



## Teaching through Time: Tracing Ballet's Pedagogical Lineage in the Work of Maggie Black

Jessica Zeller

To cite this article: Jessica Zeller (2009) Teaching through Time: Tracing Ballet's Pedagogical Lineage in the Work of Maggie Black, *Dance Chronicle*, 32:1, 57-88, DOI: [10.1080/01472520802690283](https://doi.org/10.1080/01472520802690283)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01472520802690283>



Published online: 19 Feb 2009.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1259



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)

**TEACHING THROUGH TIME:  
TRACING BALLET'S PEDAGOGICAL LINEAGE  
IN THE WORK OF MAGGIE BLACK**

**JESSICA ZELLER**

*Maggie Black, internationally renowned for her anatomically based approach to ballet instruction, helped to shape ballet training and coaching in the late twentieth century. In keeping with the widely recognized concept of ballet as an art form that is traditionally passed down by oral means, the focus of this research is on aspects of Black's pedagogy that are derived from her teachers, Audrey de Vos and Antony Tudor. This essay explores the pedagogical work of de Vos and Tudor, examines how their respective influences affected Black's methodology, and indicates characteristics of her work that she developed independently.*

In the world of ballet, lineage matters. It is a common practice for ballet dancers and students to ask about one another's teachers; such queries may stem from interest in a particular dancer's origins in ballet, or from curiosity about the basis for a teacher's method of instruction. These inquiries suggest a general awareness that a ballet teacher's philosophies and methods are likely to be woven into a student's knowledge of ballet. The affective component of ballet training, in which the teacher often becomes a beloved and revered mentor, can also motivate devoted students not only to absorb what the teacher espouses, but also to echo it in their own work. The development of ballet's pedagogical lineages—a remarkably international evolution from one part of Europe to another, and from there to the United States and other far-flung countries—largely depends upon whether teachers embrace or reject the theories and methodologies that comprised the substance of their own training. An important pedagogical lineage that stretches from Moscow to London to New York is that of Maggie Black, the renowned master ballet teacher and coach, now retired following a nearly forty-year career during which she taught some of the most acclaimed dancers of the mid to late twentieth century.

Born in 1930 in Rhode Island, Black's history as a dancer brought her into contact with several significant forces in ballet. Unaware of the inadequacies in her early studio training, she left home at age sixteen to dance in New York.<sup>1</sup> There, she studied with Edward Caton,\* whose slow and meticulous teaching style was Black's first experience with a professionally oriented ballet class. She danced for a time at the Roxy Theatre in New York, and subsequently joined the Cleveland Civic Ballet.<sup>2</sup> In Cleveland, Black studied with ballet mistress Marguerite Duncan, whose classes Black remembers as being well structured, although she was not entirely satisfied with the training.<sup>3</sup> She then moved to London for two years, where she danced with the London Theatre Ballet Company and Ballet Rambert.<sup>4</sup> During this period, she studied with Audrey de Vos, whose progressive ideas and avant-garde teaching methods were regarded with skepticism by the established institutions of British ballet.<sup>5</sup> De Vos's ballet classes were infused with anatomically based principles at a time when much of ballet training was based solely on aesthetic demands, with little consideration for the long-term healthy maintenance and fine-tuning of the dancer's bodily instrument. Black returned to the United States and danced for one year (1953-54) in the corps de ballet at American Ballet Theatre, where she met Alicia Alonso, who invited her to Cuba. She danced with the Ballets Alicia Alonso, later the Ballet Nacional de Cuba, for one year before joining the Metropolitan Opera Ballet. During her four years at the Met, Black worked with Antony Tudor, the renowned choreographer who began his second term as director of the ballet company there in 1956; he subsequently asked her to assist him in his faculty post at the Juilliard School of Music. Black credits Tudor with her introduction to teaching,<sup>6</sup> and her students fondly remember the early ballet classes she taught as Tudor's assistant.<sup>7</sup> She also performed as a guest artist with the Juilliard Dance Ensemble in ballets choreographed by Tudor or under his direction.

After working with Tudor for seven years, Black went to Europe. In an effort to improve her own dancing, she spent hours every day for three years alone in a studio, reworking her technique in front of the mirror. During this period of rigorous and

---

\*Dancer, choreographer, and teacher, Edward Caton (d. 1981) was particularly associated with the early years of Ballet Theatre (now American Ballet Theatre) and Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre. He was the author of *Ballet Class* (London: George G. Harrap, 1961).

introspective personal study, Black developed the theory of physical alignment that later became the foundation for her teaching:<sup>8</sup> “The placement that I use in the training, the technical placement, is something that I created myself because I had certain problems.”<sup>9</sup> This investigation led Black to find “the directional essence of teaching,” which for her was attention to the body’s alignment. This focus gave dancers the tools to overcome bad habits, allowing them to move forward technically and artistically. Black has never discussed the particular aspects of her early training that required reconstruction, but it appears that her own difficulties as a dancer may have derived from ineffective body placement, which led to her analysis and later development of her own theory of alignment and to her faith in alignment as central to ballet technique and artistry. In the late 1960s, Black returned to New York City, and for the next few decades both ballet and modern dancers embraced her teaching, streaming into her classes by the hundreds.

Maggie Black’s teaching methodology is both historically and pedagogically significant. Her most notable work took place at the height of the “dance boom” in the 1970s and 1980s, and her coaching of internationally acclaimed dancers, including Gelsey Kirkland, Natalia Makarova, Martine van Hamel, and Kevin McKenzie, made her one of the most sought-after teachers of her generation. Black’s revolutionary teaching methods reflected the minimalist trend in dance that was flourishing during that time; a similarly reductive style is an important theme in the pure-dance choreography of both Merce Cunningham and George Balanchine, whose work was vital to the development of dance during these decades, and whose company dancers flocked to her classes during this period. Black’s teaching both responded to and helped to define the burgeoning aesthetic that stripped away perceived excesses, and she—perhaps inadvertently—developed a teaching methodology that supported the work of Cunningham, Balanchine, and other mid-twentieth-century choreographers.

In 1995, having already discontinued her classes in New York City, Black agreed to serve as the primary instructor for a group of adolescents at the preprofessional ballet academy I attended on Long Island. Since the 1960s, Black had taught mostly professional dancers; she would only rarely allow a talented young person into her class. In her view, teenagers seldom had sufficiently

developed goals for themselves with regard to dance: “It depends on the identity of the person, but I find that young people are very changeable.”<sup>10</sup> Accepting the post initially under trial conditions, Black taught a two-hour ballet class followed by an hour-long pointe class three days a week, and I attended both classes regularly for a year and a half, beginning when I was sixteen. She also coached me in Aurora’s wedding variation from Act III of *The Sleeping Beauty*, as well as in the “Kingdom of the Snow” pas de deux and the soloist role in the “Waltz of the Flowers” from *The Nutcracker*. My own memories and knowledge of Black’s teaching from this late period in her career, as well as interviews—both firsthand and archival—with Black and with several professionals in both ballet and modern dance who studied with Black during the height of her New York teaching career, provide a context for discussion of her work and its lineage.

