

Report of an interview of Cindy Jourdain & Caroline Duprot by David Bain

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Both Cindy and Caroline come from Northern France, Cindy from Bayeux and Caroline from Arras, so both are used to cold weather.

When she was little, Cindy Jourdain was something of a tomboy. Her parents wanted her to do something more feminine, so they sent her for ballet lessons. Her dancing teacher had already sent a few girls to the Paris Opera School and she asked Cindy if she wanted to try. Cindy thought it would be fun to go to Paris and she was accepted for the standard six months' trial. If you fit, they take you full time into the school. You can take a total of seven years training at the school. The school operates in a beautiful building. It is a boarding school, providing normal school studies as well as dancing classes. The school has moved from the Paris Opera to a suburb of Paris, not a nice area, with lots of graffiti in the streets.

Caroline Duprot has a tiny body with a very flexible back. Her parents tried her first with gymnastics, but she had the physique for ballet classes. Her ballet teacher suggested that she try the Paris Opera School. Caroline had joined the School in 1990, aged 11, but only stayed for two years. Cindy began her five year stint in 1992, aged 12. They had only met in London, when they both joined the English National Ballet.

The Paris Opera School trains dancers for the Paris Opera Company, which until recently had no foreign dancers in its ranks. They bred their dancers from a very young age, taking only French dancers. Now it is a little different, but still they mainly take French dancers. They do, however, take Prix de Lausanne winners on a scholarship. The French Government pays for most of the costs of studying at the Paris Opera School, with parents only having to pay boarding fees.

Caroline is two years older than Cindy. She had mainly female teachers at the Paris Opera School. Then she had moved on to the Jeune Ballet de Paris, a different ballet school in Paris, providing ordinary school in the mornings and ballet classes in the afternoons. Caroline found the Jeune Ballet de Paris less strict than the Paris Opera School. It was a normal school, with lots of students just following the standard curriculum without ballet classes. She had studied History of Dance and Character Dancing at the Paris Opera School, but now she followed only ballet classes and normal lessons. At the Jeune Ballet de Paris, her teaching was more classical, than contemporary.

After taking her baccalaureat, Caroline began auditioning. Apart from the Paris Opera Ballet, there were hardly any classical ballet companies in France. Her private teacher thought she would try the English National Ballet, with its amazing repertoire. They quickly faxed her back, inviting her to an audition. She went shopping, she was quite relaxed and she did not think too hard about the audition. In fact, afterwards, she went shopping at Harrods and missed her train back to Paris. Three weeks later, Derek Deane sent her a letter offering her a contract. It was a very nice surprise. The Jeune Ballet de France also offered her a contract. This is a company of young dancers, preparing them for an adult company, with lots of ballets in its repertoire and lots of touring. When she arrived in London, Caroline spoke no English, because she had opted for German at the Paris Opera School. Both Cindy and Caroline claim to speak better German than English.

The Paris Opera School has lots of studios, lots of money. They deliver a range of different classes, providing very good experience. They are very strict, but very good. However, the teachers do not allow you to grow up normally. After a five-year period at the Paris Opera School, it was not working out for Cindy. They asked her to repeat a year, but she was having a difficult time with her teacher and did not want to spend another year there. She was faced with two options, either to try another school, or to give up ballet altogether and move to a normal school.

Cindy explained why she moved to London. Francesca Filpi had spent a year at the Paris Opera School as an outsider. Then she auditioned for the Royal Ballet School and was taken. So Cindy thought she too would try the Royal Ballet School. She moved to the Royal Ballet School, where incidentally her parents had to pay a lot of money. The Royal Ballet School was very different, not a boarding school. She was 16 years old and did not speak a word of English. It was really difficult; at her first class, she did not understand a word. She thought, 'what am I doing here?'. The training was difficult, dominated by Russian teachers, whereas the Paris Opera School had focussed on French teachers. She found the arm positions difficult. In France, they require high arms and extensions, whereas the English style is less showy and more compact. Amongst her contemporaries at the Royal Ballet School were Ivan Putrov (for the first few months), Begona Cao (now with English National Ballet), Igone de Jongh (now with Dutch National Ballet) and of course Francesca Filpi.

At the Royal Ballet School, Cindy found the first year difficult; a new culture and new people. She spent two years there and found the second year better - she met a good crowd. Then she sustained an injury and was unable to audition for the Royal Ballet. So she went back to France; she kept in shape and auditioned for other companies, including English National Ballet.

