

Shapes of American Ballet:
Classical Traditions, Teachers, and Training in New York City, 1909-1934

Dissertation

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Abstract

In this historical study, I examine the ballet pedagogy in New York City from the opening of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School in 1909 to the founding of George Balanchine's School of American Ballet in 1934. I posit that the first generation of American ballet dancers emerged during the research period under the tutelage of numerous Italian and Russian immigrant ballet teachers, and that the Italian and Russian national ballet lineages helped to shape the period's ballet into a more legitimate branch of the classical tradition than has previously been acknowledged. I illuminate the individual histories and contributions of these noteworthy yet largely overlooked instructors, whose contributions set the development of American ballet in motion. In addition, I tease apart the context for ballet during this period. I look at the impact of capitalism, commercialism, democracy, and immigration on ballet teachers, their students, and their approaches, and I survey the effects of vaudeville and revue, the burgeoning film industry, and Progressive Era movement trends like aesthetic barefoot dance and the Delsarte System of Expression on ballet, its people, and its pedagogy. Broad theories of nationalism, internationalism, and Americanism undergird my study of this rich and underexamined period in ballet history.

For the teachers in this study, who persevered.

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Introduction

“The term ‘American ballet’ is as open to a diversity of definitions as intricate and hair-splitting as Polonius’s catalogue of dramas.”

—John Martin, *“The Dance: Creating an American Ballet,”* New York Times, 1930

George Balanchine’s arrival in America is commonly considered a watershed in the history and development of American ballet. His prolific choreographic output, distinctive style, and extensive pedagogical influence have moved many dance scholars and writers to suggest that he was the lone architect of ballet in America.^{*1} While Balanchine certainly merits esteem, the intense academic consideration given to his particular brand of American ballet has allowed for, and in some cases encouraged, the neglect and dismissal of the ballet that had been emerging in the United States prior to

* Numerous dance writers and scholars have alluded to Balanchine’s role as the sole creator of American ballet. Edwin Denby, in his 1948 article “The American Ballet,” posited that “[Balanchine] is more than anyone else the founder of the American classic style” (644), while Olga Maynard, a decade later in her book of the same title, stated that “[Balanchine] established an unimpeachable standard for ballet in the United States, in academic calibre and in performance” (48). More recently, Matilde Butkas has noted that Balanchine’s ballet, *Serenade*, “records how Balanchine started from scratch, teaching his American students a basically unfamiliar art” (“George Balanchine,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, 228). As well, Jennifer Homans, in her 2010 *Apollo’s Angels*, claims that Balanchine “[gave] classical ballet a tradition” (521). Throughout these and many other sources is the consistent use of superlative language that seeks to bestow Balanchine with ownership of American ballet. Balanchine biographer Robert Gottlieb, for example, regularly inserts such descriptive terminology as “genius,” “supreme,” “brilliant,” and “a figure of awe” (2-3). The boldest and perhaps most controversial of the superlative statements comes from Homans, who contends that the choreographic contributions of renowned twentieth-century choreographers Frederick Ashton and Antony Tudor, among others, were inferior to Balanchine’s: “few doubted that Balanchine towered over them all; they were standing on his shoulders” (504).

his ascent.^{*} As a result, there is a dearth of existing scholarship that considers the development of American ballet during the first few decades of the twentieth century. To address this gap in the literature, this study recovers and analyzes the pedagogical contributions of eight immigrant ballet teachers in New York City between 1909 and 1934, thereby bringing to light the work of several influential but lesser-known figures in the history of American ballet. In an effort to more fully understand the impact of their work during this complex formative period in American ballet history, I consider how dance—ballet in particular—was situated in the unique urban environment of early twentieth century New York City. On a national scale, I flesh out the development of American ballet in light of the country’s socio-economic, cultural, and political landscape, and I examine the intersections of ballet with immigration, Americanism, nationalism, capitalism, and democracy.

The time period for this study is delimited by the establishment of two significant ballet schools: the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School in 1909 and the School of American Ballet in 1934. The Metropolitan School was the first training institution in America built on the European ballet academy model, and the first to set the ambitious goal of training an all-American *corps de ballet*.[†] The founding of the School of American Ballet marks the beginning of Balanchine’s organized influence in the United States, and thus 1934 is a fitting end point for this study of the years preceding his primacy in American ballet. In

^{*} Suzanne Carbonneau Levy, in her 1990 study of Russian ballet dancers in America between 1910 and 1933, asserts, “The enormous importance of George Balanchine in virtually defining American ballet during the latter part of this century has shifted attention away from these émigrés” (“The Russians are Coming: Russian Dancers in the United States, 1910-1933” [PhD Diss., New York University]: 2).

[†] See the glossary for definitions of ballet terminology and clarifications of term use.

addition, the use of two renowned American ballet academies as bookends for the research period is in accordance with the pedagogical emphasis of this study.

In an effort to garner a balanced view of the 1909 to 1934 period and of those individuals who helped to shape early twentieth century American ballet, this study operates both broadly and narrowly: I balance specific details about the work of individual teachers with a broader context of that work in its time and place. My synchronic focus on the pedagogical work of eight ballet instructors during the study's specific time frame is complemented by my wider, diachronic investigation of ballet's national lineages and international identities over time. The study analyzes ballet's development across the nineteenth century in Europe and Russia in order to illuminate ballet's subsequent expansion in the States. While there was a flurry of ballet activity during the relatively narrow research period, foreign ballet teachers had been working in the United States for centuries prior.* The eight central subjects of this investigation are, therefore, not considered to have begun American ballet or American ballet pedagogy. Rather, the teachers in this study carried American ballet's development forward during this particular chapter in ballet's history.

I have elected to locate this research in New York City for a number of reasons. New York was home to both the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School and the School of American Ballet, and it was where the central subjects of this study—all ballet teachers from Europe and Russia—established their teaching practices. As a point of intersection

* In particular, dance historian Ann Barzel's exhaustive 1944 article, "European Dance Teachers in the United States," has supplied both broad context for ballet's development in America and key pedagogical details relevant to this study (*Dance Index: A New Magazine Devoted to Dancing* 3 [April-June 1944]: 56-100). Also important to this research is Barbara Barker's *Ballet or Ballyhoo*, an examination of three Italian ballet dancers in America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (New York: Dance Horizons, 1984).

and diversity on several fronts, New York City was an urban phenomenon between 1909 and 1934. There were few, if any, other cities in America that hummed as loudly or manifested the national mood² as directly. New York was the largest and most heterogeneous metropolis in America, and it was a locus for the launching of several national social and economic movements—the Progressive, Labor, and Feminist movements among them. The city became a major center for ballet, in no small part because of its close proximity to Ellis Island, through which most of ballet’s foreign artists entered the United States. Other urban centers across the country supported and nurtured ballet during the period, but as a thriving locale for ballet, New York City warrants analysis in its own right.

This investigation into early twentieth century pedagogical practices in New York City is steeped in historical modes of inquiry. While a historical approach best suits the subject matter for this study, the methodology is not without limitations. Most significantly, those individuals who have left materials behind can be studied, while those whose traces have disappeared cannot. The research is thus necessarily skewed toward those teachers whose pedagogies have been well preserved.* Another problem illuminated by this study’s methodology involves the uniformity of archival materials across the study’s subjects. I attempt a comparable analysis of each instructor’s work, despite the reality that the type of pedagogical information available for each of the eight ballet teachers differs significantly. In order to honor the individuality of each instructor

* In seeking to illuminate the work of underexamined individuals, I deliberately selected subjects whose work had not been exhaustively researched from a pedagogical perspective. Frank D. Ries’s series of articles on Albertina Rasch, for example, and Barbara Naomi Cohen-Stratynier’s comprehensive research on Ned Wayburn, eliminated Rasch and Wayburn as central research subjects, despite their relevance to the period and subject matter. I often include Rasch and Wayburn in my discussion, however, since their work helps to provide a frame of reference for the period’s ballet.

while maintaining consistency in the depth of analysis of each instructor's contributions, I take a two-pronged approach that allows for parity across the variable kinds of pedagogical data: I investigate the material aspects of the subjects' teaching, which include both practical and theoretical elements of classroom material; as well as the relational aspects of their pedagogies, which comprise their interactions with students and how these teachers functioned as communicators of the ballet tradition.

Of the eight instructors whose work I examine, five left at least one dancing manual in which they describe both steps and philosophies: Luigi Albertieri, Stefano Mascagno,* Sonia Serova, Veronine Vestoff, and Louis H. Chalif. These manuals, and dance manuals generally, are comprised of both practical and theoretical material. Sandra Noll Hammond has noted that, "Dance technique manuals provide primary sources for documenting the historical development of the art."³ More specifically, they reveal details about the use of ballet terminology and "offer insights about the practitioners."⁴ They include descriptions of steps and exercises, common errors, issues of coordination, short choreographed dances, stylistic preferences, musical accompaniment, methods of dance notation, pedagogical philosophies, and professional advice. National affiliations often become evident in these artifacts as well, and thus dance manuals help to locate their authors in the matrix of ballet's pedagogical genealogy. From a broader perspective, these sources provide a glimpse into the socio-cultural views on bodily practices from the periods in which they were written. Most importantly for this study, Albertieri, Mascagno, Serova, Vestoff, and Chalif's manuals supply practical pedagogical material

* The manual of the Mascagno School was written by Mascagno's wife, Josephine, but was based upon Stefano's teaching approach. I discuss Stefano Mascagno's pedagogy in Chapter Five.

that is not preserved elsewhere. In this light their manuals are central to an understanding of their unique approaches to ballet technique and training, as well as to a wider view of ballet pedagogy during the 1909-1934 period.

The three subjects who did not write dancing manuals—Malvina Cavallazzi, Rosina Galli, and Mikhail Mordkin—were frequently featured in the press. News clippings, magazine articles, photographs, personal papers, and in Mordkin’s case, school brochures, serve as the primary records of their beliefs. Typically, these archival materials outline the teachers’ agendas more than the steps they taught in classes, and thus the material aspects of their pedagogies have, sadly, mostly disappeared. A major factor that has contributed to the erosion of these instructors’ pedagogical materials is the lack of dance writers during the research period; until the late 1920s, journalists who covered dance were mostly music writers by trade. Carrie Gaiser Casey notes that these writers resented having to report on “what they thought was a second rate assignment.”⁵ Like most of the American public at the time, journalists were unfamiliar with the contents and vocabulary of the ballet class, and were thus largely unable to comment on classes from a technical perspective.⁶ While our contemporary knowledge of ballet’s national lineages allows for some speculation as to instructors’ national stylistic affiliations, a substantial amount of specific ballet class material from the period has been lost. In a few instances, students’ voices—either through interviews, memoirs, or diaries—provide information about their instructors’ approaches. The few records left by the period’s dancers occasionally include the steps from their classes, but more often offer insight into the dancers’ personal experiences. Due to the limited preservation of Cavallazzi, Galli, and Mordkin’s classroom material, the pedagogical analyses for these

instructors are weighted towards relational pedagogy—the communicative processes through which teachers impart material to their students. There are innumerable other teachers from the period whose approaches have vanished entirely, so I have endeavored to include whatever scant trails remain in the research, when relevant, to afford them a place alongside their peers.

The archival materials for this study have largely driven my analysis. Despite the abundance of typographical errors that pervade these century-old documents, the sensibilities embedded within the original writings evoke an unmistakable sense of time and place. Because practitioners' perspectives are so often subjugated to larger theoretical concerns in contemporary scholarship, I endeavor throughout this study to foreground the experiences of dancers, teachers, and choreographers that permeate the primary source materials. Particularly in the chapters of this investigation that deal with such large-scale constructs as democracy, capitalism, nationalism, and Americanism, my discussion originates with the experiences of ballet's participants. While I call upon scholars in the dance field as well as in other disciplines to provide important context, I give primacy to the voices of the eight research subjects as well as other dance practitioners during the period.

Underpinning this research is ballet's legacy as an oral tradition—a concept that is widely acknowledged in the field. I refer to ballet as an oral tradition in the sense that it has passed from person to person for centuries, and that it has evolved, absorbing individual influences as dancers, teachers, and choreographers have put their own stamps on the form and disseminated it to the next generation. Inherent to ballet's growth over time is the impressionable, malleable nature of the *danse d'école*, which has allowed it to

incorporate and reflect the idiosyncrasies of its practitioners and the characteristics of its nations. More broadly, the ethos of various cultures, social systems, and political and economic structures have been inscribed in ballet's technical and artistic standards as it has traveled around the globe, and thus the ballet of any given time or place may also reflect an accumulation of influences from present and previous eras and locales.

* * *

While New York City assumed a leading role in the early twentieth century United States, historian Ann Douglas notes that it would be inaccurate to consider it a microcosm of America.⁷ The city shared several characteristics with the nation at large: a diverse citizenry, a pluralistic sensibility, and rampant individualism. At the same time, New York had forged its own unique qualities that distinguished it from the rest of the country: it moved quickly, talked loudly, laughed dryly, and loved a spectacle. It was home to a mass convergence of social, popular, and high art dance forms, and it attracted throngs of aspiring dancers from across America and Europe. In Chapter One, I look specifically at the heterogeneous landscape of New York City as a hub for American ballet between 1909 and 1934. I address the array of performance and training venues, the period-specific dance styles that intersected with ballet, and the often-uneasy relationship between Euro-Russian classical ballet teachers and the city's pluralistic dance environment.

Chapter Two investigates the impact of two major American frameworks—democracy and capitalism—on ballet's pedagogical development in the early twentieth

century. A thorough examination of these national structures as they pertain to ballet is largely absent from the literature. In its origins as an exclusive entertainment for European elites, classical ballet had not encountered the degree of pluralism and commercialism that it faced in early twentieth century America, where most Americans did not view ballet as an art form, but rather a lighter, daintier form of acrobatics. Elizabeth Kendall further asserts that, “In America people failed to grasp that a dance was a construct in space and time, involving principles of composition as palpable as those in painting or sculpture.”⁸ In contrast to the ballets under monarchic regimes abroad, the United States government provided neither financial support for ballet artists, nor a State-subsidized dance education for its would-be dancers—a fact that has been lamented for more than a century in dance literature and criticism. Lincoln Kirstein regularly bemoaned the dilemma of dance in America: “There was never enough money; unlike the situation in socialist states, there never will be.”⁹ Yet many Americans found the Euro-Russian concept of training—in which students spend eight to ten years studying ballet before they begin to earn money in their profession—fiscally unsustainable and incompatible with the nation’s capitalist economy. The democratic and capitalist frameworks in America obligated ballet teachers, dancers, and choreographers to fund their own endeavors and compete on the free market, which shaped the ballet that was taught, learned, and performed in the States.

At the international level, Chapter Three of this study traces America’s ballet lineage to its predecessors abroad. Most of the ballet teachers featured in this investigation are Italian or Russian immigrants, and thus I discuss the Italian and Russian pedagogical lineages as central to ballet’s development in the United States. Italians had

been coming to America throughout the nineteenth century as performers, and by the early twentieth century many of them elected to remain in the States, having already established teaching practices. In 1910, the initial performance of Russians Anna Pavlova and Mikhail Mordkin sparked a national fascination with Russian ballet, which was perceived as the stylistic antithesis of the Italian. Having been exposed to these two discrete national voices of the classical tradition, Americans during the period began wrestling with the national identity of their own ballet. In Chapter Three, I investigate ballet as a national, international, and American art form, and I support my analysis with scholarship on nationalism, national identity, internationalism, and cosmopolitanism.* I examine the ballet traditions in Italy and Russia during the nineteenth century, and I give specific consideration to the influence of each country's unique political, geographical, and cultural circumstances on its ballet. Subsequently, I assess the impact of these two distinct national approaches on the development of American ballet during the early twentieth century.

In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I analyze the work of eight immigrant ballet teachers in New York City between 1909 and 1934, most having arrived in the United States during the peak years of immigration—between 1900 and 1920.¹⁰ I have organized these subjects into three categories which are broadly representative of much of the teaching that took place in New York City between 1909 and 1934: *The Traditionalists*, *Nostalgic Revisionists*, and *Pragmatic Revisionists*. Chapter Four, *The Traditionalists*,

* The work of dance scholars Barbara Barker, Giannandrea Poesio, and Natalia Roslavleva on the Italian and Russian ballet is central to this chapter, and the work of Anthony D. Smith, Richard Shusterman, and Roger Scruton, among others in the fields of Nationalism Studies and Philosophy, offers interdisciplinary perspectives on the ballet of the period.

looks at the pedagogies of three Italian instructors: Malvina Cavallazzi, Rosina Galli, and Luigi Albertieri. Cavallazzi was the first ballerina at the Metropolitan Opera in 1883 and the first director of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School when it opened in 1909. Galli, who simultaneously held the positions of ballerina and director of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet, also led the school later in her career. Albertieri, the adopted son and protégé of internationally renowned pedagogue Enrico Cecchetti, was affiliated with both the Metropolitan and Century Operas in New York and ran his own studio for fifteen years. As Traditionalists, these teachers took an unyielding approach to classical ballet. Despite the differences—and difficulties—that they encountered in America with regard to ballet, they were dedicated to preserving the material precisely as they had learned it abroad.

Chapter Five, *Nostalgic Revisionists*, looks at the pedagogical work of Stefano Mascagno and Mikhail Mordkin. Mascagno, an Italian from the San Carlo theatre in Naples, established his own studio with his wife, Josephine, and was closely affiliated with the Dancing Masters of America organization. Mordkin, a Russian who first came to the United States as Pavlova's partner, started his own school and company that were the seeds for American Ballet Theatre. As Nostalgic Revisionists, these two men knew that they would need to adapt the classical tradition in some ways to suit the American context, yet they were reluctant. Their overly romanticized notions of classical ballet make them the most tragic of the eight central subjects in the study; they perceived the American modifications to the classical tradition as potentially diminishing the value of their beloved art form, yet they saw the necessity for those changes to be made in the American environment.

Chapter Six looks at the *Pragmatic Revisionists*, who, unlike the *Nostalgic Revisionists*, were avid supporters of altering the Euro-Russian tradition to build a uniquely American ballet—one that was distinct from its predecessors. The Russian Veronine Vestoff and his British wife, Sonia Serova, operated a school in New York, and they published several manuals that describe the wide variety of ballet-related forms being taught across America during the period. Louis H. Chalif, of the Russian Imperial School, ran his own school in New York, worked in the education sphere and with dance teaching organizations, and published a popular series of textbooks that advocated his particular approach. The *Pragmatic Revisionists* unabashedly adapted the physical demands of the classical technique to the needs of American amateur dancers, and they blended ballet with the popular dance forms of the day to suit public tastes.

In light of this study's pedagogical thrust and its emphasis on the work of European and Russian teachers, the experiences of immigrants to early twentieth century America are inherent to the research. The personal and professional transitions of foreign dancers, teachers, and choreographers during the period are basic to a comprehensive understanding of American ballet's emergence from its roots abroad. Issues of immigration and assimilation, as well as theories of Americanism, thus merit some preliminary discussion in the sections below.

Themes of Immigration, Assimilation, and Americanism

In his 1967 dissertation entitled "The Immigrant and the School in New York City: A Program for Citizenship," John Joseph Farrell summarizes the central conflict

that surrounded the American national identity during the early twentieth century. He states:

‘Americanization’ was an acceptable term for those who felt the assimilation of the immigrant into the American culture was of utmost importance. Confusion followed, however, whenever the term was defined. To some, the term meant a forceful immersion into the fabric of American life, even at the expense of the strong personal bonds to the Old World that constituted the personality makeup of the immigrant. To others, who were better versed in the nuances of the personal-psychological aspects of the uprooted immigrants, ‘Americanization’ was a gradual step-by-step process of assimilation, done without destroying the essential character of the alien.”¹¹

These two divergent viewpoints that Farrell discusses comprise the binary that was at the core of the national dialogue on Americanism during the research period. This duality presented immigrants to America with a dilemma: did they have to shed their cultures of origin entirely to adopt a distinctly American identity—the “melting pot” ideal of Americanism—or could they contribute their Old World cultural traditions to a pluralistic, inclusive, American national identity?

Scholar Christina Ziegler-McPherson states that conservatives “believed assimilation followed an Anglo-conformist model: Immigrants abandoned their traditional cultural practices and adopted Anglo-American ways of living.”¹² One of the most notable proponents of this agenda was Theodore Roosevelt, president of the United States from 1901 to 1909, who argued that immigrants should discard all aspects of their cultural affiliations and immerse themselves wholly into American life. Anything less, he felt, was an affront to America as their host country.¹³ The other side of the assimilation debate was articulated by early twentieth century philosopher Horace Kallen, who, in the words of scholar Jonathan Hansen, “advanced an idea of cultural pluralism, discarding the metaphor of America as a melting pot in favor of the symbol of orchestral

harmony.”¹⁴ Kallen, in his 1915 article, “Democracy versus the Melting Pot,” describes his view: “As in an orchestra every type of instrument has its specific *timbre* and *tonality*, founded in its substance and form; as every type has its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony, so in society, each ethnic group may be the natural instrument, its temper and culture may be its theme and melody and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all may make the symphony of civilization.”¹⁵ When compared to Americanization from the conservative viewpoint, this more inclusive perspective of “cultural pluralism” allowed—even encouraged—immigrants to maintain ties to their Old World cultural traditions, something that the Americanization movement scorned. It was the point of view that, as Farrell notes, most considered the “personal-psychological aspects of the uprooted immigrants.”¹⁶

For many immigrants to the United States, reconciling their Old World identities with the pressures of American life was a generations-long struggle.¹⁷ Whether the immigrant ballet teachers in this study felt constrained by the ongoing cultural scrutiny during the period is unknown, but it is likely that they encountered similar pressure to Americanize as they carried on their lives and careers in the United States. Immersed in the tension between maintaining cultural traditions and adopting new American identities, ballet’s assimilation into the American context during the early twentieth century echoed this conflict. In this light, the ballet in America between 1909 and 1934 was an embodied rendering of the immigrant experience.

Ballet as Immigrant

In the nineteenth century, ballet was decidedly un-American. Like opera, ballet's European origins and elite sensibilities rendered it unpalatable for America's populist audiences and untenable for its capitalist theatre managers.¹⁸ In her book, *Democracy at the Opera: Music, Theater, and Culture in New York City, 1815-1860*, Karen Ahlquist describes the relationship of opera to the American temperament nearly a century before the research period:

Merely importing an opera troupe and expecting the city's public to understand, enjoy, and support its offerings would not bring success. As was said in the 1830s, opera would have to be 'naturalized'—established as an institution, understood in terms of local culture and concerns, and enjoyed as entertainment by a paying audience.

Opera was successful in New York in spite of its European origin, rather than because of it. Unacceptable as 'top-down' culture, it was not established by a social or intellectual elite bent on aping European culture or promoting the Western musical canon. Rather, it succeeded as a commercial endeavor, sold by entrepreneurs on the Barnum model and supported by a public that included the city's 'aristocracy' but was open to much of the 'democracy' as well.¹⁹

It was this assimilation of the opera to the American capitalist, democratic context that eventually enabled it to prosper in the States. Historian Olga Maynard notes that during the mid-nineteenth century ballet began to assimilate as well; she states that ballet "was preserved in less than the classically pure and absolute but apparently with great verve and good humor. It may have survived in its American domicile only because it adapted itself rather adeptly from the *Place de l'Opéra* to places like the Melodeon Beer Hall in New York...."²⁰ Despite having had a presence in the United States for over a century, by 1912, the New York newspaper *The Sun* still considered ballet "altogether foreign to the American temperament."²¹

Just as early twentieth century immigrants to the United States grappled with issues of assimilation and identity, so too did the ballet that was brought to America's

shores by European and Russian immigrants. From the late 1920s to mid-century, there were frequent attempts by Americans and immigrants alike to create a company, a style, and a training method for ballet that would reflect optimism, energy, individualism, curiosity, ingenuity, industriousness, pragmatism, and humor—all characteristics that have been consistently identified across disciplines as uniquely American.²² Many of ballet's practitioners had visions for a uniquely American ballet comparable to those of Balanchine and Kirstein. Yet unlike Balanchine and Kirstein, who were in the right place, at the right time, and with the right people to formally institutionalize American ballet, those individuals working to establish an American ballet in years prior were not greeted with such favorable conditions.

It was often acknowledged during the research period that America was the fortunate recipient of ballet's most revered lineages. Many dance professionals, as well as critics and cultural arbiters during the research period, felt that the young nation had been given an imperative to devise its own unique tradition using the Euro-Russian ballet as its basis. Along the lines of Kallen's cultural pluralism, there were calls for gracious acceptance—"due reverence and becoming gratitude"²³—of the gift of the classical tradition. Because Americans would not have to shape the *danse d'école* as did previous generations of dancers and teachers abroad, it was expected that an American approach to ballet would come about with greater ease. It was also understood that American ballet would look different than its predecessors, although exactly how it would differ no one could say for sure. America's task, in this regard, was to develop its own style: its ballet would pay homage to the European and Russian tradition while simultaneously reflecting those qualities at the core of the American national identity. Ballet's immigrant

teachers—the eight central subjects of this study as well as countless others—were at the center of this movement toward an American tradition. By bringing their Euro-Russian approaches to America and adapting them to the new national circumstances, these pedagogues allowed for cultural pluralism in America's ballet. They enabled the formerly elite art form to assimilate into its new democratic home, thus ensuring a future for ballet in America.

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Fundamentally, this research attempts to expand upon the existing narrative of American ballet and to refute the widespread notion that the period between 1909 and 1934 was “largely barren ground.”²⁴ By examining the intersection of the nascent American ballet with the social, cultural, political, and economic currents in early twentieth century America, I attempt to contextualize and thereby bring import to a largely overlooked period in ballet history. With the work of numerous immigrant teachers at its core, this study brings attention to early twentieth century American ballet as a more significant extension of the Euro-Russian classical tradition than has previously been acknowledged.

Notes

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- Revolution Transformed the American Performing Arts* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008): 44; Terry Teachout, *All in the Dances: A Brief Life of George Balanchine* (Orlando, Fl.: Harcourt, 2004): 172; Olga Maynard, *The American Ballet* (Philadelphia: Macrae Smith Co., 1959): 48; Matilde Butkas, "George Balanchine," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, ed. Marion Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 228.
2. Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1995): 18.
 3. Sandra Noll Hammond, "Searching for the Sylph: Documentation of Early Developments in Pointe Technique," *Dance Research Journal* 19, no. 2 (winter 1987-1988): 30.
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 5. Carrie Gaiser Casey, "Ballet's Feminisms: Genealogy and Gender in Twentieth-Century American Ballet History" (PhD Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009): 103.
 6. Ibid.
 7. Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 9.
 8. Elizabeth Kendall, *Where She Danced* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979): 85.
 9. Lincoln Kirstein, *Thirty Years: The New York City Ballet* (1973; New York: Knopf, 1978): xv.
 10. Ellis Island Immigration Museum exhibit, *The Immigrant Experience*, viewed October 5, 2010.
 11. John Joseph Farrell, "The Immigrant and the School in New York City: A Program for Citizenship," (PhD Diss., Stanford University, 1967; New York: Arno Press, 1980): 22.
 12. Christina A. Ziegler-McPherson, *Americanization in the States: Immigrant Social Welfare Policy, Citizenship & National Identity in the United States, 1908-1929* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2009): 11.
 13. Theodore Roosevelt, "What Americanism Means," *Forum* (April 1894): 196+, accessed July 13, 2011, ProQuest.
 14. Jonathan Hansen, "True Americanism," in *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal*, ed. Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 76.
 15. Horace Kallen, "Democracy versus the Melting Pot," *The Nation* 100 (February 18 and 25, 1915); reprinted in Michael Kammen, *Contested Values: Democracy and Diversity in American Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995): 127.
 16. Farrell, "The Immigrant and the School in New York City," 22.
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 18. Karen Ahlquist, *Democracy at the Opera: Music, Theater, and Culture in New York City, 1815-60* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1997): xii.
 19. Ibid.
 20. Maynard, *The American Ballet*, 23.
 21. "Sweet Girl Graduates of the Ballet," *The Sun*, June 23, 1912, Malvina Cavallazzi clippings, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
 22. Lincoln Kirstein, "Blast at Ballet," in *Ballet, Bias and Belief: Three Pamphlets Collected and Other Dance Writings of Lincoln Kirstein*. (1937; reprint, New York: Dance Horizons, 1983): 200-1; Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (1920; reprint, New York: Henry Holt, 1976): 37; Rockwell J. Graham, "America Speaks its Own Language... Says Madame Albertina Rasch," *The Dance Magazine* (January 1931): 49; Esmond Wright, ed., *American Themes: A Selection of Articles from History Today* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1967): 5.

23. Lucille Marsh, "The Dance in American Education," *Dance Digest* 1, no. 7 (April 1939): 3.

24. Jennifer Dunning, *But First a School: The First Fifty Years of the School of American Ballet* (New York: Viking, 1985): viii.

Chapter One

Themes of Heterogeneity and Pluralism in American Ballet: New York City, 1909-1934

In his 1993 article entitled “Aesthetics between Nationalism and Internationalism,” philosopher Richard Shusterman discusses the “American pluralist spirit.”¹ With this phrase, he positions America as a cosmopolitan, multi-national country, which juxtaposes international peoples and cultures and encourages them to contribute their various national traditions to the American culture. American ballet in the early twentieth century developed along these lines as well: with no domestic tradition, American ballet began as an assortment of European and Russian classical traditions, and was taught and staged largely by immigrant or visiting ballet masters from overseas. As a composite of national approaches, ballet in America mirrored the pluralism of the American populace, and more specifically, of the motley inhabitants of New York City between 1909 and 1934. As one of the major entryways into America from Europe, New York during this period was a uniquely heterogeneous locale from which a substantial portion of the nation’s ballet emerged. In this chapter, I examine the situation for ballet in the diverse environment of early twentieth century New York City from 1909 to 1934. I discuss various performance and training venues, period dance styles and movement trends, and the cross-influence of the early twentieth century American dance scene with the Euro-Russian classical tradition.

Part I

New York City, 1909-1934

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, with American industrialization well under way, the population of New York City more than doubled.² Between 1900 and 1910, it grew again by more than a third, and by 1920, with urban manufacturing jobs at an unprecedented level, New York became the largest city in America.³ Fourteen million immigrants made the two-week trip across the Atlantic to the United States in the first twenty years of the century. Nearly three-quarters of them came into the country by way of Ellis Island, and one-third of the Ellis Island immigrants settled in New York City.⁴ During the same period, the city absorbed a profusion of domestic migrants, including large numbers of African Americans from the South who moved northward during the Great Migration. Such rapid expansion and diversification presented significant challenges for the metropolis: tenement overcrowding, public health concerns, and cultural conflicts, particularly on the Lower East Side and in Harlem.⁵ Yet in spite of these substantial difficulties, New York City's exploding population and its constantly shifting demography would persist throughout the twentieth century as the city's defining characteristics.

While there were several other American cities in which ballet blossomed and thrived—notably Chicago, Salt Lake City, Hollywood, San Francisco, and Philadelphia—New York City was a hive of dance activity that was unlike any other American urban center during the research period. New York's uniquely inclusive character and vitality has prompted scholar Ann Douglas to refer to New York as “the

capital of the twentieth century.”⁶ There was more instruction in dance available in New York, even during the nineteenth century, than in most small towns across the United States combined.⁷ A port city, New York was in an ideal location to absorb great numbers of ballet dancers and teachers emigrating from Europe, and many chose to lay roots and open small, private, ballet schools. American dancers, too, particularly from New England and the Midwest, came to the city to find training and stage work. The heterogeneity of the city’s people, dancers and dance audiences alike, was central to ballet’s development in the United States between 1909 and 1934, and helped to shape a uniquely American approach to the Euro-Russian tradition. New York City became the backdrop for dance’s widespread resurgence in popularity during the early twentieth century.⁸ In the opera houses and concert halls, on the popular stages and in social settings, audiences for dance comprised all strata of New York society.

Dance was happening everywhere in New York City. Since its inception in 1883, the Metropolitan Opera had showcased a neatly preserved nineteenth-century Italian style of ballet to its upper echelon patrons. In the decades that followed it often played host to touring dancers and companies from overseas, including the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova and Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. At the same time, there were countless vaudeville halls offering variety entertainment—and ballet in several guises—to the masses. Dancers in revues, many who were classically trained, shared the stage with acrobats, jugglers, and animal acts. Broadway productions from 1909 to 1934 included a wide array of dance styles with greater magnitude and refinement than those in vaudeville. Broadway’s repertory flourished in the 1920s and ‘30s, with musicals written and produced by such emerging legends as George and Ira Gershwin, Richard Rodgers,

Moss Hart, Florenz Ziegfield, Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake, Oscar Hammerstein II, and Cole Porter. There was an explosion of solo dancers on popular stages during the late nineteenth-aughts and the early teens, likely stemming from the examples of the early solo work of Isadora Duncan, Loïe Fuller, and Ruth St. Denis, among others.⁹ Duncan's dancing inspired the Aesthetic, Greek, and Nature Dancing trends that flourished well into the 1920s. Loïe Fuller imitators did their skirt dances in vaudeville, and scores of Salomé dancers flooded New York stages from the Metropolitan Opera House to *The Ziegfeld Follies*.¹⁰ The thriving Hollywood film industry offered a new medium through which the public could watch dance, and the conversion of proscenium theatres into movie houses in the late '20s and '30s brought about the "movie prolog," yet another avenue through which ballet could reach a theater-going audience.

Several dance styles during the period straddled the divide between social and concert dance. Vernon and Irene Castle burst onto the scene during the early teens and caused a sensation with their exhibition ballroom dancing. Little girls across the United States went to their local dance studios for lessons in "Fancy Dancing," which dancer Kathryn Mallowney remembers being comprised of "a little ballet, a little bit of tarantella, a little bit of waltz, a little bit of polka,"^{*11} all intended to polish one's social graces rather than to prepare one to become a dancer. The Delsarte System of Expression—a codified method of developing physical expressivity through posture and

* Mallowney was in the *corps de ballet* for the original Broadway production of *The Great Waltz* in 1934, and was subsequently a dancer with American Ballet Caravan.

gesture—became an integral part of the Progressive Era’s physical culture movement.* In addition to influencing Duncan’s dancing, the choreography on Broadway and vaudeville stages, and the teaching in dance studios across New York City, the Delsarte System was taught to upper-crust society ladies looking to imbue their quotidian movement with meaning.

The social dance scene exploded during the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and ‘30s. Uptown nightclubs like the Savoy became the sites for the early integration of African American and white dancers—both the vaudeville circuits and the dance studios were still segregated.† Dance marathons, which became popular during the Swing Era, pushed the physical limits of their participants to new extremes; according to Douglas, one dancer remained on his feet for upwards of three days, with fatal consequences.‡¹²

Also during the 1920s and into the 1930s, the would-be titans of American Modern Dance—Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm—were developing their idiosyncratic movement vocabularies. They rejected ballet and all of its popular permutations and generated pioneering modes of physical expression. John Martin, most notable for his championing of Graham’s work and his

* For further discussion on the physical culture movement in the early twentieth century, see Elizabeth Kendall, *Where She Danced* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979); and Linda J. Tomko, *Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

† See Norma Miller, *Swingin’ at the Savoy: The Memoir of a Jazz Dancer* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1996) for more on Jazz dance during the Swing Era; and Danielle Robinson’s “Oh, You Black Bottom!: Appropriation, Authenticity, and Opportunity in the Jazz Dance Teaching of 1920s New York,” *Dance Research Journal* 38 nos. 1 & 2 (summer/winter 2006): 19-42, for a discussion of Jazz dance teaching. For more on African American Vaudeville, see Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s *Waltzing in the Dark: African American Vaudeville and Race Politics in the Swing Era*, (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

‡ Further discussion of the era’s social dance marathons in the latter half of the research period can be found in Carol Martin’s *Dance Marathons: Performing American Culture of the 1920s and 1930s* (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1994).

coining of the term “Modern Dance,” was the first permanent dance critic employed by the *New York Times* in 1927. His appointment was a watershed in the development of dance criticism in America, and it signaled a sea change in the public’s perception of dance as a legitimate art form worthy of analysis.

Part II

Ballet on the New York Stage: A Miscellany of Venues

Ballet during the research period was neither too popular for the opera house nor too elite for vaudeville. Between 1909 and 1934, there were ballet dancers who found success at the opera house and on the concert stage—the so-called “legitimate” theatre¹³—as well as on the popular stages of Broadway and vaudeville.* Metropolitan Opera ballerina Bianca Froehlich, for example, “who had danced in Vienna, Brunn, and Cologne before coming to the Met... also danced for some seasons in vaudeville on the Keith, Orpheum, and Pantages circuits.”¹⁴ Crossover between the popular sphere and the opera or concert stage was common, considering that few but the highest-ranking dancers could expect to make a living without working in vaudeville, movie palaces, or on Broadway. Leon Danielian, a dancer with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the director of the American Ballet Theatre School in the mid-twentieth century, described the situation for ballet dancers in America in the 1930s: “There was no American company. You danced in vaudeville if there was any. You danced in Broadway shows, which at the time were written by Rodgers and Hart and Cole Porter.... And I was going

* Singers worked in dual capacities too: Metropolitan Opera baritone Everett Marshall crossed over to the revue stage, going so far as to don blackface for his musical solo. (Ethan Mordden, *Sing for Your Supper: The Broadway Musical in the 1930s* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005]: 21.).

to be a ballet dancer and there was no existing ballet company for me to go to. It didn't bother me; ignorance is bliss."¹⁵ While Danielian remembers with nostalgic disbelief his dedication to training for a profession that had no immediate outlet, dancer and choreographer Agnes de Mille recalls her struggles during the same time with a tinge of resentment: "I faced a theater which for sheer toughness and vulgarity had few counterparts in the history of the stage. Because I was a dancer I entered a branch of the theater which had almost no standing or opportunity. What dance companies existed were small, confined and dedicated to the personal exploitation of some star."¹⁶

Ballet's relationship to opera and concert venues was irregular through most of the research period; it was not until 1935 that an American ballet troupe—under George Balanchine—was invited for a period of residence at the Metropolitan. Yet ballet of all shapes and sizes was welcomed onto most of New York's popular stages for an extended stay between 1909 and 1934, and it was in these largely revue-based productions that it encountered and began to absorb the American pluralist influence. In the sections that follow, I describe the most prominent venues for ballet, which became integral to the development of an American ballet tradition.

The Opera Houses and the Concert Stage

Despite its establishment of the first ballet school in the European tradition in America, ballet was of little consequence on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House. Under the direction of Giulio Gatti-Casazza,^{*} who had been the director at Milan's La

^{*} Gatti-Casazza directed the Metropolitan Opera from 1908-1935.

Scala, ballet was almost entirely subservient to opera.* Because the Metropolitan was one of America's premiere artistic institutions, ballet's advocates were incensed.¹⁷ Scholar Carrie Gaiser Casey asserts that the "secondary position" of the ballet at the Metropolitan resulted in a "lack of adequate stage time for rehearsals, dancers pressed into double-duty as supernumeraries, and no financial support for independent productions."¹⁸ A 1914 news clipping from the *New York Morning Telegraph* describes a young Metropolitan Opera ballet dancer who "almost cried when the dance was over, because stage hands had neglected to cover up cracks, sweep away tacks and remove little wads of chewing gum that had a tendency to detract the feet from the movement of the orchestra."¹⁹

Despite his marriage to Rosina Galli, the Met's prima ballerina and ballet mistress for the bulk of the research period, Gatti-Casazza spared few resources on developing the opera ballet. The ballet at the Metropolitan was restricted mostly to *divertissements*[†] that corresponded to the operas' narratives. Scholar Tullia Limarzi asserts: "Although tradition dictated the inclusion of ballet in the nineteenth century operatic repertory, no part of the [Metropolitan's] season was devoted to ballet as was common in the European opera house."²⁰ The only full-length evenings of ballet at the Met were presented by touring foreign companies such as that of Anna Pavlova or the Ballets Russes.²¹ In this regard, the Manhattan Opera, founded in 1907 by the "opera-loving vaudeville entrepreneur and theatre owner" Oscar Hammerstein I, rivaled the

* I address this issue further in Part III of this chapter and in Chapter Four. For detailed descriptions and analyses of the ballet and its challenges at the Metropolitan, see Carrie Gaiser Casey's Ph.D. dissertation, "Ballet's Feminisms: Genealogy and Gender in Twentieth-Century American Ballet History" (University of California, Berkeley, 2009); Tullia Limarzi's "She Trills with her toes: The Met Opera Ballet career of Rosina Galli," in the 1986 conference proceedings of the Society of Dance History Scholars, 80-90; and George Dorris's "Dance and the New York Opera War, 1906-1912," *Dance Chronicle* 32, no. 2 (2009): 195-262.

[†] See the glossary for definitions of ballet terminology and clarifications of term use.

Metropolitan; it featured its own lavish opera productions while also serving as a venue for well-known touring dancers and companies.²² The Century Opera, like the Met, boasted an in-house ballet company, led by Italian ballet master Luigi Albertieri during the 1913-14 inaugural season,^{*} but both the Manhattan and the Century were considered fresher and more accessible than the Metropolitan: The *New York Times* referred to the Century as producing “popular grand opera,”²³ and similarly described the first season of the Manhattan as “for the intelligent lover of music who is not bound by the traditions of ‘grand opera’ as they have gradually been established in New York by the force of circumstances.”²⁴

Concert dancers of the period also performed at Carnegie Hall, which opened its doors in 1891. During the mid-nineteen-twenties, the Hall hosted performances by Duncan and her dancers, St. Denis and Ted Shawn, and the “Artist Pupils” from the Louis Chalif school.^{†25} The early 1930s saw a joint program by Graham, Helen Tamiris, Humphrey and Weidman, as well as greater attention to international dance forms with performances by Spanish flamenco dancer La Argentina and Indian classical dancer Uday Shankar. Carnegie Hall also rented out studio spaces to dancers and teachers, Isadora Duncan and Mikhail Mordkin among them.

Variety, Vaudeville, and Revue

^{*} I examine Albertieri’s pedagogy in Chapter Four.

[†] Chalif was a Russian ballet teacher and studio director whose work I discuss in Chapter Six.

By 1909, the brassy, bawdy performances that originated in nineteenth century concert saloons before a primarily male audience had been largely gentrified.* Re-labeled “vaudeville,” these more wholesome productions began to appeal to twentieth century women, men, and families.²⁶ In an 1899 article on vaudeville for *Scribner’s Magazine*, the playwright Edwin Milton Royle discussed the diversity of the vaudeville audience:

It is manifest, I think, that vaudeville is very American. It touches us and our lives at many places. It appeals to the business man, tired and worn, who drops in for half an hour on his way home; to the person who has an hour or two before a train goes, or before a business appointment; to the woman who is wearied of shopping; to the children who love animals and acrobats; to the man with his sweetheart or sister; to the individual who wants to be diverted but doesn’t want to think or feel; to the American of all grades and kinds who wants a great deal for his money...²⁷

Vaudeville’s eclecticism reflected the diversity of New York City audiences, as well as the pluralism that was central to the American national identity. In his seminal work, *American Vaudeville as Ritual*, Albert F. McLean, Jr. asserts that vaudeville’s heterogeneity contributed to America’s socio-cultural development around the turn of the century, helping immigrants and Americans alike cope with the cultural instability of the American populace. He states that vaudeville:

...was one means by which Americans came to terms with a crisis in culture.... That urbanization came as a distinct trauma within the American experience and that it shook the foundations of the established social order has been the conclusion of a generation of American historians. What has remained unclear, however, was just how the collective masses, both European immigrants and rural Americans, met this challenge to their traditions, standards, and even to their sanity. Vaudeville was one means—a primary one—by which the disruptive experience of migration and acclimatization was objectified and accepted. In its symbolism lies the psychic profile of the American mass man in the moment of his greatest trial.²⁸

* For more on the nineteenth-century concert saloon, see Brooks McNamara’s *The New York Concert Saloon: The Devil’s Own Nights* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

New York City, with its close proximity to Ellis Island, wrestled with the immediate effects of immigration and cultural change during this period of social and political upheaval. “Revues,” according to scholar David H. Lewis, “lived in the present. They poked fun at changing mores” and “satirized known figures in society and politics. They addressed the jaded sentiments of New Yorkers.”²⁹ Through the inherent eclecticism of its format, vaudeville empathized with the unsettled attitudes of New York audiences and Americans alike. Theater historian Robert W. Snyder notes that vaudeville, “won the allegiance of diverse New Yorkers because it presented enough of their culture to affirm their importance.”³⁰ In this light, vaudeville productions were external representations of the cultural turmoil that the audience—both in New York and across the country—was experiencing internally.

Often performed multiple times throughout the day, vaudeville shows featured a diverse lineup of quick-witted, broad-based acts.³¹ Historian Robert M. Lewis asserts that vaudeville

...was the distilled essence of the major entertainments, lowbrow, middlebrow, even highbrow. With machinelike efficiency, an assortment of brief, fast-paced acts passed in rapid succession—acrobats and animal acts, ballerinas and boxers, clowns and comedians. It was an eclectic mix, a miscellany—magic tricks and technological innovations, one-act playlets and slapstick comedy, operatic arias and high-wire acrobatics. Almost any skill well-executed was included in the program.³²

A 1924 article in the *New York Times* described the sensibility of a vaudeville show in comparison to the “legitimate theater”: “Vaudeville tempo is faster than the legitimate; its methods are terse, abrupt, and direct. There is no time for subtle nuances and shading. Effects must be precise and positive, and the action directly in a straight line from the

rise of the curtain. In a word, vaudeville is a short sprint where the contender must get out front and stay there.”³³

Like the audiences and the content of the revues, the performers in New York City’s numerous and varied vaudeville shows were a *mélange*. In 1899, Royle explained the ethos of performing in vaudeville: “If you can sing or dance or amuse people in any way; if you think you can write a one-act play, the vaudeville theatre will give you a chance to prove it.”³⁴ The variety of revue types allowed room for a flood of performers from all backgrounds and with varying talents to take the stage. There was “Big Time” vaudeville that boasted huge theaters and famous headliners, and there was “Small Time” vaudeville, which served New York’s ethnic neighborhoods in local venues with culturally specific material. Variety was innate to vaudeville’s structure, performers, content, and venues—its heterogeneity became one of its most noted and celebrated qualities. A 1905 article in the periodical *Midway*, designed for “amusement park professionals,” noted the relationship between vaudeville’s success and its eclecticism:

When one can go to the theatre and see the best of dramatic, operatic, farce comedy and comic or music farce and even grand opera, with sprinklings of science, physical culture, some of the sawdust of the circus, marvelous children, wonderful training of wild animals, magic and illusion, all in one performance for the puzzlingly small price charged by the vaudeville theatre, the acme of variegated theatrical entertainment appears to have been reached.³⁵

Like other periodicals and writers at the time, *The Dance Magazine* deemed the plurality of vaudeville to be both a constitutive characteristic and, further, one that was unique to American culture: “drawing its materials from so many sources, recruiting its army of entertainers from all over the world, vaudeville is typically American.”³⁶ The concept of eclecticism as uniquely American was also relevant to the period’s exploding

film industry, which, by the early 1930s, had moved into most vaudeville houses. In her discussion of a 1913 D.W. Griffith film, scholar Elizabeth Kendall writes: “All the acting was a collage of current attitudes: some theatrical gestures, plus Salomé-dancing, Delsarte-posing, Ballets Russes impersonations, along with the latest fashionable mannerisms. The mixture made it American.”³⁷ Vaudeville’s plurality and its American identity were, in this light, mutually exclusive: vaudeville’s American identity was a result of its heterogeneity, and its variety would not have been possible without the American pluralist influence.

In 1929, Albertina Rasch, a dancer and choreographer trained at Vienna’s Imperial Ballet School, informed *The Dance Magazine* that an American ballet was only possible if it was combined with popular—and thus heterogeneous—sentiments:

...Like the composers of our popular music, thus the creators of our popular ballets have to consider the plaudits of Broadway if something is going to be a success. Academic theories of an American Ballet may be interesting for a limited intelligentsia to read, but they will not work in actuality.

The European ballet is a twin-sister of the opera; ours can be only a twin-sister of the popular stage, our musical comedy, motion picture theatre or vaudeville type—a light entertainment, with the rare exceptions of whole dance programs in form of recitals or individual ballet companies giving full performances. We cannot follow the example of our Metropolitan Opera, but those [*sic*] of our Theatre Guild.³⁸

Like Rasch, theater critic Oliver M. Sayler asserted in the *New York Times* in 1932 that the revue stage should serve as the basis for the developing American ballet:

An eclectic but unified art form like the ballet can proceed only from one of two sources: either it can be superimposed from above out of a mature and friendly tradition, as was the Ballet Russe; or it must grow up out of the soil, out of the ‘folk’—and when I say ‘folk’ I don’t mean merely the Tennessee mountaineer or the Texas plainsman; I mean the Broadway playgoer too! Without anything resembling a tradition, our prospective American ballet, therefore, has only one sure fountainhead—the popular theatre, the theatre of vaudeville and revue.³⁹

The research period saw innumerable ballets on popular stages, many featuring Russian classical dancers from the Imperial Schools. In 1916, the Russians Theodore Kosloff and Vlasta Maslova presented ballet at the Palace Theatre, which was the home of Big Time vaudeville,⁴⁰ and Alexandre Gavrillov's 1926 "Ballet Revue" was performed at the Princess Theatre on New York City's Thirty-ninth Street, which typically featured musical comedy productions.⁴¹ Even Lincoln Kirstein—renowned theorist, writer, producer, and activist for dance—in his 1937 pamphlet, "Blast at Ballet," asserted that "popular vaudeville, revue-dance, and popular jazz or swing music," would offer source materials for American ballet, alongside classical ballet and modern dance.⁴² His 1956 "What Ballet is About: An AMERICAN Glossary," offers the kind of language about American ballet that might have been applicable to the vaudeville shows from decades prior: "Everything we do is done to be done again and again, invented each time new, with new gags."⁴³

Royle describes vaudeville's optimism: "The most serious thing about the program is that seriousness is barred...."⁴⁴ American historian Frederick Jackson Turner[†] has noted that the American temperament was "lacking in the artistic," a quality which is related to vaudeville's slapstick, exaggerated sense of humor.⁴⁵ A 1911 vaudeville comedy sketch, for example, featured the following conspicuous comedic turn: "Soubrette: Lord, Lord, have you ever had an affair of the heart? Comedian: No, but I had malaria once."⁴⁶ A 1914 sketch entitled, "Moe Bloch's Divorce," is similarly

* For more on the Princess Theatre, see Jeffrey Hilton Smart's doctoral dissertation, "The Internal Development of the Princess Theatre Musical Shows." (University of Missouri-Columbia, 1991).

† Turner is most notable for his seminal 1915 work, *The Frontier in American History*, in which he asserts that the traits that comprise the American national character can be traced directly to the existence of the frontier. (1915; reprint, Huntington, N.Y.: R. E. Krieger Pub. Co., 1976).

transparent: “Seymour: Have you at any time during your married life been happy? Moe: Yes, for two years. Then she came back to me.”⁴⁷ Such inelegance became a standard—almost a source of pride—for vaudeville managers, and their broad sensibilities were extended to dance on the vaudeville stage. In ballet acts, such overt humor and brashness was typically manifested in the form of trick steps that bordered on acrobatics. Dancers and choreographers had to carefully tread the line between America’s taste for spectacle and their commitment to maintaining the refinement and artistry of the classical tradition. Managers often refused contracts to classically trained dancers like Margaret Severn, whom they felt would not attract a broad enough audience.⁴⁸ In her biography of the American ballet dancers Willam, Harold, and Lew Christensen, Deborah Sowell notes that the Christensen’s “act was based on the classical tradition, but spectacular feats were piled on thick and fast,” further noting that the men wore tuxedo pants, rather than tights, so they would not be “mistaken for acrobats.”⁴⁹ A newspaper critic in Madison, Wisconsin, attended a performance of the Christensen’s touring vaudeville act in 1930. The review, which likely represents the majority’s sentiment during the period, indicates why many dancers chose to make artistic concessions for the sake of sustaining a career: “The quartet presents some excellent gymnastics in some twenty minutes, but they would have been a much better act if they stopped trying to dance and be graceful. The men do some very finished acrobatic turns and then spoil the effect by some attempt at lily like hand wavings.”⁵⁰

Vaudeville’s heterogeneity led to the diversification of the classical tradition. Ballet, an art form cultivated by the elite classes in Europe and Russia, was juxtaposed with comedians, acrobats, singers, and animal acts; in this environment it was compelled

to bend to American popular sentiments. The addition of trick steps and changes to the pacing, tone, and design of the dances, are examples of vaudeville's Americanizing influence on the period's ballet. Royle sums up vaudeville's artistic sensibility: "It may be a kind of lunch counter art, but then art is so vague and lunch is so real."⁵¹ Speaking to the practical, even gritty, nature of the everyday routine in New York City, Royle's comment illustrates just how peculiar the Euro-Russian classical ballet tradition may have seemed in the vaudeville setting. Ballet's content and structure had, initially, developed as entertainment for foreign royalty. It had lived for over a century in the realm of the ethereal and the fantastic, and it portrayed storylines in which diverse, practical, individualistic Americans were likely disinterested or unable to comprehend. Those characteristics that were central to the vaudeville and revue stages of the early twentieth century thus became innate to America's brand of ballet, and they helped transform the classical tradition into an art form which Americans could relate to as their own.

