LESSONS IN MANAGEMENT
FROM THE FUNCTION OF AN ENDANGERED "GREEK DANCES THEATER"

The “Dora Stratou Greek Dances Theater" in Athens is an institution unique in its kind, with various activities, all of which are centered around dance. Its function makes it possible for the theories and practice of management to be explored and followed through, from the old way of life which has been efficient over the course of time in the human and social functioning of villages, up until today in the management of this establishment. As a theatre it differs from all other theatres, as a dance company it differs from all other dance companies.

1. The "Greek Dances Dora Stratou" Society

This Society was founded in 1953 by Dora Stratou who was its president until 1983. Mrs. Stratou had studied lyrical classical singing. As she was daughter of a former prime minister and sister of a minister, she succeeded in obtaining aid from the State and from private sources with the aim of creating a permanent theater for Greek dance. She was concerned about the preservation of village dances, which are numerous and specific in each village, in order to prove the continuity of Geek culture since the antiquity.
Most members of the Society are teachers at Greek or foreign universities. Among them are distinguished researchers who are studying traditional culture. The general assembly meets every three years to elect the 7 members of the governing board, and once a year to attend the board's report. The president of the board directs the Society, represents it and binds it. He is its president and managing director.
All members of the Society, as well as the members of the board and its president, are unpaid. After the departure of its founder due to old age in 1983, the Society experienced a period of decline and of financial difficulties that lasted several years. Since 1987 its president has been Alkis Raftis.

2. The activities of the Society

The main activity since its founding have been folk dance performances, principally given in an open-air theatre with 1,000 seats constructed especially for the Company, in authentic folk costumes. The stage was designed by the famous Greek painter Spiros Vassiliou.
Right in the centre of town but far from its noise, the troupe has found an ideal place for the presentation of the shows which convey the Greek soul at its best. The stage is very large, just like a village square or a dance field. From its inception a great number of costumes have been gathered so that the shows can take place.
Alkis Raftis has added new activities to the above: dance courses, publications and archives, as well as research.

3. The Dance Company

It is composed of 50 permanent dancers, 25 men and 25 women. When the troupe presents dances having a very specific style, such as from Crete or the Black Sea, dancers from that particular regions lead the group. Moreover, groups of villagers from various regions are often invited to dance. The Company also comprises 15 musicians who play various traditional instruments, and two singers, a man and a woman, who have a profound knowledge of village songs. The troupe is directed by a director who reports to the president of the Council. Until 1997 the troupe gave 9 performances a week, every evening plus 2 matinees - Wednesday and Thursday - during the summer months (May to September). Since that year, one evening per week has been free but eight performances are still given each week.

Every two weeks the program changes and dances from other regions are presented. In this way a range as large as possible is covered. In winter, all or part of the troupe performs sometimes outside Greece. The repertoire is large - around 80 villages, islands or regions can be presented, each with its correct costumes, music and dances. The total number of dances is around 200. For comparison, the repertoire of other folk dance groups is a dozen regions at the most.
A great number of personalities from the sciences and the arts have contributed to the conception of the performances. Ms. Stratou put the accent on quality, paying attention to details and to the faithfull adherance to traditional elements. She had realized that Greek dances are distinguished by their ritual aspect, rather than by their spectacular movements.
The basic steps are relatively simple because all people in a village are involved in the dancing. Those who are more skilled can produce more sophisticated movements but this does not prevent the less skilfull from participating. This concept has escaped most organizers of folk troupes, even today.
The style of execution - which varies from place to place - is most important and is difficult to reproduce. For a new dancer to acquire the local style, many years of dancing with good dancers and to good music are needed before it becomes a part of him. The leader of the dance line has a primordial role. When he is stemming from the village presented, he can interpret and transmit the particular style to the other dancers.
Most folk dance companies in the world have learnt dances from dance masters or choreographers who “adapt ancient dances to their own personality” and thus betray them in order to “make a spectacle out of tradition”. On the other hand, the Greek Dances Theater has aquired its repertoire by inviting groups of elderly villagers to dance on stage. Each time a village group is present, the troupe learns the dances and the music from them, by performing and practicing alongside them. These authentic experiences are filmed and preserved as a reference for carrying out the dances in the true tradition.

