

Dance

Here, There, and Everywhere

by Walter Terry

JUST forty years ago, I was engaged by a newspaper to be its first dance critic (I like to think now that I was a precocious nine-year-old). There were only three of us in America then, excepting reviewers for the small dance trade publications, and because of the limited number of dance events from 1936 to 1946 (although our new golden age of dance was at its inception), I tried to justify my pitifully small salary by reviewing almost anything that moved. Ballet engagements in New York in the Thirties totaled about six weeks a year (six weeks more than in the Twenties), and there were no modern dance seasons, only isolated recitals. I even reviewed the Copacabana girls (they danced in those days), and once I wrote about the drunken-sailor scene in the play *Mr. Roberts* and referred to its director, Joshua Logan, as "a clandestine choreographer," an appellation I was told he enjoyed heartily. Obviously, dance wasn't booming as it is today, but it was stirring with all the incredible energy of a newborn babe.

For many years now, so many dance events have taken place not only on and off Broadway but across the land that one person could not have possibly covered them all. For the *Boston Herald* during my first four years and for the *New York Herald Tribune* for the next twenty-six years, I tried vainly to find something to review every day. In the last years of the *Trib*, I (and an assistant) did in fact turn in daily dance reports. My ten years with *SR*, since it is not a daily, preclude such a schedule, so every now and again I have a backlog of performances I have seen and cannot possibly write about, individually, at length.

In brief, however, I'd like, for my anniversary-year column, to whisk through a fraction (and I mean a fraction) of that backlog, spanning eight or ten weeks. The variety and the geographic range (one of the joys of writing for an international magazine instead of for a newspaper) of this dance panorama is far more extensive than the miniature landscape with danc-

ing figures that I watched forty years ago.

The link between summer and autumn dance seasons is usually the annual New York Dance Festival, given free to the public during the Labor Day period in Central Park's Delacorte Theater. Its range of styles was, as always, impressive, for it encompassed classical ballet, modern ballet, old-style modern dance, new style, rock, jazz, dances of social comment, comedy, ethnic forms, danced poems, improvisations, the avant-garde. The range in quality was, I think, broader than usual, with a good many of the offerings so amateurish or downright bad that more than once it passed my mind that the selection committee was holding open auditions instead of presenting a festival.

On the rather extensive debit side were

Split Rock, with dreadful music (Jon Deak) and even worse choreography by Nancy Meehan, once a major dancer with Erick Hawkins (perhaps her brainless dance was a reaction to Hawkins's very cerebral approach); Maria Benitez, who managed, with the help of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, to drain the poetry from García Lorca and to make a *seguriya* a bore; Frank Ohman's New York Dance Theater in Ohman's *Romanzen* (Brahms), very watery Balanchine; Kei Takei's Moving Earth, in *Light*, part five of a continuing series of twelve dances said to run seven hours (I found seven minutes rough going); Sara Rudner (from the Twyla Tharp group) and associates in *Wendy's Solution*, and if Tharp at her worst is a rip-off on public gullibility, Rudner's piece is a spin-off from a rip-off. Dances of sharp and biting social protest, at which Americans have long excelled, were not well served on this occasion by either Talley Beatty in *Pretty Is Skin Deep . . . Ugly Is to the Bone* or by Eleo Pomare in *Roots*, for they let spoken words dominate, instead of support, choreography.

But there also were fine moments at the Delacorte, among them the Theatre Dance Collection in Lynne Taylor's *Diary*, set to

Karen Steele and Michael Kelly Bruce, Repertory Dance Theater of Utah—"A sensitive work about human relationships."



some marvelous songs by Judith Lander and performed delightfully by Lander as the singer-pianist and by Taylor and Don Lopez, who danced superbly, particularly in the closing "I Can't Let You Go"; the Ohio Ballet in a modest but most pleasant dance for four by Heinz Poll; lovely dancing by the beautiful Carmen De Lavalade; and some absolutely first-rate belly dancing by Anahid Sofian, who once sat quietly and without undulations as a secretary at *SR* and has since exchanged this sedentary tranquillity for mid-body fluidities, which she accomplishes with the elegance and classiness of the Mideast's now-legendary Badia, "Queen of the Music Halls." And there was more—good, bad, and middling—but I can say that also of my forty years' viewing.

