

The Winston Memorial Trust of Australia

Report by Floeur Alder

2011 Churchill Fellow

The Stuart and Norma Leslie Churchill Fellowship for a research trip to update my knowledge on the traditions, philosophies and techniques at the oldest classical ballet schools in Denmark, France, London and Russia

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Signed: Floeur Alder

Date 24/05/12

Contents Page

Introduction and Acknowledgements: page 3

Executive Summary: page 4

Timeline and Program of Research Trip: page 5

CopenhagenHistory of Bournonville: page 6Royal Danish School and Company: pages 6-12Copenhagen Contemporary Dance School: page 12Tour of Royal Danish Theatre, School and Boarding House: pages 12-13

Paris

Ecole Stanlowa: pages 13-15History of the Paris Opera School: page 16Paris Opera School experience pages: pages 16-20Conservatoire: page 20

London

Royal Ballet History: pages 20-21Rambert Dance Company: page 21Royal Ballet Company and interview with Director, Monica Mason: pages 21-22Royal Ballet School: page 22Pineapple Studios: page 22-23The Place: page 23

Russia

History of Russian Ballet: pages 23-24Perm State Ballet College: pages 24-28Choreography "On the Edge": pages 28-29Contemporary Master Class: pages 29-30

St Petersburg: page 31-32

Recommendations: page 32

Conclusions: pages 33-34

Introduction

I now have sealed my qualification as a respected pedagogue in all of these techniques by training with the masters in Denmark, France and Russia. We have done this with great success and returned with a wealth of knowledge and experience, unique in Australia that will be invaluable in enhancing successful ballet training and preserving the history of classical ballet. This report covers extensively each learning aspect and unexpected added opportunities along the way, most which have led to further work and invitations to return to each establishment in the future.

Acknowledgements

I am forever grateful to Norma Leslie for her generosity and belief in supporting me and the Winston Churchill Trust for providing this incredible opportunity and life changing experience.

I would also like to thank the Directors of each of the schools for their warm invitations, the staff for sharing their invaluable knowledge and precious time; finally to the students who were not put off by us watching their classes and always helping us when we were lost trying to find a studio, class or teacher!

Finally I would like to thank the Australian Business Arts Foundation who provided fabulous support and advice in raising \$16,000 for my mother's travel and to all the extremely generous donors out there, thank you, it certainly was well spent and will come back to Australia in such a beneficial way.

Executive Summary

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A research trip to the oldest classical ballet institutions in Denmark , France, London and Russia to study their traditions, techniques and philosophies. **Fellowship Highlights:**

Royal Danish School and Company: Interviews with Director Neils Balle and Thomas Lund.

Copenhagen Contemporary Dance School: Classes and Interview with Morten Innstrand

Ecole Stanlowa: Participated in classes: Robert Bestonso, Francoise Legree, Frederick David

Paris Opera School: Observed teachers: Bertrand Barena, Jacques Namond, Fanny Gridre

Royal Ballet School: Rehearsals; Gailene Stock, Gary Norman, Interview: Mark Annear **Royal**

Ballet Company: Interview and tour with Director, Monica Mason **The Place:** Jose Limon

Contemporary classes with Stephen Pelton **Perm State Ballet School and Company:**

Observed classes, Choreographed, Master Class

Major Lessons:

1. It is important for the ballet world to adapt in the world's changing times but at the same time preserve the history of classical ballet.
2. To respect, honour and utilize the great knowledge that already exists here in Perth through my parents, Alan Alder and Dame Lucette Aldous, as throughout the trip my mother astounded colleagues and peers with her vast knowledge of dance and the arts.
3. It is crucial to educate teachers; teacher training is heavily incorporated at the Paris Opera and the Royal Ballet Schools and strong bloodline of knowledge in Denmark and Russia.
4. Communication between teachers is invaluable; to observe and discuss another colleagues class is beneficial to all, especially if you are teaching those students in the future.

Conclusions:

1. It is not only here in Australia that we are trying to preserve the history of classical ballet but so are the oldest institutions in the world.
3. To find the funds here in Australia to host these invaluable teachers from overseas to share their knowledge first hand with Australian students and teachers.
4. It is imperative to return to these famous ballet institutions in the future to continue to update my knowledge.
5. It is crucial to spread our knowledge far and wide to all parts of the dance community in Australia which will bring more awareness to students, teachers and parents in correct ballet training.

I am writing articles for ballet societies and dance magazines Australia wide on our research and will be holding lectures and master classes for professionals, teachers, students and parents. I have already implemented this in Perth and regional WA but my main aim is to hold intensive week long courses at the tertiary institutions and Summer Schools around Australia.

Programme of Churchill Fellowship Trip:

Denmark: January 6th-23rd

Royal Danish Ballet School and Company: 2 weeks

Copenhagen Contemporary Dance School: 2 days

Paris: January 23rd-February 10th

Ecole Stanlowa: 3 weeks

Paris Opera School: 1 week

London: February 10th-19th

Royal Ballet School and Company: 1 week

The Place: 1 week

Russia, Perm: February 20th-March 4th

Perm State Ballet College: 2 weeks

Perm Ballet Company: 4 days

St Petersburg: March 4th-10th

Churchill Report

“Dance is an art because it depends on vocation and skill. It is a fine art because it strives for the ideal not only on plastic but in lyrical and dramatic respect”

History of Bournonville Technique “August Bournonville’s choreographic creed from the middle of the 19th Century describes in a few words his endeavours, ambitions and hopes for the Royal Danish Ballet. Bournonville's importance for the Royal Danish is indisputable. Inspired by his famous French ballet master Vestris whose excellent tuition in Paris led him to create his own vocabulary which has become what we know today as the Bournonville style. It is seen now as the richest example of ballet as an expressive form during the Romantic and Golden Age of the 19th Century. What we considered 35 years ago as a purely Danish treasure has now become international property and his name is ranked alongside the famous French choreographer, Petipa and Russian, Balanchine; and Bournonville’s works are not intended for a museum” Page 11 *“Bournonville Today” Frank Anderson*

Introduction One week prior to our departure we were amazed to receive a timetable from the Royal Danish School with highlighted suggestions from the Director, Neils Balle, of what we might want to observe in our first week. This was already a positive sign that we were off to a good start and a trip of lifetime as a Mother and Daughter, Mentor and prodigy in the quest for the excellence in teaching classical ballet.

Royal Danish School and Company, Copenhagen Finally after so much planning over two years, we landed in Copenhagen where we spent two weeks at the Royal Danish School observing classes and I also participated in Company class. We watched classes from grade 0-professionals which was a lot to absorb in the time we had but was crucial to see the development of the teaching and the students from the level to level. This is what we aimed to do in each institution and is exactly what we achieved, it was hard work and could not have done it alone as we needed four eyes and two heads to grasp and record confidently what we saw.

Unfortunately we didn’t meet with Neils Balle till mid-way through the first week as he was on tour with the Company in Paris, he was so warm and generous and said the “the school is yours” and it was, we were able to use the main studio to train in the afternoon to keep fit and also consolidate class material we had seen each day. It was incredible and surreal I had to pinch myself that I was in this famous, old theatre training with my Mum! My dream had really come true and I am so grateful to the Winston Churchill Trust and Norma Leslie who was so generous in supporting our cause and making this experience of a lifetime a reality. This trip has put me in amazingly good stead for the future with strongly formed relationships in each country I visited and invitations to return in the future.

Our first two classes we observed was grade 3 taught by Rose Gard, who was actually still dancing as a principle dancer on Mum's last trip in 1994, so is a relatively new teacher and then Grade 4 by Ann Kolvig. In the last few years they have added a grade 0 starting at the age of 5yrs due to the lack of decent private schools and teachers in Copenhagen. This has now also forced them to hold open classes on Saturdays for young children where Neils is in the studio to see what talent is out there. He looks for good body shape, creativity, musicality, co-ordination and rhythm and encourages them to audition if they are talented. Unfortunately we did not get to see much of the top level which is called the Apprentices as they regularly perform with the Company. The Apprentices were on tour in Paris performing *Napoli* for the first week and then in the second week they were rehearsing *A Folk Tale* which we saw at the New opera House.

Grade 3 & 4 Girls Class We wanted to start with grade 3 as it is the youngest age at the moment that we both teach which is around 9-10 yrs, then work our way up. In Perth we often have to teach different ages and levels in the one class and that is also happening here and in every school we visited so was very helpful to see how each institution and individual teacher deals with it. I gained so much out of these initial classes and there are many ideas and techniques that we can already start to introduce back in Australia.