4. The costumes collection

By buying old costumes in villages over a 30-year period, the Dora Stratou Theater has been able to equip itself with the most important collection of its kind. 2,500 complete traditional costumes from all regions, plus a collection of folk jewellery, as well as a great number of various objects and accessories - shoes, masks, swords, scarves, belts, etc., all village-made.
The majority of these costumes can no longer be faithfully reproduced because the original materials and the craftsmen no longer exist. This collection of museum pieces is at the same time the wardrobe of the theatre.
Unlike exhibits in other museums, these costumes are in use. They come alive on stage and need maintenance and constant security. Around 1,000 costumes are shown in the performances during each season. The dancers learn how to wear them, how to tie scarves for the characteristic headgear of each region, and how to arrange them properly.
Two specialized wardrobe mistresses help the dancers to dress and they maintain the costumes, taking care of cleaning and repairs. Some costumes are extremely heavy, particularly those decorated with embroidery in gold thread.

5. Teaching

After the performances season, there are dance courses from October to April. Separate classes for beginners, advanced or children, as well as lectures and workshops for dance teachers presenting the culture of specific villages. Each dance course lasts for one and a half hour once a week for three months. As the number of participants is high (about 300) there are several courses every day. There are two instructors in each class, a man and a woman chosen among the senior members of the dance troupe.
Sometimes other dancers from the troupe take part in classes for their own pleasure. Recorded music chosen from the repertoire of the theatre is used. At the beginning of the course, each participant receives a cassette with the music and a folder with information about traditional dancing and customs; thus he can repeat at home. Other workshops are offered to leaders of folk groups. The subjects of these workshops are performance staging, teaching of folk dance, methodology of foeld research for the discovery of old dance customs.
Each Thursday evening takes place a lecture by a folklorist or other invited specialist. Subjects revolve around dance customs, music, costumes, and different aspects of dance. Entrance is free and the public discusses with the lecturer; they might continue with dinner at a nearby taverna. Sometimes istead of a lecture a group of amateur musicians is invited to play.
Gatherings for the presentation of a village are organised during weekends. The invited villagers present their dances, their costumes, their local culture. They dance, sing, play music, relate stories and discuss with the participants. They bring their old costumes, their photographs and their musical instruments. Sometimes they bring wine and local cooking to be enjoyed by all.
During the summer dance season, there are workshops on dance in English. Each one lasts a week, with 4 hours of dancing each afternoon, plus meetings and visits to folk art museums in the morning. These workshops allow people who do not speak Greek to familiarize themselves with the old village culture.

6. Archives and publications

By filming village groups who perform in the theatre, as well as by recording during field research trips, unique archives of a great size and importance have been assembled. These archives are used today to verify that the dances presented on stage reflect faithfully the original ones. A specialized library composed of 10,000 books and articles on dance, ethnography and other related subjects, also serves to support research.
The musical archives are equally rich. Field recordings as well as the collection of records of traditional music are continually enriched. They have enabled the Theater to issue the largest series of traditional records in existence - 45 records, LP and CD with songs and dances of all regions. Also, the Theater has published 20 books in several languages, postcards, programmes of shows, posters, videocassettes and teeshirts.
The administration, the costumes and the archives are housed in a 5-storey building in Plaka, the old town of Athens. It also houses a workshop for the maintenance of

costumes, a showroom and a lecture hall. The maintenance workshop is in charge of reproducing costumes - simpler copies of the originals for folk groups who order them.
In the same building are the offices of the Greek section of the International Organisation of Folk Art, a UNESCO non-government organization. Most Greek folklorists - more than 3,500 members - belong to this world-wide organisation which has sections in 160 countries.

