

World of Dance

Walter Terry

Comedy Classic

BOSTON, MASS.

Coppélia, the finest and most popular comedy-classic in all ballet, is celebrating its 100th birthday. Appropriately, the chief American celebration was held here, for Boston presided on January 15, 1887, over the U.S. premiere (two months before the first New York presentation) of a three-act masterpiece that is to danced comedy what *Giselle* is to danced tragedy. Giselle had to die in order that the somewhat inconstant Albrecht learn the meaning of true love; Swanilda, on the other hand, teaches her inconstant Franz a lesson by pretending to be the doll, Coppélia, that he has seen from a distance and thinks he has fallen in love with. *Giselle* ends in the catharsis of tragedy; *Coppélia*, in the curativeness of laughter.

Coppélia (ou *La fille aux yeux d'émail*), with choreography by Arthur Saint-Léon; music, Léo Delibes; book, Charles Nutter and Saint-Léon, suggested by E. T. A. Hoffmann's story *Der Sandmann*; décor and costumes by several designers, was first given at the Opéra in Paris on May 25, 1870. This three-act ballet had been in discussion and rehearsal for almost two years. Selected to play Swanilda, the mischievous heroine, was a child prodigy of fifteen (she was sixteen-and-a-half by the time the ballet opened). Her name was Giuseppina Bozzacchi—there were other spellings of her last name—and for her entire professional career she danced no role other than that of Swanilda. She died, you see, on her seventeenth birthday. Yet she had become, through eighteen performances of *Coppélia*, a star.

Bozzacchi, born in Milan, was imitating the flying angels, hovering over the statue of the Virgin in her church, when she was four. At about the same time, she terrified family and neighbors when she kicked off her shoes and pursued, with sureness of step, her pet canary over the rooftops. At nine, she began her dance studies and attracted the interest of the prima ballerina of La Scala, who urged the Bozzacchi parents to take their remarkably gifted daughter to Paris for further study. In Paris, despite some financial hardships, little Giuseppina progressed swiftly, earned the admiration of not only Saint-Léon but also the director and the ballet master of the Opéra, and, oddly enough in a competitive world,

won the affection of the other dancers.

Her contract specified that she would make her debut in *Coppélia*, which two years of advance publicity had made one of the most eagerly awaited art events in Paris. She was an instant success as Swanilda. The press was ecstatic, and one major critic compared her with the ballerina who had made history in the title role of *Giselle* in 1841—"She will be," he asserted, "a Carlotta Grisi." But in a matter of weeks, the Franco-Prussian War broke out, and, during the siege of Paris, the little ballerina died of smallpox.

The U.S. premiere in Boston was presented by the ballet of the National Opera (formerly the American Opera) at the Boston Theater. Marie Giuri was Swanilda, and the Franz, as in Paris, was acted by a female dancer (the male was given short shrift in ballet during these several decades). *The New York Clipper*, in its issue of January 22, 1887, recorded the event as "the first production of Léo Delibes' ballet in this country."

Coppélia has since remained an American (as well as European) favorite. Anna Pavlova, with Mikhail Mordkin as her partner, made her U.S. debut in it at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1910. Swanilda was considered by many to be the late (she died a few weeks ago in her nineties) Dame Adeline Genée's greatest role. For the 1930s, 1940s, and into the 1950s, Alexandra Danilova was unequaled as the sparkling Swanilda, and with the Royal Danish Ballet, until a few years ago, Inge Sand was the definitive Swanilda. We've had great Franz characterizations since the ladies gave up: among them Frederic Franklin and Fredbjorn Bjornsson.

Coppélia, in whole or in part, is in the repertory of most American ballet troupes, not all but most. I can't list them all. The Boston Ballet, at first unknowingly, selected the 100th anniversary for its first staging of *Coppélia* and only later discovered that Boston presided over the U.S. premiere. Still later, it was found out that the Boston Ballet's Savoy Theater was built on the same site as the old Boston Theater. And to make everything fall into place, the Boston ballerina selected for the occasion was Edra Toth, seventeen years old. So Boston had its memorable *Coppélia* celebration. And let me say that the company and its director, E. Virginia Williams, were the deserving hosts. Miss Toth, who, at sixteen,



—Harvard Theatre Collection.

Mlle. Bozzacchi, at sixteen, was Swanilda in the first "*Coppélia*" in Paris a century ago and was enthusiastically applauded by Napoleon III and the Empress Eugénie.



—Frank Derbas.