Listed below are some of our observations: 1. In grade 3 students began the class using mats to do floor work consisting of various stretching and strengthening exercises before going to the barre. They also returned to the mats during the barre for Grand Battement (big leg kicks) to help them find their alignment stability and so they don't have to defy gravity. In grade 4 the students did the Grand Battement at the barre and the accent was up which is the same as the Russians but opposite to the French.

2. Students stood in a horseshoe in the centre of the room in relation to their place at the barre; they did a formal port de bras (arms) to the pianist and the teacher and then walked to the barre. It was so beautifully organized without being rigid.

3. Unique to the Danish system and this was in every class was the 4-8 counts of breathing at the beginning of every exercise, to encourage them to be calm and to start in the correct alignment.

4. Very "hands on" with the pupils at the barre, always correcting individuals and asking them questions to make sure they understand the corrections. Also in the centre Rose lifted the girl up and lowered her in a gallop to help her get the feeling jumping and travelling.

This was a common thread line observed in all the classes which was done by all the teachers and is such a good way to help the child understand how it should feel.

5. In grade 3 and was the same at the Paris Opera they often face the barre for a lot of the exercises for extra support and also if there is a mirror to check their alignment.

6. Again at this stage of the training the structure of the barre was focused on strengthening the muscles under the feet, as the Bournonville technique is very much focused on fast footwork which is what the Danes are renowned for. The exercises are also simple and often repeated for the arms to help at a young age develop the right shape for the Bournonville style.

7. The pianist and Rose worked so closely together to achieve the perfect rhythm and timing to begin and end the exercise with the music. It was also very inspiring music such as Harry Potter which is so appropriate for their age. This also happened in all the classes and very much at the Paris Opera also; it is a crucial element to a successful and well-constructed class.

8. In grade 3, the beginning of the centre practice the boys and girls would be in couple and have a formal meeting to begin the centre practice which ties in with the beginning of the class also. This is to prepare them for pas de deux and the stage.

9. Only in this class did we see the physiotherapist watch the class, we spoke with her afterwards and the reason she was there was to monitor the young student's progress and is creating programs for the students that are either physically or mentally behind. This was the only institution where we saw this happen on our trip.

10. For strength for jumps the children started at the back of the studio doing various simple combinations travelling to the front of the studio and then also on the spot transferring from 1 foot to the other and many repetitions. The students enjoyed this even though it was hard and was a continuation of focus on the feet from the barre.

11. In grade 4 was where we saw a glimpse of how they deal with the different levels and ages in the class as a boy who had just started this year did his centre practice at the barre to assist him, especially with jumps. Anna also ended with "3 minutes in hell" which was combinations of drills to build strength and stamina.

During our two weeks we were extremely fortunate to be granted two 1 hour interviews with both Neils Balle and Thomas Lund, who is a teacher at the school and still a principle dancer in the company. Neils teaches the senior level boys and Thomas teaches the level underneath, so it is almost like Thomas is his prodigy much like Mum and me, as he is continuously learning under the guidance of Neils.

All teachers have been through the school and the company as dancers so there is a very strong bloodline and tradition throughout the school that is preserved.

Thomas started in the school in 1986 and joined the company in 1993. He started teaching 12 years ago but only the apprentice's and the company in Bournonville class. For the last four years he has also been teaching Bournonville seminars in France with teachers in other fields such as ballet history, music, repertoire and mime. He has also choreographed a few ballets for the school, the biggest being for the whole school and involving Danish TV

characters. His most recent ballet though is based on the material from the Bournonville classes and he is also remounting *Etude*, *La Sylphide* and *Napoli* for companies around the world. Thomas is the most detailed, caring and encouraging teacher and has a good relationship with his students, as he has so much experience to offer from his time in the company and also his past teaching experience, even though he considers himself to be relatively new to it. As he is still dancing he also demonstrates so beautifully which is a big help to the students. Both Neils and himself are very keen to come to Australia to teach and share their incredibly knowledge.

Graduation Boy's Class Neils boys' class again had different ages but the oldest was 18yrs. Again like all the classes we have seen, the emphasis was on the feet as there were three tendu and two battement jete exercises at the barre. Both Thomas and Neils also started with additional simple but repetitive ankle strengthening exercises facing the barre to prevent injuries. The general corrections with the arms were to use the scapula to support the arms especially for some of the smaller boys. An interesting observation for us was that even though it was the top level the boys went back to the barre for some jumps, where they did a grand plie in 1st position and then used the barre to push on to help them jump all the way from the grand plie. However Neils was adamant to make sure they had their heels down in the demi plie before they jump and the accent was up. It was from both these classes that we gained our most valuable class exercises for Intermediate and Advanced levels.

Neils Balle Interview

Neils: I talk through all the classes with the teachers and talks with the older students to discuss their development in the 4th week of January and if not going to make it into the company, evaluation of all the grades

Floeur: In the grade 4 class and grade 3 there was lots of stretching but not so much with the older girls, why?

Neils: We have noticed our students are not as flexible as we want them to be and where should we start. We came up with we should start a little earlier, usually it doesn't start, for me, I was 14yrs, come on should be 10-11yrs old. Last year Ann did a lot of stretching the year before and still is now with her grade and what I feel is a good thing but it takes time out of something else. Once they get older it is their responsibility and they have pilates etc that will focus on these things, I don't do a lot either I do one at the barre and then between barre and centre, that's it because they should do it in other classes. I don't focus that much on it with the boys and the girls the same, Eva does more however because she is Bolshoi trained. Grade 5 you should see, Henrietta a big focus on drama and their presence in class which I like they have all different focuses.

Ann-physical and flexibility

Henrietta- Dramatic

Rose- Emphasizing on port de bras (arms) and motor skills as only grade 3

Each year focusing on a different aspect of classical ballet

Fleur: Does the Physio treat as well?

Neils: Yes, Charlotte, physiotherapist has one boy on a program for not connecting body to mind, she has just started and is very good with the small ones and works with screening and motor skills. Does treatment of injuries but also wants to work with the teachers to educate them about injuries and how to prevent them so they don't get too many, hopefully!

Fleur: I was wondering in the past if all the classes were Bournonville and now it's different, there are Russian teachers and the students do one Bournonville class per week, is that right?

Neils: Yes, that's right; it's been a very long time since it was all related to Bournonville. But today there is only one Bournonville class a week for the 6 and 7 grade they have an extra hour with Anne-Marie Vessel, she teaches a combined boys and girls and once they get to the highest level with even my pupils they have a morning class each week for Bournonville repertoire also and what they usually do in these 2-3 yrs of getting through 7, 8, 9 grade they go through all the Bournonville classes.

Lucette: Because it is difficult

Neils: It is difficult

Lucette: And it's also a wonderful system he developed with all the accents, there is so much

Neils: It is building it makes more and more sense even for me today then when I did it because now you can see why you are doing it

Fleur: You need positive encouragement for the students

Neils: Especially in the teaching area right? We can't close our little world and do what we used to, because it's a different world today. That's what I like about it, each kid it's something else, if you can just teach them etiquette cause they don't even know to hold a door open for older people, so those things I really enjoy but it's not to be scolding. What I like about the new generation is that they believe in themselves a little bit more than we did sometimes. There a little more confident because you're giving them a tap on the shoulder once in a while.

Fleur: They do one modern class per week?

Neils: From the 7th grade when they come from the other part of Denmark 7, 8, 9 the grade they have one weekly session. The thing is of course we would love to have more, actually I have been emphasizing modern because I think it is very important part of their training even though we are preparing them for Bournonville and Balanchine which is more important for Nikoli (Royal Danish Company Director). I want to give them the whole package but I can't find more hours in the day; usually they have a day till 5:45pm and if they're in the evening performance they have a break from 5:45pm-8pm and then they go on stage on the top days, right, these are the older students, they don't have afternoon sessions until they get to the 7th grade sometimes 6th grade but up till 5th grade they go home 3pm-4pm and come back for evening performance. But once into teenage years, it's very long days.

Neils: With the modern technique the idea was Anne should teach Graham, Cunningham, and Limon so they get introduction to know the difference of each style. So once they have been through those 4-5 years they have a good grounding of modern work also and they love to make it up themselves. In Denmark only the Royal Danish Ballet, there is nothing else in Denmark you have to go abroad to do anything more, have a career do it's very important if you want to go just modern.

