

DECLINE OF THE PRIMA BALLERINA

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THAT the individual has no meaning, and only through incorporation in the mass or by its control does he attain significance, are indicated by the developments in the past decade. Though obvious before, this had been converted into a problem by modern democracy. A problem unsolved, interesting as well as dangerous, it became a focal point in artistic creation. The individual and the mass are the theme of the art of the theatre today. In making their goal a communal unity, political extremes meet; when the idea of a whole, either under proletarian dictatorship or national socialism becomes an axiom, the struggle of the individual for or against the mass develops in the foreground. Individual sources merge in the stream of collective action.

This may appear somewhat remote as an introduction to a discussion on the solo dance, but any consideration of events in the world of art must return continually to this sociological foundation. The dance in particular has become an ever clearer reflection of politico-social developments. Not in obvious external form, nor in the substance of the offerings, nor even in the theme. As far as subject is concerned, the dance has absorbed little of the present day problems. The few attempts in this direction have been incomplete and unsatisfactory. But in its form of expression, the dance has taken a clearly parallel direction to sociologic-historic events. It follows the laws of the time and, perhaps unintentionally, develops according to them.

It is unnecessary to discuss the significance of the dance in past centuries. The close relationship between this art and the ruling class is apparent and generally conceded. When opposing, revolutionary elements gain the upper hand, they put their impress on the nature and form of the dance. Oskar Bie has

made some intelligent observations in *Der Tanz* on the determination of the form of ballroom dancing by sociologic and political factors, documenting his thesis by the succession of social dances of pairs and groups.

Such developments are still more obvious in the art dance. Perhaps the oldest form of human expression, the dance is comparatively young as an art form in Europe. And in the formative stages of an art, styles are purer, forms determined by the era are less burdened by tradition and therefore clearer.

The modern dance has arisen from a mass religious feeling, whose source is the group impulse. In this respect, the modern solo dancer differs fundamentally from the primaballerina. The latter is a highly developed, technical phenomenon, embodiment of virtuosity plus sex appeal. The solo dancer today is a concentration of mass impulse, the interpreter of a universal attitude and, moreover, entirely without eroticism. Actually she is superfluous, a substitute for the desired but absent dance group. From the erotic background of the corps de ballet there has arisen a spiritually mystic form; the powerful diva is metamorphosed into an almost godlike creation. The modern dance did not, of course, grow out of the ballet, but rather has developed apart from it, in opposition. This generation is unlike its predecessors; it is led by an entirely different stratum of society.

The stress of development has shifted from dancer to choreography. The dancer has become unimportant, her personality is no longer decisive; not she, but what she communicates, what she interprets, attracts us to her. This is particularly clear in a phenomenon like Mary Wigman. She only seems to captivate us by her personality. Her expressive energy emphasizes her effect, it is true; her intense emotion at times overwhelms everything else, but the really significant thing in her art is what lies behind her personality. If we deprive her dances of their choreography, they lose their basis. In Mary Wigman in particular, the opposition between her work and that of the group was interesting. It was an unnatural struggle for leadership in which the leader succumbed to the ever-spreading group. Hers was the tragic fate of a spirit which was unable to conquer its inner problem. Tragic in that she found it necessary to dissolve

partnership with the group, that in her final maturity she was unable to master this group any longer, that alone she developed her solo dances to finished mastery.

The modern dance has brought forth no outstanding soloist. Argentina, Shan-Kar, Escudero or Jodjana cannot be considered exponents of modern dance art. Our age stands under the sign of the ensemble.

Thus, last summer, when the editors of *Muzyka* in cooperation with the praiseworthy Archives Internationales de la Danse issued invitations for a solo dance competition in Warsaw, it was obvious that the event would not have the significance of the previous year's contest. In Paris the attempt to present the most modern group performances had been eminently successful. It accorded with the spirit of the times, and the suggestions and discoveries, especially the presentation of the Kurt Joos dance theatre, were a marked gain. In Warsaw, as in Paris, the first-line participants were the younger generation. The conditions, not set by any jury, may be blamed for the mediocre average, although this served to emphasize the prize winners against the grey background. But, as has been said, there was no comparison with Paris. For now, in the field of the solo dance, no forward, only a backward glance is possible.

Therefore nothing really new was offered by the prize-winners. In first place were Ruth Abramowitsch-Sorel and Rosalia Chladek. The latter, an international figure since Paris, delighted the audience with the clarity of her compositions. But the apostle of the Apollonic yielded to the Dionysian temperament of Ruth Abramowitsch-Sorel. This dancer, whose art is almost indistinguishable from that of her partner, Georg Groke, has a two-sided talent which impels her equally to the creation of erotic scenes and to others of proletarian necessity. The best things were the peasant dances, which they did together, of fine but earthy weight, highly charged with emotion. This was not solo dancing, but rather a gesture toward the ensemble. The greatest success in Warsaw was undoubtedly her *Salome*, danced with tremendous verve. To this exhibition of a virtuoso temperament, fundamentally reactionary, all else yielded place. It is noteworthy that Ruth Abramowitsch, who had been dismissed with-

out notice as soloist of the Berlin Municipal Opera under suspicion of harboring subversive ideas, should triumph with a dance which is possible only in a capitalist-imperialist world. She has the stuff to gain international fame. Her partner, Georg Groke, undoubtedly less compromising, more complex but also more interesting, seeks some form of the solo dance that should be in keeping with the age, but which will probably remain elusive. He is inferior in rank to the dancers, Arco and Swaine, who are more attractive and less problematical, although of course less significant. To list the names of further prize-winners would be dull. In a final analysis, it is completely unimportant to classify individual dancers and range them in order of merit according to a more or less accurate system. We may note this name or that because we will surely meet them later, and because some of them gave momentary flashes of a genuine dance talent, still unformed.

But everything at Warsaw served again to prove that the development of the dance will not be determined in this field. In a time of mass uprooting, the solo dance is pushed aside. Today it has no justification for expansion. The leader without a following is ridiculous. And as long as Europe is caught up in political and international upheavals, it will be impossible for single dancers, the embodiment of individualism, to gain much attention. Once we recognize these fundamental relationships, we will no longer be surprised to see this species become less and less important. . . . And sometime in the future it may rise again.