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## Arnold Haskell in Australia: Did Connoisseurship or Politics Determine his Rôle?

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MICHELLE POTTER

Arnold Haskell, distinguished British dance writer, first came to Australia in 1936. It seems that he did so with some degree of reluctance. In the preface to his travel book, *Waltzing Matilda: a background to Australia*, first published in 1940, Haskell puts his cards squarely on the table:

I happened on Australia four years ago, at four days' notice and by complete accident. Had I been given a week's notice I probably would not have come at all. I was completely, even aggressively uninterested in that particular continent.<sup>1</sup>

Haskell's purpose in coming was, he says, 'to do some work with a large artistic organisation', and he wrote that he came

mainly bribed by the interest of the work itself, also by the thought of seeing Ceylon on the way out and Honolulu homeward bound.<sup>2</sup>

But he went on, unapologetically:

When I let my friends know where I was going, they said 'Why?' which did not encourage me, and left me speechless for once.<sup>3</sup>

On the surface, Haskell's position was that of a kind of roving reporter cum publicist for the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet, the so-called 'second company' of Colonel Wassily de Basil. The company was, when Haskell spoke of his 'four days notice', about to embark on a tour of Australia and New Zealand, a tour that spanned a period of nine months from October 1936 to July 1937.<sup>4</sup> While on tour with the company, he wrote articles and reviews for Australian newspapers and journals, recorded radio interviews, and sent reports home to England for magazines such as the *Dancing Times*. Because of these activities, he is often credited with popularising ballet in Australia and with opening the way for the establishment of a national company.<sup>5</sup>

Many of his articles promoted the qualities that he felt characterised the Ballets Russes and were not so much reviews as articles with a didactic purpose. Writing, for example, in February 1937 in the socially influential monthly magazine *The Home*, Haskell discussed the significance of the de Basil Ballets Russes companies as ensembles of dancers of great individuality rather than companies with 'one blazing star and a background of mechanical dancers'. In



**Fig. 1.** Arnold Haskell arriving in Sydney during the Australian tour of the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet, November 1936 (Hood Collection, State Library of New South Wales). Photographer: Sam Hood.

this article, entitled ‘Some reasons for the popularity of ballet’, Haskell assured his readers that this kind of company structure had undeniable artistic merit: ‘The ensemble of small personalities gives a far greater artistic result than the major personality’.<sup>6</sup> His articles distinguish him as an arbiter of taste, a connoisseur in the sense that the word was used by nineteenth-century scholars: a gentleman (and historically connoisseurs were invariably of the male sex) whose taste, judgement and sense of discrimination were impeccable as a result of deep knowledge of a particular subject area. And Haskell certainly had a deep knowledge of his subject area.

Haskell travelled to Australia with the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet aboard the SS *Moldavia*, which he joined in Marseille a few days after the company had departed from Tilbury. He returned to England via North America on the SS *Niagara*, which sailed from Sydney for Vancouver on 21 January 1937. He did indeed see Ceylon as he wished on the way to Australia, and he also saw Honolulu on the first stage of his homeward journey. He mentions both stopovers in his memoirs of the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet tour. These recollections were published very soon after his return to England as *Dancing round the world: memoirs of an attempted escape from ballet*.<sup>7</sup> He also enjoyed the Ceylonese stopover on his second trip to Australia in 1938, partly from the back of an elephant as photographs attest.

Haskell records details of this follow-up visit of 1938 in his second volume

of autobiography entitled *Balletomane at large: an autobiography*. In it he says he was invited to return to Australia and did so ‘for part of the tour’,<sup>8</sup> by which he meant the tour by the Covent Garden Russian Ballet, the second of the three Ballets Russes companies to tour to Australia between 1936 and 1940. That second tour began in September 1938 and concluded in April 1939. Elsewhere Haskell recounts that the purpose of his second visit, which was for a period of six months, was ‘an attempt to study the continent and provide a background for my enchantment’.<sup>9</sup> Again he wrote at length about the ballet and his writings once again reveal his connoisseurship and the didactic purpose of his writing. In *The Herald* (Melbourne) in October 1938 he wrote, for example, about the qualities of male dancers:

It is essential to state once again that the competent (let alone the great) male dancer can never be effeminate, since it is he who provides a contrast to the woman. His work is that of the athlete. Virile male dancing has been the aim of the Covent Garden ballet since its creation.<sup>10</sup>

But he also wrote about various other matters, including Australian wine, cricket, art and the landscape, and even Australian politics and history. His 1943 publication *The Australians* is subtitled *The Anglo-Saxondom of the southern hemisphere: an historical sketch* and is dedicated to ‘The Women of Australia’.<sup>11</sup>

