

## Chapter 2

### My Overture: Dance Art in Finland 1917-39

Historical narrative integrates various layers of action: collection of information, analysis of information and reporting the results and arguing for them. In my case, in one layer I collected separate 'facts' that are found in traces of the past. For instance, dance programmes of the Ballets Jooss show the performing dates and the repertoire of the group in Finland in 1937. The collection work started in 1990 and is complete now. In the second layer, I put 'found facts' together in the context of Finnish/Western society, culture, art and dance, and asked my own questions about the past of Finnish dance and made interpretations of it. This began also in 1990, because immediately when I found and named an event as a fact I put it into some context for, without context, a separate 'fact' is meaningless. The third layer emerged the picture in 2001 when I decided to write a PhD thesis on the past of dance in Finland during the period 1917-39.

Nowadays, it is evident that events of the past can be read and narrated in different ways by historians. Even an individual historian can be situated in many ways in his/her attitudes towards the past and what is known of it. This is, as Lena Hammergren argues,

a new approach to historical research, for an attitude where we put ourselves in the reader's place and try to share with him or her the burden of "putting it all together," while, at the same time, accepting multiple perspectives.

Hammergren 1995, p 187.

She writes, based on the theories of C. G. Jung that a persona as a relativistic subject can swiftly turn into changeable, pluralistic personas. The technique of different personas as a narrative mode is used in literature, and Hammergren suggests that "we can reflect on the idea of different personas as a knowledge-making device for writing history"(1995, p 185). According to her, shifting personas and changing narrative strategies can be used to comment on what a historian presents as well as on how it is presented. These ideas are adapted and used in my research, when I look for various histories of dance in Finland.

In this chapter I use first a positivistic approach, which means taking an “objective”, and “detached” attitude towards the past. The quotation marks are used for objective and detached terms to indicate that I am aware of that the possibility of objective knowledge of the past is constantly discussed and argued among historians. Still, I suggest that this ‘objective’ reading of the past has partly built our understanding of dance in Finland, and it should not be excluded, but accepted among other readings of the past.<sup>1</sup> However, I do not share Richard Ralph’s view that

the primary task of the dance scholar in most periods remains what it has been for a half century: to continue laying the foundations of the discipline in a critically intelligent way in order to begin to establish a framework within which the ambitious interpreter, interdisciplinarian, and commentator can operate with safety.

Ralph 1995, p 256.

By saying this, Ralph includes himself among those historians whose aim, according to Thomas Postlewait (1991, p 157), is to “establish an impartial method of research and analysis that operates as a safeguard against preconception, bias, prejudice, ideological judgement and misinterpretation”.

In general, Ralph’s article in *Dance Chronicle* in 1995 gives an impression that dance research, as well as dance history, should achieve a positivist standard before it is open to post-positivist views. Ralph’s longing for a simple, solid and empirical ground before interpretation is very understandable. He fears that postmodernism, which sees that reality is open to many kinds of interpretations, would make the life of historian untenable. The objective truth about knowledge of dance history has been lost even before it has been achieved.

Ralph does not admit that interpretation is inevitably present, through a researcher, in all three procedures of the historian - in collecting information, analysing it, reporting on it and arguing for results. An academic debate and modes of interpretation in dance cannot develop without commitment to the basic archive work, as Ralph argues. However, he should not forget that today it is also evident that the historian, as Postlewait writes, “must negotiate between fact and theory at each level of the three procedural stages” (1991, p 159). The

pluralities of interpretation are already present in archives. Besides, as Janet Adshead-Landale argues in her response to Ralph, "this empirical approach is a reflection upon the conceptual framework in which the description is carried out" (1997, p 67).

At the end of his article Ralph warns of the dangers of new academic trends for dance history. Of course, it is demanding and challenging for dance researchers to develop a young discipline at a time when the boundaries between disciplines as well between arts are removed, reconsidered or even "can be seen as imperialistic constructs of humanism", as Adshead-Landale (1997, p 65) states. But, the solution is not to make an appeal to the old values and ways of objective research. Dance history has to face the demands of today; it cannot wait for maturity that will never come. I agree with Adshead-Lansdale, who writes that "the old idea, that history discovers **the** "truth" has to be replaced by a multiplicity of accounts, constructed in the present"(1997, p 74, the bolding is mine). However, it is also important to remember the dynamic and ambiguous nature of histories constructed in the present, since it is "not only a question of which context we choose to examine", as Hammergren writes, "but also how we *change* together with this context" (1995, p 191).

This chapter operates across three different layers. The first layer examines what happened in dance in Finland in 1917-39 with the help of my data collection of dance performances during that period. The research data is presented, described and categorised, and the content of data is analysed by using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The exact number of performances is counted, sorted and introduced in the forms of charts. Different performance categories are described and discussed in an 'objective' and 'detached' manner. The second layer reveals how this 'neutral', 'detached' and 'objective' history gives us some knowledge of dance in Finland, but above all it gives rise to more detailed and complex questions. The naïve and all-inclusive question, what did happen in dance in Finland, fractures almost immediately into detailed questions and discourses. However, it is not only the data, which leads us to these questions and discourses, but it is also the interaction between the data and my personal interests, views, opinions and existing histories. At the end of this

chapter, in the third layer, I consider the meaning of this complexity of questions and discourses for my further research and research strategies.

This period of 1917-1939 was chosen for three reasons. Firstly, Tiina Suhonen had focused her research on dance in Finland at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and I wanted to participate in the construction of Finnish dance history by concentrating period after her research era. Secondly, a detailed look at dance performances during the period 1917-1939 offers an opportunity to reflect on existing histories of Finnish dance and contextualise Elsa Puolanne's *Loitsu* as part of dance in Finland. The third reason was personal. From the 1980 I have been interested in and curious on dance art and the changing life of the 1920s and 1930s.

### **RESEARCH DATA**

The main source for the data of dance performances is the press cutting collection at the Finnish Theatre Museum. It includes reviews of dance performances as well as theatre performances. The collection of the Theatre Museum starts from the season 1923-24 and covers the whole of Finland, not only Helsinki. In addition, all dance collections at the Theatre Museum, the statistics of the Finnish National Ballet and microfilms of *Uusi Suomi*, the biggest newspaper in Finland during the research era, were checked. The newspaper *Karjala*, published in Viipuri, was also checked in order to give regional credibility.

At this moment, the data covers almost 100 % of the performances in Helsinki, which were advertised and/or reviewed in newspapers, and about 70-80 % of the performances in the rest of Finland. Obviously not all performances, especially performances of dance schools, were advertised or reviewed in newspapers.

The collected data, presented in Appendices 3 – 11 (pp 213-235), contains the following information:

- categorisation of performances
- date(s) of performances

- title of the performance, location of the printed programme, if known
- choreographer(s) and/or dancer(s)
- venue and town
- source(s) of information
- total number of performances
- source(s) of the given information

At the very beginning of the collection process dance performances were not divided to different categories. By the end of the 1990s I had such a long chronological list on my computer that it became hard to find information and difficult to add missing data. I decided to arrange the material and sort it by using basic binary oppositions in what is nowadays thought of as Western theatre dance. Ballet and modern dance were taken as the main dance genres, although in Finland the different early modern dance trends until 1960s were usually called free dance. Ballet performances of the Finnish National Ballet formed a category of their own beside other ballet performances. Also professional and school performances were separated in the data. Because it was impossible to trace a number of performances presented during the dance tours, they formed a separate category. The division to different categories was in general made based on the information in advertisements, reviews and programmes, from which some interesting issues emerged raising the question of knowing how separated these forms were.

The main groupings of ballet and modern dance, as well as school and professional performances, constantly overlapped. Some performances contained dances from various dance genres, like ballet and character dance, ballet and social dance or all those three, and there were even performances at which the same dancers performed both ballet and plastic dance. Therefore, a new category, mixed performances, was needed. In addition, some rare dance genres, like oriental and acrobatic dance were included in the category of mixed performances. The borderline between professional and school performances was also blurred. The decision was made that, if a performance was titled as a student or school performance in a programme, press announcement or review, it was put into a category of school performance. The performances at which a

dance teacher was assisted by his/her students were located in the category of professional performance. Some difficulties also appeared in distinguishing official ballet performances of the Finnish National Opera from private ballet performances arranged by the first ballet dancers at the Finnish National Opera, under such names as the Soloists of the Opera, the Dancer(s) of the Finnish Opera.

Finally, the data was divided to eight different categories as follows. The detailed data of each category is given in the Appendices 3–10, 217-238.

Appendix 3 Ballet performances of the Finnish National Ballet; the abbreviation **FNB** is used in charts.

Appendix 4 Ballet performances other than those of the Finnish National Ballet; **B** in charts.

Appendix 5 School performances in ballet; **BS** in charts.

Appendix 6 Solo and group performances in modern dance; **M** in charts.

Appendix 7 School performances in modern dance; **MS** in charts.

Appendix 8 Performances including different or rare dance genres; **Mixed** in charts.

Appendix 9 Foreign guest performances; **GP** in charts.

Appendix 10 Dance tours; **Tours** in charts.

This data is used as material for tables and diagrams that present quantitative features of dance in Finland in 1917-1939. In addition to this data, there is a list of dance performances (Appendix 11, p 239) containing some documentation on performances in restaurants and spas as well as occasional dance numbers at private and official gatherings. The documentation of these performances is incomplete and is not taken into account in charts, but it presents some useful information for further discussions in this thesis, however.