### **Pedagogical Theory and Praxis**

Black’s teaching was largely based on her conceptions of anatomically and muscularly balanced alignment, centered placement of weight, clarity of coordination, and movement quality. She focused on simplicity of line (the body’s spatial positioning) and efficiency of movement, and she offered an understated classical technique that was stylistically unadorned: she limited the use of *épaulement* at the barre, and she eliminated any embellishment of the *port de bras*. Black’s teaching stripped ballet technique of defining elements that are inherent to several of the syllabus-based methods, such as Vaganova’s emphasis on grand *épaulement* and *port de bras*, Bournonville’s stylistic modesty in the upper body, and the Balanchine technique’s use of amplified classical positions. She regarded her work as an accessible, objective basis from which any syllabus or stylistically specific choreography could be accomplished, and as a result, dancers from many distinct training backgrounds were able to benefit from her classes.<sup>11</sup> Black attributed the usefulness of her work, specifically as a foundation for other methods, to its unmannered clarity, and noted the difficulties dancers can have when they are trained with stylistic idiosyncrasies. One of her foremost concerns has always been for dancers to develop a clear, simple, classical technique, so

that when they are presented with roles in any style they are not hindered by mannerisms that, she feels, can obstruct artistry in ballet.<sup>12</sup> This reductive approach enabled Black's students to become more versatile, so that they could consciously select a style appropriate to the repertory.

I was in attendance on two occasions—once during a class and again during a meeting of academy faculty—when Black explained her theory of placement in some detail. She considered the centered placement of the torso—comprised of both the pelvis and the back—essential to the alignment of the rest of the body. She always began her work with a student by ensuring that the pelvis was neither tipped forward nor tucked under. Rather, it should be vertically aligned, or what she referred to as “up” on top of the legs. She addressed the placement of the back only after a dancer was working primarily with the pelvis vertically aligned, at which point she would work toward the central placement of the entire upper body over the pelvis. The dancer's spine comes up out of the vertical pelvis: neither is the back pitched forward from the waist nor are the shoulders settled back. The lower back maintains its natural curve, and the shoulder joints line up directly over the hip joints. The widely used concept of “square” hips—in which the pelvis maintains a frontal orientation and the working hip does not travel in the direction of the working leg—is fundamental to Black's alignment.<sup>13</sup> This forward facing enables the dancer to maintain equal rotation and support through both legs, without compromising the rotated stability of the standing leg or skewing the hips to achieve greater height with the working leg. She also stressed the function of the entire torso as a unit, the pelvis and the back always coordinated during movement. The concept of the pelvis and back working together “in one piece” brings clarity to the body positions and to the movement of the weight through space. In this way, the body is not broken into pieces or straining to move, or what Black refers to as the body “fighting with itself.”<sup>14</sup> Black considers the concept of a correctly placed pelvis without a strong back, or vice versa, to be irrelevant in terms of her approach.

The verticality of the pelvis allows the hip sockets to be as structurally open as possible, and thus gives dancers access to the maximum rotation of their legs from the hips. When Black described this rotation, she drew an imaginary line with her hand

down the center of the front of her leg. Each leg in its entirety rotates along this centerline, so that the top of the leg from the hip to the knee is turned out to the same degree as the bottom of the leg from the knee through the foot. Black strongly opposes the over-rotation of the feet that is common among ballet dancers, and encouraged by some ballet teachers in their efforts to achieve the appearance of 180 degrees of turnout. With centrally rotated legs, the degree of rotation is determined by the amount of naturally occurring rotation in the hip joints, and the weight is distributed through the middle of each foot. Although Black rarely referred to specific muscles or muscle groups, it appears that she intended for the major muscle groups of the hips and legs to be used equally in achieving turnout of the legs and placement of the pelvis. Her concept of placement contrasts with the forward placement of the weight over the balls of the feet in the Balanchine technique;<sup>15</sup> those unfamiliar with her approach have been known to criticize it for the prescribed placement of equal weight on the heels. In my observations, the centering of the weight through each leg may initially shift dancers behind their center and onto their heels until they are able to develop the strength of the typically weaker hamstring and inner thigh muscles to support themselves on their plumb line, at which point the often overused larger muscles on the front and outside of the legs can be engaged to a lesser degree.

Other controversial aspects of Black's alignment pertain to the dancer's stance on one leg: the diminished weight shift when moving from two legs onto one, and the placement of the working, or gesture leg, in relation to the body. Black wanted the working leg to be placed squarely in front of (*devant*) or behind (*derrière*) the working hip, in contrast to a working leg in front of or behind the centerline of the body. This relatively open line of the working leg allows dancers to stay "up" in the pelvis without shifting the weight over the outside of the supporting leg; the open alignment employs all of the muscles used in rotation in a balanced capacity, and it does not compromise the rotation of the supporting leg from the hip. In the position of the leg to the side (*à la seconde*), the angle of the working leg relative to the body is dependent upon the amount of rotation in the dancer's hip joint: the foot is placed at the same angle to the side as the angle indicated by the centerline of the leg in rotation. From a

turned-out position on two legs, the individual centerline of the intended working leg can be followed in a straight line through the metatarsals and toes, and along the floor to the desired height. Shifting as little over the supporting leg as possible, the dancer utilizes the central stability through the heel of the standing side to free the working side, without lifting the working hip to raise the leg. Black's reduction of the weight shift from two legs to one, however contentious a notion, derives from her goal of balancing the muscular use of the hamstring and inner thigh, while maintaining a square pelvis and fully rotated legs.

Black's centralized distribution of weight, difficult at first to maintain without the support of—as distinguished from reliance on—the barre, makes allegro, both petit and grand, less arduous during the takeoff and more secure in the landing. With the heels firmly on the floor, the dancer pushes off from the base of the plié and returns to the same well-supported plié upon landing. Regardless of the configuration of the steps, the dancer can be in complete control of the center of weight, which allows for turning or traveling aerial work to be executed with relative ease. In the Balanchine technique, by contrast, the heels rarely, if ever, touch the floor in allegro, a practice often considered necessary for speed in jumping. Although Black's placement might seem to keep the dancer's center too far back to move quickly or with the requisite ballon (the bounce that is fundamental to allegro steps in ballet), the push of the heels into the floor on takeoff provides both buoyancy and speed without tension and allows for stable landings that do not put excessive stress on the lower legs.

The action of takeoff and landing in allegro is also important to Black's teaching of pointe work. During pointe classes, Black continued to address correct placement following the same principles that informed the rest of her teaching. She was particular about our feet continuing the central alignment of the legs en pointe, with the weight placed between the first and second toes. She was not partial to either pressing up (*elevé*), where the feet remain in contact with the floor as the dancer rolls up with straight legs to the toe of the shoe, or to springing up (*relevé*), in which there is an allegro-quality push from plié and a brief detachment of the shoe from the floor as the dancer arrives en pointe. Rather, Black advocated proficiency in both pressing and springing onto pointe, employing whichever method was appropriate



to the specific step. In my most recent discussion with her, she was specific that the pressing up takes place primarily at the barre to develop strength, and that the center work is achieved mostly through the sprung relevé. By springing onto pointe in the center work, the dancer can continually readjust to bring the centered weight into alignment with each movement. The sprung relevé enables the body positions to be centered and supported en pointe, as opposed to the strained and weakened body positions that result from trying to press up to pointe without a plié during the center work.

Black regarded the upper body with classical simplicity, in contrast to the use of the torso and arms in the grand Vaganova style or Balanchine's lengthened port de bras with its distinctive positioning of the hands and fingers. The support for the arms originates in the back, and the upper arms never come into contact with the torso. With the arms rounded in front of the body (Cecchetti fifth position en avant), the hands are level with the bottom of the breastbone, creating a gentle slope from shoulder to fingertip, and the collarbones remain open; to the side position (à la seconde), the elbows lengthen somewhat, but the slope from shoulder to fingertip is preserved. In the high rounded position (Cecchetti fifth position en haut), the shoulders are relaxed with the hands aligned just in front of the head; with low rounded arms (Cecchetti fifth position en bas), the elbows are in front of the torso such that the hands do not touch the thighs. The front arm in arabesque is held at eye level, and the back arm is only slightly open beyond the side position, so that it does not interfere with the equal support on both sides of the torso.

