

Nijinsky film fails to reach the heights

(2) In Review



Dance Collection, New York Public Library

'Nijinsky'

World East and West theaters

Vaslav Nijinsky in Paris in 1910, in "Danse Siamoise" ("Les Orientales").

By Donna Chernin

By every indication, "Nijinsky" should be a masterpiece.

It is a lavishly mounted, finely detailed chronicle of the crucial years in the life of Russian dancer Vaslav Nijinsky.

After overwhelming audiences with his genius, then outraging

some with his controversial ballets, the young Nijinsky suffered an emotional breakdown so devastating that he spent the last 33 years of his life in a mental institution. Nijinsky's world collapsed under the strain of professional pressure, but mostly under the agony of losing his longtime lover and mentor, Serge Diaghilev (Alan Bates),

impresario of the Ballets Russes.

"Nijinsky" was directed by Herbert Ross and produced by his wife, former dancer Nora Kaye. They were responsible for "The Turning Point," a visually and emotionally elegant picture that fused film and dance.

Meticulous attention has been devoted to recreating the opulent

art nouveau settings of the Ballets Russes in 1912-13 in such locales as Budapest, Nice, Monte Carlo, Sicily and Buenos Aires.

Elaborate care has been taken, too, to duplicate the flamboyant and revolutionary Nijinsky dance roles. These include the colorful Fokine ballets, as well as Nijinsky's own choreographic works that

created considerable scandal and were publicly decried as "barbaric boredom."

"Nijinsky" weaves a melodramatic web of a homosexual-heterosexual love triangle. All the ingredients are present for a powerhouse production. Yet somehow "Nijinsky" never soars.

It is almost as if one is watching a clinical exploration of a personality in disintegration. Although I observed Nijinsky's torment with fascination, I never really got behind it. Perhaps this is because "Nijinsky" is too labored and tortured a study of souls in despair.

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A vivid portrait of an enigma

Vaslav Nijinsky was one of the greatest classical dancers who ever lived.

Was he also a choreographer of genius?

Or was he just a poor peasant with no sense of music who was given an opportunity to choreograph because he was the lover of Serge Diaghilev, imperious founder of the Ballets Russes?

This is one of several disturbing questions raised but left unanswered in Herbert Ross' provocative film, "Nijinsky."

Based on fact, the opulent movie presents both sides of the choreographic issue.

Diaghilev, who believed Nijinsky was a choreographer of genius, is shown guiding the impressionable young dancer through museums, introducing him to the wonders of ancient art and encouraging him to choreograph his first ballet to Debussy's "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun" only when he was able to feel like the faun painted on a precious Greek vase.

When Nijinsky danced the faun



Wilma Salisbury

in the ballet's Paris premiere and made an obscene gesture at the climax, he was asked by his colleagues how he could do such a shocking thing in public.

"It was not me," he cried. "It was the faun."

The audience was outraged. But Diaghilev praised Nijinsky's daring as the beginning of "a new plastic art."

Collaborators who had to work with the inexperienced choreographer, however, suffered terrible indignities. Brilliant choreographer Mikhail Fokine lost his temper and his job because of his low opinion of Nijinsky's craft. Brilliant composer Igor Stravinsky stormed out of the rehearsal room in rage at Nijinsky's inability to comprehend his revolutionary music. Bal-

lerina Marie Piltz was humiliated in front of the company because of her inability to comprehend Nijinsky's peculiar way of counting Stravinsky's rhythms.

The film vividly recreates the scandalous premiere of "The Rite of Spring." As the orchestra played Stravinsky's brutal music and the dancers performed Nijinsky's primitive movements, audience members roared with anger, Diaghilev ran to the front of the theater begging them to listen, and Nijinsky frantically yelled his counts from the wings.

Also shown is an excerpt from Nijinsky's only other important ballet, "Jeux." A love triangle symbolized by an interrupted game of tennis, the modern-dress ballet to Debussy's music completely

mystified the Paris audience of 1913.

Their confusion is understandable, for Nijinsky's ballets, as reconstructed for the movie, still look strange today. In comparison to the purity of the classics and the exoticism of Fokine's Russian ballets, Nijinsky's archaic poses, angular gestures, turned-in toes and static style must have seemed grotesque. Balletomanes who idolized the great dancer as the airborne spirit in "Le Spectre de la Rose," the pathetic puppet in "Petrouchka" and the virile slave in "Scheherazade" must have had difficulty accepting him as a slow-moving, sensual creature or a casual tennis player in his own ballets.

