Tracing the Landscape of Dance in Greece

Tracing the Landscape of Dance in Greece

By

Katia Savrami

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Tracing the Landscape of Dance in Greece

By Katia Savrami

This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-4220-3
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-4220-4

Cover image: From a rehearsal of Crosstalk Choreography, 2009,
© Ioannis Mandafounis.

Dedicated to my parents

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my colleague and collaborator Maria Tsouvala, academic, choreographer and educator, for her enthusiastic encouragement, her critical comments and suggestions, and her continuous support for the completion of this book. I also owe thanks to C. Nadia Seremetakis, Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of the Peloponnese, for sharing with me her theoretical knowledge through various discussions for the content of this book.

I would like to thank my colleagues at the Department of Theatre Studies of the University of Patras, Professor Stavros Tsitsiridis for his suggestions on the structure of the book, as well as Assistant Professor Agis Marinis for his comments when the book was completed. I am also grateful to Professor Rob Roznowski, Head of Acting and Directing at the Theatre Department of the Michigan State University, for reading the manuscript and for all his suggestions.

Many thanks to Menelaos Karantzas, PhD Candidate at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and Maria Koliopoulou, choreographer of Prosxima Dance Company, who are always keen to support my projects, both theoretical and practical. Thanks to Mariza Vinieratou and Jenny Hill, lifelong friends and colleagues, for their continuous support for my work. Many thanks to the staff of the Department of Theatre Studies at the University of Patras, to Aleka Bertsoukli in particular, for their assistance in my projects. I am truly grateful to you all.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest appreciations to Ann Cooper Albright, Professor and Chair of the Department of Dance at Oberlin College and Conservatory, United States, dancer and scholar, for her opinions and insights, for her steady support for our work in Greece through the crisis, as well as for her intellectual contribution to the *Choros International Dance Journal* since its establishment in 2012. I owe special thanks to her for writing the Foreword of this book.

FOREWORD

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I write this *Foreword* to Professor Katia Savrami's *Tracing the Landscape of Dance in Greece*. Written for a new generation of Greek dancers and choreographers who need to learn the power of their own history as well as for international dance studies scholars interested in the evolution of dance in Greece, this book presents an eloquent summary of the historical and cultural trajectories of theatrical dance in Greece. In four brief but thorough chapters, Savrami establishes how theatrical dance developed alongside the formation of the modern Greek state, and how the foundational elements of European and Soviet ballet were translated and re-interpreted within the establishment and evolution of the Greek National Opera over the course of the twentieth century. In addition, she traces the enduring influence of an imaginary Hellenic topos envisioned by modern dancers from America and Europe such as Isadora Duncan and Eva Palmer who came to Greece in the early twentieth century. I was particularly interested to learn of pioneers of modern dance such as Rallou Manou and Zouzou Nikoloudi and the important role of Greek women like them who forged a new type of expressive movement in Greece. In the last section, Savrami charts the vital emergence of a contemporary dance scene and its development once Greece joined the European Union in 1981. During this period, Greek dancers and choreographers were able to take advantage of their increased mobility and open job opportunities to pursue new creative and collaborative partnerships with artists across Europe.

Throughout her meticulous mapping of the landscape of dance in Greece, Professor Savrami convincingly demonstrates how theatrical dance in Greece was necessarily an amalgam of different influences. Situated at the crossroads of east and west, Greece occupies a geographic space that was home to many different peoples and customs. As she traces this history from four centuries of Ottoman rule to the mixed blessings of membership in the European Union, Savrami reveals how Greek dance artists have navigated the tides of an ethnic and cultural hybridism to produce in its wake an approach to physical expressivity that is uniquely Greek. This narrative includes the tensions not only between east and west, but also between classical ballet and modern dance, artistic communities and state power, and ancient roots and contemporary multi-cultural experiences. Savrami also includes in her discussion a critical

mapping of the influences of the changes in political tides on the landscape of dance as well as dance education. Knowing one's history is the first step in being able to advocate effectively for the renewed importance of dancing in the twenty-first century.

One of the key sections to understanding the evolution of dance in Greece, particularly for international dance scholars, is Chapter III on the establishment of the Greek National Opera, which housed the first state-funded ballet company. Originally founded in 1939 by Costis Bastias, Minister of Education, this company was the first to bring professional dancers on the stage as part of the operas presented in the National Theatre of Greece. Ironically enough, during the occupation of Greece by the Axis Powers, the Greek National Opera continued to flourish, aided by a German love of opera as well as benefitting from a program of guest artists and visiting composers from Germany. After the war, the Greek National Opera became an independent institution. Within this organisation, ballet was staged as a legitimate art form in its own right under the structure of "Ballet Evenings" and the number and quality of dancers increased. Under the military dictatorship (1967-1974), ballet suffered from its associations with art forms from outside of Greece, but later thrived under a series of new directors. In 1983, dance was officially declared a "profession" by the Greek government, and contemporary dance began to find its own footing outside of state-run institutions.