Floeur: It is good you are open as not everywhere is

Neils: No if we weren't open we are too small a school and country not to be open, we need to have all the inputs we can get.

Modern at the Royal Danish My meeting with the contemporary side began on the first day as I observed a modern class by Morten Innstrand, where he was coaching the students on their own work and also offered for me to give some feedback. Anne Crosset the Head of Modern at the school was also in and out of this class and noticed that I was also involved in the session and saw an opportunity; this was great for me as she asked me if I would coach a young 16yr old girl, Karoline on her solo. I was honoured to be asked and was a great learning experience for both of us especially with the language barrier and her not having much contemporary background. We worked over two sessions which I filmed and was a fantastic case study of her development in a small amount of time from a new approach and positive encouragement.

Anne is also in charge of Company B, which is a youth company for the oldest students in the school where they have the opportunity to create their own work and perform it under the experienced guidance of Anne. This was a surprise but encouraging to see in an old and ballet focused institution and was the only place we saw this type of course on our travels.

Copenhagen Contemporary Dance School Morten is the Director of the Copenhagen Contemporary Dance School where they have a one year Pre- Tertiary education course which takes in a wide range of students from all different backgrounds, ages, countries and

experiences. During this course they learn contemporary technique, improvisation, choreography and how to present yourself at an audition. This is the first program of its type I have seen and think it is an imperative component that is not addressed and would definitely recommend for Australia to implement. I went out to the school in Carlsberg twice, the first time I watched their audition solos and gave them feedback and then 2nd time I participated in class which was two hours long and comprised of a contemporary/ballet barre, contemporary centre and improvisation. Morten then asked me to teach a phrase on the spot, so I had 10 minutes to create it and then teach it in 15 mins, again good experience for them and for me!

Due to my close connection with the Modern side, they have both asked me to come back in the future to teach at the Royal Danish School, Copenhagen Contemporary Dance School and possibly the Denmark Contemporary Dance Company which is project based. If it was divided by the three places it would be more affordable, as Copenhagen has been badly affected by the economic crisis. Over 100 people were fired from the Royal Danish Theatre while we were there and over 1300 people in the Arts over the whole of Denmark.

Tour of Royal Danish School Neils was so kind and took us on a whole tour of the Royal Danish School where they have 90 students as there is usually a drop out by Grade 7 due to lack of talent and the school sometimes suggests they go somewhere else. In the theatre they have various schoolrooms which has been converted from two old apartments; there is also a roof top area where the students can get fresh air and play basketball!

Boarding House The Head of the Boarding house which is a husband and wife who have worked in the education system for many years also gave us a full tour. The rooms have been recently renovated and are all different shapes and sizes with furniture that can be easily deconstructed and views of a courtyard where in summer they can have a barbecue. There is a main kitchen where on the weekend they are able to go shopping and cook for themselves.

The boarding house also provides a "parent's room" where one night a year the parents can stay over as it is extremely hard in Denmark for parents to let go of their children.

His only gripe he had was that it was still situated within the theatre so the children don't leave the building unless they go for a walk around the block which they are allowed to do, it would have been better to be five minutes away. This was the only boarding house we were able to see on our trip but was good to see how they manage and bring some of their ideas back to Australia.

Royal Danish Theatre Tour We were also lucky enough on our last day to have a tour of the whole of the Royal Danish theatre which took two hours as we saw every nook and cranny from the costumes, wigs, dyeing department, shoes, fabrics and were given many books, programmes and DVD's of the company and school. Finally we got to the old auditorium which is what I had been dying to see and all the lights were off. Luckily again, Igor, appeared who has worked in the theatre for over 20 years and is very proud of it. We had

the privilege of a personal tour and saw the Queen's personal tea room and lift but most of all we had the honour of sitting in the Queens box and I sat in her chair! We were able to see all of backstage and also on stage where part of it is the original wood from the 1700's, amazing.

Our final contact with the Company was watching the oldest Bournonville Ballet, *A Folk Tale* which was performed at the new opera house, which is architecturally stunning on the sea front opposite the Royal Palace. *A Folk Tale* is a Scandinavian folk tale so at times was confusing to us, however the staging and dancing was first class.

Our duration at the Royal Danish School and Company was remarkable and we left Denmark with a "treasure trove" of new and excellent knowledge that we could infuse into our classes back in Australia.

Ecole Stanlowa, Paris: The study tour in Paris commenced with much joy as we were being re-united with our Floorbarre Master and close friend, Robert Bestonso, retired principle dancer with the Paris Opera Ballet. Robert continues to preserve the Kniaseff Floorbarre at the private school, Ecole Stanlowa. Its curriculum provides classes for children from 10yrs up to mature adults and all the teachers are Ex Stars of the Paris Opera Ballet.

Robert Bestonso and Boris Kniaseff

Robert teaches an intensive hour floorbarre every day which was created by a Russian dancer Boris Kniaseff. He was trained at the Bolshoi and moved to Paris in the 1930's. It was here that he was influenced by his observation of gymnasts training to try and obtain more strength in the torso and legs without the use of the barre and most importantly when recovering from an injury as you are not defying gravity. He was also enormously affected by his knowledge of yoga; therefore he incorporated certain stretches, strong eye focus and use of the breath. Kniaseff also created his own barre, centre and pointe work but insisted that the dancer must always do the floorbarre first. Since the 1970's my mother and now I have continued to introduce the floorbarre to students and professionals in Australia who find it incredibly beneficial. Ironically at the Royal Ballet in London they gave us a paper written by an American praising the system of Kniaseff. It was fortunate on this visit that I participated in the classes and was able to video most days over the three weeks as the floorbarre has huge vocabulary and would change each day. In Robert's classical class he has followed on from Kniaseff's ideals at the barre as he teaches a lot of exercises facing and having two hands on the barre to maintain essential centring of balance in turns and pointe work. More advanced jumping exercises are also practised at the barre with the teachers help to encourage the dancer to go beyond their capabilities in the air then they would be able to do without this assistance. As Robert was very impressed with me as a dancer, he has invited me to return to perform and choreograph in Niece in July 2013 for two weeks.

The pointe work in this system is particularly devised for the introduction for young girls onto pointe and how to stand in and on their pointe shoes. Again he utilized the two hands at the barre to ensure they are rising and lowering correctly in the shoe. The barre is at least

20 minutes long and devised so the student is comfortable to rise and lower in the centre with reasonable strength and control. Lucette and I marvelled at the structure of the private pointe classes that Robert gives to women that are not dancers and are in their 50's and 60's. From the beginning to the end every step is well placed to feel a confident development for the final challenging adagio and "pirouettes" (turns) in the centre.

I was also able to take classes with the other Ex stars from the Paris Opera at no expense which was such an honour and have been welcome back with open arms at any time in the future.

Francoise Legree Class One of my most favourite teachers was Francoise Legree, who is a recently retired Ballerina and had such a poised presence and most generous approach to all who attended her advanced classes. Like many Ballerinas she knows how hard you have to work for beautiful feet, elegant extensions, safe turns and be quick to pick up old, famous beating steps from the French ballet repertoire; plus then to have the attack and freedom in big jumps. Each class had a barre that prepared you well for the centre practice; most exercises for the feet were complicated but still beneficial. In the centre Francoise with her rich experiences would constantly encourage me to be very calm in pirouettes as she said I had natural turning ability but too much force. I turned so much better in her classes as I gained much more confidence due to her corrections that I can now pass onto my students.

Frederick David Class

Frederick David has only just recently retired from the Paris Opera and is an extremely diligent teacher. The classes I was able to attend were an intermediate level which I enjoyed as the exercises at the barre were less complex. I also felt comfortable in the adage and turns in the centre because of Francoise professional advice to stay calm. The jumping area was carefully developed and he usually finished with a light, broad jump. He also pushed me to work differently in some exercises, mainly in jumps to work in the French style which often had opposite accents to what I am used too but was good to do as most of our bigger jumps are based on the Russian system.

My knowledge of the background of Bertrand Barena, an admired pedagogue from the Paris Opera School, was unknown to me and also my mother; but from our initial meeting a great "chemistry" developed. Later in this report I will expand on Bertrand's amazing work he has devised based from the methods of his great teachers Brioux, Francchetti and Volonine. Every Saturday Bertrand teaches at open class at the Ecole Stanlowa which was so advantageous for Mum and me, as I was able to do his class and he would interweave in his centre practice a great deal of vocabulary that we had discussed over the week at the Paris Opera School.