At the barre, Black was opposed to the use of épaulement; she always insisted that her students look straight ahead. In the center, however, she seemed impartial when it came to épaulement, and she neither encouraged nor discouraged its use. Since Black's students, for the majority of her teaching career, were professional dancers, they already understood the importance and function of épaulement in classical technique, and could access it when necessary. The ballet dancers in her classes who knew épaulement were certainly allowed to use it during the center work, but her emphasis on a coordinated use of energy made the technique more accessible and useful to contemporary dancers as well. For Black, the forward focus at the barre serves multiple purposes: it prevents

any strain on the central alignment that may result from a change in the weight of the head, and it deters the dancer from relying on the mirror for visual verification of a physical action. An important part of Black's philosophy is related to the feeling of movement in the body, in contrast to the look of movement in the mirror. In my interview with her, she conceded that the mirror could be practical, but only as a teaching tool when a dancer is unable to absorb a concept physically. She noted how quickly dancers can become "glued" to the mirror, which she considers detrimental to the development of a feeling for ballet's physicality.<sup>16</sup> This is likely the reason that her New York City studio was not equipped with a full wall of mirrors. The idea of cultivating a bodily sense for movement was essential to Black's approach, and it was incorporated into her classes beyond her treatment of the head at the barre: after giving a new correction and seeing it applied, she would immediately ask the student, "Do you feel it?" Having thus emphasized the need for dancers to develop a corporeal sensitivity to movement, she never asked this question rhetorically.

Black used the barre work to improve the positions of the body and to develop in dancers an approach to rhythm and movement quality that could be carried into the center. Her barre always began with a swinging exercise of the legs in attitude, or slightly bent at the knee, and it included a loose circling of the shoulders. The order of exercises continued with pliés, battements tendus from first position and from fifth position, battements dégagés from first position and from fifth position that often included battements piqués dégagés or battements en cloche, ronds de jambe à terre with cambré, ronds de jambe en l'air, adagio that often included battements fondus and développés, a repeat of the initial swinging exercise in attitude, grands battements, battements frappés with petits battements or battements serrés, and grands pliés in second position facing the barre. Barre exercises were done on the right side and immediately to the left, without a pause between sides or the addition of extra music to make the transition. All exercises were repeated except for pliés, allowing students to become comfortable with the exercise during their first attempt so that they could work more deeply when it was repeated, and a typical barre would last fifty-five to sixty minutes. This was in stark contrast, for example, to Balanchine's company classes, which Bernard Taper describes: "On one day Balanchine

might start with only a ten-minute barre and then as the first step in the center demand a double tour en l'air to grand plié. On the next day he might start with a twenty-five minute barre then go on to half an hour of pas de bourrées.<sup>17</sup> This key difference in approach to barre work may be one reason that several New York City Ballet dancers chose to study regularly with Black, instead of taking Balanchine's company classes.<sup>18</sup>

Black never explained why she placed the battements frappés exercise after grands battements at the barre, which is rather unconventional. It is notable that Black deems battements frappés to be a relative of the allegro work in the center portion of the ballet class, as both encompass rhythmic attack, use of the floor, and quick flexing actions of the whole leg and foot in coordination.<sup>19</sup> Considering the related actions in these exercises, she likely placed battements frappés at the end of the barre, just as allegro combinations are done at the end of the center work. Black's barre exercises were simple in design, specific in musicality, and relatively short in length—usually not more than thirty-two measures on each side—to avoid muscle fatigue. She rarely used the inside leg at the barre as the working leg, she did not reverse the patterns of exercises to begin from the back except for the ronds de jambe à terre and en l'air, and she did not set exercises to be executed on relevé, except occasionally for the end of the battements frappés exercise. Balances that were sometimes included at the end of exercises were not lengthy, but allowed for time to find the balance and sustain it briefly before turning to the second side or finishing the exercise.

In the center, Black's order of exercises was adagio, to establish alignment and body positions away from the barre in a slow, controlled manner; terre à terre, which often consisted of several battements tendus, battements dégagés, or grands battements, linking steps, and a simple pirouette; a waltz along the diagonal, which included various types of pirouettes, relevés, piqués, balancés, linking steps and traveling turns; thirty-two changements de pieds; petit allegro, usually sixteen measures for each side that focused primarily on basic allegro steps rather than the wide variety of steps used in the Vaganova syllabus; and grand allegro, similarly structured around the most commonly used steps. Center exercises were not reversed to begin from the back or to accommodate the opposite body facings, and they were always

repeated at least twice, with the waltz and allegro exercises usually done three or four times. The center exercises often finished with a tombé and pas de bourrée dessous to fifth position, a series of linking steps that Black may have designed to recenter the dancer at the end of the movement phrase. Tempi were generally moderate; Black always appeared more interested in fostering good movement, coordination, and placement than in pushing dancers toward extreme speeds.

Karen Eliot, a former dancer with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, was among the few teenagers to study with Black; she spoke with me about her own sense of relief when, during her first class with Black, she discovered that the material was not as intimidating as she had imagined it might be, but that it was comprised of the kinds of steps and exercises with which she was already familiar.<sup>20</sup> Since Black was working mostly with professionals, her vocabulary was likely designed to facilitate an understanding of her alignment and movement concepts. The modern dancers taking her classes may not have been as interested in expanding their ballet vocabulary as they were in using the anatomical ideas in Black's teaching to support their contemporary work. In a parallel sense, ballet dancers used their work in Black's classes for training purposes, to reshape and refine the fundamental aspects of their technique that were then reflected in their artistic progress and performances. When Kevin McKenzie, the current artistic director of American Ballet Theatre, was preparing to audition for the company in the late 1970s, he turned to Black for help: "She helped me build back my strength through repetition, not complication. I wasn't allowed to get away with anything, and all her movements are set up in such a way that you feel your center and you don't fool with it, you build strength from it."<sup>21</sup>

Augmenting her already commonplace vocabulary was Black's lack of preference for specific modes of executing steps that have multiple options. If she included a pirouette en dedans in retiré in an exercise, students could choose whether to do the pirouette with or without a dégage à la seconde as a preparation for the turn. Similarly, dancers could choose to use cou-de-pied devant or sur le cou-de-pied, the position of the pointed foot in front of the ankle as opposed to wrapped around the ankle, and with chaînés, dancers could work from either first or fifth position. She did, however, insist that the option selected by each dancer be

done correctly, both in terms of placement and movement quality. Black's ability to work with dancers from different stylistic backgrounds or companies while she was teaching may have hinged on this practice; there was no need for dancers to adopt an entirely new syllabus of steps, as she chose to work primarily with a vocabulary that was common to all methods of ballet training.

