



The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo had one of its great years in 1947 with both Yvonne Chouteau, right, and Maria Tallchief in the company.

*two internationally acclaimed performers are bringing ballet to the university of oklahoma*

# *Invitation to the Dance*

*Ballet is many things. It is theatre: the dancer is an actor though he remains mute, for speech is accomplished with his body and his face. It is sculpture: the beauty of the line and form is held by the classic pose. It is music, too: the body is an instrument interpreting sound. It is grace, poise, control—the culmination of the performing arts.—Miguel Terekhov.*

By RICHARD DIERS

**I**N A makeshift, recently converted and hastily equipped rehearsal room at the end of a gloomy hall in the O.U. drama building, two young artists-in-residence are taking giant steps toward broadening the scope of Oklahoma culture.

The artists-in-residence are the renowned ballerina Yvonne Chouteau and her husband Miguel Terekhov, primeur danseur, whose presence together on the O.U. campus has enhanced the University's fine arts program like nothing else since English operatic star Eva Turner's presence on the faculty from 1949 to 1959.

Not only the University and the state but the Southwest and in fact the whole complex of ballet instruction in America stands to benefit by O.U.'s windfall. Only three major universities in the country include courses of ballet in their regular academic curriculums—Utah, Indiana and Texas Christian universities. Now the University of Oklahoma can be added to this list.

Ballet courses, open to both men and women, are offered three days a week—three courses in introductory ballet and one in intermediate ballet. A course in advanced ballet will be added to the program later. The Terekhovs consented to teach the second and third classes in introductory ballet when a surge of student interest exceeded faculty expectations.

The nimble, winsome Miss Chouteau, a native of Oklahoma City and a member of one of Oklahoma's most distinguished Indian families, was the youngest American ever to be accepted as a member of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, which she joined at the age of 14. For years she and another Oklahoma Indian belle, Fairfax's notable Maria Tallchief, now prima ballerina with the American Ballet Theatre, appeared together with the Ballet Russe.

Affable and popular Miguel Terekhov, who stands an erect, broad-shouldered 6-feet, 4-inches, began dancing professionally in his homeland in Uruguay with a government-sponsored ballet company. He too was 14 at the time. Following a four-year tour with the Original Ballet Russe and

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## INVITATION TO THE DANCE continued

a stint as premier danseur of Montevideo's ballet company, he joined the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and met Yvonne.

"She wasn't looking for a husband at all, but I was a stubborn Latin," he reminisces with a roguish grin. "I said to myself, 'I want that Injun,' put a feather in my hat and began the chase."

The chase resulted in their marriage. Firmly settled in a harmonious family-and-professional life, the Terekhovs now have a pair of tutu-clad, bilingual toddlers, Christina Marie and Elizabeth, who already possess the first graceful signs of the ballerina.

Behind the glamorous façade of the ballet dancer lies continuous dedication and intense training. The applause, the bravos, the encores all are thrilling, but such rewards are the result of sacrifice and drudgery.

"People don't realize how much hard work, heartbreak and suffering ballet dancers experience," Miss Chouteau says. "While you're on tour, you live every night in a different hotel, sleep in a different bed. Your home is the bus. There's no contact with the outside world, no friends other than those with you in the company."

"You sacrifice so very much," Miguel agrees with a nod, "but you do it for one of two reasons—either you're crazy or you love ballet."

The births of their daughters have altered the Terekhovs' views toward the world of dance. While their children are young, they have vowed to give up touring with the exception of making an occasional guest appearance. After 15 years of one-night stands, and with an unwillingness to allow their children to lead a backstage life, the Terekhovs regard teaching at O.U. as an undisguised blessing.

"Yet we've no regrets," Yvonne smiles reassuringly. "We'd do it all over again if we had to."

Besides their duties at O.U., the Terekhovs are teaching at Bishop McGuinness High School in Oklahoma City and will later establish their own school of ballet. Both have enjoyed considerable success as guest instructors of master ballet classes.

"In ballet you discover muscles you didn't know you possessed," Miguel insists. "Ballet is definitely not restricted to women, and I'm gratified that men have turned out for our classes. The dance aids your coordination and is an asset to any athlete. Remember the Oklahoma City University basketball team that took ballet lessons five or six years ago?"

"A ballet dancer has to have control of



Miguel Terekhov and Yvonne Chouteau with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

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every muscle in his body. The dance is exercise, from head to toe."

The Terekhovs themselves train every day for at least an hour and a half. Without the continued workouts they fear their muscles would turn to fat, their bodies would lose elasticity and strength.

"Even if I never wanted to dance again, I'd exercise daily," Yvonne vows, "because my body is so disciplined to exercise."

That discipline began when the ballerina was only two and a half.

While Miguel is basically a classical dancer with a rich talent for dramatic interpretations, his wife is known for her graceful interpretations of romantic ballet. She dances with the soft, flowing, spiritual movements seldom displayed by contemporary ballerinas who are more engrossed in technique.

"Romantic ballet is the way you feel the dance inside you, the way you express that feeling," she explains simply. "Modern ballet interpretation is through choreography. Both styles are great.

"My highest moments in dancing have been a transcendence of reality. But ballet is both a joy and a discipline. It's certainly the first road to discipline."

"To such an extent that it's almost a sure way to reserve a place in heaven," her husband says with a chuckle.

Professional ascension, in order of experience, begins with the beginning ballet dancer or raton, and is followed by work in the corps de ballet and then solo dancing. After being promoted to fourth, third, second and first ballerina, a few—a very few—become prima ballerina.

Oklahoma can claim a good share of these princesses of the dance. Yvonne Chouteau has been a top ballerina for eight years. Maria Tallchief is also recognized the world over, as is her younger sister, Marjorie, ballerina with the Opera de Paris. Ardmore's Rossella Hightower is prima ballerina with the European ballet company of the Marquis de Cueva and reportedly is the toast of Europe. Moscelyne Larkin, who teaches at a ballet studio in Tulsa, danced for years with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

With sufficient time and support, the Terekhovs, two tremendously enthusiastic artists, should be able to show the most avowed skeptics that O.U. has ballet excellence equal to the best. For all too long talented Oklahomans have left the state for

the glow of more appreciative and knowledgeable audiences. The Terekhovs' ambition is to build and retain that talent in ballet. The University of Oklahoma Foundation is assisting their efforts by contributing a portion of their University salaries.

The Terekhovs could, and presumably will, train students for ballet presentations before the public. A corps de ballet could be formed to augment productions by O.U.'s fledgling Opera Theatre and to enhance choreography in musical and dramatic productions at the University. The future looks bright indeed.



Yvonne has been noted for her interpretations of romantic ballet. Here she is dancing the Jacques Offenbach ballet, "Gaieté Parisienne."



Miguel loves to dance the villain roles, such as this one, Hilarion in the ballet "Giselle" with the New York Metropolitan Opera Company.