Miss Toth, at seventeen, was the Swanilda in the Boston Ballet's 1970 production of "*Coppélia*"—". . . at sixteen, danced her first *Giselle* brilliantly" and has done the "same for Swanilda on this occasion."

danced her first *Giselle* brilliantly, did the same for Swanilda on this occasion (Grisi and Bozzacchi researchers, take note!), and David Drummond was a romantic Franz, an ardent and roving swain. Samuel Kurkjian, as a mime, was excellent as the irascible and engagingly gullible Dr. Coppélius. (The doll herself, Coppélia, is unimportant as a performer, but without her presence as an automaton, there would be no plot, no pretty dish for the eye of Franz to fall upon as he sees her on a balcony, and no model for Swanilda to pretend to be when she makes fools of the old man and the young male.)

Miss Williams did a first-rate job of staging *Coppélia* on the basis of the later Ivanov and Cecchetti production; Robert deMora's scenery and costumes were appropriately evocative of illustrations for a child's book; and Hugo Fiorato, conducting the Delibes score, made you want to get out of your seat and join the dancers in the rousing mazurka, the infectious czardas. So Happy Birthday, *Coppélia*, from the Hub, Boston.

The Middle East

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social revolution that will revitalize the Arab world by sweeping away the kings and sheiks and the bourgeoisie as well, to the Moslem Brothers, whose Koranic imperative is sweeping away the atheist revolutionaries. Arafat is as welcome in Jidda, Rabat, and Kuwait as he is in Khartoum, Tripoli, and Bagdad. This is possible only because the broad center that he represents makes a point of not interfering in domestic affairs (even in Jordan and Lebanon, where the commandos and the governments find themselves in collision). The Palestinians have so far avoided following the Algerian example of setting up a government in exile. They explain that this would only saddle them with the burdens of administration. More to the point, it would at once and possibly violently end their symbiotic relationship with King Hussein in Jordan; it also might tear their own flimsy unity to shreds under the strain of drafting a definite program.

So, the Palestinians coast along on

the widely accepted common denominator: armed struggle as the means of regaining self-respect and world acceptance, a new dynamism rising above the intrigues and failures of the past; then a democratic, secular state of Palestine replacing Israel, with Arabs and Jews living in harmony. The first stage is certainly in keeping with the political climate of today's world; the second is respectable enough, especially by comparison with the earlier slogan of driving the Jews into the sea. Both, however, have serious deficiencies that exert a sobering influence.

One still hears the brave assertion that the struggle will be carried on for generations if need be; and in Amman we saw ten-year-old Ashbal (Lion Cubs) carrying big rifles stiffly around a field, their little faces tense, barking, "Thawra, Nasser" (Revolution, Victory), "Assifah-Fateh" (the main commando organization). But one also hears in some sections of the leadership the fear that endless struggle will only radicalize the movement, destroying the liberal, democratic, and social-democratic elements at its cen-

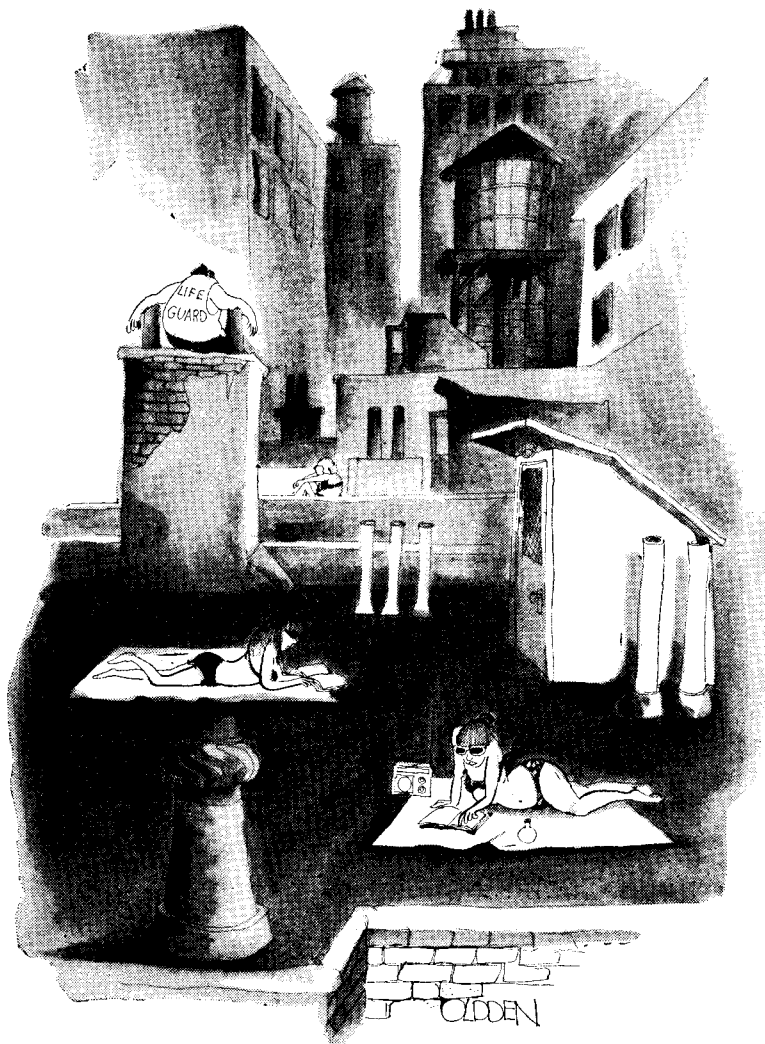
ter. Some leaders ascribe the new recognition and support of the Soviet Union to a desire not only to keep in touch with a rising star but also to move it left.

