Russian Movement Culture of the 1920s and 1930s

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THE BOLSHOI AND THE REVOLUTION

SIMON MORRISON

The Russian Revolution was in truth a coup d’état led by the radical socialist Vladimir Lenin. It had two phases: the first at the start of 1917, the second near the end. In between, and as a result, the Bolshoi Theater suffered modest damage. A few windows were smashed, and some cash stolen from a desk. One of the younger dancers in the ranks of the ballet and opera, Anastasia Abramova, made it seem as though the coup had merely interrupted her schedule, telling The New York Times: “Oh, yes, the revolution was terrible—it interrupted the work of the ballet school three whole weeks.” Abramova had to miss class a few days. So much for “one of the greatest national convulsions history ever recorded.”

That convulsion began with the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II in February and subsequent formation of a provincial government. Lenin took over in October (according to the calendar in use at the time). Henceforth the Bolshoi became a state enterprise, ending its existence as an imperial theater but keeping alive the imperial repertoire. The nineteenth-century opera Eugene Onegin was to be staged in March of 1917, but on March 1, the schedule for the theater was abruptly amended. “No rehearsal on account of revolution,” notices proclaimed. The next day, another notice: “bloodless revolution, performance cancelled.” Soon enough the Bolshoi sputtered back to life, concluding the revolution-interrupted ballet season with the Petipa-Gorsky comic ballet La Fille mal gardée (The Wayward Daughter) before a largely empty hall. Don Quixote was staged during this period, likewise Le Corsaire and, for the opening of the 1917-18 season, Sleeping Beauty. During the Bolshevik conquest of Petrograd on October 25-26, the Bolshoi performed Alexander Gorsky’s version of La Bayadère, a decadent imperialist ballet with a “slow-beating pulse” that defied the times—though, politics aside, the colors were glorious and the ensembles liberated, breaking through the temporal and spatial frames Marius Petipa had once imposed on them. Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s fairytale opera Kashchey the Deathless joined Pyotr Tchaikovsky’s Iolanta on a double bill.

The Revolution would neither be danced nor sung in the theater for many years. Yet there was one balletic nod to ongoing events, as ordered by the commissar of the state theaters. A tableau vivant titled “Liberated Russia” (Osvobozhdennaya Rossiya) was thrown together by Gorsky, ballet master at the Bolshoi from 1902 until the year of Lenin’s death in 1924. Russian cultural icons were celebrated as revolutionary heroes—especially those that had run afoul of the imperial censors or, even better, had done time in Tsarist prison. Gogol, Lermontov, and Pushkin were depicted on stage, likewise Dostoyevsky, whose semiautobiographical novel The House of the Dead recalls his four-year stint in a Siberian labor camp, the sick souls of the guards and his fellow convicts, and the brutalities everyone suffered. Actors portrayed the Russian nationalist composers Modest Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, even performing a group sing-a-long with laborers, peasants, sailors, students, soldiers, and revolutionaries under blue skies and bright sunshine. A plainly attired figure of the motherland held up her broken shackles to the strains of the French insurrectionist anthem “La Marseillaise.”

The performance on March 13, 1917, also included Alexandre Gretchaninoff’s setting of “Long Live Free Russia!” (Da zdravstvuet Rossija, svobodnaya strana!), a poem by Russian Symbolist Konstantin Balmont. The magazine Iskry (Sparks) noted “the tears in the eyes” of the audience. Gretchaninoff recalled writing his hymn in half an hour and donating the proceeds from the printed edition to “liberated political prisoners.” Hardship forced him to immigrate to Paris in 1925. Balmont had already left five years earlier. Gorsky, stuck in Moscow, would fall between two stools, castigated as too eclectically “left” by the defenders of the imperial tradition and too stannantly “right” by those who sought the reconstruction of ballet along new proletarian lines. The Bolshoi was, Gorsky complained, “a stone box with chaos inside.” Stress wrecked his health. In the spring of 1918, “severe neurasthenia, accompanied by insomnia, frequent headaches, and weakening of the heart” forced him to take a leave of absence from the Bolshoi; still, his contract as ballet master continued to be renewed. Gorsky had to straddle past and present, performing his versions of the imperial repertoire while also sanctioning productions of ballets by choreographer Michel Fokine and composer Igor Stravinsky, modernist dances that had been performed in Paris by an émigré company, the Ballets Russes. The cultural trends of the early 1920s—including Nikolai Forêgger’s machine dances, the ballet-gymnastic hybrids at the Sokol sports clubs, and the erotic night bazaars—were generally considered too radical. Gorsky loosened tradition, but did not want to do away with it. Instead he sought, through ethnographic realism, to revitalize
the Russian ballet heritage. In the aftermath of the coup, cultural revolutionaries ridiculed him, but Gorsky’s approach ultimately helped to rescue the Bolshoi Ballet. It survived as a Soviet institution thanks to the ideological redecoration of the classics, then to the commissioning of grand new ballets on Soviet themes. The Bolshoi would not have lasted as a proletarian cabaret, which is how the radicals reimagined it—and, ironically perhaps, as it had been at the time of its founding in 1776.

In 1917, the noblemen who ran the administration, or kontora, of the Moscow Imperial Theaters disappeared. The last of them, Sergei Obukhov, took a well-timed vacation in the summer of 1917, never to return. The kontora was searched by the Bolsheviks, who discovered a hidden passageway in the loge reserved for “balletomanes of rank.” It led through a corridor to a peephole, disguised as a vent, through which men of means could watch the ballerinas putting on their makeup (the dressing room was elsewhere). Investigators felt compelled to confirm that the peephole offered such pleasures, so gazed through it during an actual performance. There was nothing more to see, however, once performances began to be cancelled and replaced by political speeches accompanied by renditions of the French revolutionary anthem, “La Marseillaise.”

As head of the Bolshoi, the provisional government chose an opera singer, the lyric tenor Leonid Sobinov. At first there was nothing for him to run. He recalled once finding himself alone on stage before a crowd, having to account for a non-performance: “As the elected manager of the theater,” Sobinov declared, “I protest its fate being seized by irresponsible hands.” The hands in question belonged to the revolutionaries in Petrograd, who struggled to manage the departments and institutions formerly run by the Ministry of the Imperial Court. “Let them deal with the equerries [the kontora or Office of the Master of the Horse], the wine-making estates, and the plant that makes playing cards,” he insisted, “but let them leave the theater alone.” The lesser entertainments of horse-riding, drinking, and gambling were one thing, he seemed to be saying, ballet and opera quite another. Exasperated, Sobinov submitted his resignation, but since no one had the mandate to accept it, he remained on the job.

He traveled to Petrograd, and there received guidelines from the provisional government for restructuring. In June 1917, the Bolshoi became an autonomous institution, administered by a council that included the opera and ballet directors, their conductors, the choir master, four soloists (two from the opera, one each from the ballet and choir), and members of the technical and design crew—nineteen in all. The council sent a representative to the joint committee of Moscow’s public and social services unions. The joint committee supported the provisional government but dreaded and despised the Bolsheviks, interpreting the events that October in apocalyptic terms. The November 10 meeting of the joint committee predicted, accurately, “searches, arrests, and violence,” the beginning of a “long civil war,” the “loss of free speech, a free press, and freedom to assemble,” and the hastening of Russia’s “economic and financial implosion.” The meeting concluded with the public services union resolving not to recognize the Bolshevik takeover. The Bolshoi’s staff and artists debated whether or not the best form of resistance to the “invaders” and the “orders and actions of the Bolsheviks” was “to go on strike” or, “on the contrary, to open the theater.”

On October 27, the night after the coup d’état, the opera Lakmé was performed. Afterward the theater closed its doors. No one went on strike in anti-Bolshevik protest, but the question hung in the air. On November 17, the artists and staff decided that their work needed to continue, so there were no acts of “sabotage,” no “arrests.” After a three-and-half week hiatus, the theater re-opened with Aida, the grandest of grand operas. There was just one incident, a telling one, after it was announced that members of Mossovet (Moscow Soviet of People’s Deputies, the equivalent to city hall) would be using the former tsar’s loge. Hecklers began hurling homemade projectiles into the loge from the floor. Soldiers were summoned, the exits blocked, documents checked, and people searched. Revolvers and Finnish knives were found on the “battlefield” of the stalls. The performance in the seats overshadowed events on stage, as pro- and (chiefly) anti-Leninist factions clashed. The theater’s agitprop potential had been unleashed, albeit, in this instance, to the detriment of the Bolsheviks.

The theater soon fell under the control of a jocular Swiss-educated Marxist named Anatoly Lunacharsky. (“His features are not attractive,” one of his petitioners noted, “and he speaks with a slight burr, as children do.”) He was involved in the Comintern (Communist International), specifically as its activities pertained to leftist organizations in France. In his firmer duties as the People’s Commissar for Enlightenment, Lunacharsky toiled to keep the Bolshoi and other state theaters open; he also signed the papers ensuring the distribution of ration cards to artists and the procurement of footwear for the ballet. Between 1917 and 1919, the cost of silk and leather for ballet slippers grew from six rubles and fifty kopecks per pair to two hundred and fifty rubles each. The Bolshoi Ballet used about five hundred pairs a season but, after 1917, had no choice but to economize, leaving the dancers’ shoes and feet in tatters. Shoe theft became a serious problem. Accounts of the difficulties obtaining ballet shoes absorbed thirty-four single-spaced pages of paper.

Under the Bolsheviks, the volume of paperwork generated by the Bolshoi Theater, and the government in general, massively increased. The former offices of the kontora of the Moscow Imperial Theaters were filled with
functionaries who much preferred to sit in meetings and type endless protocols than shiver in their flats or, as the cause of freedom forced them to do, march in the streets. The official renaming and re-renaming of the Moscow Imperial Bolshoi Theater to the State Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet (in 1919), and then to the State Academic Bolshoi Theater (in 1930), absorbed hundreds of pages. Even when conditions deteriorated to the point that the operations of the theater had to be suspended, maybe for good, the meetings and typing continued.

The Revolution found its way into the theater a year after the fact, on November 7, 1918, when the Bolshoi staged a performance celebrating the first anniversary of the October Revolution. (The “October” Revolution occurred in November according to the new Gregorian calendar, adopted on Lenin’s orders.) The theater announced that it would throw open its doors to the sons and daughters of the working people—though, in fact, most of the passes went to commissars, deputies, delegates, and lesser functionaries. The Russian version of the French socialist anthem “L’Internationale” was performed, followed by Alexander Scriabin’s visionary 1910 score, Prometheus: The Poem of Fire. Hallucinogenic in conception, it calls for an enormous orchestra, solo piano, organ, a wordless chorus (representing the primordial cries of transformed man), and an electronic color-light instrument. The music is orgiastic, ultra-dissonant, and, reviewers in 1918 agreed, flickering with Revolution’s flames. There followed the popular assembly (“veche”) scene from Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera The Maid of Pskov, whose plot highlights the repressiveness of Tsar Ivan (Ivan the Terrible). He torches the rebellious city of Novgorod but leaves the rebellious city of Pskov in peace, because its most fetching maid, Olga, is his long-lost daughter. She is shot, tragically, and dies in her terrible father’s arms. The long evening concluded with a ballet by Gorsky to music by Glazunov. Titled Stenka Rassin, it concerns a Cossack insurrectionist who, in real life, killed, raped, looted, and stoked peasant unrest in the lawless borderlands of the Russian empire in the 1660s. For his all-around nastiness, which Glazunov’s music tries very hard to ignore, the rebel was drawn and quartered on Red Square in Moscow. Yet the Bolsheviks likened him to one of their own. The ballet version of his exploits was inglorious, as weirdly benign as the music with dancers dressed in costumes recycled from the opera. Notably though, it marked a turn away from balletic classicism and offered a hint of something new: a ballet whose hero is reflected in, and defined by, the collective. The program was repeated on November 12, as part of the sixth meeting of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets.

The anticipation of a fresh start, after the court patronage system was dismantled, and the fantasy of democratic elections ceded to feelings of desolation and loss. For the ballet and opera, the loss from a historical standpoint was very real. The records of the Moscow Imperial Theaters had been stashed for safekeeping in the Troitsk Tower of the Kremlin, which was damaged during the shooting in October of 1917. The papers that survived ended up being divided between the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts and Russian State Archive of Literature and Art—without any logical organization. The records of Petipa’s time at the Bolshoi were likewise spoiled. Soldiers squatted in his Moscow apartment, and when his daughter Nadezhda returned, she faced a nightmare: “Everything was turned out of the cupboards and chests. Papers, letters, documents, Marius Ivanovich’s entire archive was scattered on the floor, trod and laid upon, crushed and torn.” The official records, those that were not kept in the apartment, were culled by the Soviets owing to their tainted associations with the decadent imperial era.

The Bolshoi itself was stained as an emblem of imperial power. Thus the new government in 1917 debated its continued existence, both in private and in public. One article asked the question most pointedly, “Should the Bolshoi Exist?” The answer provided in follow-up publications was no, not at all, but closing the theater, it was argued, might be more expensive than keeping it open. Pensions would need to be paid, and the building itself maintained to prevent vandalism. But the question kept coming up, both from financial and ideological perspectives, especially during the crisis of 1918-19. As Vladimir Galkin, the commissar overseeing Moscow’s grade schools, asked: “Whose aesthetic interests have our theaters been serving up to now? . . . Carmen, Traviata, Eugene Onegin—these are all bourgeois operas. Nothing for the people, laborers, the Red Army.” He argued that “the scaffolds of the Bolshoi Theater would be better serving agitation and propaganda.” And given the shortages of fuel that winter, he wondered, pointedly, “Are we still of the mind to keep allowing precious fuel to be thrown into the voracious furnaces of the Moscow State Theaters, tickling the nerves of diamond-clad baronesses, while depriving heating stoves of the wood that could save hundreds of laborers from illness and death?”

