

THE BALLET LIBERATED; FESTIVAL IN THE PALACE

A BRILLIANT adventure in any year, but a sensation considering the time, the place and the heart-breaking compromises imposed by war has been the three-week Milloss ballet season in Rome this last October and November. From the vantage point of 1945 and a brief furlough now being enjoyed in New York, I look back over two years beginning with D-Day, North Africa, "rugged," to a more peaceful recent interlude in Italy, and find this to be outstanding among Allied-sponsored entertainments. From Josephine Baker's hilarious jeep tour to the magnificent Palazzo Venezia concerts now being staged in Rome, all efforts to raise military and civilian morale in the Mediterranean theatre deserve heart-felt G.I. tribute. But for myself I wish to express special gratitude for the tour-de-force of this amazing ballet production.

All in all, a repertory of sixteen works was presented at the Eliseo Theatre by the British Army Educational Services, the equivalent of our Special Services Branch. It benefited from the talent and gallant capacities for makeshift of the English captain, Pdraig Mills, and of Lewis Aronson. Captain Mills (husband of the movie star Michèle Morgan) under his military disguise is really a producer in his own right. Most fortunately the musical direction was out of reach of the tenth-rate musician, de Fabritis, who still keeps his baton at the Teatro Royale. At the Eliseo it was entrusted to the capable hands of Nicola Rucci and Nino Stinco. Perhaps the orchestra may have erred on the side of anarchistic burps, but there was enormous respect for dance tempi at all times. The clamorous audience was predominantly Allied. However the surprised and delighted Romans also slid into every available seat and filled up the standing room.

Milloss drew for personnel upon the regular ballet corps of the Rome Opera, and his works were a compound of those he had staged there and elsewhere during previous years. But it was the first time in many seasons that Rome had seen any ballet in its own rightful autonomy. The opera management, below par by any standards, had to bend a haughty knee to Milloss and company. When I left Italy in December, a minimum of one ballet night each week was regularly scheduled for the opera. No more dance-handouts from *Carmen*, *Faust*, *Aida*. This triumph is still news in Italy as it would have been at the Metropolitan and elsewhere just about ten years ago.

As to the dance material available in Rome, it is well-known that dancing as such has not enjoyed high repute in Italy for several years. Hence the corps de ballet suffers from lack of clear outline and exactness. The triumph of Milloss' choreographic patterns over this not very malleable stuff is another sign of his extraordinary genius. The soloists blended into his productions were distinctly uneven. Program credits refer to Attilia Radice as prima ballerina; the best she has to offer is a certain harsh and shiny precision. Thus she was a pleasure to watch in *Coppelia*, an agony in the frenetic orgy of *Salomé*.

However, besides Milloss' own appearance as dancer, there were the great assets of the superb sister-brother team, Ugo and Lia Dell'Ara. Milloss has taught these youngsters all they know, which is a lot. Ugo has first-rate classic technic, with a particularly fine *batterie*. His *entrechats six* are a clean *six*, always preferable to a sloppy *huit*. And his most advanced technical feat, the *cabriole volé*, is executed with a rigidity that reminds one of Youskevitch. This compelling wiriness is occasionally over-stressed, but it will certainly be tempered before he's twenty-two. Dancing a profusion of roles has given him great stage presence. His sister Lia will, I am certain, make dance history. She has monumental "bite" or outline, with a suggestion of baroque sculpture. She has also a special genius for folk and racial character dance. She can be seductive, demoniac, semi-pathological, and should be wonderful for any surrealist brews within the coming decade.

Milloss as a dancer has a long, rich background both in ballet and modern training. He now limits himself to the more mimetic and narrative roles, infusing them most properly with the expressionism of von Laban and the German school. He rises far beyond the Jooss level or that of Kreutzberg, in maturity and decisive portraiture. What seems so right about his dancing is the inevitability of any given gesture and that cerebral quality which lends distinction to his two greatest works, *Petrouchka* and *The Prodigal Son*.

III

Aurel Milloss succeeded Boris Romanov as maitre de ballet and choreographer of the Teatro Reale in Rome some six years ago. He was born of mixed Greek-Russian-Latin parentage in southern Hungary in 1906, and his dance inspiration was Nijinsky in *Le Spectre de la Rose*. First formal training was at Belgrade's Ecole Blasis. Later he studied with

Laban in Hamburg, Wigman in Berlin. Still later came an interlude with the Moscow classicist, Victor Gsovsky. At the Berlin Opera he won his first big appointment as premier danseur where he succeeded Kreutzberg. Then came dance tours all over northern Europe, and finally a sinecure at the Budapest opera where he successfully restaged *Petrouchka*.

Milloss' triumph with this work puts the whole controversy over re-staging repertory in a new light. His *Petrouchka* I rate far ahead of the Diaghilev version. It is remarkable, among many other reasons, for a step by step clarity, a rational even reverent integration with the score. It takes into consideration Stravinsky's special instrumental means of delineating the character types of the libretto, and is a signal triumph in holding the audience to the musical performance in a way the well-known Byzantery of the first version never did.

