**Sorel, Ruth Elly Abramovitsch (Abramowitz). (b. 18 June 1907, Halle, Germany; d. 1 April 1974, Warsaw, Poland)**

**Summary**

Upon immigrating to Montreal in 1944, Ruth Abramovitsch (also known as Abramowitz) Sorel was one of the first dancers to regularly teach and perform modern dance in Canada. Informed by her experience performing with Mary Wigman in Dresden, Sorel introduced Montreal dancers and audiences to *Ausdruckstanz*, the German expressionist dance style. Her company, variously billed as ‘Ruth Sorel Montreal Ballet’ or ‘Ruth Sorel Modern Dance Group’, performed dramatic psychological narratives set to a classically informed movement vocabulary. She received national recognition when her company performed at the Canadian Ballet Festivals in 1949 and 1950. Sorel’s legacy can be seen in the many dance careers she helped launch, including Yoné Kvietys (1924-2011) and Birouté Nagys (1920—) who jointly founded the Montreal Modern Dance Company in 1952. However, Sorel’s influence on the Montreal dance community gradually began to fade in the 1950s. Sorel left Montreal to return to Poland in 1957 where she remained until her death in 1974.

**Contributions to the Field and to Modernism**

Of Polish-Jewish decent, Ruth Elly Abramowitsch (also known as Abramowitz) Sorel grew up in Germany and began her dance training in Dalcroze Eurhythmics. From 1923-1928, she danced with Mary Wigman (1886-1973) where she became familiar with the German expressionist dance style *Austruckstanz*. Abramowitsch also performed as a character dance soloist with the Berlin State Opera from 1927-1933, but left the company to relocate to Warsaw, Poland. Abramowitsch’s career continued to flourish in Poland where she won first prize at the International Dance Festival of Warsaw in 1933 for her performance of *Salomé*. Abramowitsch toured internationally to Italy, France, England, Palestine, Canada and Brazil with her dance partner George Groke from 1933-1935. Upon her return to Poland, Abramowitsch established a professional training school for actors and dancers in Warsaw. Fleeing anti-Semitism in Nazi-occupied Poland, Abramowitsch and her husband, author Michal Choromanski (1904-1972), moved briefly to Brazil before immigrating to Montreal in 1944. It was in Montreal that Abramowitsch took the stage name ‘Ruth Sorel’.

Sorel’s career in Montreal began with a successful solo concert and was followed by the establishment of her dance studio at the Westmount YMCA. Within two years of her arrival, Sorel founded a small company, alternately called ‘Ruth Sorel Montreal Ballet’, ‘Ruth Sorel Modern Dance Group’, and several variations on those names. The company blended classical ballet technique with dramatic psychological themes. *Biographie Dancée* (*Danced Biography*, 1949) depicts the Romantic composer Robert Schumann at the moment before his death as he recalls the victories, struggles, and troubling memories of his past. In *Mea Culpa, Mea Culpa* (1949), Sorel choreographs the story of a sinner’s return to grace set to the music of J.S. Bach. However, perhaps Sorel’s most famous work is *La Gaspésienne: Vie d’une mère canadienne* (*The woman from Gaspésie: Life of a Canadian Mother*, 1949). *La Gaspésienne* was the first ballet to represent French Canadian life. In this work, Sorel tells the story of a young country girl who leaves her home of Gaspésie for the city where, despite her mother warnings, she falls victim to the temptations of urban life before returning home. In the 1950s, Sorel’s influence began to fade and her company eventually disbanded. Sorel returned to Warsaw, Poland in 1957 where she lived until her death in 1974.

Many of Sorel’s company members, like Alexander MacDougall, Andrée Millaire, and Michel Boudot, had successful careers in dance. Two of Sorel’s former dancers, Yoné Kvietys and Birouté Nagys formed the Montreal Modern Dance Company in 1952. As the programme for the first Canadian Ballet Festival in 1948 explains, Ruth Sorel was ‘Canada’s first exponent of the modern dance’, and along with Elizabeth Leese, Sorel was one of the first teachers and performers of German expressionist dance in Montreal.

**List of Works:**

*La Gaspésienne: Vie d’une Mère canadienne* (*The Woman from Gaspésie: Life of a Canadian Mother*, 1949)

*Mea Culpa, Mea Culpa* (1949)

# Biographie Dansée (Danced Biography, 1949)

*Three Miniatures: The Closed Door, All Saints, Two Lawyers and the Moonlight* (1949)

*Shakespearean Shadows* (1949)

# Tittle Tattle (Papotages) (1950)

*Suite en Blanc* (*Suite in White*, date unknown)

**References and Further reading:**

Tembeck, I. (1991) *Danser à Montréal: Germination d’une histoire chorégraphique*. Sillery, HQ: Presses de l’Université du Québec, 1991. [Translated and revised by the author as *Dancing in Montreal: Seeds of a Choreographic History*. Madison, WI: Society of Dance History Scholars, 1994.] (In this book, Tembeck gives a biography of Ruth Sorel while positioning her within, as well as her influence on, Montreal’s arts scene).

Tembeck, I. (2000) ‘Ruth Sorel’, in *Encyclopedia of Theatre Dance in Canada*, Susan MacPherson (ed.). Toronto: Dance Collection Danse Press/Presse. (This article provides basic biographic information on Ruth Sorel).

Tembeck, I. (2004) ‘Politics and Dance in Montreal, 1940s to 1980s: The Imaginary Maginot Line between Anglophone and Francophone Dancers’ in *Canadian Dance: Visions and Stories.* Selma Odom and Mary Jane Warner (eds). Toronto: Dance Collection Danse Press/Presse. (This article examines how German expressionism came to influence both French- and English-speaking dancers in Montreal).

Wyman, M. (1989) *Dance Canada: An Illustrated History*. Vancouver: Douglas McIntyre. (This book outlines the history of theatrical dance in Canada and briefly discusses Ruth Sorel’s influence on Canadian modern dance).

**Moving Image Material**

National Film Board of Canada. (1949) *Ballet Festival*. (This film features selections of Ruth Sorel’s choreography).

**Paratextual Information**

“Ballets Ruth Sorel” (Ruth Sorel), “La Gaspésienne” (André Jasmin), and “Ruth Sorel” (John Steele). In *Ballets Ruth Sorel* (1949 program). Ruth Sorel file, Dance Collection Danse Archive. (see below)

Melissa Templeton

