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# The New York Times

ARTS AND LEISURE

Section 2

CS

Sunday, August 15, 1982

## STAGE VIEW

WALTER KERR

## What Is A Fair Deal For the Writer?

I knew if I went away for a while, something would go wrong. It now develops that while I was on vacation, napping, the organization of Broadway producers known as the League of New York Theaters has instituted a pretty spectacular lawsuit against the association of playwrights known as the Dramatists Guild. Its purpose in doing so is apparently to have the Dramatists Guild declared a fearsome monopoly, given to protecting its members by group bargaining (or by imposing a standard contract known as the Minimum Basic Agreement upon all playwrights and producers alike). If the Guild can be declared a monopoly, and then more or less trust-busted with a great big stick, dramatists thereafter will be free, singly, to agree to whatever contract any producer offers them, with or without coupons redeemable at the nearest supermarket. This last is called private bargaining with the private sector and is, in general, for the birds.

However, I do not wish to engage in controversy — it seems to me, to lay it on the line, that unions and management arrived at an equal-power situation sometime back — or to lose myself dinner invitations all over town. I have friends who are dramatists and I have friends who are producers and I mean to keep it that way. Producers, for instance, can be pretty dandy fellows, as honest as the day is long. Some of them can, of course, suddenly become night creatures (as can dramatists, as can everybody). I remember, just to throw in an example, how

## The Tricky Art of Filming Modern Novels

By JANET MASLIN

Novels of all periods and genres have been brought to the screen. Here, clockwise, from bottom right: Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson in "Pride and Prejudice"; Marlon Brando in "The Godfather"; Robin Williams and Mary Beth Hurt in "The World According to Garp"; Peter Sellers in "Being There"; Meryl Streep and Kevin Kline in "Sophie's Choice."

The very existence of a screen version of "The World According to Garp," however imperfect, represents a small victory for moviedom: another typically intractable modern novel has been translated into film after all. "Garp," with its meandering plot, black humor, bizarre characterizations and oddly matter-of-fact style, isn't a book readily suited to the movies. In past years, a comparably unwieldy novel might have been reduced to a simpler story for the screen. Or, having been given an upbeat ending, it might have arrived in a bowdlerized form.

Unlike the writing process, the task of adapting novels into film is, of course, collaborative. Thus, the successful transmutation of novel into film pivots on the subtleties of screenwriters, the insights of directors, and the nuances of the actor's art. Individually or collectively, these elements may not be effective, and so the history of novel-into-film adaptations is littered with the bones of serious books ruined in translation — "The Great Gatsby" and "Crime and Punishment," to name only two. But it is also a treasure house of less ambitious works, such as "Psycho" and "Rebecca," that have been ennobled in the process.

Today, Hollywood appears to be approaching serious fiction with an ever more enlightened, respectful attitude — one that cannot help but increase the difficulty of the translation process. The task is especially problematic in an era when mass market fiction tends to be quite thin and frequently furnishes grist for the mini-series and made-for-television-movie mill — while serious novels are apt to be less conventionally cinematic than ever before.

Strong plot, abundant action, clear characterizations and traditional values: these are the qualities of a novel that are most easily presented in a movie. But they can't be considered staples of serious contemporary fiction. In their place, the modern reader may find internalized action, figurative rather than literal imagery, subtle rather than easily demonstrable reasons for characters to behave as they do.

In past years, the serious-book-turned-movie was attempted so regularly it was almost a commonplace. Is there any kind of book that Hollywood hasn't tried adapting? From "Moby Dick"

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...had never paid her one cent of the royalties due her for her extensive (and credited) work on a hit musical that had run for more than 500 performances. In those days 500 performances meant that a show had been profitable. But profitable isn't really the point. The choreographer had done the work, but she hadn't been paid the agreed-upon terms for doing it. I don't know whether she ever sued the producer, personally, or not; I think she rather liked the con-artist. But in a case like that — especially in a case like that — it's nice to have an organization around to do the dunning.

However, as I intimated, I'm much less interested in starting — or renewing — a fight than I am in taking note

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Culver Pictures

## Creating a Stravinsky Monument

'His is not 19th-Century music of legend or heroism'

By EDWARD ROTHSTEIN

All the activity of this Stravinsky centennial year has only confirmed what most everybody thought before. Stravinsky's musical personality is unmistakable and in its own peculiar way, intoxicating. Even if Stravinsky had written no music after 1920 he would have been one of the major musical figures of our century; the fact that he went on writing for another half century makes his achievement that much more imposing.

But despite all the hoopla at the centennial, and despite the fact that Stravinsky has already been honorably inducted by critics and audiences into the pantheon of musical "greats" — despite all this, the man and his music remain something of an enigma.