Broadway

Often considered the first musical, *The Black Crook* in 1866 incorporated classical ballet directly into the production when its producers hired Italian ballerina Maria Bonfanti from Milan's La Scala. Despite her classical background, contemporary scholars have conflicting opinions about the style of dancing that was included in the production. Dance scholar and Bonfanti biographer Barbara Barker cites an excerpt from a review in the *New York Clipper* about Bonfanti's dancing: "Her style of dancing is in accordance with the elegance of her person; it is full of grace, buoyant and elastic, and

avoiding all forced exertions of other artists, who seem to think the ballet is a school of gymnastics and not grace.”” Barker goes on to state that, “[Bonfanti’s] ladylike modesty and understated correct technique contrasted agreeably with the aggressive, hurly-burly elements of the burlesque spectacles.”⁵² In direct opposition, theater scholar Peter H. Riddle contends that, “the manner of their dancing was modified from the artistically stylized movements typical of *Swan Lake* or *The Nutcracker*,* becoming more suggestive and close to erotic. If it may be assumed that the ballet troupe was classically trained and its members devoted to their art, they must have found themselves in severe financial straits to have been willing to change their approach so dramatically.”⁵³ Both Barker’s and Riddle’s interpretations of the ballet’s content in *The Black Crook* are feasible within the context of the period. Because the American perception of female dancing on stage may have been linked to the risqué performances in mid-nineteenth-century concert saloons, *The Black Crook* dancers may have been understood as erotic, although they were classically trained Europeans. The American audience at the time had virtually no understanding of the difference between ballet and burlesque, and thus it cannot be assumed that the ballet in the production was either classical or erotic in nature. It may have qualified as both. It is likely, however, that the dancers’ classical training was affected in some way by the venue and production style, but the degree to which they were affected remains unknown.

A tremendous success with an initial run of 474 performances, *The Black Crook* saw numerous revivals through the beginning of the twentieth century. By then, its first

* It is important to note that neither *Swan Lake* nor *The Nutcracker* were in existence until the end of the nineteenth century; Riddle refers to these ballets anachronistically as more commonly understood examples of the classical tradition.

star, Bonfanti, had opened an independent ballet school in New York where she taught the Italian classical tradition to aspiring dancers, including Duncan. The themes of Broadway productions had shifted by the turn of the century; theater scholar Thomas A. Greenfield asserts that Broadway of the twentieth century's aught years, "was a wellspring of flag-waving patriotism and nationalistic fervor."⁵⁴ George M. Cohan, often considered to be one of the first true stars of musical comedy, was at the helm of the patriotic, democratic trend, "playing as much to the lower classes up in the balconies as he did to the carriage trade down in the orchestra,"⁵⁵ and welcoming the heterogeneous audiences to a new brand of popular theater.

The "serious book shows" that flourished during the mid-twentieth-century were not in existence at the start of the research period, in 1909.⁵⁶ The Broadway show of the 1920s, according to scholar Ethan Mordden, was "recklessly built upon the despotism of performing talent, dotty with corny humor of a bygone era, riddled with cliché and convention, its storylines ceaselessly humiliated by irrelevant songs and specialty acts."⁵⁷ The operetta and the musical comedy show comprised most of those productions; these types of productions were the seeds for the evolution of the Broadway musical that began with Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Showboat* in 1927. David H. Lewis explains that, "the typical operetta offered a durable libretto,"⁵⁸ where musical comedy productions featured a thinner storyline with a number of songs and dance numbers that veered away from the plot entirely. The operetta of the 1920s, Mordden notes:

...fielded more solid voices than musical comedy, liked exotic settings and historical periods, favored antique diction ("nigh," "betide"), placed a harp in the pit rather than musical comedy's piano, made use of martial airs and a ton of waltz, isolated the humor in one or two eccentric characters rather than let it seep out of the general company, and celebrated a crisis in the love plot with a gala

confrontation in song where musical comedy might treat it in a few spoken lines. Mainly, operetta was passionate, and musical comedy was satiric.⁵⁹

Mordden also contends that the “collapse [of the operetta] coincided with the rise of dance... operetta’s structure narrates almost entirely in music and dialogue.”⁶⁰ Musical comedy, however, had ample room for dance, as the storyline served to be more of a broad thematic guide than a specific narrative trajectory for the production. A feature of many musical comedy productions across the research period was the “New Dance Sensation,” which Mordden describes: “a soloist or two, backed by the chorus, purports to introduce ‘the latest step,’ gets one all ready to learn it, then provides at most minimal instruction.”⁶¹ The steps—like “The Hinky Dee” to music by Cohan and “The Jijibo” to music by George Gershwin—were akin to those taught in New York’s various dance studios. With Broadway directors like Ned Wayburn and John Murray Anderson working simultaneously as studio owners, the relationship between the popular stage and the studio was symbiotic. It is unknowable, however, whether the steps used in the shows derived from the steps taught in the studios, or vice versa.

In 1923, American ballet dancer Ruth Page described the dancing on the Great White Way in vivid detail:

In the Broadway shows... the success of the dancing usually depended upon the dancer’s stunts. Ula Sharon would hop for what seemed like a half hour on one toe—you could shut your eyes and take a little rest and when you opened them, there was Ula still hopping. It was Harriet Hctor, they say, who used to have such good balance that she could have lunch while still poised on one toe. The backbend was also very much in vogue—the dancer would travel backward on her toes, bending way back, and while in that position on one toe would kick the back of her head with the other. When doing pirouettes, the theory was that the dancer who kept going long enough would ultimately get a hand.⁶²

Harriet Hctor, like many classically trained dancers from that period, came of age when there were no ballet companies in the United States to join. Doris Hering, in her 1965 biographical sketch of the then pedagogically-inclined Hctor, noted: “Her attitude toward dance was serious, and she constantly tried to understate the material she presented—to make it more expressive and less superficial. Even when she arched into her celebrated trick backbend, it was kept as close as possible to the context of her dance. This backbend was to become her trademark, as well as the bane of her existence.”⁶³ Like the Christensens in vaudeville, Hctor was obliged to include such showstopping steps in her Broadway performances, in spite of her classical training, for the sake of earning a living.

A significant part of the Broadway landscape—one which frequently featured Hctor—was *The Ziegfeld Follies*, which ran from 1907 into the early 1930s. While it was certainly a revue in its structure, the *Follies* is most often given historical consideration alongside Broadway productions as opposed to vaudeville, likely because it relied heavily on the kinds of big names—including directors, musicians, composers, performers, and designers—who regularly starred in Broadway shows. Kendall asserts that Florenz Ziegfeld’s “theatrical strategy” was “to transform popular, even off-color, material into a new and high-class chic.”⁶⁴ He considered the central aspects of the productions to be “the girls, spectacular sets and costumes, and vaudeville with nothing but headline acts.”⁶⁵ Mordden offers a vivid description of the Ziegfeld show, *Whoopee*, which he considers to have been Ziegfeld’s last “hit,” in 1928.⁶⁶

A heifer on a lead for [Eddie] Cantor’s entrance, a gypsy ballet let [*sic*] by Tamara Geva, a Car Scene (with two of them, head to head on a mountain road), George Olsen’s band (and even his wife, Ethel Shutta, as Cantor’s amorous

nurse), a Modernistic Ballet in Black (for class and also to give Geva something to do in the second act), a party scene with Olsen's boys on a platform, and cowgirls, Indian maids, some bridesmaids to dress the stage while Cantor puts over "Makin' Whoopee!," girls tapping, girls toe-dancing, and, best of all, the Big Indian Showgirl Parade, performed on a set representing a rocky gorge through which shirtless muscleboys led horses bedecked with Ziegfeldian beauties, each one nude except for headdresses that grew more colossal with each entrance.⁶⁷

While Ziegfeld shows, "polished vaudeville and burlesque traditions to create a historic family friendly variety stage show," the "girls" remained front and center.⁶⁸ Scholar Ann Marie McEntee discusses the brand of sensuality that Ziegfeld put on stage, in contrast to the other largely eroticized stage presentation of the period, the burlesque show:

"Burlesque performers peddled their sexuality coarsely, while the Ziegfeld girl displayed grace, beauty, and savoir-faire as something other than herself."⁶⁹ Aspirations of one day becoming a "Ziegfeld girl" inspired innumerable young women to take dance classes and come to New York City—it is likely that they were the majority of the students who populated the dance studios of the research period.

From 1920 to 1928, the number of Broadway theatres expanded by an astonishing forty percent.⁷⁰ In nearly every season during the 1920s, over two hundred new productions were mounted,⁷¹ and the flood of talent over-saturated the Broadway market. Mordden laments, "there were too many theatres to fill with too much inferior product. There were too many producers, too many writers, too many actors—and everyone was working."⁷² After the 1929 stock market crash, theatres were being razed and talent was fleeing to Hollywood.⁷³ Despite *Whoopee*'s impressive run of 407 performances on Broadway, Ziegfeld sold its rights to Samuel Goldwyn, who reinvented the show for a film audience.⁷⁴ Such a sell-off was common during that period, which saw the booming Hollywood movie industry taking away from Broadway's profits. Not coincidentally,

1929 was also the year of the first movie musical.⁷⁵ John Martin wrote an article for the *New York Times* that same year entitled, “A Crisis for Musical Comedy: Spirit of Creation Lags While Talent is Drawn to Movies.”⁷⁶

By the 1920s, ballet had become commonplace on the Broadway stage. Mordden notes that “by 1928,” ballet “was something the chorus did, especially the Albertina Rasch girls, prancing on to cover a set change. Ballet was a relic,” he claims, particularly in contrast to the new leading ladies, like Gertrude Lawrence, who “was modern, jazzy, tough.”⁷⁷ Broadway had begun to absorb the influence of the Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age, and by the 1930s, the function of dance on the Broadway stage had changed. Mordden states: “Dance suddenly started to express what the book, music, and lyrics had no vocabulary for. The job description of the choreographer expanded.”⁷⁸ Dance on Broadway began to be called “Modernistic,” a term that referred to “a blend of traditional American show-biz motion with some other style that was sort of European, perhaps elevated, and surely prestigious.”⁷⁹ In this light, the high art dance forms and the populist Broadway productions had a mutually beneficial relationship: the addition of elitist dance forms raised the status of popular stage productions, while the popularity of the Broadway shows provided the dancers and choreographers with substantial careers that would have been non-existent in the nascent American classical sphere.

Movie Palaces

With the advent of the film industry in the 1920s, movie houses sprang up all over the city, providing additional venues for ballet. Motion pictures had become so popular that most vaudeville theatres, by the end of the decade, included film

components in addition to their live performances.⁸⁰ The Roxy, the Strand, and the Rivoli, three of the more extravagant movie palaces, employed such luminary ballet personalities as Léonide Massine, Anatole Bourman, and Ivan Tarasoff of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, as well as Léo Staats of the Paris Opéra Ballet, as the directors of their in-house ballet companies. Dance historian George Dorris explains the movie "prolog," where dance was juxtaposed with film on the popular stage: "As part of a program lasting around two hours the patron could sit in baroquely spectacular surroundings and see a varied stage show featuring music and dance in addition to a film."⁸¹ A new ballet was often staged each week, accompanied by a full orchestra if the theatre was large enough to have one in its employ.⁸² Huge screens hung at approximately mid-stage, and in most houses the dancers were restricted to the space downstage of the screen for their performances.* Likewise, ballet dancers in the prologs were often relegated to the area of the stage behind the screen during the films for warming up and rehearsing. Sowell describes how this awkward situation impacted the Christensens' training: "Silence while the movies were in progress was absolutely necessary, or the stage managers would forbid them to use the stage. So the dancers developed a technique based on soft, deep *pliés*; they learned to do beats such as *entrechats* and double air turns from *grand pliés* rather than the usual *demi plié* (not a recommended practice today)."⁸³

In 1927, *The Dance Magazine* went so far as to assert that the movie prolog was "a cradle for an American ballet,"⁸⁴ and scholar Suzanne Carbonneau Levy agrees, stating that, "the ascendancy of the prolog was one of the most significant factors in

* At the Hollywood Theatre, built in 1930, the depth of stage space between the screen and the footlights was approximately twenty feet.

fueling the demand for Russian ballet training.”⁸⁵ In seeing the results of the staged works, aspiring dancers in the popular audiences would have then been inspired to find a Russian ballet teacher. By the beginning of the 1930s, however, movie prologs were virtually non-existent. Vaudeville, too, was on the decline, having been overshadowed by the “talkies,” the advent of radio, and the downturn in attendance that accompanied the Great Depression.⁸⁶ Broadway, however, would continue to feature ballet for decades to come. Such titans in the dance world as George Balanchine, Agnes de Mille, and Jerome Robbins would navigate both the popular stage and the concert stage well into the twentieth century, continuing the relationship between ballet and the popular theater that flourished during the research period.

Part III

The New York City Dance Scene: A Miscellany of Styles

Cross-influence among the diverse dance styles in New York City’s high-pressure, fast-moving performance environment was inevitable—new trends spread like wildfire across the densely populated city that was buzzing with dancers. From high-kicking to opera ballet and aesthetic dancing to fancy dancing, many of the dance styles of the day had similar fundamental bodily qualities, including verticality and lightness. Historian Linda Tomko describes the period’s ballroom dance styles as having “the appearance of refined bearing, graceful motion, and superbly attenuated line or silhouette of the body in space.” She further suggests that, “ballroom [dance] aesthetics arguably prepared contemporary audiences for reception of touring European ballet dancers,”⁸⁷ which implies that their exposure to multiple European-derived dance forms that shared

ballet's bodily ideals allowed American audiences to become comfortable with ballet's inherent qualities long before it was regularly featured as a classical art form on the city's stages. The heterogeneity of the New York City environment, which included multiple and varied dance forms of European origin, was thus a necessary component of the American public's growing knowledge of ballet.

On the popular stage, ballet found a home among the melee of performance genres, and while it retained the basic qualities that Tomko discusses, it took a largely un-classical shape.* Most ballet performances outside the opera houses featured derivatives of ballet, as well as a number of dance styles that had come about in response to the period's fascination with expressive movement. As Casey notes, "In the early twentieth century, ballet lacked clear genre boundaries with what we would today consider other dance forms. ...both the toe-tapping variety act and the tunic-clad ballerina performing a 'Greek' dance would have fallen under the rubric of 'ballet,' particularly for the average audience member of the non-connoisseur variety, all while appearing on the same program."⁸⁸ In the sections below, I describe several choreographic genres—most now defunct—that thrived on the popular stage at various points throughout the research period and affected the selection of styles that were taught in dance studios. Since ballet was surrounded by and often merged with these related forms, this discussion provides a framework for my subsequent investigation of the period's ballet pedagogy in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

* I discuss the opera's classical ballet style from the period later in this chapter and in Chapter Four, concurrent to an examination of the work of three Italian ballet teachers who worked at the Metropolitan Opera House and the Century Opera House.

Aesthetic, Nature, and Greek Dancing

The Delsarte System of Expression, via the dancing of Duncan and Pavlova and the choreography of Michel Fokine, provided source material for Aesthetic, Nature, and Greek Dancing, which were immensely popular during the first half of the research period.⁸⁹ As Kendall notes, “American artistic dance was born of some American dancers’ extravagant desires for self-expression, guided, no matter how unconsciously, by disciplines they had absorbed from the theater.”⁹⁰ A highly structured, “pseudo-spiritual”⁹¹ approach to physical expression through gesture developed in the nineteenth century by movement theorist François Delsarte, the system became an integral part of the early twentieth century physical culture movement and also had a strong impact on the period’s ballet. Duncan’s early dancing was steeped in the Delsarte material; her work influenced Fokine, who frequently choreographed for Pavlova. While this is an oversimplified look at the trickle-down effect of Delsarte’s expressive movement legacy on ballet, it is perhaps the source of the American concept of expressive dance during the early twentieth century. Delsarte scholar Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter notes how widespread the Delsarte training had become just before the turn of the century: “There is an assortment of information available on more than 400 American teachers and performers active between 1870 and 1900 who either identified themselves as Delsartians or acknowledged that system as a significant component of their training, their approach to performance, or their own teaching methods and materials.”⁹² A number of early twentieth century dance teachers included Delsarte-based material into their schools: the late nineteenth and early twentieth century ballerina and teacher Elizabetta Menzeli taught “Delsartian numbers, recitations and posing,” to socialites at her school, while

Wayburn's "Foundation Technique," which he used to prepare popular stage aspirants for his "Modern Americanized Ballet" training, included Delsarte exercises.⁹³

Images of Pavlova's and Fokine's dancers reveal more tunics than tutus: in a *New York Times* article from 1924 entitled "The American Ballet That May Be," Fokine's American Ballet is featured in scoop-necked, sleeveless tunics that hang just above the knee. Their hair is in loose, low Romantic-era buns with hair covering the ears and headbands—reminiscent of *Giselle* in the flapper era. The dancers are either standing, gazing downward with the fingertips of both hands lightly clasped in front of one shoulder, or seated on one hip, with their legs trailing out to the side, leaning on a hand or two as they look softly upward at their cohorts (fig. 1).⁹⁴ Their appearance is more garden nymphs than ballet dancers. In light of the similarities between the period's ballet and aesthetic dance, Kendall states: "Even though the Russians had evolved a modern art of dance out of classical training, most of the American public assumed that they came from no tradition, like American girl dancers, and that Pavlova was one of the 'classic' dancers—one of the best—since she wore the familiar 'Greek' draperies, danced to Chopin like Maud Allan and Isadora Duncan, and ended the evening with a wildly popular Bacchanale ('Autumn,' from Glazunov's *The Seasons*)."⁹⁵ In 1922, the *New York Times* wrote: "...there is a growing demand for interpretative, esthetic, nature and toe dancing in what are rated as 'Main Street' cities."⁹⁶ Having drawn from and likewise influenced several distinct dance lineages, this Aesthetic Dancing trend, which reached far beyond New York City, was perhaps the most influential and lasting of the period.

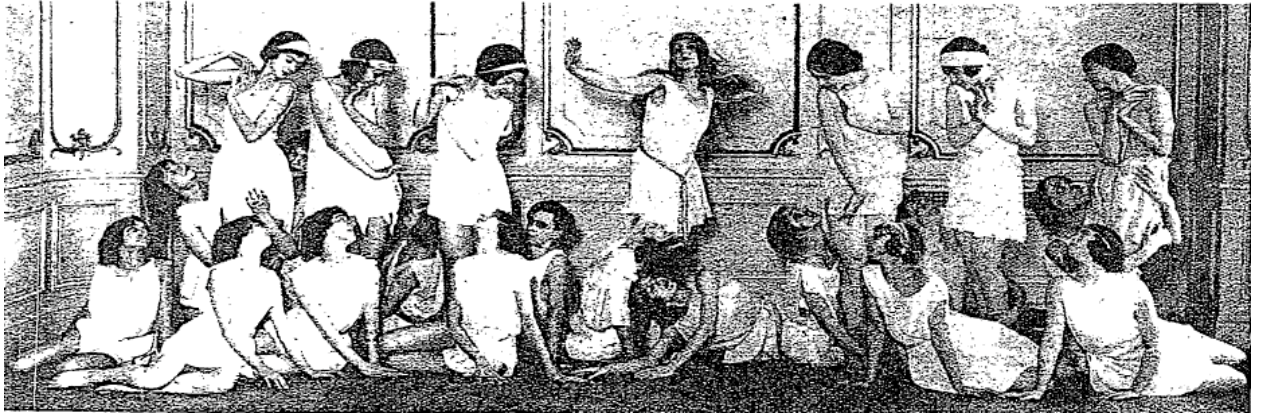


Figure 1: “Dancers of Fokine’s American Ballet.” *New York Times*. 1924.

Louis H. Chalif—a graduate of the Russian Imperial School who opened his New York studio in 1905—taught Aesthetic Dancing at his school, and considered it “a new series of graceful movements, rhythmical steps and combinations, which aims primarily for the grace, ease, suppleness, fine poise, and perfect bodily control.”⁹⁷ The generic term for barefoot dancing in a Duncan-esque tunic with the goal of developing physical well-being, an elegant carriage, and a bodily mode of self-expression, Aesthetic Dancing yielded a vast following. From little girls to society ladies to college students, it was the ultimate populist dance form, and it existed in some form throughout the entire twenty-five-year research period.

However similar they might have been visually, Nature Dancing was distinct from Aesthetic Dancing. Sonia Serova—née Aileen Swepstone in London⁹⁸—published two Nature Dancing manuals with the intent to systematize a form that might otherwise seem arbitrary. The introduction to the first manual states that Nature Dancing is “based on a study of Greek gymnastics and Greek games. Poise, development of grace and the like are prime essentials. Mlle. Serova believes that such a system produces far better results than the chaotic instruction in ‘esthetic’ dancing given in so many schools.”⁹⁹ Her

manuals include seven categories of positions that invoke emotion: “The Funeral Positions,” for example, are comprised of two poses: one with the dancer’s upper back rounded and her head tucked into her dropped elbow—“Dejection”—and another with the dancer’s head thrown back, one hand covering the crown of her head and the other thrown to the back high diagonal—“Despair” (fig. 2).¹⁰⁰ Such positions and their classifications are strikingly similar to those in the Delsarte system, which also assigns specific meanings to various positions of the body.

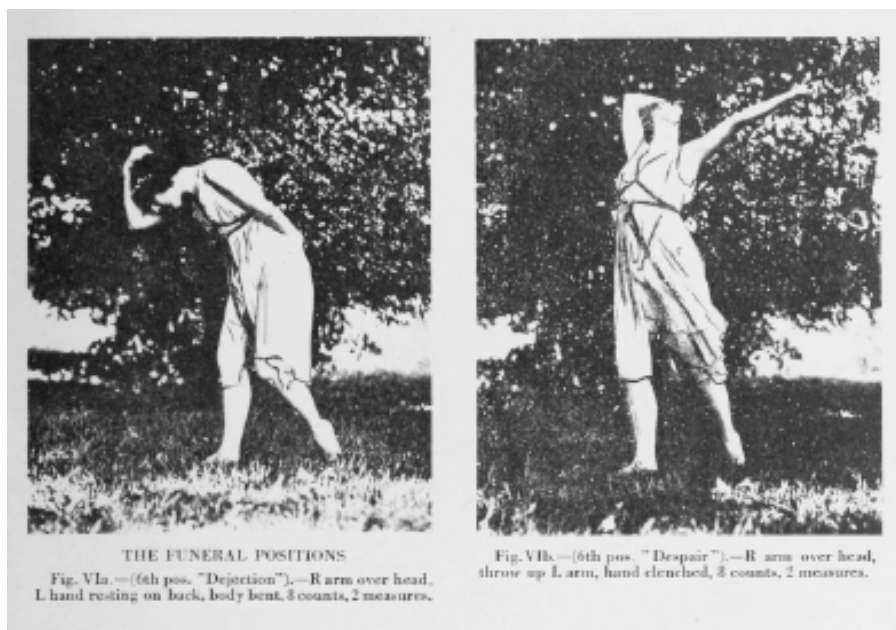


Figure 2: “Dejection” and “Despair,” from Sonia Serova’s *Nature Dancing: The Poetry of Motion*. 1916.

The Vestoff-Serova school brochure from 1920 describes Nature Dancing:

For this simple, beautiful art no more appropriate name could have been chosen than ‘Nature Dancing’—for does not every living thing in Nature dance? The free joyous dancing of the autumn leaves, tossed by brisk zephyrs, the ballet of raindrops on the walk, the wild skipping waves and the waltzing, swaying columns of grey smoke in the night—all these has humanity watched, wrapped in wonder.... Yet while Nature Dancing is in itself freedom and an unforced and spontaneous interpretation of any given thought or expression,” it “has a technical, correct foundation, upon which any spontaneous expression must be based.... The principles of Nature Dancing include nothing haphazard and at

random.¹⁰¹

Noting such contradictions inherent to the codification of a “spontaneous” form, dance historian Ann Barzel explains that during the early twentieth century, “bar [*sic*] work became so universal that even schools of nature dancing introduced bar work in bare feet. This was rather paradoxical, since the nature schools shouted against the turned-out leg and pointed toe and most bar exercises aim at inculcating these two details, concentrating on them while the bar relieves the muscles of the problem of maintaining balance.”¹⁰² Despite Serova’s efforts to legitimize her work through codification, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* published an article in 1916 that refers to Nature Dancing as “barefoot stuff”; in a section titled, “Watch Your Hayfields, Men!” it warns the reader, tongue-in-cheek, of the possibility of encountering Nature Dancers at random: “So if you happen upon a young woman of your acquaintance awakening out of a neighboring hay field in a flowing white nightie, stretching herself in rhythmic [*sic*] movements, and casting her arms out to the sun, don’t turn in an alarm. She is merely dancing ‘The Morning’ in place of her customary morning canter on the cinder path.”¹⁰³

Greek Dancing, yet another permutation of the Aesthetic forms, was also taught at the Chalif studio and codified into manual format by Chalif himself in 1920: “Confessedly it is Greek only in so far as it emulates the noble spirit of the Greeks and goes to nature for its inspiration, as did they.”¹⁰⁴ In this way it is similar to Nature Dancing, but Chalif distinguishes one form from the other by specifying three specific modes of Greek Dancing:

The Symbolic portrays such facts as night or day, or emotions such as grief, laughter, hate or despair, by attitudes or movements which somehow convey to us the idea of these things. The depiction of love, by both hands placed

over the heart and the face raised, is a typical symbol.

Imitative dancing reproduces such facts of Nature as the waving of the trees, the running of an animal, the leaping of a deer, the flight of a bird, the fluttering of a butterfly's wings, the waves of the sea—by movements and positions actually drawn from the object represented.

In the Decorative type we think not of expressing a certain meaning, but only of creating a dance that is a thing of beauty. To move rhythmically and with grace, the while building one beautiful statue after another, each flowing into the next on a wave of music, all bound together by a wind of music—this is a great joy to the dancer, as to the beholder.”¹⁰⁵

Dance scholar Lisa Arkin has described Chalif's method of training students in Greek

Dancing: “The sequence of exercises begins with relaxation exercises, progresses to

basic locomotor movements such as walking, skipping, and hopping, then culminates

with falls to the floor, triplet turns, and leaps.”¹⁰⁶ While he, like Serova, provides a

systematic outline of exercises, Chalif's fundamental approach to Greek Dancing differs

from Serova's theories on Nature Dancing: “there is no necessity that the order of the

exercises, and all their details, such as the turnings of the head, exact positions of the

arms, etc., be followed exactly; for freedom and individuality are most important” (fig.

3).¹⁰⁷



Figure 3: Louis H. Chalif, (pictured) from *The Chalif Text Book of Dancing: Book III: Greek Dancing*. 1920.

Salomé Dancing

According to McEntee, “during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an influx of Middle Eastern images circulated within a variety of art forms.”¹⁰⁸ The 1893 World’s Fair, for example, featured a dancer who went by the name “Little Egypt.”¹⁰⁹ The period obsession with Salomé dancing is linked to the 1907 Metropolitan Opera production of Richard Strauss’s *Salomé*. Its portrayal of the leading lady as a femme

fatale through her “Dance of the Seven Veils,” and her intimate interactions with the severed head of Saint John the Baptist, caused outrage among the public, and the opera was pulled from the stage after one performance.¹¹⁰ Immediately following the debacle, Met prima ballerina Bianca Froehlich, who danced the leading role in the production, took the choreography to vaudeville, where its risqué nature helped to brand it a form of burlesque, or “kootch” dancing.¹¹¹

To capitalize on the fiasco at the Metropolitan, Ziegfeld—who was unafraid to incorporate elements of burlesque into his lavish spectacles—included a parodic Salomé scene in his first *Follies of 1907*,¹¹² with classically trained dancer Mlle. Dazié in the title role.* Kendall notes that Dazié’s *Salomé* “wore a low-slung gauzy skirt, a circle of pearls over each breast, an aigrette on her forehead, and she had four peacock-costumed girls in attendance.”¹¹³ Dazié had garnered such popularity in the role that she opened a Salomé school, and as Kendall indicates, “by the summer of 1908 she was sending approximately 150 Salomés every month into the nation’s vaudeville circuits, each armed with the same routine—an incoherent mix of gestures and undulations addressed to a papier-mâché head.”¹¹⁴ American writer Dorothy Parker’s poem, *Salomé’s Dancing Lesson*, offers a sense of not only the thematic elements of these dances, but the movement as well:

She that begs a little boon
(Heel and toe! Heel and toe!)
Little gets—and nothing, soon.
(No, no, no! No, no, no!)

* The meticulously kept class records of *Black Crook* ballerina-turned-teacher Maria Bonfanti show that Dazié attended her classes in May and June of 1909. (Maria Bonfanti papers, 1868-1917, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.) Kendall notes that Dazié—originally Daisy Peterkin from Detroit—had studied ballet in Europe, and “could really dance on her pointes” (*Where She Danced* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979]: 75.). According to Dorris, Dazié was the *première danseuse* for the inaugural season of Oscar Hammerstein’s Manhattan Opera Company in 1906-7 (“Dance and the New York Opera War, 1906-1912,” *Dance Chronicle* 32, no. 2 [2009]: 221-22).

She that calls for costly things
Priceless finds her offerings—
What's impossible to kings?
(*Heel and toe! Heel and toe!*)

Kings are shaped as other men.
(*Step and turn! Step and turn!*)
Ask what none may ask again.
(*Will you learn? Will you learn?*)
Lovers whine, and kisses pall,
Jewels tarnish, kingdoms fall—
Death's the rarest prize of all!
(*Step and turn! Step and turn!*)

Veils are woven to be dropped.
(*One, two, three! One, two, three!*)
Aging eyes are slowest stopped.
(*Quietly! Quietly!*)
She whose body's young and cool
Has no need of dancing-school—
Scratch a king and find a fool!
(*One, two, three! One, two, three!*)¹¹⁵

Vaudeville star Gertrude Hoffman* developed a Salomé dance as well, based on another version that brought aesthetic dancer Maud Allan huge success overseas. Kendall considers Hoffman's Salomé “the first coherent dance creation since Isadora Duncan had left the country in 1900 and Ruth St. Denis in 1906.” The dance progressed in four parts, per the description of the first performance in the *New York Times*:

The first was a sinuous movement of the Oriental order. In the second movement Salome rushed to the edge of the well, where was the head of John the Baptist on the traditional ‘charger,’ seized it, and placed it in the middle of the stage. Then, in wild exultation, she danced in a wide circle around the head, whirling till her slight skirt rose in the air and giving full vent to the emotion of the theme. She then cast herself on the ground and crawled to the head, which she kissed. Rising to her feet, she kissed the head again and pressed it to her bosom. With the next

* Hoffman is notable as well for presenting pirated versions of Fokine ballets—restaged by Ballets Russes dancer Theodore Kosloff—like *Schéhérazade* and *Cléopâtre*, which she and her company performed as the “Saisons Russes” years prior to the arrival of the Ballets Russes in America (Lynn Garafola, “Dance, Film, and the Ballets Russes,” *Dance Research* 16, no. 1 [summer 1998]: 7.).

impulse she flung it into the well.¹¹⁶

Hoffman and her imitators embarked on national tours with their Salomés, spreading the craze country-wide.¹¹⁷ Her hundreds of performances around the States had earned Hoffman some negative attention from the public; she dealt with a lawsuit in Kansas City and was arrested in New York.¹¹⁸ An article in the *New York Times* describes the situation:

After performing her 'Salome dance'... Gertrude Hoffman was arrested at Hammerstein's Roof Garden last night... for offending public decency.... 'The Captain with his Lieutenant,' said the dancer, 'were around the theatre all evening. He saw my act from the back of the stage, and as I was going to my dressing room with my two maids the Captain stopped me and said: "Excuse me, Miss Hoffman, but do you wear tights in your act?" "Certainly I do," I replied. He then asked me to show them to him but I refused. Then I was arrested.'¹¹⁹

Hoffman's determination to continue her Salomé turn may have helped the public soften their puritanical views, paving the way for other solo dancers and the Ballets Russes to bring their own Eastern-inspired works to the stage. St. Denis returned from overseas the same year, and because of the Salomé fervor that had already swept through the country, her exoticisms were right on cue; Kendall asserts that "[St. Denis's] dancing was fashionable because it sparked imaginations already sensitized to a whole range of exotic phenomena."¹²⁰ By 1910, Salomé dancing had fallen largely out of fashion, but the theme of exoticism and what McEntee calls the "Orientalist aesthetic,"¹²¹ would continue over the next several decades, perhaps most notably in the productions of the Ballets Russes and *The Ziegfeld Follies*.

Eccentric and Acrobatic Dancing

In her article about the ballet instruction of dance director and studio magnate

Ned Wayburn, Barbara Naomi Cohen explains that the popular twin dance forms, Eccentric and Acrobatic Dancing, required the "...displacement from the standardized and, in ballet, visually vital, sense of balance."¹²² Eccentric dancing—derived from the Africanist and jazz dances of the teens and twenties—used “Legomania techniques of exaggerated stretches and hip displacement.”^{*123} According to historians Marshall and Jean Stearns, “the term ‘eccentric’ is a catchall for dancers who have their own non-standard movements and sell themselves on their individual styles. It has been used to describe a variety of highly personal performances by dancer-comedians on Broadway,” and they cite the work of such notable dancers as Cohan and Ray Bolger, both of whose dancing styles were famously idiosyncratic.¹²⁴

Acrobatic dancing, Cohen notes, consisted of “conventional foot work... performed in a deep back bend.”¹²⁵ In his 1925 dance manual, *The Art of Stage Dancing*, Wayburn notes that Acrobatic Dancing includes “*Bending exercises*; including the back bend, hand-stand, inside-out, front over, back limber, cartwheel, tinseca, nip-up, the various splits, and several more advanced feats that should be attempted only after thorough physical preparation” (fig. 4).¹²⁶ He also describes what Eccentric and Acrobatic Dancing might look like if executed in a pair of *pointe* shoes:

It may be jumping down a flight of steps on the toes, or a continued hopping on one toe for 16 counts to music, or a swinging of one leg back and forth, like a pendulum, in an acrobatic way while the dancer hops on one toe—such stunts as these are the applause-getters nowadays, and they are well worth applauding, too, for they are pleasing demonstrations of real skill, and are acquired by the dancer only after long and continued effort and practice.¹²⁷

Hector’s famous backbend was a central aspect of Acrobatic Dancing, described here by

^{*} Typically referred to as “Legmania,” this popular style showcased extreme extensions of the legs. See the section on High-Kicking for more on the “Legmania” trend.

her biographer and admirer Walter Ware in 1936: “Like a wayward sapling on a wind-swept plain, she seems to weave upward and downward impelled by some unknown force until suddenly, with a great crescendo from the orchestra, she sweeps into a low backbend, exquisite in its elliptical perfection. In this same position she *bourrées* backward, never faltering for an instant, across the entire width of the stage.”^{*128}

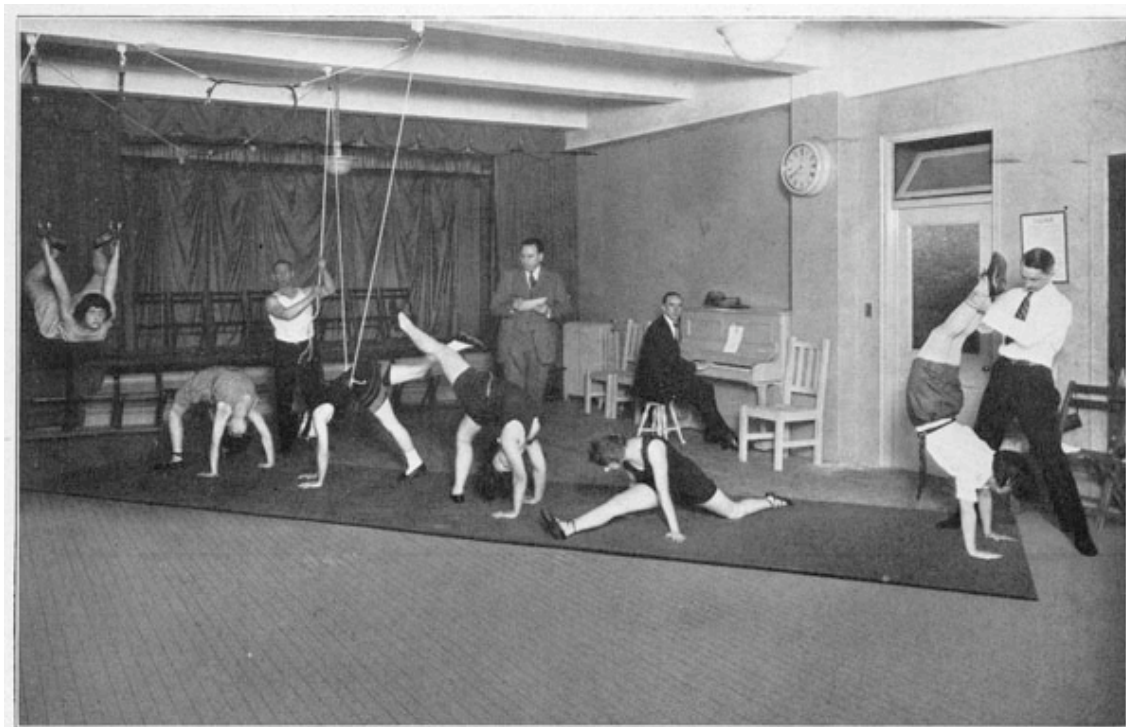


Figure 4: “Acrobatic Dancing Practice” at the Ned Wayburn Studios of Stage Dancing. *The Art of Stage Dancing*. 1925.

Aron Tomaroff, a dancer with Anna Pavlova who was most notable for his mail-order home study courses, also included Acrobatic Dancing in his manual, referring to it instead as “Tumbling.”¹²⁹ Veronine Vestoff, of the Imperial School, wrote a manual entitled *Tumbling for Class Work*, in which he included not only the acrobatic approaches of Wayburn and Tomaroff, but also the partnered acrobatics that were often

* The 1937 film *Shall We Dance?*, with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, spotlights Hoorcor performing this feat.

seen in performances of acrobatic *adagios*. In one step from the manual, “Tour Jeté to the Knee,” the man lunges forward while the woman executes a “Tour Jeté” that lands in *arabesque* on the thigh of his bent leg—he supports the landing by holding the top of her standing leg.¹³⁰ In another, the “One-arm Lift,” the man lifts the woman directly overhead, holding one ankle for leverage and placing one hand in the small of her back; once in the air, she bends backward and upside-down over his hand with one leg bent, the other stretched and pointed, and one arm floating toward her head while the other reaches toward the ceiling.¹³¹

High-Kicking

According to Wayburn, the High-Kicking subset of Eccentric Dancing included “the so-called ‘legmania’ varieties of dancing.”¹³² High-Kicking received its own level of notoriety: it was indeed spectacular, especially in contrast to the period’s ballet, which mostly required that dancers’ legs should go no higher than ninety degrees, and it caused an uproar from the classical instructors, who railed about it in the press. In 1902, the *Chicago Record-Herald* interviewed Italian ballerina Maria Bonfanti, who by then had opened her New York City school:

Mme. Bonfanti does not approve of the high kick, that obnoxious feature which has crept into modern dancing, and which many professors include in their teaching. She declares it injurious to health, a sudden dislocation of the hip, and the displacement of abdominal organs being necessary for its accomplishment. Besides, she points out to you, the moment the foot is lifted above the hip, grace is lost, and the dancer becomes a mere contortionist.... ‘The dance, more than any other art, requires time, patience and health to sustain it. And if you begin by dislocating your hip, where will you be after awhile?’¹³³

The advocates for the controversial trend were also given a voice in the media. The

“American Ballet-Master,” Earle Wallace of Los Angeles, is quoted in *The Dance Magazine*: “There was a time—the time still exists in the schools of the Russian ballet—where to kick beyond a certain height was not considered ‘the thing.’ It was not good form. How far would our American dancers get if they adhered to ideas like this? Not very!”¹³⁴ By the beginning of the research period High-Kicking had already been causing a stir for some time: its capacity to cause devastating injuries became apparent as early as 1894, when the *New York Times* ran an article about a seventeen-year-old dancer’s untimely demise due to paralysis, titled: “High Kicking Caused her Death.”¹³⁵

Musical Comedy Dancing

In his multi-volume dancing manual, Tomaroff included dance steps specific to the musical comedy stage; he claims that the style “develops a perfect sense of rhythm,” and is made up “almost exclusively [of] footwork.”¹³⁶ Wayburn also describes Musical Comedy Dancing in his 1925 dance manual, *The Art of Stage Dancing*:

It combines pretty attitudes, poses, pirouettes and the several different types of kicking steps that are now so popular. Soft-shoe steps break into it here and there in unexpected ways and places, adding a pleasing variety to the menu. The tempo enhances and harmonizes the scene and the action. There is no monotony, no tiresome sameness; yet the varying forms of action blend into a perfect continuity. The dance is full of happy surprise steps, perhaps, or unexpected climaxes and variations that arouse the interest as they quickly flash by. Often there is featured in Musical Comedy dancing a bit of so called ‘character’ work, which may be anything—Bowery, Spanish, Dutch, eccentric, Hawaiian, or any of the countless other characteristic types. Also there are touches of dainty ballet work interspersed among the other features.¹³⁷

The specificity and intricacy of ballet, in this light, were its most valuable components for musical comedy dancers. As late as 1948, dance writer Edwin Denby asserted that, “Another problem of our [American] style [of ballet] is that of

differentiation from musical comedy. Our choreographers and many ballet dancers work in musical comedy and this tends to confuse and banalize their approach to ballet.”¹³⁸ Such inadvertent blending of forms is indicative of how deeply the dance forms on the popular stage were ingrained in the American dance psyche of the research period; it is likely that the era’s ballet absorbed numerous subtle influences from several dance forms, and it probably left its own trail of influence on those forms as well.

Toe-Dancing

Early twentieth century *pointe* dancing was not reserved for classical forms. From the nineteenth century to the beginning of the research period, the soft *pointe* shoe, without a boxed toe or a stiffened shank, was the standard. Early twentieth century dancer Kathryn Mulloony describes the soft shoes, given to her by her first classically based teacher: “They were really Nicolinis from Italy, and they were very soft toe shoes. I couldn’t stand on those at all. I had to hold on to [*sic*] the walls or anything I could hang on to to stand on toe. And she made me wear those until my toes went through the front. Never any lamb’s wool.... They were very much shellacked, if anything. They were like plain soft ballet slippers that you wear today.”¹³⁹ As the period progressed, however, the blocked *pointe* shoe became more widely available, and by 1920 it was the norm, having supplanted the soft *pointe* shoe to the dismay of many foreign teachers whose careers had been built in the softer shoes; Barzel asserts that, “anybody could stand in these shoes and many so-called dancers rushed to appear in them before they knew how to dance. The new shoe increased the range of toe dancing, gave it a larger vocabulary and greater virtuosity.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, Mlle. Dazié was photographed in her

novelty toe-skates (fig. 5). A standard pair of *pointe* shoes with a metal plate over the toe and two small skate blades running along the platform of the shoe, toe-skates are one example of a modification made to the boxed *pointe* shoe for the purposes of popular spectacle.



Figure 5: Mlle. Dazié's "Toe Skates." Bain News Service. George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress.

Toe-tapping, similarly, required that the *pointe* shoe be altered; in this case a metal tap was affixed over the square toe of the shoe so that the dancer could execute tap steps and ballet steps *en pointe* simultaneously. British dancer Renée Dymott performed a solo dance where she toe-tapped up and down a small flight of stairs while accompanying herself on the banjo,¹⁴¹ thereby fusing the staircase routine, which Bill "Bojangles" Robinson had popularized in vaudeville, with a toe-dancing element.

Barbara Naomi Cohen, in her research on Wayburn, describes the context for, and content of, toe-tapping dances:

...it was essentially a group technique, designed for precision teams ranging in number from two to forty-eight.... The most important steps were those in which the body rotated on the supporting foot since these provided the greatest amount of visual movement with the least amount of aural contact. Thus, *piqués tournés*, *piqués detournés*, *coupés* and, especially, *échappés* were the prevalent steps.... The major difficulty was that the sound element could not be properly controlled—a dancer simply could not change position or place on stage without making an aural statement.”¹⁴²

As with most other popular forms of dance during the period, ballet’s purists were outraged. In her 1913 article, “Training for the Ballet,” in *McClure’s Magazine*, writer Willa Cather denounced popular adaptations of toe-dancing, in part because much of the dance was performed with the legs in a parallel position rather than with ballet’s requisite turn-out: “There is an easy kind of toe-dancing, a ‘fake’ performance which we often see generously applauded in musical comedy, in which the dancer stands on her toes *instep towards the front*. This is not toe-dancing at all, in the proper sense, but a clumsy counterfeit which requires no skill. Any child can be taught to do it in a few months. The only correct position for toe-dancing is with the *soles of the feet facing each other*.”¹⁴³ But not all *pointework* on the popular stage was flashy. Rasch presented her Albertina Rasch Dancers in a Ziegfeld production that “featur[ed] very intricate but delicate pointe work;” like her Broadway successor de Mille, Rasch was notable for not conceding too much of ballet’s classicism to suit popular tastes despite the fact that she worked primarily on the popular stage.¹⁴⁴

Africanist Influences: Jazz and Swing Dance

Particularly during the 1920s and '30s, numerous dances that began in Harlem's nightclubs were adapted for the popular stage, and were typically performed by white dancers in vaudeville or ballroom exhibitions.¹⁴⁵ Because credit was rarely, if ever, given to the African American artists who originated or taught the material, they purposefully made the rhythms and tempi of their dances more complex and faster in an attempt to make it harder for white dancers to dance the steps.^{*146} Dance scholar Danielle Robinson asserts that African American jazz dance teachers in black dance studios "had to remain 'invisible'—while they opened studios, gave lessons, taught routines, and choreographed for theatres and clubs all over Manhattan."¹⁴⁷ At the very least these instructors were compensated monetarily for their work, but they were publicly denied credit for the choreography. Robinson and others claim that early twentieth century audiences were introduced to the Africanist aesthetic through the performances of those like the Castles, who studied with African American jazz dance teachers.[†] While the Africanist elements of the dance during this period were masked, the quiet, "behind the scenes" contributions of African American teachers and choreographers made a substantial impact on the growth of concert dance during that period.¹⁴⁸

New York was a widely diversified city, yet there was almost a total lack of racial integration on the city's stages. A number of European and Russian ballet teachers and

^{*} By 1941, when Universal Pictures released its film adaptation of the Broadway production, *Hellzapoppin'*, the speed had risen to such an extent that the dancers' feet appear as a blur on the screen; their rhythm is nearly indiscernible.

[†] Two seminal sources describing the Africanist aesthetic to which I refer here are Brenda Dixon Gottschild's "Five Premises of an Africanist Aesthetic," in *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*, Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies no. 179 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996): 11-19; and Kariamu Welsh Asante's "Commonalities in African Dance: An Aesthetic Foundation," in *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity*, ed. Molefi Kefe Asante and Kariamu Welsh Asante (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985): 71-82.

choreographers, however, were anxious to incorporate elements of the Africanist aesthetic, particularly rhythmic syncopation and a sense of bodily abandon, into their classical work. They approached it from the perspective of growth—as an exciting expansion of the classical form. Despite what might otherwise be viewed as appropriation, it is likely that the intentions of these individuals were born of their artistic curiosity: they wanted to draw on Africanist aesthetic elements in order to create a new and uniquely American ballet, because they saw the Africanist movement as particularly American in style. Notably, during the 1920s and ‘30s, the country was consumed with the concept of Americanism,¹⁴⁹ and through the Harlem Renaissance, African-American art was flourishing. Both of these factors likely influenced ballet practitioners to take interest in fusing American jazz with Euro-Russian ballet.

In a 1924 *New York Times* interview, Mikhail Mordkin of the Moscow Imperial Ballet expressed his desire for an American composer to write the music for a “jazz ballet.” He wanted to choreograph “a ballet that will achieve the emotional effect of an animal’s cry—a primitive wail—a woman’s scream—a ballet that can be interpreted by animal movements, epitomizing perfection of lithesomeness and graceful bodily action in faultless rhythm.”¹⁵⁰ Mordkin felt that American jazz music and dance would invigorate the classical tradition.¹⁵¹ In an interview for the *Washington Post* article, “What is to Become of Jazz?”, he discussed the form as having a singularly American sensibility: “[Jazz] will live on because it has something important to say. Jazz music at its best is the very expression of American life. Here in America you are not pessimists. You look at the bright side of things and keep a laugh in your life. Well, that is the way with jazz. There is a laugh in it. There is liveliness and comedy. There is a quick, unexpected

motion in it. That, too, expresses the hurry and quick movement of American life.”¹⁵²

Notably, Mordkin’s comment is focused on only one particular facet of jazz and does not acknowledge its complexity and broad range of expressive qualities. But his association of jazz with the American temperament and identity indicates that the Africanist aesthetic had already become an important influence upon those who were working to develop ballet with a distinctly American voice.

Rasch, too, was a strong advocate for the inclusion of the Africanist aesthetic into the Euro-Russian classical tradition for the purpose of developing an American ballet. She noted: “What Venice was for the Renaissance art and architecture, that is New York today to an interracial rhythm, the cradle of a new esthetic alphabet. Instead of polytonic beauties we want polyrhythmic sensations.”¹⁵³ The cadences, the moods, and the sensibilities of Africanist art contributed to the period’s emphasis on Americanism, and for many immigrants, including Rasch, the Africanist aesthetic helped to define America. Rasch would likely have agreed with contemporary scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild, who describes the period’s popular stage as “a venue that manifests a harmonious marriage of Africanist and Europeanist aesthetic principles.”¹⁵⁴ Rasch’s basic understanding of the American temperament in ballet is predicated on the incorporation of these Africanist characteristics into the classical tradition, to which she alludes in her 1929 article for *The Dance Magazine*, “The New World Ballet”:

There is something typically American in our atmosphere that makes us different from the children of the Old World, and that is our racial rhythm, our climatic

* For more on Rasch, see the following series of articles by Frank W.D. Ries: “Albertina Rasch: The Broadway Career,” *Dance Chronicle* 6, no. 2 (1983): 95-137; “Albertina Rasch: The Hollywood Career,” *Dance Chronicle* 6, no. 4 (1983): 281-362; and “Albertina Rasch: The Concert Career and the Concept of the American Ballet,” *Dance Chronicle* 7, no. 2 (1984): 159-197.

temperament and, above all, our impressionistic mode of thinking. One characteristic of the New World mind is that it enjoys a suggestion of an esthetic sensation more than an accurate description of it. Instead of traditional realism we prefer dynamic surprises, accentuated action and syncopated sensations.¹⁵⁵

Rasch's "combination of classical pointe work and American idiomatic music,"¹⁵⁶ which she referred to as "American Ballet," was a direct attempt to incorporate the American jazz sensibility, for which she had deep affection, into the classical ballet she brought with her from the Imperial School in Vienna.¹⁵⁷ In 1925, she staged a ballet for fifty dancers at the Hippodrome to George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*; Frank W.D. Ries describes the piece as, "abstract," "with the dancers in various shades of blue, and choreography that experimented with position, form, and movement patterns rather than telling a story."¹⁵⁸ Casey has asserted that Rasch's blend of European classical ballet with jazz music and Africanist principles, "foreshadow[ed] similar experiments by choreographers such as George Balanchine who are more commonly credited with this innovation."¹⁵⁹

Through the work of foreign teachers and choreographers like Mordkin and Rasch, the Africanist aesthetic had a strong influence on America's ballet during the research period. Perhaps with their worldly perspectives, they were able to see inherent value—and the particularly American qualities—in the work of African American artists, which were obscured by social and cultural barriers in the United States. In this light, the

* Sally Banes and Brenda Dixon Gottschild have both discussed Balanchine's inclusion of the Africanist aesthetic in his work. See Banes's "Balanchine and Black Dance," in *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994): 53-69; and Gottschild's "Stripping the Emperor: George Balanchine and the Americanization of Ballet," in *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996): 59-80.

contributions of African American dancers, teachers, and choreographers are an integral part of America's ballet lineage that took shape during the early twentieth century.

