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## MARGARET AND SONIA

BY: GUS DICK ANDROS

Yesterday while I was teaching my ballet class at Ballet Academy East I heard myself shouting above the music: "Pull in your stomach, lift your chin, straighten your knees, get the correct arms; how many time do I have to tell you the difference between croise and efface?" Hearing myself give these commands, I thought, how did I get so demanding? It only took a minute for me to remember the great teachers who never gave up on me.

After the lesson I was sitting in the faculty room reviewing my class. I thought of teachers like Margaret Craske at one end of the spectrum, and Sonia Wojcikowska at the other, and the many more in between. All of my teachers left me with special knowledge to continue the tradition of ballet. But Margaret and Sonia, because of their differences, formed the basis of my teaching.

In 1949, when I came to New York and started my studies with the American Theater Wing, I was enrolled at Ballet Arts, the main ballet school in America. I took two ballet classes a day plus other forms of dance to fill out the day. I was young and full of energy; I never thought that I was over-working my body. By chance my schedule included classes with Sonia and Margaret. The first day I saw that these ladies' differences as teachers covered a full range of theory.

Margaret Craske was 51 with steel gray hair pulled back in a bun. Sonia, was about 30, with her brown hair pulled back in a bun, that's where the physical similarity ended. Miss Craske always wore a straight line tweed skirt that showed off her little pot belly and comfortable shoes, while Sonia was in tights, leotard, and skirt. Even though she had a child just a month before I arrived, Sonia's body was solid muscle.

Margaret's class was cerebral with an emphasis on theory. I would often shift from one foot to the other while she explained in full detail the mechanics of a movement. In her class the arms and legs had to be perfect before a student could try the next movement. I would seldom work-up a sweat, but my hearing did improve. Being in Sonia's class was a little bit like drowning: I got through the combination the best I could. There was never a break; she corrected as students danced. After Sonia's class I could wring out a pint of sweat from my dance clothes.

Margaret, British that she was, never raised her voice but could cut to the core with a soft spoken phrase. Sonia's high pitched voice could be heard three studios away, but she never insulted. She got what she wanted by cajoling and praise. Sonia always praised a movement done well, but Margaret's praise was so subtle I was never knew I was complimented.

Margaret Craske danced briefly with the Diaghilev's Ballet Russe and was one of the last students of Enrico Cecchetti. She was teaching at Sadler's Well Ballet School, when her most famous student, Antony Tudor, brought her to America to be ballet mistress of Ballet Theatre.

Sonia's father, Leon Wojcikowski and her mother, Helena Antonova, were stars of the Diaghilev's Ballet Russe. Sonia often talks about Uncle Sergei and her Godfather Pablo Picasso. As a small child she took one

lesson from Margaret, but their personalities clashed and Sonia became a prodigy of Mme. Egorova. She made her debut at fourteen with the Original Ballet Russe and came to America to dance at the World Fair in 1939. She was an original member of Ballet Theatre, and during World War II, she was the ballerina of the Foxhole Ballet. Sonia also had a part in the original Oklahoma.

As different as these two ladies were in their approach to teaching, the results were the same. Margaret and Sonia were determined to pass the traditions of classical ballet on to their students.

Many of their students are now teachers, and I hope that they, like myself, feel that the traditions of ballet should be preserved. Like every other profession the vocabulary is constantly changing and expanding. This means that today's teachers can add to, but can not change, the traditions of ballet.

I hope my students are thankful that, by accident, I had two wonderful teachers: Margaret Craske and Sonia Wojcikowska.

SONIA WOJCIKOWSKA

When I came to New York City in 1949 to continue my ballet studies at Ballet Arts, "Studio 61" at Carnegie Hall, I was surprised to see a very pregnant young lady spinning like a top. I asked a friend, "Who is that?" and was told she was Sonia Wojcikowska. I also found out that she was a teacher at the school. After the birth of her first baby she became one of my teachers and my friend. This friendship has lasted for almost fifty years.

1949 was a very special year for Sonia. It was the year that she became an American citizen, married violinist Joska de Barbary, and became pregnant with her first child.

Sonia was born in London December 17, 1919 of a Polish father, Leon Wozikowsky (he preferred this spelling), and Russian mother, Helene Antonova. She was educated at the Lycée Jules Ferrier, and studied ballet with Lubov Egorova in Paris, with her father, the famous character dancer of the renowned Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, and with Vilzak-Shollar in New York. She really learned her art by doing; she said, "I watched, I listened, I imitated."

Recently I was invited to her apartment to look at her photographs. There were pictures of her and the company of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes on the beach in Monte Carlo. Also there were photos on the ship that had taken her father's company, Leon Wozikowsky's Ballet Russe (the second company of de Basil's Ballet Russe), to Australia in 1936. Igor Youskevitch was also a member of this company. Sonia opened a metal box to show me her birth certificate and baptismal record, signed by her Godfather, Pablo Picasso.

Dancing in her father's company, she remembered with pride that in one ballet she wore a mask and danced in her father place. A friend of Leon said to him, "You danced better tonight than ever, but you look so short."

Sonia started her professional career as a little girl with a walk-on part in Diaghilev's Ballets Russes production of *Petrouchka*, holding the hand of Enrico Cecchetti.

She never had the option to become anything but a dancer, although in reality she would have preferred to be a singer. Sonia studied voice seriously, and at the age of nine sang the part of Chaliapin's granddaughter in the opera *La Sirene (The Mermaid)* at the Paris Opera. Later, at the request of Leonide Massine, she sang two Spanish songs offstage in his *Three Cornered Hat*. When Sonia was thirteen she danced with her mother at the Paris Opera with Les Ballets Ida Rubinstein. Sonia danced many of her mother's roles. (Her father told her once that he could not tell them apart.) By replacing Nathalie Krassovska in Rubinstein's company Sonia danced her first solo in Mikhail Fokine's *Diane de Poitiers*.

She joined Mme. Egorova's Ballet de la Jeunesse when she was 14 years old and was then invited to join her father's company, Leon Wozikowsky's Ballet Russe. She became a soloist with the Original Ballet Russe in 1938, and danced the roles of Frivolity (*Les Présages*), Can Can (*Boutique Fantasque*), and the Waltz (*Les Sylphides*). In 1939 she joined the Polish Ballet at the New York World's Fair and performed with them in

France, Germany and Poland. Sonia also performed in a short concert tour with Yurek Shabelevsky in the USA. In 1940 she became a soloist with Ballet Theater (now American Ballet Theater). She was often called on to fill in for an injured dancer. She makes fun of herself telling of times that she didn't always do the variation as choreographed. Once she went on for Lucia Chase in *Les Syphides* and after the performance her mother told her, "I never saw Lucia dance so poorly." She joined Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and remained for three years. During World War II she gave many USO performances in camps and hospitals. After a few seasons in the musical *Oklahoma*, dancing the part of the "girl who falls down," she became ballerina of the Foxhole Ballet (1946-47), a small touring company. My good friend Richard Thomas was also part of this group.

Sonia's abilities as a teacher equaled her skill as a dancer. When Leon Wozikowsky needed a combination for class he would come to his daughter and ask for her help. Sonia's ability to put steps together is one of her great talents. During class her father would say, "Sonia, show us that combination I gave you this morning." Because of Sonia's respect for her father, she did as she was told. She considers French to be her first language, although she speaks at least five different languages.

Except for the time she took to have a second child, Sonia taught at Ballet Arts until she retired in 1975.

Leaving her apartment, the one impression that stood out in my mind was her response when I said, "Sonia, I know it was every day living to you, but you were there while dance history was being made." Her answer surprised me, "Funny, all I remember is the hunger."