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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RUSSIAN BALLET \*\*\*

**THE RUSSIAN BALLET**

**By Ellen Terry**

**Withdrawings By Pamela Colman Smith**

1913

# THE RUSSIAN BALLET

ELLEN TERRY

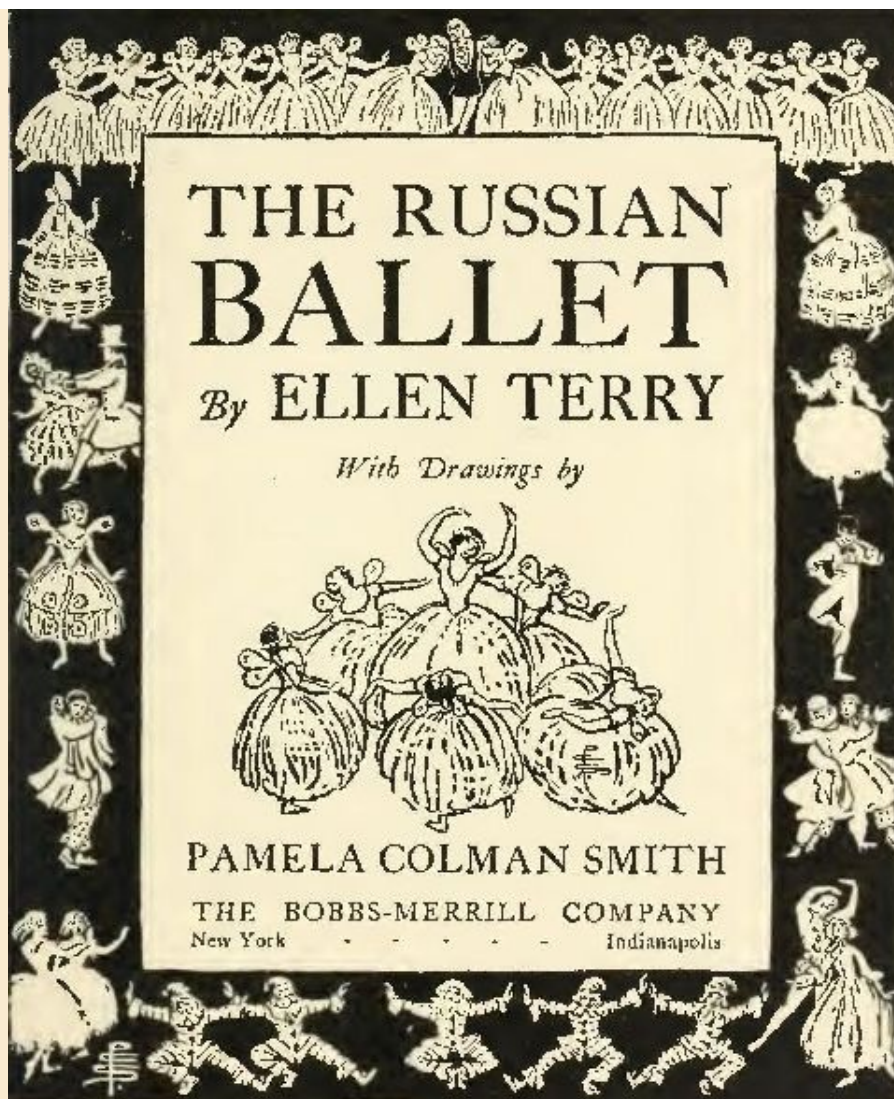


*Original*



*ANNA PAVLOVA in "The Passing of the Swan." "She takes a collection of steps as a singer takes a collection of notes, and calmly and gracefully phrases them, in the manner of a bird beating the air with its wings."*

***Original***



*Original*

# THE RUSSIAN BALLET

*Introductory*

*Original*

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## THE RUSSIAN BALLET

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### Introductory

THE Russian ballet, at least that section of it which M. de Diaghilev, patron and grand seigneur rather than agent, has taken all over Europe during the last few years, and more recently to America, is now more than a darling of its own nation, a naturally ballet-loving nation. It has become an international possession. In England the Russian dancers have perhaps been acclaimed with more whole-hearted fervor than elsewhere, because before their coming the land was barren. In France and Italy they had ballets of their own. They have a standard by which they can measure the visitors from St. Petersburg. But English audiences, like children presented with a new toy, first shyly wondered at the novelty of the agile strangers, and then fell into transports of enthusiasm.

Uncritical enthusiasm toward art and artists is an amiable attitude of the English once they have been gained over. And this enthusiasm has a way of persisting. "The English public may be slow," said a musician who had taken a long time to win their suffrages, "but they are damnably faithful!" If the fashion in Russian ballet should age elsewhere I feel sure it will not in England, the last country to adopt it. So these notes by an enthusiast have a good chance of being seasonable for many years. Yes, I claim to be an enthusiast, although, perhaps, the fact that I am not an English enthusiast but one who is half Irish and half Scotch makes me more canny than some of my fellow-admirers. I have never opened my mouth and swallowed the new ballet and all its works without thinking. These are, all the same, impressions rather than criticisms. And the impressions are not intended as an explanation of Miss Pamela Colman Smith's pictures any more than her pictures are intended to be an explanation of my impressions. Her pictures surely speak for themselves. And like the clerk, I need only cry "Amen" to her eloquent drawings.



