DANCING FOR DIAGHILEV
THE MEMOIRS OF LYDIA SOKOLOVA
EDITED BY RICHARD BUCKLE
THE LIVELY ARTS
THE LIVELY ARTS SERIES
FROM MERCURY HOUSE

LILLIAN GISH  The Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me
JEAN RENOIR  Renoir, My Father
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JOHN GIELGUD  Early Stages
LYDIA SOKOLOVA  Dancing for Diaghilev

ALSO EDITED BY RICHARD BUCKLE

The Prettiest Girl in England
Dancing for Diaghilev

The Memoirs of
LYDIA SOKOLOVA
edited by
RICHARD BUCKLE

Mercury House, Incorporated
San Francisco
To
TAMARA KARSAVINA
whose dancing inspired me from the beginning
to
LYDIA LOPOKOVA
who brought kindliness and gaiety
into my professional life
and to
LEONIDE MASSINE
who taught me so much and who created
Le Sacre du printemps
I dedicate this book.
L. S.
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* Photo. Hana Studios † Photo. Lenarc ‡ Photo. Sasha of London
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I

CHILDHOOD

Childhood in Leyton — The Such and Munnings families — Schooldays — Dancing to the barrel organ — Song and dance for the Conservative Party — Father’s weakness — Stedman’s Dancing Academy — Début at the Royal Court — Playing truant to see Pavlova — Lessons with Mordkin — A narrow escape — Summer at Bexhill — Engaged by the Imperial Russian Ballet.

Mother’s parents lived at the Manor House, Leyton, Essex. The house was at the top of a hill, with a lily pond and enormous vine in the garden which impressed me as a girl. Leyton at the beginning of the century had not yet been swamped by London, and had a peculiar charm for a small child, being so near to the jolly street life of the East End, yet backing on the glades and ponds of Epping Forest.

My grandparents had a pony trap, a piano which I tried to play and a graphophone which thrilled me because I could dance to it. I suppose I remember this house on the hill so well because I loved it, but our own home is quite dim to me, though it must have been nearby.

Grandfather Henry Such owned a lot of property in Essex, and he gave each of his four daughters an Off-Licence as a wedding present. If well-run and in the right position, these were supposed to be gold-mines: anyway, there never seemed to be any shortage of money at home in those days.

Mother always wore lovely clothes; I adored watching her sail up the road, rustling with silk and taffeta petticoats. She had wavy chestnut hair, and when I was old enough I spent hours
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dressing it for her, copying the latest fashions from books. She used to have blouses sent from the shops in pretty green boxes for her to choose from, and she bought Paris hats at a shop called Broadman’s (which still exists) in Stratford Broadway. My sister Beatrice and I had beautiful bonnets and Parisian lace pinafores for parties from the same shop. Our dolls were so perfectly dressed they were like real babies. I loved Mother, but I was always afraid of her.

At this time Father was articled clerk to a solicitor. He had the most exquisite writing I have ever seen, and excelled in Old English script. Completely untrained as a painter, he had a natural gift and loved to do water-colours. He did a set of Dickens characters, but what he liked to paint best were sailing ships—all out of his head—for most of the Munnings family had something to do with the sea.

Our branch of the Munnings family came from Lowestoft: they had been in Suffolk for generations. The first mention I have found was of a John Munnyngs in the church register of Bury St Edmunds for 1552, but my kinsman, Sir Alfred Munnings the painter, told me that all the Munnings are descended from two brothers who fought at Agincourt and were given land in East Anglia.

Grandfather Munnings and several of my uncles were sea captains. Some of these uncles were lost during the First World War. Good-looking Uncle Tom Munnings, however, was for some unknown reason at one time Mayor of Johannesburg, and died in South Africa. He caused a stir by bringing us home a stuffed crocodile on the top of a hansom cab.

Grandfather John Munnings was a real picture of a seaman, very small and broad, with one of those beards trimmed short all round the face and curly hair fluffing out from under his cap. He was a dear old boy when he was sober, but terrifying when he was tight, which was his usual state when Father and Mother took me to meet him at the docks. It must have been on one of these outings in the pony trap that I was first thrilled by seeing coster girls dancing in the street. Another thing I remember on an expedition to the docks was the sight of a string of Chinese
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seamen walking barefoot in the gutter, each man holding onto the pigtails of the one in front.

My grandfather used to tell the story of how, the day after his wedding to Granny Henrietta, he sailed away to China. It took him two years to get there and back, and he was shipwrecked twice on the way; but on his arrival home my Uncle Jack was running about in petticoats. He would always comment at the end of this story, ‘That’s the way to do it, of course,’ and I could never make out what he meant.

I stayed with the Munnings family in Suffolk for summer holidays when Grandfather was back from sea. He could never keep pace with his increasing children, some of whom were little older than me, or remember which was which. When we all assembled for dinner we had to show our hands to see if we had washed, and he used to hold a sort of roll call, rattling off the names in order of birth. He warned us that his hand weighed ‘just a pound’, and I was pretty scared of him. He snored so terribly I used to push things against the door at night in case he came to visit me. In later years he became a Trinity House pilot.

My mother had been brought up with a rod of iron, and she in her turn was very strict. I had to wash her pretty china and was caned if I broke any. As I grew older I was made to give up learning to play tennis on half holidays in order to scrub floors and do the washing. I boiled the clothes in a copper in the out-house and lifted them out on a broomstick. There were many starched blouses, and petticoats to be ironed, and the rest of the washing went through a mangle. One day I had folded the handkerchiefs and was pushing them through the mangle while Mother turned the handle and the index finger of my right hand got caught. I was rushed to hospital.

There was an old gentleman who lived nearby called Mr Busby, who was very fond of me. He left me two pennies on a shelf every week and used to hide Mother’s cane in the gutter round the roof of the outhouse. When he died his body was laid out in an open coffin in our first-floor drawing-room; afterwards whenever I went upstairs to my room, I used to peep through
the door in terror to see if he was still there. It was in the drawing-
room that I used to practise my piano, and I never really lost the
feeling of Mr Busby lying in his coffin behind me.

At the age of seven I was sent off to join Beatrice at her school
at Bexhill, but only spent two terms there. The discovery that
we all had fleas in our hair was bad enough, but the reason I left
the school was because I had scarlet fever. I was never allowed
to return there, though Beatrice stayed on there for some time.
Back at home, I went daily to have lessons in a Roman Catholic
convent nearby. This must have been in 1910, because I remember
Mother Xavier, beside whose desk I had to say my prayers every
day, whispering to me, ‘Have they caught Crippen yet?’ I
worked seriously at music and passed with honours several
advanced examinations with the idea of becoming a pianist but
I had already begun to dance.

