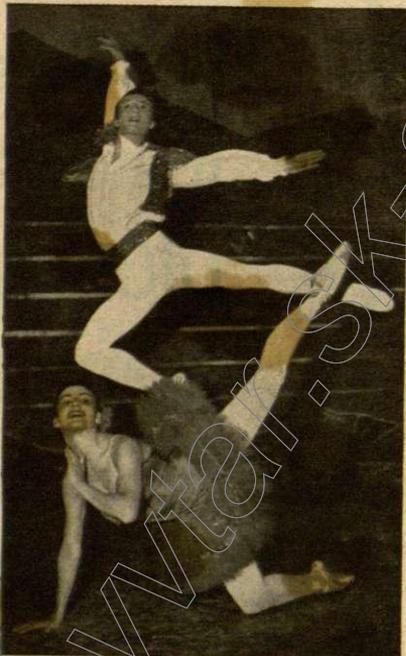


KOVACH, NORA  
\* July 13, 1931, Satoralja Ujhely

## Recruits for Freedom

A pair of young Iron Curtain refugees turned up in London's Festival Hall last week and put on a rare show: a firsthand demonstration of contemporary Russian ballet style. They were Hungary's Istvan Rabovsky, 23, and his wife, Nora Kovach, 21, since 1949 leading dancers in the Leningrad, Moscow and Budapest Opera ballets. They danced the Grand Pas de Deux from *Don Quixote*—a circusy old number that gave little chance for high art but plenty for high jumps—with a kind of brilliant virtuosity that left balletomanes' toes twitching. Istvan won top honors



The "Typical" Press Agency Ltd.  
NORA KOVACH & ISTVAN RABOVSKY  
"Whisst, we come out!"

with his incredible double turns in the air, but Nora, looking like a round-faced Spanish beauty in her red tutu, whirled through 28 whipping turns on one toe and finished with a toss of her head that brought down the house.

The press would have liked to withhold judgment until it saw a more dignified number, but got caught up in the enthusiasm. "Rabovsky," wrote the *Times* critic, "had a *ballon* [ballet talk for the ability to remain in the air during jumps] that would have ensured any rubber ball a five years' guarantee." Said the *Manchester Guardian*: "They danced with a brilliance and a vitality [that] can be equaled by no dancer in the Western world."

Even for those who cared little for ballet, the Rabovskys' debut had human appeal. Last May, booked for guest appearances in East Berlin, they discovered that underneath their hotel was a subway station on the line leading to the Western sector. An hour before their first-night curtain, they slipped downstairs, took a

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westbound train, and, says Nora, whose English made her the family spokesman, "Whisst, we come out." Last week, curled up on a couch in their London apartment, Nora recalled that for two nights afterward, "I didn't sleep because I was thinking of mother, home, family. It's a very big problem. But freedom is better."

Freedom meant, among other things, freedom to dance how and what the Rabovskys wish. Russian ballet companies stick closely to the classic repertory, e.g., *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Les Sylphides*; in lavish productions with casts which regularly numbered several hundred, Nora and Istvan were only two of more than a dozen leading dancers, in Leningrad took leading roles only about four times a month. Many of the ballets for which they had been trained are now banned; Ravel's *Bolero* is "erotic," Stravinsky's *Petroushka* is "decadent." Nora also likes to jitterbug, but when she tried it one night in a Budapest café, she was warned it might get her into trouble as too Western. Another long-frustrated ambition of Nora's: to see a Fred Astaire film.

Just ahead should be plenty of chances. Manhattan Impresario Sol Hurok dropped in one day, watched Nora and Istvan perform on an empty stage, and signed them up on the spot for an early U.S. tour.