The Repertory Dance Theater from Salt Lake City, Utah, received an unexpected publicity boost from Sister Colette Mahoney, president of Marymount College, who refused permission for the troupe to perform a dance of semi-nudity with faint lesbian overtones at Marymount's theater, where it had been booked. Naturally, larger than originally anticipated audiences turned up to see Lynne Wimmer's *Lost and Old Rivers* (to the Brahms "Liebeslieder" waltzes) at the Manhattan College Auditorium, where it had been forced to move. Audiences saw nothing shocking but, rather, a sensitive work about human relationships as captured by a gifted choreographer. The company itself, now ten years old, was brought into being by a Rockefeller Foundation grant and has always been directed by a committee. It has never had an artistic director. It needs one. The dancers are good. Some of the choreography is good (it has been better in the past, when it had Bill Evans and Tim Wengerd on tap), but it needs a sense of direction.

Marymount permitted the Jerry Ames Tap Dance Company to dance on the pleasant stage of the small and charming Manhattan Marymount Theater, and everything was as clean and as true as the Bobbsey Twins plus Bunny Brown and His Sister Sue, but it was a good show that Ames and his tapping assistants presented. It was all tap, but there was plenty of variety. After sitting through Jennifer Muller's interminable *Between Me and Other People There Is Always a Table and a Few Empty Chairs*, performed by the Utah visitors, and her equally interminable and just as dreary *Speeds* at the Delacorte, Ames and Company would be the best tonic possible.

At aristocratic Carnegie Hall, New

Yorkers had an opportunity to savor the "Martial Arts of Kabuki," studies in the most elegant, refined, and carefully calculated gestures employed in rituals of conflict and contest. And at the big, popular Felt Forum, at Madison Square Garden, Amalia Hernandez's boisterous and rousing Ballet Folklorico de Mexico was on hand to give us a feast of Mexican dance styles, along with those "fiesta" numbers that prove that the phrase "a riot of color" probably originated in old Anáhuac.

Pittsburgh

IT is always a pleasure to see the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, a non-New York troupe that proves that ballet in the provinces need not be provincial. The most recent bill of ballets was not the best I have seen here. Frederic Franklin's *Tribute* (to the Franck "Variations") is always a pleasurable opener, but the world premiere, John Butler's *Othello*, though lavishly produced, was disappointing in the extreme. I am a great admirer of Butler ballets, but his *Othello* (set to music of George Crumb's "Ancient Voices of Children") not only treads on the toes of José Limón but also treads dangerously often in the footsteps Limón choreographed for his own *Othello*-based work, *The Moor's Pavane*, a modern dance masterpiece. The Rouben Ter-Arutunian setting, handsome indeed, minimizes even more the ballet's weak and surprisingly (for the richly inventive Butler) thin patterns of dramatic action.

As for Nicolas Petrov's new *Maria Sabina*, silence would be kindest. The same holds true for its guest performer, Kaleria Fedicheva. Oblivion would be kinder yet. The Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, young and vital, will survive. It has proved its high worth on other occasions.

Baltimore

THE Maryland Ballet, which recently came under the artistic direction of Kathleen Crofton, is a charming young company that is ambitious but not foolhardy. In a performance at Goucher College, I saw a very agreeable performance of John Tara's *Designs with Strings*, a somewhat bland but widely serviceable classical ballet for non-virtuosi, and a really distinguished performance (quite as good as New York's Joffrey Ballet provides) of Alvin Ailey's *Feast of Ashes* (based on Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*), in which Maria Youskevitch was brilliant as the matriarch and Leslie Perrell most



Anahid Sofian—"Exchanged sedentary tranquillity for mid-body fluidities."

touching as the rebellious, romantic daughter. Simple (sometimes almost simpleminded) in its humor but agreeable was Fernand Nault's new *Try, Ready, Go*, a ballet about the casual warm-up, the rehearsal where things go awry, and the finished performance. I wouldn't let it stray too far from the ivied halls of Goucher. Special dividends were guest appearances by Helgi Tomasson (of the New York City Ballet) and Anna Aragno in two classical *pas de deux*.

London

CLOSING night of an engagement by the Martha Graham Dance Company, the first time in history a modern-dance troupe had performed at the prestigious Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, was highlighted by the British audience's standing ovation for the eighty-two-year-old Graham, whose ancestors had left England for America in 1620. A triumphant "comeback," indeed!

