

## A History of Irish Ballet from 1927 to 1963

Bearbeitet von  
Victoria O'Brien

1. Auflage 2011. Buch. XII, 188 S. Paperback  
ISBN 978 3 0353 0146 5

Weitere Fachgebiete > Musik, Darstellende Künste, Film > Tanz, Andere Darstellende  
Künste > Ballett, Modern Dance, Choreographie

Zu Inhaltsverzeichnis

schnell und portofrei erhältlich bei

  
DIE FACHBUCHHANDLUNG

Die Online-Fachbuchhandlung beek-shop.de ist spezialisiert auf Fachbücher, insbesondere Recht, Steuern und Wirtschaft. Im Sortiment finden Sie alle Medien (Bücher, Zeitschriften, CDs, eBooks, etc.) aller Verlage. Ergänzt wird das Programm durch Services wie Neuerscheinungsdienst oder Zusammenstellungen von Büchern zu Sonderpreisen. Der Shop führt mehr als 8 Millionen Produkte.

## Introduction

Irish ballet remains largely unrecorded and neglected in the pantheon of the Irish arts. With the exception of an ever-dwindling circle of devotees, most followers of the Irish arts and its history have never heard of Cepta Cullen, Muriel Kelly, Sara Payne or Patricia Ryan, nor of the landmark dance performances they created, including *An Coitin Dearg*, *Puck Fair*, *The Scarecrow* and *Gamble*, *No Gamble*.

If the Irish public have not heard of these people and their works it is not their fault. Up until now, there has been no record to review, no consolidated dance archive to consult, no recorded exhibition of related artefacts. In fact, up until now there has been no coherent narrative on the subject of ballet in Ireland, either by academic, popular or amateur presses. So if there has been no ballet history of Ireland published to date, one could be forgiven for thinking that there is no history of ballet in Ireland.

Although somewhat unorthodox for its time and place, my own preliminary dance training at the Irish National College of Dance in Dublin did include a strong dance history bias. Film and slides from The Royal Ballet's 'Ballet For All' educational programme, and extracts from Margaret Van Praagh and Peter Brinson's *The Choreographic Art* (1963) constituted much of these introductory classes. The subject of the history of Irish ballet, however, was never broached. It was only afterwards, through my studies as a vocational dance student in England, that I became aware of Ninette de Valois' strong connections with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Later, when seeking to learn more of de Valois' work at the Abbey Theatre, I realised that to do so I would have to research it myself. In 2002, I completed an MA thesis on the history of the Abbey Theatre School of Ballet at the University of Limerick.

It was while undertaking research for the Abbey Theatre School of Ballet that the realisation of a richer ballet history in Ireland became apparent. These further research ideas lay dormant until I started to teach

twentieth-century dance history at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick in 2004. Once again, I became struck by the lack of available material on Ireland's ballet history. While students studied the dance revolution that took place in Europe and North America during the first sixty years of the twentieth century, they were unaware of any parallel advances taking place in Ireland. Due to a lack of available or published research, these young dance scholars were oblivious to the direct impact that Margaret Craske, Kurt Jooss, Nadine Legat and Marie Rambert (let alone Ninette de Valois, Cepta Cullen, Muriel Kelly, Sara Payne and Patricia Ryan) had directly on dance in Ireland.

The primary goal of this study, therefore, is to recount the activities of the five main ballet organisations that operated in Ireland between 1927 and 1963, and by doing so to prove three significant points: first, that there is a rich history of ballet in Ireland; second, that much of its evolution between 1927 and 1945 was concurrent and somewhat comparable with that of English ballet, albeit on a smaller and more humble scale; and third, that all of the five histories are connected to and in some way stem from Ninette de Valois and her role at the Abbey Theatre School of Ballet.

The main body of the text is based on my original PhD thesis, completed at the University of Limerick in 2008. The book is comprised of four chapters that document chronologically each of the ballet schools and their companies: the Abbey Theatre School of Ballet (1927–33); the continuation of the Abbey School of Ballet (1933–58), including the Sara Payne School and Company (1936–45); the Irish Ballet Club (1939–43); and the National Ballet School and Company (1953–63).

I begin with the first wave of groundbreaking work for twentieth-century ballet in Ireland which was the establishment of the Abbey Theatre School of Ballet at the National Theatre by W.B. Yeats and Ninette de Valois in 1927. Chapter 1 recalls the Abbey School's premises and facilities, the curriculum and examinations, the teachers and teaching styles, and aspects of a typical student profile. It analyses the school's dance performances with particular attention paid to the Irish-themed ballets that de Valois staged for young Irish dancers, and Yeats' *Plays for Dancers*, as well as the ongoing theatrical activities of the school.