It was outside public houses, mostly on Saturdays when the
factories were closed, that I had seen girls dancing to a barrel-
organ. They danced in fours or sixes, opposite each other, per-
forming high kicks, rond de jambe and splits—in fact the can-can.
They also danced the cake-walk. These girls were just as good
dancers of their type as the performers I saw later in cafés in
Spain, and they bore a striking resemblance to them. They were
attractive creatures, mostly dark like Gypsies, with kiss-curls stuck
on their cheeks and foreheads, and little combs in their hair.
Unlike the Spaniards, however, they wore no jewellery, only
gold earrings and hats with feathers. Their skirts and their
blouses with puffed sleeves were of every conceivable colour, but
they had a preference for purple; over their shoulders there was
always a little shawl. The skirts, with three or four flounces at
the bottom, were worn over several frilled petticoats, and when
these were lifted they revealed black stockings and button boots.

In Holy Week they didn’t dance: they skipped. It was the
custom to lower large beer-barrels from the drays into the cellars
under public houses by lengths of thick cable; and during this
week men used to hold these cables across the street to form
gigantic skipping ropes. The weight of these must have been
enormous, and there was an art in swinging them so as not to
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hit the skippers as they jumped in and out. Old, young and middle-aged people joined in the skipping, and the coster-girls used to leap higher and higher over the rope, sometimes executing a wonderful side kick, beating the legs together. I longed to dance like those girls.

On certain days of the week an organ-grinder came to play in the street behind the garden wall of the Convent. Giving some excuse or other, I got permission to go home early. I would climb over the wall, so that the Mother Superior should not see from her sitting-room where I was going, and the organ man would greet me saying, 'Hello, Missy, got out all right again?' Then he would turn the handle while I danced. I had the time of my life, doing high kicks and jumps just like the coster-girls, completely forgetting the nuns on the other side of the wall, and oblivious of the passers-by. When my friend had to move to another street I spent the rest of the afternoon on swings in a neighbouring park. After a few weeks of these little adventures a neighbour saw me dancing in my Convent uniform and reported me to Father.

Father did a lot of political work for the Conservative Party, and at election time our dogs wore blue and white coats. During the winter months Beatrice and I would sometimes perform at Conservative concerts organised by Father. We played the piano together and sang duets like Tell Me, Pretty Maiden. I arranged the dances at the end of these songs, and we had quite a repertoire. Beatrice was pretty, with long golden curls—at school she was known as 'Seven curls and a bit' because of the fluffy pieces on each side of her face—and she would always play the girl. I played the boy. I wasn't at all pretty and my hair was very straight, so it had to be put into curl rags. Just before the performances, after I had come back from school, I used to lay my head on a table while my mother pressed the rags into my hair with an iron. My boy's costume was black satin with a velvet cape and a three-cornered hat with ostrich feathers. It was hired separately for each occasion at a fee of half a guinea and kept in reserve at a costumier's shop in Petticoat Lane. We went to these functions either in a four-wheeler, or sometimes for a treat in a hansom-cab.
I remember going with my father and sister to sing and dance for a lot of old people in South London. We went on a funny little bus through the Blackwall tunnel, which only held four aside. It was pitch dark, lit only by an oil lamp hanging from the ceiling. One got in at a little door at the back, and when the bus was full the driver banged on the roof and pushed open a tiny flap, and we each handed up our tuppeny fares.

Many children have tragedies in their homes which affect the whole of their lives. Mine was the weakness for drink which Father inherited: this led to much unhappiness and the eventual break-up of our family life. My mother was a very religious woman; she went to church frequently during the week, as well as on Sundays. Father was often alone and made full use of these opportunities to drink to excess.

Week-end shopping in those days was very exciting, and mostly done in the evenings as the shops stayed open till past ten on Saturdays. Although it was a thrill to go on these expeditions with my mother there was always the dread of what was going to happen when we got home. There were frequently appalling scenes between my parents, and ever since this time I have had a horror of drunkenness. It was still more frightening to see Father steadily getting drunk when I was alone with him.

When the time came for Mother’s return he would swallow neat vinegar. Although he ‘took the pledge’, he could never keep it. Sometimes he disappeared for days on end.

One awful evening I came home from my music lesson, knowing that Father had been drinking when I went out. When I opened the front door I could hear his voice, and I found him with Mother in the cellar. He had his hands round her throat. I kicked his shins with all my might as he had taught me to do if I were ever attacked by a man. Mother was only just able to murmur, ‘Get a policeman. He’s mad with drink!’ I rushed out sobbing into the night and ran without knowing where I was going. When I saw a policeman I hadn’t the courage to speak to him and tried to run past, but he caught me and said, ‘Don’t cry like that, gal. What’s the trouble?’ I said I had lost a shilling and didn’t dare go home in case I was caned; and that good man
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gave me a shilling. When I plucked up courage to go home I found Mother sitting with a wet towel around her throat. She said that Mary Puddock, the servant girl, had run away earlier in the evening, and that Father had passed out in the cellar.

As I was by this time crazy to be a dancer and longed to be away from the unpleasant scenes as much as possible I persuaded my parents to allow me to go to the best dancing and dramatic school in England, Stedman’s Academy in Great Windmill Street, off Shaftesbury Avenue. This building is now Jack Solomons’ Gymnasium, where boxers weigh in before the big fights. I had for some time been practising high jumps over a tight skipping-rope, doing a glissade and a grand jeté en tournant as I went over the rope. It was at Stedman’s that I really learned to jump.

In May, 1909, when I was having my first dancing lessons, Paris was seeing Diaghilev’s Russian Ballet for the first time. Diaghilev was the son of a country gentleman and since his youth he had been interested in all forms of art. He had begun by editing an avant garde literary and artistic magazine, had organised a huge exhibition of Russian historical portraits in St Petersburg, had been attached to the Imperial theatres and had been associated with new developments in choreography and stage design. Turning westwards in 1903, he had exhibited Russian pictures in Paris, and he was the first to make known the splendour of Russian music to Western audiences. In 1908 he put on Boris Godounov in Paris, and in 1909 he introduced Russian ballet with opera at the Châtelet Theatre. Parisians were intoxicated by the new forms and colours of Benois and Bakst and by the superb dancing of Pavlova, Karsavina and Nijinsky in the ballets of Fokine. The movement had been launched which would transform stage production in Europe and America, make known such names as Stravinsky and Picasso, and give a new direction to the lives of a number of people throughout the world. One of these was to be mine: but at this time, I had never heard of Diaghilev.

