

VALIA SEISKAYA



Russian-born Valia Seiskaya took her first ballet lessons in Greece at the age of six. Her teacher was Adam Morianoff, also a Russian *émigré*. (Valia was experiencing difficulty learning Greek; thus, it was natural for her mother to seek out a fellow countryman.) At nine she became a scholarship student, showing prodigious technique—for example, *entrechat huit*, eight beats, in centre—by age ten. *Pointe* work also started at ten, character ballet at twelve. Thereafter, Mme. Seiskaya rapidly developed the combination of strong technique and high elevation which would become her hallmark as a professional.

At fifteen, Valia continued her training under Sonia Morianova, the niece of Adam Morianoff, who had recently retired from the National Opera of Greece. She became a member of the National Opera at seventeen, soon attaining the rank of featured soloist, and touring Europe and Russia with the company. At the National Theater her preparation continued under resident ballet masters and choreographers, including the Bolshoi's Asaf Messerer, Boris Kniazev, Nina Kyrsanova and Olympia Yelodari (former judge at the *International Ballet Competitions* held in Varna, Bulgaria and Moscow).

In Greece, as in most European countries, ballet students wishing to become professionals must pass comprehensive national level examinations and obtain a license. Mme. Seiskaya fulfilled all of her requirements and was granted both a diploma and a license.

The Seiskaya Ballet School was founded in 1974, one year after Mme. Seiskaya retired from the National Opera of Greece. At that time she taught all fifteen class sections. In 1976 Studio A was doubled in size to its present 2,500 square feet, and in 1981 Studio B was opened, adding another 1,500 square feet to the dance facility. That year also saw the establishment of the Seiskaya Ballet Academy.

The Academy was designed as a professional training program for serious dancers who display the determination, physical attributes and musicality of the career-oriented dancer. Admission to the Academy is by audition only. Since the inception of the Seiskaya Ballet programs, over seventy students have opted for professional careers. The OPEN program was developed in 2006 to compliment the Academy and accommodate requests for more scheduling flexibility.

All Academy students are encouraged to participate in the guest teacher seminars and summer workshop programs offered by the Ballet Education and Scholarship Fund, Inc. (BESFI). As part of their professional preparation, Academy students' participation in auditions for company schools, summer workshops, internships and major dance companies is routinely encouraged.

Seiskaya students have compiled an outstanding record of achievement. Through the years, full scholarships have been awarded by every major institution for which they have auditioned, including schools affiliated with American Ballet Theatre (ABT), New York City Ballet, and the San Francisco, Houston, Joffrey, Pacific Northwest, Pittsburgh, Eliot Feld, and Boston Ballets. Some of the many dance companies Seiskaya students have joined: ABT (5), Atlanta Ballet (2), Boston (2), Ballet West, Fort Worth, Hartford, Pacific Northwest, Pittsburgh, Royal Swedish, State Ballet of Missouri, Ballet Arizona, Tennessee, Milwaukee (3), New Jersey, Alabama, Washington, Louisville, Austin, Tulsa Ballets and Momix.

In 1994 Seiskaya student Michael Cusumano captured a bronze medal and Special Commendation at the *International Ballet Competition (IBC)* in Varna, Bulgaria and a coveted Jury Award (a gold medal-level award) at the *Prix de Danse*, Paris, France. Valia Seiskaya was nominated that year as the Best Teacher and Coach at Varna, one of the few Americans ever to be so honored.

In 1996 Kirov student Rasta Thomas, coached by Valia Seiskaya, reached the pinnacle: a gold medal in the Men's Junior Division at the *17th IBC*, Varna, Bulgaria. Incredibly, he was the first American male dancer ever to win a Junior Division gold and the youngest male dancer ever to do so. In addition, his triumph ended a sixteen-year stretch in which no gold medal was awarded in the Junior Men's Division.

In 1998 Seiskaya student Elizabeth McGrath represented the U.S. in the *18th IBC* in Varna, Bulgaria. In late '98 she was a top finalist in the *8th Concours International de Danse de Paris*, France. Among the numerous awards earned during the current decade: Anna Craddock earned 2nd prize in the 2008 American Ballet Competition, Miami, Fl. and in 2009, the grand prize in the 9th International Dance Competition - Hellas (Greece). Seiskaya alum Cory Stearns (ABT principal) won the vaunted 2008 Erik Bruhn Prize in Toronto, Canada. In 2012, Danielle Lovetro earned 2nd place in the regional Youth American Grand Prix while Anna Craddock swept to a 1st place finish at the American Ballet Competition in Houston, Texas and a 1st place finish in the senior division at the 2013 YAGP regional. Seiskaya students have captured more than twenty national/regional awards, including those from the National Arts and Letters Competition; National Arts Recognition and Talent Competition (Presidential Scholar in the Arts); Saraband, Ltd; and the Amilita Hoffman Memorial Ballet Competition.

During her seventeen-year professional career with the National Opera of Greece, Mme. Seiskaya gained an affinity for the grand sweep of story-line ballets and operas staged by the company. Her own choreographic works, such as **Street People**, **Las Damiselas**, **Forest**, **MASK**, and the **Nutcracker**, reflect that interest. Fresh interpretations of classical favorites **La Boutique Fantasque**, **Walpurgis Night** and **A Night on Bald Mountain** complement her signature ensemble works **Grand Waltz**, **Seasons** and **Dance of the Hours**.

Valia Seiskaya is listed in *Who's Who Among Outstanding Americans* and was *The Village Times* 1985 Woman of the Year in the Arts. Thrice, she has been awarded Teacher of the Year by YAGP. She has received commendations from, among others, President Reagan, Governor Pataki and Congressman Forbes. In 2011, Mde. Seiskaya was elected to the Long Island Volunteer Hall of Fame for her work nurturing young talented dancers.