Haskell seems to have had no reservations about this second visit. When he returned to Australia in 1938, he was a well established figure on the Australian scene. As a result of the tour of 1936–37 he had influential friends in the media, including Sydney Ure Smith who edited *The Home* and *Art in Australia*, Keith Murdoch of the *The Sydney Morning Herald* and Frank Packer of *The Telegraph*. Haskell also moved in arts circles with ease counting, for example, the well-known Lindsay family of artists and art commentators amongst his inner circle. In his preface to a catalogue of art work exhibited for sale by Daryl Lindsay in London in 1938 Haskell mentions with pleasure the fact that Daryl Lindsay once took him riding in Australia,<sup>12</sup> so the connections he made beyond the immediate world of the ballet were both professional and personal. And the acknowledgements in *Dancing round the world* represent a small cross section of the social and artistic elite of Australia in the 1930s. He acknowledges in Adelaide, for example, Arthur Campbell and Mr and Mrs J. H. Gosse. Professor Campbell was a lawyer, university lecturer, wartime interpreter, intelligence agent and an active member of cultural, sporting and political organisations in Adelaide. He was also a popular theatre patron, gourmet and bridge player and broadcaster and film censor during World War II. The Gosse family was a wealthy and prominent South Australian farming family.<sup>13</sup> It is clear that Haskell was a gregarious and curious man who made the most of every opportunity that presented itself during both visits. He also enjoyed socialising with the dancers. Photographs in Australian collections show him enjoying festive occasions with dancers, and in his books he records the social activities he shared with them.<sup>14</sup>

Despite his initial reservations, and as the comment about his ‘enchantment’ suggests, Haskell came to love Australia. Towards the end of *Waltzing Matilda* he writes:

It is possible to love a place so dearly that it colours the whole of one's life, to love it for itself and not through associations, though the associations too are precious. There are my friends; there is also an entity, Australia.<sup>15</sup>

But what really was Haskell's reason for coming to Australia on that first occasion in 1936? Why did he say it was 'by complete accident'? Was it really? Perhaps we will never really know for sure, and Haskell may well have been using poetic licence when discussing, in the context of *Waltzing Matilda*, the 'accidental' circumstances that brought him to Australia. We do know, however, that Haskell had been invited by de Basil to a special rehearsal in London on 1 September 1936 to show the newly-formed 'second' company to critics prior to the company's departure for Australia. A newspaper article published shortly after the arrival of the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet in Adelaide in October 1936 reports that Haskell had said that he was so impressed after watching the rehearsal that he decided then and there to travel to Australia with the company.<sup>16</sup> But Haskell's accounts of the events in his own writings have a slightly different slant. In *Dancing round the world*, for example, he maintains that de Basil gave him a ticket to come to Australia because Haskell had seen the company's debut in America and had, according to de Basil, brought them luck.<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere, however, and perhaps in a more rational frame of mind, Haskell writes that de Basil asked him to travel to Australia with the company in an 'advisory capacity'.<sup>18</sup> Why? What really was Haskell's role? And why did de Basil consider an adviser a necessary addition to the tour group? On Ballets Russes programmes distributed in Australia during the tour Haskell is referred to as 'Liaison Officer'. What kind of liaison did de Basil have in mind?

Two recently located books of cables assembled by the Australian entrepreneurial organisation J. C. Williamson Ltd as a record of their activities from 1931–37 and 1937–45 provide an insight into the business context in which the tour to Australia by the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet unfolded.<sup>19</sup> Cables are perhaps an overlooked genre of primary source material for the researcher. In many respects they are the equivalent of the email in today's society – an almost instantaneous way of communicating with colleagues on the other side of the globe. The cables in this collection suggest that there were sound reasons for someone – de Basil, or even the Williamson organisation in collusion with de Basil – employing Haskell. The Williamson organisation was responsible for bringing the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet, and the two Ballets Russes companies that followed, to Australia. It was for decades Australia's leading theatrical entrepreneurial organisation.<sup>20</sup> The cables, exchanged largely between Williamson representatives in London and the organisation back home in Australia, indicate that in February 1936 the Williamson administration was discussing the possibility of bringing a ballet company to Australia in lieu of the Russian Opera, which the organisation had been considering but which was thought to be prohibitively expensive.<sup>21</sup> Initially, discussions centred on which company should be invited and the newly-formed Markova-Dolin Ballet was suggested.<sup>22</sup> By the middle months of 1936, however, de Basil (then in America) had entered the discussions and cables were crossing three continents in an effort to negotiate

acceptable conditions for the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet to tour Australia and New Zealand, and for de Basil's financial reimbursement as the company's founder and director-general. In mid-June J. Nevin Tait, the Williamson representative in London, reported:

BASIL MONTECARLO FORMED SECOND COMPANY SAME BALLETS COSTUMES SCENERY EIGHT PRINCIPALS ABOUT THIRTY OR THIRTY-SIX DANCERS SELECTED FROM EXISTING COMPANY AND ALHAMBRA REQUIRES GUARANTEE EIGHT HUNDRED WEEKLY ACCOUNT FIFTY PERCENT FARES COULD OPEN SEPTEMBER OR APRIL.<sup>23</sup>

In July 1936 Tait cabled to Australia to say that the ballet option had been exercised.<sup>24</sup>

