

COLLECTION FINDING AID



Kirsova Ballet in Australia 1941-1944

Performing Arts Programs and Ephemera (PROMPT)

Australian Collection Development

This finding aid lists programs and ephemera which document the life of the Kirsova Ballet in Australia between 1941 and 1944.

Historical notes

Helene Kirsova came to Australia in 1936 with the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet.

Born Ellen Wittrup in Denmark, she had trained with Europe's leading ballet teachers and had reached prima ballerina status dancing with major European companies and working with choreographers such as Leonide Massine and Michel Fokine. Kirsova received star billing for the 1936 Australian tour which was entrepreneured by Colonel W. de Basil. De Basil brought more companies to Australia in 1938 and 1940 which further opened up a world of exotic and dazzling ballet to Australian audiences. The advent of these 'Ballets Russes' companies also had a lasting legacy in the form of members of the companies who elected to stay in Australia. Two of the most prominent of these were Edouard Borovansky and Helene Kirsova both of whom formed companies of their own which had lasting influences on the development of ballet in Australia.

Kirsova initially returned to England with the Monte Carlo Russian ballet in 1937 but returned early in 1938 when she married the Danish Vice Consul in Sydney, Erik Fischer. She soon established a ballet school developing local Australian dancers as well as engaging other dancers from the de Basil companies who remained in Australia. She formed her own company in 1941. Based in Sydney, the company also successfully toured Australia in spite of the difficulties of movement around the country in wartime, as well as the constant threat of male dancers being enlisted into wartime duty. After a short life span of three years the company was disbanded in 1944 following its Brisbane season. Kirsova went to Europe in 1947 with her second husband the Australian journalist Peter Bellew and lived in Paris. She died on the 22nd February 1962 while visiting London.

Additional information from:

- Pask, Edward. [*Ballet in Australia, the second act, 1940-1980*](#), pp.15-22 (Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1982)

- Potter, Michelle. "A strong personality and a gift for leadership: Helene Kirsova in Australia" in *Dance research* (Oxford University Press), Vol .XIII No.2. 1995 pp 62-76. (Copy included in Kirsova file in the PROMPT collection)
- Bellew, Peter. [*Pioneering ballet in Australia*](#) (Sydney, Craftsman Bookshop, 1945)

Content

The list is primarily based on material in the *National Library of Australia's* PROMPT collection. Where there are gaps in the PROMPT holdings, the list has been supplemented by an indication of material in the *National Gallery of Australia's Research Library*. The Research Library holds Helene Kirsova's extensive personal archive including stage and costume designs, photographs and letters as well as published materials. In a couple of rare cases where no programs are held in either institution, newspaper clippings in the NGA Kirsova Archive have been quoted as evidence of performances.

Access

The [Kirsova Ballet PROMPT files may requested by eCall-slip](#) and used through the Library's Petherick Reading Room. The PROMPT collection also contains programs for part of Kirsova's career in Europe prior to her Australian visit, and programs for all the Australian tours of the de Basil companies in 1936, 1938 and 1940.

Access to the National Gallery of Australia Research Library and the Kirsova Archive is by appointment. For more information please telephone the Gallery on +61 (0)2 6240 6532

The Kirsova Company: dancers who performed

Dancers who appeared with the Kirsova Ballet as listed in programs:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| ▪ Betty Alexander | ▪ Wolf Cardamatis |
| ▪ David Beard | ▪ Peggy Chauncey |
| ▪ Mischa Burlakov | ▪ Frederick Maxwell Colas |
| ▪ Helen Black | ▪ Patricia Deardon |
| ▪ Serge Bousslof | ▪ Roxanne Dick |
| ▪ Bettina Browne | ▪ Yvonne Ellis |
| ▪ Judith Burgess | ▪ Margaret Findley |
| ▪ Margaret Cameron | ▪ Victoria Forth |
| ▪ Rachel Cameron | ▪ Helene Ffrance |

