

**REMEMBERING EDOUARD BOROVANSKY
AND HIS COMPANY 1939–1959**

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ABSTRACT

This project sets out to establish that Edouard Borovansky, an ex-Ballets Russes *danseur*/teacher/choreographer/producer, was ‘the father of Australian ballet’. With the backing of J. C. Williamson’s Theatres Limited, he created and maintained a professional ballet company which performed in commercial theatre for almost twenty years. This was a business arrangement, and he received no revenue from either government or private sources. The longevity of the Borovansky Australian Ballet company, under the direction of one person, was a remarkable achievement that has never been officially recognised. The principal intention of this undertaking is to define Borovansky’s proper place in the theatrical history of Australia. Although technically not the first Australian professional ballet company, the Borovansky Australian Ballet outlasted all its rivals until its transformation into the Australian Ballet in the early 1960s, with Borovansky remaining the sole person in charge until his death in 1959.

In Australian theatre the 1930s was dominated by variety shows and musical comedies, which had replaced the pantomimes of the 19th century although the annual Christmas pantomime remained on the calendar for many years. Cinemas (referred to as ‘picture theatres’) had all but replaced live theatre as mass entertainment. The extremely rare event of a ballet performance was considered an exotic art reserved for the upper classes. ‘Culture’ was a word dismissed by many Australians as undefinable and generally unattainable because of our colonial heritage, which had long been the focus of English attitudes. Borovansky transformed the culture of ballet in Australia with business drive and artistic endeavours, aiming at the lower class population but aware that all the audience must be considered. He was willing to entertain, encourage and educate if necessary, but always aware of the box office and an accepted standard of balletic ability. The Borovansky Australian Ballet performances were ‘ballet for the people’ in the same way as ‘music for the people’ was accepted. Borovansky challenged the well-entrenched national ‘cultural cringe’ in his own way.

Borovansky was convinced that Australians could dance as well as if not better than overseas artists, if given the opportunity. He was aware of the strong, athletic bodies of young Australians but ignored the fact that these same bodies were deemed not quite up to world standards, particularly in theatrical circles. He set out to foster Australian dancers by opening a ballet school in Melbourne with his Russian-born and ballet-trained wife, Xenia, in charge. This enabled their students to receive the correct training to

become professional ballet dancers within their own country, although remaining at the will of theatrical entrepreneurs. After establishing the Borovansky Australian Ballet company, he created a 'star' system which made many of his dancers famous in Australia, New Zealand and overseas. While Borovansky was a visible presence within his company, explaining, demonstrating and exhorting, he was also known to theatre patrons through his stage speeches regarding government support for his company, as well as the many letters he wrote to his loyal supporters.

Borovansky made it possible for Australians and New Zealanders to witness ballet performances as regularly as theatres could accommodate them, enhancing their enjoyment and understanding of this art form as it was absorbed into their theatrical culture. The Borovansky Australian Ballet became the precursor to the Australian Ballet, but his contribution to the theatrical and cultural history of Australia has never been granted official recognition.

This is to certify that

- i. *The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface.*
- ii. *Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all sources.*
- iii. *The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of bibliographies, biographies and appendices.*

Marie Ada Couper

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Preface

I could hear a Chopin waltz faintly in the background as I groped along a dusty, ghostly corridor that connected His Majesty's Theatre with Jennie Brenan's ballet academy, Exhibition Street, Melbourne, where I was a full-time student paying for my lessons by attending to the administrative side of the school. I knew that the Borovansky Ballet was presenting a season in Melbourne and that *Les Sylphides* was danced to this music, and was thus encouraged to continue through the maze of spiderweb curtains to discover where these secret passages would end.

As the music increased in volume, I eventually discovered a door on the left-hand side of the passageway, which I tentatively pushed open to reveal the Dress Circle of the theatre. I was immediately aware of the electric atmosphere of a theatre in rehearsal with the power of the sound. It was the Borovansky Ballet in full costume, rehearsing *Les Sylphides*. Just as I had sunk discreetly into the nearest seat, a thunderously amplified expletive assailed my eardrums. A strangely accented male voice then continued to describe the close relationship of the *corps de ballet* to a herd of cows. He proceeded to stand on a chair and drill them endlessly until he was satisfied their lines were straight: each head turned to the same angle and each arm at the same height.

Such was my introduction to the mastermind who was to become 'the father of Australian ballet'! There were a few more precious assignations, but all rather one-sided affairs. Blissfully ignorant, I have only discovered through research for this thesis that Borovansky's rehearsals were 'closed' and he often had more important people than a ballet student ejected from the theatre.

What I absorbed from these clandestine episodes was, firstly, an obsession with straight lines which manifests itself every time I produce a concert for my own ballet school and, secondly, an odd mixture of admiration and apprehension. I was never able to overcome the latter sufficiently to audition for Borovansky's company. My involvement with classical ballet, albeit on the fringe, for the past fifty years and the fact that I was an ardent aficionado of the Borovansky Australian Ballet almost from its creation have made this research all the more personal on the one hand and gratifyingly illuminating on the other.

I commenced serious classical ballet training at the Jennie Brenan Academy of Dance in 1944, after several years attached to Alice Alwyn's dance school, where we

were versed in theatrical dancing for the performance of Christmas holiday pantomimes presented by Hoyts theatres. The options for aspiring ballerinas in the 1950s were the same as in the 1940s – either Borovansky’s company or a self-funded overseas trip in the hope of a successful audition. Like many other disillusioned ballet students, I did neither. Having attained Royal Academy of Dancing qualifications, I initiated my own ballet school in June 1962 after moving to Frankston some two years earlier.

My two most memorable achievements involved being a foundation member of the Royal Academy of Dancing Teachers’ Workshop and having one of my male students appointed Dean of Dance at Brisbane’s School of Excellence. On a more personal level, my second-eldest son graduated from the Australian Ballet School to the London Festival Ballet, later returning to Australia to join the West Australian Ballet Company, and my daughter has performed in Australia and overseas in commercial theatre; both attained A. R. A. D. status and are currently teachers of dance.

I undertook this research with the hope that it may lead to a revival of interest in Edouard Borovansky and the outstanding dancers from his company, who provided the nucleus of our present Australian Ballet. Borovansky was the only ballet pioneer in Australia who kept his dancers performing without private or government backing, for almost two decades. He was also the initiator of a ballet tradition and culture in this country. Borovansky’s achievements have never been officially recognised nor examined in total, which has resulted in an incomplete representation of Australia’s theatrical history.

Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the assistance, encouragement and interest of many diverse personalities.

In the first instance, I humbly thank my principal supervisor, Angela O'Brien, who has not only given her academic expertise without stint, but created the time to dispense this knowledge.

Hilary Crampton, Lee Christofis and Robin Grove have also shared input in certain stages of this venture.

My niece, Jennifer Higgins, has been an enthusiastic and willing compatriot from the beginning by personally introducing me to members of the National Library of Australia, Canberra, who provided guidance in my research area, personally rendered research assistance and shared her home with me when I was visiting Canberra.

National Library of Australia researcher Richard Stone was one contact introduced by my niece, who provided me with a copy of his preliminary findings on Borovansky, and I am deeply indebted to him.

Barry Kitcher, for his sincere good wishes, the loan of his personal memorabilia and, above all, listing of the Borovansky Australian Ballet dates and programs in his book *From Gaolbird to Lyrebird*, which saved me interminable hours of time.

Edna Busse, for allowing me access to her home and private memorabilia during my visit to Wagga Wagga, which she freely allowed me to copy, numerous cups of tea and the personal gift of her one-cup teapot, to be forever treasured.

One of my ex-students, Karen Ryan, and her young family, for providing a second home during my first study visit to Canberra.

Patricia Convrey, for her patience and input during numerous telephone calls and visits to the Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne.

The staff at the Creative Arts Department (in particular Dennis Claringbold for steering me through the complexities of the computer), State Library of Victoria, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne Archives, Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, National Library of Australia, Canberra, and Australian Film Archives, Canberra and Melbourne.

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My longstanding friend, Chris Fox, for sharing her knowledge and keeping me level-headed.

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Each personal interview brought a new perspective to the work and I am very grateful for the time I shared with the following interviewees:

Bill Akers	Clare Ladders
Edna Busse	Laurel Martyn
Jillian Collinson	Bruce Morrow
Paul Hammond	Linda Smith
Strelsa Heckleman	Sylvia Stock
Barry Kitcher	Margaret Stutley

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Introduction

Czechoslovakian *danseur* Edouard Borovansky was 36 when he decided to resign from the Covent Garden Russian Ballet, choosing Victoria's capital city, Melbourne, as his Australian destination. This was the first step in his long-thought-out plan for the creation of a ballet school that would train the dancers required to form his own company.

When the Covent Garden Russian Ballet commenced touring Australia in 1938, the country was still experiencing the effects of the Great Depression, although interest had been created by the Russian companies that preceded it, including the Imperial Russian Company (1913), Pavlova's Ballet Company (1926 and 1929), the Dandré–Levitoff Russian Ballet (1934) and the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet (1936–37). The Covent Garden Russian Ballet was of great significance in the creation of Australian ballet, as several other members besides Borovansky also remained in Australia.¹

Before ballet companies started to come to Australia in the 20th century, there had been little exposure for the average person to garner knowledge. Many Australians were not prepared to submerge themselves in a foreign culture and considered males who danced effeminate, although awareness of ballet as an art which could be pursued by both sexes was brought to Australia through the newspapers. Yet while numerous articles were published, the figure of the ballerina still dominated in advertisements promoting Australian beauty products, even packaged confectionery such as Columbine Caramels.

The worst of the Great Depression came late to Australia. Primary production was dependent on its own income. Many country areas, particularly those depending on the wool market, had been suffering drought for a long time. Secondary industry only provided the national coffers with a small dividend.² Some of the unemployed men enlisted in the services when war was declared in 1939 if only to be assured of three meals a day. Many men who had been out of work for a long time took to the bush, where they were more likely to obtain food from the country housewife.³

This was the Australia that Borovansky decided to make his home and commence the process towards a national ballet company of Australian dancers. He did not confide in his wife, Xenia, about his plans to leave the company and remain in Australia until two days out from Fremantle. She had been reluctant to accompany him in the first place because of having to leave her ill mother in Berlin and the expense of her fare being a drain on their finances. Xenia's reaction was one of shock and they quarrelled, but there was no turning back – he could and would succeed.⁴ This behaviour is indicative of Borovansky's determined nature. The situation was tragic for Xenia, but he had been closely following what was happening in Europe, particularly in his own native country, and had concluded that it was the time to act. They left their old life with one suitcase between them.

Laurel Martyn knew of Borovansky's plan, as she was in England on a scholarship in 1938, and was amazed that he should be contemplating such a move. Frank Salter's chapter 'A Lunatic Scheme' informs us of the situation in Europe and Borovansky's reaction. Both he and Martyn knew what the artistic climate was in Australia, and the Depression would not have been conducive to the box office. The Australian proletariat was rather ignorant of classical ballet. While recent tours of the Ballets Russes were the beginning of a more lateral approach by a sector of the population, the average family would not have had money to spare for entertainment of this select nature. Besides, most working class men would have shied away from these 'foreign' productions and the representation of effeminate males. That all Australians should be submerged in the arts was not a primary concern of the government. Australia was a land of gymnastics, cricket, football and horse racing, and it was the latter two which most attracted the public. Going to the opera or ballet was only for the upper classes

¹ *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia*, gen. eds John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell, Currency House, Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2003, Edward H. Pask, 'Pavlova's Company, Imperial Russian Ballet, Dandré–Levitoff Russian Ballet, Monte Carlo Russian Ballet,' pp.72–73; Shirley McKecknie, 'Choreography,' p.131; Josephine Fantasia, John Whiteoak, 'Rivalry in Celebrity Tours,' p.254; Valda Craig, Gary Lester, 'Modern Dance,' p.418.

² Griffen, James, gen. ed., *Essays in Economic History of Australia*, Jacaranda, Qld, NSW, Vic., 2nd ed., 1970, Geoffrey Bolton, 'Australia Since 1939,' p.283.

³ As told to me by my uncle, who was a swagman before becoming one of the 'Rats of Tobruk.'

⁴ Salter, Frank, *Borovansky: The Man Who Made Australian Ballet*, Wildcat Press, Sydney, 1980, p.73.

– the underlings felt unworthy of this type of spectacle because they had never been educated to understand and appreciate its qualities. Borovansky had appraised the situation very well and intended to accept the challenge of presenting ‘ballet for the people’ to the people.

Edouard Borovansky (Eduard Josef Skrecek) was born in Přerov in what was to become Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic) on 2 February 1902, one of five surviving children. His father was a railway clerk but known for his folk dancing, which he later taught to Edouard. His mother had a good voice and introduced her children to music. Young Edouard veered unerringly towards a career in the theatre, while his father determined he should embrace safety and reliability as a public servant. He constantly caused his parents to wonder how to deal with this stubborn but intelligent and loving son who was not to be dissuaded from entering the theatre. He was accepted into the Prague National Ballet School, which led to the Prague National Opera Company. Via intricate machinations, Borovansky became a member of Pavlova’s ballet company and experienced his first visit to Australia in 1929. After his return to Europe and living dismally during the Depression, he auditioned successfully for the Ballets Russes *de Monte Carlo* as a solo character dancer in their 1936–37 tour, which included Australia. He had become engrossed with the idea of an Australian national ballet company after his tour with Pavlova but achieving this was another question, particularly in a time of financial stress.

Borovansky’s significance in Australian theatrical history started with this secret ambition of his. Although he died just two years before it finally became a reality, his stamp is evident in the high standard of the many ex-Borovansky performers still delighting audiences as members of our own national ballet company. Borovansky should be remembered for his creation of an Australian ballet company as early as 1940 (albeit touring, rather than attached to any city), which showcased Australian talent until 1959. His company employed Australian dancers, musicians, artists, designers, set-builders and costume-makers, operating without public or government financial assistance. He planned programs so that they would be entertaining enough to entice people back, thus fostering an appreciation of high culture that some Australians would not have normally encountered. He opened the door to high culture for everyone by working on the principle that a theatre seat occupied at a lower price was preferable to an empty seat. Borovansky achieved the appropriate response from Australian audiences with his achievements: art which they could embrace from the aesthetic side, art which they could enjoy as entertainment and art which they could afford.

Even if there had been no Depression, high culture, as represented by the arts, was beyond the purse of the average worker during the 1930s and 1940s. Entertainment for the masses was a trip to the local cinema or attending a ballroom-dancing venue. A live theatre production, such as at the Tivoli or a musical comedy, might be a yearly outing. The downsizing of culture is now known as ‘popular,’ therefore it does not seem fair to look too harshly at the children of this era when parental knowledge was minimal. Before the Ballets Russes had their Australian seasons, there was very little exposure to this form of art. Furthermore, dancing lessons had to be paid for and it may not have been possible to favour one child in a family struggling to manage during the Depression.

There are four very relevant sources of reference pertinent to this thesis:

Frank Salter’s *Borovansky: The Man Who Made Australian Ballet* (1980) is the most focused study of Borovansky, as Salter’s research took him to Czechoslovakia for information unavailable in Australia. There is also relevant data with regards to the early days of the Borovansky ballet company. Salter takes the middle road in his book as it is a personal as well as a historical record, while acknowledging in his Dedication a list of the more than 200 members who performed in Borovansky’s companies.

Barry Kitcher’s autobiography, *From Gaolbird to Lyrebird* (2001), includes extensive details about the everyday workings of a ballet company. This book gives the reader an insight into views and attitudes concerning the male dancer. Barry was first a student at the Borovanskys’ ballet school, then promoted to the company and finally appointed soloist. He was among the members of the Borovansky Ballet to be accepted into the newly formed Australian Ballet Company. I was also granted access to Kitcher’s private collection, which confirms the power of the written word as I did not read one review of Borovansky’s company that was likely to deter people from attending. The cooperation of the press is worthy of comment, as it encouraged positive reviews with ongoing articles regarding the achievements of these Australian dancers.

Edward Pask’s *Enter the Colonies Dancing* (1979) illustrates how the theatrical movement in early

Australia evolved, particularly for dancers. Pask's first book reveals that there was no lack of dancers, dance teachers or students, nor theatres and audiences to support them. *Ballet in Australia: The Second Act 1940–1980* (1982) provides detailed information regarding Borovansky's students' early performances through to the final curtain of his ballet company. The triple-bill program associated with the Borovansky Ballet which Marilyn Jones, as Artistic Director of the Australian Ballet, presented in March 1980 has been the only public tribute dedicated to the memory of Borovansky. Pask comments that "the Australian Ballet grew out of the seeds planted by Edouard Borovansky, paying him full tribute ... the father-pioneer of ballet in this country ... who gave Australian ballet an identity of its own."⁵

Michelle Potter provides an extensive picture of dance in Australia through her published literature, with emphasis on what Borovansky achieved. One of Potter's articles concerns the Borovansky ballet company's production of *Terra Australis* and the argument that it was not the first all-Australian ballet. Two other articles deal with the Ballets Russes in Australia and another covers choreography by Borovansky. In her writings Potter is looking at how Borovansky introduced new ballets and original choreography.

My study of Borovansky includes some personal memories, as well as interviews with ex-Borovansky ballet dancers. Alida Belair and Barry Kitcher had already written their autobiographies and Frank Salter included many anecdotes in his book. The oral history collection at the National Library, Canberra, was a revealing source of information, a legacy of memories and anecdotes from dancers associated with the Borovansky company. Through the Melbourne University Archives, I have studied the Actors Equity files for the period 1943 to 1962 to gain an insight into working conditions and wages for dancers. These files revealed that dancers, particularly females, in this period were not in the upper bracket of wage earners. Compared to musicians, who worked under a much more lucrative system and were unionised, there was a substantial difference, particularly in the 'living away from home' allowance.

At the Annual General Meeting of the Royal Academy of Dance on 7 March 2007, the Artistic Director of the Australian Ballet gave an informal talk on the Ballets Russes.⁶ And on 20 September 2007 Nicolette Fraillon, Music Director and Chief Conductor Australian Ballet Orchestra, presented a public lecture, *Ballets Russes Australian Tours: The Vision and the Legacy*. These personal presentations opened up quite a discourse on the impact of the relevant companies on their Australian audiences. Among my collection of Royal Academy of Dancing magazines, I discovered historical information regarding its original connection to Australia. Some recent publications have focused on the male dancer and the problem of acceptance which still needs to be overcome by young boys.

This thesis is unique as it reveals how Borovansky managed to do something in theatrical history which had not been achieved before him and has not been accomplished since. His business acumen and strong entrepreneurial skills, plus his undaunted determination, enabled him to maintain success in the commercial theatrical arena for twenty years. During this time he fostered expanding and continuing audiences in Australia and New Zealand, and raised the profiles of Australian composers, musicians, designers, writers, the dancers in his company and, in particular, the male dancer. Borovansky was also active in dealing with J. C. Williamson's theatre management company through Actors Equity in achieving some form of wage parity and conditions that were appropriate for ballet dancers and associated artists.

One of Borovansky's most successful strategies was to present a known Romantic ballet (representing high art) first, then introduce a new work to stimulate patrons' curiosity, followed by a rompish ballet that would send them home smiling and wanting more. He offered ballet as an affordable means of popular entertainment by presenting stories in dance form, thus appealing to people who would have considered going to the ballet beyond both their economic means and intellectual comprehension. Borovansky had the audacity to prove Australians wrong regarding our ability to do something that was considered impossible by world standards: to dance classical ballet in our way, with our bodies, and succeed, thus bringing into existence an authentic national identity for ballet in Australia that

⁵ Pask, Edward H., *Ballet in Australia: The Second Act 1940–1980*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1982, p.297.

⁶ This meeting was for members of the Royal Academy of Dance which, as a life member, I was entitled to attend.

eventually became the solid underlying basis for the Australian Ballet.

The literature review demonstrates that Borovansky's upbringing and European heritage defined his relationship with regards to ballet, opera, music and art. He displayed a multifaceted personality which could be benign, fatherly, obstinate or very demanding, plus a broad vocabulary. His temperament could display any number of facets from explosively stubborn, arrogant master to sympathetic, fatherly confidante, and it was possible for them to be exhibited all in one day. He is remembered by some as a genius and by others as an unpleasant tyrant – either venerated or abhorred. Borovansky's dealings with J. C. Williamson's were completely professional. He was a realist, acknowledging that compromise was often the only way to succeed, even when it irked his artistic demeanour. He worked his European charm to develop an association which was only once in danger of fracturing. Borovansky showed a lot of common sense in his business agreement with J. C. Williamson's. This became evident very early in the way he organised programs that enticed audiences to keep coming back to his company's performances because they appreciated the entertainment value of certain ballets. He also kept a good line of communication open through his relations with the newspaper press and radio broadcasters, understanding perfectly how to use them to his own advantage.

This thesis presents a chronological history of Edouard Borovansky from his decision in the 1930s to create an Australian ballet company with Australian dancers, but concentrates on his work between 1939 and 1959. This twenty-year period represents Borovansky's total commitment to establishing an Australian ballet company which he hoped would be recognised among the world's greatest. Chapter 1 includes a brief retrospective study of ballet in colonial times and into the 20th century, as I consider it important to understand that ballet in Australia did not start with the first performance of the Australian Ballet Company. Conversely, the last chapter emphasises that our first national ballet company became a reality not only through the hard work of many people, but also because of one man's vision.

Chapter 1 is a retrospective of the Australian dance scene before Borovansky. This chapter demonstrates that there was a theatrical culture developing in the 19th century which would eventually evolve into a national ballet company; "right from the start in ballet Australia was hardly the uncultured outpost it has often been taken to be."⁷

Chapters 2 and 3 cover the Second World War (1939–1945). During these war years Australia was isolated from the rest of the world, which prevented overseas ballet companies from touring. This was a situation which Borovansky grasped and used to build an Australian ballet company. The Borovansky Australian Ballet company was registered in 1941, presented semi-professional performances in 1943 and was contracted to J. C. Williamson's Theatres Limited in May 1944.⁸

The postwar years (covered in Chapter 4) brought immense changes to Australia and made the population uncomfortable. A decade of Depression, five years of war and now reconstruction caused "enduring internal instability."⁹ Mass immigration brought Europeans and their cultures. The Borovansky Ballet company continued to entertain and excite audiences in Australia and New Zealand until it was first disbanded in December 1947.

Chapter 5 (The Fabulous Fifties) is devoted to the most triumphant years of Borovansky's ballet company to the extent that he had created Australian dancers and fostered Australian talent and audiences long before our national ballet company was formed in 1962. Borovansky's death in December 1959, Peggy van Praagh's contribution to Australia's dance history and the transition from Borovansky's to a subsidised national ballet company are included in Chapter 6.

My contribution to this thesis was mainly achieved through researching Actors Equity files (University of Melbourne) and the Ingram Papers (National Library of Australia, Canberra), and conducting personal interviews. I regard the recollections of Borovansky by those who were closely associated with him, particularly his dancers, as being of the greatest importance to this thesis because

⁷ Robin Grove, 'Body Politics,' quoted by John Cargher (an article which began as a paper read to a seminar convened in Sydney by Australian Academy of Humanities in July 1980).

⁸ J. C. Williamson's Theatres Limited was originally known in the theatrical world as 'the Firm' or J. C. Williamson's, later abbreviated to JCW. I have chosen J. C. Williamson's for clarity.

⁹ Brown, Nicholas, *Governing Prosperity: Social Change and Social Analysis in Australia in the 1950s*, Cambridge University Press, U. K., 1995, p.4.

they present us with a picture in the time that it was taking place. They were in the 'now' and we are in the 'after.' My interviews make up a living archive, revealing that a methodology which used memory, recollections and historical source material was necessary. Sifting through these interviews provided a more complete picture of the man they nicknamed Boro. They revealed a side of him that was perhaps overshadowed by his reputation for having an abusive tongue and a demanding personality. There are instances of Borovansky acting paternally towards his female dancers, reminding them to be demure in their off-stage attire; on the other hand, he was emphatic that his male dancers should be totally masculine. Borovansky was a unique person who, at a time when many Australians were unaware of the entertainment derived from ballet productions, turned his spectators into regular balletomanes through hard work and determination.

The Conclusion summarises the findings of the thesis. Borovansky trained Australian dancers to world standard and encouraged his audiences to understand and appreciate the art of ballet. He built an Australian company and held it together for two decades without government subsidies or private financial backing. Most importantly, he gave Australia a theatrical era when going to the ballet became as normal as going to any other entertainment. Borovansky made theatrical history which has never been repeated.

CHAPTER 1: *Origins and Influences – Before Borovansky*

In this chapter I briefly explore what was presented as ballet in the early days of Australia's settlement, moving up to the third decade of the 20th century. I believe this background is relevant to what transpired when Borovansky implemented his plan for the establishment of a ballet school, based on Russian methodology, which would train the dancers he required to form an Australian company. Research has revealed that a history of ballet was established early in the 19th century. Theatrical productions soon became part of the colony's entertainment and ballet, or stage dance, was fostered as the population increased. Early in the 20th century it was realised that a strong base technique, combined with appropriate teaching, was lacking. The way that teaching developed in Australia has been included in this chapter as a vital link between the past and present. Initially the first dancers to reach Australia came from overseas by way of touring companies or on solo tours. They followed what appeared to be normal procedure at that time: they danced as they had been taught and passed this knowledge onto the next generation. There have been some negative views about this method of teaching ballet, but there was no alternative in the earlier years of the colony. The least we can say of that period is that ballet (as the visiting artist knew it) was not allowed to wither for lack of interest or teachers. Many individual and company dancers remained in Australia, thus continuing the line from one century to the next. One of the most important group of dancers who chose to remain in Australia were former members of the 1930s Ballets Russes touring companies, which included Edouard and Xenia Borovansky. By the time he was gaining momentum to make a positive move, circumstances decided for him. By the late 1930s the world was in crisis, preventing life moving on in many countries, including his homeland.

When Borovansky first gathered dancers together to form a company, his task was facilitated by the outcome of the Second World War. Some Australian dancers had returned or were in the process of returning to their homeland as the seriousness of the situation escalated. Dancers who had envisaged furthering their careers in England and/or Europe and serious ballet students frustrated by the theatrical situation in Australia who knew that London was the mecca for further artistic development were effectively prevented from leaving their country as it became more isolated from the rest of the world. The advent of the Borovansky Russian Ballet Academy, established by the Borovanskys, attracted many of these young hopefuls.¹⁰ Borovansky drew on this talented group of dancers when the time came to launch his company. Most of them had received their initial training from other teachers, as social stage dancing had become an established part of Australian culture by this time. There were dance schools and teachers operating throughout the land as serious ballet training became the focus. As early as 1933 the Commonwealth Society of Dancing conducted examinations, to be followed by the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (1934), Royal Academy of Dancing, previously known as the Association of Operatic Dancing (1935) and British Ballet Organisation (1937).¹¹

The originator of the Association of Operatic Dancing, Edouard Espinosa,¹² visited Australia in 1918 but returned to England disenchanted by an indifferent attitude. Some seven years later one of Enrico Cecchetti's pupils, Errol Addison, toured Australia, after which he taught the Cecchetti method in Sydney for almost a year. It is rather disconcerting to discover that these two renowned dance teachers

¹⁰ Salter, op.cit., p.82.

¹¹ Vincent, Jordan Beth, 'In Pursuit of a Dancing "Body": Modernity, Physicality and Identity in Australia, 1919 to 1939,' Ph.D., University of Melbourne (Department of Culture and Communication), 2009, pp.147–60; Ivor Guest, 'The Dancers' Heritage: A Short History of Ballet,' Royal Academy of Dancing, *Dance Gazette*, October, No.3 of 1980 (No.175), p.12 (in the 21st century this organisation was renamed the Royal Academy of Dance).

¹² Espinosa, Edouard. Born Moscow 1871, died England 1950. Father was a dancer, then teacher, at the Paris Opera, who started a school in London in 1872. Edouard became noted for his teaching; taught Ninette de Valois. Set up the Operatic Society of Great Britain. Created the British Ballet Organisation in 1930. Sister Judith Espinosa died 1949. His two other sisters were also teachers. Clarke, Mary, and Vaughan, David, eds, *The Encyclopaedia of Dance and Ballet*, Pitman, London, 1977, p.134.

could not generate enough interest to form a stronger association with Australian students.¹³ However, these were early times for Australian dance and the ‘tyranny of distance’ applied not only to our country but also to seeking enlightenment in other countries. It was also the beginning of American influence through cinemas, which featured tap dancing rather than ballet. If Anna Pavlova¹⁴ had been able to make her first scheduled tour, which had had to be cancelled because of the outbreak of the First World War, the development of ballet in Australia might have commenced some 20 years earlier.

The Brenan sisters, Eileen and Jennie,¹⁵ began their ballet school in Melbourne early in the 20th century, introducing the Association of Operatic Dancing to Australians, and organised the first examination session of the Royal Academy of Dancing. Dorothy Gladstone (Melbourne), Marjorie Hollingshed (Brisbane) and Linley Wilson (Perth) also started their ballet schools during the 1920s. The Federal Association of Teachers of Dancing (originally the New South Wales Dancers’ Society) was operational from 1931.¹⁶

The Lightfoot–Burlakov school originated in 1919. Within ten years it was known as the First Australian Ballet or the First Australian Russian Ballet and was presenting performances in halls around Sydney. While Mischa Burlakov imbued his students with enthusiasm and presentation style, his partner, Louise Lightfoot, prepared them for the Cecchetti examinations. Their company presented *Coppelia* on 4 November 1931 and Lightfoot created *Roksanda* in the same year. Their students included Valrene Tweedie, who successfully auditioned to join the 1940 Ballets Russes company at the age of 14, and Gordon Hamilton, who became a member of the Vic-Wells Company, London. Tom Merifield, described by Salter as brilliant but erratic, first danced with the Borovansky ballet company, then forged a career in musicals and television in Britain. Burlakov continued teaching after the First Australian Ballet was disbanded and Lightfoot, after many years studying Indian national dancing, became associated with the National Theatre Ballet, Melbourne.¹⁷

Lucy Saranova, who had studied with Cecchetti in London, established the Cecchetti Society of Victoria (a branch of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, I. S. T. D., commencing 1904 in Britain), together with Wanda Edwards and Claire Aytoun, in 1926. This was the same year that Pavlova toured Australia and Alexis Dolinoff, *premier danseur*, taught the Cecchetti method in Sydney for two years before returning to Europe. Edwards, who had been a member of the Imperial

¹³ Pask, Edward H., *Enter the Colonies Dancing: A History of Dance in Australia 1835–1940*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1979, pp.112–113.

¹⁴ Pavlova, Anna. Born St Petersburg 1881, died The Hague 1931. Trained at the St Petersburg Imperial Theatre School 1891 – P. Gerdt, Johansson and later Cecchetti were her teachers – debut with Imperial Russian Ballet in 1899. Graduated 11 April 1899. Prima ballerina 1906, international star 1908, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes 1909. Commenced Pavlova company 1911, world tours from 1913 until her death. Married Victor Dandre and settled in London. First Australian tour 1926, returned in 1929. McCavley, Martin, *Routledge Who’s Who in Russia Since 1900*, Routledge, London, 1997; Gadan, Francis, and Maillard, Robert, gen. eds Crichton, Ronald and Clarke, Mary, *A Dictionary of Modern Ballet*, Methuen, London, 1959, pp.262–265; Clarke and Vaughan, op.cit., p.272; Koegler, Horst, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Ballet*, Oxford University Press, London, 1977, pp.407–408.

Pavlova, Anna – 1881–1931

www.australiadancing.org/subjects/51.html 8/30/05.

¹⁵ Brenan, Jennie. Born Carlton, Victoria 1877, died 1964. Early training received from Mary Weir and Rosalie Phillipini, then Alexander Genée in London. First performed in 1896 with J. C. Williamson’s. Ballet mistress State Theatre 1929. In 1965 the Victorian branch of the Royal Academy of Dancing instituted a teachers’ scholarship which bears her name. Cargher, op.cit., pp.207–208, Vincent, op.cit., pp.140–143; Australia Dancing – Jennie Brenan

www.australiadancing.org/subjects/84.html 3/80/05 (Mary Weir and Phillipini)

¹⁶ *Currency Companion*, Robina Beard, ‘Examinations in Dance,’ p. 261; Vincent, op.cit., p.45; Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.97–98.

¹⁷ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, p.137; Cargher, op.cit., pp.214–216; Vincent, op.cit., pp.166–174; Salter, op.cit., pp.110–112; the music for *Roksanda* was composed in 1929 by an Australian, Roy Maling; *Currency Companion*, Joel Crotty, ‘Ballet Music,’ p.78.

Burlakov, Mischa. Born Poltava (1880s?), died Sydney 1965. Toured Australia (1913) with Golder’s National Dancing Company. Together with Louise Lightfoot, established a ballet school in Sydney in 1919 and the amateur First Australian Ballet Company in 1931. Vincent, op.cit., pp.167–171.

Society for two years, was fully accredited by 1929. Permission had been gained from London to conduct children's examinations in Australia by 1934.¹⁸

Just one year after Australia's introduction to the Cecchetti Society, Eunice Weston from England settled in Melbourne to establish her ballet school. Weston was a member of the Imperial Society, as well as the Operatic Association of Great Britain. Concerned by the haphazard standard of ballet teaching, Weston started to interest other teachers in a bonded organisation to assist in the improvement of their teaching abilities. After initial contact from the Operatic Association of Great Britain in September 1929, Weston became their Australian representative. Two years later Weston gathered dance teachers together to launch the Victorian Society of Teachers of Dancing.¹⁹ Because there was no official accreditation involved to obtain membership, many teachers were attracted to this organisation. However, it was soon realised that without examinations to structure training, along with concerns about who would be examiners in what was a very competitive business, the Society eventually turned to the Operatic Association of Great Britain, requesting an examiner. Consequently, Felix Demery was dispatched on an examining tour of South Africa, Australia and New Zealand in 1935. Gladstone wrote in *New Graffiti in Australia* that Weston had worked hard to foster the art of operatic dancing, and it was mainly through her efforts that Demery was in Australia conducting the first examinations of that society. The standard of the over 1000 Australians examined (300 from Frances Sculley's Sydney studio) was quite a revelation.²⁰

When Borovansky decided to settle in Melbourne, he did not come to a country bereft of artistic ability or appreciation. Australia already possessed a theatre culture, teachers of dancing, including ballet, and a theatre audience which had been created by J. C. Williamson's. Borovansky would have had some prior understanding of this from his previous experiences in Pavlova's and the Ballets Russes companies, where he was required to prepare young Australian dancers as 'supers' (extras) in their productions. His achievements were significantly linked to the extremely successful Australian tours of the Ballets Russes, which influenced J. C. Williamson's to open its doors to provide more of this high culture. Although the tours of the Ballets Russes are indicative of the evolutionary turning point in the presentation of ballet in Australia, and have been rightly remembered and celebrated, what transpired before their arrival is not as widely acknowledged.

In the ballet section of John Cargher's book *Opera and Ballet in Australia*, he is rather dismissive of the idea of ballet in the colonial days, asserting that those entertainers touring Australia were not overseas 'stars' but opportunists.²¹ While his evidence is plausible, it was their presentations that conceptualised ballet in the eyes of the colonial beholders, thus adding another dimension to their cultural experiences. Instead of colonial Australia being the backwater of the arts, the early entrepreneurs, while undoubtedly making a living for themselves, were providing some type of art to the inhabitants, particularly in the form of musical productions, which included dancing. Also, the original dancing schools relied on people coming from overseas to advise and/or instruct them on what changes had occurred, as dance is a constantly changing art. High-class dancing (ballet) evolved

¹⁸ Saranova, Lucy. Born England. Studied with Enrico Cecchetti in 1919. Moved to Australia in 1923. Taught the Cecchetti method in her own school and established the Australian Cecchetti Society. Ballet mistress and choreographer for the Capital Theatre, Melbourne. Vincent, op.cit., pp.149, 158; Guest, 'The Dancer's Heritage,' p.143; Koegler, op.cit., p.1; *Currency Companion*, Claudia Funder, John Whiteoak, 'New Ways of Training,' p.229; 'Examinations in Dance,' Robina Beard, p.261. (The obituary for Seena Bird (1918–2008), Principal of the Seena Bird Dance Academy (Victoria) for 59 years, states that "she went on to become a star pupil of Lucie [sic] Saranova ... She was chosen for the Borovansky Ballet Company when it formed in Melbourne in 1939 but chose to become a dance teacher," *Herald-Sun*, 10 December 2008.)

¹⁹ Weston, Eunice. Born England. Trained by Judith Espinosa in London. Dancer and teacher. Settled in Melbourne 1927 and opened a ballet school. Member of Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing and Operatic Association of Great Britain, which she taught to pupils attending the first summer school ever held in Australia. (This was organised by Majorie Hollinshed, who also arranged tuition for herself.) Co-founder of Teachers of Dancing. Created Adeline Genée Club, Melbourne. Vincent, op.cit., pp.145,147–49,151,153–54; *Currency Companion*, Aline Scott-Maxwell, Susan Street, 'Scanty Information,' p.226 and 'Demarcation in Teaching,' p.228.

²⁰ Vincent, op.cit., pp.144–152,155–156.

²¹ Grove, 'Body Politics,' op.cit., p.75; Cargher, John, *Opera and Ballet in Australia*, Cassell, NSW, 1977, pp.196–201.

from this meagre beginning to become a very important part of culture in Australia.

By 1797 dance had become as popular as opera (in English as well as Italian), with ordinary *pas seul* being used to make dramatic ballets appear more complicated. The first theatre in Australia (built January 1796) was constructed by convicts and initially used by convicts to perform plays. Actor John Lazar and his ten-year-old daughter, Rachel, who had trained in dance, arrived in Sydney in February 1837.²² By this time a pantomime had been presented and an Academy of Dance established. The Theatre Royal, Sydney, was the venue for the first ballet seen in the colonies. *The Fair Maid of Perth* (a ballet after Walter Scott) was presented on 27 January 1835 with ex-London theatre dancers Mrs Jones and Mr Fitzgerald in the leading roles.²³ Rachel Lazar received tuition from Messrs Clark and Fitzgerald and performed professionally on 20 May 1837 and in the pantomime *Aladdin* during December of the same year. At the Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney, in March 1838 Rachel danced as Cinderella, as well as performing the 'Spear Dance', and six months later she was the first dancer to perform the Spanish *La Cachuca* in Australia. Morris Phillips danced a *pas de deux* with Rachel in his play *Fidelio* early in 1839, after which she took on more acting roles.²⁴

By the middle of 1840 pantomimes were a part of our theatre culture, with a strong influence on the dance content. English pantomime was particularly pertinent to dance in this country as the choreographers were usually trained in England by European teachers. Those who remained passed their knowledge onto the next generation of dancers and a continuous line of dance communication was established very early in Australian theatrical history. This style of entertainment lasted until the 1920s, when the musical comedy influence from America replaced the older format. In *Entertaining Australia* Katherine Brisbane notes the development of an Australian dimension in pantomime performances, which indicates that comedians were now substituting Australian settings and mannerisms, rather than English ones.²⁵

The 1840s ushered in a strong interest in dance, commencing with a farewell performance by Rachael Lazar as Colombine in the *Demon King*, as she and her father moved to South Australia. Madame Veilburn, an Irish *danseuse*, arrived in Australia to make her debut in Sydney (October 1840) dancing a solo from *Le Dieu et la Bayadere*. In 1841 she was partnered on stage by French *danseur* Monsieur Charriere, who also taught in her dancing academy, which was attached to the Royal Victoria Theatre until 1842. During this year, four London dancers arrived in Sydney: Mr J. Chambers, Madam Louise and the Tornings. Andrew Torning was the initiator of grand ballets and pantomimes in Sydney, and Louise Torning danced in the ballet of the Royal Victoria for more than 15 years.²⁶

After years of theatrical experience as a comedian, singer, violinist and dancer (specialising in minstrel dances), George Coppin (1819–1906), along with his American wife, Maria, an actress, came to Sydney in 1843 to perform at the Royal Victoria Theatre. The Coppins were engaged by Mrs Clarke to perform in Tasmania. The culture of Van Dieman's Land was established long before the arrival of the Coppins. The Royal Theatre, Hobart, had been active as the main place of entertainment

²² Brisbane, Katherine, ed., *Entertaining Australia: An Illustrated History*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1991, pp.24,33 (Rachel Lazar).

²³ *Currency Companion*, Edward H. Pask, 'Ballet,' p.70; Cargher, op.cit., pp.199,200,350.

²⁴ Cargher, op.cit., p.200. Cargher refers to Rachel Lazar as "the first genuine dancer." The 'Spear Dance' was from Filippo Taglioni's *La Revolte au Serail*. *La Cachuca* was one of the various national dances incorporated into romantic ballets. Rachel Lazar remained the leading attraction of the theatre, with a review in the *Australian*. Brisbane, op.cit., pp.24,33–35.

²⁵ Mander, Raymond, and Mitchenson, Joe, *Pantomime: A Story in Pictures*, Peter Davies, London, 1973; Cargher, op.cit., p.200; Cumes, J. W. C., *Their Chastity Was Not Too Rigid: Leisure Times In Early Australia*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1979, p.292; Brisbane, op.cit., p.46; *Currency Companion*, John Whiteoak, 'Music Hall Songs,' "Before 1850 music in the theatre accompanied pantomimes," p.530 and 'Pantomime.' Music and dancing were important. 'Christmas Pantomimes late 19th to early 20th centuries,' pp.498–499; Edward H. Pask, 'Five-month Season, *Cinderella* 1884,' Gusstav Massartie the choreographer. (As a very young dancer I performed professionally in Alice Alwyn's Hoyts Theatre Troupe for five pantomimes. My youngest son had a leading role in an amateur production of *Mother Goose* during the late 1990s and I was involved with two amateur pantomime productions in 2003 and 2006. Currently there has been news of a revival with *Jack and the Beanstalk* to be presented by a professional company in 2018.)

²⁶ *Currency Companion*, Aline Scott-Maxwell with Bronia Kormhauser, 'Jewish Traditions,' p.386; Amanda Card, 'Dance on the Popular Stage,' p.218 and 'Interruptive Audiences,' p.219; Brisbane, op.cit., pp.38–42.

for the public since 1832. The first ballet had been staged in 1837; however, there was no further dance interest until 1842, when some overseas dancers arranged performances, then Charles Young created two productions in 1844 and Mrs Clark had a three-month season in Launceston.²⁷

The beginning of the golden age of Romantic ballet occurred on 23 July 1827 at the Paris Opera when Marie Taglioni changed ballet with her graceful movements and strength. Taglioni's style was in complete opposition to what had long been prescribed as ballet and *danseuses* of the day followed in her footsteps with pride. The initiation of Romantic ballet was part of a ballet renaissance which coincided with a tremendous revival movement in all the arts, a symptom of a world caught in a process of violent change.²⁸ The French Revolution was unwittingly beneficial to the art of ballet as it compelled dancers performing in Paris theatres to move away from the city and many ventured abroad. London became significant as an artistic oasis where dancers gained exposure.²⁹

The first Romantic ballet to be presented in the colonies was Filippo Taglioni's two-act *La Sylphide*, produced by Charles Young at the Queen's Theatre Royal, Melbourne. Opening night was 25 September 1845 and it continued to attract enthusiastic audiences until May 1846. Young danced the leading role opposite his wife, Jane Thompson. Initially taught by her mother, Martha Thomas, Jane and her sister, Eliza, became pupils of Charriere and made their debut in one of his productions. Eliza was instrumental in introducing ballet to audiences in Van Dieman's Land and Victoria. Jane joined Anne Clarke's company in Hobart and both noted dancers, along with Madame Veilburn, performed in entrepreneur George Coppin's theatrical company.³⁰ Three years later the country towns of Ballarat, Bendigo, Castlemaine and Geelong had their own theatres.³¹

During the years 1844 to 1852 Gerolamo Carandini and Andrew Torning, who was lessee, manager and ballet master, created and produced most of the ballets staged at the Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney. Madame Strebinger performed in Geelong, Melbourne, Sydney and Launceston commencing in July 1853. By 1855 new theatres had opened in Melbourne, Carandini had joined Strebinger, Antoinette Berg had arrived from Berlin and theatres continued to promote talented dancers. On 29 October 1855, there was a performance of *Giselle* at the Theatre Royal, Sydney, which was produced by Strebinger. This first foray into Romantic ballet impressed neither the audience nor the critics and the remaining performances were cancelled. Undeterred by this contretemps, Carandini and Strebinger danced in the first pantomime presented at the Theatre Royal. In June 1856 a very successful *La Sylphide* was staged by Strebinger, the Chambers Family and Tilly Earle at the Queen's Theatre, Melbourne. Strebinger toured the Australian colonies for 13 years in a great variety of roles, finally departing to dance in America with an opera company.³²

John and Rachel Lazar moved to South Australia in 1841 as he was hired to manage the Queens Theatre, with a 1200-seat capacity, but they returned to Sydney in May as the theatre closed, being too big for the population, Brisbane, op.cit., p.24.

²⁷ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.7–9,13; Cumes, op.cit., pp.80,292; Searle, Geoffrey, *From Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia 1788–1972*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1973, 1987, p.44; Cargher, op.cit., p.200, *Currency Companion*, Josephine Fantasia, John Whiteoak, 'Before the Gold Rushes,' p.253; Alison Gyger, 'Star Soprano on Stage,' p.468; Elizabeth L. Creese with Michael Brown and James Grierson, 'Management,' p.406; John Whiteoak, 'Minstrel Shows,' p.415; Carolyn Laffan, 'Ice Dancing,' p.322; Bagot, Alec, *Coppin the Great: Father of the Australian Theatre*, Melbourne University Press, Vic., 1965, pp.3–5,9,55,69,81–83.

²⁸ Guest, Ivor, *The Romantic Ballet in France*, Pitman, London, 1966, p.12; Kirstein, Lincoln, *Dance: A Short History of Classic Theatrical Dancing*, Dance Horizons, New York, 1974, p.243; Kant, Marion, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007, Lucia Luprecht, 'The Romantic Ballet and its Critics: Dance goes Public,' pp.175–183.

²⁹ Lawson, Joan, *A History of Ballet and Its Makers*, Dance Books, London, 1973, pp.44–50; Kirstein, op.cit., pp.214–222.

³⁰ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.5–13; Parsons, Phillip, gen. ed. with Chance, Victoria, *Concise Companion to the Theatre in Australia*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1997, p.243; Kant, op.cit., pp.175–183; Brisbane, op.cit., pp.46–55; for details of the Taglioni family, see Clarke and Vaughan, op.cit., pp.330–331.

³¹ It is possible that the first pantomime (*The Red Gnome*) and the first ballet (*Le Danseur Distrait*) presented in Victoria were staged at Geelong's Theatre Royal. Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.13–16; Tait, *Dames*, pp.76,78,81; *Currency Companion*, Edward H. Pask, 'Romantic Ballets,' p.70.

³² Brisbane, op.cit., pp.46–47,50,55–56.

Among the thousands who found their way to Australia during the 1850s gold rushes were dancers from various countries of the world and a small percentage did not return to their respective homelands. The period between 1853 and 1870 became significant for dancers and Australian culture as new works, particularly Romantic ballets, were introduced.³³ From the preceding abridged dance history it is obvious that, within a short span of time, 40 to 50 years since the first theatre was erected, a great many theatrical activities which included ballet were available to the public. This strong focus on ballet was not to be repeated until Kirsova and Borovansky entered the scene in the next century. The second wave of pioneers set the scene for the “second Act,” as Pask notes. Australia was still the destination of many overseas companies and artists, and many chose to remain in this country. Their status as pioneers, albeit of the second rank, should still be acknowledged.

Lola Montez (Gilbert) began her tour of the Australian colonies in August 1855 after an extremely short period of dance training and several years of political intrigue in Europe. *Lola Montez in Bavaria* was a burlesque drama about her adventures. Andrew Torning and his wife appeared with Montez in this production and, before he moved to America, she gave them the rights, costumes and sets. Louise Torning and Julia Matthews took over the title role, and Joseph Chambers and George Coppin parodied the ‘Spider Dance’ during performances at Ballarat (1856) and Adelaide (1857). The ‘Spider Dance’ is now synonymous with Montez.³⁴

A very successful theatrical group from London, the Leopold Family, accepted George Coppin’s three-year contract to perform at Melbourne’s Theatre Royal. Their season opened on 25 January 1858 with *The Spanish Galician Fete*, which included a *corps de ballet* of 15, followed in the same year by Tom Leopold’s ballet, *The Sultan’s Choice*. They also presented their version of the Romantic ballet *La Fille du Danube* and, after appearing in the pantomime *Dick Whittington*, they began touring. The Leopold Family returned to Australia in May 1862 for another extensive tour and then became permanent settlers.³⁵

The arrival of the Schmidts (Jules and his French wife, Therese) fostered interest in Romantic ballet, as he commenced rehearsing *Giselle* in September 1858. Included in the cast was Fanny Sinclair, a *danseuse* originally from Hobart, Australian-born Tilly Earle, and Henry and George Leopold. Jules Schmidt formed a company staging numerous ballets, including the only recorded production of *Pas des Deeses* presented outside London during the Romantic era. Their production of *Giselle* was

59; *Currency Companion*, Edward H. Pask, ‘Romantic Ballets,’ p.70; Josephine Fantasia, John Whiteoak, ‘Before the Gold Rushes,’ p.253; Josephine Fantasia, John Whiteoak, ‘Minstrel Shows,’ p.415; Edward H. Pask, ‘Trained in the Colonies,’ p.70.

Carandini, principal *danseur*, *Giselle*, 1855, Theatre Royal, Melbourne; Cargher, op.cit., pp.4–5,7,14. Carandini established a dancing school in Sydney shortly after his arrival in 1844; Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.23–24. Strebinger trained at the *Theatre de l’Opera* in Paris. Created roles in Perrot’s *Esmeralda* and Arthur Saint-Leon’s *Vivandere*, London 1844; Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.20–21.

Chambers, Joseph. Born 1837, died 1874. Trained by his father, Joseph, who had been a dancer with the Royal Italian Opera in London. Sister and two brothers also dancers and, with their father, became the Chambers Family; Cargher, op.cit., pp.200,205.

³³ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.1–24; Cargher, op.cit., pp.7,201–205; Tait, *Dames*, p.83; *Currency Companion*, Claudia Funder, John Whiteoak, ‘Dance Training,’ p.226.

³⁴ Kant, op.cit, p.183; Foley, Doris, *The Divine Eccentric*, Westernlore Press, Los Angeles, U. S. A., 1969, pp.152–154; Cargher, op.cit., pp.203,204; *Currency Companion*, Amanda Card, ‘Spider Dances,’ p.219; Porter, Hal, *Stars of Australian Stage and Screen*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1965, pp.39,40; Dunstan, Keith, *Knockers*, Cassell, Vic. and NSW, 1972, pp.284–289; Brisbane, op.cit., pp.56–57.

Torning, Andrew. Born 1814, died 1900. Producer, dancer and choreographer for ballet productions at the Royal Victoria Theatre. Torning was also an actor, entrepreneur, pantomimist, painter and scene decorator.

Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.6–7; Tait, *Dames*, pp.69–70,72; Cargher, op.cit., pp.200–205.

Montez, Lola (Gilbert). Born Ireland 1818. Eloped and abandoned at 14. Studied for four months with a Spanish teacher, debut at Her Majesty’s Theatre, London, not successful. Engaged to dance at the Paris Opera House 1844, again unsuccessful. After performing in several European cities and some diplomatic intrigue in Russia, Lola became Countess Landsfeld; Guest, Ivor, *The Romantic Ballet in Paris*, Pitman, London, 1966.

³⁵ Leopold Family: Tom (1829–1870), Henry (1832–1907), Fraulein Fanny (1835–?), George (1836–1904) attended classes with Bournonville. Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.38–41; *Currency Companion*, Amanda Card, ‘Dance on the Popular Stage,’ p.218; Aline Scott-Maxwell, ‘Theatrical Exotica,’ p.52; Edward H. Pask, ‘Trained in the Colonies,’ p.70; Tait, *Dames*, p.70; Cargher, op.cit, p.201.

presented at the Prince of Wales Theatre, Sydney, on 4 July 1859 with Adelaide Hart in the principal role. In June 1862 Schmidt was ready for a four-week season at the Theatre Royale, Ballarat, which already had a dance troupe of its own, capably tutored by Miss Louise (formerly Miss Collins) and Joseph Chambers. The Schmidts left Australia in 1862 to rejoin the Lehman Ballet in America.³⁶

Joseph Chambers was the first *premier danseur* to be trained in Australia. From the age of seventeen he partnered *danseuses* such as Aurelia Dimier and Therese Strebinger, both of whom offered him the chance to study in Europe with famous dancers and choreographers, but he decided to remain in Australia. By 1870 Chambers had settled in Sydney to become *maître de danse* at the Prince of Wales Opera House and, with his sister, was running a ballet school attached to the theatre. Tragically, he died of tuberculosis in 1874 after a brilliant career as *premier danseur*, mimic, choreographer and teacher.³⁷

Lyster's Royal English and Italian Opera Company was formed during the 1860s and toured the Australian colonies for 15 years. This company became significant in the evolution of ballet in Australia, as one-act ballets were presented as a section of the program as well as ballet ensembles which formed part of the opera, and most Australian dancers were in Lyster's company. This is an astounding revelation: the realisation that, almost 150 years ago, dancers in Australia were given the opportunity to perform in their own country and that this career opening existed almost into the next generation. Forward the clock some 80 to 90 years and we find a different situation. Serious ballet students and even some dancers who managed to gain experience in Australia acknowledged that they must leave their country to finish their training and hopefully gain employment in an overseas company.

