

THE DANCE: MUSIC AND MIMING

Need of Trained Emotional Expression Is Apparent in the Art, While Rhythm Is Over-Emphasized—Current Programs

IT is a more or less common pastime to estimate a dancer's musical background, to praise him for his musicianship or damn him for his lack of it; but it is a rare experience, indeed, to hear any consideration given to his dramatic equipment or his grasp of the fundamentals of actorship. Yet these are surely no less a factor in the dancer's art.

Throughout the history of dancing there has been far more agitation over considerations of miming and story-telling than there has been over any musical aspects of the art. Music, until comparatively recently, has been taken for granted as a necessary incidental, and little has been demanded of the composer except that he devise suitable measures for the exploitation of the dramatic or choreographic ideas of the director. Even Mozart passed unnoticed in the glare of success which surrounded the performance of "Les Petits Riens," for, after all, it was only so much accompaniment.

The Theatrical Elements.

It was a desire for dramatic unity that prompted the creation of Bal-tasarini's famous Ballet Comique; it was a demand for a firmer line of logic and a clearing away of encumbering virtuosity that inspired Noverre's reform of the ballet; it was an insistence of a higher conception of emotional truthfulness that impelled Isadora Duncan to fly in the face of tradition, and Fokine to disrupt his world. And similar tendencies, though unvoiced, continue to lead the ballet, at least as exemplified by Diaghileff, ever nearer to the theatre, while the public applauds and the critics storm.

Perhaps to the purist the dance as an artistic entity should be as independent of the actor's art as of the musician's; it should confine itself to the presentation of visual rhythms in three dimensions. But such a theory, though conducive of creative stimulation to the composer of dances, becomes merely an intellectual abstraction if pressed too far. The ideal dancer would ultimately be something quite apart from the human and be seen as nothing but a mechanism designed to describe movement in space. Certain experiments along this line in motion pictures have been of interest, though they have scarcely qualified for classification as dancing. Even these, unemotional as they are, fail of complete abstractness through the fact that whirling wheels, traveling belts and plunging pistons suggest the production of some practical result apart from any beauty of movement or design.

Dancing and Emotion.

So long as dancers are something other than mechanical devices, dancing cannot be totally separated from emotional action. The mere raising of an arm, if only to supply a line in a design, involves some mental action and hence some condition of volition, which, whether positive or negative, connotes feeling. Such factors render it inevitable for the dancer to express some comment in his work, and in this comment to reveal himself either as an artist with something to say, or as a performer delighting primarily in self-display, or as a well-intentioned struggler, or any one of the many shades that lie in between these generalizations.

This revelation of the dancer's mental and emotional qualities is so complete that it is well indeed for him to devote at least as much thought and attention to it when he is composing his dances as he does to the costumes he is to wear. Because the emotional instrument upon which he plays is not as separable from himself as the concert grand is from the pianist, he is likely to overlook the necessity of having it properly tuned and adequately manipulated.

Miming and Artifice.

The miming of the dancer has undergone much the same vicissitudes as the acting of the dramatic stage, but the actor has something of the advantage in the fact that the written word affords him a more accurate guide than the dancer can expect from the less explicit elements of his art. Especially is this true since the passing of the old Italian pantomime methods from the dance. Altogether artificial, expressing everything in symbols, the traditional pantomime attempted not only the externalization of mental attitudes but even the description of objects and events. In its height it was of such elaboration as to constitute a highly specialized technique in itself; and indeed presupposed a highly specialized audience to grasp its significance, for many of its conventions were too far removed from actuality ever to suggest their meaning to the uninitiated onlooker. The decay of such a method was, of course, inevitable.

But with the destruction of the old convention by the newer spirit of realism, nothing appeared to take its place. As the revolt of Isadore Duncan was later to supply only inspiration and the spirit of release to replace the tangible physical technique of the ballet, so the revolt of Delsarte turned thought in the right direction but presented no actual technique to take the place of the old artificial method. In both cases, to a striking extent, there was a general attempt to pour the new wine of the free spirit into the old bottles of the established form.

