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Movement Cannot Cheat and Lie

Valentina Archipova Grossman



"אביב בגן", 1956, חופע תלמידים בפסטיבל
 הפרח בחיפה צילום: אוסקר טאובר
 "Spring in the Garden", 1956, Student
 performance in Haifa Flower
 Festival photo: Oscar Taube

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In 1936, Valentina Archipova Grossman opened the dance studio on 37, Massada St., Haifa. Until the mid-1960s, she was the only professional ballet teacher in the north of Israel. Already in the 1950s, she started sending advanced students for studies at the Sadler's Wells School in London, and later to the Royal Academy of Dance, thus creating her first contacts with the R.A.D. In 1967, an examiner from the R.A.D. first arrived in Israel. A year later, the opening of an R.A.D. branch in Israel was approved, with Valentina Archipova as its representative. She died in 1977 of an illness.

Following is a (verbatim) lecture by Archipova, which I heard several times as a child, and believe to have been written in the mid-1950s.

Ruth Eshel

Impressions and Problems of a Ballet Teacher in Israel

My Work – Its Aims and Functions

I began my pedagogical activity in Israel thanks to an acquaintance with a dancing-shoes cobbler. Naturally, when I arrived in Israel [1933] I wanted, first of all, to become familiar with what was being done here in the field of dance. I looked for the Opera, for ballet schools. My impressions while visiting those and a few dance studios were of utter and total disappointment.

In the field of music I found many talents here: the musical terminology, the accomplishments and education were notable; I saw and felt a musical culture and tradition. But dance! Ahah! All I saw here twenty years ago was depressing. Pettiness and dilettantism were common, and mainly there was an enormous presumption to present all that as art.

Over time, I also understood my own role, my duty, and my goals in dance education became clear. Time proved and justified to me all that I have found, lived and received before, all I aspired to in a former period of my life, in art and in my actions in it; first as a student of the Imperial Ballet School in St. Petersburg and then as a professional artist and educator. Later, I realized as a certainty that in art there is only one truth, which lies beyond the boundaries of time, situation or place; what matters is not the 'what', but 'how', 'why', 'wherefore' and 'what for'. Discipline – namely, self-criticism, self-education – is the point. From which, once more, stems the holy concept – namely, that the principle is 'how', not 'what'!

I remember how Miss. Martha Graham presented a demonstration dance. She commented: 'In dance, I always take the advice of my father, who was a doctor. He said: "Movement does not cheat!" I bow to her for that comment.

As I mentioned before, I began my educational activities as a dance teacher in Israel thanks to a cobbler. I learned that this expert of ballet shoes works in Tel Aviv, and wished to order a pair of shoes for myself – so that I could at least practice my profession from time to time. When I came to him in Tel Aviv, I saw these horrible dance shoes – strong, awkward, heavy. Not dance shoes but wood logs. After hearing and absorbing all my guidance and comments, he promised me that he would make shoes according to my requirements and bring them to Haifa.

Two weeks later, his wife appeared together with another lady accompanied by a girl aged 9-11 [Natanya Bialistock (Ramon). R.E.], with two pairs of shoes of the same pattern – for me and for the girl. It turned out that the girl had already studied ballet here, in Haifa, and her mother wished to show me her daughter's accomplishments and her ability to stand



מרים ציכטינגר (לימים עופר), 1945
Miriam Zichtinger (Offer), 1945

'on point' [*Shpitzim*]. She stands already! Incidentally, the truth is that in Israel it was common practice to use point shoes from the very first lesson.

After the girl's dance – short and awful – ended with a 'split', I told her in all simplicity and honesty: Don't dare to dance or even to get on your toes, not if you ever want to dance or if you really do like dancing. I explained that until the age of 10-12 it is forbidden to get on your toes at all, since the toes are the ending of the slow evolution of the human body; of the human back's strength. They are the result of that evolution into strong uprightness and overcoming gravity; the next stage after standing on your toes is standing in the air. After many doubts and hesitations, many indeed – would she be able to face up to the demands I put to her – she became my first student in Israel, once I was convinced that her decision was made in full understanding and awareness.

This was actually the first step – the beginning of my ac-

tivities in Israel. After a while, other parents started to show up, asking me to accept their children. They convinced me to accept their children despite my claim that I had no room and couldn't work at home with several students, although at the time this was the norm: whoever taught dance at the time did so in their own private apartment, in a small room, totally unsuitable for the purpose.

I came to know more and more how inexperienced were these parents, and how simply they could be taken advantage of for material gain while harming their children and their future. It was crystal clear to me that I must not give in to the conditions prevalent in the teaching of dance; that they should be shattered and changed, and aggressively combated.

It was clear to me that, first of all, students should be taught to realize that they were not studying dance just like that, for fun and enjoyment, but were being educated in the art of dance. The issue of place became tangible to me, neces-



תלמידים רוקדים טרנטלה, 1953
Students dancing the Tarantella, 1953



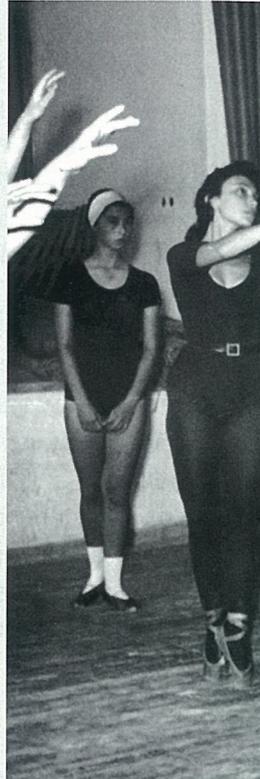
"ולס הפרחים", 1963, מופע תלמידים בפסטיבל הפרח בחיפה
צילום: אוסקר טאובר
"Waltz of the Flowers", 1963, Student performance in Haifa, students photo: Oscar Tauber

child; who runs after it in the street with a 'banana'; who looks for a job and works hard outside the home as well, so that she can buy her child an 'apple'; who exhausts herself in order to give her child every possible thing, also sending him to study dance, which is an expense – But when she buys the 'banana' or the 'apple' she examines the fruit from all directions, choosing the nicest, best one... and when choosing a dance teacher, it is the 'address' that matters to her rather than who is that teacher she entrusts with the future and well-being of her child! The child's development, physical and spiritual, depends upon who takes care of him, who guides him. She chooses the kindergarten teacher, she criticizes the school, but when it comes to a dance teacher, all she cares about is that he should be at a convenient 'address'!!!

In some cases parents brought me babies, practically in diapers. My advice to parents was one: instead of dance lessons, find yourselves a good nanny. Come to me later. Although, economically speaking, they are the easiest to take advantage of. Mothers – and, more dangerously, fathers – are gladly willing to pay in order to see how their children are being amused. It is sad and distressing that they cannot see how their children are being broken, in the physical sense, and poisoned, in the moral sense.

My role, then, is to provide my student with joy in his work and satisfaction in his self-organization, to develop in him an ability to concentrate and cooperation between his actions and his mind, and to teach him that it is not quantity that matters but quality. How their eyes shine when they reach self-correction – achievement through understanding.

Often they would bring to me the 'prodigies' or the 'stars' who have done wonderful things at home – a 'split' or a 'bridge' [back arches] – thus supposedly proving their dancing talents. This attitude to the art of dance would bring me to the verge of actual murder. This might seem strange to you today, but these used to be the facts and I had experienced it more than once.



שיעור לדוגמה בשיטת האקדמיה המלכותית, קולנוע שביט, חיפה, 1969
 צילום: אוסקר טאובר
 R.A.D. demonstration class in Haifa, 1969
 photo: Oscar Tauber

