

sometimes guilty of music that acrobats and bareback riders have made their own is the most witty and charming of all. And if these operas can be made into such adroit and satisfactory productions we shall probably have a lot more of them.

Let us hope that the New Opera Company having taken the first hurdles will

go on. It is a fine thing indeed to give our American singers a chance to develop but if this can be done with a unified policy of admitted belief in the modern spirit and creative effort of American artists we shall have something far more important than a worthy undertaking. It might turn out to be a national school of opera.

WITH THE DANCERS

By EDWIN DENBY

MODERN DANCING

THE season opened with the Jooss Ballet, presenting eight or nine pieces by Jooss, and one brand new one by Agnes de Mille. First, Miss de Mille's *Drums Sound in Hackensack*. It is about New Amsterdam, the fur trade, how the cheated Indians found a Dutch girl in the jungles of Jersey, and what happened then. To show us New Amsterdam, Miss de Mille begins with a folk dance, adds a Puritan hop and a de Mille wiggle, and we all get the joke, and smile easily. When she comes to the serious parts, terrors of the forest and Indian savagery, she invents some gestures as simple as those an earnest child would hit on. Again everybody gets the point and is perfectly satisfied to go on watching until something else happens. So the piece comes out a hit. The stage Indians, either woodenly noble or tomtom-ish, I liked especially. I like Miss de Mille's work in general. Though her heroines are inveterate wigglers, she has a real sense of how the body dances, she composes properly, and she has a gift of rhythm completely congenial to Americans.

Jooss's works, however, one looks at very seriously. They are on the plane of "masterworks." Jooss has a great reputation too, as a leader in serious theatre dancing, and as a systematizer of modern technic. Just the same, watching the stage, what I saw was one dud after another. There is one exception — the famous first scene of his *Green Table*. This is brilliant and curiously different from all the rest (including the rest of the *Green Table*), different in rhythm, style, humor, and theatrical punch.

The Jooss dancers are engaging, accurate, lively, and devoted executants, without mannerisms or bad manners, dancers by nature. They were fine for Miss de Mille. But when they dance the Jooss choreography, what do you see them do on the stage? Well, the best thing you see is a controlled, clear, wide movement in the arms. (And they can stop an arm gesture more neatly than most good dancers). Their hands and necks are plain and good. The breastbone is held high and the chest is open. This upper third of the body is excellent. But below it, the belly is dull, the buttocks

heavy, the small of the back sags in. Where is the shining tautness across the groin, a glory of Western dancing? These people might as well be sitting down, as far as the expressiveness of their middles goes. And below, the leg gestures are forced and heavy. The leaps are high and strong, but they have only bounce, they don't soar (except one boy in *Old Vienna*), they don't hang in the air, either. (The low wide leaps are the interesting ones, but get monotonous.) The feet in the air look thick. On the other hand these dancers land better from a leap than most ballet dancers. Does this add up to a satisfactory new norm of technic? It does not. Neither does it exhaust the possibilities of the modern school. Because the Jooss norm of the outward chest and inward middle is fixed, and modern technic demands that any portion can vary at will from outward to inward. It's a terrific demand, but it's the essence of widening the expressive range beyond that of classic ballet.

Or take the Jooss stylization of rhythm. I see an emphatic pound (this is a gesture stopped and held). Then comes an unaccented moment (no gesture, change of position). Then comes another equally emphatic pound (a new gesture, stopped and held.) This keeps up all evening. In the pit the music pounds down on the beat at the same moment the dancer pounds out his gesture. The effect is very dispiriting.

What happens is that there is a systematic alternation between emphatic and unemphatic movement, like that between beat and non-beat in a bar. There is also an unusual continuousness about the time quality of the movement. Many people are dissatisfied with a kind of hoppitiness in classic ballet. They point out that there

is a fraction of a second between steps, between arm positions, that goes dead; in the way a harpsichord goes dead, but not an orchestra or even a piano. Jooss has stretched a movement to fill the time space completely; he uses a pedal. It was Dalcroze who thirty years ago made us most conscious of this possibility in moving.