Thus it is that we have been regaled by so many absurd systems of gestures in the name of Delsarte, and

that we see just as much stereotyped movement and artificial emotion from the followers of the modern dance as we ever did from their forebears. To Delsarte there was no horror equal to that of a gesture without a meaning; to many of his disciples that was tantamount to saying that the same gesture must always have the same meaning; or, worse yet, that the same meaning must always have the same gesture. The difference between this theory and that of the old Italian pantomime seems hardly to justify the trouble it took to produce it.

But if, on the one hand, there appears to be too little freedom from

sort of feeling is the right feeling, provided it is intense enough. Its outward manifestations usually consist of rapt faces, backward flung heads, quivering fingers, arms hurled about vehemently and breathing increased in volume as well as in tempo. None of these lofty effects is produced by such inartistic means as muscular action or conscious intellectual direction, but by an artificially produced frenzy based on nothing in particular except the desire to express one's self, and stimulated by music of a romantic or dramatic character. This type of emotionalizing results in a huge thrill for the performer, but it cannot be wondered



Photograph by Maurice Goldberg.

Grace Cornell, Who Will Make Her American Debut at the Booth Theatre on Oct. 28.

antiquated restrictions, on the other hand the fancied release from the tyranny of the orthodox can be nothing short of appalling in its most unconfined utterances. Its credo seems to be based on the belief that any

at that the spectator is frequently left cold if not actually a bit revolted. The emotional projection of the dancer is an extremely delicate matter, since the acting element of the dance art is not its dominant feature.

It cannot be simply an abbreviated realism or it falls of being either dancing or acting; nor can it be wholly a stylized concept without becoming lifeless and cold. It must be complete, compressed, refined, eloquent, but unobtrusive. If such results can be produced with less labor than ronds de jambes and cabrioles, then Isadora has lived in vain.

Grace Cornell will make her first American appearances under the management of Julia Chandler in a series of four recitals at the Booth Theatre on consecutive Sunday evenings, beginning Oct. 28. Miss Cornell is a Chicago girl who has spent most of her time in Europe studying and, during the last two years or so, dancing in various cities on the Continent. She has studied with Mme. Nesterovsky of the Imperial Ballet of Petrograd, with Cecchetti at La Scala and with Jacques-Dalcroze in Switzerland. Her debut in Paris last April was accompanied with considerable flurry. The programs at the Booth will be supplemented as in Europe by Frank Parker, a Russian choir and a balalaika orchestra. Mr. Parker, also a Chicagoan, was formerly with Pavlova, and has been seen in New York also in revue. His part of Miss Cornell's programs, however, will consist not of dancing but of mimed songs.

La Argentina will give the first of what is expected to develop into a series of recitals at Town Hall on Friday, Nov. 9. She will not be accompanied by the ballet with which she has been appearing in Paris this Summer, but will bring only her pianist, Carmencita Perez.

Ingeborg Torrup, though playing the leading feminine rôle in Walter Hampden's "The Light of Asia," will not confine herself to acting during the season. She is planning to give two programs of dancing at a later date.

Agnes de Mille stepped quietly into the Grand Street Follies for its last three performances at the Booth, where she presented her now well-known Degas studies. Miss de Mille's addition to the cast was brought about by the withdrawal of Blake Scott, who opens tomorrow evening in the rôle of the Dancing Master in Eva Le Gallienne's production of "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme." Miss de Mille is also to be a featured member of Adolph Bolm's ballet when it begins its touring season. She will present her own creations and will also dance in the ensemble.

Elsa Findlay will direct an ensemble in choruses from the "Trojan Women" of Euripides, in collaboration with Elizabeth Grimboll, the dramatic director, at the Women's Exposition of Arts and Industries at the Astor Hotel on Tuesday evening.

J. M.