Because the movie is primarily concerned with exploring the homosexual relationship between Nijinsky and Diaghilev, it devotes relatively little footage to dancing. Still, it presents enough of Nijinsky's art to raise the question, What if...?

What if Nijinsky had not had a row with Diaghilev and severed

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Paramount Pictures

George de la Pena makes his movie debut in the title role of "Nijinsky."

Picture of today's art world tinted with business reality

By Helen Cullinan

Acceptance by society and a good business sense are not extraordinary attributes to be extolled during a commencement address, but that isn't what you'd expect at the 97th commencement at the Cleveland Institute of Art.

Arnold Herstand, director of Gallery Maeght in New York, was the speaker, and he told graduates at the recent ceremonies that they would need more than creative talent and could do without alienation.

He talked of cash flow and cash shelters, and the new symbols of conformity: a loft and a dealer. Above all — "Be flexible," Herstand said. "You may not be doing the same thing that you are now, but you will be useful."

Probably few of the graduates realized how intimately Herstand knew his topic. He, in fact, began his own career as a painter and reached the top in teaching and art administration before becoming a dealer.

Herstand earned a master of arts

degree from Columbia University and a master of fine arts from Yale University. He then studied at the Art Students League and Pratt Institute in New York and with painter Fernand Leger in Paris and aesthetics scholar Thomas Munro in Cleveland.

Herstand began exhibiting in galleries and museums (including the Whitney) in 1947, taught at the City College of New York (1952-54) and Colgate University (1954-1963) and became director of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 1963. From 1974 to 1977 he was president of the San Francisco Art Institute, resigning to become a dealer.

"I was fed up with student-faculty politics," Herstand said during a conversation last week in New York. "It was a very provincial situation, and I wanted to think international. I never believed in decisions by committee; now I make them all myself."

His wife, Nancy, who is director of development for New York's Guggenheim Museum, convinced

him to go into business for himself. He had been buying art for faculty colleagues and friends all along and had New York and European contacts.

But that was not enough. "I spent a year on my own," Herstand said, "and then realized that to be successful I needed a strong backer or a dealer with a lot of stock."

He shopped around and convinced the prestigious Galerie Maeght in Paris that it needed a New York branch. Maeght handles an international elite of artists, including Chagall, Miro, Matisse, Giacometti, Chillida, Arakawa, Steinberg, Tal-Coat, Stamfli, Estaban, Alechinsky and Tapiés. Gallery branches are at the Maeght Foundation in Southern France, and in Paris, Zurich, Barcelona and, since 1978 under Herstand's direction, New York.

Herstand's office, overlooking Manhattan, is on the 49th floor of the new 50-story glass Solo Building (by Gordon Bunshaft for Skidmore, Owings, Merrill) on W. 57th St. A client-friend of Herstand's owns the



Arnold Herstand

building. There are no gallery shows. Admission is by appointment, thus maintaining privacy and discretion.

Herstand conducts a brisk business. Continued on Page 6-C

Heed U.S. guidelines, food industry is urged

By Janet Beigle French
Staff writer

NEW ORLEANS — The new government-issued dietary guidelines are here to stay and the food industry should support them, "even if it comes out of somebody's hide," Dr. Mark Hegsted of the U.S. Department of Agriculture told the annual conference of the Institute of Food Technology here this week.

Food scientists at the meeting responded by calling for more nutrition education so Americans will know how to choose better from foods already available.

Hegsted, a nutritionist and administrator of USDA's Human Nutrition Center, has been a prime mover behind the U.S. Dietary Goals and their revised version, the guidelines.

Hegsted thinks the food industry should reformulate and promote foods lower in calories, fat, salt, sugar and alcohol and encourage use of fruits, vegetables and cereal products.

Dr. Gilbert Leveille, nutritionist from Michigan State University,

said consumers must be educated about basic nutrition principles, "but it has to be up to them to apply them in a free society."

In a recent survey, said Leveille, only 12% of the respondents connected the Four Food Groups with a good diet.

"Americans are well-nourished through no fault of their own.

"If we could get that (food-group) connection across, we'd have done our job," Leveille said.

Hegsted thinks education is not enough.

He and Leveille agreed, however, that the only way to change eating habits is to teach children. It's very difficult for adults to change the way they eat, both men said.

But because of social change, like the increase in women working, the increasing use of convenience food, and the fact that "industry can process food better than the housewife," the food industry should take more responsibility for processing nutrition into its calories, Hegsted said.

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