

# World of Dance

Walter Terry

## Boo-boo in Boston

BOSTON, MASS.

SARAH CALDWELL, artistic director and guiding force of The Opera Company of Boston, has made almost everyone's blacklist—very probably for the first time in her distinguished career—with the all-Béla Bartók program which she presented recently at the Shubert Theater. Opera lovers had every reason to be irritated since two of the three productions had no singing at all, and the third was an opera in duet form. And balletomanes had every reason to complain since the ballet, *The Wooden Prince*, and the pantomime, *The Miraculous Mandarin*, as choreographed by Imre Eck of Hungary's Ballet Sopiana, were just awful.

Casting about, rather desperately, for something charitable to say, all I can think of is that *The Miraculous Mandarin* has caused other choreographers considerable trouble, although Joseph Lazzini's version, seen here with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet in 1965, was by far the best I have encountered. I don't think that Balanchine or Ashton or de Mille could do anything with *The Wooden Prince*, unless they ditched the idiotic libretto—which tries to relate a fairy story with the tritest elements of naughty human behavior—and simply used the attractive score as a choreographic springboard. The pantomime—or wild-eyed emotional reactions that Mr. Eck devised for his staging—was

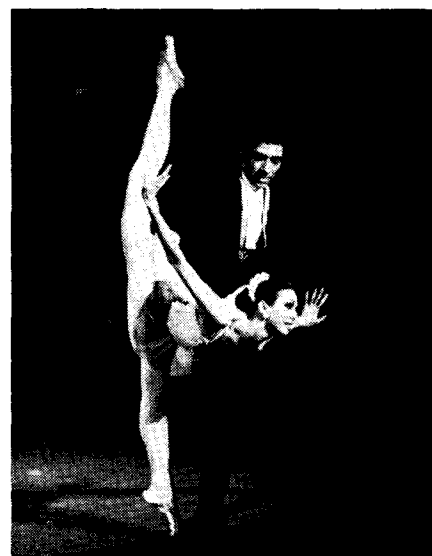
even more idiotic, if that is possible.

The imported Hungarian performers (including Mr. Eck as the Mandarin), who performed the leading roles in both ballet and pantomime, were competent. Members of the Boston Ballet, who augmented the casts, did valiantly and danced well. As for the opera, *Bluebeard's Castle*, it was so statically staged that one wanted to cry out for the New York City Ballet's superb production in which John Butler used marvelous dance images to echo in movement the marvelous Bartók sounds.

NEW YORK, N.Y.

**Produced by** the New York City Ballet at the New York State Theater in Lincoln Center, *Tchaikovsky Suite* is the best ballet that Jacques d'Amboise, one of the most brilliant of today's leading male dancers, has choreographed. This does not mean that we have a great ballet but, simply, a better one.

The most ingratiating grin in the theater of dance belongs to d'Amboise. This very personal attribute he has translated into dance movement for his new ballet. At its best, it smiles kinetically. There are times, however, when you look and when you feel that he doesn't know very much about the *craft* of choreography and is simply filling in steps while the muse is out to lunch. But then comes the smile, and all is well again for a while as the d'Amboise grin finds release in antic responses to music—situation or just plain muscle-fun.



—Martha Swope.

**The new d'Amboise ballet, *Tchaikovsky Suite*, with Francisco Moncion and Allegra Kent—"At its best, it smiles kinetically."**

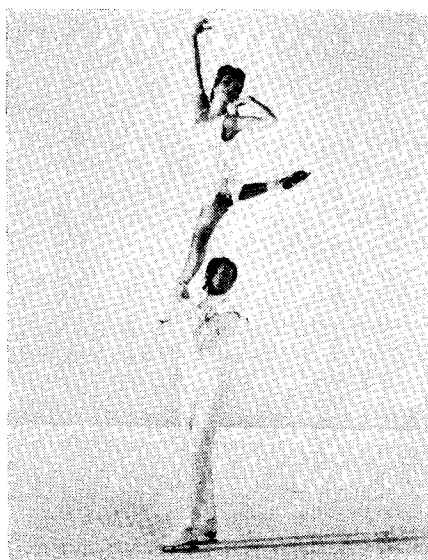
Because of the Tchaikovsky musical base, there is a hint of old Russia in the booted, broad-sleeved males, and in the planting of heels on stage—even in toe shoes—as if to suggest an earthy folk dance. But there is a tenuousness that leaves unlinked some very effective startings and stoppings.

The dashing young John Prinz (how exciting he was as the newest Cavalier in *The Nutcracker!*), with a Cossack attack, and Marnee Morris are excellent in the first movement. The high point, at least for me, is the second section in which Allegra Kent moves with lyrical loveliness in company with Francisco Moncion—who dates back to the first season of the New York City Ballet twenty years ago, and who comports himself like a performer and not as an advanced student—a status now fashionable with the New York City Ballet.

John Clifford, who doesn't behave like a student who got a gold star on his report card, headed the third movement of the d'Amboise ballet and turned up with some exciting sequences of actions, with the charming Linda Merrill as his partner.

**"If you've seen one, you've seen 'em all"** is the tolerant but unfair curse customarily directed at ice shows. There are always exceptions, and the current Ice Capades (the twenty-ninth edition) is—to use an old-fashioned expression—a humdinger. Not too long ago, we used to say that a good show was streamlined, but that invited comparison with sleek cars. This new ice show, with speed and glitter and three-screen projections and wild lighting, is jetstreamed. It's really gorgeous.

The great skating is there and the campy comics and the big production numbers, but the pace, the beat are now.



Romayne and Steele, ballet-trained, warm up as dancers (left) before donning skates for their headline appearances in the Ice Capades—"one of the ice world's most engaging duos."