Part IV

A Clash of Ideals: Euro-Russian Ballet Training meets American Heterogeneity

European and Russian immigrants comprised the vast majority of teachers working to further the classical ballet tradition, and most hailed from Europe and Russia's most celebrated opera houses: the Paris Opéra, La Scala in Milan, the Mariinsky in St. Petersburg, and the Bolshoi in Moscow. Upon arrival, they immediately encountered an American aversion to ballet in the European tradition. In addition to the challenge of navigating a new place with a new language and culture, they were faced with the public's devaluing of their life's work—it was viewed as light entertainment, with little, if any, artistic value. Americans, however, likely felt detached from the aristocratic sensibility of classical ballet, even in a city as all-inclusive as New York: as late as 1931 a critic for *Billboard* magazine remarked that dancers would be “taking a chance in trying to sell an act composed entirely of classical dancing.”¹⁶⁰ Through the first half of the research period, the American public knew ballet only as a European import—foreign ballerinas came to the States to dance leading roles in musical spectacles like *The Black Crook*, and to dance in opera ballets, movie prologs, and revues. From 1909 to 1934, however, immigrant teachers from the academic Euro-Russian tradition worked both to educate the American public in the conventions of classical ballet and to establish a ballet with an American sensibility, in spite of a fundamental cultural disagreement as to ballet's artistic value.

The students, especially during the first half of the research period, were mostly starry-eyed ingénues who flocked to New York City from across America to find success on the popular stage. With no ballet companies in New York, the notion of devoting one's life to rigorous, daily ballet training was not yet established.¹⁶¹ Foreign-born teachers became frustrated when their classical agendas clashed with American students' desires for broad knowledge in multiple popular dance forms; this discordance prompted former Diaghilev dancer Constantin Kobleff to include the following statement in his school brochure from the 1920s: "To become a dancer it is absolutely essential that you should know the GENUINE FUNDAMENTALS of the ballet before you take up any other form of Dancing."¹⁶² Some immigrant teachers—perhaps in an attempt to find a balance between their classical lineages and the American attitude towards ballet—adapted their approaches to support the American system of popular stage styles fused with ballet. Anatole Bourman, a graduate of the Russian Imperial School who was in the same class as Vaslav Nijinsky, offered several kinds of training at his school: "Ballet/Toe, Tap/Musical Comedy, Acrobatic," and "Ladies Health Class with ballet foundation."¹⁶³ Other teachers, in contrast, held tightly to the traditions they had arrived with. Menzeli—a student of the Romantic ballerina Marie Taglioni and a dancer in ballet spectacles across Europe and the United States—taught ballet in New York at the Knickerbocker Conservatory from the late nineteenth century until 1919. In one of the programs for her students' annual performance, she included a poem that derided the lack of seriousness on the popular stage in contrast to ballet's classical tradition:

‘Vaudeville Dances’
By Alice, The Dancing Poetess

I

What constitutes the dancers
In vaudeville these days?
Is their work like Pavlowa's,
Clayton's, or Geneé's?

II

Ah, no, the barefoot beauty,
With toes of dainty pink,
Has made the real artiste
Into obscurity sink.

III

With jingling beads and drapery,
(Transparent, don't you know,)
They whirl about the stage and show—
All they have to show.

IV

Princesses there are many,
A new one every week,
In ten cent shows and vaudeville,
You won't have far to seek.

V

And dance, you ask? O, my, no,
'Twould be a waste of time;
They're not there to show their art,
But a naked form divine.

VI

And does the real artiste fear
These idols of the day?
No, for even jumping nakedness,
In time, must pass away.^{*164}

The majority of early twentieth century dancers in America were young women, and despite the active first-wave feminist movement, women performers—especially dancers—garnered little respect from the public. Malvina Cavallazzi, the first director of

* Ironically, Menzeli was one of the teachers during the period who included a number of popular styles in the curricular offerings at her school. For more on Menzeli, see Barzel, "Elizabetta Menzeli," *Dance Chronicle* 19, no. 3 (1996): 277-288.

the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School, enforced a strict dress code in the nineteenth-century style that exuded modesty—knee-length tarlatan skirt, bodice, and silk tights with satin slippers.* Cavallazzi herself wore long dresses to the floor with high collars and high button shoes when she taught (fig. 6). Despite her efforts to keep the ballet looking chaste, a journalist observing a class around 1910 made a covert reference to the dancers' physiques: "The pupils showed excellent form (form is used here not the way you mean) when the piano started the exercises."¹⁶⁵ The assumption that the reader would understand the word "form" to indicate proportion of figure rather than quality of technique is indicative of how bodies—and particularly women's bodies—were perceived on the early twentieth century American stage. Kendall has addressed audience perceptions of dance during the period: "Exactly what went on three-dimensionally on a dance stage was rarely talked over, since to most Americans 'classic' dance now looked very much like pictures, photographs, of itself. Dance to most Americans then was a look, a style, not an art of motion. The look was either praised or condemned, depending on who was seeing it, since dance was caught up in larger questions within the culture."¹⁶⁶ The New York ballet scene, difficult as it was with a scarcity of professional venues, was thus made even more so because of the public's tendency to look primarily

* In Part One of her memoir, Severn explains the difficulties dancers had with the dancing attire of the day. The following anecdote illuminates the lengths to which young dancers went for a career in the early twentieth century: "We used cotton for class and silk for the stage (this was long before nylon hosiery had been invented), but in both cases they tended to wrinkle over the knees and around the ankles. The usual method of keeping them up was to tie a coin, preferably a quarter, securely into the material of the tights in front of each hip by a long piece of white tape. The two pieces of tape were then crossed in front, wound around the waist and knotted together, which arrangement invariably resulted, for me at least, in a dreadful stomach ache, but it seemed the only way to avoid unsightly wrinkles" ("Scenes from a Dancer's Life, Part One: 1910-1919," *Dance Chronicle* 15, no. 3 [1992]: 262-3).

at the dancer's physique, rather than at the quality of the dancing or the choreography, as the chief component of ballet.



Figure 6: Malvina Cavallazzi coaching a student. 1913. Photo from Willa Cather's "Training For The Ballet" in *McClure's Magazine*.

This period saw the American tours of numerous foreign dancers and ballet companies, nearly all of whom made performing in New York City a priority. Romantic ballerina Fanny Elssler performed to great acclaim during the mid-nineteenth century; the Danish ballerina Adeline Genée toured the United States several times between 1908 and 1914; Pavlova made her first visit in 1910 with partner Mordkin; and Diaghilev's Ballets Russes arrived for their first American tour in 1916. The *corps de ballets* for

these tours were often assembled using local dancers in each touring city prior to the engagement.¹⁶⁷ While joining the *corps de ballet* for a touring foreign dancer might not have earned young American women any immediate respect, Kendall asserts that their participation in such performances gave American audiences the opportunity to see some of their own American “girls” involved in a European high art form, which increased the public’s familiarity with ballet.¹⁶⁸

Despite the appearance of their own American dancers on the stage, Americans’ knowledge of ballet—especially early in the period—was based on these European and Russian imports. Ballet likely did not feel American to the American public. They perceived the work of choreographers like Fokine, whose dancers often wore tunics and headbands, to be aesthetic dancing and not ballet at all.¹⁶⁹ Ballet’s typically regal physicality and gravitas, derived from its development under European monarchic governments, was antithetical to the democratic, pluralist spirit that permeated New York City, and thus audiences could not relate to it as a form of expression. Severn recalls being rejected by producers in vaudeville, who did not seem to appreciate her classical sensibilities: “I disdained the idea of Vaudeville but finally went to see the managers concerned and found that the shoe was on the other foot: *they* disdained me. The central booking office... informed me that I was too artistic and would not draw audiences on the road.”¹⁷⁰ Bessie Clayton, an American ballet dancer on the variety stage from the turn of the century into the first half of the period, also found that the management disapproved when she performed in a more classical vein: “We admit it is very beautiful and very graceful,” they said, “but our patrons do not want to see you in that style of your art.”¹⁷¹ In her book *Theatrical Dancing in America*, Winthrop Palmer asserts that,

What Americans wanted when they attended a performance of dance, was beauty and grace in a woman, virility in man, skillful solo and adagio variations, romantic (preferably German, Austrian or Polish) music, elaborate costumes and spectacular settings. They wanted to enjoy themselves; not to be made aware of their own deeper feelings, not to be stirred in spirit and moved to pity or terror. They did not want their conventions disturbed.¹⁷²

America had been built on a puritanical foundation that was intended to distinguish it from its European forerunners; classical ballet, a decidedly hierarchical foreign art form, was viewed at least into the 1920s as having participants of questionable moral standing—it was neither easily absorbed nor appreciated by American audiences.¹⁷³

Yet while Americans did not have the taste for classical ballet in the European tradition, producers and audiences alike enjoyed ballet when it was fortified with American stage gimmicks, and it became more and more prevalent in those forms in revue lineups. Ballet's multitude of incarnations—including toe-tapping, eccentric and acrobatic dancing, and aesthetic dance forms—exemplified the interchange of classical ballet with the popular sphere. Ballet's most entertaining and exploitable aspects—turning and jumping, for example—began to take precedence over its refined articulation for the sake of catering to a paying audience. A young de Mille, who studied ballet in New York in the late 1920s, remembers the emphasis placed on learning consecutive turning sequences, like *fouettés*, in ballet classes, no matter how pedagogically inappropriate they may have been.¹⁷⁴ Severn, in a 1916 letter to her mother when she was fifteen years old, lamented: "I am just simply sick. I can't do fouettés yet. I can't even do sixteen properly. I think it's perfectly awful it's lasted so long."¹⁷⁵ Young dancers were desperate to learn such tricks, which were essential to careers on the popular stage, and many teachers—qualified or not—were willing to teach them. Throughout the period,

independently owned and operated dance studios thrived because of increased demand: some, operated mostly by foreigners, were exclusive to ballet, and others offered students a wide variety of styles in which to train.

Part V

Ballet Training in New York City: A Miscellany of Approaches

The dancers and teachers who settled in the United States to teach were aware of and frustrated by the disparity between ballet training in Europe and in America, and many pushed their classical agendas in the face of strong public resistance. Because Americans did not see ballet as an art form, they likewise did not understand that ballet was as steeped in its history and as meticulous in its methods as painting or music.¹⁷⁶ Kendall points out that most Americans in the nineteenth century were not aware of the pedagogic tradition that was the foundation of ballet in Europe and Russia: “No one in the American audiences... quite realized there was a *system* involved in this kind of dancing, and a highly exacting mode of study; that the ballerinas advertised from La Scala or San Carlo had emerged from academies far stricter and more disciplined than any convent school for girls.”¹⁷⁷ In 1913, Cather lamented, “In America we have had no dancers because we have had no schools, and no public that knew good dancing from bad. America has long been the paradise of poor teachers.”¹⁷⁸ She was aware (as Kendall would later put it) that the American public was unacquainted with the behind-the-scenes work that went into the making of a ballet dancer, so she took an instructional tone with her readership in *McClure's Magazine*: “In classic dancing there are five positions of the feet, arms, and body, which underlie all dancing; and these are all learned at the bar

[sic]....”¹⁷⁹ The establishment of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School in 1909 represented a turning point in public education in ballet, but it took the entire twenty-five year span of the research period to prepare American audiences, dancers, and teachers for a national ballet tradition of their own. Most contemporary scholarship on American ballet has either neglected or lightly glossed over the period; some have gone so far as to stigmatize the period as one of total ignorance with regard to classical ballet.¹⁸⁰ Yet, from 1909 to 1934, many significant teachers from the most revered ballet lineages were working to establish a tradition in America, and the overall perception of ballet and its training shifted markedly. What follows are descriptions of the various kinds of training grounds—each with a different philosophy—where study in classical ballet was first made available to early twentieth century American dancers.

The Metropolitan Opera Ballet School

On December 6, 1909, under the direction of Italian ballerina and former Metropolitan Opera Ballet dancer Malvina Cavallazzi, the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School welcomed its first class of dancers. Located on the roof of the Metropolitan, which occupied the entire city block from Thirty-ninth to Fortieth Streets between Broadway and Seventh Avenue, the school was the first of its kind in the United States. It was based on the European academy model: it provided the type of professional training required for would-be ballet dancers under the auspices of an established artistic institution.^{*181}

* There were other Italian teachers in New York who pre-dated Cavallazzi, including Bonfanti, most notable for her starring role in the nineteenth century American extravaganza *The Black Crook* and

For the first few decades of its existence, the European concept of training to which the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School adhered butted heads with the American understanding of ballet. In her memoir *Dance to the Piper*, de Mille discusses ballet training as being antithetical to the ethos of the period: “Mother, living in an age where self-expression was considered paramount, was afraid of the stultifying effect of [ballet] training. It was then the proudest boast a mother could make—‘Entirely self-taught, my dear, never had a lesson in her life.’”¹⁸² Historian Camille Hardy extrapolates on de Mille’s assertion, noting that Americans “perceived dance as a series of skillful steps performed in a rhythmic pattern, a simple accomplishment easily gained with a few lessons. These spectators had no concept of dance as an expressive medium, nor did they have any experience or understanding of classical technique.”¹⁸³ The first class of students at the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School embodied this perspective: a reporter from the *Telegraph* described the group that attended the school’s opening day: “There was the pouting girl whose family told her she was a genius; there was the clever girl who knew it anyway; there was the girl who thought she could dance because she knows a woman who once had a trial before Loïe Fuller; and there is the one who has wanted all her life to star in the shows because she is tired of street cars and prefers life in a motor.”¹⁸⁴ In addition to the problems inherent to a group of ballet students who had no idea of the rigors involved in ballet training, the public voiced their “objections to the formation of a ballet school for American girls on the ground that the compensation was too small to attract them to such a career.”¹⁸⁵ Cather explained the situation in 1913:

her teaching of Isadora Duncan. For more on Bonfanti’s career and teaching, see Barbara Barker’s *Ballet or Ballyhoo: The American Careers of Maria Bonfanti, Rita Sangalli, and Giuseppina Morlacchi* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1984).

“After a girl has had one year of instruction, she enters the Metropolitan ballet at \$15 a week. The second year she is in the ballet she gets \$18 a week, and the third year \$20 a week.”¹⁸⁶ The *corps de ballet* dancers were given free classes at the school and were consequently paid far less for performances than the dancers in the popular theater, who could make two to three times the wage at the Metropolitan.¹⁸⁷ Compounding the difficulties faced by classical ballet’s practitioners were the opera’s short, only half-year, contracts, in contrast to the year-round performing schedule on the popular stages. This financial discrepancy caused many dancers to defect to vaudeville for the sake of earning a better salary, and the directors of the opera ballet often had to re-teach roles to new dancers in the course of the same season.¹⁸⁸

In addition to the internal difficulties presented by opera manager Gatti-Casazza’s lack of support for the opera’s ballet, external problems arose as well. One of the biggest hindrances Cavallazzi faced was the municipal law enacted by the Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which prohibited the hiring of those under age sixteen. Because the dancers were hired as employees at the Metropolitan Opera upon their entry into the school, the would-be *corps de ballet* dancers could not begin their training until they were sixteen years of age. According to a 1909 article in *The Musical Leader*, Cavallazzi felt that starting to train seriously at age sixteen would not allow American dancers to rise to any level beyond the *corps de ballet*; she had begun her own training at Milan’s La Scala when she was eight years old.¹⁸⁹ In addition, she found the students’ prior training to be largely insufficient: “They are nearly all without experience. Those that have taken lessons do not always know as much as they think.”¹⁹⁰

Despite such substantial challenges coming from all sides, the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School, with Cavallazzi at the helm, endured in a forbidding environment. She and her successors forged a legacy of systematic, institutional training in America, along the lines of the European classical tradition.

Independent Teachers

In addition to Cavallazzi at the Metropolitan, a number of other immigrant teachers encountered the obstacles facing classical ballet in America during the period. These teachers, however, did not have the resources of an established organization at their disposal; they had to face the American public sentiment without the benefit of an institutional reputation. While the Metropolitan Opera's management was not as supportive of the ballet as it might have been, Cavallazzi's teaching was inherently supported by her affiliation with such a visible and renowned organization. The same could be said of teachers in larger studios as well, who were able to use their employers' names and resources to sustain a teaching practice. Independent teachers, however, could rely only on their personal relationships with students to keep afloat. They taught classes in the studio spaces they built in their apartments, which affected how and what they could teach. Rochelle Zide-Booth, a former dancer with the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo, recalled her experience of classes with Elisabeth Anderson-Ivantzova, a Bolshoi ballerina who established her studio in 1937 in her New York apartment: "We did a lot of pirouettes, oh my *God* did we do a lot of pirouettes, because we couldn't really do big jumps, because there wasn't room."¹⁹¹

Variety Studios

Large, privately owned dance studios, following the lead of vaudeville and revue, sprouted up across New York in response to the demand for eclectic, quick, dance training. To the chagrin of many teachers in the Euro-Russian tradition, dancers were seeking tuition that could improve their job prospects in a relatively short period of time; one or two years compared to the eight-year training program at the Russian Imperial Schools. The studios taught numerous dance styles and offered instruction on how to navigate the ins and outs of the American popular theater.¹⁹² These schools' diverse curricula emphasized the importance of those tricks and specialties that incensed the purists but launched careers on the variety stage. De Mille, having attended a variety studio herself, describes a typical ballet class: "Everybody was up on point from the very beginning. Everyone, even youngsters, turned *fouettés* pirouettes at the end of every class. Knees and ankles could take care of themselves. One had to have turns in order to finish a number. How else? So we turned. I learned to do fifty *fouettés* on spot in fair form without being able to maintain line in a single other exercise."¹⁹³ Dancer Kathryn Mulloony also recalled her experience: "You were given toe shoes, and as long as you could stand up on your toes... if you could get all the way across the floor in *bouffées*... you got into the recital."¹⁹⁴ While such testimony is evidence that not all of the New York studios could bring in classically trained foreigners to teach their ballet classes, most of the larger, comprehensive studios in the city did rely on European and Russian instructors. Adolph Bolm—of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes—and Mordkin were hired to teach ballet at the John Murray Anderson-Robert Milton School of Theatre, which also employed Léo Staats, *Maître de Ballet* at the Paris Opéra, to teach during the summer of

1926.^{*} Kobeleff taught at the Albertina Rasch School, Maria Yurieva and Vecheslav Swoboda of the Bolshoi were the ballet instructors at the Chalif School, and Russians Ivan Tarasoff and Alexis Yakovleff taught at the Ned Wayburn School.¹⁹⁵ (fig. 7) In addition to ballet classes—which school brochures refer to as “Classic Ballet,” “Classic Dancing,” “Modern Americanized Ballet Technique,” or “Modern Ballet”—these schools offered a wide array of dance styles that reflected the performance genres on the vaudeville and revue stage. Catalogs from several schools describe courses in “Acrobatic Dancing,” “Musical Comedy Dancing,” “Tap and Step Dancing,” “Exhibition Ballroom,” “Character and National Dancing,” “Toe Technique,” “Interpretative Dancing,”[†] “Oriental Dancing,” and “Dramatic and Narrative Pantomime.”¹⁹⁶ In addition, some studios offered courses designed to prepare amateur or beginner dancers for a stage career, including “Foundation Technique,” “Figure Perfecting,” “Limbering,” “Reducing or Building Up,” and “Body Conditioning” (fig. 8). These additional classes were designed to improve flexibility, coordination, and strength, and to help dancers achieve their desired physique.¹⁹⁷ By offering supplemental courses, the studios made it possible for students to advance more quickly and to begin their stage careers in a shorter amount of time. To that end, some teachers in variety studios, like Wayburn, required these courses during students’ initial training.¹⁹⁸

^{*} For more about Staats’s work in America, see George Dorris, “Léo Staats at the Roxy, 1926-1928,” *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 13, no. 1 (summer 1995): 84-99.

[†] In October of 1928, advertisements for the Anderson-Milton school in *The Dance Magazine* indicate that Martha Graham taught classes in “Interpretative Dancing.”



Figure 7: Elizabetta Menzeli, teaching at the Knickerbocker Conservatory. Photo circa 1910.

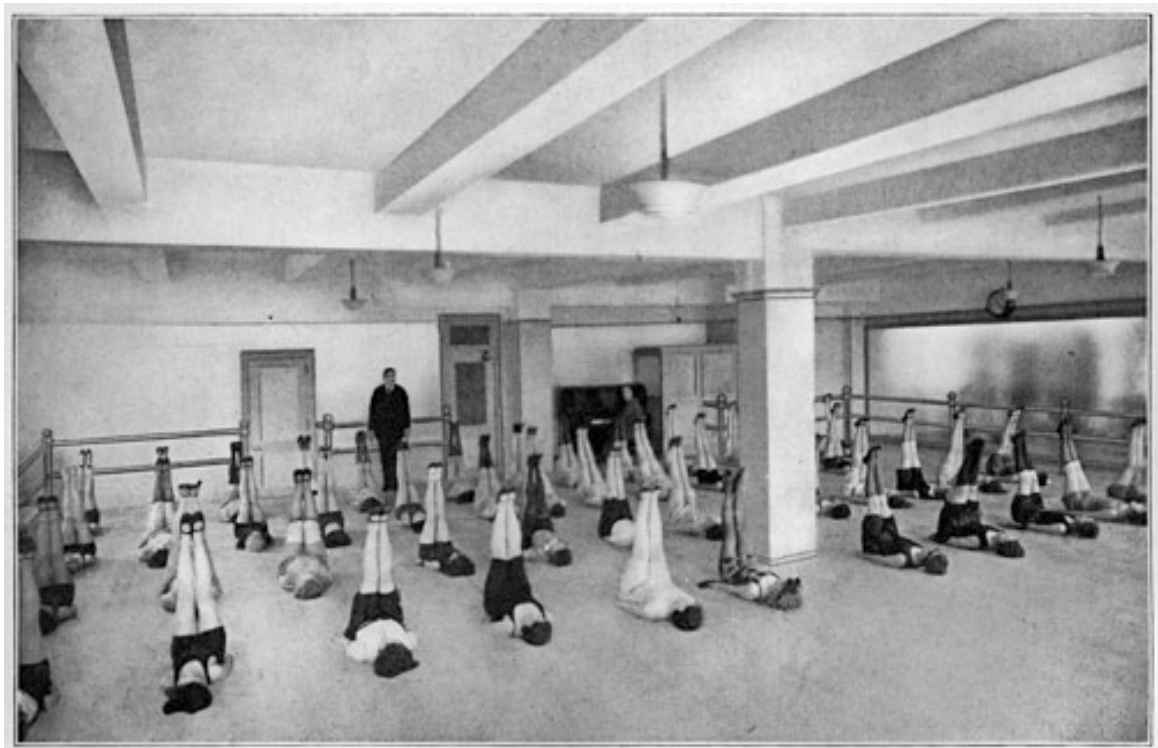


Figure 8: "Conditioning Class at the Ned Wayburn Studios." *The Art of Stage Dancing*. 1925.

The variety studio perhaps most clearly exemplifies the effect of the period's heterogeneity on ballet. In tandem with the popular stage, the variety studio exemplifies the integration of ballet with popular dance forms during the period. Largely deferential

to trends of the popular stage and to the public interest, they were the locus of much of the cross-influence between ballet and the popular sphere.

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The heterogeneity of the New York City environment for dance was a primary influence on the budding American ballet between 1909 and 1934. The performing and training venues, the dance styles, the performers and the audiences were diverse and all-inclusive. With various permutations of classical ballet appearing on the popular stage and in popular studios across New York, audiences did not perceive much difference between ballet and popular dance forms. Contrary to our contemporary understanding of the dichotomy between classical ballet and popular dance—or “high” and “low” art—between 1909 and 1934 the two were nearly indistinguishable. Rather, ballet absorbed the influence of popular dance, and vice versa, as it developed in its new American home. In Chapter Two, I examine the concurrent effects of American democracy and capitalism on the country’s developing ballet.

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Chapter Two

Ballet's American Context: Democracy and Capitalism

"To organize a ballet as a private enterprise to pay for itself as it develops is to gamble rashly."

—John Martin, *"Creating an American Ballet"*
New York Times, 1930

In her 1959 book, *The American Ballet*, dance historian Olga Maynard summarizes the foundations for American ballet; her assertions represent a consensus among ballet's advocates: "Ballet in America has struggled for its bare subsistence, and has grown, not out of royal and state endowments or the benevolence of a dilettante balletomane society, but out of faith, hope and charity." She also contends: "We have no one company and school established as our National Ballet, and no universal academic standard for all American dancers, and yet American ballet is internationally recognized, to its honor, and ranked with the national ballets of France, Russia, Denmark, and England."¹ Just as the ballets in Europe and Russia were built in the image of each country's governing structure, ballet in America came to mirror the nation's democracy.

In 1937, esteemed arbiter of American ballet Lincoln Kirstein wrote:

The American style will not imitate the Russian, but instead be its equivalent for our time and place. Our legitimate reflection of a Democracy is of necessity not distant, but immediately intimate.... American style springs or should spring from our own training and environment, which was not in an Imperial School or a Parisian imitation of it. Ours is a style bred also from basket-ball courts, track and swimming meets and junior-proms.... It is frank, open, fresh and friendly. It can

be funny without seeming arch, and serious without seeming pained. These... dancers... wish to establish a direct connection, approaching personal intimacy or its theatrical equivalent with their audiences....²

In contrast to ballet's elite status in many countries abroad, ballet in the United States was accessible to the general populace.^{*} Without a national authority to oversee ballet in the same way as the arts ministries that existed across Europe and in Russia, American ballet was not privy to financial backing from the government, but instead became a commodity that was bought and sold on the American capitalist market. Newly subjected to the whims of the American public and without any assurance of its own long-term survival, ballet in the United States endured despite the challenges of its new context, and it developed some of its unique characteristics along the way.

The 1928 *New York Times* review of Russian dancer and choreographer Alexandre Gavrillov's company, *Ballet Moderne*, describes the paradox that confronted ballet artists in America:

Today there is no... subsidy forthcoming for Gavrillov or any other impresario. If [Americans] are to have a ballet of the first rank it must be built up from comparatively raw material, and the building process, which is a slow one, must be financed through the channel of the box office. Therefore, the situation which Gavrillov would seem to be facing is the necessity for giving us good shows so that we will make it possible by our patronage for him to give us—good shows!³

Foreign dancers, teachers, and choreographers were also keen to the distinction between the European and American funding paradigms; Luigi Albertieri inscribed as much inside the cover of his 1923 dancing manual: "To Otto H. Kahn who, in a land of democracy simply, generously, and intelligently rivals in his support of the arts the

^{*} The term "accessible" has a twofold meaning here: first, it refers to the practical kind of access that audiences would have had to performances in vaudeville and revue, which were more affordable than performances at New York's opera houses; and second, it alludes to the presentation of ballet as populist, in that it reflected the American system of values through familiar and easily comprehensible subject matter.

princely patrons of the past the author dedicates this book.”⁴ European ballet dancers who came to America in the 1870s for “an immediate jump to stardom,” also had a particularly difficult time adjusting to American culture, which, according to historian Barbara Barker, was “rooted in Puritanism and considered ballet fancy entertainment, non-utilitarian, and thus morally suspect.”⁵ Despite the explosion of ballet in New York and across the United States after 1910, the public’s regard for ballet remained tenuous throughout the research period. Not only did the lack of State support leave ballet and its practitioners to fend for themselves financially, but it also fed the American public’s view of ballet as light entertainment—a leg show. In her book, *America Dances*, Agnes de Mille bemoaned the American situation for ballet at the start of the century: “The prevailing American prejudice against dancing, coupled with the denial of professional respect or civic endowment, were crippling disadvantages for ballet dancers.”⁶ While she uses strong language, de Mille’s words express the frustration and distaste that ballet dancers, even American ballet dancers, felt toward their host—or home—country. It was a betrayal of sorts; that America, with its promises of freedom and possibility and progress, might force its art and artists, who were so highly valued in European society, to prove their worth in order to survive in the States. Dancers in America were often left “at the mercy of the management,” or even worse, on the “casting couch.”⁷ While foreign dancers may have had better opportunities for roles in the United States because of their

* Morality often impacted when and how performances could occur. In 1929, the New York City police preempted a performance of Gavrilov’s *Ballet Moderne* because, as the *New York Times* notes, the company had inadvertently violated a long-standing but typically unenforced blue law, which “prohibit[ed] Sunday shows in costume” (“Police Halt Gavrilov’s ‘Ballet Moderne,’” February 25, 1929). In his memoir, dancer Barton Mumaw also recalls the impact of blue laws, as he and other members of Ted Shawn’s company were arrested for dancing on the Sabbath (Jane Sherman and Barton Mumaw, *Barton Mumaw, Dancer: From Denishawn to Jacob’s Pillow and Beyond* [New York: Dance Horizons, 1986]: 81).

more advanced training, Barker suggests that their situations backstage and offstage were often far worse than those they had left behind.⁸

Most immigrant dancers, teachers, and choreographers were frustrated by the lack of reverence for the classical tradition among early twentieth century American audiences. Alternately, there were some who viewed the American landscape as a blank slate, and thus as an opportunity for ballet's growth. Scholar Suzanne Carbonneau Levy asserts that Theodore Kosloff, of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, "accepted American theatrical traditions and American tastes, and obligingly adapted his art to fit the circumstances here. In democratizing his art, he did not seem to feel that he was cheapening or degrading it. In making adaptations, Kosloff enriched not only himself but the popular culture of his new home."⁹ Kosloff is quoted in the *New York Times* in 1916, saying: "I am very glad that vaudeville has taken up the Russian ballet, for that means that the greatest of all dancing will be made democratic. At present the Russian ballet is exclusive and aristocratic. It should be for the people, and vaudeville will bring it to them."¹⁰ Ballet master Gavrillov, too, of the Imperial School in St. Petersburg, crafted his 1926 "Ballet Revue" to reach an American public with little or no knowledge of ballet. The reviewer in the *New York Times* raved:

...At last somebody has translated the ballet that came from Russia into terms that are American. The technique and the artists are still Russian in Alexandre Gavrillov's new entertainment launched at the Princess Theater last night, but the 'Circus' comes straight from Madison Square Garden—the ring, the trapeze lady, the clowns—and even the horses, though the horses are a pony ballet. The significant thing that has happened to the circus is that it has become rhythmic in being reduced to miniature. The spirit is as American as the spirit of 'Petrouchka' is Russian. The result is delightful, amazing, exhilarating.

And the 'Night Club.' Certainly a night club is not necessarily as American as the circus, but Gavrillov's people have made an American night club into a ballet—not some other sort of night club. There you are. Again, it is

exhilarating.... Analysis shows that the trick mainly consists in taking as choreographic raw material a perfectly familiar American form of amusement.¹¹

Many foreign choreographers tried to satisfy the catholic tastes of the American audience by selecting subject matter that was considered American, as the *Times* reviewer mentions. Anatole Bourman, a classmate of Vaslav Nijinsky who became the ballet master at one of New York's largest movie palaces, often choreographed his "movie prologs" to complement the theme of the ensuing film: "At other times," Bourman told *The Dance Magazine*, "I base my ballet on ideas that come to me from picture galleries, sometimes even in popular magazines, or from the plot of a new book or play. I endeavor to have them interpret the spirit of the times, not too classical nor too extreme, but with a touch of something that is in the public eye. That is perhaps what gives the ballet such a wide appeal for everyone."¹² In addition to their own desires to make an American ballet, the basic knowledge that ballet in the United States needed to appeal to a wide margin of the public in order to survive financially likely inspired these choreographers to include American themes in their work.

This chapter gives specific consideration to the impact of democracy and capitalism on ballet in America between 1909 and 1934. By examining the effects of the American socio-economic structure on the growth of ballet in the United States, I refute the contemporary assertion that early twentieth century ballet was merely a "watered down"¹³ derivative of the Euro-Russian tradition. Instead, I argue that democracy and capitalism were far more influential in shaping ballet's classical tradition into a uniquely American art form than has formerly been recognized.

Effects of Capitalism: The Commercialization of Ballet

In America, ballet had always been forced to compete on the free market, which necessitated a change to its previously State-subsidized configuration. Performances and studio ballet classes were available for public consumption, and ballet was conveniently repackaged so that Americans could take it home and participate in it to the extent they desired. As it had for centuries prior, ballet instruction took the form of dance manuals authored by studio owners and ballet masters, but for the first time it included lessons published in newspapers, magazines specific to the dance scene like *The Dance Magazine*, and mail-order catalogs of choreographed dances and dance lessons, costumes, shoes, class attire, musical recordings, or sheet music for accompaniment. Historian Michael Kammen has noted that the research period saw a “major and enduring conflict between the Puritan ethic of saving and the consumer ethos of spending. The intense development of advertising and public relations during the 1920s did much to tip the balance toward consumerism.”¹⁴ Alongside what Kammen calls “the flowering of consumer culture,”¹⁵ ballet was reshaped into saleable units that were regularly advertised for in newspapers and magazines. The buying and selling of ballet had a significant influence on its development as an art form, and it was the key to ballet’s longevity in the American capitalist system. In 1928, *The Dance Magazine* writer Faith Service considered the switch to a capitalist model inherent to ballet’s American identity. In her article, “Dances for Sale!,” she states that Los Angeles instructor Earle Wallace, “believes in commercializing the dance. He believes that dances should be staged—and *sold*. He believes in Americanizing the school of the Russian and other foreign ballets...

He is taking the old ballet and making it American. He is selling it.”¹⁶ Interviewed for the article, Wallace clarified his position:

...I didn’t admire the big, successful Russian dancers nearly as much as I did many successful American business men [*sic*]. I felt that I knew as much about the ballet as did any foreigner of my own age and I had confidence in the so-called fickle American public. With these ideas and ideals in mind I set out to establish myself as ‘The American Ballet-Master’ with the fixed determination to awaken the public to the fact that we could lead the world in the dancing art as well as in other pursuits.

I believe I am accomplishing this. And I am doing it, not by the sacrifice of the artistry of old but by adding to that the good old principles of sound business and progress...¹⁷

Wallace’s thinking underscores the trend in which capitalism is equated to and often conflated with Americanism and the American national identity. Kammen explains: “[c]ommercial and patriotic motives have commonly been intertwined throughout our history. At times the love of country and the love of profit are compatible, even mutually reinforcing.”¹⁸ These dual intentions—of patriotism and profitability—are evident not only in the work of native-born Americans in the dance field, but in the work of immigrants who had adopted America as their home. To the Viennese ballet dancer and American popular stage director Albertina Rasch, capitalism and Americanism were one and the same: “No matter what anyone may say, America is the greatest country on earth. They do know there how to start and handle big enterprises! True, one has to work hard in America; but one gets one’s rewards.”¹⁹

According to scholar Ann Douglas, New York City in the early twentieth century was a “chaotic profusion of commercial enterprises.”²⁰ The advertisements for large corporations offer insight into the direct approach advertisers were taking in the early twentieth century: Glidden Buick reassures their potential buyers in 1933: “You can take

your pick with confidence”; a 1920 advertisement for Pepsodent toothpaste takes a similar tone: “You will see whiter teeth in ten days.”²¹ Ballet teachers—subject to the same capitalist context as corporations—were in competition with one another for students. Lesser-known teachers who taught in rented spaces or in their homes often purchased small advertisements in trade magazines or newspapers, in which they highlighted their names with boldface print and listed their addresses and class offerings in smaller type below. Advertisements for large dance studios or famous independent instructors were flashier, often taking up substantial portions of the page if not the entire page, and were sometimes printed in color. Many made brash appeals directly to student consumers using the second person: “Have You ‘It’? Learn Personality from a Personality.”²² Some made equally brazen promises of fame: “The entire Studio has but one aim—to bring you to Stardom.”²³ With greater means for advertising, these large studios were simply following the trend of corporate advertisers, who were just as unabashed in their attempts to seduce the consumer into making a purchase.

The more profitable studios published in-house newsletters or brochures, which typically included class schedules, tuition information, descriptions of certain classes, and school policies. They also featured up-to-the-minute developments on the New York dance scene and updates on the successes of former students—most often rhapsodic first-person testimonials supposedly written by the former students about their experiences at the school. Promises, too, were sprinkled throughout: “The public is waiting to make more stars. You can be one. You can be one of the greatest. But even should you not desire stage fame, Vestoff-Serova dancing is the key to popularity and happiness. Everywhere you go, you will be welcomed and asked to entertain friends and guests.

Think of their amazement at your ability—their delight and yours.”²⁴ Some catalogs aimed to entice the parents of potential students. Dance director and studio owner Ned Wayburn, in his 1930 studio newsletter, speaks of dance training as beneficial for young people’s health, but he also offers dance training as an alternative to boarding school or convent life: “If your daughter wishes a dancing career, let her have it. There is no better safety valve for her physical and mental reactions than the sound training required of dancers. It creates a strong, beautiful physique, and with it, an alert, wholesome, well-balanced mind. It will completely absorb all of her thoughts, leaving no room for puppy loves, boys and parties.”²⁵

Normal courses, or teacher training courses, were offered by a number of ballet teachers. To attract new teachers into the profession, normal course instructors often used the lures of capitalism: “The stage needs trained dancers. Profit by its need. In every community in the country are schools, clubs, social and civic organizations whose activities at some time take the form of amateur theatrical presentations. You can be indispensable to them with profit to yourself. Teach stage dancing.”²⁶ Or, they appealed directly to the ego: “Your city and community are waiting for such a teacher as you.”²⁷ Some normal school courses focused their instruction on facets of running an organization and self-promotion, since learning to teach did not equip one to handle the challenges of marketing or studio management. Veronine Vestoff’s normal course, “How to make professional use of your training,” included classes on how to operate a studio and conduct classes; and his course, “How to get free advertising,” spoke directly to new teachers’ insecurities about competing on the free market.²⁸

In addition to teachers actively selling their courses, the early twentieth century saw the proliferation of dance manuals. Viewed mainly as commodities, these manuals were typically published and sold independently by the teachers or studios, and were often advertised in nationally distributed publications like *The Dance Magazine*. Some teachers even required the purchase of their manual upon enrollment. For students, the manuals were useful reminders of class material if they wanted to practice at home, but for the instructors they served as brand advertising and proof of competency, not to mention a source of revenue. It was likely not the contents of the manual that would make one appear qualified to teach, but rather that they had published a manual at all. Recognition of a teacher's name as qualified, and thereby able to produce success, could attract students and their tuition dollars. If a student in Omaha purchased a manual from the Russian ballet master and studio owner Louis H. Chalif, for example, she would be more apt to attend classes at the Chalif studio if she came to New York seeking a career.

Historically, dance manuals have functioned as vehicles for teachers to detail their broad philosophies of dance; provide class material, choreography, and musical accompaniment; offer advice to students and teachers; and distinguish themselves from—or align themselves with—their predecessors. Most early twentieth century manuals contain similar characteristics, and they reflect the period's emphasis on novelty and marketability. A number of these manuals were also influenced by Friedrich Albert Zorn's 1887 *Grammar of the Art of Dancing*,* which went beyond the written

* The English translation was published in 1905 for the American National Association of Masters of Dancing, who established the manual as the standard for the organization (Zorn, *Grammar of the Art of Dancing: Theoretical and Practical* [1887; Boston: The Heintzemann Press, 1905]: viii.). Notably, elements of the Zorn manual are evident in several manuals from the period.

codification of ballet technique. It standardized a wide array of body positions, steps, and directions with such specificity that they could be extended to nearly any dance form from the period; the positions of the feet alone occupy twenty-one pages, and include several categories that have since fallen out of use, including “Sole Positions,” “Crossed Positions,” “Raising Positions,” “Half-High Closed Flowing Positions,” “Inward Turned Positions,” and “Prolonged Positions.”²⁹ Zorn was a student of French ballet master Arthur Saint-Léon, and he includes a number of references to the French school and to Saint-Léon’s method of notation, *Sténochoreographie*, throughout the manual. Through Zorn’s manual—and the few French ballet masters who visited the United States during this period—the French ballet lineage maintained a presence in American ballet’s development.*

The French, Russian, Cecchetti, and Bournonville systems of classical *port de bras*[†] are all codified using different numeric systems, which, in America, occasionally prompted calls for standardization.³⁰ Some early twentieth century teachers, however, found that the positions of the arms—with their lack of cohesive nomenclature—were an area of the technique where they could distinguish themselves, and their manuals typically became forums for their theories. Chalif, for example, assigned meanings, or expressions, to each of the five coordinated positions of the arms and legs (fig. 9).^{‡31} Alexis Kosloff of the Imperial Russian Ballet in Moscow expanded the numbered positions to seven, to accommodate for first and second *arabesques*. Notably, Kosloff’s

* French ballet masters had visited the United States as early as the eighteenth century. See Barzel, “European Ballet Teachers in the United States,” *Dance Index: A New Magazine Devoted to Dancing* 3 (April-June 1944): 57-62.

[†] See the glossary for definitions of ballet terminology and clarifications of term use.

[‡] The Delsarte System of Expression also ascribes specific emotional states to various positions of the body.

fifth position is reached mathematically: by adding together one arm in second position with the other arm in third position, one would achieve fifth (fig. 10).³² Vestoff expands even further to eight positions of the arms, which include “Intermediate position low” (Cecchetti fourth *en avant*) and “Intermediate position” (Cecchetti fourth *en haut*).³³ Aron Tomaroff introduces an approach that eliminates the rounded position of the arms in front of the body; he numbers the arm positions one through five, one rounded and lowered in front of the torso (*en bas*) and five rounded above the head (*en haut*), with the numbers increasing as the arms rise up the dancer’s sides through second position, which he refers to as third (fig. 11).^{*34} Such alterations are indicative of several period trends in ballet: the importance of expressivity, largely manifested in the upper body and arms; the prevalence and value of original contributions through unique methods of codification; the view of the teacher as an ultimate authority with the power and creativity to alter a centuries-old tradition; and the push to make ballet successful in America, which encouraged practitioners to adapt a European art form to suit the desires and sensibilities of American dancers and audiences.

* This organization of the arms is also found in E. A. Thélour’s manual, *Letters on Dancing*, published in 1831, although there do not seem to be any other specific connections between these two teachers.



THIRD POSITION

Figure 9: "This position symbolizes modesty." *The Chalif Text Book of Dancing, Book I.* 1914.

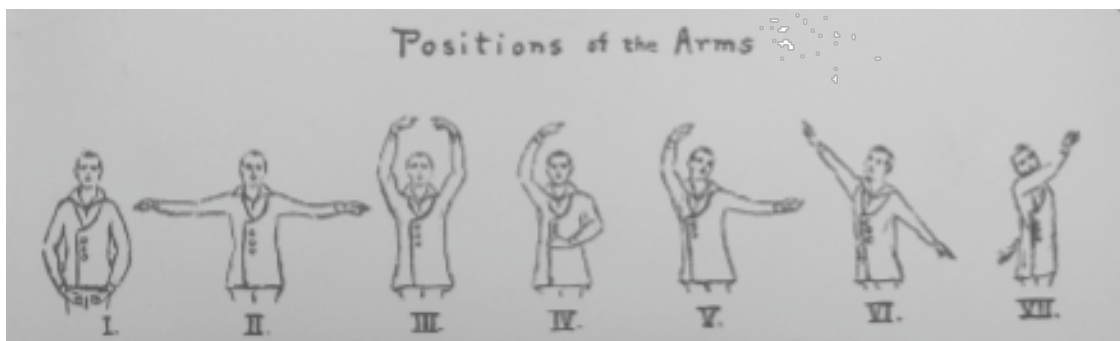


Figure 10: "Positions of the Arms." Alexis Kosloff's *Russian Ballet Technique.* 1921.

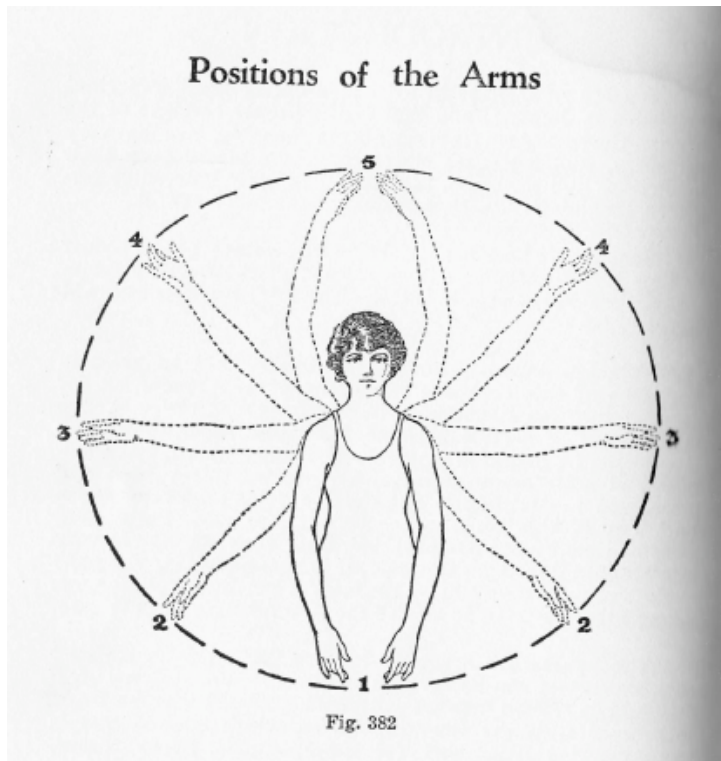


Figure 11: “Positions of the Arms” *Tomaroff’s Home Study Course of Dancing and Body Building, Book Five, Arm Movements, Adagio, Adagio Variations*. 1927.

Courses of home study—a variation on traditional dance manuals that were sent to students across the country—became popular items between 1909 and 1934. With the extensive touring of dancers like Anna Pavlova, and vaudeville halls countrywide featuring ballet or a derivative thereof, young girls all across America were inspired to become dancers. Without teachers at their disposal or the ability to relocate, many were able to get a sense for ballet’s basics through home study courses—also known as mail-order—which offered instruction that could be read and studied at one’s own pace. The instructional manuals, in ballet and various other techniques, taught students basic principles as well as how to execute the steps. Tomaroff sold his *Home Study Course* in an eight-volume set that included instruction in everything from “Limbering and Reducing,” to “Musical Comedy,” to “Toe Combinations” (fig. 12).³⁵ According to

historian Ann Barzel, the purchase of a home study course included everything one would need to set up a studio at home: “Records of music, a practice tunic and a bar were in the first parcel. These were followed by a weekly lesson that came in the post.”³⁶ In his memoirs, Denishawn dancer Barton Mumaw discusses his foray into ballet via such a course:

I took my next step into the world of dance by enrolling in a correspondence course given by the Veronine Vestoff Academie de Danse. Because its advertisement had appeared in my ‘bible,’ *Dance Magazine*, I saw nothing extraordinary about attempting to learn ballet by mail. Every seventh day I ran to the postbox to seize upon the envelope that contained a pamphlet describing in detail the progressively more difficult step-of-the-week. Each exercise came with appropriate sheet music and an ingenious instructional aid—a small flip-book with photographs of a dancer who seemed to move, as the pages were rapidly flipped, in a series of steps or combination of steps.

On the strength of these lessons, my father built a *barre* for me on our back porch and hung a shelf that held a record player and a stack of records. There, every day after school, rain or shine, I followed my texts and imitated my ‘motion pictures’ as I learned to dance by long distance. Having no ballet shoes, I wore soft slippers; having no practice costume, I wore my one-piece wool knit bathing suit. I did not know then that hundreds of Denishawn pupils were similarly garbed for their classes.

Neither did I know, in my enthusiasm and ignorance, that men never danced *en pointe*. In answer to another *Dance Magazine* advertisement, I ordered by mail the largest size box-toe slippers listed. When they arrived, I ran to put on my bathing suit and to fasten, with heavy rubber bands, the beautiful pink satin slippers on my bare feet. Calling Mazie [my mother] to bring our Kodak and record the momentous event, I clumped out to the *barre*. Gripping it with my left hand, I assumed fifth position and arched my right arm overhead. When Mother assured me she had me in focus, I took a deep breath and rose to the tips of my toes. Immediately, my shoulders hunched up to my ears in reaction to the unexpected, intolerable pain. I managed to hold the awkward pose one unique instant as the shutter clicked. Then, with exquisite relief, I brought my heels down, never again to wear the treacherous slippers. No one had told me of lamb’s-wool cups.

On flat foot and half-toe and sometimes in bare feet, I persisted in my back-porch practice. Every week, I filled out and returned to the correspondence school the question-and-answer tests sent to me. I never received any marks, however, and, alas for posterity, no record of my ‘graduation’ from the Academie

de Danse exists.^{*37}

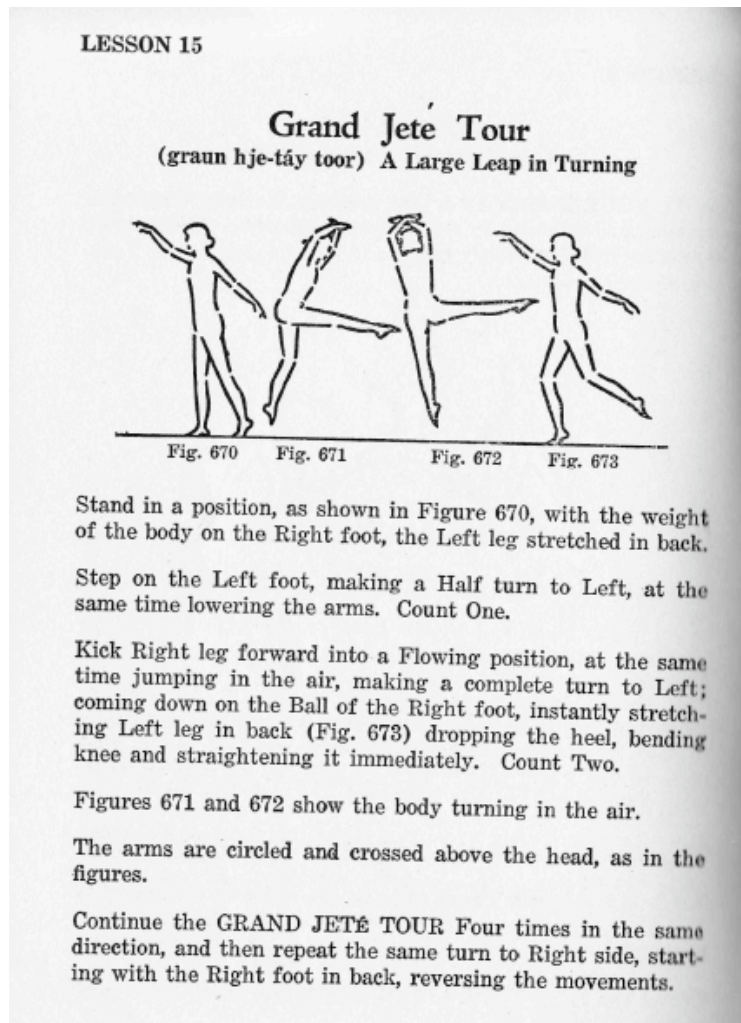


Figure 12: "Lesson 10: Grand Jeté Tour." *Tomaroff's Home Study Course of Dancing and Body Building, Book Seven, Jumps and Leaps, Turns and Pirouettes, Combinations*. 1927.