But as preparations became more advanced there was much anxiety on the part of the Williamson organisation in Australia that the dancers coming to Australia would be well-known ones, stars even. Early on, cables suggested some major names would be arriving:

EIGHT PRINCIPALS TWENTY BALLERINAS SIXTEEN MEN STAFF EIGHT ESSENTIAL SCHEHERAZADE DONJUAN THAMAR FIREBIRD EPREUVE AMOUR SEVERAL OTHER BALLETS AS NUMBER SMALL PARTS FULFILLED BY CORPS ... AS PRINCIPALS SELECTED FROM GARDEN ALHAMBRA SURELY IF SUITABLE HERE GOOD ENOUGH AUSTRALIA PRINCIPAL LADIES KIRSOVA TARAKANOVA RAIVESKA [SIC] TOUMANOVA OR DANILOVA MEN WOZIKOWSKI PETROFF YOUSKEVITCH STAGE DIRECTION MADAME NIJINSKA MAN YAZINSKY FROM ALHAMBRA STOP.<sup>25</sup>

As time wore on, however, and to the consternation of the Williamson organisation in Australia, some of the better known names disappeared from the list with various excuses being offered from London. From Australia came the cable:

CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC DISAPPOINTMENT TUAMANOVAS [SIC] ABSENCE ENDEAVOUR INCLUDE HER.<sup>26</sup>

The reply from London was:

BLINOVA EQUALLY GOOD STANDING TOUMANOVA ESPECIALLY AS LATTER SHOWING SIGNS OF WEIGHT.<sup>27</sup>

Was the Williamson management right to anticipate trouble as far as dancers and casting were concerned? It seems perhaps it was and that Haskell's job was, at least in part, to pour oil on troubled waters should that be necessary. A trio of letters to the editor of *The Advertiser* in Adelaide during the opening season of 1936 gives an indication of probable expectations of Haskell. The first letter came from two correspondents, Dorothy Fry and Daphne Foster. They wrote, shortly after the opening of the Adelaide season:

As ardent admirers of the Russian Ballett [sic] and constant attendants at their performances, we would be glad to use your columns to voice what we know to be a fairly general opinion among Adelaide audiences. We were promised the appearance of celebrated London artists, among them one who was a great favourite with the Fokine Ballet at the Alhambra Theatre this year, namely Mlle. Helen [sic] Kirsova.<sup>28</sup>



**Fig. 2.** Hélène Kirsova with E. J. Tait of the J. C. Williamson organisation, 1940s (Lady Viola Tait Collection, National Library of Australia). Photographer unknown.

Fry and Foster went on to appeal to ‘the management’ to give audiences more opportunities to see Kirsova. The next day a letter of reply from Haskell appeared in the columns of *The Advertiser*. He was generous and diplomatic in his opening remarks but went on to refer to the attitude of Fry and Foster as ‘the worst kind of partisanship’. He counselled:

I feel that such an attempt to influence the management is foolish in the extreme. It is also not a little damaging to a delightful artist, who may well say 'Save me my friends and admirers'. I draw attention to this, trivial as it is, for such misguided enthusiasm has before now damaged the harmonious working of a company.<sup>29</sup>

Fry and Foster were not discouraged in the slightest and stood their ground. The next day their reply to Haskell was published. Their opening diplomacy was tinged very quickly with overtones of sarcasm and with the suggestion that their letter had been misinterpreted by Haskell:

From his vantage point of close and constant association with the ballet, it is no doubt a trivial matter to Mr. Haskell which stars are appearing for the moment in the stage galaxy. May we remind him that we are not so favored? It is many years since the ballet visited Adelaide and we are some twelve thousand miles from the home of ballet. We are enjoying at present a rare and glorious treat. Wishing to gain the most from this our brief opportunity, we wrote our letter hoping that the management might be able to allow us to see more of an artiste of whom we have read and heard so much. We trust that the management of the ballet will not misinterpret our letter as Mr Haskell has done.<sup>30</sup>

Haskell's underlying motive seems clear. His behind the scenes role was to support management and to dispel any suggestion that the ballet was not doing the best by its Australian audiences.

Around the same time, a somewhat curious article appeared in *The Advertiser*. Entitled 'Famous creators of settings for the Russian Ballet', it sought to assure Australian readers that the decor they were seeing onstage during Monte Carlo Russian Ballet performances was 'authentic'.

We are seeing in Adelaide not copies, but the original backgrounds. Stage properties and costumes over which Europe enthused when the Russian Ballet blazed its way to fame in a glory of color and characterisation.<sup>31</sup>

The article is especially interesting in the light of complaints from the Williamson management in Australia at the time of the opening of the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet season in Adelaide on 13 October 1936 that the decor was less than they had expected. In *Dancing round the world* Haskell records E. J. Tait's dissatisfaction with the set for *Les Sylphides* and a Williamson cable from Australia to London calls the decor 'unsatisfactory'.<sup>32</sup> The article is even more interesting as it seems to have been written in advance of the company's arrival in Australia, before repertoire was finalised, and then perhaps pulled out and used when complaints began to emerge. It attempts to promote the fame of the collaborators whose works were to be seen and mentions that Picasso had agreed that his designs for *Pulcinella* could be brought to Australia. But in reality no ballet with designs by Picasso ever came to Australia on any of the Ballets Russes tours.

