

Dance

Ballet's Newest Star

BY WALTER TERRY

The fans ran down the aisles and crowded close to the orchestra pit. Armfuls of curtain-call bouquets were handed to the ballerina or thrown at her feet. Blossoms were tossed across the footlights, and outsized confetti fluttered down upon her as she stood in front of the great gold curtain for a solo bow.

She was not Dame Margot Fonteyn, the world's most popular (and highest paid) ballerina, nor was she the Royal Ballet's adored Antoinette Sibley, nor Russia's blazing Maya Plisetskaya, nor the American Ballet Theatre's deceptively fragile, hauntingly lovely Carla Fracci. She was Cynthia Gregory of the American Ballet Theatre—modest, retiring, and happily married. Her response to a major critic's rave review of her first full-length *Swan Lake* had been: "Heavens! Why did he have to say all that! Now people will expect something of me."

Cynthia Gregory, who has been with the American Ballet Theatre for several seasons, has risen meteorically in the last year or so from *corps de ballet* to demisoloist to soloist to ballerina. From the start the young, versatile Californian attracted the attention and interest of balletomanes. No technical feat that a choreographer or a teacher could dream up seemed to daunt her. Some ballerinas are famous for their turns, others for their *pointe*, some for extraordinary leaps, and still others for high leg extensions and spinal flexibility. Through natural facility and constant hard work Cynthia excels in *all* these departments.

The Black Swan's thirty-two spinning fouettés, which turn many other dancers grim-faced, do not faze Cynthia Gregory. "When I begin," she says, "I don't think of the thirty-two ahead of me. I do eight as nicely and neatly as I can. Then I do another eight, and pretty soon they are all done." Could she execute sixty-four? "Oh, yes." How about doing them to the left instead of to the right? "I think I could, although I'd need to practice for a half hour or so."

Cynthia Gregory is equally at ease in soft, flowing adagio movements and

brisk allegro actions. Classical ballets and modern works, storyless dances and dramatic ballets, are all in her repertory. Her musicality is as sensitive as was Maria Tallchief's.

But there are flaws of sorts in this seemingly perfect dance instrument. At five feet six inches, Cynthia is tall for a ballerina. "My feet are so long that when I'm on toe I'm close to six feet!" she complains. Understandably, Bruce Marks, a six-footer and a premier danseur skilled in both classical and modern ballets, is her frequent partner. What distresses Cynthia is that her husband, Terry Orr, a splendid dancer with a brilliant technique who was just promoted from soloist to the top rank of principal, is her own height offstage, but considerably shorter when his wife is wearing toe shoes.

Cynthia's height is, of course, merely a condition that must be faced. The fact that, despite all her dazzling technical proficiency, she appears to be a cold performer is more disturbing. After her initial successes as a virtuosa she said: "I know an artist is supposed to have suffered in order to communicate something special; but I've never suffered. I had a happy childhood, and I've always loved my mother and father. Terry was my first beau. We got married, we love each other, and we're happy. There are just no hangups! I know that's what is wrong with me as a performer, so I'm trying to find tragedy and conflict through the roles I dance."

Cynthia is obviously beginning to find her way, for the dance public not only respects her skills but has warmed to her personality. During ABT's summer season at Lincoln Center's New York State Theatre she danced an incredible number of diverse roles. Her dual portrayal of Odette-Odile in *Swan Lake* won her a prodigious ovation. Her first *Giselle* in New York evoked such a demonstration that one would have thought Fonteyn, Plisetskaya, Alonso, Bruhn, Nureyev, Villella, Dowell, and Sibley had just finished dancing together. It wasn't a perfect *Giselle*, but it was clearly a performance by a genuine ballerina on her way to becoming a prima ballerina and, eventually, an American *prima ballerina assoluta*.

Giselle did not seem an ideal role for a tall and sturdy girl. "Everyone thinks

of her as tiny, dark-haired, fragile," says Cynthia, "and I'm not that way at all. But *Giselle* is innocent, and I am too—I really have led a totally sheltered life. So in Act I I played her like myself. When my mother saw me, she said, 'It's just like you,' and I guess it was."

Martha Graham has said of dancers: "Master a craft, then cultivate a being." Cynthia Gregory is doing just that before the appreciative eyes of her huge public. □

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Edited 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.

One's — — — — may be
bruised; one's eye may smart:

But illness seems uncouth — —
— — — the heart.

When — — — — bursts or
bladder trouble burgeons,

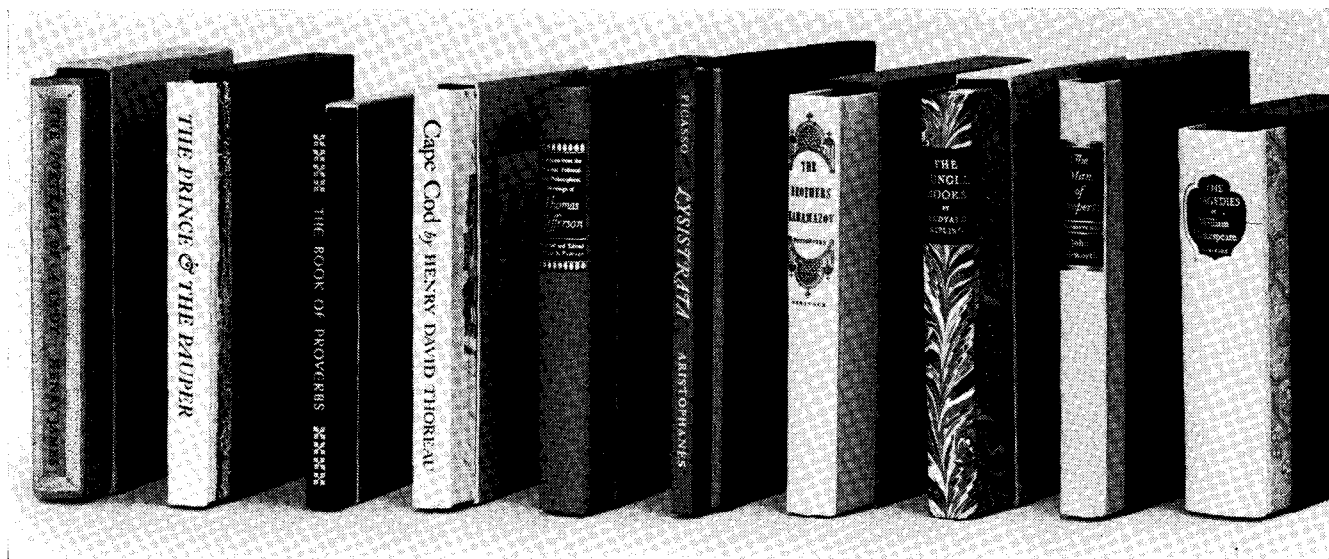
We blush to say so, even to our
surgeons!

A. S.

(Answer on page 110)

A NOTE TO THE READERS

Norman Cousins, our former associate, has launched a new magazine, *World*. Undoubtedly, a number of SR readers will also want to keep up with Mr. Cousins's new publishing venture. An announcement appears in this issue. We at SR offer Mr. Cousins and his associates our good wishes and congratulations.



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