It is remarkable, for example, how little affection can be felt for most of the composer's works. There is marvel, no doubt, at their precision, their pungent sounds, their irony; there is excitement at their imagination, their

sense of musical *frisson*. But these works are admired more than they are loved. Who has deep affection for "Petrouchka" or sympathy for the "Symphony of Psalms"? Who listens to "Canticum Sacrum" with devotion or to the "Rite of Spring" with empathy? This is music that is full of poses, music that expresses attitudes and takes on roles. Each work, in its crisp and distant fashion, seems almost a mask, cutting its listener off from the world.

But we want something more from Stravinsky, so there has been something a trifle forced about our centennial celebrations, as if the music were not quite playing the role we prefer.

One of the major attempts of this centennial to create a monument to Stravinsky's achievement needs some examination in this light as well. CBS Masterworks has released in a boxed, limited edition, a 31-record set, "Igor Stravinsky — The Recorded Legacy." It has just won the European "Edison Award" for a special issue recording of "historical or documentary character." It performs the

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## A Dancer Reflects On the Highs and Lows of Her Calling

By TONI BENTLEY

The following are excerpts from a book to be published by Random House on Aug. 16. The author, who is a member of the New York City Ballet, wrote the book as a journal begun on Nov. 21, 1980, while she was still 22 and ended on Feb. 15, 1981.



Jack Mitchell

We live only to dance. If living were not an essential prerequisite, we would abstain.

We have a different bodily structure than most humans. Our spirits, our souls, our love reside totally in our bodies, in our toes and knees and hips and vertebrae and necks and elbows and fingertips. Our faces are painted on. We draw black lines for eyes, red circles for cheekbones and ovals for a mouth.

Any hint of facial wrinkles, teary eyes, drops of sweat, audible breathing or diminishing energy levels is a sign of imperfection. They are symptoms of mortality.

I share a dressing room with seven other girls who are of the older generation. They've almost reached adulthood. One girl is sprawled on the bed. Another is taking off her pointe shoes: "First I rub this aspirin ointment on my foot — I guess it's absorbed through the skin. Then I put Saran Wrap around it, then an Ace bandage, then a sock and a heating pad — all night. Otherwise I can't plié when I wake up."

Our first thought on waking up is, can I plié? Imagine a mathematician who could not think in formulas when he awoke unless he had had a cigar and four ounces of green grapes the night before! We have certain recipes for

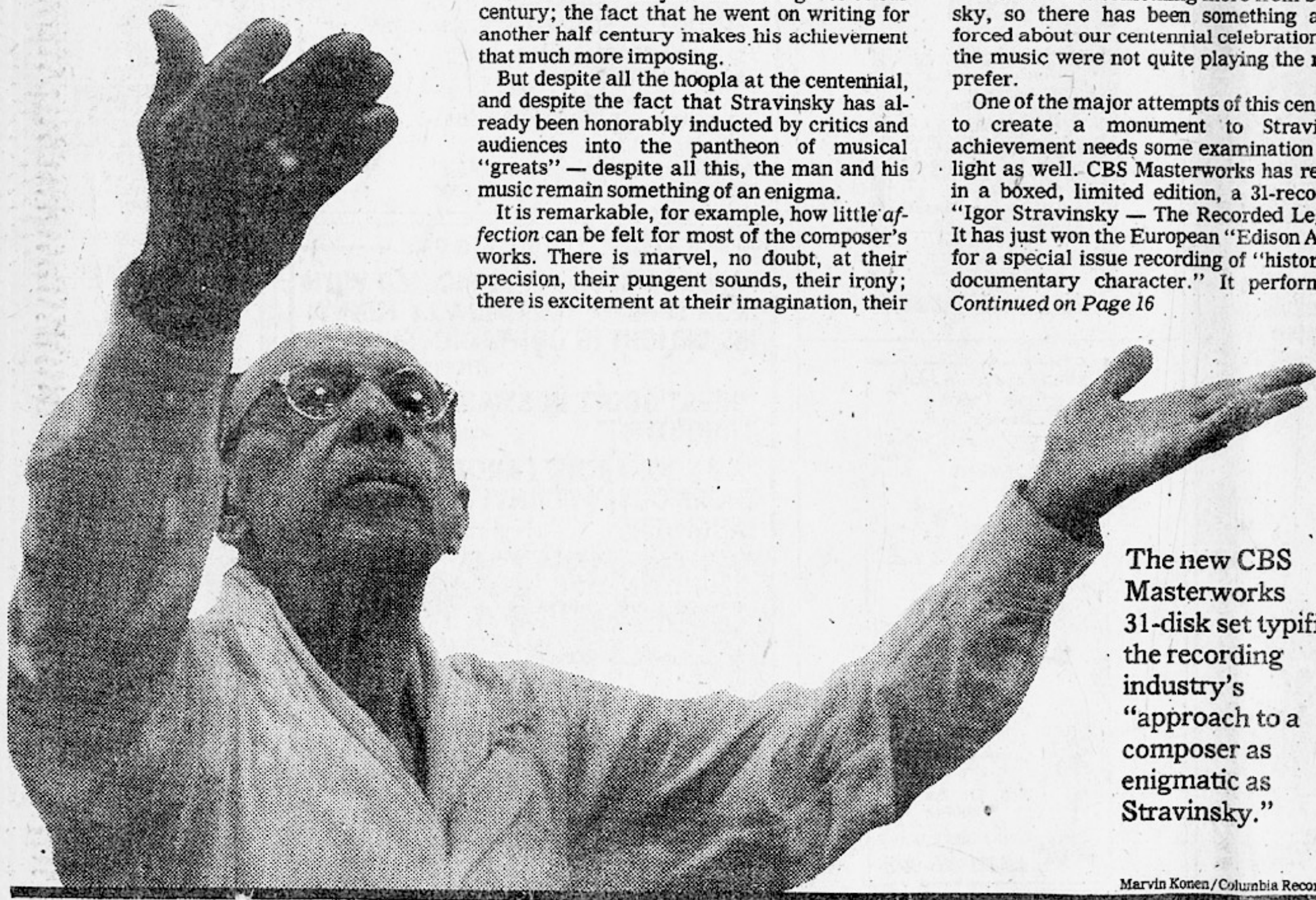
working. They are physical because unfortunately our poor old muscles are not as reliable as our poor old minds. They must be treated like babies — rests, Jacuzzi baths, ice packs, bandages, Epsom salts, creams and God knows what else!