SCHEHERAZADE

*Original*

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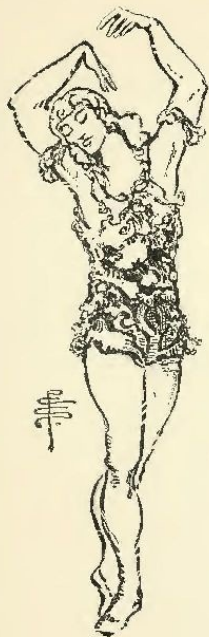
## Dancing In General

**W**HAT is dancing? The Russians have done much to show us that it is something more than *sauterie*, although they can *sauter*, or leap, with the best. As an actress I salute dancers with the reverence of a man for his ancestors. The dancer is certainly the parent of my own art, but he has other children. All arts, of which the special attribute is movement, descend from the dancer. The Greek word "chorus" means dance, and the Greek choruses were originally dances. It can be proved that dancing movements formed the first metres of true poetry. Why do we speak of "feet" if not because the feet of the body used to mark the rhythm of inspired utterance?

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## Religious Dancing

**I**T seems strange that the Dance should have almost everywhere degenerated into something base and trivial, while its children, Music and Poetry, in spite of lapses, should have preserved their dignity and beauty. It seems even more strange when we remember that dancing had a religious origin. Among the Jews, as among other peoples, dancing was constantly associated with the ceremonies of faith.



SPECTRE DE LA ROSE

[Original](#)

In Christian churches the choir was originally designed as a place in which the chanting of hymns and canticles might be conveniently accompanied by rhythmic movements. On feast days the honor of leading the dance was reserved for the bishop. This is why he was known in those days by the name, of *praesul*, the is, he who dances first. A bishop as *premier danseur*! We can hardly believe it now, yet why should we not, seeing that the movements of priest and server at mass have the nature of a solemn dance? And there are places in France and Spain where liturgical dances still exist. The most notable is the dance executed before the altar at Seville in Holy Week. I am afraid that the one that used to take place in the choir of Saint Leonard's at Limoges, where, at the end of each psalm, the people sang instead of the *Gloria Patri*, "San Marceau, pray for us and we will dance for you," is now extinct.

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## The Russian Revival

**A**LL who regard dancing seriously, and there is nothing which should be regarded more seriously than an art that is to give pleasure, must be glad that they have lived in a century which has witnessed a very fine and sincere endeavor to restore the dance to some of its primal nobility. There is much in the results of this endeavor to criticize, there are a few things to deplore, but in any refusal to recognize the magnitude of what has been accomplished, there is probably some pique that it has been the nation which Europe still views as barbarously ingenuous in matters of art which has reformed the ballet on such refined and spiritual lines.

I dislike the word "reformed," however. Reformations are generally tiresome. *Transformations* are far better! Saint Francis transformed, Luther reformed; and the Russians are with Saint Francis rather than with Luther! To appreciate the change which has come over the Russian Ballet we ought to know a little about its constitution. It is and has always been subsidized by the state. The Russian government supports schools of ballet, where from the age of eight children are given a long and arduous training in the science of dancing, and from which they are drafted into the imperial ballets at St. Petersburg, Moscow and Warsaw. A dancer's first appearance is generally made at the age of sixteen, and at thirty-six his or her career is over. The dancers are then retired on a pension amounting to about one hundred and fifty pounds a year. It is not my intention to give details of this training. They are written in many books by experts. But I should like to say at this point that one of the leading characteristics of the Russian system is the attention given to male dancing.

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## Male Dancers

**H**AD the male dancers ever been excluded from the Imperial ballet its fate would have been very different. The men are trained on the "ballon" system, not on that which is known as the "parterre," and it is "ballon" dancing which is one of the most beautiful features of the Russian ballet. After we have watched interminable exercises ingeniously performed "sur les pointes," with what relief have we seen Nijinsky, perhaps the greatest "ballon" dancer who has ever existed, bound on to the stage, rise high in the air, descend slowly and with such art that when he touches the ground he can use it again for a still higher flight.



PAVILLON D'ARMIDE

*Original*

The presence of men in the ballet has an effect beyond the pleasure afforded by the virile agility of their steps.

It does away with the necessity for those feminine travesties of men, known in our pantomimes as "principal boys," who introduce an element into ballet which at its best makes a disturbing demand on our capacity for illusion, and at its worst is a little degrading. What has made the Male Dancers word "ballet" a sort of synonym for vice if it is not the idea that it provides an opportunity for women to attract admirers—not so much on account of their dancing as for the sake of their physical charm? I think that a mixed ballet has the effect of concentrating attention on the art of the dance rather than on the seductiveness of the dancers. And the free and noble plastic of the male dancers in the Russian ballet has influenced the plastic of the women, making it far less sexual and far more beautiful.



