Dancing the Cold War
An International Symposium

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Organized by Lynn Garafola

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Introduction

Lynn Garafola

Thank you, Kim, for that wonderfully concise – and incisive – overview, the perfect start to a symposium that seeks to explore the role of dance in the many global theaters of the Cold War. David Caute, in *The Dancer Defects*, a wide-ranging volume about the Cold War struggle for supremacy in many realms of cultural activity, devotes his one chapter on dance to the high-profile defections that, beginning with Rudolf Nureyev’s “leap to freedom” in 1961, captured so many headlines. But as we will see in the next two days, there was more – far more – to the story than defections and far more even than ballet, although ballet certainly played a big part in Cold War battles for supremacy. Musicals like *West Side Story* and dances like the Twist belonged as much to the Cold War imaginary as events at the Bolshoi or the old Met that began with the playing of national anthems and even, on occasion, the display of national flags. Movie theaters and television were also battlegrounds, with millions of Americans tuning in to the Ed Sullivan Show for their first glimpse of real Russian dancers.

Although the United States and the USSR were the main protagonists of the Cold War, they were not its only ones. The ideological struggle that was said to pit capitalist freedom against communist oppression took place on many fronts and involved allies, clients, and surrogates of those countries in different parts of the world. The two powers dueled at festivals in Africa, Western Europe, and the Middle East. Master teachers and choreographers were dispatched, and students sent to metropoles. Companies large and small embarked on long tours, spreading the gospel of dance along with a dose of ideology, earning foreign currency for their governments or budget relief for themselves, and contributing to the international visibility of the dance boom. Many breathed a sigh of relief when they returned home, but over the years the exposure to other repertories and other training regimes could be felt in the globalization of works, performance styles, and techniques.

In the Cold War struggle for hearts and minds, people outside the corridors of power played a huge part. When the Moisseyev Dance Ensemble first toured the United States, the dancers were mobbed when they bought teddy bears for their children; Americans invited them home, believing that people-to-people diplomacy was the way to peace. Dancers were diplomats; in their dresses and pumps they met artists and dignitaries. They performed in opera houses and on improvised stages, giving full-scale performances and lecture-demonstrations – sometimes to people who had never glimpsed ballet or modern dance before, or witnessed performances by a company of African-American virtuosi. At a time before mass air travel, they traversed oceans and continents, encountered strange foods, languages, and customs. They became members of a global dance culture.

The cultural Cold War has become a minor cottage industry. But when Naima Prevots published *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* in 1998, it was the first book to examine the phenomenon with respect to dance. Since then a number of scholars have followed in her footsteps, and several will be giving papers on their work at this symposium. *Dancing the Cold War* had its inception two years ago when the late and sorely missed Catharine Nepomnyashchy and I curated a symposium on Russian movement cultures of the 1920s and 1930s. The event was multidisciplinary in that it prominently featured both visual iconography and film. This time, in addition to film, photographs, and memorabilia, we will be hearing from dancers from ten US companies who took part in multiple Cold War tours, as well as Soviet-trained artists who have pursued post-Cold War careers outside Russia. We are also fortunate in being able to share Cold War images from the remarkable collection of Robert Greskovic and to show a film of Balanchine’s *Western Symphony*, specially loaned to us by the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, which was
made in Paris in 1956 with Cold War dollars.

Tonight we begin with another Cold War film, *Plisetskaya Dances*, about the legendary Bolshoi ballerina, Maya Plisetskaya. It was made in 1964 by Moscow’s Central Documentary Film Studio and introduces us to the star who blazed so brightly over the international dance firmament. In Moscow she danced *Swan Lake* for innumerable foreign leaders, including Fidel Castro (shown on the symposium program and poster after a performance). Abroad she danced it to ecstatic crowds. We know from her memoir, *I, Maya Plisetskaya*, that her path was not easy. Her father was killed in the late 1930s, and she danced her first *Dying Swan* (or something that approximated it) at an outdoor concert in the city of Chimkent before an audience of political exiles, including her mother. She was denied permission to take part in the Bolshoi’s 1956 tour of London because one of her father’s brothers had settled in New York, had children, and grown prosperous. None of this appears in the film, of course. What you see instead is the magnificent Bolshoi ballerina, with her outsized temperament and splendid jumps, a dancer who had scaled the heights of international fame but remained at heart deeply Russian.

**Dancing the Cold War: Images from the 1950s and 1960s**

![Image of a poster for *Four Saints in Three Acts*]

Flyer for extra performances of the Virgil Thomson-Gertrude Stein opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* at the Masterpieces of the Twentieth-Century Festival. Choreographed by William Dollar, the work featured Arthur Mitchell as one of the dancers. Also part of the festival, which was organized by the composer Nicholas Nabokov and sponsored by the CIA-financed Congress for Cultural Freedom, was the New York City Ballet, making its Paris debut. *Arthur Mitchell Collection, Columbia University Libraries.*
CITY BALLET BOWS AT PARIS FESTIVAL

Performs ‘Swan Lake,’ ‘Valse’
and ‘The Cage’ on Opera Stage
Before Capacity House

PARIS, May 10—For the first time a foreign dance troupe gave a complete performance on the great stage of the Paris Opera, when the New York City Ballet, with a company of sixty-five performers under the direction of George Balanchine, made its first appearance tonight in the Paris festival of “Twentieth Century Masterpieces.”

A packed house applauded the program, which began with the classic “Swan Lake” of Lev Ivanov and Balanchine’s “La Valse” with music from Ravel’s composition, featuring Tanaquil Le Clerq, Francisco Moncion, Herbert Bliss and Patricia Wilde.

The other number was Jerome Robbins’ “The Cage,” with violent and controversial movements, in which Nora Kaye, who is not unknown in Paris, was supported by Nicholas Magallanes and Yvonne Mounsey.

The company will give five more performances as part of the festival, which is being held to give a demonstration of the achievements in Western art and culture. They will be staged at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées.

The performances will include two works associated with the days of the Diaghilev Ballet in this same theatre. They are “Firebird,” Igor Stravinsky’s first score for ballet, and “The Prodigal Son,” which Balanchine choreographed to a score commissioned by the Soviet composer, Sergei Prokofiev. The music has been condemned in the Soviet Union as a Western tendency.

On May 14 Stravinsky will share the podium with New York City Ballet’s director, Leon Barbin, in conducting the Paris premiere of “Orpheus.”

Masterpieces of the Twentieth-Century Festival, Paris, 1952

“City Ballet Bows at Paris Festival,” New York Times, 11 May 1952. For its Paris debut, the company performed Balanchine’s Swan Lake (identified here as “Lev Ivanov’s) and La Valse and Jerome Robbins’ The Cage, described as a work “with violent and controversial movements.” The season also included Balanchine’s Firebird, Orpheus, and Prodigal Son.
New York City Ballet, 1958-59

New York City Ballet souvenir program, showing the Manhattan skyline. In 1958 the company made a five-month tour of Japan, Australia, and Philippines, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State.
Leonard Bernstein in Moscow, 1959

Classical music artists also took part in Cold War exchanges. Here, Leonard Bernstein, composer and conductor of the New York Philharmonic, is surrounded by fans in Moscow.
American Ballet Theatre, Moscow, 1960

Members of the American Ballet Theatre take a curtain call after a performance in Moscow, 1960. ABT was the first U.S. dance company to perform in the Soviet Union. It followed tours by the Royal Ballet (1956) and the Paris Opera Ballet (1958).
Dance as an Ideological Weapon:

Comments by Moderator Naima Prevots

These comments were made after all four panelists presented their papers.

I graduated from college in 1955 and the Cold War was omnipresent and scary. It seems hard for those who did not live through those years to imagine how consistently we were told that the Soviet Union was a dangerous enemy, and that people living there could not be our friends. Soviet populations were told the same thing, and certainly, at that time, there seemed little hope of significant exchange and interaction. My father was born in Russia, and came to the United States in 1923. After World War II he discovered that, although most of his family were killed in the Holocaust, there were some survivors. He wrote to them, but his letters remained unanswered. Years later, after bringing in these relatives as political refugees, we discovered my father’s letters had never been opened. Family members at that time had been told never to communicate with the decadent and bad capitalists in America, and the letters were torn up. When I was in elementary school, we were told that the Soviet Union was a communist country and all communists were bad and suspect. Senator Joseph McCarthy began his witch hunts in 1950, with a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia. These continued until 1954 when McCarthy was finally censured by the Senate.

Two of the panelists addressed this specific background in their presentations, discussing dance as an ideological weapon. Victoria Hallinan’s presentation of the Moiseyev Dance Company’s 1958 tour of the United States highlighted the phenomenal impact of this on American audiences encountering Soviet performers as artists and individuals. For those of us who saw these performances, we will never forget not only the brilliant virtuosity on stage, but also the connections made with all the people watching, for whom Soviet Russia had been as distant and strange as Mars. The company’s tour was made possible by the 1958 Lacy-Zarubin agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States, a landmark initiative for supporting exchange. The Soviet Union could no longer be identified only as an enemy for millions who saw the company in person and on the Ed Sullivan show.

Stacey Prickett’s presentation focused on the American use of dance as an ideological weapon by sending American dance overseas. Her paper was about the 1959 overseas tour of Jerome Robbins’s Ballets: U.S.A, and their performance as part of the Athens Festival at that time. In 1954 President Eisenhower created the Emergency Fund for International Affairs, the first time in the history of American public policy that choreographers, composers, playwrights, and their works were systematically funded for export. This was transformed into permanent legislation in 1956, and dance became an important component of cultural diplomacy as public policy. As Prickett notes, the repertory for Robbins’s company included two controversial pieces: *New York Export: Opus Jazz* and *Moves*, a ballet in silence. There was not total agreement amongst members of the dance panel that helped make the overseas decisions as to whether these works presented the images of America that were most desired. What did we want to showcase overseas: our expertise in ballet, showing we were just as good if not better than the Soviets? Our traditions in jazz that were different and considered decadent by official Soviet policy but exciting
to many in other countries? Our experiments and innovations with modern dance, new ideas for movement, sound, silence, décor, music? Prickett points to these various issues, but also tells us that Robbins’s company was a big success at the Athens Festival.

Our two other panelists gave us insight into dance as an ideological weapon for the Soviet Union in its attempt to expand its political power and impact during the Cold War. Eva Shan Chou’s paper showed how Soviet ballet became an important part of Chinese cultural policy. There were small beginnings when, post–revolution, White Russians who were refugees in China began teaching ballet. It was not until the 1950s, when Mao Tse-tung and the Soviet leadership were interested in forging closer ties, that ballet became an important and highly prized component of cultural and social life in China. In 1954 the Beijing (then Peking) School of Ballet was founded, featuring teachers imported from the Soviet Union, who also created productions based on Russian classics. By 1959, a professional ballet company had been established, and in 1960 a second dance academy was founded in Shanghai. The Chinese completely absorbed and valued a form of dance that was an essential part of Soviet culture and life, but essentially foreign to their own long standing traditions. All the components of classical ballet became important: the elongated body and turned-out legs; the company hierarchies; western music, stories, and costumes. There were pluses and minuses in this absorption and transference. The importation of ballet and its increasing visibility in China helped open new ideas and western influences. Guest artists from the United Kingdom and America were eventually invited to teach and be in residence. Talented Chinese dancers began to study in places other than Russia, bringing in new forms and explorations. However, the Soviet influence made it harder for young Chinese choreographers to develop their own ideas. It also made it harder for modern and post-modern dance to find a place in the Chinese dance world.

The paper presented by Jens Richard Giersdorf highlighted the ways in which, during the Cold War, Soviets used East German folk dance to impose an ideology of conformity and group belonging, as opposed to individual identity and expression. With the wall separating East and West, the Soviets were aiming to create a society closely attuned to their way of life and belief system. There were mandates for not allowing Western social dances, as they were considered a corrupting influence. Emphasis was placed on developing amateur folk dance groups in all communities, with large festivals and prizes bringing all together. Giersdorf noted that these folk dances created both “affirmation and resistance.” Affirmation came in the form of a strong sense of belonging and even developing skill and joy in learning and performance. Resistance came in the form of feelings of oppression at having to conform to the required dances, while not being allowed to participate in the larger and current world of social dance and the opportunities for going beyond regulations. It is very striking that during this period in West Germany, there was a surge of new and exciting artistic exploration in the dance community. Pina Bausch is only one example that comes to mind.

I want to thank our four panelists for the insights they provided related to the topic “Dance as an Ideological Weapon” during the Cold War. We heard papers on four quite different environments where dance played an important role in breaking down barriers, establishing cultural and social expectations, and celebrating movement in many forms.
Soviet Ballet in Chinese Cultural Policy, 1950s

Eva Shan Chou

The People’s Republic of China was formally established on Oct 1, 1949. The Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, which laid out the diplomatic, military, economic, and territorial relations between the two countries, was signed on Feb 14, 1950. The Sino-Soviet Split that severed diplomatic relations, which were not resumed until after the collapse of the Soviet Union, came to a head in August, 1960. At that time, all thirteen hundred Soviet advisors in China and all equipment were unilaterally withdrawn, including the teachers from the Bolshoi and the Kirov at the nascent ballet school in Beijing. Thus the whole relation lasted eleven years, covering the decade of the 1950s.

In this relationship, leadership was acknowledged to belong to the Soviet Union, “the elder brother” 老大哥. On the Chinese side, Stalin, Lenin, and Marx were the great trio in public art (Figure 1). Other images paired Stalin with Mao Zedong (Figure 2, Figure 3). (Though murky, the ending tableau of Doves of Peace [Figure 3] gives a clear sense of the space occupied by Stalin and Mao. Doves is a performance work that will come up again.)

In the cultural arena, dance was one component of this relation, while a component within dance was ballet. The splashiest aspect of this relation was the Soviet ballets sent on tours to China, about a half dozen in this decade. And the splashiest of these were in 1952 and 1959, major by definition since they featured Ulanova, and in addition, in 1959, Maya Plisetskaya and many other headliners. The most far-reaching results came with the establishment of ballet training in 1954 and the arrival of Soviet experts — as they were termed — in 1958. Although the Sino-Soviet Split came less than three years later, the imprint of Soviet training and style endured. The English ballerina Beryl Grey noted this when she was guest artist in 1964. More than twenty-five years after the experts’ departure, in 1986, when the Central Ballet of China gave its first performances outside the Communist bloc, this was also a much-noted feature. Anna Kisselgoff and Robert Greskovic — who are here at the conference — both wrote extensively at the time about the performances. After twenty-five years of isolation, the results seen in performances are the main source from which we can make inferences about training, approach, and much else (the exception being Beryl Grey’s observations over six weeks in 1964). Whatever one’s reaction to the Soviet style, it might be thought of as a diagnostic marker for China, significant both by its presence and its absence for understanding how a set of highly specialized skills, grasped in a few brief years, is transmitted.

The above hints at the many parts to the story of Soviet ballet in China in this decade. This paper covers only its beginning. It makes two points: (1) how officials at the highest level came to know about ballet; and (2) how the proponents of ballet used the inclusion of ballet in a 1952 Sino-Soviet Friendship Tour to promote and explain ballet. Space and time are lacking to cover two later and larger topics: the Soviet advisors at the ballet school, the first of whom came in 1954 at the School’s opening; and the Bolshoi’s 1959 tour on the PRC’s tenth anniversary. In their stead, I provide some photographs. Four are of Soviet teachers in the classroom, from the published Archives of the Beijing Dance Academy (Figures 4-7). A fifth


4 Archives of Beijing Dance Academy, Beijing wudao xueyuan zhi, ed. Beijing Dance Academy Archive Editing Committee (Beijing: Beijing gaodeng xueyuan zhiwei Committee, 1986), 31, and passim.
one is of the 1959 Bolshoi tour, with Maya Plisetskaya as Bacchante in Gounod’s *Faust* (Figure 8).

**Officials at the Highest Level Come to Know about Ballet**

For ballet to become part of cultural policy, its high standing in the Soviet Union had to enter official consciousness. To some degree, this standing was already known. The Chinese were already aware that the Soviets had promoted ballet internationally since the 1930s and 1940s as one of their greatest cultural achievements. Thus, delegations to the 1950 Fight for Peace conference and to the Youth Federations all had ballet on their official schedules. This section concerns knowledge on the policy-making level.

This occurred nearly immediately after the founding of the PRC. This was because only two months later, on December 6, Mao, accompanied by many high-ranking officials, entrained for Moscow for a visit that initially had no set end point. At home there were still vast unconquered tracts of the country and potent rivals in the Politburo. In the Soviet Union, his reception was cool, “as if,” Adam Ulam wrote, “he were, say, the head of the Bulgarian party” (see footage at 2’24” of Mao’s arrival, December 16, British Pathé). The goal must have been judged worth the risks. That was to secure what became the Sino-Soviet Treaty I mentioned above. Mao was joined a month later, on January 20, 1950, by Zhou Enlai and other high-ranking officials, to negotiate the details of the treaty. Altogether Mao stayed two months. All left three days after the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty.

During these months, the state visitors saw firsthand that ballet performances constituted a standard part of programming for visiting dignitaries. What they thought of the content is harder to determine. I know of three seen by the Chinese officials during these months. I’ll speak first of the one that involved *Swan Lake*, which had been positioned by the Soviets as the epitome of ballet, performed on all its tours during the Cold War.

On the evening before the signing of the Treaty (February 13), surely a signal evening, it was arranged for Mao, Zhou Enlai, and the delegation to attend the Bolshoi, accompanied by high-ranking Soviet officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrey Vyshinsky. They saw a performance of *Swan Lake*. This was an event important enough for the Soviet ambassador to China, writing from China to Vyshinsky, to mention it before the event. Mao was reported to have said that he was “very impressed by the technique of dancing on point.”

The responses of Premier Zhou Enlai, the high-level official who is most often credited with decisions in the cultural sphere, were not recorded. He is, however, also known to have seen *Swan Lake* on his visit to Moscow in January, 1957, during his shuttle diplomacy between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after the Hungarian uprising.

It was perhaps more unusual that Mao saw the second ballet, *La Bayadère*. He viewed this work when he visited Leningrad informally for two days in mid-January. On his program (on the 15th), along with visits to the Winter Palace, Lenin’s 8


10 Photographs and footage relating to ballet survive from Zhou’s visit: a photograph of Zhou meeting *Swan Lake* dancers, *Spokane Review* (Spokane, WA), Jan. 12, 1957, 18; and footage (not seen by me) in a detailed listing of the contents of “The Fraternal Alliance of Two Great Nations” (1957), reel 3 (40:06 min.), http://www.net-film.ru/en/film-4767/; the home site is http://www.net-film.ru/en/. The pertinent part of the summary of the reel reads: Chinese delegation visit the Bolshoi Theatre; excerpts from Tchaikovsky’s ballet “Swan Lake”; Maya Plisetskaya dances; guests on stage to thank the artists.
on the Party, and above all on the Party’s leader and his personality cult, all the elements of this spectacle were to become a familiar pattern for the CCP.

Looking ahead, we can see that ballet was soon to take a structurally analogous place at the court of the Chinese Communist Party. Soviet practices were adopted as Chinese practice: ballet, particularly Our Red Army Girls 紅色娘子軍, from the era of the Cultural Revolution, became standard entertainment for high officials on major holidays such as October 1 and New Year’s Day. Like royalty, the high officials went up on stage afterwards to thank the dancers. Finally, ballet likewise functioned as a showcase of national culture for visiting dignitaries (Prince Sihanouk, 1964; many others; Nixon, 1972, was the first outside the Communist bloc). This last function of Our Red Army Girls is another reason that its revival in the late 1980s escalated in the early 2000s when China’s remarkable economic growth began.

Using the 1952 Tour to Promote and Explain Ballet

In 1952 the Sino-Soviet Friendship Month began on November 7 (which was the 35th anniversary of 1917). In addition to ballet, this tour included orchestral and vocal music, dances of the nationalities, artists, writers, movies, etc., all co-ordinated with locally-organized events in Beijing and in the rest of the country. The tour is worth a study of its own, as shown by presentations later in this panel and in the next on the Soviet tours in 1954 and 1958 in Paris. I am conscious that there are many here who know a great deal about the Soviet tours abroad from the sending side (as my chair today, Naima Prevots, has studied US State Department tours from the sending side). Rather, I will talk about what can be learnt about the receiving or requesting, Chinese side. (I will add as an aside that the 1959 tour of the Bolshoi [represented today only by Maya Plisetskaya in Figure 8] is likely comparable to its visits to London in 1956 and New York in 1959.)

In the People’s Daily, on November 15, every front-page headline concerned “Soviet–Chinese Friendship Month.” Some headlines: “Every Region Enthusiastically Arranges Activities of

11 Heinzig, Soviet Union, 294. La Bayadère is named in People’s Daily, Jan. 18, 1950.
14 Heinzig (Soviet Union, 283-84) points out that the performance was not Swan Lake. This was a mistaken memory of Mao’s translator Shi Zhe 師哲 (Heinzig, 486n139): she conflated Stalin’s birthday evening with the performance Mao attended on Feb. 13. For Stalin’s birthday, there is footage of a parade of Young Pioneers and more in the final four minutes of a documentary from 1990, which does seem to rule out ballet (My Years as Stalin’s Bodyguard, 1990 documentary, posted on someone’s Facebook page).
“Every Kind”; “Workers and Peasants Write Letters to Thank Soviet Advisors for Their Participation”; “Every Major City Fervently Prepares to Welcome Soviet Friends.”

Inside, on page 3 (of 8 pages), were columns by Mao Dun (1896-1981) and Lao She (1899-1966). Both were writers highly admired since the 1920s for novels of exposé (Mao Dun) and unsparing clarity (Lao She). Here their contributions are uncharacteristically effusive and vague, dealing almost solely in generalities. Only the correctness of Mao’s 1942 Yan’an Talks – whose requirement that art serve the people was being positioned as the principle of all the arts in the new nation—is affirmed at length in connection with the arts in the tour.

There are three items about ballet. The first is a poem by Ai Qing (1910-1999), a poet famous from the beginning of modern poetry in the 1920s (and father of the activist artist Ai Weiwei). His two-stanza poem is titled “On First Seeing Ulanova in ‘Nocturne’ 小夜曲.” As you know, in this work, she is carried out onto the stage atop his shoulders, with a long scarf floating behind her,16 which must explain the reference in lines 1-3:

As soft as clouds, as light as wind, brighter than moonlight, more serene than night,
her body moves through space.

Not an immortal from heaven, but a goddess from among men,
more beautiful than a dream, more expressive than can be imagined,
this is the crystal produced by labor 時勞動創造的結晶.

The last line startled me too, which is why I include the Chinese.

The other two items are of great interest for what they reveal about the complicated combination of knowledge and attitudes towards ballet at this moment. Couched as praise, the two items also aim to set out the theoretical-aesthetic and political foundations for ballet in China’s cultural policy. They are headlined “Dance Artistry of Great Emotional Impact” (November 15) and “My Appreciation of Galina Ulanova’s Artistry” (November 16). I discuss them together here for the points they make that provide and reinforce the basis for ballet in cultural policies (translations mine):

—They explain that in the Soviet Union, the leadership holds ballet in high esteem, meaning that it should also be in China.

—They prove ballet’s status by invoking the status of Ulanova. She is referred to as “USSR People’s Artist, thrice recipient of Stalin Prize First Class, the world’s greatest ballerina Ulanova”; her title is so yoked to her name, that it is practically her Homeric epithet. She is “famous across the world, and is an artist beloved by working people.” One proof is that when she went to Italy the previous year, people flew from France and England to see her. There were reactionaries who wanted to forbid her performances, but the people of Italy resisted and so she was triumphantly allowed to perform.

—As for ballet itself, the authors compare ballet to “the highest art known to man,” which is “the sculptures of Greece.” This was the common comparison used in the Soviet Union, as we saw in its repeated use by both the narrator and the camera in the 1964 Soviet documentary about Plisetskaya that was shown earlier during this conference (also here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgJOn-bH0i8U). In fact, the authors argue that ballet is an even higher art. The reason is that “the sculptures of Greece are a product of the best artists of ancient times whereas Ulanova is a People’s Artist of today” and “that a United Soviet Socialist Republic’s Artist should surpass the artists of old Greece is not at all surprising.”

—They explain in detail the aesthetic perfection of ballet, modeling well a responsive viewer’s reactions. “Her performance is an expression of the highest level of the art of dance. When she dances, her movement, expression, line, music, rhythm—all elements are unified in conception and feeling. The melody and rhythm of the music and her expression and movement are fully integrated with each other to create a lyrical whole. She commands such high artistry, it is impossible to discern the seams

16 Footage of Ulanova in Nocturne is in the 2009 CCTV documentary “Ballet” part 1.3, at 6’02” – 7’21.” Identification mine, since neither dancer, nor work, nor year was given in the documentary. The entire five-part documentary has been removed from Youtube as of April, 2017; I last accessed it March, 2017.
of her technique.” “I felt unimagined inspiration, every nerve, my every cell was penetrated by delight, by joy, by beauty. I cannot express it better than to say that I truly felt the power of artistry.”

—They quote the positive view of someone seeing ballet for the first time (“truly like a fairy”), which is fair enough – these in fact are often the words of famous dancers recollecting their first viewing of ballet.

There is another side, however, to these articles. Placed into their historical context, they reveal that in the early 1950s, ballet was fighting for a place in China’s cultural policies, a struggle in which Ulanova’s Party-confirmed standing was essential.

Two years earlier, in 1950, ballet had had an unhappy partial debut. A patriotic song-and-dance drama called Doves of Peace, created in part in response to the Soviet Union’s international Fight for Peace Movement, had had some passages of ballet that were roundly criticized for their revealing costumes. The doves of peace were represented by dancers who were dressed in short (mid-thigh), white tunics with exposed legs (Figure 9).17 The authors of the two columns praising the Bolshoi ballet were the same two figures who were involved in the much criticized Doves of Peace: Ouyang Yuqian (1889-1962) was the librettist of the work and director of Central Drama Academy, which staged it (the Beijing Dance School had not yet been founded); Dai Ailian (1916-2006) staged the work, choreographed the ballet-like sections, and danced the sole pointe role.18 Born in Trinidad of Chinese descent, Dai was the only person active in the Party at this time who had had ballet training.19 All publications are state-owned and state-


Dai’s column likely only came out under her name. Dai was talented and able – her biographer, Richard Glasstone, who knew her late in her life, had the highest opinion of her ballet and music instincts (The Story of Dai Ailian: Icon of Chinese Folk Dance, Pioneer of Chinese Ballet [Hampshire, UK: Dance Books, 2007], 8) – but her Chinese remained limited all her life and her political development likewise curtailed.


run, so making space in the People’s Daily for the two organizers who had experienced this setback demonstrated backing at high levels. At the same time, it made sense that advocacy for ballet would be an uphill battle. The negative reactions to the ballet parts of Doves were not surprising. Ballet is alien to many, even today, and not only people in a country that’s never seen it. The most pithy put-downs of Doves were repeated ad infinitum in years to come in attacks on ballet. However, in a one-Party state, criticisms, too, had official backing, and not only expressed an aesthetic viewpoint but were also a force to be contended with.

A high-ranking example of a dismissive attitude is the reaction of Chen Boda during the Chinese mission to Moscow with which this paper began, that is, earlier in the same year as Doves of Peace. Chen had said, when he watched Swan Lake on television, “Very entertaining, but tell me, why are all the women naked?” He was also described as “offended that all the female dancers performed naked.”20 Mao Zedong was similarly put off. His neutral reactions on seeing Swan Lake in 1950 were mentioned above (“impressed by the dancing on pointe”), but his views could easily go the other way. On the occasion of his second visit to Moscow in 1957, for the Soviet Union’s 40th anniversary, he was obstreperously negative. As recounted by his personal physician Li Zhisui, Mao again attended a performance of Swan Lake, sitting in “Khrushchev’s special box.” He arrived late; Act 2 was underway:

Mao was bored immediately. He had never seen Western ballet,21 and no one had prepared him for it. “I could never dance that way in my life,” he said to Khrushchev. “How about you?” The Soviet leader agreed that he, too, could not possibly dance on his toes.

Fedorenko, “Stalin and Mao Zedong,” 84, 364; Heinzig, Soviet Union, 364. Heinzig might be elaborating since his source (501n616) is Fedorenko, in the original Russian.

Li Zhisui became Mao’s personal physician in 1954; he evidently did not know of Swan Lake from Mao’s previous visit to the Soviet Union (The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao’s Personal Physician [New York: Random House, 1966], 222).
At the end of the second act, Mao announced that he was leaving.

After they left, Mao continued quizzing his physician:

“Why did they dance that way, prancing around on their toes?” he asked me. “It made me uncomfortable. Why don’t they just dance normally?”

Li suspected that Mao was “deliberately refusing to appreciate Russian culture.” He was a state guest of Khrushchev’s, but Khrushchev’s anti-Stalin speech (the Secret Speech) had deeply offended Mao, and the Chinese state press was highly critical of Khrushchev on his state visit later in 1957. Ballet seemed an easy target.

