

For the Royal, a Matter of Morale

By CLIVE BARNES

LONDON.

IT is curious that after four decades of quiet growth and development Britain's Royal Ballet should suddenly have become so controversial. Talking with people in London—critics, a few dancers, civilian audience members and the like—there seem to be certain fears for the company's future, fears that more than reflect those that were in evidence in New York when the company visited the Metropolitan Opera House this spring. I think the fears are exaggerated but not necessarily groundless.

The Royal Ballet was founded in 1931 by Ninette de Valois, who directed it until handing it over to her associate director, Frederick Ashton, in 1963. Ashton, in turn, handed over the reins to the present director, Kenneth MacMillan, just about two years ago. There was a continuity between the directorships of de Valois and Ashton that was bound to be lost whoever became the third director. Both de Valois and Ashton had nurtured the company since its swaddling days, while the newcomer would have known the company only in its comparatively lusty youth. This gave MacMillan a certain difficulty in credibility, both inside and outside the company. Perhaps only Michael Somes could have maintained the older tradition, but the decision was clearly made that the director of the company should also be its principal choreographer. That decision may not have been totally wise.

The morale of the company does not seem at all good. Dancers are malcontents by nature—so would you be if you had to work their hours—but disaffection, at least to my careful ears and eyes, seems too widespread to be entirely disregarded. The company has changed.

Probably this loss of morale is a temporary thing. Most institutions tend toward the conservative, and large

state ballet companies are no exception at all. MacMillan and his associate director, Peter Wright, have made many changes in the company's organization, and MacMillan in particular seems to delegate, quite justifiably, things—such as rehearsals—that his predecessors busied themselves with. He also, understandably and indeed inevitably, lacks their special paternalistic attitude toward the dancers. This has meant that he is a more distant figure to the dancers than was either de Valois or Ashton.

It does seem as if much of the day-to-day running of the company is now in the hands of Peter Wright. He seems to be functioning as director, although MacMillan remains as principal choreographer, naturally, and presumably has the final word on major artistic policy. This seems all to the good. I think Ashton might have functioned better had he had a Peter Wright to assist him. It was noticeable that when the Royal Ballet gave a London press conference the other week, Peter Wright made all the statements and fielded almost all of the questions.

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The statements about next season, however, raised fears in the hearts of some people, and it is in this area that the MacMillan regime will finally be tested. What some British observers fear is the gradual Americanization of the British repertory. Since MacMillan became director of the company, there have been three new ballets by Joe Layton, two new ballets by Glen Tetley (the second arrived last week), two revivals by Jerome Robbins and two revivals by Herbert Ross. Next season, the gradual Americanization of the Royal Ballet is to continue, it seems.

For that season it has been announced that there will be a Balanchine triple-bill, consisting of "Four Temperaments," "Agon" and "The Prodigal Son," and a revival

of Robbins's "Requiem Canticles." This is all very well, but it is not very creative planning—the Royal Ballet never dances these things as well as New York City Ballet does, though it sometimes tries to kid itself to the contrary. Admittedly, there is to be an entirely new production of "The Sleeping Beauty," the second in four years, and MacMillan is scheduled to create one new work for the main company and another new work for the smaller touring troupe, now called The New Group. Also for this second company are to be works by the talented young Dutch choreographer, Hans van Manen, and the ex-

Royal Ballet choreographer, Ronald Hynd, who is now director of the Munich Ballet.

This is fine, but somehow not very inspiring. The season may turn out better on the stage than it looks on paper, and, of course, if MacMillan gets his touch back and creates two really important works—and the pressure on him to do just that must be painful—then all will be splendid.

Whatever the results, MacMillan and Wright should be given more time. When we in New York next see the company—it is tentatively pencilled in for the spring of 1974—it may well be a very different company indeed.

Programs

AMERICAN BALLET

NEW YORK STATE THEATER, Lincoln Center. Today, 2:00 and 8:00; Tuesday through Friday, 8:00; Saturday, 2:00 and 8:00.

Today (mat.)—Swan Lake (D'Antuono, Kivilt).

Today (eve.)—Swan Lake (Gregory, Marks).

Tuesday—Les Noces (Everett, Prinz); A Soldier's Tale (Wilson, Tracy, Levins, Feld); Le Spectre de la Rose (D'Antuono, Bortoluzzi); Helen of Troy (Gregory, Marks, Smuin).

Wednesday—The River (Prinz, Gregory, Young); A Soldier's Tale (Wilson, Tracy, Levins, Feld); The Moor's Pavane (Gregory, Marks, Wilson, Fernandez); Helen of Troy (Brock, Denard, Smuin).

