

## *THE STORY OF THE STATE BALLET*

The story of the State Ballet was recounted beautifully in an article for the Rhode Island YEARBOOK by Carol W. Nelson. Excerpts from it are included in this chronology of the Company and its founders.

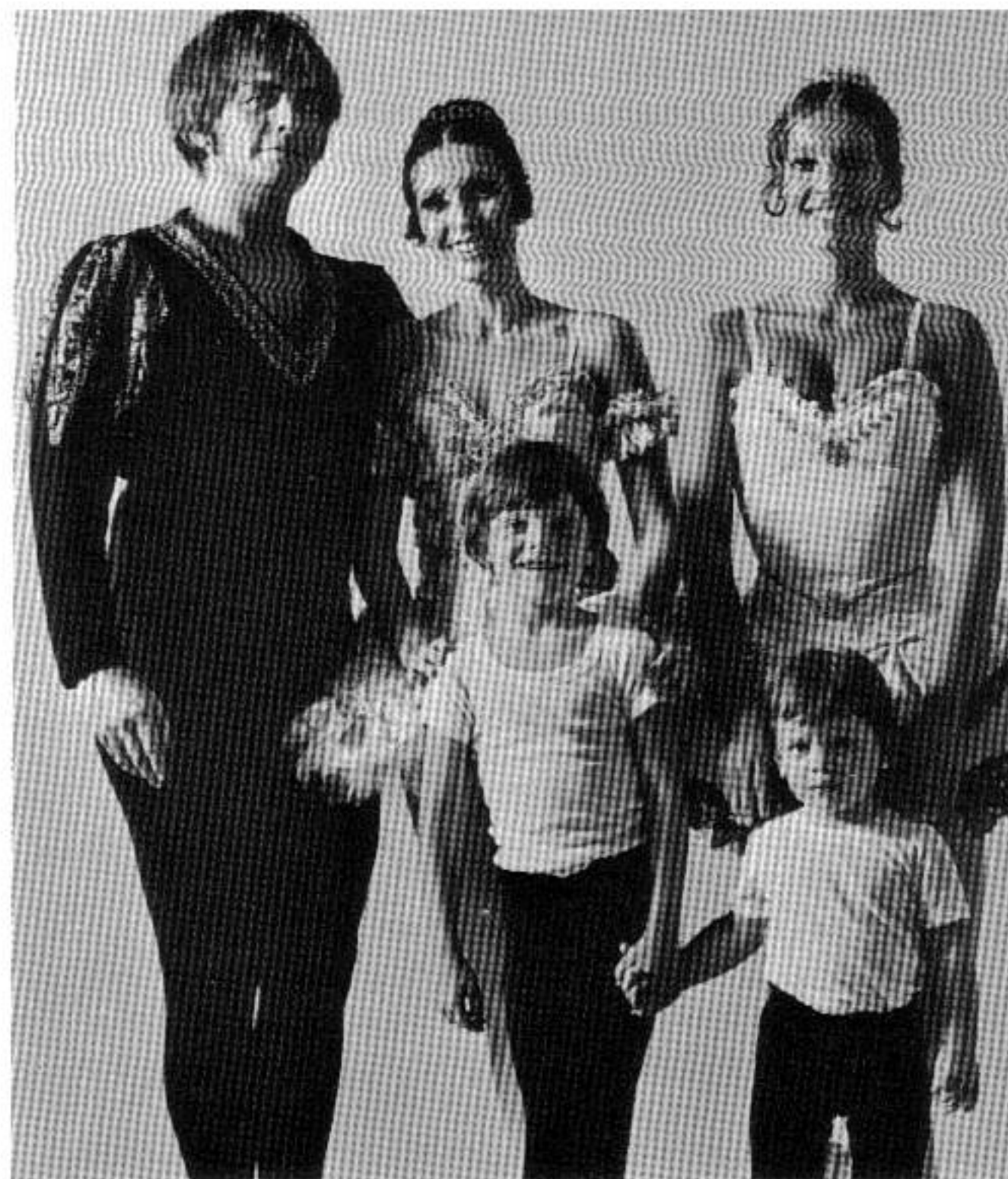
### *IN THE CLASSICAL TRADITION*

The dance technique being taught and performed in Rhode Island by Herci and Myles Marsden has a tradition that goes back 200 years to Jean Georges Noverre, the first choreographer. Noverre taught Gaetan Vestris, who taught his son, Auguste, and so on through the 19th century when such figures as Marius Petipa led the tradition. Classical ballet emerged dramatically in 1909 when the Russian impresario Diaghilev brought the Ballet Russe to Paris with such legendary dancers as Pavlova and Nijinsky. All of the teachers who have played an important role in the Marsdens' early development were leading figures with Diaghilev during the 20 years he dominated the scene. Nicholas Legat, was his choreographer, Ana Roje and Anton Dolin, his proteges.

### *FROM EUROPE TO AMERICA*

That the ethereal beauty and drama of classical ballet could be more than a dream for Rhode Islanders is due itself to a dream, a dream of a native son. At the age of 16 Myles Marsden went to England to audition for Anton Dolin. On Dolin's recommendation he was accepted to the famous Legat School. While there he alone, of sixty students, was chosen to attend the International Ballet School in Split, Yugoslavia. Under the guardianship of its founders, renowned choreographer Oskar Harnos and Ana Roje, prima ballerina of the Yugoslav National Ballet, Myles studied, performed, and grew in technique. He became the first American graduate of the school and rose from corps de ballet to premier danseur of the Yugoslav National Ballet.

