

Talk given at the National Gallery of Australia, 12 March 2011, in conjunction with the exhibition *Ballets Russes: the art of costume*

'We're going to Australia'. The Ballets Russes Down Under



Members of the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet, 1936. National Gallery of Australia Research Library

Dr Michelle Potter
12 March 2011

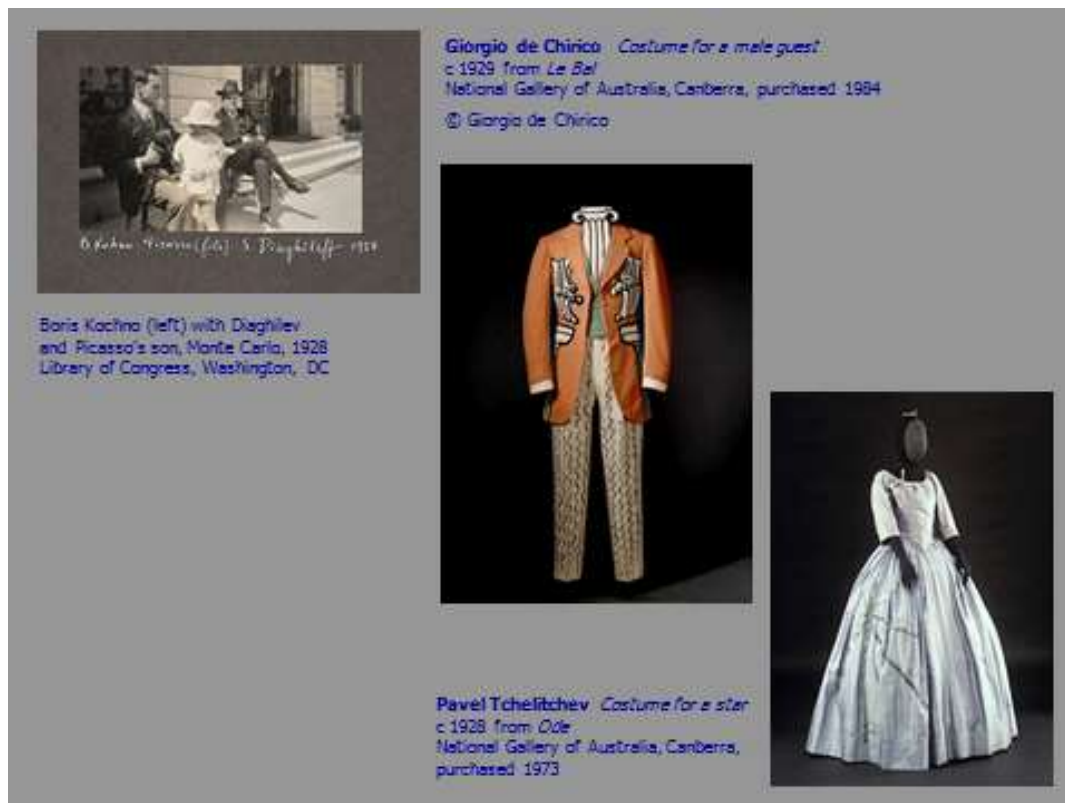
The text of this talk has been modified and adapted to accommodate copyright restrictions associated with some images, audio clips and film footage. No audio-visual material is included with this text although I have transcribed all audio interview material used (with the exception of the Kochno interview which is translated and transcribed in part only). Two audio clips appear separately on the home page associated with this talk: <http://michellepotter.org/papers/ballets-russes-were-going-to-australia>. Film footage from the National Film and sound Archive referred to in the text comes from the Ewan Murray-Will Ballets Russes Collection, especially title 262798.

PowerPoint slides used in conjunction with the text during the live talk have been inserted into the text in the appropriate places.

'We're going to Australia': the Ballets Russes Down Under


Michelle Potter

I have called my talk 'We're going to Australia' and I want to explore the adventurous journey of the Ballets Russes dancers to the other side of the world, and to recount some of their impressions of and thoughts about Australia. But I want to start in Venice, where Diaghilev, famed founder of the Ballets Russes, died in 1929. I am going to begin by playing an extract from an interview recorded by Radio France with Boris Kochno. Kochno, a poet and librettist, met Diaghilev in 1921 and became his secretary shortly after they met. You see him on the slide below, top left, with Diaghilev in Monte Carlo in 1928. Kochno also wrote scenarios for a number of Diaghilev ballets including *Zéphire et Flore*, *Ode* and *Le Bal*. And you see on the same slide two costumes currently on display in the Gallery's sumptuous exhibition, *Ballets Russes. The art of costume*, one from *Ode* and one from *Le Bal*.



Kochno was present when Diaghilev died and in the recording he describes that very moment in the *Grand Hotel des bains de mer* on the Lido in Venice. The recording is in French but it is so evocative a recording that I think even if you don't understand French

you can sense the heaviness and drama in Kochno's voice. And I have translated the salient points on the slide below.

