

# films: the 1969 moscow ballet competition

by john mueller

The First International Competition of Ballet Artists was held in Moscow in June of 1969. Some 78 dancers, all between the ages of 18 and 28, came from 18 countries to enter the competition and, after three rounds of judged elimination heats, 19 of them were awarded, Olympic-like, gold, silver and bronze medals, as well as cash awards in non-exportable currency.

Soviet cameras were grinding throughout the competition recording offstage activities as well as the performances themselves. Before the year was over the Soviets had slapped together a 70-minute, black and white documentary on the event and this film is now available in this country with English narration under the rather clumsy title, "World's Young Ballet."

The film shows many of the contestants, including most of the medal winners in action—performing for the judges on the Bolshoi Theatre's bare stage usually to piano music. It provides the only available footage showing the skills of such outstanding dancers as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Helgi Tomasson, Nina Sorokina, Yuri Vladimirov and Ludmilla Semenyaka.

The camera work on the danced portions is generally adequate though most of the sequences are shown only in excerpts and some are belabored by mindless closeups of fancy footwork. Interspersed with these performances are various scenes of the participants warming up, napping, rehearsing, touring, being massaged, gossiping, eating ice cream cones, worrying and lining up to receive their medals.

The quality of the prints is acceptable, though far from ideal. The print I saw had rather low contrast and under-articulated sound, suggesting that it was a "dupe"—that is, a print made from another print (probably several generations down) rather than from original materials. It may be that the Soviets have chosen to lock up the originals since this film of their heralded 1969 competition shows, in prominent action, the defector Baryshnikov.

Contestants were expected to present several classical numbers in the course of the competition. This meant an inevitable parade of classroom variations (there must have been a million fouettés but the film, mercifully perhaps, shows only a few). The dancers were also expected to display one "modern" work. Most of these were of such stupefying banality that the judges decided to award no prize for choreography.

The 20 judges, headed by the dignified Galina Ulanova, came from all over the world. One of them, Agnes de Mille, has written a characteristically lively and pungent account of the ordeal in *Dance Perspectives* 44 (other valuable accounts by John Barker and Beth Dean were published in the August 1969 issue of this magazine). Among the other judges were Arnold Haskell, Yvette Chauviré, Flemming Flindt, Aram Khachaturian, Alicia Alonso, Yuri Gngorovich and Maya Plisetskaya.

Participants in the competition did not generally represent their countries in an official sense, but more or less came on their own. The Soviet Ministry of Culture paid transportation one way—round trip if they were among the winners. The bulk of them came from the USSR and East Europe. Western ballet was singularly underrepresented due, in part, to the distaste for such competitions in many circles. For example, there were no dancers at all from Britain, Canada, Australia or Sweden and only a few from the United States.

**The dance contents of the film.** Since many may be interested in learning the contents of the dance portions of the film in some detail, I outline them below with information I have been able to put together from various sources. The listing may also serve as something of a guide when viewing the film.

1. Parts of the Black Swan adagio danced sequentially by three different couples: Loipa Araujo (a silver medal winner) and Azari Plisetski from Cuba, a pair of Hungarians and gold medal winners Francesca Zumbo and Patrice Bart of France.

2. Alexander Bogatirev (bronze medal) of the Bolshoi in a neatly delivered solo from "Paquita."

3. The young Kunikova of Perm in an impish solo.

4. Mikhail Baryshnikov (gold medal winner), then of the Kirov, in a solo from "La Bayadère." Though he is an even better dancer now, the extraordinarily controlled brilliance and the seemingly preparationless springs into the air were already there to be seen in this 20-year-old dancer.

5. Hideo Fukagawa (silver medal) of Japan in a soaring solo from "Paquita."

6. Peter Schaufuss (now of the New York City Ballet) and Anna Marie Duddal-Nielson of Denmark in parts of Bournonville's "Flower Festival" pas de deux.

7. Malika Sabirova (gold medal) in solos from "Don Quixote" and "Cosaire." Interspersed are some scenes of the dancer being coached by her

teacher, Ulanova—a rather startling disclosure since the steely, brittle Sabirova is about as unlike Ulanova as a dancer could be.

8. Yukiko Yasuda and Ishii Jun of Japan, winners of bronze medals, in the "Don Quixote" coda.

9. Alicia Alonso rehearsing Marta Garcia and Jorge Esquivel of Cuba in the "Don Quixote" adagio.

10. Moscow's Ludmila Semenyaka and Nikolai Kovmir, winners of bronze medals, in portions of "Giselle," Act II, and in a jazzy, goofy, innocent "modern" duet called "Us."

11. Two Hungarians, Maria Aradi and partner, in an ankle-caressing duet from "Spartacus" (Hungarian choreography).

12. Sections of a duet by Weber, as staged by Maurice Béjart and danced by Esquivel and Araujo of Cuba.

13. Portions of a duet to Debussy's "La Mer," choreographed by Tom Shilling and danced by two East Germans.

14. Baryshnikov in portions of the tour de force solo, "Vestris," that he recently revived in the West. He is also seen rehearsing the work with the Soviet choreographer, Leonide Jacobson.

