

After Courrèges: What Next?

Some Fashion Kings Remain Confident — Others Are Not

By FRANCOISE GIROUD

Special to The New York Times. PARIS—The show is over. But without the star. In the absence of André Courrèges, the Callas of French haute couture, the winter collections unveiled this summer have been like an opera sung by the chorus alone. And such performances can be boring even when the chorus is excellent.

At the height of his glory, Courrèges has abandoned art for industry, the hand-sewn for ready-to-wear and the clientele of Society for the ordinary Mme Durand.

Fame at 42 has made Courrèges as apprehensive as a wild gazelle, and when asked why he stepped down from the pinnacle of haute couture, his dark lean face turned pathetic. "Because I want every woman to be able to wear Courrèges clothes." This is really nice of him. But there is probably another reason: haute couture has become a quite unreasonable business.

Artists and Accountants

As always, behind the artists are the accountants. And this is how they count: in a collection of 174 models, such as Dior showed this year, \$200,000 is invested in labor and in materials. Then, each model is reproduced, one by one, to the client's measurements, with three fittings according to haute couture traditions. Each dress represents an average of 135 working hours—\$470 just in labor costs. Plus the material—\$80—plus general overhead.

The seamstresses—320 at Dior, which has the largest production facilities—must work in the same building where the dresses are sold. Necessarily, a haute couture house is located in one of the most expensive districts of Paris and at the cost of a square foot in these areas, the rent and taxes are wildly extravagant. If a manufacturer of shoes or records had to house his entire labor force in the building where his products were sold, his prices would be double.

Losing Money

Couturiers' prices run to \$800, \$900, \$1,000 a dress. Even so, they lose money. Raise the prices? They have already reached a dangerous ceiling.

Only 382 taxpayers in France officially declare an income sufficient to regularly buy dresses for their wives or mistresses at those prices. And even counting tax evaders and rich foreigners, the total adds up to 3,000 clients for the 38 houses officially authorized to bear the label of haute couture.

Then, too, even when they are able to afford it, young women of today no longer have the patience to come for fittings. Chanel herself has never been able to coax Brigitte Bardot into becoming a client.

She has told her: "Dress at my house and I will make you into an elegant woman." Brigitte replied: "Elegance? I couldn't care less. It's old fashioned." And she has continued buying her dresses in the boutiques.

The oldest French fashion house, Lanvin, which dresses Princess Grace of Monaco, where Barbara Hutton orders the complete collection and which has had three generations of industrialists' wives as clients, has been unable to hold onto the industrialists' daughters and this year reduced its collection to 65 models and its workrooms to two.

Business of Prestige

At the house of Yves St. Laurent an aging countess orders her dresses one by one to have a pretext for coming almost every day. But the young Baroness Guy de Rothschild, one of the couturiers' best customers, gets annoyed when she has to have more than one fitting. It is the prestige of the



FINIS: Squatting, Courrèges examines his work, which now will be in ready-to-wear clothes—at \$200 a dress.

clothes, the twice-yearly publicity over the rising hem or the dropping waistline, which makes the label.

This is why businessmen still back couturiers or hire their talent or name. This is why Richard Salomon, president of Lanvin Charles of the Ritz, for instance, has just invested a large sum in Yves St. Laurent and taken control of his perfume "Y."

Nevertheless the couturiers carry on, even though their dresses are a mere facade of publicity for the famous names that sell quite different goods. Pierre Cardin makes ready-to-wear for men. Dior manufactures ties, lingerie, hosiery, shoes and lipstick. Dior's total annual turnover, thanks to its subsidiary activities, is \$30 million, which is \$10 million more than the revenue of all the houses put together (Dior included) from their haute couture business.

All of them make perfume, the national specialty that brings in an annual turnover of \$350 million. The revenue from haute couture is only \$20 million, of which 60 per cent comes from the sale abroad of reproduction rights.

Master Healers

This is why every 10 years the doctors assemble at the bedside of French haute couture and announce that death is imminent. Their diagnosis usually corresponds to the end of a fashion era, the moment when women begin to get bored with their clothes and foreign buyers claim that Paris lacks inspiration.

Then, suddenly, along comes a master healer who revives the patient. In 1946 it was Christian Dior who regained the supremacy Paris lost during the war. In 1954 it was Chanel, who made a triumphant personal comeback. In 1965 it has been Courrèges whose show in January—his third in a year—made him a superstar of haute couture.