During the time of Lyster's opera performances, there appeared to be a decline in the ballet scene. It was during 1867 when the Martinette Troupe and the Lehman Ballet arrived from America. Before the end of that year, the Martinettes had left Australia but the Lehman Ballet remained, forming a branch company which included Jules and Therese Schmidt and a *corps de ballet* of 12. While most of the dancers in this company left Australia in 1868, Gustav Massartie remained to form his own troupe. Later he became *maître de danse* and *premier danseur* at the Theatre Royal, Melbourne, and taught up until his death in 1885.³⁸

When an Italian opera company came to Australia in 1876, a talented dancer, Signorina Emilia Pasta, was one of its members. She remained in Australia as a renowned teacher of pantomime dancers, opening dance schools which were attached to J. C. Williamson's theatres in each state. Pasta taught in Melbourne until she died in 1922. Among the students to learn their craft from her were Mary Weir, Minnie Everett, Minnie Hooper and Jennie Brenan. There are presentday dancers who can claim "lineal descent through their teachers from members of the Royal Ballerinas," thereby signifying a connection to the many 'Royal' theatres in Australia at that time.³⁹

The American actor James Cassius Williamson and his wife, Maggie Moore, actor, dancer, singer, first came to Australia in July 1874 to appear in *Struck Oil* and *The Fool in the Family*. They returned in 1879 to star in *H. M. S. Pinafore* and with a contract from William S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan to present more of their works. Williamson decided on a managerial position and Moore continued performing.⁴⁰ In 1882 Williamson was approached by George Musgrove and Arthur Garner, both

³⁶ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.47,49,50,52; Cargher, op.cit., pp.203,205; Koegler, op.cit., pp.286–287; Tait, *Dames: Pas de Desses* recorded in *Judgement de Paris* as "the centrepiece ... where Juno, Pallas and Venus try in vain to win the favours of Paris," p.100; Lauri, George, *The Australian Theatre Story: A Romantic Informal History*, Peerless Press, Sydney, 1960, p.10.

³⁷ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.61–64; Brisbane, op.cit., 'A Dancer and Ballets from the Paris Opera,' p.56; Cargher, op.cit., p.205, *Currency Companion*, Edward H. Pask, 'Trained in the Colonies,' p.70.

³⁸ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.56–60; Cargher, op.cit., pp. 201,205; *Currency Companion*, Edward H. Pask, 'Trained in the Colonies,' p.70.

³⁹ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.61–78; Cargher, op.cit., pp.206–207,210; interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Edna Busse at her residence, Wagga Wagga, NSW, 6 June 2010.

⁴⁰ Tait, Viola, Lady, *A Family of Brothers, the Tait's and J. C. Williamson: A Theatre History*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1971, pp.42–44; Dicker, Ian G., *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, Sydney, 1995, p.184; Cargher, op.cit., pp.207,209–210. *Currency Companion*, Josephine Fantasia, John Whiteoak, 'Actors turned Entrepreneurs,' p.253; David Spicer, 'Gilbert and Sullivan,' p.300.

experienced and prosperous entrepreneurs, with the view to forming a partnership. Williamson accepted the business proposition, each party pledging 2000 pounds, and ‘the Triumvirate’ was born. Williamson, Musgrove and Garner, known as ‘the Firm,’ were partners from 1882 to 1890, then operated as Williamson, Garner and Company until 1891.⁴¹ In 1886 a young cadet reporter, recently arrived from Ireland, started work as an assistant to Williamson at the Theatre Royal, Melbourne. George Tallis became tour manager of the Melbourne theatres and, eventually, Williamson’s private secretary. He remained with ‘the Firm’ until 1938 and spent 18 of those years as Chairman of Directors.⁴²

The Royal Comic Opera Company’s production *Sinbad the Sailor*, with Marie Reddall in Melbourne and Emilia Pasta in Sydney as ballet mistresses in charge of a permanent ballet of trained dancers, had its debut in Melbourne, 26 December 1888. During that year Reddall (formerly of the Gaiety Theatre, London) developed the Royal Ballerinas for the Firm’s musical productions. She returned to England in 1892 after establishing the highest quality of dance seen to date in Williamson’s shows. Around this time a theatrical revival was currently sweeping the world, with many choreographers returning to the pure technique of classical ballet.⁴³

As well as setting up the Royal Comic Opera Company, Williamson was also responsible for introducing Australia to the Entire Grand Opera Company, which was complemented with a classical ballet company of 100 dancers. Ninety of these were Australians and New Zealanders (instructed by Madame Rosalie Philippini), eight *coryphees* were Londoners and the two principal artists were Catherine Bartho from the Imperial Ballet School, Moscow, and Enrichetta D’Argo, an Italian prima ballerina. Phillipini’s *Turquoise* or *A Study in Blue*, the first classical ballet entirely conceived, produced and performed in Australia, September 1893, was the creation of this ballet company.⁴⁴

In 1897 Minnie Everett choreographed her first ballet for Henry Gracy’s New Comic Opera Company, Bijou Theatre, Melbourne. She was to become firmly established in Williamson’s productions as both a *premiere danseuse* and choreographer, and was the first Australian to be given the position of Director of the Royal Ballerinas. Her name appeared on programs for the first 30 years of the 20th century. Everett was instrumental in the staging of several operettas from 1900 to 1911 and choreographed the grand ballet for Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Emerald Isle* 1903 Melbourne production. Williamson staged a revival of *Sinbad the Sailor* in 1912 with Everett as choreographer and ballet mistress. The *corps de ballet* appears, dressed for the beach, in the One Hundredth Performance Souvenir Programme.

After J. C. Williamson’s death in 1913 but during George Tallis’s administration, the Firm merged with John and Neville Tait (1920), creating Australian theatrical history for the next 50 years.⁴⁵

The abridged section on dance in *The Pattern of Australian Culture* presents a misleading, if not false, representation of Australian dance teachers. McLeod claims that “teachers taught uninterested youngsters the basic mechanics of song and dance routines or tap dancing rather than the technique of

Williamson, James Cassius. Born Pennsylvania, U. S. A., 1854, died 1913. Actor, theatrical entrepreneur. Together with Arthur Garner and George Musgrove, created the first Australian theatre chain in the 1880s. He branched out on his own in 1890 and J. C. Williamson Theatres Limited continued until the 1970s.

⁴¹ Tait, *A Family*, pp.47–48; Dicker, op.cit., pp.110,187–188.

⁴² Stone, Richard, ‘The Business of Show Biz: The Tallis Collection,’ National Library of Australia, *News*, July 2002, Vol.XII, No.10, p.1 of 4. George Tallis bequeathed his country estate *Beleura*, situated on the Mornington Peninsula, to the people of Victoria as a living memorial.

⁴³ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.82–85; *Currency Companion*, Amanda Card, ‘High-kicking Chorus Line,’ p.219; Shirley McKecknie, ‘Choreographers,’ p.131; Edward H. Pask, ‘Royal Ballerinas,’ p.71 and ‘Dance Training,’ p.226 (Pasta trained most of the Royal Ballerinas formed in 1888 – Mary Weir, Minnie Everett, Minnie Hooper, Jennie Brenan); McLeod, A. L. ed., *The Pattern of Australian Culture*, Cornell University Press, U. S. A., 1963, p.342.

⁴⁴ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp. 86–88; Cargher, op.cit., p.207; Tait, *Dames*, p.117, *Currency Companion*, Shirley McKecknie, ‘Choreographers,’ p.131; Aline Scott-Maxwell, ‘Theatrical Exotica’ (*Djin Djin the Japanese bogie man* [1892] was written by J. C. Williamson), p.52; Philippini’s choreography was described by John Whiteoak as “highly creative,” ‘Fitting it all Together,’ p.49.

⁴⁵ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.93,98,99; Cargher, op.cit., p.210, *The Emerald Isle* theatre program, State Library of Victoria; Searle, op.cit., pp.103–104.

ballet”.⁴⁶ If this scenario was the case, where did the dancers come from who performed in the first season of the Australian Ballet, a national company, in 1962? The point I am arguing is mainly to do with the time frame for this type of statement. I concede that, in the period between the two world wars, there were some dance schools that adhered to haphazard methods of teaching (song and dance, acrobatics, badly taught tap dancing, very young girls performing high-kicks, marching and even tap dancing in pointe shoes). However, this book was published in 1963, by which time there were numerous reputable ballet schools operating throughout Australia, including Borovansky’s Dance Academy (established 1938) and the Australian Ballet School, which opened that year in Melbourne. Accredited ballet organisations such as the Cecchetti Society, Royal Academy of Dancing, Commonwealth Society of Teachers of Dancing and the British Ballet Organisation had all been active in Australia conducting examinations and ensuring that pupils received the correct training since the 1930s.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Edward Pask, John Cargher and Katherine Brisbane reveal that early dance training, although it is sometimes referred to as theatrical dance (stage dance) rather than ballet syllabi as we know them today, was available and taught to Australians soon after settlement. A knowledge of what occurred in Australia from its earliest theatrical beginnings transfers the past into the present, thereby measuring the achievements of the dancers who came after them. It also picks up the awakening attitude of early teachers who realised that there was a lack in the technique side of their craft and did as much as they could at the time to redress the situation. Although travelling overseas by sea progressed rapidly when ships started to become modernised, two world conflicts and a global depression within the first half of the 20th century were not helpful in enabling dance teachers to further their knowledge.

Several outstanding Australian dance teachers emerged from the mid-1890s onwards: Alice Mason-Beatty, Marjorie Hollinshed, Nellie Lawrence, Minnie Hooper, Minnie Everett and Jennie Brenan. Mason-Beatty was the founder in 1894 of the oldest surviving school of dance in Queensland. An examiner for the Royal Academy of Dancing, Phyllis Danaher, who also became principal of this school, said: “It is not a coincidence that the majority of Queenslanders to dance with Borovansky’s Australian ballet companies ... have either been her pupils or ... have had tuition with her.”⁴⁸ Lawrence was one of Mason-Beatty’s first pupils, but she also received tuition from Everett in Sydney. She operated her own school from 1899 to 1912, which survived until 1945 under various teachers. Hollinshed with Margaret St Ledger were the principals in charge of Mason-Beatty’s school from 1924 to 1932. During the Pavlova company’s 1929 Brisbane season she was tutored by Laurent Novikoff, later learning the Royal Academy of Dancing’s syllabus from Eunice Weston in Sydney.⁴⁹ Eunice Weston, trained by Judith Espinosa in London, moved to Australia in 1927 to start her own school in Melbourne teaching the Association of Operatic Dancing of Great Britain syllabus. She was guest teacher at the first summer school of classical ballet (1929), which was held in Brisbane and organised by Hollinshed. When Jennie Brenan discovered that Eunice Weston had given her lessons, she cancelled her invitation for Hollinshed to teach in her studio.⁵⁰ As an experienced dancer and teacher, Weston worked assiduously in establishing ballet in Australia, contacting both the organisations she was associated with regarding examinations for Australian pupils.⁵¹ Jennie Brenan incorporated the Royal Academy of Dancing syllabus into her academy during the 1930s. She accepted the position of Victorian representative and ballet examinations were held in His (later Her) Majesty’s Theatre until the 1960s. Brenan was long associated with J. C. Williamson’s, creating ballets for operettas, musicals and pantomimes (including the record 97 performances of

⁴⁶ McLeod, *op.cit.*, pp.342–344.

⁴⁷ The British Ballet Organisation (B. B. O.) was founded in London in 1930. It has been taught in Australasia since 1937 with examinations in classical ballet and Scottish highland dancing. In 1988 it was registered as British Ballet Australia Limited and National Dancing Association of Australia. After breaking ties with England one year later, the organisation now operates as Ballet Australasia Limited and National Dancing Association of Australia, *Currency Companion*, Robina Beard, ‘Breach with London,’ p.261.

⁴⁸ Hollinshed, Marjorie, *Some Professional Dancers of or from Queensland, and some Teachers of the Past*, W. R. Smith & Patterson, Brisbane, 1963, pp.xii,19,30,31,73.

⁴⁹ Hollinshed, *op.cit.*, pp.xiv,31–34,48.

⁵⁰ *Currency Companion*, Claudia Funder, John Whiteoak, ‘Scanty Information,’ pp.226–227; Claudia Funder, John Whiteoak, ‘Demarcation in Teaching,’ p.228.

⁵¹ Vincent, *op.cit.*, pp.148–149.

Mother Goose), as well as many of the *corps de ballet* originating from her school. Emilia Pasta trained dancers to perform in operetta and pantomime until 1922; Rosalie and Heloise Duvalli, operatic and acrobatic *danseuses*, taught in Melbourne from 1884 to 1912; Marie Reddall was an English ballet mistress, dancer and choreographer; Rosalie Phillipini was an English choreographer; and Minnie Hooper and Minnie Everett both taught dance and worked with J. C. Williamson's. All these women were connected to the early days of ballet in Australia by the value of their teaching and choreographic abilities.⁵²

Anna Pavlova was unable to continue plans for an Australian tour in 1914 due to the beginning of the First World War, so it was not until February 1926 that the long-awaited event became a reality. Pavlova's first performance in Australia, partnered by Novikoff, was witnessed by over 2000 people on 13 March at His Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne. Robert Helpmann's career was launched during this season, after Pavlova had auditioned and accepted him as a student dancer in her company. There was a second visit of the Pavlova company in 1929 which included Thadee Slavinsky, Edouard Borovansky, Harcourt Algernoff and Estelle Anderson, who later taught the Cecchetti syllabus until her death in 1971. Weston, who trained the 'supers' (extras) for the Melbourne season and conducted some classes for the *corps de ballet*, was especially esteemed by Pavlova for her assistance. The Pavlova tours proved to be the catalyst for a more serious attitude towards classical ballet training, as she inspired many young Australians to take up the challenge of this art.⁵³

Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes changed the perception of ballet by bringing the focus back to the *premier danseur* as an artist in his own right. Vaslav Nijinsky became the name forever associated with this era. He was the main attraction and his influence on the art of ballet profound.⁵⁴ Anton Dolin "disliked obvious homosexuality and hated any signs of effeminacy." Nijinsky's ballets focused on the body and rejected artificiality, and included both sensual and sensitive moves which were dynamic and skilful.⁵⁵ Another famous male dancer, Sergei Grigoriev (1883–1968), who was a member of Diaghilev's company for 20 years, came to Australia with de Basil's Ballets Russes in 1939.⁵⁶

At this particular time Australian men significantly avoided dance as they were unable to find a satisfactory way of dealing with their masculine identity and the ballet 'body'. The city of Adelaide did not tolerate effeminacy. Male dancers being referred to as 'sissies' and homosexuals was a perpetual torment, placing them outside the wall of accepted society: "There was no barrier to keep those qualities from contaminating Australian men."⁵⁷ However, the Ballets Russes dancers exhibited a more virile style, which would become the beacon for Australian male dancers to follow. Only a few years were to elapse before Diaghilev's former dancers and associates started to visit Australia. These visits continued for almost 30 years, and the artists who decided to remain in Australia and teach can be credited with the foundation of ballet as an art form in this country. In passing on traditions which

⁵² Australia Dancing – Brenan, Jennie (1877–1964)
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/28.html, 30/8/05.

Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.97–98; *Currency Companion*, Edward H. Pask, 'Dance Training,' p.226 (Minnie Hooper, Minnie Everett, Emilia Pasta, Duvalli sisters); Shirley McKechnie, 'Choreographers,' p.131 (Rosalie Phillipini).

⁵³ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.114–120,123–128; Vincent, op.cit., pp.119–121,123; Cargher, op.cit., p.212, *Currency Companion*, Edward H. Pask, 'Pavlova's Company,' pp.72–73; McLeod, op.cit., p.343; Koegler, op.cit., p.391 (Novikoff); Searle, op.cit., p.155. (Robert Helpmann added the extra 'n' to his name when he started performing.)

Australia Dancing – Pavlova, Anna (1881–1931)
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/51.html, pp.1–2, 8/10/05.

(As attested by a photograph, *The Age*, 1946, of young students grouped around the Royal Academy of Dancing examiner, Madam Judith Espinosa, Pavlova was still being acknowledged as the 'star' aspiring ballerinas should follow 40 years after her first Australian tour.)

⁵⁴ Philp, Richard and Witney, Mary, *Danseur: The Male in Ballet*, Jeanne McClow editor-in-chief, McGraw-Hill, U. S. A., 1977, pp. 57–71.

Nijinsky, Vaslav Fomich. Born Kiev 1888, died London 1950. Dancer and choreographer. Student at the Imperial School of Ballet, St Petersburg. Brother of Bronislava Nijinska – pioneer of modern dance. Clarke and Vaughan, op.cit., pp.253–54; Lawson, Joan, op.cit., pp.30–38; Koegler, op.cit., pp.385–86.

⁵⁵ Burt, Ramsay, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*, Routledge, London, 1995, pp.84,98.

⁵⁶ *Currency Companion*, Edward H. Pask, 'Choreographic Drama,' p.73.

⁵⁷ Vincent, op.cit., pp.131–33,135.

took many years to evolve, they influenced the generations who were struggling to prove their ability to create their own national ballet company.⁵⁸

A resurgence in pure ballet in Australia can be dated from 1913, when Adeline Genée and members of the Imperial Russian Ballet toured Australia from June to October and Fokine's *The Dying Swan* was seen for the first time in this country. Ten Australian women, including Jennie Brenan's talented pupil Addie Hine, joined the Russian *corps de ballet* for this tour. Genée and the ballet master, Alexander Volinine, both agreed that Australian dancers demonstrated an "easy grace and swinging gait that are the results of free and healthy outdoor life,"⁵⁹ were willing to work and had been well trained.⁶⁰ After the Imperial Russian Ballet's tour, Australia witnessed "ballet choreography almost exclusively of works brought by companies directed by Anna Pavlova or Colonel de Basil."⁶¹ This was Genée's last theatrical appearance apart from charity performances. She became the first president of the Royal Academy of Dancing in 1920 and a Genée scholarship continues to be awarded every year by that organisation. She was the first dancer to be honoured as a Dame of the British Empire and in 1967 the Adeline Genée Theatre was opened in Sussex.⁶²

A young Australian *danseuse* who achieved success in her native country as well as overseas during the years 1913 to 1921 was Ivy Schilling. She is also credited with being possibly the first Australian *danseuse* to appear in an Australian-made movie, *The Blue Mountains Mystery*. Later Schilling formed a partnership with Australian dancer and choreographer Fred Leslie. Working together, they created their acclaimed 'Spider routine,' little knowing the impact one of their performances was to have on a young Robert (Bobbie) Helpmann:

So while Anna Pavlova may have been Helpman's great inspiration to make a career as a dancer, as a man of the theatre his fate was sealed the night he watched Leslie and Schilling in 'The Spider and the Fly.'⁶³

Two years before Pavlova's second tour, British dancer and teacher Eunice Weston had become a resident of Melbourne, setting up her school in Collins Street. She was connected to the Association of Operatic Dancing of Great Britain, as well as holding a ballet certificate from the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (Cecchetti method). However, it was the former organisation which officially appointed her its Australian representative in September 1929. On 6 September 1931 Weston organised a meeting of interested dance teachers, which resulted in the formation of the Victorian Society of Teachers of Dancing. The following year Weston, Jennie Brenan, Lucy Saranova, Minnie Everett and A. Foxtrotter arranged a panel to ascertain membership requirements. This scheme was

⁵⁸ Pask, *The Second Act*, pp.101–103.

⁶⁰ As quoted in *Currency Companion*, Edward H. Pask, 'Ballets Russes,' p.72.

Genée, Adeline, Dame. Born Anina Margarete Jenson in Denmark, died England 1970. Trained by her uncle (Alexander Genée) and Antonia Zimmerman – pupils of M. Petipa and Johansson. Prima ballerina of the Empire Theatre, London, 1897 to 1909. Gadan and Maillard, op.cit., p.157; Clark and Vaughan, op.cit., p.151; Cargher, op.cit., p.208; Koegler, op.cit., p.216.

(How was it possible for these ten girls to dance in the *corps de ballet* alongside artists from overseas if they had not been trained – both Genée and Volinine considered them well trained. Some 50 years later a writer claims that "Australians were trained only to perform fancy dancing.")

⁶¹ *Currency Companion*, Shirley McKechnie, 'Choreographers,' p.131.

⁶² Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.101–111.

⁶³ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, p.112; Potter, op.cit., pp.12–14; *Currency Companion*, Amanda Card, 'Spider Dances,' p.219.

Helpmann, Robert Murray, Sir, C. B. E., K. B. E. Born Mount Gambier, SA, 1909, died 1985. Actor, dancer, director and producer. Learnt ballroom and 'fancy dancing' with Nora Stewart (Adelaide) when he was four, later lessons from Louise Larsen. Six months with Pavlova's company in 1926, coached by Novikoff. Toured as a soloist in J. C. Williamson's musicals. Vic-Wells ballet school 1925, member of Sadler's Wells *corps de ballet* 1933, Vic-Wells ballet leading dancer 1935–1950. Acting career Old Vic 1950 to 1958. Returned to Royal Ballet 1958 as Guest Artist. Resident choreographer Australian Ballet Company, Assistant Artistic Director 1970s. Salter, Elizabeth, *The Authorised Biography of Robert Helpmann, C. B. E.*, Angus & Robertson, Brighton, England, pp.17,27,30–46,140,150; Gadan and Maillard, op.cit., p.175; Clarke and Vaughan, op.cit., p.173.

abandoned, as other dance teachers would not endorse being examined by their Australian rivals.⁶⁴ After much vigorous campaigning, the situation was resolved by the Association of Operatic Dancing of Great Britain agreeing to send Felix Demery on a South African, Australian and New Zealand tour in 1935. Within the same year the Association appointed Brenan and Frances Scully as examination organisers. This had the long-lasting effects of negating Weston's efforts to establish ballet examinations, and crediting Brenan and Scully with setting up the Royal Academy of Dancing in Australia.⁶⁵ The mid-1930s heralded the beginning of a new generation of Australian dancers gaining access to world-recognised syllabi and examination procedures. Australian dancers were emerging overseas – Robert Helpmann, Laurel Martyn (dancing as Laurel Gill) and Rovi Pavinoff – while others such as Moyra Fraser, Dorothy Stevenson and Charles Boyd were studying in London.⁶⁶ The Dandre–Levitoff 'Russian Ballet Company' followed Pavlova's triumph with an Australian tour in 1934–35, sponsored by J. C. Williamson's. Prima ballerina Olga Spessivtzeva was featured in all the theatre programs as Pavlova's successor. The repertoire was superior to the Pavlova tour, and people became seriously interested and keen to witness more ballet programs.⁶⁷ At the end of the Dandre–Levitoff tour, Leon Kellaway (who had been performing under the name Jan Kowsky) settled in Sydney. After dancing in various musicals, he opened his own dancing school in 1937. He immediately formed a ballet company, Ballet Nationale, with Lynn Golding, Moya Beaver and Henry Legerton as his leading dancers, but was unable to continue when private backing was withdrawn in 1939. Kellaway returned to dancing in musicals but continued to create a significant profile in Australia as a renowned teacher of ballet.⁶⁸

Gertrude Johnson, opera singer, teacher and founder of the National Theatre, St Kilda, Victoria, returned to Australia in 1935 after many years of study and performance. After comparing her experiences away from home with those of other Australian singers, the notion that Australia should have a national theatre became more intense. Her vision encompassed ballet and drama as well as grand opera – all three arts under the one umbrella.⁶⁹ However, during the 1930s the attitude of Australian audiences to a singer without a Russian or Italian name was a distinct impediment, as reflected in the attendance of only 520 people at Johnson's recital, Melbourne Town Hall, in August 1935. Australian composer and pianist Edith Harhry ventures to add that "the attitude was the same for dancers in the 1930s."⁷⁰ This attitude did great disservice to Australian theatre and served to engender a more entrenched 'cultural cringe'. Australia had remained in this position because our country was still regarded as culturally bereft because of a lowly beginning and its inhabitants being referred to as colonials. Those early people were not recognised as worthy human beings and we attached to ourselves a theme of inferiority, particularly with regards to the arts. Australians began to believe that our artists could not be as good as overseas celebrities and this dumbing down started to permeate through Australia's theatrical world. We could be comic clowns, but never serious artists. The cultural cringe also devalued dance, with some Australian dancers performing under Russian names during the 1930s. The persistence and determination of visionary people like Gertrude Johnson and Edouard Borovansky gave Australians an opportunity to start moving away from this concept through their artistic endeavours. No-one had a pseudo-Russian name in the Borovansky Australian

⁶⁴ Vincent, op.cit., pp.144–148.

⁶⁵ Vincent, op.cit., pp.153–154.

(I was trained at the Jennie Brenan Academy of Dance, became Secretary and Examination Organiser, have been teaching the Royal Academy of Dancing syllabi for 56 years and laboured under the delusion that Brenan was the founder of this organisation in Australia.)

⁶⁶ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, p.134; Koegler, op.cit., p.350 (Martyn), p.253 (Helpmann).

⁶⁷ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.128–134; McLeod, op.cit., p.343; Koegler, op.cit., p.1 (Algernoff).

⁶⁸ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.128–134.

Australia Dancing – Leon Kellaway (1905–1990)

www.australiadancing.org/subjects/321.html, 30/08/05.

⁶⁹ Van Straten, Frank, *National Treasure: The Story of Gertrude Johnson and the National Theatre*, Victoria Press, South Melbourne, 1994, pp.41–45.

⁷⁰ Van Straten, op.cit., pp.46–49. During the 1940s and 1950s Edith Harhry was the pianist for senior classes at Brenan's ballet academy and composed the music for *Robin Hood* presented at the Union Theatre in the early 1950s.

Ballet.⁷¹

After retiring from the stage in 1936, Johnson worked assiduously towards reaching her goal. The National Theatre Movement, Victoria, with a constitutional committee which included Eunice Weston, began its life on 24 February 1936. The first production of the National Theatre was *A Joyous Pageant of the Holy Nativity*, in December 1936 and included all Weston's students. *A First Season of Ballet*, 25 and 26 July 1939, was so acclaimed that another performance had to be scheduled. The program included Dorothy Gladstone's pupils in *Swan Lake*, one of Lucy Saranova's pupils dancing *Bolero*, Jennie Brenan's pupils (trained by Laurel Martyn) in *Les Sylphides* and the Academy of Russian Dancing presented *Etude* and *Petite Mozartina*.⁷²

Tradition is defined by Valentin Zeglovsky as "the handing down of an opinion, idea or style to posterity." He considers the notion of ballet teaching tradition very much against what is thought to be sensible or reasonable, as only mature understanding and study result in the acquisition of tradition.⁷³ On the other hand, I believe that ballet tradition should be introduced to the young so that they may assimilate the relationship between learning their art in the present and how it has transformed from the past. The Russian tradition descended from folk dances which proliferated in peasant Russia. Specialist dancers, known as *skomorokhi*, performed at various noble estates, including the Tsar's court. The Court Theatre was initiated in 1629 by Mikhail Romanov and his son, Alexei, presented the first Russian ballet performance, *Ballet of Orpheus and Euridice*, in 1673. However, professional ballet was not to emerge for another 63 years and then only in the finale of an opera. A ballet school formed in St Petersburg in 1738 which eventually developed into a ballet company. Ballet was still seen as part of opera and more often at Court or on private estates than on public stages. In 1825 ballet moved into the public arena with a gala performance of *Cinderella* presented at the New Bolshoi Petrovsky Theatre.⁷⁴

A considerable time was to pass before Australian audiences experienced total Russian ballet, although there were some Imperial Russian dancers in Genée's 1913 tour and the Pavlova companies. Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes changed the course of ballet in the 20th century. The Dandre-Levitoff Russian Ballet tour in 1934 would have been a preparatory showing for what was to come. Colonel de Basil and René Blum formed several Ballets Russes companies following the death of Diaghilev in 1929 and it was de Basil who organised three of these to tour Australia between 1936 and 1940.⁷⁵ The first company, billed as Colonel W. de Basil's Monte Carlo Russian Ballet (Ballets Russes *de Monte Carlo*), was on tour for nine months between 1936 and 1937. By 1938 when the second tour of seven months began, the company was known as the Covent Garden Russian Ballet (also known as the Original Ballet Russe), presented by Educational Ballets Limited, due to a legal dispute. This company of more than 100 dancers included Borovansky and Algnernoff, who was

⁷¹ Alomes, Stephen, *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p.21.

⁷² Van Straten, op.cit., pp.51–59,61–66; Brissenden, Alan, and Glennon, Keith, *Australia Dances: Creating Australian Dance 1945–1965*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, 2010, pp.250–251; McBrien, Bruce, *Marvellous Melbourne and Me: Living in Melbourne in the 20th Century*, Melbourne Books, Melbourne, 2010, p.201 (Gladstone's Academy).

⁷³ Zeglovsky, Valentin, *Zeglovsky's Ballet Crusade*, Reed and Harris, Melbourne, Adelaide, 1943, pp.7,48–49,76,134–135.

Zeglovsky, Valentin. Born Kharkov 26 July 1908. First trained by Madame Novikova and Madame Balbo. Later Madame Feodorova. Riga State Opera *corps de ballet* and Riga Ballet Company; de Basil Ballets Russes 1936–1939; Borovansky Ballet Company.

⁷⁴ Roslavleva, Natalie, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, Da Capo Press, New York, 1979, pp.16–22, p.23–24; Terry, Walter, *Ballet Guide: Background, Listings, Credits, and Descriptions of More Than Five Hundred of the World's Major Ballets*, Dodd, Mead, New York, 1976, pp.6–9.

⁷⁵ Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.138–142; Potter, Michelle, audiovisual, *Keep Dancing* series, *The Ballets Russes in Australia: An Avalanche of Dancing*; McLeod, op.cit., p.343; Gadan and Maillard, op.cit., p.70; Koegler, op.cit., p.78. Colonel de Basil became an entrepreneur after being demobilised from the Russian army in 1919 and finding refuge in Paris. René Blum was director of the Theatre de Monte Carlo.

Algnernoff, Harcourt, born Harold Algernon Essex, London 1903, died Robinvale, Australia, 1967. His name was changed by Pavlova when he joined her company. Pavlova Company 1921, Markova-Dolan Ballet 1935, de Basil Ballets Russes 1936, International Ballet 1943, Borovansky Ballet Master 1959, Australian Ballet 1971. Opened studio in Mildura, Victoria 1959. Married Claudie Algnernova.

making his fourth visit to Australia. The famous dance critic and author Arnold Haskell accompanied the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet on its first Australian tour, which presented 35 ballets. It was during this tour that Leonide Massine's *Les Presages* was introduced to Australia. Massine was to become master of the abstract. Altogether the Ballets Russes Australian and New Zealand tours performed 773 performances. These tours took place during a period of profound global, social and political upheaval.⁷⁶ Irina Baronova, with her diverse range of roles, was very popular. She moved to Australia during the 1990s and became patron and adviser to the Australian Ballet until her death.

The press and frenetic fans followed the dancers on their tours, photographing them at picnics and parties, and they were regularly featured in the monthly magazine *The Home*. Even the fashions of the day reflected the impact of the Russian visitors. Four Australian dancers were to join this illustrious company: Phyllis Cooper, Valrene Tweedie, Alison Lee and Dorothy Stevenson, who only performed in Sydney. Dr Ewan Murray-Will often invited dancers to spend their leisure time at his retreat at Bungan Beach just north of Sydney.⁷⁷ In Victoria, Dame Mabel, wife of the Australian tennis champion Sir Norman Brooks, also invited members of the Ballets Russes to relax at their Mornington Peninsula holiday retreat.⁷⁸

The development of dance in Australia was substantially raised by the advent of the Ballets Russes tours. Young girls determined to become dancers after witnessing the many attributes of Russian ballerinas. It is debatable whether the Russian ballet had any direct impact on young boys in the audience, as the question of acceptance for the Australian male dancer remained unresolved. Those Australian males already immersed in dance were impressed by the masculinity of their style and became eager to emulate them. For the adult beholders, a stage full of exotic and extremely talented dancers was a tremendously exciting revelation. Some may have witnessed other visiting Russian artists, such as Pavlova's company, but the extent of the Ballets Russes was overwhelming, engendering colossal interest which was fostered by de Basil.

The Tait brothers of J. C. Williamson's, along with other entrepreneurs, had arranged a variety of overseas entertainment companies to tour Australia, but ever since they had brought Adeline Genée out in 1913 they had been drawn to dance. What the Tait venture did in bringing the Ballets Russes to Australia was to provide a model for a national ballet company – a model that suited Australia with its relatively small population and vast distances between cities. Australia's flagship company has always been a touring/repertory company. Before the establishment of the Australian Ballet, the Ballets Russes model was the one favoured by Borovansky when he established his company, which provided audiences across Australia with their major experience of dance for two decades. Borovansky was an essential link between the vast audiences that had been established by de Basil and what would ultimately become a modern product.⁷⁹

An unprecedented fervour for tuition in the art of classical ballet was created by the dancers of the

⁷⁶ Australia Dancing – Ballets Russes Australian Tours (1936–1940)

www.australiadancing.org/subjects/9.htm.

Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.149–157; Cargher, op.cit., p.231; Nicolette Fraillon, lecture, *Ballets Russes Australian Tours*, September 2007, Arts Centre, Melbourne; Martin, John, *John Martin's Book of the Dance*, Tudor, New York, 1970, p.51; Gadan and Maillard, op.cit., p.223; Koegler, op.cit., p.248 (Haskell), pp.352,353 (Massine).

Massine (Myasin) Leonid Fedorovitch. Born Moscow 1895. Russian dancer and choreographer. Trained Imperial School, Moscow, graduated into the Moscow Ballet 1912. Diaghilev Russian Russes 1913, Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo 1932. Illustrious dancing and choreographing career in America, Europe and Britain. Clarke and Vaughan, op.cit., p.230; Carroll, Mark, ed., *The Ballets Russes in Australia and Beyond*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, SA, 2011, pp.8–9,14,16,17,21.

On the way to Australia in 1938, two male dancers with Russian passports were not allowed to disembark at Port Said, so great was the fear of Communism; Carroll, op.cit., p.21.

The advent of new ballets that were given premieres by these companies “made up a third wave of new ideas about choreography, for example, *Les Presages* was influenced by Central European Modern Dance movements,” Christofis, Lee, ‘Annette Gillen's Touching World: Lee Christofis interviews Annette Gillen,’ *Brolga*, December 2008, p.26.

⁷⁷ Australia Dancing – Ballets Russes Australian Tours (1936–1940), op.cit., p.2; Koegler, op.cit., p.55 (Baranova).

⁷⁸ Brooks, Mabel (Dame), *Crowded Galleries*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1957, p.174.

⁷⁹ Australia Dancing – Ballets Russes tour, op.cit., p.2.

Ballets Russes, most of whom were international stars. However, an inappropriate remark by de Basil regarding the capabilities of Australian dancers led to some public debate. To extricate himself from a detrimental situation, de Basil started to support Australians, especially designers Nolan, Kathleen and Florence Martin and Sainthill. The outbreak of the Second World War completely altered de Basil's plans for his company to return to Europe and they set sail for America on 20 September 1940.⁸⁰

At the end of the 1936–37 tour Helene Kirsova resolved that, after years of continuous dancing, she would have a holiday in Australia. The extra incentive was a romance and she married in Sydney. Kirsova initially established a ballet school in that city and later the Kirsova Ballet, which was Australia's first professional ballet company.⁸¹

Due to a slow-healing injury, Thadee Slavinsky also stayed in Australia. Temporarily unable to perform, he was contracted to arrange dances for a musical play, but later joined the Borovansky ballet company. Many other former Ballets Russes dancers were instrumental in assisting our artists to shed the cultural cringe which had plagued Australians for so long. A group of Polish dancers led by Rassa Rousnetseva, Edouard Shobichevsky and Valeri Shaievsky founded the Polish–Australian Ballet in Sydney. Edouard and Xenia Borovansky settled in Melbourne, establishing a school of Russian ballet and a professional ballet company. Tamara Tchinarova performed with both the Kirsova and Borovansky companies. Kira Abricossova and her husband, Serge Bousloff, were associated with various companies in Melbourne before moving to Perth, where Abricossova established the West Australian Ballet. She summed up the attitude of these remarkable dancers: “We start a new life now!”⁸² As their new life revolved around teaching and performance, what was commenced in 1835 continued into the next century.

In 2006 a project was instituted by the Australian Ballet, National Library of Australia and University of Adelaide to commemorate the centenary of the Ballets Russes debut in the West (Paris 1909) and the 70th anniversary of de Basil's company. The following extract is from a lecture, *Ballets Russes in Australia: Our Cultural Revolution*, presented by David McAllister:

The Ballets Russes inspired a change in the artistry of ballet, and of perceptions of the art form ... paved the way for the Borovansky company and later the Australian Ballet. The influences are still evident today.⁸³

The Ballets Russes consolidated what had begun with the Pavlova company tours. The traditions of the ballet were significantly passed on by those Ballets Russes dancers who opted to remain in Australia. However, the most lasting influence emanated from Borovansky's company and the way in which he moulded Australian audiences into conversant balletomanes. He took advantage of the fact that war would preclude further tours by overseas companies. He grasped the significance of the situation and, realising that interest in ballet had escalated because of the Ballets Russes tours, knew that he had been correct in his timing. The realist in him conceded that he had to make a living and here was the opportunity to include his vision of an Australian national ballet company.

We have also learned from this chapter that the performer-teacher method continued to provide continuity of ballet training to the degree that progression within the art would be situated within this structure. The training of dancers was accomplished by artists who came to Australia primarily to

⁸⁰ *Currency Companion*, Michelle Potter, ‘Kirsova's Designers,’ p.231; *Australia Dancing – Ballets Russes Australian Tours*, op.cit., p.2; *Table Talk*, Stanley Parker, 29 July 1939, p.3.

⁸¹ Kirsova, Helene. Died London 1962. Settled in Sydney 1937. First joined Le Ballet Franco Russe and later René Blum Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo in 1931 as principal dancer. Toured Australia in 1936 with de Basil's Ballets Russes Company, marrying the Danish Consul Dr Eric Fischer a year later. Started a ballet school in Sydney, July 1940 and the Kirsova Ballet Company emanated from this. Clarke and Vaughan, op.cit., p.197; Koegler, op.cit., p.299; Salter, op.cit., pp.117–118.

⁸² *Australia Dancing – Ballets Russes Australian Tour*, op.cit., p.2; Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.149–157. Mira Dimna was another Ballets Russes dancer who ‘stayed’ in Australia, as she died on tour in 1936 and was buried in Adelaide. Her memory is perpetuated in the Children's Hospital of that city with a cot in her name. Zeglovsky remembered her as “a charming girl, with only one ambition in life, to be a good dancer;” Zeglovsky, op.cit., p.128.

⁸³ *Ballets Russes Project*, David McAllister lecture at the Annual General Meeting of the Royal Academy of Dance, 7 March 2007.

perform but had the ability to teach as well. This performer–teacher–student link was the means of introducing ballet to the colony and the practice was vital in the evolution of dance in our theatrical history. It is not clear where their training originated (some may have trained at the Paris Opera House) but, as accredited ballet training was not available in Australia until the 1930s, there was no alternative.

Borovansky had noted the athletic and strong Australian body on his first visit to Australia. His decision to form these energetic movers into a company was, to some extent, influenced by their physical difference. In her thesis, 'In pursuit of a dancing "body": Modernity, physicality and identity in Australia, 1919 to 1939,' Vincent places the Australian dancing 'body' alongside three other categories. The ballroom dancing 'body', with its American influence, was moving towards modernity where young females would shape Australian identity. The popular culture embodied by ballroom dancing "was perceived as a reflection on the changing world and shifting gender roles".⁸⁴ The physical culture 'body,' closely linked to femininity, represented the selfless nature of dance, whereas ballroom dancing was the opposite with numerous similarities to the Australian 'body.' The physical culture 'body' was healthy and could often perform outside, but still with male and female segregation. The male adherent was athletic, soldierly (lifesavers) while the female was chaste, virginal and acted for the good of society.⁸⁵

The classical ballet 'body' was influenced by popular culture, high art and professionalism. Russian dancers kept the ballet 'body' on display with their long Australian tours and it became recognisable through Russian ballet. The Australian ballet 'body' started to become associated with British ballet organisations during the 1930s. The ballet 'body' was legitimate because it stressed skill, artistic identity and classical technique. Australian men did not have much to do with ballet. The ballet 'body' brought a different masculinity to the stage. During the 1920s and 1930s men regarded the Australian masculine identity and the dancing 'body' as totally incompatible.⁸⁶ The modern dancing 'body' was a "fully formed concept" brought to Australia through European immigrant women such as Bodenwieser, Daisy Pirnitzer and Hanny Exiner, who were well-experienced exponents of their art. The modern dancing 'body' was female, sexual, "not a legitimate alternative artistic identity" but politically and socially aware, and usually Jewish. Early modern dancers were seeking a cultural association that influenced their own dancing 'body,' which was still regarded as foreign until the postwar era.⁸⁷ Modern dance was built around female emancipation, particularly bodily attitude and modernity.⁸⁸

Chapter 2 brings the first years of the Second World War into focus, including the difficulties encountered in operating a ballet company during a period of strict government control over the population. The chapter highlights the vital importance of, firstly, the operative benefits of Xenia being installed in their ballet school while Borovansky concentrated on his company and, secondly, his association with the Melbourne Ballet Club and, most importantly, his alliance with J. C. Williamson's, which guaranteed that theatres would be made available for his company's performances. All three scenarios amalgamated to give Borovansky the basis for success; the rest remained dependent on his business acumen, stamina and determination to succeed.

⁸⁴ Vincent, op.cit., pp.3,79.

⁸⁵ Vincent, op.cit., pp.80,90.

⁸⁶ Vincent, op.cit., pp.115–116,132. (South Australian men were strongly averse, hence Robert Helpmann's early exodus from his native land.)

⁸⁷ Vincent, op.cit., pp.194,199,218.

Bodenwieser, Gertrude. Born Vienna 1886, died Sydney 1959. Emigrated to Sydney 1938. Professor of dance, dancer, teacher, choreographer. Director of Tranzgruppe Bodenwieser, which was formed to develop her own modern style.

⁸⁸ *Currency Companion*, Jane Belfrage, John Whiteoak, 'Ideas in Modern Dance,' p.293.

CHAPTER 2: *The War Years (1939–1943) – Early Days*

In 1939 Australia was slowly “emerging from the aftermath of the Great Depression.”⁸⁹ The economy was still affected by drought. Australia was dependent on primary production for its export income, with a world glut of wheat. Gold mining started to level out after the 1930s boom and a Federal embargo on exporting iron ore was still in place from 1938. Unemployment was still 8 to 9 per cent and the political leadership not impressive. Robert Menzies was elected Prime Minister in April 1939. Price control was introduced from the outbreak of war. Australia’s economy was not ready, “even on paper,” for wartime emergencies.⁹⁰ Australians moved slowly in totally committing to the war effort and its privations. They were not impressed by petrol rationing, introduced before the end of 1940. In response, the Menzies Government curtailed its planning. Other state governments were able to join Queensland in rent control, but illicit transactions continued. The government set up a Department of Munitions in 1940. Import licencing was also introduced and secondary industry became stronger.⁹¹ Menzies resigned in August 1941. Arthur Fadden took over for six weeks, then John Curtin was elected Prime Minister. Payroll tax had been introduced in August 1941 and income tax was to follow in 1942.⁹²

Compulsory registration of all males aged between 18 and 64 was enacted in 1939. Women were not included; it was expected by the government that they would again assume the roles they had performed in the 1914–1918 war – fundraising, the provider of comforts, clerical etc., but nothing that suggested they were capable of leading. However, right from the beginning of the Second World War the lives of Australian women and their status in society changed forever: “Thousands of women ventured where few had gone before,” taking on jobs “previously considered the sole preserve of men”⁹³ and becoming responsible for the advancement of those who were to follow. Unfortunately, the war machine moved slowly in Australia and by 1941 only 70,000 women were employed in the armed forces or on the production line. There was a strong move by the United Association of Women to include women in the reconstruction process. This did not eventuate – Flora Eldershaw was the lone woman among 12 men who would represent women on the “Reconstruction Work of Special Interest to Women’s Organisations.”⁹⁴ Postwar reconstruction was temporarily halted when Japan entered the war in 1942, creating more urgent problems for the government. Women’s groups organising to change society’s perceptions would have to wait many years for any sign of recognition. The initial years of the war, although presenting quite a few domestic problems, allowed Borovansky time to gauge the situation in Melbourne and prescribe his plans for an Australian ballet company. He used this time to establish his Academy of Russian Ballet, gain the support of the Recorded Music Society of Melbourne (later the Melbourne Ballet Club) and present his dancers to the public via charity performances and the Melbourne Ballet Club. He also negotiated with theatrical entrepreneurs and began a campaign to prepare the Borovansky Australian Ballet company for its inaugural 1943 season. It was then that dancers and their audiences began to see how a national ballet of professional standard could develop, as the need for work opportunities and ongoing support was even stronger than before. There were young dancers eager to embrace the art of ballet, teachers who had set up schools to train them, authenticated examining bodies established during the 1930s to ensure their training was legitimate and an audience inspired by the tours of the Ballets Russes. The biggest issue for these dancers was the lack of a national ballet company that would provide the opportunity for them to perform in their own country as paid professionals.

One Australian dancer, Dorothy Stevenson, who was in London in 1937 studying dance, had

⁸⁹ Griffen, op.cit., Geoffrey Bolton, ‘Australia Since 1939,’ p.284.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ op.cit., p.285.

⁹² op.cit., p.286.

⁹³ Dinan, Jacqueline, *Between the Dances*, Jane Curry Publishing, Edgecliff, NSW, 2015: “Women contributed to the nation’s productivity and spirit in community halls, hospital wards, company departments, farm sheds, factory production lines, services units,” p.8.

⁹⁴ Macintyre, Stuart, ‘Women’s Leadership in War and Reconstruction,’ *Labour History*, No.104 (May 2013), pp.67–80, as quoted in Macintyre, ‘Miss Eldershaw to Direct Work for Women,’ *Canberra Times*, 3 June 1943, pp.67–68.

encountered Borovansky when he took the character class at the studio she was attending. Through various conversations they had between classes, Stevenson became acquainted with his forward planning. When he discovered that she was an Australian, he immediately became interested in her future intentions. On learning that she wished to join a de Basil company, he replied that he was going to Australia next year with his company: “I start my Academy. Then I start Australian Ballet ... you will come back and be one of my dancers.”⁹⁵ Borovansky must have made a quick assessment of Stevenson’s dancing ability and resolve in making such a statement, as she did dance in a de Basil company and she did return to Australia to become one of Borovansky’s leading dancers. Stevenson was quietly amused by this sweeping statement, particularly as she was aware of the Australian attitude towards home-grown artists. Frank Salter called it ‘A Lunatic Scheme.’⁹⁶ In general, Australian artists were subjected to the notion that if you were Australian you were naturally inferior to other nationalities, and particularly the innuendo that British was best. This became a feeling that engulfed performers like a miasma. Our detractors took the attitude that we were a tainted race because of our original background. We were poor stock, content to live in a cultural desert and destined to be non-achievers. The exodus to London seeking benediction was a tag we wore for some time. Borovansky had decided by 1937 to proceed with his Australian dream and by doing so proved everyone wrong: “Borovansky made several useful contacts, decided on Melbourne, and forged ahead” without money or possessions, only faith in his ability to survive.⁹⁷

In 1938 Stevenson (dancing as Katia Assenkova) toured with de Basil’s Covent Garden Russian Ballet. When the Original Ballets Russes returned in December 1939, Stevenson, Phyllida Cooper, Alison Lee and Valrene Tweedie were among Australians who danced in this company. Stevenson, mindful of parental concern and heeding the advice of Victor Dandre that war was not conducive to fostering ballet productions, decided to remain in Australia. Borovansky now had his own studio, complete with enthusiastic students, and Stevenson directed her attention towards this enterprise. By the early 1940s she had become one of Borovansky’s principal dancers, as well as venturing into choreography.⁹⁸

When Borovansky left the Covent Garden Ballets Russes in April 1939, there were others who were also reluctant to become involved in European politics, as Irina Baronova recalls.⁹⁹ These dancers also made substantial contributions to Australian ballet as teachers and choreographers and through their involvement in the setting up of various companies. In an article on the Ballets Russes, Baronova records that “Borovansky ... established a ballet school and the Borovansky Ballet, the precursor to today’s Australian Ballet.”¹⁰⁰ This last statement, by a respected Russian ballerina with a lifetime of balletic knowledge, should be accepted – Borovansky came before van Praagh – however, Baronova’s book was published far too late.

With the commencement of the Borovansky Academy of Russian Ballet, the school gained two pupils whose achievements in Australian ballet were profound. Edna Busse had had varied forms of training and experience before arriving at the Borovansky studio and had been sent to Majorie Bray’s school, where Eunice Weston was employed to teach classical ballet. Later it had been arranged that she

⁹⁵ Stevenson, Dorothy, Papers of Dorothy Stevenson, *The Borovansky Ballet*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, p.2.

⁹⁶ Stevenson, op.cit., p.2; Salter, Frank, *Borovansky*, ‘A Lunatic Scheme,’ pp.66–74.

⁹⁷ Stevenson, op.cit., pp.3–4. One of these useful contacts could have been Dolia Ribush, who became a close friend to Borovansky and was “a Russian who produced a great deal of amateur theatre” and “knew enough about lighting to teach him,” Salter, op.cit., p.142.

⁹⁸ Australia Dancing – Stevenson, Dorothy (1916–)

www.australiadancing.org/subjects/1310.html 8/03/05.

Salter, op.cit., pp.100,109; *Currency Companion*, Edward H. Pask, ‘Choreographic Drama,’ p.73.

⁹⁹ Baronova, Irina, *Ballet, Life and Love*, Penguin, Vic., 2005, p.296; Clarke and Vaughan, op.cit., p.50.

“Abricosova was an influential private teacher and choreographer who received an Australian Lifetime Achievement Dance Award ... the West Australian Ballet represents a vital connection with Australian dance history,” Michelle Potter, ‘Madame Ballet,’ National Library of Australia *News*, April 2006.

Bousloff, Serge

www.australiadancing.org/subjects/2021.html 30/8/05.

¹⁰⁰ Amanda Dunn, ‘Pointe of View of the Ballerina who raised the Barre,’ *Sunday Age*, 17 July 2005. Baronova was 86 and living in Byron Bay, NSW.

should attend Jennie Brenan's academy and from there she became a junior dancer employed by J. C. Williamson's. Busse spent 18 months as a pupil of Weston and remembers Xenia and Edouard Borovansky arriving to watch one of these classes; shortly after that, Weston closed her school and amalgamated with them. This was a fortuitous fate for Busse as she now became a pupil of Xena at the correct physical stage to evolve into a professional ballet dancer. The relationship between them soon developed into one more like mother–daughter than mentor–student. It was at this stage that Busse became an unpaid junior assistant to Weston, who was unkind and made trouble for her among the other girls. Busse considered Weston possessed a crafty personality and was nasty to students, which caused them to hate one another, and to this day only remembers her with intense dislike.¹⁰¹ I found no other references that clarified this behaviour by Weston. She may have been reacting against the realisation that the Borovanskys had no intention of allowing her to maintain a proprietorial position after she had closed her own school to amalgamate with them. In her thesis, Vincent mainly deals with “devotion to the cause of establishing ballet in Australia.”¹⁰²

Martin Rubinstein, born in Germany where dancing was part of the educational system, had learnt acrobatics and central European dance (early Martha Graham style). Through a misunderstanding of the English language when his family first arrived in Australia in 1939, Martin found himself in a classical ballet class at Jennie Brenan's academy. He was naturally talented and accomplished a great deal in a short time, becoming the first male candidate to attain the Royal Academy of Dancing Solo Seal in Australia. Rubinstein finished his training with Xenia and became a member of the Borovansky Australian Ballet *corps de ballet*. He was rapidly promoted to principal dancer and launched an amazing ballet career – *danseur*, teacher and major examiner – the first Australian to be sent on a world examining tour by the Royal Academy of Dancing.¹⁰³

Laurel Martyn's first training was in eurythmic dancing from one teacher and the rudiments of classical ballet from another. From Brisbane, Queensland, she moved to London to study the Royal Academy of Dancing syllabus with Phyllis Bedells, who told her it was remarkable that she did not have to relearn anything. The assumption that it was not likely that Martyn would have been taught correctly in Australia is a typical example of the downgrading Australians encountered from overseas sources. Two years later, Martyn was a member of the Vic-Wells Ballet Company. Not entirely content with Ninette de Valois, Martyn also arranged short periods of study in France. When her father became ill and with war rumours accelerating, she returned to Australia and accepted a position as a teacher of classical ballet in Jennie Brenan's studio, with the restriction that she would not perform anywhere. Ignoring this, Martyn danced solo in a production of *Hiawatha*. This was seen by Borovansky, who was so impressed that he invited her to his studio. Martyn was wary of Brenan's reaction but, before anything was finalised, she had a complete breakdown and returned to her home in Queensland. Martyn finally arrived at Borovansky's studio, having been encouraged by a letter from Dorothy Stevenson advising that the situation there was “interesting”.¹⁰⁴ This expression is quoted directly from Stevenson's own writing and could be interpreted as being something of interest to Martyn, as in a proposal which she might want to follow up or that she should look at the situation cautiously as it could be regarded as unusual. Martyn, probably influenced by the fact that there was little to choose from in Australia, became a principal dancer in the Borovansky company.