LE CARNAVAL

*Original*

## Sur les Pointes

I FRANKLY confess that I have a dislike to ordinary dancing on the toes. It may be because in my youth it had degenerated into something so stilted, distorted and unrhythmical that it conflicted with all my ideas of beauty. And when the Russians give some of their older ballets, such as "Giselle," which bears the mark of Italian influence—it was, I think, arranged by an Italian *maître de ballet* —I feel that all the



improvements that the Russians have made in this so-called "classical" dancing cannot uproot my prejudice, although they can, and do, modify it. The Russian ballerinas accomplish the feat of being *fluent* on their toes. They do not hammer out steps—it is a false notion of rhythm that there is a hammer-stroke on every strong beat—but take a collection of steps, as a singer takes a collection of notes, and calmly and gracefully phrase them, in the manner of a bird beating the air with its wings, rather than that of a blacksmith hammering on his anvil. Still I doubt whether the Russians would have conquered Europe had they come to us merely as revivers of classical dancing before it became mechanical and ugly. They owe this revival to a great extent to Tschaikowsky.

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## How Far a Native Ballet?

**T**SCHAIKOWSKY was patriotic; he wrote music for the Imperial Theatre ballets, and was the first man of any position in Russia to protest against the importation of Italian dancers and Italian methods. Undoubtedly he gave good counsel in advising a return to the French style of classical dancing, the style which was at its best under Louis XIV. But if the Russians had been content to stop at an imitation of ballet as it was under the "Grand Monarque" they would still be giving us only a dead perfection of steps. There is a deadness about all Renaissance things, whether in architecture or dancing. What always surprises us about the Russian ballet is its *life*. This vitality came sweeping on to the stage with Russian *maîtres de ballet* such as Fokine, who used tradition, used the technical perfection of classical dancing, but would not be a slave to them; with Russian composers such as Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Glazounof, Liadoff, Arensky, Stravinsky and Tscherepnin, the conductor of the ballet; with Russian artists such as Alexandre Benois and Leon Bakst; with Russian dancers such as Nijinsky. Is this ballet, then, distinguished from all other ballets by being a *native* ballet? When we see "Tamar" or "Scheherazade" or the dances from "Prince Igor" we may answer, "Yes." But what about "Les Sylphides," "Spectre de la Rose" or "Le Carnaval"? Are *they* typically Russian? I think they rather transport us into a country which has no nationality and no barriers, the kingdom of dreams. The Russian ballet has transformed itself in a little over a decade because its guiding minds have been more than national. The musicians, artists, dancers and ballet masters have depended more on invention than on reality. Many stories of widely different character have been drawn on for the new ballets, but all have been treated with an imagination which is neither the property of a nation nor the result of patriotism.

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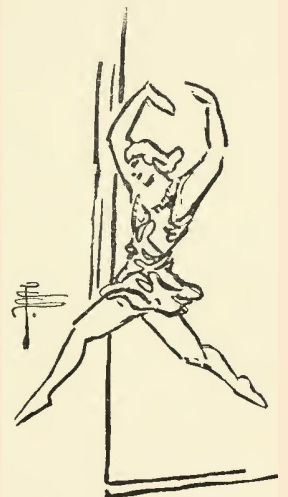
## Personality—and Nijinsky

**T**HE Russians pride themselves on not having a "star system." Every dancer has a chance of distinction. A good idea, but personality will out, and genius cannot be effaced. "I am only the centre-piece of a great mosaic," said Nijinsky once, but in his case it is a very big "only." Certainly the perfection of the *ensemble*, the well-ordered movements and groups of Fokine, assist this wonderful young god of the dance.

When Anna Pavlova, whom I still regard as the best of the women Russian dancers, was torn from her original setting, many admirers of her exquisite art, in which all the essentials of the dance, noble gesture, beautiful line, lightness, elevation, that order of movement which we call rhythm, and perfect time, are to be found, congratulated themselves, "Now we shall get more of her." We got more—and less.

Nijinsky, in the years when Pavlova was still in the ballet, was allowed to have talent. Lately we have all begun to use the word "genius." Where does the difference between the things talent and genius lie if not in the huge personality of the genius?

They used to say of Henry Irving, who expressed himself in a multiplicity of parts, that he was always the same Irving. Certainly he was always faithful to himself whatever he assumed. This is a sign of the presence of genius, not of its absence. In one sense we always have the same Nijinsky, as Miss Pamela Colman Smith has very happily shown in her drawings of him. Yet in another sense we never have the same Nijinsky.



