

# The Archives of The Royal Academy of Dancing

by Clement Crisp

The idea of a national dance archive has been under discussion for some considerable time; it is more than strange that Britain, with its long and honourable dance history, should lack a major collection which could provide all the facilities for research, reference and display so essential for a proper study of the art of dancing. Various collections exist, but none offers the services—or even the material—that distinguish such famous centres as the New York Public Library, The Bibliothèque de l'Opéra and the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal in Paris. For the past year there have been discussions between enthusiasts interested in the establishment of such an archive, and Peter Brinson, who has done a great deal of important research in the dance collections of Europe, realised that the RAD possessed many of the qualities necessary to initiate such an enterprise. Our library is probably the most complete private dance collection in the country, and our new premises in Knightsbridge could afford an excellent location for a major development in this field.

## Treasures come to light

When Mr Brinson invited me to join the RAD as librarian and archivist (I had been one of the "agitators" for a national archive) I knew little about the Academy's collections, except for the fact that its library housed the late Philip Richardson's celebrated collection of books. My introduction came one afternoon in September when Peter Brinson took me into the committee room at Holland Park Gardens, showed me the bookcases, pointed to one in particular and said: "I think you'll find most of the gems there". I soon discovered how right he was: I looked along the titles and felt like Alladin as he entered the cave. The first book I took down was Caroso's *Il Ballarino*, a code of dancing written in 1581—and this was the superb original edition; next to it was the libretto of a ballet danced by Louis XIII in 1628; then came the earliest printed history of ballet—Menestrier's *Des Ballets Anciens et Modernes*, dated 1682. Delight crowded on delight, rarity on rarity; for the next couple of weeks I ferreted, sorted, explored and gasped as more and more treasures came to light. By degrees, the pattern of the collection became clear. For more than 40 years Mr Richardson had amassed with the greatest skill and taste many of the finest and earliest printed books on dancing. There was the first edition of Thoinot Arbeau's *Orchésographie*, a very early book of dance notation, dated 1588; there, too, the first printed text of a ballet: a magnificent copy of the *Ballet Comique de la Reyne*. And this was not all. The Richardson bequest was complemented by

another fine library given to the RAD by Stewart Headlam: the result was extraordinary riches—sometimes even *embarras de richesses* as I found when I assembled on one shelf no less than eight first editions of Noverre's *Lettres sur la Danse* and six copies of *Les Beautés de l'Opéra*. More and more superb material came to light: at the bottom of a drawer I found a copy of St. Leon's *La Sténochorégraphie*, complete with original wrappers, and the ultimate picture was of a collection that covered with remarkable thoroughness the history of ballet up to the Romantic Era; thereafter the collection was good, but nowhere near as comprehensive.

## Priceless miscellany

But this was only the library. The Academy, as I soon discovered, was also the beneficiary of the generosity of many more friends—not least its first president, Dame Adeline Genée. In my search throughout the building in quest of more material—and everyone on the staff showed the greatest interest in unearthing treasures and telling me where more might be found—I discovered two suitcases which yielded the entire collection of Dame Adeline's press photographs, a priceless record going back to her earliest years as a dancer, and another trunk disgorged several of her costumes. In a filing cabinet I found another cache of material: cuttings, photographs, music, given by Mme Karsavina; in another, costume designs and documents given by Dame Margot Fonteyn. An envelope revealed a fascinating letter from Pavlova to her London agent at the

time of the Diaghilev Ballet's first visit to Britain, and tucked in a corner of another file was a *carte de visite* photograph of Fanny Cerrito and a design by Larionov for *Chout*, with a plan for some choreography. Prints and lithographs came to light, plus dozens, hundreds of photographs: Toumanova as a child in Paris; Massine in *Soleil de Minuit*, a dozen postcards of Pavlova; Lopokova's shoe in *Coppélia*, the minute books and records of the Camargo Society. In another envelope were copies of two writs served on Diaghilev in 1910, and a letter from him about a contract; a box contained four gold locket enshrining hair as yet unidentified. Books and programmes and souvenirs gradually piled up in the library, and it was impossible to do more than glance at them, register their importance, and stack them in cases until the move to Knightsbridge. But all this—and much, much more which is coming to light each day, plus the generosity of people who are already donating more material—confirms me in my belief that the Academy's collection is a wonderful one on which to build an archive of prime importance, and one that we must aim to make the equal of any in the world.

### Special appeal to readers

And this brings me to an appeal to all readers of the Gazette. At our new Knightsbridge premises the Academy intends to house and develop this collection; a most generous allocation of space has been made, including a library which can house at least 4,000 books, a reading room for study and research—or just simply browsing—and a museum room. In addition, space has also been found for a large store-room, in which material of all kinds can be properly cared for, and stored, ready for anyone to consult if necessary. Our appeal is quite simply for more dance material of every kind—not necessarily important or valuable or unique (though we should like to receive that, too)—but anything relevant to ballet and dancing in every part of the world. It is our hope that everyone connected with the RAD—teachers, students and their friends—will look upon this as, in a sense, *their* archive, and want to help to develop it. If you have any material: books, magazines, cuttings, photographs, pictures, prints, designs, memorabilia of any sort, which you would care to donate

to the RAD we shall be more than grateful for them. Thank you in advance.

An archive must cover every aspect of its subject from books and pictures to film and designs, from the most serious matters to the lightest and most ephemeral (these are often the most touching and revealing to enquirers). So much dance history has been lost and dissipated in the past that we must make a serious and determined effort to save everything we can, now that we have the facilities to do so. Had such an archive existed in the last century, how fascinating and valuable it would be now; and how great is our responsibility to the future to ensure that later generations shall be as fully documented as we can make possible, by preserving our present as well as our past for them.

Anything that you care to send us will be most gratefully received and your generosity will be acknowledged wherever possible in the Archive records; the address for any gifts is: The Library, The Royal Academy of Dancing, 251 Knightsbridge, London SW7.

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## Musical Evening

The first public entertainment sponsored by the RAD in the new headquarters in Knightsbridge will be a Musical Evening held in the Grand Salon on Friday evening, March 14, at 8.0 pm. Artists taking part are: Valerie Dixon, Christine Gough, Stephen Laid and Franz Linthorst. All four are concert pianists now working with the Academy, or who will be joining shortly. There will also be a singer, but details of the singer were not available at the time of going to press. The programme, arranged by Norman Higgins, Musical Director of the Academy, will be approximately 1½ hours' duration, with one interval. The Steinway grand piano given to the Academy by Dame Adeline Genée will be used for this occasion. Tickets 5/- from: Information Secretary, 251 Knightsbridge, London SW7, or at the door. Wine and cheese bar available in the interval at reasonable prices.

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### ● Keep to the Facts Please!

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*Kensington Post* 24.1.69