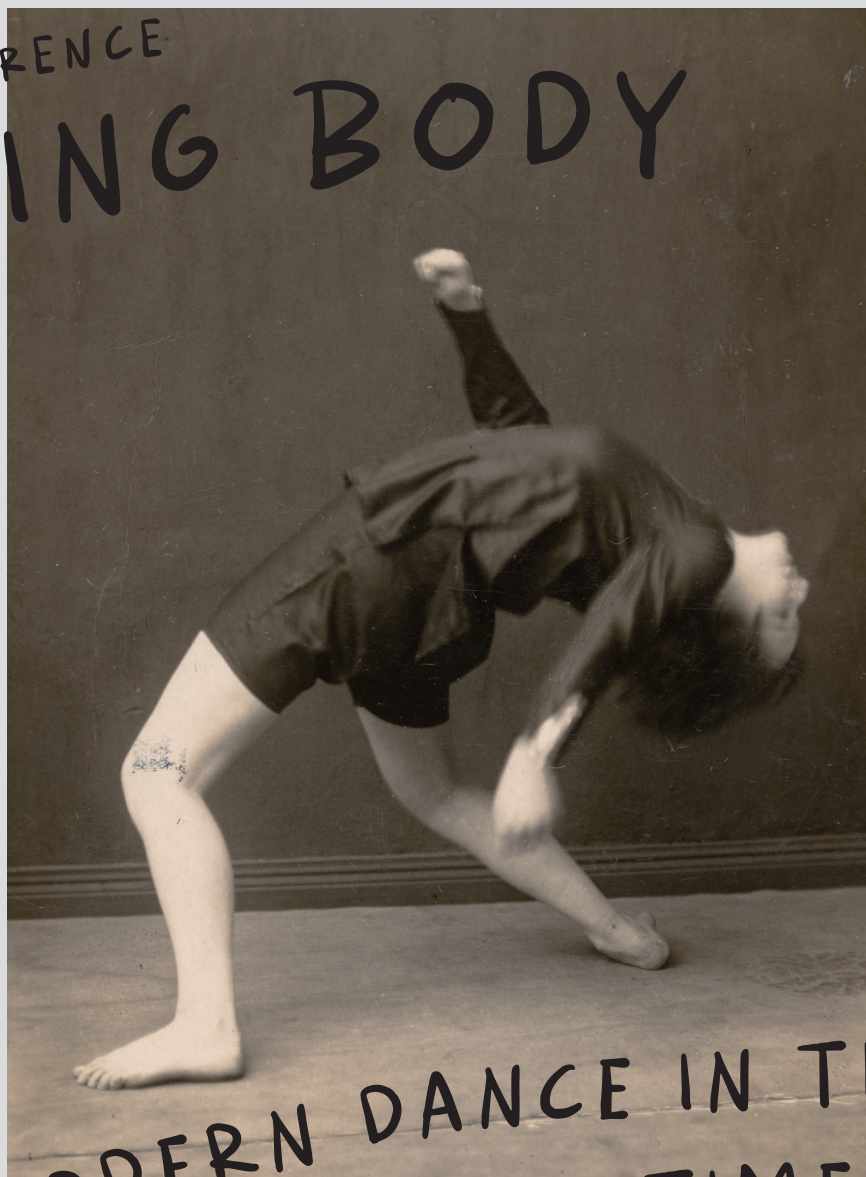


# ◀ AJALOOMUUSEUM ▶

## ABSTRACTS

CONFERENCE  
DANCING BODY



MODERN DANCE IN THE  
WHIRLWIND OF TIME

10.10-11.10.2024

**The conference “Dancing Body: Modern Dance in the Whirlwind of Time” will take place on 10–11 October in the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum’s Peeter Süda Hall. This international conference explores the early 20th-century cultural life of Estonia through the lens of dance.**

**Modern dance, back then known as plastic or free dance, emerged as symbol of modernity in the early 20th century. The physical expressiveness of dancers captivated audiences and became a significant cultural phenomenon. The main focus of the conference is to examine the connections between dance and other fields of art and to analyse the works of Estonian dancers. The presentations will discuss the artists whose work has laid the foundation for dance today. The final part of the conference will reflect on the 1990s, a period when modern dance saw a revival after the restoration of Estonia’s independence, and will explore how this second wave contrasted with the first.**

