

# VOGUE'S SPOTLIGHT

# Underground

BY JOHN GRUEN

## *Dracula*, "a gift to horror-story lovers"

There are certain entertainments, neither thrillingly avant-garde nor drearily "old hat," that inexplicably continue to find themselves attached to the specialized parts of the underground. Such works, in literature, art, theatre, or the dance, exist in limbo, devoid of any clear identity and foundering outside the aesthetic canons of their genre. More often than not, the unsubtle exigencies of money could make all the difference.

A case in point is *Dracula*, a peculiar and extremely effective ballet based on Bram Stoker's novel, now choreographed, staged, and danced by Katherine Litz. Miss Litz is a product of the Doris Humphrey-Charles Weidman school, and *Dracula* was first danced in 1959 with Mr. Weidman in the leading rôle. Since that time, it has received scant attention, with only one revival in 1960. Through the Judson Poets' Theater, long a harbour for experimental work, *Dracula* recently had ten performances.

Produced in the Judson Memorial Church, on Washington Square in New York, the ballet was danced by Miss Litz and a company of eleven, including Gemzé de Lappe, Buzz Miller, Dennis Cole, and Henri Boyer. Using a score made up of various compositions by Charles Ives, the work combines a fine tongue-in-cheek sense of drollery with an altogether spine-tingling aura of the bizarre and macabre. Indeed, given the primitive elements of the production—no raised stage, poor lighting, makeshift scenery—the results were surprisingly arresting, all because of Miss Litz's choreographic inventiveness and her dancers, most of whom created characters of immediacy and individuality.

In this full-length work, the story of Count Dracula is unfolded with conciseness and clarity. Miss Litz danced the rôle of the wife of the unlucky solicitor who must transact business with the evil count. She has a comic style that never sinks into banality, and her empty-headed charm served as a superb contrast to the generally ghoulish proceedings. The plum rôle of Dracula was performed by the gifted dancer and choreographer Buzz Miller. In spectacular makeup, wearing the obligatory black cape, he projected a terrifying presence. Despite the difficult acrobatics he had to perform—in several instances hanging on a bannister and moving upside-down like a sloth—he lent the part an uncanny sense of reality. At one point, surrounded by his court of floating and veiled female vampires, Dracula danced on huge stilts and the scene became charged with singular terror.

The point to be made about Katherine Litz's *Dracula* is that presented under poverty-stricken circumstances it can not for a moment realize its fullest potential. The work calls for two or three times as many dancers, the décor and costumes need a Franco Zeffirelli, lighting should be in the hands of another theatrical wizard, and there should be an orchestra for the marvellous Charles Ives music. The choreography could thus breathe and come into unimpeded focus. At best, the underground is a testing ground for the untried and the experimental. While it often opens its arms to older, economics-riddled works as worthy as *Dracula*, such works should finally be made accessible to wider audiences. *Dracula's* subject matter alone—familiar as it is—should prove a gift to horror-story lovers everywhere. That *Dracula* now appears in the guise of a ballet adds a new and provocative dimension to that genre.