'Famous creators of settings for the Russian Ballet' appeared under an anonymous by-line, 'A balletomane'. Given that 'balletomane' and 'balletomania' were words popularised by Haskell,<sup>33</sup> and given the paucity or virtual non-existence of Australian dance writers at the time, it is tempting to speculate that the article was written by Haskell using a pseudonym. Was this article yet another example of Haskell fulfilling to his role of soothing and reassuring Australians who were concerned that what they were seeing might be second



rate, not to mention a management anxious to keep the public and press happy?

The Williamson management was anxious from the very beginning of negotiations to ensure that there were no scandals or upsets of any kind that might prejudice the smooth running of what was potentially a hugely profitable endeavour for them. Just as the question of whether the dancers and the decor were the very best caused concern for the Williamson organisation, so too did the repertoire. As had happened in the case of the dancers, some ballets that appeared on early lists disappeared from later ones, often as a result of copyright or other ownership issues. In mid August a cable came from London asking:

ANY OBJECTION WITHDRAWING JUAN EPREUVE AMOUR BASIL CONCERNED AS BLUM OBJECTING COULD SUBSTITUTE RUSSIAN TALES COTILLON ...<sup>34</sup>

Neither *Don Juan* nor *L'Epreuve d'amour* was ever shown in Australia although earlier efforts to include the latter had resulted in an attempt to change its name to *Fantaisie chinois* [sic]. The cable suggesting a name change read:

COPYRIGHT TITLE CLAIMED BUT SAME BALLET<sup>35</sup>

*Russian Tales* (*Contes russes*) and *Cotillon* were, however, part of the Australian repertoire for the 1936–37 season.

Another cause for anxiety was the legal dispute between Massine and de Basil over the copyright of Massine's works, although whether Haskell had a role to play in this particular matter is not clear from currently available records. But, around the time that the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet was due to leave for Australia, Massine had issued an injunction against de Basil attempting to restrain him from staging the Massine repertoire in Australia, and a report of the latest stage of play appeared in *The Times* in London on 3 September 1936.<sup>36</sup> The next day a cable arrived in Australia:

INJUNCTION PROCEEDINGS CREATING BAD IMPRESSION ENDEAVOUR GET DE BASIL SETTLE MATTER ENABLING PERFORMANCES HERE.<sup>37</sup>

A return cable gave the reply:

DEBASIL ... SAYS MASSINE QUESTION SETTLED.<sup>38</sup>

The dispute between de Basil and Massine was long and extraordinarily complicated and not concluded, despite de Basil's assurances to the Taits, until the following year.<sup>39</sup> But it seems to have resolved itself fairly easily in the eyes of the Williamson organisation. A cable from Australia shortly after de Basil's assurances that all was well asked:

SEND PRESS CABLES MASSINE MATTER SETTLED AND MASSINE BALLETS INCLUDED BASILS AUSTRALIAN COMPANY STOP.<sup>40</sup>

No reply from London is preserved in the books of cables, but presumably the Williamson organisation's concerns were somehow satisfied since Massine's ballets, including *Le beau Danube*, *La Boutique fantasque*, and *Les Presages*, were popular features of the 1936–37 tour.

Another cause for anxiety, which was an ongoing concern and in which Haskell certainly did play a significant role, was the question of leadership of the company. In *Balletomane at large* Haskell recalls that the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet tour started as ‘a complete farce’.<sup>41</sup> He was referring to the fact that the company was, in many respects, a scratch company. It was made up of those artists from de Basil’s Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo who could be persuaded or harangued into going to Australia (Finch calls it being ‘banished to that end of the world’),<sup>42</sup> and artists from Les Ballets de Leon Woizikowsky, which had been appearing in Paris, London and other European cities in 1935 and 1936. De Basil, in his wisdom, had decided that, in his absence in America with his first company, the second company in Australia would be managed by two people, Jacques Lidji and Alexander Philipoff. Lidji was credited on Australian programmes as ‘Director’, while Philipoff was ‘Colonel de Basil’s Representative’. Haskell, in fact, has intimated that this unusual management structure was the reason why de Basil, obviously anticipating trouble, asked him to travel with the company in an advisory capacity.<sup>43</sup> In *Balletomane at large* he recalls that, on the arrival of the company in Adelaide, the Williamson representative, E. J. Tait, unable to understand or deal adequately with either Philipoff or Lidji, fell upon Haskell, who spoke to him in English. Haskell went on to maintain that he was the only one with whom Tait (with whom he was eventually familiar enough to call Ted) would have any dealings. Both Philipoff and Lidji agreed to allow Haskell to negotiate with Tait. Haskell writes:

As I did not represent any danger to them, both men agreed to the compromise; and I accepted the responsibility and the experience and thoroughly enjoyed it.<sup>44</sup>

