

the Fathers, a smart audience and aware, an audience ranging from the balletomanes and frequenters of the Stork to

the silver immobility of Carl Van Vechten or to Virgil Thomson with his benign air of an unfrocked Proust.

WITH THE DANCERS

By EDWIN DENBY

THE reorganized Ballet Theatre presented a season that was timid and on the musty side. Only one new feature was a real pleasure: the presence of Alicia Markova, the great English dancer. The management had commissioned no new American choreography, or score, or set. It did not even offer a new piece by its own Anthony Tudor, one of the most interesting choreographers in America; and even abandoned the best of his previously presented works, *Dark Elegies*. This season's novelties were a revival of the Diaghilev *Princess Aurora*; a revival of the Rubinstein *Beloved*; a piece called *Slavonika* which was nothing, and a *Bluebeard* which at least was a new work by Fokine.

To take them in detail, *Princess Aurora* (a Dolin arrangement of bits from the Petipa-Tschaikowsky *Sleeping Beauty*) was supposed to revive the original Bakst décor. Some of the costumes were magnificently executed, others had an unconvincing lushness more like the old Follies than like Bakst, and the backdrop looked very sad indeed. In the dance, the Gibson-Conrad *Bluebird* was extremely attractive, and surrounded as it was by dull dancing, it brought down the house. — *Beloved* (1928) has a very beautiful and interesting score, a Milhaud free rendering of some Schubert and Liszt, and it has choreography in Nijinska's "ama-

teurish" or "primitif" ballet style, which I found oddly poetic in the whole effect of it. And Markova's dancing of a Romantic Muse ("half in love with easeful death") is terrific. — *Slavonika* was one of those washouts that are natural in any theatre routine and harmless. And it did have costumes by a talented local designer, Alvin Colt. Unluckily they were in a dressed-doll style that is fine for revue but too cute for ballet: and the lace-trimmed stage looked like a Christmas window at McCutcheon's, gigantically blown-up.

Bluebeard, the Fokine-Offenbach farce, was something of a hit. The choreography tells a very complicated story with admirable clarity, and it is full of effective gags, a little in the manner of a college show. In this collegiate style Dolin dances charmingly, and everybody around is pretty busy. I was sorry however that the Offenbach love lyrics which contrast with the action had been cut down to short bits, and that the dances set to them were conventionally nice instead of really poetic. The result was more like the mechanical balance of Sullivan than the delicate equilibrium of Offenbach. It seems to me that Offenbach's humor, like Mozart's, is poised on the suggestion that false love and true love are not as different as one might wish; they are both of them really tender. The

joke isn't that romantic love is just a fake, and therefore ridiculous; the joke is that romantic love is real and real love is full of incongruity. I am sorry that neither Massine's *Gaité* nor Fokine's *Bluebeard* convey the fragrance of this tender irony that makes Offenbach a real friend. For in neither ballet is anybody ever really in love, neither with the right nor the wrong person. The music is better in *Bluebeard* however, than in *Gaité*, because the original orchestration (which is perfect) has been less tampered with. The décor of *Bluebeard* by Vertes, the fashionable magazine artist, is fussy and boring. There is no color and no shape which stays alive longer than a couple of minutes. There is no sense of air or space. A few of the costumes are pretty. Mr. Vertes is fine in his own profession. But to do a ballet set a man must make a decoration one can look at for at least fifteen minutes steady and still be interested in; it is obvious that this is just what a serious painter spends his time trying to accomplish. It is among serious painters that ballet designers should be looked for. This is one of the responsibilities of a first class management.

Markova has appeared here before, but the more you see her the higher you value her. Seen merely as a virtuoso, she is extraordinary: the adagio movements "bloom in space," the allegros "scintillate evenly," the leaps soar and subside, when lifted she looks fluid — well, in every department of classic technique she is flawless. And she has all those peculiarities of physical structure that ballet enthusiasts gloat about — like the overlong arms, the lateral overmobility in the hipjoint, the outward set of the shin, and of course the fabulously high arch — all of which add to the poignancy

of the gesture because you seem to be seeing what it is impossible to do. Musically too she is a virtuoso, even to dancing an imperceptible fraction ahead or behind the beat, for the special attack or pathos it gives to dancing. And she holds your eye on her. Not that she is sexy; she is very proper, but you watch her as intently as if you were perturbed.

Markova has power too as an actress. She alters her style to characterize her part, even to giving her virtuosity no special play. A few details of characterization, such as Giselle's mad dance, I do not agree with; but it is a disagreement of taste, not of principle. For she builds and holds a scene as steadily as an actor like Evans. And there is something more to it than the proper control. She does not make the part a vehicle for her own glamor. She takes it disinterestedly. And what you see is not Markova as Giselle, but Giselle in the figure of Markova. In this unselfconsciousness, so to speak, her dancing becomes serious and sincere poetry. When you watch her, the whole body shows that unpredictable burning edge of movement that the living images of real life have, which continue so mysteriously to live inside our hearts; and out of whose inexhaustible light art is made. It is an equivalent of the absorbing "living line" in poetry and drawing. Out of hundreds of good dancers of all nationalities, there have been perhaps a dozen in whose dancing I have seen it continue as the characteristic of the whole body for minutes at a time.

