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APPROACHES TO BALLET-MAKING:
THE LEGACY OF BALLETS RUSSES IN AUSTRALIA BETWEEN 1940 AND 1960

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Elisabetta Peruzzi
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1Перевод из английского: Я очень благодарна архивистам Петербургской Государственной Театральной Библиотеки и Отдела Рукописей и Редких Книг за их самоотверженный и полезный труд. Я никогда не забуду те дни, когда они садили и читали со мной письма Ольги Преображенской, написанные от руки на предреволюционном русском.
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Table of Contents

APPROACHES TO BALLET-MAKING: THE LEGACY OF BALLET-RUSSES IN AUSTRALIA BETWEEN 1940 AND 1960 .......................................................... 3

ABSTRACT .................................................................................... 3

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................. 5

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND LIMITS .................................................. 13
THESIS STRUCTURE .......................................................................... 20
ROMANISATION OF CYRILLIC ALPHABET AND REFERENCING STYLE ................................................................. 22

CONTEXT ......................................................................................... 24

LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................................................... 25

CHOREOGRAPHERS AND THEIR DANCERS .............................................. 37

1. AUSTRALIAN DANCERS IN THE 1940S: A BALLET STYLE ROOTED IN DIAGHILEV’S TRADITION ................................. 45

1.1 PROMOTING A RUSSIAN TRADITION: THE TEACHING HERITAGE OF LûBOV’ EGOROVA AND OL’GA PREOBRÁŽENSKÁA. ........ 51
1.2 A RUSSIAN BALLET METHOD? ..................................................................................................................... 61
1.3 FLOW AND NARRATIVE OF THE CECCHETTI METHOD ........................................................................... 72

2. FOLLOWING DE BASIL’S FOOTPRINTS: THE RESTAGING OF THE CLASSICS ................................................................. 79

2.1 DEFINING THE CLASSICS ................................................................................................................................. 80
2.2 ETHEREAL QUALITIES.............................................................................................................................. 83
2.3 THE SEARCH OF A UNIQUE RHETORIC OF MOVEMENT ............................................................................... 97

3. AN ORIGINAL CHOREOGRAPHIC REPERTOIRE: THE INFLUENCE OF FOKINE AND MASSINE ...................... 108

3.1 THE INFLUENCE OF FOKINE’S MODERN BALLETS .................................................................................. 109
3.2 THE INFLUENCE OF MASSINE’S SYMPHONIC BALLETS ............................................................................ 136

4. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE ‘NEW WORLD’ THROUGH THE ‘OLD’ ................................................................. 147

4.1 NEW LANDSCAPES, OLD MODELS ............................................................................................................. 149
4.2 OF RITUALS AND ABORIGINAL DANCING ................................................................................................ 164

CONCLUSION .................................................................................. 172

APPENDIX ....................................................................................... 176

REFERENCES .................................................................................. 180
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIMARY SOURCES</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archival documents</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-author newspaper articles</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Chapters</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footage and videos</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral histories and interviews</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECONDARY SOURCES</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Chapters and essays</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theses</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videography</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Websites</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Three major Australian ballet companies founded between 1941 and 1953 gave local dancers the chance to measure themselves with ballet repertoires originally staged in Russia and Europe and with an original choreographic repertoire created in Australia. In early-1941, Hélène Kirsova (1910-1962) founded her company, Kirsova Ballet, and staged her inaugural season at the Conservatorium of Sydney in July of the same year. In 1943, Edouard Borovansky (1902-1959) founded the Borovansky Australian Ballet, or Borovansky Ballet. The members of the company had been dancing since 1939, when Borovansky’s *Petite Mozartiana* premiered in Melbourne at the National Theatre Movement. In 1953, Kira Bousloff (1914-2001) founded the West Australian Ballet in Perth, presenting her first season in July of the same year. When these three European choreographers adopted Australia as their home country, they created new works and restaged repertoire that had been presented to Australian audiences between 1936-1940, during the three Australian Ballets Russes tours led by the Russian ballet impresario Colonel Wassily de Basil.

These tours represented a sort of cultural revolution, as defined by Australian and International scholars, that had a strong impact on Australian artists: painters, composers and, of course, dancers and choreographers. While the success of these tours has been widely discussed, the influence that ballet technique and styles inherited from the artists of Ballets Russes companies had on the original and restaged choreographic works by Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff received less attention.

This thesis examines the approaches to ballet-making in the restaging of Ballet Russes repertoires as well as in the creation of an original choreographic repertoire created in Australia between 1940 and 1960. Concentrating on the work of Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff –

\[3\] Brissenden and Glennon.
\[4\] Mark Carroll, ed., *The Ballets Russes in Australia and Beyond* (Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2011).
former de Basil’s Ballets Russes leading and character dancers who performed in Australia in the late-1930s – this thesis aims to investigate the artists’ modus operandi as they shared their ballet knowledge with Australian dancers. In order to understand their processes to ballet-making and their influences on local performers, in this thesis I examine and contextualise the legacy of the pedagogical and choreographic approaches of Ballets Russes artists in Australia between 1940 and 1960.
INTRODUCTION

In 1992, Australian choreographer Graeme Murphy created his own *Nutcracker*. The story of *Clara*, a ballet centred on the life of the titular Clara, an ageing former-Ballets Russes dancer who migrated to Australia in her twenties. Murphy asked seventy-year-old Dame Margaret Scott – his ballet mentor and teacher from 1964 to 1968 at the Australian Ballet School in Melbourne – to be involved. Excited, Dame Scott accepted and took the lead role in Murphy’s original ballet. The first act opens on Christmas Eve. In the garden of Clara’s house, there is a Hills Hoist – a height-adjustable rotary clothes line first manufactured in South Australia in the 1940s – which confers a rustic touch on the opening scene. The presence of this iconic object on-stage puts even the laziest of spectators, who has not read the libretto of Murphy’s ballet, in front of a certain truth: this *Nutcracker* is set in Australia.

It is summer, and Clara, an aged, elegant and cheerful Russian-born lady, has invited some of her old friends and former dancers, all Russian émigrés, to celebrate Christmas Eve together in her house. Clara’s doctor is also invited, as he looks after her health. He screens some black and white old video footage of the guests dancing. Memories from the past inspire them to dance again until, when tired from the laughter-filled dancing, the guests leave the house and Clara falls into a deep sleep. In her dreams, her past in Russia surfaces: Bolshevik rats kill her beloved partner, a soldier who fought against the Bolsheviks during the Revolution. Fighting against the memories linked to the cruel past, Clara recalls joyful memories, which unfold in the second act. After graduating from the Imperial Ballet School in Saint Petersburg, Clara makes her triumphant appearance at the Mariinsky Theatre, performing as Sugar-Plum Fairy in front of the Tsarist family. After the eruption of the Russian Revolution and the murder of her lover, Clara departs, heading to Europe, where she joins Ballets Russes. Her dream continues through memories of her tours, where Clara danced leading roles in several countries – Egypt, Spain, and China – before she joins the Australian Borovansky Ballet Company in 1940, the forerunner of Australian Ballet. As the dream fades, Clara dies under the eyes of the doctor, who stayed and spent the night looking after her.

Murphy’s *Nutcracker* is a revisited story of the traditional Christmas ballet originally choreographed by Marius Petipa and performed for the first time in Russia in 1892.
Commissioned by the Australian Ballet. It is set in Australia and it has at its centre the story of a Russian ballerina, an ageing Ballets Russes star.\textsuperscript{5} Australian dance historian Michelle Potter comments on Murphy’s choreography as follows:

As the ballet opens, the elderly Clara and her friends celebrate a hot Australian Christmas; as it closes, Clara is seen giving her farewell performance with the Borovansky Ballet. In between, the ballet follows Clara’s life as a dancer in pre-Revolutionary Russia, and then as a deracinated artist touring the world. But in the opening moments, as Clara and her friends share food, customs and memories of the past, Murphy’s Nutcracker sheds light on Australia’s migrant history. Clara’s performance with the Borovansky Ballet makes reference to an early period in Australia’s dance history and to the origins of that period. Underneath its obvious storyline, Nutcracker is a sophisticated celebration of collective cultural memory.\textsuperscript{6}

The migration history mentioned by Potter is the background of this research project, which aims to explore the choreographic contribution brought by former Ballets Russes dancers who settled in Australia in the late-1930s. As with Clara’s story in Murphy’s Nutcracker, my purpose is to investigate the roots of Australian ballet between 1940 and 1960. Centred on the use of the ballet technique and choreographic approaches in use among three major ballet companies - founded by Hélène Kirsova in Sydney, Edouard Borovansky in Melbourne, and Kira Bousloff in Perth between the 1940s and the 1960s - this research project can be seen as a backwards time-travel, where I investigate the source of impact of the restaged and original ballet productions. In particular, this thesis focuses on the processes of ballet-making as a characteristic that enabled artists of Kirsova Ballet (founded in 1941),\textsuperscript{7} Borovansky Ballet (founded in 1943)\textsuperscript{8} and West Australian Ballet (founded in 1953); my ultimate goal is to demonstrate how these processes derived from a ballet tradition created in Europe by Diaghilev and post-Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes companies, operating between 1909 (the foundation of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes)\textsuperscript{9} and 1936 (when the first Australasian tour was led by the Russian impresario Colonel Wassily de Basil).\textsuperscript{10} The choreographic legacy I refer to derives from the


\textsuperscript{6} Potter, 14.


\textsuperscript{9} Lynn Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, Oxford University Press (New York, 1989).

\textsuperscript{10} Kathrin Sorley Walker, De Basil’s Ballets Russes (London: Hutchinson, 1982).
works staged and created by Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo, Covent Garden Russian Ballet, and Original Ballet Russe. In this thesis, I aim to demonstrate that the legacy of Ballets Russes is traceable to the training of Australian practitioners, and the adoption of kinaesthetic strategies (the relationship between muscular and emotional associations) for the performance of the classical, modern and symphonic ballets. By ‘classics’ I refer to the choreography of Marius Petipa in Russia from the second half of the nineteenth-century. ‘Modern ballets’ refers to the repertoire staged by Fokine from the early-1910s, and ‘symphonic ballets’ refers to the modernist ballet repertoire created by Massine between the 1920s and 1930s. I contextualise these terms in relation to the specific choreographic style object of investigation in each chapter.

The idea for this research project came from years of study of classical ballet and history of ballet in Italy and Russia. When dancing in Italy as a professional and studying the history of ballet in Italian and Russian universities, I realised that technique has always played a primary role on the bodily expression of ballet dancers. When doing research at the Saint Petersburg State Theatre Library in 2012, I discovered that a group of dancers touring Australia in the late-1930s decided to move to Australia permanently. Then, three questions arose spontaneously: did these dancers apply their ballet knowledge when they founded their own companies? What sort of ballet repertoire did they dance and teach? Was the technique they taught the same as that they learnt? I transcribed these three main questions onto a piece of paper, and a few months later, when back in Italy – my home country – I wrote my research proposal around these three questions. I soon realised the third question was more complex than expected. Rummaging Australian archives in search of evidence of a transmission of a ballet knowledge rooted in Europe, I learned that Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff trained Australian dancers in Cecchetti technique. I was surprised that the use of ballet knowledge rooted in the danse d’école was used not only for restaging a classical ballet repertoire characterised by successful masterpieces – including Aurora’s Wedding, Swan Lake (act II) or Les Sylphides – but also for choreographies centred on Australian colonial topics. Dealing with a number of primary sources held in a number of Australian archives, it became clear that while Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff preserved and transmitted the Cecchetti technique to Australian practitioners and ballet styles born in Europe from their collaboration with different Russian practitioners and the adoption of kinaesthetic strategies (the relationship between muscular and emotional associations)."
artists, these styles were not static. They were often used to stage new repertoires devoted to Australian society, as they changed and absorbed the essence of the artistic environment in which they were immersed. As stated by dance historians Lynn Garafola and Nancy Van Norman Baer, the language of classical dance, as natural languages, is in constant evolution:

Although it can easily seem otherwise, the classical dance is not a language written in stone, but an idiom in constant evolution. Steps have been added, elaborated or put on pointe; jumps have gotten bigger, extensions higher, and turns more complicated; even something as basic as turnout has changed over time. Such nuances contextualize a step: they locate it in time and place, linking it to a prevailing style or artistic tradition. They differentiate a Kirov arabesque from a New York City Ballet one, a nineteenth-century Italian attitude from its contemporary French counterpart.12

Today, flawlessly extended legs and arched feet seem to be indispensable, but they were not so relevant for choreographers, dancers and audiences between the late eighteenth-century and early twentieth-century. As explained by Garafola and Van Norman Baer, ballet differs according to training, traditions and geographical location. Ballet technique and style are, therefore, the product of the transmission of different ballet sensibilities born from the collaboration of ballets masters, choreographers and dancers across time and space.

Ballet technique and style are two terms that occur regularly throughout this thesis, and they will be unpacked in the examined ballet context in chapter one. Though the definitions of ‘technique’ and ‘style’ will be expanded in chapter one, here I would like to state my position in relation to their use. Embracing the perspective offered by the dance historian Geraldine Morris, it is fundamental, in my opinion, to understand that the two terms are strictly interdependent. Morris argues that thinking about technique and style as two separate units would be reductive, and that there cannot be a static conceptualisation of ballet technique. Quoting the master teacher Richard Glasstone, Morris recalls his explanation: technique represents ‘the ability to execute a given movement or step, starting or finishing at a precise moment in the music,’13 while style can be intended as an element that emerges in ‘a given

role,’ or, in other words, as the quality of a role’s interpretation. Though Glasstone is aware that strategies for teaching ballet technique are ‘inextricably bound up with the evolution of style,’ he offers a vision of ballet technique as a set of fundamentally immutable rules necessary for the dancer to pursue a technical bravura rooted in the qualities of ‘elevation, movement, rhythm, and dynamics’. Contending the ‘prescriptive details’ that Glasstone suggests in order to codify ballet steps, Morris argues that ballet technique is as mobile as ballet style: steps should not be intended as immutable, as ballet technique is subject to the sensibility of different cultures and nations.

As I will explain in chapters one and two, the evolution of ballet technique and style led to a progressive loss of mime, and a more prominent potential for bodily expressions. Nevertheless, the potential for bodily expressions in contemporary dancers is often clouded by a compulsive attention towards the ballet technique. The development of different ballet techniques and ballet styles in different countries between 1890 and the mid-1950s brought to a slow and progressive loss of interest in the interpretation of a ballet role, a phenomenon inversely proportional to an increasing interest in ballet athleticism. Glasstone is critical towards the use of a technique to the detriment of the meaning of movement. In the late twentieth-century balletic fashion, ballet dancers (ballerinas, in particular) tend to hold legs in a position that imitates the needles of a watch at ‘six o’clock,’ to quote the Bolshoi Prima Ballerina Svetlana Zakharova in interview on a Russian talk-show. These technical and physical skills have been often criticised for imposing a ballet aesthetic that is often to the detriment of the meaning of the dancing and its communicative intention. Glasstone claims that the instrumentalisation of technique brought contemporary dancers ‘to indulge in a leg-dominated distortion of classical dance, often to the virtual exclusion of any subtlety of rhythmic movement or expressive gesture. Instead of enriching the possibilities of ballet as an art form, this sort of distortion can only hold the seeds of decline and decadence’. Glasstones’ critical perspective is accompanied by a chorus of voices attacking the new aesthetic canons, which seem to have opted for more athletic-like bodies ‘gifted’ with hyperextended lines or high jumps. For

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14 Morris, 22.
16 Glasstone, 63.
example, Soviet Prima Ballerina Assoluta Majâ Pliseckaâ stated in an interview she released for the Russian television channel Kultura\textsuperscript{20} that the performance of a ballet role does not require hyperextended legs, nor exaggerated flexibility. Talking about ballet \textit{Carmen} (1967), with music by Rodion Šredrin and choreography by Alberto Alonso, she explains the intention of Carmen’s steps. Describing the attitude that Carmen should portray in the ballet, Pliseckaâ explains that the series of \textit{battements} performed by Carmen in her opening-scene solo is aimed not to show her legs, but rather to convey the aggressiveness of the character. This aggressiveness is transmitted through the steps themselves, as Alonso explained the meaning of the steps in detail. The portrayal of Carmen’s aggressiveness reaches its peak when she performs a series of four \textit{grand battement devant}, holding her leg stretched forwards. Grabbing her ankles, her foot, which is held at the height of her sternum, gives the impression of being a gun with which Carmen is ready to shoot. In Alonso’s original choreography, the foot in this solo symbolises a gun. While in 1967, year in which Alonso composed this ballet, holding the foot at the height of the sternum was a fundamental detail in Carmen’s solo, contemporary productions omit this original feature in praise of higher legs pointing to the ceiling, creating the ‘six o’clock’ effect that became a distinctive trait of contemporary artists, such as Svetlana Zakharova. This trend, it can be argued, is to the detriment of the original meaning and, therefore, of an emotional impact in the spectator. This issue was also raised by neuroscientists Helga and Tony Noice. Their description of a dancer and their reception by an audience raises the question whether contemporary artists can give ‘emotionally moving performances:’

Acting and dance make both expressive and technical demands on the performer. However, an actor who exhibits mastery of voice projection, great fluidity of movement, and flawless retention of the longest scripts, but whose performances lack the juices of life, would probably never find employment in any professional theatre. On the other hand, although a great dancer must be both an artist and a technician, the technical component is absolutely indispensable. An audience may greatly admire Baryshnikov’s inner fire, but it is his ability to leap to phenomenal heights and appear to remain suspended in mid-air that truly dazzles viewers. Thus, the relatively greater contribution of practice-derived technical skill in dance becomes one defining difference between the two art forms.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} Nikita Tichonov, \textit{Stiki po imeni Majâ}, DVD, documentary, 2005, pt. 00:59’08”.
Noice and Noice’s observation raises questions regarding training methods and the expressive components of dancing, as many schools do not offer or require acting classes. The reader can deduce that at the base of the expression of movement in dancing there might not be a studied acting strategy; therefore, as the authors point out, a contemporary skilled dancer cannot necessarily produce an emotionally meaningful performance. Despite the idea that limited expressions in a skilled and trained dancers’ body emerges as a limit from this article, this is contrasted by the idea that artistry has always characterised the figure of the dancer in Russia. In line with the definition provided by Garafola, ballet led to the growth of artistic sensibilities that take into account different epochs and regions.

Though Bolshoi Prima Ballerina Zakharova today incarnates the ideal aesthetical canons that ballet audiences crave, it must be said that at the turn of the twentieth-century Russian balletomanes considered ballerinas artists able to engage with spectators on an empathetic level. Their role was more akin to an actor’s. In Russian, female dancers are still called aktrisy (actresses), and male dancers aktyory (actors). The Russian ballet historian Elena Fedosova discussed the role of the ballerinas at the Mariinsky Theatre of Saint Petersburg and how their image gradually started being associated with that of an actress.

Actresses, ballerinas of this theatre [the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg], do not simply transmit the muses’ art, nor are they simply ballerinas; they are historical characters representing the history of this city. Their life and their work are flesh and blood of the history of this country. During the first phase of the history of Bolshoi theatre [today called Mariinsky Theatre], the Russian actress – not only the ballerina, but also the dramatic actress – used to perform not with the intent of interpreting a role at her best, but rather to improve the quality of her personal life. It is only from the half of the nineteenth-century that the Russian actress started performing with the purpose of creating art, while her private life and her relationships served to build up her career.

As Fedosova explains, in Europe, as well as in other locations, we tend to see ballet dancers as athletes able to perform complex steps. But the Russian term aktrisa defines a more complex artistic figure and reveals important differences in values. A Russian aktyor or aktrisa should not only show virtuosic bravura through strong technical and physical skill, but should offer

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22 Noice and Noice, 501.
more complex artistry, communicating feelings and emotions through movement. The purpose of creating art, as Fedosova explains, brought the development of ballet as an art form that communicates with its spectators, instead of simply entertaining them. At the turn of the twentieth-century, the choreographers Michel Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, Bronislava Nijinska and Léonide Massine abandoned the formality of classical ballet patterns. They removed bowing between dances, divertissements, pas, and codas to free their choreographies of elements that might impede the meaning of the dancing in both story-based and plotless ballets.24 As I will explain in chapter three, Fokine and Massine made of the vocabulary of classical ballet a flexible medium that served their stylistic purposes, aimed to convey emotions to different audiences across time and space. This sort of flexibility, in terms of choreographic interpretation, was known also to the dancers who graced Australian shores through the middle decades of the twentieth-century.

The reception of Russian and European dancers was not only justified by their technical skills.25 Ballets Russes dancers were also exotic, erotic, and exciting to the extent that they captivated the Australian spectators who, as I explain in my literature review, welcomed de Basil Ballets Russes dancers and the heterogeneous repertoire they were presenting to Australians in the late-1930s. My thesis concentrates on the transmission of approaches to ballet-making, as inherited from Russian choreographers who worked in Europe from the early-1910s to the mid-1940s. As Ballets Russes dancers were exposed to different ballet styles, they were able to develop different approaches to interpretation which, as underlined by Morris, was indispensable to perform both old and new repertoires.26 In the case of Ballets Russes, these repertoires portrayed different aesthetic values, which I will analyse in chapters two, three and four. Secondary questions underpinning this thesis are: what were the internal mechanisms that helped Australian dancers to interpret a role? To what extent does the influence of Ballets Russes choreographers play a role in the transmission of approaches to interpretation? What kinaesthetic strategies were adopted to convey emotions to spectators in different ballet

repertoires? This thesis aims to answer these questions, showing how the Australian choreographic processes in the two decades following the foundation of the Kirsova and Borovansky companies were deeply influenced by methods inherited from Ballets Russes pedagogues, choreographers and dancers.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND LIMITS**

This backwards exploration of approaches to ballet-making adopted by Australian choreographers from 1940 to 1960 creates a discourse between dance theorists Susan Leigh Foster and John Martin – who dedicated their attention to the production of meaning by movement and kinaesthetic processes – and past practices, documented by primary sources held in Australian, Russian and Italian Archives. The steps mentioned in this thesis appear in italic. Unless differently indicated in the text, the description of these steps is contained in the book *Classical Ballet terms. An Illustrated Dictionary*27 by ballet historian Richard Glasstone. The National Library of Australia, National Gallery of Australia, National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, Arts Centre Melbourne, Museum of Performing Arts of Perth, and the State Library of Western Australia are the archives from which I collected most of the primary sources for this project. Oral histories from the Esso and PROMPT collections, at the National Library of Australia, represent two fundamental collections that trace the artistic path of Bousloff as well as other European and Russian-born dancers who performed in Australia with de Basil Ballets Russes, Kirsova, Borovansky and West Australian Ballet. Other primary sources I have used are in languages other than English. The names of archives and their location appear in their original language in both quotes and references in this thesis. The referenced primary sources in Russian language are held at the Otdel Rukopisei i Redkih Knig28 of the Sankt-Peterburgskâa Gosudarstvennaâ Teatral'naâ Biblioteka.29 Primary sources and secondary literature quoted and referenced throughout this thesis is also in Russian, Italian and French. I personally translated all the sources appearing in Russian, Italian and French when needed to support my argument. Some of the sources I analysed exist both in English and

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28 Translation from the Russian: Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books.
29 Translation from the Russian: Saint Petersburg Theatre State Library
Russian. One of these primary sources is Fokine’s book *Memoirs of a Ballet Master*, a 1961 English-edition, translated by Vitale Fokine. While I kept referencing this translated primary source throughout my thesis, I found useful to support my argument with parts that had not been translated in the English-edition. The 1981 edition of Fokine’s memoirs *Protiv Tečenija. Vospominaniâ baletmejstera. Scenarii i zamysly baletov. Stat’i, interv’û i pis’ma* offers insights that have not been translated by Vitale Fokine. The first section of chapter three is a case in point. Translating the original text was necessary to understand Fokine’s perspective on the creation of character dances in his modern ballets.31

My investigation includes the translation of primary sources, such as manuscripts, memoirs and interviews, and secondary literature from Russian, Italian, and French into English. Some of the manuscripts held at the Saint Petersburg State Theatre Library are written in prerevolutionary Russian, a language replaced by the alphabet reform in 1917. The staff members of the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Saint Petersburg Theatre Library offered their help in the translation and reading of these handwritten documents, such as the correspondence between the Russian ballerina and pedagogue Olga Preobraženskaâ and the ballet critic Valerian Svetlov. Video footage of Ballets Russes companies dancing during their three Australian tours, between 1936 and 1940, held at the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia represents a fundamental primary source for my analysis of ballets and movements. Video sources are often amateur recordings by fans of Ballets Russes, including Australian ballet enthusiasts Joseph Ringland Anderson and Ewan Murray-Will.32 Amateur and professional videos of Borovansky Ballet and West Australian Ballet, also held at the National Film and Sound Archive, are other sources I use here for my methodological reconstruction.33

With regards to Borovansky Ballet, there is a fairly good number of video footage documenting his choreographic production. In the case of West Australian Ballet, the only recorded video


33 Fragments of original footage are in Jackson and Potter, *Boro’s Ballet. The Making of Australian Ballet 1939-1961*; VHS held at National Film and Sound Archive are *Borovansky Ballet in Giselle*, VHS, ballet, 1951. and *The Beach Inspector and the Mermaid* (Perth, 12 December 1962), National Film and Sound Archive of Australia.
of a ballet choreographed by Bousloff for the West Australian Ballet is *The Beach Inspector and the Mermaid*, held at the National Film and Sound Archive. Unfortunately, there are no videos immortalising the dancers of Kirsova Ballet. Oral histories and interviews present practitioners who worked with Kirsova and Borovansky. Kira Bousloff was interviewed by James Murdoch and Michelle Potter in the early-1990s. These interviews enrich my thesis with information regarding the choreographer’s methodological approaches. Due to different primary sources documenting Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff’s work, my research has an asymmetrical and diversified number of primary sources. To trace back Kirsova’s methodological approaches to class delivery and choreographic strategies, I mainly relied on ephemera, radio interviews, manuscripts, newspaper articles and books centred on her legacy as a Ballets Russes artist. These are both printed sources held at the Arts Centre Melbourne, the National Library of Australia, the National Gallery of Australia, and digitised newspaper articles held on the Trove website.34 The primary sources located in different archives and libraries offer an insight into the approaches of ballet-making adopted by the three choreographers. As with Clara’s memories in Murphy’s *Nutcracker*, which can be intended as detailed pieces of her past life and career, the archives preserve and protect pieces of history. These pieces, to borrow a metaphor from Arlette Farge, are like the colourful pieces of a kaleidoscope, because they can tell different stories according to the way we turn the whirlwind:

In the end, there is no such thing as a simple story, or even a settled story. If the archive is to serve as an effective social observatory, it will only do so through the scattered details that have broken through, and which form a gap-riddled puzzle of obscure events. You develop your reading of the archives through ruptures and dispersion, and must mould questions out of stutters and silences. It is like a kaleidoscope revolving before your eyes. Pausing for an instant, it fixes the precise shapes of imagined figures, which then burst into iridescent light before coming together in different configurations. These figures are ephemeral, and the smallest movement scatters them to produce others. The meaning that can be found in the archive has both the strength and the evanescence of these images that are one by one brought forward by the whirlwind of the kaleidoscope.35

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All the archival materials I have consulted for this research project take different configurations. For my purpose here, I selected the configurations that gave me the opportunity to examine the analysed historical moment from a methodological perspective. The fragments contained in the archive often do not occupy a specific place in a folder. Sometimes these are ephemera, such as undated manuscripts, or changes of cast list in a performance. Sometimes they are catalogued programs, magazines, newspaper articles, letters, telegrams, postcards, film and, of course, photographs. These latter enclose a world of beauty transmitted through black and white or sepia colours, with scratched surfaces, creased by times. Or sometimes these images are technicolour, appearing as a flash of light in the greyish room of the archive, strategically placed in the basement floor of the library, far from the natural sunlight. An inscription on the back can make you feel as if you were peeking at two people talking quietly in a room through the hole of a wall. Though photographs of dancers enclose an aesthetic that talks to us - the researchers - of the world that we want to know, it would be reductive to limit a research on movement through the analysis of photographs. Forcing the pieces of the archives together, into one discourse that could accommodate our wish of demonstrating what the past looked like, as claimed by Järvinen, would result in the generation of a manipulated reading of the same:

It is embedded in complex interactions with the archive to which we can return but which also always-already limits what we can claim to know about past performances. Thus, the disappearance of a particular work from the active repertory (of all dance companies) does not entail an actual loss of that work as much as its transformation on the level of archive/repertoire.

In my research I have found that photographs represent a limit in terms of how they help us ‘read’ the dancing past. On one hand, the photograph can preserve memory, identity, and creates a bond between the artist and the viewer across time. On the other hand, a photograph reminds the researcher of the limits in reconstructing with precise accuracy the performance. Following the footprints of the dancers only through photographs implies that the viewer must stop at a traffic light that never turns green. The impossibility of determining a quality in motion

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37 Järvinen, 70.
of photographs is what brought me to exclude them from my methodological analysis I conducted for this thesis. Other fragments of a past history I have utilised here are also static; these are newspaper articles, letters nevertheless, when combined with other fragments, they can provide sufficient information to peek briefly into the past. In this thesis, Australia’s ballet history and the choreographic analysis of restaged and original ballets is supported by small fragments, whether these are static or ‘in motion’ documents. This archival research aims to explore the methodologies and styles of pedagogy in use among Ballets Russes practitioners. Video footage, manuscripts, memoirs, and the recollections of choreographers and their dancers in oral histories – Clara’s memories - enabled me to trace part of a historical narrative built up on the transmission of specific choreographic conventions. These conventions are the frame of ballets, their modes of representation, their vocabulary and their syntaxes. Composing dances, as Foster explains, adheres to these conventions, as they bring ‘knowledge of the body and of its motion’.38

Primary sources held in different archives allow us to understand the choreographic influence of Ballets Russes artists on Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff through an analysis of five choreographic conventions formulated by Foster:

1. the frame: the way the dance sets itself apart as a unique event; 2. the mode of representation: the way the dance refers to the world; 3. the style: the way the dance achieves an individual identity in the world and in its genre; 4. the vocabulary: the basic units or "moves" from which the dance is made; and 5. the syntax: the rules governing the selection and combination of moves. This sketching out of the strategies and techniques involved in dance composition is simply that-a rough draft of the art of choreography designed for a specific cultural and historical moment.39

These conventions, conceptualised by Foster, permeate my thesis. The frame is often provided by journal articles offering comments regarding the impact that ballet had on Australian audiences. As Foster explains, the frame of a choreography refers to the impact that the work has on a society. Applying this convention to the Australian audiences between 1940 and 1960, in this research I analyse newspaper articles which offer evocative descriptions that aim to

confirm the distinctiveness of the performances created by the three choreographers at the centre of my research.40

The analysis of the second choreographic convention conceptualised by Foster, the mode of representation, is at the base of my investigation on the kinaesthetic strategies adopted by the three choreographers to convey emotions to their spectators. The mode of representation is divided into other four subcategories: resemblance, imitation, replication and reflection. Resemblance consists in creating movements that do not necessarily coincide with the precise evocation of a particularly natural element or being (human or animal). The movement resembling something is, therefore, subject to multiple interpretations. To create a movement that resembles a river, the choreography, as Foster clarifies, should focus on the representation of a quality or an attribute of the river, such as its waving path. Imitation is a mode of representation that aims to reproduce a precise pattern to bring a clear evocation to the mind of the spectator.41 In this case, the viewer can clearly understand that a river is what is being represented through the dance. The third mode of representation is replication. A replicative movement considers something, such as the river, that has to be replicated as a ‘dynamic system, an organic whole made up of functionally distinctive parts’.42 Here, the relationship between these parts is replicated and expressed through different parts of a dancer’s body, or through the interaction of two or more dancers. Because of the multiple interpretations of the tension between two or more dancers, or different parts of the bodies, aiming to represent the relationship existing between different attributes or qualities of the river – for instance the flowing water and the banks of the river – this mode of representation can suggest different images. Foster suggests that the flowing water and the banks delimiting its path could represent not only the relationship between the river and the banks, but also the relationship between mother and child. Finally, reflection can be intended as a convention suggesting multiple associations with a particular movement. A reflective movement does not directly refer to external events in the world, but they can be evoked by the quality of movement – not only certain the attributes of the river, but also to other events.43 These modes of representation, as I demonstrate in this thesis, inform the processes of ballet-making adopted by the Russian choreographers who were inspired by the choreographic approaches conceptualised by Michel

40 Foster, 60.
41 Foster, 65.
42 Foster, 66.
43 Foster, 66.
Fokine and Léonide Massine. Video footage and oral histories enable speculation about the different modes of representation preferred by Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff in their restaging of classical, modern, and original ballet repertoires based on literature and colonial themes.

In this investigation, I often examine the dancing style performed by dancers on the Australian stages. Style, the third convention established by Foster, indicates the quality with which a dancer performs a movement.44 It also questions, as earlier mentioned, its relationship with technique, a relation that I am exploring in chapter one. With the term ‘style’ in my thesis, I do not only refer to the interpretative qualities characterising the ways of performing of different dancers. I often use the term to indicate the creation in choreography of what John Joseph Martin called a ‘hypothetical environment,’ where the choreographer represents a specific environment, whose structure is delimited by selected materials, patterns of behaviour and ‘the agencies for overcoming them’.45 A choreographic style is characterised by a contextualised movement of the body, which is considered by Martin a ‘medium’ (the tool of the dancer), ‘a material that is closer to life experience than that employed by any of the other arts, namely, the movement of the body in its reaction to its environment’.46

The vocabulary and the syntax of classical and modern ballets, respectively the third and the fourth conventions established by Foster, refer to the ‘structural organisation of the dance’. In this case the spectators, previously guided by the framing conventions indicating what is the style of the dance they are watching, can deduce the style of movements and steps (vocabulary) and appreciate their combination in the choreography through different sequences of movement (syntax). These ‘syntaxes’ give the dance an internal coherence. In this thesis, the analysis of choreographic syntaxes allowed me to understand the presence in some of the examined ballets of ‘mimetic’, ‘pathetic’ and ‘paratactic’ principles that inform the approaches to ballet-making. ‘Mimesis’, ‘pathos’ and ‘parataxis’ are principles that, similarly to the modes of representation, can operate simultaneously or appear isolated in a choreography. Mimesis refers to a movement or a step that is repeated several times, or even as a movement that occurs in different moments in the choreography, assuming a different meaning according to the

44 Foster, 77.
46 Martin, 31.
context. For example, in the case of the first act of *Giselle*, analysed in chapter two, the heroine performs two series of *ballotté* in two different moments: first, when she is dancing with Albrecht, and the second time, just before dying. The repetition of the same step acquires two different meanings. When performed the first time, it evokes the happiness of the ideal love between Giselle and Albrecht. The second time, the same step is performed in a very sloppy way to portray Giselle’s desperation after she discovers she has been betrayed. The principle of mimesis, Foster explains, is aligned with the musical structure of the choreography. The function of mimesis is deeply contextualised in chapters one and two in its pedagogical and choreographic contexts. With the term ‘pathos’, Foster refers to the ways in which the dancers move within a space, where they build up a relationship between music and the psychological space of the spectator. For instance, the crescendo of the music, the vorticose whirling of the dancer performing a series of *chaînés* in diagonal (physical space) could generate in the spectator a sensation of increasing tension or uneasiness, as when Princess Aurora pricks her finger in Act One of *The Sleeping Beauty*. The last sub-principle of syntax is ‘parataxis’, which consists in the movement order. Variation, as Foster explains, is a paratactic technique used in relation to ‘spatial, temporal, or tensile properties of a move or phrase’. The application of variation as a paratactical technique will be discussed in chapter two, where the stylistic variations in the execution of the promenade in The Rose Adagio from Act One of *The Sleeping Princess*, performed by British ballerina Margot Fonteyn and Australian ballerina Kathleen Gorham represent a case in point.

**THESIS STRUCTURE**

This thesis is divided into one opening chapter, “Context”, four main chapters, and a concluding chapter, followed by an appendix and a list of references. “Context” offers a literature review, which aims to establish my research project in relation to the existing

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47 Foster, ‘Reading Choreography: Composing Dances’, 93.
48 Foster, 93.
49 Foster, 96.
academic literature. A subsection, “Orientation,” aims to provide biographical information including the educational and artistic background of the founders of the ballet companies I am analysing. It also aims to present the key artists who worked in contact with Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff, as their words represent a fundamental contribution to this thesis.

Chapter one is dedicated to the transmission of ballet technique from Europe to Australia. It is divided into three subchapters. The first, ‘Promoting a Russian Tradition: The Teaching Heritage of Lûbov’ Egorova and Ol’ga Preobraženskaâ’, analyses the impact these Russian pedagogues had on European practitioners, questioning to what extent their influence affected the teaching method of Kirsova, Borovansky and his wife Xenia. The second subchapter, ‘A Russian Ballet Method?’ focuses on the transmission and questions the meaning of ballet method and ballet style, anticipating the content of the next subchapter, ‘Flow and Narrative of the Cecchetti Method’. In this latter I aim to clarify that, despite the fascination with Russian ballets, classes were not taught according to a Russian method, but rather according to the Cecchetti method; here I will explain how Kirsova and Borovansky favoured ballet exercises infused with a sense of harmony as well as a lexicon of steps developed by Maestro Cecchetti at the turn of twentieth-century.

Chapter two focuses on the continuation of the tradition, established by the Russian impresario Colonel Wassily de Basil during the 1936-1940 Australian tours. The first of the three subchapters defines the term ‘classic’ and determines the tastes of Australian spectators in relation to the representation of the classics. In the second subchapter, I start my investigation on the methods adopted by Australian choreographers to convey a sense of ethereality in the restaging of the Russian classics, a process rooted in the aesthetic canons of a Russian ballet tradition. In the last subchapter, ‘In Search of a Unique Rhetoric of Movement’ I argue that despite their link with an artistic past anchored to the Ballets Russes choreographic tradition, neither Kirsova nor Borovansky aimed to mould Australian dancers to replicate the same quality offered by their European predecessors. Instead, they nurtured talented dancers, whose interpretation and style enriched the classics.

Chapter three illustrates the kinaesthetic processes borrowed from Fokine’s modern ballets in Kirsova and Borovansky’s original repertoires, and the impact that Massine’s symphonic ballets had on abstract, plotless ballets based on symphonic scores. In particular, I discuss the problems of delivering authentic folkloric dances through the ballet vocabulary, the representation of Commedia dell’Arte characters in Kirsova and Borovansky ballets, the
adoption of symbolic forms borrowed by Borovansky and Bousloff from Massine to stage ballets based on International literature.

Chapter four focuses on a return to an old, classical ballet vocabulary to create ballets devoted to the representation of Australia. I examine the ways in which Borovansky and Bousloff utilised classical ballet vocabulary for their production based on Australian and Aboriginal themes. Here, the problem of the cultural appropriation of Aboriginal cultures is the central discussion.

ROMANISATION OF CYRILLIC ALPHABET AND REFERENCING STYLE

Titles in the Cyrillic alphabet of primary and secondary sources have been Romanised according to the conventions established by the ISO 9:1995 transliteration system. Russian family names also have been transliterated according to the same system. Nevertheless, the Russian family names present in quoted sources have been left, as it is my intention to leave them as they appear in primary sources and secondary literature unaltered.

Though I used the ISO 9:1995 transliteration system rigorously and consistently throughout my thesis, I did not use the ISO 9:1995 transliteration system for Russian family names who became popular in Western countries in the early twentieth-century. This is the case of the Russian impresario ‘Sergeî Pavlovič Dâgilev’ (transliterated according to the ISO 9:1995 system), here appearing simply as ‘Diaghilev’. Other names that went through the same treatment in this thesis are: Pëtr Il'ič Čajkovskij, referred to with the anglicised version ‘Tchaikovsky’; ‘Matil'da Feliksovna Kšesinskaâ’, referred to with the anglicised version ‘Mathilde Kschessinska’; ‘Michajl Mihajlovič Fokin’, referred to as Michel Fokine; and Leonid Fëdorovič Másin, transliterated to Léonide Massine. These Russian names, together with Spesivtseva, Nijinska, Tchinarova, Riabouchinska, Toumanova, and Kouznetsova appear in their most common form, which often coincides with transliteration provided by the Merriam-Webster dictionaries.\(^{(50)}\) Given the number of documents reporting these names and family names as they became popular to Western audiences throughout the twentieth-century,
I decided not to convert them into their transliterated correspondence, as it would make the process of identification of these artists harder.

Chicago seventeenth-edition full note referencing system is the referencing system I chose for this thesis, as it enables me to quote and reference efficiently from archival sources. I apologise if the reader finds my transliteration style inconsistent with the style recommended in the seventeenth-edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The manual encourages referencing Russian Cyrillic characters according to the United States Board on Geographic Names, while I deliberately chose to reference Russian sources according to the ISO 9:1995 transliteration system. This choice is due to my educational background in Russian Studies, where I learnt to appreciate the validity of this transliteration system over any other because of its precise correspondence of each sound, including the hard and soft signs. Where other systems often omit these sounds, the ISO 9:1995 includes them, offering a more specific transliteration.

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Michel Fokine (Saint Petersburg, 1880 – New York, 1942), Bronislava Nijinska (Minsk, 1891 – Los Angeles, 1972) and Léonide Massine (Moscow, 1896 – Borken, 1979) were among the choreographers who brought to Diaghilev’s company a number of choreographic successes. After the dismissal of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes following the impresario’s death in 1929, a number of new ballet companies were established in Europe. Nijinska worked as ballet master for Ida Rubinstein’s company in 1931. One year later, she founded her own company, Théâtre de la Danse, which closed in 1934. In those two years, Kira Bousloff was one of her dancers. From 1937 to 1938, Nijinska worked as ballet master at the Polish Ballet in Warsaw. She settled in Los Angeles in 1938, where she collaborated with Original Ballet Russe, The American Ballet Theatre, and the Buffalo Ballet. While Nijinska had an intense career that took her not only to France and America, but also Eastern Europe as an independent ballet master, her colleagues Fokine and Massine joined different companies in Europe. After Diaghilev’s death, the Russian impresario Colonel Wassily de Basil and the artistic director René Blum founded Les Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo, a company that lasted until 1936, when de Basil and Blum split their artistic collaboration. After the company dismissal, Fokine continued his collaboration with de Basil, while Massine allied with Blum. In 1937, Blum founded Le Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and Massine was appointed its artistic director. A number of dancers, who were familiar with both the European and Australian audiences, joined the Blum’s company; among them, Alexandra Danilova, Alicia Markova, Frederic Franklin. Though the artistic director was Massine, the company still performed works choreographed by Fokine, Nijinska, George Balanchine and Frederick Ashton. Under the guidance of de Basil, Les Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo changed its name twice. When de Basil’s Ballets Russes toured

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52 Homans, Apollo’s Angels. A History of Ballet.; Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes.
54 Baer, Bronislava Nijinska: A Dancer’s Legacy.
57 Les Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo is plural in French, not to be confused neither with Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo, which is singular.
58 Chazin-Bennahum, René Blum and the Ballets Russes: In Search of a Lost Life.
Australia, the company’s name was often referred to as Monte Carlo Ballets Russes and Colonel W. de Basil’s Monte Carlo Russian Ballet, while in 1938 it was known as Covent Garden Russian Ballet and, finally, in the 1940 Australasian tour, the company was known as Original Ballet Russe.60 Michel Fokine collaborated with de Basil, restaging the repertoire that brought to the company an incredible success during the three Australian tours in 1936, 1938 and 1940. Among Fokine’s milestones, Australian spectators enjoyed Les Sylphides (1907), a ballet later restaged by Kirsova and Borovansky, Polovtsian Dances (1909), Firebird (1910), Petrouchka (1911), Thamar (1912), Le Coq d’Or (The Golden Cockerel, 1914), and Cendrillon (Cinderella, 1938).61 The company also presented ballets choreographed by David Lichine, Massine and Balanchine.