7. Scientific research

The initial archives (films, recordings, photographs, notes, etc.) are now enriched by new research so that students can find in the same building a unique wealth of resources.
A study group for ancient Greek dance functions independently within the theatre, offering courses, workshops and exhibitions. Moreover, during the last few years more that 20 research projects have been carried out, using ethnographic or sociological methodology under the direction of professor Raftis. They comprise doctoral theses, postgraduate dissertations, diploma papers by students of Greek or foreign universities, as well as work by amateur folklorists.
Many students and researchers come to look for documentation or advice. Leaders of folk groups, as well as film directors, choreographers and costumes designers frequently ask for a variety of information.

8. Administrative principles of the theatre

Apart of the dance company (dancers, musicians and singers), the theatre staff is composed of the president & managing director, the theater director, two secretaries, a cashier and accountant, a wardrobe mistress and her 2 assistants, a sound and light technician, two watchmen (one for the building and one for the theatre) and a housekeeper. There are another two secretaries for the Greek section of the International Organisation of Popular Art.
The dance company rehearses on show nights from 20.30 till 22.00 with the musicians and singers. Then the performance lasts from 22.15 till 23.30.
In the administration of the company, similar principles are found to those which exist in the villages of old times. It would not be coherent to pattern the operation of this company along the lines of a classical dance company, since its objective is to present tradition as faithfully as possibly.
We will examine in turn: the hierarchy, the daily functioning, the informal character, the motivation and the departures, the globality of approach, the oral and physical culture, the importance of family bonds, the method of recruiting, the absence of job definition, the anonymous character, the versatility and multiplicity of activities, the salaries.

9. The hierarchy

What counts most in the troupe is seniority. The theatre director is also the most senior dancer. He was practically born in this theater - his father used to play music there.

Among female dancers as well as among male dancers, the senior ones are the first to chooses costumes and their place in the dance-line. The most senior members also settle arguments. Seniority is commensurate with years in the Theater, not with being a better dancer or with an appointed status.

10. The daily functioning

A lot of time is spent in each other's company - 3 hours a day during the summer months - plus time during the winter activities.
This group's life very much resembles village life. Families come with their children who play in the wings. The men talk among themselves about football, television programmes; they help each other with personal problems. The women talk apart about home; they exchange advice, and often dispute for the choice of costumes.
As in all work premises, alcohol is not allowed. On the other hand, no traditional musician or dancer can get into the right mood without a sip of ouzo. As a result the president avoids visiting the wings just prior to their coming out on stage...

11. The informal character

Formal structures are avoided, both for meetings and for decision making. Everyone talks to everyone in an informal fashion. Information circulates by word of mouth. A problem is discussed in an informal way and everyone will be involved little by little if he is inclined to. It suffices to transmit information orally to some persons and soon everyone will be informed.
There is no formal guidance for a new dancer. No one shows him how to dance. He learns by contagion, by following the others.

12. Motivation and departing

Those who are not getting on with the others leave on their own, no one is ever shown the door. As in a village, those who want to stay, stay. Naturally those who do not get on well with the others leave. It is their choice, bearing in mind the way they have been received initially.
To be a member of the troupe carries a high esteem in Greece, especially for men. It is not the case in classical or modern dance ensembles, which are a very competitive and individualistic milieu. Apparently, folk dancers value more the friendship and relationships woven among individuals.

13. The global approach

Everything is interrelated - dancing together, the pleasure of donning costumes, the music, friendship, the honour of preserving traditional culture, as well as personal relationships. Salaries are low, it is this togetherness that counts. Moreover, a good

dancer or a good musician is very much in demand by other groups, for teaching dance or for playing at feast days and weddings.

14. The oral and physical culture

Members of the troupe and the administrative personnel don't read much. A posted notice often remains unread. On the contrary, an announcement transmitted verbally is retained and passed on... verbally of course.
Lectures are attended by outsiders but rarely by members of the troupe. At first Alkis Raftis could not understand why. It took him some time to realize that the main point lies elsewhere for them. It lies in the physical activity of dancing, of playing an instrument, in singing, in interpersonal relationships rather than in lectures or discussions with experts.

