**Pavlova, Anna (b. 31 January [12 February] 1881, St. Petersburg, Russia; d. 23 January 1931, The Hague, Netherlands)**

**Summary**

Considered the most expressively gifted ballerina of her generation, Russian dancer Anna Pavlova introduced ballet to a world audie­nce through twenty-three years of nearly constant touring. Pavlova’s talent resided in her ability to convey subjective and emotional experience through conventional ballet material, rather than in avant-garde experimentation. While the themes of her ballets pegged her as a traditionalist, Pavlova’s career mirrored forward-thinking trends in dance through her embrace of a freer style, her commitment to popularising ballet worldwide and her experiments with dances from other cultures.

**Training and Early Influences**

Pavlova entered the Imperial Theatre School in St. Petersburg 1891 and joined the Imperial Ballet at the level of coryphée (demi-soloist) in 1899. In 1906, she was promoted to the rank of ballerina. Pavlova’s expressive style, inspired in part by Isadora Duncan, who made her first tour of Russia in 1904-5, complemented new ideas about naturalism and neo-romanticism in ballet choreography. With choreographer Michel Fokine, a proponent of the new approaches, Pavlova created principal roles in the original versions of *Chopiniana* (1907) and *Egyptian Nights* (1908) and in 1907 her iconic solo *The Dying Swan*. In this brief work, using only the simplest of ballet steps, Pavlova performed a deeply moving portrayal of the fragility of human life.

**Touring and Legacy**

Following a tour of the Baltic States and Northern Europe in 1908, Pavlova appeared in the first season of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in Paris in 1909; the following year she formed her own company. From this point forward, Pavlova toured almost continually until her death in 1931. Pavlova believed in ballet as a force for moral and spiritual uplift. A self-declared ‘ambassadress’ of ballet, she was a pioneer in bringing ballet to small towns in the United States, Canada and Great Britain, and, often under trying conditions, to areas of South America, Latin America, Japan, China, India, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Burma, Java and Africa. Frequently, Pavlova’s company offered these audiences their first glimpse of ballet. As part of her mission to make ballet accessible to audiences everywhere, her company often performed in venues for more popular entertainments, such as music-halls. A 1916 engagement at New York City’s Hippodrome, where Pavlova premiered her *Sleeping Beauty*, for example, appeared together with an ice ballet, a minstrel show with 400 performers and vaudeville acts including a march of West Point cadets.

Pavlova’s repertoire consisted of condensed versions of multi-act ballets such as *Giselle*, *Coppélia* and *Don Quixote*; one-act thematic ballets in the format popularised by Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes such as *Oriental Fantasy* (1913), *Les Préludes* (1913), *La Péri* (1919), *Dionysius* (1921) and her own choreographic work, *Autumn Leaves* (1919); and shorter divertissement pieces including the *Bacchanale* (1909), the *Dragonfly* (1914), the *Pavlova Gavotte* (1914) and *California Poppy* (1915). Of these, her shorter solo pieces proved to be the most enduringly popular.

Pavlova carefully controlled the use of her image. No photograph could be released without her approval, and most, produced in studio settings, were heavily retouched to her specifications. In addition, Pavlova was one of the few ballerinas of her era interested in the expressive possibilities of film. She allowed herself to be filmed on four occasions, most notably at Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford’s studio in Los Angeles in 1925, and she starred in a feature film, *The Dumb Girl of Portici* (1916), directed by Lois Weber.

Pavlova’s travels produced several cross-cultural ballets. In Japan, Pavlova studied with the revered teacher Matsumoto Koshiro VII; the dances she learned, reconstructed from a company member’s notebook, became part of the ballet *Oriental Impressions*, which premiered in London in 1923. Included in this ballet were two pieces produced and performed in collaboration with the Indian dance pioneer Uday Shankar: *Krishna* *and Radha* and *Hindu Wedding*. Pavlova’s work with Shankar helped revive interest in traditional dance in India. In Mexico City, where the company performed in a bullring, Pavlova created *Mexican Dances* (1919), a work blending national folk dances with pointe work.

**Legacy**

Pavlova’s legacy lay in introducing a world audience to ballet and in inspiring a generation of dancers. Many of Pavlova’s company members became distinguished teachers and performers; still others established ballet schools and companies, thus furthering the diasporic spread of ballet from Russia in the early twentieth century. Notable examples of Pavlova company alumni include Muriel Stuart, Mikhail Mordkin, Hilda Butsova, Pierre Vladimiroff, Alexander Volinine and Ruth Page.

**References and Further Reading**

Dandré, V. (1932) *Anna Pavlova: In Art and Life*, London: Cassell & Co. (A celebratory yet thorough biography by Pavlova’s husband and company manger)

Fonteyn, M., and J. and R. Lazzarini (1984) *Pavlova: Portrait of a Dancer*, New York: Viking. (Rare first-person quotations, interviews and newspaper articles about Pavlova organised by topic)

Franks, A.H. (1956) *Pavlova: A Biography*, London: Burke. (A compilation of reminiscences by those who worked with Pavlova, including Michel Fokine, Sol Hurok, Muriel Stuart and Laurent Novikov)

Gaiser Casey, C. (2012) ‘The Ballet Corporealities of Anna Pavlova and Albertina Rasch’, *Dance Chronicle* 35 (1): 8-29. (Examines Pavlova’s career in the context of the American women’s movement)

Magriel, P. (1947) *Pavlova: An Illustrated Monograph*, New York: H. Holt. (Includes Pavlova’s autobiography, ‘Pages of My Life’)

Money, K. (1982) *Anna Pavlova: Her Life and Art*, New York: Knopf. (The most comprehensive biography and career overview of the ballerina)

Svetloff, V. (1974 [1922]) *Anna Pavlova*, New York: Dover. (Pavlova’s art analysed by a Russian dance critic in light of the history of classical dance)

**Moving Image Material**

*Classic Kirov Performances* (Kultur, 1992). (A commercially available recording of Pavlova’s ‘Dying Swan’)

*Immortal Swan* (Productions Limited, 1935). Directed by Vladimir Launitz. (A treasury of Pavlova film footage originally shot in 1924)

*The Dumb Girl of Portici* (Universal, 1916). Directed by Lois Weber. (Pavlova’s feature film debut)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMEBFhVMZpU> (‘Dying Swan’ [1907])

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyDiLBSbKio> (‘Dragonfly’ [1914])

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpMJkntY1zs> (‘Greek Dance’ [1910])

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etEKJphBXtc> (‘La Nuit’ [1909])

**Photographs**

Anna Pavlova

<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?pavlova_0003v>

Anna Pavlova in *The Dumb Girl of Portici* (1916)

<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?pavlova_0376v>

Anna Pavlova photographed by Arnold Genthe

<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?pavlova_3023v>

Anna Pavlova in *Dragonfly* (1914)

<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?pavlova_0019v>

Uday Shankar and Anna Pavlova in *Krishna and Radha* (1923)

<http://artsci.wustl.edu/~perfhist/spr_07_essays/radha_through_ages.html>

Photograph courtesy of the Alice Boner Foundation, Zurich

[if that doesn’t work, use the not-as-good photograph on the NYPL site]:

[<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?2015211>]

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