

## Fokine Describes Creation of Russian Ballet

Famous Leader of Russian Ballet, for First Time in America, Tells of Difficulties Under Which Art Was Created — Convincing the Relatives of Dead Composers

FROM those too-rare and fleeting glimpses of Russian ballet, America has conceived for it a veritable hunger. An art brilliantly composite, it seems to have sprung much as a folk art, so intimately does it belong to the race of its genesis. Yet this is not so; much as it is the expression of the Russian soul with its exuberance, its rhythmic abandon, like every other art, it needed apostles. One who worked hardest in the creation of this art was Mikail Fokine.

For the first time Mr. Fokine has come to America, brought here by Morris Gest, and on the origin of the art we consulted him. Somewhat over timid in his use of English, Mr. Fokine prefers to speak in his native tongue, and being unacquainted with its intricacies, we had the adequate interpretations of J. Mandelkern, who was present, to help us find each other.

"Much as the Russian ballet has now been adopted and taken into the hearts of the Russians, its birth was a difficult process," began M. Fokine. "During the end of the last century Russian ballet, though superior to that in the rest of Europe, was in a worked-out, anemic state, because of the walls of convention which surrounded it. In Russia very few great composers were writing for the ballet because they despised its rigid and unswerving form. Of the great composers only Tchaikovsky and Glazounoff had written for the ballet, the former three works, the latter two, and for the rest, the music was of a very banal and poor order. And this was because ballet masters would say to them 'I want a ballet, and it must be composed of an adagio, variations, pizzicati to give my soloists a chance to dance, a valse and a finale in the shape of a galop. There must be sixteen bars of this, sixteen bars of that, eight bars of this, eight bars of that, etc.

"My conception of the art was of a very different sort; and I communicated it to the composers and asked them to write ballet music for me, but to write not by rote, but as they themselves conceived some picture, in their own mood. Occasionally, as in the case of 'L'Oiseau de Feu' and some others, I gave the libretto, otherwise they would take it themselves. With Stravinsky, Tcherpnin, the Ducasses, Ravel, Strauss and Debussy, I discussed my conception in the new ballet music.

"While waiting for the development of this new writing, however, I turned myself to the works of the masters. I devoted myself to the symphonic classics, taking such works as the 'Schererazade', Schumann's 'Carneval,' etc., to interpret. Hereupon, not composers, but the relatives of the dead writers set up a hue and cry. How dare I, they said, desecrate the works of the masters with the ballet; how audacious I was to connect the two. A great controversy was set up, the Fokinists and those against me.

"Working for me I found the composers who now saw freedom in the art of ballet music. With me also were the painters, such men as Bakst, Seroff, Anisfeld, Golovin and Benois, who now found a new field for design in the costume work and scenes, the former of which had confined itself to the short ballet or umbrella skirt. The younger members of the ballet school also became my followers. Against me, naturally, were the leaders of the old régime in the ballet, the ballerinas who had formerly been the stars in the old system and who, looking forward shortly to the customary pension, did not care to adapt themselves at so late an hour to a new school. Above all, however, my opponents were the relatives of the composers.

"My arguments were these, however. I told them that all arts were interrelated and that the boundaries between them were so vague as to be undeterminable. No one could set up barriers between them. The very composers whom they feared I would desecrate had drawn for inspiration from the poetry



Mikail Fokine Training the Ballet for the Bacchanale in "Aphrodite"

of Pushkin. Where shall the line be drawn? Homer's 'Iliad' and the Trojan legend has formed the inspiration for many artists of the day; vases of Greece are decorated with figures from



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M. Fokine and His Wife, Mme. Vera Fokine, Celebrated Dancer

the Homeric legend. Shall we say his art is desecrated because of that?

### Circle of the Arts

"To show how this art circle exists let me tell you of an incident in Russia. A certain painter, named Hartman, once saw a ballet 'Trilby' given under the old ballet school. Inspired by this work he painted a picture of it, representing some new hatched chicks breaking through their shell. This work was exhibited, and to this exhibition came Moussorgsky. Seeing this picture he was inspired to write his 'Pictures at an Exhibition,' and I, later, hearing his music, was inspired to write a ballet to it. How, here, would we have drawn the boundaries between the arts?

"At this time I was teacher in the Russian ballet school, and started my first creations for my students of the

ballet school. Individual artists saw my work and asked me to stage works for them, and I did mostly for charities. Imperial favor I did not receive at all at the time, however. Seeing this, then, the above mentioned painters joined with me in forming an organization, and we travelled through Europe giving my ballets. These included some thirty in all among which were 'Les Sylphides,' 'Kleopatras,' 'Carneval,' 'Prince Igor,' 'Schererazade,' 'L'Oiseau de Feu,' 'Spectre de la Rose,' 'Petrouchka,' 'Coq d'Or,' 'Legend de Joseph,' etc. Our success was phenomenal. Even in Germany, where the press had assailed me for daring to use Schumann, the appearance of our ballets dispelled all such enmity and we received only praise. Then, the Czar, seeing our success, recalled me, and my ballets in Russia began.