15. The importance of family bonds

There are many families in the group. Many of the dancers are couples. Three generations are often together on stage - the grandfather, his daughter, his son-in-law and his grand-daughter for instance. It is inevitable that children from a very young age attend performances or play in the wings. Later they frequently become a part of the troupe. The dean of the troupe, a violinist, has been playing there since 1953!

16. The method of recruitment

Each year 5 or 10 dancers leave the troupe for personal reasons. Subsequently, there are openings for new members. But there are no auditions, much less recruitment on credentials.
In January the candidates present themselves. Often there are many of them, in the order of a good 100, attracted by the reputation of the troupe. They are invited to dance and members of the troupe watch them. The process is repeated several times a week for a month - perhaps two. A great number of them are discouraged when they compare themselves with the others. When there are about 20 left the senior dancers start making their choices. They find indirect ways to discourage those who are not very good, without upsetting them. By Easter the final selection is made, quite naturally, by this slow process of elimination of the less talented.
A dancer can consider himself confirmed as a full member of the troupe when he has participated in around 200 performances. As there are around 150 performances a year and a dancer does not participate in every one during the season, it can take him two years to feel permanently at home.

17. The absence of job definitions

It is interesting to compare the Greek Dances Theatre with other dance companies. There is no such thing as a dance master or choreographer in the company. There are no titles which put dancers into categories such as "star dancer", "first dancer" etc.

The company prides itself in the fact that its masters are the village dancers who have shown them dances from their own village directly. The dancers of the troupe, even those who are more senior and more competent, are happy to be pupils of the villagers.

18. The anonymous character

No names are mentioned, whether in the printed programme, at the entrance of the theater, or in announcements of performances. In the same way as the names of the inhabitants are not posted at the entrance of a village. Dancers are not "divas".
The only name which appears is that of the founder in the title of the theatre. The team members are anonymous as a group of people inspired by common objectives - to live in the spirit of tradition, to show respect for their grandfathers' songs, music and dance, whatever they have been or still are in each particular place.

19. Versatility and multiciplicity of activities

When a guard is absent a dancer keeps the gate in his place. When the technician is indisposed the director shows his competence in this area taking charge of the lights and the sound (he is a trained electrician). Every person in the theater, except office staff, has a morning job. They have all kinds of professions: One violinist is shopkeeper, the other is a shoe repairer, a clarinetist sells insurance, the santouri player is an accountant. Several dancers are students, one is a medical doctor, another is a hairdresser. A singer who is blind (the blind were reputed to be excellent singers since the antiquity) is a telephonist.
This does not stop them from being engaged outside to play music or sing at feast days or weddings...or to give dance lessons to a neighborhood troupe.

20. Compansation

This is very modest - in the order of 6 dollars a day for a newcomer. This is just enough to pay for a coffee and transport to and from the theatre. An experienced dancer can receive 15 dollars a day. Musicians and singers are paid in the order of 20 dollars per day. Everyone is paid whether he appears on stage that day or not. The theater does not have sufficient income to offer better compensations. As in a village, everyone is kept by the means that the community disposes, divided as equitably as possible.
When the troupe is on tour, the compensation is higher - two to three times the normal one. This depends on the payment given by the host institute, which is related to the cost of transport and living on the trip. Hence the problems arising when "the family" wants to travel in full; the group wants to stay together.
Opportunities for musicians to perform at village celebrations or family gatherings, rather than in the theater, are very tempting. A musician or a singer can earn 10 to 20 times more, since each time someone requests a song or a dance tune he pays for it.

