**Georgi, Yvonne (1903-1975)**

Karl Toepfer

**Summary**

Yvonne Georgi was a major figure in the evolution of modern dance in Germany. She amplified the scale of modern dance performances by expanding the size of ensembles operating in a modernist idiom, by enlarging the narrative structures that motivated dance performances, and by increasing the complexity of the movement vocabulary used in modern dance performances. In pursuing these ambitions, she strove to reconcile ballet techniques with modern dance theory, so that ballet would assume greater significance in the modernist project. Modern dance in turn would achieve greater impact institutionally when it incorporated the organizational and choreographic discipline of ballet to build large scale works with large ensembles for theater audiences generally, not just dance audiences. Georgi was also important in deepening appreciation of German modern dance in the United States when she toured the country with Harald Kreutzberg in 1929-1930 and in developing a distinctly modernist ballet in The Netherlands, where she worked during the 1930s and 1940s.

**Career**

Georgi was unique in her skill at crossing borders and bringing into partnership otherwise disparate categories of identity and performance. Her father, a physician, was German, but her mother was French-Arab, born in Algeria, and Yvonne spent most of her childhood summers in Burgundy. She possessed a distinctly dark, sleek physical beauty that seemed neither Teutonic nor Mediterranean but was a kind of mysterious ‘mixture,’ to use the vocabulary of her time.

While studying to become a librarian, she began to study dance at age 17 in Leipzig, under Agathe Schlesinger, and made her stage debut that same year in 1920. She then decided to devote herself to dance, and after a summer course at the Dalcroze school in nearby Hellerau, she enrolled at the newly opened Mary Wigman School in Dresden in 1921 and soon became a member of Wigman’s dance group. Two years later in 1923, she began to present solo concerts of her own, at first in Leipzig and then in Berlin and Hannover.

While her solo concerts received enthusiastic responses, Georgi was eager to choreograph on a larger scale than prevailed within the solo dance concert format that dominated perception of modern dance performance. In 1924, she accepted an invitation from Kurt Jooss, a former student of Rudolf Laban, to become a solo dancer at the Munster City Theater, where she gained familiarity with the administration of a large performing arts organization. The following year, she received appointment as ballet mistress in Gera, where she introduced a modern dance approach to the choreography of ballet segments in opera productions. In 1926, she began her long affiliation with the city of Hannover, which appointed her ballet mistress for the city theater. In 1931 she moved to Amsterdam, although she continued to work half-time in Hannover for another five years.

Also in 1926, Georgi began her enormously successful collaboration with Harald Kreutzberg. They toured Germany the following year to great acclaim, and then between 1929 and 1931 they made three hugely popular tours of the United States, although by the last tour, she had grown dissatisfied with the partnership, partly because American audiences showed much keener interest in her than in Kreutzberg and partly because Kreutzberg had little interest in working on a larger scale. Nevertheless, in 1935, she returned to New York for successful solo concerts without Kreutzberg.

**Suggested Paratexts**

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Figure Georgi and Kreutzberg in *Stravinksy Suite* (1928), photo by Hans Robertson at the Deutsches Tanz Archiv

Source: <http://www.sk-kultur.de/tanz/georgi/georgi-1.htm>

In Amsterdam, Georgi strove to create a distinctive national identity for ballet built around modernist movement aesthetics. Although at first her large-scale choreographic work remained confined to dance sequences in operas, by 1936 she was able to produce evening-length ballet concerts, building a company from students in her school. In 1932, she married a Dutch musician, Louis Arntzenius (1898-1964), who assumed responsibility for the musical accompaniment of Georgi’s choreography. Arntzenius was also a culture editor for *De Telegraaf* newspaper and influential in promoting Georgi’s ambitions in The Netherlands. With her Dutch company, Georgi was a prolific choreographer of ballets encompassing an extraordinary range of themes, movement relations, and musical accompaniments, perhaps most notably *Goyescas* *(From Goya)* (1935), *Les animaux modeles* *(The Model Animals)* (1940), *Symphonie fantastique* *(Fantastic Symphony)* (1942), and *Carmina Burana* *(Songs from Beuern [Bavaria]*(1944). In 1939, she brought her company to New York and Washington DC, but the tour was not a success. She was, however, unusually successful in attracting men to her dance company, and their presence allowed her to diversify her narrative structures and ensemble configurations.