Despite Haskell, problems associated with leadership were evident from the earliest days in Australia. A Williamson cable expressed it succinctly:

BALLET THEIR MANAGEMENT ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE OBSTRUCTING EVERY REASONABLE EFFORT.<sup>45</sup>

Finch too has written of ‘strife, intrigue and a great division of loyalties’ as a result of the dual structure,<sup>46</sup> and by early November 1936 E. J. Tait in Australia was cabling de Basil in New York asking him to intervene:

CABLE IMMEDIATELY PHILIPPOFF CONTROLS COMPANY WORKING AMICABLY WITH US LIDJI MAKING IMPOSSIBLE DIFFICULTIES.<sup>47</sup>

But no instant return cable from de Basil seems to have been forthcoming. Arguments and conflict continued. The dancers were involved when the currency in which their salaries would be paid became an issue, as corps de ballet member Elisabeth Souvorova (the English dancer Betty Scorer, later Betty Frank) explained in a letter written to her mother back in London:

Of course Lidji – our Jewish general manager & Philipov too, I suppose, have tried to do the dirty on us over our salaries – & are insisting that the money we signed for was Australian pounds – which means losing £5 a month & getting a perfectly ludicrous salary – however, as he has refused to let us even *look* at our contracts, we know it is all hanky panky – & Miss Deane & the Australian Management are going to create a fearful



**Fig. 3.** Elisabeth Souvorova as L'Américaine in *Port Said*, Monte Carlo Russian Ballet, 1936 or 1937 (Maroussia Richardson Collection, MS 9915, National Library of Australia). Photographer unknown.

scandle [sic] – & we are assured we shall get it – at the moment we have all refused to take our salary & have just taken advances until everything is settled.<sup>48</sup>

Souvorova writes a little later:

The money question has been temporarily settled at £26 a month – which of course is only a compromise – but they are writing to Basil about it.<sup>49</sup>

The Lidji controversy, however, continued and the Williamson organisation continued to cable de Basil asking him to intervene:

FIND LIDJI IMPOSSIBLE STOP ASSERTING RIGHT CONTROL PRODUCTIONS DISMISS ARTISTS REFUSING PAY CERTAIN SALARIES GENERALLY ATTEMPTING DISRUPT BALLET STOP STRONGLY URGE YOU CABLE US IMMEDIATELY CANCELLING HIS AUTHORITY ACT FOR YOU FINANCIALLY AND APPOINTING PHILOPOFF AND WOLFENDEN CHARTERED ACCOUNT HIGH REPUTE SYDNEY TOGETHER RECEIVE MONIES PAY SALARIES OTHER DISBURSEMENTS.<sup>50</sup>

Haskell again appears to have been working behind the scenes for management on this issue. A cable from de Basil indicates that Haskell had arrived in New York and had delivered a letter to de Basil:

HASKELL BROUGHT YOUR LETTER THANKS STOP CABLING INSTRUCTIONS PHILOPOFF DEPEND UPON YOUR FRIENDLY COOPERATION ALL MATTERS REGARDS LETTER FOLLOWS DE BASIL.<sup>51</sup>

The delivery of the letter, the contents of which can only at this stage be the cause of speculation, was perhaps the final act by Haskell in his work for the 'large artistic organisation' before he returned to London. There was no sudden end to the disputes, however, and the Williamson cables record that Lidji continued with a litany of complaints and eventually went to arbitration. A Williamson cable to London in July 1937 stressed the difficulties:

URGE YOU SEE DE BASIL AND OTTLEY AND INDICATE SUCH CLAIM IF PROCEEDED WITH WOULD LEAD TO DISTURBANCE OF PRESENT AND FUTURE FRIENDLY ASSOCIATION BUT FEEL DEBASIL IGNORANT OF LIDJIS ACTION.<sup>52</sup>

A later cable recorded that the arbitration result was entirely in favour of the Williamson organisation.<sup>53</sup>

There is no doubt that Haskell was deeply engaged with the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet. So how should we interpret his role on the 1936–37 tour to Australia? What characterised his engagement? For much of the time on his first visit Haskell was writing his well informed criticism and articles – playing in his inimitable fashion the role of connoisseur. His written output ranged across a wide spectrum of outlets from the popular to the more serious, and covered a variety of formats from short articles to lengthy books. From a distance of some seventy years, and now that Australia has its own lively dance culture, its own admired writers and critics and has at least tried if not yet succeeded in throwing off the final vestiges of its colonial ties, much of what he wrote now reads as overly didactic and at times, perhaps unintentionally, a little patronising. He writes in *Dancing round the world*, for example:

I never ceased urging in Australia that Ballet Club movements should be started which might, after many years and many mistakes, evolve into a national ballet on the lines of our own Sadler's Wells.<sup>54</sup>

