mind, and that in themselves need have no particular bearing on the ballet's subject though the actual expression of them, the acting of them, and superimposed postures of arms and heads gives them the necessary meaning.

If a ballet bears a complex plot and the exigencies of a detailed story are too closely followed, it may cease to be a ballet, and become instead a mime play.

An involved story can, of course, be told in completely balletic terms, with steps founded on classical and national dances presented from the fresh view of the particular choreographer's imagination, as in Fokine's *Petrouchka* or Massine's *Three Cornered Hat*.

On the other hand in Helpmann's *Hamlet* the unfolding of the plot and the dramatic content are all important, with the result that this work, though it has compelling theatrical power, is in reality a mime drama and has been removed from the sphere of pure dancing to which true ballet belongs.

For me Balanchine and Ashton are both at their happiest with themes rather than with elaborate stories, and I would say the same for Mme Nijinska whose most fascinating and important work was based on slight subjects: *Les Biches*, *Le Train Bleu* and

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*Les Noces*. Fascinating in the originality and style of the movements, important in that the actual choreographic conception, the atmosphere of these ballets were prophetic of the trends choreography was to take much later. These inventions of Nijinska's are still truly contemporary, as contemporary as the work of Ashton, Balanchine, and sometimes Tudor is today. The world that the dance creators of the Twenties pictured is one conceived in tune with present day life, whatever the period and settings of their ballets. It is a world where people are evasive, deceptive, dual-minded, where everyone's gaze is oblique, making those moments when eyes occasionally meet almost alarming for fear of what those eyes may reveal. A world where movement is no longer direct and unconfusing, but has become entangled and elaborate, where life is frustrating, suspicious, escapist, where melancholy (though it is a romantic melancholy) drapes the scene and the characters, who mostly want something or somebody they may never possess.

Massine has a kinship with Fokine, and they both have a close link with the Ivanovs, the Petipas in that they seem to enjoy working out a story in terms of dancing, and can employ elaborate choreographic characterization.

Nijinska, too, has her erudite and scholarly side which produced monumental works such as the long, involved, and skilful reconstruction of a court ballet of the period of the Roi Soleil to the music of Bach. *Les Noces de Psyche et de L'Amour* which she created for the Ida Rubinstein company in Paris; but ballets of this type do not reveal the real Nijinska.

It is in the provocative atmosphere of *Les Biches*, the gay commentary on the Riviera beaches that she made in *Le Train Bleu*; the grave groupings of *Les Noces*; the delicate visions of *La Bien-Aimée*, and the lush romantic splendours of her second version of Ravel's *La Valse* that the style of this highly individual woman is shown at its best.

These creations, like the best work of Ashton, of Balanchine and Tudor are as truly representative and important to modern

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choreography, as the early Nijinsky, Fokine and Massine ballets are to the first glories of the Diaghilev era; *Lac des Cygnes* and *The Sleeping Princess* to the splendours of the Imperial Ballet, and *Giselle* and *La Sylphide* to the Romantic Revival.

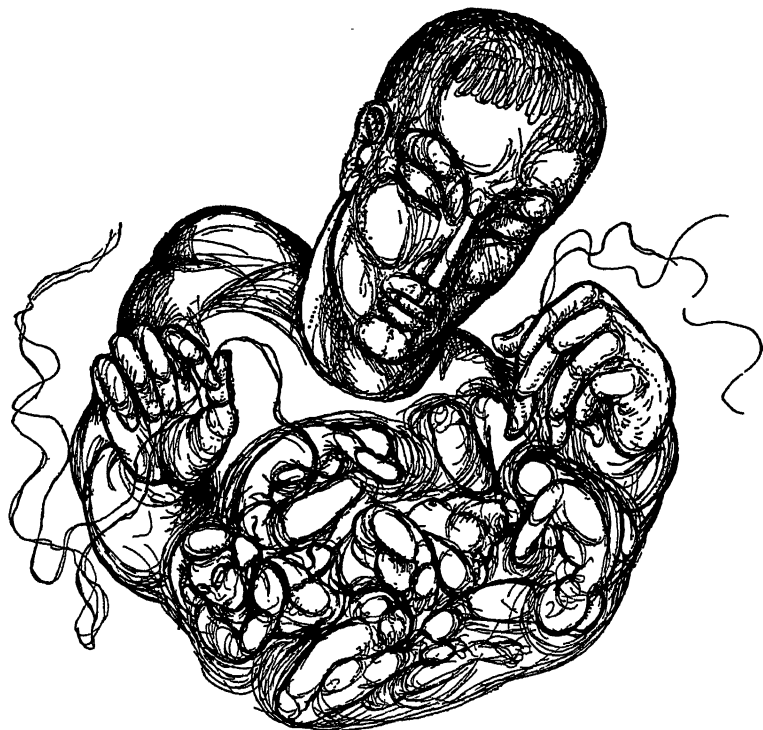
Nijinska, and after her Balanchine, more than any other choreographers of their day, have been responsible for the present school of dance designing.

The choreography by Georges Balanchine that was shown during an unsuccessful, but magnificently interesting, season at the Savoy Theatre in 1933 was much in advance of its time which no doubt accounted for the poor attendance. The present ballet public would have packed the theatre to see the same programme, for these ballets were absolutely expressive of the shape and character of the best work that is being done today.

I remember *Ania—Anna* to music of Kurt Weill, a ballet on the theme of dual personality in which Tilly Losch and Lotte Lenja mimed and spoke together the two characters that were the role of Anna. Next there was *Errante* the first ballet version of Schubert's *Wanderer*. This was a particularly lovely and disturbing work, with a decor by Tchelitchew of great simplicity, originality and distinction.

In both these ballets Balanchine produced Tilly Losch with wonderful skill, revealing to the greatest advantage a dancer who was not a classical dancer but merely a girl with a gift for fluid and expressive movement. Balanchine has always shown himself capable of adapting his work to other forms of theatre. In revue, music hall, musical comedy and the cinema he can suit perfectly and tastefully his medium and his material, without for one moment cheapening or losing his impeccable sense of style. This is a rare gift. The foreign atmosphere of the more commercial forms of entertainment usually seems to have a stultifying or vulgarizing effect on many of the best choreographers. There were two other enchanting examples of choreography by Balanchine in this same season of *Les Ballets* 1933. *Les Songses* with

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magnificent costumes by Derain, a ballet in which the child Tumanova appeared; and *Mozartiana* designed by Berard, and to me, still memorable for one entrance of Pearl Argyle borne high on the shoulders of the men, and appearing almost immortally beautiful, with a plume springing from her brow, and a cloud of black tulle faintly veiling her magical face.

In many of the most typical and individual works by Nijinska and Balanchine the subjects are of the slenderest description. Vague dreams, journeys, a ball, a house party, a peasant wedding. A waltz, a Riviera beach, aspirations. On such insubstantial pegs was hung a highly complicated drapery covered with unusual patterns. The effect made by these ballets had little to do with the telling of the story. Their spell grew from the projection of a

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mood, and the visual delight of the movement. They were dependent on dancing for their appeal, and therefore were examples of real choreography.

The work of these two master choreographers reveals a vast fertility of invention in movement, of which they have been continually prodigal. There is a more obvious classical foundation in the arrangements made by Mme Nijinska. Her work has more gravity than Balanchine's, but she has made many choreographic discoveries that have had a great influence, notably her use of dancers' arms and shoulders. Balanchine's overflowing wealth of ideas went to his dancers' feet; the intricacies and speed of some of his solo variations make one wonder how it is that a dancer can move in what appears to be sixteen directions at once and still finish in one place.

There is no doubt in my mind that from the work produced by these two great creative artists in the nineteen twenties and the early 'thirties the present school of choreography has grown. It would be not only unwise but arrogant for any creative person to deny those who have influenced their work. All art springs from other, older arts; and every artist has developed under the influence of a master, either as a pupil, or as a passionately admiring observer, transforming their work as they mature, by the impress of their own minds and personalities.

The major influences in present day ballet production are found in the work of the late Diaghilev period. They were Franco-Russian influences, more Parisian than Slav, and their pervasive effect no doubt accounts for the fact that in this country we have not yet produced a style of choreography that is genuinely British. De Valois has shown a native style in *The Rake's Progress* and *The Prospect Before Us*, although both of these works are more brilliant dramatic productions than pure dance designing. In *Job* the English tradition of the Masque, of Folk and Morris dancing are all apparent.

Among the younger ballet companies it is so far only the Americans who show signs of producing work truly typical of

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the country of its origin. *Fancy Free* in choreography, setting and performance was ideally suited to the dancers of the Ballet Theatre Company. As yet, the style of the old classical and romantic ballets sits a little uneasily on this group. Tradition in ballet takes a certain time to acquire if there is no old background already present in a country's theatrical history. With *Fancy Free*, *On Stage* and *Interplay* the American choreographers were forming their own traditions, ones that were personal to them; being completely and delightfully themselves they were in these productions truly successful, and one knew that these three ballets could only appear half as effective if performed by an English, French, or Russian company. Their other most impressive presentation, Antony Tudor's poignant *Pillar of Fire*, although on an American theme, revealed throughout his European upbringing and the feeling and atmosphere of a work of art from the old world.

In Europe one other school of dancing movement has had a certain affect on ballet choreography. This is the Central European style made famous by Laban, Wigman, Jooss, and a host of lesser performers and dance producers. Its effect is, of necessity, limited for it is a school of movement that finally leads to a dead end of repetition. Anything that dancers trained in this method are able to do, classically trained ballet dancers can not only do infinitely better, but having done so, they will have shown a mere fragment of the variety of movement of which they are capable. The reverse certainly does not apply, as can be seen when the Central European performer is asked to do something in the classic ballet tradition.

If we are producing an individual style of choreography in this country I think it will be found in the ballets of Frederick Ashton.

It is not necessarily a definitely national style, even though it shows itself as being part of our cultural background. The years of Ashton's South American childhood that still lie warmly in his blood, and his early training under Massine and Nijinska, his



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admiration, during his formative period, for the work of Balanchine, prevent him from revealing himself as an obvious Englishman. It is in the deep tenderness, the lyricism, the balletic clarity of his later productions; the emphasis he places on dancing as pure dancing; his appreciation of the rightness of the intense simplicity of Sophie Fedorovitch's designs for his ballets, that it is possible to see a genuine kinship with certain aspects of English culture, such as the cool sweeping prose of our classic writers and poets; the lines, severe, delicate and balanced, of our best architecture. He shows, in addition, a sense of humour not only perverse and subtle, also broad and outrageous as the comedy of the great English clowns.

Early in his career with ballets such as *Les Masques*, *Mephisto Waltz*, *La Peri* and *Foyer de Danse* he proved himself to be in direct succession to Nijinska and Balanchine. At the same time he revealed that he was also an individual with his springtime *Capriol Suite* and the evergreen *Façade*. It is some years now since the more obvious signs of his choreographic parentage—certain mannerisms of point work for his women artists—the use of arms and shoulders in all his dancers—vanished. His ancestry is still there and must not be denied.

Today his own touch, sure and inventive, is strong in everything he produces and his realization and understanding of the problems of the choreographer are complete.

He is a master of flowing movement, and it is flowing movement that he most dearly loves, basically classical in style, enriched by his peculiar gifts for making dancers appear even more oblivious and independent of the ground than usual. His work shows an aerial floating quality that is unlike any other choreographer. It is also strangely geometrical. I can only liken it to the flight of swallows; sleek shapes cutting curves and angles, twisting and turning in space. The further evolution of his style will be interesting to watch.

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### II

#### THEMES AND SCENARIOS

Harlequin might well be taken as a symbolic figure representing dancing, a figure with no humanity who only means movement.

Prankish, perverse and cruel; outside life; nimble and swift as a fly, his whole delight in leaps, pirouettes and twinkling beats, he is quite soulless. He recurs again and again in the ballet; an element of mischief and mockery outside yet dominating the action, causing havoc amongst the lives and relationships of the more simple realistic figures in the ballet world.

Imagine a ballet where all the characters were harlequins, a city of harlequins.

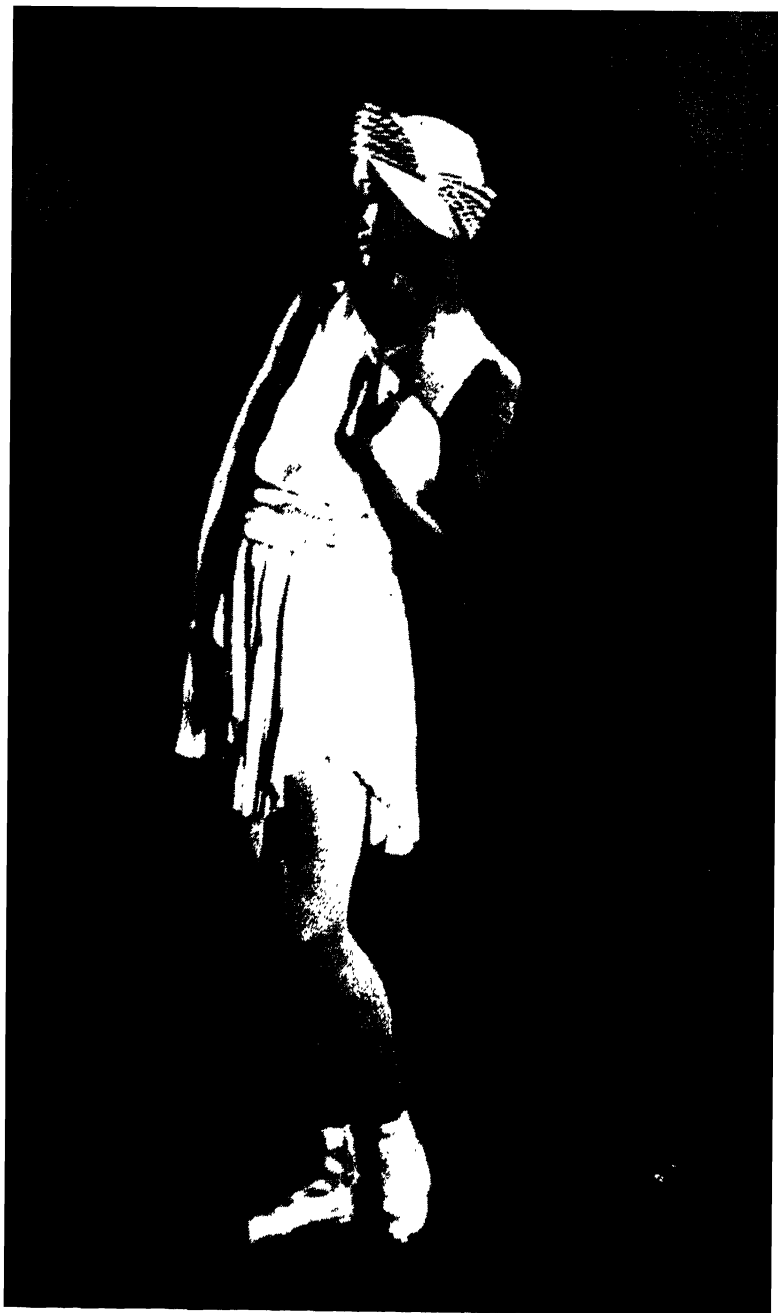
An architectural décor that is a mixture of Pisa, Lecci, and the district round about Waterloo Station; a vista of ruins, arches, gasworks, railway viaducts, tenements, and ancient baroque churches; the whole dominated by the leaning tower whose tilted galleries carry a continual traffic of the swift inhuman harlequin citizens. The town is full of narrow ways. High, heavy porches, intricate balconies and grim flat grey walls with small windows.

In the shops they sell wands, tinsel stars, plaster hams, and cakes of cardboard with elaborate icing of chalk.

Harlequins in thousands swarm over the streets, climb amongst the chimneys, fall from the eaves, gesticulate from doors and spring from windows.

They swing by the neck like gay gallows birds, suspended from the iron scrolls of the Art Nouveau lamp posts, sometimes kicking and jerking, or hanging in limp travesty of death, then suddenly the noose is slipped and harlequin bounds skywards across the roofs and chimneys.

They play mock solemn funerals with dead harlequin carried on a melancholy bier by a troop of Arlecchini. The grave



I. OLGA SPESSITSEWA

[Lipnitzki



2. ANNA PAVLOVA IN "THE SLEEPING BEAUTY"

28-11-21.  
G.H. ...  
S. ...



3a. IDZIKOWSKY  
IN "BLUE BIRD"

3b. JEAN BABILLÉE  
IN  
"LE JEUNE HOMME  
ET LA MORT"



[Duncan Melvin



4. NATHALIE PHILLIPART IN "LE JEUNE HOMME ET LA MORT" [*Duncan Melvin*]



5. MARGOT FONTEYN AS THE CREOLE GIRL IN "RIO GRANDE",  
HER FIRST ROLE AT SADLER'S WELLS

[Debenham



6. FREDERICK ASHTON IN "LES MASQUES"  
BALLET CLUB PRODUCTION





7. ROBERT HELPMANN AND WILLIAM CHAPPELL  
BETWEEN ACTS IN "FACADE"



7a. BRONISLAVA NIJINSKA  
*[Duncan Melvin]*

7b. IDA RUBINSTEIN COMPANY, MONTE  
CARLO, 1930, ARTHUR MAHONEY, WILLIAM  
CHAPPELL, FREDERICK ASHTON, IICHINE



7c. FREDERICK ASHTON, DUNCAN GRANT, LYDIA  
LOPOKOVA, WILLIAM CHAPPELL, 1933





8. MARGOT FONTEYN

[*Felix Fonteyn*]

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procession proceed to church with eyelids lowered beneath the masks to hide the restless gleam in the bright, empty eyes.

The service begins; the crowd standing still with bowed heads beneath the writhing sculptures of the roof, when up leaps the corpse and tumbles priest harlequin head over heels.

Confusion, turmoil, squeals, peals of high laughter, struggles and destruction. Corpse overturns the funeral canopy on to the mourners, and is away, skimming the darkened alleys of the city, tripping up the unwary, and being in turn tripped up by his brothers.

Dusk till dawn, and dawn till dusk, there is movement everywhere, like a continual darting of insects, for harlequin has no need of sleep.

Unfeeling and indestructible beneath his bright lozenged suit there are no bones, only springs of supple metal fastidiously joined together, the whole bound and padded with silk in careful semblance of a human body.

Within the round neat head is a mechanism of wheels as delicate as a finely made watch.

Whirr! Whirr! the wheels revolve and the hours chime out in a cackle of laughter; a quarter, the half and the hour itself. Day and night the city echoes with sound.

Apart from this metal laughter harlequin is dumb. He has no need of speech.

Harlequin is heartless and sexless. He has no need for Columbine.

. . . . .

There we have a subject for a ballet. More a theme than a story. How essential it is to the interest of an audience that a ballet should tell a story, I have no idea. Neither am I prepared to lay down any rules stressing (though I believe it myself) the importance of movement for movement's sake in choreography. As long as dancing takes precedence over miming and acting it is unimportant whether the plot is complex, the theme is slight, or

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there is no subject at all other than something indicated or suggested by the costumes and décor.

The value of a ballet scenario lies in the amount of atmosphere it helps to produce. Finally and above all else, the *raison d'être* of a ballet exists in its creator's ability to discover fascinating and unusual movements for his dancers. Whether a story is more valuable than a theme, or vice-versa, is entirely dependent on the personal view of the choreographer.

Some, like Massine or Fokine, can tell a story balletically with genius; others, like Ashton and Balanchine, find more freedom for their invention and fantasy if they are not tied down by the exigencies of an elaborate plot. In the ballet world today the fact that there is a dearth of suitable scenarios and subjects is proved by the periodical re-hashing of tired old stories already known as good dancing material, the Don Juans, the Cinderellas and the

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legends from the Greek Mythology. I have said that the value of a ballet scenario lies in the atmosphere it suggests. This atmosphere can also be termed poetic content. If this is necessary, and it is undeniably so, I would say that the solution to the problem of finding new and suitable subjects can be discovered in the writing of our modern poets. Poetic imagery is particularly fitted to the ballet; it is highly evocative, and has never been more so than in contemporary verse. The visual aspect of the musical handling of words in poetry has inspired choreographers many times in the past. In *L'Après Midi d'un Faune*, in Ashton's *Lady of Shalott*, *Lord of Burleigh*, his *Façade* and *Rio Grande*. Andrée Howard's charming version of *The Rape of the Lock* and the ravishing entrance of Sabrina and her train in Helpmann's choreographic version of *Comus*.

This last subject offers a perfect example of what entrancing pictures may be conjured up by the similes and rhythms of poetry. There is dancing interwoven in the words of the Sabrina poem . . . "The glassy cool translucent wave. . . ." ". . . twisted wreathes of lillies. . . ." "The loose train of her amber dropping hair. . . ." Consider the ". . . sliding chariot. . . Thick set with Agat and the azurn sheen. Of Turkis blew . . ." and the nymphs' ". . . printless feet. . . ."

The lines are rich with pictorial movement; and a choreographer translating it into terms of ballet must be highly insensitive if he is unable to produce something of beauty.

Ballet being one of the poetic forms of theatrical art, it offers itself to subjects of fantasy, fearfulness, strangeness and dreams. To find these subjects, choreographers could not do better than approach the poets to invent them, and to write the descriptive notes for the programmes. Even should a choreographer discover his own theme, he would still be well advised to ask a poet to put it into words, for a poet's imagination cannot fail to startle the choreographer's invention into a stranger more productive activity. The association of words with images brings to a creative mind a flood of suggestion.

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Turn to the work of Miss Edith Sitwell, where, on every page, examples of evocative writing lie thick as jewels in a royal crown. Subtly, yet with a glittering brilliance the cadences of this poet's verse, create a world one knows; or is it *the* world one knows transmuted through being observed by a poetic eye? In her pages, cities assume the terrible threatening shapes a city can take to the lonely stranger or the hopelessly lost. They are peopled by ghosts, skeletons and rag pickers. Alternatively they shine with gilded lattices and elaborate balconies. There are dark woods hiding in their shaded depths, kings in golden armour, lions, and stony figures, older than time. Across her landscapes the seasons break with the gem-like splendour, the ravishing detail of the illuminations in *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. Trees sparkle with emeralds, or foam into constellations of blossom. The overtones of pale gold, the splendid colours of her writing bring a radiance to the mind as one reads. Even her sombre passages hold the deep glitter of carved jet, or the dull fire in the heart of an uncut, unpolished jewel.

If it were possible to persuade a craftsman in words of such consummate power as Edith Sitwell to provide a ballet scenario it would not only be stimulating to the choreographer but also to the designer. Ordinary realism is of little use to the ballet. It is translated realism, oblique aspects of character, suggestions not exact statements of life that are needed. Each of these is most immediately produced by the symbols and the images of poets.

One wonders if the bold plots of the Shakespearean plays would have possessed their attraction for choreographers had they not been written in some of the greatest poetry the world will ever know. Would Romeo and Juliet represent so perfect an embodiment of young ecstasy if they were bereft of the language that shapes their sweet passionate speeches?

Enchantment lies in poets' words and enchantment is what the ballet seeks in the subjects for its productions. It must be a subtle magic and one that is not over complicated. Fairy tales like *The Little Mermaid* of Hans Andersen are cut to measure for the

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ballet. On to the age-old and always satisfactory story of someone beautiful and touching who suffers and dies for love we have the ideally choreographic theme of the feet that danced though every step was as though it were taken on sharp knives. The story has few and definite characters. The *Mermaid* and her sisters; the Prince, his betrothed and their followers. Too much detail, too many confusing characters do not suit the modern choreographer's approach. *The Quest*, Ashton's ballet on the story of Una and the Red Cross Knight from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, appeared on paper in Doris Langley Moore's skilful adaptation genuinely suitable subject for a ballet, romantic, fantastic, dramatic, and pictorial. I think it might have been highly effective in the hands of an Ivanov or a Petipa. Ashton became lost in the intricacies of the plot; its convolutions and complications proved confusing and restricting. Today, plots are unhelpful to choreographers who are not content to let pass the transparent deceptions that we accept so happily in the Odile—Odette characters in *Lac des Cygnes* and the Swanilda—Doll complication of *Coppelia*. The modern dance designer will not leave a plot alone. To create deliberate confusion as part of a scheme, a new angle on an old story, can be very effective as we have seen in Helpmann's *Hamlet* where by introducing every sort of interwoven psychological relationship between the characters he succeeded admirably in presenting the painful turmoil and the half seen mingling of figures, that might swim before the glazing eyes and within the failing brain of a dying man. It was no mean feat of theatrical production to cram into so short a ballet, not only almost the whole of the dramatic content of Shakespeare's play, but a great deal more besides. Helpmann created a memorable piece of mime drama and lost a ballet.

The simpler a scenario, the more freedom there can be for the choreographer's correct use of his medium, and simplicity need not be uninteresting. The subject matter of *Dante Sonata* is on a grand scale. The hopeless despair of the world in the continual struggle between the good and evil in humanity. The emotional aspects

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of love, death, murder, crucifixion, lust, war, and aspiration that are present in this ballet would have become uncomfortably complex if allied to separate figures and worked out in personal relationships. Conveyed, as they are, in an abstract way, by groups rather than individuals, the emotions become impersonal and as big as their theme.

The abstract approach suits the style of present day choreography but it is not without its dangers. There is always a risk of crossing the very narrow line that divides sincerity and integrity from pretension and a laboured striving after effect. Certain choreographers every so often trip up rather badly over that dividing line, and fall up to their necks in a sea of pretentious symbolism when they let abstraction run away with them as Antony Tudor did in *Undertow*. The choreographer may be happily keeping his own head above water as he wallows in a flood of outrageous undanceable themes and suggestions; I doubt if many of the audience are managing to swim without enormous effort.

A few last words specially addressed to those with choreographic ambitions. For the good of your own souls (as well as for the good of the souls of your prospective audiences) avoid like the plague the following:

Western treatment of Oriental themes.

Fauns. (Nijinsky's Faune said superbly everything there is to say).

Insects.

Toys. (As for Fauns, *La Boutique Fantasque* and *Coppelia* said the final words on Toys).

Conscious Propaganda. (Always dangerous to art).

Old Vienna.

The Modernistic (as opposed to the Modern).

Over-daintiness.

Over-prettiness.

Facetiousness.



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Confine yourself and school yourself towards:

Classical and Romantic (not sentimental) themes by poets and writers.

Music by living composers, or classical music that you do not hear on the radio or in the concert hall week after week.

Fairy Tales that are not Cinderella.

Beauty.

Integrity.

Wit. (You will either possess this, or not. You cannot acquire it.)

Drama.

Vitality.

Originality.

If your work encompasses half the second list and is devoid of half the first I shall admire you deeply.