- John Foxall
- Joan Gadsdon
- Ruth Green
- Betty Hall
- Joan Halliday
- Monica Halliday
- Paul Hammond (aka Paul Clementin)
- Strelsa Heckelman
- Earl Henderson
- Anne Hiller
- Peter Houston
- Terence Hughes
- Nicolas Ivangine
- Patricia Jordan
- Betty Kellett
- Athol Kirkland
- Raissa Kousnetzova
- Henry Legerton
- Frances Lett
- Charles Morris Lisner
- Shirley Longley
- Barbara Macdonnell
- Elsie Macgregor
- Grant McIntyre
- Marie Malloy
- Alice Marcetts
- Gloria Mitchell
- Norma Mitchell
- Joyce Morgans
- Judith Murphy
- David Murray
- June Newstead
- ? O'Sullivan
- ? Parsons
- Joy Palmer
- Moira Peoples
- Gwen Pike
- Roland Robinson
- Peggy Sager
- John Seymour
- Valery Shaevsky
- Jean Shearer
- Thadee Slavinsky
- Edouard Sobishevsky
- Arnold Spirka
- Edna Stanton
- Jill Stanton
- Tamara Tchinarova
- ? Walker
- Bruce Walter
- Trafford Whitelock
- Billie Windas
- Maria Windas
- Vera Windas
- Valentin Zeglovsky

Repertoire

Ballets performed by the Kirsova Ballet in Australia 1941-1943 as documented in programs – all “Produced by Helene Kirsova”:

- ***A dream...and a fairy tale***
Book and choreography: Helene Kirsova
Music: Frederic Chopin
Décor and costumes: Loudon Sainthill
Premiere: 8 July 1941
- ***Les Matelots***
Choreography: Helene Kirsova after Leonide Massine
Music: Georges Auric
Décor and costumes: Loudon Sainthill after Pedro Pruna
Premiere: 8 July 1941
- ***Vieux Paris***
Book and choreography: Helene Kirsova
Music: Jacques Offenbach, J. Strauss Jnr
Décor and costumes: Loudon Sainthill
Premiere: 8 July 1941
- ***Les Sylphides***
Choreography after Fokine
Music: Frederic Chopin
Premiere: November 1941
- ***Faust***
Book: Heinrich Heine arranged by Helene Kirsova
Music: Henry Krips
Décor and costumes: Loudon Sainthill
Premiere: October 1941
- ***L'Oiseau bleu = Bluebird***
Pas de deux from ‘The sleeping princess’
Music: Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky
- ***Ritual fire dance***
Music: Manuel De Falla
- ***Revolution of the Umbrellas***
Book and choreography: Helene Kirsova
Music: Henry Krips
Décor and costumes: Wolfgang Cardamatis
Premiere: February 1943

- *Lac des cygnes* (Swan Lake, Act 2)
Choreography: Marius Petipas
Music: Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Premiere: September 1943
- *Jeunesse*
Choreography: Helene Kirsova
Music: Francois Poulenc
Costumes: Birger Bartholin
Premiere: September 1943
- *Hansel and Gretel*
Book and choreography: Helene Kirsova
Music: Engelbert Humperdinck
Décor and costumes: Amie Kingston
Premiere: March 1943
- *Capriccio*
Choreography: Helene Kirsova
Music: Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov
Costumes: Alice Danciger
Premiere: September 1943
- *Harlequin*
Choreography: Helene Kirsova
Music: Maurice Ravel
Décor and costumes: Amie Kingston
Premiere: December 1943

Arrangement

The Kirsova Ballet programs are listed in chronological order, which reflects the arrangement of the Library's PROMPT collection.

The arrangement within each sequence is by year and then by month, week or day with all dates based on evidence in the programs, posters or other related ephemera.

Entries are arranged as follows:

City. Venue/Theatre

Season

Holdings are noted for NLA (National Library of Australia, PROMPT collection) and NGARL (National Gallery of Australia Research Library).