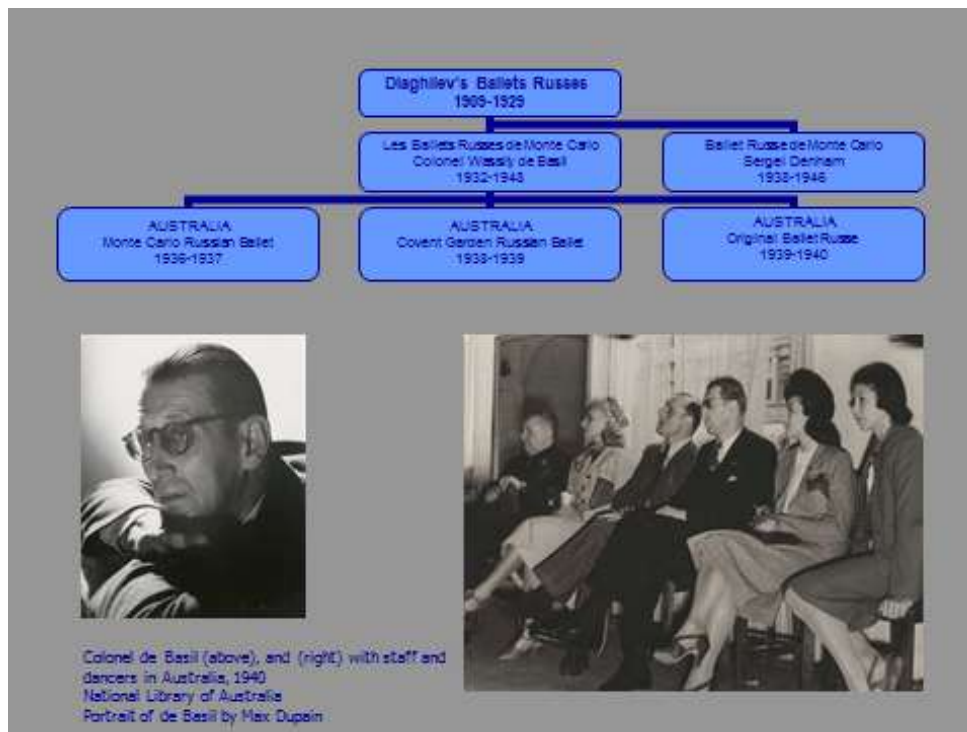


The previous evening his breathing had become very laboured... We were there, Lifar was also in his room... in Venice. I realised the critical time had come... I telephoned Misia Sert... we called a priest... we had to do it very quickly because we were afraid that Diaghilev would open his eyes and be shocked at the sight of the priest. But it happened very quickly. The priest left and Diaghilev didn't notice. Diaghilev was breathing as if he had a heavy stone pressing on his chest. After several hours of agony Diaghilev stopped breathing... the first rays of the morning sun broke through the window and warmed Diaghilev's forehead... his head fell towards his shoulder and a tear rolled down his cheek ... it was 6 am on 19 August 1929.

Voice of Boris Kochno, 1981
Jerome Robbins Dance Division
New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

I have begun in this way because it leads me into an explanation, if a little simplified, of the term Ballets Russes. I have made a diagram, which you see on the slide below, of what I am about to explain. The phenomenon known as the Ballets Russes began with Serge Diaghilev and most of the costumes and other items on display in *Ballets Russes: the art of costume* relate to that period between 1909 and 1929 when Diaghilev's Ballets Russes was the talk of the dance, art, music, design and fashion world in Western Europe.

When Diaghilev died the situation became somewhat complicated. Many of his dancers and staff wanted to keep the company going and there were some attempts to do this. But none was really successful on a long term basis. However, over the next decade two new initiatives developed, in somewhat of a rival fashion, which did have ongoing lives. One company, which toured under a variety of confusingly similar names, and whose composition quite naturally changed over time, was led by a man believed by many to be a former Russian Cossack, Colonel Wassily de Basil, whose portrait you can see bottom left on the slide below. The other, which was largely an American-based company, was led by the impresario Sergei Denham, a Russian by birth whose family background was in banking. Both these strands of operation perpetuated to a greater or lesser extent the heritage of Diaghilev. It was the companies of the de Basil organisation that came to Australia three times between 1936 and 1940.



So the Ballets Russes dancers I would like to talk about today are those who came with one or other of the three de Basil companies. You see the names of those three companies above. The image at the bottom right of the slide above shows, from left to right, Alexander Philipoff, who acted as a representative for de Basil when de Basil was not touring with his company; leading dancer and sister-in-law of de Basil, Nina Verchinina; dancer and founder of the Borovansky Ballet, Edouard Borovansky; Colonel de Basil; dancer Olga Morosova, who was also de Basil's wife; and dancer Tatiana Stepanova. As I mentioned, these new companies perpetuated much of the artistic heritage of Diaghilev as well as developing their own aesthetic, and I will mention some of those links back to Diaghilev as I proceed.

So, what **did** these Ballets Russes dancers think about coming to Australia? Many were very young. Stepanova for example was born in 1924 so was only 16 when the photo above was taken. Many were stateless having escaped from Russia themselves or with their parents during the Revolution, and only a few had previously visited Australia. Shortly after the first de Basil company arrived in Australia their publicist, a young lady by the name of Olga Philipoff (daughter of Alexander), wrote an article for the Melbourne weekly *Table Talk*. She wrote, very endearingly, about the reactions of the dancers on hearing in London in 1936 that they were going to Australia:

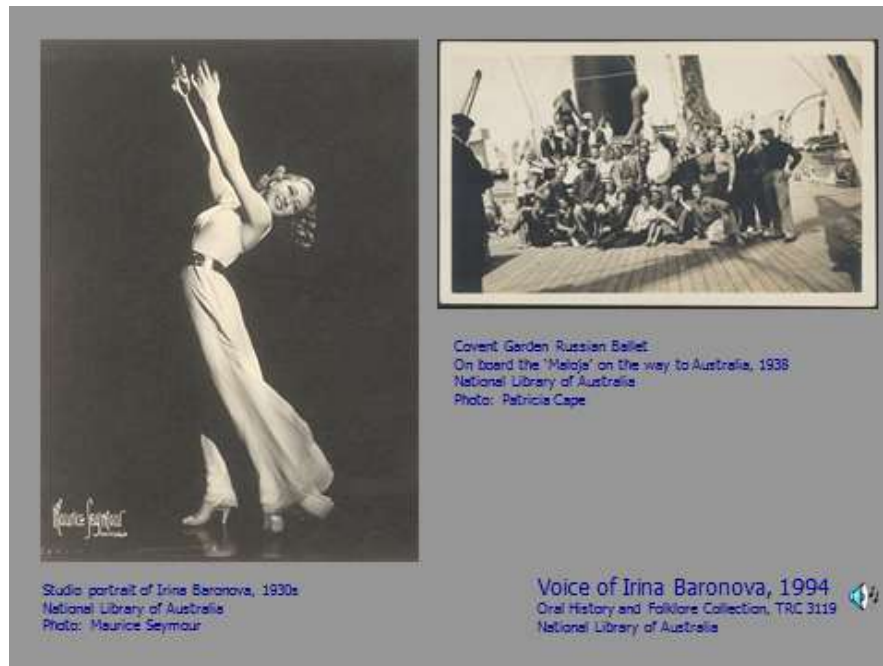
Australia ... Australia ... the ballet may be touring Australia. This news spread among the members of the company in the last days of the usually brilliant season....and suddenly the trip became a reality when gentle Mr Nevin Tait brought to a rehearsal some Australian journalists to interview the artists. They told us with a note of homesickness in their voices "Australia ... a beautiful country. You will like it." From this moment on the excitement grew every day. Unable to control their joy the artists rushed to the shops, some buying summer dresses and parasols. And others spending their money on fur coats, the particulars about the weather being rather contradictory.