# GISELLE AND THE ROMANTIC BALLET

**R**OMANTICISM IS BEST AND MOST CONVINCINGLY expressed in atmosphere and by symbols. Ballet is the perfect vessel to hold both. On a fundamental simplicity the romantic spirit of the early and mid nineteenth century builds up a complicated and decorative pattern.

The heroine's unswerving purity and innocence; the villain's black heart; the hero's nobility (the only individual characteristic that wavers in its integrity) represent a foundation on which are superimposed as embroidery the symbols of love and death, suicide, murder, remorse, despair and madness.

The picture, framed in ivy and vine leaves, becomes heavier yet with detail under the influence of the ballet. Swords, skulls, cloaks, plumed hats and poison phials, tombs and crucifixes. The winged heart, symbolic of the ecstatic love of the heroine. The chained heart, representing the hero; and the heart, corroded by the fires of jealousy, that symbolizes the villain.

Across all these light and darkness shift in mysterious shapes, and tragedy dogs eternally the footsteps of every character, in the guise of his own shadows cast in half a dozen directions by the blue spotlights.

Romantic themes appear more peculiarly suited to ballet than to any other form of theatre; for the silent exaggerated mime through which dancers convey their meaning expresses most

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satisfactorily by thoroughly overstating without "ham", the violent dramatics of the romantic period.

*Giselle*, as a perfect example of romantic classical ballet, has significance in many ways. In its hero, as one of the first roles in which the male dancer assumed equal importance with the ballerina. In its haunted atmosphere that emanates, not only from the setting and the choreography, but to a great degree from the fact that the theme came from a poet's brain.

Nowadays, our Gautiers have little interest in the ballet as a medium for the visual and musical expression of a poet's thoughts, which is a misfortune, for poetry, and the imagery of the modern poets in particular, offers ideal material for ballet today when choreographers prefer themes and suggestions rather than concrete and elaborate plots. With the present day revival of interest in romanticism, *Giselle* has proved one of the most popular of the old classics, and rightly, for it is as near perfection as an example of romantic ballet as we can ever wish to see. It fails in complete artistic unity only by reason of the musical score.

It would be a mistake to say that the music spoils the ballet; its rippling melodies and easy rhythms are eminently danceable, and written, as we are told they were, bar by bar with the choreographer's requirements, it contrives to be alarmingly apt. Grasping cosily the movement of the dances, it sets an audience free from the mental teeth-clenching that sometimes accompanies the approaching climax of a dance set to the complicated shapes of music by a living composer, when the choreographer pitting his own ingenuity against that of the musical score, produces something that makes one too much aware of the intense physical concentration enwrapping the performer. "Oh, God!" one cries soundlessly, the stomach twisting into a nervous knot, "they'll never make it".

If they manage to accomplish the apparently impossible, the spectator's relief is so great that the next movement of the



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dance may be half way through before its import has invaded his mind.

Moments of anguish such as these are not liable to disturb the audiences watching *Giselle*; therefore, though the music may lack the style of the ballet's other qualities as a supreme manifestation of the romantic school, we cannot do more than regret its slight banality and wonder what might have been the result had the genius of a Tchaikowsky been brought to bear on this perfectly balletic scenario.

*Giselle* is more complete, and purer in shape and content, than the bigger classics. It is not so long as *Swan Lake*, *Coppelia*, and *The Sleeping Princess*. It is less incongruously interrupted by divertissements. The mime passages appear less like padding and more necessary to the progress of the plot.

The characters are rounder, more fully presented; and the two chief roles are almost the most satisfactory—and incidentally, the most exacting—of the classic repertoire.

The heroes of the romantic and classical ballets are a poor lot. Taken as a whole they are only justified as supporters to the ballerinas. They combine stupidity, gullibility (Prince Siegfried's failure in *Swan Lake* to observe the deception practised on him by the Magician and his daughter); conceit, cunning and caddishness (Franz in *Coppelia* determined to woo the doll he imagines human; Albrecht, already affianced, trifling with *Giselle*). These characters bear every mark of the super bounder, but the role of Albrecht has more humanity than the others in its combination of weakness and strength, and also offers superb opportunities for dramatic performance and highly technical dancing that makes it one of the most interesting of the famous male ballet characters.

In Act I when, disguised as a peasant lad, he woos *Giselle*, he has something of the light-hearted boyishness of Franz in *Coppelia*. In Act II dressed in black, haggard with remorse, knee deep in lilies, carrying funeral lilies, his cloak trailing the damp grasses of the wood-embowered graveyard of the Wilis, his dishevelled

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hair brushed by the ivies that grow about Giselle's unhallowed tomb, he is the Hamlet of the ballet, and one of the most genuinely moving male figures in its hierarchy.

The role of Giselle presents the ballerina with the same richly contrasted opportunities. She in fact covers the complete alphabet of human emotion from carefree love through doubt and madness to death and, in Act II, the tender spectral appearance as her own spirit.

In *Giselle* the solos and pas-de-deux are not only dances in themselves, they are also clearly indicative of the mood, and quite naturally facilitate the progress of the story far more than the dances in *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Princess*. Above all, there exists (in present repertoires) no other old ballet that possesses the same atmosphere, from the scenes in the autumnal glow of the vineyards where the love of Giselle comes to life, to the shadowed forests of the Second Act heavy with the perfume of lilies and dewy lilac; haunted by the cold implacable Myrtha and her attendant sprites; a scene decorated with crumbling urns, dark trees and mysterious lakes, lit by lightning, and at last by the chill dawn creeping through the overhanging branches to light the deserted grave and the body of Albrecht, who has danced until his faithless heart bursts and his crime is expiated.

There is no nonsense here of an epilogue revealing hero and heroine united for ever. In true romantic style, gloom and despair crowd the stage picture; drip from every leaf, hover in the dawn light. The lily-dappled earth has engulfed Giselle. The villain drifts amongst the woods beneath the green waters of the lake, beside which lies Albrecht, a pallid corpse.

# GISELLE AND THE ROMANTIC BALLET

## I

### FIVE GISELLES

I have said that Giselle is an exacting role and this is true in every aspect of it. Not only technically and dramatically but also physically.

More than any other of the great classic ballets *Giselle* demands very particular physical qualities in its ballerina if she is to be completely successful in performance. First and foremost she should be delicately built. Strong legs and full bosom are unthinkable; as disturbing as the strapping prima donnas expiring from consumption in *La Bohème*. Giselle is gay and carefree, never robust. (A robust mid-nineteenth century heroine would be a monstrosity.) She must have finely made arms, legs, wrists and feet. Extreme youth is not, as might be imagined, an advantage, but a handicap. The ballerina should be able to present an appearance of youth while possessing the experience that only a certain maturity can give. The changes of mood in the role cannot be fully explored by a very young dancer however strong her technique. Many teen-age ballerinas have danced classic roles with outstanding technical skill, but to be really satisfied it is necessary to see a more mature dancer in the same parts, who, while still having a youthful appearance can by her experience infuse the choreography with the subtleties that lift a rendering from the merely skilful into the realms of authentic artistry.

A serious ballerina brings a discipline to bear on her life that would, to most people, appear grindingly hard. If this be joined with thought, a certain intelligence, and natural dancing gifts it will produce as time passes a change in the dancer's appearance that springs from a kind of mental control, and which acts on the very set of her features and the lines of her body, endowing them with something that is apart from, and yet affecting, to her physical shape. These attributes (a mental, in addition to a

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physical control over her work) are necessary to most of the classic roles, but particularly to that of Giselle.

I have seen only five Giselles, and have missed many who are said to be outstanding. Nevertheless my quintette are representative, containing some of the faults as well as most of the virtues that can be apparent in performances of this ballet. They also cover a period of time that has links with the Diaghilev epoch and brings us up to the present day.

The first Giselle I saw was danced by Olga Spessitzewa as guest artist from Paris during a season of ballet given by the Camargo Society at the Savoy Theatre in 1932. Although at the time British ballet was in its infancy, it was already showing signs of growing into a handsome adolescent. I had seen Spessitzewa in the early '20's when she was dancing the part of Aurora in the Diaghilev production of *The Sleeping Princess*, but I had been too young to appreciate her qualities or properly to compare one dancer to another. Each one of them had appeared to my enchanted eyes to be equally radiant and god-like creatures. In the period between that visit to the ballet and the Camargo Season I had grown up and was attempting to become a dancer myself, which made me more able to understand and appraise a great dancer when I saw one.

To see Spessitzewa first as the Swan Queen in Act II of *Lac des Cygnes* (with one of the most successful décors, by Duncan Grant, which that ballet has ever had) and later as Giselle, was to realize the extraordinary privilege of watching intimately at practice, in rehearsal, and during performances, a genuine Prima Ballerina Assoluta. She was, as I remember her, more physically perfect for the role of Giselle than any dancer has ever been. She was small and built with incredible lightness. Her feet were perfectly shaped, her legs slim and wonderfully moulded. She had the face of a beautiful ghost, pale, finely formed with huge mournful eyes that lit up when she smiled, and her smile was as endearing as a child's. Possessing to perfection the quality of youthfulness (though she was a woman not a girl) coupled with



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maturity of style and the sure approach to a classical role that was the heritage of her generation of ballerinas, she was able to give full value to the changes of mood that are so important to the role of Giselle. Her interpretation of the first act had a lyrical quality which made the mad scene by contrast infinitely touching; and the fine drawn shapes of her limbs, the haunted gravity of her face in repose brought to her performance in the second act a genuine spirituality. She was no longer a human being pretending to be a ghost. She was, actually, a disembodied creature. To her dramatic and pictorial gifts, add effortless technique, and a line of great purity, and it can be seen that here was a dancer who fulfilled every demand that this particular work makes on its ballerina.

Markova was the next Giselle I saw, during a Sadler's Wells season a year or so later.

In appearance she also was well suited to the role, although she lacked Spessitzewa's tragic beauty, and her performance only touched perfection in Act Two.

Markova was a brilliant dancer but she was not a natural mime, and she lacked warmth. In roles calling for speed and glitter she was infinitely exciting. In Giselle, the humanity and the tenderness of the part escaped her, and one felt from the first moment she stepped on to the stage that this Giselle was already hovering on the verge of craziness. She was fey, a little dotty, even in the earliest passages with Albrecht. It was in Act Two, where a serene grave face is not only correct but necessary, that her expression, the fragility, lightness and aerial quality of her movement were absolutely in key.

Fonteyn was my third Giselle, and to me the most interesting, for starting with a first performance which—though amazing from a child of seventeen—was naturally incomplete, I was able to witness a development of the role into a harmoniously beautiful interpretation, that has become, for me, the only one of the five Giselles I have seen which can stand beside my memory of Spessitzewa.

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Fonteyn's advance to perfection proves my point. In this part actual youth is a handicap, rather than an advantage.

At seventeen, Fonteyn was an enchanting child, with strong natural gifts for dramatic expression as well as great technical ability. She had the freshness, the light-heartedness, the gaiety, and also the repose. She lacked, quite naturally, the final radiance which can only evolve from a certain maturity and knowledge. This radiance, invisible to the naked eye, obvious to the eyes of the mind and the senses, is like a glowing extra nerve running all through the framework of a great dancer's body, and becoming more apparent each year as the dancer's work matures.

Fonteyn has grown this extra nerve, and today, when she sets foot on the stage she brings with her a light which is outside the jurisdiction of the electricians.

The two other ballerinas whom I saw as *Giselle*, Alicia Alonso of the American Ballet Theatre, and Mia Slavenska, gave me less pleasure.

I found it disconcerting that Alonso's performance was more or less a carbon copy of Markova's *Giselle*. Even to the extent that she seemed a little crazy from the moment she appeared. This was interesting, in that it showed how strong the influence of Markova had been on the American ballet; but it was also highly irritating, because Alonso seemed to possess the qualities to give an interesting interpretation of her own. However, a certain respect for European culture may have made the company nervous of asserting their own personalities too strongly in performances sternly given to them as unassailably correct by Markova and Dolin, though Mr. Dolin's liberties with the choreography of this particular production of *Giselle* struck me as a little purposeless.

With Slavenska, the faults were purely physical. While she was technically capable of the role, she was wrong, not merely in build, possessing all the robustness I have protested against, but also in colouring. She was a strong handsome young woman—more an amazon than a peasant girl—and failed to convince in

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either aspect of the part. A failure that was due not only to her physique but also to a very disturbing factor, her brilliantly red gold hair.

To insist on a ballerina being brunette is, to say the least, absurdly dictatorial; nevertheless, all prejudice apart, there is little or no doubt that golden, platinum blonde or red-headed ballerinas do not appear completely right in the dramatic classic roles.

In *Coppelia*, or in *Casse-Noisette*, or in modern works the shade of hair is unimportant. In *Sylphides*, *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, and *The Sleeping Princess* anything lighter than a dark brown head is somehow disturbing, though in every other way a ballerina may be completely suitable.

One of the chief reasons for a brilliantly light-haired ballerina appearing an anachronism in the classic ballets, may be that blondes, and red or red-gold heads are something we associate with Technicolor movies, with musical comedy and revue. The reverse also holds good—I can think of few things I should dislike more than a revue chorus of smooth-haired ballerina types.

In either case, the shining raven-headed ballet coiffure in the musical comedy and film world, or the golden and copper curls of the chorine in the sphere of ballet, produce an effect similar to seeing any true aspect of art wrongly presented, a Wren building, for example, painted cerulean blue, a Hepplewhite chair upholstered in a fabric of dubious modern design, or an Italian primitive framed in peach-coloured mirror glass. These would, or should, be disturbing to the most elementary visual sense.

So, to me, is a light-haired ballerina in a classic ballet. She must be dark. Not necessarily black; light brown or mouse blonde can be judiciously darkened to a suitably sombre tone by the application of a little brilliantine.

To return to my five *Giselles*. They are pleasingly representative of a variety of schools and races. Two Russians, one of the grand school, a link with the great days of the Diaghilev period, the second belonging to the newer Russian Ballet. One English of Russian training, a dancer who commenced her life in the

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ballet under the Diaghilev aegis and came into her own as a ballerina with the Sadler's Wells Company. Another English, and, to our own glory, English trained. The last American, a dancer to whom the role was handed by Markova and Dolin.

There is a certain neat satisfaction to be found in the contemplation of this group of five ballerinas for they are all linked, one with the other, by Markova.

Spessitzewa, supreme as Giselle, was a peerless ornament of the Diaghilev ballet, in which the child Markova made her *début*. Markova later danced Giselle at Sadler's Wells where Fonteyn was to make her first appearance in this role. Later still Markova joined the Massine Company where I saw Slavenska as Giselle. With the outbreak of war Markova left this country for America and taught Giselle to Alicia Alonso of the Ballet Theatre.

How much each dancer's individuality and intelligence contributed to their varying degrees of success in this wonderful part, and how much their background, upbringing, and training, must be praised or blamed, are subjects I do not propose to enquire into too deeply. Ultimately, the dancer's own natural gifts brought to perfection by study, are the touchstone of her success in performance.

Technically, each of the five ballerinas I have written about was completely capable of dancing this long and arduous part. Their training, whether taken in Paris, New York, in Russia or London, was always based on the unchanging classic tradition, without which no ballet dancer can fully succeed.

The individual performances were made radiant, unsatisfactory or incomplete by the minds that were working behind their five beautifully dissimilar faces.

# GISELLE AND THE ROMANTIC BALLET

## II

### THE SKULL AND THE IVY LEAVES

Though many years lie between *Giselle*, the *Lilac Gardens*, and the *Apparitions*, of our contemporary ballet, they are all informed with a similar feeling, spring from one source, and seem, one might say, to be heavy with the perfume of moon-drenched flowers. Nearly all of them are preoccupied with betrayal, frustration, or death, which accords ill with the accepted idea of the spirit of English art; and yet this pre-occupation, which produced such beautiful poetry in the generation which followed Keats, is still indisputably present in one of its aspects today; the ballet.

This motif of romantic feeling, so frequently recurring in present day choreographic trends, is there not only because the choreographers have instinctively discovered an urge for it in themselves; the ballet public has also shown a hunger for, and a response to, romanticism, that can only be explained by the existence of some emotional need.

During a great part of the twentieth century, the world has been more than usually aware of death in the many violent and horrifying forms it takes in great wars and revolutions. The fact that the great majority of human beings, even the poorest and unhappiest, dread death, makes it, perhaps, consoling to see it tricked out like a dream; and in the ballet, as in all manifestations of the Romantic movement in art, the vision of death is disguised in a way that gives it a bitter sweet magical beauty. The maggots are half concealed by full blown roses; the bony hand lies within a jewelled glove; the skeleton's hollow ribs are veiled with gauze, and the skull is hidden behind a mask and a fan. Death, perhaps, could be like that? So, something within us is satisfied when we see *Giselle* and *Apparitions*.

We know that poverty is sad, cruel, and ugly. Therefore it is

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pleasant to be persuaded that it can be decorative and moving, delicately coloured and subtly shaped, as in *Les Forains*, a ballet in the modern romantic idiom, that has grown directly from the renaissance of romanticism which came about in the nineteen thirties. The dinginess of present day existence creates, in each of us, a need to clothe misery in a pictorial imagery that may help to make it appear more palatable. This need can be satisfied by the visions of the romantic movement in the ballet, giving us those pictures that are lit by unreal lingering sunsets, by the blue jewelled moon of the limelights; those enchanted figures that die so gently, with such grace, whose hearts break to music, whose melancholy and madness are always visually beautiful.

The growth of the Romantic Ballet has been consecutive and logical, and though there may appear to be no connection in feeling between the Gothick dream world of *Giselle* or *La Sylphide*, and the pure abstractions of *Symphonic Variations*, they are, nevertheless, links at the beginning and the end of the same

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chain. Ashton's ballet has shown a contemporary romanticism, based only on movement, and the juxtaposition of bodies that remain sexless and serene, afloat in a spatial geometry, bound by the curved lines of Sophie Fedorovitch's exquisitely apt décor.

If I should be taken sharply to task for setting *Symphonic Variations* in the sequences of the Romantic Ballet, I can only, in self defence, say that the appeal of works such as *Giselle*, *La Sylphide*, *Symphonie Fantastique*, and *Apparitions* is at bottom for me the same emotional appeal as that of *Symphonic Variations*, which expresses, in some inexplicable abstract way, as much, or even more, of the human heart, as any ballet with a definite plot or obvious theme.

Between this work, and the rich crowded pictures created by the mid-nineteenth century ballets, it is fairly simple to trace how we arrived at a point where the angle of a dancer's head can induce tears in the onlooker, and the cool beauty of six figures, like human planets revolving on some pre-ordained plan in inter-stellar space, can stir our emotions so deeply.

The death wish, the morbid melancholy fascination of grave-stones, coffins, wicked monks, and ivy clad ruins repeats itself, either in actuality, or atmosphere, over and over again from the early days, to appear as lately as in the Howard-Stevenson *Mardi-Gras* and in Petit's *La Fiancée du Diable*—the Gothick to end all Gothick. Among the contemporary ballets of the last twenty years, we can follow a new line, when the old symbols are gradually discarded and fresh ones appear, leading us from Nijinska's *La Bien Aimée* via Balanchine's *Cotillons*, to Ashton's *The Wanderer*, where we have left the earth we know and crept inside the brain of the poet from *Apparitions* to find ourselves in a new landscape, a bleak, withered lunar region. Yet the figures that people this desolate country have their counterparts in other romantic ballets. It is on the tip of our tongues to say: "I don't remember the name—but the face is familiar." Without doubt, it is familiar; the femme du monde, the young lovers,

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the hero, who is poet, visionary, musician, or benighted traveller; and the chorus, who have been monks, devils, witches or carnival grotesques, and are now menacing disembodied darkness; every character in *The Wanderer* is a contemporary expression of an eternal romantic type.

Ashton's *Nocturne*, with its impersonal onlooker and its 'nineties beauties, brilliant as a bouquet of anemones, was a half-way house between *Apparitions* and *The Wanderer*. Its characters derive their being from the romantic period; the innocent beautiful Flower girl, the dashing hero-villain (Albrecht and Hilarion in one) and the glittering woman and her cavaliers, but the ballet has shed the Gothick atmosphere, and while the symbols used are more delicate—a posy of violets, the long white gloves of some Edwardian gala at the opera—the story is true to type, with its innocent love, betrayal, and despair.

The next step had to be an expression of frustration and tragedy no longer individual, formed instead to embrace all humanity. To convey this, Ashton produced *Dante Sonata*. Once more the death wish, and at the same time the old romanticism, the powers of evil, the lovers torn asunder, the crucifixion symbols, the corpse; only, unlike the original romantic works where love must triumph, even if it has to be after death, in *Dante Sonata* pity is equally distributed on good and evil. Both suffer. Both are frustrated. Both are crucified.

From this ballet, in which the bodies of the dancers form the symbols of despair, of love and death, it is easy to follow the evolution of a modern romanticism revealed in the serene purity of *Symphonic Variations* where male and female have become almost as impersonal as electrons; yet, as they revolve round one another, forming a continual harmonious design, they seem to express the secret of all existence.

To take only Ashton's ballets as an example of progression in the Romantic School, would be to show merely one side of the choreographic picture. It is simple to trace the movement we are studying, in his choreography, his line and his approach



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being so essentially romantic and his development so clear from one work to another.

But there is a clarity of progression in the work of other living dance designers, and Antony Tudor has shown in his *Pillar of Fire* a remarkable example of a contemporary approach to the old themes of romanticism. Anyone who has followed this choreographer's work from his days with Marie Rambert, will understand how *Pillar of Fire* grew quite naturally from qualities present in two of his earlier ballets, the straightforward emotions of *Lilac Garden* and the abstract emotions of *Dark Elegies*. These two conceptions fuse easily and beautifully in the later ballet.

Frustration is its principal theme, as it is in greater or lesser degree the theme of almost every romantic ballet, and it is true to tradition that frustration and heart-break should be vanquished in the final picture, as the lovers, eternally united, move away from us through green transparent woods, behind the floating unattached figures of the corps de ballet, who are so typical of this choreographer's style.

To some, *Pillar of Fire* may appear to be as out of place in the Romantic repertoire as *Symphonic Variations*. Actually, I believe it to belong there with even clearer right, not simply because it is fundamentally true to type, with good and evil characters strongly contrasted, and unrequited love as a mainspring for its action, but, above all, because it has a sustained emotional strength and a physical intensity overlaid by poetry, giving it the quality that sets a Romantic ballet truly in its own genre.

This poetical, moving appeal, this intensity is found in each of the ballets I have mentioned, giving them a kinship, whether they be truly Gothick, rich with symbols, or scorn any symbolic decoration other than that conceived by the choreographer in terms of his dancer's limbs and bodies.

Andrée Howard is another English choreographer who delights in the sentiments and trappings of the Romantic period; and yet, though she is highly gifted, and possesses taste and

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sensitivity, she somehow fails to belong as completely as one might expect to this particular group. In approach, she would appear to be one of the most obvious candidates for membership of the Romantic school. The subjects and settings of her ballets are heavily endowed with signs and portents that we recognize. Masks, gloves, fans and plumes. . . . Coffins, corpses, moonlight, candlelight and shadows. . . . Muses. . . . Young girls and men who move, quietly as a sigh, in a tranced world. . . .

But her choreographic movement is so tenuous and hesitant that, finally, her ballets lack strength in emotion, a full blooded romantic feeling, and as a result their content rarely seems to justify their length.

*Fête Etrange* is, in some ways, quite exquisite, and the impact of its first few minutes on the senses is genuinely haunting, but how much is due to the choreographer and how much to its designer is not easy to say. Its mysterious twilight lit by the spectre of a crystal chandelier, that, afloat in the dusk of a winter evening, drops a faint tinkling music on to the snow-covered terraces of the gardens where the action takes place. The delicately luminous figures who move so sweetly and silently, no word, no laughter, only a half smile, as they meet and part, revolving round the bewildered dreaming boy child who has strayed amongst them. The unknown beauty, and the sombre handsome man who watches her from the icy terrace. These are, or should be, the very breath of romanticism. But the movement and the conception are so frail, so understated, they fail to hold the attention, and catch neither the heart nor the eye, though decoratively this work is another triumph for Sophie Fedorovitch. As choreography it is as though one had dreamed it, and waking, one could hardly remember anything about it. It is the ghost of a Romantic ballet.

Andrée Howard is on firmer ground with *Mardi-Gras*, even if we are back with *Apparitions* and *Symphonie Fantastique*. It is a re-statement, not a new vision, and for those who love the Romantic period it has the expected pleasures. The atmosphere

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of death. The phosphorescence of decay. The familiar macabre thrill of the open coffin in which the trembling heroine knows she will see her own self lying, pallid with heavy lidded eyes.

Corpse must join hand with ivy wreathed spirit; masked woman in ball gown of gauze must link fingers with the evil Queen of the Wilis. Poets, wild with melancholy, embrace skeletons, pressing fevered kisses on hands that are only bone, while about them and about, a whirling silent multitude of figures, monks in purple and scarlet habits, sinister revellers garbed in grey, white and silver, black witches, mocking Punchinellos, move wildly from steely moonlight to the indigo shadows of tombs and ruins.

Like planets with attendant constellations, certain radiant shapes revolve serenely across and through the writhing tortured crowds. It is the Romantic ballet.





# THE SADLER'S WELLS BALLET

## I

### “THE SLEEPING BEAUTY” AT COVENT GARDEN

**A**S I STOOD AT THE BACK OF THE STALLS circle in the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and watched the Sadler's Wells Ballet take the stage in *The Sleeping Beauty*, perhaps the most famous and the most exacting of the great classics of the ballet repertoire, something moved in my thoughts when I saw the dancers enter the scene by way of a flight of steps sunk below stage level at the back of the setting; my eyes turned inward and looked across the distance of the past, across a space of twenty-five years.

It was almost a quarter of a century before that I had last seen dancers—the plumed, proudly coroneted heads of the Diaghilev Ballet—entering the stage of the Alhambra Theatre by a similar scenic contrivance; a shallow staircase sunk below stage level at the back of the scene. Confronted abruptly with so large a portion of my existence I was, for a moment, dazed by the number of memories that rose up, shouting for recognition and consideration. Then, as my thoughts settled I became aware, and, under the circumstances, quite naturally, of the memories that concerned the ballet world. The European ballet world in general. Ballet in England, and the Sadler's Wells Ballet in particular.

A childhood, my own, lay in the past quarter of a century and another infancy, that of the British Ballet. A maturing,

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my own, was there, with the maturity swifter than mine, of the British Ballet.

There was also the passing of a Russian epoch in the dance in Europe, and the birth of a new kind of Russian ballet in the Soviet Companies, strongly embedded in tradition, but so far as we can gather from the scanty evidence we have, different in taste and feeling to the Westernized decorative and intellectual qualities of the Diaghilev organization.