Starting from observations on the cultural impact that de Basil’s companies had on the Australian artistic landscape, in this chapter I will pursue two goals. In the first part of “Context” I focus on the academic contribution relevant to my research. In the second part, I provide historical information to understand the educational backgrounds of Kirsova, Borovansky, Bousloff and their social legacy in Australia. Through the words of the artists who kept the memory of these former Ballets Russes practitioners alive, here I present the choreographers who are the object of my methodological investigation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2006, the National Library of Australia, the Australian Ballet, and the University of Adelaide collaborated in a four-year project funded by the Australian Research Council titled Ballets Russes in Australia: Our Cultural Revolution. Unfolded between 2006 and 2009, it celebrated the history and impact of the three Ballets Russes companies touring Australia from 1936 to 1940. It was timed to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the arrival of Ballets Russes in Australia and the 80th anniversary of Diaghilev’s death. The project was not only based on historical research and reconstruction, but it also had a performance program that saw the collaboration between the Australian Ballet and contemporary choreographers, including

61 Carroll, The Ballets Russes in Australia and Beyond.
Aleksej Ratmanskij and Graeme Murphy; Ratmanskij restaged Massine’s *Scuola di Ballo* (1933) to original music by Luigi Boccherini, Murphy created his own *Firebird*, inspired by Stravinsky 1910’s score (both performed in 2009). The Australian Ballet music director, chief conductor and contributor to the project Nicolette Fraillon discussed the genesis of Ballets Russes and its impact in Europe. Speaking about the inception of the four-year project, Fraillon pinpointed the necessity of creating a link between past and present by restaging old choreographies in a contemporary perspective. Instead of conducting an original choreographic reconstruction, it was decided to bring different European and Australian artists together to celebrate these early artistic innovations of the twentieth-century. New dancers, choreographers and designers, having a different, contemporary language, revisited the *Ballets Russes*’ masterpieces, combining different tools and different ballet techniques from those in use during the early twentieth-century. Fraillon concludes that music and movement are also part of the contemporary culture and that Ballets Russes ‘cultural revolution’ is not just part of Australian history. Indeed, the project is underpinned by an interactive research and collaboration between dance experts, practitioners, music experts and composers of International prestige, as when Ballets Russes visited Australia and inspired local artists.

The success of Ballets Russes companies laid not only in the collaboration of International artists, but also in the variegated nature of the repertoire they brought with them: Russian classics such as *Swan Lake* (act II), *Aurora’s Wedding* (based on the third act of *The Sleeping Beauty*, with fairies’ variations borrowed from the first act) restaged and adapted by the Russian choreographers Nicholas Sergeyev and Nijinska, Fokine’s modern ballets and symphonic works by Massine and Lichine, represented a direct link between a classical ballet tradition born in Russia and a modern and a symphonic ballet tradition developed in Europe. As Christofis66 and Garafola67 make clear, the inspired elements of innovation were sweetened by the maintenance of the old repertoire. Diaghilev’s aim was to export the Russian tradition

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67 Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*. 

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without renouncing choreographic innovation. As the Prima Ballerina Baronova understood, the roots of the Ballets Russes’ success in Australia also lay in the combination of newness and tradition that made de Basil’s tours a successful experiment, and resulted in an enthusiastic audience, ‘greedy’ for their artistic revolution.68

Before exploring the impact that Monte Carlo, Covent Garden and Original Ballet Russe companies, led by Colonel Wassily de Basil in the late-1930s, it is necessary to understand what sort of reception Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes had in Europe, its place of origin. The ‘cultural revolution’ carried out by Ballets Russes companies touring Australia between 1936 and 1940 is connected to the artistic revolution instigated by the Russian impresario Sergey Diaghilev, founder of Ballets Russes, a company which toured Europe from 1909 to 1929. Järvinen explains that behind the success of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes is a profound ignorance among French spectators of 1909. Diaghilev was mainly motivated by his need to do good business with ballet; he sold an all-European idea of Russian ballets portraying Russia as an Oriental, primitive land that mesmerised audiences in search of light-hearted stories or fairytales. Hence, Järvinen explains, it can be traced the success of Fokine’s ‘modern ballets’ and the rejection of Nijinsky’s complex choreographic structures.69 They would have compelled the European spectators to a new critical approach that, as they were still under the spell of the easy plots of Petipa’s ballets, they were not ready to embrace:

Paradoxically, Nijinsky’s works also changed the way in which ballet was seen and written about in the West. Apparently overnight, the critics began to pay attention to the poses and movements of the dancers, the placements of groups on stage, the general structure of the events, and the counterpoints between various elements of the spectacle. […] Besides detailed description of what the dancers did on stage, the critics also paid attention to their own affective responses to this new dance – to how it created in them feelings other than joy and delight: anger and uncertainty, yes, but also deep sympathy, sadness, elation and even fear.70

The rejection of Nijinsky’s works in France confirmed the predilection by European audiences of ballet syntaxes that were easily recognisable, possessing a ballet vocabulary rooted in the

70 Järvinen, 34.
steps of the classical technique. The ballets that used these vocabularies were the classics created in Russia by Petipa in the mid to late nineteenth-century, but also the modernist works created by Fokine and Massine in Europe. These ballets required the presence of several dancers on-stage, so Diaghilev used to recruit new dancers in Europe. Dancers performing in the company were not only from Russia, but also from different parts of Europe. Remembering the artists recruited by Diaghilev during his time in Britain in the late-1910s, Haskell pointed out that London ‘was to provide him with many outstanding dancers carefully disguised under foreign names’: these dancers were Lydia Sokolova (born Hilda Tansley Munnings), Ninette de Valois (born Edris Stannus), Alicia Markova (born Lilian Alicia Marks), Anton Dolin (born Sydney Francis Patrick Chippendall Healey-Key), Vera Savina (born Vera Clark). But, as Garafola explains, the presence of European artists in the company was a fundamental element for the success of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. The collaboration between Russian choreographers, musicians, designers and European artists was at the base of the success of this company. They collaborated with Diaghilev for a twofold purpose: to present a Russian choreographic repertoire, unknown to the European spectator at the time, and to create new ballet repertoires pleasing the different tastes of European audiences in the years following the First World War. Garafola examined in depth the social and cultural phenomenon that was the Ballet Russes across her academic career. In her books and articles, she is concerned with tracing the successes and artistic impact of the Ballets Russes across the world. She highlights a number of factors that contributed to Diaghilev’s company being a noteworthy artistic phenomenon in the twentieth-century. These factors coincided with Diaghilev’s ability to both save the Russian classical repertoire and let the choreographers working for him stage modern and symphonic ballets that displayed a new choreographic aesthetic. The Russian impresario did not renounce the classical ballet vocabulary, nor let choreographic patterns rooted in the Imperial Russian tradition die. Instead, he opted for a coexistence of different choreographic styles that found their quintessential value in the works of exponents of a ballet taste typical of the ancien régime, whose major exponent was Petipa (1818-1910), but also the modern and modernist Fokine and Massine. Garafola pays particular attention to the structures and movements created by Massine, who joined Diaghilev’s

71 Goldfine and Geller, Ballets Russes.
73 Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes.
74 Garafola; Homans, Apollo’s Angels. A History of Ballet.
company in 1915. In “Astonish Me! Diaghilev, Massine and the Experimentalist Tradition”,
Garafola explains that it was in the years following the fiasco of Nijinsky’s Le Sacre du
Printemps (The Rite of Spring, which premiered at the Theatre of Champs Elysées in 1913),
that Diaghilev championed Massine. Precursor of neo-primitivism in ballet, Nijinsky is
considered an innovator by Garafola, as he broke with the Russian tradition imposed by the
Russian Mariinsky Theatre (a tradition to which choreographers such as Fokine and Massine
were still attached). Garafola considers also Massine an innovator, as his ballets were examples
of ‘neo-primitivism’ and ‘period modernism’. This form was an ‘amalgam of old and new […]
hybrid forms that became the major vehicle of ballet modernism’: ‘Descendants of pre-war
exoticism and retrospectives, these combinations of experimental and received material
provided […] the aesthetic foundations of Diaghilev’s remade repertory’.77

For Stephanie Jordan, Massine’s Le Sacre du Printemps (choreographed in 1920) offered ‘a
new weight and physicality, a sense of the earth, strident dissonance and rhythmic
complexity’.78 Comparing the works created by Nijinsky and Massine, Jordan pinpoints how
the two choreographers were differently connected with the musical pattern created by
composer Igor Stravinsky in 1913. According to Jordan, Nijinsky’s choreography displays a
certain subservience to the metric system adopted by the composer, an element that seems to
have been replaced by a more independent approach in Massine’s choreography. The two
choreographic productions differ markedly from a structural perspective. Referring to a system
created by the Swiss pedagogue Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950), who theorised that the
way of perceiving music should be based on the study of movement, Jordan suggests that
Nijinsky translated each accent of the score into a step. By comparison, Massine took a distance
from the asymmetrical structure of Stravinsky’s composition. As a result, movements in
Massine’s revival produced an independent subjectivity. Contemporary viewers began to
consider this separation as a liberating force, utilised by the choreographer to create works of
a non-narrative quality. Jordan also points out that Fokine’s work offered a similarly
sophisticated, stylised relationship between movement and music, allowing the dancers’

75 Garafola, “Astonish Me!”, Diaghilev, Massine and the Experimentalist Tradition’.
76 Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes.
77 Garafola, 82.
interpretation to emerge from how the music made them feel: in *Les Sylphides*, for example, Fokine asked the dancers to interpret each movement beyond the expectations of the steps.  

While the 1920s ballets created by Massine were characterised by movements and settings infused with his idea of a neo-primitivismo style, a second phase of his choreographic production, starting in the 1930s, marked the creation of symphonic ballets. For this second phase, Garafola explains that the choreographer took inspiration from Italian visual art rejecting ‘naturalist imitation’. Massine declared, ‘decor is above all an independent creation [...] an autonomous art form with its special problems and subject to its own laws’.

In the swinging of arms, hammers, and bodies, in the spinning of wheels and snapping of signal discs and with mounting rhythmic intensity, Massine achieved a kind of symphonism, welding scenic, corporeal, and musical elements in a way that was fundamentally abstract.

Here, Garafola hints at the potential of exploring structural embodied analysis when assessing the impact that movements and steps can have on our understanding of the action on-stage over the choreographer’s intent. She questions how these choreographic effects might be received. Visualising and narrating movements as they appear in Massine’s symphonic ballets, Garafola defers her analysis to the use of the body. According to Garafola, Massine gives the dancer more potential for expression and liberated the dancer’s body from the most common analytic modes of balletic patterns previously adopted for the execution of movements aimed to narrate a precise story. Asymmetry, harmony, and elongation of lines are the main ideas developed in Massine’s new choreographic productions. Explaining how these symphonic ballets were performed by de Basil’s Ballets Russes during the Australian tours, Garafola notices a similar use of the body in Massine’s *Les Presages* and the choreographies created according to the use of Laban techniques. They both present stylistic traits that implied a deep bend of the torso, high jumps, angular gestures in opposition to what Garafola refers to as ‘the rounded forms of academic *port de bras*’:

79 Jordan, 165.
81 Garafola, 54.
In the use of shifting levels within groups to create visual and dynamic contrast, and even the incorporation of floorwork, Massine seems to have adopted certain Laban ideas of space, presenting the body in ways that stressed not only its three-dimensionality – or the 'reach space' immediately surrounding the body – but also its muscular energy and flow.82

Focusing her attention on Massine’s creation of asymmetric movements and off-balanced structures, Garafola’s analysis hints at the potential of a reconstructive methodological approach, an adoption that is expanded in this thesis and applied to the work of artists who migrated to Australia and restaged, among other works, this choreographer’s symphonic ballets. Basing their considerations on the binomial music-movement in Fokine and Massine’s works, both Garafola and Jordan ask new questions about interpretative values, which inspired me to examine their transference onto Australian companies. From their analyses, it emerges that, stepping back from a Dalcrozean eurythmic idea of movements choreographed on precise notes of the music, Massine and Fokine created movements aimed to narrate a precise story (in the case of Fokine’s ballets), or emotions (as in the case of Massine’s plotless ballets). The influence of the ballet styles of the two choreographers on Kirsova’s, Borovansky’s and Bousloff’s methodological approaches for the creation of modern and symphonic ballets will be covered in chapter three.

While Diaghilev’s company marked a counterpoint in the history of European art, as well as in the transmission of ballet methodologies unknown in France and England, the companies born from Diaghilev’s legacy regrouped some of the performers who had worked with the Ballets Russes as well as choreographers. As we learn from Judith Chazin-Bennahum, Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo had two co-founders, Blum and de Basil, who employed the Massine as their principle choreographer.83 1935 marked a turning point in these artistic and entrepreneurial collaborations. Frustrated by de Basil’s autocratic attitude, Blum resigned from the company. Ballets Russes, a documentary directed by Dayana Goldfine and Daniel Geller in 2006, centred on the life and career of the Ballets Russes companies founded after Diaghilev’s death, highlights the two contrasting natures of this company’s two founders. De Basil showed a strong attachment towards the lucrative outcome of the performances put on-stage; Blum, on the contrary, showed a milder character.84 The documentary also represents the recollections

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82 Garafola, 67.
83 Chazin-Bennahum, René Blum and the Ballets Russes: In Search of a Lost Life.
84 Goldfine and Geller, Ballets Russes.
and view of dancers such as Irina Baronova, Tamara Tchinarova and George Zorich, for example, who worked for the company. The dancers discuss the roles they played, the relationships they established with the choreographers, the expectations of the European, Australian and American audiences, the repertoire danced, and the selection criteria adopted by the choreographers of the companies to recruit dancers. When the company was disbanded, some dancers – Aleksandra Danilova, Alicia Markova and Frederic Franklin – did not hesitate to follow Massine, who, together with Blum and Serge Denham founded a second company in 1937. Irina Baronova, Tamara Tchinarova and Tamara Toumanova stayed with de Basil, but this latter was prevented from using ‘Monte Carlo’ in the name of his company, so he opted for Covent Garden Russian Ballet and then Original Ballet Russe instead. These two companies made their success in Australia through a ballet repertoire previously staged by Massine (with some restrictions), Fokine, and Balanchine, and new ballets created by an emerging choreographer, who was David Lichine. The creation of these different ballet companies after Diaghilev’s death created a number of coalitions among Ballets Russes practitioners. These companies never renounced restaging the Russian classics that were first performed in Europe by Diaghilev’s company. Confident of the success that the Russian repertoire would have generated, de Basil’s Ballets Russes performed it in Australia: the impresario and the dancers introduced the Australian dancers to a ballet world extending from the revival of the Russian classics to the modern and symphonic ballets created by Fokine and Massine.

Australian dance historians Michelle Potter and Lee Christofis explain that the legacy of Ballets Russes represents a fundamental component in the development of the Australian ballet repertoire. According to Christofis, the reason of de Basil’s success is rooted in the heterogeneous nature of the ballet repertoire he presented in Australia, nurturing hope for the creation of an Australian company:

85 Goldfine and Geller.
86 Balanchine was previously dismissed by de Basil when he was working as principal choreographer for Blum/de Basil’s Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. For more on Balanchine’s relationship to the Ballet Russes history see Chazin-Bennahum, René Blum and the Ballets Russes: In Search of a Lost Life, Homans, Apollo’s Angels. A History of Ballet; Tim Scholl, From Petipa to Balanchine: Classical Revival and the Modernisation of Ballet (Taylor & Francis, 2004).
87 Goldfine and Geller, Ballets Russes; Carroll, The Ballets Russes in Australia and Beyond.
88 Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes.
The effect of de Basil’s companies touring Australia between 1936 and 1940 was immediate. It left audiences hungry for more and grafted onto the collective Australian imagination the hope that a professional, home-grown Australian ballet could be established, as indeed it was at the end of the tour. Those exotic and extravagant experiences that audiences in Europe and Americas had enjoyed during the 20 illustrious years of the inaugural Ballet Russe finally were replicated in Australia.\(^91\)

Christofis pinpoints the major stylistic differences existing between ballets performed by de Basil’s Ballets Russes in Australia in the late-1930s. Swinging between different repertoires, the versatility of the works presented became the strength of the success of Ballets Russes in Australia. They exposed the spectators to the Russian classical repertoire, as well as to Fokine’s modern ballets, Lichine’s ballets – based on ‘pure dancing’\(^92\) – and Massine’s symphonic works.\(^93\) In 1955, Borovansky hired Lichine to restage ballets previously performed by de Basil’s Ballets Russes. Lichine’s *Francesca da Rimini* (originally created in 1937) was revived for Borovansky Ballet, so it was his own version of *The Nutcracker*. Lichine also created *Corrida* for Borovansky Ballet, which premiered in 1956 and saw the Australians Paul Grinwis and Kathleen Gorham dancing in their respective roles as the bullfighter and his apprentice, a girl in disguise.\(^94\) To narrate the history of Borovansky Ballet and the story of its interpreters, Christofis uses a range of primary sources, such as memoirs and newspaper articles. Mentioning the works staged by Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff, Christofis traces back the birth of the most important companies founded after the last Australian tour led by de Basil. The companies directly influenced by the artistic legacy of de Basil’s Ballets Russes, according to Christofis, are Kirsova Ballet and Borovansky Ballet (respectively 1940-1944, and 1940-1960), Laurel Martyn’s Ballet Guild (1946-1967), Gertrude Johnson’s National Theatre Ballet (1949-1955), and Valrene Tweedie’s Ballet Australia (1960-1976). De Basil’s tours generated a success that found its maximum expression in both its immediate and later reception. As Christofis highlights:

> The general public in Australia, unaware of the personal challenges that went on behind scenes, followed the artists of de Basil’s Ballets Russes with remarkable assiduousness. They

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\(^{91}\) Christofis, ‘Dancing the Ballets Russes: Creators and Their Interpreters’, 21–22.  
\(^{93}\) Christofis, ‘Dancing the Ballets Russes: Creators and Their Interpreters’.  
\(^{94}\) Salter, *Borovansky. The Man Who Made Australian Ballet*.  

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saw the dancers as distinctive personalities, not a nameless corps. Over the three tours, the public had been entertained by 131 dancers from 17 countries in 770 performances. With so many dancers in a rich roster of ballets, old and new, audiences for the Russian ballet became a phenomenon in their own right, discerning, attentive and enthusiastic. They were well prepared for the Kirsova and Borovansky companies, which would flourish in the space left behind when the last of the Original Ballet Russe dancers departed for America in 1940.95

Christofis’ academic contribution provides an opportunity to get acquainted with primary sources and their location in different Australian archives. The development of the three major ballet companies performing in Australia between the 1940s and 1960s was strictly connected to the legacy of what has often been referred to, as mentioned in the above quote, a ‘Russian ballet’. In chapter one, I discuss the misuse of the adjective ‘Russian’ used to define ballet technique and style taught by Kirsova, Borovansky, and Bousloff. Though they were considered representative members of these ‘Russian ballet’ companies, was the technique they were exporting Russian? Kirsova, Borovansky, and Bousloff often claimed that their teaching methods were based on the study of Cecchetti technique, a ballet training method developed by the Italian ballet master Enrico Cecchetti (Rome, 1850 – Milan, 1928) and codified after his death by ballet historians Cyril de Beaumont and Stanislas Idzikowski in 1966.96 In other words, theirs was Russian ballet style, based on a Cecchetti ballet technique, as I explain in chapter one. Borovansky Ballet adopted this method until at least 1962, when British director Peggy van Praagh (London, 1910 – Melbourne, 1990) took up the directorship of the company that became known as Australian Ballet.97 The appointment of Peggy van Praagh marked a change in the style of the former Borovansky company, as part of the British repertoire was introduced into the company under her direction.98

An indispensable source to develop this research project is Australia Dances. Creating Australia Dance 1945-1965 by Alan Brissenden and Keith Glennon. Concentrating on the development of local ballet companies around Australia in the two decades following the end of the Second World War, Brissenden and Glennon conducted an extensive research aimed to track record of minor and major Australian ballet companies, their members, their choreographic repertoires and ballet synopses in years where ballet strove to be considered a

form of theatre. The book has an encyclopaedic structure and it is the result of years of archival research and interviews; here Brissenden and Glennon explore the success of semi-professional and professional ballet companies founded between 1945 and 1965, their choreographic production, costumes, design, music and dancers, offering a record of the main milestones achieved by Australian ballet companies during those two artistically fertile decades. Brissenden and Glennon record both the classical and modernist choreographic repertoires originally created in Europe and Russia as well as the classical and modernist ballet repertoire created in Australia by Australian and European choreographers of Australian adoption. The idea of the presence of an influence of Ballets Russes legacy implicitly permeates those sections dedicated to those ballet companies born after the de Basil Australian tours. Nevertheless, Brissenden and Glennon do not attempt to actively demonstrate either the existence of an influence deriving from Ballets Russes approaches to dancing in the restaging of the European and Russian ballet repertoires either the existence of a relation between the European repertoires and the Australian ones. Integrating my research with Brissenden and Glennon’s record, I aim to reconstruct the choreographic approaches permeating the re-staged as well as original ballet productions in Australia between 1940 and 1960 looking at the methodology carried out by Ballets Russes practitioners. Brissenden and Glennon provided a complete and detailed overview of the choreographic productions of the Australian ballet companies formed in the analysed decades. Nevertheless, the ballet historians did not aim to prove the existence of a choreographic and pedagogical influence deriving from overseas. While Brissenden and Glennon created a complete work aimed to understand the nature of the Australian ballet companies active in the analysed years, the aim of my research is to pinpoint the existence of approaches to ballet-making deriving from Europe and Russia through an investigation of primary sources demonstrating how methodologies in use among Ballets Russes practitioners influenced Australian ballet companies.

As pointed out by Ann Tuley, who conducted MA research on the impact of the geographical isolation of Australia in respect to the development of ballet in the twentieth-century, the dancers of the Australian Ballet at the beginning of the 1960s progressively started losing their

‘Russian’ style, in praise of a more controlled, and cleaner (in the endings of the steps) British style:

The supremacy of the British style in Australian ballet was confirmed with the appointment of Peggy van Praagh as the founding director of the first federally sponsored national company, The Australian Ballet. In choosing van Praagh as Borovansky’s successor upon his unexpected death in 1959, the J.C. Williamson Company was effectively “defecting” from the Russian to the English style of ballet. The powerful J.C. Williamson Company must have seen that the days of the Russes spectacle were ending, soon to be replaced by a preference for the more restrained, streamlined British approach to movement.101

Tuley focused on the international and intra-national models of postcolonial ballet pedagogy that dominated in Australia. Despite their geographical isolation, Tuley explained that the Australian dancers, by the late-1950s, had been exposed to different styles and methods of ballet pedagogy. In particular, Australia established artistic connections with Britain, connections that affected Australia’s postcolonial identity. Tuley argues that with the dismissal of the Borovansky Ballet, the Australian Ballet started absorbing pedagogical and stylistic models that conferred the dancers a sense of ‘Britishness’ as they were searching for their own ‘Australianness’.102 In other words, Tuley identifies that Australian artists ended up adopting a British ballet style and technique in their attempt to achieve an new Australian ballet style. The adoption of the British ballet examination system in the 1930s reveals, as Tuley explains, Australian subservience to England.

While Tuley’s research investigates the evolution of ballet techniques in use among different Australian schools, from 1851 to 2011, the purpose of this project is to understand the dynamics that influenced and eventually re-shaped ballet technique and acting styles on-stage. Where Tuley asks how the Australian pedagogical ballet tradition evolved, my work focuses on performance, speculating on the impact that local, talented dancers had on the Australian spectators before the consolidation of the British technique and its preferred mode of performance. While Tuley’s approach towards the analysis of physicality is at the base of an understanding of the evolution of ballet pedagogy in Australia, my analysis of the dancers’

102 Tuley, 169.
physicality in this thesis serves to formulate considerations on the ways in which these dancers performed on-stage, and the effect this may have produced on audiences.

**CHOREOGRAPHERS AND THEIR DANCERS**

In an article written by Basil Burdett, published in 1937 by *The Home* magazine, the reader can perceive the sense of emptiness created by the absence of some of the most well-known Ballets Russes icons missing in the second Australian tour:

To-night the ballet. At the moment of writing this sign in winking its Neon welcome from the front of His Majesty’s Theatre in Melbourne. By the time you read this it will be flashing the glad news of another festival of dance from the temporary headquarters of Russian Ballet in Sydney, and we in Melbourne shall be more vividly green with envy than any Neon sign. This latest season of ballet in Australia, under the auspices of Colonel de Basil, who is doing his gallant best to continue the great work of Diaghileff [sic] interrupted by his death in Venice some years ago, has upset many ballet lovers. There is no Pavlova. There is not even the Toumanova we were promised when the season was first announced.103

This article reveals a certain kind of knowledge of the preferences of Australian spectators, who enjoyed the first tour of Monte Carlo Russian Ballet the year before, and the performance of Anna Pavlova in 1929. By 1937, Toumanova left to join the new Blum-Massine company, leaving audiences admiring her beauty on and off-stage. Nonetheless, de Basil’s Ballets Russes still represented an incredible attraction, a point of contact between the European artistic recent past that hosted Diaghilev’s revolution. The author of this article sees de Basil’s intentions as an attempt of staging a ballet repertoire more in line with the choreographic choices made by Diaghilev during his European career as impresario:

In Diaghileff’s estimation the ballet was a thing – a combination of dancers, music and décor, in which the individual star, although naturally important, was subject to the production as a whole. The very composition of the present company allows that ideal of unity to be more easily grasped. For the first time we are seeing in Australia ballets with the original décor and costumes designed for Diaghileff by Bakst, Benois and other artistic collaborators.104

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104 Burdett, 29.
The success of the second and third tours were confirmed by the presence of a heterogenous repertoire, with ballets choreographed by Fokine, Massine, Balanchine and Lichine, Diaghilev’s favourite choreographers. As Potter explains, the arrival of de Basil in Australia generated hopes among spectators, curious to assist to the artistic and cultural phenomenon to which the Europeans assisted some decade earlier:

Predictably, Australian critics noted that the de Basil companies appeared to be perpetuating the tradition of a synthesis of the arts that had been a feature of the productions of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in the earlier decades of the century. But they also remarked on the presence of ballets that looked beyond the Diaghilev repertoire. The symphonic works of Leonide Massine, such as Les Presages, Choreartium, and Symphonie Fantastique, were enormously popular in Australia. Les Presages, for example, received over one hundred performances around Australia during the course of the three tours. Innovative works like the symphonic ballets were thought to be especially important as they fulfilled the expectations of the Australian arts community that it be kept abreast of the latest overseas developments.

The repertoire consisted of classical Russian ballets (Aurora’s Wedding, Swan Lake – act II), modern ballets (Fokine’s Scheherazade, Petrouchka), and the above-quoted symphonic ballets choreographed by Massine. The dancers were versatile interpreters of different ballet styles and the audience was mesmerised by their presence on-stage. But the fame of the artists went beyond the stage, and soon de Basil’s dancers became popular figures appearing also in local advertisements. They also appeared more often in public, as they enjoyed the Australian landscape, the people, and life away from the tensions of the upcoming Second World War. The dancers became familiar faces off-stage, too, as they socialised with local ballet fans. Michelle Potter points out how easily de Basil’s Ballet Russes dancers touring in the late-1930s were able to captivate Australian audiences. The dancers established a friendly relationship with the spectators that extended beyond the stage, and local audiences were equally interested in these dancers’ private lives. Hosted by locals when not rehearsing, Ballets Russes dancers spent their time at the beach. These convivial moments are immortalised in videos held at the National Film and Sound Archive. One shows a semi-improvised ballet at Bungan beach, New

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107 Goldfine and Geller, Ballets Russes.
108 Potter, ‘Challenging Perceptions: [The Impact That Three Touring Ballets Russes Companies Had on Australian Audiences.]’
South Wales. Another show features Paul Petroff performing lifts with two unidentified female dancers. Among the collections held at the National Library and the National Film and Sound Archive are pictures and videos recorded by Ewan Murray-Will, a dermatologist who befriended the Ballets Russes artists. Murray-Will recorded videos of dancers on-stage and in everyday life:

He [Ewan Murray-Will] was reputedly a shy man and did not produce a family of his own, but a select group of Ballets Russes dancers became a little like a family to him. He was close to a small coterie of dancers, among them Helene Kirsova, Paul Petroff, Nina Youchkevitch and Milos Ristic, all of whom feature frequently in photographs in his album. They appear in candid snapshots as well as in portraits and performance shots. Together Murray-Will and the dancers visited wildlife sanctuaries where they enjoyed feeding kangaroos and wombats and cuddling koalas, and went on bush picnics where they posed amid Australian flora.

Kirsova became a good friend of Murray-Will and they appeared frequently in public. Murray-Will also immortalised Kirsova on her wedding day as she married the Danish Vice-consul of Sydney – Erik Fritz Emil Fischer. As a dancer, Kirsova was praised for the interpretation of romantic roles in classical ballets. In 1936 and 1937, Kirsova was appointed prima ballerina of the Ballets Russes de Monte-Carlo. Here, she worked with Fokine, who was appointed maître de ballet in 1936. In 1940, Kirsova founded her own company, the Kirsova Ballets, becoming a fundamental figure for the development of ballet in Sydney. Born in 1910 in Copenhagen, Elisabeth Kirsten Ellen Wittrup Hansen – later Hélène Kirsova – became well-known to Melbourne balletomanes when she performed as principal and solo dancer in ballets such as Les Sylphides, Aurora’s Wedding (where she interpreted Princess Florine from the Bluebird pas de deux), Odette in Swan Lake, The Firebird, Passion in Les Presages, the Ballerina in Petrouchka, the Doll in La Boutique Fantastique and the Street Dancer in Le Beau Danube with Monte Carlo Ballets Russes in 1936 and 1937. Although Kirsova was committed to the creation of a professional company, this dream vanished in 1944, when her company last
performed. She returned to Paris in 1947, after marrying her second husband, the art critic and editor Peter Bellew, and died in London in 1962. Kirsova Ballet staged a repertoire that was already familiar to audiences who were reinvigorated by the last de Basil’s tour, and an original repertoire based on European literature and folklore. Kirsova hired some of the former de Basil’s Ballets Russes principals, who performed with the company until the year of its folding. In the early-1940s, Kirsova recruited four former de Basil dancers: Tamara Tchinarova, Raissa Kouznetsova, Valentin Zeglovsky, and Edouard Sobichevsky. Though the former Ballets Russes dancers possessed the technical and interpretative skills that Kirsova was looking for to restage the classics, she also recruited Australian dancers for the leading roles: Peggy Sager, Strelsa Heckelman, and Helene Ffrance. Although Tchinarova, Kouznetsova, Zeglovsky, and Sobichevsky had a technical background that consolidated their reputation as professional artists, who had trained in Europe with Russian pedagogues Olga Preobraženskaâ, Lubov Egorova, and Mathilde Kschessinska, Kirsova found ideal performers among local practitioners. Though having dancers with the physical and artistic standards of Tchinarova, Kouznetsova was fundamental to guarantee the preservation of the standards of quality in her company, Kirsova believed that Australian dancers had the potential to become excellent artists too.

Dancers who recall Kirsova’s pedagogical approach and her choreographic tastes are Tchinarova and Sager. The Romanian-born Tamara Tchinarova moved to Paris in the 1920s, where she studied with former ballerinas of the Imperial Russian ballet, such as Mathilde Kschessinska, Ol’ga Preobraženskaâ and Lûbov Egorova. She dedicated her life to ballet after she saw Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes performing in Paris. She joined Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo in 1932 and she danced with de Basil’s Ballets Russes until 1939, when she settled in Australia. Due to her young age, Tchinarova and the other three ballerinas performing in the Monte Carlo Ballets Russes (Baronova, Riabouchinska, Toumanova), were given the nickname ‘Kindergarten Ballets Russes’. However, following the first successful performances, this name was abandoned. Later, Anna Volkova joined de Basil's company, where she danced from 1935 to 1943, before permanently moving to Australia in 1945. In interview with Potter,

118 Tchinarova Finch, Dancing into the Unknown. My Life in the Ballets Russes.; Mandy Chang, A Thousand Encores: Ballets Russes in Australia, Documentary (Screen Australia, Flaming Star Films, Film Victoria, 2009).
119 Chang, A Thousand Encores: Ballets Russes in Australia.
Tchinarova explained the roles that Kirsova created for the dancers and how they found her training beneficial for their future working perspectives.\textsuperscript{120} Sager, a talented New-Zealand-born dancer who worked in the Kirsova Company for its whole existence, as well as for the Borovansky Ballet from 1944 to 1947, provides insightful information to delineate the teaching strategies adopted by Kirsova in her training, which will be analysed in chapter one.\textsuperscript{121} A generous and kind-hearted artist, Kirsova, as we read from the theatre programmes held at the National Library of Australia, donated the profit from her performances to the Australian Red Cross and orphans.\textsuperscript{122}

In 1943, for example, she presented a cheque for £966/4/8, the proceeds of a season in February 1943 in Sydney, to the Legacy War Orphans' Appeal. She even established causes of her own. The profits from Kirsova's season in Sydney in September 1943, a sum of £1,678, went towards establishing two children's playgrounds in Erskineville, a depressed working-class suburb of the inner city area. Kirsova planned a series of such playgrounds and had bought blocks of land for the purpose. The first of the playgrounds was opened on 28 December 1943, the second on 31 October 1944. The amounts Kirsova donated to charity were significant sums considering that around the same time Borovansky paid Zeglovsky £8/9/2 per week for work as a guest artist.\textsuperscript{123}

Kirsova did not seem to have lucrative intentions or an interest in prioritising her artists’ salaries. As pointed out by Potter, the appeal of paid work might have been a motivating factor for her dancers to pursue a career with Borovansky Ballet, bringing Kirsova Ballet to the fold.\textsuperscript{124} As Tchinarova explains in her memoirs, working as a principal for Kirsova Ballet was a remunerative, but short experience, as the company was dismissed in 1945 due to some tensions with J.C. Williamson, Australia’s foremost theatre manager.\textsuperscript{125} On the dismissal of the company, Tchinarova offers her insights:

\textsuperscript{122} Hélène Kirsova, Program for the Kirsova Ballet’s Season for Red Cross at Sydney Conservatorium Presented by Hélène Kirsova, in ‘Kirsova Ballet: Theatre Programmes, Ephemera Held at the National Library of Australia’, Macdonald and Masterson (Sydney, 1941); Hélène Kirsova, Program for the Kirsova Ballet’s Sydney Season in Aid of Legacy War Orphans’ Appeal, in ‘Kirsova Ballet: Theatre Programmes, Ephemera Held at the National Library of Australia’, 1943.
\textsuperscript{123} Potter, “A Strong Personality and a Gift for Leadership”, 68.
\textsuperscript{124} Potter, “A Strong Personality and a Gift for Leadership”, Hélène Kirsova in Australia.
No, it was not entirely because these people [the Polish dancers Valery Shaevsky and Edward Sobishevsky] left. It was also because she [Kirsova] could not find theatres to perform. One has to realise that at the time the only management that could really use a ballet company in a professional manner were the Tait brothers and J C Williamson and the ones who danced at the conservatorium or at the Comedy Theatre. Where do you go from there? You cannot organise a full tour. She was very demanding in her own conditions. She wanted it absolutely her way and it didn't happen, so little by little she just I think eventually left for Europe after having married Peter Bellew.126

The lack of flexibility in the creation of a repertoire that could accommodate the expectations of Tait Brother and J. C Williamson Theatres, at that time ballet was only existing in Australian theatre organisations, Kirsova’s lack of cooperation to pay her percentage for hiring Williamson’s venues might have been a reason that brought Kirsova Ballet to its dismissal.127 Reflecting on the reasons of the dismissal of the company, Potter states:

The reason or reasons why the company folded will probably never be known with certainty but, unlike Borovansky, whose correspondence with the Taits often smacks of obsequiousness despite his legendary temper, Kirsova was not prepared to be manipulated, not in any situation. And clearly, in any examination of the reasons behind the demise of the Kirsova Ballet, the issue of gender-bias, conscious or unconscious, in the male-dominated world of theatrical management in Australia of the 1940s cannot be discounted.128

Contrary to Kirsova, Borovansky was ready to compromise for the sake of his business. Borovansky was a former Ballets Russes character dancer who settled in Australia in 1939 with his wife, Xenia Borovanky. They founded their ballet school in Roma House in Melbourne that same year.129 As Potter makes clear, the Borovansky Ballet, founded in Melbourne in 1940, obtained financial assistance from J. C. Williamson Theatres Ltd.

The Czech-born Edouard Josef Skřeček (sometimes spelt Skrechek) had his name ‘Russianised’ into Edouard Borovansky when he entered Anna Pavlova’s Company, with whom he toured Australia in 1929. Borovansky Ballet was officially created in 1943, but started performing in 1939, when Borovansky’s Petite Mozartiana premiered in Melbourne at

126 Tchinarova, Tamara Tchinarova Finch Interviewed by Michelle Potter in the Esso Performing Arts Collection - Oral TRC 3120, secs 1, 00:11'29".
128 Potter, 70.
129 Salter, Borovansky. The Man Who Made Australian Ballet.
the National Theatre Movement. Former Ballets Russes ballerinas who joined his company in the early-1940s were Tchinarova and Baronova, but, as Kirsova did, Borovansky also gave Australian performers the chance to develop a career as professionals.

He gave local dancer Laurel Martyn, a principal dancer with Borovansky Ballet from 1940 to 1945 and the first Australian ballerina to perform the role of Giselle, the chance to learn dancing according a ‘Russian’ style. Born in Toowoomba, Queensland, in 1916, Martyn danced with the Borovansky Ballet from 1940 until 1945. She received her first ballet education by Kathleen Hamilton, a dance teacher in Queensland who Martyn remembered for paying particular attention to the role of music in ballet classes. Martyn trained with Hamilton during her teenage years, before moving to England in 1933 to join the Royal Academy of Dancing. In 1936, Martyn joined the Vic-Wells Ballet in England. During the 1930s, she also trained in Europe with different pedagogues, including the former Ballets Russes ballerina Lúbov Egorova, and Ninette de Valois, founder of the Sadler’s Wells Ballet (which later became Royal Ballet). British choreographer Ashton liked Martyn, and wanted her to appear in his ballets, because he was impressed by the technical training she received in Paris while studying with Egorova. When Martyn returned to Australia she, along with her colleague Dorothy Stevenson, were engaged as a choreographer by Borovansky; Martyn produced ballets Sigrid (1935) and En Saga (1941), while her colleague Dorothy Stevenson created Sea Legend, which premiered at the Melbourne's Comedy Theatre in November 1943. Founder of the Victorian Ballet Guild (1946-1967), Martyn pursued a rich artistic career as dancer, choreographer and teacher. Martyn is the artist who contributed the most to reconstruct the choreographic approaches utilised by Borovansky. In particular, Martyn provides information regarding the interpretation of a role as well as Borovansky’s work to maximise the expressive potential of his dancers.
Martyn explains that the transmission of the Russian ballet repertoire and styles put the local dancers in contact with performing principles they had only seen intermittently – with the tours of Anna Pavlova (1926 and 1929) and the Dandré-Levitoff Russian Ballet – with the famous Spesivtseva as prima ballerina – in 1934. Martyn articulated her concern for the loss of approaches to ballet-making infused with the Russian style inherited from Borovansky, as the British stylistic models challenged the influence of those derived from Europe and Russia. She claimed that after the Ballet Rambert tour in 1947

[I]t became the fashion to be like the Rambert ballet, the dancers, and to create ballets like the Rambert ballets. And so I think, to a certain extent, we lost our individuality to follow in the Rambert mould. And I think that’s still going on’.\(^{138}\)

Martyn’s discourse seems to precede the research analysis conducted by Ann Tuley, who demonstrated in her thesis that the dancing style imported by Ballets Russes practitioners was soon superseded by approaches to dancing imported from a British ballet tradition.

The third and last artist responsible for the transmission of choreographic values rooted in the Ballets Russes companies is Kira (Abricosova was her Russian patronymic) Bousloff. She came from a Russian family, studied in Europe and, finally, permanently moved in Australia in 1938. When, in 1987, Bousloff received the medal of the Order of Australia, a prize in recognition of the contribution she made to the development of ballet in Australia, Bousloff said that she could think about herself as a person with no regrets in life: ‘…It’s the Russian blood, the French education, and the adoption of Australia’\(^{139}\). She was born in Monte Carlo in 1914 to a family of Russian expatriates. She received her ballet education Paris, where she studied with Leo Staats in the early-1930s. But she was also tutored by Mathilde Kschessinska, Lûbov Egorova, Aleksandr Volinine, and Ol’ga Preobraženskaâ, who was remembered by Bousloff as a small woman constantly looking for technical perfection.\(^{140}\) In 1932, she joined Nijinska Ballet Company. In 1934, after its folding, the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo,\(^{141}\) who

\(^{138}\) Potter, ‘De Basil in Australia’.
\(^{141}\) Bousloff, Kira Bousloff interviewed by Michelle Potter in the Esso Performing Arts collection - ORAL TRC 2627; Mejlah, Esterpa, ty? Hudožestvennye zametki. Besedy s artistami russkoj emigracii.
brought her to Australia with the 1938 tour. Bousloff was an ideal interpreter, and also a reproducer the experimentalist works created by Massine and Nijinska, along with the Russian classics she restaged in the 1950s. She founded the West Australian Ballet in 1952. Tracing her life from her birth to the foundation of her company, Potter considers that Bousloff created ‘an environment for dance to flourish in Western Australia’.

From its inception, the West Australian Ballet presented the classical repertoire previously staged by de Basil’s Ballets Russes: Fokine’s Polovtsian Dances from Prince Igor and Les Sylphides, Coppélia (restaged Bousloff’s collaborator Marina Berezowska in 1956 after Arthur Saint-Léon), sections from La Bayadère (centred on the solo dances performed by the main character, Nikiya) and Don Quixote pas de deux. We learn from Potter that Bousloff danced in 1938 as a soloist in Les Sylphides, Aurora's Wedding and Swan Lake act II, as well as in several symphonic ballets, such as in Massine’s Symphonie Fantastique, Les Presages and Choreartium. Knowing her artistic background, including the roles she interpreted when she was a dancer in Nijinska and de Basil’s companies, enables me to find stylistic analogies between the ballet repertoires she used to dance and those she created for the West Australian Ballet.

It was common for the Ballets Russes dancers to train with Preobraženskaâ and Egorova. Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff were influenced by these two pedagogues: in fact, they shaped the dancers’ expressive potential not only on-stage, but also in class, an aspect that will be examined in the following chapter dedicated to the transmission of ballet technique and styles.

1. AUSTRALIAN DANCERS IN THE 1940S: A BALLET STYLE ROOTED IN DIAGHILEV’S TRADITION

The aim of this chapter is to explain how the transmission of the ballet technique from Europe to Australia at the beginning of the 1940s shaped the technique and training of the Australian dancers working in Kirsova and Borovansky ballet companies. In particular, I investigate the
adoption of the Cecchetti technique, and how it shaped Australian dancers at the turn of the
1940s. Here I claim that there are good reasons to believe that this technique, rooted as it was
in the Diaghilev tradition of Russia and then Europe, was the most suitable for Australian
dancers as they approached the choreographic repertoires of these former Ballets Russes
practitioners. Though the spread of the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) ballet method had
already left its mark on the education of young Australian dancers, I argue here that it was
through the study of the Cecchetti method that Australian dancers, particularly those working
with Kirsova and Borovansky, mastered the relevant skills to be able to accommodate the
expectations of these two choreographers. Exploring the ways in which former Ballets Russes
practitioners transmitted a ballet technique and a ballet style handed down from Russian to
European pedagogues and ballet masters, this chapter aims to pinpoint how the methodologies
adopted by Australian practitioners between 1940 and 1960 reflected technical approaches
developed in Europe until the mid-1930s.

The post War World I political and economic recession, the entrance of Europe into a new
world conflict must be intended as the main reasons that brought many dancers to seek shelter
far from Europe.144 Among the artists who settled in Australia in the 1940s there were the
already mentioned ballerinas Baronova, Volkova, Kouznetsova, and the male dancers Valery
Shaevsky and Edward Sobichevsky. As we read from a local newspaper, the settlement of
Polish dancers Shaevsky, Sobichevsky and Kouznetsova in Sydney was a consequence of the
outbreak of the Second World War:

Exiled by the Nazi scourge, three Polish patriots organised in Sydney the Polish-Australian
Ballet. They are the ballerina Raissa Kouznetsova, and two notable male dancers, Valery
Shaevsky and Eduard Sobichevsky. They left Covent Garden Ballet after its New Zealand
tour, intending to return to Poland. War broke, cutting them off from the homeland that
Hitler’s invaders devastated. Since all three are of International status in ballet, their presence
here is Europe’s loss and Australia’s gain. Acquisition of dancers so accomplished will have
a marked influence on our own dancers. The Company hopes to devise an Australian ballet,
and it is considering a beach setting.145

144 Salter, Borovansky. The Man Who Made Australian Ballet.
145 National Library of Australia, ‘Culture: Gain to Australia’ (newspaper article, 1939), v.2. [1938-1945 (small v.), Ballets Russes
[Microform]: Their Australian Tours, 1938-1940: Scrapbooks Held at the National Library of Australia.

