**Burrowes, Leslie (b. April 16, 1908, Rochford, Essex, England; d. August 25, 1985, London, England)**

**Summary**

Dancer, choreographer and teacher Leslie Burrowes was the first British recipient of the full certification of Mary Wigman’s Dresden School, licensing her to teach Wigman’s modern dance technique to amateurs and professionals. Before beginning her training with Wigman in 1930, Burrowes had studied and performed with Margaret Morris, whose ‘free dance’ method belonged to the Hellenic and Duncanesque non-balletic dance techniques of early twentieth-century Britain. Burrowes rejected her original dance training in favour of Wigman’s expressionism, returning to London in 1931 to proselytise on its behalf and to serve as Wigman’s official British representative. Burrowes’ attempts to embed Wigman’s dance in Britain were largely unsuccessful, caught in the squeeze between the better established ballet and Hellenic dance. However she is an important figure in the development of modern dance in Britain, providing a thorough aesthetic education to some of the teachers and lecturers who, from the 1940s, were instrumental in establishing Laban-based modern dance in British teacher training colleges and schools.

**Training**

Lucie Leslie Burrowes began to study with Margaret Morris in London in1924 and rapidly became one of her assistant teachers. In 1928, she took a post teaching dance at Dartington Hall in Devon, where Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst were setting up their ideal community dedicated to education, the arts and modern agricultural methods. Burrowes taught classes to the children of the Dartington Hall School (a private, pupil-centred establishment) and to adult amateurs based on the then popular technique of Margaret Morris Movement, but she began to feel that its expressive potential was limited. The philanthropic Dorothy Elmhirst financed Burrowes’ studies at the Wigman School in Dresden.

As a student with a strong technical background, Burrowes was critical of what she saw as the limited development of physical ability at the Wigman School; however, she maintained a personal admiration for Wigman as an artist and teacher and credited Wigman’s methods for releasing her capacity to express herself through movement. For her part, Wigman recorded her appreciation in letters to Burrowes, making her one of the solo dancers whose photographs appeared in Wigman’s 1935 book, *Deutsche Tanzkunst* (*German Dance Art*). The two exchanged letters into the late 1960s. (More than seventy letters from Wigman are preserved in the Burrowes Archive.)

**Contribution to the Field and to Modernism**

On her return to London, Burrowes set out to establish herself as a modern dance artist and educator of the ‘Central European’ or Ausdruckstanz school. Following Wigman’s model, she initially aimed to establish herself as a performer. In the solo recitals she gave in 1931–32, the dances revealed the influence of Wigman’s choreography and training. *Gypsy Witch* and *Fear*, both choreographed in 1931, were vivid expressions of mental states, and the latter was also a masked dance. Making and using masks for inner and outer transformation was one of the skills Burrowes had acquired in Dresden, and one which she continued to explore after her return to England. Her signature dance, *Primitive Joy* (1931), was a boisterous sound and movement composition. Combining voice, body-sound and percussion, it evoked the creative use of so-called ‘primitive instruments’ at the Wigman School. Although excelling in dynamic and percussive movement, Burrowes was also a lyrical dancer, choreographing to a wide range of music.

In 1933, Burrowes married the oboist Leon Goossens. Their home in Chelsea became a shared studio, rehearsal and performance space. At the Leslie Burrowes Studio of the Dance the curriculum was based upon Wigman’s, and this connection was maintained through frequent visits to Dresden for summer courses in the 1930s, where Burrowes sometimes taught and her own students could be certified. Local activity in London also included children’s creative dance classes for boys as well as girls.

In 1938, Burrowes joined forces with Louise Soelberg, an American former Ballets Jooss dancer she had previously met at Dartington Hall. Their joint effort, The Dance Centre, initially split between their two studios, had early success in organising a performing group, guest lectures and performances, and classes for amateurs and professionals. Although the original idea was to bring all the activities together in one place, The Dance Centre was unable to find suitable premises. With the onset of the Second World War, The Dance Centre foundered with Burrowes and Soelberg both moving away from London and disagreeing about future policy. After the war, Burrowes mainly devoted herself to teaching in Sussex and London, especially the children’s classes in which she excelled.

