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# DANCE FOR YOUR DADDY!

MANOLA ASENSIO

It was the late Sir Noël Coward who wrote the now immortal lyrics "Don't put your daughter on the stage, Mrs. Worthington".

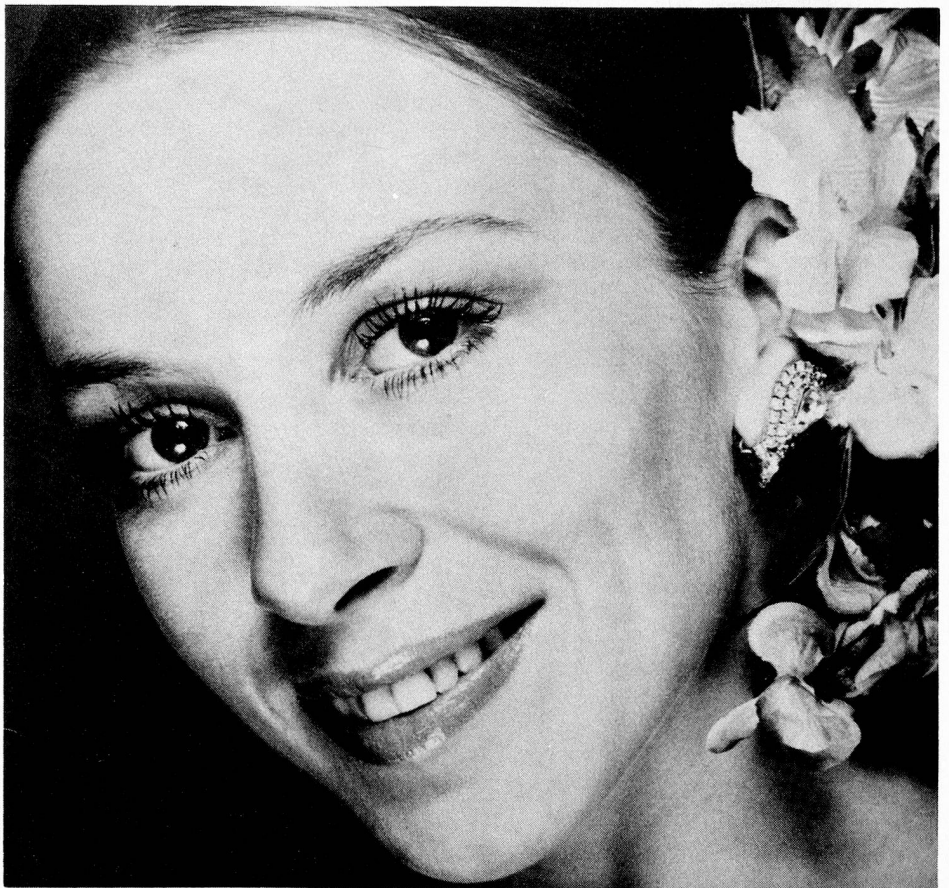
Whether he was right or wrong will remain a topic for eternal debate. Stage-struck girls will continue to try to ring the jackpot of stardom. Some will face a life-time of grindingly hard work and never savour the sweet taste of success.

A few, pathetically few, will — for that is show business! And one that did is the exquisitely beautiful and graceful Manola Asensio — the first prima ballerina ever to be produced by Switzerland — or should we say in spite of Switzerland?

We pose the question because our ballet dancer's road to stardom was not exactly roses all the way. "Swiss girls don't do *that* sort of thing." "It's not a career for a well brought up girl." "Take a respectable job as a postal clerk." Or, to quote Manola herself, "Swiss conservatism disapproved of a dancing career." Proof lies in the very fact that Manola is, as already stated, the first ballerina to achieve international acclaim, to originate from Switzerland. Let's hope that, using her perseverance (with her mother's help) as an example, will not be the last.

Let's show the world that Switzerland *has* a part to play in the cultural enrichment of the world — that Switzerland is *not* just a nation of bankers. Perhaps, one day, she may even be recognized as "Switzerland's *own* prima ballerina?" Profiles of her have been televised in many parts of the world but not, as yet, by TV Suisse Romande — her "home" network. One day soon — perhaps?

