

Trudy Goth

Go to the *Life on the move*

Law No. 517 of 1942 sanctioned “the exclusion of Jewish elements from the field of entertainment” in Italy. Trudy and her mother had left for the United States in September 1938, because, in addition to being artists, they were also foreign Jews. They left Florence where they had been living since 1923, that is, since Trudy was ten years old. A photographer and a dancer, Trudy was wealthy and talented and wanted to set up a Dance school in Florence. She established the Choreographers’ Workshop in New York, danced at the Jacob’s Pillow Dance center, and always explored new possibilities and cultivated artistic contacts, which she tried to propose in her first Teatro, but in vain. She became an American citizen in 1945, at age 32, but continued to declare herself a Florentine by adoption, despite everything.

Budapest, Berlin, Florence: a life in music

Trudy was born in Berlin on 31 May 1913 to Ernő Góth and Gisela (henceforth Gisella) Schlesinger; she was the only child of a wealthy Jewish family. Her destiny seemed to be inextricably linked to classical music: both parents, Hungarians from Budapest, were active, in various capacities, in the Mitteleuropean music scene of the early twentieth century. While her father’s name is little known nowadays (he is remembered only for having authored the libretto of *The Tenor*, a comic opera composed by Ernő Dohnányi in 1927), the name of her mother, Gisella Selden-Goth (1884-1975), née Schlesinger, is well known for she was a musicologist, a pianist, a composer, and a sophisticated organizer of cultural events, close to many of the leading figures of the time in the arts.

It was with her mother that Gertrude, called Trudy by all, left for Italy in the fall of 1923, at the age of ten. In the spring of 1925, Gisella bought a beautiful late-19th-century two-story villino with a garden in Florence at Via Michele di Lando 5, in the upper-bourgeois neighborhood of Viale Michelangelo, a part of the Viale dei Colli

promenade¹. In addition to the “Selden-Goth” villino, where she used to host gatherings mainly open to musicians, widowed Gisella also bought a small house in Procchio, on the island of Elba: “Villa La Triglia” may not have seen guests as prestigious as those invited to the Florentine mansion, but it welcomed Trudy and her mother for long and happy periods.

The Florence where mother and daughter took up residence in the 1920s and 1930s was a bustling city². These were also the years in which Florentine fascism was turning from squadristism, and the violence that had characterized it, to a “respectable and reassuring” appearance³. To support this effort, in the wake of recently established institutions such as the Institute for the Italian Encyclopedia, the Royal Academy of Italy, the National Institute of Fascist Culture and especially the Music, Cinema and Theater sections of the Venice Biennale,⁴ the establishment of a major cultural institution would offer a sophisticated propaganda tool, and would also please the rampancy of some leading figures in the party and civil society. The former squadrist Alessandro Pavolini (1903-1945) presented himself as an interpreter of “the fascist regime’s need to offer *panem et circenses* (bread and leisure suitably differentiated) to the diverse citizenry, to the upper and educated and the lower classes alike”⁵. Pavolini played a prominent role in the development of the Teatro Comunale and the Maggio

¹ See District notarial archives of Florence (ANDFi), “Atto di vendita-compra ai rogiti Notaio Vittorio Vitelli del 9 aprile 1925 (Rep. n. 7782)”, recorded in Florence on 15 April 1925. See Claudio Paolini’s entry on the building included in *Repertorio delle architetture civili di Firenze* <<http://www.palazzospinelli.org>> (accessed 25 July 2023).

² See Marco Palla, *Firenze dalla prima guerra mondiale al fascismo: contesto storico della nascita del Maggio Musicale*, in Moreno Bucci and Giovanni Vitali (eds.), *1933-2003 Le ragioni di un festival. Nascita e ambiente culturale del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino*, “Antologia Vieusseux”, 28, 2004, monographic issue, pp. 21-26.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴ “For Mussolini [...] festivals constituted a great opportunity to hide the fundamentally petty, xenophobic and closed-minded nature of his dictatorship, and to show tolerance towards people and tendencies manifestly opposed to the principle of blind obedience, on which any dictatorial regime is based”. Cf. Harvey Sachs, *I Festivals degli anni Trenta: le ragioni del regime*, *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵ M. Palla, *Firenze dalla prima guerra mondiale*, cit., p. 24. Cf. Giovanni Teodori, *Pavolini Alessandro*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 81, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2014 <<https://www.treccani.it>> (accessed 10 August 2023).

musicale fiorentino; likewise, the commitment of Marquis Luigi Ridolfi (1895-1958), who was among the founders of the Amici della musica and the secretary of the National Fascist Party until 1929, when Pavolini took over from him, and of writer Carlo Delcroix (1886-1977), a Fascist deputy from 1924 to 1943, was decisive⁶. Even within this small group of promoters, the circumstances surrounding the music institution appeared to be uncertain: Ridolfi and Pavolini, “well aware of the political effect of a heightened cultural policy of repute, also had a sincere inclination toward the cultural world and supported the creation of the Orchestra board and an international festival”, and disagreed with Delcroix’s autarkical positions.⁷ Their intervention, however, would not suffice: the expertise and prestige of conductor and composer Vittorio Gui, who had founded the Stabile orchestrale fiorentina in 1928 and was highly respected in Italy and abroad, was needed. As a signatory of the Manifesto of antifascist intellectuals, Gui was not among the artists liked by the regime; his presence in the group of the early organizers of the Maggio fiorentino was sufficient to “cast doubt on the thesis of an autonomous initiative by the fascist provincial federation”⁸.

