

The Cinesource site crashed in 2020 and the original content lost. Here is the text:

The screenshot shows the cineSOURCE website interface. At the top left is the logo 'cineSOURCE' with the tagline 'film, art and ideas for N. California'. Below the logo is the date 'November 6, 2018' and navigation links for 'advertise', 'subscribe', and 'contact'. A search bar is located at the top right. The main article title is 'The Harkness Ballet Was Camelot!' by Steven Middlestein. The article text discusses the Harkness Ballet's rise in 1964 and its disappearance. A photo shows Rebekah Harkness and Marjorie Tallchief. To the right are three video thumbnails: 'SONG CYCLE OF THE ANCIENT ROCK STARS', 'THE NATURE OF THE LORD OR PSALM 23', and 'Our Holocaust Vacation'. A sidebar on the left contains social media icons, a 'Subscribe' button, and links to 'our blogs', 'cineclips', and 'archives'.

It was Camelot!

The Harkness Ballet bursts onto the burgeoning global dance scene in 1964, when the young Joffrey Ballet company splits into two pieces over a power struggle for artistic control. Bold, brash and controversial, the Harkness revolutionized the way dance is taught and performed until it disappeared.

What happened to the Harkness Ballet, a company that produced two international touring companies, a youth ballet and its very own theater? Its training program sent more dancers into the world of professional dance than any other company of its time. And yet the name “Harkness Ballet” has been almost totally eliminated from books on dance history.

Filmmakers Leslie Streit and Robin McCain, working as Cinematiks, operate out of a live work space in the Bayview district of San Francisco. They decided to investigate what is one of the great artistic mysteries of the 20th century and make a documentary about it, “An American Ballet Story”. <http://www.anamericanballetstory.com/>

Although ballet history or ballet itself is often considered a little elitist, they found it a story they couldn't resist. How they came to this film is a story in itself starting in 2010

when ODC School in San Francisco hired Cinematiks to film a three-month workshop taught by Maria Vegh, the former co-director of the Harkness Ballet School, which grew into a longer project.

Maria Vegh talked incessantly about the Harkness Ballet and what it had accomplished. This was a world class company that had danced at the White House and performed for Princess Grace.

Although Streit grew up in New York City, she didn't see dance or dance herself until her late teens when she suddenly was smitten. Obsessed with ballet and the lives of its dancers she studied not only the art but everything related to it.

Their research first led the producers back to the Ballet Russe, the notorious Parisian troupe which toured the world between 1909 and 1929. Drawing on the Ballet Russe model of bringing together the great artists of their time to create spectacular productions, the Harkness Ballet employed the best minds of the 1960's in the worlds of dance, politics, journalism, Broadway, music, photography, visual art and design.

The Harkness dancers, choreographers, composers and designers were pioneers and experimenters. Themes of sexual repression, homoerotic love, tribalism and even the aftermath of rape were explored by some of the most famous choreographers of the era notably Brian Macdonald, Alvin Ailey, Stuart Hodes and Margo Sappington, whose pieces are highlighted in the film.

All of the work and much of the music was original. Modern dance, jazz dance, Spanish and Indian dance were taught at the school as well as a core Ballet curriculum based on principles of Kinesiology (how the body moves) rather than learning by imitation.

Founder Rebekah Harkness gave opportunities and scholarships to dancers and students no matter their race, heritage, body shape or background. Truly "dance for everybody" way ahead of its time. Both the company and the school reflected a diversity in line with the civil rights movement of the day—a fact that caused problems when they toured in the South.

Rebekah arranged and composed music, designed pointe shoes and established a foundation that still supports dance today. Her generosity to her dancers was legendary. Unfortunately, she was hated and maligned by powerful New York critics who sought to destroy her, particularly the critic Clive Barnes, who had a personal agenda and never let up.

Was it because Harkness was rich and powerful? Or simply because she was a woman? Was he attacking her personal taste and life style or the fact that she withdrew funding from the Joffrey Ballet, which he loved?

Alas his influence and vituperation were so great, and although the company was a sensation when they toured in Europe, New York audiences were forced to take sides.

The drama unfolded year by year, dance piece by dance piece. Stories about conspiracy theories and chaos within the company are revealed while the daring of the pieces and the excellence of the dancers emerge as the true legacy of the Harkness Ballet.

The first Harkness Ballet which began in 1964 with core members from the Robert Joffrey Ballet was disbanded in 1970 by Mrs. Harkness for many reasons which will be explored in the film. They were replaced by a second company whose dancers had been trained at the Harkness Ballet School.

By 1975 Rebekah Harkness fell on hard times and the bottom dropped out of her fortune. Despite drastic cutbacks, economizing, and even a last ditch attempt to solicit public funding she could no longer support a major Ballet company on her own. Donors were especially reluctant to give funds to a company that had received so many negative reviews by New York Times critic Clive Barnes and so the second company came to an end. The world had clearly changed, but the Harkness Ballet School continued to train dancers for another 10 years until it too closed.

Rebekah died in 1982. The key artists carried on with other companies, creating a post-Harkness dance world, while the Harkness Ballet's own accomplishments were buried behind hard-to-access archival walls and legal issues of rights ownership.

Many questions arise. How does funding effect art? Who owns art, creators or funders? Does art criticism determine success or is it "fake news"? Did the walls at the sumptuous Harkness House actually have ears?

Most importantly: What does it mean to artists working today?

"An American Ballet Story" went into production in 2015. There was little time for pre-production as the producers quickly learned that some of their planned interview subjects were dying of old age and other causes, so they dove in right away using their own money.

To date they've made three production trips to New York City, one to Florida, one to Cincinnati and three to Los Angeles. When they couldn't afford to travel somewhere, they experimented with sending DIY video kits in the mail to their participants. More than 70 former Harkness dancers, choreographers, composers, technicians and designers have been interviewed and the project is now in post production.

Their current plans are to not use a narrator. The film will unfold through the interviews with the people who were actually there. Each individual story will be a short stand-alone video with the collection of sequences building the overall film.

Marina Eglevsky, a former dancer, told them, "It was Camelot!" Andrea Cagan, another dancer who is now a bestselling author, remembered opening night at Harkness House. She looked up the stairs and saw Salvador Dali swooping down wearing a black cape

while carrying an ocelot on his shoulder. "...it was magnificent!" For many of the former Harkness artists it was the best time of their lives.

It has taken over three years to unearth archival film and video (video was rare in that era) and a growing collection of photos. Amazingly more films and photos keep showing up.

The film's score will feature works by music director Lee Gurst, a composer and musician who toured with Barry Manilow and Bette Midler. Additional music by Marga Richter, Michael Kamen and Mrs. Harkness herself will accompany archival dance footage. The first rough cut is due sometime in 2019.

Cinematiks has proved over and over during their more than twenty years in business that compelling video and media can be made on minuscule budgets. Their "VD 2001" is widely recognized as the first dramatic series on the web (1996-97); their "God Wears My Underwear" (2005), an experimental film about the Holocaust and memory has earned plaudits.

Most recently their feature documentary "Elly and Henry" (2017), concerns a love story about Holocaust survivors who built the first solar house in America. Distributed by Espresso Media International, it can be seen on Amazon and Amazon Prime. The "An American Ballet Story" website at <http://www.anamericanballetstory.com/> has 13 short video previews. Or visit An American Ballet Story on Facebook.