Some mail-order manuals catered directly to the needs of aspiring solo dancers, and included "...dances of all types, with variety in steps and well selected music... that [were] easily commercialized."³⁸ By selling their choreography, the manuals' authors thus freed local teachers from having to painstakingly devise dances for all of their

* Veronine Vestoff's teaching is discussed in Chapter Six.

students, each wanting to appear unique. In the 1933 “Annual Dance Frolic” presented by the Ned Wayburn students at the culmination of the school year, there were seventy solo dances, which made up almost two-thirds of the one hundred eight dances on the matinee program.³⁹ Stage directors, too, required dancers to bring their own dances to auditions.⁴⁰ With solo dances in high demand, local teachers were able to earn substantial income through the sales of hundreds of pre-choreographed dances to their students. Barzel explains this phenomenon: “The offering of a great deal of material was necessary, because teachers did not know enough technique to teach technique. Class time was taken up in teaching dances and more dances.”⁴¹ Perhaps in an attempt to create an infinite number of choreographic possibilities, Aron Tomaroff published his *Tomaroff’s Self-Combining Technical Ballet and Character Cards: A simple device that creates dance enchainements*. The instructions state: “Select as many cards as desired, this depends on how long one wants the combination to be. On each card is indicated a step or movement, showing the various ways in which each can be executed” (figs. 13 and 14). With this instant choreographic apparatus, Tomaroff provided teachers with a quick and easy way to assemble innumerable dances or combinations.

ENTRECHATS -Braidings

Variations

A - Entrechat à trois ou Royale - 3 braidings, 5th. to 5th
B - Entrechat ouvert à trois - 3 braidings, 5th. to 2nd.
C - Entrechat fermé à trois - 3 braidings, 2nd. to 5th.
D - Entrechat à quatre - 4 braidings, 5th. to 5th.
E - Entrechat à cinq - 5 braidings, 5th. to 5th.
F - Entrechat ouvert à cinq - 5 braidings, 5th. to 2nd.
G - Entrechat fermé à cinq - 5 braidings, 2nd. to 5th.
H - Entrechat à six - 6 braidings, 5th. to 5th.
I - Entrechat à sept - 7 braidings, 5th. to 5th.
J - Entrechat à sept ouvert - 7 braidings, 5th. to 2nd.
K - Entrechat à sept fermé - 7 braidings, 2nd. to 5th.
L - Entrechat à huit - 8 braidings, 5th. to 5th.
M - Entrechat volée - ending on one foot in above variations

Directions

Sur la place ou en tournant

FOUETTÉS - Whipped movements

Variations

A - Petit fouetté en dedans - an inward whip from knee

B - Petit fouetté en dehors - an outward whip from knee

C - Grand fouetté en dedans - an inward whip from hip

D - Grand fouetté en dehors - an outward whip from hip

E - Fouetté - relevé - a whip with a raise in A,B,C,D

F - Fouetté - baissé - a whip while dropping heel in A,B,C,D

G - Fouetté - plié - a whip while bending the supported leg in
A, B, C, D, variations.

H - Fouetté - temps - levé - a whip while making a hop in
A, B, C, D, variations.

10 Sur la pointe ou demi pointe, dessus ou dessous
leg held parallel, turned out or turned in

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By 1914, Chalif had choreographed and was selling nearly four hundred dances that ranged from thirty cents to four dollars apiece: “There are folk dances arranged according to difficulty, ballroom steps, character dances... simplified classic dances, baby ballets, toe dances, complete ballets for Christmas and other holidays, easy Greek dances... and full-length Greek ballets.”⁴² The descriptions of several solos from his 1929 catalog of “New Dances” that follow are an indication of period values: a narrative or thematic sensibility, decorous costumes, age-appropriate subject matter, aesthetically appealing music, and the ability for teachers to stage the dances with ease, regardless of their students’ levels of proficiency.

Interpretive Dances: Lily Nymph. A dance of sweetness and charm, wherein a maid tries to be like a lily, curving her arms like the lily’s petals or folding them like a lily asleep, and meanwhile dancing with gracious animation. Waltz by Meyer-Helmund. \$3.

National Dances: Gipsy Rose. What every teacher wants,—an easy gipsy dance. This one will ‘set off’ a pupil who has life and fire and personal charm without much technique, for it looks more difficult than it is and has great variety in the figures. 2/4 music by Behr. \$3.

Toe Dances: Polka Piquante. A dance in which personal charm comes to the fore to captivate and bewitch an audience. Pretty technical steps done with a bird-like daintiness and precision, accompanied by arch coquetry. Unusually attractive music by Poldini. \$3.

Baby Dances: Sleepy Head. Going to bed made pleasant (a boon to mothers). A few sleepy steps, a yawn or two, an evening prayer, a good-night kiss, the light blown out and off to dreamland. Sweet music by Zilcher. \$3.⁴³

Immigrant teachers responded differently to the commercial aspect of dance in America. Some, like Chalif and Vestoff, made concerted efforts to adapt their training practices to the commercial environment for the sake of succeeding in the business of dance, while trying to maintain their standards for dance as art. In the introduction to his

1920 school brochure, Vestoff declared, “Today, in all its unaesthetic commercialism, finds the dance represented largely as an institution of public, transitory amusement. Yet the dance as a thing of beauty survives, upheld by those who devote their lives to the perpetuation of art.”⁴⁴ Others, mostly purists like Metropolitan Opera Ballet School Director Malvina Cavallazzi* and independent teacher Maria Bonfanti, spoke publicly about their distaste for their American students’ necessarily entrepreneurial approach to dance: “...they are too anxious to be out and earning a salary before they have learned all they ought to know about their art.”⁴⁵ Mikhail Mordkin,[†] one of the first major male influences on ballet in America, felt strongly as well that the commercialization of dance in the American capitalist system did a disservice to dance as an art form:

...the Russian School has no commercial end but was run on the subsidy of the Tsar. Thus a pupil *dod* [*sic*] not have to dash off to make money, but could stay and bring his art to a point where it was complete and rounded whole. He was thus enabled to bring to the public the noblest form of his art.

When a school is put on a commercial basis, and each one tries to put in the least possible length of time, for his artistic education, then you have not the time to study such superfluous things as the History of Art; time is money, the pupil must do fast turns, jump high, his steps must be amusing and ‘tricky’, rhythmic of course. If the Polish Dance of Wieniasky is played, it can easily be called a Russian dance. Not having studied the dancer does not know the difference.

In that way it is easy to open a school and to teach dancing. But I am profoundly convinced that the Russian has and always will be the best source and inspiration for the development of the human body.⁴⁶

Mordkin, who was in favor of a democratic approach to ballet, seems to have believed that America’s capitalist context was hindering ballet from becoming an art form, and more than simple entertainment, in the eyes of the American public.

* Cavallazzi’s teaching is discussed in Chapter Four.

† Mordkin’s teaching is discussed in Chapter Five.

Ballet's commercialization under American capitalism cast the art form in a new light, and a spectrum of viewpoints developed among teachers and choreographers as to the future of ballet in the United States. The dancers, however, were working as entrepreneurs in a system that offered no assistance—they were on their own.

Effects of Capitalism: The Dancer's Perspective

For most dancers, ballet under the American system of capitalism meant that they paid for classes out of their own pockets.⁴⁷ If a dancer making \$40 or \$50 per week in vaudeville wanted to take four ballet classes during the same week, she would spend roughly one quarter of her salary on training; most classes cost approximately \$2.50 each, with some—such as those of choreographer Michel Fokine—priced as high as \$5.00.⁴⁸ When paid on a monthly basis, they could be as low as \$1.00 per class, but the student would have needed a lump sum at her disposal.⁴⁹ The sheer expense of classes would thus have resulted in inconsistent training regimens. If the price of shoes, costumes, and class attire were added to her class fees, the percentage of a dancer's salary that was given over to her professional obligations would have increased markedly. During stretches where dancers were performing regularly, the rehearsals and performances often substituted for lessons—a practice which continued into mid-century with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.⁵⁰ It exposed dancers to greater risks for injury, and many wrote letters home or in their diaries about physical ailments. Dancer Margaret Severn wrote a letter to her mother in 1917 with an update on her injury: "My leg only gave once today, but that was at a most inopportune moment."⁵¹ For dancers, going to a doctor in these cases would have proven difficult on two fronts. Health insurance—

established in its most embryonic form in 1929—was only available for voluntary purchase on an individual basis.⁵² The expense of a doctor's visit would likely have been too much for most dancers to afford, and the time off that would be required to heal certain injuries would have prevented dancers from doing their jobs and thus from earning income.⁵³ The American system of capitalism provided these dancers with no safety net in the way of guaranteed employment, which was especially troubling for dancers who were not featured soloists.* When problems arose, they were too financially strapped to take care of them, particularly as the Depression began.⁵⁴ Dancers' expenses were so notably on the rise that in 1925 the *New York Times* published an article entitled, "Dance Pupils Pay \$3,000,000 A Year," which detailed the thriving dance industry in New York: "Their education costs a pretty penny, more than that of the university lawyer, architect, engineer, and physician. Their outlay is continuous.... A modest estimate of the cost to one who aims at perfection in the career of a première danseuse followed up to the age of 35, when it ends save in rare cases, is \$10,000."⁵⁵ Money became such a prominent issue that in June of 1929, only four months prior to the crash that would set off the Great Depression, *The Dance Magazine* asked two well-known managers and two noteworthy dancers to answer the burning question: "Does Classical Dancing Pay?" The article was on the pulse of dancers' biggest anxieties about their ability to survive in their chosen career path. Mordkin empathized, "Artists do not like to

* The statement, "THIS CONTRACT MUST NOT BE ISSUED TO THE CHORUS," appears at the top of an Actor's Equity contract reproduced in Ned Wayburn's 1925 manual, *The Art of Stage Dancing* (n.p.). It is therefore likely that the chorus in many productions worked without contracts on a show-by-show basis.

discuss the money part of the profession. It gives too much sorrow, too much aggravation.”⁵⁶

The financial burden also impacted American dancers’ training regimens. Teachers throughout this period lamented American students’ impatience, their desire to rise quickly to fame and fortune, and their understanding of training as a mere handful of classes in which to learn the tricks required for stage work.⁵⁷ In an interview in *The Sun* in 1912, Cavallazzi’s frustration was apparent: “If only the American girls were willing to study long enough! If they would only realize that they would make much more money in the end by learning to be good dancers instead of quitting school when merely indifferent dancers for the sake of getting some small salary at once.”⁵⁸ In 1930, the *New York Evening Post* published an interview with Rosina Galli, the then director of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School, in the article “Galli Deplores Gold Rush as Bane of American Ballet.” She was clearly exasperated with the capitalist current running through ballet in the United States: ““The difficulty of creating a fine corps de ballet in America... is that Americans still insist upon going out to make money out of their profession before they have properly learned it.”⁵⁹ Gavrilov, too, who was “immensely stimulated by the natural talents of young American dancers,” felt that the “lack of the discipline which is taken for granted in Europe, and the lure of commercialism,” seriously impeded dancers’ progress in America.⁶⁰ This fiscal burden was not an issue with the dancers in the European and Russian government-run theatres, where they were hired as State employees, trained tuition-free, and often granted pensions that would sustain them through retirement.⁶¹ But in America, it is likely that the dancers’ economic straits were a primary factor in their inability to attend ballet classes regularly. Dancers in

the United States needed to make a living on their own, which they patched together with short-term single engagements and gumption. Given their willingness to toil in a profession that offered them little but artistic satisfaction in return, many more dancers would surely have been thrilled to attend more classes more regularly had their purses allowed it.

The coordination of ballet training into one's daily activities proved difficult for many students as well. In contrast to European academy students whose living quarters, formal education, and ballet training were organized for them by the school, American students had to individually patch together a formal education alongside their studies in ballet, which often became overwhelming. Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo dancer Leon Danielian describes his daily routine as a twelve-year-old aspiring ballet dancer in New York in 1933:

I went briefly to high school, which as I've said, I finally left because I was very unhappy... I would take the subway, and the subway then was a great deal more pleasant to ride than it is now, or I thought it was; it seemed cleaner.... I would go home and leave my books at home and take whatever small little book that I would need; I always had to do some homework on the subway and then I would go down. I was taking classes at Carnegie Hall at Studio 61 which is the present-day Ballet Arts Studio.... I would do my homework there until class started which was somewhere around four or five o'clock. I would just make it and I would come home and have a late dinner and do my laundry, or my mother would do it for me, and I would start the day all over again which was too much for a child to take.⁶²

Economic and logistical factors notwithstanding, dancers looked for work in vaudeville, Broadway, or movie prologs because of the sheer lack of ballet companies. Starting a career on the popular stage often required dancers to commodify themselves to win the attention of a director. Because one might only have a moment during an audition to win the favor of a director, dancers worked to accumulate tricks or specialties.

There was no national ballet academy to set the example of rigorous, systematic training as preparation for a ballet career, and thus many students went to classes seeking to amass a quick repertoire of steps that they could use to find work. They displayed an attitude toward ballet technique that was offensive to many classical teachers; they wanted to reach the highest level in the shortest amount of time, and often preferred to bypass the fundamentals in favor of the more virtuosic, flashier steps. Cavallazzi interpreted students' desires for shortcuts as anti-artistic superficiality: "'Ah,' she exclaimed, placing her hands on her heart, 'they have it not *here*. The art is in the heart; and they have it not; all are too impatient to study. They want to know without learning, to succeed without work.'"⁶³ Ballet teachers were as challenged by their students' lack of attention to fine details in the classroom as they were by their irregular attendance. The capitalist context in which these dancers worked, however, was most likely the source of these perceived shortcomings. Such seemingly flippant approaches to training, when considered in the social, economic, and cultural environment of the early twentieth century, suggest that dancers were, instead, victims of the free market.

The Effects of Democracy: Ballet for All

The American democratic structure, which precluded the establishment of a State-run ballet, compelled ballet's entrepreneurs to maximize the accessibility of their work for the general public. While some resisted, there were many dancers, teachers, and choreographers who embraced this new context for ballet. Maria Gambarelli, the Italian ballet dancer who became known affectionately as "Gamby" when she left the stage at the Metropolitan for the bright lights of vaudeville's Roxy Theater, noted the importance

of ballet's democratic nature: "During my time, even if I danced in movie theaters, I made people, the everyday American public, love the dance."⁶⁴ Mordkin, too, whose company evolved into Ballet Theatre, now American Ballet Theatre, was motivated by the idea that ballet could be popular. In a 1938 interview in *The Sun*, he showed great enthusiasm for bringing ballet to the masses: "'I want,' he said, jumping up and waving his arms, 'I want to make ballet for everybody—like books are in libraries—I do not want that only people like this'—he gathered imaginary sabres about his neck and minced across the room in a caricature of all the haughty dowagers who ever paraded the Metropolitan lobbies—'should have the ballet!'"⁶⁵ The idea that the American public might have access to the ballet was typically a source of pride: ballet artists wanted to reach a large swath of American people with their art, and ballet entrepreneurs wanted to reach into the public's purses to sustain their careers. In the American democracy, however, the artists and the entrepreneurs were one and the same.

Because their businesses could not run solely on the payments of aspiring stage performers, studio owners and teachers actively recruited and made accommodations for amateurs, including those with lofty aspirations who had never set foot in a dance studio. In 1928, *The Dance Magazine* proclaimed, "Anyone May Become a Dancer!" and noted that amateurs could expect to find employment after a relatively short period of training in the dance form of their choice.⁶⁶ By the early 1930s, with the Hollywood movie industry in full swing, many dancers were making the trip from New York to California to become one of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of dancing extras in elaborate movie spectacles, orchestrated by such now legendary directors as Cecil B. DeMille and Busby Berkeley. Even in the popular theatre, dancers only needed to be able to fit into a chorus

to be hireable. The openness of the profession to the dancing amateur, and the desire of the amateur to jump headfirst into a performing career, helped to chip away at the American perception of dance—and ballet—as a specifically foreign phenomenon reserved for society’s elites. Scholar Elizabeth Kendall asserts, “...in the 1890s ballet girls and chorines were, socially speaking, unclean creatures of another race. Now class lines were blurred; the girl on the screen or even in vaudeville could be the girl next door.”⁶⁷

In the 1920s, Anatole Bourman, the Russian director of the ballet at the Strand movie palace, and his friend and ballet teacher Ivan Tarasoff from the Moscow Imperial Ballet School, began an experiment. They wanted to establish several companies of dancers who would relocate to various areas of the country and perform under their direction, like ballet-based versions of regional vaudeville troupes. Inspired by their “admiration for Miss United States and her innate capabilities as a dancer,” they sent out advertisements specifically for non-dancers.⁶⁸ They amassed a group of interested women who had never danced before, gave them free lessons, and succeeded in turning them into hired professionals in a matter of months.⁶⁹ Bourman and Tarasoff, however, were not the only instructors from the period who specifically targeted amateurs. Despite his Imperial School training, Chalif based most of his teaching on students with no intentions of having stage careers; he even offered dual step progressions for both professionals and amateurs in his dance manuals.^{*70} The Delsarte System of Expression was often taught in the parlors of high society amateurs who wanted to develop the expressivity of their daily deportment. Even Wayburn, whose studio curriculum and

* I address Chalif’s teaching in Chapter Six.

advertisements emphasized the ascent to stardom, taught primarily “the Junior League crowd, the society girls, the child from the well-to-do refined home,” with only twenty percent of his students advancing to stage careers.⁷¹

Dance was also making its way into higher education via Physical Education departments, where the amateur students did not have professional ambitions in dance. The focus in these programs was on physical health and individual creativity, “as opposed to accomplishment in the art,” which Lucille Marsh, writing for *The Dance Magazine* in 1927, found intolerable: “Coming out before an audience and emoting through the dance for one’s own satisfaction and emotional purgation is about the most selfish, sentimental, and inartistic habit we could possibly inculcate in our young people.”⁷² Amateurs could also get involved through the mail-order industry, which existed primarily on their behalf. In addition, dance exercises and bits of choreography were frequently published in the newspaper for the public to enjoy, complete with photographs and instructions. A series of ten articles published in the *New York Evening Journal* included photographs and descriptions of ballet exercises from the Viennese stage director and studio owner Albertina Rasch: “Repeat this movement until you can do it perfectly, and without wiggling.”⁷³ Even for those immigrant instructors who had begun to accept the appearance of ballet in popular settings, the flagrant courting of amateurs was offensive. Several foreign-born teachers, including Russian choreographer Michel Fokine, railed publicly against the “experiments of amateurs” in the American “world of plastic spectacle.”⁷⁴

If anyone could become a dancer, then anyone could certainly become a teacher of dance, and with even less time spent in training. The normal courses offered by the big

studios did not have any prerequisites for the abilities of the would-be teacher, and thus a two-week summer course was potentially the sum total of the pedagogical training some teachers had; in most instances, teachers had no pedagogical training at all.⁷⁵ Chalif, as one of the first teachers of pedagogy in America, placed a high value on the teacher's dancing ability: "First be a good dancer yourself. Your pupils will unconsciously imitate you, whether for good or evil, and every fault or peculiarity will be copied and magnified, until they are burlesques of yourself."⁷⁶ A 1928 editorial in *The Dance Magazine* followed Chalif's lead and made a plea for teacher licensure, noting that, "great numbers of pupils, eager to learn and unable to discriminate, are being made the victims of frauds."⁷⁷ And three years later, *The Dance Magazine* again published an article about crimes in teaching, citing one teacher's swindling of his students: "One teacher requires the students to buy printed copies of the dances and work them out for themselves. Then in class he watches them do the dances. But the only comment he ever gives is 'Next, next.' If a student comes to him for explanation he suggests private lessons."⁷⁸ The dance organizations—the American National Association of Masters of Dancing and, in 1926, the newly formed Dance Masters of America—which were primarily dedicated to teacher education, would have had no legal recourse to officially bar dishonest instructors.*

The American environment for dance, in which anyone could dance professionally or open a studio and claim to be a master teacher, was a result of the

* The American National Association, Masters of Dancing, joined forces with the International Association of Masters of Dancing in 1926 to become Dance Masters of America. For more on these organizations, see Debra Hickenlooper Sowell, *The Christensen Brothers: An American Dance Epic* (Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998): 16-20; and "The History of Dance Masters of America, Inc." on the Dance Masters of America website, <http://www.dma-national.org/pages/about/201>.

nation's democratic structure. No longer under the strictures that came with government subsidy, ballet could become whatever its practitioners—however legitimate—and the public could agree upon. With many foreign, academy-trained ballet teachers in America alongside a newly indoctrinated amateur public, the debate over ballet's fate in the American democratic system was highly contentious throughout the research period.

Toward an American Ballet Pedagogy

Ballet slowly became acclimated to the American democratic, capitalist context; schools became businesses and performances were predicated on commercial success. Inside the individual studios, however, there were numerous efforts to Americanize ballet pedagogy, which often included significantly shortening the almost decade-long training approach in Europe and Russia. The manual sold at Stefano Mascagno's School of Dancing describes this intention: "It was through the eyes of his English American wife that Mr. Mascagno first saw the need of a real Ballet-School in this country, and together, they have established a school combining the old reliable methods of his early training and the American spirit of enterprise and progress which insures advancement as rapidly as is consistent with thoroughness and finish."⁷⁹ What "thoroughness and finish" consisted of, from the student's perspective and, likewise, from Mascagno's, is unknowable. It cannot be assumed that Mascagno, having studied and debuted at the San Carlo opera house in Naples, truly believed that a condensed or accelerated method was a viable approach to training. Yet the benefit of hastening the training to any degree must

* I discuss Mascagno's teaching in Chapter Five.

have been apparent at the time, considering the widespread nature of a shortened instructional methodology for ballet among schools in New York City.

Ned Wayburn was probably the most notable of those who truncated ballet's traditional training regimen. In his 1925 dancing manual, *The Art of Stage Dancing*, he describes the reasons for his development of "Modern Americanized Ballet Technique":

I have invented a method of teaching the ballet that eliminates the long and tedious training formerly considered necessary, and fits the pupil for a stage appearance in the briefest possible length of time.... I am assuming that you are aware of the fact that in all foreign countries the ballet student is taught for years before she is allowed to attempt a public appearance or permitted to consider a professional engagement.... It was taken for granted that there was no short cut to this trade, and up to the recent present there has been none. But our American girls who are gifted with a talent for this superb form of graceful dancing will not consent to devote the best years of their lives to unproductive labor. The idea of signing away several years of their happy lives in order to become entitled merely to a critical teacher's approval, and all this time without compensation of a financial nature, does not appeal to any, and least of all to that very person, the young person who would make the best dancer.^{*80}

By re-titling his approach to teaching ballet "Modern Americanized Ballet Technique," Wayburn highlighted the expediency and pragmatism that he and others viewed as part of the American temperament.⁸¹ He was, in a way, providing a training solution for those innumerable American dancers with whom many Euro-Russian teachers were frustrated, which constituted most of the American students who desired any kind of stage career during the research period.⁸² Wayburn's concept of American training was inclusive in a democratic sense, and it was likely prompted by his capitalist motivation to sell his product. In his school newsletter from 1930, he wrote:

* In her article, "Modern Americanized Ballet: 'Her Stage of Perpetual Chiffon,'" Barbara Naomi Cohen-Stratyner describes the details of Wayburn's modified approach to ballet training (*Dance Scope* 14, no. 3 [1980]: 29-35.).

Ballet dancing teaches the body to speak, gives the face vitality and spiritual artistry and can be studied at any age. Musical comedy stars have long known that it is not necessary to begin the study of ballet at an extremely early age. Many of these stars were only awakened to the ballet after reaching twenty-eight and thirty years of age. So no one should be discouraged in the belief they are past the age limit.⁸³

The dual American structures of democracy and capitalism, as they influenced the training at Wayburn's school and elsewhere, helped to distinguish American ballet and ballet training from their counterparts abroad and shaped the way the American public perceived ballet. In subsequent chapters, I attend to individual teachers' approaches to teaching ballet in the New York City environment, which oftentimes included alterations to the classical training to accommodate for the American democratic and capitalist context.

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In 1931, Chalif observed that, "dancing is so fluid that it can and does change with each passing fancy."⁸⁴ Between 1909 and 1934, ballet wrestled with American democracy and capitalism. There were countless opinions about the changes that should or should not be made to the classical ballet tradition to make it American. Despite the cacophony of voices, the inclusive tenets of democracy and the volatile nature of the capitalist system had a direct and inevitable effect on ballet during its formative years in the United States. In contrast to the Euro-Russian tradition, the American public established the standards for the ballet they wanted to see, and the ballet changed course in response to market trends. The perception and training of American dancers was

shaped by the country's decentralized economic structure, and the easy availability of ballet brought innumerable amateurs to the stage. It is perhaps the latter of these effects that has caused the period to be undervalued for its contributions to American ballet as an extension of the classical tradition. To further substantiate the validity of the period's ballet in a global context, the next chapter attends to issues of national identity and internationalism in American ballet. It includes a study of ballet's most significant international lineages that, through numerous immigrant teachers, fed directly into the ballet during the research period in the United States.

Notes

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1. Olga Maynard, *The American Ballet* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Macrae Smith Co., 1959): 28, 45.
 2. Lincoln Kirstein, "Blast at Ballet," in *Ballet, Bias and Belief: Three Pamphlets Collected and Other Dance Writings of Lincoln Kirstein* (1937, reprint; New York: Dance Horizons, 1983): 200-1.
 3. John Martin, "The Dance: A Ballet: Success and Limitations of Gavrillov's Current Production," *New York Times*, April 15, 1928.
 4. Luigi Albertieri, *The Art of Terpsichore* (New York: G. Ricordi, 1923): n.p.
 5. Barbara M. Barker, "The Dancer vs. the Management in Post-Civil War America," *Dance Chronicle* 2, no. 3 (1978): 173.
 6. Agnes De Mille, *America Dances* (New York: MacMillan; London: Collier, 1980): 71.
 7. Barker, "The Dancer vs. the Management," 173; Iris Dorian, *Great Producers: Visionaries of the American Theater* (New York: Allworth Press, 2008): 12; Albert Auster, *Actresses and Suffragists: Women in the American Theater, 1890-1920* (New York: Praeger, 1984): 60.
 8. Barker, "The Dancer vs. the Management," 173.
 9. Suzanne Carbonneau Levy, "The Russians are Coming: Russian Dancers in the United States, 1910-1933" (PhD Diss, New York University, 1990): 175.
 10. "Minute Visits in the Wings," *New York Times*, June 4, 1916.
 11. "Gavrillov's Ballet Revue is Amazing," *New York Times*, April 13, 1926.
 12. Betty Ross, "Bourman's Bits of Ballet," *The Dance Magazine* (November 1925): 23.
 13. Debra Hickenlooper Sowell, *The Christensen Brothers: An American Dance Epic* (Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998): 18.
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Chapter Three

National and International Tendencies in the Development of American Ballet

Central to ballet's expansion in America between 1909 and 1934 was the question of what American ballet would look like and how it would distinguish itself from its Euro-Russian antecedents. British dance writer Arnold Haskell offers a fitting analogy for ballet's identities as a national and international form: "The technique of classical ballet is a language that has developed over the centuries and that can be spoken correctly in a number of accents. We may prefer one particular accent, but we cannot affirm that only one accent is correct."¹ In this light, this chapter serves to examine ballet as dually national and international in nature. I define and analyze the various concepts related to nationalism and internationalism using contemporary scholarship and historical sources, and I consider ballet's global development through national and international lenses. In particular, I focus on the dominant national groups that impacted ballet's growth throughout the research period in New York City.

Ballet's Nationalities in New York City

Between 1909 and 1934, one of the biggest upheavals in the New York ballet world involved the Italians and the Russians, the two primary national factions of ballet

dancers, teachers, choreographers, and directors.^{*2} Since the mid-nineteenth century, Italian dancers had visited frequently and taken up residence in the United States. Many opened their own schools, capitalizing on the untapped market of American dancers who had little exposure to classical ballet training. Historian Barbara Barker, in her biographical accounts of ballerinas Maria Bonfanti, Rita Sangalli, and Giuseppina Morlacchi, credits these nineteenth-century Italians with breaking ground for twentieth century ballet in America; she asserts that they “laid a foundation for future generations of American dancers. They established routes of tours, reproduced traditional repertory, and worked to maintain the purity of their technique. They educated dancers and audiences alike. By virtue of their own integrity and discipline as artists and women, they were accepted by society and by their colleagues, thus winning respect for ballet as a profession.”³

When the Metropolitan Opera and its resident ballet company opened in 1883 under German directorship, all of the operas—even *Carmen*—were sung in German.⁴ Yet the opera ballet, and in 1909 the ballet school, adhered to early nineteenth century traditions that Barker and historian Elaine Machleder have ascribed to the Italian style: leg extensions not higher than the hips, upright torsos, and single *pirouettes*.^{†5} Malvina

^{*} It is important to note that teachers from France, Austria, England, and Denmark, among other countries, worked in New York during the period, but Italians and Russians made up the majority of ballet’s personnel. In order to parse out the broad sensibilities of both the Russian and Italian approaches to ballet, I make sweeping generalizations that apply to most of the work of those nationality’s teachers. There were, however, individualized, nuanced approaches among the instructors, which I expand upon in chapters four through six as I discuss the work of selected teachers in the Italian and Russian traditions.

[†] In her *Ballet or Ballyhoo: The American Careers of Maria Bonfanti, Rita Sangalli and Giuseppina Morlacchi* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1984), Barker describes the shift in the Italian style at the La Scala school after master pedagogue Carlo Blasis’s departure in the mid-nineteenth century: “Gradually, the emphasis of the training changed. Technical accomplishments were stressed, and mime was neglected.... Whereas, during... Blasis’ tenure, the repertory had centered on narrative ballets with complicated dramatic plots blended with spectacle...” (10-11). Malvina Cavallazzi, the first director of the

Cavallazzi, at the head of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School, was an acclaimed mime during her career, and she taught the Italian pantomimic tradition—derived from the Italian theatre’s *Commedia dell’Arte* lineage^{*}—to the students there.⁶ The public’s desire for spectacle, however, which was doubtlessly influenced by the trick-laden, showy dance styles that prevailed on the stages of vaudeville and revue, began to eclipse their tolerance for the more reserved Italian style of ballet. With the arrival of the Russians at the beginning of the research period, the Italian supremacy began to wane, and by the 1930s, Italian ballet’s “small, detailed dancing-style” and gestural emphasis had become quaint in the eyes of the American audience.⁷ According to dance scholar Giannandrea Poesio, “[t]he peculiarity of nineteenth-century Italian ballet lies mainly in its failure to respond to foreign influence.”⁸ The inability of the Italian technique to adapt to the American capitalist value system was responsible, in part, for the decline of Italian ballet on American stages in the early twentieth century. In addition, the Progressive Era expressive movement trend—which included aesthetic barefoot dancing in the manner of Isadora Duncan and the Delsarte System of Expression—made the straight backs of the Italian ballet seem stiff and anti-expressive in comparison.

The 1910 United States tour of Anna Pavlova and her partner Mikhail Mordkin was the catalyst for change in America’s perception of ballet; the Russians had “revived

Metropolitan school, studied with Blasis himself, and thus would have taught single *pirouettes* as opposed to the more presentational stunts—like the thirty-two *fouettés* of Italian ballerina Pierina Legnani—that made the Italian school famous in the late nineteenth century.

^{*} In their article, “Mime in the Cecchetti ‘Method,’” Toby Bennett and Giannandrea Poesio detail the lineage of the Italian pantomime tradition, from the *Commedia dell’Arte* through the work of Italian ballet masters Gasparo Angiolini, Salvatore Viganò, Carlo Blasis, and Enrico Cecchetti. (*Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 18, no. 1 [summer 2000]: 31-43). Also see Giannandrea Poesio’s doctoral dissertation, *The Language of Gesture in Italian Dance From Commedia dell’Arte to Blasis* (University of Surrey, 1993).

an interest... in dancing as a form of artistic expression.”⁹ The young Italian dancer Rosina Galli, debuting in America the following year, found the newly arrived Russian dancers to be daunting competition: “One of the reasons I was so much frightened was that all I had heard after I came to America was every one [*sic*] here was so enthusiastic about the Russian dancers. That made me a little afraid that they would not like me.”¹⁰ Galli would eventually find a home with the Italian intendancy that succeeded the Germans at the Metropolitan—literally, by marrying the Met’s manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza—but the Russianization of ballet in America had begun like a landslide. The 1916 American tour of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes contributed to the fervor over Russian ballet in the United States—what dance scholar Suzanne Carbonneau Levy has termed “Russomania.”¹¹ The gradual unseating of the Italians as the primary agents of ballet in America was solidified over the few decades that followed by America’s cultural arbiters and the large numbers of Russian dancers who immigrated to the States to perform, teach, and choreograph. It became common practice for Americans to Russianize their names: Faith Service, a writer for *The Dance Magazine* in 1928, recalled, “If you weren’t Russian it was necessary to take a Russian name if you expected to meet with any measure of credence or success.”¹² Opportunities for employment, too, were often contingent upon a change of surname.¹³ By the end of the research period, the public’s attention and the “cognoscenti’s artistic expertise” strongly favored the Russian perspective on ballet; Russian ballet itself quickly became a standard against which other kinds of dancing were measured.¹⁴ Dancer Bertha Wardell pondered the shift in ballet’s nationalities in *The Dance Magazine*: “How odd that we have taken with avidity what the

Russians have brought to us of skill in the dance; an Italian technique enlarged and enlivened by the life force of another race.”¹⁵

While the style of ballet the Italians produced during the period was not entirely compelling to New York audiences, the training system—and particularly that which could be traced to Enrico Cecchetti—had a tremendous impact on ballet pedagogy in the United States. With innumerable Cecchetti disciples teaching in his image across the country—including Ernest Belcher in Los Angeles,¹⁶ Ruth Page in Chicago,¹⁷ and his protégé Luigi Albertieri in New York City*—his methods permeated the ballet classes of the research period in America, alongside other methods from the various Italian opera houses where many immigrant teachers studied. Cecchetti’s career as a ballet master spanned the globe: he taught at the Russian Imperial Ballet School and the Imperial Theatre of Warsaw in Poland; he was Pavlova’s teacher and he taught company classes for Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. While teaching in London, he systematized his training approach and exerted substantial influence on the development of British ballet training, before ending his career at the school of Milan’s La Scala.¹⁸ Having traversed the ballet world with such fluidity, it is apropos that Cecchetti did not believe ballet to have a nationality.¹⁹ Many of his students settled in the United States, thus bringing the Cecchetti lineage into American ballet prior to the 1922 publication of his codified approach by Cyril Beaumont and Stanislas Idzikowski,²⁰ and prior to the 1939 establishment of the Cecchetti Council of America, an organization dedicated to “maintaining the standards and method of ballet training established by Cav. Enrico Cecchetti.”²¹

* See Chapter Four for the details of Albertieri’s pedagogical approach.

Differences in Training and Style

In broad strokes, the Italian training during the research period—not all of which was Cecchetti-based—was markedly different than the Russian training. According to dancer Margaret Severn, the Italian training was more comprehensive than the Russian; she discusses the advantages of the Italian approach to training, in which a specific series of exercises was prescribed for each day of the week:

This ensured that all of the basic steps, together with their variations, were presented and practiced in the course of one week, to be repeated week after week, thus supplying the dancer with a finished execution and broad vocabulary of movement. This is in contrast to the style of many Russian teachers who compose their own combinations of exercises and almost invariably tend to neglect certain groups of steps, concentrating instead on their particular favorites.²²

While Severn seems to have viewed the Russians' choreographic impulses as problematic, historian Ann Barzel found the Russian diversification of class material beneficial: "Classes became more interesting and varied. The same exercises were not repeated every day; the Russians liked putting together intricate new *enchaînements* for each lesson."²³

There were, as well, distinctions in the general movement sensibilities of the two national schools. In 1925, the *New York Times* called the Italian style "conventional" in comparison to the Russian, a statement that likely resulted from the perceived lack of expressivity in the Italian ballet by the New York public—what Carrie Gaiser Casey refers to as "the dying gasp of an alternate lineage traced back from the Italian ballet

tradition through the music hall ballet centers of London and Paris.”²⁴ In contrast, scholar Lynn Garafola asserts that the Russian ballet had been influenced—through choreographers Alexander Gorsky and Michel Fokine—by the avant-garde work of the Moscow Art Theatre, with its emphasis on “expressive movement.”²⁵ Crediting the work of Mikhail Mordkin in the development of *plastique* movement, *The Dance Magazine* described this phenomenon that had captivated American audiences:

Plastique: a new word for an old, but for centuries a forgotten medium of expression; not pantomime, not ballet, as we have known it, but a visualization, infinitely more expressive, of the intelligence acting directly upon the subject body. It was the pupa period of plastique, represented by the Diaghileff Ballet, that disturbed and enchanted us a decade ago. At last the wings of the new art break through its creeping chrysalis of ballet, and the psyche, freed once more, spreads wings of glory to the sun and soars.

The art of plastique, through rhythm or music, so subtly and completely trains the creative mind of the actor-artist to dominate his body that he is enabled to project every movement of his mind externally in animate form. Not only is this training of essential importance to the dancer, but, the dramatic actor and the operatic singer require the liberating influence of plastique to be able to synthesise body movement with the sound and emotion of word and music. This potent plasticity, used by the Greeks in the orchestra or chorus of their drama, has been rediscovered by that genius of the dance, Mikhail Mordkin, and imparted to his pupils.²⁶

Scholar Elizabeth Souritz notes that, “*plastique* was the standard Russian term for ‘free dance’ or dance emphasizing ‘pure’ movement.”²⁷ She suggests in her article, “Duncan and Prewar Russian Dancemakers,” that the Russian development of *plastique* movement can be traced to the expressive influence of Isadora Duncan.²⁸ The incorporation of Duncan-inspired movement into the Russian ballet, as well as the Duncan-inspired Aesthetic, Greek, and Nature Dancing trends in the United States, was largely responsible for the American public’s belief that the Russian ballet was more expressive

* A number of Italian dancers, including Cavallazzi, performed on music hall stages in Europe before coming to the United States.

than the Italian. The Russian teacher Veronine Vestoff explains the difference in physicality between the Italian style and the Russian in his dance manual, and he makes no attempt to conceal his national allegiances: “Taking all that was good in the Italian method of training, the more imaginative Russians added to it, softening down much that was mechanical and stiff, and developing a softness and ease hitherto unknown in the Italian schools.”²⁹ By the beginning of the research period, the upright backs and modestly raised legs of the Italian training likely began to appear rigid and archaic in comparison to the sweeping upper-body movement—influenced by *plastique*—of the Russians. In a period where both physicality and expressivity were gaining cultural import in the United States, the Russian dancers embodied the spirit of the age, thus earning the favor of the Progressive Era American audience.*

Nationalism, National Pride, National Identity, and Nationality

To further examine the influence of the nation on the period’s ballet, I refer here to the body of scholarship on nationalism and related constructs that spans the twentieth century. Journalist Herbert Adams Gibbons, in his 1930 *Nationalism and Internationalism*, states: “[t]he subject of nationalism cannot be divorced from violence. Nationalism calls for the spilling of blood, at birth and during growth; its successive steps—so far—have been marked by wars.”³⁰ In 1955, scholar Nicholas Hans claims that, “‘nationalism’ [has] acquired that narrow and aggressive character which... [leads]

* In her 2003 dissertation, *Ballet’s Feminisms, Genealogy and Gender in Twentieth Century Ballet History*, Carrie Gaiser Casey asserts that the increasing presence of the Africanist aesthetic—as defined by Brenda Dixon Gottschild—in American dance was another reason that the Italian style faded from popularity: “By the 1930s, this sort of restraint undoubtedly looked antiquated as ballet technique became more extreme (higher extensions, faster kicks, off-center movements, even leading with the hip)” ([University of California, Berkeley, 2009]: 116).

to wars of extermination and destruction.”³¹ And the twenty-first century philosopher Roger Scruton’s definition of nationalism—“the force which enables people to stand together and claim their territory”—echoes the existing idea that nationalism deals specifically with political turbulence that often results in hostilities.³²

In light of this strong relationship between nationalism and violent ends, ballet in early twentieth century America was, in all likelihood, far from a strictly nationalist enterprise. Based on philosophy and multiculturalism scholar Will Kymlicka’s argument that “[i]mmigrant groups rarely give rise to nationalist movements,” the work of Russian immigrant ballet teachers in America was almost certainly not involved with acts of violence in the name of Russian nationalism.³³ But, as Russian émigrés with strong emotional ties to their homeland during the upheaval of the Russian Revolution, nationalist sentiments could conceivably have filtered into their individual knowledge and dissemination of ballet as a Russian art form, and thus nationalism cannot be dismissed entirely as a possible influence on their teaching in America. It more likely manifested itself in their work as a tempered kind of nationalism, or a sense of “national pride.”³⁴ These teachers developed their artistic values under Imperial rule, and the fall of the Tsarist regime may have bolstered their love of country. Russian ballet master Nicolas Legat describes his dual sense of national pride for the country’s artistic contributions and melancholia at the demise of the Russian aristocracy in his 1939 memoir:

Not in this day or in this age shall another majestic artistic edifice arise as crumbled in the ruins of the Russian Revolution. But we, the product of that artistic culture, must give to other countries the benefit of that we know, and hand down the treasures we received. In the four quarters of the globe I behold the greatest dancers of my generation, many of them my pupils, upholding the

standard of the great arts, and if I am proud at the sight it is not merely a personal pride but a national pride, that we, in things material and political the despised and rejected of men, shall live for ever in thus transmitting a spark of the otherwise inexpressible soul of Russia.³⁵

With such strong personal and professional ties to a country to which they knew they could never return, these teachers proudly emphasized their national origins and nationally-derived artistic values once they arrived in the United States.

The flood of Russian national pride that swept through the New York ballet scene during the period likely inspired the public's belief in Russian ballet as the ultimate standard for classical dance. Many immigrant teachers and dancers espoused their reverence for Imperial Russia's developments in ballet, their national pride being conveyed, in part, through their performances and their demonstrations in ballet classes—through their individual embodiment and teaching of the Russian classical style and sensibility. They also voiced their national pride to the American public through school brochures, newspaper and magazine advertisements, dance manuals, and interviews. A 1920 brochure for the Vestoff-Serova School proclaims: "The Imperial Schools... may be said to have reaped the best of all in Europe and have formed a method quite to themselves, which, combining as it does, technique of unsurpassed brilliancy with an exquisite grace of body, is at present acknowledged to be the best in the world."³⁶ Ivan Tarasoff, in a 1933 interview with *The American Dancer* magazine, touted the Russian approach at the expense of others:

* Notably, Sonia Serova was born in London as Aileen Swepstone. Her biography in the school brochure states that she attended a rather generic "Russian School." Since her husband Vestoff lists his biography alongside hers, but specifically notes that he had trained at the "Russian Imperial Academy of the Arts, Moscow," it seems likely that they Russianized her name and her training background in accordance with period practice. Serova's teaching is discussed in Chapter Six.

...the strictly French technique was artificial, fluttery, full of unnecessary gesture and movement. The Italian school produces mechanical and stiff graduates and in time ugly muscles and knotty knee joints, so, after observing these results as registered very positively (for I was a young man and ugliness I did not favor), and knowing the Russians had gained their coveted reputation as dancers not only by industry of study, but by fearlessness of originality not hesitating to change any rigid rules of technique did their intelligence suggest better, I, being born Russian, assumed the privilege of exerting my own intelligence.³⁷

Constantin Kobeleff, too, in the section of his mid-1920s school brochure entitled “THE GENUINE METHOD,” states:

The KOBELEFF RUSSIAN SCHOOL OF DANCING is modeled on the lines of the (former) IMPERIAL SCHOOL OF DANCING IN PETROGRAD, in which Mr. Kobeleff received his training and of which he is a graduate.

What is the significance of:

‘FROM THE (former) IMPERIAL SCHOOL OF PETROGRAD’

???

Answer:

THE FINEST INSTITUTION OF THE DANCE IN THE WORLD, where the GENUINE FUNDAMENTALS of the ballet were taught.^{*38}

All of the teachers in this study who trained at the Imperial Russian Ballet School cited it as the source of their expertise, often lauding its achievements as the singular, superior, national brand of ballet. While all Russian immigrant teachers were not the same—they maintained diverse approaches to teaching, taught in a variety of situations, and had different reasons for leaving their home country—they all emphasized their Russian ballet lineage. National pride manifested itself differently in the work of each teacher, yet

* As late as 1931 Kobeleff was using the name Petrograd in his print advertisements and brochures, despite the institution of the name Leningrad in 1924. While some Russian dancers were interested in the ideals behind the Revolution, others were attached to the Tsarist regime under which they trained and were nostalgic for the days of the aristocracy. For more on the dancers’ responses to the Russian Revolution, see Natalia Roslavleva’s *Era of the Russian Ballet 1770-1965* (London: Gollancz, 1966).

it was present in each approach.* The need for self-promotion in the American marketplace and the dance world's emphasis on all things Russian likely contributed, too, to the publicizing and extolling of their national heritage; it is unknowable whether these teachers' Russian heritage was thrust into the foreground in earnest displays of national pride, or to establish legitimacy in the American commercial environment, where anything remotely Russian in flavor could whip the public into a frenzy. In all likelihood, each teacher was influenced by his or her own sense of national pride in addition to the circumstantial requirement for publicizing one's Russian origins.

In addition to national pride, the concept of national identity provides another lens through which to interpret the period's ballet. Nationalism scholar Anthony D. Smith considers "*nationalism*, the ideology and movement," to be "closely related to *national identity*, a multidimensional concept... extended to include a specific language, sentiments and symbolism." He states: "we cannot begin to understand the power and appeal of nationalism as a political force without grounding our analysis in a wider perspective whose focus is national identity treated as a collective cultural phenomenon."³⁹ Smith's view of national identity—that it encompasses nationalism but expands beyond politically driven acts of war to include the realms of culture and tradition—is most applicable in this examination of early twentieth century immigrant ballet teachers. It broadens the context in which these instructors' work can be viewed, and it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how national characteristics emerged in the ballet they taught in America. In particular, it gives import to their past

* See Chapters Five and Six for detailed analyses of select Russian teaching practices in New York.

experiences as students at the Imperial Ballet Schools and to their adult lives in the United States as instructors, and it promotes examination of the displacement they experienced as both émigrés and immigrants.

In his 1991 book, *National Identity*, Smith argues:

...a sense of national identity provides a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves in the world, through the prism of the collective personality and its distinctive culture. It is through a shared, unique culture that we are enabled to know 'who we are' in the contemporary world. By rediscovering that culture we 'rediscover' ourselves, the 'authentic self', or so it has appeared to many divided and disoriented individuals who have had to contend with the vast changes and uncertainties of the modern world. This process of self-definition and location is in many ways the key to national identity....⁴⁰

By this logic, Russian teachers, in holding tightly to the principles of ballet as they had learned them in Russia, were “rediscovering” and reinforcing their individual and collective identities as “disoriented” newcomers to America.⁴¹ While there were surely varying degrees of adherence to the Imperial traditions among the teachers, their emphatic perpetuation of Russian ballet in the West at a time when their homeland was in a state of revolutionary flux likely bolstered their collective sense for the Russian national identity in America.

In his 1916 *Nationalism and Internationalism*, British historian Ramsay Muir discusses the idea of nationality; it is similar to Smith's concept of national identity:

...it is probable that the most potent of all nation-moulding factors, the one indispensable factor which must be present whatever else be lacking, is the possession of a common tradition, a memory of sufferings endured and victories won in common, expressed in song and legend, in the dear names of great personalities that seem to embody in themselves the character and ideals of the nation, in the names also of sacred places wherein the national memory is enshrined.⁴²

Muir's description, like Smith's, deals with both the cultural and political aspects of national identity, and is therefore also germane to the situation of the Russian émigré teachers. It is no surprise, then, considering Muir's idea that nationality includes a sense for "great personalities that seem to embody in themselves the character and ideals of the nation," that Russian ballet teacher Mikhail Mordkin often yelled at the top of his voice the names of celebrated Russian dancers and theatres during his classes in New York City. In a 1970s interview, ballet dancer and teacher Leon Danielian, who had studied with Mordkin, recalled:

...if class was very good, he would start screaming out the names of the great theaters of Europe and Russia: 'St. Petersburg! Geltzer! Pavlova!'...he would never scream out Nijinsky, but he would scream out all these fascinating women Geltzer, Kchessinska, Preobrajenska, and he would scream out these names. 'Maryinsky!' And you'd think you were dancing at the Maryinsky Theatre. He had a marvelous theatrical voice, husky, a bold voice, and we would get so elated about it.⁴³

By summoning the famous Russian personalities and theatres of the Imperial era in his teaching, Mordkin kept his nationality and his national identity alive in his work. Perhaps in an effort to inspire his American students in the 1920s and '30s, he conjured images of the Imperial ballet despite its demise; his immediate inclination was to turn to the nationality that motivated his own artistic development.

Mordkin's outpouring of Russian names can also be associated with the idea that national identity serves to reinforce the identity of the individual. Professor of Philosophy Kai Nielsen states: "national identity is... an identity essential for very many people to give meaning to their lives, vital for their secure sense of self-respect, essential for their sense of belonging and security: all things of fundamental value to human beings...."⁴⁴ The Russian teachers in this study regularly made references to Imperial

Russia—and its renowned approach to ballet training—throughout their careers in the United States. These teachers' expressions of Russian identity may have been attempts to maintain their connections to personal history and community as immigrants in a foreign country. In 1916, Russian dancer Theodore Kosloff brought to light the Russian national characteristics when he described to a *New York Times* reporter:

...[t]he Russian people are morose and gloomy when they think of worldly affairs, for their struggle for existence is keener than that of other peoples and they have little liberty. Consequently in all Russian art you find expression of a great longing, a soul-hunger, or a dream of freedom for humanity, such as the wild animals of the steppes and the birds of the forests enjoy. You will find this longing expressed in literature, in poetry, in painting, and in the Russian ballet. It is the real soul of Russia....⁴⁵

Kosloff's statement seems to indicate a belief that a peoples' culture emerges from their socio-political situation. Because the Russian Revolution was fresh in the memories of the Russian immigrant teachers during the research period, the individual longing to which Kosloff refers may have manifested in their work through consistent references to Imperial Russia and its ballet. Based on Nielsen's definition, their attempts to preserve and glorify the imperiled national identity of Imperial Russia were part of maintaining their personal identities as displaced individuals.

Geopolitics and National Identity

National identity—which encompasses the concept of nationalism—is important to the study of the Russian teachers because of the continuous political turmoil in their home country during this period. The Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, as well as World War I, may have occasioned the emigration of these Russian teachers;⁴⁶ they notably arrived *en masse* in America in the relatively condensed two-decade period

during which these conflicts took place.^{*47} The centrality of the Russians to this discussion, however, does not preclude the idea of national identity as being part of the Italian teachers' work in America as well. By the early twentieth century, Italian dancers and teachers had been trickling into the United States for over fifty years. Their situation was comparable to that of the Russians in the sense that both groups were émigrés, as well as immigrants, facing a monumental cultural shift that challenged their values and their traditions. Yet there is evidence that the Italians did not experience national pride and national identity with the same intensity as the Russians; the politics of each country's geography were important to this distinction. The Russian Imperial Ballet Schools were centered in Russia's two most prominent cities, each of which embodied different aspects of the Russian national identity: St. Petersburg, built as a Western metropolis, has a more refined European sensibility than Moscow, whose Byzantine architecture—the onion domes of St. Basil's cathedral, for example—reflects the traditional folk character of Old World Russia.⁴⁸ Mirroring the complexion of each city were the two styles of ballet that emerged from these schools: the lyricism and refinement of the Mariinsky dancers in St. Petersburg, and the boisterous spirit of the Bolshoi dancers in Moscow. In her 1959 book *The American Ballet*, Olga Maynard discusses the conflict over the dual Russian styles: "...arguments raged between the Imperial theatres at St. Petersburg and Moscow as to the respective merits of the lyric and the athletic. Balanchine records that the style of dancing at the Maryinsky was strict and precise, while in Moscow, six hundred kilometers distant, the dancing was closer to a

* While World War I also affected Italy, all of the Italian teachers in this study who immigrated to America had already settled by the time the war began.

circus performance. The Moscovites [*sic*] accused the St. Petersburg school of dance of being cold; St. Petersburg retorted that the Moscovites were in bad taste.”^{*49} Despite the incongruity of the two styles, both can be viewed as reflections of the Russian national identity.

