

like fine lobsters? Seen in this light, they probably turn out not to be errors at all, but bait, or of such insignificance that they quickly disappear into the swollen sea of your narrative like nondescript peas. As for any big wrong fact, it could, like the bad apple in a cinder pile, prove how good the other apples are.

It would, in any case, go unnoticed in the whirr of the reportage. If the Silver Streak railroad train whizzed by, would you remember the blaze of azure or the forgotten particulars of a wheel that may not be firmly situated on the rail?

*Also, truly good writing requires that it be puzzled over. Slightly muddy, it should spring out; and engage the reader's perplexity.*

Mitch, can I have a light?

C) The hardest task is to write about a specific person, who hasn't been in the news, and this is when you should do a composite sometimes. If I say that someone has flared Victor Mature lips, then I am already delimiting your perception of him in terms of a tiny part of another personage. Or if I say he has tiny slit-like snake eyes, then I am really going the distance and bringing animal sections in. By the time you get through, a person could be a real mish-mash.

But with so many writers today, we have a pathetic lameness, in that they don't go far enough with having people be mixtures of others. In the hands of someone who knows how to do it, it can be done though. As an example, I just finished a portrait of a clerk for a book I'm doing on something. Despite repeated efforts, we couldn't seem to locate the person, and so it became necessary to have him feigned. My staff, which is divided into parts of people, upper/lower, inner/outer, etc., assembled characteristics of clerks we have encountered along the way. Quotes, that had the ring of what he might have said, were put into his mouth. A certain tilt of the head was added. Type pants, that would probably have been worn by him, were pulled up onto his trunk. And so on, until eventually came he to be, bearing now the unmistakable stamp of his own special himness, more of it even than might have been found in the individual himself. You'd be sure to recognize him if you met it on the street.

*Reliance on too much accuracy is sounding the death knell of writing as we know it.*

*Insert earlier:* Or, should you be forced to leave the scene of the crime for an appointment, the notes of another writer, perhaps hastily observed, can sometimes yield all that you may need. These so-called diligent phonies wouldn't know a story if they saw it, and their writing is as thin and lifeless as a vine. So you should sift through and lift from some pads.

*I also ghostwrite no-hope-of-recovery books.*

In conclusion, I have said that regular writing should be done away with by 1994 and replaced by what I call nowriting. This would be not writing anything down, but simply experiencing it when it happens, through others on cassettes or through the compiler on different shows. For instance, even this paper I wrote would have been better if it hadn't been written.

To be continued. □

## BALLET A CLASSIC "BEAUTY"

BY HOLLY BRUBACH



TCHAIKOVSKY'S SCORE FOR *The Sleeping Beauty* is like a miracle waiting to happen, and occasionally—not nearly often enough—the miracle is brought into being on the stage. Always dance-worthy, the music describes the characters and the course of events, in detail. When the staging keeps to this musical blueprint, as it does in the best productions of *Beauty*, this nineteenth-century storybook ballet manages to capture more of human nature than the most modern psychological dance-dramas.

The most recent *Sleeping Beauty* I've witnessed was brought by England's Royal Ballet to the U.S. this past summer. Though a few other companies, here and elsewhere, maintain their own productions, the Royal's undisputed claim to this ballet makes perfect sense: it rests partly with Margot Fonteyn, who remains the definitive Princess Aurora in many people's memories, and partly with the English national character, which takes hierarchy for granted (American ballet companies

*Holly Brubach has written about dance for Vogue, Ballet News, and Ballet Review.*

identify in the program every last dancer in a performance; the Royal lists only those dancers in featured roles and accounts for all the rest collectively, as "Artists of the Royal Ballet"). Anyone who ever doubted the plausibility of this ballet's fuss over a princess had only to consult his television screen in July to see the pomp and circumstance surrounding Aurora's wedding confirmed in real life, in the marriage of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer.