Another thing about us — with our heads full of toe shoes, ribbons, and soaking our feet — is that we find it difficult to socialize with "normal" people. They are curious, starstruck, charmed

by us, and totally frustrated when they can find no points of common interest. Books and politics are definitely out; TV and movies maybe. But worse than that, when it comes to sheer living, well, we simply must go to bed, and it is far better not to be full of Scorpions from Trader Vic's!

One gives in to the temptation a few times, but the side effects are just not worth the fun. Our spontaneity is on stage, not in late-night revelry. But how we love to hear of one another's straying from the path! All ears are pricked when the story of a crazed evening on the town is described. The younger ones especially listen in awe and innocence. Such living is as alien and confusing to us as dancing every day would be to most people. Yes, we are definitely curious creatures. And in moments of weakness we try to reassure ourselves that it is worth it, and best of all, that one has the whole rest of one's life to live. After all, we are allowed none of the decorations — no love life, no food, no liquor, no late nights, no drugs. This is the general rule. Of course we all are human and forget ourselves periodically and lapse into "living" habits, but the inevitable repercussions always let us

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The new CBS Masterworks 31-disk set typifies the recording industry's "approach to a composer as enigmatic as Stravinsky."

Marvin Konen/Columbia Records

# A Dancer Looks at Her Life

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know when living is interfering with dancing!

About money: I really think we are the most ignorant paid people on earth. I'm sure we are constantly cheated and never complain. We are not trained to think financially. Money is only to pay for the apartment, to buy a fur coat and ballet clothes. I often save money, but it is purely by mistake. We live as we must dance — now. When we have a need, we write a check. It's the only way we know. All our excess money goes on clothes and bodily adornments. We live to adorn ourselves.

I don't think that there is any dancer who does not harbor this dream of the future: to eat three meals a day — French toast with butter and syrup, ice cream sodas and three-course dinners with wine — and not to have to grab a yogurt or coleslaw in a half-hour break for dinner. On the other hand, our minds and hearts are focused on other, far more important things — a flat tummy, warming up, makeup, and the endless toe-shoe sewing. Food is unnecessary.

Everyone always wonders what

peanut butter and jelly on Wonder Bread.

There is a strange irony in our hierarchical situation. When one is first a member of the company, one dances every ballet. Then as one proceeds, one is taken out of ballets and the younger kids move in. It is a point of great triumph and a sign of seniority to be "out" of a ballet. To dance less is a sign of great respect. Rather strange when the object is to dance, but so it goes. On the same premise, to be left in "Swan Lake" past one's peers is a sign, a warning that things are not so good. The complaints about still being in "Swan Lake" are numerous and never-ending. People demand to be out of ballets, and then of course complain because they don't dance. It's rather like everything in life — the grass is always greener elsewhere.

