

# World of Dance

Walter Terry

## Hail, Harkness, Hail!

THE HARKNESS BALLET, which will soon celebrate its fifth birthday, in this short span of time has become a major force in the highly competitive world of dance. As a troupe of dancers, it's dreamy; it's groovy; it's young; it's sophisticated. What a combination! Its repertory is fresh—not one old chestnut on the bill of fare—yet the technique and elegance of classical ballet at its most dazzling is given stunning representation as well as works which are pure modern dance or ethnic-flavored exotica.

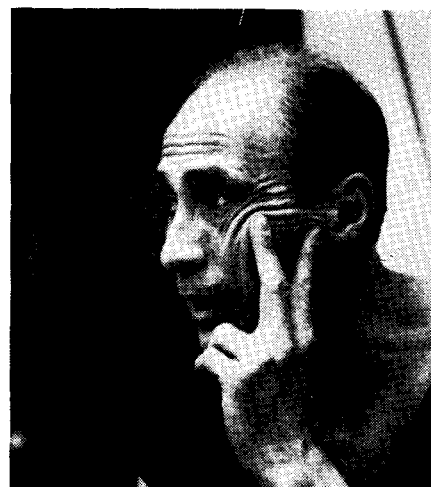
Indeed, one of its dancers once joshed that the Harkness repertory was the only one in the world which could present three full programs in which every ballet would include a rape, or near-rape, scene and never once repeat itself. But this same repertory also boasts Anton Dolin's *Variations for Four Plus Four* and Benjamin Harkarvy's *Grand Pas Espagnol*, showpieces of virtuosity which would have illumined the Maryinsky in St. Petersburg in the grandest era of the Russian Imperial Ballet. The former—with a score by Margaret Keogh (on Verdi themes) and scenery and costumes by Tom Lingwood—and the latter—set to Moszkowski and with costumes by Joop Stokvis—demand nothing less than dancers of star caliber, not just athletic kids, mind you, but polished artists. Harkness has them.

Five of the troupe's six principals are in both these display pieces—Lawrence Rhodes, Lone Isaksen, Elisabeth Carroll, Helgi Tomasson, Finis Jhung—and what they accomplish in terms of classi-

cal dancing is breathtaking. In both, you would also find your attention turning to a beautiful, assured, gifted young soloist, Marina Eglevsky, whose father, André, was one of the world's greatest *danseurs* not many years ago, and whose mother, Leda Anchutina, used to enchant an earlier ballet public with her fleetness of movement and irresistible smile.

The versatility of the principals is almost to be expected in ballet repertories as they are today, but to find the performing standards equally high in classical, dramatic, modern, and avant-garde is a special treat. Rhodes himself, of course, is nothing short of remarkable. At twenty-nine, he is the director of the company—and appears to be doing a fine job of it. If he is in the category of a d'Amboise or a Villella in matters of technical prowess, he is also an actor-dancer of superb accomplishment as attested to by his heart-tearing quietly dramatic characterizations of the tormented poet, Rimbaud, in John Butler's powerful portrait of one drawn to both homosexuality and heterosexuality, *A Season in Hell* (music of Peggy Glanville-Hicks and scenery and costumes by Rouben Ter-Arutunian); and as the embattled, tortured hero of a truly monumental *Monument for a Dead Boy*, by the Dutch choreographer, Rudi van Dantzig (to an electronic score by Jan Boerman).

Rhodes is important as director, classical dancer, actor-dancer, colleague-of-other-dancers to the Harkness Ballet; but the contributions of others—the principals I have mentioned, the soloists, the corps, the batterie of international chore-



—Photo: Robert Pavlik.

José Limón—"commanding dignity."

ographers, the support and guidance of the producer-benefactress herself, Rebekah Harkness—are the ingredients which have produced, developed, and brought the flush of triumph to the Harkness Ballet.

