

On their toes

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ABSTRACT

Three young members of the New York City Ballet share some fascinating inside info on what it's like to eat, sleep, and live dancing-- and love every minute of it

FULL TEXT

** Due to publisher restrictions, full text is restricted to a single page or page spread. **

Beauty

Dancing isn't just a career—it's a way of life

It takes a very special set of qualities to be a ballet dancer. Aside from the more obvious requirements—talent, grace, stamina, dedication—a ballerina must love dancing more than anything else in life. And that's not a feeling you can persuade yourself to learn; either you have it in you or you don't. The three young dancers here most definitely have it.

All three—Evelyn Carton, Roma Sosenko, and Hélène Alexopoulos—graduated from master choreographer George Balanchine's School of American Ballet and have been with the corps of his New York City Ballet for about a year. Which means that they exercise, rehearse, and perform six days a week (Monday's their day off). A particularly grueling schedule might read:

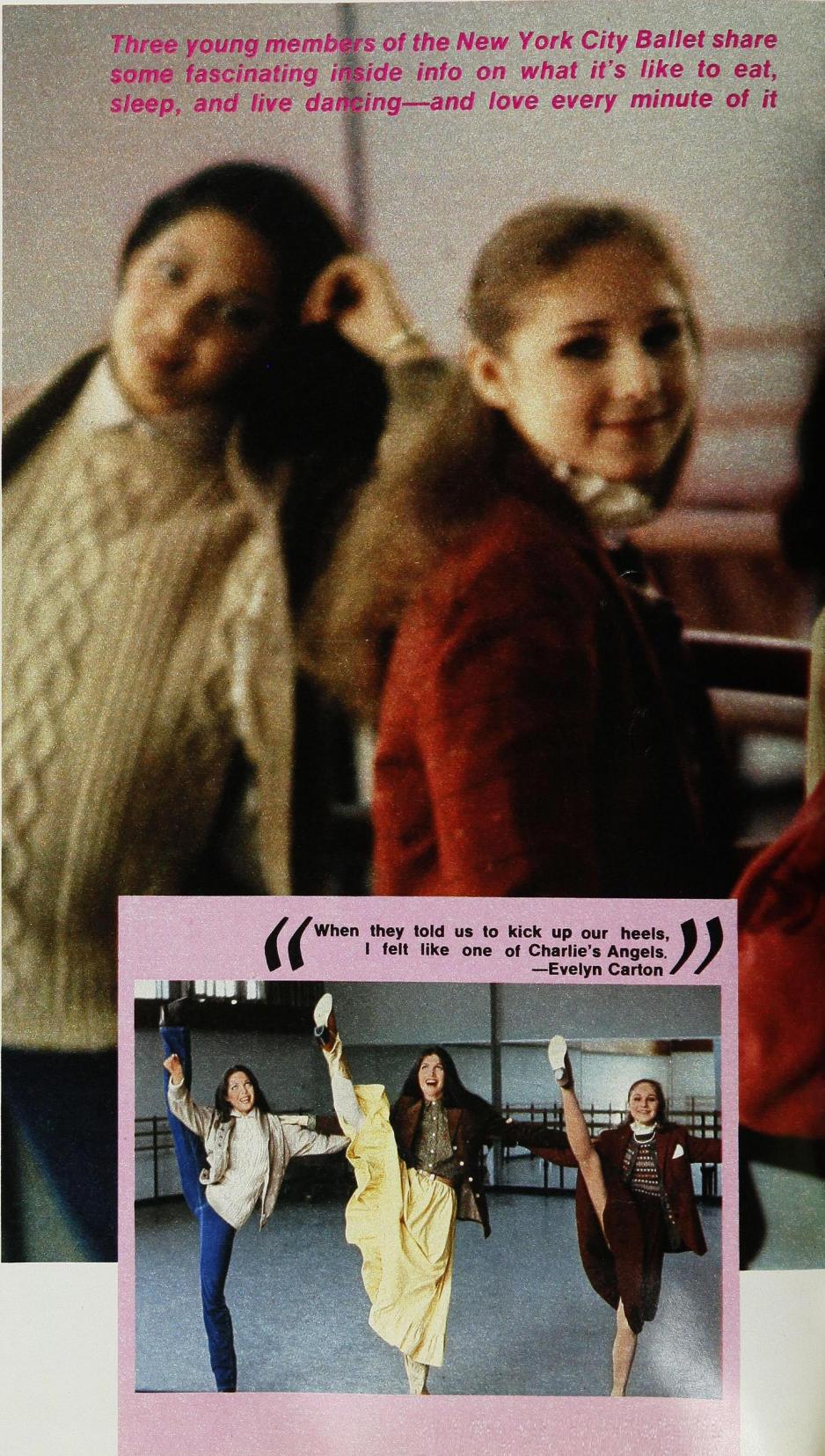
10:30-11:30 AM	Go to class
12:00- 1:00 PM	Rehearse
2:00- 4:00 PM	Rehearse
5:00- 6:00 PM	Rehearse
6:00- 8:00 PM	Get ready, warm up
8:00 PM	Perform

