

BALLET HO!

English Company on N.Z. Tour

WHEN the Ballet Rambert opens its three-month New Zealand tour at Auckland this week, New Zealanders will have their first taste of what is easily the most extensive repertoire of any ballet company to have visited this country. This was one of the first things *The Listener* learnt in an interview with Vera Howe, the company's advance agent who was on a flying visit to Wellington last week from Australia, where the company has been playing.

Miss Howe said that the repertoire included over 30 modern and classical works, as well as the original versions of ballets created by the Ballet Rambert and since borrowed or imitated by other groups. She rattled off a few of them for our benefit. The classics were represented by such favourites as *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *Les Sylphides*, *Casse Noisette*, *Carnaval*, and *Le Spectre de la Rose*, and the moderns by *Peter and the Wolf*, *Lady into Fox*, *The Sailor's Return*, *Jardin aux Lilas*, *the Fugitive*, *Plaisance*, *Mr. Punch*, and *Simple Symphony*.

Although she couldn't remember whether all of the ballets she had named would be performed in New Zealand, she assured us that quite a number of them would. "You will be able to see ballets never seen here before," she said, "performed by a top-flight British company of 40 players and a large orchestra. As you probably know, they have



A SCENE from the first act of *Giselle*

been brought out here in association with the British Council, who sponsored the Boyd Neel and Old Vic tours."

We asked who some of the leading dancers in the company were.

Prima Ballerina

"The prima ballerina is Sally Gilmour, the leading male dancer is Walter Gore, and the youngest member of the company is John Gilpin, who just turned 18

while we were in Australia," she said. Sally Gilmour had made her first reputation in Andrée Howard's *Lady into Fox*, and was considered to be a dancer of rare interpretative skill. Walter Gore, besides dancing, had done some of the company's choreography, including that for *Plaisance*, *Mr. Punch*, and Britten's *Simple Symphony*.

When we asked whether Madame Rambert would be coming here in person with the Ballet, Miss Howe's eyebrows shot up. "Absolutely," she exclaimed. "We couldn't get on without her." Madame Rambert was a remarkable woman, she said, and "quite the most vital person I have ever met." When she was in Sydney, for instance, she celebrated her silver wedding by turning 32 cartwheels. People were very sceptical when this was reported in the Press, Miss Howe told us confidentially, but it was a fact.

Madame was a tiny woman, hardly over five feet, with a small piquant face full of character and a quality of determination that suggested the high ability which had enabled her to bring her company up to its present standard, where it is regarded as one of the finest organisations of its kind in the world. In private life she was the wife of Ashley Dukes, the English playwright and critic, and

although she was born in France she had since become a naturalised Englishwoman.

Dancing and ballet had been her whole life. She had been with Diaghilef and Cechetti many years ago, and even to-day she kept herself in perfect dancing trim. But her greatest contribution to ballet had not been through her dancing so much as through her developing of young dancers and choreographers whom she could guide artistically, and who became, in fact, her "creations." Some of the great ballerinas who had worked with her company were Karsavina, Markova, Pearl Argyle, Maud Lloyd, and her present star Sally Gilmour. She had also taught Frederick Ashton, Anthony Tudor, Andrée Howard, and Walter Gore to be choreographers.

Pioneer of English Ballet

Madame Rambert was one of the founders and pioneers of English ballet, and had tried right from the start of her Ballet Club in 1926 to break away from Russian traditions. She was probably the first to show that the English girl had something characteristic to express as a dancer, and was fitted for better things than relegation to the back row of a Russian *corps de ballet*. One of the first things she did was to insist that her girls appeared under their own or at least English stage names, and she has carried this on with her present company.

When the Ballet Club was founded in 1926 Madame Rambert had a hard fight against the prejudices of English audiences which had grown to regard the Russians as the only successful exponents of the art. But the Club was lucky enough to take advantage of a gap of four years between the last London Diaghilef season in 1929 and the first de Basil season in 1933. In these years the Ballet Rambert became established,

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JOHN GILPIN and Belinda Wright in *Blue Bird*