In sum, on the occasion of the 1952 Sino-Soviet Friendship tour, the advocates of ballet were both evangelizing and defending. This was the situation in the early 1950s. Ballet was struggling for a place as one of the dance forms in the arts bureaucracy of the new nation. Bureaucratically speaking, it needed a place in the All-China Federation of Literature and Art Circles, under the Ministry of Culture. The nature of the difficulty can be seen in a comparison of ballet to what was probably the best received performance act, the [Soviet] Red Army Song and Dance Ensemble, which came in 1949, in 1952, etc. Its People Liberation Army counterpart came to be just as vigorous. Yet, with backing at high levels, the advocates for ballet were able to make their case in the People’s Daily.

The premise for everything in this pre-Split era was the Elder Brother status of the USSR. Quoting from only one page of the People’s Daily on a typical day: “the firm foundations of Internationalism,” “The visit of Soviet artists binds together the indestructible unity between us,” “the great leader Comrade Stalin,” etc. In line with this, my title, “Soviet Ballet in Chinese Cultural Policy,” could easily have parallels in other areas of Sino-Soviet relations of the 1950s. There could be as well a topic called “Soviet Economics in Chinese Economic Policy, 1950s” or “Soviet Agriculture in Chinese Agricultural Policy, 1950s.” In each case, there was, in the 1950s, only one entry in any category -- one kind of ballet, one kind of economics, and so on. For the Chinese, Soviet ballet was ballet; it wasn’t just ballet from the Soviet Union. Ultimately, the status of ballet in Soviet policy meant that its export of ballet rendered this art rather like national airlines or Olympic teams: it was self-evident that every nation must have one, and so it happened.

A School of Dance was founded in 1954 with a division in ballet; this was only the beginning, of course. How it continued is another story.

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Figure 1. “The Arts Work Group of the Youth Service Corps press on to paint many large portraits of the Greats.” Source: China Pictorial 1 (July 1950), np.
Figure 2. The heading above the poster reads: “Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance / Urging Forward Long-lasting World Peace”. Note the doves. Source: https://chineseposters.net/themes/soviet-union.php. This is the most vivid of many similar ones to be found by searching the treaty name and “images.”

Figure 3. Finale of Doves of Peace. Source: Zou Zhirui, A History of Ballet in New China, 19.
Figure 5. Caption: Pyotr Gusev and Bai Shuxiang. Source: Archives of Beijing Dance Academy, 23.
Figure 6. Caption: Boys’ class. Source: Archives of Beijing Dance Academy, 23.
Figure 7 Caption: Coaching. Source: Archives of Beijing Dance Academy, 23.
Figure 8. Caption: “Faust, Soviet Artist Maya Plisetskaya as Bacchante.” Source: China Pictorial 11 (1959), 21.

Figure 9. Doves. Note the similarities in costume and grouping to Swan Lake. Source: Zou Zhirui, A History of Ballet in New China, 17.
"Taking America’s Story to the World": Ballets: U.S.A. during the Cold War

Stacey Prickett

Abstract

The motto of the US Information Agency, “Taking America’s Story to the World,” summarizes the objectives of state support for international performing arts tours during the Cold War. Jerome Robbins’ Ballets: U.S.A. was funded by the government to help win the “battle for hearts and minds” against communism and to counter negative perceptions of American society. The performances of Ballets: U.S.A. at the Athens Festival in 1959 offer a starting point for analysis of various versions of national identity circulated in dances, some of which remain in repertory today (N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz and Moves). Archival research has exposed debates between ANTA (the American National Theatre and Academy) and Robbins about the aesthetic suitability of new commissions in addition to revealing local critical responses to performances by the innovative and multi-racial company. Analysis of reviews and accompanying photographs raise issues of race and representation while posing questions about national identity politics and inclusion within a cultural diplomatic context.

Keywords: Jerome Robbins; Ballets: U.S.A.; cultural diplomacy; Athens Festival

Stéphanie Gonçalves

Abstract

The first tour by a Soviet ballet ensemble outside the USSR took place in May 1954, with dancers from the Bolshoi and Kirov companies. On May 3, 1954, after months of negotiation, the Soviet dancers arrived in Paris and the very next day began to rehearse at the Paris Opéra, where they were to perform. However, their arrival coincided with the final assault of the battle of Dien-Bien-Phu, when the Soviet-backed Viet Minh decisively defeated the French in Indochina. On the night of May 7-8, 1954, after learning of the French defeat, Joseph Laniel, the French prime minister, decided to cancel the Soviet tour. He did so despite the fact that the Soviet dancers were already in Paris, that casts had been announced weeks before, programs had been printed, and thousands of tickets sold. But a delegation of veterans of the Indochina War had warned the government that they had bought 150 tickets to the first performance and was planning to create a public disturbance inside the Opéra. With nearly 3,000 dead and more than 11,000 wounded at Dien-Bien-Phu, how would French veterans and their families react to seeing the Soviets dancing on the stage of France’s national opera house? The Cold War had touched France with full force. Although little known, this “micro-history” of dance and politics during the early Cold War sheds light on the sometimes controversial role of dancers as cultural ambassadors.

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Notes
Hurok and Gosconcert

Harlow Robinson, Northeastern University

The historic American debut of the Moiseyev Ensemble on April 14, 1958, and of the Bolshoi Ballet on April 6, 1959, both at the old Metropolitan Opera in New York---at the height of the Cold War---represented the fruition of extended, delicate, and difficult negotiations between Soviet cultural officials and one particular Russian Jewish immigrant to the United States: Sol Hurok. For decades, Hurok, born poor in the provincial town of Pogar near the Ukrainian border, had been traveling to Moscow in the hopes of securing the rights to present in the United States the leading Soviet dance troupes, particularly the Bolshoi. As early as 1930, he struck a deal “with the Soviet government” giving him the “monopoly right to engage Soviet artists for appearance in the United States and England and for American and British artists in Russia. The contract covers musicians, singers, the theatre, ballet and the circus.” 1 Because of continuing political and cultural instability in the USSR and uncertainty in Soviet-American relations, however, this contract was never fulfilled. Nearly 30 years of dreaming, scheming, and patience would pass before Hurok succeeded in importing to the New World what many considered to be the greatest ballet company on the planet under the banner of “S. Hurok Presents.” In pursuit of this elusive goal, Hurok travelled often to the USSR, staying for extended periods of time while waiting for meetings with particular officials. These trips became increasingly frequent beginning in 1956, after a long hiatus during World War II and the last years of Stalin’s regime.

During this period, Hurok worked intensively with the Soviet state agency that arranged and oversaw tours by Soviet performing artists abroad. Initially known as Gastrolbyuro, it was renamed in November 1957 as Gosconcert, by a decree of the Ministry of Culture, under whose auspices and strict control it operated. In an interview with The New York Post in 1936, Hurok described the organization in glowing terms: “Over there they have a


Central Bureau for artists. You go to the bureau as you would go to a private manager for an artist in this country. The bureau protects the artist, arranges for his passport, his expenses and all that.” 2 In fact, of course, this central concert and touring bureau, which existed until the fall of the USSR in 1991, was infamous among performers for its inefficiency, corruption, and strong links to the secret police. Only a tiny percentage of Soviet performers were granted the right to travel abroad. Those who were had to turn over 80 percent of their foreign earnings to Gosconcert and submit to the indignity of constant surveillance by the Soviet police agents who accompanied them abroad.

In April 1988, at the height of glasnost truth-telling, pianist Nikolai Petrov described the rampant corruption at Gosconcert in a long article in Literaturnaia gazeta. All too often, he wrote, artists were sent abroad not because they were the most talented, but because of their high-placed friends and relatives. If granted the extraordinary privilege of performing in the West, performers not only had to surrender 80 percent of their earnings to Gosconcert and live on a pitifully small daily stipend, they were also expected to return laden with gifts of perfumes, radios, clothing, and even foreign currency for the bureaucrats who had processed the stacks of documents that made their tours possible. The situation within the Soviet Union was even worse, he continued; local concert managers were notoriously ignorant and lazy. According to Mr. Petrov, one wrote to the office of Rosconcert, the entertainment booking agency for the Russian Republic, to ask if a pianist had to be paid a full fee for performing Ravel’s Piano Concerto for the Left Hand. For many years, a pianist would receive twice as much for a concerto by Tchaikovsky as for one by Mozart.

Hurok laid the groundwork for his 1956 trip to Moscow by carefully cultivating the Soviet officials who were making the decisions in Mos-

cow. One of these was Edward Ivanyan, a bright young man with a remarkable gift for languages who had joined the Ministry of Culture in 1955, just at the moment when relations with the United States were opening up. Appointed as chief of the division dealing with America, Ivanyan in 1956 was sent by the Ministry of Culture to accompany Mstislav Rostropovich on his twelve-concert American tour. This tour was sponsored not by Hurok, but by Columbia Artists. Hurok wined and dined the impressionable young Ivanyan, and even scored him tickets for the brand-new smash hit *My Fair Lady*. Already dissatisfied with the terms Columbia was offering, Ivanyan returned to Moscow ready to promote Hurok’s case with responsible officials in the Cultural Department of the Party Central Committee. (Until 1960-61, foreign impresarios conducted negotiations directly with the Ministry of Culture, not with Gosconcert, which would only carry out the logistics of the negotiated tours.) Hurok further sought to improve his bargaining position by sending two of his most famous clients on tour to the USSR in spring 1956: Isaac Stern and Jan Peerce.

Columbia Artists should have competition, Ivanyan told his superiors in Moscow, or else a monopoly would develop that would be financially unfavorable to the Soviet side. By then, Hurok’s operation had been checked out and found to be reputable. “At first they weren’t impressed by all this information,” Ivanyan told me in a 1992 interview. “But after some time passed the Central Committee decided to give permission to enter into negotiations with S. Hurok Attractions. This had happened by the time Hurok came to Moscow. And little by little—with my help—he was able to squeeze out Columbia in presenting Soviet artists in the USA.”

From the beginning of their collaboration, Hurok had told Ivanyan his ultimate ambition was to bring the Bolshoi Ballet on tour to the USA. But according to Ivanyan, the Central Committee had already given the Ministry of Culture specific instructions that the Bolshoi could be offered only as a “second step.” The Moiseyev Dance Ensemble had to go first. “I’m not sure what their reasoning was,” explained Ivanyan, “but the Moiseyev was at the time very popular, on the rise, and possibly— even probably—Moiseyev seemed to have some particularly good personal connections within the Central Committee.” Hurok had no choice but to agree.

Even with their connections, Moiseyev and Hurok had to work long and hard to get the company to the United States. According to Moiseyev, Hurok had to “distribute bribes” to various officials in Moscow to win them over. He also had to work with unflagging persistence to penetrate the enigmatic, byzantine, and corrupt Soviet bureaucracy. “It took someone with Hurok’s energy, tenacity, and authority to cross over that threshold of inertia and make it happen,” said Moiseyev. “For two years he came to Moscow and always came to our performances. He would applaud loud and hard and then stand up, so that the whole hall would rise, following his example.” Even before his Ensemble finally made it to the USA in 1958, Moiseyev had come to admire Hurok’s generosity and *nyukh* (“intuition”) for what would sell and how to sell it. “If he saw something he liked, he would grab on to it like a bulldog and never let go.”

Hurok’s negotiations in Moscow were always difficult and protracted, but he was prepared (after settling into his usual suite at the Hotel National, at the foot of Gorky Street facing Red Square) to spend however much time it took to work things out. In Russia, such patience and determination are highly valued. Unlike some American impresarios who sought business in the Soviet Union, Hurok did not fight over nickels and dimes. Disagreement over the fee for the Moiseyev Ensemble was settled when Hurok agreed “to take on the extra expense for excess baggage—because the performers would always return from the United States with much heavier luggage than they had gone over with.”

Hurok’s delicate negotiations and agreements with the Ministry of Culture and Gosconcert were also frequently disrupted by political events. The brutal Soviet invasion of Hungary on November 4, 1956, and the French-British-Israeli attack on Egypt the following day, destabilized the international situation and soured the Soviet-American relations. For two years he came to Moscow and always came to our performances. He would applaud loud and hard and then stand up, so that the whole hall would rise, following his example.” Even before his Ensemble finally made it to the USA in 1958, Moiseyev had come to admire Hurok’s generosity and *nyukh* (“intuition”) for what would sell and how to sell it. “If he saw something he liked, he would grab on to it like a bulldog and never let go.”

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5 Ivanyan, interview.
7 Ibid.
ican relationship in all spheres. The Soviet side
continued to be troubled as well by the American
law requiring that Soviet citizens traveling to the
United States be fingerprinted. “Fingerprinting is
only for criminals,” declared the colorful Nikita
Khrushchev.

There were also security questions raised on
the American side about allowing the ensemble to
land in the USA in Soviet planes (“Red jet airlin-
ers,” as UPI called them), which were assumed
to be equipped with spying devices. So Hurok
returned to Moscow in June 1957 for further ne-
gotiations. This time he emerged with even more
impressive pledges from the Soviet side: a tour by
the Moiseyev Ensemble in spring of 1958, a ten-
week engagement by the Bolshoi Ballet (including
star ballerina Galina Ulanova) in spring 1959,
and appearances by David Oistrakh (now wooed
away from Columbia Artists) and composer Aram
Khachaturian. Described in an interview with
the New York Times in Moscow as “ebullient” at
being the first American to sign the Bolshoi, Hurok
“threatened to solve the cold war himself to fulfill
the contract.”

Under the terms of the agreement, the Soviet side agreed to pay transportation to and
from New York for all its artists.

This time, perhaps because the Soviet side had
come to trust Hurok more completely, the agree-
ment stuck. Fortunately, the fingerprinting provi-
sion was repealed and the way was clear for Hurok
to import the nearly 100 dancers and numerous
support personnel of the Moiseyev Ensemble.

As the years wore on the picture grew even
brighter. For the first few years after the Geneva
Summit between Eisenhower and Khrushchev in
1955, Soviet-American cultural exchange proceed-
ed in a rather haphazard fashion, on the basis of
individual agreements. But this situation changed
on January 27, 1958, when the first official “Agree-
ment Between the United States of America and the
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Exchanges
in the Cultural, Technical and Educational Fields”
was signed in Washington, D.C. Usually called
the Lacy-Zarubin agreement after its negotiators
and signatories (William S. B. Lacy, Eisenhow-
er’s Special Assistant on East-West Exchanges,
and Georgy Z. Zarubin, Soviet ambassador to the
United States), it covered a two-year period but
was extended periodically after that. The desire for
the agreement seems to have come more from the
Soviet than the American side. Spurred by the ac-
celerating pace of cultural exchange but wary about
dealing with their chief ideological foe, formalistic
Party officials and bureaucrats wanted to spell out
clearly what were the limits and obligations of each
side.

Hurok’s attentive wining and dining of Soviet
cultural officials over the last few years paid him
huge dividends when the Lacy-Zarubin agreement
was signed. Paragraph four of Section VIII (“Ex-
change of Theatrical, Choral, and Choreographic
Groups, Symphony Orchestras and Artistic Per-
formers”) gave him and his agency unprecedented
official status: “The Ministry of Culture of the
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, in accordance
with an agreement with Hurok Attractions, Inc.,
will send the State Folk Dance Ensemble of the
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to the United
States in April-May, 1958, and will consider invit-
ing a leading American theatrical or choreographic
group to the Soviet Union in 1959.”

With such high-level governmental support and
recognition, Hurok’s ability to carry out his busi-
ness in Moscow received a boost that must have
left the jilted folks at Columbia Artists reaching for
their smelling salts. By receiving mention in this
historic document, Hurok gained unprecedented
leverage and prestige, which he would exploit to
brilliant effect for the next ten years.

The resounding success of the Moiseyev tour
of the United States in 1958 convinced Goscon-
cert and the Ministry of Culture that Hurok could
deliver what he promised. The performances were
a critical and popular triumph. (It didn’t hurt that
on the very day of the Moiseyev’s debut in New
York, April 14, it was announced that Van Cliburn
had won first prize in the Tchaikovsky Competi-
tion in Moscow.) Critics reached for their super-
latives. Crowds gathered by the stage door to see
and touch the exotic Russian dancers, like visitors
from another planet. So great was the demand for


10 Treaties and Other International Acts Series 3975,
US Dept. of State, brochure on “Cultural, Technical, and
Educational Exchanges: Agreement, With Exchange of Let-
ters, Between the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA and the
UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS” (signed in
Fig. 1. The written inscription under this photo reads: “Sol Hurok gives his version of an arabesque.” Constantine/Courtesy of Dance Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
Figs. 2-3: Hurok (right) with Dmitri Shostakovich (left) and conductor Kiril Kondrashin (center) in Moscow in the 1960s. Courtesy of Ruth Hurok Lief.
Figs. 4-5. Hurok standing in the room of a house at teatime in Minsk (1930). Courtesy of the Dance Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; the townspeople of Hurok’s birthplace, Pogar, around the turn of the century. Courtesy of Pogar Municipal School.
Figs. 6-7. Hurok at a train station—the signature on the photo reads: “To my dear daughter. S. Hurok.” Courtesy of Ruth Hurok Lief; Sol Hurok around the time he arrived in the United States in 1906. Courtesy of Dance Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
Fig. 8. Dancer Vladimir Popovnik of the Ukrainian Dance Company demonstrates his fabulous elevation by leaping over a seated Hurok. Wayne Shilkret, courtesy of Dance Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
CULTURAL, TECHNICAL, AND EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES

Agreement, With Exchange of Letters, Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Signed at Washington January 27, 1958

SECTION VIII

Exchange of Theatricall, Choral and Choreographic Groups, Symphony Orchestras and Artistic Performers

(1) The Ministry of Culture of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics will invite the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra to visit the Soviet Union in May or June 1958 and will send the ballet troupe of the Bolshoi Theatre of the Soviet Union, numbering 110 to 120 persons, to the United States in 1959 for a period of one month.

(2) The Ministry of Culture of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, on the basis of an existing agreement with Hurok Attractions, Inc., and the Academy of the National Theatre and Drama, will send two Soviet performers—V. Tchali, pianist, and I. Itkin, violinist—to the United States in January-April, 1958, and will invite two American soloists—R. Thelott, vocalist, and L. Warren, vocalist—to visit the Soviet Union.

(3) The Ministry of Culture of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics will send Soviet vocalists I. Petrow, P. Latifian, and Z. Delachkhanova, as well as Z. Berrendi, violinist, and V. Arak-keniz, pianist, to the United States and will invite R. Peters, vocalist, L. Stolowski, conductor, and others to visit the Soviet Union.

(4) The Ministry of Culture of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, in accordance with an agreement with Hurok Attractions, Inc., will send the State Folk Dance Ensemble of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to the United States in April-May, 1958 and will consider inviting a leading American theatrical or choreographic group to the Soviet Union in 1958.

(5) The Soviet side will send the Red Banner Song and Dance Ensemble of the Soviet Army or the Choreographic Ensemble "Berounka" to the United States in the fourth quarter of 1958 and invite one of the leading American choreographic groups to visit the Soviet Union.

SECTION IX

Visits by Scientists

(1) The Academy of Sciences of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the National Academy of Sciences of the United States will, on a reciprocal basis, provide for the exchange of groups or individual scientists and specialists for delivering lectures and holding seminars on various problems of science and technology.
tickets that Hurok added four more performances in New York at the end of the tour—at Madison Square Garden, no less. On June 29, the Moiseyev Ensemble appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show. When Fred Schang of Columbia Artists complained to State Department officials about Hurok’s “monopoly” over presenting Soviet attractions in the United States, he was told in a memorandum that “the Department did not and would not wish to discriminate in any way between impresarios but that it appeared Hurok had been more energetic and active in lining up Soviet attractions.”

By the time the Moiseyev left Idlewild for Moscow on July 1, it had achieved P. T. Barnum-scale success for its first American tour, having appeared before an estimated 450,000 spectators and reportedly grossing $1.6 million. As usual, however, there is considerable uncertainty about the actual financial results. According to Edward Ivanyan, the Soviet Ministry of Culture realized a profit of $1 million and Hurok cleared $800,000. Whatever the precise figures, they were clearly impressive enough to convince both Hurok and the Party Central Committee that cultural exchange paid not only ideological, but financial dividends.

With the unquestioned success of the first Moiseyev tour behind him, Hurok was that much closer to fulfilling his obsessive ambition of bringing the Bolshoi Ballet to America. But one of the conditions that officials at the Party Central Committee and the Ministry of Culture had set down in their negotiations was that Hurok also bring another folk dance troupe, the all-female Beryozka Ensemble, before he could get the Bolshoi. Founded in 1948 by Nadezhda Nadezhdina, who reportedly enjoyed favor in high political circles in Moscow, the Beryozka specialized in dances and scenes based on Russian themes and sources, and was something of a hybrid between a folklore ensemble and a character dance troupe. The Beryozka’s first—and last—American tour opened at the Broadway Theater in New York on November 4, 1958, but had nothing like the popular or critical impact of the Moiseyev.

Hurok now believed he had permission from Moscow for the long-awaited Bolshoi tour to go ahead in the spring. Travel arrangements were made and theaters booked. Then word came that the tour had been postponed to the fall, with several excuses offered: the company wanted to prepare a new work for America; it had been doing too much touring. In January, Soviet officials approved the tour after all, only to change their minds once again in February. Partly in order to resolve the matter once and for all, Hurok travelled to Moscow in mid-February. Meanwhile, Soviet Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan was in the United States, where he had happened to see the Beryozka perform in Chicago. Favorably impressed by its reception there, and still hearing glowing reports of the Moiseyev’s historic tour, Mikoyan reportedly wired the Ministry of Culture (according to a State Department report) “insisting that the Bolshoi Theater group should be sent as originally planned in the spring.” Before Hurok left Moscow on March 1, he was given final approval from the ministry for the Bolshoi to come to the United States in mid-April.

By this time, Hurok had become an important source of information for American officials, whose network of contacts in Moscow was still relatively limited. In a briefing session the day before he left Moscow, Hurok told staff members of the US Embassy that he knew there was a faction of Soviet officials still strongly opposed to widening cultural exchange with the United States. The pro-exchange faction was led, he said, by G. A. Zhukov, Chairman of the State Committee for Cultural Relations Abroad (its Russian acronym was VOKS), who, for the moment, retained the upper hand and possessed considerable influence at the highest Party levels.

Hurok also reported that despite his good standing with the Ministry of Culture, which even asked his advice about which attractions would do best with the American audience, he still encountered many obstacles in dealing with lower-level bureaucrats. “Having remained in Moscow for over two weeks, he still had not completed his business and therefore he complained to Minister Mikhailov about the unnecessary red tape constantly being placed in his path by subordinates in the Ministry,” Richard H. Davis of the American Embassy wrote home to the State Department. “Mikhailov had immediately summoned those concerned and in front of Mr. Hurok had ordered them to cooperate fully

11 Declassified State Department memorandum of conversation, May 9, 1958.
12 Ivanyan, interview.
13 Declassified dispatch from US Embassy in Moscow to State Department, March 3, 1959.
and to get the work done immediately. This had worked wonders.”\footnote{14}

On this and earlier trips to Moscow, Hurok had also been spending more and more time at the Bolshoi, getting to know its current ballet master (Leonid Lavrovsky), dancers, and repertoire. According to Genrietta Belyaeva, who worked for Gosconcert as an interpreter and assistant to Hurok on his visits to Moscow, he considered the Bolshoi “his second home.”\footnote{15} In late 1958 or early 1959, he met Galina Ulanova, whom he had already seen dance in Moscow and London. Ulanova told me in an interview in Moscow in 1988 that Hurok at first thought she might be too old (she was 49 at the time) for export to the United States, and that at their first meeting in the director’s box at the Bolshoi, “he looked at me rather gloomily, with mistrust.”\footnote{16} With time, however, especially after the huge success of the first Bolshoi tour in the United States, the two developed a relationship of mutual respect and admiration. For Ulanova, Hurok became a kind of father-figure, “a good 
\textit{papasha},” as he was, indeed, for many of the members of the company. “I always say that I was lucky that Soviet-American relations improved when they did, for it gave me a second career, at a rather advanced age for a dancer.”\footnote{17}

Throughout the Bolshoi’s highly publicized 1959 tour, Hurok was careful to protect the health of Ulanova and of all the dancers, and especially to ensure that they “had enough to eat. He would give us a free noon meal, with lots of choices, because he knew that the younger dancers would go without food because they wanted to spend their small dollar allowances on other things. He would create the best possible conditions, and expect the best from his performers in return.”\footnote{18}

In order to break even on the Bolshoi tour, Hurok had to take in at least $170,000 weekly. His contract with the Ministry of Culture called for a guarantee to the Bolshoi of $50,000 a week (twice as much as the Moiseyev received), plus hotels and round-trip transportation between New York and London. The company also received $330,000 for the filming of two performances. According to Edward Ivanyan, the Bolshoi returned to Moscow with a healthy profit of between $500,000 and $600,000. Because of the heavy expenses, Hurok did not make nearly as much profit himself on the Bolshoi as on the Moiseyev. He told Ivanyan that he did little better than to break even, although Hurok’s public relations director, Martin Feinstein, claimed that the tour did produce a small return to Hurok Artists.\footnote{19}

But money had never been Hurok’s primary motivation in anything he did. Now 71 years old and wealthy (his attractions were estimated to have grossed over $5 million in the preceding few years), he saw the successful completion of the Bolshoi tour as the capstone of his creative career, the fruition of thirty years of cultivating Soviet officials and agencies. To him it was no less important than it would be for a ballerina to finally dance her first Giselle or Juliet. With the importation of both the Moiseyev Ensemble and the Bolshoi, an era came to an end both in Hurok’s life and in the young history of Soviet-American cultural relations.

For various reasons, Hurok’s special bargaining and personal relationship with the Ministry of Culture and Gosconcert began to deteriorate in the years after the first Moiseyev and Bolshoi tours. The climate for Soviet-American exchanges worsened, due to such events as the defection of Rudolf Nureyev from the Kirov tour in Paris in 1961; the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 (which occurred just as the Bolshoi Ballet was on its second American tour); the escalation of the Vietnam War; and growing American protests at performances by Soviet artists, especially by members of the increasingly militant Jewish Defense League, who sought to bring attention to the persecution of the Jewish minority in the USSR. Larissa Netto, who worked in the American Department at Gosconcert throughout the 1960s, observed that “all the disagreements and difficulties in the Soviet-American relationship were immediately reflected in the area of cultural exchange.”\footnote{20}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] Ibid.
\item[16] Galina Ulanova, interview by Harlow Robinson, Moscow, April 8, 1988.
\item[17] Ibid.
\item[18] Ibid.
\item[20] Netto, interview.
\end{footnotes}
At the same time, Gosconcert and the Ministry were beginning to pursue a new policy of encouraging competition among American presenters for Soviet attractions. Hurok’s virtual monopoly over the American market was coming to be viewed as harmful to the financial—and even artistic—interests of the Soviet side. Accordingly, Gosconcert officials began seriously to encourage and entertain offers from Hurok’s main competitor: Columbia Artists. Gosconcert complained that Hurok underpaid for attractions, that he flaunted Ministry rules by paying performers extra under the table, that he did not care enough about upcoming young artists, and that he was too focused on the “big whales” like the Moiseyev and the Bolshoi.\(^{21}\) To Hurok’s bitter disappointment, a blockbuster tour by the Bolshoi Opera and Ballet, already planned and announced for April 1968, was cancelled. On his trips to Moscow, Hurok was encountering a much more difficult atmosphere at Gosconcert’s shabbily utilitarian offices on Neglinnaya Street, just behind the Bolshoi, where what Larissa Netto described as a “mean and desperate struggle” was going on between Hurok and Columbia Artists.\(^{22}\)

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August, 1968, made the prospect of any improvement in relations between Moscow and Washington more unlikely than ever. Only a month earlier, the sixth consecutive Agreement of Exchanges in the Scientific, Technical, Educational, Cultural, and Other Fields had been signed in Moscow, capping a decade of US-USSR exchange. As a result of the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia, however, the US government put all contacts with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe on hold. The outlook for East-West cultural exchange had not looked so bleak since Stalin’s death in 1953.

Facing all these headwinds, Hurok decided to sell his company in early 1969 to the entertainment industry conglomerate Transcontinental Investing Corporation. Although he continued to work for the new entity, his negotiating position at Gosconcert was further undermined by the change. In 1971, the Ministry of Culture cancelled a planned tour of the Bolshoi Opera under Hurok’s auspices, ostensibly out of security concerns. And in 1974, Columbia Artists gained the right to present the Kirov Ballet on its American tour, ending Hurok’s monopoly of the presentation of the two major Soviet ballet troupes. Hurok died just a few months before that tour took place, on his way to a meeting with David Rockefeller to discuss a new dance venture—\textit{Nureyev and Friends}.