Such an agenda leaves little room for personal chores (like shopping and doing laundry) and practically none for socializing with anyone but a fellow dancer. Hélène's approach is philosophical: "You have to adjust. It's growing up."

Corps members don't perform solos, though some are singled out for solos when and if they prove themselves to be exceptional. And that, of course, is every dancer's dream, the one each has been working for since her first commitment to the barre. For Evelyn, that commitment came seven years ago when she switched from piano to pliés. Roma (Evelyn's roommate) has been dancing for twelve years, and Hélène for ten. "As far as ballet goes," Evelyn explains, "you're always a student." And, she might add, always working, practicing, perfecting. Weighing this against the few moments of glory onstage, one may wonder why they do it. But put that question to any of the girls, and she's likely to beam at you and answer: "Because I love it!" For a dancer, that's reason enough.

On their toes

Three young members of the New York City Ballet share some fascinating inside info on what it's like to eat, sleep, and live dancing—and love every minute of it



**"When they told us to kick up our heels,
I felt like one of Charlie's Angels.
—Evelyn Carton"**





Some people think that all ballerinas dress alike—even offstage. But the truth is, each has her own sense of style—whether she's in rehearsal gear or street clothes



Helene Alexopoulos



Roma Sosenko



Evelyn Carton

How to spot a dancer? Look for a slim girl with nonstop legs, long hair, a toes-slightly-outward walk, and a tote slung over her shoulder. But the similarity stops there, because when it comes to dressing, each dancer expresses her own kind of style. For example, Helene (*big pic, left*) likes comfy sweaters and blazers, while Roma (*center*) opts for antique clothing. For Evelyn (*right*), it's classics, mixed with flouncy skirts and leather boots.

