

CONVERSATIONS ON CLASSICISM

INCLUDE

☒ YES

8/1/2013

ARTIFACT

Evolution of Classicism

SUBJECT (Title of app, one in a series)

3 three

CONVERSATION (a chapter within a SUBJECT)

OF CONV

ARTIFACT PROPERTIES

ARTIFACT TYPE ☐ IMAGE ☒ TEXT ☐ QUESTION

TITLE (the name of the ARTIFACT)

Edwin Denby, Looking at Dance

TEXT (a textual excerpt provided for study inside a conversation)

Balanchine's Apollo is a ballet so simple in story, so rich in dance imagery, so exciting in invention, I should like to describe a little what happens. The piece calls for a sitting orchestra to play the Stravinsky score and for four superb dancers; it has beyond that only three small parts, no chorus, almost no scenery. It is quite unpretentious as theater. The scene is on Delos, Apollo's birthplace, and the action begins a moment before his birth, with Leto, his mother, high on a rock in a sharp ray of light, tossing grandly to and fro in the labor of a goddess. Then Apollo appears standing wrapped rigid in swaddling clothes. Two nymphs bring him forward and he bawls infant-like. The nymphs begin to unwrap him, but with a godlike vigor before they are done he makes a ballet preparation and whoosh! Spins himself free. Free, he makes a grandly clumsy and baby-like thrust and curvet or two, and the prologue is over. When the lights come on again, he is grown to boyhood and alone. The nymphs have brought him a long-necked lute and he tries to make it sing. But his solitary attempts, first entangled, then lyrical, then determined, look inconclusive. Three young Muses appear and the four of them dance together. They dance charmingly and a little stiffly, reminding you of the inexpressiveness seriousness and shy, naïve fancy of children. But as they end, the boy gives the three girls each a magic gift, a scroll of verse to one, a theater mask to the second, a lyre to the third. And holding these emblems of poetry, each seems to be inspired beyond her years. The first girl dances flowingly with an airy and lyric delight; the second bounds with dramatic speed, with sudden reversals of direction as if in mid-leap; just at the end one hand that has seemed all through to be holding a mask before her face seems to sweep the mask away, and she is herself again and frightened. The third muse, Terpsichore, invent the most brilliantly adventurous dance of all, boldly cutting her motions in startling divisions, as if isolating the elements of her art, without in these diamond-clear stops breaking the cumulative drive. She combines suspense with calm. And as she ends, Apollo gently touches her bright head. But, the dance over, she ducks away like a child and runs off. Then Apollo, his strength awakened, dances by himself, leaping in complex virtuoso sequences, in a grandly sustained sweep of powerful motion. It is no show-off number; it is a masculine surge of full dance mastery. Terpsichore returns just as he ends and together they invent a series of adagio surprises, extremes of balance and extension, boldly large in line, boldly intimate in imagery, and ending with a tender and lovely "swimming lesson" that he gives her. And now all three Muses dance together in darting harmony and dance inspired by poetry's power, swinging from Apollo like birds, curving from his body like a cluster of flowers, driven by him like an ardent charioteer, and ending, when immortal Zeus has called through the air, in three grand accents of immolation. Then calmly and soberly, in Indian file, all four ascend the rock of the island and a chariot comes through the sky down toward them as the curtain falls. They will go to Parnassus where they live ever after. You see as Apollo proceeds how from a kind of pantomimic opening, it becomes more and more a purely classic dance ballet. More and more it offers the eye an interplay of lines and rhythms, of changing architectural balances the edge of which becomes become keener and keener. In this sense Apollo conveys an image of increasing discipline, of increasing clarity of definition. It grows more and more civilized. But the rhythmic vitality of the dance, the abundance of vigor increases simultaneously so that you feel as if the heightening of discipline led to a heightening of power, to a freer, bolder range of imagination. Since the piece is about the gods of poetry, and how they learned their art, it seems, too, to be describing concretely the development of the creative imagination. And as the dance images grow more disciplined, more large and more vigorous, they also grow grander in their sensuous connotations. As Apollo and the little Muses grow up, the intimate contact them between them seems to develop from an innocent childlike play to the firm audacity and tender inventiveness of maturity. Suggested in no sense mimically but purely by dance architecture, the range and richness of Apollo's sensuous imagery is marvelous; and because of this consistent honest but unself-conscious sensuousness the "abstract" classicism is at no point dehumanized or out of character with the dramatic situation. So for example the taut ballet extension of a girl's leg and toe – used in Apollo as an insignia of poetry itself – grows increasingly poignant to watch as the piece proceeds; and you experience everywhere the cool sensual luminosity of civilized art. So Apollo can tell you how beautiful classic dancing is when it is correct and sincere; or how the power of poetry grows in our nature; or even that as man's genius becomes more civilized, it grows more expressive, more ardent, more responsive, more beautiful. Balanchine has conveyed these large ideas really as modestly as possible, by means of three girls and a boy dancing together for a while. But as the immediate excitement of watching does not depend on how you choose to rationalize it. Apollo is beautiful as dancing and gloriously danced.