SPECTRE DE LA ROSE

## Nijinsky's Distinction

**W**E must not belittle him by merely admiring him for his miraculously agile leaps and jumps. As I said at the start, dancing is not only *sauterie*. There was probably no *sauterie* at all in the dancing of the ancients. I am told that Nijinsky was much affected by the dancing of Isadora Duncan when, some years ago, she appeared in St. Petersburg, and I can well believe it, for there was manifested in her at her best what was probably the supreme object of religious dancing—and all ancient dancing was religious—the training of the body to the point of making it docile to the rhythm of the soul. There are many young men in the Russian ballet who dance excellently with their bodies, even if they cannot leap as high as Nijinsky, but what really separates him from them is the fact that he dances not only with his body, but with his soul. Unfortunately this expression is often used lightly to mean merely "with enthusiasm." But it can be used in a graver sense, and it is in that sense that I use it.



[Original](#)

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## Nijinsky Always a Dancer

**S**O free and yet so disciplined!" said someone of Nijinsky's dancing. It was a very good \* criticism. But I like even better these words from a French appreciation by M. Charles Mèryel: "We should not begin by praising him for his prodigious physical ability for leaving the ground. Let us think first of his power of evoking, through the means of a human body in movement, a sort of beautiful dream, of his power of subjugating his material appearance so that he becomes a *visitation divine* and almost immaterial." I remember in this connection something that was said to me by Christopher St. John after "Les Sylphides": "This gives us a conception of what our glorified bodies after the Resurrection will be like, the same bodies, but spiritualized and agile!" I thought, "This is too much!" and laughed at an excess of enthusiasm! But the French writer and the English one were both expressing the same idea.

Whatever his role, the young Russian dancer projects an interior emotion which has in it all the force of spontaneity, but is at the same time conscious and considered. As an actress, that has always been my ideal of expression. But actors express emotions; it is generally their duty to *realise*, in fact, to recall a man. Nijinsky never recalls human experience, never suggests the passions of mankind. He is always the dancer. Now the miming of ordinary ballet-dancers has often in the past seemed to be more than a little ridiculous. Love and joy and pleasure, pain and hate and death—how could they be simulated by pirouettes, posings and posturings? Did I reject them as absurdly unconvincing because I did not understand the language of choreography? I think I was alienated because I had never heard the language spoken well. I am sure now that it can be infinitely expressive, but the better it is spoken by the dancer's body the less it will resemble the expression of mortals. I could never call Nijinsky a good actor. I can, and do, call him a great dancer.



LE CARNAVAL

*Original*

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## The Dance Poems

**I**T has been said that the Russian ballet makes a vivid and brutal appeal to the senses, and certainly there is some truth in this as regards the ballets of which the artist Bakst is the guiding spirit. The old saying that you cannot see the wood for the trees may be borrowed to express a criticism. You cannot see color for the colors in some Bakst ballets. Yet even Bakst sometimes helps to aid that impression of a visitation divine which Nijinsky in his own person produces. You will see that Miss Pamela Colman Smith has given what some may think a disproportionate amount of space to her studies of "Les Sylphides," "Le Carnaval," and "Le Spectre de la Rose." I think she was, perhaps unconsciously, more strongly attracted by these three dance poems (for dance poems they should be called rather than ballets) because of their greater wealth in the immaterial.