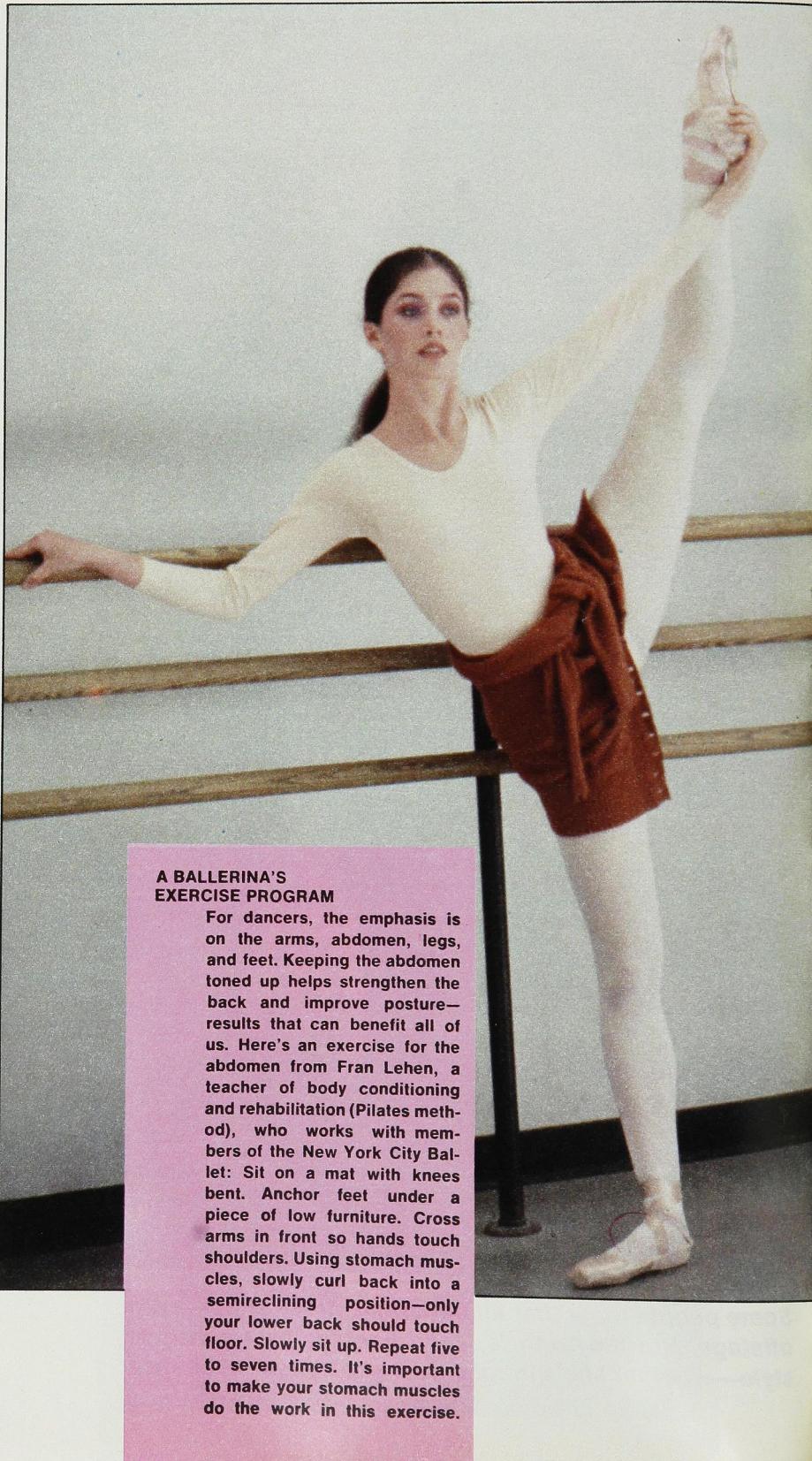
Big pic, left: United Knitwear sweater. Gant for Women shirt. Eva Graham earrings. *Center:* Jacket, blouse, Fay's Closet. *Right:* Clothes, Ralph Lauren Western Wear. Ruza for Elegant belt. *Inset, center:* Acme boots. *Right:* Sweater set, Gerard Martin. Fay's Closet skirt. On these and the following four pages: Hair by Christian; makeup by Wendy Whitelaw. Photographed by Arthur Elgort at the School of American Ballet.

Diet and exercise—a big part of every dancer's regimen

You might say a dancer's body isn't really her own—it belongs to the ballet. And since her career depends on the way that body performs, she's got to keep it in top condition. The practicing is constant, and it has to be: one missed day makes a difference a dancer can feel. (That's why Hélène—like many others—exercises even when she's on vacation.) As for the resulting aches and pains—they're just something a dancer has to live with. "Fifty percent of the time, something hurts," Evelyn laments. And Hélène points out, "Silly accidents happen all the time. It's a part of company life." But any initiate will tell you that a dancer would rather dance even though she's hurting than not dance at all. Of course, a real injury is another matter. It means coming back slowly with lots of barre work—and meanwhile, worrying that another dancer will learn your part while you're out of action. It's to ensure against aches and injuries, by the way, that dancers show up for practice in such an incongruous-looking array of clothing—like the waist-tied sweater, fuzzy leg-warmers, and plastic pants that Evelyn, Roma, and Hélène wear here. Pieces like these help keep muscles warm, less prone to injury under stress.