### **CONSEQUENCES OF DISTINCTIONS OF THE DATA**

The above difficulties with grouping raised new questions. Western dance history pays much attention to the dissimilarities, polarities and binary oppositions between different dance genres, and especially between ballet and modern dance. The chapters in surveys of Western dance history are divided

mostly between ballet and modern dance. Less attention has been paid to the occasions in which genres appeared together or even mixed. It is questionable to what extent such distinctions as ballet and modern dance and professional and amateur, are relevant in Finland during the 1920s and 1930s. My own data categories were based on the current view that there was already a distinction between ballet and modern dance as well as between professional and amateur, but on the other hand my sources suggest that the distinctions were not established during my research period. Actually, overlapping in my data categories indicates that the distinctions were not very clear, as Finnish dance historian Tiina Suhonen writes.

One battle line during the years of independence has been between classical dance and new dance trends, the other perhaps between amateur and professional art.

Koko itsenäisyyden ajan yksi taistelurintama on kulkenut klassisen tanssin ja uusien tanssisuuntausten välillä, toinen vaikkapa harrastaja- ja ammattitaiteen välillä.

Suhonen 1997, p 11.

In his book *Alien Bodies* Ramsay Burt (1998) suggests that distinctions between ballet and modern dance, as well as between 'high' and 'low' culture, were more fluid and dynamic during the first four decades of the 20th century than after the Second World War. This seems to be true in Finland. It might be useful to analyse discourses and practises in dance, and to examine to what extent these distinctions existed and were created during my research era. This issue is given closer consideration in Chapters 3 and 4.

### **NUMBER OF DANCE PERFORMANCES**

The exact numbers of dance performances in the period 1917-39 are presented in **Chart 3** on the next page. Numbers are given by seasons, and performances are divided to eight categories, as defined before. **Chart 3** shows the number of tours by season, but not the number of performances during the tours. Therefore, the total number of performances, 775, does not include performances on tours. Most of these performances were arranged twice or three times, some just once, and only some ballets at the Finnish National Ballet were performed more than ten times. The number of first nights is 256.<sup>2</sup>

**Chart 3** *Dance performances in Finland in 1917-1939.*

Season	B	BS	FNB	M	MS	Mixed	GP	Total	Tours
1917-18				4	1	2	3	10	2
1918-19	4			8	1	4	4	21	1
1919-20		2		5	2	6	34	49	3
1920-21	2	3		12		7	1	25	
1921-22	3	4	25	9		6	3	50	1
1922-23	4	2	40	3	2	4	2	57	
1923-24	12		24	4	2	1	9	52	2
1924-25	1	1		2	2	4	2	12	1
1925-26	4		2	2		5	2	15	2
1926-27	1		3	3	1		4	12	1
1927-28		2	23	4	3	7	4	43	1
1928-29	5		30	4	2	2		43	
1929-30	2		39	3	3	2	3	52	1
1930-31	1		32		6		3	42	
1931-32	1		27	5	8		7	48	
1932-33	2		29	1	2		7	41	
1933-34	4		17	3	8	2	7	41	1
1934-35	2		7		4		5	18	
1935-36	1		8	2	3	4	5	23	2
1936-37			19		2	3	14	38	
1937-38	4		14	2	2	2	9	33	
1938-39	1	1	37	1	1	3	1	45	2
1939-40			5					5	
Total	54	15	381	77	55	64	129	775	20

The numbers show that the increase in dance performances during the period was not fast at all. The number of performances varies from ten to fifty-eight per season; the average is thirty-three performances. Compared to the number of performances in recent years (1997-2005) the number of performances in 1917-39 was low. The total number of performances, 775, during the whole research period of 22 years, is about 1/3 of the total number of performances in a recent year.<sup>3</sup> So, the years of sharp growth in numbers came later, but anyway these numbers have some striking and revealing significance.



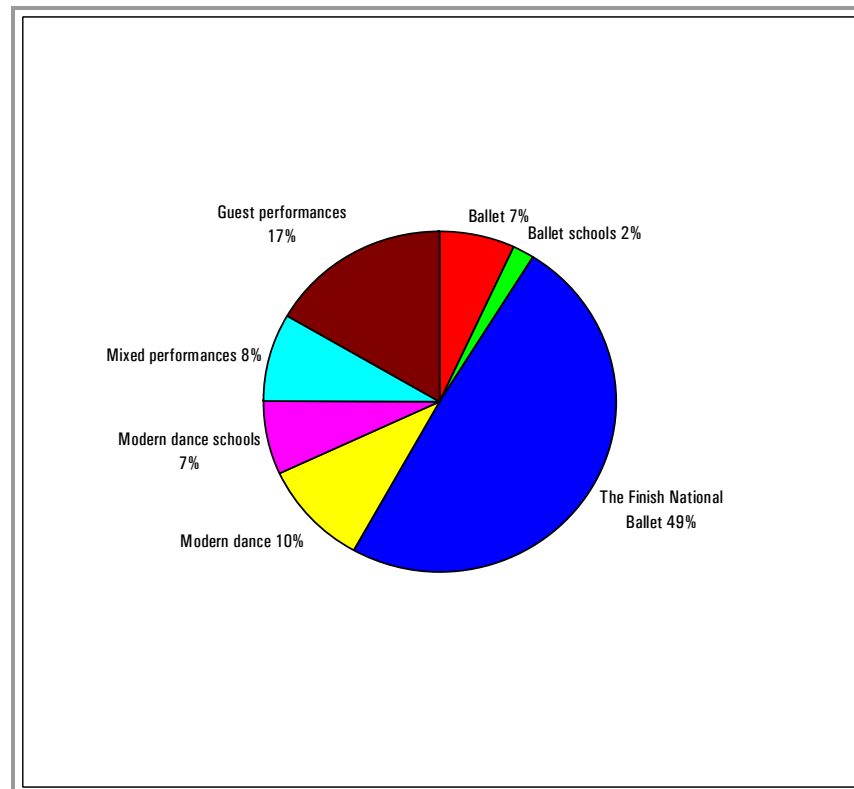
There was a huge number, thirty-four, of Russian guest performances during the season 1919-20. The performance data (Appendix 9, pp 233-236) shows that Senta Will, Boris Strukov, Lyubov Egorova and Catarina Lyutikhova, former dancers of the Imperial Ballet, had arrived in Finland probably during the spring of 1920. They formed various dance groups and performed at least in Helsinki and Viipuri. Most of their performances took place in the Restaurant Pörssi, one of the most famous restaurants in Helsinki; only a few performances were arranged at theatre venues. These performances certainly did not reach only Russians living in Helsinki, but also wider Finnish audiences, perhaps even people who did not go to theatre venues. The question is: of whom did the audience consist? Generally, the performance data that used to present exact numbers does not contain show performances in restaurants. On the basis of advertisements in *Uusi Suomi* and *Karjala*, they were abundant but it is impossible to find out their real number (Appendix 11, p 239). The exception for Russian dancers and their performances was made during the spring of 1920, because of the repertoire and the high number of performances. The repertoire in the Restaurant Pörssi included for example, the third act of *Pachita* by Marius Petipa, the ballet *Magic Flute* by Lev Ivanov and the pas de trois from the ballet *Coppélia* by Marius Petipa. The Russian dancers stayed for varying periods in Finland, and some of them taught ballet at the Helsinki Dance Institute.

**Chart 3** also reveals that the balance between modern dance and ballet performances changed during the season 1921-22. Until that season, there were more performances of modern dance than ballet performances. The first ballet performance of the *Swan Lake* at the Finnish Opera in January 1922 changed the situation. And there were not just one to three performances of *Swan Lake*, but twenty-five of them during the spring of 1922. However, the number of ballet performances at the Finnish National Opera kept changing dramatically during the period 1922-1939. According to different writers (Vienola-Lindfors & af Hällström 1981, Säilä & Räsänen 1986), the ballet group did not reach a stable position at the Finnish National Opera during the first decades of its existence. The Opera had constant economic troubles in the 1920s and 1930s, which was also reflected in the work of the ballet group. The ballet had a minor

role beside the opera, and despite of the support of the director of the Opera, Edvard Fazer, the ballet group had to fight for its existence.

The share of different performance categories is shown below.