Gaukelei was the choreographic ballade which brought an abrupt end to his Central Europe period. Laban had done this work as a terse pantomime without music. Milloss proceeded to triple it in length and the composer Zillig then wrote a synchronized score after one view of the ballet. Since its theme was anti-tyranny, *Gaukelei* made Milloss one of Hitler's increasingly numerous targets. He did manage to produce the work in Berlin, but left Germany shortly afterwards for an extended tour with his small, international troupe. There followed Paris and Milan days, with intensive study under Cecchetti and other masters, the period in Budapest, and then the creation of *Aeneas* (Roussel score) and other works at the San Carlo in Naples.

In the six years he has been in Rome, Milloss has created twenty-six new works for the opera, and for various Florentine May Festivals. On the strength of these successes he was invited to La Scala to create three ballets - a neo-classic *Amphion*, involving Valery, Honegger and de Chirico; *Visione* (Chopin, Pick-Mangiagalli, Benois) and finally *The Wonderful Mandarin*. This latter production made political as well as art history. With its score by Bartok, libretto by Emil Lengyel and costumes and décor by Prampolini, its scheduled appearance invited a storm of Fascist abuse which continued during and after the opening, Farinacci leading the anti-"modern," anti-Semitic, anti-"shocking" attacks. Milloss refused to produce the ballets without Lengyel, refused to puritanize the script and came out of the battle the winner.

This fall in Rome, Milloss presented, besides *Petrouchka*, *The Prodigal Son*, *Bolero*, *Caprice* (a surrealist sketch to two short Stravinsky

suites), by all odds his four most outstanding choreographic achievements. Also *The Four Seasons* (from Verdi's *Sicilian Vespers*), *Coppelia* (which had fine moments), *Afternoon of a Faun* (danced by Filippi Morucci, after Dell'Ara the best male dancer in the troupe), *Don Juan*, (notorious for the blatant steal by de Chirico out of El Greco but one of the few effective sets even so), *Nostalgia Romantica* (to Busoni's *La Valse*), *Hungarian Rhapsody* (Liszt of course, with a very pretty décor by Istvan Pekary and strange, wonderful dancing by Lia Dell'Ara), *Follia Viennese*, *Boutique Fantasque*, *Poloutzian Dances* (again by Dell'Ara) and *La Giara* (Casella music to a folk fantasy by Pirandello).

Projected for after the war are several new works for which the music has already been written, and four ballets, sketched but without scores as yet – a choreographic epic *Vision Apocalyptic*, *Macbeth*, *La Dame aux Camélias* (surrealist treatment) and *Cuore Maschera Rasoio* (grotesque ballet). By the time any of these are ready for the stage I trust we will be ready for Milloss in America. He is the biggest dance news since Anthony Tudor appeared in 1940.

III

Rome also enjoyed, during and after the ballet season, an unbelievably rich *Autunno Musicale*, the radiant name given to a cycle of five symphonic and four chamber music concerts. These were presented under joint Allied-Italian sponsorship. It would be impossible to over-stress the heroic effort incidental to the performances of this cycle. Vexing at all times is the dearth of orchestral parts; monumental labors of filling-out and patchwork have become legendary in the Italian theatre of war. Then too there is the absence of certain instruments or, what is worse, the incorrigible tendency of the strained transportation system to separate a given musician from his instrument or to lose, then find the necessary conductors. These serio-comic factors are well-understood by the huge military and civilian public which nevertheless devours the concerts.

As war-time art, and particularly as propaganda the concerts and ballet performances have been eminently successful. The former practice of limiting concerts and opera to military audiences (justifiable at first for many reasons) has been relaxed and the resultant Italo-Allied harmony is impressive to witness.

On the Allied side of this collaboration there are Albert Spalding, Mario Braggiotti and Lt. Jonathan Schiller working in different capacities.

Spalding's war-time biography is one of the most interesting, certainly the most self-effacing. Abandoning his violin against concerted protests of both American and European audiences he has ground out a daily stint of script writing and announcing which reaches an enormous and hungry patriot Italian audience in the still silent north and in the newly articulate south. The pianist Braggiotti is all over the place, sometimes making program arrangements for the generous, daily radio music hours, occasionally playing the piano himself. Schiller, out of Juilliard and Harvard, and fresh from a bright civilian past of music lectures, did much in Naples to unscramble the confusions of libretti, from a box in the San Carlo Opera, thereby becoming the G.I.'s own Deems Taylor.

On the Italian side of the autumn festival, the chief support came from the present commissioner of Radio Italia, Doctor Luigi Rusca, and his co-worker Franco Passigli; the magnificent symphony orchestra was organized and directed by Maestro Fernando Previtali. The four chamber concerts deserve very special mention, for they were held in the Piazza Venezia whose once vicious rooms now house the exhibition of Italian masterpieces collected and arranged by the Monuments and Fine Arts Section of the Allied Commission. It was doubly gratifying to be able to see the two Caravaggios correctly lighted for the first time since being rescued from their dingy church niche while hearing, just to mention one concert, a program of music proscribed by Hitler. Conducted by the young and vastly admired musician, Carlo Maria Guilini, the merit of the concert was enhanced by its symbolic appeal. The Italian press gave high praise to works locally little known for obvious reasons. These included Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, the *Schelomo* of Bloch, several pieces by Milhaud, and a truly superb rendering of Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*.