In our last days I took class with Bertrand and much to Lucette's astonishment he presented and taught with such style an Adage created 200 years ago by the famous dancer Vestris who in turn had been Bournonville's first and most prominent Ballet Master. Naturally the Adage will be treasured and demonstrated in only very special lectures in Australia. It was

amazing the amount of connections we discovered between the various schools, teachers and styles which makes the history and tradition of classical ballet so strong.

We gained so much from our three weeks at the Stanlowa School as it was the only place where I was able to participate in multiple classes a day and Mum was able to write them all down and was also good for moral support to have her there as the work was often difficult, different and so was the language barrier sometimes. The Royal Danish was the only other place we could freely write down the exercises while we were watching, otherwise we would sit together at night and record what we remembered from each class.

The Stanlowa School is very efficient in its every day running of the establishment; and is centrally located in Paris and as mentioned before had an excellent dance faculty, a small but well organized administration and very good pianists to accompany the teachers. The timetable of classes ranges from the morning, lunchtime and evening classes and as mentioned before in Paris the trend seemed to be for older women especially, to do floorbarre and ballet, even pointe to keep fit rather than yoga, gym or pilates. Robert's floorbarre classes especially were full, an average of twenty at various times of the day. I have also started my own floorbarre and ballet classes on my return following in Robert and Kniasseff's footsteps and have found the same trend; most of my classes are full of older, mature women but they are fabulous, respectful, work hard and more than anything want to be there! They are a joy to teach and you can see the improvement and change in their bodies, I think they are also fulfilling a childhood dream of being a ballerina and there is nothing wrong with that.

History of the Paris Opera School "The Paris Opera is the oldest school of dance in the Western world. It's creation is linked to Louis XIV, whose reign began and ended with two important decisions which made dance into an art. The first in 1661, the initial year of his reign, was at the instigation of Cardinal Mazarin: the King was granted dancing teachers and the right to open the Royal Academy of Dance founded well before the Royal Academy of Music.

Jean-Baptiste Lully was at its heart and it was he who imposed upon the building form of the Opera, its structure and rules. Lully did not forget dance. He invented expressive steps and when necessary, danced, before his dancers to make them understand his ideas."

"The first regulations concerning the school appeared in 1780 stating it would be supervised by ballet masters such as Vestris, who in the latter years was Auguste Bournonville's teacher and mentor. From 1806 due to the revolutionary period and "political battles" the school was moved to several locations, suitable for its safety. During all this time the school has tried to give the institution the high level of prestige that it enjoys today.

In 1973, the ballet school's long history reached its apex with the arrival of Claude Bessy; and now gallantly following in her footsteps is the strong but very sensitive new director, Elizabeth Platel. The school is now situated in Nanterre outside Paris is also a remarkable

achievement. The building close to the main train to Paris and extensive parkland is a notable success with its great staircase of asymmetrical spirals, each of which leads to the mezzanines that overlook the dance studios, already considered an architectural jewel. The outside of the complex offers series of gentle arabesques for the eye; a glass-walled hall links the dormitories to the teaching building, both the interior and the exterior painted in white with numerous windows which allow light to flood in; a harmonious union of beauty and function." *Quotes: Ecole du Ballet L'Opera de Paris 1993, pages 3,5,7,13,28*

Paris Opera School Experience: On our first day at the Paris Opera School we had the great honour of meeting Elizabeth Platel, the director who is famous for her role *Nikia* in Nureyev's *La Bayadere*, the role I performed for my graduation at Waapa. It was through the connection with Nureyev that we were able to get our foot in the door as the even the teachers from the Stanlowa School who were ex dancers were shocked that we had been permitted a whole week at school. Ms Platel was firm on our first meeting about no photos, writing or filming of any classes or the interior of the Paris Opera. She is very protective of all her teachers and their work which is the most unique part of their training, as there is no syllabus. In Russia the syllabus is Vaganova and in Denmark it is Bournonville. Ms Platel did become more relaxed during our time there and was happy for us to observe as much and whatever classes we wanted. Each teacher is teaching exactly what they were taught by their teachers and is passed on from generation to generation, so nothing is lost. This is so apparent in the clarity and thoroughness of the teaching and corrections. Much to our surprise and delight each teacher was so generous with their invaluable information during the class and often explained why they were concentrating on certain aspects of the class. A lot of this attention was due to the respect they all had for my Mother's performance of *Kitri* as Rudolf Nureyev's partner in his production of *Don Quixote*. Not all teachers were principle dancers with the Paris Opera and that was not important.

Another benefit of the French system is their four year training course before they teach at the school. Just because you are a good dancer does not mean you are a good teacher and they are very aware of that, something which we need to address in Australia. This is now also happening at the Royal Ballet School in London under Mark Annear who did his teacher training under my Mother. He is now running an Outreach program for retired dancers from the Royal Ballet Company to become teachers and also going out to schools all around England to teach and educate children and teachers.

Out of all the schools for me the Paris Opera had the most holistic approach to the teaching and well-being of the students and was the only School that didn't work on Saturday's. Also the structure of the timetable is such that the students do their academic studies in the morning and then start their physical classes at 1:30pm starting with a their general ballet class and then either repertoire, music, national dance or gymnastics just to name a few. This was the only school that was structured in this way but seemed to have a very good

result. Most of the teachers at the Paris Opera also teach outside at private schools on the weekend to earn extra money.

Fanny Gridre

Our first class we observed was the middle level girls which were 14yrs old, there were 12 in the class and the teacher was Fanny Gridre, who we saw the most of out of the female teachers. My most obvious observation was the beautiful use of the head and port de bras (arms) and a big focus, similar to the Danish to “respire”, breathing, before each exercise and during which was emphasized by every teacher. Within this class they also did pointe work which the students were extremely strong and confident as they were prepared with exercises at the barre. Again the teaching was very “hands on” as she took each girl close to the mirror and supported her round the waist as she did her turn on pointe to feel secure and told them to use their eyes into the mirror. The French also wear Freed pointe shoes which makes a huge difference as in Denmark they used Bloch which was not as flattering to the feet. It was also interesting to see Fanny teach the level below which often happens; the teachers swap sometimes so they can see where the students are at as they will have them the following year and also they can get used to their style of teaching.

Bertrand Barena It was then by accident that we met Bertrand Barena, mentioned earlier, as we were peering through the window at him teaching when he gestured for us to come in, that was our best move ever. At the Paris Opera they have a separate boys and girls class once a day for outside children that are aspiring to audition the following year for the school. This is a fabulous idea as the teachers can train them the way they want for them to audition and also the child is able to experience what it would be like to be a part of the Paris Opera School and whether they are up to it. Bertrand takes this class and then the youngest boys at the school which is of great benefit as they get consistency for two years with the same teacher. Bertrand is 63yrs old which made a huge difference to have such an experienced, knowledgeable teacher at this influential age, as he is still demonstrating and does his own 30 minute floorbarre every morning. This again is so important as to relate it back to Perth, my Mother who is 73yrs still does her floorbarre everyday so is able to demonstrate and is a true inspiration to all the students she teaches as they can see the training and want to aspire to be like that at her age.

Bertrand started with them on the floor doing at the least 15 minutes of his own version of the Kniaeff floorbarre which was rather hard but some very new and interesting variations that I am able to incorporate also. We had a great rapport with the young boys and they would often look over to us for advice which we gave and were keen to try harder steps to impress us. Bertrand was the only teacher on our whole trip that I saw use a long wooden stick in his class and I asked him why? He said “Floer they are young boys and I am an older man, I cannot touch them” he never used the stick in a bad way but could at least then touch the area he was giving a correction to, how times have changed.

If the boys made a mistake they would get down and do 10 push ups which they were almost eager to do, no complaining, proud that they acknowledged the mistake and then paid the consequences but not in a harsh way. I learnt so much from this class and was a highlight of the trip as it was balance of positive encouragement and discipline which really worked. Bertrand would start with the boys facing the barre for one month and then repeat the barre but facing the side, the key is to keep it simple and repetitive so they don't have to think about the exercise but focus on what their bodies are doing. He was the teacher we spent the most time with and also gave us an hour interview which I recorded with gems of information that I will treasure forever. I asked many questions regarding the French system, his classes, methods, exercises, accents and how he develops the material through the year with the students in each level.