Black's concepts of bodily alignment were the basis of her noteworthy ability to work with and rehabilitate injured dancers. Her foremost concern was the placement and use of weight, based on the same methodology as the rest of her teaching.<sup>22</sup> She worked to assure that the weight was centered and equally supported through the entire body, and that the dancer was not compensating for the injury and causing undue strain elsewhere. The ideas of placement that Black devised allowed dancers with any body type access to ballet technique. Because her alignment honored each dancer's rotation and flexibility, she made the study of ballet an organic process that did not require dancers to have an ideal shape or physique. Although she acknowledges that specific body types may facilitate the study of ballet, Black believes that dancers without those attributes can arrive at an equally high level, both technically and artistically: "The problem with ballet is that people tend to look at specific forms in the body and I can understand that, because it's very helpful in a lot of ways. But also many of the dancers—some of them very famous that I've worked with—didn't have facilities like that at all. But if they learn to work physically in a certain way, then they have access to their other physical senses and also to the development of their artistry through the physicality."<sup>23</sup> This central element of Black's work may have added to her appeal as a teacher; dancers knew that in attending her classes they would not be judged by their physical characteristics, a common practice in ballet.

Black's classes offered both ballet and modern dancers a kind of somatic practice, prior to the widespread availability of classes in somatics that are common supplements to dance training today. Just as Pilates, yoga, and the Alexander technique work with the physical attributes of each individual, Black's teaching was also based solely on her students' individual facilities, approached within the framework of classical ballet. The stylistic common ground and unmannered accessibility of Black's work does not call for dancers to mold their bodies to meet a set of established

physical conditions, as do some of the syllabus-based techniques. In the Balanchine technique, for example, if the leg is in a position *à la seconde*, the toe is expected to rest on a precise line that bisects the dancer into front and back halves, thus requiring 180 degrees of rotation in the hips if the standing leg is to be equally rotated.<sup>24</sup> However, if the hips are not open to that extent, the dancer must overextend his or her physical structure to reach this leg position. Black's method of alignment enabled those with less-than-ideal physiques to develop sound classical technique, while attending to the need for anatomical health and longevity.

During the barre, Black stood on one side of the studio to watch, which eliminated any sense of encroachment that might arise as a teacher strolls through the room, and she called out corrections to individual students during and after the exercise. She then divided the studio into two parts and systematically worked her way from the middle of the room to one side, addressing half of the class with a brief comment to each student. The class repeated the exercise and she usually relocated to the other side of the room, repeating the process of correcting with the other half of the class. Black varied which side received the corrections first, enabling all of her students to repeat some exercises with the application of her comments. During her years teaching in New York City, she was more physically active throughout the class than when I studied with her in later years. Eliot recalled Black's boundless energy as she constantly moved to different vantage points throughout the studio, including atop chairs and benches, yelling corrections all the while.<sup>25</sup> Black often watched the center portion of the class from the sides or back of the studio, unlike teachers who operate primarily from the front of the room. When I asked her about this, she responded, "When you stand in the front of the room you don't visually get the same sense that you do standing in other areas of the room."<sup>26</sup>

"Up Jess!" "One piece, Jess." "Get your butt up, Jess!" Black's resonant voice could be heard without strain from anywhere in the studio, in an almost nonstop stream of corrections directed, by name, toward specific dancers. She was efficient and precise with her language; she articulated complex ideas simply, and her phrasing of corrections was concise, direct, and easy to understand. Group corrections, a common component of most ballet classes, were rarely heard from Black, as she addressed the vast

majority of her corrections to individuals. She did not give corrections by touch unless a concept was eluding a student, and in the few instances when she did, she only poked students lightly with her fingertips. It is notable here that Black absolutely never used the commonly heard directive “pull up,” and she never suggested breath or breathing as an impetus for or a qualifier of movement. These concepts seem to be contrary to her sense for ballet placement and movement quality, which, for Black, are achieved by the coordinated use of the whole body, and not by patterned breathing or muscular tension.

Black’s demeanor and tone in the studio were always positive. She was patient while students worked, acknowledging through her insistent yet encouraging repetition of the same corrections that her concepts may take time to manifest themselves physically. If the class’s first attempt at an exercise was disastrous, she might flap her feet and flail her arms as an example of what not to do, and mention briefly how to approach the movement. This response, though rare, was usually elicited when students did not use appropriate energy at the beginning of an exercise, and the resulting movement was uncoordinated. It was also likely accompanied by a statement that began with an emphatic, “You *can’t* just. . . .” Black gave the class a clear sense that her expectations had not been reached, but she never insulted her students or left them feeling dejected. She had an uncanny ability to say two or three words at exactly the right time during an exercise, in such a way that the dancer could understand and assimilate the correction into the work when it was needed most. The combination of her eagle eye with her use of clear, concise language made every correction valuable. Because of Black’s direct approach, there was no room for egos or personal issues in her class; she was clear that they were to be left at the door upon arrival. Neither was she interested in the prior training of her students; instead she worked with them based on her determination of their abilities when they entered the class.<sup>27</sup> During my time as a regular student in Black’s classes, her exasperation with the wavering temperament of adolescents occasionally became evident. With one student prone to bouts of crying, Black would often say, “Go collect yourself,” and gently usher her into the hallway. Other memorable phrases were, “Come on, get it together,” and, though I only heard her say it once, to a frustrated fifteen-year-old who was struggling with her

pirouettes, “Nicole, just say ‘shit,’ and do it again.” For Black, the work was always of the utmost importance; everything else was secondary.

Black’s anatomically derived teaching was groundbreaking in the 1960s, and her pioneering efforts have certainly contributed to the widespread inclusion of somatic concepts into much of today’s ballet pedagogy. Her classes, comprised of students with professional ties to ballet and modern dance companies, brought together dancers who were just beginning to meet on the same training grounds. Robert Joffrey at his American Ballet Center espoused his own bodily-minded methods and was also notable for classes attended by dancers from ballet and modern dance backgrounds.<sup>28</sup> The dance division faculty at The Juilliard School, under the direction of Martha Hill, was training students in both ballet and modern dance, and this kind of cross-training was becoming more and more visible in the period leading up to and throughout the “dance boom” of the 1970s and 1980s, as technical and artistic versatility was gaining importance.

In contrast to other teachers in New York City whose classes also attracted both ballet and modern dancers, Black had no affiliation with an established dance institution. As an independent instructor, she was under no time constraints in the studio: “I never felt that when I was working in class that I would be inhibited from using time. If I wanted to use time a certain way, then I could, but I had my own studio and if I wanted to go on over two hours I could.”<sup>29</sup> Unlimited time to work allowed dancers to learn from Black at a pace that was optimal for their advancement, and it promoted the notion of training for its own sake, an ideal that was largely unavailable to professionals in their tight company schedules.<sup>30</sup> Black’s classes, which were solely devoted to dancers’ individual efforts to improve, allowed them to cultivate their craft without the fear of imperfection that came with taking daily class under the watchful eyes of company directors. According to Christine O’Neal, a former student of Black’s who is currently on the faculty at Washington University, dancers often tape-recorded Black’s classes: “On tour with ABT you could walk through various studios in the theaters the company danced in and hear Maggie’s voice as dancers gave themselves class to these recordings. It was their attempt to hold onto that ‘training just to train’ atmosphere.”<sup>31</sup>



After working with Black in classes for just over one year, she agreed to coach me, along with seven of my classmates, for an academy performance in which we were each to dance a classical variation, or short solo. I chose to perform Aurora's wedding variation from Act III of *The Sleeping Beauty*, which Black felt was appropriate for my level of ability at the time. In my interview with her, she talked about the correlation between technique and artistry: "Class is the technical aspect of dance, and it should be combined with a sense of artistry at the same time, except that the most important thing first is that people can accomplish the technical steps and the technical basis of what they're doing." Without that basis, "You can coach them 'til doomsday, and it's not going to quite work."<sup>32</sup> In light of her belief that a certain degree of technique must be reached before an artistic sensibility can be developed, it is important to note that I was working on this variation at age seventeen, as a preprofessional. As such, Black likely spent more time working on my technical capacity within the variation than she might have with the established professional dancers she had coached.