In 1936, Mario Labroca was called in to replenish the by then severely impoverished coffers of the institution. He served as superintendent until May 1944 and was the main executor of the Maggio’s artistic policy: on the one hand, he successfully opposed the demagogic campaigns conducted by the local press, which demanded a less costly festival, more aligned with the cultural directives of the regime; on the other hand, he imparted a direction which was far removed from the experimentation

⁶ See the entries by Alessandra Martinelli, *Ridolfi Luigi*, *ibid.*, vol. 87, 2016 <<https://www.treccani.it>> and Albertina Vittoria, *Delcroix Carlo*, *ibid.*, vol. 36, 1988 <<https://www.treccani.it>> (accessed 20 August 2023), respectively.

⁷ Johannes U. Müller, *Alberto Passigli, la Stabile Orchestrale e la nascita del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino*, in M. Bucci and G. Vitali (eds.), *1933-2003*, *cit.*, p. 67.

⁸ About Gui’s role, also see H. Sachs, *I Festivals degli anni Trenta*, *cit.*, p. 30. The study of the documents of the Fondo Vittorio Gui, held at the Central National Library of Florence, which will not be accessible until 2025, will prove particularly useful in this regard.

and avant-garde artistic expression which, at least in its early years, the Maggio seemingly pursued⁹.

In the cultural and political environment where Gisella Selden-Goth and her daughter found themselves, because of its natural proximity to gymnastics and physical practices, dance seemed likely to become the most advanced means to spread a new culture of the body that would be at the core of an authentically fascist anthropological revolution¹⁰.

At the school of Angiola Sartorio

Not even 20 years old, Trudy exhibited a passion for artistic photography. Two still lifes that she published in 1933 in "Domus", the prestigious magazine founded by Gio Ponti and Giovanni Semeria, are evidence of this passion: next to two snapshots that Trudy

devoted to everyday objects (a plate, some nut kernels, a knife) are some shots by the young Florentine photographer Fosco Maraini. Son of an English woman, he was of the same age as Trudy, had lived in Hungary, and would later become a famous scholar of Asian cultures¹¹. Trudy's ties with the Teatro Comunale stem from photography on the occasion of the first edition of the Maggio musicale fiorentino: it is indeed to her that we owe an intense portrait of Andreina Pagnani wearing the stage clothes for *Rappresentazione di Santa Uliva*, directed by Jacques Copeau with music by Ildebrando Pizzetti and staged in the cloister of the Basilica of Santa Croce in

⁹ On the person and role of Mario Labroca, see Fiamma Nicolodi, *Il Maggio ed i Festivals musicali italiani fra le due guerre*, in M. Bucci and G. Vitali (eds.), *1933-2003*, cit., pp. 33-48. See also Moreno Bucci, *Le carte di un teatro. L'Archivio Storico del Teatro Comunale di Firenze e del "Maggio Musicale Fiorentino" 1928-1952*, inventory edited by Maria Alberti and Chiara Toti with the collaboration of Benedetta Ridi, Florence, Olschki, 2008, pp. XVI-ff.

¹⁰ F. Nicolodi, *Il Maggio*, cit., pp. 92-94.

¹¹ Cf. "Domus", XI, 64, April 1933, p. 202. Cf. Domenico De Martino, *Maraini Fosco*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 69, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2007 <<https://www.treccani.it>> (accessed 10 August 2023).

June 1933¹².

Trudy established a closer relation with the Teatro Comunale through the choreographer Angiola Sartorio, who had trained in Germany at the school of Rudolf Laban and was a member of the company of the famous Kurt Jooss. Since Jooss had declined the offer to form a corps de ballet in Florence, the top management of the institution entrusted Sartorio with this task. By an agreement reached in April 1934, Angiola Sartorio “undertakes to perform, by means of the necessary and suitable personnel for the purpose, with a minimum number of 16 male and female dancers [...], the choreography and dance required in the operas that will be staged at the Teatro Comunale V. E. [Vittorio Emanuele] II in the upcoming opera season”¹³.

Trudy Goth was among the dancers in the ensemble directed by Sartorio as is attested by a request, dated April 1935,¹⁴ from the leadership of the Teatro Comunale to get identification cards for nine female students and two male students. In Sartorio’s School, dance was taught “not so much as a way to control the body and its emotions, that is, following a classical ballet approach, which was favored, not surprisingly, by dictatorships [...], but rather as a search for identity and expression”¹⁵. Only two years later, Trudy was in the cast of the four ballets of the Maggio musicale that, created by Sartorio herself and conducted by Mario Rossi, were staged at the Teatro della Pergola on 29 May 1937¹⁶. The ballets earned the appreciation of some critics in the field: the journalist of the German monthly “Der Tanz” called Sartorio a “poetess of dance”, and characterized the company’s lineup as “masterful”¹⁷.