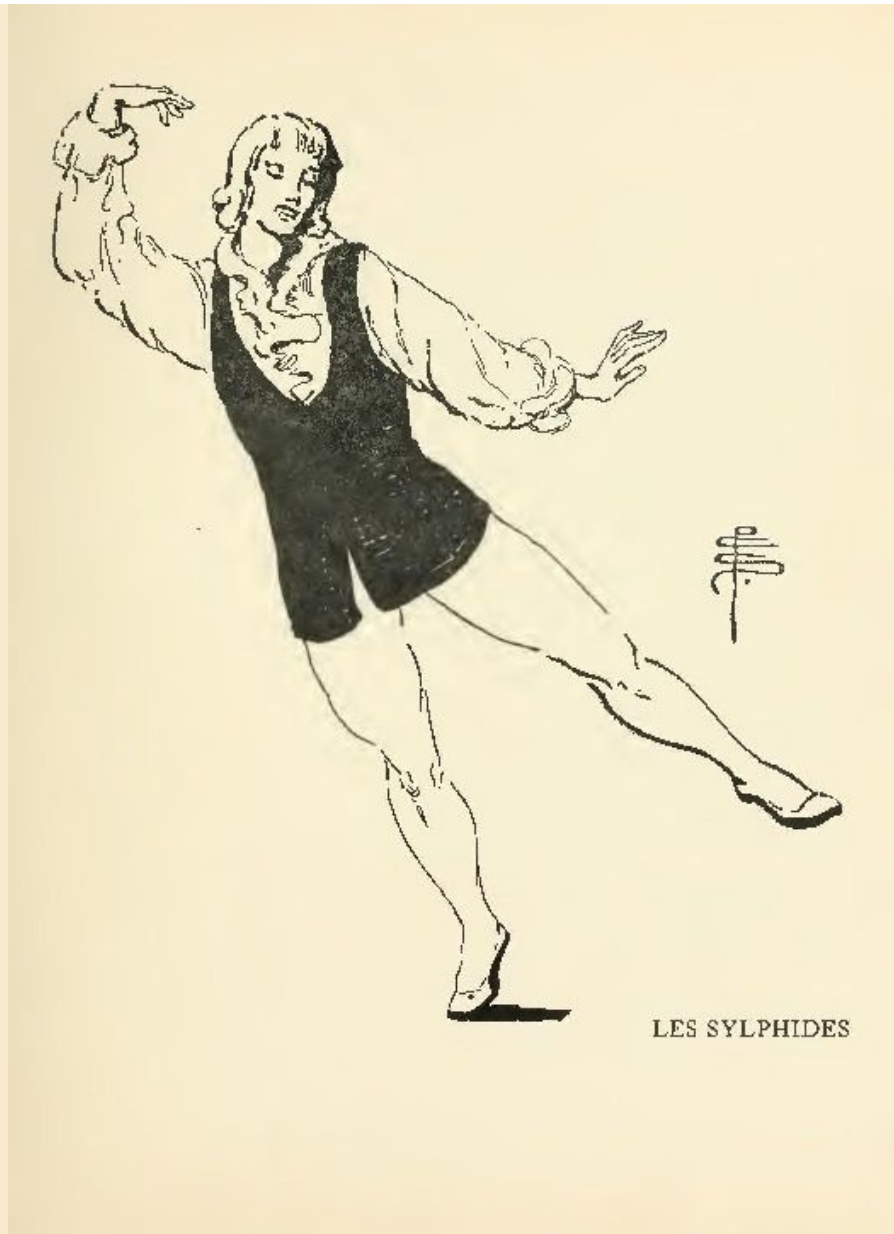
LES SYLPHIDES

*Original*

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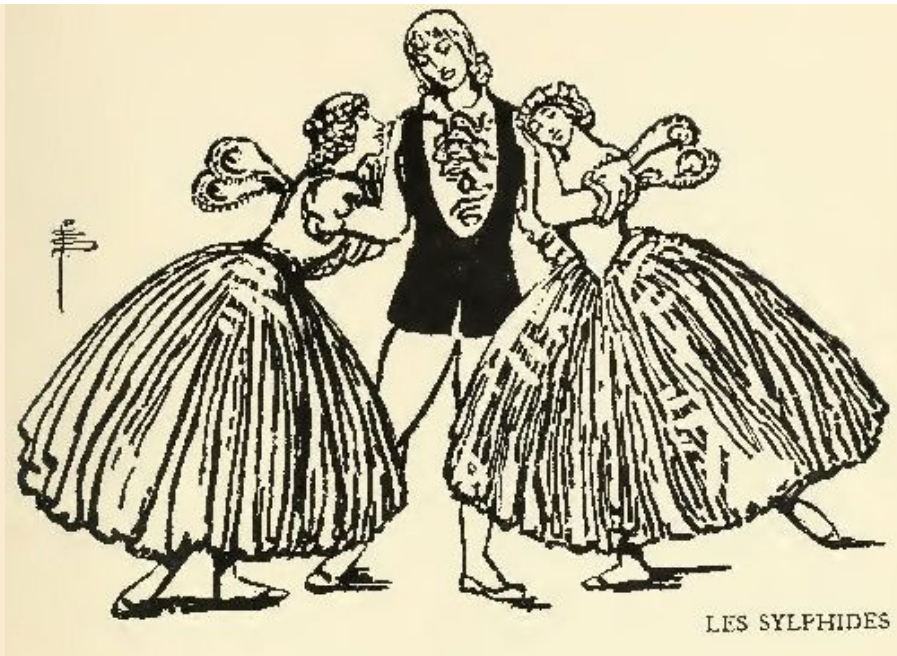
## Les Sylphides

**S**OME of the Russian ballets take a material story and treat it in terms of the dance. But what story is there in "Les Sylphides"? Even the programme, seldom at a loss for a synopsis, has never tried to tell us what it is all about. We hear preludes and waltzes, nocturnes and mazurkas by Chopin, and hear them orchestrated audaciously, but for the most part successfully, by distinguished Russian composers. We remember that when we heard these lovely Chopin pieces on the piano, interpreted by a Paderewski or a Pachmann, we had our mental dreams; we saw things, but not with our eyes. When the curtain rose on "Les Sylphides" we were asked to make our imagination abdicate its rights, to put away the films of that little individual cinematograph which we had made with closed eyes. The demand may have seemed impertinent to those who love the interior visions given by musical sounds better than the most beautiful spectacle that the theatre has ever presented. But "Les Sylphides" had not progressed far before we ceased to be worried by the antagonism between dreams and stage pictures. The grace of those immaterial white figures, Victorian just so far as Chopin is Victorian, became one with the grace of the music.



*Original*

Perhaps the rhythm of the music has never been better perceived than through these well-ordered movements designed by Fokine. The appearance of Nijinsky as a kind of dream Alfred de Musset in a romantic fair wig, and dressed in black and white, among the impalpable Sylphides was both inexplicable and inevitable. When he danced he seemed almost to play Chopin with his feet, so perfect was his time. His steps seemed to be the symmetry of the music—in fact its rhythm, for the rhythm of music is symmetry in motion. And when he merely walked about with outstretched arm, he recalled Ruskin's allusion to man "in erect and thoughtful motion," to "the great human noblesse of walking on feet."



