

# UP-STAIRS CLUB

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An Educational Group

CHICAGO needs a great many things - but - what it needs most is an audience who is able to form its own taste... without guidance from critics...or worse yet to judge performers by what they see on television...many very good performances are missed by doing just this thing. Criticism mainly is based on the personal taste of one individual and the television never has, nor, ever will be a substitute for a live show. Those who did go to the recent performances of the Polish State Folk Ballet enjoyed them tremendously. Folk work is not to be compared with classical ballet and of recent years has much more vitality than much of the ballet we see. Now to the news - our best surprise visitor of the year was CHAUNCE CONKLIN who has been in these parts staging "The Girl Friend" for various groups...despite his growing family (3 girls) he is still the same old March Hare... JACK TYGETT is often on TV and his next appearance will be on the "Cyd Charisse Show" Dec. 29th - he can also be seen in the movie "Lil Abner"...CHUCK SCHICK is home for the holidays on leave for about five weeks - his stretch in service will end early next summer...the SYBIL SHEARER concerts have had SC dancers - JOHN WIDMER, MEL SPINNEY, JOAN and VAL EHEMANN, PAUL BERNE, & MARIA RAE BALABAN...KAREN FAHRENBACH has transferred from the University of Utah to Madison due to illness in her family...both JOHN WIDMER & GILDO DINNUNZIO are now in the Musical "Music Man"...the beautiful poster you see in our doorway was sent to us from HENRY HOLTH who is now dancing in the Opera at Munich...by now PETER WILLIAM REILLY and family are settled down in The Hague and to his new job...among his first assignments are Black Swan, Don Q, and Giselle... wouldn't we love to be in the front row on one of these nights... Those des-

perate looking boys and girls you see in classes are really very nice people who happen to be dancing in "West Side Story"...well known in the school are AUDRE HAYES & BARBARA RICHMOND...the boys are JOSE DE VEGA, BARRY BURNS, JERRY NORMAN and just recently our old friend GEORGE MARCI has returned to the cast after recovering from a severe ankle break...the nice thing about this time of year is all the 'old friends who stop in to visit...two former Chicago Civic Opera dancers recently visited with MR. S & C...FLORENCE STRELTZOV & LYMETTE DUFFY...Florence now has a successful school in Wilmington, Delaware while Lymette has a family growing up... JIM MOORE no sooner arrived home than he was wanted back in New York for a TV show...he looked great and is dancing marvelously since his last European trip ...JUDY WEST was another pleasant surprise - now dancing with the HAL LOMAN act as one of his Playmates...she is more beautiful than ever and as happy as can be...JAY DEVLIN is appearing in a production called "The Littlest Circus" for a special Christmas run in New York at the Golden Theatre...JOHN BARKER & RONNY FRASIER are dancing in a concert at the YMHA in New York presenting the choreography of Adam Darius...the wandering DIANE SPERBERG TALLMADGE has now turned up teaching in Santa Monica, California...Thanksgiving week Mr. C. flew six thousand miles for a teaching engagement in Vancouver B.C....LORA ABORN is now writing a new ballet for the SC Ballet to be presented this spring...the scenario has been written by Mr. C. and is loosely based on the seven ages of man and is to be entitled "IN MY LANDSCAPE"...rehearsals are well under way on another ballet - "LES FEMME MISERABLE" to music by Mozart... the cast includes - KAREN KRYCH, TONI KUTYNA, POLLY HARDING, FRUMETH HIRSH, JOAN MANSFIELD, MARY LOU GODVIN and

DEBBY KRYCH as the troublesome cupid...  
TERESE RUDOLPH was a recent visitor to  
the school from Garmisch, Germany -  
here on business...Incidentally, have  
you subscribed to or renewed your sub-  
scription to the UPSTAIRS CLUB BULLE-  
TIN - \$2.50 a year for six issues. We  
also will appreciate any news sent to  
us about former SC alumni - just jot  
down and mail it to us. There will be  
an OPEN HOUSE January 3rd, at 4 P.M.  
to plan the activities for the coming  
season...do stop in.

OPERA BALLET. . . . . Walter Camryn  
Continuing from October 20th Issue.

The Italians use ballet mostly as  
divertissement and often they are just  
that. The ballet is meant to divert  
you from the singing so that you are  
fresher when you return to the singing.  
They do not necessarily need to have  
anything to do with the plot...and it  
is not necessarily the desire of the  
composer but the precedent is set by  
their stage directors. The over use of  
toe work when in reality character  
dancing should be used...the circus  
display of technical virtuosity... and  
the omitting of ballet scenes complete-  
ly is typical of Italian stage  
directors.