The People’s Commissar for Enlightenment, Lunacharsky, missed the meeting, leaving no one to defend the Bolshoi from Galkin’s snarling attack. Lenin put the matter to a vote, but not before deadpanning: “To me, it seems that comrade Galkin has a somewhat naïve conception of the theater’s role and significance. We need it less for propaganda than to give rest to our workers at the end of the day. And it’s too early yet to put the bourgeois artistic heritage in an archive.” Lenin had spoken. The vote went against Galkin.

There remained the question of closing the long-neglected, underfunded ballet school, or at least ending the
subsidies for room and board. The school had survived the Revolution, shuttered, as Anastasia Abramova remarked, for just a few days during the shooting. The ballet committee demanded that it remain open to prevent the stars of the future leaving the country and ending up in the service of foreigners. The director of the Theater College, of which the ballet school remained a part, insisted on preserving the pre-1917 academic curriculum, which included lessons in “the Holy Gospel in Old Slavonic, God’s laws, and moralistic spiritual readings”—all anathema to Marxism. The financial problems, the director’s recalcitrance, and a dip in the temperature in the classrooms to close to freezing forced the school to close through the winter of 1918-19. A committee was appointed to overhaul the curriculum according to the new political realities. It proposed abolishing the table of ranks for dancers, the aristocratic system that placed the corps de ballet, akin to working-class dancers, at the bottom. The coryphées, the bourgeoisie, rested in the middle, and the soloists sat at the top as the noble elite. Character dancing would be emphasized, likewise athleticism, “physical culture.” The school would also, in time, privilege the teaching of regional dances. Some of these dances purported to be authentic, straight from the campfires of the provinces, but most of them were abstracted and estranged from their sources, made more folk-like than the folk. The imagined proved better than the real, and so under Lenin’s successor, Joseph Stalin, dancers and singers from Moscow would be sent to the provinces to teach the locals their own eccentric traditions. In terms of how they sang and danced, the peoples of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Uzbekistan, and the other Soviet republics would be made into caricatures (drawn in Moscow) of themselves.

The council governing the Bolshoi Theater proved inept. Basic administrative questions about benefits, leaves, and performances in other venues were left unanswered. It was dissolved only to be replaced by another, equally ineffective council. Eventually Lunacharsky recognized the need to bring order to the Bolshoi—both for his own sake, as Lenin’s overworked culture and education minister, and for the Bolshevik cause. In 1919, he named a new director of the Bolshoi, the loyal Bolshevik functionary Elena Konstantinovna Malinovskaia (1875-1942). Stern, stout, and flush-faced in the middle, and the soloists sat at the top as the noble elite. Character dancing would be emphasized, likewise athleticism, “physical culture.” The school would also, in time, privilege the teaching of regional dances. Some of these dances purported to be authentic, straight from the campfires of the provinces, but most of them were abstracted and estranged from their sources, made more folk-like than the folk. The imagined proved better than the real, and so under Lenin’s successor, Joseph Stalin, dancers and singers from Moscow would be sent to the provinces to teach the locals their own eccentric traditions. In terms of how they sang and danced, the peoples of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Uzbekistan, and the other Soviet republics would be made into caricatures (drawn in Moscow) of themselves.

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Her political climb began in 1905, when she joined the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (of which Lenin’s Bolsheviks were a faction) and involved herself in agitprop activities. Moving to Moscow landed her a position in the cultural-enlightenment division of Mossovet. She lived in the building where she worked, spending long hours at a desk concealed by telephones, never raised her voice (even when shouted at), and demonstrated unsmiling trustworthiness in her duties. A cartoon captures her grimace along with the fashion for silk and felt hats in the early 1920s; the caption reads “today she’s gloomy.” The Bolshoi’s older artists resisted her efforts to lift the rock of imperialist repression from their backs and forced her, more than once, to resign. She was accountable to the artists in word, but to Lunacharsky—and, above him, Lenin—in deed.

The theater’s artists discovered that their professional unions, or profsoyuzy, which supposedly represented their interests to the directorate, were actually powerless. Any decision required Lunacharsky’s approval. Minutes from the meetings of the dancers in June 1918, October 1919, and December 1919 reveal the depths of their discontent. Some soloists quit; others floated the idea of separating the Bolshoi Ballet from its theater. Despite deep resentment for Malinovskaia, however, they elected a representative to the directorate: Vladimir Kuznetsov, an 1898 graduate of the ballet school who both danced with the Bolshoi and acted in silent films. Other side activities included adjudicating a contest for best female legs for a satirical magazine (the contestants submitted photographs of their exposed calves for his sophisticated assessment). An affair with Sophie Fedorova, Gorsky’s preferred ballerina and a sometime member of the Ballets Russes, aided his modest career. He appeared in Gorsky’s version of The Hunchback of Notre Dame and danced the Gopak (Cossack dance) in The Little Humpbacked Horse; a photograph also shows him costumed for the mazurka in, presumably, Swan Lake. His signature role was the Chinese doll in Coppélia, who dances in the second act until his clockwork runs down. He then collapses on a bench upstage, facing the audience. Kuznetsov once wagered that he could get through the entire act without blinking, and won the bet by painting fake eyes on his eyelids—keeping his own eyes shut tight. Besides makeup, magic tricks, and comic roles, Kuznetsov loved practical jokes, causing a stir in 1914 by masquerading as Gorsky during a performance of The Little Humpbacked Horse in celebration of the ballet-master’s quarter century in the theater. Kuznetsov was a congenial bon vivant, praised by his peers for his “sense of justice.” But he does not seem to have been politically savvy, given that he taunted Malinovskaia, calling her a Bolshevik factotum ignorant of the arts. Being right did not help him, nor did redoubling the insult.

Lunacharsky scrapped the election of Kuznetsov to the directorate—claiming, in classic kompromat fashion,
that Kuznetsov had been detained in the commissariat for “drunkenness” and had even, according to the sadistic charges, hosted “orgies” in his “tavern.” Lunacharsky’s accusations repeated those leveled, in another context, against the bohemian “Stray Dog” café in Petrograd, which the imperial government had closed in 1915 for the unauthorized selling of spirits. But the “tavern” was in fact an atelier, a basement dining room of sorts near the Bolshoi where skits, humorous tales (by Chekhov, among others), dances, and songs of different genres were performed. Kuznetsov put together the programs and enlisted the entertainers, who worked for food in his little space, one free meal per show; they were denied booze, sex, and the delights of hashish. Just kasha and cutlets for them. Kuznetsov defended himself from the slander to the satisfaction of his colleagues at the Bolshoi, none of whom believed he could have been “arrested in a drunken state.” But to keep the peace he asked for his name to be struck from the ballet. The third and final vote went to Gorsky’s disciple, Vladimir Ryabtsev.

Kuznetsov continued to attack Malinovskaia on behalf of the union, underestimating the director’s importance to Lunacharsky. In the first of her several acts of revenge against the artists under her control, especially the more charismatic ones, she accused Kuznetsov of sabotage. He had, she told Lunacharsky, incited the troupe to go on strike before the start of the 1920-21 season. Lunacharsky, in response, turned to the head of the Cheka, Lenin’s political police. Kuznetsov was arrested, but spent just three days in prison after his colleagues signed a petition asserting his innocence. The feud continued. Lunacharsky, no longer the congenial Bolshevik the artists had believed to him to be, filled Kuznetsov’s Cheka file with fictions about his basement bordello, alcoholism, and “morally dubious past.” Lunacharsky informed the chief of the secret police that “disloyal and demagogic agitation persists” in the Bolshoi, with roots in “the ambition of a group of dubious types who seek election to the directorate.” He pointed to Kuznetsov as the perpetrator of “a series of clear criminal acts,” including agitating the collective to demand better rations and encouraging the dancers and singers to “disrupt spectacles and close the theater.” “From my personal meetings with Kuznetsov,” Lunacharsky continued, “it became obvious that this individual seeks to lay the path for himself to the highest positions in the theater and he will not desist in his damaging campaign unless he is eliminated in the severest fashion possible. In light of Kuznetsov’s criminal actions I ask the M. Ch. K. [Moscow Cheka] to immediately place him under arrest. This will in and of itself sedate the troubled personnel, bringing the matter, once investigated, to a proper conclusion.” Kuznetsov blamed the prudish Malinovskaia for his downfall, never suspecting Lunacharsky’s involvement. But the Commissar harbored an intense, almost intimate, hatred for him.

Kuznetsov was forced to quit the Bolshoi after the 1920-21 season. His Cheka file labeled him a “sulky element” with no right to work in a state theater. At 42 years old, he was past retirement age for a dancer. But since he had been voted head of not just the ballet union but also the combined union for all of the artists in the theater, he technically had the right to work until old age. Lunacharsky expelled him nevertheless, then instructed everyone to breathe a sigh of relief that the subversive demagogue was gone. Kuznetsov recovered from the blow. After the Bolshoi, he found employment in Soviet cultural groups and cabarets, giving dance lessons and, in the mid-1920s, staging a frolicsome entertainment about mythological satyrs titled “The Goat-legged” (Kozlonogiy). He also remarried, divorcing his first wife for a 19-year-old Bolshoi ballerina.

The dire housing shortage forced Kuznetsov, his second wife, his ex-wife, and his ex-wife’s new lover to share a communal apartment. Nerves frayed; tensions within the ménage à quatre increased. Kuznetsov foolishly brought home émigré newspapers and even read aloud favorite passages within earshot of his ex-wife. She and her paramour denounced him to the Cheka, and he was locked up for possessing subversive material. Apparently his jailors had gentle hearts, and after two months of interrogations they allowed him to plead ignorance. His punishment was relatively mild. Kuznetsov was banished from Moscow and denied the right to live in any of Russia’s five largest cities. For a dozen years he lived in Malinovskaia’s hometown, Nizhny Novgorod, after which he was arrested for a third and final time. He had opened his mouth in the presence of the director of the Soviet “Palace of Culture” in Novosibirsk, declaring Soviet culture inferior to that of his golden, tsarist youth. It was 1938, the height of the Stalinist purges, the Great Terror. Kuznetsov was convicted of treason under article 58 of the Soviet penal code and assigned to a labor camp in Tomsk. He died in the Gulag in 1940.

Conditions deteriorated in the Bolshoi Theater, as in Moscow, during the frigid winter of 1919. The civil war prevented food and fuel from reaching the city. Sewage entered the water system; typhoid, flu, and cholera spread. There were shortages of pine for coffins and plots for burial. Despite being illegal, bartering for peat moss, flour, and potatoes flourished, as did thefts from factories. Some were slyly retrofitted to produce items that employees could sell for food, including “stoves, lamps, candlesticks, locks, hatchets, and crowbars.” Dancers rehearsed in the cold, their breath visible as the temperature fell close to freezing on the stage and well below in the ballet school. Audiences sat in coats and gloves. Curtain times...
were moved up an hour to save heating costs. Power failures curtailed performances. Instead of hiring part-time workers to clear snow, the theater had the artists themselves do the shoveling. Artists and technical staff scattered, leaving altogether or, between rehearsals and performances, taking on hackwork for “bread” (“black bread,” Malinovskaia notes, since white bread could not be found in Moscow at the time). Verdi’s *Aida* and Wagner’s *Die Walküre* had to be pulled from the repertoire due to lack of resources—both physical and material. Bolshoi orchestra musicians entertained soldiers for rations, sometimes playing on rare, historical instruments that had been confiscated from the homes of noblemen by the music office of the People’s Commissariat for Enlightenment. Nationalizing the instruments, the thieves argued, kept them from being sold for hard currency or smuggled abroad.

Salaries were cut, save for the highest-ranking employees. (One of them was the machinist Karl Valts, whom Lunacharsky thought “an exceptional talent” and so increased his pay from 4,800 to 8,000 rubles in the spring of 1919.) The belt-tightening meant wages were paid through the winters of the Revolution and civil war, but not the summers. Malinovskaia and her bookkeeper came up with an unusual scheme to make payroll, made possible by the limited free-market reforms of Lenin’s New Economic Policy, including permission to earn a profit and the encouragement of entrepreneurship. A new elite appeared on the streets of Moscow: speculators, or “gold-diggers,” who bought and sold the essentials of life, plumping themselves up with the profits at cake shops. “Speculators’ wives are usually fat, red-cheeked, with heavy hanging hair, and much fur and diamonds,” *The New York Times* reported in an exposé of the women of “Red Russia”—from the no-nonsense spouses of Lenin’s inner circle to the ragbag tramcar ticket-takers. “She wears what she has and in the winter everything she has,” the reporter observed of one of the un-uniformed tramcar conductors. The NEP-era was short-lived, and Malinovskaia expressed loathing for it in her memoirs. Salaries were cut, save for the highest-ranking employees. (One of them was the machinist Karl Valts, whom Lunacharsky thought “an exceptional talent” and so increased his pay from 4,800 to 8,000 rubles in the spring of 1919.) The belt-tightening meant wages were paid through the winters of the Revolution and civil war, but not the summers. Malinovskaia and her bookkeeper came up with an unusual scheme to make payroll, made possible by the limited free-market reforms of Lenin’s New Economic Policy, including permission to earn a profit and the encouragement of entrepreneurship. A new elite appeared on the streets of Moscow: speculators, or “gold-diggers,” who bought and sold the essentials of life, plumping themselves up with the profits at cake shops. “Speculators’ wives are usually fat, red-cheeked, with heavy hanging hair, and much fur and diamonds,” *The New York Times* reported in an exposé of the women of “Red Russia”—from the no-nonsense spouses of Lenin’s inner circle to the ragbag tramcar ticket-takers. “She wears what she has and in the winter everything she has,” the reporter observed of one of the un-uniformed tramcar conductors. The NEP-era was short-lived, and Malinovskaia expressed loathing for it in her memoirs. At the time, however, she took advantage of the system by asking the government for permission to organize a Bolshoi Theater lottery. Her bookkeeper calculated that selling five-ruble tickets for a chance at the ten-thousand-ruble jackpot would increase the salary pool by two hundred thousand rubles. For that to happen, however, the artists would need to hawk tickets to the theater’s patrons. Malinovskaia hectored them into doing so, all the while recounting her difficulties in getting the Moscow trade union council to allow the event at all.

