**Sigurd Leeder (b. 14 August 1902, Hamburg, Germany; d. 20 June 1981, Herisau, Switzerland)**

**Summary**

In a career that spanned over sixty years, Sigurd Leeder made important contributions to the dance worlds in Germany, Great Britain, Chile, and Switzerland. His early association with Kurt Jooss was of great importance to them both, with Leeder working not only as a dancer in the Ballets Jooss, but also as a ballet master and teacher at the various schools associated with the company. In 1924 he joined Jooss at the Municipal Theatre Münster as a soloist and as a teacher at the new Westphalian *Schule für Musik, Sprache und Bewegung* (School for Music, Voice, and Movement), then in 1927 he moved with Jooss to Essen. There he became head of the dance department at the *Folkwangschule für Musik, Tanz und Sprechen* (Folkwang School for Music, Dance, and Voice) and danced with the municipal dance ensemble that later evolved into the Ballets Jooss.In 1934 Leeder moved to Dartington Hall in Great Britain, along with Jooss, other members of the company, and several students from the school in Essen. When the Ballets Jooss folded in 1947, Leeder established the Sigurd Leeder School of Dance in London. He moved to Chile to become Director of the Dance Department at the University of Santiago in 1959, and then to Switzerland in 1964 to again open his own school. The dance language developed by Leeder and Jooss was a synthesis of ballet and Laban’s theories filtered through their varied dance and theatre experiences and distilled in Leeder’s inspirational teaching. He was renowned not only for these teaching skills but for his exploration, development, and refinement of Kinetographie-Laban (Labanotation).

**Training**

As a young man Leeder studied at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* (Art Academy) in Hamburg, taking acting and movement classes. During 1920-1921 he gave several solo recitals and had his own dance group while simultaneously working as a dancer and actor at the *Kammerspiele* (Chamber Theatre) in Hamburg under director Erich Ziegel. In 1923 he partnered Jutta van Collande and performed throughout Germany with her. In 1924 Leeder met Kurt Jooss, who introduced him to the *Tanzbühne Laban* (Laban Dance Studio) and the ideas of Rudolf Laban, particularly his thinking on choreutics (direction and design in space) and eukinetic (dynamics and flow of energy). Jooss and Leeder worked on a programme entitled *Two Male Dancers*, performed at Laban’s *Neue Tanzbühne* (New Dance Stage) during 1926-1927, and they travelled together to Paris to study ballet.

**Major Contributions to the Field and to Modernism**

Leeder, with Jooss, developed a new method for training dancers based on their thorough knowledge of Laban’s theories and principles, their background in ballet, and their own dance experiences. Leeder was not concerned with teaching a dance style. Rather, through teaching an understanding of movement principles, he intended to enable the dancer to move in any style in order to express the choreographic intentions. Technical virtuosity for its own sake was not taught, instead the conceptual and physical understandings of dynamics, design and the principles of movement each informed and affected how the daily dance practice was executed, how movement in improvisation classes was explored, and how choices in choreography were made. The most distinctive aspect of his teaching was the development of ‘studies’, miniature and purposeful compositions based on a simple movement idea that were developed, varied, modified, and kept in the class repertoire for practice.

Leeder created one work for the Ballet Jooss, *Sailor’s Fancy* (1943), a comedy, and many other dance works—some small scale for student performance and others for the small companies that emerged from his schools. Many of these works were recorded in Labanotation and some have subsequently been published, the most well-known of which is *Danse Macabre* (1935) a short work for a large group to the Saint-Saens score. Other works include *Doña Clara* (1939) based on Heine’s poem *Don Ramiro* and choreography for the Glyndebourne Opera season in 1951 which included Mozart’s *Idominea, Don Giovanni, La Nozze di Figaro* and Verdi’s *La Forza del Destino*.

**Legacy**

The dancers of the Ballets Jooss exemplified Leeder’s teaching and, as a result of their international tours, the Jooss-Leeder School of Dance at Dartington Hall and his own Sigurd Leeder School of Dance in London attracted students from many countries who subsequently influenced the development of dance in Europe and elsewhere. In England his influence was felt through former students such as Simone Michelle who went on to teach for many years at the Art of Movement Studio (later the Laban Centre and now Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance) and Jane Winearls, who, already an experienced teacher, upon graduating from the Leeder School was immediately employed by Leeder to teach at the school. After a year she went to teach for Jooss at the *Folkwangschule* before returning to London in the mid-1950s. Hence Winearls was in a unique position to write on the work of these two men in her book *Modern Dance*, *the Jooss-Leeder Method* (1958), in which she articulates clearly Leeder’s teaching. She taught Jooss-Leeder work at the University of Birmingham until her retirement in 1977, after which the Jooss-Leeder based work was continued by Andy Adamson until 2001.

In South America where, in the early 1940s, former Ballets Jooss dancers Ernst Uthoff, Lola Botka and Rudolf Pescht had established a dance department and company at the University of Chile in Santiago, Leeder’s influence was felt both through his own teaching and that of his students Joan Turner (Jara) and Patricio Bunster. In Europe his influence reached from Ireland (through the work of June Fryer one of the first students at his London School) to Sweden where Birgit Cullberg’s Ballet company flourished – she had trained at Dartington with him - and back to Germany where Jean Cebron (trained at the Leeder School) and Hans Zullig (a former Ballets Jooss dancer) taught at the Folkwangschule in Essen from the early 1950s for many years, and through Bunster at the Palucca School in Dresden.

Ann Hutchinson Guest, a student of Leeder’s at Dartington, became a world leader in the field of Labanotation while Leeder’s interest in dance notation became a lifelong commitment. In 1959 he became one of the founders of the International Council of Kinetography Laban (ICKL), an organization that spearheaded the subsequent development of Laban’s notation ideas.

**Clare Lidbury**

**Selected Works**

*Danse Macabre* (1935; 1977)

*Doña Clara* (1939)

*Sailor’s Dance* (1943)

*Nocturne* (1976)

**References and Further Reading:**

Dröge, W. et. al. (2011) ‘Barbara Passow—Jooss-Leeder Technique,’ in *Dance Techniques 2010* *Tanzplan Germany*, eds. I. Diehl and F. Lampert, Leipzig: Henschel Verlag, 90-124.

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Winearls, J. (1958) *Modern Dance*, *the Jooss-Leeder Method,* London: A. & C. Black.

**Paratexs**

Kurt Jooss and Sigurd Leeder in Jooss choreography for *Marché Militaire* (1924)

Contact Folkwang School archive www.folkwang-uni.de

<http://www.folkwang-uni.de/uploads/pics/sigur_leeder-kurt_joos_175_01.jpg>

*Nocturne* (1976), chor: Siguard Leeder; contact Swiss Dance Archive [www.tanzarchiv.ch](http://www.tanzarchiv.ch)

<http://filmspur.ch/uploads/images/art_63_1.jpg>