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Kouznetsova was one of the former Ballets Russes practitioners who toured with de Basil’s Covent Garden Russian Ballet in Australia in 1938 and the first to settle in Sydney at the end of the 1930s. Together with Shaevsky and Sobichevsky, she founded the Polish-Australian Ballet in November 1939. She was also one of the leading ballerinas in Kirsova’s ballet production, taking the role of Mephistophela in Kirsova’s Faust, a three-act ballet in five parts with Henri Krips’ music score that premiered in Sydney. While her colleagues were trained according to the Russian Imperial Ballet style, Kouznetsova was educated in Soviet Russia and danced in the Bolshoi Theatre of Moscow before working in Paris with the Russian choreographer Michel Fokine. Though we learn from Alan Brissenden and Keith Glennon that Kouznetsova restaged some Ballets Russes productions in the active years of her company (Fokine’s L’Epreuve d’Amour and The Polovtsian Dances, Saint Leon’s Coppelia), and created two original ballets (her version of Peter and the Wolf and Les Nuits des Légumes), there is scarce information to trace her choreographic approach.

Kouznetsova and Kirsova in the early 1940s and Bousloff in the early-1950s succeeded in their attempt of founding their own ballet companies in Australia, bringing with them their knowledge of ballet, a knowledge cultivated in Europe while training with Russian ballet masters and pedagogues. They all shared a similar ballet education, as they often trained with the same ballet pedagogues and ballet masters in Paris. Among these, the Russian pedagogues Lúbov Egorova (Saint-Petersburg, 1880 – Paris, 1972), Ol’ga Preobraženskaâ (Saint-Petersburg, 1871 – Saint-Mandé, 1962), and the Italian ballet master Enrico Cecchetti, contributed to the development of their ballet education and the strengthening of their technique. In an interview with Michelle Potter in 1990, Bousloff explained that she received her ballet training in Paris from Egorova and Preobraženskaâ, and the teaching method that she adopted when coaching students at the West Australian Ballet was the one founded on the principles of Maestro Cecchetti.

But these Ballet Russes émigrés were not the first people to attempt to create a local ballet company. In 1931, a few years prior to the de Basil’s Ballets Russes Australasian tours, Polish

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150 Bousloff, Kira Bousloff interviewed by Michelle Potter in the Esso Performing Arts collection - ORAL TRC 2627.
dancer Micha Burlakov and architect-come-dancer Louise Lightfoot established the First Australian Ballet in Sydney. Although Burlakov and Lightfoot were pioneering ballet in Australia, they did not introduce their students to a specific technique. While we know the First Australian Ballet staged and performed a classical repertoire that included Lightfoot’s version of *Coppelia* and four ballets after Fokine (*Petrouchka*, *Le Carnaval*, *Le Spectre de la Rose*, *Scheherazade*) between 1931 and 1937, there is little evidence of a specific technical approach favoured by either of these dancers and choreographers. In fact, Lightfoot was critical on the development and spread of specific ballet techniques and saw the introduction of ballet syllabi as a commercialisation of dance as an art form. In her collection of essays, published posthumously in 2017 and edited by Amit Sarwal, there is a piece titled “A Danger,” which saw the introduction of an examination system such as RAD, and one can only presume Cecchetti as well, as a detriment of dancing in its pure form. She criticised the commercialisation of toe-dancing (a term Lightfoot used to refer to both classical ballet and dancing *en pointe*), blaming Hollywood movies for sensationalising dance:

As regards the position of toe-dancing abroad, one can say it is so popular that it seems scarcely likely ever to be otherwise. Thousands of pupils, every year, sit for an examination in its technique. Really the art is rather in danger of being commercialized, and in America it is all too often used for cinema tricks. Some of our best ballerinas are tempted there to sell their pirouettes for a pile of dollars; and lured before the Hollywood cameras, are foregoing their “immortal longings” – to assume the necessary role of glamorous ladies. [...] Toe-technique will always be beautiful, but technical virtuosity is not of itself sufficient. “Ballet”, that theatrical art which most utilizes toe-dancing, has now become a paying proposition and hence is a little on the wane.

Lightfoot’s critical perspective on the spread and use of ballet technique and associated examinations was in contrast to Australia’s progressive adoption of both RAD and Cecchetti methods. The question of how we are to define ballet technique needs to be addressed here. In this chapter, I have relied upon a definition provided by Susan Leigh Foster. According to Foster, technique is ‘the mastery of a specific set of movement skills’. Different ballet

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153 Foster, ‘Reading Choreography: Composing Dances’, 90.
techniques share some common movements and steps, they have a ‘lexicon of moves’ familiar to different dancers:

The ballet and many types of folk dance, including square dancing, each has a lexicon of moves from which the vocabulary of a given dance is drawn. The ballet's lexicon, consisting of approximately two hundred steps and their accompanying verbal referents—for example, arabesque, pirouette, sauter—are taught in most ballet technique classes and documented in several dictionaries of ballet. Although variations can be found from school to school, students of the ballet largely agree about the execution of these moves. This consistency, along with the names for the steps, demarcates them as the minimal units of any choreographed sequence. Since many steps in a given ballet are taken from the lexicon, the viewer well versed in it can appreciate a particular choreographer's selection of movement from and innovations in the lexicon.154

A specific ballet technique represents a vocabulary where the words contained in it can be used for different narrative purposes. The steps and patterns of ballet technique create different syntaxes.155 The body is trained to enhance specific physical skills that meet the needs of narrative purposes through an ‘anatomically informed regimen’.156 It was between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in particular, that ballet lost its original social function, which primarily appealed to noblemen and women of European courts in their attempt of fashion social engagements.157

Maintaining the balance between beauty and physical accomplishment, the steps of the lexicon were gradually enlarged. Higher elevations of leg lifts and leaps, longer balances, and new varieties of turns were developed, facilitated by the introduction of the toeshoe for the female dancer and lighter, shorter costumes for both sexes. Ballet masters such as Auguste Bournonville, Marius Petipa, and Enrico Cecchetti contributed substantial innovations to the lexicon and devised pedagogical techniques for its transmission, abstracting and purifying the lines of the body so that the dance no longer suggested idealized social behaviour.158

As Foster intimates, Cecchetti was an innovator. His Manual of the Theory and Practice of Classical Theatrical Dancing (Method Cecchetti) was published by the ballet historian and critic Cyril W. de Beaumont and the former Ballets Russes dancer Stanislas Idzikowski in

154 Foster, 90.
155 Foster, ‘Reading Choreography: Composing Dances’.
157 Homans, Apollo’s Angels. A History of Ballet.
London in 1922, and as already suggested, this method was the one favoured by Ballets Russes dancers.

But before the 1936-1940 de Basil’s Ballets Russes ‘cultural revolution’ and the spread of the Cecchetti method, Australian local ballet schools had already adopted the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) dance education method and syllabi. One by one, all Commonwealth countries adopted the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) educational system by the first half of the twentieth-century. RAD technique was based on the method created in 1920 and established by the founders of the Association for the Teachers of Operatic Dancing (later Royal Academy of Dance): Tamara Karsavina, Adeline Genée, Edouard Espinosa, Phyllis Bedell, Lucia Cormani, and Philip Richardson, all Russian and European dancers who marked the history of ballet in Europe in the first half of the twentieth-century. The Royal Academy teaching method was created to set standards for teaching in the United Kingdom first, then to introduce to Commonwealth countries; it arrived in Australia in the early-1930s. By 1955, Australia began producing its own RAD examiners and Martin Rubinstein, former dancer with the Borovansky Ballet, became a RAD examiner in the late-1950s.

As Tuley explains, embracing different ballet methods and techniques was due to Australia’s cultural attachment to its motherland and the diffusion of ballet styles and techniques as a result of the visits of different touring ballet companies. The geographical isolation of Australia and its constant interest in hosting different touring ballet companies could not permit the local dancers to be constantly updated with only the British ballet technique. This geographical isolation rather contributed to the proliferation of different ballet styles and methods, encouraging Australian practitioners to embrace them in different epochs. The development of ballet technique in Australia, as Tuley claims, is a consequence of the influence of different ballet methods that contributed to the creation of multidisciplinary approaches that Australia could boast despite its geographical isolation from Europe. In this chapter I demonstrate how the two decades following the settlement of the former Ballets Russes dancers in Australia...
were still under the positive impact that Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes had in the transmission of the Cecchetti technique.

1.1 PROMOTING A RUSSIAN TRADITION: THE TEACHING HERITAGE OF LÛBOV’ EGOROVA AND OL’GA PREOBRAŽENSKAÀ.

While Lightfoot found the standardisation of ballet technique an obstacle in the development of dance in the early-1930s, the Ballets Russes émigrés made ballet technique a fundamental tool in the training of their dancers. In the late-1950s, Borovansky also introduced the RAD method in his training, asking the German-born dancer Martin Rubinstein to teach it, as he was trained according to the RAD syllabi. Despite he opted for the later introduction of this method, I am going to demonstrate that the Cecchetti method was his favourite. At the same time, as documented in local newspapers and magazine articles held at the Melbourne Arts Centre and National Library of Australia, in the early-1940s Kirsova and Borovansky founded their own ballet companies and schools promoting an all-Russian ballet tradition. Borovansky Ballet publicity emphasised the versatility of the former Ballets Russes dancer: ‘Monsieur Borovansky, whose experience of 17 years with the Russian Ballet has singularly fitted [sic] him for teaching all branches of dancing art, will give lessons in – classical and character dancing, mime and make-up’. Articles and programs held in various Australian libraries often reported that Kirsova and Borovansky’s artistic education was ‘Russian’. Kirsova, in particular, promoted her ballet school by taking advantage of her artistic background: ‘The Hélène Kirsova school of ballet – Diaghileff [sic] tradition’. According to Sager, Kirsova’s demanding classes mirrored the quality of the training and the pedagogical approach that she received when she was a student in Paris with Preobraženskaà and Egorova. Hers and Borovansky’s training is mentioned in the ephemera and programs held in various Australian libraries and archives as an evidence of their professionalism. In a paragraph following a black

166 Rubinstein, pts 1, 01:01:38”.
169 Sager, Peggy Sager interviewed by Michelle Potter - ORAL TRC 3157.
and white photograph of Kirsova and Youskevitch in a tender hug from Fokine’s *Carnival*, we read as follows:

Mme. Kirsova, Prima Ballerina of the Ballet Russe [sic] de Monte Carlo, has been trained in the world-famous studio of Egorova in Paris. She rose to play leading roles under the direction of Massine and Fokine themselves; and her career, which culminated in the brilliant Australian tour of 1936-1937, included in its repertoire the principal parts in all the greatest Ballets of today [sic]. Mme. Kirsova intends to preserve and develop in Australia, with the aid of the undoubted talent latent in our young dancers, the original Russian Ballet tradition as inspired by the genius of Diaghileff [sic], based on its pure and beautiful classical technique.

The above-mentioned lines need to be contextualised here to better understand the meaning of the transmission of this Russian ballet tradition. The unknown author of the ballet program mentions three aspects related to the transmission of ballet technique to Australia, referring to three points that need to be further investigated. This is the establishment of Russian-ballet-based tradition in Australia, ‘inspired by the genius of Diaghileff’; the existence of a link between Kirsova’s training and the Russian ballet tradition she aimed to export to Australia; and Kirsova’s training with the Russian ballerina and ballet pedagogue Egorova. Preobraženskaâ received her ballet education in Russia in the early nineteenth-century, under the reign of the last Tsar, Nicholas II, and became the most popular ballet pedagogue with whom Ballets Russes dancers trained. Nevertheless, it would be inappropriate to state, as I am arguing here, that the ballet education that Ballets Russes dancers received when studying with Preobraženskaâ entirely derived from a ballet tradition created in Imperial Russia. Dancers of the Ballets Russes trained in Europe with Preobraženskaâ and Egorova, whose teaching approaches represent a substantial part of a tradition that flourished under Diaghilev era. Diaghilev tradition is only one of several traditions that have represented Russia’s balletic origins to post-perestroika epoch. Indeed, Russian ballet tradition and Diaghilev ballet tradition cannot be considered the same. Russian ballet tradition cannot be intended as a homogenous phenomenon, but rather as an umbrella term referring to distinctive epochs. Russian ballet has been subject to the influence of different artists (especially international dancers and choreographers during the Tsarist epoch) and political events. In order to trace the different

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stages of Russian ballet though history, I rely on the classification made by Vera Krasovskaâ, Russian historian who dedicated her career to the history of Russian ballet. In her *History of Russian Ballet*, a book never translated into English, Krasovskaâ traces the milestones achieved in the history of Russian ballet from its inception in the seventeenth-century up to the twentieth-century. She divides her work into three main sections:

This book concisely summarizes the main stages and patterns of this process [the study of the theory and history of ballet]. Here I am taking in consideration the history of Russian ballet on the Russian stages from its beginning to the Great October Revolution. The first section covers the longest period, which goes from the origins of ballet in Russia to the nineteenth century. This section is centred on the fundamental characteristics of choreography intended as an art form, to define the national identity of Russian ballet. It also focuses on the history of the foundation of the two oldest schools of our homeland, located in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, tracing the origins of the formation of ballet companies in both these two cities. This fundamental chapter is dedicated to the history of the cornerstone of ballet as a theatrical genre. The second section focuses on the second half of the nineteenth century. The birth of the Russian choreography and the establishment of the first Russian ballet theatre in the world. The apex of this process is reached when Russian choreographers meet symphonic composers. From their collaboration were born outstanding works, where the union between ballet music and choreography is regarded today as the classical foundation of the world ballet repertoire. The third and last section is dedicated to the development of ballet in the twentieth century, revealing the artistic contradictions arising in the ballet theatre on the threshold of the great revolutionary events. Centred on the opposition between the supporters of the academic direction and the reformers of the ballet art, this section analyses the historical inevitability and core of this opposition. The triumph of *Les Saisons Russes* [Diaghilev’s Russian Seasons] abroad represent the evidence of the fruitful synthesis of art and its realization on the ballet stage.171

Krasovskaâ places the Russian period I am considering in this thesis in the final section of her book, which is dedicated to the history of Russian ballet from the beginning of the twentieth-century to the three Russian Seasons performed by Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in Europe, between 1909 and 1929.172 By ‘original Russian tradition’, the Australian commentators who promoted Kirsova and Borovansky schools and companies possibly referred to the ballet style that the choreographers studied when they trained in Europe with Egorova and Preobraženskaâ. Therefore, they referred to a ballet tradition deriving from the artists hired by Diaghilev, and not to the ballet styles in use in Imperial Russia. Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff represented that European tradition and, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis, they transmitted it to

172 Krasovskaâ, *Istorijâ Russkogo Baleta*. 53
Australian dancers. Nevertheless, it must be said that before the foundation of the first ballet companies by the former de Basil’s dancers, the sour comments that started circulating during the first de Basil’s tour regarding the impossibility of having a national ballet company could discourage even the most enthusiastic Australian spectator. With the foundation of the Kirsova and Borovansky ballet schools in the 1940s, it became clear that these prejudices could be defeated. De Basil’s lack of trust in the ideal prerequisites that Australian dancers were supposed to possess in order to become established artists appears in The Herald in Melbourne in 1940: ‘Colonel de Basil said Australians lacked the art, finesse, fine feeling, grace, deportment, sensitiveness, tradition, or gift to make ballet dancers, but if we tried hard for 25 years we might have the tradition’.  

A few years later, Kirsova reacted to this statement. Soon, the Australian dancers were exposed to a ballet technique rooted in the Diaghilev tradition. Fighting against the prejudice that Australian dancers lacked the necessary requirements to become full artists, Kirsova’s voice stood out for the talented and skilled Australian dancers when de Basil’s words echoed in the spectators’ ears. Referring to the British-Australians studying dance and performing in colonial Australia at the beginning of the 1940s, Kirsova debunks this statement, claiming the British-Australian dancers possessed all the faculties to develop their ballet skills:

There is no truth in the popular theory that British dancers are incapable, through their temperament or physique, of becoming prima ballerinas or premier danseurs. It is often pointed out that few dancers of British origin have reached stardom in the leading companies of the world. This is true, but it is not through any lack of natural talent. Australians, in particular, possess all the faculties necessary. It only remained to those faculties to be brought out or developed. Recent visits by leading world companies have acted as an incentive to many young Australian girls and men. With experience, there is no reason why they should not reach a standard equal to any in the world.

Kirsova firmly believed in the potential of the Australian dancers to perform an already consolidated ballet repertoire. According to Kirsova, the lack of a solid ballet tradition in Australia had nothing to do with the dancers’ skills, but rather with the adoption of the wrong

174 Ballet program, 1943 in Kirsova Ballet: theatre programmes, ephemera held at the National Library of Australia.
ballet method. Kirsova thought that the British method was not the most suitable for a ballet dancer who aimed to achieve the greatest results in terms of musicality and interpretation:

There is one popular theory that I would like to contradict. It is often said that the English girls and men are not as suited for ballet as the Russians, the French or the Scandinavians. The English lack the necessary temperament, it is said. But I don’t agree. It is true that there are few British girls or men in the leading companies of the world, but the reason is not that they lack the necessary faculties. In the company that which visited Australia with Baronova there was an unusually large proportion of English girls, but few of them, if any, were given prominent parts. The reason is faulty teaching. I have known many English girls who, technically, were very strong, but they had no musical understanding or sense of drama. They also lacked grace and ease of movement. Technique can be acquired by hard work, but the other necessities must be carefully developed and nursed by the teacher. Bad teaching can ruin a most promising pupil. In the great ballet schools of the Continent, students are coached to appreciate music and taught to develop their natural dramatic ability. In England little or no attention is given in these directions, although many of the teachers would deny it strongly. They stress foot work only, and when they do pay any attention to acting or music, it is superficially imposed on the pupil like a part to be learnt.

Kirsova understood that a lack of a solid tradition had nothing to do with a dancer’s skill, but with the adoption of what she considered an inappropriate method of training. Kirsova thought the British ballet style lacked in musicality and artistry that prevented the dancers from developing interpretative skills. By musicality, here I am relying on the definition articulated by the dance historian Stephanie Jordan, who individualised a deep connection between dance and music, bounded in the equivalence of a gesture to the quality of a musical phrase:

The root of these ideas about equivalence is the essentially romantic theory of organicism, wholeness, a long-standing tradition in the arts of transcending dualities. […] Such unity or wholeness arises from the identity of spectator and dance, dancer and dance. There is the suspicion that language introduces the principle of duality, words arbitrarily related to what they want to convey. Through dance, history can be at one with the present, the body at one with nature.

The quintessential essence of this wholeness, according to Jordan, could be found in Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, as the artists collaborated according to the principle of

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175 Helene Kirsova, ‘Ballet as Art. A Summing up by Helene Kirsova’ (magazine cut, 1 July 1941), v.2. [1938-1945 (small v.), Ballets Russes [microform]: their Australian tours, 1938-1940: scrapbooks held at the National Library of Australia.
Gesamtkunstwerk, where music, dance, décor and design had to be one organically. While according to Kirsova, British dancers lacked musicality, Ballets Russes dancers knew how to convey emotions on-stage through this organicism created by movement and music. To help the Australian dancers develop their artistic skills, Kirsova aimed to transmit a ballet knowledge she inherited from her Russian mentors. This transmission did not pass only through the restaging of a ‘Russian’ repertoire, but it was also something that emerged from the teaching method that Kirsova adopted in her classes. In an interview, Australian prima ballerina Rachel Cameron (Brisbane, 1924 – London, 2011), who performed with both Kirsova and Borovansky companies, affirmed that Kirsova ‘was a woman who tried to mould her company in the Diaghilev tradition, where the music, the scenery and the dancers became part of a whole. There it is I think that the true beginning of Australian ballet lies’.

Kirsova and Cameron’s considerations regarding the role of music and acting reveal an important truth: it is impossible to think about ballet technique decontextualised from its artistic function. The attention for music, the ways in which movements could convey emotions on-stage and the development for what Kirsova called ‘dramatic ability’ represent the distinctive traits, I would argue here, of a tradition that has often been defined as ‘Russian’. Diaghilev ballet tradition, as explained, is part of a cultural phenomenon that started in Europe in 1909 and culminated with Diaghilev’s death in 1929. With Diaghilev the collaboration of different artists of Russian origins and, first of all, of Russian ballerinas and pedagogues became really strong. Pedagogues like Egorova and Preobraženskaâ represented a bridge between the Imperial Russian Ballet tradition and the Diaghilev style. They were responsible for the revival of ballet in France in the twentieth-century; their knowledge of classical dance, as they studied in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth-century, and their experience as Ballets Russes ballerinas was beneficial for the dancers who trained with them. Preobraženskaâ and Egorova, in particular, were praised by Krasovskaâ for being two important representatives of the Russian classical ballet in the early twentieth-century. Despite Preobraženskaâ’s ungifted ballet body (she had a weak back structure), Krasovskaâ describes her as agile, with an ‘extremely rare musical and expressive dancing quality, and gradually her devotion to art

177 Jordan, 18.
178 Rachel Cameron, Rachel Cameron interviewed by Hazel de Berg for the Hazel de Berg Collection, interview by Hazel de Berg, Audio record and transcript, 1 September 1976, National Library of Australia Oral History Branch, Hazel de Berg Collection.
guaranteed her a leading position in the [Mariinsky] company’.\textsuperscript{180} Studying with Russian ballet masters and choreographers, such as Lev Ivanov, Marius Petipa, Christian Johansson, and Enrico Cecchetti, Preobraženskaâ mastered a strong ballet technique, where ‘the distinctiveness of her movements combined with a sense of softness’ and ‘her plasticity was characterised by a sense of elegance that permeated her pure and precise figure. Among her qualities, there is an intrinsic sense of sincerity, and a natural ability to improvise to the music’.\textsuperscript{181} By plasticity, Krasovskaâ uses the Russian noun plastika, which here I am translating as ‘plasticity’. Plasticity, as a ballet quality, is described in detail by Elvira Roné, a student of Preobraženskaâ, when referring to the quality of movement on-stage. Roné describes plasticity as a pivotal element in the successful conveyance of beauty and meaning in ballet:

\begin{quote}
The Russian noun plastik, derived from the French noun plastique, carries a precise meaning in the world of Russian dance, related to but rather different from the French noun plastique and the English noun plasticity, which is re-used in connection with sculpture and painting. Plastik refers to a type of movement that is graceful but goes beyond grace, being broader and corresponding exactly to what in music is called legato. The Russian adjective corresponding exactly to the noun plastik is plasticnii. If an artist sculpts a figure of a dancer in which every detail of arms, legs, head, and so on is in harmony with all the other details, a Russian may say “That is a plasticnii pose”.\textsuperscript{182}
\end{quote}

Preobraženskaâ’s idea of plastik has been refined by another term: artistry. According to Roné again, artistry is what helps the dancer ‘feel’ movements.\textsuperscript{183} Fernau Hall, former dancer and ballet critic who worked for the Daily Telegraph, said that Preobraženskaâ’s contribution went beyond a mere study of ballet as technical skill:

\begin{quote}
This is something that needs stressing at the present time, when there is a strong tendency to treat dance training as a set of mechanical exercises that, if done correctly in the right order, produce the proper result after a few years. In fact, they tend to produce dancers who are a little bit more than robots, not interpretative artists - as they must be if they are to make their proper impact on the stage as soloists or as corps de ballet dancers. It is a great mistake to think that technique is something that is taught in class quite separately from feeling or artistry; the dancer must learn how to feel each movement, how to be an artist, from the very beginning of the training. By the time he or she enters a company, it is much too late to learn
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{180} Krasovskaâ, Istorijâ Russkogo Baleta, 193. Translated from the Russian, note 3 in Appendix.
\textsuperscript{181} Krasovskaâ, 193. Translated from the Russian, note 4 in Appendix.
\textsuperscript{182} Roné, Olga Preobrazhenskaya, 84.
\textsuperscript{183} Roné, 84.
\end{footnotes}
that dancing is an art; this must be an integral part of all training, and this was very well understood by Preobrazhenskaya.\textsuperscript{184}

The sense of artistry that Preobraženskaâ tried to transmit to her students was a distinctive trait of her methodological approach. By artistry, Roné refers to the particular quality a dancer should possess in order to ‘feel’ the movements, or, the correlation between the movement and human feelings that should be transmitted by the same. To help understand what we mean by artistry in ballet, I believe it is important to consider secondary sources reporting the use of this term in its context. Here I look at the way in which the ballet expert Geraldine Morris defined artistry within its technical context in an article dedicated to the dichotomy between the interpretation of a ballet role and ballet technique.\textsuperscript{185} Morris interviewed the former dancers and judges of the 2007 Prix de Lausanne ballet competition Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux, Irina Sitnikova and Mavis Staines, the artistic president of the ballet competition asking them to define artistry:\textsuperscript{186} ‘Sitnikova believes it to be “like love, it can be felt but not touched” and is essentially about “expressing your own feelings on-stage”’.\textsuperscript{187} Morris explains the complex nature of this gift by quoting ballet historian Foster:

This kind of approach, as Susan Foster notes, sees dance as an ‘outlet for intuitive or unconsciousness feelings inaccessible to verbal (intellectual) expression’. It thus cannot be analysed or articulated because it gives priority to some private thought or feeling, unavailable to objective, or even shared, criteria.\textsuperscript{188}

Morris, in particular, underlines how the process of judging ballet dancers in today’s ballet competitions is often based on the dancers’ ability to convey feelings to their spectators through their bodily expressions. In Morris’ interview, both Bonnefoux and Staines claim that artistry and a solid ballet technique are not two separate things, but rather intertwined elements that combine to make a performance more enjoyable for both performers and the audience alike.

\textsuperscript{184} Hall in Roné, 4.
\textsuperscript{186} Morris.
\textsuperscript{187} Morris, 43.
\textsuperscript{188} Morris, 43.
From the interviews she conducted, Morris realises that the judges of the competition agreed in ‘supposing’ that artistry could be considered the ability of a dancer to express their feelings.

According to the competition judges, artistry is based on dancers’ abilities to express their feelings. But as I suggested earlier this is a problematic notion of dance, since much philosophic thinking locates expression in the movement, and not in the dancers. In other words, while dancing, a dancer does not have to feel sadness or happiness in order to express either, so the dancer’s feelings are irrelevant to dance performances. Indeed, the philosophers Adina Armelagos and Mary Sirridge (1977) go so far as to suggest that dancers can only (my italics) be thinking about the movement. This does not mean that there is no expressiveness in dance. As McFee notes, art by its nature is expressive and the makers of dances intend the dance to be art and thus expressive, or at least open to interpretation. We judge the dance, or rather a performance, to be expressive by applying to it artistic concepts, which are found in the traditions and codes of the particular art form. In ballet, this can only reside in the choreographed movement.189

As suggested by Morris, it is movement that plays a fundamental role in the ways a dancer conveys emotion. One does not need to ‘feel’ the emotions to portray them effectively on-stage. It is the movement itself, produced through the relationship between pedagogy and practice, that produces a quality in its execution which endows the movement with emotion and, by association, the dancer with artistry. To maximise the impact that artistry has on spectators, we must also consider the relationship between a dancer’s movements and music, something that was indispensable also for Preobraženskaâ and Egorova, both as interpreters and pedagogues.

Formers Ballets Russes practitioners valued artistry as a fundamental component of the technical notions they transmitted to the Australian dancers, as this reflected the ability of dancers to interpret music. Baronova praised Egorova for teaching students to express their feelings through music.190 For her, the search for a harmonic union between technique and music was an indispensable quality. Baronova was not the only dancer to remember Egorova for her attention to expressivity with music. Ethery Pagava, choreographer and founder of the

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189 Morris, 46.
190 Baronova, Irina Baronova interviewed by Michelle Potter in the Esso Performing Arts collection - Oral TRC 3119.
French ballet company Ballets Ethery Pagava, was a student of Egorova in the early-1940s. In interview with the Russian ballet historian Mihail Mejlah, Pagava explains that Egorova’s search for poetic movements was an essential component in her classes. By poetic, Pagava refers to the ability to transit from one movement to another, without interrupting the flow and by listening to the music. This was essential to Egorova, even during simple class exercises:

Egorova’s school was famous for the beauty of the arms, the expressiveness and the poetic quality. In that respect, she was unique […] Egorova introduced us, the little ones, to the works of the great composers. She developed a musicality that is often missing with the contemporary dancers. Music not only accompanied the movements, Egorova taught us to listen to the music attentively and express it in dance. Classical dance includes glissés, assemblés, changements de pied and so on, and Egorova taught us how to join up the pas, gliding from one movement to another. Dancers often simply neglect this – it is as if there is a whole between two movements.

This flow and harmony between steps, and the intention with which a dancer approached the movement, along with the performance quality of the movements with the music, contributed to an approach that would not subjugate artistry and the dancers’ expression to mere technical tricks. The ability of mastering expressiveness of movement dancing to the music was the goal for Egorova and Preobraženskaâ. They taught their students to convey emotion on -stage, paraphrasing a comment from the Russian ballet critic Nikolaj Bezobrazov, they encouraged *dancing* the music rather than dancing *to* the music.

As I will illustrate later in this chapter, artistry and musicality were enriching, indiscernible components of the Cecchetti method. While, according to Kirsova, British dancers lacked musicality, Ballets Russes dancers as Kirsova and Baronova knew that it was indispensable for a ballerina or ballet dancer to convey emotions on-stage through their dancing. This knowledge matured, I claim, in the years they spent in contact with Russian pedagogues in Europe. In order to help improve the artistic skills of Australian dancers, Kirsova transmitted the ballet knowledge she inherited from her Russian mentors, developing it as the foundation for her own

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191 Born in Paris in 1932, Ethery Pagava is currently artistic director of the Ballets Ethery Pagava (balletsetherypagava.org. Her biographical information is available in French only on the company official website. Translating from French: “Child prodigy who trained with the famous Lûbov Egorova (Mariinsky Prima Ballerina and privileged interpreter of Petipa’s classics), Ether debuted as soloist in the company Ballets de Roland Petit when she was 12. She was appointed Prima Ballerina when she started dancing for Les Ballets du Marquis at the age of 15. She performed the classical ballet repertoire as well as the choreographies created by Lifar, Balanchine, Massine, Nijinska …”. Translated from the French, note 5, appendix A.

192 Meylac, *Behind the Scenes at the Ballets Russes*, 301.

school and company. This was not passed only through the restaging of a Ballet Russes Russian repertoire, but it also emerged from the teaching approach that Kirsova adopted in class. The Australian prima ballerina Rachel Cameron, who performed with both Kirsova and Borovansky companies, confirmed that Kirsova ‘was a woman who tried to mould her company in the Diaghilev tradition, where the music, the scenery and the dancers became parts of a whole’. As Preobraženskaâ and Egorova taught Kirsova, and Kirsova passed it on to Cameron; it is impossible to think about ballet technique as separate from its expressive function. Artistry, expressivity or poetics, attention to the relationship between music and emotion – and the development of what Kirsova called ‘natural, dramatic ability’ represented distinctive traits that contemporaries of Kirsova’s often called Russian.

1.2 A RUSSIAN BALLET METHOD?

In biographies, monographies and in different primary sources, we often read that Kirsova and Borovansky taught a Russian tradition, without specifying if this refers to a specific technique, repertoire or method. According to Frank Salter, Borovansky was considered a representative of the Russian technique. When Borovansky and his wife Xenia settled in Australia in 1939, the Association of Operatic Dancing was regarded as the most systematic form of teaching ballet in Australia. Salter explains ‘The Borovanskys opened their ballet academy in Melbourne, with Xenia teaching the Russian method in which she had been trained, and which she and her mother had been teaching in Germany for years’. Other articles claim that Borovansky’s ballet knowledge was rooted in the Cecchetti school. The problem in defining Borovansky’s teaching method and style needs to be addressed here.

Xenia and Edouard Borovansky started their career as professional dancers with Anna Pavlova Ballet, where Xenia danced secondary roles and Borovansky became a character dancer in the early-1930s. Borovansky’s ballet education, in particular, was rich and diversified. He trained with Egorova, for whom he often worked as a handyman, making small reparations on her

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194 Cameron, Rachel Cameron interviewed by Hazel de Berg for the Hazel de Berg Collection, 1.
house. Xenia Borovansky (née Xenia Nikolaeva Smirnova Krüger), who, according to Salter, was Pavlova’s niece, created a pedagogical approach based on her ballet education. Tuley dedicates her attention to the contribution that Xenia made in the development of the Borovansky school syllabus:

The Borovansky Syllabus is named for its founder, Xenia Borovansky. Frank Salter, Edouard Borovansky’s biographer, devotes a fair amount of attention to Xenia’s professional past as well. According to Salter, Madame Xenia Borovansky was the daughter of Bolshoi dancer Alexandra Ivanova and received her training from one of her mother’s Bolshoi colleagues “mainly as a social grace and with no positive thought of a dancing career abroad” (29). After the Russian Revolution forced her middle-class family from Russia to Germany, Xenia Borovansky took a job dancing for Pavlova’s touring company, where she met and married Edouard Borovansky (Salter 30). The couple immigrated to Melbourne in 1939, where Edouard established his Russes-style Borovansky Company [sic], and Xenia became the principal teacher at Borovansky’s Ballet Academy, originally called the Borovansky Academy of Russian Ballet, in Melbourne (Salter 78). After Xenia passed away in 1985, her pedagogical approach was passed along through a small group of her pupils, who have carried the method into the present day (Jones, 16 June).

Despite Xenia receiving, according to Salter, Russian training at the Bolshoi School, little has been said about the characteristics and the origins of her Borovansky syllabus. Former Australian ballerina Marilyn Jones, in interview with Tuley, describes the syllabus ‘as a locally overseen training system that fulfills the same roles as an international examination system’. The Borovansky syllabus shares common characteristics with the Royal Academy of Dance syllabus. But, as Jones herself admits, the ballet methods studied in Australia were also Cecchetti and Vaganova. Pulling apart these influences is difficult, but in attempt to understand how the teaching styles, favoured by the former Ballets Russes practitioners who settled in Australia, produced this sense of artistry in their pedagogy and their performances by embodied means, it is important to distinguish between the Europeans who trained with Russian pedagogues, and the assumption that pedagogy was purely derived from Russian methods. Here I would like to raise three further objections to the loose use of the term ‘Russian method’ as used by Salter.

199 Salter.
200 Tuley, ‘Up from (Down) Under. The Effects of Perceived and Actual Distance and Isolation on Australian Ballet Pedagogy 1851-2011’, 82.
201 Tuley, 82.
202 Tuley, 83–84.
First, as discussed by Tuley above, the Borovansky syllabus was the result of the coexistence of two different ballet methods that had already entered Australia by the early 1940s (RAD and Cecchetti). Second, I do not think it is possible to define the ballet training that Xenia and Edouard Borovansky learned when dancing with Pavlova Company and de Basil’s Ballets Russes as merely ‘Russian’. When looking at the origins of the ballet tradition represented by the artists who joined Diaghilev’s company and later René Blum and de Basil’s companies in the 1930s, it is clear that the ballet tradition did not simply originate from Russia. Though Ballets Russes choreographers and dancers were Russian, or were taught by Russian pedagogues, their style developed in France and Britain, where Russian choreographers developed and created their own choreographic repertoires under Diaghilev’s guidance. The so-called ‘Russian ballet,’ as referred in the primary sources held in various Australian archives, existed before the success of Diaghilev Ballets Russes: it originated from the collaboration of ballet masters and choreographers invited to Russia from France and Italy throughout the nineteenth-century. Therefore, it cannot be considered a ballet method, but rather a combination of different ballet methods (such as the nineteenth-century French and Italian methods) that allowed for the use of different techniques developed by ballet masters who aimed to enhance Russian dancers’ expressivity.

Second, the ballet masters who were working at the Russian court of the Tsars between the late nineteenth-century and the early twentieth-century were mostly invited from France, Italy and Sweden. Among the Internationally acclaimed artists invited by the direction of the Imperial Theatres were Arthur Saint-Léon (Paris, 1815 – Paris, 1870), Jules Perrot (Lion, 1810 – Paramé, 1892), and Marius Petipa (Marseilles, 1818 – Gurzuf, 1910) – promoters of ballets infused with pantomimic elements – Christian Johansson (Stockholm, 1817 – Saint Petersburg, 1903), and Enrico Cecchetti (Rome, 1850 – Milan, 1928). These last two ballet masters, in particular, coached Preobraženskaâ in her early career as ballerina at the Imperial Mariinsky Theatre. Johansson found Preobraženskaâ’s body too weak and, therefore, unable to perform the classical repertoire staged in the late nineteenth-century. When she was learning the role of the Tsar Maiden in Saint-Léon’s The Humpbacked Horse, Johansson used to insult Preobraženskaâ by calling her ‘hunchbacked devil,’ referring to her weak spine. While

\[204 \text{Homans.} \]
Johansson used to criticise the ballerina for her unlucky physical traits, Cecchetti perfected Preobraženskaâ’s technique by teaching her how to strengthen her back. Strengthening the body and, in particular the back, was one of the distinctive traits that made Cecchetti’s method an ideal approach for dancers in the early twentieth-century.

Third, I believe that the terms ‘method’ and ‘style’ are often misunderstood and should be disambiguated. Primary documents – newspapers, ephemera, and programs often use the term ‘Russian method’ where they perhaps actually mean ‘style’. Understanding the difference between method and style has an impact on the ways we perceive the transmission of the Russian ballet heritage to Australia in the analysed decades. The American dance historian John Martin explains that a dance ‘style’ derives from certain ‘crystallisations’ of ballet habits in a dancer. By this, he refers to the dancer’s approach to a movement, where the specific quality of its execution caused by the imposition of a ballet method. While a ballet style can develop by taking into account a number of environmental, geographical, historical and aesthetic elements, a ballet method can be intended as a vocabulary where procedures are ‘codified and fixed by tradition’. By method, we refer to a precise written system. In line with Martin’s perspective on the definition of style, Foster identifies style as a choice in the world of dance that ‘implies a background of alternatives, rejected in favour of some feature of movement that lends its distinctiveness, by signifying and identifying for, its bearer’. Foster derives her considerations from Barthes and Foucault’s considerations in regard to style; according to Foucault, style can be intended as the possibility of expressing the same concept in different ways. Relying on Martin’s definition of method and Foster’s definition of style, I would contend that it is possible to think about the Russian ballet tradition transmitted by Ballets Russes practitioners to Australia as based on different technical and choreographic Russian styles rather than a Russian method. The official creation of a fixed and clearly codified Russian method coincides with the publication of Agrippina Vaganova’s Basic Principles of Classical Ballet: Russian Ballet Technique, first published in Russia in 1934. The leading method characterising Ballets Russes dancers and the method exported to Australia is in fact based on the Cecchetti method, which started being codified in the years spent in Europe working with Ballets Russes dancers.

205 Martin, Introduction to the Dance, 95.
206 Martin, 109.
207 Foster, Reading Dancing, 246.
Egorova and Preobraženskaâ’s coached Ballets Russes dancers when Cecchetti was writing a manual dedicated to his ballet method, the *Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet*, edited and published by Cyril W. de Beaumont and Stanislas Idzikowski after its completion in 1922.\textsuperscript{208} It is undeniable that Cecchetti’s method had a relevant impact on the Russian pedagogues working in Europe in the 1930s. Indeed, we learn from Roné that being trained by Cecchetti in Russia in the early twentieth-century was fundamental for Preobraženskaâ, as it enabled her to strengthen her back and improve the quality of her movements.\textsuperscript{209} Preobraženskaâ was one of the depositaries of Cecchetti’s knowledge, as well as Kirsova’s pedagogue. It is not a surprise that Kirsova was remarkably famous for being ‘flawless in technique, with a back of purely tempered steel’.\textsuperscript{210} As already mentioned, the Cecchetti method represented a turning point for dancers’ technique. As we learn from Valrene Tweedie, the first Australian ballerina to be hired in de Basil’s Original Ballet Russe in 1940 dancing with the pseudonym Irina Lavrova,\textsuperscript{211} the lessons that the members of de Basil Companies had to attend were based on Cecchetti training. Only a few Australian dancers performed as extras in the *corps de ballet*, but in 1940 the 14-year-old Tweedie joined de Basil’s Original Ballet Russe Company and travelled with them to America.\textsuperscript{212} Tweedie’s adventure with the Original Ballet Russe took her across the United States, Canada and Cuba. In Cuba she started her career as a teacher. Back in Australia in 1952, she began teaching full-time in Sydney from 1956. Potter described Tweedie’s classes as demanding. At the barre, Tweedie set ‘Danilova’s grand battements,’\textsuperscript{213} an exercise in which the swing, the *battement* of the working leg would return to the supporting leg on a *cou de pied* rather than a fifth position. Potter underlines that Tweedie was trained according to the Cecchetti method, and this study represented a fundamental technical support for her own professional development:

Tweedie’s background in the Cecchetti system meant that centre practice and adage were gruelling. Her classes were, however, especially remarkable for the grand allegro sequences that came at the end of every class. She often said that her penchant for this kind of exercise could be traced back to the fact that throughout her career she had been taught largely by men.

\textsuperscript{208} Beaumont and Idzikowski, *The Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet*.
\textsuperscript{209} Roné, *Olga Preobrazhenskaya*.
\textsuperscript{210} Haskell in The Australian Ballet Collection, 5.6K A29.1.17. Collection held at the Melbourne Arts Centre.
\textsuperscript{212} Potter.
\textsuperscript{213} Potter, 5.
They included one of her earliest teachers in Australia, Mischa Burlakov, and the charismatic Russian teachers who taught for the Ballets Russes companies. 

Potter offers an overview aimed to understand the way Tweedie used to work when she was a member of de Basil’s Original Ballet Russe in 1940. First, the fact that Tweedie was mainly taught by men reflects a training based, according to what is claimed in Potter’s article, on the strengthening regime required for jumps and tours (or pirouettes), features that historically belong to male dancers. Second, Tweedie’s appreciation and use of what she called ‘Danilova’ grand battements reveals the existence of a meticulous muscular training for the working leg. Grand battements ending in cou de pied is an exercise aimed to both stretch and strengthen the working leg. This movement originates from ‘a throw’ of the working leg, a movement that originates from ‘dragging’ of the foot of the working leg en avant until the pointed foot reaches its maximum extension in the air. Then, the pointed foot is brought down towards the malleolus (ankle) of the supporting leg. While standard grand battements are usually performed ending in fifth position (where this ending implies the transfer of the weight of the working leg to the floor), a grand battement finishing in cou de pied offers a different approach altogether: the next ‘hurl’ into the air originates from the upper part of the leg, more precisely from the vasti muscles of the thigh. This does not allow the dancer to push the foot against the floor and ‘drag’ it to reach the highest position possible en l’air, as the starting position of cou de pied implies that the foot of the weight-free leg be pointed on the ankle of the supporting leg. This particular training can be considered relevant for developing vasti muscles, also responsible for the quality of elevation in jumps. Regarding the role of elevation in ballet in the 1940s, Laurel Martyn, principal in the Borovansky Ballet from 1940 to 1945, claimed in interview that while contemporary practitioners tend to focus on hyper-extended legs and elongated lines, artists of her generation were trained to perform high jumps. Martyn pointed out that elongated lines and overstretched legs did not have the same importance they have today. While today, it is a general trend to favour ballet canons where the dancers’ body is almost pushed beyond its limits (legs held as if they were needles positioned at ‘six o’clock’ seem to attract many ballet fans), ballet dancers in the early twentieth-century were not required

214 Potter, 5.
216 Glasstone, 20.
to raise their legs above 90-degrees. In Martyn’s epoch, there was not an almost compulsive attention for overstretched knees and high legs, and dancers were praised for other physical traits and ballet skills: Sono Osato, Irina Baronova and Tamara Toumanova, whose aesthetical beauty amazed audiences across the world, performed more complex jumps and tours than those performed by contemporary dancers, as they mastered a ballet technique aimed to strengthen their bodies.

I believe that dancers’ technique was one of the principal causes that made them look attractive and exotic to the Australian spectators. Pictures portraying the dancers in evocative poses started filling Australian newspaper and magazine articles dedicated to this Australian ‘cultural revolution’ since 1936. Indeed, Baronova claimed that the Australian spectators were mesmerised by the beauty of the performances, the costumes and the dancing, as de Basil’s Ballet Russes brought with them a repertoire that embodied a unique exotic charge. Photography contributed to fuel this exoticism behind Ballets Russes. In particular, the pictures immortalising the dancers in technically demanding poses were the reason why this sense of exoticism was amplified beyond the ballet stage. Pictures of Baronova, Osato and Toumanova started appearing in many local journals and magazines. Helen Ennis, expert of Australian photographic history, explains in an essay dedicated to the impact that the Ballets Russes touring companies had on Australian photography that posing dancers represented the best publicity for de Basil’s tours:

Dancers were photographed in costume and in character, both on stage and at select photography studios, where they assumed appropriate dance poses. Numerous individual dancers also had their portraits taken, either as formal studies or as glamour portraits. Nonetheless, the output can be loosely grouped into two categories: action photography, championed by Hugh P. Hall and Nanette Kuehn, and posed studio photography.