The pupils of Stedman’s Academy gave public displays; and at one of these, held at the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square,
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I made my first appearance in the theatre, and received for it my first notice. About a ballet of fairy flowers a reviewer wrote: 'The Daisy was charmingly embodied by Miss Patricia Mutter and the responsibilities of the Butterfly, the Bee and Robin Red-breast were creditably borne by Miss Winifred Browne, Miss Winifred Atwell and Miss Virginia Kynaston'; and of another number that 'Little Cora Poole-Goffin, a dainty maiden, danced to the evident enjoyment of herself and the audience'. The reviewer described me leading the Stedman Sextet in an Old English Country Dance and giving in Mignon 'a series of graceful and highly finished movements'. There was also a Tarantella in which I got so carried away that I cut my knuckles banging the tambourine, and there is blood on it to this day.

Of the girls who took part in that entertainment, Hilda Boot, later known as Butsova, became Pavlova's understudy; Cora Goffin became a famous Principal Boy and is now Mrs Emile Littler; and Hilda Munnings became Lydia Sokolova.

In 1910, when King Edward was dangerously ill gloom descended on our home. We were all loyal subjects. I can see my mother now, on the morning the King's death was announced, standing at the foot of my bed, crying and saying, 'Hilda, the King is dead'. We got up at 3 a.m. on the day of the funeral, and watched the procession from a point in the Mall not far from the Palace.

Together with other girls from Stedman's, I started my first professional engagement on Boxing Day, 1910, in the corps de ballet of Alice in Wonderland at the Savoy Theatre. We danced six matinées and were paid a pound a week. Dan Leno, Jr., was in the show, and there was a well-staged ballet. Hilda Boot, our principal dancer, came out of an oyster shell; and I was one of four lobsters, as well as being a jester. Every day as I left the house for the theatre my father used to throw an old shoe after me for luck. I would always say, 'Oh, really, Dad', and carry the shoe back to him, not understanding the significance of the gesture.

The treats I most looked forward to were visits to music-halls. A company of Red Indians came several years running to the
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Hippodrome to take part in an amazing Wild West show. These men walked about London in all their feathers and war paint. The stalls were abolished and the whole ground floor became a battlefield, which in the second half of the show was transformed into a lake. Into this the Indian braves dived on horseback from a breathtaking height above the proscenium arch.

One of the excitement of those early days in Leyton and East London was to see the factory workers on their summer outings in ‘Excursion Brakes’. These all-day ‘Beanos’ were great events, as there was so little entertainment in those days. Factories such as Crosse and Blackwell’s, which stood where the Astoria Cinema now is, in the Tottenham Court Road, had hundreds of women workers who made pickles one day and jam the next—you could tell by the smell—and these were the sort of people who patronised the brakes. The brakes were long, high wagonettes harnessed with dray horses, driven four-in-hand. You climbed up steps at the back, and there were benches round three sides. The brakes had a canvas shade on top with a wavy fringe all round. The parties would start off in the morning, all on their best behaviour, trotting eastwards to Epping Forest or Southend. They would come back about half-past nine or ten in the evening, with a man seated beside the driver sounding fanfares on a silver horn. The horn-calls, the singing and the concertinas could be heard a long way off. There might be five or six or more brakes together. The horses would be going full pelt, the driver cracking his whip, all the men and women would be merry and singing at the top of their voices as each brake carried half-gallon or gallon stone jars of beer. But the beautiful thing was that the brakes were hung all round with coloured Chinese lanterns, which swung backwards and forwards as the revellers went by. Sometimes one of the lanterns would catch fire and be hastily pulled down and thrown on the road, while another was hung up in its place. If the party halted to rest their horses, boys would do cartwheels and hand-stands in the road to entertain them, calling up, ‘Throw out yer rusty ’appence!’ Coppers flew through the air and there was a scrum of boys as the Beano trotted off down the road.
Another pleasure was looking after our animals, which Mother taught me to love. At the time I left home we had seven Pomeranians which Mother bred, three cats, a large white Angora rabbit which had the run of the house, two parrots and a cockatoo, all of which talked, a chameleon which sat on a table to be fed with a spoon, a tortoise which followed us about, two canaries, a family of guinea pigs, chickens and two small owls. An old man walked from Orpington in Kent twice a week with fresh herbs and groundsel for the canaries.

I had been working at Stedman’s Academy for about a year when Pavlova appeared with Mordkin at the Palace Theatre and had her first great success in England. Pavlova’s peculiar genius made it hard for her to sink her individuality into an enterprise such as Diaghilev’s new company, which was in the process of detaching itself from the Russian Imperial Theatres, and besides, she was out of sympathy with his experiments; so she formed with Michael Mordkin a small group of her own, and made appearances in London music-halls. She was the first Russian dancer that many of us in England had seen.

It was on Wednesdays and Saturdays that I went to Stedman’s, and on those days Mother allowed me a shilling for my lunch and tea. A poached egg, tea and toast cost fivepence. On Wednesday afternoons, some of the girls used to go in the gallery at the Palace Theatre to see Pavlova and, sacrificing my lunch, I spent my shilling on a ticket instead and went with them. It was worth it.

There was a poster with a larger-than-life figure of Pavlova in the Dying Swan outside the theatre in Cambridge Circus; and hoping to be mistaken for a dancer like her, I used to stand waiting for my bus home at the corner of the Strand and Trafalgar Square in the third ballet position, reading a copy of the Dancing Times.

After going hungry two Wednesdays running, I pinched an extra sixpence from Mother’s purse. This made me feel very guilty and I could not keep up the deception for long: besides I was longing to tell my family how wonderful Pavlova and Mordkin were, and I think they must have guessed from my excitement that I had been up to something. With tears and
confused emotions I owned up to the theft, and begged them to see Pavlova dance so that they should understand how I longed to follow in her footsteps. Mother said in her usual way, ‘I knew there was something going on’; but she and Father went to the theatre and came home full of enthusiasm.

It was after this that Father was persuaded to write and ask Mordkin if he would give me private lessons. Father agreed to pay Mordkin’s stiff fee of five guineas a lesson on condition that I should be taught a solo dance. He had some idea that it would be advantageous if I could say I had a dance especially arranged for me by Mordkin. So the great day arrived and I reported at Miss Phipps’ Dancing School, Harrington Gardens, off Gloucester Road. I had five lessons, but I cannot say Mordkin taught me anything I didn’t know already—though he did arrange a dance for me to Sidney Bayne’s Destiny Waltz, which was very commonplace.

