

ITS
DIRECTOR
TELLS
HOW
THE
HARKNESS
BALLET
PREPARES
FOR
ITS
FIRST
NEW YORK
SEASON

Right:
Brian MacDonald (see
page 82 for biographi-
cal notes) has also
written the captions
for these pages.

Opposite:
"Performances being
our rite, rehearsal is our
ritual... Here danc-
ers pay close attention
to John Butler as he
works out passages for
Landscape for Lovers,
Willia Kim envisioning
costumes."

The Harkness Ballet has danced in Paris, Dallas, Bucharest, Chicago, Caracas, Cairo, Honolulu, Washington, and Rome. But not New York. Audiences in Monte Carlo, Barcelona, Athens, West Berlin, and even Beirut know us as the Harkness Ballet "of New York" but we have never danced there. We are quite well known in Cincinnati, New Orleans, Fort Worth, Los Angeles, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Laredo, and even Byran, Texas, where Alvin Ailey was born twenty miles up the road, but we never played New York.

When finally it was confirmed that the Broadway Theatre would be definitely ours for the first three weeks of November, the news was greeted in Harkness House like the birth of an overdue child, with relief and anticipation. About time!

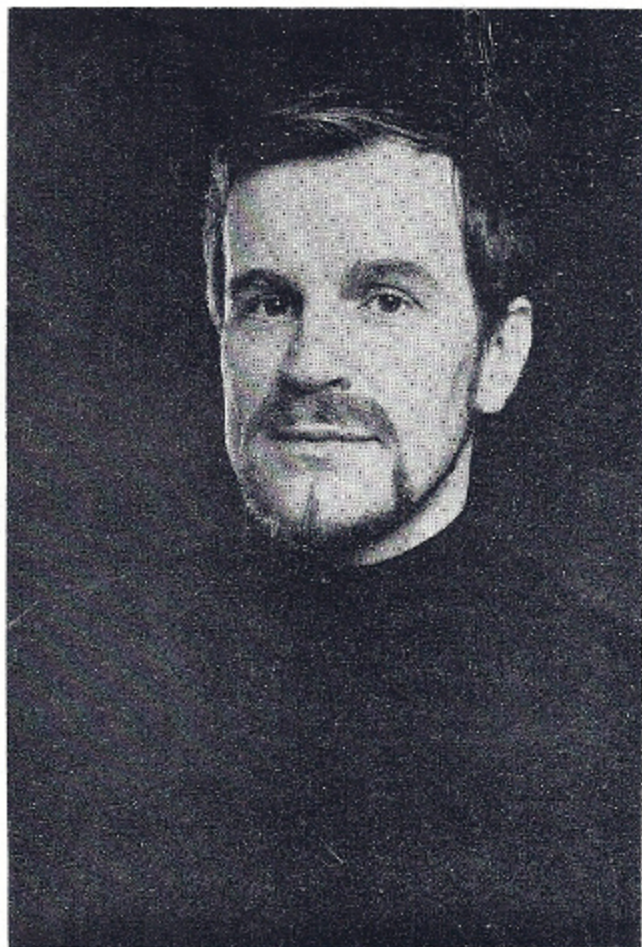
The seriousness that has recently characterized the company doubled overnight.

Five weeks residence (Sept. 25-Oct. 28) in Cloews Auditorium on the campus of Butler University in Indianapolis would be used as a try-out period, to polish and present ten new ballets by John Butler, Rudi Van Dantzig, Agnes deMille, Anton Dolin, Jack Cole, Vincente Nebrada, and me. Combined with another ten ballets from our extant repertoire, we could then plan to present nineteen works. Van Dantzig's *Monument for a Dead Boy* has been seen in the Netherlands and on Dutch TV, Dolin's *Variations for Four* has been briefly in other repertoires but he was adding for us a distaff half completely new and calling it *Variations for 4 plus 4*. My *Firebird* was known in Stockholm though not in the same version—otherwise we were to show eighteen ballets new to New York.

In many ways, we have been anticipating this engagement since early 1967. Several ballets had been dropped or at least

THE COUNTDOWN BEGINS...