This ‘exoticism’ was immortalised in pictures today held at the National Library. Max Dupain was one of the professional Australian photographers who created a series of posed studio photography. One of his works, in particular, caught my attention: the title of it is ‘Caught in

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218 Baronova, Irina Baronova interviewed by Michelle Potter in the Esso Performing Arts collection - Oral TRC 3119.
Leap,’ a photograph portraying Osato and Skibine ‘suspended’ in the air. The caption under this black and white photograph explains that the two dancers were reputed to have invented this extremely difficult step. While it is understandable that advertisements served to promote Ballets Russes dancers’ skills, it must be said that Osato and Skibine did not invent this step. This is a Cecchetti pas de chat, where the left leg is in retiré positions trying to reach the right leg in the air stretched à la second. ‘Caught in Leap’ is a captivating title for this picture and paragraph dedicated to these two dancers who, in reality, are performing a Cecchetti version of a pas de chat, a step already present in the ballet method founded by Cecchetti that can be translated into English as ‘cat step’. For the execution of this step, Cecchetti pinpointed the necessity of stretching the first working leg in the air before landing, while the second working leg should follow the trajectory of the first one, enabling the dancer to close in fifth position with both feet, one after the other.

Danilova, Osato and Skibine were not responsible for the invention of any step. Rather, they developed sequences of exercises adapted from the Cecchetti method they knew from their training. Kirsova, as we read in different articles, mesmerised Australian audiences with her physical beauty, elevation and artistry: ‘Hélène Kirsova is one of the principal ballerinas of the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet. Like Adeline Genée, she was born in Denmark. She possesses an almost flawless technique’. The classical roles were those in which Kirsova received the most acclaim for her ballet technique and grace of movements:

For most ballet lovers, the revival of the classic “Aurora’s Wedding” was the chief attraction of the new program presented by Colonel de Basil’s Russian Ballet at His Majesty’s Theatre last night. And the highlight of the performance was undoubtedly Roland Guerard and Hélène Kirsova’s exquisite dancing in that acid test of classical technique, which was “The Blue Bird”.

220 Max Dupain, ‘Caught in Leap’, 1 December 1938, [Ballets Russes [microform]: their Australian tours, 1938-1940: scrapbooks held at the National Library of Australia].
221 Beaumont and Idzikowski, The Cecchetti Method of Classical Ballet.
Kirsova’s technique was steeped in the lessons she received from Preobraženskaâ, who, as Roné explains, based her method on Cecchetti’s concept of harmonious correspondence between upper part of the body and legs.

The teaching method of Olga Preobrazhenskaya was based, above all, on that of Enrico Cecchetti; she learned more from him than from any other teacher. Cecchetti’s basic concept was that all parts of the body should work together in harmony: trunk, arms, hands, head, legs, and feet. He could not stand seeing a pupil whose legs executed the steps as required but who did not know how to place the arms in position corresponding to those of the legs and feet. He wanted all parts of the body to be in harmony so as to constitute a single musical phrase, a single harmony. This concept was part of a rich tradition that Cecchetti inherited from his teacher, Giovanni Lepri, who in turn inherited it from the greatest teacher of an earlier period, Carlo Blasis (1795 – 1878).

Preobraženskaâ took over the great Cecchetti tradition and enriched it in many ways, establishing a branch of the Russian school that was to have worldwide influence through the dancing of her pupils, until when she developed her own ballet method. As we learn from Roné, Preobraženskaâ relied on Cecchetti’s teaching to develop her own method. She was able to transmit her teaching style to her dancers. As Sager recalls, Kirsova paid attention to technique as inherited by Egorova and Preobraženskaâ:

She gave tremendous classes because she had a background from Egorova and Preobrazhenska. Her classes were a short barre, then adage, pirouettes, allegro, beats - a tremendous amount of beaten work [batteries] for the girls and not only for the boys, and then grand allegro. In all the allegro you had to do it forward and then, without a break, reverse it. You had to be able to do fouettés, left, right, doubles, triples if you could manage. A tremendous amount of her class was on speed, footwork and brain.

All the steps mentioned by Sager are present in the method developed by Preobraženskaâ and, before her, by Cecchetti. Though dancers such as Sager took their exams in RAD, concluding with the final exam in Solo Seal, studying with Kirsova was fundamental to strengthen her technique. Indeed, Sager describes some of the sections that characterised Kirsova’s classes as very demanding, because the ballet method she utilised was based on the Cecchetti one. Not

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224 Roné, Olga Preobrazhenskaya, 120.
226 Sager, Peggy Sager interviewed by Michelle Potter - ORAL TRC 3157.
only Preobraženskaâ, but also other Ballets Russes choreographers and dancers, such as Massine, Ashton and the first ‘baby-ballerina’ Markova remembered the Cechetti method as a fundamental guide in their training. Markova, in particular, found that the Cechetti method enabled her to dance any repertoire: ‘Cechetti’s training stayed with me my entire life. I call it my compass. I could do anything modern after that’. 227

Looking at the way in which Cechetti wanted his students to approach the execution of the exercises listed by Sager – *adage, pirouettes and allegros* – illustrates quite exhaustively the reasons why former Ballets Russes practitioners considered the Cechetti training complete and strengthening. In his manual, Cechetti explained that the *adage*, or *adagio*, is an exercise focused on the extension of legs and arms, where the dancers must be able to keep their balance while performing slow and precise movements:

> You had to perform diligently and assiduously the exercises at the barre, the exercises of *port de bras*, and centre practice – which in the art of the dance corresponds to scales and arpeggios in music – you have prepared yourself for the execution of those movements collectively entitled *adage*. These are slow and very graceful movements, which may be simple, or of the most complex character, yet are so replete with beauty and delicate shades of expression that the manner in which combination of steps reveals its charms may be compared to the opening of the petals of a flower. The principal use of the exercises of the *adage* is to develop a sense of equilibrium in the body when it is supported on one foot. 228

In the first draft of his method, an unpublished draft edited by Enrico Cechetti’s son (Grazioso) in 1946 and held at the Fondo Brillarelli in Civitanove Marche (Italy), Cechetti described this section of a class as one of the most challenging of his method, as it was characterised by very slow movements, and, therefore, any imperfection could be noticed. 229

This description is omitted in the translation of the Beaumont and Idzikowski’s edition, but I think it is a comment that needs to be taken into account to understand to what extent the Cechetti method values balance and legwork. This comment appearing in Cechetti’s original draft in Italian reveals a care for the strengthening and correct use of the lower part of the body and the straight position of the back. This attention for legwork and the correct position of the back was passed to Cechetti’s students, such as Egorova, Preobraženskaâ, Markova, and

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Danilova, and, later, to dancers who studied with Egorova and Preobrażenskaâ, such as Osato, Borovansky, Baronova, and Kirsova. In contrast with the dynamic of the adage study, is the allegro; Cecchetti formulated a number of exercises falling into this category to enable the dancer to strengthen their leg and footwork. Beats and allegros, also mentioned by Sager, are exercises where the dancer must be able to keep their balance. But while adage exercises are performed on the floor, where the base foot can be flat or raised in demi-pointe, the dancer performing allegros must find their balance in the air. In batteries (called ‘beats’ by Sager), in particular, feet cross en l’air and change their position very quickly. For the execution of these steps, Cecchetti wanted the heel ‘pressed forwards and the pointe pressed backwards’.\textsuperscript{230} The ability of a dancer to keep a balance in the air entirely depends on their ability of making their instep ‘easy and strong’: ‘As you come to the ground in your pas sautés [an allegro jump], it is the instep which sustains your weight and, by a rapid movement, permits you to alight on your toes’.\textsuperscript{231} Though adage and allegro have different dynamics, the quality of legwork and footwork for these two categories must be impeccable, as the dancer must be able to keep their balance when dancing on the floor or en l’air.

\textit{Pirouettes}, also mentioned by Sager in her interview, are among the most challenging steps for a dancer, as the dancer’s balance must be held on one foot (in demi-pointe or full pointe) while performing multiple turns. Tours in pirouettes are divided into \textit{en dehors} (outward) and \textit{en dedans} (inward). In order to perform pirouettes, the dancer must be ‘slender’, their limbs ‘pliable’ and their legs strong:\textsuperscript{232}

You have seen that the body is supported entirely on the demi-pointe of one foot. Consider how slight is the base upon which the whole body turns. For this reason, you must press strongly against the ground all the toes of the supporting foot, so that by their expansion you will increase the size of the base and thereby materially assist the equilibrium of the body. Unless these precautions are taken, your body will sway and rock on the naturally convex surface of the sole, the equilibrium will be lost, and the pirouette rendered impossible of execution.\textsuperscript{233}

\textit{Pirouettes}, particularly fouettés, were highly valued in Kirsova’s classes. As Sager recalled,
You simply turned out to your own ability and her classes were excellent. You had to, in all the allegro, you had to do it forward and then without a break reverse it. You had to be able to do fouettés, left, right, doubles, triple if you could manage, whatever. At the end of every class we had to do fouettés and pirouettes.234

Sager claimed that Kirsova’s classes were centred on the development of a technique in line with the physical skills of the dancers. For this reason, Sager explains that Kirsova’s dancers used to develop their turn-out according to their own physical potential, though they were never forced to reach a hyperextended position that was beyond their physical limit. Though Kirsova seemed not to force an athletic physicality, as Sager explains, the dancers were still required to perform all the exercises according to a rigorous plan. Kirsova aimed to enhance a ballerina’s own physical skills. While on one hand a 180-degree turn-out would have not been an indispensable feature for Kirsova – as she structured her classes to create foot-work based on speed rather than on accuracy of closing positions –, she encouraged her students to work on resistance, a feature highly valued by Cecchetti, the choreographers and ballet masters embracing his method.

1.3 FLOW AND NARRATIVE OF THE CECCHETTI METHOD

Strelsa Heckelman (Brisbane, 1925 – Melbourne, 2012), another prima ballerina with the Kirsova Company, recalls the second act of Swan Lake as possibly one of the most demanding in terms of technique, as it featured fouettés, virtuoso and challenging turns. Only dancers with a strong technique could deliver the role of Odette. As highlighted in an article from 1944, Kirsova’s ballerinas were also good virtuoso technicians: ‘an interesting feature of Swan Lake is the 32 consecutive fouettés, usually omitted because of many dancers’ inability to reach the required number of turns. But three of the Kirsova ballerinas are able to turn the 32, a feature which caused a furore when first presented on-stage’.235 Heckelman recalls that Kirsova’s ballet

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234 Sager, Peggy Sager interviewed by Michelle Potter - ORAL TRC 3157, secs 1, 00:18:31”.
235 “Ballet Rehearses’ (newspaper article - Family and Teleradio, 6 April 1944), J. C. Williamson Collection_Scrapbooks_JOO-LEN, Melbourne Arts Centre.
training was largely based on Cecchetti’s method, which she praised for generating more fluid movements than those defined in RAD syllabi. Recalling Kirsova’s impressions on RAD technique, Heckelman explain that the fact that she undertook RAD exams was irrelevant for Kirsova:

The fact that I had done all these exams didn’t mean a thing to her. All she wanted to do was see me dancing. She brought it out of me, because the Royal Academy was very good grounding but also very staid. You could not learn to flow as much as you did with the Cecchetti method. It had much more flow in movement in its syllabus.237

Kirsova dedicated her attention to the development of harmonious port de bras, a fundamental aspect to restage a good part of the classical ballet repertoire she performed with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. The attention that Kirsova paid to technique accumulated around the development of physical strength passing through intense ballet training, culminating in her attempt to equate the physicality of male dancers with athletic skills. In a 1944 article entitled ‘Male dancers are not “cissies,” but athletes, says Kirsova!’, the artist talks about the importance of having a good physical preparation to develop a strong technique. In interview, Tchinarova recalls that Kirsova was constantly looking for technical perfection, and she spent several hours rehearsing with her company. Tchinarova also admits that her professional experience as a Ballets Russes dancer was indispensable for the demanding steps Kirsova required:

I remember I was a fairy in a ballet called Dream and a Fairy-Tale and I was having to do what I could do simply because I was very strong technically then, what in ballet is called ballonés on toes. You have to hop on toe with the other foot dangling about without touching the floor. She made me do that again and again and again on pointe and she made all the others work very, very hard. She really disciplined the people like we had been disciplined in the Russian Ballet.240

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237 Lording and Christofis, 11.
239 ‘Male Dancers Are Not “Cissies,” But Athletes, Says Kirsova’.
240 Tchinarova, Tamara Tchinarova Finch Interviewed by Michelle Potter in the Esso Performing Arts Collection - Oral TRC 3120, pt. 00:06:15*.
The strengthening of feet and legs often passed through the execution in class of virtuoso steps, such as *ballonés*, which were present in many solo dances of the romantic repertoire, such as Giselle’s solo of the first act of *Giselle*. *Ballonés* is a step described in detail by Cecchetti in the allegro category of his manual.241 Hopping on the toe of the supporting leg requires great strength, as each hop unloads on the ankle of the supporting leg. This diagonal of little hops on pointe presented in the solo of the first act of *Giselle* became quite famous in the romantic ballet repertoire. The French prima ballerina Yvette Chauviré describes this step as a moment of ‘culmination of Giselle’s happiness’.242 According to Anton Dolin, this solo was performed in Europe for the first time in 1932, when the Russian ballerina Olga Spesivtseva danced in London.243 This step, for Dolin, represents the expression of happiness. Chauviré agrees with him, commenting that the steps of the solo represent ‘the pleasure of love, of being loved, of being surrounded by love’.244 In Kirsova’s *Dream and a Fairy-tale* (this two-act ballet premiered on 22 November 1941, at the Minerva Theatre in Kings Cross, New South Wales), *ballonés* were possibly intended to communicate and emphasise the physical, graceful lightness of the Fairy Queen, performed by Tchinarova in the role of the Fairy Queen in *A Dream and Fairy-tale*.245

As discussed throughout this chapter, Kirsova praised musicality and a dancing style that took into account the role of music. For Egorova, one of her predecessors, music played a fundamental role not only in the performance of a ballet repertoire, but also in the ballet training. For Kirsova, as Heckelman pinpoints, technique did not have to possess only grounding qualities, it had to transmit a certain flow, a quality perfectly rendered by the study of the Cecchetti method. Technique, for Kirsova, served as a tool to convey a sensation rather than being a mere display of a dancer’s skills; a tool that was wisely utilised by another predecessor of Kirsova, the choreographer Fokine. Regarding the creation of his *Dying Swan*, Fokine wrote ‘the perfection of technique serves only as the means of creating a poetic image, a symbol of the perpetual longing for life by all mortals’.246 Also according to Fokine,
Cecchetti’s method was quite demanding in terms of technique, because it required the dancers to perform virtuoso tours, such as *pirouettes à la second* ad *fouettés*, steps that could not be performed flawlessly by everyone.\(^{247}\) As already discussed, Cecchetti created exercises aimed to strengthen and endure dancers’ bodies. In her history of ballet, Homans pinpoints the benefits of studying with Cecchetti:

> Under the guidance of the transplanted Italian ballet master Enrico Cecchetti, who taught most of Diaghilev’s future dancers in St. Petersburg and would later accompany the Ballets Russes across Europe, ballet became suppler and more malleable. The reasons for this were not immediately obvious: Cecchetti belonged to the old Italian school and emphasized repetitions and tricks (especially multiple pirouettes) and designed long, gruelling *enchaînements* to build strength and endurance.\(^{248}\)

Because of its strength and endurance, Cecchetti lent itself to strengthen ballet dancers’ technique. Roné explains that this method, on which Preobraženskaâ based her own, was designed in a way that could strengthen the physicality of the performer, making a movement seem effortless at the same time.\(^{249}\)

This search for a harmonic work of the different parts of the body and the strengthening of the same was not to the detriment of the attention that a student should have for the quality of a movement, its *plastičnost*, ‘to borrow the Russian term utilised by Roné, or its ‘flow,’ to quote Heckelman. As pointed out by Heckelman, the Cecchetti method was characterised by certain approaches to steps that rendered dancers’ movements ‘flowy’. The creation of a flow of movement, as Heckelman remembered in her interview, was another characteristic that made the Cecchetti method a suitable method for artists who wanted to transmit their ballet knowledge as they assimilated it during their time with the Ballets Russes companies. For Borovansky, in particular, the appliance of the Cecchetti method was a preliminary skill to create character roles in his original ballet production, an aspect that I will investigate in chapter three. The Cecchetti method, as stated by ballet experts Giannandrea Poesio and Toby Bennett, embeds mimic elements; according to them, Cecchetti’s own training in acting helped him to develop a teaching method based on exercises aimed at bestowing meaning and

\(^{247}\) Fokine, 32.
\(^{249}\) Roné, *Olga Preobrazhenskaya*, 4/120.
characterisation on and within movement. Cecchetti focused on the expressivity of movements of the head and the fingers. These details, according to Poesio and Bennett, derived from the mimetic gestures imported from the Commedia dell’Arte, art form that Cecchetti studied during his training as an artiste mime in Italy:

A ballet-mime related movement which recurs frequently in the recorded Cecchetti exercises is the one which is commonly referred to as the ‘blowing kiss’ gesture; it occurs both in the adagio exercises and in allegro, jumping sequences. The gesture is characterized by a movement of the hand passing near (or touching) the lips and moving away from the body (as if blowing or throwing a kiss).

Cecchetti’s concern for a dancer’s mimetic qualities revealed his idea of how both body movements and facial expressions contributed to the flow of the ballet narrative in his time. The narrative embedded in the above-mentioned gesture, ‘blowing a kiss,’ is twofold:

It gives focus and direction to the movement that follows and gives a potential literal and expressive peg for the dancer to develop his/her interpretation of the enchaînement. The focus of the 'blowing a kiss' gesture goes from 'me' (the dancer) to 'you'; 'you' could be the audience or another character on stage, in which case such a gesture could be said to establish a dialogue. You could also be more abstract in which case the result is more purely to give focus to the movement and to open it out and to speak of space in a more formal, non-narrative way.

Supported by the analysis offered by Bennett and Poesio, it is possible to find narrative strategies in the Cecchetti method that imply the use of mimetic gestures in order to render the ‘flow’ of movement mentioned by Heckelman. In a short subsection of the first draft of his manual dedicated to the history of the Russian ballet tradition, Cecchetti wrote that, despite the greatness of the Imperial Russian Ballet, which flourished when Ivanov and Petipa were appointed choreographers, the improvement upon mime skills was derived from his own interpretative ideas. This section is omitted in the Beaumont-Idzikowski English publication. In regards to the role of mime in Russian classical ballet, Cecchetti explained that since the days in which Petipa and Ivanov were appointed choreographers, mimetic qualities were ‘still

253 Bennett and Poesio, 37.
slightly unreal’. The search for gestures represented, for the Italian ballet master, an indispensable component to convey meaning through movement.

The success of the Cecchetti method over the RAD in Australia between the 1940s and the 1960s shares both historical and methodological reasons. From a historical perspective, the Australian spectators witnessed a migratory process where the adoption of Russian ballet styles, and the adoption of a ballet method largely used among Diaghilev’s practitioners, contributed to emphasise that sort of exotic charge that RAD promoters did not. In addition, the Cecchetti method allowed the use of exercises aimed to strengthen the dancers’ bodies, enabling them to perform virtuoso steps that became familiar to the Australian dancers since the foundation of the Kirova Ballet. The attention for a ballet method provided with set exercises aimed not only to strengthen the dancers’ technique, but also to bestow the dancer with flow, or plasticity, a dancing quality that found its completion when combined with musicality. Annette Gillen, a member of the corps de ballet of the Borovansky Ballet, believed that the key to the success of Ballets Russes in Australia also resided in the dancers’ musicality, a quality that for the Russian ballet pedagogue Egorova, as earlier explained, was indispensable to deliver a performance. Captivated by the settings and the dancing of Ballets Russes in their 1938 tour, Gillen believed these ‘Russian’ dancers had a poetry all their own. ‘They listened to the music,’ explained Gillen in an interview to Christofis, ‘they had soul and excitement. They might have not had the technique that dancers have got today, but it was too exciting’.

Reflecting on when she first saw the Ballets Russes performing, Gillen articulates one of the abiding concerns of this thesis, which is the choreographic influence of Ballets Russes companies in the restage of a known classical and an original repertoire in Australia. As we have seen, this success seemed to derive from the ability of the performers to be expressive through a ballet syntax that has its origins in the Cecchetti method and Russian ballet styles. It conveyed a sensibility, a feeling passing through musicality and embodied emotion, which were all more important to the performers than a flawless or exacting technique. As Gillen makes clear, audiences of the time found these companies to be a union between virtuoso technique and musicality, physical strength and interpretative skills. The ‘soul and excitement’ to which Gillen refers, represents and, to some extent, reveals a common taste for acting that

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254 Cecchetti, Trattato teorico-pratico di danza classica. Metodo Cecchetti, 48. Translated from the Italian, note 6, Appendix A.
superseded the meticulous ballet technique, as intended by the Royal Academy of Dance. To quote Gillen, ‘It was the “meatiness” versus cucumber sandwiches’. By this, Gillen seems to refer to qualities that Ballets Russes performers possessed, qualities in stark contrast with the mannerisms displayed by Ballet Rambert dancers, who performed in Australia in the late 1940s. This appreciation for acting, rooted in Diaghilev tradition, provided the ‘meatiness’ that Gillen found so appealing in Ballets Russes dancers. This was combined with a virtuosic technique that valued expression to the detriment of precision in completed movements and polished endings. The approaches to acting, musicality and embodied expression through balletic syntax preferred by Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff were the result of the choreographic values developed in Europe and transmitted to Australia for in the restaging of the Russian classics, which will be examined in the next chapter.

Gillen, Annette Gillen interviewed by Lee Christofis - Oral TRC 5783, secs 1, 00:10'.53''
2. FOLLOWING DE BASIL’S FOOTPRINTS: THE RESTAGING OF THE CLASSICS

The foundation of ballet companies following the success of Ballets Russes in Australia was an event that led to the restaging of a classical and a modernist ballet repertoire previously performed in Australia by de Basil Ballets Russes between 1936 and 1940. Kirsova Ballet, Borovansky Ballet, and West Australian Ballet gave local dancers the chance to perform classical masterpieces that were choreographed in Russia and restaged in Europe by choreographers who worked with Diaghilev. Together with the Russian classics, a term that I will unpack in this chapter, also the modern and symphonic ballets choreographed respectively by Fokine and Massine in Europe between 1910 and the 1930s became an important part of the success of these local ballet companies.

This chapter illustrates the processes carried out by Kirsova and Borovansky in the restaging of the classical ballet repertoire they performed with de Basil’s companies. The classical Russian repertoire I am analysing here is Petipa’s ballet-féeries, created in Russia in the nineteenth-century, and revived in Europe by Nijinska, Sergeyev and Fokine between 1909 and 1929.\(^{257}\) The repertoire that Kirsova and Borovansky restaged was familiar to the spectator who saw de Basil’s Ballets Russes performances: the evocative power of the ballet in works such as Aurora’s Wedding (1922), Swan Lake (act II) (1911) and Fokine’s Les Sylphides (originally staged in Saint Petersburg 1907 with the title Chopiniana and then restaged 1909 in Paris), performed both by Kirsova and Borovansky companies gave the spectators the opportunity to compare the interpretation of the Australian artists with one of their predecessors.

This chapter aims to explore the approaches to dancing and interpretation adopted by Australian practitioners dancing the classics in Kirsova and Borovansky companies. My purpose here is to examine Kirsova and Borovansky’s mode of representation, the use of a ballet vocabulary and the production of a replicative syntax of the Russian classics, a syntax that, according to Foster, brings the viewer to encounter ‘a variety of principles that inform the

selection and combination of individual moves,’ which gives the dance an internal coherence. After defining and contextualising the classics, I will discuss the choreographic approaches applied by Kirsova and Borovansky in their restaging of the classics and how the two choreographers encouraged Australian artists to find a unique rhetoric of movement.

2.1 DEFINING THE CLASSICS

In an interview released to Arnold Haskell during his Australasian tour in 1938, Fokine reacted to the dance critic who considered Les Sylphides a ‘classic’. The choreographer complained about the fact that in the late-1930s his ballet was considered a classic, yet when it premiered in Saint Petersburg in 1907 it was considered almost scandalous. As Haskell remembers in his Sydney Morning Herald article appeared at the end of the 1930s:

I made a pardonable error, therefore, when I said to Fokine, its creator [of Les Sylphides] “Your classic is as fresh as ever.” “Classic!” he replied, a trifle bitterly; “so it is called classic nowadays. When it was first produced they hailed it as a revolution against the classics.”

Despite the causality with which today we can refer to Fokine’s neoromantic ballet Les Sylphides as a classic, Haskell reminds us that this definition needs to be considered in the specific cultural context of the time. Here I would like to claim, using Beth Genné’s words, that Haskell did not make a ‘pardonable error’, but that he was right in defining Les Sylphides a classic. Ballet historian Beth Genné explains that ‘classic’ is a term that was first utilised in England by Ninette de Valois, who founded the Royal Ballet in Britain in 1931. Questioning the origins of the term, that was not in use before Ninette de Valois adopted it, Genné suggests this term started being used when Madame de Valois performed in the corps de ballet of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes between 1923 and 1925. Before this, ballet experts used the adjectives ‘old’ and ‘new’ to distinguish the repertoire created in Russia by Petipa, Ivanov

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258 Foster, ‘Reading Choreography: Composing Dances’, 92.
260 One case in point is Levinson’s book, where the author classifies with “old” Romantic ballets and Petipa’s ballet-féeries, characterised by the classical structure, where main dancers alternate in pas, grand pas, and the soloists perform divertissements followed by a coda, while the
and Perrot, restaged in Europe by Nijinska, Fokine and Sergeyev from the modernist repertoire choreographed by Fokine and Massine. Genné states that de Valois referred to the repertoire of ballets choreographed in Russia in the nineteenth-century as ‘classics,’ such as Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, Giselle, Coppelia and The Nutcracker. In her Invitation to the Dance, as Genné states, de Valois briefly mentions Petipa’s Swan Lake and Sleeping Beauty as fundamental to test a pure classical performer:

It was, however, with this ‘legitimising’ notion in mind, I believe, that Dame Ninette and her circle eventually begin to use the term ‘the classics’ when referring to Sleeping Beauty, Swan Lake, The Nutcracker, Giselle and Coppelia. They use the term in its broadest sense - not to refer to a specific historical period or style, as with ancient Greek art or literature of the ‘classical’ period or ‘classical’ ballet itself - although, to be sure, the ‘resonance’ of the period reference lends the term weight. Rather, ‘classic’ is used to indicate a landmark work - a work, like the Parthenon or the Sistine Ceiling, which is fundamental - a primer, an exemplar of style and techniques. These are works that a choreographer and dancer must master and then evolve from. This conception would be instilled in the dancers and choreographers of de Valois’ company from the thirties onward - both Ashton and MacMillan looking to the Sleeping Beauty, in particular, as a cornerstone from which their own art would develop and as a fount of inspiration to turn to for ‘lessons’ in their craft.

This definition is the one that I refer to when discussing the restaging of the classics by Kirsova and Borovansky. And Les Sylphides can be considered a classic too, given that it represents a landmark in the Ballets Russes’ repertoire. Les Sylphides was not the only classic restaged both by Kirsova and Borovansky. Among the Russian classics, Kirsova, restaged Swan Lake (act II), Aurora’s Wedding (a one-act ballet based on the third act of The Sleeping Beauty), Borovansky restaged Giselle in 1944, a full version of Swan Lake in 1957, a full version of The Sleeping Princess in 1952, and The Nutcracker in 1955. Though the Russian classics were performed also by Vic-Wells (later Sadler’s Wells Ballet and then the Royal Ballet) from the 1930s, it was the influence of the Ballets Russes that shaped and helped to construct a ballet identity in Australia from 1939.

corps de ballet perform disposed in symmetric group framing the ballet stage. “New” ballet, in Levinson’s view, avoids these schemes in favour of a group interaction. For more, Levinson André, Ballet Old and New, trans. Susan Cook Summer (New York: Dance Horizons, 1982), 37–49.


262 De Valois quoted in Genné, 143-144.
Though the British company Ballet Rambert, whose Australian tour started in 1947 and concluded in Perth in 1949, had a positive impact on local companies, it was Ballets Russes that, as I aim to demonstrate, inspired local dancers and choreographers to find an ideal approach to the interpretation of the classics. In addition to the already-known ballet repertoire, including Petipa and Fokine’s works, Ballet Rambert introduced choreographies by Ninette de Valois, Frederick Ashton, Andrée Howard, Walter Gore and Anthony Tudor. It was the first European company performing after the Australian tour of Ballets Russes. As Edward Henry Pask commented, ‘For audiences in Australia who had been brought up on a steady balletic diet of Petipa and Ballet Russe, the first impression was one of a gentle, almost sober company by comparison with the boisterous Russian and Poles who had toured here in the previous two decades’. Ballet Rambert graced Australia with a tour beginning in 1945, favouring a heterogeneous repertoire that combined the Russian classics together with an original repertoire born in England. In particular, were performed ballets such as Bar aux Folies-Bergère by Ninette de Valois, Frederick Ashton’s Capriol Suite, Façade, Mephisto Waltz, and Antony Tudor’s Gala Performance, Jardin aux Lilas, Planets, Soirée Musical. The stylistic differences between the Ballets Russes and the English ballet divided the world of ballet into two main parts: Australian audiences praised the Ballets Russes dancers for their interpretative qualities and their musicality, yet they appreciated the English ‘accomplishment’, to borrow a term from Hall. Geoffrey Hutton, an Australian critic who documented the tour of Ballet Rambert in Australia, described Tudor’s Jardin aux Lilas as a work of ‘utmost simplicity, with no technical innovations, which introduces something entirely new to the stage here’.

Because ‘it was an English company and as such presented Australian audiences with a very different repertoire from what they were used to,’ it had an approach to dancing that did not necessarily require innovative technical innovations. As it already possessed an original ballet repertoire created by English artists, Ballet Rambert might have not represented a primary source of inspiration for the interpretation of the classics. The ways in which the Australian practitioners were inspired by former Ballets Russes dancers and the ways in which Kirsova and Borovansky restaged the classical ballet repertoire reveals a strong attachment to the

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264 Pask, Ballet in Australia: The Second Act 1940-1980, 44.
265 Pask, 34.
266 Hall, Ballet in Australia: From Pavlova to Rambert.
choreographic values that they assimilated in Europe the 1930s. The influence of their mentors, I will argue here, was in the restaging of the classical ballet repertoire, in the style of the dancers’ interpretation, and also in the syntax of the movements.

2.2 ETHEREAL QUALITIES

Kirsova was the first of a number of European artists previously engaged in the de Basil’s companies to claim to be a proponent of Diaghilev’s tradition. She staged both a repertoire that was already familiar to the audiences just reinvigorated by the last de Basils’ tour, and an original repertoire based on European literature and folklore. Kirsova hired some of the former de Basil’s principals, who performed with the company until 1945, when her company was dismissed: these were Tamara Tchinarova, Raissa Kouznetsova, Valentin Zeglovsky, and Edouard Sobichevsky. As Tchinarova explains in her memoirs, working as a principal for the Kirsova Ballet was a remunerative, but short experience, as the company was dismissed in 1945 due to tensions with J.C. Williamson, Australia’s foremost theatre manager. Among the leading dancers, were also Australians Peggy Sager, Strelsa Heckelman, and Helene Ffrance. Their skills were soon recognised and valued by local commenters. In May 1944, an unknown Australian writer of the journal *Family and Teleradio* commented on Kirsova’s production of *Les Sylphides*, a restaging of Fokine’s original choreography. The ballet was presented at His Majesty’s Theatre in Brisbane. The skills of the Australian interpreters, the principals Cameron and Sager (partnered by Nicholas Ivangine), were compared with those of Kirsova, who was remembered for her ease on-stage when she was performing with Monte Carlo Ballets Russes:

The Australian girls trained by Kirsova have already gained much from her. In the Nocturne there was an appearance of strain and not quite perfect balance by the *corps de ballet*, and the first waltz was at one performance marred by squeaking shoes – perhaps due to wartime shortage of supplies. But Rachel Cameron, with the aid of a polished partner, Nicholas Ivangine, captured in the *pas de deux* the illusion of a soaring flight. Peggy Sager wove a spell by her delicate resilience. She has learnt something of Kirsova’s lovely flow of movement,

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269 Tchinarova Finch, *Dancing into the Unknown. My Life in the Ballets Russes*.
270 Tchinarova Finch.

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and by the lightness of her leaps suggested the silent dancing of a moonbeam in *The Prelude*. 272

Though, in 1944, the dancers of the *corps de ballet* of Kirsova Ballet may not yet have developed the confidence and assurance required for a professional company, Cameron and Sager seemed to have already assimilated their mentor’s quality of movement. In the comments to the performance of the Prelude of *Les Sylphides*, Cameron and Sager’s dancing is described through images that evoke a sense of lightness. Words such as ‘delicate resilience,’ ‘lightness of her leaps,’ and ‘silent dancing of a moonbeam,’ recall a sensation of suspension and delicacy that perfectly portray the romantic setting of this neoromantic ballet. 273 This classic is a neoromantic *ballet blanc* that, as Scholl explains,

recreates the era of romantic ballet, the age of *Giselle* and the original *La Sylphide*, the period when pointe technique was still developing. Like *The Swan*, *Les Sylphides* effectively isolates the nineteenth-century ballet’s white act, or vision scene, making it the ballet’s subject while omitting any notion of plot. 274

Fokine neoromantic ballets, *Dying Swan* and *Les Sylphides*, portrayed an ideal of ethereal beauty embodied by ballerinas who gave the impression of flying on-stage when performing *bourrées*. It is noticeable that the image of ‘soaring flight’ and ‘delicate resilience’ that Cameron and Sager were able to convey to the spectators are rooted in the evocative power of movements performed on-stage by Kirsova only a few years earlier. Conveying this sense of delicacy was the skill that most of all made Kirsova appreciated, as she developed as a technically strong dancer able to interpret romantic roles. Commenters of the 1936 tour remembered Kirsova’s interpretation of Odette, the Queen of the Swans in *Swan Lake (act II)*, and a one-act version staged by Sergeyev when he worked with Diaghilev and introduced by Colonel de Basil into his repertoire. The Australian critics who enjoyed the 1936 tour praised Kirsova for her ability to convey a sense of delicacy through her approach to movements. We read from an unknown writer of *Truth*, an Australian tabloid newspaper:

274 Scholl, *From Petipa to Balanchine*, 50.
“Le Lac des Cygnes” opened the season and the plaintive notes of Tchaikovsky’s music stole through a theatre hushed to an almost breathless silence. The stage formed a perfect setting for the delicate movements of Hélène Kirsova as the Queen of the Swans.

Hugh Hall, an Australian photographer who documented the major ballet companies touring Australia since the arrival of Pavlova in 1926 until the advent of the British ballet company Ballet Rambert in 1947, commented with enthusiasm Kirsova’s interpretation of the Queen of the Swans:

Tchaikowsky’s [sic] well-known music for this ballet has a lovely freshness and an essential balletic quality - rich, luscious, and lyrical, with a never-failing appeal. [...] On the opposite page, Kirsova and Yousskevitch are seen in the beautiful love-duet. Yousskevitch looked romantic enough to turn any maiden’s heart, while Kirsova’s interpretation was full of charm, and she had a deeper romantic quality than is usually portrayed in this classical role.

Kirsova’s ‘delicate movements’ and her ‘deeper romantic quality’, Cameron and Sager’s ‘soaring flight’ and ‘delicate resilience’ are all definitions that carry the expressive potential of an almost floating ballerina shrouded in an aura of graceful beauty expressed through controlled movements. The definitions used evoke ethereality, a quality, as the ballet historian Tim Scholl explains, that permeates the classical ballet production since the advent of pointe shoes:

The ballerina’s new prominence in the late nineteenth century derived from the advances made in female point technique. In the early 1800s, when female dancers of the romantic period began to replace the noble male heroes that dominated the ballet stages in the previous century, dancing sur les pointes began as a novelty. Poses and simple steps on the tips of the toes conveyed a sense of lightness and ethereality in romantic works.

The ethereality of movements in ballet is a quality that, as Scholl points out, emerged during

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275 “Swan Lake” from the French. This title is often used to refer to the one-act version of Le Lac des Cygnes (act II) is a one-act version restaged by the ballet master Serge Grigoriev after Lev Ivanov ’s second act from Swan Lake that premiered at the Théâtre de Monte Carlo the 21st of April 1932.


277 Hall, Ballet in Australia: From Pavlova to Rambert.

278 Scholl, From Petipa to Balanchine, 9–10.
the early nineteenth-century, when the Russian Imperial theatres started staging romantic ballets. By romantic works, Scholl refers to *Giselle* (1841) and *La Sylphide* (1831). He explains that ‘basic themes, plot structure, and imagery of the ballets of the romantic period served as models for the ballets of the nineteenth-century until the premise of narrative ballet was finally abandoned in the twentieth-century’. As the romantic ballet prototypes represented a starting point for the ballets staged in Imperial Russia at the end of the nineteenth-century (later revived in Europe in the twentieth-century with Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes), ethereality was a quality that permeated also Petipa’s grand ballets, ballet-féerie and Fokine’s neoromantic ballets, terms that refer back to the definition provided by Scholl. With the term grand ballets, Scholl refers to Petipa’s ballets that have dominated the Saint Petersburg scenes from 1860 to 1890 and represented the predominant ballet style of the late nineteenth-century. *The Daughter of the Pharaoh* (1862), *Don Quixote* (1869), and *La Bayadère* (1877) are examples of grand ballets. These ballets are typically structured in more than two acts and scenes, in contrast with the typical two-act romantic ballets. Its popularised version is the ballet-féerie, where

> [...] visual effects completely overshadowed the choreography; the dancing emphasized flashy virtuoso numbers for the stars and precision routines for the corps de ballet. A compromise of opera house and music hall aesthetics, the féerie was the predecessor of the showgirl revues and follies of the turn of the [twentieth] century.

*Les Sylphides* is characterised by the lack of a plot; here ballerinas wear a long, white tutus that recall the typical oneiric or post-mortem scenarios of the romantic ballets. The ballet is divided into Prelude, Nocturne, Valse, Mazurka, and a final general Valse on orchestrated Chopin’s music. In the history of ballet, *Les Sylphides* coincides with a Russian ballet epoch where, according to Scholl,

> [...] much of the style of the design in the new revivalist style recalled the architecture of Russia’s empire style (c. 1820 – 1830), a period that roughly coincides with the ballet’s

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279 Scholl, 4.
280 Scholl, *From Petipa to Balanchine*.
281 Scholl, 14.
perceived Golden Age, the romantic era fondly recalled in Fokine’s *Chopiniana/Les Sylphides*.  

These three categories, the *grand ballets, ballets-féeries* and the neoromantic ballets, find their roots in the romantic ballet, a genre that confers ‘an ethereal quality to the dancing of that period’s sylphs and willis,’  

where with the terms ‘sylphs’ and ‘willis,’ Scholl refers to the fairy creatures populating the second act of *La Sylphide* (libretto by Adolphe Nourrit) and *Giselle* (libretto by Théophile Gautier).

But how is it possible to identify ethereality in a ballerina’s steps and movements in grand ballets, *ballets-féeries* and neoromantic ballets? The way in which a dancer approaches a movement, or a dancer’s dancing style, reveals how it is possible to convey this quality to the spectator. By dancer’s style in approaching a movement, here I am referring to what Foster calls a ‘quality in movement,’ which can be intended as ‘the texture or effort found in movement as it is performed’. This quality, Foster explains, can be visible when comparing two dancers’ interpretations of the same role in the same passage:

> For example, one dancer performs the Swan Queen's speech to the prince, "Please, don't shoot my swans," with a light, tentative quality, thereby indicating her delicate, ethereal identity. The other dancer performs the same sequence with more force, directness, and quickness, indicating her regal authority and conviction. In either case the quality helps form Odette's character in performance and so gives Odette a more specific identity. Such interpretations, an important part of choreographers' and dancers' responsibilities, give characters a believable vitality and immediacy. If, on the other hand, the dancer, regardless of the role, consistently uses specific movement qualities, then these qualities help shape the dancer's own performance persona - a theatrical version of the dancer's personality.

‘Performance persona’ is a term, as Foster suggests, that corresponds to the dancer’s personality in their interpretation of a role. In her development of her performance persona, Cameron possibly tried to absorb Kirsova’s stylistic traits. Her ability to perform a leap recalling ‘a soaring flight’ was, according to the unknown writer of *Family and Teleradio*, a skill transmitted by Kirsova herself. Cameron’s quality of movement recalls the interpretation of her teacher in a role that was indispensable to convey the same sensation of ethereality and

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283 Scholl, *From Petipa to Balanchine*, 69.
284 Scholl, 89.
285 Foster, ‘Reading Choreography: Composing Dances’, 77.
fugacity. It is easy to imagine that when performing this romantic role – and by romantic role I refer to a role infused with a sense of magical ethereality typical of ballets-féeries and neoromantic ballets – Kirsova had a clear idea of the mood of the ballet; therefore, her performance persona was shaped according to the quality of movements required for the ballerina dancing the Nocturne, a role that was originally created for the Russian ballerina Tamara Karsavina. In a BBC documentary released in 1953, Karsavina claims it was fundamental for the interpreters to convey a sense of ethereality to the spectator: ‘The whole body must become expressive’ she explained, ‘especially the arms, which should move softly. They should suggest unearthly, ethereal beings’. The unearthly and ethereal beings described by Karsavina coincided with the ideal mood that Fokine wanted to render on-stage. This mood was clearly described by Markova, who was the very first ‘baby-ballerina’ engaged in Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in 1925, where she danced leading roles until 1929. Markova also danced the Nocturne in Les Sylphides. In a lesson aimed to share her knowledge of this role to the French Étoile Elisabeth Platel, Prima Ballerina with Paris Opera from 1981 to 1999, Markova explained that Fokine wanted to represent on-stage the vision of a poet, who is the only male character in the ballet. Ballerinas and the members of the corps de ballet act as ethereal beings governed by the moon: ‘Everything we did we used to do it for the moon. We could wear not too hard ballet shoes. There was no noise ever. It was just visions, dreams, all dominated by the music’ remembered Markova. Legs were never too high, not only because the aesthetic canons of the time in which Karsavina performed did not consider it a necessary skill, but also because Fokine wanted to let the spectator focus on the quality of the ballerina’s interpretation instead of her leg extension. ‘Not too high!’ shouted Markova when correcting Platel in her solo. ‘You see, today we see high legs; but [Fokine] wanted you and your feelings to be the most important thing to watch’. Ethereality was a quality that Markova claimed it could be reached through a visualisation of the mood and a specific approach to movement. Similarly, Kirsova, who worked in contact with Fokine, was able to master the skills required to render the mood wanted by the choreographer and described in detail by Markova. Video footage recorded in 1936 captures Kirsova’s ability in her performance of the Nocturne of Les

288 Dominique Delouche, Markova, la légende, Documentary (Arte, 2002).
289 BBC Dance Archives, “Les Sylphides.”
290 Delouche, Markova, la légende.
291 Delouche.
Sylphides, partnered by the Ukrainian-born Igor Youskevitch in the role of the poet. In this video, it is possible to understand how Kirsova conveyed her own ideal of ethereality through a carefully mastered ballon, a quality considered by the Russian critic Akim Volynsky indispensable to confer a leap a certain lightness to look effortless. ‘By ballon,’ claims Volynsky, ‘we mean a person’s ability to retain in the air poses and positions they naturally assume on the ground. It is as if the person was standing still in the air’. The Russian ballerinas, who most of all possessed and were able to convey ballon were, in particular, Agrippina Vaganova and Anna Pavlova, whose execution of leaps in Swan Lake, according to Volynsky, evoked the flight of a swan. While the execution of steps in Les Sylphides, performed by Cameron and Sager, lacked the technical rigour that Australian spectators had seen when de Basil Ballets Russes toured, their artistry, ballon and their expression where already present at an early stage of their career; all these are choreographic values transmitted through Kirsova’s pedagogy, values that her dancers acquired from her in a reasonably short time.