When it comes to Italy, however, scholar Debra Hickenlooper Sowell refers to the country as a “politically fractured peninsula” during the nineteenth century; she states: “The lack of national unity and the resulting decentralization of the arts resulted in a complex web of performance activity in which a widespread network of opera houses included ballet in their programming.”⁵⁰ The Italian dancers who came to America in the late nineteenth century from the La Scala and San Carlo opera houses were brought up in this splintered environment, where the ballet training in one theatre may have been entirely dissimilar from that in the neighboring province. Sowell describes hundreds of choreographers whose work made up the Italian repertoire from that period, far too many to begin to distinguish a unified Italian style, *per se*.^{†51} Without a national training approach or style, the Italian teachers were likely unable to develop connections to a national artistic identity in the same way as the Russians. When the Italians teaching ballet in America made references to their heritage, they credited the individual theatres from which they hailed or the specific instructors with whom they studied. Josephine

* A trend that emerges here finds many of the dancers who trained in St. Petersburg relocating to Paris during the revolution, while many from the Moscow school went directly to the United States. The vigorous ballet style of the Moscow dancers seems better suited to the American, spectacle-seeking temperament than the elegance of the Mariinsky dancers, while the more sophisticated Parisians may have been more appreciative of the St. Petersburg dancers’ specificity and classicism than the zest of the Moscovites.

† Despite the lack of a cohesive national tradition, certain characteristics—upright torsos and modest leg extensions, for example—consistently arise in both primary and secondary sources as uniquely Italian in origin.

Mascagno, wife of Italian pedagogue Stefano Mascagno and a teacher in her own right, included such references in the dance manual they sold at the Mascagno School: she refers to the San Carlo in Naples as, “one of the most celebrated theatres in the world,” and Milan’s La Scala as “another of the world’s most famous theatres.”⁵² In his 1923 manual *The Art of Terpsichore*, pedagogue Luigi Albertieri omits any direct mention of his training ground, instead acknowledging his personal lineage to the international pedagogue Enrico Cecchetti.⁵³ In this light, the Italians more readily acknowledged that there were other valid approaches or styles of ballet on the international scene, while the Russian tendency was to claim national supremacy over other countries’ styles of ballet. The avidity of the Russians’ national identity—due largely to the emotions stirred by the Russian Revolution—is likely responsible for their assumption of dominance during the research period.

The Internationalization of Russian Ballet

During the late nineteenth century, the Russian Imperial School became the first deliberately internationalized institution of ballet training. Having seen the Russian audience awed by the spectacular thirty-two *fouettés* of Italian ballerina Pierina Legnani and the equally acrobatic feats of her compatriots, the school’s management solicited the teaching of ballet master Enrico Cecchetti.⁵⁴ They wanted the bold virtuosity of his Italian training to complement the more refined Danish and French approaches that were already being taught there by ballet masters Christian Johansson and Marius Petipa, respectively. In his memoir, Nicolas Legat remembers the Russian dancers’ response to the arrival of the Italians: “We found that they had a school all their own, which was

distinguished by remarkable dexterity and sensational brilliance. Their tours, their pirouettes, their *fouettés* were all superior to our own. Their manners, on the other hand, often lacked grace; theirs was a school of *tours de force*; taste was sacrificed to effect and dexterity.”⁵⁵ This strong dissimilarity, between the Russian lyricism and the Italian athleticism, is noted as early as 1866, when the Italian dancer Claudia Cucchi spent the season as a guest artist in St. Petersburg; nineteenth-century ballerina Ekaterina Vazem noted the difference between Cucchi’s dancing style and that of the Russians: “Her rather ordinary ‘swift’ dancing in the Italian genre, with its effort to overcome various difficulties, was definitely not to our taste.”⁵⁶

While the Imperial School’s international “selection and systematic arranging of all that was necessary for the education of Russian dancers” became one of ballet’s most revered national traditions in its own right, the early juxtaposition of national approaches was not without conflict.⁵⁷ It is likely that the disparate national allegiances of the Russian Imperial School’s faculty actually undermined the attempt of the management to blend those national traditions together. It was considered treasonous to study with a teacher from another background: when Johansson discovered that ballerina Mathilde Kschessinska was studying with Cecchetti while also benefiting from his private instruction, for example, he threatened to stop teaching her entirely.⁵⁸ In some instances, dancers were left to craft their own blend of traditions to avoid the wrath of their teachers. In her memoir, Kschessinska remembers being “so ashamed and hurt” by Johansson’s response that she “gave up Cecchetti’s classes and studied Italian technique on [her] own.”⁵⁹ In this regard, the internationalization of Russian ballet was taking place, at least during these early years, in the bodies of the dancers who were cross

training in various national styles. The pedagogies themselves did not reflect a blend of techniques; rather to the contrary, the teachers seemed to resist that blend entirely.

According to historian Roland John Wiley, the inclusion of the Italian style into the Imperial Ballet School curriculum contributed to the Russian ballet's distinguished output of dancers around the turn of the century: "Inspired by Enrico Cecchetti, virtuoso male dancing was taken up by Russians. In general, Italian dancers brought a fresh way of looking at dance, and the interaction of Italian virtuosity and passion with Russian elegance and school produced the stars whose names still linger in the memory...."⁶⁰ In her introduction to Marius Petipa's biography, dance historian Lillian Moore describes Russian ballet as "a combination of technical elements from the French and Italian schools, plus indigenous factors contributed by the Russian dancers themselves...."⁶¹ Legat, similarly, describes the eventual merging of national approaches in the Russian training: "The secret of the development of Russian dancing lay in the fact that we learnt from everybody and adapted what we learnt to ourselves. We copied, borrowed from, and emulated every source that gave us inspiration... [t]hus the 'Russian' school of dancing is an eclectic school—the French, the Scandinavian, the Italian—all welded into an artistic whole by the genius of the Russian people."⁶² Imperial Russian training, often considered to be the root of "pure, classical tradition," was, in actuality, a confluence of ballet's existing European traditions that was shaped by the Russian national identity.⁶³ It is distinctly possible that the French, Danish, and Italian techniques merged differently in each dancer's body. The impact of the Russian national identity—such as the longing

* Wiley goes on to mention such luminaries as Anna Pavlova, Olga Preobrajenska, and Tamara Karsavina, whose studies at the Imperial School coincided with some of the Russians who taught in New York City during the research period.

that Theodore Kosloff describes—and the influence of Russian national pride upon the otherwise diverse Imperial training, may have lent a uniform appearance to the technique. Each immigrant teacher to the United States who trained at the Imperial School, in this regard, was most likely teaching his or her own uniquely shaped brand of Russian ballet during the research period in New York City.

The international, multifaceted Russian technique, complemented by the Russian national style, was sent around the world as itinerant dancers and teachers fled political turmoil during the Russian Revolution and World War I. While the Russian dancers were largely sheltered from the political unrest outside of the Imperial Theatres, they were not impervious to it: during the 1905 Revolution, historian Natalia Roslavleva claims that “[t]here was a pronounced feeling of unrest in the Mariinsky company,” which profoundly affected the dancers.⁶⁴ Sergei Legat, the brother of pedagogue Nicolas Legat and a promising member of the Imperial Ballet, had developed political leanings that conflicted with those of the ballet’s administration;⁶⁵ he committed suicide as a result of the pressure to cease his populist activities.⁶⁶ In her definitive book, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*, scholar Lynn Garafola states, “...life at the Imperial Ballet did not resume its normal course in the aftermath of 1905.”⁶⁷ The company subsequently lost a number of its most celebrated dancers—including Fokine, Pavlova, Vaslav Nijinsky, and Tamara Karsavina—to Diaghilev’s enterprise, which would take Russian ballet to the West and make an indelible mark on American ballet.

The 1917 Revolution also inspired Russian dancers to leave their homeland. The following excerpt from Mordkin’s four-part autobiography, published by *The Dance*

Magazine in 1926, illustrates the atmosphere at the Imperial Theatres after the October Revolution:

The Bolshevik regime was not friendly to the artists. We had been pets of the old aristocrats and were to be punished accordingly. We were classed with the hated bourgeoisie and treated as members of the detested middle class. The spirit of hatred and bitterness was everywhere. Families quarrelled among themselves. Institutions as unified and closely knit as our ballet had been lost to all unity of purpose and action. Dancers openly showed their jealousy for rivals. Masters' orders were disobeyed. It was impossible to keep peace and discipline during those days of continual fighting.⁶⁸

The beginning of Soviet rule signaled an end to the Imperial ballet tradition, which was supplanted by the Vaganova method in the early 1920s.⁶⁹ The dancers from the Imperial theatres, however, had dispersed across the globe, exporting the ballet from Imperial Russia on an international scale.* Many relocated to Paris, London, and New York to teach; the growing English and American ballets, as well as the then-atrophying French tradition,⁷⁰ were the immediate beneficiaries of the Russian approach.

Internationalism, Cosmopolitanism, Multi-Nationalism

The international nature of ballet, and particularly of the Russian ballet which had such a strong impact on the development of ballet in New York City during the span of this research, requires a broader investigation into the construct of internationalism. Scholars of internationalism tend to fall on one side of a generally two-sided argument, articulated here by pragmatist philosopher Richard Shusterman in the *Journal of*

* The Russian teachers in this study were trained at the Imperial Schools in Moscow and St. Petersburg, the latter which was renamed both Petrograd and Leningrad during the research period. The approach at the Imperial Schools was distinct from that of the Vaganova system of training, which is currently considered the Russian method, and which was developed alongside the change from Imperial Russia to the U.S.S.R. The Russian training that came to the United States with the immigrant teachers in this study, then, was of the Imperial tradition as opposed to the Vaganova tradition.

Aesthetics and Art Criticism: “Is internationalism simply an eclectic dialogue of difference, or is it an attempt to reach some unifying synthesis of views?”⁷¹ He continues:

...one model of internationalism functions in terms of the world dominance of a specific cultural tradition or master language, while another is more pluralistic and multi-cultural. If the first tries to overcome difference by concentrating on the power of a singular master-tradition, the other tries to accept and bridge differences so as to achieve an international synthesis or collaborative dialogue where the integrity of the different traditions will be preserved in the whole.⁷²

The first kind of internationalism that Shusterman addresses deals with a fusion of nationalities and thereby a fusion of national characteristics to form an international blend.* Scruton clarifies this position in his 2005 article, “The Dangers of Internationalism”:

The internationalist is someone who wishes to break down the distinctions between people and who does not feel at home in any city because he is an alien in all—including his own. He sees the world as one vast system in which everyone is equally a customer, a consumer, a creature of wants and needs. He is only too happy to transplant people from place to place, to abolish local attachments, to shift boundaries and customs in accordance with the inexorable demands of economic progress.⁷³

Scruton further asserts that this approach to internationalism leads to the loss of “everything that was distinctive of our histories and traditions.”⁷⁴

Shusterman’s second definition of internationalism is a kind of multi-nationalism that some scholars have dubbed cosmopolitanism.[†] Scruton explains:

The cosmopolitan is someone who is at home in any city, who appreciates human life in all its peaceful forms, and is emotionally in touch with the customs, languages, and cultures of many different peoples. Our classical music has ranged freely across cultures, not destroying or absorbing but enhancing them. The same

* Such fusion has often been referred to as a “melting pot” with regard to the international composition of America.

[†] I use these terms—cosmopolitanism and multi-nationalism—interchangeably.

is true of our art, architecture, and religion. The cosmopolitan is a nationalist—a believer in his own nation. But he is also a believer in all the other nations that have captured a corner of the earth that they can legitimately claim as their own. He is a patriot of one country, but a nationalist of many.⁷⁵

Shusterman states that one potential pitfall of such multi-nationalism—where almost anything can be substantiated as belonging—is a “radically pluralist discourse” that may devolve to a nihilistic end.⁷⁶ Ballet during the research period was all-inclusive in this way; its definition was so broad that the general public could not distinguish ballet from other period dance forms such as aesthetic dancing or toe-tapping.⁷⁷ Shusterman’s warning is apropos to these varied brands of ballet, which consisted of forms well outside of the classical. To a certain degree, those balletic dance forms that appeared on New York revue stages during the period can be considered cosmopolitan, specifically in the relativistic sense about which Shusterman cautions; if anything could be considered ballet, then what were ballet’s constitutive properties? It is this issue that has given the ballet of the research period a reputation of inferiority: in 1959 Olga Maynard wrote that American ballet “had a past bankrupted by a frivolous attitude toward dance,” a disparaging sentiment that has been echoed throughout dance scholarship.⁷⁸ This view, however, fails to consider the contributions of immigrants—who were working in the classical tradition—to American ballet.*

The classical ballet in America, like the classical ballet in Russia, became an international form in the cosmopolitan, multi-national sense as well, although it did not wander into the nihilistic territory about which Shusterman warns. Rather, ballet’s

* As well, many histories of American ballet acknowledge the presence of these individuals but begin their analyses with the tours of Anna Pavlova or the Ballets Russes, or the arrival of George Balanchine. See Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No Fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003): 106-7; and Jennifer Homans, *Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010): 448-451, among others.

technique—having continually evolved from nation to nation—functioned as his “international synthesis or collaborative dialogue,” and the stylistic traditions from each contributing nation were, as he states, “preserved in the whole.”⁷⁹ This multi-national definition is also relevant from the perspective of the dancer’s body, where the total separation of ballet’s international technique from its national styles is impossible. Ballet’s style emerges through the technique and the technique is developed with a particular stylistic, often national, inclination; thus the two function interdependently in the physicality of the dancer. A *battement tendu* in Moscow in the early twentieth century would have utilized the same basic bodily mechanics as a *battement tendu* in Copenhagen, yet the emphases on certain national stylistic qualities would have caused them to appear slightly different.

Such subtle reflections of each nation in its ballet were inherent to the teaching of ballet in those countries; the presence of both national and international elements in the ballet taught in New York City supports the idea that ballet during the research period was international from a multi-national, cosmopolitan perspective. In this light, nationalism and internationalism as they pertain to early twentieth century ballet are decidedly complementary. Ballet is not *either* national *or* international, rather each concept is integral to the development of the other. National approaches merge to create an international form, of which the Russian school is evidence. International forms return to their countries of origin to revitalize the national approaches, an example of which was when Russian émigrés fleeing the Revolution settled in Paris, thereby refreshing and bringing new influences to the existing French tradition that had helped inform the development of Russian ballet.

In early twentieth century America, Italian and Russian national characteristics were at the center of the public's understanding of ballet, which may account for the plethora of period writers who endeavored to parse out the differences between the two styles. The French, Danish, and Italian approaches that were Russianized in the Imperial School and dispersed internationally, as well as the Italian training—primarily from Milan, Naples, and through the teaching of Enrico Cecchetti—were the major influences on ballet's pedagogical development in the United States. The national identities of the Russians and the Italians, as manifested in their ballet, were inspirational to Americans and those who called America home; their work throughout the research period allowed for the unearthing of American ballet's unique national characteristics, spirit, and values.

Notes

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 61. Lillian Moore, introduction to *Russian Ballet Master: The Memoirs of Marius Petipa*, by Marius Petipa (London: Dance Books, 1971): x.
 62. Legat, *Ballet Russe*, 2, 12.
 63. Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 108.
 64. Ibid., 167.
 65. Ibid.
 66. Ibid., 167-9.
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Chapter Four

The Traditionalists: Malvina Cavallazzi, Rosina Galli, and Luigi Albertieri

“Now, young men and women, arm yourselves with courage and persevere in the study. Happy, indeed, is he who has favorable dispositions prepared by nature and who knows how to improve them with constant and intelligent study.”

—Luigi Albertieri, *The Art of Terpsichore*, 1923

In this chapter, I examine the work of three Italian ballet teachers who worked in New York City between 1909 and 1934: Malvina Cavallazzi, Rosina Galli, and Luigi Albertieri. Cavallazzi, a ballerina, *travestie*^{*} dancer, and mime who hailed from Milan’s La Scala, was the first director of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School; Galli, a La Scala ballerina of the following generation, was both ballerina and ballet mistress at the Metropolitan before taking directorship of the school from Cavallazzi’s successor; and Albertieri, the adopted son and protégé of pedagogue Enrico Cecchetti, was ballet master for a number of opera companies including the Metropolitan, and was also an independent studio owner and teacher in New York City.

I use the term Traditionalist in this chapter to describe these teachers’ common struggle with and repudiation of the American environment for ballet. Capitalism, commercialism, and the popular stage impacted their students in ways they found to be nearly intolerable. Rather than modifying their heritage in response to a new context,

^{*} See the glossary for definitions of ballet terminology and clarifications of term use.

these teachers held tightly to their artistic beliefs. They taught the Italian technique and style of ballet as they had learned it, and they fought to retain the emphasis on classical training that was so valued in Europe but largely underappreciated in the United States. Cavallazzi, Galli, and Albertieri refused to concede to popular pressures and trends, and their pedagogical approaches reflected their steadfast beliefs in their traditions.

Beginning with Cavallazzi, I discuss elements of each teacher's pedagogical philosophy and methodology, as well as other contextual issues that impacted their work. Sadly, a substantial amount of their class material has been lost over time, and thus there is limited analysis of the specific content of these classes. Despite the dearth of technical material, however, these instructors—both individually and collectively—made substantial pedagogical contributions to the nascent American ballet during the research period.

Malvina Cavallazzi,* c.1855-1924[†]

Malvina Cavallazzi began her training at La Scala in Milan when she was eight years old. Her performing career in Italy was in small theatres, during the period when gaslights were still used to illuminate the stage. According to dance historian Ivor Guest, Cavallazzi had a harrowing experience during one particular performance that “haunted her all her life”: “She was waiting to be let down to the stage from the ‘flies’ when a careless stage-hand, after lighting the limelight, dropped a burning match on her

* I have elected to use the most commonly found spelling of Cavallazzi's name in both archival documents and in the work of contemporary scholars.

[†] I have deduced Cavallazzi's birth date from records of her immigration through Ellis Island, which show her to have been 54 years old when she came to America in 1909. Having performed at the Metropolitan Opera House during its inaugural season in 1883, this was not Cavallazzi's first trip to the States.

costume. Fortunately he at once saw what had happened and promptly smothered the flames with his coat. Though shocked, she was able to make her descent and perform her *pas*, though omitting all the turns, for the back of her costume had been largely burnt away.”¹ The same tenacity that enabled her to finish the performance that night became an important aspect of her professional life, particularly as she assumed leadership of the first European-style ballet school in the United States.

After leaving Italy, Cavallazzi danced at Her Majesty’s Theatre in London beginning in 1879, and was the first ballerina at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York when it opened in 1883.² She then turned her career over to *travestie* and mime roles at London’s Alhambra and Empire theatres, where, according to dance scholar Alexandra Carter, Cavallazzi’s “dramatic skills dictated the tone of a major part of the repertoire.”^{*3} Guest considers Cavallazzi one of the few legitimate teachers in London, seeing that she gave “many young dancers an invaluable grounding in dancing, mime and deportment.”⁴ A number of her students—including ballerina Phyllis Bedells—became the first generation of British ballet dancers; her teaching can therefore be considered an important contribution to the development of British ballet during the music hall era.⁵

Cavallazzi arrived in America on November 1, 1909 at the behest of the Metropolitan Opera’s management, having been “fetched back from England” to lead the ballet school.⁶ Her appointment—which lasted until her retirement in 1913—was significant for a few reasons. In 1912, the *New York Sun* acknowledged: “Mme. Cavallazzi is the first woman to have charge of a real ballet school in this city,” an

* For descriptions of Cavallazzi’s mime and *travestie* roles in London, see Ivor Guest, *Ballet in Leicester Square: The Empire and the Alhambra, 1860-1915* (London: Dance Books, 1992).

achievement both for the establishment of an American ballet academy in the European image, as well as for the advancement of women in the early twentieth century.⁷ The same newspaper also reflected on the previously limited availability of such celebrated European training, to which American students would now have access: “Dancing of the kind she teaches had never before been possible to pupils here except in the private classes of some of the retired premières.”⁸

The opening of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School was a historic moment for American ballet, and the pressure on Cavallazzi was tremendous. The *New York Telegraph* placed “the destiny of the ballet movement in this country... in Madame’s hands,” and she quickly became the face of European-style training in America.⁹ Her students during that first year were a motley group, and she would spend the next four years working to turn them into the first fully American *corps de ballet*.¹⁰ At the end of the first year, Cavallazzi presented her students to the public in a showcase. The twenty-four female students were all Americans, and their work prompted the writer and ballet enthusiast Carl Van Vechten to note that, “It is not only Italians and French and Russians who can stand on their toes and pirouette.”¹¹

In the press, Cavallazzi was one of the first Europeans to tout the aptitude of American students for ballet, claiming that their physical abilities and sharp-mindedness were ideal characteristics for ballet dancers.¹² Her efforts to forefront the talents of young American women delighted those writers, like Willa Cather and Van Vechten, who were eager to see ballet take root in America, and who wrote about the new school and its

* It is likely that Maria Bonfanti, student of Carlo Blasis, was one of those premières, having opened her studio in New York in 1897 after touring in ballet spectacles across the United States.

director with great anticipation and seriousness.¹³ Cavallazzi's students included Maria Gambarelli, who was a prima ballerina at the Metropolitan as well as a dancer in both movie "prologs" and the precision dance line that was the precursor to the Radio City Music Hall's Rockettes.¹⁴ Gambarelli also taught Ted Shawn's teacher, Metropolitan Opera Ballet dancer Hazel Wallack, thereby carrying Cavallazzi's influence, albeit indirectly, into the realm of American modern dance.¹⁵

According to Ann Barzel, Cavallazzi's "method of teaching was strictly Italian with much foot work, stiff backs, and no extension work at all."¹⁶ Barzel's qualification of these specific characteristics as Italian derives from the tenets established by pedagogue and Italian ballet patriarch Carlo Blasis. Barbara Barker claims that Blasis felt that the legs should be placed at low angles "to preserve the balance of the body," a concept that—based on photographs of her students—Cavallazzi maintained in her teaching.¹⁷ The Italian focus on footwork, too, was consistent with that of other Italian instructors. The teacher Enrico Zanfretta, another product of the La Scala School, emphasized tidy, quick footwork in his classes. His student, ballerina Alicia Alonso, has said: "From his training I acquired the ability to use my feet with great rapidity."¹⁸ Cavallazzi's British student Bedells remembers that she taught "tricky *enchaînements*," from which it can be assumed that the footwork in her class exercises was relatively intricate.¹⁹

Cavallazzi used 180 degrees of rotation in her feet, which were "so turned," according to the journalist from the *New York Sun*, "that one might be a continuation of the other."²⁰ It can be assumed that because Cavallazzi demonstrated in this fashion, she expected the same degree of turnout from her students. Again, this feature of her teaching

is consistent with that of other Italians teaching during a similar time frame. Barker has described Maria Bonfanti's approach in this regard: "She insisted that the students turn out so much that they 'show the sole of the foot to the publique.'"²¹ Barker also states, "when closing from tendu, the toes of the working foot touched the supporting heel before the heel of the working leg could touch the floor."²² This action would require 180 degrees of rotation in the feet, and it also gives a sense for how the foot was expected to connect with the floor—with the weight mostly on the ball of the foot, then on the heel as the foot closed tightly into fifth position.

Cavallazzi's perception of *pointework* hearkened back to the nineteenth century; she did not approve of any extraneous padding or stiffening of the shoe, which was unboxed at the toe. In an article entitled, "Mme. Cavalazzi Defends Ballet" from the *Boston Daily Herald* in 1909, Cavallazzi described her approach to *pointework* through the story of an encounter with a cheeky, but perhaps typical, American student:

'One girl who had danced a little,' she explained, 'told me that she could stand on her toe. I was not astonished. To stand on the toe one must have worked and studied a long time.

'Gradually one practises [*sic*] rising on the big toe. The muscles by degrees become trained to bear the weight of the body. The nerves, too, become accustomed to the strain, and slowly, very slowly, little by little, the dancer learns to rise on her toes until it is as easy to her as to stand on her feet.

'The weight is so evenly distributed throughout the muscles of the legs by this time that they should not exhibit the least visible sign of effort. When the dancer can so move as not to disturb the normal arrangement of the muscles, then'—here the professor's eyes were bright with enthusiasm—'then can she really say that she can stand on the toe. If not—' and the Cavalazzi shoulders went into the air with an expression of complete lack of interest in any such person.

'And this girl,' she continued, 'this girl, she try [*sic*] to stand on her toe. Of course, she could not even rise firmly on her toe.

'When she did get up in a certain way, she did it so badly that all the weight fell on the knee and the upper leg. Then there were bunches of muscles in her calves and thighs, and her knees were thick from the weight of her body.

‘I said to her, no my dear, that is not the way to stand on one’s toe. And I leaned down to show her what she should not do.

‘I put her foot into the right position, explained that there should not be large bunches of muscles and told her she did not know how to stand on the toe. But she said that she knew that already.’²³

Cavallazzi, who believed strongly in the rigors of the ballet class to develop the feet for this kind of strenuous work, was quoted in a 1912 interview in *Musical America*: “We get the foot in a highly supple state by giving the child the exercise which is called the ‘battimant,’ [sic] and the very first work of the student is a series of exercises which give her agility and grace.”²⁴ Most Americans would not have understood her firm belief in the class material as preparation for *pointework*, since there was no lineage of European-style academic ballet training in America.²⁵ She was one of the first, along with Bonfanti, to emphasize in the American press the importance of ballet training; the media became a primary vehicle through which her philosophies reached the public.

In addition to ballet technique, Cavallazzi taught her students two central aspects of the comprehensive curricula that were taught in the European and Russian academies: music and pantomime. Musically, she was appalled that some students did not know about the four primary meters used in ballet.^{*26} Yet there would have been few, if any, places for them to learn that information—particularly in combination with studies in ballet—in early twentieth century America. The pantomime Cavallazzi taught was a long-standing part of the Italian dance tradition. The study of gesture is a prominent though disappearing aspect of the Cecchetti Method of ballet training, which was derived originally from the *Commedia dell’Arte*.²⁷ Barzel describes Cavallazzi’s teaching of pantomime: “Among the problems set was to express the idea ‘no’ in various ways—as a

* Presumably, the four meters to which Cavallazzi has referred are 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, and 6/8 time.

peasant girl would say it, as a queen would, etc. The standard gestures for *I, you, love, pretty, crowd* and so on were taught.”²⁸ Cavallazzi taught her students how to use their faces as part of the pantomime vocabulary. A journalist attending a school performance in 1911 found one of the students to be particularly adept: “Miss Schwartz displayed a natural grace and an unusually well-developed sense of facial expression...”²⁹ In the *New York Evening World* in 1913, Cavallazzi described one of the pantomime playlets she was rehearsing with the students:

The ballet will be a pantomime sketch. Just as you are sitting here I shall have a gentleman come on the stage to watch a ballet rehearsal. My prima ballerina is very beautiful... and the gentleman will fall in love with her and try to win her heart and take her away from her art. Twice she will be lured by the promises of riches and luxury and love, but twice she will refuse. The third time she will succumb to his pleadings, but just as he starts to embrace the prima ballerina the girls of the ballet rush to her and beseech her to remain with them. She abandons the rich gentleman and goes back to her art and her lovely confreres, these sweet children you see dancing before you.³⁰

Her instruction and the students’ performance of this piece must have been exacting—the reporter from the *New York Telegraph* described each nuance of the narrative just as Cavallazzi had intended.³¹

Twenty to thirty pupils typically attended Cavallazzi’s classes, which were often observed by students’ families and “members of the inner society circles... bejeweled and decked in regal furs,” according to the *New York Telegraph* in 1910.³² Based on the numerous newspaper clippings and articles that quote Cavallazzi and give details of her classes, it must have been common practice for journalists to be present as well. Several articles cite her demonstrations for the students: “The girls begin to imitate her as they stare at the feet which used to be admired by the New York public.”³³ Customarily clad in a Victorian-style, high-collared, long-sleeved dress to the ankle, it is likely that her

demonstration was more of an indication than an articulate representation of the movement (fig. 15). A 1912 article in *The Sun* described the nature of her demonstration: “Madame... catches here the eye of one of the dancers and corrects her way of raising the arm by a gesture obviously intended for her to see. Then she sees that a girl has her feet in the wrong position and shows her how to correct the error by lifting her skirts so that the girl may see her own mistake and imitate her steps exactly.”³⁴



Figure 15: Cavallazzi with a student at the Metropolitan, circa 1912. Photo from “Begin Careers As Operatic Dancers,” *Musical America*, July 6, 1912.

Imitation and demonstration were commonly used teaching strategies in early twentieth century ballet classes; many of those teaching classical ballet in New York during the research period were immigrants who spoke little English and were thus relegated to mostly demonstrative methods. There is no journalistic mention of Cavallazzi stumbling to communicate verbally with her students; her various and

extensive newspaper interviews indicate that she had a strong command of the English language. In this light, she may have demonstrated for a different reason: until Pavlova's arrival in 1910, her American students had likely seen only bits of classical ballet embedded within spectacles or revues. Even if they had seen ballet in the European tradition through the touring of those like the Danish ballerina Adeline Genée, they would not have seen the foundational and preparatory ballet class exercises that enabled the dancers to perform as they did.* Without a visual reference for the training material, the students would have needed Cavallazzi's example. In London, however, she could teach while seated. Her students there had more of an opportunity to see ballet dancers—who were regularly featured in the music halls as opposed to being considered merely a “dumb act” as they often were in American vaudeville—and perhaps knew to a greater extent than the Americans what they were trying to achieve.³⁵ Bedells remembers Cavallazzi's classes in London: “It was not always easy, as she never rose from her chair, but called the steps out by name—partly in French and partly in Italian—and if we were not quite sure what she meant she would show us with her hands. Those beautiful hands of hers danced far better than the majority of dancers' feet.”³⁶ It is difficult to imagine the shock that Cavallazzi must have experienced when she moved from London to New York, and, in her mid-50s, found herself having to demonstrate for her students rather than teaching from a seated position. Bedells's recollection also offers insight into Cavallazzi's adeptness as a pedagogue: she noticed the different proclivities of her

* For a discussion of Genée's career and her American tours, see Ivor Guest's *Adeline Genée: A Lifetime of Ballet under Six Reigns* (London: A. and C. Black, 1958).

English and American students and had the wherewithal and the tools to teach them in the way she deemed most appropriate.

As a teacher, Cavallazzi was acknowledged for her efficacy. A 1912 article in *Musical America* describes her students as “show[ing] remarkable proficiency, considering the short time during which they had enjoyed Mme. Cavallazzi’s tutelage.”³⁷ Cavallazzi was impressed with the “quickness and ease with which American girls acquire the art of dancing,” an indication that she saw promise and talent among her students.³⁸ Yet at the same time as her work was producing strong results, Cavallazzi was torn about teaching American dancers. She often expressed concern for what she perceived was a lack of work ethic among American students; a common sentiment that was echoed throughout the research period by many a ballet teacher, and particularly by the Traditionalists in this chapter: “There are girls here... who show that there is plenty of talent in this country. I have at least six girls here with uncommon ability for dancing and if they can only be persuaded to study long enough to learn their profession it ought to be possible to create all the dancers necessary in this country.”³⁹ The American capitalist environment—which left dancers with the financial burden of supporting themselves as they studied—often resulted in irregular study[†]: dancers could neither afford to attend lessons every day nor to focus solely on training without the income they

* According to her obituary written by Mark Perugini of *The Dancing Times*, Cavallazzi felt that her students in London were also too impatient with their training. England’s music hall ballet at the Alhambra and the Empire, where most late nineteenth and early twentieth century British ballet happened, was in many ways parallel to the American circumstances around vaudeville and revue. It is possible that Cavallazzi encountered similar challenges with her students in both London and New York, who were enticed by a stage career before they could complete what she considered an appropriate amount of training. For a discussion of England’s music halls, see Ivor Guest’s *Ballet in Leicester Square: the Alhambra and the Empire, 1860-1915* (London: Dance Books, 1992) and Alexandra Carter’s *Dance and Dancers in the Victorian and Edwardian Music Hall Ballet* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2005).

† Bonfanti’s meticulously kept roll books from 1906 to 1909 attest to the spotty attendance of many students.

could earn by performing. Cavallazzi and many other instructors were frustrated with dancers who they believed were not fully dedicating themselves to training. This recurring conflict was likely due to misunderstanding: the students did not share their instructors' perspective that rigorous daily study was necessary to achieve artistic success because such a concept had not yet become part of the American ballet lexicon.⁴⁰

The dualistic nature of Cavallazzi's feelings about her American students was reflected in her classroom persona: she could be a harsh taskmaster, yet she could also be sympathetic and forgiving. Bedells remembered this dualism with fondness upon hearing of Cavallazzi's death in 1924: "If we were particularly bad she sometimes lost her temper and would rage—in Italian—and leave us for a few minutes until she felt better. She would then come back and apologise to us in the sweetest manner possible. This of course made us feel that we would do anything in the world for her."⁴¹ This double persona commonly came out in her teaching; it may have resulted from her exasperation with students whom she did not perceive as dedicated enough, in addition to her almost maternal tendency to want to nurture them as young women and artists. In 1913, the *New York Evening World* quoted one particular incident in her class:

A blue-eyed girl in the second row was entirely out of pose and Madame's keen, black eyes spotter [*sic*] her in a moment. 'You! Maggie Reilley!' she cried. 'Haven't I taught you better than that? If you must be taught all over, just use your time in watching Esther Rosenberg on your right.' Madame Cavallazzi seemed to repent this little display of discipline. She sank back in her chair and smiled at Maggie as if to assure the girl that she didn't mean a word of it. The Irish girl smiled back as if to say that it was all right.⁴²

In her obituary in *The Dancing Times*, Mark Perugini substantiates her two-sided reactions as the product of her high expectations for ballet as an art form alongside her affection for her students: "While shrewdly critical of her pupils it was only out of desire

that they should do well for themselves and for their art, of which she wished them to uphold—as she had done—an ideal standard; and she had ever the warmest hearted sympathy with the younger generation.”⁴³

Her fondness for her students must have been easily apparent, because despite any cruelty she might have displayed, they were smitten with her. There are numerous accounts of the school’s annual performance given the year of her retirement, all depicting weeping ballet girls presenting their beloved teacher with an engraved “loving cup.” The titles of several articles provide glimpses into the culminating event in Cavallazzi’s career at the Metropolitan, and into the quality of her relationships with her students:

Ballet in Tears as Cavalazzi Retires: Metropolitan Dancers Give Loving Cup to Ex-Premiere, Who Trained Them: She Goes Back to Italy: Loretta Glynn Too Sorrowful to End Little Speech at Farewell.⁴⁴

Opera Ballet, In Tears, Dances Farewell to Tutor: Metropolitan School Pupils Much Moved at Exhibition Which Marks Parting with Mme. Cavalazzi.⁴⁵

Future Pavlowas Dance Their Valedictory Under Opera House Rafters: Metropolitan Ballet Pupils in Tears at Presentation of Loving Cup on Retirement of Mme. Cavallazzi, Their Instructor for Four Years.⁴⁶

While her teaching career in New York was short-lived, Cavallazzi’s contribution to ballet’s lineage in America was essential to its later success. She set up academy training that mirrored the European ballet academies, and she fought for its success in a difficult environment for classical ballet. Her frequent touting of American dancers in the press was part of her offensive; it initiated the idea that America had the raw materials to have a ballet of its own. While many of her peers taught in their private parlors and studios, Cavallazzi’s teaching was supported by a prestigious parent organization, which

likely made her assertions about the possibilities for a future American ballet more plausible in the eyes of the masses. She was willing to educate a largely unaware public about the classical tradition by talking to the press and permitting them access to her classes; such openness to the media allowed her theories to be disseminated on a large scale, which expanded her influence on the New York public's understanding of ballet. In this light, Cavallazzi played a pivotal role in American ballet's development: she established a pedagogical tradition at the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School in keeping with her Italian lineage, and she used her position at the head of the school to garner respect for and approval of European classical training in an American context.

Rosina Galli, 1896-1940

Rosina Galli—prima ballerina at the Metropolitan Opera from 1914 until 1930—was born in Milan and trained at La Scala. She had danced prima ballerina roles at both La Scala and the San Carlo in Naples by the time she was in her mid-teens. Galli came to the United States in 1911, and by 1912 she had, once again, attained prima ballerina status in the joint opera companies in Philadelphia and Chicago. As a dancer, she captivated American audiences, in large part because of her young age and doll-like appearance (fig. 16). A *Chicago Tribune* article from 1912, “How Elfish Rosina Galli Captured Naples, Milan, Philadelphia and Chicago at the Age of Seventeen,” reinforced her girlishness: “Rosina is only 17 years old and her position as a leader of the ballet is a high one for so young a girl. Yet she looks even less than her 17 years, and her manner when she talks has in it the eagerness and simplicity of a child.”⁴⁷ In 1914 she became the Metropolitan's ballerina, having been commissioned by Giulio Gatti-Casazza,

manager of the Metropolitan and Galli's future husband, to join its ranks. Known as a sparkling example of the Italian training, she caused great commotion with her performances.⁴⁸ Dance historian and former Metropolitan Opera Ballet dancer Lillian Moore has noted that, "admirers of the Italian school, as contrasted with the freer Russian style, went so far as to call her the greatest dancer in the world."⁴⁹ Galli was nervous about coming to America and competing with the Russian dancers, but her apprehension apparently had no impact on her ability to rouse an audience. Moore recounts an episode in which Galli received more applause than the lead singer in *Carmen*, inspiring the singer's refusal to perform with her from then on. She asserts that Galli's performance left an indelible impression: "Old-timers still rave about the double circle of pirouettes, swift as light, which she executed in the *Carmen* ballet. Perhaps it wasn't authentically Spanish, but it must have been spectacular."⁵⁰

* The distinctions between the Italian and Russian styles are discussed in Chapter Three.



Figure 16: Rosina Galli. Bain News Service. George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress.

In 1917, Galli assumed the role of ballet mistress in addition to her position on the stage—she continued dancing, but also choreographed for the opera, rehearsed the *corps de ballet*, and helped to oversee the ballet school.^{*51} After retiring from her performing career in 1930, she remained at the head of the ballet school during the early thirties, when the Metropolitan was struggling to withstand the early years of the

* For further analysis of Galli's performing and choreographic work at the Metropolitan Opera, see Carrie Gaiser Casey's *Ballet's Feminisms: Genealogy and Gender in Twentieth-Century American Ballet History* (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009) and Tullia Limarzi's "She Trills With Her Toes: The Metropolitan Opera Ballet Career of Rosina Galli," in *Society of Dance History Scholars Proceedings* (Ninth annual conference, 1986): 80-90.

depression.⁵² Despite Galli's desire to stay—she was only thirty-nine—Gatti-Casazza, who was twenty-five years her senior, was ready to retire.⁵³ In 1935, they returned to Italy, where Galli died five years later of pneumonia.⁵⁴

Galli taught a traditionally structured ballet class lasting one-and-a-half to two hours for members of the opera ballet.⁵⁵ It included *barre* exercises, center work with *adagio*, *pointework*, turns, jumps, and—according to *Dance Lovers Magazine*—“fancy steps,” a term which, according to British ballet matriarch Ninette de Valois, was “a quaint compromise of rudimentary steps such as the chassé and glissade combined with other steps fancy beyond belief.”⁵⁶ Sheila Graham, writing for *The Dancing Times*, also took note of Galli's “beautiful plastique exercises.”⁵⁷ *Plastique*, however, inasmuch as it is comprises the Imperial Russian classical ballet tradition as influenced by Isadora Duncan, involves the malleability of the whole body, including the torso, as a means of expression in dancing; thus the term *plastique* would not typically be used to refer to the Italian training from this era. A major identifying characteristic of the period's Italian ballet is its erect torso, and its verticality is antithetical to the idea of *plastique* movement.* Galli has recalled the emphasis on the upright torso in her own training: “The most difficult thing was to learn how to keep the body entirely separate from the arms and legs. The movement of the limbs and of the arms must be entirely separate movements, in which the body itself takes no part. The moment the body begins to break the straight lines, the dancing becomes ordinary.”⁵⁸ Galli, a noted mime herself, kept pantomime in the curriculum at the Metropolitan,⁵⁹ and it is possible that the *Dancing Times* reporter mistakenly perceived her teaching of pantomime movements—which

* See Chapter Three for further discussion of *plastique* movement.

would have looked more expressive than the classical positions of the arms—as the Duncan-influenced *plastique* movement. In addition, some of the Italian *port de bras* exercises—like those that appear in the Cecchetti manual—called for bending or “pivot[ing] at the waist.”⁶⁰ Galli’s likely incorporation of such *port de bras* movements that involved upper body mobility off the vertical axis may have also been misinterpreted as *plastique*.

Galli has described her own approach to training the body for ballet in her brief autobiographical account, “My Life As A Ballet Dancer.”⁶¹ In the excerpt below, she discusses how the body’s natural gifts are molded during training. Her belief—that there are innate attributes which enable only certain dancers to advance in ballet—is indicative of a European perspective that would have garnered objections during the research period in America, where it was accepted that anyone, with enough ingenuity, could become a dancer.

...One of the first things taught a ballet-dancer is how to display the natural graces of her figure. And then, how to retain them, how to exploit them, how to make the body poetize [*sic*] itself. It becomes evident to the pupil that she may be born with exceptional beauty in the first place, or at least that she must be pretty, because that is the first requirement of the ballet-dancer. But, this is not enough to secure her success. She must have, as nearly as possible, a perfectly healthy body, a strong body, not merely muscular but resilient. What beauty of form has been given her must be improved, emphasized, taught to move always with due proportion of beauty to the eye. There are angles in the human body that must be rounded, there are lumps and muscles that must be smoothed out. It is by no means merely a matter of having well-shaped legs; that is the least necessity in the art of dancing.

These conditions are not brought about by any acrobatic exercises. The wonderful lightness of the feet, the perfect poise of the body, the lines of the neck, and the arms, and the shoulders, are developed by very gentle exercises.... The ballet dancer is always on guard to defend her body from awkward movements, from stoop-shoulder, from angular poses....⁶²

In this light, it is apropos that Galli worked at one of the few institutions in the United States where she could hand select her dancers if she so desired. Yet it appears that Galli fundamentally trusted the effectiveness of the ballet class structure and content to refine natural ability, which she believed her American students had in abundance.⁶³

Galli's difficulties with ballet in America were at odds with her sense for the Americans' talent, and like Cavallazzi, she developed a two-sided persona in the classroom. Dance scholar Tullia Limarzi has noted Galli's overt harshness with dancers doing what she perceived as substandard work, in contrast to her tendency to comfort them after having reduced them to tears.⁶⁴ She was a formidable figure in the studio and drove her dancers hard, but she was also known to soften when their work pleased her. In 1933, Eugene Gunning from *Dance Culture Magazine* observed her in rehearsal: "Nothing short of perfection will satisfy her, and time and time again, she will halt the piano player, tap impatiently with a bamboo rod, and with consummate grace, demonstrate how the difficult dance should be performed. When the company performs in harmony with the music, a beautiful smile illumines her expressive face..."⁶⁵ Sheila Graham from *The Dancing Times* makes Galli sound like a cruelly intimidating figure in spite of her occasional warmth: "To dance before Galli is somewhat of an ordeal. Nothing escapes her, and she can be extremely sarcastic. A quick brain and a good memory are essential, as it is necessary to follow the many different steps she gives rapidly and almost faultlessly. Any sign of nervousness or hesitation is fatal; at the same time mere technical ability is not sufficient."⁶⁶

As the head of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet, Galli required a specific dress code for her dancers. While Cavallazzi demanded a modest appearance in the same

nineteenth-century style depicted in the paintings of Edgar Degas, the dancers under Galli wore pink, silk, sleeveless tunics, with scoop necks and low backs, and they were to be neatly put together—no runs in their pink silk tights or loose ribbons on their pink satin slippers.⁶⁷ She shared Cavallazzi's utter distaste for popular trends in American dance, thereby continuing the legacy of Italian traditionalism at the Metropolitan. She was adamant about ballet's classicism, and became just as frustrated as Cavallazzi when it came to her students' desire for quick training and their inconsistent approach to study. Also like her predecessor, she had a strong enough command of the English language to voice her discontent publicly. In her 1940 obituary, the *New York World Telegram* reprinted a portion of a previous interview with Galli, noting that, "she was a little irritated with the impatience of American ballet pupils. 'I know the Metropolitan ballet is good,' she said. 'The pupils come. I train them. Before they know how to dance properly, however, they want solo parts. They go away, and I have to begin with new ones. It takes at least 10 years to train a dancer. My former pupils are all over the United States. Most of them don't know how to dance yet!'"⁶⁸ Each time a member of the ballet left for the bright lights and higher salaries of Broadway or the revue stage, Galli would have to replace her, and thus she was faced with the daunting task of bringing the prior training of the new dancers up to a satisfactory level that would allow them to blend in with the existing dancers. The revolving door of *corps de ballet* dancers also reduced the number of new works Galli was able to stage each year—the time she had planned for rehearsing new pieces was instead used to teach new dancers the existing repertoire.⁶⁹ In a 1930 article in the *New York Herald Tribune*, "Rosina Galli Finds Several Excuses for the Short-Comings of Her Hard-Worked Coryphees," Galli explained that the American

dancers' values were inconsistent with the needs of the opera ballet, and presumably with her personal values as well: "“They come and go here. I have at most sixteen upon whom I can rely as leaders: the rest have to be put between them in line. They have no patience, these American girls; they do not see anything worth while in making part of a fine ensemble; they care nothing for the beauty of mass.””⁷⁰

However challenged Galli was by her work at the Metropolitan and the restlessness of her students, she, like Cavallazzi before her, made a point of acknowledging that American dancers had potential: “You know the American girl is the best one for dancing. She is of the slender and graceful build, with a natural... ability for dancing.”⁷¹ But she was bothered by the Americans' inexperience with ballet's tradition and training demands. In her autobiographical sketch, she describes what she perceives as a significant problem for ballet in the United States:

I have naturally been impressed with American audiences and while I realize that they may enjoy the spectacle of ballet, I do not think that they appreciate dancing as an art. The ballet school in New York is hampered by not being able to get the material of which fine dancers are made. The American girl does not wish to waste her time in classic studies of the art. She wants to begin earning money at her profession too soon. I do think that a national school of ballet in this country would be a very inspiring influence. Perhaps that will come later.⁷²

Galli's optimism for ballet's future in the United States is representative of her traditionalist approach: despite the challenges ballet faced in the early twentieth century, she and her traditionalist cohorts seemed to believe in the ability of the dancers enough to continue laying the groundwork for a classical ballet tradition in America.

Galli's departure in 1935 signaled the end of the Italian intendency at the Metropolitan Opera Ballet. In Cavallazzi's wake, Galli had tirelessly perpetuated the La Scala legacy during a major period of Russianization in New York City and across the

United States. Unlike her predecessor, however, Galli spent the majority of her performing career in America, thus continuing the Italian tradition not only through her teaching but through her dancing as well. She trained her students in the La Scala lineage while at the same time modeling those attributes in her performances. Her impact, in this light, was layered and multifaceted, and it kept the Italian tradition alive in the face of the period's shifting aesthetic and the Russian challenge to its long-standing dominance in America.

Luigi Albertieri, c.1860-1930

Born in Milan, Albertieri studied ballet in Italy with his adoptive father and mentor Enrico Cecchetti. He made his debut in Luigi Manzotti's ballet spectacle, *Excelsior*, stepping in at the last minute to replace Cecchetti, who had feigned an illness so that his protégé could perform.⁷³ Upon leaving Italy, Albertieri danced at the Empire theatre in London with Cavallazzi and ballerinas Adeline Genée and Katti Lanner, and subsequently became the ballet master at Covent Garden.⁷⁴ He arrived in America in November of 1895, having accepted the position of ballet master at the Metropolitan Opera.⁷⁵ He became the Metropolitan's first male dancer that same year, but his influence was greater as the head of the ballet: he lowered the maximum age for the company's ballet dancers from fifty or sixty years old to a more youthful thirty.⁷⁶ In 1895, an article in the *Washington Post* described the character of the ballet at the Metropolitan before and after Albertieri's arrival:

The gilded swells of the metropolis will be disappointed this year if they expect to have any fun with the grand opera ballet. It is made up of twenty-four young women, each one capable of doing premier work and a stern believer in her

artistic usefulness. There are no grandmothers among them; in fact, it looks as if the sixty-year-old ballet girl were a thing of the past. All of them are young, well inside of the thirty-year mark, and several have husbands and babies.⁷⁷

After an intermittent relationship as ballet master at the Metropolitan, Albertieri left in 1909 for the Chicago Opera, where he was ballet master until 1913. He worked briefly as the head of the ballet at the Century Opera in New York before returning to the Metropolitan where he remained until 1927.⁷⁸ In 1915, he opened his own school at Eleven East Fifty-ninth Street. During all of his years at the Metropolitan, he never taught classes at the school—the wide acclaim he received as a pedagogue was mostly based on his teaching at his own school, as well as the teaching he did at the conventions of the American Society of Dancing Masters.⁷⁹ Albertieri had several notable students, among them Rosina Galli; Maria Gambarelli, the Metropolitan ballerina after Galli and a dancer in films, movie prologues and revues; Albertina Rasch, the Viennese dancer and noted choreographer for Broadway and revues; Fred Astaire, the film star; Lydia Lopokova, the Diaghilev ballerina; Catherine Littlefield, the American ballet dancer and teacher; Margaret Severn, the American ballet dancer notable for her work with masks; Ruth Page, the American dancer and choreographer; and Carmelita Maracci, the teacher of a number of influential dancers and choreographers from the mid-twentieth century, including Cynthia Gregory, Agnes de Mille, Erik Bruhn, Gerald Arpino, and Jerome Robbins.

Like his countrywomen and fellow Traditionalists Cavallazzi and Galli, Albertieri saw problems with the attitude of American dancers: “They think... that the art should just come to them.”⁸⁰ He too was a classicist, with “great respect for tradition” and dislike for popular trends in dancing that might detract from the artistry of ballet.⁸¹ In his

dancing manual, *The Art of Terpsichore*, he advises teachers: “Let your pupil perform... with extraordinary vivacity and lightness, with impeccable perfection, and without falling into acrobatism; then you will have formed an artist.”⁸² There is ample historical precedent for the argument against acrobatism in the tradition of dancing manuals: eighteenth century French ballet master Jean Georges Noverre cautioned his students against “over-complicated steps”; and nineteenth century Italian ballet master Carlo Blasis warned students not to be persuaded by “acrobatic antics and ridiculous pirouettes.”⁸³ Albertieri may have been trying to perpetuate the views of his ancestors, while simultaneously responding to the acrobatic, ballet-derived dance styles that were prevalent during the period. Classical ballet, he felt, was the “very backbone of dancing.”⁸⁴ Also like Cavallazzi and Galli, Albertieri acknowledged the innate advantages he perceived American students to have. In writer Willa Cather’s 1914 article for *McClure’s Magazine* that described ballet training to a largely uninformed American audience, Albertieri contrasted European students with Americans, claiming that American “girls are much prettier and more individual. And they are all right for the legs and quick to learn.”⁸⁵ Yet he, too, had conflicting feelings about American dancers, who he felt were generally talented, but not focused enough on the classical training to achieve a meaningful sense of artistry in ballet.