Although many contemporary Greek dancers and choreographers have taken advantage of the European Union's opening up of extraordinary opportunities to study experimental dance, improvisation and composition at international centers such as S.E.A.D. in Salzburg and P.A.R.T.S. in Belgium, they return to a country that has suffered from depleted arts funding for several generations. Savrami charts the devastating impact this has had not only on young and emerging dance artists, but also on the state dance schools, whose curricula have not been updated and refreshed for many years. Fortunately, several big dance festivals such as the Kalamata International Dance Festival have helped give dance much needed visibility and vitality in Greece. In addition, the Association of Greek Choreographers was founded in 1999, organizing yearly festivals that are important venues not only for more established companies, but also for emerging choreographers and new dance collectives. As Savrami details, collaborations among artists and the pooling of resources have provided critical alternatives to state funding of the arts, particularly during the financial crises of the past decade. Her discussion of the formation of the Mavili Collective and their occupation of the

Deserted Embros Theatre is an uplifting example of the resilience of artists even in the midst of a deep financial and cultural crisis.

Unfortunately, and perhaps most sadly for those of us who work in academia, Savrami recounts the multiple attempts to found and fund a dance studies program in a university which have ultimately proven not completely successful. Nonetheless, in 2012 the A.S. Onassis Foundation supported an initiative to create the *Choros International Dance Journal*, a peer-reviewed dance journal, and the first of its kind in Greece. In addition, there have been several important events such as the 2010 "Dancing Bodies: Practices and Politics" conference, the 2015 international conference entitled "Cut and Paste: Dance Advocacy in the Age of Austerity" which was co-sponsored by the Society of Dance History Scholars, and the Congress on Research in Dance in collaboration with the Hellenic Centre of the International Theatre Institute. These efforts, however, most often rely on individual initiatives and lots of unpaid labor, and are, in the long run, unsustainable.

As Savrami points out in her Coda, there are many factors in play when one looks at the history and development of dance in Greece. Dance has always been implicated in the political climate of the country, and even though there is an increasing governmental emphasis on the need to support Greek arts and culture broadly speaking, the art of expressive movement – perhaps because it has little exchange value in the capitalist market – is still not taken seriously enough in terms of funding for choreographers and educational support for dancers. A strong arts advocacy program on the part of the government as well as private funders could cultivate the field of dance in many areas, including K-12 programs in public school education, the evolution of folk forms, or experiments in contemporary multimedia work. As Savrami makes clear, the real challenge is in finding ways to organize and consolidate the training of dancers, inspire and produce emerging choreographers, document and publish critical trends in regional and global dance, and create a lasting community that draws from the past to support the future of dance in Greece. This work requires perseverance in the face of institutional (and sometimes public) indifference. Katia Savrami's concise mapping of the landscape of Greek dance is a critical first step. Hopefully, others will be encouraged by this work to continue the journey.

Ann Cooper Albright
Professor and Chair of the Department of Dance
at Oberlin College and Conservatory,
United States

PREFACE

Often, the problem with notions of history and education in dance is that every human society approaches them differently, mainly according to its cultural heritage. Thinking back, I was trained in dance, in a certain way, in Greece, but what I realised later was that there was a system of beliefs that were transmitted through dance in Greece and were related to the values of technique, creativity, aesthetics, ethics and morals, and that this education was very different from the education in dance I received later at the Laban Centre in London, United Kingdom. My postgraduate studies helped me to understand that, although we all talk about similar things, our practices and the values we transmit as educators can differ significantly. Historical developments as well as educational practices are related to the social and cultural reality in which we live and to its internally differentiated structure of functional relationships, which may interfere and conflict with other social and cultural realities. In this way, dancing bodies explore, enhance and transform their kinaesthetic awareness, thus creating new symbolic configurations by being, moving and interacting with the world.

In the current moment of choreographic language evolution, dancing bodies are agents that open up new crossroads between the self and the world by moving, performing and thinking. To understand and discuss this physical discourse, one needs to reflect on the different social, cultural and political realities that human beings experience as global citizens and on the many worlds that dancing bodies inhabit. Moreover, one also needs to know and appreciate the significance of dance in its specific context.

Having been engaged in dance for my entire life, initially as a practitioner, dancer and teacher, choreographer, and later as an academic, I have experienced the multimodal corporeality of dance together with the transformation of my body through ageing. I have also experienced dance in my country and, by regularly teaching dance abroad, I have found myself mediating between the different perceptions of temporalities and spaces and their constant flux and interchange through my dancing body in the world. Reflecting on my experiences and experiencing the severe crisis in my country over the last ten years, I felt the urge to write this book for two reasons: first, to share the cultural roots, the influences, the context and the causes of the development of the art of dance in Greece with the

younger generation of people involved in the study and practice of dance; and second, to provide international readers with a broad perspective on how dancing bodies can be socially and culturally mediated in diverse contexts. The range of the subject matters might also provide a comprehensive view to ethnographers interested in dance as an object of cross-cultural study.