Throughout the crisis, she represented herself as a heroic warrior doing battle with unnamed foes of the Bolshoi. “The B. T. is surrounded by enemies; fighting those seeking to get their hands on it takes great effort,” she wrote. The most serious threat to the theater came from the hardline Bolsheviks who, for financial, political, and aesthetic reasons, saw no reason to finance the arts—especially during a time of cold, hunger, and civil war. Her job was to enact Lunacharsky’s harshest decisions and accept blame for them, while he pivoted between the artists and the authorities, trying to placate both sides.

Yet everyone found a cause to rally around in the first successful Revolution-themed ballet, a work by and for children. This makes sense considering that the Soviets made children the sole privileged class in the Soviet Union—so in terms of staging a new art to suit the changed times, agitprop for kids was a safe bet. The children’s ballet-pantomime *Ever-Fresh Flowers* (*Vechno zhivye vety*, 1922) earned sincere praise from Lunacharsky. The Commissar was so impressed that he even urged Lenin and his wife to attend the second performance, the first having been reserved for children, some of them orphans of the Revolution, the civil war, and the Cheka. *Ever-Fresh Flowers* was both rustic and Constructivist, depicting meadows and mountains, ribbons and garlands, bees and butterflies, fresh-baked buns and cakes, harvesting and blacksmithing, sickles and hammers, marching and singing, and the one-letter-at-a-time assembling of political slogans with letters held up on sticks for all to see. It opened with the children in a ship at sea, threatened by a thunderstorm, and ended in an orchard under the sun. The score was a bric-a-brac of accessible classics, boys’ and girls’ songs and marches. The elders in the cast explained to the children on stage, and everyone in the production then to the audience, that the flowers in the title represented the new start provided by the Revolution, now five years old. The sets and costumes were fashioned by an inspired Fyodor Fyodorovsky in a “bright [agitprop] poster style.” The apotheosis of *Ever-Fresh Flowers* involved more slogans, more marching, and a hymn to toil—a hit with the fresh-faced audience and, for Gorsky, an uncontroversial success.

Yet the question remained: “Should the Bolshoi Exist?” In some sense, the most dire moment had passed. Its finances had begun to improve, and Russia had begun to rise back up on her feet, leaving time to consider the survival of the theater from an ideological perspective. The theater remained suspect as an imperial institution. It staged operas and ballets, the most elite entertainment. It seemed that it could not be controlled at a time when lack of control was most threatening. From the perspective of the government, there was too much free-thinking in the theater. Lunacharsky tried to fulfill his promise that the theater be made to serve the regime. Thus those artists who were the most true to themselves, the most artistic, the most spontaneously and individually inspired and motivated, needed to be suppressed. The bind that the Bolshoi, its artists, and its management found
itself in would inform the plots of its greatest “Soviet” productions: sacrifice of the individual for the collective.

Lunacharsky and Malinovskaia defended their actions as if they were woodcutters: letting chips fly, arguing that risk-taking belonged outside of the government, in the looser domain of the proletarian cultural groups, and that the path taken by government-funded organizations needed to be narrower, straighter. The Cubists, the Futurists, the Cubo-Futurists, the likes of Kuznetsov, and the riskier experiments of Gorsky’s disciples, if not Gorsky himself, belonged elsewhere. To be inspired by the Revolution was one thing, but to support Bolshevism quite another. One existed in the realm of ideas, the other as a regime. To let the iconoclasts run free even within the world of the theater would be to risk the ire of the old guard within the ranks as well as the rulers within the Kremlin. The theater remained open, but only in the shadow of another threatened rebuilding—this time, as a political convention center.

In May 1922, Lenin suffered the first of the three strokes that, two years later, would end his life. His wife Nadezhda Krupskaya, a former schoolteacher, did her part at the typewriter to make it seem that he was still in command. Lenin had already anointed Stalin as general secretary of the Communist Party, a position that allowed Stalin to establish an enormous political support structure for himself and begin to vanquish his nemeses. Meanwhile the architect of the Revolution would be confined to his residence in the woods outside of Moscow, unable to speak, enfeebled, and only dimly aware of his protégé’s machinations. Stalin would become the ruler of Soviet Russia, and the Soviet Union, after Lenin’s death on January 21, 1924.

Malinovskaia suffered serious health problems of her own but, even while battling fatigue and stress, hung on to her position. In November 1922, she announced that she had reached an agreement with Lenin’s accountants to keep the Bolshoi Theater operating, thanks to lotteries and other such gimmicks as borrowing from the maintenance budget, selling properties, reducing or cancelling royalty payments, even selling the “two hundred jars of perfume and cosmetics” from storage.36 She and Lunacharsky were both fighting for the survival of the theater, threatened by a chain of harsh resolutions from the Political Bureau of the Central Committee. First there was the decision to close both the Bolshoi and Mariinsky Theaters, then possibly to close them, then to maximally reduce their subsidies, and then the decision to establish a “liquidation commission.”37 Lunacharsky defended the Bolshoi against them all, citing the Russian cultural legacy and importance, pleading ignorance of the resolutions, protesting being excluded from meetings in which they were made, and denying allegations that he had leaked confidential information to Malinovskaia.

The Soviet government, unlike the Tsars, could not afford to make up the difference between income and expenses, which had been over a quarter of the budget in the past. Having spared Lunacharsky a Central Committee lynching by bridging the gap, Malinovskaia informed the fourteen-hundred employees under her direct control that she was overwhelmed with joy at the news that the theater would remain open and expressed her heartfelt gratitude to the artists for performing their duties with “great diligence and discipline.”38

The trouble-makers had left or been expelled, but the ranks still needed to be purified and loyal young Soviet artists enlisted, brought up from the reopened school and recruited from properly proletarian venues. A vision crystallized, a plan came into focus. The Bolshoi would become the people’s ballet and opera house, serving the hammer and sickle and the court in the Kremlin. It would imagine a glorious past for itself, beginning with 1825 and its survival of the Napoleonic siege, and ending with the premieres of Tchaikovsky’s treasured balletic and operatic classics. The composer’s imperial service and the troubles throughout the theater’s long history would be all but forgotten, except when caused by the tsars. The Bolshoi would retain select glories from previous eras, while also creating new ones. Henceforth the Mariinsky in Petrograd, formerly the jewel in the imperial crown, would be the second stage. One regime had succumbed to another, the seat of power had shifted from one city to another, and likewise the weight of the Russian—now Soviet—tradition had moved from one theater to the other, the Bolshoi.

But first a further cleanup operation: Malinovskaia began to impose fines on the dancers and singers for claiming illness, for tardiness, moonlighting, leaving cigarette butts smoldering after meetings (the dancers smoked, both to keep their weight in check and in defiance of the general atmosphere), and giving unauthorized interviews to newspapers. Members of the ballet, the opera, the chorus, and the orchestra were sacked for real and fictional misdemeanors, with special attention paid to those who seemed to undermine the foundations on which the theater was being rebuilt by pursuing a “dangerous, anarchic path.”39

The ranks thinned but the workload increased, the number of performances almost tripling between 1917 and 1924. Evening performances of the nineteenth-century repertoire alternated with children’s matinees and “experimental” works. On Malinovskaia’s order, special commissions of artists reviewed the rosters, deciding which performers needed to be promoted, demoted, or sent packing. One of the dancers was released in the spring of 1923 because her looks had become “completely unsuitable for the stage; she’s stopped dancing; and she’s
Malinovskaia formed a commission to investigate the Bolshoi’s past. It was meant to be tense, sexual, and violent, but also transparently allegorical, representing the destruction of the feudal order by a force majeure, even in a luxuriant castle—was to be applied by the audience to the last days of the Russian empire under Tsar Nicholas II. But it was not to be. Malinovskaia recalled the rehearsals being “nervous,” the atmosphere no less ominous than the black and red room on stage. Goleizovsky was disorganized, grew hysterical, and soon became the subject of rumors about “pornography.” Malinovskaia formed a commission to investigate the brouhaha.

Red Masks ended up being replaced on the stage by the tamest of all ballets, The Nutcracker. This was Gorsky’s version of The Nutcracker, in fact, which took out the darkness of the original and excluded the act II floozy, the Sugar Plum Fairy. Two years later, Goleizovsky was pardoned and granted permission to stage a biblical parable, Joseph the Beautiful (Iosif Prekrasnyi). The dancing was free and diverse, a kaleidoscopic fusion of shapes and styles, some fluid, others sculpted. The elaborate set comprised multiple platforms connected by bridges at strange angles. Once the ambition, and ambivalences, of the project became clear, the ballet and its creators were banished from the Bolshoi, consigned to an “experimental” affiliate.

Malinovskaia did not lament the loss of talent, and an argument could be made that even if her arch-conservatism harmed the theater in the short-term, during the free-for-all cultural revolution, it spared the Bolshoi from serious attacks in the long term, during the Stalinist era. But the restless spirit of the times proved her downfall when the lesser talents of the theater, the artists who kept the place running, began to leave both for artistic and financial reasons.

During the 1922-23 season, for example, fifty-seven members of the orchestra decamped to “Persimfans,” an ensemble that performed without a conductor in charge, with the musicians facing each other in a circle. Persimfans might have had proletarian ideals, but to Malinovskaia’s distress, it lured talented players away from the Bolshoi. Other musicians from the theater found work in cafés and restaurants. When she threatened them with dismissal, they fought back through the massive RABIS organization, the All-Union Professional Union of Workers in the Arts, which accused her of dictatorial anti-communist conduct. The chorus, opera, and the ballet joined in the attacks. She was forced to form a commission devoted exclusively to the resolution of conflicts, but the commission itself became embroiled in conflict. Malinovskaia rallied her backers in the commissariat, who sent a letter to Stalin (head of the organizational bureau of the communist central committee at the time) to defend her honor and prevent her arrest. “Accusing comrade Malinovskaia of forsaking communist principles, being patronized by bourgeois elements, protectionism, and other terrible crimes is senseless and baseless,” they wrote.

Comrade Malinovskaia survived, but she was pressed, now for her own sake, to provide ideological justification for the Bolshoi’s continued operation. And so on September 2, 1923, as part of her presentation to the council of artists, Malinovskaia outlined the task before them all. “New topics and scripts for the opera and ballet repertoire,” she said, should be “formulated in consonance with contemporary ideological objectives, broadly understood. Libretti from the old repertoire to be rewritten, with attention to literary form, in a manner that responds to current needs and new production concepts; the latter, along with the new vision for the repertoire to come, to be rendered with similar attention to verbal form.” Goleizovsky’s tamer projects would have been part of this new vision, had the rhetoric been anything other than rhetoric and had practice met intention.

Malinovskaia’s emphasis on the texts—the scenarios and libretti of the ballets and operas under her control—
has idiosyncratic explanations. Lunacharsky's ideological arbiters tended to be writers whose careers stretched back to the Silver Age, the quarter century before the Revolution. They themselves had been forced to renounce their own pasts and adapt, chameleon-like, to new political conditions. (Those who did not evolve either put down their pens or packed their bags for Paris.) Some of these writers nurtured dreams of world transformation, and thus found it possible, even while queuing for rations, to interpret the events of 1917 in eschatological terms, as the striving for a realm beyond. Alcohol lubricated some of these conjectures, along with narcotics and bouts of psychosis.

The most notable of the converts was a figure of Mephistophelian countenance named Valery Bryusov. He endorsed in turn the Revolution, the Bolsheviks, and Lunacharsky, serving the cause from 1917 to his death in 1924. Bryusov's résumé included hackwork for the commission responsible for ideological discipline within the Communist ranks (its formal title was the Central Control Commission, Tsentral'naya kontrol'naya komissiya). In this capacity he drafted a resolution on the state of affairs of the Bolshoi Theater, pointing out that, despite endless promises of reform, little had in fact changed. Dissent in the ranks persisted, and the ideological retooling of the repertoire had yet to begin. “Ideology, in the sense of social and political ideology, as envisioned by the directorate of the Bolshoi Theater,” he lamented, “has manifested itself only weakly in the past three years, chiefly through the elimination of those plays from the repertoire that were obviously contrary to the communist world outlook.” *A Life for the Tsar* was swept off the stage (though it would return), but most everything else remained. The Bolshoi was “academic” rather than “experimental,” Bryusov continued, and had not contributed to the aesthetic innovations in proletarian cultural venues, which nurtured Constructivism, biomechanics, ballet-circus hybrids, and experiments in free movement. Bryusov endorsed the performance of dances by newer Russian artists, including expat Russian artists, who embraced the “simple” over “the imagined splendor of the past” and emphasized the need for synthesis. He believed gesture (*plastika*) could fuse with sound and image, and imagined the corps de ballet leading a hypnotic round dance of the arts. Collective action, and through that action, collective transformation, now needed to be the focus. The theater’s closure had been avoided for the moment, but Bryusov predicted the end if it failed to embrace the future.45

Just after Bryusov drafted his report, Lenin died of a massive cerebral hemorrhage. The news reached Stalin by telephone during the eleventh All-Russian Congress of Soviets on January 21, 1924, in the Bolshoi’s chamber concert space. The meeting came to a halt; everyone began to cry. Stalin travelled to Lenin’s home in Gorki to kiss the dead ruler’s lips. The Bolshoi’s orchestra provided accompaniment for the procession of Lenin’s coffin to the Hall of Columns in central Moscow. To beat back the frost, the honor guard lit bonfires in the streets. Hundreds of thousands of mourners flowed past the coffin during the three-day viewing period. Lenin’s remains were not interred, and never have been. His embalmed corpse is displayed on Red Square in a mausoleum designed by a Constructivist artist.