According to Barzel, Luigi Albertieri was one of four ballet masters who influenced the teaching of ballet in America: she cites he and Stefano Mascagno* as the “first popular teachers to teach correct technique and make many teachers and pupils aware of the synthetic quality of their previous training.”⁸⁶ Albertieri was considered “the

* Mascagno’s work is discussed in Chapter Five.

last great exponent of the real Italian Ballet,” and he was among the first to introduce the Cecchetti system of training to dancers in New York City.⁸⁷ To perpetuate his lineage, Albertieri wrote a dancing manual, *The Art of Terpsichore*, which is organized in accordance with the dancing manual tradition, but which is most closely linked to Blasis’s 1828 *The Code of Terpsichore*. Both Blasis and Albertieri, for example, in the sections of their manuals directed to the student, emphasize the importance of selecting a qualified teacher—an apparent issue of concern both in the early 1800s as well as in early twentieth century New York, where anyone could claim to know and teach ballet for a profit.⁸⁸ Both manuals also deal with issues of anatomy, a concept that arises as well in the 1803 manual of the ballet reformer Jean Georges Noverre, *Letters on Dancing and Ballets*. Albertieri and Blasis were particularly influenced by Noverre’s description of bow-legged and knock-kneed dancers as having “physical defects” that must be corrected with rigorous training from a young age.⁸⁹ In this way Albertieri seems to share Galli’s understanding that dancers, to a certain extent, are born before they are made. Another place where Albertieri’s manual parallels Blasis’s is regarding the body’s center of gravity, or the plumb line. In fifth position, for example, Albertieri states that, “the weight of the body should rest on both legs, and the throat should be virtually above the ankle of the front leg,” and Blasis agrees: “The pit of the neck must correspond perpendicularly with the feet.”⁹⁰

Published in 1923, Albertieri’s *The Art of Terpsichore* also shares some basic attributes with the Cecchetti manual, written by historian Cyril Beaumont and Cecchetti

pupil Stanislas Idzikowski.* First, the order of class exercises is the same as the Cecchetti order of exercises as detailed in the Cecchetti manual, with the *grand battement* exercise immediately following the first *plié* exercise at the *barre*.⁹¹ Albertieri's manual also features center work organized by the day of the week, from Monday through Saturday, with exercises increasing in difficulty as the week goes on; this organization of class material throughout the week is a hallmark of Cecchetti's work.⁹² Because Albertieri studied so closely with Cecchetti, it can be assumed that the similar aspects of these two manuals were derived from his direct study with Cecchetti, as opposed to being derived from the Beaumont and Idzikowski manual of Cecchetti's method published only one year earlier.

The Art of Terpsichore also offers some direct insight into Albertieri's teaching, and particularly through his use of terminology. Throughout the book he makes references to anatomy, going so far as to include detailed anatomical drawings of the legs and feet, with the bones, muscles, and connective tissues labeled, as had numerous dancing manuals prior.⁹³ In the early twentieth century, when knowledge of anatomy was not at all central to the instruction of ballet, Albertieri—based on the manual's contents—seems to have been aware of and invested in the basic anatomical processes within each step. In *battement tendu*, for example, he writes, “the thigh must be turned out from the hip. It is impossible to turn the leg at the knee without turning the thigh with equal motion, because the articulation of the knee permits only of forward and backward motion as in walking or kneeling; no motion sideways or turning on its axis is possible at the knee joint. The hip joint, however, is of the ball and socket variety and is capable of

* The Cecchetti manual appears also to have been written using Blasis's manuals as models.

motion in all directions.”⁹⁴ He also notes the importance of the *battement tendu* exercise, which “develops the muscles called *vastus internus*, *rectus femoris*, *gastrocnemius* in the leg, and the *extensor brevis digitorum* in the foot.”⁹⁵ With such detail in his descriptions, it might be speculated that Albertieri taught with the same anatomical focus in his classes, yet there is no evidence to support that hypothesis. In fact, most of the archival material describing his teaching is to the contrary, which may indicate his purposeful inclusion of anatomical information to continue the dancing manual tradition.

The terminology in the manual also includes one anomalous English word that is entirely unrelated to the ballet vocabulary: the “stay,” which he defined as “a step in which you jump from one leg to the other, [a] word without etymological origin, used commonly in the art of dance by the old masters.”⁹⁶ The *Newman Catechism on Classical Dancing*, published in 1922 by Philadelphia ballet master and member of London’s Imperial Society of Dancing Masters Albert W. Newman, indicates that a “Stay turn” is “a corruption of the word Jété [*sic*], and is used in England in connection with a Jété Turn.”⁹⁷ Because Albertieri did spend a period of his career in England, it is possible that he adopted this language for his own use, since Albertieri’s definition of a “stay” is in accordance with the execution of a *jeté*, and the two words are aurally similar.[†] In addition, the Russian teacher Veronine Vestoff lists a “Grand Stay or Tour Jété,” in his 1918 manual, *Advanced Technique of the Russian Imperial School*, which

* Barzel, in her article, “European Dance Teachers in the United States,” also notes Albertieri’s “careless” use of vocabulary, citing “ankle-turn” and “shtay”—which may have been a typographical error for “stay”—as the most egregious offenders (*Dance Index: A New Magazine Devoted to Dancing* 3 [April-June 1944]: 82).

† Renowned for her work examining the transmission of dance steps throughout history, Sandra Noll Hammond discusses other examples of Albertieri’s unconventional nomenclature in her article, “Steps through Time: Selected Dance Vocabulary of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 10, No. 2 (Autumn 1992): 99-100.

indicates a likely similarity between the two steps.⁹⁸ Barzel corroborates the idea that the ballet terminology in the United States may have been altered, and she attributes it to language and pronunciation issues alongside the inexperience of American students: “A strange and wonderfully corrupt terminology that included such terms as *shtay*, *fortay* and *padbask* came into general use. Part of it was due to the poor diction of the Russians and part to the lack of background of their pupils.”⁹⁹ Like many Russians, the Italian Albertieri had difficulties with the English language, and thus Barzel’s argument applies to him as well.

The specificity of anatomical detail, the oddity of the term “stay,” and the slightly awkward yet mostly correct English used in the manual, when looked at collectively, provoke some questions about *The Art of Terpsichore*: did Albertieri originally write the manual in Italian and have it translated into English? Was he the only author? Would someone else, an American or English associate perhaps, have encouraged him to use the term, “stay,” or to include specific anatomical terms with which he was otherwise unfamiliar? It is unlikely that someone who spoke the kind of broken English that Albertieri did would be able to produce such a document singlehandedly, yet there is no mention of another contributor in the book’s opening pages. In addition, and despite the fact that most of Albertieri’s American students would likely not have known enough about the history of ballet to understand the lineage, Albertieri must have felt it necessary to align himself with his predecessors in his manual. He was likely aware of the significance of his pedigree, and may have been trying to legitimize his teaching in an environment where unscrupulous teachers of ballet were given the same permission to teach as those who came from the most prestigious ballet extractions.

Ruth Page, who studied with Cecchetti in addition to Albertieri, describes Albertieri's classes as following "the Cecchetti pattern, with one big difference: Cecchetti's classes were very concise and tight; Albertieri's sprawled out in a leisurely way."¹⁰⁰ She claims that he taught a four-hour class, divided into several sections, with long breaks between the parts:

We started with a short, simple *barre*—about twenty minutes—then rested at least twenty minutes. We repeated the *barre* in the center, and rested again. The *adagio* section had all the famous Cecchetti *adagios*, including a new one, 'Pas de Mami,' which he composed on the occasion of the opening of his Academie de Danse in London and named after his cat. Another 'intermission' was followed by lots of fancy pirouettes... A long rest, and the class ended, as is usual, with jumps.¹⁰¹

Albertieri espoused a pedagogical approach in which the overall course of study for male dancers and female dancers should be the same—with the exception of *pointework* for women—yet according to Barzel, his approach so strictly adhered to gender conventions that his female students did not do *grand allegro* in his classes.¹⁰² Page's statement above makes it sound as though she participated in the jumping section of these classes, which conflicts with Barzel's assertion. In her account of Albertieri's class, Margaret Severn—who studied with Albertieri a decade prior to Page—makes it sound as though the female students only observed the jumps: "There was quite a small class—seven girls and one boy who is *wonderful*—such jumps! Ooo and once after he had done some marvelous ones, Albertieri just patted his back with a cane and said, 'Keep zat zing straight.' But everyone else clapped for all they were worth."¹⁰³ Because most American students studied with multiple teachers during this period, it is likely that Albertieri's female students were learning to jump from other instructors if indeed he did not permit them to jump in his classes. Particularly with the strong focus on *allegro* in the newly popular

Russian training, Albertieri would have appeared old-fashioned had he not allowed his female students to jump. It is likely that his approach changed over the course of his thirty-five-year teaching career in America, perhaps to include jumps for female students by the time Page arrived in his class in the 1920s.

In terms of the qualitative demands of the training, Albertieri took a conventional stance; he believed that men and women should be taught to embody distinct movement qualities that reflected traditional gender roles. The male dancer, he felt, should “be taught to be graceful and harmonious in his movements, always avoiding affectation and... effeminacy, which is especially repugnant and repulsive.”¹⁰⁴ He may have eschewed effete tendencies for men, yet neither was he advocating for the dramatic virility that was a characteristic of many Russian male dancers of the period. The female dancer, he stated, should endeavor “to shine in her executions, to make her movements at once voluptuous [*sic*] and modest, to perform her steps with softness and lightness, to put energy and strength into pointing, overcoming every difficulty in her work of art.”¹⁰⁵ Notably, earlier manuals reflect similar emphases: Blasis, for example, stated, “Men must dance in a manner very different from women,”¹⁰⁶ from which Albertieri may have derived his notion of gendered training.

Albertieri taught mostly in accordance with the Italian tradition. Barzel states that the leg was never raised above ninety degrees in his classes, even in *grand battements*.¹⁰⁷ He also emphasized a vertical torso; his correction, to “Keep zat zing straight,” while tapping a male student on the back during an *allegro* exercise, is indicative of his

attention to the torso's upright alignment.^{*108} Sandra Noll Hammond, in her analysis of the 1929 film *The Ballet Class*—which featured Albertieri and a young Agnes de Mille—discusses his teaching method as including “the insteps stretched but the foot not fully pointed, the gently relaxed elbows of the arms in second position.”¹⁰⁹ These details, in addition to the relatively low legs and erect posture, are evident in photographs of Albertieri working with the dancers of the Century Opera and in the drawings of dancers throughout his manual (fig. 17).¹¹⁰



Figure 17: Luigi Albertieri, far right. Photo from *Century Opera Magazine*, circa 1915.

As a dancer, Albertieri was noted for his *pirouettes*, which were “the cause of much admiration and amazement.”¹¹¹ As a teacher, he incorporated many different kinds of turns into his classes.¹¹² In Page’s detailed accounts of his class exercises, the turning sequences are often combined with jumps and tightly packed, with few linking steps in between to re-center the weight or re-establish spatial orientation. For example, the landing of a *jeté en tournant* is often the beginning of a *pirouette*: in one instance the jump lands in fourth position and the subsequent turn begins from the same fourth

* Whether he meant “straight” as in not rounded, or “straight” as in not pitched forward, is uncertain.

position; in another the jump lands in *arabesque* and is immediately followed by a *relevé* into an *arabesque* turn.¹¹³ One of Albertieri's corrections for *pirouettes*, according to Severn, was to "stand up inside yourself."¹¹⁴ This statement alludes to the need for a centered, balanced position in which to turn, where the dancer has lengthened the plumb line or axis of the position. Based on his own propensity for turning and the memories of his students, *pirouettes* seem to have been a point of emphasis in his teaching.

Toward the end of his career, Albertieri seems to have given in slightly to the demands of the day, softening his Traditionalist approach to training. Barzel states that he began to incorporate stretches at the *barre*, in addition to "spleets."¹¹⁵ In an interview, Albertieri defended these additions with a tinge of sarcasm: "What is a poor girl to do if a manager asks her to spleet?" he asked the reporter from *The Dance Magazine* in 1929, "smilingly."¹¹⁶ Severn perceived these small changes as exemplifying Albertieri's resignation, as he worked with limited communication skills in an inhospitable environment for his classical artistic beliefs: "It was his own bitterness and hatred that killed him, I believe, for he lived in the glorious past of Italian opera houses, where there was real art and constant quarreling, and he could not endure the cold dull present. He had become careless in his teaching and indifferent to his pupils; he condemned everything and everybody with equal ferocity—there was nothing left."¹¹⁷ Albertieri's struggle to make a life for himself in America, while he disseminated his nineteenth-century Italian traditions in the face of the newer, more sensational Russian ballet, may have encouraged him to loosen his Traditionalist ideals.

Albertieri's spirited teaching persona inspired several written accounts from journalists as well as students. Page, who studied with Albertieri in the early 1920s,

claims that he taught mostly from a chair, while Severn recalls his awe-inspiring demonstrations from a decade earlier.¹¹⁸ He wore a long pajama top while teaching, which struck some as bizarre, but which other male teachers from the period also used as teaching attire.¹¹⁹ In addition, Albertieri maintained the traditional practice of playing the violin for his classes, and according to Severn, his “wild discords” often reflected his feelings about the class’ progress (fig. 18).¹²⁰ Severn and Page both recall his lack of feedback to the students, although Page, a teacher herself, expresses far greater discontent with this aspect of his teaching: “he never corrected anyone—at least, I do not remember his ever having corrected me. As a personality, Albertieri does not stand out too clearly in my mind because he never even spoke to me, unlike Cecchetti, who made a big fuss over me. Fortunately, I was very conscientious, but everyone needs corrections.”¹²¹ Severn, after executing a series of *fouetté* turns that she thought were particularly well done, recalls that, “Albertieri did me the honor of a grunt.”¹²²



Figure 18: Luigi Albertieri. Photo from *The American Dancer*, circa 1930.

It is possible that his limited verbal feedback was partly a result of his language barrier, an issue with which several of the immigrant teachers in this study struggled. Albertieri was fluent in French, Italian, Spanish, and German, but despite a career that was spent largely in English-speaking countries, he never fully grasped the English language.¹²³ In ballet classes, he relied on a combination of French and English, with an occasional bit of Italian.¹²⁴ Severn asserts that he had trouble distinguishing between the pronouns “him” and “her;” Barzel describes him as using “stock phrases;” and Page remembers him calling *pas de bourrées couru en pointe* “wiggles.”¹²⁵ In 1925, three decades after his arrival in the United States, the *New York Times* published a short article called “Language of the Ballet,” depicting a rehearsal with Albertieri and the

Metropolitan Opera Ballet dancers. It is a testament to his frustration with English communication:

‘Now, when I say “Go,” you pirouette. Comprennez? Understand?’ ... The ballet nodded as one girl. They comprennezed; they understood; they caught on.

‘U-u-m-m-m-m, go!’ called out Albertieri. Not one went. All stood marking time. Albertieri banged the piano viciously.

‘Encore! Again!’ sotto voce from the man on the side. All came to attention.

‘Now,’ said Albertieri. ‘U-u-u-m-m-m, go!’ shouted the balletmaster. The ballet never moved, but continued to mark time. Albertieri wiped his face and swore in Italian and kicked at the leg of the piano.

‘Encore! Again!’ he shouted. They formed again, and Albertieri stood back almost too hot to live. ‘U-u-u-m-m-m, go!’ he fairly shrieked. The ballet marked time.

Albertieri suspended proceedings and sat down on the table. He looked the aggregation over. After a moment he said:

‘Say, what you call it when you mean to—to—move—to—to—act—to—to—do—zis?’ and he stood a minute before them, then pirouetted.

‘Why,’ said a yellow-haired fairy of the ballet, ‘you say “Gauw.”’

‘Oh!’ shouted the poor man wildly waving his arms in delight at having discovered a road to the minds assembled. ‘Gouw! gouw! gouw!’—and they went.¹²⁶

This particular account, while lighthearted in tone, speaks to the problems with vocabulary as well as with pronunciation and regional dialects that teachers like Albertieri encountered with their students. Of all the instructors in this study for whom English was a non-native language, Albertieri seems to have been the most frustrated by it, or at least the most overtly so, which may have affected his teaching. Had he been able to teach in his native Italian or any of the other languages in which he was fluent, he might have approached teaching differently, possibly even incorporating some of the anatomical material that he included in his manual.

Albertieri is the only teacher in this study who was decidedly violent with his students. He was known for throwing chairs or taking his teaching stick to students’

knees or insteps; even his obituary in *The Dancing Times* noted that, “theoretically he should have been a poor teacher, he was impatient, violent, and uncompromisingly severe.”¹²⁷ He also expressed his discontent verbally as much as he could—he screamed disparaging criticisms and often chastised his students with statements such as: “Beast, you afraid you fall?”¹²⁸ Severn recalls some of Albertieri’s comments: “You see that chair? If I play my fiddle long enough to that chair, she dance—but YOU—you never dance!”; and “If I no teacha you to dance, Jesus Christ no teacha you to dance!”¹²⁹ She also claims that he called children “Goddamned mosquitoes,” and used the still-popular ballet class adage with regard to *arabesque*, “You look like a little dog at a hydrant.”¹³⁰

Despite the ferocity of his approach, Albertieri’s students—with the likely exception of Page—adored him. He was generous, as his *Dancing Times* obituary states, offering free tuition to the numerous students whom he felt exhibited some potential, to the detriment of his business.¹³¹ Lydia Lopokova found Albertieri to be “kinder to the class, more gentle to the pupils, than Cecchetti,” and Severn believed that, “in spite of all his raging, [his students] loved him all the same.”¹³² Severn’s description of his personality provides some insight into how he was perceived by his students: “A terrific egotism and narrow intolerance for any method other than his own, combined with a childish unreasonableness and consummate artistry, resulted in a character that was at once forbidding and amusing.”¹³³ The idea that he was at all “amusing” calls into question the seriousness with which he would admonish his students. It is possible that he invoked the drama of the ballet class as a way of showing affection for his students, and some—like Severn and Lopokova—played along, while others—like Page—were turned off to him as an instructor.

Likely the closest of Cecchetti's disciples to work in the United States, Albertieri made a wide-ranging and significant impression on ballet in America. He was one of the few Italians to teach outside of the opera houses, in his own independent school, which made him more accessible to ballet dancers who were not in the opera ballets. His obituary in *The American Dancer* states: "Nearly every ballet dancer in America has worked under Maestro Albertieri at one time or another."¹³⁴ While this assertion is surely overstated to some degree, it certainly speaks to the breadth of his influence. Albertieri taught during a critical period for ballet's development in the United States, and he helped to establish the Italian lineage as a central pedagogical component of American ballet.

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In 1931, *The Dance Magazine* proclaimed, "So low has the ballet of the Metropolitan Opera House sunk in public estimation that few even bother to write about it."¹³⁵ The nineteenth-century Italian style of the ballets at the Metropolitan, which included pantomime, had fallen largely out of favor with the public. They had begun to look antiquated and, it can be surmised, anti-expressive. The article, titled "Opera Ballet's Last Chance," lambasted the Metropolitan's ballet repertoire, which the author found to be "composed exclusively of the stilted, unimaginative forms of the traditional Italian ballet."¹³⁶ But the Italian ballet aesthetic, which valued the kind of separation through the body that Galli remembered from her own training, paved the way for the Russian tradition in American training and performance. On its arrival, the Russian style

immediately grabbed America's attention, with its plastic forms of expression that were not as gestural as the Italian style, but rather used the arms, legs, head and torso in fluid coordination.* The result likely appeared more expressive to the early twentieth century viewer than the Italian style, which, as Galli described, treated the body parts as separate entities with limited movement through the upright torso.¹³⁷

Yet while America's new preference for Russian ballet was leaving Italian ballet behind, the methodology for the Italian technique became an integral part of American ballet's development. There were decidedly no Italians represented as the two major New York ballet companies were founded shortly after the research period, but the Italian pedagogical methods remain essential components of academy-style training across the country.[†] While much of this survival is due to the internationally recognized teaching of Enrico Cecchetti and his countless disciples, it was Cavallazzi, Galli, and Albertieri, among others, who began to prepare American dancers for the European-style rigors of academic ballet training. They helped to establish a lineage and methodology for ballet in the United States. Their tireless dedication to their traditions—despite the challenges presented by the American context for ballet in the early twentieth century—impressed

* One example of the kind of expressivity in the Russian ballet of the period is exemplified in the choreography of Michel Fokine, which includes exaggerated *épaulement*, florid arms, and lifelike characterizations. Fokine would most likely have been a Traditionalist teacher himself, according to an article, "The American Ballet Today," which he wrote for the November 1928 issue of *Dance Magazine*: "All the amateurish endeavors to create in America an ensemble of dancers, without the assimilating connection from the European art, I decidedly refuse to call them Ballet.... Only in America is it thought that anyone can compass the dance, instruct in it, create a 'Dance Theatre' for even those who never studied that art themselves" (12-13). For a discussion of Fokine's teaching, see Dawn Lille Horwitz, "A Ballet Class with Michel Fokine," *Dance Chronicle* 3, no. 1 (1979): 36-45.

[†] New York City Ballet was established according to Balanchine's tradition, and Ballet Theatre—later American Ballet Theatre—emerged from a group of founders that included four choreographic contingencies upon its founding in 1940: The Russian unit, with Michel Fokine, Adolph Bolm, Mikhail Mordkin and Bronislava Nijinska; The American unit, with Eugene Loring and Agnes deMille; a "Spanish unit" and a "negro unit." For more on Ballet Theatre's founding, see R.J. Austin, "Ballet Theatre After Fifteen Years," *Tempo* 1, no. 35, (spring 1955): 22.

upon Americans that the classical ballet lineage would be the wellspring for American ballet.

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Chapter Five

Nostalgic Revisionists: Stefano Mascagno and Mikhail Mordkin

“It is the ambition of Mme. and Sr. Mascagno to prove, that with proper instruction, America can produce some of the foremost dancers of the world, and to correct the mistaken idea that she does not appreciate real art. America needs only to be awakened.”

—Explanatory Notes of Ballet Technique, *Mascagno School of Dancing*, 1918

This chapter examines the pedagogical approaches of two immigrant teachers who lived and worked in New York City between 1909 and 1934. Stefano Mascagno, from the San Carlo theatre in Naples, Italy, maintained an independent school in New York and held a post as the leading ballet master at the normal school run by the Dancing Masters of America organization.* Mikhail Mordkin, who trained at the Imperial Ballet School in Moscow and first toured to the United States as Anna Pavlova’s partner, established a school and a company that evolved into Ballet Theatre, now American Ballet Theatre. I refer to these teachers as Nostalgic Revisionists;† the materials they left behind—manuals, interviews, photographs, and school brochures—suggest that they straddled the two sides of the conflict between European classical values and the American demands for ballet during the period. They were dedicated to preserving what

* The organization changed its name in 1948 to become Dance Masters of America, Inc. See Chapter Two and <http://www.dma-national.org/pages/about/201> for more about the history of the Dancing Masters of America.

† Constantin Kobleff can also be considered a Nostalgic Revisionist, but there is not enough archival material to merit a full discussion of his pedagogy. See Chapters One and Three for brief mentions of his work in America.

they viewed as the ideal classical tradition as they had learned it abroad, and to promoting that tradition in America. Yet they also understood that if they wanted to sustain teaching careers—and earn enough to make a living—in the United States, there were facets of these traditions that they would need to adapt to better suit the American context. They therefore made changes to the context in which they taught ballet, but they were staunch in their refusals to modify the Euro-Russian classical technique. Their balancing act between Old World traditions and New World necessities mirrored that of many immigrants coming to the States, and it reflects Horace Kallen’s concept of “cultural pluralism,”¹ in which elements of multiple cultural traditions coexist without blending to form new, heterogeneous, identities.* Mascagno and Mordkin, in this light, worked to maintain ballet’s Euro-Russian traditions while making them accessible in the American context. By honoring the American democratic and capitalist value systems as well and upholding the classical tradition, they helped ballet assimilate to its new American home.

For each instructor, I offer a biographical sketch as well as an overview and analysis of his pedagogy and philosophies. I give specific attention to the aspects of their work that both adhere to and deviate from their respective traditions, since these areas are where their nostalgic revisionism becomes most evident.

Stefano Mascagno, b. 1878

Born in Italy, Mascagno received his early training from his father, Ernesto. They worked for three to four hours each day on the stage of the San Carlo theatre, before the

* See the introductory chapter for a discussion of Kallen’s “cultural pluralism.”

demands of Ernesto's own career became unmanageable atop his teaching commitment to his son.² He enlisted his rival, Aniello Ammaturo, to continue Stefano's training, finding him the only suitably competent alternative.^{*3} At seventeen, Mascagno made his debut on the stage of the San Carlo before embarking on a two-year tour to Russia in 1897. He then returned to Italy, where he was engaged as a dancer at the La Scala theatre in Milan for one season, the San Carlo for two seasons, and as the ballet director and Première Danseur at the Municipal Theatre in Brescia. Mascagno came to America for the first time in 1905, toured to Central America, South America, and Cuba, and then returned to the United States. In 1915 he opened his own school in New York City, which he ran with his wife, Josephine, for twenty years.⁴ He also held a position as the leading ballet master at the Dancing Masters of America's normal school, where he taught ballet pedagogy to aspiring teachers.

A 1922 article in the *New York Times* entitled "Dance Instructors Flock to New York" describes Mascagno and his teaching style:

Mascagno, 'Maestro' his pupils call him, exponent of the Italian school, is the Beau Brummel of the studios. Soft silk shirt, flowing black tie, silk knickerbockers, silk stockings and ballet slippers give to him the appearance of having just stepped out of a Watteau painting. He has all the temperament of the Italian. Having illustrated the steps he wishes danced, he stands before the class, one leg advanced, and, holding two sticks in his hands, beats time with them. If a pupil makes some particularly stupid blunder he smashes the sticks. His wife, prepared, hands him two more, he says 'come again' and the lesson goes on. In the Italian school he is acknowledged to be without a peer.⁵

* Debra Hickenlooper Sowell claims that Mascagno studied as well with the pedagogue Giovanni Lepri, the teacher of Enrico Cecchetti (*The Christensen Brothers: An American Dance Epic* [Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998]: 19.). The manual for the Mascagno School, however, does not mention Lepri in the details of Mascagno's training.

Having studied with Mascagno during one of his six-week summer courses, dancer and choreographer Willam Christensen recalled his traditionally authoritative classroom manner in an interview with Gretchen Ward Warren: “Uncle Pete warned me, ‘Willi, you’d better practice your *assemblés*.’”⁶ Mascagno’s uncompromising approach to the classroom ritual began from the moment students entered the room, which they did only upon his invitation. According to Christensen biographer Debra Hickenlooper Sowell, “The girls entered and curtsied, the boys entered and bowed, all took their places at the barre, and no one moved until Mascagno tapped his cane.”⁷ In this light, Mascagno seems to have earned respect in the American ballet world because of his dedication to preserving several facets of the classical European tradition: the authority of the teacher, the deference of the students, and the rigor of the technique.

The Mascagno manual, *Explanatory Notes of Ballet Technique: Embracing Bar Exercises, Port de Bras, Adagio and Allegro*, was written by Mme. Josephine Mascagno for the students at the Mascagno School of Dancing, “to serve solely as reminders of routine and execution as studied under STEFANO MASCAGNO, in connection with the Normal Courses and the earlier training for professional students.”^{†8} In contrast to many other manuals issued during the period, the Mascagno manual was not a do-it-yourself,

* See the glossary for definitions of ballet terminology and clarifications of term use.

† Since Signor Mascagno’s native language was most likely Italian, it is possible that he and his wife Josephine, who was English, wrote the English-language manual together using her translations. It is also possible that she wrote it independently according to the methods of their school, or with his oversight and perhaps his approval. Despite his unknown role in the manual’s generation, his methods were central to its contents according to the introduction, which states that it was written specifically as a refresher for his students and not for general instruction in ballet technique (5).

learn-at-home guide, primarily because it was not comprehensive. At the end of the manual, for example, is the following disclaimer: “The pirouette, in all of its various and brilliant varieties is one of the remarkable features of the Mascagno School. The subject, however, can not be treated here as the execution of the pirouette can be successfully explained only when accompanied by actual demonstration.”⁹ For Mascagno, the American concept of training at home from a book must have been anathema, and thus he would have kept the study of *pirouettes*—a historically celebrated aspect of Italian training—reserved for those who attended classes at the school.

The manual’s introduction lays out Mascagno’s philosophies about ballet training, and it seems designed to counter several American ideas about training that were common at the time: “The prevailing idea among American teachers seems to be that technique is a subject too difficult for use in children’s or beginners’ classes, when, in reality, TECHNIQUE IS THE VERITABLE ‘A B C’ OF DANCING.”¹⁰ In the American environment in which freedom of movement and expressiveness was so highly valued, the idea of putting novices through the paces of a ballet *barre* would have seemed positively reactionary in comparison. Beginner students would often learn simple choreographed dances before the technique itself, which, to Mascagno, must have seemed backwards. The manual also indicates the Mascagnos’s concern for the future of ballet if the classical technique was not taught systematically from the beginner level upward: “From the age of five or six there is no reason why children should not be given the technical exercises in dancing, just as they are taught the A-B-C’s [*sic*] in learning to read. Without a complete knowledge of technique how is it possible to impart it to others!”¹¹ Mascagno’s decade-long experience at the helm of the Dancing Masters of

American organization—whose members largely lacked foundational knowledge of classical ballet despite their desire to teach it¹²—may have compelled him to emphasize the traditional academy-style instruction of technique from an early age.

The manual offers an example of Mascagno's allowance for the American democratic, capitalist context, as it states that ballet technique is important for anyone interested in dance, and not just for those who wanted to perform: "Among some there seems to be a feeling that technical study is of use only to those who have theatrical aspirations. What a mistake!"¹³ The Mascagnos must have understood that many students of dance during the period were not looking for a performing career. They must also have realized that for the school to exist in the American environment for ballet, they would need more students to enroll than only those with stage ambitions. In this light, the manual includes two levels of center exercises, likely in order to address the variety of students who attended the school: "Centre Exercises (Regular)" consists of reconfigured steps from the *barre* in different patterns, and "Centre Exercises (Simple)" includes an almost exact replication of the *barre* work in the center. Despite his traditional upbringing on the opera house stage, Mascagno seems to have accepted the idea that ballet training in America had been democratized, and he modified his approach in response. It is important to note that he did not alter the technique to suit the democratic context. Rather, he made beginner-level classical material—which would only have been taught to children in the Euro-Russian tradition—available to older dancers as well.

From a technical perspective, the Mascagno manual includes all of the general components of the classical technique. Contrary to many other manuals written in the mid-1920s, it does not deviate from classical ballet to include elements of popular or

social dance forms. For example, it specifically calls for the decidedly-classical 180 degrees of turnout in the feet when describing the five basic positions: “*First*: Both feet in horizontal line heels touching.”¹⁴ The *barre* begins with a *battement* exercise with *plié* that historian Sandra Noll Hammond describes as, “two *battements dégagés* and a quick *plié* in second position.”¹⁵ *Grand battements* are the second exercise at the *barre*, which is the same order of exercises as the Cecchetti syllabus *barre*. Also similar to the Cecchetti work is the outside arm at the *barre* which remains in the *à la seconde* position throughout. Sowell notes that Mascagno’s *barre* always included the same exercises and lasted only twenty minutes, which the manual does not state explicitly but which provides a sense for the pacing and structure of his class.¹⁶

The center work in the manual features *port de bras*, standard and simplified “centre exercises,” *adagio* exercises and combinations, *allegro* exercises and combinations, “Toe Work and its Preparation,” “Entrechats,” and *pirouettes*. Christensen described Mascagno’s teaching as similar to the Cecchetti approach with regard to *allegro*: “We learned to brush *assemblés* and land with *ballon*.... You didn’t put your heels down on the fast stuff, but, of course, you did on the slower jumps like *assemblés* and *sissonnes*.”¹⁷ Sowell asserts that teaching *pirouettes* was one of Mascagno’s strengths as a teacher; she notes that he “included circles of *chaîné* turns and multiple circles of *coupés jetés*,” and that “one of Mascagno’s specialties was a *grand renversé* in which the dancer’s working leg whipped around in a high arc from the front to the back of the body, causing the dancer to spin on the supporting leg while his arms opened

* Hammond also notes that the same exercise was regularly part of the *barre* in Luigi Albertieri’s class (“The Ballet Class,” *Society of Dance History Scholars Proceedings* [25th Annual Conference, Temple Univ., Philadelphia, Pa., June 20-23, 2002]: 49).

overhead.”¹⁸ While *renversé* is not typically considered a *pirouette*, it does indicate Mascagno’s penchant for turning steps more generally. The idea that *pirouettes* were Mascagno’s strong suit and likely a point of pedagogical pride is also supported by the lack of written instructions or exercises for *pirouettes* in the manual. While he may have truly believed that the coordination of *pirouettes* was best taught in person, it is possible as well that he wanted to retain ownership of his approach to the coveted Italian *pirouettes* and was therefore averse to publishing it. It is also possible that he was using his teaching of *pirouettes* to compel students to take more classes, having purposefully not provided them with an outside avenue through which to study this aspect of the technique.

There are several key aspects of the manual that help to illustrate Mascagno’s teaching methodology. Many exercises include the isolated repetition of individual steps—a trait often associated with an Italian approach. For example, in *rond de jambe par terre en dehors*, the manual instructs, “from 2nd pointé move right foot backward with circular movement passing through 1st, back to 2nd (16 times).”¹⁹ The *allegro* section of the manual has a particular build, in which each step is described individually before being combined with others, and thus it is possible that he taught the *allegro* vocabulary according to this same progression. The manual also includes two different versions of several steps. At the *barre*, *battement sur le cou de pied* moves from the *cou de pied* position out to a low *à la seconde* position and back in to the ankle. The manual states that “when properly executed the right foot makes a slapping sound each time it comes into contact with the left ankle.”²⁰ The second version, which he refers to as *petits battements*, “are executed as quickly as possible, so cannot be counted, and when

correctly executed are accompanied by a swishing sound as right foot brushes left leg.”²¹ The action of the Mascagnos’s *battements sur le cou de pied* seems similar to *battement serré*, despite beating against the ankle as opposed to the instep of the supporting foot. In addition, the manual specifies two approaches to the *glissade*, “sustained” and “sauté,” the latter described as “quicker and shorter than the glissade (sustained)... accomplished with a slight spring instead of the dragging of the left foot.”²² The *pas de basque*, similarly, has a “gliding” version and a “sauté” version.²³

Dance historian Ann Barzel asserts that Mascagno, in addition to teachers Luigi Albertieri, Veronine Vestoff, and Louis Chalif,* “had a tremendous influence on the teaching of dancing all through the United States.”²⁴ Indeed Mascagno cast a wide net with his influence as a pedagogue. For ten years, he was the “Principal and Ballet Master at the Normal School of the Dancing Masters of America,”²⁵ where he served as an exemplar for ballet teachers nationwide who attended the organization’s teacher training programs. Barzel notes that, “even though he simplified his work to meet the capabilities of his employers, he introduced real ballet technique to many so-called ballet teachers.”²⁶ Considering that anyone in America could open a school and teach, it is likely that many teachers involved with the organization had neither pedagogical knowledge nor a comprehensive understanding of the classical ballet vocabulary; their lack of basic expertise in ballet would have necessitated Mascagno’s “simplified” focus on ballet’s fundamental steps and concepts. As Barzel indicates, however, he maintained his dedication to teaching “real ballet technique,” and did not change the foundational

* Albertieri’s teaching is discussed in detail in Chapter Four; Chalif’s and Vestoff’s pedagogies are examined more closely in Chapter Six.

elements of the classical work to include, for example, elements of aesthetic dancing, which would undoubtedly have been more physically accommodating to those with little or no dance experience. After his departure from the Dancing Masters of America, Mascagno tried several times, unsuccessfully, to establish other kinds of American ballet organizations: a ballet teacher's association, an American ballet academy, and a "National American Ballet," to "advanc[e] the Euro-Russian tradition in America."²⁷ It is possible that his strict adherence to ballet's classical roots made these ambitious endeavors untenable in the early twentieth century American environment, where ballet was so often fused with popular forms.

Mascagno's influence on American ballet expanded in part because of his relationship to the Christensen family, who became largely responsible for the flourishing of ballet in Utah and along the West Coast of the United States.^{*} Mose Christensen first introduced Mascagno to the Dancing Masters of America.²⁸ Years later, as Willam, Harold, and Lew Christensen's first teacher in the classical tradition, Mascagno became an adviser for their professional development. When Lew and Willam tried to find work in vaudeville, Mascagno offered to choreograph for and manage the troupe, which, with their two female partners, toured the country as the "Mascagno Four."²⁹ Because the primary purpose of the vaudeville venture was financial,³⁰ Mascagno had to balance the need to conform to popular stage trends with his belief in classical ballet as an elite art form: he tried to keep the choreography as classical as possible, while taking into consideration the essential nature of spectacle on the

^{*} See Sowell's *The Christensen Brothers: An American Dance Epic*, for a thorough account of the Christensen family's influence on ballet in America (Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998).

vaudeville stage. Sowell describes one of the tricks included in the otherwise classical act: “In addition to traditional ballet steps and positions, Mascagno inserted a backbend on pointe for Mignon and Wiora (shades of Harriet Hocter!). To a drumroll in the music, the brothers would lower their partners by one hand until their heads touched the floor. They would let go of the women’s hands, the women would blow a kiss to the audience, and the men would raise them up again, to predictable cheering from the crowd.”³¹ In contrast to the largely classical material that the dancers performed, such an easy applause-getter was, according to Sowell, “an obvious concession to popular tastes,”³² one that Mascagno must have felt was necessary for the act to succeed on the American popular stage. The reliability of Mascagno’s classical agenda to that point—including the statement at the beginning of his dancing manual, “The fundamentals of ballet technique always have and always will be practically the same,”³³ indicates his commitment to maintaining the European classical tradition. It may be assumed, in this light, that his addition of trick steps to his vaudeville choreography was done with reluctance and perhaps even regret. As Willam noted years later in an interview with Sowell, “You couldn’t just stand around looking elegant.”³⁴

Despite the classical nature of most of Mascagno’s work, Barzel has asserted that he “yielded to pressure and conformed to American demands.”³⁵ The American context—in which the capitalist, democratic structure necessitated certain changes for the Euro-Russian ballet to attain commercial success—required that Mascagno adapt his work to suit popular stage standards, particularly because he was not affiliated with an opera house where classical ballet might have been more readily accepted on its own terms. It is true that he ceded some of his conventional values to the American

environment in making choreography for the vaudeville stage, offering classes for a variety of students, and simplifying his pedagogical training for American teachers, yet the traditional nature of his pedagogy suggests that he only made those concessions to earn income. By looking at Mascagno's adaptation of ballet in America through the lenses of democracy and capitalism, Barzel's claim—in which Mascagno seems irresolute about his strong beliefs in classical ballet—can be reconsidered, and Mascagno can be historically repositioned as a classicist who made only the necessary concessions to support himself and his family in the United States. The avenues through which Mascagno gained popularity and respect in America—his work as a pedagogue with the Dancing Masters of America and his own independent school, and through his work as a ballet choreographer in vaudeville—were, ironically, the same avenues that demanded he deny some of his classical values to make a living in the capitalist system. Inasmuch as Mascagno idealized classical ballet in its Euro-Russian form, he found subtle paths toward its revision in America that brought prestige to ballet's traditions and provided Mascagno with the means to continue his work in the United States.

Mikhail Mordkin, 1881-1944*

Mikhail Mordkin graduated from Moscow's Imperial Ballet School in 1899, and danced in the Moscow Imperial Ballet during the reign of ballerinas Pierina Legnani, Mathilde Kschessinska, and Olga Preobrajenska.³⁶ He studied under Vasily Tikhomirov, who, according to historian Natalia Roslavleva, provided many of the Muscovite male dancers with “a solid classical training coupled with that manly *plastique* that was the

* See Chapter Three for a discussion of Mordkin's Russian identity.

hallmark of Tikhomirov-trained artists [*sic*].”³⁷ It was the latter expressive aspect of their training, she contends, that prompted Anna Pavlova to select so many of them as partners.³⁸ Roslavleva also asserts that Tikhomirov’s “special ‘Moscow style’ of male dancing, manly and heroic,” was “cleverly utilized by Gorsky in his productions.”³⁹ Maxim Gorsky, the then director of the Moscow Imperial Theatre, created innovative choreography that was strongly influenced by the “expressive movement”⁴⁰ of the Moscow Art Theatre and the dancing of Isadora Duncan.⁴¹ Scholar Lynn Garafola notes that Gorsky “formed a brilliant constellation of dancer-actors” during his tenure at the Bolshoi, and that Mordkin was one of his protégés.⁴²

In 1909 Mordkin joined Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes for its premiere season in Paris. Having given a performance with Pavlova at the Imperial Theatre of Moscow years earlier, he accompanied her to the United States on her first American tours in 1910 and 1911. The team of Pavlova and Mordkin was a sensation: they brought the first sold out performances in the history of the Metropolitan Opera House,⁴³ and Mordkin earned acclaim as the epitome of a male ballet dancer among American audiences. His name was used as a common noun, synonymous with virility and vigor in dancing: when Malvina Cavallazzi at the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School dressed one of her female pupils *en travestie* in 1912, a journalist from *Musical America* wrote that the student, “ably assumed the costume and poses of a Mordkin.”⁴⁴ In her dissertation, Suzanne Carbonneau Levy notes that the verb “to Mordkin” also became popular, “meaning to perform male dancing.”⁴⁵

Mordkin appears to have singlehandedly changed the landscape for male dancing in America. His 1944 obituary in *Musical America* credits him as “the first male dancer

to win popular favor in this country,” and a 1927 article in *The Dance Magazine* recognizes that “he had demonstrated to the incredulous that a man could dance and remain a man.”⁴⁶ Winthrop Palmer has written that, “...serving as an example himself, Mordkin had showed how great an artist a man could be in the act of living as a man,” and in 1926, *The Dance Magazine* published the article, “Mikhail Mordkin: An Appreciation of Masculinity in the Dance.”⁴⁷ He was famous for his “Bow and Arrow Dance,” in which the *New York Times* notes that, “he shot arrows from a huge bow behind his shoulder.”⁴⁸ His costume for the piece was reminiscent of ancient Greek warrior garb; it revealed his muscular legs, broad shoulders, and barrel chest, and offered a conventionally masculine physique (fig. 19). Mordkin’s brawn and his vitality as a dancer allowed him to evade criticism for including in his performances aspects of ballet that Americans found quaint—namely pantomime. In a 1927 review of the ballet, *Aziade*, *The Dance Magazine*’s Vera Caspary described his performance:

Mordkin himself is given to much gesticulation. He loves the florid gesture, the uplifted head, the outstretched arms, the chest rising high in pride or expectation. And yet Mordkin is so beautiful, so manly and vigorous, so sweetly naïve in all his mad movements that the most futile pantomime becomes a series of handsome pictures when he is their protagonist. There is something adorable about his blissful belief in that silly pantomime.^{*49}

From a technical perspective, Mordkin won praise for his *ballon* and his *pirouettes*. He garnered a reference in the glossary of a 1922 dancing manual under the term, “The Leap,” where the author wrote: “Mordkin and Nijinsky were renowned for their leaps.”⁵⁰ The *New York Times* review noted his *à la seconde* turns in a 1910 review, titled,

* It is likely that the pantomime to which the reviewer refers was Mordkin’s *mimo-drama*, which was derived from *plastique* movement and included expressive gesturing. *Mimo-drama* is discussed in greater detail later in this section.

“Russian Dancers in Amazing Feats”: “Mordkine whirled for long seconds on one foot, with the other foot pointed at right angles from his body.”⁵¹ Mordkin’s capacity to execute such virtuosic elements of ballet may have eclipsed the more pantomimic aspects of his work in the eyes of the American audience, who were more prone to acknowledge physical feats over dramatic intentions.



Figure 19: Mordkin in “Bow and Arrow Dance.” Photo from “Mikhail Mordkin: His Last Curtain Call” in *The Dance Magazine*, 1944.

In addition to his United States tours with Pavlova, Mordkin performed and worked in England, teaching in London and dancing in music halls.⁵² He gathered a group of dancers, some from the Diaghilev company, called them “The All-Star Imperial Russian Ballet,” and took them on tour to America.⁵³ In her memoir, *Ballets Russes* dancer Lydia Sokolova refers to this traveling company as “old-fashioned,” and notes

* Dancer Lydia Sokolova refers to this trip in her memoir as taking place in 1911, while Mordkin notes that these trips took place in 1912 and ’13. Data from the Ellis Island online collection of ship manifests shows Mordkin entering the U.S. in 1910 and 1911, and again in 1924, but not in 1912 or 1913.

that the “productions would have little value except as background to the brilliance of the star dancers.”⁵⁴ In the American environment where solo dancing was so highly valued, audiences would likely have been more interested in the abilities of the solo dancers than in the work of the company on the whole. After the tour Mordkin went back to Russia. He did not visit the United States again until 1924, when he relocated permanently.⁵⁵

Upon his return to Russia, he developed relationships with the Kamerny Theatre of Moscow and with Constantin Stanislavsky of the Moscow Art Theatre, where he worked primarily with the Duncan-influenced *plastique* movement.⁵⁶ Shortly after the 1917 Revolution, Mordkin and his wife and son left the country under duress. He wrote of the ordeal in *The Dance Magazine* in 1926:

...in one crashing moment I discovered that even a peaceful artist could not escape the war gods.... We fled, leaving all our possessions behind, and escaped death, only to face new dangers. We had no money, no home, no worldly goods. How could we live? I had been trained only as a dancer, but as a dancer I could not earn a living in this war-stricken, starving country. I built a home for my wife and son with my own hands and found work as a goatherd. We did not starve but neither did we grow fat. And just as we were beginning to feel secure and look forward to a time when we might dance again, came another invasion, and again we were threatened with death.⁵⁷

They escaped to the Caucasus, where he was contacted with an invitation to serve as the Director of Ballet at the old Imperial Theatre. It had been renamed the State Academy Theatre, however, and according to historian George Amberg, Mordkin “found his position untenable under the new regime.”⁵⁸ His deep fondness and high regard for the Imperial Ballet under the Tsar would have made it difficult for him to work under the auspices of the Bolsheviks.

When he returned to America in 1924, he established a school and garnered further attention from the American press. The *New York Times* contrasted Mordkin the

dancer, who had delighted American audiences over a decade prior, with the ballet master in his forties, who had returned to make America his home: “The Mordkin of the days before the war was a dancer and dancer only; the Mordkin of 1924 is preeminently producer and trainer, without having lost any of the virility and technical prowess which gave him his early fame as a dancer. Uncontent with dancing by rote and to order, he has learned by eager and ambitious experiment the profession of regisseur in the dance, until today he is a law unto himself and yields obeisance only to his own imagination.”⁵⁹ In the late 1920s, while he was running his own school, he taught “Ballet Technique, Toe and Classical” with Adolph Bolm at the John Murray Anderson-Robert Milton School of the Theatre.⁶⁰ He also founded his own company, the Mordkin Ballet, during that period. Roslavleva maintains that Mordkin “introduced many motifs of Gorsky’s choreography into his own productions;”⁶¹ Mordkin’s *The Goldfish* and his *Bow and Arrow Dance* were both inspired by Gorsky works with the same names.⁶² Roslavleva also notes that Mordkin’s strict adherence to the Russian tradition via Gorsky helped him to leave a lasting imprint on American ballet: “Mordkin remained true to Gorsky’s principles of dramatic truth in ballet to the end of his days, and, while being unable to march in step with modern trends in ballet, passed on these valuable precepts to his American pupils who, in turn, founded the ‘American Ballet Theatre.’”⁶³ In 1942, Mordkin retired from teaching,⁶⁴ and upon his death in 1944, his wife Bronislava Pojitskaya, who had also graduated from the Moscow Imperial School and taught at her husband’s school, continued his legacy by folding the Mordkin School of the Dance into the Master

Institute of United Arts, a cultural institution founded in New York City by Russian artist, writer, and philosopher Nicholas Roerich.^{*65}

At the Mikhail Mordkin school,[†] there were typically ten to fifteen students in each class, and the class schedule was flexible: Leon Danielian, former dancer with the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo and a student of Mordkin's for nine years in the 1930s and '40s, recalled: "it was very irregular. Sometimes we would have an hour's class if he'd lose his temper; sometimes you'd have two hours if he felt like working on something and the next class would wait."⁶⁶ He often repeated material in his classes, but in contrast to Mascagno, for example, who repeated a single step eight or sixteen times, Mordkin put together a phrase of movement in eight or sixteen bars, and then repeated the phrase four or eight times on each side. Julia Vincent Cross, a student in Mordkin's classes in the late 1920s and '30s, gives the details of several of his class exercises in her 1956 *Dance Magazine* article, "A Class with Mikhail Mordkin." An exercise at the *barre* is cited below:

Start in 5th, right foot front, left hand on barre, right hand in 2nd. Grand battement en avant ending in demi-plié. Single pirouette ending with right leg in attitude. Développé into arabesque, assemblé to 5th back, relevé passé bringing right foot forward. Repeat exercise 4 times both sides.^{‡67}

* The *New York Times* asserts that Michel Fokine was among the faculty at the Master Institute of United Arts (Christopher Gray, "Streetscapes/The Master Apartments; A Restoration for the Home of a Russian Philosopher," January 29, 1995). Like Mordkin's mentor Gorsky, Fokine was also influenced by the Moscow Art Theatre (Lynn Garafola, "Dance, Film, and the Ballets Russes," *Dance Research* 16, no. 1 [summer 1998]: 7), as well as the dancing of Isadora Duncan.

† The Mordkin school had several names over the years, including the "Mikhail Mordkin Studio," the "Mikhail Mordkin Studio of Ballet and Mimo-Drama," and the "Mikhail Mordkin School of the Dance."

‡ Danielian has edited the section of the article that contains the class exercises "according to the Vaganova method." By the time of the article's publication in 1956, the Vaganova method had become synonymous with the Russian method. Mordkin, however, having graduated and danced at the Imperial Theatres, would not have been teaching the Vaganova method that began there in the early 1920s after the Revolution. How such editing might affect the writing of the exercises in the article is unknown. See chapter three for a discussion of Russian ballet's development before and after the Russian Revolution.

Mordkin's construction of complex exercises that focused on more than one step would have included opportunities for dancers to work on transitions between steps, movement quality, and musicality or phrasing, which are typically considered more expressive than technical aspects of ballet. In this way, Mordkin was directly supporting his strong belief in ballet's expressivity through his classroom material, as well as through his teaching of a *plastique*-derived form that he referred to as *mimo-drama*.

In 1944, Barzel noted, "as a teacher, Mordkin is slightly eccentric, but his classes are very interesting; there is never a dull moment."⁶⁸ Cross echoes this sentiment: "His lessons always depended on his mood of the moment. He never gave a dull class. He inspired one to move—to flow with the music. Even his *barre* exercises forced one to use the whole body rhythmically."⁶⁹ Journalist Dorothy Kilgallen describes the atmosphere in Mordkin's class in the 1939 *Journal American*; an excerpt of the article appeared in Mordkin's school brochure of the same year:

Here is no gentle tripping to the light fantastic. Here are no tulle-skirted wraiths picking rosebuds and chasing butterflies. Here is, in fact, a clamor and shouting and wild movement of hurtling bodies, such as the staid premises has rarely experienced. They whirl, spin, bend, leap through the air in arabesques and entrechats, and pirouette endlessly... Mordkin himself sits comfortably ensconced on a corner bench, attired in black dancing tights and a rainbow-colored pajama top... With a fine display of strength he beats relentlessly on the floor with a wooden stick to sustain the tempo, shouting a running comment...⁷⁰

In addition to this fiery aspect of Mordkin's persona that emerged when he taught, Danielian also remembered his sense of humor in the studio: "one day we couldn't do the combination and he went down on his hands and knees and he prayed to Terpsichore to come down!"⁷¹ Dancer Virginia "Winkie" Doris took Mordkin's ballet class when she was seven years old; she recalled: "Mordkin would stand in front of us with his back to

us of course, demonstrating meanwhile making faces at the mothers you know, and we couldn't understand why the mothers were just completely broken up through the whole class. We wondered what we were doing that was so terribly funny.”⁷² Cross, too, experienced his sense of humor: “Mordkin, with his wonderful feeling for rhythm, sweep and emotion, would sometimes start a movement slowly—then go quicker and quicker—until a climax was reached which would put me into great confusion. When this occurred, as it did on many occasions with all of his students, he would stop the whole class and ask to have a funeral march played.”⁷³ It is possible that Mordkin used humor to motivate his students, but it also seems reasonable that he would have used humor to entertain himself, as in the situation with the students' mothers, or to express frustration with his students' lack of understanding without deriding them directly.

