

Book review

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mances were astonishing. They gave us tremendous ovations, but reacted in a strange way, probably because they are unfamiliar with classical ballet and were surprised at classical productions. They would applaud if they appreciated a technical step, but refrain from applauding at the end of a passage. In "Giselle", for example, the Queen of the Wilis glides across the stage, so I have to dance very short but fast steps on point, called "pas de bourrée", to give the impression that I am gliding. I cross the stage, disappear into the wings and return for variations, which include high jumps called "coupés-jetés". Here in London or in other Western capitals, the audience applauds at the end of the variations. The audience in China, however, applauded me before, during and after the variations. To mention another strange example, in "Greenings", there is the sound of a siren at one stage, and the audience was amused and unexpectedly started laughing. Chinese television filmed the second performance of "Giselle" in Peking. Our company were impressed by the competent and superb work of the crew who had had no rehearsal and who had not seen the production before.

Q.: *Although you had a very busy schedule of rehearsals and performances, were you able to meet Chinese dancers? In what sort of productions do they dance; does Chinese ballet have any connection with Western ballet? Peking Opera is about to pay a visit to this country. Has it anything to do with ballet as we know it?*

M.A. There are two distinct types of dancing in China. One is the traditional represented by Peking Opera. This company is coming to London in July and is bringing a spectacular version of the legendary tradition dating back to the 8th Century. It presents a kaleidoscope of dancing, acrobatics, mime and singing. Productions are based on martial law; they are what I would call folklore choreography. The Chinese style has moments of deep silence, relaxation, great control. When I watched Peking Opera performing, I was deeply moved by all that I saw. The other style is influenced by the Russian tradition, the Russians having taught the

Chinese classical dancing until about twenty years ago. Since then, there have been no new influences. That is why Chinese dancers were keen to study our productions, to visit classes and to learn from us. The Chinese also showed much interest in the company's technical equipment. We took a steam ironing machine to iron the costumes, and they were so enthralled that they wanted to borrow it. They took it to pieces to see how it works . . . But to come back to ballet: the Chinese are producing full length ballets like "Swan Lake" which they are polishing up and would be able to perform abroad in some years time. Beryl Grey, Festival Ballet's artistic director, danced with a Chinese partner when she visited China in 1964.

Q.: *Did you learn anything about Chinese society today?*

M.A. There was little time to look into the Chinese way of living. It struck me that women work hard and often live separated from their families. Women cannot marry before they are 24, men before they are 27. They are encouraged to have as few children as possible, allowances becoming smaller the more children they have. The Chinese are a very hygienic people. They are allowed no pets in order to stamp out diseases. There is not enough food to spare for animals which would starve and then spread diseases. Nothing goes to waste, all materials are used sparingly.

Q.: *You stayed in Peking and Shanghai. Is there any difference between them?*

M.A. It is like London and Manchester. I would say that Shanghai is more characteristic of China than Peking.

Q.: *You have been with Festival Ballet to Paris, New York, Washington and China in the past eighteen months. What are your plans for the immediate future and where else would you like to perform?*

M.A. I shall shortly be appearing in Festival Ballet's season at the London Coliseum with Rudolf Nureyev. I expect to dance Rosalyn in the Russian dancer's "Romeo and Juliet", as well as Princess Aurora in "Sleeping Beauty" with Nureyev, and "Shéhérazade" with him too. After that, Festival Ballet has a short season in the regions and a

Royal Festival Hall season in London where I shall appear in the name part of Ronald Hynd's "Rosalinda", based on Johann Strauss' "Die Fledermaus".

Having visited Paris, America — where incidentally I spent six years with the New York City Ballet and Harkness Ballet — and China, I have one great wish, that is to dance in Russia, the home of classical ballet. Whether that will ever come true remains to be seen. But, of course, I hope to have some opportunities of appearing in my native country too.

Q.: *I am sure all the readers of The Swiss Observer would like to wish you luck and success. They will certainly be interested to know that the Suisse-romande television is currently preparing a film on you.*

BOOK REVIEW

A few words about "William Shakespeare's Plays", by Ulrich Bräker

Most people who have been on the receiving end of a formal education in Great Britain have "studied" at least one of Shakespeare's plays at some time or other. But "study" is indeed usually the operative word and far less people would lay claim to have enjoyed the experience. The language is too complex even for British schoolboys to readily understand and the humour especially seems anachronistic and scarcely funny to anyone who has been reared on a strict diet of "The Two Ronnies".

Thus, all too sadly, it is often the case that, having been treated as a text-book at school, Shakespeare is discarded in adult life as part of "school culture". This is certainly not what Shakespeare would have wanted as a man who "crept unwillingly to school" himself. Rather than becoming part of an academic study, he would have no doubt far preferred the less sophisticated criticism of Ulrich Bräker, "the poor ignorant citizen of the world who had the good fortune to read him".

It is also a good fortune that those of us who find German difficult can now read Bräker's thoughts on Shakespeare in its first English translation by Derek Bowman, a lecturer in German at Edinburgh University who has also translated Bräker's autobiography, "The Poor Man of Toggenburg".