I've talked about the performing and choreographic skills of the Harkness Ballet in terms of classical dance and dramatic dance. But let me say that there is no lovelier pure dance work, sculptural in contour, kinetically pulsating, and muscally lyrical, than Norman Walker's *Night Song* (Hovhaness). The entire ensemble is captivating in it, but if you have a camera in your eyes, you'll record forever the incredible air-turns to a kneeling position which Dennis Wayne dances (not just executes, but truly dances) in a diagonal across the stage. In this phrase alone, one is witness to a distillation of that purity which inhabits both the animal and the poet.

There is laughter too, and you will find this in a new production of Todd Bolender's *Souvenirs*—with Samuel Barber's music and Ter-Arutunian's delicious period (1912) décor and costumes. In this ballet about high (and decidedly low) jinks in a resort hotel, you'll love (and this is a promise) Hester Fitzgerald as a not-too-constant wife, Michael Tipton as a masher convinced of his own irresistible charm, Salvatore Aiello as a *primo gigolo assoluto* (if there is such a term), and Bonnie Mathis as a Theda Bara-type vamp, with a snarl, a hiss, and a pelvic walk which have to be seen to be believed.

There were, inevitably, some lesser moments during the first part of the three-week stand at the Music Box, one of Broadway's most delightful theaters. One, ironically, was van Dantzig's *Moments* to music of Webern (in its U.S. premiere). It had some quite brilliant and arresting designs—*die Augen blicken* kind—but the continuing choreographic patterns seemed diffuse. Harkarvy's *Madrigalesco*, despite exquisite perform-



—Martha Swope.

Helgi Tomasson, Lone Isaksen, Lawrence Rhodes of the Harkness Ballet  
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ing, was bland, harmless, lacking the soft glow of the Vivaldi music. But then there were many exuberant pieces—among them *Canto Indio*—choreographed by Brian Macdonald (formerly director of the Harkness Ballet) to the sunny Aztec-Spanish music of Chávez, and performed like bursts of Mexican sunlight by Miss Carroll and Tomasson. But more on the Harkness successes next week.

**The ambitious** and generally rewarding Festival of Dance 68-69, which ran for weeks at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, moved on to Broadway's Billy Rose Theater under the auspices of Richard Barr's and Edward Albee's Theater 1969. The first week was given over to Merce Cunningham and his avant-garde offerings, and the second to José Limón, who is now old-guard modern dance.

I wish I could offer an enthusiastic report about everything that these two major figures in America's modern dance offered. But I must report that the Harkness Ballet's excursions into *Augenblicken* images, and responses to electronic sounds seemed to me more avant-garde than the Cunningham efforts (and more entertaining). The ballet's investigation into the dramas of the human heart—as seen by the American Ballet Theatre or Harkness—were more modern than contemporary Limón.

Cunningham and the marvelous Carolyn Brown danced beautifully (as did his entire group), and *How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run*, with John Cage and David Vaughan as narrators, was great fun, as it always is, but more so audibly than visually. Limón's *The Moor's Pavan* remains his choreographic masterpiece, a remarkable movement essence of the Othello story. But his later pieces tend to run on and on, and—all too often—indulge in trite emotionalism. The disciplining, inspirational hand of his late artistic director, Doris Humphrey—herself a choreographic great—is sorely missed. But Limón does boast the dancing presence of Louis Falco—athlete, dancer, actor, artist—and the excellent Sarah Stackhouse. His own bearing, in his increasingly rare appearances, is something to cherish; for he is man himself—strong, eager, noble, with the commanding dignity of a grand old hero. But increasingly, it seems that ballet, once a stick-in-the-mud for tradition, has hoisted its sails and is catching up with modern dance, if it has not already passed it by.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: In WORLD OF DANCE (Feb. 1), the New York production of "Bluebeard's Castle" should have been credited to the New York City Opera and not the New York City Ballet.