**The conference is organized by:**

**Estonian Association of Theatre Researchers and Theatre Critics**

**Anne-Liis Maripuu**

**Heili Einasto**

**Anneli Saro**

**Estonian History Museum**

**Annely Kaldoja**

**Krista Sarv**

# KARL TOEPFER

## A FOREIGN PERSPECTIVE ON EARLY MODERN DANCE IN ESTONIA: HOW ELLA ILBAK'S IMAGE CHANGED MY LIFE

My paper examines Estonian dance history from a foreign perspective. I explain how my awareness of Estonian dance in the 1920s arose through an image of Estonian dancer Ella Ilbak (1895–1997) published in Lea Tormis's history of Estonian dance (*Estnisches Ballett / Estonian Ballet / Eesti ballett*, 1984). In the 1920s, people became aware of modern dance more through images of dancers published in various media or postcards than through performances. Similarly, dance scholars in our time engage with the history of early modern dance primarily through images of dancers in that time, especially in relation to modern dance history in countries whose languages are not familiar. I explain how the image of Ella Ilbak brought me to Estonia in 1995 in search of information about her, my encounter with theatre historian Lilian Kirepe (1927–2018), and our exploration of archive material on Ilbak in the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum. I then describe my subsequent efforts to define Ilbak's contribution to international (more than national) dance history, her significance for a person who is not Estonian, and her impact on my relationship to dance history and dance scholarship. These efforts include, among others, my attempt to learn Estonian, my visits to archives in other countries, my research on Estonian pantomime of the 1920s and in the Soviet era, and my eventual conviction that a foreign perspective on Ilbak entails an innovative or 'foreign' method of doing dance history.

Karl Toepfer is an emeritus professor at San Jose State University, where he taught in the theatre programme and was Dean for the College of Humanities and the Arts. He received his doctorate from the University of California at Los Angeles. His most notable books include *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Body Culture in Germany 1910–1935* (1997) and *Pantomime: The History and Metamorphosis of a Theatrical Ideology* (2022). He has published numerous scholarly articles as well as a novel, *The School of Illusions* (2019). He has given several guest lectures in Estonia.

# MART LAUL

## PHOTOGRAPHY EQUIPMENT DURING INTERWAR PERIOD

This presentation will focus on the technical possibilities for photographers to capture dance during the interwar period. What could be portrayed in terms of the technical side of photography? What conditions had to be met for a photo to be taken? What were the technological limits in capturing dance?

Photographing dance presented a real challenge to the photographers and photography techniques of the time, as it depicted movement. Getting the desired image required extreme skill on the part of the photographer. In terms of technical possibilities, the photographer was working in a so-called 'coffin corner', where they had to use all the methods. The photo, however, could only be an illusion or a characteristic moment of the dance.

In this presentation, I will talk about how photographers took up the challenge. The lecture is structured as a timeline, where I describe step by step the decisions a photographer had to make and at what stage, the difficulties the photographers had to face and what happened if they made a mistake at one stage of the process or another.

In elaborating on these topics, I will give examples of dance photographs from the Theatre and Music Museum's collection and show photographs that have technical implications. I will also draw parallels with today and talk about the current limitations of photographing dance.

Mart Laul is a photographer and the manager of the photo collection of the Estonian History Museum. He started working with photo collections at the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum in 2012. He has been shooting on film since 2005. In collaboration with Tanel Verk (the Museum of Photography of Tallinn City Museum), Mart Laul has curated exhibitions of analogue photographs of the Parikas brothers, *Presentation of Photographs by Photographers Johannes and Peeter Parikas* (Estonian National Opera Gallery, 2018), and theatre photographer Armin Allas, *Theatre Through a Lens* (Estonian National Opera Gallery, 2019).

# LIIS KOLLE

## THE INFLUENCE OF DANCE AND RHYTHMICS ON HANNO KOMPUS' WORK AS A STAGE DIRECTOR

In this presentation I will focus on the relationship of Hanno Kompus (1890-1974), as an opera director, with dance from both theoretical and practical aspects. It is known that since his student days, Kompus has considered the harmonious relationship between body and mind to be important and placed emphasis on physical expression. Particularly important for his development were the years he spent studying in Moscow, where, among other things, he attended Emile Jaques-Dalcroze's course in rhythmic gymnastics, on which he published an article in 1916 entitled *The Role of Rhythm in Education for Life and Art* (Üliõpilasleht). On the other hand, Kompus discovered for himself the Moscow Chamber Theatre, where Alexander Tairov was engaged in liberating theatre from the yoke of other arts, especially (naturalistic) literature, by cultivating its essential means of expression (facial expressions, gesture, movement, voice), which could also be expressed in a pantomime without text. The performances he saw there corresponded to Kompus's ideal of theatre (at the time), and he later called them his greatest theatre experiences ever. There is no doubt that what he experienced transformed into his later work as an opera performer.

Even before he became a director, Kompus described his beliefs about movement in musical performance in reviews of Estonia's opera productions as well as in articles. In his opinion, the staging of operas and operettas should be based on the music and its spirit, i.e. the style, character and mood of the music. The movement of the singers had to resemble dance rather than functional, everyday movement (this was particularly important as Estonian spoken theatre at the time was dominated by a realistic, naturalistic style). Above all, it meant moving to the rhythm of the music without stepping 'between the notes'. Rhythmics and free dance were important direction indicators here. Later, when Kompus himself was an opera director at the Estonian National Opera in 1923, the presence and influence of contemporary dance deepened with the appointment of Rahel Olbre as ballet master of the National Opera, who also created dances for opera productions.

