

rather than by the vocal line, which was usually a secondary consideration. There were one or two tunes which seemed to have been allowed to grow naturally, but one felt the greater part of the melodic material to have been formulated by adherence to preconceived theories about prosody. Any given tone appeared to have been chosen more with an eye to its general pitch location than to its effect on the line's logic or its strategic harmonic value. There was rough handling of word accents, too. The libretto was embarrassingly ingenuous.

Randall Thompson's *Solomon and Balkis*, commissioned by both The League of Composers and the Columbia Broadcasting System, was a competently written little opera whose argument presupposed that polygamy necessarily makes for humorous dramatic material. Even if this were true, the element of humor is not a thing that can be developed in song. One understands it instantaneously if it is there, and no amount of verbal elaboration can possibly sharpen its impact. Not being made of satire, the exposition always seemed to be explaining something quite obvious. One found one-

self hearing and understanding the words and rather wishing one couldn't. However, a simple harmonic structure and singable vocal line kept things moving. Instruments did not get in the way of voices, and the melodies were not forced. With some other subject matter the piece could have been extremely enjoyable.

At the High School of Music and Art the students, after doing a bit of unsuccessful rewriting of the end, presented the Copland-Denby *Second Hurricane* in its first functional New York performance. It is a spirited, poetic work. In spite of its apparent delicateness, it is pure sinew, made to stand up under rough treatment. The kids went at it with gusto, and enunciated superbly. It was too bad there was no direction to help them know what to do with their bodies while they were supposed to be "acting natural." The less moving around a character was allowed to do, the better his performance was. But the music more than made up for production weaknesses. It is Copland's most lyrical work, and contains, too, some of his most nervously exciting passages.

WITH THE DANCERS

By EDWIN DENBY

BALLET IMPERIAL (Balanchine-Tchaikovsky-Doboujinski; danced by Kirstein's American Ballet) was the single full-length ballet offered at the New Opera and it is the most brilliant ballet of the season. In intention it is an homage to the Petersburg ballet style, the peculiarly sincere grand manner which the Imperial Ballet School and

Petipa evolved. We know the style here from the choreography of *Swan Lake*, *Aurora's Wedding*, or *Nutcracker*, even of *Coppelia*, though all of them have been patched out; we know it from glimpses of grandeur in the dancing of the Russian-trained ballerinas; from photographs, especially of the young Pavlova and the young Nijinsky; and

from the legend that persists and which is distinct from the Diaghilev legend. Balanchine of course knows it from having been trained in the actual school himself. But even with faint knowledge, homage to this manner is natural for a dance lover. The Petersburg style was the one that alone continued our tradition of serious dancing during the barbarism of 1850-1900. It was also the solid foundation for the extraordinary glory of dancing a generation ago, a glory which still pays the expenses of our present ballet companies. And there is another attraction toward it more compelling and more personal. It is the force of the mysteriously poignant images of the style — an expressive force which keeps returning them to the mind. And they so return, even after the context of them is gone and their outline altered, marked among other images by their singularity of expression.

Such images spontaneously arising are *Ballet Imperial's* theme. It does not reproduce or stylize the period as a decorator would. You don't find the fairy tale plot, the swans, the dance variations intended to register an obvious sentiment. Instead there is a backdrop that makes you think of the concrete St. Petersburg, and in front of that a brand new ballet with lots of novel steps. Actually you see a stage full of dancers who, say, arbitrarily disappear, who reappear in peculiarly rigid formations that instantly dissolve, or else stop and stand immobile. You see the vivacity of the star set oversharply against the grand pose of the ensemble; or else the solo dancer lost and still, while the full company hastens happily. You watch the solo partners discover each other, two individuals in the noncommittal cheerful society of the

company; you follow their touching play. And afterward you see them alter their natures from having been tender personages to being star performers, an inexplicable duplicity that leads to no heartbreak but culminates instead in the general dazzle of a virtuoso finale for everybody all over the stage at once. So described *Ballet Imperial* might be a typical Petersburg ballet. But the fact is that each of these typical effects is arrived at by so novel a technical procedure that it comes as a surprise. We feel the effect first, we recognize the feeling, and from that we remember the old effect. One might say the effect is as fresh as the Petersburg ballet was in its own time. Or that the past and the present seem to happen at the same time as they do in the drama of the personal memory.

