

The Dance

For Those "Not Interested" in the Dance

Who were sensible or lucky enough to see the last two dance reviews please turn the page. This review is for you, Mr. or Miss of-Social-Art who are interested in samples of left-wing culture except the. You have been told, of course, that last year four thousand people packed the Theater to see a handful of dancers in revolutionary solos. You have even heard, with due skepticism, stories of otherwise sensible people stood in piercing cold rain to purchase the privilege of standing in Carnegie Hall for hours during eight dances. Possibly you read that another capacity audience at the Adelphi Theater a week later. Nonetheless, whenever the dance is mentioned you lift an eyebrow or turn on a grudging smile in order to assure everyone in sight that you are still an untouch-

able. It is about time for you to wonder if by some remote possibility you may be wrong. The masses of devoted spectators may be taken with a mania—that has happened before; but you can be positive that they will not pound their hands to demand encores for works that are innocuous or incomprehensible. Nor do crowded revolutionary journals devote columns to analyzing faddist stiches. The fact is: we are living in the midst of a genuine renaissance, one of the most exciting that has fructified America. And there are no mysterious prerequisites for enjoyment, there is no mystical vocabulary. Fundamentally the dance is for any-

body who has felt an emotional lift seeing a splendid arc in the flight of birds or other piercing instants of plastic grace. But the new dance is not interested exclusively in the beauty of body motion; it appreciates that the configuration of movements communicates emotions and ideas. In the dance of social consciousness, particularly, these ideas and emotions are legible.

There was in fact much more ideology than dancing in the first left-wing dances; a necessary process but one which had to be outgrown if there was to be a fusion of form and content. Last year the New Dance League electrified New York with a group of compositions that proclaimed a vast leap toward artistic maturity. This year their recital has produced no such repercussions—how could it?—but the dancers themselves have achieved far more skill and scope, and at least two unforgettable compositions.

The consistently excellent technic throughout the recital (Dec. 22) was nothing less than astonishing. Naturally this was especially apparent in those works unsuccessful as compositions—Rose Crystal's *We Need Space* (whose title bore no inherent kinship to the composition); Marie Marchowsky's *Conflict* (too reminiscent of Graham's *Imperial Gesture*); William Matons' *Mad Figure* (a routine illustration of a poem). The warm audience-response proved that the dancers made the most of hampering material. It also implied the need for more penetrating choreographic creativeness.

Two of the performers, on the other hand, gave brilliant demonstrations of the achieve-

ment of which our dancers are capable. Drawing her material from one of the *Songs About Lenin*, Sophie Maslow has created in dance form the contrasting moods of "In January he died," "In April he was born."

But the high point of the evening was Lily Mehlman's *Fatherland*, a group of three dances: *Heil*, *Defiance* and *Song of Affirmation*. We have seen many attempts at utilizing fascist symbolism, but never such creative use of symbols and never such savage intensity. There are no obvious tricks here, no glib maneuvers of design. With driving lyricism *Fatherland* registers the shame and degradation of German fascism, the desperate defiance, and in another emotional key, the prophetic note of affirmation. In our opinion this work is the flower of all our efforts at anti-fascist, anti-Nazi art.

The program included several satires, a welcome emphasis but one which brings its own problems; for nothing is more exacting of precise invention and execution, and nothing is sadder than a satire that misses fire. Anna Sokolow's *Speaker* began in apparently forthright terms but it suddenly emerged as travesty. Similar confusion thwarted the effect of her *Impressions of a Dance Hall*, whose mood was irony until it suddenly melted into pathos, blunting the emotion of the whole. Jane Dudley's *Liberal* registered its witty point but her other three portraits blurred. Jose Limon and Letitia Ide made a dazzling thing of *Nostalgic Moments*—overlong but studded with passages of beautiful irony and splendidly performed. With disingenuous sureness Merle Hirsch turned *Valse Sentimentale* into a witty fragment.

The dances performed at the recital for the benefit of the International Labor Defense (Carnegie Hall, Dec. 15) have been reviewed before, but revisions have been made in three new dances and with interesting results. Martha Graham's *Imperial Gesture* has been enriched by specific political symbolism. Although the new material has not been quite assimilated it is a much deeper and stronger work. Tamiris has considerably shortened her anti-militarist *Maneuvers*, but at the sacrifice of needed irony. She has strengthened her *Middle Ground* by discarding the color literalisms; but the whole conception of this work still remains inadequate. Doris Humphrey describes her *New Dance* as "the growth of an individual in relationship to his fellows within an imaginary state." The superabundant energy of this work, its magnificent color and the driving music by Wallingford Rieger inspired the audience to a prolonged ovation. It is by no means an easy work to follow, but a second seeing clarifies the sequence and rewards one again with its gorgeous lyricism.

Charles Weidman's *Stock Exchange* was the only new number. Like several of his new works, it proclaims his growing interest in social themes, but it is still a first draft. It moves with a fine gusto, broad comic strokes and sputtering iron ironies.