However, rather than focus on the account of the publicist, as endearing as it is, what I'd like to do today is give you the impressions of some of the dancers themselves. You will hear the voices of Irina Baronova, Anna Volkova, Kiril Vassilkovsky and Kira Abricossova Bousloff, and I will read you some comments from letters written by Elisabeth Souvorova and Harcourt Algeranoff to their families back home in the northern hemisphere. On the slide below you can see from left to right Baronova, Volkova, Vassilkovsky and Bousloff and below Souvorova and Algeranoff.



First Irina Baronova. Baronova came to Australia on the second Australian tour and she was hugely admired by audiences in this country and in fact continued to be admired and loved until the end of her life. You can tell I think from the studio portrait of her in the slide below that she had beautifully long and elegant limbs and a graceful line

through the whole body. She was especially admired for her dancing in the second act of the symphonic ballet *Les Presages* and as the Princess Aurora in *Aurora's Wedding*.



She was also exceptionally generous of spirit and I think that quality comes through in her voice as she recalls her impressions of coming to Australia:

You know it was very exciting because Australia seemed to me a country so far away, the other side of the world where people walked upside down. Probably to you we walk upside down, in Europe! And it was very exciting the thought to go there. The aeroplanes didn't fly yet, over the ocean, in 1938 when I came. So it was on the boat, five weeks, which was naturally great fun and very interesting trip because you went through Gibraltar, and the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea. And you stopped at all those places for the day. Bombay, Ceylon, and finally Perth.

It was interesting to see the new nature, the new animals that we only saw pictures of. I absolutely fell in love with the little koala bears. At every spare moment we dash to the koala bears because they hug you. They hold on to you and they hug you.

Very quickly we made a lot of friends because we found the Australians so warm and open and they approach you. They don't stand off and wait to be introduced or don't talk to you. In England it's difficult. Takes time. But here they come and introduce themselves and they talk to you and it's always so warm and so hospitable. So very quickly in every town we made friends.

In the extract you've just heard Baronova identifies three aspects of her time in Australia with the Ballets Russes. First, the journey by ship from Europe. On the right hand side of the slide above you can see a scene on the ship on which Baronova travelled showing a number of the dancers posing together on deck.

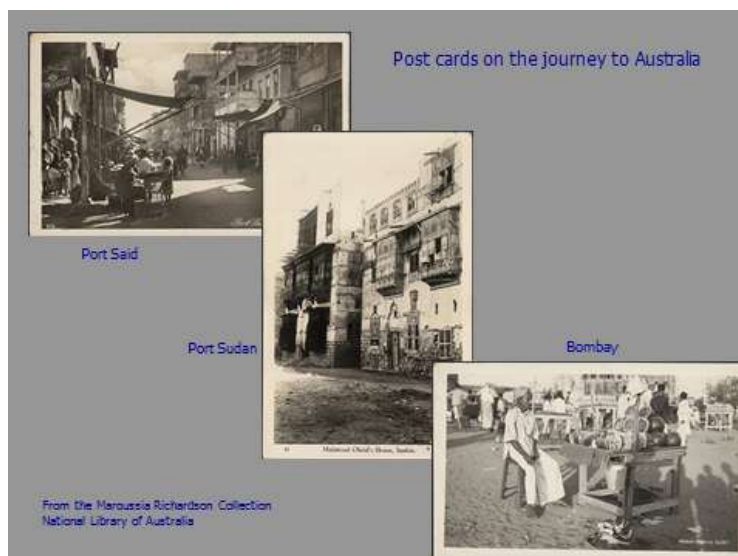
And I just want to fill in a few more details of what the journey to Australia was like from letters and postcards written by Elisabeth Souvorova, one of the dancers in the corps de ballet in the 1936 company. She was an English dancer whose real name was Betty Scorer. In a letter from Port Said, Souvorova wrote not only about Port Said but about the problems faced by her Russian boyfriend, whom she refers to Alyosha, but who danced under the name of Alexis Frank and whom she later married while in Australia. Souvorova wrote:

I'm being eaten by mosquitoes here, but enjoying it. The weather is absolutely grilling. When we got to Port Said Alyosha was put under arrest and forbidden to land as no red Russians are allowed in Egypt— everything was tried including bribery but to no avail. The poor child was almost in tears he was so disappointed and the thought of having to sit alone on the ship with two Egyptian soldiers (who followed him even to the W.C) was a little dreary. The nicest things are the boats full of merchandise that come to the ship's side. I bought a lovely pair of sandals for 1/6 and a fez for 6d.

And in a postscript to this story Souvorova recounts that when she got back to the ship at 1am after going to a cabaret she found Alyosha and his guards quite drunk, Alyosha having discovered that one of the guards spoke Russian!

From Port Sudan:

We put into Port Sudan in the morning in sweltering heat. I found it a lovely place—so much more genuine than Port Said. We took a car and went out to a native village— incredibly primitive and very poor. We came to a group of camels in the middle of the village and got out of the car and asked if we could ride. They spoke of course no English but seemed quite pleased with the idea. So six of us mounted. My driver offered to sell me the camel for five shillings.

