

April 9, 1942  
New York Times

## BALLET PREMIERE OF 'PILLAR OF FIRE'

Ovation Greet Performance  
of Antony Tudor's Work at  
Metropolitan Opera House

NORA KAYE IN CHIEF ROLE

Markova and Baronova Add to  
the Glamour of the Ballet  
Theatre's Program

By JOHN MARTIN

It was a great night at the Metropolitan Opera House last night, for the Ballet Theatre put on a program of unusual distinction with the world première of Antony Tudor's magnificent new work, "Pillar of Fire," as its particular feature. In addition, that matchless ballerina, Alicia Markova, gave a performance of Odette in "Swan Lake," which is the finest Odette that one can remember, and later on in the evening in Anton Dolin's charming "Pas de Quatre" presented her little cameo of Taglioni, which is a masterpiece in miniature. For good measure, Irina Baronova and the rest, in Barbara Karinska's stunning costumes after the Bakst designs, closed the festivities with "Princess Aurora." If these be superlatives, make the most of them. It is a pleasure to be able to indulge them.

### A Psychological Study

"Pillar of Fire" is another of Tudor's psychological studies in frustration, set this time to Schoenberg's "Verklaerte Nacht," with settings and especially excellent costumes by Jo Mielziner. Laid in an apparently small community in the period of muttonleg sleeves and the corresponding ideas on sex and marriage, it tells the story, if that is not too flat and commonplace a term, of a girl who is in love with her younger sister's fiancé and in desperation gives herself to a sensual young man she does not love.

The situation is crudely realistic, but the action is translated into a realm of symbolic unreality, brooding and terrifying because of its intangibility. By the very artificiality of the ballet technique, and its constant contrast with sheer colloquialism of movement, Tudor achieves a sharp and vivid inner truth for his people and his theme. He spares you nothing of suspense and emotional grilling, and when at the last he brings about a solution to his problem, it is immensely welcome. This is not because of the way the tangle is resolved, which is far from clear, but because the turbid and neurotic state of mind that he has built so mercilessly has been calmed and clarified.

The central role has been designed quite evidently for Nora Kaye, who plays it so beautifully that it is impossible to conceive of anybody else doing it. There is great passion always latent under her inhibited movements and her inordinate quietness, and not even

in the difficult lifts and often elaborate adagio passages does she lose an atom of her conviction. It is a superb performance.

But so, for that matter, is everybody else's. Lucia Chase and Annabelle Lyon as the two sisters, Hugh Laing as the young man, Tudor himself in the modest role of the lover, Sono Osato as a "lover-in-experience," and the two marvelously conceived choruses of "lovers-in-innocence" and "lovers-in-experience" are all as near perfection as can be asked. For once, everybody on the stage seems to know what he is doing and what it means.

### Unlike Schoenberg's Scenario

Tudor's scenario departs altogether from Schoenberg's, yet there is not a shadow of violation done to the score. Quite to the contrary, because he is so instinctively the musician, Tudor has discovered an unsuspected validity of emotion in this early Schoenberg piece, just as he did in the Chausson "Poème," on which he based his earlier ballet, "Jardin aux Lilas."

On first seeing, there seems to be a bit of slowing down of interest in the second half of the work, as if there might be a little too much music for the action, but that is a tentative opinion subject to revision. The work as a whole is a tremendous achievement, and last night's audience treated it accordingly. There were countless curtain calls, much full-voiced cheering, and probably as many flowers as were ever heaped together on a single stage. Antal Dorati was the conductor.

### Opera Club Meets Today

"Opera Comique" will be the subject at the meeting of the National Opera Club in the Waldorf-Astoria at 2 o'clock this afternoon. Baroness Katherine Evans von Klenner, the Rev. Charles D. Tinker, Arthur Lief and John Hand will be the speakers.