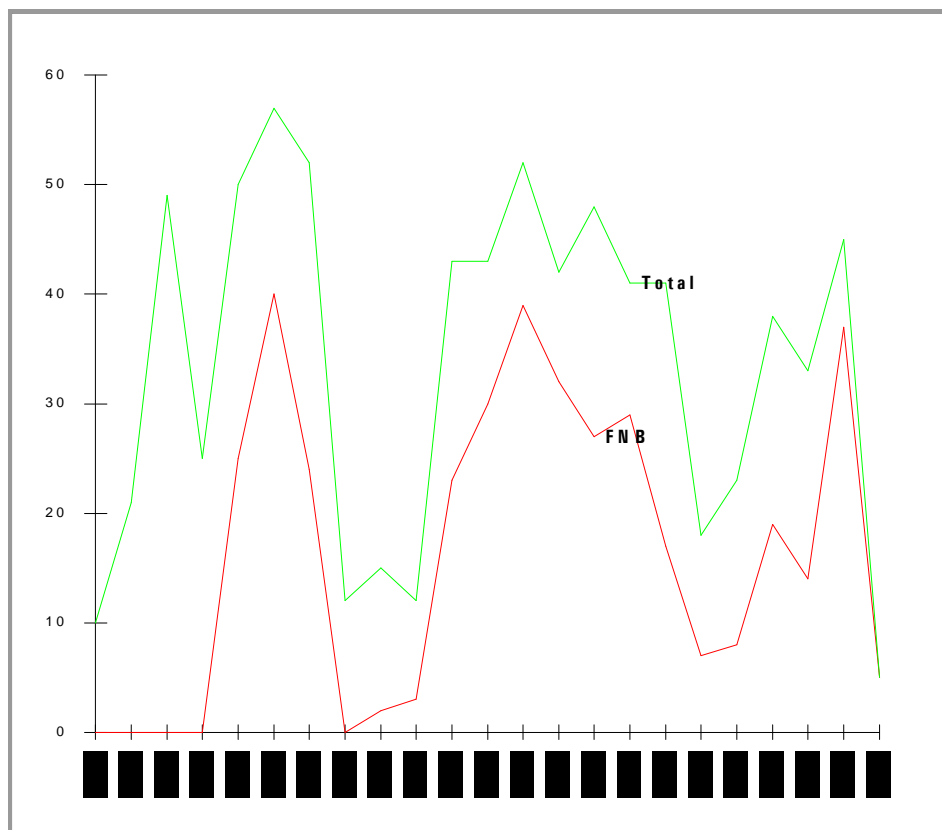
**Chart 4** *Percentage of different performance categories in 1917-1939.*



Almost a half, 49%, of the performances were given by the Finnish National Ballet. The second largest group is foreign guest performances with 17%, and the third is modern dance with 10%. The share of mixed performances is also quite high, 8%. The share of modern dance schools, 7%, is higher than the share of ballet schools, which is only 2%. The ballet performances outside the Finnish National Ballet have a 7% share. This share may have been bigger, as there are not many traces left or found of the performances in the Finnish countryside. Most of these performances were actually carried out by the dancers of the Finnish National Ballet.

The leading role of the Finnish National Ballet - on the basis of the number of performances - is demonstrated on the next page, in **Chart 5**. The upper line shows the total number of dance performances, and the lower line indicates the performances of the Finnish National Ballet. There are two periods when the number of performances decreased dramatically, from the season 1923-24 to the season 1926-27 and from the season 1933-34 to the season 1937-38. Both declines were connected to the number of performances at the Finnish National Opera. The lack of funding closed down the Finnish National Opera, as well as its ballet in 1925. The Opera was reopened next year, 1926, and for the first time a permanent ballet group of nine dancers, was employed in the same year. Earlier only soloists had permanent contracts; other dancers were paid by performance. The second decline happened in 1935 when the Board of the Opera decided that operettas and ballet would not be performed anymore in the National Opera. This time common support for the ballet in newspapers forced the Board to give up the plan (Vienola-Lindfors & af Hällström, 1981).

**Chart 5** *Dance performances and performances of the Finnish National Ballet.*



There were few ballet performances and ballet school performances before the *Swan Lake* at the National Opera in 1922. After 1922 schools arranged only occasional performances, although there probably were more performances, but they were not advertised or reviewed in newspapers. On the basis of my data the number of ballet performances outside the Finnish National Opera ballet was not high. However, the work at the Finnish National Opera was irregular and poorly paid, and according to dancers' reminiscences, dancers performed in restaurants and spas and had their own performances and tours around Finland as the Opera did not offer enough work and salary for their living.

**Chart 3** (p 48) shows that the development of modern dance was different from that of ballet. The ups and downs in the number of performances were not so sharp. The most active years in modern dance were in the late 1910s and the early 1920s when various dancers, such as Maggie Gripenberg, Sari Jakelow, Taina Helve, Wini Laine and Martta Bröyer, had their own performances. And again during the early 1930s when various dance and movement schools, such as Gripenberg, Suontaa, Salminen, Bröyer, Gustafsson, Tamminen and Tuulos-Eskelinen, put up their performances. In modern dance there appears to be a slight shift from solo performances towards school performances during the first half of 1930s, yet the total number of performances in modern dance actually decreased during the late 1930s.

There were more mixed performances in the 1920s than in the 1930s. This may indicate that borderlines between dance genres became tighter and there were fewer choreographers and dancers who used more than one dance genre. There seems to be an opposite development in foreign guest performances, which increased slightly during the 1930s, especially during the late 1930s when the economic recession was over in Finland.

### **NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FINNISH DANCE ART**

At the turn of the 20th century dance was not considered an art form in Finland. Thus, at the very beginning the models for dance art were taken from different dance genres and trends presented in Finland by foreign dancers. Western dance history presents dance at the same time as an international and national

phenomenon, but what these terms mean in dance is seldom discussed or analysed. It is necessary to reflect on the meaning of 'national' and 'international' dance art understood in Finland at that time.

Based on the analysis of the number of performances, the most significant feature in dance in Finland during my research era was the birth of the Finnish National Ballet. It also meant a remarkable shift from modern dance to ballet. Dance art in Finland did not follow the usual story of Western dance history. Finland did not have an aristocratic ballet tradition, which would have been challenged and opposed by modern dance, as the story usually evolves in surveys on dance history. I would even suggest that in the beginning Finnish representatives of modern dance and ballet did not acknowledge clearly the binary situation. How far the idea that there had to be a clear distinction between ballet and modern dance was exported by Finnish dancers who studied in Germany, or by critics and writers influenced by European dance writers, and to what extent it was a result, of what happened in dance in Finland is worth further examination.

Ballet and modern dance appeared almost simultaneously in Finland. On the basis of the number of performances arranged by Finnish dancers during the first decades of the 20th century modern dance had a stronger start. In the 1910s even the first dancers of opera performances at the Finnish National Opera were modern dancers, Maggie Gripenberg's students, or character dancers, Toivo Niskanen's students. This, and especially the quite peaceful coexistence of ballet and modern dance during the 1910s and in the early 1920s, has not received much attention in existing histories of Finnish dance.

It would be also important to study how the birth of an institution, the National Ballet, affected and changed the dance field in Finland. The cultural institutions have had a remarkable role in building nations. How the Finnishness of ballet was constructed in performances of the Finnish National Ballet, and to what extent this meant that ballet in Finland became a national dance art, are complicated questions. The varying relationship between Russian ballet and its representations in Finland has to be considered, discussed and evaluated. If this

question is extended to modern dance, we might ask how far this issue of nationalism was discussed and realised in early modern dance in Finland. Then, the influence of early Central European modern dance, especially German Ausdruckstanz, on dance in Finland has to be examined as well. If we accept Alexandra Carter's view that dance "produces as well as re-produces; speaks about society, and to it" (1998, p 193) the task is not limited to examining only dance relationships, but it obviously expands to complex political relations between Finland, the Soviet Union (former Russia) and Germany.

It seems that the dance art in Finland offers an unusual and interesting site for studying the questions of nationalism and internationalism. Nationalism during the 19th century was strongly tied to language. This was very true in Finland, where the Finnish language was one of the main vehicles in the creation of nation. "One language and one mind", Senator Johan Vilhelm Snellman put it as early as the 1840s. How did non-verbal dance art interact with nationalism in Finland? How was nationalism constructed in dance and by whom? And to what extent is Susan Manning's (1988, p 36) suggestion that after the First World War "modern dance became an arena for the forging of national identity, while 20<sup>th</sup>-century ballet became an arena for international competition" relevant in Finland during my research period? The situation in Finland was perhaps not so straightforward. My hypothesis is that both ballet and modern dance participated in constructing national identity.

#### **FOREIGN GUEST PERFORMANCES**

In dance art international and national trends were constantly interwoven. The young dance culture in Finland was open to foreign influences, and guest performances had a prominent share, 17%, of dance performances in 1917-39 (**Chart 4**, p 50). Finland's location, on the northern frontier of Europe between east and west, has made it a crossroads of cultures. This can also be seen in **Chart 6**, on the next page, which lists, names and categorises guest performances in dance.