Mordkin was a handsome and charming man, and I heard he was much loved by all the Pavlova company. He was beautifully built, and did strong character dances with scanty costumes to show off his wonderful limbs. I remember one dance with a spear and another with cymbals. He often had to give an encore, and the audience went mad even at matinées. The company excelled in rhapsodies and mazurkas—in these Helena Schmoltz and Morosoff were terrific. The classical part of the programme consisted mostly of ensemble dances, Chopin waltzes and nocturnes. Pavlova herself was at her greatest in those days and a profound silence descended on the theatre when her music began. The moment for me, though, was when Pavlova and Mordkin danced the Bacchanale together.

While I was having lessons with Mordkin an advertisement appeared in The Stage for a young character dancer with good elevation. My father took me across from Stedman’s to the Pavilion for an audition. There we found a small company of crashing, spinning, shouting Russians. They were a very rough crowd, very badly dressed, a sort of circus act. The reason they wanted someone urgently was that one of their girls was pregnant. They agreed to take me, and it was settled against my will.
that I should leave for Germany with this awful troupe the next Sunday, in four days' time. There was no Equity then to protect artists, and these people could have abandoned me anywhere. I was totally inexperienced and could never have stood up to two shows a day of such a gruelling performance. It was criminal to think of sending me. I begged, pleaded and wept, but my parents had made up their minds that my chance had arrived. When Sunday morning came, I locked my bedroom door and threw the key out of the window. By the time it was found, the Russians' train had left Victoria, and I was accused of base ingratitude.

Father had once more forgotten that he had ever taken the pledge. One evening he had a bad quarrel with Mother, and she went up crying to bed. Father went to sleep downstairs. I was in the drawing-room, doing some transposing. The house was silent and it began to get dark. I heard my father's heavy footsteps on the staircase, and held the door tight shut so that he shouldn't come in to see me, but he passed and went on up the stairs. Opening the door just a crack I saw in the fading light that he held a carving knife. I screamed to Mother, who was in the room above me, 'Lock the door! Quick! Lock the door!' Father was completely bewildered. He turned round on me and shouted, 'Stop screaming at once. Are you mad?' Then, suddenly he realised he had the carving knife in his hand. He staggered down the stairs, hanging onto the banisters. After this he disappeared for several days.

This episode coincided with a crisis in the affairs of Grandfather Such. He and Granny Such and various aunts came to consult with Mother at this time. Financial difficulties were never discussed in my presence, but I soon found out something was wrong when Beatrice was brought back from School.

In spite of these troubles it was arranged for Mother, Beatrice and me to go to Hastings for our summer holiday. With Mother in a red bathing-gown and bloomers, we were dragged by a stumbling horse over shingle and sand in our bathing-machine down to the sea. We rocked about inside, peeping out of a little round window. The horse would take us and the bathing-
machine into the water, then the attendants would remove him and let down the steps. With screams and pushes we climbed down into the icy English Channel, only to hang onto thick ropes attached to the bathing-machine and bob up and down. Beatrice and I really did better in the swimming pool, where we learned to dive singly and as a pair. In the evenings we either took sixpenny circular trips on top of an open tram-car or went for long country walks. That summer we lived happily from day to day, with no thought of the future.

My peaceful existence was interrupted by a telegram which summoned me to an audition at Miss Phipps’ Dancing School. I heard later how disagreements between Pavlova and Mordkin had culminated in her slapping his face on the stage. They finished their season together at the Palace, but after that the company split in two. Most of the dancers, and certainly all the principals, joined Mordkin who was negotiating with Max Rabinoff (of St Petersburg, New York and London) for the first American season of Russian ballet. Mordkin had engaged six of Miss Phipps’ English students, but ten days before the ballet was due to sail for New York one girl fell ill, and Mr Michael Mitchell, Mordkin’s manager, sent for me. That was how I came to join what was called ‘The All-Star Imperial Russian Ballet’.

Time was short, and I travelled up to London every day for rehearsals. One afternoon a few of us were taken down to Brixton to be photographed as a group in our ballet costumes. To make us look more numerous the photographer was told to join two prints together, one being in reverse, so that our faces occurred twice in the same picture.

From now on I was a professional, and at fifteen my youth was over. Although during the next few years I went back to my parents between engagements, it was under different circumstances and to a different home.
I wonder what Diaghilev thought in 1911 when he heard that Mordkin was taking a company off to America with the title of 'Imperial Russian Ballet'. It was a challenge to his supremacy; yet as he was probably already confident in his mission as an artistic pioneer he may have laughed at Mordkin's old-fashioned company, knowing that his productions would have little value except as a background to the brilliance of the star dancers.

Stars we certainly had—too many perhaps! Geltzer from Moscow, Sedova from St Petersburg and Zambelli from Paris, each wanting to top the bill. Dear Lydia Lopokova was also with us at the beginning, but on the programme she was only listed as 'ballerina': the two other Russian ladies had the rank of 'Prima Ballerina', and Zambelli was 'Première Danseuse Étoile'. Mordkin had his hands full to control the warring temperaments of his stars, and when he was taken ill with appendicitis on the boat our tour seemed doomed to disaster.

I have always had a keen sense of smell. Although petrol is the predominant smell nowadays in streets throughout the world, even that cannot obliterate entirely the human and cooking smells which are so distinct to me, and with closed eyes I could tell whether I am in France or Italy, Germany or Spain. That ship, the President Lincoln, in which we sailed for New York in the
autumn of 1911, just stank. It must have been a combination of German sauerkraut, fresh paint and the effects of the bad weather on the passengers.

My English companions in order of age were Sheila Courtenay, who was later with the Pavlova company; Rita Zalmani; Annie Broomhead, who later joined Diaghilev and became Bromova; Ethel Montague; Doris Faithful, who also joined Diaghilev; and Blanche James, who afterwards became a snake dancer. Mrs James, Blanche's mother, travelled with us as a sort of matron. She was a tiny little woman and quite ineffective.

I think I grew up on that journey. What with sea-sickness and home-sickness, I cried myself to sleep every night. That crossing was a crossing in more ways than one: I was leaving behind not only England but my childhood. From now on I had to fend for myself. Although I was so young and inexperienced, I was physically well developed and got the nickname of Mammasha, which means 'Little Mother'.

The excitement of passing the Statue of Liberty, seeing our first skyscrapers-dominated by the Woolworth building—and steaming slowly into New York Harbour, with the funny tub-shaped ferries crossing between the islands, made us forget the horrible smell of the ship, and we ran from side to side for fear of missing anything.

I soon found myself standing in the vast customs shed, where we were all divided up alphabetically and I had to queue under a letter M the size of a house. I listened to everyone around me speaking English with a strange accent, and was amazed by the number of black folk who seemed to inhabit this new world.

