

UPSTAIRS CLUB

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An Educational Group

We were very impressed by the Chicago papers coverage of Mary Garden after her death in Scotland. Having danced in many of her Operas and with many personal memories of this great artist, her going was like losing a very dear friend. You have all heard both Mr. Stone and myself glorify Mary Garden many times in our classes and just in case you thought we were exaggerating, this is what Mr. James Huneker, the famous music critic of the past said of her - "She is a condor, an eagle, a peacock, a nightingale, a panther, a society dame, a gallery of moving pictures, a siren, an indomitable fighter, a humane woman with a heart as big as a house, a canny Scotch Lassie, a superwoman".

My proudest moment was having been chosen by the Chicago Drama League to introduce Garden at a lecture she was giving them on October 22, 1951. It was my very first attempt at public speaking, but I believed so passionately in all I had to say about "Our Mary" that it carried me through with flying colors.

There has been no great French Opera since she stopped singing. And there are many good reasons why her performances were so inspired; both to be in and to see and hear. It was her common practice to visit the Ballet and Chorus rehearsals and to make them feel an important part of her performance. Then she would jolly up the stage crew and at performances all did their best working with a warm hearted unity.

January the 8th the Ballet Guild gave an especially pleasant party for JOHN KRIZA upon his formal retirement from the stage. Hard to believe (from one who is much older) but it has been in his mind for some time. All his old teachers, dance and otherwise, attended, along with other celebrities - MARIA TALLCHIEF, RUTH ANN KOESUN, ERIC BRAUN, and HARRIET HOCTOR. ANN BARZEL had a very large display of photographs of John in all his various roles and with the many dancers he had worked with in Ballet Theatre. A lot of water under the bridge since John danced "Carnival" choreographed

by BENTLEY STONE in 1939 for the Mary Kane School recital in Oak Park.

RUTH PAGE'S "Nutcracker" was the big howl for the holiday season for the kids. As of last year, it played to sold out houses for its 16 performances. SC alumni DOLORES LIPINSKI and CHARLES SCHICK were prominent among the star parts - as were MAGGIE SMITH and DEAN BADOLATO in the younger set. ANNA DROGOSEWSKI, TERRY KIM and STEVE PRIMIS were singled out by their fans in the school as "the tops". Among the snowflakes were DIANE KORF, NANCY MC CLOUD, KATHY PARKIN, DONNA EHRLER and PAMELA MULAC. Outstanding in the younger set of boys were RICHARD WILCZINSKI, and GREGG OSTER who had small parts. MARK TRUDEAU, and GREGORY and LOREN GORSKI were among the mice. Small girls from the school were DALE ARMEN-TROUT, JORENE HOLAS, LAUREN ROUSE, PAMELA JUSTICK, NANCY GLYNN, JULIE SIPAL, PHOEBE REDMAN, JENNIFER PHILLIPS and ELLEN FRIEDMAN. Twenty-seven in all from the school.

Three new scholarships were given at Christmas. The KAREN & DEBBY KRYCH scholarship was given to LAUREN ROUSE and JORENE HOLAS. The ZACHARIS scholarship was given to MAGGIE SMITH. Scholarships are never given in our school to entice students from other schools. They are always given to students who have been in our own school for sometime and whose talent we know.

The holidays always bring in former students who are away at school or working in another area. Among these were ELIZABETH WINEBERG, BUD TYGETT, CHAUNCE CONKLIN, POLLY HARDING, JOAN EHEMANN, BENTLEY STONE, and SUE BROWN. RANDI SCHULTZ and JO JEAN RETRUM were in for a week to study and left bemoaning that the summer is so far off.

A note from MYRL LAURENCE told all about PHYLLIS GAMBOE'S wedding on the 26th of December. . . "Phyllis's wedding was so lovely, one had to be there to see and feel the happiness. She was beautiful and the small church was just the right

setting. The reception was held in the Gym about which Phyllis had worried. Your Chicago kids and parents took care of that. Christmas trees decorated with paper poinsettas and icicles glowed in back of the receiving line. A huge homemade white bell hung over the cake. Dan bought thousands of yards of white crepe streamers. The kids climbed on pipes and beams and it was a picture. Janet hung by one leg from a beam to secure the final streamer. The wedding was huge, all the pupils came even mine like Elaine and Patty from New York."