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# Music to My Ears

Irving Kolodin

## O'Hearn's New "Rosenkavalier"; Composer-Conductor Walton

ALT WIEN has rarely looked so splendid at the Metropolitan as it does currently in Robert O'Hearn's sparkling settings for its new production of Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*. The palatial boudoir for Act I, slightly (and suitably) garish interior for the parvenu Faninal's reception hall in Act II, and dimly clandestine *Extrazimmer* of the Inn (Act III) are the product of the same drawing board that has provided the Metropolitan with its fine *Meistersinger*, *Frau ohne Schatten*, and *Hänsel und Gretel*. As a totality, it is the most spacious and theatrically satisfying *Rosenkavalier* design the Met has had since it started giving Strauss's comic masterpiece in 1913.

This is not really saying as much as might be surmised, for the very first was succeeded in 1922 by another from Vienna (both based on the classic concept of Alfred Roller) which, in various guises, served the Metropolitan downtown. For the 1955-56 season, Rolf Gérard was commissioned to perform something like cosmetic surgery on the old flats, and provide a forecurtain. That was the scenic history of *Rosenkavalier* at the Metropolitan, until that indefatigable benefactor, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., provided the necessary green stuff to give the green light for O'Hearn's fantasy and taste.

Mostly traditional in its elements, O'Hearn's creation is nevertheless not conventional. This relates not so much to the option of putting the bed of Act I on stage left rather than right, but rather to the placement of entrances and exits in ways to facilitate the action and broaden the normal stage picture. In Act I, this is achieved by providing a big bay window (St. Stephen's is visible in the distance) to frame some action of the levée scene; in Act II, by huge, transparent doors between the reception area and the staircases leading to it; and, in Act III, by conceiving the room in which Ochs has his rendezvous with Octavian-Mariandl not merely as a *Zimmer* but as a vaulted private chamber in a *Rathskeller*, say.

Best of all, the O'Hearn production gives every promise of durability. This is well, for it encourages the hope that it will, eventually, frame a cast of performers truly worthy of it. The present one, under the always authoritative if sometimes unrelentingly forceful direc-

tion of Karl Böhm, has the names to suggest a rounded result. But, as the indoctrinated operagoer knows, names are no guaranteed answer to the query: "What did you do last night?"

As names, those of Leonie Rysanek as the Marschallin and Christa Ludwig as Octavian have prior Metropolitan connotations. Both performed the roles in the bygone downtown house, though in rather different chronological circumstances. As of 1959, when Ludwig was first seen as Octavian, she was a young performer of almost unbearable promise, straining at all the fences that hedge in the young. Rysanek's Marschallin, also new in the same year, was the effort of a performer well launched on her career. The passage of time has influenced both, rather more to the advantage of Ludwig than Rysanek—or, to depersonalize it, to the benefit of Octavian rather than the Marschallin.

As most operagoers are aware, Rysanek has a powerful top, a questionable midrange, and a veiled, muffled lower register. Much of the important writing for the Marschallin in Act I (which she dominates) is in the middle and lower registers with, consequently, too much thick, unfocused sound. Together with her tendency to play the part in a rather hard, unappealing way, this diminished the buildup of sympathy that should surge in her direction in Act III when she graciously gives up her lover, Octavian, to his new-found love, Sophie. Act III is Rysanek's best, vocally, for the power she commands at the top enables her to dominate the trio to a degree given to few Marschallins. Taken together, the two acts in which Rysanek appeared (the Marschallin is absent in Act II) left an impression, with me, of a calculating woman well served by Octavian and reluctant to let him go, but not particularly involved, emotionally.

On the other hand, Ludwig has curbed a good deal of the exuberance which characterized Octavian's romping about the last time she performed the part here. In the complicated assignment of a female impersonating a male (Octavian), who is called upon to impersonate a male impersonating a female (Mariandl), Ludwig had her greatest success with the greater complication. As the supposed servant maid Mariandl, leading the easily led Ochs into an assignation designed to reveal him as an unsuitable spouse for Sophie, Miss Ludwig was both funny and sad, always singing beautifully and making