The book examines and discusses the distinct path that dance took in Greece as a cultural product and as an artistic practice. The discussion reveals the relationship of dance with culture through historical data and landmarks that have affected the country's social, political and economic development. The focus of attention was initially on classical ballet and its development in Greece and the pursuit of its synchronisation with the international dance scene, given that theoretical sources on the issue are limited to oral narratives and autobiographies. However, as the content of the book was structured and writing began, it became apparent that modern and/or contemporary dance should also be integrated into the discussion, in order to examine the field as a whole.

Readers of this book will gain knowledge of dance as an art form in Greece as well as the variety of approaches and attitudes to dance that are apparent in cultural and artistic activities. In particular, Greece was occupied by the Ottoman Empire from the mid-fifteenth century until the Greek War of Independence (1821-1832), and its cultural isolation during the period of Ottoman occupation kept Greece apart from European dance artistic influences and the development of ballet. Ballet in Greece was introduced in operas and operettas, organised by the royal court in the last years of the nineteenth century. From the late 1920s, with the foundation of ballet schools and later, with the inauguration of the Greek National Opera in 1939, the development of ballet until the early years of the twenty-first century followed its own distinct pathway, different from that in the Western world. The accord between dance as an art form in Greece and the Western world was partly achieved with the appearance of dance as part of Greek drama performances, where the reimagining of antiquity became the link between past and present. The establishment of modern and contemporary dance in the twentieth century was closely related to, and in many cases became an integral part of, theatre, music and the visual arts. The notions of 'Hellenism' and 'Greekness' were employed to reflect on how national sensibilities are embodied, in search of cultural identity. With the spring of contemporary dance in the 1990s, Greek choreographers created a distinctive language of expression which was quite different from their predecessors' conception of dance. Since then, the landscape of dance in Greece has gradually changed, because

choreographers have included the social, political and cultural body in their works. As Martha Graham has said, "The body says what words cannot" and this is the belief of the Greek dance community, in general. The relationship between dance and politics has affected and delayed the development of ballet and modern and contemporary dance culture in Greece[1]. Synchronisation between Greece and the world's dance trends can be found in performances and theoretical approaches mostly during the twenty-first century. The shift of artistic intentions from the local community to the world's network was an urge which occurred through collaborative and collective practices, due to the economic, social, political and cultural crisis, during the last ten years. However, in certain cases, politically-engaged performances expose a continuous transformation of the aesthetic forms and concepts of dance, being synchronised with current trends, and deviating from previous artistic intentions, including the notions of 'Hellenism' and 'Greekness'. Despite the financial strains in the country, a new era in the Greek National Opera and Ballet started after its relocation to the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center and through the vision and initiatives that its directors are taking.

The two main questions I have addressed are the following: whether and in what way dance in Greece has been influenced by the ever-changing aesthetics of classical and modern or contemporary dance in Europe and America, and how the cultural heritage of antiquity, the socio-political challenges and the cultural attitude towards dancing bodies in Greece have influenced the creation of a reflective dialogue with the systems of knowledge, both empirically and theoretically. The book offers an overall picture of dance as art in Greece, critically incorporating into the discussion the historical, social, political and economic factors that have slowed down its cultural synchronisation with the international dance scene.

Setting the context

The concept of time has been addressed by various philosophers and scientists in an attempt to explain its abstract nature and the linear progression of past, present, and future temporality. Among an endless list of researchers, an important figure whose writings inspired the redefinition of time is Henri Bergson, a French philosopher who regarded intuition as a means of attaining knowledge and who tried to reunite scientific theories of evolution with spirituality. Bergson, in his book *Creative Evolution,*

[1] See Mills 2017.

distinguished between a linear, continuous and homogenous time often adapted to the needs of language and space, and the term "duration" that he introduced, which refers to an individual subjective experience of time, with multiple rhythms and various flows[2]. Martin Heidegger, with his major philosophical work, *Being and Time*, contributed to the theory of hermeneutics, phenomenology and existentialism by introducing and discussing the notion of "Dasein" or "being-there in the world". The key to Heidegger's understanding of time is that it should be grasped as the unity of three dimensions: future, past and present. This is what he calls "primordial" or "original" time, and he insists that it is limited. So he suggested a separation between the temporality of the primordial phenomenon of authentic being and that of "public" or worldly time[3]. The multiple times of human experiences, the rhythms of the mind, episodic memory, recollection, meaning and anticipation, are experienced differently from clock time, as a universal form of social time relation. In the early 1970s, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari[4] confirmed that the categories we use to identify individuals derive from differences, and they explained that pure difference is non-spatio-temporal; it is an idea that Deleuze refers to as "the virtual"[5] and is a system of differential relations that create actual spaces, times, and sensations. In critiquing the heritage of Western philosophy[6], Deleuze supported the idea that "Chronos" (time) is considered to be the present moment, as time's only existing facet, thus relegating past and future to its two dimensions. Deleuze further discussed the notion of "Aion" (a Greek word which in Homer refers to lifespan) as a past-future of vast and divisible abstract moments that coexist with the present. Overall, the concept of time as the passage of moments from past to present to future, as well as an experience that originates from an anticipated future, leads us directly to the concept of memory.