These three diverse but talented dancers plus an immigrant youth in the process of finding his way in a new country would provide Borovansky with the principals he needed for his foundation company. As Busse began to be known in ballet, she was often referred to by journalists as ‘Australian maid!’ as she was the first Australian to achieve ballerina status without overseas experience. Borovansky had started to present his pupils to Melbourne audiences and Busse performed a *Valse* arranged by ‘Edouard Vorovansky’ [sic] on 1 July 1939 at a church hall in Burnley. He despised this “variety program”; his name was misspelt and Busse was berated for her unacceptable standard of dancing.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Edna Busse, at her residence, Wagga Wagga, NSW, 6 June 2010. Up until the time of her death, Xenia Borovansky made several visits to be with Edna Busse.

¹⁰² Vincent, *op.cit.*, pp.145,147,149–150.

¹⁰³ Interviewer Jane Hollier, interviewee Martin Rubinstein, venue unknown, *Tempo*, No.1, 4, official magazine of Royal Academy of Dancing Teachers' Workshop, 1981, by permission of the author.

¹⁰⁴ Salter, *op.cit.*, pp.106–108.

¹⁰⁵ Salter, *op.cit.*, p.92.

Later that year, six of Borovansky's dancers presented his ballet *Etude* in a program at the Melbourne Town Hall which showcased physical wellbeing as part of Health Week. However, the outbreak of war had cast an immediate shadow over the population, coming as it did barely 20 years after the end of the First World War, so Borovansky's hope of establishing a professional ballet company appeared to be unattainable, and he and his dancers would have to be content with demonstrations of their achievements as part of war charity appeals. His dancers presented divertissements, character dances and solos, as well as short ballets such as *Etude* and *Mozartina*, repeatedly at balls, concerts, garden parties and cabarets. As there were limited opportunities to perform, dancers tended to look on these unpaid events as a way of displaying their talents. Borovansky, although irked by the unprofessional situation, rationalised that these productions, which he had to choreograph and teach, were a means of attracting more students for his school.¹⁰⁶ The arts were not a common topic in this era, with the result that there were few journalists employed by the newspapers to write about ballet. Furthermore, as these charity events were usually covered from a social angle which focused on fashion and status, the artistic ability of the performers was rather inconsequential.¹⁰⁷

The Original Ballets Russes was the only ballet company to come to Australia after war was declared. During their tour Borovansky was a guest artist, dancing the character roles he had perfected during his association with de Basil. He was also put in charge of the extras or 'supers' (as they were then called), as he was very experienced in this position. Anne Mackintosh, destined to become the noted poet Anne Chloe Elder, first encountered Borovansky when chosen as a super in *Aurora's Wedding*, subsequently joining his professional classes in November 1939. Shirley Andrews, another super who decided to take professional tuition with Borovansky, became a member of his company in its earliest stages. Mara North (a pupil of Lucy Saranova, who taught the Cecchetti ballet syllabus) and Jonet Wilkie, together with Corrie Ladders and Laurie Rentoul, both trained at Jennie Brenan's, also joined this class.¹⁰⁸

An early pupil of Borovansky, Margaret Walker, had been brought up in a country town but moved to Melbourne to attend MacRobertson Girls' High School. One of the teachers organised a theatre party to see the Russian ballet; not content with one, Walker saw every program. She was amazed at the artistic quality and the different ballets, which were so rich in their impact.¹⁰⁹ After seeing Borovansky's *Petit Mozartina* and *The Bush Ballet* Walker, despite being employed in a pharmacy and still studying chemistry, decided to learn ballet by attending the business girls' class. This is just one example of how the Ballets Russes impacted on the lives of many Australians. For some it was a change in attitude towards ballet in general. Others acknowledged that ballet, when presented with an emphasis on tradition and athletic prowess, was powerful viewing. However, Walker was so impressed that she risked her future by deciding to forfeit her already chosen career so she could dance. After two years of training, she appeared as one of the Miseries in Act 2 of *Grieg's Concerto in A Minor*. She recalled Borovansky's skilfulness in producing this ballet with:

a hotchpotch of bodies and abilities ... with veils over our heads so the parents couldn't tell who was who. Boro ... encouraged us to build up what we lacked. Another thing ... was Boro's ability to inspire and please an audience. He gave them value for money.¹¹⁰

These early members of Borovansky's company represent some of the dancers who finished their training with the Borovanskys and could then utilise their talent without travelling overseas. They

¹⁰⁶ Salter, op.cit., p.96.

¹⁰⁷ Salter, op.cit., pp.94–96; Performing Art Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, Borovansky Program Collection: Charity Performance in Aid of the Red Cross, Union Theatre, University of Melbourne, 21 June 1940. Borovansky was not impressed that his dancers were never acknowledged for their non-paid appearances or their talent.

¹⁰⁸ MacGeorge, Norman, *The Borovansky Ballet in Australia and New Zealand*, F. W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1946.

Australia Dancing – Andrews, Shirley (1915–2001)
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/661.html 8/03/05.

¹⁰⁹ Margaret Walker, *Australian Council – Archival Film Series*, courtesy Patricia Bratulic private collection.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

were among the first of the long line of dancers who would pave the way for a national ballet company. “He gave them value for money” is reiterated throughout the years of the Borovansky Ballet, confirming that his strategy worked admirably, as the company received wholehearted support. While economics was a vital factor, Borovansky knew that programming was just as important. He held very strong views that ballet should be entertaining as well as artistic. This combination, along with affordable seating for lower income earners, encouraged a regular patronage.

In the Australian manner, Borovansky’s foreign name was shortened to ‘Boro,’ which he accepted as part of his chosen new identity. Xenia and Edouard both obtained citizenship four years after arriving in Australia. Borovansky drank Foster’s beer, although he preferred champagne, and went fishing with his mates. He became an average Australian citizen, but also engaged with company directors, local mayors and titled personalities. He appeared to have an innate sense of what constituted an Australian and strived to achieve the same rapport with his audiences. This would not have been easy to accomplish as there was a definite wariness of anyone who was not of English heritage, as though we were still tied to Mother England’s apron strings. However, Borovansky realised that Australia was in a transitional stage when the population was averse to being divided by social structure, as was still the case in England as well as some other overseas countries.

Margaret Walker began seeking the solution to this situation of having to exist between two worlds. Before leaving the Borovansky company, she was given a chance to experience working with people who were not arts oriented. Through experimental choreography, she expanded her theories regarding the “question of Australian identity in these arts.”¹¹¹ Thoughts about national identity transformed into movement and were probably the basis of her plan to form a unified dance group which would explore and express this concept. Walker used her Borovansky ballet training to achieve professional status in national folk dancing. Margaret Frey (née Walker) is remembered for founding the Unity Dance Group, Melbourne, in 1946, a lifetime commitment to dance which started with a ballet performance and achieved consolidation through the influence of Borovansky’s Australian dream.¹¹²

In 1940 the famous English ballet critic Arnold Haskell wrote: “I know from experience that Australia has a vast theatre-going public and a fine tradition”.¹¹³ This tradition evolved from the first drama presented by convict actors, leading on to 20th-century professional theatre with established audiences. The usual bill of fare was Gilbert and Sullivan, English and American plays, and musical comedies, utilising overseas principals with locals making up the rest of the cast. The Australian artist who made good was soon appearing in England or America, as the concept of Australians not being recognised in their own country was well and truly evident. Serious artists understood that to remain in Australia meant financial and artistic drought, even if their natural skill was admitted. In the ballet world, this was the case for almost the next two decades.¹¹⁴ Despite this situation, Haskell believed that it would be possible to create a true Australian theatre, as the talent and the audience already existed, but the idea that an Australian could possibly be as good as an overseas star took much longer to dispel. He considered that music, ballet and opera were healthier than drama, mainly because of the influence of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Tait brothers of J. C. Williamson’s, who were responsible for importing so many world-renowned singers and musicians.

Dame Nellie Melba exploded the inferiority complex issue as far as singing was concerned, as she proved that an Australian could be considered a natural singer as much as any Italian. On the other hand, dancers still had a long way to go before they could convince the Australian public of their right to be included in the rank of overseas stars. Haskell recognised the influence of the touring companies. The effect on Australians was tested by the visits of the Genée and Pavlova companies. The Ballets Russes 1938–39 tour was a great financial risk which J. C. Williamson’s weathered because of audience support for first-class theatre.¹¹⁵ Geoffrey Searle qualifies this by his statement that, during the late 1930s, the Australian public had become deeply interested in ballet performances and a sense of commitment was beginning to develop. It is his contention that the visit of the Imperial

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ Haskell, Arnold, *Waltzing Matilda: A Background to Australia*, A & C Black, London, 1943, p.163.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Haskell, *Waltzing Matilda*, pp.164–167.

Russian Ballet Company in 1913 was “the true birth of ballet in Australia.”¹¹⁶

John Cargher deemed that the visits of Pavlova and the Ballets Russes stimulated the urge of Australians to involve themselves in serious dance: “Professionalism was just around the corner ... the next step in the evolution of ballet in Australia.”¹¹⁷ Before the Ballets Russes tours, Australian audiences had witnessed the two tours of Pavlova, whose artistry was never in dispute although her company’s repertoire appeared to be rather limited. The Ballets Russes ushered in new and exciting choreography, and extravagant presentations with the latest scenery, costumes and lighting techniques. Commencing in Adelaide, their subscription series tour of two months lengthened to ten months, which included returning for repeat performances, consequently extending the language of ballet.¹¹⁸

It was at the Princess Theatre, Saturday 5 October 1940, during a large charity performance, *The Cavalcade of Empire* (a spectacular historical pageant representing the growth of the British Empire), that Borovansky finally made valid cultural contact with Melbourne audiences. He created his first piece of Australiana, *The Bushfire Ballet*, a symbolic bush ballet wherein his students represented Australian flowers and creatures almost destroyed by a bushfire. During the summer of 1939, Victoria experienced a catastrophic bushfire in which the flames came close to Melbourne’s outskirts and many people died. The bush is greatly symbolic in Australia because of its vastness and the people have grown to understand and recognise that it is part of our rural culture – bushfires also belong in this category. Borovansky understood this relationship and knew that Australians would not be perplexed by a ballet that represented the bush but also included the ever-present danger of the destruction of that beauty by fire.¹¹⁹

Significantly, this ballet was performed by Australian dancers technically trained to a standard not witnessed before in Melbourne or perhaps even Australia. Borovansky’s principal dancers were the first to achieve celebrity status.¹²⁰ The reference in the program to creating a keen interest “among those who hope to see the formation of an Australian ballet” is clearly one of Borovansky’s earliest attempts to identify himself with the Australian people while possessing a foreign name and being involved in a foreign culture. It also initiates what he was envisaging as the future outcome of his strategy.¹²¹ Stevenson recalls that there was only ever one performance of the *Bush Ballet*, but it served to alert the Melbourne public about what was transpiring at Borovansky’s studio.¹²²

From the very beginning Borovansky made a strong stand for a national ballet company as he had experienced in his own country. On 2 November 1940, the following appeared in the *Sun News-Pictorial*:

First ballet co. registered

The first Australian ballet company was registered in Melbourne yesterday. Promoted by Mr. Roger Racine, an Australian dancer, it will include 60 dancers from Australian schools, and will give its first performance in December. Mr. Edouard Borovansky, soloist in the Russian ballet for the past 17 years, will be ballet master and choreographer. Mr. Borovansky, a Czech, was choreographer and ballet master to Prague State Theatre. The company was registered as Borovansky Australian Ballet Co. Ltd.¹²³

On 26 November 1940, the Borovansky Ballet was involved with another charity performance, “A

¹¹⁶ Searle, op.cit., p.155.

¹¹⁷ Cargher, op.cit., p.221.

¹¹⁸ Fraillon, op.cit.

¹¹⁹ Michelle Potter, ‘Personal Gestures: Early Choreography by Edouard Borovansky,’ *Green Mill Paper*, 1997, p.64; Salter, op.cit., p.97; *Boro’s Ballet*, audiovisual, op.cit., narrator refers to this production as the 1939 *Cavalcade of Empire Pageant*.

¹²⁰ Salter, op.cit., p.97.

¹²¹ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 14, Folder 82, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Koegler, op.cit., p.33; Appendix 1 – Borovansky’s Program for the *Cavalcade of Empire*.

¹²² Stevenson, op.cit., p.20. Stevenson made note that Joan Potter from the junior school was a youngster set on the path towards a ballet career in Australia and overseas. Among her other credits, Potter was Ballet Mistress of the London Festival Company for many years.

¹²³ Author unknown, *Sun News-Pictorial*, 2 November 1940.

Night of Ballet in Aid of the Red Cross and Australian Comforts Fund.” This was organised by the National Theatre Movement and staged at the Princess Theatre. Borovansky chose to present an original Pavlova ballet, *Autumn Leaves*.¹²⁴ He was on track towards realising his aim of an Australian ballet company and, at the time, the way to attain this was through interminable charity performances. He regarded his students as professionals and begrudged the fact that the women he referred to as the ‘Toorak Matrons’ (society ladies of independent means, usually on the committees of charitable organisations) received so much publicity and tribute while his dancers were practically ignored. It angered Borovansky that they were not acknowledged as talented artists who also gave their time. He was fundamentally paternal in this regard, even though he considered it his right to subject them to harsh discipline in the ballet studio. Nevertheless, he needed the Toorak matrons more than they needed him and, swallowing his pride, he set out to gain their support.¹²⁵ Borovansky and Helene Kirsova had one thing in common – they both disliked dilettantism – but Borovansky exploited it. Astutely conscious of the power of the press, he was also careful in his dealings with the society columnists of the day, as their cooperation was invaluable. Beth Thwaites, of the Melbourne *Truth*, wrote of the Borovansky Australian Ballet company’s first performance at the Comedy Theatre, Melbourne, 18 and 19 December 1940:

You can believe it or not, as you like, dear duckies, but the premiere program presented by the Australian ballet company ... clearly revealed that Maestro Borovansky not only knows just where the plum-cake is hidden in the terpsichorean pantry – but serves it up in fine style ... Borovansky served up a choreographic menu which, if it was strongly reminiscent at times, had about it a sufficiently professional sweep to generate high hopes of some big beaut ballets from this quarter in the near future.¹²⁶

While Borovansky was disgusted by the ignorance of this so-called review, he decided to take the attitude that it was better than no publicity. This scandal-sheet newspaper had a wide circulation among the working class of Victoria and therefore reached a large section of the population who were not yet ballet adherents. At least the journalist, Beth Thwaites, referred to the company as “the Australian ballet” and, intentionally or not, prophesied in 1940 what became a reality some 22 years later.

Earlier in 1940 Borovansky had invited Frank Tait and his wife, Viola, to see one of his studio performances. The program was *Pas Clasque*, *Vltava*, *Autumn Leaves*, *L’Amour Ridicule* and four one-act ballets by Laurel Martyn and Dorothy Stevenson. The highlight was an arrangement of Russian national and folk dances with Borovansky and the whole company together. Tait saw the nucleus of a professional company under Borovansky’s direction and gave him every encouragement. Although there was still some doubt in his mind whether the public would accept Russian classical ballet as a local product when names like Toumanova, Riabouchinska and Baronova lingered, Tait was willing to take this risk. He was so impressed by the high standard that he organised a repeat performance in December of that year.¹²⁷ However, not long before this production was presented, one of Borovansky’s pupils, Roger Racine, officially registered “the first Australian ballet company.”¹²⁸ A crowded theatre proved that the venture was highly successful and the call for an Australian national ballet company fully justified.¹²⁹

Borovansky added *Autumn Leaves* to his first big production as it was Pavlova’s major choreographic one-act essay (1918) and he had learnt this ballet as a member of her company.¹³⁰ In this way many ballets were passed down from the performer or ex-performer to the next generation of dancers, with

¹²⁴ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 14, Folder 82, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Salter, op.cit., p.1.

¹²⁵ Salter, op. cit., pp.94–99; Performing Art Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, Borovansky Program Collection: Charity Performance in Aid of the Red Cross, Union Theatre, University of Melbourne, 21 June 1940.

¹²⁶ As quoted by Salter, op.cit., pp.99,114,115.

¹²⁷ Tait, *A Family*, p.224.

¹²⁸ Salter, op.cit., pp.100–101. (Despite this achievement, Roger Racine was obviously never permitted to encroach on Borovansky’s territory any further and, to quote Salter, his “status ... was an eccentric one, even in the eccentric history of ballet in Australia,” p.100).

¹²⁹ MacGeorge, op.cit., p.12; Appendix 2, First Season of Borovansky Australian Ballet company.

¹³⁰ *Currency Companion*, Edward H. Pask, ‘Pavlova’s Company,’ p.72.

the usual allowance for modifications. How fortunate were these Australian dancers to be taught by someone conversant with Pavlova's ballet, which would evoke favourable memories in those viewers who had witnessed the original: *Pas Classique*, a set of classical variations choreographed by Xenia; *L'Amour Ridicule*, a Spanish ballet with a plot; and *Vltava*, Borovansky's creation. These ballets were of a distinctly un-Australian flavour but staged in such a professional manner that his audiences were enthralled and entertained. All four ballets were to remain in the Borovansky Australian Ballet's repertoire for many years.¹³¹

L'Amour Ridicule evolved from the Spanish dancing classes given by Borovansky after the Pageant of Empire performance. In this ballet Stevenson worked with him and Serge Bousloff, who remained with Borovansky's company until its demise. She valued their combined knowledge. Borovansky was a master in the art of interpretation, endeavouring to ensure that all his pupils were fully tutored, and Bousloff, also ex-Ballets Russes, an experienced *pas de deux* dancer. The costumes in *Vltava* puzzled the cast, as they wore "unbecoming white tennis outfits." Enlightenment came years later for Stevenson when she saw a television program about a large gymnastic display in Prague called *The Spartarkiana*. This was apparently what Borovansky was portraying in his ballet. It is possible that he may have participated in such an event when he was young. He felt very strongly about *Vltava* and would get quite agitated during rehearsals if the lines were not straight. Straight lines were to become his signature in all future productions, as he regarded this tactic as an important part of the visual effect in the structure of a ballet.¹³²

The season, performed to full houses on both nights, gave the dancers a great deal of confidence. Their rapidly rising sense of professionalism was also bolstered by the Melbourne Ballet Club (initially the Society of Recorded Music, becoming the Society of Ballet and Recorded Music), which was led in this period by Robert Helpmann's mother. Not long after the Society arranged to hire part of his studio to conduct their monthly Sunday meetings, the loquacious Borovansky presented a lecture on ballet music complete with a demonstration of ballet by two of his most advanced pupils. The members were completely captivated by this performance. When the organisation became the Melbourne Ballet Club, membership fees were used to raise money to provide a stage in the smaller of the two studios for Borovansky's pupils to perform on. Below is an extract from a letter detailing how the Society circumvented council laws to achieve its goal:

It is important to realise what this has meant in the evolution of Australian ballet, for Borovansky was not allowed on the grounds of City Council Health Laws, but our society was, as a private concern, to give public performances. Because the Society was legally unable to charge for these performances, they made every member of the audience a temporary member for one night.
Dr W. McRae Russell (former Chairman)¹³³

At the Second General Meeting held by the Society of Ballet and Recorded Music, 25 February 1941, it was noted that money was being raised to provide lighting and curtains, and the stage was listed as an asset.¹³⁴ Borovansky's address on choreography was acknowledged in the April Circular.¹³⁵ Because of the growing popularity of Borovansky's programs, two performances had to be scheduled for 14 and 15 June 1941. Laurel Martyn's *En Saga*, which focused on the duality of women awaiting the return of their men from war, had its world premiere that weekend, with an introduction by Borovansky. It is my contention that audience reactions, combined with the dedication of the Borovanskys and their initial core of Australian dancers, provided the nucleus from which the

¹³¹ Salter, op.cit., p.105.

¹³² *ibid.*

¹³³ Society of Ballet and Recorded Music, MS 10394, MS 0207, State Library of Victoria, letter, Dr W. McRae Russell, 3 June 1974.

¹³⁴ Society of Ballet and Recorded Music, Minutes 25 February 1941, MS 10394, MS 0207, Special Collections, State Library of Victoria.

¹³⁵ Society of Ballet and Recorded Music, Minutes 1 March 1941, Circular, 16 April 1941, MS 10394, MS 0207, Special Collections, State Library of Victoria.

(Miss J. Alexander, Mrs. M. Helpman, Mr. R. Racine and Miss E. Weston were members as at March 1941.)

Australian Ballet was to emerge two decades later.

A short time after these performances, it was unanimously agreed that the Society would pay Borovansky 20 pounds for every ballet performance, but left it to his discretion as to which performers received payment. A further motion was carried that only pupils of Borovansky could join the Society.¹³⁶ This was a surprising act of discrimination which leaves one wondering if it were legal. The available records provide no revelation of any outside protest and there is no evidence to indicate that it was a move to protect the choreographer's rights. This motion could have had the propensity to increase the number of Borovansky's followers, as well as attracting dance students from other studios who were desperate for a chance to perform. On the other hand, legal liability may have caused the motion to be submitted. Clarification was not established from the available files but, whatever the reason, it gave the Club a distinct feeling of exclusivity. At the 21 July 1941 meeting, Dr Ringland Anderson showed the following films of the Ballets Russes: *Swan Lake*, *Symphonic Fantastique*, *Spectre de la Rose*, *Good Humoured Ladies* and *Aurora's Wedding*. Martyn's *en Saga* was performed once more in August 1941 with Kenneth Rowell, who later joined the Borovansky Ballet.¹³⁷

Not long after this meeting, there were outward signs of belligerence from Japan, who was waging war in China, and problems gaining public support for another war in faraway countries. During 1941, with Menzies absent overseas and the state of the war with many defeats and consequent loss of life, there was further criticism of the government. By early August, Menzies' position was in jeopardy as relations with Japan declined.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, Menzies' Atlantic Charter was adopted in September 1941. The charter was referred to as "a central reference point" with the force to persuade: "A product of a distant war, the Atlantic Charter would serve as a talisman for Australia's planning of post-war reconstruction; a central reference point."¹³⁹ The Reconstruction Division did not contradict the escalating criticism against Menzies, proceeding with their national broadcasts. Reconstruction planning was entrusted to economists and Ronald Walker, Professor of Economics, University of Tasmania, announced "some measures of reconstruction might begin before the end of hostilities."¹⁴⁰ During this time, Flora Endershaw's proposals regarding women's main concerns – employment, living conditions, education, child welfare, health, legal rights and Aboriginal women's circumstances – were disregarded. Labour activist Muriel Heagney put forward a scheme for equal pay for women which was also not accepted.¹⁴¹

During the general meetings, 25 and 26 October 1941, members were advised that Daryl Lindsay was offering his drawings of dances for sale. They were also advised that the Australian National Ballet Society would present two performances of the Borovansky Australian Ballet at the Princess Theatre, 18 and 19 December 1941, as a fundraiser for the Red Cross. Mr N. R. Macintosh broached the subject of an Australian National Ballet Subscription Fund to enable performers to be given an income. Rowell is noted as the designer of the backcloth for *Bach Suite* and this portends the beginning of his career as a stage designer.¹⁴² This very early reference to Borovansky's company as

¹³⁶ Society of Ballet and Recorded Music, Minutes 26 May 1941, Minutes 14, 15 June 1941, MS 10394, MS 0207, Special Collections, State Library of Melbourne.

¹³⁷ Society of Ballet and Recorded Music, Minutes 21 July 1941, MS 10394, MS 0207, Special Collections, State Library of Victoria.

¹³⁸ Macintyre, Stuart, *A Concise History of Australia*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 3rd ed., 2009, pp. 79,82.

¹³⁹ Macintyre, op.cit., pp.40,44,46.

¹⁴⁰ Macintyre, op.cit., pp.63,73.

¹⁴¹ Macintyre, op.cit., pp.74,77.

¹⁴² Society of Ballet and Recorded Music, Minutes 25, 26 October 1941, Special Collections, MS10394, MS0207, State Library of Victoria; Kingston, op.cit., pp.181–182; *Currency Companion*, Shirley McKechnie, 'Dancers from Vienna,' p.133; Michelle Potter, 'Kirsova's Designers,' p.232.

Australia Dancing – Royall, Kenneth (1920–1999)
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(See Salter, op.cit., p.101 for further details of the National Ballet Society as quoted from the newspaper, *Truth*, November 1941. Note: The programs held at the Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Borovansky Program Collection, Melbourne, reveal that these performances were held at His Majesty's Theatre. The forming of ballet societies appeared to be a priority during the first year of the war. Melbourne's society ladies

‘the Australian Ballet’ indicates that there was a growing propensity to regard it as Australia’s national company, at least in Melbourne. The final meeting for 1941 was held on 6 December and the recital which followed included some very young pupils of the Borovansky Academy dancing in Martyn’s ballet *Puddleston-on-sea*. The minutes of this meeting verify that Eunice Weston was still associated with Borovansky, as he expressed his gratitude to her for “teaching the children through the year.” There is no performance mentioned in the minutes of 20 February 1942, which is the last document in this collection. It was at this meeting that the name of the organisation was officially changed to the Melbourne Ballet Club.¹⁴³

In an earlier performance at the Comedy Theatre of *Fantasy on Grieg’s Concerto in A Minor*, Borovansky had acknowledged the assistance of the Misses Wallace, four maiden ladies who were stalwarts of the Melbourne Ballet Club. Their timely assistance took the form of financing the costumes for this ballet. Laurel Martyn remembers that they continued to support the Borovansky Ballet, maintaining that without their financial assistance Borovansky would not have achieved his goals so rapidly. But, along with Weston and Roger Racine, the Wallace sisters were permanently excluded from any future plans. Martyn was unimpressed by Borovansky’s obtuse behaviour, but was not in a strong enough position at that time to influence the situation.¹⁴⁴ Borovansky proceeded with his scheme to propagate budding balletomania in Australia by setting up a national company. He dutifully attended various functions given by wealthy socialites who aspired to be connected to classical ballet as a means of improving their status in society. Outwardly he was all smiles and benevolence, tolerating their nonsense, but underneath he abhorred the tactics they employed to become part of the theatrical scene. He was prepared to go along with this charade while the spin-off resulted in more interest in his developing ballet company.¹⁴⁵

J. C. Williamson’s had also been reflecting on the idea of a national company of Australian dancers. The company’s touring manager, Claude Kingston, who had toured with the Original Ballets Russes, made a statement to the press some 12 months before the National Ballet Society announced its plan, stating that J. C. Williamson’s was “definitely interested in the formation of a purely Australian ballet.”¹⁴⁶ However, its idea was just as outlandish as the views of the social ladies. To allay travelling expenses J. C. Williamson’s proposed that teachers from every state, except Tasmania, would supply the *corps de ballet* from their students. The most aspiring pupils would be offered principal roles, there would be three changes of program and ticket prices would be kept at a level attainable to all. Borovansky was mentioned in all the proposals as a likely candidate to fill varied positions. He was not averse to any of these schemes, but his complicity was never intended for the benefit of anyone other than himself.¹⁴⁷ Ticket pricing was the only point in J. C. Williamson’s plan that was of any lasting value. It must have been carried through to when they engaged Borovansky’s ballet company, as attendance was not restricted to those who could well afford entrance. The ever-growing number of working class people who became followers of the Borovansky ballet company, usually from ‘the gods’ (the highest areas of a theatre and so the cheapest seats), acknowledged his salesmanship by their repeated attendances throughout seasons.

Kingston, who operated out of Melbourne, had befriended the Borovanskys during the Australian and New Zealand tour of the Covent Garden Russian Ballet (presented by Educational Ballet Limited) in 1938. Kingston had long thought about an Australian national ballet company, but had never encountered anyone with enough determination and ability to tackle the issue until he became more familiar with Borovansky. Here was someone who was prepared to work hard and was not only

plotted throughout 1941 to introduce the Australian National Ballet Society, but it disintegrated within three weeks; Salter, op.cit., p.101.)

¹⁴³ Society of Ballet and Recorded Music, Minutes, 6 December 1941, recital (program and commentary), Special Collections, MS 10394, MS 0207, State Library of Victoria.

(I found Borovansky’s remarks on young girls and pointe shoes extremely significant, as so many dance schools of that era had their students *en pointe* from their very first lesson – including myself at age 5 – and it was never questioned.)

¹⁴⁴ Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Laurel Martyn, at her residence, Balwyn, Victoria, 1 August 2005; Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, Borovansky Program Collection.

¹⁴⁵ Salter, op.cit., pp.101–103.

¹⁴⁶ Salter, op.cit., pp.103–104.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

passionate about his art but a realist as well. He was also married to an experienced dancer/teacher with famous family connections. Kingston and Borovansky often had conversations about the possibility of an Australian ballet company and Borovansky agreed to discuss it further on Kingston's return to Australia. When this became a reality, Kingston arranged for him to meet Frank Tait, Managing Director of J. C. Williamson's, and a partnership was created that lasted until Borovansky's death.¹⁴⁸

While Borovansky's Australian Ballet company was the first to officially register, other ballet companies had already been established, particularly in Sydney. Having left the Dandre–Levitoff Russian Ballet in 1934, Leon Kellaway started his school in Sydney, later obtaining financial backing to form the Ballet Nationale. He refrained from including the word 'Australian' as the art world was highly susceptible to the cultural cringe – Australians being considered incapable of cultural originality. The Ballet Nationale was unable to continue after the Second World War commenced as finances were withdrawn. Kellaway returned to the theatre as a dancer and ballet master.¹⁴⁹ While Mischa Burlakov and Louise Lightfoot had been operating the First Australian School for many years, it became the First Australian Ballet in 1931. This was an amateur company which presented a mixture of classical ballet and modern German dance for seven years. Lightfoot was an exponent of the Cecchetti method and had Valrene Tweedie, Gordon Hamilton and Tom Merrifield as early students. Burlakov's background is rather confusing, with Salter also remarking that his teaching was "never identifiable" but that he inspired "ebullience and enthusiasm."¹⁵⁰

During the 1930s and 1940s, women predominated in the field of modern dance. Gertrud Bodenwieser (formerly of the Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in Vienna), her musical director and modern dance company, escaped Nazi-occupied Vienna but she was unable to rejoin her company. After temporarily living in Wellington, New Zealand, she decided to return to Sydney. Separated from her family and her possessions gone, Bodenwieser gathered those dancers who remained, contacted her musical director, opened a studio in Sydney and quickly revived her company. The Bodenwieser group opened its Australian tour on 18 March 1939 at Adelaide's Theatre Royal. *The Demon Machine*, created by Bodenwieser in 1923 and performed at His Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne in 1939, had become a sensation as it depicted the problems of our age with machines taking over and the disappearance of humanity. After appearing in Melbourne and Sydney, Bodenwieser disbanded her company because of the uncertainty of the world and dancers needing to return to their own country. Gathering another company of dancers, and despite other groups mounting productions in 1940, Bodenwieser succeeded in gaining enough audience approval to maintain the equilibrium. This company was managed by J. and N. Tait (the concert division of J. C. Williamson's) and a tour was arranged for the Bodenwieser Ballet (initially the Central European Dance Ensemble) in 1940–1941. The company continued to perform consistently throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In April 1958, it made a television debut with *The Imaginary Invalid* and *Waltzing*

¹⁴⁸ Kingston, op.cit., pp.177–178.

Claude Kingston was born in Richmond in 1888, joined J. C. Williamson's in 1921 and was still a director of the company in 1971; Michael and Joan Tallis, op.cit., pp.92,214, refer to Kingston as the manager of celebrities.

¹⁴⁹ Salter, op.cit., pp.30,111,113; Koegler, op.cit., p.292; *Currency Companion*, Claudia Funder, John Whiteoak, 'Scanty Information,' p.226 and 'Influences from Europe,' p.227.

Leon Kellaway was a member of the Borovansky Ballet during the 1950s. He later became a revered teacher at the Australian Ballet School and was held in great esteem by the ballet teaching fraternity of Australia. Kellaway, Harold Lionel Jacks (Leon). Born London 1905 and died Melbourne 1990. Had a theatrical upbringing. Stage name was Jan Kowsky, Kowski or Kowskey. Studied with Serafina Astafyeva and Nicholas Legat in London. First partner was the Australian Ivy Schilling in musicals. Member of Pavlova's company during the 1920s, then toured Australia in 1934 with the Dandre–Levitoff company. In 1937 opened a ballet school in Sydney, then formed the Ballet Nationale. Ballet Master of Borovansky Ballet 1940–55. Professor of Dance, Australian Ballet School. Clarke and Vaughan, op.cit., p.195; Koegler, op.cit., p.292.

Australia Dancing – Leon Kellaway

www.australiadancing.org/subjects/321.html, 8/03/05.

¹⁵⁰ Salter, op.cit., pp.110–112; *Currency Companion*, Joel Crotty, 'Ballet Music,' p.78; Claudia Funder, John Whiteoak, 'Learning by Dancing,' p.227; Valda Craig, Gary Lester, 'German Expressive Dance,' p.418.

Matilda. Bodenwieser died from a heart attack on 19 November 1959.¹⁵¹ She exerted a powerful domination over modern dance in Australia, presenting dance and dance drama so expertly that the audience perception of ballet was forever altered. During August 2017, ballet students from the Victorian College of the Arts performed *The Demon Machine* as a tribute to Bodenwieser as it was 70 years since this famous ballet was performed in Australia.¹⁵²

Sonia Revid and Irene Young were two devotees of German dance who had embraced this new style in the early 1930s. They were followed by Daisy Pirnitzer, Elizabeth Wiener, Gerda Hass, Ida Beeby and Hanny Exiner (née Kohm).¹⁵³ The Sonia Revid School of Art and Body Culture, Melbourne, was established in 1932. In 1939 Revid choreographed *Bushfire*, an Australian drama-ballet. Australian-born Irene Vera Young was representative among the pioneer modern dance exponents. She formed a motion choir and published a book of exercises, *A System of Body Culture for Young and Old*, which was quite rare for the time.¹⁵⁴ Haas, who had danced with Wigman, taught at the Melbourne University Physical Education Department and Council for Adult Education from the 1940s and founded the Council for Adult Education movement choir.¹⁵⁵ After studying under Bodenwieser, Pirnitzer established her Studio of Creative Dancing in Melbourne during 1939. Exiner joined Pirnitzer and eventually took over the school. Exiner established the Modern Ballet Group in 1953 and taught movement to trainee kindergarten teachers until the 1970s.¹⁵⁶

Helene Kirsova, prima ballerina, had remained in Australia after the 1936 Monte Carlo Russian Ballet's Australian tour. In 1940 the Helene Kirsova School of Russian Ballet Tradition opened in Sydney. Many of her pupils, including Paul Hammond, Bryan Ashbridge, Cecil Bates and Peggy Sager, were destined to succeed as professional dancers, teachers and examiners.¹⁵⁷ The Kirsova ballet company (initially known as the Australian National Ballet) first performance was a fundraiser for the Red Cross on 8 July 1941. The *Sydney Morning Herald* critic recorded that the Kirsova ballet "should go down as the first great page in Australia's own ballet history" as it completely overturned the tacit notion that Australia was incapable of producing professional ballet. Another critic remarked that it was hard to believe that the young Australian performers were so new at their craft, but there was no comment about the fact that they were professionals dancing in their own country. This omission presents another example of the cultural cringe. As these dancers had been trained in Australia, they could not be credited with having learnt their craft because high culture demanded overseas authority to make it happen.

It is evident from program notes that Kirsova was thinking along permanent lines for her company:

It seems anomalous that Australia which, through visits of Adeline Genée, Pavlova, Spessivtseva, the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, and Colonel de Basil's two most recent companies, has proved itself to be the most truly ballet-conscious country in

¹⁵¹ Pask, *The Second Act*, pp.64–69; Salter, op.cit., p.115; *Currency Companion*, Valda Craig, Garry Lester, 'German Expressive Dance,' pp.418–419, Josephine Fantasia, John Whiteoak, 'Rivalry in Celebrity Tours,' p.254; Amanda Card, 'Immigrants Transformed,' pp.452–453; Claudia Funder, John Whiteoak, 'Learning by Dancing,' p.227, Rachel Fensham, 'Ideal in Modern Dance,' pp.293–294; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 November 1941.

¹⁵² *Herald-Sun*, 9 August 2017, p.16.

¹⁵³ Vincent, op.cit., pp.186–194 (Sonia Revid), pp.185–188 (Irene Vera Young), pp.182–319 (Ida Beeby); *Currency Companion*, Claudia Funder, John Whiteoak, 'Influences from Europe,' p.227; Valda Craig, Gary Lester, 'German Expressive Dance,' p.418, Amanda Card, 'Outback Romp,' p.452.

¹⁵⁴ *Currency Companion*, Valda Craig, Gary Lester, 'German Expressive Dance,' pp.418–419; Grove, op.cit., p.3. (The only Australian representative at the Olympic Festival of Dance, Germany 1936, Young was awarded a Gold Medal for her solo dance, *Prison*.)

¹⁵⁵ *Currency Companion*, Claudia Funder, John Whiteoak, 'Learning by Dancing,' p.227; Valda Craig, Gary Lester, 'Sensuous Movement,' p.419.

¹⁵⁶ *Currency Companion*, Rachel Fensham, 'Ideas in Modern Dance,' pp.293–294; Shirley McKecknie, 'Visionary in Ballet,' p.132; Claudia Funder, John Whiteoak, 'Influences from Europe,' p.227; Vincent, op.cit., p.211 (Hanny Exiner).

¹⁵⁷ Searle, op.cit., p.155 (Kirsova and Sager); *Currency Companion*, Claudia Funder, John Whiteoak, 'Learning by Dancing,' p.227; Cargher, op.cit., p.222.

the world today, has never had its own permanent company.¹⁵⁸

Kirsova formed her company on the touring repertory model she had experienced with Russian ballet companies. Her principal dancers were Tamara Tchinarova, Raissa Kousnetzova, Edouard Sobichevsky and Valery Shaeivsky, There were also seven Australian dancers in Kirsova's company who were comparable to Borovansky's early dancers (Dorothy Stevenson, Edna Busse, Laurel Martyn and Martin Rubinstein) with similar histories and standards. All the Australian dancers had received their early training from other teachers (most of them following the Royal Academy of Dancing syllabus), but realised their ambitions through Kirsova and Borovansky.¹⁵⁹

By late 1941 Kirsova's company had increased to 40 dancers, whom she regarded as professionals (they earned five pounds a week while performing), registering them with Actors Equity and paying their union fees: "Kirsova was the first of its kind ... produced on strictly professional lines by an established firm as a purely commercial offering."¹⁶⁰ Kirsova's three-act ballet *Faust*, with music by Henry Krips and Loudon Saintill's scenery, premiered on 22 November 1941. This was the beginning of a six-week season at the Minerva Theatre and the criticism was very positive:

Last night's gala opening ... should go down as the first great page in Australia's own ballet history, for it established the fact ... that it is possible to present programs of professional standard without importing large expensive companies.¹⁶¹

Although dancers were mentioned, the reviewer failed to identify the Australians in Kirsova's company, who were Strelsa Heckleman, Rachel Cameron, Barbara McDonnell, Peggy Sager, Helene Ffrance, Paul Clementin (Hammond) and Henry Legerton (with special leave from the army). Pask wonders why the critic did not focus on the fact that "they were performing in a professional company in their own country as this was ground-breaking procedure for Australian ballet dancers."¹⁶² In this period of female dominance in dance, Kirsova performed the principal role, having choreographed Mephistopheles as a feminine character. Sager made her debut in this season in the *corps de ballet* and performed her first leading role in *The Revolution of the Umbrellas*, February 1943. In a review of this ballet, a critic remarked that its "masculinity and virility" were a rare characteristic in women choreographers, which Pask relates to the modernisation of society. Serge Bousloff, who became a part of the Australian ballet scene for the next 20 years, was a very welcome addition to Kirsova's company as she was also battling to keep her male dancers as the war escalated.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Pask, *The Second Act*, pp.16–22; NLA News, August 2000, 'Helene Kirsova and the Development...' www.nla.gov.au/pub/nlanews/2000/august/00/dancer.html, p.3, 20/6/08.

¹⁵⁹ *Currency Companion*, Robina Beard, 'Dance in Musicals,' p.215; Michelle Potter, 'Professional Seasons,' p.74; Amanda Card, Carole Y. Johnson, 'Theatrical Dance,' p.22.

Australia Dancing – Finch, Tamara Tchinarova (1919–)
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/86.html, 30/80/05.

Strelsa Heckleman, Rachel Cameron and Helen Ffrance all attained professional status as principal dancers. Salter, op.cit., pp.122–123; Hood, John, *Peggy Sager: Prima Ballerina*, John Hood, North Ryde, 2004, p.17. Heckleman had her own ballet school and was later appointed examiner for the Society of Australian Teachers of Dancing, and Cameron became an eminent teacher at the Royal Academy of Dance, London, until her death in March 2011. 'Passing It On,' *Dance Gazette*, Issue 1, 2009, p.30, ed. David Jays, R. A. D., London.

¹⁶⁰ L. S. of the *Radio Times*, 'Battle of the Ballets: Who Came First?' January 1942, courtesy Edna Busse private collection; Bellew, Peter, ed., *Pioneering Ballet in Australia*, Craftsman Bookshop, Sydney, 1945, p.16; Tait, op.cit., p.225; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Music and Drama,' 14 November 1941; Hood, op.cit., p.12; recorded interview with Peggy Sager (1924), TRC3157, pp.25–27, National Library of Canberra.

Australia Dancing – Kirsova Ballet (1941–1944)
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/40.html, 30/80/05.

¹⁶¹ Pask, *The Second Act*, p.16.

¹⁶² Pask, op.cit., p.17.

¹⁶³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Music and Drama,' 21 November, 1941; Hood, op.cit., pp.12–15,27; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Music and Drama,' 28 November, 1941; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Music and Drama,' December 1941; Pask, *The Second Act*, p.18.

Sager, Peggy. Born Auckland, New Zealand, 1924, died 2002. Trained in Hamilton by teachers from Nettleton Edwards School, final Royal Academy of Dancing examination in Sydney. Kirsova Ballet 1941. Borovansky

Edward Tait of J. C. Williamson's regarded Kirsova with great esteem and had arranged her first Melbourne tour in January–February 1942; Kirsova's company returned to His Majesty's Theatre two years later. It was during this performance that Borovansky was so impressed by Sager's Swan Queen that he offered her a place in his company. Kirsova's company was about to go on a tour that nearly got scuttled by the Manpower Act, which ruled civilian lives during the war. Initially the Deputy Director of Manpower refused permission, as he assessed ballet dancing as non-essential. His ruling was finally influenced by the travel permits and tickets, which were already held by J. C. Williamson's. Official permission was granted providing the dancers were outside the specified age limit, were being paid by the ballet company and were not being removed from vital war work, and that entertainment was essential for those members of the forces on leave as well as to uphold civilian morale. Lastly, a baseless complaint from another ballet company confused the issue. This sounds very much as if the about-face resulted from some theatre manager's rhetoric; could the other ballet company have been Borovansky's? After five months of packed houses, Kirsova was ecstatic and would have taken her company overseas if there had been no war. Her company was fully professional, but only able to offer seasonal employment. Their final performance was in Brisbane, 2 March 1944.¹⁶⁴

Kirsova had been offered a long-term contract with J. C. Williamson's but, not wanting to compromise her individualism and creativity, she declined. Borovansky, on the other hand, had observed the local scene with a more business-like approach; it was a case of do it the Australian way or not at all. He deferred to the preference of presenting traditional ballets, as commercial theatre could not afford to indulge in experimental ballets and neither could Borovansky. The Ballets Russes had set the precedent on their Australian tours and this policy assured box-office receipts. Kirsova received support for her company through the pockets of wealthy benefactors, but there was minimal aid given to Borovansky to assuage the perpetual economic concerns that beleaguered him. He had agreed to use J. C. Williamson's orchestra, costume department and scenery, which had been included in his contract. On the other hand, Kirsova had already decided that her two experienced pianists were more melodious than J. C. Williamson's orchestra.¹⁶⁵ Kirsova soon discovered that she was unable to book J. C. Williamson's theatres for a straight run, which precluded touring and long-term contracts. Taking advantage of this situation, Borovansky made offers to many of her dancers, which Kirsova gave leave for them to accept. After dancing in the Kousnetzova, Kirsova and Borovansky companies, Valentine Zeglovsky left Australia with this prophecy: "Until such time, however, as State endowment can be expected it will be more difficult to attempt any cultural reorganisation in this country."¹⁶⁶

There certainly appears to have been considerable animosity between Kirsova and Borovansky. In reply to my question on relations between Borovansky and Kirsova, a smiling Laurel Martyn replied

Ballet 1944. Soloist in film *The Red Shoes* 1948. Metropolitan Ballet and Brussels Opera Ballet. Borovansky Ballet 1951. Retired 1959. Ballet school in Mount Eliza, Victoria – teacher and adjudicator.

Australia Dancing – Sager, Peggy (1924–2002)

www.australiadancing.org/subjects/103.html, 3/80/05.

Hammond, Paul, O. A. M. Born Sydney 1922, died Melbourne 2010. Studied with Mischa Burlakov, Helene Kirsova and Leon Kellway. Kirsova Ballet 1943–44. Borovansky Ballet 1945. Performed in film *The Red Shoes*. Glyndebourne Opera, Metropolitan Ballet and Brussels Opera Ballet 1948–51. Returned to Borovansky Ballet until 1956. Started ballet school in Melbourne. Became Royal Academy of Dancing Children's Examiner during 1960s. In 1975 became Senior Classical Tutor at Australian Ballet School and in 1981 accepted a position as Archivist, Librarian and Lecturer, which he held until 1995. *Diary*, Royal Academy of Dancing, Australia, Issue No.1, 1997, p.8; Tribute, *Herald Sun*, Melbourne, 12 October 2010.

Australia Dancing – Hammond, Paul (1922–2010)

www.australiadancing.org/subjects/92.html, 3/80/05.

¹⁶⁴ Tait, op.cit., p.225; Hood, op.cit., pp.23,29,33,35; Bellew, op.cit., p.16. Correspondence held in the National Library of Australia indicates that around this period there was also a contentious issue regarding dress material Kirsova obtained, probably without the relevant ration tickets, as some political representatives were attempting to have the issue brought before Parliament. Borovansky learnt of this situation through one of his Sydney acquaintances and may have tried to block her proposed tour.

¹⁶⁵ Hood, op.cit., pp.15,39; Pask, *The Second Act*, pp.21–22.

¹⁶⁶ Zeglovsky, op.cit., pp.131,133,143; Pask, *Enter the Colonies*, pp.15–22,25.

“they hated one another” and that was all she was prepared to say. A strong signal of the animosity Borovansky exhibited is the fact that Kirsova ran her company on private backing while he was forced to deal with a commercial company. Kirsova was in a financial position to indulge in experimental ballets while Borovansky’s creativeness was shadowed by so many negatives. He had tried repeatedly to interest J. C. Williamson’s in newer works and differing choreographers, but did not pursue the issue too hard, realising the futility of his efforts. Kirsova’s choice of repertoire was imaginative while Borovansky was restricted by J. C. Williamson’s to producing ballets that would entertain, thus attracting a more diverse audience. The bottom line for Borovansky was a full theatre, enabling continuance of productions, while Kirsova needed only concern herself with stimulating those artistic balletomanes who craved exciting new creations. She was very well equipped to cope with this as she was a very prolific choreographer whose work attracted the higher echelons of society.

Nonetheless, Kirsova’s downfall appears to be strongly linked with a flaw in her personality. Tamara Tchinarova acknowledged that “Kirsova was not one to make compromises ... had differences of opinion with those who managed the theatres in which she performed.”¹⁶⁷ Although Salter describes Kirsova as “unmanageable” and “individualistic,” he concedes that she made an enormous impact. In comparison, correspondence between Borovansky and J. C. Williamson’s reveals that he was willing to accept compromise and resort to submissive behaviour, if necessary, for survival.¹⁶⁸ Kirsova’s second husband, Peter Bellew, wrote that her story is one “of success over extreme war-time difficulties to establish the first Australian professional Russian Ballet Company*.”¹⁶⁹ The asterisk leads us to the following page, where an obvious insertion in small print informs the reader:

Australia’s second professional company was formed by J. C. Williamson Ltd. in May 1944, three years after the Kirsova Company’s premiere. Under the leadership of E. Borovansky and comprising a group of former members of the Kirsova company and pupils of the Borovansky and other schools, it has toured Australia and New Zealand.¹⁷⁰

What I find significant with regards to Bellew’s writing is his reference to Kirsova’s company as “the first Australian professional Russian Ballet Company.” From his initial declaration regarding his company, Borovansky never referred to it as anything other than an Australian company. There were times when he even dropped his own name when referring to the company. This demonstrates how very passionate he was about attaining recognition for his dancers as members of an Australian ballet company, and he showed no sign of ever wanting to alter this attitude.

Les Sylphides was officially presented by Borovansky to Melbourne balletomanes at the Princess Theatre, 29 to 31 July 1942, having been tried out before the Melbourne Ballet Club earlier.¹⁷¹ There are also records of two ballet performances, 22 and 23 August 1942, given by Borovansky at his Studio Theatre.¹⁷² When Borovansky suggested to the Melbourne Ballet Club that he would be able to give them regular performances, they took up this idea with such enthusiasm that, with minimum delay, a stage started to appear in the back studio. By early 1941 Borovansky had enough items to present the first performance.¹⁷³ Not wasting an opportunity, he made a speech on that Sunday night: “Tell your friends ... This just the beginning. The Australian ballet is on the way.” It is evident from

¹⁶⁷ Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Laurel Martyn, at her residence, Balwyn, Victoria, 1 August 2005; Potter, ‘A Dancer’s Dream,’ p.4.

¹⁶⁸ Salter, op.cit., pp.127,129.

¹⁶⁹ Bellew, op.cit., p.16.

¹⁷⁰ Bellew, op.cit., p.17.

¹⁷¹ *Les Sylphides* was performed for the Melbourne Ballet Club on 4 and 5 July 1942, Manuscript Section, MS 10394, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

Australia Dancing – *Sylphides, Les*
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/4461.html, 8/30/05.

Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, Borovansky Program Collection.

¹⁷² Program, 22–23 August 1942, Ingram Papers, MS 8932 in MS 8929-8933, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Salter, op.cit., p.118; Pask, *The Second Act*, pp.15–20.

¹⁷³ Stevenson, op.cit., pp.25–28.