Caroline joined English National Ballet two years earlier than Cindy. She had come to the English National Ballet straight from her ballet school in Paris, rather than through the Royal Ballet School. In those days the English National Ballet presented even more performances than now. Dancers had to organise their own accommodation, which is difficult when you don't speak the language. She arrived in the company in September and immediately they were performing a Triple Bill and Coppelia in Leeds. She danced one of the girls in black in Etudes and in Coppelia she was the doll, one of Swanilda's friends, "Work" and one of the hours. Then they spent four weeks rehearsing in Jay Mews, preparing The Nutcracker, which went on tour, before the Christmas season at the Royal Festival Hall. Her parents saw her as the doll in Coppelia, a role with no dancing at all. Nevertheless they cried, when the curtain went up.

Caroline began at the English National Ballet by dancing a fairy in The Sleeping Beauty and by learning a snowflake and a mirliton for The Nutcracker. Her first major role at English National Ballet was Clara in Derek Deane's production of The Nutcracker. The Ballet Mistress told her that Derek wanted her to learn Clara; then one of the girls was injured and there weren't enough Claras for so many shows, so Caroline went on. Derek Deane had choreographed the role for Tamara Rojo, but Caroline did not watch it being choreographed. These were private calls with Tamara and other dancers were not welcome to watch. She made her debut as Clara in Manchester at a Saturday matinee, with three days' notice. Derek Deane danced Drosselmeyer. In the wings, he talked her through the entire show. He was amazing. In fact he talked her through the entire performance.

Cindy is a tall dancer and English National Ballet had lots of small girls, so she was often the odd one out in duets and quartets. She danced a leading swan, a harlot in Romeo and Juliet, a girl in white in Etudes (very different, but nice to do!). When she was 20 she danced Terpsichore in Apollo, for two shows at the Coliseum. All her family and friends came. Nanette Glushak from Toulouse taught it to her, because Pat Neary did not come to the English National Ballet. Nanette Glushak has been rehearsing the Royal Ballet in The Four Temperaments in the current season.

Cindy had participated in the Royal Albert Hall seasons of the English National Ballet, dancing in Swan Lake, Romeo and Juliet and The Sleeping Beauty. Swan Lake was brilliant, such a nice experience. There were so many dancers, but they really worked as a team. Derek Deane had really good and new ideas. There were 8 cygnets crossing, 4 leading swans, no straight lines, new patterns. They had miles to run; they ran up the stairs, down the ramp and back on to the stage. Swan Lake had been performed in other major arenas, even bigger than the Royal Albert Hall. They became used to running everywhere, rehearsing in trainers, because of the danger of injury in pointe shoes. So many swans in white, it was beautiful!

Caroline talked about Romeo and Juliet in the round. She thought that the ballroom scene worked, but the town scenes and the principals did not work so well. The Sleeping Beauty was very bright with flashy costumes. They had guest dancers from Russia. It was a challenge to perform ballet on a big round stage, but she and Cindy could say that they had done it.

Cindy and Caroline spoke about rehearsals for Swan Lake in the round, which included extra girls, who auditioned just for the Swan Lake performances. Jay Mews was not big enough. All rehearsals took place in a special army base in Hammersmith, with no changing rooms, no heating, no sprung floor and very dusty. Sometimes they went into a studio at Bromley-by-Bow.

They had toured all round Great Britain with English National Ballet. Caroline's favourite theatre outside London was Liverpool, which has a lovely, refurbished theatre. Cindy's least favourite venues were Scunthorpe and Barrow-in-Furness!

After Derek Deane left in February 2001, the English National Ballet had no director for six months. David Wall and Rosalyn Whitten were the ballet master and the ballet mistress, but the company went on a major tour to Australia with no-one really in charge. The new director, Matz Skoog, joined in September, but they met him first in Australia. He was just finishing as Artistic Director of the Royal New Zealand Ballet and he flew to Australia to take a class.

Cindy received lots of new work under Matz Skoog. Rosalyn Whitten had left, but David Wall was still the

ballet master. Matz wanted to perform new work and produced Cathy Marston's Facing Viv and Christopher Hampson's Double Concerto, very different for the company. Matz had seen Cindy dance in Apollo and a year later he promoted her up in the corps and cast her in Facing Viv.

Caroline began to find some of the repertoire repetitive. Sometimes, because of injuries, she was dancing two shows in one day: Sugar Plum Fairy in the matinee and Clara in the evening. Derek Deane had promoted her to 5th year corps de ballet and then to coryphee; Matz promoted her to soloist. Now the English National Ballet has the same ranks as the Royal Ballet. She spoke to Matz at her annual meeting with him. In seven years with the company, she had experienced good times and tough times. It was always the mostly same repertoire; there was no more motivation, just routine. She wanted the excitement of new things to do. Now it was time to move on. Shortly afterwards, she fractured her foot in class, which prevented her from auditioning. You work all the time, you complain, but being off is hell. She came back too soon, but by May she was stronger. She sent her CV to the Royal Ballet and Monica Mason invited her to take class with the company. She spoke to Matz and he understood completely. She had been with the English National Ballet for such a long time, with lots of different experiences. Monica offered her a first artist contract and Caroline accepted.