¹² Teatro della Pergola of Florence, *Fondo fotografico Andreina Pagnani*, photo by Trudy Goth, 16 April 1933. The photo can be viewed at <<https://artsandculture.google.com>> (accessed 8 August 2023).

¹³ Historical archives of the Maggio musicale fiorentino (ASMMF), b. 65, f. 105.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, b. 95, f. 1. On letterhead paper “Scuola di Danza, direzione Angiola Sartorio”, 18 April 1935. Judging from their last names, five of the nine ballerinas were not Italian.

¹⁵ According to Patrizia Veroli, Sartorio’s was the only school in Italy using this approach. See P. Veroli, *Sperimentazioni moderniste e conformismi ideologici. Il Maggio e la politica della danza 1933-1944*, in M. Bucci and G. Vitali (eds.), *1933-2003*, cit., p. 97.

¹⁶ ASMMF, b. 121, f. 348/1. The program lists Trudy Goth’s specific roles.

¹⁷ Cf. P. Veroli, *Sperimentazioni*, cit., p. 99.

However,

that evening was the only opportunity that Sartorio was granted to stage her own works. The authorities of the Florentine theater considered them not consistent with “authentically fascist” objectives; thus, the four choreographies – *Primavera* based on the concerto by the same title from Vivaldi’s *Quattro stagioni*, *Intermezzo* on music by Virgilio Mortari, *Il pesce turchino* on music composed by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, and finally *Barabau* on a score by Vittorio Rieti – went essentially unnoticed¹⁸. Although the School board (of which Castelnuovo-Tedesco was a member, among others) had complained with Ridolfi about the little space that had been given to Sartorio,¹⁹ even the artistic director Labroca treated her worse than coldly, inviting her only “to follow the provisions of the contract, and avoid discussions, hearings etc. that at a busy time like the present, cause to waste time and do not benefit our good relations”²⁰.

A few months later, it was the young dancer Goth who, in a dense correspondence with Mario Labroca in October 1937, put her candidacy forward as organizer, artistic advisor and curator. In a deferential yet confidential tone and signing only with her first name,

Trudy suggested names and addresses, and offered her opinions on male and female dancers whom, in the name of “*l’art pour l’art*”, she proposed to recruit to form “a quite exceptional corps de ballet”²¹. Not only that; she also submitted a project of her own – not devoid of rhetoric and homage to Mussolini – to establish an “Italian national school of the art of dancing in Florence”, which would remedy a fact of “considerable gravity”, namely, as the Hungarian citizen lamented, the need to “always have to go abroad to recruit first-rate artists”.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

¹⁹ ASMMF, b. 95, f. 190. The same document includes a comparison with Jia Ruskaja.

²⁰ ASMMF, b. 127, f. 202, M. Labroca to A. Sartorio, 1 May 1937.

²¹ *Ibid.*, b. 149, f. 45. Cf. the letter from T. Goth to M. Labroca, 18 October 1937.

Before any other City, Florence had a famous School, and among the glories of classical ballet shines that of Taglioni, who was educated in Florence and brought honor to Italian dance all over the world. Now all of our great Cities value those institutions, which in the past held their civil and cultural standards high. By the will of the Duce everything that Italians have been able to do in every time and in every age is illustrated and restored, drawing the admiration of other countries. [...] The proposal basically wants to achieve nothing other than that the art of dance, undisputed homegrown glory, gains new impetus, without the need to involve foreign artists²².

The project, undated but with a reference to the year 1936, included a budget and a 5-year educational program with five teachers for twenty students and an annual examination.

In the meantime, Trudy was apparently performing assistant duties in Sartorio's School, at least in 1938²³. But this was a very brief experience.

Jews in the entertainment industry

The interference of the fascist organs in the life of the theater became more pressing: this is evidenced in the documents held in the institution's archives, among which one finds numerous recommendations for musicians that the National Fascist Party sent to the leadership of the institution, for example, the recommendation from the Fascio of Predappio, Mussolini's birthplace, for a double bass player about whose musical skills nothing was said, but who had been "a Fascist since 1922"²⁴.

In early September 1938, the royal decrees "for the defense of the race" – and among the first ones, the **Provisions relating to foreign Jews** of 7 September – mandated that the Jews, who had arrived in Italy before 1919, left the country within six months. As we have seen, there were numerous foreigners on the staff of the Florentine theater, and among them were also Jews such as Trudy Goth. In the historical archives of the

²² Ibid., b. 149, f. 51/2, T. Goth, "Una Scuola nazionale italiana dell'arte della danza a Firenze. Lavoro per l'esame dell'anno 1936", undated.

²³ Ibid., b. 149, f. 291.

