

Early Spanish Dance in Canada

One of the jobs of an historian is to take seemingly disparate pieces of information and assemble a story. Like other aspects of Canada's history, our dance history is filled with international influences. Touring artists and immigration have been major factors in how dance in this country has been shaped. Our theatrical dance history in the first half of the twentieth century was deeply affected by the presence of ballet through Russian, British and European immigration, and also by tours made by Anna Pavlova, Mikhail Mordkin, the Ballets Russes, Kurt Jooss, and the Sadler's Wells Ballet. Modern dance developed a greater presence in the 1930s with tours by Mary Wigman, a German Expressionist dancer, to cities such as Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg. There are Canadians who studied Wigman's technique at her schools in New York and Dresden in the 1930s and then created a lineage of her style in Canada. There are also Canadians who worked with American modern dance pioneers such as Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman and Martha Graham. But there is another theatrical dance form that emerges in 1930s Canada and we are still gathering evidence to reveal the whole picture. Each year, we find new information that indicates the presence of flamenco and Spanish dance in Canada in the early twentieth century. I'm Amy Bowring, Director of Collections and Research at Dance Collection Danse. Welcome to a new edition of Artifact of the Month.

Our featured artifact-of-the-month, a broadsheet from 1935, is among several artifacts that have taught us more about the earliest signs of Spanish dance in Canada. Beginning in the 1930s in particular, major Canadian cities, such as Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver, saw an influx of performances by international touring artists. José Cansino and Tonia de Aragon, La Argentina, Carola Goya, Argentinita, Vicente Escudero and Teresina all visited Canada multiple times. In this decade, we also see Spanish dance teachers settling in Canada, as well as Canadians travelling outside the country to study this art form and returning to teach and perform.

House and souvenir programs, flyers and newspaper clippings provide some indication of the quantity and variety of Spanish dancers who toured Canada. Escudero's 1932 performance at Eaton Auditorium included costumes designed by Pablo Picasso and Argentinita's company included her sister, Pilar Lopez, and acclaimed guitarist Carlos Montoya.

José Cansino and Tonia de Aragon's 1935 tour definitely included performances in Toronto and Vancouver. De Aragon returned to Vancouver the following year for the Cuban Follies show at the Lyric Theatre and she made a stop at Winnipeg's Civic Auditorium. A 1935 program from a New York performance gives us an indication of the dances that might have been included in their Canadian shows. Some were narrative, such as their *Sevilla* about a young girl navigating her first love amid the restrictions of her aristocratic lineage, or their *Rapsodia Valencia* about a little flower girl who shares a street corner with a fruit vendor. And there were dances rooted in different traditions and regions of Spain such as *Danza Quinta*, *Garrotin*, *La Corrida* and *Jota Aragonesa*. Cansino was a member of a famous family of dancers from Madrid who immigrated to the United States in 1913. Antonio Cansino's children, Angel, Eduardo and Elisa, performed on many of the vaudeville circuits as The Dancing Cansinos. Though the evidence is unclear, José appears to be the youngest of Antonio's four children. A school was established in New York and Angel published a book on how to play the castanets. Eduardo married a dancer from the Ziegfeld Follies named Volga Hayworth and their children, Eduardo Jr., Margarita and Verron, also became performers. Margarita adopted her mother's maiden name and became famous as the actress Rita Hayworth.

Angel Cansino and his partner Susita were brought to Toronto in 1933 to give a workshop at the studio of Dimitri Vladimiroff. Vladimiroff was a Bolshoi-trained ballet dancer as well as a monarchist and an officer in the Don Cossack Army who fled Russia following the Revolution. After a few years in Europe,

he immigrated to Canada in 1925 and set up a studio in Toronto bringing notable guests, such as the famed Ballets Russes choreographer Michel Fokine, to teach and perform. Vladimiroff and Cansino gave a joint concert of Spanish dance and Russian ballet at the Eaton Auditorium. During his residency at Vladimiroff's studio, Cansino taught an *Alegrias* to Vladimiroff's senior dancers, which they performed at the concert. A few years later, Vladimiroff took two students, Rosalind Dilworth and Edna Liggitt, with him to London for training and performing. In London, they studied with Spanish dancer Elsa Brunelleschi and performed in a concert with her in 1935.

An undated brochure for Vladimiroff's school describes the Character Dancing classes as including "Russian, Gypsy, Oriental and Spanish including Castanet Playing". Considering that he stayed in England after 1935, it is difficult to know who else he may have studied Spanish dancing with other than Angel Cansino. It is possible that he made routine trips to New York to keep up his training from 1925 on, or he may have picked it up in Europe between the Revolution and his immigration to Canada. The year before Cansino's visit, Vladimiroff has two dances in his recital of Spanish origin. There is a *Grand Pas Espagnol*, a trio he danced with Liggitt and Dilworth, as well as a *Gypsy Beggar* dance, a solo that betrays the stereotypes and racism of non-Roma people. This raises some general questions about the teaching of Spanish dance in Canada in the 1930s. It is common to find "Spanish Dance" listed in recitals of this period from across the country but we must question the authenticity of the dances until we know more about the credentials of the teachers. With the international touring that was presented in Canada, it is plausible that teachers capitalized on the popularity and exoticism of these foreign dances mimicking the steps and gestures they could remember from the performances and amalgamating that movement with character steps from ballet. Add some Spanish-styled orchestral music and a colourful, frilled dress and there you have instant Spanish dance.

While there is no doubt that this kind of appropriation occurred, there is also evidence of Canadian teachers who made great efforts to study authentic Spanish dance in New York, London and other parts of Europe. Toronto's Alison Sutcliffe studied with Elsa Brunelleschi in London during multiple summer training trips throughout the 1930s. Judging from Sutcliffe's program collection, she also attended a significant number of performances by Spanish artists during her three seasons in New York dancing with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet. It is highly likely that she also studied Spanish and flamenco during her years in New York. BC's Helen Crewe, who taught in Prince Rupert, New Westminster and Vancouver, had immigrated to Canada from England where she had trained with renowned ballet teacher Edouard Espinosa, co-founder of the Royal Academy of Dance, as well as with Elsa Brunelleschi. Helen Crewe's daughter Joan became a dance teacher and provided Vancouver's Kay Armstrong with her first lessons in Spanish dance. Armstrong subsequently studied in New York with Helen Veola, teacher of renowned Spanish dancer José Greco, and later with one of Greco's lead dancers, Luis Olivares.

Two Toronto teachers who have appeared in our records in recent years are Elisa Lopez and Angela Guerreiro. City directories provide evidence of Lopez teaching as early as 1928 and into the 1950s. We know nothing of her background but among her students in the 1930s was a young dancer named Barbara Beck. With encouragement from Lopez, Beck travelled to New York to study with Juan de Beaucaire Montalvo who gave her the stage name Conchita Triana. Triana went on to have a busy solo career performing throughout southern Ontario. A 1937 *Toronto Telegram* clipping reveals that Senora Angela Guerreiro, originally from Spain, had taught in Vancouver where she also sang and danced for a radio program. By 1937, she had moved to Toronto and associated herself with Boris Volkoff's studio. But this is all we know of these two early teachers.

And so the piecing of the puzzle will continue as we try to learn more about the roots of Spanish dance in Canada. The 1930s seem to represent a period of growth for this genre in North America ... occurring simultaneously to the political turmoil that existed in Spain in this decade.