In my presentation, I would like to address the question of whether and how the principles and specifics of dance can be transferred to the theatre stage, including the opera stage, to what extent Kompus himself was able

**to integrate them into his productions, and whether any of his ideas and aspirations have been preserved in contemporary Estonian musical theatre.**

**Liis Kolle is an opera director, lecturer and music and theatre journalist. She graduated from the University of Tartu with a Master's degree in Theatre and Literature (Master's thesis *Hanno Kompuse kujunemine lavastajaks (The Development of Hanno Kompus into a Director)* and from the School of Music Hanns Eisler Berlin with a degree in Musical Theatre Directing. She has attended master classes of directors Peter Konwitschny and Volker Schlöndorff and studied cultural management at the Cimdada Media Academy in Berlin. She was a recipient of the Bayreuth Festival and Deutsche Bank Kulturstiftung scholarships and the Estonian State Cultural Award and a nominee of the Annual Award of Estonian Theatre. From 2007–2011 and since 2015 she has been the director of the Opera Studio of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. She has taught at the University of Giessen in Germany and the Estonian Academy of Arts and also taught master classes. She has translated plays and librettos.**

# MEETA VARDJA

## ON THE ACCOMPANYING MUSIC IN THE ROUTINES OF ELMERICE PARTS, GERD NEGGO AND ELLA ILBAK

The emergence of modern dance at the beginning of the 20th century not only marked a whole new chapter in the history of dance, but also brought about a fundamental change in the kind of music used to accompany it. Representatives of the new movement, including modern dance pioneer Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), turned to classical instrumental music as a good backdrop for the physical expression of human nature and emotions. They danced to the music of Chopin, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Wagner and other 19th century composers. Combining formal music with modern dance provoked mixed opinions - some audiences found such a combination unacceptable, while others strongly approved of the choice (Teck 2011). The preference for classical music is also reflected in the routines of the Estonian modern dance pioneers of the 1910s-1920s, which also feature Chopin, Brahms and others as well as composers from earlier times (Bach, Beethoven), Nordic composers (Grieg, Sibelius) and Estonian composers (Eller, Tobias).

In this presentation, I will take a closer look at a selection of the accompanying music of three important Estonian dancers: Ella Ilbak (1895-1997), Gerd Neggo (1891-1974) and Elmerice Parts (1878-1974). I shall comparatively analyse the dancers' musical attitudes and the works they used in their routines, whether there are differences in their choices and, if so, what they were, and how the musical part of the dancers' routines related to the broader musical trends of the time. In addition, I will investigate whether and how the music accompanying dances was commented on or appreciated in the reviews of the time. My main sources are the pages of the dancers' programmes and articles published in the newspapers *Postimees*, *Päevaleht* and *Vaba Maa*.

Meeta Vardja is a doctoral student in musicology at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. In her dissertation, she focuses on the development of the musicology faculty at the Soviet-era Tallinn State Conservatory. She holds a cum laude Bachelor's degree in Music Education and a Master's degree in Musicology from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. In addition to her doctoral studies, she teaches and mentors students and serves as the editor of the Concert Office of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and writes reviews for cultural publications.

# ANNE-LIIS MARIPUU

## THE RISE AND FALL OF ELMERICE PARTS

Elmerice Parts (1878–1974) is not entirely unknown in Estonian cultural history – many have probably heard her name in connection with her performance as Salomé in the Drama Theatre’s production of the same name (1919). She is probably also known as one of the first free dance practitioners in Estonia. Nevertheless, she remains rather obscure and is not considered a talented dancer or a skilful choreographer. In my view, unjustifiably so.

Parts’ career began in 1920 and lasted for around seven years; in the last two years, she performed with Herman Kolt-Oginsky (1902–1977). Parts’ dance style changed significantly over time. Parts was motivated by a desire to renew the art of dance in order to “not lose touch with the rhythm of modern life and the new signs of modernity” (Päevaleht 14.02.1926). She started out as a delicate, sensitive, sometimes sensual dancer. In the second half of her career, she focused on contemporary urban life, depicting, together with Kolt-Oginsky, the effects of mind-altering substances, erotic experiences and the monotonous movement of machine parts. The attitude of Estonian critics towards Parts’ work underwent an equally drastic change. In 1924, she was considered one of the best dancers in Estonia; two years later, there were comments that her performances did not belong to the realm of art.

The attitude towards the dancer and her work reflects the attitudes, beliefs and views of the time. It speaks of what was considered to be artistic. They also shed light on the attitudes towards women, their bodies and what was expressed through them.

In my presentation, I will analyse what ensured Parts’ success in the eyes of critics in the early years of her career and what prevented her and Kolt-Oginsky’s work from being recognised as art a few years later.

Anne-Liis Maripuu is a PhD student at the University of Tartu. Her research topic is modern dance in Estonia and Germany before World War II. More specifically, she looks at how Estonia’s first modern dancers portrayed themselves on stage. Maripuu has published a number of studies dedicated to Estonian dance history, including in the collection *Teatrielu* and the magazines *Teater. Muusika. Kino* and *TantsuKuukiri*. Maripuu has organised two photo exhibitions: *Dancing Free. The Early Years of Free Dance in Estonia 1913–1944* in cooperation with Heili Einasto and the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum, and *Dance Only is Sovereign. Gerd Neggo 130*.