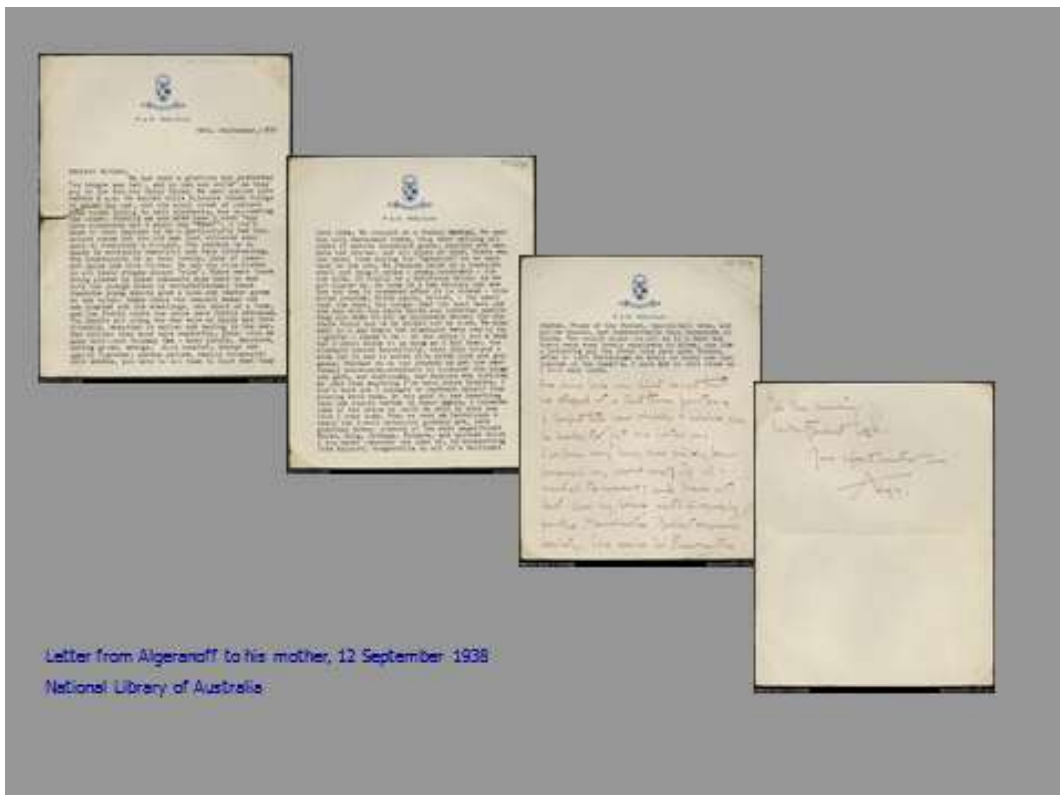


From Bombay:

I find Bombay absolutely fascinating. Of all the places so far the most interesting—unbelievable. So many different colours and costumes in the bazaars. And the stream of people with their foreheads marked, blue, red, magenta, yellow and white to show their cast, the brilliant saris, the women in purdah. The silk bazaar especially was lovely beyond dreaming.

Another source of information about the trip to Australia comes from the letters of Harcourt Algeranoff, another English performer and a leading character dancer with the company. Algeranoff even carried a typewriter with him as you can see from the letter in the slide below. From Ceylon Algeranoff wrote:

We had such a glorious day yesterday—“no tongue can tell, and no pen can write” as they say in the Russian Fairy Tales...The journey up to Kandy is extremely beautiful and very interesting. The countryside is so very lovely. Lots of coconut palms and rice fields. We saw the rice-fields in all their stages except ‘ripe’. There were those being ploughed by naked peasants knee deep in mud with the plough drawn by water buffaloes; those where the young shoots grew a lush and tender green in the water; those where the peasant women and men planted out the seedlings one shoot at a time, and the fields where the crops were fairly advanced. We stopped later at a roadside stall and bought colas—young coconuts—for the milk. It really is a delicious drink.



The people all along the way were so happy and friendly, wreathed in smiles and waving to the car. The colours they wore were wonderful, pink—even more brilliant than my tie—deep purple, sapphire, spring green, orange, deep scarlet, orange and maroon together, chrome yellow, really indescribable shades.

We also went to a zoo where the elephants were really delightful—I hadn't been on one since I was a baby but I still enjoy it as much as I did then. One elephant danced beautifully, they just played a drum for it and it moved with rhythm, line and grace.



Drinking coconut milk.
Private collection

Algeronoff (on elephant on the right hand side) and personnel of the Covent Garden Russian Ballet in Ceylon, September 1938.
National Library of Australia



But eventually the dancers reached Australia and in the audio excerpt I played Baronova remarked on how interesting she found it to see a new country with its unusual flora and fauna. She also noticed the friendliness of the people and their openness towards the dancers, and of course these last two impressions were often part of the same experience.

One Sydneysider who befriended the company was a dermatologist, Dr Ewan Murray-Will. As his photograph album indicates, Murray-Will enjoyed hosting picnics and visits to wild life sanctuaries on the dancers' day off thus satisfying their interest in a strange new country. Here are some of the dancers enjoying a bush picnic with Ewan Murray-Will—he's in the bottom left hand corner of the photograph on the slide below. You can see some of the dancers engaging with a large kangaroo and with a hefty wombat. And