Mordkin made use of his individual capacities as a dancer when he taught, even after he had ended his performing career. He was often a source of inspiration for his students: Danielian recalled: “He was a marvelous character dancer. He used to splinter a floor when he would do a krakoviak and a mazurka and we would stand up and clap.”⁷⁴ Cross notes that his artistry was central to both his performing and his teaching: “He had so thoroughly mastered [the technique] himself that he appeared to be oblivious to it. He was able to express himself emotionally and musically without thinking of the mechanics, and in his effort to make dancers out of his young students, he taught them also not to be bound by the steps.”⁷⁵ To the extent that Cross gives Mordkin credit for his non-technical teaching methods, by mid-century there were numerous detractors of the kind of imitative teaching that Mordkin and so many immigrant teachers utilized. In part, the use of imitation was a result of the language barrier. Danielian describes how

Mordkin, like many teachers of the period, “spoke Russian and spoke only very poor English, and... never bothered to learn.”⁷⁶ He asserts, “They never really cared to learn. Everybody came to school and it was put upon them that if you wanted to be a dancer, you should learn to speak Russian.”⁷⁷ As a result of teachers’ limited ability to communicate verbally with their students, they often turned to demonstration and imitation as pedagogical tools. Barzel also notes the use of mimicry in early twentieth century teaching, but she attributes it instead to a lack of pedagogical training: “Some of these dancers turned teacher were more than a little bored with teaching for they knew nothing of pedagogic methods, or of the psychological principles involved in the learning process. It was only because their pupils were avid to learn that they got anything at all, and it was usually by sheer imitation.”⁷⁸ Danielian’s description of Mordkin’s teaching fits with Barzel’s assessment, and it also reflects the changing role of anatomical knowledge in ballet training in the 1930s and ‘40s:

I don’t think he was particularly interested in teaching. It was just a way of making a living. He really wanted to perform.... I don’t think he ever stopped, and held my foot, or pushed my hip down, or ever gave me a physical criticism—about holding your back or your shoulder down. He never analyzed.... I can’t remember where I first learned the terminology such as ‘ribcage’ and ‘pull up on your thigh.’... As much as I worshipped Mr. Mordkin, I can’t say that I learned from him.⁷⁹

Sokolova had a similar response to Mordkin’s teaching when she studied with him briefly in London: “I had five lessons, but I cannot say that Mordkin taught me anything I didn’t know already.”⁸⁰ Cross, however, disagrees with the assessment that Mordkin was an apathetic or uninspired teacher: “In his teaching he was more emotional than any other teacher with whom I ever studied. He loved his teaching and his pupils with a fervor and devotion which seemed to carry them forward as dancers without a great deal

of concentration on form and technique.”⁸¹ In this regard, Mordkin’s teaching aligned with his strengths as a Tikhomirov- and Gorsky-trained dancer, and with his belief in the expressivity of *plastique*.

Perhaps because teaching was Mordkin’s livelihood, and because he had given tuition scholarships to some students, including Danielian, he demanded absolute loyalty from them. Danielian remembered that, “the [School of American Ballet] had just started.... I knew the faculty and I would read about it and think I’d love to go there. I remember hearing Vladimiroff’s name for the first time, and Dimitriew and Balanchine, but Mr. Mordkin wouldn’t allow us to go.”⁸² He noted Mordkin’s inflexibility in the matter: “if you went to [another teacher], you were banished from the kingdom. That was it.”⁸³ For students who were loyal, however, Mordkin taught not only classes but some of the repertoire from the Imperial Theatre; his student Lucia Chase recalled in a 1973 interview: “He taught me the three great roles that he said all great Russian ballerinas had to know before they graduated. So he taught me *The Sleeping Beauty*, *La Fille Mal Gardée*, and *Giselle*. The classic, the comedy, and the dramatic.”⁸⁴ Considering that he taught ballet from his strengths as a dancer, he likely taught repertoire from his strengths as a performer. Roslavleva describes Mordkin’s style of dance-acting: “In every new role Mordkin looked for psychological motivation, giving his own version even in classical ballets.”⁸⁵ Ironically, it was Mordkin’s group of students, Chase included, who would leave him behind to form Ballet Theatre, the vehicle through which Americans would come to know the also psychologically-driven, albeit stylistically distinct, work of British choreographer Antony Tudor.

Mordkin was generous in sharing his philosophies on ballet with the American public, and his star status gave him more opportunities than most of his contemporaries to express his ideas in the American press. Mordkin's belief that "all that one does in ballet must have reason, meaning," was at the core of his work in America, exemplified by the range of classes he offered at his school.⁸⁶ He described his intent for the school in *The Dance Magazine* in 1926:

I do not wish to make mine another Imperial Ballet School although I aim to give my students all the beautiful skill which this school bestowed on its pupils. But I shall try to give my school the artistic richness and fullness of the Imperial School in the days of Petipas [*sic*] and Gorsky and Fokine, when there was so much richness that all who came took away a share and there still remained plenty for those who stayed. I hope to give America the spectacle of a real Russian ballet, a ballet such as their awed and admiring eyes have never seen, one even greater than we brought across the Atlantic Ocean when we came bearing acts and episodes and moments from the glorious ballets produced in Petrograd and Moscow.⁸⁷

His high esteem for and nostalgic attachment to the Imperial School is evident here; he still refers to "Petrograd" despite the post-Russian Revolution date of the article; by its 1926 publication the city had been renamed Leningrad for two years. Because of his reverence for the institution of Russian ballet under the Tsar, and because it is not known whether he had a working knowledge of any other systems of training with which to compare the Russian pedagogy, the Russian method was the only one that Mordkin felt could adequately prepare dancers for versatile careers. In an unpublished statement typed on his school letterhead, he wrote:

The value of the Russian School of Dance lies in the fact that the exercises serving to develop the human body were based on a thorough knowledge of anatomy and each movement was designed to bring into play some muscle of the body. The strict sequence of these exercises finally resulted in a perfect coordination of muscle and harmony of line. Having completed the full course of the Russian school any dancer can take any character of the dance, any style such

as, for instance, the Duncan school and ending with the most modern of dances, and if that dancer has any talent or individuality, and if he is willing to keep abreast of the times, having a Russian foundation he is able to perform with ease in any manner that pleases him.⁸⁸

It is notable that the idea of versatility was highly valued in American dance during the period, which saw quickly shifting trends in dance on the popular stage. Mordkin, perhaps as part of his attempt to preserve the Russian classical training in the American environment, stressed the importance of ballet as the basis for success in all other dance forms.^{*} *The Dance Magazine* asked for his advice on how to achieve a successful and lucrative dance career in a 1929 article entitled: “Does Classical Dancing Pay?” in which he reiterates the idea that classical training is central to versatility:

The best is to study modern American dancing along with the classical repertoire. For myself, I see nothing wrong with that. Art is that which is good. A good banjo player can produce art as well as a good fiddler.... What the dancer must avoid of course is slipping into modern specialty dancing. The dancer who does that exclusively can say goodbye to classical dancing and will quickly develop into a vaudevillian instead of remaining an artist. The young dancer must absolutely keep up with the classical repertoire.⁸⁹

Without denouncing popular dance forms as did many of his contemporaries, Mordkin espoused his belief that ballet training was central to one’s ability to perform ballet, in addition to numerous other dance styles. In contrast to the Traditionalists, for example, Mordkin seems to have believed that ballet could co-exist with popular dance, and that ballet could acclimate to the American dance environment without losing its classical basis.

^{*} This sentiment has carried into the twenty-first century, with innumerable ballet teachers and studios touting ballet training as necessary for success in any other dance form. A search using Google.com of the exact phrase, “ballet is the foundation of all dance,” elicited 6,420 results: most were websites for regional or local dance studios scattered across the United States. (<http://www.google.com/>, accessed October 16, 2011).

In addition to his acceptance of the American popular dance tradition, Mordkin was enthusiastically in support of jazz as a potential force in creating a uniquely American ballet.* He wrote an editorial for the *New York Times* upon his return to the United States in 1924, titled “Mordkin’s Views on Jazz”:

It has been announced that I am to do a jazz ballet. This is untrue. I cannot do a jazz ballet unless an American composer will create jazz music for me. Is there in this country a composer who is capable of doing this?

Since my arrival in New York I have become intensely interested in this new form of music—the American jazz. I am delighted to find that many of your great artists are also interested in it, and that your great patrons of art, such as Mr. Otto H. Kahn and others, are espousing the cause of jazz.

My many years of experience in the school of traditional Russian ballet have, of course, familiarized me with syncopation in music. There are many movements, both in the greatest symphonies and in the finest ballets, that are syncopated, yet by no stretch of the imagination can they be called jazz.

...I am, however, eager for a composer who will create a jazz ballet not from any of the old forms of music nor the traditional dances of the Russian school, but a ballet that is charged with the fundamental rhythm of American jazz. ...I want a jazz ballet that may be interpreted by jazz movements—entirely new renditions, where the dancer indulges, first in the imperceptible hesitation (so characteristic of the American ‘jazzing’), then throws himself into the mad beat of the dance.⁹⁰

Mordkin’s embrace of the jazz sensibility is indicative of his desire to make ballet American by including a uniquely American cultural concept. Yet there is no evidence that he was able to make his “jazz ballet” a reality. His attempt at revisionism through the Africanist aesthetic seems to have lost its momentum soon after he wrote the above editorial; it is not known whether he continued to try and find collaborators or whether he simply turned his focus to the establishment of his school and company, both of which followed shortly after the article was published.

* See Chapter One for further discussion of Mordkin and the Africanist aesthetic influence on the development of American ballet during the period.

Brochures for the Mikhail Mordkin Studio feature descriptions of a range of classes, including “Classical Ballet Technique” “Toe,” “Character Dancing,” and “Classic Dance,” which may have been either a Duncan-esque style of aesthetic dancing, *plastique* re-titled to reflect the current trend of “Greek” or “Classic” dance, a Fokine-inspired approach to freer ballet-based movement, or a combination of the three. The school offered classes for children with “an elementary ballet foundation,” as well as two kinds of “Physical Culture” classes: one “for body control and reducing,” and one called “Modern Physical Culture,” held in the evenings and marketed to “business girls.” The 1939-1940 school brochure describes the “Mordkin method of intensified training,” which “combines practical and theoretical experience to awaken the artistic expression in the mind and soul of the individual.”⁹¹ Through the variety of courses he offered, Mordkin made an effort to democratize his school, thus adapting his work to fit the American context for ballet. He held classes for most ages and levels of proficiency, but he remained firmly rooted in the Russian traditions from the Imperial Ballet and the Moscow Art Theatre in not offering classes in vaudeville styles such as toe-tapping or eccentric dancing.

A unique element of Mordkin’s work in America was his teaching of *mimo-drama*. The brochure describes these classes as “cultivat[ing] essential development in co-ordination, body-control and emotional expression.”⁹² They were offered in two sections: “Preparatory for the Screen,” and “Preparatory for the Opera, Musical, and Dramatic Stage,”⁹³ and it might be assumed that the course for aspiring film actors focused more on the expression of the face and upper body, where the course for those

with stage ambitions may have addressed the body in its entirety. *The Dance Magazine* described *mimo-drama* in 1926:

It is all immeasurably above the level of what the English call pantomime. The best term for it might be Mordkin's own—*mimo-drama*—were this not too reminiscent of the films, the screens and the pictures. It is an art of *plastique* based upon the fundamentals of rhythm transcending the technicalities of mere body work, important as that is, or bar work, intimately as this kind of practice enters into the effect, or arm work either. The spectator loses all impressions of rhythmical exercises on a floor, of steps in circles forming patterns however perfect, in much loftier ideas. Mordkin, as the psychologists say, has sublimated the dance. It sways, not the emotions merely through the eye, but the intellect through the idea.⁹⁴

Despite his emphasis on expressive movement that brought Mordkin such acclaim as a performer in 1910, *mimo-drama* may have seemed sentimental to Americans of the early 1930s. The work of the early American modern dancers—including José Limón, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm—offered additional modes of expressivity through dance movement, and Danielian has noted that the development of modern dance techniques brought greater attention to the anatomical analysis of what the body was doing in movement.⁹⁵ The dancers of Danielian's generation would likely have seen Mordkin's imitative teaching, which included *mimo-drama* but did not embark on physical analysis, as antiquated and ineffective in comparison. Yet through his insistence on teaching *mimo-drama* and his expressive approach to ballet classes, Mordkin was among the first to bring the *plastique* movement, which was so integral to the work at the Imperial Ballet in Moscow, to America.

Mordkin's attachment to the expressive style of *mimo-drama* may have prevented him from becoming a central figure in the development of American ballet. The Mordkin Ballet presented dramatic ballets that echoed the work of Gorsky and the Moscow Art

Theatre. Images of Mordkin's *Giselle*, for example, feature the ballet's soloists in character-appropriate poses (fig. 20): Myrtha stands *en pointe* facing stage right; Albrecht kneels behind her, pleading with arms outstretched toward her; and Giselle stands behind him, reaching softly toward both Myrtha and Albrecht. The *corps de ballet* dancers—standing close together in *tendu derrière* in a single-file line behind the soloists—hold their arms directly above their heads with fingers spread and crooked like claws. Traditionally, their arms are crossed over their chests, but Mordkin's adjustment more directly expresses the evil nature of their characters, the *Wilis*.^{*} This would have been particularly useful for an American audience who would not have understood ballet's traditional, gestural pantomime in which crossed arms symbolize death. Yet Mordkin's changes to the canon, likely intended to both heighten dramatic content and promote understanding of ballet's meaning with *mimo-drama*, would have been inconsequential to most Americans by the time Mordkin returned to the States in the mid-1920s. Palmer explains: "Great as he was, Mikhail Mordkin could not transform the practical and commercial traditions that had frozen the feelings and spirit of American boys and girls in the brief span of ten years. The youth of a mechanically gifted people found it easier to master the technique required by Balanchine choreography than to master the human understanding of life required by Mordkin's ballets."⁹⁶ By the time of his death in 1944, American culture and American ballet had moved beyond Mordkin's brand of expressive movement. His romantic, nostalgic notions about ballet as a lofty, ideal art form that could express the whims of the soul probably seemed silly or elusive

^{*} The *Wilis* in *Giselle*, led by Myrtha, are an ensemble of undead women. Having been jilted at the altar by their fiancés, they remain between worlds to ensnare men and force them to dance to their deaths.

to most early twentieth century American audiences who did not yet view ballet as art. While his intentions were, in part, focused on making ballet that was unique to America, his insistence on the incorporation of an expressive medium that dated back to the turn of the century in Russia was likely culturally irrelevant to most Americans.



Figure 20: Mordkin's *Giselle*, as pictured in his school brochure circa 1937.

Mordkin worked to preserve the past while moving cautiously forward into the American environment for ballet. As a Russian immigrant with great admiration and reverence for the ballet under Imperial rule, he considered himself an important link between the Russian ballet tradition before the Revolution and the ballet that was forming in America: "Me, I like to think I am the bridge between what was in Russia and what will be in the future here."⁹⁷ He was dedicated to preserving the principles of the art he learned in Imperial Russia, while bending them just enough to accommodate the demands of the American scene. Mordkin's democratic approach to operating his school reflects his acceptance of American structures, his embrace of the jazz sensibility indicates his curiosity and interest in ballet's expansion in America, and his often forgotten place as the teacher of the American Ballet Theatre founders places him among American ballet's most quietly influential figures.

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The Nostalgic Revisionists held high ideals regarding the classical tradition, and they were dedicated to the extension of that tradition in America. They promoted classical ballet in an environment that was often unsympathetic to their beliefs, and they educated American students and audiences in the Euro-Russian tradition at a time when ballet was decidedly not seen as an art form with historically significant, academy-based training methods. Because these teachers refused to alter the classical technique, but rather the context in which they taught it, they pushed Americans to embrace Euro-Russian classical ballet in spite of their aversion to it. In this light, they were more effective than the Traditionalists in bringing classical ballet to the masses. In Chapter Six I discuss the Pragmatic Revisionists, who took the opposite perspective: they realistically adapted the classical tradition—including the technique—to suit the democratic, capitalist, heterogeneous American environment, and they endeavored to shape classical ballet into a distinctly American art form.

Notes

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Chapter Six

Pragmatic Revisionists: Veronine Vestoff, Sonia Serova, and Louis H. Chalif

“‘But, Veronine,’ insisted my first inducer—‘America is young—already she skips about on her toes—Americans wish to dance—to express themselves in rhythm—but know not when to leap nor how to brisé. Nowhere will you find such enthusiastic pupils. Come to America, Veronine. I who have seen the eager longing in American eyes—who have thrilled at American handclapping, I tell you Americans are inborn dancers and only wait a master who can help them to find themselves.’”

—Veronine Vestoff, “My Message to You,” in the Vestoff-Serova Russian School of Dancing brochure, 1926

“We have made many changes in this material, to adapt it to new conditions. Let us hope that our nearly life-time’s occupation with the art has enabled us to make the changes wisely, and even here and there to carry the art of Teaching Dancing to a higher point than it had there as yet reached.”

—Foreword to The Chalif Text Book of Dancing, Book I, 1914

In this chapter, I examine the work of pedagogues Veronine Vestoff, Sonia Serova, and Louis H. Chalif. Vestoff studied in Russia and came to the United States as a dancer with Anna Pavlova. He and his wife, Serova, an English dancer and renowned Nature Dancing teacher, established a successful school, the Vestoff-Serova Russian School of Dancing, in New York City.* Chalif was a student at the Moscow Imperial Ballet School before eventually rising to the post of Ballet Master; he arrived in America in 1904 and established his school, The Chalif Normal School of Dancing, the following

* Despite their disparate teaching agendas—Vestoff with ballet and Serova with more popular forms—I discuss the two together. The catalogs and brochures from the Vestoff-Serova School, which constituted a substantial portion of the archival material related to their pedagogy, reflect shared pedagogical philosophies between the co-founders. I thus consider them to have collectively established the school’s curriculum and ethos.

year. Through their noteworthy schools, these teachers established thriving mail-order businesses. The dance manuals and at-home instruction that they sent across the country regularly reached innumerable American students, and these writings allowed them to have greater influences on ballet's development in the United States. Historian Ann Barzel considers Vestoff and Chalif, along with Luigi Albertieri and Stefano Mascagno,^{*} to have been among the most influential teachers of the period.¹ Both men, as well as Serova, pioneered the teaching of dance pedagogy through normal courses taught at their own schools and through their work with various dance organizations. Martha Hill (1901-1995), founder of the American Dance Festival and the notable dance departments at The Juilliard School and Bennington College, was a student at both the Vestoff-Serova and Chalif schools, and she even did some of her early dance study through Vestoff-Serova's mail-order program.^{†2} Through Hill and untold others, the Vestoff-Serova and Chalif legacies have become part of ballet's continued development into the twenty-first century.

Vestoff, Serova, and Chalif can be considered Pragmatic Revisionists because of the degree to which they embraced the American environment for ballet between 1909 and 1934. While the Nostalgic Revisionists were more sentimental about the classical tradition and thus less inclined to include popular styles in their class offerings, the Pragmatic Revisionists espoused early twentieth century dance trends and willingly threw ballet into the mix. These instructors worked to preserve the classical ballet tradition for those dancers who could accomplish its rigors, while increasing ballet's

^{*} Albertieri's and Mascagno's work has been discussed in Chapters Four and Five, respectively.

[†] For more on Hill, see Janet Mansfield Soares's 2009 book, *Martha Hill and the Making of American Dance* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press).

viability on the American scene by either combining it with more popular forms of dance or simplifying it for the average American. Vestoff and Chalif, with their classical backgrounds, shrewdly adapted their knowledge of Euro-Russian ballet to the American environment.* As a result of their work, the period's dancers could accomplish what was considered an acceptable level of ballet without enduring the requisite academy-style training that was prevalent throughout Europe and Russia but unattainable in early twentieth century America. Serova, with her emphasis on Nature Dancing, sought to bring a more academic, classically based approach to a style that was typically viewed as having little or no methodology. Through their efforts, these Pragmatic Revisionists broadened the classical ballet tradition enough to make it palatable in the early twentieth century American context, thus helping it gain public appreciation and respectability as both an American business venture and a developing American art form.

Veronine Vestoff, 1865-1941, and Sonia Serova, d. 1943

Veronine Vestoff was born in Stockholm, Sweden, to an English mother and a Russian father, Edward Vestoff, whom Barzel notes was “said to have danced with Taglioni, Grisi and Elssler.”³ Veronine’s training background in Russia is uncertain: his obituary in the *New York Times* claims that he was a graduate of the Imperial School in St. Petersburg;⁴ Barzel states that he performed in a touring ensemble with his family;⁵ and the brochures for the Vestoff-Serova School in New York cite the “Russian Imperial Academy of Arts, Moscow”⁶ as his artistic home. It is likely that he attended at least one

* Alexis Kosloff, brother of Theodore, can also be considered a Pragmatic Revisionist, in light of his teaching at the Kosloff School in New York coupled with his work on Broadway and in film. There was not enough archival material available, however, to merit a full discussion of his pedagogy. See Chapter Two for a brief mention of Kosloff’s teaching approach.

of Russia's Imperial Schools, though, since he first came to the United States as a soloist with the Pavlova-Mordkin company—whose dancers had also emerged from the Imperial Schools—in 1910 and '11. His whereabouts between 1911 and 1916 are, likewise, unconfirmed. His biographical sketch in several Vestoff-Serova School brochures notes that he was the ballet master for ballerina Adeline Genée in 1912 and 1913, and that he was the “Late Ballet Master” in Petrograd and Moscow, with no further details. It also lists his participation in a summer course at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1915. He served as an instructor for the American National Association of Masters of Dancing, teaching in New York, Chicago, and California, and in 1917 he and Serova opened the Vestoff-Serova Russian School of Dancing on West Seventy-second Street in New York City.

Serova was born Aileen Swepstone* in London, where she graduated from Mrs. Wordsworth's School of Dancing, which offered instruction primarily in social dancing.⁷ Her biography in the Vestoff-Serova school brochure mentions that she was a graduate of the “Russian School,” but there are no additional details as to which of the Russian schools she may have attended. The particulars of Serova's arrival in the United States and her first meeting with Vestoff are also unclear. Barzel notes that Serova taught in Victoria and Vancouver, British Columbia, before going to San Francisco where she met Vestoff.⁸ Serova's obituary in the *New York Herald Tribune*, however, states that, “she came to this country after her marriage, and, with her husband, opened the Vestoff-

* Despite the *New York Herald Tribune* obituary that cited Serova's original last name as Swetstone, it is likely that Serova's last name had been Swepstone. The Vestoff-Serova school catalog from 1920 lists a Mrs. Albemarie Swepstone—perhaps a relative—as the school's secretary. In addition, an Eileen Swepstone, of Mrs. Wordsworth's School in London that Serova attended, published a social dancing manual in 1914, another indication that the article citing her as Swetstone was misprinted.

Serova dancing school.”⁹ In spite of these conflicting possible scenarios, it is evident that she chose to Russianize her national identity, perhaps with encouragement from Vestoff, because of their shared belief in the authority of Russian training and in response to the period’s “Russomania”^{*} trend in ballet. Once she arrived in the United States, however, Serova performed as the “first solo dancer at the Pan-American Exposition in San Francisco,” and choreographed such popular stage productions as Irving Berlin’s *Music Box Revue* and the *Greenwich Follies* on Broadway.¹⁰ She also directed ice ballets and exhibitions at Madison Square Garden,¹¹ and held the position of ballet mistress at the Strand Theatre in Brooklyn, New York, for several years. Serova was affiliated with the American National Association of Masters of Dancing, and after Vestoff’s death she operated her own studio out of New York’s Steinway Hall.¹²

At the Vestoff-Serova Russian School of Dancing, the owners and a few hired faculty members offered instruction in various kinds of dancing—both classical and popular styles—as well as normal courses for aspiring teachers. The school brochure from 1923 is explicit about the contents of the school’s most prominent classes: “All courses in Ballet and Classic Dancing consist of instruction in Bar [*sic*] work, Technique of dancing (including technical combinations and comprising various studies in simple and advanced technique) and Plastique movement.” Courses were also offered in “National and Folk Dancing,” “Dramatic and Narrative Pantomime,” “Oriental Dances,” and “Ball Room Dancing,” and the school regularly presented its students to the public in recitals at Carnegie Hall. Serova taught “Nature Dancing,” and was considered by the

^{*} Suzanne Carbonneau Levy originated this term in her dissertation, *The Russians are Coming: Russian Dancers in the United States, 1910-1933* (New York University, 1990). See Chapter Three for further discussion of this trend.

New York Times to be “the best-known woman instructor in nature dancing in the metropolis.”¹³ She also taught what the school brochure refers to as “Baby Dance,” which may have been the precursor to classes in “pre-ballet”—for children ages two through six—that have become a fixture in regional and local dance studios across the country in the twenty-first century. Vestoff taught several classes in ballet technique and “Toe,” and in 1922 his teaching was described in the *New York Times*:

Vestoff, whose school occupies the building in Seventy-second Street where Duryea was wont to teach ballroom dancing to society debutantes, in his tweed Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, seems to have stepped out of an English country curate’s home and his paternal, benevolent manner strengthens the illusion until you notice the ballet slippers on his feet. More than most of the others he dances with his pupils so that as they dance they can see in the long mirror his feet doing exactly what he desires theirs to do. He has his tea and cakes promptly [*sic*] at 4:30 o’clock [*sic*] every afternoon. He is noted for his patience with beginners and the pupils from the Western and Southern cities, who are in the majority at his school, swear by his thoroughness.¹⁴ (fig. 21)

The Vestoff-Serova owners seem to have fully embraced America’s democratic underpinnings and the heterogeneity of the American populace. Serova’s obituary in the *New York Herald Tribune* noted her willingness to teach students from across America: “Contrary to a widely held impression, Mrs. Serova believed that country girls made just as efficient dancers as city girls. Of the hundreds of girls that had come to her from all parts of the country and from every walk of life, the country girl, she declared, made just as good a society dancer, a dancing teacher, or a professional stage dancer, once she had mastered stage fright and bashfulness.”¹⁵ In addition, the Vestoff-Serova brochures list graduates of the school hailing from twenty-eight states as well as from Canada, France, and Norway. It was perhaps Vestoff’s and Serova’s combined willingness to work with a

range of students, including beginners and “country girls,” that allowed them to quickly acclimate to and thrive on the American dance scene.



Figure 21: Veronine Vestoff. Photo from Vestoff-Serova School brochure, 1926.

Unlike Mikhail Mordkin, another of Pavlova’s partners who eventually made a home in the States, Vestoff’s career in America was built more on his teaching than his performing. He and Stefano Mascagno worked to establish a “National American Ballet” company,¹⁶ but they were ultimately unsuccessful. Serova, as well, was known primarily as a teacher, and her participation with Vestoff in teaching organizations, particularly the American National Association of Masters of Dancing, brought them renown as “high

priests and priestesses of the art.”¹⁷ The Vestoff-Serova pedagogical influence reached a wide swath of the American ballet sphere, largely through their publication of at least sixteen comprehensive dance manuals and numerous choreographed dances with musical accompaniment. Vestoff and Serova authored their manuals individually, despite publishing them jointly as products of the Vestoff-Serova School. What follows are descriptions of selected Vestoff-Serova texts that offer insight into the pedagogical philosophies and training practices of these two instructors.

Russian Imperial Method (1916) and *Advanced Technique of the Russian Imperial School* (1918)

At only thirty-two pages in length, Vestoff’s *Russian Imperial Method* is comprised of over one hundred photographs—most likely of Serova—that demonstrate ballet’s various positions and steps. The inclusion of photographs distinguishes it from most other manuals from the period, which typically utilized sketches to serve as visual representations of the material. Like many other ballet teachers at the time, Vestoff defined his own sequence of arm positions and included sheet music to accompany each exercise.* He includes sections for “Bar Exercises,” in which the outside arm is always in a relaxed *allongé*[†] position to the side, and “Plastique Movements,” which seems to be a study of mostly expressive upper body movement—including *cambrés* and *port de bras* that are not confined to the classical positions—that correspond with directional changes and weight shifts like *temps lié* and *tombé* (fig. 22). The “Technique” section is mostly

* See Chapter Two for a description of Vestoff’s arm positions.

† See the glossary for definitions of ballet terminology and clarifications of term use.

comprised of *terre à terre* center work and *petit allegro* steps, and “Toe Exercises” includes a series of *barre* exercises *en pointe*.



Figure 22: Two photographs from the “Plastique Movements” section of Vestoff’s *Russian Imperial Method* (1916).

Vestoff’s subsequent publication, *Advanced Technique of the Russian Imperial School*, from 1918, is a continuation of the first, in that it offers a number of *enchaînements* but no *barrework* or *terre à terre*. It is just under half the length of the first manual, but the primary difference is in appearance: the contents of *Advanced Technique* are neither photographic nor in typeface, but are hand printed with a calligraphic slant and reproduced (fig. 23). It features an introduction to the school, a glossary of terms used in the combinations, a preparatory exercise for *pirouettes*, and a two-page section entitled, “Practice of Steps Preparatory to the Combination,” which offers simple exercises for individual steps within the *enchaînements*. The last two pages consist of simple drawings of dancers in various positions, some of which appear to be tracings of the photographs in the first manual. Like Albertieri, Vestoff includes some terminology that is decidedly outside of the traditional language of ballet: he uses

“perch” in lieu of *piqué*, “sink” instead of *plié*, and “grand stay,” in place of “tour jeté” or *grand jeté en tournant*.^{*} He explains his use of these terms in the introduction to the manual, noting that, “In addition to the age old terms and expression used in all the great Ballet Schools of the World, every Ballet Master of note has his own peculiar and pet names which he is in the habit of using. The explanation [*sic*] of the terms as used in this book are those in use in the Imperial Schools of Russia, with one or two added expressions which Mr. Vestoff has found useful in his teaching in this country.” By using the descriptive English verbs “perch,” and “sink,” Vestoff may have been trying to convey the steps’ qualities to his American students, since he did not entirely replace the old terms with the new, but rather used the new terms in specific situations in addition to the traditional vocabulary. “Sink,” for example, is used instead of *plié* at the end of a *pirouette* in *attitude*, but “plié” is the term of choice when Vestoff discusses *changements*. In this instance, he may have used these distinct terms to contrast the melting quality of the *plié* at the end of the *attitude* turn with the springing variety that is used with *allegro* steps.

^{*} See Chapter Four for a discussion of the term “Stay.”

series of exercises. Unlike the *Plastique* section, however, the *Technique* half of the manual reverts to the mostly traditional French ballet terminology that Vestoff included in his previous manuals.

Veronine Vestoff Académie de Danse: A Series of Instructions and Lessons for becoming A Successful Stage Dancer or Teacher (1926)

This substantial work, at over two hundred pages in length, seems to have been Vestoff's *pièce de résistance*: its typeface-printed pages are bound by royal blue canvas-wrapped hard covers, and it features hundreds of hand drawings, several photographs, and sheet music accompaniment. On the title page, the subtitle, "A Series of Instructions and Lessons for Becoming a Successful Stage Dancer or Teacher," is followed by further clarification: "Constituting an Authoritative Handbook for Normal and Stage Work." It is possible that this manual was sold as well under the mail-order title *Veronine Vestoff's Teacher's Guide: A Complete Home-Study Course in 36 Lessons*, which he advertised in *The Dance Magazine*. He charged a steep twenty dollars for the book, in contrast to the rest of the school's publications, which ranged from \$2.20 to \$5.20, and which were more in accordance with the prices of other dance manuals sold during the period.¹⁸

Vestoff covers multiple dance styles in the *Académie*: there are lessons in ballet, "Greek" dancing, "Toe" dancing, tap dancing, and musical comedy dancing. In addition, there are short dance history lessons threaded throughout the book in chronological order: he begins with "The Antiquity of Dancing" in Lesson One, continues through "Ancient Rome and the Dance" in Lesson Two, and by Lesson Six he reaches the Renaissance. Louis XIV is discussed in Lesson Seven, Lesson Eight features Baroque

Era dancers Marie Camargo and Marie Sallé, and so on. He includes several choreographed dances, including Russian Folk Dances, with musical accompaniment. Stretching exercises are also a feature of the manual, as are examinations after every three or four lessons with questions testing the student's knowledge of the lessons' contents. The first examination explains the importance of such tests and the ethics to be considered in taking an at-home exam:

You are on your honor not to refer to your text book in answering the following questions. Return the accompanying answer sheet at once for grading. Answer all questions in pen and ink. Your answers will be analyzed and your marks sent to you. This information will be filed at this office for future reference. It is important that we have this information in our files in order that we may refer to it in making out your graduation certificate and also that we may know of your progress.^{*19}

Examination questions range from "Give a description of the action of the leg in a Rond de Jambe á [*sic*] Terre," to "Describe 'The Step Hop,' 'The Degagé,' [*sic*] and 'The Intermediate Arm Position.'"²⁰

The final lesson in the *Académie* is intended to help with the transition into the professional dance world of the early twentieth century. Titled "How To Make Professional Use of Your Training," it offers advice to aspiring dancers on "Personality," "Showmanship," "Make-Up and Costuming." For future dance teachers or studio owners, Vestoff includes sections on "Securing Pupils," "Conducting a Class," "How to Set Tuition Fees," "Recitals," and "To Organize Your Own School," among others.²¹

The student is presented with thirty-six "lessons" in the *Académie*, and Vestoff writes in second person as though he is teaching the reader directly: "I want you to

^{*} See Chapter Two for Denishawn dancer Barton Mumaw's account of using Vestoff's *Académie* as a mail-order manual and submitting the examinations.

concentrate on each exercise, or set of exercises, as it comes to you, but do not try to go on to a new exercise until you have become thoroughly familiar with the execution of the preceding one.”²² Vestoff was also explicit about how the student should make use of the photographs in the book, which, again, are likely of Serova modeling some “Greek” poses: “each pose must be practiced from these pictures before a mirror. This enables you to get a mental impression of how they should look.”²³ Like many of his contemporaries, Vestoff required 180 degrees of turnout in the feet; he describes fifth position as: “the right heel at the toe of the left foot with the feet parallel and turned out.”²⁴ Additionally, in his discussion of *grand battement* he distinguishes between the traditional rules for leg height in ballet as opposed to popular dance forms: “In ballet dancing the leg is not usually raised higher than hip level, but in some forms of dancing the dancers kick as high as they possibly can.”²⁵ In making this contrast, Vestoff seems perfectly willing to acknowledge the validity of the high-kicking trend as opposed to making disparaging remarks about it, as did several other immigrant teachers during the period. His understanding of the American dance field in this way indicates his acceptance of ballet’s place alongside the popular forms of the day. He may therefore have encouraged his students to approach ballet as they would any other popular form—with enthusiasm and dedication.

The Adagio: Or the Various Manipulations of Handling the Dancer in Slow Movements (1927) and *Tumbling for Class Work* (c. 1940)

Both of these manuals deal with partnering, the first from a classical perspective and the second from a popular, more acrobatic vantage point that also includes ballet-

derived concepts. *The Adagio* gives instruction in classical *pas de deux* work, and it offers exercises for individual steps as well as lengthier combinations that resemble much of the classical repertoire. For example, he describes a partnered *développé croisé devant*, followed by a *grand rond de jambe* to *arabesque croisé derrière*, followed by a *promenade en dehors* that returns to the *croisé derrière* position;²⁶ this combination is found in the Act II *pas de deux* in *Giselle* (fig. 24). In addition, he describes a step from the *Grand Pas de Deux* in *The Nutcracker*, in which the woman uses the man's arm to support her in an *attitude derrière* while he walks in a circle to *promenade* her (fig. 25). Amusingly, he refers to the partners as "the dancer," and "the support," which he must have found necessary for clarity given the longhand nature of the descriptions he provides. This is another of his manuals that is hand-written and relatively short, and the last six pages of thirty-six are sketches of dancers in some of the various positions that Vestoff refers to throughout the text.



Figures 24 (L) and 25 (R): Two sketches from Vestoff's 1927 *pas de deux* manual, *The Adagio*.

Vestoff wrote *Tumbling for Class Work* “in collaboration with G. Quaintance,” who was most likely George Quaintance, the vaudeville dancer and artist of the male physique who was a student and friend of Serova.²⁷ In contrast to *The Adagio*, *Tumbling* is acrobatic in nature, but it seems to have been strongly influenced by ballet. The first part, “Acrobatics,” gives descriptions of fundamental acrobatic skills that can be done individually or with a partner for assistance, beginning with “The Splits,” and working up to “The Back Bend,” “The Cart and Wheel,” and the “Backover.” The second part, “Advanced Stage Acrobatics,” describes the kind of partnered tricks often seen in vaudeville “Adagio Acts.” Such stunts often resembled ballet maneuvers but were coarser in their execution. In the “Drop Down Back,” for example, the woman—referred to as the “girl”—is raised up in a backbend and then dropped, literally, down and back into what resembles a “fish” dive in classical ballet, where the woman is supported by the man in a *poisson* position (figs. 26 and 27). The “Arabesque Lift” takes after a traditional partnered *arabesque* lift in classical ballet, but instead of holding the woman’s waist and raised leg, the man supports the woman in a full height *arabesque* lift by holding onto what would be her supporting leg if she were standing (fig. 28).

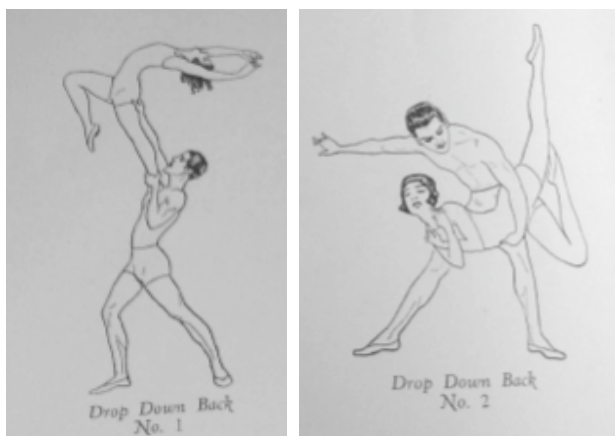


Figure 26: The “Drop Down Back,” from Vestoff’s *Tumbling for Class Work* (c. 1940)



Figure 27: The first stage of the “Drop Down Back,” as pictured in *The Dance Magazine* in 1928.

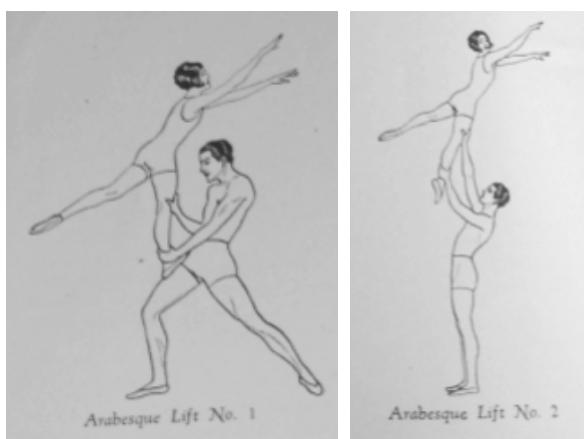


Figure 28: The “Arabesque Lift,” from Vestoff and Quaintance’s *Tumbling for Class Work* (c. 1940)

Nature Dancing: The Poetry of Motion (1916) and *Advanced Nature Dancing* (1920)

Serova's widely-read first book, *Nature Dancing*, helped her garner significant renown as a foremost "exponent of the Modern school."²⁸ During the period when aesthetic dancing was in high demand and available to students under numerous guises, Serova makes a point of noting that "Nature Dancing" establishes a higher standard for expressive dancing. Her beliefs are explained in an excerpt from *The Boston Post* in 1916, which is included in the introductory section of the manual:

Mlle. Serova has nothing but contempt for the amateurish running, throwing out the arms and giving an occasional clumsy leap that goes under the name of aesthetic dancing.... This [Nature Dancing] system is based on a study of Greek gymnastics and Greek games. Poise, development of grace and the like are prime essentials. Mlle. Serova believes that such a system produces far better results than the chaotic instruction in 'esthetic' dancing given in so many schools.²⁹

The manual includes exercises for individual steps, such as "Swift Walking," "Simple Springing Step," and "The Grecian Pivot," in addition to "Grecian Ball Exercises."³⁰ The second manual, *Advanced Nature Dancing*, includes more complex exercises: "Fly and Valse with Arms Raised," and "Jumping with the Feet Together and Landing on One Foot," for instance.³¹ Both books stress the importance of a specific series of poses, and the first includes numerous photographs of Serova demonstrating these poses in her tunic among the grass and trees.* Both manuals include "Interpretive Nature Studies," or brief choreographed dances, as well, including "The Brook," "Butterflies," "Evening," and "Pierrot Dreaming" (fig. 29).

* See Chapter One for further discussion of Nature, Greek, and Aesthetic Dancing, and for images from *Nature Dancing: The Poetry of Motion*.



Figure 29: Serova, on the cover of her 1920 publication, *Nature Dancing: The Poetry of Motion*.

Baby Work (c. 1920)

In what may be the earliest American publication to address children's dance, Serova outlines her pedagogical philosophy for teaching such young students: "The only way to get anything out of a baby is to be a baby oneself, and so I just play I'm about four years old when teaching the Tinies. Of course in the exercises, I insist on correct position, pointed toes, etc., but when it comes to the 'Dances,' they do them their own

way. In fact, my ‘Baby Dances’ are created from watching the babies themselves.”³²

Serova includes several ballet class exercises in “Baby Bar Work,” “Arm Movements,” and “Baby Technique”; these exercises consist of simplified *pliés*, *relevés*, *port de bras*, *polkas* and other traveling steps like skipping. It also features fifth position of the feet, sixteen *battements tendu en croix*, and a preparatory exercise for *petits battements*, which seem incongruous when set in the same publication against Serova’s dance studies set to familiar nursery rhymes, which she calls “Baby Nature Studies.”

Having “ushered the age-old Dance into the realm of infancy,”³³ it is possible that Serova’s manual helped to start the American “pre-ballet” trend that has since become ubiquitous in regional and local dance schools. Her description of the beginning and end of her class in the 1920s could be describing a twenty-first century pre-ballet class:

To open and close my classes, I use a march. The babies stand in single file round the room holding their dresses wide and with the L foot pointed forward. Then they march, raising the feet high forward each time with the knees straight and toes well pointed, and placing the foot down each time very close to the one on which the weight is resting, so that they get plenty of practice lifting the feet and pointing the toes and do not advance quickly over the floor. They come up the centre in single file, and turn off one to the R, and one to the L. My assistant stands ready to pair them and send them up to me in twos, and the next time in fours. When they face me in fours, I let them spread out to arms length away from each other which puts them in their places for the lesson. After the class they march up in twos only, and then facing each other in two lines curtsy goodbye to their partners.³⁴

Following the success of *Baby Work*, Serova published a number of other dancing manuals for children, including *Talented Tots* in 1925 and *Childhood Rhythms* in 1926.

Additional Publications*

In addition to those cited above, Vestoff published two manuals that were related to the motion picture industry. *The Vestograph*, circa 1926, was a series of flipbooks. As the student at home flipped quickly through the pages, the dancer in the photographs appeared to execute the steps. Such a device was both timely and practical: while capitalizing on the popularity of the developing motion picture industry, Vestoff managed to address the primary problem for home study students, who lacked in-home demonstrations of the class material. *The Road to Happiness: Presenting Veronine Vestoff's Exclusive Motion Picture Method of Learning Dancing at Home*, circa 1925, also used the idea of the motion picture to aid the self-taught dancer, possibly in a similar manner to the *Vestograph*. Vestoff and Serova each published a Toe Dancing manual as well: Vestoff's "Training on the Toes" (1921), and Serova's "Technique of Toe Dancing: A Graded Text Book for Students on Pointes," (1934). These two manuals were unique in their specific attention to *pointework*; until that time, most instructors included this material as an addendum in the last few pages of their manuals.[†]

As Pragmatic Revisionists, Vestoff and Serova found a way to reconcile the American socio-cultural and economic context with the Euro-Russian classical ballet tradition. The school brochure from 1923 shows their investment in continuing the Russian classical tradition unchanged: "The Vestoff-Serova method is the Russian

* These manuals were not available for viewing, yet they were novel contributions to the field of dancing manuals from the Vestoff-Serova enterprise.

[†] The fifth volume of Chalif's manual series was dedicated to *pointework* as well. *The Chalif Text Book of Dancing* is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

method, and the prestige of the School is founded on this fact.”³⁵ In this light, it appears that they tried to Americanize the Russian ballet without making fundamental changes to the training methodology. Vestoff maintained his dedication to classical ballet, teaching “The Russian Imperial Method” and “Professional Ballet Classes,” while juxtaposing these traditional classes with numerous popular dance forms taught in his school, including Serova’s classes in “Interpretive and Nature Dancing” and “Baby Dances.”³⁶ Yet it is also possible that they emphasized the Russian identity of their work for commercial reasons while the material they taught was altered to suit American popular tastes. Based on the scope of their dance manuals and their collective embrace of the American sensibility for dance, it would not be outrageous to posit that the two pedagogues made changes to the classical tradition for the sake of bringing ballet to America.

Vestoff’s belief system privileged classical ballet above all else, but he must have held Serova’s disciplined approach to popular forms in high regard. The two also seem to have respected other popular and social dance forms, like ballroom and tap dancing, for which the school employed its own graduates as well as experienced teachers from the outside. In tandem with their willingness to reshape the classical tradition, Vestoff unhesitatingly tailored his Euro-Russian approach to training to fit the American scene while Serova Russianized her identity in the name of American commercialism. In this light, the Vestoff-Serova ethos aligns directly with the concept of Pragmatic Revisionism. Their development as Pragmatic Revisionists comes across in the brochures for summer normal courses at the Vestoff-Serova School. Of the three school brochures for summer normal courses, the earliest, from 1920, emphasizes the strict traditional

philosophy of the school, even in the more popular styles like “Classic (Aesthetic) Dancing.” It states: “The aim will always be to combine dainty technique, perfect arm work, with a rigid adherence to the underlying principles of the dance which have been handed down by the various schools of the old world. Classic dancing is an art which is much misinterpreted today and has given rise to much comment for this reason.”³⁷ Also in the 1920 catalog is a declaration that Vestoff and Serova were interested in both meeting American expectations while keeping the integrity of dance training intact: “The school will endeavor at all times to encourage those new principles which have been formulated and found worthy of emulation, but shall not enter this field of the dance in that spirit too common nowadays, that the new must necessarily be the best.”³⁸ Their balance of Old World and New World training practices is, perhaps, most evident in the following statement from the same brochure: “For those who wish to study Dancing seriously, as an art, special monthly rates are arranged enabling them to attend the school daily at moderate charges.”³⁹ It is apparent in this training option that Vestoff and Serova saw dance, including the popular forms, as art, but also understood that for most students, dance was what the brochure refers to as a “transitory amusement.”⁴⁰ The 1923 brochure is similar in its emphasis on tradition, but by 1926 the tone shifts markedly to include the language of capitalism and commercialization. Rather than the photographs of dancers in traditional ballet attire with tarlatan skirts at the *barre*, it includes images of popular stage dancers in ballet-related but not classical dances (figs. 30 and 31). In

* If the “Classic” dancing that Vestoff-Serova offered was distinct from Serova’s “Nature Dancing,” which had a specific approach of its own, it may have been akin to *plastique* and the work of Michel Fokine and Anna Pavlova. See Chapters Three, Four, and Five for discussions of *plastique* movement.

addition, the 1926 manual includes more direct appeals to the reader. One headline reads, “Consider a stage career with all its alluring possibilities,” and another: “More than 400 VESTOFF pupils now earning big money as teachers!”⁴¹ Also in the later brochure is evidence that Vestoff and Serova had noticed that speed in training with high quality results was important to American dancers: “The Vestoff-Serova Method has required long experience and great labor to be prepared for you. It is simplicity itself and yet so thorough and intense that makes for finished dancing in a very short time.”⁴² This concept of a shortened period of ballet training also arises in the work of Vestoff’s and Serova’s contemporary on the American dance scene, dance director Ned Wayburn, who developed an abbreviated method of classical training during the mid-1920s that he dubbed “Modern Americanized Ballet Technique.”^{*} In this regard, the Vestoff-Serova work with ballet corresponded to major period trends in the larger dance world, which helped ballet’s process of Americanization.

^{*} Wayburn’s approach is discussed further in Chapter Two. Also see Barbara Naomi Cohen’s article, “Modern Americanized Ballet: ‘Her Stage of Perpetual Chiffon,’” *Dance Scope* 14, no. 3 (1980): 29-35.



Figure 30: "Advanced Toe Class, Personal Instruction of Veronine Vestoff." Vestoff-Serova School brochure, 1920.



Figure 31: "Betsy Rees: Premiere Danseuse of the Keith-Albee and Orpheum Circuits." Vestoff-Serova School brochure, 1926.

Vestoff and Serova's evolution as Pragmatic Revisionists seems to have been a process that was largely solidified by the mid-1920s. In light of the earlier school brochures, it does not appear that the two initially embraced the American democratic, commercial sense for dance in America; they may have started out more like the Nostalgic Revisionists, whose wistfulness about the classical tradition diminished their influence on ballet's development in America. In contrast, by the middle of the decade, Vestoff and Serova had embraced the popular and commercial aspects of dance and were unafraid to merge them with classical ballet. They can therefore be considered part of the innovative group of immigrant teachers who helped to Americanize the Euro-Russian ballet tradition.

Louis H. Chalif, 1876-1948

Louis Harvy Chalif, born in Odessa, arrived in the United States in 1904 under the name Lasar Chalif.* He trained with Thomas Nijinsky—father to Vaslav and Bronislava—at the Odessa Opera, and he studied at the Moscow Imperial Theatre where he would later hold a post as Ballet Master.⁴³ Upon immigrating to the United States, he danced under Albertieri's direction at the Metropolitan Opera House during the 1904-

* There is conflicting information as to Chalif's date of arrival in the United States. In her 1998 article in the Society of Dance History Scholars Proceedings, "Continuity in National Dance Technique in Early Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century Sources," scholar Lisa C. Arkin cites 1903 as the year of his arrival, but in her 2000 paper, "'Papa' Chalif, Leading American Dance out of Its Infancy," she lists 1905. Records from the Ellis Island Immigration Museum show that a Lasar Chalif—at age 28, which corresponds with Chalif's birth year of 1876—arrived in 1904 under the occupation of Dancing Master. It is possible that Chalif changed his birth name to Louis from Lasar; having studied at Russia's Imperial Schools he would have understood the importance of sharing his first name with one of ballet's foremost patriarchs, Louis XIV, of France. He may also have changed his name in accordance with parochial tendencies to Americanize foreign names at Ellis Island and other points of entry to the United States. This change would have occurred prior to the Russianization trend in ballet, since the first visit of Russian dancers to the United States was with Anna Pavlova and Mikhail Mordkin in 1910.

1905 season;⁴⁴ taught his own students privately in their homes; and established his school, the Chalif Normal School of Dancing, which Barzel asserts was, “for many years... the largest in the country.”⁴⁵ Chalif worked with Alice and Irene Lewisohn of the Henry Street Settlement and the Neighborhood Playhouse to produce festivals on New York’s Lower East Side; he staged Russian folk dances and ballet-influenced works for the settlement dancers, as well as for his own students who performed there as well.⁴⁶ As a champion of dance-in-education, Chalif taught a teacher’s course at New York University at the request of Dr. Luther Gulick during the 1906-1907 academic year, and a similar course at Columbia University’s Teachers College.⁴⁷ After holding his own classes for several years in rented spaces in New York City, Chalif had his own building erected to house The Chalif Normal School of Dancing; at 163-165 West Fifty-seventh Street,[†] it sits across the street from Carnegie Hall, where Chalif’s students often presented their annual recitals (figs. 32 and 33).⁴⁸ His obituary in *The Dance Magazine* calls the new home for the Chalif School “the greatest highlight and dream of Chalif’s lifetime.”⁴⁹ Of the hundreds of students who studied at the Chalif School, two of the most notable were dance educator Gertrude Colby, who published the dancing manual *Natural Rhythms and Dances* in 1922,[‡] and the popular ballerina Harriet Hctor, who worked in vaudeville, on Broadway, and in Hollywood films (figs. 34 and 35).[§]

* In 1923 he changed the name of the school to the Chalif Russian Normal School of Dancing, adding the “Russian” identifier in accordance with period trends.

