

Our Mr. "J"

By . . . Latrelle Hastings

(PETIT ENSEMBLE AND CHANGS INTERNATIONAL FOLK DANCERS)

So you think you really know Anatol Joukowsky. Have you ever heard of him? If you are a folk dancer, chances are you have. Oh, so you say every folk dancer has heard of him. Probably they have. So you know him well because you have worked with him? Maybe you do. You know him as an instructor of folk dance, mainly Slavic and Balkan. You know he is from Europe. But do you really know him as Anatol Joukowsky, great dance star of many companies? Do you know his lovely wife, Yania, as a prima ballerina? Do you know his life and experiences in Europe? Ah, chances are, you don't! Then let me re-introduce you to "our Mr. J".

Two and one-half years ago in August of 1958 I walked into folk dance class on my first day at Santa Barbara Folk Dance Camp. I was brand new to this strange activity called folk dancing, but most enthusiastic and ready to conquer the most advanced dance available, as nearly all newcomers are. It was the several festivals I had attended that summer, with the wonderful music and swirling skirts, in addition to a few classes I had taken with the very adept Mary Williams of Ojai, in my much younger days, which lured me back onto the dancing floor.

When I walked into the Santa Rosa Hall I noticed a large number of people had selected *Zahrajce Mi*, a Slovak *Czardas* as their dance for that period. The teacher listed was *Anatol Joukowsky*, a name I couldn't even pronounce. But I'd heard many people speaking highly and enthusiastically about him, and I was especially interested in Slavic dances. Soon a little man of very solid build walked into the room. He was wearing a knit shirt, navy blue sailor pants with a little flare at the lower part of the leg, and last, but not least, a green scarf wrapped about his head and tied in the back. It is this green scarf which has become a very traditional part of his dress to those who know him. At the time of my first class with him there was a certain mystical element in his personality which infected me into his dances. As the week in camp wore on I attended all of his classes and began to develop early stages of "koloitis". His professional background and warm sense of humor made him loved by all at camp. Before the camp period ended, I'd felt my desire to study regularly and seriously with this "fantabulous" man. It still seems strange to look back to that time when I thought how wonderful would be the miracle that might bring me to study

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ANATOL JOUKOWSKY
(Mr. "J")

Photo by . . George Posner

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with him. Now here I am taking two ballet and two ethnic classes a week with him, exhibiting with one of his groups, and finally, writing a short sketch of his biography. It was a year after I'd first seen him at camp that I realized my dream of working with this great man; a year's hoping, planning, and changing then finally paid off - San Francisco, Anatol Joukowsky, and dancing! After studying with him and getting to know him better just as a person, I have learned what a really fine person he is. He has an amazing background of experiences of all types which we could touch only in a history and geography book.

Starting from the beginning we find that "Mr. J", as he is affectionately called by his groups, was born in the Ukraine in Poltava in August of 1908. He lived there until 1917 when at the age of nine, his father, a cavalry general, was transferred to Salonika, Greece. His father was Russian and his mother, Russian and Polish. He has one sister, now living in San Francisco with his mother, and one brother, an electronics engineer in Belgium. His mother is a very sweet little old lady, very proud of her son, and never misses any of his annual ethnic dance concerts. When I met her, I was struck by the amazing close resemblance of the pair.

At the age of 12, Anatol entered the State Theater School of Belgrade to study ballet. After finishing his high school education in Belgrade, Serbia, he completed his education at the University of Belgrade in constructional engineering. However, his early observations of folk dancing in villages among which he traveled, when he was a Boy Scout studying natural science, led to a deep interest in ethnic dance. Instead of going into practical experience in engineering, he went on to graduate from the State Ballet school in 1926. After this graduation, he and some of his scouting and dancing friends formed a group to go on some more of their "natural science exploring trips" during summer months. Each person had a specific duty which ranged from notating music, observing dance movements, to recording and making records of the ethnic music. They continued this project for several summers.

In 1935 he became the director of the ballet school's professional company, the Yugoslav State Ballet. This was the first time a resident Yugoslav was appointed, as all other directors had been imported to the company for that purpose. In 1936 he organized his own small, professional group of ethnic dance. They won first prize in competition at a Sokol Festival in Prague in 1938. There were representatives of five Slavic nations in attendance.

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On December 14, 1940 in Belgrade he presented a full program of Yugoslav dances with his group and a complete orchestra. The music and dances were the result of his many summer natural science studies. This performance was such a success that he was finally encouraged as well as permitted by the director at that time of the Yugoslav State Ballet, to perform ethnic dances under the company name. On February 6, 1941, a group of ethnic dances was first performed with the company. His ethnic section, called "The Book of Yugoslavia", was performed between two folk ballets which he also choreographed.

While Mr. J was still in training at the Belgrade State Theatre, he met the lovely Yania Wassilieva, who was later to become his wife as well as prima ballerina with several nationally known ballet companies. She was born in Warsaw, Poland, began her dance training at the tender age of 8, with Prof. Helen Poliakova, and worked her way up from a group dancer to prima ballerina of the Yugoslav State Ballet. In this company he was her partner in the well-known ballets, "Copellia" and "Swan Lake".

As a guest dancer before the war Miss Yania, as she is now called by those who know her, was prima ballerina with the Memorial Vienna Opera House, Bulgarian St. Theatre, Athem, E.T.C. During the war they were both with the Yugoslav State Ballet again, (having been in Yugoslav Army, then war prisoners and then escaped) which had been renamed the Serbian State Ballet. After the war they went to France and were with the French Army Theater for 2 years. After this they danced with the "Original Ballet Russe" as Soloists and Choreographers. In 1950 they were with the Belgium Royal Theater, then finally in 1951, America! And here our Mr. J has been ever since, content to work with amateur dance groups and to spread the wonderful generations-old rich European culture he brought with him.

Mr. J and Miss Yania now have a cozy little home in Palo Alto where Yania has her own ballet studio. In addition to teaching there, Mr. J also has classes at Stanford University and commutes to San Francisco 31 miles away nearly every day of the week. There he has classes at the San Francisco School of Ballet, San Francisco State College, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and ethnic exhibition groups - Petit Ensemble, Coral Dance Group, Changs International, and Dance Guild. So you see, he is a busy man. He also teaches at several folk dance camps in the summer.

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