²⁴ Ibid., b. 172, f. 102, the secretary of the Fascio of Predappio, Aurelio Moschi – Rachele Mussolini's brother-in-law – to the president, 28 December 1928. See also *ibid.*, b. 172, f. 47, f. 88 and f. 92.

Teatro Comunale, no list or other documentation has been found regarding verification of the staff's belonging to the so-called "Jewish race".

Yet, some census did occur, even if the relevant documentation appears to be missing. A typewritten "Personal Card", with "Città di Firenze. Ente autonomo del Teatro comunale V.E. II" (City of Florence. Board of the Municipal Theater V.E. II) imprinted, was found among the archival papers related to the series "orchestra". Employees had to fill it out and sign it, declaring their personal information, their father and mother and their job title and rank, and answering eight questions about their membership in the Jewish race, their membership in the Israelite community, their religious denomination, any conversion, and the racial affiliation of their spouse and children. The document that was found, out of how many we do not know, also shows the two holes typical for insertion in a binder. It was signed by a woman, professor of violin at the theater, Italian, age 55; she included the date, 18 November 1938, in her handwritten statement on the back of the card that she had diligently compiled²⁵. Thus, it appears that the implementation of a survey of the staff to be classified as Jewish occurred immediately, without waiting for [Law 517 of 19 April 1942](#), which sanctioned the exclusion of the Jews from the performing arts sectors, by prohibiting the representation, recording and performance of any work created with the contribution of Italians and foreigners belonging to the Jewish race, including stateless people, and even those who had been "discriminated" (i.e., those to whom the authorities had granted the exemption from some racial provisions). The law, published in the "Gazzetta ufficiale" of 28 May 1942, was issued belatedly compared to the first measures "for the defense of race". However, it prohibited everything, including the sale of records, and affected everyone, including dubbers, scriptwriters, and technical and administrative staff in the entertainment industry.

²⁵ Ibid., b. 172, f. 202 and f. 202/1, personnel card by Evelina Arias, married Ugolini, violinist, who on the back declared: "although I do not profess any religion, my feelings have always been Catholic". It is unclear whether she was related to Professor [Gino Arias](#), a fascist Jew who converted to Catholicism before the racial laws and was expelled from the University of Florence.

Unfortunately Trudy Goth's personnel file could not be found, nor could that of the Jewish Angiola Sartorio, who obtained a temporary visa for the United States in December 1938 and arrived in New York the following January. After her escape, her "School of Dance of the City of Florence", founded at the end of 1933, was dissolved, undermined too by severe financial problems, of which the city tax collector also notified the Teatro. The latter declined to take charge²⁶. Beginning in 1940, the choreographies of the fall opera seasons were assigned to Avia De Luca, a pupil of that Jia Ruskaja whose sudden rise to the stage empyrean was essentially due to the rhetoric of her dance, which "adopted a fascist gender politics, centered on the two complementary myths of man's virility and woman's grace"²⁷. Only Aurel Milloss (1906-1988), a Hungarian trained at Laban's school and capable of balancing out modernism and classical rhetoric, seemed to represent an alternative to the prevailing conformism: he was entrusted with the choreographies of the most prestigious operas²⁸.

In the United States: from the stage to writing

Trudy had left even before Sartorio; she too went to the United States. She left on 1 September 1938 with her mother a few days before the enactment of the anti-Jewish laws. They had obtained their visas as early as mid-June, even before the publication of the *Manifesto degli scienziati razzisti* on 14 July. The two of them had already been in New York ten years earlier, when Trudy was 15: on 28 September 1928, they had landed there on the steamer Roma. To the officers in charge of controlling the

²⁶ From the summonses that the City Tax Collector's Office in Florence also delivered to the Teatro Comunale, Angiola Sartorio was found to owe a total of 46,129.75 liras, but attempts to obtain these sums from the Teatro were rejected for "the Teatro Comunale V.E. Il neither holds nor owes any sum to Sartorio Angiola, daughter of the deceased Aristide" (ASMMF, b. 216, ff. 373-374).

²⁷ In P. Veroli, *Sperimentazioni*, cit., p. 101.

²⁸ See Gino Tani, *Il Balletto e l'opera di Aurelio M. Milloss al Maggio musicale fiorentino*, Florence, Salani, 1977, and Patrizia Veroli, *Milloss Aurelio*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 74, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2010 <<https://www.treccani.it>> (accessed 8 August 2023).

arrivals, they had indicated Aldo Olschki – Leo’s last son and co-heir with his brother Cesare of the publishing house – as their closest friend in their country of origin²⁹. But at the time, that was a trip “for pleasure”, according to what they declared upon landing. Quite different was the crossing on the *Saturnia* from Trieste to New York. The arrival on 15 September 1938 represented a turning point. As a reference they indicated Herbert Schlesinger, Trudy’s maternal uncle in Switzerland; as a destination address they reported the Mayflower Hotel on Central Park West, which was then located between W 61st and W 62nd Streets³⁰. They had a temporary visa – for just 60 days that had been corrected to 6 months – but they certainly did not plan to return to Italy and Europe anytime soon. A little over a month after their arrival, after settling down at 19 West 69th Street, her mother decided to entrust the management of her properties in Italy to someone she trusted. On 17 October 1938, Gisella Selden-Goth signed a general power of attorney to Aldo Olschki at the office of notary Joseph Drago³¹. To obtain a permanent visa, Trudy traveled to Havana and she declared to be an immigrant from Cuba to the United States in Miami, Florida, on 11 April 1939; she signed her declaration of intention on 8 May 1940³².