When Caroline took class with the Royal Ballet in May to audition, Johan Kobborg spotted her doing class, and asked her, at the end, to appear in his show at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in September 2003. Caroline was thrilled and accepted immediately. She then began her Royal Ballet career in class with Johan Kobborg and some of the dancers from the Company. She appeared in Dances from Napoli. There was one week of rehearsals, straight after the holidays; it was quite shock! Nevertheless it was a good introduction to the Company and its dancers.

Caroline spoke about rehearsing the shades scene in La Bayadere. It had been her first ballet with the company and it had been a relief, when it was finished. In the studio, there was no ramp and no spotlight. You start either on the first beat or the third beat. The leading bayadere performs 39 arabesques. It was nerve-wracking in the wings. The first arabesque on the ramp is your 'moment'. You have to be careful not to be dazzled by the spotlight. Alternate girls change their supporting legs, when they go round the corner. If you go wrong, everyone behind you goes wrong as well.

Caroline had received a letter in her pigeon hole, casting her as Olga in Onegin. It was a wonderful surprise, especially as she had never once danced in the ballet. She had been cast with Alina Cojocar, Johan Kobborg, Federico Bonelli and Bennet Gartside.

Cindy Joourdain left the English National Ballet after five years. She never thought it would last so long. She had been at the Royal Ballet School and she thought it would be nice to try the Royal Ballet. She resigned from the English National Ballet; at the time, she did not have a contract with the Royal Ballet. She auditioned for Monica Mason, who straight away offered her a contract as an artist. She had a slow start. It was a big company, lots of dancers, a new repertoire. For the first few months she appeared in the new Sleeping Beauty, sitting at the side, trying to look pretty. Recently she had enjoyed good opportunities, for example in the Balanchine repertoire. You don't look back!

Cindy had been thrown in at the deep end with Cathy Marston's new ballet Broken Fiction for ROH2 at the Linbury Theatre. For five weeks during the Summer she had not been dancing, although she had swum regularly to keep in shape. She was learning the corps work in La Bayadere for the opening of the season. She was also due to dance in Traces, one of the other ballets in the RO2 programme, as a substitute for Rachel Rawlins, who had recently left the company. Two and a half weeks before the premiere of Broken Fiction, Kristen McNally was injured. Cindy agreed to take over and learn the ballet from scratch with Johannes Stepanek; it was the fastest time she had ever had to learn a new ballet. She had finished it, but she had not polished it. She was worrying about her other dance commitments at the same time.

Cindy was enjoying the modern repertoire of the Royal Ballet. Nanette Glushak had taught Balanchine's The Four Temperaments. Cindy had appeared on the first night, partnered by David Makhateli, which was very enjoyable. She had stepped into Wayne Macgregor's ballet Qualia at the last minute. Now she was covering the Siren in Balanchine's Prodigal Son, the second movement in Symphony in C and the principal pas de deux in Agon. Would she get performances? Probably not, with two casts already scheduled to go on.

Cindy sketched out a typical day with the Royal Ballet: class at 9.30, followed by a stage call of Giselle from 10.45 to 2.30, then an afternoon rehearsal of Balanchine, followed by a performance of Cinderella. Next week they would be starting work on The Sleeping Beauty. Although the Royal Ballet did less touring,

they had a diverse repertoire and styles; they often had to learn a work in one or two weeks. In the English National Ballet, they did not need time to put on shows. They had two studios, one each for the male and female classes. At the Royal Ballet, they still did not have enough studios.

Cindy confessed to wanting to dance the role of Manon. She told us that tall girls don't look at small girls; we do different roles. She is inspired by all the Royal Ballet principals. Caroline likes a lot of different dancers; everyone has something special, that they project on stage.

Cindy's most embarrassing moment on stage? She turned her head incorrectly on the opening night of Giselle. She was the only one to turn her head when dawn appeared and the next girls copied her. Caroline also has memories of the English National Ballet Giselle. She was running across stage as one of Giselle's friends, when her foot caught her partner's knee. She landed on the edge of the pit and saw all of the orchestra watching her.

Kenneth Leadbeater

Report checked and corrected by Caroline Duprot, Cindy Jourdain and David Bain.