The other star ballerina, also new to the Ballet Theatre, is the sumptuous Baronova, who used to be a very fine dancer indeed. Of her present style I can find nothing good to say. She hams with a heartlessness that is frightening.

She ogles, flounces, capers and cuddles, jumps, turns and stands, slapping down each effect like a virago operating a cash register. She seems to want the title of "Miss Ironpants." I hope so intelligent a dancer as she is will quickly get over this phase; or else team up with the Three Stooges where her present manner properly belongs.

III

Martha Graham appeared for two evenings, repeating her recent works and adding a new one. It is called *Punch and the Judy*, and is a domestic comedy, for a cast of eleven, taking place in a white-collar apartment; the reiterated "squabble and scuffle," as the program says, between a husband and wife. Most of the audience thought it was very funny, the indicated kicks and slaps, the parodies of tragic gesture, the general air of middle class self-importance and nervous activity. It happens that continuous stylized pantomime doesn't make me laugh much; so I was following the action. It seemed to me that the protagonists were quite untroubled by their quarrels, untroubled by sex, too, and not much interested in their child. Their infidelities didn't seem to interest them especially, neither did jealousy. And the wife had nice dreams. So I gathered that they were a good-natured conventional young couple, who didn't notice much. Then what is the piece about? Maybe, as in Noel Coward, the theme is the couple's incidental charm and liveliness. Now and then the husband reminded me of the charming Dagwood in the comics. But perhaps that isn't the theme. I was confused by the multiplicity of detail in gesture and rhythm, the brusque shifts of spacing, the clutter, the unsympathetic staging and costum-

ing and spoken words. I could find no appreciable point of repose from which to see the figure of the movement. I was rather appalled by the stubborn parody of the expression. Maybe the real theme is something sinister, even malevolent. Or maybe, as so often happens to me at a new Graham piece, I will get a very different impression when I see it again.

It was clear however that Martha Graham and Eric Hawkins in the title parts danced with an admirable fluency, a complete control of the timing, the attack, the extent, and the transformation of a gesture; keeping it perfectly placed in style, in character, in quality. They made other modern dancers look wooden and awkward, as you watched. And the music, by Robert McBride, I liked very much indeed. It is in his quite personal style, completely unromantic (or "unexpressive"), but not uninteresting and very agreeable to listen to. It does without seasoning as well as an apple.

Letter to the World, last year's piece about Emily Dickinson, I again found very beautiful; and Miss Graham danced it magnificently. Beautiful too was Merce Cunningham's dancing in this; he is in his own way as noble and as touching a dancer as I know, one of the finest dancers in America.

Ruth St. Denis appeared, doing dances that went back to 1905. It is extremely interesting to see how decorative these famous dances are, how boldly and happily unauthentic, and how charmingly lady-like in their tone. There is no foolishness, no pretense whatever. The power of these dances is not in their composition but in the extraordinary projection Miss St. Denis gives them, the flood of good intention and the personal charm by which she makes the whole

house feel comfortable and friendly. She would have no trouble at all winning the Broadway audience all over again.

Louise Crane's Coffee Concerts at the Modern Museum have included a good deal of interesting dancing and are well worth going to just for this aspect of them. The finest, no doubt, was the dancing of Martinez in last year's Spanish program. He remains shining in your memory as only the great performers do, and he seems to me the greatest Spanish dancer in America. This season I liked especially Luisita, an eight-year-old flamenco dancer, a very exact little girl, who danced with all the joyousness of a child who is playing her best game. I liked too, Belle Rosette from Trinidad, an intelligent, really gifted and person-

ally modest artist. There was Baby Lawrence, a man who did a tap dance as purely acoustic as a drum solo; it was interesting how he ignored the "elegant" style in shoulders and hips, sacrificing this Broadway convention to the sound he made. But best of all I liked the Yemenite, Israel Tabi, from Miss Leaf's South Arabian Jewish group. Dressed in what looked like a flannel nightgown, this young man danced in a jerky style of thrusts and syncopations, with a decisiveness of rhythm, a sweetness of expression, and a violence of energy that showed him a born first-class dancer. He showed too in his technic a whole unsuspected dance tradition quite different from any I have ever seen.

ON THE FILM FRONT

By LÉON KOCHNITZKY

SCARPIA announces to Melisande the death and transfiguration of the Fire-Bird. — This is not an exact synopsis of the *Maltese Falcon*. But the score written for the picture by Adolph Deutsch might be summed up in that manner. It is not my intention to tilt a lance against the Hollywood windmills. These are splendidly rationalized, industrialized, motorized. Many thousands of human beings depend on the smooth working of the astonishing machinery that sells pleasure and forgetfulness to millions all over the world. The music critic must yield to purely sociological considerations. Mr. Deutsch's score for the *Maltese Falcon* is neither worse nor better than so many others. It is exactly what it could be: a

fairly important part of the huge wheel-work that is a great Hollywood production. It keeps its place and runs quite satisfactorily.

The critic comes into his own, however, with John Steinbeck's *Forgotten Village*. Hanns Eisler has written for this beautiful painting of Mexican country life, a very important score, and his special work and research in the sphere of film-music are well known. The problem of the *Forgotten Village* was difficult, well suited to this fine musician's skill and talent. Since the picture is really a silent film that is *explained* to the audience by an announcer, he found himself in the difficult position of having to choose between two contradictory tasks —