Diet? They all try to keep their weight down (Balanchine likes his girls on the thin side). But with such irregular schedules, it's often easier for a dancer just to "grab a sandwich at the deli," Roma admits. "Even dancers pig out." And Hélène confesses, "I'm not prudish about food; I wouldn't refuse a piece of chocolate cake," though when it comes to eating a big meal after a performance, as many dancers do, she draws the line. So how do they stay so slim? It's the exercise: They need lots of calories to burn for body fuel. They also use some tricks of the trade. Evelyn, for example, never eats dinner later than four o'clock so her stomach won't stick out at performance time (something to keep in mind before you slip into that body-skimming party dress).

Hardworking dancers need the right food—at the right time—to give them maximum energy. That's why they usually have several small, light meals during the day



A BALLERINA'S EXERCISE PROGRAM

For dancers, the emphasis is on the arms, abdomen, legs, and feet. Keeping the abdomen toned up helps strengthen the back and improve posture—results that can benefit all of us. Here's an exercise for the abdomen from Fran Lehen, a teacher of body conditioning and rehabilitation (Pilates method), who works with members of the New York City Ballet: Sit on a mat with knees bent. Anchor feet under a piece of low furniture. Cross arms in front so hands touch shoulders. Using stomach muscles, slowly curl back into a semireclining position—only your lower back should touch floor. Slowly sit up. Repeat five to seven times. It's important to make your stomach muscles do the work in this exercise.

EXERCISE TIPS

- Be sure to drink enough fluid when you exercise. Your body loses water when you sweat. In addition, it loses moisture every time you exhale.
- When you're thirsty, don't gulp your drinks. Drink your liquids slowly. You'll need at least a cup of water before exercising—more if the weather is hot. However, drinking too much water can bloat your stomach, which then presses up against your diaphragm and makes breathing uncomfortable.

DIET TIP

- The best way to fuel up before exercising: Take in a meal based mostly on high-carbohydrate items, like rice, pasta, bread, potatoes, or oatmeal. Reason: Carbohydrates are quickly converted into glucose, which your body needs for immediate energy. High-protein, high-fat food—like steak—isn't a good choice. Your stomach has to work harder to digest it, so such foods take longer to be converted into fuel. And that means less instant energy.



Exercise warm-ups always come first—before class, before going onstage—because cold, tight muscles can cause cramps, injuries, or, worse, a bad performance

Beauty routines for a dancer: a little goes a long way

Because a dancer's free time is so limited, an efficient grooming routine becomes a necessity. And with performances almost every evening, skin, makeup, and hair must be on-stage-perfect all the time. How do dancers cope? By paring down to the basics. For skin, the key word is *clean*. Not so easy when you're sweating through class and rehearsals all day. Roma's solution is to squeeze in a shower during breaks, while Hélène takes the preventive approach: She follows Erno Laszlo's Skin Ritual—a special program using a group of products chosen for her specific skin type. On the plus side, dancing (read: exercise) helps skin by giving it a healthy glow. Makeup? Offstage, the girls usually keep it simple. Hélène wears "a little eye makeup," Roma "some mascara and blush." Stage makeup, on the other hand, has to be elaborate and must make skin look pale, "unexerted." Common to all is a base of long-lasting, opaque stage foundation. Eyes must look big and expressive (the striking appearance comes from intensely colored eye shadows and the obligatory set—or sets—of false eyelashes). Each dancer designs and applies her own makeup. Says Evelyn, "You can tell what effect makeup really has on your face when you exaggerate it the way you must for the stage." Ballerinas must be careful, though, because heavy stage makeup can spell skin problems. That's why the girls remove it *thoroughly*—and as soon as they can.