The second chapter chronicles the activities of the Abbey School of Ballet after de Valois' resignation, as it continued to operate under the directorship of an ex-student, Muriel Kelly, until the late 1950s. This chapter also documents another important legacy of the Abbey Theatre School of Ballet: the Sara Payne School of Dance and Mime, and that school's Company, which operated in Dublin between 1936 and 1945. I look at the large body of work undertaken by Payne and explore Payne's unique vision for the development of ballet in Ireland, an idea that fused ballet with traditional Irish steps and patterns, using both classically and traditionally trained dancers.

The third chapter recalls the Irish Ballet Club, which was founded in 1939 by another student from the Abbey Theatre School of Ballet, Cepta Cullen. It looks at the origins of the Irish Ballet Club as well as its aims and the many diverse personalities who contributed to it. This chapter documents the five-year life span of the Ballet Club, with particular reference to the regularly staged dance performances and Irish-themed choreographies produced in collaboration with leading Irish poets, directors, composers and artists.

The fourth and final chapter covers the National Ballet School and Company. Founded in 1953 by a Russian dancer, Valentina Dukto, and the Irish painter, Cecil French Salkeld, this school followed the Russian Legat system of ballet training. Under the subsequent directorship of Patricia Ryan, a Nadine Legat-trained dancer, the school developed to become Ireland's first national ballet company and was amongst the first dance companies to be supported by the Arts Council of Ireland. This chapter records the school's premises, the teachers and students, the curriculum and Russian examinations. It documents the many performances with particular focus on the collaborative ballets created by Patricia Ryan (choreography), Donagh MacDonagh, Patrick Kavanagh (libretto) and A.J. Potter (score), as well as the productions staged with the principal dancers from the Soviet Union during the season of 1962.

Consistent across the four main chapters is an exploration of the influences, motivations and teaching methods of Ireland's classical dance pioneers, as well as cataloguing their choreography during this period. In completing this research, a chronological list of the company performances held in Ireland between 1927 and 1963 has been created and is included as an Appendix.

This study also attempts to provide an understanding of how classical dance has developed through various influences (such as the Cecchetti Method, the Royal Academy of Dance and the Legat System) into the different methods and systems practised in Ireland today. The RAD method of training remains the fundamental system of classical dance training practised in ballet schools today, although little is known about how, where or when it originated in the country. While the Cecchetti and Legat forms are no longer formally taught, they continue to influence teachers and schools in Ireland. This study attempts to trace the origins of these teaching methods as practised in Ireland and also to understand their origins more fully. It also aims to establish the fact that they extend further into the past than currently perceived.

A heretofore neglected dimension of Irish artistic life, I hope that this work will contribute to a greater appreciation of the roles that ballet has played in the development of Irish cultural activity. One of the most interesting findings of this study is the rich interaction between the different choreographers and the various arts and cultural movements active in Ireland during the forty year period, which led to dance-initiated collaborations across the entire spectrum of Irish artistic endeavour, including such personalities as Cecil French Salkeld, F.R. Higgins, Mainie Jellett, Patrick Kavanagh, J.F. Larchet, Louis Le Brocqy, Elizabeth Maconchy, Donagh MacDonagh, Michael Bowles, Brinsley MacNamara, Micheal MacLiammoir, Norah McGuinness, A.J. Potter, Lennox Robinson, John Ryan, Anne Yeats and W.B. Yeats. This work chronicles the creative processes of these alliances and documents the resulting dance works.

One of the reasons that the history of Irish ballet between 1927 and 1963 has remained unexplored is perhaps directly related to the lack of a good Irish dance bibliography. A large body of information has languished for many years, unconsolidated, in multiple locations and collections, and hence remained virtually unknown. This study, perhaps for the first time in published record, provides a bibliography of journals, articles, reference works, editorials, newspaper columns, libretti, ballet programmes, playbills, music-scores, memoirs, papers and images of Irish ballet. It also provides an extensive descriptive list of where these sources are housed.

This book is an attempt to remedy the neglect of twentieth-century Irish ballet in historiography. It chronicles the activities of the five most important ballet schools and companies of their eras and provides an extensive bibliography and description of related sources, providing both the data and hopefully the impetus for further research in this area. I hope that through this work our collective understanding of classical dance as it has developed and evolved in Ireland will be improved, generating in turn a greater appreciation for ballet as part of Ireland's broader artistic landscape.