

LYNNE GOLDING
AUSTRALIAN BALLERINA



EDITH PILLSBURY

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LYNNE GOLDING

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EDITH PILLSBURY

Dedication

To Jackie Everidge who nurtured my love of dance

&

To Alan Hope Kirk who nurtured my love of words



Foreward

People often ask me, “What’s your favorite theatre?” Always, without hesitation, I answer “The Princess in Melbourne.” The next question, inevitably, is, “Why?” That’s easy, too. It’s because within the welcoming walls of the grand old lady in Spring Street I have had more than my share of great theatrical experiences.

It was at the Princess that I saw Marlene Dietrich and Lillian Gish; Hayes Gordon in *Kismet* and June Bronhill in *The Sound of Music*; Marjorie Lawrence in *Aida* and Marie Collier in *The Consul*; Reg Livermore in *Betty Blokk Buster Follies*; Margaret Rutherford, Lauren Bacall, Gladys Moncrieff, *West Side Story*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Miserables*... What memories!

But above all, I remember a night in February, 1951 – can it be so long ago! – when, at the Princess, I saw my first *Swan Lake*. It was the undoubted highlight of the premiere season of the new National Theatre Ballet. Founded by the great Gertrude Johnson, the company was destined to take its place alongside the National’s opera and drama activities.

I was perched way up in the gods, in the only seat I could scrounge. I can still remember that humble seat, and how excited and alarmingly crowded the gallery was. It seemed everyone wanted to see that *Swan Lake*. After all, it was not only the first time it had ever been presented in full in Australia, it was also the very first time we’d ever seen a ballet that occupied an entire evening’s program. But more importantly, it introduced a new star, the tiny prima ballerina Lynne Golding, gamely and gracefully dancing the gruelling twin roles of Odette and Odile. She was perfection.

In fact, I had seen Lynne Golding dance before, but at the Tivoli; there she frequently had featured spots in lively variety bills or played the enchanting fairy princess in pantomime. This *Swan Lake* was different, a world away. Here was beauty, elegance, vulnerability, tragedy. This was the real thing, and audiences and critics knew it. I saw Lynne dance only once more, and then, it seemed, she vanished.

Fast forward, now, to 1993. I was busily at work researching *National Treasure*, a book chronicling the story of Gertrude Johnson and her crusading National Theatre Movement. Someone suggested that I really should speak to Lynne. Lynne Golding? In Melbourne? Yes, Lynne was indeed living and working in Melbourne. She graciously agreed to allow me to interview her and to record her memories.

What an afternoon that was! For two hours this remarkable lady held me spellbound with the story of her struggle to find a place in professional dance in the unsympathetic setting of pre-war Australia, her Tivoli years and her National Theatre Ballet triumphs. She revealed, too, her subsequent career in London, New York and Caracas, and how, happily, she found her way back to Australia. Here, eventually and inevitable, she turned to teaching, determined to pass on her skill and dedication to new generations.

I saw evidence of this a few months later when Lynne invited me to the graduation performance of some of her Council of Adult Education students. Their appreciation and love of her was evident. Since then, we’ve kept in touch. I love and respect her and I continue to marvel at her infectious enthusiasm for life and her devotion to dance.

How wonderful, then, that thanks to her loving husband, Alan Kirk, and her expert biographer, Edith Pillsbury, we can all share the inspiring story of this remarkable and extraordinary life. Lynne Golding, prima ballerina – take another curtain call!

Frank Van Straten OAM
December, 2007



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Introduction

Russia—June, 2006. I was among a group of ballet teachers in St. Petersburg to observe classes and attend lectures at the Vaganova Ballet Academy, arguably the world's finest training ground for classical dancers. I, a former teacher, was there to do research for a book on the history of the school. Sitting next to me was another American, a retired teacher from Los Angeles. I had met him just a few days earlier, and we hit it off right away. He was smart, he was erudite, and we shared a common interest not just in ballet technique, but in Russian history, as well. Furthermore, he was funny—an asset high on my list of “musts” for a new friendship. As we waited for the next class to begin, Alan Kirk whispered to me, “Edith, darling,” (he calls everyone “darling”) “have I got a writing project for you!” In that moment, my world changed. Alan explained how, in the 1950s, he had met and married Australian ballerina Lynne Golding. The more he told me about this remarkable woman, the more intrigued I became.

