

recording, with Stravinsky admirably conducting the Philharmonic Symphony, has special appeal, for it amplifies the

exquisite elements and allows us to linger over details which are somehow more persuasive than the whole.

WITH THE DANCERS

By MINNA LEDERMAN

FANTASTS who deal in images of the monstrous and the sublime lend their talents to the ballet at great risk, for the hazard of choreography is beyond reckoning. Having learned early about devil-dancers at the opera, audiences are generally immune to terror and surprise at balletic orgies. Their resistance has not been worn thin by Massine who continues to snare major assignments of this category from all the companies. His fiascos with Dali's magnificent props before Dali's easel paintings are gargantuan; to the religious symbols of Tchelichev he adds a note of child's play (the huge "handie" tableau in *St. Francis*); his nervous agitation even diminishes the intense rapture of Chagall.

Aleko, two years old in Ballet Theatre repertory, was new to me this season. Night after night I sat entranced before Chagall's apocalyptic birds and beasts, watching his great white pony fly over the spire, the monkey and bear fall out of the tree. But, just as I had been warned, the dancing was a matter for laughter and tears. It had, as usual with Massine, distracting "counterpoint" — his way of detaching the left side of the stage from the right and both ends from the middle —, a multitude of dubious arabesques and back bends, and finally a pyramid with everyone boiling all over

the stage like lava. How much simpler if the cast had simply knelt to bob for apples.

SEASON OF ANTHONY TUDOR

Tudor of course is no visionary. His hectic dead-end romanticism has a solid grip on all the details of character, class and temperament, of time and place, for which his passion is as vast as Balzac's and as fussy as Belasco's. But in their narrative form and overtones Tudor's ballets suggest the British stream-of-consciousness novel and by much the same prose method they create a sense of interior life, of reverie.

Undertow, Ballet Theatre's big new number, gives off an aura of hallucination not easy to define. Breinin's décor of clouds and winged architectural forms is on the tepid side and except for his trick at the end of making the sky reel, without novelty. Neither is the key to this mystery in William Schuman's score, the first to be specially written for Tudor.

The music does create a dimension new to Tudor's ballets — a cosmic grandeur that enhances the minutely elaborated effects of his symbols. The Wagnerian chord of doom on which the Hero's Birth takes place is prolonged an incredibly long moment by dark

brasses and strings and broken by muffled, later violent, drum beats. There is a massiveness too about the episodes of *Life in the Great City*. Schuman's Salvation Army number, with its clash of cymbals and sour drunken notes, misses some of Tudor's more precise intentions but makes up for that by large, rowdy parody. (Rhythmically too he gives the dancers more support and variety than Tudor does.) The woodwind passage for the newly-married pair could easily be a separate "bright" piece, devoid of bitter social comment. And, in an orchestral suite, the off-stage rape and on-stage murder, for all their excitement and violence, might pass for a Sturm-und-Drang climax. Like the dancing, the music expresses no pity. But in relation to the detailed visual content it seems outsize and aloof. It has none of the ballet's sicklier atmosphere.

Tudor's subject for some time has been that man is conceived in sin and sex is his incurable malady. This far from original theme receives a "soft" treatment in *Lilac Garden*, is poetically represented (as a kind of aside to Shakespeare) in *Romeo and Juliet*, and finds a sentimental echo in *Dim Lustre*. Hard-boiled is the crass approach of *Judgment of Paris*, so too are the clinical studies in *Pillar of Fire* and *Undertow*. In *Undertow* the transference mechanism of Freud is used as a structural and ornamental device. After a magnificent arabesque, Cybele, the mother, fades out in a universal dusk, circling on the toes, her arms held grandly in the fourth position *en haut*. When the light rises over the City we see a prostitute circling alone in the same spot and in the same majestic pose. The Hero advances and a male passerby

shoves him off with the violent thrust that earlier separated the son from the mother. The crouch of the embryo, in the Prologue, is recalled at various moments of frustration with an accompanying infantile gesture of thumbsucking, and the murder repeats exactly the pictorial design of the birth.

This highly charged material Tudor handles directly, without equivocation or squeamishness. His are no Thurber females assuming the vague poses of a modern dance recital. In long drawn out passages, the dancers approach each other like animals in heat. *Undertow* shows us the labors of a difficult childbirth; later we see the Hero visibly affected by the multiple rape of a girl just beyond our view but well within his, and finally an orgiastic murder carried out exactly in dead center of the stage.

The dance language Tudor uses to make a personal commentary on such events is not basically mimetic. It is a hybrid or rather corroded idiom drawn largely out of the ballet. All patterns of physical exuberance, the allegro steps – beats, elevation, rapid turns, high easy leaps – have been removed. Retained, but in low key are the courtly gestures – extensions though not high or flowing ones, toe-steps employed chiefly for elongation, inhibited arabesques, adagio lifts that never strive for purity of line but only to express significant emotion. For continuity there is a slow gliding walk, broken most often by an up-and-forward thrust of the pelvis that precedes a rigid extension of the leg to the side or back or in a backward circle, a sequence which gives the effect of approach and retreat. For variety there are certain rushing lifts that burst and fade

off into the horizon. The forward impetus is always checked, no one velocity seems to generate the speed of its successor. And the characteristic floor pattern is a series of winding circles, first in, then out, suggesting incantation.