The business manager of our show had lists of places to stay at with their different prices, and he helped us to find accommodation. Leaving our little trunks to be sent on to the theatre, we packed into a taxi and drove up Broadway. We couldn't stop exclaiming at everything: the tobacco stands, the big displays of candy and biscuits marked 'One Cent', '3¢' or '5¢', the Flatiron Building and the height of the other office buildings, which might be considered nothing nowadays, but which was unlike anything
we had seen at home. The elevated railway we called the ‘overhead underground’.

We were staying, two to a bedroom, in a little pension on 52nd Street, which was very well run by a Frenchwoman married to an American. It was a brownstone house, identical with all its neighbours on both sides of the long, straight, gloomy street. It was different from London houses in that a steep flight of steps went up to the front door from the pavement. The dining-room was a small but very clean room in the semi-basement under these steps. We were well set up for morning rehearsals for we were given a good breakfast before we went to work, something hot as well as grapefruit or cornflakes, neither of which I had ever eaten before and which I found delicious. The Frenchwoman cooked us a very good dinner, but we had our lunch at Child’s. We’d never seen anything like that vast crowded restaurant before. At Child’s they cooked buckwheat cakes in the window. Buckwheat cakes and maple syrup—these for me were the smell of New York.

My home-sickness disappeared with all these new experiences, but it was replaced by another worry. I began to doubt whether I was really a good enough dancer to be able to cope with my work in the ballet company. After all, I had so little experience, and was only there by a fluke.

I was scared stiff when I went to our first rehearsal. An elevator took us to the top of the building, and there was a further staircase beyond that which led into the centre of an enormous loft. When we had all assembled, the trap-door was shut down over the staircase. In that high room in New York I was shut into my new life among dancers. I looked around at all the famous people among whom I was to work.

Katerina Geltzer was considered, after Pavlova, the great ballerina of her day, and she used to dance Giselle in our company. My memory tells me that she was not very pretty, but highly neurotic and excitable. In fact, I used to think she must be slightly mad to act as she did on the stage. Sedova was a sweet and gentle woman. Zambelli was the Italian-born star of the Paris Opera: she had made a guest appearance at the Mariinsky Theatre in

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St Petersburg at the beginning of the century and was the last foreigner to do so.

Lydia Lopokova had not the appearance or physique of a classical dancer, but, to everyone’s astonishment, whatever she attempted came off: she was always sure and her elevation was terrific.

What I have always liked about the dancing of Russians is the manner in which they jump. On the stage I tried to do it their way. The secret is to travel through the air, not up into it. I learned that if one refuses to allow the body to sense any weight lightness can become a habit. I loved the sensation of flying through the air.

I think that in a way Helena Schmoltz must have been my first inspiration when I saw her leading the rhapsodies and mazurkas with Morosoff in Pavlova’s company. She was so blonde, elegant and attractive; and now that she had joined our company as first character dancer I felt all the more that she was the kind of artist I should like to be. How I hoped that I might one day dance like her! I loved the turn of her hands and her trim way of clicking her heels together. Like me, she never excelled to a high degree in classical work: she could do anything easily if it had a character element, as I could. Standing for ages trying to do a perfect arabesque, and all the other detailed polishing of classical technique, bored me. I wanted to express myself individually and in various moods—to do something exciting. It was Schmoltz who started me off.

My first sight of the Metropolitan Opera House left me speechless. The Russians, who had danced in St Petersburg and Moscow, were naturally not as impressed as we English girls were to find ourselves on such a big stage and in so splendid a theatre. I know of no other sensation so exciting to a dancer as that of suddenly having a space to express herself with freedom of movement.

The ‘Imperial Russian Ballet’ appeared for a couple of weeks at the Metropolitan with great success. Our repertoire consisted of Giselle, Coppélia and a divertissement called Russian Wedding, in which we wore beautiful costumes covered in pearls, and which was fun to dance. It was not until we went on tour that the
discontent in the company became obvious. The ballerinas quarrelled about when to perform and when not to perform, according to the size of the town. Geltzer was the first to leave; and Zambelli soon followed her.

We English girls were paid three pounds a week. This proved desperate poverty, and we gradually grew out of all our clothes. Our parents sent us warm clothes for the icy New York winter, but by the time they arrived we were touring the south in the broiling heat of spring. On tour we enjoyed sightseeing when we got the chance, which is more than can be said of the Russians and Poles, whose only idea was to play poker at every possible opportunity.

In Boston I chiefly remember the Mother Church of the Christian Scientists, because we lived in rooms nearby. Philadelphia had the most colossal back-stage I have ever seen. Doors that opened on to the street were so high and wide that lorries, seeming to take up no room at all, could drive straight onto the stage. The set was rigged up in what seemed to be a tiny space in the middle of this vast area. On our way into Denver, Colorado, we were stuck in a snow drift and the train was followed by wolves. In Denver there was a fair where I saw a cow with two heads, and there was a booth with two little girls joined together at the stomach. I went and talked to them every day the three days we were there.

I developed a passion for the viola player in our orchestra, who was Italian and good-looking. In Little Rock, Arkansas, he took me for a ride in an open carriage and we drove to a pretty house with a balcony entrance on the outskirts of the town. I thought we were visiting someone he knew, but we were shown into a bedroom. I made a scene, rushed out of the house and demanded to be taken home at once.

In our special train I slept two in a bunk with Doris Faithful, head to toe. Doris grew almost visibly, and her feet were enormous. Her black button boots got so down at heel that they would not stand up on their own and were not safe to walk in as she kept slipping off the kerb.

Our little English group was pretty shabby compared with the
atttractive Polish dancers, who had seen more of the world. We had just one suitcase each and they all had names: mine was called Harriet. Doris Faithful had a very awkward, large, green, square fibre suitcase, which had been given her when she left home. This was known as ‘Doris-grip’, because the only way she could carry it was clasped tightly with both hands in front of her. Whenever we got a room to sleep in as a change from the train, she used to make me furious by her habit of opening the lock of this bag and emptying all her rubbish on the bed. As Doris grew bigger and more of her clothes wore out, so there was more room in ‘Doris-grip’, and it became a dumping-ground for all our surplus possessions. Eventually the men in the orchestra began to make a joke of the old green suitcase: it came in for some rough treatment, became a wreck and had to be tied up with string.

We English girls put a few cents together and bought a neat little wicker affair for Doris as a surprise. One night after the show we all collected in my room, where the old wreck was laid out on the bed with candles stuck all round it. We lit the candles, one of the girls dressed up as a clergyman and we held a funeral service for ‘Doris-grip’. After this, we had a lovely time jumping on it and tearing it to bits. Doris sat on the floor in floods of tears, moaning ‘What shall I do? What will my Mother say?’ Then we brought out the new case, held a christening service over it, sprinkled it with water and named it ‘Little Willie’.