But Haskell was clearly an influential figure and his commitment to promoting the art form is undeniable. Australian ballet was and is richer for his input. And Haskell could indeed legitimately write about the success of the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet, and the companies that followed between 1938 and 1940. Not

only were the tours hugely successful with the public, who adored these glamorous artists from the other side of the world, but the Ballets Russes companies brought to Australia an unprecedented panorama of dance, music and design. The impact on the development of the arts in Australia was powerful and long-lasting.<sup>55</sup>

As for his designated role of 'Liaison Officer', Haskell's apparently gregarious nature made him ideally suited to working with people and, as his books reveal, he clearly loved this side of his work, even if occasionally it must have been less than pleasant. Souvorova records in another of her letters to her mother that Haskell was given the job of going to Sydney to meet the mother of American dancer Madeleine Parker. Parker, who danced under the name Mira Dimina, died in Adelaide of previously undiagnosed leukaemia shortly after the company's arrival in Australia. Souvorova writes:

All the company are feeling very sad owing to the death of Dimina. She died last Sunday & the funeral was yesterday – the management went over to Adelaide for it – & tell us that she died unconscious, & had no idea that she wouldn't get better. In delirium she thought she was dancing 'Sylphides' with Eglevsky. The awful part about it is that her mother who was coming out here to join her & is now on the boat has no idea that her daughter is even ill – & poor Haskell is having to meet her at Sydney, & break the news to her.<sup>56</sup>

In the end it seems that Haskell may have been spared the worst of the job as the Melbourne newspaper *The Argus* reported on 10 December 1936 that it was the commander of the liner on which Mrs Parker was travelling, the *Port Alma*, who broke the news when the vessel reached Brisbane.<sup>57</sup> Haskell, however, devotes an entire chapter of *Dancing round the world* to Parker whose friendship, forged on the ship to Australia in 1936, he clearly valued.<sup>58</sup>

Souvorova mentions Haskell in other situations in her letters and intimates that not all the dancers enjoyed the social side of his liaison activities to the same extent. She mentions to her mother, for example, that Haskell made a speech at the company's 1936 New Year party:

On New Years Eve, Tait gave us a party on the stage – it was absolutely deadly – nine people made speeches, Haskell for about twenty minutes – everyone was bored stiff!<sup>59</sup>

But Haskell did what he did with passion and commitment and, as Finch remarks, he too was unable to escape the intrigue and the dramas of the double organisational structure of the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet.<sup>60</sup> Souvorova was a Woizikowsky dancer, Finch was from de Basil's company and it seems that the dancers divided themselves along these lines. No doubt, too, the strength of the personal friendship between Haskell and de Basil was well known to the dancers, which perhaps influenced some to enjoy Haskell's company, others to remain more distant. Haskell recalls in *Balletomane at large* that he first met de Basil in 1930,<sup>61</sup> and despite the fact that the relationship seemed to be less than friendly at times, including around the time that the Australia-bound Monte Carlo Russian Ballet was forming,<sup>62</sup> the friendship was ultimately a strong and long-lasting one.



**Fig. 4.** Nina Raievska (left) and Valentina Blinova with Arnold Haskell at a New Year's Eve Party for the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet, Sydney 1936 (Hood Collection, State Library of New South Wales). Photographer: Sam Hood.

Perhaps Haskell's most influential role at the time of the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet visit, however, was the one that we currently know least about. His own explanations or descriptions of his role, or roles, while in Australia are not consistent throughout his writings. Those explanations reflect of course the multifarious nature of his activities and the particular focus of individual books or articles. But he nevertheless often seems cautious, even secretive, about what he was engaged to do: he lets us wonder. Was he simply an astute politician, a diplomat? Or was he gagged? Or did his personal friendship with de Basil engender a tight-lipped integrity?

The books of Williamson cables, in particular the first book dated 1931–37, have significantly expanded our understanding of the business context in which that first Ballets Russes tour to Australia took place. The cables refer to Haskell only once, on the occasion of the hand delivery of the letter to de Basil in New York, and they leave much still unanswered. That one reference, however, with all that it implies, is enough to motivate the researcher to go back through the cables and other documentary sources to seek out possible reasons why Haskell joined the tour. We can still only speculate until more primary source material surfaces.

We can continue without a doubt to regard Haskell as a gentleman who worked tirelessly to promote the aesthetic of the Ballets Russes to the Australian public. For many Australians, it was a time when they still looked to England for guidance on many matters. It was also a time when the English felt, with colonial



**Fig. 5** (detail). Arnold Haskell, Harcourt Algeranoff and other Ballets Russes dancers with elephants in Ceylon, 1938 (Geoffrey Ingram Archive of Australian Ballet, National Library of Australia). Photographer unknown.

beneficence, they were in a position to provide it. But it is clear that Haskell was much more than an arbiter of taste, much more than a connoisseur in the best nineteenth-century tradition, as previous writing has implied. As liaison officer for the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet, Haskell's role was undoubtedly a political one. De Basil and the Williamson organisation relied on him to step in when intercession was necessary for the smooth running of the company and for the achieving of maximum financial benefit for the promoters. Haskell was discreet, diplomatic and reliable, and able to communicate effectively with business stakeholders. The 'accident' that brought him to Australia in 1936 was most likely one that those stakeholders had deliberately arranged.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## NOTES

1. Arnold Haskell, *Waltzing Matilda: a background to Australia*, first Australian edition (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1944), p. xvii.