# SILLE KAPPER-TIISLER

## ELMERICE PARTS' FOLK DANCE-INSPIRED WORK

Elmerice Parts (1878-1974), who was born in Põlva County to the family of a manor tenant of Baltic-German origin, grew up in Saaremaa and worked as a gymnastics and dance teacher in Tartu, was probably the first modern dance choreographer to use motifs from Estonian folk dance in her work. As a dancer, her repertoire included a number based on folk music and some folk dance movements, entitled Pulmapoiss (Wedding Boy), which received a lot of coverage from the press, but for reasons still to be explained, its performance was limited to one year, 1924. However, after the end of her dancing career in the 1930s, Elmerice Parts began to create and teach so-called stylised folk dances.

In this presentation, I plan to analyse the folk dance elements Elmerice Parts used in the creation of her dances, where she got them, how she presented them, and what her artistic choices were based on or what they may refer to. The results of the analysis could also show how the modern dancer's turn to folk dance characterises the rapidly developing and diversifying dance life in Estonia in the 1920s and 1930s in general, including dance education and dance as a hobby as well as professional dance.

I call my research method ethnochoreological, which in this case means the synthesis of the methods of dance history, dance anthropology, dance folklore and other disciplines, according to need and opportunity. As a direct source material on Elmerice Parts' folk dance work, we have one photograph, which probably shows her dancing Pulmapoiss in an attire resembling to folk costumes, as well as reviews of her performances, other newspaper reports and a collection of descriptions of children's dances she created in 1935. Images, media texts, technical dance descriptions and the choreographer's own accompanying text as very different types of sources, together with the narrower and broader context and previous studies, can cast light on the choreographer's activities and aspirations from several angles.

The use of folk dance elements has been analysed previously in Estonia in the context of Soviet- and re-independence-era folk dance, dance festivals, and author's dances created for amateur groups and ballet. Less research has been done on the folk dance work of pre-World War II and modern dance choreographers. Adding this perspective will diversify our understanding of

## **the possible purposes of turning to folk dance and the functions of folk dance material in choreography.**

**Sille Kapper-Tiisler is a choreographer and a director, doctor of philosophy, dance analyst and researcher who has focused mainly on the history and contemporary perspectives of traditional and folk dance, including authentic traditions, revival, dancing as a hobby and dance education. She works as an associate professor of folk culture at the Baltic Institute of Film, Media and Arts at Tallinn University and as the artistic director of the Folklore Society Leigarid.**

**She has supervised numerous creative-practical and research-based Bachelor's and Master's theses on choreography, held dance and concert performances based on folk heritage, participated in the artistic team of dance celebration as a category director, stage director and assistant, been a folk dance mentor for the Estonian Folk Dance and Folk Music Association, trained dance teachers and folk dance leaders in courses organised by the ERRS, the Estonian Centre of Folk Culture, the Estonian Folklore Council, the Viljandi Culture Academy of the University of Tartu, etc., and participated in the professional committee of dance specialists, in the development of the curriculum of the school of folk dance leaders, etc. and in other thematic *working* groups.**

# KAI STAHL

## MODERN DANCE AND DANCERS IN ESTONIAN VISUAL ART IN THE 1910S AND 1920S

In this presentation, I will focus on the ways in which Estonian artists, in particular, captured Estonian modern dancers in the first decades of the last century. I will highlight the ways of thinking that may have been behind their styles of expression. By the beginning of the century, a completely innovative form of movement that transcended artistic genres had arrived in Europe from America, and its novelty also made an impression on the cultural crowd in Estonia who were seeking alternatives to traditional forms of expression. They were enchanted by the free dance numbers of dancers, which, however, also evoked conflicting emotions.

The best-known work of art depicting an Estonian dancer of the time was by Hungarian artist Endre Komáromi-Kacz (1880–1969). This is his delicate and melancholic bust painting in oils of the first professional Estonian dancer Ella Ilbak (1895–1997), who was also portrayed in the same genre and technique by Caesar Kunwald (1870–1946) in 1926. Ilbak was mostly captured by photographers in various dance poses. Estonian artist Ants Laikmaa (1866–1942), however, turned his attention to Gerd Neggo (1891–1974), of whom he painted a static bust portrait. The names of the dancers depicted in surviving and known works have mostly been left unmentioned when they are depicted in dances, for example, in works by Anton Starkopf (1889–1966) or Ado Vabbe (1892–1961). At the time of creating these artworks, both artists were in or had previously visited European centres of modern dance and art. An exception to this anonymity is a work by Karl Krahe (1890–1922), a modern dancer himself, who remained little known as an artist and who depicted Elmerice Parts (1878–1974) as a dancer; the skull on the ground in the picture refers to the role of Salomé. One of the sources of inspiration for both female dancers and their portrayal in art was oriental dances, such as the Dance of the Seven Veils performed by the titular character in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* adapted to Richard Strauss's opera (which premiered in 1905), which was rewarded with the head of John the Baptist.

Kai Stahl holds a PhD in Art History from the University of Turku. She has focused mainly on studying the work of Estonian female artists, modernism and deviations from the norm. She has published several research articles and a doctoral thesis (*Dualismit marginaaleissa: Naistekijyys ja modernisaatio Natalie Mein 1910–1920-lukujen tuotannossa*, 2023), in addition to the monograph *Ainulaadne sõsarkond. Õed Kristine, Lydia ja Natalie Mei (2020)*.