Back in New York for a second short season, which was less of a success because some of our best artists had left us, I had another chance to look round the city. There were very few shops on Fifth Avenue then, and some of the houses had walled gardens in front. Central Park did not impress me at all: it was not a patch on Hyde Park. There were not many motor cars. Our theatre baggage and trunks would be picked up by long flat lorries drawn by horses. On this visit I was allowed to sit in the flies at the Metropolitan to look down on two marionette-like figures who were Tetrazzini and Caruso, singing Aïda. I also saw somebody walk across Times Square on a tightrope holding an open paper parasol.
When our manager Rabinoff decided to take the remains of our company out on the road again, it was Volinin who spoke up for the underpaid English and got our salaries increased by $25 a month. Sedova stayed with us until shortly after the second New York season: when she left the company was led by Schmoltz and Volinin. They were very much in love, and they danced beautifully together in *Coppélia*.

Our increase in salary did not really leave us much better off, as we now seldom slept on a train and had to pay for lodgings. The tour went from bad to worse. We played in some strange towns. At one southern college town, the hotel was only half-built and we slept with no roof over us. Some of the dancers stayed the night in the depot station waiting-room round an old pot-belly stove. The theatre was tiny and we dressed in corners under the stage in full view of the musicians. The footlights were gas jets, and when the curtain went up we found there wasn't a white face in the audience.

New Orleans was different from anywhere else, a mixture of France and England, with its wrought-iron balconies, twisted streets and trees everywhere. We had become so disorganised by this time and had been having such bad houses, that all the Russians and Poles decided to return to New York with what money they had, and so did the company's manager. Nobody thought of saying a word to the English girls, and one day when we arrived at the theatre for the evening's performance we found a notice posted up saying the engagement was cancelled.

Stranded in the Deep South with no money or prospects, we spent our days on the doorstep of the English Consul. He was no help at all, and could get no information from the offices of Mr Rabinoff in New York. The hotel manager, however, was kind to us and gave us all our meals free, so that for the ten days we were stuck in New Orleans we ate better than we had for weeks. In the end it was the local authorities who got things moving: they communicated with the New York police, and Rabinoff was forced to send for us. So one day a horse-drawn lorry came round to the door of the hotel. Our trunks were flung on to it and us on top of them.
We travelled back to New York on a tiny cargo boat, which was more than primitive. Our cabins opened onto the one and only saloon, where we had our meals, and they were so small that we had to go in, undress and get into our narrow bunks one at a time. Except for the benches we sat on to eat there were no seats of any sort. Huddled together in the evenings around that saloon, in our shabby old clothes, beneath a great swinging oil lamp, we were like characters in a Charlie Chaplin film. Luckily for us the weather held, for we were over a week on that boat.

When we got back to New York we deliberately parked ourselves, regardless of our bedraggled state, in one of the best hotels—much to the amusement of the bell-hops. To spur Rabinoff into action we sat on the steps of his office in relays throughout the day. The treatment worked. We got warning at breakfast-time one morning that we were off. Three taxis drew up, with a van for our luggage, and we were hustled in, disregarding nasty remarks from the bell-hops who received no tips. We were rushed to the docks, and as we arrived alongside the Lapland the gangway was just being pulled up. In response to our shouts and screams they let it down again and we ran full pelt on board, our trunks and suitcases being flung onto the ship behind us. We hadn't a pennypiece between us, but kind Mr Mitchell, Rabinoff's representative, emptied his pockets of what he had and flung handfuls of money onto the deck as we were moving from the quay. We travelled back to England in style—that is to say, second class, and eating three square meals a day instead of just the ice cream, toast and coffee which had become our staple diet during the long tour. I arrived at Dover in March, 1912, having danced in a hundred and twenty towns in seven months.

One of the things I had learned in America was how to dance the Polish mazurka correctly. Unless the rhythms of this subtle and exciting dance are mastered from the very start they are almost impossible for an outsider to assimilate, and I was lucky to have had the chance of learning the mazurka from Poles when I was very young.

While I had been away my parents had moved to a new house
in East London, as Father had found a new job and wanted to be near his work; and Beatrice was training to be a nurse. My Grandfather Such, however, had got into money difficulties and sold all his property in the Leyton neighbourhood, including the dear old Manor House where I had been happy as a child.
Pavlova had bought herself a house in the northern outskirts of London; and Mr Mitchell arranged that she should interview a few of the English girls who had been with Mordkin in America, with the idea that she should give us lessons. When I took the train to Golders Green I could hardly believe that I was going to meet the most famous dancer in the world, whom I had admired from afar in the gallery at the Palace Theatre.

Golders Green was lovely in those days. From the station you walked up the hill, which had huge trees on both sides. There was no traffic: it was a country lane. When I entered Ivy House that hot summer day, everything seemed so cool, white and shady. The French windows were wide open with sun-blinds pulled down over them. There were big vases of flowers, and perfume everywhere. The studio was awe-inspiring and seemed to me almost sacred. It was the centre of the house: not quite square, two storeys high, and with a gallery running round it. Off this gallery with its pretty railing, white doors led to Madame’s bedroom, boudoir and bathroom. Below, was the barre. On the opposite side to the front door, windows opened onto the garden, and round the room there hung several life-size paintings of Pavlova in her most famous roles. Although the sun poured in at the upper windows, down below there was a sense of coolness which I shall always associate with Pavlova.
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On that first day when we went to her house she gave us a wonderful welcome, and had iced fruit drinks brought to us in her drawing-room. I am afraid we were quite speechless, overwhelmed by the beauty of the house and by the glamour of Pavlova.

It was impossible when one met Pavlova like this in her own environment to believe the stories one had heard of her tantrums and hysteria, yet some of them must have been true. Perhaps even her scenes were part of an act, because in my limited acquaintance with this remarkable woman I could see that the only time she wasn’t acting was when she was asleep. I never saw her asleep. I wish I had.

In the house she was always dressed in draperies, and seemed never to be alone, because there was always a swain in attendance to kiss her hand and tell her how beautiful she was, or to drape her silks and chiffons as she sat down. After tapping at the door timidly, one of these admirers would enter the room at her bidding, approach her with the utmost reverence, click his heels together, accept her outstretched hand, linger as long as possible over kissing it, then, with deep devotion in his eyes, would bring a bunch of her favourite flowers from behind his back with the left hand and whisper ‘Anna Pavlova’. She then would kiss the gentleman on each cheek, fondle the flowers and thank him with such ecstasy that you would think she had never been given flowers before.