It is, in sum, a fitful Sprechstimme of the dance which lends itself to shrill bursts of eloquence, to the expression of the convulsive, of the morbid and of deep gloom. Tudor does not, like Graham, dredge below the conscious self for the sources of feeling. He is synthetic and intelligent, but subtle enough to make us feel that Romeo is somehow his own creation and to inspire a doubt whether *Undertow* may not after all be a nocturnal fantasy. In *Undertow* Tudor seems to have telescoped some of the nightmarish aspects of Bloom's long day in Dublin; there is even a final Joyce-ean soliloquy, though instead of ecstasy the subject is remorse.

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On occasion Ballet Theatre set Tudor off by opening with *Waltz Academy*, a perfect antithesis. Even for Balanchine this work appears to be one-of-a-kind — a forthright treatise, in unbroken happy mood, on bravura leaps and toe-steps. The dance groups flower out of each other and out of the musical phrases, without hurry. And as the girls circle back and out, crouch, stalk, or are dropped, on toe, they embroider a delicate, aerial tracery overall. It is a ballet as impersonal and fresh as morning light and each time one sees it more beautiful.

DANCERS AND DIVERTISSEMENTS

Before the curtains had parted on Markova, I heard ecstatic cries that she was Out of This World. And so, hap-

pily for *Giselle*, she proved to be — wan, clear and distant as the moon. No one else has this remoteness, so desirable in a spirit doomed to float through "viewless winds". Markova's leaps seemed bodyless, her elevation and beats fantastically light, unreal. In *Pas de Quatre*, her wry smile and the special angle of knees and elbows set her apart, and rightly so, in the period of that piece. I was all the more glad then to find her Juliet not only perfect in its Botticellian grace, but intensely alive. Distance may so easily widen into the stellar space that separates a great lady from the rest of the cast and all the human beings out front.

Neither remoteness nor any personal distinction troubles us these days in Toumanova. What has happened to the lovely girl who even eight years ago had more than enough technical virtuosity? This gifted creature appears to have been brutally screened, the elements of her charm taken apart, weighed, ticketed for the American mass market and then reassembled by a commercial craftsman who left out the power, or the desire, to project feeling. In *Harvest Time*, Nijinska's new, rustic trifle, she was spectacular and bold, in *Nutcracker* very pink and pretty and in both one could enjoy the childish straddle from which she prepares for her dizzy turns. The glitter of *Black Swan* sets off her stabbing points, the flick of her sharp high *retiré*. She has a wonderful passage too in *Don Quixote* when she moves obliquely forward, in and out on toe. Her line is always clean, her knee action the most fluid in the world, there is a fine animal zip to everything she does — and no one would be surprised to find her, some evening, bril-

liantly suspended by the teeth from a trapeze.

This season established Eglevsky as Ballet Theatre's star. The secret of his lyric flight, his slow whirls, is a sustained tempo of absolutely even gradation. In the air he reduces the activity of everyone else to the trivial. At times he suggests a large, quite unferocious creature, moving alone through space. I am often tempted to cry Please Do Not Disturb to the conductors who remain indifferent to his rhythm (as indeed they are to the natural breathing of many dancers helplessly trapped by their callousness). When the accents are clear and unhurried, Eglevsky converts almost any show piece into a thrilling exposition of the grand style. His *Blue Bird* last month was hair-raising. And much to my surprise, I found him tragic in *Aleko*, although there he has only a mimed role. Some one should create a special work, even just a *pas seul* to exploit the somnolence of his grave and noble movements.

ARGENTINITA AND COMPANY

As a foil for Ballet Theatre's miscelany, Argentinita's company is not a bad idea, theatrically speaking. The proud back, the sinuous hands, the feet in brisk staccato, all the precision of Spanish dancing offer relief from the sprawling bustle of the major repertory. And it is absorbing to study the ground patterns as a point of reference for their elaboration in the ballet world. The trouble is that in this setting Argentinita feels constrained to put on numbers as big and extended in form as any of the rest. *Café de Chinitas* opens as a very pretty piece — Dali for once having painted a serenely beautiful drop. Ar-

gentinita quarrels pleasantly with a man and woman, then grandly enters the well-placed door. Inside the café however, the cabaret act expands to blowsy proportions. *Pictures of Goya* is high-class vaudeville and *El Amor Brujo* a not very convincing melodrama.

On the other hand, alone with her sister and two male dancers, Argentinita is no match for the great bare spaces of Carnegie Hall where she appeared earlier this season. The regional numbers were sometimes intensely moving, and I like also the little-girl sound of Argentinita's voice, the occasional harsh cries from the others. But the vastness of the hall made the sisters seem curiously spinsterish and diminished the force of the men.

At her best, Argentinita shows us good manners, good humor and style, and what she needs to set these off is a more intimate frame, and an atmosphere less competitive.

III

It is more agreeable to forget than to recall the new tidbits, though I am not sure Ballet Theatre deserves that kindness. Nijinska's little adventure in bad taste, the *Pas de Deux Caractéristique*, and *Harvest Time* are inconsequential. But Massine not only made *Moonlight Sonata* in cold blood, he exposed its horrors to New York after a try-out on the road and that is hard to forgive.

Looking back on the company's season I feel most grateful to the individually brilliant dancers, and to Tudor for his genius in casting them. In Tudor's ballets, not only Laing and Kaye, but classicists like Orloff and Alonso, and even Markova, appear to be at the same time his creatures and superbly themselves.