According to a report in “The New York Times”, she studied journalism at Columbia University, but no records in her name are known to Columbia’s Office of the Registrars, which is tasked with their preservation³³. She began to collaborate with

²⁹ Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search, ad nomen* <<https://heritage.statueofliberty.org>> (accessed upon registration 9 August 2023). The travel is recorded under the name of Gertrude Goth.

³⁰ Ibidem; the Ellis Island Foundation records list this journey under the names of Gertrud Goth and Gisella Selden-Goth. About the hotel, which has now moved elsewhere, see Laurie Paonessa and Clio Admin, *Hotel Mayflower (1926-2004)*, in *Clio: Your Guide to History*, 28 August 2021 <<https://theclio.com>> (accessed 9 August 2023).

³¹ The mandate of general power of attorney dated 1938 is attached to ANDFi, “Atto di compra-vendita ai rogiti Notaio Edilio Ritzu del 31 gennaio 1948 (Rep. n. 4022)”, recorded in Florence on 17 February 1948, with which Aldo Olschki sold the Selden-Goth villino to Ernesto Simondetti.

³² New York, U.S., *State and Federal Naturalization Records*, Trudy Goth, “Declaration of Intention”, New York 8 May 1940, accessible at <<https://www.ancestry.com>> (accessed upon registration 8 August 2023).

³³ This piece of information is found in Trudy Goth’s obituary in “The New York Times”, 14 May 1974, <<https://www.nytimes.com>> (accessed 9 August 2021). We extend special thanks to Jocelyn K. Wilk and other archivists at Columbia University for verifying the information. Trudy’s name does not even

some magazines in the industry, taking her first steps in dance criticism. It was in the curatorship of complex artistic projects that Trudy seemingly wanted to establish herself: in just a few years she managed to offer herself as an organizer and a manager, showing a striking ability to establish relationships and serving as a point of contact between performers, choreographers, musicians, and scholars.

She also put this aptitude to good use in facilitating, in 1939, the escape from Europe of Claudia Vall, a Jewish dancer originally from Zagreb who had moved from Vienna to Florence at Sartorio's invitation. Claudia Vall recalled that it was Trudy Goth who made the arrangements regarding her move, with legal paperwork as a member of the ensemble that was to stage a Mozart opera in Cuba³⁴.

Jacob's Pillow Dance and the 92Y

Beginning in the 1940s, Trudy was in contact with Ted Shawn (1891-1972), a pioneer of American modern dance, founder with his wife Ruth St. Denis of the Denishawn School, and teacher of Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. Since 1930 Shawn had been renovating a dilapidated farmhouse in the suburbs of Becket, Massachusetts, and had made it the headquarters of his "Men Dancers", an all-men company with which he wrote memorable pages of twentieth-century choreography, in addition to breaking down and fighting against prejudice and homophobia. He inaugurated the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, named after the farm, which is the oldest dance festival in the United States; and in the 1944 summer festival, Trudy Goth, together with Henry Schwarze, danced there on music by Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. In 1946 Trudy and her partner were on stage again, this time with *Hungarian Harvest Dance*, with music by Béla Bartók, and *Joseph's Legend*, with score by Richard Strauss³⁵.

appear in the "Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Columbia College" from 1938-39 to 1944-45. Perhaps she informally frequented the School of Journalism.

³⁴ The protagonist's memories are found in Brin Inger, *Fred Berk: The Metamorphosis of a European Dancer 1939-1949*, "Dance Chronicle", 7, 1, 1984, p. 8.

³⁵ Jacob's Pillow Archives (JPA), *Jacob's Pillow Performance Programs, 1934-Present, Season of 1944 / Seventh Program and Season of 1946 / Third Program*.

The bond with Shawn lasted at least until the mid-1950s, as a deep and affectionate friendship³⁶. In her letters, Trudy addressed him with the expression “papa”; the tone was confidential and in her greetings she also included John Christian, Shawn’s partner. From those letters, preserved in the prestigious Jacob’s Pillow Archives, Trudy’s commitment as a cultural organizer also emerges.

In 1946, in New York, she started her own project: she named it “Choreographers’ Workshop”, a modern dance festival that hosted emerging talents from the field of choreography, not only from the United States³⁷. The main venue for the events in the lineup is significant: it was the 92Y, a shortening of 92nd Street Young Men’s and Young Women’s Hebrew Association (YM-YWHA), a cultural center located in Manhattan’s Upper East Side, founded and run by a group of Jewish professionals. Trudy’s studio was at 154 W 56th Street, her office at 471 Park Avenue, as the director’s letterhead indicates. The association’s bulletin gives a clear idea of the variety of Trudy’s projects: from children’s recitals³⁸ to ballet-based creations, from the exploration of folk roots to the most advanced expressions of modern dance, Goth’s artistic direction aimed to support young choreographers as they approached New York audiences³⁹.