"Since the Revolution, however, the work has discontinued. I myself since that time have developed also a new field of the art,—I have longed for a more intimate type of dancing. Somewhat like the composer, who having done orchestral work with its mass and force, longs to write chamber music, where each part exhibits individual beauties, so I wish now to develop the plastic of the individual. In my ballet, the audience was formerly too wont to look at the mass expression and the brilliancy, now each gesture, each movement, must mean something to them. For this reason, in the last few years, I have written ballets just for my wife and myself and we have been dancing in them throughout Europe, with much success.

"My wife, Mme. Vera Fokina, has been my only assistant through the years. Also a student at the Imperial Russian school she was my pupil there, and as soon as she was graduated we married. Although she has not helped in the creation of the works, she has been their model. Everyone of the thirty ballets which I have written, she first interpreted, and after that I taught it to my other pupils. Most dancers specialize in one style of dancing alone. With Mme. Fokina it is different, she has worked in every style of dancing: the

classic, Greek, Egyptian, Italian, French and others, and possessed knowledge of every school. She has a great fund of material and a tremendously versified art. She has danced the leading role in twenty of my ballets appearing in Paris, London, Petrograd, Stockholm, Moscow, Berlin, throughout Italy, Germany, etc., and I feel that she is the finest interpreter of my work."

Asked as to what material he has found for his art in America, M. Fokine said he had found the American women very beautiful, having the Anglo-Saxon tendency to be very rhythmic, but lacked fundamental training.

After the production of "Aphrodite" for which Mr. Fokine has been brought specially to America to stage the Bacchanale and other dances, M. Fokine and his wife will give some recitals devoted entirely to the dance. The first of these will be given at the Metropolitan Opera House, on Dec. 30, and will be followed by a tour of the United States. Mr. Fokine having received many offers from teachers and schools, will remain here and conduct classes for some time. He has also brought with him pupils from Copenhagen and Vladivostok to continue their work with him.

In Mr. Fokine's visit to America, music-lovers have this to be thankful. Of that art, of which some choice souls have presented to us several works, we are to have another taste, from a very fountain head of its creation. F. R. G.

## DESTINN'S RETURN DELIGHTS NEW YORK

Beauties of Soprano's Voice Still Potent—Sings with Ysaye Orchestra

Emmy Destinn reappeared before a New York audience as soloist with the Cincinnati Orchestra in the Hippodrome, last Sunday night, for the first time since her ill-starred trip to Europe four years ago. A huge audience acclaimed her uproariously. She was heard in Rachel's air "Il va venir," from "La Juive," "Vissi d'Arte," which she sang as an encore to this, "D'Amor sull'ali" from "Trovatore" and some Bohemian songs. It may be said at once that the wonderful beauties of the soprano's voice are still potent, though not to the same degree as when she left here after an unforgettable recital in Aeolian Hall. The silver and gold of her upper register have not ceased to enchant the ear. Yet the middle register, always the least satisfactory part of Destinn's voice, shows its weaknesses even more conspicuously than heretofore, and for all the abiding splendor of the upper range the tones are no longer consistently steady or true to pitch. Further judgment may be reserved till the artist is heard in surroundings more congenial than the Hippodrome.

Under Mr. Ysaye's bâton the Cincinnati Orchestra which, on the whole, sounded ill, gave one of the longest performances of Beethoven's "Eroica" ever heard here, as well as the "Freischütz" Overture, a "Fantasie Walloon," by Theodore Ysaye and a suite of pieces from Delibes's "Sylvia." Mr. Ysaye played the first movement of the symphony at an incredibly slow tempo and for some undecipherable reason deferred to tradition by playing the repeat—a practise eschewed even by ultra-conservative conductors in this work. H. F. P.

## Greenwich Villagers Applaud Program of Old Scotch Airs and Ballads

Harrison Dowd and Allan Ross Macdougall united in sympathetic interpretation of Scotch songs and ballads at the Provincetown Players Theater on Sunday, Nov. 16. Aside from such household airs as "Ye Banks and Braes," "Turn Ye to Me," "Farewell to Lochaber," and other of like genera, dear to all the dour and canny folk of Scotia, no matter how many generations removed, Mr. Dowd sang four songs of his own, from "Shropshire Lad," which were given their first public hearing. O. T.

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