Five months later, I was on my way to Melbourne. As soon as I arrived, I began interviewing Lynne's friends and colleagues, and more importantly, I talked to Lynne. I was immediately entranced by Lynne's charm and grace, and I was fascinated by the scope of her career. Lynne Golding's contribution to the history and development of ballet in Australia is inestimable. Her story is an important one, and it is a story that begs to be told.

Additionally, I discovered a wealth of wonderful pictures of Lynne—at one point in her career she was probably the most photographed woman in Australia. Although ballet is a dynamic art, and no photographs can adequately express the essence of movement, the pictures in this book are an attempt to capture the magic that is Lynne Golding.





Act 1

For some of us, childhood memories are as detailed and precise as a Vermeer portrait; for others, recollections are painted with softer, more Impressionistic strokes. For Lynne Golding, some old memories are as clear as yesterday's, while others evoke mood rather than specifics.

Lynne has no first hand memory of the day, but she was born on April 13, 1920 at the Royal Hospital for Women in Paddington, Sydney. She was the fourth child of Melinda and John Golding. She joined a rapidly growing family that included five year old Neville, three year old Jack, and one year old Jeanne. In a few years, another daughter, Pamela, would complete the family.

Both parents were fond of the theatre, and music was always a presence in their home. Lynne's mother had a lovely mezzo-soprano voice, and was a gifted, self-taught pianist. She played very expressively, and Lynne attributes her own musical sensitivity to the inspiration of her mother's playing. Other sensory memories, like the scent of the solvent her mother used to clean her paint brushes, bear witness to her mother's diverse artistic talents. Her mother was also a resourceful woman of many talents and boundless energy—she painted, she gardened, and she nurtured five active children. Her garden nourished the Goldings, and she used her dressmaking skills to support the family. She was also the family disciplinarian—Lynne remembers being hung up, coat and all, on a hook by the door for some infraction of the family rules. The punishment was brief, and more amusing than traumatic. She does not remember the crime.

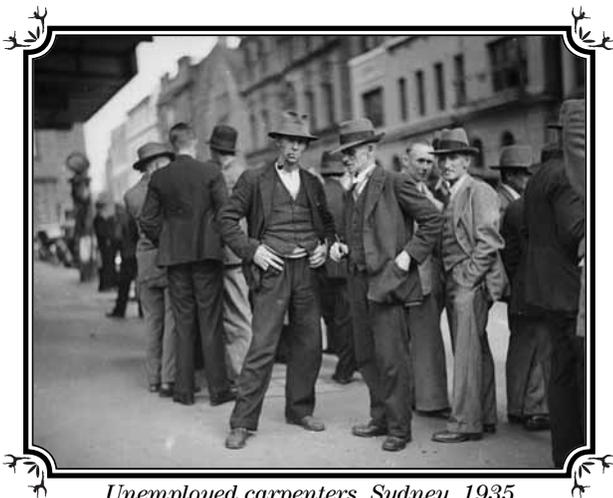
Lynne remembers reading seed catalogs aloud while her mother planted carrots, parsley and parsnips. She inherited her mother's love of gardening as well as her green thumb, and wherever she lived, she always grew flowers, whether in a garden, on a patio, or in window boxes. She also learned dressmaking skills from her mother, which have served her in good stead, from the design and construction of tutus to making her own draperies. Piano lessons never figured in Lynne's busy life, but she shared her mother's love of music.

There was not much money in the Golding household for necessities, much less for frivolous extras. However, there was one aspect of her children's education about which Mrs. Golding felt strongly. In Australia, as in class-conscious England, an "unrefined" regional accent can impede one's success in business circles and society. Accordingly, Mrs. Golding found funds for elocution lessons for the children. A local teacher came to the house each week to instruct the little Goldings in the fine points of tone, phrasing, and enunciation. With a twinkle in her eye and tongue in cheek, Lynne recalls her great-aunt's words: "One must enunciate with clarified conciseness and dulcet tones." Auntie would be proud, for Lynne's speech bears no semblance of the often disdained Aussie accent.

The Golding household was happy but hectic, and Mrs. Golding was sometimes hard-pressed to keep track of five active, occasionally mischievous children. Lynne remembers that her father, a labourer, worked long hours, and during the dark days of the Depression he was frequently forced to leave the city in order



*Clockwise from top:
Lynne's mother, Neville, Jeanne, Lynne, Jack*



Unemployed carpenters, Sydney, 1935



to find work in the gold fields.

