

Early Days
Notes from Carole Chadwick

Notes from Carole Chadwick



Early Days in the Cecchetti Society of Canada

When Betty Oliphant arrived in Canada she founded the Cecchetti Society of Canada, (which, at that time, was part of the ISTD in London, England) to connect teachers throughout the country and raise the standard of teaching of dance. After opening her school on Sherbourne Street in Toronto, she began to teach the Cecchetti Method. Gradually, as her students became more advanced many of them took their Qualifying Examinations, became teachers, and were later appointed examiners.

The Cecchetti Syllabi were taught at the National Ballet Company's Teachers Seminar in June of each year. Then, when the National Ballet School came into existence in 1959, the system was taught in the School's ad hoc teacher training course and at the annual Teachers' Seminar, designed for teachers from the larger dance community.

As the teachers who attended the NBOC and NBS courses became eager to enter students in exams, examiners were sent across Canada to conduct examination sessions, give encouragement to local teachers, and help to further their skills.

In the early days, the main examiners were Betty Oliphant, Celia Franca and Margaret Saul. As time went on, qualified teachers from the National Ballet School, as well as Jack Bickle, Sheila Kennedy, and examiners from Europe became part of the team. One advantage of having an English examiner was that it kept us up to date on any syllabus changes, of which there were many!

Margaret Nicol was the Society's first secretary, followed by Catherine Buffie. Their duties included staying in close touch with teachers across Canada to work out examination dates as well as typing up the examiners' hand-written reports and returning them to the teachers. Because this information came to NBS's office, it was possible to keep track of standards.

Later, the Society held Cecchetti days in Toronto on a yearly basis. Teachers brought their students to participate in classes from Grade One up to, and including, the Majors. In time, teachers in other cities also established Cecchetti days.

Some of the first studios to embrace the Cecchetti system in Canada were under the direction of Phyllis Angel in St. John's, Kay Armstrong in Vancouver, Micheline Bérubé in Quebec City, Margaret Flynn in Edmonton, Sheila Kennedy in Victoria, Gisèle et Yvette Pauzé in Montreal, Joyce Shietze in Ottawa, and Jean Spear in Fort Erie.

For my part, I was introduced to the Cecchetti Method by my first ballet teacher and later employer, Mildred Wickson, who had studied with Betty Oliphant. However, the majority of my Cecchetti and teacher training was with Betty. I also had classes with Margaret Saul, Shirley Kash, Juliette Fisher, Nancy Schwenker and others at the National Ballet School. As well, I studied both the Cecchetti, and later the Vaganova method abroad.

At that time, the Cecchetti Society and the National Ballet School were closely intertwined. Teachers from across North America were motivated to attend NBS's Teachers Course as it was held in a professional atmosphere. Many became interested in the Cecchetti method because of this connection.



During my 40 some years at the National Ballet School, as both a full time ballet teacher and Vice-Principal (Ballet), I organized and led the School's annual cross-country audition tour, connecting with Cecchetti teachers and often holding Cecchetti exams upon request. I travelled to England twice on behalf of the Cecchetti Society. The objective of my first trip was to learn the new grades and men's syllabi. The second was to meet with the Chairman of the ISTD, who

planned to bring the Cecchetti Society in line with the Royal Academy of Dancing by, among

other things, producing an expensive magazine. This meant a large increase in fees, particularly for overseas members. At the end of the day, he got his magazine, and we reached a compromise regarding the fees.

As head of the comprehensive three-year Teacher Training Program, established in 1978, I was responsible for setting the program's curriculum and timetable, auditioning aspiring teachers, and mentoring them throughout their time at the School. The Cecchetti Syllabus was the only system taught in the course at that time. Students graduated with a Teacher Training Diploma from NBS, as well as attaining an Associate Degree from the Cecchetti Society. Many returned to their home towns and either taught for an established school or opened their own studio. In this way, a real Canadian network was developed.



The beauty of the Cecchetti style is in the wonderful sense of movement and purity of line it produces. The eight directions of the body, two sets of port de bras and five arabesque lines develop an elegant, classical use of the upper body. Strength is developed through demanding adages, and quick, precise footwork through a variety of allegro combinations. Because Enrico Cecchetti was a brilliant dancer himself, he understood what was needed for a dancer's training. His strategy of giving a different group of steps each day meant that no aspect was forgotten.



The seeds that Betty Oliphant planted and nurtured so many years ago, grew and developed during my 17 years as Chair of the Cecchetti Society of Canada. Since my retirement, it has been very encouraging to see how the work has been continued. Cecchetti Canada has become a major organization with representatives across Canada whose mission is to maintain the standards of dance at the highest level possible.

To conclude my story, in 2003 I moved from Toronto to a country village overlooking the Grand River. It is here where I can enjoy nature, fresh air, and peace.