

# Osato - Born to Dance

Barry, Edward

Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Feb 28, 1937;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988)

pg. E1

# Osato - Born to Dance

By EDWARD BARRY

ON FEB. 22, 1934, the members of the Osato family gathered around the dinner table in their apartment on Michigan avenue, Chicago, just as unconcernedly as if this day were no different from the many which had preceded it and the many more that were to follow. Certainly nothing had happened yet to make it memorable.

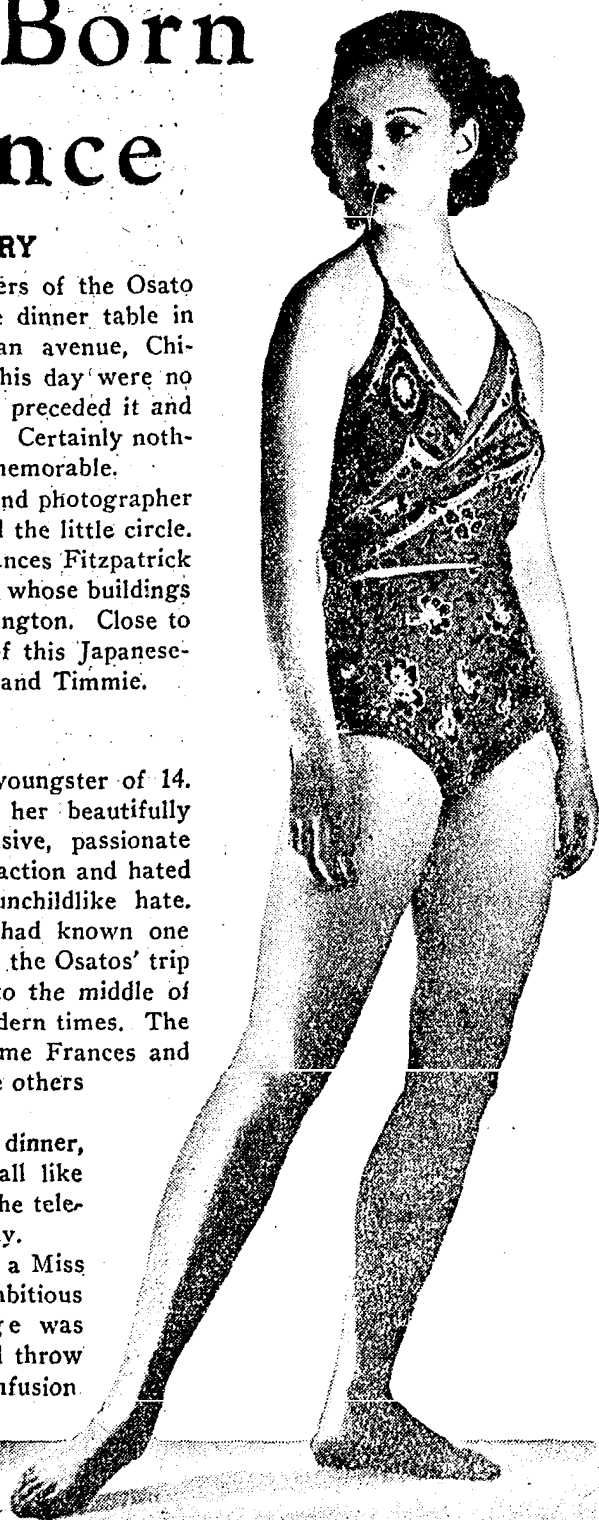
Shoji Osato, Japanese by birth and photographer by profession, looked calmly around the little circle. Here was Mrs. Osato, formerly Frances Fitzpatrick of Omaha, daughter of the architect whose buildings dot the maps of Chicago and Washington. Close to her sat three enchanting children of this Japanese-American marriage—Sono, Tarew, and Timmie.

Sono, the eldest, was an elfin youngster of 14. The almost oriental passivity of her beautifully chiseled features belied an impulsive, passionate nature. She loved dancing to distraction and hated school with a bitter and quite unchildlike hate. Young as Sono was, she already had known one terrible and scarring experience, for the Osatos' trip to Japan in 1923 brought them into the middle of one of the worst earthquakes of modern times. The family was separated, and for a time Frances and tiny Sono did not know whether the others were alive or dead.

But to come back to this 1934 dinner, which, it turned out, was not at all like other dinners. Before it was over the telephone rang importantly, imperiously.

At the other end of the line was a Miss Harris, dancing teacher to the ambitious and hopeful Sono. Her message was enough to ruin the quiet dinner and throw this peaceful family group into confusion.

At right: Sono Osato, graceful and promising member of the Ballet Russe.



Photographed in natural colors in The Tribune's color studio, this picture reveals Miss Osato's exotic beauty.



(Tribune Studio photo.)

Pirouetting! Osato is rapidly mastering the technique of the dance.



Above: In a dance of the east, for which her racial background fits her.



At left: A classic pose of the girl who won instant recognition in the eyes of a famous impresario.

said, "and be ready to dance for Colonel de Basil right after tonight's performance." (This Colonel de Basil was and is head of the famous Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.)

High above the turmoil that succeeded this summons rang the frantic shouts of Mrs. Osato. "Relax! Relax!" she cried at her dithery little daughter. "Relax! Relax!"

Sono could not relax, but she did manage to find her dancing slippers. The girl and her mother dashed downtown and arrived at the Auditorium in time to watch the end of the performance from backstage and to listen to the wild applause that welled up from the darkness beyond the footlights.

Soon the great moment arrived. The final curtain had fallen, an audience limp with enthusiasm was making its way toward the exits, and Colonel de Basil declared himself ready for the "audition."

Sono began her routine in a daze, trying not to think of what these brief minutes might mean. Failure? Then back she must go to the Waller High school. Success? Here were the long roads of the world beckoning to the eager girl, the excitement of the dance ready to fill her days and nights to overflowing!

Soon the gruff voice of the colonel broke in upon her whirling thoughts.

"Go to the Auditorium theater," she

He was talking to Mrs. Osato. "We'll take her for three years."

You don't just join the ballet and tell the manager which rôles you'd like to do—Aurora, the Miller's Wife, the Polovetzian Maid, or whatever. You go into the corps de ballet and work anonymously, day and night, for years.

Up and down the world went the ballet—to Barcelona, London, Paris, New York—carrying in its entourage this enthusiastic little Japanese-American, who really saw more of the rehearsal halls of these glamorous cities than of their malls and promenades. She worked to good advantage and was soon singled out for special and extra-special parts—an odalisque in "Schererazade," the barmaid in "Union Pacific." Technical skill, sheer ability to dance well, was not entirely responsible for this preferment. Sono has great beauty, a pert, distinctive presence, quick and clever understanding of character, and real ability as a mime.

Who knows? Although she still rates as a member of the corps de ballet, there is no reason to believe that this 17-year-old will spend even the remainder of her minority there.