Toe shoes cost \$30 a pair (\$4 extra because we have them made to order individually) and have to be sent from England, where little old men are sewing day in and day out. We each have a "maker" designated by his mark on the shoe. I have Y, and there is a frightening rumor around that Mr. Y is dying or retiring. Well, we Y devotees are at a real loss. Some of us have already been given P — such

ety is essential. Only new company members wear anything that actually fits, a sure giveaway of their youth. We go through fads: big sweat shirts, Capezio's latest leg warmers, or triple layers of leg warmers. New articles are very suspicious; they contain no personal identity, so the scissors are instantly applied to the neckline (as low as possible, please!). The basic premise is to cover up and keep warm. Layer upon layer is essential so that we can peel off at appropriate intervals when sufficient warmth and confidence for self-exposure is reached. When we are onstage in tutus and leotards, it is the most naked we've been all day. Layers also give a wonderful feeling of possibility; after all, one can always take them off. Adding layers also happens but less frequently; it's a sign that things aren't going so well in the security area.

For this art form, dancing, thinking should not go beyond steps, toe shoes and ballets. It is best that way. That is how we remember the 50 to 60 ballets in the repertory in a season. People always wonder how we manage to remember so many, but it is not that hard. There are basics. The first year or so is the hardest; one learns as many as 20 to 30 new ballets, and after that just a few new ones each season. We learn like any student. Our minds are trained to pick up steps and count music. It becomes second nature, just as a college student learns to read quickly and pick out the important points. It's part of our job, that's all.

I skidded on my bottom in ["The Nutcracker"]-snow tonight, but the audience didn't see it. As I exited by the first wing in a flying *grand jeté*, I landed flat on my tail at Mr. B.'s [Balanchine's] feet. He looked down with satisfaction and sniffed. I was heartily congratulated on my perfectly placed mishap, for Mr. B. is known to like those who fall; it indicates an energy and fearlessness that is essential to excitement. I'm afraid my fall was not attributable to such lofty pursuits but just to slippery snow. It is very slippery — all those tiny rounds of paper. They are swept up after Act I into barrels. Apparently they cost \$1,200 a barrel because they are fireproof.

We are a good two weeks into "Nutcracker" so the snow has become interesting, for along with the paper pellets everything else imaginable is swept up and deposited on our heads the next day — lost earrings, dirt, bits of glass, even a wire coat hanger clunked to the ground recently. It's a dangerous business, this snow! It sticks to everything, goes in our ears, up our noses and down our throats — and it's anything but cherry-flavored!

'The first thought on waking up is, can I plié? Unfortunately, our poor old muscles must be treated like babies.'

dancers eat to stay so slim. Well, to each his own. I know what I eat — and very strangely, too, very consciously, savoring every mouthful: eggs, bran muffins, salads, melon, ice cream, fish — real-people food. I think the strangeness comes in how we eat and when. Never at mealtimes. The only possible real meal is after performance at eleven o'clock, and then you're up all night. We tend to pick at dishes smorgasbord-style so as not to miss a thing but not to finish anything. There is surprising psychological satisfaction in just a bite or two of something. Quality not quantity in food is a distinction well made. But we love cakes, ice cream, fudge, chocolate doughnuts. If any are around, they are breathed in. I guess we all eventually find the weight and "look" we like and know what food suffices for it. But we have a lot of faddy ideas: "Sugar freaks me out"; "Take B", really, B" will fix everything"; and on it goes.

I think I reveal not great secrets by saying that Heather Watts is associated with junk food, Mr. Balanchine and Suzanne Farrell with gourmet food, Kyra Nichols and Dan Duell with hamburgers, and Alexia Hess with anything. Oh yes, Gerry Ebitz with

messing around with our shoes over in England, where we have no control, is not taken lightly! As a result, I have just changed my shoe order.

We use at least 12 pairs a week, very often more. That's at least \$360 per girl per week, times 54 girls. That's \$19,440 a week times 16 weeks a season — \$291,600. Very expensive footwear.

We take them out of their plastic bags, pour Fabulon in the toes (to harden them), sew on ribbons and elastic, cut out the satin toe (it's slippery), pull out the insole (it's excess), soak the toes in water or alcohol (they're too hard and too small), step on them (they're too round), bend the shank in half (it's too straight), shave the leather off the bottoms with a rasp (it's too slippery), and bang them on the wall (they're too noisy). We then put them on for a fifteen-minute ballet and as soon as it is over throw them out (there is no life left in them). A very quick \$30! But no one of us thinks for a moment about it. To us they are simply toe shoes — essential, but enemies that must be beaten.

There are some basic rules for rehearsal clothes. Everything must be soft, old, borrowed, pinned, cut up and oversized. And worn only once — vari-

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