Watching the video footage of Les Sylphides from the 1936 tour, the spectator can grasp much of that ‘quality in movement’ defined by Foster. In fact, Kirsova had the ability to make a movement look suspended and effortless on-stage. When the curtain opens, Kirsova and Youskevitch stand at the bottom of stage, almost hidden by the corps de ballet, which is disposed in two diagonals, creating a ‘V’ shape, with the vertex located on the top of the stage, towards the spectators. When we imagine that music starts (the video footage is soundless), the ballerinas of the corps de ballet start crossing the stage with tiny pas de bourree, the arms held in fifth position and the head softly bent towards their shoulder, as if they were whispering imperceptible words to an invisible presence at their side. Kirsova and Youskevitch are at the bottom, standing with their right foot pointed in dégagés derrière. After the corps de ballet splits into two main lines, Kirsova starts running in a high demi-pointe towards the spectators, stopping at the right corner of the stage. She runs to the front of the stage, followed by her partner, and suddenly stops, suspending in a piqué arabesque. She gives the impression of being dragged by an external force; Youskevitch takes her hand and holds it gently, as if he wanted to prevent her from escaping. Pulling softly her arm, he accompanies her to the centre

293 Akim Volynsky, Ballet’s Magic Kingdom: Selected Writings on Dance in Russia, 1911–1925, ed. Prof Stanley J. Rabinowitz (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2010), 149.
294 Volynsky, 168.
of the stage. With two temps levé in arabesque, Kirsova seems to fly first to the left, then to the right, while Youskevitch, with his hands firmly placed on her waist, stands at her back to support her. Kirsova ‘floats’ in the air, while the tulle of her dress waves softly around her legs. The sense of lightness produced by the temps levé in arabesque gives a sense of ephemerality, as if the ballerina, once more, was trying to escape the grip of the partner. With a series of grand jetés en tournant, Kirsova and Youskevitch move in diagonal, reaching the front left corner of the stage. Each jump culminates in a posé arabesque, where Kirsova’s arms in third arabesque reach a high point in the air, above her shoulders. In this passage, the sensation of ethereality passes through the alternation of grand allegro steps and posé pique, or, in other words, of a movement simulating a fly and a suspension on one foot, with the other leg raised on the back, creating an angle of 70-degrees with the base leg. The arms try to reach an indefinite point in the air, at the height of the ballerina’s eyes, above her shoulder. The sense of lightness is also conveyed by the push the ballerina takes from the ground: when Kirsova, helped by her partner, pushes her foot onto the floor to perform the temps levé, she looks in front of her, with her head slightly raised above the shoulders. It is the intention with which Kirsova, in 1936, and Cameron, in 1944, perform jumps such as temps levé that arises in the spectator the impression of a soaring flight. The movements of the dancers are designed to portray and convey a sensation of ethereality that passes through the vocabulary of ballet technique. Nevertheless, the same technical vocabulary and ballet technique could be used in different ballet contexts to express different sensations. What creates in a temps levé and a piqué arabesque an idea of ethereality is the intention with which the dancer performs it. In this particular case, it is the intention with which Kirsova and Cameron perform jumps and suspensions on-stage that arises certain sensations in the spectator. This intention, as Foster points out referring to dance critic John Joseph Martin’s theories on the creation of a process called ‘inner mimicry’ in the spectator, is ‘deduced’ or ‘interfered from movement’:  

John Martin [...] took up the role of the emotions in empathetic experience, calling it “metakinesis” and argued for emotional engagement as one of the fundamental components of watching dance. Dance meaning was apprehended through the combination of kinaesthetic sympathy, the experience of feeling what another’s muscles were doing, with metakinesis, the process with which intention was deduced or interfered from movement [...] Martin first

295 Anderson, pt. 00:02:51.
297 The American dance critic John Joseph Martin (1893-1985) is often quoted by Susan Leigh Foster in her Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance in “Empathy”, chapter 3.
proposed dance as an event that would be replicated at a subliminal level within the viewer’s own body. He then asserted that implicit within any movement was an intentionality, a fundamental connection between movement and emotion, that enabled the viewer not only to apprehend the argument of the dance, but also to be moved by it.  

Metakinesis, a process through which a spectator can find an emotional engagement through an intention deduced or interfered from a movement, and ‘kinaesthetic sympathy,’ a reaction aroused in the mind of the spectator and produced by bodily movement, are two concepts that Martin synthetised into a process called ‘inner mimicry,’ which takes place in the ‘inner man’. According to Martin, and as explained by Foster, ‘inner mimicry’ corresponds to a ‘fundamental physical reactivity to all events’.

Since we respond muscually to the strains in architectural masses and the attitudes of rocks, it is plain to be seen that we will respond even more vigorously to the action of a body exactly like our own. We shall cease to be mere spectators and become participants in the movement that is presented to us, and though to all outward appearances we shall be sitting quietly in our chairs, we shall nevertheless be dancing synthetically with all our musculature. Naturally these motor responses are registered by our movement-sense receptors, and awaken appropriate emotional associations akin to those which have animated the dancer in the first place. It is the dancer’s whole function to lead us into imitating his actions with our faculty for inner mimicry that we may experience his feelings. Facts he could tell us, but feelings he cannot convey in any other way than by arousing them in us through sympathetic action.

Embracing Martin’s theory, according to whom it is our faculty of inner mimicry that enables us to experience movement as a carrier of feelings and sensations, we can assume that the dancer’s movements trigger a reaction in the mind of the spectator, bringing them to such a degree of empathy with the action happening on-stage. As such, the conveyance of ethereality from the dancer to the spectator is manifested through the performance of movements evoking it. In the Nocturne of Les Sylphides, this evocation is rendered by temps levé replicating the idea of a soaring flight and a piqué arabesque creating a tension of movement while suspending it instead of terminating it in a closing position. Running with quick, tiny steps in demi-pointe from the back to the upper-right corner of the stage, Kirsova creates the illusion of escaping from the poet. In the execution of temps levé, Kirsova takes wing supported by Youskevitch:

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299 Foster, 155–56.
301 Martin, Introduction to the Dance, 54.
with her partner’s hands positioned on her waist to lift her up, Kirsova pushes one foot against the floor to soar. Helped by Youskevitch, who raises her in the same moment when she pushes her right foot to the floor to perform a high jump, Kirsova raises her performing leg into arabesque derrière, while her arms gently caress the air in third arabesque. The replication of a soaring flight derives, in this particular case, from the interaction of the two dancers. As Foster explains, replication consists in the interaction of the dynamic parts that, in this context, contribute to create a sensation. This sensation is the result of metakinesis, a process elaborated by Martin and described by Foster: we realise that it is the approach to the execution of a temps levé that replicates the idea of a floating movement in the mind of the spectator. Kirsova bends her knee before jumping and, while pushing against the floor with her foot, she gives the impression of ascending, as Youskevitch places his hand on the side of her torso to sustain her in the air.

Though Kirsova was admirable for her ability to infuse the movement with an ethereal quality through an effective approach to movement that could create an idea of suspension, she was not the first to perform Les Sylphides in this way. Before her, Preobraženskaâ, who was in the original cast and danced the Prelude in the first production staged by Fokine, excelled for her exquisite ballon. Fokine remembered her in his memoirs for her ability to create suspended movements recalling the ‘feeling of ethereality’: ‘In this I made use of her exceptional sense of balance. She would just freeze on the toes of one foot, and in a dance almost without jumps was able to project the feeling of ethereality’.

The ethereal qualities of the Russian classics can be attributed to Swan Lake and the second act of Giselle. Odette, the swan princess in Swan Lake, portrays qualities such as lightness and ephemerality. She incarnates the quintessence of a romantic heroine. Confined by the wicked magician Rothbart in a lake made from her mother’s tears, Odette is a frail, supernatural creature (half swan, half maiden) waiting to be rescued by a man who can promise her eternal love. This role requires the dancer to convey ideals of grace, femininity, and ethereality; qualities a ballerina can show through specific approaches to movement. A case in point was the reception of Edna Busse performing with Borovansky Ballet in the role of Odette in Melbourne in 1944, year in which Borovansky’s Swan Lake premiered. As Pask recalls,
Busse’s interpretation was remarkable, as it portrayed the qualities required for the interpretation of this role, such as grace and delicacy:

The reception accorded Edna Busse at the conclusion of Swan Lake was well deserved. A delicate sensitiveness underlies her dancing, and there was a suggestion of classical vitality in her rendering of the Queen of the Swans. Her swanlike grace and delicacy held the audience entranced … the long and sustained applause, which compelled her to make many returns in acknowledgement, was evidence of the degree of discernment reached by the Australians for what is good in ballet.\textsuperscript{304}

In the \textit{pas de deux} between Odette and Sigfried, Busse, partnered by Kenneth Gillespie, performs a role that seems to share much of that romantic quality that Ballets Russes had when performing on-stage. Busse’s Odette has a specific quality in motion that reveals the attributes of her performance persona. The movement of the head, in particular, seems to emphasise the shy nature of the heroine. Finishing a double \textit{pirouettes en dehors} supported by Gillespie, Busse embraces her partner with her right leg held in attitude position. From this position, Busse gently raises her eyes up, and with a floating movement originating from her arms held in a fifth \textit{port de bras}, she lowers her wrists, crossing them in front of her waist, while Gillespie gently lowers her torso towards the floor. Busse’s eyes follow the trajectory of this slow, limp \textit{port de bras}, and when they reach the height of the wrists (now crossed at 45-degrees from the floor) she slowly waves her hands twice, with the same slowness with which someone would move under water.\textsuperscript{305} Raising from this position, Busse places her hands above her head while turning into \textit{arabesque} position. Supported by Gillespie, and balancing on the tip of her left foot, she slowly opens her arms from fifth to second position. The elegant grace of this \textit{port de bras} is there: it is in the impulse originating from the index finger opening first, reaching the sky to start drawing its parabola from the top of the head to the shoulders, in the head softly turned back, where Gillespie is standing while holding firmly her waist, in her eyes contemplating his rescuer and in the arms calmly floating in second \textit{arabesque}.

The same \textit{pas de deux} of Le Lac des Cygnes featuring Baronova in the leading role, partnered by Anton Dolin, performed by Covent Garden Ballets Russes in Melbourne in 1938, presents features that recall that sense of grace that Busse was trying to render on-stage only few years

\textsuperscript{304} Pask, \textit{Ballet in Australia: The Second Act 1940-1980}, 86.
\textsuperscript{305} Doc K. Sternberg, \textit{Spotlight on Australian Ballet}, VHS, ballet documentary (National Film Board, 1948), pt. 00:32:46.
later. Both Busse and Baronova in the *pas de deux* of *Le Lac des Cygnes* render an idea of feminine grace that passes through the soft transitions of their dancing. Watching he same fragment it is possible to see that also Baronova embraces her partner with her leg in *attitude derrière*, slowly opening her arms from fifth to second position. The whole transition from one pose to the other is characterised by the intense, long-lasting look she gives Dolin. Though this *pas de deux* celebrates the love idyll between Odette and Sigfried, Baronova’s interpretation is constantly permeated by sense of scare rendered by the penetrating eyes of the Russian ballerina, a dramatic element missing in Busse’s interpretation. The reason for these different approaches can be traced, as I explained through the support of Foster’s definition of performance persona, to two different styles and quality in movement. In fact, the two interpreters were able to convey a sense of feminine grace through an approach to dancing that is exquisitely personal. Stretching her leg from *arabesque* to *penché*, Busse takes some seconds before raising her torso and placing her leg in *attitude*. Instead, we can see a different quality in Baronova’s interpretation, as she performs a triple *pirouette* and, ending with a leg in *attitude derrière*, she terminates the movement looking backwards at her partner, prolongating their eye contact. Despite these choreographic differences in the execution of the *pas*, both Baronova and Busse express the ethereal nature of Odette through unique qualities in movement, which is provided by their own ways of approaching steps and poses and their facial expressions. It is their eyes, indeed, that are shown signs of a suffering condition, a condition that coincides with Odette’s being entrapped in a spell, where she can be human only at night. Baronova and Busse’s eyes accompany all the movement in the *adagio*, creating a sensation of harmony that originates from the opening of the left leg and the arms *à la seconde* in Baronova and from the *arabesque* in Busse until their placement in *attitude*. According to Volynsky, the *adagio* in Ivanov’s choreography was centred on the idea of the Swan and, what he called, its ‘semi-existence’. Describing its technical features, Volynsky refers to the section of the *adagio* I have analysed above as technically demanding:

The adagio is long and complex. It is full of figures: double pirouettes with arms lifted upward; arabesques across the diagonal of the stage with aerial support from the danseur. The ballerina throws herself into the arms of her partner and extends her legs full length. This is the moment of the fading of the chimes of love. But how deeply the musical theme needs to be inhaled, embodied, and penetrated here! The body is in repose, but meanwhile it shakes with a silent, dying passion, basking and resting in the delightful peace of semi-existence.

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The ethereal qualities of a ballerina performing Ivanov’s adagio emerge through the quality in motion aimed to remind the spectator of Odette’s semi-existence. Though Baronova and Busse perform slightly different steps, their approaches to movement reveal, in both cases, Odette’s condition of semi-existence, a condition that, according to Volynsky, expresses all its dying passion in Tchaikovsky’s penetrating music.

The intention with which the dancer performs a step must take into account its relation to the music. The synchronicity of the steps and music guarantees a harmonious result. Once more, it is the case of Fokine’s Les Sylphides that serves as a useful example to understand the transmission of modes of representation from Ballets Russes to Australian dancers. Gillen recalls the importance that music had in the attempt of rendering the mood of Les Sylphides. She claims that Borovansky’s restaging of this ballet was more ‘moving’ compared to the one staged by Baronova in 1986, as the dancers used to listen to the music. While in Borovansky’s version the piano was playing more slowly, softly, as fast music could not give the dancers of the Australian Ballet the chance to ‘float’ on Chopin’s notes. For Gillen the distinctive traits of the influential Ballets Russes were lost forever and the Australian Ballet was too ‘anglicised’:

We’ve become very anglicised, I think. I had hoped – that with Baronova [coaching] Sylphides for The Australian Ballet – that they would have the essence of the ballet, but they just didn’t seem to be able to get off the ground. They didn’t have that ethereal quality of looking beyond. And flying, almost. I wonder – did they listen to the music? That was the aim. And that’s what she’s always saying, ‘They don’t listen to the music.’

While Gillen in 2007 was more generic about what was her impression of Borovansky and Baronova’s version of the Les Sylphides, Sager remembered how important it was for Kirsova to dance to the music. Sager remembered that for Kirsova it was indispensable to focus on the ending of the step on a particular note:

She worked and worked with me so that I could get the little posé assemblé and land on that note that you just hear (I think it might be on the harp). But you have to land on it and she

worked me so hard. I took my shoes off and there was an awful lot of blood. But she wanted it to be perfect. She was a perfectionist in every way, artistically and musically.\textsuperscript{309}

I find Sager’s words relevant to understand the technical and interpretative qualities that Kirsova demanded. The example of the \textit{posé assemble} described by Sager above, reveals the importance that the synchrony between movement and music had for Kirsova. \textit{Posé assemble} is another \textit{allegro} step belonging to Cecchetti method, in which the dancer must be able to combine two movements, where first one leg is extended to the front in a leap, and, secondly, the feet close at the same time in fifth position. The importance of music for Kirsova recalls the musical sensibility of Fokine, her predecessor and mentor, for whom it was indispensable to convey the synergy between movement and musical meaning. Despite Fokine’s rejection for improvisation on-stage, interestingly, he admitted that he did not program specific endings for all the dances in \textit{Les Sylphides}, instead he decided to let his dancers improvise them.

\begin{quote}
I did not plan to have a different ending for each dance. It just so happened that in the Mazurka Pavlova ran off the stage; in the Waltz duet she left with a \textit{pas de bourrée} on toes; Karsavina, terminated her number with a final pirouette and stop with her back to the audience; Nijinsky, after his jump, fell on one knee, with his hand extended as if to a vision; Preobrajenska froze on toes facing the audience as if imploring the orchestra to play still more softly.\textsuperscript{310}
\end{quote}

As her predecessor, Kirsova valued the role of music and the visual impact of each movement when performed on some particular note of the score. Whether this was a jump or a landing on the fading notes of the Mazurka or Waltz, \textit{Les Sylphides}, as performed by the Kirsova Ballet, conserved this devotion to musicality, still ‘forgetting’ technique – precise positions or executions of balletic syntax, in praise of an interrupted synergy between movement and music. Kirsova believed that ‘the essence of ballet is the perfect marriage of movement to music, and thus the character of the ballet is determined by the music to be interpreted’.\textsuperscript{311} As Stephanie Jordan explains, there are structural relationships between music and dance in \textit{Les Sylphides}:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{309} Sager, Peggy Sager interviewed by Michelle Potter - ORAL TRC 3157.  
\textsuperscript{310} Fokine, \textit{Memoirs of a Ballet Master}, 130.  
\textsuperscript{311} Hélène Kirsova, Interview with Madame Hélène Kirsova, broadcast by 5 KA, interview by Jean Forward, 22 February 1944, J. C. Williamson Collection, Melbourne Arts Centre, Arts Centre.
Fokine himself taught continuity across dance phrases and through musical cadences, and it is significant that when he was not around to direct, a dull adherence to beat would often return. Irina Baronova, rehearsing the Prelude for a lecture demonstration, pointed out moments where the movement should be slightly delayed after its related beat: she asked her dancer to land an assemblé just after the moment of beat, to step into onto pointe just after the note in order to give the impression of sustaining the suspension longer.\textsuperscript{312}

Jordan’s considerations are in line with the point raised by Gillen, as they both agree on the correspondence that should exist between music and steps in the performance of \textit{Les Sylphides}. In this particular case, the assemblé in the Prelude, as Kirsova understood, had to be on a specific beat. Jordan recalled the importance that music had for Fokine as well as for Markova:

Fokine said about this dance: ‘Please, listen to the music, let it tell you what to do. Let it carry you in its arms.’ As Alicia Markova points out, Fokine wanted the effect to be spontaneous. [...] The style of \textit{Les Sylphides} is a style of listening and responding to, or echoing, the music, dancing to ‘the call of the note’, the effect improvisatory. Thus, the dancer lets the audience know that the music prompts performance of the dance, an interpretative stage beyond the actual steps. With this effect, despite fairly predictable structural relationships between music and dance, \textit{Les Sylphides} comes alive and look unpredictable.\textsuperscript{313}

Jordan’s observation allows us to make different considerations regarding the relationship between the music and choreography. First, despite the synchronism between musical phrases and movements, \textit{Les Sylphides} does not possess a Dalcrozan mechanical approach to movement according to which one step should correspond to one specific note. Second, Jordan investigates the relationship between the dancing and its ‘listening and responding to or echoing the music’. This aspect, in particular, is relevant to understand the way in which dancers can convey the sense of ethereality in Fokine’s neoclassical ballets through the use of gestures that anticipate, listen to and echo the notes of the orchestra.

\subsection*{2.3 THE SEARCH OF A UNIQUE RHETORIC OF MOVEMENT}

\textsuperscript{313} Jordan, 35.
While Kirsova staged ballets of de Basil’s repertoire and other new choreographic works she created for her own company across four years, Borovansky, as Ingram suggests, spent more time restaging de Basil’s works in the early years of his company. Borovansky, as Kirsova did, gave Australian dancers the chance to develop as leading ballerinas. Artists such as Martyn, Stevenson, and Busse performed both Borovansky’s ‘Russian’ remakes and original ballets. These ballerinas became familiar with the Russian repertoire in a reasonably short time and, according to the critics of that time, they performed it masterfully, in styles reminiscent of de Basil’s Ballets Russes. Borovansky restaged almost all the ballets presented by de Basil’s companies: Swan Lake (1944), Giselle (1944), The Sleeping Princess (1950), Nutcracker (1955), Symphonie Fantastique (1955), and Carnaval (1956). These represented a bedrock for the development of dancers’ skills. For these performances, Borovansky never imposed his dancers to imitate the ballet style of any particular Ballets Russes artist. Martyn, one of the principals of Borovansky Ballet since its foundation, explained that for Borovansky there was more than one way of interpreting a role. He created lyrical roles for Martyn and dramatic ones for Stevenson. In an interview, Martyn explained the approaches to acting preferred by Borovansky:

Boro really brought out the best in his dancers. […] He did not say “you are a Swan Princess, and you dance it because you are a Swan Princess, but he said “I think you might be an interesting Swan Princess” and to Edna [Busse] “you will be a different Swan Princess, but do not do the same thing”. We were never pushed into a mould and this is why the Borovansky dancers are remembered today as individuals.

Martyn believed that it was Borovansky’s way of letting each dancer’s personality emerge in the interpretation of a role to make Australian practitioners deserved to be ‘remembered for their liveliness and vitality’. This was a lesson that Borovansky seemed to have already assimilated in the 1920s, years in which he performed as a solo dancer with the Anna Pavlova Company. Borovansky was often asked to substitute Zalevsky in his principal roles, so he

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317 Martyn, Laurel: Interviewed by James Murdoch: Oral History, pt. 00:26'10".
318 Martyn, Laurel: Interviewed by James Murdoch: Oral History, pt. 00:30'30".
always had to learn the other dancer’s parts. Borovansky became adept at learning a role, not at imitating one specific dancer. He suggested that one of the most difficult aspects of performing a role originally created for another dancer was to keep one’s individuality in terms of mannerism and expression.

I was, of course, subject of much criticism while I was rehearsing; there was always someone to tell me “Zalevsky did it this way” and “Zalevsky did it that way” and that I was trying to dance in my own way instead of the original manner. However, I was able to overcome all these difficulties and, in the end, to create the roles just as I felt them. It seemed to me during performances that my interpretation was satisfactory as most of the roles were comical and the audiences appreciated my efforts very much. From this experience I gained sufficient knowledge to realize that, in the future when I was in the position to teach others the roles I had created, it was futile to demand an exact replica of my interpretation and, therefore, I gave my pupils more or less the freedom to dance the role as they themselves felt it, creating their own expression but in the frame of the type.

This way of letting the dancers be free to interpret a role according to their own predisposition emerged also in the restaging of Massine’s symphonic ballets, and in the creation of Borovanky’s own choreographic repertoire, which will be the object of investigation in the next chapter. Noticeably, Borovansky stated there is no ‘the’ interpretation, only ‘an’ interpretation, an aspect that Martyn valued as indispensable in his choreographic approach towards the classics.

Different dancing styles emerging from the unique quality in motion of ballerinas of Borovansky Ballet can be traced to some fragments of video footage portraying Martyn and Stevenson dancing in the role of Giselle. Martyn was the first Australian ballerina to perform in this title role and she used to alternate in this title role with Dorothy Stevenson. When Martyn and Stevenson danced in Giselle together, one was performing the title role, the other danced the role of Myrtha, Queen of the Willis. The way in which Martyn and Stevenson conveyed their liveliness and vitality in the first act can be observed in the interpretation of scenes where pantomime plays a prominent role for the narration of events. It was a role that grew with the two Australian ballerinas and, as Martyn made clear, Boro (a nickname often used for the choreographer by Borovansky’s dancers) never pushed his performers ‘into a mould’. The

320 Borovansky as quoted in Salter, 32.
iconic, romantic ballet *Giselle* ideally explains how Martyn and Stevenson approached the title role to render their own interpretation in a way that I would describe as natural, or close to reality. Among the artists who danced in the role of Giselle, the Russian ballerina Olga Spesivtseva was remembered by her partner Anton Dolin as an ideal Giselle. When dancing acting scenes in the first act of Giselle, scenes where ballet steps are reduced to leave more room to mimic gestures aimed to narrate events, Olga Spesivtseva, as claimed by Dolin, tried to achieve an acting style that he considered ‘naturalistic’. The conveyance of ‘naturalism,’ as Dolin called it, present in ballets scenes generates sensations in the spectator through the use of movements deprived of classical ballet technical vocabulary. Movements must evoke sensations, as Markova and Karsavina made clear when they explained what the expected quality of movement in *Les Sylphides* was.

To convey the idea of natural movements (described by Dolin as ‘naturalism’), the Australian ballerinas developed a rhetoric of movement in line with their own performance personas, without emulating the style of Ballets Russes dancers for the interpretation of Giselle. In the opening of the first act, Giselle meets Albrecht in the courtyard of her cottage. Albrecht, who is the Duke of the local county in disguise, seduces Giselle, and tries to convince her to spend some time with him. Shyly, Giselle gives way to Albrecht advances and sits with him on a bench. Her reluctance is communicated through the tension of her body, as she gives the impression of being ready to stand up and leave at any moment. When comparing the 1934 and 1951 productions, it is noticeable from the examined segments that the scenes present the same syntax. The Australian dancers in the 1950s, and Spesivtseva in the 1930s, convey the principle of pathos in two different ways, as their movement qualities are different. When Stevenson and Martyn performed the role in 1951, we see a love scene infused by, what can only be called, more mischievous traits. This sensibility comes from the liveliness that emerges from Stevenson’s and Martyn’s postures. In Borovansky’s production, the torsos of the ballerinas are straighter by comparison with the position held by Spesivtseva, whose torso is slightly bent forward in the execution of *batteries*. We also see different facial expressions and a different use of the head, constantly tilting towards Albrecht’s shoulder in Borovansky’s

323 Dolin.
324 Dolin and Wishy, *A Portrait of Giselle*, sec. 00:40:30”.
325 *Borovansky Ballet in Giselle*.
326 Foster, ‘Reading Choreography: Composing Dances’, 93.
choreographic restaging. Instead, in the footage of the 1934 performance, featuring Spesivtseva and Dolin in the main roles, it is noticeable that Spesivtseva’s movements appear clumsier. This sort of clumsiness mirrors a search for natural movement to the detriment of ballet technique. The ballet lexicon is omitted, or at least reduced, in the first act’s love scenes. In her encounter with Albrecht (Dolin), Giselle (Spesivtseva) shows an increasing reluctance and shyness. These sensations are conveyed through a gesture that breaks a momentary stillness in the progression of the courtship. The gesture consists in a sudden burst of the arms. From her facial expression, we assume that Spesivtseva’s Giselle is almost annoyed, unable to control her feelings in front of her lover. Her face is contrite, and she intertwines her hands nervously. Suddenly, Spesivtseva bursts, throwing her arms towards Dolin; almost bowing, as if to implore him to leave her alone. ‘Please, let me go now!’ she seems to say, before running to the entrance of her cottage. A moment before she reaches the door, Albrecht stops her by grabbing her wrist, and, pulling her gently towards a bench, he implores her to stay with him. Reluctantly, Giselle follows him to the bench once again. After Dolin swears his eternal love to her, raising his left arm to the sky and touching his chest with his right hand, Spesivtseva lowers his hand, as if to beg him not to swear on God. She spots a daisy not far from the entrance of her cottage, picks it up and starts playing ‘loves me, loves me not’ with its petals. Her gestures are free from any attempt to keep ballet technique as the functional vocabulary in this acting context. For some instances at the beginning of their encounter, unpointed feet have abandoned outward positions. This sense of clumsiness also pervades Spesivtseva’s use of the torso in the opening scene of the first act, where Giselle’s youthful enthusiasm is conveyed through the performance of a series of ballottés, tiny quick jumps, through which Giselle celebrates her joy for life. Volynsky remembers Spesivtseva performing this love idyll with the Russian dancer Semenov, with an enthusiasm that, according to the critic, conveys a ‘unique realism’ transmitted through her unique quality of movement:

In spite of my wish to refrain from details, I cannot help but note Spesivtseva’s first dance with Semenov. A classical ballotté is brilliantly mounted, as only Petipa could mount it. This is the innocent play and frolic of two young people in love. There is one moment—an imperceptible little feature, an instant, a point—when both artists seem to be hanging in mid-air. Now beyond this moment is the repetition of slight battements after a resolute shifting of
Unlike Spesivtseva, the two Australian ballerinas performed the same scene with a quality in motion that partly took into account the strictures of their technique. Here the conveyance of pathos does not avail of the total loss of the ballet vocabulary as it happened in Spesivtseva’s interpretation. In the 1951 video footage we can see both Martyn and Stevenson keep their feet outward and introduce their upcoming dancing with preparatory positions. Spesivtseva, instead, ‘goes out onstage and assumes fourth position, and without any preparation the entire scene is ready’. For the courtship scene, the two Australian ballerinas control their movements, and the clumsiness transmitted by Spesivtseva has slightly disappeared, in praise of more controlled movements. Steps are executed more quickly, the bending of their heads is accompanied by tender smiles and poses are held with a much straighter back, a trait that conferred the Australian ballerinas a deeper sense of lightness, as they are able to combine a care for technique with the acting required for the scene. What seems to be lost in Martyn and Stevenson’s interpretation is the abandonment of ballet vocabulary, an element that conferred Spesivtseva’s acting a realistic aura. Giselle’s mad scene is another example where it is possible to see the differences in the quality in motion between Spesivtseva and Martyn and Stevenson. When Spesivtseva performed Giselle’s mad scene in 1934, she assumed the traits of a person with an almost altered proprioception: her steps look heavy and semi-abandoned and her head tilts down, giving the impression of not recognising any familiar face in the crowd. Her arms seem almost too weak to grab the sword, with which she tries to stab herself. Her steps are heavy. Her walk does not replicate the characteristics of a classical ballet walk (where the heels are raised and the ballerina walks on high demi-pointe): Spesivtseva’s Giselle is flat-footed, while her eyes scrutinise some indiscernible point in the air and she does not seem to recognise familiar faces in the crowd, as she wanders on-stage avoiding them. In her performance of this scene, the Russian ballerina did not perform steps that could interfere with what could render her performance persona. Though Martyn and Stevenson never

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327 Volynsky, Ballet’s Magic Kingdom, 93.
328 Borovansky Ballet in Giselle.
329 Volynsky, Ballet’s Magic Kingdom, 92.
331 Dolin and Wishy, A Portrait of Giselle, see 1:04’;00”.

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completely abandoned their technique in praise of that complete ‘naturalism,’ where that sense of clumsiness is more typical of an everyday action (as portrayed by Spesivsteva), this ‘naturalism’ partially emerged through the same sense of sufferance they conveyed through their own acting style. Indeed, it must be said there are some choreographic differences between Spesivtseva and Martyn. In the 1930s, in Europe, kinaesthetic strategies that emphasised the heroine’s psychological solitude seemed to be favoured. These strategies are emphasised also, in my view, to the minimisation of Giselle’s contact with members of the crowd. Spesivtseva’s Giselle, for instance, wanders among her fellow peasants until the moment in which she drops at the feet of Albrecht and her mother. By contrast, in Borovansky’s version, the interaction with Giselle’s mother and Albrecht is more frequent. While in the 1934 performance Giselle dies in a centred position of the stage (where the heroine falls dead between her mother and her lover after he drops to his knee to implore her forgiveness), in the 1950s Australian restaging Giselle dies in Albrecht’s arms. The very last moment preceding Giselle’s death is characterised by the following syntax: Albrecht runs towards Giselle, grabs her waist and eases her down to the floor. Though interpreting the same sequence is characterised by the same syntactical structure, Martyn and Spesivtseva have different styles: Spesivtseva drops quickly and heavily onto the floor, while Martyn indulges longer in Albrecht’s arms, before slipping slowly towards the floor. The quality of movement in Spesivtseva and Martyn’ style of the same fragment reveals different rhetoric of movements that serve the same choreographic purpose, which is conveying through a pathetic action Giselle’s upcoming death. Giselle mad scene preludes Giselle’s transformation into a willi332 in Act Two. Brisbane critic of The Telegraph lauded Martyn’s interpretation of this mad scene, claiming that she was superb, as ‘with faltering steps that indicate her wandering mind’ Martyn ‘tries to repeat the light-hearted measure she danced in happier days’.333 This mad scene, as suggested by The Telegraph critic, present steps recalling the idyll love between Giselle and Albrecht. Through the syntactical principle of mimesis, these steps (ballottés) are repeated in two different moments. The first is the love idyll at the beginning of the first act, the second is the mad scene. In this latter, ballottés are repeated to emphasise the heroine’s distorted mind.

The joy provided by this step at the beginning of the act has now been replaced by a sense of sadness, an emotion aroused from Giselle’s fading memories of a happy life. Stevenson

332 Willis are spirits of women dead before getting married who haunt men in the graveyard and force them dance to death.
recalled the importance of approaching the role of Giselle as a ‘real character’, especially in the mad scene: ‘To create a dialogue with the audience, we had to work on our own interpretation. But these subtleties were beyond us at the time, because we were too busy learning the steps’.334

Another Russian classic that gave dancers of Borovansky Ballet the chance to challenge themselves with a technically demanding classic was *The Sleeping Princess*, which premiered in Melbourne in 1950.335 Though the Australian audiences had already seen *Aurora’s Wedding* (a reduced version of Petipa’s original choreography created in 1922, based on the wedding of Princess Aurora and Prince Désiré) during de Basil’s tours, *The Sleeping Princess* presented dances that were unfamiliar to the 1950s audience. The Rose Adagio and the original variations of Prince Désiré and Princess Aurora in the third-act were not included in *Aurora’s Wedding*.336 For the restaging of *The Sleeping Princess*, Borovansky saw the potential of different styles in different female interpreters. He invited British dancers Margot Fonteyn to perform in Australia in 1957. As we read in the correspondence between Borovansky and Fonteyn in that year, Borovansky was looking forward to the presence of Fonteyn in Australia, as he thought it would serve as inspiration for Australian practitioners:

> Your appearance in Australia will be of tremendous value to the younger generation because of the wonderful example of great artistry you will bring them. You of course must realise that in Australia you are as famous as anywhere else in the world, and your arrival is greatly anticipated.337

The admiration that Borovansky had for the British dancer did not imply that he wanted to force his dancers to acquire the Fonteyn’s style. A comparison between the styles of Margot Fonteyn and Kathleen Gorham represents another useful example to understand the importance for Borovansky’s dancers to find a unique rhetoric of movement. Through an analysis of film footage of *The Sleeping Beauty*,338 performed by Fonteyn and Somes in 1955 and *The Sleeping

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336 The variation of Aurora as originally intended by Petipa had been replaced in *Aurora’s Wedding* by the Sugar-Plum Fairy variation from *Nutcracker*.
Princess, and the version danced by Kathleen Gorham in 1959 circa, it is possible to identify some stylistic differences in the interpretation of the role of Aurora. The Rose Adagio is one of the fragments that I am examining to understand the movement quality offered by different interpreters. In this adagio, Aurora dances with four Princes who arrived at the French court of Henri IV to celebrate the Princess’ sixteenth birthday; each of them introduces to Aurora in the hope of marrying her. This dance is technically demanding, as the ballerina is required to perform a number of balances with the four Princes followed by promenades en attitude, a step where the male dancer supports the ballerina to perform a full circle while holding her hand. For this promenade, Aurora is standing in piqué attitude. These repeated promenades (‘strolls,’ from the French) are the most distinctive and technically demanding steps of the adagio. The ballerina is supposed to keep eye contact with each of the four princes, while they alternatively hold her right arm, as the left is raised in fifth position.

Kathleen Gorham, prima ballerina with Borovansky Ballet from 1947 to 1960, rendered Aurora’s femininity by presenting herself as a shy sixteen-year-old, unable to maintain a direct eye-contact with the four princes during the final promenades. By contrast, Fonteyn approaches her role with assured enthusiasm, conveyed through her confidence in taking all four Princes’ hands. Fonteyn’s sudden, large smile towards the spectators celebrates the balance she keeps in a masterly manner as her princes alternate in holding her hand in the promenades. I do not believe that Gorham’s choice of not looking into the eyes of the four princes is to be interpreted as a lack of technical confidence, but rather, I see it as a stylistic choice in line with her performance persona. Her eyes do not search for the glimpse of the four princes, nor the approving clapping of the spectators, as such a demonstration of confidence would interfere with the style of her role. The confidence showed by Fonteyn and the innocent shyness portrayed by Gorham provide two different interpretations that have one common syntax: representing a sixteen-years-old princess divided between the impulses of teenagerhood and the social responsibilities of adulthood.

Aurora’s solos of the first-act present stylistic differences that contribute to understand how different and unique Fonteyn and Gorham’s interpretations are. For this solo, Aurora dances

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339 Borovansky Ballet, VHS (National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, 1957).
340 The same stylistic differences appear in this dancer’s performance of the Sugar Plum Fairy in the restaging of The Nutcracker made by David Lichine for the Borovansky Ballet in 1955. In the pas de deux of the second act, Gorham accompanies her arms movements with her eyes instead of addressing her smiles to the audience.
surrounded by the four princes, and other members of the court, who celebrate her coming of age. One of the most virtuosic parts of this variation consists in the execution of quick, little jumps in diagonal on flat feet while moving backward, which terminate with a series of double pirouettes. This sequence is repeated three times, and both Fonteyn and Gorham establish eye contact with the audience. The dancer’s head accompanies the movements of the feet. Every time the right foot is pointed, the chin is slightly inclined towards the right shoulder, and when the left foot is pointed, the chin moves slightly towards the left. While Fonteyn keeps her back straight, and follows her feet with these quick gestures of the head, Gorham accompanies her footwork not only with her eyes and chin, but she also bends her torso towards her outstretched leg, a characteristic, as we see in other video footage of the de Basil’s dancers in Australia,\textsuperscript{341} that seems to derive from the memory of Ballets Russes ballerinas who executed this step in this way. It was no surprise that the ballet methodologies adopted in Britain and Australia presented some stylistic differences. Ingram saw in the English practitioners a set of more timid interpreters. He compared their physical expressivity to what he called the more ‘full-blooded’ approach of the Australians.\textsuperscript{342} Fonteyn and Gorham provided two different interpretations of Aurora through what Foster defined the syntactical principle of variation. Through their variations in style, it could be contended that Fonteyn’s Aurora represented the precise elegance of the British style, while Gorham’s Aurora showed the influence that the Ballets Russes had on interpretative style. This influence, in particular, emerges in the use of the upper body: the generous movements of the torso coordinated with the head movements and the wide, full port de bras confer on Gorham’s solo a dramatic depth that passes through an exaggerated, if compared to Fonteyn, use of the upper body. While Gorham’s concentration on the upper body expression, Fonteyn’s Aurora communicated her femininity and enthusiasm for life through smiles, movements of the head accompanied by the closure of the arms into fifth position on precise musical accents and more frequent eye contact with the audience.

Different interpretations of the same role were often associated to ballerinas’ different skills. For instance, while Edna Busse was known for her lyricism, dancers Laurel Martyn and Dorothy Stevenson were remembered for their technique. Busse had remarkable port de bras and elongated lines; Martyn possessed a strong elevation that enabled her to perform high

\textsuperscript{341} Anderson, *Aurora’s Wedding*.

\textsuperscript{342} Ingram, Geoffrey Ingram interviewed by Michelle Potter in the Esso Performing Arts collection - Oral TRC 2372, sec. 2.
The different physicality of the dancers, and their unique approaches to interpretation, supports the idea that Borovansky’s goal was to let the Australian dancers emerge for their own individuality, favoring an interpretation over conformity – a trait reminiscent of the ballet as it was understood and practiced in the early twentieth-century. Martyn praised not only the unique rhetoric of movement searched by dancers of her generation, but also the ballet aesthetic and technique of her time. Among her European teachers, Martyn dealt with what she described as ‘the rigidity’ of Ninette de Valois, Margaret Crask, and Anna Prusina. Each expected her to dance according to their precise instructions. Martyn remembers Prusina for paying particular attention to elevation. She would say: ‘No darling, I want you to jump, stay there and then come down’, as Prusina considered the ability of suspending a jump in the air an effective and valuable skill for the sensibility of audiences and practitioners of her time. In interview, Martyn claimed that while today dancers tend to focus on hyper-extended lines, artists of her generation concentrated on the quality of their jumps:

Martyn’s words echo the ideals of the Russian critic Volynsky, according to whom elevation with aplomb were essential features in a dancer.

Humans always need something to stand on, and if this support disappears on the ground, then its fiction or illusion appears in the air. In reality there is no support whatsoever, but nonetheless it is as if it existed. With his earthly poses and supple movements, the person who remains motionless in the air for a second reminds us of a plant. This is why a woman’s elevation captivates us the most. On the ground the woman is in general primarily a flower. All her gestures, movements, and postures are plant-like. When repeated in the air they create the impression of something genuinely human because humans always retain their loyalty to their earthly form. A woman is gentler in the air as well. She glows there like a tender and resplendent rainbow.

344 Martyn, Laurel Martyn interviewed by Mark Gordon in the Esso Performing Arts collection - Oral TRC 2444, pts 3, 00:02':40''.
345 Martyn, Laurel: Interviewed by James Murdoch: Oral History, pt. 00:31':33".
346 Volynsky, Ballet’s Magic Kingdom, 150.
Once again, technique serves as a vocabulary, while the ballet syntax is combined with different styles and modes of representation. While for the restaging of the classics or of Fokine’s modern ballets it is possible to rely on specific stories as we read them on the libretto, in the case of modernist ballet occur different syntactic approaches. A case in point, as I will explain in the next chapter, are Massine’s symphonic ballets, where the presence of symbolism and the choreography of movements on an already existing musical score represent a ground for interpretative approaches different from those established by the classical ballet conventions of the late nineteenth-century.

3. AN ORIGINAL CHOREOGRAPHIC REPERTOIRE: THE INFLUENCE OF FOKINE AND MASSINE

At the beginning of the twentieth-century, Russian choreographers Fokine and Massine shifted their attention towards the narrative function of movements. Mimic gestures were kept in some of Fokine and Massine’s ballets – object of investigation of the first subchapter - but not in Massine’s symphonic ballets – analysed in the second subchapter. While Massine’s works such as Scuola di Ballo (1933) and La Boutique Fantastique (1934) used mimic gestures to render the humorous nature of his folkloric characters, his symphonic ballets concentrated on the coordination between music, choreography and décor. The original ballet production choreographed by Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff was largely influenced, as I argue here, on Fokine’s ideas of modern ballets and Massine’s symphonic ballets, where these latter were created during an artistic phase that Garafola calls ‘period modernism’. Though ‘modern’ and ‘modernist’ might sound like similar adjectives, there are specific stylistic differences between the two. ‘Modern’ can be used in relation to the choreographic works created by Michel Fokine, while ‘modernist’ considers the works of choreographers influenced by the European artistic avant-garde movement.

Considering himself the creator of the Russian modern ballet, Fokine explains what the five ideal principles were, how they regulated ballet’s new aesthetic, and how they were to be performed according to his style. In a letter dated 6 July 1914, addressed to the director of The Times, Fokine explains that these principles include: expressive gestures, where these aim to portray the character of the represented nation; mimetic gestures, used to convey dramatic action; conventional gesture, if required by the specific style of the ballet; expressive ensemble dancing; the alliance of dance with other arts, such as music and design. The distinction between Fokine’s modern ballets Massine’s ‘period modernism’ is exhaustively explained by American ballet historian Lynn Garafola. The main difference between the two relies upon the eloquence of their choreographic styles. In Fokine’s ballets, the representation of the characters assumes the eloquent personality of their interpreters. For Fokine the success for the interpretation of a role was in his dancers’ ability of interpreting a character through an intention to movement that was in line with their own personality; for Massine it was necessary that the dancer, in his symphonic ballets, activated ‘an intellectual process of ironic distancing’ from the characters they represent on-stage, exploring the interpretative possibilities suggested by the symphonies. Under the influence of these two choreographers, Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff created an original ballet repertoire amply based on the choreographic strategies utilised by their Russian predecessors. The aim of this chapter is to understand to what extent Fokine’s modern ballets and Massine’s symphonic ballets impacted the restaged and original repertoire created by Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff. Here I discuss the ways in which Fokine’s modern and Massine’s symphonic ballet styles influenced an original repertoire, created in Australia during the 1940s and 1950s. My purpose is to define the stylistic approaches of ballet-making adopted by the Australian choreographers inherited from their Russian mentors, defining their styles, syntaxes and modes of representation.

3.1 THE INFLUENCE OF FOKINE’S MODERN BALLETS
In her book, Ballet in Moscow Today, Kirsova claims that she had a strong admiration for Fokine’s choreographic works. With him, she learned a precious lesson: the dancer is the

349 Michel Fokine, ‘Letter to The Times’, July 1914, Fond M. I Fokina R 12, Saint Petersburg State Theatre Library, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts.
351 Garafola, 28.
352 Garafola, 30.
source of inspiration for the creation of a new role. In interview, she claims that she had learnt much about choreography from these artists, defining herself as the tool through which they respectively created the role of the Chinese Butterfly in *L’Epreuve d’Amour* and the third part of *Choreartium*. Kirsova embraced the modern style, letting the interpretative potential of her dancers emerge through what Garafola called ‘the arabesques’ of their own personality,’ a definition that seems to bring back to the concept of ‘performance persona’ defined by Foster, as presented in chapter two:

In Fokine’s ballets the dancers had been compelled to “act”, in the sense of interpreting their roles and embellishing character with the arabesques of their own personality. In this guise, performance was akin to conversation: both radiated charm, nuance and feeling. The triumph of the mechanistic concepts in movement, design and characterization called for a new performing style, one that conveyed emotion by abstracting, concentrating, and projecting it from behind a mask of eloquent impassivity.