Pavlova had a profound understanding of the value of receiving graciously. She brought this to a fine art. Being the wonderful dancer that she was, it was rare for her to give anything less than a perfect performance. However, on an evening when she had danced less well than usual I have seen her work the audience up into tumultuous appreciation merely by the way she behaved with her bouquets. Accepting them with a charm which is rarely seen on any stage, she would press the flowers to her body, moving first one hand and then the other as she almost cuddled them. She would bend deeply from the waist, bowing to various parts of the house, give a brilliant turn of the head and shoulders, then run off, with head thrown back to reveal the
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line of her neck, taking the longest possible route to the wings. This picture she gave of herself, moving so delicately and swiftly with the flowers, was only the beginning. Before she had taken two curtain calls people had entirely forgotten her earlier performance in watching another important and exquisite aspect of Pavlova's art. They loved every movement she made during those curtain calls, and applauded accordingly. I've seen several dancers try to copy this amazing feat of Pavlova's, but they have never succeeded. She was the only one who has been able to build up applause from nothing.

In later years, when I travelled with Pavlova's company, I realised that there was a curious atmosphere of constraint among her dancers, and that nobody ever appeared quite at ease. The artists never seemed sure of themselves or of her: they were always anticipating the next move a little fearfully.

If some unforeseen incident occurred during a performance Pavlova could become in a flash extremely angry, and she would grumble quite audibly while dancing. Once during a ballet in which she had to pass between two lines of kneeling girls she saw a foot projecting too far, which might conceivably have tripped her up, though it did not. She ordered the curtain to be lowered and told her stage manager, Pianovsky, to inform the conductor that the ballet would start again from the beginning.

Pavlova had one trick of balance, the secret of which I discovered later in the following way. Our shoes were always made by Niccolini in Milan, and as Pavlova's feet were much smaller than mine I was surprised to learn that my shoes were made on her last. It is almost impossible to dance in ballet shoes just as they come from the maker, as they have to be adjusted to the individual foot. No two dancers 'fix' their ballet shoes in the same way, and whenever I see a new pair 'done up' ready for a girl to wear I invariably look to see what she has done to make them comfortable. Pavlova had a secret method entirely her own. Taking shoes which were made somewhat too large for her, she would insert an extra support of thin leather or cork in the forward part of the shoe, but some distance from the tip. Then, soaking them in water she would tread down the padded points
as far as the support. When they were dry she cut a slit in the rear edge of the point and inserted a plait of tape. Finally, she would darn all over and round the point in the normal way. She thus contrived for herself solid platforms on which to balance.

Her shoes, however, were only part of the method which enabled her to hold an arabesque for so long. Watching her, you would close your eyes and think, ‘She can’t possibly still be there when I open them again’, but she was. She would keep this up for ages, then suddenly do a couple of pirouettes and go flitting away. I asked her how she did it. Pavlova told me that as soon as she took the position, either an attitude or an arabesque, she would start to concentrate. From the point of the toe which rested on the ground she would think her way through the ankle—to the calf—to the knee—to the thigh—to the waist—to the breast—to the head—through the arm—to the tips of her fingers; and when she had finished this controlling thought-process it was time to move on.

I was always fascinated by the perfection of Pavlova’s costumes: they were so exquisitely made. Those with tu-tus—that is, short stiffened ballet skirts—were works of art; they were constructed with such skill, the weight so nicely calculated and the cut so exact, with their layers of tulle, their sequins, ribbons or feathers for adornment, that they never wilted or changed their shape during a performance. Between performances they were as carefully groomed as their owner. Costumes like The Swan and The Butterfly had a specially prepared basket on the principle of an old-fashioned hat box. This basket was lined and padded, and was large enough for these costumes to be laid out flat and pinned on the sides, bottom and top, so that five dresses could be carried without any harm coming to them.

Pavlova was immaculate on and off the stage, with never a hair out of place. At home she wore pastel colours to show off her sleek dark hair. Her hats often had ospreys drooping round the brim to soften her face. The way she used her hands or placed her feet with their great arched insteps all combined to produce an impression of art. She always wore flowers, which became her better than mink.
One day during that summer of 1912 she took two of us with her into her aviary of tropical birds. It was very high, with a rounded top. She walked straight into it through double doors and stood with her arms outstretched. The many-coloured birds showed no fear and behaved as if she was one of them. She then took us to the lake at the bottom of her garden where she knelt down and called to her pet swan. The bird came to her immediately, and she folded her arms round its neck and talked to it gently. The swan's mate, meanwhile, remained watching nearby in absolute stillness.

The first day that we went to her house we had our practice clothes with us and were given a class in her superb studio. After that we came regularly for several weeks. Our main schooling and character lessons were from Sheraiev, who had been a famous teacher in Russia, but Cloustine gave us a few classes too.

One day Sheraiev said to me, 'Wait after class. I will speak with you.' I was terrified. After dressing, I went back to the studio prepared to receive my dismissal, while the other girls left the house intrigued by the mystery. Seeing by my face that I was scared, Sheraiev put his arm round my shoulder and said, 'Don't be frightened. I want to tell you to concentrate on character dancing and to learn as much as you can from the Russians. If you work very hard I think you stand a chance of being a good dancer.' His English was not as clear as that, but this was the gist of what he told me. I was so thrilled I ran all the way down the hill from Ivy House to Golders Green station to get home with the news as soon as possible. I didn't even stop to have the usual drink of milk in the dairy, although I was very thirsty, for fear the other girls whom I knew to be waiting inquisitively would ask me what the old man had said. When I got home, bursting with the news, my family showed so little interest in what Sheraiev had told me that I ran upstairs and had a good cry. However, I knew that a maestro like Sheraiev would not have bothered to single me out and say what he did unless he meant it: so I worked hard.

During the autumn of 1912, a troupe of Russian dancers, headed by Theodore Kosloff, appeared on the bill of the Coliseum.
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music-hall. Kosloff and his wife Baldina had taken part in Diaghilev's famous first Paris season in May, 1909, but like Pavlova and Mordkin, they had decided to break away and form their own little company. At the Coliseum they were dancing a version of Scheherazade twice daily; and it is a proof of the profound impression that Russian music and the new ballets of Diaghilev had made on the Western European public, that within two years of the first production at the Paris Opéra of Fokine's Scheherazade with Bakst's décor, when Rimsky Korsakov's score was first heard outside Russia, an arrangement of this work should have reached the music-halls.

