



ASSEMBLÉE INTERNATIONALE 2009

National Ballet School of Cuba



In 1948, Cuban Ballet forefathers Alicia, Fernando and Alberto Alonso established the Alicia Alonso Ballet. They soon realized that a ballet academy was required to nurture the company. In 1950, they founded the Alicia Alonso Ballet Academy, to create the ethical and aesthetic basis of the Cuban Ballet School.

After the Cuban Revolution the National Ballet of Cuba was reorganized, with the Provincial Ballet School in Havana and the National Arts School (ENA) established in 1962. The ENA included the National Ballet School, and had Fernando Alonso as its first Director with company dancers as its professors. The ENA graduated its first class in 1968 and since then National Ballet School graduates have been or are currently dancing with such companies as American Ballet Theatre, the San Francisco Ballet, Ballet of Flanders, Ballet of Hamburg, Leipzig and Dresden, The Royal Ballet of London, the English National Ballet, the Boston Ballet, Mexico's National Dance Company and others.

In addition to being a training centre, the National Ballet School is also a national and international methodological institution. Its unique Cuban method of teaching has been adopted in countries such as Mexico, Italy and Venezuela, with technical assistance provided to countries such as Ecuador, Uruguay, Brazil and South Africa. With such a heavy teaching focus, the National Ballet School graduates students with specialties in dancing as well as in teaching. The National Ballet School is also a Higher Institute for the Arts teaching centre, allowing ENA graduates the option of studying ballet in a post-secondary institution.

The National Ballet School's headquarters include 20 ballet studios, a gym, specialized makeup, languages and computer rooms, a physiotherapy department, infirmary, sound studio and projection room, in addition to other classrooms for theoretical teaching of each specialty. The ENA annually hosts The International Ballet Teaching Academies Encounter and every two years welcomes The International Ballet Students' Contest, which involves students from a number of different countries.

Ramona de Saá

Director, National Ballet School of Cuba

Ramona de Saá Bello began studying classical ballet after having received a scholarship at the age of eleven along with her sister, Margarita de Saá. She was a student with Fernando and Alicia Alonso, Magda González, Mary Skeaping, Ana Ivanova and Jose Parés at the Alicia Alonso Academy.

In 1954 she took part in the first international tour of Latin America by the Alicia Alonso Ballet, later known as Ballet of Cuba and National Ballet Company. In 1957 and 1958 de Saá successfully danced in seasons of California's Greek Ballet directed by Alicia Alonso.

She was one of the first ballerinas of the National Ballet of Cuba, becoming a Soloist and performing Soloist and Principal Dancer roles. Along with Loipa Araujo, Mirta Plá, Josefina Méndez, Aurora Bosch y Margarita de Saá, she became one of the company's most important young dancers, performing the main roles of the classical ballet repertoire. An incurable injury kept her away from the stage until she retired as an active ballerina in 1966, after 12 years of successful work as a dancer.

With the Cuban National Ballet Company de Saá toured Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Venezuela, Mexico, Germany, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, China, Korea, Mongolia and the former Soviet Union.

In 1962 she founded the National School of Arts under the direction of Fernando Alonso. In 1965 she was named Directress of the National Ballet School and in 1977 was promoted as a National Adviser with the Artistic Teaching Division, currently known as National Arts Schools Center, CNEART.

De Saá is an outstanding ballet mistress, one of the most renowned experts in dance teaching in today's world, she is internationally acknowledged as the designer of today's classical dance teaching system in Cuba. She is a Professor with the Cuban National Ballet School, an Assistant Professor with the Higher Institute for the Arts and a Methodologist at the National Arts School Center in Cuba, and the current Director of the Cuban National Ballet School.

In her long career as a Ballet Mistress and Professor, she has taught and graduated different generations of nationally and internationally recognized students, as well as renowned personalities in the ballet world.

She has been the professor and mentor of most of the main male dancers and ballerinas with the Cuban National Ballet company, including, among many others, Principal Dancers Amparo Brito; Ofelia González; Rosario Suárez; Lorena and Lorna Feijó; Alihaydé Carreño; José Manuel Carreño, Principal Dancer with the American Ballet Theatre; and Carlos Acosta, Principal Dancer with The Royal Ballet of the London-based Royal Opera House.

At present she is a promoter and organizer of national and international dance competitions and festivals for ballet students; she has also participated in international events as ballet mistress, jury member and professor in technical assistance programs in different countries.

She has been received important awards and recognitions, including Cuba's highest cultural distinction – the "Felix Varela" Order – granted by the Cuban Council of State; the National Culture Order; the Culture Minister's Diploma for Pedagogical Merit; the National Arts School Founder Diploma and Medal; the "Raúl Gómez García" Order; the Cuban Education Award; the

Jesús Menéndez Medal; the Cuban Council of State's "José Tey" and "Alejo Carpentier" Medals; a Diploma from the Nina Novak Ballet, Caracas, Venezuela; the Citizen of Honor Title by the City of Torino, Italy; the Vignale Danza Award in Italy; the Jeonville Festival Best Mistress Award in Brazil; the Grand Prix as Best International Ballet Mistress at the Regio Danza Festival held in Calabria, Italy.

In Cuba she has been a nominee for the National Arts Teaching Award on four editions, winning the recognition in 2002. She received an Honorary Doctor's Degree in Arts by the Cuban Higher Institute for the Arts.

