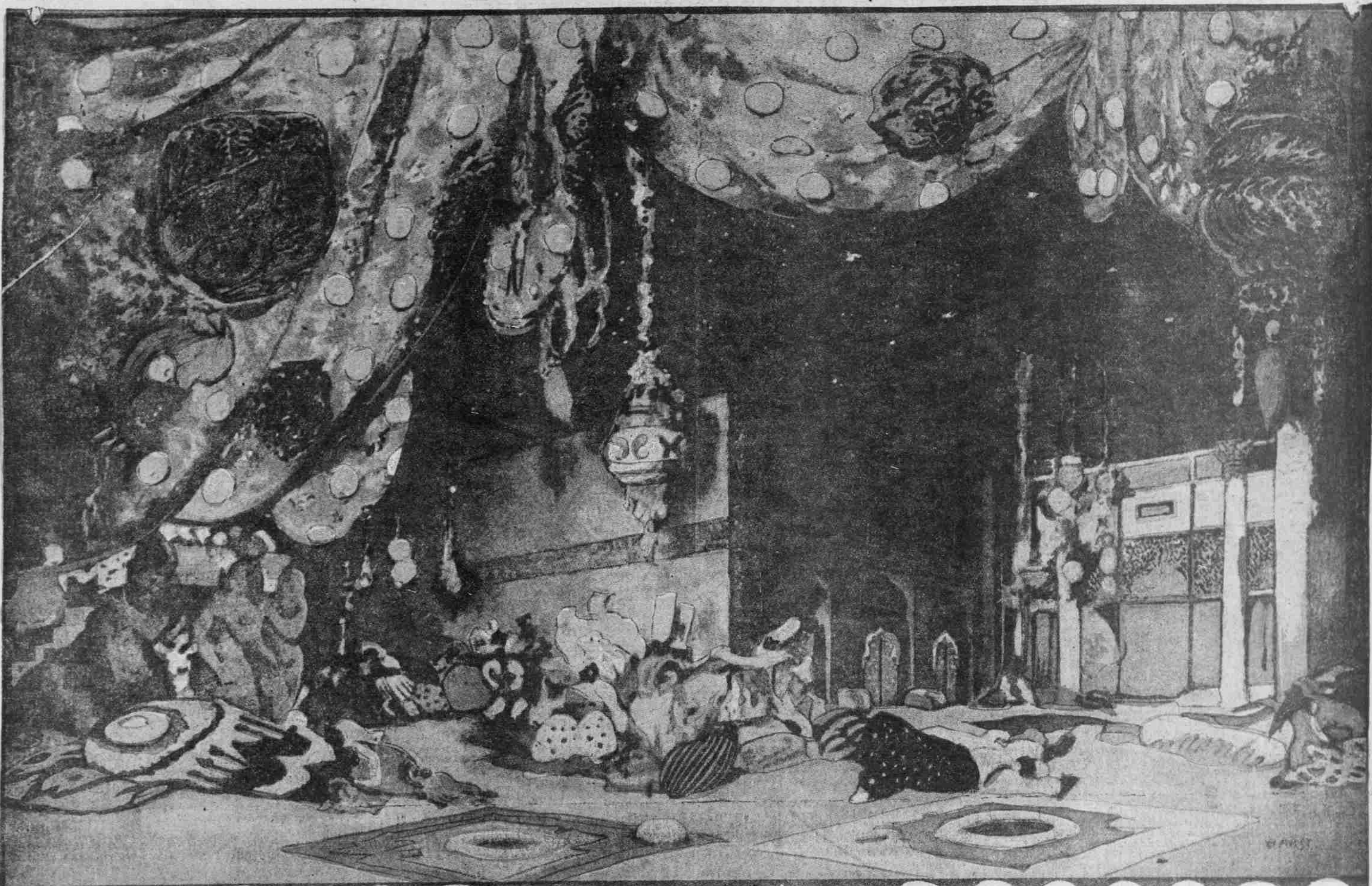




PORTLAND, OREGON, FEBRUARY 20, 1916.



STAGE SETTING FOR "SCHEHERAZADE"



BACCHANTE IN NARCISSE

BY ARCHIE BELL.



LADY wears them conspicuously and they are found throughout the American home from umbrella shades on standard lamps to draperies that shut off the reception hall from the "thus far shalt thou see" corridors and apartments. Puzzle: What are "THEY"? Bakst colors, of course! Everybody has been talking glibly about "boxed colors" for several years. They struck the American fancy just a little more than the ordinary Parisian fobbe or

HOW BAKST IMPROVES ON NATURE

influence in this country. It was not until a few weeks ago that this country saw the simon-pure, blow-in-the-bottle Serge de Diaghileff ballet Russe. While this ballet may not have been his inspiration in the first instance, it has inspired him to the accomplishments that have brought him international fame.

"We owe everything to Diaghileff," says Bakst.

