

NIJINSKY ALL THE RAGE NOW

NIJINSKY is the man dancer who just now occupies the place once held by Mordkin in the United States. This Russian master of ballet has lately been in San Francisco. The Argonaut critic rather vividly describes the dances—one of which was Till Eulenspiegel of Strauss. Evidently Nijinsky is not a narrow-minded dancer, for he had no objection to dancing to German music. Says the Argonaut:

"Till Eulenspiegel," with Nijinsky in the role of the tricky Till, opened the programme. They have given us in symphony programme notes a resume of the full meaning of this characteristic specimen of Strauss eccentricity. The story is a familiar myth in Germany. I notice that it figures in 'The Allies' Fairy Book' as a Belgian fairy tale, under the title 'The Last Adventures of Thyl Ulenspiegel.' But somehow the audience remained, as it were, on the outside while the tragi-comedy played itself out. They didn't know, many of them, what it was all about, and the really wonderful setting mystified them all the more. It was beautifully colored fantasia, a curious medley of mediaeval towers and castles all awry, and typical, evidently, of the wild derangement brought by the tricky mediaeval Puck upon his sober townsfolk. The stage was a striking picture, a shifting panorama of German street figures of the middle ages; for there are twenty characters listed, aside from the unnamed members of the ballet. Mlle. Revalles, as one of the three chatelaines, was rather lost in the trio, which, however, was a most striking element in the general effect. The three wore mediaeval head-dresses almost as tall as themselves, while their long trains almost doubled their natural length.

"Nijinsky, as the madcap Till bouleversing an entire village, did some of the loveliest dancing of the evening. His body looks overmuscled, and his legs too thick and bunched for beauty, but every little movement has a meaning of its own." Nijinsky's theory as a pantomimic dancer is expressed in his versatility. "One must be," he says, "as a changing chameleon in the varying roles one enacts. Like the 'coat of many colors' one must be prepared with shades to enhance one's meaning. . . . Of course, the dancing counts for much, but the idea must be seized. Its expression naturally follows."

Jane Molineau, writing in the Minneapolis Bellman, recalls some racy reminiscences of Nijinsky, who seems to have been a classic in Europe, especially Paris, before he began to be exploited in the United States. Miss Molineau describes the first appearance of the Russian dancer in Paris when all the world was gay.

On the first appearance of the Ballet Russe, in 1909, says the writer, Paris was stirred to its artistic depths. Here was something new, the expression of thought simultaneously and harmoniously by three mediums—movement, color, tone. And what movement! What color! What tone!

The quick imagination of the Parisian seized the inspiration, and adopted the Ballet Russe as a national institution. The nimble feet of young Nijinsky, the star, and the beautiful Karsavina, his companion in honours, danced new line into art. Bakst waved his brush, and the color scheme of Paris changed; and with Paris, the world. The effect produced

by the Russian Ballet in that city, where every workman is an artist, was revolutionary, far-reaching, and lasting. It affected commerce as well as art. The little manufacturer felt it as much as the great musician. It wrought a change in costumes, the dressing of hair, the pose of individuals, and the decoration of homes. It introduced new vogues in antiques, liberated harmonies heretofore counted discords, and harmonized colours long considered enemies.

The hit of the 1912 season was 'L'Après-Midi d'un Faune.' To the shrill notes of the wind instruments there wove across the stage of primeval green a bas-relief of human figures, uncanny in their reproduction of the attitudes and gestures of the Greek frieze. The central figure of this group held us spellbound. Was it man, woman, or a phantom? Could



Nijinski, the great Russian dancer, in "Petrouchka."

any human creature take such attitudes? Here was the apotheosis of line and harmony. We dared not breathe lest we lose a moment of the enchanting movement.

But where was Nijinsky?

There was no Nijinsky! There was only the Faun, the creature of myth and fable, whom all the writers have put into phrases, the sculptors modelled and the artists painted.

Draw Line at Strauss.

CONCERNING Strauss and his music a good story is told by a contemporary. It concerns Pierre Monteux, conductor of the Ballet Russe, no doubt, to acclaim the dynamic leader. This is Pierre Monteux, the fiery Frenchman who stirred up such a rumpus in New York when he refused to lead "Till Eulenspiegel" because Richard Strauss subscribed to the manifesto against France at the beginning of the war. "I am a French soldier," said Mons. Monteux. "I was released from actual service in

the trenches by Briand himself for this engagement in America. I am going back to the trenches. I say nothing about Strauss' music as such. But I will not conduct the work of a man who is the avowed enemy of my country." So "Till Eulenspiegel" had to be directed by another conductor.

Old Stuff in New York.

OLD music has charms, declares Morris Paul in the Theatre Magazine, and goes on to say that it seems as if New York has been oversupplied with ultra modern music in the past two or three seasons. At least the artists and conductors who make up the programmes of concerts and recitals have come to that conclusion, for this season everything points toward the past. Old music is taking the place of new. Revivals instead of first performances are the rule.

In opera as well as in the concert field this state of affairs holds. The Metropolitan Opera Company opened its season with a rather old-fashioned work, Bizet's "The Pearl Fishers," and the most important novelty offered so far has been Gluck's "Iphigenia in Tauris," which was written one hundred and thirty-seven years ago. To be sure, it has been touched up and to a certain extent modernized by no less person than Richard Strauss, but the spirit of the original composer has been retained to a remarkable degree.

"Iphigenia in Tauris" had never been produced in America prior to November 25th when it had its first Metropolitan performance. It was looked upon by general manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza as a sort of artistic venture, produced to satisfy the cravings of a few zealous music lovers for something restful in comparison with the blood curdling melodrama of the average modern opera.

Elman on Old Violins.

MISCHA ELMAN is to give a recital at Massey Hall, Toronto, on January 24th. Meanwhile, he hands out some genial advice about old violins to all such readers of this paper as feel interested in that subject.

"I am constantly receiving letters from various sources," he says, "about old violins, and although it is a physical impossibility to reply personally to all of them, I always try to communicate with the writers. The question of old violins appears to interest hundreds of people who are not violinists nor even musical. There is, of course, a certain mystery about the instrument that fascinates almost everyone, but at the same time there is altogether too much misconception and misunderstanding. My first word of advice to purchasers of violins is, 'Do not believe all you read on the label inside!' It is the easiest thing in the world to paste imitation old labels in a fiddle. Most old labels are pure fakes. No one but an experienced violinist can be sure of a genuine instrument. Do not waste time looking in pawn shops for a Stradivarius worth ten thousand dollars. Such things happen once in a hundred years—sometimes.

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