Fokine’s idea of modern ballet offered dancers an opportunity to interpret roles in line with their performance personas, intended as ‘the theatrical version of the dancer’s personality’. Fokine, and later Kirsova and Borovansky, offer a constructive perspective on the role of the dancer for the creation of a modern ballet. The dancer, indeed, can offer a number of ideal interpretations of the same role, which can often be tailored to the dancer’s skills. With Borovansky, Australian audiences could appreciate different interpretative nuances offered by different interpreters testing themselves with the same role. As discussed in chapter two, Martyn highlights that Borovansky never pushed his dancers into a mould. Instead, he supported the unique personality of each artist in his company. Borovansky’s choice of letting the dancers’ personality emerge through their own understanding of a ballet role reflected the principle discussed by Garafola in relation to Fokine’s approach to ballet-making. Kirsova also embraced this principle, aiming to let her dancers’ quality emerge through their artistic personality. A case in point is Kirsova’s *The Revolution of the Umbrellas* to Henry Krips’ music. This ballet premiered in 1943 at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. It was divided into a prologue, three acts and an epilogue, based on a popular fairy-tale by Kjeld Abell (Ribe,

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354 Kirsova, Interview with Madame Hélène Kirsova, broadcast by 5 KA.
355 My italic.
357 Garafola, 27.
358 Foster, ‘Reading Choreography: Composing Dances’, 77.
1901 – Copenhagen, 1961), a Danish playwright, screenwriter and theatrical designer. This ballet tells the story of Little Anna, a child who tries to lead a revolt against her unfeeling, wealthy family with the help of lost umbrellas that come to life. It begins when Little Anna, the protagonist, finds a lost umbrella in the park and starts dancing with it until when she falls asleep. Her dream is populated by lost objects that come to life. The Spirit of the Lost Umbrella appears and takes Anna into the lost property office, where she meets other forgotten umbrellas who help her to revolt against her family. In interview, Peggy Sager remembered The Revolution of the Umbrellas as an enjoyable modern ballet in which Kirsova played the role of Little Anna, a role that was often performed also by Rachel Cameron. Cameron was assigned an acting role, where pantomime and mimetic gestures were essential for the narrative context: ‘for the other dancers there were tremendously difficult technical virtuoso dances, but they also had to portray characters. It was a story which involved a lot of acting for everyone’. Bellew recalled Cameron’s ability in portraying the musical qualities required by the role.

The role of Little Anna requires both musical understanding and dramatic intensity – two demanding qualities admirably met by Rachel Cameron for whom the role was created. As the Spirit of the Lost Umbrella, Peggy Sager brings purity of lines, a strong posture and depth of feelings, qualities she displays also in Swan Lake.

Kirsova created a choreographic work where Rachel Cameron’s musicality and Peggy Sager’s lines made of The Revolution of the Umbrellas a modern ballet largely influenced by Fokine’s style. Bellew’s use of the expressions ‘musical understanding’ and ‘dramatic intensity’ reflect the importance of qualities for Kirsova in the dancers’ interpretations. The production could only be rendered on-stage through the synchronisation of movements and music, a principle that informed, as I clarified in chapter two, also Fokine’s Les Sylphides. As I contextualised in chapter one, musicality was one of the distinguishing factors of Kirsova’s pedagogical style. This quality can be intended, as Kirsova suggested, a ‘perfect marriage’ between the dancer’s movement and music. This idea find its support in the definition of

360 Bellew.
361 Bellew, 46.
362 Sager, Peggy Sager interviewed by Michelle Potter - ORAL TRC 3157, sec. 00:18:09.
363 Cameron, Rachel Cameron interviewed by Hazel de Berg for the Hazel de Berg Collection, secs 12,800-12,801.
364 Bellew, Pioneering Ballet in Australia, 46.
367 Kirsova, Interview with Madame Hélène Kirsova, broadcast by 5 KA.
musicality provided by Jordan, who defined it, among several possible definitions, as an organic wholeness deriving from the correspondence between movement and music. Similarly, Foster defines the reproduction of musical structures in choreography a syntactical principle she calls 'mimesis': ‘The principle of *mimesis* also functions whenever the choreography reproduces the structure of the music or even the narrative structure described in the program notes. Dances frequently exhibit some syntactic choices based on the structure of the accompanying music’.368 This ‘marriage,’ to quote Kirsova, or ‘mimesis,’ to use Foster’s definition, existed not only in Kirsova and Borovansky’s restaging of the classics, but also in their original choreographic production. The role of music in modern ballets, and in the modernist repertoire, became an element intertwined with the narrative flow of movement stage. Kirsova explained in interview that rehearsals of the ballet were accompanied by a gramophone, as she choreographed the parts in relation to specific musical sections:

The second act of *The Revolution of the Umbrellas* is on symphonic lines. The *corps de ballet* becomes the voice of the orchestra: one side of the *corps de ballet* answers for the bass, and the other for the strings. Solo parts are suggested by the woodwinds.369

*The Revolution of the Umbrellas* presents that syntactical principle of mimesis, as each section of the orchestra corresponds to a different dance; this strategy was previously adopted by Fokine and Stravinsky when they collaborated to create *Firebird* (1910) and *Petrouchka* (1911). In *Firebird*, Fokine’s innovation appears at its finest. This innovation, as confirmed by Fokine himself in his memoirs, consisted in the lack of *entrechats, battements, ronds de jambes*, turnouts and preparations which made *Firebird* a ballet in complete contrast with the aesthetics of the classics. Here, ‘the arms would now open up like wings, now hug the torso and head, in complete contradiction of all ballet arm-positions,’ a technique that gave Stravinsky the impression of seeing movements overburdened with a sense of ‘*plastique*’ that made the coordination between steps and music a difficult process.370 The correspondence between the dancer’s movements and precise symphonic lines of the music requires a strong collaboration between choreographer and composer, as noted by music historian Joel Crotty. Crotty explains that the musical score of *The Revolution of the Umbrellas* sometimes references composers Albert Ketelbey, Claude Debussy, Richard Wagner, Julius Fučík, and Igor

368 Foster, ‘Reading Choreography: Composing Dances’, 93.
369 Kirsova, Interview with Madame Hélène Kirsova, broadcast by 5 KA.
The collaboration between Krips and Kirsova reveals the sort of ‘marriage’ that is fundamental for translating movements into action led by music. Kirsova seemed to have learnt another important lesson from Fokine: the new ballet ‘does not demand ballet music of the composer as an accompaniment to the dancing’ but rather it ‘accepts music of every kind, provided only that it is good and expressive’. In her book, Kirsova explains that it was thanks to Fokine’s reform that ballet became an endurable art form in Europe. Praising the Russian choreographer for making ballet an official artform in Western countries, Kirsova recalls his revolutionary contribution:

When Fokine left his native Russia to join Diaghilev, he left behind him a tradition – a great tradition owing most perhaps to Petipa, but in danger of stagnation. Fokine realised this peril and, under the inspiring guidance of Diaghilev, set about revolutionising existing conceptions of the roles of choreography, décor, costume, music and “theme”.

The perfect ‘marriage’ celebrated by Kirsova is formalised by her collaboration with Australian painter Trevor Clare and composer Henry Krips. Strongly influenced by her experience as performer with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Kirsova was able to reproduce a collaborative atmosphere, enriching and activating a creative interaction among different Australian artists. In her collaboration with Krips, Kirsova reproduced the collaborative dynamics previously established between Fokine and Stravinsky. With Krips, it could be argued, Kirsova started an artistic collaboration that mirrored the one established thirty-years earlier between Fokine and Stravinsky. A decade after Kirsova’s creation of The Revolution of the Umbrellas, choreographer Kira Bousloff and her husband, Australian composer James Penberthy, replicated their collaborative model. In the history of Ballets Russes, this successful collaboration between choreographer and composer is well represented by Fokine and Stravinsky. It brought together a visualisation of movements on the music. By visualisation I refer to the terminology adopted by Stephanie Jordan. As explained in my literature review, by ‘visualising the music,’ Jordan refers to the artistic synaesthesia in which Diaghilev’s company was a ‘guiding principle’ that was, as we have seen, ‘linked to the Wagnerian concept of Gesamtkunstwerk’. The root of this term is embedded in the German geist, or spirit of the

372 Fokine, ‘Letter to The Times’.
373 Kirsova, Ballet in Moscow Today, 7.
music, which, for American dancer and choreographer Isadora Duncan, represented the basis for dance.\textsuperscript{374} An example of \textit{geist} is in the choreographic adaptation of \textit{Firebird}, by Russian choreographer Sergeï Grigor’ev for the Royal Ballet in 1954.\textsuperscript{375} Faithful to Fokine’s original choreography, Grigor’ev represented the shattering wings of the desperate Firebird, caught by Prince Ivan at the beginning of the ballet on the trill of the woodwind.\textsuperscript{376} Fokine identified the orchestra’s woodwinds as the ‘voice’ of the Firebird. Through a replicative model, Kirsova made the ‘voice’ of a character correspond to a specific instrument. As American composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein suggested in 1969, the collaboration between the two Russian artists for the creation of \textit{Firebird} differed from the usual collaboration of the choreographer and composer in Russia up to the end of the nineteenth-century. Bernstein explains that in Fokine’s \textit{Firebird} there were elements typical of the choreographer’s ‘new’ ballet:

> No waltzes, no incidental and irrelevant numbers, [like Swan Lake].\textsuperscript{377} Every note of this \textit{Firebird} music is tightly woven into the story making a marvellous tapestry of sound. There is no question here, as there must have been in Swan Lake, of the composer being the slave of the choreographer, supplying music on demand by the yard or by the bar (an extra 8 bars here, 16 bars there) for the further glory of the male variation or to give the choreographer time to get the swans off the stage. There is nothing like that, Igor Stravinsky is in command here, making the music and the story all of one piece.\textsuperscript{378}

For Fokine, the synergy existing between music and movement had to be intended as a tool for the narrative flow. This was an innovative choice adopted by Kirsova as well: the synergy existing between music and movement reshaped the collaboration between choreographer and composer, who, until Fokine’s reform, was supposed to create music on already existing choreography.\textsuperscript{379} Though Kirsova tried to replicate the collaboration existing between Fokine and Stravinsky, she did not simply replicate models and choreographic values, but utilised them to create her own works. Kirsova found her artistic expression also in the creation of an original repertoire based on literature. She showed an interest towards the Danish folkloristic tradition.

\textsuperscript{376} Ross MacGibbon, \textit{L’Uccello Di Fuoco/Le Nozze}, DVD, ballet (De Agostini, 2009).
\textsuperscript{377} Leonard Bernstein here refers to \textit{Swan Lake}, but he does not mention whether the choreographer-composer collaboration was between the Czech Ballet Master Julius Reisinger (1828-1892) and Tchaikovsky or Petipa and Tchaikovsky. In this documentary entitled \textit{Young People’s Concerts: Two Ballet Birds} he compares the structure of the ballet and of the music of Tchaikovsky’s \textit{Swan Lake} and Igor Stravinsky’s \textit{Firebird}.
\textsuperscript{378} Roger Englander, \textit{Young People’s Concerts with the New York Philharmonic - Volume 2: Two Ballet Birds.}, DVD, Concert/Documentary (Kultur International Films, 2013), sec. 23:50”.
For this reason, Gillen defines Kirsova a more ‘forgiving, intellectual and artistic’ choreographer than Borovansky.\textsuperscript{380} For Gillen, Kirsova was a more mature artist, and this artistic maturity was conveyed through the consolidation of her style. For Kirsova, the transmission of choreographic values inherited from her artistic career in Europe, served as a basis upon which she could build an Australian ballet identity. Her approach to ballet-making was never completely detached from the ballet context within which it had matured. The creation of an Australian ballet identity was never to the detriment of the preservation of its origins. As Cameron explained in 1944, Kirsova was responsible for the construction of a social and artistic identity.

We as Australians should feel grateful to Kirsova for her interest in this country. Not only as she devoted so much of the proceeds of her ballet performances to the opening of kindergartens to poor children, but also because she is giving us a cultural foundation of our own. Australians have always been recognised as people of eager and willing to learn. They have always flocked to the seasons of Opera and ballet, but they had never had the opportunity to see their own countrymen and women sufficiently trained to rise to great height in ballet. They had never had the opportunity to see so many of their countrymen in a ballet company. Australia must look to the old countries for her roots, which now have been transplanted to Australia.\textsuperscript{381}

The consolidation of an Australian ballet identity, Cameron believed, laid in the roots of the ‘old countries’. Still, the social and artistic contribution that Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff brought to the Australian practitioners promoted an artistic flexibility around interpretation, which aimed to create rather than to emulate dancers of the past. According to Kirsova, ‘Australia has no so-called ballet tradition,’ which seems to support that ballet methodologies were transmitted to Australia beyond any spurious attempt of identifying a nation with one specific tradition.

I believe that Kirsova and Borovansky share some common stylistic traits in their choreographic production. In particular, the relationship between the representation of the folkloric element and the claim for its authenticity deserves attention. Here I would like to examine two of their ballets which present steps that are supposed to recall folkloric, Mediterranean dances: \textit{Capriccio Espagnol} and \textit{Capriccio Italien}. When Kirsova staged her

\textsuperscript{380} Gillen, Annette Gillen interviewed by Lee Christofis - Oral TRC 5783, secs 1, 00:41:39”.
\textsuperscript{381} Rachel Cameron, Interview with Rachel Cameron. Ballet Talk, Manuscript, 1944, J.C. Williamson Collection (Scrapbook Dance): JOO_LEN, Melbourne Arts Centre.
Capriccio Espagnol (1942) she selected a different setting from that wanted by Borovansky in his Capriccio Italien (1943). Kirsova’s ballet embedded a series of stylised Spanish dances on a musical score by Rimsky-Korsakov Capriccio Espagnol. Borovansky’s Capriccio Italien presented tarantella-style character dances to Tchaikovsky’s Opera 45.

An analysis of primary sources dedicated to the creation and reception of Capriccio Espagnol reveals how Fokine and Massine’s ideas of representation of folkloric dances influenced Kirsova and Borovansky’s work. Possibly, Kirsova’s Capriccio Espagnol could have some common choreographic points with Massine’s version that premiered in Monte Carlo in 1939. Gillen considered Kirsova’s version more ‘elegant’ when the choreographer performed a character dance with a fan in the role of the character Infanta. For Gillen, ‘it was magical to see true professional dancers interpreting this ballet’. Kirsova paid attention to small details, such as the fan she used in her variation with the costumes, which, according to Gillen, were to evoke the Spanish culture which the ballet celebrated. The costumes were provided with a wide gown, as we learn from Mrs Sager, Kirsova’s costume-designer and mother of the leading ballerina Peggy Sager. The fabric of the gowns was light, so the costumes did not hinder the dancers’ movements and guaranteed a freedom to perform complex legwork. The gowns still recalled the sumptuous atmospheres celebrated in Velazquez paintings portraying the Spanish aristocracy of the seventeenth-century. Mrs Sager claimed it was impossible to stick to the original sketches of the gowns for Capriccio, originally preferred by Kirsova, as the heaviness of these gowns would have compromised the free-flowing movements the choreographer had designed for the dancers. The representation of the Spanish dances in Kirsova’s Capriccio incorporate movements that recall an ideal passion and temperament that her contemporaries would have attributed to Spanish culture as they imagined it. Among the national dances performed was a jota: usually accompanied by castanets, and a gypsy interlude. For these artists, the music of Rimsky-Korsakov played a fundamental role in creating a Spanish atmosphere. Looking at Kirsova’s creation, we can understand that the choreographer paid attention to the costumes: they represented a folkloric element that, as we read from critics, contributed to immerse the spectator in Kirsova’s representation of a Spanish atmosphere.

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382 Bellew, Pioneering Ballet in Australia.
385 Rose Sager, Interview with Mrs. Rose Sager, Transcript, 1944; J. C. Williamson Collection_Scrapbooks_JOO-LEN, Melbourne Arts Centre.
386 Sager.
costumes combined with the ‘passional’ Spanish dances, aimed to transmit a sense of ‘gaiety without crudity’.\textsuperscript{387} Capriccio Espagnol was valued by Kirsova’s contemporary critics as not too ambitious but ‘attractively flamboyant’.\textsuperscript{388}

To music that has the cool majesty of a waterfall, Kirsova delicately wields her fan and skirts of silk and lace. She dances with grandeur and serenity as the Princess Velazquez loved to paint. In contrast, Rachel Cameron as the gypsy is alive with passion and temper, in every dart and turn and whirl of her skirt. Paul Clementin dances with showy vigour as the vain, fickle matador, traditional idol of the women in Spain.\textsuperscript{389}

Massine’s Capriccio Espagnol (1939), with costumes and scenery by Mariano Andreu, was also to Rimsky-Korsakov music. In his memoirs, Massine recalls how the Spanish dancer Argentinita, already casted for his Le Tricorne (1919), reinvigorated his passion for Spanish dances to the extent that he decided to create this twenty-minutes ballet:

\[\text{Argentinita] taught me a great deal about such difficult Spanish dances as the buleria, the seguidilla and the manchega. My enthusiasm for these dances, which had primarily resulted in Le Tricorne was re-awakened, and I decided to do another Spanish ballet, this time for Argentinita. For this I used the music of Rimsky Korsakov’s `Capriccio Espagnol’, which lasted only for about twenty minutes, but provided plenty of excitement. With costumes and scenery by Mariano Andreu, Capriccio Espagnol portrayed a country fair, with gipsies dancing a rousing buleria until the dancing becomes general and the watching couples swing into a frenzied jota.}\textsuperscript{390}

Two certain points in common between Massine and Kirsova’s Capriccio Espagnol are the music choice and the representation of folkloric dances. For Massine, the insertion of folkloric dances could bring a ‘note of authenticity’ to his ballets.\textsuperscript{391}

By contrast, Borovansky had an idea of an all-Italian Capriccio. Borovansky’s Capriccio Italian was to Tchaikovsky’s Opera 45. The dance was inspired by a tarantella, a folkloric Southern Italian dance that varies from region to region. The black and white video fragment features Martin Rubinstein dancing with Kathleen Gorham.\textsuperscript{392} The two artists spin and jump

\textsuperscript{387} ‘His Majesty’s Kirsova Ballet’ (newspaper article, 1943), J. C. Williamson Collection; Scrapbooks_JOO-LEN: 034/21, Melbourne Arts Centre.
\textsuperscript{388} ‘Spanish Dances’ (newspaper article - Telegraph, 1944), J. C. Williamson Collection, Scrapbooks_JOO-LEN, Melbourne Arts Centre.
\textsuperscript{389} Te Pana, ‘Kirsova Great in Ballet Role’ (newspaper article, 1944), Papers of Hélène Kirsova; MS10/9, National Gallery of Australia.
\textsuperscript{390} Massine, My Life in Ballet, 211.
\textsuperscript{391} Massine, 211.
\textsuperscript{392} Jackson and Potter, Boro’s Ballet. The Making of Australian Ballet 1939-1961, sec. 00:32:48".
in a circle, framed by the lively, quick hops of the corps de ballet carrying baskets and whirling around the stage. When Rubinstein and Gorham join each other in a joyful dance, they perform jumps and pirouettes to evoke a tarantella. Leaping across the stage in a gallop, with their legs alternating in attitude devant, Rubinstein and Gorham reach the center of the stage. They hold their hands while hopping, leaping, touring, and kicking their legs in the air. The ballerina’s embroidered circle-skirt twirls, raising above her knees as she reaches the left corner of the stage with two double pirouettes and multiple, quick chaînés in demi-pointe. Her partner runs to the corner to reach her. He firmly holds her waist to let her bend forwards, while holding her leg in a penché for two bars. After recovering on a straight pose with one leg raised in demi passé at the end of the second count, Gorham bends backwards in a deep cambré derrière, holding the pose for another two counts. At that point, Tchaikovsky’s music accelerates, as to invite the two dancers to perform another pas de galop. Rubinstein and Gorham jump, stretching their front legs, and land synchronically on one bent knee, while the second is held pointed towards the floor. With their torsos held straight and their smiling faces looking at each other, the two dancers alternatively jump up onto one leg while pointing their right foot to the floor, rhythmically clapping their hands above their headgear.

Both Kirsova and Borovansky wanted to offer their own representation of Mediterranean folklore on the stage, for which, here I argue, they followed Fokine’s choreographic ideas. Kirsova and Borovansky’s ballets reflected Fokine’s attention towards the reproduction of national dances within a ballet context. Fokine once remarked on the importance of his balletic research: ‘I began to compose only after I absorbed the historical, ethnographical, musical and literary material’. The search for folkloric elements that Kirsova and Borovansky adopted to stage in their Capriccio and Capriccio Italien is a point in common with Fokine’s search of an ‘ethnographical element’ to represent geographical and cultural contexts. These contexts, in Fokine’s ballets, are often characterised by costumes presenting colours and styles of the nations he wanted to represent, evocative stage design and poses.

In regard to Fokine’s choreographic innovations, it is necessary to mention his impact on European audiences through the lens of his contemporary critics. Russo-French dance
journalist André Levinson (Saint Petersburg, 1887 – Paris, 1933) divided classical ballet into two main aesthetics: the ‘old’ and the ‘new’. The old convention reached its peak in the romantic era. It was defined by certain elements: pantomime; historical, conventional and allegorical subjects; and a reliance upon mimic gesture to dramatise the characters’ emotional states. The new aesthetic let the dramatic expression emerge through the act of dancing itself. Levinson, who criticised Fokine’s choreographic works because of their monotonous and repetitive dramatic development, wrote:

Having renounced classical dance, which I see as conventional and abstract, in the name of scenic and psychological realism, Fokine had to turn, on one hand, to the ancient world and on the other to a unique living source, to ‘character’ dances, to daily life and history, to the dances and rituals of all manner of tribes.

Levison’s discourse applies to both ballets where the choreographer aims to depict the aesthetic of an ancient or classical dimension, and to ballets that aim to capture the folkloric elements of a nation. Reading Levinson, we understand that Fokine engaged in an ethnographic search for forms that would offer what Levinson calls ‘psychological realism,’ resembling a choreographic stream on which Fokine built the pillars of his ‘new ballet’. He considered the role of the dancers in relation in conveying the story of the ballet. The third rule of modern ballet defines the boundaries of the use of the representational or historically conventional gestures:

The third rule is that the new ballet admits the use of conventional gesture only where it is required by the Style of the ballet, and in all other cases endeavours to replace gestures of the hands by mimetic of the whole body. Man can be and should be expressive from head to foot.

By conventional gestures, Fokine refers to mimic gestures mostly performed by the hands and sudden or slow body movements that vary according to the narrative contexts. Italian ballet

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master Carlo Blasis, who published his ballet treatise in 1830, divided these gestures into three main categories: natural, artificial and conventional. The natural gestures represent the physical manifestation of feeling, the artificial gestures represent people, and the conventional gestures are ‘things we cannot perfectly understand but with the assistance of our imagination’. The progressive loss of conventional gestures, the increased use of movements and dramatic elements, the recall of folkloristic dances, and the Mediterranean atmospheres present in Kirsova and Borovansky’s works result from a search of movement purified from superfluous mimic gesture that Fokine conducted from the 1910s. Kirsova and Borovansky’s representation of folklores seem to be informed by Fokine’s search of distinctive cultural elements, a strategy that the Russian choreographer applied when he staged ballets aimed to enhance a specific folkloric dimension (for example the Polovtsian Dances from Prince Igor, created in 1909, or Scheherazade, created in 1910). The first rule of the ‘new’ ballet was, in fact, dedicated to the representation of a nation’s character:

Not to form combinations of ready-made and established dance steps, but to create in each case a new form corresponding to the subject, the most expressive form possible for the representation of the period and the character of the nation represented—that is the first rule of the new ballet.

For Kirsova, the application of Fokine’s first rule certainly passed through the representation of Spanish dances and costumes that recalled Velazquez’s portraits. Unfortunately, there is no video footage documenting the quality in motion of Kirsova’s Spanish Dances. Instead, it is possible to reflect on the quality of movement of Capriccio Italian. For the creation of this ballet, Borovansky possibly adopted choreographic strategies previously adopted by Fokine to render his own idea of Southern Italian dancing folklore, a tarantella. Borovansky himself danced in the role of the Officer partnering ballerinas dancing in the light atmosphere of a square in the South of Italy. The costumes create an ideal Italian scenario: women wearing large, long skirts and carrying baskets above their heads, engaging in some dances characterised by quick, small hops on alternating legs. Here, Borovansky follows Fokine’s
attempt to render a specific folkloric style. Fokine’s memoirs in Russian, the original language in which they were written, report some considerations that seem to be missing in the version translated by Vitale Fokine for Anatole Chujoy’s 1961 English edition. Here, it is necessary to translate from the original memoirs to cite Michel Fokine’s precise words regarding the presence of the ethnographical element in his ballets to appreciate the effort that Kirsova and Borovansky made to keep this element alive in their original choreographic production. Fokine wrote:

The ability of developing a dancing style, accurately grasping and transmitting the character of a nation, is necessary for the creation of character dances. […] Movements of the arms, legs, torso, head, as well as music and costumes - all this has to converge towards one style. In the dances of different periods and nationalities there are characteristic features, such as unique gestures and rhythms. The spirit of the epoch portrayed as well as the character of the nation is reflected in all this.402

Interestingly, a few decades later, Soviet Prima Ballerina Assoluta Majâ Pliseckaâ said that the arms and hands play a fundamental role in how a dance conveys not only feelings, but culture. Fokine’s ideas on the representation of the ethnographical element were also adopted in the repertoire performed in the Soviet Union. Representing cultures through the dancers’ movements and specific steps was a strategy that, according to Pliseckaâ, helped the choreographer portray the specific cultural identity they aimed to represent:

[Performers] dance with every part of their body. Legs, torso, head, neck and also arms and hands. Stanislavsky used to say that “fingers are the eyes of the body”, as if he was talking about ballet, as if he was a ballet master himself. While legs and feet are fixed in classical positions, arms and hands are free to express anything, such as national identity, character, epoch and mood.403

Though Pliseckaâ thought it was possible to express through the movements and positions of the arms and hands the character of a nation, this stylistic choreographic choice cannot be intended as an accurate ethnographic research.404 Classical ballet presents its own vocabulary

403 Tichonov, Stihi po imeni Majâ, 42’00”.
404 Some elements were authentic: the costumes worn by the corps de ballet in Borovansky’s Capriccio Italian recalled the dress of a Pacchiana from Montecalvo Irpino, a region in Calabria, Italy. There is the linen headgear, called tovaglia (table cloth) that is the most distinguishing trait in the ballerina’s outfit, also present in the Tarantella choreographed by Burmeister in 1953 in his production of Swan Lake. Despite this similarity between the costumes in Capriccio Italian and the Calabrese costume worn by pacchiana, it is not possible to assume that the moves presented in Borovansky’s Capriccio recall those of a Calabrese tarantella.
and specific patterns common to every ballet technique and style, yet folk dances should be distinguished for their unique choreographic components. Järvinen warns on the dangers of a so-called ‘authentic’ representation:

> Although imposing period style and ‘national character’ on the dances was a hallmark of the new ballet, the claims made by the ballet masters about how well they had researched the Other for these works (for example, Fokine 1961, especially 55-61) should really be taken with a grain of salt: thoroughly conditioned by the balletic ideals of beauty, grace and symmetry, their cultural appropriation had just about as little to do with actual ethnography as that resulting in the character dances of the old ballet”.

Endorsing Järvinen’s consideration, here I argue that ballets such as *Capriccio Espagnol* and *Capriccio Italien* present character dances that only try to evoke the mood of the nations portrayed, by what Foster calls an imitative mode of representation. Watching Borovansky Ballet performing *Capriccio Italien*, we see the choreographer’s attempt to stage an Italian folkloric world. But Borovansky, as Fokine, did so using the vocabulary of classical ballet. There is no folkloristic authenticity though, because the choreographer is presenting a ballet, not a *tarantella*. Also, the spectators would not recognise a specific *tarantella* among the numerous that have existed in Southern Italy since the early twentieth-century. The costumes worn by the *corps de ballet* and by the leading ballerina recall the dress style of a *Pacchiana* from Montecalvo Irpino, in Calabria region. A linen headgear, also called *tovaglia* (table cloth) is the most distinguishing trait of her outfit, which is also present in the *tarantella* choreographed by Burmeister in 1953 in his production of *Swan Lake*. Despite this similarity between the costumes in *Capriccio Italien* and the Calabrese costume worn by *pacchiana*, we cannot assume that the moves present in Borovansky’s *Capriccio* should recall those of a Calabrese *tarantella*. The same costume and headgear, typical of the Calabrese women from Montecalvo Irpino, appears a decade later in Burmeister’s Neapolitan Dance from his own choreographic version of *Swan Lake*. Therefore, how can we establish that the dances choreographed by Borovansky and earlier, in the twentieth-century by Fokine, are based on

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406 My italic.
407 Stiscia’s work dedicated to the figure of *Pacchiana* provides a historical context on the evolution of this folkloristic figure. This book exists only in Italian language: Antonio Stiscia, *La pacchiana di Montecalvo Irpino. Tradizioni, oro, cunti e canti* (IpinitaLibri, 2014).
tarantella dances? Fokine explained his choreographic inspiration came from the folkloristic dances he saw on Capri:

The last number of this suite was the Tarantella. This was performed by Vera Fokina assisted by a large ensemble. I tried to project the authentic character of the national dances which Vera and I had observed on our trip to Italy, when we studied them in detail on the island of Capri.409

This raises a second question: how is it possible to portray a nation’s character when the authenticity of the folk dance is constantly compromised by balletic forms that permeate the whole choreographic asset? The answer comes from Fokine himself in his 1914 letter to The Times:

None form of dancing should be accepted once and for all. Borrowing its subjects from the most various historical periods, the ballet must create forms corresponding to the various periods represented. I am not speaking of ethnographical or archaeological exactitude, but of the correspondence of the style of the dancing and gestures with the style of the periods represented.410

Representing their own ideas of Spanish and Italian folk dances, Kirsova and Borovansky embed some folkloric elements in their dances which do not coincide with an attempt to represent the reality. According to dance historian Martin, there cannot be authenticity in the representation of the ethnographical elements in ballet, as it is an art form based on the conventions of Western theatre. Fokine, according to Martin, represents a clear example of the impossibility of representing dances that aim to portray a nation or ethnic group authentically:

Fokine put a definite end to all such practices. For him Greeks, Hindus, Egyptians, Persians, as well as the many native tribes of his own Russia, moved in a manner dictated by the most reliable research. To say that such movement is authentic would be to misstate the case entirely, for authentic movement would simply get in the way of the artist's creative purpose in much the same way the everyday naturalistic gesture would. The ballet itself is a convention of the Western theatre, and though its choreographic action must be adapted to give the colour of other styles it must remain always within the bounds of its own.411

409 Fokine, Memoirs of a Ballet Master, 103.
410 Beaumont, Michel Fokine and His Ballets, 144–45.
The representation of the folkloric element in Kirsova and Borovansky’s productions are not the only ideas that influenced their choreographic style. The staging and restaging of ballets reproducing the moves and gestures typical of ballet characters inspired by Commedia dell’Arte masks represents a point of contact with Fokine’s stylistic taste. Kirsova’s *Harlequin* (1944), and Borovansky’s revival of Fokine’s *Carnival* in the early-1940s, both recall Fokine’s interest in representing characters and masks of Commedia dell’Arte, characters which, given the Commedia style of the ballets, required the use of conventional gestures and stereotyped body movements.

Remembering the role that Kirsova created for Cameron in *Harlequin*, where Australian ballerina danced in the role of Columbine, Sager states that Cameron was selected to perform that particular role because she possessed ideal interpretative qualities and ‘beautiful’ *port de bras*. A typical trait of Kirsova’s choreographic approach, indeed, was her habit to tailor each role to the individual qualities of each dancer. In *Harlequin*, the dancers were assigned roles according to their best qualities:

> The initial performance showed Rachel Cameron (Columbine) as a dancer possessing intense musicality and poetic understanding – an artist as well as a dancer – and indicated a real future for June Newstead (Circus Girl) […] Strelsa Hackelman (Rich Girl) was admirably suited for the part with her natural beauty and intuitive, rhythmical and musical feeling. Thadee Slavinsky (Troubadour) ably supported the young cast.

Kirsova’s *Harlequin* is the story of the love between Harlequin and Columbine, two lovers who spend the night whispering declarations of love under the moonlight. When a troubadour passes by, the lovers beg him to ask the Moon about their future. When they learn that their destiny will set them apart, they morn their fate.

The dramatic love story between Harlequin and Columbine recalls the impeded love of Petrouchka for Ballerina in Fokine’s *Petrouchka* (1910-1911). *Petrouchka* is the story of a puppet who experiences human feelings. The puppets are the property of their puppet master, the Charlatan, a semi-magical figure who brings them to life during the Russian *Maslenica*
(Carnival). In 1944, a newspaper writer pointed out that the plot of *Harlequin* presents some similarities with Fokine’s *Petrouchka*: ‘In *Harlequin*, a spiritual descendant of *Petrouchka*, the choreographer created some evanescent figures whose movements seem always to be governed by some tyrant force outside themselves’. In the above-quoted article, the reader is reminded that in 1936, Kirsova danced *Petrouchka* in the role of Ballerina. The anonymous author noticed that Harlequin’s ‘tyrant force’ movements aimed to connote the character’s psychological traits, reminding us of the complex personality of Fokine’s puppets Petrouchka, Ballerina and The Moor. Describing the complex personality of the characters in *Petrouchka*, Fokine wrote:

> For the dancers in the leading role, I tried to create puppet-like, unnatural movements and, at the same time, to express in these movements three totally different characters and to convey the plot of the drama – so that, in spite of the puppet-like movements, the audience would be forced to respond and sympathize.

Petrouchka loves Ballerina, but his feelings are impeded by his rival, the Moor, who kills Petrouchka in a Saint-Petersburg square, to the astonishment of their puppet master and the crowd. Kirsova’s *Harlequin* finds its parallel in a non-typical *Commedia dell’Arte* character: Petrouchka. According to Garafola, this character represents ‘A perfect combination of Punch and Pierrot’, as Petrouchka ‘spoke directly to a generation reared on fairground entertainments and poeticised images of the *Commedia’.

Garafola reminds us that the symbolism of *Commedia dell’Arte* was not only included in ballets with typical Italian theatre characters, but also through visual art examples that dated back to the foundation of Diaghilev’s artistic movement *The World of Art*. This is the case of paintings like ‘The Italian Comedy’ by Benois and ‘Harlequin and Lady’ by Konstantin Somov. According to Sager, the role of Columbine in *Harlequin* was created to enhance Cameron’s ‘depth of feelings,’ as ‘Kirsova chose you exactly for the personality that she wanted in that ballet’.

Kirsova was a choreographer who looked into what she called the ‘living personality’ of a dancer to be sure that an artist had the talent necessary to play a role. The dancer who possibly made the strongest impact in Kirsova’s life was Soviet Prima Ballerina Galina Ulanova. For Kirsova, she was quintessential of that

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416 ‘Kirsova Ballet’ (newspaper article, 10 April 1944), J. C. Williamson Collection Scrapbooks _JOO LEN: 034/21_, Melbourne Arts Centre.
419 Garafola, 29.
420 Sager, Peggy Sager interviewed by Michelle Potter - ORAL TRC 3157, pt. 00:35:51".
‘living personality’. During the months she spent in Saint Petersburg and Moscow before the publication of her book, Kirsova had the opportunity to look at the approaches to dancing and acting adopted by Soviet ballerinas. The tension between Russia and the capitalist Western countries sparked the Iron Curtain, a period in Russian history where information regarding any aspect of political, social and cultural life in the Soviet Union could not leave the borders.421 Bewitched by Galina Ulanova’s – the Soviet Prima Ballerina of Bolshoi Theatre from 1944 until 1959 – performances, Kirsova described her as a person endowed with a ‘highly sensitive personality,’ where ‘her intellectual approach to both movement and music is also a large phenomenon of her phenomenal success’.422 Kirsova’s book shows her to be an attentive choreographer who could not disregard qualities such as musicality, technical brilliance, virtuosity and a dancer’s own temperament. All these skills contributed to create ‘living personalities’.423

Kirsova was a choreographer who, like Borovansky, was interested in representing characters of Commedia dell’Arte. This interest, which found its expression in the staging of Harlequin, possibly matured in the years in which she performed Fokine’s Carnaval. This latter originally premiered in 1910,424 and was restaged by Borovansky in 1944. Carnaval is set in a garden, where some masked dancers are celebrating around a table in a convivial atmosphere. Kirsova herself danced in this ballet, interpreting the role of Columbine in the 1936-1937 Australian tours of de Basil’s Ballets Russes. This ballet does not have a structured plot, as it portrays the life of Commedia dell’Arte characters through several poignant and humorous scenes. The puppet-like movements of the dancing confer the choreography a fairy-tale dimension. Describing the relationship between Schumann – the composer of Opera 9, on which Carnival is choreographed – and the dancers, Fokine explains ‘the duality of Schumann’s personality’425 was related to the different themes he composed for the various Commedia dell’Arte characters portrayed in his music:

From this and from the titles indicated on the music, such as “Harlequin”, “Columbine”, “Pantalon”, “Pierrot” and “Papillon”, I was able immediately to visualize and construct the picture of the ballet: the series of separate characters, linked one to the other – the proverbially

421 Meylac, Behind the Scenes at the Ballets Russes.; Homans, ‘Chapter 7. Tsars of Dance: Imperial Russian Classicism’.
422 Kirsova, Ballet in Moscow Today, 10.
423 Kirsova, 11.
424 Beaumont, Michel Fokine and His Ballets.
425 Fokine, Memoirs of a Ballet Master, 135.
hapless Pierrot, the comical Pantalon, the Harlequin always emerging victorious from all escapades; and the light plot around the love between Columbine and Harlequin.426

For Borovansky, reproducing the lively lightness of characters on-stage, such as Columbine and Harlequin or the hapless Pierrot, represented a test-bed to prove himself. Critics of the 1937 Covent Garden tour were already well-acquainted with this ballet and could notice different expressive details in the de Basil’s production, such as the difficulty of dancers in ‘following the witty and satirical episodes which occurred during a masked ball’.427 Despite the lack of a witty aura emerging from the 1936 performances, one year later Kirsova, as Columbine, and her partner Igor Youskevitch, as Harlequin, were praised by their contemporary critics for their brilliant duet, as they conveyed a bright interpretation of their roles:

Helene Kirsova (Columbine) ad Igor Yousskevitch (Harlequin) evoked the heartiest of applause for their quaint two-step [sic].428 She was running gaily on pointe while he bounded beside her, knees high-drawn.429

426 Fokine, 135.
428 Pas de deux
The scene, immortalised by Dr Joseph Ringland Anderson, who was filming the touring company in 1936, shows the same sequence described and quoted above. Harlequin holds Columbine’s softly crossed hands; with quick, little hops landing on flat feet he carries
Columbine, who is moving with a quick bourrée, around the stage, drawing an imaginary circle. Critics commenting the performance delivered by the Borovansky Ballet eight-years later did not struggle to find the mood originally intended by the original choreographer:


Borovansky immediately showed an interest in the choreographic repertoire moulded on the performances previously danced by de Basil’s troupes. As Ingram suggests, Borovansky had the tendency to emulate the Russian standards, while Kirsova was more adventurous, as she devoted her career to the creation of an original repertoire through the foundation of her company. Laurel Martyn remarked on this as well, claiming that Borovansky was not a creative choreographer, but a reproducer. Restaging the Ballets Russes repertoire was a move that enabled Borovansky not only to create a link with his artistic past, but also a strategy that allowed him to re-establish a familiarity with a choreographic repertoire that Australian audiences had already come to know and appreciate. This familiarity was emphasised by an insistent restaging of ballets centred on character dancing. Glasstone explains that character dancing is a term used to refer to ‘an adaptation of folk or National dance for the theatre; but this term can also apply to dancing requiring a good acting ability and strong characterisation of the dance movement’. Borovansky, as Salter explains, was a character dancer himself, both with Pavlova and de Basil’s companies, as well as his own; in his company he starred as Officer in Capriccio Italien, Pierrot in Le Carnaval, and the Chef Eunuch in Scheherazade. He was also one dancer to interpret the role of Pierrot during the 1936 Australasian tour, just eight-years before introducing this ballet into his repertoire. From video

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430 Anderson, Ballets Russes Compilation: Fokine Part 1, sec. 00:03:30.
432 Ingram, Geoffrey Ingram interviewed by Michelle Potter in the Esso Performing Arts collection - Oral TRC 2372.
footage of *Carnaval* we can see how the dancers acted in ballet in the late-1930s. Borovansky enters the stage first as Pierrot, a man dressed in white with his face covered in greasepaint. He stumbles and loses his footing as soon as he enters. His make-up accentuates his sadness. He indicates to people to have fun. He is surrounded by people flirting with each other while he remains solitary, without anyone to love. Russian ballet critic, Yuri Slonimsky, described the attitude of Pierrot when he saw the work in the early-1930s: ‘Everyone ran away. Everyone around me is having fun, dancing, kissing and loving each other. I am standing all alone, no-one wants me!’ Stevenson remembered Borovansky as an ideal interpreter of Pierrot:

As we understand from Stevenson’s words, Borovansky was able to convey the tragic and complex nature of Pierrot. The first interpreter on the ballet stage was the Russian theatre director Vsevolod Ėmil'evič Meerhol'd, whose mime knowledge was ideal for the interpretation of the role he was assigned. Describing the gesture performed by Pierrot when the character wants to communicate the sentence ‘I have an idea!’ is meaningful to understand the role played by mime in Fokine’s ballet:

He points to himself, places his index finger on his forehead and then points the finger up to the sky […] the gesture is appropriate for Pierrot: addressing oneself directly to the audience is a typical characteristic of Commedia dell' Arte. The index finger to the forehead fits Pierrot very well.

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438 Anderson, *Ballets Russes Compilation: Fokine Part 1*, sec. 00:24':14”.
442 Fokine, 178.
This character shares psychological traits like those of Petrouchka, as they both dance to narrate the story of their unrequited love. But Pierrot, contrary to Petrouchka, expresses contrasting emotions through the dance he performs. For instance, when dancing alone, his needy nature emerges as an almost disturbing element within the convivial environment. But when dancing with the lettres dansantes (butterflies), Pierrot turns into a careful and sweet figure and finally expresses his love by dancing with the fairy creatures. But once caught by one of the lettres dansantes, Pierrot embraces her: with his arms stuck to the wings of the butterflies, he follows her fluttering in the air. He communicates his joy by raising his head up to the sky and finding consolation in the duets he performs, before ending up alone once again.

Harlequin, interpreted in this footage by Roland Guerard and Igor Youskevitch, is in contrast with the figure of Pierrot. Harlequin wears a mask characterised by a mocking smile, mirroring his irreverent and playful personality. His goliardic humour is invoked by swirling movements,

like double *pirouettes en dedans* and *en dehors* which alternate with small skips on the spot (*en place*), or with small skips he performs very quickly to move around the stage, as he attempts to impress Columbine with his gaiety. His charisma passes to Columbine (and the audience) through the execution of these whirling steps. Describing the connection existing between the steps performed by Harlequin in the *Commedia dell’Arte* tradition and those performed by the dancers in Fokine’s choreography, Barry Grantham, British performer and theatre director expert in *Commedia dell’Arte*, states there are two steps readjusted by Fokine into balletic form. These two are *Capriole d’Arlecchino* and *Pas de Scaramouche*:

The first of these is the familiar Harlequin leap, Capriole d’Arlecchino (goat leap), which as far as we can ascertain was performed by making a vertical leap into the air, while keeping the knees bent and crossing (and possibly re-crossing) the feet and the ankles. It would start and finish in third position in demi-plies. This was modified, possibly by Fokine for Le Carnaval, into the balletic form, by bringing the toes of the feet together, forming a neat diamond space between the legs. The starting and finishing position of this leap is in first. It can also be performed elancé (travelling) like a Cecchetti assemblé porter de côté (a sideways leap, landing on both feet, usually on 3rd or 5th position). […] The second is the Pas de Scaramouche, an eccentric step performed by Tiberio Fiorilli […] The performer slides into a forward split and then pulls up onto the front leg. By repeating this on alternate legs he is able to cross the stage in a few moves. It requires considerable strength and is more for the acrobats than the dancers.444

Through Grantham’s observation we can see that the contribution of Cecchetti steps were fundamental in *Carnaval*. These, as explained in chapter one, often recalled the mime used among *Commedia dell’Arte* actors.

Papillon, interpreted by Anna Volkova, performs agile, quick and joyful movements to portray her vivacious nature. *Temps levé* and *gargouillarde* alternate with very quick footwork: while the first step is a jump is performed by pushing one foot towards the floor and releasing the other in *arabesque*, the second is a step that requires the dancer to lift both the legs almost simultaneously, bending the knees and keeping their turnout at the same time.445 This is the same step performed in the diagonal of Aurora’s variation introduced in *Aurora’s Wedding*,446 and originally danced by the Sugar Plum Fairy in the second act of *The Nutcracker*. As

446 Anderson, *Aurora’s Wedding*, 00:15’:31”.

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Papillon’s vivacious nature is conveyed by the performance of jumps and quick steps, these allow Anna Volkova, one of the interpreters of this role during the 1936 Australasian tour of Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo, to cross the stage very quickly, which gives the impression of flying. The bravura of this dancer is expressed through strong leg and footwork, and whirling arms that draw imaginary circles in the air, to portray her lively (but not disordered) nature.