Of course the real fascination of Bräker's writings on Shakespeare is how a man born in 1735 in what is even now a relatively remote part of Switzerland should have come to make an intensive study of Shakespeare's plays. It was not even as if he was born into a family where academic study was part of everyday life. His father was a charcoal burner and he led his early life as a goat-boy before widening his horizons as a soldier in Frederick of Prussia's Silesian campaign. Even after this he made his living until his death in 1798 by weaving, spinning and trading in yarn — his financial position remaining precarious until the end. But he did achieve some fame as a writer, having in 1776 been elected to the Moral Society of Lichtensteig which gave him access to a well-stocked library and "stimulating contacts with men of culture".

The translation of his "A few words about William Shakespeare's plays" deliberately tries to preserve the lively individualistic style of the original. To the modern mind some of Bräker's language may seem a little too intense — concerning Richard III he remarks, for example:

"Thank you, translator, for not putting it into prose like the others, for not using that emotional style which I usually like, otherwise some of the scenes would have affected me so intensely that my health might have been impaired."

It may also seem rather odd, while having a relatively low opinion of some of the more popular plays, such as the comedies, he goes into ecstasies about his favourite, *Timon of Athens* "which is scarcely ever put on the stage nowadays except as a deliberate effort to cover Shakespeare's 'lesser' plays".

There are two other points which readers of this book may find fascinating. The first is that Bräker achieved his appreciation of Shakespeare's plays without having ever read them in the original. Evidently Shakespeare translates well into German. Secondly, I could not find a mention of him ever having seen one of Shakespeare's plays performed on the stage.

It goes to prove of Shakespeare, that, as Bräker said, "If ever a man wrote for all kinds of people it's you".

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"This is the first English translation of the thoughts of Ulrich Bräker, the 'Poor Man of Toggenburg', on reading Shakespeare's plays. They give a fascinating insight into the reactions of a lowly peasant in a remote corner of eighteenth-century Switzerland to the overwhelming experience of exposure to the greatest of modern dramatists.

"Written in a lively, highly individual style, the product of a realistic mind, the book shows us a man in his forties, aware of the way of the world, engaging gratefully, humanly with Shakespeare's characters and their conflicts.

"Here is no bookishness but an honest, generous, richly rewarding encounter of two minds, Bräker learning as much as he can from Shakespeare, his wise teacher, and in his turn sharing that knowledge as clearly and warmly as he can with his own readers. This book will appeal to all who love Shakespeare, indeed literature itself.

(Quotation from book-jacket)

"A few Words about William Shakespeare's Plays"

Oswald Wolff (Publishers) Limited

MONEY AND FINANCE

THE UPSURGE IN GOLD

Gold has always held an attraction for the individual, not only as an investment but also as a "store of value": a factor which has been of special importance in a Europe which has experienced two world wars in this century and has seen more than one apparently inviolable currency reduced to the dust. But whereas, prior to 1972, holding gold in any quantity was viewed as a suitable occupation for the more conservative French peasants, over the past six years investing in the yellow metal has become fashionable everywhere.

This year has been especially buoyant for sales of gold, as the price has gathered strength and — at around \$280 per ounce — is heading towards the magic \$300 mark. However, the "gold bugs" should remember that the price of the metal has had considerable ups and downs over the past six years. Having reached a peak of just \$200 an ounce in late 1974, it fell from grace along with most other fashionable investments in 1975, dropping to a low of \$104 per ounce in 1976. But it has benefitted since by the abandonment of the USA's former policy of trying to keep down the

price of gold and the weakness of the dollar itself — which has made gold an effective "Hedge" against currency devaluations. Since 1975 gold an effective "hedge" against US and — although it was once considered that gold was too tame an investment for US citizens — they have proved to be the most avid buyers of the metal. Thus total world gold sales last year were valued in Gold 1979, Consolidated Gold Fields' latest annual review of the world bullion scene, at \$10.8 bn. compared with the previous peak of \$7.8 bn. in 1977.

The trend since the beginning of this year has been important in that, in its rise above the \$200 (the approximate level at the turn of the year), gold has parted company with the hard currencies. Previously the Swiss franc had been as "hard" as the gold price, but has since done less well.

What is the outlook from now on? The short-term investor in gold should probably be prepared for squalls once gold gets close to the \$300 per ounce which is a psychological barrier at which selling may develop. Of course by the time this article appears it may indeed already be at \$300. So it

seems better to hold off buying for a while at this stage. But in any case the private investor should remember that, unless he buys bullion (which is quite possible in Switzerland), it is better during a dull period for gold to hold coins which have a numismatic as well as an investment value. This may involve paying for more than the gold is worth but it also gives him a stake in something which has a value independently of the gold price — to an extent.

PROPERTY

Anyone with an eye on the British Budget will have noticed that British residents may now invest up to £100,000 a year of their own money (and apply to borrow more) outside this country in property for private use without having to pay the investment currency premium. At one time this involved paying more than 50 per cent above the official exchange rate which was a big deterrent. But now there might well be renewed British interest in buying Swiss flats and houses — it is a curious fact that despite all the tax depredations of the Chancellor, there still are wealthy people in the UK.

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