The debate about how time is perceived has raised several questions in current neuroscientific research, such as whether our perception of time is linear, resembling a flowing river, or cyclical, like a wheel or a helix. Data from the Kavli Neuroscience Institutes suggest that both are correct and that the signal in the time-coding network can take on many forms depending on the experience. The 2014 Nobel Prize winners for Physiology and Medicine, May-Britt Moser and Edvard Moser, have

[2] See Bergson 1911.
[3] See Heidegger 1962.
[4] See Deleuze and Guattari [1972] 1977; Deleuze and Guattari [1991] 1994.
[5] See Deleuze [1968] 1994.
[6] One of the earliest, and most famous, discussions of the nature and experience of time is the autobiographical *Confessions* of St. Augustine.

discovered experimental evidence supporting the view that time is a non-equilibrium process. It is always unique and changing[7]. The above-mentioned philosophical and scientific thoughts have had a significant influence on the creation, performance and analysis of dance's ephemerality, as well as on writing dance nowadays.

The methodological approach of this book, although its chapters and various parts form a continuum, was influenced by the German historian and theorist Reinhart Koselleck and his book *The Practice of Conceptual History, Timing History, Spacing Concepts* in particular. For Koselleck, as written in the book's Foreword:

> […] historical process is marked by a distinctive kind of temporality different from that found in nature. This temporality is multileveled, is subject to differential rates of acceleration and deceleration, and functions not only as a matrix within which historical events happen but also as a causal force in the determination of social reality in its own right[8].

Koselleck's work has replaced the idea of linear time with the multilayered notion of temporality, an approach which "[…] converges with the work of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida, all of whom have stressed the status of historiography as discourse rather than as discipline and featured the constitutive nature of historical discourse as against its claims to literal truthfulness"[9]. Paul Ricoeur's writings in *Time and Narrative* support the idea that, although the events discussed may be in chronological order and/or continuous, the individual being, at present and through selective memory, interprets and transforms the meaning of the past based on specific brain mechanisms[10]. Thus the present can be viewed as a modified reenactment of the past, which creates an implicit dialogue between the remembered and the remembering self. The personal past is available to be viewed from different perspectives depending on the interpretation being constructed, the selective remembering, the present context and the anticipation of the future. The multilayered construction of time depends on shaping relationships, ranging from the individual experience to an intersubjective experience, within a sharing communicative social time and by taking into account history, tradition and politics, notions that are interrelated with culture.

---

[7] See Tsao *et al.* 2018: 57-62.
[8] White, cited in Koselleck 2002: xii.
[9] White, cited in Koselleck 2002: xiii-xiv.
[10] See Kearney 1991: 57-60.

In these regimented augmentations of different conceptions of time and experiences, the chapters of this book look back to the past, discuss the now, and reach out into the future. Avoiding the linear progression of time and structure, the content of the book unfolds in parallel and intertwines discourses incorporating reflections on philosophical and scientific subjects and experiences, relative to dance. The investigation places ballet, modern and contemporary dance in the Greek context, and juxtaposes these genres with international dance making. Further, it uncovers the factors that have affected the development of dance practices in Greece during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It also discusses the reasons why, until now, dance, as an embodied art form, has not been established in Greece as an academic discipline with its own sustainable educational structures. The book does not arrive at or lay down conclusions; instead, it leaves the discussion open by setting the question: What will happen next in the practice of dance in Greece? The journey through this book is based on different and multiple temporalities, both subjective and objective, even though time is accompanied by clocks marking time with regular ticks.

CHAPTER I

BALLET IN WESTERN CULTURE: ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION

The first chapter outlines the origins of ballet and its evolution in Western culture through a brief historical perspective, and also through fragments of references to the influences of antiquity in the contemporary Western dance world. In doing so, it begins with the early court dances or pre-classical dance and moves on to examine the diverse forms of dance in the Renaissance, a significant period for the establishment of ballet as an autonomous theatrical art, according to the moral, political, and aesthetic concerns of that time. It highlights the creators of Ballet d'action, the Romantic era of ballet, Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, as well as the ballet culture in the Soviet Union.

Dance in the courts of Europe

The origins of ballet can be traced back to the Italian Renaissance courts of the fifteenth century, from where it expanded and further developed in other countries, such as France, England and Russia, as a concert dance form[1]. As dance historian Mark Franko states in his book *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body*, "Ballet spectacle in the late Renaissance began as a hybrid of pre-existing art forms: dance, drama and music. Indeed, the term *ballet* then referred both to an entire spectacle and to its dance segments"[2]. In Franko's statement, we can observe the inevitable effect of classical antiquity on Western culture. Ancient Greek culture was a vital source of inspiration for the development of the arts in the baroque period, contemporary classicism and modernism[3]. In various periods of

1 See Thomas and Gingell 1987 and Lee 2002.

[2] In Franko 1993: 31.

[3] Ancient Greece is called the birthplace or cradle of Western civilisation. The epitome of Greek civilisation lies in the achievements of Athens in the fifth century BC, the centre of both the development of democracy and the flowering of

history, including the Renaissance, dance artists, inspired by the classical principles of antiquity, reimagined notions of ancient dance in the creation of innovative choreographies[4].