As dancing, *Ballet Imperial* is full of freshness. In point of form, it is an abstract ballet interpreting Tchaikovsky's *Second Piano Concerto*. Interpretive dance reveals one of the structural aspects of a piece of music — Fokine is apt to show how the periods sit, Massine goes for the tangle of musical motives. Balanchine draws our attention to the expressive flow under the syntax, and we have a vivid sense of the free musical animation. I was delighted in *Ballet Imperial* how the *Concerto*, a show piece I had thought forced, came to life and sounded fresh and direct. The dance focuses the interest like a good musician's playing: certain moments get an imperceptible emphasis, a long passage is taken in at one swoop, another is subdivided; and thanks to a happy interpretation, the piece comes out as good as new.

In dance steps and dance figures Balanchine has always been inventive. But most people think of his choreography as

full of specifically poignant detail – quick thrusts backward and sideways, odd pauses, hobbled leaps, extraordinary group poses, indecently upside-down lifts. Most of us recall how his dancers have looked torn in three directions at once, and so were we, and it was wonderful. *Ballet Imperial* has a certain oddness, but it isn't in that earlier manner in the least. It does have a slow middle section, a very beautiful one (it's in a free style of ballet movement derived from classic pantomime) which has for sentiment the pathos of a love story. A boy and a girl find each other, they misunderstand, become reconciled, and lose one another. The tone is intimate. But there is not one indecent image or lift. The gestures are easy, the figures simple. And at the end the movement is brushed away, and the solitary "frustrated" emotion left in the air is very simply succeeded by a general comradely liveliness of tone in the next section; a long finale which like the long opening section has no pathos at all.

And in the slow pantomime part as well as in the rapid other two parts one comes to notice how the detail of gesture does not run counter to the main line of movement. It is not an accent, it does not draw attention to itself. The arms are easy, the dance is lighter, faster, more positive, presents itself more openly. The dance figures throughout are readily grasped. Balanchine maintains interest by an extraordinary flickering rapidity of dance steps and quick shift of dance figures. I found the speed, perhaps because it is still unfamiliar, at times confusing; but the positive style was unexpected and it had a pleasantly fresh aroma. And the brief solos in the last section reminded me of the bold large manner that Petipa seems to have had,

where the dance stands out so plain you see it right off with delight and you don't stop to think of the choreographer.

I was sorry the ensemble of *Ballet Imperial* had the weakness that young dancers always show – an insufficient power of projection. It is hard to feel them from the back of the house. Looking at it in another way, in inexperienced dancers the movement never quite comes to rest; so that dynamic scale is a bit blurred, and the movement does not lift to its flower, shine, and subside completely, leaving a completed image in the mind. This is rhythm in dancing (as distinct from musical rhythm) and it is what gives to dancing the air of style. It is a quality of expression independent of choreographic or virtuoso effects, and much more communicative than they are. To have it the dancer must be unusually sturdy and self-possessed. But as *Ballet Imperial* progresses the dancers do give you a sense of dance style. You begin to feel it in the air. You see it as vivacity and then you recognize that the freshness of movement comes from their personal animation. And you realize in the end how badly you missed, in the celebrated ensembles at the Met this fall, an air of intelligence that the sense of style gives to dancing. (Particularly absent in the Ballet Theatre ensemble.) I remember too that dancers Balanchine rehearses, whether stars or students, always tend to show their natural dance intelligence. They have an indefinable grace in dancing that seems to come natural to them, that seems extemporaneous. They look not so much like professionals, they look like girls and boys who are dancing.

