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## SR REVIEWS

# Dance

## Divine Clown And Other Dance Winners

BY WALTER TERRY

Maurice Béjart, one of the most controversial choreographers today, prefers arenas, circuses, and gardens to opera houses or theaters. Recently his Ballet of the 20th Century (the official dance company of the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels) came to New York City's vast Felt Forum in the even vaster Madison Square Garden to show us Béjart's newest spectacle, *Nijinsky, Clown of God*, a production involving ninety performers, giant puppets and masks, an incredible array of lights, ramps, hundreds of costumes, three Crucifixion-style crosses, music ranging from Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* to electronic sounds, and an amplified voice declaiming words written by Nijinsky during his years of madness.

The ballet, if that's what it is, is a fantasia based on the career of the great dancer and a psychological exploration of a tormented being who fled the protective relationship with the master impresario of the Ballets Russes, Sergei Diaghilev, for love of a woman, marriage, insanity—and the end of his career.

If you go for tasteful and imaginative steps or skillful *enchainments* in ballet, Béjart is not your man; but if you permit yourself to be overwhelmed by spectacle and find fascination in the relating of sensual physicalities to the tortured spirit of man himself, Béjart has a message for you. He reaches the applauding, cheering young by the thousands in Europe and America, while their seniors look bewildered or glum or even boo.

Attendance was light but enthusiasm high during the run of *Nijinsky, Clown of God* at Felt Forum. There was no disagreement about the superbly disciplined performers: about the portrayal by the nearly nude Jorge Donn of Nijinsky stripped to his very soul; about the four costumed male dancers who recreated the legendary dancer in evocations of *Petrouchka*, *Schéhrazade*, *Le Spectre de la Rose*, and *Afternoon of a Faun*; or about America's own Suzanne Farrell as The Woman.

I saw *Nijinsky* twice and I'm glad I did. The first time I found it visually striking but dramatically pretentious, with Act II going downhill fast. The second time it got through to me—or I to it.

Ballet of a more conventional, but nonetheless stirring, sort was to be seen in our nation's capital and on a coast-to-coast tour, courtesy of the National Ballet, based in Washington, D. C. The troupe, codirected by Frederic Franklin (an internationally acclaimed star of an earlier ballet era) and Ben Stevenson (one of today's most versatile choreographers), has never danced better. It performed without benefit of such guest stars as Dame Margot Fonteyn and held its own nicely. But why not? Six of its dancers won medals last summer at the International Ballet Competition in Varna, Bulgaria, and Stevenson earned a medal for choreography.

In the current repertory, aside from that old-time spectacle, *The Sleeping Beauty*, audiences are savoring Franklin's tender and lovely restaging of the Fokine masterpiece *Les Sylphides*; Stevenson's new *Bartók Concerto* (Third Piano Concerto), a beautiful abstract ballet that hints at love and nature, sunshine and remembrance; and *Harlequinade Pas de Deux* (Drigo), a virtuosic blockbuster and the piece that won Stevenson his award at Varna.

In New York, as the City Center Joffrey Ballet's annual six-week fall season drew to a close, a final premiere, *Sacred Grove on Mount Tamalpais*, came along to put a temporary damper on an otherwise effervescent engagement. The new piece is a semimodernization of those old ceremonies in which people gathered to celebrate love, harvests, rebirth, and fertility in general. The new Gerald Arpino piece is rock music-oriented, but it is nowhere nearly as good as his rock masterwork *Trinity*.

At the City Center American Dance Marathon '72 at the ANTA Theater, involving eighteen companies and two soloists, you might have encountered rag instead of rock, thanks to Twyla Tharp and her company in *The Raggedy Dances*, a carefree, often amusing, seemingly improvisational hoofing spree. And as for sacred groves and their cousins, Erick Hawkins and his fine dancers were way in front with such serene, pictorially satisfying rites as *Angels of the Inmost Heaven*, *Dawn Dazzled Door*, and *Classic Kite Tails*. □

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# Music

## Composers Argento, Kolb, Tippett, and Gluck

BY IRVING KOLODIN

Is there a charm in chimes? Can a tape recorder function in a musical ensemble? What are the chances of an English symphony born in 1945 or a German opera dating from 1775 being considered "new" in 1972? These are some of the questions inherent in a batch of recent offerings to the New York musical public.

Of the unfamiliar works, the most ambitious was *A Ring of Time* by Pennsylvania-born Domenick Argento. It received its first performance from the Philharmonic under the direction of Stanislaw Skrowaczewski as guest conductor. This was no random encounter, for the work had been commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra, of which Skrowaczewski is music director, on behalf of the seventieth anniversary of the orchestra's founding in 1902.

The reasons for Skrowaczewski's good opinion of the score by Argento (who teaches at the University of Minnesota) are not hard to isolate. Meditating on the interrelated elements of time and sound represented by the anniversary of an orchestra, Argento has evolved a score using that universal symbol of the passage of time, the tolling of bells. Full sets of chimes are arranged at stage left and right and at rear center, forming a resonant triangle around the conventional orchestra.

Allowing for the passage of time and the alterations of musical idiom since the Twenties and Thirties, Argento could be related to such a predecessor as the late Ottorino Respighi. That is to say, he has a considerable command of orchestral resources and rather limited musical invention. Like Respighi, whose creations include *Fountains of Rome* and *Pines of Rome*, Argento can make a sound-picture of such a statement as "remember me as one who loved all things, the bright and the dark," from Thornton Wilder's *The Woman of Andros*. He even can weave

into the texture his admiration for Gustav Mahler. It would be a worthwhile aspiration for Argento to combine some of Mahler's substance with his own mastery of musical materials. Skrowaczewski's program began with a vigorous performance of Haydn's Sixtieth Symphony in C (subtitled "Il distratto") and concluded with the Third Piano Concerto of Rachmaninoff, for which Alexis Weissenberg was the facile soloist.

The musical possibilities of the tape recorder came to prominence in this year's opening concert by The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, in Alice Tully Hall. Composer Barbara Kolb has utilized, in a work called *Soundings*, a prerecorded tape as the twelfth participant in a double sextet based on a string quartet, and associated wind instruments (plus harp and chimes). The double meaning of the title relates to vibrations in general and particularly to their use in charting ("sounding") the subsurface depths of an ocean.

Miss Kolb has woven the capacity of the tape recorder to sustain an ostinato sound into a tone texture of remarkable imagery and vibrational appeal. Some of the supporting sound could, doubtless, be provided by an organ, but organs are not always available in spaces suited for the performance of chamber music. As monitored by conductor Gunther Schuller, the "live" and the recorded efforts were artfully interrelated. He could not, unfortunately, control the tape sound distributed in the auditorium through speakers on the balcony level. At my listening post near one, the ostinato was much more audible than the structure it was supporting.

In 1945, long before he was knighted, Michael Tippett wrote a symphony that was performed by the Liverpool Philharmonic under the direction of the late Sir Malcolm Sargent. It had its first American performance in Carnegie Hall during the recent visit of The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in a concert directed by guest conductor Lawrence Foster. The time lag would not strike one as excessive for the introduction of an English work to America. What is more surprising is that it had its first London performance as recently as 1970, under the direction of the same American-born Foster.