Black divided the *Sleeping Beauty* variation into long phrases of movement; each phrase consisted of a series of repeated steps and a few transitional steps that served to connect with the next phrase. Once she was satisfied with my technical execution of the first phrase, we moved on to the second. When we had gotten through the second, Black added it on to the first, creating a new and longer phrase before moving on to the third. When the third phrase was acceptable, she connected it only to the second, and we continued in this pattern so that the phrases were first paired to those that surrounded them before being lengthened into three- and then four-phrase-long sections. By the time the variation was pieced together, I had become technically stronger in each phrase, and I had developed control of my stamina through the length of the work. This control contributed to my use of energy and my artistic understanding of the piece in its entirety. Black's coaching method gave each part of the variation fair time and scrutiny, as opposed to an approach that might, due to time constraints, deprive the dancer of an appropriate amount of coaching at the end of the piece.

Throughout the process, Black worked with my personal tendencies as a dancer. Because she had coached high-level



Maggie Black during a 1995 rehearsal. Photograph courtesy of the author.

professionals in this particular variation, and since several versions of the choreography exist, she was able to give me choreographic options within the variation that better suited my abilities as a preprofessional. She twice took note of my fatiguing lower legs,

allowing me in one instance to relevé in sous-sus instead of attitude, or on two legs instead of one, and in another to chassé instead of piqué, which allowed for a moment of stretch in plié before rising back up en pointe. Her coaching allowed me to compensate for my weaknesses in a way that did not compromise the integrity of the work. She gave me elements of different versions of the variation so that I was able to perform to the best of my technical and artistic ability at the time.

Once Black attended to most of the technical aspects of the work, we began the part of the coaching for which Black is particularly appreciated. She described her coaching process during my interview with her: “You look into what it is the dance is doing: where it’s set, what is the particular style of that particular work, and what you are trying to say in the movement, because in the end you’re establishing communication through movement.”<sup>33</sup> Martine van Hamel, during her more than twenty-year tenure as a renowned principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre, was a regular student of Black’s, and she has described her experience of Black’s coaching: “In dramatic roles she helps you look for a certain logic, to determine which kind of physicality to attach to each dance. Every dance has a signature—like an accent. . . . Maggie works in a similar way with abstract ballets; she has you find the appropriate energy. Because she believes in a dancer’s individuality, she encourages you to move as is your nature.”<sup>34</sup> Notably, Black often attended her students’ performances to see how they were realizing their studio work on stage, and to determine how she could best facilitate further improvement in her classes.<sup>35</sup> She also attended our academy performances on Long Island, where she came backstage both before and afterward to give us feedback and encouragement.

In rehearsals for the *Sleeping Beauty* variation, we talked about the setting of the ballet and the time period. We discussed the character’s development through the entire ballet, as well as through the different choreographic sections of the piece. Black encouraged clarity and simplicity in my execution, and worked to eliminate any of my mannerisms that obscured the choreography. During this process, she worked with my natural inclinations toward the movement, including nuance and musical phrasing, and she sought to make the character’s qualities discernable solely through the movement.

## Pedagogical Lineage

Black's lineage as a teacher is traceable primarily to Audrey de Vos and Antony Tudor, the two individuals who, I believe, most influenced the development of her pedagogy.

### Audrey de Vos (1900–1983)

Born in London, de Vos was a student of Serafima Astafieva and Laurent Novikoff, both former Diaghilev dancers who established their own schools in London.<sup>36</sup> Novikoff was a graduate of the Bolshoi Ballet School in Moscow and a well-known partner of Anna Pavlova.<sup>37</sup> By the late 1920s, he had settled in the United States, where he danced and choreographed for the Chicago Opera and the Metropolitan Opera.<sup>38</sup> Astafieva had received her training at the Maryinsky School in St. Petersburg, and after opening her studio in 1914, she was instrumental in the training and development of several significant British dancers, including Frederick Ashton, Alicia Markova, Anton Dolin, and Margot Fonteyn.<sup>39</sup>

De Vos's pioneering efforts in ballet during her nearly fifty-year teaching career bear little resemblance to the pedagogies of the time, which were often based on an imitative process with limited, if any, physical analysis. She believed that ballet dancers who trained across genres were capable of a broader range of expression in movement and, in addition to her ballet classes, she taught her own style of modern dance.<sup>40</sup> According to dance historian David Vaughan, a former student of de Vos and the current archivist for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, these modern dance classes included "back exercises and isolations, though she didn't call them that."<sup>41</sup> She was firmly opposed to the terms *method* and *system* to describe her work; these words held fixed connotations, which she perceived as contrary to the gradual process of dance training.<sup>42</sup> De Vos's teaching was unconventional enough to elicit doubt from the British ballet establishment about the legitimacy of her work.<sup>43</sup> In the early 1950s, when Black moved to London and became a regular pupil at de Vos's Notting Hill Gate studio, de Vos was at the forefront of a movement toward versatility in dance that continues to unfold today, more than a half-century later.

In her classes, de Vos emphasized a central dispersal of weight through the pelvis and a balanced use of the musculature; she often addressed disproportionate and unnecessary accumulation of muscle.<sup>44</sup> This bodily focus, and particularly the emphasis on centering the weight, became the basis for much of Black's theory of placement and were regular themes in her classes. Although the concepts were likely derived from de Vos's teaching, Black's approach was distinct. De Vos was specifically attentive to the muscles of the inner thigh, which she felt gave dancers greater control of their weight.<sup>45</sup> On the contrary, Black did not discuss the use of specific muscles to help her students find a central distribution of weight, but focused instead on total alignment. She most often made comments that related directly to the vertical placement of the body as a whole, using general terms like "back," "leg," and "hip," as opposed to citing particular muscle groups. One startling distinction between the two approaches is the use of language regarding the placement of the pelvis. De Vos used the phrase "tuck under,"<sup>46</sup> in contrast to Black's description of the pelvis as "up" on top of the legs, which conjure entirely different images of pelvic alignment.

The result of de Vos's and subsequently Black's emphasis on a central alignment and use of weight was that their students stood with more weight in their heels than in other methods of instruction. This included those who trained at the School of American Ballet, according to Vaughan, who studied at SAB with Anatole Oboukhoff after training with de Vos: "When I went back to her class on a visit to London I found everyone had their weight back and I was by then used to putting it forward, as Balanchine taught, so that one is ready to take off, as it were."<sup>47</sup> What de Vos and Black achieved by centrally aligning the weight through the pelvis was an equal distribution of weight through the feet, between the balls of the feet and the heels. This enabled students to access the inside muscles of the leg as well as the more dominant outside muscle groups, thereby equalizing the use of the musculature and preventing the overuse and buildup of the major muscle groups. De Vos's focus on the "remedial" teaching of each student often changed the muscular imbalances that had resulted from poor training.<sup>48</sup>

De Vos's classes were comprised of all levels of dancers, from relative beginners to professionals; Beryl Grey, the celebrated

British ballerina, was a regular student of hers for ten years. According to de Vos's former student Dina Shmueli, de Vos was especially notable for her "pluralistic approach" to dancers' bodies; she was renowned for her success with dancers who were not ideally suited physically to ballet, as well as those with particular physical obstacles, such as scoliosis.<sup>49</sup> Her consideration of the physical variables in each student's body led her to direct most of her comments toward individual students rather than to the class as a whole.

