

The Art That Pays

DANCE
Chairman: Miss Hill

Those participating in an official capacity were Louis Horst, critic, editor, and teacher; Nadia Chilkovsky of the New Dance League; Martha Hill, Dance Educator. Mr. Horst opened the discussion from the point of view of the Concert Dancer with the following comments:

An Approach to the Dance that Pays from its practical side is useless and may as well be dismissed. The American attitude has done more to hurt the American Dancer and to bring this situation about than is generally realized. To be a modern dancer and foreign can be a success commercially, but to be modern and American is unfortunate.

The Modern Dancer is limited as to income, has a struggle for necessities, and when she is able finally to give a concert, it is more than likely reviewed by some cub reporter. The sense of return gained by the American dancer comes through the ideals, political or educational, which she upholds.

Mr. Horst joined Ruth St. Denis as musical director in 1905. They lost money on tour and were forced to go into Vaudeville in order to pay their bills and thus be able to go on tour again. But today there is hope, despite the financial disappointments. People are turning to American Dance as they did to American furniture and American literature. Martha Graham gave thirteen concerts on the way to Los Angeles this year and the audiences were large, (27000 in Portland, 3000 in San Francisco, 28000 in Los Angeles). She is a modern American dancer without a troupe, and to find such a response thruout the country is cheering.

Mr. Horst credited this response to the Bennington School of Dance, the Dance Observer, and the New Dance League, all of which are concerned with reaching more people and stimulating their interest in Modern Dance. Managers, however, do not attribute Martha Graham's success to these powers, but to such items as the eulogistic article published in TIME, which they consider a fine piece of publicity. It is to be hoped that ultimately one may be an artist and be paid for it without such sensational advertising.

Where does the Modern Dance pay? It pays with life and awareness. A dancer is paid with the excitement of her work, she is challenged by the element of danger in it. Dancers are alive and are modern in their approach to ~~xxx~~ the other arts. All that is part of their pay.

There are still those who agree with a reviewer of one of Miss Graham's concert s who wrote: "Dance must be joyous- like the birds, and the trees, and the waves, and the bees." But there is less demand that the dancer be sweet and young. Our modern dancers are women and not girls- and that also is part of their pay.

The Modern Dancer's hardest problem is the financial one. She is misunderstood and therefore unpopular. She is not supplying a demand and must find or make the demand, therefore she must look to the hope of a growing audience for her pay.

On a tour a Dancer encounters many types of audiences. There are those who take their art seriously; everyday townsmen, society people, sophisticates, and college groups. It is this youthful element which is the most hopeful factor. Even if they do not like the dancing, they know it is of their time.

Some of the questions asked Mr. Horst during the discussion period were as follows:

Ques: What is the dancer's refuge financially?

Ans : The only answer is to engage in work other than dancing.

Ques: Why aren't there books on the subject to teach those who want to learn?

Ans : In modern dancing, movement is formalized. It is not literary. The body in action should be meaning enough.

Ques: Yes, but to make an art pay the audience must be educated.

Ans : An artist cannot stop to explain his reaction to his time, even if he were able to. The education of an audience cannot be hurried.

Ques: There are books explaining how to listen to music. Isn't the problem the same?

Ans : Learning forms may give one a broader sense of Dance, but the problem is not an intellectual one of learning the Anatomy of the Dance, but of acquiring sensitivity to movement. No one asks Fred Astaire what he means. Popular dancing is abstract, so why restrict Modern Dancing? It is continual seeing of the Modern Dance which is the real solution.

Miss Chilkovsky began by observing that the organization which she represents proves that the Art of Modern Dance does not pay. The New Dance League has been in existence four years. Its aim is to give young people the opportunity to compose dances and to perform them. It has been most active in educating a Dance audience.

There are twenty groups in New York and as many scattered

over the United States. The performing units gave one hundred and nine performances in New York before a combined audience of 100,000. It has enlarged greatly within the past two years, adding 1000 new members and giving three major recitals. Though the members are interested in dancing social messages, they are not necessarily political ones.

In their training school there are Dalcroze, Composition, and Technique classes conducted by experienced teachers. The New Dance League members could never afford to attend the schools which these teachers represent.

The New Dance League helped to organize the Dance Association. This union for dancers was formed last year around the issue of the Sullivan bill, which, if passed, would license every teacher and studio. A project was planned to ~~make~~ ^{create} a need for unemployed dancers by presenting programs. Approximately one half the dancers have been placed. Until this Association was established the dance unions consisted of the Chorus Equity (line girls), The American Federation of Actors (specialty dancers), and an organization for dancing teachers, not inclusive of modern dancing teachers. Each of these unions functioned for itself and was interested only in making an economic standard.

The New Dance League is changing this situation by making more opportunities to earn through projects and by carrying on an intensive cultural campaigns. Miss Chilkovsky stated the platform of the New Dance League as follows: 1. To fight War, Fascism, and Censorship, because they are forces which are destructive to art in general. 2. To develop the Art of the Dance to the highest cultural level.

Questions asked Miss Chilkovsky were:

Ques: How is the large audience which attends N.D.L. functions assembled?

Ans: The performing groups sent

Ans : The performing groups accept bookings before clubs and have speakers at each performance.

Ques: What is the price of admission?

Ans : From \$.50 to \$1.10.

Ques: What is the financial organization of the League?

Ans: Parties and benefits are arranged and the League pays its rent with the profits. The secretary receives the only salary(\$15 a week) and the expenses of the performers are paid when there is money.

Ques: Are the teachers paid?

Ans : Each teacher gets 25% of what her class brings in.

Ques: What is the charge for lessons?

Ans : From \$3 to \$5 each term.

Ques: Do the N.D.L. members go to the dance recitals in order to see the expression of their convictions?

Ans : At first they are primarily interested in the meaning of the dances, then they go to learn about the movement, and gradually they learn to appreciate form.

Miss Hill reported that 48% of the dances taught in the course of study of High School girls were from the Chalif school of Dance. 37% of the dances are Chalif once removed, so that 80% of the dances taught in the New York City schools are actually Chalif dances. There are 122,340 girls learning those dances, which are sold for three dollars a piece. Best sellers among these are: Poppies, French Doll, Snow Stars, and Two Butterflies.

Out of the thousands of girls dancing in high schools there are only 3350 in dance groups functioning after school hours. It is perhaps to be wondered at that there is any interest left in the Dance at all.

The Bennington College Dance Group performed authentically ten dances which were actually included in the syllabus of the New York Schools.