On January 26, before two thousand delegates in the main hall of the Bolshoi, Stalin marked Lenin’s demise by affirming, in vaguely menacing terms, the justness of Lenin’s policies and pledging, in his high-pitched measured cant, to continue the forced march to a socialist and then communist utopia. Having absorbed the paternalistic credo, delegates to the Congress dispersed, and the artists of the Bolshoi went back to work, the first task for the orchestra and chorus being the preparation of a memorial concert on February 10, 1924. Lunacharsky gave the pre-concert lecture, drafting his speech several times on paper of different sizes. Other hands edited it, helped to shoulder the load. The music that evening, Lunacharsky explained at the podium, had no obvious connection to the Revolution but had been written by Lenin’s favorite composers. The pieces were heroic. The audience heard the Funeral March from Wagner’s *Siegfried* along with movements from Beethoven’s Napoleonic “Eroica” Symphony and Tchaikovsky’s “Pathétique.” Strauss’s *Death and Transfiguration* expressed the kind of “mystical beliefs and hopes” that Lenin the atheist despised, but Lunacharsky nonetheless justified its inclusion on the program by asserting, limply, that its “pathos” could be felt even by non-believers in the afterlife.46 The music was eternal, if not its message. The orchestra played through the long concert but then, just nine days later, went on strike. Malinovskaia responded by disbanding it. The musicians could petition to get their jobs back, so long as the instigators were named. But they vowed not to return while she was in the job, and so on March 13, she submitted her resignation to Lunacharsky. The “battle that the union has waged over the last few years became intolerable for me last year and has achieved its goal—I can no longer work,” she explained. “I ask you to relieve me of the directorship of the Bolshoi Theater.” She nominated an assistant as her replacement, then retreated to the shadows in Lunacharsky’s bureaucratic matrix. It was not the end for her; indeed, Malinovskaia would return to the directorship in 1930, after Lunacharsky was gone, and after Stalin was in complete control over the Soviet Union.47

Ultimately, her achievement was negative, more about destruction than creation. Malinovskaia had culled...
the ranks, and could argue that by doing so she had eliminated those employees of the theater who could not adapt to Bryusov’s ideal of synthetic, collective action on stage. She had also, for this same purpose, culled the repertory—but again, ending things, not beginning them.

Imperial ballets and operas remained on the books, but decisions about which works would be performed were handled by Glavrepertkom, a censorship board that Malinovskaia co-chaired. Glavrepertkom decided the fates of new projects and those from the past, or from outside of Russia, that had hitherto been neglected by the Bolshoi. For a performance to be approved, it needed to be presented to the bureau in the form of a carefully nuanced write-up, an ideologically contextualized description that related the work, whenever it was written, to the present day. Mussorgsky’s opera Boris Godunov was approved by Glavrepertkom because it described a corrupted tsar, but in the crowd scenes, the bureau decided, the people had to do less kneeling. Tchaikovsky’s opera The Queen of Spades received the nod, despite being set in the era of Catherine the Great. Glavrepertkom mandated that she be shown on stage—a pointed reversal of the convention during Tchaikovsky’s time, when the empress, when imperial Russia’s other rulers, could not be shown. Fokine’s and Stravinsky’s The Firebird and Petrushka received approval for performance given the “scarceness of balletic material responding to the times,” but also in hopes of luring Fokine and Stravinsky back to Russia from France.

Petrushka reached the Bolshoi stage in 1921, the grittiness of the opening and closing crowd scenes amplified with more “chatting” and “laughing” as the samovar hissed. The Firebird, in contrast, was never staged at the Bolshoi. Richard Strauss’s Expressionist opera Salomé raised hackles and was not, at first, approved by Glavrepertkom for the Bolshoi. Boris Asafyev’s revised orchestration of La Bayadère also had to pass through the censor, likewise the decision to expand the title of Esmeralda to Esmeralda, Daughter of the People, with the plot now pitting the people against the Roman Catholic Church and the feudal order. Proposals for ballets about soldiers and soccer players were floated, line-edited, crumpled up and, on second thought, smoothed out. As time went on, the fearsome censors imposed more radical changes on the standard repertory, and demanded life-affirming, folk-themed productions that focused on ensembles, not egos, and that expressed the ideals (as opposed to the realities) of the Revolution. Even Swan Lake was reworked with a life-affirming ending. The grimness of its original version, much like the neurosis and decadence evidenced in the Russian “mystic” Symbolist dramas that the theaters could no longer perform, ended up in the tsarist dustbin. The Soviet version became much more profitable than the imperialist original.

The future of the Bolshoi Ballet, and to a lesser extent the Bolshoi Opera, was to belong to the New Soviet Man, to the acrobatic, muscular builders of socialism. The heroes needed to be people of action; not witnesses to it (for this reason the artistic and political council of the theater rejected a proposed 1930 opera about John Reed[50]). And the present also needed a New Soviet Woman, a heroine both on stage and off, who could perform the revised female-driven repertoire of the imperial era but who was also committed to the bright future. “Russia’s salvation lies with her women,” claimed the ballerina Ekaterina Geltser (1876-1962). She embodied the revolution, having trained as an imperial dancer under the tsars to become, under Stalin, the icon of Soviet artistic power.

There followed the first official Soviet ballet, The Red Poppy (Krasnyi mak); there followed the scandal of The Bright Stream (Svetlyi ruchey), and the dramballets created by Leonid Lavrovsky and Rostislav Zakharov. There followed the illustrious ballerinas Galina Ulanova and Maya Plisetskaya, and the dictatorial ballet master Yury Grigorovich. The people and their art are now surrounded by question marks, as the Bolshoi Ballet confronts the painful question of preserving the recent past, the Soviet experience, which did so much to erase its distant past, the imperial experience.

Notes

2  RGALI (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art) f. 1933, op. 2, yed. khr. 12 (Ye. K. Malinovskaya, “Boš’hoy teatr po imeyushchisyma material. Vospominaniya”), l. 2.
3  E. Surits, “A. A. Gorskii i moskovskiy balet,” in Baletmester A. A. Gorskii: Materialy, vospominaniya, stat’i, 49.
5  Alexandre Gretchaninoff, My Life (New York: Coleman-Ross, 1952), 118.
6  Surits, “A. A. Gorskii i moskovskii balet,” 51.
8  RGALI f. 659, op. 3, yed. khr. 932, l. 127.
9  Arkhiv Bol’shogo teatra/ Soiuz teatral’nikh deiatelei [STD]; “‘Taina ministerskoi lozhi’ (iz gaz. ‘Vremya’ ot 10/V-1917 g.).”
10  RGALI f. 1933, op. 2, yed. khr. 12, l. 5.
11  RGALI f. 1933, op. 2, yed. khr. 58, l. 10.
12  Ibid., l. 3.
13  RGALI f. 1933, op. 2, yed. khr. 13, l. 2.
14  Ibid., l. 3.

Bolshoi Theater Museum.

Rimskii-Korsakov, “Iz rukopisiu o russkom balete konsta XIX-nachala XX v.,” 76-77.

Even standard bureaucratese—certifications of Petipa’s travel, for example—disappeared. The papers that survived the ransacking of the apartment ended up in the theater collection established by the industrialist Alexei Bakhruhin.

L. Sabaneyev, “Byr’ li Bol’shomu teatru?,” Ekrann 7 (November 15-17, 1921): 3. The author comes to the conclusion that the theater had outlasted its purpose even before the Revolution.

P. N. Lepeshinskii, Na povorote (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1955), 111-12.

Ibid. Although allowed to continue operating during the crisis, the Bolshoi could not count on the government to provide fuel to heat the theater, and so was encouraged, by the theater division of the People’s Commissariat for Enlightenment, to purchase firewood on the black market (RGALI f. 649, op. 2, yed. khr. 177, l. 14).

RGALI f. 1933, op. 2, yed. khr. 12, l. 6.

Asaf Messerer, Tanets. Myśl’ Vremia (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1990), 70.

Personal communication with Tatyana Kuznetsova, Vladimir Kuznetsov’s granddaughter.

RGALI f. 1933, op. 2, yed. khr. 13, l. 18.

Protokol obshchego sobraniia artistov baletnogo teatra, December 17, 1919, l. 1.

Personal archive of Tatyana Kuznetsova.

Archiv Bol’shogo teatra/STD; letter of April 10, 1923 from Lunacharsky to the “M. G. O.”/Moskovskaia gorodskaia organizatsiia.

Personal archive of Tatyana Kuznetsova.

Personal archive of Tatyana Kuznetsova.

Kevin Murphy, Revolution and Counterrevolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), 71; additional information in this paragraph from pp. 68-73.

RGALI f. 1933, op. 2, yed. khr. 13, l. 20.

RGALI f. 648, op. 2, yed. khr. 54, l. 81.


RGALI f. 648, op. 2, yed. khr. 128, l. 19.


RGALI f. 658, op. 2, yed. khr. 351, l. 18; minutes of the Bolshoi workers’ assembly, June 21, 1924.

FEELING, SENTIMENT, AND THE SOVIET BODY: FROM ISADORA DUNCAN TO THE RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE

NICOLETTA MISLER

During the course of my presentation I hope to explain how figurative representation of the body can establish codes that are profoundly different from one another but can still be adapted to the figurative ekphrasis of the same ideological and artistic conception of dance. The specific episode that I shall be discussing concerns the metamorphosis of the image of Classical Greece within the abstract forms of the Russian avant-garde. We can witness this in figures 1-2.

GEPTAKHOR, a dance group from St. Petersburg, represents this curious, but justifiable, permanence (I have in mind choreography) and impermanence (I have in mind imagistic representation). To develop this idea, let us turn to the dancer and artist, Natal’ia Enman, cofounder of GEPTAKHOR, who recorded the experiments or, rather, experiences of it, annotating them and providing us with a visual interpretation. I speak of “experience” because, from its very inception, the group sought to mold its own, new language from the life of the everyday, endeavoring to synthesize its own diverse passions — for Classical music, for Ancient Greece, and for the corporeal expression of dance.

For this small group of young ladies, who in 1908 were students at the Bestuzhev Courses (the prestigious women’s college in St. Petersburg), Duncan’s first performances in Russia were the primary stimulus to their researches. The founder of GEPTAKHOR was Stefanida Rudneva, who, accompanied by her friend Enman, had attended Duncan’s concerts in St. Petersburg in 1908, an event that changed their lives forever (see figures 3-4).

Their first exploratory steps toward a new language of musical movement took Duncan’s liberation of the body as a departure point. Other young girls, also students of the Classics, dressed in peploses and chitons (homemade by themselves, their mothers, or their aunts), soon joined the enterprise (see figure 5).

By 1918 or so, their group consisted of about seven members – hence the reason why their mentor, Professor Faddei Zelinsky (see figure 6), a distinguished Classicist, baptized the group GEPTAKHOR (from the Greek word for “seven”/“dance”). The study of and passion for the Classical world became an element of this synthesis, reinforced by a field trip to Greece with Zelinsky in 1910. Zelinsky, too, was so fascinated by Duncan that in 1913, he introduced her third Russian concert with a public lecture on the Classical myth of Iphigenia. A watercolor and some drawing by Enman capturing that very evening have come dow to us (see figures 7-9).

The choreographic forms of Greek tragedy can also be recognized in the photographs of the reconstruction of the myth of Kalliroe and Koreiz, presented by GEPTAKHOR to Schubert’s music in 1922-23 (figure 10). Or take the drawing Choreographical Fantasy (c. 1917), which is close to Duncan’s Moscow choreographies (figure 11).

I would like to emphasize that colored pencils were used specifically to express the choreographic ideas of Kalliroe and Koreiz. These colored notations formed a bridge between tradition and the avant-garde (figure 12).

With their colored lines, these choreographic notations also lead us to Rudolf Laban’s own attempts – in choreographic notation – to combine color with movements and music. Following Duncan, the Geptakhorians chose to teach toddlers and children. Also significant is the fact that they attended very briefly Emile Jaques-Dalcroze’s St. Petersburg courses in rhythmic gymnastics in the fall of 1912; soon, however, they rejected his method for what they regarded as the mechanical overkill of Dalcroze’s rhythmic training. The Swiss theoretician’s command to “feel with your body” was, in its rigorous and systematic elaboration, very distant from the experiential totality to which these daughters of the Silver Age aspired.

Their decision to join GEPTAKHOR was not dictated by ideology, but by a common experience of dance and a desire to experience communal life, transforming Ancient Greece into reality in the cold and clammy city of St. Petersburg. This is clear in Enman’s watercolor cycle of 1916-21, entitled Dreams of a Future School in Greece, a title that may seem ingenuous to us today but attests to the desire to create and lead a “life somewhere else.”