**Legacy**

Burrowes brought Wigman’s distinctive aesthetic and pedagogy to London in the 1930s, where disciples from other European schools were already practising. Enthused by this climate, many young teachers wanted to bring creative dance into the regimented physical education syllabus for schools. Burrowes’ obvious artistry and vision for creative teaching attracted, amongst others, Joan Goodridge and Diana Jordan. From 1940, as awareness of the educational potential of modern dance was enhanced through the presence of Rudolf Laban, students of Burrowes such as Goodridge and Jordan were already equipped to become influential leaders in the educational sphere. Although Burrowes did not align herself with Laban, she trained a number of figures who became active in the modern educational dance movement closely associated with him.

**Selected List of Works**

*Pastorale Lunaire* (*Moonlight Pastorale*, 1931)

*Chorale: I Call on Thee Lord* (1931)

*Gypsy Witch* (1931)

*Primitive* *Joy* (1931)

*Negro Rhapsody* (1931)

*Fear* (1931)

*Spanish Suite* (1931)

*Celtic Dances* (1932)

*Figurine Burlesque* (1932)

*Dance* *of* *Sorrow* (1933)

*Choreographic Concerto* (1935) [for variety programme at the Coliseum, London]

*Pavane* (1938)

**Selected Writing**

Burrowes, L. (1933) ‘Leslie Burrowes Answers Mr. Haskell’, *The Dancing Times*, March: 699-701. (Burrowes’ response to critic Arnold Haskell’s attack on her article about modern dance.)

------ (1933) ‘The Modern Dance Movement in England’, *The Dancing Times*, January: 452-53. (An article based on an interview with Burrowes in which she counters the opinions of some critics that modern dance has ‘failed’.)

**References and Further Reading**

Haskell, A. (1933) ‘A Reply to Leslie Burrowes’, *The Dancing Times*, February: 547–548. (The response by a leading critic of modern dance to Burrowes’ article, ‘The Modern Dance Movement in England’.)

Nicholas, L. (2007) *Dancing in Utopia: Dartington Hall and its Dancers*, Alton, Hants: Dance Books. (Includes the context of Burrowes’ early career at Dartington Hall)

Nicholas, L. (2010) ‘The Dance Centre: Finding a Place for Laban’, *Movement, Dance and Drama* 29 (1): 23 – 24; and 29 (2): 9. (Summarises controversies surrounding the break-up of the Dance Centre and Laban’s position in 1940)

Nicholas, L. (2010) ‘Leslie Burrowes: A Young Dancer in Dresden and London, 1930 - 34’, *Dance Research* 28 (2): 153–78. (Includes annotated transcriptions of Burrowes’ letters from Dresden and compares her activities in the first years back in London)

Rutherston, J. (1934) ‘The Central European Dance in England’, *The Dancing Times*, December: 313–16. (Provides essential background on the diversity of modern dance in early 1930s Britain)

**Photographs**

Photographs of Burrowes from the Dartington Hall Trust Archive can be accessed online at:

<http://www.dartington.org/archive/>

An image of Burrowes in *Fear* can be viewed in the Hulton Archive, <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk>, #2638971

**Archives**

Dartington Hall Trust Archive: DWE, Arts 7, Folder A, Leslie Burrowes. (Includes Burrowes’ letters from Dresden to Dorothy Elmhirst)

The Leslie Burrowes Collection, The National Resource Centre for Dance, University of Surrey. (Books, albums, photographs, programmes, letters (including Mary Wigman’s) and other documents relating to Burrowes’ career.)

<http://www.surrey.ac.uk/library/nrcd/index.htm>

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