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"PARADISE LOST" By CLIFFORD ODETS

"'Paradise Lost' is beautiful. It gives me that feeling that I don't often have in a theater . . . the feeling that the theater is after all something worth fighting for."
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Anna Sokolow's *Strange American Funeral* closed the program, and as those familiar with the interpretation of Michael Gold's poem know it is a work of large significance. By the use of an amplifier, the singer's voice acquired a range quality supremely attuned to the need of the dance. Anna Sokolow has proved that the poem-dance can be incomparably more than the tiresome pantomimic illustration if one has the necessary creativeness. That she has this is brilliantly apparent in the constant freshness and "inevitableness" with which the dancers flow from one design into another. Dance as well as poetry can "surprise by a fine excess."

STANLEY BURNshaw.

[Note to the New Dance League Management: Isn't it time to overcome the disgraceful amateurishness which permits false cues, wrong lighting, changed programs, etc. to mar your recitals? The unswept stage is not only a trial to your dancers but an insult to your audiences.]

Current Theater

Let Freedom Ring, by Albert Bein (Civic Repertory Theater). Grace Lumpkin's strike novel in a powerful dramatization revived by the Theater Union. One of the most moving social plays of our time. Attendance required.

Ghosts, with Alla Nazimova (New Empire). More than half a century of playing has not tamed the force of Ibsen's great social explosion, and in all its long history it has never been touched off with more precision than Nazimova's incomparable acting and direction give it.

Pride and Prejudice (Plymouth Theater). Helen Jerome's remarkably adept dramatization of Jane Austen's classic preserves so much of the original that you don't miss a few omitted characters. In its sly and bubbling way it shows up the husband-hunting mores of the nineteenth century as the mind-shriveling, spirit-warping thing that they were.

May Wine (St. James Theater). There isn't very much to say for this new musical drama. From beginning to end the fifteen scenes are well snowed under granulated sugar. The formula is simple: a dash of nobility, a bit of mystery and murder, a tumbler of bedroom love and a dropper full of Romberg music. The pretty girl at our side was wisely asleep at the close of the first act.

Winterset (Martin Beck Theater). Maxwell Anderson's poetic play studies the effect of the legal murder of a labor-agitator on the second generation. Though it deliberately turns aside from the true and unavoidable issues and turns heavenward on a trajectory of universalities, the picture it creates of corruption and wrecked humanity will not easily be forgotten. Beautifully staged and directed.

Haunch, Paunch and Jowl (Artef). A careful dramatization of Samuel Ornitz's novel, tracing the development of an East Side boy through gangsterism and shyster lawyerism to the high places.

Paradise Lost, by Clifford Odets (Longacre Theater). For people who think of the drama as a place for expressing the hopes, actions and truths of human beings. Theme: the impact of the depression on the middle classes. A rich and beautiful play. Magnificent performance by Carnovsky, Gordon and Kazan. Attendance required.

The Screen

"Frontier"

NO REVIEW of *Frontier* (Cameo) can hope to be more than a tentative summary. Even Pudovkin, probably the film's greatest critical faculty, when asked for his opinion of *Frontier*, replied, "It stirred me too deeply to permit cool professional judgment." It is the reviewer's unenviable task, however, to rush in where his superior's fear to tread. Let me begin at once by stating that *Frontier* is the most consummate and mature cinematic embodiment of the poetic impulse I've ever seen on the screen. If Alexander Dovjenko had no more than vaguely intimated that motion-pictures could on occasion display an evocative power equal to spoken and written poetry we would be grateful. But Dovjenko has done much more. In *Frontier* he has created a cinema-poem that ranks with the noblest works of the poetic mind.

When I use the term poetry I have in mind its formal significance also; not only poetic intensity but true poetic symbol and methodology. There have been films in which for an isolated moment the director bursts through the hard resisting shell of necessary exegesis to uncover essential truths, but no films save those of Dovjenko, *Arsenal*, *Soil* and *Ivan*, "present entirely, immediately and essentially what prose can only describe from the outside," to quote Archibald MacLeish's penetrating distinction between poetry and prose.

The tightly-meshed structure of *Frontier* supports three themes: first and most important, the building "of another great city on the shores of the ocean, another Vladiv-

stok" (originally *Frontier* was titled *Air-City*); second, the struggle between encroaching imperialism and socialism; and last, the defeat of the kulaks by collectivization. All three themes are subtly combined in a plot of simple and pliant facture.

Four traitor Russians and two Samurai are making their way through the Siberian taiga. They carry dynamite with them to destroy the Soviet mines and collectives. Glushak, the "tiger's death," who symbolizes Soviet watchfulness, sets upon them and shoots down three of their number. Only one Russian, Shabanov, escapes while Glushak pursues the Samurai, finally overtaking and slaying one of them. The other he tracks to the hut of his friend, Vasil Khudikov. Vasil assures him that there has been no one about. Convinced he must be mistaken, Glushak leaves. Vasil and the Samurai then join a village of kulaks who for seven years have been hiding in the forest, living among the wild beasts in preference to the sinful Bolshevik cities. As the Samurai, the imperialist, and Shabanov, who exemplifies the tragic bewilderment of the kulaks, are about to lead the villagers in a foray against the collectives, Glushak and his followers appear. The villagers are overcome; Vasil and the Samurai are taken prisoner. Glushak himself executes his dearest friend, Vasil, for having taken arms against the workers and murdered the Chinese partisan, Van-Lin. Glushak carries the body of Van-Lin to the plane of his son, Vladimir. The plane takes off and lofts into the air. Planes in increasing number, from

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