We do note the Mediterranean sea sparkling beyond a wintry window (Winter Day), and The Classroom flooded by a Mediterranean sun — as a matter of fact, these are the very rooms that the commune occupied in St. Petersburg (figures 13-14). In figure 15 we see little children being inculturated with ideas about art and musical movement (A Lesson in Musical Movement).

Life in the commune began in the Fall of 1916 when a large apartment became available – a corner building with a splendid view of the Neva, which could create the illusion of the Mediterranean. Here, in Duncan’s wake, they took charge of a small group of preschoolers and young children with whom they made their first appear-
Figures 1-2.
Top, figs. 3-4: Natalia Aleksandrovna Enman (1889-1961); Stefanida Dmitievna Rudneva (1890-1989);
bottom, figs. 5-6: GEPTAKHOR in the Crimea, 1920s; Faddei Frantsevich Zelinsky (1859-1944).
Top, fig. 7: The trip to Greece, 1910; bottom, figs 8-9: N. Enman, *Life Painting: Duncan Dancing*, 1913.
Figures 10-11
ance on stage, performing short miniatures to the music of Schumann, Grieg, and Couperin. But in contrast to Duncan, they also offered young men the chance to teach and learn. In searching for subject-matter that would be appropriate to the new young male dancers, they expanded their repertoire to include a more masculine kind of movement and music (see figure 16).

As Rudneva stated: “We had to transfer all our musical and kinetic material to a different tonality, one more active, more macho, and more effective, and at the same time to take care of all the technical and motor assignments, to develop a cohesiveness, flexibility, and smoothness of movement.”

The real stimulus to the change in the “representation” of the body’s movement towards a more “abstract” one occurred in the spring of 1919, when the director of the Institute of the Living Word, Vsevolod Nikolaevich Vsevolodsky-Gerngross, invited GEPTAKHOR to teach musical movement, through the assistance of Zelinsky, who was one of the Institute’s founders and teachers. We can be sure that the invitation paralleled the Institute’s own investigations into the connection between phonetics and gestures and the study of sounds in the language of animals, etc. (see figure 17).

The Geptakhorians studied, analyzed, and applied color again in the context of their choreographic notations during their experiments at the Institute between 1919 and 1922, which reminds us of the importance attributed to the visual expression of emotions (figures 18-19).

In 1924, enriched by their experience at the Institute of the Living Word, GEPTAKHOR encountered Boris Ender, one of Mikhail Matiushin’s foremost students, and through him attended the experiments conducted in the Department of Organic Culture, which Matiushin established at Ginkhuk in 1923.

GEPTAKHOR collaborated with Boris Ender for almost three years (1924-27) in what might be called three directions: the perception of space, color, and nature. Ender requested, first of all, that the chitons which the Geptakhorians wore for their exercises bear less fortuitous or casual colors, and proceeded to teach them the laws of supplementary colors for their performance costumes as well.

The dancers were invited to acquaint themselves with the “strange devices” at the Ginkhuk where Mariia Ender, Boris’s sister, worked in the Color Laboratory in close collaboration with Matiushin. Mariia conducted scientific experiments on color perception — for example, she studied how, with one eye closed, the viewer perceived “changes in the color spot and color background over time” (figures 20-21). Enman’s own tables, produced together with Mariia, had been used during their group sessions (figures 22-23). Employing these colored “grills” as their departure-point, Mariia Ender, Enman, and their students liberated not only their body, but also their artistic imagination (figures 24-25).

In any case, freedom of body movement formed the foundation of the GEPTAKHOR system of teaching. Boris Ender linked this to the ability to move freely in space, expanding Matiushin’s concept of extended viewing to that of extended space (figure 26). But both Ender and Matiushin questioned the pose in profile of the “antique bas-relief” so as to learn how to master space, conducting experiments via group exercises and with the eyes closed, often in open spaces, en plein air.

Enman’s drawing, Axes of Movements (Nature, Man, Sculpture), dated 1927, is an example of her classwork for Boris and Mariia Ender (figure 27).

As Rudneva commented: “Our pupils learned how to locate dynamic axes – tension and aspiration – in the form of the branches of different varieties of trees: at first in the guise of a geometric straight line and then in the volumetric form of the branches.”

A second element which linked Matiushin’s school with GEPTAKHOR was the significance granted to musical perception. Music was viewed as an essential element in the total, immediate, and spontaneous perception so similar to the pantheistic immersion in nature. A case in point is the watercolor by Mariia Ender entitled Transcription of Sound (figure 28; 1921, SMCA, Thessaloniki)

Not only music, but also sound in general was summoned to contribute to the refinement of the senses and, consequently, to the liberation from everyday triviality. Let me quote Rudneva again: “On seeing our unfinished work [Boris Ender] was struck by the organicity, cohesiveness, and spatial diversity of the movements which we had been executing on the same spot. He said: ‘It is a bush, a living bush.’” The movements of the nude body in a natural setting symbolized this freedom (see figure 29).

Indeed, during 1924-27 Boris Ender often accompanied the Geptakhorians and other students on field trips to the countryside. A few drawings from these sessions have come down to us – as well as a couple of portraits, perhaps of Rudneva herself, such as the watercolor Resting, (figure 30: 1927, Ender coll. Rome).

The sympathy and syntony which distinguished this alliance prompted them to conduct research on the character of sympathy, i.e. on the notion of “feeling together,” and the notion of syntony, i.e. listening to nature and music on the same wavelength, and the alignment of hearing and movement with touch. Rudneva’s archive contains a sequence of highly experimental watercolors by Enman, which record investigations on the connections between sound and movement. We can see this, for example, in this composition of 1927, which is inscribed: “A harmonium, a crash, and then a strong, sharp clunk, everything spasmodic. Movements: breathing in while stretching; flexing the shoulder – and a quick dodging away from the...”
Figures 29-30.
Figures 31-33. All three by N. Enman
Figures 34-37. Top: N. Enman and Students, *The Reflection of Music in Drawing*, 1930, fig. 34 as interpreted by T. Dervis, fig. 35 as interpreted by Rasbas (R. Fogel'son); bottom row: by N. Enman.
Figures 38-41. N. Enman and GEPTAKHOR students.
Figures 42-43.
the rigid canons of Stalinist ideology (figures 42-43).

of the GEPTAKHOR tradition and its capacity to oppose body. However, such exercises did demonstrate the vitality be especially experimental in the context of the new Soviet dancing at a provincial workers’ club (1935) — could not March (1933) or young girls in crowns and Grecian robes mances — children in tunics dancing Schubert’s Military mote its own special style. Of course, by then their perfor the 1930s and beyond continued to maintain and pro

spontaneity that Duncan had preached, and throughout less, GEPTAKHOR did not cease to teach children the 1927, the first inscribed “Milk, water,” and the second “Acidity and acuity (figure 33).

In other, no less fundamental experiments, they divined a topic which was especially close to them, i.e. the coordination of sound, color, and movement, which, according to Rudneva, was an effort to “use color so as to transmit the different impressions of various musical and non-musical sounds and then the tactile impressions (with the eyes closed).” For example, we have access to a number of sketches in two sequences, the first being an attempt to transcribe this: “The reflection of music in drawing. Seventeenth-century French song performed on the harmonium.” The dancers have also provided us with a variety of watercolors on different themes; presumably, made by the dancers themselves, who suggested the particular imagery or even painted the compositions themselves (figures 34-35).

The second group of sketches suggests motor reactions to sonic impressions. Once again, it is Enman who recorded the different interpretations of different sounds — for example, the movement suggested by the “Noise of [leafy] trees from a strong wind” (figure 36).

Figure 35, more curiously, is the “Banging on a frying-pan. The strewing of grain. The torso slowly tapering to the side, the head bowed down and then sideways. Sharply shrugging the shoulders,” which registers two different noises and, therefore, two different perceptions and movements.

Another cycle of experiments was on the “interaction between materials and colors,” in the mid-1920s, which Enman transcribed, i.e, sand, linoleum, cloth, and glass (figures 38-41).

We see how far this kind of research had led our group of dancers – far from Isadora Duncan. Nevertheless, GEPTAKHOR did not cease to teach children the spontaneity that Duncan had preached, and throughout the 1930s and beyond continued to maintain and promote its own special style. Of course, by then their performances — children in tunics dancing Schubert’s Military March (1933) or young girls in crowns and Grecian robes dancing at a provincial workers’ club (1935) — could not be especially experimental in the context of the new Soviet body. However, such exercises did demonstrate the vitality of the GEPTAKHOR tradition and its capacity to oppose the rigid canons of Stalinist ideology (figures 42-43).

Notes

1. A longer version of this article was posted in the conference proceedings for Free Dance and Free Verse, held at the School of Psychology, Philology, and the Arts, Moscow State University (1-3 October, 2010), by I. Sirotnina, A. Ajlamazian, et al., eds. For more detailed references, see: http://discours.philol.msu.ru/index.php/events-english/10-events/61-free-verse-free-dance-eng. The images in the text are strictly copyrighted and are NOT to be reproduced or duplicated in any way.

2. These images regarding the Geptakhor activities are preserved in TsMAMLS (Central Moscow Archive and Museum of Personal Archives) in Moscow, including Enman’s drawings, the photographs, and Stefanida Rudneva’s personal memoirs, which were published in 2007. See note 4.

3. Natal’ia Aleksandrovnna Enman (1889-1961) studied painting under Dmitrii Kardovsky, and also Classical antiquities in the Department of History and Philology at the Bestuzhev Courses (the Women’s University) in St. Petersburg, specializing in classical archaeology and the culture of Ancient Greece. In 1914, together with Stefanida Rudneva, she selected a group of Russian girls to train at Duncan’s school in Paris. In 1934 she resigned from Geptakhor and from 1938 until 1951 worked at the Sergei Kirov House-Museum in Leningrad. See S. Rudneva, “Kratkie svedenia o zhizni i deiatel’nosti N. A. Enman” [Brief information on the life and work of N. A. Enman] (typescript, 1978-87) // TsMAMLS, Call No.: f. 140 (S. D. Rudneva archive), op. 1, d. 9.

4. In 1915 Stefanida Dmitrievna Rudneva (1890-1989) finished her studies in the history and archaeology of classical antiquity at the Bestuzhev Courses (the Women’s University) in St. Petersburg. During 1913-17 she pursued her special area of interest, while also elaborating a new method of musical movement. From 1914 onwards Rudneva conducted children’s classes in movement within Geptakhor, after which she developed her own pedagogical methods and was involved in various organizations for the teaching of children. In 1922 she gave up archaeology so as to devote herself to teaching dance. See her memoirs: A. Kats, ed., Stefanida Rudneva: Vospominaniia schatlivogo cheloveka [Stefanida Rudneva: memoirs of a happy individual] (Moscow: Glavarkhib, GIS, 2007).

5. Faddei Frantsevich Zelinski (Tadeusz Stefan Zielinski, 1869-1944), the classical philologist, teacher, and translator, was of Polish extraction. A talented researcher, he received a grant from the Russian government to pursue a classical education in Leipzig, whereafter, aged only 26, he was appointed professor at the University of St. Petersburg. Zelinski published both popular appreciations of antiquity and major scholarly tracts on Greek mythology and philosophy (for example, he edited the works of Sophocles in three volumes, 1914-16). In 1922 he returned to Poland, where he was appointed professor at the University of Warsaw.

7. Ibid., 205.


10. Ibid., 294.

11. Ibid., 297.
CHOREOGRAPHING PHYSICAL CULTURE: BETWEEN WAR, THEATRE, AND CIRCUS

IRINA SIROTKINA

In Soviet Russia as, perhaps, in certain other countries, the beginning of the physical culture movement had tight connections with the acclaimed theatre reform of the early twentieth century. The movement took up issues previously discussed by theatre reformers, such as the role of spectators in a performance and the balance between mass participation and staging or between spontaneity and control. One of the earliest Soviet showcases was the project Tefizkul’t, the abbreviation for the “theatralization of physical culture” (“teatralizatsiia fzikul’tury”), or making physical culture theatrical. Short-lived yet important, the project brought together the theatre reformer, Vsevolod Meyerhold, with Nikolai Podvoisky, the head of the Vsevobuch (1918-1922), an organization for military and physical training established during the Civil War in Russia. It also gave birth to the first physical culture parades, a genre that appeared in Soviet Russia long before the well-known sport parades of the 1930s. The latter were named the “theatre of collective enthusiasm” (only half-ironically, for theatre is also the place of genuine enthusiasm). Yet the intention and elements of theatre were present as early as the Vsevobuch parade in Red Square, on May 25, 1919.

Those involved in staging the first mass events, including Podvoisky, Lunacharsky, and Meyerhold, were influenced by pre-Revolutionary discussions of theatre as “the community” or “the multitude.” When Wagner and Nietzsche announced the coming of a new, artistic humanity sharing aesthetic values, they had a multiple echo in Russia. In 1908 Lunacharsky anticipated that “poets, artists, signers, musicians, actors, beautiful men and women” would join in “wonderful dramas, processions, ceremonies.” And, in the middle of the First World War, Viacheslav Ivanov announced that art should bring in a new, better age of collective mystery and sobornost’. Sobornost’ in theatre, Ivanov claimed, occurred not when the spectator identified himself with the hero, but when the spectator lost himself in the multitude, which shared the transcendent experience of the hero’s deed. To enhance the emotions of the participants and to make them into one collective body, the hero himself had to be sacrificed. Likewise, the artist had, if not to die, to renounce his individuality and merge with “the multitude.”