What an impact such a profile would have on young Swiss girls suffering just those agonies of doubt that Manola herself did.



*This portrait of the exquisitely beautiful Manola Asensio was taken by Alan Bergman of New York City.*

But enough of what was, what could be and what might have been. Let's take a look, in words and pictures, at Manola herself.

Manola Asensio was born in Lausanne and began her ballet studies at La Scala di Milano at the age of eleven. After graduation, the best in her class, La Scala became her first professional home. One year later at Janine Charrat's invitation she joined the Grande Theatre de Geneve where she was quickly singled out to dance several solo roles.

The next two years saw Manola dancing soloist and principal assignments with the National Ballet of Holland. Among her roles she was especially praised for her performance of the "White and Black Swan", "Les Sylphides", "Queen of the Willis" from "Giselle", 2nd movement "Symphony in C", "Concerto Borocco", 3rd movement

of the "Four Temperments", "Pas de Fiancee" and Rudi Van Danzig's "Jungle".

Before joining New York City Ballet there were numerous television appearances in Paris with Jean Babilee, and the principal female role which Harold Lander created for her in his Copenhagen Television production of the ballet "King Christian II".

Two years later, Mrs. Harkness invited her to dance as guest artist with her company. Since then Manola has been performing as principal ballerina in all the capital cities of Western Europe and the Middle East.

Manola has received national and international acclaim not only for her brilliance in highly demanding technical roles such as "Black Swan", but also her lyrical interpretation of ballets like "Les



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Sylphides". However, her versatility does not end there. Her interpretation of the title role of Janine Charrat's dramatic "Phedra" and the girl in Todd Bolender's "Still Point" were triumphant successes as was her portrayal of the woman in Brian MacDonald's "Time Out of Mind". She has continually received wide critical acclaim at numerous international ballet galas and festivals, but at the ballet gala in Geneva where she danced Ben Stevenson's contemporary "Three Preludes", which was awarded the first prize at the Varna competitions, she especially enjoyed an overwhelming success as the favourite of the audience and press. And in New York, portraying the part of the Vamp from Todd Bolender's "Souvenirs", Manola displayed yet another side of her many faceted artistry — comedy!

After the demise of the Harkness Ballet, she was invited by Gert Reinholm to dance John Cranko's "Firebird" during the Deutsche Oper Berlin Ballet's Gala ballet week.

Immediately following these highly successful performances Manola accepted Beryl Grey's invitation to "guest" with the London Festival Ballet during their Australian tour of Nureyev's production of "Sleeping Beauty". With the return of the Company to London, Manola took her present position as principal ballerina.

During this past year with Festival Ballet, Manola has enjoyed many stunning successes ranging from "Sleeping Beauty" to "Scheherazade". However, her most glittering triumph was in the title role of Nicholas Beriosoff's revival of the Fokine ballet "Le Coq d'Or".

On 9th May, the night following "Le Coq d'Or", at the 21st International Festival of Lausanne's Gala of International Dance Stars, Manola again received an "extraordinary success".

Performances of special interest are: Manola's July '76 Command Performance in Monte Carlo for Princess Grace. Manola will be dancing the Ronald Hynd's ballet "L'Evantail" which has been especially created for her. Later in July she was at the Festival of Santander Gala. And in September she will again dance "L'Evantail" for its London première.

It is of interest to note that Manola has appeared on the cover of numerous publications among them *Dance Magazine*, *Art and Dance* (Paris), *La Coruna* (Barcelona), *Ticketron Entertainment Magazine* (U.S.A.), in a four page editorial in *Redbook*, *The Swiss Observer* and on many television and radio talk/interview shows in the United States and Europe.

Repertory available for guest performances includes "Nutcracker", "Don Quichotte", "Firebird", "Spartacus", "Corsaire", "Spring Waters", "Three Preludes", the sensual "Kiss" pas de deux which Margo Sappington created for her in "Rodin Mise En Vie", "Sleeping Beauty", "Giselle", "Scheherazade", "Baiser de la Fee", Tchaikovsky "Pas de Deux", the flute (cigarette) and the pas de Cinq variations from "Noir et Blanc",

"Bourree Fantasque" (all three movements) and "Le Coq d'Or".