*The Sleeping Beauty* culminates in a wedding, but its subject isn't love, or even marriage—this is a ballet about manners, about moral issues of the most everyday sort. The plot is a tug-of-war, declared in the music, between good and evil. From the first four bars of the Introduction, we learn that an entire kingdom is in peril: the fairy Carabosse's motif hovers around E minor, with a witchlike cackle built on an augmented-sixth chord. Tchaikovsky's marking is *fff* at the outset; only two measures later, a lightning-fast arpeggio that builds to a thunderclap demands a crescendo. There is something stingy and abrupt about Carabosse's rhythms: an eighth note, an eighth rest, an eighth note, an eighth rest, and then—a little fit of pique—four sixteenth notes. When Carabosse laughs, the harmony alternates between two dissonant chords; otherwise, it tends to move stealthily, chromatically. Nowhere in this twenty-seven-bar-long introductory passage is there a musical line continuous enough to constitute a melody. Carabosse extends her hand and snatches it right back again, in music that is furious and menacing. The curtain stays down. With nothing to look at onstage, nowhere to run for cover, the audience is caught in the storm. Then, suddenly, the weather changes.

The key changes, from E minor to E major, and we hear the Lilac Fairy waft in on a harp glissando, hushed pianissimo. She sets our fears to rest, with a calm and expansive melody, four breathless measures long. The tempo is *andantino* (compared with Carabosse's *allegro vivo*), the rhythm is even and soothing. When, finally, the Lilac Fairy raises her voice to triple forte, it's to announce glorious news: the brass adopts her theme and brings it to full flower.

Throughout the ballet, Carabosse and

the Lilac Fairy are pitted harmonically against each other, and their antagonism in the music is truly ingenious. A major key and its relative minor, which is lower by a third (the relative minor of E major is C#), are coexistent—they share the same scale. A major key and its parallel minor, however, do battle over the same territory: in both E major and E minor, the tonic is E, but the minor scale must lower the third tone by half a step. Parallel keys disagree; one or the other must win. So the Lilac Fairy and Carabosse come to blows in the key of E, major versus minor.

The Lilac Fairy's decree in the Introduction gives way to eleven bars of a march, off in the distance, and with that the music comes down to earth. The curtain rises on the ballet's prologue; we hear the procession coming closer. The next music, titled No. 1, March, in the score, echoes the tag end of the Introduction. Like most marches, this one sounds important, but, with its dotted eighth notes on the offbeats, it's too graceful and lilting to be mistaken for a military drill. This music heralds the arrival of noblemen, who walk tall, and women wearing wide skirts, stepping lightly. They are making their way to the palace, part of which we see onstage, for the christening of the newborn Princess Aurora. The time is the seventeenth century. Though we never learn the location of this king's realm, his palace and the fashions of his court look remarkably like those of Louis XIV, the king of France who founded the first official academy for ballet.

Presiding over the festivities onstage is Cattalabutte, the emcee, a self-important civil servant who wears his authority like a well-polished badge. The Royal Ballet's Leslie Edwards plays Cattalabutte in the tradition of Eric Blore's hotel managers and waiters in Astaire-Rogers movies—servile, slightly rotund, swaggering, fussy, easily befuddled. The ladies and gentlemen, who enter by twos, ask Cattalabutte's permission to go look at the baby in her cradle, upstage. Permission granted. Cattalabutte stalks the stage as if he owns it, until a footman hurries on to announce the King's arrival.

The King and Queen wear velvet cloaks lined in ermine; two attendants follow along behind and carry their trains. The Royal's finery (costumes for this production by David Walker) strikes a believable balance between

antique and lived-in: these cloaks, for example, don't look as if they've spent the past few centuries hanging in a museum, nor do they look like costumes—brand-new. The king asks Cattalabutte if he's sure the guest list is complete. Cattalabutte shakes his head, as if to say, "You can place your faith in me." Not to worry.

In this ballet, mime becomes dancing; every gesture is positioned precisely on the music. Long speeches are designated in the score ("*Récit de Cattalabutte*" is specified twice in this march alone). Classical-ballet mime is, of course, stated according to French grammar: "I love you" becomes "I you love," or "*je t'aime*." But the music underlying the words in this ballet makes them more lyrical and eloquent than any spoken language.