He could not dance or choreograph, but Sol Hurok, a proud immigrant and American patriot, played a key role in introducing the Russian and Soviet dance tradition to a wide American public. One of the most successful practitioners of Cold War cultural diplomacy, he was, as Galina Ulanova said, a “Diaghilev in his own time.”\(^{23}\)

\(^{21}\) Ibid.  
\(^{22}\) Ibid.  
\(^{23}\) Ulanova, interview.
Outcast as Patriot: Leonid Yakobson’s *Spartacus* and the Bolshoi’s 1962 American Tour

Janice Ross

The Cold War made strange patriots of artistic rebels. In this paper, I explore the possibility that it was in fact the net of propagandistic-trained conventions of reading visual data, coupled with heightened paranoia and nationalist sentiments of ownership over narratives of heroism, that significantly ensnared the Bolshoi’s 1962 production of Leonid Yakobson’s *Spartacus*, resulting in one of the most spectacular embarrassments either the USSR or the USA experienced in the decades of cultural diplomacy during the Cold War. In the space of a few days, after the Bolshoi Ballet opening of *Spartacus* at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York on September 13, 1962, and the publication of reviews by second-string dance writer Allen Hughes in *The New York Times* and Water Terry in *The New York Herald Tribune*, Yakobson’s *Spartacus* was hastily erased from the entire tour. The first notice was a brief announcement in the *New York Times*, on September 18, stating that “the three remaining scheduled showings of ‘Spartacus’ would be replaced by other works.”† Five days after that another notice appeared, this one in *The Los Angeles Times*, one of several cities where *Spartacus* was to have toured; the headline announced: “*Spartacus* Taken Out of Ballet Repertoire.” This article attributed the difficulties of transporting huge sets and other complicated structures by air to the West Coast as the reason for removing the ballet from the repertoire, as if this issue had not been considered and solved long before the tour ever began.

What happened that could so dramatically move this four-act major work, acquired just for the tour, from a highly anticipated American premiere to a vanished part of the Bolshoi touring repertoire in a matter of less than a week? And why does it matter? I think the lessons here are potentially quite significant and point to what might be called the cross-contamination of conventions of viewing visual data as a consequence of propaganda-saturated retraining of spectatorship during the Cold War. Instead of what Clare Croft sees as the more benign Cold War take away of dancers as diplomats - that we are all not so different after all - might the shared experience for Cold War Soviet and American audiences instead be that of absorbing the cultural diplomacy dance through the propaganda-tinted lenses of their respective nations?

“The Red Scare” campaigns of the Western media were widely presented in media sources. The use of print, with easily decodable and emotive images, helped to redefine national identity as a virtuous and patriotic America, set against a dangerous and destructive socialist east. The media distributed extreme propagandist slogans such as “Better Dead than Red!” and other politicized propaganda, designed to heighten anxiety over Communism and nuclear war.

In the months preceding the premiere of Yakobson’s tale of a heroic champion of rebellion against powerful authority, the US media was saturated with terror-inducing anti-Communist narratives in everything from children’s cartoons to public posters, educational films in public schools generated by the Department of Defense (DOD), and TV broadcasting of *Twilight-Zone*-styled tales of Communist plots to infiltrate American cities. A case in point is *Red Nightmare*, a DOD short film that was widely taught as part of the public school curriculum, and reflects how the media circulated state-sanctioned images and narratives to foster public fear and paranoia and polarize cultural differences. *Red Nightmare* rapidly became the best-known anti-Communist short. The plot concerns a man who takes his American freedoms for granted until he wakes up one morning to find out that the United States Government has been replaced with a Communist system. The basis for this short film, narrated by Jack Webb, is the alleged Soviet re-creation of US communities for the purpose of training infiltrators, spies, and

moles. The film begins in what looks like a typical American town. The camera moves back to reveal barbed wire, barricades, and soldiers in Soviet Army uniforms. Narrator Jack Webb informs us that there are several places like this, essentially fake American cities, performances of freedom, behind the Iron Curtain, which are used for training Soviet espionage and sabotage forces prior to infiltrating America. The production of the film is quite similar to episodes of The Twilight Zone. It was made by Warner Bros. under the auspices of the DOD, which explains its aesthetic of sci-fi meets heavy-handed espionage paranoia. It traffics in what has been called, at least when used by the Soviets, “impregnational propaganda,” that is propaganda designed to create a favorable environment and a “trust me” attitude in the target audience so as to prime it for the more tactical “operational propaganda.” Yakobson’s Spartacus effectively succumbed to a tangle of this double-coded and suspicion-saturated reception of cultural images, as anxieties about the hidden persuasiveness of cultural images and products from the Soviet Union escalated in the early 1960s.

There was no moment during the Cold War more fraught with the distilled tensions of the time than the autumn of 1962, when the deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba led to a showdown with the United States in October 1962. The lives of millions of Americans, Soviets, and potentially the world were controlled by two men, John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, who could have easily escalated the crisis into war. Then the “hard power” of bombs and missiles would have replaced the “soft power” of fear, suspicion, and distorted perceptions.2

I would like to consider for a moment the implications of this “soft power” on Yakobson’s Spartacus. While it’s difficult to say with certainty how complicit or naïve Yakobson may have been in agreeing to the Bolshoi officials’ invitation to remount Spartacus, his highly successful 1956 work for the Kirov, at the Bolshoi in a frenzied few months of preparation just prior to the commencement of their American tour, it is clear that a number of agendas were at play in the hasty inclusion of this ballet as part of the troupe’s tour-repertoire to the West. Yakobson was always a double-edged choice as a choreographer, prodigiously creative, assertive about his authority in the studio and on stage, energized rather than cowed by the Soviet censors’ restrictions on his work, yet his instincts for artistic survival included a decidedly disengaged view of immediate political agendas.

The process of Yakobson’s Spartacus coming into being stretches back decades. Beginning with its genesis as a morale-boosting vision in 1941, much about the ballet Spartacus originally seemed shaped toward propagandistic ends. Originally conceived as part of a wartime Soviet project to arouse citizens to a heightened state of optimism and determination in the uncertain days of December 1941, Spartacus did not reach its full form until fifteen years later. As part of a government project to excite nationalist loyalty and build confidence that the USSR would triumph over the Nazis as the invading German army advanced across the Soviet Union, the Soviet newspapers began publishing interviews with leading artists describing ambitious new future art works they would be making. “I’ve been commissioned by the Bolshoi Theater to write a ballet about the ancient Roman gladiator Spartacus whose heroic feats remind me so much of our people’s epic struggle against the Nazi invaders,” the Soviet Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian wrote in the December 1941 issue of Pravda.3 “I think the historical significance of the slave rebellion that happened 2,000 years ago is that it reminds people of those freedom-loving heroes who, at the dawn of human civilization, dared to rise against their oppressors,” Khachaturian explained.4 The experienced librettist Nikolay Volkov was commissioned to write the libretto for a planned production at the Bolshoi Theater.

The tale of the slave Spartacus, leader of a famous Roman slave uprising against oppression in the years 74–71 BC, has a history intertwined for decades with Communist politics as well as authors sympathetic to those politics outside of the USSR. As classics scholar Martin Winkler has noted, the linking of Spartacus and Communism began with the Russian Revolution:


4 Ibid.
The ruling classes in Britain and America had no interest in making Spartacus a heroic model. Besides, he was a slave – someone who had no business being an epic-style hero – and too low-class and dangerous an opponent to be dignified with heroic status. He was not brought into the center of Roman history until Karl Marx and his followers put him there and until somewhere there was a society which established itself, at least in theory, by bringing about the revolution that Spartacus failed to accomplish (and probably did not try to bring about).  

Winkler argues that it was the Bolshevik Revolution that moved Spartacus up to the status of a mythic hero for Russia. Indeed, both Lenin and Marx had praised Spartacus in their works as a forerunner of twentieth-century revolutionaries. Marx described Spartacus as “the most magnificent figure in all of ancient history,” and Lenin called him “one of the most outstanding heroes of one of the most important slave rebellions.”

Italian author Raffaello Giovagnoli, who had been a participant in the Risorgimento, the nineteenth-century Italian movement for unification, was one of the earliest widely read writers in the USSR on fictionalized treatments of overcoming tyranny. Giovagnoli’s 1874 novelization, Spartacus, translated into Russian in 1881, shaped its glorification of Spartacus into a tale of an ancient revolutionary who rose against a tyrant in an adventure story designed to appeal to the broad masses.

The most widely read of all Spartacus novels, however, was that by American Communist Party activist Howard Fast. Fast had published his novel himself in the United States in 1951 during the McCarthy era. He had begun writing it as a reaction to his imprisonment for his earlier involvement in the Communist Party. A Communist sympathizer from his youth, Fast joined the Party in 1943 and subsequently broke with it after Khrushchev’s speech. He wrote Spartacus, his best-known novel, to vividly illustrate his troubles with party leadership. As a member of the board of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, Fast was called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. He refused to provide the organization’s records, was found guilty of contempt of Congress, and went to prison for three months in 1950. Then he spent a year and a half writing Spartacus. Clearly, as a Communist, Fast was drawn to the theme of a Roman slave who leads a successful rebellion. He felt sure that the novel would find a good reception among party members and the Communist leadership. When the book was rejected by seven publishers, Fast decided to publish it himself. Other self-published books had been failures, but Spartacus was successful and was picked up by a commercial publisher a year later. The Communist Party’s cultural commissar decided, however, that the novel violated the party line.

“For two years and more I had labored to produce a book that would be an epic of the oppressed,” Fast said. “A paean to liberty and the high conscience of mankind. I had labored under the notion that I was furthering and giving more complete expression to the values that had guided my life. But the lashing tongue of the commissar informed me otherwise.” What was wrong with Spartacus? It was filled with “brutalism” and “sadism,” contained psychoanalytic terms such as “inner struggle,” and generally violated Marxist-Leninist principals on human relations. Fast wrote that “the commercial book publishers of the US had hustled me out of their offices because I was a Communist, the Communist Party had established its discipline because I was a writer. I sat down that night and wept, because it was the end.”

The Daily Worker (Feb. 17, 1952) accused Fast of creating “a reverse for the class theme,” showing the “destructive influence of Freudian mystifications concerning the erotic as against the social basis of character.” This anecdote of the creator of a Spartacus cultural product being reduced to tears, and caught between rejection by both the Soviets and Americans, is eerily prescient of Yakobson’s own moment of emotional defeat in Maya Plisetskaya’s dressing room.

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following the mid-run shutdown of his *Spartacus* in New York a decade later.

A letter in the Bakhrushin Museum from Khachaturian to Yakobson, dated May 19, 1946, documents that as far back as this date, nearly a decade before he received the commission to make *Spartacus*, Yakobson was already in conversation with Khachaturian about it. Fyodor Lopukhov, who returned as director of the Kirov Ballet following Stalin’s death, was the critical person who finally made the engagement of Yakobson as the choreographer of the Kirov’s *Spartacus* possible. Thus, in December 1955, Yakobson was signed on at last to begin work on the ballet.

Although Yakobson was deliberately apolitical when it came to government politics, he was intensely political in regard to his art. In *Spartacus*, the two intertwine with remarkable subtlety. Yakobson focuses on the aesthetic rebellion that the ballet effects by opening up the classical vocabulary to a new freedom of expressiveness. His symbolic oppressors as a choreographer are the authoritarian rules of ballet classicism as defined by the Soviets in the 1930s and 1940s. Refuting these by virtue of his approach to choreography, he is working to extend the doctrines of Jean-Georges Noverre and Michel Fokine into an expressive naturalness outside the lines of *danse d’école*.

Despite the grandeur and scale of the *Spartacus* narrative, and the heft of Yakobson’s cast and props as well as Khachaturian’s orchestration, the real story his ballet tells is one of remarkable intimacy and emotional privacy. Inside of the massive authoritarian power, he shows us the personal scale of suffering. The ballet is set as a series of kinetic tableaux alternately animated and still. The ballet’s scenery and costume designer was the modernist artist, Valentina Khodasevich. The effect of Yakobson’s play with extremes of emotional scale in *Spartacus* vividly reminds us that this is how history impinges on the present, and that all apparently free actions in the contemporary moment have ripples connecting them to the past.

The ballet opens with a series of crisp marching squadrons of military battalions, their lines starched, their tempos brisk, and their pivoting maneuvers crisp as they enter the city center, the human antecedents to Soviet war tanks in a huge spectacle of power. One of the few instances when Yakobson choreographed for a corps, in this instance it is nearly the real thing, with a corps de ballet performing as the male-only squadrons of the Roman army trot in, stepping as smartly as trained horses to Khachaturian’s triumphal fanfare.

Next, the human cost of this grandeur staggers through the stone archway of the city, as the enslaved captives of Crassus are driven to market like human chattel. The final person to enter is *Spartacus*, who lumbers slowly forward with his fellow slave Harmodius, as both men wear harnesses, yoking them to pull the massive chariot on which the Roman oppressor, Crassus, stands. Yakobson doesn’t belabor the large-scale imagery of enslavement, however; instead the next scene exemplifies the “choreographic thinking” about which Lopukhov spoke, by disclosing a large subject through the small moment of two women inside the slave market.

On several levels, *Spartacus* makes efforts to pick up the threads of innovation from the decade of the 1920s, to remember a modernism suppressed by Socialist realism and the drambalet. Specifically, Yakobson also quotes from his own work in *The Golden Age* a quarter century earlier, pulling these artifacts of dance innovation into the Soviet 1950s. These included the use of cinematic techniques of slow motion, a personal ballet language, the expression of subjectivity, and a dance vocabulary that stretches outside of classicism to embrace gymnastics and athletics.

Repeatedly throughout the ballet, Yakobson uses frieze action and *tableaux vivants* so that action quiets into stillness and then animates back into full movement. One of the most arresting instances of this device occurs in the battle scenes of the slave revolt where the dancers assume the attenuated drama of the actual scenes from the Pergamon Altar, freezing as the curtain falls and then rearranging themselves in a newly advanced stage of the conflict, which we glimpse like a stop action snapshot when the curtain rises again a moment later.

Phrygia, Spartacus’s faithful wife, has the ballet’s most extended and least conventional solos, and they are all dances of sorrow and loss. They culminate in her final dance of anguish and mourning, performed in soft sandals and without any virtuoso movements. This solo, the most often
excerpted section of the ballet for galas and mixed repertory programs, reveals Phrygia’s desperate farewell to Spartacus as he heads into a battle she already knows he will lose. It is best preserved in a documentary film clip made in 1962 of the staging Yakobson created for the Bolshoi Ballet. This clip was subsequently broadcast on a Soviet television program called About Ballet, with narration by the critic Lvov-Anokhin. Here Maya Plisetskaya as Phrygia dances in bare legs, soft sandals with small heels, and a sheer tunic, as she performs Yakobson’s beautifully spare choreography. Her partner, Spartacus, danced by Dmitry Begak, is monumental and solid as she winds about him like a tendril, loving, containing, and trying to restrain his quiet yet fierce determination to go forward into battle.

Yakobson uses the Spartacus legend as a means to depict vividly the personal cost of living under a brutal authoritarian ruler. In scenes where the gladiators are goaded into fighting their compatriots, they perform a dance of darting footwork that neatly suggests the edgy anxiousness of their mental states, as they realize they must kill a friend to live. Yakobson thus suggests how political systems eat into the soul of their citizens, replacing humanity with savagery. While this was enormously risky, he is able to accomplish this because the surface story seems so transparently about the oppressed that the deliberate ambiguity of the oppressor’s identity doesn’t register.

Ambiguity, however, is not the currency of propaganda or propagandistic modes of spectatorship, and thus the reception of Yakobson’s work by the American press faulted it for not being what the scale of its narrative had become in the West – a massively scaled epic in Stanley Kubrick’s 1960 epic adventure film, also titled Spartacus. Some of the American audiences were likely familiar with Howard Fast and the tensions of the HUAC era around his 1951 pro-Soviet novel. More immediately, however, the young film director Stanley Kubrick had just begun his film career with the enormously successful release of his film, featuring Kirk Douglas as the Christ-like Gladiator leader. Dubbed “the thinking man’s epic,” Kubrick’s Spartacus, with its cinematic grandeur, sweat, and gore – reportedly a college football game of 70,000 fans was recorded shouting “Hail Crassus” for one of the sound effects in a Gladiator fight scene – would be a difficult act for any live performance to follow, particularly a ballet hobbled by Soviet limitations on theatricality, religious symbolism, narrative openness, eroticism – basically all of the essential elements that a Soviet ballet Spartacus could offer as a compelling alternative to the American Spartacus film.

By the time the Bolshoi arrived with Yakobson’s ballet for its opening at the Metropolitan Opera House on September 13, 1962, the lore around the Kirk Douglas Spartacus was turning it into a celebrated anti-Fascist statement, rivaling the original gladiator’s story. Instead of Crassus, the foe was Senator Joseph McCarthy, the self-appointed eliminator of democracy’s Leftists. The screenwriter for Kubrick’s film was Dalton Trumbo, a writer blacklisted by McCarthy. Defying the ban on employing him, Kubrick and Douglas publically announced that Trumbo was the screenwriter of their Spartacus film. They deliberately displayed his name on the film in the Spartacus spirit of heroic action in the face of HUAC’s inquisition into the film industry. Even President Kennedy made a public show of defiance against the intimidation of the blacklist by crossing anti-Communist picket lines to attend the opening screening of the Spartacus film, a gesture that in retrospect is credited with having helped to end the blacklist. Yakobson’s message in his Spartacus, however, was the wrong one for the polarized moment in which it landed in New York.

In creating Spartacus, Yakobson tested the ways in which the contemporary body interacts with historical texts. He made the meeting an occasion for inverting the customary hegemony of dance history so that the voice of the narrator is not that of the dominant power but of the one tearing at it from inside. Instead of silencing the alternative forms of narration, Yakobson configures history in Spartacus as a way to make the voice of the individual rise up out of history and point the way toward social change through art. He does this through the medium of ballet itself, questioning the archival function of the stage, thus focusing on how bodies instruct us more vividly in preparation for the present, rather than on memorializing the past.

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7 About Ballet, with narration by Boris L’vov-Anokhin, directed by National Soviet TV (Moscow: 1962); archival video courtesy of Irina Jacobson and the Stanford University Archives Collection.
By freeing the female dancers in Spartacus from not just turn-out but also toe shoes, and placing them instead in sandals with small heels, Yakobson made possible a new foot position that his female dancers could attain—an exquisitely high relevé. The impression is that their legs seem to be continuously stretching to give the elongated line and lift of a dancer in pointe shoes. Yet the effect is all the more dramatic because it is achieved through the sheer muscular effort of a forcefully pointed toe, without the caged support of a toe shoe. Yet for the United States, the birthplace of modern dance, Yakobson’s efforts to discard pointe shoes and tunics looked more unfinished than innovative.

Among the comments the Bolshoi received about its 1956 London season had been critics’ observations that the dancing was impressive but the repertoire outdated. In 1958, Igor Moiseyev had tried, and failed, at staging his own Spartacus for the Bolshoi Ballet using Khachaturian’s score and Volkov’s libretto. A feature in Life magazine in February 1959 on the Bolshoi Ballet and Moiseyev’s Spartacus discusses the production in a tone that suggests it would be part of a forthcoming American tour by the Bolshoi that spring. Clearly efforts were being made to assemble a repertoire that could showcase a more contemporary side of the Bolshoi, and a new full-length ballet seemed destined to be part of it. The Life photos of Moiseyev’s production depict a courtesan doing a strip-tease with a crowd of Romans grabbing at her feet, as she stands revealed in a saggy beige body stocking. Despite its enormously expensive costumes and décor, Moiseyev’s Spartacus was a failure with Soviet audiences and critics. It lasted just two performances before it was permanently erased from the season and the Bolshoi repertoire. Mindful that the company needed a fresh full-length ballet for its tour to the U.S., the Bolshoi turned to Yakobson. So Yakobson began a cross-city commute between Leningrad and Moscow as he raced to prepare a Spartacus for the Bolshoi that would meet the demands of all the oversight committees and still do justice to his vision.

In the United States, the Spartacus preparation was also unfolding. The priming of American audiences’ excitement grew when The New York Times sent a correspondent, Seymour Topping, to cover the premiere of Yakobson’s Spartacus at the Bolshoi Theatre on April 4, 1962. Topping filed an overnight review to advance the tour, calling it a “sensual extravaganza” and noting that the premiere was greeted with cheers from the audience. But he also wondered in print how a “richly costumed tale of Roman violence and lust, danced on half pointes, would be received by American audiences who look to the Bolshoi for a more traditional approach.” Without a proper context for the radicalism of Yakobson’s choreography, and with tensions heightened by geopolitical competition echoing through the content of Spartacus, two of the critics for the major New York newspapers, Allen Hughes at The New York Times and Walter Terry at The Herald Tribune, both took aim at Yakobson’s Spartacus, armed with sharply polarized Cold War prose. The most knowledgeable daily dance critic in New York, The New York Times’ John Martin, was absent. Martin was about to retire and he was making his exit by accompanying the New York City Ballet on their eight-week tour to the USSR, scheduled to begin soon after the Bolshoi’s arrival in New York.

The morning after the Bolshoi premiered Spartacus at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, The New York Times published Hughes’ review, a catalogue of unfulfilled expectations. His article opens with the statement that “The Bolshoi Ballet’s much-heralded Spartacus was given its first American performance last night, and this reviewer feels it is only fair to preface his remarks with the admission that he found the spectacle to be one of the most preposterous theatrical exercises he has ever seen.” Hughes proceeds to deride Spartacus in caustic prose designed to display the wit of the writer more than the attributes or problems of the production. “There is so much that is unbelievable about it that it is difficult to know what to mention first.” Hughes writes. “But, for example, the fact that one of the greatest ballet companies in the world would invest so much talent, time and money and presumably belief, in the staging of a dull pageant is simply beyond understanding.” Hughes repeats his contention that the ballet “contains very little dancing of any kind” and is “conspicuously lacking in taste.” One of the sections of the ballet he actually describes is the gladiators’ fight scene; he objects that the number of corpses
on the ground doesn’t equal the number of fighting sequences depicted. In the same deprecating tone, Hughes dismisses Khachaturian’s score as being “in the style of Hollywood sound tracks.” He concludes: “The work as a whole represents a sadly disappointing attempt to do something that Hollywood manages better.”

Terry’s review in the New York Herald Tribune adopted a similar tone of personal affront. “You have to see it to believe it,” was his opening sentence. “Spartacus is not as non-dancy as the comment overheard at the end of the first act would lead one to believe: ‘Look Ma, no dancing!’ There is dancing, pseudo-Roman, pseudo-Oriental, pseudo-Isadora Duncan and pseudo quite a few other things... The truth is the dancing gets lost in the bigness of it all. Only the unrestrainedly emotional acting manages to hold its own with the massive towers and statues and with costumes that knock you senseless.” In a tone that suggests an adult admonishing a child that what they thought was good is in fact awful, Terry compares the ballet to “the eye-battings, lurching and gesticulations of silent movies,” and “extravagant extravaganza” that suggests if one can “combine your sense of humor with a nostalgia for the fanciful improbabilities of the old screen spectacles, you will have a whirl.”

The essence of Terry’s summation is that, whatever Yakobson’s Spartacus is, it is not dance, much less serious art.

What Hughes and Terry did not see was that Yakobson was making a fledgling attempt at ballet Modernism. However, Modernism from this source was too foreign, too unexpected, and too un-Soviet. On September 23, 1962, Hughes wrote again about Spartacus, this time as a Sunday feature. Under the headline “About Spartacus: Can It Be Understood Though Disliked?” Hughes commences a half-hearted reassessment that reveals the angry responses his flip initial review must have generated from New York Times readers. “Now that the general astonishment created by the Bolshoi Ballet’s unveiling of its ‘Spartacus’ has abated some-

what, it might be worthwhile to think more calmly about this work, its reason for being, and its lack of significance for us.” Hughes editorializes: “Let us begin by reminding ourselves that for all the universality it is supposed to possess, art—even the best of it—does not invariably travel well... Just now, the New York City Ballet is headed for its first tour of the Soviet Union, and it will be surprising if the Soviet press and public do not find at least a part of the company’s repertory and dancing style incomprehensible and therefore, valueless,” he writes, suggesting that his reviews might be counter attacks on Soviet audiences and press responses to New York City Ballet.

In an effort to justify his earlier critique of Spartacus, Hughes suggests that perhaps the ballet was not really as popular in the USSR as was reported, or that the interest was short lived. “We have not been told how the Muscovites felt the morning after, nor how they have responded since,” he offers. Then he tries a second justification, suggesting that, if in fact the Soviets did like the ballet (and it would have taken little effort to confirm its extraordinary popularity at the Kirov and Bolshoi), then this is either because “it has a special patriotic or ideological appeal for Russians it does not have for us” or “Soviet concepts of staging and costuming seem markedly old-fashioned to us... [but] do not seem so to the Soviets.” Perhaps even the absence of classical dancing for audiences accustomed to ballet classics, Hughes says, may seem quite refreshing or strike the Russian people as being genuinely modern. He then resumes his defensive stance, concluding in the same lofty tone with which he began: “That Spartacus is not for us we know for sure, and it is probably safe to assume that the work is of no artistic significance whatsoever.” Then in his next sentence, Hughes contradicts himself, ending with a final statement that is the closest he comes to an honest assessment in either article: “The possibility exists however, that the work is of no artistic significance whatsoever.” Then in his next sentence, Hughes contradicts himself, ending with a final statement that is the closest he comes to an honest assessment in either article: “The possibility exists however, that the work is of no artistic significance whatsoever.”

That this humiliation unfolded in tandem with the warm reception of NYCB in the USSR exac-

10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
erbated the affront. It also served, de facto, as an object lesson in how the Cold War conditioning of spectatorship created confusion between conflicting historical ideas of the stage: as a state ideological platform versus an arena for autonomous artistic voices. Yakobson was left suspended in between; slammed by the American press as a perceived patriot and censored by the Soviets for being an unrepentant outcast.

Bibliography


Traces: What Cultural Exchange Left Behind

Tim Scholl

Those of us who try to study performance typically have recovery as our operative mode. We weave together scraps of a “lost” past, be it performance, performance tradition, institution, training method, or style, in our quest to propose or describe what once was. Working with the tools and materials at our disposal, we do what we can to create a legible narrative from them, neither definitive nor exhaustive, or even partially complete. But have we allowed this quest for notions of congruence and coherence – and most obviously, “authenticity” – to blind us to other ways of interpreting events? Has our search for the lost past made us less open to other possibilities, especially to the tantalizing traces we come across, and too often dismiss as incomplete or inconclusive? In trying to map the forest, have we overlooked the trees?

I don’t mean to suggest that we should ignore one in favor of the other, but I am arguing for a reading of so-called “lost” works or bygone performances that leaves space to accommodate the parts of the story that may not fit the tidy narrative we would like to describe. This idea strikes me as particularly appropriate as we look at cultural exchange. We are careful to make room for a variety of contexts in considering the works we study: political, historical, gender, class, etc. But it has always seemed to me that in the case of cultural exchange between the United States and the USSR, politics and cultural difference dominate our discussions, and intrude especially on what is often a kind of gold standard of evidence in performance studies: the memories of lived experiences. When used carefully, and when provided to us after years of reflection on the part of the participant, they are invaluable. But in the best-case scenarios, we rely on recollections or opinions that may have been shaped by blighted careers, attempts to whitewash or exaggerate past involvements, in an absence of institutional data that has gone missing, and increasingly, archives that are less accessible than they once were.

Limited communication between performers and audiences has likewise long been a glaring omission in our studies. In an era of post-performance chats and audience surveys, the performances of the 1950s and 1960s seem to end at the stage door, and survive primarily in the recollections of well-intentioned viewers who witnessed these performances more than half a century ago. I have generally found their enthusiasms for the performances they saw more telling and convincing than the “facts” that they recall.

Nonetheless, a number of tantalizing traces of cultural exchange remained in the repertory in the Soviet Union, in particular. Sometimes these were one-off performances, and in other cases, they become enshrined in choreography. Two categories of these relate to the dissemination of the Balanchine repertory in Russia: first, the “homages” of unlicensed, unsupervised attempts to recreate works that were seen on the tours, and second, signs of Balanchine’s influence that can still be seen in the post-Soviet repertory. This is not an exhaustive list, but is meant to encourage us to think beyond notions of reconstruction or authenticity, to questions of influence and the spread of ideas.

One particularly riveting example of a survival of Balanchine’s choreography came to light in an interview Pavel Gershenzon conducted with former Kirov dancer Gabriela Komleva in 1996, as the first “official” production of Balanchine’s Symphony in C was being prepared in St. Petersburg’s Maryinsky Theater and after Komleva had worked for many years as a coach in the Maryinsky. Komleva recalled dancing the Scherzo and Adagio of the ballet – only two parts of the work could be staged without official licensing – in a performance rehearsed by John Taras in Leningrad in 1967. The performance was given in a series of “creative evenings” that her teacher, Natalia Dudinskaya, arranged for the students in her class of perfection outside the theater.

Because Makarova and Sizova proved unsuitable for the roles they were assigned – at least according to Komleva — she danced both solos in
alternating performances, including the Scherzo with Baryshnikov. This series of performances is itself interesting in that it falls outside the usual scope of Balanchine performances in the Soviet Union, some five and nine years, respectively, after the Paris Opera and New York City Ballet tours introduced the complete work.

More intriguing, however, is the work’s afterlife. In 1988, as Komleva was planning her retirement performance, she says that she decided to introduce the work to a new audience, opening the performance with the Adagio from Balanchine’s *Symphony in C*. She had danced the Adagio in the Conservatory at least once in the years intervening in one of her own “creative evenings.” Komleva doesn’t go into the sort of details we might like to know concerning the performance (she tells her interviewer: “You never saw the tape of that performance”), but asserts that the details that Patricia Neary passed on to the Maryinsky troupe in the late 1990s were the same as those she recalls Taras emphasizing, and praises the faithfulness of “the Americans” to the choreographic text and attention to details.¹

The experiences with Taras and then Neary opened a window for Komleva into the curatorship of the ballet at a time when she, in her role as a coach, might more often be involved in the practice of changing choreography to make it more suited to younger performers. At a time when Dudinskaya famously said that her late husband, Konstantin Sergeyev, kept what was “good” in his restagings of Petipa masterworks, Komleva’s thinking marks a shift from the primacy of the essence of the work to the importance of the proper articulation of its smallest components. This shift would be important for the reception of the flood of European and North American choreographers who came to stage their works in Russia in the 1990s.