Diaghileff is a young Russian of noble family, who was too "revolutionary" to thrive in that country. A friend of the czar and other powerful persons at court in Petrograd, he was nevertheless not powerful enough to permit his wings ample flight.

He went to Paris and gathered around him a circle of Russian artists, composers, dancers and writers. Richard Wagner tried to combine drama and music. Diaghileff laid out for himself a much more difficult task: to combine painting, drama, music and dance in a single expression.

That he succeeded beyond his optimistic hopes, is now history. And along with his own success came international fame to the principals who assisted him in his great scheme. Bakst, Nijinski, Karsavina, Pavlova, Fokine, Fokina and Stravinsky quickly became names familiar to all the world. To the dancers and composer has come serious recognition as the heralds of a new era on the stage; but perhaps a more far-reaching influence has gone out from Leon Bakst, the man who primarily devoted his attention to scenery, stage pictures and costume designs, because his work has gone far beyond theater walls and has entered into the every-day life of the world.

When Bakst showed Paris his "Clopatria" in 1909, it was apparent that he did not merely attempt to show the portrait of a place, but the insistence upon a mood, a "state of soul." He did it by availing himself of everything that had gone before him and by bringing to his use all the most modern lighting and technical devices of the modern stage. But he did not stop there. Instead, he leaped far ahead. At first, people could not understand his "intoxicating colors" of the rainbow. They clashed and clashed with a harmony that was dizzying. But the principal thing was that he made audiences sit up and take notice. They could not sit in their seats and see the curtain rise upon one of his settings and maintain a different attitude. Either they

shrieked with agony, or with delight.

For many years, the world has known that something was the matter with stage scenery, lighting and costumes. Their designers and creators have not kept pace with architects of theaters, or even with the writers of plays. The idealists were followed by the realists and naturalists. All of them were rather absurd on close scrutiny. It was found to be impossible to reproduce nature. The painted trees on the stage, remained only a painted tree and no audience felt that it was genuine.

Bakst realized the errors of his predecessors and profited by them. His idea was to improve on nature, or at least to go beyond nature in forcing moods and suggestions. Scientists had done it in a degree by submitting their subjects to intense purple rays. He went beyond the glare of single rays and exposed to the eyes of his audiences tempestuous reds, poisonous greens, weird blues and fierce yellows that met in a veritable orgy and riot of color. Sometimes they produced by lights, sometimes by dyed fabrics.

One of the scenes now shown in this country by the ballet Russe shows a panorama drop of ultramarine or sapphire blue, near to the night shade of a tropical sky. There is but one other color and that is a collection of banana trees in vermillion at the foreground. The effect is bewildering and causes an audience to gasp for breath when it is first exposed. In similar fashion, or by similar means, he succeeds in suggesting tremendous distances. Not merely a distant lake between parting trees, with which we are familiar from the works of our own scenic artists, but miles on miles of distance, beyond which mountain peaks rise. Clouds drift between them and the audience. Away off there—in the region of imagination only—castles top those mountain peaks. The foreground and the stage and its people are of this world; the background causes the mind to drift beyond what the eyes see. Here are landscapes that become "a state of soul."

Little wonder, then, that Leon Bakst exercised his tremendous influence upon the people who saw his handiwork. Just as the preachers and writings, as well as the example, of William Morris succeeded in changing the household decorations of England, and indirectly of America, from the tawdry big-patterned Brussels carpets and stiff-backed furniture of the Victorian era, so Bakst is creating a desire among the people for a better knowledge of col-



FAUN IN L'APRES-MIDI DUN FAUNE

ors, the mingling of colors, their uses and influences. The stage is his cathedral, and the ballet Russe is the ministering priest of his gospel.

If "by their works you shall know them," applies to Bakst, as to the rest of us, it is apparent that his favorite color is yellow. But yellow with him means shades all the way from a deep-brownish ochre to orange, lemon, and to something that approaches green. Also, he is partial to green, which begins at a dark myrtle and shades to light bluish jade, then back through the blues to indigo.

Some of his quests for desired colors seem to be like looking for rare orchids in tropic jungles. Some of his costumes are made of rare velvet turned inside out, because the shade on the "wrong side" suited his fancy better than that on the "right side." Some of them are made of what appears to be ordinary mosquito-bar, which has been dipped in strange dyes and produces effects that would not come from other material. Then again, the

fabric for some of the costumes has run as high as \$500, because he could not get what he wanted from ordinary cloth or gauze.

But success has come in such an extraordinary fashion that no expense is too great. There are no imitations. And as all the experimental period has passed and Bakst has a thorough understanding and grasp upon all means of producing his effects, it may be just as well that America has waited until the present before viewing his handiwork.

Bakst combines the artistic with a highly developed sense of the commercial. He knows that he has brought much that is pleasure-giving to the world, and he permits the world to pay him for his talents.

But the world tells him that he has "improved on nature"; and when the world acknowledges such a triumph, it should be willing to reward him—as it does willingly in fame and dollars.

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