BY BRIAN MAC DONALD



(over)

The Countdown Begins (Cont'd)

put aside until their choreographers could edit or rework them. We have originated the policy of studio run-throughs before a small audience prior to any thought of production to see whether the heat of creation blazed strongly enough to merit New York attention.

As we prepared, Rebekah Harkness followed each decision closely, her only anxiety seeming to be that her initial concept prevail. New and provocative works had been the order of the day since the company's inception. But new ballets like plays, congressmen, or rockets, are a gamble. They can stupefy or exhilarate, fizzle and misfire. There is no insurance that a commitment to the best choreographer, composer and designer, not to mention the dancers' investment in time and sweat, will result in a good ballet. Mrs. Harkness seems to intuitively understand the odds and stubbornly be prepared to gamble again. She feels that dance merits this kind of devotion.

The new commissions had been given with an eye toward balancing the repertoire — several full company works, an excursion into pure jazz, two classical divertissements—homogenizing it somewhat. Seven new dancers, mostly from the school, moved into company ranks. Extra classes were added in the mid-afternoon—virtuoso classes taught by our principal teacher, David Howard from the Royal Ballet. Understudy rehearsals and alternate casts kept four or five studios in constant use. Assistant ballet mistress, Karina Rieger, was learning as many as four new ballet simultaneously while rehearsing several others. Costume sketches and technical plans, press releases and estimates flowed to and from company manager, Jeannot Cerrone and technical director, George Bardyguine. Jonathan Sternberg, our principal conductor, was everywhere, in rehearsals, with composers, copyists, and contractors. Choreographers choreographed.

Jack Cole worked every morning after class, jazz piano and drums reverberating upward from Studio A. Meticulous in the extreme, he descends hawk-like on every detail of the style he himself embodies completely. The dancers wonder if it will ever be finished. Cole assures me it is coming along wonderfully. I give him the dates of dress rehearsals and premieres. He doesn't flinch but exits on a wisecrack.

Agnes deMille had finished her ballet

(over)



Opposite:

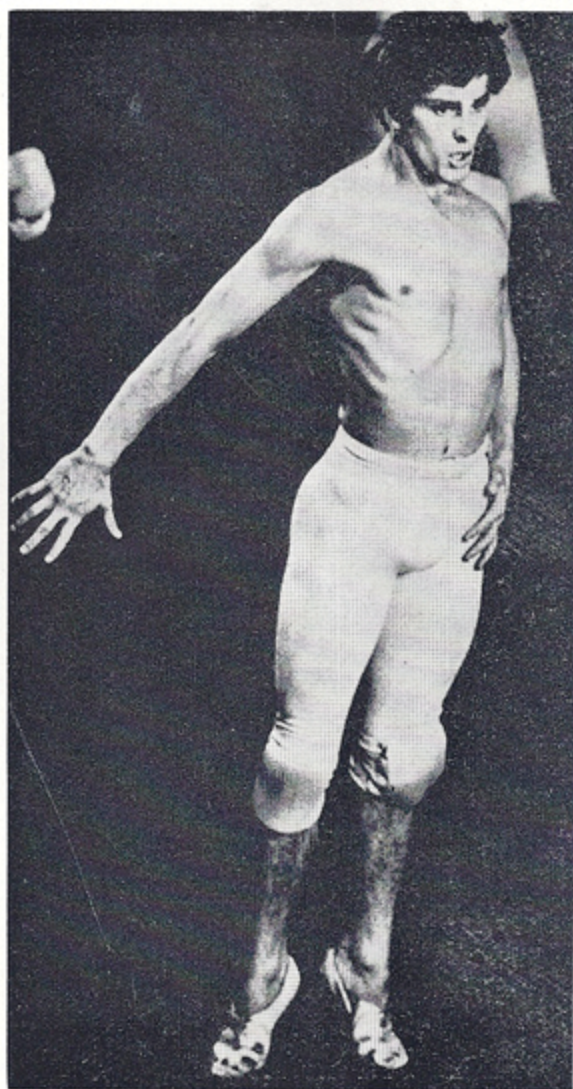
"Lone Isaksen is fragile, lyrical, lost—a sylphide somehow wandered into our midst. She has inspired several of our choreographers."

Above:

"Fast and precise, Finis Jung has a highly personal rubato that he weaves into the fabric of his movement."

