

The Future of Ballet.

By ANTON DOLIN.

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Ballet is essentially a sophisticated art and far too difficult and all-embracing to be made the subject of casual experiment.

The Camargo Society caters for a selected audience—an audience of members—but, so far, it has not had any pretensions to cater for the general public. On the quality of its productions, within certain limitations, I feel sure that when the right moment comes along, it will succeed in its venture if it can retain the same level of performance shown on four in-days and four matinee performances a year in an evening bill. However, if for lack of funds, or lack of financial assistance so necessary in Ballet, it has to reduce the number of dancers and engage instead an orchestra of thirty, two pianos, then, in my opinion, it must fail.

To experiment four times a year, as this Society does, is definitely worth while, for they experiment with a fine orchestra under a fine conductor; the ballets are prepared well beforehand and, so far, they have had the pick of some of the finest dancers in England to choose from. But change all this and something very different will be the result.

The recent venture of the Ballet Club of a two weeks' season in the West End hardly proved I think, effective in capturing a ballet-going public. Ballet was never meant to be presented with black velvet curtains and two pianos. Decor and orchestra are an integral part of a great whole.

Every element that goes toward the making of ballet must be professional, and, in order to achieve this, there must be a permanence, a concentration on one centre, something that isolated performances can never achieve.

I am of the opinion that there must be a definite quality of romantic approach to a romantic art which can only be discovered in a building well-seasoned with glamorous associations.

Incidentally, it seems to me a pity that the actual subject matter of ballet is losing its poetic flavour, but I am averse to inadequate revivals of exquisite ballets of an earlier period. To give a performance of "Les Sylphides" with only eight girls, perhaps, instead of the original eighteen or twenty-four, and to cut this or that little dance, alter this particular group because of the inadequate number of dancers to compose it, is to spoil a precious memory for those who saw it many years ago, and gives them a justification for saying "Ballet is not what it was."

We must try—not to fit our artists to the ballets but to find ballets for the artists at our disposal.

That charming young dancer, Pearl Argyle of the Marie Rambert company, could scarcely have been bettered in the *pas de deux* in "The Gods go A-Begging," although it is only fair to say that she was partnered and, no doubt inspired by that admirable artist, Woizikowski, but I should hesitate to trust her in, say "Le Spectre de la Rose."

Cannot we find something to take the place of the purely poetic ballets that have been given in the past? Let us stop reviving the romantic ballets of the Diaghileff era and find fresh inspirations in the works of Shelley and Keats and Byron. Amongst their great works there is an abundance of romanticism adaptable for ballet. Let us only revive the beautiful creations of the past if we can do them as well as they have already been done. Except in very rare

instances, such as the one I have quoted in a previous paragraph, I consider this a practical impossibility. Amusing or bizarre items certainly add piquancy to a programme, but without the romantic attraction as well, I do not think that Ballet can regain its former full glories.

In the efforts now being made to establish Ballet at the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells, you have ready-made a permanent centre, an intelligent and cultured audience, a definite "atmosphere," an orchestra under one of the two Englishmen who wrote for the master-mind of Russian Ballet, a hard-working and enthusiastic company headed by an extremely clever person—Ninette de Valois.

In more ways than one I have a sincere admiration for her. She knows what she wants, and sooner or later, she is going to get it a hundred per cent. I admire her for realising that with the company at her disposal and her own personal style of dancing she cannot hope to make a success of her venture by reviving adequately any of the Diaghileff ballets. Therefore, her task has been even more difficult, for she has had to create an audience entirely on her own work and with no name attraction, so far as a well-known ballet is concerned. It is useless to deny that to advertise such famous ballets as "Les Sylphides," "Le Lac des Cygnes" and "Le Spectre de la Rose" is undoubtedly a draw to the public, but in realising that she might disappoint her audience or those members of the audience who have seen these ballets performed by great artists in the past, Ninette de Valois has been very wise, and, in my opinion, deserves the greatest credit for trying to present ballet that is original and new.

She would be the last to lay claim to the tremendous constructive force of Diaghileff. Failing the dominating personality that was seen through his works in his choice of artists, painters and musicians, she has realised that the general public is always fond of seeing a personality and instead of trying to make her Ballet the one necessary object of her work, she has been clever and appreciated that to make her ballets live, they must be danced (not only when performed four times a year by the finest dancers in this country, but when presented before the general public), in the most efficient way possible. Sooner than present such and such a ballet with inferior artists to dance the important roles that have been danced for the one Sunday night and Monday matinee, she prefers either not to give this ballet at all or else to create again something that is new, suitable for the eminent little company that she has gathered around her at the Old Vic.

Because of the tremendous encouragement by the general public, the enthusiasm of the press, and, if I may say so, the amazingly spontaneous response I received at the hands of the public who comprise the audiences at the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells at the five performances I was able to give at these two theatres—performances given under strenuous conditions, for by the kind permission of Mr. Jack Buchanan I was able to fulfil by obligation to an audience at the London Hippodrome and at the same time dance at the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells; because the effort was so worth while and because of the faith I have in everyone concerned in this enterprise, discussions have taken place between Miss Baylis, Miss de Valois and myself to inaugurate in the New Year a season of ballet which will consist of ten performances, two a week.

I feel sure that the tremendous work entailed in giving such a season will be amply rewarded, and I look forward with confidence and great happiness to my next appearances at the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells.