

Obituaries



Bengt Häger

Professor Bengt Häger, doyen of dance educators and historians, a seminal figure in the Swedish and international dance world, and long-time friend to this magazine, has died in Stockholm at the age of 95. It will be as founder of the Carina Ari Foundations, the Memorial Foundation, the Library and the Art Foundation, which he served until the end, that he will be longest remembered, but his work as critic, writer, manager of dance companies and collaborator with dancers and choreographers, among them Kurt Jooss and Mary Wigman, was of equal importance during a long life devoted to dance.

Born in Malmö in 1916, he studied at Stockholm University specialising in palaeography (the study of ancient documents), literature, art history, theatre history, and economics, all subjects that would be united in his later work. His dance training was with Swedish pedagogues such as A Meurk and also with Mikhail Fokine after he left the

Ballets Russes. Already established as a critic and writer, Häger became in 1944 chairman of the Swedish Association for the Promotion of Dance, then, from 1947–1950, secretary general of Les Archives de la Danse in Paris which inevitably led to his becoming in 1954 the first director of the Dansmuseet in Stockholm, which inherited the Rolf de Maré collections.

In 1960 he became a board member and chairman of the Carina Ari Foundation, named for the Swedish dancer who endowed it with some £1,000,000 (she married and inherited from the owner of Bols, the Dutch liqueur) for training and educating dancers. In 1969 he became librarian and chairman of its library. From 1977–1988 he was founder and president of the dance department of UNESCO and in 1989 was named its honorary president.

In addition to these duties, Häger was manager of the Cullberg Ballet (1967–1987) and also undertook managerial duties for countless other dance companies, among them those of Graham, Nikolais, Dunham, Ailey, Antonio, Marceau, Gopal, Sarabhai, and the Peking Opera. His interest and knowledge of dance was all-embracing; he loved and served all its forms.

Häger was twice married, to Pipaluk Freuchen, with whom he had a daughter, and to the lovely Indian dancer Lilavati Devi, with whom he had a son. His many books included dance histories, *Rolf de Maré's Svenska Balett*, 1947; *Les Ballets Suédois*, 1998; and biographies of Isadora Duncan and Marie Taglioni. He was a distinguished, courtly gentleman of the old school, a delightful and amusing

companion who bore his many awards lightly and totally without vanity. I shall miss his London visits sadly.

MARY CLARKE

Erik Näslund, director of the Dansmuseet, writes:

In the many roles Bengt Häger played in his long life, perhaps his most important was as dance promoter. He introduced to dance-hungry Swedes a great number of the big names, presented them on stage, wrote about them, and thus became a key figure in the dance life that developed in Sweden from the 1950s. With his contacts inside the political establishment he could spur the founding of the State Dance School and the Cullberg Ballet. He was everywhere, animating dance for broader audiences. He became Mr Dance in Sweden.

In the 1940s he became very close to Rolf de Maré, who had founded the Ballets Suédois in the 1920s and then the world's first museum and research institute for dance in Paris in the 1930s. Bengt became De Maré's indispensable assistant and, in 1954, the first director of the Dansmuseet De Maré had opened in Stockholm in 1953. After De Maré's death, he saved the then small museum for the future by gaining a state subsidy. He broadened its collections, travelling the world, all the time curious about new cultures and new dance forms. He did not live in the past, but always looked to the future.

Bengt Nils Richard Häger, born April 27, 1916; died November 2, 2011.

Above Bengt Häger at Stockholm's Royal Opera on his 95th birthday (and the Carina Ari Day). Photograph: Michael Schmidt.