

## WITH THE DANCERS

By MINNA LEDERMAN

THREE new pieces by Balanchine were the jewels of an otherwise lack-lustre season. Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo gave us *Dances Concertantes* and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. *Waltz Academy* was mounted by Ballet Theatre which also revived the lovely *Sérénade*. Not every Autumn brings such pleasure. More than any other choreographer Balanchine has been the victim of managerial timidity and the superb landmarks of his distinguished career are never enough on view.

There can be no doubt his work is complex. Like Ariel the dancers "divide and burn in many places", they take on simultaneously all dimensions. But the design always has power and its own logic, and as Balanchine's passion to distort lessens his idiom grows purer. Now we all begin to see the figures, with their extraordinary embellishments, in clear and timeless relation to the space around them. The feeling of his later works is large, cool and serene. Surely none of this is hard to take, and in the Fall the audiences at the City Center and the Metropolitan responded with delight.

Bitter controversy persists however about Balanchine's musicianship. I can understand this, but only as the expression of professional hostility. For he never condescends to the impressive, like the moderns, he is no interpreter (Massine) he does nothing to, with, or against the music (Nijinska) and he doesn't ride it either (Tudor). He simply gets inside a score. When he

reappears he has added to it another resonance.

*Dances Concertantes* is a wonderful piece of collaboration. Stravinsky can be the most exacting of ballet composers; for Balanchine he has proved himself more than once the most rewarding. By supple phrasing, by virtuosos rhythmic work-out and above all by its feeling for style the choreography catches every refinement of this mocking, allusive little suite. The dancers strut across the stage in a pert greeting. They are sure and elegant, they strike at once the impersonal note of irony. When the curtain rises we see them in a frieze and, so concentrated, Balanchine holds them firmly. For each variation he cuts out a group of two or three, puts it through a broad lyrical passage. In the background a high lift, a sudden leap echos some passing dissonance or a shrill pizzicato in the strings. The frequent time shifts from 2/8 to 3/8, from 3/4 to 4/4 are taken easily but never with imprecise slurring. When syncopation breaks out and later the coda booms into an oompah-oompah, the whole company relaxes in the most elegant hip-swinging possible with just the right degree of sophistication. Most sensitive of all is the response to instrumental timbres. The dancers never fail to articulate the solo entrances which at the anemic orchestral performances for this production were barely audible. Very beautiful indeed in the allegretto are the sweeping obeisances of the girl to the repeated

wide interval in the horn; in the andantino too the linked-arm movement of the trio adds charm and youthful eloquence to the plaintive discourse of the woodwinds.

Balanchine sets his dancers in a garden – a tribute to Stravinsky's Californian phase – where Eugene Berman, with his opaque clusters of cerise, turquoise, jade, amethyst and topaz quickens our sense of mid-summer. But if the color is deep and hot, the scent is not heavy and the flight never soars. As in the vibrating approach of a humming bird or a brilliant darning needle, the motion is all concentric. Even in the ornamental pas de deux the great Danilova unwinding in the most elaborate but subtly restrained arm movements is no Queen Bee. There is barely any climax, and what we hear and see gives us the kaleidoscopic whirring feeling of bright noon-day.

*Waltz Academy* is another order of theatre entirely. Rieti's brassy score is loud and bumptious though never lush. It is good Gebrauchsmusik for dancers, School of Paris, about the late 1920's with more than a hint of the organ grinder in almost every waltz. Balanchine makes the most of it. In the domed space – one of Oliver Smith's best sets – the boys look a little like smoothly gaitered paratroopers. They bound off in the most astonishing leaps, they shift their weight abruptly in mid-air from right profile to left, their great horizontal arm stretches span the stage, all in the most virile contrast to the delicate twirling acrobacy of the girls. Watching them as their exhilaration grows is like seeing Roman candles burst in rapid succession on a Fourth of July until, in a wide shower of

sparks, the show is over.

It is too soon to have a clear impression of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. On its second and last night in New York this dazzling spectacle in which Balanchine and Berman do homage to Molière was still insufficiently rehearsed and confused. Even so it had superb moments – the flying-wedge formation of the pas de sept, and the love duet for which Balanchine, moving happily from walky-talky pantomime to the formal dance, creates a lovely opening passage, the girl circling with half-turned body and upraised arm, followed a second later by the echoing motions of her suitor.

Berman's décor is not the "lebendes Rokoko" Strauss intended in his orchestral suite, but grand baroque and ever so much more effective. Seldom has the theatre seen such splendor as in the riotous cascade of plumed head-dresses, court trains, gunmetal, gold, white, jet-black and "Turkish" candy stripes swept together for the finale. How long before the Metropolitan recognizes here the designer to give us the feeling that time has indeed marched on? Berman's sense of scale and mass – if anything a little opulent for ballet – would add contemporaneity to the Strauss operas from *Salomé* to *Rosenkavalier*; it would be perfect too for Verdi's *Macbeth*, if anyone there ever got round to it.