When a dancer makes his gesture coincide as closely as possible with the time length and time emphasis of musical rhythm, he is apt to be as pleased as a hen is who has laid an egg. He tells everybody, look how musical I am, and everybody cackles back, isn't he just the most musical thing. Rationally it seems odd to confuse the metrics of music with musicality. And also to assume that the metrics of dancing are identical with those of music. It strikes me that there is in fact an inherent disparity. The proportioning of time, as well as the proportioning of emphasis, between the stress and the follow through of a single metric unit is much more regular in music than it is in movement. Apart from theory, in practice this kind of measured gesture draws attention to itself and away from the body as a whole. In practice, too, the dancer loses a certain surprise of attack, which is one of his characteristic rhythmic possibilities.

Well, in point of musicality, listen to the music Jooss uses. True the dancers obey the metrics of music, but the music in its rhythmic development obeys beat by beat the rhythmic detail of the dance. The piece makes no musical sense. It is merely a cue sheet for the dancers. It sounds as if it kept up a continuous gabble about the mechanics of the steps. It's like a spoken commentary in a documentary film, that names every object we

see, while we're looking at it. Music that can't make any decision on its own is functioning on a bare subsistence level, and it is apt to be as glum as that. Poor Frederic Cohen's voluble cue-sheets for Jooss are utterly depressing, they reminded me most of cafeteria soup gone sour. I don't think much of the musicality of a director who makes me listen to such poverty. If this is collaboration, it must be the Berlin-Vichy kind. I detest a dancer who is satisfied with it.

I don't go to the theatre to see a servant problem solved. Jooss of course isn't the only choreographer who has music in to do the dirty work and keeps all the dignity for himself. Modern dancers have made the same error often enough in the past. They commission a new composer, but when the piece is played it has (like a poet's advertising copy) no character, it only has manner. For awhile it was fun enough to listen to a new manner; and affix at least an ideological, a historical meaning. But the historical significance of style is a parlor game that gets tiresome. I wish all kinds of dancers would let us hear pieces of music old and new, and do, while they are played, whatever they like to. I wish they would put themselves on the spot in the presence of serious music. When the dancer acts serious and the music is trivial, he can't escape seeming petty and provincial. Anyway, in the theatre I want the dancer to dance, the orchestra to make music, and the décor to be a stage picture. If these three don't come out in accord, I am angry but still interested. If only one of them is allowed to speak up the production isn't big time.

But the issue of dance music has led me away from the subject of Jooss. Besides technic, rhythm, and the use of

music, there are many other aspects to choreography. In the Jooss ballets I did not see any I cared for. He has systematized grouping so that diagonals, cubes and spheres cut across each other by the dozen. But they look stupid because they have no relation to the size of the human figure on the stage. He has systematized the representational aspect of movement, with the result that every gesture can be translated so exactly into words the dance might as well be a series of signals for deaf mutes. You imagine it would have the same meaning if performed by non-dancers. The dancers add neatness, but they don't by dancing create the meaning, a meaning which undanced would not exist. Looking at it another way, all the gesture is on the same level of signification. The wonderful shift possible from pantomime to lyric (like a new dimension of spirit); or the shift as in Spanish dancing from standing around to taking the stage; all this with all the rest in dancing that is tender and variable and real only the moment it happens, has been systematized away.

A systematization of modern dancing, like the literary adoption of the heroic couplet, makes a great deal of sense to dancers floundering between the arrogant academicism of the ballet on the one hand and the uncompromising private language of some studio dancers on the other. I remember fourteen years ago in Germany the attempt to establish a new academy, a new order, seemed of the greatest importance, and we all watched Jooss's gradual discoveries (for he was the leader of the movement) with delight. The results shown here this fall are well worth acrimonious theoretical dispute. But what I actually looked at on the stage was a stodgy, self-satisfied,

and petty solemnity, pretending to be serious and, worse, significantly ethical.

