



# **Agrippina Vaganova 1879-1951: Her Place in the History of Ballet and Her Impact on the Future of Classical Dance**

*Peggy Willis-Aarnio*

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The enormous wealth of information distilled within the pages of this work provide a unique opportunity for the reader to become acquainted with the breadth of knowledge Dr. Willis-Aarnio has amassed on classical dance. She captures the soul, the passion and fire characteristic of the Russian people. No one is more qualified to reveal the truth about classical ballet than Peggy Willis-Aarnio. Since the early seventies when she first discovered Agrippina Vaganova's unique, comprehensive pedagogy, Willis-Aarnio has worked tirelessly to preserve and transmit the teaching method in its entirety. On June 6, 1992, Prof. Peggy Willis-Aarnio became the first American to be certified by Valentina Rountiantseva, senior methodologist of the Vaganova Ballet Academy, as a "knowledgeable practitioner and a teacher of the teaching method of classical dance". I was fortunate enough to have been one of her students when she was first introduced to Vaganova's teaching method and in turn began teaching it in her classes. Her initial reaction at the time, in her words, was that she was in "balletic shock." For that reason, perhaps the title of this book should be Ballet History Shockwave. As anyone who reads it will find out, the ripple effect classical ballet continues to have, not only on ballet but also on modern dance, is immeasurable. Classical ballet is sometimes misunderstood and dismissed as antiquated, a tradition that inevitably had to die to make way for modern ballet. However, this misconception is one of many dispelled by this book. As G. K. Chesterton once said, "Tradition may be defined as an extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death." The enormous wealth of information distilled in these pages provides a unique opportunity for the reader to become acquainted with the breadth of knowledge Willis-Aarnio has amassed on classical dance. She captures the soul, the passion and fire characteristic of the Russian people. A literal walking encyclopedia, Willis-Aarnio provides, among other things, Russian documentation, translated into English for the first time, showing the surprising interconnectedness of contributions made by significant figures in the world of dance. Endowed with keen insight and an indomitable spirit much like her Russian counterparts to whom she pays tribute in this book, Willis-Aarnio demystifies the origins and evolution of classical ballet. This book will revolutionize the public's understanding of classical dance. And I cannot help but believe that Vaganova would be pleased.

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