

the sonorous standpoint it is superb.

Orchestra scores lean towards the utilitarian. Music Press gives us a diatonic and guileless *Village Suite* by Douglas Moore, four short movements for small or full orchestra that should appeal to student orchestras. Mercury publishes

*Four Sketches* by Darius Milhaud, *Eclogue*, *Madrigal*, *Alameda*, *Sobre la Loma*, also scored for small orchestra. Nothing new is said here, but the music is characteristic Milhaud in its allure and orchestral approach.

## WITH THE DANCERS

By EDWIN DENBY

IN *Russian Soldier* (Fokine-Prokofiev-Dobujinski) at the Ballet Theatre you sat and watched a Russian soldier dying on a battlefield as a pretext for a darling Radio City spectacle in brightly harmonizing colors. "How perfectly lovely," the suburban lady next to me exclaimed when he was dead. She was seduced probably by the coy folksiness of the show — eternal Russia, tea-room style. As for me, before the war the piece might have slipped by as vulgar and adroit. Presented now, with a title so full of immediate associations, it is obscene. The balletomanes, less irritable than I, expressed their opinion by reviving Samuel Barlow's classic pun, "Standing in tears amid the alien corn," and adding another, "I was bortscht to death." About the score (the suite, *Lieutenant Kije*), it went on indefinitely with no modesty whatever; a smart workout for all the old gags about the good earth. Fokine says he fell for it. Prokofiev says it's travesty music. It certainly is heartless.

I grant that my disgust with *Russian Soldier* is more a matter of general viewpoint than of dance viewpoint. And I still take something of the same mixed point of view when I object violently to the coyness of the piece, apart from its

subject. I object to it in itself but more because I find coyness has been the keynote of the Ballet Theatre. Its management has consistently specialized in the large-scale cute. In light pieces it tries for a knowing giggle. In versions of serious classics about tragic love, it injects cute "period" effects. Up to this spring the Ballet Theatre has never been able to put on a serious and poetic work on its own initiative under any circumstances. As novelties it has given us over and over again some sycophantically simpering piece, the very kind of ballet our fathers and mothers drove off the stage in the great dance wars of thirty years ago. The history of management teaches that only poetry confers prestige on entertainment; and that without prestige ballet can't get private citizens to pay its deficit. Another fact is that a company loses its self-respect without serious new works, without a sense of fresh poetry in the routine; and the management is responsible for the development of its dancers. Certainly the Ballet Theatre has plenty of talent in its company; besides having a kind of touchstone in Markova, who is one of the most poetic dancers of our time.

III

This seems to me a quiet moment to

consider the future of the Ballet Theatre, because just now its prestige has been saved for one more season by the latest novelty, *Pillar of Fire* (Tudor-Schönberg-Mielziner). The program says the production of it was "made possible" by funds from a new organization called Ballet Associates. However it got itself put on, I congratulate all of its fathers. Here at last is a ballet that doesn't compete with a Wyman musical. It is the one really good ballet that has been launched in New York since the de Basil company's *Balustrade* two years ago.

The audience watched *Pillar of Fire* almost breathlessly. For me, I see the dancers continuously transforming and contrasting their dance, as if no possibility open to them were to be left out. And the moving effect of the piece is that all this real complexity and power seem barely able to cope with the immense space of the stage that becomes, as you watch, vast and real as the doom of fate. It seems to shut down from all sides on the dancers. Tudor is a master in what the painters call negative space. It gives the movement a peculiar privacy, as if it took place in an immense silence.

In point of dance style, *Pillar of Fire* is a work of originality and precision. The devices used are dramatic ones: Brief phrases urgently interrupted – they re-emerge and do amplify; gesture that tends in or braces itself against a direction, an imperative direction in which the dance is driving, urgently into an imminent future. It is the thrill of needing, not the delight of having. And the need is so intense, so unrelieved, it is unbelievable in any but a private faith. – Or looking at the style statically as a complex of devices, you see it employs three separate technics of body carriage,

of body tension. The ballet technic – firm, with gesture flowing controlled, with taut leaps and high lifts; a kind of modern-school technic, – flexible, with impulsive gesture explosive as jitterbugging, loose low leaps, low lifts; and third, a technic of the body as in everyday life, modest, unstraining, as if at ease. Absorbing are the variations of these three seen simultaneously in adjustments of speed to delayed movement, of diving into space to holding back, of tautness to being relaxed.

But there is another aspect of the choreography that gives me a more convincing intimate pleasure. This is that the technical devices don't have the effect of tricks, the effect of them isn't that of professional symbols of style or pattern or meaning. While you watch the dance, the eye sees everything plain. If Tudor uses a grand jeté, with high carriage and legs spread taut in the air, the carriage, the taut legs don't tickle you as a gadget would, they are a direct act. And if two dancers are close together, the knees, the hands, the shoulders, what they do to each other, how they mix – this is what holds your attention, the actual moves made. You don't have to make allowances as if anatomical facts were to be glossed over, as if you were for the sake of ulterior generalization to ignore one left arm, or the place where you know an organ is. In other words, at every moment you see the dancer as a person, as a man or a woman dancing; not as an unhappily defective instrument of a choreographer's flights of fancy. This is honesty in dancing. It makes not theoretical perfection the paramount issue, but the merely intensified expressivity of a dancer's movements over our common movement. In sequence all of it – the