The Christmas cards always bring in news from pupils in other cities. DEAN DIGGINS is working on his BA degree in Speech Therapy and is no longer dancing after a very successful start with the Madison Trio. ELISA QUEYQUEP is now working as secretary for the newly formed "American Association of Dance Therapists". JOAN PETLAK recently finished filming "How To Succeed" in Hollywood but still loves Broadway better. ALICE GALLINA attending Frederick College in Portsmouth, Virginia and teaching ballet and character on the side. CANDY HESS is at the University of Iowa studying in the Physical Education department and dancing as a side line. BARBARA MACFARLANE is at Marymount College and dancing. PEGGY MORNER living with MYRL LAURENCE and dancing in the Civic Ballet in Cincinnati. JOHN BRAVOS has moved to California where he is managing a business. BILLY ALBERTS writes that his sister VAL is expecting sometime in July and he is thrilled at the possibility of being an uncle. JUDY SODINI is dancing in Paris and MAURINE BYRNE is with her. JOHN NEU-MEIER writes from Germany that he recently choreographed a ballet to Debussy music for an experimental theatre, called the "Noverre Matinees". The title of the ballet was "Haiku" and I gather that it must be of oriental character. It was well received by the well known German critic Horst Koegler. John has an excellent creative talent if ever given a chance. We all remember his good work on the TV series - "Coventry Mystery Cycle". KATHY HAAS left Chicago with the "Hello Dolly" company. She landed a plum part as the maid in the hat shop - Minnie Fay - a combination dancing and acting part. The dates are finally set for our spring concerts at St. Alphonse

and rehearsals are well under way for that event. There will be two, Friday evening, May 5th and Sunday afternoon May 7th. There will be changes in the program for each date. ELIZABETH WINEBERG will return from school in Boston to dance again in "A Sense Of Wonder". The balance of the family will be the same - STEVE PRIMIS, MAGGIE SMITH and DEAN BADOLATO. There will be some changes in the group because NAOMI SORKIN is in Ballet Theatre, JUDY CONWAY in Sweden and MARGARET YELACIC dancing in Florida with a tour of South America in the spring. It is possible MR. STONE will revive "Foo Foo Raw" a jolly ballet to Strauss performed a few years ago. I have been working on a new set of dances to Mozart's Bohemian waltzes. There will be many new faces this year, so order your tickets early.

Also, do not fail to see the exhibit of photographs of the beautiful old Auditorium Theatre in the windows of the First Federal Savings Bank at Dearborn and Madison. It is a ridiculous thing that the Ford Foundation can throw away so much money and not be able or willing to give it to finish restoring this wonderful old landmark. Will someone please hurry while the McCormick Place is out of the picture.

THE SWOBODA-NOVIKOFF period at the Opera
By Walter Camryn

The most significant and productive period of dance in Chicago was during the Swoboda and Novikoff periods in the Chicago Civic Opera Company - from 1927 to 1935. Generally, little is said or written about these years, probably because those writing and in positions of importance at the moment were not a part of that period. Those who were part of it have been devoting busy years to teaching in various parts of the country. Teaching is a full time endeavor and allows one little time to do anything else - least of all write.

The position of the choreographer in opera is entirely different today than it was during those years. Today, the choreographer is subservient to the stage director and the whims of its

impresarios. They have very little to say about how a ballet is to be presented and often do not choose the work being presented. Dancers are used mostly in terms of staging and the fine art of the divertissement in opera is practically lost to the world. In the Civic Opera days the Ballet Master had complete authority over his work and his dancers and could arrange his ballet or scene into a charming interlude which always enhanced the opera. He was held in only by the space allowed by the stage sets and the tempo of each conductor.

I was privileged to be a part of those days. I joined the company during Swoboda's second year at the Auditorium Theatre in 1928. During his first year he had choreographed "Les Sylphides", "Spanish Caprice", "Snow Maiden" and a Divertissement program.