Here are a couple of quotes from the interview: Bertrand: You know Monsieur Franchetti told us the barre is an average 10 exercises, so it's 30 mins, 45 mins max: plie, degage, battement, ronde de jambe, fondu, frappe, ronde de jambe en l'air, adage, Grand battement and jumps at the barre, it's 10.

Bertrand: I love to teach, so, I love the children, for me we are the seekers, for me the baby is like the rough diamond and in 6 yrs maybe a beautiful diamond. Me I work the diamond and if there is a mistake, my work is to cut and work the diamond, I like that. I am a jewellery maker for the dance, I think. I like to teach the foundation. For me to give a professional class is very easy

Bertrand: A journalist asked Elizabeth Platel "What is the secret to the French School?" "It is the simplicity, all exercises simplicity" Elizabeth Platel

Bertrand: Very important, the dancer must be free!

National Dance Class We watched all the levels of boys and girls classical classes as well as rehearsals of one of Violette Verdi's ballets who was ironically a close friend of my Mother's. We also observed the National dance class where the teacher was wearing piano accordion and playing it as she was teaching. The steps were from the Elizabethan times with tricky rhythms and intricate steps that the students struggled with but had fun. This class however does not get assessed but is noticed whether they attend and do well or not.

Gymnastics Class One of the classes I was most interested in was the gymnastics which we watched two sessions of 45 minutes each, older boys then younger boys. It was held in a studio that had gym equipment so they could still use the barre and was instructed by a physiotherapist, who was again very "hands on" constantly checking their alignment and that they are safe. The main focus was on the abdominals, strength in arms for pas de deux by using elastic ropes and mannequin torsos to lift. They also used trampolines and mats for jumps in various positions to feel the height and proper, safe landings, he was always on the side of the mats to stop and correct them, very well taught and constructed.

Jacques Namond and Francesca Zumbo Jacques Namond was in charge of the graduating boys class who were absolutely stunning. This had a lot to do with Jacques, as he taught exquisitely, still demonstrating, “hands on” corrections and good rapport with the students. The class was well-structured so they felt ready to do the difficult combinations in the centre. The boys worked so hard for him, they were pouring with sweat in the first exercise. The other teacher I must mention is Francesca Zumbo, who was in charge on the 2nd top level girls; she is in her 70’s but has so much energy, again still demonstrating and was an inspiration to her students which were strong and of a high standard.

Pianists At the end of every class I asked for the teacher and the pianists signature as it was such a privilege to be allowed into their classes. The pianists at the school were incredible and worked extremely closely with the teacher and played the most beautiful and inspiring wide range of music. One lady actually writes and improvises all her own music for the classes and has her own website with all her own compositions.

Conservatoire, Paris: Again through Robert’s connections we were invited to watch classes and rehearsal at the Conservatoire of Dance which is the other top school in Paris along with the Paris Opera. The main difference between the two schools is that the Conservatoire is equally balanced in classical and contemporary techniques. We were warmly met by Guy Vareuilhe, who took us into to watch his rehearsal of Maurice Bejart’s *Sacre du Printemps* with the 2nd top level boys. Guy was in the original cast and was demonstrating full out at the age of 63yrs, it was amazing. There were only five in the class and a fantastic pianist who played the score of Stravinsky with every ounce of his body, it was so inspiring and that was just rehearsal; those boys were incredibly lucky but not sure they realized it. We also had a good discussion with Guy after the rehearsal about his career, the school and the ballet world in general.

Conclusion The three main words I took away from the French system which may have been the most important words on the trip:

1. Respire (breathe)
2. tres clam (very calm)
3. Equilbre (equal)

I use this in my daily practice and have also very much incorporated it in my teaching at every level.

It was quite hard and emotional to leave Paris as we had made some very close friends; however we left with a huge amount of outstanding new knowledge that we not only have on dictaphone and in our notes but also on film.

It was the hardest I had worked so far on the trip, participating in two classes in the morning at Ecole Stanlowa; we would then trek out to Nanterre to the Paris Opera School from 1:30-6:30pm so was a hard few weeks. It was incredible how my body changed during my time from their regular training; I was stronger, more flexible, consistently good turns and a higher jump.

Royal Ballet History: London With the amazing vision of Dame Ninette de Valois, the Royal Ballet as we know it was founded. Dame Ninette's early career as a dancer was with the famous Diaghilev Company, the Ballet Russe. She then began her idyllic quest for a ballet company in London using all her knowledge of the French and Russian traditions; plus her individual training with Anna Pavlova's ballet master Enrico Cecchetti. Dame Ninette gradually built up a small company performing at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in North London to the much admired Royal Ballet Company as we know it today, housed in the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Dame Ninette realized that the establishment of her company needed a well-structured ballet school to support her on-going vision for growth and stability. *"Respect the past, herald the future but concentrate on the present"* Dame Ninette de Valois

The arranged schedule for London was deliberately shorter as it was more of a pilgrimage back to where both my Mother and Father, Alan Alder, had their first major training at the Royal Ballet School and where they began their famous careers in both in the Royal Ballet and Mum in Festival Ballet and Rambert also. Our invitations to visit were so warm especially from my Mother's colleague and friend, Monica Mason, Director of the Royal Ballet Company.

Rambert Dance Company Our first appointment was at the Rambert Dance Company but we had been warned when we were in Paris that the schedule had changed and the dancers were leaving for Scotland on tour the morning we were visiting, which was disappointing. Mark Baldwin the Director had left a welcoming letter apologizing for not being able to meet us.

We had however organized to meet with the archivist to look at old programmes, photos and posters of the company when my Mother was there from 1957-1962. For me this was an amazing experience to see all the memorabilia as Mum was giving full commentary of the history behind many the photos of which much of it the archivist did not know. This has led for my mother to have a Skype interview in the future with Rambert so that she can share all her knowledge that seems to have been lost from that era.

Royal Ballet Company After this rather tiring experience we headed to Covent Garden for me to finally meet Monica Mason, in her office at the Royal Opera House. I again recorded the conversation which ended up lasting for two hours where we covered so many subjects from their past, my background, various aspects of training, style of dancers in this day and age, new choreographic styles, as she has been with the Royal Ballet for 45 years and the director for 10 years, so she has witnessed many changes both good and bad. We were fortunate to meet up with Monica twice and the second time she took us on a full tour of the newly reconstructed "House" as they call it, from the studios, canteen with a view over London, backstage where there is the most beautiful large portrait of Rudolf Nureyev, it was a special moment. Finally we ended up in the corridor behind the stalls circle where there was a photographic exhibition to honour Monica's life in the Royal Ballet as it is her last year

as director. Unfortunately the company was on a break that week so I was unable to do class or see a performance.

Monica Mason Interview Quotes:

Monica: These two dancers were blessed in having; even though one was in Japan and one was in Australia, really fine early training. And if you don't get that you never catch up, you can't, you can't alter those childish habits

Fleur: That's exactly what everyone has said everywhere we have been especially the Paris Opera and now here, so it's true

Monica: Well I think it applies to teach someone the piano in the wrong way with everything in the wrong place, with the elbows up and wrists dropped, you know you have to learn it from the ground up.

Monica: But you know now all the life's gone out of it, it's extraordinary, you get these amazing bodies and it's absolutely dead, there's no life, no spirit

Fleur: No character

Monica: No nothing and one ballet looks like another, it's so sad. Somebody actually said to me "oh have you heard there's this 18yr old Odette on the stage today" I actually thought 18yr, do you know I must be getting old because actually I don't think I am interested in an 18yr old Odette

Royal Ballet School The Royal Ballet School is architecturally very well designed as there is a famous bridge that connects the school to the Opera house. My parents are very close friends with Gailene Stock the Director of the school assisted by her husband Gary Norman so we were able to observe classes and rehearsals of the graduating year preparing for an International competition, as the rest of the school was also on a break. One of the works they were taking was choreographed by William Forsythe, which I did a secondment with in 2000, so Gail and Gary were very welcoming and complimentary about any feedback I had for the dancers, as it was quite out of their comfort zone being more modern. Again we had a full tour of the school and all the studios as it is completely new including a different location since my parents trained there. We also had a good interview with Mark Annear, mum's former prodigy and through her influence has started a teacher training course for ex-dancers of the Royal Ballet who intend on teaching and also an education program teaching students and teachers in schools around England.

