

Renate Leaves Home

For the dance world, Argentina was the crossroad of European and American modernism. Dance teacher Renate Schottelius recalls that prestigious past

by Brigitte Macher



In conversation, Renate Schottelius often uses the expression "I was lucky." Luck allowed her to immigrate and escape the Nazis regime in 1936 at the age of fourteen. Moving to Buenos Aires and living in the custody of an uncle meant leaving her parents, familiar surroundings and her dance instruction at the Städtische Oper Berlin where, from the age of eight, she studied under two Mary Wigman students, Ruth Abramowitsch and Alice Uhlen. Renate was enthusiastic about German Ausdruckstanz and wanted to become a dancer no matter what. " It never entered my mind to do anything else." Alongside earning a living doing office work in Buenos Aires, she took lessons at the National Ballet School. At that time the capital was a centre for international dance and many American dancers and companies appeared there. Because the war had closed Europe off, Renate Schottelius' contact with the Denishawn student, Miriam Winslow, was of the utmost importance for her. Winslow combined the Denishawn technique with the styles of Mary Wigman and Harald Kreutzberg and founded a company of

18 male and female dancers, two pianists and a drummer which she toured Argentina with. The meeting of German Ausdruckstanz and modern dance that took place in the 40s in Buenos Aires brought together formidable representatives of the European and American avant-garde. The American moderns in New York, who first met them after the war, were quick to realise how fortunate they were to make the acquaintance of personalities like Louis Horst, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. Doris Humphrey was a likable though firm instructor. "Even if her illness kept her from executing the individual movements, you always knew what she wanted." During this intensive year of study in 1953, Renate Schottelius also trained with José Limón: "He was a wonderful dancer with a unique aura. His work, though influenced by Doris Humphrey, has a character all its own. As a native Mexican, he prefers working Mexican and American themes into his choreographies. Limón is open and friendly towards people, especially towards his audiences. The harmony found in his movement technique is reflected in the harmony of his character. " Renate Schottelius struck up a lifelong friendship with Hanya Holm whose Mary Wigman Studio was opened in New York in 1931. And further, she explains, Hanya Holm made the Wigman technique compatible with American standards. She could be as loveable as feisty in private, this magnificent academician who at the age of 88 still teaches at the Juilliard School. It was understood, however, that while Renate Schottelius trained in the studio of Martha Graham, she could not breathe a word about her instruction with Hanya Holm. "Martha could be pretty unfriendly and sometimes played the demon - and maybe she really was one. Either way, she had an incredibly strong personality." Schottelius was unable to accept another engagement with Limón and Hanya Holm. In spite of her instructors' efforts, her work permit was not renewed. This did not, however, make her bitter. "Looking back at my career, " she says, " I was allowed to lead a rich and creative life as a dancer in South America, as a choreographer with her own company and as an academician." For six years, from 1966 to 1972, she taught dance technique, composition and dance education at the Boston Conservatory of Music and was later invited to teach at the School of Dance in Stockholm. In 1980, Schottelius returned to Buenos Aires.



Oscar Araiz and Daniel Goldin are very much influenced by her. Our picture shows Renate Schottelius on the rooftops of New York in 1953. Photograph: Ellen Auerbach/ Dt. Tanzarchiv Köln

"Because of my credentials as an academician people forget that I was a successful dancer, that I choreographed so much, and that I worked with the Association Amigos de la Danza, founded in 1960, a union of choreographers working in classical, neoclassical and modern styles, dedicated to establishing modern dance at the National Dance Academy in Argentina." Here, young choreographers were given the chance to present their own works, for example Oscar Araiz, now chief choreographer at the Teatro San Martin. Araiz and Daniel Goldin to whom Renate Schottelius refers as her most talented students Today she still works as an academician. After the last dance fair, she trained Daniel Goldin's company. Petite, delicate and amazingly agile at her age, she teaches her own style now whose method of "patient steps" has its own golden rule: Discover the body's possibilities without raping the body. To encourage her dancers to really dance, she can be heard shouting "Walk through your body! " at a moment of great concentration during a training session. Her life has effected a great deal, last but not least her students around the world. Meanwhile she also serves as artistic advisor for the Ballet Contemporáneo at the Teatro San Martin in Buenos Aires and her works have been honoured with numerous prizes. As endearing, unconventional and witty as she is assertive and broad-minded, she remains the engaging conversationalist that she always was. Moreover, as a modern dance forerunner linked with the effective connecting of German Ausdruckstanz and American modern dance, she represents an important chapter in the history of dance - not only in Argentina.