Enough is not yet known of the Soviet dancers for it to be possible to give opinions of any value concerning them; and the little that is known, has arrived via the pens of one or two writers who appear too sadly biased, too woefully lacking in the slightest technical knowledge of dancing to judge correctly the merits or demerits of ballet in any country. They have only succeeded in adding to the already overpowering length and strength of the Russian legend, a phenomenon fashioned by the public, which needs discussion in more detail later.

The implications which, for myself, lay so thickly in this particular moment of awareness of the passing of a long period in my life, were most important where they concerned the Sadler's Wells Ballet Company, a company with which I had worked from its earliest days, and which, when I left it, had already laid the foundations to build what could become an enduring structure. That had been six years before; a brief stretch of time in which to achieve the position they held when I found them at Covent Garden; a position corresponding in size and importance to that of a National Company.

Analysing my feelings, for I was fully conscious that it was needful to be wary of feelings, I knew that many things had to be considered before accepting without question the appearance of the Sadler's Wells Ballet as a perfect, completely important, artistic organization on a national scale.

I could not help feeling pleasure over their arrival at this new eminence, although it was a pleasure I knew to be biased, and I hate to be biased. Willy-nilly, I underwent the glow of



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satisfaction felt on seeing an old and valued friend in whose worth one has had faith, risen at last in the world and given some of the appreciation one knew had been his due for a long time. And it must have been a dull heart in the audience, which had no pride in the spectacle of this company of British dancers taking the stage so gracefully, supported both musically and scenically with taste and splendour.

Such sentiments were, however, out of place. Emotional and patriotic impulses have nothing to do with assessing the value of a work of art. A coldly analytical eye is needed; a pin-point criticism should be brought to bear.

My eyes were older, more tired and I hoped wiser than the eyes of the child who had sat enchanted at the Diaghilev production of the same ballet. Then, I only saw beauty, or the illusion of beauty, in every aspect of the performance. Realities were non-existent. Even when the enchantments, rising jerkily from the traps in the Alhambra stage, failed to grow more than a foot or two, despite the agitated bourrée and the waving wand of Lilac Fairy Lopokova, I remained entranced. The spell was unbroken. A similar breakdown in a performance today would rob it at once of magic for me.

It was sad, yet inevitable that the eyes I now turned to the Sadler's Wells version of *The Sleeping Beauty* were readier to notice faults than delights. The more one knows of any single subject, the more easily one becomes bored with it, except in its supreme manifestations. Knowledge and experience are not always welcome. Once the glitter of the impressions received in childhood fades, there is nothing left to replace it, save an occasional satisfactory savouring of the rare moments when a true and newly created beauty is discovered. To every person seeking for one of these moments, the Wells Company have issued a challenge. Are they strong enough to back it up?

The highest standard has been aimed at. Has it been achieved?

"That is a point," I told myself, nervously nibbling my fingers as I stood at the back of the stalls circle. "This would have been

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perfection, unalloyed magnificent perfection, in the old Sadler's Wells days under the watchful economical eyes of Lilian Baylis. Is it good enough for Covent Garden? Is the designing and the execution of the décor and costumes perfect? Is the orchestra of the right size and in the best hands? And—most important of all—is the company good enough? Are the dancers technically and artistically capable of fulfilling the demands we must now make of them?"

I arranged my unspoken queries and labelled them (a) décor, (b) music, (c) dancing.

(a) and (b) I dismissed, for it was not my place to offer opinions on either, though my views on (a) must have been a little more knowledgeable than my views on (b).

It is enough that on both points the challenge had justification and the challenger sufficient strength to win his way.

On point (c)—the standard of dancing—I was not prepared to accede so quickly and easily. First, I had to admit the wisdom and the justified temerity shown by the company in choosing this particular ballet to present itself as a company demanding international notice and prestige.

Wisdom lay in the obvious suitability of the choice. There is no other ballet in the classic repertoire (the repertoire in which a company proves its technical work) better suited than *The Sleeping Beauty* in style, music, and setting to revive the glories of a theatre illustrious as Covent Garden.

The temerity I have called justified. A big classic was certainly right for the first performances as a full-size company, but *Lac des Cygnes*, *Giselle*, or *Coppelia* would have made fewer demands for such outstanding performances from the supporting dancers, than are essential in *The Sleeping Beauty*.

This ballet, apart from needing a ballerina of superb technical and artistic ability in the role of Aurora, also demands a dancer of classical style and authority, for the part of the Lilac Fairy. Sadler's Wells can, fortunately, provide these easily enough, but in addition there must be a large number of first-class female soloists,



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supported by a full and precisely trained corps de ballet. The Company—how pleasant it is to be able to write these words with confidence—can offer not one, but three Auroras. This is more than satisfactory and I do not believe any other company at present in existence could produce a higher number. I am not suggesting there are no other dancers in the Wells Ballet capable, technically, of performing the role. That is not the point. Quite apart from perfect technique in execution, Aurora must also be right in line, style and build. Each of these qualities is apparent in the dancers who are taking the part, and in Fonteyn, May and Shearer, De Valois should be content, for she is the Director of three real Graces.

Fonteyn is Chief Grace. Pages could very easily be written on her performance. This chapter is not devoted to personalities but to an organization, so let me be content with stating that her Aurora has artistry, flawless line, exquisite precision and places her immediately in the top flight of living ballerinas.

There is now in the Wells Company a plethora of female talent to fill the supporting roles, dancers who possess, apart from their gift of movement, the asset of physical beauty.

English female dancers tended at one time to a jolly solidity that could not fail to be displeasing in the airy world of ballet. The present schooling seems to be producing girls with strong yet delicate limbs and bodies and well-shaped elegant feet.

The variations leading into the *Grand Pas des Fées* in the Prologue, and the female roles in the "divertissements" in the famous Wedding scene were performed in a manner that did not merely meet criticism but vanquished it.

If a school so newly established has been able to make many potential as well as full-fledged ballerinas, at the rate with which the Wells has been producing them within the last few years, it need have no fear concerning the future of the feminine side of the company.

For the male dancers *The Sleeping Beauty* offers fewer opportunities than some of the other classics. The "premier danseur's"

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role of Prince is as colourless as, perhaps more colourless than, Siegfried's in *Lac des Cygnes*. It is a credit to Helpmann that he not only brings to the part a distinction which does not lie in its choreography, and which must come solely from the dancer's rendering; he gives it also, and in this particular role how important a quality, nobility. Helpmann has a rare gift in male dancers. He is able to stand still with grace and authority. His Prince avoids being the nonentity he can so easily become.

Apart from this leading male part, with its one poor solo, there is no other choreography that calls for real dancing from the men, save the Blue Bird and the Florestan variations, and the character dance of the Three Ivans. The cavaliers in the prologue have a few technical steps to perform. Here the demands made on the men really finish.

In view of this, it may appear strange to say that one was incompletely satisfied by the standard of the male dancing as compared with that of the women. There is, in fact, nothing strange about it at all. I saw no work I could label bad, a lot actually to praise, and if I was not as satisfied as I could have wished, *I see no reason why I or any other member of the public should expect to be.* (The italics are deliberate.)

The persistent and monotonous comparisons that have been made by the audiences and the thousands of amateur critics for whom the ballet is, apparently, an easy prey, between British and Russian male dancers, to the continual detriment of the former, has long been a source of irritation to me. The ballet public has always shown signs of a racially artistic snobbism, a snobbism acute in the early days of British ballet and for which there is now small justification. It is time that some facing of facts was done, some appreciation made of the appalling and unnatural difficulties, both economic and psychological, that are still being fought by the organization of the Wells Ballet Company, and by any boy who wishes to take up a dancing career.

What good reasons have the public for expecting absolutely first-class performances from British male dancers?



9. PEARL ARGYLE IN "LE BAISER DE LA FÉE"

[Anthony



10. KARSAVINA

IIa. MARGOT FONTEYN  
AS GISELLE



[Anthony]



IIb. KARSAVINA IN  
"LE PAVILLON D'ARMIDE"



I2. SPESSITSEWA IN "GISELLE"

[Lipnitzki



13. ALEXANDRE BENOIS, 1947

[*Duncan Melvin*]



14. CHRISTIAN BERARD

[*Duncan Melvin*]





15. OLIVER MESSEL

*[Duncan Melvin*



16. THEME FOR A BALLET

## THE SADLER'S WELLS BALLET

Examine the situation and it will be seen that they have no reasons. The ballet as a career for men, in England, has long been considered rather despicable and shocking.

In this country, if a boy wishes to become a dancer, he is fairly certain to meet opposition from parents, relations and friends; the kind of opposition which the self-conscious British character finds hardest to withstand. The cries of "Sissy"—"Effeminate"—the taunts and the teasing that the average boy does not easily ignore.

"Johnny wants to be a ballet dancer when he should be kicking a football about." It was, and to a great extent still is, a humiliation to his entire world. Worse, really, than being killed in a war. Against this backing it is not easy to build up a school and tradition of male dancing.

The Russian training, on the contrary, has a tradition which goes back many many years, and in Russia, ballet dancing has long been an honourable and respected profession for a man. Official support made it possible for children to begin their dancing studies at a suitably early age, for these studies were made part of their general education.

Compare this with the state of affairs until very lately in this country. It is only within the last few years that the Wells has been able to offer to any promising talent the chance to be financially independent and more or less assured of a future. The gift of dancing is rare in the economically secure classes, and on leaving school—at an age when it is already late to begin training as a dancer—it is often immediately necessary for a boy to take the first stamp-licking office job that presents itself. In the face of difficulties that appeared at one time to be practically insurmountable, the standard of male dancing in this country is surprisingly high, and has now reached a point where it should receive official encouragement and a just measure of praise.

When, eventually, it has the same number of years of unbroken training and tradition behind it as the Russian has today, I do not hesitate to say that we shall be able to offer to the public a

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group of men who will be as good as any other country can produce.

War is another factor that has played a part in rendering valueless years of work. The war caused chaos in the Sadler's Wells Company.

In Russia, dancers were considered important enough in their own work, and were kept in it, and prized as part of their country's cultural heritage.

With the Wells Ballet many of the most promising careers were interrupted, some fatally, others—if not fatally—still irrevocably. It is impossible to foresee how much a steady continuation of their training and general dancing experience might have meant to the male members of the pre-war company who were snatched into the Services. This amounts to a minor tragedy, and I use the word minor with deliberation, for what would have been a major tragedy in any other country where the arts are fully appreciated for their pervasive and beneficial influences, is only considered of minor importance in England, where beauty and creative art are, at best, uneasily tolerated because of the furious endeavours of a few devoted and enlightened people.

One more such interruption will spell final ruin to the British Ballet. Let us hope it does not occur, and that a full chance can be given to at least a generation of male dancers. The talent is there. Seeing the new young dancers at Covent Garden one has no doubt of that. It is only now that they have a real opportunity for steady training and a real necessity for endeavour.

Before the war, in face of the lack of encouragement and the smug public attitude towards the ballet as a career for men, the shortage of male dancers was alarming to anyone with ambitious ideas regarding British Ballet. This shortage made it possible for dancers of mediocre talents to reach positions they should never have held and which they did not have to work hard to keep. During the war years, any mildly talented boy, not liable to conscription, was able to obtain a position quite out of proportion



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to his gifts; but now having got so far, he will have to work hard to remain there, for the group of boys at present growing up in the Wells Company is full of promise, and in the native ballets mounted on the Company, several members of the new group show more than promise. I was struck by the precision and attack of the male corps in Ashton's *Dante Sonata* and it was good to know these dancers were part of a comprehensive scheme of training and belonged to a school where the strongest and most industrious talents will get the chance to prove their worth.

So, let us have less ill-considered criticism; less wilful prejudice. A school of ballet does not fully mature over-night any more than a school of painting, music or literature. These other arts in England have centuries of wonderful examples behind them. Our school of male dancing has existed for twenty-five years at the very most. If one realizes that fact, then what has been accomplished calls not for censure, but for encouragement and praise.

Earlier, I mentioned a phenomenon, the Russian *Legend*. Something approaching mythology has grown thick and fast round dancers of earlier epochs; and the Russians, as dancers, have been wrapped in a more dazzling glitter of adulation than most.

Looking back down my quarter of a century of ballet-going—it was actually more, for I saw Pavlova many times before I saw the Diaghilev Ballet—it is impossible to say sincerely how much the colour and beauty of past memories are enhanced by distance. This must apply to all dancers, even those heard of, read and dreamed about but never seen. For example, was Taglioni as delicate, as inhuman and fascinating as the old prints depict her? When aged ballet-lovers murmur “Ah—Nijinsky!—his leap will never be equalled,” is it not possible that they had never before seen a male dancer leap, and anyone who rose more than two feet with grace, and landed with ease, must have seemed phenomenal? The legends cling and grow. Those living dancers who are temporarily out of sight do not escape them. Markova lauded in America, where, in company with other British dancers, as a war refugee from battered Europe, she has triumphed for the

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last six years, is still often asserted to be the only real ballerina the Wells has ever shown. Then we have the inevitable postscript "And she of course was Russian-trained."

No one admired Markova more than I. Her steely fragility always delighted me, even after partnering her three times a day in the *Dance of the Hours* at the Odeon (then the Regal) Cinema, Marble Arch, many years ago. Yet I have no doubts that Fonteyn could more than hold her own should Markova reappear.

Markova is part of the Russian spell that has for so long held the British ballet public in thrall; a spell that the appearance of the Wells Company at Covent Garden may help to break.

As a part of this enchantment, we must note with interest the presence in this production of *The Sleeping Beauty* of a Soviet dancer, Violetta Prokhorova, in the famous Blue Bird variations. She warrants special attention as an ex-member of one of the Soviet companies whose worth is rated so highly. That she is a performer of first-rate talent must be immediately conceded. She has warmth, strength and beauty. The certainty of her "pirouettes" gives a feeling of relaxation in the onlooker. With these qualities she possesses faults, surprising in a representative of a school from which we have been led to expect absolute perfection. Her arm movements are unclassical and over-extravagant, and she has an unusually bad line in her "demi-arabesque". It is more than odd, in a dancer of whose technical skill there is no doubt—though she is more a swan than a blue bird—to see the fault of a turned-in foot. Nevertheless she is an ornament to the Company and makes one curious to see more of her compatriots.

Character dancing is something at which the Russians have always excelled, and the dance of the Three Ivans can never be really satisfactory as performed by a British trio. In the Wells production, Turner's vitality inclines to render the dance unbalanced. The two other dancers, however willing, do not seem to be able to keep up with him. Virility and strength, however, are not always lacking in our male dancers; this has been proved before and will be proved again. Walter Gore in his earliest days

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was one of the most rhythmically exciting dancers I have ever seen, and Harold Turner still shows an attack in his work that would make him conspicuous in any company.

There have been two major changes made by Sadler's Wells in the choreography of *The Sleeping Beauty*. It would be interesting to know how many members of the public were aware of them. The insanely banal Peasant Dance in the second scene has been completely rearranged, by Ashton, without the male corps, and very much to its advantage. He has also made several changes in the variations for Florestan and his two sisters. With these he has not been so successful in preserving the quality of the ballet's line, as he has so charmingly succeeded in doing with his version of the Peasant Dance.

These alterations bring up the question of what right a company has to embellish or change the classics. If a company has reached a status of sufficient importance and is able to lay down its own canons of style and taste, then it has a definite right. There are passages of intense boredom in every famous classical ballet, and *The Sleeping Beauty* contains some perfect examples. The endless fiddling opening of the hunting scene for instance, which does not begin to show a glimmer of invention until the Lilac Fairy's arrival, cries out for some new and more interesting choreography.

Diaghilev never hesitated to interpolate work by living choreographers, or to switch dances from one scene to another. Those purists who raise horrified hands at the sacrilegious suggestion that masterpieces of the ballet should have so much as a single original gesture altered, would do well to accept the fact that it is almost certain that no one of the old classical ballets is ever given in exactly the same form, step for step, movement for movement, by any two companies, and that no versions now being performed are completely truthful to the original choreography.

In most cases the changes take place imperceptibly over a long period of time. A ballet may fall for a while from the repertory



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of a company. There is no fully adequate dance notation. Choreographers forget; ballerinas gradually, and with no intention, slur a movement that may be awkward for them, into one that feels easier and more natural. The changes creep in, and are accepted, though they may be far removed from the original step or gesture. A ballet's choreographic character lies in its shape, line and spirit; therefore, unless some alteration drastically out of harmony is made, quite sweeping changes can be effected without in any way destroying the quality of the original work.

Allowing for the obvious fact that no one would wish a creative work of art to be altered by a new talent, and could get only a perverse pleasure from seeing Titian's *Rape of Europa* touched up by Edward Burra, *Blenheim Palace* enlarged by Frank Lloyd Wright or interpolations made into *Pride and Prejudice* by Henry Miller, one must understand the impermanence of a ballet as a work of art. It does not endure as a painted canvas, a written word, or a carved stone. It is fluid, existing in movement only, and therefore changeable.

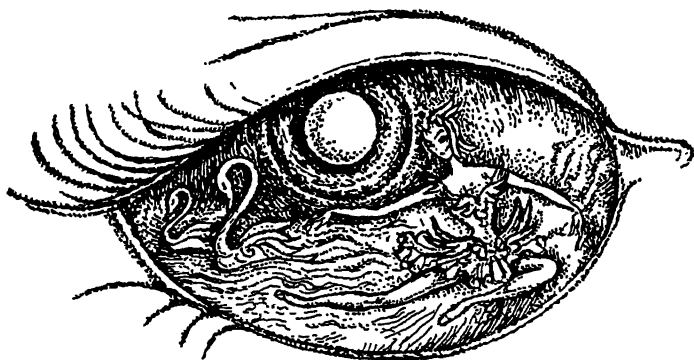
It should, then, be the prerogative of any company of high standard to improve or eradicate the deserts of old-fashioned mime, that so woefully spot the beauty of the ballet classics.

Taken all in all, viewing the Sadler's Wells Ballet against the background of the years that have passed since the Diaghilev production and compared with this and with that and with their own beginnings and their past work, I saw a certain splendour, and hoped for its increase and continuation finally to enrich what is the first British ballet company on the grand scale.

If the present standard of production is kept up; if the ballets are continually under the most careful supervision, thereby ensuring that the scenery and the costumes do not lose, as in the past they have tended to lose, any relation to the designer's original conception; if every detail of the lighting and staging is considered of paramount importance; if their native style, which in Ashton produced *Façade*, *Les Patineurs*, *Wedding Bouquet* and *The Wanderer*, in De Valois *Job*, and *The Rake's Progress*, in Helpmann

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*Hamlet* and *Miracle in the Gorbals* is still further developed so that our own qualities of humour, invention and drama give the company its national flavour; if the dancers are nurtured, cherished and ceaselessly disciplined towards perfection, made more aware of the uses, the advantages and disadvantages and the possibilities of an opera house stage, there is a great future for the Sadler's Wells Ballet.



## II

### MASSINE WITH THE BRITISH BALLET

When confronted by a mirror, either washing, shaving, brushing the hair, or tying a tie, there are occasions when one's eye wanders from the task in hand, losing interest in the cleansing of the features or the exact line of a parting, because one has suddenly become aware of changes in the reflected face.

In the mind's eye one gloomily compares the ageing mask that stares out from the mirror, with the smooth contours of remembered youth. Anxiously, pathetically, questions rise to the silent lips. "Isn't it perhaps more interesting? Don't those lines and hollows I never noticed before give it character? Hasn't

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it really worn rather well? . . . Or is it just a tired glum-looking old thing I no longer wish to look at?"

In similar fashion, when one views again a work of art on which one has not looked for a period of years, the same search for changes takes place, the changes, the altered reactions that a maturing of the mental processes can bring about. The object scrutinized is found more pleasing or less pleasing. Except at those moments, as when critically examining the reflected face the expected difference is not seen and one says hopefully, "I really haven't changed (much) in the last few years."

I confronted a mirror, a magic looking-glass that allowed a view into the past when I went to the Opera House at Covent Garden to see Massine's revivals of two of his most famous works, *Le Tricorne* and *La Boutique Fantasque*; for the reflected series of pictures I saw were pictures associated with my youth, when, during seasons of the Diaghilev Ballet, I had been spell-bound by what seemed to me revelations of the purest beauty.

After I had seen the revivals of these two ballets I fell to wondering and sighing why certain works, hailed in their day as expressions of genius, continue to satisfy for a lifetime, while others, in their own time equally wonderful, lose their appeal.

It is to be expected that Ballet will suffer more, lose, or gain, more attraction over a period of time, than other arts, for it is one of the most ephemeral character, made of nothing more solid than movement, and as such, possessing a kinship only with the fleeting beauties of creation and nature, the patterns made by the wind on the surface of water, the shapes of trees and flowers; and as trees and flowers dying and being re-born each year, are never similar, causing one to exclaim regretfully, "The lilac is poor this spring"—in the same way each time a ballet is revived, and reborn, it must lose something of its original quality; though, to all intents it is the same flowering, there is an altered shape, a radiance missing, a colour changed.

Music and dancing are to a great extent dependent on the performers; their capacity, their inspiration, even the state of

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their minds and their physical health. A dancer suffering from a toothache, or a slight indigestion can still perform, but he is liable to give a performance that has no edge to it.

On my visit to the first of the Massine revivals *Le Tricorne* I found, as I sat waiting for the curtain to rise, and even after it had risen, that I was nervous and inclined to be tearful. Any "*recherche du temps perdu*" made at a certain age is liable to cause a faint but unmistakable upheaval in the emotions, and the days when I first saw *Le Tricorne* were indeed lost and far away. Added to my nervousness, my tendency to tears, I was also a little on the defensive and inclined to aggression.

When I first heard that Massine was to appear as guest artist at Covent Garden, and to re-create, on the Sadler's Wells Company, these two famous works, I remarked acidly to a friend, "If I hear anyone saying, 'At last—under Russian direction the Sadler's Wells Company look as though they can dance', I shall kick them straight in the face."

Quite apart from the fact that it was ambitious to imagine I could kick as high as anyone's face after seven years away from the classroom, I should have passed an intensely tiring fifteen minutes interval if I had attempted to carry out my belligerent threats, for I had hardly left my seat, than I became aware of the general murmur "*Never seen them dance so well—What an affect a Russian teacher has—At last they really looked alive. . . .*"

Appeased, if in an unpleasant way, for there is no oracle who does not like even his direst prophecies to be proved true, I stifled my desire to beat my way through the crowd roaring abuse at them. I made haste, instead, to acquire a cooling gin and withdraw to a corner to consider something that really interested me: the effect on myself of what I had seen, and whether the opinions I heard revealed any foundation of truth. *Le Tricorne*, there was no doubt of it, had withstood triumphantly the test of years. It was exciting, ingenious, and more pleasing to look at than I remembered, though it had long been for me a décor that was as near perfection as one could hope to see.

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The company had danced very well indeed. Never for a moment had I felt a lack of vigour, style, rhythm, or co-ordination.

It was possible there was a certain special stimulus present, for they were taking part in an event that, in the small world of the ballet, was of historical importance; the performance by an English company of a famous Russian work. I was prepared to brush this stimulus aside, not only on the grounds that I had seen them dance equally well with as much spirit and style on other, more everyday occasions; but also because I had been able to compare them—poor, dull, English creatures—with visiting companies, and to discover to my satisfaction that they had little trouble in keeping level with competition, and often rising ahead.

The astonishment of the public, still freely expressed on every side in the bar, amazed as though it were a miracle that each individual member of the corps-de-ballet had not fallen flat on his face the moment he dared to attempt the movements invented by the twentieth century Russian choreographer, made me smile wryly.

There are passages in many of Ashton's ballet arrangements that make the choreographic movement of *Le Tricorne* appear comparatively simple. I am aware there is no reason why the Press or public should realize this, and one must hasten to forgive ignorance, except when it becomes loud-mouthed or condescending.

I had remembered *Le Tricorne* as a complex and elaborate piece of work, and was amazed on seeing it again, after a period of years and through slightly more experienced eyes, to discover its clarity, and the straightforward line of its ensemble arrangements.

It remains exciting and beautiful to watch because it possesses a cardinal balletic virtue—one very often lacking today—that of harmony. The whole work holds together, and is of one piece, musically, visually and choreographically. The style never falters. It is in its general, not its individual, effect that its strength and persistence as a work of art is found.

## STUDIES IN BALLET

When the announcement of these two productions at Covent Garden was first made, it had been *Le Tricorne* which I felt might not suit the company. I was more sure about *La Boutique Fantasque*. This, long cherished in my memory as a favourite of real enchantment could, I felt certain, be more suitably allied to the talents of British dancers than the sophisticated style of *Le Tricorne*.

I should have known better; there were many reasons why *Le Tricorne* remained alive and vital, and *Boutique* appeared suddenly to have become a museum piece.

*Tricorne* one associated with Massine: Massine was still in it. *Boutique* was also associated with Massine: he was still there, but with the second work one recalled Lopokova, Woicikovsky, Danilova Tchnercheva, Sokolova, Slavinsky, and Idzickovsky, because *La Boutique Fantasque* consists of a host of highly individual star parts which fitted like gloves the performers one remembered seeing in the Diaghilev production. It is not a work in which the whole ensemble is the ballet; the ensemble work is the least interesting part of the choreography, it is a work composed of many small parts, that build up into a brilliant patchwork, not a balanced design.

First and foremost the Wells production suffered from a miscast ballerina. Moira Shearer, a dancer of whose icing sugar daintiness the Press and the public can never have enough, lacked the gusto, the verve, the faint vulgarity that brings this role into full life. Miss Shearer is a sugar plum fairy, a Swanilda, she is not a "Can-Can" dancer, and if this high spot of the ballet is insipid, a moment of delicious gaiety and satisfaction is lost irrecoverably.

Then, thinking of Massine's performance as the miller, where style is all, in the "Can-Can" one was abruptly aware that it was phenomenal for him to be still dancing.

In *Tricorne* one had taken him for granted, supreme stylist, magnificent presence, unchanged through the changing years; in *Boutique* one realized regretfully that the greatest dancers are only mortal.

## THE SADLER'S WELLS BALLET

These reflections did not seem sufficient reason for my dissatisfaction. I felt as though I had taken a large bite out of a particularly luscious-looking cake, and found my mouth full of a completely tasteless substance.

The décor was still a jewel. Many of the performances were well up to standard. The Russian soldiers. The poodles—though this dance, while extremely well performed, suddenly seemed to show a crude choreographic conception. The Snob: I had found it impossible to visualize anyone other than Idzickovsky in this enchanting role, and here of all unexpected people in the Sadler's Wells Company was Alexis Rassiné—a soft, romantic, classical dancer—producing a neat stylish performance that was one of the most satisfying of the evening.

Considering my disappointment (as saddening as on re-reading in adulthood a book much loved in adolescence, and finding it empty of meaning) I came to a sort of decision as to why one ballet lived and the other had become part of the past, a past that was not far enough removed or definite enough in style to give it a true period flavour.

