

FROM: **AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE**  
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### **SERGE LIFAR**

Born in 1905, Russian-born, Serge Lifar was introduced to dance in 1920 by Bronislava Nijinska, under whom he began to study. Brought to France to join Sergey Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, Lifar studied with the eminent teacher Enrico Cecchetti and became premier danseur of the company and created the title roles in a number of George Balanchine's early ballets, including *The Prodigal Son*. After Diaghilev's death, in 1929, Lifar joined the Paris Opera Ballet as premier danseur and ballet master and soon instituted weekly ballet performances, thus abolishing the Opera's practice of producing ballet only in conjunction with opera. In 1932 he was awarded the title of professeur de danse and began reforms of the Opera's school to enable its dancers to perform the more modern ballets, particularly his own.

Lifar believed that dance was more important than the music and decor in a ballet, and he held that since ballet technique has its own innate formal values, its choreography should not derive from music. Lifar first experimented with this controversial concept in *Icare*. The work was performed solely to a percussion accompaniment that was added after the choreography had been completed. In later ballets he utilized more conventional music but continued to dictate to his composers or musical arrangers the rhythms necessary to coincide with his choreography.

Apart from revivals of classical ballets, Lifar staged more than 50 works for the Opera. Most of his ballets were considered modern but classical in structure. Many were narrative works, with themes drawn from classical mythology and legend or from the Bible. His ballets often attempted to convey the drama through appropriate technique and choreography, rather than through mime-dance, and, in contrast to prevalent Opera custom, frequently gave leading, rather than supporting, roles to men.

Serge Lifar died in 1986.