

# Ballett in Switzerland

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## BALLET IN SWITZERLAND.

By L. Franc Scheuer.

The great vogue that Switzerland had enjoyed abroad since as early as Rousseau's "Back to Nature" doctrine and Marie-Antoinette's dairy practises had reached its zenith, when Marie Taglioni danced *La Laitière Suisse* and the Paris Opera mounted idyl after idyl in the pastoral vein of Salomon Gessner. Shortly afterwards a general reaction to this sentimental attitude set in and condemned not only alp-horn and yodel, Allemand and Laendler, but Swiss art as a whole, about which it knew little at all.

From this moment date most of the difficulties the Swiss artist, whatever his mode of expression, experienced in familiarizing his work; difficulties that were greatly augmented by the linguistic differences of the land and by the peculiar situation of Switzerland as bridge between Germanic, Slavic and Latin cultures. On every side the artistic integrity of the Swiss met with ridicule, professional distrust or preconceived associations. His efforts were crowned with success only when he stooped to assume a foreign nationality, and in this case Switzerland gained no recognition.

A striking parallel might be drawn between this latter state and that of the Dance in England until a few years ago, but since it is with Swiss dancing that we intend to deal, having recently spent several months on Swiss soil, we will hasten on to it.

There is, first of all, no contemporary form of dancing that might be labelled "Swiss," despite the fact that both Daleroze, who is Swiss, and von Laban, whom rumour describes as Czecho-Slovakian with meridional antecedents, sowed the first seeds of their respective methods in Switzerland.

One of the most plausible reasons for this, according to Mme. Suzanne Perrotet, an authoritative teacher of dancing and gymnastics in Zürich and one of von Laban's early associates in the days when the present ballet master of the Berlin Staatsoper was living in Ascona, is that

pieces found were still legible the carved names of Agassiz, Nicolet, and Stengel, ensuring their trustworthy identification. The block had early quitted the crest of the moraine, and glided along its left flank down to the bordering ravine. Starting from a fixed point on the Abzwang, where the two great affluents, the Finsteraar and Lauteraar glaciers join to produce the Unteraar glacier, the positions at each of the epochs, 1842, 1884, 1899 and 1922 were found to be respectively 0.9, 3.2, 3.8, and 4.6 kilometres. These correspond to the following velocities: 1842-1846, 74.0 metres per annum; 1846-1884, 51.5; 1884-1899, 40.0; and 1899-1922, 32.2.

The diminution in velocity is partly due to the drive to the left from the middle of the glacier, and partly to the diminution of the glacier, the end of which was continually in retreat from 1872 to 1922. We have thus a continuous record for eighty years of the movement of this very interesting glacier. And the work of Professor Mercanton is only just in time. For owing to the completion in 1931 of the barrage work at the Grimsel (for the provision of immense electric power stations at Handret, Boden and Innerkirchen), and the consequent very large increase in the size of the lake now three and a half miles long, the end of the Unteraar glacier has actually been reached by the waters. Cliffs of ice twenty or more metres high were standing up directly out of the lake the whole time from August 19th to mid-October, 1932, the appearance being exactly like that of a Norwegian fjord. This attack by water has naturally acted fusion and undermining of the ice, no less than fifty metres of retreat of the glacier being the direct result. The ice cliffs were of a wonderfully clear azure-blue colour, and formed a very beautiful spectacle during the summer months. The old Grimsel hospice, so well remembered for its resonant sleep-preventing wooden cubel-rooms, has disappeared for ever, the lake covering its site, and a new hospice has been built on the rocks well above the new lake level. Besides the loss of 206,500 cubic metres of its snout due to the lake, the Unteraar glacier has lost in the last two years another 2,375,000 cubic metres of its volume. All this renders it the more fortunate that Professor Mercanton's completion of the work of Agassiz should have occurred before this large disturbance of the conditions.

Before proceedings to give the latest results of the official measurements, a few words about the new refined methods are due. And first as to *enneigement* and its determination by nivometry. On a lovely autumn day, September 22nd, 1902, three members of the Diablerets section of the Swiss Alpine Club, Messrs. Mercanton, Lacombe and Ramelet, painted the first nivometric scale in the Alps on the Glacier d'Orny, the realization of a suggestion of Forel in 1890. (To be continued).

the Swiss has greater proclivity for sports than for aesthetics, for the "Hosenlupf," let us say, which is a form of wrestling that consists of "swinging" one's opponent by the trouser leg, than for elementary exercises at the *barre*.

In his turn, the Swiss dance critic, M. Edouard Szamba, suggests that the political history of Switzerland with its democratic trend may have had a great deal to do in preventing ballet traditions from taking root in Helvetia as they did in Italy and France. Not only was court life, so salutary to the Ballet in these two countries, lacking, M. Szamba explains, but likewise regular theatrical troupes, so that until a century ago even the largest Swiss cities were dependent upon ambulating companies of comedy or ballet.

Nevertheless, a varied and ardent choreographical activity is pursued in these same cities to-day, stimulated in certain cases by the experimental, even sectarian, tendencies of Central Europe, but modulated often by the tact and measure for which the Swiss are known.

Centre of gravity of the Dance in Switzerland, Zürich, for instance, has frequently furnished Berlin with representative exponents of modern dancing, or in times of social upheaval, such as Germany is now experiencing, has harboured those in search of refuge or artistic independence. In the first group we discover the names of Max Terpis, former ballet-master Unter den Linden; Berthe Trümpy, prominent Berlin demagog; and the late Vera Skoronel; in the second those of Mary Wigman and the Sacharoffs, who made Zürich their headquarters during the war.