Given the ways that we usually talk about cultural-exchange era performances, this Taras staging of 1967 receives considerably less attention than the “institutional” stagings for the Maryinsky, and later, the Bolshoi Theater as the Soviet Union unraveled (*Scotch Symphony* and *Theme and Variations*, 1989). Unlike those institution-to-institution projects, this one seems to have been something closer to a personal one, and the experimental quality speaks to the somewhat subversive contacts with the West that Khrushchev’s Thaw allowed, and that an artist of Dudinskaya’s reputation could allow herself. (The same could be said of Komleva in the 1980s.)

There are stories about a pair of dancers who traveled the hinterlands in Russia, staging “Balanchine” from performances they saw on the tours or early videotapes that they managed to obtain, but I would like to turn to another means of leaving choreographic traces, the ones still visible in the choreography of some monuments of nineteenth-century choreography as they were re-staged and adapted by Soviet balletmasters who saw the Balanchine performances.

Audience members in the Maryinsky in the late 1990s could see the sort of curatorship of the Russian and Soviet ballet that few companies — due to the expense of maintaining two versions of a multi-act ballet in the repertory simultaneously — could scarcely allow themselves. For a time, it was possible to see Sergeyev’s 1948 *Raymonda* alongside Grigorovich’s 1984 version. The differences in what these versions kept and discarded from older versions were telling, and highlighted in the scenography of Grigorovich’s newer version. The Bolshoi’s production had evolved to a kind of Palace of Soviets blankness — the huge open spaces we know from the productions of *Spartacus* or *Ivan the Terrible* — but Grigorovich also retained some features of the original choreography, especially in the group dances (Saracens). The result was that a portrait that could be seen onstage in the older version when Raymonda gestured to it was missing from the newer version.

Many people attributed these disruptions to the presence of Balanchine performances in the years intervening, and a desire to freshen up the choreography with new scenography. Of course, there is a deeper Balanchine meaning here as well: the notion that the *werkstreu*, the “work truth” of Balanchine’s choreography, resided in the choreographic text, and that other components of the production were necessarily subservient to it. To that way of thinking, it made perfect sense to keep the gesture with nothing to gesture to.

The 1975 film made of Grigorovich’s *Giselle* (with scenography by Vorobyova) offers another-

er tantalizing glimpse of an earlier suggestion of Balanchine’s influence on the Soviet stage, or more precisely, on the visual elements. The *Giselle* recorded with Natalya Bessmertnova and Mikhail Lavrovsky still reveals some of the more arresting set designs created for the ballet. *Giselle* is a “white” ballet, famous for its ballet blanc, but this filmed version goes beyond what one reviewer called an “operetta/pastel” quality: it seems frozen, thanks to a great deal of studio back-lighting, its visual elements pared to a minimum. Even the autumnal trees in Act I appear to be covered in snow. Was Grigorovich influenced by Balanchine’s stagings here, and does the effect work? Both questions are difficult to answer conclusively, but this “trace” of Balanchine’s famously stark sets certainly proposes a sharp departure from the sets and costumes in brown and blue that Virsaladze had churned out by the yard before and after this unusual version.

In this case, and given Grigorovich’s love of innovation in this phase of his career, the freshness of this filmed version, or a Petipa work performed without its requisite portrait, brings the visual components of the work closer to what was being done in the West.

It’s important to note that the context for these works often changed quickly. Paul Boos worked hard to stage *Serenade* in the Maly Theater in St. Petersburg in the 1990s, but neither that theater’s dancers nor its public was quite ready for such innovation from the 1930s. After some lackluster dancing, however, the performers’ attentions focused at the end of the ballet, when a stage death seems the logical reading of the work. It was an early, but telling example of the way that the Balanchine works would become imaginatively refigured as “Russian,” not American works, and signaled an important new strategy of acceptance of them.

Given that cultural exchange was aimed at “hearts and minds,” we should bear in mind that the performers on both sides were the first beneficiaries. A well-known professor of Russian literature who has worked for many years in the United States once told me that when he saw the NYCB in Moscow in 1972, it was his first experience of modernism, aside from some “little pictures by Picasso,” and that the performance he saw prompted his desire to emigrate. That is, of course, a pow-

erful testimony to the exchange project’s success, yet the transformations that occurred, in thinking, if not always in dancing, sometimes happened in the absence of performances, in the meetings of peers that the cultural exchanges were also meant to stage. The dancers of the Finnish National Ballet, who served as hosts for a kind of ballet détente dinner party with ABT and Soviet dancers in 1957, still recall the moment as transformative, even though the Russian and US dancers did not, apparently, see each other perform. Yet several of the dancers I interviewed have asked me about one or another of the Soviet or American dancers they happened to meet that night and with whom they shared some artistic kinship. These audience effects are often the easiest to pin down.

In studying the performances of the Cold War, we find ourselves in a new territory, mostly because the project was about establishing interpersonal connections or influencing local intellectuals, “proving” the superiority of one system or another through its performances. There is evidence of that, but it is often inconclusive, which suggests the need to look slightly farther afield for the traces that remain – of memories, experiences, and performances – in order to continue to assemble a more comprehensive picture of the workings of the process of cultural exchange.
“You wanna live?” the leader of the Jets in *West Side Story* asks. “You play it cool,” he answers. With a “rocket in your pocket,” the song and dance “Cool” allied nuclear frisson with sexual explosion and bravado. The eruptions of movement echoed the violent undercurrent of the coming war between gangs. Few words set the scene that music and dance dominate. Starting with snapping fingers to cohere the group, Riff (in the stage version of the show, not the film) calls out to different Jets as they lose their cool and “jump out of [their] skin,” as one of the dancers put it.¹ The snapping fingers bring them back. And then the music begins to spiral tighter, building contrapuntal lines until trumpets blast the melody in full force. The movement goes vertical. Jets shoot straight up, tightening their bodies into coiled rods. Hands and legs dart out and up; tight turns end on the ground only for the dancers to spring off into action again. Leonard Bernstein’s music for the number is his most jazzed, his most dissonant, with swing lines by the brass and contrasting volume that propel a call-and-response. Groups of three or five come into and out of action, advancing then retreating. And then there is the offensive move of the whole group. Humped back over bent knees, stomach hollowed-out and fingers snapping, the Jets run and leap in a frontal attack toward the audience. The build-up reaches its peak as dancers spiral from spinning on their toes to sprawling on the ground in one motion, from desperate containment to grateful release. Pressure popped, they are ready to face the Sharks.

*West Side Story* debuted on Broadway in 1957 and on film in 1961. It became a global sensation, touring domestically and internationally from 1958 into the early ‘60s; the film ran for five years straight in Tokyo and Paris. *West Side Story* has become emblematic of the best of musicals, both Broadway and Hollywood. I think there are many untold stories about it—so I wrote a recently published book uncovering them—and one of the most buried aspects is the embeddedness of Cold War politics in the production. Rhetoric about nuclear warfare, as well as the Cold War in general, infused *West Side Story* and the responses to it. The musical also became a battle within the strained relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. Traveling Soviet dancers flocked to the show and pushed for it to tour there; the producers sought State Department sponsorship. In the immediate years after the debut of the musical, the international volley of conversation and interest about it exposed the fragility of cultural diplomacy of the era. Even as it found its local meaning in dozens of very different countries, *West Side Story* bolstered the perception of a bilateral world—with tragic consequences.

When Jerome Robbins was working on ideas for the musical, he thought of the world of New York streets as a war. “This is a play . . . about a square block on which there is a war. You can get everyone’s character out of how they deal with it,” Robbins’ friend commented.² In the playwright Arthur Laurents’ hand, this war led to military illusions and metaphors in drafts of the script. In some, the Jets had ranks, with Riff as Commander and expecting soon to be hauled off to the army. And jets set sights on a new target: the moon. “The jet’s all set and the moon won’t wait,” Riff declares in a draft. Land had ceded to outer space in the brimming conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. The new battleground also appeared in an unused song called “Moon,” which ruminated on how long it takes to fly to the “moonerooney.”³ References to atomic warfare magnified the explosiveness of the fight. Riff begs Tony to take part in the rumble because, without him, “riga-tiga-tum,


³ Annotated Script, n.d. [early 1957?], b.81 f.5, Act I, Scene I, JRP/NYPL.
crock-o jacko—: Hiroshima!” in an early draft. A tabloid with the “screeching” title in the drugstore scene makes the connection to global politics explicit: “New Atomic Threat.”

Lyricist Stephen Sondheim toyed with these ideas in another discarded song that brought together many of the overt references to the Cold War. “Atom Bomb Baby,” a mambo for the dance hall scene, used a hot, sexy woman to symbolize atomic explosiveness. This was a common image during World War II. Fighter planes displayed pictures of women on the fuselage, including starlets such as the Latina Rita Hayworth, who added their wattage to military force. Sondheim pushed the analogy between female sexuality and atomic power even further. The “Atom Bomb Baby” gives a bang: “I go all out for her fallout.” She motivates the fight: “She’s my fission, she’s my mission.” And she provides emotional cover for the devastating results: “Now my Atom Bomb Baby makes me feel so proud/That all day long I’m walkin’ a mushroom-shaped cloud.”

The song reinforced a vision of women as sexual objects, and the fact that the song is a mambo also tied that explosiveness to Puerto Ricans. The over-the-top lyrics may have doomed it, or its explicit references to the newly toxic for the story to contain. But the Cold War simmered in the background of the script, with little direct reference to it in words in the final version of the play.

Dances such as “Cool,” however, conveyed those tensions clearly. Just below snapping fingers lay exploding—nuclear—bodies. “The radioactive fallout from West Side Story must still be descending on Broadway this morning,” Walter Kerr began his opening-night review of the show. Kerr gave it a mixed review, seeing brilliance in certain parts but little emotional wallop overall. The clear exception was the dance: “The sense of seething pressure and detonating release is extraordinary.” Another critic declared that Robbins’ dances “advance the action with the momentum of an inter-continental missile.” Robbins himself promoted this connection, seeing the gang members as living in “pressure cooker”: “I think they have a sense of having been born into one of the worst worlds possible—fall-out, hydrogen bombs. You get the feeling that they think they have to live their lives now—without delay.”

Audience members saw this connection as well. “The two warring groups, the terrible weapons to be used only if the other fellow proves untrustworthy, and the tragedy that faces the world if this deadly division is not stopped,” wrote one in a letter to the editor of the Washington Post. “Can we see our own giant follies clearly enough, to understand that all of us are participating in developments toward the biggest rumble ever, and are we smart enough to call a halt?” he asked.

Critic Henry Hewes, writing in the Saturday Review, concurred: “Later, when the rival gang leaders agree to have a war council, their terse summation ‘no jazz before then’ is a capsule Cold War. And the discussion of weapons they will use in their forthcoming rumble is as ridiculous and at the same time terrifying as are most disarmament conferences.” Why wouldn’t teenagers fill that vacuum with “cool and fierce bravado,” the kind modeled for them by the United States and the USSR on the international stage?

As hot and explosive as the show was, though, it promoted “Cool.” This signature song and dance built on the style of jazz musicians such as Lester Young, who combined intense expression and individuality with a relaxed confidence. African Americans were the embodiment of cool in the city, projecting a practiced nonchalance in the face of continuing discrimination and provocation.

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4 Script [Jan. 1956], b.17 f.4, Stephen Sondheim Papers [hereafter SS]/Wisconsin Historical Society [hereafter WHS].
5 Lyrics manuscripts, b.18 f.1, SS/WHS.
8 Daily News (27 September 1957), b.69 f.12, Jerome Robbins Personal Papers [hereafter JRPP]/NYPL.
12 Peter Stearns, in American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style (New York: New York University Press, 1994), and Joel Dinerstein, in “Lester Young and the Cold War.”
The connection became explicit during Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev’s visit to the United Nations in New York in the fall of 1960. He burst into anger at various times during the summit when countries criticized his country’s actions, even banging his shoe at one point. British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan, who had become a mediator between the USSR and the United States, urged Khrushchev to “‘get cool, boy.”13 And, just a few years later, in April 1963, the production served as the basis of a parody of US-Soviet relations in Mad magazine. Instead of gangs on the West Side, the satirists placed the story on the East Side, between the “two rival gangs at the U.N.,” with “When You’re a Jet” redone as “When You’re a Red,” sung and danced by Khrushchev and Tito.

The production displayed these tensions but also provided a channel to ameliorate them. Diplomatic niceties and cultural exchanges increased after the death of Stalin in 1953, even as actions in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia continued to heat up the animosities. Eisenhower promoted cultural exchanges, a soft approach, with less at stake.14 A visit of Moscow’s Moiseyev Dance Company to New York in April 1958 acted on the idea.15 Such exchanges put on the show—literally—of diplomacy and rapprochement, as Moiseyev appeared as part of a carefully crafted narrative masterminded by impresario Sol Hurok, himself a Russian émigré. West Side Story entered the staged rapprochement when the Moiseyev dancers attended a matinee. Their leader, Igor Moiseyev, then urged the Soviet Embassy to invite the musical to tour Russia.16 Just a few months later, Soviet students visiting the United Nations chose to see West Side Story over the play Look Homeward, Angel, three to one.17 With this kind of public attention from Soviets in New York, producer Hal Prince followed up on the suggestion with Hurok. Prince also solicited the help of the influential newspaper publisher Alicia Patterson, who had joined Adlai Stevenson on a trip to Moscow in July 1958 and had connections to the upper echelons of both Moscow and Washington. She also became determined to arrange a tour of West Side Story in Russia.18 The effort merely roused anger and frustration, however, particularly for advocates of the show. The State Department had one view of the production: as fodder for anti-Americanism, with its stark portrayal of discrimination and juvenile delinquency, and its tarnished view of the Ameri-
can ideal of opportunity for all.

Nearly a year later, the visit of the Bolshoi Ballet in the spring of 1959 reignited the campaign. The Bolshoi dancers announced on arrival that *West Side Story* was the show they most wanted to see, having heard exclamations by the Moiseyev dancers. The Bolshoi visit to the show prompted even more publicity than the Moiseyev company, with a backstage photo shoot of ballet and Broadway dancers exchanging steps. A Jet taught a Bolshoi ballerina the mambo; a Bolshoi dancer hoisted Carol Lawrence, playing Maria, into a high lift.¹⁹

The publicity gambit drove Prince to pressure diplomats again.²⁰ He traveled to Washington to converse with the US diplomat who had just negotiated the new cultural agreement with Russia. The diplomat held out little hope of US government support and urged Prince not to organize an independent tour. He even declared that the Russians were not that interested in the production. “Moiseyev is in the doghouse because he liked *West Side Story* too much,” Prince reported to Robbins, Laurents, Bernstein, and Sondheim. “So the Russians sent their Cultural Minister to see *West Side Story* so that he could report back that it wasn’t so hot after all. His lukewarm reaction has been widely publicized.” The American diplomat went on to suggest that if the Russians did agree to host the production, it was probably because they were planning to use it in an anti-American propaganda campaign. “Now I am convinced that we cannot take this chance,” Prince concluded.²¹

However, Prince did not give up quite as easily as he suggested he would to the diplomat and the creators. Performing in the Soviet Union was a way to give the show a global political impact that few musicals could even attempt. In July 1959, he traveled to the Soviet Union himself to “see how I thought they would take the play.” After two

weeks there, he came back “fortified in the notion that it would do far more good than bad.”²² He believed that the aesthetic quality and innovation would withstand any propagandizing against it. He was sure that its artistic merit would not permit an interpretation of the story as a literal rendering of American life.

Despite this belief, Prince dropped his effort to get the show to the USSR in the face of intransigent State Department disapproval. There were also plans for a privately sponsored tour in Israel and Western Europe that were far more concrete. And then—just a couple of months after Prince’s visit to the USSR—a tiny squib of an announcement appeared in the *New York Times* that fired up the question again. The Soviet Minister of Culture declared that three American plays were to be produced that season: Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, James Lee’s *Career*, and Arthur Laurents’ *West Side Story*.²³ Infuriated, Prince barely kept his cool in his tirade to a Soviet diplomat. He immediately fired off a letter that sought to make them aware of the licensing rights necessary for any production.²⁴ Rumors began to come from Russia itself about the plans for the production. Bernstein, traveling with the Philharmonic there, heard about it from a woman at a party who claimed to be with working on the adaptation with the Vakhtangov Theatre in Moscow. Surprised, Bernstein asked Stein, traveling with the Philharmonic there, heard from working on the adaptation with the Vakhtangov Theatre in Moscow. Surprised, Bernstein asked

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were making their own presentation of the musical, with little music or dance. (“Sounds as if they were about to discover the telephone—again,” responded Robbins.26) Prince reprimanded the State Department for their implication in this artistic-scan-dal-in-the-making. “It seems to me lethal propaganda without these artistic elements [the music and dance]. It is disappointing that something which is not West Side Story, but merely a devastating account of life in New York City, should be presented to the Russian people, when they might have seen the original, which was lyrical and totally stylized.”

A few months later, Prince received assurances from the State Department that the production was not going forward.27 (In fact, a translation of the play appeared in a Soviet theater journal in 1959, complete with lyrics to the songs. Although the preface to the translation mentions that the work for a production was underway at the Moscow Theatre, there is no evidence that one occurred at that time.28)

The question of how, when, or if the show would travel continued throughout the early 1960s. Yet another Soviet dance company (150 Ural dancers) attended the show in Paris and declared that the show depicted a problem they knew about at home. This bolstered many who believed that juvenile delinquency served as grounds for commonality rather than disparagement of the United States. Producers of the European tour asked the State Department again about sponsorship for the company to go to the Soviet Union. The State Department was adamant: no tour.29

Still, it traveled. The album leaked in. Soviets who were able to travel to London, Paris, and New York made a beeline to the show. The cosmonaut Gherman Titov, who was the second person (and second Russian) to orbit the Earth in August 1961, went to see the film in May 1962 in Washington with forty other Russians.30 The film, in fact, arrived on Russian soil before a stage production took place as part of the 1962 Moscow Film Festival. Russians stood in line for four hours to see West Side Story and it was considered one of the most popular films of the festival.31 The US delegation, however, attempted to slant the viewing, opening the film by saying that the audience should understand that the depiction of gangs in New York “represents only one section of the city, not the whole city.” It was a slice of American life that was not representative of it.32 American exhibitors even requested that the lyrics to “America” not be translated into Russian. Izvestia, the Soviet government newspaper, promptly printed a full translation.33

In the Soviet Union, the film prompted stage productions, first in the republics of Armenia and Estonia.34 Then rumors started that West Side Story was coming to Moscow. Robbins, Bernstein, Laurents, and Sondheim rallied the lawyers again, who shot off a threatening letter to the State Department. This time the lawyers targeted the International Business Practices Division, rather than the Department of Cultural Affairs. The specific

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26 Prince to Ambassador Lacy, 30 December 1959, b.198 f.4, HP/NYPL.
27 Frank G. Siscoe, Director East-West Contacts Staff, to Prince, 29 February 1960, b.198 f.4, HP/NYPL.
28 The script was published with the title “The History of the Western Outskirts” in Sovremennia Dramaturgiiia (Contemporary Dramaturgy) 14, trans. A. Afonina and L. Moroshkina (Moscow: Iskusstvo Pub., 1959): 275-342; Russian State Art Library [hereafter RSAL], Moscow, Russia. Research assistance by Daria Lotareva in Moscow for the retrieval of reviews of the play and film; translation by Mariya Smirnov.
29 For a more thorough discussion of the debates of the State Department from the late 1950s through the 1960s, see my A Place for Us, chaps. 4 and 6.
33 “Izvestia Sees Political Angle,” 17. The song “America” seems to have prompted an interpretive change in lyrics in the translation of the film too, referenced in an article on the film: “Everybody is proud and free here/Here, every third is hungry!” Georgii Makarov, “Vzlety i padeniia miuz-

ikula” [The Rise and Fall of the Musical], in Mify i real’nost’: zarubezhnoe kino segodnia [The Myth and the Reality: Foreign Cinema Today], vypusk 3 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1972): 262; RSAL; translation of article provided by Yulia Cherkasova.
tic situation “may afford your department with an opportunity to advance the cause” of protecting foreign property rights for all American authors, the lawyer reasoned. Even the appeal to capitalism did not inspire foreign diplomats to intervene on behalf of West Side Story’s creators. The Moscow Operetta Theater scheduled the production with only a day’s notice in July 1965. The reviews were mixed. One lamented the lack of “humor and happiness” in the play, a sign that “Gee, Officer Krupke” might not have been rendered in the same way. In fact, it is difficult to know exactly what music or dance was used. Records were available but scores were harder to come by. Similarly with dance, the film might have served as inspiration for movement, but there was little training in the jazz dance so necessary to Robbins’ choreography. But the barriers of Bernstein’s music and Robbins’ choreography, infractions of intellectual property, cultural confusion, and political tensions—all this did not stop the production from rolling through the Soviet Union, from Leningrad to Chelyabinsk, east of the Ural mountains. The reviews indicate that most productions were significantly altered, making clear that the “immorality of American social culture” crushed individuals and the potential for “simple human understanding.”

Would the meaning have changed so much if the dance of the production had remained the same? Or, as Hal Prince put it, was West Side Story “lethal propaganda” without the music and dance, but recognizable aesthetic innovation and a bridge to empathy with it? I’d like to think Prince was right. Even for American critics, the dancing provided a way into—and out of—the more difficult subject matter of prejudice, murder, sexual assault, and failures of policy and intervention. “Dancing is not used as a release from tension,” the dance critic Walter Terry explained, “but as a vivid symbol of it, as a desperate, sometimes evil and sometimes hopeful voice speaking through the body.” West Side Story abetted the perception of an enclosed world divided into two camps—two gangs—but, through dance, it was a world both “tough and tender,” a world that contained a rumble but also an idyllic “somewhere.”

35 Miles Lourie, Orenstein, Arrow & Lourie, to Harold Levin, International Business Practices Division, State Department, 25 November 1964; b.77 f.25, JRP/NYPL.
37 Y. Ostrai, “Successes and Failures of a Certain Premiere,” Moskovskia Pravda (11 August 1965); RSAL. Translation by Mariya Smirnov.
38 Cheliabinski rabochii (11 July 1970); RSAL; translation by Mariya Smirnov.
39 Krasnoe znamia (Tomsk) (16 May 1974); RSAL; translation by Mariya Smirnov.
41 Cooke, “The Theatre.”
Cold War Modernist Missionary: Martha Graham Takes Joan of Arc and Catherine of Siena “Behind the Iron Curtain,” 1962

Victoria Phillips

“I am not a propagandist,” declared modern dancer Martha Graham while on her first State Department sponsored tour in 1955, “My dances are not political.”1 Graham’s claims inspire questions: between 1955 and 1987, the United States government, representing every seated president from Dwight D. Eisenhower to Ronald Reagan, exported Graham and her company internationally to over twenty-seven countries.2 Her denial is a signal of Cold War politics in action: the rhetoric meets government anti-Soviet “informational” or propaganda needs. For an artist to represent freedom through democracy, she could not be tied to the state, as Soviet artists were. The totalitarian state produced art for political gain; the United States gave artists democratic freedom to create at will. They had to be, by definition, apolitical. Thus, I follow Graham’s lead of implausible deniability. In a second move, she declared to reporters on tour: “I believe in God,” but she added, “I am not a missionary.”3 Yet on every government-sponsored tour in all countries, Graham performed works that were based on religious references. Not one tour departed American soil as a secular Cold War mission. Her religious programming deliberately fought “atheist” totalitarianism with democracy’s celebration of freedom of speech and individualism through modernism—and, through them, freedom to worship. International audiences were presented an American vision of liberal democracy through Cold War “civil religion.”4 Through a discussion of tour programming “behind the Iron Curtain” in 1962 that emphasized religiously-themed works while promoting freedom of expression available to democratic nations, I explore the connection between religion, modern dance, and liberalism.

The use of religion as American propaganda during the Cold War has been “systematically neglected” according to scholars; the same can be said of religious impulses in the history of modern

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1 Naima Prevots, Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 51; author’s interview with Ethel Winter, dancer, and Charles Hyman, stage manager, regarding the 1955-1956 tour, 2006, transcript available from author.

2 Martha Graham, Federal Bureau of Information file, requested 2006, Victoria Phillips Papers, Performing Arts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (LOC); note that dance historians Victoria Thoms and Camelia Lenart have demonstrated that the government supported and watched Graham’s tours in the 1950s to Europe (specifically Camelia Lenart, “Turning the Tide and Reconstructing the Politics — A New Perspective on Martha Graham’s Tours to Britain in 1954 and the Response to Its Political and Artistic Complexity,” Conference Proceedings, March 13, 2010, https://www.academia.edu/267220/Conference_ProceedingsCompilation_DanceHistory_Conference, accessed January 27, 2017); see also Victoria P. Geduld, “Dancing Diplomacy,” Dance Chronicle, 33, no. 1 (2010): 44-81, who used Thoms’ archival research. Although Lenart claims that historians have not taken the early Graham tours to Europe (1950, 1954) under the funding of Bethsabee de Rothschild into consideration, indeed historians view them as a precursor to direct government involvement; see Geduld, Croft, Franko, and note pictures of Eleanor Roosevelt at the Paris performances, 1954, in the Graham files at the Library of Congress, box 264, folder 6, Martha Graham Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (MGC-LOC); note that the National Security Archive, The George Washington University, Washington, DC, has found a more complete version of the FBI file, Michael Ravitsky FBI Personality Files Collection, box 12; the document will be available after the publication date of this article.

3 Louis Grossbeyer, “Martha Graham: Back to Work”; “Bridging the Past and the Future,” The Bangkok Post, Sept. 28, 1974, box 65, folder 6, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Historical Collection (CU), Records, ca. 1938-1984, Manuscript Collection 468, Group II, Cultural Presentations Program, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AK (UAK); “Martha Graham’s ‘Rebirth,’” The Nation, Sept. 27, 1974, box 65, folder 6, UAK.

dance. During the Cold War, the use of religious references, rhetoric, and propaganda began during the immediate clashes with the Soviet Union after World War II, because it had been a prewar source of ideological clashes as well: the “City Upon a Hill” was in direct conflict with religion as “the opiate of the masses.” George Kennan, “Father of Containment” and the ambassador to Yugoslavia when Graham performed there, described his “Long Telegram” as deriving from the structure of “an 18th-century Protestant sermon.” Truman, America’s first Cold War president, used the “containment” thesis to promote the Truman Doctrine in Turkey and Greece with pious language: “God has created us and brought us to our present position of power and strength for some great purpose.” His Assistant Secretary of State, who headed the Information Service, precursor to the United States Information Agency that promoted Graham, believed that religious forces could become “communism’s greatest foe.” President Dwight D. Eisenhower would draw on the expertise of his Secretary of State, John F. Dulles, who brought prayer to the White House, and Eisenhower inserted “In God We Trust” on paper money, the postwar symbol of American financial hegemony in the face of the communist system. However Protestant United States leaders were, during the Cold War “the new American civil religion” came into being; it was constructed by an amalgamation of Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and internationally, even Muslim practices to build international alliances through the appearance of mutual understanding. Because of the “great appeal of godliness versus godlessness,” the United States versus the Soviet Union, the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty attacked godlessness and attached it to tyranny and totalitarianism in programming molded for Europe, Eastern Europe, and Russia. Under Eisenhower, and his USIA, the lines in the sand were drawn: “The conflict between Soviet Communism and the free world is a religious conflict…a struggle for the soul of modern man.”

While over time the implementation of rhetoric waxed and waned according to the personality of the president and the strategic needs of the times, the “Godless” communists were ever present in propaganda that emanated from the State Department, United States Information Agency (USIA; known as USIS outside the United States), Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) during the Cold War. Government-sponsored outlets consistently sought to “mobilize the great spiritual and moral resources” of God-fearing people, who existed behind the “Iron Curtain.” The communists were a product of “atheism,” and thus “barbarism and totalitarianism.” The bloc nations were thus held captive and to be freed by the democratic system. With the liberation of Eastern Europe, the “pseudo-Gods of the Kremlin” would be vanquished.

Dance historians who have written about cultural exchange have not explored the religiosity that was built into programming. The two most recent books on dance and politics do not address the problem. Author Dana Mills does not list religion as a topic in her chapters or even in the index of

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Dance & Politics: Moving Beyond Boundaries. In Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange, Clare Croft provides a broad overview of dance-based international strategies from Eisenhower through the present. Although she does mention religion, it is framed in the context of African or African American dance and dancers. Her index suggests “see also individual religions”; yet Christianity only appears once in relation to a modern dance choreographed to an African American slave spiritual described as “Christian,” and neither Catholicism nor Judaism are mentioned. In the most recent article on the State Department tours of modern dance to Yugoslavia and Poland, Camelia Lenart argues that although the countries “Behind the Iron Curtain” were once differentiated culturally, including religiously, they had been relegated to “bloc” status once under Stalinist rule. The political and cultural agreements between Yugoslavia and the United States were gingerly brokered by Kennan, who served as ambassador, and relations were even cordial – too much for some in Congress. Yet in 1962, when Graham toured Poland, although the “Thaw” had taken place, Poland remained under Soviet domination. While the revolution in 1956 had failed, the Polish Church remained “the main force behind the opposition movement in Poland and Eastern Europe, and despite suffering a series of serious blows and retreats, the opposition movement increased its power.” The practice of Catholicism was sharply contested; while freedom was promised, those who practiced were often punished by the communist state if discovered. The nation was at a religious crossroads, and its people were particularly well-primed to receive American signals about freedom of religion that could inspire political alliances with the West over time. Although President John F. Kennedy did not want to be understood as a “Catholic President,” his election showed that the nation was inclusive. Freedom was at the heart of the problem. Martha Graham had become one of the government’s most trusted agents after her two tours under Eisenhower.