Manola Asensio shares the national passion of Switzerland for ski-ing. But for the green-eyed, red-haired, internationally acclaimed ballerina, it's a passion frustrated by a greater love — the dance.

"When I was younger, I used to ski on the sly," she says. "Now I don't take the chance because there is always the possibility of a leg accident." She's found out that the demanding life of the dance means "you have to be willing to give up many things you might like to do".

Making sacrifices has paid off for Manola, who began her ballet studies with the help of the now defunct Pestalozzi scholarship fund at the age of eleven at La Scala di Milano. When she graduated first in her class, la Scala became her first professional home. She has been on her way up the slopes to fame ever since. From La Scala she went to the Grande Theater de Genève where she was quickly singled out for solo roles. She then became a principal performer with the National Ballet of Holland and made many television and film appearances in Paris and Copenhagen.

Before taking the next step in Manola's climb a question about how it all started. "A dancer is all I ever wanted to be," she says in her soft French-accented voice. "I never even considered anything else. You might say it all began when I was very small. My mother used to dance around the house and I would imitate her." Her mother, incidentally, is Swiss of Spanish and English origin and not a professional dancer, her father is also Swiss. The family name is Bichsel — one of the older and larger families of the lovely Emmental village of Lützelflüh.

A broad view of Manola's progress sweeps from the family living room to La Scala and eventually, at the invitation of George Balanchine, to the New York City Ballet for two years and then on to principal ballerina of the Harkness Ballet of New York until its demise one year ago. All along the way, coping with the very special demands of a career in dance, she calmly accepts the inevitable limitations on the rest of her life.

"Talent is work," Manola says. "It is not enough to have simple physical ability. A strong drive may be even more important. I know dancers who have made it despite limited physical talent because they had drive. Those are the dancers I admire most."

Manola continues to be in a spotlight of admiration from around the world. Foremost among those admirers is the artistic director of the London Festival Ballet, Beryl Grey. Miss Grey watched Manola dance when the young ballerina came to London after her guest performance with the Deutsche Oper Berlin Ballet. Would Manola join the Festival Ballet as guest artist for their Australian tour of Rudolf Nureyev's production of "Sleeping Beauty?" Manola would. During this last year our star has risen to her present position as the widely heralded principal ballerina of the London Festival Ballet.

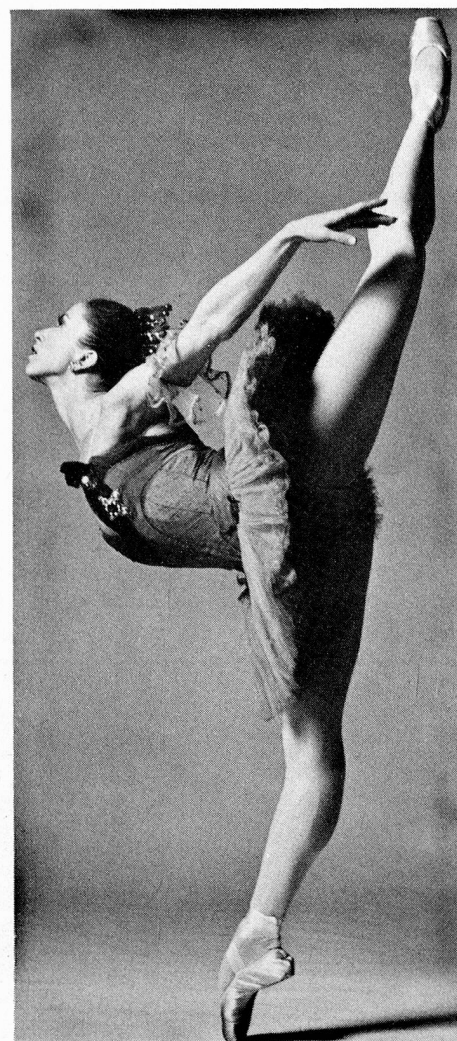
Manola has managed to combine an arduous, dedicated, demanding career in dance with marriage, admitting: "I'm lucky because my husband used to dance so he understands the life." He is still very much involved in dance and exercise as the managing director of Dans-ez International Limited.