It comes as no surprise then that her exchanges with Ted Shawn veered toward issues related to cultural management. Perhaps somewhat replicating what she had done in the past with Mario Labroca, Trudy invited “Papa Shawn” to her workshop and recommended that he welcome to Jacob’s Pillow “two of my girls [...] both beautiful, young, blond, serious and talented and the sweetest personalities”;⁴⁰ always declaring

³⁶ For the transmission of the letters that Goth sent to Shawn between 1947 and 1953, we extend our thanks to Norton Owen, director of the Jacob’s Pillow Archives.

³⁷ Some programs of the festival are held in both the Historical Archives of the Maggio musicale fiorentino and the Jacob’s Pillow Archives: see ASMMF, b. 454, f. 53/2 and 53/3; JPA, b. 54, 23 March 1952, and letter on letterhead paper dated 5 October 1950.

³⁸ 92Y Archives (92Y), “The ‘Y’ Bulletin”, 15 February 1950. Pedagogue and choreographer Alwin Nikolais, a protagonist of the second generation of American modern dance, also appears among the listed performers.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 January 1953: “Choreographers’ Workshop, under the direction of Trudy Goth, helps young dancers and choreographers display their talent to N.Y. audiences”.

⁴⁰ JPA, b. 48, T. Goth to T. Shawn, 2 March 1949 and 22 March 1949.

her connection with Jacob's Pillow, she offered to write an article on this choreography center for an Italian dance magazine.

She was in fact in Florence, at home, at Viale Michelangelo 37, at the same time when the director Dimitri Mitropoulos was in town. He was preparing to stage Verdi's opera *La forza del destino*. She followed him to Milan, to the theater La Scala: a unique experience, she told Shawn excitedly⁴¹.

After the war: always traveling

As documents show, Trudy lived a life on the road: her homes in New York, Florence and on the island of Elba are only the three main points of departure for tours that took her to Salzburg and Munich, Milan and Venice, Greece, and Bermuda, and which offered the irresistible "possibility for me to see new places (and what places, YOU understand what I mean), a new field, a new horizon"⁴². She was happy to attend UNESCO's Fifth General Conference in Florence from 22 May to 17 June 1950:

The UNESCO meeting in Florence convened here 800 delegates from 56 nations and although I did not have much time to focus on everything, the atmosphere and the audience around us were very special and noteworthy. I spoke with Rosamond Gilder, with the U.S. delegate and director of the International Theater Institute and with a very important person from ANTA [American National Theater and Academy], and I made new contacts for the future⁴³.

As usual, she was full of desire to forge connections between two worlds: between Italy and the United States, between Florence and New York, between that Maggio musicale that she had to leave – and with which she was trying to reconnect – and the profoundly innovative experiences that she had seen or realized in her long American apprenticeship.

On 23 May 1945, at the age of 32, she had been declared a naturalized American

⁴¹ Ibid., b. 54, T. Goth to T. Shawn, 5 June 1950; *ibid.*, 25 May (some letters show incomplete dates).

⁴² Ibid., T. Goth to T. Shawn, 17 July 1950; see also the letters of 15 June 1950 and 24 June 1950.

⁴³ Ibid., 15 June 1950.

citizen

by the Supreme Court in New York, the city to which she would always go back. Apart from a return flight from Montreal in July 1945,⁴⁴ her next flight was from Geneva on 2 September 1947, alone, because her mother had left for the United States the year before, in September 1946. Trudy remained longer than her mother in Italy, where they had probably arrived together, the first time in nine years, in the spring-summer of 1946, as a greeting card that Gisella Selden-Goth sent to **Amelia Rosselli** in Larchmont, NY suggests⁴⁵.

Trudy returned to Italy again in 1948, and left from Rome again on 17 September. From that time up to 1956, thirteen entries to the U.S. are recorded under her names in eight years. She was constantly traveling, almost always animated by the desire to be of service to art organizations and institutions, so much so that she would become very bitter when her proposals were received coldly. Even her relationship with “Papa Shawn” seems to have soured for similar reasons: when he did not inform her about a trip to Italy, Trudy felt betrayed by the one person who most seemed to understand her:

you should know how it feels to be shelved so completely after having given [a] good 10 years of my life to the dance – not as you have, but still and though a correspondent for many magazines and papers (following all dance events whenever in town) – the so called dance world has completely forgotten about me [...] and now even you!⁴⁶

Insistent and unsuccessful attempts

In June 1946, from her villa in Procchio on the island of Elba, Trudy wrote to *maestro*

⁴⁴ Her naturalization is in fact recorded in the documents for that flight on 15 July 1945. Cf. Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search, ad nomen* <<https://heritage.statueofliberty.org>> (accessed upon registration 9 August 2023); see *ibid.* for her other trips up to her flight to Milan in 1956 (the database stops at this year). After 1956, documentation related to her travels is accessible at <<https://www.ancestry.com>> (accessed upon registration 8 August 2023).