Why modern dance, writ large? Modernism and thus modern dance fit in lock-step with arguments that promoted America during the Cold War. From the 1950s, the United States used Americanized modernism to represent the United States. In dance, unlike the Soviet ballet that was stuck in the past, steeped in old-fashioned rote traditions, modern dance was new, freed yet highly technical, born of individual power and emancipation of the woman, and displayed a freedom of expression available only with democracy. In addition, the form used psychology to unravel the human condition. Graham’s understanding of the “soul” and its psychology brought freedom, and thus the understanding of religious righteousness in particular works. This was a dancing “apples-to-oranges” fight, and the Soviets had no coveted oranges. A United States Information Agency report in 1969 noted that modern dance and jazz were extremely effective particularly for Eastern European countries; the Soviets had no cultural retaliation in these nations where Soviet art was well-known.

Religious practice certainly seems divorced from the Cold War cultural weapon as the harbinger of freedom and democracy, see Barnhisel, Cold War Modernists.

In my dissertation, I argue that dance modernism during the Cold War was “victor’s history,” and thus particularly useful as a political agent. “Modern dance” was developed by the Germans and imported into the United States in the late 1920s, and Isadora Duncan had a strong presence in the Soviet Union in the decade after the Revolution. After World War II, the modern and “freed” dance was defined as a product that could only have been born in the United States by dance critics. Stalin renounced Duncan and these dancers faded in influence. Please contact the author, lvb3@columbia.edu, for a copy of the full text.

18 For the most recent review of these efforts in art, film, literature, and radio, and a discussion of modernism as a Cold War cultural weapon as the harbinger of freedom and democracy, see Barnhisel, Cold War Modernists.
19 In my dissertation, I argue that dance modernism during the Cold War was “victor’s history,” and thus particularly useful as a political agent. “Modern dance” was developed by the Germans and imported into the United States in the late 1920s, and Isadora Duncan had a strong presence in the Soviet Union in the decade after the Revolution. After World War II, the modern and “freed” dance was defined as a product that could only have been born in the United States by dance critics. Stalin renounced Duncan and these dancers faded in influence. Please contact the author, lvb3@columbia.edu, for a copy of the full text.
from modernism. While scholars have debated much, the inception of modern dance has been equated with the artist’s ability to use tenets of abstraction, not religious practice. Whether the modern dance was German or American born, it was this fracturing of human drama that brought technique and movement to the body and thus to the choreographer’s stage. Graham’s Lamentation is seen as the first important work that defined her position as a leader of “Modern Dance” with the work about grief, writ large. Yet in the 1920s, dance critics understood modern dance in relation to religion, as well: it promised a return to the “heart and soul of human intercourse,” and thus “religion,” according to the New York Times’ John Martin. She was known to frequent bookstores where she studied biblical works and Joan of Arc, which would frame her modernist compositions. While little more is said by critics and historians, Graham’s early choreographic works included A Florentine Madonna (1926) and Figure of a Saint (1929). Citing Heretic (1929) as the opening salvo of Graham’s modernism, one scholar of women and religion wrote, “Virtually all Graham’s choreographies had religious themes.” Throughout her career, “Graham danced many of the dimensions of feminine spirituality experienced by religious women.” In 1955, Perspectives USA published an article on Graham for international consumption. The Ford Foundation-sponsored journal mirrored the intentions of other covertly-funded publications. George Kennan published a work supporting visual modernism as pro-American propaganda, and the piece on Graham celebrated her work for her likeness to Picasso, a familiar trope used by USIA in promotional materials that framed her as “The

Picasso of Modern Dance.” But it also emphasized the power of religion in her works “in which its dramas … reveal an image of man in his struggle for wholeness, for what one might call God’s Idea of him.” Graham’s use of the independent dancing body and religious figures was built into her genesis as a modernist choreographer, which became a Cold War propaganda weapon.

With her biography, Graham made arguments about the United States and its freedom of “civil religion” through program notes crafted by the USIA for the international market that accentuated her ties to the founding of the nation, as well as her diversity. While her mother was Protestant and a Mayflower descendant, her father was Roman Catholic, and she held a deep appreciation of Native American rituals. Graham seemed to ally most directly with her Protestant background and its connection to the founding of the United States, the frontier, and the “City Upon a Hill” that brought the Protestants to America to find religious freedom. Yet she was deeply affected by her nanny and father and their attachment to the Roman Catholic Church: “a place of ceremony, mystery, blessing.” She noted: “I loved the formality, the ritual, and the discipline. I loved the almost incomprehensible message.” While Graham went to Sunday school in the Protestant Church, she did not like it. Within the retelling of her resistance, Graham accessed ideas of freedom of religion in her household, and thus the United States. As a child, her father said to her that, with knowledge: “You will be a woman of the world who is able to choose her own religion.” Graham recalled that her first dance performance was in a church as a child; she scandalized the

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25 Porterfield, Female Spirituality in America, 199.
28 Leatherman, “Question of Image,” 47.
30 Ibid., 37.
congregants. In the end, she taught Sunday School lessons in the Presbyterian Church, but found it overly intellectual; instead she identified with the physicality, mysticism, and “livingness of the body” she found in the Catholic Church, and stories from the Old Testament. As a child in California, she was exposed to Native American rituals, which led to her interest in joining painter Georgia O’Keeffe and female anthropologists in Taos, New Mexico, during the interwar period. Based on these experiences, she created one of her most celebrated modernist works in 1931, *Primitive Mysteries*. Graham played the Virgin Mary set in the context of the Buffalo Dance on the pueblo. While seemingly celebrating the power of Spanish imperialism according to twentieth-century historians, Graham also choreographed *El Penitente*, which celebrated the Penitent tradition that was banned by the Catholics. Graham continually challenged political power practices embedded in the church, and celebrated the freedom to practice. She recalled letters from her father: “Martha,” he wrote, “You must keep an open soul.” With an interreligious heritage and choreography that celebrated freedom of religion, Graham was understood during World War II by the Office of War Information as a figure that “speaks for Americans.”

Graham always accessed cultural zeitgeist, and her works based on religious texts in the 1950s were particularly renowned; she hit her pinnacle with *Seraphic Dialogue* in 1955. Graham had featured herself in the *Triumph of St. Joan* in 1951, which she transformed into the internationally heralded group work, *Seraphic Dialogue*. This work told the story of Joan of Arc through Joan and her three facets – Maid, Warrior, and Martyr – told with three different female dancers. The dance told a story of religious persecution, drawing on the idea of a universal human narrative; that of the righteous being victimized. Graham studied St. Joan using historical manuscripts to prepare the work. From reading the transcripts of the trial, Graham began the dance with “The Maid,” which was the term used to refer to Joan. Yet she then moves to call her “The Warrior.” In male clothing, almost reminiscent of a ballet top, Graham’s Warrior performed her section with Noguchi’s modernist sword. She then choreographed Joan as “The Martyr”: “Suffer it willingly, do not be at all disturbed by your martyrdom,” said Joan. Graham’s fourth Joan then relived the interaction between herself and the voices of St. Catherine, St. Michael, and St. Margaret, and she was blessed by St. Michael with the human hand being used as a halo for the Saint. The Isamu Noguchi set, with its embedded sword of anti-imperialism, became an integral part of the work. Graham said that it was “a cathedral without limitations, like no other cathedral in the world.”

Graham’s focus on St. Joan was not mere intellectual curiosity. In the 1950s, the Cold War brought nuclear war “fear management,” and thus an interest in religion, into the American domestic market: “Religious books populated the best seller lists.” Although Graham disavowed her connection to politics, Joan “was tried as a heretic not because she was a woman…nor because she heard voices, but [rather] because she heard voices telling her to attack the English…. The motivation for the trial was political because Joan’s claims were political.” She became a martyr to save the French Macmillan, 1984), 173.

31 Ibid., 42.
32 Ibid., 41, 52, 53, 176; note that Graham recalls also going to church while on tour with Denishawn, 86.
33 Ibid., 15.
34 “Martha Graham: Biographical Data,” Office of War Information, RG 208. 5.2, 2.A, Records of the News and Features Bureau, NARA.
35 Erinnestine Stodelle and Pearl Lang, *Deep Song: The Dance Story of Martha Graham* (New York: Schirmer Books/
from the throne of England, and thus became a voice of political independence. Yet she also brought the ideology of “truth telling” in the context of an oppressive régime. Joan embodied “the peculiar blend of the visionary and the military.”

In the post-World War II decolonizing world, this message would have rung true for many from India to Israel, where Graham took *Seraphic Dialogue* under Eisenhower in 1955. The story, like Judith’s, tells of a woman’s “hard power” fight on behalf of a nation for political freedom in the name of God.

But “hard power” fights were necessarily fatal in the mutually assured destruction of an atomic war during the Cold War, so the choreographed section that depicts Joan as a warrior had to be framed in the context of larger objectives for Cold War currency to assert the potency of independence followed by peace; Graham had to emphasize the ultimate redemptive power of peace, which she did in the title *Seraphic Dialogue*. Joan served well: when asked if victory was for the “flag,” Joan had responded in the trial transcripts that it was “all for the Lord.” Eisenhower had linked religious piety, or democratic freedoms, with peace: “The pursuit of peace is at once our religious obligation and our national policy.” Graham was an admitted artistic thief, and she only stole from the best: “I am a thief – and I am not ashamed. I steal from the best wherever it happens to me.”

Graham always “lifted” titles from poetry or other literary sources, and “seraphic” does not appear in the transcripts of St. Joan. “Dialogues” appears once, and is used to admonish Joan’s lack of humility with a reference to Saint Gregory. Thus, “Seraphic Dialogue.”


50 Ibid., 247-48.
51 Emling, *Setting the World on Fire*, 57.
52 Ibid., 215.
ciated the arts.\textsuperscript{54} Regarding religion, the Soviets were vulnerable, and under Kennedy the United States seemed to have the upper hand in Catholic nations, in particular. Kennedy vowed to make a nation “where all men and all churches are treated as equal; where every man has the same right to attend or not attend the church of his choice.”\textsuperscript{55} While the United States argued that the Soviets suppressed and punished religious actions, those that lived in the freedom of a democratic state could worship as Catholics or as they pleased and even achieve the highest position in the land, if not the Western world. And the question of freedom and even political power for Catholics became particularly effective when presented in Eastern Europe where religion was fused with political dissidence.\textsuperscript{56} While Kennedy said, “I do not regard religion as a weapon in the Cold War,” he met with Pope John XXIII and said of his teachings for the international arena, “We are learning to talk the language of progress and peace.”\textsuperscript{57}

The Kennedy administration put Edward R. Murrow in charge of the United States Information Agency, and his legacy brought prestige to American broadcasts abroad when Graham hit the international market. Preparing for the tour, Graham was taped with Murrow for the international broadcast of “This I Believe.” The radio show featured prominent Americans revealing “the living philosophers of men and of women in the hope that they may strengthen your beliefs so that your life may be richer, fuller, happier.” Graham spoke about her philosophy of dance and of life; she made it “universal,” with proclamations about “the state of the soul.” Yet with her references, she drew on the Bible, which fell in line with a new emphasis during the tour. She said a dancer must have “the kind of faith that Abraham had: “Therein he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.”\textsuperscript{58} For those who knew the quote, it would show the commonality among all religions. She continued to reference the story of Lucifer. To emphasize the freedom of the American individual and not the heavy hand of the government in broadcasts, Murrow concluded: “Those are the personal beliefs of Martha Graham.”\textsuperscript{59}

The 1962 tour was long and grueling and repertoire changed according to politics. The Graham company touring extravaganzan began in Israel under private funding by Bethsabée de Rothschild to premiere the religiously righteous work, \textit{Legend of Judith}, restaged as a group piece with Israeli partners. During the first days of the tour in Israel, the Cuban Missile Crisis took place in October over a thirteen-day period.\textsuperscript{60} Graham continued to Greece and Turkey, Truman’s Cold War hot spots. In Greece, the Greek-inspired \textit{Clytemnestra} dominated programming and the press. The embassy party in Ankara brought out another function of the Graham company for government officials. While it has been rumored that various unknown men appeared to “assist” the company with various tasks that were already well taken care of — particularly in “hot” Cold War countries — the Graham company could also serve as a simpler cover. When the Graham company performed, a constitutional crisis was coming to a head with Cyprus. Indeed, President Kennedy had been involved.\textsuperscript{61} On the night of

\textsuperscript{54} Note the continued involvement of Jacqueline Kennedy with Graham despite the dearth of information at the Kennedy Library and papers. She was a strong supporter of Graham’s company in New York after the assassination of her husband and as the wife of Onassis. She served with Betty Ford as a gala representative in 1976. In addition, she became the editor of Graham’s “autobiography” at Doubleday.


\textsuperscript{56} Shaw, “Martyrs, Miracles, and Martians,” 220.

\textsuperscript{57} Appey, \textit{So Help Me God}, 104n18; Public Papers of the President of the United States-1961, 99n10, Public Papers of the President of the United States-1963.

\textsuperscript{58} Romans, King James Bible, 4:20: “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God”; 4:21: “And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.” Abraham is justified by faith, not works. Jews and Gentiles are thus blessed as the same under God.

\textsuperscript{59} “This I Believe,” RG 306, 306.TIB.79A, nd, 22 min.; also 306VOA,TIB 45B, 23/33/2, NARA; it would have been made in preparation for the tour while Murrow was at the USIA before 1963. As always, with special thanks to Greg Tomlin for his guidance and support; see Greg Tomlin, \textit{Murrow's Cold War: Public Diplomacy for the Kennedy Administration} (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2016).


\textsuperscript{61} Adel Safty, \textit{The Cyprus Question: Diplomacy and...
the reception in Ankara, “It was supposed to look like there was a big party going on, and there was a big meeting going on about Cyprus. And it was covering the thing with a company downstairs.””

The party took place with larger political negotiations just rooms away.

The leg to Yugoslavia and Poland became known to dancers as the “Behind the Iron Curtain” tour. Although Winston Churchill had defined Yugoslavia as behind the Iron Curtain in 1946, the imaginary construction of this barrier was challenged by 1948. Yugoslavia’s president, Josip Tito, the “little Stalin,” certainly espoused the ideals of communism. Yet he did not need the military backing of the Soviet Union to stay in power, “nor did he want much Soviet influence.” In 1948, Yugoslavia was officially expelled from the Cominform. Tito played both sides and kept the American Secretary of State guessing about his alliances. Kennan was the American ambassador and friendly with Tito, too much so for some. Yet Yugoslavia was the only socialist country that allowed American intelligence services to operate on its territory. Under Kennan’s watch, in 1961 an agreement expanding cultural exchange and cooperation between the United States and Yugoslavia was signed, and spending on cultural exports by the Americans more than doubled. Yet by 1962, politicians complained that while the United States had given Yugoslavia over three billion dollars since the war, Tito worked to undermine American interests.

A fitful push-me, pull-you took place. Although Yugoslavia was economically a communist state, artistic license was allowed under Tito and USIA spending increased dramatically. Yet the government was aware of a danger. USIA spent money “popularizing the American lifestyle and Western democracy,” and the Yugoslavian government was not blind to the efforts. While the public was “not aware of the political and ideological background of American cultural activities,” a report found that, “Despite all tactics employed, the subtle and covered up nature of the United States propaganda is, at its core, subversive.” Yet exchange continued and thrived with Graham a part of the project, which included libraries, publications, lectures, films, exhibitions, and even requests from the Yugoslavian government itself for an international school in Belgrade where Graham and her company would perform.

Yugoslavia would prepare the company for the harshness of Poland; in these Soviet-inspired spaces, Old Testament and Catholic religious works were emphasized. While embedded in other works in Turkey, and taking backseat to Clytemnestra in Greece, Seraphic Dialogue was featured in Yugoslavia and opened evenings in Warsaw. Seraphic Dialogue’s story of Catholic martyrdom would have played well, particularly in Poland. The show trial and detention of Cardinal József Mindszenty in 1949 had provided images of the “martyr” under Communist rule used by propagandists well into the 1950s. Revolutions in Poland and Hungary in 1956 equated religious belief and political action, and resonated under the oppression of religious thought in the 1960s. And Graham foregrounded Joan as an everywoman, like the rebels: she said, “I had no grounds to go on except what I imagined went on in her heart.” While peace was sought, tropes of martyrdom would play particularly well in Eastern Europe where the Soviets had jailed religious leaders and suppressed movements.

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62 Thomas, interview with author. Transcript available upon request and with the permission of Thomas.


68 Ibid., 3-4.

69 Ibid., chap. 3.

70 Shaw, “Martyrs, Miracles, and Martians,” 220.

71 Stodelle and Lang, Deep Song, 173.

72 Shaw, “Martyrs, Miracles, and Martians.” Although the company showcased “Americana” with Appalachian Spring...
The example of Graham’s stop in Yugoslavia demonstrates how politics and diplomatic tensions, alongside the careers of cultured diplomats and politicians, affected touring decisions, particularly with modernist art that demonstrated American freedom. Francis Mason, then cultural attaché, had written a letter to Graham in 1957 urging her to consider performing in Yugoslavia. He had championed Graham while at VOA, and later became the Chair of her Board. Mason also bent the ear of George Kennan, the Ambassador to Yugoslavia and “Father of Containment.” Earlier in his career he had said, “We must accept propaganda as a major weapon.” He promoted the use of the arts, and particularly modernism. He had championed the power of modern art as an international symbol of American freedom at the Museum of Modern Art in 1955, and the speech was published in Perspectives, a Ford Foundation and CIA-funded journal for export to Europe. While a recent historian has asserted that Mason’s request was “naïve,” it was a clear example of a deeply embedded government strategy to export modernism that had informed and would continue to generate tours for Graham. Kennan explained to his audience in 1955, and his European readers in 1956, that the United States had become identified with “such things as modern technology, standardization, and mass culture,” a “frightening” turn which meant that the United States was “hated.” In response, he advocated for high-art cultural exports that expressed “the life of the spirit.” The political realities on the ground

in 1955, Seraphic Dialogue was also on tour. Government promotional materials for Seraphic Dialogue focused on Graham’s use of high-intellectualism and civil rights with the “Martyr” figure played by an African American, who also was featured as Appalachian Spring’s Pioneering Woman in press photos. Although it is noted differently by Lennart, I found the letter in box 220, correspondence, MGC-LOC.

Kenneth Alan Osgood, Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle At Home and Abroad (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2006), 38; Yale Richmond, Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2003), 123.


met artistic openings. Modernism was a weapon in the Cold War to entice the “hearts and souls” of the elites who might join the American side, particularly in Soviet-affected nations.

By the time of Graham’s arrival in Yugoslavia, Mason had left the post as cultural attaché, but had a key role in arranging for an exhibition of modern art to travel to Belgrade under Kennan. Kennan understood psychological warfare and the arts as propaganda. When opening the exhibit of modernist art in 1961, Kennan allowed audiences to take the art as they pleased with no expectations—again freedom in action. People lined up in hordes to see the works. The Kennan success created more projects: “Embassy of Good Will, A U.S. Art Show in Red Poland” described an avant-garde exhibit headed to Poland in 1962, just months before Graham was slated to arrive there.

The tour stop to Yugoslavia was grueling, and demanded that Graham be on her best behavior and shine as a diplomat. When the company landed on November 15, Graham, as usual, immediately held a press conference. In the “Belgrade Entertainment Guide,” it was noted that a ballet company would perform the day after Graham’s performance, so the talk became particularly significant. The following morning, she led a lecture demonstration to explain the fundamentals of her dance for a select audience including ballet masters and critics. After opening night, Kennan invited Graham to the embassy to meet him and his wife at the usual cocktail party and dinner with dignitaries and embassy officials. Unfortunately for Graham, Kennan missed her performance, and she was not able to meet him because he had the flu. Yet other officials attended, from cultural leaders in government to the Political Secretariat for Foreign Affairs, the Head for Analysis & Research of Yugoslav


George Kennan, Diaries, George F. Kennan Papers (MC 076), 1962, subseries 4C, box 235, folder 1, Special Collections, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.
Foreign Trade, and the Acting Secretary for Legislation. In addition, representatives from the British and French Embassies were on the guest list. The Polish Embassy sent an emissary. After opening in the evening, the company performed both a matinee and an evening performance the following day. As representatives of Kennedy, the company members relished the opportunity to participate in people-to-people exchange. They thrived in Yugoslavia under the watch of the State Department. The dancers interacted with other artists in conversation and exchange, “instead of just going to the theater, [to] rehearse the show.”

*Seraphic Dialogue* received rave reviews for its “mystic-religious” drama that was “perfectly realized.” When her company performed *Secular Games* they showed “the perfect mastering of technique.” On closing night, after 30 curtain calls, the audience chanted, “Mar-tha, Mar-tha.”

Unlike Yugoslavia, Poland remained under Soviet domination, but there was hope. Cultural diplomacy promised a thaw, yet did not present the freedom offered by Tito. In 1956, the year of uprisings, a confidential source had told the CIA-funded RFE/RL interviewers that “Radio Warsaw Listeners Demand Religious Program.” The stage was set. With government backing and the need to emphasize the power of freedom of religion, Graham’s repertory changed to accommodate the message that would bring dissent through the exercise of freedom. When Graham and the company arrived in Poland, the political implications of the tour became undeniable with the wooing of the elite, and the suppression of dancers’ freedoms. “This was totally not what we were used to, coming from America. It was our first experience with a Soviet organization of any kind,” noted dancer Linda Hodes. The schedule was fixed. A press conference was followed by a required evening violin concert of Polish classical music. Opening night was followed by a two-hour embassy reception for the entire company. “That lush party” was not the lifestyle the dancers would be shown the following day. Unlike Yugoslavia, where the dancers had been encouraged to interact with others, in Warsaw, “We were very, very constricted.” As a mandated tour bus turned through the cold grey streets, dancers were fed “information” about the country. “This is where the head of all of Poland lives with five other families in the same apartment,” they were told. “We saw people waiting in line to get milk in a store where you could see there wasn’t anything in the window.” Linda Hodes concluded: “Everybody was nervous and feeling very undone by all of the pressure of the propaganda.”

The only program of all religiously themed works took place in Poland. This choice of repertoire followed the American fight in Poland where, unlike other Central-European states, Catholicism remained. Communism and Catholicism seemed “ontological and ultimately irreconcilable.” *Embattled Garden*, a story of the Garden of Eden, was included almost every night. Lighter in tone than *Seraphic Dialogue*, *Embattled Garden* was largely spirited and accessible. The adventures between the characters—Adam, Eve, Lilith (Adam’s first wife), and the serpent—seemed less driven by the drama and angst of the Old Testament story than Graham’s other biblical works. Graham retained the seductive core of the story, yet with the stark pink, black, and red costumes, along with highly styled sexual movements, she created a satiric, playful work. She used a multi-leveled, complex, and cutting-edge set by Noguchi. Graham’s version

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82 "Guest List for Ambassador’s Reception for Martha Graham,” November 16, 1962, scrapbook 350, MGC-LOC.
83 “Welcome to Belgrade,” Martha Graham Dance Company, scrapbook 350, MGC-LOC.
84 Thomas, interview.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
89 Marni Thomas and Ellen Graff, interview with author, 2016; transcript available upon request with permission from Thomas and Graff.
90 Linda Hodes, interview with author, 2016; transcript available from author with permission from Linda Hodes.
91 Thomas and Graff, interview.
92 Ibid.
93 Murat, “Service With Body and Soul,” 263.
94 *Embattled Garden*, premiered April 3, 1958, choreography by Martha Graham, music by Carlos Surinach, set by Isamu Noguchi, costumes by Martha Graham.
of the story of the Fall foregrounded mischief with risqué movements rather than a tragic Fall of Man that demanded repentance. In addition, Acrobats of God gestured to the religious through outright comedy, and often closed evenings rather than the usual fare, Diversion of Angels, the light celebratory story of love set in abstract terms. While Graham seems to “play God” as the choreographer reigning in her dancers with a whip, the press noted the title’s reference to the devotion of monks in a monastery. With the pieces working together, Graham brought the seriousness of revelation in worship alongside a light work with an unmistakable religious theme, which showed that she was free and not a missionary.

Press reviews were mixed, even in the same review. Cables back to the State Department emphasized that at performances, “Numerous representatives of diplomatic missions were present.” Dancers remember reception as “fairly good…I don’t think it was very demonstrative in any way, or I would’ve remembered it. I think it was all subdued; the whole place was very subdued.” Another recalled, “I don’t remember anything other than just clapping.” Polite. No cries of “Martha” were reported. In January, a State Department report summarized the Polish reception, noting that a Polish critic claimed that the “intellectualism is unfamiliar to us.” The summary concluded: “Less of philosophy and more of dancing!”

Although Martha Graham did not create an artistic sea change, by 1963 the Soviet bloc countries saw an increased cultural thaw and artists took a modernist turn. Officials in Poland sounded much like Martha Graham when they extolled the merits of the “art of truth,” “for mankind and for the dignity of man.” By 1965, the showing of abstract art at the Biennale in Rostock “set a precedent.” The reporter continued, “We feel allied with the humanist content.” Homegrown abstract art began to appear in Poland. On the grounds of artistic neutrality, the politics of religion had been used to express the ideology of freedom. Despite pushback against American modernism, East began to meet West as the tenets of universalism and an expression of the spirit were accepted as the basis for the creation of a national artistic expression freed of both Soviet and American domination.

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95 See introduction to Acrobats of God, first in the film series Three by Martha Graham, directed by John Houseman, 87 minutes.
96 "American Ballet in Warsaw," Cable, November 23, 1962, scrapbooks, box 352, MGC-LOC.
97 Hodes, interview.
98 Thomas and Graff, interview.
100 Ibid.
101 HU OSA 300-3-1 Box 12, 300 RFE/RL Research Institute, 3 German Affairs, 1 East German Subject Files, FROM: 801 Culture: Awards, 1956-1966, TO: 804 Culture: Formalism, 1956-1972. Folder 804, Culture: -Formalism, 1956-1972, "Continuing Indications of East German Liberalization in Art and Literature," Aug. 17, 1965, OSA.
Dance and Decolonization: African-American Choreographers in Africa during the Cold War

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If the Cold War is one global history frame of the period between 1945 and 1989, then the decolonization movement is the other. Indeed, the two global frames are flip sides of the same coin, given that the Cold War battle for power and influence was largely fought on the ground in decolonizing or postcolonial states. In this paper, I examine the role of three African-American choreographers—Alvin Ailey, Katherine Dunham, and Pearl Primus—in the cultural politics of the decolonization movement in Africa and the intersection of those politics with Cold War narratives. I synthesize existing scholarship by Clare Croft, Julia Foulkes, Naima Prevots, Penny Von Eschen, and Peggy and Murray Schwartz, with my own original, archival research.

When Ailey, Dunham, and Primus traveled to Africa, their presence connoted conflicting symbolisms: they came from the United States, an aggressive world power that looked to many African nations suspiciously like their former colonial oppressors, but also came as people of African descent, aligned with Africans through shared experiences of oppression and cultural histories.

In synthesizing the available research, I came to something of a counterintuitive conclusion: I had presumed that receiving US State Department support would be a source of tension in diasporic relationships, but official government sponsorship had surprisingly little effect on African perceptions of these artists. Instead, what determined Primus, Dunham, and Ailey’s effectiveness was how these artists engaged on the ground. Ailey, whose 1966 Dakar Festival visit and 1967 tour were both sponsored by the State Department, had a smoother time building diasporic bridges than Dunham or Primus because he brought a distinctly American aesthetic as part of his presence in Africa, rather than imposing his vision of Africa on Africans, which both Primus and Dunham attempted to do in their own ways. To say that Primus and Dunham faced challenges with their approach is not to say that they were out-and-out failures. To the contrary, both choreographers built lasting relationships with people on the continent that strengthened the internationalist dimensions of the Black Arts Movement. But their struggles along the way, the pitfalls that befall them, and the contrasting experience of Ailey are useful to analyze as we think about how dance can forge transnational solidarities in the name of political liberation going forward in our current political moment.

Part One: The Anti-Colonial Era

In 1948, the continent of Africa was still overwhelmingly under European colonial rule, though the massive disruptive force of the Second World War had done much to weaken colonial power. Into this context arrived the well-known African American choreographer Pearl Primus, who came to Africa under the auspices of a fellowship from the Rosenwald Foundation. Primus’s biographers, Peggy and Murray Schwartz, characterize her eighteen-month trip to Nigeria, the Belgian Congo, the Gold Coast (now Ghana), Angola, Cameroon, Liberia, and Senegal as a personal journey of discovery. She learned dozens of dances and their meanings; she made meaningful connections with people she learned from. One ruler in Africa (some sources say in Nigeria, others say in the Belgian Congo) named her “Omowale,” or “Child Returned Home.” The Schwartzes claim: “Uncannily, she seemed to have known the cultures already, and she

deepened her belief in her own spiritual powers.”

