

## DANCERS IN GERMANY TODAY

ALFRED SCHLEE

TWO years ago in Paris, Trudy Schoop and a group of Swiss dancers bobbed up for the first time with their creation, *Fridolin Unterwegs*, to remind us that choreographic humor still exists. At the time of the international competition in Paris, this work was partly overshadowed by the impressive earnestness of Kurt Jooss' *Green Table*, which, presented for the first time, took our breath away. But since then this *Fridolin* has taken on added stature. A real dance ensemble has developed out of a group of dilettante girls and their sketch has been elaborated. A second part has been written and new, winged music composed by Schoop's brother. Thus one fine day, *Fridolin*, in new form, was presented at a small Berlin theatre. The guest performance intended for a few days' run, was held over for weeks. And every time Trudy Schoop mimed her *Fridolin*, a light laughter hovered over the city.

What is the cause? In choreographic achievement the new group offered nothing unusual. Undoubtedly many dancers are better equipped technically. As with Joos, there is hardly any choreographic virtuosity. The point seems to be that here is a dance which appeals to us on the human side. Action, generally despised by the German dance, and frequently reduced to the too silly or stupid by the ballet, again assumes significance. Schoop has learned much from Joos and uses it skillfully.

Thus *Fridolin* comes timidly into the world and proceeds to learn all sides of it, good and bad. He acquires mastery with all the naivete of a healthy nature, and sees through the injustice of the world. Since he is good-natured, he does not become a revolutionary but a mocker. The brutal earnestness of the European bourgeoisie is at the mercy of his laughter. Sports, bowling clubs, singing societies, domestic happiness, sectarianism—everywhere

Fridolin seeks the essential truth and finds only convention. Fridolin loves—how devotedly, how tenderly—but family life, habit, kill this passion. Fridolin, at first so eager to conform, becomes no Philistine. He escapes and laughs.

And from the very first moment, this laughter, which Fridolin learns in the course of his development, is Trudy Schoop's gift to her public. She makes us laugh at ourselves, heartily, freely, openly. To suddenly find oneself ridiculous without being in the slightest offended, is wonderful. We owe her our gratitude for this new experience.



I have previously called attention to a period of stagnation in the German dance, but I may have been too pessimistic. Kurt Joos, who stopped work for a year, has again resumed activity and is preparing a new program. Trudy Schoop's dancing comedians will certainly not give us another Fridolin so quickly, but they are still to be reckoned with. The possibilities of the German dance lie apparent in these two theatres. For we no longer have the regimented studies of the ballet, and Wigman's expressionism is no more. There has been an advance.

Less definitely modern was the German Dance Festival which has just taken place in Berlin. Rudolph von Laban, who has abandoned his unproductive activities in the Berlin Staatsoper, is busy with plans for a new German dance theatre. For this occasion, however, he confined himself to presenting a cross-section of the German dance in an important festival. According to the announcement, it was intended to show to what extent there was a German dance and what had been its development in the last few years. It was unnecessary to make the first point. No one will deny that there is a German dance. The second was entirely overlooked by the program makers. The greater part of the programs depended on many old concert or dance theatre traditions, with absolutely no reflection of the political upheavals of the present. Those dance groups which have been long recognized in Germany made the most important impression.

Among them was Dorothea Gunther's, which gave the premiere of a suite, *Klänge und Gesichte*. This ensemble fascinated

us years ago with a *Barbarische Suite*, and by the sweeping elan of its rhythmic precision. Then we heard for the first time, the new sound of a high tension dance orchestra, which also satisfied us musically. Drums and stopped flutes, handled in a sharply differentiated manner, supplied an acoustic foundation that was contrapuntally interwoven with the dance. This dance orchestra has since then been refined. The wild rhythm has been subdued, and more place given to the melodic instruments. Stopped flutes, xylophones, metallophones, and bells, were retired to the background, and two instruments were introduced, the spinettino and portative. The general tone has been completely changed by the domination of the melodic instruments.

The transparency of a musical composition by Gunild Keetman, a pupil of Orff and Hindemith, was matched by a choreographic presentation and development for which Maja Lex, its solo dancer, was responsible. These gay, fresh dances are a pure play of form and so are most successful when they serve as expressions of bright joy.

On the same evening we saw the premiere of the *Frauentanze*, representing the first public appearance of Mary Wigman's new group. This was reminiscent of her first ensemble but we saw nothing new.

The work being carried on in the municipal theatres of the provinces is important in the general cultural development of Germany. The dance stages of these theatres are significant, if for no other reason, because they provide a fair means of livelihood for thousands of dancers. We thus find many supported and self-sufficient dance groups in a number of cities. Three examples were shown at the festival. Valerie Kratina (Karlsruhe) was an authentic representative of her Hellerau background in Brahmsian dances, and gave a lively interpretation of Casella's *Scarlattiana*. Highly interesting choreographically, and rich in conception were the efforts of Yvonne Georgi with the Hanover dance group. She made visible the polyphony of a Bach partita and staged Turina's *Erinnerungen* with action as concise as it was meaningful. Jene Keith, the successor to Joos in Essen, made a tremendous hit with Schumann's *Carneval*, in a refreshingly clear-cut, capable and lively ballet.

Solo dancers also appeared in numbers, Palucca giving us worthy performances, the rising Alexander von Swaine with Alice Uhlen, in an individual and charming dance, *Caprichos*, after Goya, and, among the lesser lights, Karl Bergeest as parodist and the graceful Erika Lindner. Harold Kreutzberg, our most splendid dancer, triumphed over all. Then there were innumerable group and solo dances by known and unknown dancers.

But Joos is now living in England and Schoop is Swiss; on this account they could not be included in the festival. There were others missing who are indissolubly linked with the German dance. Above all, what we missed most was a new discovery. The German dance festivals demonstrated—even with the omission of important testimony—only what was already known. We were entitled, however, to expect more.