Dance may be the only career she ever wanted but she is not willing to do it indefinitely. "I love life too much to do it for ever. Eventually I want to go back to Switzerland, live there, enjoy a family and open a dance school. I hope by teaching and lecturing about dance and using my career as an example I will be able to encourage Swiss parents that dancing is a wonderful and honourable profession for Swiss children."

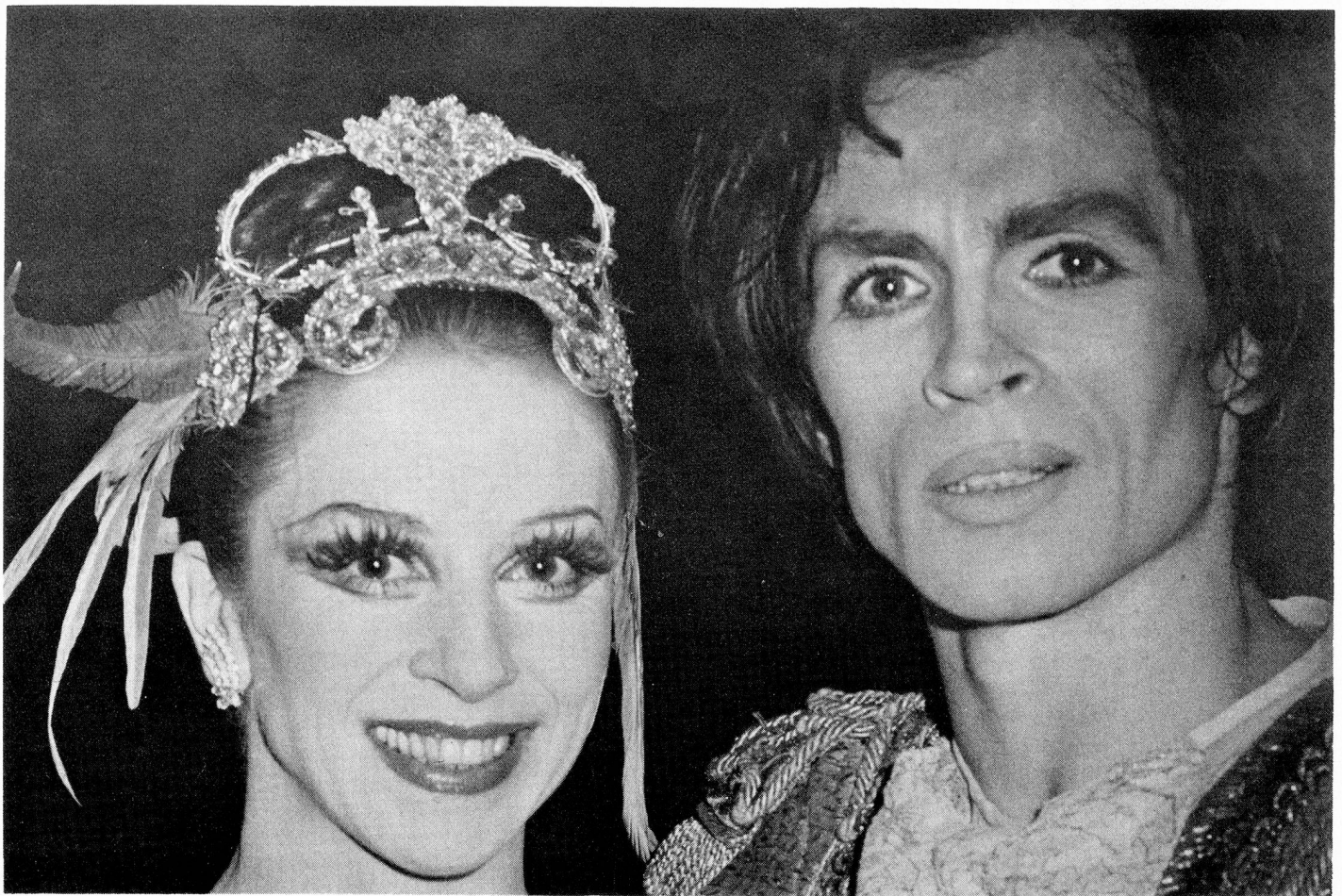
Maybe when that time comes she'll even make an occasional trip up the slopes to try the skis again, in any case, Manola Asensio will not be teaching or ski-ing for some time. She's too much in demand as a dancer in the concert halls of the world.

