



ASSEMBLÉE INTERNATIONALE 2009

École de Danse de l'Opéra national de Paris

When Louis XIV was young, the Guild of Fiddlers held the monopoly over the training of dancers. In 1661, he created the Académie Royale de Danse with thirteen of the best instructors in the kingdom. Since the King “needed people able to dance in ballets and other entertainments” their mission was to train professionals and codify the art of dance.

In 1713, Louis XIV founded the Conservatoire de danse, with the aim of “perfecting the talents of the artists of the Académie Royale de Musique.” Here was taught the French School, based on the primacy of harmony, the coordination of movement, the accuracy of placement and a disdain for prowess”.

In 1784, at the same time that he created the Conservatoire de Théâtre and the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris, Louis XVI gave the Opera school official status by royal decree. Among other things, the decree called for the creation of a special class for children under the age of twelve, no doubt out of a desire to recruit young pupils who were untainted by prior training. Though these official texts would later be improved, the key elements remained unchanged. Napoléon who was so proud of anything he felt embodied national prestige, used the Paris school as a model to create two similar schools in Milan and Naples to which teachers and regulations were exported.

Candidates aged between six and eight, and later ten, were selected by the ballet masters according to their appearance: “One should only admit into Terpsichore's nursery those whom Nature has intended to represent Beauty in its Temple” (reg. of 1807).

From 1805 onwards, the pupils were expected to give a performance inside the School in the presence of the administrators, orchestra directors and premiers sujets. But it was on the stage of the Opera, in the midst of their elders that they made their debuts in children's roles or as extras in return for remuneration. “Each pupil will enter into a contractual obligation with the Académie Royale de Musique. He will be obliged to follow all lessons exactly and to make himself useful to the Opera on all occasions when required, without the right to claim any remuneration” (reg. of 1780). The work was seen as recompense for the free tuition.

On March 28, 1842, Jules Ferry passed a law making primary, secular education in public schools obligatory for all children between the ages of six and thirteen.

Apparently, it took a long time for Jules Ferry's laws to be applied at the Opera's school. It took until 1890 for the pupils to gain access to public education and until 1919 for the Certificat d'étude primaire to be a prerequisite for enrolment in the Corps de ballet at the age of fourteen.

The quality of the school, which had never ceased to improve since its creation, started to falter during the 1830's. In 1860, Marie Taglioni, a dance inspector since 1858, was appointed to head the classe de perfectionnement that had been created at her own initiative. The end of the century proved to be a difficult time. Ballets were rarely staged and the dancers only appeared in extracts or as entertaining additions to the operas. With dance reduced to a secondary role, the school lost its direction. In 1930, Lifar was instrumental in restoring the Opera's confidence units dance school.

In 1930, Serge Lifar appointed to lead the troupe, was instrumental in restoring the Opera's confidence in its dance school. He made a point of giving the artists who graduated from it a chance to perform instead of systematically inviting foreign soloists.

An exceptional institution in terms of its longevity and thanks to a succession of remarkable teachers – who had for the most part made careers within the Opera Ballet Compagny – The Ballet School continues the mission it has been entrusted with for over two hundred years: passing on French tradition to future artists.

www.operadeparis.fr/cns11/live/onp/L_Opera/L_Ecole_de_Danse/index.php?lang=en

Elizabeth Platel

Director, École de Danse de l'Opéra national de Paris

Elisabeth Platel started to dance at the conservatoire of St Germain-en-Laye then at the Conservatoire National de Paris in Christiane Vaussard's class. She won her first Prix du Conservatoire in 1975 which opened the doors of the Ballet School. She joined the corps de ballet in 1976, was promoted "Première danseuse" in 1979 and "Danseuse Etoile" after her first Giselle, on 23 December 1981.

Until 1999, when she made her farewell appearance in La Sylphide, she performed for all the major classic choreographers including George Balanchine, John Neumeier and Rudolf Nureyev in particular, for whom she gave first performances of many roles.

She has been awarded the Prix Benois de la danse for her lifelong achievements and in particular for her role as ambassador of the French school throughout the world. While continuing to appear as a guest Etoile, she rapidly felt the need to pass on her art and precious insight into dance. A guest teacher in France and abroad, Elisabeth Platel has also produced ballets and coordinated teaching for the State diploma.

In September 2004, she took over as Director of the Ballet School.

Florent Melac

Student Choreographer, École de Danse de L'Opéra National de Paris

Florent Melac was born in Tarbes, in the South of France. He discovered dance at the age of eight with contemporary dance and started studying ballet at the age of 10. He joined the École de Danse de l'Opéra National de Paris in 2005 at 12 years old. In 2006, he danced in *Scaramouche*, a ballet created by José Martinez for l'École de Danse. He participated each year in the *Démonstrations* of the school at the Palais Garnier as well as in the *Défilé* with the school and the Corps de Ballet of the Paris Opéra Ballet Company.

During the 2009 annual school performances at the Palais Garnier, Melac performed a semi-soloist role in *Péchés de Jeunesse* by Jean-Guillaume Bart as well as a role in *Yondering* by John Neumeier. He also took part in the school's Japan Tour, with performances in Tokyo and Osaka, in April and May of 2009.