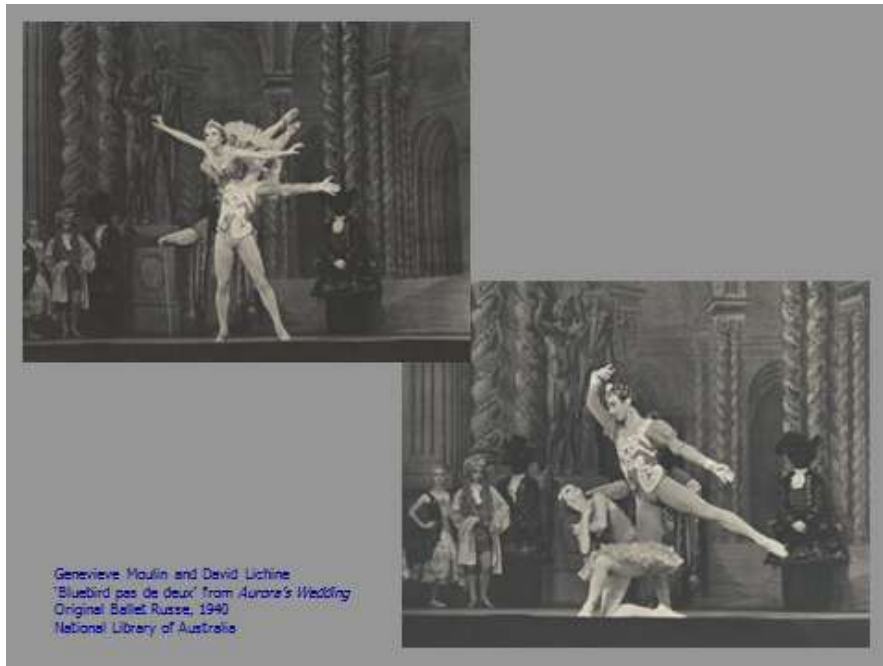
the image on the bottom right shows Tamara Tchinarova Finch and Nina Youchkevitch dressed for a swim.



And on the subject of swimming, Murray-Will had a beach house at Bungan Beach north of Sydney. He would often invite dancers to visit there and as a keen amateur cinematographer would film them at play on the beach. Their play was more often than not based on the repertoire they were performing. The footage I am about to show for example shows Nina Golovina and Anton Vlassoff performing excerpts from the Bluebird pas de deux from *Aurora's Wedding*.

But before I ask the AV technician to start the film I'll just show you two still images of the Bluebird pas de deux. You will notice on the footage Nina Golovina taking the pose you can see in the bottom right image on the slide below. She flutters her hands on the footage because originally only the male dancer was meant to be a bird and the female was a princess (Princess Florine) who was being taught to fly by the Bluebird. In addition on the footage you'll see Vlassoff lift Golovina onto his shoulder as in the top right image (although he lifts her onto his left rather than right shoulder). Just another note:

the footage is silent and in slow motion and sadly quite short. It comes courtesy of the National Film and Sound Archive.



Other times the dancing on the beach was pure fun or fun and repertoire mixed. Next I am going to show you two brief segments again from the collection of the National Film and Sound Archive and shot by Dr Ewan Murray-Will: first Paul Paul Petroff doing a series of grands jetés the length of the beach, and secondly Tamara Toumanova wearing some fetching swimwear. You can see both these dancers in the slide below in performance in Australia and also in a more relaxed setting.



Another interesting Sydney friend was Russian-born Ivan Repin. Repin owned a well-known chain of coffee houses in Sydney and employed Russian speaking staff. When in Sydney dancers from the Ballets Russes enjoyed drinking coffee at these establishments, one of which was in King Street just around the corner from the Theatre Royal in Castlereagh Street where the company performed when in Sydney. You can see the interior of the King Street shop on the slide below along with a portrait of Ivan Repin.



Ivan Repin invited dancers to his home in Bellevue Hill and the photographs he took of them remain to remind us of the friendliness of Australians that Baronova noticed. In addition some of the images are particularly interesting because they remind us of the links back to Diaghilev. The top left image on the slide below shows from left to right Roman Jasinsky; company teacher Anatole Oboukhoff; Sono Osato; Serge Lifar; and Yura Lazovsky. Lifar performed and restaged his choreography in Australia in 1940 but he was also a principal dancer with the Diaghilev company in the 1920s. The image bottom left shows Vera Nemchinova; George Repin, son of Ivan and now a retired medical doctor living in Sydney; and the family dog Sharick. Nemchinova was Oboukhoff's wife and was also originally a Diaghilev dancer between 1916 and 1925.

Ivan Repin also shot some quite formal portraits of the dancers including (top right on the slide below) one of Serge Grigorieff, who was Diaghilev's régisseur, that is his stage manager and rehearsal director, and who continued this role with the de Basil companies working to ensure that the works from the Diaghilev repertoire remained

fresh and exciting. So the Diaghilev heritage clearly continued into Australia through some of the de Basil company personnel.



Souvorova also sent an interesting letter to her mother from Adelaide in 1936 with other news about excursions with Australians. She wrote:

Sunday we went on a picnic, about fifteen people in six cars with various people I had never met. We went to the most lovely place in the mountains, and I have never seen so many fruit trees and wild flowers and even parakeets flying about. We had a marvellous lunch. They built fires and grilled chops and sausages and we ate until we nearly died.

The scenery is really exquisite. We found lots of wild orchids. Everywhere are eucalyptus trees, which they call blue gum trees, and also mimosa but it isn't out yet. In the evening we went to a large party at a Russian doctor's house, marvellous house, and such food!

Now, before I leave the discussion of Baronov's two main impressions—that is the excitement of visiting foreign ports on the way to Australia, and the friendliness of Australians once the company arrived—I'd like to return briefly to Baronova herself. I mentioned that one of her best known roles in Australia was that of Aurora in *Aurora's Wedding*. On the slide below you can see her in that role in 1938 with the Covent Garden Russian Ballet. And just below her, because it gives a slightly better view of the tutu worn by Aurora in Australia is Nina Youchkevitch from the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet on the 1936–1937 tour. And also on the slide is the dress for Aurora held by the

National Gallery and on display in the current show. The Gallery's costume is dated ca. 1922, which was the time of the premiere of the work by Diaghilev's company, and I think you can see how close the costume worn in Australia is to this earlier and original version. Although the costume was probably remade, given that *Aurora's Wedding* was a very popular work, and often each principal dancer would have his or her own costume anyway, Australian audiences were indeed seeing a very close approximation to what Diaghilev's audiences saw.