Stevenson's account that Borovansky was so empowered by his ambition that incorrect English was not considered an impediment.¹⁷⁴ Borovansky was never in the least inhibited in talking to an audience:

I don't think that he considered he had any language difficulties ... his grammar was fractured, but his meaning was never in the least unclear.¹⁷⁵

Borovansky continued to address audiences for the rest of his life and the theme of an Australian ballet company was frequently an integral part of his speeches. It appears that support from the Melbourne Ballet Club came not only from relatives and friends but also from many European refugees, who would have been quite discerning critics. Solo dances were not considered suitable and a high standard was demanded and maintained, with a written critique for each performance published in the newsletter.¹⁷⁶ As this chapter has revealed, Borovansky made considerable progress after his decision to remain in Australia and become one of its citizens. As observed in his personal correspondence and dealings with people, Borovansky had formed an early bond with the Australian people which was about to increase during the latter war years.¹⁷⁷

The following chapter continues with the war years, encompassing increased war work, restrictions, rationing and young men disappearing into the armed forces, before moving onto its conclusion. Borovansky was determined to encourage those dancers who were available to be involved in the formation of his professional company. His vision remained strong and, while the war isolated Australia, he pushed his agenda. Success was just around the corner and, in the meantime, he improved and consolidated his company, gaining professional status and wages. At the same time, he never ceased trying to prove to the population that ballet could be entertaining as well as a cultural experience. The dictionary tells us that 'entertainment' means amusement and enjoyment, but Salter expresses it in words more suited to ballet being entertaining: "not merely to amuse but to engross, involve, and stir".¹⁷⁸ This signifies to me what Borovansky's aims were, as far as his newer audience members were concerned: first of all to enjoy and understand ballet, then to create ballets that would increase the momentum.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*; Salter, *op.cit.*, "Borovansky was totally outgoing ... letting ... syntax ... actual words in English fall where they might," p.81.

¹⁷⁶ Stevenson, *op.cit.*, pp.27–29. I did not find any newsletter which contained a critique in the Melbourne Ballet Club's file.

¹⁷⁷ Copies of Borovansky's correspondence are scattered throughout the Ingram Papers located at the National Library of Australia, Canberra. I have not used any direct quotes from this source.

¹⁷⁸ Salter, *op.cit.*, p.105.

CHAPTER 3: *The War Years (1943–1945) – Consolidation and Commitment*

On 13 April 1943 at His Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne, a momentous chapter in Australian dance history was about to begin with the first performance of the Borovansky Australian Ballet. An agreement had been drawn up on 5 March between Australia and New Zealand Theatres Limited and Borovansky, who was paid 300 pounds for six nights and one matinee with no partnership involved. Because of the shortage of male dancers, it was arranged to bring some from Sydney. At this stage men from every occupation were disappearing into the armed forces as the war escalated.

The first advertisement appeared in *The Argus*, 27 March, but as the proposed two matinees were reduced to one, an explanation was published on 12 April. This stated that the war work that the young dancers performed was too demanding of time on that Wednesday for them to get to the theatre.¹⁷⁹ This situation, with every adult in Australia controlled by the government, is indicative of just one of the problems Borovansky faced while trying to establish his company, which he determined would be Australian in every way. The resounding success can be attributed to Borovansky's business link with J. C. Williamson's advertising division, which launched a strong campaign, and the way in which he planned his programs so that they appealed to a wider range of the population. For those who saw them the Ballets Russes also came into the computation, as their performances had stimulated so much interest in ballet. With more experience in presenting ballets, Borovansky's dancers were undergoing a transformation in technique and finesse which was noted by critics and audiences. This period was the beginning of everyday Australians becoming interested in ballet a form of entertainment which gave them respite from wartime concerns.

The advertising was thorough, with all three Melbourne newspapers involved. *The Herald*, under the heading "Lovers of Ballet," focused on the principal dancers in this new company. Laurel Martyn and Dorothy Stevenson had both danced in overseas companies and "the program ... is devised to reveal Australian resources in creative arts."¹⁸⁰ Prior to Martyn arranging Frederick Ashton's ballet *Façade*, she wrote to him, 5 February 1943, explaining that she had received no response to her reply-paid cable and assumed he had not received it. She asked if he "minded my producing *Façade* at the Melbourne Ballet Club ... the production part of the Borovanskys school," which had a large membership because "Melbourne is very ballet conscious." It appears that Melbourne Ballet Club members had pressured Martyn to pass on something she had experienced while at the Vic-Wells. On her understanding from Ninette de Valois, Director of Sadler's Wells Ballet, that this was appropriate, she chose *Façade* because it was the only ballet she remembered in detail after five years. The ballet was initially produced at the end of 1942, with William Constable designing the costumes and décor. It generated so much interest that J. C. Williamson's requested that it be included in the forthcoming season at His Majesty's Theatre.¹⁸¹ Ashton must have passed a copy of Martyn's letter to de Valois, as his signature is discernible at the bottom. Her reply to Martyn was as follows:

you have only the right to reproduce the old classics ... Quite apart from Freddy's productions, I would most certainly not even have committed myself to allowing you to produce any of mine.¹⁸²

This official rebuke apparently did nothing to stop Borovansky from continuing to produce *Façade*, as it was included in the November–December season after its introduction earlier in the year. Here is a

¹⁷⁹ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 2, Folder 8, Australian National Library, Canberra; Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book 'A' 1943; *The Argus*, 27 March 1943, 12 April 1943.

¹⁸⁰ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book 'A' 1943; *The Argus*, 1 April 1943, *The Herald*, 'Lovers of Ballet,' date unknown. Copies of all other advertisements are available in J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book 'A' 1943.

¹⁸¹ Ingram Papers MS 7366, Box 1, Folder 3, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

¹⁸² Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 3, letter to Laurel Martyn from Ninette de Valois, 6 July 1943, National Library of Australia, Canberra. de Valois was a key figure in the development of many Australian dancers, as she had direct contact with those students who won the Royal Academy of Dancing Genée scholarship, as well as those who went to London independently such as Robert Helpmann.

clear indication of Borovansky's single-mindedness. He was not prepared to let de Valois dictate what he should present to his audiences. This production was choreographed by one of his principal dancers, from memory, so there could have been many subtle changes. Where in isolated Australia was there a person who could argue about what Martyn had produced? The war had given Borovansky another unexpected benefit, as *Façade* maintained its popularity, remaining in his company's repertoire for some years.

The Advocate, 8 April 1943, states that, after nearly four years of war, the civilian population required some respite, bringing to the forefront the idea of culture as a panacea for them. This could be found in the seven performances of a new Australian ballet company: "Russian inspiration and Australian co-operation enter here on a new and powerful alliance." If the journalist was referring to Borovansky as the 'Russian' and J. C. Williamson's as the 'Australian' component, history has proven this singular sentence to have been profoundly prophetic. Also, an article by *The Sun* states that this presentation of *Façade* was unique in that it was "the first time that English ballet has been seen here."¹⁸³ The accolades continued. *The Age* published a conservative paragraph detailing the Borovansky Australian Ballet's successful inauguration, which delighted the enthusiastic audience with its artistry. *The Argus*, 14 April 1943, was prepared to be more expansive: "The highlight of the evening was *Façade*." *The Sun*, 14 April 1943, revealed that "The packed house was somewhat reminiscent of pre-war days."¹⁸⁴ One of the first signs indicative of positive public reaction to an Australian identity was the following comment published in *The Sun*, 15 April 1943: "It was good to see young Australian dancers winning such approval."¹⁸⁵ This was ground-breaking ideology because of the prevailing attitude in this country that Australians could never achieve a high standard in theatrical arts comparable to overseas companies. The cultural cringe was still entrenched in Australian theatre and took a long time to eradicate. In the meantime, the Borovansky Australian Ballet was on its way to proving how wrong the people could be.

It is enlightening to note what Ted Tait of J. C. Williamson's had to say about Australian audiences in the 1940s:

when Australian audiences are pleased they support you well and their applause is genuine. When they dislike a production, they do not hiss or make a row, they simply stay away with great unanimity.¹⁸⁶

For almost two decades Borovansky gave his audiences what they liked, thus ensuring that they regularly returned when new programs were presented. Introducing ballet as culture in a way that could be understood and absorbed by people was one of Borovansky's main strategies in his overall scheme.

Despite its rather bizarre journalistic style, the *Truth* was inspired to write:

Maestro Borovansky and his flock of sylphs ... managed to do more for our starved aesthetic souls than anything since Col. De [sic] Basil and his band departed ... *Façade* disappointed nobody ... Edna Busse treads an entirely fantastic polka ... and we're prepared to burn candles because sufficient stalwarts remain to hoist ballerinas on their airy flights.¹⁸⁷

It is interesting to realise how well this journalist understood that ballet was acting as a positive influence on Australians in this uncertain period when the possibility of invasion started its worm-like

¹⁸³ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book 'A' 1943; *The Advocate*, 8 April 1943; *The Sun*, 'Here, There and Everywhere,' 9 April 1943.

¹⁸⁴ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book 'A'; *The Age*, undated; *The Argus*, 14 April 1943; *The Sun*, 14 April 1943. *The Sun* also highlighted the fact that "The girls taking part are business girls, many of them doing war-work which ceases at 5.30 pm."

¹⁸⁵ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book 'A' 1943; *The Sun*, 15 April 1943.

¹⁸⁶ Tait, *A Family*, p.1.

¹⁸⁷ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book 'A' 1943; *The Truth*, 16 April 1943.

intrusion into the minds of the populace. Apparently the Borovansky Australian Ballet company was performing its own war work in raising the morale of its audiences. There is also a casual reference to the work in munitions factories that was being done by the male members of the cast, which was the alternative to being called up into one of the services. The remark about burning candles was in response to the total blackout enforced on the Australian public when Japan entered the war.

The Advocate, 22 April 1943, was full of praise for the fledgling ballet company: “The remarkable success of the Borovansky Australian Ballet ... is a triumph ... to the ballet company ... to JCW ... no suggestion of the amateur.”¹⁸⁸ The rather lengthy but inspirational review, advocating continuance of the cultural experience, heralded a positive step towards the fulfilment which awaited the Borovanskys and their hard-working dancers and, at the same time, giving credit to the theatrical management of J. C. Williamson’s for its vision.

F. S. of *The Bulletin*, 28 April 1943, also described a cultural awakening. He outlined how ballet had started in obscure surroundings with music provided by a piano and nondescript scenery, then graduated to municipal theatres but still accompanied by the piano. After that the Borovansky Australian Ballet, complete with orchestra, conductor and scenery, produced by an experienced professional and numerous Australian dancers, made its appearance courtesy of J. C. Williamson’s, all worthy of an enthusiastic acknowledgment.¹⁸⁹ In this article the writer has described how the Borovansky ballet evolved, not quite accurate but indicative of an ignoble path. F. S. described the company as dancing with “verve” and this was exactly the type of dancer Borovansky set out to produce. He had seen the vitality of Australian youth and knew he could turn their athleticism into a representation of cultural beauty.¹⁹⁰

Borovansky was obviously receiving support from high places, as both *The Argus* and *The Sun* reported the presence of the Governor (Sir Winston Dugan) and personal members on opening night. There are many letters and other references in the Ingram Papers indicating Borovansky’s strong relationship with Australia’s governors-general throughout the years of his ballet company.¹⁹¹ In reply to a letter from a Melbourne doctor who added his approbation, Borovansky replied: “With the support of people like yourself ... we cannot fail to eventually achieve our ideal: the permanent establishment of an Australian ballet.”¹⁹² Borovansky answered the many letters he received, thus introducing a very personal touch to his business. This was an onerous task for a busy person but initially he had the able assistance of Colleen Gough, who remained in the position of his personal secretary for eight years. It is evident from the copies of these letters that he was interested in what people had to say and replied in a manner of reassurance to their comments but, at the same time, adding that some suggestions were not within his authority to implement.¹⁹³

Thoughts of a permanent Australian ballet company had been germinating in Borovansky’s mind for some years. He had been trained in a state ballet school and graduated to a state opera company. Australian dancers of this era did not have access to such cultural privileges, but Borovansky was prepared to confront this issue with his school and company. However, he acknowledged that much groundwork needed to be accomplished before the solution became a reality.¹⁹⁴ In the interim, the maximum that could be achieved with his young company was to maintain interest through the Melbourne Ballet Club, which presented performances in July and August 1943.¹⁹⁵ Prior to these

¹⁸⁸ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson’s Publicity Book ‘A’ 1943; *The Advocate*, 22 April 1943.

¹⁸⁹ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson’s Publicity Book ‘A’ 1943; *The Bulletin*, 28 April 1943.

¹⁹⁰ *The Herald*, 20 April 1943.

¹⁹¹ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson’s Publicity Book ‘A’ 1943; Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 2, Folder 7, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

¹⁹² Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 2, Folder 7, copy of letter to Dr T. Seward, Collins Street, Melbourne, 29 April 1943.

¹⁹³ Salter, op.cit., pp.173–174. What remains of Borovansky’s correspondence is held in the Ingram Papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra. (I was impressed that one of his replies was to a nine-year old boy.)

¹⁹⁴ Another dancer from the Ballets Russes, Edouard Zeglovsky, held the same strong views, also deploring the lack of cultural facilities in Australia. Zeglovsky, op.cit., p.43.

¹⁹⁵ *Ballade, Sigrid, En Saga* and *Capriccio* were presented by the Melbourne Ballet Club during August 1943. MS 8932 of Box MS 8932 – 8933, Judy Bartram Collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

performances Borovansky had written to the President, Lady Best, explaining the impossibility of presenting a new production every month:

it is very difficult to obtain material ... often not the right colour or texture ... it was necessary for everyone in the Academy to sacrifice ... their own coupons ... rehearsals took much longer because his dancers were doing war related jobs ... main difficulty was to obtain male dancers ... called into military service ... few replacements.¹⁹⁶

The above missive reveals some of the hardships that confronted the company, as well as the general population, during the war. The loss of coupons was particularly stressful, as all clothing and footwear was rationed. Stevenson also notes the shortage of male dancers in her reference to Serge Bousloff being a “very welcome” addition to the company.¹⁹⁷ During a period of eight months, the young company experienced a variation in numbers from 42 in April down to 31 in December 1943. It is reasonable to assume that, as the war continued, Borovansky lost more of his male dancers to the armed forces, which would have caused a lot of angst while trying to maintain a balanced company. In 1944 a despairing letter to Borovansky written by Wilfred Stevens provides an indication of how difficult it was for young, aspiring male dancers who were caught up in the war. Borovansky wrote to one of his former male dancers, Lt. George Robinson, stationed in New Guinea, bringing him up to date with all that was happening with the ballet company. He finished with wishes that “all my boys, who are now on Active Service, will be with me again.”¹⁹⁸ By regarding his male dancers as his ‘boys’ Borovansky reveals a natural protectiveness and anxiety about their return to him as surely as a natural father.

Not only did the war impede the progress of many male dancers, possibly denying them a future career in dance, but some female dancers suffered loss of opportunities as well. J. A. V. S. of *The Sun Pictorial*, December 1943, reports that “Corrie Ladders had her career somewhat retarded by the war.” As the recipient of a Royal Academy of Dancing Genée scholarship, she was unable to further her studies at the Sadler’s Wells school in London or benefit from further tuition by Egorava in Paris. Ladders took up the option of being principal dancer with the Borovansky company for some years, then with Laurel Martyn in the Ballet Guild. After teaching for the Borovanskys, she opened her own school in Melbourne during the 1950s.¹⁹⁹

In a letter to his friend Sascha, 18 June 1943, Borovansky wrote that Australia was a wonderful country with excellent people. He explained that he had remained in Australia because his homeland was one of the first casualties of the present world war and he stood by that decision. It was hard at first, as they had been unable to do anything for their relatives still living in Europe, but now “we are absolutely happy.” Borovansky detailed that his idea was “to establish ballet ... on the same basis of European theatres, which this country needs” as there was tremendous enthusiasm here for ballet. He added that his newly established company had attracted “very large audiences” which he regarded as a sign of success. In the meantime he acknowledged that the altered situation in Australia had limited his original intentions, but hoped that the postwar years would see total accomplishment.²⁰⁰

In September 1943, Borovansky informed his dancers that J. C. Williamson’s had offered the company a three-week season, on a trial basis, at the Comedy Theatre commencing 27 November. This could lead to an extended time the following year and spurred them on to even greater heights. J. C. Williamson’s was willing to present them as a professional company, referred to in the program as

¹⁹⁶ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 2, copy of letter from Borovansky to Lady Best, 2 July 1943, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

¹⁹⁷ Stevenson, op.cit., p.44.

¹⁹⁸ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 2, File 7, Australian National Library, Canberra.

¹⁹⁹ *The Sun*, ‘Here, There and Everywhere,’ 9 April 1943.

Corrie Ladders started ballet training with English dancers Gerado and Adair in 1926 when they opened their studio in Collins Street, Melbourne. She was a member of the 1936 de Basil Ballets Russes. Brissenden and Glennon, op.cit., p.144; Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, Concert Program (Melbourne), Corrie Ladders School of Ballet.

²⁰⁰ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1. Folder 2, copy of letter from Borovansky to Sascha, 18 June 1943, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

‘Australian Ballet.’ The program would include *Les Sylphides*, *Vltava*, *Façade* and *Divertissements: Blue Bird* or *Aurora’s Wedding*, *Spanish Dance* and *Tango*.²⁰¹ The group now rehearsed with utter dedication. This was too important to risk failure. Stevenson credited the Borovanskys for this opportunity as they had worked assiduously to pass on a large proportion of their own standards so quickly.²⁰²

Stevenson’s *Sea Legend*, which was premiered during this season, received a large amount of press coverage; for example:

All-Australian Ballet ... choreography ... music ... décor. A really home-grown product for the first time ... critics ... surprised that ordinary Australian working girls could have even a remote resemblance to real dancers.²⁰³

In this instance the cultural cringe was perpetuated by theatre critics openly admitting that Australians could not be seriously regarded in the same way as overseas ballet dancers. The “real dancers” they referred to would have been from the Ballets Russes, complete with their Russian names, as the impact of these companies still existed. There appeared to be no-one willing to make further comment about this demeaning statement – not just “resemblance” but “remote resemblance” – which implies that it was not possible for them to possess the ability to become ballet dancers because they were Australian.

Early in 1944 the Borovanskys must have had serious thoughts about their association with the Melbourne Ballet Club, as they tendered their resignations on 29 March after a controversy involving two club members and Borovansky. The response, 27 March 1944, stated that the opinions of Mr Tipping and Mr Aitkin were not those of other Club members:

The Committee are very appreciate [sic] of all the hard work which you and Madame have done ... and are unanimous in their sincere admiration for the wonderful success you have achieved.²⁰⁴

One week later, another letter was sent to Borovansky requesting continuation of his and Madame’s patronage and permission to hold their meetings at his studio. Mr Tipping had previously sent a two-page epistle to Lady Best in which it appears the Stage Fund and prepaid bookings for ballet performances had been the cause of the dispute. He later wrote a personal letter to Borovansky enjoining him to reconsider, and declared great admiration for what he had achieved. At the same time, one line in Tipping’s letter to Lady Best – “the adroit manner in which he [Borovansky] has managed to dominate the Club” – clearly indicates his perception of Borovansky’s motives towards ensuring that he should be the one in charge.²⁰⁵ A letter from Borovansky to the Melbourne Ballet Club, 6 May 1944, in reply to their correspondence of 17 April, stated that he and Xenia “would continue as patrons of the Club” but made the stipulation that the properties listed be transferred to him. In return Borovansky agreed to the Club using the Studio Theatre rent-free on Saturday and Sunday evenings once a month on the condition that only dancers from his academy were to be

²⁰¹ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 14, Folder 82, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Borovansky Ballet Programs, Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne.

²⁰² Stevenson, op.cit., pp.43–44, mentions that Jonet Wilke did not dance this season as her day job was very demanding, and that others speculated about giving up their jobs for a dancing career.

²⁰³ Stevenson, op.cit., p.44. In 1949 *Sea Legend* was performed in London, but not with an Australian cast; *The Ballet Annual* 1949, p.105. Locksley Shaw was greatly impressed by *Vltava* which, in his opinion, “conformed more to the ethic of ballet;” *Radio Times*, ‘Stage, Song and Screen,’ December 1943. Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson’s Publicity Book ‘A’ 1943.

²⁰⁴ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 2, copy of letter from Borovansky to Melbourne Ballet Club, 20 March 1944; letter from Melbourne Ballet Club to Borovansky, 27 March 1944, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

²⁰⁵ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 2, letter from Melbourne Ballet Club to Borovansky, 3 April 1944; copy of letter to the President, Melbourne Ballet Club, 12 March 1944; copy of letter to Borovansky, 7 April 1944, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

included in dance items.²⁰⁶

Actors Equity was on the move in 1944, establishing an office in Melbourne with Margaret Clarke as its Victorian representative, and a State Office Control Committee was to be elected. Radio announcers and studio staff had recently been absorbed into Actors Equity so their votes were to be included, and a proposed name change to Actors and Announcers Equity Association of Australia was to be arranged. The April updated news bulletin stated that a committee of seven had been elected to examine postwar problems, including a national theatre: "Members of our profession ... must realise that only by planning on the part of Equity can possible hardships after the war be obviated." This refers to the fact that, when the shipping lanes were freed, overseas artists would once more take precedence in the employment market. The cultural cringe would again encircle theatrical employees, particularly if there was not a concerted effort from unionists.²⁰⁷ An interesting article regarding contracts between J. C. Williamson's and Equity members of a company touring New Zealand indicates the degree of difficulty Borovansky must have experienced in his own dealings. It appears that negotiations were refused and Equity declared the tour void, resulting in a "set back to all management who attempt to enforce the old inequitable contracts still being used in theatres in Australia."²⁰⁸ This is indicative of the new Equity gaining strength through its growing members, and Borovansky was there to speak for his company.

While war still raged in Europe and the Pacific, and five years after establishing the Academy of Russian Ballet, Borovansky won his private war to present a professional company of 40 dancers (a repertoire of eight ballets), managed by Frank Tait. On 17 May 1944, a contract was drawn up between Edouard and Xenia Borovansky (as the Borovansky Australian Ballet) and J. C. Williamson Theatres Limited for a 13-week season, 20 May to 18 September, at a rate of 50 pounds each per week. Another agreement in October saw their remuneration advanced to 70 pounds plus 5 pounds per week holiday pay, which was the requirement of the Holidays Act of New Zealand. The Borovansky Australian Ballet was officially launched in Adelaide on 20 May, followed by seasons in Tasmania, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, and a tour of New Zealand which lasted four months.²⁰⁹

As a point of interest regarding the way ballet tradition was passed on in this era, Stevenson recalls that "Boro's dramatic memories were of Pavlova, probably the greatest *Giselle* of all times ... we were lucky to have this opportunity to learn it in so direct a tradition."²¹⁰ As ballet notation was still in the future, companies had to rely on their dancers' memories. Borovansky's experience in characterisation as well as choreography was well used in passing this onto the next generation of dancers. One Melbourne critic had already written that Borovansky could "command a high salary" in vaudeville revue as a silent comedian.²¹¹

On 11 May 1944 Borovansky wrote to Joanne Priest, a Royal Academy of Dancing teacher, asking for her assistance in obtaining accommodation while the company was in Adelaide. In her reply she also mentions the shortage of male dancers and Manpower, which were two of the major problems Borovansky was also experiencing.²¹² In a letter to Bill Constable, 7 March 1944, Borovansky said that he had a "little trouble with the Manpower" and it can be assumed that he would have been continually trying to get his dancers released from compulsory wartime duties. A month later he wrote again, asking Constable not to say anything, particularly to the press, "until everything is settled with

²⁰⁶ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 2, Folder 8, copy of letter Borovansky to Melbourne Ballet Club, 17 April 1944, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

²⁰⁷ Actors Equity, Acc.3#1984.004, Box 31, 27/1/1–27/1/2, *Equity News*, April 1944, 1, 2, University of Melbourne Archives.

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 4, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Papers of J. C. Williamson's Theatres Limited, MS 5783, Box 446, Contract Book 1940, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Tait, *A Family*, p.225.

²¹⁰ Stevenson, *op.cit.*, pp.45–47; Tait, *A Family*, p.226.

²¹¹ Locksley Shaw, *Radio Times*, 'Stage, Song and Screen,' December 1943, Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book 'A' 1943.

²¹² Joanne Priest choreographed *The Listeners* for the National Theatre's Melbourne season, 29 September 1949, and formed the Joanne Priest Studio Theatre, Adelaide in 1955; Pask, *The Second Act*, pp.48–58.

the Manpower ... as they could ruin completely the whole company.”²¹³ The rationale behind all this cloak-and-dagger rhetoric is difficult to unravel, as there is nothing else in the files to explain his exact fears except that Manpower had control of every Australian while the country was still at war. Constable was living in Sydney and perhaps Borovansky was uncertain about any reaction from the Kirsova faction when it realised that J. C. Williamson’s was now backing his company. With regards to Kirsova’s company, Borovansky wrote that “The Firm was starting to worry about it” as “Adelaide is not showing a big interest” and “without jealousy or prejudice” he did not consider her company in any way artistically comparable with his. Borovansky’s opinion goes against those of other critics, and some dancers, of this era who maintained that her company’s artistic value was highly rated.²¹⁴ In readiness for the Borovansky ballet’s tour, Stevenson had left her job, as it had been a strenuous two years, and attended to her wardrobe. Not wishing to incur Borovansky’s displeasure and as she and Martyn were being paid 20 pounds per week, they reacted instantly to his dictum that they dress and behave like ladies. He had always stressed that ‘his girls’ should be well groomed when attending parties and be totally feminine in attitude. This is not surprising, as fathers of that era were prone to admonishing their female children for wearing clothes which were not prescribed (as in ‘no slacks’). As to female behaviour, demure and compliant should be the acme. Stevenson described the crowd of people at Spencer Street Station to see the company off on its first tour: photographers, members of the Melbourne Ballet Club with flowers and good-luck tokens, and mums and dads, as some of the *corps de ballet* were very young.²¹⁵

When they arrived at the theatre the following day, they found the pianist, Winifred McDonnell, trying to play the last part of *Façade* from memory with her eyes shut, as the musical score had gone to Alice Springs. The stage manager, Fred Stenning, somehow managed to secure a record and McDonnell memorised the whole ballet just before the curtain went up.²¹⁶ The Adelaide press commented on the lack of orchestra, making a comparison between the Borovansky Australian company and the de Basil company. However, the second program was more favourably received and the *corps de ballet* in *Swan Lake* was singled out. Borovansky publicly complimented his ‘girls,’ who were “so surprised they almost fell off the stage *on bloc*.”²¹⁷ According to Stenning, their first professional performances were successful: “numerous curtain calls, the stage covered in flowers, Borovansky popular with autograph hunters, deafening applause, great reception for second program.”²¹⁸ The very knowledgeable Adelaide audience would have been hard to impress but the company accomplished this and, at the same time, gained a great measure of maturity.

A wartime incident occurred during their trip back to Melbourne. The entire company had sleepers on this journey, thanks to Borovansky’s endeavours, but an officer of the W. A. A. F. (Women’s Australian Air Force) could not be accommodated and lodged a formal complaint. The newspapers decided that this was a tale of bribery and graft which could boost their sales. It was subsequently confirmed that the dancers had priority. Borovansky treated the issue as free publicity and, in Stevenson’s words, “some of us had our most glamorous photographs in *Truth*.”²¹⁹ The company’s next port of call was Hobart after a tempestuous, sitting-up-all-night crossing of Bass Strait with everyone suffering seasickness. They were “met by our dapper, smiling leader who had travelled by ‘plane ... the smile quickly faded” and the scheduled rehearsal cancelled.²²⁰ Stevenson remembers

²¹³ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 2, Folder 17, copy of letter to Bill Constable, 7 March 1944, 2, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

William (Bill) Constable became a great friend and confidante to Borovansky; he was an Australian designer connected to Borovansky’s company, the National Theatre and the London Festival Company; Pask, *The Second Act*, pp.24,26,208,217; *Currency Companion*, Michelle Potter, ‘Kirsova’s Designers,’ p.231.

²¹⁴ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 2, Folder 17, copy of letter to Bill Constable, 3 February 1944, pp.1–2, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

²¹⁵ Stevenson, op.cit., p. 4.

²¹⁶ Stevenson, op.cit., pp. 48–49. Fred Stenning had a long association with the Borovansky Ballet, a peacekeeper who managed to keep Borovansky’s bullying tactics in their proper perspective.

²¹⁷ Stevenson, op.cit., p.51.

²¹⁸ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 2, Folder 13, letter to Xenia from Stenning, Adelaide, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

²¹⁹ Stevenson, op.cit., p.52.

²²⁰ Stevenson, op.cit., p.52–53.

very well the extreme cold and grubbiness of the convict-built Theatre Royal:

We opened with *Les Sylphides*: our frozen breath generated a very romantic-looking mist and the arms and necks of the *sylphs* ... were a convincing blue colour. The audience must have been cold also but the reception was as warm as the theatre was cold.²²¹

A press notice from the Launceston performances raised a pertinent point with the statement that “they were deeply impressed and incredulous that these girls and boys were ordinary Australians like themselves.”²²² This is a very profound statement because dancers were not considered to be of any worth unless they were Russian; hence the period of adopting Russian stage names to become acceptable to the ballet public. Also, in another state, we have the cultural cringe busily at work compounding the long-held belief that Australians could not possibly be as good as or, heaven forbid, better than those educated or trained overseas. The praise the company received was well earned as Borovansky constantly pressured them, determined to maintain his standard. A communication from Charity Wynne, a Tasmanian dance teacher, expressed the hope that Borovansky might be the one to establish a permanent ballet company “to do for us what Ninette de Valois has done for London.” Wynne was also impressed by his well-balanced work. To have a stranger recognise and acknowledge this distinguishing quality would have brought a knowing smile to Borovansky’s face and a tired sigh from his cast. Once on a hunt, Borovansky was relentless.²²³

After facing another rough voyage where “the ship’s funnel and a good deal else was lost between Tasmania and Melbourne,” the Theatre Royal, Sydney, was the company’s next stop. Their first Sydney season, commencing 13 July 1944, complete with a 20-piece orchestra conducted by Gabriel Joffe, was approached with considerable apprehension as Kirsova’s company had been a popular fixture for four years and her followers were used to their favourite dancers.²²⁴ The Sydney program commenced on 13 July 1944 and received excellent reviews, with the *Sydney Morning Herald* stating that the Borovansky Ballet had “opened a new chapter in Australia’s cultural history.” The *corps de ballet* was selected for extra praise: “the precision of these Australian girls made the curtain-raiser, *Les Sylphides*, that classic test piece, a pleasure to watch.” *Swan Lake* was part of the second program and the same reviewer again praises the *corps de ballet*. He also credits Borovansky’s disciplinarian approach in getting results, as the four ballets were danced with complete assurance. The company did not start strutting around with swollen heads after receiving this adulation. They knew “Boro’s standards were not those of war-time Sydney, nor anywhere else in Australia.” He insisted on the Russian ballet methodology – “work, work, work” – to be accepted by European standards.²²⁵

The J. C. Williamson’s publicity juggernaut sprang into action in Melbourne with eight weeks of advertising and articles, commencing 14 July 1944 when *The Age* advised that the Borovansky Ballet would be featured in a gala matinee on 5 September to be held at His Majesty’s Theatre. However, before this date the company had presented *Giselle* and *Capriccio Italien* as their Melbourne opening, on 5 August, with an extended season because of the popularity of *Giselle*. The abridged Preface for the opening night of the Melbourne season, 5 August 1944, stated that:

Mr. Borovansky has succeeded in developing an understanding of this fine educational art the way it is done in England and Russia, and, in these difficult days of war, he is building an original Australian Ballet which will be the foundation of ballet here in the future ... has proved ... that his Australian dancers have justified

²²¹ Stevenson, op.cit., p.53. (Theatres were also strictly regulated by the government during the war years as far as the use of power was concerned).

²²² *ibid.*

²²³ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, letter to Borovansky from Charity Wynne, Hobart, National Library of Australia, Canberra. (As this letter is undated, I assume it was written after the first Tasmanian tour of the company.)

²²⁴ Stevenson, op.cit., pp.53–54; Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, Borovansky Ballet Programs; Kitcher, op.cit., p.351. Latvian Gabriel Joffe settled in Australia as the war broke out and conducted for the de Basil company during its season in Australia.

²²⁵ Stevenson, op.cit., p.54 (note Stevenson’s use of the abbreviations ‘Boro,’ and ‘Boro’s Ballet’ was how many of his followers referred to Borovansky’s productions).

his belief in them, and he also believes in the Australian audiences who, from the very beginning, have supported him in his difficult task.²²⁶

Helene Ffrance, a protégée of Slavinsky, was now a member of the company facing the unenviable job of learning her roles “in the middle of a very frantic tour.” It was expected that she would cope with this because of her experience in Kirsova’s company. Stevenson noted that Ffrance was “very gifted” but had started dancing at a late age and was not given the time necessary for development. The *Sun Pictorial* critic considered that the Borovansky Australian Ballet was yet to produce an “outstanding ballerina ... the main characteristic of the company is its unison.”²²⁷ The unison of the *corps de ballet* was particularly noticeable and it is significant that this ability emerged at such an early stage. It definitely became a characteristic of the company in later performances. There is some anecdotal data, particularly in interviews, which indicates that a *corps de ballet* moving as one was an obsession that Borovansky was never going to relinquish – even if it involved a session of standing on a chair while hurling abuse over a microphone. On the other hand, it may have been the vision of a company of young Australians determined to make a go of it with a leader capable of steering them in the right direction.²²⁸

The Argus printed two articles, both dated 7 August 1944. Theatre critic ‘The Chief’ writes that, at the end of the performance, “the packed house was silent ... a higher tribute could not have been paid the artists.” The second article adds that “his young dancers would seem to be as good or better than the Russian Ballet.” The *Stage and Screen* publication reveals that Australians were serious about having a national ballet company during the 1940s: “The enthusiasm ... and the intense interest ... again proved the demand for a permanent Australian ballet company.” An article in *The Argus*, 10 August 1944, provides an insight into how our national traits would play a significant role in the evolution of an Australian ballet company:

No temperament backstage – Mr Borovansky would not like us to develop it ... From the principal ballerinas to the youngest fourteen-year-old Alma Watson, there was a youthful, healthy, concert-pitch enthusiasm ... Young Australia is bringing something new and delightful to ballet.²²⁹

²²⁶ Ingram Papers, MS 73367, Box 1, Folder 2, National Library of Australia, Canberra. (During this season *Facade* was still being presented and *Fantasy on Grieg’s Concerto in A Minor* became a favourite. Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, Borovansky Ballet Programs.)

²²⁷ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson’s Publicity Book, Melbourne season, Borovansky Australian Ballet, Books ‘A’ and ‘B;’ *The Age*, 14 July 1944; *The Sun* and *The Argus*, 4 September 1944; Stevenson, op.cit., unnumbered page between 54 and 55; Tait, op.cit., p.226; J. C. Williamson’s Publicity Book ‘B’ August 1944; ‘Borovansky Australian Ballet at His Majesty’s,’ *Sun Pictorial* critic, 7 August 1944, who was full of praise for the costuming of *Giselle*, which was due to Edna Busse, who directed the making of almost all the costumes worn by the company despite shortages that many people today could not begin to imagine.

²²⁸ In the early 1950s, unbeknown to Borovansky, I was in the theatre during a rehearsal and witnessed this behaviour first-hand, so I am convinced it was vital to his ideology of a *corps de ballet’s* function, as he spent so much time ensuring straight lines.

²²⁹ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson’s Publicity Book ‘B’ August 1944; *The Argus*, ‘*Giselle* Enthral Big Audience and Ballet Dancer’s Busy Tour,’ author unknown, 7 August 1944; Helen Seager, *The Argus*, ‘Australian Ballet Dancers Backstage’ 10 August 1944, (Borovansky’s opening and closing night speeches were to become legendary); *Stage and Screen*, details unknown. *Radio Ramblings* by ‘SIB’ mentions that Viola Tait, wife of Frank Tait, Gertrude Johnson of the National Theatre and Philippe Perrott, former Borovansky dancer now in the R. A. A. F., were in the audience. Philippe Perrott with Rachel Cameron choreographed *Arkaringa* in 1945; *Currency Companion*, Amanda Card, Carole Y. Johnson, ‘Theatrical Dance,’ p.22.

(I was particularly excited when I came across Alma Watson’s name in the early Borovansky Ballet programs as she had been the leading dancer in *Robin Hood*, presented by the Melbourne Conservatorium at the Union Theatre in 1951. The Brenan Academy provided the *corps de ballet* for this production and we rehearsed at her studio with the composer, Edith Harrhy. As a student of Jennie Brenan’s Academy, Watson had won the Royal Academy of Dancing scholarship to Sadler’s Wells. At that time this was awarded to one Australian ballet student every second year. During her stay in London, Leonide Massine requested Alma as his partner on

Borovansky's Melbourne performances appear to have influenced public thinking towards our own national ballet company. *The Listener In*, 12 August 1944, gives credence to the fact that the push for a permanent ballet company was significant at this stage of our cultural development:

The development of a permanent Australian Ballet Company has been brought a stage nearer by the success of the Borovansky Ballet ... It was the most artistic performance by a purely Australian company yet given.²³⁰

The Sun, 12 August 1944, in stating that "war-time restrictions on travel have brought to light undreamed-of talent among young Australian dancers," reinforced the premise that the war, which had closed the doors on overseas travel, now provided the opportunity for dancers to develop their talents in Australia. Furthermore, *The Argus*, 24 August 1944, reported that there was an appreciative and enthusiastic audience ready to support them. Martin Rubinstein also endorsed the concept of an Australian company by telling an interviewer that "he hopes to see a national ballet established in Australia and to become part of it."²³¹

The Age, August 1944, reiterated that the Borovansky Australian Ballet was still the people's popular choice. Was this the point at which ballet was assimilated into popular culture? If so, then Borovansky had achieved something which appeared unattainable and was perhaps regarded as an improper intrusion by some Australians still clinging to a British-based society. Borovansky's company became the conduit through which ballet was disseminated to the working class, that is, 'ballet for the people'. Did ballet also become a therapy for the darkness of war? Did the war influence leisure? Was there a tendency to just go and see anything as a way of forgetting what was happening in the world? I think that ballet had a therapeutic affect for many audience members. With the introduction of shift work, the hours of leisure had to change and this obviously presented problems for those workers, but the length and sell-out seasons of the Borovansky Australian Ballet prove that many found a way around this different life. Those who attended a ballet performance rather than a lighter form of entertainment at their local cinema could have been seeking the same result but in a theatrical atmosphere that was completely new to most of them.

By the time the third program was presented, the critics were unanimous in their praise for the Borovansky Australian Ballet. An interesting article appeared in *The Australian*, 23 August 1944, under the heading 'The Ballet – People's Fare':

After being considered as entertainment only for the classically minded minority for more than a century, ballet has been accepted by the people ... to such an extent that it has become a serious rival for all other forms of entertainment ... crowded Melbourne audiences are being treated to a season of ballet which rivals anything yet presented by overseas companies. And all the girls are Australians, who make no attempt to disguise the fact. Trained by M. and Mme. Edouard Borovansky, they work as rigorously as any ballet dancer trained in Russia.²³²

It was reported in *The Age* on 24 August 1944 during Professor Crawford's opening speech for an

several occasions and she was chosen to dance in the film *The Red Shoes*. I last saw her in the early 1950s as she served customers in a shop which sold women's clothing. Watson is mentioned in *Currency Companion* as one of the *In Melbourne Tonight* choreographers who began in 1957; Robin Collins, 'Trained for Television,' p.648.)

²³⁰ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book 'B' August 1944; *Listener In*, 12 August 1944.

²³¹ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book 'B' August 1944; *The Sun*, 12 August 1944; *The Argus*, 14 August 1944; interview JAVS, *Sun Pictorial*, 17 August 1944. (Martin Rubinstein witnessed the Australian Ballet established and flourishing but, unfortunately, his time with the company was shortened through illness. He did become the most famous teacher of ballet Australia had ever produced.)

²³² Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book 'B' August 1944; *The Age*, 14 August 1944; *The Australian*, author unknown, 23 August 1944.

exhibition of ballet sketches that he had been agreeably surprised at the excellence of the Borovansky Australian Ballet. In a comparison between ballet he had recently seen in Moscow and what he had now witnessed in Melbourne, Crawford remarked that “he had expected to find himself making allowances for the Australian ballet” but, on the contrary, was inspired to write a letter of congratulation to Borovansky. He also commented on the company’s “freshness – no sign of emulating Russian and European ballet companies.”²³³ Here is an indication from a reputable source that the Australian ‘body’, to which Borovansky was initially attracted, was now ready to present its own interpretation of dance without the limitation of having to perform a prescribed style. The true beginning of the Australian dancer had just been witnessed.

The Melbourne season proved to be the catalyst that launched the Borovansky Australian Ballet on its meteoric course towards stardom. The home audience could not get enough of them and names such as Stevenson, Martyn, Rubinstein and Busse currently appearing on programs would forever be regarded as ‘our ballet dancers.’ The company travelled to Brisbane for a five-week season commencing 12 September 1944. Stevenson remembers that, as Queenslanders, it was very exciting for her and Martyn to be performing in Brisbane. Two ex-Kirsova dancers, Joan Gadsden and Strelsa Heckleman, joined the company in Brisbane. Earlier in 1944 J. C. Williamson’s had withdrawn its support from Kirsova’s company, advising some of the soloists to join Borovansky; Joan and Monica Halliday and Judith Burgess had already followed this advice. Phyllis Kennedy, Jennie Brenan’s pupil and recipient of a Genée Royal Academy of Dancing scholarship, also became a member of the company. Kennedy had performed in J. C. Williamson’s musicals, which Borovansky dismissed as not pure ballet and consequently not proper, with the result that he treated Kennedy rather harshly. Ten days after the final performance in Brisbane, the company started its first New Zealand tour, which ran for almost five months.²³⁴

The contracts signed by company members gave them a wage for appearing on stage, with half-pay for rehearsals:

There was never any subsidy for non-working time between engagements. A commercial theatre is ... maintained by the takings ... there was no way the Management ... could have employed us otherwise ... we were only too grateful to accept ... they were the first real contracts we had been offered.²³⁵

This pinpoints one of the abysmal situations which existed in Australian theatre. As far as young dancers were concerned, the alternative was no work, and without work they could not gain experience, which placed them in a vulnerable position. The case for unionism to counteract these anomalies was apparent. In September 1944, the newly established Actors Equity (Melbourne) reported a case of short payment but, as the “Award did not prescribe any payment for ballet members doing more than the statutory number of performances in one week,” the arbitration judge’s ruling could not be contested by Equity. The article compares conditions offered to ordinary workers and those endured in the theatre, equating this difference with the fact that outside a theatre there was unionism. The *Sydney Bulletin* and J. C. Williamson’s maintained that “Unionism and Art do not mix.” Equity’s answer was that “good, just and equitable conditions of work and grossly inflated profits do not mix.” On the question of conditions, the following quote has been reproduced from the August 1944 issue of American Equity’s magazine: “Actors dress in surroundings hardly fit for a self-respecting chimney sweep to park his brooms and brushes.” This echoed the battle for better conditions in Australia, starting with an elected Equity deputy to monitor general background conditions in every company and radio station. In November 1944, Equity applied to the Federal

²³³ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson’s Publicity Book ‘B’ August 1944; *The Age*, author unknown, 24 August 1944.

²³⁴ Stevenson, op.cit., p.55; Kitcher, op.cit., pp.352–353; programs for the New Zealand tour at the Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, under the title ‘Borovansky Ballet of 40.’

Phyllis Kennedy was Victorian representative of the Royal Academy of Dancing for many years after she retired from the stage. Judith Burgess choreographed for Valrene Tweedie’s company, Ballet Australia, in 1960;

Currency Companion, Shirley McKechnie, ‘Visionary in Ballet,’ p.132.

²³⁵ Stevenson, op.cit., p.46.

Arbitration Court to register the Actors and Announcers Equity Association of Australia.²³⁶

During the rehearsal period in preparation for the 1945 Melbourne season, Xenia received a letter from Frank Tait, 20 May 1945, in which he agreed to her “exclusive services as Choreographer.” The company set the commencement date of employment and the date of the Melbourne season. Xenia was to be paid a salary of 50 pounds per week and J. C. Williamson’s had the option of a further extension on the same terms. Wartime influences are noticeable in the final condition, which stated:

the engagement is made subject to there being no restrictions imposed by Manpower or Transportation authorities upon any member of the Borovansky Ballet Company which would prevent fulfilment of this engagement.²³⁷

As there is nothing in the correspondence to indicate that Xenia was replaced, it must be assumed that she fulfilled this obligation until the end of the Sydney season some seven months later, earning 200 pounds per month, which would have been an extraordinary salary for a woman in the 1940s.

It is now evident that the Borovansky Australian Ballet company made a significant impact on Australian theatre. A successful touring ballet company had been structured by Borovansky, backed by Xenia and their enthusiastic dancers. The unthinkable had happened! Australian dancers were performing in their own country to reviews that proved their talent was of a quality to maintain a professional ballet company. 1943 to 1945 were the defining years in the development of the Borovansky Australian Ballet company, as they gradually disconnected themselves from the Melbourne Ballet Club. Their first venture onto the professional stage, albeit not professional in the legal sense, was accomplished in an amazingly short time. A little over a year later, the company was embedded in Australian theatrical history thanks to the commitment of the entrepreneurial Tait brothers, the nurturing of Xenia, the determination of the dancers and the business acumen and drive of Borovansky. The company entered the postwar era prepared to work even harder on improving its standard. The repertoire altered and expanded, and Borovansky would present his first ‘Australian’ ballet, *Terra Australis*, in 1946. His early dancers, Martyn, Stevenson, Busse, Ladders, Rubinstein and Trunoff, set the standard which other dancers worked hard to attain. They developed into the stars that Borovansky had envisaged and encouraged; however, a lot more work had to be done before that stage was achieved.

As Australia entered the postwar era of positives and negatives, there were changes not only for ex-servicemen and women and civilian war workers, but for the Borovansky Australian Ballet as well. With the reopening of sea lanes between Australia and Europe, J. C. Williamson’s was once again able to book overseas companies, including England’s Ballet Rambert, to tour Australia. Increased interest in ballet produced several amateur groups as well as the professional National Theatre Ballet Company. There was to be a great deal of change to the Australian theatrical scene during the postwar period.

²³⁶ Actors Equity, Acc.#1984.0044, Box 3, 27/1/1–27/1/2, *Equity News*, September 1944, p.2, Box 31, 27/1/1–27/1/2 *Equity News*, October 1944, p.2, University of Melbourne Archives.

²³⁷ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 2, letter from Frank Tait to Xenia Borovansky, 20 May 1945, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

CHAPTER 4: *Postwar Years in Australia*

After Curtin's death in July 1945, Ben Chifley took over as Labor Prime Minister with the hope of a new deal for "labour and investment," the working class wage structure, and anticipated that his government would expand "distribution of services to tax payers."²³⁸ By the time of the 1946 elections, Member of Parliament Robert Menzies had changed many of his earlier attitudes but was still opposing socialism.²³⁹ Through the later part of the 1940s, the Labor Party maintained a campaign to nationalise banks in Australia, with the Banking Bill being passed through the Senate to become the Banking Act. The Communist Party of Australia was strongly in favour of nationalisation.²⁴⁰ Menzies advocated the destruction of the Australian Communist Party and the Liberal Party backed him with a complete ban, thereby attacking the "the Chifley government's attraction to socialism and regulation."²⁴¹

Menzies rejected the relevance of class to a society like Australia as it did not have fixed status groups; class was not important in its individualistic New World style of living.²⁴² Australian culture in postwar Australia is described by D. H. Lawrence as "Egalitarianism – in Australia nobody is supposed to rule, and nobody does rule, appointed to administer the law, not to rule."²⁴³

According to Justin Macdonnell in his book *Arts, Minister?*, governments only accept responsibilities but are seldom able to rid themselves of them. He further stated that, since the Second World War, most governments assumed this responsibility. As an English-speaking nation, Australia tended to follow Britain, the U. S. A. and Canada in secular education, public hospitals, toll-free roads, etc. Macdonnell queried their decision. Nations of Africa and Latin American chose the ministry of culture to cultivate. Anglo-Celtic countries approached the situation in a more consistent manner, creating the council and committee:

This was as true in broadcasting and film (BBC, ABC, NZBC, Film Board of Canada) as it was in the arts proper (Arts Council of Great Britain, Canada Council, Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, National Endowment for the Arts).²⁴⁴

It was not until the late 1960s that Australia followed this trend. Since the Second World War, the ABC (responsible for six state symphony orchestras) has received funding from state governments and the councils of capital cities. To the best of my knowledge no one has drawn attention to this feature of the Menzies era.²⁴⁵

There began to be appeals for more government action to acquire premises for the arts and the push for a national theatre became more insistent. The Arts Council of Australia was established in 1947 in New South Wales, its main aim being "to ensure access to the arts by all Australians, especially those

²³⁸ Henderson, Anne, *Menzies at War*, NewSouth Publishing, Sydney, 2014, p.188.

²³⁹ *ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Henderson, *op.cit.*, pp.200–202.

²⁴¹ Henderson, *op.cit.*, p.205. As quoted in Arthur Fadden, *They Called Me Artie: The Memories of Arthur Fadden* Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1969, pp.99–100; Gerard Henderson, *Menzies' Child*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, NSW, 1994 p.197.

²⁴² Brett, Judith, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1992 (this edition 1997), pp.21–22,44–45.

²⁴³ As quoted by Nick Carter in *The Lucky Culture, And the Rise of an Australian Ruling Class*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 2013, p.4. Carter arrived in Australia in 1989 and described Australia as having "no ruling class" but the following divisions: "Catholic/Protestant, City/Country, Rich/Poor, Left/Right ... There was no class distinction, wealth was tolerated but privilege and deference was not. The nation's primary operating principle was egalitarianism," pp.8–15.

²⁴⁴ Macdonnell, *Arts, Minister? Government Policy and the Arts*, Currency Press, Paddington, NSW, 1992.

²⁴⁵ Richard Waterhouse, 'Lola Montez and High Culture: The Elizabethan Theatre Trust in Post-war Australia,' *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol.21, No.52, pp.148–158, 1997, DOI:10.1080/144430570938705, p.148.

living outside the capital cities.” This move had an invaluable effect in the years to come.²⁴⁶ In 1948 H. C. Coombs was head of the Commonwealth Government Department of Post-War Reconstruction and was later appointed Governor of the Reserve Bank while remaining “an influential advisor.”²⁴⁷ At this stage, hope for a national theatre was once more put aside. The Chifley Government had established a Committee for Cultural Establishment, which authorised grants for the activities of arts. However, Chifley lost the next election and ex-barrister Robert Menzies, “grand old man of the Liberal Party who kept the socialists from power,” took over in 1949, leading a government averse to funding the arts.²⁴⁸ He introduced the Communist Party Dissolution Bill in 1950, which was subject to a referendum in 1951 and defeated. Menzies was born in Jeparit in 1894 and grew up ignoring the pioneering relativity of his German Lutheran neighbours (he looked on them as foreigners in ‘his’ British colony) and any Aborigines still in the area. He “was a person singularly lacking in curiosity about other people, other cultures, other ways of life.” Menzies regarded his British parents as members of the *petit bourgeois*, frugal, hardworking and home-centred, the middle class ‘forgotten people’ representing the backbone of a country.²⁴⁹

In 1949 the English theatre director Tyrone Guthrie had been commissioned by Chifley’s government to do a feasibility study on the initiating of a national theatre. The report was not acted on as it caused controversy in the Australian theatrical community by advocating training in Britain, which would have reinforced the existing cultural cringe to the detriment of expected national achievements. It was a complete negative – no “single national institution like, for example, the Royal National Theatre in Britain.”²⁵⁰ There are separate funding bodies for the states and territories; however, operational procedure is independent of the Australia Council. The Victorian government of 1947 led in direct subsidies, but these were not handed out to commercial organisations; therefore, while Borovansky remained connected to J. C. Williamson’s he would not be eligible for a grant.²⁵¹

There was employment for the Borovanskys and their dancers for the first two years of the postwar era, then J. C. Williamson’s resumed its pre-war policy of presenting musical comedies with overseas principals. The English Ballet Rambert was also brought to Australia by J. C. Williamson’s, with use of its theatres, which left the Borovansky Ballet with nowhere to perform as a professional company.²⁵² This time was used to develop the skills of its students and amateur performances were still being held at the Studio Theatre. However, most of the experienced dancers sought employment with some also seeking further training overseas, as their future in Australia without the Borovansky ballet company could be in jeopardy. On a more positive note, new ballets were added to the repertoire, including Borovansky’s version of the Aboriginal/white dichotomy, *Terra Australis*. The ballet recalls white settlers exploring Australia with the resulting tensions between two different cultures – European and Indigenous. Tom Rothfield, who wrote the libretto, said in a radio broadcast, “Borovansky had very definite ideas about creating an Australian ballet to be danced by Australians with Australian music, story and décor.” Borovansky and Rothfield were doing their best to present a factual account of what occurred when two diverse cultures encountered one another and were hoping that “the national conscience” would be agitated by the ballet.²⁵³

The Borovansky Australian Ballet of 40 was in Brisbane continuing an Australian tour as the war came to an end. Their Adelaide season, preceded by a barrage of publicity, opened on 8 September

²⁴⁶ Milne, Geoffrey, *Theatre Australia (Un-limited): Australian Theatre Since the 1950s*, Monograph 10 in series Australian Playwrights, series ed. Veronica Kelley, Editions Rodopi, B.V., Amsterdam, New York, 2000, p.79.