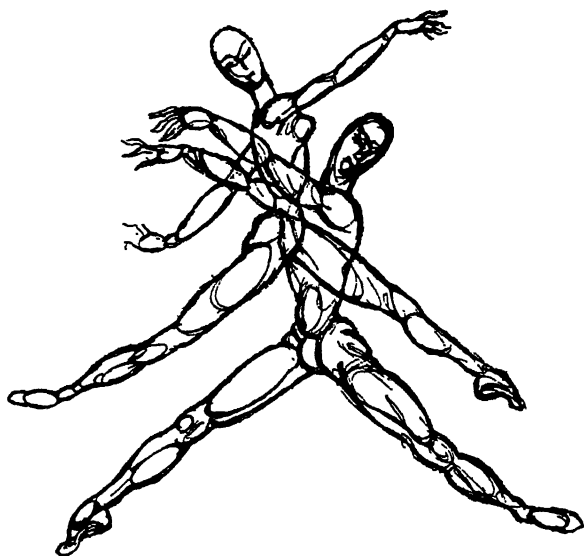
*Tricorne* is not a purely Russian Ballet. *La Boutique Fantasque* is. It is crammed with character studies drawn in by wide simple strokes. The Russian school of character dancers of the Diaghilev period, approached these roles in a big, open-hearted way. The British dancer's approach is too vague, too diffident, too intricate; which proves (only to myself, I am sure) that to say we Britishers are a direct and straightforward people is a complete fallacy. We are probably the most evasive, tortuous-minded, schizophrenic race in the world. The British approach to the warm obvious characters in *La Boutique Fantasque* cannot be right. In the Sadler's Wells performance there is not so much a lack of temperament—a silly accusation far too often thrown at British dancers—as the presence of the wrong kind of temperament.

I do not think there is at this time, allowing for the fact one has not seen the Soviet Ballet, a company or school of dancing

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who can interpret *Boutique* with the necessary controlled gaiety, and what is equally important, the correct simplicity.

It seems to be part of an epoch that cannot be re-created, whereas *Le Tricorne* has proved itself ageless, belonging to no particular school, no nationality and to no place. It can live anywhere and be performed by any good company.







# THE ENTRY OF THE DANCERS

## I

**A** DANCER, REGARDED AS AN ABSTRACT OR impersonal figure, is an intriguing and beautiful creature. More than any other type of stage performer he (or she) can (with the assistance of the choreographer and *maître de ballet*, the designer, the manufacturer of make up, and the electrician) present an appearance unreal, exotic and romantic, that no human being, however beautiful, could possibly carry over into real life.

Therefore, excepting the very few who are able to take with them when they leave the theatre a faint glimmer of the beauty that was revealed to their public, I would say that it is a great pity dancers should ever be seen off-stage; the contrast between their appearance behind the footlights, and their appearance in private life being so strong that it can only prove a shock and disappointment to the onlooker.

A female dancer—woman's clothes, hair styles and facial décor being as they are—can preserve away from the theatre some small fraction of the illusion she creates in performance. For the man, it is useless to attempt it. The drab-coloured cylinders of cloth and muffling jackets of modern man's clothing put a male dancer at a disadvantage right away, for they successfully smother his best feature, which is usually his physique.

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The small or medium build of the average male dancer is not seen at its best in modern clothing. It appears either meagre or stumpy; and tending to fall into two main categories of street clothing—the untidy-arty, or the well-brushed gloomily neat look of a clerk catching the 8.15 a.m. from the suburbs to the city—it does not make him appear distinguished in his private life.

The impression made by category two, the well-brushed clerk type, is enhanced by that symbol of the dancer's profession, the attaché-case or satchel containing his practice clothes without which he is rarely seen.

Considered away from the splendid appearance they present on the stage, dancers are at their best as people during their working hours; those hours which are spent in the rehearsal or classroom, making a day that is without doubt one of the most exhausting in the theatrical profession, calling for the expenditure of ninety-five per cent more energy and concentration than any other performer has to give.

Dancers always look tired for the good enough reason that they always are tired. Caught at class or in rehearsal they are pallid as coal miners or any worker who spends long periods in physical labour below ground, or indoors beneath artificial lights.

Away from work the woman can counteract this effect by the discreet or lavish use of make-up, but the men, for the most part, are dragged round the eyes, thin-faced and unhealthy-looking; which is deceptive, for taken as a race dancers are extraordinarily healthy, with great resistance, resilience and staying power.

When I say that dancers, as people, appear at their best during their working day I mean that they are socially at their best.

There is no other section of the theatrical world—unless it be the repertory play companies, and they rarely hold the same members for the many years that a ballet company will keep its personnel—where the people concerned spend so much of

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their lives in one another's company, for they are members of a community which, though an integral and important part of the theatre, is inclined to be isolated from other communities. In ballet the exigence of the work demands so much of its exponents' time that they have little left in which to mingle with the people in other sections of the theatre.

The whole atmosphere of a first-class ballet company is something completely different from any other theatrical group; unless it be paralleled by one or two of the more famous and reputable repertory companies where the actors do not need to submit to an over-riding discipline from above (though that discipline should be there,) but produce a natural sense of discipline and a concentration of purpose from within themselves with an effect that acts like magic on performances.

Companies that have this discipline, and its concentration, have also an air of detachment from the theatre in general. They resemble in a way acolytes dedicated heart and soul to a religion. The study of ballet, if the student has a serious aim and wishes to reach perfection, needs an approach which contains some of the fervour of a truly religious mind. Needless to say this fervour will vary in strength with each individual dancer, but the mere fact that they are willing to give so much of their lives to work, in which only a few reach the heights, and where a career is woefully short, and in comparison with other branches of entertainment, shockingly underpaid, shows that in every dancer who remains in ballet there must be a core of serious endeavour or a consciousness that the work he is doing possesses at its best a distinction, and therefore a satisfaction, that few other aspects of the theatre can offer today.

So when the ballet community impinges on to other theatrical communities it never seems quite in its element, and its denizens do not appear at their best, though like most stage people they are cheerful, sociable and garrulous by nature; but any craftsman who devotes three quarters of his time or more to his work becomes of necessity, whether willingly or not, circumscribed

## STUDIES IN BALLET

by it and its atmosphere, and therefore appears at his most relaxed, attractive and natural, when seen working amongst his fellow workers.

Another reason for my preference for dancers at work in their daytime, is that if they must be seen stripped of the super-human beauty with which ballet costume and make-up invests them, then it is better to see them in the unhampering and motley trimmings of their practice clothes.

What a costume! Drab in colour, inclined to raggedness and patches; the woollen tights, brief tunics, endless variety of knitted or woven sweaters and bodices make it one of the best versions of ballet dress, for it reveals the human body in a most harmonious and untrammelled style.

Heads bound close in scraps of net, scarves or handkerchiefs. Hips, thighs and calves held closely and smoothly in shape by the woollen tights, the dancers begin in this aspect to reveal the poetry of their profession.

To enter a room where dancers are practising is to find oneself in a surrealist garden where the plants, the trees and flowers, are half human. Dancers are like plants and creepers as they coil, sway and bend, unfolding their subtle limbs like the tendrils of vines. Male dancers, sturdily built, are like young trees. The women are flowers, particularly when they are wearing the "tu-tu" which resembles a zinnia, a many-petalled daisy, or a full-blown rose. The long ballet skirt is a bell-shaped flower and from its gauzed petals, the delicate legs, the curved and pointed feet, emerge like stamens.

Flowers, trees and plants, become birds and insects when dancers leave the ground, to bound, leap, dart together, meet in mid air, defying gravity, and showing an independence and control of movement that places them apart from the ordinary human.

"Immortal creatures!" I want to exclaim "May the Gods strike you dumb. For you express in movement an enchantment that you destroy when you speak."

## THE ENTRY OF THE DANCERS

Only if their conversation could match the lightness and the beauty of their dancing would I really want dancers to speak. As devotees of a speechless art I prefer to find them silent.

A good dancer is automatically expected to be an intelligent person. If he chances to be, so much the better, but I would hesitate to say that real intelligence is a necessary attribute of real dancing.

The best theatrical performers work, for all their technique, a great deal by instinct, and this instinct is far more important than intelligence to a talented artist who has acquired the technical skill necessary. It is also important that he should be able to submit to direction rather than have a head abuzz with ideas and theories of his own. One only needs to see the lamentable displays that can be given by established and clever performers when carelessly directed or left to their own devices. Then we realize that the bulk of stage performers are Trilbys who must have a Svengali to control and coax their natural instincts into the right channel.

This has particular application in a ballet world. I have known dancers of impeccable virtuosity and technique who, left to themselves, gave performances empty of meaning; yet, if able to take direction and under the right influence, were capable of showing grandeur and subtlety and giving performances that seemed to spring from the mind, though one knew that this was not in their case a possibility.

When dancers enrich a choreographer's work by their own personalities, we know that we are seeing great dancing. The public seldom realize that eighty per cent of the performance they see is an example of the choreographer enriching, or even providing, a personality that is non-existent.

Another factor that comes into performance is taste. In the ballet world a high standard of taste should be easily and automatically acquired; but leave most dancers to their own devices and it is depressing to observe the results. The costumes, the music, the themes and ideas they will sponsor and produce.

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The stupidest dancer has a veneer of culture, for no one who works in ballet for any length of time can fail to acquire this. In some it progresses and develops into an individual sense, but with the majority it is apt to remain a line of talk as glib and pointless as the prattling of a parrot. This is another reason for finding dancers aurally preferable when they are amongst themselves, for then their conversation is unaffected.

In social life the luckless dancers are often forced into "culture" conversations much against their wills. As representatives of an art form that holds, for the public, a certain mystery, the dancer is prey to amateur enthusiasts of the arts wherever he may go, and is in continual danger of being expected to show intensity and to be revealing about his own work or the ballet in general.

I think, and for their sakes, I hope, they do not realize the enormity of their behaviour, those earnest undergraduates, and intellectual dilettantes, those frustrated designers and writers, and those musical bores who pin a dancer, tired from an arduous day's rehearsing and performing, into a corner, and demand that he explain his thoughts and sensations when performing *Giselle* or *Swan Lake*, or expect him to clarify the meaning underlying the Dago's dance in *Façade*.

Perhaps a feeling that some mystery, some air of remote magic must, at all costs, be maintained, renders the average dancer, thus victimized, unable to be disappointing or unobliging enough to reveal the truth, which is, more often than not, that eighty-five per cent of his mind is usually occupied in controlling movement, worrying about an approaching pirouette, or holding an arabesque. The remaining fifteen per cent of his concentration makes him able to cover the intense pre-occupation with which he is following the technical side of his performance by the tranced serene, or gay light-hearted expression necessary to the feeling of the dance.

Should he be one of those fortunate performers who does not need to become too involved in attention to the physical



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side of his work, it is ten to one that he will be carrying on muttered conversations with the nearest member of the company, or making joking asides to his partner.

Bending broken-hearted over the dead body of Albrecht, when playing the role of that dim young man Wilfred, in *Giselle*, I have been forced many a time to lower my head to hide a broad smile, elicited by some highly unsuitable remark breathed, for my ears alone, by the corpse.

Again, dancing Elihu in *Job*, a role that calls for an expression of the purest spiritual exaltation, I remember how disconcerting it was to become suddenly aware of Robert Helpmann, waiting his entrance as Satan in the wings, and behaving in a manner that was hardly in keeping with the dignity of the ballet.

Should the scenery suddenly become transparent as glass, illusion would, for the audience, die an abrupt death; their fantastic and exquisite idols might be revealed in a newer, more human guise. For me this double life has a charm that gives the dancers a character they could not possibly possess, were they to be continually the unreal and spiritual, or strange and grotesque beings they appear in performance. At the same time, I am torn between wishing them to be human beings, and a longing that as they bound, float, or glide into the wings they might cease temporarily to exist, until they make another entrance and assume once more their beautiful aerial forms.

## II

I have always regarded with the suspicion one reserves for the sight of something unnatural, those budding ballerinas and ambitious male dancers who insist that they derive enjoyment from a ballet class. To my mind the term "enjoyment"—and I am comparatively certain that most dancers agree with me—cannot possibly be applied to those daily hours which, from a misery and torture angle, might as well have been spent with the Spanish Inquisition.



## THE ENTRY OF THE DANCERS

I will admit that satisfaction may be felt at conquering a difficult movement, or achieving a temporary perfection in a pirouette, (only temporary, alas, for a few months' lack of practice and perfection fades). One can also allow that it would be possible to find a masochistic pleasure or to feel a smug sense of duty fulfilled. But enjoyment? No. Or practically never. Unless it be on those rare occasions when physical well-being is at its height, or when there is an outside stimulus such as suddenly discovering oneself in the throes of a deliriously happy love affair, or perhaps having woken to one of those unexpectedly golden days, which can so disturb and elate one's spirit in the early spring.

Taken generally and in the spirit with which they are most often approached, both classes and rehearsals appear a purgatory—a necessary tract of desolate uncomfortable country which must be traversed to reach the demi-paradise of a successful performance.

The contemplation of a dancer's working day, regarded in terms of the expenditure of physical energy, might well make the sturdiest labourer quail. And, as often as not, it is a working day which, having started at 10 a.m., does not end as others do at 5.30 p.m. or 6. p.m. but continues with a tiring performance in which to the physical work involved, there has to be added an appearance of happy ease and pleasure. In class, one can at least look as sour as one feels.

A performance can, and usually does, act as a stimulant on the performers, with the result that even if they go straight home, they rarely retire discreetly to bed. Dancers being sociable and pleasure loving, it is a struggle for them to deny themselves company and some form of relaxation after an evening's work. Some do. Many do not. The toughness of their training produces a wiry strength which enables them to lead lives and keep hours that would, I suspect, kill off at an early age any average person attempting to expend so much of himself in any one day, every day.

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This proves, perhaps, that the rigours of class are good for the body. A well taught class is always, if seriously approached, profitable. It is rarely enjoyable, sometimes bearable, but to me only vaguely possible in the mornings. Classes in the afternoon are a series of minor deaths, and I can think of nothing at all to say in favour of a class taken at tea time or during the early evening. These are the day's zero hours; lost pieces of time, possessing a vacuum emptiness, which can only be successfully filled by sleeping, or sitting and staring; by reading, or lazily gossiping with an intimate. The prospect of occupying them with the physical labour of a class in ballet is appalling, and if there is so unpleasant a necessity the accompanying atmosphere is indescribably dreary. Whereas the advantages of taking a class in the forenoon are obvious. If one feels liverish or splenetic the exercise has a tonic effect, and it can certainly be recommended as a drastic but almost certain antidote to a hangover, a symptomatic state less common in the ballet world than might be imagined. In the morning the day is ahead, a whole unexplored territory. Somewhere in its unknown perspective surely there may lurk a pleasing moment. After lunch the day has lost all freshness and mystery, it offers no siren calls to gaiety, and if fate or the teacher sees fit to give one the first class of the day after lunch or later, then one is doomed.

In the stuffy overheated air of the rehearsal room, air that after half an hour is thick with the odour of sweating humanity, everything seems to enchain the mental and physical languor that overcomes one during the early part of the afternoon.

The melancholy brightness of the jingling tunes played in a manner totally uninspired (and who can blame them) by a bored rehearsal pianist. The monotonous hypnotic tapping of the foot or stick of the teacher. There appears to be no reason why it should ever end. "I am here," one says to oneself, clutching the barre in a glassy-eyed trance, "for ever. For eternity. Painfully trying to turn my legs out. This is my life for the rest of time."

## THE ENTRY OF THE DANCERS

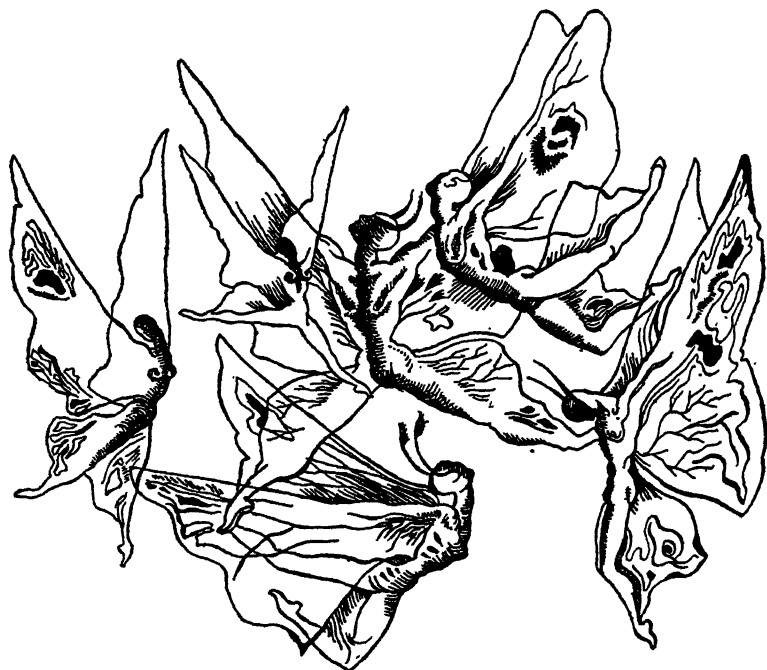
The barre work is a bore. The centre practice a torture. The adagio a tottering misery. There is a faint lightening of the gloom when one reaches the elevation steps, though they may take the last ounce of one's flagging energy, for one suddenly realizes that this is not eternal, there is an end in sight. And when, after the final jumps, the longed-for word of dismissal is spoken, the sense of release is so enormous, a species of pandemonium may break out, as with the unexpected arrival of a miraculous second store of energy the tortured followers of Terpsichore (cruellest of the muses) break ranks, and bounding, running, pushing, squeaking and chattering, make for their changing rooms.

This miraculous second store of energy, I may add, lasts no time at all if class be followed, as it almost inevitably will be in a repertory ballet company, by a rehearsal, though this in comparison to the monotonous routine of class work seems pleasantly varied, and may even allow one to squat cosily in a corner out of sight for a quite appreciable length of time whilst some unfortunate is put through and through a solo role by a remorseless choreographer.

Whether they are prepared to admit to it or no, there is undoubtedly a streak of sadism in most choreographers. Without it, they could not possibly contemplate the abject state of exhaustion to which they reduce their puppets; nor, after regarding, with their habitual impatience, the heaving chests, the trembling limbs, the shining faces, (scarlet or pale green, according to the way intense bodily heat affects them) still be able to say unmercifully "Once more—back to the beginning—and this time, let me see it done with a little style."

Burning up, during their working day, so much strength, one would expect dancers to eat large and nourishing meals. They do, no doubt, need them, but if they are to bound about almost immediately on top of eating, the results of swallowing a full-sized meal would be not only uncomfortable but disastrous; so there is a continual nibbling and chewing at stodgy sandwiches

## STUDIES IN BALLET



and buns, and gulping cups of tea and coffee at various odd hours, and it is often not until after the performance at night that a proper meal is eaten. To eat much before dancing is almost certain to bring on a kind of earthbound sensation. I found that I only felt comfortable before a performance if I were so empty inside that on drawing in my breath, my navel practically touched my back bone. This, of course, is a purely personal foible. I can remember being continually amazed by the size and the weight of the meals that frail Markova could tuck away during a day, into a body that was positively pin-like in shape. However much a dancer may need to eat at least two satisfying meals during the day, it is not always possible, and having done perhaps six hours almost continuous work, feeling weak and tired out, weariness clutching at every limb, it is not altogether surprising if, as he sits rather heavily down before the mirror in the dressing-room,

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he experiences a certain sensation of repugnance at the prospect of a performance.

Advancing a thin, pale, slightly haggard face towards its reflection, the dancer lifts a stick of greasepaint—number five, or five and a half—and begins to lay the foundations of that freshly exotic mask which is, to the public, that dancer's normal face, even though it be utterly dissimilar to the one seen in the mirror before the make-up covers it.

Some fifteen minutes later, there can be no doubt that the dancer, coryphee, ballerina, corps de ballet boy or premier danseur, feels abruptly a little better. How could it be otherwise? To find oneself transformed; the eyes larger, brighter, clearer; the spots and blemishes erased; the bony outlines smooth as a peach; the mouth curved and surfaced with satin; the bad points muffled or disguised; the good points enhanced, and the whole face glowing and radiant with unreal delicate colour.

The psychological effect is incredible. One ceases to droop. The head appears to lift itself, the shoulders set firmly yet easily, the back straightens, and by the time the stage is reached, and one stands scratching like a well trained cat in the rosin box, it is as a newborn being.

Faintly through the curtain penetrates a sound which cannot fail to excite: the sound of the orchestra tuning up. The miseries and pains of the day's work are no longer acute, instead there is an awareness (rather grudgingly admitted) of the profit acquired through the strenuous practice that has made the limbs more obedient.

If one is an exhibitionist—and it is a poor performer who is not—a ballet performance gives super-excellent opportunities for exhibitionism. Silent as a vision, and as dreamlike, denizen of a world stained with colours that are brighter than life, the dancer takes the stage triumphantly, as beautiful as a peacock, a humming bird or a rare butterfly.

Once in front of an audience, however listless or unwell they may be before the opening of the performance, a kind of trance

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seems to enwrap the dancers, and they move swiftly and easily, carried on wings of music, and riding deliriously on the crest of the waves of applause.

There are of course the exceptions, those nights when nothing is right, when shoes won't stay on, hooks, buttons, or shoulder straps burst, tights wrinkle, and head dresses slip; or one starts on the wrong foot, misses a beat, the balance is rocky, the audience gives out a miasma of apathetic boredom and the orchestra seems spiritless and at the same time fiendishly determined to alter every tempo. Yet taken as a whole, it is during a performance that the dancer reaps a just reward and embarks on the one enjoyable portion of the day's labours.

Not, however, at *matinées*, which possess the same dreariness as the class or the rehearsal held after lunch. *Matinées* are no pleasure to a theatrical artist: the afternoon is an unnatural time of the day for a theatrical entertainment, and in general a *matinée* is a hollow and spiritless affair that should have been abolished long ago. As *matinées* unfortunately continue to be given, it might be just to charge patrons half-price to see what is usually a half-hearted performance.

In an evening entertainment the stimulus is always present for the artist concerned, becoming stronger according to the importance of the particular role being danced. It grows as the night passes, particularly if the reception is good and the dancer knows he has given of his best. By the time the final curtain falls (and at this point, on an exciting first night, elation is at its highest, combined with a blissful sense of relaxation) the dancer is agog for gaiety.

To go quietly home to a nice glass of Ovaltine and the hot supper Mum has left drying itself happily up in the kitchen, is unthinkable. Even though very tired, one is pleasantly so; fabulously hungry, ready for the most fulsome adulation, and eager for the society of the brightest and most congenial friends.

By ten o'clock one is ready to leave the theatre. It might seem that twelve hours is a long enough working day, and that to

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complete it, bed and a deep sleep would be the only desirable prospect, but to attempt to sleep in an over-stimulated condition is impossible.

“All work and no play,” one murmurs, and regardless of the hostility of the few restaurants that condescendingly cater for the late diners, one is prepared to linger indefinitely seizing any excuse to prolong the delicious night.

What if tomorrow's classes and rehearsals loom ahead, an implacable black shape whose greedy hands are clutching to stretch and rack one's defenceless body? It seems days, years, a whole lifetime away, and it is not until the worn-out dancer stumbles finally into bed, that the full import of how beastly he is going to feel in the morning strikes home and he wonders gloomily what on earth possessed him to think that ballet dancing could be a pleasant career. There, behind him, meaningless and repetitive as one of the shadows cast by a series of symmetrically planted telegraph posts, lies another dead day.

Mad to postpone the evil moment of retiring to bed, one either asks one's friends back to one's own home, or goes back to theirs.

This is the most fatal and profitless finish to the day. Crouched round the kitchen table with a pot of tea, or in the bedroom with the remains of the gin, one talks and talks and talks. The gossip of the company is dragged out for the five hundredth time, sorted, docketed, added to. Imitations are given of the less favourite colleagues' performances; arguments entered into on the merits or demerits of this dancer and that choreographer.

I have known it to be 3.30 a.m and 4 a.m. before I have finally dragged off my clothes after one of these quiet little sessions, fuming at shoes that need unlacing and buttons that have to be undone. As though one has not undressed and dressed again often enough. The wear and tear on a dancer's wardrobe is enormous. It would be statistically fascinating to record the number of times per year a dancer gets in and out of his clothes, as compared to the average citizen who dresses in the morning and disrobes at night,

## STUDIES IN BALLET

this, saving for gala occasions, being the beginning and the end of his daily buttoning and unbuttoning.

It is not the same for the unfortunate dancer. Practically every item in the day's activity has meant the putting on and off of clothes. Not only for the classes, rehearsals and performances that fill the greater part of the working day, but also the other occupations for which time has to be found. For instance, the costume fittings, which are almost continual in a repertory ballet company, where new works are constantly being produced, or old works revived. Then, the photograph calls; both general (on the stage) and individual (at the photographer's studio). These are nearly as frequent as the fittings. Sessions with the masseur are one of the few pleasant necessities, yet even these can seem a nuisance when added to a day that is already over-taxing one's nervous and physical energies.

I have mentioned, in passing, that Terpsichore is the cruellest of the muses, and it can be seen that of all her devotees, it is the exponents of the ballet over whom her whip cracks loudest.

Ponder on each of these things, ambitious embryo dancers, remembering, as you ponder, the greater your success, the smaller the opportunity for a full private life, except in the hours when you should be resting and when further activity, however mild, can only add to your exhaustion. Not that I imagine for a moment the realization of this fact will send you hurrying to lie down in a darkened room during your hours of ease. You are only young once, and that is the time when unwittingly, unconsciously, yet with passion, one makes every possible attempt to destroy oneself.





## THE TRAINING AND PHYSIQUE OF THE DANCER

**T**HE TYPE OF PHYSICAL TRAINING SPONSORED by the armed services is one whose rigours can present only few difficulties to a highly trained dancer.

It is in its present form the result of a vast deal of consideration, experiment, and thought, on the part of the authorities responsible for its planning; which makes it distressing to discover that, on the whole, it fails to fully achieve its purpose, which should be to warm and loosen the limbs, to produce a general feeling of elasticity, well-being and controlled strength.

Its lack of success was brought home to me during my Army service, when I found that, nine times out of ten, after an hour's P.T., on leaving the refrigerated gymnasiums, the damp fields or concrete parade grounds, my feet and legs were still as rigid and frozen as they had been when I started off. In such a condition the limbs can easily be injured should fairly strenuous exercise be taken, which probably accounted for the epidemic of sprains, strains and wrenches attendant on most of the P.T. classes in the Services.

The fault lay in the failure of the exercises to be built gradually enough to a finish; the preliminary warming up was of so sketchy a variety it could not possibly be effective in preparing the limbs to undergo with any degree of ease and safety the more complicated movements to follow.

