

THE WORLD OF DIAGHILEV. By *John Percival*. London: Studio Vista. New York: Dutton Pictureback, 1971. 159 pp. \$2.25, paper.

Percival relates that one early morning a drunk waiting outside Covent Garden to buy ballet tickets asked, "Did you ever see that Daggylev? He was the greatest dancer that ever lived." Sergei Diaghilev was no dancer, of course, but in 1909 he presented his astonishing Ballets Russes to Paris. Earlier he had brought Russian operas starring Chaliapin to the West. Subsequently few men in history have left a greater imprint on the history of Russian artistic life. After studying memoirs and histories written by Diaghilev's artistic collaborators, Percival wove together a narrative focused on the dancers in his company, the choreographers, designers, and composers, taken in that order.

Diaghilev's special genius, it seems, was excellent taste. He recognized the talent of a dancer such as Nijinsky. He could appreciate the worth of a young, quite unknown composer such as Stravinsky. He realized the scenic potential of his own entrancing Russian folklore, and was able to present it to the world in such memorable productions as *Firebird*, *Petrouchka*, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, and *Le Coq d'Or*. His own artistic career began with exhibitions of paintings, and the scenic collaboration of artists such as Bakst, Benois, Larionov, Goncharova, and Picasso lent a very special panache to his works.

Positively speaking, this is an interesting bit of "instant Diaghilev." It was not intended to be a scholarly tome; Percival wanted to produce a readable volume bearing witness to the vast influence of Diaghilev. The illustrations alone convey that message. Its numerous photographs and costume drawings depict the very first productions of works which are still standard ballet fare, such as *Spectre de la Rose*, *Apollo*, *Daphnis and Chloe*, *Prodigal Son*, and *Les Sylphides*. The book would be a worthy addition to a course on Russian culture where small, compact paperbacks are desired.

MARY GRACE SWIFT
Loyola University, New Orleans

MEYERHOLD'S THEATRE OF THE GROTESQUE: THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY PRODUCTIONS, 1920-1932. By *James M. Symons*. Books of the Theatre Series, no. 8. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971. 231 pp. \$7.95.

The name of the innovational Soviet theater director Vsevolod Emilievich Meyerhold has finally reappeared in the USSR, out of the total vacuum that has surrounded his work since his arrest and disappearance in 1939. Some excellent Soviet books have been published in the last decade, following his gradual rehabilitation. These are largely based on factual material—actual recollections, conversations, and memoirs of the young people who were drawn into Meyerhold's vortex of activity. In addition, a two-volume collection of Meyerhold's own articles, letters, and speeches for the first time presents a true and unbiased picture of the many-faceted ideas of the radical director.

James M. Symons uses this new material to present, in English, an account of Meyerhold's work between 1920 and 1932, his artistic prime, when he had a theater of his own and freedom enough to pursue his own theories. Though his experiments with the nonrealistic theater began before 1917, it was only after the Revolution that he was able to put into effect his theatrical methods, which ranged from im-

provisations, *commedia dell'arte*, agitprop, and Symbolist and Constructivist staging to biomechanics and a rewriting of the classics—all in an effort to fulfill his search for “an organic form for the given content” of a drama.

Symons gives us an orderly analysis of the plays Meyerhold staged, together with an attempt to find the artistic and political motives behind his work. Most important, we get a glimpse of his laboratory methods—the brilliant trials and errors seeking a workable theatricalism that broke with the Stanislavsky method of theatrical realism. The author describes in detail the devices Meyerhold used in staging, sets and decors, costumes, and acting technique. Often contemporary press releases are cited. The reader may be grateful for this valiant book, and yet the true excitement and creative fervor, the daring novelties, and the red-hot enthusiasm surrounding each production are not captured. Perhaps theater history never can be. The greatest tribute to Meyerhold is Peter Brook's staging in the seventies of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which so many of Meyerhold's inventions are brilliantly employed at a time and place more favorable to nonrealistic productions.

NORA B. BEESON

Metropolitan Museum of Art

MUSIC AND MUSICAL LIFE IN SOVIET RUSSIA, 1917–1970. By Boris Schwarz. New York: W. W. Norton, 1972. xii, 550 pp. \$13.50.

This is a longish (500 pages) chronicle of Soviet musical life and the ways of the Soviet musical establishment; there is only cursory discussion of the music itself. The five main parts (further divided into nineteen chapters) are called “Experimentation” (1917–21), “Consolidation” (1921–32), “Regimentation” (1932–53), “Liberalization” (1953–64), and “Collective Leadership” (1964–70). Western scholars of Soviet affairs will recognize the dates easily enough but will be puzzled by Schwarz's historical approach, or lack of it. Schwarz is an impressively accomplished musician (a violinist and conductor as well as a scholar), and he brings that discipline to bear on the problem, not that of the historian.

The book is choked with facts, and Schwarz's task was to find, review, select, and discard from among what must have been a nearly overwhelming mass of them. On the other hand, he is reluctant to reflect, conclude, or analyze. Although he is quick to criticize a foolish Soviet propaganda stance or an equally foolish Western misreading of events, he seldom goes beyond the surface in the delivery of opinions. His style varies with his sources and with his enthusiasm for a composer or a period. He apparently finds the twenties the most interesting of times in Soviet music. He wonders, as have other Western observers, where—after Prokofiev and Shostakovich—are the truly significant Soviet composers, especially the younger ones. Unlike the less expert observer, he is not misty-eyed about the Soviet musical future because of the glory of the Russian musical past. He acknowledges the potential but is aware of the pitfalls, including the political ones. He essays to discover and announce these pitfalls afresh, ignoring many Western writers on Soviet literature and music who have preceded him. A warning to the nonspecialist reader: the peculiar difficulties of indexing a musical chronicle may demand that the reference user will have to become familiar with this volume's format for best service.

For one reason or another there are critical lacunae in this account of Soviet music. Because he apparently is not well read in Soviet sociopolitical history, Schwarz brushes by many items, such as the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939, with a dutiful