# **RIIKKA KORPPI-TOMMOLA**

## **POLITICS OF EARLY MODERN DANCE GUEST PERFORMANCES – ESTONIAN DANCERS IN FINLAND**

**In my paper, I present Estonian early modern dance artists who visited Finland before the Second World War. Who performed and with what kind of dance numbers, what was the performance context, and what kind of image did the Estonian dance artists create among the Finnish critics?**

**Certainly the most visible Estonian modern dancer in Finland was Ella Ilbak (1895-1997), who performed a solo performance for the first time at the Finnish National Theatre in 1922, and thereafter during the years 1930, 1932, 1933 and 1936. For example, the tour in the 1930s with a Finnish pianist consisted of 45 performances in 26 cities all around Finland, including small towns. Ilbak became very popular among Finnish audiences. She acted as a cultural diplomat and became an important figure of the ‘Estonian-Finnish cultural bridge-builders’, though she has not been mentioned among them in previous historical writing.**

**Other Estonian modern dance visitors in Finland before World War Two were Elmerice Parts (1878-1974) in January 1924, Alice Jürna (1902-1964) in 1927, and Gerd Neggo (1891-1974) with her dance group in 1929 during the International Gymnastics Festival. They all performed in Helsinki.**

**With the help of these visitors and their performances, I explore special features, similarities and differences between Estonian and Finnish early modern dance developments.**

**The reviews, texts and articles related to the Estonian dance visits also reflected the political views in both countries. Politics manifested itself in many ways depending on an era, a situation, or the context of the performance. This was obvious when performances of Ella Ilbak were organized twice to celebrate Estonian Independence Day (1922, 1930). Political statements were conveyed through press rhetoric, individual interviews, speeches presented at events and criticisms, especially in the general atmosphere of the 1930s.**

**Riikka Korppi-Tommola is a dance researcher and teaches dance and theatre history and analysis at the University of Helsinki, and the Ballet School of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet. Her dissertation (2014) examined the process of change in Finnish modern dance during the 1960s. Previously, Korppi-Tommola worked as a professional dancer (1980–2000) in the Helsinki City Theatre Dance Company. Latest articles in editions: 2024 *Vieraita näyttämöllä - Suomen ja Viron teatteri- ja tanssisuhteet. [Visitors onstage. Finnish and Estonian Theatre and Dance Connections]*; 2021 *Se alkoi joutsenesta. Sata vuotta arkea ja unelmia Kansallisbaletissa. [The National Ballet 100-year history]*.**

# **VALDA VIDZEMNIECE**

## **ESTONIAN MODERN DANCERS' GUEST PERFORMANCES IN LATVIA: A REVIEW OF PRESS PUBLICATIONS (1921-1935)**

The paper examines the period of modern dance development in Latvia in the 1920s and 1930s when, in addition to Latvian dance art activities, dancers' guest performances were of great importance. Estonian modern dance artists played a particular role in this context.

In the 1920s, new dance schools and studios appeared in Latvia one by one that popularized plastique and rhythm-plastique dance, German modern dance ideas as well as Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics method.

To better understand dance processes in Latvia, it is important to pay attention to the performances and concerts of guest artists, which taught and inspired Latvian dancers and choreographers and acquainted the audience with new European dance trends.

Two Estonian dancers - Elmerice Parts and Ella Ilbak - gave performances in Latvia in 1921 when cultural life was just starting to recover after all the sufferings of war and struggles for independence. Elmerice Parts also visited Latvia the following year, but Ella Ilbak performed in Latvia almost every year, gaining public recognition and reviewers' appreciation. Ilbak became an example of modern dancing. At the beginning of the 1920s, reviewers praised the courage of Estonian dancers to approach modern dance trends because in Latvia they appeared only in pedagogical practices at that time.

Gerd Negro performed in Riga in 1927, a year after Mary Wigman visited Latvia. Reviews of Negro's performances were ambiguous; the reviewers seemed more interested in discussing Laban's theories and innovations. Estonian dancer Herman Kolt-Oginsky visited Latvia in 1935 and was perceived as a peculiar dancer seeking novelty in the art of dance.

Reviews of dance concerts helped to understand and evaluate the performances of artists, creating the modern dance discourse in Latvian periodicals.

Valda Vidzemniece is a choreographer, educator, and dance researcher. Since 2008, she has taught Dance Composition, Dance History and Theory at Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music. She holds a Master's degree in Choreography from JVLMA and completed her doctoral studies at the Latvian Academy of Culture in the field of Arts and subfield of Theory of Culture. Doctoral thesis: Modern Dance in Latvia in the First Part of the 20th Century. She is the author of the monograph of the same title. Research interests: Dance History and Theory, Ethnochoreology and Cultural Theory. She has participated in numerous international conferences and has publications in Latvian and English.