*Original*

But it is time we cried "place aux dames!" Miss Pamela Colman Smith has well transfigured the bounding motion of Nijinska (sister to the "centre piece of the mosaic") in the Mazurka; and the names of Karsavina, Schollar, Will and Kovalewska excite happy memories of this romance of style.

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## Le Carnaval

**L**E CARNAVAL," the second of the dance poems which have inspired Miss Pamela Colman Smith, is equally romantic, but not in the pensive, twilight manner of "Les Sylphides," with its vague suggestion of mysterious grief. Everything in "Carnaval" is joyous and *insouciant*—except perhaps poor Bolm as Pierrot, the unhappy dupe of Nijinsky-Arlecchino's teasing pranks. Bakst's scene, with its plain blue curtains and two absurd uncomfortable Victorian sofas, prepares us for the Russian interpretation of Schumann's music, before the peg-top trousered and crinolined *corps de ballet* have made their appearance.



LE CARNAVAL

*Original*

Until I saw "Le Carnaval," although I had realized that the art of the Russians was not narrow or local, and that they could dance in several languages, I fear I had not credited them with humor. The true comic spirit (which makes us smile, not laugh in the manner so offensive to Mr. Bernard Shaw) rules this delicious episode, which is a setting of Schumann's music in the way that music can be a setting of words, completing their message and intensifying their significance.

For the first time I will use the word "acting" in connection with the Russian ballet. The comedy in "Le Carnaval" is of a very high order. The story is interpreted more through genuine pantomime than through dancing, which perhaps accounts for the popularity of this particular ballet with us English, who still understand the nature of good acting better than the nature of good dancing, although we are at the present time much attracted by dancing. A real note of freakish farce is in this "Carnaval." The dancing itself is freakish. It is the simplest, silliest thing! A bit of fun—yet to give us this bit of fun what serious work was needed! The grave young Nijinsky is transformed into a mischievous child!

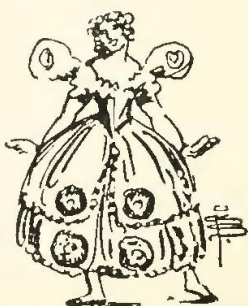


LE CARNAVAL

*Original*

## The Corps de Ballet

**I** NOTICED in "Carnaval" the individual work done by each individual of the *corps de ballet*, yet always done in such a way as to contribute to the harmonious effect of the whole. The Pierrot (Bolm), the Harlequin (Nijinsky), the Columbine (Karsavina), played the leading parts incomparably, but that was not surprising. It was far more surprising to see in every member of the ballet the talent of a "star."



LE CARNAVAL

They were not there just to wear their 1860 costumes well and to form themselves into mechanical groups. The entire *corps* vibrated with life, did their full share in the dancing and miming. They never appeared to be waiting for an opportunity for distinction; they were content to distinguish themselves.





LE CARNAVAL

Original

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## Le Spectre de la Rose

**W**HAT would a dramatist make of Gauthier's little idyl of the vision of the Rose? What would an actor and actress make of it if it could be dramatized? I am afraid to answer these questions. Fortunately they need not be answered, as no dramatist now will be fool enough to rush in where dancers have trodden on such light feet. ("The beautiful is light. All divine things run on light feet.") A young girl returns from a ball. She sinks into a chair and, kissing the rose in her hand, which reminds her of the evening's innocent pleasure, she falls asleep. She dreams that the rose comes to life and invites her to dance with it. She dances in her dream. (Does she see the rose, I wonder, or is it invisible to her while visible to us?) She knows a joy in which there is no fatigue, a love in which there is no threat to her virginity. The phantom rose disappears. She wakes. The real rose is at her feet where the dream rose had lain for a moment. She picks it up and kisses it again, poor little faded and finite sign of a fresh infinite thing which has shown itself for a moment and passed out of earth's tiny room.



SPECTRE DE LA ROSE

*Original*

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## A Paradox

**I**T is one of those paradoxes, of which the Russian ballet is rich in examples, that the music of this fragile little poem should be Weber's "Invitation à la Valse," robustly orchestrated by Berlioz. I can imagine how sickly and pale specially written music might have been! The healthy, strong melody, the sound, marked rhythm help to create that sense of the *impossible* which is the abiding impression of the phantom of the rose.



SPECTRE DE LA ROSE

*Original*

How this music pulsates! Its deep expectant breathing increases one's sensation that we are all dreaming—dancers and audience too. Tamar Karsavina, who in other roles shows a nervous force, a tragic power, a strange and luring grace which account even better than her dancing for her triumphant prominence, is so gentle, so modest, so suppliant in the "Spectre de la Rose," that she becomes the incarnation of snow-white youth, dreaming of a heavenly lover. And Nijinsky becomes the spirit of that dream. I feel sorry for that young girl, who perhaps will wake next day in that queer Bakst bedroom, and think of the partner who gave her the rose, not of the Rose itself, who came to her as virginal as the thought which summoned him. I don't like the idea of the remembrance of an ordinary flirtation at a ball walking in at the door of that room, out of whose window the mystical figure of the Rose flew forth into the night, which was, I am sure, day to him!