**Chart 6** *Guest performances in Finland in 1917-1939.*

<b>Season</b>	<b>Visitors</b>
1917-18	Eugenia Wolskaja and Fjodor Vasiliev (ballet); Mikhail and Vera Fokine (modern ballet)
1918-19	Ronny Johansson (modern dance); Jean Börlin and Edith von Bonsdorff (modern ballet)
1919-20	Dancers from the Maryinsky Theatre - Lyubov Jegorova, Doris Strugov, Senta Will... (34 performances, ballet)
1920-21	Olga Preobrazhenskaya (ballet)
1921-22	Ella Ilbak (modern dance) Tamara Tschitschangova (ballet)
1922-23	Ella Ilbak (modern dance)
1923-24	Sent Mahesa (oriental); Elmerita Parts (modern dance); Klawdija Gorewa, Ivan Kireyev and Alexander Saxelin (ballet); Dihah Selkina-Aho (modern dance)
1924-25	Mikhail and Vera Fokine (modern ballet)
1925-26	Tamara Karsavina and Pierre Vladimiroff (ballet)
1926-27	Mary Wigman (modern dance); Dinah Selkina-Aho (modern dance); Elena Smirnova, Boris Romanov and Anatol Obukhov (ballet)
1927-28	Tamara Karsavina and Pierre Vladimiroff (ballet); Vera Coralli (ballet); Alice Jürna (modern dance)
1928-29	
1929-30	Ella Ilbak (tour in modern dance); Jenny Hasselqvist (ballet visit at the FNB)
1930-31	Astrid Malmberg (modern dance) ; Klawdija Gorewa, Ivan Kireyev and Alexander Saxelin (ballet)
1931-32	Enayet-Hanoum (= Emmy Wiik, mixed); Ella Ilbak (modern dance); Helena Tangijeva-Birznieks (ballet visit at the FNB); Uday Shan-Kar (Indian dance)
1932-33	Clothilde and Alexander Sakharoff (mixed); Danish Ballet; Olga Spessivtseva (ballet visit at the FNB)
1933-34	Yeichi Nimura (oriental); Ella Ilbak (modern dance); Alanova (mixed); Nini Theilande (mixed)
1934-35	Trudi Schoop group (modern dance, dance theatre); Sylvia Chen (oriental)
1935-36	Vera Alexandrova (ballet); Ella Ilbak (modern dance); Nati Morales (Spanish dance)
1936-37	The Riga Ballet, Theodora Lagerborg (ballet visit at the FNB); Ballets Jooss (modern dance, dance theatre); Africa Doering (modern dance); Ruth Page (modern ballet); The Ballet of Estonia Theatre; Manuel del Rio (Spanish dance); Indian Ballet Maneka
1937-38	Harald Kreutzberg (modern dance); Ballet Loring; Ballet Russes du Colonel de Basil (modern ballet); Alexander von Swaine (mixed); Beduin dancers; Jutta Klamt group (modern dance)
1938-39	Child Ballet from Estonia

There were fifty-six foreign dancers or dance groups, which visited Finland during the research era. Twenty-five of these visitors were categorised as representatives of ballet, eighteen as those of modern dance and thirteen as those of other genres of dance. Almost all ballet visitors were Russian, and most of modern dance visitors were German, Swedish or Estonian. The young dance art in Finland and its audience were familiar with and influenced by the Imperial Russian ballet, modern ballet, early trends in modern dance and also by 'exotic' and 'oriental' dance trends.

Before moving to a more careful description of the content of guest performances, it is useful to consider how and when dance was recognised as an art form in Finland, and who watched the guest performances, as well as

Finnish dance performances, at the beginning of the 20th century. Tiina Suhonen (1999) discusses these topics in her article 'Duncan tanssi Helsingissä' (Duncan danced in Helsinki). According to her, Duncan's visits in February and in March 1908 were presented, reviewed and commented on in the Finnish press before and after the performances, and not only by music critics, but also by famous Finnish academics and authors. Some ballet groups and dancers had already visited Helsinki at the turn of the 20th century: Irene Sanden, a German imitator of Isadora Duncan, had performed in Helsinki in 1907 and even a Finnish dancer, Hilma Liiman had danced à la Duncan in Tampere in 1906. However, Suhonen argues that Duncan's visit was the first time that dance was discussed widely in the press as an art form. The reviews of Duncan's performances also mentioned her audience. It was described as cosmopolitan and including art people, businessmen, officials, civil servants; and the most expensive seats were occupied by representatives of the Russian colony in Finland.<sup>4</sup> This audience was the core for future guest performances and for Finnish dance performances, but certainly it was not enough to fill seats in theatre venues around Finland during the tours of Maggie Gripenberg or Toivo Niskanen in the 1910s or at the Finnish National Opera during the spring of 1922 when *Swan Lake* was performed twenty-five times.

The dancers and repertoire of the Imperial Russian Ballet had already been introduced in Finland before my research era, at the turn of the 20th century, in performances in the Alexander Theatre, but also in the Finnish National Theatre in 1908 and 1913. Beside divertissements, the repertoire of Russian dancers included ballets by Marius Petipa for example, *Coppélia*, *Halte de Cavallerie* and *the Magic Flute*, but also Fokine's *The Dying Swan*. Among dancers were Vera Trefilova and Maria Petipa (1906), Anna Pavlova (1908, 1913), Olga Preobrazhenskaya (1908, 1912, 1914), Elena Smirnova (1915, 1916, 1917) and Mathilda Kschesinskaya (1916, 1917) and their partners were Nikolai Legat, Adolph Bolm, Anatol Obukhov, Alexander Shirayev, Leon Novikov and Boris Romanov.<sup>5</sup> The guest performances of Russian ballet dancers continued after the Russian revolution when Finland became their first stop on the ways to Western Europe. The season 1919-20 was important, as discussed before. The repertoire of the above Russian dancers included dances from the ballets by Petipa, but



also ballets by Mikhail Fokine, such as *Chopiniana (Les Sylphides)* and *The Dying Swan*. Fokine himself and his wife Vera Fokine performed several times in Finland, for the first time in Helsinki in 1917, then in Turku in 1918 and again in Helsinki in 1925.

The first visitors of modern dance during the research era were pioneers from the neighbouring countries. The Swede Ronny Johansson performed in Helsinki in 1919. The Estonian Ella Ilbak visited Finland several times during the 1920s and 1930s; she even made a tour in Finland in 1930. Another Estonian dancer, Elmerita Parts, danced in Helsinki in 1924. Famous German dancers, such as Mary Wigman (1926), Trudi Schoop and her group (1934), Harald Kreutzberg (1937) and Ballets Jooss (1937), followed them. Various trends of so-called oriental and exotic dances were introduced to Finns, for example by Sent Mahesa (1923), Uday Shan-kar (1932), Yeichi Nimura (1933) and Indian Ballet Maneka (1937). In the constant flow of foreign guest performances, it is useful to consider how national can be made up of all kind of elements, and if there is something particularly Finnish in dance, why and how it is constructed and shown.

## **DANCE SCHOOLS**

Dance schools, beside guest performances, were essential for the development of dance art in Finland. **Chart 7** on the next page lists dance schools in Helsinki during the period 1917-39. The list was collected mainly from advertisements in the newspaper *Uusi Suomi*. Not all these schools were active during the whole period. In addition, there were about ten dance schools in Helsinki, which taught only ballroom dancing, and some dance schools outside of Helsinki, but they are not presented in **Chart 7**. The schools marked with an asterisk\* were considered prominent in existing histories of Finnish dance.

Chart 7 *Dance schools in Helsinki in 1917-1939.*

Dance schools – ballet	Dance schools – modern dance
<p><b>*Helsinki Dance Institute</b> (1915-24) - also ballroom dancing and modern dance - many Russian teachers</p> <p><b>Hilma Liiman School</b> (until 1928) - also ballroom dancing and modern dance</p> <p><b>Bertta Corander School</b> (until 1932) - also ballroom dancing</p> <p><b>Boris Strukov Ballet School</b> (1917-18) - Strukov came from Russia</p> <p><b>*Toivo Niskanen School</b> - also ballroom dancing and character dance</p> <p><b>Bertta Marjanna Dance Institute</b> 1917-20 - mainly ballroom dancing - Danish ballet teacher Kathe Othon</p> <p><b>*Elo Kuosmanen School</b> (1920--) - also ballroom and step dancing</p> <p><b>Akseli Vuorisola School</b> (1920-28) - mainly ballroom dancing</p> <p><b>*The Ballet School of the Finnish Opera</b> (1922 --)</p> <p><b>Else Penger School</b> (1925-26) - also ballroom dancing</p> <p><b>Aku Käyhkö Dance Institute</b> (1926-30) - ballroom dancing - ballet teacher Alexander Saxelin</p> <p><b>Mary Paischeff Ballet School</b> (1923 --)</p> <p><b>Sage Gundborg School</b> (1929-31) - also gymnastics and modern dance</p> <p><b>*Alexander Saxelin Ballet School</b> (1930-35)</p> <p><b>Estelle Suomalainen Dance Institute</b> (1931-32) - also ballroom dancing</p> <p><b>*Elisabeth Apostoli Ballet School</b> (1937-39) - Apostoli came from Russia</p>	<p><b>*Maggie Gripenberg School</b> (1909-1952) - also some ballet exercise in 1939</p> <p><b>Hertta Idman School</b> (? - 1932) - also ballroom dancing</p> <p><b>Hilma Liiman School</b> (? - 1928) - also ballet and ballroom dancing</p> <p><b>Taina Helve School</b> (1921-30) - also ballroom dancing</p> <p><b>Toini Gustafsson-Karto School</b> (1924-?) - also gymnastics</p> <p><b>Martta Bröyer School</b> (1925-?) - also gymnastics</p> <p><b>*Helvi Salminen School</b> (1925-?) - also gymnastics</p> <p><b>*Esteri Suontaa School</b> (1926 -?) - also gymnastics</p> <p><b>Sage Gundborg School</b> (1929-31) - also gymnastics and ballet exercise</p> <p><b>Irja Vilagós School</b> (1931-?) - also gymnastics</p> <p><b>Elna Tamminen School</b> (1930-?) - also gymnastics</p> <p><b>Maija Leppo and Mary Hougberg School</b> (1931-32) - also gymnastics</p> <p><b>Sari Jankelow School</b> (1931-?) - also gymnastics</p> <p><b>Maija Leppo School</b> (1932-33) - also gymnastics</p> <p><b>Mary Hougberg School</b> (1932-?) - also gymnastics</p> <p><b>Telma Tuulos and Lempi Eskelinen School</b> (1933-38) - also gymnastics and step dancing</p> <p><b>Irja Hagfors School</b> (1939-?) - also gymnastics and ballet</p>

The number of schools in ballet and in modern dance was almost the same. There were sixteen dance schools that taught ballet and seventeen dance schools that taught modern dance. Very few schools concentrated on only one dance genre. There seemed to be an alliance on the one hand between ballet and ballroom dancing and on the other hand between modern dance and female gymnastics. Some dance schools even taught both ballet and modern dance; thus for example the Sage Gundborg School and the Hilma Liiman School are

listed both as a ballet and as modern dance schools. Financial matters and the law of supply and demand certainly influenced the curriculum of the schools. The 1920s was even in Finland an era of new ballroom dances. In the 1930s the principles of new Finnish female gymnastics were articulated, and many of the teachers of modern dance were also gymnastics teachers. Although the number of participating students is not available most of the students of dance schools were actually amateurs or children who studied ballroom dancing or women's gymnastics.