# ANNE TAMM-KIVIMETS

## LECTURE/WORKSHOP IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF GERD NEGGO IN ESTONIAN

As a representative of the so-called new dance, Gerd Neggo undoubtedly had a great influence on Estonian dance at the beginning of the last century. From 1921 to 1924, she studied and danced in Germany with Rudolf Laban, one of her most important teachers. Laban is considered to be one of the founders of modern European dance. His theories of movement have been recognised in both dance and theatre and are still used in many parts of the world, including Estonia. According to Neggo, Laban's technique works through the whole body and provides, in addition to body control, "a technique of dance expression for the whole body". She considered artistic expression to be important in dance, as was typical of the era, without forgetting the detail of movement and the dancer's good technique. According to Neggo, dance is "an artistic, rhythmically moving expression of a spiritual, mental, physical experience". (Päevaleht 14.01.1927) Neggo's aim was to raise intelligent dancers.

In the lecture/workshop, I will be looking for answers to the question of how Neggo's students and dancers might have moved around the stage in their day. I proceed from the writings of Neggo and her contemporaries, and the knowledge of Rudolf Laban's movement system, which I have used as a basis in my daily work as a dance teacher for the last 15 years. We will place Neggo's teachings in the modern-day setting and see how they fit into the way we move and think today. Are Neggo's principles still relevant and applicable to dancers and the general public? The lecture/workshop will consist of a practical and a theoretical part: we will talk about Rudolf Laban and Gerd Neggo and do simple movement exercises. The workshop is for anyone interested in the movement techniques of Laban and Neggo. Previous dance experience is not required.

Anne Tamm-Kivimets is the founder and teacher of Just Dance School (founded in 1984) in Tartu. She acquired her dance education by reading, watching, experiencing and attending countless workshops, training and courses. Tamm-Kivimets received her Bachelor's degree in Vocational Education from the Institute of Educational Sciences of the University of Tartu. After that, she commenced studies in Innovation in Education at the same institution. In 2023, she became a member of the board and CEO of the Estonian Dance Art and Dance Education Association. Tamm-Kivimets was awarded the Gerd Neggo Dance Teacher Scholarship from the Estonian Dance Art and Dance Education Association in 2013.

# **KAI VALTNA**

## **BOX RM: UNDOUBTED REPRESENTATION OF THE 1990S**

**Box RM was undoubtedly one of the most avant-garde phenomena on the emerging Estonian contemporary dance scene of the 1990s. The spontaneous gathering of dance students at the then Viljandi Culture College gave rise to a new view of movement and performance politics in general, the impact of which can also be felt in the 21st century dance scene.**

**The presentation will focus on an analysis of the movement language and aesthetics of a dance company based on Yvonne Rainer's concept of found movement, looking at choreography as a ready-made phenomenon. Contemporary dance, which emerged in the 1960s in the world and in the 1990s in Estonia, begins to emphasize objectified corporeality, which detaches the subjective dimension of modernism from the kinaesthetic experience and instead brings its objectifying component to the fore. This decisively broadens the spectrum of what can be considered dance and where dance can take place. In the case of both ready-made objects and found movements, the aesthetic value of the work is not limited to the technical skills of the artist.**

**Box RM's aesthetic included performing in so-called found places - an abandoned restaurant, an empty swimming pool or a chapel - which emphasised the need to contextualise choreography outside the space and codes of the theatre. The new concept of movement and the new aesthetics changed the relationship between the performer and the spectator, complicating it in several ways and requiring a reconceptualisation of the traditional understanding of the responsibility of the performer and the audience. Marcel Duchamp's claim that the creative act is not performed by the artist alone but that the work is only complete when the viewer makes an aesthetic decision about the value of the work is self-evident knowledge today; it is a claim that the activities of Box RM in the last decades of the last century have helped to cement in the Estonian contemporary dance scene.**

**Kai Valtna graduated from Tallinn University (then Tallinn Pedagogical Institute) in 1989 with a degree in cultural education. Since 1995, she has held a diploma in Historical Dance from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. As of the same year, she has been working at the Viljandi Culture Academy of the University of Tartu, first as a lecturer and now for 10 years as the programme director of the dance curriculum. Her current title is Head of Dance in the Performing Arts curriculum. She teaches history of performing arts and dance analysis and has just obtained her Master's degree in Theatre Studies at the University of Tartu. The Master's thesis explores authenticity as a strategy for contemporary dance. Alongside the latest dance strategies, she is interested in bodies in a cultural-historical context.**

# HEILI EINASTO

## DANCE WRITERS IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE ESTONIAN REPUBLIC AND AFTER THE RESTORATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Dance criticism in the press is one of the sources of dance research that can be used to draw conclusions about what happened when and how it affected the viewer (critic). Dance criticism is often produced by people who have no background in dance education, so they do not look at the dance from the inside but address its inner themes (the nature of the movements, the purity of the performance) with the eyes of an outsider primarily concerned with how the dance affects the viewer.