The Palestinians who feel this way see armed struggle primarily in Algerian terms, as a means to gain recognition as political equals. They do not exaggerate the damage they have done to Israel and dismiss the likelihood of military victory in foreseeable circumstances. On the other hand, they see themselves becoming stronger and able to inflict greater punishment, with consequent growing bargaining power. To bargain what? They do not for one moment believe that Israel will do the Palestinians the favor of liquidating itself. They advance the thesis of dissolving Israel in a Palestinian state as a negotiating gambit and privately concede their acceptance of coexisting Arab and Israeli states. There is no sign that these men represent a majority in the commando leadership or that they are in a position to deliver any such terms. The Israelis are right; there is as yet no one to negotiate with. But these leaders exist. They say they want to be accepted and to parley.

Here a qualitative difference emerges between the commandos and the Arab states. The latter, as they defined their stand in Khartoum, will not negotiate with Israel. It is widely assumed that any leader who engaged in talks would have his throat cut, literally or figuratively, as a traitor to the Palestinian cause. But for the Palestinians themselves, negotiation would be recognition and a step up. If the suggestion caused convulsions inside their camp, the outcome would depend on the strength of the contending factions. Surely the diplomacy of peace should do everything to strengthen the hand and enhance the stature of the moderates.

The effort of the past three years has failed, trapped in dead formulas and stony positions. It is time for imaginative, not stubborn, diplomacy to turn away from deadlock and try to undemonize a problem that has taken on nightmarish aspects and to create opportunities where none appear to exist. That is the new game in the Middle East.

Given the premise that peace will not be imposed from outside but must be forged by people who must live together, an enormous responsibility falls on Israel. In failing so far to indicate its peace aims except in general and noncommittal terms, Israel has made it very easy for its adversaries to paint a picture of a ruthless, implacably expansionist state whose efficiency makes it able to spread out forever and with which there can be



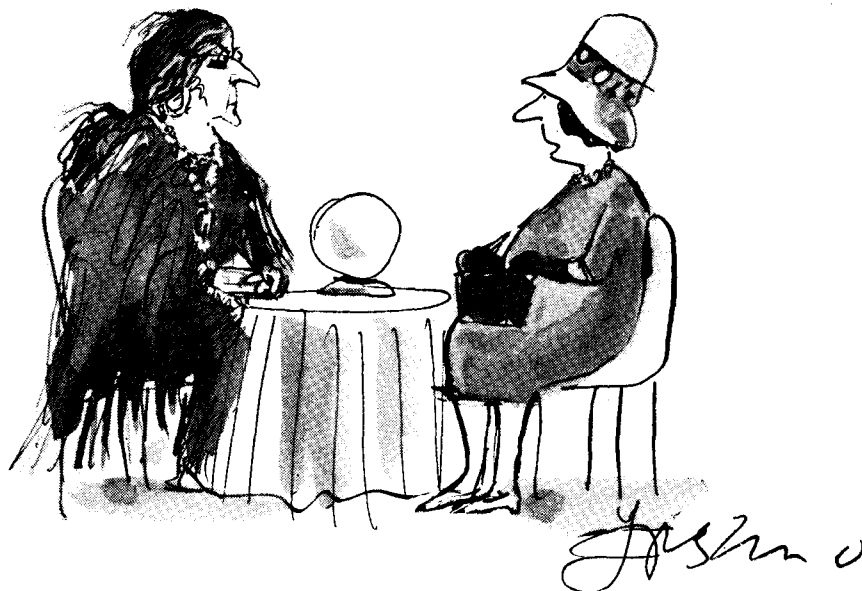
no peace. The fact that the Israeli government, while vaguely signaling its intention to return Arab land, has not said how much and, for some unfathomable reason, has never used the word withdrawal obviously does not allay suspicion.