In history, the origins of ballet date back to the *Dance de Cour,* a name given to dances performed in the royal courts, halls of grand estates and palaces, where noble amateurs, dancing next to each other, made various floor patterns by using mannerisms of the aristocratic court, and harmoniously connecting their movements to musical style[5]. The idea of courtly feasts and balls has been known since the Middle Ages, when kings and queens began organising festive events with musical accompaniments and dances at the European courts[6]. Dance was a mode that allowed noble men and women to wear elaborate costumes and masks at court entertainments. Dancing masters taught the steps to the nobility, and the court participated in the performances.

A valuable resource, the most detailed and authentic record of sixteenth-century and earlier dance forms is Thoinot Arbeau's *Orchesographie*, written in the form of a dialogue between the author and his student

philosophical inquiry. Athens experienced a unique intellectual and artistic blossoming, as sciences – geometry, astronomy, mathematics, and medicine – as well as new arts – architecture, sculpture, painting, literature, drama, poetry, music and dance – flourished.

[4] For recent scholarship on this issue, see, for example, Macintosh 2010, and Hall and Wyles 2008.

[5] On style and genre in dance see Cohen [1983] 1991, and Anderson 1992.

[6] While dance as public entertainment was almost persecuted during the Medieval period by the Western Catholic Church, everyday life was not devoid of dancing. Briefly, in the early Middle Ages, *Carole* was a song-dance that served the needs of common people and nobles alike. It had two distinct forms: the *farandole*, which was a line of dancers in single file holding hands, and the *branle*, in which the dancers held hands in a circle. These linked dances were not gender defined, meaning that they could be danced by any combination of the sexes (see Rust 1969). The troubadours could hardly be expected to favour this form of dance and it is to them that we owe the earliest form of couple dance. It was a couple dance in pantomimic form, where the only contact was the clasping of the hands. From the twelfth century in Provence, France, troubadours sang for the "lady of their heart", for a noble love, which became part of feudalism through the Code of Chivalry. Romantic love between men and women became a theme for literature, the arts and ballet as well; heterosexual couples partnered in movement became a distinct feature of Western ballet. The dancing couple performed for the nobles of the court but avoided difficult movements or acrobatics, as these were considered vulgar.

Capriol and first published in 1588[7]. André Lepecki, an eminent scholar in the field of dance and performance studies, explains the philosophical association of the manual's title with ancient Greek dance through the word *orchesis:* "The first version of the word 'choreography' was coined in 1589, and titles one of the most famous dance manuals of that period: *Orchesographie* by Jesuit priest Thoinot Arbeau (literally, the writing, graphie, of the dance, orchesis)"[8].

In the sixteenth century, Catherine de Medici – an Italian noblewoman, wife of King Henry II of France and a great patron of the arts – began to fund ballet at the French court. Her elaborate festivals encouraged the growth of *Ballet de Cour,* which included dance, decor, costume, song, music and poetry. The evolution from *Dance de Cour* to *Ballet de Cour* was made with no effect on the existing formalised style of dance, which lasted from the beginning of the fifteenth century to the early years of the Italian Renaissance. The earliest ballet masters in the Italian Renaissance were Domenico da Piacenza and his students Antonio Cornazzano and Guglielmo Ebreo, who both became successful dance masters. Their dances were models of simplicity and beauty, and formed the basis of all aristocratic works until the French Revolution.

By the end of the sixteenth century, Italian dance had lost its noblest style and Paris had become the centre for dance under the protective 'wings' of Catherine de Medici. The most famous and remarkable ballet of the era was "Ballet Comique de la Reine" (1581), choreographed by Balthazar de Beaujoyeulx, who influenced the development of theatrical dance and opera[9]. Ballet Comique included pastoral themes and idyllic stories of peasants or interpretations of Greek myths and stories of gods and goddesses, with the focus being on the ideal form. Thematically, dance works created in that period often praised hierarchy and royal power, but still preserved their artistic value. Their plots, which derived from Greek and Roman mythology, were not true to the originals but were used as springboards to connect the new-found values of ancient politics and philosophy, so admired in the Renaissance, to contemporary government[10].

---

[7] Among the dances described are the pavane, gavotte, galliard and allemande, which are not only described but also illustrated and directly associated with their musical forms (see Arbeau and Backer 1967).
[8] In Lepecki 2006: 6-7.
[9] See Yates [1947] 1988: 236–274.
[10] In Kirstein 1971: 11.