**T**HE Russian dancers may reasonably pride themselves on their versatility. In their seven-leagued ballet shoes they travel all over the world, and beyond. They bound easily from ancient Greece to a Caucasian camp, from the East of a thousand-and-one nights to a legendary country invented for their playground.

It really requires astonishing mental activity to follow them with pleasure from "Le Spectre de la Rose" to "Scheherazade." A symphonic poem of Richard Strauss after a plain-song hymn, or Wagner after Mozart, could not be a greater shock to the system. Everything in "Scheherazade" suggests violence and horror.



*Original*

Bakst's palace was built for dreadful deeds; no one, I am sure, could ever feel safe in it. Its color makes it vibrate on its foundations, if indeed it has any foundations. There are bad dreams as well as good ones, and the dream quality, on which I have insisted, so far, as the special beauty of these Russian ballets and mimed poems, is present in "Scheherazade." The strange thing is that this nightmare, in which sensuality and cruelty are the only emotions evoked, has a paradoxical vein of delicacy running through it. There is something almost childlike in the wiles by which the Sultan's wives, when their lord's back is turned, induce the Master Eunuch to liberate the slaves for their pleasure. The infantile joyousness with which the dark-skinned youths rush from their silver and gold cages on their loves and on their impending doom has an element of pity. The whirligig dance which follows expresses exactly the happiness, which is short, sharp and sudden, but over which destiny hangs, and for which there is no mercy. And all the time in this riot of color, this orgy of animation, we never lose sight of the negro who is the chosen of the Sultan's favorite, the negro who half an hour ago in another world was the phantom Rose! His arms, which but now were waving invisible garlands in the serene air, are ready to coil round their prey in a serpentine embrace.



SCHEHERAZADE

*Original*

The lips which gave the innocent kiss of naïve youth are now twisted in the spasms of desire. Nijinsky in "Scheherazade" is not the incarnation of evil, but its spirit.... His ghastly pallor is terrible. Really he seems to turn white under his black skin.



SCHEHERAZADE



SCHEHERAZADE

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## Tamar

**T**AMAR" is another pleasant little ballet of barbarity, in which Karsavina, as one of those avid, fatal heroines, in the interpretation of whose serpentine passions she is always fine, lures lovers to her high tower, and, in the manner of the Chinese Empress, makes death the penalty of an hour of her love. The execution is summary, the unfortunate lover being hurled out of the window by muscular members of Tamar's suite. In "Tamar" Adolph Bolm, who was I think the first Russian male dancer to appear in England, makes a magnificent entrance. Miss Pamela Colman Smith's drawing gives a very vivid impression of the effect produced by the first appearance on the scene of the Lover and his companions. Here is a very good example of the amazing influence that the color and shape of mere garments can have on the imagination. Those silent, black-coated, black-hatted men, their faces muffled in concealing scarfs, seem to have come from far, from very far. I feel that their horses below are in a sweat, that they have been riding furiously at the summons of a force which their fresh and ardent youth could not resist!



*Original*

Poor frenzied man! What is his secret? Why has he come here to see love through a veil of blood—blood which is his own?

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## Prince Igor

**A**T the head of the Polovtsien warriors in the dances from Borodin's opera "Prince Igor," Bolm has to dance as well as to mime, and very splendidly and fiercely he dances with his bow. This "Prince Igor" ballet lasts only a few minutes, but in those minutes are crowded enough energy, excitement, lightning swift successions of different movements, true healthy barbarity (not the barbarity of decadence), and splendid music to take away all words, all thoughts, but "wonderful"! But those "Prince Igor" dances ought never to have been given without their accompanying songs. It has been the custom lately to leave out the singing, one of those omissions that matter.



*Original*

*NOTE: An omission of mine that matters is that I have recalled "Prince Igor" without mentioning the name of Sophia Féodorova, who holds her own in astounding feats of agility, as in fiery spirit with the adolescents in whose evolutions she participates. The girl is a wonder at this man's work!*

## **Pavillon d' Armide**

**I**N this ballet, in the style of the French ballets of the reign of Louis XIV., there is less distinction, I think, than in the others from which Miss Pamela Colman Smith has derived her pictures. The costumes and scenery are "designed by Benois," but any one with a knowledge of the theatre and a Racinet at hand could have done the same sort of thing. And yet as I write this I know I should make the reservation of that "life" which the Russians know how to breathe into everything. What I mean is that Benois gives us no new creation. Karsavina's bird-like grace in her eighteenth-century guise is captivating (oh, that this talented little dancer had more music in her, and did not dance always a fraction off the beat!), and Nijinsky as a wholly unnecessary slave in white satin gives a wonderful exhibition of dancing in the style of the original Ballon who danced at the opera in Paris at the end of the seventeenth century, and gave his name to the kind of classical dancing which consists in elevation.