Kirsova and Valentina Blinova alternated in the role of Columbine. Compared with Papillon, Columbine’s temperament is smooth. Her grace emerges in all her vivacity when Harlequin joins her in a pas de deux. Here, Columbine lets her partner take the lead in a promenade: here she stands with her front leg en attitude, a position in which the front leg, never hyper-rotated, is slightly bent with the heel pointing towards the base leg. Harlequin leads the promenade with tiny, quick skips, lifting his knees up to his abdomen. The movements performed by Harlequin and Columbine evoke an atmosphere infused with childish humour. By contrast is Pierrot’s sadness, emphasised by more grounded, heavy and abandoned movements.

The original cast of Carnaval saw Tamara Karsavina in the role of Columbine, Vera Fokina (Fokine’s wife) in the role of Chiarina, Ludmila Schollar as Estrella, Nijinska as Papillon, Nijinsky as Harlequin, Adolph Bolm as Pierrot, Cecchetti as Pantalon. Each character in this ballet shows a unique personality, a trait that is common to the original characters of sixteenth-century Commedia dell’Arte. After watching Carnaval performed by Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Beaumont stated that many of the technical steps performed by the original cast were replaced over the course of time by movements that did not appear in the original choreography. These, according to Beaumont, compromised the original acting purposes created by Fokine for this ballet. Beaumont emphasises that much of the original spirit of the work was missing when Ballets Russes restaged it in 1936. In 1951 he wrote:

[M]ost contemporary performances tend to be frivolous rather than gay; there is too much shaking of the head on the part of Harlequin, too much beckoning of the fore-finger from Columbine. Pantalon is no longer that brisk, lovable little lady-killer of uncertain age as presented by Cecchetti, he has become something between a Napoleonic officer on half-pay and a type which suggests affinity with the Baron from a pantomime version of Cinderella. Pierrot, once a great tragic figure, as portrayed by Bolm, a pathetic figure of unrequited love and frustrated hopes, has almost faded away into an aimless weakling who inspires contempt rather than pity.

448 Beaumont, 703.
For Beaumont, when *Carnaval* was represented by Ballets Russes across Europe and Australia, it went through major stylistic changes that involved not only interpretative adjustments, but changes in the execution of the steps. Describing the moment when Pantalon enters the stage carrying a letter he thought had been written by Columbine (in which she fools him asking to meet her), this scene, according to Beaumont, had a much more demanding technical structure than the one presented by Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in the 1930s. In the latter version, Harlequin steals the letter from Pantalon’s pocket. When Pantalon tries in vain to prevent Harlequin from stealing his love letter, Beaumont points out that steps changed in the later representation of this scene, reducing the efficacy of the gesture with which Harlequin tore the note to pieces.

When Harlequin outwits Pantalon by producing the compromising note, he used to leap into the air and tear the note to pieces to the accompaniment of *entrechats*; now the dancer frequently assumes a pose and tears up the note. In Harlequin’s *pas seul*, which follows his *pas de trois* with Columbine and Pantalon, both Nijinsky and Idzikowsky executed a dazzling series of *pirouettes a la seconde* then, gradually bringing in the working leg and sinking on the supporting knee, each ended sitting on the ground; this is a very difficult movement which demands a fine balance. Now Harlequin frequently limits himself to a few pirouettes and then sits on the ground.

This critic is in my opinion arguable. Basing my judgment on the observation of video footage held at the National Film and Sound Archive, there is clearly effort to keep the liveliness in the steps, as performed by Roland Guerard for the tour of Australia in 1936-1937 with de Basil’s Ballets Russes. Though some transitions between steps may lack the confidence that Nijinsky and Idzikowsky possessed in terms of technique, as pointed out by Beaumont, I believe that the liveliness portrayed by late 1930s Ballets Russes male interpreters were in line with the playful mood portrayed in the ballet scenario. Guerard’s performance is a case in point: he shows a Harlequin performing technically demanding steps, such as *pirouette à la seconde*, in his solo. The act of spinning in this context evoked the playful personality of this character. He spins while keeping his right leg stretched *à la second* at the height of his right hip, with open arms at the height of his shoulders, a step typically performed by male dancers that is now often referred to as a male version of the *fouettés*.451

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451 Anderson, *Ballets Russes Compilation: Fokine Part 1*, pt. 00:12:50".
Fokine’s *Carnaval* still adhered to the rules and conventions of classical ballet of the time. Mimicry and conventional gestures in *Carnaval* still exist, and function as communicative elements within the actual movement. For example, the gesture of Columbine calling Pantalon, waving her hand as if to say, ‘come here!’ is classified by Blasis as artificial, and has a specific function in its narrative context. Beckoning Pantalon, she invites him to join her and Harlequin in a *pas de trois*. As I have already mentioned, the rules of the ‘new’ ballet required a choreographic structure quite different from the one present in Petipa’s *ballets-féeries*. Fokine’s modern ballets did not have Petipa’s formalities consisting a partition into acts, *pas de deux*, followed by a male and female variation, coda, and consequent bowing at the end. Nevertheless, the lack of a proper array of multiple acts was compensated for by the introduction of movements (as in *Les Sylphides*, whose choreographic structure is related to the musical movements of the score), or episodes (as in *Carnaval*). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in Fokine’s ballet there is only a partial loss of the mimic element, not a total rejection. Fokine’s characters tell their stories using mime, which serves as a narrative tool when the ballet style requires it.

The influence of *Commedia dell’Arte*, as we understand when looking at the restaging of the Ballets Russes repertoire, was evident not only in the development of the Cecchetti ballet technique adopted by Kirsova and Borovansky, as I argued in chapter one, but also in the development of Fokine’s ballets, which were a source of inspiration for the two Australian choreographers. Fokine reappropriated that expressive ballet vocabulary to infuse the character he created with a theatrical touch exquisitely derived from that genre. For Borovansky, the influence of *Commedia dell’Arte* was part of his European ballet heritage, as well as mime. Observing the video footage of *Carnaval* enabled me to reflect on the narrative role that steps and movements acquired to communicate emotions in Fokine’s work. *Carnaval* is a ballet built on dances rather than on merely mimic scenes; waltzes and divertissements are dances dedicated to the amorous adventures of the characters of *Commedia dell’Arte*. Fokine partially freed his choreography from the constant use of gesture as a narrative tool to let the characters

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452 Anderson, pt. 00:01:40'.
454 Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*.
455 Fokine, “Letter to The Times”.
457 Murray-Will, Ewan: *Ballets Russes: Petrouchka: Carnaval: Aurora’s Wedding*, pt. 00:12:20".
of Commedia’s scenarios ‘talk’ through their steps and movements. Some conventional gestures are still present in certain actions. For instance, we can think about passages where Columbine asks Harlequin to be quiet by bringing her index finger to her nose, or when Harlequin touches his chest with both his hands to indicate he is in love with Columbine. But the sensations and the psychology of the characters are embedded in the steps and in the approaches to movements.

Léonide Massine, who based his Scuola di Ballo (1933) on the Italian Carlo Goldoni’s work (with the same title) at the Teatro San Luca of Venice in 1759, was influenced by Commedia acting training, as he studied it at the Moscow Theatre School in 1913.458 Victoria Tennant, daughter of the Irina Baronova, writes that Massine’s connection with the world of Commedia dell’Arte was clear in his Scuola di Ballo:

[…] Massine believed in spontaneity and a strong, clearly defined personality for each character. He casts each dancer carefully, then gave them the freedom to develop their characters. Each dancer collaborated and contributed to the interpretation of their role. This brought to a freshness, a naturalness that to every gesture as if it was happening in the moment for the first time. Every movement was an outward expression of a flowing, internal emotion with clear intent.459

While Fokine entered in contact with the Italian theatre genre when he improvised some scenarios with Cecchetti, Marie Petipa and Leon Bakst in his apartment,460 Massine trained in acting. Hence Massine’s idea of spontaneous interpretations, a characteristic of the acting required by Commedia dell’Arte’s style.461 This idea of expressive freedom was then transmitted also to Massine’s symphonic ballets, which I will examine in the next subchapter.

### 3.2 THE INFLUENCE OF MASSINE’S SYMPHONIC BALLETs

The introduction of modern ballet and modernist works was part of the artistic experiment conducted by Diaghilev, in which he placed the Russian classics, modern and modernist works side by side.462 In particular, the roots of the modernist ballet style as intended by Massine can

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459 Tennant, 40.
462 Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*. 
be traced, according to Garafola, between 1914 and 1917. Among these ‘imitators’, are Edouard Borovansky and Kira Bousloff in their Australian choreography, between the early-1940s (for Borovansky) and the early-1950s (for Bousloff).

Annette Gillen recalls her experience as a performer involved in the restaging of Massine’s symphonic ballets. Before entering the Borovansky Ballet, she was already familiar with Massine’s repertoire. As documented by Christofis in interview, she could understand Massine’s ‘ground-breaking symphonic ballets,’ such as Les Présages (1933) and Symphonie Fantastique (1936). When Gillen entered the Borovansky Ballet in 1953, she had the chance to train with other two Ballets Russes practitioners, Kiril Vasilovsky and Leon Kellaway, who knew de Basil’s repertoire well, including the symphonic ballets that Gillen performed in the 1950s. According to her, Symphonie Fantastique (restaged by Vasilovsky after Massine in 1953) and Les Présages (restaged by the choreographer Lichine for Borovansky Ballet in 1955) were considered challenging in terms of mnemonic efforts. Symphonie Fantastique was Massine’s work which influenced Bousloff in Poème Symphonique, a ballet she staged in 1954.

This was a symphonic ballet based on a Lamartine poem, which reflects the influence of Massine on Bousloff as a choreographer. Based on Lizst’s thirteenth symphonic poem (and inspired by Les Préludes Lamartine’s 1823 poem), Poème Symphonique featured Yurek Shabelevsky in the role of a young man undertaking a visionary journey where he encounters love, war and philosophy. It is the story of a poet and of his vision of ideal beauty, embodied by Mary Inwood, dressed in white. The poet lives his life with enthusiasm, indulging himself in the beauty of the nature and in the encounters with a young peasant. But suddenly the poet becomes obsessed with power, loses his ideals of beauty and love. The ballet premiered at His Majesty’s Theatre in Perth, where Helene Ffrance danced the role of Power. To extend the ballet, Bousloff used Mephisto’s voice from Lizst’s Faust: the music chosen for the final part of the ballet describes the moment when the poet hopes to pursue evil in order to find pleasure. For the ballet’s conclusion, Bousloff created a hill with the bodies of the dancers piled up, on the top of Mary Inwood, symbolising the death of the ideal of beauty on the top of vices. The composer runs to the top of the hill to grab his vision, who is waiting for him

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464 Christofis, ‘Annette Gillen’s Touching World’, 47.
465 Gillen, Annette Gillen interviewed by Lee Christofis - Oral TRC 5783.
467 Brissenden and Glennon, 177.
468 Brissenden and Glennon, 177.
469 Brissenden and Glennon, 177.
standing with her back to the audience. The choreography is partly based on Massine’s *Symphonie Fantastique*, and the structures of the two ballets presented some visible similarities. *Symphonie Fantastique*, as Gillen recalled, was technically demanding because the dancers had to count furiously, as there were no precise accents in Berlioz’s music. Both Massine and Bousloff’s choreographic works present the allegories of virtues and abjections. *Poème Symphonique* presents several dances that have, at their centre, a young musician and poet, struggling to reach their idealised lover, represented by a witch in disguise. While there is no video footage of *Poème Symphonique*, we can rely on the positive comments by the critics framing the ballet. Despite a symbolism that was often difficult to understand, West Australian Ballet received more attention with this symphonic work than any other performance danced that night. Referencing Massine and looking for a symbolism that characterises the modernist ballet tradition, Bousloff confirmed that she was linked with her artistic past as a ballerina infused with a modernist approach.

Massine inspired also the creation of *Fifth Symphony* for the Borovansky ballet, choreographed by Shabelevsky in 1955. *Fifth Symphony* included a partial restaging of Massine’s *Les Présages*, another symphonic ballet imbued with symbolism. First produced for Monte Carlo Theatre in 1933, this symphonic ballet was choreographed on Tchaikovsky’s *Fifth Symphony*. As Potter explains in her documentary, ‘its similarity to Massine’s *Les Présages* resulted in legal action by Massine against both Borovansky and Shabelevsky, for failing to obtain permission to stage the work and for not paying the royalties’. The succulent chance of restaging this symphonic ballet represented a way for Borovansky to expand his repertoire with ballets that had already been positively acclaimed when they were performed by de Basil’s Ballets Russes. Considered by the local critics one of the most successful ballets of the 1940 tour by de Basil’s Original Ballet Russe, *Les Présages*, as the ballerina Anna Volkova remembered, was soon considered a masterpiece:

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470 Bousloff, Kira Bousloff interviewed by Michelle Potter in the Esso Performing Arts collection - ORAL TRC 2627.
471 Gillen, Annette Gillen interviewed by Lee Christofis - Oral TRC 5783.
474 Though the influence of Massine was evident in the above-mentioned ballet, it was Bronislava Nijinska the choreographer with whom I see more connections in terms of the transmission of choreographic values, particularly between Bousloff’s *Brolga* and Nijinska’s *Les Noces*, whose relation will be at the centre of an investigation in the fourth chapter of my thesis.
My first impression of Les Présages was in 1935 when I became a full member of Colonel de Basil’s Ballets Russes. By that time it was hailed as a great masterpiece and certainly a novelty in the world of music, as until then no ballet had ever been staged to any great symphony.  

Describing this choreographic symphony, the ballet historian Beaumont explained that the ballet ‘portrays Man’s contest with his destiny, and falls into four parts: I Action, or life with its amusements, ambitions and temptations. II Passion, or the contest between sacred and profane love. III Frivolity. IV War’. In the restaging of Les Présages, as Gillen explains, Borovansky focused on teaching the step sequences, but did not provide information regarding the interpretation he intended to see in this ballet. The dancers did not pursue a specific interpretation, as they did not know what sort of image the choreographer wanted them to reproduce on-stage: ‘It wasn’t until you had been doing the ballet for quite some time that suddenly things would appear in your mind as the reasoning why this step is here’. For this ballet, dancers were expected to rely on sensations evoked by the music:

You got a very slow sort of dragging sound. You could feel the sadness, the intense sadness. But we were never told that. I mean, you worked it out for yourself, or I did, as we dragged our feet across the stage and you did a sort of ‘what war can do’.

The lack of a detailed explanation of the feelings that the dancers had to be able to reproduce on-stage was a characteristic that made of Borovansky a choreographer distinguished for his interest in seeing different approaches to interpretation. As already explained in chapter two, this was a characteristic highly valued by Laurel Martyn, who remembered Borovansky as a choreographer praising his ballerinas for their ability to achieve different interpretations of the same ballet role. His attitude was in stark contrast with that adopted by Lichine, as noted by Gillen. Restaging of Fokine’s Francesca da Rimini was much easier for Gillen, who claimed that Lichine ‘gave you the atmosphere and the emotional contents as well […] and he explained to us what he exactly wanted to do and what we were supposed to feel’. While Lichine gave the dancers a narrative structure that could help them visualise the intent and meaning of the ballet, Borovansky seemed to embrace the choreographic approaches preferred by Massine. In

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479 Gillen, Annette Gillen interviewed by Lee Christofis - Oral TRC 5783.

480 Gillen, pt. 00:29:31”.

481 Gillen, pt. 00:30:23”. 

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his memoirs, Massine claimed that the nature of abstract virtues represented in *Les Présages* mirrored the forms of buildings of Classical Greece, where movements tend to evoke forms rather than telling a precise story. Here, linear movements performed by Nina Verchinina, who danced the role of Action in the first part of the ballet, alternated with curved and straightened arms and close-angled gestures.482

In contrast with the mood provided by the angular gestures of the first part of the ballet, the *pas de deux* danced by Irina Baronova and David Lichine, as The Lovers in part two, revealed a passionate lyricism, which was then in sharp contrast to the third section where Tatiana Riabouchinska, in the role of Frivolity, ‘glided merrily in and out of a succession of symmetrically disposed, rapidly changing groups movements’.483 Massine’s intentions were to interpret Tchaikovsky’s *Fifth Symphony* creating asymmetrical movements that were supposed to render the flow of the music by giving the arms of the dancers the impression of being ‘fluctuating lines,’ through the use of static and dynamic forms’.484 Paying attention to the steps, instead of the dancers’ intentions behind them, Borovansky deliberately avoided information that could stymy interpretation; this speaks to a rendering of musical flow that was at the base

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484 Massine, 187.
of Massine’s creation of his symphonic works. *Les Présages* presents a certain freedom in terms of structure, which relies on the absence of a concrete synopsis. Movements are not contained within the frames imposed by the traditions of the classical technique and, along with the lack of the interaction with the spectators in this ballet, this work had much in common with the innovations of Fokine. *Les Présages* explores the surrounding space with wide movements, it is as if the space that contains these dancers was made of a denser material than that which surrounds everyday actions. This sensation derives from the dancer’s movement, especially when one observes the way the upper body engages with the space. Watching footage of the de Basil tour held at the Australian National Film and Sound Archive,485 one can see where the dancers put their energy. They move as if to pierce the air. These movements have an intensity of action, a sensation that would contend derived from Massine’s studied approach to movement. This quality, observed in the film footage 80 years after its original performance, is supported by Hall’s words, writing in 1948. After seeing Tchinarova, Kirsova and Woizikowsky dancing in the roles of Action, Passion and Fate in Melbourne in 1936, Hall wrote:

[Tchinarova’s] dark hair, flashing eyes and her strong sense of rhythm, her movements so angular, powerful and compelling, produced a most dramatic effect – to me the strongest interpretation of this role yet seen here. In the part of Passion, Kirsova seemed to move the audience profoundly, through her own realisation of the emotional intensity of this ballet. Now Fate (Woizikowsky) has entered, first disturbing, then tearing the Lovers apart, and finally forcing them to dance to his macabre tune. Woizikowsky’s impeccable sense of rhythm invested the whole part with irresistible power.486

Hall describes an evocation of intense emotions that derive from the movements themselves; the approaches to movements and the intention with which Tchinarova, Kirsova, and Woizikowsky danced in *Les Présages* do not seem to mirror a specific intention imposed by Massine, but rather, they seem to derive from the dancers’ own ability to render Action, Passion and Fate on-stage. Denying any indication that could push the dancers into a mould of movements that could better render the tension of these allegories on-stage, we might think that Borovansky was embracing Massines’ ideas of representing only linear and curved

485 Ballets Russes Compilation: Massine part 2 Ringland Anderson Ballet Films (ID: 450660), recorded in Australia between 1938 and 1940. VHS held at the National Film and Sound Archive.
movements on-stage. In his memoirs, Massine does not provide information regarding the way he wanted the dancers to interpret the ballet. Massine’s only comment about interpretation in this ballet is about Verchinina’s dancing in the role of Action in Part 1:

I first applied this idea of linear movement to Verchinina’s dance as Action in Part 1. Subtly interpreting Tchaikovsky’s dramatic music, she curved or straightened her arms in a succession of contrasting positions, using alternately tremulous, flowing movements or sharp, close-angled gestures.487

Verchinina’s subtle interpretation of Tchaikovsky’s music, vaguely described by Massine, guides our thinking that it was not in the interest of the choreographer finding an ideal form of interpretation for this abstract topic, as the artist in charge of finding an ideal way of conveying the meaning of Massine’s symbolism had to be the dancer, not the choreographer. Anna Volkova, who had the chance of performing Massine’s Les Présages in 1935 when she was a corps de ballet member, recalled that there were no precise indications on how to render the role that she was assigned for this ballet:

Massine left that mainly to Mr Grigoriev but he was usually present at all the rehearsals. His manner was calm and detached. He very seldom shouted, never showed any favouritism or familiarity with the artists when he was working with us. He would show us the movements which we would repeat after him, then he would make a few corrections but no comment and would leave it at that. In all the years that I worked with him I can honestly say I did not really know him.488

As the dance critic Martin explains, Massine’s choreographies were inspired by the musical patterns instead of any narrative intention. He was a ‘genuine’ modernist, as Martin claims, whose inspiration aroused from symphonies by composers including Beethoven or Shostakovich. As a modernist, Massine was endowed with the ability of using a mostly unused, until that moment, power of interpretation, a power laying in a modernist stream, where nature becomes subject to the machine.489 Shapes, according to Martin, represent a new narrative in Massine’s symphonic works:

489 Martin, Introduction to the Dance, 122.
Though there is, to be sure, little reason for grafting a gratuitous visual program upon these purely musical works, a mirroring of their forms has at least served to give some shape to the ballet. If this is only a reflected shape, and not the substance of the ballet’s true body, it nevertheless takes it one large step away from stylized representationalism and within hailing distance of abstraction.

Massine’s symphonic language appealed to Borovansky. Massine’s predilection for geometrical shapes, typical of his symphonic production, lived a second life in Borovansky’s original repertoire. One case in point is Vltava, choreographed in 1943, which premiered at the Comedy Theatre in Melbourne. Named after the Vltava river in former Czechoslovakia – a river that is ‘bound up [with] the history and the tradition of the Czech nation’ Vltava was created to music composed by the Czech composer Bedřich Smetana, and featured Martyn as the Spirit of the River. Potter found that some of the movements present in were ‘reminiscent of the second movement of Massine’s Choreartium’, a symphonic ballet created by Massine in 1933. The flowing of the river Vltava was an effect reproduced by the dancers of the corps de ballet. Disposed in two parallel lines as to form an obtuse triangle with its vertex at the bottom-centre of the stage, the dancers of the corps de ballet perform tiny balancé steps on the spot, raising the working foot at the height of the heel on a very low demi-pointe. This low and slow footwork is in stark contrast with the arm movement, which happens at the same time. Dragging their arms from the floor to the air, as to create an open V-shape that recalls the obtuse angle created by the disposition of the corps de ballet on the stage, the dancers personify the river, swinging their arms upwards and downwards, bending on their sides. The smoothness of the arm shape is provided by the elbows, softly bent as to recreate a sort of round shape while the arms reach the floor and the air. While on one side, Borovansky expressed his preference towards different interpretative approaches that let the leading dancers’ personalities emerge in the characters they portrayed, on the other, he wanted the members of the corps de ballet to conform. In Vltava it is noticeable that the corps de ballet dances in unison, as if it the river had one, long wave (represented by the dancers disposed on two parallel lines) rippling onto the shore. The corps de ballet performs providing an imitative representation of the river Vltava. Imitation as a mode of representation, as explained by Foster

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494 Jackson and Potter, sec. 00:16:10”.
495 Jackson and Potter, sec. 00:16:14”.
where she refers to a river to contextualise this principle, ‘reproduces a schematised version of
the river’s appearance’.497

Imitation depends on a spatial and temporal conformity between represented entity and
danced step. Thus the curves, width, speed, colour, and texture of the river are carefully
appraised and reproduced in the movement. The movement, although altered to the scale of
the human body and simplified in certain ways, clearly indicates the size and shape of its
counterpart in the world. Thus the river might be represented by a continuously moving line
of dancers in flowing blue costumes, with other nearby dancers waving to each other across
the line.498

To represent the river and to imitate the wave movement, it could be said that Borovansky
borrowed the arm movements from Massine, a strategy that aimed to provide a sort of dramatic
effect to the dance.499 In addition, I would claim that this choice was meant to reproduce the
three-dimensional effect that Massine intended for his Choreartium. In his memoirs, Massine
stated that Brahms, the composer of the Fourth Movement used for Choreartium, wanted to
offer a ‘spiritual quality’ that was typical, according to Massine, of medieval Italy as
represented in a fresco he saw in Palazzo Campanile in Siena.500 Massine tried to represent the
tridimensionality of the fresco thorough movements that had to be performed in ensemble
dances.

Most of it [the fresco] had become blurred with the passage of time, but there was a group of
women in deep burgundy-red robes which was still visible. I made these women the leitmotiv
of the movement, threading the image of them through the ensembles, in which the weaving
dancers, with their arms extended, formed a succession of harmonic choreographic
progressions and dynamic evolutions. To sustain the illusion of the third dimension – height
– I employed a series of lifts, leaps and wide-flung arm movements.501

Massine’s ‘wide-flung arm movements’ were reproduced by Borovansky in his Vltava, defined
by Potter as a ‘choreographic rhapsody’.502 The swinging of the arms was a faithful
reproduction of the movements performed in Massine’s Choreartium, as Potter made clear, a
ballet that Borovansky had danced himself years earlier. In Vltava, the link with Borovansky’s
cultural background was suggested in costumes only, particularly those worn by the male

497 Foster, ‘Reading Choreography: Composing Dances’, 65.
498 Foster, 65–66.
500 Massine, My Life in Ballet, 191.
dancers of the *corps de ballet*, which recalled the traditional white costumes so much a part of the Slavic culture. Nevertheless, none of the moves recall those of folkloristic Czech dances. Once again, the choreographer did not stick with the idea of representing a national folkloric element through the representation of authentic dancing forms, as happened with *Capriccio Italien*. Able reproducer, to borrow an expression from Ingram, of both the modern the symphonic works performed by Ballet Russes companies between 1936 and 1940, Borovansky tried to follow the direction of de Basil’s companies restaging good part of his repertoire.

The attempts made by Kirsova, Bousloff and Borovansky to reproduce the modern and modernist choreographic values they assimilated when they worked with Ballets Russes had a positive impact on Australian audiences. Opting for a ballet repertoire, either original or restaged, rooted in Fokine’s modern tradition and on Massine’s symphonic works, gave the Australian choreographers a challenge with which they could measure themselves. The strength of the Australian dancers under the guidance of Kirsova and Borovansky, as discussed, relied on their ability to convey emotions through a unique interpretation. Endorsing an idea formulated by Martin, Foster argues that the viewer is empathetic to the different emotional states of the dancers on-stage. According to Foster, ‘Martin believed in an autonomous inner-self that, impressed upon by its witnessing of the dance, responded with its unique interpretation of the dance’s expression’. In terms of kinaesthetic experience, it can be argued that Massine’s symphonic ballets opened to more interpretative possibilities than works accompanied by a libretto. ‘Liberated’ from the tides of the redundant narrative of the mimic gestures of Petipa’s ballets, the modern and the modernist ballets established a new relationship between choreographer, dancer and spectator. Borovansky, who followed the example of Massine, often did not suggest a ‘proper’ way of interpreting a role; movements and steps aimed to evoke sensations and feelings in the viewer through the expressivity of the dancer’s whole body and were informed by different interpretative styles.

Despite the success of Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff’s productions, Fokine and Massine’s approaches to ballet-making did not represent the only syntaxes preferred by the three

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503 Jackson and Potter.
504 Ingram, Geoffrey Ingram interviewed by Michelle Potter in the Esso Performing Arts collection - Oral TRC 2372, sec. 1.
506 Foster, 2.
507 The process of liberation from the uncontextualized use of mimic gesture was, in primis, carried out by Bronislava Nijinska in 1921, when of *The Sleeping Beauty* for Diaghilev.
choreographers for the creation of an original repertoire. In fact, they still availed of the ‘old’ frame and language represented by the classics, on which they moulded original ballets based on Australian themes. In the next chapter I explore these choreographic conventions applied to Borovansky and Bousloff’s representation of the Australian landscape and creation of so-called ‘Aboriginal ballets’.
4. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE ‘NEW WORLD’ THROUGH THE ‘OLD’

Referring to Australia with the term ‘new world’, Hungarian-born conductor Antal Doráti (1906 – 1988) recalled his experience of conducting an Australian orchestra during the Ballets Russes tour:

I was enchanted. This was the real New World, I said to myself. How really new it was, I found out at the first orchestra rehearsal. I met a group of very nice people who knew nothing about orchestral playing at all. 508

For Baronova, what was ‘new’ in the Australian dimension were the spectators and the enthusiasm with which they greeted the dancers. In interview with Potter, Baronova claimed the Australian fans were ‘quick learners’ and that the positive impact the repertoire had on the audience was because of the spectators’ thirst for art. Australia’s nature was also a factor in it being considered a new world. For Baronova:

Every tree is a different tree we’ve never seen before. The flowers, those gorgeous flowers and the animal world was different. Everything, everything is new, another world, fascinating, beautiful and people different, much more friendly, open and relaxed. 509

The dancer also recalled her impressions of Australia after her arrival in 1938. She was mesmerised by the warmth and kindness of the ballet fans. Doctor Anderson was the ballet fan who most of all established a deep relationship with the dancers. 510 The ‘new’ world to which artists such as Doráti and Baronova opened their heart at the end of the 1930s had a positive impact in their lives and artistic careers, to the extent that former Ballets Russes dancers Borovansky and Bousloff staged an original repertoire dedicated to their adoptive country. The

508 Antal Doráti quoted in Mark Carroll, ed., ‘“A Flutter in the Orchestras”: The Ballets Russes and the Australian Orchestral Situation in the 1930s.’, in The Ballets Russes in Australia and Beyond (Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2011), 154.
510 Baronova, Irina Baronova interviewed by Michelle Potter in the Esso Performing Arts collection - Oral TRC 3119, sec. 00:02:20".
‘new world’ in Borovansky ballets is portrayed as a virgin land, a point of contention between Aboriginal Australians and British colonists, seen in *Terra Australis* (1946) and *Black Swan* (1949). Bousloff’s ballets strive to represent Australian nature, apparent in *The Beach Inspector and the Mermaid* (1959) and *The Fire at Ross’s Farm* (1961), and especially the inclusion of Aboriginal dances in *Kooree and the Mists* (1960) and *Brolga* (1953).

This chapter is concerned with a choreographic analysis of these ballets against the backdrop of an early twentieth-century colonial land, where ‘new’ Australians and ‘old’ Australians – European settlers and Indigenous Australians – struggled to accommodate each other’s presence. 511 Officially proclaimed *Terra nullius*, 512 literally ‘no man’s land’, in 1770 by Captain James Cook, Australia went through a long process of colonisation. The violence and disruption began in 1788, when the first British colony was established around Sydney Harbour and the original inhabitants became subjects of Britain. 513 The Walk for Reconciliation in May 2000 brought to what has been defined by Australian historians Raymond Evans and Bill Thorpe a ‘postcolonial apology’ from settler-Australians to Indigenous Australians. 514

The violent process of colonisation was not the only way settler-Australians imposed their authority. With the term settler-Australians, I am referring to European citizens deported to Australia in the eighteenth-century, and free-settlers. Appropriation of Aboriginal cultures was used at various times in a transnational context, especially in the 1950s. As dance historian Amanda Card explains, ‘the process of referencing and the appropriation of Aboriginal culture does not begin in the 1950s.’ 515 Nevertheless, the 1950s represented a decade where there was the urge to find an Australian artistic identity that brought settler-Australians to find their source of inspiration in Aboriginal art and rituals. 516

For the purpose of this chapter, the referencing made by Borovansky and Bousloff of Indigenous stories, symbols, music, and movement are my object of investigation. This chapter is centred on the representation of the Australian landscape as intended by Bousloff and also

511 Here I am using the adjective ‘new’ and ‘old’ to refer respectively to Australia and Europe in line with the definition provided by Doráti and Baranova, who, as explained in the introductory part of this chapter, saw in Australia a ‘new world’.
516 Card, 41.
on the stereotypical representation of Aboriginal peoples in colonial Australia as intended by Borovansky, where this latter created choreographies dedicated to Australia’s colonial dimension, where land and peoples were represented as conquered and ‘domesticated’. Here I discuss the adoption of classical choreographic models inherited by Ballets Russes choreographers in Borovansky and Bousloff’s productions for the creation of their own ballet repertoires, respectively centred on colonial and Aboriginal topics. My purpose in this chapter is twofold: firstly, I aim to investigate the impact that classical ballet patterns had on the creation of ballets based on Australian themes. Secondly, this chapter aims to pinpoint how the creation of a ballet repertoire referencing aboriginal symbols and topics diverted from the intention of preserving the integrity of Aboriginal peoples’ dances an rituals, but rather constituted an appropriation of Aboriginal dance rituals for the creation of ballets. This cultural referencing, as argued by the Indigenous activist and founding director of NAISDA Dance College Carole Johnson, represents an appropriation of the Aboriginal cultural symbols, a practice that facilitated the proliferation in the 1940s and 1950s of misleading newspaper headings reporting ‘Aboriginal Ballets’ in their titles.  

4.1 NEW LANDSCAPES, OLD MODELS

Creating a repertoire based on her impressions on Australia’s natural environment, Bousloff created ballets which had bush and beach as settings, but using a purely classical ballet vocabulary and syntax. Bousloff herself divided the ballets she staged from 1953 onward into three main categories: established ballets which include partial restaging of the classics, Fokine and Massine’s works, literary ballets inspired by existing stories, and Australian works that purported to borrow from Aboriginal ritual practices, and life in the Australian outback. In a scrapbook held at the National Library of Australia, we read that Bousloff divided the ballets she staged from 1953 into three main categories: established ballets (which include partial restage of the classics, Fokine and Massine’s works), literary (original ballets inspired by

Bousloff’s Australian ballets can be classified in other two groups: the first regards works having as their main theme the Australian natural environment, and the second works having at their centre the appropriation of the Aboriginal theme. In this section of this chapter I will be examining the Australian ballets of the first group.

Like Kirsova twenty-years earlier, Bousloff also wanted to create a ballet company enriched by the collaboration of different local artists. In interview, she claimed she intended to create the West Australian Ballet Company ‘with scenery painted by local artists, music written by Australian composers, and ballet themes inspired by Australia’. The Fire at Ross’s Farm (1961), choreographed by Edward Miller to James Penberthy’s music, and The Beach Inspector and the Mermaid (1959) explore the Australian lifestyle. The Fire at Ross’s Farm is a two-act ballet, based on a poem written by poet Henry Lawson (Grenfell, 1867 – Abbotsford, 1922), first published in Sydney in 1894. Lawson’s poem is about a settler, Ross, fighting against a bushfire. The squatter, whose family name is Black, helps him extinguish the fire threatening his property. Ross’ daughter and Black’s son are ‘a Romeo and a Juliet in the case,’ to quote Lawson, and their initially unapproved love story is the background of the poem.

Bousloff’s ballet is centred on the story of Ross and Black, two feuding farmers. The first act is centred on the misadventure at Ross’s farm: the two farmers’ children, Jenny Ross and Robert Black, fall in love and Robert is repudiated by his family. When the fire reaches his family’s property, Robert helps them, and reinstates his honour. The two lovers can finally get married. The second act of the ballet shows the celebrations of the farmers: a rodeo, a stock whip exhibition, a sheep shearing contest, and Scottish and English country dances to portray a rural outback family. In interview, Bousloff explains that The Fire at Ross’s Farm was entertaining because it presented national sports and attractions known to Australians, ‘except football!’ clarifies Bousloff in interview, because it was set in the bush, and this sport could not match with the mood of the setting. As Card explains, Australian choreographers in the 1950s felt the need to engage ‘in the construction of themselves as locals,’ and Bousloff was

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520 West Australian Ballet Company.
521 Kira Bousloff, Transcript of an Interview with Kira Bousloff (1914 – ) WA Ballet Company Founder, interview by Margita Chudziak, verbatim, January 1986; 36, Library and Information Service of Western Australia, State Library of Western Australia.
522 Bousloff, 36.
526 Bousloff, Transcript of an Interview with Kira Bousloff (1914 – ) WA Ballet Company Founder, 41.
not alien to this process: ‘As artists, they sought to be recognised for knowing subjects in their place of residence. To this end, the bush was a favourite image. The land held the truth, it was the source of native identification.’

With this choreographic work, Bousloff symbolically proclaimed her commitment to her new home.

*The Beach Inspector and the Mermaid* is also devoted to Bousloff’s love for the Australian landscape. In interview, the choreographer recalled the enthusiasm showed by her ex-husband James Penberthy, who composed the music for the ballet:

Jim [James] was fascinated by the figure of the beach inspector who was pushing people around the beach. And we both loved the beach, so he said: “What about a ballet about a beach inspector?” and I agreed. We had Janice Ericson, ex dancer from Borovansky Ballet, and I asked her to dance the role of the mermaid.

This is a humorous one-act ballet set on a beach shore, where young men and women relax, engage in some playful activities and flirt with each other. A beach inspector approaches the crowd and starts flirting with the girls on the beach. A sudden cry erupts from the ocean and the lifeguards rescue a mermaid, who loses her tail and becomes a human. Irritated by the Mermaid’s presence, the group of young women who were flirting with the Beach Inspector leaves the shore. He then falls in love with the Mermaid and they dance an amorous idyll until the Mermaid disappears back into the waves. Broken-hearted, the Inspector orders the sun to set so the crowd leaves and he can be alone to mourn his lost love.

Interestingly, the representation of Australian society, from the perspective of a choreographer who settled twenty-years before the creation of this ballet, does not include Fokine’s modern stylistic trait. Indeed, this choreographic work, I would argue, presents some characteristics common to the ballet-féerie, which, as mentioned in chapter two, is a Russian dance genre from 1880 where fairy-tales provide the plot:
A popularized version of the grand ballet, the féerie exaggerated the worst features of Petipa’s productions: visual effects completely overshadowed the choreography; the dancing emphasized flashy virtuoso numbers for the stars and precision routines for the corps de ballet.

The key elements in The Beach Inspector and the Mermaid that recall ballet-féerie characteristics are the presence of a heroine shrouded in her mythological aura, the crowd and the love idyll between the lovers. Despite it not being divided into multiple acts and scenes, it still presents a choreographic structure partially influenced by the mythological element populating Petipa’s ballets. The love idyll between the beach inspector and the mermaid follows a typical step of romantic ballets or ballet-féerie, a genre based upon the representation of mythological iconography populating ballet librettos: half-animal and half-human heroines briefly entertain themselves with mortals, before returning to their enchanted places, once more inaccessible to humans. Bousloff possessed a good knowledge of the classics and an irresistible attraction for the folkloristic elements typical of the Russain fairy-tales populated by magical female creatures such as water nymphs. Another element that her ballet shares with ballet-féerie is the crowd, represented by dancing and non-dancing groups. The crowd playing on the beach represents a choral element in The Beach Inspector and the Mermaid; its role is close to the choral one fulfilled by the corps de ballet in a ballet-féerie. By choral, I refer to dancing and non-dancing groups present on the ballet stage that vaguely evoke the social function of society in the Greek tragedy of fifth-century B.C. I say ‘vaguely’ because, despite its proximity with the groups formed by the member of the corps de ballet, the Greek chorus played a much more interactive part in the Greek tragedy. On the contrary, the corps de ballet in ballet-féeries does not play an interactive role. Nevertheless, even when the corps de ballet does not dance, its presence is fundamental for the choreographic structure. They frame and define the action of the main characters dancing on-stage, moving in parallel, vertical, or circular lines on the sides of the stage, moving, standing still, or maintaining poses that change on a specific musical accent or at the end of a dance.

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531 Scholl, 14.
532 Potter, ‘Kira Bousloff, Founder of the West Australian Ballet’.
533 It was the Russian ballet critic Akim Volynsky who, between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, suggested that the corps de ballet, supported by the assessments previously made by the dance expert Levinson, recalled the structure of the Greek chorus, particularly of the works of Sophocles between 496 and 406 B.C. Nevertheless, there are main structural differences that must be taken in consideration. While the chorus in a Sophoclean tragedy offers a popular-mythical commentary that serves to establish an active interaction with the ipokrit (a figure in Greek tragedy who answers the questions of the chorus), the corps de ballet does not interact directly with the main dancers. Volynsky, Ballet’s Magic Kingdom, 252–53.
by the *corps de ballet* in the *ballet-féerie*, the crowd in *The Beach Inspector and The Mermaid* does not directly interact with the two lead dancers; its function is more framing than interactive, representing a specific social group on-stage (young Australians), whose role is not key to the narration.

Finally, the *pas de deux* between Beach Inspector and Mermaid is characterised by steps recalling a search for harmonic lines typical of the romantic Russian ballet tradition. The duet presents a series of poses in *arabesque on pointe*, where Mermaid, who sways her arms in harmony with the peaceful ripple of the waves, dances with Beach Inspector, who often lifts her onto his shoulders. This *pas de deux* between the lovers shares the typical characteristics of a romantic *pas*. There is no innovation in terms of steps: their love is interpreted according to the purest classical forms that made Petipa’s *pas de deux* the quintessential love meeting between the female and the male character of his fairy-tales. Supporting the ballerina during her *pirouettes*, *arabesque penché* and *cambrés*, Beach Inspector embraces her waist and raises her in several lifts that culminate in a series of technically demanding poses, such as fish dives, a virtuosic step made popular in the 1920s. The encounter between the two main characters is infused with plastic poses that fill the *adagio* with steps of a purely classical ballet tradition. They indulge in conspiratorial looks. The flow created by the harmonious combination of movements set in predefined patterns, such as lifts where Mermaid sits on the Beach Inspector’s shoulder, *arabesques* and *attitudes croisé* – serve as elements for the celebration of love.534 In line with the aesthetic sensibility of *ballet-féeries*, Bousloff inserted virtuosic steps, such as fish dive pose, a technically demanding and athletic pose that reveals the complete abandonment and trust of the ballerina in her partner. This pose was possibly inserted by Nijinska in the 1921 restaging of *The Sleeping Princess*, and it was not part of Petipa’s original choreography.535 It consists of a lift were the ballerina’s torso is bent backwards, her partner keeps one of her leg under his arm, while the second leg is in *attitude derrière* position. Mindful of the aesthetic qualities and ballet that Russian pedagogues such as Egorova and Preobraženskaâ taught her, Bousloff created a *pas de deux* where the idealised love encounter represents the epitome of the ballet. A *pas deux*, as Martin explains, represents a series of idealised qualities that praised the male and female characters:

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534 ‘The Beach Inspector and the Mermaid’, pt. 00:15:10”.
In it we are shown first the static qualities, so to speak, of the medium and of the dancers in relation to each other—balance and line, the strength and stability of the masculine and the lightness and delicacy of the feminine, not in terms of free mobility, but sustained and supported.\textsuperscript{536}

By ‘medium’ Martin refers to the ballet code utilised by the choreographer, the artist’s material and the artist’s way of conveying their art to society.\textsuperscript{537} In The Beach Inspector and the Mermaid the choreographer and composer’s fascination for the beach presents the vocabulary of classical ballet, a medium that ‘pleases’ spectators, according to their contemporary reviewers, and provides a ‘light-hearted’ mood.\textsuperscript{538}

Bousloff never totally abandoned the classical ballet vocabulary. Borovansky also favoured this vocabulary when he created his own repertoire centred on Australian topics. Contrary to Bousloff, who centred her ballets on the Australian natural environment and her own reproduction of Aboriginal dances, Borovansky was interested in the representation of the conflict between the colonials and Aboriginal peoples. But before analysing Borovansky’s choreographic production about such a historically complex topic, I would like to dedicate my attention to the phenomenon of appropriation of Aboriginal symbology, which is of fundamental and preliminary historical relevance within this context.