Black's teaching directly reflects de Vos's work in this area of pedagogy. Black, too, became recognized for her individualized instruction, and it is to this style of tuition that Black attributes her students' loyalty, saying, "that's the reason they were there."<sup>50</sup> Black's anatomically based body alignment appears to have been principally influenced by de Vos's concept of central weight distribution through the pelvis. With this element as a cornerstone of Black's instruction, she was able to make ballet accessible to dancers without ideal physiques, another characteristic of her teaching that she shared with de Vos. De Vos's corrective, or "remedial" teaching style appeared in Black's classes as well; often the extent of the movement—the height of an extended leg or the number of revolutions in a pirouette—was deemphasized in favor of quality, which referred to proper placement, coordination, or clarity of line and body position. Once a dancer's fundamental problem had been rehabilitated, the increased extension of the leg or greater number of pirouettes could be reinstated. As I remember it, the realization of the quantitative aspects of technique came almost naturally to the body once the basic correction had been made; after working with Black's adjustments to my pelvic placement for some time, my leg extension increased with ease and stability. After she worked long hours alone to reconstruct her own technique following her time with de Vos, it is likely that Black's attention to correcting ballet's basic elements was a combined result of her study with de Vos and her solo explorations.

De Vos's barre began with a swinging exercise that was designed to loosen the hip joints and facilitate rotation;<sup>51</sup> this was a likely antecedent to Black's leg swings in attitude, which were the first exercise of every class. De Vos's classes were two hours long, and each exercise at the barre was repeated twice.<sup>52</sup> These factors became a critical part of Black's work. The two-hour time frame

allowed for barre exercises to be repeated and for students to grasp and explore her alignment and movement concepts. While both Black and de Vos repeated the class exercises in their entirety, neither teacher found much use for the repetition of one particular step as a means for improvement. De Vos found the method of teaching via repetition counterproductive to the development of a sensibility for dance movement.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Black's construction of exercises was balanced, and would never have included, for example, more than three or four ronds de jambe en l'air in succession. The demands of such an exercise on dancers' muscular stamina is likely to pull their focus toward the building fatigue in the leg and hip, rather than allowing for consistent work toward a centered alignment. In the efforts of de Vos, and later Black, to counteract muscular overdevelopment, the kind of multiple repetitions that are prevalent in some methods of ballet training—and especially popular during the first half of the twentieth century—became virtually useless, even detrimental to their teaching.

While many aspects of de Vos's teaching were integrated into Black's methodology, there is one in particular from which Black diverged. De Vos was physically involved in her teaching, which included occasional chiropractic-type adjustments of her students' backs.<sup>54</sup> "In fact she was very much a hands-on teacher, and she was very strong, if she took hold of your leg and moved it, you felt it."<sup>55</sup> Black rarely, if ever, touched her students, unless it was the only way to convey a concept that was eluding them. It is possible that her experience of working for three years alone, without the advantage of an outside eye or hand, led Black to prefer training without the aid of physical touch.

Ultimately, for both de Vos and Black, the use of ballet technique as an artistic medium was paramount. Through a central and muscularly balanced alignment, both teachers were able to facilitate subtlety of technique, ease of movement, and clarity of interpretation within the classical vocabulary.

### **Antony Tudor (1908–1987)**

When Black joined the Metropolitan Opera Ballet in the mid-1950s, Antony Tudor held the post of ballet master. She performed in his obscure 1959 ballet *Hail and Farewell*, and he invited

her to assist him in his faculty position at the Juilliard School of Music (renamed The Juilliard School in 1969). Also at Juilliard was Margaret Craske, the renowned pedagogue with whom Tudor had studied the Cecchetti method of ballet technique. Tudor and Craske taught concurrently on the faculties of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School and the Juilliard School of Music, and they were well known for their contrasting yet complementary perspectives in their ballet classes. Prior to her tenure at American Ballet Theatre, where she became a preeminent interpreter of Tudor's ballets, the late Sallie Wilson was a student of both Tudor and Craske while she was with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet: "At the time, I studied with them equally, and I always considered Miss Craske my teacher. Tudor was something else... He was an inspiration. His class was more choreography. Craske brought you back to the rules, and he broke the rules all the time. It was a wonderful combination."<sup>56</sup> Tudor's approach toward movement has permeated Black's work, both in the theoretical development of her methodology and in her style of coaching, and it is to his prompting that she attributes her initial venture into teaching.<sup>57</sup>

Tudor's ability to use his choreography as a means of communication made a strong impression on Black: "He had a wonderful facility for understanding the usage of movement in order to be able to say what he wanted to say with it."<sup>58</sup> In the development of her methodology, Black strove toward an unmannered, clear technique, which would allow the choreography to be expressive. The clarity of movement, simplicity of line, and subtlety of technique would bring the choreographic intent to the fore, as communicated through the dancer's straightforward yet distinctive performance. After working extensively with Tudor and coming to understand his approach, Black developed her pedagogical theories based on the conception of ballet movement as inherently expressive. She acknowledges that much of her teaching outside of the technical aspects was derived from Tudor's work,<sup>59</sup> and as such she developed a method of training that would make it possible for dancers to perform his ballets effectively. In light of her extraordinarily high regard for Tudor's artistry, it can be speculated that preparing dancers in this way was one of Black's initial intentions when developing her work, but that point remains unclear. It is evident, however, that one of her achievements was to enable dancers to find their own ways of moving, clearly and without



mannerisms, within a classical context, which not only elicited versatile classical dancers in general, but also prepared them particularly well to dance the Tudor repertory.

A hallmark of Tudor's work is the display of classical lines within a string of movements that are not classically coordinated.<sup>60</sup> Despite the physical complexities of his quick and often awkward directional changes, which are not common to classical technique, the classical ballet line is preserved, although stylistically defined to suit Tudor's vision. Black always emphasized the importance of moving through clear, classical positions, and she attended to the classical lines as landmarks for musicality within phrases of movement, regardless of speed or dynamic. Without a particular emphasis on the *épaulement* that is integral to most lines in ballet, Black's focus was on the use of energy and coordination to create positions that were clear within movement sequences and stylistically simplified. She encouraged students to feel the line of the whole body during movement, honing their sensitivity to ballet's inexhaustible range of movement qualities. Tudor has discussed the importance of developing the dancer's bodily intuition: "You've got to train them to be sensitive to everything you want, whether it's the shape of a muscle, the shape of a foot, the shape of an arm progressing through space, the feel of the air around them, the sound of the music—not to listen to it but to hear it. To just be sensitive is the main thing: sensitive of the audience, sensitive of the space on stage that you're working in, sensible to the emotion you're conveying to the audience and how you're going to express it. I could go on forever, but I won't."<sup>61</sup> Black's emphasis on correlating line, musicality, and bodily sensitivity was likely derived from her work with Tudor. His influence provided her with the artistic basis from which to develop clear, musical dancers, as she simultaneously, if indirectly, prepared her students for Tudor-style work.

In a 1954 article about Tudor, Selma Jeanne Cohen explained, "Critics have found in Tudor's work a remarkable appropriateness of form to content, and this is the reason—in the creation, the two are indistinguishable: the meaning is in the form of the movement."<sup>62</sup> Cohen's point could also apply to the concept of dance movement as intrinsically expressive that was in its formative years during the second half of the twentieth century, when Black was teaching. In addition, it could apply to

the groundbreaking pure dance choreography of Balanchine and Cunningham, both key figures in the development of twentieth-century dance. It is conceivable that Black's work—specifically her objectives in coaching repertory—was developed in response to this growing aesthetic, based on her understanding of movement through her work with Tudor.