And taking a look at the two other dancers that I have spoken of so far, Souvorova and Algeranoff, they too performed in costumes that were very close to the Diaghilev originals.

One of Souvorova's roles in Australia was a nymph in *Afternoon of a Faun* and she wrote to her mother from Melbourne in 1936 saying: 'Yesterday we did *L'Après-midi* after only one rehearsal but it really went quite well. I'm one of the Nymphs and am wearing Sokolova's original costume'. Lydia Sokolova danced one of the nymphs with Diaghilev's company from 1913 onwards and the Gallery has three of the costumes for the seven Nymphs in the work—you see them in the slide below along with an archival image from 1916 and one of Souvorova in the role in Australia.



Elisabeth Souvorova (left) in *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*
National Library of Australia
Photo: E.A. Rowell



Léon Bakst: *Costumes for nymphs* c. 1912
From *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1973

One of the dancers in the archival image above is identified as Sokolova but I am not sure at this stage which one she is (although I think she may be the dancer second from the right). But if Souvorova is correct we know that once again Australians were seeing close approximations of the Diaghilev costumes, if not originals.

As for Algeranoff, one of his best known roles was Pierrot in *Le Carnaval*. You see him in the slide below in costume for that part alongside the Gallery's costume.



Algeranoff in costume for Pierrot in *Le Carnaval*
Ballets Russes ca. 1940
National Library of Australia



Léon Bakst: *Costume for Pierrot* c. 1910 From *Le Carnaval*
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1973-1976

And part of what I hope to convince you of today is that the costumes gain something extra when we see them worn by dancers and when we have an idea of what those dancers thought and felt. That is when you see them in a dancerly context. Robert Bell, curator of the Gallery's exhibition, remarked at a talk last Thursday [10 March 2011] that it can only enhance the experience of viewing the costumes if we imagine them populated by young and passionate people.

I'd like now to turn to Anna Volkova who felt some hesitation I think at the prospect of going to Australia and leaving her family behind in Paris where they had settled after fleeing from Russia, and then to Kiril Vassilkovsky who, looking back at the life he led after joining the Ballets Russes, realised just what he had avoided in doing so. Here is Volkova:

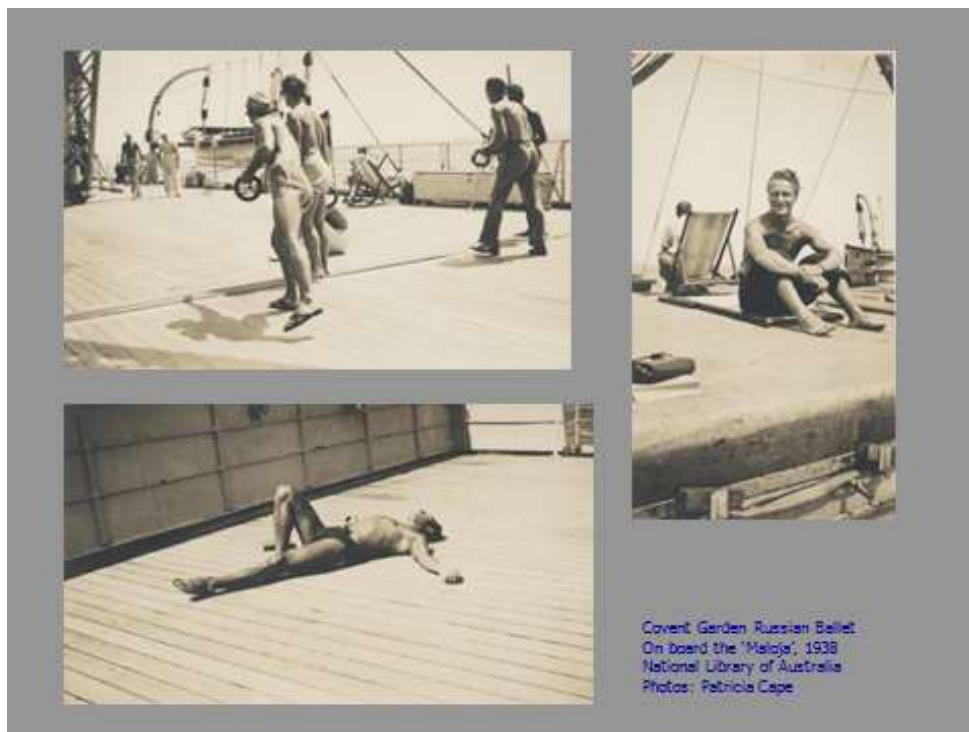
I was slightly horrified really, first of all because it was so far from home. My father died by then and my mother and the two brothers were in Paris. In one way, of course, I wanted to go. It was something new. On the other hand I didn't know anything about Australia. I didn't even know about the Aborigines or the koala bears or whatever. I didn't know anything. But my brother, he studied history and geography at the Sorbonne, and he has a degree in both things, he knew everything. He almost could describe to me Sydney, the way it was. But the only thing that made me laugh is when we arrived in Sydney and someone took me to show me Martin Place, you see. He said 'Well that's Sydney's Champs Elysées'. That I thought was a little bit strange.

Also we hit summer in Sydney, 120 degrees [Fahrenheit] I think it was then and the sun was all red in the sky because it was so hot. You know we were not used to that, although on the ship we got pretty sunburned. That was another thing, when we opened in Sydney all the little swans were tanned and the white tutus and everything and the black bodies inside. We were all fined.

I think you will notice from looking at Volkova in the photograph on the right of the slide below that her hesitation was perhaps short-lived and in the end she married an Australian rowing champion, Jim Barnes, and lived first in Sydney and then in rural New South Wales on her husband's sheep farm. Her best known role was the waltz in *Les Sylphides* and you see her in that role in the image on the left of the slide below. Some of you in the audience with strong connections to the Australian Ballet will also know that Volkova assisted in the restaging of *Sylphides* for the Australian Ballet just a few years ago, thus perpetuating another link with the Ballets Russes in a particularly dancerly way because as we know so much dance is transmitted from body to body, older dancer to younger.