Balanchine has an extraordinary gift for bringing performers to life on their own personal terms, so that the uncon-

sious grace that is in each one of them can shine out in the work they do, giving it the momentary and mortal expression of beauty. The plan of a choreography is a great pleasure. But it is the brilliancy of young dancers entirely in the present, the unique liveliness of each dancer caught entirely in the present instant that at once, we all know it, will be past and irretrievable forever — it is this clear sharp sense of our own natural way of living that makes a moment of ballet speak to the complete consciousness; that makes the choreography look beautiful. Again and again Balanchine's has.

III

Several straight flamenco numbers ended Carmen Amaya's Carnegie Hall program. They were each one much too short to have their full effect, but anyway, in them everybody can see that she is a great and a very individual dancer. That however isn't the curious part of the story. Four-fifths of the evening was reserved for Spanish dancing, recital style, a form made illustrious by the great Argentina, and of which Argentinita is now the star (at least here). Amaya, as a flamenco dancer in process of becoming a recitalist, has naturally chosen the best model she could find and she has worked hard — the improvement in detail over last year is obvious. But actually in the kind of number Argentinita turns into a marvel of polish, Amaya right after some real stroke of genius next looks as if she had lost the thread of her story, she looks plain or out of place. Well, she carries off the number by the force of her presence on the stage, and it is wonderful how silly she invariably makes the Granados or Albeniz music sound by the edge of her attack; but the whole thing is off balance. Off balance,

but highly interesting. Because Amaya is a completely honest character, and what you watch is the loyal conflict between two opposite dance natures, Argentinita's and Amaya's. Argentinita is a sensible artist, she completely understands the logical line of a recital dance, she dances any piece from A through to Z without a false stress or a gap. Similarly she is a great purist of gesture and her transitions too from one to the next one are a technical delight. She is also a witty and charming lady, who takes the audience into her confidence in a vivacious and cultivated way. Her dance numbers make the most of all these qualities. But Amaya has none of these. Form for her is not logical, it is a successive burst of inventions; the rhythmic shock is wherever you don't expect it; gesture is expression and attack, it's a gamble and there is no sense in saving and budgeting; and she has no patience for illuminating anecdotes on Spanish life, she wants to say straight out what she knows is so.

I admire in Amaya the effort of a great natural dance intelligence to master a form so foreign to it; it strikes me as a noble struggle. I am sure she is not limited to pure flamenco. The first sign of a new form of her own seems to me the very original though not yet completely successful dance she has called a "supercreation," which though it is a recital number is a piece Argentinita wouldn't dream of performing. Meanwhile in the imitative dances it is the strokes of genius that break up the form which I am happy over. Technically speaking Amaya's dancing was more controlled and more various than last year; she also has checked her former mannerisms; she doesn't repeat her

lightning turns over and over, she doesn't shake down her hair, nor dance male parts too frequently. Her magnificent rapidity, her power, her fine originality in handling the sex character of Spanish dancing will I imagine lead her to add unexpected steps to Spanish feminine dancing.

III

Agna Enters, who is of course a realistic mime and not specifically a dancer, appeared in new and old impersonations. The clarity and unobtrusiveness of her action, the elegance of her accessories, her pointed sense of "genre," and a certain rhythmic instinct in forming a scene, all this is expert and high class. So is the extremely intelligent piano tinkling off stage. The evening is a specialty of understatement and inference. But the emotion is not always distinct and it is mostly small. For me, grateful though I am for so much good taste and so little pretentiousness, I find an entire evening of it gives me an impression of timidity. Of course I know that for a century or more the cornerstone of the American school in art and in taste has been timidity of expression. But now and then it seems to me an absurd standard for grown up people.