All dance writers consider the work of Russian ballet teachers, such as Natalia Suvorova, Lyubov Egorova, Boris Strukov, Catarina Lyutikova and Anna Oblakova at the Helsinki Dance Institute, essential for the education of the first Finnish ballet dancers, but even the basic documentation of the Institute and its activity is missing. The Helsinki Dance Institute was established in 1915, and from 1916 it included ballet in its curriculum.<sup>6</sup> Press advertisements in *Uusi Suomi* show that ballet was at first taught by Danish Katha Othon, who already in the spring of 1917 moved to the Bertta Marjanne School and was replaced by a Russian ballet teacher. During the spring of 1917 advertisements in *Uusi Suomi* do not mention the name of the Russian teacher, but they state the Institute having both ballroom and dance art departments, and 565 students in 1915 and 983 students in 1916. In the autumn of 1920 the Institute advertised itself as the biggest dance school in Helsinki, with over 4000 students. Although most students studied ballroom dancing the syllabus of the dance art department was very ambitious. It was based on the methods Mikhail Fokine and the former Imperial Ballet School (US 1.1. 1921). The Institute's leaflets (1920 and 1921) declare: "the aim of the dance art department is to create a national ballet." In December 1920 and January 1921 the Helsinki Dance Institute arranged three student performances, which were advertised as "the first Finnish group performance of classical dance" in *Uusi Suomi*. The comprehensive programme with two intermissions was planned and rehearsed by the Russian Catarina Lyutikova. It contained seventeen dances and ended in Grande Valse Variations from Marius Petipa's ballet *Raymonda*. In the autumn of 1921 the Institute had again two student performances that were divided into three parts: classical dances, character dances and plastic dances. The Russian Anna Oblakova

rehearsed classical and character dances and the Polish Victoria Bahr plastic dances. And it was not at the Finnish Opera, but in the last student performance of the Institute (1923), in where the first domestic ballet, *Onnen salaisuudet* (The Secrets of Happiness) was performed. Rafael Penger, the managing director of the Helsinki Dance Institute, wrote the libretto for the ballet, Emil Kauppi composed the music and Alexander Saxelin choreographed it.

After the popular performances of the *Swan Lake* at the National Opera in the spring of 1922 the director Rafael Penger offered the Opera a share of the Helsinki Dance Institute (Penger's letter 27.5. 1922 and minutes of the Board of the Opera 12.9. 1922). The minutes do not tell if the Board of the Opera answered this offer. Perhaps there were some contacts, since George Gé was mentioned as one teacher of the Helsinki Dance Institute in the autumn of 1922 (US 14.9. 1922), but no more in 1923 when *Onnen Salaisuudet* was performed.

The first generation of Finnish modern dancers was mainly educated at the Maggie Gripenberg School. Some also studied at the Hertta Idman School. Gripenberg was educated by Anna Behle in Sweden and at the Dalcroze School in Hellerau. Gripenberg may also have been a student of Hilma Liiman in Finland, because she performed in a dance performance arranged by Hilma Liiman in 1905 (Gripenberg 1950). However, Maggie Gripenberg never mentioned directly that she was a student of Liiman, neither in her memoirs nor in the TV document *Maggie Gripenberg tanssin lumoojatar*, in which she states that there were no dance schools in Finland at the turn of the 20th century. That was not actually true. Perhaps Gripenberg wanted to emphasise her own role as the first Finnish dance artist, and did not consider Bertta Corander and Hilma Liiman teachers in dance art because they taught mainly social dances. Likewise, Gripenberg's reminiscences ignore not only Toivo Niskanen, her male contemporary, and the birth of the Finnish National Ballet, but also almost all Finnish dancers who were not her students.

Gripenberg had opened her own dance school in 1909. Ilta Leiviskä, Gripenberg's former student and assistant teacher, became a partner of the school in 1949 (TeaMA 1058). Three years later, in 1952, Gripenberg retired

completely and Leiviskä continued the work of the school. The Gripenberg School never included social dances and gymnastics in its curriculum. Gripenberg, as well as her students, studied in the 1920s and 1930s at dance schools in Germany and in Austria. Some Finnish dancers, such as Irja Hagfors, Marianne Pontan, Mary Hougberg and Sari Jankelow, made their professional career in the theatres and dance schools of Central Europe. In the late 1920s, some of Gripenberg's students opened schools of their own in Finland. Unlike Gripenberg, they also taught gymnastics in their schools. The most famous schools during the 1920s, beside the Gripenberg School, were the Helvi Salminen School and the Esteri Suontaa School. The recession and the new political situation in Germany brought most of Finnish dancers back to Finland in the 1930s and the number of schools that taught modern dance increased. Most of these new schools also taught so-called women's gymnastics, and they were now called movement schools (*liikuntakoulu* in Finnish).

Maggie Gripenberg's life and work as a pioneer of (modern) dance in Finland has received much well deserved attention. The stories of her students have not yet been widely studied. Whether the dominant status of their teacher overshadowed their careers in Finland is open. Gripenberg's students were not only ones to study in Central Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Several Finnish gymnastics teachers or dance students, who were also gymnastics teachers, visit also Germany and Austria. Even the founder of the so-called new Finnish women's gymnastics, Hilma Jalkanen, collected material and adopted ideas from various German gymnastics and dance schools as she herself tells in her book *Uusi Naisvoimistelu* (New Women's Gymnastics, 1930). The complex discourses and practises that defined and articulated similarities and distinctions between modern dance and gymnastics are explored later in detail in the context of the life of Elsa Puolanne in Chapter 3.

### **THE FINNISH NATIONAL BALLET**

The first attempt to create a national ballet was made at the Helsinki Dance Institute. The memoirs of Elo Kuosmanen and Iris Salin (Kuosmanen 2000) open alternative reading for the years 1920-24 in ballet in Finland. According to them, the Institute appears not only as a place where the first Finnish ballet

dancers were educated as presented by af Hällström (1945a, 1981), but also as a short-lived competitor for the ballet at the Finnish Opera. The role of the Institute in the birth of Finnish ballet needs further research and consideration. The status of existing institution is often overestimated; and the significance of an institution not continuing its work is often underestimated in writings on history. The Helsinki Dance Institute was closed in 1924, but nobody has paid any attention to it. There are many open questions. Why did Rafael Penger not continue the school, which had thousands of students in ballroom dancing? Was the closure somehow connected with the birth of the Finnish National Ballet and Penger's own ambition to create national ballet? When did Russian teachers leave Finland? The ballet school at the Finnish Opera was opened in 1922, but according to Airi Säilä (1986) it was not regarded as the best ballet school in Finland in the 1920s and 1930s. Many dancers considered George Gé a poor teacher and preferred the Helsinki Dance Institute and its Russian teachers and Alexander Saxelin, who at first taught at the Helsinki Dance Institute, later at the Aku Käyhkö Dance Institute and ballet school of his own.

The birth of the Finnish National Ballet has been connected to the year 1922 when *Swan Lake* was premiered at the Finnish Opera. Airi Säilä (1986) tells in her memoirs that Fazer was encouraged to establish Finnish ballet after the student performances of the Helsinki Dance Institute in December 1920. Another dancer, Iris Salin (Kuosmanen 2000), recalls that Edvard Fazer, after performances of the Helsinki Dance Institute, asked Catarina Lyutikova to become a ballet master and to start the rehearsals of *Swan Lake* at the Opera. Lyutikova had already decided to leave Finland, and in the autumn of 1921 Edward Fazer engaged George Gé as first ballet master of the Finnish Opera .

