

become more understandable as his searchings crystallize in his mind.

Ballet International

BY NOW it is common knowledge that enough funds for at least two B-29's were invested to launch a new ballet company which, under the inverted title of Ballet International, gave the New York public two months of old favorites, new works and a couple of world premieres at its own theater on Columbus Circle. It is equally common knowledge that these funds were made available to ballet because George de Cuevas, married to a Rockefeller, "had a dream [quoting the organization's statement of principles]: "to form a foundation to foster ballet; a foundation which would make still more perfect that illustrious marriage of the arts; a fostering of dancers, composers, choreographers and artists."

The dream had certain nightmarish overtones for this reviewer, although it is not our intention to condemn the proceedings wholesale. Whether they come from Rockefeller or other equally affluent sources, half-million dollar clips for the furtherance of culture, for the subsidy of art and therefore of artists, are all to the good. There should be more such gestures.

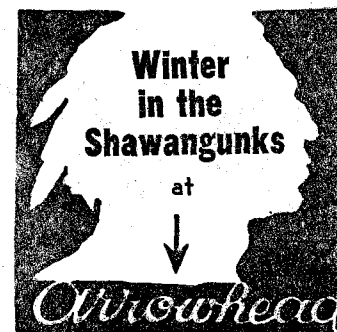
But generosity and dreams are not enough. Other elements are needed for the launching of praiseworthy cultural ventures. For instance, a professional *corps de ballet* in which *all* members, not only a few, warrant professional rating. Or what about artistic taste? integrity? authority? Well, you can't buy all that in packages. And George de Cuevas, admitted artistic director of Ballet International, must assume full share of responsibility for the patent weaknesses of the project.

De Cuevas is no Diagheliev, although he, too, gives with a lavish hand to composers, artists, choreographers, designers, and dancers, and hopes that under his guidance they will make a contribution to the world of art. But de Cuevas seems incapable of rendering sound artistic judgments, which certainly is part of his function. No firm hand was laid on the artistic extravagances in which the repertoire abounded. There was apparently no one around who knew how to build artistic unity and cohesiveness in the company; who could solve its creative problems with something approaching taste and authority; who would aim above all for dignity, if not distinction, in its presentations.

Let's get down to cases. "Sentimental Colloquy" took sensitive music by Paul Bowles, an exquisite Verlaine poem, and then gave it to Dali to drown out with naked bearded old men riding on bicycles all over the set. It permitted a good ballet work, "Constantia," choreographed by Bill Dollar, to be costumed in lavender and mauve chiffon in the boudoir lampshade tradition. It condoned a real atrocity, "Pictures at an Exhibition." Mme. Nijinska, its choreographer, was staging Moussorgsky, so she said, as it would be done in one of the Russian theaters today. Now, not a single correspondent—Ambassador Davies, Willkie, Eve Curie, Quentin Reynolds, others—failed to report on the glory of Soviet ballet, its gorgeous and lavish spectacle maintained in the midst of and despite the war, and the passionate love the Russians have for these very spectacles. But Nijinska decided that "a luxurious production, complete with rich scenery and costumes, *would not only be impossible to obtain, but would also be strange and unacceptable to the Russian audience.*" This is not only ignorance, it is plain effrontery. And the ballet itself was of a piece; drab blouses and boots and kerchiefs and unpainted benches and ladders for props; the dancing a hodge-podge of folk and character, of stupid realism and ridiculous games. It was quite an unbearable business. Both Nijinska and Boris Aronson, set designer, ought to be thoroughly ashamed of themselves.

On the credit side of the ledger, "Sebastian," choreography by Edward Caton, music and plot by Gian-Carlo Menotti, Oliver Smith and Milena doing sets and costumes, is a good piece of ballet theater. "Constantia" has several excellent sections in it, notably a fine second movement. "Mute Wife," based on the Anatole France story, is charming, and introduces a new witty choreographer, Antonia Cobos, who dances the title role also. And then "The Mad Tristan," with choreography by Massine, but salvos to Salvador who emerged with a shockingly exciting set and costumes and a mad, mad libretto, "the first paranoiac ballet based on the eternal myth of love in death" to quote the master himself. Its sheer insanity of symbol and juxtaposition of image set to Wagner's turbulent music made the whole business a fascinating, if somewhat gruesome, show.

The dancers, too, some of them, were good. Marie-Jeanne is one of the few young ballet performers who has strength as well as beauty in her style.



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Pick Your Prizes (See Page 26)

Viola Essen leans gracefully towards the lyric. Francisco Moncion, as the Moor Sebastian in the Caton ballet, was over-violent in his histrionics, but scored a triumph in the title role of the Mad Tristan. Ditto for Lisa Maslova, who appeared as the Chimera of Isolde.

Ballet International should sit itself down in a quiet room after its nationwide current tour and have a good heart-to-heart talk with itself. And then resolve to gather around it that artistic personnel and leadership capable of advising and inspiring it, instead of letting it run riot. FRANCIS STEUBEN.

On Second Avenue

AFTER the last curtain of the American premiere of the Soviet-Jewish play, *We Will Live*, Jacob Ben-Ami stepped from the midst of his excellent company to pronounce the credo of the New Jewish Folk Theater and to point to its works. Of the group, he said, "We believe that the theater today must provide more than artistry and entertainment. In this time of great questions, it is its social duty to help clarify and formulate great answers." Of the play, he said, "It teaches us that unity among the people can beat the enemy and destroy him; and it warns us not to forget the dreadful log of Nazi bestialities in the day when he will plead his innocence." Thus theory joins practice even as it did in the theater's previous production, H. Leivick's *Miracle Of The Warsaw Ghetto*. The New Jewish Folk Theater is helping to provide clarity, guidance, and inspiring militancy to the people of its community. No Broadway producing organization, for all its superior financial and technical resources, has been so consistently true to time and the theater.

David Bergelson's new play is simple and direct melodrama. To a small, prosperous Ukrainian farm collective, largely Jewish in composition, a German-Jewish refugee agronomist has fled with all the work of a lifetime of research and experimentation. The Nazi tide roars over the village, but the Nazi commander seizes only its empty, burned-out husk. With an assurance which soon turns to murderous rage, he tries to wrest the agronomist's secret from him and from the community elders. Vainly he tortures, hangs and shoots the people in the hope of forcing them to surrender their hidden stores, to work the abandoned fields, to betray their partisan hideout. But in the end the invincible unity and will to live of this

January 9, 1945 NM