15. Bronze medal winners Natalia Bolshakova and Vadim Gulyaev of the Kirov in excerpts from a romantic duet to Massinet by veteran Soviet choreographer Kasyan Goleizovsky.

16. Helgi Tomasson (silver medal), then of the Harkness Ballet, in a sparkling, Balanchinesque variation apparently choreographed by Anton Dolin.

17. Zumbo and Bart of Paris in extensive portions of Béjart's flashy and rather erotic "Bhakti." The duet caused quite a fuss at the competition and some judges wanted to give it an award for choreography, but they were out-voted by those who found it scandalous and/or ill-fitting to the spiritual Indian music it uses.

18. Finally, gold medal winners Nina Sorokina and Yuri Vladimirov of the Bolshoi are shown emoting their way through chunks of "Peace and War" and hurtling themselves through the variations and coda of the "Esmeralda" (or "Diana and Acteon") pas de deux.

**Obtaining the film.** "World's Young Ballet" can be rented for \$65 (higher for large audiences or where admission is charged) or leased for five years for \$750 from Audio Brandon, 34 MacQuesten Pkwy. So., Mt. Vernon, NY 10550; (914) 664-5051. The company also has offices in Oakland and Los Angeles, Calif.; in Dallas, Texas, and in Brookfield, Ill.

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aftermath of Tetley's "Voluntaries." This had Vernon and Breuer plus Coleen Scott and Vamos as the lead couples.  
Horst Koegler

## NEWS FROM ITALY

My Feb.-March visit home to Philadelphia caused me to miss the Italian premiere of Maurice Béjart's "Notre Faust" in Rome, and the central-Italy tour of the Béjart co., Ballet of the 20th Century, as well as Roland Petit's "Coppélia" with his Marseille ballet at Trieste. Bad timing, but unavoidable. I got back in time to catch the last "Romeo and Juliet" of the Fracci-Menegatti group, at Mantova; last, that is, until July, when it will make a return to Palermo, where it had such huge success in early Feb. Though the smaller size of Mantova's Teatro Sociale meant a reduction in the scenic pieces and a cramping of some crowd movement, and though the orchestra was just short of disastrous in spite of the relatively able baton of Enrico De Mori, the impression I got on the whole was of a prod'n that had been refurbished. In fact, choreo'r Roberto Fascilla, KO'd by a broken leg during his Feb. 7 duel with Romeo (Dennis Wayne), had been able to follow the co. on its March tour of Como, Cremona and Mantova, and had brought back to perfection some spots that had become a bit sloppy over the wks. I was particularly interested in seeing the

growth of Roberto Niddu, by now a secure Benvolio; of Jean-Pierre Martal, a sleazily feline "Tybalt, King of Cats," and of Dennis Wayne, a charmingly convincing, boyish Romeo whose moments of tenderness and awareness of tragedy are made all the more poignant by his otherwise apparently carefree exuberance. Carla Fracci and Lawrence Rhodes gave their familiarly excellent portrayals of Juliet and Mercutio.

Circumstances beyond anyone's control are becoming all too frequent causes for canceled to be missed in today's mixed-up Italy: a strike canceled the March 25 La Scala perf. of "Giselle" with Fracci and Vladimir Vassiliev, and the next eve., which was to be the last, Vassiliev was in bed with the flu. Fortunately, Paolo Bortoluzzi was just leaving the theater after a "Swan Lake" rehearsal, and someone from the administration caught him in time to send him off in search of an Albrecht costume and the show went on, after a half-hour delay. Of course, I still was anxious to see Vassiliev, and it seemed I would be lucky after all: The "strike" perf. would be given on the afternoon of the 28th, if Vassiliev was well. Otherwise, no Albrecht, as Bortoluzzi had the premiere of "Swan Lake" with Liliana Cosi the eve. of the 28th. But the problems of La Scala, as of all other Italian opera houses, are far deeper than "who will dance Albrecht." After much discussion among administration, union representatives, dancers and orchestra

members, with financial, sociological and political difficulties brought into play (note the absence of "artistic"), the corps and orchestra decided to strike Sun. afternoon, at the precise hours of the planned "Giselle," giving as one lame excuse the impossibility of dancing 2 ballets in one day. (What would they do, I wonder, in any other country but Italy?) So, no Vassiliev, and he was in fact over his flu.

I had the chance to chat for a few minutes with Vassiliev, who told me his plans for future Italian perf's, "if all goes well": the Festival at Nervi, the Accademia di Danza at Venice (both with Maximova) in June-July, and in Aug., perhaps, "Nutcracker" at Verona. (I said it might be Nureyev, previously, and I have also heard Bortoluzzi's name tossed about.)

Among vague plans for Florence's Maggio Musicale Festival are a number of eve's of dance in June, incl'g a new setting by Geoffrey Cauley of Mahler's "Kindertotenlieder," the ballet half of Sylvano Bussotti's "Bussotti Opernballet" and "Apollon Musagete" with guest Elisabetta Terabust (who has quit her post as prima ballerina of the Rome Opera).  
Susan Gould

## LONDON DATES

It is always sad when the great names of a former generation die. One such was Lubov Tchernicheva, soloist and ballet mistress of Diaghilev and de Basil, creator of