Primus’s self-perception that she had found oneness with her African brothers and sisters intersected with colonial politics in complicated ways. Though both she and her biographers emphasized the artistic and spiritual aspects of her journey, one cannot overlook the political significance of her trip. In Nigeria those who were engaged in anticolonial activism suspected that she, as an American, had come to steal their dances. In a country where the extraction of raw materials to enrich Great Britain was at the foundation of the colonial enterprise, it was inevitable that some would interpret her actions through that lens of extraction, and apparently they made their views known to Primus. In response, Primus wrote an editorial in The Daily Times (Lagos) to argue that artistic exchange did not fit the capitalist, imperialist model. It is unclear to what extent her words assuaged any fears.

If in Nigeria the local population challenged Primus’s self-perception of diasporic solidarity, in the Belgian Congo the colonial authorities feared that her self-perception was correct. For those who would think of dance as politically unimportant or as at best a minor part of the Cold War, one need only to read a 1949 memo of the American Consul General stationed in Leopoldville to be convinced otherwise. Primus’s trip to the Belgian Congo threw the entire colonial apparatus into a state of mild panic. Three weeks into her stay, Primus was the talk of all the “Belgians of prominence” in “government, business, [and] newspaper circles” in Leopoldville, who concluded that it was a “serious mistake” for her to have been granted a visa to visit. Her mere presence, they feared, stirred up anticolonial sentiment, as the Congolese population would see her as a fellow black person somehow, it was suggested that Primus herself perform. The Consul General reported, “After two dances, the mood of the native crowd became so excited and excited that the police had to put a stop to the performance.” Any hint of affinity or solidarity required immediate repression. Thereafter, the Belgian authorities put up an “invisible screen” between her and “the natives.” A black dancing body, no matter how seemingly apolitical in its movements, was full of political potential during a period of rising anticolonial sentiment.

The same year that Pearl Primus traveled to West Africa, another prominent African American choreographer, Katherine Dunham, also encountered Africa—but in Europe. When Dunham premiered Caribbean Rhapsody in London and Rhapsodie Caraïbe in Paris in 1948, elite African intellectuals and political leaders—who tended to receive their educations in colonial metropoles—were captivated. T. R. Makonnen, secretary of the Pan-African Federation in London, called Dunham’s potent combination of artistry and intellect “perfection” and essential to the cause of promoting African culture around the world. Léopold Sédar Senghor, then a student at the Sorbonne, claimed that Dunham’s Rhapsodie Caraïbe caused a “cultural revolution” among African students in Paris, who were awakened to the idea of using their own dance forms as part of the anticolonial struggle.

Paul Niger, a Paris-based poet and political activist originally from Guadaloupe, wrote a review of Rhapsodie Caraïbe in Présence Africaine, the Paris-based journal widely acknowledged as the

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3 Schwartz and Schwartz, Dance Claimed Me, 79.
5 Pearl Primus, “Dancers and Teachers of Dancing,” The Daily Times (Lagos), February 9, 1949, enclosure to Kuykendall letter.
7 William H. Beach, American Consul General of Leopoldville, Belgian Congo, to Sec. of State, Washington, DC, June 3, 1949, RG 59, Central Decimal File, 032 Primus, Pearl Eileene/6-349.
8 Ibid.
9 T. R. Makonnen to Katherine Dunham, January 28, 1949, box 12, folder 7, Katherine Dunham Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Southern Illinois University Carbondale (hereafter SIUC).
primary mouthpiece of the négritude movement. Negritude was a contested term that roughly meant an assertion of black pride in the face of colonialism, enslavement, and oppression. Niger’s review was the first article, or even substantive mention, of dance in Présence Africaine’s history, and therefore suggested Dunham’s importance in making embodied performance a part of the intellectual argument for decolonization. Niger saw in Rhapsodie Caraïbe a utopian promise of diasporic harmony. The show, he argued, revealed “the profound unity of feelings, rhythms, and sources of the black soul.” Importantly, this black soul was not purely African or Francophone. He wrote, “We feel Africa and America intimately intertwined.” Dunham’s “precise and cordial intelligence about the habits and history of the black race” constructed a new vision of diaspora “with a kind of love and pride.” Her emphasis on the “Latinized negro,” in particular, exposed the Francophone Africans in Paris to lesser-known areas of the diaspora. Niger and the other editors of Présence Africaine sought proof of black unity across lines of language and nation, and Dunham’s revue exhibited that unity.

The articulation of diasporic solidarity, however, was not without its gaps in translation. Dunham’s dance Afrique (1949) points to some of the tensions involved in forging diasporic unity. She choreographed Afrique during the company’s stay at a casino in Monte Carlo in early 1949, and it served as the opening number for her return to Paris that November. She later insisted that the dance had “authentic material” and “African movements” in it, even though she had not yet visited the continent. The dance concerns a day in the life of an imaginary village somewhere in Africa (rendering invisible the continent’s wide variety of geographic regions and cultural/ethnic groups), described in the program as a place where “The ladies are lovely/And the men are handsome and strong.” There is not space in this short paper to analyze the choreography of the eight-minute dance, but the characters—women who carry pots, men who display warrior-like virility, a witch-doctor, and a queen—are generic archetypes. The choreography is a diasporic pastiche, borne out of Dunham’s ethnographic research in the Caribbean, training in ballet and modern dance, and imagination.

When asked in an interview with Radiodiffusion Française why she had choreographed a new dance titled Afrique, given that her expertise was on the Caribbean, she responded, “In these islands [of the Caribbean], the blacks who were transported during the colonial period felt in times of joy or sorrow of the land of their ancestors, and that is why the opening of the show is titled Afrique.” The dance rendered an imagined ancestral home of Western Hemispheric black communities. Authenticity and specificity mattered little, for apparently Dunham intended the dance to be the nostalgic imaginings of the people and communities depicted in the rest of the program, not as the literal ancient past—but it is unclear if that intention translated to audiences.

Later in life, Dunham offered another interpretation for Afrique, one that virtually nobody comprehended in the late 1940s. Her production notes from the late 1970s stated, “There is a satirical intention.” In an interview with New York Times dance critic Jennifer Dunning in 1987, Dunham claimed that her inspiration came from watching mediocre performances that African choreographers staged for Parisian audiences during her first visit in 1948. These shows, she felt, lacked theatricality and flair. Rather than reproduce their

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12 Paul Niger, “Rhapsodie Caraïbe de Katherine Dunham,” Présence Africaine 6 (1949): 152. I thank Brent Edwards for bringing this review to my attention.
15 “Katherine Dunham and Her Company” program, April 24, 1950, box 15, folder 7, Katharine Wolfe Collection, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
16 Dunham, interviewed by R. Goupillières of Radiodiffusion Français, ca. 1949, box 14, folder 5, SIUC.
17 Production notes for Afrique, n.d., box 18, folder 4, Katherine Dunham Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.
earnest attempts at authenticity, she created *Afrique* “almost tongue-in-cheek.”\(^{18}\) Dunham insinuated that she intentionally invoked stereotypes as a way to poke fun at her fellow choreographers and the thirst for authenticity among audiences.

Whether it was meant to portray a nostalgic vision or to parody extant notions of “African” dance, not all Africans in Paris appreciated the liberties Dunham took with *Afrique*. Keita Fodéba was a law student from Guinea who had founded Le Théâtre Africain de Keita Fodéba in Paris in 1948. When asked in a radio interview in November 1949 (one month after *Afrique*’s premiere) if his troupe was similar to Dunham’s, Fodéba responded, “No no no. Ours has nothing to do with Katherine Dunham ... it is absolutely authentic.”\(^{19}\) The repetition of “no” implies that he took great pains to distance himself from the theatrical nature of Dunham’s revues. For Fodéba and other African students, the continent was not an imaginary homeland or object of satire, but rather a real place fighting for independence. Only six weeks after the interview, however, Fodéba wrote Dunham to ask for advice about directing a dance company. Clearly, her show had made a strong impression, and not an entirely negative one. Two years later, Fodéba would change the name of his company from Le Théâtre Africain to Les Ballets Africains.

The Postcolonial Moment

By 1960, dozens of nations in Africa had achieved independence. New challenges arose in the early postcolonial era: what relationship should these new nations have to former colonial powers? Which economic and political model should they follow—that of the United States, the USSR, or some other entity? Despite the new circumstances, the tensions that arose around Primus and Dunham’s presence in Africa in the 1960s were remarkably similar to those of a decade earlier, only intensified given that self-government was now a reality.

In 1958, Primus proposed that she and her husband Percival Borde become the artistic directors of what they called the First African Dance Theater, working in Liberia, Ghana, and Nigeria, with the idea that they would “help” those nations transform their dance practices in the “appropriate way” to make them “go down very well in America” on a proscenium stage.\(^{20}\) Primus and Borde’s vision eventually found concrete form as the Konama Kende Performing Arts Center in Liberia, opened with the blessing of President William Tubman in 1960. The Center raised an important question: was this a collaborative process that resulted in a tangible cultural and economic benefit for a West African nation eager to assert itself in an international arena? Or were Primus and Borde following the colonialist model of extracting raw material from Africa that required European/American ideas of “refinement” to become “presentable”? For many Liberians, it was the latter interpretation that stuck, for Primus’s employment of the language of modernization and development seemed too close to colonialist arguments about African backwardness and need for tutelage. The opening night gala was abruptly canceled the morning of, and the entire institution was seen as suspect.\(^{21}\)

In addition to opening the Kende Center, Primus, Borde, and a drummer toured the continent to perform. Primus’s programmatic decisions suggested a certain tone deafness to the political moment. Instead of performing her American-based dances such as *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* or *Strange Fruit*, she chose to perform her versions of African dances, which led one journalist in Nigeria to conclude, “Miss Primus and the whole lot of them who are coming to sell African culture to the Africans should get out of the continent...the condescension, the hypocrisy, and the amateurishness sickens me.”\(^{22}\) Her shows catered to elites in the

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\(^{18}\) Dunning, “Alvin Ailey Dancers Follow the Steps of a Trailblazer.”

\(^{19}\) Pierre Fromentin, interview with Keita Fódeba, “Gala de l'Afrique Noire” program, November 28, 1949. I thank Joshua Cohen for his transcription.

\(^{20}\) Quoted in Schwartz and Schwartz, *Dance Claimed Me*, 143.

\(^{21}\) Schwartz and Schwartz, *Dance Claimed Me*, 145-46.

\(^{22}\) Ibid, 151.
new governments. Having to finance her own tour, she did not emphasize reaching out to poorer or working-class Africans when on tour, or offer free shows, despite the fact that it was those Africans to whom she insisted she felt a greater affinity.23 Things came to a head in Zimbabwe, when a group of local citizens interrupted one of her rehearsals and “began accusing her of doing the business of white people.” Primus not only physically feared for her safety but also “suffered a traumatic threat to her identity,” as her self-perception as being spiritually one with Africans—and thus as above politics—faced a severe test.24

Dunham faced similar issues when she became involved with planning the First World Festival of Negro Arts (colloquially known as the Dakar Festival) in Senegal. The Dakar Festival was the brainchild of Senghor, who had become the first president of independent Senegal in 1960. Dunham had maintained a friendship with Senghor since their Paris days, and he pressured the US State Department to give her a grant to help him plan the festival. With the vague title of “Special Ambassador,” Dunham decided to make her role one of cultural development consultant. She explained in a 1964 grant proposal, “The most urgent need of newly emerging countries such as the African States ... is to find a system of exploitation of their own resources ... development of native arts into forms acceptable for world exploitation is one of the important resources in this day of cultural exchange.”25 Though Dunham used the word “exploitation” in a non-pejorative sense, it was a dubious choice at a time when several intellectuals were railing against the West’s exploitation of Africa’s material wealth and labor force.

Dunham’s proposals in the cultural development arena did not go very far. The number and diversity of projects she proposed for Senegal to develop the island of Gorée, for example, seemed out of touch with financial and logistic realities. She called for a performing arts academy, a permanent theater space, geodesic domes to house students and hold classes, an exchange program with other world universities, an archive of West African performing arts, collaborative projects with musicologists and ethnologists, a transformation of the island for commercial use in television and film, a restoration of the slave buildings for tourist purposes, and finally, a casino and a nightclub.26

Dunham’s expansive visions overwhelmed her interlocutors. US Ambassador to Senegal Mercer Cook told her that her proposals were too much and that she should “spend time following through” on her designated role as Special Ambassador. When she arrived in Dakar in 1965, tensions arose between Dunham and various Senegalese government officials, who viewed her development ideas as a distraction. They viewed her performing arts academy proposal in particular as “competition [to the] already existing cultural dance group.”27 This was their moment to showcase national independence, not relinquish control to an American.

During the festival, Dunham’s ideas about cultural development continued to create friction. In a lecture before a colloquium of distinguished writers, she said that she was returning to a more anthropological definition of dance reawakened by her travels in Africa. She argued that dance should “return to where it came from, which is the heart and soul of man, and man’s social living.” She told her fellow colloquium members to turn to “the Old Ones for truth, more than the outside world,” though, ironically, she also aggressively promoted herself—an outsider—as a guiding force in the cultural development of Senegal.28 Foulkes and Von Eschen assert that Dunham’s emphasis on traditions placed her in conflict with her fellow

23 Foulkes, “Ambassadors With Hips,” 88; Schwartz and Schwartz, Dance Claimed Me, 151.
24 Schwartz and Schwartz, Dance Claimed Me, 153-54.
26 Dunham, “Recommendation for Program of Cultural Expansion.”
colloquium members, who felt that such an injunction flew in the face of the desire of young Africans to be modern and cosmopolitan.\textsuperscript{29}

Four years earlier, in fact throughout most of her career, Dunham had asserted the opposite point of view, favoring intercultural mixing and fusion over notions of authenticity. Dunham’s essentialist position at Dakar may have been influenced by her perception of Africa as the repository for culture that had either been lost or appropriated in the United States. Her ideas were rooted in romanticized notions of Africa’s greater connection to nature and spirituality. She was far from alone in her perspective. Her view reflected a growing desire, shared by many in the diaspora, for greater knowledge about and recognition of African culture. Often, that desire included a reification of African cultural practices as unchanging to rebuke the consistent attempts of colonial powers to erase historical legacies and traditions. Senghor asked Dunham to shed some of her essentialism when he named her to the post of “conseil technique culturel” (technical cultural adviser) to the National Ballet of Senegal at the conclusion of the Dakar Festival in April 1966. He asked her to “turn out an Alvin Ailey type company,” meaning one simultaneously rooted in black cultural ideas and fully modern.\textsuperscript{30} Though the plan was to stay for at least a year or two, Dunham quit after only six weeks. The gap in vision, and understanding of how to fulfill that vision, was too wide.

As Senghor’s directive suggested, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater was a huge hit at the Dakar Festival. In contrast to the struggles Primus and Dunham faced, Ailey’s experiences in Africa, both at the Dakar Festival and during his company’s 1967 State Department sponsored tour, were widely successful. Why? In reading between the lines of the various sources, it seems that it was because he showed solidarity not by telling Africans how to run their dance companies or performing what he thought of as “African” dance back to them, but rather by demonstrating his uniquely black American experience. He allowed his African audiences to make the connections between their own cultural practices and what he brought to the stage, rather than didactically telling them what those connections were or how they themselves should create them. Furthermore, he insisted that the State Department support informal, outdoor shows that ordinary Africans could attend. His dancers went out to nightclubs to dance with locals—not with the announced anthropological intent of Primus and Dunham, which despite their best intentions could be seen as part of anthropology’s damning connection to colonial extraction models—but rather to enjoy cultural exchange on a casual, peer-to-peer basis. Company members asked local people questions about their cultures—not with a tape recorder or notebook in hand—and bought goods as tourist souvenirs.\textsuperscript{31} The Ailey Company reflected back to West African dance artists what they wished to be in the world.

What can we conclude from these stories of Ailey, Dunham, and Primus? Interestingly, in the late 1940s, neither Dunham nor Primus actively voiced support for anticolonial movements when abroad. Primus insisted that her trip was artistic and personal; Dunham spoke openly about discrimination in the United States, but in Europe never advocated explicitly for decolonization. Nevertheless, their efforts to learn and present black culture to the world was seen as a part of the cultural argument for growing assertions of independence. When we fast-forward a decade to the early postcolonial moment, cultural independence became an even trickier proposition. What was the best way to show diasporic solidarities and affinities, without reproducing the unequal power structures between the

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\textsuperscript{30} Katherine Dunham to Giovanella Zannoni, May 13, 1966, box 40, folder 6, SIUC.

United States and these new West African nations? Both Primus and Dunham lobbied for a synthesis between traditional cultural practices and Western theatrical conventions, but often their modes of communicating such ideas smacked of American arrogance. Showing, rather than telling, seemed to be a preferable mode of engagement. For the countries that Ailey visited, his company seemed to be the model for how to blend traditional and modern. His work was not that much different from what Primus and Dunham advocated, but he left the act of translation up to those in African nations themselves, giving them agency over the process. And perhaps we can learn from those stories as we head toward the third decade of the twenty-first century. Finding political solidarity across lines of difference has perhaps never been more important, and at the same time, people are even more adverse to the perception that they are being dictated to. Dialogic exchange is a process that requires patience and continuous efforts at communication, often with the need to push through moments of mistranslation.

Elizabeth Schwall

In 1962 Cuban ballerina Alicia Alonso needed a new dance partner. Her long, successful collaboration with Russian émigré Igor Youskevitch had ended by 1960. She had subsequently partnered with the Cuban born Enrique Martínez and then Argentinean dancer Rodolfo Rodríguez. However, depending on a single male partner was risky, according to Fernando Alonso, Alicia’s husband and co-director of the state subsidized ballet company, Ballet Nacional de Cuba (National Ballet of Cuba, BNC). In a missive to cultural bureaucrats about the situation, Alonso described the “urgent and immediate needs of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba,” which included a “lead Soviet male dancer who eliminates dependence on a single dancer…and who can teach pas de deux classes to the members of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba.” The male dancer, according to Fernando, would also be an invaluable inspiration to young men in the company, serving as “an example that would help the others.” In 1963, Soviet dancer Azari Plisetski arrived in Cuba to fulfill Alonso’s request and ended up dancing and teaching on the island for ten years.

This paper examines Plisetski’s decade in Cuba within a longer history of ballet linkages between Cuba and Russia and then between Cuba and the Soviet Union. I argue that the spectacle of Cuban-Soviet relations, when expressed through ballet in the 1960s and early 1970s, obfuscated even as it exaggerated the contours of the international friendship. Many tensions operated below the surface in private and public lives and increased over time. Furthermore, Cuban dance leaders harbored a nationalistic determination to retain cultural sovereignty despite drawing upon Soviet advice and technical support. Although Cuban and Soviet dancers like Plisetski forged institutional, aesthetic, and even conjugal relations as a result of dance collaborations, these sustained close encounters also sowed seeds of discord. In this paper, I will examine this dualistic nature of Cuban-Soviet ballet exchanges.

This paper, which contributes to literature on Cuban-Soviet relations and dancing the Cold War, builds on work by historian Anne Gorsuch and literary scholar Jacqueline Loss, who have examined, respectively, Cuba in the Soviet imaginary in the 1960s, and contemporary Cuban memories of the Soviet Union. Picking up where they left off, I examine the same period as Gorsuch from the Cuban, not the Soviet, perspective; and I analyze historical events that fuelled the nostalgic memories discussed by Loss. This also adds to ongoing conversations about the history of Cuban and Soviet dance relations. Assessments have ranged from US press descriptions of “Cuban ballet cast in Soviet mold” to the Cuban refusal that local dancers were “Sovietized” or “Russianized.”

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1 Youskevitch performed with Alonso in Cuba and during a South America tour in 1959, but does not appear in performance programs after that year. See for instance, Folder Ballet-Danza 1959 and Folder Ballet-Danza 1960 in Centro de Documentación y Archivo Teatral, Teatro Nacional de Cuba, Havana, Cuba (hereafter cited as TNC).

2 The Cuban-born dancer Enrique Martínez was a member of the American Ballet Theatre and went to Havana to work with the Ballet de Cuba as a teacher and choreographer in 1959 and 1960.


4 Fernando Alonso to Dra. Mirta Aguirre, June 25, 1962, Folder BNC Personal 60, Cajuela 241, Fondo: CNC, AGMC.


6 For US assessments see Al Burt, “Cuba Cast in Soviet Mold,” The Washington Post, Herald Tribune (Mar. 28,
rehashing or taking sides in the debate, I focus on the political valences of Cuban-Soviet collaborations and how events behind the scenes precipitated changes in the international ballet relationship. Moreover, I add to research on dance diplomacy during the Cold War by shifting attention away from US and Soviet clashes over communism and anti-communism. Instead, I analyze Cuba, a small, so-called “Third World” country, as it interacted with an ideological ally. Cuban dancers took advantage of opportunities that arose in the midst of geopolitical shifts, but mostly focused on building a strong Cuban ballet establishment. Thus, rather than a story of governments and dancers struggling to win hearts and minds, I focus on how dancers utilized international politics as a means to further national ends, namely expanding ballet possibilities in Cuba. In other words, as the Cuban government became estranged from the United States and allied with the Soviet Union following the 1959 Cuban Revolution, the Alonsos capitalized on the political expediency of ballet exchanges with Soviet artists.

In this short piece, I focus on Plisetski and necessarily omit other important aspects of Cuban-Soviet ballet exchanges in the 1960s and early 1970s. Plisetski was born in Moscow to the well-known Messerer clan that included several professional dancers with the Bolshoi, where he also trained. Several of his family members also collaborated with Cuban dance makers. For instance, Cuban choreographer Alberto Alonso (Fernando Alonso’s brother and Alicia Alonso’s brother-in-law) famously worked with Azari’s sister, ballerina Maya Plisetskaya, and cousin, set designer Boris Messerer, to create the ballet Carmen (1967). In contrast to the better-known Carmen collaboration, Azari’s time in Cuba has received less scholarly attention. Yet, unlike other Soviet ballet artists, Azari spent the longest time living and working with Cubans. He influenced his Cuban counterparts through his performing and teaching. Examining Plisetski’s history contributes to our understanding of Cuban ballet developments after 1959, Cuban-Soviet ballet exchanges, and Cuban-Soviet international relations more broadly.

The ballet linkages that brought Plisetski to the island in 1963 had an important prehistory in the Russian émigré dancers that ended up in Cuba in the early twentieth century. In 1931, Russian émigré Nikolai Yavorsky began teaching the first ballet classes on the island. Born in the Ukrainian city of Odessa in 1891, Yavorsky fought in the White Army before fleeing Russia and eventually starting his performance career in Belgrade in 1921. International tours took him to other parts of Europe, the Americas, and finally Cuba. Yavorsky trained the first generation of professional Cuban ballet dancers, choreographers, and teachers, including future dance leaders like Alicia Alonso (née Martínez), her future husband Fernando Alonso, and Fernando’s brother Alberto Alonso. Thanks to Yavorsky, Russian influences predated Soviet dance habits in Cuba.


Cuban observers have noted Azari’s significance as Alicia’s partner, but have been less forthcoming about his contributions to male dancers. See Miguel Cabrera, “Los Parte-


Nicolai Yavorsky, “Mi biografía,” trans. Russian to Spanish by Mireley García González and Pablo Batista Aja, in Expediente 1, Legajo 1, Fondo Personal de Nicolai Yavorsky, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santiago de Cuba.
The Alonsos had more contact with Russian ballet while pursuing performance opportunities outside of Cuba. Moreover, Russian dancers continued to teach and choreograph in Cuba. In 1935, Alberto Alonso had the opportunity to audition for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo when the company was performing in Cuba. Alberto danced with the company for six years before returning to Cuba in 1941. Meanwhile, in 1937, Fernando and Alicia Alonso traveled to New York, where they danced with Lincoln Kirstein and George Balanchine’s Ballet Caravan and were founding members of Ballet Theatre. They later recalled training with the great “Old World” teachers residing in New York, including Russians Alexandra Fedorova, Anatole Vilzak, and Anatole Oboukhoff. After the Alonsos returned to Cuba in the 1940s, they continued working with Russian dancer Anna Leontieva (who settled in Cuba) and Leon Fokine (who was invited to teach at Fernando and Alicia Alonso’s school and ended up marrying the young Cuban dancer Gloria González).

A new period of ballet exchanges between Cuba and the Soviet Union began when Alicia performed and Fernando taught classes in numerous Soviet cities from December 1957 to January 1958 after receiving an official invitation from the Soviet Ministry of Culture. An article about the trip in the *New York Herald* labeled Alicia a “U.S. Ballerina” and “the only Western Hemisphere ballet dancer to perform in the Soviet Union in recent times.” Cuban Ibrahim Urbino, writing for the Havana periodical *Bohemia*, angrily contested the *Herald*, noting that, although Alicia may have completed her training in the United States, “her roots are eminently Cuban. And the poetic imprint of her art is Cuban.” Despite overlapping and competing claims regarding Alicia’s ballet loyalties, all reports agreed that the trip was a success. Alicia impressed Soviet audiences, who “waited outside the theater in a temperature of 27 degrees below to…[thank

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16 Urbino, “Alicia en el Mundo,” 100.
The 1959 Cuban Revolution and resultant geopolitical changes gave dancers an opportunity to build on Cuban-Soviet ballet connections. The 26th of July Movement led by Fidel Castro espoused a populist, nationalist agenda that, while not yet communist, struck nervous US politicians and businessmen as left-leaning. As the relationship between Cuba and the United States soured in 1959 and 1960, Cuba turned increasingly to the Soviet Union as a trade partner and political ally. After the United States backed the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961, Castro officially endorsed Marxism and secured the promise of Soviet protection in the case of nuclear war.


As the Havana-New York circuit closed, Cuban ballet leaders responded by organizing new avenues for Havana-Moscow dance dialogues. This meant an unprecedented level of ballet exchanges between the two countries. By May 1962, Soviet teachers had arrived in Cuba, observed ballet activities, and offered suggestions for improving the training of ballet students and professionals.19 Around the same time, Fernando Alonso asked cultural bureaucrats to invite a lead male dancer from the Soviet Union, and Plisetski arrived in Cuba.

Soon after arriving, Plisetski staged a ballet with six dancers called La Avanzada (The Outpost), which premiered in Havana on July 27, 1963.20 According to a performance program, the ballet was “inspired by a heroic event in the battle of Stalingrad.”21 Choreographically, dancers in fatigue and boots performed strong movements of aggression. Faces smudged with dirt, dancers carried flags and mimed holding rifles as though in the midst of battle. Given the content of the piece, it became a favorite to show soldiers and reservists in Cuba. Take for instance, the image of Alicia Alonso performing for soldiers in Guantanamo (Fig. 1).22 Lurching forward in mid-run or jump, she squares off for fight and flight. Her mouth, slightly open, perhaps emitted an improvised or choreographed battle cry. The costumes and the aggressive choreography made clear the propagandistic possibilities of ballet. La Avanzada became an important part of the company repertory.23 The Ballet Nacional de


19 “Resumen de los informes y opiniones brindados por los compañeros Victor Zaplin, Olga Kriolova y Michel Gurov a la Presidencia del Consejo Nacional de Cultura a su Dirección De Teatro y Danza, en relación enseñanza y actividades del Ballet de Cuba,” Folder BNC Informes 60, Cajuela 238, Fondo: CNC, AGMC.


21 Performance Program, Ballet Nacional de Cuba, Nov. 9, 1967, Folder Ballet-Danza 1967, TNC.

22 Photo from Museo de la Danza, Havana, Cuba.

23 For instance, it was still being performed as part of a program in 1971, as indicated by the Performance Program, Ballet Nacional de Cuba, November 4-6-7, 1971, Cajuela 250, Fondo: CNC, AGMC. A 1975 lecture demonstration featured La Avanzada. See Performance Program “El Ballet y su Historia”: Charla Didáctica, Casa Central de las FAR y Sección Cultura de la Dirección Política de las FAR, Sept. 20, 1975, Folder Ballet-Danza 1975, TNC. It was also performed in 1984, see Miguel Cabrera, “35. Aniversario en Santiago de Cuba,” Cuba.
Cuba regularly performed its overt celebration of revolutionary militancy that also embodied Soviet-Cuban dance and political alliances. Although the plot focused on a Soviet event, Cuban bodies that performed and observed the work year after year gave it new meanings specific to the socialist revolution in the Caribbean.

Besides partnering with Alicia Alonso and choreographing militant ballets, Plisetski integrated into the Cuban ballet establishment by marrying Cuban ballerina Loipa Araújo in 1965. The nuptials took place in November, coordinating with a performance by Maya Plisetskaya in Havana so that the Soviet ballerina could attend her brother’s wedding. There were two wedding ceremonies—one at the Soviet Consulate in Havana and the other at Loipa’s parents’ house. In an article about the weddings, Plisetski claimed that their relationship had begun before even meeting. He said, “I had been told that Cuban women were very pretty, and I already knew that I would not leave Cuba without a wife.”

Plisetski brought fantasies about Cuban women to the island and secured the pretty wife that he had desired.

