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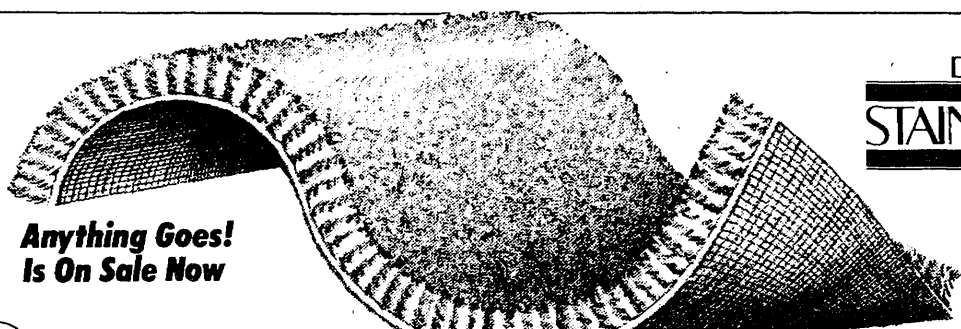
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'Rite of Spring' still has power to shock audiences

By ROBERT M. ANDREWS
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vaslav Nijinsky's "The Rite of Spring," the revolutionary ballet that provoked a riot at its Paris premiere 76 years ago, is showing the jaded world of the 1980s that it can still shock an audience.

When the Joffrey Ballet presented its revival of the long-lost Nijinsky masterpiece, set to Igor Stravinsky's jarringly primitive score, about 50 spectators stalked silently out of the Kennedy Center Opera House during Friday's opening-night performance.

Choreographed by the legendary Nijinsky, widely regarded as the greatest dancer of the 20th century, the ballet received a far more tumultuous reception at its Theater des Champs-Elysees debut in Paris on May 29, 1913.

The audience erupted in cat-calls, whistles and bawling animal sounds when the dancers of the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo, standing hunched and pigeon-toed, began stomping obsessively to Stravinsky's frenzied rhythms as they carried out the ancient Slavic ritual of a maiden's sacrifice for the renewal of spring.

Fistfights broke out, dowagers shrieked and impresario Serge Diaghilev was pelted with fruit when he stood in the balcony to plead for order. The uproar drowned out conductor Pierre Monteux's musicians, and Nijinsky stood on a chair in the wings furiously shouting cues to the dancers.

"The theater seemed to be shaken by an earthquake," wrote an artist who sat in the audience that night. Nijinsky's triumph was, indeed, an earthquake that shattered classical ballet traditions and marked the violent birth of modern dance.

The Joffrey's recreation of the original "Le Sacre du Printemps" ("The Rite of Spring"), which was abandoned after only eight performances in Paris and London in 1913, had its world premiere in Los Angeles two years ago.

It is the highlight of a "Diaghilev evening" at the Kennedy Center, running through Sunday, which also includes Nijinsky's "The Afternoon of a Faun" with music by Claude Debussy, and "The Wedding," choreographed by Nijinsky's sister, Bronislava Nijinska, to music by Stravinsky.

"It was a ballet program to end all ballet programs," wrote Alan Kriegsman of The Washington Post.

Long a dream of the company's late founder, Robert Joffrey, the reconstruction and staging of the original "Sacre"

was the result of seven years of painstaking detective work by Millicent Hodson, an American dance historian and choreographer, and Kenneth Archer, a British art historian.

After working with Nijinsky's former assistant, Marie Rambert, in London in the mid-1950s, Joffrey met Ms. Hodson, a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley, in 1971 and encouraged her to pursue her research on Nijinsky and the Ballets Russes.

Starting in 1979 with only three black-and-white photographs of dancers from the original "Sacre" production, Ms. Hodson embarked on a search for scraps of materials to reconstruct the ballet in a sketch book.

"My dream was that it be performed on stage," she said.

In London, she met Archer, who was gathering material for a biography of Nicholas Roerich, a Russian archeologist and painter who designed the sets and costumes for "Sacre" and wrote the scenario with Stravinsky.

Together, Archer and Ms. Hodson traveled to the Soviet Union, the United States, France, Scandinavia and India, conducting interviews and collecting memoirs, costumes, sketches and handwritten notes from the original production. Their professional collaboration led to marriage in 1982.

They found an oboist who had played in the orchestra pit on opening night in Paris, and sketches left by an artist who drawn ballet scenes in crayon from her seat in the darkened theater. They interviewed the ballet physician's daughter, then a 13-year-old girl who sat in the audience and vividly recalled the astonishing scene more than 70 years later.

In 1984, they happened upon what Ms. Hodson called "absolute gold ... the single most important document of those seven years of research." It was a copy of Stravinsky's rehearsal score containing Miss Rambert's meticulously detailed notes on the dancers' movements throughout the 34-minute ballet.

Archer tracked down most of Roerich's original "Sacre" costumes, which had been auctioned in 1969 and were scattered among museums and private collections from the Soviet Union to Castle Howard in England to the University of Texas at Austin.

"This was a phenomenon of dance that had been lost and never repeated," Ms. Hodson said. "It was a complex kind of choreography, a branch that hadn't grown. I wanted to see it brought back to life onstage so it could continue to grow."

October Employee of the Month



Patti Laurie is our Office Manager and has worked for Agway for 7 years. She is married to Jon and has 2 sons.
Congratulations, Patti!

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