²⁴⁷ Macintyre, Stuart, *Australia’s Boldest Experiment: War and Reconstruction in the 1940s*, NewSouth Publishing, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2015, p.460; Coombs retired in 1983, p.7.

²⁴⁸ Brett, op.cit., pp.18–19.

²⁴⁹ Brett, op.cit., pp.12,21,132,142,145,215. Menzies’ childhood family was the prototype, believing that the English experience was the best guide to the Australian experience.

²⁵⁰ Milne, op.cit., p.12.

²⁵¹ Milne, op.cit., pp.23,157.

²⁵² ‘Australian Ballet,’ *Post Magazine*, ed. George Johnson, 9 May 1946.

²⁵³ ‘New Ballet, Strong Drama’ was the headline for *Post Magazine*’s review of *Terra Australis*, 30 May 1946; ‘Ballet,’ 30 May 1946, Appendix 3. Michelle Potter describes *Terra Australis*, the Borovansky Ballet’s all-Australian creation of 1946, *National Library of Australia News*, pp.7–10; Potter refers to the Borovansky Ballet as “Australia’s first enduring professional ballet company.”

1945 at the Theatre Royal with *Les Sylphides*, *Grieg's Fantasy on A Minor*, *Sigrid* and *Le Beau Danube*. *The Advertiser's* critic thought the company had proved its popularity on its first visit to Adelaide and its current performance confirmed that, with proper direction, young Australian dancers had the ability to achieve.²⁵⁴ The critic M. A. (Ballet, Music and Talkies), *The News*, 10 September, observed that there were many Borovansky dancers who just needed further development and experience: "one ... male dancer, Australian born of Russian parentage ... will shortly become a *premier danseur* ... not yet sixteen." This dancer was Vasillie Trunoff, who initially performed with his mother's folk dancing group. After watching one of these performances, Borovansky persuaded the young boy to take classes at his Academy. Trunoff's talent for dance was rewarded with a position in the company at a very young age.²⁵⁵

Even though the Adelaide season was well attended by enthusiastic audiences, critics were mixed. Some had praise for certain artists and the multiple curtain calls for popular ballets. Others were averse, citing an "atmosphere of schoolroom rather than theatre" (*The News*, 17 September), "dancing with the feet rather than the spirit" and "lacked authentic ballet magic" (*The Mail*, 16 September 1945).²⁵⁶ These were perplexing reviews when compared to 1944 when all states were unanimous, and would have given Borovansky cause for serious reflection in trying to find the cause. It was no good just admitting that Adelaide theatre critics were renowned for being unfavourably analytical; the problem seemed to be more deeply rooted than harsh critics. Perhaps the cast was becoming weary of performing the same ballets and desperately required a change to refine its interpretative abilities. They appear to have become mechanical and lost that performance 'sparkle' which is so important to dancers. It is possible that they were reflecting the stress emanating from their leader, as Borovansky was undergoing the effects of overwork as well as the added problem of lack of understudies. Lodders had sprained her ankle early in the Adelaide season and, although there was an understudy for *Les Sylphides*, she still had to dance in *Grieg's Concerto*.

There was some resolution after Stevenson and Martyn spoke to Borovansky about their concerns. Stevenson considered Borovansky's unwillingness to delegate authority while he was still dancing and choreographing new ballets was too much of a burden on top of the company's uncertain situation. 'House Full' signs every night in Adelaide inspired the dancers, but Borovansky was in a depressed state. During the Perth season, he succumbed to moodiness and displayed more irritability when dealing with company matters. He was so difficult that the dancers thought his altered mood was caused by some illness, perhaps a stomach ulcer. In retrospect, Stevenson wrote: "he knew that J. C. Williamson's were looking at the Ballet Rambert for an extensive tour ... there would be no room for two companies".²⁵⁷ While Australian dancers languished in their own country for lack of employment or disappeared overseas, the members of this English ballet company were assisted by their government to go on tour. Borovansky was worried about the continuance of his company, but he also had concerns for the future of his dancers. Two of his principal dancers, Gorham and Trunoff, along with several others, joined the Ballet Rambert, which Salter described as:

²⁵⁴ McBrien, op.cit., p.9; Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, Borovansky Ballet Programs; J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book, Borovansky Season.

During the Melbourne season, there had been discussions between the cast and the Secretary of Actors Equity with regards to dirty dressing-rooms, supply of ballet shoes and the unacceptable attitude of the wardrobe mistress; Borovansky's criticism of Equity's response was noted. Actors Equity Acc.#1984.0044, Minutes of Meeting 31/7/45 Borovansky Ballet, Victorian State Committee File, Melbourne University Archives.

²⁵⁵ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book, Borovansky Season.

Vasillie Trunoff. Born Russia 1929, died London 1985. Émigré Russian family. Taught Russian dances by his mother, who had a folk dancing group. Initial training at Borovansky Academy. Borovansky Ballet early 1940s. Ballet Rambert (Basil Truro) 1947–48. Married Joan Potter 1950. Soloist London Festival Ballet early 1950s. Borovansky Ballet 1954. Ballet Master London Festival Ballet 1958. Australian tours of Festival Ballet 1975 and 1977. Produced *Scheherazade* and *Graduation Ball* for Australian Ballet's tribute to Borovansky in 1980. Australia Dancing – Trunoff, Vasillie (1929–1985)

<http://australiadancing.org/subjects/161.html>, 30/80/05.

²⁵⁶ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book, Borovansky Season.

²⁵⁷ Stevenson, op.cit., p.68.

at their best profound, witty and elegant, and at their worst lack-lustre studio endeavours which should have been jettisoned years before ... bore little resemblance to Russian companies ... deriving more from the English tradition of pantomime than from the classics.”²⁵⁸

During the 1945 Perth season, Borovansky was given the opportunity to publicly air his views on the lack of government-based facilities for talented artists in their own country. The following quote is his clear and early judgement of the situation:

The talent in Australia is equal to that in other parts of the world ... the establishment of a State Theatre ... would be an estimable advantage to the development of ballet ... I should think that a people who can support seven governments could support a National Theatre as well.²⁵⁹

Robert Helpmann’s statement to the press some 20 years later was almost a reiteration:

Australia has just as much talent as anywhere else in the world. All that is needed is a chance to develop it ... we must foster our own arts; give people their own individual culture.²⁶⁰

From these two great men of the ballet, we can see that there was a lot of agreement, particularly in the knowledge that Australia was being shortchanged by the government as far as dance was concerned.

The Tasmanian tour opened at the Theatre Royal, Hobart, on 17 November 1945, presenting the same programs as in Adelaide and Perth.²⁶¹ The concept of culture was highly valued in Tasmania as evinced by a circular entitled ‘An Important Event in the Cultural Development of Hobart’ which described the Borovansky Ballet of 40 as “the greatest entertainment Australia has produced.” Another newspaper article by ‘Olivia’ maintained that “ballet is the greatest shop window for a nation’s art” and the value of this type of culture is “beyond calculation ... This company is proof that Australians are quite capable of developing artistry of a high standard.” Another article in *The Mercury* stressed the educational and cultural value in children viewing ballet performances.²⁶²

During the Tasmanian tour, Actors Equity held a meeting on 12 December 1945 which would have concerned many Borovansky members, as dancing in J. C. Williamson’s musicals was one of the options available to them when the company was in recess. During this meeting, members of the chorus and ballet raised their concerns about unsatisfactory terms of employment whereby they were given no indication of whether their services were to be retained for a new show and the economic insecurity of receiving only one week’s notice of contract termination. This was representative of the employment instability experienced by dancers in Australia when the control was basically in the hands of one firm, and no definite resolution is documented in this file.²⁶³ The final season of the extensive tour began on 22 December at Sydney’s Theatre. After two years of almost continuous work, J. C. Williamson’s gave the cast a party and an extra week’s pay before their break and rehearsal period.

What is generally acknowledged to be the postwar era began in 1946. This period opened a new age

²⁵⁸ Salter, op.cit., pp.158–59.

²⁵⁹ Stevenson, unknown author and date, Perth newspaper clipping appended to this document.

²⁶⁰ Salter, Elizabeth, op.cit., p.213.

²⁶¹ Kitcher, op.cit., p.354; 7 and 24 November 1945 programs; Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne; ‘Borovansky Ballet of 40’ programs 26 and 29 November 1945.

²⁶² Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J. C. Williamson’s Publicity Book, Borovansky Season. The company left Hobart for Launceston’s National Theatre to begin its season on 3 December 1945 with a duplication of the Hobart program, *Sigrud* replacing *en Saga* during the fourth week.

²⁶³ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, Borovansky Ballet programs, 22, 29 December 1945, 5, 12, 19, 26 January 1946; Kitcher, op.cit., 254; Stevenson, op.cit., pp.72–73; Actors Equity Acc.#1984.0044, Minutes 12 December 1945, 1/2/3/1, Melbourne University Archives.

in world history when determination and enthusiasm became keywords in the reconstruction of people's lives. For Australians, the shadow of the threat of invasion by a foreign power whose way of life was in opposition to our European heritage had been removed. However, the settling-down process was not as traumatic or lengthy in comparison to the millions of people who had experienced the cruelty and destruction of modern warfare first-hand. Rationing was still in place and continued until 1947 with H. C. Coombs in charge. However, many wartime restrictions were gradually lifted and the Australian people became more optimistic about their future. A complete reorganisation of the workforce occurred as men and women were discharged from the services. A National Reconstruction Scheme was introduced for ex-servicemen and -women returning to civilian employment, and other programs mainly organised by the Council for Adult Education began in 1946.²⁶⁴

The status of women altered perceptively, if still slowly, during the postwar period as many ex-servicewomen gained access to further education. They had proved their ability to diversify during the war and were now eager to continue to do so in peacetime. The war also changed the attitude of many married women who had learned to cope with wartime jobs, children and inferior housing while their husbands were away at war. The result of this temporarily enforced lifestyle was to make them more independent. Women of all ages had earned decent wages for the first time in their lives by working in essential industries. They had learnt skills that had been forbidden to them in pre-war years and were loath to turn their backs on the financial benefits to be gained.

Another significant influence in postwar Australia was the influx of migrants. A Federal Department of Immigration had been established in 1945 by Australia's first Minister for Immigration, Arthur Caldwell, so that the government could initiate a migration program.²⁶⁵ The Second World War was responsible for a radical change towards migrants. The notion that the small population of Australia would be unable to mount an effective defence if the country were to be seriously threatened rather altered perspectives. With the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948* coming into force, Australians became citizens in their own country and, at the same time, the flow of immigrants reached 118,800.²⁶⁶ There was an underlying feeling that Australia of the 1940s (and, to some extent, extending into the 1950s) had an inherent mistrust of people who came from foreign shores. Most Australians matured having little contact with people from other countries. Even the English were often regarded as intruders, notably by Australians of Irish descent. This government-organised avalanche of European people was not perceived by many Australians as advantageous, with issues mainly concerning jobs and housing. In this climate, Borovansky was probably aware that his nationality was a disadvantage, but did not change his adopted Russian name or revert to his baptismal name.²⁶⁷ On the other hand, isolated in the ballet school, Xenia retained her upper class Russian heritage as prescribed when she had been a maturing adult. What was more significant for Borovansky and his company was the attitude towards culture which also arrived with the increasing number of migrants from European countries. Now we had among our population a proportion of people who would support the fine arts because that was inherent in their upbringing. Their knowledge and appreciation of the arts would be passed onto successive generations as they became the audiences of the future.

Culture is a progression which in 20th-century Australia had been somewhat submerged due to the composition of our colonial years. The legendary writer Vance Palmer believed that Australian

²⁶⁴ Gawler, D., *Victorian Year Book 1945–46*, 66th issue, 16 September 1947, J. J. Gourley, Government Printer, Melbourne, pp.406–407; *Victorian Year Book 1946–47*, 67th issue, 26 July 1948, J. J. Gourley, Government Printer, Melbourne, p. 478; *Victorian Year Book 1947–48*, 68th issue, 30 June 1950, J. J. Gourley, Government Printer, Melbourne, p.481.

²⁶⁵ www.ssa.gov/history/archives/narr/group6, pp.3–4, State Library of Victoria, 14/7/06; “The total intake of migrants for 1946 was 548,902, which was the highest recorded since 1926.” Gawler, D., *Victorian Year Book, 1945–46*, 66th issue, J. J. Gourley, Government Printer, Melbourne, p.500. Gawler, D., *Victorian Year Book 1946–47*, 67th issue, J. J. Gourley, Government Printer, Melbourne, p.431.

²⁶⁶ D. Gawler, *Victorian Year Book, 1947–48*, 68th issue, 30 June 1950, J. J. Gourley, Government Printer, Melbourne, p.347.

²⁶⁷ When Borovansky joined Pavlova's company, his original surname was considered too difficult to pronounce. He obtained permission from a reluctant uncle to use his surname, which was Borovansky, and altered the spelling of his Christian name. He became Edouard Borowanski in 1928, having been baptised Eduard Josef Skrecek in 1902. Salter, op.cit., pp.1,15–16.

cultural achievement in the early years of the 20th century was at a very low ebb: “The problem was while the European heritage was a guide and a spur to higher achievement, it was also a paralysing reminder of Australian insignificance.”²⁶⁸ As culture is the result of non-stop communication between the past and the present, thereby creating an environment which is continuously being modified, the significance of these European migrants cannot be overvalued. As a more advanced state developed in our theatrical culture, the postwar period brought about a notable interest in ballet. This was attributable to the success of Borovansky’s company, which had entertained and enlightened the people during the difficult years of the war, and to the presence of cultured migrants now being assimilated into the population. The emergence of the Victorian Ballet Guild and the National Theatre Ballet in 1949 would provide people with other creative perspectives to explore.²⁶⁹ Towards the end of the 20th century, the concept of culture moved towards “the identity of the nation, communities and individuals.”²⁷⁰

Even though Borovansky may have considered the postwar period more amenable to incorporating new and traditional ballets which had been reworked, he was still constrained to present the same popular ballets until May 1946. Memories of the Ballets Russes lingered, the traditional classics were recognised as ‘ballet’ and the expectation remained. It was only when the company was based in Melbourne, where it had access to permanent rehearsal facilities, that other ballets could be created.²⁷¹

Undeterred by the knowledge that the Ballet Rambert would tour in 1947, Borovansky produced new works and even had plans for more. His persuasive negotiations with the Taits resulted in gaining finance to produce “two lavish ballets which would only have a season in Melbourne and a possible tour of New Zealand.” A preview of *Terra Australis* appeared in *Post* magazine, 25 April 1946, and the world premiere was on 25 May 1946. In the film *Boro’s Ballet: The Making of an Australian Ballet*, Rothfield considered that in choreographing *Vltava* Borovansky was yearning for his Czechoslovakian homeland, but *Terra Australis* signified his new Australian identity as a choreographer with a political agenda. Both he and Borovansky were aware that the fate of the Aborigine was part of Australian history and hoped this ‘evocative message’ portrayed in dance would stir up the national consciousness. The narrator considers that *Terra Australis* may have been the first ballet to use the stage space “as a contributing element in the design and choreographic structure.” By dividing the stage into two levels with the main characters on the upper level and the *corps de ballet* representing the earth on the lower level, an entirely different dimension had been added.²⁷²

Locksley Shaw of *The Radio Times*, 1 June 1946, posed the question, “who said Australian productions would not take with the public?” Shaw was reminding readers of a certain negative theme which often surfaced during this era, and beyond, that everything in theatre that was good came from overseas and Australian creations could not succeed.

Despite praise for its creativeness and choreography, *Terra Australis* had two very short runs (Melbourne 1946, Sydney 1947) but was included in the 1947 New Zealand tour. Rothfield’s synopsis of “Australia as an unspoiled virgin courted by an Aboriginal lover but attracted to a European explorer” is set out in the film *Boro’s Ballet*. Although Kitcher has only seen this film and not the original ballet production, he considers that Borovansky had thought it out well. It was obviously interestingly different for audiences and dancers alike. The final decision to withdraw *Terra Australis* from the company’s repertoire was made by J. C. Williamson’s, who were definite about its discontinuation.²⁷³ The Taits and other Australians of purely English heritage were probably averse to

²⁶⁸ Searle, op.cit., pp.125–126.

²⁶⁹ Searle, op.cit., pp.201–202.

²⁷⁰ Commonwealth of Australia, *Creative Nation*, Government Printing Office, ACT, 1994.

²⁷¹ *Minuet au Bal* was choreographed for the musical *Gay Rosalinda* and added to the New Zealand tour. His Majesty’s Theatre, Melbourne, was considered ‘home’ by Borovansky’s company.

²⁷² Stevenson, op.cit., pp.72–73; Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J. C. Williamson’s Publicity Book, Borovansky Ballet (Aust.) Season 1946 ‘A’ (1); *Post Magazine*, 25 April 1946, provides a synopsis of *Terra Australis*; film, *Boro’s Ballet: The Making of an Australian Ballet*, Michelle Potter, Sally Jackson, Jean Wein, Screenound Australia, National Library of Australia, 2001.

²⁷³ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J.C. Williamson’s Publicity book, Borovansky Ballet (Aust.) Season 1946, (A) 2; *The Radio Times*, 1 June 1946; interview, Barry Kitcher, 13 July 2006;

the ballet because it brought the ‘who owns Australia?’ argument out into the open with perhaps too much empathy towards Aboriginal claims. Borovansky must have been dispirited about the Taits’ attitude, because he would not have proceeded without the basis of prior study. Borovansky was an intellectual in many ways and one of them was reading about the history of Australia. It was certainly a controversial ballet with a new format and deserved to be kept in the repertoire.

Borovansky, nevertheless, did venture twice more into Australia’s past during the next decade, but without the impact that *Terra Australis* had imparted. Interest in the Borovansky Ballet had been promoted by two of Melbourne’s radio stations introducing a new series entitled ‘Backstage at the Ballet.’ There were interviews, photographs and articles, one of which commented: “I never imagined that I’d see ... small girls of ten years or less in a theatre audience as were at the ballet.”²⁷⁴ This quote presents strong testimony of how rapidly Borovansky was succeeding in his endeavour to encourage appreciation for the art of ballet in the generation that would become future adherents.²⁷⁵ He was never in a position to interest officialdom in arranging free admission for children to see ballet, but the overall structure of pricing by J. C. Williamson’s obviously assisted decisions made by parents on the affordability of a theatrical experience for young and old.

In his review of *Scheherazade*, Gregory Parable of *The Advocate* declared that its success was due to the “strong training which Mr. Borovansky gives his company ... Australia may congratulate itself on the success ... it is now a permanent institution.”²⁷⁶ Borovansky would have nodded his head in agreement on reading this review, for vigorous training had been instilled in him and this was what he passed onto his dancers. But it was not just the physical side of training that made his dancers remarkable; he also imparted acting and stagecraft, which are so important to a dancer. Rubinstein presented a perfect example of this training in his role of the Golden Slave in *Scheherazade*, which, combined with his gymnastic abilities (learnt in Germany), made his interpretation perfect. Parable’s final words reflect public recognition, but permanence was not to be achieved within this decade. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that the words ‘permanent institution’ were attached to Borovansky’s company. The connotation that it was a ‘national’ and not a ‘state’ company elevated it above all others. Borovansky had outdone his rivals in this respect, as they were regarded as state companies. He had resolved to capture the support of the Australian public, thus earning the right to be known as the Australian Ballet Company in these early years.

In 1980 the Australian Ballet, under the directorship of Marilyn Jones, performed *Scheherazade* as part of a triple-bill tribute to Borovansky. Joan Potter and Vassilie Trunoff came from the London Festival Ballet, England, to stage this production, with Michela Kirkaldie and Kelvin Coe as principal dancers.²⁷⁷ *Scheherazade*, which was a ballet made familiar to Australians through the performances by the Ballets Russes tours, was a natural choice for Borovansky to include in his repertoire, particularly when he knew the ballet and Tchinarova was on hand to do a remake. It interested Australians as its exotic background came from a land of which the majority had little knowledge. It was unique in approach and presented a spectacle eagerly grasped by the imagination, having the connotations of a fairytale. The dichotomy between the two ballets was emphatic, with *Terra Australis*’s earthy scenery and plain costuming pitted against *Scheherazade*’s lavishness. *Terra Australis* concerned Australians more profoundly, as it brought an Australian historical episode into theatres as a cause for serious reflection on an unresolved problem. Both ballets had a dark side, but

Salter, op.cit., p.207; *Currency Companion*, Amanda Card, Carole Y. Johnson, ‘Theatrical Dance,’ p.22; Joel Crotty, ‘Ballet Music,’ p.78.

²⁷⁴ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J. C. Williamson’s Publicity Book, Borovansky Ballet (Aust.) Season 1946 ‘A,’ ‘Borovansky Gives Ballet New Zest’; *The Sun*, 10 May 1946; *Listener-In*, 11–17 May; *The Radio Times*, 12–18 May; *The Argus*, 6 May; *Australasian Post*, date unknown, p.9.

²⁷⁵ Some young people of this era who had never heard of the Ballets Russes became interested in ballet performances through radio broadcasts.

²⁷⁶ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J.C. Williamson’s Publicity Book, Borovansky Ballet (Aust.) Season 1946 ‘A,’ *The Advocate*, ‘Borovansky Ballet – *Scheherazade* Success,’ Gregory Parable, 18 May 1946; Locksley Shaw, *The Radio Times*, 18 May, considered Rubinstein’s gymnastic display “had to be seen to be believed.”

²⁷⁷ Salter, op.cit., pp.134–135,142, Rubinstein in *Le Carnaval*, p.142, Rubinstein in *Scheherazade*, p.143.

Australia Dancing – *Scheherazade*
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/4661.html, 8/03/05.

Terra Australis was presented without subterfuge. In the Australia of 1946, there was a distinct aversion to openly discussing Aboriginal rights by the public; if viewed reflectively this ballet became a concern, while *Scheherazade* was regarded purely as entertainment.

J. C. Williamson's continued its intense advertising campaign during the 1946 season and Borovansky's determination that his company be 'Australian' appeared to be gaining support from some members of the press: "In Borovansky ... lies our hope for a real Australian Ballet ... we have lived on borrowed culture long enough."²⁷⁸ There is no doubting the success and popularity of the Ballets Russes when they toured Australia, but now Melbourne embraced the Borovansky Australian Ballet company as its own. These were our dancers, who had "fought their way to success the hard way. And they started the fight in Melbourne."²⁷⁹ Nevertheless, as was the case with all Australians trying to make a living in the theatre, dancers resumed going abroad after the war, seeking personal improvement and opportunity. As far as actors were concerned, there were three basic problems – the lack of professional companies performing at the highest level, few opportunities for actors to reach their fullest development and no stage to create a national theatrical tradition. Australia remained in the colonial cultural cringe where we still regarded our country as culturally bereft because of its lowly beginning, particularly with regards to the arts.

In the 1940s people would have been more likely to play sport than music.²⁸⁰ Sidney Nolan felt that 'overseas' mattered more than Australia when it came to art markets and criticism.²⁸¹ The writer Alan Moorhead concluded that "to be really someone in Australian eyes you first had to make your mark ... on the other side of the world."²⁸² Australia was regarded as "inferior ... lacking validity."²⁸³ As a musician, composer and conductor, Charles Mackerras regarded London and Europe as the place for study and performance, as classical music had a stronger representation in their cultures. In Australia, tennis players of the time were feted while musicians and composers lacked recognition and support.²⁸⁴ There was also a class and gender culture where Australian women cultivated an English accent which derived from the late 19th century when they were encouraged to identify with Englishness. Denying one's origins had become entrenched in our culture by the next century.²⁸⁵ During the 1940s, life in rural Australia was characterised by deep class division and social animosity – enforced conformity and repressed conformity. Decentralisation was integral to the postwar definitions of 'citizenship' and 'community'. Both these perspectives would become significant for the forming of national development in the next decade.²⁸⁶

In 1946 an article, 'Record of our Ballet,' was published by Melbourne newspaper *The Herald*:

Peter Bellew edited ... *Pioneering Ballet in Australia* ... gave the impression that the Kirsova Ballet was the beginning and end of ballet in this country. But Sydney is not to have it all its own way. Supporters of the Borovansky Ballet in Melbourne ... were inclined to be a bit testy ... *Borovansky Ballet* ... will do ... what the Sydney book

²⁷⁸ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book, Borovansky Ballet (Aust.) Season 1946 'A' (1); Locksley Shaw, 'Ballet Reflections,' *Radio Times*, 25 May 1946; unknown author and date, 'Russian Ballet by Australians,' unknown author, *Listener In*, 18–24 May; unknown author, 'Ballet is Here to Stay,' *Weekly Times*, May 1946.

²⁷⁹ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book, Borovansky Ballet (Aust.) Season 1946 (1); 'Ballet is Here to Stay,' *Weekly Times*, May 1946.

²⁸⁰ Alomes, op.cit., p.68.

²⁸¹ Alomes, op.cit., p.81.

²⁸² Alomes, op.cit., p.83; Clive James described "a generation of Australian intellectuals who believed that life is elsewhere ... until you won over there, you didn't really exist," p.247.

²⁸³ Alomes, op.cit., p.93.

²⁸⁴ Alomes, op.cit., p.165. Sir Charles Mackerras, musician, conductor, principal oboist in Sydney Symphony Orchestra 1946. First Australian national to become chief conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 1978. *Herald-Sun*, 'Orchestra Great Dies,' 16 July 2010.

²⁸⁵ Alomes, op.cit., p.271.

²⁸⁶ Brown, Nicholas, *Governing Prosperity*, p.147.

did for Kirsova.²⁸⁷

The continuing rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne is very much in evidence from the above. Notwithstanding all that had transpired between the two companies, Bellew's opinion on the legitimacy of the outcome was biased, not the least by the fact that, as stated previously, he was married to Helene Kirsova.

Ivor Novello's highly successful *The Dancing Years* and an updated *Gay Rosalinda (Die Fledermaus)* were two new productions that J. C. Williamson's imported from overseas now that the war had ended. Because of this altered situation, Borovansky had been informed that all its theatres would be booked for shows, not ballet. However, not to be outwitted, Borovansky reminded them that, as his dancers were still contracted to them, they would have to be paid. He then suggested that they be incorporated into these musicals, thus two problems were amicably solved.²⁸⁸ Strelsa Heckleman recalled that, as a company, they had a lot of fun performing in *The Dancing Years* and *Gay Rosalinda*. However, the following not-so-funny experience is one which she never forgot. On stage and at the end of her solo performance she stumbled and when "Boro lifted the lino a big nail was revealed." An extremely upset Borovansky turned to the nearest stagehand and yelled, "my girls, they will break their ankles!" His response was in the form of some very inappropriate remarks regarding their training, and Borovansky had him dismissed.²⁸⁹ This situation had the potential to be extremely dangerous to any dancer no matter how experienced or well-trained. Here is yet another example of his concern for his dancers, whom he regarded as part of his family. Naturally, any slur on the ability of his performers was bound to result in an immediate reaction to one of his volatile temperaments. Bruce Morrow, who danced with both the Borovansky Ballet and National Theatre, also confirms that Borovansky looked after his dancers. In addition, he was firmly of the opinion that there was no other contemporary to Borovansky who rivalled his achievements.²⁹⁰

During the run of *The Dancing Years* at His Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne, there were reports of brutality by Joe White, one of the stage management crew, towards members of the Borovansky Ballet. At a Victorian committee meeting of Actors Equity, 8 October 1946, it was recorded that "these accusations have been substantiated ... any repeat would result in strong action being taken against White." As there is no further record of transgressions by White, or any other stagehand, at this point it is assumed that warnings must have sufficed.²⁹¹ The ongoing negotiations by Actors Equity to achieve adult wages for young dancers, especially when on tour, are detailed in the September 1946 edition of *Equity*. Just before *The Dancing Years* finished its Melbourne season, it was reported by the Secretary that all junior ballet girls would now be paid adult rates while on tour. A minimum rate for ballet was tabulated in October along with a limit on performances per week and

²⁸⁷ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book, Borovansky Ballet (Aust.) Season 1946 'A' 2; unknown author and date, *The Herald*, 'Record of Our Ballet,' Melbourne season, His Majesty's Theatre, 9/5/46 to 26/6/46.

²⁸⁸ Hood, op.cit., pp.49,55.

²⁸⁹ Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Strelsa Heckleman, at her daughter's residence, Langwarrin, Victoria, 18 August 2002. Heckleman also records that, when she left the Borovansky Ballet to give birth to her first child, Borovansky said he "looked forward to the day when that child was a dancer in his company."

²⁹⁰ Interviewer Michelle Potter, interviewee Bruce Morrow, *Keep Dancing* Oral History Project, 15 June 2000, TRC4588, National Library of Australia, Canberra. Bruce and his wife, Bernice, also a Borovansky dancer, later opened their own ballet school and were involved with the Royal Academy of Dancing Teachers' Workshop (Victoria). Bruce was also on the teaching staff of the Australian Ballet School for 16 years. They have three children, two of whom, Rebecca and Karl, danced professionally in Europe (telephone conversation, 6 July 2010).

²⁹¹ Actors Equity Acc.#1984.0044, Minutes of Victorian State Committee Meeting, 8 October 1946, Box 6, 1/2/2, Melbourne University Archives.

The Dancing Years was described as brilliant by viewers: "The Borovansky Ballet almost stole the show. Its cleverly conceived and executed *Mask of Vienna*, colourful interlude in mime, and many other graceful ballets lifted the piece to a high level" (F. Keith Manzie); "The Borovansky Ballet were brilliant" (J. de M.); "The Leap Year Waltz ... captivated the house. Tamara Tchinarova and Peggy Sager ... thrilled spectators. The *Masque* ... danced in dynamic expression ... makes *The Dancing Years* memorable. Hood, op.cit., p.55.

the admonition that “all companies must adhere to this award.”²⁹²

After its premiere, 19 October 1946, *Coppelia* is significant in that there was only one week when it was not presented and an extra two weeks were added to its run. *The Argus* recorded that “it stimulated more than one person ... to express a desire for the sponsoring of a national ballet.” Australian audiences were becoming much more aware of the necessity for a structure that would encourage our dancers to become a national entity, and Borovansky was proving himself to be the one to lead the way: “Speaking from the stage ... Borovansky assured the House that his Australian Ballet was still alive.”²⁹³ He was never averse to having his say in front of an audience but, with the altered situation his company was facing, this speech was probably the most important he had ever made with regards to its future. It is regrettable that this and other ‘addresses to the audience’ remain a mystery as there appears to be no record of them.

The fervour of the Melbourne press over this last season of the Borovansky Ballet before its likely demise was overwhelming. Right up to the end of the season, every newspaper was reporting success and enthusiastic audiences for the ‘home-made ballet company’. Geoffrey Hutton, theatre critic for *The Argus*, presented an interesting article, 16 October 1946, in which he acknowledged that the Borovansky Ballet was “born, grown and matured in Melbourne.”²⁹⁴ Early in November he made this comment in regards to the artist Norman MacGeorge’s book, which had just been released: “his tribute ... is typical of the influence this lively fusion of dance, drama, music and design can exercise beyond the four walls of the theatre.”²⁹⁵ This is indicative of the fact that ballet was going into the homes of many more people, mainly through newspaper articles and radio broadcasts, and now there was a ballet book totally devoted to an Australian company.

Scattered among ballet reviews there emerged towards the end of 1946 correspondence published by the Melbourne newspapers pertaining to a permanent theatre for Australian ballet. The first letter which initiated this debate stated that it was time for the public to seriously consider putting its efforts towards an adequate, permanent theatre for the use of local ballet schools. The Honorary Secretary of the Melbourne Ballet Club considered that the more acute problem was a building which was suitable and available for conversion. There were several suggestions about the next step, but nothing seems to have been resolved at this point. Clive Turnbull of *The Herald Magazine* credited the efforts of Borovansky and Kirsova, along with their enthusiastic supporters in Melbourne and Sydney, with altering the status of ballet in Australia to a professional level, adding that “in many respects the Borovansky Company may claim international standard”. *The Advocate* backed up this statement with “The current ... program might be suitably presented to show a connoisseur what this company can really do”. The above review was substantiated by Oscar Hammerstein, who, after attending a performance of the Borovansky Ballet with Viola Tait, stated that “our young dancers were of a high standard and equal to the best on Broadway.” A newspaper cutting, 4 December 1946, shows Madame Judith Espinosa and some of Jennie Brenan’s young pupils waiting to be examined; Australia had not forgotten Pavlova’s tours, as these ballet students were described as having “hopes of Pavlova-like fame” 17 years after her last tour.²⁹⁶

Les Sylphides was the first ballet on the final program. Borovansky was particularly pedantic about every presentation of this traditional Russian ballet, as it was one of his favourites. Just before the

²⁹² Actors Equity Acc.#1984.0044, *Equity*, Vol.1, No.2, September 1946, 1, September 1946, Box 31, 17/1/3, Melbourne University Archives; Actors Equity Acc.#1983.0044, Minutes of Meeting, 25 September 1946, 1/2/3/1, Melbourne University Archives.

²⁹³ Hood, op.cit., p.59; Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J. C. Williamson’s Publicity Book, Borovansky Ballet (Aust.) Season 1946, ‘A’ (3); Salter, op.cit., p.153; Geoffrey Hutton, ‘Growth of Ballet,’ *The Argus*, 16 October 1946; G. M. H., *The Argus*, 21 October 1946.

²⁹⁴ ‘Melbourne Season October/November 1946: Towards a Theatre,’ Geoffrey Hutton, ‘Growth of Ballet,’ *The Argus*, 16 October 1946.

²⁹⁵ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J. C. Williamson’s Collection, Publicity Book, Borovansky Ballet (Aust.) Season 1946 ‘A’; G. M. H., *The Argus*, 9 November 1946. The local press focused on the transport strike and ballet attendances, reporting the fact that people were still so enthusiastic that they walked to the theatre rather than missing a performance. This is corroborated in the above Publicity Book.

²⁹⁶ Performing Arts Centre, Melbourne, Melbourne, J. C. Williamson’s Publicity Book. Borovansky Ballet (Aust.) Season 1946, ‘A’ and ‘A’ second volume; C. T., *The Herald Magazine*, 16 November 1946; *The Advocate*, 22 November 1946; Tait, *A Family*, p.199; *The Age*, 4 December 1946.

curtain was raised, he gathered the cast on stage and simply stated: “Tonight I want you all to dance specially for me. It will be some time before I see this ballet again, and I would like you to do it well.” The company was shocked, as they were used to him shouting about straight lines, correcting lighting and even holding up curtains while he fussed and fumed. They proceeded to give the performance of their lives. When the ballet ended, Borovansky said, “thank you all very much. You are lovely girls – and Martin, too.” In his usual speech at the close of the performance, he announced that Martyn and Stevenson were leaving. He said such charming things about them that they were incapable of responding.²⁹⁷

Although this last season in Melbourne was an exciting one with the new productions and personalities, it was also a time when the future of the Borovansky Ballet was decidedly uncertain. The departure of several of his dancers would have made Borovansky feel personally betrayed, because not only had they received their final training from him but he also regarded them as part of his family. Everyone became highly emotional. He was experiencing the disappointment of the company he had created starting to disintegrate at a time when his group of mostly Australian dancers had reached the point of performing as professionals. The following quote comes from an article written by Tamara Tchinarova and published in the *Australian Musical News and Digest*, December 1946: “The achievements of the company have been built on the work and enthusiasm of a small group of people without whom ballet would not exist in Australia today.”²⁹⁸ Tchinarova had been a soloist with the 1938 Covent Garden Russian Ballet in company with Algeranoff, Kousnetzova and Borovansky. She had married the actor Peter Finch just before the Second World War broke out and went into semi-retirement, dancing only solo roles in Kirsova’s ballet. Tchinarova joined the Borovansky Ballet in 1945, reproduced *Scheherazade* and danced the role of Zobeide partnered by Rubinstein. She admired Borovansky as a performer, understood the many problems he encountered and greatly influenced the other members of his company.²⁹⁹

During 1946 the Borovanskys decided to resign from the Melbourne Ballet Club and Martyn was approached to take over. She agreed but suggested they change the name to the Victorian Ballet Guild, taking on the leadership and wearing the caps of director, choreographer and dancer. As a non-profit organisation the Guild mainly relied on members’ subscriptions, but it did receive some government monetary assistance. At this stage Martyn considered that the Borovansky Company was losing its sense of family. Perhaps the company had expanded too quickly for the closeness of its dancers to remain at the same level as when it began, or perhaps it was just time for some members of the family to move on. Ladders, Noel Murray, Grace McLean and Maxwell Collis joined her and started to rehearse four original ballets she had choreographed. Martyn admits that she did too much choreography because there was nobody else to do it. She also emphasises that her dancers were never drilled but encouraged to dance feeling the music.³⁰⁰

Four ballets premiered at the Melbourne Repertory Theatre (later the Arrow Theatre) on 5 November 1946. In March 1947, with the addition of Heckleman, the Guild embarked on a one-week season at Melbourne University’s Union Theatre and later that year gave performances in Hobart and Launceston with Rubinstein as guest artist. There was another season at the Union Theatre in April

²⁹⁷ Stevenson, op.cit., pp.74–76.

²⁹⁸ Tamara Tchinarova, ‘Ballet in Australia,’ *Australian Musical News and Digest*, 2 December 1946, p.17, courtesy Edna Busse private collection.

²⁹⁹ Salter, op.cit., pp.65,115,124,135,147.

Tamara Tchinarova. Born Romania 1919. Began training in Paris with emigré Imperial Russian Ballet dancers. Then danced in Ballets Russes companies during the 1930s, including Monte Carlo Russian Ballet 1936 Australian tour and Covent Garden Russian Ballet 1938. On retirement (as Tamara Finch), entered a career as an interpreter for dance companies touring Russia and became a published dance writer.

Australia Dancing –Tamara Tchinarova
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/86.html, 8/03/05.

“*Sylphides*, *Spectre* and *Scheherazade* were presented in 2006, at the State Theatre Melbourne, in a program entitled *Revolutions*, honouring Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes and the 70th anniversary of de Basil’s first Australian performances,” ‘Annette Gillen’s Touching World,’ p.59.

³⁰⁰ Pask, *The Second Act*, p.160; Margaret Frey, ‘The Growth of Ballet in Melbourne’, *New Review*, February/March 1947, p.2; interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Laurel Martyn, at her residence, Balwyn, Victoria, 1 August 2005.

1948 and one month later Martyn staged the ballets for *Marinka* presented at Melbourne's Tivoli Theatre with herself and Rubinstein as principal dancers. In 1949 Martyn became one of Victoria's poliomyelitis victims, but managed to recover in time to organise the Guild's December performance. Despite requesting a name change from the onset of her directorship, Martyn had to wait until 1959 for this to become official. It was changed to the Victorian Ballet Company in 1963, and given the new name of Ballet Victoria along with state funding in 1967, allowing the company to tour regional Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales and Queensland before its demise in 1972. The ballet school which Martyn set up shortly after the Guild started was incorporated into the newly formed Victorian College of the Arts. Ballet Victoria's untimely end was a shattering blow for its supporters. Martyn was particularly bitter about losing the school in this way.³⁰¹

During November 1946 the Australian Ballet Society, with Rachel Cameron³⁰² as assistant producer and Kyra Bousloff as ballet mistress, presented two Melbourne seasons and gave performances in several country towns. An all-Australian production, *Arkaringa*, was presented during their first season but, despite their ambition to form a permanent company, this did not eventuate.³⁰³ Looking outside the classically based groups, Margaret Frey points out that Elizabeth Weiner, a modern expressive dance teacher, also had a company of dancers which gave recitals in Melbourne. Two associates of Weiner, Ruth Bergner and Patricia Edie, were engaged in significant exhibitions, while Daisy Pirnitzer, Hanny Kolm and the National Theatre Ballet Company were rapidly gaining momentum. The Unity Dance Group is given a brief mention as it was at its very earliest stage. This group aimed to present all types of dance, encourage dance training and take the art to the people. The New Theatre became the focus of Margaret Walker, who had committed herself to dance during the postwar period after becoming part of a group concerned with the issue of an Australian identity. A dedicated pioneer of folk and character dancing in Australia, Walker established the professional performing group Dance Concert in 1967 and later the Margaret Walker Folk Dance Centre.³⁰⁴

In early February 1947, Peggy Sager and Paul Hammond were on their way to England via sea. They commenced classes with Vera Volkova as soon as they had established themselves in London. After performing with the Glyndebourne Opera, Sager and Hammond, along with former Borovansky dancers Helen Ffrance (who had also taken Volkova's classes), Charles Lisner, Philippe Perrott, Bryan Ashbridge and Alma Watson, were united in the award-winning film *The Red Shoes*. When filming was finished, Sager, Hammond and Ffrance joined the just-established Metropolitan Ballet.³⁰⁵ Back in Australia, Borovansky's company travelled to Sydney for the continuation of the *Gay Rosalinda* season. It was to stay at the Theatre Royal almost seven months as *The Dancing Years* followed on. These two very popular musicals provided Borovansky's dancers with continuous employment, which meant that they did not have to seek work elsewhere between ballet seasons. Commencing in July, a 12-week ballet season followed *The Dancing Years*, after which they toured

³⁰¹ Pask, *The Second Act*, pp.159–162;

Australia Dancing – Ballet Guild (1946–1967)

www.australiadancing.org/subjects/6.html,p.1.,8/30/05;

'Annette Gillen's Touching World,' footnote 41, p.60; interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Laurel Martyn at her residence, Balwyn, Victoria, 1 August 2005.

³⁰³ Australia Dancing – Rachel Cameron

www.australiadancin.org/subjects/222.html, 8/03/05.

Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J. C. Williamson's Publicity Book 'A' Vol.2; author unknown, *The Herald Magazine*, 16 November 1946.

³⁰⁴ Frey, op.cit., p.2.

Australia Dancing – Walker, Margaret (1920–1996)

www.australiadancing.org/subjects/67.html p.2, 30/8/05.

Video transcript, Australian Council, Archival Film Series; *Currency Companion*, Helen Penrose, Aline Scott-Maxwell, 'Record Industry Awards,' p.66; Georgia Bins, Joel Crotty, 'Oral History Collection,' p.154; Shirley Andrews, 'Colonial Dance Revival,' p.156; Claudie Funder, John Whiteoak, 'Demarcation in Teaching,' p.228.

³⁰⁵ Hood, op.cit., pp.62–63,67,69–82; *Currency Companion*, Robin Collins, 'Trained for Television,' p.648; Claudia Funder, John Whiteoak, 'Learning by Dancing,' p.227 (Kirsova had taught Bryan Ashbridge); Michelle Potter, 'Choreographers Encouraged,' p.76 (lists Charles Lisner); Robina Beard, 'Dance in Musicals,' p.215 (Helene Ffrance was a featured dancer); Amanda Card, Carole Y. Johnson, 'Theatrical Dance,' p.22 (Phillipe Perrott and Rachel Cameron co-choreographed *Arkaringa*).

New Zealand until December 1947.³⁰⁶

There are indications in Actors Equity correspondence of representations during 1947 to obtain better wages for dancers. A letter was sent to the Australia–America Association regarding a function for the Children’s Hospital, insisting that the dancers receive the award rate. Furthermore, an increase in wages for ballet and chorus employed by J. C. Williamson’s had been submitted and rejected because the strike had caused the company to lose business. After further correspondence and representations the matter was finally resolved in August, with the Secretary reporting “increase granted ... now made the rate for chorus and ballet uniform.”³⁰⁷ As previously stated, there was much unrest and anxiety among workers during the postwar era, particularly with regards to low wages, and strikes became prevalent as workers became more desperate.

A very exciting event for dance adherents occurred in the latter part of 1947 with the famous American exponent of modern dance, Ted Shawn, performing at the Melbourne Town Hall. In her article about this event, Frey wrote: “The work of Borovansky, and the groups that have stemmed from him, has made many people aware of the enjoyment of watching and taking part in good dancing.”³⁰⁸ This quote confirms that, within three to four years, Borovansky had achieved at least one of his strategies by making Australians more aware of artistic culture through the medium of dance. He had proved to them that dance can be entertaining as well as providing stimulation for the mind. As one of the founders of modern or expressive dance, Shawn’s performances were in total contrast to classical ballet, but he acknowledged in his teaching that other forms of dance justified their existence.

The Ballet Rambert commenced its 52-week tour of Australia in 1947 with a repertoire of 25 ballets and sponsorship by the British Council. This must have been a tremendously large thorn in Borovansky’s side, as he had been unable to obtain any funding for his ballet company from the Australian government. In her article ‘Ballet Rambert: Memories of an Australian Tour 1947,’ Margaret Scott stated that “Ballet Rambert did not come to a country where the art of ballet was unknown.” She noted that the legacy left by the Ballets Russes and the Borovansky company was “large and thriving” and regarded the Victorian Ballet Guild as “artistically exciting.” When the Ballet Rambert tour was extended to 18 months, Scott was at a loss to understand this phenomenon and thought it may have been an immediate and spontaneous audience reaction to the creativity of the repertoire.³⁰⁹ Scott, Rex Reid, Joyce Graham and Brenda Hamlyn did not return to England at the end of the tour as they were offered positions with the National Theatre Ballet in Melbourne. Graeme and Reid were invited by Gertrude Johnson to reform and direct the company, while Scott and Hamlyn joined as dancers. After an extensive period of touring with the National Theatre, Scott, Graeme and Hamlyn moved back to London, while Reid started a ballet school in Adelaide.³¹⁰

Kitcher attributes his encounter with Ballet Rambert as the catalyst which propelled him towards a career in ballet: “I used to go to every show. Then I saw Ballet Rambert. I didn’t even know what it was. I thought it was just another musical or something. I went along to the Theatre, and that was it!” This episode in Kitcher’s life provides a prime example of how ballet was reaching out to the average Australian as envisaged by one of Borovansky’s initial strategies. However, this time the deciding

³⁰⁶ Kitcher, op.cit., pp.355–356; Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, J. C. Williamson’s Collection, Borovansky Ballet Programs, 11 July, 23 August, 6, 13, 20, 27 September 1947; 1947 Sydney season, Theatre Royal, 11 July 1947.

³⁰⁷ Actors Equity Acc.#1984.0044, Victorian Divisional Committee correspondence 6 May 1947, Melbourne University Archives.

³⁰⁸ Frey, op.cit., pp.2,8; Terry, op.cit., p.14; Gadan and Maillard, op.cit., pp.115–116; Koegler, op.cit., pp.480–481; Kant, op.cit., p.257.

Margaret Frey, née Walker. Born Bendigo, Victoria, 1920 and died 1996. Pupil of Borovansky Academy. Professional national folk dancer, choreographer, producer and teacher. Member of New Theatre. Set up Unity Dance Group, Melbourne, 1946. Established Dance Concert in 1967 and later Margaret Walker Folk Dance Centre. Australian Hall of Fame.

³⁰⁹ Scott, Margaret, ‘Heritage and Heresy, Ballet Rambert: Memories of an Australian Tour 1947,’ *Green Mill Paper*, 1997, p.67.

³¹⁰ Scott, op.cit., pp.69–70; Gadan and Maillard, op.cit., p.158; Koegler, op.cit., p.220.

Sally Gilmour, born in Malaya 1921, the company’s senior principal dancer, also remained in Australia after she married Dr Wynn of Wynn’s Wines, Sydney.

influence came from an English ballet company touring Australia. Kitcher spent his early years in country Victoria but was living in Melbourne and employed as a railway clerk when he started to attend theatrical performances. *Giselle* was the first entertainment called ‘ballet’ he had encountered and his response to the movement, expression and music was so cathartic that he enrolled in Borovansky’s evening classes, progressing through the levels of training, which eventually led him to company status.

Kitcher always knew that he did not want to be the farmer his father might have envisaged; this type of follow-on was not unusual in that period, particularly in country areas. He often had thoughts as he was growing up of a life outside of farming. His mother was an artist and she had ensured that he had a knowledge and appreciation of art by taking him to exhibitions when possible. Kitcher also had a leaning towards music and organised lessons when he started work in the city. School concerts and a pantomime had their desired effect on him as he was inclined to indulge in fantasy and make-believe. After attending a show at the Tivoli (while in Melbourne for medical tests) he told his father, “I could do that dance and I could do it better”.³¹¹ He started his first tour with Borovansky’s company, which he described in 1952 as “a very happy and secure kind of extended family.”³¹² He then performed for a season on the Tivoli Circuit in 1953, was again a member of Borovansky’s company in 1954 and spent “A year on the London Palladium.”³¹³ About this latter experience, Kitcher writes:

London was almost invariably the destination of Australians and New Zealanders who travelled overseas. I was part of a long line of artists and performers who trekked there in the 1950s and 60s. We had to emigrate at a crucial point in our careers (in order) to gain wider experience.³¹⁴

Kitcher notes that most of these expatriates, including himself, returned to Australia, bringing their new knowledge with them. This confirms that the overseas influence as practised at the very beginning of ballet training in Australia was still relevant in the 1950s – dancer/teacher/student. He rejoined the Borovansky Ballet as principal dancer and finished his dancing career with the newly formed Australian Ballet.³¹⁵

It would appear from Actors Equity records that the Borovansky Ballet was employed (in approximately July 1948) by the Tivoli Theatre in filming a ballet (unnamed and undated), which was probably *Terra Australis* as Kitcher mentions in his book having only seen the film, not a live production.³¹⁶ They were offered a rate of “eight pounds, seventeen shillings and sixpence,” which was not what was expected. The reply from theatre management was short, sharp and to the point: accept this rate or you will be released from your contract – they accepted, but there was further correspondence and controversy during the next month.³¹⁷

Equity records reveal that the union was working hard to obtain better pay for dancers during the postwar period:

July/August 1947 – increase of two shillings and sixpence per week for Dancers in J. C.

Williamson’s musical.

October 1948 – submission to J. C. Williamson’s regarding increase for ballet and chorus.

³¹¹ Kitcher, op.cit., pp.19–20,35–37.

Barry Kitcher. Born Gunbower, Victoria. Teachers Dorothy Gladstone and Xenia Borovansky. Borovansky Ballet Company 1951–56, London Palladium 1956–57, Marquis de Cuevas Ballet 1957–58, Borovansky Ballet 1959–60, Australian Ballet 1962–66. Retired 1966. Cinema theatre manager, Victorian Arts Centre, author and public raconteur.

³¹² Kitcher, op.cit., p.81.

³¹³ Kitcher, op.cit., p.141.

³¹⁴ Kitcher, op.cit., p.143.

³¹⁵ Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Barry Kitcher, at his home, Frankston, Victoria, 13 July 2006.

³¹⁶ Kitcher, op.cit., performances of *Terra Australis*: 25 May 1946 (world premiere) Melbourne, p.354; 9 November 1946, Melbourne, p.355; 20 September 1947, Sydney, p.355; 15 October 1947, New Zealand, p.355; 15 November 1947, New Zealand, p.356; 27 December 1947, New Zealand, p.356.

³¹⁷ Actors Equity Acc.#1984.0044, Victorian Divisional Committee Meeting Minutes, 20 July 1948, Melbourne University Archives.

November 1948 – Ballet Rambert regarding claim for annual leave and four per cent payment – settled February 1949.

14 December 1948 – Tivoli ballet demands thirty shillings increase in wages and two pounds ten shillings per week rehearsal pay.