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Every form of physical training bears a certain similarity to the barre and centre practice of a ballet class, and the services P.T. is no exception, yet it has acquired very few of the virtues a ballet class possesses as a scientific and thorough training for the limbs and body.

In ballet training the exercises done at the barre at the beginning of the class go gently and thoroughly about the business of stretching and loosening every muscle; feet, legs, back, arms; and by the time the dancer has moved to the centre of the class room and begun to perform the more controlled, and later the more energetic, exercises, the limbs and torso are ready to respond without undue discomfort.

Warmth is essential to the body, if the muscles are to produce their maximum effort, which makes complete nonsense of the Army theory of removing as many clothes as possible, leaving only a pair of ill fitting and idiotically long and baggy shorts which catch the thighs every time the knees are bent. Dancers (like boxers) muffle themselves in wool for the early part of their exercises, thereby rapidly inducing perspiration once the barre work is well under way. Later they can comfortably shed a layer or two, for the body has generated its own warmth and become supple and responsive.

A modified form of barre work provides the ideal warming up exercise for anybody who wants to keep in good physical trim. The stretching and relaxing of the feet, the lifting, swinging, and kicking of the legs, the bending of the torso; these are all found in the physical training of the forces, but in a bastard and unhelpful form.

Another unfortunate result of the services training is the rigid stance it encourages. There is probably no carriage so unnatural. The chest and stomach equally protuberant, the back hollowed, the rump jutting at an angle that might comfortably balance a cup of tea, the whole pose strained, tense and unnecessarily tiring, instead of being easily and naturally upright.

## TRAINING AND PHYSIQUE OF THE DANCER

It is certain that a rearrangement of the exercises would prove beneficial, if one only had some conviction that recruits could be persuaded to regard their daily performance with anything other than the undiluted aversion the average soldier, sailor or airman brings to most forms of comparatively strenuous exercise (apart from any particular sport he may happen to favour). A result of this attitude is that the movements are so mechanically and half-heartedly reproduced, that they automatically become valueless, whether they are helpful, or useless, in themselves.

I do not want it to appear that I am suggesting to the Admiralty, the War Office and the Air Ministry, that it is the most desirable goal, and for the greatest good of all concerned, that the British Forces should be transformed into a vast corps-de-ballet (although it is an idea that I do not find unpleasing). I am merely comparing their particular version of physical training—as the only form of exercise other than ballet classes that I have known—with the training of a dancer, and finding, quite by the way, that it does not stand the comparison as well as one would expect.

To illustrate this point, at the risk of being a war bore, I cannot resist recounting an actual incident in my Army life, which, when I look back on it, leaves me convinced that the training I had received during my years as a ballet dancer stood me in as good, or better, stead than if I had during that time only done the routine Army P.T.

I had disembarked at a North African port after over a week of lazy days in the sun aboard a troopship. It was midsummer. The sky was a luminous burning blue, the sun at its zenith, the air still and breathless. In company with another nervous second lieutenant, I was looking hopefully round for the transport we were expecting to take us to whatever camp or depot we had to reach.

It was something of a shock to find that, with a party of some thirty-five or so soldiers in our charge, we had to march to our destination, vaguely indicated to us by a harassed officer, where it lay, lost in a hazy distance about eighteen miles away on the other side of the bay.

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There was nothing to be done, the men fell in and off we went, objects of mockery to the veteran military who passed many loud, jovial, and disrespectful remarks about our idiotic topees (so soon to be discarded), our obviously new tropical kit, our bewildered rather sour faces.

We stumped determinedly forward, past the shabby buildings, the French and Arab cafés on the outskirts of the town, until we found ourselves moving along a dusty road where the hedges of mimosa poured sweetness over our perspiring brows. Having proceeded about five miles we halted for a rest, a necessary but fatal move, for when we started off once more it was to the accompaniment of a chorus of groans from most of the men. We had not gone much further before some of the soldiers began to lag behind. Hearty, falsely encouraging admonitions to keep going had merely a momentary effect. In no time at all, I and my companion second lieutenant each found ourselves supporting two stumbling figures, one on either arm. "It's me feet," they moaned dismally at intervals. "It's me feet, and me boots 'urt." I was fairly desperate before we had reached a halfway point on our journey. Two-thirds of the men seemed to be in a bad way, scarlet in the face, limping, and dragging their badly blistered feet. We had become a group from one of Gustave Dorè's *Inferno* pictures, an entwined, damned band, trailing hopelessly through the heat and dust.

The march seemed endless; I was beginning to wonder uneasily if we should ever get the men there. We were about four miles from our destination when a lorry arrived from the camp. There was not enough room for all, we piled the worst cases aboard, and waved them off, then in company with a few of the younger members of the original party who were still cheerful we finished the march easily on our own.

It has to be confessed that I felt a certain smugness at finding myself in good repair. Tired, I will admit, and hotter than I cared to be, slightly distraught-looking, and thickly coated with white dust, yet, in comparison to the bulk of the men with whom I had

## TRAINING AND PHYSIQUE OF THE DANCER.

taken that unexpected walk, definitely fresh. I should not like it to be thought that in recounting this incident, I am attempting to prove any essential toughness or outstanding virility in myself. I am merely using it as an illustration of the way in which ballet-trained legs and feet could capably carry a body that was approaching middle age on an eighteen-mile walk and allow it to arrive in a far better condition than many younger men who had only, as far as I knew, received the routine Army physical training, which did not appear to have equipped them with a fully adequate resistance.

Having given the ballet-dancer's training this initial fanfare, it might be seemly to examine the physique it produces.

In comparison with a boxer, an all-in wrestler, or one of those muscle-bound giants hailed as "The Perfect Man" in the health and physical training periodicals, the average dancer might appear puny, but in a dancer the overdevelopment of muscle is undesirable. Even the heroic build of a classic statue is not to be wished for. An Apollo Belvedere, a Venus de Milo must appear heavy and clumsy on a stage, viewed as they would be from an angle which lengthens and enlarges proportions.

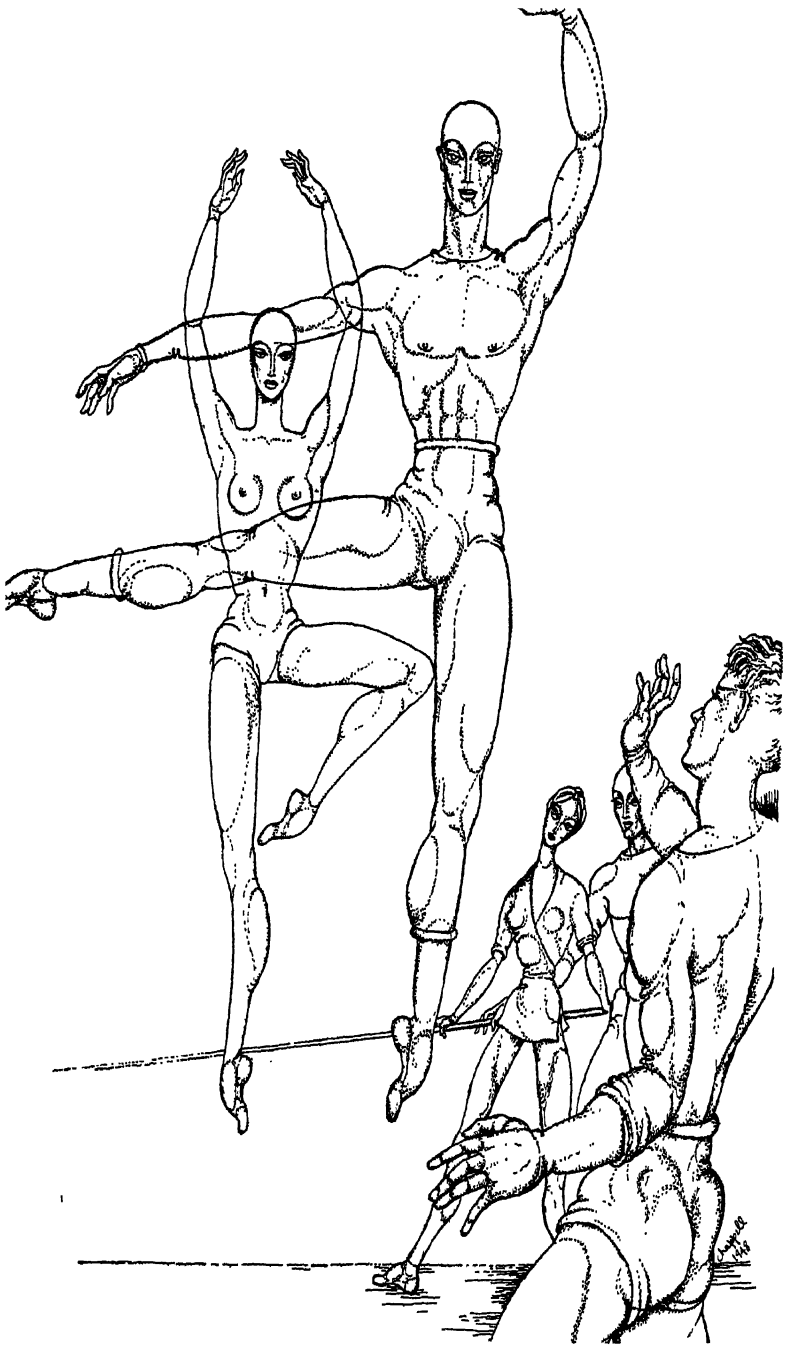
Dancers reproduce the classic ideal in a gentler mould; they are, in effect, the children or the spiritual counterparts of those great marble bodies, those large noble heads, and massive glossy limbs.

Among athletes, the unexaggerated even development of a champion swimmer's body most closely approximates to the dancer's build.

Let us take two perfectly made dancers, a male and a female, and gently dismember them, lay out before us the separate portions of the body, and lifting each in turn examine it critically and dispassionately to see wherein its beauties and perfections lie.

Take first, and lift it carefully, a head.

It is a male head; round and neatly shaped with ears laid close. The column of the throat is long and full. The face, oddly enough, is not strictly handsome, and this is an advantage, for classical



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regularity of features is far less effective on a stage than a slight irregularity in the structure, giving a face life and character.

This face is not over-smooth, the cheek bones are obvious, the cheeks slightly hollowed, the nose is not particularly small, it is straight and not too thin, the mouth is wide and full, the jaw line firm without being heavy. The large eyes are set far apart, and not too deeply, and the modelling of the brows and the bone of the eye socket is arched and clearly shaped. The forehead is high, round and smooth.

It is a face that accepts beautifully the emphatic mask of a dancer's make-up.

Though we have so callously removed this head from its body the expression is serene and mild, with lightly closed lips, and eyes alive and gently wondering, for the perfect dancer's face is disciplined to show no signs of stress. It is a young and noble head.

Take now the female, and place it at the side of its male companion. They have certain points in common. The female cranium is round and small beneath its smooth hair, the brow is clear and high like the brow of Diana the chaste huntress; again, the cheek bones are apparent, and a faint fragile hollow falls away beneath them to a gently curved jaw; this slight hollowing of the cheeks gives the face a wistful romantic air. The nose is small and straight, the eyes are wide but elongated and slightly tilted at the outer corners, needing only a touch of eyebrow pencil to give them a similarity to the eyes of a kind and well loved cat, which can suddenly appear strange, unknown and a little wicked. The throat is long, smooth and slim. The expression resembles the man's expression, calm, far away, but still alive and aware.

These heads, these faces, at which we gaze so intently, are the perfect heads and faces every dancer should wish to possess, but we are examining ideals and obviously every dancer is not the possessor of the ideal appearance. Nevertheless something very near to it can be arrived at, for it is an indisputable fact that after a certain number of years spent as a dancer, trained by the right

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hands and minds, definite physical changes can take place in a face, producing finally an appearance very close to these two dream heads which we have been examining.

These changes grow from a mental approach as well as from environment and study.

In much the same way as people who breed certain animals tend to grow to resemble them, so a young dancer, continually surrounded during training by other dancers, and watching the work and performances of great and experienced artists—on whom he looks with a different and more absorbing eye than the casual observer—gradually begins to acquire the dancer's face.

It is most quickly noticeable in the young person of genuine talent, whose approach to his work is truly serious and concentrated. A face that may, in the early days of training, have been ordinary, plump, even rather coarsely-built, can, if it belongs to a dancer whose gifts and aspirations are real and fervent, become more delicate, evocative, nobler. Control of the facial muscles, the correct set of the mouth, are insisted upon by the good teacher and the good choreographer, and they can give a face that has been slackly held, relaxed in mouth and jaw, dull of eye, almost a new cast of feature.

One sees daily in the streets hundreds of faces possessing every attribute of beauty; fine features, wonderful modelling, good proportion; yet they fail to please because of a lack of conscious discipline in the expression, a vulgar tilt to the mouth, or loosely held lips, a lack-lustre look or an unattractively beady glitter in the eyes.

Though I have asked you to consider two ideal faces of definite beauty, it is the type of beauty that is right for a dancer, which does not in actuality mean anything approaching the accepted idea of good looks.

Pavlova, by ordinary standards, was an ugly woman; it was the poise of her head, the fragile bone structure of her face, and above all, the genius and fire illumining her expression, that produced on the stage an impression of unearthly loveliness.



## TRAINING AND PHYSIQUE OF THE DANCER

Karsavina is a genuine beauty, but her exquisite face might have been meaningless had it not shown a radiant intelligence, a mental beauty behind the eyes, which made it seem more fascinating each time one saw her again.

Nijinsky's face had no single attribute of the Greek God but it was able to acquire any characteristic his roles demanded. Looking at his pictures one finds in them all the romanticism, the exoticism, or subtlety, that each separate part needed. His face, apart from an obvious plasticity, had many of the qualities I have shown you in my ideal, the clearly shaped cheek bones, the jaw that is firm yet not heavy, the full mouth, the wide-set eyes.

It is the dancer's approach to the work, and the dancer's training, which are responsible for modelling the dancer's face.

Lay down my two dreaming heads that gaze so gently, thoughtfully, upwards and outwards. Here now are the two torsos, mutilated like the figures in a surrealist landscape, or the broken statues in some sand-buried Atlantis, yet each is complete in itself and there is a heart beating quickly and evenly beneath the smooth honey-coloured skins.

They belong to the classic tradition, but they are not classic in size; they are lighter, more aerial.

The male torso has firm solid shoulders and the well-built, though not overdeveloped, chest slopes into a flat stomach and a taut waistline. The pelvic muscles are apparent but not chunky, and the hips and buttocks are compact and firm. The whole shape has something like the appearance of a runner or a swimmer.

The woman's torso appears far more delicate, with fine-edged lines to the shoulders, and small curved breasts perfectly placed. It falls in sharply to a tiny waist. The hips are smaller and neater than most women's, and the stomach is as flat as a boy's.

Embrace it. Do not be afraid. It has no arms to repel you, and it is warm to your touch. This is where you are surprised. It appeared frail as spun glass covered with silk to your eyes, yet under your hands how firm, how unyielding it is, more like steel than spun glass, but it is steel covered with satin.

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The muscles of the back are amazingly strong and the whole body has a thrust to it like a taut spring.

Both these torsos have the same compact firmness to the touch, both the same vigorous upright movement produced by the leaping and lifting and upward line of all dancing exercises.

Here we can begin to repair the damage we have done. Lift our two heads and set them in place on their respective bodies. The lips curve into a half smile—the inscrutable smile of the ballet dancer in performance that means everything and nothing—as the necks join gently on to the shoulders and no flaw is seen.

Take now the legs, ideal as all the other parts of the figures I have dismembered for your edification.

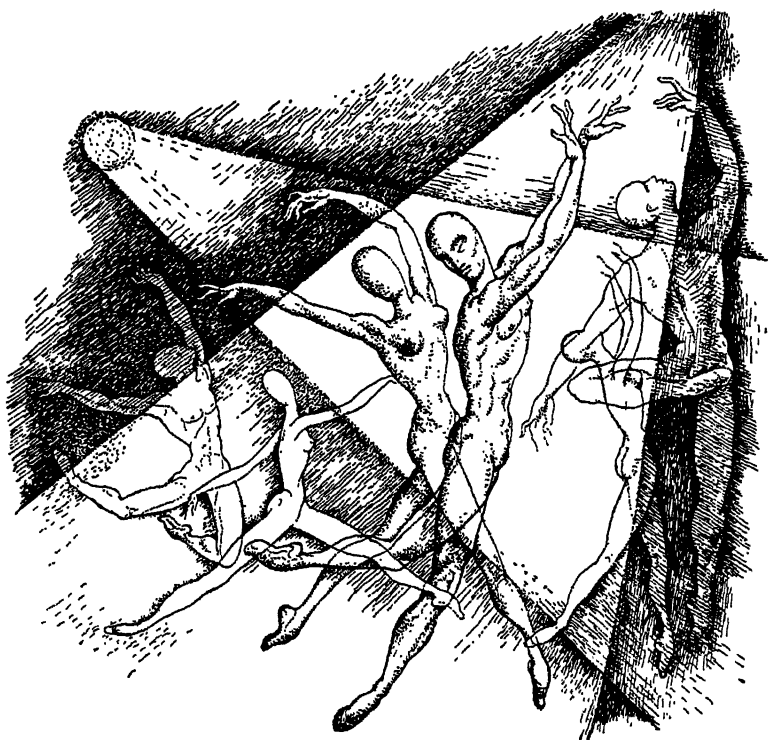
The male legs are strongly developed. They are not over-long and there is an evenly balanced proportion in the build of the thigh and the calf—this is a rare thing in the average man's leg even in the leg of an athlete. These dancer's legs give an impression (which is not false) of great strength and untiring energy; and the lines of the muscles are smooth and harmonious. There are no unsightly and abrupt bumps. The knee is not protuberant or knobbly, it is flat and well-shaped, forming a neat join between thigh and calf. The ankle is shapely and the foot has an arched instep, making it appear to spurn the earth on which it stands.

The legs of the woman dancer have, like her torso, a deceptively fragile appearance. They are, in fact, intensely strong and supple. The line is smooth and fine, the shape superbly elegant, the long curve of the thigh gliding down to flow into the knee and fall from there to a fine ankle. The calf is lightly curved and the whole outline shows a tense electric clarity. The small narrow foot has an instep more strongly roundly-arched than that of the man.

Let the legs join the bodies. No sooner do they become part of one another than they are quivering to move and would leave us. We must hasten to examine the arms and then let them resume their rightful place so that we may admire the completed figures.

Those belonging to the man are strongly and neatly built, one

## TRAINING AND PHYSIQUE OF THE DANCER



would expect the hands to be bigger, more powerful, but they are elegantly and delicately made, sensitive with long thin fingers, neither limp and inexpressive, nor rigid and clumsy, like most hands. The arm muscles are developed, but not so elaborately as those of a boxer or a weight lifter, the forearm is roundly and gracefully formed, terminating in a neat wrist.

The female arms are in complete contrast. Exquisitely made, the wrists and hands are a miracle of fragility. It seems unbelievable that limbs so delicately formed should not look bony, but these do not. They only have an appearance of phenomenal finesse.

Take them and place them where they belong. Once more the figures are complete, and though for a moment they stand still,

## STUDIES IN BALLET

they are obviously about to bound from our sight. For a brief second you and I are Pygmalion confronted by statues that breathe and smile. How beautiful they are, and—have you realised?—how small. Dancers as a race are little people, and the perfect build for them that we created in two ideal figures is not just a dream, for it has been seen and can still be found in varying forms in all the dancers you have known. In Nijinsky, in Masine, in Lifar, in Woicikovsky, in Idzikowski, in Shabelevsky. In Walter Gore, Frank Staff, and Harold Turner. In Jean Babillee and David Lichine. Pavlova, Spessitsewa (a superlative example) Karsavina, Lopokova, Markova, Pearl Argyle, Pamela May, Chauvire and exquisite Fonteyn. None of these are tall, only a few approaching the medium build and height. They have all reproduced either wholly, or approximately, the shapes that have been described on these pages.

Slim yet sturdy. Finely made, yet strong and vibrant with life and energy, they are the vision figures, the embodiments of the shape that dancers should be.

What then of those who fall lamentably short of the requirements of a good dancer's physique? Those women as tough and solid as gym mistresses and hockey players, or the young girls plump as pigeons wrapped in a generous covering of adolescent fat?

Those men who are over large or over long? The dancers with long bodies and short legs; stumpy bodies and spidery legs? The young boys as thin as sparrows? Those with over-large heads, clumsy hands, and meagre bodies? In other words, the majority of dancers at the commencement of their training. It is here, the wise teacher, the great choreographer, and the intelligent designer step in, each to work his individual magic.

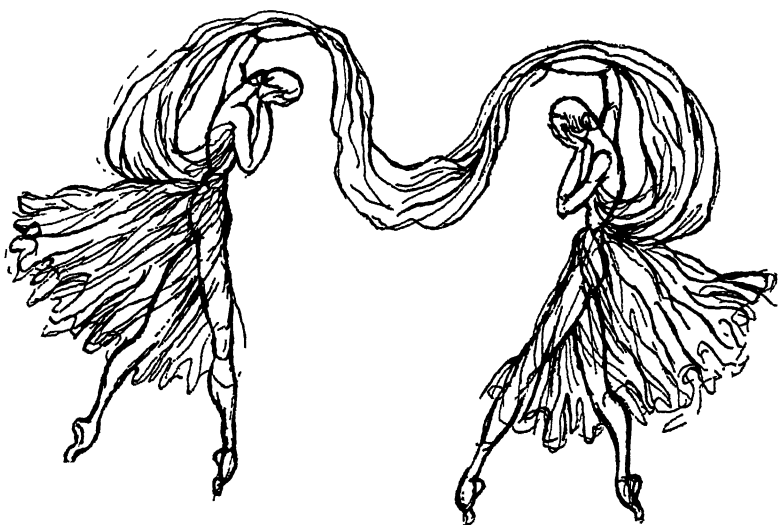
It is, firstly, the training a dancer receives that can correct or exaggerate faults. If it is good, wise, experienced training it can remedy many physical disadvantages, building muscle where it is needed, reducing it where it is unsightly. Hiding deficiencies by altering the dancer's stance, the carriage of the back and the

## TRAINING AND PHYSIQUE OF THE DANCER.

posture of the head; teaching control of every muscle in each limb so that movement, in becoming flowing and effortless gives grace to every line of the body.

Once this has been accomplished, the choreographer is able to emphasize the particular gifts of movement at which the dancer excels, abetted by the designer who must know how to enhance the dancer's best features and blur those less pleasing.

All of this achieved, the expertly trained and presented dancers—though they may have originally fallen far short of the perfection discovered in those bodies we have so closely examined—can appear to possess every lovely attribute needed to make them in truth the radiant, though more delicate, children of some splendid figure from the classical mythology.





## THE BALLET PUBLIC

**F**OR AN AUDIENCE, BALLET HOLDS AN appeal, part physical, part emotional, and to the few part intellectual.

It has qualities that work solely on the ducts, glands and guts of the onlooker, causing a stirring in the region of the stomach.

This physical titillation, common, though perhaps they would not like to admit it, to every member of the audience; slight or intense according to individual reaction, but always present, is induced by the sight of beautiful well-proportioned bodies moving with grace, dressed and displayed to maximum effect.

The emotional disturbance, again general and varying in its intensity, is produced by a diversity of obvious elements. Colour, light, the mood projected by the choreography, the acting ability of the performers, and the association of music with movements as exciting and technically flawless as those of a champion diver, and having the added attraction of being more varied and interesting.

Mental stimulus is received by the small number of people who are fully capable of appreciating a work of art. Not necessarily capable of full appreciation, but fully capable of appreciation. There is a difference. The former being based on real knowledge and experience; the latter on a state of mind.

These qualities of appeal, physical, emotional, mental, which are found in varying degrees in the attraction of all forms of theatrical entertainment, are intensified in ballet, giving it even

## THE BALLET PUBLIC

in its second-rate manifestations power to spellbind and dazzle those watching it.

Only the more knowledgeable and thoughtful minds, the experienced dancer or choreographer sitting in the auditorium, will be seriously disturbed by obvious faults such as badly-trained feet, untidy shoes, lack of inspiration, sweaty armpits, darned tights, careless lighting, and shabby or unpressed costumes. These do not disturb, are in fact hardly seen by, the greater mass of the public eyes.

The majority of humans are earthbound and slow moving; liable to crack, or to strain some part of their anatomy, should they attempt to jump or climb, they are soon exhausted by any physical effort more arduous than walking; and this may explain the fascination—as at the appearance of something supernatural—with which they regard the ease and beauty of the movements of a well-trained dancer.

The ballet is a demon lover, versed in magic lore, and its worshippers are possessed by a passion more than usually blind, therefore the opinions of the greater part of an average ballet audience are as valueless and distorted as the opinions of any individual hopelessly in love, of the adored one.

The British audience is fond of the dainty. This may arise from the fact that as a race we are a singularly undainty people, and the starting point of attraction for most ballet fans springs from the delight they took in their first view of the white ballets, *Les Sylphides*, Act II of *Swan Lake* and the second act of *Giselle*, all to the public “dainty” ballets with “dainty” movements and “dainty” net dresses.

It would be cheering to persuade oneself that this leaning towards delicacy was brought about by a desire to escape from the solidity and banality of everyday existence, or even a laudable endeavour to find and appreciate beauty, but it has to be reluctantly admitted that it actually arises from a deplorably low standard of taste, a standard which has grown steadily lower in this country since the days of the industrial revolution.

## STUDIES IN BALLET

It is a highly debatable point what represents or composes the quality of beauty. Where do we find it? Can we lay down hard and fast rules as to where true beauty lies or what beauty is? Is it in an overmantel, a Cupid's bow mouth, a puffed sleeve, a pressed glass vase from a chain store, a human hand, or a jewel? Is it something we can grasp, and press close to us, or is it an essence? We cannot say, we only recognize it or fail to see it, for beauty appears as a veiled shape. Unfold the draperies, and find beneath them invisible air.

The realization of the shapes and appearances of beauty remain the individual's secret, for he cannot fully communicate his discoveries of them to another person. Beauty is shapeless because it has every shape, is present in nothing and in everything. It is obvious and it is so subtle it passes unseen. It is always hidden, wrapped in forms made by man or nature, forms which are completely different to every eye that beholds them. You may find it in ruins, wrinkles, dust, mud, stones and decay. Or in growth, space, light, movement, transparency and distance.

Within the confines of a lifetime those individuals who are most aware of living, are continually destroyed and rebuilt by the discovery of beauty. They still remain unable to explain fully either to themselves or to others what shape it takes or how they have found it.