One memory is clear: Lynne had a passion for dance from an early age. She danced in her room, in the halls, in the yard. She danced when her mother played the piano, and when the piano was silent, she danced to the music in her head. This need to dance, this obsession with movement resulted in a sense of disconnection from her family. Her memories of her brothers and sisters are fond, but they are tinged with regret. She remembers hearing her sisters and brothers say, “Why doesn’t Lynne come to dinner?” Or to play. Or to bed. She wishes she could have been closer to her siblings, but hers was a calling she could not deny, for she had a single-minded devotion to dance. A seminal moment occurred when Lynne was twelve. She attended an exhibit, “Orphans of the Tsar,” that featured photographs of Russian dancers Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinsky. The pictures of these magical, almost mythical beings inspired Lynne, and she left the exhibition with the determination that she would, somehow, some way, become a ballerina.

She knew that her sheer love of movement was not enough to achieve this ambition—she needed intensive training. Unfortunately, lessons, at one shilling per class, were too expensive for the daughter of a labourer, so Lynne continued her academic studies at Sydney Girls’ High School, with the intent of becoming a teacher. She tried to quiet her dancing feet and apply herself to her studies. She entered a writing contest at St. Andrew’s, her local parish, the topic; “Why I attend Sunday School.” Her essay, which was deemed “mercifully short,” won the contest, and she was awarded a scholarship to the School of Arts in Marrickville. One must consider that brevity may have been the essay’s winning quality. The award was enrolment in a Saturday morning writing class. Perhaps there was a good fairy in the wings, for her admission to the School of Arts led her not to a career in literature, but to the path of her dreams.



*Anna Pavlova with Vaslav Nijinsky in
“Pavillon d’Armide”*



*Anna Pavlova with
Nicholas Legat in
“La Fille mal Gardée”*

One morning, on the way to her Saturday class, Lynne and her mother followed the sound of classical music to a classroom filled with young girls. The children, some dressed in dancing outfits, others in street clothes, were taking ballet class, using chair backs as makeshift *barres*. Lynne immediately forgot about the writing class. She begged her mother to allow her to join the ballet class, and her mother, who saw the class as a good outlet for her perpetually active daughter, agreed. There was still the issue of expense, but just then another good fairy stepped forward. The Goldings’ neighbor, a Mrs. Dwyer, offered to pay for her lessons. This gift was precious to Lynne, and profound in that it came from a woman who, like the Goldings, suffered the financial hardships of the Depression.

Like all beginners, Lynne began in the back of the class, but because of her talent and determination, was soon moved to the front row. Her teacher told the other girls, “Do it the way Lynne does it.” Lynne would hear this refrain from teachers for the rest of her dancing life. This first teacher was one Vera LeVere, about whom little is known, except that Miss LeVere was a teacher of limited ability; in fact, she seemed to know less about classical dance than did her students. Trained as a tap and Spanish dancer, the subtleties of classical dance eluded her. Miss LeVere went into the city once a week for Royal Academy of Dancing (RAD) training in an effort to keep a step ahead of her students, figuratively and





literally. Insecurity about her teaching abilities may account for a stern, abusive manner, which tended to frighten the children, rather than to inspire them. As Lynne tells it, “Miss LeVere threw the syllabus at me.” One might infer from this that Vera offered the girl more and more technical challenges in rapid succession. No—LeVere literally threw the RAD syllabus book at her! Lynne, in addition to mastering her class work, applied herself to learning the French terminology, as well as learning technique from a book—a most unorthodox, and rarely successful method.

Fortunately, Lynne’s talent included an uncanny ability to train herself. This aptitude is extraordinary, in that classical dance technique is an unnatural and counter-intuitive form, from turning out the legs at the hip to dancing on the tips of one’s toes. Her assets were a natural turnout, a tremendous *ballon*, and a phenomenal turning ability that became her trademark. Lynne devoted her very existence to her calling. She practised with untiring fervour, and voraciously read every ballet book she could find. She also had an iron will. She drew not just her artistic inspiration, but her work ethic from that of her idol, Pavlova, whose mantra was “pay attention to details.” In many ways, Lynne was always more adult than child. She knew her goal, and she made a plan to achieve it.



Lynne made rapid progress in class, started *pointe* work within six months, and within a year she was performing in, and winning, dance competitions. The night before her first competition, Lynne and her mother were up most of the night, putting the details on the costume her mother had made for her. In 1934, at age 14, Lynne won first place at the City of Sydney Eisteddfod. Such was her talent, she won first prize, not just in her own age group, but in the age group above hers as well. She was told if she had smiled, she would have received a perfect score. The reason she had not smiled was not nervousness or shyness, but a small vanity. Dancing was such a joy to the child, it was a challenge not to smile, but Lynne was embarrassed by a gold tooth that, she felt, ruined her smile.