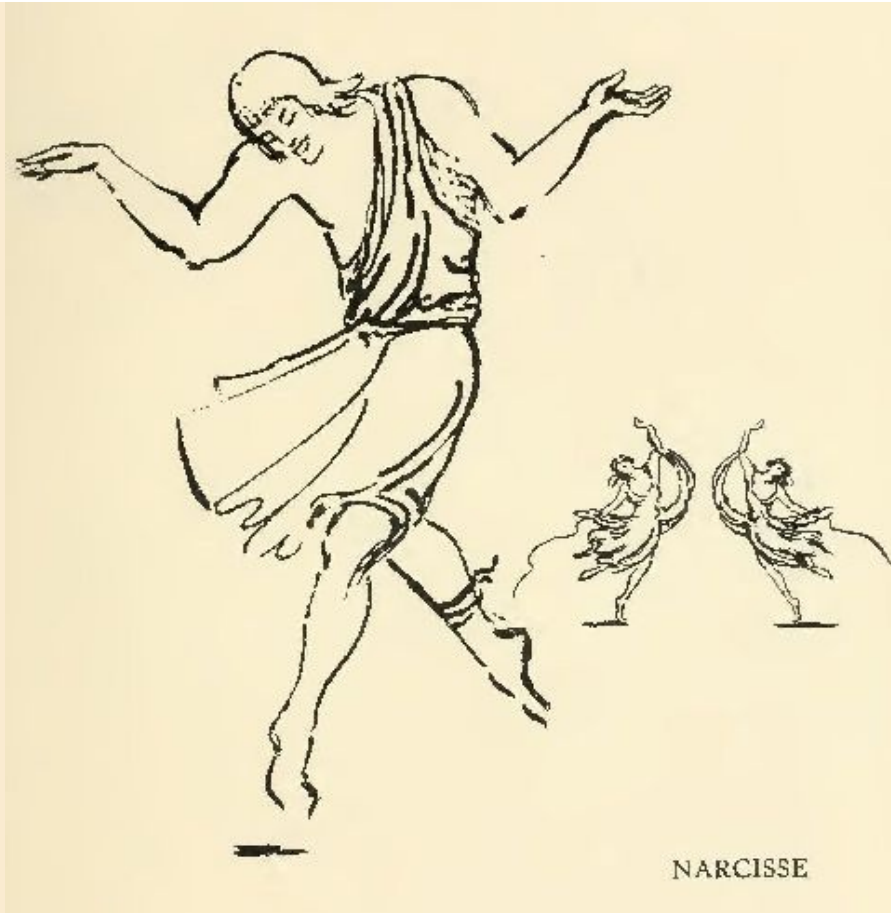
*Original*

*NOTE: Bolm as the lover looks very like one of Louis XIV.'s sons, and mimes perfectly. I like the "pas de trois" (the music of this ballet by Tscherepnin is fascinating), but I liked it better when it was originally given at the Coliseum as an extract, and danced by Kosloff, Karsavina and Baldina. Our spirited, bounding Nijinska has not got the eighteenth-century style. Oh, I must not forget those dear Bouffons! Their little dance alone makes "Pavilion d'Armide" worth while.*

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## Narcisse

**T**HE last drawing in this book is of Nijinsky as Narcisse, and if Narcisse had been a *pas seul* by Nijinsky I am sure that there would have been more to praise in it. For once, the mosaic was all wrong, and so the centre piece could not be all right. I have read enthusiastic accounts of "L'Après-midi d'un Faune," which Nijinsky himself arranged, making Debussy's music the vehicle for a display of Greek poses, and from Nijinsky's personal performance in "Narcisse" I believe it to be possible that he has succeeded in doing, in "L'Après-midi de un Faune," what Bakst failed to do in "Narcisse." ' ' When, at the end of the ballet, that colossal stage narcissus was jerked up from the stage pool, and the limelight was turned on it, I regretfully saw in that light a limitation in the Russian art. They could not interpret the tranquil repose, the immanent beauty of Greek ideas.



*Original*

The whole treatment of the exquisite story of the youth who fell in love with his own beauty, and was drowned seeking to come near its reflection, was heavy-handed, even a little barbarous and ugly. And all the grave movements imprisoned in stone and marble by the sculptors of ancient Greece, all the joyous silhouettes on Greek vases, seemed to remain remote, and secure from the conquest of the devouring Russian, restlessly seeking material for his ballets in all nations and all times. I had a sudden seizure of distrust; it was as though the disdain of the Greek had sapped the foundations of my belief in the justness of the praises lavished on the new dance; but then memories of gestures, colors, bounding movements, freedom of expression given by perfection of technique, came crowding pell-mell into my mind. The frown on a cold marble forehead could not extinguish my joy in the flame of life which burns so ardently in the work of the Russian ballet.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RUSSIAN BALLET \*\*\*

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