Syracuse

I'VE just seen a workshop in which the dancers were computerized. Not now? Okay, I'll tell you about it another time. ©

A Multinational Jamboree of Theatrical Trend Setters

by Henry Popkin

A FLAMBOYANT feast of avant-garde theater was served up in Belgrade this fall under the aegis of an aging but still lively festival known as Theater of the Nations. For years this was an annual springtime event in Paris, a gathering of the theatrical clans that ran the gamut from Brecht's Berliner Ensemble to the Peking Opera. About a decade ago, Theater of the Nations went into a decline and briefly disappeared from view altogether. Now it has rejuvenated itself by going on the road. Last year, Theater of the Nations was held in Warsaw, and this year it ran for three astonishing weeks in Belgrade, where it was united for the occasion with that city's annual Bitef Festival of New Trends in Theater, now in its tenth year.

The big news was the presence of Moscow's Taganka Theater, which international festivals and canny impresarios have been passionately courting almost since its founding, in 1964. The who's who of the world theater has scrawled its homage on the wall of the director's office, but until very recently the Taganka was not permitted to travel abroad, perhaps because its style does not accord with the socialist realism to which the Soviets still pay lip service. The Taganka's director, Yuri Lyubimov, is a brilliant showman who employs all the arts of the theater—including music, dance, and ingenious lighting and scenic design—to illuminate texts that are generally of his own devising, based on fiction or poetry or world classics of drama. He detests naturalistic scenery, scenic divisions, and makeup on actors, and that sort of thinking can unhinge the tidy minds of cultural bureaucrats. Also, Lyubimov implies that he is critical of things as they are.

Henry Popkin, a professor of English at the State University of New York at Buffalo, is currently on leave, writing a book on contemporary theater through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Taganka Theater's *Hamlet*, which won one of three equal prizes awarded at Belgrade, is certainly a brilliant and provocative re-creation. It is dominated by a curtain, a huge, thick hempen object that can take any position onstage. It helps to clear the stage, too, thereby eliminating conventional scenic breaks, but it has a symbolic function as well. The curtain seems to act as an accomplice of political oppression. When Claudius and Gertrude lean against it, it mysteriously gives them something to rest upon; it does no such favors for Hamlet. Behind this curtain Polonius eavesdrops and Claudius plots. The Taganka's *Hamlet* takes place in a contemporary world, where most of the men wear turtleneck sweaters. Hamlet himself carries a guitar and sings, appropriately because he is played by Vladimir Vysotsky, a popular balladeer. His foes are all external. Although Stanislavski's portrait hangs in the Taganka's lobby, beside Vakhtangov's, Meyerhold's, and Brecht's, Lyubimov shows little interest in Stanislavski's meticulous character analysis.

The Taganka *Hamlet* was accompanied by two plays that are politically safer—*The Dawns Are Quiet Here*, from a novel by Boris Vasilyev, and *Ten Days That*

Shook the World, a colorful vision of the Russian Revolution inspired by John Reed's book. If *Hamlet* was dominated by a hempen curtain, *Dawns* is dominated by pieces of lumber. Some inexperienced girl soldiers and their hard-boiled sergeant major hunt Nazis, but the play's suspense has nothing to do with their mission. The real question is: what will Lyubimov do next with those boards? They start out as parts of a truck; then they conceal the girls as they shower and sunbathe. Stepping warily through a swamp, the girls tread them lumberjack-style. Becoming hysterical, one girl whirls around on a board. In a flashback, a board becomes the wall of another girl's apartment. At the end, when all the girls have been killed, each turns slowly on a board to music; a moment later, the boards are turning alone. *Ten Days* is "a popular entertainment" with singing, dancing, gunfire, and other diverting sights and sounds—a portrait of excitement and only incidentally of history.

Another of the prizes went to *The Ik*, performed by Peter Brook's International Center for Theatrical Research, based in Paris. Here the production and even the theater itself are stripped bare of theatrical devices. This is Grotowski's "poor theater" with a vengeance! The dramatization by Denis Cannan, Colin Higgins, and Colin Turnbull of Turnbull's *The Mountain People*, an anthropological study of a hard-pressed tribe in Uganda, needs a ruined theater like the torn-up playhouse in Paris where I saw it last year; the Yugoslavs compromised by giving Brook a theater under construction. The actors represent a diversity of origins, and some take more than one role; all convey the brutal reality of this tribe's wretched situ-

The Taganka Theater's Hamlet—"A brilliant re-creation."

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