

Dawning on the Faun!

Two Private Secretaries Required to Answer Love Letters from New York Maids and Matrons, but Madame Nijinska Inspects Them All!



THE Faun himself is here. Nijinsky, the greatest dancer of the age, released as an Austrian prisoner of war, is in New York, the idol of thousands.

Two private secretaries are answering the love and other letters received by the twenty-six-year-old youth, who three years ago shocked even Paris itself by his performance of the exotic, pagan dance of the Faun.

In London it took four secretaries ten hours a day to answer the passionate letters of appreciation he received from duchesses and other ladies as highly placed. Ladies of the purest aristocracy had hysterics during his dance. They tore bracelets from their arms and rings from their fingers and flung them on the stage. Flowers and jewels were his gifts every day.

In New York love letters and telegrams and flowers have been his gifts of appreciation so far but he has been there only a few weeks. And his two secretaries work only nine hours a day instead of ten.

Alas, for the Nijinsky-sick maidens; his wife helps direct the secretaries in their labors. For Nijinsky is married. Mme. Nijinsky is the daughter of one of the richest and most famous families of Austria-Hungary.

"I receive the letters," says Nijinsky, "and I must answer them. It is only polite to do so."

"Some of them are from young girls," says the beautiful blonde Mme. Nijinsky quite naturally, "and they are charming."

"You see," continues Nijinsky, "I was once very young myself and I understand that those expressions of feeling are for the artist and not for the man. Why, when I was a pupil in the imperial ballet I used to write such love letters to artists myself."

The only one in the family who does not assist in the work of answering the myriads of love letters that come to the household is baby Nijinsky.

Her name is Kyra and her famous father hopes she will not only be a dancer, but an artist as well. She was born in Budapest twenty-one months ago—a real war baby. Already she watches her father when he practices his muscle scales and tries to imitate him. The play of her expression follows his and she imitates him unconsciously. And, as Nijinsky says, it is that quality of sympathetic interpretation that makes the great artist.

Famous as a dancer for many years Nijinsky reached his greatest fame when he did the startling dance of "The Faun" a few years ago in Paris, clad chiefly in spots of paint. Calmette, the editor of



Waslaw Nijinsky

Figaro, who was later shot by Mme. Callaux, led the attack against him. Rodin, the famous French sculptor, and the whole art colony of this city of art came to his defense.

"We stand in the presence of nature herself," cried the great Rodin, in one of his speeches in Nijinsky's defense. "Here there is neither modesty nor immodesty, propriety nor impropriety.

"What these artists show is nothing but

the absolute joy of life. Artistic expression must not and cannot be confined within the narrow limits of every-day conventionality."

Little by little the Paris public, as it happened with all publics in other nations later, became accustomed to "The Faun," forgot its frank naturalism and saw only its amazing beauty of line and color.

Nijinsky always has been a revolutionist in the arts. In "The Faun" instead of moving in curving lines and adopting graceful poses he moves almost jerkily and his attitudes are all angular.

"I have worked at my art since I was four years old," he says. "I studied in the imperial ballet for nine years. No one knows better than I the value of tradition, training and technic. But there was too much tradition in all the arts."

The tradition of beauty had become a millstone around the neck of the young artist, so the young artist revolted. In his efforts to throw off the chains of classicism he produced horrible things, things absolutely without value, like the work of the cubists. These things will pass but the revolt will have done much good.

"Dancing as an art requires incessant training after its technic is learned. Even now I practice for hours every day certain

movements that I call muscular scales. And I eat simply—no wines, no cigarettes, no lobster. Dancers are born. My mother and father were dancers. My little daughter, Kyra, will be a dancer—not merely a dancer, I hope, but a great artist."

Nijinsky began his career as a student in the Russian imperial school. A little senior to him was a whole galaxy of geniuses which included such famous names as Karsavina, Pavlova, Mordkin and Bohm. The profession was already crowded with famous dancers, but Nijinsky by his eighteenth year had successfully asserted his claim to a place beside these brilliant stars.

His advancement came not only because he could leap and kick and pirouette better than his fellow students. It was because he could think quicker and better than they and had greater imagination. From the first there had been evident in his dancing that promise of genius which no technical skill can simulate, but which through technical skill alone can blossom into its fullest flower.

The first decade of this century saw the rise of several novel tendencies of first importance in the development of the art of the ballet. These many influences appeared to be converging on the city of St. Petersburg. Something unusual seemed bound to happen when these new forces met the Russian ballet. Something was needed to combine the new forces and the Russian ballet of tradition. It was found in the person of M. Serge de Diaghileff.

With the instinct of a Shubert or a Klaw and Erlanger manager Diaghileff acquired the services of young Nijinsky at this time in the heyday of his success at the imperial ballet. He must have speedily realized that if he could only retain the exclusive services of this wonderful young dancer he would also have gone far toward making his organization a permanent one and altogether safe from the possibility of awkward competition.

From his own standpoint Nijinsky was scarcely less far-sighted in his view of the trend of affairs. The conservatism of the imperial ballet was becoming a byword among the more advanced spirits in art,

and having once tasted the joyous freedom of service with M. Diaghileff he was not likely to remain content with the rules and regulations of an organization which, in his view, was lamentably incapable of marching along with the times.

The result was that after one or two excursions with the Diaghileff ballet Nijinsky's relations with the Imperialists became awkwardly strained. In the early part of 1911 the strain became so severe that on an unimportant pretext of costume Nijinsky received and accepted his dismissal at the hands of the imperial authorities.

In his new freedom Nijinsky developed rapidly. The impresario gave him all the leeway that his genius required and he broadened both the technic and the scope of his dancing. There is a wide gulf between the various characterizations he makes and he seems to take on a different personality with each character.

During the past few years Nijinsky has enlarged the sphere of his activity beyond the actual bounds of the theater and has in a measure assumed the mantle of

M. Fokine, who previously had been responsible for the arrangement of most of the ballets.

Nijinsky himself designed the three most famous ballets of the time, namely, "The Faun," "Jeux," and "Les Sacre du Printemps," which made him one of the greatest ballet composers of his age.

Nijinsky's mere grace and skill in dancing have been equaled by other famous dancers of the day, but the man himself lends a certain exotic quality to his work which is lacking in that of his rivals. Any one with an aptitude for dancing may perfect himself in the art by training and practice and may attain a purely technical perfection.

Only once in every three or four generations of dancers is there found a man who has the technical perfection plus the un-

definable thing of genius. One of the principal marks of genius is the combination in one and the same person of talents common enough in themselves but rarely found together. Nijinsky's art is full of such combinations. One of them is that union of strength and lightness which is the most obvious feature of his style.

Apart from the muscular development of his hip and thigh Nijinsky gives one the impression of being slight in build. His body is as slim as a boy's. His wrists and ankles are almost dainty. While watching him dance it may not seem strange that a being so agile should be able to lift and hold at hairbreadth from the ground, another being like himself but frailer even than he, one of those sylphides, perhaps, that sway like river reeds in the breeze or hover like thistle-down. Yet thinking it all over you have to realize that after all it was a grown woman he held there, and that only the apparent ease with which he held her cheated you into the belief she was as light as air.

Try for yourself a similar feat and you will know how much of physical strength is needed to perform it even clumsily. And Nijinsky is nothing if not graceful. And graceful strength is strength twice over,