1 March 1949 – request to David Martin to grant seven shillings and sixpence increase to ballet.

12 April 1949 – National Theatre ballet rates.³¹⁸

Whether there was ever any resolution to the ‘film saga’ is almost impossible to determine from records available, but it does illustrate that people power, where it was appropriate to stand up for what were considered their rights, was emerging. It was also during this period that the ABC set up capital city-based orchestras, as high culture was starting to be pioneered the same way as in Europe and North America. As previously discussed, the feasibility report by Tyrone Guthrie was controversial as the Australian theatrical community regarded training in Britain would reinforce the ‘cultural cringe’ and impede national achievements. The matter was settled with a change of government to one not in favour of subsidising the arts.³¹⁹

The National Theatre Ballet evolved with the National Theatre Movement, which was created by Gertrude Johnson with a capital of 8 pounds 18 shillings. In 1940 it was renamed the National Theatre Movement of Australia, based in Melbourne and directed by Johnson. As a successful concert and opera soprano, she had toured with J. C. Williamson’s Grand Opera Company in 1919–1920 before arriving in London in March 1921 to fulfil an engagement with the Old Vic Opera Company. On returning to Melbourne in 1935, Johnson had developed the notion of an Australian national theatre to present grand opera, ballet and drama, as she had met so many Australian singers while overseas who had had to travel to Europe to gain experience. Johnson, a woman of independent income and socially well connected, as well as possessing a dominant personality, remained the National Theatre Movement’s Honorary Director until her death in 1973. Dance performances had been part of the National Theatre Movement’s seasons since 1939, with some early ballets choreographed by Borovansky included. However, it was to take another ten years before the National Theatre Ballet presented a premiere program to a Melbourne audience. In 1948 the National Theatre was granted 5000 pounds per year for three years for the general development of drama, ballet and opera. Borovansky had heard about this grant and was undoubtedly seething as his company had not long been forced to disband. Although not a huge amount of money even for this period, it was a subsidy which he would have welcomed at that crucial time. He probably felt a certain sense of justification in 1955 when the National Theatre Ballet Company was no more and his company was experiencing its greatest triumphs, still without any government grant as it continued to be regarded as a commercial enterprise.³²⁰

The National Theatre Ballet Company was officially launched at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne, in June 1949 with Joyce Graeme in charge of productions and Margaret Scott, Brenda Hamlyn and Rex Reid as her assistants. The company then had a two-week season in Adelaide and a country tour with the Council of Adult Education. It appears rather coincidental that this tour coincided with the Borovansky Ballet’s disbandment, thus allowing patronage without competition from a firmly established ballet company. The National Theatre Ballet Company last performed in 1955 after touring capital and provincial cities as well as New Zealand.³²¹

Frank van Straten places the emergence of cultural awareness after the Second World War, but I believe that it was happening before then, at least as far as ballet was concerned. The tours of the Ballets Russes and the Borovansky Australian Ballet had set the benchmark earlier, proving that

³¹⁸ Actors Equity Acc.#1984-0044, Victorian Divisional Committee, Minutes of meetings 1948 – 20 July, 3 August, 20 October, 30 November, 14 December; 1949 – 1 February, 1 March; 1950 – 12 April, Melbourne University Archives.

³¹⁹ Waterhouse, ‘Lola Montez,’ p.148.

³²⁰ Searle, op.cit., pp.158,201–202; Van Straten, op.cit., pp.23,45,46,100–102,111–112.

³²¹ Van Straten, op.cit. pp.115–117; Searle, op.cit., pp.158,201,202. During her time with the National Theatre, Graeme produced many original ballets, including those of Kyra Bousloff, Laurel Martyn, Joanne Priest and Rex Reid as well as her own. Early in 1951 she produced the first full-length *Swan Lake* ever seen in Australia.

Australia was not totally without culture. However, it was mostly the influential and moneyed of Australian society who were financially able or even interested in attending the Ballets Russes, while Borovansky's Australian Ballet garnered audiences from all strata of society as part of his overall plan. This situation would only markedly improve if the people received more contact and education in the finer arts, and the struggling companies more reassurance of support at government level. There were initial stirrings in 1948, but achievement was many years away. In the meantime, Prime Minister and Federal Treasurer Ben Chifley was keen to establish the Education in Music and Dramatic Arts Society, usually known as EMDAS. This would be a non-profit organisation with J. C. Williamson's placing its resources at the society's disposal and providing financial backing. The government "remitted the entertainment tax which then stood at twenty-five per cent." EMDAS was registered as an incorporated body and among its objects proposed to:

propagate the art of music, drama and the ballet throughout Australia; provide education in the proper appreciation of music, drama and ballet [and] provide education of experience for persons practising the arts of music, drama and ballet.³²²

It is apparent from the foregoing that Borovansky had achieved in a few short years what others had attempted but could not sustain. During the postwar years, he had demonstrated the possibilities open to Australian dancers if only their government would acknowledge and act on their need for financial support. From May 1944 until December 1947, he had built up his company and kept his dancers in professional work, although not at a continuous level as theatre availability still determined their employment. He was only temporarily defeated by the arrival of an overseas company, backed by its government, touring Australia. He retired to his portrait painting and fishing, utilising the time now at his disposal to reflect and plan his next strategy in the battle he knew he would resume because his inherent nature would not let him admit defeat.

The postwar years saw the return to the Australian theatrical world of overseas productions, with overseas artists reappearing to take up leading roles. Suddenly J. C. Williamson's was no longer interested in ballet programs. The danger had long since ceased, Australia was open for business and audiences were eager to embrace difference. Even though the postwar years were indirectly responsible for the temporary demise of the Borovansky Ballet Company, the fates had not reckoned with a personality so determined of his place in Australian theatre. The 1950s, often referred to as the 'fabulous Fifties', were decidedly fabulous for the resilient Borovansky. Once more he harnessed himself to the job of assembling his dancers, with the addition of some overseas stars, to form the 1951 Borovansky Jubilee Ballet Company. With his energy and enthusiasm rekindled, he set to with stubborn determination to put his company back where it belonged – in a legitimate theatre performing for the audiences which had acclaimed it in previous years. Still persistently advocating a national Australian ballet, Borovansky commenced more of the spadework which resulted in such an institution finally becoming a reality, although he never lived to see the ultimate pinnacle of his labour.

³²² Tait, *A Family*, p.211; Kingston, op.cit., pp.178,179; Ingram Papers, MS 7336, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

CHAPTER 5: *The Fabulous Fifties (1950–1956)*

By the beginning of 1950, the Cold War had entered a further chapter, likely to compromise world stability, and the Korean War was waged from June of that year. Menzie's anti-Communism received more attention than his utterances on this subject. Between 1948 and 1954 global war threats, with the probability of nuclear weapons being unleashed, were of great concern as it was inevitable that Australia would be involved.

The Cold War started in Europe towards the end of the Second World War when the dividing of Germany into East and West caused distrust between Russia and America. A new order had emerged, with colonial rule and European influences less important. Australia's trade agreements with Asian countries proved economically sound and, with Britain's decision to concentrate on Europe instead of the Pacific during the Second World War, our country now looked more to America. When the Cold War expanded to Asia, Australia had no choice but to assist America in Westernising Japan as a barrier against Communism in the East.

The population was set to increase at a rate of one per cent through the immigration of assisted and non-assisted migrants. This engendered fear that the Australian way of life was being irretrievably altered, causing concern well into the next decade. The previous generation had endured a world-wide Depression and six years of war in succession, which made it difficult for many of them to adjust to their rapidly changing world.

It is in an editorial of the *Australian Musical News and Musical Digest*, September 1950, that Borovansky was first referred to as:

the father of an Australian professional Ballet Company ... reaching towards world standards ... has proven that Australian audiences appreciate and will attend the ballet. The Victorian Government's neglect of Borovansky when allocating grants to Opera, Ballet and Drama are a vital mystery.³²³

This extract is very revealing in its appraisal of Borovansky's position as a forward-thinking leader in the theatrical arts. By publicly acknowledged him as having 'fathered' a ballet company of professional standard, the writer indicates a strong transformation in the expectations of the average theatregoer. This article, written at a time of class distinction transition, used two words, 'neglect' and 'mystery,' when describing the government's policy, which did nothing to encourage the patronage of the lower paid population of Victoria. As attested, they appear to have considered ballet productions important enough to resolve the monetary position themselves. The top tier of His Majesty's Theatre, known as 'the gods', was available at ten shillings (equivalent to one dollar) a seat throughout 1949 and well into the 1950s.³²⁴

The adolescent cult of 'bodgies' and 'widgies' manifested itself during the 1950s through the adoption of modes of dress, attitudes and dance styles associated with rock and roll music. Contemporary commentators expressed alarm for the morality of these misguided juveniles. Social change was on the doorstep of Australian society, mainly influenced by Americanised styles; nevertheless, our impressionable society was content to copy rather than create its own. The 1956 Olympic Games brought the television revolution, which was the last link in freeing Australia from its isolated position.³²⁵ Richard White upholds the premise that the outside world, Communism, decolonisation, atomic bombs and consumer culture challenging the old moral authorities (Americanisation) were the fears of the day. However, Mark Peel specifies other concerns that

³²³ Author unknown, *Australian Musical News and Musical Digest*, Vol.41, No.9, September 1950, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

³²⁴ *The Forgotten Fifties*, Murphy, John, Smart, Judith, eds, Australian Historical Studies Vol.27, No.109, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1997, Menghetti, Diane, 'Mount Isa: A Town Like Alice,' p.22; Brown, Nicholas, "'Sometimes the Cream Rises to the Top, Sometimes the Scum": The Exacting Culture and Politics of Style in the 1950s,' pp.49–54; *Bold Experiment*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p.13.

³²⁵ *The Forgotten Fifties*, pp.49–54; Evans, Raymond, 'To Try to Ruin: Rock and Roll Youth Culture – Law 'n' Order in Brisbane 1956–1957,' pp.106–119; Davison, Graeme, 'Welcoming the World: The 1956 Olympic Games and the Representation of Melbourne,' pp.65–76.

particularly pertained to working class adults. There were anxiety and insecurity, with many still living in poverty and experiencing class distinction. Illness and accident proved economically disastrous. Life remained a financial battle which many endured to provide a better life for their children.³²⁶

Industrial disputes became more prevalent during the 1950s and one of the battles being waged by Actors Equity was non-unionised labour in the theatre. The February 1950 issue of *Equity News* announced that “after April 26 no non-unionist will be allowed to ride on the band-wagon without his union ticket”. Vasillie Trunoff, elected Theatre Artists Counsellor (March 1950), thoroughly endorsed the ‘closed shop’ which gave members the strength to fight their battles. In the new awards listed in the May 1950 *Equity News*, the female chorus and ballet received 6 pounds and 13 shillings, with male counterparts receiving 1 pound more. Actors Equity had gained an agreement with J. C. Williamson’s, Tivoli, Harry Wren and Fullers Theatres to add 7 shillings and sixpence per week, plus 21 shillings when on tour in Sydney or Melbourne, and 31 shillings when on tour at another place. *Oklahoma* continued its Australian tour, with several ex-Borovansky members dancing in this production because of the disbanding of their ballet company. The June 1950 edition of *Equity News* stated they would receive an increase in pay (9 pounds, 12 shillings per week for both sexes, and 11 pounds, 5 shillings for the New Zealand tour) because of union representation.

This is the only example I have come across where females and males were awarded equal pay.³²⁷ There are no comments on this ruling recorded in the Equity files, although it was an unusual precedent in a time of accepted difference in the male–female wage structure. During an interview Annette Gillen (née Dunlop) records that by 1952 Borovansky’s female dancers were paid “thirteen pounds per week and one pound ten shillings living-away allowance for eight performances a week, while members of the orchestra received twenty pounds and a much bigger living-away allowance.”³²⁸ At the end of the interview Gillen agrees that “it was very much a family.” They existed in a family atmosphere with a typically dictatorial father who ensured that they were treated fairly, especially regarding the monetary side of their profession.³²⁹

From the Victorian Actors Equity records, 1951 could be labelled the year of dispute, as from 19 February to 5 November there were wage disputes involving management and dancers in various theatrical productions, including Borovansky’s company. The Borovansky Ballet subcommittee and the secretary of Equity had meetings regarding claims for increased salaries. Correspondence received by Equity from EMDAS rejected the request to review the salaries of the company. There is no further record of resolution to be found in Equity’s files. Wages and not conditions appear to have been a significant issue for dancers in this year. Under chorus and ballet rates, the male wage was 13 pounds 2 shillings and sixpence, and the female wage was 12 pounds 5 shillings. Full rates only applied if the rehearsal period extended longer than four weeks.³³⁰

Another issue for performers which was brought to the forefront in 1951 was the theatre quota, which decided the overseas artist – local artist ratio of employment in Australian theatre. The system was being influenced by the availability of overseas productions and their stars now that the world was

³²⁶ *The Forgotten Fifties*, White, Richard, ‘The Retreat from Adventure: Popular Travel Writing in the 1950s,’ p.105; Peel, Mark, ‘A New Kind of Manhood: Remembering the 1950s,’ pp.148–149.

An example of how an unexpected medical crisis could impact on the wellbeing of a family is conveyed in John Lack’s ‘Out of My Class: Reminiscences of Melbourne,’ *The Forgotten Fifties*, pp.164–165. His mother experienced a nervous breakdown and the resulting financial burden became a family threat. He was born in Footscray, Melbourne, in 1941 and was the only one of four boys to go to university.

³²⁷ Actors Equity, Acc.#1984.1400, *Equity News*, February 1950, 1, Box 31, 27/1/7; *Equity News*, May 1950, ‘Theatrical Awards,’ p.11; *Equity News*, June 1950, ‘What Your Union is Doing,’ p.7; *Equity News*, September 1950, p.10, Melbourne University Archives.

³²⁸ Christofis, op.cit., p.56. Gillen was trained in Sydney by Royal Academy of Dancing teachers (later examiners) Joan and Monica Halliday and Helene Kirsova. She danced in both the Kirsova and Borovansky ballet companies.

³²⁹ Christofis, op.cit., p.57.

³³⁰ Actors Equity, Acc.#1984.1400, Minutes of Victorian Divisional Committee and Executive Meeting, Box 6, 1/2/2/4, 1/3/3/2; Minutes of Executive Meeting, 14 October 1951, and Victorian Divisional Committee, 5 November 1951, Box 6, 1/2/3/2; Theatrical Section Minutes, 4 May 1951, Box 6, 1/2/3/2, Melbourne University Archives.

returning to normal. One of these stars, Robert Morley, stated that “if we did not do something about the importation of overseas artists we would become a nation of supporting players revolving around a group of imported stars.” Morley added that Australian members of Actors Equity who worked overseas achieved exceptional success, proving that Australian artists could be stars if given the opportunity.³³¹

Borovansky was on the brink of presenting this opportunity to several talented Australian dancers and he ultimately created many stars in the field of ballet. On the same subject, the General Secretary of Actors Equity wrote that he had recently attended a performance by the Victorian National Ballet with moderate expectations, but was astounded and at a loss to understand why commercial entrepreneurs kept using imported artists when all the talent they needed was in Australia. He had also witnessed the Borovansky Ballet’s new program, writing that it was “ballet at its best by an almost entirely Australian company” and enquiring of the commercial entrepreneurs, “Have you Messrs J. C. Williamson’s become artistically and culturally conscious? Or ... presentations of good theatre ... in the main by Australians, pays off?”³³² Here the writer reveals the nub of Borovansky’s foresight, as his planning had guaranteed sound profit for his backers and assured some type of future for his dancers even if it entailed layoff periods as dictated by commercial theatre.

It was at the beginning of the 1950s that J. C. Williamson’s authorised Borovansky’s overseas trip to engage six principal dancers and secure new ballets, at a wage of 50 pounds per week. EMDAS agreed to pay all travelling expenses.³³³ Another ballet season was the motivation the Society offered and Borovansky enthusiastically embarked on one of the most memorable tours in the company’s history. While the company was in rehearsal, it was proposed that Xenia would act as assistant in producing, directing and supervising the repertoire. Borovansky and Xenia each received 25 pounds per week until the opening performance. Borovansky then was to appear as ‘principal performer’ at a salary of 50 pounds, plus 10 pounds for studio expenses.³³⁴

As reported in *Equity News* Borovansky managed to entice Gorham away from the accolades she was receiving in France to perform as principal dancer in his company. In an interview with Stewart Moyser, she admits that Borovansky’s discipline was very hard, with a lot of shouting and derogatory remarks, but necessary if a dancer was to achieve full potential: “I think Borovansky has done more for ballet here than anyone else.”³³⁵ Expatriate Charles Boyd was also enjoying a successful career overseas when Borovansky persuaded him to join his company. He gained fame as the Blackmoor in *Petrouchka* and the Snob in *La Boutique Fantasque*.³³⁶ Stevenson, who had been performing with the

³³¹ Actors Equity, Acc.#1984.1400, *Equity News*, February 1951, ‘The Theatre Quota,’ p.8, Box 32, 27/1/8, Melbourne University Archives.

³³² Actors Equity, Acc.31984.1400, *Equity News*, February 1951, ‘General Secretary Writes an Open Letter to Theatre Managements,’ p.10, Box 32, 27/1/8, Melbourne University Archives.

³³³ Borovansky’s Paris diary mentions that he saw Roland Petit’s Ballet and was disappointed. He had lunch with de Basil and “ended up paying the bill ... as it became obvious that de Basil did not have any money.” Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 5, File 36, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

³³⁴ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 4, copy of letter from Frank Tait, 2 August 1950, National Library of Australia, Canberra. Located in the same file is a letter from Borovansky to Frank Tait, 25 March 1952, mentioning contentious solicitors’ letters and documents with regards to the time Borovansky was on 50 pounds per week – there is no evidence of a resolution; Kitcher, op.cit., p.71. While in New York Borovansky was told by Sol Hurok, the great impresario, that if he kept the company together Hurok would bring them to America; author and date unknown, *Ballet Again*, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection. There appears to be nothing official to confirm this among the Ingram Papers, but Borovansky mentioned in correspondence relating to the Edinburgh Festival that J. C. Williamson’s was not interested in sending them overseas.

³³⁵ Actors Equity, Acc.#1984.1400, Box 32, 27/1/8, *Equity News*, ‘Where Are They?’ January 1951, p.19, Melbourne University Archives; Stewart Moyser, ‘Kathy is a Star,’ *The Age*, 23 November 1951, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection. Appendix 39 – extract from Borovansky’s Paris diary: 13 September 1951.

³³⁶ Australia Dancing – Boyd, Charles (1917–2002) www.australiadancing.org/subjects/184.html, 30/8/05.

(When Boyd took over Grace Norman’s classes at Jennie Brenan’s Academy of Ballet while she was on an overseas teaching scholarship, I recall a very forceful voice demanding that we “tuck those hideous skirts in your bloomers.” Our uniform consisted of black tunics with matching underwear and we were mortified at having to ‘expose’ ourselves in front of this male teacher. It is a great pity we were never informed of his illustrious career both here and overseas.)

International Ballet in England, answered the call and returned to Australia as principal dancer.³³⁷ A young dancer from Queensland, Audrey Nicholls O. A. M., also became part of the company. Borovansky added her to his star collection and she attained first-soloist status in 1955.³³⁸ The Danish dancer Poul Gnat made his Australian debut with Borovansky's company during the Jubilee season, featuring in many leading roles.³³⁹

An article in *Pix* magazine demonstrates how far Australia had progressed in the higher cultures. According to a cultural assessment of the Commonwealth Jubilee Year of 1951, Borovansky's Ballet was the one people watched: "Borovansky has created an Australian Tradition." Featured in the same article is a photograph of three men: Eugene Goosens, conductor, William Constable, artist, and Edouard Borovansky, "who established the Commonwealth's first permanent ballet company in 1940."³⁴⁰ While the date given in this accolade is not historically accurate, it does illustrate the Borovansky Ballet Company's advancement after a little more than a decade. Within that decade there were adults who in previous times had pursued a lower form of entertainment. By their regular attendance they now acknowledged that, while it was still high culture, it was also possible for ballet to be appreciated for the quality of its presentation, the physical accomplishments of its dancers and the overall pleasure in the experience.

With the first performances, the company commenced a period of advancement and acclaim which would eventually lead to the establishment of an Australian national ballet company. During the 12-week Sydney season, 6 April to 22 June 1951, there were seven premieres: *Petrouchka*, *La Boutique Fantasque*, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, *Aurora's Wedding*, *The Outlaw*, *The Black Swan* and *Chiaroscuro*.³⁴¹ Borovansky's ballet *The Outlaw* premiered on 18 May 1951 at the Empire Theatre, Sydney. A Melbourne critic described it as a "rather confusing entity, interesting but not impressive." Clive Turnbull's prologue, spoken by John Auld, was a first for a ballet in Australia, but not enough to save it from oblivion. *The Outlaw* disappeared from the Borovansky's Ballet repertoire after the Jubilee year.³⁴² Borovansky continued along the Australian history trail with his ballet *The Black Swan*, which was an excursion into the first sighting of the Swan River by Dutch mariners. During my interview with him, Kitcher said that "it didn't take him long to display his love of Australia and its heritage."³⁴³

On 6 June 1951 there appeared an interesting magazine article about the male ballet dancer in which Borovansky was on the defence. He used every opportunity to dismiss the popular belief that ballet is effeminate, conceding that there were male dancers with feminine tendencies but none in his

³³⁷ Australia Dancing – Stevenson, Dorothy (1916–)
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/130.html 8/03/05.

³³⁸ Hollinshed, op.cit. p.62.

There is a delightful anecdote in Kitcher's book where he tells of his first performance with the company as Audrey Nicholls' partner in *The Sleeping Princess*, p.74. After many decades of teaching with Eve King at their Malvern studio and examining for the Royal Academy of Dance, Audrey Nicholls is now retired but continues to conduct special classes for its Victorian workshops.

³³⁹ Australia Dancing – Gnat, Poul (1923–1995)
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/4541.html 30/8/05.

³⁴⁰ Author unknown, 'Australia Comes of Age in the Arts,' *Pix* magazine, 2 June 1951, pp.7–9, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

³⁴¹ Performing Arts Collection at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, Borovansky Ballet Collection; Kitcher, op.cit., p.35.

Australia Dancing – *Boutique Fantasque*, *La*
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/4861.html 3/30/05

Australia Dancing – *Aurora's Wedding*
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/4981.html 8/30/05

Australia Dancing – *Black Swan*, *The* (1949–)
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/1721.html 8/30/05.

³⁴² Australia Dancing – *Outlaw*, *The* (1951–)
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/2861.html 8/30/05.

Frank Doherty, 'Ned Kelly in Mime is Hard to Interpret,' *The Argus*, date unknown, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

³⁴³ Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Barry Kitcher, at his residence, Frankston, Victoria, 13 July 2006.

company.³⁴⁴ In an interview many years later, Paul Hammond adds that in Australia highland dance was acceptable but ballet was not. The stigma of ‘men in tights’ as opposed to ‘football shorts’ created a built-in bias. Of homosexuality, Hammond says that Borovansky tended to treat it with a cruel tongue.³⁴⁵ When Rubinstein first became a professional ballet dancer, he told everyone enquiring about his occupation that he was a stagehand in the theatre.

The stigma attached to boys learning ballet still exists in the 21st century; it is not as socially accepted as some people would have us believe.³⁴⁶ When *Billy Elliot* was produced in Australia, *The Sunday Herald-Sun*, 13 May 2007, contained an article featuring the four boys who shared the leading role. Catherine Lambert commenced her review with: “Young male dancers face immense challenges in Australia”. All our boys admitted that they “get ribbing at school”.³⁴⁷ Although the young boys I quote are not Australian but British, it is worth noting that these examples could be relevant in any country. Their ages ranged from 10 to 16 and they were students of the Royal Academy of Dance, London. They all had experienced bullying at school, but one admitted that this stopped when he performed in Matthew Bourne’s *Lord of the Flies*. Another boy recorded that “everyone said you’re weird” and “people made fun of me” was the catch-cry from another.³⁴⁸ The male interviewer for this article was “heart-broken to learn that bullying and teasing are so common that they seem normalised, as if that is what you expect if you are a boy who dances”.³⁴⁹

In another interview a male dancer from Brazil, Yuki Mendes, who was teaching at the Ramallah Ballet Centre, Palestine, remarked that:

There are other problems, like an antipathy towards male ballet dancers. Students’ brothers sometimes come to the centre, but say that ballet is not for boys. I was most surprised that there are no male dancers here.³⁵⁰

This negative attitude has also continued in Australia, as the Australian Ballet’s new leading male dancer, Brett Chynoweth, a born-and-raised Melburnian, reports that his acceptance into the Australian Ballet School was “his refuge from bullying.”³⁵¹

However, it is unreasonable to expect that every ballet can be choreographed solely for the male dancer. Compromise needs to be established with education. Australians are very sports oriented and it takes a special family unit to accept that some male children can be more connected to dancing. There have been one or two newspaper articles regarding a football club engaging a male dancer to impart his knowledge to the players, but this appears to have had little effect on negative attitudes. Modern dance has provided men with another alternative, as its choreography can be more vigorous. However, males still dance as a career as opposed to what is believed to be a valid occupation for them. If male dancers are going to be accepted as professional workers in Australia’s future culture, there need to be more understanding and support outside of the dance world.

Rubinstein became seriously ill during the Jubilee season and was unable to continue his stage career. A recorded interview reveals that he had contracted tuberculosis and was admitted to a sanatorium,

³⁴⁴ Unknown magazine article, 6 June 1951, pp.44–45, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

There are several references to John Cranko in correspondence where Borovansky reveals his personal attitude on this subject; Ingram Papers, MS 7336, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

³⁴⁵ Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Paul Hammond, at his home, Melbourne, 2 October 2005.

³⁴⁶ Martin Rubinstein, interview, 29 August 1995, ROK-001218 0424-3375-001, TRC-3322, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

³⁴⁷ Catherine Lambert, ‘Billy and the Kids,’ *Sunday Herald-Sun*, 13 May 2007.

(As a teacher it has been my experience that the number of boys interested in learning ballet has decreased in comparison to the 1960s and, if attending classes without male support, they do not continue.)

³⁴⁸ Sanjo Roy, ‘Boys Don’t Cry,’ *Dance*, Issue 3, 2016, pp.28–31.

³⁴⁹ Roy, op.cit., p.29.

(When my ballet-trained sons entered high school in 1970–71 the younger one gave up dancing immediately through bullying, but the older boy remained firm and achieved his goal of becoming a professional ballet dancer. This could also be attributed to differing personalities and ages, as they both received some male support in their early training.)

³⁵⁰ *Dance Gazette*, Issue 1, 2017, ed. David Jays, Royal Academy of Dance, London, U. K., p.47.

³⁵¹ ‘My Melbourne,’ *Sunday Sun*, 3 June 2018, p.15; full interview melbnow.co.au/brett-chynoweth

which in the 1950s involved compulsory isolation for six months. On experiencing a relapse, he had to return for another six months. Consequent to this, Rubinstein missed 12 months of ballet and his physical condition deteriorated through the inactivity of long hospital procedures. He never made complaints about his working conditions, even though at the beginning of his professional career he had to dance the leading roles for every ballet that Borovansky produced. He had been involved in ballet from the age of 13 and was well used to the physical effort required of the male dancer. Rubinstein may have been concerned about the juxtaposition of his career and the world outside the theatre, as revealed by his ruse of telling enquirers that he worked as a backstage hand. He did not personally like Borovansky, but never made any open comment or gave a specific reason. As he was a perfectionist, I am inclined to believe that he thought it impossible to re-create what had been lost through his illness and made the decision not to resume his stage career. With a change of focus and renewed determination, Rubinstein commenced teaching the Royal Academy of Dancing syllabus at the Borovanskys' school. His situation was brought up at an Actors Equity meeting, a recommendation was submitted and the Benevolent Fund made a grant of 25 pounds.³⁵² Rubinstein's loss as one of the few principal male dancers in the company was felt not only by Borovansky but also by his loyal followers who, among the people I have spoken to since that time, have never forgotten his versatile performing ability. The name Rubinstein encapsulates everything a male dancer should aspire to attain.

The reception accorded to the Borovansky Jubilee Ballet on its opening night in Melbourne clearly indicates that, despite an absence of three years from professional theatre, the company had certainly not been forgotten. It received applause comparable to that given to the Ballets Russes. Australian dancers were now ready to take their place among the world's finest; the principals displayed their virtuosity, the *corps de ballet* was excellent and audience response indicated a sell-out season. It was during this acclaimed season that Kitcher was first introduced to the stage as an extra in *Petrouchka*. He recalls that Borovansky treated them with respect, even though extras are usually thought of as incidental background decoration: "his infectious enthusiasm made the characters and the situation come to life ... impressing upon us the exact significance of every movement."³⁵³ This anecdote demonstrates Borovansky's determination not to overlook any minute detail which might detract from his productions. Kitcher confirms that Borovansky was obsessed with straight lines and with *Les Sylphides* he was fanatical. The Borovansky Ballet became renowned for the straight lines of its *corps de ballet* and Kitcher recalls the instant applause "as the curtain rose on a perfect tableau" which was described by one critic as "magnificent." During my interview with Kitcher, he mentioned the Australian Ballet's *Les Sylphides* (co-directed by Irina Baronova) and how one of his ex-Borovansky ballet companions remarked, "Boro would be proud of this *Sylphide* because the lines were so straight."³⁵⁴

Returning to the stage, Borovansky stole the show in *Le Beau Danube* as the Strong Man. He was noted for this portrayal as it was his creation from the de Basil company's repertoire. Geoffrey Hutton wrote that it was "big news for Australia because he has already given this country much more than it could ever return. Set down amongst comfortable Phillistines who thought that only Russians could dance, and men shouldn't try anyhow, Borovansky decided that he would create a professional company out of Australians, men included, and put it on stage against all competition with all comers ... [he] has been a Halley's Comet in the theatre world, but we have had enough of Comets and we would rather see a fixed star." Hutton's remarks imply that it was time the Borovansky Ballet was government-funded so that Borovansky would not have to organise his company while travelling from

³⁵² Kitcher, op.cit., pp.70–71; recorded interview, 29 August 1995, ROK-001218 0424-3375-001, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Actors Equity, Acc.#1984.1400, Box 6, 1/2/2/4, Minutes of Executive Meeting 21 September 1951 and Minutes of Victorian Divisional Committee, 8 October 1951, Melbourne University Archives. This amount was 15 pounds higher than their normal grant.

³⁵³ Kitcher, op.cit., pp.64–66.

Australia Dancing – *Petrouchka*
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/1441.html, 8/03/05.

³⁵⁴ Kitcher, op.cit., pp.68–69; interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Barry Kitcher, at his residence, Frankston, Victoria, 16 July 2006.

one place to another at the whim of commercial theatre.³⁵⁵

Hutton had previously written that “the reluctance of young men of athletic type to ... take to dancing ... limited Borovansky’s choice of ballets.” This choice of ballets was predicated on many issues, particularly as he was programming for commercial theatre, but the problem of the Australian male dancer was one of the highest concerns. Hutton’s reference to men dancing reveals the negative view of the male dancer still prevalent in the next generation after the Ballets Russes performances. There was and is a certain amount of resistance to the idea of Australian men dancing when they should be playing sport. Over half a century later, Australian dancer Steven McRae, now Royal Ballet principal dancer, recently recorded that “Parents who think dance isn’t a real profession need to let go of that presumption and allow children to pursue their own passion.”³⁵⁶

It took 60 years for Petipa’s *The Sleeping Princess* to reach Australia via the Borovansky Jubilee Ballet, although excerpts from the original were known. Miro Zloch had the responsibility of reproducing Petipa’s choreography, as well as dancing the role of the Prince. Now Australians were dancing authentic Russian choreography and the moment passed into theatrical history practically unnoticed. During the four-and-a-half month Melbourne season *The Sleeping Princess* was such a success that people slept on the footpath to obtain tickets. On the final night of the Melbourne production, Borovansky had his three ballerinas, Gorham, Busse and Sager, dancing Aurora: “the cheers and applause were so thunderous that we seriously thought the theatre was going to collapse.”³⁵⁷

Following on from the Ballets Russes, Borovansky also encouraged the star terminology for his principal artists and from 1951 audiences referred to certain dancers as ‘stars’. Gorham earned the title of ‘our star’ and was still dancing for Australia as principal ballerina in the Australian Ballet when it went on its first international tour in 1965. Sager’s stardom continued until the end of the 1950s, but Busse, who was “the idol of Australian Ballet audiences ... loyal to their own stars ... not misled into thinking that everything from overseas is preferable to the great talent of our own country,” was facing an operation on her foot. The recovery was so long that it precluded her acceptance of J. C. Williamson’s 1952 contract and permanently removed her from the Borovansky Ballet.³⁵⁸ The foregoing quote represents the first public admission that our own talented artists could be on a par with or even higher than their overseas counterparts.

There is a reference in a letter, 23 March 1952, that several dancers, particularly male, proposed to leave the company after the Sydney season. Hood put this down to the fact that they got tired of the purely classical repertoire and needed to go overseas to pursue the more modern style of ballet. While Borovansky was anxious to present newer ballets, J. C. Williamson’s was not willing to risk its box-office takings. There were numerous verbal altercations between Borovansky and management, as he could only present a new ballet by assuring them it would be as successful as the favourite traditional classics.³⁵⁹ During the 1950s Borovansky’s detractors maintained that he was not adventurous enough with new works. They ignored the fact that these decisions were out of his hands, being an employee

³⁵⁵ G.W.H., ‘Borovansky Keeps his Promise: Hopes High for Return of Australian Ballet,’ *The Age*, date unknown, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

³⁵⁶ ‘How I Make It Work ...,’ Steven McRae, as told to Alley Pascoe, *Stellar, Sun-Herald* supplement, 12 March 2017, p.30. McRae grew up in Western Sydney in a motorsport family who totally supported him, particularly his father, and ignored negative comments.

³⁵⁷ Australia Dancing – *Sleeping Beauty*, *The* www.australiadancing.org/subjects/3641 html, 8/03/05.

Frank Doherty, ‘Ballet Reaches Height of Perfection,’ *The Argus*, date unknown, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection; Kitcher, op.cit., pp.75,78.

Zolan (Zloch) Miro was trained at Prague National Theatre, Czechoslovakia, and later studied under Preobrajenska and Egorova. Joined Ballet Rambert. *Premier danseur* International Ballet, Borovansky Ballet, London Festival Ballet.

³⁵⁸ Author unknown, ‘Letters to the Editor,’ *Listener-In*, 29 December 1951, courtesy Edna Busse private collection; interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Edna Busse, at her home, Wagga Wagga, NSW, 6 June 2010. Busse established a school in Wagga Wagga which eventually provided enough young dancers to form a non-commercial ballet company. A permanent plaque has been set up in the main street of Wagga Wagga in recognition of her contribution to the arts in this area of New South Wales.

³⁵⁹ Hood, op.cit. p.117.

of theatrical entrepreneurs, and that his company was run on commercial lines or not at all. Borovansky acknowledged that his audiences were mainly people who had little experience of ballet productions except those presented by his company and would not embrace 'artistic' works. Nevertheless, he was also acquainted with the fact that new ballets were expected.³⁶⁰ Because of his recent recruiting visit, Borovansky knew the latest trends in ballet choreography and what other companies were presenting. This had been his first visit to England and Europe since the late 1930s and changes in different theatrical works were very noticeable. Nevertheless, without subsidisation, all was dependent on J. C. Williamson's. The only recourse was to wait and gently edge in a new ballet at what he considered an appropriate time. Over the years he had become quite adept at this ploy.

A theatrical flier advertising the Borovansky Ballet's forthcoming season of *The Sleeping Beauty* concluded with: "Could Australia seek a more perfect foundation for the Ballet which is becoming ever more part of our artistic life?"³⁶¹ The theme that the Borovansky Ballet was the most appropriate company to evolve into the Australian Ballet continued to occur. Hutton reminds us that, 12 years before, Borovansky had told him he would put ballet on its feet here, and that is exactly what he did by 1952.³⁶² *The Sleeping Princess* recorded 125 performances, which was an Australian record, and there remained several more in New Zealand before the tour ended. A New Zealand critic stated that most of the credit for this production belonged to Borovansky, "whose idealism is firmly centred in the tradition of the Russian ballet."³⁶³ Before the final curtain on the Perth season, Borovansky made his usual farewell speech. Never missing an opportunity to reinforce his message that the arts in Australia, particularly ballet, required government subsidies to maintain and expand their artistic endeavours, he left the stage with an 'until we meet again' rather than a 'goodbye'. The company was disbanded on 15 December 1952 at the end of the New Zealand tour.³⁶⁴

In Federal Parliament on 21 October 1953, Alec Downer broached the subject of a national theatre:

There can be no doubt that in this country for at least twenty years the legitimate stage has been absolutely starved ... if the Australian theatre is to flourish ... the Government should step in and ... grant a worthwhile subsidy so that a strong National theatre can be established.³⁶⁵

Was Borovansky finally getting through to the government with his ceaseless speeches regarding the deplorable situation for Australian theatrical artists who lacked a national 'home'? The wheels of Parliament turn slowly and many perils lay ahead for this vehicle. Borovansky had been agitating for action ever since he had decided to form his own ballet company. It was going to be a long wait for the populace to observe the realisation of Borovansky's vision, and for him it was too late.

In December 1953 Borovansky wrote to Kathleen Danetree, noted teacher and Royal Academy of Dancing representative in Sydney, regarding Martin Rubinstein, who was now an established teacher at the Borovansky school: "I want him to re-establish his membership ... go through the examinations for Teachers [sic] Certificate." To regain his membership status and add a teaching certificate was a very expensive procedure which Martin probably could not afford, having lost income through his year of hospitalisation. It is obvious that Borovansky paid for this coaching, as in a letter to Danetree, 5 February 1954, he enquired: "how [sic] I owe you for tuition fees for Martin's course ... I am sure he is going to do a good job for the Royal Academy of Dancing."³⁶⁶ Rubinstein certainly did "a good

³⁶⁰ Laughlin, Patricia, *Marilyn Jones: A Brilliance All of her Own*, Quartet Books, South Yarra, 1978, pp.37–38.

³⁶¹ Theatrical flier, 20 May 1952, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

³⁶² G.W.H., 'Borovansky Keeps His Promise,' *The Age*, date unknown, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

³⁶³ Author unknown, 'Ballet Makes a Record,' courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection; Hood, op.cit., p.116.

³⁶⁴ Perth newspaper, unknown author and date (possibly October 1955), 'Crowd Clamours for Ballet as Curtain Drops,' courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection; Kitcher, op.cit., p.358.

³⁶⁵ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 22, Folder 64, Extract from Rough Hansard, 45 over 2266A, CRSF1571, Item 70835 Pt.1, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

³⁶⁶ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 3, Folder 18, copy of letter from Borovansky to Danetree, 9 December 1953; letter from Danetree to Borovansky, 11 December 1953; copy of letter from Borovansky to Danetree, 5 February 1954, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

job” as he was awarded a Fellowship from the Academy and received the Order of Australia for services to ballet. It is one of the tragedies of life that Borovansky did not live to see what his generosity engendered.

While the company was enduring another layoff, Borovansky was once more sent overseas by J. C. Williamson’s to contract more principal dancers: the American ballerina Jocelyn Vollmar, previously with the San Francisco City Ballet, New York City Ballet and Grand Ballet du Marquis de Cuevas; Raoul Celada, who was from Brazil but had danced with Russian and American companies; Hungarian Anna Mariya from the Janine Charrat French company; and Paris Opera-trained Christaine Hubert from Theatre Chatelet, Paris. Paul Grinwiss returned as choreographer and *premier danseur* along with John Auld and Vasillie Trunoff, both of whom had been touring England, Europe and Canada with the London Festival Ballet Company.³⁶⁷ Borovansky re-engaged many of his former dancers who had gone abroad to improve their career opportunities and earn a living. These expatriate dancers discovered that, not only did the Borovansky Ballet compare favourably with highly esteemed overseas companies, but it eclipsed their entertainment value.³⁶⁸ Meanwhile, the *Australian Women’s Weekly* reported on the accolades appearing in Paris newspapers regarding Gorham’s performances with the Marquis de Cuevas Monte Carlo Ballet Company as the star of two new ballets for which she received coaching from Madame Nijinska. Gorham was assigned honours by the critics above “established stars such as Tallchief and Rosella Hightower.”³⁶⁹

The company had not been active for 12 months when rehearsals commenced in Melbourne for a 19-week season beginning at the end of January 1954. During this lapse, Borovansky’s Educational Ballet Club continued to provide entertainment.³⁷⁰ In one of his articles, the theatre critic J. B. McA. provides a glimpse of a typical stage rehearsal of Borovansky’s company. He described Borovansky as “a stocky, balding man with a sharp tongue and a droll sense of humour that robs his comments of any real sting.” Pronouncements like “a policeman directing the traffic” when correcting a dancer’s arms and the *corps de ballet’s* grouping “resembled a plate of scrambled eggs” resonated through the microphone. Notwithstanding Borovansky’s methods, the writer deemed that “here ... was an Australian company that could do justice to the best traditions of ballet.”³⁷¹

Kiril Vassilkovsky, whom Borovansky had brought to Australia to stage *Symphonie Fantastique* and *Graduation Ball* because of his first-hand knowledge of these ballets, was also appointed ballet master. *Symphonie Fantastique*, which premiered in Melbourne on 30 January 1954, was acclaimed a triumph with the critics acknowledging that the Borovansky Ballet was now a world-class company. The journalist Douglas Wilkie wrote that “[it] matches the pre-war Ballet Russe ... Here is a company ... which would receive acclaim in any country ... a big Australian content.”³⁷² This was a very

³⁶⁷ Hood, op.cit., pp.121–122.

Australia Dancing – Vollmar, Jocelyn (1925–)

www.australiadancing.org/apps/ad?action=ViewSubject&id=5041&resourceType+All

³⁶⁸ Salter, op.cit., p.178.

Grinwiss, Paul. Born Ghent, Belgium, 1920. Student of Sacha Sarkoff, later Preobrajenska, Lubov, Egorova, Nicolas Zvereff and Nora Kiss. First performed with Le Theatre Francais in Ghent and Le Grand Theatre in Rijssel. 1947–1949 soloist and principal dancer in de Basil’s Original Ballets Russes, then joined Marquis de Cuevas company. Borovansky Ballet 1951–52. Returned to Australia 1954 as principal dancer in Borovansky’s company. Left the company to form his own in 1960. Later returned to work in Europe and South Africa. Founded Ghent Ballet Academy in 1972.

Australia Dancing – Grinwiss, Paul (1920–)

www.australiadancing.org/subjects/502.html, 30/8/05.

³⁶⁹ Roland Pullen, ‘Paris in Love with Tiny Australian Girl,’ *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 30 December 1953, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

³⁷⁰ Kitcher, op.cit., p.358; Educational Ballet Club program, courtesy Edna Busse private collection.

³⁷¹ J. B. McA., ‘At the Theatre – Behind the Scenes with Ballet Company,’ *The Age*, 16 January 1954, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

³⁷² Kitcher, op.cit., p.358; Hood, op.cit., pp.121–122; Douglas Wilkie, ‘Great Artistic Burst in Ballet Bombshell,’ newspaper and date unknown, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

Vassilkovsky, Kiril. Born Riga 1919. Russian parents – migrated to England in 1924. Initially trained by Marie Rambert, later Igor Schwesoff. Came to Australia with de Basil’s Original Ballets Russes 1939–40 tour. Danced with this company in America until it disbanded in 1947. Returned to performing in Europe and by 1954 was Bronislava Nijinska’s personal assistant in Marquis de Cuevas’s company. Persuaded by Borovansky to join his

complimentary comparison to the Ballets Russes almost 15 years after their final Australian tour. J. B. McA., *The Age* critic, considered *Symphonie Fantastique* to strongly indicate Borovansky's success in setting up an Australian ballet company of the highest standard. He described this performance as "a landmark in Melbourne's theatrical history" and believed that Borovansky should be honoured as "the real founder of Australian ballet."³⁷³

It is now time to dispense with past ideologies insistent that Australia can't produce good ballet ... our companies can't compare with those overseas ... only Russians can make great dancers.³⁷⁴

By 1954 Borovansky had received many positive tributes from theatre critics who persistently acclaimed his company as representative of Australian talent. That he was popular and respected by his audiences is defined by the continuation of their support. We recognise historically that he was not the first, as Kirsova takes, and deserves, that accolade, but neither during his lifetime nor after his death has Borovansky been recognised by any official organisation as the founder of Australian ballet. Betty Gill wrote of the Borovansky Ballet Company as "our ballet," which clearly highlights that Borovansky's strategy was working well. He had set out to create this appellation and was succeeding, as no other company was referred to in this manner. Hutton exhorted ballet adherents to banish their doubts about the ability of the Borovansky Ballet to resurrect itself, as Borovansky had just proven that he was a master at repeating success. He ended his article with a concern that opera, and not ballet, was likely to be "shown to the most distinguished guest to visit us."³⁷⁵ Hutton was referring to the 1954 tour of Queen Elizabeth, the first reigning British monarch to visit Australia. Another critic, J. B. McA., added his views on this subject:

It will be a thousand pities if the Queen ... cannot see the ballet. Borovansky is venerated by those who firmly believe in the future of Australian theatre. He has not only justified his own faith but consolidated the loyalty of the great army of ballet lovers whom he has served so well.³⁷⁶

The royal visitors never did get to see the Borovansky Ballet Company. It was deemed that the Elizabethan Theatre Trust's Opera Company would appropriately represent Australian theatre. The Menzies Government viewed art in a traditionally conservative manner. H. C. Coombs (Commonwealth Bank), J. D. Pringle (*Sydney Morning Herald*) and Charles Moses (ABC) introduced the Elizabethan Theatre Trust in commemoration of Queen Elizabeth's Australian tour. The Trust was initially set up as a private company with public subscription. Federal representation followed, but grants from both Commonwealth and state governments were pitiful. Planning commenced immediately for a drama company and an amalgamation of Sydney and Melbourne opera companies, but not for ballet. John Dewey attributed this to the newly appointed director Hugh Hunt's belief that the Borovansky company had already fulfilled the requirement to be called the national ballet of Australia. As he had recently arrived from England ex London's Old Vic Theatre and was unfamiliar with our government's policies, perhaps Hunt assumed that the Borovansky Ballet was fully funded, whereas there is no record of it ever receiving a government subsidy.³⁷⁷

company, remained for four years (1954–58) as dancer and *repetiteur*/ballet master. Then joined Robert Pomie's company in Sydney. Productions: ABC Television Young Australian Ballet. 1960s and 1970s produced original ballets for West Australian Ballet. In 1980 staged full program for Tasmania Ballet. Taught in the school he had established at Busselton until retirement in 1991.

Australia Dancing – Vassilkovsky, Kiril (1919–)
www.australiadancing.org/subjects/3281.html, 30/8/05.

³⁷³ J. B. McA., 'Brilliant Spectacle at Ballet Opening,' *The Age*, date unknown, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

³⁷⁴ Betty Gill, 'Our Ballet is Here to Stay,' *Women's Day and Home*, 12 April 1954, pp.8–9.

³⁷⁵ Geoffrey Hutton, 'Our Ballet was Never Better', *The Age*, date unknown, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

³⁷⁶ J. B. McA., source unknown, 16 January 1954, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

³⁷⁷ Searle, op.cit., p.201.

After being appointed assistant by J. C. Williamson's in December 1953, Bill Akers joined the Borovansky Ballet as stage manager while it was preparing for its four-month Melbourne season. As well as gaining managerial experience, Akers had trained as a professional actor. Now, as stage director, he was about to learn how to 'light' a ballet from the master himself. Akers became a legend in the theatrical world, both in Australia and overseas, for his superb lighting of stage productions. Acting as Borovansky's stage director in 1958, he was responsible for negotiating with Marilyn Jones and "had in a sense auditioned her" before she joined the company.³⁷⁸ Borovansky proceeded to make Jones his protégée, grooming her as a dancer but also educating her as a person, as she was not particularly well informed in cultural matters.³⁷⁹ As Borovansky's closest associate, Akers knew of his considerations regarding an opera company in which he planned for Akers to be its technical director. Circumstances did not permit this transition to occur, but Akers remained connected to theatre and was consultant to the Victorian Arts Centre in 1980.³⁸⁰

Borovansky, through J. C. Williamson's, had arranged with a young South African choreographer, John Cranko, to produce his ballet *Pineapple Poll* for the Borovansky company, which would make it "the first company other than Sadler's Wells to dance the ballet."³⁸¹ A newspaper of the day describes it as:

a ballet in lighter vein ... begins with a burst of colour on the waterfront at Portsmouth to celebrate the return of Gunboat H.M.S. Hot Crossbun ... skilful choreography interwoven with Sullivan's sparkling music.³⁸²

During my interview with Barry Kitcher, he remarked that even though Borovansky brought in outside choreographers to produce ballets, he would have the final say. However, he did not interfere with Cranko as he appeared to be "afraid that Cranko would put him in his place."³⁸³ In his curtain speech, Cranko said that Australian ballet had "tremendous possibilities ... no other country in the world could ever present a single program of ballet to crowded audiences for three weeks in a row."

One former member of the company did perform with the Elizabethan Theatre Company not long after its inauguration. Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Jill Collinson, at her residence, Mornington, Victoria, 6 July 2009.

³⁷⁸ Kitcher, op.cit., pp.13,358; interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Bill Akers, at his residence, Flinders, Victoria, 30 October 2006; Pask, *The Second Act*, pp.152,189.

Akers, William (Bill). Born Sydney 1929, died Victoria 2010. Performer, choreographer and director. Trained at Rathbone Academy of Dramatic Art and Halliday's Ballet Studio. Assistant stage manager, Borovansky Ballet, 1950s. Lighting specialist. Production director and lighting designer, Australian Ballet 1962. Theatre planning coordinator, Victorian Arts Centre building committee 1973. Director of productions, Australian Ballet 1983. Awarded Chevalier de Sahamet'rei and A. M. for services to lighting ballet and theatre, and Green Room Award.

Australia Dancing – Akers, William (Bill)
www.australiadancing.org/subjects,76.html, 8/03/05.

³⁷⁹ Laughlin, op.cit., pp.35–36.

Jones, Marilyn. Born Newcastle, Australia, 1940. Studied first with Tessa Maunder, Newcastle, then Lorraine Norton, Sydney. Scholarship Sadler's Wells Ballet School 1956. Royal Ballet 1957, Borovansky Ballet 1959–61, junior ballerina de Cuevas Ballet 1961, ballerina Australian Ballet 1962–71, guest artist London Festival Ballet 1963. O. B. E. 1972. Clarke and Vaughan, op.cit., p.191; Laughlin, op.cit., pp.11–18; Koegler, op.cit., p.284.

³⁸⁰ Salter, op.cit., pp.128,143,176,201,203,205.

³⁸¹ Pask, *The Second Act*, p.79; newspaper article, author, title and date unknown, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

Cranko, John. Born Rustenburg, Transvaal, 1927, died 1973. South African dancer and choreographer, architect of Stuttgart Ballet. Studied at Sadler's Wells School in 1946 and danced with the company at Covent Garden. His choreographic gifts were fostered by Ninette de Valois; *Pineapple Poll* was his first triumph, followed by success after success until his early demise. The school in Stuttgart is named after him, as is a ballet studio at Sadler's Wells Theatre. Clarke and Vaughan, op.cit., p.98; Koegler, op.cit., p.135.

³⁸² Unknown newspaper, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

³⁸³ Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Barry Kitcher, at his residence, Frankston, Victoria, 13 July 2006.

He also congratulated the company on giving the best performance he had seen to date.³⁸⁴

An article written by Borovansky for *The Ballet Annual 1954* commenced with a reference to Arnold Haskell's pre-war visit to Australia (see Chapter 2), when he predicted that one day Australia would have its own ballet. While Borovansky questioned Haskell's conviction of this outcome, he stated that he had not been very hopeful of accomplishing "so much in such a short time." It was acknowledged by Borovansky that the war benefited the emergence of local ballet because overseas companies were precluded from travelling to Australia. Nevertheless, he clearly stated that Australians danced with "unbounded enthusiasm," which stimulated and inspired, and was the reason his company achieved in a few years "what has taken other companies decades."³⁸⁵ Commenting on the type of ballet presented, Borovansky explained that local theatrical entrepreneurs must consider the financial as well as the artistic success of professional ballet before its future could be assured. It was vital that our repertoire would initially consist of ballets that were known and popular, as a secure and strong financial basis was an essential foundation. His company could not afford to experiment with original ballets in its evolutionary stage because funding was not available. By introducing such masterpieces as *Giselle* and *The Sleeping Princess* his company created a solid, supportive Australian public. In answer to local critics, Borovansky stated that the matter of finance in commercial theatre was a given reality – commercial enterprise would not be prepared to support a ballet company showing continual financial losses. It was Borovansky's belief that "ballet is entertainment" and "cannot be forced on the public."³⁸⁶ In other words, if you made it more amenable to all the population, its potential educational value was significantly widened. Borovansky attributed the most important factors in the development of his company to the natural talent of the Australian dancer and the high standard achieved by both individual artists and the whole company. His article reveals a lucid account of what had been successfully completed without financial backing and what might be achieved in the future.

In July 1954 Borovansky wrote a lengthy letter to a Mr Blake in which he explained the setting up of his company and business relationship with J. C. Williamson's. He questioned the legality of his arrangement with Frank Tait, which had no written agreement or contract, and requested Blake's immediate attention to this matter.³⁸⁷ There appears to be a pattern throughout the 1950s of Borovansky becoming more disturbed in his dealings with J. C. Williamson's over what he saw as injustices regarding his position and remuneration. In a letter to Frank Tait, he conveyed his distress over the fact that the business of his affairs had been so exasperatingly tardy and discussions disagreeable. Borovansky was anticipating a definite proposition from EMDAS and expected J. C. Williamson's and the Society to value his position exclusively because of his generous complicity, which allowed them to amass free profits.³⁸⁸ Not knowing when his affairs would be examined (presumably by Council members of the Society), Borovansky assumed that the attitude Frank Tait and the Society displayed towards him was decidedly unfriendly. As J. C. Williamson's was presenting the Borovansky Ballet Company under the auspices of EMDAS and Borovansky was Frank Tait's appointed Artistic Director, Tait was left with no option but to negotiate with him. Borovansky anticipated that the Society would accept Tait's judgement and opinions, as he was handling the business for the organisation as far as his ballet company was concerned. Borovansky stated that he had no knowledge of the Society nor any contact with it, and appealed for quick action in order to commence organising the company's next program before it was too late.³⁸⁹ EMDAS replied that members of the Council had considered his letter and, because the Society was a sponsoring body only and J. C. Williamson's was paid a service fee for the management and conduct

³⁸⁴ Kitcher, op.cit., pp.114–118; Salter, op.cit., pp.186–187. A talented Australian musician, Charles Mackerras, had very successfully adapted the music of Arthur Sullivan for this ballet. (There was an obituary for Charles Mackerras, 'Orchestra Great Dies,' featured in the *Sun-Herald*, Melbourne, 16 July 2010.)