† In 2000, the New York Landmarks Preservation Foundation established the building as a “Designated Landmark,” and the Chalif School is noted on the plaque that adorns the façade.

‡ For more on Colby, see Janice Ross, “Institutional Forces and the Shaping of Dance in the American University,” *Dance Chronicle* 25, no. 1 (2002): 115-124; Janice Ross, *Moving Lessons: Margaret H’Doubler and the Beginning of Dance in American Education* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000): 16, 116-7; and Colby’s manual, published by A. S. Barnes.

§ Hctor is discussed in greater depth in Chapter One.

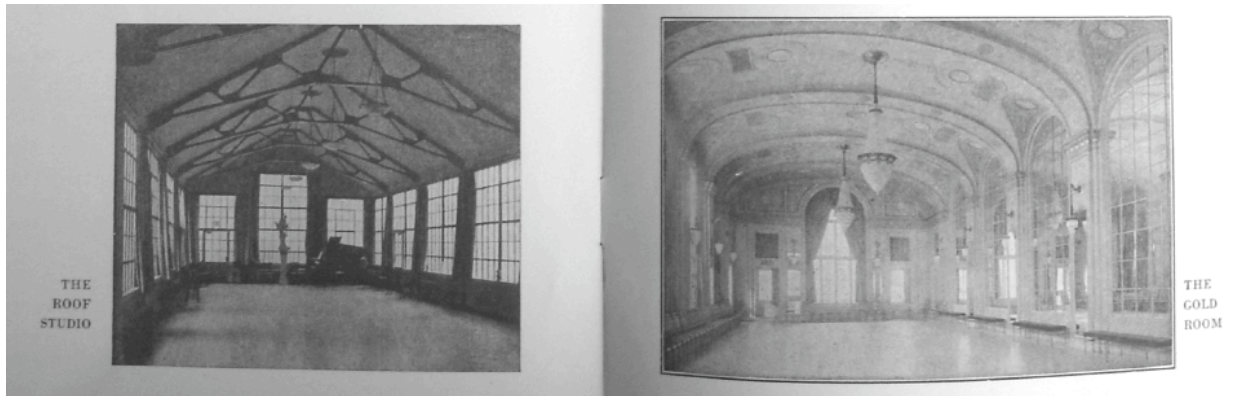


Figure 32: Two of the Chalif School's studios, the Roof Studio (L) and the Gold Room (R) as pictured in a school brochure from 1933.

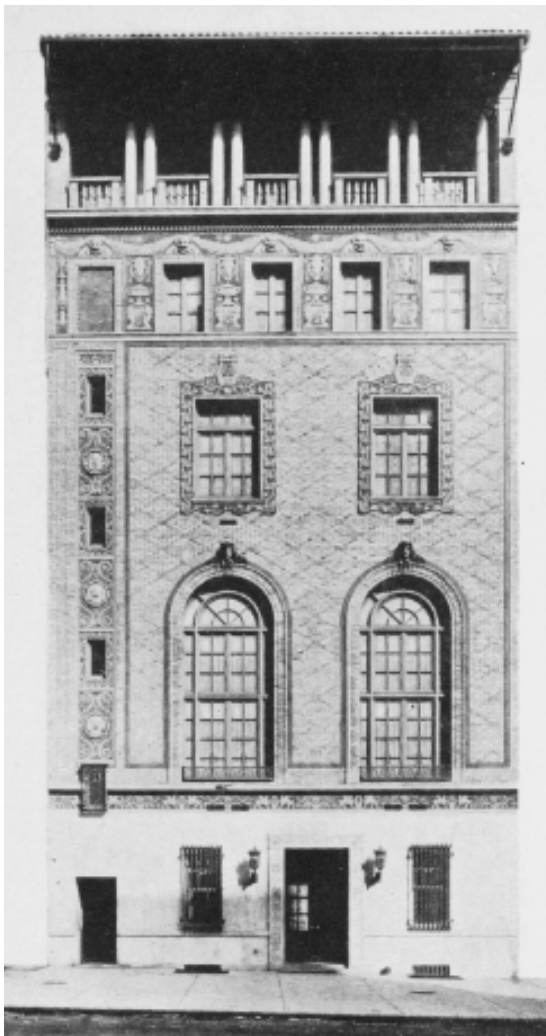


Figure 33: Chalif's pride in the School building was evident: he included images of the building's façade in most school catalogs, and referred to it as a "Temple to Terpsichore" in the first volume of *The Chalif Text Book of Dancing*.



Figures 34 and 35: Harriet Hctor was the most famous product of the Chalif School, having begun her training with Chalif at age twelve before working on Broadway, in vaudeville, and in Hollywood. Photographs of her are sprinkled throughout the *Chalif Text Book of Dancing: Book V: Toe Dancing*. 1925.

Between 1914 and 1924 Chalif published a five-volume series of dancing manuals, titled *The Chalif Text Book of Dancing*, which, Barzel notes, influenced numerous subsequent generations of teachers in the United States.⁵⁰ Volumes one, two, and four are dedicated primarily to ballet technique but also include some ballroom dancing; volume three details Chalif's approach to the "Greek Dancing"* trend, and volume five tackles "Toe Dancing." His early attention to *pointework* as a discrete area of study placed Chalif at the forefront of *pointe* training in America; Barzel asserts that, "the sale of toe shoes throughout the U.S. really started with the Chalif School."⁵¹ In

* See Chapter One for a discussion of Greek Dancing during the period, see *The Chalif Text Book of Dancing, Book III: Greek Dancing* (New York: Louis H. Chalif, 1920), and see Lisa C. Arkin, "'Papa' Chalif: Leading American Dance out of Its Infancy," in *Dancing in the Millenium: An International Conference Proceedings* (Washington D.C., 2000): 10-15, for an analysis of Chalif's work with Greek Dancing.

addition, Chalif choreographed, published, and sold 1,200 individual dances of various genres and for a range of ages that were disseminated through his nationally renowned mail-order business. Early twentieth century dancer Margaret Severn recalled her training with a student of Chalif, and she notes the importance of his impact on ballet training across America:

...[in Colorado Springs] I had more advanced dance lessons from a Mrs. Smith, who was a pupil of the Russian teacher Louis Chalif in New York. She had acquired all of the little dances, including written instructions and sheet music, that he supplied to his pupils throughout the country. This practice was scoffed at by the professional dancers of a later era, but he certainly did contribute substantially to the advancement of classical dance in America.⁵²

By the early 1930s, he had developed student-performing groups called the “Chalif Dancers,” and he had begun a ballet company, the “Chalif-Swoboda Ballet,” with Vecheslav Swoboda of the Moscow Imperial Ballet who was also on the Chalif School faculty.* In 1936, the Chalif-Swoboda ballet boasted fifty dancers; most were likely products of the school.

One of Chalif’s foremost philosophies was that dance training could help students live healthy and full lives, regardless of whether students intended to make dance part of their careers. In 1928, Chalif spoke to *The Dance Magazine* about his school’s approach to training: “I want my pupils to be ladies and gentlemen,’ he began decidedly, ‘before they are artists. You know, most of these girls and boys won’t dance all their lives, but always they will have to walk and bow, and make a decent social impression.”⁵³ He continued: “The dancing teacher has a chance to help each one of his pupils to a richer

* Swoboda was married to another Moscow-trained dancer, Maria Yurieva Swoboda, who was also on the faculty of the Chalif School. The Swobodas opened their own school in New York City in 1937, which became the Ballets Russes School in 1954 upon his death. See “Maria Swoboda Dies,” in the *New York Times* from August 13, 1987.

life, to a freer self-expression.”⁵⁴ These beliefs were at the core of the Chalif School’s ethos and objectives, as stated in the school brochure: “The three-fold aim of the Chalif School is: 1) to make dancers who are surpassingly good; 2) to train teachers to spread our glorious art; 3) to make everybody dance, young or old, just for the joy of it and for the other rich benefits.”⁵⁵ Chalif’s approach employed dance in the service of bettering one’s self, as opposed to pushing students toward careers in dance. In an interview with Gertrude C. Warburton of *The Dance Magazine*, he noted, ““My school is not a professional one.... No, I am interested in giving my pupils grace and health—that is something to work for!”⁵⁶ He strove to allow students to more fully develop as individuals. His 1933 school brochure under the heading, “The Spirit of Chalif Dancing,” describes: “A joyous, happy abandon, a free flight, a deep expressiveness—an inner spring of life—these are some of the characteristics of Chalif dancing. Chalif students seem to find release from inhibitions and self-consciousness and become more nearly their real selves, which is, of course, their most attractive selves.”⁵⁷ As early as 1915, in the prospectus for his school, he emphasizes the broad benefits of dance training for all ages:

The Classical, Aesthetic and National Dances, as taught by Mr. Chalif, are simple and open an entirely new field of enjoyment and recreation to **young and old**. Not only do they present a novel and **effectual means of physical training**, but they also tend in a high degree to develop artistic taste. The interest of young people in these dances is readily awakened, for they appeal to the vivacity and energy of youth. They are fascinating to **children** as a form of play, while their most lasting influence is seen in the **added grace and dignity** they give to **manners and deportment**.

To those of maturer years they prove a most agreeable exercise whereby **freedom of action, lightness of movement, vivacity, vigor and strength** are **easily acquired**. Mr. Chalif advises to begin the children’s lessons in dancing not

earlier than six years of age. The physical part of the Education of Children cannot be properly carried on without the aid of Dancing.^{*58}

Chalif's focus on overall health and decorum were in direct accordance with several early twentieth century social trends; the physical culture movement, the high value placed on etiquette in social settings, and America's inclusive, democratic context, were all embedded within his pedagogical philosophies.

Chalif's holistic approach was at the root of the various classes offered at the school. He even held classes for children, the description for which reflects the school's larger philosophies of dance as a means to general well-being: "The primary object in teaching children to dance is to fit them for life, to bring out their native charm and expressiveness and to make them graceful, strong and self-confident."⁵⁹ Similarly, Chalif notes in the same school brochure that his adult training program "prepares one to teach but also develops grace, charm and confidence."⁶⁰ The school ran a number of different classes for adults, and the classes diversified as the school grew. The 1937 brochure explains: "The new departments are the Modern Dance, Ballroom Exhibition Dancing, Figure Perfecting for Women, Body Conditioning for Men, and Fencing. You are doubtless familiar with our former schedule of Character Dancing, Rhythmics, National Dancing, Ballet, Toe, Tap, Acrobatics and Ballroom and Spanish Dancing."⁶¹ Chalif espoused diversity in training, which he described in his 1931 article in *The Dance Magazine*, "Ethics in the Dance":

Variety is as necessary to a dancer as the breath of life itself. How horrible it would be if all the world were suddenly to adopt the German technique of dancing, or the Spanish technique, or even the Russian ballet technique! The monotony would be unbearable. We admire gardens, you know, not because of

* The emphasis in this extract is Chalif's.

one beautiful flower or another, but because of the harmony of them all and the most beautiful garden, like the most beautiful bouquet, is composed of a variety of blooms.⁶²

As one of the foremost variety schools in New York City between 1909 and 1934, the breadth of dance styles available at the Chalif School was likely a reflection of the numerous dance genres both on the revue stage and in society at large.

Expression, too, was highly valued in both early twentieth century dance and social decorum. In his textbooks, Chalif emphasizes the social benefits of dance from an expressive perspective: “it has been found that all people after such training use their hands more gracefully and expressively in conversation.”⁶³ He includes “Expression” sections in the descriptions of each step, no matter how fundamental, and he describes how each of the five foot positions communicates a unique feeling: First Position shows “attention,” Second displays “strength,” Third exhibits “modesty,” Fourth conveys “dignity, authority, command” (fig. 36), and Fifth he considers “a cultivated artistic position.”⁶⁴ In a section of the second volume that specifically deals with pedagogy, Chalif warns teachers about attempting to stifle a student’s expressive impulses:

Each pupil has a personality, and manners expressing it, which he must be allowed to keep unless he does things fundamentally inartistic. Do not try to pour each pupil into the same mould; you will surely lose some charming inspiration if you do. The child or older pupil must never be told that his gestures are ungraceful; if spontaneous, they probably are beautiful to him. He must be a free spirit allowed to grow and blossom out in his own way, his personality developed, not destroyed.⁶⁵

In the heterogeneous environment of both New York City and America during the period, Chalif encouraged individualism through his approach to expression. Early twentieth century American historian Frederick Jackson Turner considers individualism to be a uniquely American characteristic that is inherent to the American national

identity.⁶⁶ In this light, Chalif's work helped to bring an American sensibility into ballet, and vice versa.



Figure 36: Chalif demonstrating Fourth Position in *The Chalif Text Book of Dancing, Book I*. 1914.

Chalif made dance training accessible to a broad section of the public; more specifically, he introduced classes for men at a time when students of dance were mostly women. He taught a course named “Athletic dancing,” which the school prospectus describes as, “a new series of medium athletic exercises which is specially beneficial for men and boys, particularly business men, who will find a new and interesting form of obtaining that exercise and enjoyment which is so necessary to the over-taxed brain.”⁶⁷ He also devised a class called “Conditioning,” which, the school brochure states, was

“for men only.”⁶⁸ Male dancers like Mordkin had made a substantial impression on the public with their adherence to conventional ideas of masculinity, yet Americans throughout the period were more willing to accept a European man dancing ballet than an American. As a result, there were few men or boys studying ballet, and Chalif utilized the fourth volume of his manual, from 1923, as a platform to discuss the matter: “Our use of the feminine gender in referring to the dancer is prompted by the fact that, in the United States at least, most dancers are women. Let us hope that in time we shall have, as formerly in Russia, a large number of men dancers. For dancing needs both sexes; the qualities of the one enhance the other, and feminine daintiness is never so appealing as when contrasted by masculine strength.”⁶⁹ The evolving classes at the school reflect Chalif’s unrelenting attempts to attract and foster male dancers. For a time he offered a class in fencing, which, the brochure notes, “develops strength, posture, endurance, courage, alertness, discipline, and chivalry.”⁷⁰ In the early twentieth century, such descriptive language would have been interpreted as more masculine than feminine, and thus while this class may not have been explicitly intended for men, it seems to have been part of Chalif’s agenda to bring men into the studio.

A central tenet of Chalif’s work was his enduring belief in ballet as high art. His obituary in *The Dance Magazine* states that, “he actually rejected a very lucrative offer from the famous Ziegfeld as he feared it might commercialize his work and ideals.”⁷¹ Despite his broad approach to training, he also felt that ballet was more important to a dancer’s training than other dance styles. According to newspaper writer Eve Stebbins, Chalif saw studying ballet as a “cultural accomplishment, like reading good books or playing an instrument.”⁷² Yet he also believed that the training should be inclusively

extended to all interested parties regardless of innate ability or potential for a professional career. In this way, his work was aligned with the democratic, context for dance in America, in which amateur dancers were an important facet of ballet's survival. Barzel notes that Chalif "advertised 'the most exclusive school for amateur dancing in New York' and was not trying to instil [*sic*] perfect technique or virtuoso dancing."⁷³ Chalif did not seem to view these two concepts—ballet as a high art and ballet training being widely available—as contradictory, but rather as complementary. In *The Dance Magazine* in 1931, Chalif wrote: "I believe that ballet will and must remain as a foundation for all kinds of dancing. Beginners must not, for the sake of their own futures, go into the expressionistic work before they have the traditional foundation of ballet, which is as necessary to the dancer as Latin and Greek are to the professional man."⁷⁴ Barzel notes that, "Chalif was at the forefront of the movement that introduced ballet dancing to the 'average American child.' Before his time ballet dancing was a profession for which theatrical people got training."⁷⁵ It is possible, even likely, that Chalif's extension of ballet to American amateur dancers was at the root of the concept of recreational ballet training and was the seed for the local and regional ballet studio movement that has boomed throughout the United States into the present day. His emphasis on ballet and his willingness to make the training accessible and to educate the public in its benefits supports his place among the Pragmatic Revisionists. Chalif's determination to make a permanent home for ballet in the United States led him to encourage amateurs to take part in a historically elite art form and shape the form to their proclivities. Through his innovations with amateurs, he helped ballet adapt to the democratic, American scene.

Along with Chalif's attempt to make ballet more intellectually palatable and physically accessible for American amateurs, he also championed chief elements of ballet's traditional training. Barzel asserts that he "reintroduced bar [*sic*] work [to Americans] though he reserved it for advanced students several times a week."⁷⁶ Since many variety teachers during that period would have bypassed the *barre* work in favor of teaching discrete dances that the students could perform, Chalif's inclusion of the *barre* exercises for advanced students was likely viewed as rigorous in comparison.⁷⁷ In addition, Chalif acknowledges the more intensive training required for students for whom ballet is a serious pursuit, in his article "First Principles in Teaching Dance Movements": "Much bar [*sic*] work is necessary for children studying the ballet seriously. Its support enables them to do everything more perfectly as well as with more vigor; and it develops plasticity too. It is well said that any mistake in a pupil's dancing can be traced back to the same mistake in her bar work. Extreme turning out of the legs is necessary here, for it frees the hip-joint. Any tightness there means awkwardness and lack of freedom."⁷⁸ With full knowledge of the European academic ballet tradition and training practices, however, Chalif sought to adapt ballet for the every-dancer by lessening the stringent physical requirements of classical technique. Rather than diminishing the artistic aspects of the training or eliminating the structure or vocabulary, he moderated ballet's demands on the body, calling for "90 degrees or more" of turnout in the feet⁷⁹ and modest extensions of the leg; he notes, "Greater benefit is derived from doing a low battement correctly, with straight knees, than from a higher one done incorrectly."⁸⁰ Rather than pushing for dancers to develop their maximum physical capacities, he instead established high standards for the precise, expressive execution of

ballet's most fundamental steps. He slowed down the accumulation of steps in the training in order that the basic vocabulary would be performed accurately and with artistic intention, but he did not lessen his demand for specificity. In 1928 he told *The Dance Magazine*: "Of course technique is important. Imagination without technique is not art, but rather have too much of the former than so much of the latter that the dance is without soul, without significance."⁸¹ Chalif worked to maintain balance between ballet's technique and artistry for American students; in diminishing certain technical requirements for training he simultaneously raised the standard for expression, an area in which he felt his students could more readily excel.

The *Chalif Text Book of Dancing* offers several instances where Chalif put his populist theories into action, and most involve the simplification and detailed clarification of the ballet vocabulary for beginners. In the first volume, he distinguishes between two possible approaches to the study of ballet: amateur and professional. First he discusses the "Five Standard Positions," which are essentially ballet's five fundamental positions with a lessened requirement for turnout, and then he describes the "Ballet Positions":

Ballet Positions are like the Five Standard Positions with the exception that the toes are turned out so that the feet are parallel with the dancer's shoulders. That these positions are unnatural we personally agree. But at the same time we approve them in the classical ballet, for extreme cultivation is appropriate here, and it is well for the dancer to show himself a virtuoso. Moreover, the practice using the Ballet Positions is valuable for obtaining freedom and ease in other movements.⁸²

In the second volume, he is even more specific about the objectives for various groups of students with regard to the positions of the legs and feet:

The Fifth Position of the feet should be used whenever a closed position is

desired by those aiming to be professional dancers. But for amateurs and children, who should avoid extremes, we advise Third Position as being more natural. When an open position is used the weight should be on one foot, with the other pointed diagonally backward with toes turned out. Professional students should stretch the toes of this pointed foot down, rest on the tips, and keep the knee straight, while the amateur should relax the leg, allowing the knee to bend slightly and the foot to rest naturally on the entire great toe.^{*83}

By the fourth volume—the third one dedicated specifically to ballet-related work—

Chalif has only begun to introduce *enchaînements*, where many other manuals from the period introduce such advanced material after much less preparation. The preface indicates his uncomplicated approach to teaching ballet, as opposed to the academic tradition from Europe:

...Think of it! Four volumes and the exercises still simple. This is a victory over technique, of which we are justly proud.

The word difficult depends for its meaning upon who says it. To the usual amateur dancing class this volume would seem difficult, while to the professional ballet student it would be extremely simple. But the people of the ballet school have no idea how simple ‘extremely simple’ can be. The ballet school would not accept pupils three years of age or fifty years old, or untalented ones at any age, and hence has no need of the extremely simple. But we studio teachers do accept them, and what is more, teach them to dance, and we do it by making the beginning so very simple that anybody can grasp it, and proceeding to greater difficulties by very gradual stages.... Our belief that all the world could and should dance, for the joy of it and for its physical and esthetic benefits, has impelled us to make a special study of the very beginnings in technique, opening the art to all. We do not believe that all have the bent or time to proceed far in the art of dancing, yet however little they do, their lives will be enriched by it, and beauty can be exprest [*sic*] at any stage of development if it is in a dancer to be exprest. Simple songs are often the sweetest.

Yet from another point of view these and the preceding exercises are not so very simple after all. It is always difficult to do a thing *perfectly*; the harmonious use of the whole body is a very deep study, which we start to teach from the very beginning; and a moment’s thought will reveal the great complications of coordinated movement in even the simplest exercises,

* The word “amateur” would not have held the same derogatory connotation during the research period as it does in the twenty-first century. Historically, professional dancers have always been lower on the social scale than amateurs, since for amateurs dancing was a non-essential social accomplishment and for professionals it was a trade.

difficulties which we lead up to so gently that they are not realized.⁸⁴

Despite Chalif's tendency to allow amateurs some latitude in their execution of ballet, his manuals feature language that suggests he had not entirely relinquished the emphasis on strength building and rigor that would have come from his Imperial training. Words like "force," "decisive," "vigorous," and "clenched," for example, are scattered throughout the books. This dual sensibility, where he relaxes the physical demands but simultaneously expects a high degree of physical engagement, is evident particularly in the fifth volume on Toe Dancing. Here, Chalif describes his pedagogical approach with beginner *pointe* students:

In giving the first lessons to a class in toe dancing, proceed very slowly, trying to form perfectly correct habits from the start. Teach the class the ideal foot positions not only by showing them with your own feet, but by walking around the class and taking hold of the foot of each one individually and placing it as it should be. Grasp the heel with one of your hands and the toe with the other, then turn the foot out while stretching it down, then release the toe and use the hand to straighten the knee, if necessary. Think how well you must understand this position yourself, before attempting to force it upon another! The pupil will thus get the 'feel' of the correct position even tho [*sic*] she cannot hold it after you let go, and will know what to try to do. This planting of the idea is most important. If more strenuous effort is needed to turn the leg out, grasp the knee with both hands and twist it. You will find that you get more exercise than the pupil does, but she will reap the benefit.⁸⁵

Chalif's varying demands on the body—in which he simultaneously simplifies movement and calls for stringency—suggest that he may have believed the rigorous elements of classical training to be important in the teaching of amateur dancers. While he was philosophically inclined toward simplification for the amateur, and while he was, for the most part, successful in his attempts to ease the conventional demands of ballet technique, there are also pockets of his methodology that reflect a more traditional, physically rigorous approach. In this regard, he may have believed that the bodily

demands of ballet were necessary for amateur students to master within the parameters of the simplified physical expectations that he had established for them.

Chalif worked closely with various dance organizations during the period, which, according to the *New York Times*, were “aimed at both professionalizing dance instruction and regularizing the bewildering variety of steps.”⁸⁶ His attempt to standardize both dance material and dance teaching practices is evident across his school publications and his series of dancing manuals. The prospectus for the Chalif School states in boldface type: “It is the intention of the Chalif School to establish in this country a standard method of instruction, so that American students may secure a thorough education in dancing without going abroad.”⁸⁷ In order to graduate with a diploma from the Chalif School, students were required to complete four hundred hour-long classes. Chalif’s curricular requirements are similar in structure to the degree requirements in twentieth and twenty-first-century higher education; he established a breakdown of “points”—similar to credit hours—that students must acquire in different areas across the course offerings. Specifically, they needed two hundred hours in “Junior and Senior” classes, thirty hours in “Toe Dancing and Advanced Technique” classes, ten hours in “Graduating Theory,” twenty hours in “Ballroom,” and ninety hours in “Elective” classes, which, it might be assumed, were any of the other classes the school offered.⁸⁸

One of Chalif’s most significant aims—perhaps where he made his greatest long-term impact on the dance field—was the education of teachers in dance pedagogy. He worked with teachers who wanted to offer instruction in stage dancing as well as dance-in-education. In 1944, Barzel noted that he taught, “dancing teachers and gym teachers, and he modified and simplified ballet dancing to meet their requirements. He gave them

their first taste of ballet technique, for none of these people had ever seen real ballet and were very vague as to what it was all about, and the technical precepts were established which are the accepted basis of ballet teaching in hundreds of schools in America.”⁸⁹ In 1941, Chalif laid out several rules for dance instructors:

1. Experience and observation have taught me that first of all the teacher should be a good dancer. Pupils always imitate; they can’t help it. Bad habits are contagious; on the other hand, grace is contagious, too. As Emerson says, ‘What you are speaks louder than what you say.’ So, the further the teacher goes along the road to perfect dancing, the better his pupils will dance. But it must be admitted that if a teacher is intelligent and has a thorough knowledge of the work he can often achieve marvelous results in teaching.

2. The teacher must have an analytical mind and know what each exercise will do to a pupil’s dancing, what the pupil’s faults are, and what exercise will cure them; what are the main virtues to strive for; all about the anatomy, physiology and *lines* of the body; and be able to show steps slowly and clearly and tell about them plainly and know their technical names. A dancer may follow the music instinctively and blindly, but the teacher must *know* what he is doing. He must always study his pupils, too, for they will teach him how to teach!

3. We can teach prospective teachers how to plan programs of exercises and dances, but there are some things they will have to learn for themselves: how to use imagination, and how to teach with dynamic force, and to be calm and patient as well.

4. A few specific rules we recommend to teachers are: a. Know your dancing well. b. Know how to analyze each step. c. Study your pupils. d. Know what you wish to accomplish for each pupil. e. Realize that technique is your servant, not your master. f. Try to make your pupils strong, beautiful, lithe, and free. g. Learn to distinguish between the essential and the accessory and to stress only the essential points. h. Learn to implant the seeds of all the virtues of good dancing. i. Know that the first virtue in dance teaching is clarity; that is, in doing simple things accurately and thoroughly, not half way. j. And know that beauty of lines and grace begins in attention to the carriage at the bar.⁹⁰

In addition to Chalif’s dissemination of these ideas in various public forums, these principles are dotted throughout the five-volume *Chalif Text Book of Dancing*. The manuals, in this way, illuminate these concepts as central to Chalif’s philosophies of dance pedagogy.

Each of the five Chalif texts contains a section called “Notes on the Pedagogy of Dancing,” or a similarly titled chapter dedicated to how the material should be taught. These parts of the manuals allowed Chalif space to discuss his specific ideas about teaching and learning. In volume one, he describes the process of learning dance movement, when he notes that, “learning a dance is chiefly a matter of establishing *muscle memories*,”* an element of physical training that may not have been understood by aspiring American teachers at that time.⁹¹ In the fifth volume, which focuses on “Toe Dancing,” he discusses the diligence required to improve one’s teaching skills: “The good teacher always *plans* his lessons beforehand, but is never a slave to his plan.... The teacher who does not plan, does not progress in excellence of teaching; for it is in careful thought preceding teaching that he is most apt to have new ideas, when his mind is not occupied with discipline, the pianist and other matters.”⁹² He frequently makes suggestions in these chapters that relate to the simplification of ballet training. During the early twentieth century such simplification made ballet accessible to many more students and teachers than would have otherwise had the opportunity to study, yet by mid-century it had earned him a reputation for weakening ballet training in America. In volume one, for example, he writes: “Finally, beware of too many details. They obstruct learning the important elements of the step and the expression. Leave them as much as possible to imitation.”⁹³ Likewise, he advised:

A rule for all of your teaching is *Don’t talk too much*. Keep your pupils’ minds relaxed and open by giving them but a few matters to think of simultaneously. If they have but one thing on their minds at a time they will do that thing—if more

* Muscle memory is an acknowledged term that refers to kinesthetic learning and the ability of the body to hold knowledge. It is typically taught through repetition, which builds and continually emphasizes the same muscular and neural pathways until the repeated movement becomes familiar.

they are apt to hesitate or flounder. Moreover, mental effort, in beginners especially, induces stiffness and self-consciousness, while the mind not clogged is evidenced in ease and relaxation. The pupil can learn a great deal without burdening his mind, unconsciously, by imitation of the teacher.⁹⁴

He reiterates this concept in another volume: “One does not need to talk continually to put over one’s ideas; in fact, it is noticeable that the best teachers talk less than the others and so give their classes the chance to concentrate better on their dancing.”⁹⁵ Chalif’s high expectations for dance teachers, particularly during a period where dance was not always taken seriously by the public, helped to bring legitimacy to both the study and teaching of dance in the United States.

Chalif’s emphasis on pedagogical instruction was at the core of his work in the broader field of education as well. Having taught in the education departments at New York University and Cornell University, he desired to make dance a regular component of general education in the States, and to have dance pedagogy as a field of study for teachers of all kinds. He had a fundamental understanding—also evident in his studio work—that dance promoted student development; in 1930 he published an article in the *New York Herald Tribune* entitled, “Dancing for Children Seen as Artistic and Cultural Education.” In another article, “First Principles in Teaching Dance Movements,” appearing in a 1941 anthology called *Dance: A Basic Educational Technique*, he wrote: “As a teacher of long experience, I know that great skill and patience are required to teach people how to dance, to guide their growth, to ‘let them grow!’ *My purpose is to make the dancer’s body what it should be, a perfect instrument with which to express thoughts of goodness, beauty, and truth.*”⁹⁶ In this regard, he adapted the Euro-Russian classical tradition to suit the student’s individual expressive capacities, thus allowing it to

fit into the American physical education curriculum. Yet, as Arkin posits, in spite of Chalif's attempt to deemphasize the strictures of classical ballet training in favor of a more expressive—and thus accessible—approach, his attachment to ballet as the basis for all dance diminished his long-term influence on dance-in-education.⁹⁷ Dance education pioneer Margaret H'Doubler,^{*} in contrast, eliminated ballet from her dance education curriculum, which Chalif was unwilling to do. Arkin concludes: "H'Doubler took dance education in directions Chalif could not fathom because he was never able to relinquish his conviction that ballet technique should provide the foundation for all forms of dance."⁹⁸

Chalif's idealistic, yet pragmatic approach to ballet in America establishes him as one of the most avant-garde teachers of his time. Arkin asserts that, "the Chalif system of dance training brought about a fundamental restructuring in American dance education by establishing the role of expressive dancing and teaching methodology as necessary components in dance training."⁹⁹ His work influenced American studio training as well, and the effects of his teaching—particularly his popular organization of the arm positions and his initiation of the term *tour-jeté*¹⁰⁰ in place of *grand jeté en tournant* or *entrelacé*—are still evident into the twenty-first century. While many of his contemporaries were determined to maintain the Euro-Russian technique in its original form, Chalif was quick to adapt it to the American environment by loosening ballet's physical requirements. While he championed expression, individuality, and overall wellbeing for amateurs through a more relaxed method of training, he also emphasized the kind of rigor that

^{*} For more information on H'Doubler, see Janice Ross, *Moving Lessons: Margaret H'Doubler and the Beginning of Dance in American Education* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

emerges from an emphasis on specificity—not the kind of rigor that results from pushing for physical extremes. Another contradiction that Chalif embraced in his work was his belief that all dance forms should be studied for the sake of versatility, but that ballet was the most important dance form of all. While these may seem like inconsistencies in the twenty-first century context for ballet, it is likely that such ideas blended harmoniously for Chalif as he tried to fashion a brand of ballet that Americans could embrace while maintaining most of its Euro-Russian, traditional elements. Barzel notes that the complicated nature of ballet training, “was his chief problem when he first began to teach in America, and it was his ability to adjust himself to the situation, and to simplify his material and present it in a form useful to hundreds of teachers that make him occupy the special niche he does in the history of dance teaching in America.”¹⁰¹ With no existing ballet tradition in the United States, Chalif’s emphasis on simplicity and specificity for both students and teachers of ballet was his solution to bringing Euro-Russian ballet and its pedagogy to Americans who had little to no knowledge of ballet as an art form. His progressive, open approach fit the American democratic, capitalist environment, and helped make ballet both accessible to the populace and characteristically American in spirit.

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As Pragmatic Revisionists, Vestoff, Serova, and Chalif helped ballet evolve in the face of the early twentieth century American distaste for the classical tradition. They did not hesitate to alter ballet’s Euro-Russian technical elements or to blend features of popular stage forms with the highly revered classical tradition. There are numerous

possible reasons that they found it necessary to make such changes: it may have been for the sake of ballet's American expansion, for commercial and economic reasons, for recognition among their peers and students, or for posterity. Whatever their motivations, they employed bold tactics and published their ideas; the lasting archival materials that preserve their approaches have allowed their work to be visible out of context and have thus contributed to these teachers being viewed as having limited credibility.¹⁰² Rather, Vestoff, Serova, and Chalif might be considered innovators who, with full knowledge of their diversions from the Euro-Russian classical lineage, made the adaptations they deemed necessary at the time for ballet to develop as an American art form.

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Conclusion

New York City was a nexus of American ballet between 1909 and 1934. While it was not the only urban center that could boast progress in the development of American ballet or the establishment of American ballet organizations, it was a thriving hub of ballet activity. The steady stream of foreign dancers and teachers immigrating through the port at Ellis Island gave the city unique access to ballet's numerous and varied European lineages, and it was therefore apropos that two prominent American ballet schools were founded there in the Euro-Russian image: the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School in 1909, and the School of American Ballet in 1934. Cultivated artistically by immigrant ballet teachers and supported financially by American capitalists,^{*} both institutions helped to raise the profile of New York City as one of the most ballet-minded metropolitan areas in the country. The two-and-a-half decades between the founding of these two world-class training academies saw America's overall awareness of ballet increase radically. Numerous immigrant teachers in the European and Russian ballet lineages raised ballet's profile during this era, and their efforts helped lay the groundwork for subsequent and lasting American ballet organizations; in particular

^{*} The American banker Otto Kahn was the Chairman of the Metropolitan Opera Board of Directors when the Ballet School was founded. American impresario and dance writer-philosopher Lincoln Kirstein, whose father was at the helm of the Filene's department store chain, was instrumental in the establishment of the School of American Ballet.

American Ballet Theatre, formed as Ballet Theatre in 1940, and Balanchine and Kirstein's longest-running enterprise, New York City Ballet, established in 1948.

For aspiring dancers between 1909 and 1934, the New York City environment was as much a part of their dance educations as their training in the studio. The city's heterogeneous makeup and its thorough manifestation of American democracy and capitalism made indelible impressions on dancers coming from across the United States seeking employment on the stage. In New York's heavily commercialized atmosphere for dance, reputable career guidance was limited; it was typically available either through word of mouth or in workshops run by shrewdly marketed "experts," whose registration fees would have been prohibitive for many dancers. According to Elizabeth Kendall, the early twentieth century saw the proliferation of more dancers "with that precious theatrical quality of imaginative concentration than any other time in the American theater."¹ These dancers were precocious, having developed a degree of pluckiness, ingenuity, and smarts that allowed them to navigate an untrustworthy system. Agnes de Mille vividly recalls this era in American dance in her memoir, *Dance to the Piper*: "These were the days of speak-easy money on Broadway and speak-easy taste, of the active casting couch, of dancers hired on the sheen of the stocking and the wink of their agent, of the unmated trumpet and the High Fish off the perilous pedestal, of the sexy rhinestone, the Texas Guinan holler, the zip, the boom, the got-diggety-dirt. This was the profession of my choosing, this corrupt carnival."² The more sordid aspects of the American stage were often masked by its brazenly publicized spectacle and pageantry, which enticed audiences yet caused many dancers to fall prey to what theater historian Albert F. McLean, Jr., calls the "Myth of Success."³ The false yet ubiquitous notion that

anyone, with enough gumption, could become a star, was largely responsible for the mass influx of dancers to New York City from across America; in actuality, many dancers were far from their families, faced with limited financial support and the often difficult living conditions that were part of New York's rapidly expanding metropolis. McLean asserts that for many such ingénues, the prospect of a stage career "was both an escape from the moment and a tangible promise for the future," with "its glittering promises of pleasure and fulfillment, its easy answers for immediate problems, its roots in middle class values, and its cheerful materialism...."⁴ As regular consumers of the American commercial culture from which dance was by no means exempt, the dancers themselves often become so caught up in the glamour of the dance world that they optimistically overlooked its harsh, even seedy, realities.

At the beginning of the period, dancers—particularly ballet dancers—belonged to a low-ranking social set. In the public's estimation, dancing was a disreputable practice, whether on the concert stage or in the dance hall. Judith Lynne Hanna notes that, "since the 1910s, America has been known as the land of a thousand sexy social dances,"⁵ many of which were notorious even within the dance field, and particularly among ballet instructors, concert dancers, and members of dance organizations, who found such dances offensive. The choice of dance as a profession in these early years garnered even less respect. Carrie Gaiser Casey states that, "in some quarters the ballet girl would still be considered little better than a prostitute,"⁶ a perspective for which there was a long-standing precedent in European ballet as well. These young, inspired, American dancers, however, persisted despite public opinion and the often-unscrupulous practices of directors and producers. They cultivated themselves as dancers in any way they could;

their curiosity and alacrity allowed them to negotiate the challenges of classes, auditions, rehearsals, performances, and personal economics with little insider knowledge. As more and more teachers emphasized ballet training as essential to a performer's career, dancers began to attend ballet classes across the city, and their attendance became more regular over time. In this way, the willingness and determination of American dancers enabled ballet training to become an important foundation for American ballet dancers; while training as a means to a professional career seems obvious by twenty-first century standards, it was not a widely understood concept in America for at least the first half of the research period.

Building on the bedrock that was established by nineteenth century foreign ballerinas-turned-teachers such as Maria Bonfanti,⁷ teachers between 1909 and 1934 shaped public opinion about ballet and ballet dancers. Early in the period, during the nineteen-teens, teachers fought for ballet's future in America despite the popular belief that ballet was little more than a titillating stage vignette. By the twenties and thirties, owing in part to the frequent visits of foreign dancers and companies that began the decade prior, the public and the dancers began to recognize ballet's artistic value, and the idea of ballet training as having a historically significant methodology began to emerge. Many immigrant teachers, including Malvina Cavallazzi, Luigi Albertieri, Rosina Galli, Stefano Mascagno, and Mikhail Mordkin, trumpeted ballet training as essential, arguing to a largely unaware public that one could not be a true ballet artist without a thorough knowledge of ballet technique. The more populist teachers, including Louis Chalif, Veronine Vestoff, and Sonia Serova, added another layer to that argument. They touted ballet training as a basic requirement for dancers in any style, and as a benefit for health

and wellbeing in association with the physical culture movement. De Mille's parents, for example, having initially denied their daughters ballet classes, changed their minds about ballet training when a physician—after examining de Mille's sister's fallen arches—recommended it as a form of rehabilitative therapy.⁸ The movement to Americanize the Euro-Russian tradition had become widespread, and however disparate their strategies, the period's teachers made concerted efforts to develop a uniquely American branch of ballet; because of their work on American ballet's behalf, they established the Euro-Russian ballet tradition as a permanent facet of the American dance scene.

By the mid-1930s, at the end of the research period, the ballet field in America existed simultaneously in elite and populist social spheres.* The formative years between 1909 and 1934, in which ballet's practitioners and its public advanced their conceptions of ballet as an American art form with a tradition and a methodology, were central to ballet's long-term survival in America. Through their efforts in both populist and elite brands of ballet, the Traditionalist, Nostalgic Revisionist, and Pragmatic Revisionist teachers made possible the establishment of American ballet institutions at the end of the research period and beyond. They trained dancers, educated audiences, and choreographed and staged works that helped bring about an expansion of ballet knowledge on the whole, thus setting the stage for ballet's future in America.

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* The legacy of popular ballet that was established during the period has continued throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. It has not been unusual for teachers to work in elite academies or opera houses while also being involved with local studios, university dance, or conservatory training. Choreographers like Agnes de Mille, Jerome Robbins, George Balanchine, Twyla Tharp, and most recently, Susan Stroman, have traversed the opera house-popular stage division as well.

The United States between 1909 and 1934 saw wide-ranging developments in a number of areas, including manufacturing, commerce, advertising, military and foreign relations, immigration, women's rights, and American culture and values. The rapid expansion that occurred in almost all areas of American life was reflected in the growth of the nation's ballet. Classical ballet during the research period was not yet considered "American," but was instead seen as a predominantly foreign art form. Ballet developed its American identity alongside the heterogeneous and perpetually shifting American population, who were likewise struggling to define their national identity. Like immigrants to the United States, ballet had to become acculturated to America. Anthony D. Smith's description of the process by which immigrant groups assimilate into a new national culture offers insight into the parallel process by which ballet became American: "Even where new, immigrant communities equipped with their own historic cultures have been admitted by the state, it has taken several generations before their descendants have been admitted (in so far as they have been) into the circle of the 'nation' and its historic culture through the national agencies of mass socialization."⁹ Considering that ballet was an immigrant art form in America, Smith's concept supports the theory that the period between 1909 and 1934 served as a gestation period for ballet's entry into the national culture. In this light, ballet in America needed the research period to begin developing its American identity; during this time span ballet absorbed the effects of democracy and capitalism that helped to distinguish it from its Euro-Russian predecessors.

As it shifted from its foreign, aristocratic surroundings, to the American democratic context, ballet also began to incorporate and reflect the American pluralist character. Michael Kammen notes that, “the creation of compound identities has been a highly significant aspect of Americanization as a social process.”¹⁰ Such typically American traits as individualism, optimism, candor, pragmatism, and an entrepreneurial spirit were merged with the “high-art” ideals of Euro-Russian ballet during the research period, and thus American ballet can be viewed as an embodiment of Kammen’s “compound identit[y]” concept. The composite techniques and styles of America’s blooming ballet became a point of contention among teachers from the European and Russian lineages. At the core of the dialogue was a concern with how much of the American character ballet could register while retaining its link to the classical tradition. The array of voices on the matter is manifested in the range of pedagogical approaches during the period, with some instructors shouting for the absolute preservation of ballet’s European conventions, and some charging ahead, blending those conventions with the American context and sensibilities to develop a uniquely American approach to ballet.

The mercurial nature of America’s capitalist democracy strongly influenced the range of early twentieth century pedagogical approaches. With a decentralized government and a financial structure based on entrepreneurial savvy, the longevity of any enterprise—including artistic enterprises—was predicated on the support of the masses. Financial success for artistic ventures was thus wholly reliant upon public approbation, which often affected the product, whether it was ballet classes or choreographic works. Faced with the imperative of making a living independently, teachers were often compelled to modify their classical values based on popular trends and public tastes. The

spectrum of teaching methodologies—from Traditional to Nostalgically Revisionist to Pragmatically Revisionist—therefore developed as teachers responded to this American socio-economic structure.

Driven by the economic possibilities of the American system, the Pragmatic Revisionist teachers experimented pedagogically with American dancers to give them a national system with which they could identify. These instructors were largely interested in initiating a uniquely American approach to ballet that reflected the nation's populist identity by way of the classical tradition, while also establishing themselves at the creative precipice of American ballet's development. The Traditionalist and Nostalgic Revisionist teachers, to different degrees, worked with American dancers because they believed in their potential to be classical dancers in the Euro-Russian tradition. These two groups of teachers desired American ballet to be a branch of the Euro-Russian tradition that included as few popular elements as possible. The Nostalgic Revisionists bent further than the Traditionalists toward public tastes out of perceived necessity, but the popular theater, particularly to the Traditionalist instructors, was seen as anathema. In the eclectic environment for ballet in New York City during this period, there was ample space—and more than enough students—for these multiple perspectives.

The diverse assortment of ballet's pedagogical approaches during the period became a constitutive element of American ballet training, and it was central to the identities of early twentieth century American dancers. Few dancers studied with only one teacher; most trained either in various styles at the same school or traversed the studios to study with a number of different teachers. There were Italian classicist teachers, Russian teachers who incorporated *plastique* movement into their teaching, and

others—Americans as well as Europeans—who adapted ballet’s traditions for American students by including popular trends in their teaching. In this regard, American ballet was not taught during the research period, but it was learned and created. As dancers studied multiple approaches under several teachers with varied pedagogical values and beliefs, an American pluralist approach to ballet developed in their individual bodies. Their eclectic training reflected the diversity of the American democracy and the influence of American capitalism. In this light, the dancers of the period were the first generation to embody a truly American approach to ballet.

The variety of approaches to teaching ballet in early twentieth century America substantiate an overarching description of American ballet pedagogy as heterogeneous. Yet the Balanchine Technique is the only pedagogical approach that is widely considered to be American. The singling out of only one approach as American, however, is problematic for a few reasons. First, highlighting one form as more American than others inherently denies the concept of American pluralism. Second, selecting one technique as the sole American brand of pedagogy has facilitated the current conundrum facing American ballet training, in which American hybrid methodologies are viewed as less viable, less effective, or less authentic.¹¹ Lastly, the focus on Balanchine as the proprietor of American ballet from a pedagogical perspective—however prolific he was choreographically—has allowed the contributions of both the immigrant ballet teachers in this study as well as other significant American teachers over the last century to be overlooked in historical accounts. American ballet pedagogy is as heterogeneous as the American populace; it includes the Balanchine Technique, yet it also comprises the full

range of international approaches, as well as those lesser-known pedagogies that have been quietly influencing American dancers for more than a century.

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Glossary

Ballet Terminology

À la seconde: A term that typically refers to the position of the leg or arm extended to the side.

Adagio: Italian term, derived from music, indicating a slow tempo. *Adagio* work in ballet is slow, sustained movement. During the research period the term *adagio* was also used to refer to *pas de deux*, or partnered dancing.

Allegro: Italian term, derived from music, indicating a quick tempo. In ballet, *allegro* refers to jumping, which can be either *petit* (small) or *grand* (large).

Allongé: Elongated. Typically refers to the lengthening out of the arms or legs in various positions.

Arabesque: A ballet position in which the leg is extended straight out behind the dancer's body. Because the arms can be in any number of positions while the leg is in *arabesque*, there are several systems for numbering *arabesques* that depend on the directional facing of the body and the overall shape of the arms and legs.

Attitude: A position in which the leg is raised behind or in front of the body and bent at the knee.

Ballon: A term that refers to the light, suspended, bouncing quality of ballet jumps.

Barre: The long horizontal pole that the dancer holds during the warm up. The *barre* helps dancers develop stability and balance in the first part of the ballet class.

Battement: There are several types of *battement*, including the *battement tendu* (stretched), *battement dégagé* (disengaged), *grand* (large) *battement*, *petit* (small) *battement*, *battement sur le cou de pied* (on the neck of the foot, or ankle), and *battement serré* (tightened). Translated literally as “beating,” *battement* exercises work the legs in and out of straight and bent positions of varying heights and in different directions. *Battement* steps are mostly done at the *barre*, and are used to build the specificity and strength required for the traveling steps in the center.

Cambré: Literally, arched. Typically refers to the bending of the torso at the waist.

Changements: A small jump in which the dancer changes the feet from one fifth (crossed heel to toe) position to the other.

Corps de ballet: Literally, body of the ballet. The large group of dancers that form ballet's version of a chorus. The *corps* often dances in unison and in geometric patterns behind the soloists.

Danse d'école: The *danse d'école*, which translates as "dance of school," refers to the entire compendium of steps and positions that make up ballet's technique and vocabulary.

Divertissements: Short vignette dances that may be thematic in nature, but typically convey no plot of their own. *Divertissements* are often used in operas or ballets to fill out or support the larger work. *Divertissements* are sometimes referred to as *variations*.

Enchaînements: Combinations of various steps done during the center portion of a ballet class, once the dancers have moved away from the *barre*.

Fouetté: A quick, whipping motion that can refer to several steps in ballet, but the most recognized form of *fouettés* are a sequence of virtuosic, repetitive turns, executed on one leg while the moving leg whips around the body to maintain speed and rhythm. In classical works such as *Swan Lake*, the dancer performs what has become the standard number of 32 *fouettés* in succession.

Glissade: A transfer of weight through *plié* in which the dancer appears to glide across the floor from one foot to the other. Often used as a link between or a preparation for other steps.

Grand renversé: A step in which the dancer appears to upset the balance of the torso, often by wrapping one leg behind the body and spiraling away from a frontal facing.

Jeté en tournant: Also known as *grand jeté en tournant*, *tour jeté*, and *entrelacé*, the *jeté en tournant* is a jump that turns in the air and lands with the dancer facing the opposite direction. The legs are tossed up into the air successively, which facilitates the turn of the body to a new directional facing.

Pas de basque: A linking step, similar to *glissade*, in which the dancer changes weight from one leg to the other with a *rond de jambe*, or circle of the leg.

Pas de bourrées couru: Often called simply *bourrées*, these tiny shifts of weight from one foot to the other are typically only executed by women. When done well, *bourrées* can make a dancer look as though she is floating.

Pirouette: *Pirouettes* are ballet's famed turns, which can be executed in numerous positions, both traveling and stationary.

Plié: In ballet, the bending of the knees.

Pointe: Also called dancing *en pointe* or *pointework*, *pointe* is the contemporary terminology for what was referred to during the research period as "Toe-dancing." It comprises a special pair of shoes with a reinforced toe that enables dancers to rise onto the tips of their toes. It was only women in the early twentieth

century who practiced toe-dancing; by the late twentieth century *pointework* had been extended to men, although mostly in novelty situations.

Port de bras: Translated as “carriage of the arms,” *port de bras* refers to the codified system of arm and upper body movements in the ballet vocabulary.

Relevé: Rising, either by pressing or springing, from the whole foot onto the ball of the foot or the toes.

Rond de jambe: Literally, circle of the leg. *Rond de jambe* can be executed with the toe drawing a circle *à terre* or *par terre* (along the floor), or with the toe making a circle *en l’air* (in the air).

Sissonne: A jump that begins on two feet but lands on one. Uses all directions and many positions; has both *petit* and *grand allegro* possibilities.

Terre à terre: Literally, ground to ground. Small steps that keep the feet close to the floor as opposed to high in the air.

Travestie: A term used to describe the practice of performing as the opposite gender in stage productions. Also a relevant practice in opera and theater performances.

Clarification of Terms Used

Approach, Method, Methodology, Pedagogy: Used synonymously, whether referring to the work of an individual or to the ballet developed on a national scale.

School: An actual institution of training, such as the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School; or more broadly, a system of training, as in the French school.

Style: Elements of *technique* that reflect the influence of external sources and contexts—national characteristics or personal interpretations, for example. *Style* is integral to *technique*, and vice versa.

Technique: The basic elements of classical ballet. The vocabulary, or *danse d’école*—which has remained largely unchanged since the early nineteenth century.

Training: The regimen of study that dancers undertake, which amounts to the process of learning ballet.

Additional Notes on Terminology

I substitute *woman* for *girl*, the latter having been used during the research period to refer to women of any age in a performance capacity.

I use the terms *dancing master* and *director* interchangeably with the more recent term *choreographer*, thereby updating the language and recognizing the contributions of these early twentieth century individuals in present-day terms. *Dancing master* was also a label for the period’s teachers, and thus I add the terms *teacher* and *instructor* to modernize these references.

My intention with the language of the study is to simultaneously evoke the sensibility of the period through the original terminology, but to also bring the terms up to date, thereby lending a contemporary sense of regard to the long overlooked individuals who worked under these labels.

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