

# Anna pavlova and the dying swan drama essay



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A couple years ago I used to think that ballet was boring. I did not understand ballet as an art and did not recognize its classical and modern types. Dances like hip-hop, samba, rumba, cha-cha, tango, and disco appealed to me more. Once I tried ballet myself in the U. S., I realized that most of the great dancers learned ballet for a lengthy amount of time. I decided to take ballet classes and after a year I realized that ballet brings me indescribable joy and appeasement. I became interested in learning more about ballet itself and its famous dancers. One of such a dancer was Anna Pavlova, whose life story I am determined to tell. It is important to note Anna Pavlova's childhood and early ballet career in Russia, her debut in *The Dying Swan*, emigration to Europe, performances around the world, marriage, and death.

### **Childhood and early career:**

Anna Pavlova was born in St. Petersburg, Russia on a cold winter day of February 12, 1881. According to a New York Times article, when Anna was eight years old, her mother took her to a performance of “*The Sleeping Beauty*”. There, Anna experienced an epiphany, a baptism by ballet. From that day she knew, ballet was her future. At the age of ten, Anna Pavlova was admitted to the Imperial School of Ballet. Shortly after her acceptance to the Imperial School of Ballet, the exceptional gift of dancing was noticed in Anna Pavlova (Kent, 1996). At that time ballet was considered a court luxury and was one of the favorite entertainments of the late Czar. He would often visit the school to admire the little dancers, talking to them and sometimes telling jokes (Anna Pavlova Dies..., 1996).

In 1902 after her graduation from the Imperial School of Ballet, Anna Pavlova joined the Maryinsky Theater as a second soloist, and in the following year was promoted to a first soloist (“ The Legendary”, n. d.). Alexander Pleshcheyev, an author of the book “ Our Ballet” where he studied Petersburg Imperial Ballet Company, wrote about Anna Pavlova:

“ I recall the frail, slender, tall and lithe figure of a young, shy girl, with confused, deep eyes, in a dress of cornflower blue with a white pelerine and black pinafore -on holidays a white pinafore – but always with a quite starched skirt for magnificence . . . This was the student of the Imperial Theater School in Petersburg Anya . . . Annushka ... (as her friends called her) Pavlova, whose appearance was awaited on the stage of the Maryinsky Theater, where she was known on affiches as Pavlova II ...

Timid, trembling, lovely, like a wildflower, Pavlova II as a dancer just beginning subdued the public with her grace and tenderness. One sensed no physical exertion in her, and in those days, after the triumph on the Russian stage of Italian technical subtleties, every artist who appeared on stage was evaluated above all on technical abilities.”

Anna Pavlova had a favorite teacher and a mentor that was Enrico Cecchetti, an Italian dancer and a teacher who immigrated to St. Petersburg in his early age. Cecchetti taught at the Imperial School of Ballet from 1887 to 1902. In 1905 he established a school in St. Petersburg where he coached Anna Pavlova exclusively from 1907 to 1909 (“ Cecchetti, the teacher”, n. d.). With Cecchetti’s help, Anna Pavlova was promoted to ballerina in 1905, and prima ballerina in 1906 (“ The Legendary”, n. d.).

## **The Dying Swan:**

In 1905 Anna Pavlova, already a prominent ballerina, received an offer from a choreographer Michael Fokine to take the leading part in the ballet The Dying Swan to music by Saint-Saens. Later The Dying Swan became her signature solo performance and a swan symbolized with her as a personal emblem (Kent, 1996). The author, Allegra Kent, in her article argued that a woman imitating a swan is an absurd idea since the body parts do not match and the bird can be graceful only when it swims. The black and webbed swan's feet, with its shaky movements do not resemble the graceful and aesthetic motions of Anna Pavlova during The Dying Swan. Kent wrote that The Dying Swan was not about a woman impersonating a swan, instead it was about the fragility of life and the passion humans possess to hold on to it.

## **Emigration to Europe and travels:**

In 1907 Anna Pavlova's performances were seen abroad and in 1909 she danced in Diaghilev's famous first Russian season in Paris, France where Pavlova danced with Vaslav Nijinsky (Kent, 1996). Since then, Anna was honored to dance before Emperor Franz Josef of Austria, King Alfonso of Spain, Emperor Wilhelm of Germany, and the Queen of the Belgium (Anna Pavlova Dies... 1996).

In 1910 upon Anna Pavlova's return to Russia from her first American tour she was summoned to the royal box by the late Czar Nicholas to congratulate her. In one of the chronicles Anna Pavlova quoted the Czar telling her: " I so much regret that despite all I hear about your wonderful

swan dance I have never seen it. Yet I am called one of the absolute monarchs”(Anna Pavlova Dies..., 1996).