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. A chronology, list of repertoire performed, and a list of personnel associated with the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet tour can be found in Appendix A. More detailed listings, including digitised copies of programmes and cast sheets, are available online from the National Library of Australia: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.aus-vn143713>
5. See, for example, Tamara Finch, 'My dancing years, part three', *Dance Chronicle*, 27 (No. 3, 2004), p. 389.
6. Arnold Haskell, 'Some reasons for the popularity of ballet', *The Home*, 1 February 1937, p. 24.
7. Arnold Haskell, *Dancing round the world: memoirs of an attempted escape from ballet* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), pp. 56–8 (Ceylon); pp. 212–15 Honolulu).
8. Arnold Haskell, *Balletomane at large: an autobiography* (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 97. Haskell's first volume of autobiography was published as *In his true centre: an interim biography* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1951).
9. Haskell, *Waltzing Matilda*, p. xvii.
10. Arnold Haskell, 'Personalities of the ballet', *The Herald* (Melbourne), 1 October 1938, p. 37.
11. Arnold Haskell, *The Australians. The Anglo-Saxondom of the southern hemisphere: an historical sketch* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1943).
12. Arnold Haskell, 'Preface', *Drawings of the ballet by Daryl Lindsay*, exhibition catalogue, 17 February–12 March 1938, Arthur Tooth & Sons Ltd, 155 New Bond Street, London W1.
13. I am grateful to Margaret Abbie Denton's knowledge of Adelaide society for this information.
14. See, for example, Haskell, *Dancing round the world*, Chapter II, 'On board S.S. *Moldavia*'; and Haskell, *Balletomane at large*, p. 94.
15. Haskell, *Waltzing Matilda*, p. 283.
16. 'Has written many ballet books. Dancer's guide and friend'. Undated clipping from an unnamed Australian newspaper in the Maroussia Richardson Collection, MS9915, National Library of Australia. Finch discusses this rehearsal of 1 September 1936 in 'My dancing years, part three', pp. 386–8.
17. Haskell, *Dancing round the world*, pp. 28–9.
18. Haskell, *Balletomane at large*, p. 93.
19. 'Cables 1931–1937' and 'Cables 1937–1945'. J. C. Williamson Collection, MS 5783, National Library of Australia.
20. For more about the J. C. Williamson organisation in Australia see <http://www.australiadancing.org/subjects/2681.html>; and Viola Tait, *A family of brothers: the Tait's and J. C. Williamson* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1971).
21. 'Cables 1931–1937': cable dated 10/2/36.
22. Ibid.: cable dated 20/2/36.
23. Ibid.: cable dated 8/6/36.
24. Ibid.: cable dated 1/7/36.
25. Ibid.: cable dated 7/7/36.
26. Ibid.: cable dated 25/8/36.
27. Ibid.: cable dated 27/8/36.
28. 'Enthusiasts' wishes', *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 22 October 1936, p. 22.
29. 'Worst type of partisanship', *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 23 October 1936, p. 32.
30. 'Letter 'misinterpreted'', *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 24 October 1936, p. 26.
31. A Balletomane, 'Famous creators of settings for the Russian Ballet', *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 17 October 1936, p. 12.
32. Haskell, *Dancing round the world*, p. 77; 'Cables 1931–1937': cable dated 17/10/36.
33. Arnold Haskell, *Balletomania: the story of an obsession* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934).
34. 'Cables 1931–1937': cable dated 14/8/36.
35. Ibid.: cable dated 11/8/36.
36. 'Vacation Court. Dispute over ballets: Massine v de Basil', *The Times* (London),