⁴⁵ ASFi, *Fondo Rosselli*, Gisella Selden-Goth to Amelia Rosselli, 9 April 1946.

⁴⁶ JPA, b. 54, f. 29.

Pariso Votto (1898-1965), a singer and the new superintendent of the Maggio musicale fiorentino, mainly to offer her services. She proclaimed that she was “fond of Florence again and [...] confident that [...] with his efforts and those of his collaborators (among whom I wish I could count myself a little) Florence will retake the place in the artistic world that it deserves”. She was ready to help in whatever way she could: by advising him, by pointing him to some Florentine talents whom she had scouted, and by advertising “the next festival in America and... The first subscription will be mine!”⁴⁷. She unrelentingly repeated the same proffer in the same terms.

At the beginning of 1949, she introduced herself to Francesco Siciliani (1911-1996), the new artistic director of the Teatro and the Maggio festival, who was fresh from the success of Maria Callas in *Norma*, an engagement the he had imposed on the hesitant Votto after Mario Labroca’s and even Toscanini’s negative views on the singer. Trudy Goth wrote to Siciliani, on letterhead paper, as director of the Choreographers’ Workshop:

You do not know me and I have never had the pleasure of meeting you – but suffice it to say that the Maggio is close to my heart as I am an old Florentine by adoption – Labroca, Ballo and Comm[endatore] Vannini can tell you enough about me. [...] I offered my modest help to *maestro* Ballo in Venice, but of course, I would feel much more inclined to do something for Florence, in case there might be some need. By all means, I am at your service – at your convenience⁴⁸.

She presentend him with further proposals. In order to write about the performances at the Maggio festival as an American newspaper correspondent, she asked for two tickets. They reserved for her two subscriptions at 109,000 liras, “which you will pay upon your arrival”⁴⁹. In another letter, she put her name forward for an organizational

⁴⁷ ASMMF, b. 355, f. 7, T. Goth to Pariso Votto, 28 June 1946], and again *ibid.*, b. 398, f. 14, Venice 6 September 1948.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, b. 398, f. 17, T. Goth to Francesco Siciliani, 6 February 1949. Cf. Franco Carlo Ricci, *Siciliani Francesco*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 92, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2018 <<https://www.treccani.it>> (accessed 8 August 2023).

⁴⁹ ASMMF, b. 398, f. 18, letter from Tonino Cerboneschi to T. Goth, which appears to have intersected

role in the theater; she resubmitted to Siciliani the idea of establishing a dance school and a corps de ballet, complete with a budget.

I have a lot of experience in things like this, and if it made things easier for you or the theater, I would be glad to use this budget [...]. It is understood that I would do it not only out of my love for Florence and dance but out of the gratitude I have towards both, since they gave me my artistic education and a purpose in life. [...] Of course, you will need to gather your own information about my organizational skills etc. through references that I am always ready to provide you with, both in Italy and in America, where I have carried out my professional activities in the last ten years⁵⁰.

Her efforts were unsuccessful. Even in later years, her relations with the Maggio seem to alternate between occasional consultations and cold detachment, formal courtesy and belated complaints. During that period, however, Trudy participated in a historic event: she was in the organizing team, for dance, of the first experimental television programming, broadcast on 11 September 1949, from the Milan Triennale, on the occasion of the 1st International television exhibition. Trudy immediately tried to present this engagement to Siciliani as a qualification and a reference; she did the same later, with Votto⁵¹. In June 1950, Trudy wrote to the former again: "my work, my collected experience and practice of diverse methods in America should, at this point, be useful to the Florentine projects that we all care about"⁵².

Added value

At one point, the Maggio leadership seemed to understand how potentially useful could be a collaboration with Trudy Goth. They asked her to lead the negotiations to secure the participation in the 1951 festival of the New York City Ballet directed by George Balanchine, whom she knew, without the burden of funding their travel

with her request from New York, dated 5 May 1949.

⁵⁰ Ibid., b. 398, f. 21, T. Goth to F. Siciliani, 30 June 1949.

⁵¹ Ibid., b. 421, f. 230, T. Goth to F. Siciliani, 16 August 1949; *ibid.*, b. 487, f. 34, T. Goth to Votto. The event appeared in "Stampa sera", 14 September 1949, p. 2 and "La Stampa", 15 September 1949, p. 2.