The tension between “the multitude” and “the hero,” “the masses” and “the artist” created the dilemma of “spontaneity vs. control.” How far does the planning go, and how much space is there left for improvisation and spontaneity? Proletkul’t claimed that “the proletarian theatre will be collective and improvisational, and it will involve the audience in the stage act.” In reality, however, the division between the stage director, artists, and the audience persisted. At the Vsevobuch parade on May 25, 1919, Podvoisky expected the formations to enter Red Square and “to flood it in a theatrical way” ("razlilis’ po nei teatral’no"). Yet, they failed to do it because, Podvoisky explained, there was no appropriate orchestration of the event. Though the organizers were good, they did not know how to make it look spectacular, “to sell it” to the spectators (“pokazat’ svoiu rabotu litsom”). Is it then true that for mass events to be efficient and genuinely performative they need to be organized and controlled, like a theatre performance? Where does the artist / organizer / stage director stand in relation to the masses in a mass event? The dilemma was resolved in favor of control: in 1919, the Soviet Ministry of Enlightenment (Narkompros) opened the Courses for Games and Festivities and a Section for Mass Performances and Shows within its Theatre Department (a year later the section was renamed the section for “mass action” [“massovoe deistvo”]).

In the summer of 1920 Podvoisky and Lunacharsky were at the festivities for the Second Congress of the Comintern at the Moscow Hippodrome. Vsevobuch-trained pre-conscripts performed physical exercises en masse. The audience was impressed by the masses doing precision movements “without any visible control.” The impression was, in Podvoisky’s words, of “something mystical, supernatural.” He realized, however, that a major effort went into orchestrating the movements and “making a fine finish, rounding them up.” “Any parade is a performance, a spectacle,” Lunacharsky confirmed. Both decided that a special artist, a professional stage director, was needed to “make the show knit, well-controlled, and grand.”

Such a director was quickly found. Meyerhold had been for a long time tempted to make a theatre performance on a mass scale. At the beginning of the Great War, he wrote a scenario, Fire (Ogon’), in eight acts with apotheosis. It included a march of military divisions and a procession of army ambulances and ammunition cars. The plan was partly realized in the summer of 1920 in Petrograd, in the mass performance To the World Commune. Meyerhold was out of town, but his former assistants (including Nikolai Petrov and Vladimir Soloviev) took part in the staging. The performance, on a huge scale,
involved thousands of participants as well as weaponry, and managing it was comparable to a “complicated military maneuver.” From the top of a special deck, the stage directors controlled, with the help of field telephones and light signals, a territory that stretched from the Stock Exchange on Vassilievsky Island to battleships on the Neva.

At this time, Meyerhold was in the south of Russia, in Novorossiisk. In March 1920, the Tenth Army, of which Podvoisky was the commissar, took over the town. It is likely that Podvoisky and Meyerhold had decided to work together in Novorossiisk. Meyerhold completed the Vsevobuch training course and began working at the local department of people’s education. Later they conceived of a mass performance at the Khodyinka Field in Moscow; an article about that in the journal Vestnik Teatra (issues 91–92, 1921) was titled “Theatralization of Military Maneuvers.” From this, it was a short distance to “making physical culture theatrical.” In July 1921, Meyerhold, Podvoisky, and Lunacharsky signed the foundation of Tefizkul’t. This was also the year of the birth of Meyerhold’s stage biomechanics, with actors making physical exercises similar to military drills.

Throughout that summer Podvoisky stayed in a log house on the Sparrow Hills in Moscow, where he decided to organize the Red Stadium to train “new Spartans.” An open-air wooden amphitheatre – “the Greek stage,” or the “natural theatre” – was built and opened for the guests of the Third Congress of the Comintern. Tefizkul’t organized festivities that included physical culture exercises. In August 1921, “physical culture workers” held a national meeting there, dressed in special sport suits and demonstrating exercises. Isadora Duncan, who arrived in July 1921 to open a school in Russia, was at the same time a guest of Podvoisky and stayed in his hut. Impressed by the “Red Spartan,” she wrote her first ever newspaper article, comparing the head of the Vsevobuch with both Spartacus and Jesus Christ.

Tefizkul’t was going to stage a mass performance, _Spartacus_, to Beethoven’s Fifth, and to invite Isadora to dance in it. Tefizkul’t also developed plans to use the circus building (formerly, The Nikitin Brothers Circus on Triumfal’naya Square). In 1919 circuses were nationalized, and Tefizkul’t suggested transforming them into “Houses of Physical Culture.” In August 1921 permission was granted for Tefizkul’t to use the circus building on a part-time basis.

Yet, by 1922 Tefizkul’t’s days were numbered. With the end of the Civil War the Vsevobuch was closed and the state program for physical culture was interrupted. Podvoisky remained in charge of the Red Sport International (Sportintern) and busied himself with organizing sport performances for Comintern meetings. He constantly asked Meyerhold and his theatre to entertain important guests, to “treat” them to a performance. In the summer of 1924 he invited the Fifth Congress of the Comintern to the “mass action theatre” on the Sparrow Hills (which, on Podvoisky’s suggestion, were renamed Lenin Hills). Meyerhold’s theatre staged a special show, _Destruction of the Soviet Trade Office in Berlin_. Later in June there was a performance of Meyerhold’s _The World Turned Upside Down_ (Zemlia Dybom). Like the earlier mass performance _To the World Commune_ in Petrograd, _The World Turned Upside Down_ was partly based on Meyerhold’s _Fire_ scenario. It had the same “naturalism of the war, the feeling of military power, the maximum of emotional impact.” Podvoisky rewrote the play for 1500 participants, including army divisions, cavalry, and a procession of military vehicles and guns. He also altered the finale; the play now ended victoriously, with an apotheosis. The audience of 25,000 proceeded to hold a political meeting, with speeches from Ernst Thälmann and other Comintern members. The evening

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**Fig. 1. Poster for the “Workers’ Festival” on Lenin Hills in Moscow, 29 June 1924. The program included a baseball match between two American teams and a mass action: “collective improvised parade, precision marching, gymnastic dances, choir singing, collective declamation and shared jokes.” Meyerhold’s actors demonstrating collective exercises in biomechanics, and, at the end, _The World Upside Down_ was performed.**
finished with everybody singing *The International*.17

In 1928 the “theatre of collective enthusiasms”18 had made its way to even larger audiences. The first Spartakiad opened in a newly built Dynamo Stadium with a procession of trade unions, arguably reminiscent of Lunacharsky’s “wonderful processions and ceremonies.” When sport parades moved to Red Square in 1931, they became more choreographed.19 Thank to the efforts of talented stage directors, choreographers, composers, and athletes, sport parades were indeed spectacular. However, the names of the creators were rarely mentioned, to give the impression that there was only one creator, “the people.” Sport parades (re)built the collective body and spirit, energy, and unity of “the masses” – or, at least, created an illusion of it. A journalist called the parade of almost 70,000 participants on Red Square in 1932 “a symphony of unity and precision.”20 Was it indeed so, or was it just a parody of the Wagnerian dream of an ecstatic union to Beethoven’s Ninth?

Meyerhold, again, was asked to take part. His last theatre work was a staging of the parade procession for the Lesgaft Physical Culture Institute in Leningrad. He was arrested in his Leningrad apartment on the night from of June 19-20 – a few weeks before the sport parade on Red Square for the Physical Culture Day. Thus Meyerhold appears as the hero who sacrificed more than his powerful individuality to the masses: he was the sacrifice that helped reinforce the collective spirit and shape the collective body.

Sport parades on Red Square stopped after Stalin’s death. After Perestroika, the whole project of “mass action” was critically reassessed, and the failure of parades to create genuine communal spirit was finally admitted. For many years, it was said, the organizers of mass events left out entire sections of public life and the real needs of people. “The time has come to pay farewell to the tasteless finery of decoration, bungled in combination with complete passivity of the people.”21 Yet the May Day Parade on Red Square was recently officially revived, two decades later.

How then should we deal with the issues of “spontaneity vs. control” and “participation vs. spectatorship”? In contemporary performance theory, a theatre performance is an event during which a community, however volatile, is created.22 Its participants, both actors and the audience, are supposed to go through performative experiences and be transformed. Yet there is no guarantee that all this will happen at each particular performance. A community might emerge or it might not, and the audience might be transformed or it might not. The success of the performance is, in the words of the performance theorist Erica Fischer-Lichte, an “emergent phenomenon.”23

Physical culture parades are more than an example of biopower or of state control over the bodies of its subjects; they are an excellent subject for performance studies. Theatre theory can help historians understand when and under which conditions the parades become the “wonderful processions” that the intellectuals of the Silver Age had dreamt about. A “total” work of art, about which Wagner wrote in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, should not be confused with a “totalitarian” work of art. Performance studies could divert the discussion from the old issue of the totalitarian nature of mass parades and the belief that formally choreographed parades allow neither individuality nor any “genuine” collective feeling. Taking the lead from early-twentieth-century theatre reformers, contemporary theorists argue that any performance creates (or intends to create) some kind of community and that in theatre spontaneity has to be achieved.24 Ultimately, a comparison between mass parades and other performance (including the recent genre of flash-mob) might throw some light on the very nature of sociality. Was it not the utmost aspiration of both theatre reformers and social reformers at the beginning of the twentieth century?

Notes

1 For more on Tefizkul’t and the role of other participants, including the poet, Ippolit Sokolov, see Irina Sirotkina, *Svobodnoe dvizhenie i plasticheskii tanets v Rossi* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012), 122–25.


6 A. A. Gvozdev and Andrian Piotrovskii, “Petrogradskie teatry i prazdnestva v epokhu voennogo kommunsizma,” in *Istoria sovetskogo teatra: Ocherki razvitii* (Leningrad: Gos. izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1933), 1:238.

Ibid.

Ibid.


See Peter Kurt, Isadora: A Sensational Life (Boston: Little, Brown, 2001), chap. 23.

Russian State Archive for Literature and Art, Fund 998: V. E. Meyerhold, Inventory 1, Delo 2922, 17–20.


N. D. Volkov, Meyerhold (Moscow and Leningrad: Academia, 1929), chap. 3.

Ferral’skii, Zapiski rovesnika veka, 238–39.

Terekhovich, Vasosuzhne fizsha’tparady, 3–7.


Igorii Kriger quoted in Mike O’Mahony, Sport v SSR: fizcheskaia kul’tura – vixual’naia kul’tura (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010), 113.

A. A. Kemovich, Teatraltuzovannye prazdniki i obrjadi v SSR (Moscow: Vysshaia shkola, 1990), 202.


Bodies in Motion: Physical Culture and the Construction of the New Soviet Person

Susan Grant

This paper takes as its focus physical culture in the form of exercise, dance, and games in the 1920s and 1930s. The first section briefly explores the origins of physical culture and its importance in the hygiene campaigns of the early 1920s. The focus then shifts to the efforts to popularize physical culture among young people and women; this section looks at the different ways in which “Soviet” forms of physical culture were introduced to the provinces and national republics. The final section considers how these “new” Soviet bodies were displayed in physical culture parades. Through propaganda campaigns, acculturation efforts, and parades, physical culture and sport became an important means of building the New Soviet Person.

Russian physical culture was originally connected to an interest in physiology and gymnastics in Europe at the start of the twentieth century, with German and Swedish gymnastics as well as the Czech Sokol system dominating the physical education scene. Reflecting the rising interest in physical culture and physical education, Russian scientists had by the early twentieth century turned their attention to developing theories for the correct practice of physical exercise. The pioneers in the development of a Russian form of physical culture, Pyotr Lesgaft and Ivan Pavlov, championed health, hygiene, and physical education. Their influential ideas as well as an interest in European gymnastics fundamentally shaped the development of physical culture in Soviet Russia. After the war the rehabilitative powers of physical culture were recognized and applied to help rebuild the broken male body. As one German contemporary wrote, sport and physical culture were the “symptoms of a new way of life characteristic of the post-war population” where “Bolshevism, fascism, sports, body culture, and the New Objectivity [were] all interrelated.”

In the 1920s exercise became a key feature of the Soviet project, an important means of making people healthier. The physical body became a site of transformation. Broken, sick bodies could be made strong and healthy again. Physical culture campaigns were launched with propaganda and agitation deployed to draw public attention to the benefits of improving their physical selves. Physical transformation, accompanied by a process of acculturation, would make these transformed physical bodies “Soviet.” Participating in physical culture — that is, in its Soviet form — required commitment to the new regime. Soviet citizens, especially young people, were called on to participate in physical culture and demonstrate the benefits of socialism to help educate others, especially older generations.

A chastushka from 1927 provides a useful illustration of how young people were expected to embody the new ideology and promulgate it in an everyday sense. Published in a Komsomol booklet, its purpose was to serve the very important propaganda function of inspiring youth to become active fizkul’turniki and builders of socialism. In this chastushka an “old man” describes the “shocking” scene he encounters one day when walking down a Moscow street. He is paralyzed by fear when confronted by a youth wearing only “some type of underwear.” Fearing this person might attack him, he considers running away quickly, but the youth talks to him about health and fizkul’tura. The young person invites the old man to the krushbok, where “all the lads were in some kind of shorts/jumping/waving their hands/exercising” and enjoying the sunshine. The old man is impressed and starts to practice physical culture everyday. Now he is healthy and strong, and able to do the work of two people. With industrialization high on the agenda, fitness for labor productivity was another reason to promote physical culture.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAZ5ZgS3C60

Socialist competition in industry was matched by socialist competition in sport. Athletics promoted physicality: muscular men and toned women. A strong, athletic individual body symbolized a powerful Soviet Union. By the 1930s, Soviet citizens, whether in the factory, farm, or in school, were increasingly drawn to physical culture and sport. In a brief account published in Fizkul’tura i sport in 1931, a woman worker involved in physical culture explained that being active made her feel better, fresh, and more cheerful. A Soviet diving champion, N. Slivina, echoed this, explaining how sports improved her physical and mental well-being. She noted that she followed a strict regime and diet, and was active in swimming, athletics, gymnastics, and diving. Diving and water sports, she admitted, were especially complicated and difficult, and consequently required enormous physical and mental commitment. One needed to attain complete mastery of one’s body and possess qualities such as decisiveness and willpower. By promoting physical culture and sport the state gained healthy, fit, motivated,
and committed workers and athletes, while participants had opportunities to receive social promotion, confidence, and increased control over their lives. Yet for those interested in physical culture, active participation was not always possible or desirable.

