DELINEATOR
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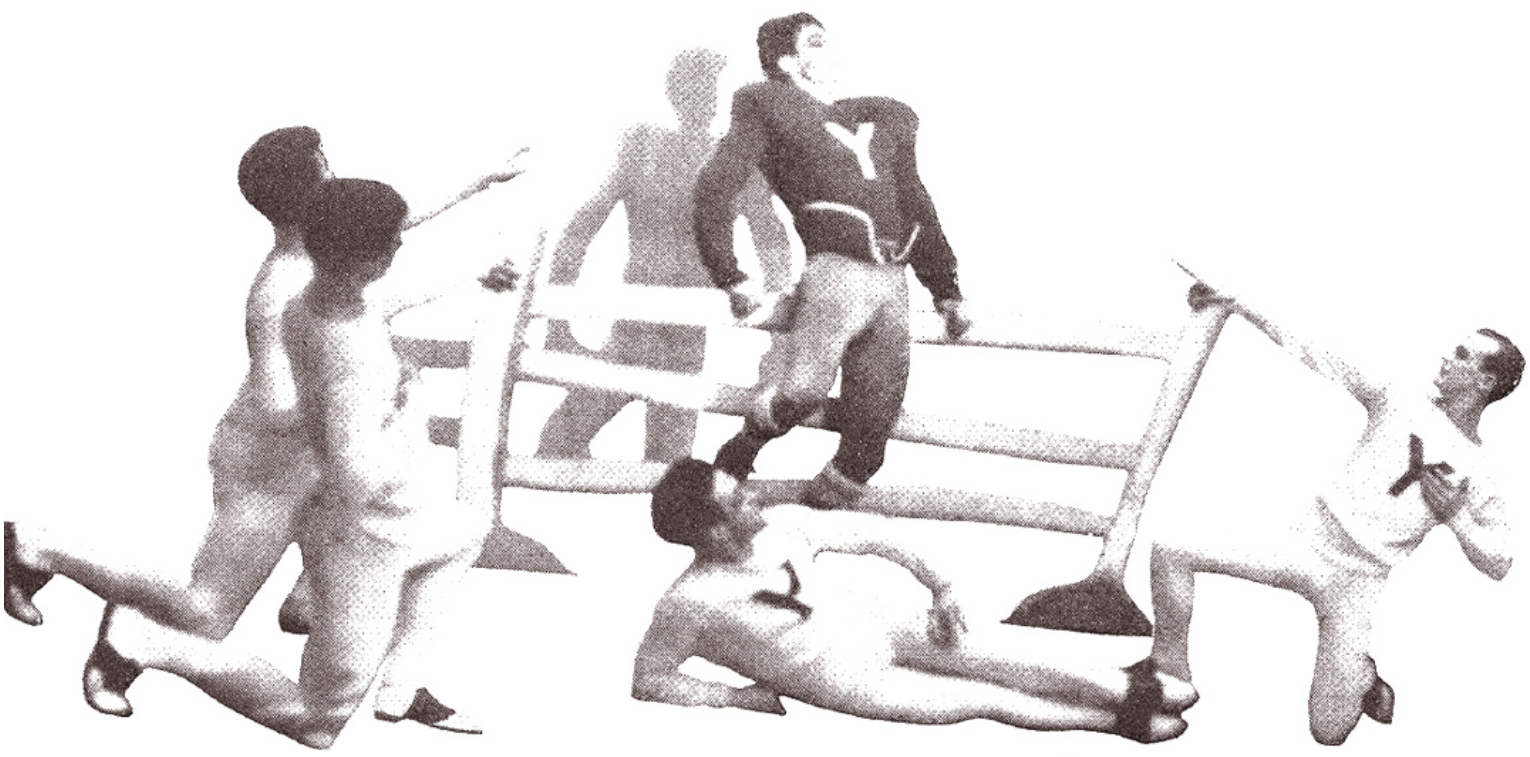
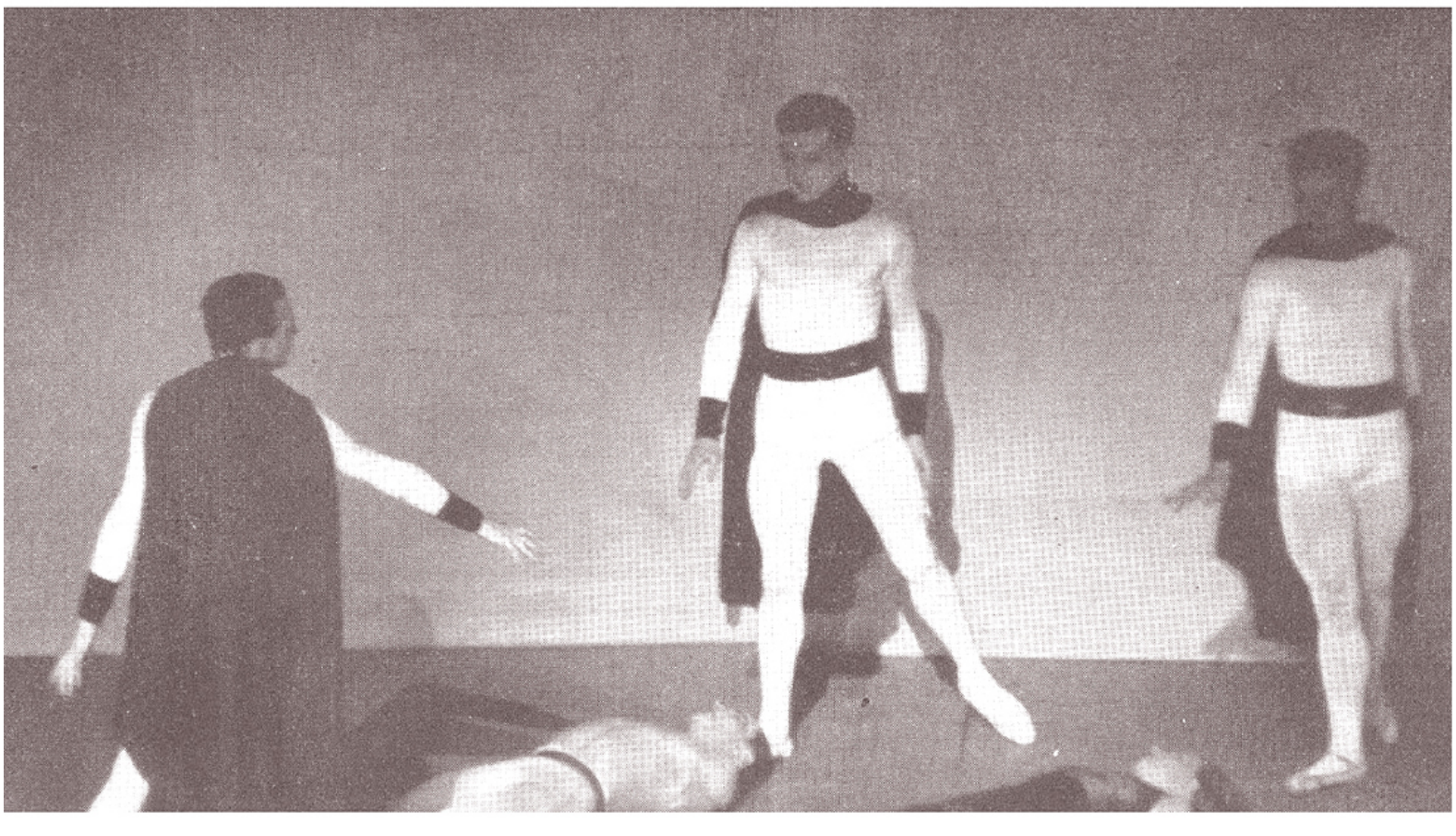
America on Its Toes