On the final chord of the march, everyone onstage pays his respects to the King and Queen in *révérence*. Then the guests of honor arrive (No. 2, *Scène Dansante*). In this kingdom, apparently, no one questions the existence of fairies; they're invited as a matter of course for state occasions like this one. They live in peaceful harmony with the people, though their powers are clearly superhuman. Five fairies appear, each with a cavalier and a footman bearing her gift to the baby Princess. Then come eight girls—junior fairies, presumably—who pave the way for the Lilac Fairy. In some productions, she is simply the last of the fairies to arrive. But the Royal Ballet, which makes no apologies for differences in rank, sets the Lilac Fairy apart from the rest. So, when Carabosse arrives to deliver her curse, it is logically only the Lilac Fairy who can countermand it.

To a waltz marked *grazioso*, the eight girls in the Lilac Fairy's retinue dance in canon—two lines of four, with one line taking up the steps of the other. The music, with a big crescendo to fortissimo and the addition of the brass, shoos the girls off and brings on the fairies' six cavaliers, who execute a fairly standard jumping combination, impressive in unison, then *pirouette* and exit in time for the reprise of the first theme and the girls' return. The six fairies finish out the waltz in front of the Lilac Fairy's corps.

The King and Queen descend from their thrones; the Queen invites the fairies to dance. The Lilac Fairy accepts for them all. Thank you.

The six fairies convene—*bourrées* in a circle—then sit on their cavaliers' knees, in a line at the foot of the stage, for the harp glissandi that open the Adagio (No. 3, *Pas de Six*). The fairies' six footmen—little boys—return with the gifts, each presented on a tasseled velvet cushion. Then, one by one, from left to right, the fairies turn two *pirouettes* and finish balanced in *attitude*, supported by their cavaliers.

All together, the fairies do *développé à la seconde*, and at the height of the extension their partners lift them, so that they seem to soar. They land in *arabesque*, and each of them dips one hand to the ground, as if rippling the surface of a pool, or consecrating the center of the stage. But the musical climax of this scene goes to the baby, brought down by her nurse from the crib to that hallowed spot where the fairies converged. The music swells from *ff* to *fff* to *ffff*, as the fairies gather round and the Lilac Fairy is lifted high overhead; then—more glissandi—they give their blessings with sensuous, rippling arm motions, working their magic. The tempo picks up, the adagio theme heard a few moments earlier returns, *allegro vivo*, and along with it come the eight girls. The stage is now set for the fairies to bestow their gifts individually, each with her own variation.

Our modern-day notion of fairies and who they might be is a rather insipid one, but, fortunately, Tchaikovsky and Marius Petipa, who choreographed the first *Beauty* in 1890 (based on the fairy tale by Charles Perrault), had a broader range of personalities in mind. No two of these six variations are alike.

The first occurs in B $\flat$  major, the same key as the preceding adagio, with a sweet, sustained oboe melody over a clarinet walking up and down stairs. This is, in the Royal's version, the Fairy of the Crystal Fountain, and her dancing is gentle, with precious footwork—*bourrées*, *piqués*, soft *pliés* on point—and frequent changes of facing. Slowly, languorously, she extends one arm, then the other, like a woman admiring her long evening gloves. Midway through, a bassoon takes over the theme from the oboe. Harmonically, this variation makes quick little forays into G minor (the relative minor of B $\flat$  major), and so prefigures the second fairy, of the Enchanted Garden, whose variation is set in G minor. Her music



and her dance—mischievous *piqués* back and *bouffées* forward, little runs and quick double *ronds de jambe* on point, all set to fidgety, staccato woodwinds over galloping strings—set her apart from the first fairy. But, as if by some reciprocal arrangement, she too declares their kinship harmonically, by reverting to B $\flat$  major for the middle eight bars. Though none of the remaining four variations in this suite makes reference to any other, the major/minor link between the first two fairies, with each briefly in the other's key, hints at some larger scheme: we understand by ear, right off, that these are not star turns for competing ballerinas but are six compatible solo variations in which each of the godmothers bestows her own charms on the baby Princess.