It was there he met and married Herci Munitich, an exquisite soloist with the company. The Marsdens, with their baby daughter, Ana, returned to America and made an important career choice: to devote themselves to teaching rather than just performing with a major dance company. Thus in 1958 Brae Crest School of Ballet Education was founded. The



Marsdens were determined to maintain the standards of classical Russian ballet and to develop dancers of professional caliber. The school, in a beautiful country setting in Lincoln, adjoins their home. Two sons, Richard and Mark, round out the Marsden family. A conscientious, amicable atmosphere abounds at the school. Brae Crest Studio II was opened in Newport in 1972. Classes there are held in the carriage house at Swanhurst, Bellevue Avenue, under the Marsdens' personal tutelage.

The ballet life is a busy one for Herci and Myles Marsden. They have been conducting bi-weekly classes at the University of Rhode Island, Kingstown Campus (Department of Physical Education), since 1967. In 1972, Mr. Marsden was appointed Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology, URI Extension Division. There he teaches a course in dance therapy. The couple rehearses and appears in productions by the State Ballet and its counterpart, the University Ballet Company. They choreograph, adapt music for, and oversee all facets of the performances.

### *THE COMPANY*

The State Ballet of Rhode Island is one of some 300 non-profit ballet groups in the United States associated with an area or a school. The Company was founded in 1960 to serve as a training ground and showcase for future professional dancers and teachers, and also as an outlet for the talents of those dancers who may not seek a full-time career in the dance.

The dancers of the State Ballet are a dedicated group of young people who have achieved a certain level of technique and ability. The Company holds weekly four-hour rehearsals which are increased to as often as three times a week preceding major performances. The average new member of the Company has had at least five years of competent ballet instruction and must maintain the level of excellence set by the Artistic Director in order to remain in the Company. Regular attendance at all Company classes and rehearsals is required. A minimum age of thirteen is necessary for Company membership. It has not been Company policy to engage guest artists for leading roles in productions to attract an audience as some groups do. Principal dancers and soloists are drawn from the corps de ballet.

An apprentice class to prepare dancers for the Company is an important part of the organization. An applicant for this preparatory class must be at least eleven years old and must meet specific requirements. During apprenticeship, "prep" class members are offered opportunities to understudy and to perform with the Company. It is with a sense of achievement that a young dancer advances from the preparatory class to the status of Company member. Many of the dancers are high school and college students. Some have left the state for careers in the theatre, while others leave to further their education. There is a strong sense of family among the dancers and ties are kept even after leaving the Company.

Although the Company has its home at Brae Crest School of Ballet where many of the members received their training, qualified dancers from any ballet school or company may audition for either the preparatory class or Company membership. Annual scholarships are awarded on a competitive basis. A panel of judges, all recognized authorities in the fields of dance, music, and drama, select the winners of the Director's Scholarship, the Anton Dolin Scholarship, and the Board of Trustees' Scholarship.

The Officers of the State Ballet of Rhode Island are elected for a two-year term and the Board of Trustees serves for three years on a staggered basis. The Board is a representative cross section of the community. Its members are interested in furthering an awareness of the educational as well as the entertaining aspects of the dance. Membership is open to all who enjoy ballet and wish by their support to ensure the continued success of the Company. The members give generously of their time. Some are employed in the media and lend a measure of professionalism that enhances the total operation. Each major production entails countless hours of preparation: the costume and set design and construction, the publicity campaign and ticket sales, the yearbook and obtaining advertisements that help defray its cost.

The business of backstage before curtain time, the attractive displays at the front of the house, the gala reception and the party for the cast, all require a certain expertise that is furnished annually by many volunteers.

A newsletter, EN POINTE, is published four times a year to keep the membership informed of Company activities and coming events. The State Ballet is a member of ARTS Rhode Island, a member of the United ARTS Fund Drive, and the recipient of a portion of its proceeds.

## THE STATE BALLET OF RHODE ISLAND PRESENTS . . .





The Company has packed its costumes, scenery, and equipment and travelled to nearby and far off places. It performed at the World's Fair in New York and toured Yugoslavia in the summer of 1970. Its young dancers have received critical acclaim and have been singled out for excellence in technique.

#### THE FUTURE

The State Ballet has extended its horizons. A Summer Season was begun in Newport. That area was a logical direction in which to expand in view of its energetic support of the arts. In 1973 Summer Season found an ideal home at the Portsmouth Abbey, Portsmouth, R.I. The performances there, on three consecutive weekends, drew enthusiastic audiences and are but another test of the Company's professionalism and maturity.



A familiar announcement, often anticipated for many months by an eager following throughout the area, is "The State Ballet of Rhode Island presents. . . ." Over the years the State Ballet has introduced to Rhode Islanders such giants of the traditional repertoire as GISELLE, COPPELIA, ROMEO AND JULIET, CINDERELLA, and THE SLEEPING BEAUTY in commendable performances. Guest choreographers, Anton Dolin, Oskar Harnos, Joseph Levinoff, and Mia Slavenska have interpreted their work, supervised rehearsals, and even lent their presence on the stage. Harnos enacted the role of the Stranger in his ballet, STRANAC, and Dolin appeared as King Claudius in HAMLET and Hilarion in GISELLE. The Company has appeared with local music groups in their various productions. It performed in FAUST, AIDA, and CARMEN and with the Rhode Island Civic Chorale in the production of CARMINA BURANA.

That the Marsdens have elevated the level of awareness and appreciation of classical ballet is evident. Through their lecture-demonstrations at schools they have introduced the dance to the very young and to those who would not otherwise be reached. That the popular State Ballet performances have created an audience for ballet where once it was minimal is confirmed by the response to visiting dance companies.

The Marsdens look forward to personally contributing another link in the chain begun by Noverre as their daughter Ana continues the tradition. They will continue to teach and to personify the art that was passed down to them. They will give to others the knowledge of music and choreography, acting and mime, stagecraft, set and costume design, and the quest of excellence that combine to become the Art of the Dance.