George Gé (originally Grönfeldt, Gé was taken as an artist name) was born in St Petersburg in 1893. His parents, Swedish speaking Finns, had moved to St Petersburg from Turku. Gé's father was Ernst Grönfeldt, a wealthy businessman, who had a clothing shop in St. Petersburg. According to af Hällström (1945a) Gé's mother, Amelia Grönfeldt, had her own box at the Maryinsky Theatre, and many famous ballet artists visited the family home. Gé studied music, took private ballet lessons from Nikolai Legat and Victor

Semyonov, and worked as a bank clerk in St. Petersburg. The turbulent years in Russia expelled him to Helsinki, where he worked as a piano accompanist at the Toivo Niskanen School and as a operetta dancer in the Apollo Theatre. There his partner was Mary Paischeff, the first Odette-Odile in Finland. According to Iris Salin (Kuosmanen 2000), it was Mary Paischeff who insisted Edvard Fazer to employ her former partner Gé at the Finnish Opera in autumn of 1921.<sup>7</sup>

Airi Säilä tells in her memoirs (1986) that the appointment of Gé as first ballet master came as a surprise. Firstly as Gé was not considered a professional dancer, and he had no experience in choreography or pedagogy. Secondly, Fazer bypassed the well-known dancer and dance teacher Toivo Niskanen, who had already choreographed for the Opera. Was it just Frazer's instinct or personal reasons that guided Gé's appointment? At least Fazer knew Gé having some knowledge of the ballet repertoire of the Maryinsky Theatre, and in addition, he was a well-educated Swedish-speaking cosmopolitan, like Fazer himself. The repertoire during Gé's first era as ballet master (1921-35) show that Gé used in his choreographies material collected from St. Petersburg and his Europe journeys in the 1920s. **Chart 8** on the next page presents the repertoire of the Finnish National Ballet in 1922-1939.

**Chart 8** *The repertoire of the Finnish National Ballet in 1922-39.*

	<b>Premieres</b>	<b>Choreographer</b>	<b>Finnish Music</b>
1921-22	Swan Lake	Petipa-Ivanov-Gé	
1922-23	Sheherazade	Fokine-Gé	
	Les Sylphides	Fokine-Gé	
	Ruses d'amour	Petipa-Gé	
	Les Milloins d'harlequin	Petipa-Gé	
1923-24	La Fille mal gardée	Dauberval-Petipa-Gé	
1927-28	The Sleeping Beauty	Petipa-Gé	
1928-29	The Nutcracker	Ivanov-Gé	
	Le Saisons	Petipa-Gé	
	Kreisleriana	Gé	
1929-30	Giselle	Coralli-Petipa-Gé	
	Petrushka	Fokin-Gé	
	Okon Fuoko	Gé	Leevi Madetoja
1930-31	Don Quijote	Petipa-Gé	
	Blue Pearl	Gé	Erkki Melartin
	Hungaria	Petipa-Gé	
	Polovtsian dances	Fokine-Gé	
	Spetre de la Rose	Fokine-Gé	
1931-32	Poème	Gé	Jean Sibelius
	Water Column	Gé	Väinö Rautio
	Swan Lake	Petipa-Ivanov-Gé	
1932-33	Coppélia	Petipa-Gé	
1933-34	Le Bal	Balanchine-Gé	
	Cléopâtre	Fokine-Gé	
	Puppet Fairy	Gé	
1934-35	Scaramouche	Saxelin	Jean Sibelius
1935-36	Quarrelling Goddesses	Saxelin	
	Prisoner	Saxelin	
1936-37	Raymonda	Petipa-Saxelin	
	El Amor Brujo	Saxelin	
1937-38	The Sleeping Beauty	Petipa-Saxelin	
	Castle of Happiness	Saxelin	Väinö Hannikainen
	Le Pavillon d'Armide	Fokine-Saxelin	
	Sheherazade	Fokine-Gé--Saxelin	Heini Sundbland - Halme
	The Magic Belt	Saxelin	
1938-39			
1939-40			

The ballet repertoire of the Finnish National Ballet can be divided to different three categories. Firstly, there were ten ballets, which were based on the works by Marius Petipa, and one, *the Nutcracker*, which was based on Lev Ivanov's work. This means that some Petipa's classical ballets and the heritage of Russian ballet tradition were popular in Finland earlier than in Western Europe. And some of the repertoire of the Imperial Ballet was performed in various guest performances in Helsinki as early as at the turn of the 20th century, as discussed previously. Secondly, the early repertoire of the Finnish National Ballet



included six short ballets based on the works of Mikhail Fokine. And thirdly, there were ten ballets that could be considered Gé's and Saxelin's own works. They all were choreographed in the 1930s.

Alexander Saxelin replaced Gé as ballet master in 1935. Saxelin was graduated from the Imperial Ballet School in St. Petersburg. He already had dance performances in Helsinki and ballet classes at different ballet schools in Helsinki in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1931 Saxelin was employed as dancer and ballet teacher at the Finnish Opera. Four years later, when Gé resigned and left Finland, Saxelin was nominated as ballet master. During Saxelin's early period as ballet master the number of ballet performances declined, but the repertoire remained the same, including works by Petipa, Fokine, Gé and Saxelin.

The ballets, which achieved the highest number of performances - more than ten - were works by Petipa and Ivanov. They were *Swan Lake* (1922,1932), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1928, 1938), *The Nutcracker* (1929), *Don Quijote* (1930), *Coppélia* (1932) and *Raymonda* (1937). On the basis of performance numbers (Appendix 3, pp 217-218) Fokine's *Les Sylphides* and *Scheherazade* were also popular. The first Finnish full-length ballet at the Finnish National Opera was the fairytale ballet *Sininen helmi* (Blue Pearl) in 1931. Gé choreographed it to the music of the Finnish composer Erkki Melartin. *Sininen helmi* was performed 24 times.

## **MODERN DANCE**

Modern dance performances were arranged by individual dancers or by dance and movement schools. **Chart 9** on the next page gives nineteen dancers and twelve schools that performed modern dance in 1917-1939.

Chart 9 *Modern dance performances in 1917-39.*

Season	Total	Modern dance	Total	Modern schools
1917-18	4	Hertta Idman/2, Sari Jankelow/2	1	Liiman School
1918-19	8	Sari Jankelow/2, Maggie Gripenberg/6 + tour	1	College of Music in Helsinki, Gripenberg
1919-20	5	Maggie Gripenberg/4, Sari Jankelow	2	Idman School
1920-21	10	Hellerau-trio, Martta Bröyer/2, Sari Jankelow/3, Taina Helve/2, Wini Laine/2		
1921-22	8	Taina Helve, Sari Jankelow/2, Martta Bröyer, Maggie Gripenberg/4		
1922-23	3	Sari Jankelow, Maggie Gripenberg, Taina Helve	2	Gripenberg School, College of Music in Helsinki
1923-24	4	Taina Helve, Ester Naparstok/3	2	Idman School
1924-25	2	Maggie Gripenberg, Taina Helve	2	Salminen - Napartok School
1925-26	2	Ester Naparstok/2		
1926-27	3	Martta Bröyer, Maggie Gripenberg/2 + tour	1	Gustafsson School
1927-28	5	Maggie Gripenberg/2, Taina Helve/2 + tour/, Anssi Bergh and Marianne Pontan/ 1	3	Bröyer School, Gustafson School, Salminen School
1928-29	4	Irja Hagfors/2, Maggie Gripenberg/2	2	Salminen School, Suontaa School
1929-30	3	Maggie Gripenberg/2, Taina Helve	3	Bröyer School, Suontaa School/2
1930-31	1	Dolly Hjelt	5	Gustafsson School, Suontaa School/2, Bröyer School, Salminen School
1931-32	5	Sari Jankelow/2, Maggie Gripenberg/2, Mary Hougberg	8	Salminen School, Suontaa School /2, Bröyer School, Gustafsson School, Tamminen Schools, Vilagos School Helsinki Conservatoire
1932-33	1	Ella Eronen	3	Helsinki Conservatoire, Suontaa School, Tuulos-Eskelinen School
1933-34	3	Ella Eronen, Aira Arja, Mary Hougberg	8	Bröyer School, Suontaa School/5, Gustafsson School, Tamminen School
1934-35			4	Tuulos-Eskelinen School, Suontaa School/3
1935-36	2	Martta Bröyer, Anitra Karto	3	Gripenberg School, Jankelow School, Suontaa School
1936-37			2	Tamminen-Arja School, Helsinki Conservatoire
1937-38	2	Kaarina Kuoppamäki, Maija Leppo	2	Vaasa Conservatoire, Lehtikanto Helsinki Conservatoire
1938-39	1	Hagar Lehtikanto	1	Vaasa Conservatoire
1939-40				

On the basis of the number of performances, Maggie Gripenberg dominated the modern dance scene until 1932 when she retired as a dancer at the age of 50. Sari Jankelow was Gripenberg's first student who arranged dance matinee of her own in Helsinki in 1917. Her example was followed by Gripenberg's other students, such as Taina Helve, Mary Hougberg, Marianne Pontan, Wini Laine, Ester Naparstok, Anssi Bergh and Irja Hagfors in the 1920s. However, theatres,

opera houses and dance groups in Germany in the 1920s and the early 1930s offered these dancers better working possibilities than Finland. The Finnish National Opera employed only ballet dancers during the 1920s, Finnish Theatres did not have many vacancies for dancers, and not even Maggie Gripenberg, a member of a wealthy family, could afford a permanent dance group. So modern dance performances were quite occasional and the number of performances did not increase during the 1920s, although there were more actors in the field of modern dance. For dancers who stayed in Finland teaching was the only real opportunity to earn a living by dancing during the 1920s. Toini Gustafsson (later Karto), Helvi Salminen, Esteri Suontaa and Martta Bröyer opened their schools in 1920s.