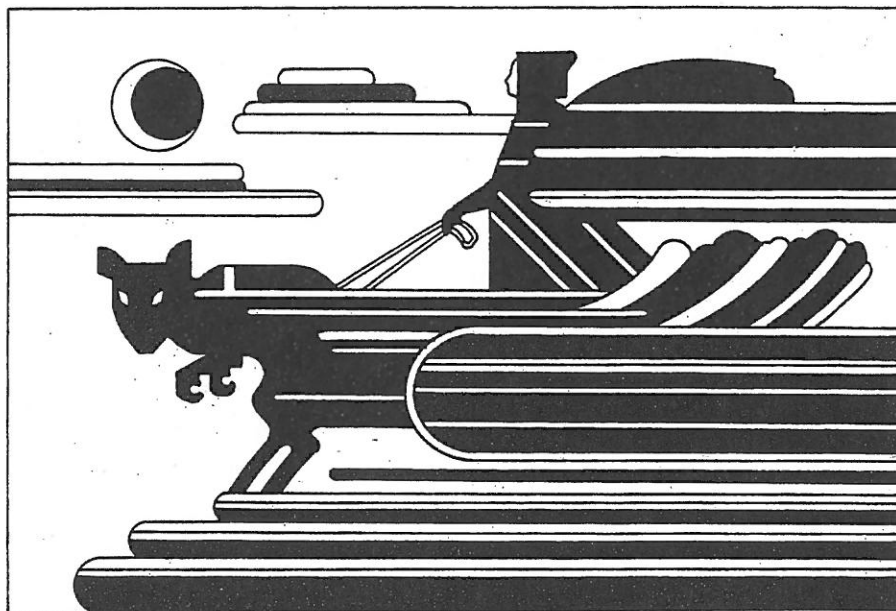
The third fairy is calm, enchanting. Her tiny walking steps, *emboîtés*, and hops in *attitude*—all on point—underscore the music's upper line, pizzicato strings that sprinkle a little trail of eighth notes. Then the dancing shifts our focus from the strings to the shorter, more melodic figure that began on the trombone and was taken over by the piccolo, an octave higher: the little hops and dainty pointwork give way to a larger, more sustained step—a slow *développé* from front to back, through *passé* into *arabesque*.

The fourth variation, set, like the one before, in D major, belongs to the Fairy of the Songbirds; a piccolo descant tweets along with the melody on the glockenspiel. This fairy scurries on point, with her hands fluttering. The music and the choreography together characterize her as vivacious. She raises the pitch of energy onstage, and it's in that new, higher register that the fifth fairy, of the Golden Vine, enters, shooting sparks. Hers is the famous "finger" variation, in which she points with both hands at once to one corner, then to another, up, down—her gestures seem designed to cast a kind spell on the Princess and, at the same time, to bewitch the audiences, onstage and in the theater. Twice she leaps out of a string of fast *châiné* turns, right on the top note of an octave-long chromatic scale, then runs back, as if to retract the outburst.

The last to take her turn is the Lilac Fairy, whose variation is the only waltz of the six, and everything about it is expansive—large and clear. The chore-

ography also draws a subtle distinction between her and the rest of the fairies, not with steps we haven't yet seen but with many familiar steps on a grander scale than we've seen them so far. Like two of the others' variations, the Lilac Fairy's includes double *ronds de jambe*, but whereas theirs were low and quick, hers are leisurely, with a last-minute lift into a high *développé à la seconde*. The music builds until the melody's final round, fortissimo, when the Lilac Fairy swings into *fouettés* in *arabesque*—her leg swooping down and up again into a well-held second position, her torso twisting into *arabesque*. The cavaliers return—to the strong,

