

## **Bousloff, pioneer of Australian dance, dies at 87**

### ***BALLET***

*Valerie Lawson*

When the Ballets Russes dancers sailed from Australian shores they left behind on the wharf a brave but very sad group of colleagues. The ones who stayed chose Australia as a safe haven just before World War II. Most never returned to their homelands.

Among them was Kira Bousloff, who went on to found the West Australian Ballet in 1952. One year short of that company's 50th anniversary, she has died in Perth aged 87. She died of a stroke two weeks ago, an hour or so before the Australian Ballet announced a collaborative season for next year to celebrate the West Australian Ballet's half century.

Bousloff was a pioneer of Australian ballet, one of the diaspora of dancers from Europe who maintained in Australia many of the works from the repertoire of the original Ballets Russes, founded by Sergei Diaghilev.

As well as restaging these ballets, Bousloff's affection for her new country meant she choreographed or commissioned works set in Australia, including *The Beach Inspector* and *the Mermaid* in 1958, *Kooree* and *the Mists* in 1960, and *Fire at Ross's Farm* in 1961, based on the poem by Henry Lawson.

Born Kira Abricossova to Russian parents in Monte Carlo in 1914, she moved to Paris with her family to study ballet. At the age of 17 she joined the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo and toured the United States and Europe.

When she was 19 she married the dancer Serge Bousloff. The couple came to Australia in 1938 with the Covent Garden Russian Ballet, a company that included Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo dancers. She settled in Melbourne, where she staged a number of works for the National Theatre Ballet.

Bousloff moved to Perth in 1952 to found the West Australian Ballet. She later recalled: "When I came to the airport in little Perth at the end of the world, I put my feet on the ground, I looked around and I said loudly and strongly, 'This is where I'm going to live, and this is where I'm going to die ... this is my place.'"

Her best work for the West Australian Ballet was considered to be *Poeme Symphonique* to music by Liszt.

The company became fully professional in 1970, when Rex Reid succeeded Bousloff as artistic director. She continued to teach at her own school and as a guest teacher until two years ago.

After Bousloff's first marriage ended in divorce she married the composer James Penberthy. That marriage, too, ended in divorce. She is survived by a son, Alex Bousloff, and a daughter from her second marriage, Dr Tamara Walters.