



## **The History of the Russian Ballet Society and the Legat System**

Nicolai Legat was one of the most distinguished teachers of the 20th century. He was born in St. Petersburg in 1869 and trained at the Imperial School with his father Gustav Legat and with Christian Johansson and Pavel Gerdt.

When Nicholas graduated in 1888 and joined the company he became one of the most respected principals of his time. He was skilled both as a classical and character dancer, and appeared in over 70 ballets in 20 years.

When Petipa was forced to resign, Legat succeeded him as ballet master. He choreographed many ballets but preferred to teach.

After Johansson retired, Legat became the director of the Imperial School and his students included Olga Preobrajenska, Agrippina Vaganova, Tamara Karsavina, Mikhail Fokine and Vaslav Nijinsky.

Following the great success of Diaghilev's Ballet Russes in France, Legat was enticed to replace Enrico Cecchetti as company ballet master.

Following the First World War, he attempted to return to Russia, but found that, due to the impact of the revolution, it was impossible to find work in his beloved homeland again.

Nicolai and Nadine Legat left Russia for good in 1922 and eventually settled in London in 1926 where he opened his own School and trained a new generation of famous dancers, among them Margot Fonteyn, Moira Shearer, Ninette de Valois, Anton Dolin, Alicia Markova and Serge Lifar. These later became the founding stones of British Ballet.

During this time the Russian Ballet Society, (formerly titled, “the Association of Russian Ballet”), was constituted to preserve and further this unique system of ballet training.

The Founder Members were, Monsieur Nicolas Legat, Madame Nadine Nicolaeva-Legat and Mesdames Lydia Kyaksht and Flora Fairbairn.

After Nicholas Legat's death in 1937 his wife Nadine Nicolaeva continued to run the school and moved it to Kent where she created the first British Ballet boarding school. When



Nadine Nicolaeva retired due to illness in 1967 she appointed Eunice Biedrisky Bartell as her successor.

Re-titled in 1968, the Russian Ballet Society was registered with the Friendly Societies and the registered office of the Society was at the Legat School, near Tunbridge Wells.

Mme Bartell continued as Principal of the Legat School for 20 years.

With the change of management of the School in 1985 and the consequent change in the policy of training, leading eventually to the closure of the last permanent home of the Legat School, the Russian Ballet Society, dedicated to maintaining the Legat System of ballet training transferred headquarters to Edinburgh. At the end of August, 1986, Mme Eunice Biedryski Bartell, then vice-president of the Russian Ballet Society left the Legat School and established residence in Edinburgh.

Mme Bartell continued teaching the Legat System from her base in Edinburgh. She worked tirelessly to spread this very pure style of Russian Ballet and the Society now have schools in Japan, Thailand, South Africa, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Malta, Cyprus, Greece and Italy.

In 2012 the Russian Ballet Society was accepted as a fully validated member of the Council for Dance Education and Training (UK) and its qualifications became accredited in partnership with RSL.

Meanwhile, in Russia, after having kept the name of Legat for many years in the shadows, the school where Nicolai Legat was trained and where he later became Director have at last acknowledged him, and his life and work are included in the history of Ballet lessons taught at what is now called the Vaganova Academy.

In fact the present Director of the Vaganova Academy, Nikolay Tsiskaridze, assured those present at a conference in January 2017, celebrating 80 years since the death of Legat, that Nicolai Legat and Agrippina Vaganova had worked together on the syllabus for the school. Nicolai Legat now has a place of honor in the Academy's history.



Since Mme Bartell's retirement in 2014 the Russian Ballet Society continues to grow under the guidance of the present President and Artistic Director and helped by a group of Trustees. Many of the Trustees were pupils at the Legat School and recognise the importance of carrying on the Legat System.

Sources:

Russian Ballet Society archives