In this presentation I will look at the background of authors who wrote about dance in two periods - 1910-1930 and the 1990s - what influenced what they wrote (and what did not), what was important to them, and what conclusions can and cannot be drawn from their writings. At the beginning of the century, a number of writings were also published anonymously (which are not included in the sample), but the authors included are Rasmus Kangro-Pool, Jaan Pert, Hanno Kompus, Voldemar Mettus, Hendrik Visnapuu, Gustav Suits, Theodor Linde; and, from the second half of the century, Heino Aassalu, Kadi Herkül, Lea Tormis, Pille Palm, Esta Tatrik, Mark Rais, Aime Hansen, Reet Kudu, Kristiina Garancis (who started writing in 1997), Toomas Kuter and Erkki Luuk (who started writing in the late 1990s). In the case of both periods, I will also touch briefly on the places of publication (i.e. the possibilities of publication). For the latter period, I will draw on my own experience and knowledge as someone who started actively writing about dance in 1991.

Heili Einasto graduated from the Estonian Institute of Humanities with a degree in History and English

Studies, received a Master's degree in Gender and Cultural Studies from the Central European University, then studied at the International Women's University (IFU) in Hanover and Bremen as a DAAD scholarship recipient, the University of Turku and the University of California, Los Angeles. She obtained her PhD in Cultural Studies in 2016. Since 1991, Heili Einasto has published dance criticism and research articles on dance, for which she has been repeatedly recognised. Teater. Muusika. Kino magazine has given her the annual award three times (2002, 2003, 2007), and the Estonian Theatre Union has nominated her twice for the Oscar of Estonian theatre critics, i.e. the Reet Neimar Prize: in 2012 and, together with Evelin Lagle, in 2018, as "dance theatre cartographers who, in addition to their characteristic form of dialogue, have also emerged with more programmatic problem statements". Heili Einasto is one of two dance writers to have received the Reet Neimar Prize in 2013. In 2020, Heili Einasto was nominated for the Priit Põldroos Prize "for the development of theatrical thought, theatre research or long-standing theatre education activities" for her research and documentation of dance history and her teaching work at Tallinn University; for her study *Rahel Olbrei. Eesti tantsuteatri rajaja (Rahel Olbrei. Founder of Estonian Dance Theatre)* (2018); and for the recording of Mai Murdmaa's person and work in the book *Teekond tantsus (A Journey in Dance)* (2018).

# **EVELIN LAGLE-NÕMM**

## **THE BEAUTY AND PAIN OF THE EMERGENCE OF HIGHER DANCE EDUCATION IN THE 1990S**

**Dance education is one of the essential foundations of dance culture and it gradually lays the groundwork for the development of a dance landscape. The 1990s were a time of great birth and explosion in Estonian higher contemporary dance education.**

**In the early 1990s, like now, dance training was offered by two institutions of higher education: Viljandi Culture College, now Viljandi Culture Academy of the University of Tartu, and Tallinn Pedagogical University, now Tallinn University. In the early 1990s, the curriculum at both institutions was still largely based on the programme developed by the Soviet Union's Ministry of Education, but it was soon realised that a viable trend was moving towards newer dance styles.**

**In the presentation I will discuss the creation of new curricula based on modern trends in the 1990s at Tallinn Pedagogical University and Viljandi Culture College and draw parallels with contemporary dance education in Estonia in the period 1910–1930.**

**Evelin Lagle-Nõmm graduated from the University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy in 2009, majoring in Dance, and received a Master's degree in Choreography from Tallinn University Institute of Arts in 2012. Evelin Lagle-Nõmm has been writing dance criticism and research articles for various publications since 2007. The Estonian Theatre Association nominated Lagle-Nõmm for the Reet Neimar Critics' Award in 2016 and also in 2018 alongside Heili Einasto. Since 2011, Lagle-Nõmm has been the editor of the Estonian Dance Art and Dance Education Association's online publication Tantsu KuuKiri. From 2015 to 2019, she worked as a lecturer in the history of ballet and modern dance at the Viljandi Culture Academy.**

# **ROUNDTABLE: HISTORY OF DANCE – WHO CARES?!**

**To whom and with whom do you need to talk to about dance art? Why is it important to preserve the legacy of this vanishing art? What is important to capture and what can be captured, stored and inherited in the case of dance in general? How has Estonian dance in different periods reflected local social values, beliefs and social practices, and what role does it play in society today?**

**Kristina Paškevicius, Sveta Grigorjeva and Mart Kango, representatives of the Estonian dance scene of different generations, will participate in the discussion. The discussion will be moderated by dance critic Marie Pullerits.**

**All lovers of dance and dance and theatre history, researchers and practitioners are welcome to listen to the roundtable. The audience is invited to think along and join the discussion.**

# ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME

## CURATORIAL TOUR AT THE EXHIBITION “ASTOUNDING STORIES ABOUT THEATRE AND MUSIC”

October 10th 17:30-18:30

Over the course of 100 years, numerous artefacts have been accumulated in the Theatre and Music Museum and they are as special as the stories they tell and the people who owned them. Through these stories, a world opens filled with sadness and joy, new beginnings and final goodbyes, eternal love and little mischiefs, sporting rivalry and the joy of play. We have selected 100 objects from the museum collection for the exhibition and accompanied them with stories and pictures.