file: georgi-7.jpg

Figure Georgi in Salome (1929), photo by Ortega at the Deutshes Tanz Archiv

Source: <http://www.sk-kultur.de/tanz/georgi/georgi-7.htm>

When the Nazis invaded The Netherlands in 1940, Georgi, as a German national, was able to strengthen her company without significant interference from the occupation authorities and indeed she enjoyed support from them. But when the war was over, her comfortable relations with the occupational government caused important sectors of the Dutch public to adopt a severely critical attitude toward her and her husband. Between 1945 and 1950, her only important choreographic work was for Ludwig Berger’s French film *Ballerina* (1950). In 1951 Düsseldorf invited her to become ballet mistress for the city theatre, a position she held until 1954, when the city of Hannover appointed her ballet mistress for its Landestheater (Regional Theatre), a position she retained until 1970. Between 1951 and 1970, no other German choreographer premiered as many new ballets as Georgi. Until 1973, she continued to accept engagements as a visiting choreographer elsewhere in Germany and abroad.

**Contributions to the Field and to Modernism**

Although she was a captivating solo dancer, especially when embodying intensely dramatic figures such as *Salome* (1929), *Kassandra* (1931), *Electra* (1932), and *Penthesilea* (1935), Georgi’s greatest achievement was to integrate modern dance into established, subsidized theatres. This integration gave modern dance access to greater resources than prevailed within the dance studio system of production. With greater resources, Georgi’s choreographic imagination could encompass considerable innovation. Not only did she create numerous large-scale modern dance works, she showed that modern dance could redefine ballet, and she further showed that modernist ballet could operate in a variety of historical settings and emotional conditions, from the comic and frivolous to the tragic and monumental. With Georgi, modern dance functioned powerfully in relation to an astonishingly wide range of musical accompaniments from different centuries, cultures, and idioms. Though she was not without a sense of humour in some pieces, her work was strongest when dealing with dark or tragic themes. Yet her seriousness was never an obstacle to the popularity of her work.

Very few choreographers employed such a large, diverse spectrum of twentieth-century musical compositions, including the first ballet in Germany to use electronic music, *Electronisches Ballet* (1957), set to a score by Henk Badings. Sometimes she used different music for the same choreography, such as *Gavotte* (1926), which used music by either Bach or Prokofiev, or *Spielerei* (1931), which used music by either Max Reger or Mozart. Georgi was also exceptionally imaginative in expanding the appeal of modern dance through movements that took advantage of elegant, intensely cosmopolitan costumes.

**Legacy**

Few, if any, of Georgi’s dances have enjoyed revival since she died. Yet she remains an important figure in German cultural history deserving of more attention than the sparse scholarship on her might suggest. An exhibition on Georgi took place in Hannover in 2009, but a comprehensive assessment of her achievements and significance remains to be done.

Few choreographers from the early period of German modern dance were as successful as Georgi in linking modern dance to ballet and integrating modern dance into the publically subsidized theatre apparatus for opera and ballet. Georgi brought a large-scale ambition to modern dance, demonstrating that the genre could create big, complex ensembles and narratives. Her intensely theatrical approach to dance—not to mention her location within the state-subsidized theatre system—anticipated the Tanztheater (Dance Theater) aesthetic developed by Pina Bausch in the 1970s.