So, to conclude, let us look at just a few of the innumerable "rave reviews" that have been written about Manola Asensio in many parts of the world. Let us also wish her, and her devoted public, many, many more years "on the stage, Mrs. Worthington".

WGS



Manola Asensio displays her gazelle-like grace and poise in this picture by Alan Bergman.



Manola Asensio and Rudolf Nuryev pictured taking curtain calls together on 19th June after dancing in Nuryev's production of "Sleeping Beauty" at the London Colliseum. The production was for the London Festival Ballet.

"Manola Asensio is a flawless dancer with a suggestion of depth beyond technique."

Jean Battey Lewis  
The Washington Post

"I particularly like Manola Asensio ..."

Clive Barnes  
The New York Times

"Manola Asensio is fabulous in the 'Firebird'. The ballerina has such a grace that she can, with one gesture switch reality into a dream. Her legs, her arms, her neck - everything about her depicts breeding, superb and expressive - she gave moments of art which one sees only rarely."

G.B.  
Tribune de Geneve, Geneva, Switzerland

"The triumph of the evening was Manola Asensio. This young, brilliant and exuberant ballerina showed herself in different ballets to be lyrical, tender and musical. Amused and amusing. Pungent and tragic. She is a little genius of the stage."

Tribune Le Martin  
Antoine Livo

"Manola Asensio is a great international ballerina. She is a star. She explodes or melts as the music or part requires it."

Festival of Athens  
Athens, Greece

"Manola Asensio surpassed the stage of pure virtuosity and moved us much more than her brilliant colleagues ... The public wasn't wrong in giving her the warmest, most spontaneous reception."

La Suisse, Jean Delor  
(Gala of Stars, Geneva)

"Manola Asensio danced the title role of the 'Firebird' with just the right amount of magical elegance needed for the Russian fairy tale."

Frank Pauli, Der Abend  
Ballet Gala week of the Deutsche Oper  
Berlin

"In the title role of 'Le Coq d'Or' Manola Asensio dances her solos with vigour and sharp attack. She has a bright, incisive technique and she looks marvellous in the glittering gold costume"

John Percival  
The Times (London)

"The evening permitted the audience to discover one of the most brilliant and most beautiful stars of the hour - the young Swiss ballerina Manola Asensio."

Rendez-vous Lausanne, Antoine Livo  
International Festival of Lausanne

"Making her British debut as Myrtha, and dancing with fine bearing was Manola Asensio, a Swiss ballerina

who will be remembered in New York for her time with the Harkness Ballet."

Clive Barnes  
The New York Times

"Manola Asensio, as the street dancer Mercedes, looks so Spanish she might have stepped down from a painting of Goya."

Fernau Hall  
The Daily Telegraph (London)

"Manola Asensio represents today the purest tradition of the great lyrical occidental ballerina. She dances with an intense, intelligently controlled, lyrical spirit."

One has to see Manola Asensio to enjoy the rare pleasure of being in front of a body so finely sculptured for dance; with delicate instepped feet, legs with perfect shape, a body of exquisite suppleness, the neck of a swan and a face which makes one guess the shadow of Chauvire."

Antoine Livio, "Arts and Danse", Paris  
Festival Des Champs-Elysées

"The title role of the Golden Cockerel was brilliantly taken by Manola Asensio."

Edward Thorpe  
The Evening Standard, London

Need we say more?