



themes in the variations. With no dramatic content to carry the line, the movements in a dance of this kind need to be as exhilarating and evocative as possible. I rather feel, too, that it can only succeed fully where the technical skill of the dancers is high. The group do not yet have this, and though the dance was lucid and compact it lacked something in excitement. The main dance of this programme was "Hiroshima," in every way the group's most mature work. The theme was suggested by a passage in John Hersey's report on Hiroshima, and dramatizes a small incident from it. As it was performed "Hiroshima" could well stand as a small but genuinely imaginative poetic work on the tragedy as a whole. The first part of the dance shows the people of Hiroshima about their normal business. To express this, a combination of bells and percussion was used, which was wholly suitable. The bomb falls, there is chaos and silence. Very quietly, the slow theme from the Schubert *Death and the Maiden* Quartet steals in. A woman blinded picks her way across the littered stage—someone clutches her. With one hand, she pushes her other arm before her face. The eyes do not change—she is quite blind. This passage was most moving. A woman goes mad, and writhing, leaves the stage. Another, without legs, hobbles on her stumps, seeking aid. A light passes over the dead forms, illuminating each one briefly, and the stage darkens. That was all. For my part, I regretted the decision to read "The Bomb that fell on America," by Hermann Hagedorn, with this dance. It seemed to say nothing more than the atom bomb clichés that one may read now every day in the Press, and the refrain of "God have mercy on us" would have been more telling if left for the dance to imply in its own idiom. It remained, however, a deeply moving work.

THIS gives some answer to the questions asked in the first paragraph. Some account should also be given of the difficulties which the New Dance Group have surmounted in order to present their three programmes and 24 dances. The group has no funds, beyond

a small contribution from the dancers themselves which barely pays for records and hiring halls. There is no regular accompanist, a grievous lack. Several pianists have helped from time to time, but mostly they have been too busy to give of their time regularly. Furthermore, the composition of the group has been very fluid; only two of the members were in all three programmes, and hence each year a new group had to be broken in, and any progress or consolidation from year to year was difficult. For this reason the programmes evolved each year less and less democratically. This was a defect, but rooted in the nature of the group. For anything really creative to be achieved, there must be a more or less permanent group of dancers, six or eight would be enough, who would carry on each year the best work of the year before, and so in time develop something individual, the beginnings of a tradition. And more important still, a group like ours must have men dancers. A programme by women dancers alone seems to have the flatness of a frieze—a one-dimensional pattern which may be considerably varied, may delight the eye, excite the senses for a time, but leaves one finally unappeased. I believe that the dramatic possibilities of modern dance can be explored fully only by men and women dancing together. Then why have men not joined the group?

There are probably several reasons. A dancer needs a good physique, and most healthy young New Zealanders are too occupied with winter sports to be able to work with the group on Saturday mornings. But this is not enough. The prejudice against men dancers is endemic in this country. It is, no doubt, a carry-over from the debasement of ballet at the beginning of the century, when in accordance with the romantic tradition the ballerina was a fleshless, ethereal sylph who held the stage, with the man waiting in the wings to lift her, and perhaps dance an occasional *pas seul* while she rested. There was no place for a strongly masculine dancer who really wanted to dance, and hence ballet has not, on the whole, attracted

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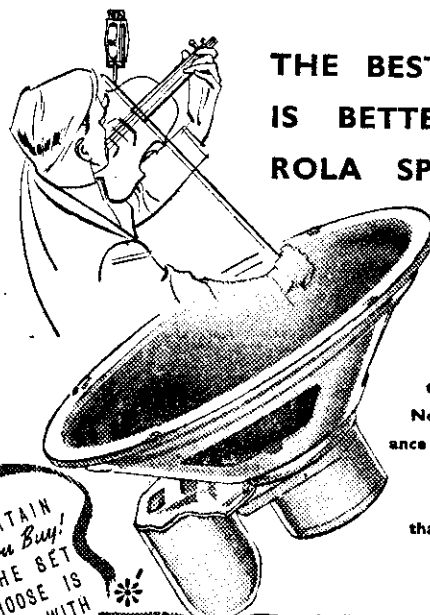
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