The Israelis ask why they should risk a cabinet crisis in formulating peace terms when there is no one on the other side to discuss them. They ask why they should be called upon to make gestures of conciliation that, they say, will only be taken as signs of weakness. If such steps were to solve the problem, the answer would be easy, but there is no certainty that they would. On the other hand, it does seem certain that without them the problem will not be solved.

The tough, unyielding line Israel has pursued for the past three years may suit the national mood, but it has also solidified the Arab camp. It has turned what would be a much more manageable local contest between Jerusalem and Damascus or Amman or Cairo into a great Arab-Israeli conflict drawing in Arab countries that would much prefer to stay out of it. The projection of modest and realistic goals—an agreed, mutually binding peace within internationally secured boundaries, without blockade and boycott, but also without more than the minor territorial acquisitions needed to rationalize the border—might well de-Arabize, depolarize the struggle. The alternative, the continued pursuit of or the appearance of pursuing undefined maximum goals, is likely only to perpetuate the crisis. Israel, increasingly isolated, even from its friends who will not support the maximum, will be forced more and more into a state of siege.

A de-Arabized conflict would, at least, offer more opportunities to negotiate. The war on the Suez Canal might then appear a local brawl, a fight between Israel and Egypt, with no relevance to the Israeli-Palestinian question. It is at least open to question whether Saudi Arabia and Kuwait would then help to maintain an annual subsidy to Egypt of some \$250-million for a closed canal that might well be opened. One may also speculate on how strongly the Soviet Union would indulge its very expensive interest in an Egypt which was no longer the fulcrum of the Middle East. Everywhere, inside and outside the Arab world, the healthy demands of normal life might begin to assert themselves.

Britain, France, and the United States, freed of the Soviet veto that is built into quadripartite diplomacy, might exercise their different talents bilaterally for a settlement. Each has its own influence with the countries in



"I don't have time for all the boring details. Just give me the bottom line."

the area and its own self-interest, and each genuinely wants peace in the Mediterranean. The Rogers proposals now have given Washington greater access to the Arab moderates without casting doubt on the U.S. desire to preserve a secure, viable Israel.

It would be childish to assume that recognition of the possibilities inherent in the new situation opens a door to happy tranquillity. There is no instant peace.

What are these possibilities? A secure Israel, accepted by its neighbors, could help to enrich and stabilize the whole region. One of these neighbors would be a Palestinian Arab state, possibly a liberal constitutional monarchy replacing Jordan and called Palestine, with a government of Palestinians capitalizing on the great personal assets of King Hussein. He would be the link with the strong Bedouin element whose opposition would mean civil strife. As a Hashemite descendant of the Prophet, he might help in time to solve what still appears to be the insoluble problem of Jerusalem. Only a Palestinian state could work with Israel to solve the refugee dilemma—and be assured of enormous international financial help in doing so.

Lebanon, having no territorial problems, would be free to abandon the social fictions that have kept Christians and Moslems suspended in artificial and jittery balance for a dozen years and engage in badly needed social reform. Syria, now holding out as an ultraradical, might not long remain aloof from the profitable regional development that peace would make possible. And Egypt, with Nasser still

in charge, secure in its ancient boundaries, could turn the now wasteful effort of war into construction. It remains the largest state in the region, with every chance for growing prosperity and commensurate influence.

Much of the connective tissue of such a peace might be provided by the United Nations, which could maintain demilitarized zones under foolproof inspection and security forces not capriciously removable.

All this is a dream. No part of it need ever come true, but it could. Progress and peace are dreams that people make real. Failure to try could ensure the Hundred Years' War, of which U Thant has warned.

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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.

Cain was _____, and his
countenance fell,
For he knew the _____
of his offering well.
Why did the Lord _____
him looks of disdain,
While He made His acceptance
of Abel's gifts plain?

—A.S.

(Answer on page 73)