**Major Works (excluding opera choreography)**

*Tanz des Bösen* *(Dance of Evil)* (1923)

*Eugenspiegelei (Jokester) (*1923)

*Arabische Suite* *(Arab Suite)* (1926)

*Iphigenia in Aulis* (1926)

*Mexikanisches Lied* *(Mexican Song)* (1926)

*Gavotte* (1926)

*Pulcinella* (1926)

*Petrouchka* (1926)

*Saudados do Brasil* *(Soldiers of Brazil)* (1926)

*Arlesienne Suite* (1927)

*Seitensprünge* *(Side Leaps)* (1927)

*Don Morte* *(Count Death)* (1928)

*Tanzsuite* *(Dance Suite)* (1928)

*Baby in der Bar (Baby in the Bar)* (1928)

*Robes, Pierre & Co*. (co-choreography with Harald Kreutzberg) (1928)

*Der Fächer* *(The Fans)* (1929)

*Die Josephslegende* *(The Legend of Joseph)* (1929)

*Salome* (1929)

*Walzer* *(Waltzes)* (1929)

*Pavanne* (1929)

*Persisches Lied* *(Persian Song)* (1929)

*Creation du Monde* *(The Creation of the World)* (co-choreography with Harald Kreutzberg) (ca. 1930)

*Karussellfahrt* *(Carousel Ride)* (co-choreography with Harald Kreutzberg) (ca. 1930)

*Le Train Bleu* (1930)

*Spielerei (Tricky Games)* (co-choreography with Harald Kreutzberg)(1931)

*Kassandra* (1931)

*Drei Stücke im spanischen Stil* *(Three Pieces in the Spanish Style)* (1931)

*Prometheus* (1931)

*Planeten* *(The Planets)* (co-choreography with Harald Kreutzberg) (1931)

*Electra* (1932)

*Acis und Galathea* *(Acis and Galathea)* (1933)

*Goyescas* *(From Goya)* (1935)

*Penthesilea* (1935)

*Habanera Sombre* *(Dark Habanera)* (1935)

*Girls Dancing* (1935)

*Diana* (1936)

*Laughing Cavalier* (1937)

*Stadium Spectacle Choreography Celebrating Fortieth Anniversary of Queen Wilhelmina* (1938)

*The Nutcracker* (1939)

*Les animaux modeles* *(The Model Animals)* (1940)

*Orpheus und Euridike* *(Orpheus and Euridice)* (1941)

*Symphonie fantastique* *(Fantastic Symphony)* (1942)

*Coppelia* (1944)

*Carmina Burana* *(Songs from Beuern [Bavaria])* (1944)

*Choreography for film Ballerina* (1950)

*Der Goldfischglas* *(The Goldfish Glass)* (1952)

*Wendungen* *(Turnings)* (1953)

*Le sacre du printemps* *(The Rite of Spring)* (1953)

*Serenade* (1954)

*Glück, Tod und Traum* (*Fortune,* *Death, and Dream*, 1954)

*Human Variations* (1955)

*Zwischen den Welten (Between Worlds)* (1956)

*Elektronisches Ballett* *(Electronic Ballet)* (1957)

*Der Mohr von Venedig* *(The Moor of Venice)* (1957)

*Le loup* *(The Wolf)* (1959)

*Vier Temperamente* *(The Four Temperaments)* (1958)

*Agon* (1958)

*Evolutionen* *(Evolutions)* (1958)

*Ruth* (1959)

*Das Einhorn, der Drache und der Tigermann* *(The Unicorn, the Dragon, and the Tiger Man)* (1959)

*Die Frau von Andros* *(The Woman of Andros)* (1960)

*Prisma* *(Prism)* (1961)

*5 +1* (1962)

*Metamorphose*n *(Metamorphosis)* (1962)

*Passacaglia* (1962)

*Jazzstudie* *(Jazz Study)* (1962)

*Hamlet* (1962)

*Suite in vier Sätze* *(Suite in Four Movements)* (1963)

*Vier Essays* *(Four Essays)* (1963)

*Demeter* (1964)

*Der Golem* *(The Golem)* (1965)

*Der Kuss der Fee* *(The Fairy’s Kiss)* (1965)

*Spiel der Elemente* *(Play of Elements)* (1966)

*Concerto in D* (1966)

*Cinderella* (1968)

*Scenes de Ballet* *(Ballet Scenes)* (1968)

*Romeo und Julia* *(Romeo and Juliet)* (1969)

*Jeux Venitiens* *(Venetian Games)* (1969)

**Further Reading**

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**Film Documentation**

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