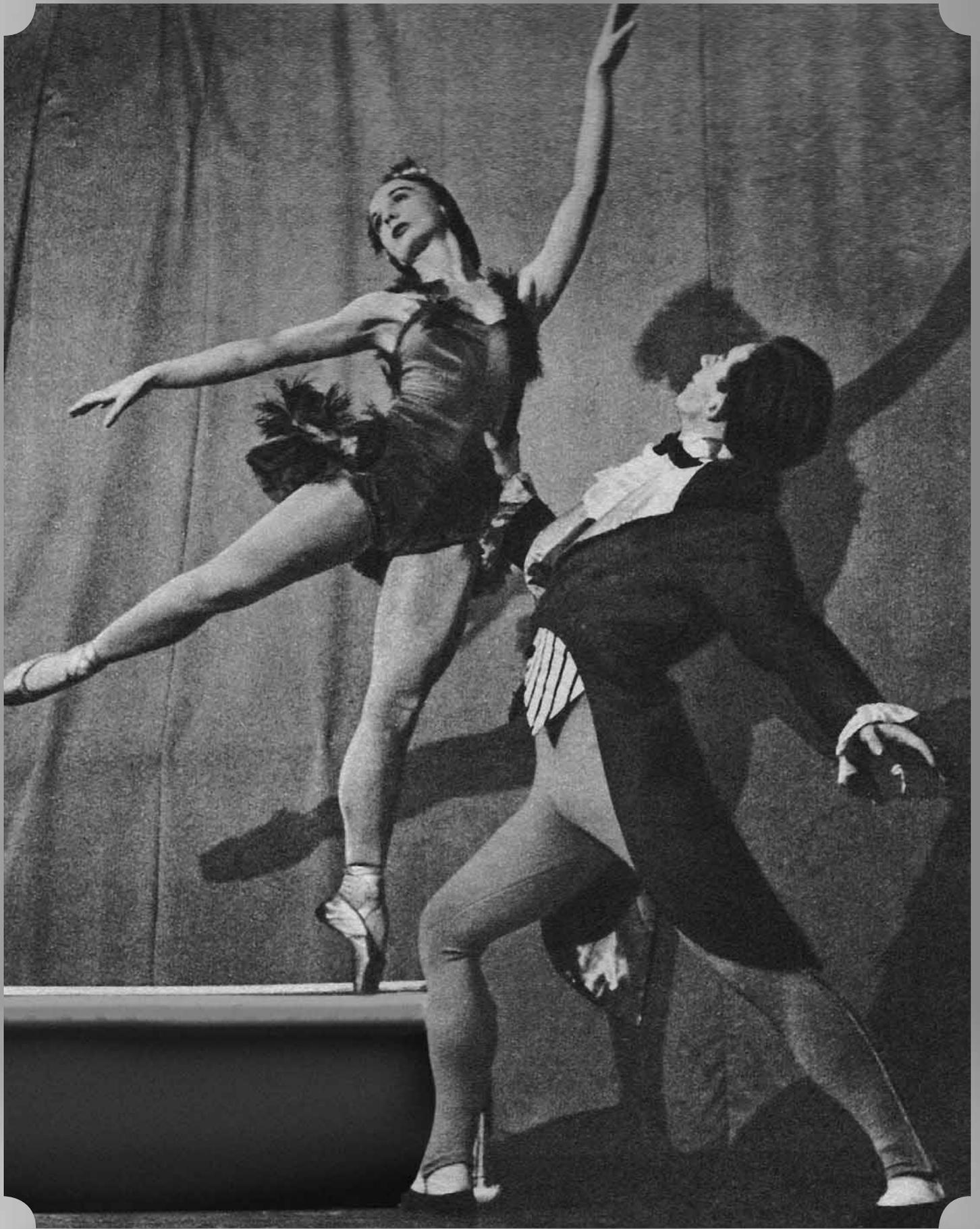


City of Sydney Eisteddfod, 1934

Nonetheless, the judge was impressed. She told the young girl that she was already “a fully trained dancer.” The judge spoke to the audience of Lynne’s exceptionally expressive, ethereal quality—a quality rare in a dancer so young and inexperienced. Yet, Lynne was not aware of projecting this quality; she was doing what came naturally to her—she was dancing the music.

