

ject is warm and not academic. Unlike some German theoreticians, he does not scold his readers. Rather does he try to charm and seduce them; for there is tenderness – perhaps even to the point of fatuousness – in this book of theory. It all assumes an exactness of musical reproduction on the part of the performer that is compatible with the high standard of solfeggiation (if I may coin a word) which is so uniquely that of the French. And if we are amazed by the extreme religiousness of the emotional concepts we must also be impressed by the mathematical exactness of their musical embodiment. From one small section of the *Musical Examples* I quote a title: *Praise to the Immortality of Jesus, Ecstatic Chant in the Midst of a Sombre Landscape, the Celestial Banquet*; here, on the other hand, is a specimen of a rhythmic scheme, obviously minutely calculated:



The pseudo-mysticism of Scriabin and the no less pseudo-scientific exactitude of the later Stravinsky seem here to have met. Are these qualities invalid because they are quasi-pseudo? I believe not entirely so: for no individual, no matter how persuaded he may be of his own theories, has exactly found the truth for the rest of us; but he may, nevertheless, have indicated a path which is both fruitful and edifying.

There is a short chapter, with illustrations, devoted to birdsongs. Amazing as it may seem, this chapter is very evocative and stimulating along the line of possible new melodic developments. Messiaen quotes his own teacher, Paul Dukas, as having said: "Listen to the birds, they are the great master." Is this fantastic? Perhaps, but not entirely so!

There is a classification of Debussy's harmony of "added notes" – far less valid than the tables in which Hindemith classifies chords according to the acoustically persuasive strength of the various harmonic intervals; there is a list of apparently random chord progressions which might be expanded ad infinitum. All of these, inchoate as they may seem, are the celebrations of an active and imaginative musical personality.

The book will have its value for those of us who are mentally curious along the lines of analysis and classification. It is inspiring to note that it has been published in France during days which must have been difficult, to say the least. I do not believe that it will add materially to an understanding of the musical works of the author; these works must, and will, stand on their own. Its main contribution, it seems to me, is in the realm of rhythm and in the fact that any new musical approach must be stimulating to those of us who believe that the gates are still open.

Frederick Jacobi

### A TALE OF THREE CITIES

THREE new books, a little rigidly cast in Story of the Ballet form, tell us something fresh about dancing in London, Moscow and

New York. *Soviet Ballet* (Collins, London, 1945) is in fact a revelation. Miss Iris Morley lived in Moscow during the 1944-45 season, attended

the Bolshoi with passionate frequency and observed there also many visiting stars from Leningrad. Her luxuriant prose reminds one at times of Willkie and Ambassador Davies but this is no tourist diary. She makes us see clearly the morbid beauty of Ulanova whose "soaring, soundless flight" has the eloquence of poetry; Semyonova, the classicist, heroic almost in the Greek sense; the gay and extrovert Lepeshinskaya whose handicap of shortness robs her adagio of nobility. The superior technique of the Bolshoi, says Miss Morley, reduces the *Swan Lake* of her native Sadler's Wells Company to the proportions of *Goose Pond*. Russian audiences frankly prefer brilliance to lyricism – and are expert in their preference. Ballet criticism (still practiced in the imperial tradition by railway engineers!) is awesome and penetrating; she quotes from one Golubov and, I think, proves her point. In the creation of new ballets there is a continuous struggle between the romantics and the realists. And undoubtedly *Romeo and Juliet*, the Prokofiev-Leonitov production of 1940, of which we in America know nothing, is the supreme achievement of Soviet ballet.

The greatest discoveries however you make for yourself from the action photographs. Here the dancers are caught, often in flight, their positions flawless – the torso perhaps more fiercely outthrust than is the custom with us, legs broadly extended but not strained, arms sweeping out or back in magnificent gestures of power and the head held smiling and high. Time, one often hears, has stood still for dancers in Russia. It seems indeed to have preserved their freshness and strength in perpetual youth. I would

love to see them.

The *Sadler's Wells Ballet* (London, 1946) written and published by Cyril W. Beaumont is in the style of his *Complete Book of Ballets*. How much this orderly catalogue reveals about British taste. The company, now a national institution, presents five classics, three early Fokine ballets, and no contemporary works except by British choreographers – de Valois, Ashton, Helpmann, Howard (not Tudor). The photographs show the present extreme concentration on dramatic allegory. When you reach the newest productions – Helpmann's *Comus*, *Hamlet*, *Miracle in the Gorbals* – you are definitely across the line; dancing is melted down to theatre pantomime.

Elusive and personal is the *Borzoï Book of Ballets* by Grace Roberts (Alfred Knopf, New York, 1946). The title is not clarified by what's left out or kept in. (*Nutcracker* for instance is omitted, *Le Sacre* and *The American Goof* are included.) From the warmth of reaction – her pleasantest contribution – I take the real subject to be Mrs. Roberts' many happy evenings at the ballet in New York, principally at the Ballet Theatre. There is a great deal of documentation of works, dancers, the attitude of the press. Indefensible however is the cursory dismissal of nearly all Balanchine's repertory in one brief chapter – with the excuse that it requires the, so to speak, surgical operation of a musician. Not many readers of Edwin Denby's columns in the *New York Herald Tribune* will have forgotten his lucid statements on Balanchine, his illuminating portraits of the most abstract works.

Minna Lederman