Pineapple Studios London was the first place that I had to look for and pay for classes, so I searched the internet for Pineapple studios which is the biggest commercial dance studios

in London, Covent Garden. It provides many various styles of dance and all different levels and to my astonishment I had to pay 4 pounds on a weekend and 2 pounds on a weekday just to enter the building to use the facilities and then for the class on top of that, I think I had been a bit spoilt so far! It was the most expensive of all the places to do class which ranged from 10 pounds to 16 pounds. I only did two classes here the first was with Jonny O'Brien who danced with Mum in Festival Ballet, again it was full of older women that obviously adore him and have followed him his whole career and the second classical class was with Roland Price. This class I felt very uncomfortable as there would have been over 40 people ranging from hoards of Japanese students, Royal Ballet student and professionals, amateurs with no air ventilation, it was like a sauna. It was also the first time I felt daggers from other girls in the class, there was so much competition it was frightening; I felt it a little in Paris at the Stanlowa School but to a much lesser extent. It was an eye opening experience.

The Place The place is situated in Euston Square and is a complex that houses London Contemporary Dance School, professional contemporary classes and the Richard Alston Dance Company. It was here that I found my best classes in London even though it was in contemporary which was a shock to my body but such a pleasure to do after so much classical. I was lucky enough to be there the week that Stephen Pelton was teaching as he is based on the Jose Limon technique which I have never done but absolutely fell in love with and have a huge desire to do more of. He was impressed with my movement and was surprised I had not done it before; we are keeping in contact to work together in the future as I would love to learn more of the technique and possibly work on a solo for me.

As the week we were in London not much dance was on we went to a show "*Resolution*" which was a week long season that comprised of established and emerging choreographers. Each night had three works by different choreographers every night which I thought was a clever idea. Two of the works had interesting concepts and movement; one work was very unusual and moving, where the other very comical and maturely performed. It was good to see contemporary dance in another country especially on such a similar level to Strut here in Perth, so it was interesting to compare.

History of Russian Ballet: "Russian Ballet began with twelve little girls. How small was the beginning" said Tamara Karsavina, the ballerina who rose to fame during the era of Serge Diaghilev's leadership as impresario for the Imperial Ballet Company. This quote explains how the Empress Anna was not content with amateur and foreign artists performing at the Imperial court and as a result she insisted a ballet school in 1738 on the attic floor of the Winter Palace in St Petersburg. The French ballet master Jean-Baptiste Lande was brought from Paris to give instruction. The French influence persisted through the 19th Century and contributed greatly to the gracious style of the Russian dancers; and during the last decade of the 20th century the Imperial Ballet through the artistic vision of Serge Diaghilev received amazing ovations in Paris and London.

The 2nd decade saw the building up of what we now know as the Vaganova Choreographic Academy. It brought forth an abundance of qualities – ecstatic lyricism, heroic virility, plastic sensuousness of powerful dimensions”. This incredible development was explained personally to my mother in 1976 during her five month academic training under Vaganova’s original pupils, Natalia Dudinskya, Ninel Kurgapkina and Irina Kolpakova.

Quote Dudinskya:” *the whole of Vaganova method is rather like learning from an encyclopaedia of ballet.*”

Vaganova worked tirelessly to co-ordinate and amalgamate all the teachings of the ballet masters from France, Denmark and Italy which were fortunately manually recorded. Her philosophy was to take the very best qualities of each master and place them at suitable levels during a period of training from 10 years to 18 years of age.

During the 2nd World War the arts were in peril. The long siege of Leningrad by Hitler necessitated the Russian Ballet in its entirety to be evacuated to Perm.

In Perm it continued to cultivate its school and prepare young dancers for the future. “Theatre Street” Tamara Karsavina 1930, page 8

“Leningrad’s Ballet” John Gregory 1980 page 9, 13, 19, 25

Perm State Ballet College, Russia In early 2011 my mother began negotiating with the Vaganova Academy in St Petersburg to acquire similar invitations that my parents had received in 1976 and 1993. But gradually over several months the Academy politely declined any entrance to their institution as the establishment was undergoing quite a few political and financial changes. Fortunately we have a close friend in Perth, Ivan Salmin, who was born in Perm and went through the Perm Ballet College and Company as a principle dancer. Ivan spent an immense amount of time trying to gain contact with the school for our sakes and finally after many months we received a generous invitation to spend two weeks at the school. It is also important to note that it was through Ivan’s foresight that he contacted, Ksenyia, a language teacher at the school to see if she would act as our translator and she was an absolute god send, we could not have achieved any of what we did without her help, we will be forever grateful and now have a friend for life. We would have truly struggled with daily communication with the Directors, their staff, students and even basic things like finding the studios, the canteen, to order and pay for food as due to the severe weather conditions we didn’t leave the school from 8:30am-6pm each day.

On our first day we were greeted by Ksenyia and had a very private but formal lunch with the Deputy Director, Lilia Gogoleva and we were shown with much pride their library of history full of photos programmes and diaries of principle dancers that chose to retire from the elite ballet company in St Petersburg to establish a school that would carry on the Vaganova method.

The Perm Ballet College is housed in an expansive 20th century building with many long corridors and staircases. The studios vary in size but only the three main studios have the luxury of tarquet surface and all the others still have the traditional wood floor where the

students have to constant water the floor from ancient, old water bottles to avoid slipping. One big plus is that this institution has its own theatre within the premises with good proportions and floor and a nicely furnished auditorium.

At it at this time I would like to refer back to my Mother's finding's under the daily guidance of Natalia Dudinskya; the most revered teacher in Russian ballet in the 20th century before we comment further on the training here. During her time she observed classes for girls from 10-14 yrs and the boys from 11-12yrs. The class for the 10 yrs old girls was taught with a gentle but firm approach and was assisted by a student teacher currently engaged in a 7 yrs course to be qualified to go out and teach internationally the renowned Vaganova system. Exercises were simple and many anatomical corrections were given each day, as correct posture and application is instilled very much at this age. Therefore the student is physically prepared for more complicated vocabulary in the next few years, which really begins at the age of 14yrs to graduation. Of course time has moved on and in the ballet world the development of the technique is probably more demanding and competitive than ever before. This remark is to explain the fact that the classes at the Perm school for 10-13yrs old girls contain a more complicated vocabulary and the physical application expected by the teacher is very demanding.

Perm School like all ballet schools but noticed more here, are obliged to take in foreign students from Japan, Italy, USA and Mongolia. This of course helps the college financially but it is difficult for the staff to structure the classes so they gain the full benefit of the Vaganova system, especially with the language barrier. However after most classes the lecturer would spend time with them to help and consolidate certain exercises they were having difficulty with so they can keep up technically with the other students in the class.

First week Of observations: Our general observations of classes were that as it was only late February and the pupils were simply learning all the steps required for the 1st term assessment, as the students hadn't mastered it yet. There was little attempt by the teachers to correct the students basic anatomical faults and did not have a "hands on" approach. The classes for 12-13yrs girl's in our opinion was slightly too choreographically difficult and the standard was distinctly varied. A number of the students were struggling but quietly encouraging each other where the more talented ones would be constantly receiving attention and corrections. This happened in all the various levels of classes we observed and was reiterated by a friend of Ivan's, Olga, an ex-dancer, that it is a tradition throughout the students tuition at the school to accept constant, critical and sometimes quite harsh corrections; this meant they are tough enough in the future to handle a career in a company and able to perform demanding roles. It was interesting that some of the teachers conducting the girls appeared to be reasonably young considering their responsibilities and chose to wear street clothes as opposed to dance apparel and did not demonstrate physically much at all, which was the opposite to Copenhagen and Paris.

Gymnastics Even though we were so busy cramming as many lessons as we could in our first week, again I was keen to see the gymnastics taken by Tatyana Rezoceva .We watched two classes, the first were the girls around 14-16yrs and it was quite old fashioned. It was mainly focused on extensions using thera-bands, strength, balance, turns on a disc and of course the famous flexible Russian gymnastic back which featured in all the classes. The second class was the level 5 boys and commented they were not the strongest year as she felt they were not yet at the standard she would like. They were working on jumps but was early in the morning and had not done class yet which was a little confusing for me in relation to dance safety. As they are limited with their basic equipment compared with the Paris Opera, Tatyana has done as best as she can inventing exercises similar to Paris but without certain materials to assist them. The comment I would make is that it made a huge difference she was not a physio as often they would be stretching incorrectly anatomically which they then carry into their classical class. This lead us to talking with her afterwards as she was very eager to hear about what we had seen at the Paris Opera in this area; she was in no way daunted or envious but open and optimistic that with her innovative ideas and inspired by our various opinions on the development of a dancer, she would create an ideal gymnastic programme in Perm.