21. Lessons in management

What have we to learn today from the functioning of this theatre?
Let us take for example as a reference the recent and excellent book of John Farson, which proposes "some essential principles of management" (33 principles). One can equally refer to Peter Drucker, who is probably the most well-known international expert in management, and to I. Nakouchi, President & General Director of a big corporation. They have written together one of the most beautiful books of thoughts for the year 2000.
Finally the book "Quel travail pour demain?" (What work for tomorrow?) by Oscar Ortsman runs also partly along the same lines as the management methods of the Greek Theatre.
One can return now to most of the subjects which have been covered in presenting the way of this theatre functions: the hierarchy, the daily operation and the informal character, the motivation, the globality of approach, the oral culture, the method of recruitment, the absence of job definitions, the anonymity, the family spirit and the long-term approach, the versatility and the multiplicity of activities of evryone, the salary.

22. Hierarchy: the importance of seniority

Farson maintains that one should not concentrate on training for the accumulation of knowhow and of techniques which lead to an extra load of responsibilities, often conflicting, but in education, that is in the "maturing" of information and of understanding (30th management principle).
Is it not this that leads to seniority? Companies who get rid of their senior staff too early often deprive themselves of a welath that cannot be recovered by training those who remain. They lack this "maturing" that comes with time only.

23. The daily functioning and the informal character of relationships

Farson puts the accent on the importance of relationships between members of the company (3rd principle): "What counts is not so much what we do, but what we are". The group's life is just as intense and as diversified as that in the villages and must be kept alive in the company with this richness of informal relationships.

24. Motivation

For P. Drucker and I. Nakauchi there is an urgent need to remobilize employees at the base - the most ordinary people - to make them efficient again. We invite these two managers to meet the dancers, singers, musicians, wardrobe staff, and technicians of the Greek Dances Theater. These people would aid them to find ways to meet their objectives.

25. The global approach

In his book "What work for tomorrow?" Ortsman presents an approach of change in work organisations which puts the accent on the globality of problems to be solved - the "mirror approach". This approach consists, after individual interviews, in defining and discussing with personnel the principal problems of the company in their global and complementing nature. It is only afterwards that work groups will be formed to resolve the more serious problems.
Dealing with a problem - for example the organisation of work in one unit of the company - does not necessarily mean that only this aspect of the functioning is looked at by this unit. It is often necessary to start by enlarging the field of investigation and discussion with all parties of the company concerned.

26. The oral culture

As Farson writes in the chapter entitled "The more we communicate, the less we communicate" (9th management principle), the point is interactions between people, the advice of colleagues, their opinions, their interpretations - and not necessarily the time of formal communication with complete tables of statistics and an impressive amount of data.

27. The method of recruitment

One sees in the SAAB factory, whose work organisation is well described in "What work for tomorrow?", methods of recruitment in semi-autonomous groups which are of the same nature as those in the Greek Dances Theatre. The new members are integrated into a test work group where, not until after long practice, firstly the workers (not the specialized recruiters) accept or not the applicants.

28. Absence of job definitions, anonymity, sense of family and long-term conscience

Farson calls one of his chapters "To be a professional, one must be an amateur" (31st management principle). In this chapter he puts the accent on the existence within the company of a “sense of community", of the existence of “a deep feeling of unity, a camaraderie".
A "oneness" is formed which is not about distinguished "stars", the most marked differences which would prevent the formation of one family. For him, this community is difficult to build and easy to destroy. He writes: "Community is one of the most powerful but also most fragile concepts in the development of a company”. The dimension of long-term inherent in this community is at the same time different to that which one usually finds in a company. The time factor in a company is based on the notion of contract - it has a beginning and an end. the best example is a project.

In the Greek Theatre it involves a "history" which is rooted in the distant past and projects itself by descendants into the future. This enlarged family stretches in time and is prolonged infinetely. This idea of a strongly rooted and anonymous line of descent is understood when one realizes by which ancestral culture this Greek theatre is impregnated...

29. The versatility and multiplicity of everyone's activities

In "What work for tomorrow?" it is well shown that companies performing best put the accent on the versatility and multiplicity of everyone's activities. The present-day evolution towards a more flexible work time will necessarily accentuate this tendancy.