the wings and will be onstage any minute. The King and Queen hastily review with consternation the scroll that is the guest list—Carabosse, also a fairy, has been forgotten. The menacing theme that began the Introduction, we now know, was an omen of this: hurling thunderbolts in E minor, Carabosse rides right into the midst of the festivities in a carriage driven by her pack of rats. Two rats run on ahead, paving the way, and point back to her: Here she comes! She descends from her coach and, about to explode but restraining her anger for the moment, walks forward and curtsies to the King and Queen. Then she unleashes her fury:



square music of the coda—with air turns, *cabrioles*, *assemblés battus*; the girls in the Lilac Fairy's retinue come back, then the fairies, two at a time, crossing the stage. The Lilac Fairy herself brings this finale to a close, wending her way downstage with a few steps, then an *arabesque*, as the orchestra peals the same note, bell-like. As soon as she arrives at the footlights, the fairies and their company all take their places in the tableau that concluded the preceding *Scène Dansante*.

THE KING AND Queen come forward to thank the fairies; the fairies' footmen surround them and offer the gifts. Suddenly, the sky darkens. "*Bruit dans le vestibule*," the score says—a commotion just offstage. A page hurries on: Sire . . . But the warning comes too late. Carabosse has already arrived in

You didn't invite me—why? The King fumbles for an excuse: I—I, uh . . . it wasn't me, it was (pointing to Cattalabutte) him! This King, passing the buck, is only human. Cattalabutte cowers in fear. As the rats dance a little agitated jig, Carabosse slowly walks a circle around him, sizing up her prey. In some productions, she snatches his wig, as the score directs. But in the Royal Ballet, Carabosse has only to snap her fingers in his ear—Boo!—and Cattalabutte jumps. It's his own cowardice, not her cruelty, that finally makes him look ridiculous, and Carabosse is so shrewd a judge of character that she instantly perceives how easily Cattalabutte can be humiliated. Her rats take an imbecilic delight in this little scene. The score tells us, "*Les pages rient d'un air caustique*."

Traditionally, Carabosse is some-

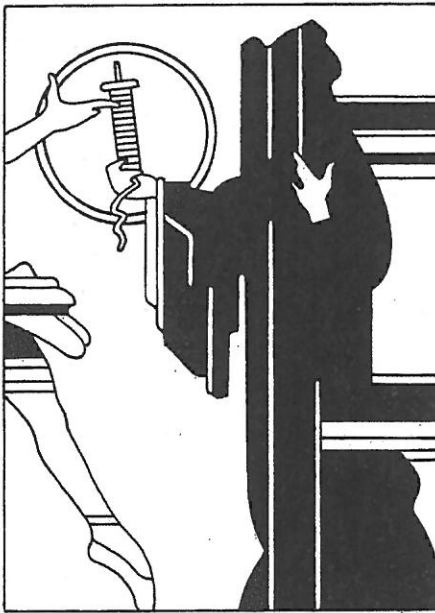
thing of a witch: she comes wearing a long black gown, her mime gestures exaggerate the length of her fingers, and she rubs her hands together the way witches do when they're concocting their brews. But Monica Mason, who now performs the role at the Royal, conceives the character on her own brilliant terms. Though there's no doubting her mean streak, Mason's Carabosse is beautiful where others are ugly, evil to the core (the role is sometimes played by a man, in travesty). It seems clear enough in her portrayal that Carabosse was once a nice fairy—a little touchy, perhaps, and jealous—whose feelings have been hurt. She isn't wicked, she's vindictive. While all the other fairies have come wearing their Sunday-best tutus, in jewel-like colors, with filigreed bodices, Carabosse intends her funereal attire as an affront: worse than wearing black to a wedding is wearing black to a christening.

The King and Queen beg Carabosse's pardon—there is alarm in the brass—and the other fairies, surrounding her in a deep *révérence*, recommend forgiveness. But Carabosse will have none of it: she laughs back at them; she mocks the Fairy of the Crystal Fountain to her face, mimicking the arm movements from her variation. She sneers at the Songbird Fairy: And you, *you* with your fluttery little hands . . . Carabosse will not be turned away from her purpose. She has come to deliver a curse.

