

# Musings

the newsletter of the



SOCIETY OF  
**RUSSIAN**  
**BALLET**



*...keeping in touch with life & with art*

**Issue #04 — February 2022**

## *Contents:*

- 2...**The Power of Observation
- 3...**Simply Steps: Tour Sissonne Tombée
- 4...**Docs & Ops: New Exam Form
- 5...**Books, Articles & Blogs:  
*Vaganova Today* by C. Pawlick
- 6...**Committee Reports
- 7...**Upcoming Exam Sessions
- 9...**Member & Student News
- 10...**Contact Us

“Pupils who have not seen me for a long time find an improvement and progress in my teaching. What is the cause of this? Diligent attention to new types of productions. Look at life all around; everything is growing, everything is moving forward. Therefore I recommend...

***keeping in touch with life and with art.”***

— Agrippina Vaganova  
*Basic Principles of Classical Ballet*

# *The Power of Observation*

By Leica Hardy

This month's Vaganova quote is the famous one. When anyone thinks of Vaganova this is the quote they know, so it most definitely warrants discussion. Ultimately she was talking about how dance technique, and her vision for it, needs to respond to and serve the choreographic trends of the time. After all, ultimately dance is a form of artistic expression, and dancers are the medium of choreographic expression. Undoubtedly, if she were alive today, her teaching would have grown and developed from her teaching methods at the time when she made this sweeping statement. Choreography has changed drastically from the early 20th century and probably she would have instinctively evolved with it. She did not seem to be a woman who fixated on the rote methods of the past. She was an independent thinker and a life-long learner.

Relevancy in pedagogy will be an ever-changing mix of the old and the new. Too much of either will undermine any pedagogical method. We cannot afford to fixate rigidly on the old, nor is striving for innovation and development a reason to throw out the baby with the bath water. We must be open to new ideas, but must not change just for the sake of change. Ideas become pedagogy through rigorous thought, experimentation, and by witnessing observable results that stand the test of time. To be relevant it should embrace the past while also becoming more successful and purposeful through the infusion of new ideas. Catherine E. Pawlick discusses this very idea in the final paragraphs of page 182 in her book *Vaganova Today*, "If, as so many pedagogues insist, the core principles of Vaganova technique can continue to be preserved while adapting to the changing times, then Vaganova's system of ballet training will withstand any future vagaries that may arise in ballet, and will persist for decades to come."

## **Relevancy in pedagogy will be an ever-changing mix of the old and the new.**

We can also look at this quote in another more philosophical way — learning from the power of observation. That is an even bigger idea. I know that after 40 plus years of teaching, that observations do transform into knowledge. Over time our observations and experiences become our personal knowledge base, or our personal pedagogy, which we pass on to our students. We need to recognize that learning doesn't always come from the kind of rote information that we are told. This is also true for our students. We can tell our students what they should be doing, but we should also stand back and observe. We should guide their explorations and help them to create their own experiential observations, and therefore their own personal knowledge base. If we all continually observe and reflect then we will all grow and move forward.

# *Simply Steps*

## **Tour Sissonne Tombée**

This month we will discuss a question posed by South Surrey, BC member, Heather Davies about tour sissonne tombée or what is colloquially known as ‘pancake turns’. Follow the video link in Heather’s question and you will see an interesting video of the step being taught and demonstrated at the Vaganova Academy from the 1940’s.

*“Tour sissonne tombée in Intermediate —  
Are we landing with our front leg stretched devant,  
then quickly transferring forward to jump again?  
Or <https://fb.watch/aLZjsnLeJw/>?“*

This step is a character virtuoso turning step done for speed and brilliance by females in low character heels. The Society does not have a character programme, but we incorporate those movements into the syllabus. The way the step is built up in the video is accurate, but when it transfers to the turn version it loses accuracy, and because of this it reverts to a character technique. They are not putting their heels down at all. You do not extend the leg in this tour, as we would in the sissonne tombée en tournant en dehors in Level Elementary. The Elementary step requires the weight to be totally back on the landing plié leg as you fully extend the other leg forward, followed by a tombée en avant, and this would not work in a quick series. You can find a more contemporary performance of the step by searching “Shakirova - Princess Florine Variation from Bluebird” on YouTube.

