

Dancers, artists, lovers — Ballets Suédois 1920–1925

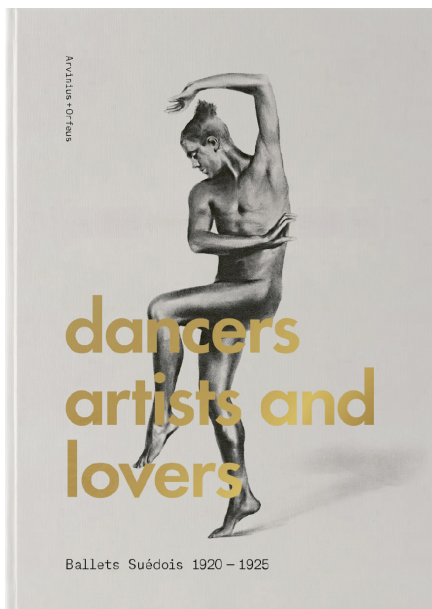


Photo: Dansmuseet archives

“I envy the painters. Their art is eternal. The work carries its own life within, independent of its creator. A dance lives rather short. As short as the dancer himself.” — Jean Börlin

In the post-war 1920s, new ideas were blossoming and a creative experimental appetite was awakening. A new avant-garde took form. At its epicentre was an unconventional dance troupe with a politically charged repertoire that did not hesitate to provoke its audience: they went by the name Ballets Suédois. The eccentric couple Rolf de Maré and Jean Börlin were its leaders, but the co-creators were many. Ballets Suédois was not an ordinary dance company, their creations were more than plain choreography, they were total artworks. Aside from the young dancers in the company, they had collaborations with artists such as Nils Dardel, Francis Picabia and Fernand Léger, and composers like Erik Satie, Hugo Alfvén and Darius Milhaud, to name but a few.

With multi-media works such as *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* (The Wedding on the Eiffel Tower), *Iberia*, and *L'Homme et son désir* (Man and his Desire), where the music, stage décor, choreography, costumes, performance, and at times even the audience, were part of the creation, they took over stages around Europe and the USA between 1920 and 1925.

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Photo: Dansmuseet archives

In ten chapters written by art history professors, dance historians, music historians, theatre scholars and choreographers, the story about Ballets Suédois is told: Through the feuds with the Stockholm Opera, the scandals and the vicious gossip in the press. Through the art collections and painters that inspired and were inspired. Through historical views on the male body. Through the adventures of the female dancers. Through love, friendship, conflict and tragedy. Through financial troubles and the fierce competition with Ballets Russes. Through Paris, Stockholm and Copenhagen. Through experimental musical compositions and their influence on composers such as John Cage. Through the legacy they left behind for new generations of dancers and through a re-enactment of their Dadaistic piece *Relâche*.

Ballets Suédois were ahead of their times in many regards. Ballets Suédois were queer long before it was a notion in gender and LGBTQ research. Ballets Suédois created performance art long before the Fluxus movement introduced it to the art world in the 1960s. This book highlights their importance for modernism as well as following generations of artists, composers, choreographers, dancers, fashion designers and scholars.

Börlin's wish came true: Ballets Suédois lives on, it is eternal.

The book is published in collaboration with Arvinius + Orfeus Publishing for the 100th anniversary of Ballets Suédois. An extensive jubilee exhibition opened at Dansmuseet in connection to the book release. More info on dansmuseet.se/2020.



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