Vecheslav Swoboda was born in 1892 in Moscow Russia and had studied at the Imperial Ballet School. He graduated into the Bolshoi Theatre at the age of 16 and later became a soloist. He was a member of Diaghileff Ballet playing in Paris and London and later dancing with Ida Rubenstein at the Grand Opera in Paris. Diaghileff had considered him one of the four greatest male dancers of that time. It was about this time that he came to the Chicago Civic Opera as Ballet Master.

His opera ballets were always noteworthy. They were delightful gems using an overall pantomimic idea that gave a reason for being on stage; worked out with originality, humor, correct style for the production, and with interesting choreographic patterns. Some of his best ballet were in "Aida", "Il Trovatore", "La Gioconda", "Thais", "Romeo and Juliet", "Carmen", and "Faust".

His second year was to start out in glory and end in disaster for him. A disgraceful incident happened on the last performance of his "Les Sylphides" which brought about his resignation as Ballet Master. An inferior conductor had been bribed to ruin the performance by clique who wanted Swoboda out of the company. When Mr. Swoboda appeared on stage to dance the mazurka, the conductor deliberately

played his variation so slow that it was impossible to dance. This humiliation to the ballet went on into the performance until Theodore Kosloff, himself a famous Russian dancer, could bear it no longer - he stood in the audience and shouted "Presto" at the conductor, who begrudgingly pulled up the tempo. No self respecting artist could take this treatment and it was the Opera's loss when he left for New York where he opened his school which became so very well known.

I have always regretted the fact that I did not have a chance to work and study more with Swoboda. As a teacher he was tremendously inspiring and his classes were what modern teachers (mostly New York ones) term smugly choreographic. In this respect every good teacher I ever had was choreographic. They are the teachers that give the student the full meaning of dance. The pedagogic teachers contrive their dull classes laboring under the illusion that they are developing strength, technique and endurance; but completely ignoring the fact that dance is an art form and not merely gymnastics.

Swoboda was a very large man, beautifully proportioned and possessor of a plastic movement quality seldom seen in the male dancers of today. His style was extremely masculine but with the soft easy grace of a well trained animal. The only dancer today who seems to fit in with my memories of Swoboda is Soloviev - except that Swoboda was larger. His class work was technically difficult with each combination a pleasantly designed etude. In rehearsal when he was creating he possessed a never ending flow of steps, plastically designed poses, an infinite variety of port de bras, unusual stage patterns along with a highly developed sense of period and the use of motivated pantomime.

After Swoboda's departure, Muriel Stuart took over for the balance of that season which was the tour. She choreographed two successful ballets for "Thais" and "Faust". Both ballets were

reminiscent of the Pavlova company. This year Polacco, the conductor placed the "Valpurgis Night" ballet just before the Soldiers Chorus at the end of the opera, and requested that it be peasant dances. It was popular with the audiences but was mainly childish horse-play.

In the company that year were MARIA YURIEVA (now with the Ballet Russe School in New York), MURIEL STUART (American Ballet School), JULIA BARASHKOVA (has own school in New York), RUTH PRYOR (heads a school in Cleveland), HARRIET LUNDGREN (now a retired teacher in Chicago), and many others to be mentioned in the next Bulletin.

It is interesting to note that the Chicago Civic Opera Company had produced up through 1929, 60 operas in Italian, 41 in French, 10 in German and 17 in English. During the 1928-29 season the company gave 134 performances in Chicago and toured from coast to coast in 12 weeks - playing 19 cities.

(To be continued in next issue)

TO BE THOUGHT OVER:

Every day is a fresh beginning -
Every morn is the world made over,

Susan Coolidge.

Self-renewal - so long as man is
capable of self-renewal he is a
living being.

Frederick Amiel

There is nothing so easy but that it
becomes difficult when you do it
with reluctance.

Terence (190-150 B.C.)

God gave us two ends,
One to sit on and one to think with.
Success depends on which end we use
the most;
Heads we win, tails we lose.

Anon.