These romantic visions of Cuba in the Soviet imaginary were common, especially in the ebullient early years after the 1959 Cuban Revolution. As historian Anne Gorsuch has described, the youthful, bearded Fidel Castro and his fellow male revolutionaries, as well as bikini-clad, often dark-skinned Cuban women, became objects of Soviet female and male desire. The perceived vigor and exoticism of the island made Cuban men and women irresistible to Soviet citizens. Cuban-Soviet romances often went from fantasy to reality when Cuban students in the Soviet Union met future spouses. The marriage between Plisetski and Araújo differed slightly from the norm, because for the most part, Cuban men married Soviet women. Nevertheless, the ballet wedding between the Soviet and Cuban dancers resembled other cross-cultural couplings in serving as a symbol of the political and cultural linkages between the two countries.

In addition to the romantic union, Plisetski fomented a melding of Cuban and Soviet training methods and styles, especially for male dancers. He filled the important pedagogical role of teaching the men’s class to ballet students and professionals. The US journalist Marian Horosko, writing for *Dance Magazine* about her trip to Cuba in 1971, described Azari’s class as “based on his Russian training: deep pliés and slow controlled jumps. Most of the pirouettes ended in attitude or arabesque.” Yet, Horosko was surprised by what she called, “cool sentiments towards all things Russian.” She went on to describe a revealing incident: “when I saw a few hips up and out in a développé à la seconde, I remarked jokingly to Fernando, ‘You see, there’s a Bolshoi hip!’ ‘I see,’ he answered. ‘I didn’t notice that today. We’ll have to make a correction.’ After that ‘Russian’ hips were playfully slapped down into Cuban placement.”

During an interview conducted in 2010, Loipa Araújo told author Toba Singer that Azari taught the men’s class but “never tried in any way to impose Soviet methods.” She went on to claim, “On the contrary, [Azari] took Fernando’s classes, and paid careful attention to Fernando’s pedagogic approach, and introduced only the virtuosity and power of the Soviet men’s training, producing a very welcome element that is highly regarded by audiences. The end result is a melding of the Cuban neatness and particularity with the Russian virtuosity.”

Back in 1971, Horosko came to a similar conclusion. She admitted, “I kept looking for the ‘Russian’ influence, certain that the political revolution had affected their dance as well. If their *Swan* [Lake] looked Russian in style, it was just that, style superimposed on their own basic technique. The technique is Fernando’s; the artistry, Alicia’s. The result, uniquely Cuban.” According to these estimations, Soviet and Cuban ballet techniques were able to harmoniously blend during daily classes and performances.

Though Soviet and Cuban ballet dancers found ways to respect and learn from shared political objectives and stylistic differences, Plisetski’s mar-

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28 Ibid.
29 Araújo, quoted in Singer, *Fernando Alonso*, 63-64.
riage to Araújo faltered and his days in Cuba were numbered. Internal reports on an international tour that included Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Hungary in 1972 reveal that Plisetski had an affair with another Cuban ballerina in the company. In a summary of the problems encountered on the tour, Cuban cultural bureaucrats called Azari a “Don Juan” in the center of “a love triangle.” Despite having great respect for Plisetski, Fernando Alonso suggested canceling Azari’s contract because there were enough other male dancers to take his place. Before Plisetski left, however, the Ballet Nacional de Cuba had a full evening program on February 4, 1973 that honored his ten years with the company. Contrary to the drama behind the scenes, the public narrative remained cheerful and celebratory. The opening pages of the performance program said that Plisetski’s time in Cuba helped to bring the Soviet Union and Cuba even closer, illuminating a shared “proletarian internationalism” not only in politics and economics, but also in culture and art. Adding to the spectacle of bilateral linkages, Plisetski danced the main roles of the ballet *La Fille Mal Gardée* with his betrayed wife, Loipa.

When Plisetski left Cuba, the island had entered what scholars have called its most Soviet decade. The Cuban government embraced Soviet models of politics and economy to an unprecedented degree in the 1970s, just as the ballet establishment asserted artistic independence from Soviet guidance. Though ballet exchanges between Cuba and the Soviet Union continue to this day—for instance, on February 14, 2017, the Cuban ballerina Daniela Gómez performed at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg—the period of particularly intense ballet collaborations ended in the early 1970s.

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31 Marcos, “Resumen analítico de las informaciones recibidas por la DGI sobre la Jira del Ballet Nacional de Cuba por Checoslovaquia, RDA y Hungría,” Nov. 21, 1972, Folder BNC Relaciones Internacionales 1972, Cajuela 261, Fondo: CNC, AGMC.


During the period of détente, the relaxation of international tensions between the Soviet Union and the “capitalist West” of the 1970s, Soviet popular dance culture, known as “socialist diskoteka,” became a new front of the cultural Cold War. This cultural Cold War affected even those industrial cities that were “closed” to all foreigners. One of these “closed” cities in Soviet Ukraine was Dniepropetrovsk, the location of Yuzhmash, a famous “rocket” factory, which produced missiles for the Soviet military-industrial complex.1 In February of 1979, a KGB operative, in his official annual report to the Dniepropetrovsk Regional Communist Party Secretary, complained that Isaac Portnoy, the local Jewish enthusiast of the central city disco club, not only popularized the Ukrainian folk dance gopak in the official meetings of this club, but also, beginning late 1977, “emphasized Ukrainian nationalistic elements of this dance.” (Regarding gopak, see link 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALzZ69HLXuY.) This enthusiast, who was an engineer and an amateur folk dancer, “taught his numerous followers on the dance floor forbidden erotic elements” from forbidden music material by the “famous American disco group [sic!] Bee Gees.” This KGB officer informed his “Party boss” that in January 1979, the police intercepted a special package sent from Chicago by the Jewish relatives of this enthusiast. As it turned out, these relatives were former emigrants from Soviet Ukraine, and they were “very active in Zionist religious organizations in America.” The relatives had enclosed a music record and tapes with disco music and pictures of various dance moves from the film Saturday Night Fever (John Badham, 1977). (For the “erotic dance moves,” see link 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0lm58cet1g.) The KGB considered this case to be an example of “a dangerous American influence, connecting Ukrainian nationalism with Jewish Zionism, by promoting the dance material,” which is the most popular in “American bourgeois propaganda.” First, Soviet police confiscated all of Portnoy’s “American music material,” but by June of 1979, after Portnoy’s numerous complaints, they returned all this material to him. Portnoy promised the KGB officer that “he would never use sexual elements and a combination of Ukrainian nationalism with Zionism.”2 Eventually, the KGB officers complained about “the dangerous disco effect,” which led not only to the Westernization of local youth culture in the Soviet Ukrainian city, but also to the “spreading [of] the dangerous trends of capitalist commercialization” among Komsomol youth.3

From 1976 to 1985, the Dniepropetrovsk region of Soviet Ukraine lived through the peak of official “Westernization,” which was connected to the Komsomol “disco movement”; through the various profitable (and sometimes illegal) business activities of the Komsomol and trade union tourist agencies, the commercial success of a new “disco” entertainment industry; and through anti-rock music ideological campaigns. During this period, Westernization and commercialization influenced not only the ordinary consumers of Western cultural products, students, and workers, but also the young generation of Dniepropetrovsk Komsomol activists. New Komsomol enterprises like tourism and music entertainment helped to promote Komsomol ideologists’ careers and brought them profits.

Life experiences during this “disco era” shaped the identities of Komsomol members, such as Yulia Grigian (Tymoshenko), Victor Pinchuk, Serhiy

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2 Derzhavnyi arkhiv Dnipropetrovskoi oblasti (hereafter – DADO), f. 19, op. 62, d. 18, ll. 25-26.

Tihipko, Igor Kolomoiskii, Oleksandr Turchinov, and many others, who would become the typical representatives of “the Dniepropetrovsk political clan” in post-Soviet Ukraine. As result of their life in Dniepropetrovsk during this era, they developed a very cynical and practical approach to the ruling ideology, which replaced high moral Communist ideals with pragmatic, profit-oriented goals based on their ideals of Westernization. The provincial character of Dniepropetrovsk, and the confusing impact of Western mass culture, which reached the closed city indirectly and too late, contributed to their moral cynicism, and to the very provincial and parochial worldview of the future Ukrainian politicians who grew up during the “disco era” in the “closed” city of the Soviet Ukraine.

The Beginning of the Disco Movement

Dance floors in Soviet parks and palaces of culture became the primary location for new forms of Soviet entertainment in the mid-seventies. (For a traditional Soviet dance floor, see link 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OxUr1Jwgr8.) These forms, known as discotheques, were promoted by the All-Union Komsomol in Moscow as the most progressive and ideologically safe for Communist entertainment of Soviet youth. The Komsomol discotheque movement reached Ukraine in 1976 and affected cultural consumption not only in the big Soviet capital cities, but also in the provincial, “closed city,” Dniepropetrovsk.

According to Artemy Troitsky, the first “typical” Soviet discotheque was organized in Moscow in 1972. Troitsky and his friend, Aleksandr Kostenko, rented special musical equipment from their musician friends, and operated this “dancing enterprise” inside a café at Moscow University. As Troitsky noted, they organized a special program for this discotheque event, which became a model for other Soviet discotheques. “The first hour was dedicated to listening; that is I played music by ‘serious’ groups like Jethro Tull, Pink Floyd, King Crimson, and talked about their histories… After the ‘listening’ hour, people spent the next three expressing themselves on the dance floor.” 4 Komsomol ideologists had already tried to use similar musical lectures as early as 1966 at different youth clubs in many Soviet cities, from Moscow and Kyiv to Kazan and Dniepropetrovsk. Even local branches of the Znanie (Knowledge) organization, which usually worked under the control of the ideological departments of regional communist party committees, provided these kinds of musical lectures, followed by dance parties to popular music. 5 To some extent, Troitsky and his friends transformed traditional Soviet musical propaganda into a new form of musical entertainment, which imitated Western forms and fashions.

If dance parties in Moscow mostly followed Troitsky’s model, the new discotheques of Riga and other cities in the Baltic republics during 1973-74 developed more flexible forms and presentation, sometimes without the “obligatory thematical” part of musical lectures. They drew on the East European model of the “socialist discotheque,” which had existed from the late sixties in many European socialist countries. In 1971-72, the Yugoslavian model became the most popular form of disco club in the Soviet bloc. This type of dancing was promoted by Soviet Central television in its variety shows throughout the 1970s. 6 (For a 1975 show, see link 4: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdvsQYBJmLY; for a 1978 show, see link 5: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfW_H_Zij9k.)

By 1975, discotheques, as a new form of youth entertainment, became part of the official ideological campaign among Komsomol ideologists. Timothy Ryback, the first Western scholar to write about Soviet discotheques, noted that the “discomania” in the Soviet Union and official fascination with Western disco music began in Riga, the capital of Latvia. The Latvian Republic Cultural Workers Trade Union and Latvian Komsomol organized the first Soviet (mezhrespublikanskii) Discotheque Festival and Competition in Riga as “the first national effort to assess the effectiveness of the discotheque as a means of ideological indoctrination.” The

6 DADO, f. 22, op. 19, d. 73, ll. 13-14.
oldest and most famous disco clubs from five cities—Riga, Ventspils, Kaunas, Tartu, and Tashkent—competed in this festival. Hundreds of Komsomol ideologists from all over the Soviet Union took part as observers and judges in the Riga competition. From October 23 to October 30, 1976, the first Soviet disco clubs presented, as Timothy Ryback writes, “discotheque format, combining music, light shows, and Communist propaganda in an attempt to appease ideological watchdogs without alienating youthful audiences.” By the end of 1978, Moscow registered 187 Komsomol-sponsored discotheques. Latvia had more than three hundred disco clubs of different kinds. In 1978, Ukraine had sixteen disco clubs in Kyiv, sixteen in L’viv, and ten in Odessa. The majority of these clubs followed the same pattern, which Ryback called “the prototypical Soviet disco of the late 1970s: flashing lights, mirrored walls, and Western disco tunes.”

According to the Ukrainian participants in the discotheque movement, as early as 1974 former youth clubs in the Ukrainian cities already used dancing parties and musical lectures, which were similar to what in 1976 was called “the discotheque for young people” (“molodëzhnaia diskoteka” in Russian). In 1974-75, all major Ukrainian cities, such as Kyiv, Odessa, and L’viv, already had dance parties that imitated Western disco clubs. Under the influence of the Baltic “discotheque initiative,” the Komsomol of Ukraine tried to emulate and imitate this new form of youth entertainment. The All-Union Komsomol leadership supported this initiative as a new venue for Communist education and organization of ideologically reliable leisure for Soviet youth. The Komsomol city committee of Dniepropetrovsk became involved in this new ideological campaign as early as 1976. Different spontaneous forms of the discotheque movement already existed in many locations in Dniepropetrovsk, especially at vocational school and college dormitories, where local Komsomol activists organized dancing parties on a regular basis and used music recordings of popular music enthusiasts, who provided these parties not only with music material, but also with information about the music. These dances without live music became known as “dances to tape-recorder music” (tantsy pod magnitofon). It was cheaper for organizers of leisure activities to use a tape-recorder than to invite a band to play.

The Komsomol city committee decided to transform the old youth clubs, which already existed in Dniepropetrovsk, into new disco clubs, which were promoted by the Komsomol leadership from Moscow. Mriia, the old youth club, a pioneer of jazz in the city, was under the jurisdiction of the Yuzhmash administration. By 1976 this club (legendary for its Ukrainian jazz) had been turned into an ordinary café. Sometimes local rock bands played live in this café, but most of its time Mriia functioned like a restaurant, and its intellectual aura disappeared. Komsomol activists and enthusiasts of rock music from Yuzhmash decided to transform this place into the new Komsomol music club.

As the wealthiest and most influential industrial enterprise in the region, Yuzhmash sponsored the first professional disco club in Dniepropetrovsk. Both the trade union and Komsomol organizations of this factory used special “recreational” funds assigned to them by the factory’s administration for purchasing music and audio equipment for their dancing parties, for the factory jazz and rock bands, and for organizing leisure-time activities in the numerous Yuzhmash dormitories. The center for these activities was in the Palace of Culture of the Machine-Builders, a magnificent building of the Stalinist Empire style, located on Rabochaia (The Workers’) Street, not far from the central entrance of Yuzhmash. In December of 1976, using this equipment and music audio tapes of local enthusiasts of Western pop music, Stanislav Petrov and Valerii Miakotenko, who worked at the Palace of Culture of the Machine-Builders, organized a New Year’s Eve dancing party structured like a Baltic discotheque. This party included the disc jockey’s special announcements and intellectual commentary about the music, and new technology:

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7 Ryback, Rock Around the Bloc, 159-60.
8 Ibid.
10 DADO, f. 17, op. 7, d. 1, l. 76.
home-made equipment for special video and audio effects, such as “color-music” (son et lumière - “tsveto-muzyka”) lights. Miakotenko, who was a manager of the local rock band Vodograi, also organized a special concert of amateur musicians and included this in the dancing program. He also asked musicologists and teachers of music from the local music schools to provide professional commentary about modern music.\footnote{11}

After this successful dancing party, Petrov and Miakotenko decided to use the old club Mriia for their discotheque. The Komsomol district committee supported this decision, and in February of 1977 Mriia became the location of the first officially registered discotheque by the city Komsomol. The first director and manager of this disco club (or “the club of music lovers”) was Stanislav Petrov. At the beginning, this club had two official leaders and disc jockeys – musician-manager Valerii Miakotenko and musicologist Natalia Fesik. During February of 1977, the disco club at Mriia had three meetings with an average number of forty participants, mainly young workers and engineers from Yuzhmash, but also high school and college students. Local enthusiasts of popular music, architects, designers, artists, and engineers helped to decorate and prepare the club’s building and interior, and also made and assembled the sophisticated audio-visual equipment.\footnote{12}

As Stanislav Petrov explained to the guests of the discotheque, the main goal of their club was “a campaign against musical illiteracy.” “Although we all love music,” he noted, “we do not know everything about it. We need a consistent system of music education. We can’t understand music without the assistance of musicologist-specialists.” The same evening, a local musicologist, who became one of the first commentators (“disc jockeys”) of this disco club, organized a special lecture about the songs of Soviet composer David Tukhmanov. This lecture was in response to the increasing interest in Tukhmanov’s new album, On the Wave of My Memory, among young guests of the club. Both Communist and Komsomol ideologists praised these presentations in youth clubs as “a new positive form in popular music consumption” in the city.\footnote{13}

The city Komsomol committee invited the pioneers of the Soviet discotheque movement from Riga to demonstrate how best to organize Komsomol music entertainment for local enthusiasts and activists of this movement. These Latvian pioneers of the disco club movement were Normund Erts and Karlis Upenieks, members of the special council of youth entertainment at the Riga Komsomol committee, and the organizers of discotheques at the Riga Club of the Printers and at the radio factory VEF, which also belonged to the Soviet military industrial complex. It is noteworthy that the Riga guests from the VEF factory and Dniepropetrovsk hosts from the Yuzhmash factory were part of the same financial and economic machine that provided the Soviet military with sophisticated equipment and ammunition. Both VEF and Yuzhmash factories had better funding and equipment for organizing disco clubs than other Soviet industrial plants. Moreover, ideological and entertainment initiatives (including the disco club) from these secret factories were supported by the KGB as ideologically reliable, in contrast to initiatives from “immature college students.”\footnote{14}

The Latvian guests summarized the major results of various experiments in the organization of discotheques. Dniepropetrovsk Komsomol leaders followed their guests’ recommendations. After this visit, they promoted two types of disco club programs recommended by the Latvians. One was the “program for enlightenment and education” called a “discotheque-club.” Another was the “program for dance and entertainment” called a “discotheque-dancing hall.”\footnote{15} Latvian guests demonstrated their own discotheque programs in three locations in Dniepropetrovsk -- at the Student Palace in Shevchenko Park, the Yuzhmash club Mriia, and in the park pavilion “Dnieper Dawn” in Chkalov Park. They explained to their hosts that the first “socialist” discotheque was organized in the German Democratic Republic in 1962, and Latvians followed this East German model. The

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{11}{Pidgaetskii, interview. See also Suvorov, interview.}
\footnote{12}{Yu. Milinteiko, “Pervye shagi diskoteki,” Prapor iunosti, February 26, 1977; Pidgaetskii interview.}
\footnote{13}{Milinteiko, “Pervye shagi diskoteki.”}
\footnote{14}{Igor T., KGB officer, interview. He always praised the ideological reliability of the entertainment efforts by Yuzhmash ideologists.}
\footnote{15}{V. Ivashura and I. Manevich, “Rizhane dariat prazdnik,” Dnepr vechernii, March 23, 1977.}
\end{footnotesize}
most impressive disco programs of the Latvian guests that were praised by the local Komsomol newspaper covered music of the “socialist rock musician Cheslav Nieman from Poland and anti-imperialist American singer Bob Dylan.”

The practical advice of the guests from Riga was very important for the Dniepropetrovsk enthusiasts of discotheques. According to the hierarchy of a typical Soviet cultural consumer in the 1970s, the Baltic region represented the “authentic” West in its Soviet socialist form. If Western cultural forms such as disco clubs were presented by “Westernized” Soviet people such as Latvians, they immediately received authenticity and proof of ideological reliability in the minds of Dniepropetrovsk Komsomol ideologists. The visit from Latvian guests not only offered symbolic approval of the discotheque movement in the Dniepropetrovsk region, but also began the imitation of Baltic cultural forms. These forms were considered ideologically reliable because they came from a Westernized Soviet region, not from the capitalist West. In 1977-78, the local administration of Dniepropetrovsk opened new bars and cafeterias with elements of Baltic variety shows, including “erotic dances” and other “exotic” cultural forms that looked like Western ones. Local disco organizers also introduced dance elements, which Baltic guests imitated from the Finnish television shows openly available in Soviet Estonia during the same time. (For Finnish dance moves, see link 6: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikas43q-xdg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikas43q-xdg))

Using the ideas of Baltic entertainers, the local administration opened the popular music bar “The Red Coral” on the embankment of the Dnieper River, with a Latvian variety show and live rock band, which featured a famous guitarist, Vladimir Kuz’min, who became a living legend of Soviet rock music in the 1970s. Each evening more than five hundred young rockers waited in line to get to their favorite music show. Despite the relatively high price for admission, five to ten rubles compared to the average price of fifty kopecks to one ruble for a ticket to a regular dance floor, “The Red Coral” became the most popular venue for rock music fans in the city. In 1977, a seventeen-year old Yulia Grigian (Tymoshenko) and her classmates joined the crowds of these rock fans as well. From 1977 to 1981, venues such as “The Red Coral” and “The Lighthouse” restaurant in Taras Shevchenko park became symbols of collaboration between the local Ukrainian and Baltic organizers of youth entertainment. The beginning of this collaboration was initiated during the Komsomol discotheque campaign of 1976.

Responding to pressure from above, i.e. from the Moscow Komsomol Central Committee, which urged local Komsomol organizations to participate in a new All-Union initiative for youth entertainment, the Dniepropetrovsk Komsomol committee decided to officially support the Yuzhmash disco club. Moreover, local Komsomol functionaries understood that they were losing contact with even ordinary Komsomol members, who were bored with traditional ideological Komsomol events, such as the regular meetings with official reports and elections of new officials, subotniks, lectures, etc. They tried to re-establish ideological control over the new forms of cultural consumption and the new growing disco movement, which involved thousands of young enthusiasts of Western pop music throughout the entire Dniepropetrovsk region.

The city Komsomol leaders invited young disc jockeys from the Yuzhmash discotheque to be leaders of the central city disco club, which was created with the support of the Komsomol city committee. Valerii Miakotenko, who worked

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17 Regarding the transformation of this bar into the most popular disco club in 1982, see Prapor iunosti, January 9, 1982. 4. Valerii Miakotenko, a disc jockey of the central city discotheque rented “The Red Coral” in 1981-82, and organized very popular, but very expensive dance parties there. See also Suvorov, interview; Aleksandr Gusar, interview, May 4, 1990; Vladimir Solodovnik, interview, June 21, 1991; Sadovoi, interview.

18 Andrei Z., interview, Dniepropetrovsk, June 12, 2005.

19 Pidgaetskii interview; Vladimir Demchenko, with Mikhail Suvorov, interview; Andrei Vadimov, interview, Dniepropetrovsk, July 20-21, 2003.

20 Komsomol leaders declared these goals in public. See: V. Ivashura, "Diskoteka stanovitsia popularnoi," Dnepr vechny, May 24, 1977. See also Ivan Litvin (first secretary of the city Komsomol committee), official report, December 17, 1977, in DADO, f. 17, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 32, 87, 98.
with Stanislav Petrov at the Yuzhmask cultural centers during 1973-76, organizing various dancing parties, became the first official disc jockey of this Komsomol enterprise. On May 15, 1977, Komsomol apparatchiks officially announced the opening of the first city discotheque at the Student Palace of Culture in Taras Shevchenko park in the so-called student district of Dniepropetrovsk. All major colleges of the city and the State University were located near this park. From the 1960s through the 1980s Shevchenko park, including the famous Student Palace (the only one for the entire Ukraine), became a favorite place for the leisure activities of thousands of city college students.21

To control and direct the central discotheque and other disco clubs in the city, the Komsomol functionaries recommended the creation of a new bureaucratic organization, a special Council of the City Discotheque. Under the guidance of the Komsomol city committee, the organizers of this Komsomol “enterprise” elected a disc jockey, Valerii Miakotenko, as chairperson of this council, and formed three special council sections. The first one was the scenario-producing section, which addressed the major problems of selecting material, writing a script, producing the show, and staging a dance. The second section comprised of presenters. Its main goal was to prepare disc jockeys and anchormen responsible for presenting information, organizing the elements of the variety shows, and inviting clowns, mimes, and jugglers. The last section addressed technical issues related to audio and video equipment, music recording and producing devices, light effects, technology, etc.22

Natalia Fesik and Valerii Miakotenko, two disc jockeys who had been approved officially by D. Fedorenko, a secretary of the city Komsomol committee, opened the first meeting (zasedanie) of the city discotheque on the evening of May 15, 1977. They introduced the first music program from the series which they called “Vocal Instrumental Ensembles from the Brotherly Soviet Republics.” The first evening was devoted to “Pesniary – Music of the Byelorussian Folk in Modern Rhythms,” the most popular theme from this series. Fesik and Miakotenko covered the biographies and musical achievements of the Byelorussian rock band Pesniary (whose name in English translation means “Singers”), which was famous for its popularization of Byelorussian folklore and its rock-'n’-roll arrangements. For more than an hour, the disc jockeys played music and showed photo slides to illustrate the main ideas of their presentation. The second and the longest part of the event was devoted to dances. Fesik and Miakotenko made comments for each melody they played (half of these melodies were foreign and half of them Soviet). During a break, local mimes and jugglers performed various tricks and entertained the audience. At the end both Komsomol and Communist ideologists praised the high “ideological and educational level” of the central city discotheque and characterized it as an example of the “really good cultured” consumption “under the reasonable ideological supervision” of the city Komsomol leadership.23 (For typical Soviet disco dance moves, see link 7: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJ4gH86DKPo.)

During its first year, the city central discotheque sponsored the organization of branch discotheques at different places such as the Mining Institute, the Mechanic-Mathematical Department of Dniepropetrovsk University, Yuzhmask, and the Radio Factory. By July of 1978 there were eleven officially registered discotheques in Dniepropetrovsk. The majority of these disco clubs had the official support of the central city discotheque. Yet the organizers of the discotheque movement still complained about a lack of funding, music, and visual information. Miakotenko had his own ambitious plans for his discotheque. He shared these plans with the local journalists:

Our main goal is to transform the central city discotheque into a special cultural center, which would provide important information, materials, and recommendations for all enthusiasts of popular music. First, we need to organize our own photo laboratory to supplement musical information with visual information. It is easy for an audience to understand a story we are telling, when we show photos or video clips about a particular musician or a band. We need to organize our own disco ballet and school of modern dance. This school will educate our audience and help to develop the elements of good dance.

21 DADO, f. 17, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 97-98.
22 Ivashura. “Diskoteka stanovitsia populiarnoi.”
23 DADO, f. 17, op. 10, d. 1, l. 98; Ivashura, “Tsia charivna dyskoteka.” See also O. Marchenko, “Isia charivna dyskoteka.” Prapor iunosti, May 21, 1977. Professor Demchenko, who was present at the opening of this discotheque, also mentioned “a good cultural level” of this event.
According to Miakotenko, the central city disco club should help to develop “positive” forms of the “real cultured” consumption which would be ideologically reliable and “positive and elevated” from an aesthetic point of view. Later, Miakotenko told journalists that “the discotheque had to teach and educate young people, not just entertain.” At the same time, the local journalist who interviewed Miakotenko reminded readers that the disco club needed funding to function. The same journalist then suggested that the club should introduce an entrance fee and use the money for financial needs. The local ideologists from the Komsomol and Communist party supported this idea of financial independence for the disco club and approved this idea officially in 1978.

**Disco Club as Komsomol Business**

Eventually, the city administration permitted the opening of a central city disco club in the big park pavilion, “Dnieper Dawn,” in downtown Chkalov Park in October, 1978. The city administration also allowed the disco club to function as a “financially independent enterprise under the auspices of the city Komsomol organization.” The organizers of this disco club were allowed to introduce entrance fees and use money for their financial needs, which included purchasing and repairing music equipment, etc. By January of 1979 the central city disco club had acquired the name Melodiia (“melody” in Russian). In two years, from 1978 to 1979, the club Melodiia became a successful business enterprise, which brought profits to its organizers and made them famous among Ukrainian Komsomol ideologists. The city Komsomol organization used the talents of the young architects, designers, and artists who were students of the Dnepropetrovsk Engineering-Building Institute to decorate and prepare the rooms of the pavilion in Chkalov Park for a new disco club. Although a lot of money was invested in this building, the results exceeded all expectations. On average, the disco club met six times a week. Each meeting attracted 300-500 visitors. By charging one ruble as an admission fee from each guest, the organizers of this disco club made almost 500 rubles profit every evening. During 1979–83, admission payments alone created a profit of approximately 3,000 rubles per week. The disco club also had a bar serving alcohol, vending machines, and a hall with video games. In 1983, alcoholic beverages and games brought in an additional 5,000 rubles every week. The new equipment and catering service required participation from the other departments of the local Soviet administration responsible for the provision of food and beverages. Very soon, both Komsomol and Soviet apparatchiks realized the profitability of the new disco club. By 1983 Melodiia became a kind of joint venture that combined the efforts of different people from different offices of the city administration. Still, Komsomol ideologists tried to play the main role in controlling this new “ideological enterprise,” which became the first stable source of profit for the local administration, including Komsomol apparatchiks. According to official records, the club Melodiia brought a monthly profit of more than 60,000 rubles in 1981-83. In fact, the organizers of this business earned an additional “non-registered” (by the accountant’s books) 20,000 rubles each month. The leaders of Melodiia tried to invent something new to attract more people to the club’s meetings. Eventually, they cut back on the

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25 Ibid., 4.
27 Chenous’ko, “Disko-klubu”; DADO, f. 22, op. 28, d. 1, ll. 41, 87.
28 DADO, f. 17, op. 11, d. 1, ll. 28-29; Chenous’ko, “Disko-klubu”; Mikhail Suvorov and Andrei Vadinov, interview.
theoretical “music lecture” part of the meetings. As Miakotenko commented, “We try to make our presentations and commentaries in a laconic and emotional way.” “We had no right to forget,” he continued, “that our guests came to us after a long working day and they wanted just to relax, dance, and talk to their friends.”