An important step towards *Ballet de Cour* in its final form was made during the reign of Louis XIII in France from 1610 to 1643. Back then, the nobles had begun to wear shoes with low heels, which changed the position of their feet, which were now slightly turned out from the hip joints. This change affected their dance technique. The style of dancing in the '*en dehors*' position was developed later. The mid-seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries brought about the birth of Classical Ballet. Louis XIV, "*Le Roi Soleil*" of France from 1643 to 1715, led *Ballet de Cour* to its most brilliant highpoint[11]. King Louis XIV founded the first Royal Academy of Dance in 1661 under the direction of Pierre Beauchamp, his dance master and favoured partner at the *Ballet de Cour.* Beauchamp was credited with the codification of the five positions of the feet as well as the development of the use of arms. Among those creating dance productions for the king was Jean-Baptiste Lully, an Italian born musician and dancer, who wrote many scores for *Ballet de Cour*. Lully also collaborated with the playwright Molière, as well as Beauchamp and Louis, to create lively ballets modelled on the Italian Commedia dell'Arte. The Royal Academy of Dance permitted male and female dancers to become professionals, to hold a prominent position in the court analogous to that already held by the musicians, and allowed them to perform not only in the royal court but also in popular theatres. As the technical demands of performance increased and amateurs gave way to professionals, ballet moved onto the stage. The ability to dance with elegance, grace and nobility originated in the royal courts, where ballet continued to evolve over several centuries. This style epitomised the aristocratic idea of nobility. For Louis XIV, ballet was more than art: it was the political currency that kept his country together. Until the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, the Paris Opera remained closely linked to the court. The Revolution put an end to such support.

At this point, it should be noted that Commedia dell'Arte, an early theatrical form, influenced European drama and ballet. It emerged in Northern Italy in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century and rapidly gained popularity throughout Europe. Performances were based on a basic plot, often a familiar story, upon which the actors improvised their dialogues at outdoor fairs and festivals. Commedia dell'Arte provided a total theatre in which colour, music and acrobatics contributed to the overall effect[12].

[11] In Bland 1976: 49.
[12] In Oreglia 1968: 4.

The Ballet d'action

During the eighteenth century, ballet was continually developing, a fact that resulted in two opposing groups of dance practitioners. On one side were the *Virtuosi*, and on the other the admirers of *Ballet d'action*. These two different types of dance professionals had a significant influence on the development of ballet in the following years. The major controversy was the opposition between those seeking abstract dancerly qualities and those demanding virtuosity. These were the circumstances in which *Ballet d'action* evolved, a dance expressing dramatic movement out of the contrasts and relationships between different characters. It reflected the growing need of the time for a dance form capable of expressing human passions. This idea was in conflict with the *Virtuosi*, who had improved ballet technique, bringing complexity and speed to the dancing motifs. A virtuoso principal ballerina was Marie Camargo, who shortened her skirts to mid-calf length to expose her agility in '*entrechats*', a series of crossing and beating the feet in jumps.

As *Ballet d'action* developed, ballet reinvented itself, and Jean-Georges Noverre became the voice of the reform. In his revolutionary *Lettres sur la danse et les ballets,* first published in 1760, Noverre documented his ideas by underlining the importance of dramatic motivation and criticising overemphasis on virtuosic dancing. Among his artistic intentions were the removal of wigs and masks and the modification of costumes. Noverre argued that dance is meaningless unless it has some dramatic and expressive content and that movement should be more natural and accommodate a wider range of expression. Noverre intended to make ballet an autonomous theatrical art, instead of a simple decorative supporter of the opera. For him, ballet should involve dramatic action and not confine itself to short interludes. By employing dramatic action and narrative in combination with pantomime, technical skills, music and sceneries, ballet could become emotional and expressive, able to communicate and consequently be understood by viewers. Noverre's choreographic approach would eventually result in the separation of ballet from opera and the establishment of dance as an independent and autonomous art form[13]. Noverre's ideas announced the period of Romantic ballet. Fiona Macintosh explains that in Noverre's account "we have the singing, dancing ancient chorus incarnate on the eighteenth-century stage", and she adds that "Whilst eighteenth-century attitudes to the ancient chorus

[13] Among the artists who contributed to the development of *Ballet d'action* was the Englishman John Weaver, dancing master and author of several excellent studies supporting the autonomous status and storying capacity of dance.

are generally regarded by classical reception scholars as simply a 'theoretical' preoccupation of a few German intellectuals, Noverre's important collaboration with Gluck was a seminal practical experiment that had wide repercussions"[14]. Macintosh is correct, as it was the dancers who got there first. Marie Sallé "[…] provided the first classical *tableau vivant* at Covent Garden in 1734 as she performed as a statue in loose hairs and scant garment in *Pygmalion*"[15]. Sallé, the first woman who choreographed and performed ballets, anticipated Noverre's reforms. She reformulated choreographic conventions, by embracing two distinct aesthetic traditions, the baroque opera-ballet and the pantomime, from which emerged the action or story ballet (*Ballet d'action*).