Beauty in every form, mental, spiritual, emotional and physical is to be found in all good ballet. It would be of interest to know how much of it is observed by the average member of an audience, who should be imbibing an appreciable amount of artistic education from attending with regularity the productions of a first-class company. A small percentage do, no doubt, assimilate their quota, but the bulk remains a robot body, moved mostly by the premier danseur's legs, the ballerina's beauty and the circulation of intimate gossip and speculation on the back-stage and private existence of their favourites. What an opportunity they miss to expand their minds by learning to appreciate the most harmonious blending of painting, music, acting,



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movement and thought that the theatre has to offer; the very heart, blood and bones of the people who created the spectacle. Instead an audience is inclined to take its ballet like an overdose of some potent and vision-inducing drug. Swooning dizzily in their seats, with critical faculties suspended they voice their all-embracing approval with loud and ugly cries. For ballet audiences more than any other are given to applauding very noisily and at great length.

A violent and impulsive demonstration of approval and pleasure made by a large body of people can be one of the most exciting things that happen in the theatre for the performers and the creators of the work approved. It can also be alarming, even sinister, in its implications.

It is heard at its most sinister when the same doped howling greets in turn an exceptional ballet, a capable yet uninspired work, and something that is thoroughly bad.

Deafened by the animal wailing we may well ask ourselves if there is any need or reason for perfection? And side by side with that question another. How important in itself is perfection if only a minority sees and appreciates it?

To the great creative artists in painting, writing and music, the minority's appreciation may be sufficient. A genius can work without even that, thrice blessed if he be independent of the need to earn a living and so has no need of public approval. Even if his brains must earn him his daily bread he still exists in another universe and contains within himself urges so strong and foreign to the average that the opinions of the masses cannot affect him either way. The quality and output of his work will remain the same be he popular or despised, understood or ignored. He is possessed by a personal demon that sets him apart from his fellow men, and though he may suffer mental and spiritual tortures he is none the less enviable, for he knows exaltations, reaches heights, and sees distances denied to most of us. At this particular period of world history genius is a rare quality that one hesitates to attach to any theatrical names.



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Nature, in compensation for the unknown great that have been lost in the many wars which have made an almost continuous accompaniment to contemporary lives, has allowed us many first-rate creative minds.

The sensitive and gifted performer in the theatre has a right to good appreciation and to a measured comprehension to assist and stimulate his, or her endeavours. One might say that to theatrical people—both those who create and those who interpret—applause and approval are practically a necessity, a life-giving force, yet unadulterated popularity, in the worst sense of a word that has now really unpleasant associations, can be a death dealing force, if one wishes truth and sincerity and purity of style to have any importance.

It may perhaps be better for the integrity of the creative theatrical artist (particularly in the ballet world) that he should create solely for the small minority who can genuinely assess his value, but it shows at the same time a shocking state of affairs that a world public is today quite incapable of doing this. The minority must become the majority if the arts of the theatre are not to sink to the lowest common denominator of taste now contained in the word “popular;” and it is only by continually seeing the best, by accepting and appreciating it fully and satisfactorily that audiences will give to the creative minds in the theatre the response that is their due.

There is no ballet but good ballet, using the word good in its superlative sense. Anything below that must be dismissed. Perfection is more necessary in ballet, and anything short of perfection more noticeable and disturbing, than in any other theatrical spectacle.

Therefore, the need for perfection is absolute, and from that need arises another, a need for the training of an audience to a state of perception and taste that will make them capable of meeting perfection with genuine understanding.

Ballet must not be “popular”. When we are told, as we are told continually these days, that music, opera and the visual

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arts are becoming popular it does not, unfortunately, mean that a renaissance of taste has come about amongst the people of the world. It only means that certain obvious aspects of the various arts—those that can be easily taken in and call for little consideration or effort to enjoy—are now accepted by a larger public than before. The moment any one of the arts reveals itself in a shape that may disturb the senses or make some mildly exacting demands on the mental processes there is sure to be a sustained howl of protest from that mystic figure known as “the man in the street”.

To be popular today means to confine thought, experiment, and image in a small, circumscribed, and familiar shape; to play safe, and to make gestures that everybody can recognize; all things that spell a slow paralysis to any form of art, and that would mean death to the purest forms of ballet.

At this period of world culture, when mass production, prefabrication, synthetic materials and machine-made merchandise are in the ascendant the public has to search hard if it wishes to find things of lasting beauty. In other ages when building, decoration, and the trimmings of life were produced by craftsmen, and were all the products of individual brains, and the slow, loving work of people's hands the populace did not know of anything that was other than beautiful, and whether they appreciated it or not there was only one standard, a good one. Nowadays the individual has to take trouble to find the good, the true and the beautiful, and it entails an effort that few are prepared to make. The faculty of appreciation develops its full sensitivity by being carefully and constantly exercised, therefore a public fed on ugliness, on the products of chain stores, factories, the cheap Press, the cinema (ninety per cent of whose productions incline to favour the cretinous impulses in humanity), the jerry-builder, the vulgarity and paucity of the the modern theatre, get few opportunities to exercise real appreciation.

Today the largest part of a British theatre audience seems only

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able to take in scenes, characters and emotions that are larger than life. This is, possibly, the normal reaction of a people who have lived, and are still living, through so long a period of regimentation, mass movement, and globe-shaking catastrophes. The pleasure to be derived from the delicate nuances of feeling that have given the world the greater part of its man-made beauty, is a pleasure few appear to feel these days. The eye and the mind are out of focus. Large shapes, giant emotions that explode against the stomach are understood by an audience. The subtle gesture, the thought that creeps quietly as a dream into the hidden places of the heart and mind, remain unseen, unheard, except by a minority, and a surfeit of entertainment built to provoke as little mental exercise as possible coarsens, more and more, public approach to the theatre.

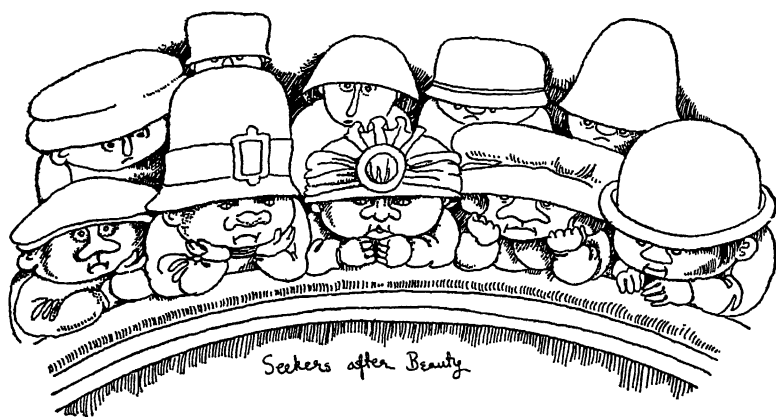
Ballet in its best aspects is a form of theatre which can inspire thought, and school the eye to notice delicacy in approach, or whispered suggestion as opposed to shouted statement, and the onlooker if he wishes fully to satisfy himself and train his eyes and mind to discover hitherto unsuspected delight, may, by paying close attention to the undercurrents and moods projected in the work of the best choreographers, teach himself to recognize meaning and beauty in many places where it has before escaped his notice.

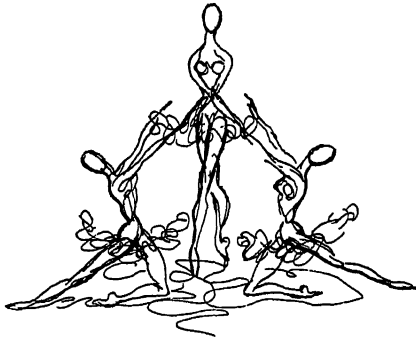
In the wordless musical world of the ballet certain gestures can give the key to the shape and meaning of the work offered. The choreographer will point his theme by these and then give himself up to evolving his dances. Where many misguided writers and critics are searching for, and, to the choreographer's bewilderment, discovering, drama in the pirouettes, pathos in the bourrée, and anguish in the arabesques, it would be well for them to realize that first and foremost the choreographer is bent on making a dance movement musically and aesthetically correct, and that it is only a short mime passage or a slight repeated gesture superimposed on the general line of the choreography that gives the meaning necessary to explain the ballet's theme.

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The overruling expression of the dance may be wild, despairing, serene or lyrical, but the actual movements are controlled by and grow from the music, and from one another; added positions of head and arms pointing and producing the ballet's story and the dancer's character.

Superlative choreography possesses craftsmanship, technique, delicacy and beauty, and until the Utopian dawn when these qualities are once again a normal part of every aspect of our daily lives, a discriminating approach to the ballet can educate the audience's mind and equip them in a way that will help them to find a new satisfaction in many aspects of art which have before pleased them without their knowing the reason for their pleasure.





## PAS-DE- TROIS

**T**HE THREE BALLERINAS WHO FORM THIS *pas-de-trois* belong to different periods, and varying glories of the ballet. Physically they are not alike. Spiritually they resemble one another. They each reveal possession of the same two qualities, serenity and subtlety, qualities that I particularly admire in a dancer, though neither, I am afraid, are as popular with audiences as fireworks and *fouettés*. In the first ballerina, Tamara Karsavina, serenity and subtlety appeared as a deep romanticism. In the second, Pearl Argyle, they were expressed coolly with a luminous radiance. And in Margot Fonteyn they showed themselves as a lyrical delicacy.

I have deliberately chosen to write about three ballerinas whose work has given me continual and growing pleasure in retrospect, as well as at actual performances, and if the outburst of adjectives that so liberally bespatter the ensuing pages appear slightly over-eulogistic, it must be borne in mind that I feel something more than ordinary enthusiasm for each of these three dancers, and that restraint in enthusiasm,—if the things or people over whom one is enthusiastic are fully worthy of it—is something I do not understand.

I consider each figure in my *pas-de-trois* to be fully worthy of my extravagant admiration, and in relation to the depth of the pleasure, excitement, and satisfaction I have felt in watching these three dancers in rehearsal and at performance, my praises are miracles of restraint.

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Those of you who have never seen Karsavina or Pearl Argyle must see them as I present them to you. If my words give you only an inkling of how they appeared, you may consider yourselves fortunate to realize even a fraction of these ballerinas' qualities.

To those of you who have seen Fonteyn I say read, and then hurry to see her again and attempt—if you have not been sensible or observant enough to have already done so—to watch her with the seeing and thoughtful eye that is necessary if you are to fully appreciate one of the greatest of living dancers now performing.

### I

## TAMARA KARSAVINA

The younger members of a professional company will tend automatically to acquire something of the style of their leading ballerina.

They also, and far more easily, adopt any mannerisms or affectations in performance that ballerinas may have. Mannerisms, even affectations, are acceptable when allied to genius, and when individual to the person possessing them; they are of the greatest possible danger when acquired, and not belonging to a dancer.

It is, therefore, of primary importance, that the minor members and promising second rank dancers in a ballet company should work with principals whose style and technique are as pure as possible, offering an example and instruction of inestimable value to the younger and less experienced performer.

There is one particular dancer amongst world famous ballerinas who has completely fulfilled this ideal and whose presence in a theatre must always be inspiring and beneficial.

Tamara Karsavina is remembered in almost every one of the famous ballet roles—she has been exotic Firebird and inhuman Thamar; delicious Columbine and dreaming young girl in love with the perfume of a rose—and many more too numerous to



## PAS-DE-TROIS

list, revealing the same perfection in each part, and a sureness and intelligence of approach that made it possible for her correctly to adapt her romantically melancholy personality to every sort of role, without for one moment smothering her own subtle and delicate character.

She is a strikingly beautiful woman—her beauty on the stage has long been legendary—and any young dancer who was fortunate enough to work in the same theatre with her, and perceptive enough to appreciate her quality could not fail to realize it was an unsurpassed education in the art of dancing to watch her at rehearsals and in performance.

I was privileged, as a fledgling member of the first Ballet Rambert company, to find myself in this fortunate position. It did not take long to discover that it would be only possible to acquire knowledge of the most beneficial kind, from this noble and exquisite ballerina, for her taste, her sense of style, and her instinct in performance, were equally impeccable, and in addition, she was probably the most perfect mime I have ever seen.

I have often thought it must have been a moving experience for those audiences who saw Karsavina appearing with the untried and immature members of the young Ballet Rambert. The quiet, clear radiance of her personality, like the cool light just before sunrise; the world of experience revealed in every movement, the beauty of her finely shaped face, and the sweet melancholy of her smile, cast a benediction on the young dancers surrounding her. She appeared like a high priestess, attended by acolytes and dedicated virgins, or a goddess, who moved as quietly as a cloud, among a tumbling train of nymphs and winged messengers.

I became most fully aware of the quality of Karsavina's mime when watching, first at rehearsals, and later in performance, certain solo divertissements that she was including amongst her appearances with the Ballet Rambert. The first of these, a short piece arranged by herself, was entitled *Mdlle. de Maupin*. Her performance of this dance was one of the most completely

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enchancing and satisfactory examples of theatrical artistry I have ever seen; so evocative, so delicate, and yet so revealing, that we all crowded the wings nightly to watch.

The dance itself, like many true works of art, was of the greatest and most deceptive simplicity, a simplicity that is of the most dangerous variety, for it has every pitfall unless expressed by a real artist.

As presented by Karsavina, through her controlled gestures and the elusive shades of expression that changed continually the set of her lovely tragic face, it told the whole story of *Mdlle. de Maupin*.

Wearing a long curled red wig, and a costume that was an interpretation, rather than a statement, of a period, consisting of a full skirted velvet tunic with ruffles, a tricorne hat with a plume, tights and soft knee high boots, she appeared like a beautiful stripling—a boy with a girl's tenderness—a girl with a boy's eagerness. The choreographic shape of the dance was slight, consisting of a few elevation steps, and some stretched arabesques with the supporting knee bent and the whole line long and drawn out to a reaching and imploring hand. It was the poetry, the implications and the controlled emotion that Karsavina laid over the smooth movement of the dance that made it, once seen, an unforgettable experience. I would consider a great deal of modern ballet repertoire well lost if it were possible to see once more in exchange, her exit as *Mdlle. de Maupin* with one finger to her lips, and her great sad eyes lit by the warmth of a wondering and passionate heart as she looked back over her shoulder.

In the same manner, she added a personal magic to a traditional Russian peasant dance. It was fundamentally that same Russian dance any ballet-goer must know only too well, where the mood fluctuates between mad gaiety and deep despair. Here, expressed by Karsavina, the same type of arrangement became a miracle of subtlety, seeming to contain all the variety and poetic mood of Russian folk lore.

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Dancers in performance, and dancers as human beings can be—like all other theatrical characters—totally different people. Ballerinas who appear to resemble spirits, removed from every earthly failing, from each small unattractive human weakness, are far too often known to their colleagues as arrogant, foolish, and tiresome people, given to idiotic displays of false temperament and prone to dreary ugly little jealousies and spites; or else of such blank stupidity that as people they hardly exist.

Karsavina as a dancer was a noble figure, with an innate dignity and intelligence illuminating every gesture and movement of her performances. As a woman she possessed the same qualities in even greater degree. That the intelligence revealed throughout her dancing was in-bred and natural is proved by her writings. If one had never met Karsavina it would be obvious after reading *Theatre Street* that the mind which conceived it was a mind of no ordinary calibre.

## STUDIES IN BALLET

Backstage she was by right, and by behaviour, a great ballerina. She had a personal dignity that forbade intimacy, but in no intimidating way, and seemed always to be wrapped, as she still seems today whenever one occasionally catches a glimpse of her, in a serene melancholy as though she were aware of many things beyond the sight of most human beings.

Of today's ballerinas I can only think of one who appears to be a natural heir to the beauty of style that was so integral a part of Karsavina's art. This is Margot Fonteyn, whose stage presence conveys something of the delicate, brooding, romanticism which Karsavina always evoked so magically. There is a similarity also in Fonteyn's rendering of the Miller's wife in *Le Tricorne*.

Those critics who regretted Fonteyn's performance in this part as being too restrained, would do well to cast their minds back to the days when Karsavina so magnificently danced the role, and revealed all the elegance, grandeur, and restraint of which she was a past mistress. Unfortunately many of our younger critics can never have seen Karsavina, have in fact seen only one generation of dancers. One has to pity those followers of the ballet who, by the sad mistake of being born too late, never saw Karsavina's adorable Columbine, the dreaming girl of *Spectre*, the moving *Mdlle. de Maupin*, the magnificent, proud, miller's wife. To have not seen Spessitzewa is terrible, to have missed Lopokova is a calamity, but to have never known the art of Karsavina is a major tragedy in the life of any genuine lover of the ballet.

## II

### PEARL ARGYLE

It may be illogical to say that the death of a young human being of exquisite beauty is more poignant than the death of another less favoured by nature, for in making such a statement one

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leaves aside every other consideration of spirit, mind and heart; it is still inescapable that the sudden disappearance of such beauty from the world is deeply moving, and when, as in the case of Pearl Argyle, who died so abruptly and tragically in the beginning of 1947, the youth and beauty were only the outer cover of a sweet and radiant spirit, it is bitter indeed to contemplate the loss.

Her beauty was almost a disadvantage to her position in the ballet world. Her career was not of sufficient length to leave the impression that she should have made on the public, and even during the period when she was a leading figure in the British Ballet, her qualities as a dancer were never assessed at their true value because her personal beauty overshadowed and threw out of focus her gifts as a performer. Pearl was not a virtuoso dancer, but she worked on an infinitely higher level than she was ever given the credit for having reached. Her talents were subtle and individual, and at its best, her work had a rare clarity and a phenomenal breadth of movement, which, aided by the nobility and elegance of her line, made her dancing very lovely to watch.

I have seen other dancers in many of the roles that she originally created, but I have never received quite the same satisfaction. They lost something, not only a beauty of face and limb that were phenomenal, but also a species of lustre, a shimmering quality which she gave to every role in which she appeared, and if many ballerinas have given more technically dazzling performances of the Grand Pas-de-Deux from *Aurora's Wedding* I have never seen any dancer take the stage with quite the same regal splendour which Pearl brought to that magnificently proud entrance. It was this instinct for style that marked everything she did.

From the public point of view, there may be other dancers more appealing, more cosy in the part of the shepherdess, created by Pearl Argyle in De Valois' version of *The Gods go a' begging*. None gave it the same poetry, and one could discover

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in her rendering an adumbration, which no other dancer made apparent, of the immortal Goddess who was to be revealed in the finale. This same half hidden glory could also be felt during early seasons of the Rambert company when she danced the *pas-de-deux* from Balanchine's version of the same ballet.

Frederick Ashton found intense satisfaction in her long exquisite line, and he showed it to particular advantage when he cast her as the Snow Queen in *Le Baiser de la Fée*. This not altogether successful but lovely ballet, contained some outstandingly beautiful work, notably the *pas-de-deux* for Fonteyn and Harold Turner and the role designed for Pearl Argyle which suited to perfection her cool delicacy.

Her looks were not classic in the Grecian sense; they were classic in that they contained the shapes of an eternal type of beauty which recurs in every century and country. She was Botticelli's Venus, and she was also Nefertiti. She was a head by Manet, and her face can be found in some of the frescoes of Tiepolo. She was a temple dancer from Bali and an academic portrait of an Edwardian aristocrat.

She was particularly breath-taking in flight, that is, when being lifted by her partner, or carried, as so often occurs with both male and female dancers in Ashton's choreography, high on the stretched arms of the *corps-de-ballet*. At these moments she appeared to be independent of support and to belong completely to the air.

Whether she would finally have become a really great dancer, one cannot say. She may during her all too short career have made apparent the full extent of her gifts. I doubt this, for she was still in her twenties when she retired into married life and a ballerina continues to enrich her work until the last moment of her career; at fifty Pavlova appeared more wonderful than ever.

As I remember Pearl (and I danced with her very many times and watched her continually during a period of years), whether or not she fulfilled herself completely as a dancer, she was an



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ornament to the British Ballet, and an ornament of rare workmanship. Her impeccable sense of style was inherent in her work, more natural than acquired, in that it was part of the graceful serenity of her own nature, but it was less obvious to an audience than her transcendental loveliness, and this appeared to so dazzle the public, that they failed to fully appreciate the quality of her movement and her unusual gift for effortlessly covering the spaces of a stage, a rare accomplishment that could be a lesson to many promising young dancers who are hampered by a fiddlingly small and dainty movement.

Pearl Argyle was dancing at a time when the British School of ballet was far from having acquired its present high position, and it is important that people should realize how much her work contributed to the artistic prestige of dancing in this country.

After she left England, she was no longer a professional dancer, but she remained a beauty. In 1946 Nora Kaye of the American Ballet Theatre, telling me of her last meeting with Pearl in California, described her as I do not remember her.

"She's luscious," said Nora, and her rich American voice caressed the word "Pearl is luscious. Like a beautiful peach."

That wonderfully constructed face on which I had so often gazed with delight, must have acquired a richer bloom beneath the Californian sun. It pleases me to think of the Snow Queen, the Attic nymph in *L'Après Midi d'un Faune*, the porcelain Aurora I had known, maturing into a golden woman, a sun ripened madonna. I remember her as one of the most beautiful human beings I have ever seen. Apart from my own personal sadness at losing (though I had not seen her for many years) a figure, for whom I had the warmest affection, and who had that extra claim on my heart, that all friends possess who belong to the spring time of one's life, I feel regret for those admirers of ballet who saw her dance, yet failed to fully understand the true qualities of artistry and integrity of style that were allied to the loveliness on which they were privileged to look.



## PAS-DE-TROIS

She was a figure whose name must always be treasured in the annals of the Ballet in England.

### III

## MARGOT FONTEYN

The British mania for the overstatement of understatement (and that is not so eccentric a remark as it may appear at first glance) regarding their own virtues, gifts, and few though undeniable advantages, is, in relation to our native theatre, most often brought to bear on one of its more distinguished branches, the ballet. When superlatives are used, they are mostly directed to the more obvious and less deserving manifestations.

One of our ballet's most notable figures, almost, in fact, a national treasure, Margot Fonteyn, has in the past suffered to a certain degree from this undiscerning attitude, which, emanating from a boring and moronic artistic snobbishness, insists on a foreign equivalent being automatically superior to a home raised product. A certain tastelessness allied to a lack of knowledge has made our critics wary of really letting themselves go in praise of Fonteyn; it is only latterly that a more complete realization of her gifts begins to be shown. And at last a real appreciation of her quality and status is apparent.

During the war, at a period when for some time no foreign company had been able to visit these shores, and when I was still a faction giddy from the strong wine of my memories of the Diaghilev organization, the first De Basil, Blum, and Massine companies, I might argue in favour of our own ballerina, but with a faintly uneasy feeling that, as we had not seen any others for quite a while, she was not perhaps as special as one insisted, which goes to show one should (if in a position to do so) trust one's own judgment and eyesight. Mine being normally acute and pretty well-trained to appraise a dancer, had been telling me for a year

## STUDIES IN BALLET



or so that I was watching in Fonteyn a ballerina of brilliant gifts liable, at any moment, to prove herself more than brilliant.

With the arrival of an uneasy peace, the companies from abroad began to trickle in; the Ballet Theatre from America, the Champs Elysées Company, Lifar's Monte Carlo ballet, and finally the loudly fanfared De Basil troupe.

Varying degrees of excellence, indifference or magnificence in performance and choreography have been seen. One went, one looked, one considered, and then one saw Fonteyn again as Aurora, and knew with a satisfying certainty that this was a performance as close to being flawless as could be seen in the world today. The fact that at this time many of the critics were being condescending in their praise made me wonder how it would be possible to persuade them to see, what was apparent to an observant eye, the arrival in the theatrical heavens of an important new star.