According to a local journalist, in January of 1978 Miakotenko limited the entire “theoretical part” to only brief comments. They were devoted to a new sensation of the Soviet estrada: The Mirror of My Soul by the Soviet superstar Alla Pugacheva. This record had just been released in 1978 on the Soviet Melodiia label and was very popular among the female audience members of the club. Miakotenko finished his thematic part in less than an hour. Then a dance followed. To demonstrate his ideological reliability and the political correctness of the program, Miakotenko included some official Soviet radio and TV shows about the contemporary political situation in the world, especially in the United States, because a majority of his music came from this part of the globe. Other than these political comments, which came from official Soviet sources, the entire program of the disco club offered more contemporary dance music than ideological indoctrination. Miakotenko played mostly hits by Donna Summer, ABBA, Boney M., and the Bee Gees.32

Valerii Miakotenko’s decision to join a Komsomol city discotheque led to a division inside the Yuzhmask disco club in 1977. One of its founders, Stanislav Petrov, had to use different locations for this club because the administration of the rocket factory, including its Komsomol apparatchiks, did not want to be involved in the “leftover” of what was considered the city Komsomol’s object, Miakotenko’s disco club Melodiia. As a result of this attitude, Stanislav Petrov, who still worked at the Palace of the Machine-Builders and had access to expensive music equipment and funding from Yuzhmask, was left alone with a few rock music enthusiasts from the rocket factory to continue the Yuzhmask disco club’s activities. With all the Komsomol apparatchiks’ attention directed to the central city discotheque, Petrov used his temporary

independence from Komsomol supervision during 1977-78 to develop new forms of entertainment and advertising. Using his connections among the city industrial, communist, and trade union leaders, he attracted to his dance parties not only many young and middle-aged guests, but also various sponsors (besides the Yuzhmask administration), who could advertise their products and services during his club’s activities. These products and services included everything from new toothpaste, which was available at the central department store, to special sports events in the stadiums and gymnasiuums, to new movies and plays at the local theaters. The Yuzhmask disco club, which was now called Courier under Petrov’s leadership, became the most popular youth club among those who loved serious rock music, because the ideological control here was minimal. Moreover, after 1978 the city disco club Melodiia looked more like a commercial place for dancing and drinking rather than a music club for serious intellectual discussions. Petrov used advertisements for different public and state organizations (sport stadiums, the music philharmonic center, kinoprokat, a regional committee which was responsible for delivering new movies, etc.) to establish important relations with the leaders of these organizations. In response to “good favors” from Petrov (reminiscent of what A. Ledeneva called “blat”), the leaders of these organizations (directors of sport stadiums, movie theaters, concert halls) provided Courier with a location, audience, and sometime even with substantial funding.33

33 For a good description of this mechanism of sponsorship and management of Petrov’s disco club see: L. Titarenko, “Tsikavi tsentry vidpochynku,” Zoria, August 15, 1978; Andrei Vadimov, interview; and official documents in: DADO, f. 22, op. 28, d. 1, l. 41. Compare with Alena V. Ledeneva, Russia’s Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1. Using the traditional structure of the original Yuzhmask discotheque of 1977, Petrov organized five groups of people who formed his club’s council: 1) technical department, 2) music department, 3) literary department, 4) informational department, and 5) department of translations. Sergei Varava, an engineer and enthusiast of rock music who used to play rock guitar himself, imitating Jimi Hendrix, became a disc jockey of Courier. Nine other enthusiasts were in charge of the five main departments of this disco club. They created special music programs, which won not only an official acknowledgement from the Dniepropetrovsk Komsomol leaders, but also high prizes at the USSR competition of discotheques. “Amber

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The ideological and financial success of *Melodia* and *Courier* during 1977-78 inspired other enthusiasts of popular music to organize their own independent local discotheques. At the beginning of 1978, the disco club “Your World” was organized at the Pridneprovsk Chemical Factory in Dneprodzerzhinsk, not far from the capital city of the region. By the end of that year, there were eight registered disco clubs in this industrial city. All colleges (university and institutes) in the region of Dnepropetrovsk organized their own disco clubs. In contrast to the factory-based discotheques, the college disco clubs were more oriented to the intellectual student audience, who preferred serious rock music to official Soviet *estrada*. The thematic programs of student disco clubs always covered classic rock bands such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Doors, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, King Crimson, Jethro Tull, Yes, Genesis, and Pink Floyd. Of course, the student disc jockeys always included some anti-imperialist criticism in their political comments. Thus, in a program devoted to the Beatles in November 1979, they often covered Paul McCartney’s song “Give Ireland Back to The Irish” (1972) as an example of the anti-capitalist spirit of rock-'n'-roll, and pointed out that this song was banned in the West. In 1979, the city of Dnepropetrovsk alone had more than twenty discotheques. Each college (including the university) organized one “main college discotheque” and allowed each student dormitory to open its own “dorm disco club” as well.

The rapid spread of the discotheque movement made this region exemplary for many Soviet ideologists, who, in their propaganda for new forms of socialist leisure for Soviet youth, used the success of the Dnepropetrovsk central discotheque as proof of ideological efficiency. The region of Dnepropetrovsk was praised by Komsomol ideologists in Kyiv for “the efficient organization of the disco club movement.” In 1979, the city of Dnepropetrovsk became the location for the “first All-Ukrainian final festival contest of discotheque programs.” The city Komsomol organization of Dnepropetrovsk prepared a special report about the achievements of the city disco club *Melodia*, which summarized the major forms and methods of “musical entertainment” in the city. In October 1979, this published report was widely circulated among the participants of the All-Ukrainian festival competition. Many guests of the city used this publication as a guide for their disco club activities. During the first year of its existence, *Melodia* organized 175 thematic dance parties, with special music lectures attended by more than sixty thousand young people. In 1979, many *apparaty* who were involved in this movement were promoted and rewarded for “excellent ideological and educational activities among regional youth.” By the beginning of 1982, more than 560 youth clubs with 83 officially registered discotheques existed in the Dnepropetrovsk region. In the capital city there were 31 officially registered disco clubs in 1983. Despite the Communist ideologists’ criticism that discotheques spread bourgeois mass culture among local youth, Komsomol leaders maintained their collaboration with activists of the discotheque movement.

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36 Mikhail Suvorov, interview; and Andrei Vadimov, interview.


38 Zdes’ možno uznat’ mnogo pouchitel’nogo: Iz opyta raboty Dnepropetrovskogo molodezhnogo diskokluba ”Melodia” (Dnepropetrovsk, 1979), 1-4.

39 DADO, f. 17, op. 11, d. 1, l. 28.

40 DADO, f. 22, op. 32, d. 1, l. 44. In the USSR there were more than 50,000 officially registered disco clubs. See *Sbornik rukovodiashchikh materialov i normativnykh dokumentov po kul’turo-provesitel’noi rabote*, ed. A. Gavrilenko and I. Galichenko (Moscow: Ministerstvo kul’tury SSSR, 1983), 25; G. Nikitiuk, “Razvlekaia, prosveshchat,” *Dnepr vechernii*, May 31, 1983, 3.
‘Bad’ Music Consumption and the Ideological Threat of L’viv

In 1980, new attempts by Soviet ideologists and Komsomol apparatchiks in Moscow to stop the “bad” cultural consumption and capitalist ideological influence on the dance floor led to new legislation about Soviet discotheques. The Soviet discos were regulated during July–August 1980, at first by a joint resolution by the Ministry of Culture and the Komsomol, “On Measures for Improving the Activity of Amateur Associations, Hobby Clubs, and Discotheques,” and then by the “Model Statute for the Amateur Discotheque.”

The amateur discotheques were defined as “one form of organization of the population’s leisure time, the development of amateur arts, the satisfaction of spiritual needs and interest in music on the basis of a comprehensive utilization of artistic and audio-visual technological aids.” According to these All-Union regulations of 1980, the Soviet disco club “had to create interesting, emotionally filled, patriotic, and informational programs, which have a perceptible effect on the socialization and formation of the aesthetic tastes of young people.” In theory, the difference between a discotheque and a regular dance party was that a Soviet disco club had some educational content. As Anne White, a scholar who has studied the Soviet system of entertainment and houses of culture, notes: it was “connected with the fact that discos [were] officially viewed as originally having been channels for Western propaganda, and the solution found [was] to fill them with counter-propaganda.”

The All-Union resolution of 1980 about discotheques criticized the lack of control exercised by cultural and Komsomol organizations, and complained about “the small use made of classical and folk music in disco programs.” Soviet ideologists noted that Western and samizdat materials were used in their preparation, with “the commentary element re-transmitting bourgeois culture, and quite frequently exerting a negative influence on the socialization of Soviet young people.” A new resolution, published by the Ministry of Culture, the Komsomol, and Soviet trade unions in 1982, reiterated their criticism of “bad” cultural consumption in many Soviet disco clubs: “Many disco programs that are prepared for public participation are not registered with the cultural organs. They rarely take patriotic themes or use Russian classical or contemporary Soviet music. Responsible organizations were ordered to exert more control and to make more methodological guidance available to disco planners.”

Trying to adhere to these regulations and recommendations from the center, local ideologists and Komsomol apparatchiks tried to prevent Western mass culture consumption in Dniepropetrovsk. Even before the central regulations about disco clubs reached Dniepropetrovsk, the local Communist ideologists recommended that all Komsomol organizations “improve the ideological and political focus of discotheques, youth clubs, and cafés, and strengthen ideological control over entertainment of the local youth.” On November 11, 1980, the city Komsomol committee had a special meeting to address the problems of “bad cultural consumption” in local discotheques. Following recommendations from Moscow, the local Komsomol leaders organized a special “city inspection-competition of the disco programs” during November 29-30, 1980, in Shinnik, the Palace of Culture, which belonged to the Automobile Tire Factory. Each disco club in the city had to present one disco program for this inspection-competition. As result of this competition, Komsomol organizers decided that the best programs belonged to Melodiia, the discotheques from Yuzhmash, and Shinnik, the Palace of Culture. The major concern of Komsomol organizers was the lack of education in all programs and “an obvious domination of Western musical forms.” After 1980, local publications

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41 Sbornik rukovodiashchikh materialov, 24-27, 133-35.
42 See a definition of the “socialist discotheque” in Sbornik rukovodiashchikh materialov, 133.
43 The official resolutions of 1980 about the disco movement in the USSR complained about the Soviet disco clubs’ widespread imitation of the worst patterns of capitalist mass culture. See Sbornik rukovodiashchikh materialov, 26.
44 Sbornik rukovodiashchikh materialov, 26.
45 Ibid.
46 DADO, f. 22, op. 28, d. 1, l. 41.
47 DADO, f. 17, op. 12, d. 18, l. 15.
about disco clubs changed their tone and became more critical of the fascination with discotheques. They began criticizing disco clubs for their commercialization, promotion of low vulgar tastes, and “bad” music culture.

Meanwhile, in 1980, Valerii Miakotenko, the old disk jockey, left Melodiia for a new commercial organization created by the Dniepropetrovsk Komsomol for the supervision and centralization of funding for all forms of youth entertainment: music, theater, and discotheques. This organization, which supervised not only ideology, but also the profits of musicians and disco clubs, embodied an institutionalization of discotheque movements in the region. It was called DOOMAD (an abbreviation of the long Russian title “Dniepropetrovsk Regional Union of Music Ensembles and Discotheques”). Created as a result of the Soviet Komsomol leaders’ initiative, DOOMAD connected Komsomol apparatchiks with trade union officials who were responsible for leisure activities and entertainment. After 1980, the discotheque movement was connected to both apparatchiks and “the activists of the Dniepropetrovsk black market,” who provided fresh musical information and material for the fresh musical information and material for the

dancing programs of disco clubs. The new leaders of the central city disco club Melodiia represented a new generation of discotheque leadership, which depended on both “black market” and Komsomol ideological support. These young activists of Melodiia, head of the club Oleg Litvinov, disc jockey Sergei Novikov, and sound engineer Mikhail Suvorov, made their disco club “events” more commercial, combining alcoholic beverages, video games, and dancing, and brought more profits to DOOMAD. As a result, despite the constant criticism of their activities in the local press, they still had the support and protection of their Komsomol supervisors.

At the beginning of the discotheque movement in Dniepropetrovsk, besides the obligatory hits of the Soviet estrada, classic rock ballads such as “House of the Rising Sun” by the Animals, “July Morning” by Uriah Heep, or Badfinger’s hit “Without You” in Harry Nilsson’s interpretation, still dominated the music programs of the main disco clubs. However, after 1976, disco music from the West (mostly Euro-Disco) had begun replacing traditional rhythm and blues, heavy blues, and hard rock on the Dniepropetrovsk dancing floor. During this year, the Swedish band ABBA’s hits, such as “S.O.S.” and “Money, Money, Money,” became the most popular melodies for “cultural consumption” by young customers of Dniepropetrovsk disco clubs. During 1976-77, the new disco stars were also added. In 1977 the most popular dancing melodies were Donna Summer’s hit “Love to Love You Baby,” and songs by the West German disco band Boney M., such as “Baby, Do You Wanna Bump,” “Sunny,” “Daddy Cool,” and “Ma Baker.” Donna Summer and Boney M. (and later Eruption, another West German sensation) became the dominant names in the Dniepropetrovsk music market until the end of the 1970s. (For Boney M.’s dance, see link 8: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAjvTs4vUVM.) Even disco songs by the Bee Gees, from the film “Saturday Night Fever,” which reached Dniepropetrovsk disco clubs in 1978, could not compete with the West German “kings” of disco. In 1976, during the official celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the founding of Dniepropetrovsk, disco music


49 Gran’ko, “Karbovanets’ za tanss”; Sukhonis, “Karbovanets’ za tanss.”
was endorsed by the city leaders as an officially approved music for mass entertainment. Starting in 1976, this kind of music dominated not only local dancing parties and discotheques, but also musical programs in numerous “Western-style” bars and restaurants, which opened all over the city because of Dniepropetrovsk’s 200th anniversary.56

Komsomol ideologists and their KGB supervisors faced a very serious problem. Young pop music consumers apparently preferred Western music hits to Soviet ones. A majority of rock music enthusiasts completely rejected what they called Soviet *estrada* (pop music). Therefore, Komsomol ideologists began to encourage discos that played mainly Soviet music, including songs from the national republics. *Apparatchiks* responsible for the discotheque movement supported the Ukrainian band *Vodograi* or the Byelorussian band *Pesniary* because they represented Soviet tradition in contrast to the alien forms of Western pop culture. To show their ideological loyalty and local patriotism, many disc jockeys in Dniepropetrovsk included comments about “glorious Ukrainian history” and criticized “capitalist exploitation in Western countries.”51 Even in their comments about Ukrainian history, they (as loyal Soviet citizens) always emphasized the class struggle. Still, their stories were about the Ukrainian Cossacks or melodious Ukrainian poetry, which were not very popular subjects among local KGB operatives.

Eventually, KGB supervisors had to accept these stories and national Ukrainian music on the local dance floors. For them it was less evil than capitalist music from the West.52 It is noteworthy that both the KGB and Komsomol *apparatchiks* praised the patriotic approach of Dniepropetrovsk’s discotheques in contrast to the famous L’viv disco clubs in Western Ukraine. One KGB officer who visited both L’viv and Dniepropetrovsk during April and May 1979 criticized “a lack of patriotic themes in L’viv disco programs and bad pop music on L’viv dance floors.”

Only Western rock and disco music dominated in L’viv. L’viv disco clubs did not include Ukrainian popular songs in their programs. L’viv disc jockeys did not cover problems of Soviet or Ukrainian history and culture. Their comments were only about the Western style of life. It is a paradox, but our Dniepropetrovsk discos (in a mainly Russian speaking city!) had more Ukrainian music and presented more information about our Soviet Ukrainian culture in one week than all L’viv discos did in the entire month. I was pleasantly surprised when I heard at the Dniepropetrovsk disco club a good story about our Ukrainian Cossacks’ struggle with Turkish invaders for the freedom of our Ukrainian nation. You would never hear such stories in L’viv disco clubs. Their disc jockeys talk only about the most fashionable trends in American pop culture. L’viv disc jockeys ignored completely the Western Ukrainian popular music of the band *Smerichka*. We should praise our Dniepropetrovsk entertainers for promoting the good Soviet Ukrainian music of *Smerichka* and other Ukrainian Soviet musicians. We need to support our Dniepropetrovsk initiatives in the disco movement in contrast to the Americanized disco clubs in L’viv. Patriotic material about our Ukrainian history and culture on the Dniepropetrovsk dance floor will educate young people, while L’viv disco clubs, which idealize American pop culture and ignore Ukrainian history and culture, will confuse and disorient our Soviet citizens and transform them into apolitical cosmopolitans.53

During 1978-82, according to Mikhail Suvorov, the Dniepropetrovsk Komsomol committee discussed the city disco club repertoire almost every month. The main focus of these discussions was the patriotic theme of music education on the dance floor. As Suvorov recalled, in October 1979, a KGB supervisor who visited a Komsomol city committee during a discussion of the disco club repertoire, requested the old “Cossacks” song instead of “stupid” Western disco. This KGB officer recommended playing “a

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51 Regarding national Ukrainian and Byelorussian themes in the city disco clubs, see: DADO, f. 17, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 87, 98; op. 11, d. 25, l. 88; op. 12, d. 18, l. 15; f. 22, op. 36, d. 1, ll. 36-37. See also the local periodicals: Chenou’sko, “Diskoklubu”; Titarenko, “Tsikavi tsentry vidpochynku”; Rodionov, “Vecher v diskoklube”; Belkina, “Vechir u dyskotetsi.”

52 Igor T., KGB officer, interview.

53 Ibid. See also Askold B., son of the tourist department head in Dniepropetrovsk Trade Unions branch, interview, Dniepropetrovsk University, April 15, 1993; and Serhiy Tihipko, director of “Privatbank” in Dniepropetrovsk, my interview, October 12, 1993.
patriotic song about Ukrainian Cossacks instead of the Western crap that dominated the local disco clubs.” When the surprised Komsomol ideologists tried to figure out what kind of song it was, they realized that the KGB officer was referring to the Ukrainian cover of the old Shocking Blue song of 1969. (See link 9: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrNGCVNQpu8, and link 10: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPEhQugz-Ew.) Komsomol leaders and KGB officers complained about the bad Western influences from L’viv discotheques; local ideologists tried to protect the patriotic character of youth entertainment from the Westernized trends emanating from L’viv. The major concern of Komsomol apparatchiks was “the total domination of American music hits” in L’viv disco programs. The main advice for disc jockeys in Dniepropetrovsk was to avoid this “bad and ideologically harmful L’viv disco experience.”

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As we see again, the themes of good and bad cultural consumption influenced the evaluation of the disco club movement in Soviet Ukraine. But this time it also included the problems of national history and culture. The paradox was that, to prove their ideological reliability, Dniepropetrovsk ideologists invoked elements of Ukrainian culture in opposition to a dangerous Westernization of youth culture. This time Westernization was associated not only with the “capitalist West,” but also with L’viv, the most Westernized city of Western Ukraine. This was part of the ambiguity in the Soviet ideology of mature socialism in addressing the problems of leisure and entertainment among the youth of national republics such as Ukraine. On the one hand, Communist ideologists had to resist Western cultural influences on the dance floor, using any available Soviet music genres, including the Ukrainian ones. On the other hand, they confused young consumers of mass culture by officially supporting and elevating cultural forms that were usually associated in Soviet ideological discourse with so-called bourgeois Ukrainian nationalism. However, by the beginning of the 1980s, profitability became more important to the Komsomol ideologists responsible for the Dniepropetrovsk discotheque movement than the promotion of Soviet pop songs in Ukrainian on the dance floor. Komsomol disco clubs combined ideological indoctrination, such as musical lectures, with entertainment, such as dance parties. This combination now involved more Western cultural products and, at the same time, brought more material profits to Soviet officials in charge of the discotheques. The Komsomol initiatives of 1975-76 attempted to control and regulate Western music consumption by incorporating elements of Communist indoctrination. These Komsomol efforts led to unexpected results. The Komsomol ideologists, initially involved in the discotheque movement primarily to guarantee its socialist character, became part of the profit-making business, which had nothing to do with the Marxist-Leninist theory of cultural enlightenment and Communist indoctrination.

Epilogue: From Soviet Disco to Post-Soviet Oligarchy

The present massive political corruption in post-Soviet geopolitical space is rooted in the cultural consumption of the Brezhnev era (1964-82), especially in the so-called “disco effect” on the society of “mature socialism.” During this period of late socialism in the USSR, millions of Soviet young people, loyal Komsomol members, fell in love with the catchy sound of the “beat music” of the Beatles and the hard rock of Deep Purple. Even ten years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, post-Soviet space was ruled by former Soviet hard-rock fans, representatives of the so-called “Deep Purple generation,” the new post-Soviet politicians, such as Dmitri Medvedev, Prime Minister of Russia, Yulia Tymoshenko, Prime Minister of Ukraine, and Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia.
Paradoxically, the détente of the 1970s, when international Cold War tensions were relaxed, led to the influx of Western cultural products such as popular music and feature films in the Soviet Union. As a result, Soviet ideologists, including Komsomol ideologists, tried to control Soviet consumption of those cultural products from the capitalist West, using Western popular music and video in the new “socialist forms” of leisure and cultural consumption. One example of such ideological control was the creation of “Komsomol discotheques” (or disco clubs), where Soviet young people could dance to “ideologically permitted” Soviet and Western music tunes. In the 1980s, a system of Komsomol-run video salons was organized to control Soviet youths’ consumption of Western video. Ironically, this Komsomol movement of “Soviet disco clubs and video salons” revealed the new cultural and economic practices among activists of this movement, which became a profitable business for its organizers. Contemporaries called these organizers “the disco mafia” in the industrial cities of eastern Ukraine. Many leaders of post-Soviet Ukraine, such as Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine, and Yulia Tymoshenko, began their business activities by playing Western music and videos and organizing the successful “video salons” in Kyiv and Dnepropetrovsk [Photos 1, 2, and 3].

By the end of perestroika in 1991, more than 100 Komsomol businesses had emerged in the industrial provincial cities of Eastern Ukraine. Only a few of the most successful enterprises survived the brutal, post-Soviet competition during the 1990s, and created “new business corporations” such as Yulia Tymoshenko’s “Gas Empire,” Igor Kolomoisky’s and Serhiy Tihipko’s Privatbank, Aleksandr Balashov’s “Trade Corporation,” and Rinat Akhmetov’s Liiks. The overwhelming majority of these post-Soviet successful businesses (nine out of ten) were organized by or directly connected to the disco mafia – a network of rock music enthusiasts, black marketeers, Komsomol ideologists, entertainers, and representatives of the Soviet tourist agencies. In this way consumption of Western cultural products such as music and video during the late 1970s and early 1980s contributed to capitalist entrepreneurship in post-Soviet Ukraine.

Some contemporaries noted how business activities of the new Komsomol “entrepreneurs” in the 1980s contributed to the regional identity of eastern Ukraine. Many of these “entrepreneurs” who were not ethnic Ukrainians became active participants in the Ukrainian independent movement in 1988-91 in an attempt to protect their regional business interests rather than their national cultural interests. In the 1990s, the former members of the Soviet disco mafia and their former ideological supervisors became an integral part of the business and political life of independent Ukraine. In present-day Ukraine the former active participants of the Soviet “disco mafia” and “Komsomol business,” such as Tymoshenko, Turchynov, Akhmetov, and Kolomoisky, became the leaders of the oligarchic clans that rule the Ukrainian post-Soviet space, resisting an expansion of the KGB oligarchy from Moscow into their “spheres of influence” [Photos 4 and 5].
Sergei Zhuk

YouTube Links and Figures

**YouTube Links**

1. Ukrainian Folk Dance Gopak Virskiy’s Ensemble: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALzZ69HLXuY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALzZ69HLXuY)
2. John Travolta dancing moves from Saturday Night Fever (1977): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0lm58ce1tg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0lm58ce1tg)
3. Typical Soviet dancing place (c. 1980) from the film “Assa” (1988): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxUr1Jwgr8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxUr1Jwgr8)
7. Soviet disco moves of 1978: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJ4gH86DKPo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJ4gH86DKPo)
8. West German disco band Boney M. “Sunny” (1976): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAjvTs4vUVM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAjvTs4vUVM)
9. Ukrainian Cossack Version of “Venus”: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrNGCVNQpu8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrNGCVNQpu8)
10. Shocking Blue “Venus”: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPEhQugz-Ew](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPEhQugz-Ew)

Fig. 3. Rinat Akhmetov in 2010.
Figs. 4-5. Dniepropetrovsk Disco Club, built in the Brezhnev era as a concert hall; Donetsk Night Club Faces, which still has old connections from the Brezhnev era.
Dancers on the Front Lines of the Cold War:
Introduction

Lynn Garafola

It was in the late 1990s, when I was curating an exhibition about the New York City Ballet, that I discovered this film of Balanchine’s *Western Symphony*. It was filmed in Paris in 1956, after a season at the Paris Opéra, and just before the company left for Denmark, where Tanaquil LeClercq contracted polio. This alone gives the film an unusual importance. The cast, a who’s who of the first generation of New York City Ballet dancers – Diana Adams and Herbert Bliss in the Allegro, Melissa Hayden and Nicolas Magallanes in the Adagio, Allegra Kent and Robert Barnett in the Scherzo, and LeClercq and Jacques d’Amboise in the Rondo – adds to that importance. But what makes this film unlike any other film of New York City Ballet in the early and mid-1950s is that it was produced with money from the US government. As I discovered when I was clearing the rights for the exhibition loop, Monitor Productions was a dummy company. Apart from *Western Symphony* its only other title was *Battleground Europe*, a documentary featuring the evangelist Billy Graham. Photographed by Jacques Mercaton, neither title appears on the Wikipedia list of his credits.

Clandestine government funding sponsored other dance phenomena during the 1950s as well. In 1952 CIA dollars, funneled to the Congress for Cultural Freedom through several dummy corporations, sponsored the New York City Ballet’s debut in Paris as part of the Masterpieces of the Twentieth Century Festival. CIA funding also subsidized the Virgil Thomson-Gertrude Stein opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* presented during the same festival. Among the all-black cast was Leontyne Price and a very young Arthur Mitchell. 

Souvenir programs reflected the international thrust. In 1958-59, to coincide with the New York City Ballet’s five-month State Department tour of Australia, Japan, and the Philippines, the company produced a program with the New York skyline as its cover image. Similarly, the San Francisco Ballet used an image of the Golden Gate Bridge on many of its programs (as we will later see).

Finally, we should remember that classical music as much as ballet was central to the cultural exchanges of the 1950s and 1960s. Here is Leonard Bernstein in 1959, at the height of his fame as music director of the New York Philharmonic and composer of *West Side Story*, being mobbed by fans in Moscow.

And, now, to *Western Symphony*. We are indebted to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library, to its curator, Linda Murray, and her staff, for making it possible for us to show this cinematic rarity today.
**Filmography**

**Thursday, February 16**

**Plisetskaya Dances** (1964)
Documentary produced by Central Documentary Film Studio, Moscow.

**Friday, February 17**

**Romeo and Juliet** (1954)
Film of the Bolshoi production choreographed by Leonid Lavrovsky, with Galina Ulanova and Yury Zhdanov in the principal roles. Produced by Mosfilm.

**The Sleeping Beauty** (1964)
Film of the ballet staged by Konstantin Sergeyev, with Alla Sizova (Aurora) and members of the Kirov Ballet. Produced by Lenfilm Studios.

**Katia et Volodia** (1989)

**Spartacus** (1970)
Film of the Bolshoi production choreographed by Yury Grigorovich, with Vladimir Vasiliev in the title role.

**Saturday, February 18**

**Western Symphony** (1956)
Filmed in Paris by Monitor Productions.


**Giselle** (1977)
Live from Lincoln Center telecast of the American Ballet Theatre production, with Natalia Makarova and Mikhail Baryshnikov in the title roles.

**Vestris** (1976)
Excerpts from the ballet by Leonid Yakobson, performed by Mikhail Baryshnikov at Wolf Trap.

**The Nutcracker** (1977)
Film of the American Ballet Theatre production choreographed by Mikhail Baryshnikov, with Baryshnikov (Nutcracker Prince), Gelsey Kirkland (Clara), and Alexander Minz (Drosselmeyer). Telecast on CBS-TV.

**Prodigal Son** (1978)
Film of the New York City Ballet production choreographed by George Balanchine, with Mikhail Baryshnikov in the title role. Telecast on the Dance in America series by WNET/13.

**Push Comes to Shove** (1984)
Film of the American Ballet Theatre production choreographed by Twyla Tharp, with Mikhail Baryshnikov in the title role.
Bibliography

Compiled by Naima Prevots

I. General and Arts-Related Books on Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War


Scholl, Tim. “Student Interactions, Race and the Media: The Oberlin College Choir 1964 Tour of the USSR and Romania.” *Music, Art and Diplomacy: East-West*


II. Books, Articles, and Dissertations on Dance and the Cold War

Note: This list includes books with sections on dance and the Cold War as well as books and articles completely devoted to that topic.


Kodat, Catherine Gunther. “Dancing Through the Cold War: The Case of The Nutcracker.” Mosaic 33, no.3