⁵² ASMMF, b. 454, f. 51.

expenses from the United States; the institution could only pay for the trip from Europe⁵³. The negotiations went on for months⁵⁴. Trudy proposed an alternative, “a very revolutionary idea”. She wrote to Votto:

I think it never hurts to have new ideas, and it will be up to You to decide whether all this is within Your means and the possibilities of Teatro Comunale for the Maggio. The choreographer Herbert Ross, author of the ballet *Caprichos* that the Ballet Theatre has performed with enormous success in Europe and especially in Paris [...] has formed a company of 12 people with whom he organized an evening with 4 ballets obtaining great success. The next day, he was cast with the whole ensemble for a Broadway show [...] but he would very much like to go to Europe and work with the company. [...] I think that Ross, with what is called here a “build-up”, can be a huge success and a truly ABSOLUTE novelty in YOUR programming⁵⁵.

Her proposition did not meet with favor from the Maggio leadership. The related correspondence outlines a clash of aesthetic visions and approaches to dance between her, who had lived pioneering experiences elsewhere – by frequenting Broadway and Ted Shawn’s *Jacob’s Pillow* in the 1940s – and those who had remained attached to the great tradition of European ballet and were not open to novelty. The contrast clearly emerges in a letter to Votto on 23 January 1951, in which Goth claimed the added value of her experience outside Italy:

Believe me, dear *Maestro*, that this Ross, although unknown (in Europe, because here [in America] in 10 months he has become famous), is the Balanchine of the future, even though by now the choreographers of the future no longer come from the imperial school of [St.] Petersburg but from Brooklyn! [...] Believe me that I [value] the artistic success of the Maggio too much to try to persuade You to cast anyone mediocre or unsuitable. I would like for the Maggio to be the first to avail itself of a new talent and an original and

⁵³ Ibid., b. 454, f. 57, F. Siciliani to T. Goth, 23 November 1950; ibid., b. 454, f. 59, P. Votto, 20 December 1950.

⁵⁴ Cf. ibid., b. 454, ff. 55-59.

⁵⁵ Ibid., b. 454, f. 60, T. Goth to P. Votto, 10 January 1951. Herbert Ross (1927-2001) was a choreographer and a film director; he collaborated with the American Ballet Theatre. Today he is remembered particularly as a filmmaker: among his films, many of which he dedicated to the world of dance and ballet, one remembers *The Turning Point* (1977), *Footloose* (1984) and *Steel Magnolias* (1989).

outstanding artist. [...] Please excuse me if I so frankly share my opinion with You, but I think that You will understand my interest, and though You have known me from the times when I was simply a member of Sartorio's corps de ballet, my 12-year-long experience since in this field allows me to express these opinions⁵⁶.

Once again, the choreographer with whom the Maggio musicale entrusted the performances for the festival was Aurel Milloss⁵⁷. Confronted with the rejection of the American choreographer and of her daughter's proposals, Gisella Selden-Goth also wanted to express to Siciliani her own expert disapproval, and sent him the clipping from an American newspaper that was rather sarcastic about the Maggio's choices⁵⁸. The whole affair led to a bitter conclusion. On 18 January 1952, Votto coldly wrote to Trudy: "I would be very happy to avail myself of your collaboration; however, at least for the moment, I do not consider what you wish to be possible"⁵⁹.

From that moment on, Trudy devoted herself more to music than to dance. Almost as if to close a circle, she established a strong relationship with Dimitri Mitropoulos (1896-1960) as an assistant and secretary. Mitropoulos was a pupil of Ferruccio Busoni and a longtime friend of her mother Gisella, who had first met him in Berlin in 1923 when she was a child⁶⁰. In her dedication to the Greek conductor, Trudy appeared valuable and appreciated for her work but, according to his biographer, to many she was a "disagreeable woman" and even a "witch"⁶¹. She continued to assist Mitropoulos, who spent much of his career in the United States, where he had made his debut in 1936 and where he had taken citizenship in 1947, until his sudden death in 1960 at La Scala in Milan.

⁵⁶ ASMMF, b. 454, f. 61.

⁵⁷ Ibid., b. 454, f. 67.

⁵⁸ Ibid., b. 457, f. 151, Gisella Selden-Goth to F. Siciliani, 19 February 1951. The name of the newspaper is missing.

⁵⁹ Ibid., b. 457, f. 35. We find Trudy's words in a letter dated 15 August: "I am sorry that nothing at all came of my desired collaboration for the Maggio" (ibid., b. 487, f. 32).

⁶⁰ Cf. William R. Trotter, *Priest of Music. The Life of Dimitri Mitropoulos*, Portland (OR), Amadeus Press, 1995, pp. 44-45, who cites this memory from an article by Gisella Selden-Goth herself dating to 1955.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 344: "Trudy Goth cared fiercely about Mitropoulos [...]. She made few friends in the process".

Trudy, instead, fell ill with a brain tumor. Shortly before she turned 61, she died on 12 May 1974, at her home at Via San Bernardino da Siena 21, near Viale Michelangelo in Florence. She wanted to be buried in the cemetery of Pomonte, on Via del Tramonto, on the island of Elba⁶².

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⁶² About the details of her funeral, see *Reports of Deaths of American Citizens Abroad 1963-1974*, Trudy Goth, prepared by the American Consulate in Florence, 3 June 1974, which can be accessed at <<https://www.ancestry.com>> (accessed upon registration 8 August 2023).

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