Europe was transformed by the Enlightenment (1650-1800), the intellectual and philosophical movement that challenged the old way of life, superstitions and monarchical authority. It was led by philosophers such as Voltaire, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Genealogically, new ideas were developed by philosophers like René Descartes and Immanuel Kant and by scientists like Isaac Newton. In addition, philosophers like Rousseau and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe inspired the Romantic generation with their ideas. Europe was influenced by the Romantic movement, especially in literature, the fine arts, music and dance. Romanticism was particularly marked by the presence of artists searching for new sources of inspiration and expression. The characteristics of Romanticism were a focus on the expression of emotions, individualism and the apotheosis of nature as a response to the socio-political context of the time and the radical changes that were taking place in Western culture, following the French, the Napoleonic and the Industrial Revolutions. The audience expected a different perspective from the theatre, a depiction of a life very different from what was happening around them. This resulted in the creation of an imaginative world, full of colour, fairies, elves, ghosts and characters from exotic lands, supernatural creatures that everyone would want to dream of or become one of. The scenes depicted ranged from moonlit monasteries and forests to representations of exotic, distant places. The music became more descriptive in order to enhance the story and climax of the ballet. One of the most important challenges in choreography was how to create the Romantic illusion. Romantic ballet soon reached an exceptional level of artistic achievement addressed to a wider audience[16]. Théophile Gautier, a poet and lover of ballet, was the

[14] In Macintosh 2010: 6.
[15] Ibid.
[16] For a multi-layered vision of ballet as movement, art, theatrical spectacle and history, see Kirstein 1994.

first notable ballet critic in the history of dance. He was also largely responsible for effecting changes in the perception and performance of dance, helping to launch the "golden age" of ballet, in which ballet began to evolve from mere displays of technique into a dramatic and expressive art form[17].

The improved methods for teaching ballet, such as the one by Auguste Vestris, who was a strong supporter of *Ballet d'action,* set the foundations for *pas d'action*, whereby dance promoted dramaturgy and exalted a more poetic dance style. *The Code of Terpsichore*, written by Carlo Blasis in 1828, was an early and highly influential study on dance theory and technique, through which the new French *danse d'école* was established. As a result, there was a gradual disappearance of the three distinct categories of dance styles – the noble, the demi character, and the comic.

While in the previous centuries ballet had been a masculine domain (mainly due to the influence of King Louis XIV), in the Romantic era it became an essentially feminine art, incompatible with masculine qualities. This is evident in the role of the male dancers, who became mere porters of sylphs and other mysterious weightless creatures. Women were idealised on the stage, as the female dancer was symbolically 'elevated', through their pointe shoes and lifts in partnership with a male dancer. Marie Taglioni, who incarnated the ideal of beauty, was the first prima ballerina to dance on pointe in *La Sylphide* (1832), choreographed by her father Filippo. During the Romantic ballet era, well-known ballerinas both danced and created works.

Meanwhile, ballet had also taken root in other European cities. The Royal Danish Ballet was founded in the Royal Theatre of Copenhagen in 1771. It was developed by the ballet masters Pierre Laurent and Vincenzo Galeotti, and later by August Bournonville, who studied with Vestris and joined the Paris Opera. Bournonville choreographed his version of *La Sylphide* for the Royal Danish Ballet in 1836 and staged more than fifty works during his tenure as ballet master. He also established the "Bournonville School", a training programme focusing on virtuoso solo dance, dramatic impact through expressive mime and harmony between the movements of the body and music[18]. Although Great Britain had a rich

[17] While *La Sylphide* and later *Giselle or the Wilis* (1841) represent the zenith of the Romantic period, other grand ballets are *Cachucha* (1836), *Napoli* (1842), *Ondine* (1843), *Esmeralda* (1844), *Pas de Quatre* (1845), *A Folk Tale* (1854), *Le Corsaire* (1856), *Coppélia* (1870) and *Swan Lake* (1895).

[18] On *Bournonville's Etudes Choregraphiques,* see Bruhn and Moor 1975.

history of dance, ballet was almost completely unknown to the British until the beginning of the twentieth century. The Theatre Opera was constructed in Covent Garden, London, in 1732 and was a playhouse until 1774, where the first ballet performances were showcased. In the nineteenth century and after a fire in 1856 which destroyed the old theatre, it was rebuilt and became the Royal Opera House in 1892. The Royal Ballet and its school were established by Dame Ninette de Valois, professional dancer of the Ballets Russes, in 1926. When Lilian Baylis, Manager of the Old Vic Theatre, acquired the Sadler's Wells Theatre, Ninette de Valois moved the school there in 1931 and it became the Vic-Wells Ballet School, feeding dancers into the Vic-Wells Ballet Company. During World War II, the company toured in Great Britain and in Europe, performing for Allied troops. In 1946, they moved to the Royal Opera House, premiering a new full-length production of *The Sleeping Beauty* to reopen Covent Garden as a lyric theatre after its wartime closure. In 1956, the Royal Ballet was recognised as Britain's flagship company[19].

At the end of the nineteenth century, the centre for ballet was Paris, the dance capital of the world, where the tradition of the opera and the ballet school had been established in the time of Louis XIV. However, nothing lasts forever. As the popularity of ballet in France began to decline, the centre of ballet shifted to Russia.