BALLET Russe

With the opening of the new season the Fleischmann Monte Carlo Ballet also returned — world premieres, stars, rich refugees and all. Dali's *Labyrinth* is the pudding's plum. It is the height of fashionableness and of bad manners. Dali hogs the show so completely he won't let you see Massine's part of it, or hear Schubert (whose *Seventh Symphony* is played throughout). He focusses your eye at a spot so high on the drop, that every time you pull it down to look at the dancers below you feel acutely uncomfortable. Besides dwarfing the dancers he dresses them in incredibly bad taste, as if in the rented rags of a burlesque chorus. The colors and materials coalesce like a stew. He jams the dance between a drop hung too far forward and a litter of props; and finally distracts the audience by some idiotic revue tricks, doves, dolphins and roosters, which are all that emerge recognizable from the hectic mess. The dance looks like the milling Times Square subway platform on New Year's Eve. And the music is an irritating noise that keeps on and on. There is no doubt that this is what Dali wanted. The drops, four of them, which alone survive the general rape, are grandiosely frantic and frozen. The effect of it all is absolutely real, as acute as discomfort. And its complete disregard for the audience's comfort is what makes it so terrifically fashionable. The first time I saw it it put me in an excellent humor. There was nothing second hand, nothing pedantic about it. It was a real world premiere, something made this minute and made for all the world to look at. At the

second performance of course there wasn't any novelty left and I was bored. That no doubt condemns the piece as art, but not as a production. I think the Monte Carlo owes us such manifestations among other things; this is the first time it has given us a real one, and I feel very pleased about it.

Oh yes, the subject of *Labyrinth* is the return of art to the classic tradition. If you think art can leave I suppose you think it can return. That's all nonsense to me, so I wasn't bothered by Dali's little blasphemies, either.

III

A different kind of discomfort was that of the Massine-Weinberger *Saratoga*. The music is as ingratiating as a restaurant waiter. The dance is inept and half unfinished. Franklin to be sure danced brilliantly whenever he could. But still *Saratoga* marks an epoch in our ballet. Way at the back of the stage hangs a drop neighbored by a little kiosk, done by a new designer, Oliver Smith. It is the first time I have seen anything on our own stage that has color, size, and air-quality all completely personal and right. And then you see that the rest of the set helps, too. You see it doesn't fade as time passes, but grows brighter. (And to put white in the sky is quite an achievement.) It is as poetic and as real as anything the Parisians used to make. For this discovery Massine—who up to now has been as unlucky as Broadway in his local designers — deserves cordial thanks. Alvin Colt's costumes — well, never mind.

On the other hand the ultimate, inexcusable worst in local stage design was the third premiere, *The Magic Swan*, an act resurrected out of *Swan Lake* (Petipa-Tchaikowsky). There seemed to be

some unhappy misunderstanding in this production about what constitutes classic dancing. Such fine dancers as Mladova, Rostova, in fact a whole string of soloists of both sexes, appeared as smooth and languid as ballroom performers. And then, exactly on this subject, *Magic Swan* itself brought a wonderful revelation: Toumanova in her *pas de deux* and *finale* with Eglevski is absolutely magnificent. When she dances the rest of the world stops. Her classicism doesn't express any emotion, it is passionately just itself. Her incredibly swift *frappé* is somehow magnified so it fills the whole opera house. There is no being nice to the audience, there is no letting go of them either. When she dances it is a matter of life and death. Dancing can be other things than this, but I don't see how it can be any greater. . . Toumanova has gained since last spring in contact with her partner, a kind of emotion deeper than play acting, up to now Danilova's undisputed territory. Eglevski too has gained, he seems drawing ahead of the other men in emotional power. His soli were impeccable, of course; better still were his duets; and I was impressed especially by his final pantomime gesture of despair. I feel Toumanova is still a bit solemn in serious classic pantomime, but that is a minor reservation. Both of them are wonderful too in *Baiser de la Fée*. And in *Coppelia* in which she and Franklin are radiantly brilliant she reveals a gift for comedy as true as the great Danilova's; here correct pantomime and dance-style are both wonderfully personalized by her own happy intelligence.