— **Merle Adam, Examiner**

The video is essentially correct, although it has evolved from the era of this video for classical purposes. I was originally taught this turn by founder Marijan Bayer as a teenaged student. Pending the tempo of the music, we now demonstrate it with a strong forward step, with the leading arm in a low allongé devant. At a slow tempo you should be able to step en avant to a broad 4th position, followed by a strong jump en tournant with the arms in 1st position. This will require a forceful thrust into the floor with the front foot, and collecting the legs into 5th position, while keeping the torso centred and aligned over the advancing stepping leg. At a quick tempo, the step will have to shorten and the height of the jump will lessen. The example of the turns en suite in the video is relatively quick. I advocate teaching it slowly first, as I feel the student acquires better comprehension of the step that they can later transfer to a faster version. — **Leica Hardy, Examiner**

# *Docs & Ops*

New Comprehensive Examination Document Under Development

The Society is in the process of developing a new comprehensive examination document. This new document for in-person and digital examinations will combine the content of the old *Candidate Entry Form* and *Mark Results Sheet* along with your studio's schedule into one document. The template also details the exam and break lengths for each level from the syllabus. Sharing the document between the Society's office, examiners and host studios will all be done digitally.

Our hope is that the new document, available in Excel and Numbers applications, will reduce paperwork for members, examiners and the office. Host members/studios will use it as a cut and paste template for entering the exam day's contact information, daily schedules, listing candidate information, and listing members/instructors beside their exam groups. It will provide examiners with consolidated schedule and candidate information, and will be used by them to record mark results. The office will then use it to create certificates and to transfer mark results to our mark history databases. We plan to have the document fully functional no later than Fall 2022.

SOCIETY of RUSSIAN BALLET		Exam Schedule, Candidates & Mark Results										
<b>Studio :</b>	Name Here		<b>Contact Phone:</b>		Phone Here		<b>Contact Email:</b>		Email Here			
<b>Studio Address:</b>	Address Here		<b>Examiner:</b>		Examiner Name Here							
<b>Exam Date:</b>	Month, Day, Year											
Start Time	End Time	Exam or Break Length	Member	Level	Group	Student/Candidate Information			Notes for Examiners	Mark (Examiner Use Only)	SRB Award (Examiner Use Only)	
						Number	First & Last Name	Age				
Time Here	Time Here	25 min.	Name Here	Primary	A, B etc.	1						
						2						
						3						
						4						
						5						
						6						
Time Here	Time Here	Length Here	Mark Break or Lunch									
Time Here	Time Here	30 or 45 min.	Name Here	Level 1	A, B etc.	1						
						2						
						3						
						4						
						5						
						6						
Time Here	Time Here	Length Here	Mark Break or Lunch									
Time Here	Time Here	45 or 60 min.	Name Here	Level 2	A, B etc.	1						
						2						
						3						
						4						
						5						
						6						

The sample document above is currently being test driven by members for their current examination sessions. Kim Hurley from Generation Dance Studio in Fort MacMurray, Alberta reports that the document is “quite easy to navigate”. We will provide members with instructions on how to use the new document in future issues of *Musings*.

# *Books, Articles & Blogs*

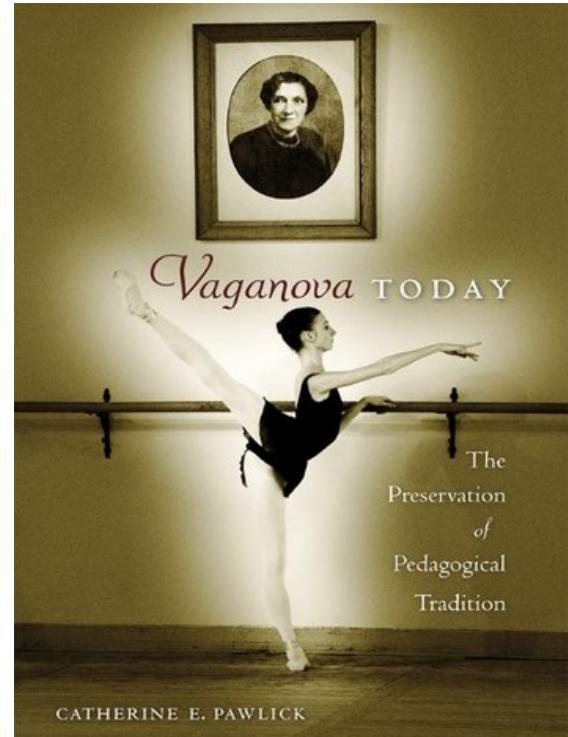
## ***Vaganova Today: The Preservation of the Pedagogical Tradition* by Catherine Pawlick**

Hardcover, Illustrated Sept. 4, 2011  
University Press of Florida, Publisher

In this absorbing volume, Catherine Pawlick traces Vaganova's story from her early years as a ballet student in tsarist Russia to her career as a dancer with the Mariinsky (Kirov) Ballet to her work as a pedagogue and choreographer. Pawlick then goes beyond biography to address Vaganova's legacy today, offering the first-ever English translations of primary source materials and intriguing interviews with pedagogues and dancers from the Academy and the Mariinsky Ballet, including some who studied with Vaganova herself.