CAPTION

inventory #

0071

sequence #

048

SOURCE

Credit (the creator of the ARTIFACT)

author

Edwin Denby

publication

October 28, 1945

text source

12:05:25 PM Elizabeth Kidera

Editor

Nancy Lassalle



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TITLE (the name of the ARTIFACT)

Lincoln Kirstein, SAB catalogue

TEXT (a textual excerpt provided for study inside a conversation)

Every artistic medium has its peculiar nature which allows it to express some things better than any rival medium and prohibits it from expressing other things altogether...in its dazzling display of physical energy, the ballet expresses, as no other medium can, the joy of being alive...

CAPTION

inventory #

0072

sequence #

045

SOURCE

Credit (the creator of the ARTIFACT)

author

W.H. Auden

publication

Essay from THE NUTCRACKER program, 1954

text source

A Past and Present Eden

12:05:25 PM Elizabeth Kidera

Editor

Nancy Lassalle

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Lincoln Kirstein, SAB catalogue

TEXT (a textual excerpt provided for study inside a conversation)

Classical ballet is a unified system of movements gradually designed over the ages to constitute a veritable language of the dance. The exercises and steps that compose it are aimed at extending the scope of human motion, whether on the ground, as in arabesques, attitudes, developpes, turns, etc., or in leaps and batterie. Dancing on toes not only enhances the impression of airiness and fleetness, but makes possible a highly effective series of steps such as fouettes and chaines for which the foot is used to pivot on. All ballet movements stem from the five absolute positions of the feet which oblige the dancer to turn his leg outward from the hip, greatly increasing his mobility and extension, and from definite positions of the arms, torso and head. As training develops, the contrast between male and female dancing, so vital to effective scenic performing, is increasingly emphasized. This system, taught in the American Ballet classes, forms the basis of all the courses given at the School of American Ballet. Like the alphabet, every movement is learned separately, then woven into the choreographic poems we call ballets.

CAPTION

inventory #

0073

sequence #

045

SOURCE

Credit (the creator of the ARTIFACT)

author

Lincoln Kirstein

12:05:25 PM Elizabeth Kidera

publication

SAB catalogue, 1954?

Editor

text source

Nancy Lassalle

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TITLE (the name of the ARTIFACT)

Carlo Blasis, An Elementary Treatise upon the Theory and Practice of the Art of Dancing

TEXT (a textual excerpt provided for study inside a conversation)

Infuse your attitudes, arabesques and groups with feeling and expression. The position which dancers specifically refer to as the attitude is the loveliest and most difficult of execution in dancing. In my opinion it is an adaptation of the much admired pose of the celebrated Mercury of Bologna. A dancer who can dispose himself well in the attitude will be outstanding and give proof that he has acquired a knowledge requisite to his art. Nothing is more graceful than those charming positions we call arabesques, which have been inspired by the bas-reliefs of antiquity and fragments of Greek painting, as well as by the delightful frescoes from Raphael's drawings in the loggias of the Vatican. Dancers should learn to portray these spirited and lovely effects of sculpture and painting in their own art.

CAPTION

inventory #

0074

sequence #

046

SOURCE

Credit (the creator of the ARTIFACT)

author Carlo Blasis

publication An Elementary Treatise upon the Theory and Practice of the Art of

text source

12:05:25 PM Elizabeth Kidera

Editor

Nancy Lassalle

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TITLE (the name of the ARTIFACT)

Balanchine Variations

TEXT (a textual excerpt provided for study inside a conversation)

Because Apollo is not a literal narrative, it's not wise to look for specific reasons why Terpsichore's solo is the "best." But it's worth noting that hers is the most three-dimensional of the lot. If there is one salient characteristic of her solo, it's that she keeps revolving around herself, showing her body to the audience from all possible angles. She offers full disclosure. Decades later, in other ballets, Balanchine was still presenting his choreography so that the ballerina would be presented to us as fully as possible. Indeed, self-revelation is the definition of a Balanchine ballerina – and if you wish to extend the physical realm into a disposition of courage and honesty, please feel free. Naturally, Apollo brings back Terpsichore for a pas de deux, after he does a variation of his own. What I particularly love about his solo is its encoded homage to ballet technique. Accompanied by grand chords from Stravinsky, Apollo thrusts his arms skyward, as if holding up the world in the raised palms of his hands. But it's not his arms that give him Herculean strength; it's his legs locked tightly in fifth position. Fifth position, of course, is the cornerstone of ballet; it's the beginning and the end.

CAPTION

inventory #

0075

sequence #

047

SOURCE

Credit (the creator of the ARTIFACT)

author

Nancy Goldner, 2008

12:05:25 PM Elizabeth Kidera

publication

Editor

text source

Nancy Lassalle