14-15 yrs Girls Classical Class The classical tuition for the girl's aged between 14-15yrs is quite complex and a great deal of strength in the torso and legs is already required when executing and sustaining high extensions at the barre. Concentration on turns in the centre was not apparent compared with the Paris Opera School; it was focused much on the adagio and attention on jumping for which the Russians are famous for their height and strength. The pointe work commences at 12yrs and is based on the French schooling of at least 15-20 mins at the barre which is then minimized by 14yrs so there is time for the repertoire from ballets such as "Sleeping Beauty" and "Swan Lake"

The Graduation Girls Class It is at this point I must also recognize the fine achievements in teaching in the past at this college, as Perm attracted worldwide attention when they produced an outstanding female student in 1986, Nadia Pavlova; who won a prestigious international ballet competition in Moscow. The school continues to strive to develop more graduates of Pavlova's calibre.

The first graduation class we saw was very similar in structure to Mme Dudinskya's in St Petersburg and at this stage of their training the work requires control to execute turns in multiple positions, small intricate jumps and of course very high extensions and attack in big jumps. The teacher was very gracious to us, however was extremely critical even to her most favourite pupil, who we saw perform later in the week as *Clara* in the *Nutcracker* and she was very beautiful and extremely well partnered by a graduation boy that made her look lyrical and graceful.

Pas de Deux Class Due to our tight schedule and due to rehearsals for *Nutcracker* we only observed one pas de deux class in our time at the school. The teacher's material was exactly

like my parents training at the Royal Ballet School, which was encouraging. He chose to demonstrate with one of the girls to show the boys how to keep his partner on balance or correct it immediately if she was falling off balance; at the same time he also taught the girls how to be aware of their posture in turns and balances. He also demonstrated a lot of the lifts for the boys to show where they should be holding the girls on the torso and legs; he was not young, would have been in his 60's and still amazingly strong, I was very impressed and think he still enjoys it.

Nutcracker On our first day we were given invitations to sit in the Director's box at the main theatre in Perm, which is a mini version of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. The opening night was very professionally performed with elegant sets and costumes and the sound tutelage was obvious in the performance as all partnering throughout it was safe and well presented. After the show we were approached by the staff and students for comments as they respected our opinion and were delighted with our very genuine compliments.

Conclusions at end of first week The entire course at the Perm Academy contains three major aspects:

1. 180 degrees rotation in the legs and feet are required at all times.
2. The alignment of the head and shoulders is exaggerated in order that even at an early age girls may have the "poise" of a ballerina and a strong virile stature for the boys.
3. The application of the foot, not favoured by most institutions is the "clawing" of the muscles under the foot in all barre work instead of good articulation of all the underneath muscles of the foot to enable the dancer to engage with the floor continuously. This is crucial for support in rises, turns but most of all for the strength to push off in jumps and then the security and softness in landings which helps in the prevention of injuries. The clawing of the foot is mainly used for when the female dancer has to "hop" on pointe of which there are many in the old ballets created by French master Marius Petipa

Second week of observations: Boys classes From the age of 13yrs up to graduation there seems to be a strong comradeship between the boys and their teachers. The content at the barre was less than the girls and aimed at good extensions especially in deep lunges which will help to develop their high jumps. Both the teachers and the boys enjoyed turning and jumping so the adage exercises were shorter in the centre. The boys from 14-16yrs were given long arrangements of turns preparing them for the next level of training and also excellent combinations of assembles which prepared the boys for more difficult jumps especially when turning in the air. The boys were also encouraged to jump as high as possible freely in various positions to help them feel the suspension in the air at the height of the jump.

Graduation Boys Class The graduation class was taken by the Artistic Director, Vladimir Tolstukhin and the structure throughout each lesson contained exercises at the barre and in the centre to encourage them to feel expansion in their movements. The adage section was sometimes shorter and other days longer; turns were varied and demanding repeated numerous times but with excellent corrections. All the jumping section contained a good development from basic preparatory steps up to the more choreographic content expected from the Russian male dancer.

Mongolian Classes It was interesting for us to see that the school had timetabled the students from Mongolia separately. This was beneficial for the students as they had been previously trained very correctly and carefully in their private school in Ulan Bator. The average age of both classes was 12-14 years and they only stay at the school for one year. The girls' teacher was very thorough and her corrections were clear and constructive with the girls having a good understanding and then able to apply it. The boys' teacher was rather flamboyant but the young boys really enjoy this approach and seemed to feed off it. He was encouraging with the boys and the content was geared towards them attempting fun and challenging turns and jumps at the end of class.

Choreography In our final days we met the Director of the whole college, Ludmila Shevchenko, as there are two directors. We had an arranged meeting in her office with Kseniya, of course as she speaks no English. I found this very daunting at first but through Kseniya's translation she seemed to be friendly and enthusiastic we were visiting the school. It was due to my Churchill Fellowship business card that mentioned I was a choreographer which led to the proposition of the director for me to choreograph for *Arabesque* an International Ballet competition held in Perm. I was shocked as it was now Wednesday and I was leaving for St Petersburg on the Sunday on the Trans-Siberian train. However it was an opportunity too good to pass up so I agreed but only to create a solo not a group piece due to the time constraint. The director was more than happy with this and immediately contacted the teacher in charge of the chosen student, Dasha Lotsova, who we saw dance the *Sugar plum* in *Nutcracker*, so I was familiar with her. I was given as much time as I needed, the use of the stage to rehearse, Kseniya to translate even though Dasha spoke a little English and a lady who also filmed all the rehearsals.

Both her classical and modern teachers were at all the rehearsals, except the initial one, as they are protective of their students but also wanted to have the right information to rehearse once I had gone. It was a very intense last few days, as I was also doing classes with the Perm Ballet Company who had just returned from tour in France, rehearsing Dasha and also still observing classes. This was again where having my Mum was invaluable as I could not have achieved all of this without her, I am forever grateful. For me this was one of the most rewarding experiences of the trip and my life as she was so respectful, worked extremely hard on top of all her other studies, was so open and responsive to my

corrections and to moving in a completely foreign way; she was completely out of her comfort zone in every aspect, especially dancing in bare feet.

In three days Dasha developed so much but a lot of work was still to be done; I was on film dancing the solo full out and also giving corrections so she could always refer back to it. I was paid for this commission and made sure that they sent me a DVD of her rehearsal before the competition in April 2012. This they did and she had improved enormously in most of the solo, even though I sent back 25 notes with corrections, friendly reminders and positive feedback. Dasha did incredibly well and got through to the 3rd round and received a *Competition Diploma*. I am so proud of her and she recently wrote to me expressing how much she enjoyed performing “*On the edge*” and hopes to be able to perform it again before she graduates. What an accomplishment for both of us!

Contemporary Master Class It was in Russia that I was most keen to share my skills and knowledge in contemporary dance and is exactly what happened. I approached the Artistic Director in our first days and he was very eager but I had to wait for confirmation of the date and until the 2nd week when *Nutcracker* performances were over. It was finally organized for our last Wednesday afternoon for approx. 40-50 students of various ages and many more watching including staff and both directors. Ksenyia was my life saver as she translated the class to the best of her ability, not being a dancer and also not a qualified translator! The students were shocked when I asked them to take off their shoes, skirts and roll up their tights as we would be working in bare feet. I demonstrated the entire class with every group so did not have much opportunity to see how they were handling it. Mum informed me they were very enthusiastic especially the girls but the boys were a little more shy and intimidated by the last exercise and sat down. The main comment at the end of the class from the students was “it was so different and you make it look easy but it isn’t”. It was a fantastic experience for me to be able to open their eyes and bodies to a whole new way of moving which they had never been exposed to before. The modern that is taught at the school I did not see but they wear jazz shoes with a little heel, tights and skirts, which is opposite to my style of contemporary. This was good also for the modern teacher as I feel that she learnt a lot from my class and choreography as she has not been exposed to it before and I am sure will incorporate some of my ideas and techniques into her classes.