Kirsova Ballet seasons

1941

Sydney, New South Wales. Conservatorium

Season opened 8 July 1941 (5 performances)

Book: 32 p. Wrappers Held NLA
Cover title: "Ballet productions"
Title page: "Red Cross Ballet Season presented by Helene Kirsova... Gala opening performance July 8 1941".
Includes photographic portraits of Helen Kirsova, principal dancers and designer Loudon Sainthill; photos of rehearsals; four pages of colour designs by Sainthill; program of ballets.

Program: 4 p. Held NLA
Cover title: "Ballet season for Red Cross...presented by Helene Kirsova."
Repertoire: *Dream...and a fairy tale, Les Matelots, Vieux Paris*

Sydney, New South Wales. The Everglades, Blue Mountains

Season opened October 1941

Program: 12 p. Wrappers Held NGARL
Cover title: "Souvenir of "Everglades" Garden Fete...October 4th, 5th, 6th. Proceeds in aid of War Veteran's Home at Narrabeen and King George's Fund for Sailors."
Title page: "Ballet productions presented by Helene Kirsova."
Repertoire: *Les Sylphides, Vieux Paris*
Includes advertisement for "The Helene Kirsova School of Russian Ballet — *Diaghilev Tradition*", with two pages of photos of company principals.

1941-1942

Sydney, New South Wales. Minerva Theatre

Season commenced 22 November 1941 - 6 weeks

Book: 32 p. Wrappers Held NLA
Cover title: "The Kirsova Ballet Souvenir"
Title page: "Madame Helene Kirsova and Whitehall Productions present The Kirsova Ballet, Minerva Theatre, Sydney, Season 1941-1942."
Content is substantially the same as the book above with photos, portraits designs etc. Program of ballets differs.

Programs: 16 p. (undated) Held NLA (2 copies)
Repertoire: *Les Sylphides, Faust*

16 p. (undated) Held NLA
 Repertoire: *Les Matelots, Faust*

16 p. (undated) Held NGARL
 Repertoire: *Les Sylphides, Les Matelots, Vieux Paris*

1942

Melbourne, Victoria. His Majesty's Theatre

Season commenced Saturday, 31 January 1942

The contents for all the programs for this season of the Kirsova Ballet are identical. Photo portraits of the company are the same and page nine in each program is an uncredited essay titled "*A permanent Australian ballet*". However, changes in the Repertoire and in the cover illustrations have been noted.

Programs: 34 p. Wrappers Held NLA (2 copies)
 Cover title: "JC Williamson Magazine Program"
 Cover illustration of seated woman in yellow evening gown
 Repertoire: *A dream... and a fairy tale, Faust*

34 p. Wrappers Held NLA
 Cover illustration of seated woman in yellow evening gown
 Repertoire: *Les Sylphides, Faust*

34 p. Held NLA
 Program as above with same repertoire but cover illustration is a drawing of a ballet dancer signed "Constable".

34 p. Wrappers Held NLA
 Cover illustration of seated woman in yellow evening gown
 Repertoire: *Les Sylphides, Les Matelots, L'Oiseau bleue, Ritual fire dance, Vieux Paris*

34 p. Held NLA
 Program as above with same repertoire but cover illustration is a drawing of a ballet dancer signed by "Constable".

Change of cast slips:

Wednesday, matinee 11 February 1942 Held NLA
 Changes to casts of *Dream ...and a fairy tale, Faust*

Friday, 20 February 1942 Held NLA
 Changes to casts of *Les Matelots, Blue Bird, Vieux Paris*

1943**Sydney, New South Wales. [Conservatorium]**

Season commenced 9 February 1943 (6 performances)

Program: 4 p. Held NLA
Cover title: "Kirsova Ballet Season in aid of the Legacy War Orphans Appeal"
Repertoire: *Les Sylphides, Revolution of the Umbrellas*

Sydney, New South Wales. Conservatorium

Season commenced 15 March 1943 (7 performances)

Program: 4 p. (undated) Held NGARL
Repertoire: *Revolution of the Umbrellas, Hansel and Gretel*
Season details verified in Pask.

