



A Motlier Crowd—

## Conspiracy of Silence Against Jazz

Exponents of the True Poetry of Motion Seemed to Agree with That Young Author, Daisy Ashford, That Least Said Soonest Mended

By ROBERT J. COLE.

Can anybody destroy what does not exist? Assuming the non-existence of disease is the first step in certain cures. Maybe it will have some effect on that negation of rhythmical sound and motion called "jazz." An interview with high authorities found at the recent New York convention of the "Masters" and "Professors" of dancing strengthens the hope.

Certain afflicted towns have risen up—or got down on their knees—and begged the teachers of the classic and the social dance to help them curb jazzing. This is to be done partly by "influence" and partly by showing the benighted ones how much more joyful the artistic steps really are.

Among the high priests and priestesses of the art gathered in the Hotel Astor were Veronine Vestoff, a former associate of Pavlova and Mordkin, and his wife, Mme. Serova. These two graciously undertook to answer questions as to the campaign of the allies of grace against that crown prince of ugliness—jazz. But somehow the original theme proved elusive. The dialogue developed in this fashion:

"Your convention has decided to put down or drive out or kill off or otherwise annoy the offensive type of social exercise now in vogue?"

"We are here to handle the classic dances."

The term "handle" in this connection puzzled the ignorant listener. "Pedal" or "foote" would seem to be more apt. But these offhand criticisms are always wrong. For Mme. Serova went on to explain that the foot was only a detail in a comprehensive view of the art.

"As the Russians have developed it the classic dance involves the whole body. The Italians were their teachers, but the Italians are too much inclined to stop at mere external arm or leg movements."

"Would you say that the jazz —"

"Veronine Vestoff is the son of Veronine Vestoff, who worked with the greatest dancers of the nineteenth century. He continues the great traditions and adds the best modern developments." Modern developments was a good cue.

It seemed to glide into the desired theme like a pas seal into a faux pas, as the initiate might say.

"Do you believe that gradual education of the people will tend to eliminate false practices, such as the jazz?"

"Of course those are social dances, but they are really unsocial in their nature." This began to look like a discussion of the subject to be discussed. But alas for human hopes!

"We did put on a popular modern dance at the end of one of our programs and the people went wild over it."

"It was in ragtime," added the almost completely silent Veronine Vestoff.

Ragtime! Respectable, conservative ragtime, about which learned men are writing solemn essays to prove that it is America's great contribution to the world's rhythms. The frantic jazer of today has forgotten it or, if he remembers, he calls it "old stuff." But to your true devotee of the classic art it is still in the doubtful stage. As for jazz, it doesn't exist. Well, that may be the true method of extermination. The attempt to start a conversation on the thing that is not was abandoned. After that, talk flowed smoothly on. The morning session of the convention was just ending. To the strains of an old-fashioned dance, a coryphee flew down the hall.

"I love the dreamy waltz!" cried Mme. Serova.

"Can't you bring it back?"

"People won't take the trouble to learn the old steps now. The two greatest enemies to the spread of good dancing are laziness and the love of money."

"What has love of money to do with it?"

"Teachers can make the quickest profits by forming classes in the newer steps and they drop serious work. The trouble is not with American temperament."

"Americans are very quick and clever at learning the true art," assented Vestoff.

"It is our ambition," went on his wife, "to found a great theatre devoted to the pure art of dancing, like the Royal Theatre of Moscow. Then we could present the dance as it should be presented, without compromise."

In a further discussion of the professional ballet dancer as a familiar figure in Europe, reference was made to the paintings of Degas.

"Degas has helped by showing the public what hard, serious work has to be done to prepare for the result that looks so easy. But he has done harm by taking away some of the glamour. Glamour is the essence of classic dancing. It must be guarded jealously. I was at a country house not long ago and they insisted on my giving something to amuse the guests. I finally yielded, but I felt all the time that it was wrong.

The audience was all about me. To preserve glamour there must be distance."

At last the answer had been given. If there is one thing the dance of the moment lacks it is distance. Distance, enchantment, glamour. And without these it can never hope to snare the favoring attention of those to whom the dance, in spite of all the hurly-burly, yet lives a glory and a gleam in the ideal vision of art.

The turn of the taciturn Veronine Vestoff came in the afternoon, when he gave the assembled music teachers a few exercises in classic motion. This is a language he knows. It cannot be reduced to words. Glissade, chassée, capriole, pirouette—these are only the actor's cues; the motion is the thing.

Behind the teacher as he went through his woven paces were the assembled "masters" and "professors." They followed the leader with eye, body, and limb. The effect upon an observer was curious. It would be impossible to bring together, save perhaps at an old-fashioned county fair, a motlier crowd. They ran up and down the scales of age, type, size, and costume, from one little girl out of the second reader class to a breeched and slippered graybeard who looked for all the world like Rodin. Near him was an elusive slip of a Greco-American girl who might have been one of the great sculptor's models. She wore a few more clothes than he demanded, but very few.

Here was the languishing, willowy Southern type of girl, the kind one sees by the rosebush in front of porticoed white houses in romantic magazine illustrations. Beside her the snappy business man in a severe sack suit. A brother of old Jack Falstaff was there, too, yet as light on his feet, for all his bulk, as the late "Diamond Jim" Brady. There were New England schoolmarms of the traditional mold among the dancing pedagogues. And sad-eyed, unfulfilled poetesses of motion, very like the pathetic, rejected haunters of the literary purgatory.

Yet here, incongruous as were the elements, an irresistible force drew the strange particles together for the magic moments while the pianist played. They danced. Some with a heaven-born grace and others in spite of hindering flesh. They danced. There was a flash of such glamour as would transform the jazer into an artist if he could feel it in his soul. But maybe the jazer has no soul.



As for Jazz, It Doesn't Exist.