Few of the pedagogues interviewed for this book have ever been translated and published outside of their native language. Their accounts reveal the deep significance of the Mariinsky and Vaganova traditions.

**Catherine E. Pawlick** danced with ballet companies in the United States before moving to St. Petersburg, Russia, where she lived for six years, observing classes at the Vaganova Academy and rehearsals and performances at the Mariinsky Theatre. Fluent in French and Russian, she has written on dance for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Ballet Review*, and *Dance Europe*.



*"An extensive and thorough compilation of numerous sources with unique insights on Vaganova and her methodology. The author has had access to several important figures in Russian ballet who knew Vaganova and/or her students. Confronting the dilemmas facing the art of classical ballet, Vaganova Today is a thought-provoking read."*

— John White, author of *Advanced Principles in Teaching Classical Ballet*

# *Committee Reports*

## **Examiners & Executive**

**Chairman — Jane Pound/Reported by Leica Hardy**

The examiners and executive have been meeting twice monthly to discuss a variety of issues. A major focus for the committee has been a discussion of the Affiliate Guide content and how to make it more thorough and informative for our members. We have also had discussions about such things as communications, history, promotion and marketing, member outreach, and operations processes. Another major development from these discussions is the launching of the Growth & Development Committee and its sub-committees, which are now operational.

## **Growth & Development Sub-Committees**

### **50th Anniversary - Ottawa August 19 & 20, 2023**

**Spokesperson — Janie Lacelle/Reported by Merle Adam**

Save the dates! Our 50th anniversary celebrations will be held August 19-20, 2023 in Ottawa. The event will be housed downtown in the LabO facility, in photo below, run by the University of Ottawa's theatre department. Workshops, lectures and events take place in two large studios and in the Academic Hall theatre. The studios and theatre are conveniently located between the Novotel and Les Suites hotel complexes. Next steps for the committee include investigating hotel pricing and securing catering estimates. The committee is also looking for suggestions for topics for keynote guest speakers. To date suggestions are: early movement education, pointe shoe fitting practices, flexibility and strength for dancers and variations. If you have any suggestions please forward them to Janie or Merle.



## **International Members**

**Spokesperson — Courtnae Bowman**

This committee is not active at this time.

## **Member Outreach**

**Spokesperson & Reported by Elizabeth MacDonnell**

The Member Outreach Committee (formerly Community Outreach) has been created to find new and effective ways to support SRB members and their growth as teachers beyond the yearly seminar. We hope to help foster relationships within the Society and its members, giving more opportunities for connection through possible forums/sessions to ask questions, opportunities to share ideas for classes and teaching, as well as discussing syllabus materials throughout the year. Have an idea on how you could help? Contact Elizabeth MacDonnell.

## **Seminar & Webinar**

**Spokesperson & Reported by Audra Grierson**

The first meeting of the newly formed committee for Seminars, Webinars and Conventions was held on Monday January 17th via Zoom. In this initial meeting, each examiner identified their top goals and objectives for our annual seminars and webinars, and the results of the members survey distributed in the fall were discussed. Proposals to expand the Society's seminar offerings to best suit the members and their needs were suggested, as well as ways to offer regional seminars. Smaller workshop seminars targeting specific subjects and a video diary of Vaganova steps and vocabulary are potential future projects. A follow-up meeting occurred on January 31st.

## **Social Media, Marketing & Advertising**

**Spokesperson — Katherine Clarke/Reported by Audra Grierson & Leica Hardy**

We have a gorgeous new branding look and have been working to create regular eye-catching and informative posts on Instagram and Facebook. We are thrilled that our Instagram account now has over 700 followers! The committee is planning SRB's attendance of the Dance Teacher's Expo, which is being held at the Pearson Convention Centre in Toronto, August 2-4, 2022. Information regarding discount codes for tickets will be available soon. Also in the works is Society of Russian Ballet merchandise! Stay tuned for updates coming soon!