BALLETOMANES REVIVE A GAY NEW-OLD ART



Whether it be concerned with a college football hero or with the tragic loneliness of Franz Schubert's "Wanderer" (lower left) or with the light ecstasy of Tchaikovsky's "Serenade," (lower right), dancing, in the words of Charles Baudelaire, the French poet, can reveal all the mystery that music conceals



A NEW-OLD ART

ON THE fourth and top floor of an unprepossessing building which squats on the noisy northeast corner of Manhattan's Madison Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street, fifty-odd scantily clad young women and a dozen or more young men have been kicking, stretching, turning, jumping, posturing from two to six hours a day for more than a year because (1) they believe the ballet is the highest form of artistic expression, (2) they have supreme faith in their ability to express themselves in this medium.

They are students in the newly formed School of American Ballet and, if their achievements and fame grow at the dizzy pace set by their first year, they will in a brief span become a dominant factor in American art, just as the Italian, French, and Russian ballets have in their respective countries.

If your lay mind defines ballet as the pretty pirouetting of frail females in anemic tints of fluffy chiffon and gauze, you know not its meaning. Ballet, in the vision of the founders of the American school, is the one medium which coordinates painting, sculpture, architecture, music, into one harmonious whole. Furthermore, through the ballet, this unison of all the arts is brought into the theatre and thus made manifest to large audiences. Dancing and ballet must not be confused. There are many kinds of dancing—folk, athletic, ritual, religious, and theatrical. Ballet is primarily *theatrical* dancing, conceived entirely from the point of view of the modern theatre, of an audience seated, watching dancers on the stage.

On September 27, the American Ballet Company, composed of graduates of the School of American Ballet, begins a tour of art-conscious American cities. It will present the ballets* which nearly caused a friendly riot at New York's Adelphi Theatre last March. With no more ballyhoo than a formal announcement in the press that the first American Ballet Company would present a series of new ballets, the theatre was packed with an audience accustomed to criticize and applaud the Russian Ballet, the Monte Carlo Ballet, the Joos Ballet. What could America offer? As the curtain fell on the

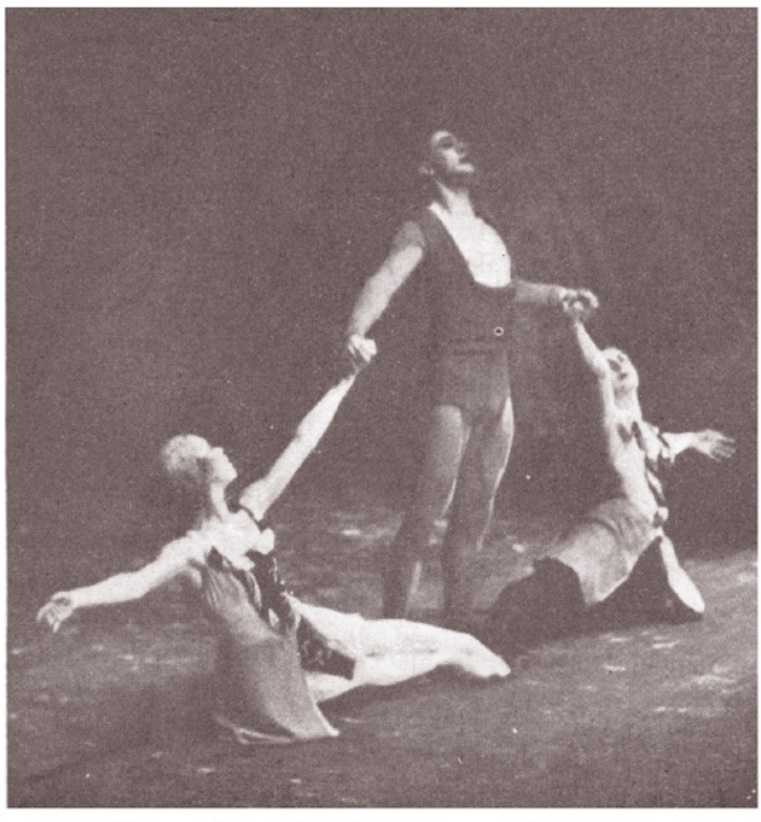
first number, a satire on American idolatry of football heroes, the audience cheered. Frenzied applause, bravos, a rush of enthusiasts to the stage brought to a close the first New York performance. The following morning glowing tributes from the critical pens of Samuel Chotzinoff, John Martin, Burns Mantle, Pitts Sanborn, appeared in the papers. One and all hailed the advent of a real American Ballet.

The performance thus praised, and the performances which will be given in about thirty American cities, would not have been possible but for two young Harvard graduates (1930), Edward M. M. Warburg and Lincoln Kirstein, both *balletomanes*. In 1916 when Lincoln Kirstein was nine years old, he saw Diaghilev's Russian Ballet in New York. Some children at that age decide they will become doctors, lawyers, firemen, aviators. Kirstein vowed eternal loyalty to the ballet. On trips abroad, ballets were his quest. At Harvard, in discussing painting, sculpture, architecture, music at the Society of Contemporary Art (he was one of the founders), Kirstein would hammer his point—"Ballet gives you all of these." As editor of the literary monthly *Hound and Horn*, he devoted many pages to ballet. As collaborator with Madame Nijinsky on a biography* of her famed husband, he learned that hard work, discipline, thorough schooling, and life-long devotion are essentials for mastery of ballet art.