Focusing so much attention on the physical body placed some in a vulnerable position. In the textile-dominated town of Ivanovo in 1935, for example, an instructor in one factory weighed girls “in an exposed state” and asked that each girl be weighed separately in a storeroom so that an accurate weight could be ascertained. Some instructors, according to a fikul’turnitsa there, “supported” or “stood by” those girls in whom they were “interested.” Those in charge appeared indifferent to these problems, “accustomed to the shortcomings” and “too lazy” to do anything about them. In parts of this city the negative attitude toward physical culture was not limited to the factory and actually included home life as well. One landlady forbade some of her tenants who worked at the factory from practicing physical culture, as it was for “hussies” and “shameless people” (“smanititsa” and “bestydnitsa”). The danger of being labeled some sort of a “loose” woman was a stigma that no doubt discouraged many women from participating in physical culture, particularly in smaller towns and villages.

One young cotton worker and fikul’turnitsa injured her leg but was told that she was “faking” her injury. The other (all female) cotton workers said that she was a “worn out tart.” By the end of the working day this “good cotton worker” was hardly able to stand; despite repeatedly telling the instructor that she could not participate in competitions and needed medical expertise, she was instead forced by the instructor to practice physical culture without receiving medical attention. As a result of being forced to participate in these competitions she fainted and was told “maliciously” that without her there would be no fikul’turniki. All of the women in the factory shop apparently knew of this case and were consequently “convincing that practicing physical culture was useless and impossible.”

In the 1920s and 1930s the body was very much a contested site of physical culture transformation. This was also the case in the provinces and national republics. The Soviet effort to popularize physical culture in the provinces and national republics led to traditions of dance (pliaska) and forms of movement culture being incorporated into Soviet physical culture. Traditional forms of movement culture were not quite “Soviet” enough in their original form. According to the All-Union Council of Physical Culture in Transcaucasia there was “no organization of the masses, no physical culture vospitanie, [and] no correct physical culture.” Another Transcaucasian correspondent noted that there was “not one physical culture kruzhok in a single local village.” In the North Caucasus local physical culture correspondents communicated that there was no equipment, nobody educated in physical culture literature (and there was in any case an absence of literature in the native languages), no specialists, instructors, or teachers, and an “incorrect” understanding of physical culture. Young people there were only interested in dehigiotovka, wrestling, and dance.

Yet these indigenous forms of dance represented a rich heritage of traditional movement culture that predated the arrival of the Bolsheviks. Contrary to the impressions created by negative local reports, it was not the case that there was no physical culture, but rather an absence of Soviet physical culture. Popular among peasant children for instance were games such as “blind man’s buff” and “hide and seek,” while during Easter especially “egg and spoon” racing was popular among all age groups. Traditional games such as lapta and gorodki were widely played by peasants. Children played lapta and other games because these were considered a good means of strengthening their young bodies for the physical demands of peasant work that lay ahead of them. Physical strength, besides being a prerequisite for life on the farm, was a matter of pride and prestige among peasants and stories of famous “strongmen” were passed down from generation to generation. The cult of the body had been embedded in village culture since the nineteenth century.

When it came to physical culture and sports activities, peasants preferred games and entertainment with elements of social interaction. In her study of peasants in Penza in the 1920s, Larissa Lebedeva notes that games were often a means of fraternizing with the opposite sex, especially for young people. Male peasants liked to use games as a way of impressing girls with their strength. On certain holidays, village men gathered together to mark the festive occasion through fist-fighting matches (“kulachnye boi” or the “stenki”). These were of course not recognized as a form of Soviet physical culture. Fist-fighting or boxing in particular had no official place within the early spectrum of physical culture, even though it enjoyed some popularity. Fist-fighting, wrestling, or dance, as interpreted by peasants and national minorities, were simply unacceptable as part of the “new culture.” The challenge for Soviet activists consequently lay not in convincing rural inhabitants to actually become involved in physical culture, but to change their habits and adopt a more “Soviet” style of physical culture. To claim therefore that physical culture per se did not exist among peasants or national minorities overlooked the existence of this body symbolism and the fact that Russian and non-Russian culture already had a wide variety of traditional games and activities.

In its physical culture policy it seemed more plausible for the state to merge some of these long-standing traditions with new Soviet values, rather than completely
НА ЗАЛОБОДЕВНЫЕТЕМЫ
ЗА РАЗУМНОЕ СОГЛАШЕНИЕ

СОВЕТСКИЕ ПЛОВЦЫ

Нам кажется недостаточно серьезной декларации харьковских коллеги, судя по страницам № 44 выделя «Груда». Харьковские коллеги борутся на себя большую смысль, отставая свое национальное толкование футбольных дузей. Они за согласование правил, но это в редакции ВСФК и РСФСР, т.е. не в международной редакции, а, вероятно, в своеобразно-украинской, или вернее харьковской.
Харьковские товарищи, вероятно, и применяют правила в своих толкованиях и в этом толковании правил воспитывают своих игроков. Но то, что вызывает улыбку харьковской команды на Спартакиаде, то, что мы ссылались на коллегий судей по играм Спартакиады от успехов харьковской коллегии судей достаточно далеко от, некоего, выражаясь, корректной игры и неправильно го ее толкования.
Из газетных команд, безусловно, самой грубой была команда Харькова, воспитанная на харьковских прави- лах.
Нам кажется, что § 22 и § 24 правила ВСФК в переработке не нуж- жаются. Они дают полный простор толковать правила о грубой игре в смысле принятия всех мер против грубо- сти и для предупреждения грубости.
Все вопросы в производстве судьи, его определения по правилам игры. Дело не в тексте правила. Текст вполне удо- влетворителен.
Но, как же, в уверенности, что харьковские товарищи во всем при- тиологизируют себя Москве и Ленинграду, вводя свои специфические точки зрения. Ложный стиль и балансовое самозабавление делают харьковцам исключить и иметь необходимую об- ективность и согласованность в действиях, направленных к единой цели.
И, вместо обоснования своей работы, вместе доказательства правоты хар- ковской точки зрения декларация за- канчивается утверждением: если же усмотрены садовники товарищи будут придерживаться старых установок, нам придется пойти своей дорогой.
Вместо того, чтобы доказать, что московские за грубую игру и против корректных правил Харькова, заранее утверждается, что московская установка за грубую игру. Это не верно, но про- сто иллюстрация на московских судьях: мо- сковские судьи всегда боролись против грубо сти и в этом отношении до- стигли серьезных успехов. Приехать к несчастным случаям с Городовым Бойковым и др. Москве и ее толкование правил достаточно заметно.
В Одессе играют по украинским правилам, но именно из Одессы при- емственное больше количество раз- дыхов игроков. Москва—Ленинград играют по московским правилам, но никто из 22 игроков обоих городов в игре не пострадал.
Мы—за единообразие, разумное соглашение, в интересах советской физкультуры, а также РСФСР и Украинщины.
Помимо горячности, юного темперамента и ложного самолюбия, со стороны харьковских товарищей, и со- гласованность будет.

КАКОЙ НАМ НУЖЕН СУДЬЯ

Один из наболевших вопросов, ко- торый должен быть поставлен в по- рядок дня, это вопрос о судействе. Терпимые организационные формы судейства надо признать устаревшими и требующими коренной ломки. То положение, в котором застала судейство, менее тому какому-либо содержанию, которое мы хотим в этом ин- ституте вложить.
Наше судейское организацию до сих пор существует в тех формах, в ко- торых их застал Октябрь. Отгорожен- ные от общей физкультурной жизни, несущие особой воинственной, не санкционированной с теми новыми активными кадрами, которые водят физкультурное движение, замкнутые внутри своих коллегий, они, конечно, не мо- гут выполнять тех новых задач, ко- торые жизнь выдвигает. Судья, кото- рый связан с физкультурой только через свое участие в составах, непо- доступный строгий арбитр, руководи- тельство, не санкционированный в своей повседневной работе со своим кружком, а успешный внедрению и неж- ный—такой судья нам сейчас не нуж- жен.
Жажда выдвинуть новый тип судьи: активиста кружка, передового фил-
destroy them. If this was done correctly then they could be used as a modernization strategy, easing peasants into the Soviet mode of life on more familiar and agreeable terms. To make national dances and games more amenable to the Bolshevik vision, propaganda workers and organizers were to choose sports and games that emphasized collectivism, solidarity, discipline, and similar characteristics. Peasant and national dance were favored over “bourgeois” dances, preferred so long as they were healthy and helped the biological, psychological, and emotional development of performers, especially in schools where national and traditional dance were less likely to lead to sexual deviancy.17

One criticism however, was that sometimes these dances were slow-paced, depriving rural dancers of the “motions and rhythms...for the new conditions of work.”18 Games had to be interesting and “emotive” in order to attract villagers.19 Policymakers realized that making peasants into active fizkul’turniki meant educating and impressing them on terms that were amenable to them. In physical culture, indigenous games thus represented an important element in the overall state policy of korenizatsiya or “nativization.” Throughout the 1920s and into at least the beginning of the 1930s central authorities considered it necessary and advantageous to utilize native peasant games in an effort to establish the values of Soviet physical culture. As Mark Saroyan has argued, this “process of national-cultural construction developed not simply from the amorphous activization of ‘tradition’ by the cultural intelligentsia but reflected the ‘modern’ institutional innovations of Soviet national-state formation.”20

Soviet authorities were certainly faced with different challenges when it came to introducing Soviet concepts of physical culture to the countryside and national republics. Local organizers did not seem to take a nuanced approach, as instructed by the central physical culture leadership, and so the reception of Soviet physical culture varied considerably on a case-by-case basis. The approach appeared to vary as the 1920s progressed, with collectivization impacting how policy was carried through in the regions and provinces. By the mid 1930s it was evident that physical culture in relation to the national minorities had progressed from simply establishing a Soviet type of physical culture among local communities into articulating a more defined approach to nation building and establishing a Soviet identity among national minorities. The process of making bodies Soviet was thus part of a large, complex, state-building project.

If making bodies Soviet was one task, then displaying them was a challenge of another kind. Parades exemplified the pre-eminence of the body in Soviet society. The body and body image were fundamental to physical culture ideology and to the larger project of making bodies Soviet. The ideology of the socialist world strove to create the ideal form, the New Soviet Person. According to one observer of physical culture, Evgenii Riumin, mass proletarian festivals embodied the artistic and organizational visions of the revolution.21 Writing in 1927, he considered that the immense organization and rhythms of proletarian festivals set them apart from bourgeois carnivals. The inclusion of physical culture elements was intrinsic to the success of a parade or festival and with this, he added, would come “increased organization and rhythm.” The spectacle of seeing masses looking “sharp” and steel-like demonstrates that such “intense discipline, exactitude, and dynamism” could be channeled through physical culture. Their resonance would be increased when accompanied by music, songs, words, and movement. What was essentially created, Riumin averred, was a “living picture.”22 The depicted stars, pyramids, and other formations were images that reflected the “strength and agility of the collective.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fym8G8snb18

These festivals offered organizers the opportunity to promote military movements and skills, as well as exhibit national dances and the customs and costumes of the various nationalities participating.23 Riumin pressed for increased attention to be paid to parades, as they were such a valuable form of “organizing mass energy and impressing meaning and significance upon spectators.” Yet as Riumin noted, the key ingredient was organization — these parading masses had to be strictly organized and controlled so as to avoid creating a scene of chaos and disorder. Images and iconography were an essential part of the “socialist myth.” The images of those celebrating on Red Square and on the streets of the capital thus had to correspond to the political images of the state — structure, order, control, strength, and collective unity were to be portrayed through the parades.

The year 1927 marked the point when serious attention began to be paid to the physical culture parades as a serious tool of mobilization.24 Until then, the primary concern of those in charge of physical culture had been organizational, health, and hygiene matters. When the Five Year Plan was introduced, parades were used to relate physical culture to industry and labor. By the early 1930s, parades were receiving increasing coverage, designed to reflect both the apparent general progression and expansion of physical culture and sport as well as the image of a modern, developed nation. Their value was recognized by the presidium of the All-Union Council of Physical Culture, which considered that parades “exemplified the system of physical culture as a mass form showcasing their achievements and in the militarization of physical culture.”25
As increasing attention was paid to parades, even more time and effort was required on the part of both organizers and participants. With this growing significance and attention, tensions and hierarchies emerged both behind the scenes and center stage. Questions about Soviet physical culture in the national republics again came to the fore. As Karen Petrone has argued, “the symbolic construction of the Soviet nation clearly revealed the contradictions inherent in Soviet nationality policy,” as “the nationalities section of the parade affirmed Russia’s geographic and ethnic hierarchy,” with the Russian republic marching first.26 The 1939 Physical Culture Parade, themed “Friendship of the Peoples,” placed particular emphasis on the contribution of the national republics to the Soviet Union. The performance of each national republic was clearly defined and rehearsed, and only approved when all the necessary arrangements were in place. Artistic and design standards were to be met, with a certain degree of thematic consistency to be attained by all eleven republics. No republic was to have more than 200 participants and no performance was to last more than eight minutes.27 All republic representatives were to portray their successful and happy lives through physical culture.

