

Such technical considerations are so intimately related to the entire work that they can scarcely be considered separately. As in the case of the difficulty of the work, the defect—if such it be—is one of initial conception, rationale.

The *Sonata* is disciplined even at moments of intense feeling. It seems inspired by the very concept of disciplined musical thought and feeling. Discipline is at once its meaning and its mode of expression. This is good, and to this extent one can agree with the statement of Aaron Copland that the *Sonata* is “a cornerstone upon which to base an American music.”* Discipline and integrity, both of which so characterize the *Sonata*, are indispensable qualities. In this case they have caused some others to be sacrificed. The work is, if anything, overcharged with thought, tightened beyond the point of freedom in its own expression, condensed in its incisiveness to a point where its communicativeness is hampered rather than helped. If a short story is condensed to a day letter, the day letter may contain all the essentials but the short story is bound to contain something—perhaps even an irrepressible irrelevancy—that makes it better reading and heightens its powers of communication.

“The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.” To a musician of any stature the price is not exorbitant; but it is not an end in itself. If a musician pays the price, he may justly claim the liberty. Sessions has paid it fourfold: he is entitled to fourfold liberty.

All of which must not obscure one's admiration for the *Sonata*: the elegance and tenderness of the *cantabile*; the fire of the *allegro*; the recurring moments of Platonic melancholy; the gentle colloquy of the voices in the middle section; the self-possession in the presence of musical realities; the emergence toward the close into a region of ethereal gaiety. The work gives so much and is prophetic of so much more to come.

Randall Thompson

LES BALLETS AMÉRICAINS

CALLING the new dance organization the American Ballet is much the same thing as speaking of American crêpes suzettes or American borscht. There is this advantage, however:

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the new group has produced at least one dancer who is unmistakably as American as he is remarkable, and an entire company, which gives evidence of an irrepressible native vitality, and which might in time shake off its hybrid airs to stand revealed as a spirited, indigenous troupe of dancers. It is obvious in every way—save the most important one of production—that those responsible for the new organization have set out to create something here which should be essentially native. Yet what emerges, with the exception of the dancers themselves, is European.

Of the six ballets shown in one week, four were set to inferior arrangements and bad orchestrations of European music. In *Errante* we writhed at the things that happened to Schubert's *Wanderer*. The potpourri of Godard in *Reminiscence*, Tschai-kowsky's *Serenade*, and the sentimental Liszt to be found in *Transcendence* represent the kind of music that I, for one, can no longer hear with any feeling of rapport. It is also possible that no one could have done more with *Dreams* than George Antheil did, but it was an unfair task to assign to anyone. *Dreams* was a completed work, among the *Ballets* 1933 which Balanchine presented in London, when it was set to Darius Milhaud's music. Antheil had to create to the dance, and to the décor by Derain and very possibly also to the still-lingering sounds in the ears of the choreographer. With mention of Kay Swift's *Alma Mater*, which can be dismissed after a bit of cutting as a very superior number in anybody's revue, all six of the American Ballet's offerings have been briefly accounted for.

The outstanding feature of this exhibition is the dancers themselves: Mr. William Dollar in particular and almost everyone else in general. Movement is far more immediately revealing than either music or décor. Every strongly defined "school" of dancing has established a style and quality of movement. The particular traits which distinguish one school or one style from another are in all likelihood derived from racial and nationalistic influence. In music, such distinctions are more broadly and less clearly drawn; there have been earlier periods when it was almost impossible to distinguish nationalistic boundaries. But in the dance, movement inevitably betrays every racial characteristic

Now what congruity is there between these young native dancers, whose style of movement is obviously American, and the ballets which they were given to perform? Mr. Balanchine's choreography has a quality sometimes approaching genius; that he is an excellent ballet-master no one can deny. But that his choreography—all of it—is strictly and completely European is also incontrovertible. Now Mr. Dollar, Mr. Laskey, Miss Mallowney and Mr. Loring execute their roles excellently on the whole. Their lack of style, however, is due to their conscious or unconscious lack of sympathy with the ballets they are called on to perform, with the kind of romantic preciousness which these particular ballets demand. The dancers have shown great promise; what they need for fulfillment is to develop in a manner more closely related to themselves.

The suitability of the ballet as a form of contemporary expression is a moot question, which need not be discussed again here. There is no doubt that an "American Ballet" might be enormously absorbing to native artists and to composers—but for any ultimate success it will have to grow simpler and healthier than the first indications of the present enterprise. With the exception of *Alma Mater*, which is hardly to be regarded as a ballet, there is nothing in its repertoire which in any way touches our lives or our times. We cannot expect—presto!—great works like the *Sacre* or *Petrouchka*. But why overwhelm us exclusively with the subject matter of the late nineteenth century? Why give us something puny where there should be robustness; staleness and decay instead of freshness and youth? The expression of fin-de-siecle neuroticism is remote from our lives—as it has always been from life. Why sponsor a new movement by celebrating an epoch, doomed to failure, whose artists lived in a world of unreality, where dreams replaced life and where vitality was not even a hope? The European ballet itself entered upon such a phase only after a glorious period of classicism. For the American Ballet to make its initial appearance in a state of artistic exhaustion, to decorate such a state with its vital young performers does not make sense, nor augur well for its future. It has begun at the wrong end. *Dreams*, *Transcendence*, *Errante*, and *Reminiscence*—these are what I mean—what

have they to do with contemporary artistic experience? Or with America? *Serenade* was better; at least there was a directness and clarity about it, and little attempt to force a kind of false "expression" from the young dancers; *Reminiscence* also was forthright in its appeal, but each dance so purposefully called to mind something that we have seen more expertly done by the Russian ballets, that the result was unsatisfying.

The young Americans who have worked with Balanchine have demonstrated by their extraordinary accomplishment, what a brilliant ballet master he is. It is now time for the creation of ballets to which the dancers are suited, physically and temperamentally. Whether or not Mr. Balanchine is able to fill this choreographic need is another matter. There are plenty of American composers who are interested in the dance and in the theatre. If they are provided with suitable libretti, they should be available to the American Ballet. Given the freedom which their work demands, they will impart a greater vitality to the ballet than it now possesses.

Last year the Ballet Russe offered us the "American" ballet *Union Pacific*; it failed in every department. Now it might have succeeded in France. Did not Puccini's *Girl of the Golden West* have some appeal for Italian audiences? But *Union Pacific* was not authentic, despite Mr. MacLeish's scenario; when the choreographer and the dancers interpreted it to us they spoke with a ludicrous "accent" and so we could not tolerate it.

In *Alma Mater* the American Ballet proved that it had been born and reared at home. If it will, it can depart from the weak, the unhealthy, the unassimilative. Then let it seek here for its materials, from American artists. The American Ballet will become an extremely interesting institution to the native composers, if it follows the path that it must follow for its own survival.

Lehman Engel

SYMPHONIC MUSIC; NEW YORK

THE effectiveness of Ernst Toch's *Big Ben*, Variation Fantasy on Westminster Chimes, given by Dr. Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony, was considerably diminished for me