## **Teacher Resources**

**Spokesperson & Reported by Heather Davies**

The Teacher Resources sub-committee has been created to work on evolving our existing teaching manuals and to create new teaching tools for our current members. This committee has just begun an exciting project working on a brand new "Student Teacher-in-Training" online program! We look forward to incorporating the use of an online platform and finding ways to create more accessible training for members.

*...keeping in touch with life & with art*

## Upcoming Exam Sessions

### This Month:

- Feb. 2 & 3: Generation Dance, Fort McMurray, AB c/o Kim Hurley  
Examiner – Denise Vitali
- Feb. 6-11: On Stage Dance Studio, Stratford, ON, c/o Katherine Clarke  
Examiner – Jane Pound
- Feb. 12: Dancemakerz, Waterdown, ON c/o Irina Egorova  
Examiner – Jane Pound
- Feb. 24 & 25: Bradford School of Dance, Bradford, ON, c/o Jane Pound  
Examiner – Katherine Clarke
- Feb. 26 – 28: Maritime Dance Academy, Halifax & Bedford, NS c/o Alicia Clavette  
Examiners – Donna Bender (26-27th), Jane Pound (28th)



Member Nicole Pelot with student Kiersten Boyle. Photo by Kate Hayter-Reid.

## Member & Student News

### Donna Bender Launches *Groundforce Technique*

This winter, examiner Donna Bender and her co-creator, Kim Greco launched their new dance conditioning program *Groundforce Technique*. GFT is a three-level, body conditioning, floor barre series designed with focus on the basic principles of dance; breath, posture, placement, feet, arms, plié and tendu. Its emphasis is on training the dancer from the ground up, creating a strong foundation and heightened body awareness, which in turn influences the overall development of the dancer. The curated exercises in the program are drawn from their years of personalized and private coaching by mentors in North America and Europe, including their knowledge and expertise in The Paula Morgan Technique, Pilates and yoga. For more information contact Donna directly or search *Groundforce technique* on Instagram and Facebook.



### 'Twas The Night Before Nutcracker Choreographed by Leica Hardy

This past December, Symphony Nova Scotia presented '*Twas the Night Before Nutcracker!*' as an online performance. The ballet, featuring choreography and direction by Leica Hardy was created as a shortened version of her full-length ballet which has been presented by SNS for 29 years. This mini version created some interesting challenges in order to comply with pandemic restrictions. The cast of

40 had to be reduced to no more than eight youth performers and a narrator, along with a restricted roster of musicians. The musical cuts were chosen by Leica in Nova Scotia and SNS Musical Director, Holly Mathieson in New Zealand via email and a very detailed Excel spreadsheet! To date the performance has had over 2.7K online views. The ballet is available for free viewing on the Symphony Nova Scotia's YouTube Channel.



Photo courtesy of Symphony Nova Scotia.

## Johanna Hilchie is now an International Member!

Member Johanna Hilchie has moved from our Ontario directory page to our International page! Johanna and her husband are setting up residence in Marseille, France. This past December Johanna was a guest instructor at The National Ballet of Kosovo. We are looking forward to news of Johanna's new dance adventures and helping us to expand our international membership.



Johanna Hilchie front row centre in mauve top with dancers of the National Ballet of Kosovo.

## We want your input!

- *Do you have any news you would like to share with the membership?*
- *Do you have an idea for an article, a book to recommend, a question about a step or teaching pedagogy?*
- *Would you like to contribute articles, photos or be a regional reporter?*
- *Are you good at proof-reading?*

If you have skills to contribute or have any ideas please email:  
[operations@societyofrussianballet.org](mailto:operations@societyofrussianballet.org)



### Office Staff:

- Jane Pound** — Chairman, Affiliate Coordinator  
[affiliatecoordinator@societyofrussianballet.org](mailto:affiliatecoordinator@societyofrussianballet.org)
- Deanna Stewart** — Office Manager  
[info@societyofrussianballet.org](mailto:info@societyofrussianballet.org)
- Leica Hardy** — Communications & Website, Documents  
[operations@societyofrussianballet.org](mailto:operations@societyofrussianballet.org)

### Contact Us:

- Office** — P.O. Box 13046  
140 Holland Street West  
Bradford, ON, L3Z 2Y5
- Phone** — 905-775-0662
- Email** — [info@societyofrussianballet.org](mailto:info@societyofrussianballet.org)
- Website** — [www.societyofrussianballet.org](http://www.societyofrussianballet.org)