The class was filmed and numerous photos taken of me with the students all of which I have copies and hold wonderful memories for me of a very special time. It was after the master class that Konstantin Uralsky, Director of Astrakhan State Ballet Company in the South of Russia approached me about my background and why I was in Perm. I explained everything; he was so complimentary of me as a teacher and dancer and could really see that I was trained in the classical technique and was still performing as well. He himself trained at the Bolshoi School but has spent most of his life in the USA and also trained in the Lester Houghton contemporary technique which is not common for a Russian male ballet dancer. We had a meeting the following day to discuss the logistics of me returning to teach, assist

and possibly perform with his company. We have stayed in touch and I am in the process of sending him my work and he is currently negotiating with other companies in Russia to see if they are interested in having me as a guest to help share the costs. This is very exciting for me and never thought out of all the places on our trip I would be offered work in Russia.

Dame Lucette Aldous Interview Half way through our last week the director approached my Mother, Dame Lucette Aldous to give an interview on her life and career which as very unexpected. Ksenya, our interpreter was so conscientious in gathering appropriate questions on technique and repertoire in Australia and footage of Nureyev and my mother in the film of *Don Quixote* which impressed everyone very much. I was also involved in the interview which lasted for one hour where the staff asked many questions including what our thoughts were on their establishment. Several photos were taken afterwards and we are now permanently mounted on the wall of the Perm Ballet Academy along with many famous Russian dancers. By the end of our two weeks everyone at the school became more open and generous throughout all the classes and I now have a permanent open invitation for me to return to their institution at any time in the future.

La Sylphide This performance was on my last night in Perm and I had just been rehearsing for five hours that day with Dasha but was determined to travel back to the Theatre that night as again I had been given the Director's seats to see *La Sylphide*. This was ironical for me and a fabulous link back to the beginning of the trip as *La Sylphide* is one of Bournonville's most famous ballets, where I first began my studies. Here I was in Perm watching a Russian ballet company perform a Danish ballet; the sets and costumes were first class and was fabulous to finally see the effect of the *Sylph* being flown up the chimney. The principle female was dancing her last performance that night and was amazing to witness how the Russian's love, respect and follow their dancers as the curtain call went on forever and there were so many flowers, streamers and of course the traditional slow clap.

Diaghilev Museum In our last few days we were also given a private and most enlightening tour of the original house of Serge Diaghilev's family as he was born in Perm. It is now a museum which is full of incredible photos, costumes, programmes and is also a school where they often hold performances of excerpts of ballets of his time. The staff at the museum were absolutely astounded at the knowledge of my mother and have asked her to provide photos and written history for the museum.

St Petersburg My Mother has always called her studies in St Petersburg as "pilgrimages" and this is exactly what this last leg of the trip was for me. It was filled with high expectations as I have grown up with countless stories of my parents working alongside very famous Russian ballerinas and gaining so much knowledge of the Vaganova method that Nureyev had encouraged them to seek. Although Mme Dudinskya and Mme Kurgapkina are deceased they will not only be remembered as two of Russia's great ballerinas but as the most knowledgeable and inspiring teachers of Vaganova's philosophies and technique. It was to our great fortune that before we left Perth we made contact with Mme Kurgapkina's

niece, Irina, who resides in the ballerina's old apartment and over many conversations over the phone we were invited to her home for traditional Russian afternoon tea. This was a surreal experience for me as we had the honour of watching many famous videos of Ninel Kurgapkina's performances and viewing touching photos of Nureyev's last visit to her in St Petersburg and that very apartment. I actually at the time was sitting on the couch where Nureyev had sat happily with Mme Kurgapkina and other close colleagues from the Marinsky Theatre. It was a truly remarkable afternoon and ended with an offer from Irina for my mother to contribute her thoughts and experiences in Mme Kurgapkina's book that she is writing, this is a great honour.

My last but unforgettable experience of the trip was finally attending a performance of the Kirov Ballet perform the famous Russian Ballet, *Le Corsaire* at the Marinsky Theatre with my mum. This ballet is of course synonymous with our much loved Rudolf Nureyev. To enter the Marinsky Theatre felt as if I were in dream but the reality was a feeling of being part of all this great history the theatre stands for, so many famous artists have performed there such as Nureyev and Pavlova. The ballet was danced by two exquisite ballerinas but the success of the performance mainly was due to the energy, technical precision and elegant interpretation of the leading male who danced *Conrad*. He had all the qualities expected by this company's training to produce inevitably astounding male dancers.

The last day in St Petersburg was filled with very mixed feelings as of course the nine weeks of studies had been accomplished and the pilgrimage to St Petersburg had lived up to my expectations and was full of joyous occasions.

I am so thankful for to Norma Leslie and the Churchill Trust for this invaluable experience and I am truly excited to share this new found, rare knowledge that we have acquired with the Australian dance community.

Recommendations:

1. I feel it is imperative that aspiring teachers have teacher training at some level whether it be a course or studying under a mentor in their field; just because you are a good dancer does not mean you are a good teacher and some teachers have not been professional dancers either.
2. This leads me to my next point from what I observed especially in Paris and Denmark is that the teacher should still be able to demonstrate at some level, definitely not be sitting in a chair and just reading from a syllabus book.
3. A close relationship with teacher and pianist was very prominent again in Paris and Denmark which made for a positive and holistic class. It also helped the students with the accents in certain exercises by having a clear rhythm, introduction and ending.
4. A separate re-hab class for the dancers every morning at the same time as normal company class. At the Royal Danish Company it was taken by older and experienced

teachers that knew the dancer's injuries and geared the class towards strengthening the injury.

5. Physiotherapist working closely with students and teachers monitoring their progress during classes and if they are struggling to set up a programme to help with their weaknesses. Also educating teachers on how to prevent injuries.
6. The one year pre tertiary course that was in Copenhagen Contemporary Dance School is a fabulous idea and would highly recommend institutions such as Waapa, VCA, QUT or larger scale private dance schools to try and implement such a course. It is filling a huge void in our education system and is the first type of course addressing this issue I have heard of anywhere.
7. All private ballet teachers should research and consolidate for their pupils awareness the amazing history of our ballet heritage beginning with Louis XIV in Paris, Bournonville in Copenhagen and Empress Anna to Vaganova in St Petersburg.

Conclusions

1. That some of the oldest and most successful ballet training systems in the world are the ones that have taken the best from other styles and made their own syllabus. However, in saying that the Paris Opera has no syllabus, the knowledge is passed from generation to generation; which being the oldest ballet school in the world at 300 yrs old is the reason this has been so successful, nothing is lost. Preserve the history and knowledge and don't forget to pass it on.
2. "Hands on" approach to teaching is the key to correct alignment, execution and understanding of a movement or exercise. Sitting in a chair and telling them to get their leg higher or turn out more is not the answer, you must help them feel how to do that.
3. Even though in this day and age dance is so much more demanding and competitive; we must not lose the artistry; quality, poetry and musicality, we are not just acrobats. This was reinforced by great ballerinas on my trip as it is starting to happen around the world, we must not lose what dance is all about.
4. The entire Australian dance community should be utilizing on every level our *State Living Treasures*, my parents, as we have an encyclopaedia of English, French, Russian and Danish ballet history and technique on our doorstep. This trip has inspired me to convince them it is time to write a book, so that is the next chapter.

As I already teach at various dance schools, institutions, private lessons and professional classes, I decided on my return, inspired by Ecole Stanlowa to start my own classes based on the Danish, French and Russian systems and of course the Kniaseff Floorbarre. This has gone extremely well, have had a lot of interest and good attendance over the first few weeks. This has created more private students for me, preparing them for auditions this year to tertiary institutions. However our next step and main aim is to travel the East Coast to the

major ballet institutions, private schools and summer schools. This I am confident in achieving as we already have strong contacts in this area and they have an eager hunger for our knowledge.

I have had meetings with the RAD society to run a teachers course based on my studies which would include lectures and physical master classes. I have also had contact with Waapa, Cecchetti & RAD, Society, WA Ballet Company, Perth Ballet School, Perth College just to name a few to give lectures, demonstrations and master classes on our research trip in the future.

The dance community in Perth such as Waapa, private ballets schools, Cechetti and RAD Societies, WA Ballet Company and Ausdance need to work together to raise funds to bring out teachers from Denmark, Paris, London and Russia as then everyone can benefit from their invaluable information. Now we have re-built these overseas relationships and they have expressed interest to come to Australia we need to act on it.

I have already written an article on our research trip for the Cecchetti Society and Health Central but I will now be contacting Dance Australia, National Archives Library in Canberra, National & WA Ausdance to write more in depth articles on our observations, recommendations and conclusions. This is important so that the information is also accessible to the general public.

Finally I would like to thank everyone involved in making this trip possible and recognize that we have achieved an unbelievable feat in the quest for excellence in classical ballet.