The stars don't just take off, they peel out.

For the dance-minded, the big number is *Rhapsody for Piano and Ice*, choreographed by Robert Turk to a specially commissioned score by James Harbert. Phil Romaine and Cathy Steele—one of the ice world's most engaging duos—head the cast in that part of this skating ballet dealing with romance, impeccable technique, and lovely adagio; but there are also other episodes that bring in different rhythms, different styles, different colors. Incidentally, Romaine and Steele are ballet trained, so it is not surprising that they bring balletic elegance and polish to their skating skills.

The twenty-ninth edition of the Ice Capades also keeps its groovy approach with a delicious satire on a popular television show. It's called—you guessed it!—*Mission Improbable* and it's a hoot. Other highlights include a show-stopping precision routine by the skating corps; the antics of the indestructible Freddie Trenkler—and if you don't laugh with him you're not well; Spanky, the chimpanzee, who skates better than most of us and is star stuff to boot; and Tommy Litz, World Free Style Champion, who brings the Ice Capades right back to what skating is all about with one of the most dazzling performances to be seen anywhere.

Two Ice Capades companies are currently on the road. The one that played New York at Madison Square Garden, and which is herein described will be performing in Washington, D.C., when you read this and, subsequently, in such places as Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, and on out to Los Angeles. Don't miss it.

## WIT TWISTER #97

By ARTHUR SWAN

*The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash within a blank corresponds to a letter of the word.*

Our junk heaps, — — — — —  
of metallic blight,  
Are graveyards of things no one  
— — — — — for here.  
Poor future — — — — —, seek-  
ing past delight,  
We'll — — — — — you with this  
sordid souvenir!

(Answer on page 63)

# SR Goes to the Movies

Arthur Knight

## The Old, the New, and the Ugly

"IF IT'S NEW, it's good," runs the current equation in the arts, and contemporary artists in all fields seem bent on knocking themselves out in proving how thoroughly contemporary they can be. There are assaults on the eyes, assaults on the ears—multi-media assaults on all the senses—all proffered in affirmation of how thoroughly "with it" their perpetrators can be. Experimentation, of course, is something to be encouraged—but not if it carries with it as a natural concomitant the slogan, "If it's old, it's bad."

Illustrative of this is a new "old" Western by the illustrious team of Alan J. Pakula and Robert Mulligan, responsible for, among others, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Up the Down Staircase*. *The Stalking Moon* is their first essay in this field and, with the aid of a notably laconic script by Alvin Sargent (adapted from the novel by Theodore V. Olsen), they have brought it off beautifully. Essentially, it is the story of a hero who "must do what he must do" (Gregory Peck), the woman he has undertaken to protect (Eva Marie Saint), and the murderous Apache who stalks them from Arizona to New Mexico to wrest away from them his son. It is a simple plot, such as most good Westerns have, and it is simply told, without a great deal of camera trickery or editing effects. And miracle of miracle in this age of split screens and Richard Lester: it works!

It works primarily, I suspect, because the material is ideally suited to the screen in the first place. In the few moments we have to look at each shot, the eye glances nervously about in search of clues. Behind any rock or bush, in the branches of any tree may lurk the deadly Salvaje, who has already left behind him a trail of corpses. The camera comes in tight on Gregory Peck, eyes narrowed, jaw set. Was that sound in the forest the cry of a bird, or Salvaje luring him on to his destruction?

Robert Mulligan, the director, has captured well not only the tensions, but the Western landscape that creates them. Fog shrouds a canyon soon after we learn that the Indian has tracked Peck, Miss Saint, and the boy to their cabin nearby. Does it also conceal Salvaje? On the ground, a close-up reveals a coil of dead brush. A moment later, it proves to be the spring to a deadly ambush. With such devices, and his ever-taut script, Mulligan builds his film

to a nerve-shattering climax. Of course, nobody raises the question of whether a father—even if he is only an Indian—should have the right to raise his own son in his own way. But that, too, is part of the tradition of the old Western, and it interferes not at all with one's enjoyment of a good, old-fashioned story excitingly told.

**One longs for** a similar professionalism in *Double-Stop*, a first film by Roger and Gerald Sindell that is at once awkward and attractive. It is attractive because these two young men, very earnestly and honestly, are trying to deal with very real problems of today—the problems of young parents who are trying to educate their children in a city where the child has become a pawn of a system that seeks to placate all sides; and also the problems of young people who are not yet ready to make commitments of any kind. As the title suggests, these problems are intertwined fugue-fashion as the film develops—but, unlike the fugal form, their resolution here has no satisfying inevitability. A chance murder brings two friends, members of the Cleveland Symphony, closer together, but hardly answers the question of what to do when you object to your boy's being bussed to an integrated school. Still, the question is raised, and the world of the artist explored with some sensitivity; but, as in too many privately financed first films, where self-expression becomes more important than commercial success, the Sindells have permitted themselves all sorts of self-indulgences. Their picture looks beautiful, is obviously sincere, yet lapses into moments of didacticism and bathos that are embarrassing to watch.

Compared to Otto Preminger's *Skidoo*, however, *Double-Stop* is a masterpiece. This has to be the ugliest film of 1969—fumbling old plot, feeble old gags, dirty old men. The trouble is that Preminger tries to make it seem new, with psychedelic sequences, a bouncing Nilsson score, and all sorts of references to flower children and love. Despite a cast that is long on comics, it is short on laughs. And despite the fact that he has been sporting a Nehru jacket in his numerous TV appearances recently, the film reveals that Mr. Preminger is no more "with it" than John Wayne. Curiously, in his private life Otto Preminger is the most tasteful of men. Unfortunately, none of that taste seems to turn up in his pictures.