The other dancers are all as good as ever, though they seem overworked, too. One doesn't notice it in technic so much as in the extra personal warmth they

don't always project. But of course the fact is that the company is too small to carry off the heavy repertoire it has in the finest style. Just as the orchestra is too small to sound as good as it might. For this season's repertoire however I am full of admiration. Though some of the pieces are duds, the list covers the complete range of style and subject and novelty, and each piece has some aspect of interest. For Petersburg classics you can see *Magic Swan*, *Swan Lake*, *Nutcracker*, *Coppelia*. For early Diaghilev there is *Sylphides*, *Prince Igor*, *Sheherazade*, *Petrushka*, the *Spectre* and the *Faun*. For the post-war period, there is the *Toyshop* and *Tricorne* (two of Massine's masterpieces) and his renovated *Bogatyri*. For his symphonic style there is his Beethoven, and his Shostakovich. For his musical comedy side there is the *Danube*, *Gaité*, *Capriccio Espagnol*, and *Vienna 1814*. For Balanchine choreography there is the *Baiser*, *Poker Game* and *Sérénade*, all three fascinating to watch. For English choreography there is Ashton's *Devil's Holiday*, which is still my favorite among the English works shown here. There are two Dali's, *Bacchanale* and *Labyrinth*. And for the American angle there are Massine's *New Yorker* and *Saratoga* — that is still the weakest side of the collection, but let's hope we get a more enterprising piece in the spring. Apart from "American" it adds up to the best all round ballet repertoire we were ever offered.

III

Among these ballets I think *Baiser de la Fée* the very finest. I am shocked however to find that its climax has been mutilated and ruined. The slow rope-climbing of the obscure finale used to open up both in style and emotion a

terrifying further perspective, which set the proportion of everything that had gone before; just as the music here does. This fall the rope ladder has been cut. Instead there is some creeping around

on a ramp, which can't look other than stupid and is completely ineffective. The substitution is an act of vandalism. Whoever is responsible for it, should be watched; he is dangerous.

ON THE FILM FRONT

By JOHN LATOUCHE

FOR MANY years now, experimental films have been demonstrating how closely the medium is related to fantasy. But Hollywood, with its own fixed ideas of what the public wants, has released production after production relentlessly molded to box-office categories. Recently, however, something other than run-of-the mill has come out of the industry. The last-month success of *Here Comes Mr. Jordan*, due chiefly to its antic dialogue and Robert Montgomery's magnificent performance, rather than its fantastic subject, has obviated the cater-cornered approach of the critics to films suggesting *avant-garde* technic. And now *All That Money Can Buy* sweeps like a fresh wind from static Hollywood. Based on Stephen Vincent Benét's *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, this production transcends the slightly folksy mysticism of the short story original and elevates it into a stirring and evocative theme. The plot unfolded as a kind of reverse-English *Faust*, with the Devil as a supernatural fifth-columnist sabotaging the calm existence of a New Hampshire community. To this, William Dieterle has added new and exciting elements: a surrealist Georgian house springing up in the bleak landscape; fox-hunting along the rocky roads; a romantic dance of the dead

that underlines the supernatural quality of the story; a Woman from the Other Side of the Mountains, who appears out of light and smoke . . . all these injected into the Benét tale achieve convincing and majestic authority.

The cast is disciplined. Simone Simon as the homespun Lilith, surprisingly contrives to be sinister through her network of lips and dimples. Edward Arnold as Daniel Webster is fine. The leads, Anne Shirley and James Craig, recruited from the murky borders of B pictures, contribute B-1 performances. But it is Walter Huston as the Devil who bags the laurels. He growls, smirks, hisses, scampers, beams, and pirouettes through one of the most captivating roles the camera has recorded these many years.

Bernard Herrmann, as usual, employs a strangely variegated orchestra and the result is excellent. His score weaving in and out of the action is the catalyst that works the final trick for this movie. One effect I found particularly fascinating, a macabre vibration of sound emerging from the Jury of the Damned as Daniel Webster addresses them. Dieterle said, when I inquired, that Herrmann had experimented with every kind of instrument, but each noise had sounded forced, until they tried muffling enormous ca-