In 2006 Ramona de Súa Bello received Cuba's National Dance Award for her entire life's work.

Fernando Alonso

Founder, National Ballet School of Cuba

One of the most outstanding figures in the world of ballet, Fernando Alonso, is celebrating his 95th birthday in 2009. Still very active and strong, Alonso has earned prestige worldwide as one of the world's best ballet professors and as the principal creator of the internationally known and praised Cuban Ballet School. Alonso discovered, was the mentor of and formed Cuban Prima Ballerina Assoluta and Director of the Cuban National Ballet Company, Alicia Alonso, to whom he was married for a number of years and with whom he has a daughter, Ballet Maître and Director of the Havana-based ProDanza Center, Laura Alonso.

Born in Havana on December 27th, 1914, Fernando Alonso began in the world of dance in 1936 as a student at the Ballet School of Havana's Pro-Arte Musical Society and continued his technical and artistic training in the United States beginning in 1937 under the guidance of prominent professors, such as Italy's Enrico Zanfretta and Russia's Alexandra Fedorova, Anatole Vilzak, Fierre Vladimirov and Leon Fokin.

In 1938, he joined the Mordkin Ballet and was part of several Broadway musicals. A year later, he joined the American Ballet Caravan, the predecessor of the New York City Ballet, and became a member of the then newly-founded Ballet Theater of the same city in 1940. He reached the position of Soloist and stayed at the Ballet Theater until 1948, when, along with his wife Alicia and brother Alberto Alonso, he became involved in the historic event of setting up the Cuban National Ballet Company, whose general direction he assumed for 27 years.

In 1950, he limited his career as a dancer and devoted himself to directing the Company and the Alicia Alonso Ballet Academy, founded the same year. At that time, Fernando began what is considered his most outstanding work: dance professor or pedagogue.

At the Academy aimed at training the first generations of professional Cuban ballet dancers, he and Alicia conducted serious research aimed at creating a unique teaching method that, with the passage of time, has led to what is known today as the internationally recognized and praised Cuban Ballet School.

From 1948 to 1956, Fernando Alonso knew how to face the apathy and misunderstandings of the Cuban governments which denied the most basic support for cultural efforts such as the Cuban ballet.

In a prophetic and brave paper sent to the Continental Culture Congress held in Santiago de Chile in 1953, read by Cuban National Poet Nicolás Guillén, he said: "Ballet has begun taking

roots in the people, getting the autonomous essence of different nationalities, acquiring new colors, invigorating itself with new currents and helping common people in the grassroots in their artistic and intellectual improvement. Ballet will never again be an art for kings and the powerful but a popular art for the people, as the new times demand. We have to work toward that purpose."

The advent of the 1959 Cuban Revolution gave Maestro Alonso endless possibilities of professional realization as the General Director of the Cuban National Ballet Company from 1959 to 1975, of the National Ballet School from 1962 to 1967 and of the Camagüey Ballet from 1975 to 1992, institutions to which he devoted himself with sustained and valuable creative work.

As of 1992, he became involved in an extensive period of cooperation with the international ballet movement, including his job as director of Mexico's National Dance Company from 1992 to 1994 and of the Monterrey Ballet as of 1995. He later became the Academic Advisor in Classical Dance and Director of the Classical Dance Workshop at the Nuevo León Autonomous University's Performing Arts School.

The Maestro was also a jury member at the New York International Ballet Contest in the United States in 1996; Honorary President of the International Contest of Ballet Teaching Academies and a jury member at the Alicia Alonso International Ballet Contest in Havana as of 1997 and at the International Arts Contest at Cali, Colombia in 1998.

Fernando Alonso was awarded the Cuban Dance Prize for the work of his entire life dedicated to dance and to ballet in particular; the Félix Varela Order by the Cuban Council of State; UNESCO's Arts Prize; the Corporal Arts Prize at the Nuevo León Autonomous University in Mexico and received Honorary Doctor's Degrees by the Cuban Higher Institute for the Arts and the Nuevo León Autonomous University, among other awards.

Fernando Alonso is an inspiration to current Cuban ballet dancers who have followed his teachings with a method that combined the best features of the European and US schools, adapted to the characteristics of Cuba as a nation and the spirit of Cubans as human beings.

Denia Luisa Suárez Leyva

Student Choreographer, National Ballet School of Cuba

Denia Luisa Suárez Leyva began her dance studies at the age of six at a contemporary dance academy in east Guantánamo province. During her seven years studying there, she learned not only dance but also had the opportunity to study choreography. She created pieces for different competitions and won several prizes. At age 10, she began to student ballet, and was then accepted to the National Ballet School of Cuba, ENB, in Havana, where she currently studies.

During Leyva's second year at ENB, she was given the opportunity to create a work for a special student gathering. She continued to create new works and in 2009 was given the chance to choreograph a contemporary piece for Havana's National Choreographic Competition as part of the International Ballet Academies Encounter sponsored by the National Ballet School of Cuba.

Leyva also danced in pieces created by professional dancers and teachers from other countries, such as Caryatid by two Mexican choreographers. In her third year, she had the opportunity to

choreograph a “Danzón”, which is Cuba’s national dance and music genre. Her work, entitled Danzón Barroco, will represent the National Ballet School of Cuba at Canada’s National Ballet School’s Assemblée Internationale in November, 2009.