The early Finnish modern dance also had a minor pioneer beside Gripenberg, as mentioned before. Hertta Idman (1890-1942), like Gripenberg a student of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, started performing two years after Gripenberg in 1913. Idman and her school were active until the middle of the 1920's. Idman's name is seldom mentioned in history writings; for example af Hällström does not mention her at all in his writings. Suhonen (1997) states that as an artist Idman seems to be overshadowed by Gripenberg. In 1950 Elisabeth Valto, dance critic in *Iltä Sanomat*, describes Idman as a pioneer of dance art who had to give up her career quite early. Martta Bröyer and Esteri Suontaa were Idman's most known students, the latter one studied also at the Gripenberg School.

During the 1930s, the number of actors in the modern dance field continued to increase. As discussed earlier, some Finnish dancers who had worked in Germany (Sari Jakelow, Irja Hagfors, Mary Hougberg and Ester Naparstok) or graduated from German or Austrian dance schools (Maija Leppo, Aira Arja) returned to Finland. In addition, some students from the Karto, Suontaa, Salminen or Gripenberg schools, such as Ella Eronen, Hagar Lehtikanto, Telma Tuulos, Anitra Karto and Kaarina Kuoppamäki, worked as dance artists and/or as dance teachers. However, the growing number of dance artists in modern dance did not lead to an increase in the number of performances in the 1930s.

The performances in early modern dance can be divided into two: solo performances arranged by an individual dancer and school performances produced by a school. A typical modern dance solo programme contained about 10-15 short dance numbers. Dancer usually choreographed and performed dances. Choreographer's name was not always mentioned in programmes. School performances for their part included two sections. The first one was simply called training. It presented the gymnastic forms of body training, in German Körperbildung, performed in groups and rehearsed by the teacher. The second section, entitled dance, contained short group and solo dances. They were choreographed by teachers and students and danced by students and teachers, sometimes together.

Dances in both programme types were usually performed to piano accompaniment. On the basis of information in dance programmes experiments without music were rare.<sup>8</sup> Titles of dances were very often taken directly from music. Music by Finnish contemporary composers, such as Jean Sibelius, Erkki Melartin, Toivo Kuula and Selim Palmgren, was used a lot beside internationally well-known composers, like Franz Schubert, Frederic Chopin, Emile Saint-Saens and Edward Grieg. Occasionally rhythmic compositions, so-called rhythmic etudes, were accompanied by dancers themselves.

### **DANCE AS A LEGITIMATE ART FORM**

During the 1930s, some Finnish ballet and modern dancers identified themselves as professional and they founded together The Union of Finnish Dance Artists in 1937. Later, the position of modern dancers beside ballet dancers was undermined in the Union. History writings, as well as general opinion, have sometimes left early modern dance out of Finnish dance history or labelled it amateurish by using definition and values for professionalism in dance of their own times. The definition of professionalism in the arts is fluid and it changes through times. Bruno Frey and Werner Pommerehne (1989) states eight features that can be used for defining professionalism in the arts. They are the amount of time spent on artistic work; amount of income derived from artistic activities, reputation as an artist among the public; recognition among other artists; quality of the artistic work produced; membership in a professional artists' association;

professional education and qualification; and the subjective self-evaluation of being an artist. It would be useful to study which of these features of professionalism were underlined by dancers and by the press during my research era, and to what extent the emphasis in definitional terms changed. On the other hand, we have to discuss these questions in connection with the legitimisation process of dance art in Finland. Legitimation is the process in which prevailing circumstances and practises of an art form are stabilised, accepted and supported by society. The legitimisation process of ballet and modern dance started simultaneously during the first decades of the 20th century.

Ahonen (2000) has already studied the legitimisation process of ballet in Finland in 1922-35. Her research identifies ballet in Finland with the institution, the Finnish National Ballet, and explores the ways in which representations of body and gender in the performances of the Finnish National Ballet corresponded with discourses of body and genre in Finland during the 1920s and 1930s. Ahonen presents, with the help of existing research, two discourses, the white or right-wing and the modernist, that dealt with and defined the body and gender in Finland. According to her, male and female bodies that were represented in the ballet in Finland did not match either the existing right-wing or modernist views of body and gender, and this complicated ballet's legitimisation process as an art form. However, it seems evident that by the end of the 1930s ballet had achieved a more stable position in Finland than modern dance. In the case of modern dance, the legitimating process continued until the 1970s or even the 1980s.

Ahonen's MA dissertation deals only with ballet and does not take modern dance into account at all, although ballet and modern dance started to appear as competing dance genres in dance discourses in the late 1920s and 1930s. It would be interesting to bring modern dance into a discussion of body and gender, and to examine how the female body and almost totally absent male body in early modern dance performances match modernist or right-wing views. All representatives of early modern dance in Finland were women. Only Maggie Gripenberg had a couple of male partners, the actor Onni Snell, the dancer Elo Kuosmanen whose main concern was in ballet, and the actor Veikko Nikkinen.

Thus, there was no a real corporeal male body in the modern dance scene. Could modern dance that represented only women be legitimate in Finland or in Europe during the 1920s or later? In addition, it would pay to examine and find out, if there were other discourses beside the right-wing and modernist ones that defined the views of body and gender. There was a civil war in Finland in 1918 between the "Reds" and the "Whites", between the left-wing and the right-wing. The war, which the "Whites" won, divided Finland mentally for many decades. So, how did red or left-wing discourses understand and legitimate body and gender? If I consider practices of teaching, performing and writing, in early modern dance some dancers and gymnastics teachers participated in both right-wing and left-wing activities and even in modernist circles in Finland. They were involved in many discourses simultaneously. It seems to me that through the practises of these female dancers and gymnastics teachers, German body culture and its representations, both physical and ideological, formed not only the white or the modernist body, but also the red body in Finland, at least red female body. If we look closely enough at particular instances, the hegemonic and general overviews of body, gender and dance have alternative tones in the practises of individual (female) dancers. This research only touches these interesting and complex questions in relation to Elsa Puolanne in Chapter 3, but further detailed examination is left for future research.

### **MIXED PERFORMANCES AND TOURS**

Most performances in the category of mixed performances presented various dance genres, ballet and character dances, or ballet and ballroom dancing, or ballet and modern dance (Appendix 8, pp 230-232). Some dancers who were later considered classical dancers, such as Elo Kuosmanen and Mary Paischeff, performed few plastic dances as part of their repertoire during the 1920s. Secondly, the mixed category included dance performances in which Finnish dancers performed popular oriental, Indian or other ethnic based-dances outside Western culture. Thirdly, there were dance performances that combined 'high' and 'low' art in theatre venues, such as Klaus Salin's and Tuulikki Paananen's acrobatic dances, which were fusion of ballet and acrobatic lifts and flexibility. Klaus Salin was engaged as soloist at the Finnish National Ballet after the Second World War. Eventually, many dance performances in restaurants and

spas were often performed by the dancers of the Finnish National Ballet (Appendix 11, p 239) could be easily included this hybrid form of 'high' and 'low' art.

The two best-known choreographers of mixed performances were Toivo Niskanen and Edith von Bonsdorff, who was originally Danish, but married a Finn. They, as well as Kaarlo Eronen, were engaged to the Ballets Suédois in the 1920s. Niskanen, a male contemporary of Maggie Gripenberg, was a many-sided dancer and dance teacher. From 1908 to 1920 he made annual study trips abroad, mainly to St. Petersburg, but also to Stockholm, Berlin, Vienna and Paris and studied character dances, ballet, social dances as well as Dalcroze method (TeaMA 1160). After his dance debut in 1911 Niskanen performed in Helsinki and on dance tours around Finland. The content of his performances varied from tango to classical ballet. Edith von Bonsdorff's first performance in Finland was with Jean Börlin in 1919. During the 1920s and 1930s she had various performances in Helsinki and at least one tour together with Kaarlo Eronen in 1925. She also visited the Finnish National Ballet as Gé's partner in *Sheherazade* in 1926, and in 1951 she even choreographed *Salome* for the Finnish National Ballet. *Salome* was one of her most popular dance pieces during the 1920s. Von Bonsdorff used both ballet dancers, such as Alexander Saxelin Kaarlo Eronen, and students from the Helvi Salminen School in her group choreographies. Some of her works were based on dance pieces of the Ballets Suédois.

The capital Helsinki was not the only place where dance was performed in Finland. During the 1910s both Maggie Gripenberg and Toivo Niskanen made dance tours around Finland, and Gripenberg toured also in Sweden and Estonia, and had a few performances in the USA (TeaMA 1958 and 1160).<sup>9</sup> In 1917-1939 there were 14 tours. Both representatives of modern dance and ballet performed around Finland. Detailed documentation of tours is presented in Appendix 10 (p 237-238). Found traces of tours suggest that tours were not very extensive, usually including less than ten performances. Dance performances in tours took place in local theatre premises. Many towns in Finland had both right-wing and left-wing theatres, and amateur playing was

popular both in youth associations and in workers' associations. The theatre repertoire in Finland during the first decades of the 20th century included many musical plays and operettas with dance numbers. Dance artists were used as choreographers, not only in Helsinki but also in other bigger towns, such as Viipuri, Tampere and Turku. Dancers were local assistants. Thus, it seems obvious that the audience of dance performances included also spectators whose main interests were in the theatre.