In my own experience with Black's coaching—the variation from *The Sleeping Beauty*—the idea of movement as the expressive component in choreography became clear to me when she addressed the port de bras in the middle of the variation where the dancer walks along the diagonal en pointe. We spent some time discussing connotations of the arm movements with regard to the character's attributes, and she drew connections between the arms and the character's development throughout the variation. In this instance, Black tied the port de bras to the character's qualities, thereby conflating the meaning with the movement, as Cohen describes. It is important to note here that Black used neither the term "expression" nor "interpretation" in her discussions with me. She did not ask about my understanding of the character beyond our conversations about the intent of the piece or her observation of my physicality within the variation. In her statement regarding Tudor, Cohen posits that the significance of his work resides in its choreographic integrity, a concept that seems to have shaped Black's entire approach to coaching: "To me, it's the combination of the technique and the ability to use that and capture what the movement is, at that moment, supposed to be doing or saying, or where it's coming from."<sup>63</sup> Although Black's consideration of the meaning in the port de bras was not specific, the conversation was based solely on the movements of the arms. She wanted me to look at the character from the perspective of the physicality and not just the psychology, an approach to choreography that Kevin McKenzie also attributes to Tudor: "Tudor would always say: 'Don't comment on this. Just do it.'"<sup>64</sup>

During one class, Black taught Tudor's approach to running in ballet. This was the only occasion during my experience with her in which she ascribed any of her teaching to another individual. When she asked the class if we knew of Tudor, Black seemed disappointed and almost exasperated that only a handful responded with enthusiastic nods. She briefly explained that

he was a significant ballet choreographer before describing the physical mechanics of running as he had taught them. Beginning with slow walking steps that were propelled from pushing off the back leg, Black instructed us to increase the tempo of the steps organically until we were running. After pushing off, the back leg comes through a low *cou-de-pied* position where the pointed foot passes by the ankle before it extends forward to take the weight of the next step through the toes and the ball of the foot. It has an earthy feel, combining the articulation of the feet that is common to most balletic running with the *plié* and connection to the floor that is more often seen in modern dance techniques.

While Black assimilated much of Tudor's movement approach into her coaching and the groundwork for her technique, she did not use many aspects of his ballet classes in her teaching. Tudor was notorious for his highly analytical mind and biting wit, to which he often subjected his students. Exercises in his class were often related to the "human condition," and he frequently questioned students about their motivations during certain movements.<sup>65</sup> Lance Westergard refers to Tudor's use of imagery in his classes: he would tell students to do a first port de bras "like you're getting up in the morning and you open the window and it's raining, or it's your birthday."<sup>66</sup> In contrast, Black eschewed any peripheral psychological issues that came into class, especially those related to ego or lack thereof. Part of the incentive for many dancers to take Black's class was the security that one would not be personally targeted for anything other than technique. Black's primary interest was the progress of her students, and she conducted classes as vehicles to achieve that end.

Another area of Tudor's classwork that Black avoided was his use of *épaulement*. He considered the back a highly expressive part of the body, and he required articulate upper backs in his choreography.<sup>67</sup> In this light, he often brought his choreographic intentions into classes with exercises that resembled, or that may have been a precursor to, the choreography in his ballets.<sup>68</sup> Several accounts by and interviews with Tudor's students include vivid recollections of his unconventional and inventive class exercises.<sup>69</sup> Black had no choreographic ambitions of her own, and was not concerned with emphasizing *épaulement* or creating expressive class exercises.

Cohen paraphrases Tudor: “There are many ways, for example, of handling the problem of correct body placement, and many of them are good. What is important is that they produce the same aesthetic result.”<sup>70</sup> Tudor’s conception of alignment was incompatible with Black’s ideas as she developed her own pedagogical methods, and she repudiated his acceptance of a range in body placement. Her own theory of placement was the only one she deemed appropriate for her students and certainly the only one she ever taught. Black conceives of her placement as a gateway to a “beautiful clear style” of ballet that can be used to communicate choreographic intent.<sup>71</sup>

The effect of Tudor’s work on Black’s methodological development has manifested itself as a veritable homage to his artistry. In rejecting many of his classroom tactics—his incorporation of psychological motivation into classes, his deliberate use of *épaulement*, and his trust in various methods of alignment—Black had to devise her own methods of teaching the thematic underpinnings of his movement style, which she subsequently integrated into her classroom pedagogy and her approach to coaching. The establishment and maturation of Black’s methodology was based on her respect for Tudor’s understanding of ballet movement as innately expressive.

\*            \*            \*

Tudor and de Vos are certainly central figures in the development of Black’s pedagogy. This is not, however, to detract from the much larger percentage of her work that she herself devised over an extended period. Despite Black’s return to New York in the late 1960s with a still nascent pedagogy,<sup>72</sup> she quickly generated a following. In my interview with her, she described a period of symbiotic growth for her and her students, in an environment that was based exclusively on the work at hand at an extremely fertile time in the history of dance. It can be inferred that Black drew on influences from the work of de Vos and Tudor throughout her career, perhaps more so in the early stages before her pedagogy had taken shape. However, her resulting theories and methodologies were mostly of her own making; her experience with these teachers appears to have inspired and substantiated her own ideas, and the knowledge she accumulated during her

lengthy period of actual teaching undoubtedly shaped her work as well.

Perhaps the only area of Black's pedagogy where de Vos's and Tudor's influences intersect is in her blending of the ballet aesthetic with a sensibility more typically associated with modern dance forms. De Vos's use of anatomical principles as a device for teaching ballet may have more closely approximated the teaching methods one might see in a mid twentieth-century modern dance class than in a ballet class of that period, and as such her work is an early example of crossover between the genres. Likewise, one of the distinguishing features of Tudor's choreography is "the invention of movements that subtly combine classical and modern technique."<sup>73</sup> Tudor's understated use of modern dance concepts, as illustrated by his style of running, can be attributed to the grounded, human quality of the movement in his ballets, as opposed to the light, decorative quality of movement that is often paramount in the Romantic and classical ballet repertory, where dancers portray otherworldly or fairytale characters. Black's interest in developing her pedagogy based on Tudor's use of movement appears to have led her to a methodology that would enable dancers to find movement that was grounded, balanced, and natural in appearance within the framework of classical ballet. She recognized the technical basis for this methodology in the work of de Vos, whose integration of anatomical principles into ballet technique and class structure became fundamental to Black's work. Although Tudor and de Vos were involved in different areas of the field, Black drew from their respective work, allowing each to inform her pedagogy. Her appreciation of the earthiness and corporeal sensibility inherent to contemporary movement was an invaluable part of her work for both the ballet and modern dancers who studied with her.