Ballet in Imperial Russia

In the Russian Empire, ballet achieved a stylistic identity that has left its mark on dance internationally ever since[20]. Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ballet in Russia was cultivated by foreign ballet masters, some of whom were recognised throughout Europe. The Mariinsky Ballet was founded in 1740, following the formation of the first Russian dance school in 1738, directed by the French ballet master Jean-Baptiste Landé in order to train young dancers to form the first Russian ballet company. In 1806, the Petrovsky Theatre School was reformed into the Moscow Imperial Theatre College for the training of opera, ballet and theatre artists and theatre orchestra musicians. In 1911 it became the Moscow School of Ballet[21].

---

[19] The Royal Ballet today employs more than a hundred dancers, and is one of the foremost ballet companies of the twenty-first century for its artistic and creative values and remains one of the leading companies in the world.

[20] In Cross 1944: 19-49.

[21] For the history of Russian ballet, see Wiley 1990; Souritz 1999.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Marius Petipa, dancer, choreographer, and maître de ballet of the St. Petersburg Imperial Theatres, raised Russian classical ballet to international acclaim and recognition. Petipa, at a time when ballet in Europe had declined into a show, found refuge in Russia and produced monumental work. He took elements from Romanticism, which he expanded and wove into fantasy plot lines, while adding pointe work and partnering. His legacy includes the reimagining of corps de ballet, which was until then little more than background decoration for the featured dancers. He also pioneered a new structural model for the pas de deux and demanded a higher technical standard from dancers. His ballets have survived the test of time and continue to be reconstructed, restaged, and re-envisioned by great ballet companies and artists throughout the world[22].

The era of the Ballets Russes

Nearly every aspect of ballet practice was transformed in the West by the renowned Ballets Russes, established and directed by the impresario Sergei Diaghilev in 1909. The Russian stars Vaslav Nijinsky and Anna Pavlova created enthusiasm for ballet all over the world as the principal dancers in the Ballets Russes. The influence of the Ballets Russes, even today, a century later, remains a hallmark of aesthetic trends and ideas in the history of twentieth-century dance. According to Lynn Garafola, the Ballets Russes were a choreographer's theatre, a laboratory for experiments that explored new technologies of the body and defined the art of choreography as the quest for new forms, infused with a subjective vision. One of the things that distinguished Diaghilev's vision was the focus on ballet as total art, one in which all of the arts could be unified, as he believed:

> […] that classicism was not a static entity but something that evolved, and that continuity with the past was not a matter of replicating the late Imperial repertory, but of recreating in a

[22] Petipa choreographed more than fifty ballets and restaged several others, including *Don Quixote*, *La Camargo*, *La Bayadère*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, *Swan Lake*, *Raymonda*, and *The Magic Mirror*, in collaboration with ballet master Lev Ivanov, who specialised in choreographing for the corps de ballet. He collaborated with Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky for the creation of *The Nutcracker*, which was completed by Ivanov in 1892 due to Petipa's illness.

> modern way an older dance theatre grounded in multiple art forms and the corporeal expressiveness of highly trained dancers[23].

In 1909, as the prospect of revolution made life in Russia less secure, Diaghilev moved to Paris from St. Petersburg, home of the Ballet Russes. In the company's first seasons, principal choreographer Michel Fokine staged several ballets that have become classics: *Les Sylphides* (1909), *The Firebird* (1910), and *Petrouchka* (1911), the sad tale of a puppet performed by the talented Vaslav Nijinsky. Before long, Diaghilev encouraged Nijinsky to create ballets for the company, which became legendary. They include *L'après-midi d'un faune*, which premiered in May 1912 at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. The 'primitive' steps and the movements that Nijinsky created were drawn from the static poses, shapes, and gestures found in the archaic culture of ancient Greek and Egyptian art, exhibited in the Louvre museum. The ballet was presented in bare feet and rejected classical formalism. Nijinsky's *Sacre du Printemps*, on Igor Stravinsky's composition, a mysterious and provocative choreography, both fascinated and outraged audiences at the Champs Elysées in Paris in May 1913 with its contorted, heavy, and pounding movements. In the words of Hodson, "*Le Sacre* is celebrated as the harbinger of modern dance, the work that broke the ground of twentieth century choreography"[24].

Apart from Fokine's and Nijinsky's works, the Ballets Russes were famous for the choreographies of many other acclaimed dancers, such as Anna Pavlova, Léonide Massine, Bronislava Nijinska, Serge Lifar and George Balanchine, who created opera-ballets and new ballets for the company's winter season in Monte Carlo. The Ballet Russes toured Europe and America, presenting a wide variety of ballets, and it is widely recognised as the most influential ballet company of the twentieth century. Diaghilev promoted ground-breaking cooperation between choreographers, composers, designers, and dancers by incorporating all mediums of the artistic world: choreography, visual arts, music, and dance[25]. He commissioned works from composers such as Igor Stravinsky, Claude Debussy and Sergei Prokofiev, and from visual artists such as Léon Bakst, Wassily Kandinsky, Alexandre Benois, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and the fashion designer Coco Chanel. The company's productions created a huge sensation, fully reinvigorating the art of dance by bringing visual artists to public attention, and by significantly altering the use of music. It also introduced European and American audiences to fairytales, music and

[23] In Garafola 2011: 32.
[24] In Hodson 2001: 17.
[25] In Garafola 1989: vii.