Mixed dance performances, as well as some performances in restaurants during the 1920s and 1930s, show how flexible and fluid the borderlines between dance genres and between art and entertainment were for the most Finnish people. It is possible to think, for instance that ballets at the Finnish National Ballet were so popular because most of the audience viewed ballet more as an entertainment than as an aristocratic and legitimate art form. According to Ahonen (2000), some press reviews of the 1920s and 1930s presented ballet as an entertainment, not as an art form. The borderline was blurred also because the same dancers performed at the Opera, in restaurants, spas and on tours around Finland. And they even performed partly the same repertoire in restaurants and on tours as at the Opera. Thus, it was not only at the Opera that you could see ballet during the 1920s and 1930s, although Ahonen (2000, p 3) states straightforwardly, "the Finnish National Ballet in Helsinki was the only place where you could see ballet". This view is shared by many other dance writers, including me.<sup>10</sup> Dancers themselves still remembered these entertaining performances (e.g. Säilä & Räsänen 1986, Sylvestersson & Puromies 1995) but probably they as well as other writers ignored and considered them less important, since they wanted to emphasise and distinguish ballet as an art form.

### **DANCE AS HISTORY**

At the turn of the 20th century the Imperial Ballet made several times visits to Finland, then an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. Many ballets of Petipa, Ivanov and Fokine, based on the memory and imagination of George G e, were taken into the repertoire of the Finnish National Ballet. But it is unclear to what extent these ballets copied performances, which G e had seen in St.



Petersburg. We have to consider how far a tiny Finnish National Ballet, about 20 dancers and most of them part-time assistants, could dance in the fashion of the former Russian Imperial Ballet. And how a ballet group could be maintained and create ballets that would simultaneously be based on the heritage of tsarist Russian ballet, Finland's former political ruler, and yet construct and support national values of Finland, such as Finnish nature and language.

It belongs to the tradition of ballet to recycle, restage or re-choreograph ballets. This happened also in Finland. Even today, it is possible to see some of the ballets that were performed at the Finnish National Opera in the 1920s and 1930s. It is worthwhile to consider how and to what extent they include or repeat the past or to what extent each performance of *Swan Lake* is also a history of other *Swan Lakes* before it. Recycling has not been appreciated in modern dance in Finland, and there are only few Gripenberg's dances are still performed. The Praesens group, lead by Ritva Arvelo, made some re-stagings of Gripenberg, the most often performed of them being *Juoru (A Gossip)*. I have also heard that some gymnastics clubs still perform Maija Varmaala's dances.

This relativist attitude towards 'the truth of the past' opens an opportunity to choreograph dancing history based on the traces of old choreography as well as on the creativity of its present scholar, choreographer and dancer(s). This work would not be a reconstruction, which tries to reach the original dance as it was. It is a new creation that tries to understand and interpret the traces of old dance from the present moment to its present audience.

#### **FURTHER RESEARCH STRATEGIES**

On the one hand, the data that I have collected mostly matched and supported the outlines of existing histories of dance art in Finland. On the other hand, the systematic and factual knowledge of events in dance in Finland led me to speculate and ask more complex questions and to get to know the binary oppositions, such as amateur – professional, national – international, ballet - modern dance and low art - high art, which are used to define and legitimate dance art in Finland as in other parts of Western culture. My presence in the present time has produced some strong biases. Current legitimated and

hegemonic definitions of dance art have obviously affected my selecting and sorting of data as well as my writing as can be seen in this chapter. This challenges and encourages me to search and use some alternative reading and research possibilities.

The chronological and categorised data of dance performances in Finland, presented in the appendices and the charts of the thesis, offers me material interminably to develop and expand this chapter into a full PhD with several hundred pages about dance venues, music, dancers, titles of choreographies, styles of choreographies, reviews of dance performances and so on. While it might be valuable to create a detailed chronology of dance in Finland, I have to ask how far it pays, if I want to understand the past through multiple perspectives and to reflect and share the process as well as the outcomes with my readers. It seems to me that the descriptive and classifying method is not adequate on its own, if I would like to study and discuss further some issues that interest me.

All histories include tensions and co-operation between the factual and imaginary and between the found and made (e.g. White 1973, Ankersmit 1994). The writer and her/his imagination have been hidden in 'objective' writing, and the events seem to speak for themselves. However, the past did not ask to be presented in the form of lists, tables, categories and descriptions. It was I, a researcher and writer, who invented those forms, inspired by my conscious aim to write 'objective' history. We all live and experience our lives in time and we cannot step aside from the present moment and become 'objective' and 'neutral' participants of the past, even if we would like to. However, we can try, as I have done in some parts of this chapter, and I have found it useful, but not sufficient.

During my writing of 'objective' history, new questions and issues emerged through the interaction between the data, the existing histories and me. In order to examine some of these new questions and discourses, I shift more openly and freely between factual and imaginary constructs and between found and made histories. It means that the discussion and analysis of the whole data material is

not continued and developed anymore further here. The linear and chronological time structure formed by dance performances, following one after another, has to be dispersed to some particular discourses and representations of the past relating to one particular dance solo *Loitsu* and its dancer and composer Elsa Puolanne. *Loitsu* and Elsa Puolanne are marginal and seldom mentioned in the context of dance art, as previous chapters have shown, but they are both involved in complex discourses of the modern and the national in dance. The search for *Loitsu* and its meanings on the pages and in the studio is not used here to construct a comprehensive and coherent historical narrative to answer what happened in dance art in Finland, but to challenge and expand the notion of dance history and how it can be presented. This does not mean that the data and the years of collecting it have been pointless, on the contrary. It has been an essential part of my moving toward new research questions. Therefore, the data and my process with it have a prominent place in the thesis, and I am happy to share the collected data with other dance scholars for further research of the past of dance art in Finland.

The past of dance in Finland is present in me through various representations and experiences, as I have discussed, but at the same time “the past as it was” is totally gone. It is always imperfect in the present, and when I ask questions about the past of dance in Finland and about *Loitsu* I know it is the ‘other’ past that I know (Bynym 1999). New kinds of questions appear, as I accept this relative standpoint toward the past. What are the criteria for preferring one interpretation to another? Is it purely a matter of current aesthetic, political, ideological and moral considerations or my own preferences? Is there still some relevance to at least a partial objective knowledge of the past? Or perhaps I will continue my research and accept Lena Hammergren’s argument, that the discerning of changes that the research and its context have for us

reveals the false nature of a binary opposition between objective and subjective perspectives, an opposition founded on perceiving the author as being either the authority of a text or completely absent from it. In an intriguing fashion we are both and thereby neither. The making of history is and yet is not our “own” doing.

Hammergren 1995, p 191.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> The various readings of the past are also discussed in dance history. There are a few published articles, which apply recent issues in theory and philosophy of history to dance history. The discussion between Richard Ralph and Janet Adshead-Lansdale in *Dance Chronicle* (1995, 1997) is one of them. Barbara Sparti and Janet Lansdale also had a brief dialogue in *Dance Research Journal* (1996), and Lynn Matlock Brooks wrote an article in *Dance Research* (2002). The debate in dance research periodicals reflects the division between 'proper' history and 'postmodern' history. Ralph, Sparti and Matlock consider trends, such as postmodernism, poststructuralism and deconstruction as a threat to descriptive and document-based history. Adshead-Lansdale on her part, argues that accurate documentation is crucial for history, but nowadays it is not enough, and recent theories should also be adapted in history research. More articles relating to dance historiography are found in *Rethinking History* edited by Alexandra Carter (2004).
- <sup>2</sup> On the basis of my data in Appendices 3-11 the amount of premieres were divided as follows: 23 (the Finnish National Ballet), 34 (ballet besides FNB), 9 (ballet schools), 52 (modern dance), 42 (modern dance schools), 41 (mixed performances) and 55 (guest performances).
- <sup>3</sup> 1997: 1683 performances, 1998:1789, 1999: 2191, 2000: 2481, 2001: 2093, 2002: 1973, 2003: 2278, 2004: 2236 and 2005: 2366. The numbers based on the web page of the Finnish Dance Information Centre ([www.danceinfo.fi/tanssitilastot](http://www.danceinfo.fi/tanssitilastot)). Guest performances of foreign dancers and groups are not included in their statistics.
- <sup>4</sup> The number of Russians in Helsinki at the turn of the 20th century was about 12 000.
- <sup>5</sup> The names and repertoire are picked from various resources, such as Laakkonen (1999, 2003), Byckling (2000), Suhonen (2001), TeaMA 1318.
- <sup>6</sup> Af Hällström and others, who used him as a source, state that the Institute was established in 1916 and closed 1924, but according to press advertisements (*Uusi Suomi* during the autumn of 1915) it was already operating in the season 1915-1916 offering classes in social dances.
- <sup>7</sup> There is little knowledge of George Gé's life. The information presented in the thesis has been collected from various sources such as Säilä & Räsänen (1986), af Hällström (1945a), Kuosmanen (2000), Vienola- Lindfors & af Hällström (1981), Suonio (1928) and TeaMA 1003.
- <sup>8</sup> The performance of Annsi Bergh and Marianne Pontan in 1928 in Helsinki seems to be the only one in which some dances were performed without music.
- <sup>9</sup> Toivo Niskanen (TeaMA 1160) and Maggie Gripenberg collections (TeaMA 1058) in the Theatre Museum both include various tour programme leaflets.
- <sup>10</sup> For instance af Hällström 1945a, Vienola-Lindfors & af Hällström 1981, Makkonen 1990 and Suhonen 1997.