The actual head of the municipal ballet of Zürich is Hellmuth Zehnpenning, who evolved a great deal of theatrical routine, if not creative energy, as leading solo dancer of the Städtische Oper of Berlin. He disposes of a comparatively limited troupe, indifferently formed, insufficiently remunerated (where is this not the case?), obliged, as in all municipal theatres of Switzerland to participate in operetta performances as well as in operatic and ballet. These difficulties made themselves felt during a production of Stravinsky's *L'Oiseau de Feu* we had the opportunity of witnessing in Zürich.

A second troupe to present occasional ballet and to tour Switzerland under the banner of the Zürich Stadttheater is now being composed, partially of German dancers, by Zürich's well-known humoriste, Mme. Trudi Schoop. An interesting experiment that will show us whether the ballet-mistress of *Fridolin en route* — the work that gained Mme. Schoop recognition at the competition of the International Archives of the Dance — is capable of converting her talent for comedy portraiture into more serious channels.

The Mohr-Macciachini School, with a decided trend towards expressionism, is also settled in Zürich, while further we find Thunelda Walter, whose original compositions won honourable mention in the recent competition at Warsaw.

Basel presents a double and unexpected aspect with the ballet of the Stadttheater on one side and the *avant-garde* group of the Tanzstudio Wulff on the other. The former is directed by a new ballet-mistress from Mme. Eduardowa's Berlin school, Frä. Ruth Sendler, whose repertoire for the coming year includes such widely diversified works as *Coppelia*, *Gartenfest in Schönbrunn* (Haydn) and a new ballet by the Swiss composer, Pierre Maurice, *Tanzlegendchen*, after Gottfried Keller. The latter with Käthe Wulff as directress and Marietta von Meyenburg as choreographer specialises in fresh presentations of ballets of confirmed merit, such as *Mercur* (Satie) and *Le Bal* (Riet), in which Laban technique is reinforced by selected elements from the Classical School. Marie-Eve Kreis, whom Paris saw for the first time last year, hails from this school.

To this by no means complete list it is fitting to add the names of several movements whose endeavours have recruited sympathy in Switzerland. In Dornach we find the late Rudolph Steiner's Academy of Eurhythmics. Emmi Sauerbeck, long associated with the Swiss theorician of dancing, Gustave Fueter, has her studio in Bern. At the other end of Switzerland, in Geneva, which likewise boasts the Ballet School of Mme. Missol-Rivaux, Jacques Daleroze has centred his activity, while in Ascona may be found Charlotta Bara's Teatro San Materno, a regular laboratory for young dancers.

Dancing Times.

## H. JENNE †.

The interment of the late Henri Jenne took place last Tuesday at the Hörnli cemetery at Basle.

A great number of his former friends and colleagues assembled to pay their last tribute to the departed. Pastor Buxtorf, in moving words, described the life of Henri Jenne, General Manager Schumacher, of the Swiss Bank Corporation spoke of the great services which he had rendered to the Bank, and General Manager Hatt took a touching farewell from his late friend.

## CITY SWISS CLUB.

Over forty members and friends assembled at Pagani's for the usual monthly meeting, which was preceded by a dinner.

Amongst the visitors were Dr. Rüfenacht, 1st Secretary of Legation, M. Lardy, M. Desponds from Roubaix and M. Boehringer, jun.

The President, M. H. Senn informed the meeting of the passing away of a member, M. H. Jenne, the members stood in silence to honour the memory of their former colleague. The Assistant Secretary read out a report concerning the Annual Banquet, which took place at the Grosvenor House, on the 24th of last month. The committee was heartily congratulated on the success of this function, which was attended by about 300 members and friends.

It was decided to hold, during the months of January, February and March, three Cinderella Dances at the Mayfair Hotel, for which the necessary funds were voted. A sum of £5. 5. 0. was allotted to the Xmas tree celebration of the Swiss children.

## AN EXCELLENT XMAS PRESENT.

We have had the privilege of seeing the advance copy of a small book edited by M. R. Hoffmann-de Visme, entitled "Dieu Sait Pourquoi," which contains a collection of letters of great spiritual value, written by the late Mme. Hoffmann-de Visme.

In publishing this book, M. R. Hoffmann-de Visme has been guided by the advice of several friends, who felt that all who had come into contact with Mme. Hoffmann-de Visme, or known of her work in our Colony, would welcome an opportunity of possessing this work in remembrance of her.

We are very glad to be the medium of making this book known, especially since the proceeds will be devoted to the Sunday School of the "Eglise Suisse," founded by the late Mme. Hoffmann-de Visme.

The price per copy will be 3/- including postage, and can be obtained at the offices of the Swiss Observer, 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2. A few personal friends have already asked if this work could be obtained in a more lasting binding, and we shall publish in our next issue the price at which such a copy can be obtained. The book will be reviewed in our next number.

## AN APPEAL.

The Swiss Benevolent Society, l'Eglise Suisse and the Schweizerkirche in London appeal to their countrymen for their kind contribution in cash or kind to provide some extra cheer for Christmas for our poor. Clothing, and particularly warm underclothing, footwear and children's clothing are most welcome and should be addressed to:—

34, Fitzroy Square,

79, Endell Street, W.C.2.

and cash remittances to:—

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102, Hornsey Lane, N.6,

or 43, Priory Road, Bedford Park, W.4.

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