³⁸⁵ Edouard Borovansky, 'Australia – Borovansky Ballet, *The Ballet Annual 1954* (unknown date, editor and publisher), Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 3, Folder 18, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

³⁸⁶ *ibid.*

³⁸⁷ Copy of letter from Borovansky to Mr Blake, 6 July 1954, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 3, Folder 18, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Appendix 5.

³⁸⁸ Copy of letter from Borovansky to Frank Tait, 13 October 1954, pp.1–2, Ingram Papers MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 27, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

³⁸⁹ *ibid.*

of the productions, the Council could not depart from its contractual obligations.³⁹⁰

This whole episode took 12 months to come to its unsatisfactory – as far as Borovansky was concerned – resolution and clearly reveals the power enforced by the combination of J. C. Williamson's and EMDAS. Despite Borovansky's anxiety, frustration and feelings of inadequacy, he obviously remained bedded in this relationship, which was not within his power to alter. This unsatisfactory situation would not have improved his temperament and probably influenced his thoughts away from life as a 'ballet puppet'. It was around this time that he confided to Bill Akers that he was interested in producing opera in Australia but, while the thought was there, he remained loyal to the commitment of a ballet company.³⁹¹

Towards the end of the Sydney season, Borovansky received an invitation from the Premier of New South Wales, Rt Hon. J. J. Cahill, to attend a conference on 30 November 1954 with regards to the government and the working committee inspecting sites and making general recommendations for the erection of the Sydney Opera House. Borovansky attended this initial symposium and, in his post-conference congratulatory letter to the Premier, pledged his company and his personal assistance in order that "Australian Art will be able to develop and progress in its own country." This was always foremost in Borovansky's mind and epitomised his inner feelings about where our theatrical arts should be headed. By December 1954 Borovansky was ready to concede that he had "built a tradition of ballet in Australia" but the impressive assistance he had received from Australian artists was a vital contributing factor.³⁹²

In April 1955 *People* magazine published an article describing a typical stage rehearsal of the Borovansky ballet company in which the writer declared, "No one ... not dedicated to the ballet would stay in its atmosphere of low salaries ... iron discipline, continual criticism."³⁹³ Whereas the real fight for a decent wage began in 1954, it can be seen from this article that it was still an acknowledged fact that ballet was not a well-paid profession. During the Borovansky Ballet's 1954 Sydney season, the orchestra (under the Musicians Union) had their salary considerably increased. In the same year, male and female *corps de ballet* members received a touring allowance of 1 pound 11 shillings, whereas the orchestra was paid 7 pounds per week. The *corps de ballet* decided that, when their next contracts were drawn up, they would request an increase of 2 pounds per week, as it cost them just as much to live away from home as the musicians. The Secretary of Actors Equity, Hal Alexander, approached J. C. Williamson's without success and subsequently called a strike, as the on-tour allowance had remained static at 1 pound 11 shillings for the past three to four years despite living costs increasing at an enormous rate. When the *corps de ballet* arrived at the Empire Theatre in Sydney for a sold-out matinee performance, they were instructed to stop work for 30 minutes, then wait outside while negotiations were in progress. If the decision was unfavourable, there would be no matinee that day. Union representatives Barry Kitcher and Judith Kerr soon found themselves in Borovansky's office to face a meeting with Hal Alexander and two senior management members of J. C. Williamson's. In a voice which resonated with the atmosphere of the Cold War, Kitcher was asked if he was a Communist by one manager – this being standard procedure at that time. Although making the appropriate negative response, he admits that this ploy successfully made him feel culpable and uneasy. In an interview he says that "the two J. C. Williamson's representatives put us through the third degree. We were scared little *corps de ballet* people."³⁹⁴ The increase was granted and the audience finally witnessed the curtain being raised at 2.30 p.m., after members of the *corps* had changed into their costumes and applied make-up on the footpath opposite the theatre.

Minimum rates now payable to *corp de ballet* members:

Men – 14 pounds 10 shillings plus 2 pounds 18 shillings on tour

³⁹⁰ Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 28, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

³⁹¹ Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Bill Akers, at his residence, Flinders, Victoria, 30 October 2006.

³⁹² Invitation from Rt Hon. J. J. Cahill to Borovansky, 17 November 1954; copy of letter from Borovansky to Rt Hon. J. J. Cahill, 1 December 1954; letter from Rt Hon. J. J. Cahill to Borovansky, 14 December 1954; Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 3, Folder 19, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

³⁹³ Author unknown, 'The Ballet Slaves,' *People*, 20 April 1955, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

³⁹⁴ Kitcher, op.cit., pp.123–124; interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Barry Kitcher, at his residence, Frankston, Victoria, 13 July 2006.

Women – 13 pounds 5 shillings plus 2 pounds 18 shillings on tour.³⁹⁵

While commending J. C. Williamson's for the length of time over which it had given employment to more theatrical people than anybody else in Australia, Kitcher concedes that "they sometimes had to be persuaded to pay fairer wages, particularly to their performers." It did, however, agree that all members of the Borovansky Ballet were regarded as on tour when out of the city of Melbourne.³⁹⁶

At the same time, a wage claim was instigated regarding extra pay for *corps de ballet* members who danced minor roles and another strike was threatened. Borovansky diffused the whole issue by advising them that, if they persisted, there would be no company and therefore no jobs. Furthermore, if another company was ever formed, they would not be re-engaged as he could no longer trust them.³⁹⁷ An angry Borovansky was solidly trumped by Alexander at a rowdy meeting of Actors Equity on 12 December 1954 regarding the above wage claim and his letter to Frank Tait, 21 December 1954, subsequently lost his case against Equity. While his ego was considerably dented, he was not entirely defeated. His solution was to hire two more women to specifically dance solo roles, while keeping the *corps de ballet* for group dancing. Borovansky believed that if this strategy created mistrust between the *corps de ballet* and Actors Equity, resulting in a possible break, perhaps separate representation and ruling in the existing award could be achieved.³⁹⁸

During December 1954 Stevenson wrote to Borovansky from England that, although they had heard some remarkably pleasing news about the company, it would be good to have more details. She specifically mentioned a rumour circulating that the Borovansky Ballet was coming to the Edinburgh Festival and reopened the subject of original ballets. Borovansky wrote back dismissing Edinburgh, as "the Firm is never really one hundred per cent interested in sending us overseas." He also acknowledged that original ballets were needed and proposed to bring David Lichine to Australia for this purpose.³⁹⁹

Reporting on the intended April/May 1955 Brisbane season, John Dowe wrote that interest and support for the Borovansky ballet company had grown despite an absence of three years. He attributed this to "the efforts, tenacity and ideals of Edouard Borovansky." Dowe confirmed Borovansky's strategy in fostering the tradition of historical ballets (produced by Diaghilev, Fokine and Massine) as "they are as worthy of preservation as the Old Masters in painting." The Borovansky Ballet was to include a production of *Les Presages* by Shabelevsky, who would be joining the company along with Jocelyn Vollmar, Roger Fernandes and Charles Dickson. On a further note, Dowe revealed that the government had invited the Borovansky Ballet to take part in the frame of the 1956 Olympic Games by presenting a November season in Melbourne: "While Borovansky is naturally gratified at this honour I feel, and many with me, that such recognition is long overdue."⁴⁰⁰ This season did not eventuate and once more he and his company were devalued. Borovansky had just finished promoting this proposed Melbourne season throughout Australia when he received a communication from Frank

³⁹⁵ Actors' Equity Acc.#199984.0044, Box 31, 27/1/11, Equity News, December 1954, 'The Ballet Girl,' pp.12,18, Melbourne University Archives. As far back as 1943 Equity was endeavouring to obtain better wages for junior dancers, particularly when on tour. One theatrical organisation was found to be employing an "overwhelming majority of junior girls ... at junior rates."

³⁹⁶ Kitcher, op.cit., p.12; Equity News, December 1954, op.cit., commenced the article with the following: "The *corps de ballet* of the Borovansky Ballet ... have earned the thanks of the entire theatrical membership in their stand for an increased on-tour allowance."

³⁹⁷ Copy of letter from Borovansky to Frank Tait, 2 December 1954, Ingram Papers, MS 336, Box 4, Folder 27, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

³⁹⁸ Copy of letter from Borovansky to Frank Tait, 21 December 1954, Ingram Papers MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 27, National Library of Australia, Canberra; copy of letter from Frank Tait to Hal Alexander, 29 November 1954, Appendix 6.

³⁹⁹ Letter from Stevenson, 12 December 1954; copy of letter from Borovansky to Stevenson, 16 February 1955, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 3, Folder 25, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Lichine, David. Born Rostov-on-Don 1910, died Los Angeles 1972. Russian dancer and choreographer. Studied with Egorova and Nijinska in Paris. Danced in Rubinstein, Pavlova, de Basil and Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo companies and later American Ballet Theatre. Clarke and Vaughan, op.cit., p.211; Koegler, op.cit., pp.324–325.

⁴⁰⁰ John Dowe, 'Ballet in Australia,' pp.3–4, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 3, Folder 29, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Stenning advising that he was to produce an opera the next year for the Olympic Games. In conveying this information to Arthur Tait, Borovansky's disappointment is palpable:

the Borovansky Ballet, which for years has been such a force in the cultural development of Australia, will probably have to be disbanded.⁴⁰¹

This whole guessing game is difficult to comprehend, particularly as it had already been in print that the Borovansky Ballet was going to be part of the entertainment presented during the Olympic Games in their home city, not to mention his one-man advertising campaign. This must have been a disheartening development in Borovansky's efforts to present his company to the world (for the world was about to come to Melbourne), as well as a personal affront to his integrity. In some circles the Borovansky Ballet was still regarded as foreign and therefore not representative of Australia, while the Opera Company carried the appellation 'National'.

In a letter to Frank Tait, 19 September, 1955, Borovansky recorded his long standing dissatisfaction regarding his past and present position with the Borovansky Ballet. He desired that all concerned should know of his achievements and interest, not only to maintain the ballet in Australia but to ensure its economic viability for J. C. Williamson's and EMDAS. After citing some background facts, he detailed his grievances:

It was as early as 1940 that I proposed ... I organise a ballet company which would belong to J. C. Williamson's Theatres Limited. I based my idea on my knowledge of the existing talent in Australia, and my capability to organise such a company. You did not accept my proposition then as you said you did not believe that an Australian ballet without overseas stars would fill the Box Office.⁴⁰²

After a second refusal, Borovansky "through great effort and struggling introduced Australian ballet to the Australian public." He succeeded, and only then received a merger proposition from J. C. Williamson's. Borovansky took issue with Tait over his attitude towards ballet as "a branch of theatrical entertainment with enormous appeal to the public ... a developing art. Unlike musical productions which are static."⁴⁰³ He then took issue with Tait for his lack of ballet knowledge, which had caused an incident regarding David Lichine's royalties for choreography. This could have been avoided if handled by him as Director of the company with the knowledge to handle such situations: "Probably you do not know how much my knowledge has resulted in the Company's financial successes." Another concern he expressed was "our three-year recess, which was never explained to me."⁴⁰⁴

After reforming the company and expanding the scale of it, Borovansky was informed by J. C. Williamson's that EMDAS was now its sponsor and would take over management. All this occurred without informing Borovansky or obtaining his agreement. He had never received an invitation "to attend any meeting to discuss their aim in sponsoring" his company. He had very little knowledge of the Society which "completely owns the Company" and had been made to feel his position was obviously of very low accord:

As the creator and organiser of the Borovansky Ballet you trust me with the duty of discovering and engaging artists both in Australia and overseas, of making the most acceptable terms with them ... I was solely responsible for selecting the repertoire and of adding new productions ... which I did most effectively. I selected the producers for these ballets and arranged the terms for the productions most agreeably. I fixed the royalties with most of the producers. I am personally responsible for the ... discipline and progress of the Company ... on tour continually

⁴⁰¹ Copy of letter from Borovansky to Arthur Tait, London, 12 December 1955, p.3, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 3, Folder 26, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴⁰² Letter to Frank Tait from Borovansky, His Majesty's Theatre, Perth, 19 September 1955.

⁴⁰³ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁴ *ibid.*

... great physical and moral effort ... very costly. I maintain an extensive correspondence abroad ... continually in contact with the Press and important figures ... to ensure the success and prestige of the company.⁴⁰⁵

Borovansky also pointed out that he discussed new contracts with the principal artists, “which I can do to everybody’s satisfaction.” He also stated that he had never asked for royalties for “any ballet I have produced, and some of those ballets are still in the repertoire.” Borovansky pointed out that most of his other activities were the business of the Managing Director, which was “the position which you refuse to recognise ... I am surprised at your mistrust which is grossly insulting to my intelligence, and is against the dignity of my position.”⁴⁰⁶ Borovansky finished his letter with reference to some lapses of office security and the fact that he did not get consulted about costs and general expenditure. After previously receiving an offer from Frank Tait to invest 25,000 pounds and become a Managing Director of the Company, Borovansky was sceptical of this arrangement and decided to wait on further information. He was unable to understand “how the Society which is sponsoring us and is subsidised by the Government, can dispose of the Borovansky Ballet.”⁴⁰⁷ In the future he would demand that his position be clarified as follows:

I, as Director of the Borovansky Ballet will be informed on request, of ALL business matters relating to the Borovansky Ballet ... all staff where the Borovansky Ballet appears will be responsible to me in fulfilling their duties in relation to the Borovansky Ballet, and I, in turn, will be responsible to the Managing Director of JCW who is responsible to the Society.⁴⁰⁸

He offered to resign if the above was not acceptable to Tait or the Society.⁴⁰⁹

Nevertheless, smarting but undeterred, Borovansky wrote to Arthur Tait advising him that the company had started rehearsing Lichine’s ballet and he rated the company very highly in the firm belief that it could be taken anywhere in the world. Borovansky used this statement to remind Tait about a world tour, adding that he would attach no blame if it could not be arranged as he knew that Arthur was as enthusiastic as he, but the final decision came from another direction. It was during the first week of November 1955, when the company had moved to Sydney, that Lichine agreed to perform his original role of Head Junior Cadet in his own ballet *Graduation Ball*, which had premiered nearly 20 years before. Historically, this one Wednesday matinee was “probably the last time that the great David Lichine ever danced on stage.”⁴¹⁰ From 16 December 1955 to early February 1956, Lichine’s *Nutcracker* presented a Sydney season which broke all previous Empire Theatre box-office records. After four weeks in Brisbane, then a short break, the company moved to Melbourne for a 14-week season and was disbanded on 11 August 1956.⁴¹¹

Hutton described Borovansky’s Australian Ballet as a “personal miracle” and “an Australian institution” which is unique in the annals of Australian theatrical history. For the past 12 years it had been one of Australia’s major theatrical attractions and it was not uninterested audiences but economics which threatened the Borovansky Ballet which is now one of the biggest ballet companies in the world. Hutton pointed out that the best ballet companies had always been permanent. This was

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ *ibid.*

⁴¹⁰ Copy of letter from Borovansky to Arthur Tait, London, 13 October 1955, pp.3–4, National Library of Australia, Canberra; at the time of writing this letter, Borovansky was ill with influenza and had just undergone an eye operation. *Currency Companion*, Edward H. Pask, ‘Choreographic Drama,’ p.73.

Lichine, a choreographer and leading dancer of the de Basil Monte Carlo Ballets Russes, wrote the story and choreographed the ballet. Lichine and his wife, principal ballerina Tatiana Riabouchinska, were the junior cadet and his sweetheart. Hood, *op.cit.*, p.126. Since its world premiere in Sydney, 1 March 1940, during the de Basil Ballets Russes tour, *Graduation Ball* “has remained a staple of the international repertory,” Kitcher, *op.cit.*, p.111,133.

⁴¹¹ Kitcher, *op.cit.*, pp.188–189,239.

the desired situation required to save Australian dancers from travelling overseas or working in musical comedy. Borovansky “has built something here which is worth preserving” with both artists and audience prepared to support a national ballet.⁴¹²

During an Actors Equity meeting on 12 July 1956, it was brought to the attention of members that Dame Pattie Menzies (wife of the former Prime Minister) had alleged that the government subscribed to a view in which Australian talent was consistently ignored.⁴¹³ This was in particular a reference to commercial television, which had just arrived in Australia. It could be equally applied to Australians working in commercial theatre (singers, actors and dancers), whose artistic merit was deemed to be inferior to that of their overseas counterparts. For many years this concept was the blight of any Australian artist aspiring to achieve in their own country. The idea that Australians had to succeed overseas before being acknowledged in their own country had resulted in the cultural cringe which may well be considered responsible for the negative attitude of many talented artists. By continually disregarding the importance of culture and denying financial support to the Borovansky Ballet, as well as various other artists, the government did very little to dispel the idea that we were an inferior people as far as the arts were concerned.

In this chapter the focus has been on Borovansky’s ever-increasing role in the cultural unfolding of Australian ballet and the voices of theatre critics advocating that Borovansky receive credit where credit was due by acknowledging his achievements in an official capacity. The triumphant return in 1951 of the Borovansky ballet company after a three-year absence became a turning point in the history of Australian ballet. Borovansky refused to accept defeat. Displaying total faith in his dancers’ ability to once again captivate and entertain at the highest level, he rebuilt his company with renewed energy and enthusiasm. His Jubilee Ballet was a resounding box-office success as more and more people realised that going to the ballet was not just for the elite. An even more successful tour from January 1954 to August 1956 saw the Borovansky Ballet reach international standard.

Borovansky’s final crusade for his company to become national is detailed in Chapter 6, when it reached its greatest height in technique and presentation with more record-breaking seasons. At the apex of all this acclaim, Borovansky succumbed to a fatal heart attack and slowly the soul of the Borovansky ballet company withered. A resurrection was attempted with a new artistic director, Peggy van Praagh, from London’s Sadler’s Wells Ballet, but the response was not encouraging. The pattern that Borovansky designed was not compatible with a different cloth. When the situation was heading for disaster, a Melbourne politician moved Parliament to act and the final transition of the Borovansky ballet company to the Australian Ballet was enacted.

⁴¹² Kitcher, op.cit., pp.360–361; Geoffrey Hutton, ‘Australian Ballet: A Luxury We Cannot Do Without,’ *The Age*, 14 March 1956, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

⁴¹³ Minutes of Executive of the Council, 12 July 1956, Box 1, 1/1/1/3, Actors Equity Acc#1984.0044, Melbourne University Archives.

CHAPTER 6: *From 1957 into the Next Decade*

After nearly 9 months without a ballet season, the Borovansky Ballet once again entered the theatrical scene. The Borovansky Ballet Academy was still flourishing, with Xenia and Martin Rubinstein in charge, while their professional dancers were overseas seeking more stage experience, further tuition or both where possible. Barry Kitcher was among the dancers, singers, musicians, artists and others associated with the theatre for whom “London was almost invariably the destination,” as this was the place where it was all happening.⁴¹⁴ According to the artist Sidney Nolan, ‘overseas’ mattered more than Australia when it came to art markets and criticism, and Alan Morehead, of writing fame, believed that “to be really someone in Australian eyes you first had to make your mark ... on the other side of the world.”⁴¹⁵ Before 1950 most Australians had to resign themselves to being regarded as colonial, and therefore oddities.⁴¹⁶ In his book *On the Cultural Cringe* (originally published in 1956) A. A. Phillips maintained that the cultural cringe was still in everyday use; a “chronic sore point” with unflattering comparisons between Australian and English literature. He aligned Australia’s small population with the resultant smaller audience participation as the cause of wide critical response and continual work being denied.⁴¹⁷ On an ABC program involving the musical performances of two people (one Australian and one a foreigner), a listener had to guess which was the best, and the local was rated as good as the overseas performer:

that, in any nation, there should be the assumption that the domestic cultural product will be worse than the imported article ... cringe direct ... cringe inverted ... was rightly diagnosed by the program’s designer.⁴¹⁸

This attitude remained the reality that Australian dancers (and other artists) were still dealing with in the 1950s. In comparing the state of music in Australia with what was presented before the ABC was established, Phillips, who coined the memorable term “the cultural cringe,” maintained that “as much could be done, at a low financial cost” for ballet as well as other cultural ventures. All that was needed was a man with foresight and the ability to act, plus appropriate finance, then “the superior person who sniffs at our cultural aspirations might be answered within a generation.”⁴¹⁹ Phillips regarded being “a young colony offshoot of a nation with a strong tradition of culture” was a more damaging disability than isolation as Australians were inclined to imitate the English, thus producing the cultural cringe.⁴²⁰

One Australian who had returned to join the Borovansky company was Lichine’s protégée, Elaine Fifield. Along with Mary Gelder (ex-principal, Royal Ballet), Kenneth Melville (Royal and Festival Ballets) and Robert Pomie (Paris Opera), she was featured in the four-act *Swan Lake* which the American choreographer Charles Dickson produced for the Borovansky Ballet in 1957. This was the first time the company had danced the full-length *Swan Lake*, but not a first for Australia as Joyce Graham had produced it for the National Theatre before she returned to England. In a letter to Lichine, Borovansky wrote of how proud he was that “our” *Nutcracker* (referring to the one Lichine choreographed when he was in Australia) was known in Europe. He also mentioned that he was rather concerned about Pomie, who was reputed to be of a temperamental nature.⁴²¹ This comment was strangely prophetic, as before the end of 1957 there was to be a very nasty incident involving Borovansky and Pomie. In the meantime, a whirlwind romance developed between Pomie and

⁴¹⁴ Kitcher, op.cit., p.361.

⁴¹⁵ Alomes, op.cit., p.83.

⁴¹⁶ Phillips, A. A., *On the Cultural Cringe*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2006 (originally published 1956).

⁴¹⁷ Phillips, op.cit., p.72.

⁴¹⁸ Phillips, op.cit., pp.1–2.

⁴¹⁹ Phillips, op.cit., p.19.

⁴²⁰ Phillips, op.cit., pp.12–13,70.

⁴²¹ Copy of letter from Borovansky to Lichine, 16 April 1957, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 28, National Library of Canberra.

Kathleen Gorham and they were married while the company was in Sydney.⁴²²

The most exciting news for Australian balletomanes in 1957 was the proposed visit of Margot Fonteyn. Correspondence reveals that Borovansky considered it imperative to use his own ballerinas on the same program in order that the Australian public did not feel that our dancers were to be second-graded. By insisting that Australian dancers should not be confined to the shadow of an artist as great as Fonteyn, he reveals his trust in their ability to ascend to the world stage. Initially he requested that Fonteyn perform the maximum eight times but her agent, James Laurie, replied that she would only dance six performances per week and suggested that he approach the Fonteyn tour as his company, being host to two of the finest ballerinas in the world plus the principal male dancer of the Royal Ballet, rather than bringing his stars into the foreground. On receiving this information, Borovansky appears unable to resist having a jibe at Fonteyn, writing that he hoped the season would not be too tiring, as she was not used “to dancing eight performances a week as the ballerinas in a touring company.” He also subtly emphasised that Fonteyn should choose an artistic program, as the Australian public “is by no means ignorant.”⁴²³ In reply to a letter from Nevan Tait, 13 February 1957, Borovansky wrote, “I only wish to make her happy here so that she will be the greatest ambassador for us when she returns to London.” Further correspondence reveals that he urged the Tait to offer Fonteyn more money if she would do extra performances in Australia. Fonteyn finally agreed to dance seven performances a week, including the Saturday matinee. Borovansky particularly wanted the Saturday matinee as it was the only time children would be able to attend. There was further detailed correspondence regarding Fonteyn’s tour before all parties were satisfied but Borovansky, knowing the temper of his Australian audiences, ran the show his way. He wrote a final six-page letter to Fonteyn accepting the program she had chosen. He then proceeded to enumerate all the problems specific to Australian theatre that had to be considered and explained why some of her suggestions were impractical in this country.⁴²⁴

While still in Adelaide, he told the company that Margot Fonteyn would be joining them to perform in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane:

Boro was immensely proud ... he had built a ballet company ... now the equal of any in the world and Fonteyn’s visit was the greatest possible acknowledgement of that achievement.⁴²⁵

The Fonteyn/Borovansky season commenced on 25 May 1957 at the Empire Theatre, Sydney. ‘Fonteyn fever’ became the byword as soon as she set foot in Sydney. She was reported in the press, seen on television, heard on radio and attended social functions. Kitcher remembers her prophetic words spoken at an Arts Council reception: “I can foresee that this is the country which will produce our male dancers in the future.” Fonteyn is to be commended, as this was a bold statement during the 1950s when mainstream Australians firmly believed that ‘real’ men did not do ballet. It was to take more time than first imagined, but eventually happened. Despite the excessive flattery she received, Fonteyn quickly revealed her realistic approach to working with the Borovansky Ballet: “She presented herself as another member of the company, we were not put under any pressure because of her fame.”⁴²⁶

Unfortunately, Fonteyn’s relationship with Borovansky rapidly declined for reasons that can only be

⁴²² Letter from Kathleen Gorham to Frank Tait, 13 March 1958, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 6, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Kitcher, op.cit., pp.184,185.

(I can recall these two brilliant dancers having a ‘domestic’ while performing the *Don Quixote pas de deux* and Gorham was almost dropped.)

⁴²³ Copy of letter to Arthur Tait (London) from Borovansky, 23 January 1957, page 2; letter from James Laurie to Borovansky, 7 February 1957, pp.1,2; Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, folder 6; copy of letter to Margot Fonteyn from Borovansky, 19 March 1957, page 1, Box 4, Folder 28, Ingram Papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴²⁴ Copy of letter from Borovansky to Nevan Tait, 19 February 1957, p.2; letter from Nevan Tait to Borovansky, 26 February 1957, p.2; copy of letter from Borovansky to Margot Fonteyn; Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 6, Ingram Papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴²⁵ Kitcher, op.cit., p.185.

⁴²⁶ Kitcher, op.cit., p.186.

speculated about. Their normal working conditions were so much in contrast. Fonteyn was familiar with the professional traditions of the Royal Ballet, bolstered by government subsidies, while Borovansky, with his irrevocable personality, was bound by the demands of a commercial company. Nevertheless, their professional connection was preserved and other annoyances, such as one critic who was unimpressed by Fonteyn while praising Peggy Sager's dancing, had no influence on the extremely enthusiastic reaction to performances.⁴²⁷ The adulation Sydney had shown Fonteyn continued unabated in Melbourne, where she was also treated like royalty. She insisted on giving matinee performances, in both cities, for children with disabilities at which she and the other principals went down into the audience during intervals to talk to the children.⁴²⁸ During the Melbourne season, there appears to have been some sort of ferment stirred up by the entrepreneur John Carroll with regards to Fonteyn's agent, James Laurie. Borovansky wrote to *The Sun*, *The Age* and *The Herald* regarding Fonteyn's tour as follows:

I am only Artistic Director ... and not in any way financially interested in the Dame Margot Fonteyn season ... my concern is only in the artistic development of ballet in Australia. If Mr. Carol [sic] had grounds for complaint ... he could have begun his action before Dame Margot Fonteyn came to Australia and spared her this embarrassment, which she certainly does not deserve.⁴²⁹

Regardless of his personal feelings towards Fonteyn, Borovansky arranged for 90 dozen roses, gathered from all over Australia, to be delivered to the theatre for the final performance. Broken into petals by Bill Akers and his staff, they were then scattered from the 'flies' to fall on Fonteyn and the company as "a very moving tribute to her." She was completely overcome by this gesture, declaring in her curtain speech that "nothing like this had ever happened to her before."⁴³⁰ The one sour note of Fonteyn's time with the Borovansky Ballet revolved around the mystery of the photographic albums depicting the entire history of his company which he proudly presented to her. After she had left the theatre, they were found in her dressing room. Borovansky was extremely upset, perhaps thinking that she did not consider his company worth the bother. An album is mentioned in a letter to Borovansky from Fonteyn's agent, who assured him that it had not been a deliberate action on her part.⁴³¹ Despite this contretemps, Fonteyn's visit was significant insofar as it resulted in Australian ballet being a focus of international interest. It also improved the reputation of the Borovansky Ballet both at home and overseas – all this according to what Borovansky had envisaged.

In her autobiography, Fonteyn dealt rather shabbily with her first Australian experience, describing Borovansky as "a rare character left over from a tour made by Colonel de Basil's Ballet" as if he had been abandoned in Australia instead of choosing to remain here and become an Australian citizen. She also implied that character dancers such as Borovansky were not quite on the same level as classical dancers.⁴³² Fonteyn was critical of Borovansky's directing aptitude. In comparing his company to the Royal Ballet, she intimated that they did not know what they were doing when they got on stage and implied that he and his company were of an inferior standard. Borovansky's rather odd behaviour while he followed the quest for the perfect *corps de ballet* line would have been very distracting to distinguished dancers and Fonteyn was within her rights to ask him to desist. She also criticised his insistence on a full dress rehearsal of ballets they had already performed 12 times, as was normal procedure in his company. Displaying indignation and disapproval, Fonteyn and Some refused to participate at first, but theatre discipline dictates that the director is always right and they

⁴²⁷ Kitcher, op.cit. pp.186–187. Kitcher attributes the critic's attitude to "a burst of patriotism" which was a sign of the pride quite a few Australian balletomanes felt at this time, that is, "our dancers were comparable to the best in the world."

⁴²⁸ Hood, op.cit. p.159; Tait, *A Family ...*, p.229.

⁴²⁹ Newspaper articles, *The Sun*, *The Age*, *The Herald*, Melbourne, 15 June 1957; Ingram Papers MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 34, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴³⁰ Kitcher, op.cit. p.188; Hood, op.cit., p.150.

⁴³¹ Kitcher, op.cit. p.188; letter from J. Laurie to Borovansky, 29 July 1957, Ingram Papers, MS 7336 Box 1, Folder 6, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴³² Fonteyn, Margot, *Margot Fonteyn: Her Own Best-selling Autobiography*, Wyndham, London, 1976, pp.189–191.

conceded. In hindsight Fonteyn admitted that:

Borovansky did a marvellous job for Australia in maintaining a very good company with an enthusiastic public for many years. Without him some excellent dancers would have been lost in the sands of ballet desert.⁴³³

Borovansky wrote frequently to Bill Constable after Fonteyn left Australia and his true thoughts on her are overtly revealed in his letters of 28 June and 9 August 1957. He is extremely sarcastic in the first letter: “showed all her very well-trained balances on her toes ... acrobacies [sic] she has been practising the last twenty years with a broad smile on her face ... made everybody happy.”⁴³⁴ He also threw in a derogatory comment about snobbish theatrical people who really knew nothing about ballet, displaying an almost pathological hatred for them. One soon realises that he only tolerated them for what they could bring to him.⁴³⁵ His second letter is also nasty, with its generalisation about the English disposition: “The Melbourne public did not like having to pay so much money to see Fonteyn and the Borovansky Ballet Company suffered a bit. Fonteyn, like all the English, was just a big snob and prig. That goes for Mr. Somes as well.”⁴³⁶ However, these are very private letters to a long-time trusted friend; Borovansky was too astute to publicly disclose his personal feelings on this subject.

Television had arrived in Melbourne in time for the 1956 Olympic Games, and both theatres and cinemas were profoundly affected by this enormous change in the way people sought entertainment. Borovansky quickly recognised that it was the best form of advertising; being visual and available to a wider range of audience, it would attract new patrons. During the Melbourne season, June to September 1957, the Secretary of Actors Equity received a request from the Artistic Director of the Borovansky Ballet that they should be allowed to have a rehearsal telecast on the ABC channel so that they might gain publicity in view of the fall-off of audiences. One telecast was agreed to with a few provisos imposed. According to a letter from the ABC’s Christopher Muir, there was also a 30-minute feature on ballet in general and an interview with Borovansky was requested because “your name is synonymous with Australian ballet.”⁴³⁷ This represents a revealing acknowledgement from the Australian people towards an unknown foreigner who had made it possible for them to appreciate high culture through the medium of ballet performances. His influence at this stage developed into the truism that ‘Boro meant ballet’.

In August Bill Constable wrote an enthusiastic letter to Borovansky suggesting that the company should tour England and Paris: “could scoop the pool ... a lot of interest in Australia ... because of ... *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (this Australian play had been on the London stage performing to record crowds for a considerable time.) Borovansky replied during the last week of the Brisbane season that he still desired to take his company to England, but had not been successful in gaining financial support from either J. C. Williamson’s or the government. Just a few weeks later, Frank Tait advised Borovansky that he was hopeful of organising an American tour for the company. Tait requested him to send the book dealing with the company to Peggy Tait, who would take it to Luben Vichey, National Artists Corporation, New York. However, this proposed American tour would depend on it directly following the New Zealand tour. Because the Borovansky Ballet had to conform once again to commercial dictates, this tour did not eventuate.”⁴³⁸

⁴³³ Fonteyn, op.cit., p.190; Salter, op.cit., pp.190–192.

⁴³⁴ Copy of letter from Borovansky to Constable, 28 June 1957, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 28, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴³⁵ *ibid.*

⁴³⁶ Copy of letter from Borovansky to Constable, 9 August 1957, Ingram Papers MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 28, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴³⁷ Actors Equity Acc.#1984.0044, Box 6 1/2/2/6, Minutes of Enlarged Executive Meeting of Victorian Caretaker Committee, 31 July 1957, Secretary’s Report, Melbourne University Archive; letter to Borovansky from Christopher Muir, ABC, 26 June 1957, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴³⁸ Letter from Constable to Borovansky, 28 August 1957, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 28; copy of letter from Borovansky to Constable, 6 November 1957; letter from Frank Tait to Borovansky, 19 December 1957, pp.1–2, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 3, National Library of Australia, Canberra. Ray Lawler’s *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, 1955, was structurally European but characteristically Australian: “History

After attending the Borovansky Ballet during its 1957 Brisbane season, Johanna Krannin (a European migrant and pre-war ballet enthusiast) wrote to Borovansky. She noted that the *corps de ballet* was “just as good as overseas companies” and “Australia should be very grateful to you for having given her a national ballet company of such high standard.”⁴³⁹ Australia never did show its gratitude to him, neither in this period nor any other time up to the present. Krannin’s remark about the *corps de ballet* is very interesting, nearly 15 years after the company’s professional debut, as it clearly demonstrates Borovansky’s determination to keep the focus on all aspects of presenting good ballet. The lines and groupings of the *corps de ballet* are a very important part of any ballet and maintaining this standard though the years must have been hard work for master as well as servants.

On 26 November 1957 Robert Pomie and Borovansky signed an agreement that Pomie, as the creator of *Serenade Classique*, dedicated this ballet to Borovansky as his sole property and would not make any claim for fees or royalties. However, relations between them had become distinctly unpleasant as the year progressed. It was an altercation backstage on the night of *Serenade Classique*’s premiere on 20 December which resulted in Pomie’s suspension from the company for a breach of theatrical ethics. Notice was sent to the Ethics Committee of Actors Equity on 23 December with statements by Borovansky, Len Clerehan (Wardrobe Master) and Colleen Gough (Stage Director). Actors Equity recorded a special meeting on 2 January 1958 regarding this incident but, because of pending civil legal action between the parties, “the Committee declined to register any decision.”⁴⁴⁰ According to Kitcher, Gorham while partnering Pomie in his new ballet had some very difficult steps to do and, because of tenderness in one foot, felt it safer to do single instead of double turns. She knew that Pomie would be upset, but did not imagine he would take it out on someone else. A furious Pomie rushed off the stage to his dressing room and, when Borovansky tried to congratulate him on an excellent performance, Pomie pushed him away and forcibly shut the door, crying out that it was dreadful. Borovansky received another shove when he tried to open the door, then Pomie locked it.

Consequently, Pomie was suspended on 7 January, Gorham was ordered to rest for two weeks by the doctor and *Serenade Classique* was not presented again by the Borovansky Ballet.⁴⁴¹ Borovansky wrote to Frank Tait on 13 January 1958 that his staff “refuse to go on tour if Robert Pomie is reinstated ... he has already been violent towards Mr. Akers.” Borovansky also did not want to go on tour with him; nevertheless, Pomie was reinstated in March and joined the company for the rest of the New Zealand season, finishing in May 1958, with Borovansky as director. These facts are verified in a warning letter, March 1958, written by Borovansky to a Mr Baldick of His Majesty’s Theatre, Dunedin, listing behavioural problems recorded against Pomie while on tour in Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Sydney. He also immediately alerted the New Zealand newspapers, as he did not want unfavourable publicity for the company.⁴⁴²

Early in March 1958 while in Christchurch, New Zealand, Borovansky received a letter from Frank Tait which stressed that, during the Firm’s contemplation of the New York City Ballet several months before, an undertaking had been given to Actors Equity that the proposed tour would not put at risk the continuation of the Borovansky Ballet. There is no indication in this letter of breaking up the company and Tait mentioned a short season in Melbourne and possibly Brisbane. The company presented two short seasons, 17 June to 10 July in Perth and 23 July to 4 August in Adelaide, and was

may prove that *Bran Nue Dae* was a watershed for our theatre as much as *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* was in 1955,” Brisbane, op.cit., pp.19,280,340.

⁴³⁹ Copy of letter from Krannin to Borovansky, 31 October 1957, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 30, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

(Krannin’s reference to Borovansky’s company being the Australian national ballet is interesting. How many other European migrants would have considered it a national institution?)

⁴⁴⁰ ‘Agreement between Mr. Robert Pomie and Mr. Edouard Borovansky,’ 26 November 1957, Empire Theatre, Sydney, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 3; copy of notice sent to Ethics Committee, Actors Equity, 23 December 1957, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Actors Equity Acc.#1984.0044, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 2 January 1958, Box 1, 1/1/1/4, Melbourne University Archives.

⁴⁴¹ Kitcher, op.cit., pp.189–190.

⁴⁴² Copy of letter to Frank Tait from Borovansky re Robert Pomie, 13 January 1958, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 6; copy of letter to Mr Baldick from Borovansky, 25 March 1958, 1, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 28, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

disbanded on 9 August 1958, not to be presented again until 11 December 1959.⁴⁴³ Previous to the above seasons, Borovansky had sent a telegram to Hal Alexander asking if Actors Equity sanctioned what was about to happen to his company and dancers. Alexander replied on 8 May 1958 that “Equity completely unaware proposed visit Royal Ballet ... strong opposition unless proper exchange ... arranged.”⁴⁴⁴ The Minutes of Council Management, 26 May 1958, for Actors Equity include a cable from and copy of a cable to Borovansky with regards to the tour of the Royal Covent Garden Ballet. There is also a cable to and copy of a cable from Vasillie Trunoff, who moved that Equity’s quota be implemented with regards to the proposed tour of the Royal Ballet. After some discussion, it was agreed that a statement be issued by the Council that while it

“did not oppose the visit of the Royal Ballet ... we are alarmed at the fact that the Borovansky Australian Ballet company, because of the visit of three overseas ballet companies (the Spanish Dance Theatre, the New York State Ballet and the Royal Covent Garden Ballet), is out of work indefinitely. Further to this, certain of the ballet companies visiting Australia can only do so because of the financial backing of their own governments or agencies ... and the absolute failure of the Australian Government to assist our own world-known ballet company in this regard. Unless some exchange base of employment ... between Australia and other countries is organised ... the position of Australian companies will become impossible.”⁴⁴⁵

There does not seem to have been any resolution to this disastrous, untenable situation, which had been repeated since Borovansky started his company. It now became evident that all the years of this stop–start existence had been eroding his health to the point where it required “immense reserves of energy” for him to continue. After the altercation with Pomie, which affected him physically and mentally, Borovansky’s health visibly deteriorated and the strain of operating his company almost single-handed was evident. He had assumed that his long-time assistant, Colleen Gough, would take on an administrative role, but she married and left the company.⁴⁴⁶

While in Perth Borovansky received a letter from Frank Tait advising that the Royal Ballet tour would begin on 11 September, as it was not possible to delay the tour until 1959 or 1960. The Borovansky Ballet would have to go into recess. To placate their many loyal followers, he was instructed to advise the press that the principal artists’ contracts had expired and the Australian–New Zealand tour had lasted 18 months. However, there was hope of reorganising the company later that year with new ballets and time would be required for rehearsals.⁴⁴⁷ During the final week of the Perth season, the ABC news broadcaster on 15 July advised listeners that Borovansky had addressed a meeting of the Junior Chamber of Commerce.⁴⁴⁸ His business acumen was one of the reasons he had maintained a ballet company throughout the economical fluctuations of commercial theatre. His skill was obviously recognised and utilised by Perth’s commercial organisations, as he was deemed to be a worthy speaker for their up-and-coming professionals. The New York City Ballet was apparently not receiving the reception it expected from Melbourne audiences, as Borovansky’s reply to a letter he received from George Holman (theatre critic for one of the local newspapers) stated that “he was not surprised.” He added that the Australian public’s “taste for ballet is much more developed than the people abroad would think.” After viewing their own company for 15 years, they had the knowledge

⁴⁴³ Copy of letter from Frank Tait to Borovansky, 5 March 1958, pp.1,2, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 4, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Kitcher, op.cit., pp.363 (p.362 for New Zealand itinerary).

⁴⁴⁴ Undated copy of telegram to Alexander from Borovansky; copy of telegram from Alexander to Borovansky, His Majesty’s Theatre, Auckland, 8 May 1958, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 35, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴⁴⁵ Actors Equity Acc.#1984.0044 Minutes of Council Management, 26 May 1958, Correspondence: 6 Box 1, 1/1/14.

⁴⁴⁶ Kitcher, op.cit., p.190; Salter, op.cit., pp.203–204.

⁴⁴⁷ Letter from Tait to Borovansky, 11 July 1958, regarding Royal Ballet tour, Ingram Papers MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 3, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴⁴⁸ Copy of item broadcast on ABC news, 16 July 1958, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 33, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

to decide on “what they will accept, and what they will not.”⁴⁴⁹ This snippet is indicative of the way in which, over the years, Borovansky had educated not only his dancers but also Australian audiences. He knew only too well that the reaction of an audience is the benchmark of ongoing patronage. When the people absorbed what it was they liked in ballet and it continued to be available to them, then they gained the power to discriminate.

Just prior to the final performance in Adelaide, Borovansky received a letter from a Brisbane devotee regarding the disbanding of his company, which the writer referred to as the “first Australian Ballet Company”. Although, as noted previously, this is not historically correct, the perception of many ballet enthusiasts at that time was that Borovansky’s company was the first and they were therefore not prepared for disputation. This can be interpreted as approbation from the people, because for most of them Borovansky’s company had been their introduction to ballet performances. This misconception could have a lot to do with the fact that the Australian states were separated in more ways than lines on a map, or that knowledge of Kirsova’s company might have been submerged because the publicity was Sydney-based. The correspondent understood the Borovansky/J. C. Williamson’s situation but considered the disbanding an act of cultural theft, as if the Borovansky Ballet belonged to the people: “We are proud of it, and proud of you.”⁴⁵⁰

The Australian Ballet Theatre Group was formed to prepare a submission on the creation of a ballet company for the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, probably prompted by the fact that the Borovansky Ballet was once more being forced to disband. Margaret Scott called a meeting on 27 October 1958 to discuss an approach to the above organisation to form a permanent Australian ballet company. By the end of 1958, a strong move towards a subsidised Australian ballet had been achieved. At the request of Geoffrey Ingram, the Artistic Director of the Royal Ballet John Field wrote a draft entitled ‘Formation of New Australian Company’, dated 28 November 1958 and marked ‘Private and Confidential’. In the interim this draft, or a revised version, must have been sent to the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, as a letter, 4 December 1959, thanks Ingram “for his draft ... formation of an Australian Ballet Company.” The letter also directs the reader to the fact that obtaining suitable theatres was difficult because of the Theatre Trust’s relationship with J. C. Williamson’s.⁴⁵¹

While waiting in the wings for the Borovansky Ballet to resume, Pomie initiated his own group, Ballet Theatre le Francais Company Robert Pomie, with Kathleen Gorham and Marilyn Jones as principal dancers. As Bill Akers was in Sydney, Borovansky asked him to attend one of this company’s performances and offer Jones a contract as a solo dancer. On receiving Akers’ enthusiastic judgement, Borovansky arranged to audition her personally and she was immediately offered a position in his company. He was so captivated by her that, not long after the audition, he arrived at the theatre where she was working as an usherette and took her out to supper. Jones was destined for a lifetime career in dance and was to be the last ‘star’ discovered by Borovansky. When *The Sleeping Princess* opened on 11 December 1959 at the Empire Theatre, Sydney, 19-year-old Jones danced the role of Princess Aurora as Iovanka Biegovic had become ill.⁴⁵²

Not long after the opening night, an extremely upset cast learned that Borovansky was in a private hospital but that they should not be apprehensive. There was still a strong belief that “he was absolutely indestructible ... he would soon be back.” As fate would have it they were never to see him again, as he died on 18 December just one week into *The Sleeping Princess* season. For the cast, the finality of Borovansky’s death was too unbearable to believe. There were tears and whispered words of doom: “Borovansky was our life and soul ... the reason we were there ... the source of our

⁴⁴⁹ Copy of letter to Holman from Borovansky, 16 July 1958, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 33, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴⁵⁰ Letter from Lucy Marques to Borovansky, 28 July 1958, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 4, Folder 29, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴⁵¹ Draft, John Field, 29 December 1958, Ingram Papers, Box 10, Folder 58 (17); Australian Ballet Theatre Group Meeting, 27 October 1959, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 12, Folder 67; letter to Geoffrey Ingram from Elizabethan Theatre Trust, 4 December 1959, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 10, Folder 55, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴⁵² Laughlin, *op.cit.*, pp.21–40; Kitcher, *op.cit.*, pp.198–199; program, *Ballet Theatre le Francais Company* Robert Pomie, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 1, Folder 3, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

inspiration”.⁴⁵³

The *Sydney Morning Herald* was the first to comment:

No hint of the shock ... the Borovansky Ballet Company must have suffered at the news of the death of their director was contained in the company’s performance ... A spokesman for J. C. Williamson’s said ... “I am sure that this is what Boro would have wanted.”⁴⁵⁴

The spokesman was Harold Bowden, executive director of J. C. Williamson’s, and he added that Borovansky “gave his whole life to ballet and was one of the greatest artist Australian theatre has ever known.” At Bowden’s request there was no applause, just a devastating silence as people silently left the theatre, while the whole company “stood together quietly ... openly crying.”⁴⁵⁵

A summary of Borovansky’s life, under the banner ‘Famous Dancer Fathered Ballet in Australia’, began with a prophecy which unfortunately came to pass all too soon. Borovansky had said he would retire if he could find someone to take his place, adding that he “would probably die in this job.” The article went on to iterate that the “Company had become synonymous with professional ballet in Australia” but kept in perspective by the man who once recorded:

Ballet is great art. It has exquisite subtleties for those who appreciate them. But it is also great entertainment for the ordinary person who wants a night out.⁴⁵⁶

The “exquisite subtleties” and “great entertainment” were always present in the performances of the Borovansky Ballet because he would have it no other way. H. A. Standish, ballet critic for *The Herald*, Melbourne, wrote that “he converted a whole continent to appreciate an art form which previously it had known as something exotic shown by occasional imported companies.”⁴⁵⁷

St John’s Anglican Church, Toorak, Melbourne, and St Mark’s Anglican Church, Darling Point, Sydney, conducted special memorial services simultaneously so that the whole company could attend. The funeral speech of the vicar of St John’s focused on the man:

Borovansky ... made it possible to enjoy an art form we would otherwise have been denied ... There burned in this man a steady pure flame of devotion to a cause, combined with a simplicity of the great.⁴⁵⁸

The following obituary, ‘What “Boro” Did for Ballet: Note by a Journalistic Admirer’ appeared in the *Sun-Herald*, 27 December 1959, Melbourne:

The magnitude of his achievement in creating a full-time ballet company is not generally realised. He proved that it was possible to give a straight ballet season up to six months duration in an Australian city, using Australian dancers ... musicians ... décor ... costumes ... and with a *corps de ballet* trained in Australian ballet studios, equal ... to any company in the world ... it all added up to good box office. He had one dream never to be realised ... to take the Australian Borovansky Ballet Company on tour of the capitals of the world. Boro was a perfectionist. There was no detail of production or execution that escaped him. He knew his music, his décor, his staging and above all the great tradition of ballet.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵³ Kitcher, op.cit., p.202.

⁴⁵⁴ Author unknown, ‘Dancer Fathered Ballet in Australia,’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 December 1959, p.4, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 16 of 17, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴⁵⁵ Kitcher, op.cit., p.202.

⁴⁵⁶ Author unknown, ‘Dancer Fathered Ballet in Australia,’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 December, 1959, p.4.

⁴⁵⁷ H. A. Standish, *Herald*, Melbourne, 19 December 1959, courtesy Edna Busse private collection.

⁴⁵⁸ Rev. Thomas Gee, ‘Borovansky is Mourned,’ *Sun-Herald*, date unknown, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection; Kitcher, op.cit., p.202.

⁴⁵⁹ A. C. P., ‘Obituary,’ *Sun-Herald*, 27 December 1959, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

Borovansky would have beamed brightly over this obituary, for it emphasised the Australianness of his company. He held this dream close to his heart and only death cheated him of it. Robin Grove thought that by 1959 Borovansky's company "had developed in ways he could hardly have foreseen." Grove attributes this to two factors: Borovansky had "brought a highly developed style to Australia" and he "found a wide and enthusiastic audience."⁴⁶⁰

A newspaper article written by F. W. L. Esche identified the uncertain future of ballet in Australia now that "the man whose force of character did so much to make it a going concern" had died. While the general feeling was leaning more towards the establishment of a national company, continuing under Borovansky's name and operating the company the way he had was extremely unlikely – continuity would require a complicated balance. However, a successful act of transformation would make the finest memorial to Borovansky that anyone could devise: "the genesis from his own company of a permanent Australian National Ballet." Esche then reported that the noted Sadler's Wells producer Peggy van Praagh had been appointed to take over the company and outlined his thoughts with regards to a national ballet company "if a wonderful opportunity to further the progress of the arts ... is not to be missed."⁴⁶¹

With the death of Borovansky, the dancers who had recently joined his company were now faced with a doubtful outcome, but those who had been associated with him for a longer time felt "devastatingly drained."⁴⁶² Borovansky had previously made offers to van Praagh, one by letter and personally late in 1958 while he was in London, reinforced by letter when he returned to Australia. Both these proposals were for the position of ballet mistress, with assistant director attached to the latter. She did not accept either, not wanting to travel that far and considering that there were greater opportunities in Europe. However, after Borovansky's death van Praagh did agree to the position of artistic director offered by Frank Tait and John McCallum. The end of the Borovansky ballet company was in its initial stage.

There was a noticeable thinning of audiences after Borovansky's death. The dancers realised how much weight his personal impact applied to them, but were not well acquainted with his special bond with those supporters of his company whose loyalty he had engendered over the years. The dancers had used to dismiss his never-ending opening and closing night speeches as an eccentricity to be endured but now knew their importance, for "audiences were missing him as much as we were" and the company was in economic crisis. In a financial statement issued by J. C. Williamson's the 1959–1960 Borovansky Ballet tour lost 115,900 pounds. The company was full of apprehension for the future. J. C. Williamson's acted immediately, putting Bill Akers (Stage Director), Wynne Austen (Stage Manager), Algeranoff (Ballet Master) and Leon Kellaway (Assistant Ballet Master) in charge. They offered the position of artistic director to Madame Borovansky, but she declined.⁴⁶³

In answer to the question of the Borovansky ballet company and its future, J. C. Williamson's (Sydney) issued a special news bulletin on 2 January 1960 referring to Borovansky as the "father of Australian Ballet". It also said that the decision of appointing an artistic director was particularly difficult because of how important Borovansky had regarded this office to be while building a reputation that was very hard to follow. They desired his work to continue in the same manner as his memory: a great artist whose "creative force and impetus" enabled "growth and development."⁴⁶⁴

During the 1960s Australia was moving further away from a Britain that was becoming more focused

⁴⁶⁰ Robin Grove, 'Visions Fugitive: Ideologies of Dance in Australia 1930–1960,' *Dance in Australia: Influences and Present Trends*, Denton, Meg, ed., Choreography and Dance series, Vol.6, Pts 2,3 (pp.35–57), Harwood, Amsterdam, 2001, pp.49,50.