Verdi did not always use ballet but  
when he did it was in one of three ways  
- first, as an intimate connection with  
the dramatic situation as in "Masked  
Ball" - secondly, as a divertissement  
inserted more or less arbitrarily into  
the drama as into ballets he composed  
for the Parisian stage, for instance,  
"Otello", or as he did in Act I of "La  
Traviata" as background for the drama.  
The 3rd act ballet is purely divertisse-  
ment and is now and then omitted.

The most effective ballet music  
Verdi wrote was in "Aida". The dance  
of the priestesses in the temple is a  
wonderful evocation of exotic atmosphere  
achieved without any sham orientalism.  
Then there is the vivacious Moorish  
Slave dance for small boys at the throne  
of Amenaris. The triumphal scene  
dances, also using the exotic effect,  
are beautifully written dances in a  
variety of styles. These deserve more

intelligent treatment choreographically  
than they usually receive.

It is interesting to note that  
Verdi's opera "La Forza del Destino"  
was commissioned by the Russian Imperial  
Theatre and was first performed there.

Divertissements need not be dull or  
banal or irrelevant to the story. They  
can still remain in the framework of  
the opera and tell a fragment of a  
story of its own in keeping with the  
character of the opera. The Russian  
choreographers did this especially well  
and nothing infuriates an Italian sing-  
er more than for the ballet to have a  
success. The Russian Choreographer with  
greater knowledge of folk and character  
material made these scenes works of art  
in themselves. In the beginning Russian  
opera itself evolved from French and  
Italian sources. Catherine the Great  
whose taste lay in the western European  
cultures gave it its first encourage-  
ment.

The one Russian opera that is truly  
an Opera-Ballet is "Le Coq D'or" by  
Rimsky Korsakov. Its first performance  
was in 1914 and was choreographed by  
Michael Fokine. The opera had two  
casts - one operatic and one choreo-  
graphic. The singers sang the parts at  
the side of the stage as in a Greek  
chorus while the dancers mimed and  
danced the roles on stage. In this  
case the dancers were more important  
than the singers and the opera has had  
more performances without singers than  
with them. Rimsky Korsakov also wrote  
"Sniegurotchka". Both of these operas  
were in the repertoire of the old  
Chicago Civic Opera Company; with  
Laurent Novikoff choreographing the  
first and Yeschlav Swoboda the latter.

Two of the first Russian operas were  
Glinka's "A Life of the Tsar" and  
"Russlan and Ludmilla". Both operas  
were rich in ballet with the wonderful  
mazurka in "A Life of the Tsar" and a  
very large ballet in Act 4 of "Russlan"  
and with many eastern dances with fan-  
tastic settings - a fairy tale in quasi  
oriental style.

Borodin's "Prince Igor" is better  
known as a ballet than it is as an  
opera. Its Polovetzian ballet had

brilliant music for brilliant dancing - Fokine's choreography and Adolph Bolm's performance as the Prince matched up to it. In old Chicago Civic Opera days these scenes from the opera were produced with the ballet and the chorus using the entire opera stage for about the first time. When shorn of the beautiful choral accompaniment in an ordinary ballet performance a highly important element of the music is missing. Producing the entire opera is a highly expensive production and is rarely performed in our time. The leading role was at that time sung by the great Chaliapin and there are not many basses of his calibre today.

One of the most serious faults with opera choreographers and directors today, as I see it, is their desire to modernize an age old story and to remove it bodily from its rightful period. If they are interested in modern operas, they should then produce modern operas written by contemporary composers.

The qualifications for a good opera choreographer are enormous. Besides his knowledge of dance and stage direction he should have a large store of knowledge of historical periods, styles, manners, and costume at his command. There is a vast difference in the kind of dance required in "Carmen" - in "Thais" - "Lucia" or "Aida". Often in an opera as "Mefistofele" each scene requires a different knowledge of dance style.

Two recent Metropolitan Opera performances in Chicago were notable for bad taste as far as ballet was concerned. These were "Aida" and "Samson and Delilah". The first is an Egyptian story and "Samson" is biblical. Neither are difficult to place in time. Yet both ballets produced by the Met bordered on New York primitive dance with little or no relation to Egyptian or Hebraic dance.