Right:

Helgi Tomasson, who always seems to be pursuing a classical ideal he absorbed from his early training in Iceland and Denmark, also shows an affinity for kneepads."



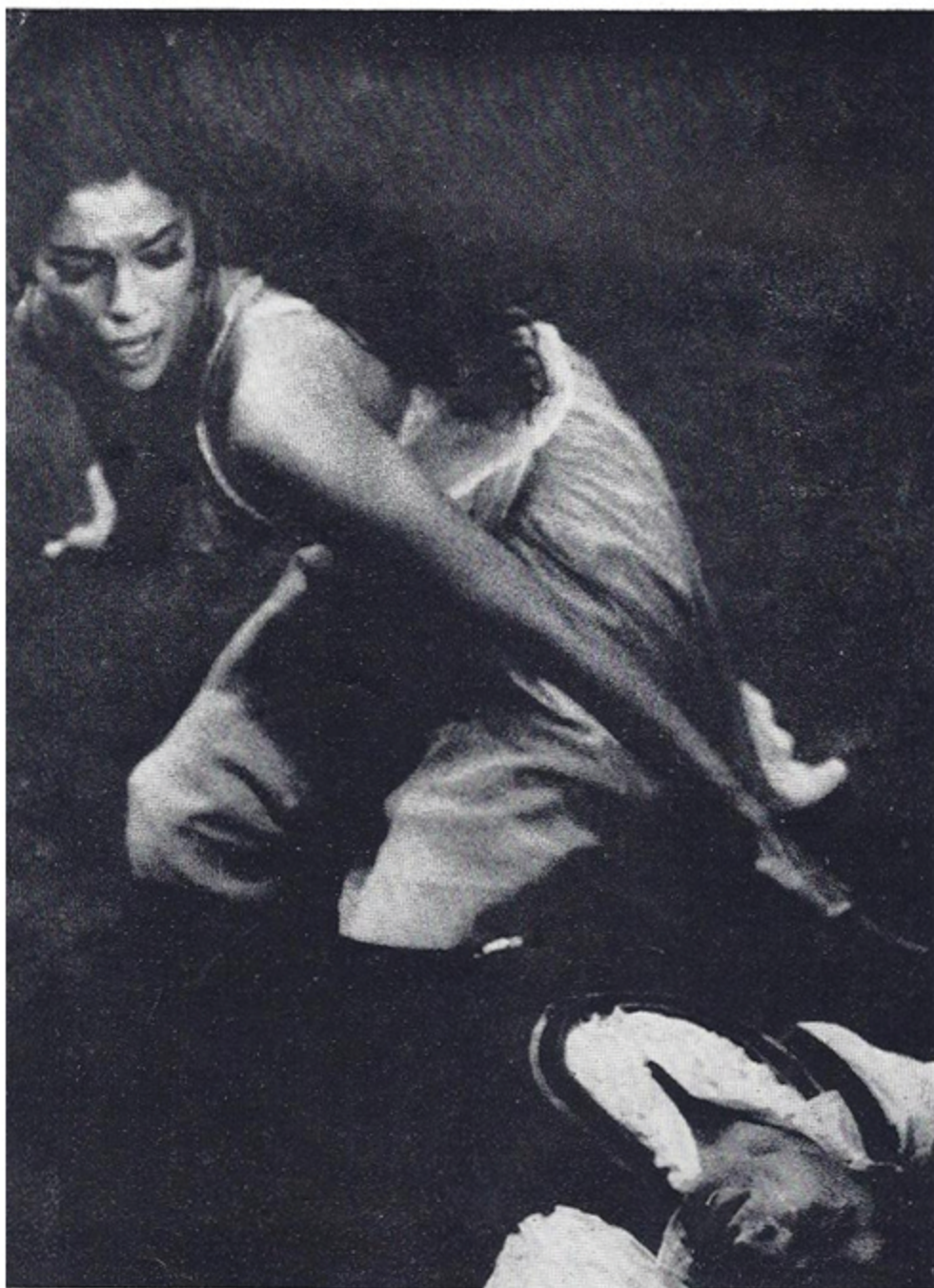
Opposite:

"Elizabeth Carroll has developed into a formidable technician. Especially in 'Firebird' she continues to astonish with her ability to extract every drop of physical juice from a phrase, whether it require speed, ballon, or balance."