Anna performed throughout North and South America during the days of World War I. Her passion to dance and travel eventually brought Anna to Japan and India. In 1927 Anna went on another tour to the Scandinavian capitals, where King Christian presented her with a gold medal after seeing her performance in Copenhagen (Anna Pavlova Dies..., 1996). Circling around the world with her company, Anna Pavlova covered 350 000 miles and hence was named the most traveled of all artists at that time (“ Anna Pavlova Dies...”, 1996).

As time passed from her first debut Anna Pavlova’s repertoire grew and was influenced by foreign cultures and new styles of dance. Such influences were new choreographies and changes in classical ballet technique; for example the changes brought by Isadora Duncan, a rebel-dancer who initiated the creation of modern dance. However, Anna remained a more conservative classical dancer: in her company’s repertoire she kept ballet classics as Giselle and Sleeping Beauty. Anna had two popular signature pieces in her career; they were Bacchanale and The Swan (The Legendary..., n. d.).

### **Her Private Life and Marriage:**

In 1912 Anna Pavlova bought an expensive house in London, which bore the name Ivy House, where there was a pond and a garden. Since the dancer was fascinated by feathers and was fond of watching birds, Anna decided to have pet swans in her pool. Watching them, she believed, helped her to improve the mastery of her swan dance (Kent, 1996).

During her last American tour in 1924-1925, Anna Pavlova announced her marriage with Victore d'Andre, her accompanist. She commented on her marriage the following way: " For an artist there is no husband. Pavlova the artist and Pavlova the wife, they are two very different persons, so I keep them separate. My dancing belongs to the world, but my husband to myself" (Anna Pavlova Dies..., 1996).

### **Soviet Russia:**

During the Soviet time, Anna Pavlova was helping dancers in Soviet Russia by sending them financial aid. For 10 years Anna had been supporting dancers in London and Marianski Theater of Ballet in Leningrad by sending them an annual financial aid of \$500. In 1929 this information became known to the Bolsheviks. The small unofficial committee of three that managed the funds from Anna Pavlova was reprimanded for accepting aid from the emigrant dancer, a " darling of wicked capitalist audiences in Europe and America" (Anna Pavlova Dies, 1996).

### **Death:**

Anna Pavlova's death came suddenly. It was January 1931 when Anna took a three week vacation at Christmas to spend time with her family. At the end of her vacation Anna took a train to return to her work at the Hague. There was an accident that happened on the way, so Anna's train had to stop. Curious of what happened, Anna Pavlova wearing a light coat on top of silk pajamas stepped off the train into the snow. Shortly thereafter, Anna came down with double pneumonia (Kent, 1996). Two Dutch physicians and her own Russian doctor, Professor Valerski, fought to save the life of a great ballet dancer. The doctors performed an emergency operation to remove  
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excess fluid from Anna Pavlova's lungs. After the operation, the dancer was treated with Pasteur vaccine; however it was too late to cure Anna. Anna Pavlova died at 12: 30 in the morning on January 23rd, 1931 (Anna Pavlova Dies..., 1996). As Anna Pavlova was dying her last wish was to prepare her swan costume. The following evening when her company performed The Dying Swan, when it was Anna's part, the curtain opened to an empty stage.

## **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, Anna Pavlova the Russian ballet legend, from a very young age was almost destined to be a great dancer. When she was a very small girl she took an interest to ballet. At a very young age Anna was accepted to the prestigious imperial school of ballet. After being accepted to the imperial school of ballet, Anna quickly showed uncanny skill at the art of dance. Anna quickly reached the rank of ballerina and one year later to prima ballerina. As a ballerina, Anna was offered the chance to perform The Dying Swan with the choreographer Michael Fokine. In 1909, Anna Pavlova began performing abroad and travelled to many parts of the world performing in front of emperors, kings, queens, and Czars. Everywhere Pavlova went she was complemented by the noble elite she met. During the First World War, Anna performed her renowned plays in North and South America. Anna Pavlova was a highly classical dancer and stuck to the ideals of classical ballet even after the advent of modern dance. Later in 1912, Anna decided to buy an expensive house in London named Ivy House. Anna was so absorbed by swans that she had a few pet swans at her home. However, Anna Pavlova was not only a great dancer, she was a philanthropist, she donated money to the Marianski school of theater in Leningrad. She sent financial aid to

students of dance like herself back in Russia. At the time of Anna Pavlova's death, she was known from America to Asia and not merely famous, but infamous. She was a great dancer with a tragic end of life story. She was best known for her dance *The Dying Swan*, where she imitated the swan's movements more gracefully than any other dancer of her time. Although Anna Pavlova was honored to meet many famous people, all the people she met greeted her as a legendary dancer.