She points to the crib. The baby Princess will grow up to be beautiful, Carabosse says. The crowd hangs on her every gesture. She milks the suspense and pauses, kicking the rats at her feet. Continuing, she points again to the crib, holds up a spindle, and, with long, graceful hand motions, spins an imaginary thread. The music runs along, fortissimo, until suddenly, gleefully, she pricks her finger: "She will fall asleep and her sleep will be eternal," the score says here, and the music fades to pianissimo. But Carabosse doesn't break the news so gently: she raises her arms overhead and, with one emphatic gesture, brings them crashing down in a death sentence—wrists crossed, her hands in fists. The court recoils in horror; the King and Queen, on their knees now, implore Carabosse to rescind the curse. She stands like a washerwoman, her hands on her hips, and laughs. She spreads her arms in front of her and

makes waves; the music scurries, staccato, and the rats at her feet scramble back and forth on their bellies. Their exultation at last screeches to a halt when the music shifts to E major and the Lilac Fairy, in hiding all this time, steps forward.

She bows to Carabosse; then: Why do you want to harm the Princess? I heard what you said—and she reiterates Carabosse's mime speech, gesture for gesture, right down to the final grim prediction of Aurora's death. But then she breaks the spell: from that same awful, intractable gesture—wrists crossed, hands in fists—she opens her hands and smoothes the air in front of her, as



much as to say, "But no," or "It doesn't matter." For—there's more—Aurora will not die but will fall asleep; the Lilac Fairy makes a pillow of her arms and rests her head on it. Aurora will sleep until a Prince comes and awakens her with a kiss. Unlike Carabosse's terse prophecy, the Lilac Fairy's is lyrical and unbroken; the contrast in their deliveries is as dramatic as if Gertrude Stein and Marcel Proust had been their speechwriters.

The music builds to a climax, reached when the Lilac Fairy predicts Aurora's awakening, and, rising from a deep *plié*, raises her arms in triumph. Carabosse crumbles before her. The coach stands ready; Carabosse, who has lost the battle but isn't about to concede the war, clambers back in and, drawn by her rats in harness, drives off in a huff. She rises to her feet, shakes her fist, points

to her forehead—Mark my words!—and vanishes in a cloud of smoke: pouf. The crowd at court watches her go, raising an arm in salute, or perhaps in send-off: Be gone! Right away, the sun comes out and, as the people and fairies resume their processional and assemble for the prologue's final tableau around the cradle, the blue haze that is Carabosse's wake has lifted and hovers overhead.

FROM THEN ON, the ballet unfolds exactly as predicted: the first act, a birthday party for the sixteen-year-old Princess Aurora, during which she pricks her finger on a spindle and falls into a dead faint, is according to Carabosse; the second, in which Prince Florimund awakens Aurora with a kiss, is according to the Lilac Fairy.

During Act I, it's the members of the audience who keep Carabosse's curse in mind, watching with trepidation. The members of the court seem to have forgotten it—sixteen years have passed, after all. Not even the King seems concerned. There is an awkward scene at the act's opening, when the King decrees that three women found knitting be hanged (the connection seems far-fetched—presumably knitting needles, or maybe all sharp objects, have been banned since Carabosse's prophecy). But the King's moment of recognition doesn't come until much later, when he sees an old hag, whose face is hidden by the hood of her cloak, present Aurora with a golden spindle. He puzzles for a moment—it's as if he has seen this before—and then recalls: this is the way Carabosse predicted that the Princess would come to her death. He tries to get the spindle away from her, growing impatient as she refuses to hand it over: Give it here, he pleads. But, of course, the machinery is already in motion. Aurora pricks her finger, embarks on a "*Danse-vertige*," as it's labeled in the score, and swoons, in *arabesque*, "*Aurore tombe morte*": the score's stage direction assumes the worst.