It is in this climate of appropriation of the Australian land and ‘Indigenocide,’\textsuperscript{539} to borrow a term from Evans and Thorpe, that the settler-Australians appropriated elements of Aboriginal art. Historian Victoria Haskins recalls an episode that marked the interest in Aboriginal music and dance, which was Queen Elizabeth II’s tour in Australia in 1954, an event celebrated with excerpts from Corroboree, a ballet based on Aboriginal dances and performed to music created by Australian composer John Antill in 1946, representing the initiation of a young boy into manhood:\textsuperscript{540}

\textsuperscript{536} Martin, Introduction to the Dance, 215.
\textsuperscript{537} Martin, 13.
\textsuperscript{539} Evans and Thorpe, ‘Indigenocide and the Massacre of Aboriginal History’
The lead role of the boy initiate was played by the choreographer, a dynamic American dancer, Beth Dean, performing in a nylon brown bodystocking and make-up mimicking the ochre bodypainting, her hair pulled up in a chignon that suggested the hairstyles of the central desert. A curious spectacle, indeed, as one English woman watched another young, American woman, play out the initiation of manhood of an Aboriginal youth, as a symbol of Australia’s distinctive cultural identity.541

As Card explains, the fact that Dean claimed that the steps for her Corroboree could be considered ‘authentic’ and ‘Aboriginal’ could only be considered valid in the 1950s. By the 1970s, when Dean restaged Corroboree, she called the choreography interpretative, and by the 1990s she claimed the steps had almost no relationship to Aboriginal movement when she restaged the work with the dancers from the Australian Ballet School. This change was in direct association with the changing status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia and their gradual attainment of recognition and rights, and the increasing cultural awareness to not reappropriate Indigenous art and practice in the decades following World War II.542 This 1946 music had already been used for a ballet, choreographed by Rex Reid in 1950 for the National Ballet. Reid’s choreography – with set design by William Constable and costume design by Robin Lovejoy - was famous for the large headdresses and parade-style action arranged in pseudo-Aboriginal totemic groups.543 While Reid claimed that his dance was pure invention, Dean, instead, claimed that her 1954 version of the ballet was created from authentic Aboriginal dance steps that she and her husband, Victor Carell, had seen and recorded during their ‘anthropological’ tour of the Northern Territory.544 Borovanky, referring to Rex Reid’s Corroboree, commented saying that Antill’s music was interesting, but the production did not deserve to be called a ballet, and that corroboree dances should be left to Aboriginal peoples:

Antill's music was not written for ballet. It is aboriginal music put into forms of Western culture. We have our own culture to develop in classic ballet. If aboriginal themes are to be given, let them be performed by aborigines, without being distorted by, or without distorting, classic ballet.545

541 Haskins, 19.
544 Card.
The critic raised by Borovansky discloses a negative impression of Antill and Reid’s *Corroboree*, as the dancing on-stage could not be considered a ballet, but rather a re-visititation of corroboree dances from a Western perspective. Interestingly, in 1946, while Antill was composing the score, Borovansky created a choreography with a non-Aboriginal dancer playing the role of an Aboriginal. This ballet is Borovansky’s first full-scale ballet on Australian theme: the symbolic *Terra Australis*, where Australia is personified as a virgin land (interpreted by Sager), which is a point of contention between the Aboriginal (interpreted by Vassilie Trunoff) and Explorer (interpreted by Martin Rubinstein). As Jackson and Potter explain in their documentary, ‘the ballet personified Australia as a virgin courted by an Aboriginal lover but attracted to a European explorer. It examines the tragic consequences of this troubled liaison and created an opportunity for Borovansky to create original roles for his finest dancers’. *Terra Australis* was a new Australian collaboration with production design by Eve Harris, a commissioned score by Esther Rofe, and libretto by Tom Rothfield. From an article that appeared in the same year as the performance, we read:

> The chief interest of the current week's ballet programme centres, naturally, on the premiere presentation of Australia's first ballet, "Terra Australis." Written by Tom Rothfield, to music by Esther Rofe, with choreography by Borovansky, and costumes and decor by Eve Harris, it is undoubtedly an impressive work, and congratulations are due to those concerned for their initiative, enterprise and painstaking co-operation in bringing the ballet to the point of perfection reached in its performance.

Borovansky presented the Aboriginal figure as stereotyped. Though he created a ballet that did not intend to represent Aboriginal dances on-stage, as Dean’s *Corroboree*, it must be said that the choreographer followed the same frame adopted by Beth Dean by mimicking Aboriginal costumes. In support of this consideration, the articles that appeared in a local newspaper in the mid-1940s report the success of *Terra Australis* as a ballet that deserved to be remembered for its picturesque costumes, and not its dancing:

548 Jackson and Potter, pt. 00:29:21”.

156
Edouard Borovansky has interpreted Esther Rofe’s music with skilful, satisfying choreography, using two levels of the stage. On the upper stage the drama of the three central characters is enacted against a bold background of hills and fields, while below timeless Earth continues its endless workings. In the costumes designed by Eve Harris the lower groups of dancers are truly the brown Australian earth, streaked with clay patterns and slivered with the ghosts of trees. This is not a mere pictorial effect; costumes, music, and movement blend perfectly. With the Aboriginal, danced by Vassllie Trunoff, the costume is again an integral part of the role. The terracotta hued tights, trunks and headband, with their white tribal markings, were a happy choice. There was fine contrast between the primitive strength of the native and the aggressive assurance of the interloper — the part taken by Martin Rubinstein. Each dancer was at his best, and Trunoff, dancing his biggest role of the season, showed great artistry. The weaving of his body into the earth brought the two planes of the stage together for the final moments of the ballet. Peggy Sager, who was also appearing in her most important role; proved technically adequate as the girlish Australia but could not give full character to the formalised figure. Her pale green tunic, spattered with flowers, was the one really trite note in the entire ballet.

The costumes of Aboriginal and of the corps de ballet in Terra Australis and Beth Dean’s ‘brown bodystocking and make-up mimicking ochre bodypainting’ are a point in common in terms of décor and design. As noted by Carol Johnson, this way of framing the ballet falls into the category of ‘appropriation of the cultural symbol,’ as a ‘part of a creative process that has very specific political ramifications’. By appropriation of culture, in particular, Johnson refers to ‘the taking of distinctive cultural symbols of one people and incorporating them into another culture while at the same time devaluing the people whose culture is being used’. Corroboree and Terra Australis are two examples where it is possible to find this exploitation of Aboriginal symbology in an art form such as ballet. Terra Australis makes no claim towards authenticity or allegiance to anything but a European classical ballet history.

First produced at His Majesty’s Theatre in Melbourne in 1946, Terra Australis is a one-act ballet symbolising the invasion of Australia, and the aggression towards Aboriginal peoples perpetrated by the European colonisers, who win the right to own the land. The corps de ballet of the Borovansky Ballet enters, and the terracotta colours of the dancers’ costumes merge with those of the background scenery of bush and a cave. The dancers symbolise the Earth, and through their sombre dancing they express ‘the fate which hovers over the ancient continent, about to pass from its sleep of many thousand years to a new awakening’.

553 Norman Macgeorge, Borovansky Ballet in Australia and New Zealand (Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1946), 93.
*de deux* that celebrates their long-lasting love, when suddenly Aboriginal catches the sight of Explorer. They hide from the view of the man, but she is curious and, ‘ever ready to welcome the newcomer as one who may make her fruitful,’ 554 who decides to approach him. Aboriginal, jealous of his new rival, watches the scene in disgust. Australia then calms him down with a lullaby, but when Aboriginal wakes up he attacks Explorer, who hits the Aboriginal and kills him. Aboriginal falls from the platform, where he was fighting, unto Earth, who lays him to rest while Australia and Explorer turn away, to start their future together. 555

In *Terra Australis* the choreographer represents his own idea of Australia as a primitive land to be conquered. According to the contemporary critics of Borovansky, the symbolism used in the choreography was to the detriment of dancing and, at the same time, conferred the ballet a static asset:

 [...] the ballet is too much of an action dance, with the emphasis on action, in the sense of attitude, rather than on dance. This may be justified because primitive "dances" are of this sort and the story is primitive in its essential idea and decor. But with the tradition of ballet it would seem preferable to catch up those ideas and fashion them more fully into a wider use of the dance forms that have been developed in order to avoid a certain static atmosphere which the ballet has and to strengthen the dynamic idea of struggle and triumph. 556

By primitive dances, we might assume that the unknown author of the article refers to the moves performed by Aboriginal in the dancing, a role interpreted by the dancer Valery Trunoff. The stylistic difference between Aboriginal and Explorer is rendered by the execution of steps (such as multiple *pirouettes*) which end, for Trunoff, with feet turned-in (an inward rotation of the feet and legs from the hips) instead of being turned-out, which is the usual position of the feet in classical ballet. Borovansky does not attempt to recall an Aboriginal-inspired dance, as the dances are represented by the vocabulary of classical ballet. In this union between classical ballet vocabulary and Aboriginal symbology, we are assisted by a phenomenon explained by Card in her critical analysis of the appropriation of the Aboriginal symbolic culture in 1950s Australia: ‘Both cultures had been borrowed: the “primitive” Aboriginal from the “lower other” and the “sophisticated” European from the “higher other”’. 557 The ‘higher other’ in the ballet

554 Macgeorge, 93.
555 Macgeorge, 93.
556 Borovansky Ballet. “Terra Australis”.
is revealed through its medium of classical ballet. The ideal of symmetry, typical of the ballet-féerie, is all here: it is in the pas de trois danced by the Explorer, the Aboriginal and the Spirit of Australia – in the poses held in arabesques, and in the aesthetic function of the corps de ballet. The frame of the ballet deserves some attention. In Terra Australis, the corps de ballet is placed on a lower level in front of a platform, on the top of which Aboriginal and Explorer fight to conquer Spirit of Australia. As Potter explains,

Terra Australis was also perhaps the first Australian dance work to consider the space of the stage as a contributing element in the design and in the choreographic structure. A raised platform extending across the entire width of the stage divided the performance space. On the upper level the protagonists acted out their drama, while on the lower level the corps de ballet, dancing as the earth, wove organic patterns and created monumental groupings. This spatial divide was crossed when the main characters were delivered back to the earth. Dancers who appeared in the original production remember not so much distinctive features of the choreography as the fact that the stage was tiered, and that, while they welcomed this innovation, it occasionally created a feeling of insecurity, as they were unaccustomed to performing on a rostrum above the usual level of the stage.

Dividing the stage into two main levels, upper and a lower, confers the choreographic structure a hierarchical order, where the corps de ballet occupies a lower level. The fact that the dancers, as Potter makes clear, could not remember much of the steps they performed, seems to reinforce the validity of the comments of the unknown writer who criticised the ballet for a lack of dancing and an abundance of action, where by action the author possibly refers to the fight scenes. The corps de ballet performs basic movements on their knees, the groups of dancers do not engage in an active interaction with the three main characters. The terracotta one-piece jumpsuits worn by the corps de ballet symbolise the colour of the ground. Movements performed by the corps de ballet are simple: they alternate their arms in fluctuating waving that originates from the elbow raised above the height of their shoulders. With their eyes looking up to the sky, the dancers slowly wave their arms, with their fists closed, for two counts; during the next two counts, they knock on the floor, with their head lowered. Sitting on their knees, they wave and knock in two groups, disposed on the central-left and central-part of the stage. They are divided into ‘organic, monumental groupings,’ where their compactness is in stark contrast with the fight scene of Aboriginal and Explorer attempting to

561 Jackson and Potter, pt. 00:31’:29”.

159
conquer Spirit of Australia. The compactness of the corps de ballet, as Volynsky explains, represents the quintessence of order and symmetry in classical ballet. Such a compactness enhances a sense of unity and cohesion that essentially represents ‘the choreographic accompaniment to the essential theme,’ where the latter is represented by the dancing of the main roles, a fundamental feature for Petipa’s ballet-féerie.

The dancing groups in Terra Australis frame the action of the main dancers disputing for the love Spirit of Australia. The corps de ballet and the three main characters dance on two different levels: they represent the ‘voice of the earth’, which, in line with the aesthetical function of the corps de ballet described by Volynsky, narrates, from a lower portion of the stage, the fights and struggles of the Aboriginal land. The dancers of the corps de ballet keep a low posture: they run in small circles with their back curved and the torso bent forward, they stop in fondu position, and they mostly dance on their knees. From a kinaesthetic point of view,

562 Volynsky, Ballet’s Magic Kingdom, 253.
the *corps de ballet*, representing the earth and the Australian land, is always presented in a subordinated perspective. It is only when Explorer defeats Aboriginal that the dancers stand still in front of the platform, with their arms straightened to receive the wounded body of Aboriginal. The contrast of the two levels symbolises the subordination of the Aboriginal land and the Aboriginals to the invaders: this controversial and strong symbolism, as Potter pinpoints, could not pass unobserved. As Potter comments, the ballet ‘unnerved some contemporary commentators who felt uneasy even in the 1940s about the effectiveness of its symbolism’. An anonymous Melbourne critic of that time criticised the use of symbolism in the libretto:

> Terra Australis, presented by the Borovansky Australian Ballet for the first time at His Majesty's on Saturday, proved a notable event within the limitations imposed by its symbolic form. Those limitations, however, prevented it from fulfilling the promise of its title. As an expression of the character and spirit of the land it succeeded only partially because the author chose to use abstract figures who, given other names, could have successfully played out any story of aggression and conquest, love, hope and despair, and of whom nothing more could be made than conventional ballet characters.

Because of the critical comments that the ballet aroused, Potter explains that Borovansky and Rothfield (the librettist) made clear that it was not their intention nor to ‘give expression to an “Australian spirit”’ nor to ‘deliver a didactic message to white Australians,’ and that the libretto was written multiple times before Borovansky was satisfied with it. In interview, Rothfield explained that the choreography had to be appreciated for its narrative, faithful to the representation of true historical events: ‘We were concerned with writing the true story of Australia and naturally the fate of the Aboriginal came into it. If the national conscience is stirred by the ballet, then so much better’.

Another ballet staged by Borovansky is *Black Swan*, a two-part ballet produced in Melbourne in 1949, but performed for the first time only at the Empire Theatre in Sydney in June 1951 with music by Finnish composer Jean Sibelius’ *Swan of Tuonela*. It was another Borovansky original work dedicated to the colonisation of Australia by the Dutch. The ballet is divided into
three main scenes, set in Holland and Australia. The libretto for this ballet is based on an historical event, the visit to Western Australia by Dutch Captain Vilhelm Vlaming in 1697. It opens with a dream, which represents a sort of prologue to the ballet, where Brandt, Captain Vlaming’s Lieutenant, dreams of the spirit of the unknown land that manifests to him as a black swan. Admiring the animal on the banks of the Swan River, the lieutenant gains a strong attraction for Australia. But after his crewmates capture the swan, he realises he must return to Holland and to his fiancé Villemine, Vlaming’s daughter. The first scene opens in Amsterdam, where the spectator is shown the lieutenant’s backstory, before he departs from Holland. His mother and Villemine farewell him, the crew and the young women of his town dance to celebrate the new adventure. The second scene is set on the ship, where Brandt is dreaming a pas de deux with Black Swan. The third and last scene opens on the banks of the river, where Brandt finds Black Swan and her companions. Mesmerised by her presence, the Lieutenant dances with her until Vlaming and the crew interrupt them and try to catch the Black Swan. ‘The finale’ as we read in Brissenden and Glennon’s book, ‘was particularly impressive, the Swan being borne away while held aloft in arabesque’.567 The pas de deux they dance with the Lieutenant was tailored to dancers Eve Gordon and Kenneth Gillespie, who were praised by Xenia Borovansky for their technique and potential as excellent main dancers.568 After them, Busse and Sager alternated in the title role of Black Swan.569 Frank Salter explains in his monograph dedicated to Borovanky that this ballet was to be performed together with Beth Dean’s Corroboree at the Empire Theatre in Melbourne.570 According to Salter, this ballet was a neo-classical, Russianised concept which, after a bright first scene involving departing Dutch sailors and their girl-friends, emerged as another anthropomorphic relationship between a man and a bird, the ballerina black swan of the title epitomising a young lieutenant’s love for this new-found country. Neither very original nor memorable, The Black Swan was eminently danceable, provided its performers with clear-cut roles they could develop […].571

Though it is difficult to understand precisely what Salter means by ‘neo-classical, Russianised concept,’ a definition that is not contextualised by the author with any academic accuracy, I believe it is possible to grasp a fundamental meaning in Salter’s comment. The ballet is indeed

567 Brissenden and Glennon, 18–19.
568 Salter, Borovansky. The Man Who Made Australian Ballet, 162.
570 Salter, Borovansky. The Man Who Made Australian Ballet, 162.
571 Salter, 162.
characterised by a symbolism that, like *Terra Australis*, discloses the choreographer’s fascination for colonial topics. Choosing to create a personification of Australia by representing it through the image of a black swan, Borovansky was unavoidably creating a link with the classics of the Russian tradition. As Salter mentioned, the ballet was not original from a choreographic point of view, and the presence of the black swans in the last act partly evoked Petipa’s *Swan Lake* scenario. The lack of originality and homogeneity in the choreographic style of *The Black Swan* was noticed also by critics of Borovansky:

The Black Swan - a ballet about the early discovery of Australia - improves on acquaintance, when one has overcome its elements of banality and its discordances of style. Last night's performance was lively enough to prove that end of season lethargy was not entirely in command, and revealed, some moments of beauty, notably in the fluttering dance of swans in the last act.572

There are some features that made *The Black Swan* a ballet that aimed to be remembered, though unsuccessfully, as a link between the Russian classical ballet tradition and an Australian original work. Among the features anchored to the classical ballet tradition there are costumes and virtuoso steps of the classical ballet, while the sense of ‘Australianness’ in the ballet is merely provided by the choice of the colonial topic. The costuming is in line with the classical ballet tradition, and ballerinas perform *on pointe* and wear black tutus. The *pas de deux* between the Lieutenant and Black Swan included a fish dive, a spectacular leap performed by the ballerina landing in her partner’s arms.573 Keeping the classical choreographic patterns, and introducing such an acrobatic feature, *Black Swan* revealed, once more, Borovansky’s attachment to a choreographic sensibility typical of the classics, a term I have contextualised in chapter two. In *Black Swan*, as well as in *Terra Australis*, Borovansky demonstrated to possess a choreographic sensibility far from being revolutionary. They simply elaborated on the principle offered by Petipa at the turn of the twentieth-century, which consisted in creating symmetry on-stage, dividing the main dancers from the *corps de ballet* and inserting a virtuoso pose, fish dive, of a well-known ballet, *The Sleeping Princess*. His original repertoire did not really present innovations in terms of choreographic values. As Laurel Martyn observed, Borovansky’s wish to create original ballets did not bring his

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company the success he had hoped for. It was the old tradition developed by Ballets Russes in Europe that was more prominent and more appreciated.574

4.2 OF RITUALS AND ABORIGINAL DANCING

Borovansky and Bousloff’s use of classical ballet patterns for their ballet repertoire dedicated to Australian and colonial topics was largely based on the combination of steps and choreographic schemes borrowed from the classical ballet repertoire. While Borovansky preferred to represent the colonisation of Australia through ballets that created a stereotyped figure of Aboriginal peoples, like Terra Australis, or through symbols that represented the Australian land, like Black Swan, Bousloff concentrated on the representation of the most iconic settings, being the bush and the beach. But contrary to Borovansky, she staged ballets dedicated to the representation of Aboriginal rituals. This section of this chapter is dedicated to the choreographic processes that Bousloff adopted to represent two so called ‘Aboriginal’ ballets: The Brolga (1953), with Australian dancer Terri Charlesworth, and Kooree and the Mists (1960), featuring Indigenous dancer Mary Pearson.

As mentioned in ‘Context’, Bousloff was largely inspired by the avant-garde Russian choreographer Nijinska. She performed in her Parisian company in 1932, Théâtre de la Danse,576 where she had the chance to dance some of Nijinska’s most significant works, such as Les Noces (1923) and Les Biches (1924). Nijinska’s Les Noces is dedicated to the representation of a Russian peasant ritual: the celebration of a peasant wedding in rural Russia at the turn of twentieth-century. Bousloff’s Russian roots were apparent in her family origin, artistic education, and her career as a principal ballerina with Nijinska’s Théâtre de la Danse (1932 to 1934), and with de Basil’s Ballets Russes (1936-1940).577

In Europe, Bousloff was a well-known dancer who impressed audiences and critics with her technical skills with her work at Nijinska’s company. Les Noces is one of Nijinska’s works that

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574 Martyn, Laurel Martyn interviewed by Mark Gordon in the Esso Performing Arts collection - Oral TRC 2444, sec. 5.
Bousloff remembered with great pleasure. It follows a young peasant woman’s preparation for marriage. Homans called it ‘Nijinska’s answer to *Sacre* – her brother Nijinsky’s infamous, short lived work *Sacre de Printemps* (1913) – a re-enactment of a Russian peasant wedding, depicted not as a joyous occasion but a foreboding social ritual’. Bousloff’s name appears in 1933 in an article published on the French journal *Le Matin*, where Busloff and other two interpreters of Nijinska’s *Les Noces* were reviewed in positive tones:

The story is simple, the rhythm persistent and the black and white scenery helped understand the spiritual character of the work. Madame Tatiana Lipkovska, Kira Abrikosova [Bousloff] and Monsieur Boris Kniaseff are the principal interpreters of *Les Noces*. The famous cast of Bronislava Nijinska demonstrates once more to be professional and disciplined.

Bousloff seemed to be tailored for modernist ballets. From the avant-garde productions choreographed by Nijinska to performing main roles in Massine’s symphonic ballets, such as *Cimarosiana* (1924) and *Symphonie Fantastique* (1936), she was often recruited to dance in productions rooted in a more experimental ballet repertoire. In Potter’s monograph, Bousloff explained that she was inspired by Nijinska. Her years spent working with her company shaped the approaches to teaching that Bousloff later adopted.

I thought she was so inspiring, I based myself a lot on her in my teaching and in my approach [...] To me she was something very special. She gave all classes and did all the choreography. And we performed in Paris, and Covent Garden in England. She demonstrated even the boys’ steps, full speed. Fantastic woman!

Bousloff met Nijinska when she joined her ballet company in 1932 and kept dancing there until 1934, year in which the company folded. In those two years, Bousloff danced in Nijinska’s most famous works: *Les Cent Baisers* (first staged in Australia in 1936), *Les Noces* and *Les Biches*, these latter choreographed by Nijinska respectively in 1923 and 1924 for Diaghilev.

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580 Potter, ‘Kira Bousloff, Founder of the West Australian Ballet’.
581 Potter, 2.
582 Carroll, *The Ballets Russes in Australia and Beyond*.
Ballets Russes. Bousloff remembered Nijinska as a meticulous choreographer who considered musicality an invaluable component in performance. Les Noces, a ballet that Bousloff knew quite well, presents a musical structure intertwined with each character’s personality. Nijinska seemed to have inspired Bousloff not only on a technical level, but, as I aim to demonstrate here, also on a choreographic level. Both Nijinska and Bousloff created two ballets, respectively Les Noces and Brolga, portraying two distinctive social rituals. Nijinska’s Les Noces represents a Russian country wedding. The inspiration for the creation of this avant-garde work came when Nijinska was in Russia following the 1917 Revolution; she based her expressionistic ballet on her observations of Kiev countryside:

I saw a dramatic quality in such wedding ceremonies of those times, in the fate of the bride and groom since the choice is made by parents to whom they owe complete obedience and there is no question of mutuality of feelings. The young girl knows nothing at all about her future family, nor what lies in store for her. Not only will she be subject to her husband, but also to his parents. It is possible that after being loved and cherished by her own kin, she may be nothing more, in her new, rough family, than a useful extra worker, just another pair of hands. The soul of the innocent is in disarray because she is bidding good-bye to her carefree youth and to her loving mother. For his part, the young groom cannot imagine what life will bring close to this young girl, whom he scarcely knows, if at all … From this understanding of the peasant wedding, and this interpretation of the feelings of the bride and groom, my choreography was born. From the very beginning I had this vision of Les Noces.

The passage to womanhood, in particular, was common also in Bousloff’s ballets Brolga and Kooree and the Mists. Bousloff’s Brolga (1957) was a solo portraying a young Aboriginal woman protected by her animal totem – a brolga - entering adulthood. For this solo, Bousloff borrowed Nijinska’s idea of representing a social ritual rooted in Aboriginal totemic tradition. Like Nijinska, Bousloff found that social ritual could become an object of choreographic interest. But instead of exploring and performing ceremonies related to Russian rituals, as Nijinska did, Bousloff devoted her attention to a specific ritual performed within Aboriginal communities. This was the basis of Brolga, a ballet created for the dancer Terri Charlesworth.

584 Potter, ‘Kira Bousloff, Founder of the West Australian Ballet’.
586 Nijinska as quoted in Johnson, 154–55.
It is centred around the separation of a young Aboriginal girl from her community as she embarks on a process of initiation:

A young Aboriginal girl waits alone before her tribal initiation into full womanhood; disturbed by sharp noises of the night, she is overwhelmed by the meaning of the song of life and she thinks on the brolga, her totemic symbol. She imagines the whirlwind sweeping down upon her and she fights frantically against its power but is swept away.589

Both Nijinska’s Les Noces and Bousloff’s Brolga invoke a pre-liminal phase,590 to borrow a term from the British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, which consists in a moment of segregation as the young girl prepares for transition into womanhood. Upon reflection, Nijinska stated: ‘[t]he ritual is an attempt to resist the impermanence of the human being, freeing him from the concept of temporality and giving him something enduring and eternal’.591 In these two ballets, the ceremony and the initiation ritual represent two irreversible conditions, from which the characters cannot escape. The dancers perform their evolving social condition, where the steps, abandoning any conventional mimetic gestures typical of the classical ballet style, constitute the only tool through which the dancers perform their passage through their liminal condition toward their re-aggregation back into their society.

In interview, Bousloff remembers another work created by Nijinska, Les Biches (1924) to music by Francis Poulenc. It represents the quintessence of Nijinska’s unique ballet style, where the dances were performed on pointe, but the arms were far removed from classical port de bras.592 The Spirits in Les Biches perform fast and furious petite batteries, jumps consisting of quick crossings of the feet in the air multiple times before landing. Bousloff found Nijinska’s style remarkable because the choreographer used to focus on a quick footwork, while arms were held over the head with crossed wrists.593 Nijinska was totally absorbed in her world. The choreographer was partly deaf, but she was always perfectly aware when Bousloff (or Abricossova, as the choreographer used to call her) was out of tempo.594 In those years,
Bousloff made a good impression on Nijinska with her technical skills and she landed the leading role in *Les Noces*, which she shared with Tchinarova. This ballet was hard work. The syncopated score created by Stravinsky required the dancer to keep counting, furiously, as one could not rely on accents nor on rhythmic patterns of Stravinsky’s syncopated music, as there are very few. Nijinska’s style was a point of reference for Bousloff. She too became a choreographer who paid attention to a new form of expressivity of the arms, liberating them from the strictures of *port de bras*.

In *Brolga* it is possible to recognise Nijinska’s stylistic touch in the expressivity of the arms. The performance transcends the actions of a human to that of a bird. It was the dancer Charlesworth who approached Bousloff, asking her to choreograph something typically Australian. During an informal chat with Terri Charlesworth, in a café in North Perth in July 2014, I had the chance to discover more details about the movements in this solo. Recalling some of the gestures, Charlesworth described the awakening of the young woman as a slow, gradual process. She could remember her solo with remarkable lucidity and even ‘marked’ some action for me: her arms, representing the wings of the animal, moved in succession. The movement originated from the wrist, as her hands raises into the air, while the tip of Terri’s middle finger pushes slightly inward. In this way, the wrist caressed the air, creating small circles. Little by little, as Charlesworth recalled the movement, she began to move her feet and, finally, her neck, before standing up. As Terri recalled, in *The Brolga*, the narrative was in the movement of the arms and hands, a reflective mode of representation, where arms movement alludes to a brolga’s flattering wings.

A few years later, Bousloff choreographed a second ballet on an Aboriginal theme: *Kooree and the Mists* (1960), set to a commissioned score by James Penberth and design by Michael Page. A partial program of *Season of Ballet*, contained in the 1952-1965 records at the West Australian Ballet, outlines the plot:

> A young girl comes to a swamp in the evening and sees the white mists rising like spirits. These shapes and airy forms seem like spirits of all that is beautiful and good to the girl. She dances as if aspiring to join in their elevated movements. The mists swirl or float around her. No matter how hard she tries she remains earth bound. She believes that the other baser side of her human nature binds her to the earth. She notices gnarled trees with their roots delving

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595 Bousloff, sec. 2.
596 Bousloff, Transcript of an Interview with Kira Bousloff (1914 - ) WA Ballet Company Founder.
597 To ‘mark’ is to execute steps or movements in miniature.
598 Foster, ‘Reading Choreography: Composing Dances’.
into the slimy mud. Strange grotesque shapes seem to move from the darkness. Their movements easy to follow [sic] and soon she is dancing with the figures. The darkness of the night and her mind have conjured. Gradually the monsters take on an evil and menacing nature. When she fully realises that this terrifying manifestation of her own nature is destructive, and the imagined creatures become real and terrifying she loses control of her mind and escapes by throwing herself into the dark waters of the swamp. The monsters are now seen no more: only the white mists rising from the surface of the water, up through the still branches of the trees.

The ballet was created for Mary Pearson (nee Miller), Australia’s first Indigenous ballet dancer. Pearson performed as the Girl and the role of the Spirit of the Mists was performed by Gerard Sibbritt. Pearson was a talented dancer who received a scholarship to study with Kira Bousloff at her school. In interview, Bousloff claimed that she gave scholarships to Aboriginal students to encourage diversity in her company. The idea for the ballet came to the composer James Penberthy who, while observing the mists rising in moonlight, thought ‘what a fantastic setting for an Australian Giselle’. The story was written with the help of the writer Donald Robert Stuart (1913-1983), who became good friend with Bousloff and Penberthy, and spent significant time with local Aboriginal communities. According to Sally Clarke, who wrote her doctoral thesis on the life of Stuart, he had a strong influence in the art of Bousloff and Penberthy:

Donald Stuart was in the group of writers who gathered around James Penberthy. By now, Donald was regarded as having some authority when Aboriginal matters were under discussion and he advised on stories for the new Australian ballets, Kooree and the Mists and Woodara; his knowledge of Aboriginal customs would have been invaluable in ‘getting the story right’ and his powers of observation surely helped the dancers to transpose the movements of outback animals and birds into naturalistic dance forms. Donald and prominent Western Australian nature-lover, Vince Serventy, gave ‘technical advice’ for the ballet Brolga, designed around a story outlined by another well-known wildlife expert, Hany Butler.” Choreographed by Madam Bousloff to James Penberthy’s music, the short ballet tells the story of ‘a young Aboriginal woman’s totemic symbol of the brolga’. When ballerina Terri Charlesworth took Brolga to the 1957 International Ballet Competition in Moscow, she received the prestigious Ulanova Laureate for her performance of this unusual ballet.

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602 Kira Bousloff, Transcript of an Interview with Kira Bousloff (1914 - ) WA Ballet Company Founder, interview by Margita Chudziak, verbatim, January 1986, 40, Library and Information Service of Western Australia, State Library of Western Australia.
603 Bousloff, 39.; Bousloff, Kira Bousloff interviewed by Michelle Potter in the Esso Performing Arts collection - ORAL TRC 2627, secs 5, 00:20:20".
This ‘transposition of movements into naturalistic dance forms,’ described by Clarke makes clear ballets on Aboriginal themes, such as *The Brolga* nor *Koorree and the Mists*, transposed Aboriginal totemic symbols into dances. Bousloff created two ballets through the appropriation of an Aboriginal totemic symbol (the brolga, metaphor for the entrance to womanhood) casting Person to serve her primary artistic scope. The appropriation of Aboriginal totemic symbols and their representation on-stage cannot be intended by any means as a veridical reproduction of an Aboriginal ritual, but rather an instrumentalization of an Aboriginal theme to serve ballet purposes. It can be argued that Bousloff’s mode of representation in *Koorree and the Mists* and in *The Brolga* was the result of approaches to movement reflecting, or alluding to the movements of animals that assume a sacral value in the Aboriginal communities. Bousloff’s ballets can focus on certain qualities or attributes, to borrow two terms used by Foster, recalling those of outback animals. But even if we assumed that there is a certain degree of authenticity in this representation, these attributes do not correspond to the movements in their primary essence, as they do not belong to ballet, but to their Aboriginal cultural and social context. What Bousloff and her dancers could achieve were movements resembling those of Aboriginal rituals, using classical ballet as a ‘mode’ of expression.

It is the combination, to quote Card, of the search for the ‘primitive’ or the ‘lower other’ with the European, or the ‘higher other’; the search for a harmonious coexistence between these two factors, according to Carole Johnson, cannot exist. Embracing Johnson’s perspective, it can also be argued that resemblance, as a mode of representation, is an appropriation of the Aboriginal symbol by the settler-Australians forces two social and political realities in a coexistence of non-shared values.

The white creative artist who appropriates from another culture gains a benefit for himself, recognition for creating an extraordinary art product. However, he doesn’t exist as just an individual. Like the Aboriginal artist, he is part of a cultural and national group. The white Australian creative artist is expanding what is perceived as white culture and his contribution becomes part of the dominant white Australian culture. The Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander input of his distinctive style is soon ‘Australianised’ (in this way the
Though Bousloff alluded to Aboriginal dances to create a quality in motion that could establish a point of contact with Aboriginal rituals, this appropriation of the Aboriginal symbolism and dances, as in the case of *The Brolga* and at *Kooroo and the Mists* represents what Johnson pointed at as a ‘systematic non-recognition’ of the validation of racism towards Aboriginal communities. Johnson explains that ‘What is perceived as accepting into white culture elements of Aboriginal culture has nothing whatsoever to do with accepting Aboriginal people’. In their ways of portraying the new world they encountered, Borovansky and Bousloff, without taking into account the importance of preserving the Aboriginal symbols as part of a cultural dimension that could not serve as a choreographic input for their own ballet repertoire, they used the Aboriginal symbols to communicate, in different ways, the intrusion of ballet, a Western art form, in an Aboriginal ritual context.

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609 Johnson, ‘Ideas on Appropriation: The Emergence of NAISDA and Bangarra’, 49.
610 Johnson, 50.
CONCLUSION

While previous literature treated the topic of a transmission of choreographic and pedagogical approaches developed in Europe and Russia inherited by Australian practitioners as an implicit consequence of the settlement of Ballets Russes artists in Australia, in this thesis I sought the transmission of these approaches in a methodological perspective through an analysis of the modus operandi of Australian-based practitioners.

In Graeme Murphy’s Nutcracker, Clara’s dream is a time-travel that returns the elderly lady to her youth. Through a metatheatrical strategy, where the spectator becomes an unnoticed observer of her life, Clara recalls her successes as a student at the Russian Imperial Ballet Academy, as a Ballets Russes artist and finally as a Borovansky Ballet ballerina, until her dream ends. During the closing scene, Clara’s final heartbeats are saluted by two younger ballerinas, a child and a young lady, who invite her to join them on her bed. Like a living representation of Klimt’s painting, The Three Ages of Woman, the three dancers represent Clara at three ages who are finally reunited. Wearing their Nutcracker tutus, they hold their last pose for few counts on the notes of Nutcracker’s Apotheosis before falling one after the other on their side, falling into an eternal sleep. Clara’s memories, in Murphy’s choreography, are the equivalent of what, in this thesis, have been the archives from which I could learn part of the history of Australian ballet. Clara’s memories narrate a transnational story; the past life of a generation of artists who left Russia to embark on a new artistic adventure, joining the European companies Ballets Russes before becoming renowned artists in Australia. Murphy’s Clara symbolises the legacy of Ballets Russes in Australia.

This legacy, as I tried to make clear in this thesis, firstly passed through the adoption of the Cecchetti method. Favouring this ballet method over an already known RAD ballet method gave Kirsova and Borovansky a twofold opportunity: it represented a possibility for both sharing a ballet method that they refined in the years in which they studied and performed in Europe and, at the same time, transforming it into an appealing attraction for Australian performers keen to strengthen their technique. The Cecchetti method was, as I demonstrated through my first chapter, ideal to develop approaches to movements that could render Diaghilev choreographic tradition at its best. Considered already quite demanding for the structure of exercises aimed to strengthen legs, spine as well as for its quick footwork, the Cecchetti method combined all the perks of strengthening exercises and lyrical movements of the upper part of the body – such as ecartés and port de bras – in a harmonious whole. The
expressivity of Cecchetti method conferred exercises a lyrical quality which could be easily borrowed for developing character roles. As Poesio and Bennett made clear, this method embedded ballet-mime related movements\textsuperscript{611} and possessed, to borrow a term from Roné, a plastic quality.\textsuperscript{612}

Ballets Russes legacy lived also through the restaging of the Russian classics, Fokine’s ‘new’ modern ballets, Massine’s symphonic works. In the different choreographic sensibilities portrayed in Petipa, Fokine and Massine’s repertoires resides the interest of the Australian spectators, who followed with curiosity the advent of Ballets Russes in Australia between 1936 and 1940 and loved the repertoires performed by the Australian companies founded by Kirsova, Borovansky and Bousloff. The choreographic value of what Foster calls ‘quality in motion’ fuelled my research on ballet methodologies. Throughout this thesis I analysed the gestures, steps, and the approaches to movement in their choreographic context, which has been my primary concern in this historical enquiry and analysis. Though Australian performers were supposed to transmit qualities such as ethereality through their approaches to movement to convey the sensation that the heroines of classics such as Les Sylphides or Swan Lake (act II) were supposed to transmit, they were looking for their own rhetoric of movement. As demonstrated through chapter two and three, Fokine and Massine praised the individual artistic and expressive potential of each dancer, and roles were often tailored according to this potential. Kirsova and Borovansky used technique as the common vocabulary for the restaged classics and adopted Fokine’s principle of ‘ethnographical research’ as a base for their character dances. But while the syntax of their restaged classics avails of diversified styles and modes of representation,\textsuperscript{613} the ‘ethnographical research’ adapted from Fokine’s principle resulted in a stereotyped representation of cultures and character dances that do not share authentic characteristics with the groups of people that Kirsova and Borovansky aimed to represent on stage. Borovansky’s original choreographic repertoire based on Australian topics resulted in a stereotypical representation of Aboriginal peoples through what Johnson defined as an unapologetic cultural appropriation of symbols related to Aboriginal peoples and


\textsuperscript{613} Foster, ‘Reading Choreography: Composing Dances’.
communities. A more adventurous explorer of choreographic possibilities in the representation of ballets having at their centre Aboriginal themes was Kira Bousloff. In her ballets, the appropriation of the Aboriginal symbol passes through ballets such as *Brolga*, choreographed for a non-Aboriginal dancer. Bousloff’s fascination for the representation of liminality in Aboriginal social rituals translated with the representation of womanhood in rite of passage performed by some Aboriginal communities living in Western Australia. Womanhood and rites of passage are two elements characterising Nijinska’s choreographic production, where *Les Noces* represents a case in point. While the Russian choreographer represented her own folkloric background, Bousloff incorporated the Aboriginal symbols representing rites of passage into womanhood into her choreographies. The processes carried out by Borovansky and Bousloff are quite different in terms of cultural representation: while Borovansky created a stereotyped representation of Aboriginal peoples, Bousloff incorporated rites of passages of some Aboriginal community into her own ballet production. Both these two choreographers’ choices served, as a primary scope, the creation of choreographies which combined an ‘old’ ballet vocabulary with what Johnson defined an appropriation of the Aboriginal symbol.

It was not always possible to locate video footage that illustrates the processes to ballet-making or the modes of representation of a dance. Nevertheless, manuscripts and oral histories enabled me to sift through information about practice and process from the reflections of dancers and their audiences and critics. Interestingly, I found that different primary documents provided clear information regarding the use of several approaches to ballet-making, and the ways in which these approaches influenced the audience responses during the examined decades. Through the lens of this kaleidoscope called ‘ballet history’, whose colourful pieces are made of archival fragments and ephemera, I could indulge in admiring a picture: the choreographic legacy of *Ballets Russes* in Australia between 1940 and 1960. Though the fragments of this kaleidoscope have always been there, waiting to be combined together to offer this picture, this configuration had never appeared. Though the archival fragments often offered the chance to look at this methodological legacy matured with Ballets Russes as the result of a transmission

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of approaches to movement to Australian practitioners, the picture that derives from the aggregation of these fragments had never been recorded in any secondary source. When I look through my lens, I can see images of men and women dancing at the beach and of ballet audiences craving what Annette Gillen called the ‘meatiness’ of Ballets Russes. I can see the moving images of Australian dancers coming after them, performing on Australian stages. They often performed on a stage a variety of ballets choreographed by Russian artists in Europe between the 1910s and the 1930s. Nevertheless, they never duplicated the ‘quality in motion’ of their predecessors. They studied it, they acknowledged it, they learnt from it. But they never plagiarised it. While critics and commenters of their time often sought in Australian dancers their stylistic approaches to understand whether they were communicating their ‘Australianness’, ‘Britishness’ or ‘Russianness’, Australian dancers who availed of the experience of Ballets Russes artists sought their ‘performance persona’.616

The fragments have always been there, in the archives of history; but they have never been read through this methodological perspective. Nevertheless, the archives, as I mentioned in my introduction, offer different, colourful pieces which, to borrow an expressive metaphor from Farge, when combined together offer one possible picture. It is when we slightly move the lens of our kaleidoscope that we can admire a new picture offered by a new combination of pieces. This thesis can be intended as one of a number of pictures that could potentially be offered by archival, historiographical research. It offers the potential to keep rummaging among the archives of this kaleidoscope called ‘ballet history’.

616 Foster, ‘Reading Choreography: Composing Dances’, 77.
APPENDIX
TEXTS IN THEIR ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

1. Актрисы, балерины этого [Мариинского] театра, они являются не только служительницами муз, они не только балерины, но это уже исторические персонажи, это лики истории города. История их жизни, их творчества – это плоть от плоти общей истории нашей страны. Только если в первоначальные этапы истории Большого театра русская актриса – не только балерина, но и драматическая актриса – выходила на сцену не для того, чтобы отлично сыграть роль, а только для того, чтобы продемонстрировать себя и каким-то образом устроить свою личную жизнь, то с середины 19 века русская актриса выходит на сцену уже для того, чтобы творить, служить искусству, но ее личная жизнь, ее мужчины должны служить ей и помогать ей сделать карьеру”. Елена Федосова.

2. Книга сжато излагает главные этапы и закономерности процесса. Исторические судьбы русского балета рассматриваются от зарождения балетного театра в России до Великой Октябрьской революции.

Первый раздел охватывает наиболее длительный по времени период: от возникновения балета в России до середины XIX столетия. Здесь устанавливаются особенности хореографии как вида искусства, определяется национальная самобытность русского балетного театра, дается история создания двух старейших балетных школ нашей родины — петербургской и московской, прослеживаются пути формирования балетных трупп обеих столиц. Самостоятельная глава отведена истории крепостного балетного театра.

Следующий раздел посвящен второй половине XIX века. В нем показаны расцвет отечественной хореографии и утверждение русского балетного театра как первенствующего в мире. Вершиной процесса предстает встреча русских хореографов с композиторами-симфонистами. В результате этой встречи рождаются выдающиеся произведения балетной музыки и сцены, ныне являющиеся классической основой мирового репертуара.
Последний раздел освещает положение балета в начале XX века, выявляет творческие противоречия, возникшие внутри балетного театра на пороге великих революционных событий. Характеризуется борьба сторонников академического направления и реформаторов балетного искусства, объясняется историческая неизбежность и суть этой борьбы. Триумфы «русских сезонов» за рубежом рассматриваются как свидетельства плодотворного синтеза искусства, осуществленного на балетной сцене.177.

3. Обладая скромными внешними данными, Преображенская была сильна и ловка, на редкость музыкальна и выразительна в танце, а преданность искусству постепенно выдвинула ее на ведущее положение в труппе.18

4. Ученица Льва Иванова, Петипа, Иогансона, она занималась у иностранных мастеров и добилась высокого совершенства техники. Отчетливость движений сочеталась у нее с мягкостью, пластика отличалась изяществом, чистотой и точностью рисунка. К особым качествам относились естественность и задушевность, умение как бы импровизационно «рассказывать» музыку.19

5. Enfant prodige, formée par la célèbre Lubov Egorova (Etoile du Mariinski, interprète privilégiée de Petipa), Ethery Pagava débute sa carrière d’emblée comme soliste des Ballets de Roland Petit (à l’âge de 12 ans), puis devient danseuse étoile à 15 ans, engagée par les Ballets du Marquis de Cuevas. Elle y danse les grands rôles du répertoire et crée les chorégraphies de Lifar, Balanchine, Massine, Nijinska...

6. […] essendo composto di esercizi molto lenti, ogni imperfezione è immediatamente notata.20

18 Krasovská, 198.
19 Krasovská, 198.
7. [...] embeds mimic elements utilised in some of his choreographies [...]621

8. Умение выдержать стиль, метко ухватить и передать характер обязательно для того, кто берется за выполнение стилевых или характерных танцев. [...] Движения рук, ног, корпуса, головы, музыка, костюм - все должно быть объединено одним стилем. В танцах разных периодов, так же как и в танцах разных народностей, - масса характерных черт, жестов, ритмических приемов. Во всем этом отражается дух эпохи так же, как и характер народности.622.

9. Вообще-то, в танце участвует всё тело: и ноги, и корпус, и голова, и шея — словом, всё. Ну, конечно, и руки. «Пальцы — голова тела» — Так сказал Станиславский как будто для балета. Как будто он балетмейстер. В то время, когда ноги строго держат классические позиции, то руки в это время могут выражать всё. И национальность, и характер, и эпоху, и любое настроение, словом всё.

10. Все убежали. Кругом веселятся танцуют, целуются, любят друг друга. Только я одинок и никому не нужен!623

11. L'affabulation très simple, le rythme tenace de la musique, la sobriété de la coloration scénique blanche et noire aident, d'ailleurs, à la comprehension spiritualiste de l'oeuvre. Mmes tatiana Lipkovska, Kira Abrikosova et M. Boris Kniaseff sont le principaux interprêtes de Noces. L'importante troupe choréographique de Mme Bronislawa Nijinska demeure aussi experte que discipline”

12. Отец не отрицал большого значения техники для достижения виртуозности, но и не считал технику главным в искусстве. Его кредо заключалось в том, что артист

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621 Cecchetti, 48.
балета должен совмещать технику как обязательное условие артистичности с осознанием образа в гармонии с музыкой и передавать внутреннюю насыщенность через мимику лица, пластичность и выразительность движении.
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