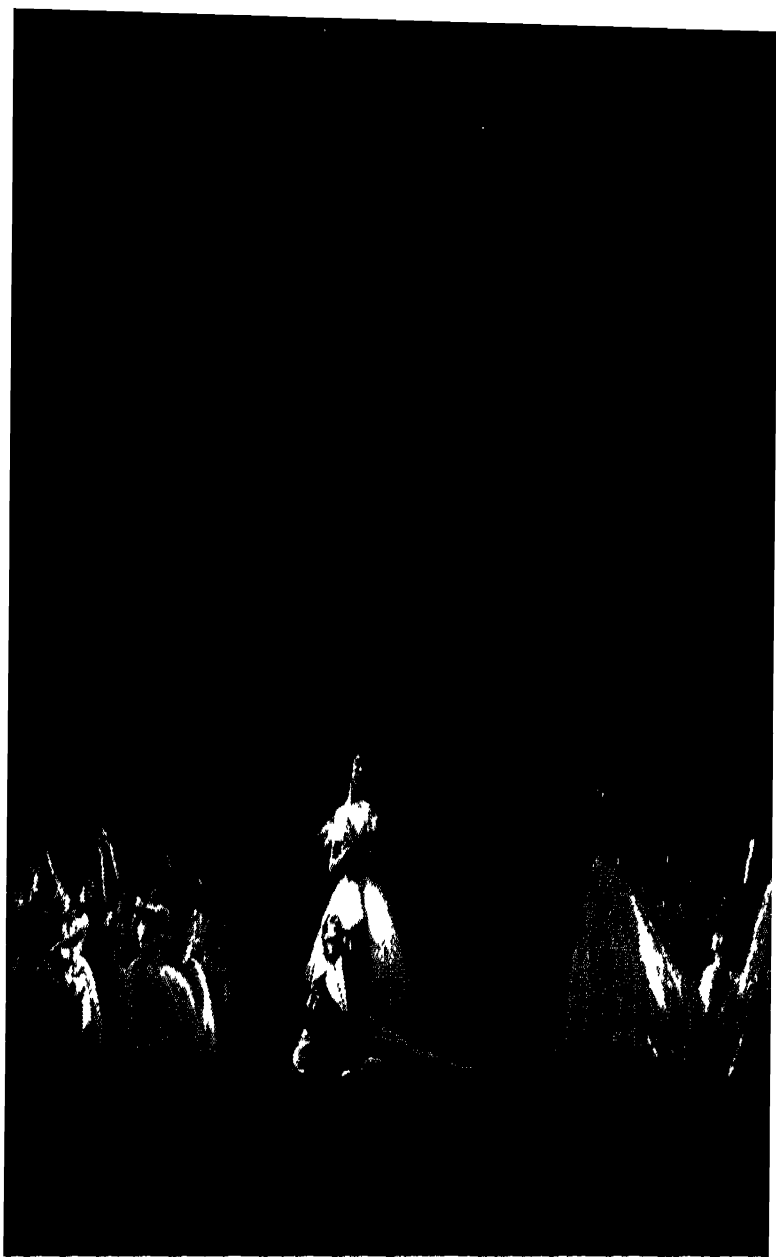


17. DANCERS IN UNIFORM: MOIRA SHEARER, ALEXIS RASSINE, MARGOT  
FONTEYN, PAMELA MAY



18. PEARL ARGYLE IN "THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS"

[*Anthony*

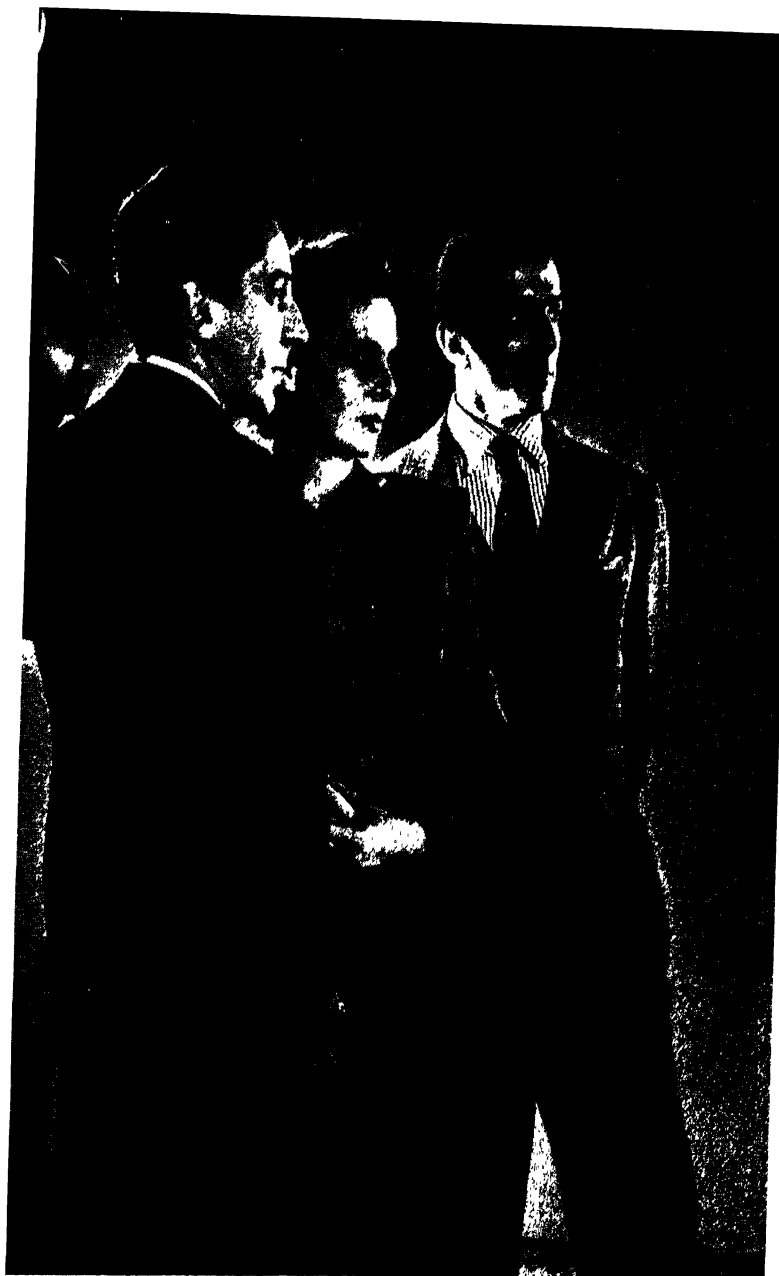


19. "GISELLE"—ACT II AT COVENT GARDEN



20. MARGOT FONTEYN AND ALEXIS RASSINE  
("GISELLE", ACT II)

[Baron



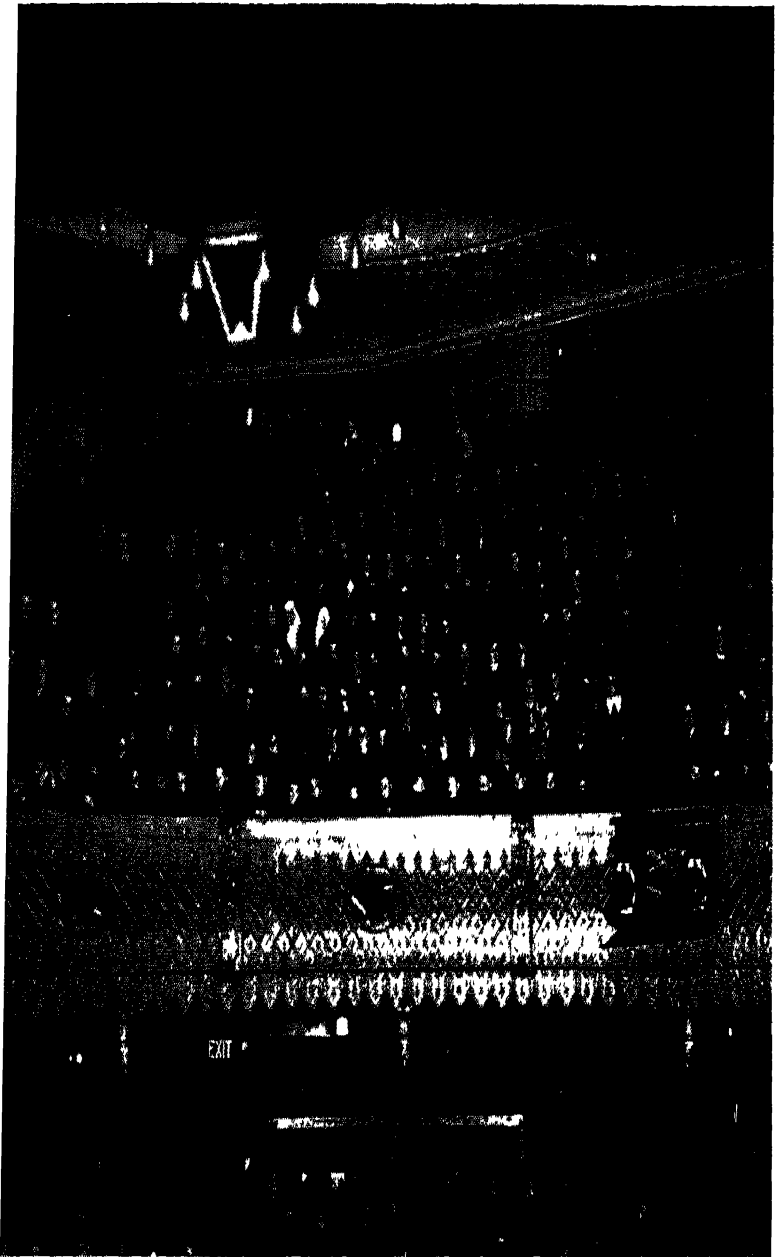
21. FREDERICK ASHTON, NINETTE DE VALOIS, LEONID MASSINE, [Angus McBean  
COVENT GARDEN, 1947



22. PEARL ARGYLE AND ROBERT HELPMANN  
REHEARSING AT SADLER'S WELLS

[*Angus McBean*





23. THE AUDIENCE AT THE OLD VIC

[*Angus McBean*]



24. PEARL ARGYLE AND WILLIAM CHAPPELL  
IN "THE GODS GO A-BEGGING" (SADLER'S WELLS)

*(Anthony*

## PAS-DE-TROIS

There is a strong phalanx of young ballerinas in the British ballet world. Let me name Pamela May, Moira Shearer, Beryl Gray, June Brae, Sally Gilmour, Anne Heaton, Mona Inglesby; each notable for something outstanding in style or artistry, personality, or technique pure and simple; above them all Fonteyn rises like the planet Venus, gently, yet how brightly glowing. Should that list of British dancers be altered and replaced by the names of a picked collection of ballerinas from the various companies that have latterly visited England, the glow of Fonteyn becomes in no way dimmed. In the face of this indisputable fact it seems to me ineffably sad that the critics should, for so long, have obstinately denied themselves the pleasure of a beautifully enjoyable wallow in the satisfaction of discovering a performer over whom they could with a clear and unbiased certainty be truly enthusiastic.

What then can be done to make critics wholeheartedly support and encourage the artists whose gifts should be obvious to those with perception, when the perception is incomplete, and if critics be weak in perception how, in the name of all that is logical, can they adequately fulfil their proper function?

Writing of what he terms "the fundamental difference" between the Sadler's Wells Ballet at Covent Garden and the Champs Elysées Company, one gentleman once unburdened himself of the following statement:

". . . the French people give the impression of being adult. They have the ability—Natalie Phillipart, for example—of losing themselves in their roles. . . . The chief offender in this connection is the other reigning Princess at the Valois Court—Madoiselle Margot Fonteyn. La Fonteyn has an excellent technique, but, to my mind, a singular lack of fire. She seems to have a complete inability to 'live' a role."

Anyone who has seen Fonteyn as *Aurora*, and/or *Giselle*, and can still make so nonsensical a statement is talking or writing—if I may be permitted so mixed a metaphor—through a very old hat.

## STUDIES IN BALLET

One of the greatest attractions of Fonteyn's performances as *Aurora* and *Giselle* is their completeness, the magnificent sense of mood in both parts, from the young carefree creatures that each heroine represents in the early scenes (no dancer is better than Fonteyn at expressing the untouched radiance of youth) to the mature dignity of the awakened *Aurora*—the broken heart and spectral beauty of *Giselle*. When, in addition to the actual projection of her personality being completely in key, the lightness, the finish, and her brilliant style is taken into account, one can only be sorry for the gentleman I quote in that he so pathetically missed the realization of what constitutes fine dancing.

Perhaps I am presuming, should I venture to resent an accepted oracle's announcements. And I know that to the bulk of the ballet-going public Miss Caryl Brahms is an accepted oracle. Nevertheless I do resent the fact that on the eighth of May, nineteen hundred and forty-seven, she wrote in the *Evening Standard*:

"As the *Miller's Wife*, Margot Fonteyn seemed more full of merriment and outraged virtue than of sultry Spanish fire. Spanish dancing should be more a matter of swaying hips, of the elusive invitation of sloping shoulder, and of eyebrow nuance—waving arms and conscientious heel tappings do not suffice."

In this particular notice it is not the fact that Fonteyn's interpretation fails to please that irritates me—though in itself the criticism is meaningless; I should like to know the precise meaning of "eyebrow nuance"—what I object to is a suggestion that the performance was merely conscientious. An artist of Fonteyn's ability and integrity is incapable of giving a performance that is merely conscientious. She may be on occasion miscast, in a big repertory company this is often inevitable, but a dancer of her gifts brings a special quality to every appearance she makes and to be so summarily dismissed shows not only the lack of perception I have already mentioned, but also something dangerously near to bad manners.

On many pages in this book I have listed certain fundamentals in approach, appearance, and technique, that a ballerina should

## PAS-DE-TROIS

possess. Fonteyn shows each of these necessary attributes at their best.

First, she is an almost exact reproduction of the ideal shape for a ballerina as described in the section headed "The Training and Physique of the Dancer". Her torso is fine, taut, small, compact and divinely proportioned. Her rounded head is perfectly placed on her shoulders. Her arms and legs are miraculously moulded. Then she has the true ballerina's face. She has the dancer's "look", by which I mean a certain expression, a light in the eyes when she gazes out beyond the footlights, that makes one feel it is no shaded auditorium she sees, but a far landscape, a country of great distances and romantic perspectives encompassing space enough to hold every dream the human heart has ever known.

This "look" is something that only the greatest ballerinas possess, and Fonteyn reveals when she lifts her eyes that she is the legitimate successor to the unforgettable Karsavina.

She has in performance a remoteness, an elusive romanticism. There is nothing obvious about her, which may be a reason that it has taken the critics several years to fully realize the magnitude of her talent.

Her role in *Symphonic Variations* is of no greater importance than those of the two other female dancers, but the style of her movement, her clear thrusting line, her impeccable speed, fragility and dignity make her immediately apparent as a supreme ballerina. These gifts, these attributes, would be of only secondary interest if they were merely technical. It is the addition of her personality, a spiritual strength allied to her mastery of technique that makes everything she does memorable.

I wonder how many of the audience realize the importance attaching to the manner in which a ballerina uses her head. Held wistfully sideways; lifted aspiringly high; turned to look back in question or wonder over the shoulder; the angles it assumes can add the final touch of beauty to a dancing position that might otherwise be only coldly correct, and fail to move the onlooker. Fonteyn is always aware of these final graces of style, and it is

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necessary that the audience should also appreciate these subtleties if they are fully to realize a dancer's genius. It is all too obvious that only a very small percentage of present day writers on the ballet possess sufficient knowledge to understand what constitutes great, as opposed to capable, dancing.

England is tired. England is shabby. England is devoid of far too many attractions, joys and amenities that other countries still possess. But while she retains a glimmer of her fundamental gentleness, while she can still show a few examples of her best architecture, still possess unscarred her lush enchanted landscapes, and can claim proud ownership of Margot Fonteyn, it is pleasant and also satisfying to make the most of these few exquisite and agreeable assets, and praise them as they deserve, wholeheartedly.



## BALLET COSTUME

**T**HERE IS A COSTUME IN THE BALLET, with a skirt resembling the wide petals of an open flower, or a curved plate of cloud on which the hips and torso of the ballinera rest as though they were an offering made of spun sugar.

Below the skirt's fragile layers, every inch of the dancer's legs are revealed and enhanced, emerging from a foam of frills so airy in appearance they look as though they had been blown together by the puffed cheeks and pursed rosy lips of Aeolian cherubs.

Pleasing as it is to persuade oneself that this most enchanting example of traditional ballet costume, the "tu-tu", or short ballet skirt, must be the work of immortal creatures, one has, reluctantly, to admit that they are produced by human hands. Hands belonging to a select band of mortal beings, shut away in scattered flats, in apartments screened by the façades of tall, late Victorian houses, in workrooms hidden above or below the salons of theatrical costumiers, or behind doors discovered at the top of the highest reaching staircases of theatres.

There, like priestesses who belong to some mysterious cult, they sit, brooding over their rites, surrounded by clouds of gauzy net, yards of fine frilling; with the sewing machines making a strange music, as accompaniment to the busy movements of their fingers.

They pursue their task with a jealous concentration, for each has some small idiosyncrasy in the forming of these ethereal

## STUDIES IN BALLET

garments, which must be kept secret from the knowledge of her fellow priestesses, as though it were the recipe for some rare liqueur, or the chief ingredient in a potion that could drive men wild with love.

The final versions of their individual labours will give the same effect; even though they may vary in minute details of making such as the gradation or width of the under frills; the shape and depth of the fitted basque from the lower edge of which, these frills spring; the presence, or absence, of a light hoop among the innumerable layers in the fragile skirt; these individually may make variations, but there is a method in the manufacture of a "tu-tu" that is almost architectural—an architecture built from air and cloud—and to be successful the foundations of the skirt have to be based on the same unaltering formula.

This secret of building—for a "tu-tu" is, literally, built up, layer by layer—is a secret that is not in every dressmaker's possession.

A cutter can be brilliant, and yet unable to produce a satisfactory "tu-tu", for it is a thing apart from the rest of theatrical dress-making, and quite outside the realms of haute couture.

I have seen a "tu-tu" lamentably executed by a Parisian dress-making house, and most perfectly made by sewing women whose work was otherwise mediocre.

Let me describe a "tu-tu's" essential qualities.

Above all else, an appearance that is light as air. This is achieved by the carefully measured gradation of the layers forming the skirt. There must be no bulk, no thickness, only a fine froth of frills, one above the other, each a fraction wider than the one below it until the top skirt (usually made of net softer and finer in texture than the rest) spreads itself to the required width, which may measure from eleven to fourteen inches, but should never be less than the former. The short fluffy abominations beloved of some American dancers merely thicken the hip line, and give a vulgar appearance devoid of the style and dignity essential to the classical ballerina.



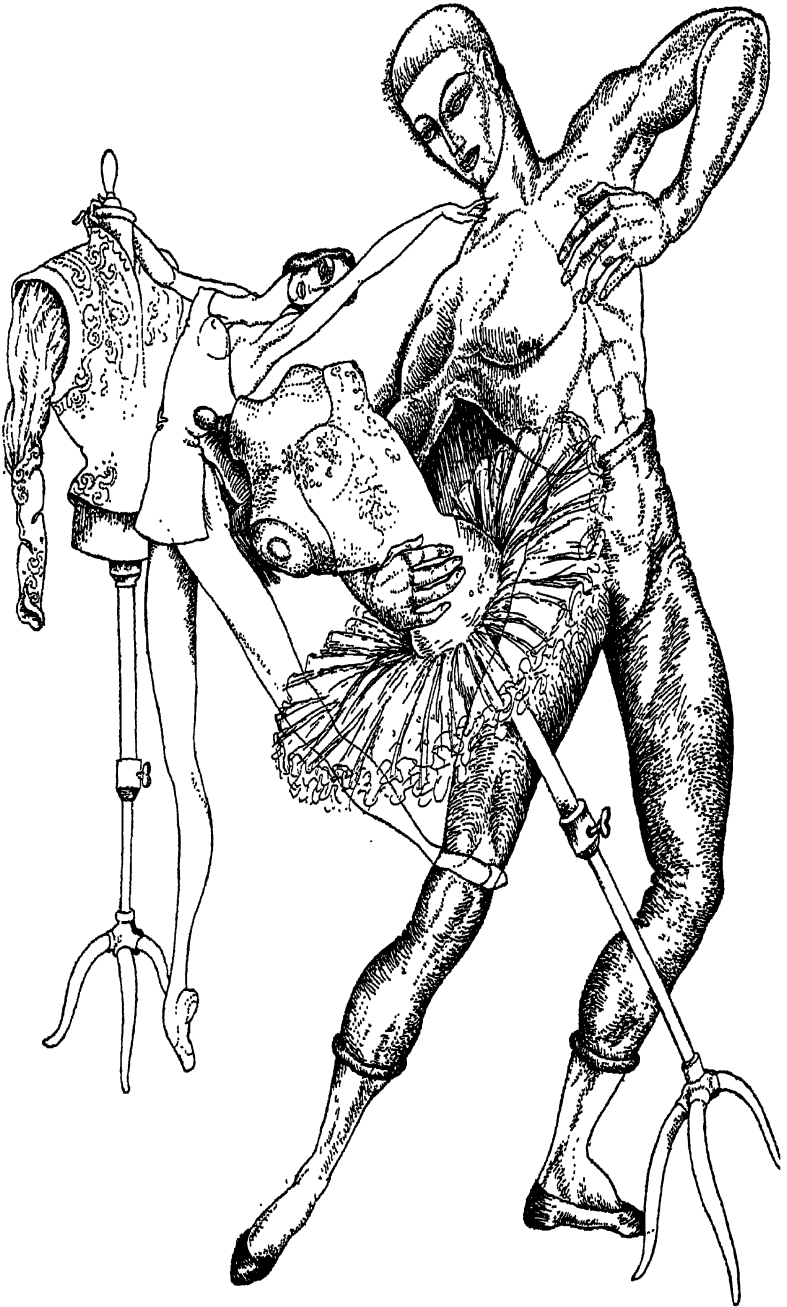
## BALLET COSTUME

However carefully the width of the frills has been checked, the appearance of the under skirts can be ruined if they have not been evenly gathered. This smooth dispersal is necessary to produce the light foam that should be shown when the dancer is lifted or stands in arabesque revealing the under part of the "tu-tu". Uneven gathering or bunching of material will cause unsightly lumps of net that fall away from the rest and break the rippling circular lines that are as delicate and complicated as the inner petals of a full blown rose.

Though the composition of the long ballet skirt of the shape worn in *Les Sylphides* is less elaborate than the "tu-tu", it must still be approached with the greatest care. It is not enough to obtain (if you *can* obtain) yards of net and having gathered it firmly in to a waistband sit back and imagine that little Annie is going to look like a dancer. The result of such thoughtlessness and haste would not only be a very unattractive shape, it would also make it practically impossible for the wretched girl's partner to get an adequate grip on her waist in lifts and pirouettes owing to an over-generous bulging of material where the skirt joins the bodice.

The layers of the skirt must be built up on a narrow basque that hugs the waistline, each layer of varying width and composed of shaped sections, thereby making the amount of the net at the waist less than the circumference of the skirt hem. The whole skirt must be formed to spring lightly outwards and downwards, presenting, although many yards of material have gone into its manufacture, an effect of airiness. In the long ballet skirt we should be continually aware of the dancer's hips and legs without actually being able to see them through the gauze veiling—as though a wreath of mist were afloat round the limbs.

Over the last hundred years the calf length ballet skirt has not altered in its shape. The "tu-tu" as we know it today has on the other hand gradually evolved, rising higher and spreading as it rose, becoming lighter and flatter year by year, until it finally appeared as the ruffled plate we see now, an invention so suitable



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## BALLET COSTUME

to its purpose that it is surely one of the most attractive of all theatrical costumes.

It gives an air of unreality, distinction and brilliance to a dancer, enhancing a body that has beautiful lines, improving one that is less than perfect, accepting sweetly any kind of decoration whether it be the looped panniers of a peasant girl or the shimmering embroideries of a princess.

The glove-tight bodices that accompany and complete the perfection of these two traditional forms of ballet skirt, are also garments that lie outside the scope of the haute couture dress-makers.

They are a very specialized form of theatrical dressmaking; smooth as the folded sheath of an arum lily, skilfully boned, holding and supporting the body, moulding, without compressing the bust, each seam falling at an angle that emphasizes a small waist and corrects one not so small.

The miserable male dancer of the nineteenth century was hard put to it to compete with the incredible elegance of his ballerina, or to produce some contrast with the femininity of her costume. His tunics, based on medieval and Renaissance styles, give him a strangely hermaphrodite appearance. Bulky in shape, knee length (death to the well developed legs of a male dancer), with an overfull skirt, their unfortunate lines make one wonder if the fondness shown by the premier danseurs of this period, for moustachios and small beards, however unsuitable to their roles, could possibly have arisen from a feeling that it was necessary in some way to assert their masculinity?

It was only later as the man assumed an equal importance with the woman in the ballet that his costume began to acquire a dignity more equal to hers, and at the same time a more masculine style to set off the finely feminine attraction of the ballerina.

Today, when we see a grand *pas classique* dressed in the costumes founded on a tradition that has evolved over a period of years, we see examples of supreme elegance. Stage clothing that is

## STUDIES IN BALLET

“chic” in the grandest meaning of that poor overworked little word.

There is a most divine sleekness to be found in the best examples of the classical ballet costume, something as velvety and gleaming in appearance as the coat of a healthy cat—an animal with whose grace and ease of movement, dancers have much in common—an all-over sheen, from the top of the smooth heads with their jewelled head-dresses, through the close fitting and discreetly glittering bodies, to the legs where the separate shapes of the muscles are harmoniously blended and held by a second skin of silk.

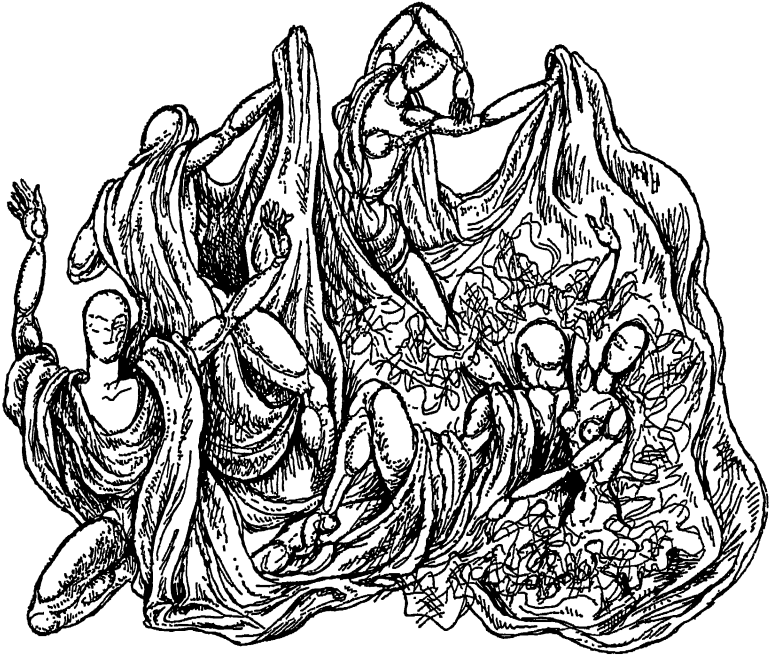
The tunics and tights, the glove-fitting bodices and spangled “tu-tus” help the dancer’s line. This is not true of all ballet costumes, and to derive sheer pleasure from watching movement, it has to be admitted that some ballets do not appear to the same advantage in stage dress, as when they are seen at rehearsal, in the unhampering shapes of practice clothes.

These garments are the basic pattern for what is rapidly becoming a traditional modern ballet costume, one that is a direct descendant of the classic style, but being more abstract in appearance is ideally suited to present day choreography. Consisting of tights that cover the entire body, as worn by acrobats, coating the limbs and torso with a wash of colour, but leaving them otherwise untrammelled as if they were almost nude, it has the same advantages as the dancer’s practice clothes, in that it in no way impedes movement or blurs outlines. It is, as well, pleasantly uncompromising; showing up with unbiased clarity the physical and technical faults or perfections of the wearer.

Like its classical ancestor, it can happily accept decoration in the shape of embroideries, stencilled patterns, draperies, overskirts, small jackets or bodices to alter its impersonal character.

Despite the fact that in the later years of the classic ballet, the male dancer became as prominent as the female, it was mostly in the guise of the gallant cavalier who supports, adores and asks that the audience should admire, the glittering creature whom he

## BALLET COSTUME



partners. He was a subservient man showing his strength and his masculinity by the ease with which he lifted, held and presented the adorable feminine woman.

In modern choreography the male and female roles are less sharply differentiated. The *pas-de-deux* and the ensembles conceived by the imagination and invention of choreographers like Balanchine and Ashton make the dancers equally plastic and graceful, each beautiful in their own right, regardless of sex. They become intricately interwoven, forming unexpected patterns of limbs that can render it difficult to sort out which are feminine, which masculine.

The smoothly fitting all-over tights that form the foundation of so many modern ballet costumes, and, closely hugging the dancers' bodies, reveal the wide shoulders, small waists, strong hips and thighs of the men in contrast to the frailer, lighter proportions of the women, make the physical difference in the build of the

## STUDIES IN BALLET

dancers' bodies apparent, and the softest movements performed by the men, the hardest most angular made by the women, become permissible and pleasing.

This type of basic costume possesses, in common with all good ballet clothing, the quality of elegance. Let me repeat the word elegance. A realization of its paramount necessity in ballet design should be instinctive in the artist responsible, and it can be found in every one of the great works. What could be more elegant than the swirling pink, blue and black of Picasso's Miller's wife in *Le Tricorne*? The mica and silver shapes worn by Nikitina and Lifar in *La Chatte*? The costume designed by Rouault for Doubrowska in the original production of *The Prodigal Son*, with its tight tunic, and the train that poured from the shoulders like a waterfall of blood? Cecil Beaton's shimmering women in the ballroom of *Apparitions*? The opalescent rainbows Berard imagined for *The Seventh Symphony*? Benois' dolls in *Petrouchka*; and the radiantly simple costumes by Sophie Fedorovitch for *Symphonic Variations*?