In Chicago, now at the Lyric we have a Management unfriendly to the ballet and much of their repertoire is without ballet. When an opera is chosen where a ballet could have a chance a special director is called in who ends up using the ballet mostly as supers.

While the recent production of "Carmen" was in many ways a failure, the ballet held its own and was very beautiful in the "L'Arlesienne Suite" in the last act. The opera managers saw fit to engage two authentic Spanish dancers, supposedly to add authentic color. Authentic Spanish dance is much too intimate for the huge opera stage and the dancers were not at all effective from the back of the house. A more flamboyant style is necessary which is known in the profession as operatic Spanish.

Lyric's next opera with ballet will be "La Gioconda" which gives a nice opportunity in the Dance of the Hours in Act 3. This is frankly a divertissement for the Palace guests. It has been the custom for many years to use the classical style of ballet in this ballet, to represent the golden hours of the day being slain in pantomime by the sable hours of night. The hours of dawn, day, evening and night are danced by groups of dancers in tutus of various colors to suggest their time of day. The male and female soloists represent the sun and the moon. Last season the Lyric direction chose to dress this ballet in oriental costumes - this season it will no doubt be something else.

The ballet in "Thais" is a mild bacchanale usually dance in Grecian style with nymphs and fauns. The music is insipid and the ballet can only be decorative at best.

Ballet in opera is the poor relation in the arts - not that it is unpopular with the opera going public when they have a chance to see it - what the public does not know is the back stage intrigue that keeps it down. Important people in the dance have neglected ballet in the opera due to their preoccupation with the ballet as an independent art in our time. Laurent Novikoff during his reign at the old Civic did produce considerable ballet independent of the opera, under stress too I might add. These performances were usually before or after a short opera, and among these were "Swan Lake", "Prince Igor", "Le Coq D'or", and "El amore Brujo". In the

days of the Chicago City Opera Company Ruth Page and Bentley Stone produced many of their first ballets which is a story in itself. Last season the Metropolitan Opera Company began giving special ballet nights of ballet with various choreographers and will repeat the idea again this season. These performances are "Ballet with Opera" rather than "Opera Ballet". They certainly can make up what the opera does not do for the dance.

A great part of my professional life has been associated with opera in Chicago and it has always seemed to me that the Russian trained choreographers were more concerned with the styles, the character and the manners of the period in which the opera story was laid. It was my great pleasure to work under Laurent Novikoff for four long seasons in the great days of the Chicago Civic Opera. Mr. Novikoff was a graduate of the Moscow Imperial Ballet school and had been a choreographer for the Moscow Opera before World War I. Fifteen years later in 1929 he became Ballet Master for the Chicago Civic Opera and from 1941 to 1945 he was ballet master at the Metropolitan.

His "Aida" was an intelligently created ballet integrated into the opera with a balance of taste and theatricality, using the typical Egyptian frieze-like formations that were difficult to perform but a joy to see. Other operas where he had superlatively worked out ballets were "The Bartered Bride", "La Juive", "Samson and Delilah", "Herodiade", "Lakme" and "Manon".

#### DANCE PERSONALITIES . . . AUGUSTE VESTRIS 1760 - 1842

It is difficult to imagine in our time such a cyclonic success as Auguste Vestris enjoyed in his time. Indeed he had both the French and the English nations adoring him and shouting his praises.

Horace Walpole, writing from London in 1780 to a friend wrote; "I just learnt the dreadful calamity that happened at the Opera House last night. There was a fire, and it is not yet

extinguished. The theatre was brimful in expectation of Vestris. At the end of the second act he appeared; but with so much grace, agility, and strength, that the whole audience fell into convulsions of applause; the men, thundered; the ladies, forgetting their delicacy and weakness, clapped with such vehemence that seventeen broke their arms, sixty-nine sprained their wrists, and three cried bravo! bravissimo! so rashly that they have not been able to utter so much as 'no' since."

Auguste had been born for the theatre March 27, 1760. He was the illegitimate son of famous dancer Gaetana Vestris and Marie Allard, a rising young premiere danseuse. No priest blessed the fleeting union of the great Vestris and buxom and brilliant Allard, the birth of young Vestris could not be legalized. A writer of the time, Grimm says, "Nature, which delights in using its favors to mitigate the severity of our institutions, has lavished her most precious gifts upon him, endowing him with the talents of both father and mother."

At 12 the boy was acclaimed as a prodigy who had to be seen to be believed and by the time he was 18 he was honored with a place vacant in the King's Ballet.