dance – has an emotional effect. And this effect is real and poetic thanks to the continuous certainty of the physical impression all along. Here is an example: It happens to one side of stage front, as if painfully placed. The frantic heroine leaps and the passionate young man she wants but does not love catches her in a split in mid-air firmly between the legs with both hands, catches her close to him at the level of his waist; for an instant she hangs against him, rigid as in mid-leap and caught. This is a technical device, a concrete act, and an image all at once. The audience watches spellbound, shocked and moved at the same time. Such a moment would be merely vulgar in the unpoetic theatre. For that matter in the unpoetic theatre how could we bear to listen to a grown son objecting to his mother's second marriage, telling her outright "Nay, but to live in the rank sweat of an enseamed bed, stewed in corruption, honeying and making love over the filthy sty."

The dancing of *Pillar of Fire* is perfect. Of course the dancers of the Ballet Theatre are very good indeed; but they don't always look as good as that. Tudor, like Balanchine, is one of those rare choreographers who make dancers look technically superb and accurately expressive. I have never seen Miss Kaye, Miss Chase, and particularly Miss Lyon look quite so wonderfully interesting. Laing is always remarkable.

As for Tudor's musicality, like Balanchine's again, it is a marvel worth seeing. The seams of the music are never patched over by the dancing. At climaxes Tudor may use arrested movement, at other times he holds back or hurries the steps ahead, but music and dance seem to have equivalent phrasings that don't get in

each other's way, and don't double for one another either. The score (it is *Verklärte Nacht*) comes out limpid and clear. Incidentally the orchestra sounded very good too.

I do just the same have a reservation about the ending of *Pillar of Fire*. Here the dance becomes so subdued, it turns static and the effect is indistinct. The heroine seems still sad and strained. It is rather a sense of exhaustion and retrospection than a sense of fulfillment; though the latter would be expected from the story's happy ending and the (rather over-warm) Threshold-of-the-Future lighting effect that ends the piece. I was bothered by this discrepancy, and then retrospectively fell to wondering if the real subject of the piece isn't "Nevermore" despite the story. But though I was confused the end does not really disturb. The whole piece stays with you, not comforting, but very moving in its pathos.

As a footnote, the weight of the materials of the costumes, and the cut, especially of the little girl's dresses, was miraculous.

### III

The Monte Carlo appeared too, but had no new work to show. It dances in a more ample style than any other company, and it brought along a Balanchine in the repertory, the fascinating demonstration of choreographic elements called *Serenade*.

I liked going to Loring's new Dance Players very much, because the company was so fresh and charming; and not – like the big companies – worn out from overwork. Michael Kidd and Miss Howell were especially good. I liked seeing Loring, who has such a fine stage presence, and Christensen, who is the purest

example of our emerging non-European ballet style. The Players won the prize as the only ballet to give new local choreographies. Though I didn't care for Loring's *Man from Midian*, his *Prairie* had a certain American quietness and a beautiful finale. Christensen's *Jinx* was poetic dancing, but the possibilities seemed lightly sketched rather than completely realized. Another point for this lively organization was the new scores it brought, Wolpe's for *Man from Midian* and Dello Joio's for *Prairie*. The Wolpe struck me as highly respectable rather than anything else, but I enjoyed the Dello Joio, which was not stylish but attractive and modest, with an unobtrusive local flavor. The recent Britten suite used for *Jinx* I thought very uninteresting; however it sounded far better on the piano than any score in the repertory (Colin McPhee's arrangement). And the costumes for *Jinx* by Bockman were the most poetic of any I saw all winter. The Dance Players didn't perhaps have quite enough character, but they brightened up the season considerably.

Looking back over the ballet of the whole year, it is clear that its greatest loss is the absence of the Ballet Caravan organization. The new works it took to South America, were, as a group, far more interesting than any set of novelties offered us this year by the other companies. In and out of the Caravan, its

manager, Lincoln Kirstein, has certainly produced more ballets worth our seeing than anyone else in the same period.

### III

It was the Circus that this spring played the trump card of ballet, beating the Operahouse Gang at their own game by putting on a Balanchine-Stravinsky novelty. It was also the world's first elephant ballet, and it was a fine number. The elephants do all their charming old tricks and one new one — the classic adagio pirouette supported by the partner. They are lively and feminine, and the many pretty girls with garlands are very exact and very pleasant. Balanchine as usual has deployed counter-rhythm, asymmetry, and adagio invention. And there is none of that drill-sergeant emphasis on uniformity that destroys the real flavor of dances by animals or athletes. The Stravinsky is a bit jumpy, but he's an old friend, we're glad to meet up with him, and even if we can't quite make out what he's saying in the general din, I'm willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. "There goes Igor", as *The New Yorker* reports the band saying.

There was a Chinese wirewalking number with a completely beautiful flower-table, that made me think how sumptuous the Circus would look if the whole decor could be designed and executed by Chinese. The Bel Geddes color is all aniline and it's like playing in one key very loud for three hours.

## ON THE FILM FRONT

By LÉON KOCHNITZKY

IN the musical score that accompanies the revival of the *Gold Rush*, now

converted into a sound film, there is not a single line that can not be traced to