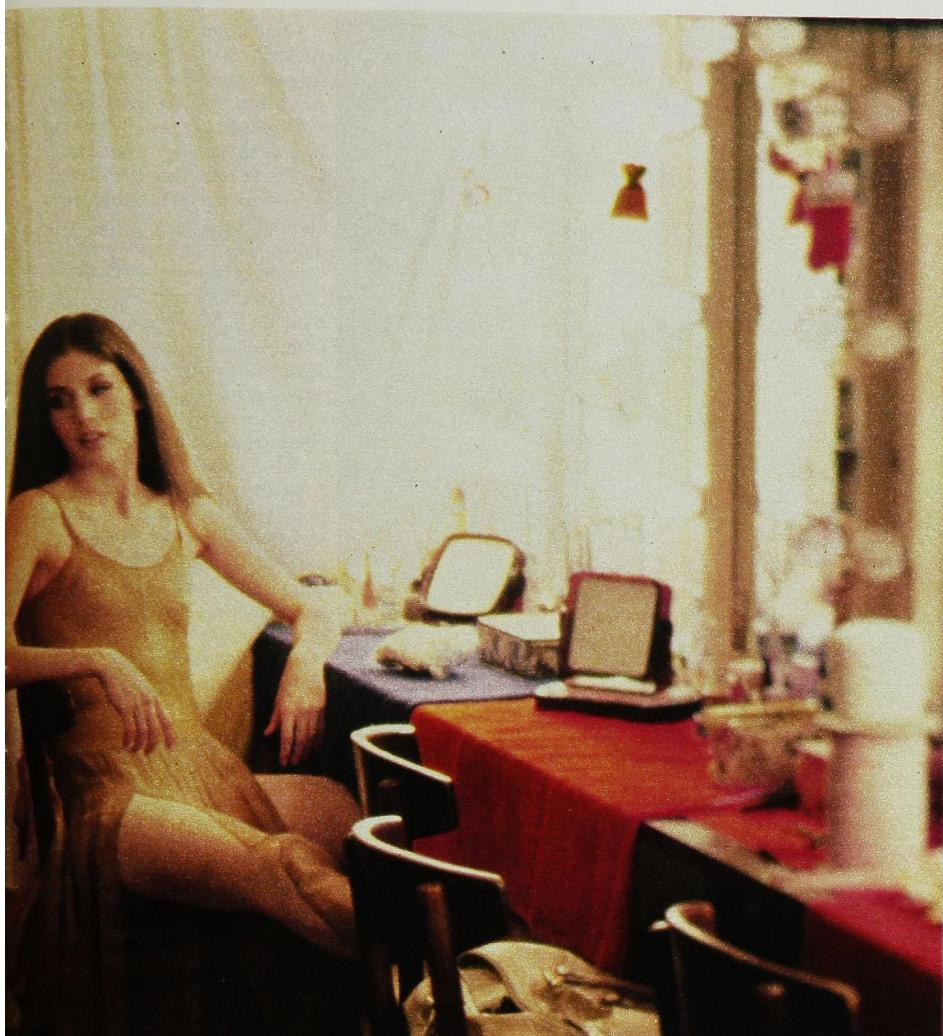
Though makeup is somewhat a personal choice for a ballerina, hair is not. It has to be long enough to wear up for performing. And since no one has time for the luxury of hair salons, shampooing is the most care hair usually receives. Even that sometimes gets in the way: Hélène finds she can't wash her hair every day because then "It's hard to put up in a chignon." During performances, dancers can't be worrying about haphazard wisps of hair, so they use hair spray. The girls agree—it really works.



“Dancing is a wonderful feeling—a genuine high. And when everything is going right . . . the feeling is great!”
—Roma Sosenko

The ballerinas' hair is worn long. When they perform, it's either knotted or chignon. Reason? Illusion: Worn up, it makes the neck look longer, more graceful

Every dancer in the New York City Ballet company does her own makeup—onstage and off. That way, each ballerina has the freedom to discover her own best look



Ordinary talcum powder has a special significance for dancers. Tradition calls for the lead ballerina in the classical ballet *Swan Lake* to powder herself completely white with talc for the role, a ritual considered a necessary part of the mystique of the Swan Queen. Talc is often used by the rest of the company, too, but as a translucent powder. When brushed lightly on the face and neck, talc effectively finishes the makeup and covers any imperfections the foundation has missed. Dusted on shoulders and arms, it absorbs sweat, keeps skin looking dry. And talc works just as well offstage as on. For everyday wear: Use a makeup brush, apply lightly and evenly.



Toe shoes: At \$20 a pair, you might call them reasonable, except for one thing. The shoes are worn for one performance only. During the season, a dancer can go through eight pairs a week! Now consider the feet that fit these shoes, the long hours spent in unnatural positions—and the resulting scrapes, blisters, and calluses. For the ballerina, calluses are a good thing. They're natural protection. For the rest of us, however, it's another story. One way to get rid of calluses: Gently pumice them after bathing; follow up with moisturizer.