These few examples, widely differing in style, each show an innate elegance and a true knowledge of what is needed from an artist working for the ballet. And the ballet designer has to show qualities differing from those asked for by the legitimate and musical theatre.

He must know how to dress dancers so that they are free and unencumbered, the line of their movements clearly shown.

He must be able to suggest period without heaviness; adapting and interpreting it in dancing terms without losing its flavour.

He must understand the use and weight of materials and trimmings, and be able to produce a royal robe that appears to be of rich brocade or heavy damask when, in reality, it is infinitely light.

He must consider the size and solidity of wigs and head-dresses, making certain they are not too heavy or liable to unbalance the wearer's proportions.

He must watch the shape and the fitting of sleeves and see they allow the full and unrestricted use of the arms and shoulders.

## BALLET COSTUME

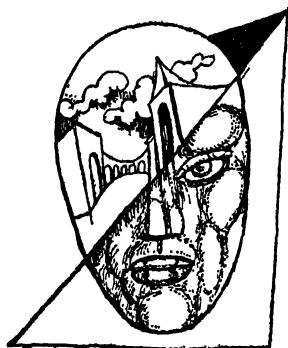
He must know where realism and fantasy begin.

He must never be afraid of colour. In no other branch of theatrical design is there such unlimited opportunity for an artist to experiment with colour.

To these qualifications he should be able to add another. A gift for designing a new face for a dancer. In other words, it is well if the ballet designer understands the use of theatrical make-up, so that he may conceive a new mask to go with each of his costumes, and can explain clearly the size and shape the eyes should appear, the angle and thickness of the brows, the modelling and shade of the lips, the tone of the skin, and the colour and line that any necessary shading must take.

The great ballet designers know all these things, and to their knowledge we owe, consciously or unconsciously, a large part of the satisfaction we receive when we see the luminous figures that people the ballet world, dressed in garments that move easily as air or water, and give their wearers a perfection and beauty of form it does not seem possible any human being could possess.





## BALLET DESIGN

**W**HEN WE GO TO THE THEATRE TO SEE a play, we expect, and we usually find, that it has been given a setting of almost photographic realism. An interior appears as life-like as it can be made by the combined skill of the designer and the scene-painter. It has what seems to be solid walls with doors and windows that open and close. There may even be a ceiling. The room will be filled with real furniture, the walls decorated with real pictures, the windows hung with real drapery. The stage is as cluttered with objects as any actual inhabited room might be.

When we go to see a ballet, we are, or should be, immediately aware of the emptiness of the stage. So it can be said that the designer for the drama fills space, where the designer for the ballet must create space.

Photographic realism, by which I mean the type of realism that seeks to reproduce exactly objects and elements, does not attend comfortably on the ballet. An almost completely faithful reproduction of the world we live in, which is immediately recognizable, calls for no effort on the part of the audience's imagination. Everything that should be there is present, solid and three dimensional. One per cent of an audience may now and then question the validity of a realistic setting on aesthetic grounds. Notice I say "may", for it is a matter for conjecture, whether, on being confronted by a realistic setting, any members of the audience who have no theatrical connections, react at all, either



## BALLET DESIGN

for, or against, the scenery, so long as it faithfully resembles things, places and objects. That it may be beautiful or tasteless, suitable or improbable, does not enter into their approach.

The mysterious universe in which ballets move and have their being is a universe of the mind, of dream, myth, and legend. To place it in a setting that exactly imitates life is to pin it to too solid a base, and so partially destroy its effect. Only in certain works, such as the old classics, the *Lac des Cygnes*, *Giselles* and *Sleeping Princesses* is a measure of realism permissible, and this must be what I call a painter's realism. In these old ballets, the woodlands, the palaces and the landscapes may be recognizable as such, but they are given by their designers a certain visionary quality. The individuality of the painter's eye, the quality of his brush work and his sense of colour transforms them from statements of fact into suggestions of beauty.

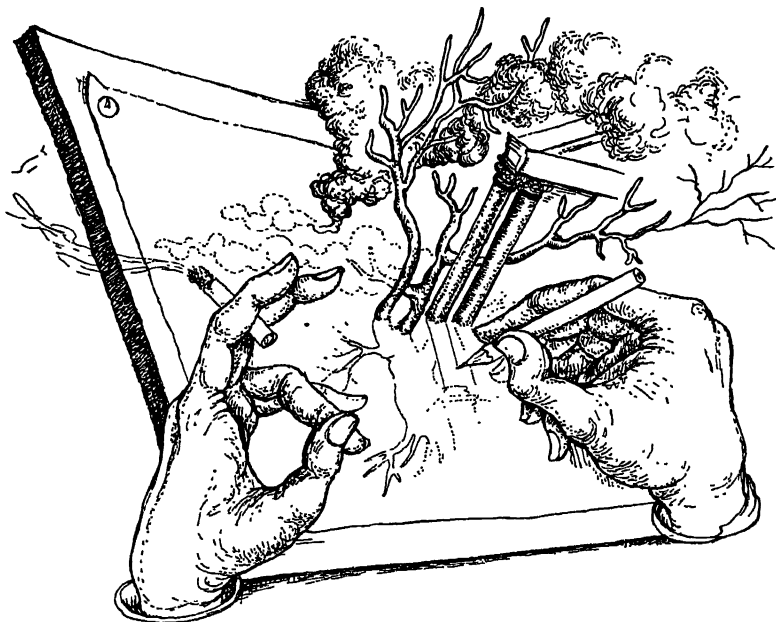
Ballets of actual place, ballets of actual character, like *Miracle in the Gorbals* and *The Rake's Progress* call again for a recognizable representation, but once again it is the painter's realism, and Edward Burra, whose far reaching perspectives and simple, strong, dramatic shapes presented so brilliantly the teeming tenements and glimpsed shipyards in which the *Miracle* takes place, gave infinitely more to this work than the most painstakingly realistic reconstruction could have done.

More than anything else it is the actual quality of the painting, the designer's handling of his medium, that lifts a ballet décor that is based on a realistic convention away from the solidity tying most films and plays firmly to the earth on which we live. The painter's brush releases a ballet to float in its own sphere, the boundless universe of the imagination.

Any list or book of ballet designs immediately makes it apparent how much artist painters (as opposed to theatrical designers and decorative artists) have contributed to the more famous and successful settings.

In the twentieth century the ballet designers can be roughly divided into three groups. The first consisted of the famous

## STUDIES IN BALLET



Russians who worked in close association with Diaghilev. A group almost completely Slav in outlook and background, containing the names of Golovin, Bilibin, Douboujinsky, Roerich, Korovin, Benois and Bakst. These artists were responsible for the richly voluptuous settings and costume for works like *Scheherazade Cleopatre*, *Prince Igor*, *Le Pavillon d' Armide* and *L'Oiseau de Feu*.

The second group was larger, no less brilliant, more varied in outlook, recruited from the new school of painting in Paris. Although it included many different nationalities, it still possessed a homogeneity similar to the first, purely Russian group, for all the painters showed a spaciousness of mentality that had shaken off conventions and was expressing itself personally in paint.

Two of the most illustrious names in the second group were Picasso and Derain. Sooner or later during the long and triumphant progress of the Diaghilev Ballet every artist who had

## BALLET DESIGN

anything special and individual to state created settings for the Russian dancers. The most memorable were probably Braque, Utrillo, Chirico, Marie Laurencin, Rouault, Pruna, and much later Berard and Tchelitchew.

The two groups, the Russian and the Parisian, were linked and made one by the inclusion in each of Bakst and Benois and by the arrival of two younger Russian artists, Larionov and Gontcharova, who revealed themselves firstly as Slavs in their respective designs for *Chout* and *Le Coq d'Or*, and then as members of the Paris school in their settings for *Le Renard* and *Les Noces*.

The third group of designers only became a separate entity by force of circumstance. In essence it was, and is, a logical part of Group Two, but the death of Serge Diaghilev caused a break in ballet continuity, and the collapse of the great Russian Company formed an abyss across the ballet world, an abyss which appeared to be of such depth and width that only a huge bridge, a miracle of artistic engineering formed by a very strong and wealthy organization could possibly hope to span it.

Strangely enough, the gap was finally crossed by the flimsiest of catwalks, which might, at the time, have appeared to the untrained eye pathetically incapable of carrying all the weight of tradition necessary to start rebuilding the citadel of ballet on the further side.

The vast load, however, was taken safely across, carried by two women, and the catwalk proved strong enough to bear the weight. Its strength lay in the fact that it was the most genuine and natural link between one side and the other because it was fashioned, thrown across and tested by Marie Rambert and Ninette de Valois, both of whom had been directly connected with the Diaghilev ballet.

From the crusading zeal of this couple the present school of ballet designing in this country, where before none existed, has grown and formed the third group of artists who have done important work for the dancers and choreographers. Rex Whistler, Roger Furse, Oliver Messel, Cecil Beaton, Leslie Hurry,

## STUDIES IN BALLET

Nadia Benois, James Bailey, Hugh Stevenson and Sophie Fedorovitch: these are the names.

In this group, although the painter artists are outnumbered by the decorative artists, pure painters have made rare incursions and we have seen décors by John Banting, Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Graham Sutherland and John Piper. Burra belongs by right completely to the painters, but he is, like Picasso, that rare thing, a painter of genius with a sure sense of the theatre.

Though we have seen many enchanting settings created by stage designers and decorative artists, the painter's approach is finally, I think, the most satisfactory for a ballet décor.

The basic simplicity of a setting for dancers offers the pure painter the same opportunities as a sheet of paper or an untouched canvas, for the fundamental shape which varies only in small ways, and is usually a backcloth with two sets of wings and borders, or a series of cut cloths, demands a painter's vision rather than a decorator's preoccupation with pattern or an architect's solid sense of building.

A talented interior decorator or a clever architect are both capable of producing settings that could satisfactorily suit a play, or a revue, or an opera or a musical comedy, but for me a painter is the only one who can be relied on to produce and emphasize the qualities a ballet needs.

The creation of space. The ability to give to recognizable objects and elements by the mingled effects of his imagination, his vision, and his handling of paint, a magical style that makes them appear stranger or more beautiful or more disturbing than they would be in actual life. Then a further step: a capacity to carry the mind and the visual senses completely on to another plane, or into another universe where nothing is actually reminiscent of anything we know, unless it be in a purely abstract or atmospheric way. There is one more transitory transformation—that of fantastic realism where we accept furniture and draperies that are painted on walls, perspectives that obey no laws of



## STUDIES IN BALLET

science, and flora and fauna of a kind that acknowledge no season, or habitat or sense of proportion.

Here are some actual existing examples. The first (and the easiest for the average audience to understand and appreciate) is the one which is reasonably true to life, in a romantic or stylized way, as seen in the settings for *The Sleeping Beauty*, firstly, by Bakst, later by Messel. In Benois' *Petrouchka*, in *Giselle* as designed in 1947 by James Bailey, in Rex Whistler's *Rake's Progress* and *Wise Virgins*, in Burra's *Barabau* and *Miracle in the Gorbals*.

Of the painter's eye that creates the abstract universe, Sophie Fedorovitch is a perfect example. Her settings for *Symphonic Variations*, for *Dante Sonata*, for *Baiser de la Fée* and *Horoscope* take us to another world, or perhaps a portion of space rather than a world. These are proportioned voids and the spectator seeing them needs to use his own mind, meet the designer half way and supply from his own imagination what he wishes or is stimulated to see in the disciplined simplicity shown to him.

If he finds these settings empty of interest, he must not blame the designer, but himself, for he has a lack of creative energy in his own mental processes if he is unable to discover or super-impose any time, place, or season he prefers onto, for example, the exquisite fresh spaces of the green washed whiteness of Fedorovitch's setting for *Symphonic Variations*, so correctly and gently controlled by its few curved dark lines that only just seem to keep the brilliantly delicate white figures of the dancers from vanishing into infinity. This is one of the few completely flawless settings for ballet that I have seen as yet, and must take its place beside Picasso's *Tricorne* and *Pulcinella*, Derain's *Boutique Fantastique* and Laurencin's *Les Biches* as one of the décors that are completely in key with the music and the choreography, and have the inevitability that makes it impossible to imagine these ballets looking any other way.

The fantastic realistic is perhaps the style that the average ballet audience accepts most happily, even above the more easily understandable painter's realism. The fantastic style is just unreal

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enough for most members of the public to feel they are getting their money's worth, and is ideally suited, when in the hands of a true painter, to most ballet subjects. Superb examples have been seen in John Armstrong's original *Façade*, in Hurry's *Lac des Cygnes* and *Hamlet*, in Oliver Smith's *Fancy Free* and in Burra's *Rio Grande*.

There is a certain similarity in approach to be found in all ballet décors. I am not suggesting this shows a lack of individuality, merely that the standards and style set by the Diaghilev organization had proved themselves correct in feeling and provided a firm foundation on which the personal vision of each designer has been able to build his own world.

The influence of the Diaghilev ballet was so all-pervading, so strong, the beginning of so new and vital an epoch in the world of the dance, that it could not fail to be a touchstone and to dictate the line for others to follow. The result of its influence has produced an international school of ballet designing. Purely native or national schools of design can no longer exist. The permeating flavour of what has gone before has made the designer's approach to ballet similar in every country. Only in a certain way of painting, of solving the problems and satisfying the demands made by the choreographers are we sometimes made aware of the difference in nationality of the artists. One cannot, as yet, say whether a purely national school of design will eventually arise in this country. At present it is only in certain styles, techniques, faint atmospheres, that the sense of native background, of birthplace, of the spirit of the country to which the painter belongs, becomes apparent.

The late Rex Whistler's work for the ballet revealed more perhaps than others an "English" approach in the best sense of the word. His designs showed our more pleasant characteristics—honesty, strength, and craftsmanship, and avoided our unpleasant traits—a commonplace outlook, heaviness of touch, and a lack of the senses of colour and gaiety.

In his beautiful setting for *The Wise Virgins*, we can see how his

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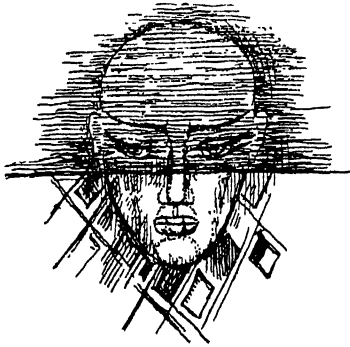
pleasure in fine detail, his clear colours and carefully proportioned shapes gave the work freshness and clarity, echoing the harmonious forms, the round bell tones of Bach, and presented a story that was not English in a style decidedly so. It was his technique of painting that above all gave his work its essentially national flavour. It has a strong affinity with the enchanting conversation picture artists of the Eighteenth Century, as well as a poetic brotherhood with Hogarth and Frith, and a true love and knowledge of the best in our architectural history.

Only intermittently do I feel that Oliver Messel is a British designer. In his work the British quality is revealed in atmosphere. He has not the same purity or detailed technique of Whistler, but his landscapes for *Comus* breathe the romanticism inherent to the country air of England, and this lovely décor correctly interprets Helpmann's rendering in dance terms of Milton, not the heroic poet of *Samson Agonistes*, but the gravely glittering Milton of *Comus*.

In Messel's *Sleeping Beauty*, although the noble sweep of the perspectives in his palaces have a classic and Italianate air, the landscapes and the deep woodlands surrounding them are poetically English in suggestion, and the walk to the enchanted palace takes place through a forest that could be Arden or Sherwood where the heavy plumaged trees sweep the ground and catch a radiance that is the pale wet gold of an English sun.

But nationality and national characteristic are unimportant in the world of ballet, a country without frontiers, where there is one universal language—and of present day designers Fedorovitch to my mind is the most truly balletic. Beyond the lit confines of her settings I am made to feel there is endless distance, misted and mysterious, or ablaze with dark suns, cold moons and glittering planets, amongst which the dancers will continue to make their patterns of movement when they leave our sight.





## EPILOGUE

**T**HERE SHOULD BE NO NECESSITY FOR A good craftsman to make excuses for his work, and if, at this point I take up my pen to make mine, I wish it to be quite clearly understood that for the *manner* of my book I am begging no pardons. I blithely disregard my faults of style, my erratic punctuation, and my amateurish phrasing. If I am to excuse myself it is for the *matter* of my book, for its omissions, its lack of coherence, its rambling and discursive way.

In my introductory chapter I stated more or less categorically that my aim was to describe dancing, the world of dancing, and what it is like to be a dancer. That, indeed, was what I wished to do, and for failing in my attempt I wish to be excused, though I ask for your pardon quite cheerfully and with no feeling of guilt. It would be not only foolish but also false modesty to plead guilty of having failed at what is obviously an impossible task.

Though I know volumes could be filled if one were thoroughly to explore all corners, every inch of the ground (so thickly covered with flowers and weeds) of the enchanted garden of the ballet, it would involve a huge amount of research work, of statistics, of dates, of exact information as to who did what, when they did it, by whom the music was composed and by whom it was choreographed and designed. To include all these I would have been forced to make what could only have been a pathetic attempt to rival the brilliant erudition of that most famous of contem-

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porary ballet historians, Cyril W. Beaumont. I must also admit to a sneaking dislike for research work due, perhaps, to the "passionate" laziness of which Marie Rambert once accused myself and Frederick Ashton. And then, in some justification, let me plead that I was attempting to present a more atmospheric impression of the working life and background of a dancer.

Yet even here, as I have said, I failed, for the essence of the ballet world is too elusive to be completely captured in the written word, or at least by my written word. Describe, conjecture, state, suggest, wax lyrical as I may, I have found finally that the only thing which can be conjured up is a mere ghost of that quality the ballet possesses, which works such magic on so many and so diverse people, appealing equally strongly to the brilliantly clever and the intensely stupid. Why is it that I, as an ex-dancer, having known it stripped completely of its shimmering trappings, having lived in it, worked in it and breathed its air for eleven solid years of my life, still find it can stir me to reactions of such violent extremes, from a pleasure so intense in the realization that human beings are capable of such perfection, to a boredom so abysmal and depressing that the mere sight of a ballet shoe makes me groan with despair, though I am still watching the same dancers in works by the same creative artists?

There is something strange about an art that can have this effect. Great painting stimulates me, but deeply and gently. Great music and wonderful architecture fill me with the same kind of contentment. Great writing soothes me and stirs me. Great acting exhilarates me.

Ballet contains elements of all these arts. Perhaps it forms a combination that is chemical and explosive, the results of which can never be foretold.

Then, of course, there are the reasons both psychological and sexual for the wide and intense appeal of the ballet during its centennial waves of world success, and in that aspect of its appeal

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there is material for another book, but it is one which I devoutly hope will never be written. There are cases odd enough, in all conscience, to be found in the queues and at the stage doors, whose Freudian implications make one vaguely uneasy. And they are by no means merely hysterical adolescents. At fourteen or fifteen, or even sixteen, one is half insane anyway, and at that age I hung from the gallery and shrieked as loudly and madly as the best of them. But a year or two later I had become an orderly member of the audience. There are other fans whose attitude remains something I cannot and never will understand. The resentful worshippers, the hostile adorers. I was made personally aware of these phenomena not so long ago. It was during a rather more than usually exhausting working day that had kept me running from one end of London to another since the early morning. Finding myself at tea time in the West End near to a café much frequented by the mid strata of the theatrical world, I ventured in to snatch myself a quick cup of tea. Tired, engrossed in my own affairs, I was more or less unaware of the people about me until I heard the name of Margot Fonteyn spoken very close to my right ear. I was sitting beside a shoulder high partition and glancing across it I saw that the speaker was a very ordinary looking young woman accompanied by her still more ordinary looking boy friend at a table next to mine on the other side of the partition. Once my attention had been caught by the name of Fonteyn I listened with the deepest concentration for the expected praises that any true and observant fan should have been expressing.

I was doomed to disappointment, even to shock and finally to embarrassment. Knowing the truth of the old saying "Listeners never hear good of themselves," it was still a little hard to have the role of listener more or less forced on one, and then to hear most of your friends and finally yourself being consistently abused.

It was not a conversation, rather a running commentary by the young woman, occasionally broken by a question or an exclamation-

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tion from her companion. I could not be sure if he was impressed or bored by her apparently inexhaustible and (to me at least) incredible store of obscure knowledge about the world of ballet and its performers. She was, one might have thought, on the most intimate footing with them all. Christian names, even diminutives, were tossed casually into the imbecile stream of her conversation. Knowing them apparently so well, there should have been a certain eulogistic tone to her dissertations. Far from it. She was in turn malicious, condescending, weary of it all, rude, and at many moments, and regarding many dancers, frankly hostile and libellous. She seemed, in fact, personally to hate eight-five per cent of the British Ballet with a hate that could, surely, have only been engendered by some deep seated grudge, or feeling of slight, and which must have made it a dubious pleasure to see them perform even once, let alone the fourteen times which, she complacently informed her startled companion, she had seen one particular ballet.

Regarding her ordinary puddingy face, the teeniest bit distorted by the undercurrent of venom that ran through her whiningly genteel voice, I recognized with a sinking heart her type, the fan whose love is so near hate it can turn in a flash, the fan for whom the ballet has a species of boa constrictor fascination. I had discovered in the old days when I was myself a dancer that hell hath no fury like a ballet fan scorned, and if an exhausted dancer dared to show an undue haste to get home, or failed to respond instantly to a request for a photograph or an autograph, infatuation turned into hostility.

The explanation of this mentality is one that can only be made by an Adler, a Jung or a Freud. It is beyond my simple mind and belongs with so many other of the more mysterious reasons for the ballet's popularity, too complicated ever to sort out or analyse.

Having asked pardon for my lack of success in truly distilling the essence of the world of dancing, let me proceed to self-castigation. What else is fit for anyone who, having attacked

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almost every other critic and writer on the ballet, having, indeed, almost gone so far as to state that he alone is capable of writing a true book about the ballet, then proceeds to produce a volume in which he ignores or merely mentions in passing names as illustrious as Lopokova, de Valois, Marie Rambert and Robert Helpmann? Gives only a few lines to Pavlova and to Alicia Markova, and hardly admits of the existence of the Rambert Ballet. How can I be excused, a self-styled authority who wallows so happily in each one of the personal prejudices, the arrogance, condescension and ungrammatical chattering of which I so often accuse others of being guilty?

As for the omissions, I regret them as much, even more, perhaps, than any reader could. I have longed to bring in and eulogize in detail every dancer, every creative mind I have admired as artists, loved as people, or worshipped as objects of producers of beauty. Only my conviction of the inevitable sameness of the rhapsodies I would produce made me hesitant and selective. It has also to be taken into consideration that for most of my omissions regarding performers there has been very little left for me to say. The tiny stretch of literary territory the ballet can claim has been ploughed, sown and reaped so many times by other writers it is hard for anyone else to bring up the smallest new plant. There is nothing left to describe about, for example, Robert Helpmann, unless I were to try to evoke the life of a dancer on tour in the early days of the Sadler's Wells Ballet. Would his admirers care to hear of him, with myself and Ashton, eating kippers for supper after the performance, in a combined room in lodgings on a wet night in Glasgow? Something tells me it hardly fits the picture that his public hold of him.

It seems, on the face of it, impossible that I did not devote pages to Rambert and de Valois. I could have written half the book about these two women, both so wise, so far sighted, so single minded, so enchanting to know and so infuriating to work with; both so masculine in their efficiency, so feminine

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in their guile; so altogether astounding, lovable, magnificent, maddening, intelligent and attractive. I suppose, as far as they are concerned, there is too much to tell.

Then if I feel, and I do feel, that the male dancer in Britain has been shabbily treated until now, why, oh why did I not describe him at his best as I have seen him in performances given by Walter Gore, who is as fantastically rhythmical as any Pole or Russian, as theatrically wise as the greatest, and has been as technically exciting as any dancer I have ever seen?

If I chose to ignore some personalities, my pen ran away with me to tell of others, of the Goddess Karsavina (Juno, Minerva, Venus), of the nymph Pearl Argyle (Echo, Psyche, Eurydice) and of the muse Fonteyn (Euterpe, Polyhymnia, Terpsichore). My *pas-de-trois* could perhaps have been a *pas-de-huit*, but I am happier with my three Graces.

I have made only one omission deliberately, with planned and aforethought consideration especially for the benefit of my friends in the ballet. It is for them that I leave out any suggestion of an index. Long experience makes me know how rapidly they turn to that conveniently tabulated list and having opened up the pages on which their names appear, note, approve (rarely), disapprove (usually), glance through the illustrations and lay the book away to quietly collect dust in an obscure corner of the shelves for ever more.

You have read so far. Are you any wiser about a dancer and a dancer's life? I doubt it.

In Dublin, before the war, we were being watched, silently but sympathetically by a small crowd outside the stage door on a Saturday night. (The only night in the week when there was anyone to see the glamorous dancers leave the theatre.) They stood and stared, polite, not very curious, as we ran up and down stairs and in and out with our bags and boxes, packing them into the char-a-banc waiting to take us to catch the night boat. We were young; we were gay; we were dancers, and it had

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been a highly successful week, but the only remark came from a very old lady.

She shook her head reflectively as we heaved in the last suitcase, the final make-up kit wrapped in its stained and greasy towel. "You poor creatures," she said with a strong and lovely brogue. "It's a terrible life."

She was wrong. It was not a terrible life. But at the same time she had a faintly better understanding than most of the ballet public, of the oddness of the mixture of elements in which dancers move, one foot in the road and one amongst the stars, in wide and airy space. Rogues and vagabonds. Strolling players. Performers at the fair. Here today and gone tomorrow, the old Irish woman obviously thought, and though that is only a fraction of the picture, it's a fraction I tenaciously cling to, for it keeps dancers in a world apart where they belong. I often think it a pity that theatrical performers are no longer "socially impossible".

Such a thought, I have no doubt, shows the worst kind of muddle-headed, unreal approach to an art I profess to love and respect, but as a result of writing from a highly personal viewpoint, a muddle-headed approach was certain to make itself apparent in many of these pages. What have I produced? A series of theoretical essays? A set of word pictures that were meant to be tableaux vivants and may only have turned out to be still lives? A lot of bright and meaningless stage gossip interspersed with obscure and purple passages? (Regretfully I admit to having found far too much enjoyment in the purple passages.) A collection of anachronisms, contradictions, exaggerations, and misleading statements? A dream world?

This last, perhaps, for unreality is present in every aspect of the ballet, even in its dullest classes, its most mechanical rehearsals. And it is an unreality that can only be felt and fully understood by a dancer.

The truly personal conversation of one's most intimate friends is not always immediately comprehensible. I have been

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speaking personally, and thoughtfully, and also from the inside looking outward.

Seen from that angle the surroundings of the Ballet world appear different. The light falls in another way, and the detail of the complex decorations can be studied at close range.

These surroundings, the light, the decorations and the denizens I have described as I see them.