## LAUNCH OF THE ANTHOLOGY “VIERAITA NÄÜTTÄMÖLLÄ-SUOMEN JA VIRON TEATTERI- JA TÄNCISUHTEET”. The book is introduced by Anneli Saro.

October 10th 18:30

*“Guests on Stage - Finnish and Estonian Theatre and Dance Relations”* (*“Vieraita näyttämöllä – Suomen ja Viron teatteri- ja tanssisuhteet”*) is

a collaboration by Finnish-Estonian research team that explores the rich interaction between the Finnish and Estonian theatre and dance scenes from the 19th century to the 21st century. The aesthetic interactions have commonly been mixed with political and ideological objectives.

The book contributes to the recent debate on transnationality by examining the activities of theatre makers and institutions: visits, tours, drama translations, etc. Although Estonia and Finland are geographically and linguistically close, their societies, theatre systems and cultural influences have clearly diverged. This situation has produced links, clashes and cooperation characterised by a mixture of familiarity and strangeness. The transnational links have in many ways also raised questions of national identity.

Finland and Estonia are still theatre countries whose cooperation continues to find new forms.

## **A VISIT TO THE THEATRE ARCHIVES AT MAARJAMÄE**

**October 11th 10:30–12:00**

**An exclusive tour of Maarjamäe, where the collection managers will explain how archival dance materials and photographs of the Theatre and Music Museum are preserved**

**We will meet at 10:00 at the theatre and music museum or at 10:25 at the Maarjamäe castle gates.**

## **DANCE PERFORMANCE “FIRESTARTERS”**

**October 11th 19:3, Kanuti Gildi SAAL**

**Under the steady hand of Sveta Grigorjeva a timeless spectacle of FIRESTARTERS will come to life on the stage of Kanuti Gildi SAAL.**

**FIRESTARTERS are tricksters, erotic body hackers, mindbenders, supermanifesters of a better world but also the catalysts of decline.**

**FIRESTARTERS take lead from radical cheerleading, from militant search for joy, from the motivational discourse of the neoliberal world and turn all of it upside down. Are they good guys or bad guys? Is this an attempt to shake up the status quo or just a carnival of capitalism? You decide!**

**FIRESTARTERS are dreamers. FIRESTARTERS spark desires. FIRESTARTERS is a protest in the form of dance. FIRESTARTERS is an invitation to be sensitively radical and radically expressive. FIRESTARTERS will set themselves on fire. FIRESTARTERS will set you on fire. FIRESTARTERS will get you higher.**

**Sveta Grigorjeva is an Estonian choreographer, dancer, poet and critic. She has published three poetry collections “who is afraid of sveta grigorjeva” (2013), “American beauty” (2018) and “Frankenstein” (2023). Her stage productions include “TEKHNE” (2017), “FAKERZ” (2021) and “Dances to Dream, Res(is)t and Sleep to” (2023) which won the best dance award in Estonia in 2024. As an artist, she is interested in the Spinoza-influenced belief that we do not know yet what the body can do and the subversive nature and potential of the expressive body and text. In autumn 2022 she finished her second MA at the Justus Liebig-Universität in Giessen, Germany and started her doctorate at Estonian Music- and Theatre Academy in 2023.**

**Conference attendees can receive a discount on tickets**

## **“TRACING VLADIMIR TARASSOV’S STEPS WITH NEEDLE AND THREAD POP-UP EXHIBITION BY TEXTILE ARTIST EVELYN ERVIN”**

**Evelyn Ervin’s work is inspired by the wide-ranging international dance career of Vladimir Tarassov (1896-?), during which he was exposed to different cultures, both geographically and in terms of dance. Tarassov was a cabaret dancer trained in classical ballet, and his creative prime was in the 1920s and 1930s. He performed in the most famous variety theatres in France, including the Moulin Rouge and the Folies Bergere, often accompanied by Nicolas Titzé and Lydina Sadde.**

**Among the clothes on display is a glamorous stage photo of a dance that was probably entitled Dance of the Blue Birds. Tarassov used this image to promote his performances in various countries, including Estonia, which he visited rarely. The image has been digitally cleaned and silk-screen printed onto different fabrics. The dotted surface of the photograph is perfect for aligning glass beads and sequins, and adding colour to the monochrome surface, as well as illustrating how stage costumes might have looked in different periods - the three garments are like a journey through a hundred years to the present day.**

**The author of textiles, Evelyn Ervin, received her art education at the Estonian Academy of Arts, and her main means of expression are textiles and various forms of embroidery. Ervin has a keen interest in music and the visual arts, and has played saxophone in the ensembles Müstika, Vennaskond and Soterios. Vladimir Tarassov was the brother of her great-grandfather.**

**Addresses:**

**Süda Hall and ja Assauwe Tower  
Estonian Theatre and Music Museum  
Müürivahe 12  
10156 Tallinn**

**Archive of the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum  
Estonian History Museum  
Maarjamäe castle  
Pirita road 56  
12011 Tallinn**

**Kanuti Gildi SAAL  
Pikk 20, 10133  
10133 Tallinn**

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**Supported by:**



**Photo on the poster: Unknown dancer.  
Private collection of Alvar Loog**