Sydney, New South Wales. Conservatorium

Season commenced 18 September 1943

Program: 4 p. Held NLA
Cover title: "Kirsova Ballet Season presented by Helene Kirsova to provide at Erskineville the first of a series of fully equipped children's playgrounds to be established by the Kirsova Ballet throughout the congested areas of Sydney"
Repertoire: *Lac des cygnes, Jeunesse, Hansel and Gretel, Capriccio*

Sydney, New South Wales. Conservatorium

Season commenced 17 December 1943

Programs: 4 p. Held NLA (2 copies)
Cover: "Proceeds from this season will be used to continue the work of establishing a series of fully equipped playgrounds throughout the congested areas of Sydney. The full proceeds from the September season amounting to pounds 1,678, were sufficient to provide two grounds at Erskineville, and these are now under construction. Proceeds from this season, it is hoped, will be sufficient to complete the requirements in Erskineville and also to extend the scheme to another municipality lacking proper playing facilities."
Repertoire : *Lac des cygnes, Capriccio, Harlequin, Vieux Paris*

4 p. Held NGARL
As above except for changed repertoire: *Les Sylphides, Harlequin, Hansel and Gretel, Capriccio*

1944**Melbourne, Victoria. His Majesty's Theatre**

Season commenced 15 January 1944

Program: 3 p. fold out Held NLA
 Repertoire : *Lac des cygnes, Jeunesse, Harlequin, Vieux Paris*

Melbourne, Victoria. His Majesty's Theatre

Season commenced 22 January 1944

Program: 3 p. fold out Held NLA
 Repertoire: *Les Sylphides, Revolution of the Umbrellas*

Melbourne, Victoria. His Majesty's Theatre

Season commenced 29 January 1944

Program: 3 p. fold out Held NGARL
 "Program for final week commencing Saturday January 29"
 Repertoire: *Lac des cygnes, Harlequin, Hansel and Gretel, Capriccio*

Adelaide, South Australia. Theatre Royal

Season commenced 7 February 1944 (3 weeks)

Programs: 3 p. fold out Held NLA (2 copies)
 For the week 7-12 February 1944
 Repertoire: *Les Sylphides, Hansel and Gretel, Harlequin, Vieux Paris*

3 p. fold out Held NGARL
 For the week 14-19 February 1944
 Repertoire: *Les Sylphides, Revolution of the Umbrellas*

3 p. fold out NGARL
 For the week 21-26 February 1944
 Repertoire: *Lac des cygnes, Capriccio, Jeunesse, Vieux Paris*

Brisbane, Queensland. His Majesty's Theatre

Season commenced [8 April] 1944

Programs for the first two weeks of season are not held in either NLA or NGARL.

News clippings held by NGARL list the repertoire on 8 April 1944 as *Swan Lake, Harlequin, Hansel and Gretel, Vieux Paris*; 15 April 1944 lists the repertoire as *Revolution of the Umbrellas, Les Sylphides*.

Programs: 4 p. fold out Held NLA
 "Program for the Third week commencing...April 22..."
 Repertoire: *Lac des cygnes, Jeunesse, Capriccio, Hansel and Gretel*

4 p. fold out Held NGARL

“Program for...week commencing April 29”

Repertoire: *Les Sylphides*, *Revolution of the Umbrellas*

4 p. fold out Held NGARL

Programs for 1-2 May 1944

Repertoire: *Les Sylphides*, *Revolution of the Umbrellas*

4 page fold out Held NGARL

Program for [3-6 May] 1944

Repertoire: *Lac des cygnes*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Harlequin*, *Vieux Paris*

[Sydney, New South Wales]. Maccabean Hall

Program: 4 p. fold out Held NGARL

“Kirsova Ballet School pupil’s recital”, 11 December 1944

Repertoire: Ten items danced by pupils and six items danced by members of the Kirsova Company.

Undated

No venue or place

Program: 4 p. fold out Held NGARL

Cover title: “Ballet productions presented by Helene Kirsova”

Repertoire: *A dream...and a fairy tale*, *Les Matelots*, *Vieux Paris*

Back page has advertisement for “The Helene Kirsova School of Russian Ballet-Diaghiliev Tradition”