Their future plans? Evelyn intends to dance with the company as long as she can. She believes, "Your career blossoms because of what you're capable of. If you're good—you'll keep going." She adds, "It would really be difficult to find something I'd love as much as the ballet." For Roma, too, it's hard to imagine doing anything else. "Right now, I'm dancing," she says. "I don't really know what I'll be doing later on . . . perhaps teaching." Hélène is emphatic: "Dancing is euphoria! I can't describe it any other way. It seems too good to be true. I know there will be a day when it's not so good, so I enjoy every day and remember it." Then she adds, smiling, "I don't plan to leave the ballet for a long time."

This holiday season, Evelyn, Hélène, and Roma will perform in the New York City Ballet's *Nutcracker* at New York's Lincoln Center. Check entertainment listings to find the *Nutcracker* performance nearest you.

Ballerinas in Russia and France have always worn perfume onstage. New York City Ballet dancers adopted the idea, and it soon became an American tradition as well

Fragrance: for classes, rehearsals, and especially onstage

Choreographer George Balanchine developed his nose for perfume in Russia—where it was the custom for each ballerina to have her own identifying fragrance. So when he established his New York City Ballet, it seemed natural to introduce the perfume concept here. All his ballerinas share an enthusiasm for special scents; a dancer will often ask Balanchine to suggest a perfume that will express her personality. The fragrance he selects then becomes her signature scent. As a result, the rehearsal halls, classrooms, and stage are filled with the aroma of dozens of different fragrances.

Perfume is a gift universally appreciated—you don't have to be a ballerina to love it. So if perfume, cologne, talc, oils, soaps, and the like are on your shopping list—or if you're looking for your own signature scent—investigate some of the pretty finds shown on these pages.

This page, clockwise from top left: Babe Spray Cologne and Babe Soap (both, Fabergé), Cabriole Fragranced Soap by Elizabeth Arden, Pavlova Bain de Beauté Bath Oil and Pavlova Soap by Payot, Ambush Eau de Cologne by Dana, Houbigant Essence de Chantilly Dusting Powder, Embracing Cologne Spray from the makers of English Leather, Love's Baby Soft Perfume by Love Cosmetics, White Shoulders Perfume by Eyan, Emeraude Parfum by Coty, Chanel No. 22 Perfume, Charlie Concentrated Cologne Spray by Revlon, and Toujours Moi Bath Crystals Elegante by Max Factor; and in the center, Chanel Oil for the Bath (No. 22). Book, *The Dance Catalog*, edited by Nancy Reynolds (Harmony Books). Toe shoes, chiffon skirt, and peach-pink ankle-warmers from Frederick Freed Ltd. of London. Baby-pink leg-warmers from Capezio Ballet Makers. *Opposite, clockwise from center top:* Shalimar Talc by Guerlain, Amour Amour Soap by Jean Patou, Cachet Perfumed Dusting Powder by Prince Matchabelli, Embracing Splash Cologne from the makers of English Leather, Smitty Cologne by Coty, Jontue Body Silk by Revlon, Mel Cologne Spray by Coparel, Arabesque Perfume Purser by Merle Norman Cosmetics, Charlie Soap by Revlon, Jontue Soap by Revlon, Blue Jeans Soap on a Rope by Shulton, Chantilly Perfume by Houbigant, Shalimar Perfume by Guerlain, Tatiana Parfum by Diane Von Furstenberg, Skin Musk Concentrate by Bonne Bell and Wind Song Perfume by Prince Matchabelli (lower left), Blue Jeans Dusting Powder by Shulton, Amour Amour Perfume by Jean Patou, Khaki Cologne Spray by Love Cosmetics; and in the center, Oleg Cassini for Women Cologne by Jovan and Estée Lauder White Linen Perfumed Body Powder. Book, *The Ballet Lover's Companion*, by Kay Ambrose (Knopf). Leg-warmers, Capezio Ballet Makers and Frederick Freed Ltd. of London. And at the bottom, toe shoes and headband, Frederick Freed Ltd. of London.





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