Chanel Protests

Christian Dior was financed by a textile industrialist, Marcel Boussac, who still controls the firm. Dior, a modest and superstitious fellow, accepted Boussac's proposition because his fortune teller had predicted success. His "New Look" triumphed because after the war years of mourning and hardship his flowing skirts and rediscovery of femininity became a symbol of abundance.

Chanel made her own fortune. She started out before 1914 as a milliner and opened a fashion house at a time when one could get rich in the business because labor was so cheap. Even today a seamstress earns only 90 cents an hour and it is be-

coming more and more difficult to find one.

Chanel had genius. She created her own materials and jewelry. She invented the famous No. 5 perfume with her own nose.

Chanel has since ceded manufacturing rights to Pierre Wertheimer, who also makes cheap perfume under the Bourjois label, but she still gets enough royalties on each bottle of No. 5 to give her one of the largest incomes in France.

Courrèges is Chanel's nightmare. Her clothes are a shield, covering a woman's imperfections. He does everything she hates: clothes without waistlines, baring the knee and the upper arm. "Everything that is most ugly in a woman," she says. "Have they all gone mad?"

But when she examined a pair of pants cut by Courrèges she had to admit: "He knows his business."

Odds Favor Courrèges

Dressing women is a minor art, perhaps, but is it an art that can be industrialized? This is Courrèges's wager, an interesting bet with the odds in his favor. It follows the trend of history and France's evolution toward an American way of life.

He will try on his own hook and in his own country what ready-to-wear manufacturers have been doing for 20 years in the United States when they buy Paris reproductions created by the couturiers.

Courrèges will create, reproduce and distribute his own models by the thousand instead of making ten of each. And he will be able to sell them at \$200, five times less than haute couture prices, by doing away with the fittings and perfecting the technique of cutting and assembling the clothes to reduce labor costs to the minimum.

Not a great many French women can afford to pay \$200 (a secretary's monthly pay) for a dress. Ready-to-wear clothes rarely exceed \$100, and according to the most recent Gallup poll, the majority of women think a dress should not cost more than \$40.

But Courrèges is not aiming at this group. He has a very good chance of getting enough women to pay his prices. And if he succeeds in finding this clientele it may mean the death of the superb ceremonial of haute couture and its high priests.

Competing With a Pioneer

Faced with the pioneer, Courrèges, the craftsmen who still work as they did in the 19th century are not yet worried. At least not all of them.

The least happy, those whose clientele is wavering,

recklessly have tried to grind a little Courrèges pepper into their habitual menu.

The most cynical of them say: "As long as we know how to attract American buyers over here by welcoming them like princes, giving dinners in their honor and inviting them to Maxim's, they will continue coming to Paris twice a year and have leave behind enough money for us to live on."

When the young Marquis Givenchy decided to follow the same path of sophistication on the opposite side of the Avenue George V, Balenciaga helped him a great deal. Givenchy, who had been a designer at Schiaparelli, opened his own house with the financial backing of friends, owners of the large department store, Au Printemps. He, too, had his perfume. Even two in fact: "Le De" and "L'Interdit."

His brother looks after that side of the business. The most famous members of the Givenchy set are Audrey Hepburn and Jacqueline Kennedy.

Since all artists have the temperament and nerves of a prima donna, none of the couturiers were happy to see Courrèges steal the limelight—and, incidentally the customers. But on second thought they argue: "Ford didn't kill Rolls-Royce. Let Courrèges make Fords for one and all. We shall go on making Rolls-Royces."

Francoise Giroud is executive editor of L'Espresso. She wrote this article for The New York Times Magazine.

Happy Days Is Back At N.Y. Cherry Lane

By LEWIS FUNKE

Special to The New York Times.

NEW YORK, Sept. 14—There is that passage in Samuel Beckett's "Happy Days," when Madeleine Renaud, playing Winnie, has been ruminating on the days that follow days in her life, days no different from the days that have gone before and no different from the days that will come.

She studies herself in a hand mirror. She takes from a large handbag a little music box. The melody it plays is the waltz duet, "I Love You So," from "The Merry Widow." As it plays she hugs it close to her breast. Over her face sweeps the pain and sadness and joy of memory.

Seconds later she is filing her nails, commenting, admiring her manicure. The interlude is superb, one of the many to be relished at the Cherry Lane where the play was given its press premiere last night before opening to the public tonight.

To those who have seen Miss Renaud in her previous visits to these shores with the Theatre de France, which she heads with her husband, Jean-Louis Barrault, her artistry will come as no surprise. To see her now as Winnie, however, is a special pleasure.

Versatile Performance

She regards it as one of her favorites and into it she has poured all of her versatile acting skill. Although Barrault plays the part of Willie, there isn't much of him to be seen. This is essentially one long monologue, Winnie's monologue of the daily routines of life, of all the bits and pieces that go to making up a life.