- 3 September 1936, p. 4.
37. Ibid.: cable dated 4/9/36.
  38. Ibid.: cable dated 4/9/36.
  39. Kathrine Sorley Walker, *De Basil's Ballets Russes* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 75.
  40. 'Cables 1931–1937': cable dated 7/9/36.
  41. Haskell, *Balletomane at large*, p. 93.
  42. Finch, p. 386.
  43. Haskell, *Balletomane at large*, p. 93.
  44. Ibid., p. 94.
  45. 'Cables 1931–1937': cable dated 17/10/36.
  46. Finch, p. 391.
  47. 'Cables 1931–1937': cable dated 9/11/36.
  48. Letter from Elisabeth Souvorova to her mother written from the Theatre Royal, Adelaide, 22 October [1936], nla.ms-ms9915-1-32. Maroussia Richardson Collection, MS 9915, National Library of Australia. The Souvorova letters are available for online reading as part of the National Library of Australia's digital collections: <http://www.nla.gov.au/cdview/nla.ms-ms9915-1>
  49. Ibid. Letter written from His Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne, 17 November [1936], nla.ms-ms9915-1-36.
  50. 'Cables 1931–1937': cable dated 27/1/37.
  51. Ibid.: cable dated 26/2/37.
  52. 'Cables 1937–1945': cable dated 3/7/37.
  53. Ibid.: cable dated 18/9/37.
  54. Haskell, *Dancing round the world*, p. 133.
  55. For more on the impact of the tours see Michelle Potter, 'Avalanche: de Basil's Ballets Russes in Australia', in *From Russia with Love* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1998), pp. 74–83; and Michelle Potter, 'De Basil in Australia: Publicity and Patronage', in *Dance Research*, XI (Autumn 1993), pp. 16–26.
  56. Souvorova, letter written from His Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne, 24 November [1936], nla.ms-ms9915-1-37.
  57. 'Captain tells sad news to mother', *The Argus* (Melbourne), 10 December 1936, p. 7.
  58. Haskell, *Dancing round the world*, Chapter VI.
  59. Souvorova, letter written from the Theatre Royal, Sydney, 5 January [1937], nla.ms-ms9915-1-43.
  60. Finch, p. 391.
  61. Haskell, *Balletomane at large*, p. 78ff.
  62. Haskell, *Dancing round the world*, pp. 23–4.

## APPENDIX A: COLONEL DE BASIL'S MONTE CARLO RUSSIAN BALLET IN AUSTRALIA

### Dates

October 1936–July 1937. Touring to Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, New Zealand (February to April 1937) and Brisbane, followed by return seasons in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide.

Opening night, Adelaide: 13 October, 1936.

Closing night, Adelaide: 14 July 1937.

### Personnel

#### Dancers

Helene Antonova, Valentina Blinova, Irina Bondireva, Nathalie Branitzka, Mona Dimidova, Mira Dimina (Madeleine Parker), Helene Ducrailova, Nina Golovina, Margot Guerard (Mary Garina), Vanda (or Wanda) Grossen, Xenia Kalinowska, Helene Kirsova, Marija (or Moussia) Korjinska, Vera Lipska, Tatiana Mouravieva, Nina Natova, Helene Polouchina, Nina Raievska, Lilia (or Lelia) Roussova, Anna Severska, Anna Skarpa (or Anna Skarpova),

Elisabeth Souvorova (Betty Scorer), Tamara Tchinarova, Maria Valevska, Olga Valevska, Irina Vassilieva, Sonia Woizikowska, Nina Youchkevitch.

Savva Andreieff, Thomas Armour, Jean Aykoff, Valentine Baline, Birger Bartholin, Jashf Crandall (Joseph Crandall), Joseph (or Jash or Jashf) Dolotine, Alexis Frank, Valentin Froman, Roland Guerard, Jean (or Jan) Hoyer, Milos Ristic, Ivan (or Vania or Jean) Rykoff, Valery Shaevisky, Thadec Slavinsky, Arnold Spirka, Dmitri Tovaroff, Serge Unger (or Serge Ungern), Serge Vladimiroff, Marjan Winter, Igor Youssekevitch, Leon Woizikowsky.

(Some local dancers appeared briefly, usually as extras. Some are mentioned by Sorley, *De Basil's Ballets Russes*, p. 300.)

#### *Ballet staff*

Choreographer: Leon Woizikowsky

Maitre de ballet/Regisseur-General: Leon Woizikowsky

Regisseur/Assistant Regisseur: Jean Hoyer

#### *Music staff*

Principal conductor: Jascha Horenstein

Associate conductor/musical director: Ivan Clayton

#### *Management*

Director: Jacques Lidji

Colonel W. de Basil's Monte Carlo Russian Ballet Founder and Director General: Col. W. de Basil

Colonel de Basil's representative: Alexander Philippov

Liaison officer: Arnold Haskell

#### **Repertoire**

*L'Amour sorcier* (c. 18 performances)

*L'Après midi d'un faune* (c. 20 performances)

*Le beau Danube* (c. 55 performances)

*La Boutique fantasque* (c. 49 performances)

*Le Carnaval* (c. 54 performances)

*Les Cent baisers* (c. 31 performances)

*Contes russes* (c. 16 performances)

*Cotillon* (c. 20 performances)

*Le Lac des cygnes* (c. 54 performances)

*Le Mariage d'Aurore* (c. 52 performances)

*L'Oiseau de feu* (c. 28 performances)

*Petrouchka* (c. 35 performances)

*Port Said* (41 performances)

*Les Présages* (48 performances)

*Prince Igor* (52 performances)

*Schéhérazade* (46 performances)

*Scuola di ballo* (29 performances)

*Soleil de nuit* (23 performances)

*Le Spectre de la rose* (51 performances)

*Les Sylphides* (63 performances)

*Thamar* (21 performances)

The information in this appendix has been assembled from programmes and cast sheets held by the National Library of Australia and from an undergraduate thesis, 'The Ballets russes in Australia: sources for modernism in Australian art', written by Michelle Potter and presented to the Department of Art History at the Australian National University, Canberra, in partial fulfilment for the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in 1989.