Like a hummingbird, Lynne was always active, always moving, and she rarely slept more than a few short hours each night. In addition to her classes with Miss LeVere, her tireless solitary practice and her academic homework, Lynne helped her mother, who took in sewing to supplement the family income. Schoolwork was no longer a priority but, although Lynne’s grades never faltered, the girl was exhausted. Often, in the midst of a particularly tiresome academic lecture, Lynne found herself gazing at her exquisitely sculpted feet, these feet which were made for dancing, and her body, built for movement, felt trapped behind her school desk. At age fifteen, Lynne left formal schooling behind her.

Lynne quickly progressed as much as she could under Vera’s tutelage. Lynne couldn’t master *batterie* because her teacher did not know the steps herself, much less how to teach them. The child’s eager mind and body needed more challenging work; she





1930s

needed a teacher who could provide the concentrated studies a pre-professional dancer must have.

Enter another good fairy, this time in the guise of LeVere's assistant, Norman Patton. This man recognized Lynne's talent and determination, and he became dedicated to facilitating her development as a dancer. He knew of her family's financial difficulties and he bought her dancing shoes as well as making costumes for her performances. He also arranged for Leon Kellaway, one of Sydney's finest teachers, to provide Lynne with ballet instruction, free of charge.

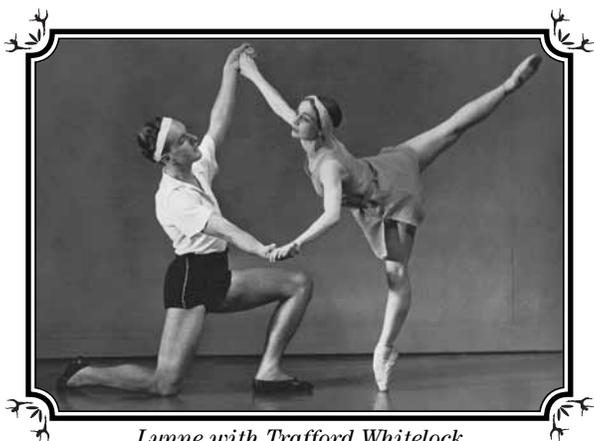
In return for her "free" classes, Lynne was expected to clean Kellaway's studio, wash his dishes, and to be his teaching assistant. In the beginning, she was in awe of Kellaway; she even had a bit of a schoolgirl crush on him. Her family, who thought Leon took advantage of Lynne's Cinderella-like existence at his studio, referred to him as "Killer Kellaway," but Lynne would say nothing against him. She soon found herself demonstrating and leading classes of all levels, even the boys' classes. Kellaway readily recognized her innate teaching abilities, and later left her to run the studio for extended periods while he pursued performing opportunities. Lynne had not planned to become a teacher while still a student herself; yet, even at a young age she found the work rewarding.



Leon Kellaway

Lynne's command of ballet technique grew daily. She worked herself relentlessly, and learned not only from corrections given her, but also from those addressed to her fellow students. She absorbed every precious gem of information from each class, whether given by touch, word, or demonstration. And, like all good teachers, she learned from the act of teaching.

Every day, Lynne learned more and more, but as valuable as Kellaway's classes were, it is another teacher to whom Lynne credits her development as an artist. Riassa Kouznetsova, a Polish dancer, had chosen to remain in Australia after the 1938-39 Ballet Russe tour. She was a fine dancer, with many solo roles to her credit, but her real strength was pedagogy; she was a brilliant teacher. Lynne met Raissa Kouznetsova at Kellaway's studio, and she began studies with her while continuing her work with Kellaway. Lynne formed a bond with Kouznetsova that was unlike any other relationship in her life. Today, she still refers to Kouznetsova as her "mamoushka." This remarkable teacher taught her the subtleties of interpretation. She taught her how to darn her *pointe* shoes so her footsteps would be soundless. She taught her technique, and she taught her the classical repertoire. (Kouznetsova had worked extensively with Mikhail Fokine during the 1938 tour, and she passed on to Lynne the priceless interpretive details she had learned from this master.) She told her stories of her own artistic heritage and of her performing career throughout Europe, and she instilled in Lynne the assurance that she was part of this rarefied world—she was a dancer.



