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 unmemorably as if this were any 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, Torii, and Tinmin.

Sono, the eldest, was an elfin youngest of 14. The almost oriental passivity of her beautifully cleaved features belied an impulsive, passionate nature. She loved dancing to distraction and hated school with a bitter and quite unphilosophic hate. Young as Sono was, she already had known one terrible and scaring experience, for the Osato's trip to Japan in 1925 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.

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 roles you'd like to do—Aurora, the Miller's Wife, the Polovtsian 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 boisterous halls of these glitzy cities than of their stalls and promenades. She worked to good advantage and was soon singled out for special and extra-special parts—an odelette in "The Sleeping Beauty," the harum-scarum in "Undine." Technical skill, shy ability to dance well, was not entirely responsible for this preference. Sono has great beauty, a part, distinctiveness, presence, quick and clever understanding of character, and real ability as a mime.

Who knows? Although the still rate 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.