Below:

"Brunilda's roles often seem to call for a fierce femininity; whether voluptuous, incensed or grieving she is a Latin actress triggered by lights and music."

The Countdown Begins (Cont'd)



early in July. Bleak, black comedy, she calls it, with the ironic title *Golden Age*. Editing and adjusting continue whenever we can juggle rehearsal schedules to accommodate everyone. Four days after the earthquake in Caracas, Hershy Kay returns miraculously to start the orchestration of the Rossini-Pitot score.

Between engagements in Cologne and Oslo, John Butler arrives to continue work he had started in the spring. *Landscape for Lovers*. My spies tell me it's gorgeous. I linger in his rehearsal to see for myself and agree. Certainly our dancers inspire him. Another ballet of his, *Rimbaud*, awaits only final approval of sets and costumes. Nevertheless, I scheduled the New York premiere.

Dutchman Rudi Van Dantzig works mostly in the big studio. He is quick and methodical, guiding the dancers through electronic whines and screeches that defy counting. The dancers catch at his revelations, responding completely, Larry Rhodes flashing through a young man's torment, leading us into the territory of death.

My own pieces are nearly finished. The designs for *Firebird* pour out of Rouben Ter-Arutunian, Severe icon outlines, Byzantine colors, silks like stained glass windows. Over seventy costumes for this one ballet alone. For another ballet, wanting to make a pas-de-trois into a pas-de-six, Mrs. Harkness and I chose more Schubert piano pieces to be orchestrated.

In one stroke, the stork knocks my casting askew. One of the principal dancers is pregnant. Mrs. Harkness, with concern for who ever will take over her roles, suggests that my wife replace her as quickly as possible. Telegrams fly. Annette takes leaves of absence from the Royal Swedish and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and joins the plain Harkness Ballet of New York. (over)

The Countdown Begins (Cont'd)

I circle about the opening night program like a wary old dog. How best to present the dancers, the choreographers, the faithful stars, the accomplishments, the potential, the concept of a company that combines classical and modern movements with an American bias?

Programs and casting, I usually do alone, late on a silent night, hoping to be masterful and judicious once insulated from the telephone rag-taggle of the day. It is the single most complicated responsibility of the director, full of pit-falls but as exhilarating as chess. Once the opening night program is arranged, premieres of other new works are fitted into different slots, often specifically to suit the press.

Casting quickly follows, usually logically, but with considerable flexibility and ingenuity being necessary. Not like a politician dispensing patronage but rather like an officer marshaling his strongest forces, I make endless lists and comparisons, eliminate caprice, prepare for emergencies and then invite associate director Donald Saddler and my entire staff to comment. Thus I arrive at the program for the first New York season. After going over it carefully with Mrs. Harkness, it becomes "The Word" — the reference point for every future decision on rehearsals, fittings, run-throughs, classes, arguments, in fact everything but babies.

Finally choosing Norman Walker's *Night Song*, Butler's *Sebastian*, my Schubert divertissement and *Firebird* for the opening program, with a new Butler ballet for the next night along with Alvin Ailey, Stuart Hodes and Jack Cole for the third night, I relax long enough to enjoy several of the American Dance Festival programs at New London and watch the Harkness trainees performing at Watch Hill. A composer approaches me about his score for choreographer X, Dali phones from Spain about the execution of his sketches this winter, quietly I begin planning next season even while the countdown for this one begins . . .

END

Opposite:

"Reuben Ter-Arutunian (whose set for *Time out of Mind* is seen here, on end) provides 4 new sets and over 100 costumes for the N.Y. season. He and Raoul Pene Dubois, Stanley Simmons, William and Jean Eckhart, Willa Kim, Tom Lingwood and Robert Davison, will join us in Indianapolis, away from the eyes of the storm, to settle a thousand details."

Below:

"Brunie Ruiz and Larry Rhodes work late into the night . . . Just recently I realized that the words rehearsal and search have a clear internal rhyme joining them."



An informal snapshot of founder Rebekah Harkness who, "seems to intuitively understand the odds . . . and feels dance merits this kind of devotion."

