

## BALLERINA

By: Gus Dick Andros

I really get angry when I hear a female dancer being called a ballerina. Kyle Good, a director for the NBC News, was in my class one day, and I complained to her that the people working at her station should know that every lady that dances is not a ballerina. "What does NBC have to do with that?" she asked.

"Yesterday, one of your reporters referred to this dancer as a ballerina and she can't dance her way out of a paper bag," I said.

"What makes a ballerina?" Kyle inquired.

"Ballerina is a rank that you must work to achieve. Like in the army you start as a private and work your way to general," I replied.

"You know they are very careful with their information. I suggest you look it up in the dictionary."

"I have!"

"In Webster's?"

"No, in a dance dictionary."

"They only go by Webster. Do me a favor, look it up in Webster's Dictionary and let me know what you find, and if you are correct, I will take it up with the editorial staff myself," Kyle smiled and left.

When I got home the first thing I did was to get my old Webster out of the bookcase to check. To my surprise it read, "bal-le-ri-na (bal'e re'na) n {It} a woman ballet dancer." I quickly got my Chujoy's Dance Encyclopedia and it said, "Ballerina, a principal female dancer in a ballet company. It used to be a definite rank given to an outstanding ballet soloist. The Russian Imperial ballet companies consisted of ballerinas, premieres danseurs, soloists, coryphees, and corps de ballet. There also existed the title "prima-ballerina assoluta," which was held in Russia by only two dancers during two hundred years of existence. This strict division of members of a ballet company is no longer used, but the title ballerina, premier danseur and soloist are still recognized."

I really think that the editors of Webster's Dictionary should rethink their definition of the word "ballerina." I myself like the idea that a dancer can rise above the crowd and be rewarded for his or her efforts if only in name.

In my dance life I have seen ballerinas who were electrifying on stage such as: Alexandra Danilova, Alicia Markova. Mia Slavinska, Nana Gollner (America's first modern ballerina to achieve the rank of prima ballerina in a foreign company), Alicia Alonzo, Nora Kaye, Maria Tallchief (who I had the honor to partner), and in recent times, Cynthia Gregory.

Some time ago I took class with Cynthia when she was a student. It was easy for me to see the line, musicality and vulnerability that gave her the special qualities to be a great dancer. I followed her career closely; I watched as she rose through the ranks to principal dancer with American Ballet Theater. I saw her first New York performances of: *Giselle* and *Swan Lake* and knew then that she was America's greatest dancer. No one before or after has had the technique and artistry that Ms Gregory brought to a role. When Cynthia was working her way up the ladder, Lupe Serrano was the ballerina and a great one she was, but Cynthia could do everything that Ms. Serrano could do, and her softness and her acting ability brought the characters she danced to life. If we had the title Prima Ballerina Assoluta she would certainly own it.

Can you imagine how nervous I was when she took my class the first time? What saved me was the thought I could only be me and if she didn't like it she could leave. I had to wait to see if she would return. Cynthia has taken my class many times since, and I am always in awe of her. She never changes the combination that is given, nor does she ever look down her nose at what is given or said. In my dictionary, Cynthia would be the definition of ballerina.