The senior Vestris said of his son: "Auguste is more skillful than I - the explanation is simple. Gaetano Vestris is his father, an advantage, which nature has denied me."

Writers and critics of the time agreed, despite the influence wielded by the father - that the young Vestris was indeed worthy of the praise showered upon him. He was well formed and handsome. As a dancer, he was possessed of a sensitive ear for music, and excellent technique, a prodigious elevation, a particular ability to execute entrechats and pirouettes, and, what is rare indeed, he could adapt his movements and expression to suit any mood or style. In addition to all these qualities he was an excellent mime.

Vestris danced for all the great people of his generation and worked with the great teacher Noverre who said of

him - "The most astonishing dancer in Europe". He with his father earned great fortunes in London and even Parliament was once suspended to allow its members to attend Covent Garden to see him dance. With such fabulous success he got more conceited and arrogant, but his talent was so great that the directors of the opera, where he was first dancer for 36 years, suffered his bad manners. Off stage, as well, Auguste was a difficult person -jealous - arrogant - vain - quarrelsome, insolent, capricious and fantastic to a degree. Backed by his influential father, secure in the indulgence of the public, and supreme as a dancer, he even dared to disobey Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, who promptly had him tossed in prison, only to be released promptly for some performance.

Many anecdotes exist attributed to the father and son team that are not unamusing.

Auguste - "In Europe there are only 3 great men - Myself, Voltaire and the King of Prussia."

His father - "If my son does come to the ground, it is only purely out of kindness to his fellow artists."

Despite this eccentric ego we are indebted to the Vestris family for discarding the use of masks worn by the male dancers up to his time. He developed the grand jete, or the leap as we know it today and he elaborated on the pirouette. No history of dance would be complete without this amusing pair.

#### FROM A DANCER'S SCRAPBOOK.

Tell him there is measure in everything and so dance out the answer...

Shakespeare

A man lives not only his personal life, as an individual, but also, consciously or unconsciously, the life of his epoch and his contemporaries.

Thomas Mann

There never was in the world two opinions alike, no more than two hairs or two grains; the most universal quality is diversity.

Montaigne

Nothing so clearly and inevitably reveals the inner man than movement and gesture. It is quite possible, if one chooses, to conceal and dissimulate behind words or paintings or statues or other forms of human expression, but the moment you move you stand revealed, for good or ill, for what you are.

Doris Humphrey

In the instinctive and organic life, in the mental and spiritual life of man, Characteristics make themselves felt which demand communication. Man turns to man. Man needs man. Art is communication spoken by man for humanity in a language raised above the every day happening. What would be the sense of an art that robs itself of its communication and arrogantly believes that it can turn away from man? Mary Wigman

There is nothing so necessary for men as dancing...without dancing man can do nothing...all the ills of mankind, all the tragic misfortunes that fill the history books, the blunders of politicians, the miscarriages of great commanders, all this comes from the lack of skill in dancing...when a man has been guilty of a mistake, either in ordering his own affairs, or in directing those of the state, or in commanding an army, do we not always say; so and so has made a false step in this affair...?

And can making a false step derive from anything but lack of skill in dancing?

Moliere

#### HAVE YOU WONDERED ABOUT?

WILLIS BROWN, brother of Kelly, after a stretch in the service now works in the AGMA office in New York City.

STEVE PRIMIS, became more and more interested in muscles, became a Phys-Ed teacher and is now teaching at the Anatolia College in Salonika, Greece.

BETSY ROSS, of Oklahoma and Carousal Days, now is in charge of the drapery department for Colby's and has made several buying trips to Europe for that company.

LAURA BLUM TOFFEL, of the Old Grand Days, now has her own school and is dancing for the Teatro de Danza Jose Pares in Puerto Rico. Incidentally she has a small boy and a girl.

MURIEL BACCIOCCO MULATZ, now living in San Francisco is a teacher of mathematics in a High School there.

JESSE SEAMAN, of Stevens Building days, now maintains his own school of dance on the north side of Chicago.

MEREDITH ANDERSON McGLYNN, of Children's Civic Theatre days, now living in Los Angeles has a three month old baby girl.

RENEE KUGLER MELL, teaching English and social studies in Edgewood, Maryland, while her husband, a doctor, completes his studies.

ANSWERS TO OCTOBER 20TH QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Pierre Beauchamp.
2. Jean Balon.
3. Marie Camargo.
4. Gaetano Vestris.
5. Marie Taglioni.
6. Marie Camargo.