Lynne with Trafford Whitelock

However, Lynne was determined to be not only a dancer, but a ballerina. Too often, the term "ballerina" is used extravagantly, to describe any female dancer in a ballet company. Traditionally, ballet dancers are assigned ranks in a company: *corps de ballet*, second soloist, first soloist, and finally, ballerina (or, for a man, *premier danseur*). "Ballerina" is a title that reflects years of hard work and dedication, and is not a title easily come by. Few of

Left: Lynne with Henry Legerton in "The Nightingale and the Rose"





"Where's Charley?" Tivoli, 1950

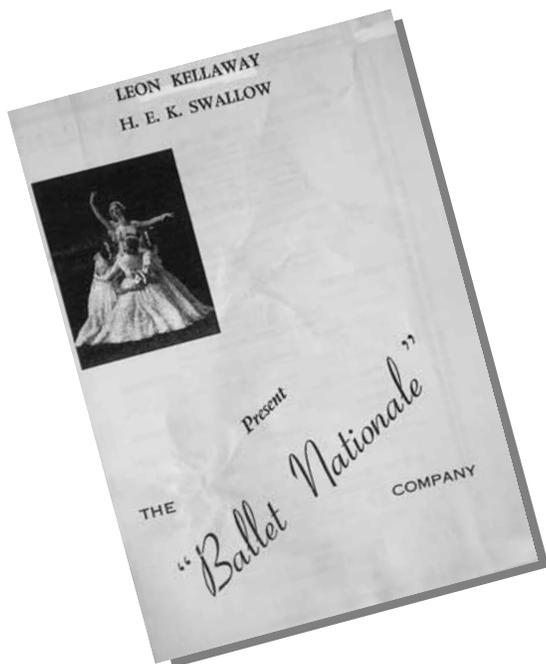
those who join the *corps* ever achieve ballerina status. Lynne knew this, and she knew that she had the technical prowess, the artistic depth, and the mental fortitude to achieve the goal of ballerina. Yet, she knew the odds were against her.

Performing opportunities were limited for a young female dancer in the late 1930s, especially in Australia. There were a few small companies, all of them struggling to survive. Ballet companies needed costumes, sets, and orchestras. Rehearsal halls were expensive, and full houses not guaranteed during those Depression years. One unfortunate, but necessary, source of income was from the dancers themselves. Some companies actually charged membership fees for their dancers. The rationale behind this unusual obligation was that the companies offered valuable performing opportunities for young dancers. Lynne's own financial position was particularly precarious and, unhappily, she could not afford the luxury of paying to dance.

Only one company, founded and directed by Edouard Borovansky, offered contracts to professional dancers, although in its early years, the seasons were short and the layoffs frequent. "Boro," as he was known, ran a school in Melbourne with his wife, Xenia. Lynne attended Xenia's classes whenever she was in Melbourne, and she recalls, "Xenia was a wonderful teacher who'd had marvelous schooling...I loved her classes." These classes were seasoned with a soupçon of Russian eccentricity. Former Borovansky dancer Jack Manuel remembers, "She would say, 'Ve vill do waltz,' and we would waltz across the floor while she finished her cigarette—for hours, it seemed!" Once again, Lynne's technique set the standard for the rest of the class, which did nothing to endear her to the other dancers nor, apparently, to Boro. The fact was, he already had two petite dancers in the company, Edna Busse and Rachel Cameron, and was not inclined to invite another, perhaps more virtuosic, dancer to join them. He also had a particular disdain for Leon Kellaway, and by extension, Kellaway's dancers.

The world of ballet teachers is well known to be a jealous and often petty one, not given to artistic generosity. Boro derisively told Lynne that Kellaway was, "no good, he was only a musical comedy dancer." This, of a dancer who had, as Boro had, performed with Pavlova. At any rate, although Lynne sent her resumé to Boro, she was never invited to join his company.

Touring European companies occasionally took on local dancers. The Ballet Russe, in its many and varied manifestations, regularly included Australia in its touring schedules. Many young Australian dancers performed as extras, sharing the stage with the likes of Irina Baronova, Tatiana Riabouchinska, and David Lichine. During the company's Sydney season, Lynne danced in the *Firebird* as one of the *kostchei* and, due to her tiny size, was cast as a child in *Petrouchka*. Impending war in Europe wrought havoc with touring ballet companies, the casts of which were largely Eastern European. Ballet companies have their own nationality, dance, and their members consider themselves, first and foremost, citizens of the world. However, when war threatens, choices have to be made. When the Ballet Russe completed its Australian tour in 1938-39, several dancers, including Edouard Borovansky and Raissa Kouznetsova, chose to remain in Australia rather than return to an unstable, unsafe Europe. During World War II, touring companies took refuge in North and South America, and Australia



Left: Tivoli, 1940s