Thursday—Pulcinella Variations (Weber, Brock, Orr, Conover); Jardin Aux Lilas (Makarova, Prinz, D'Antuono, Young); Dark Elegies (Wilson, Young, Makarova, Kivilt); The River (Paul, Prinz, Wilson).

Friday—Giselle (Gregory, Denard).

Saturday (mat.)—Petrouchka (Smuin, Everett, Young); Intermezzo (Gregory, Nagy, Paul, Feld); Rodeo (Sarry, Orr).

Saturday (eve.)—Petrouchka (Fernandez, D'Antuono, Paredes); Pillar of Fire (Makarova, Young, Bortoluzzi); Etudes (Gregory, Kivilt, Nagy).

TODAY

VIRSKY'S UKRAINIAN DANCE COMPANY—Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. Today, 2:00; Tuesday through Friday, 8:00; Saturday, 2:00 and 8:00.

CHARLES WEIDMAN AND THEATER DANCE COMPANY—Expression of Two Arts Theater, 102 West 29th Street. Bach/Beethoven Program; Plausible Impulses by Paul Wilson. 7:30.

MULTI-GRAVITATIONAL EXPERIMENT GROUP—The Brooklyn Museum, 188 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn. "Air Dances." 2:00.

AMERICAN THEATER LABORATORY, 219 West 19th Street. "The All the Same Faces Affair," choreographed and danced by William Dunas. 6:00. Repeated Monday, 6:00.

BALLET PLAYERS—Manhattan Theater Club, 321 East 73d Street. 7:30.

SEAGRAM BUILDING, 53d Street and Park Avenue. Intermedia Theater Piece by Marily Wood and the Celebrations Group. 8:00.

MONDAY

CUBICULO THEATER, 414 West 51st Street. Tuesday & Wednesday: Anne Cleveland, Merle Lister Dance Co. (Gale

Ormiston, Diana Ramos, Marian Sarach, Sheila Sobel, Batya Zamir, Dana Wolfe and Louis Montes de Oca), Friday and Saturday: Works by Saeko Ichinohe, Diane McIntyre, Jan Wodynski, Kel Takel, Tropical Fruit Co. of Rochester, Betsy Weltzig.

ROD RODGERS DANCE COMPANY—Allice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center. Soul at the Center. 8:00.

OUT OF TOWN

CONNECTICUT COLLEGE AMERICAN DANCE FESTIVAL—Palmer Auditorium, Conn. College, New London, Conn. Today, 2:00; Friday and Saturday, 8:00.

Today—American Dance Festival Repertory Company in Emperor Jones; Asparagus Beach; With My Red Fires (De Soto, De Gange, Dong, Saxon, Johnson, Jordan, Knisel, Majors, Schor, Stevens, Strigales, Tarnay, Watt, Woodin, Zalkind, Ishino, Lamb, Clemett, Hedel, Hubert, Donovan, Levine, Regnier, Needham).

Friday—Alvin Ailey American Dance Company in Dance for Six; Cry; Lark Ascending; Revelations.

Saturday—Alvin Ailey American Dance Company in Streams; Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder; Mary Lou's Mass.

INDIAN HILL DANCERS—Indian Hill Outdoor Theater, Stockbridge, Mass. Dances for a Silver Evening; In the Mist, Saturday evening.

SARATOGA PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, Saratoga Springs, New York. Saturday at 2:30; The Myth (Sanasardo); Era (Alum); Footnotes (Sanasardo); Metallica Sanasardo.

BAR HARBOR FESTIVAL, Criterion Theater, Bar Harbor, Maine. Saturday, 8:30. Bar Harbor Festival Ballet Company.

DOWNTOWN BALLET COMPANY OF NEW YORK—Roberson Center for the Arts and Sciences, Binghamton, New York. Thursday at 8:30; Works by Paschal Guzman. Repeated Friday at 8:30.

VIENNA STATE OPERA BALLET—John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. Tuesday through Friday, 8:00; Saturday, 2:00 and 8:00. With guest artist, Margo Fonteyn. Tuesday—Estro Arguto; Romeo and Juliet; Vienna Operetta.

Wednesday—Swan Lake. Thursday—Estro Arguto; Romeo and Juliet; Vienna Operetta.

Friday—Swan Lake. Saturday (mat.)—Paquita; Giselle. Saturday (eve.)—Estro Arguto; Romeo and Juliet; Vienna Operetta.

JACOB'S PILLLOW DANCE FESTIVAL, Lee, Mass. Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at 8:40; Thursday and Saturday at 3:00. The Boston Ballet Company, director Loyce Houlton.