But the audience's first clue that Carabosse's hex is about to take effect comes much earlier than the King's. With the music for Aurora's entrance—frisky, shadowed with faintly minor harmonies—the Princess seems already under Carabosse's sway. Our first glimpse of Aurora, poised in the colonnade upstage before she runs into the midst of her party, confirms our fears: she is, as Carabosse foretold,

But no sooner has Carabosse carried out her threat than the Lilac Fairy returns to keep her promise. She organizes a cortège to transport the Princess to her bed, then dances a lullaby to put the rest of the court to sleep. She coaxes the palace's landscaped garden to grow into a wild forest, so that the people's sleep will go undisturbed, their presence undiscovered, for a hundred years.

When, a few minutes later, the curtain rises on Act II, we find ourselves in the eighteenth century: the clothes are different in style and in their deeper, more saturated colors. Prince Florimund's hunting party is picnicking in the woods, engaging in a round of social dances—a Colin-Maillard, minuet, gavotte, farandole, mazurka. The Prince, though, is distracted, not in the mood for dancing, and he stays behind when the party continues on. The Lilac Fairy shows him a vision of the Princess Aurora and then, at his request, takes him to the palace in her mother-of-pearl boat, which looks as fragile and seaworthy as a Fabergé egg. This is the Panorama (No. 17), and in the music we can hear the waves lapping against the side of the boat.

The Awakening in itself is brief, but before it can take place, the Lilac Fairy must drive out Carabosse, who has made one last, desperate but feeble attempt to hold the fort and see that the Princess sleeps on forever. Without much of a struggle, Carabosse surrenders and then skulks off into the overgrown woods. The Prince's kiss resurrects Aurora and, stretching and yawning, the rest of the court comes back to life.

Act III, in which Aurora and Florimund are married, is another state occasion for character-dance diversissements and more variations. Invitations have gone out to representatives of other Perrault fairy tales: Beauty and the Beast, Red Ridinghood and a lusty Wolf attend. A Bluebird arrives with a Princess in tow: she is charmed by his song and follows him; he flies around her. Three other guests, Florestan and his sisters, dance a *pas de trois*.

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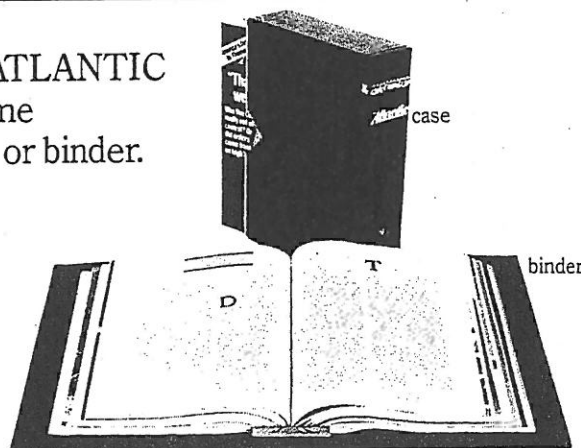
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The bride and groom take their vows in a *pas de deux*, and the ceremonies conclude with a mazurka. The only fairy in attendance is the Lilac Fairy, and the others are sadly conspicuous in their absence. But, despite his nearly fatal oversight in the prologue, Cattalabutte's services have been retained, and he patrols the stage, puff-chested, with new and deepened pride.

Like most ballets, *The Sleeping Beauty* is only as good as its cast, and in the five performances I saw, no single cast seemed quite complete. Only two Lilac Fairies—Pippa Wylde and Bryony Brind—had authority enough to command the stage, and the Royal lacks a great Aurora. Lesley Collier makes a pugnacious Princess; Jennifer Penney, who looks the part, seems slightly bored by life at court. Merle Park in the role is intelligent above all, which is not unappealing but not especially appropriate, either—it's not the Princess's mind we are out to admire.

But even without a true ballerina in the title role, and without strong dancers in the leads, the Royal Ballet understands *The Sleeping Beauty* and never for a moment betrays the ballet's spirit. The dancing is distinctly British: slightly chauvinistic, always proper; the girls see that they don't spread their legs too far in turned-out positions, or open their hips too much in *arabesque*. No step is ever made too large or too fast—nothing urgent. The girls' insteps are ravishing, delicately curved to the point. Their arms make cameo-frames for their faces. Positions are always correct, decorum prevails—as befits royalty.