⁴⁶¹ F. W. L. Esche, 'Ballet Without Borovansky,' newspaper and date unknown, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection. There was to be no mention of Borovansky in this "successful act of transformation."

⁴⁶² Kitcher, op.cit., p.202.

⁴⁶³ Sexton, Christopher, *Peggy van Praagh: A Life of Dance*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1985, p.112; Kitcher, op.cit., pp.206,207,209,210; J. C. Williamson's Financial Statement, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 12, Folder 69, National Library of Australia, Canberra. Evidence of Borovansky's extraordinary connection with his army of supporters can be accessed at the National Library of Australia, Canberra, in the form of correspondence.

⁴⁶⁴ *News Bulletin*, 2 January 1960, issued by J. C. Williamson's Sydney, Papers of Harcourt Algeranoff. Algeranoff, Harcourt, Series 12, Borovansky Ballet 1959–1960, MS 12/4, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

on European economics. At the same time, the impact of almost two decades of European migrants was beginning to stoke the fires of nationalism. Borovansky had written to the Federal Treasurer, Harold Holt, during the latter months of 1959 to indicate that J. C. Williamson's was no longer able to support a grand-scale ballet company. He had stated as a possible course of action that the government should now "subsidise a National Ballet Company on the basis as was done in Europe."⁴⁶⁵ By 2 February 1960 the Australian Theatre Group had completed its submission on the formation of a nationally representative ballet company and sent this to the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust.⁴⁶⁶ Two months later, on recommendation from the Resolutions Committee, the following motion was accepted and carried by Actors Equity, Minutes of Convention 15–18 April 1960, Sydney:

This convention calls upon the Federal and various State Governments ... Municipal Councils of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, to help support by some form of adequate subsidy for the Borovansky Ballet Company or any such ballet company ... present subsidies ... are far below those available in other countries, and do not allow for ... continuance of growth of cultural entertainment ... in Australia.⁴⁶⁷

The position of artistic director of the Borovansky Ballet was first offered to Ninette de Valois by the J. C. Williamson's organisation, but she recommended Peggy van Praagh. Despite financial misgivings, the company opened in Brisbane on 25 March 1960 and it was during this season that van Praagh arrived in Australia. Although the company was understandably nervous when she took over, it was also concerned about new leadership and hence prepared to cooperate: "Those who had worked overseas were aware that the company was uniquely Borovansky's creation ... we did not want to lose the essence of his all-pervading spirit."⁴⁶⁸ Borovansky had been inclined to indulge in an argumentative style of contact with his dancers, judging whether they were worthy adversaries, while the traditionalist van Praagh expected the total obedience she had experienced during her years at the Royal Ballet. While she gave the company excellent and beneficial classes, many felt that she was shaping them in the mould of the Royal Ballet. They were quite shaken by this and earlier strategies concerning the addition of 'Royal' to the Australian Ballet's name. The dancers became concerned about being Anglicised and fearful of losing their Australian identity, which Borovansky had taught them to value. According to Salter, it became "a kind of Royal Ballet in which the technician predominated and the individual was secondary."⁴⁶⁹ The dancers lost all the individuality and style which Borovansky had encouraged and became as automatic as a factory production line. There was even talk, inside and outside the theatre, of a third Royal Ballet Company. This notion was evidently transported overseas, as evidenced by a reference to "Peggy van Praagh's Royal Australian Ballet" in a 1967 publication. Technique was maintained and improved but audiences were not responding, particularly in New Zealand, where Borovansky had been revered and they were now acutely aware of his absence. During the Adelaide season (16 July to 16 August 1960) van Praagh commenced a systemic purge of dancers and the situation worsened during the Perth season. In October 1960 she started campaigning on radio and television for an annual subsidy so that the Borovansky Ballet could become Australia's national company. At this early point she advocated the removal of Borovansky's name, which caused quite a controversy; ardent followers of the company were appalled at this betrayal.⁴⁷⁰

After a holiday period of three weeks, the company went into rehearsal for the Melbourne season due

⁴⁶⁵ Kitcher, op.cit. p.209.

⁴⁶⁶ Note re Submission, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 10, Folder 58 (27), National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴⁶⁷ Minutes of Council Management, 7 April 1960, p.3, Actors Equity Acc.#1984-0044, Box 11, 1/1/1/5; *Show Biz*, May 1960, Box 32, 27/1/12, Melbourne University Archives.

⁴⁶⁸ Kitcher, op.cit. pp.214–215.

⁴⁶⁹ Salter, op.cit., p.209.

⁴⁷⁰ Sexton, op.cit., p.118; Lawson, Valerie, 'Forty Years of Dreams,' *Beyond Forty: The Australian Ballet Celebrating 40 Years of Dreams, The Merry Widow*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, ABC Books, Sydney, 2002, pp.i,x; Kitcher, op.cit., pp.122,126,215–216,363–364; *Princess Tina Ballet Book*, No.6, photographs by Mike Davis, Fleetway House/IPC, London, 1973, p.58.

to commence on 22 October 1960. An important article by Hutton appeared in *The Age* on the same day:

The new season today will be the first in Melbourne without the direction of that human dynamo who, against all predictions, built an Australian ballet out of unorganised talent and enthusiasm ... it may decide whether Australian ballet will have a future of its own or disintegrate into little theatre groups.⁴⁷¹

The program for the 1960–1961 season contained the following tribute to Borovansky: “We Australians – this is the way the late Edouard Borovansky used to talk; and to him the Borovansky Ballet Company was ‘Australian Ballet’ ... and proudly so.”⁴⁷² There was a Special General Meeting of Actors Equity in Melbourne on 5 December 1960 at which it was noted that a letter had been sent to all members of the Borovansky ballet company inviting them to a full meeting in regards to the forthcoming closing of the company in February 1961. As this was “not simply the finish of another show but rather the end of an Australian theatrical institution,” the union was obliged to call an immediate meeting to discuss “a full-time professional Ballet Company in Australia.”⁴⁷³

Before the season finished, the dancers were officially informed that financial constraints would cause the company to permanently disband: “The Borovansky Ballet Company, the foundation stone of the Australian Ballet, finished forever on February 19, 1961.”⁴⁷⁴ At the conclusion of Melbourne’s 17-week season, van Praagh delivered her curtain speech to a shocked audience, saying it was up to them (and the ballet public in general) to demand action from the federal government in support of an Australian national ballet. As it turned out, balletomane and Federal Treasurer Harold Holt was an audience member on that memorable evening. He sought out van Praagh and assured her that he could start proceedings to gain the required government subsidy for a permanent ballet company, with the proviso that she return to Australia as its artistic director.⁴⁷⁵ The founding of the Australian Ballet in September 1961 marks the beginning of government subsidies for dance: “The federal government channeled money through the Australian Elizabethan Trust for the purpose of establishing the company.”⁴⁷⁶

According to Neil Hutchinson, Executive Director Australian Elizabethan Trust, the Australian Ballet Foundation hoped to begin its first season in August or September 1962. van Praagh, now working in France with the Marquis de Cuevas Ballet of Paris, would take up her new position in March 1963 and a federal grant had recently been made available. Hutchinson acknowledged that a national ballet school incorporated with the ballet company was necessary, but first they had to build up a company, as Australian audiences had a “real passion for high-quality ballet.”⁴⁷⁷ An article which appeared in the *Daily Mirror* towards the end of 1961 described Borovansky as a pioneer with the courage and vision to create and maintain a professional ballet company against all odds. A greater achievement, the writer explained, was the way he turned ordinary Australians, some who said it was not manly and others who maintained it was insufferably boring, into ballet enthusiasts: “The name Borovansky became synonymous with ballet for a whole generation of Australians.”⁴⁷⁸

The shattered ex-members of the Borovansky Ballet dispersed with unanswered expectations; their immediate imperative was to find work. Some, like Kitcher, returned to Australia in time to audition for what was simply called the Australian Ballet, as rehearsals were scheduled for 1 September 1962. Everyone had to audition for van Praagh, even those who had been in the Borovansky company under

⁴⁷¹ Geoffrey Hutton, ‘After the Borovansky Ballet: What Then?’ *The Age*, 22 October 1960, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

⁴⁷² Borovansky programs, Prompt File 1960–61, Box 17 of 17, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴⁷³ Special General Meeting, Melbourne, 5 December 1960 (Item 5 repeats General Meeting in Sydney re subsidies for ballet and opera companies), Actors Equity Acc.#1984.0044, Melbourne University Archives.

⁴⁷⁴ Kitcher, op.cit., pp.221,364.

⁴⁷⁵ Kitcher, op.cit., p.221.

⁴⁷⁶ *Currency Companion*, Hilary Crampton, ‘Dance,’ p.639.

⁴⁷⁷ Neil Hutchinson, ‘Overseas Director Chosen – New Ballet Group Plans to Open Season Next Year,’ newspaper unknown, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection; Searle, op.cit., p.202.

⁴⁷⁸ Author and title unknown, *Daily Mirror*, 8 November 1961, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

her leadership. Kitcher believes this was so that she could eliminate anyone she did not want.⁴⁷⁹ It was at this point that the name the 'Australian Ballet' was in dispute. The following is an extract from the ballet critic H. A. Standish's angry response:

The suggestion that Borovansky's name might be dropped from the ballet in order to give the company a more national character has nothing to commend it ... The name Borovansky is synonymous with the best ballet in Australia ... He used to say that Australia had given him a lot, but he gave so much to Australia.⁴⁸⁰

Claude Kingston expressed his disappointment when he saw Borovansky's name removed "as he had done all the donkey-work and achieved so much" but thought "he would be well satisfied" with the end result of what he had set out to accomplish.⁴⁸¹

There were probably many people, particularly in Melbourne as it had been the home of the Borovansky Ballet, who felt just as angry as Standish. It appears that the members of the company during that time were unaware of van Praagh's resolve to expunge Borovansky's name. She did not seek to clarify that her success was a direct result of what Borovansky had already accomplished. The Borovansky ballet company was professional and fully functional, gaining a reputation for its high standards in other countries of the world. Borovansky had so nurtured a love of ballet in the Australian people that they became devotees of the art; hence the audience that van Praagh inherited was enlightened and discerning. It took a few years for the dancers to realise that her policy was to "pretend that Boro never existed."⁴⁸² Salter revealed that, after Borovansky died, his name "disappeared from the public consciousness" with great alacrity. There was absolutely no mention of Borovansky in any Australian Ballet programs nor any inclusion in its history until 1980, when Marilyn Jones as Artistic Director presented a special program, 'Tribute to Borovansky'. Husband-and-wife team Vasillie Trunoff and Joan Potter were persuaded to teach the dancers Borovansky's choreography for *Scheherazade* to maintain authenticity.⁴⁸³ *The Australian* theatre critic added his wisdom, published at the same time as the 'Tribute to Borovansky' became theatrical history:

When a Czech migrant ... set up a ballet company in 1940 he could have had no idea he was about to make dance history. With nothing but his own vision and expertise ... he confounded sceptics by proving this country was ready for a classical dance ensemble of its own. And in 1962 it was the Borovansky group which, under Peggy van Praagh, was reformed as the Australian Ballet.⁴⁸⁴

There is wide disparity in the achievements of Borovansky and van Praagh. Borovansky had the advantage of following straight after the Ballets Russes' very successful Australian tours, a factor which he utilised to his advantage. However, if he was known at all it was only as a member of this company in a land suspicious of foreigners and far removed from European cultural teachings. Nevertheless, he created his own ballet school, organised a small theatre and then built a professional company from a very limited pool of talent. At this point he persuaded commercial theatrical entrepreneurs to financially back his company, attracted and created an army of balletomanes throughout Australia and New Zealand, and survived the theatrical rat-race for two decades – all accomplished while he alone was in charge and without subsidies.

There is no doubt that van Praagh worked extremely hard to originate a new ballet company with a national identity and succeeded in placing Australian ballet on a par with international companies. This was only accomplished because she had the support and expertise of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, H. C. Coombs (Australian Ballet Foundation), J. C. Williamson's and Geoffrey Ingram. Her

⁴⁷⁹ Kitcher, op.cit., p.224. Kitcher was engaged as a soloist at a rate of 31 pounds per week.

⁴⁸⁰ H. A. Standish, title and date unknown, *The Herald*, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

⁴⁸¹ Kingston, op.cit., pp.178–179.

⁴⁸² Kitcher, op.cit., p.225.

⁴⁸³ Author unknown, 'Memories of Borovansky,' *Woman's Day/Woman's World*, 20 March 1980.

⁴⁸⁴ Author unknown, 'Bravo Borovansky,' *The Australian*, 21 March 1980, p.8, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Salter, op.cit., p.209.

audiences had been oriented and, most important of all, that vital government subsidy which ensured permanent employment of dancers had been granted. Her achievements cannot be denied; van Praagh possessed all the personal requirements – diplomacy, promotional skills, artistic insight, resolution, strong organisational skills – and historically succeeded commendably. Her name quickly became identified with the Australian Ballet, known throughout Australia and noted internationally, while never mentioning Borovansky or his company during the numerous interviews she gave. Many people thought that she only darkened her own reputation by trying to bury Borovansky's.⁴⁸⁵

The Australian Ballet's future achievements were significantly influenced by the enthusiastic audiences who had been nurtured over the years by the Ballets Russes, Borovansky and his core dancers, who initiated its beginning. According to the Chambers Biographical Dictionary:

The Australian Ballet, formed in 1962, drew many of its members and much of its impetus from Borovansky's company and pioneering efforts, and his influence on Australian dance was considerable.⁴⁸⁶

The Australian Ballet's first program, on 2 November 1962, was the four-act *Swan Lake* with guest artists Sonia Arova and Erik Bruhn. Bill Akers joined the company, as did Marilyn Jones and Garth Welch, having returned to Australia after fulfilling their overseas scholarships. Introducing British choreography to the company, van Praagh recreated *Les Rendezvous* for the third program. After this first season in Sydney, the company went on an Australian–New Zealand tour.⁴⁸⁷ The tour lost 100,000 pounds, as Australian balletomanes remained loyal to Borovansky. There was too much stress on the Royal Ballet, noticeable in advertising campaigns, and ballet fans were not prepared to accept this foreign influence. By 1962 there was more separation from Britain on a cultural level and the Australian Ballet started to move away from earlier British influences. The Elizabethan Theatre Trust wanted the company to go into recess for six months; van Praagh responded by announcing that she would resign. By this stage she had realised that a misogynistic attitude prevailed among the directors of the Trust and the Australian Ballet Foundation. It was eventually resolved that the Australian Ballet would be given another 12 months to sort itself out.⁴⁸⁸

The return to Australia of the legendary Robert Helpmann, enticed back to his homeland to choreograph new works for the company, revealed a reformed and significant focus on ballet. His Australian ballet, *The Display*, proved to be the turning point. It was a controversial ballet full of dramatic content with intentional drama and constructions of personal and national Australian identity, a symbolic ballet reconstructing the 1950s when football, drinking beer – which was at that time regarded as Australia's national beverage – and the separation of the sexes all combined to create a combustible situation. There were strength (violence), anger (vengeance) and retaliation (violation) in Helpmann's intention to show Australians a representation of how our national identity was being influenced in the 1950s by the behaviour of our young citizens.⁴⁸⁹

Helpmann, like Borovansky, endorsed the principle that ballet was for the people and should be entertaining. He understood the Australian male aversion to ballet and the concept of men in tights. For *The Display* he had the men dressed in jeans and the women in summer dresses. The scene was a bush picnic – a normal Australian pastime – complete with a few cans of Foster's beer and a football match. In her article, Amanda Card takes us through the pros and cons of Helpmann's excitingly different choreography and its effect on the audience. The ballet provided a view of an evolving national identity where a strong society formed in the 1940s and was validated during the 1950s. *The Display* was accepted and seen by many who were not balletomanes, and once again Borovansky was

⁴⁸⁵ Kitcher, op.cit., pp.225–226.

⁴⁸⁶ Chambers Biographical Dictionary, 9th edition, Charles Harrap, London, U. K., 2011, p.191.

⁴⁸⁷ Kitcher, op.cit., pp.231–232,239; Laughlin, op.cit., pp.53–58.

Akers was credited as Lighting Director for the Australian Ballet's production of *Symphony in C*, program leaflet 'Mr. B – A Tribute to George Balanchine', 20 March 2004.

⁴⁸⁸ Kitcher, op.cit., p.239; letter from Ingram to van Praagh, 29 April 1960, Ingram Papers, MS 7336, Box 19, Folder 58 (3), 2, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁴⁸⁹ Amanda Card, 'Violence, Vengeance and Violation: *The Display*, a Powerful Dramatic Work Intended to be very Australian', *Australasian Music Research* 4 (1999), pp.77–94.

justified. Helpmann produced many ballets for the company, including *The Merry Widow*, for which he negotiated and secured the rights. He became Co-artistic Director of the company in 1965.⁴⁹⁰

Six years after Borovansky's death the Australian Ballet, which still included some of his dancers, embarked on its first international tour with Margot Fonteyn and Rudolph Nureyev as principal dancers. They received pop-star ovation in Liverpool, which had treated the Bolshoi Ballet with indifference, while Marilyn Jones as the Swan Queen was singled out by a Scottish critic as "one of the most beautiful ever seen," they won honours in European competitions and were awarded the Grand Prix of Paris for their production of *Giselle*. Borovansky's influence on his former dancers, and their knowledge that this was what he had always strived towards, would have been very relevant in their quest for total dedication to their art.⁴⁹¹

In the *Australian Woman's Weekly* 'Pictorial Souvenir of the Australian Ballet' (published 25 years after its inception) Edouard Borovansky is described as "the benefactor". It is not to be wondered that during the 1940s and 1950s 'Boro meant ballet'. His death just three years before the advent of the Australian Ballet left "a cultural gap and a wealth of talent." The talent was readily available to van Praagh, who became the "mother to a ballet company she was determined would hold its own at home and internationally." All agree that she succeeded in this resolve, with ten overseas tours between 1965 and 1979.⁴⁹² However, as asserted by Kitcher, van Praagh set out to and continued to stifle the memory of Edouard Borovansky and his ballet company by pretending that he had not existed. She never admitted that his achievements were paramount to her success, insomuch as she was presented with a very highly regarded and operable professional company with loyal and discerning audiences. In August 1972 van Praagh delivered fallacious and preposterous statements concerning the Borovansky Ballet, such as "audiences composed of old ladies in funny hats, and children" with productions "generally about fairies," which were published in *The Herald*, Melbourne. What van Praagh did not make public was the reality that Borovansky had been prevented by the directors of J. C. Williamson's from too much experimentation, as they believed "Australian audiences respond best to prettiness, glamour, colour, fairy-tales and fun."⁴⁹³

Among the flood of responses noted in various daily newspapers are the following excerpts:

Any mention of Australian ballet of this vintage which does not include an appreciation of Borovansky is less than fair. Our present standard has been built on a solid foundation, not conjured up out of a hat by a magician.⁴⁹⁴

Another respondent records:

He was truly a great man in his field and I always felt that he never received the recognition he deserved. His period with us was probably the most exciting and rewarding in the long history of the theatre in Australia. (Harry Strachan, General Manager of J. C. Williamson's)⁴⁹⁵

And finally:

Nobody can tell me that Australian Ballet is that much better than the Borovansky Ballet 10 or 20 years ago, but the public at last have been convinced that our ballet is world class and so supports it. (George Fairfax, General Manager of the Victorian

⁴⁹⁰ Salter, Elizabeth, op.cit., pp.215–219,223,226; Kitcher, op.cit., pp.242–250; Lawson, Valerie, op.cit., pp.xi,xii,12–13,202.

⁴⁹¹ Salter, Elizabeth, op.cit., pp.223; Lawson, Valerie, op.cit., pp.2–5.

(I was an audience member in Melbourne when the French Consul presented this award after a performance of *Giselle* and felt immensely proud of what our dancers had achieved.)

⁴⁹² Rosemary Munday, ed., 'The Australian Ballet 25 Years: A Pictorial Souvenir,' *Australian Women's Weekly*, Sydney: Australian Consolidated Press, 1987.

⁴⁹³ Kitcher, op.cit., pp.11,226; Lawson, Valerie, op.cit., p.ix.

⁴⁹⁴ Kitcher, op.cit., p.226.

⁴⁹⁵ *ibid.*

Arts Centre.)⁴⁹⁶

It is Kitcher's firm opinion that Peggy van Praagh, by her ungracious deviousness in manipulating ballet history, is largely to blame for the ignorance of the contemporary world in relation to Borovansky's place in Australian theatrical history.⁴⁹⁷

On 25 April 1993 a reunion of ex-Borovansky dancers was held at Ray and Maureen Trickett's home in Melbourne; 170 invitations were sent out and an amazing 140 acceptances received. Although 44 years had passed since Borovansky's death, he still wielded a compulsive power over his 'family.' At this stage, Poul Gnatt was a Founding Director of the New Zealand Ballet and "remembered his time with Borovansky as the happiest in his life," Garth Welch had become a choreographer and actor, Bill Akers was Director of Productions for the Australian Ballet, Paul Hammond was Archivist at the Australian Ballet Centre and Barry Kitcher was a senior theatre manager. Added to this were the numerous dancers who had opened ballet schools, proving that, according to Kitcher, "The trail he [Borovansky] blazed continues."⁴⁹⁸

In 1973 it was stated by the *Sydney Morning Herald* that "Edouard Borovansky is the 'father' of today's classical ballet" in Australia. By 1972–73 there were 13 million people in Australia and 700 ballet schools. A good proportion of teachers in these schools would have been ex-Borovansky dancers or their students, continuing the teaching of traditional ballet as had the Borovanskys.⁴⁹⁹ On the other side of the coin would be the generations following his first audiences, who were inducted into the delights of 'ballet for the people'. In many ways Borovansky's legacy is being perpetuated, but forgetfulness of the "greatest achievement in Australian theatre" is an indictment on our national pride as far as cultural recognition is concerned.⁵⁰⁰ Valerie Lawson succinctly summed it up: "The Australian Ballet ... was reborn from the last days of the Borovansky Ballet, engaged with the heritage of British ballet ... finally settled into its own skin."⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁶ *ibid.* (originally quoted by Alan Trengrove in 'A Theatre Critic,' *The Sun*, 23 April 1966).

⁴⁹⁷ Kitcher, *op.cit.*, p.12.

⁴⁹⁸ Kitcher, *op.cit.*, pp.344–350.

Ray Trickett was one of Borovansky's male dancers in the very early days. The second reunion with over 150 people was held in the ANZ Pavilion, Melbourne, 18 December 1994.

⁴⁹⁹ *Dancetrain*, May/June 2017, Australia/New Zealand Syllabi and Associations, Australian Institute of Classical Dance (AICD), Artistic Director: Marilyn Jones OBE, Patron: Steven Heathcote AM, BOROIVANSKY SYLLABUS: An Australian Syllabus Inspiring Australian Teachers and Dancers: "The syllabus originated from Xenia Borovansky, wife of Edouard Borovansky ... He went on to found the Borovansky Ballet Company – the precursor of the Australian Ballet," pp.34–35.

⁵⁰⁰ Author unknown, cutting from *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 October 1973, p.12, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁵⁰¹ Lawson, Valerie, *Luminous: Celebrating Fifty Years of the Australian Ballet*, Australian Ballet, Southbank, Victoria, 2011.

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the work of Edouard Borovansky, who, with his wife, Xenia, settled in Australia in 1939 to follow his vision of creating an Australian ballet company. My contentions are: that Edouard and Xenia Borovansky established a ballet tradition and culture in a country struggling to arrive at its own identity; that it is justifiably correct to regard him as the ‘father of Australian ballet’; and that his pioneering achievements have not been accorded the official recognition they deserve. Borovansky’s legacy endures, as many of his dancers shared their technical and theatrical knowledge with those young aspirants who were destined to follow. The Borovansky Ballet School is still in existence, as an advertisement in the *Age* appeared in 2017. This thesis focuses on Borovansky’s work between 1939 and 1959. I have included an introductory chapter demonstrating that ballet did not commence in this country with the first performance of the Australian Ballet but has gradually evolved, in one form or another, since the 1840s. I have also extended the time frame in Chapter 6 because, between Borovansky’s death and the end of his company, what he had been publicly advocating for so many years finally took place.

Edouard and Xenia Borovansky brought the Russian ballet tradition to Australia and were prepared to propagate it, albeit tempered to the Australian ‘body’ and psyche, by establishing a Russian school of dance and subsequently a ballet company. Borovansky’s strategy evolved during the Pavlova Ballet Company’s Australian tour, when he was confronted with the athletic symmetry of the Australian body. This ballet tradition, in which the discipline and style of past masters is personally passed onto the student, was established in France and then spread throughout Europe, Russia and Britain. While historically the Borovansky Australian Ballet company was not the first professional ballet company formed in Australia, his ideology encompassed the specific style of the Australian dancer, with their more athletic body, and thus the formation of a genuine Australian ballet. The Borovanskys were pioneers in this respect, as tradition was one of the pivotal points in establishing ballet which reflected its movement through the ages. Their dedication to the tradition, style and teaching of ballet resonates down through the decades to our present national company.

At the time when Borovansky decided to remain in this country, it was generally accepted that Australia was still somewhat lacking in the social graces. Cultural enlightenment was regarded by the working class as far too expensive, even if they were interested. From the other side of the stage, it was almost impossible to develop our theatrical culture due to the prevailing attitude of deifying English-born and denigrating Australian artists. Nevertheless, the Borovanskys took up the challenge, integrated themselves into this British homogeneity and became Australian citizens as soon as legally possible. Borovansky was totally committed to his vision of establishing an Australian national ballet company, rather than advancing his own stage career as a dancer. According to Tchinarova, the Australian Ballet Company would not have existed without the tremendous effort of the Borovanskys during the first developmental years of his company.⁵⁰²

Although there were others with similar ideas, it was Borovansky who initiated and maintained an Australian ballet tradition. Helene Kirsova officially presented the first professional ballet company in Australia. As the wife of the Danish Vice-Consul, she maintained a strong social position, thus attracting private backing, which left her free to indulge in artistic experimentation without undue concern. Kirsova was hard-working and talented, facing a difficult barrier because of her gender, but her ballet company was almost a hobby, focusing on her performances and choreography. Weighed against that, it must be acknowledged that her dancers were paid as professionals, plus she ensured that they became financial members of Actors Equity. Kirsova encouraged Australian musicians, designers and artists in their early years when becoming known was the goal only attainable by being involved in current productions.

There were also others who desired to generate interest in Australian ballet. In 1946 the Melbourne Ballet Club became the Melbourne Ballet Guild under the direction of Laurel Martyn. In 1959 it was known as the Victorian Ballet Guild, but did not attain professional status until the 1970s, when it was renamed Ballet Victoria with Martyn still at the helm, but floundered a few years later. The National

⁵⁰² Michelle Potter, *Interview with Tamara Tchinarova*, 1994, TRC3120, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Theatre Ballet Company (1949–55) was formed by two English dancers, Joyce Graeme and Walter Gore, both of whom had come to Australia with the Ballet Rambert. Bruce Morrow, who had danced with Borovansky and the National, recorded that the National Theatre Ballet Company was not as professional in its work as Borovansky's.⁵⁰³ There were small companies throughout Australia, such as the Australian Ballet Society (Melbourne 1946), all endeavouring to achieve professional status but remaining amateur. It required tenacity to remain at the top in this business, but Borovansky persevered and, emanating from his vision and dedication, Australians have had over 50 years of their own national ballet.

I have revealed that the paternal ideology surrounding Borovansky originally evolved from his own notion of a father image towards his dancers. Because the Borovanskys had no children, his relationship with his dancers had a propensity to become more personal. Many dancers attested that he genuinely cared for their welfare and regarded their contracts as a familial commitment.⁵⁰⁴ There are several incidents which reveal his paternal side. When Borovansky was master of the 'supers' in de Basil's 1938 company, he was sympathetic, enthusiastic and helpful to the young, inexperienced Australian dancers in his care, which would have been unusual at that time with a person of his experience and status.⁵⁰⁵ During the 1940s, he ensured that Dorothy Stevenson and Laurel Martyn received increases in their salary which would enable them to purchase clothing appropriate to wear outside the theatre when representing the Borovansky ballet company. This may have been for his own prestige as well, but at least he forestalled possible social embarrassment, which is indicative of his caring nature.⁵⁰⁶ Strelsa Heckleman recalls that Borovansky admonished her on an overnight train journey when he thought her new linen pyjamas were trousers, which were not acceptable on women to fathers of that era. He gave the impression that he was looking forward to a continuing family circle when he indicated to Heckleman that the children of his original dancers might one day be dancing in his company.⁵⁰⁷ Kathy Gorham had only one serious argument with Borovansky. This appeared to be a father-daughter quarrel, as later he sent her a conciliatory note wishing her happiness. She later acknowledged that "he was all temperament ... no malice whatsoever."⁵⁰⁸

This sense of family was transferred into the outer sphere via the press picking up the theme and beginning to identify Borovansky as the 'father of Australian ballet'. During 1950 an editor considered him to be like Louis Beauchamp (Director of Ballet to King Louis XIV) and he "is unquestionably the father of an Australian professional ballet company."⁵⁰⁹ By 1951 Borovansky's paternal personality was receiving public recognition. *People* magazine maintained that his attitude to ballet was paternal and Stewart Moyser of the *Melbourne Age* referred to him as "the artistic father of them all."⁵¹⁰

Fourteen years after Borovansky's death, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published an article under the headline 'Father of Our Ballet' which stated that "Edouard Borovansky is the 'father' of today's classical ballet in Australia."⁵¹¹ In 1980 Frank Salter commenced his book, citing the term 'the father of Australian ballet' as a clichéd heading for a practically forgotten legend. He conceded that Borovansky was 'father' to more than 200 people who passed through his professional companies, "a deeply concerned parent." Further on, Salter considers Borovansky's attitude fundamentally paternal

⁵⁰³ Interviewer Michelle Potter, interviewee Bruce Morrow, *Keep Dancing* Oral History Project, 15 June 2000, TRC4588, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁵⁰⁴ Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Paul Hammond, at his residence, Melbourne, 28 February 2004; interviewer Bill Stephens, interviewee Kiril Vassilkovsky, 14 September 2006, TRC5704/1, tapes 1, 2, 5, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁵⁰⁵ Salter, op.cit., p.71.

⁵⁰⁶ Stephenson, op.cit., p.46.

⁵⁰⁷ Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Strelsa Heckleman, at her daughter's residence, Langwarrin, Victoria, 5 August 2005.

⁵⁰⁸ Kitcher, op.cit., p.190.

⁵⁰⁹ Editorial, *Australian Musical News and Musical Digest*, 1 September 1950.

⁵¹⁰ Author unknown, *People*, 6 June 1951; Stewart Moyser, 'Kathy is a Star,' *The Age*, 23 November 1951, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

⁵¹¹ Author unknown, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Father of Our Ballet,' 16 October 1973, p.12.

when critics publicly acknowledged the artistic merit of his dancers.⁵¹² During an interview, Reg Bartram referred to Borovansky's 'family', meaning the company members.⁵¹³ The narrator of the film *Boro's Ballet* implies a paternal attitude when he said of Borovansky that "he took his responsibility towards his dancers very seriously."⁵¹⁴

Two reunions of ex-Borovansky dancers to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Borovansky Ballet as a professional company were accomplished in the 1990s. The large numbers of people who attended both these reunions, many coming from overseas, clearly demonstrate "the wonderful sense of family that Borovansky had created."⁵¹⁵ Although Salter deemed the 'father' appellation rather hackneyed, I think Borovansky would have felt a certain sense of fulfilment in the connotation. His company was his creation and the sense of 'family' that he encouraged contributed to its longevity. The disciplinary tradition of ballet is predicated on the master–student relationship, where strict control is necessary for the student to achieve the standard required for success, which is the aim of both student and teacher. This tradition can also mould the maturing student into an artistic ballet performer.

Madame Xenia Borovansky, with her retiring personality, was content to be 'the woman behind the man'. She was a knowledgeable and gifted teacher of ballet, comfortable in her role as the sculptor of future professional dancers. This Xenia consistently accomplished until her death in 1985. There has been very little documented about her vital connection with the Borovansky Ballet. In the initial stages of the school and its early productions, Xenia choreographed many ballets, danced in quite a few of them and was involved in their rehearsals. At one stage she was employed by J. C. Williamson's as Artistic Director for the ballet company. Her unceasing contribution in the ballet classroom and genuine input into the company have unwittingly been overshadowed by the focus on Edouard Borovansky. Prepared to calmly wait, Xenia should not be separated from her husband. According to her obituary: "The debt that Australian dance owes to them both must never be undervalued or forgotten." Tragically, time has not dealt kindly with the memory of Xenia and Edouard Borovansky and their achievements as the progenitors of professional ballet in Australia.⁵¹⁶

The dual personality of Edouard Borovansky needs to be considered when giving a summation of his remarkable achievements in the theatrical history of Australia. Like most humans Borovansky was a complex individual, but his idiosyncrasies were more public. Some journalists and dancers labelled him arrogant, tenacious, courageous, resourceful, temperamental, generous, intolerant, sympathetic, visionary and, above all, an astute businessman. While Tchinurova considered that Borovansky's confident demeanour was a front to cover up his feelings of insecurity, I found no evidence of this, although she had known and worked with him for a long time. Salter summed it up in the following statement: "he was reviled, revered and called just about everything ... from messiah to monster."⁵¹⁷

To counterbalance all these labels, there was Xenia exhibiting a remote but purposeful nature, content to pass on her knowledge to future generations.

Claude Kingston confirmed that, although Borovansky was passionate about his art, he was a realist. It was this aspect of his nature that placed him above his rivals. I do not consider that Borovansky's peccadilloes had a negative value, as he was 'a man in a man's world' and successfully made extraordinary efforts to be in favour with anyone in authority important to his success. On the other hand, his support of a nationalist approach during a period when Australians were fearful of the spread of Communism and the spectre of a war between America and Russia may have been sufficient to turn conservative attitudes against him. It must also be remembered that, during the Second World War and postwar period, the low level of tolerance towards foreigners was heavily influenced by Australia's isolation from the rest of the world plus its predominantly British

⁵¹² Salter, op.cit.; in the 'Dedication' (no page number) Salter listed all those who danced in Borovansky's company.

⁵¹³ Interviewer Michelle Potter, interviewee Reg Bartram, *Keep Dancing*, TRC3941, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁵¹⁴ *Boro's Ballet* film, op.cit.

⁵¹⁵ Kitcher, op.cit., pp.345–350.

⁵¹⁶ Author unknown, *Australian Musical News and Musical Digest*, p.7; Kitcher, op.cit., p.319; interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Edna Busse, at her residence, Wagga Wagga, NSW, July 2009. Busse appears to be the only dancer in the company who remembers Xenia as a 'mother figure'.

⁵¹⁷ Salter, op.cit., p.210.

background.

Initially the lack of official recognition of Borovansky's pioneering contribution to our theatrical history through the medium of ballet could have been attributable to the inherent suspicion of Australians towards anyone who was not attached to Mother England's apron strings, even if it be several generations ago. Although the Borovanskys had officially become citizens within a few years of arriving here, it was possible, if not probable, that their conversion was doubted by some influential people because of national differences. Borovansky went out of his way to diffuse this undercurrent of suspicion; on the other hand, Xenia fostered a detached appearance of neutralism.⁵¹⁸ During the Second World War a feeling was developing that it was time Australia severed ties with England, but a hard core of Anglophiles still existed. The advent of postwar immigration did little to solve the situation and feelings of mistrust remained, along with changing attitudes to Russia and Eastern Europe. On facing this dichotomy, Borovansky's resolve to form an Australian national company became a lifelong task. The Borovansky ballet company continued to be esteemed in Australia and his name became synonymous with ballet. The public became so attuned to this foreign-named ballet company that by the 1950s it was believed that Australia did not need a national ballet as it already had a fully professional company in the Borovansky Ballet.

This attitude took a downward slide when Borovansky died and it was obvious that what he had built up was not going to be appropriate for the future. Two years after his death, which was hastened by his demonic attitude to the work at hand, his name and connection to the company he founded were expunged when the Australian Ballet was formed. The historical disappearance of Borovansky began in 1945, when Peter Bellew published his book *Pioneering Ballet in Australia* and omitted to acknowledge Borovansky's role in the establishment of the Borovansky Australian Ballet company. It was continued in 1959, when *A Dictionary of Modern Ballet* was published by Methuen in which Kirsova's accomplishments are noted in full but there is no entry relating to Borovansky. His company is mentioned only when referring to Elaine Fifield becoming its principal dancer. Significantly, no other Australian dancer connected to Borovansky's company is deemed worthy of even a passing remark. David Lichine's *Nutcracker*, as later performed by the Festival Ballet, London, is not identified as the production presented in Australia by the Borovansky Ballet, and Margot Fonteyn's guest appearance with his company is not recorded at all. As one of the expert consultants who contributed to this historical publication, Kirsova's failure to include Borovansky is indicative of an unforgiving nature. Her exclusion of Borovansky was continued by Peggy van Praagh when she became Artistic Director of the Borovansky Ballet Company in 1960 and the Australian Ballet in 1962. According to the first-hand experience of Barry Kitcher, she deliberately obliterated Borovansky's name from the Australian ballet scene.⁵¹⁹

It is notable that, after van Praagh became Artistic Director, the company dancers' high standards were attributed exclusively to their dancing experience in England or Europe. Borovansky's one and only Australian-trained ballerina, Edna Busse, rapidly descended from stardom, the prevailing attitude being that there could be no comparison between Australian ballet and overseas companies. The reality of this period for dancers was that those who had been trained overseas and, preferably, had performed in overseas companies must be superior to the home-grown variety. To see this approach just two years after Borovansky's death, with Xenia continuing to produce dancers from her studio, clearly shows that the concept of the Australian-trained dancer still had a long way to go before acceptance. As early as 1952 the Borovansky Ballet was becoming noted overseas for its excellence. Two years later, a critic expressed the view that this was an Australian company accomplished enough to legitimately symbolise the most excellent traditions of the ballet. In another review he declared that the company was "a landmark in Melbourne's theatrical history ... Borovansky was the real founder of Australian ballet."⁵²⁰ The theatre critic H. A. Standish believed that Borovansky's latest company, evolved in Australia, was comparatively close to world standard.⁵²¹ During the 1954–

⁵¹⁸ Salter, op.cit., p.132.

⁵¹⁹ Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Barry Kitcher, at his residence, Frankston, Victoria, 13 July 2006.

⁵²⁰ J. B. McA., 'At the Theatre: Behind the Scenes with a Ballet Company,' *The Age*, 17 January 1954; 'Brilliant Spectacle at Ballet Opening,' 31 January 1954, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

⁵²¹ H. A. Standish, 'Is Boro Turning Handsprings?' newspaper and date unknown (1954?), courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

55 New Zealand tour, a review stated that “The Borovansky Ballet is now ... ready to stand comparison with the world’s older established ballets of comparable size.”⁵²²

Through the ceaseless efforts of Borovansky, the fifth decade of the 20th century brought Australian ballet into such prominence that it created theatrical history. No other person of this era can be credited with his feat of ingenuity – the name Borovansky stands alone. His company was constantly reported as being world class, with strong evidence of an Australian tradition developing. He was also referred to as “the master-mind of Australian ballet.”⁵²³ By removing the elitism from ballet performances, Borovansky exposed his art form to a much more diversified audience, therefore making his company a permanent part of Australian culture. It must not be forgotten that the European migrant population was also a factor in the formulation of regular audiences and long seasons, as they brought their perspective of culture to Australia.

As well as providing the nucleus of an Australian national company, Borovansky can also be credited with creating the audiences, which are the other side of any theatrical venture. This determination to involve audience members began with the amateur studio performances for the Melbourne Ballet Club and continued into the professional performances. Borovansky provided a vital link between the patrons of the Ballets Russes and our current Australian Ballet. According to a Sydney newspaper, his greatest achievement was making countless numbers of everyday Australians into devotees: the name Borovansky “became synonymous with ballet for a whole generation of Australians.”⁵²⁴ Borovansky exhibited strong entrepreneurial skills by cultivating audience support: “During the 1950s Australia had the largest ballet audience per capita in the world.”⁵²⁵ He encouraged audience participation by giving them “value for money.”⁵²⁶ This was particularly pertinent during the postwar period, when wages were low and other priorities, such as the cost of housing and transport, were high.

Another relevant approach employed by Borovansky was the use of principal dancers to generate public interest (much the same as today’s celebrities are lionised) with the idea of increasing box-office takings. He created a ‘star’ system, knew how to work an audience to produce exciting theatre, balanced his programs to create strong audience appeal, and all this was achieved while restrained by J. C. Williamson’s. Program balancing was one of his specialities and was often commendably commented on by experts and laypeople alike. Sager recorded that Borovansky wanted a happy, involved audience and “good theatre”.⁵²⁷ ‘Good theatre’ is often used to describe a performance that may lack some elements but overall remains an entertaining production. Borovansky achieved this by using lighting to cover up the occasional lack of elaborate stage settings. He also encouraged the individuality of his principal dancers to the point where they became household names. The audience decided which dancer they liked best in a certain role and followed them like movie stars. It became normal practice to fete them in this manner. Above all, Borovansky gave the people what they wanted – an enjoyable experience at a price they could afford. He was adamant that ballet is entertaining as well as educational, and had the expertise to present ballet that had some relevance to Australians. The essence of ‘good theatre’ is a returning audience and Borovansky’s company was prominent in this respect.

Borovansky received criticism for ‘pleasing the public’, but this strategy was one of the key factors in keeping his company within the public’s vision while repeatedly experiencing the troughs of commercial existence. He proceeded to cultivate and educate audiences to the point where it was admitted that his Australian dancers were comparable to, and in some cases above, the overseas product. At a time when a national ballet was the theatrical topic of conversation, one critic gave credibility to Borovansky by acknowledging that he “has trained both dancers and audience in support

⁵²² D. J. C. M., ‘Borovansky is a Ballet of World Standard Now,’ newspaper and date unknown, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

⁵²³ Unknown author and title, *A.M. Magazine*, 29 June 1954, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

⁵²⁴ Unknown author and title, *Daily Mirror*, 8 November 1961, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

⁵²⁵ Interviewer Michelle Potter, interviewee Barry Kitcher, *Keep Dancing Oral History Project*, TRC-3102, pp.3–7, 15 August 1994, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁵²⁶ Interviewer ABC, interviewee Margaret Walker, audiovisual, courtesy Patricia Bratulic private collection.

⁵²⁷ Interviewer Michelle Potter, interviewee Peggy Sager, *Keep Dancing Oral History Project*, TRC-3157, pp.3,10,11, November 1994, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

of such an institution.”⁵²⁸ Although the journalist Clive Turnbull credited both Kirsova and Borovansky with raising the status of ballet in Australia to a professional level, it was Borovansky who maintained an Australian company long enough for it to have been openly (if not officially) referred to as national. He had his feet firmly placed on *Terra Australis* and his head away from the clouds. His managerial skills were well defined and his knowledge of the theatre absolute. Although passionate about his art, Borovansky was a realist. It was this aspect of his nature that placed him above his competitors. With great foresight, he read the Australian scene very accurately – he understood the times. Because he was bereft of private financial backing, Borovansky was fully aware that the only way he was going to keep a ballet company performing in Australia was to enter a compromise with entrepreneurs, the Tait brothers of J. C. Williamson’s, as they held the monopoly over theatre availability throughout Australia and New Zealand. This he achieved for almost two decades while waiting for some sign of interest from the Australian government. Borovansky was tenacious in this respect. His competitors had long given into the pervading feeling that it was an impossible dream in this sports-oriented country where cultural politics dictated that only overseas artists were acceptable on our stages.

Kirsova proved to be Borovansky’s most serious rival. They were both products of the international ballet scene but appear to have had only one thing in common, which was a profound dislike of influential society ladies. Kirsova was creating an original company, while Borovansky was creating dancers. Borovansky encouraged other choreographers, but Kirsova was predominantly the choreographer in her company. Borovansky cultivated individuality in his *corps de ballet*, raising their standard to the point where they were remembered for years, whereas Kirsova relied on her principal dancers to keep the audience enthralled. While Borovansky was constrained by J. C. Williamson’s to present more well-known ballets, Kirsova’s choreographic creativity knew no bounds. Kirsova ballets were aimed at impressing a coterie of sophisticated art lovers who were prepared to finance her endeavours. Borovansky had to answer to the box office. Kirsova conducted “open house all the time.”⁵²⁹ Borovansky’s rehearsals were closed. The greatest discrepancy between these two rivals was that Kirsova saw no reason why she should compromise artistic ability to please entrepreneurs when she was able to run her company without them. On the other hand, Borovansky knew that the financial backing and organisational skills of J. C. Williamson’s were pivotal to achieving his objective. Kirsova had great difficulty in obtaining venues for her company and became so dispirited that she no longer desired to remain in Australia. Conversely the Borovanskys, having committed themselves completely to Australia, quickly acknowledged that they were not in Europe any more.⁵³⁰

Apart from various amateur ballet companies striving for recognition and economic security, the only other professional company to come into existence during the Borovansky period was the National Theatre Ballet Company, Melbourne. Although dance performances had been part of the National Theatre since 1939, its professional ballet company did not premiere until 1949. After six years of successful performances and some ground-breaking work, the company presented its last season in 1955.⁵³¹ Borovansky’s reaction was one of indifference and what little evidence is available suggests a rather dismissive attitude on his behalf.

Borovansky’s initial accomplishment was to provide a training ground from which students could graduate into a professional company. He realised the importance of gathering talent in one place, and ballet training in Australia during the 1930s had not been centralised. The type of training Borovansky and Xenia had known in Europe was within ballet schools subsidised by the government and attached to theatres, but in Australia they had to create their own school, unacknowledged by the government and not attached to any theatre. While Xenia had full control of the classical ballet training of students, Borovansky ensured that gesture and mime, both of which he had specialised in during his

⁵²⁸ Geoffrey Hutton, ‘Australian Ballet: A Luxury We Cannot Do Without,’ *The Age*, 24 March 1956, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

⁵²⁹ Interviewer Michelle Potter, interviewee Peggy Sager, *Keep Dancing* Oral History Project, TRC-3157, pp.3,10,11, November 1994, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁵³⁰ *ibid.*

⁵³¹ Australia Dancing – National Theatre Ballet (1949–1955) www.australiadancing.org/subjects/46.html, 30/8/05.

stage career, were also studied. The culmination of this training was an Australian professional ballet company which toured Australia and New Zealand, intermittently, for almost 20 years. The length of these tours and the numbers of people attending their favourite ballet (quite often more than once) created Australian theatrical history.

Borovansky discovered and developed Australian talent, not only in dancers but also in other aspects of theatrical productions. Martin Rubinstein maintains that Borovansky's ability to "bring the best out of a dancer" was a strong factor in the continued success of his company.⁵³² Borovansky was instrumental in changing the concept that the male dancer was effeminate. He was adamant that his young men were presented on stage as strong, masculine and self-confident, in the mould of the Ballets Russes male dancers. In building up his audiences, he made his company and himself factual to them through correspondence and personal appeals delivered on opening and closing nights. His company became so well known for the straight lines of its *corps de ballet* that Australian balletomanes began to look for and comment on this attribute. The 'moving as one' and 'straight lines' were frequently regarded by critics as skills achieved by few companies. His resolution to attain and capitalise on this aspect of a performance brought audiences to the realisation that there is more to a ballet program than the principals. Borovansky passed on the ballet tradition he had absorbed in Europe and adapted it into an Australian cultural foundation. In 1956 a theatre critic wrote that the Borovansky Ballet was a one-man creation and doubted whether anyone but him could have originated and maintained a ballet company for such a long period; it was "one of the biggest companies in the world ... no parallel in Australian theatrical history."⁵³³

Many members of the Borovansky Ballet, after auditioning for Peggy van Praagh, formed the nucleus of the Australian Ballet Company and the myth was created that professional ballet in Australia began with this company. She inherited a professional ballet company of excellent repute and a dedicated, well-informed audience, with all the preliminary pioneering work done by Borovansky. There was never any mention of him or his company during van Praagh's numerous television appearances.⁵³⁴

She did invoke his name, while it was still fresh in people's minds, at the final performance of the Borovansky Australian Ballet when she asked the audience to subscribe to a \$50,000 appeal to form a national ballet company in memory of Edouard Borovansky. Those loyal subscribers must have been suitably aggrieved on discovering that the program and historical notes for the Australian Ballet did not include any reference whatsoever to Borovansky.⁵³⁵ As more time passed and van Praagh persisted in claiming full responsibility for Australia's continued success in the world of ballet, it was enough to extinguish the flame that was once Borovansky.

As far as the legacy of Borovansky is concerned, the principal factor is the imprint he left on the theatrical scene. His ballet productions were theatrical experiences which remain etched in the memory of those who witnessed them.⁵³⁶ In this way he brought culture to a large section of the population who would not previously have had the opportunity or been interested in theatre of this nature. A former general manager of J. C. Williamson's, Harry Strachan, said of Borovansky:

He was truly a great man in his field and I always felt that he never received the recognition he deserved. His period with us was probably the most exciting and

⁵³² Interviewer Michelle Potter, interviewee Martin Rubinstein, *Keep Dancing Oral History Project*, TRC-3322, 29 August 1995, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁵³³ Geoffrey Hutton, 'Australian Ballet: A Luxury We Cannot Do Without,' *The Age*, 24 March 1956, courtesy Barry Kitcher private collection.

⁵³⁴ Kitcher, *op.cit.*, p.225.

⁵³⁵ Salter, *op.cit.*, p.209.

⁵³⁶ Interviewer Marie Couper, interviewee Margaret Stutley, at her residence in Mount Eliza, Victoria, 24 March 2004.

Margaret Stutley, born May 1940, was taken (via train) by her very interested older sister to Borovansky Ballet productions for two to three years. She remembers that they went "straight up to the gods – no booking" and she "always wore a green coat in winter." Before "going to the ballet" Margaret had wanted to learn the art but her parents "were not into that scene." Her father was interested in athletics; ballet was too costly for the family and they were not prepared to take her. Margaret's favourite ballet was *Scheherazade* and Kathy Gorham remained her 'star' dancer, but she admits that she was too young to evaluate productions. Margaret married an English migrant and observed that he was "used to theatres and exposed more to culture."

rewarding in the long history of the theatre in Australia.⁵³⁷

Borovansky's legacy is intertwined in our cultural imprint and the successful line of Australian dancers, teachers and choreographers who have emanated from his companies. Consequently, his achievements should have been enshrined in some other way than a memorial plaque created and financed by the Czechoslovakian Society of Australia and donated to the Sydney Opera House, but later rejected. The plaque finally found a home appropriate to the future ballet dancers of Australia, attached to a wall in an obscure corridor of the Australian Ballet School, Melbourne. This location is unlikely to engender any interest or provoke any challenge from those who remain the final beneficiaries of Borovansky's Australian experiment.

This thesis is limited because there have been several books on Borovansky and his company published since the 1980s, notwithstanding other academic studies and a video available. My thesis presents facts which were obtainable by research in areas such as the Equity files (University of Melbourne), Ingram Papers (National Library of Canberra) and Performing Arts Collection (Arts Centre, Melbourne). The information gathered from these sources reveals the 'working' Borovansky busy wearing his many 'hats': negotiator, director, celebrity, teacher, choreographer, artist, educationer, raconteur, correspondent. The personal interviews gave me an insight into the inner Borovansky, reinforcing the image of a complicated personality which could turn itself inside-out if, and when, necessary. They were vital in proving the claim that he was 'the father of Australian ballet'. He was a man of many moods, but nobody's fool!

Borovansky's achievements have been monumental. Just prior to the start of the Second World War, Edouard Borovansky arrived in Australia with a plan but no money. As he and his wife were both experienced dancers with years of theatrical experience, they opened a school of Russian ballet. Borovansky became involved with the Melbourne Music Club, which was operating from the same premises as their ballet school. In an amazingly short time, he gathered up Australian dancers to form an amateur ballet company and obtained support from the Music Club. Williamson came to see one of these amateur performances, was impressed and offered Borovansky the Comedy Theatre to assess audience response. The Borovansky ballet company was registered in 1940. J. C. Williamson's became interested and further engagements were arranged. At the same time, Borovansky accepted more charity work to create interest in his dancers. Borovansky became employed by J. C. Williamson's to organise and present his company on a semi-permanent basis. Their association was to last 20 years. Borovansky is the only person in Australian theatrical history to have kept a ballet company together for 20 years without government subsidy, and the Borovansky Australian Ballet company conducted the longest seasons ever recorded.

⁵³⁷ Kitcher, *op.cit.*, p.226.

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