### III

No other new works were shown before the International Ballet opening in the late Fall, but the present apparently standard American repertory was well sampled. Lichine's *Graduation Ball* revived by Ballet Theatre has a new Dobujinsky set and its former moments of charm – the first dizzy waltz (when

Lichine and Riabouchinska do it) the *perpetuum mobile*, the idyllic last exit of the girls in pairs – but its adolescent exuberance still wears me down. Massine's finest work, *The Three-Cornered Hat*, was welcome; it is always a pleasure to hear the De Falla score, to see how Picasso can open up the stage to let in light and air, how his costumes accelerate the dancers' movements. Fokine's *Sylphides* appeared in three versions, not one with an agreeable orchestration; two other old works, *Scheherazade* (Ballet Russe) and *Carnaval* (Ballet Theatre) were disinterred but even after exposure, remained moldy.

Tudor was completely represented; everything he has brought to America or created here was staged by the Ballet Theatre. Of all his work, I find *Pillar of Fire* to be dating most rapidly. The over-explicit formulation of ideas has something to do with this. When you see the piece a second time, how completely you realize that you have seen it before. These racked torsos, lifting themselves by the hip-bone, have already yielded their ultimate secret. With its cluttered stage set, the ballet has a way of joining itself in the mind to the period when O'Neill was celebrating the same discoveries in *Desire under the Elms*. *Lilac Garden* has more staying power. Here again are the pursuer and pursued and the intervening shadows, but the story is simpler and the poetic images do achieve a life of their own. As the evening wears on the sense of heartbreak dissociates itself from the individual lovers and is diffused in the restless moth-like fluttering of the whole company. We drift along on the tumult of the Chausson *Poème*

and when the curtain comes down the mood of the uneasy June night stays with us.

### III

It was impossible to see Danilova at the Monte Carlo this season and come away unmoved. Here surely is the most abundant and glowing temperament in the theatre today. I would gladly go again and again to *Swan Lake*, not so much for her queenly adagios, beautiful and touching as they are, but for the more poignant moments – to catch the exquisite movements of her head, so unlike the sharp bright peckings of most other ballerinas in this role, and above all to feel the intense quiet that surrounds her, as she stands apart, almost off stage, wings folded, a creature imprisoned in the dusk. The sensual charm of Tchaikovsky's music is of course perfect for her warmth. But to sustain this role as no one else does, night after night, with passion and tenderness, and then at a matinee to toss off the imperial coquetties of *Coppelia*, giving every ebullient whim its full play, is to accomplish the kind of miracle the theatre no longer demands and that departed from the operatic scene with Mary Garden.

In the younger more powerful Toumanova, recalled from Hollywood by Ballet Theatre, I find no challenge to this spell. It is a pleasure to see her handsome animal strength, her tremendous central control. When she slowly unfolds in arabesques one comes to excited attention as to a long drum roll at the circus. But Toumanova casts no magic over *Swan Lake*, still less over the second act of *Giselle*. As the Miller's Wife in *Tricorne* she has charm and dramatic vigor, but this season at

any rate she came into her own with éclat only in such show pieces as the grand pas de deux of *Black Swan*.

The crying need of all the companies appears to be more and better male dancers. A few of the well-tried ones, Eglevsky and Laing, have been much overworked — others are either too young or too old, or too unfinished. There has been a great decline in noble bearing, and arm gestures grow steadily less exact and less convincing.

### III

As we go to press the International Ballet has just opened with a gala night almost Parisian in reverberation. Here as once over there the jewelers, perfumers and haute couture were out in full force. But Diaghilev who also encouraged his audience to go on parade never turned the stage over to the dress-makers. Our International's debut was

smothered in heavy drifts of blue and lavender tulle, and there was an irrepressible tendency at the premiere to burst into Halloween masquerade.

For the high spot of the evening, *Colloque Sentimentale*, Paul Bowles has written a smoothly flowing piece with harp glissandos and a surging unbroken line. The music is properly in love with the Verlaine poem which is the ballet's subject. Perhaps the liveliness of Dali's backdrop with its own insistent rhythm was a little unanticipated, yet the whole effect did come off. But where were the two dancers bound, who shyly slipped on between the orchestra and the so active scene behind them?

The International is to run for eight weeks in New York before going on tour and it promises us nine new works. So there will be much to see and time for second thought before the next issue.

## ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By LAWRENCE MORTON

TWO interesting new movie scores, at least one of them representing an important advance in this medium, were recently heard at a demonstration of film music held on the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles, as part of the Musicians' Congress. They were Leigh Harline's score for the Disney cartoon, *Baggage Busters*, and the long-awaited *White Floats* which Hanns Eisler has been preparing for the Rockefeller Foundation. Fifteen hundred people came to hear the film composers themselves tell what they are doing and how they meet their problems. Participating, besides Eisler and Har-

line, were Louis Applebaum, Adolph Deutsch, Gail Kubik, Alfred Newman, David Raksin on behalf of Serge Prokofiev, and Roy Webb. A dozen sequences were screened. They dealt with the problems of music for montage, for the supernatural, for pursuit, for violence, for the cartoon and the documentary, and for the musical film. In each case the composer or a spokesman made the analysis.

Harline's score, *Baggage Busters*, was of special interest because of the economy of means with which highly amusing ends were realized. The music is for six wind players and four percus-