The marriage of this particular company to this ballet was made in heaven, and each has served the other well over the years. When, in 1939, Nicholas Sergeyev restaged Petipa's version (or so he claimed; we'll never know how accurately he had preserved the original in his notebooks) for the company that later became the Royal Ballet, he set English dancing on its feet. *Beauty*, in one production or another, has been the repertory's staple ever since, the bread and butter by which the company survived hard times. The ballet's style has become the code by which the Royal conducts all its dancing. Now the hard times are over, but the Royal Ballet, in its fiftieth anniversary season, dances with *Beauty* in its soul. □

## BOOKS

## HAPPINESS IS NO LAUGHING MATTER

BY ALFRED KAZIN

CLIFFORD ODETS: AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT  
by Margaret Brenman-Gibson. Atheneum, \$30.00.



ON A WINTER NIGHT in the depths of the Depression, February 19, 1935, a mediocre actor in the "socially conscious" Group Theatre Acting Company, Clifford Odets, startlingly emerged as an important American dramatist, with a rambunctious play about poor Jews in the Bronx—*Awake and Sing!* The title came from another work addressed to poor Jews: Isaiah 26:19—*Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust.*

Later that winter, having graduated from college just in time to join thirteen and a half million other Americans on the unemployment rolls, I saw Odets's play from a fifty-cent seat in the second balcony of the Belasco Theater, on West 44th Street in New York. Like most of the people in the balcony, I didn't see *Awake and Sing!* so much as I lived it. It was the first American play that convinced me that the Depression was good for writers, the first that brought dignity and fire to the tumultuous lives of New York's millions of Jews, the first that took off from the newly learned traditions of Chekhov and Russian stage practice to show difficult people *not* relating to each other in the same narrow room. Above all, it was the first to sound out joyfully, with blazing vitality, a profane, mocking English put together out of New York's street life; echoes of Hebrew, Russian, and Yiddish; the everlasting promises of American advertising; and romantic Tin Pan Alley lyrics of the period:

"All I want's a chance to get to first base!"

"That's how it is—life is like that—a cakewalk."

"What's it get you?"

"A four-car funeral."

At twenty-eight, Odets had made an initial smash with the agitprop one-act play *Waiting for Lefty*, which was

Alfred Kazin is at work on *An American Procession*, a book about American writers from Emerson to Eliot.

based on the violent New York taxicab strike of 1934. The success of this irresistible propaganda play suddenly gave new meaning and purpose to the actors and directors who shortly became "the Group," a company of twenty-eight young stage aspirants in revolt against the slickness of Broadway and the unfairness of the "star" system. The members of the Group made it clear that though they meant to succeed on Broadway and hoped to convert it, they would never be spiritually *of* Broadway. The Group was a seminar as much as it was an acting company: an intellectual kibbutz, endlessly drawn to discussions of anything relating to "the theater and society" but especially to the Stanislavsky method, which the founders—Cheryl Crawford, Harold Clurman, and Lee Strasberg—had been smitten with in a brief visit to the Soviet Union. When Harold Clurman, the only genuine intellectual in the company, directed a new play, more hours were often spent discussing the play than rehearsing it.

Out of the Group eventually came future Hollywood stars and solid performers—Franchot Tone, John Garfield, Lee J. Cobb, Karl Malden, Elia Kazan (who became more famous as a director), Howard da Silva, and Luther and Stella Adler, children of the famous Yiddish actor Jacob P. Adler. As the Group slowly fell apart during the thirties with the erosion of radical hopes and with Odets's failure to sustain the promise of *Awake and Sing!*, Odets and other members became Hollywood fixtures. Certain Group stalwarts—Stella Adler and Morris Carnovsky—seemed to producers too Jewish for leading parts. At a time when the former immigrant Louis B. Mayer, the boss of MGM, invited the German Nazi consul in Los Angeles to pass on a "political" film, it did the vital Stella Adler no good to have her nose shortened. But Julie Garfinkle, who was