30. Salary

In our changing world one can no longer take the salary as the only form of recognition in a company, and the only compensation for being invoved in work. It is the whole of compensations attached to the salaried activities that apparently need rethinking.

31. The cultural bid for the "living" conservation of traditional dance

As Alkis Raftis writes in the introduction to his book "The world of Greek dance":
"*There is probably no other country in Europe where national dances are still present and integrated in daily life as they are in Greece. In countries which have a large number of folklore groups, conserving the old ways is more likely. In reality, in the performances that these groups give, it is rare to find local inhabitants who can still dance in the proper fashion for their area when dances are performed on feast days, at weddings, or in taverns. But this does still happen in Greece. The happiness at a wedding is intense when the married couple leads the dance. This still happens and there is no reason to think that it is in danger.*
Discotheques are on the increase, the waltz and tango are on the way out, ballet and modern dance are losing ground, but Greek dance is solidly maintained. More than everywhere else, dance for Greeks remains a factor of conservation of the national identity. In the United States, thousands of young people of Greek origin speak Greek reasonably well, but can faithfully carry out the dances of their ancestors.
Nevertheless with this optimistic view there are shades of doubt.
Greek dance is not only spread out geographically. There are several different kinds of repertoires, different in content, in the public who use them, and in the conditions under which they are executed and transmitted. In the past the dance which we can say is traditional in the full sense of the word, is that which is found in the village, inherited by rural generations who came before them, and passed on from father to son until today. Other kinds have either been forgotten or have been made up. We acknowledge them as folklore, the dances given in shows: modern popular, those which we see in taverns accompanied by the clarino, the lyra, and the bouzouki. A tourist dance called the syrtaki fits into this category.

All these last ones quoted which are of this type show Greek dance as continuing to live and to flourish.
Traditional dances on the other hand are in danger. Their days are numbered, because only the elderly in the village are the undisputed holders.
At the beginning of the century Greece had a very rich heritage. It has been dwindling. since then. Those who appreciate its beauty see with sorrow that the time is approaching when it will no longer exist.
Traditional architecture has suffered the same fate - the protection of early buildings from past ages is a recent measure.
If we do not find a solution, our dances will soon be like concrete, and those who endeavour to study their different types, more or less faithfully recording them, will be able to say, as the ethno-musicologist Samuel-Baud-Bauvy has written in his treatise on Greek music, "It is as if one were performing an autopsy."

32. Conclusion

It is quite true that the annual income of the theatre only just covers expenses. On the one hand, in order to safeguard its independence the theatre refuses to compromise with some offers of national funds which are often given in return for favours - various requests, for example, imposing such and such recruitment, which can be seen to be political. Thus, the grants received by this theatre are clearly inferior to those received by other organisations of spectacles in Greece.
On the other hand, the receipts coming from tickets (about 10 dollars per seat) cannot be increased when compared with of other shows. At the same time the number of spectators tends to decrease since they are composed of approximately 80% by tourists. Tourists more and more bypass Athens as there are numerous direct flights to other cities or islands in Greece.
There has been an attempt to obtain grants from the EU under the guidance of a prestigious Minister for Culture, Melina Mercouri. the famous actress. But the authorities in Brussels have refused: the theatre only shows Greek dances. It would have to show dances from all countries in the community to have the right to European aid. Here is, therefore, a very original institute which is in danger in the long term.
The original and particular management of the Greek Dances Theatre is certainly the reason for
- the high quality of its productions
- the capacity to carry out in a harmonious manner a multitude of activities such as performances, training, research, archives and publications
- the involvement of everyone in the carrying out of a common task
- the long-time existence of this institution.

It would be a pity if financial difficulties were the cause for the decline of this institution. The Greek Dances Theatre deserves better than this. After all, if it is true that this theatre is evidence primarily of the Greek culture, is it not then justified in presenting this culture for humanity, a culture so important within the European heritage, and further as a part of the Greek-Latin world?