

"G.O.M." OF THE BRITISH BALLET

*Perspiration is the Secret of
Success in Dancing, says
Espinosa — Interviewed by*

ROGER HOLDEN



"Next to the face, the hands are the most expressive part of the body . . ."

"MY sweet children, you almost make me think that you New Zealanders must be a very unfriendly lot among yourselves. You seem to hate each other so much that you do not even start to dance all on the same foot! Now, forget for the moment that you are rivals, and let me see you dance together."

The "sweet children" were a group of Wellington dancing teachers and advanced pupils; the scene was the studio of Miss Estelle Beere, in Wellington. And the speaker was Espinosa, famous dancer and "maitre de ballet" of London.

There was a twinkle in his eyes as he made that remark about New Zealanders' "hate." He obviously did not mean it to be taken too seriously. . . .

But most of the other things he said were in earnest, and were so received by these girls who, for an hour, were privileged to work under one of the leading figures of modern ballet.

A slight, agile man — very agile in view of his 66 years — with a crown of white hair, and wearing a flowing bow tie, Espinosa completely fitted his description of "the Grand Old Man of British Ballet." A most approachable man, his whole attitude was one of wanting to teach the "sweet children" as much as he could in the short time available. He made them work hard.

HIS technical instructions for each movement were given in a flow of French unintelligible to anyone who had not studied the ballet (though some of the terms seemed to me to be related to those used in fencing). But his general

LAST week the cables announced the coming tour of New Zealand by the Covent Garden Russian Ballet. And last week a flying visit was paid to New Zealand by Espinosa, founder of the modern British School of Ballet, with a view to looking over our dancing talent. So it seems likely that we are about to catch some of the revived enthusiasm for the ballet that is now sweeping the cities of the Old World.

remarks were homely. English, and to the point. For instance:

"Next to the face, the hands are the most expressive part of the body. Use your hands and make them mean something . . ."

Even a non-dancer could appreciate that.

He did not hesitate to encourage; he also did not hesitate to condemn.

Pupils who showed faults had to go over and over each movement till he was satisfied; and I think his enthusiasm for the ballet was communicated to them.

When the lesson was over they crowded round, plying him with questions, asking for autographs. . . . And then he announced that he would stay an extra day in Wellington to put any dancers who wanted, through an examination for the British Ballet Organisation, of which he is chairman and examiner.



Espinosa and his wife, Madame Louise Kay, founders of the British Ballet Organisation. He was looking for talent in New Zealand.

BETWEEN the lesson and lunch I was able to snatch a few minutes' conversation with Espinosa. That is the name by which he is always known, that or "Uncle Espy," though — as I subsequently discovered from "Who's Who in the Theatre" — his Christian name is Edmond, and he is a Londoner. His parents, however, were of Spanish extraction.

"This is the first time I've been to New Zealand, but from now on either I, or another examiner, will be coming every year from the British Ballet Organisation," Espinosa told me. "I have just been in Australia for the second time."

"Don't go asking me questions about what I think of New Zealand girls as dancers. Those you saw (Continued on page 56.)"