In the fall of 1933 Kirstein found himself in Paris with Vladimir Dimitriew, one-time tenor of the Leningrad State Theatre, later director of a troupe of Russian dancers who were incorporated into the celebrated Ballets Russes of Diaghilev. With them was George Balanchine, for five years ballet-creator for Diaghilev, later under contract to the Royal Theatre of Copenhagen. Kirstein argued that America offered unparalleled ballet material, induced them to cancel their European contracts, join him and Warburg in founding an American School of the Ballet. With

* *Most popular: Reminiscence; Alma Mater*

* *Nijinsky, by Romola Nijinsky, Simon & Schuster, the tragic story of the world's greatest dancer*



At the left: Important only as parts of a rhythmic scheme are the three dancers as they respond to the mood of the elegy movement in "Serenade"

them as chief instructor, came Pierre Vladimiroff, Nijinsky's successor, Pavlova's last partner.

In January, 1934, the School of the American Ballet opened in New York City. The founders hope eventually to open similar schools throughout the country.

The object of the school is to train American youngsters in all forms of theatrical (*Turn to page 52*) dancing, mainly for professional careers. In the curriculum are courses in classical ballet, adagio, toe dancing, lectures on the dance, lectures on history of painting and correlated arts. School year extends from September to July. Tuition is fifty dollars a month, with numerous scholarships available. The school has no dormitory accommodations. Age limits for students, twelve to twenty-five.

During the first year, more than 250 dancers received instruction. Twenty-five of the ablest were graduated into the producing company which will go on tour this fall and winter.

These first recruits proved that American children are amazingly quick and apt in learning ballet. They are endowed with excellent athletic physiques; they are flexible, imaginative and exceptionally responsive. Unsteeped in ballet tradition, no awesome comparisons with feats of past

performers limit their ambitions. A sixteen-year-old student one day thought it would be fun to see how many fouettes* (quick whip-like turns on the toes) she could do. When she reached sixty-four she stopped, not through fatigue, but boredom. She didn't know that thirty-two was high standard for top Russian dancers!

Frankly borrowing the best that Russia offers, the founders hope that ultimately this school will be primarily an American expression. American composers and designers are important contributors to the first program. There is music by Kay Swift ("Can't We Be Friends?") and George Antheil (operas "Transatlantic" and "Helen Retires"); costumes by John Held, Jr. (*New Yorker* wood-cuts) and Franklin Watkins (first prize Carnegie Exhibition, 1931).

And then there are the dancers themselves, all American-born, many from foreign parents. Ten different American localities are represented. There's William Dollar from St. Louis, Ruthanna Boris from New York, Rabana Hasburgh from Kansas City, Holly Howard from Philadelphia, Charles Laskey from Staten Island, Eugene Loring from Milwaukee, Frances Mann from New Jersey, Yvonne Patterson from Honolulu, Mary Sale from California, Leyda Anchutina from Long Island.

These and their associates have worked hard to present to America a sample of the gayest yet most stimulating entertainment known to man. Ballet can be as funny as Charlie Chaplin, as inspirational as a symphony concert. The Russian Ballet's invasion of Western Europe from 1909 to 1929 resulted in the greatest innovation in music, painting, dancing since the Renaissance. It is the best medium for reviving what is most essential and living in the past,

for presenting what is most lyric and eternal in the present.

America has seen its troupes of self-expression dancers. These are heavy with symbolism, glued to earth with floor-hugging gymnastics. Ballet is light with leaps and pirouettes, gay with wit and satire, exciting with frank drama. Modern dancers reject national dances. Ballet uses them as it uses the inherent rhythms and gestures of people, of their machines, their occupational movements, their sports. Ballet offers the most compact, intense form of lyric theatre.

To those who ask "Can Americans make good ballet dancers?" let Mr. Warburg answer.

"Physically speaking, Americans make the best dancers in the world, with the possible exception of Russians. America, with its national amalgams can bring more to this highly developed form of lyric theatre than ever before. The form is capable of being assimilated by everyone. America is no exception. Just as the civic symphonic orchestras of America are among the most brilliant in the world, so does America offer the world the possibility of a great ballet."

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* *Other ballet terms:* barre, *or* bar, *a wooden pole fixed horizontally to the wall of the practice room, which serves as a support for dancers in certain exercises.* Chorégraphie, *term generally applied to dance composition;* élévation, *term used to indicate the height attained in springing steps;* balancé, *a rocking step;* arrière, *a step executed away from the audience;* attitude, *a particular position suggested by Giovanni-Bologna's statue of Mercury*