Her comments in the extract I just played also bring up the boat trip over and the relaxing time the dancers had on that trip (and its often unwanted consequences, unwanted by the company management that is). Here we see some of the Covent Garden Russian Ballet on the ship on the way to Australia playing deck quoits and sunbaking.



Again Elisabeth Suvorova's letters tell a similar story of being dramatically suntanned. She writes: 'We lie about, play deck tennis and swim all day...Alyosha now looks exactly like a South Sea islander'.

But in addition to the *Sylphides* waltz Anna Volkova performed in *Les Presages*, first in the corps de ballet and then later in Baronova's role of Passion in the second act. *Presages* was not a ballet from the Diaghilev repertoire but nevertheless, with its symphonic music, it was as confronting to later Ballets Russes audiences as many of Diaghilev's productions were to his audiences. With its designs by André Masson, it was certainly created in a similar collaborative mode.



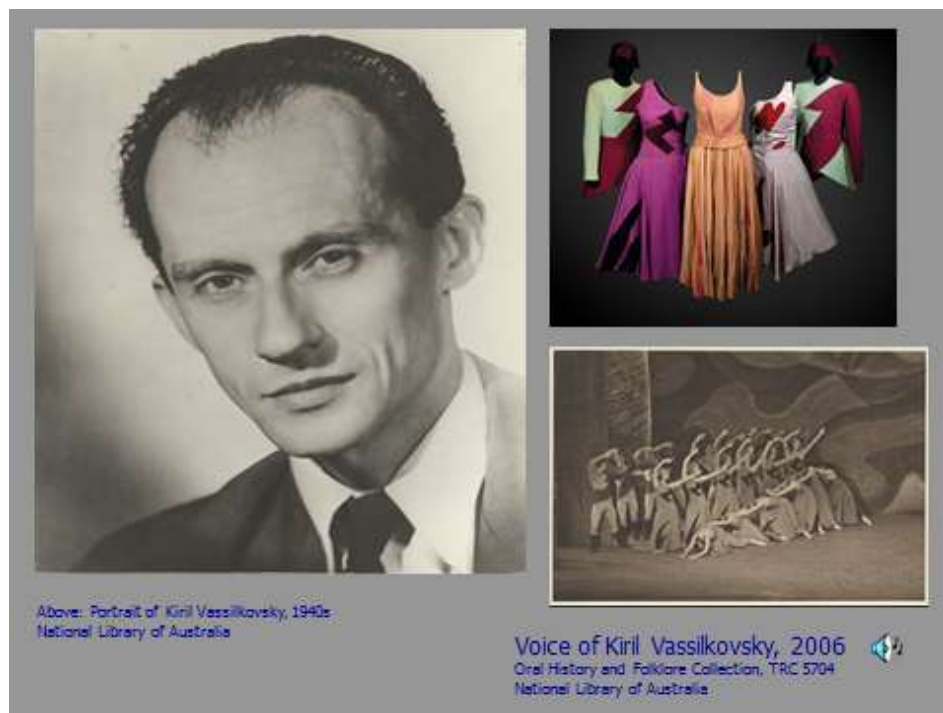
She also danced the role of an Enchanted Princess in *The Firebird* wearing a costume similar at least in cut if not so much in applied design to the one in the slide above right, which is on display in the Gallery's exhibition.

Volkova (as one of those passionate young people Robert bell mentioned) has a favourite story too about the enchanted princesses saying that they normally danced the role in bare feet and they had a particular dance with the golden apples that grew in the enchanted garden. She recounts that the dance with the apples generated a good deal of fun as the dancers tossed the apples back and forth across the stage: 'That was quite a work of art', she says 'because the apples were falling all over the stage. Finally Mr Grigoriev the stage manager said, that if that happens again, because we were having fun, if that happens during the performance you will all be fined a heavy sum of money.' So I think her initial hesitation about coming to Australia quickly disappeared as she immersed herself in her work, and in having a good deal of fun at the same time.

Kiril Vassilkovsky also danced in the corps de ballet of *Les Presages* but his recollections of coming to Australia were different again. There were political reasons why he was glad to join the de Basil company on the 1939–1940 tour.

Well, it was very exciting. It probably changed my life completely. If I had remained in England I might have got bombed or I would have been conscripted into the Army or the Air Force or something when I was 21. And I had just turned 20 and I was very excited to leave. Leave for a new life. I didn't know much about Australia, but I came ... we very soon adapted.

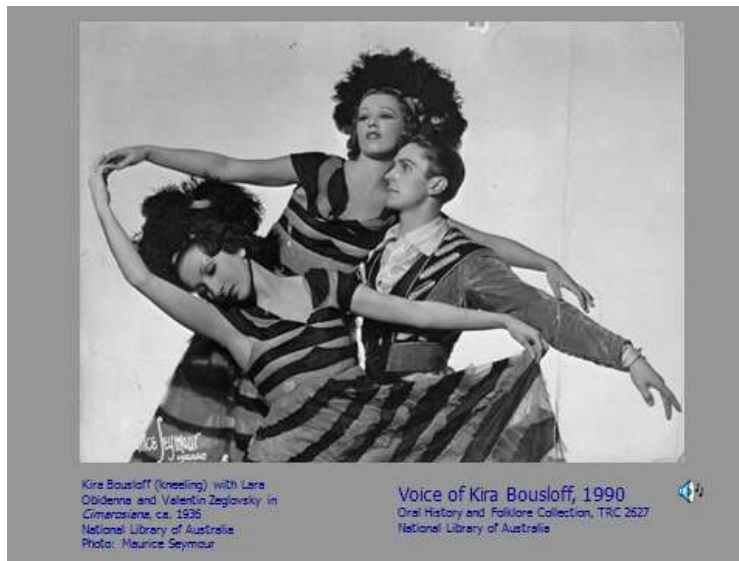
Like Anna Volkova, Vassilkovsky returned to settle in Australia eventually living in Western Australia. He performed with the Borovansky Ballet and staged productions of some of the Ballets Russes repertoire for the Borovansky and other companies.