The play originally was presented at the Cherry Lane in 1961. The first act finds Winnie encased in a mound of sand up to her waist. The set by Matias is a stretch of barrenness, lasting it seems to the end of time.

Winnie, no longer young, carries on an incessant chatter, some of which is directed to Willie, who probably is her husband. She jabbars away in recollection. Occasionally Willie speaks and she assures herself that this is one of the happy days. But

as she assures herself, she is on the verge of tears.

In the second act, considerably briefer than the first, the same chatter goes on. But there is a difference. Winnie now is up to her neck in the enveloping mound. She can only move her eyes. Still, when Willie finally emerges and attempts to reach her, she is able again to assure herself that this is one of the happy days. That is all there is, on the literal level. And yet, though the presentation is in French, and you may not understand a word of it, you sit mesmerized by an actress who has made the role her very own.

Words With Color

Not a line, not a word lacks its proper color. Miss Renaud's face is a marvel of mobility and expressiveness. She moves in and out of moods, her voice rising and falling in a variety of tones, in tones of weariness and also indomitability, her grimaces bring laughter.

Her attempts to read some writing on a toothbrush are gay and amusing. Still, there are the tears that always are on the brink, the burdens and the wistfulness, the nostalgia and the hope that lurk in the characterization. The range is marvelous.

Miss Renaud's engagement is limited. Barrault will be seen again tonight, after which Wyman Pendleton will take over. Commencing Sept. 28 Ruth White and John C. Becher will assume the roles of Winnie and Willie, which they created here in the 1961 production.

Miss Renaud's appearance is the result of her husband's being here to direct a production of "Faust" for the Metropolitan. Her stay, brief though it is, is most welcome. For those who appreciate Beckett and know French as well, it should be a joy.

Barbara, Poet-Singer, Performs in Paris Today



The New York Times (by Reginald V. Gray) Barbara

Special to The New York Times.

PARIS, Sept. 14—Barbara, the poet-singer, whose records are now on the collector's shelves beside those of Georges Brassens, Jacques Brel and Boris Vian, will perform tomorrow night at the Bobino Music Hall in Paris at 20 rue de la Gaite.

The radio network France Inter will devote all 17 hours of its air time tomorrow, from 8 A.M. to 1 A.M., to Barbara's songs and to interviews with her. Her recital from the Bobino hall will be broadcast in the evening. The honor is unprecedented in the network's 44 years of broadcasting.

Miss America Contest Aide Bars Queries on Negroes

Special to The New York Times.

NEW YORK, Sept. 14—Deborah Bryant, the new Miss America, was taken out of a press conference here yesterday after she was asked about charges that Negro girls had not been adequately represented in the annual beauty contest.

The contest's director, Lenora Slaughter, interrupted the questioning when the racial issue was raised.

Miss Slaughter, who said "there is no bar whatsoever" to Negroes in the Miss America competition, then escorted Miss Bryant from the room.

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MARIAN ANDERSON TO APPEAR IN PARIS

Special to The New York Times.

PARIS, Sept. 14—Marian Anderson will make her farewell European appearance in Paris late this month. She will appear during a two-evening benefit gala to aid the International Exposition of Negro Arts, which will be held in Dakar, Senegal, during April, 1966.

The first of the double gala evenings will take place on Sept. 23. Known as "The Night of the Black Arts," it will open with a recital of Negro spirituals by Miss Anderson in the Sainte-Chapelle Church. Afterwards ticket-holders will proceed to the Palais de Chaillot to attend a showing of the movie, "Carmen Jones," which stars the late Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte.

The "Carmen Jones" film has been withheld from release in France. Following its projection at the Cannes Film Festival

Helsinki Symphony Plays Sibelius Works in London

Special to The New York Times.

LONDON, Sept. 14 (Reuters)—The Helsinki City Symphony Orchestra performed Sibelius master works in London's Royal Festival Hall last night under the baton of Sir John Barbirolli.

In a four commemorating the centenary of the Finnish national composer, the orchestra is playing his works also in Amsterdam, Vienna, Munich, Prague, Warsaw, Moscow, Budapest, Leipzig, Luebeck, Copenhagen, Stockholm and Oslo.

A large audience cheered and applauded its playing with the greatest enthusiasm last night.

Finland's oldest symphony orchestra—many of whose members are remarkably youthful—is custodian of the true Sibelius tradition, having given many of his works their first performance with the composer conducting. It naturally plays them with great authority.

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