Together with several other girls who had been working with Pavlova, I was given an audition by Kosloff and accepted for his company. Baldina, Theodore Kosloff, and his brother Alexis were a very strong team. Theodore was not unlike Fokine in his manner of dancing, and obviously from the same school. Alexis was a first-rate comic character dancer, excellent as the Eunuch in Scheherazade. Our Scheherazade was quite different from Fokine's, as I was to discover later; and Baldina, being an 'old-fashioned' ballerina, danced Zobeide on her points—a procedure which would certainly have horrified Fokine. She had an unusual gift: she could sit in a box and record the movements of a classical ballet in some secret notation of her own.

Baldina had started dancing very soon after the birth of a baby, and before we had given many performances at the Coliseum she heard that her little girl, who was being cared for at Bournemouth, had developed meningitis. The child was so seriously ill that her mother was sent for, but Baldina was afraid of breaking her contract with Oswald Stoll. Something had to be done, so the Kosloffs decided to let me go on in her place. I had one rehearsal between the shows and another the next morning. I was not unlike Baldina in appearance, but her costume was too big and I had to be padded out. With her wig, head-dress and make-up I might have been Baldina herself—except for the dancing.

It was certainly exciting to be dancing a ballerina's part at the London Coliseum at the age of sixteen, and I was shaking like a
leaf with stage-fright. Theodore, who played the Negro, was very helpful all the time I danced with him, but as soon as I was on my own in the tragic scene at the end I nearly went to pieces. At the supreme moment when the unfaithful Zobeide pleads with her husband the Shah for forgiveness before committing suicide at his feet, I got carried away. Clutching furiously at the Shah, I accidentally grabbed hold of his beard and was horrified to see it part company with his face. I let go quickly, thinking I had pulled it off, but it was on elastic and snapped back, not under his chin but over his mouth. Needless to say I lost no time in stabbing myself and falling dead before him in an apologetic attitude.

An Austrian tour was arranged for the Kosloff company. Just before the end of our four-week season at the Coliseum, I was called to the manager’s office and told that as I should be dancing a Hungarian czardas with Alexis on the tour I would be given an extra pound a week, making my salary five pounds in all, but that on no account was I to let anyone know this. Almost immediately after this, the dancers who were to get only four pounds a week on tour decided to strike. When they said to me, ‘You’re with us, of course,’ I was in a real dilemma. I had not the wisdom to agree, but feeling that after my rise in salary loyalty to the management came first, without asking anyone’s advice I refused to join them. I was sent to Coventry and called a ‘blackleg’. This made me so miserable that I cried when I told my family, who made it worse when they explained that I should have stood by the company. The strike was a failure and the salaries remained at four pounds. The whole time we were away I was hardly happy except when we were on the stage, because of that wretched extra pound which I was afraid to spend. We must have been away five weeks, because I know I saved five pounds. Whether somebody got to know of this money which was burning holes wherever I put it, I do not know; but on the day we started for home my handbag was stolen and I arrived back without a pennypiece in my pocket.

In Budapest I was nervous of dancing the czardas, the Hungarians’ own national dance, and even Alexis was a bit apprehensive too. But we must have been quite good as we had to
give an encore and repeat the czardas at every performance in the city.

When we came back to the Coliseum for a two weeks’ return date, London was talking of nothing but the Diaghilev Ballet, and I heard for the first time about Nijinsky and his phenomenal elevation. It was said that in *Le Spectre de la rose* when he leaped through the window, he would hang suspended in the air. How I should have laughed if anyone had told me that one day I should dance with Nijinsky in that very ballet.

The Diaghilev Ballet had paid its first visit to London during the Coronation season of 1911. This visit had been followed by another later in the same year, while I was in America, and by a third during the summer of 1912. After Pavlova quarrelled with Mordkin she had rejoined Diaghilev briefly for his autumn season in 1911, and London audiences had the advantage over Paris in enjoying the never-to-be-repeated experience of seeing Pavlova and Nijinsky together in *Giselle*. From then on Pavlova was to go her own way again, and Diaghilev was to continue on his appointed mission of creating new stars and new masterpieces. Londoners had been given the opportunity to lose themselves in the romanticism of Fokine’s *Les Sylphides* and *Le Spectre de la rose*, and to be stirred by the passionate revelry of his Scheherazade and *Prince Igor*. They had also heard in *L’Oiseau de Feu* and *Petrouchka* the music of Diaghilev’s greatest discovery, Igor Stravinsky. London had, in fact, experienced the theatrical revolution initiated by Diaghilev, Benois, Bakst and Fokine, and though still gasping for breath, had failed to be shocked either by the eroticism or the unclassical choreography of Nijinsky’s own first ballet *L’Après-midi d’un faune*. Now, early in 1913, the Diaghilev ballet were once more in London.

There were a few Russian men in the Kosloff company, and one of these was Nicolas Zverev, a cheerful young man whom we called ‘Percy Greensocks’, because he always wore green in class; another was his friend Tarasoff. These two heard from friends in the Diaghilev company that they had a few vacancies, and were told that if Diaghilev was approached carefully he might give us an audition. I knew later that Diaghilev had a low opinion
of what London could produce in the way of dancers, and I do not suppose that he really entertained the possibility of engaging us: nevertheless, it was arranged that four of us girls, with Zverev and Tarasoff, should be given an audition to show our ability, if any, at the awful hour of ten o'clock on a Monday morning. And so I came to the greatest ordeal of my life up-to-date.

We changed into practice dress, and stupidly put on brand new ballet shoes. We had to face a committee more terrifying than any first-night audience: they sat with their backs to the towering safety curtain on the stage of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Diaghilev, of course, was there, and Nijinsky, Maestro and Madame Cecchetti and Grigoriev. We had no music, and nothing arranged. We girls lined ourselves up to do some of our dances from Scheherazade. Just as we started I caught my uncomfortable shoe in something, and down I went with a crash. The stage was slippery and my feet had not got used to the shoes. Before we finished I had gone down three times. At last Diaghilev suggested that Cecchetti should give us some classroom steps to do, and with these I got on better. I cannot remember how the other girls danced, but Zverev jumped and did his entrechats and pirouettes splendidly, which seemed to save the situation. Still, we hadn't much hope as we crawled out of Covent Garden and down Henrietta Street to the Coliseum.

That same evening during our performance we got the news that five of us had been accepted; Anna Broomhead (later Broomova), Doris Faithful, Zverev, Tarasoff and myself. It fell to Tarasoff, who had arranged the secret audition, to tell poor Theodore Kosloff that he was losing us. Theodore was very sad, but stuck a photograph of himself in my autograph book, and cut a strand of beads off his costume to give me as a souvenir; and Alexis did the same. We completed our contract with them, dancing in Harrogate and Cheltenham. There we said good-bye to a company we had grown fond of and with whom we had been happy. I was to join Diaghilev in Monte Carlo at a salary of thirty pounds a month.