Ballet's pedagogy and its lineage are passed down through an oral and kinesthetic tradition, from the words and hands of teachers to the bodies of their students. These teachings are then uniquely integrated into students' understandings as they themselves develop as teachers and, thus, continue the process into future generations. Black has distinguished her approach from that of her instructors at the same time that elements of their pedagogies remain in her work. Her impact is still felt today through the work of her students who have become involved in

various areas of the field as dancers, teachers, directors, choreographers, administrators, and dance scholars. Karen Eliot, now a dance scholar and professor at Ohio State University, structures her classes similarly to Black's, and her corrections often convey the fundamental principles of Black's alignment. Zvi Gotheiner, director of Zvi Gotheiner & Dancers and a popular New York City ballet teacher whose classes are often comprised of dancers from all areas of the field, attributes his understanding of placement to Black: "She helped me understand that alignment is not just for the sake of aesthetic value, that alignment doesn't revolve around an idea of looking like royalty or the need to appear to be on top of something. Finding individual alignment is a way in which movement can become more organized and consequently easier to execute."<sup>74</sup> Christine O'Neal also acknowledges Black's enormous influence on her teaching at Washington University.<sup>75</sup> Eliot, Gotheiner, and O'Neal are only a few of Black's former students who are handing down aspects of her work that have become central to their own pedagogical methods today. Black's work is a paradigm for the transmission of pedagogical theory and practice from teacher to student, and an illustration of ballet's pedagogical evolution through the latter half of the twentieth century.

### Notes

1. Maggie Black, in discussion with the author, New York, August 21, 2008. Facts about Black's early life are from this discussion.
2. Valerie Gladstone, "Maggie Black: Grande Dame of Dance," *Dance Ink* (July/August 1991): 17.
3. Black, discussion, 2008.
4. Gladstone, "Maggie Black," 17.
5. *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, s.v. "De Vos, Audrey"; Anthony Cowper, "Teacher with a Difference," *Dance and Dancers* (October 1953): 19; Richard Glasstone, "Teachers I Have Known," *Dancing Times* (September 2005): 63; Dina Shmueli, "Audrey de Vos, 1900-1983," *Ballet Method*, <http://www.ballet.co.il/default.asp?SubId=18> (accessed May 30, 2007); and Wendy Hilton and Susan Bindig, "Getting Started in Dance, 1946-1953, A Memoir," *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2007): 310.
6. Maggie Black, telephone interview by author, December 29, 2006.
7. Gary Gatzke, "Alumni News Spotlight: Dance Pioneer Down Under," The Juilliard School on the Web, [http://www.juilliard.edu/alumni/spot\\_0409.html](http://www.juilliard.edu/alumni/spot_0409.html) (accessed July 17, 2007).
8. Gladstone, "Maggie Black," 17.

9. Black, interview, 2006.
10. Jee-Young Shin, "Black Magic," *Newsday*, August 9, 1995, B48.
11. Black, interview, 2006.
12. Ibid.
13. Black, discussion, 2008.
14. Ibid.
15. Suki Schorer, *Suki Schorer on Balanchine Technique* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1999), 40–42.
16. Black, interview, 2006.
17. Bernard Taper, *Balanchine: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 334.
18. Arlene Croce, "Balanchine vs. Ashton," *New York Times*, June 8, 1997; Gelsey Kirkland, *Dancing on My Grave* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1986), 70–72; and Gigi Berardi, "Stephanie Saland: Teacher's Wisdom," *Dance Magazine*, vol. 80, no. 7 (July 2006): 66.
19. Black, discussion, 2008.
20. Karen Eliot, discussion with author, July 3, 2008, Columbus, Ohio.
21. David Cleveland, "No Gimmicks: young *danseur noble* Kevin McKenzie," *Ballet News*, vol. 3, no. 10 (April 1982): 28.
22. Black, interview, 2006.
23. Ibid.
24. Schorer, *Suki Schorer on Balanchine Technique*, 38.
25. Eliot, discussion, 2008.
26. Black, interview, 2006.
27. Shin, "Black Magic," B48.
28. Rochelle Zide-Booth, interview by the author, March 5, 2007; Rochelle Zide-Booth, "Dancing for Joffrey," *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1989): 48; and Sasha Anawalt, *The Joffrey Ballet: Robert Joffrey and the Making of an American Dance Company* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 81, 134.
29. Black, interview, 2006.
30. Christine O'Neal, e-mail message to author, March 25, 2008.
31. Ibid.
32. Black, interview, 2006.
33. Ibid.
34. Gladstone, "Maggie Black," 16.
35. Valerie Brooks, "That Black Magic: The Legendary Maggie Black is Shaping the History of Dance in her New York Studio," *Connoisseur*, vol. 213 (August 1983): 71.
36. Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 225.
37. Lawrence Sullivan, "Nikita Baliev's Le Théâtre de la Chauve-Souris: An Avant-Garde Theater," *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Winter 1986-87): 18.
38. Lillian Moore, "The Metropolitan Opera: Its Sixty-Seven Years Seen in Review," *Dance Magazine*, vol. 25, no. 1 (January 1951): 47; and Nancy Moore, "Dance," in *The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago*, Chicago Historical Society,

- <http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/359.html> (accessed July 13, 2008).
39. Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, 225.
  40. E. C. Mason, "Schools and Teachers: Audrey de Vos," *Dance and Dancers* (July 1957): 21.
  41. David Vaughan, e-mail message to author, September 12, 2007.
  42. *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, s.v. "De Vos, Audrey;" Mason, "Schools and Teachers," 20; and Hilton and Bindig, "Getting Started in Dance," 310.
  43. Black, discussion, 2008.
  44. *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, s.v. "De Vos, Audrey."
  45. Glasstone, "Teachers I Have Known," 63.
  46. Vaughan, e-mail message, 2007.
  47. *Ibid.*
  48. Hilton and Bindig, "Getting Started in Dance," 309.
  49. Shmueli, "Audrey de Vos."
  50. Black, interview, 2006.
  51. Mason, "Schools and Teachers," 21.
  52. Shmueli, "Audrey de Vos."
  53. A. V. Coton, "Two Tributes to Audrey de Vos," *Dancing Times* (October 1965): 20.
  54. Vaughan, e-mail message, 2007.
  55. *Ibid.*
  56. Sallie Wilson, quoted in John Gruen, *The Private World of Ballet* (New York: Viking, 1975), 246.
  57. Black, interview, 2006.
  58. *Ibid.*
  59. *Ibid.*
  60. "Attitudes and Training: Antony Tudor the Teacher," *Eye on Dance* 226, VHS, produced and directed by Jeff Bush and Celia Ipiotis (ARC Videodance, 1987).
  61. *Antony Tudor*, VHS, directed by Viola Aberlé and Gerd Anderson (Pennington, N. J.: Horizons Video, 1985).
  62. Selma Jeanne Cohen, "Antony Tudor . . . Man without a Theory," *Dance Magazine*, vol. 28, no. 4 (April 1954): 51.
  63. Black, interview, 2006.
  64. Jennifer Dunning, "Antony Tudor's Teaching Method: 'No, You Fool!'" *New York Times*, October 26, 2003.
  65. Donna Perlmutter, *Shadowplay: The Life of Antony Tudor* (New York: Viking, 1991): 60, 234.
  66. "Attitudes and Training," VHS, 1987.
  67. Lillie F. Rosen, "Talking with Antony Tudor: A Choreographer for all Seasons," *Dance Scope*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1974-1975): 16.
  68. Perlmutter, *Shadowplay*, 234-35.
  69. "Attitudes and Training," VHS, 1987; Perlmutter, *Shadowplay*, 231-42; Gruen, *The Private World of Ballet*, 448; and Sally Gilmour, "Remembering Andrée



- Howard," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 48.
70. Cohen, "Antony Tudor," 15.
71. Black, interview, 2006.
72. Ibid.
73. Gruen, *The Private World of Ballet*, 259.
74. Rachel Straus, "Zvi Gotheiner: Teacher's Wisdom," *Dance Magazine*, vol. 80, no. 5 (May 2006): 66.
75. Christine O'Neal, e-mail message to author, July 24, 2008.