III

At her studio theatre Doris Humphrey presented an all Bach program. It contained her well-known large composition to the *Passacaglia and Fugue in C-Minor*; a new very long solo by José Limon to the *Chaconne* for solo violin (it had interesting references to fencing style and was an honorable failure); and the program also contained two new pieces for small groups by Miss Hum-

phrey, one set to four *Chorale Preludes*, the other to the *Partita in G-Major* played on the harpsichord. These new dances, which are often gentle, pleased her faithful audience, but less than the old ones do. I thought them interesting as a further example of the general tendency of the "modern dance" choreographers to compose in a more continuously fluent manner. Five years ago they were chiefly concerned with the emphatic aspect of movement, they socked the active phases of gesture, stamp, jerk, thrust or stop, they gave slow motion a knife edge or contracted with paroxysmal violence. A dance seemed like a series of outcries. The moderns had always cultivated continuity in their intellectual concepts of dancing; but they did not build their dances out of a continuity of expression. Now they are interested in the value of the unemphatic phases as well, in the continuous support on which the continuous dance line rests (as in singing or piano-playing). I think they are interested in the confidence the continuous line can express, and in the melody of a continuous movement.

Modern dancing is not dead, of course not. It has an appreciative public. Its intentions are extremely intelligent. Its execution varies from the student-like to being (as in the case of Peter Hamilton on this program) fresh and real. But it sets itself the highest standards. Musically it has brought us this season several pieces by Cage, a novel music of freshness and delicacy; and MODERN MUSIC reported in the last issue two new ballets by Harris for Hanya Holm. Even when modern dancing is conventional, we who watch are happy over the disinterested love of serious dancing that motivates it.

Any child knows by now that there is no money in it, and little enough glory. But young people do it just the same,

with the obstinate generosity that does keep turning up in our species.

OVER THE AIR

By CHARLES MILLS

WAR propaganda, as was to be expected, has found its way into almost every type of program on the air. Surprising however, is the sparse use of music. Every network now runs a number of these war shows, but only Mutual's *This Is Our Enemy* goes in much for musical effect beyond routine introductory march themes or occasional fanfares. *This Is Our Enemy* is an average radio mystery thriller; music highlights striking moments, offers background material and serves as connecting link between the dialogues and the commentary. This well regulated accompaniment makes for sure-fire technic. It can be adequately effective when music of good quality is used intelligently and to the point, which unfortunately is not the way it works out on Mutual's series. The general idea here is to engender hate for Nazi Germany. But first the program itself must learn to make fewer enemies and attract more listeners. Bloodthirsty over-written plots fairly bristle with the old nickelodeon villains who twirl their mustaches and utter sneaky, confidential asides to hissing audiences. The music is in keeping — unashamedly bombastic, with loud trombones blasting a descending major seventh to give us the vicious arrogance of a Nazi chief, or screaming tremolo strings, à la Strauss, for the agony of suffering victims. Surely radio has something smarter to show than this — and now is the time to produce it.

Mutual also offered its version of the Shostakovich *Seventh*, an industrious performance by Eugene Ormandy with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Ormandy and his men appear to have rehearsed this tedious opus with righteous enthusiasm, which is certainly not what they did to the *Third Symphony* of Roy Harris. The unfortunate rendering of Harris' work, incidentally its thirty-sixth, was marred by unprofessional false entrances and poor dynamic balances. Chalk up on the credit side, however, Mutual's performance of Harold Morris' *Suite for Orchestra*, cleanly played by Alfred Wallenstein's ensemble. This is an interesting and colorful work, somewhat curious in form and in the general emotional layout. The opening fugal overture seems to have a dramatic aim, but it is scored in a manner more suitable to burlesque; neither atmosphere is fully achieved. A melancholy intermezzo seems authentic, orchestrated in a style brilliantly effective for radio. The concluding humoresque is delightful and amusing although the pretentious ending falls flat.

Bernard Van Dieren's rarely heard *Sonnet Amoretti* was beautifully played by Bernard Hermann and the C.B.S. orchestra. This fine little work shows a skillful treatment of dissonance which is completely natural in its rich sonorities. There is a perverse artistry in its subtle harmony, its cunning expertness of re-