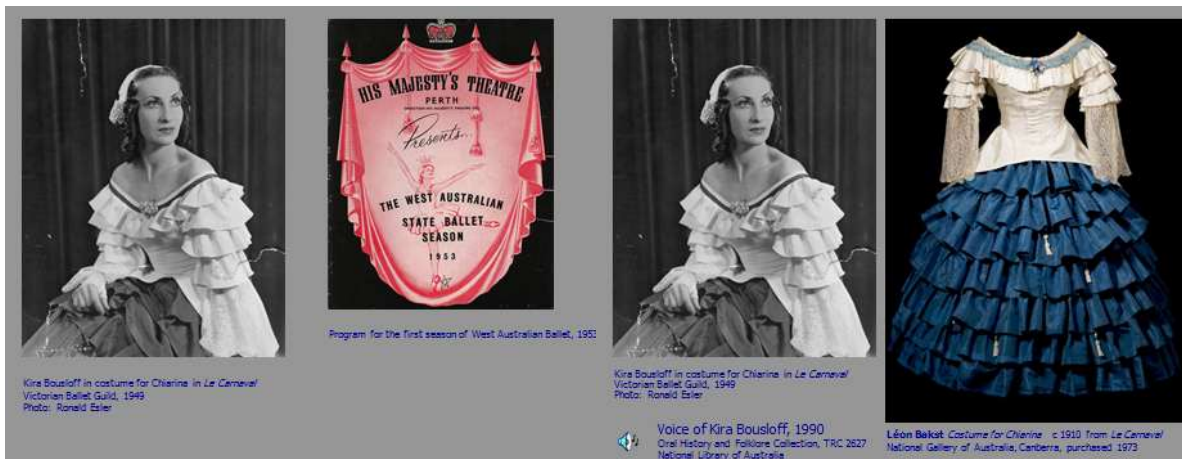
But the question of settling in Australia brings me to Kira Bousloff. With the threat of war looming, and given their often precarious position as stateless people, a number of dancers stayed on in Australia. Bousloff was one who stayed on at the end of the 1938–1939 tour and she speaks of the moment when, standing on the wharf in Adelaide, she watched the ship, which carried all her friends, depart for Europe. It was then that she realised the momentous nature of what she and her partner Serge Bousloff, who was also staying, had done.

And anyway, they were going and we went to the pier to see them off. And as soon as the boat start to move they all went up, the whole ballet company went to the top deck

and they were throwing ‘serpentine’—streamers—they call them ‘serpentine’ in French. So they were throwing those streamers and I kept one little bit, the last one that I could hold on to it. And the boat start to move slowly away and they all went to the top deck and they were all calling ‘Kiroush, Kiroush’ (because that’s what they used to call me as a nickname, instead of Kira) in unison, all those 60 voices. And gradually the boat went further and further and the voices disappear. And I looked at Serge and thought it was like the streamers, something was broken of my life, part of my life. But we look at each other and I said, ‘Well, never mind, we start a new one now’.



And Bousloff did ‘start a new one’ as she said she would and went on to have an enormous influence on the development of ballet in Australia, first briefly in Melbourne where she performed with Ballet Guild and then in Perth where she founded West Australian Ballet. You see her in the slides below dressed in costume for Chiarina in *Le Carnaval* with Ballet Guild along with the front cover for the first season of West Australian Ballet in 1953. For comparison there is also an image of the costume for Chiarina presently on display in the Gallery.



So before I move to my final few slides, I have always looked upon the visits of the Ballets Russes companies to Australia as indications of the existence of a mutual fascination between the dancers and their Australian fans. Although we more often than not focus on the significance of the visits for the development of the arts in Australia, and indeed the visits had a huge impact, I think Irina Baronova brings out so clearly that it wasn't a one-sided interest but that the dancers were as fascinated by the situation in which they found themselves in Australia as Australians were with the glamour and exoticism and the new ways of approaching the arts that the Ballets Russes presented. But I think it's also salutary to remind ourselves that it was a huge step in the 1930s to come to Australia and leave family and friends and home comforts behind as Anna Volkova reminds us. And also that there were sometimes particular benefits to be had, which may only have become apparent after the fact, as Kiril Vassilkovsky points out. But in the end I suspect that there were very few who did not find Australia a source of endless fascination. Kira Bousloff perhaps sums it all up.

Everything about my life ... I mean if tomorrow I am dead and I stand in front of the doors of the angel, or whoever is there to let me in to paradise, or send me down to hell, asking me if I want to go back to this life and live a life again, which sort of life I would like to live, who will I like to be, I will say to live exactly what I live now. This life from beginning to the end.

But I think we can perhaps also look at more recent events to remind us that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The wonderful photograph on the right of the slide below is of Vicki Attard, former principal dancer with the Australian Ballet. It is



Above: Dancers of the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet with Dr. Ewan Murray-Will, 1936 or 1937
National Library of Australia

Right: Vicki Attard, Principal Artist, The Australian Ballet
In costume for *The Sleeping Beauty*
Ueno market, Tokyo 1993
Photo: Jim McFarlane



clearly set-up by the photographer, Jim McFarlane, and has many layers of meaning, whereas the shot on the left is more casual and straightforward. Yet beneath its complexity, including its implicit question of at what or at whom Attard is pointing her camera (is it us?), McFarlane's shot still says to me that dancers on tour continue to enjoy new surroundings just as the Ballets Russes dancers did as I have discussed and as you can see in the slide above.

And what about the costume Vicki Attard is wearing! It was designed by Hugh Colman for Aurora in a 1984 Australian Ballet production of *The Sleeping Beauty*. While the shape of tutus has clearly changed over the decades, I love that the decorative, appliquéd pattern of the 1984 design still has a fleeting reference to the past, something I think that Colman is quite skilled at doing.



So finally, I hope you will continue to enjoy looking at the costumes on display in *Ballets Russes: the art of costume* and that some of the context in which they were worn in Australia will enhance your viewing.