More or less the same image was to be portrayed internationally at the Soviet Pavilion at the 1939-1940 New York World Fair, where a quickly paced physical performance with fast changing scenes was to show “colorful pictures of Soviet national culture,” with “happy young people...in national costumes,” moving to national music.28 These young people, the best fizikul’turniki from the republics, were to perform different types of national sports that showed their “strength and dexterity” as well as “a willingness to defend.” The physical culture performance was acknowledged as being “unusually broad” so as to convey to the world a sense of the uniqueness of the Soviet character.29 This uniqueness was, ironically, not always appreciated by Soviet authorities. Even for the 1939 parade Tadjik men were prevented from wearing traditional wide trousers (sharouvary) and were forced to wear shorts.30 While wearing wide trousers was permitted in their native clubs, for a national performance participants had to conform to accepted standards of Soviet physical culture.

In the 1930s, especially, parades were to show the Soviet person as aesthetically pleasing — in the sense that he or she was physically strong, agile, and well-formed. Body imagery played a significant role in this society, where not being able to join in with the masses and embrace the collective spirit often meant social isolation. This is attested in the diary of Zinaida Denisevskaia, as examined by Jochen Hellbeck, where she acknowledged in 1931 that the “chief agent preventing her absorption into the collective organism of Soviet activists was her failing body.” She admitted that she “didn’t have enough strength to join their ranks” and was thus “doomed to loneliness” until her death.31 When Denisevskaia eventually did summon the strength to march in a demonstration, she enjoyed the sense of “merging with everybody,” becoming in essence a “one million headed body.”32 For that brief moment, Denisevskaia felt complete, a true member of society. The parades of the mid to late 1930s showcased physically strong and impressive bodies and provided a powerful visual demonstration of Soviet power.

Actively engaging with the new Soviet life was not just a matter of attending political lectures, reading Marx, or wanting to be a better communist. Engaging with the new way of life also involved physical transformation. Although Soviet citizens might very well have been already engaged in physical culture and sport of some description, whether playing football, skiing, or playing games, this was not organized or sufficiently sovietized. Propaganda thus tried to draw them toward participation in the kruzhok or club where they would be under party guidance. Agitation aimed to show these groups that physical culture and even the Soviet regime itself was to be embraced. All purportedly offered a sense of belonging to a greater whole, a welcoming collective with everyone’s interests and needs its primary concern.

Physical culture entailed both physical and mental transformation. It fed into the visual image of what a good communist, a politically conscious worker, or a Soviet woman should look like, how they should act and even think. Muscular, toned, and tanned with a clean and tidy appearance, reading politically prescribed literature, attending club meetings, and going to the stadium or sports square — these were the criteria for the New Soviet person. Yet this was the end product (and one that was anyhow engaged in an ongoing process of self-betterment and acculturation). Physical culture offered one of the most straightforward routes to transformation. The emotive qualities of physical culture, its collective and individual nature, and its potential to shape the body and the mind were recognized and harnessed by the Bolsheviks, who were keen to implement it as an essential component in the development and modernization of the young communist state.

Notes

1 This was a sports and gymnastic organization for youth founded in 1862 in Prague. It was a pan-Slavic organization that sought to develop physical, moral and intellectual capacities of its members.
2 Wolfgang Graeser, Gymnastik, Tanz, Sport (Munich, 1927), in Anton Kaes, 

3 “Fizkul’turnyi reen” (letnii), in Rossiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arhiv Sotsial’no-
Politicheskoi Istorii (hereafter RGASPI), f. 1-M, op.23, d.480, II, 64-66.

4 N. Slivina, “Mastera – organizatory massovoi ucheby,” Fizkul’tura i sport, nos. 
16-17 (1931): 15.

5 Gosudarstvennyi Arhiv Rossiskoi Federatsii (hereafter GARF), f.7576, op.4, 
d.4, l.159.

6 GARF, f.7576, op.4, d.4, l.160

7 GARF, f.7576, op.4, d.4, l.160.

8 GARF, f.7576, op.1, d.54a, l.3. Stenogramma zasedaniia fraktsii zakavkazkogo 
VPSK ot 27/vii-1930.

9 GARF, f.7576, op.1, d.54a, l.59.

10 RGASPI, f.1-M, op.23, d.944, l.70 (1929).

11 Dzhigitovka is an equestrian sport popular in the Caucasus traditionally 
associated with Russian Cossacks. It involves galloping at speed, standing on horseback, 
shooting targets, and other feats (Bol’ shaia Sovetskaia Entstiklopediia).

12 Lebedeva, using peasant questionnaires from the archives, found that lapta was 
most popular among children (33%) and teenagers (17%) and that adults preferred card games 
(14%) but also enjoyed gorodki (8%) and lapta (6%). Penza State Regional Museum (PGKM) 
n. A. No.88. Podschety avtora. l.49, l.198, in Larissa V. Lebedeva, Povsednevnaia zhizn’ 
Penzenskoi derevnii v 1920-e gody: traditsii i peremeny (Moscow, 2009), 118.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 123.

15 Ibid., 118.

16 Ibid., 122-23. As the provincial party commission disparagingly observed, the 
winner appeared the next day with a bruised and swollen face.

17 Gosudarstvennyi Arhiv Penzenskoi Oblasti (hereafter GAPO), f.3-349, op.1, 
d.15, l.279, “Toward the Question of Dance as a Means of Physical Development,” NTK VSFK 
(Pitlia).

18 GAPO, f.3-349, op.1, d.15, l.221 (1925).

19 L. Petnev, “Pervye shagi fizkul’turnoi rboty v kolhozakh,” Fizkul’turist, no. 
6 (1930): 10-12.

20 Mark Saroyan, “Beyond the Nation-State: Culture and Ethnic Politics in Soviet 
Transcaucasia,” in Transcausia, Nationalism, and Social Change, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny (Ann 

21 Evgenii Riumin, “Fizkul’turnyi organizatsiiia prazdnestv,” Evventiia Fizichskoi 
Kul’tury, no. 3 (1927): 4.

22 The creation of “living pictures” or “living images” was also a feature of 
German festivities and even before the Weimar Republic. See Rosaud, Performing the 
Nation in Interwar Germany: Sport, Spectacle, and Political Symbolism (London: Palgrave 
Macmillan, 2007), 64.

23 For detailed discussion of the role of the national republics in the physical 
culture parades, see Karen Petrone, “Parading the Nation: Physical Culture Celebrations and the 
Construction of Soviet Identities in the 1930s,” Michigan Discussions in Anthropology, Post-

24 The immense surge in the relevance and popularity of the parades is evidenced 
by the statistics of those involved. For instance, prior to 1927 (excluding the Vsevobuch parade 
of 1919), the International Youth Day parade in 1924 included 4,000 athletes from Moscow’s 
trade union clubs. In 1934, there were 120,000 Moscow fizkul’turniki (Petrone, “Parading the 
Nation,” 25). The Second All-Union parade in 1924 was by all accounts a fairly dismal affair, 
not helped by the torrential rain which was one of the cited reasons for the low turnout of both 
participants and spectators. GARF, f.7576, op.3, d.1, l.50.


27 GARF, f.7576, op.10, d.1, l.65-69.

28 GARF, f.7576, op.24, d.3, l.46. Yuri Pimenov’s painting Fizkul’turnyi parad 
covered the back wall of the pavilion. See Mahe Rolf, “A Hall of Mirrors: Sovietizing Culture 
under Stalinism,” Slavic Review 68, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 601-2.

29 GARF, f.7576, op.24, d.3, l.39.

30 GARF, f.7576, op.10, d.1, l.69ob.

31 Hellbeck, Revolution on my Mind, 156.

York, 1993), 124.
HOW WIDE IS MY MOTHERLAND: MOVING THROUGH SPACE AND TIME IN AKLENSANDROV’S MUSICALS

JAMES VON GELDERN

Choreography was an uneasy component of the Soviet cultural arsenal well into the 1930s. The reluctance of Russia's main opera and ballet companies to adapt their art to the Soviet aesthetic consigned dance to second-class citizenship for many years. Ballet entered the company of the Soviet muses most successfully when its traditions and their durability were recognized, accepted, and incorporated in the 1930s into the Stalinist aesthetic of power. Soviet ballet, the most prominent and most publicized of dance forms, would in the Bolshoi become the elegant backdrop to the Soviet elite. Great political events and famous speeches happened there; the Kremlin eminences graced the Ioges and tsar's former box. Ballerinas and Bolsheviks mixed socially and in secret; Muscovites in the know shared gossip and rumors of back-stage goings-on.

Dance nonetheless would struggle to secure recognition as a socialist art form. To gain that status would mean not only aesthetic validation but also the professional and material rewards enjoyed by other arts and artists. Ultimately in the 1930s ballet could converge with other socialist activities as its highly trained principals and dancers of the corps de ballet replicated the disciplined body of the factory work force, the military corps, and physical-culturalists. Their order, cohesion, and obedience to the command of the ballet director mimicked the performances of other loyal adherents of the Soviet order. Dance would also find allies in other forms that had realized a Soviet aesthetic: the cinema, which might have been anticipated, and architecture, which might not. The alliance was most fruitfully realized in Grigorii Aleksandrov's musical comedies of the 1930s. The medium of film, above all the newly mobile camera lens deployed by Aleksandrov, united the social and physical movements of his heroes and heroines with the architectural centers of Stalin's Russia, the past and present glories of Moscow, starting with the Kremlin and the Bolshoi.

Much has been written about these still popular movies, though little about the choreography in them. Indeed, spectacular though the program numbers in The Merry Fellows (1934) or Circus (1936) might have been, there is little to distinguish them from the Hollywood extravaganzas of Busby Berkeley, whose influence Aleksandrov freely acknowledged. But if we consider dance in the larger sense of the choreographed movement of bodies through space and time, then there is much to distinguish these movies from their peers abroad, in the stages they occupied, the people they featured, the life journeys they charted, and the aspirations they fulfilled. Here if they are arguably socialist and less arguably realistic, they are most definitely Soviet, both in the popular cultures they represented and in the power aesthetic they helped create.

Merry Fellows (1934), Circus (1936), Volga-Volga (1938), and Radiant Path (1940) are about many things we need not repeat at length: the coming into Soviet personhood, embodied by Liubov Orlova's Stakhanovite weaver in Radiant Path; the cheerful pluckiness of the Russian people in the face of all obstacles, natural and bureaucratic; the classic Soviet “go-to-Moscow” plot. A prominent presence in all the movies is the architecture of the Soviet capital, both in its classic sacred center, and the new projects of the 1930s. Each movie is about the movement of a central character or characters from the Soviet periphery — the Crimean town of Abrau, or the Little Grand Hotel from which Tanya begins her radiant path to Moscow — to the center of Soviet being, either its once and present centers in the Kremlin or Bolshoi Theater, or its new centers, the Hotel Moscow, the Moscow-Volga Riverboat Terminal, or the greatest of all, VDNKh (Exhibit of Achievements of the National Economy). The movie camera caresses the architectural wonders of the Soviet state, the most visible aesthetic embodiment of its power and glory. Aleksandrov's Moscow, so filled with cheerful humor, shares this feature with his contemporary Leni Riefenstahl and her Berlin.

The architecture of Moscow provided a stage from which dance could enter Soviet life. Merry Fellows did so in relatively unimaginative fashion, perhaps because this was Aleksandrov's first foray into the genre of filmed dance. Aleksandrov's camera transported Leonid Utesov and Orlova from Crimean obscurity to the Bolshoi main stage, where they performed not the classical ballet that was traditional for that stage, not a recognizably Soviet form of dance, but a Hollywood-style extravaganza. The film concludes with a shot that would become characteristic of the Aleksandrov films, a zoom-out. The zoom shot implies rapid movement in time and space, creating displacement and placing a person or object in a wider context. Here the zoom goes from our heroes on the Bolshoi stage out to the audience, outside to the theater and then presumably to the entire Soviet Union. The shot does not reverse but extends the journey of our heroes, from Abrau to Moscow, then from the Bolshoi stage to the great stage of the Soviet Union.

The film medium subsequently allowed dance to move from its permanent home on the stage to other stages not traditionally associated with dance, and then like the ideal Soviet art form, into life itself. That of course would take place in Circus, where the extravagant finale took place in the famed single ring of the Moscow
Circus. The choral pageant seemed to expand the ring to many times its normal size, and in case the meaning of the pageant hadn't registered, it ends with another zoom-out, this one including a sudden displacement from the circus to a May Day demonstration, which further extension shows to be on Red Square, among the diverse peoples of the Union, and, in effigy, their great leaders.

It would seem that the finale has brought filmed dance to the most sacred space of the Soviet Union, Red Square. But just as important is the cinematic unification of the ancient sacral spaces of Moscow with their Stalin-era kin. Each of the final three films features a spanking new architectural space. The architectonic of Circus was provided by the Hotel Moscow, the coeval of the movie, both brought into the world in 1936. If the movie's finale zooms from the circus to the square, this shot is presaged in reverse by a zoom-in from Red Square through the hotel's picture window to the heroine and circus director Martynov, composing the soon-to-be unofficial national anthem, “Broad Is My Homeland.” The zoom mimics the symbolic gesture at the heart of the film, which links the periphery to Moscow, banishment to acceptance, old to new, the local to the universal Soviet.

The successor film, Volga-Volga, staged its performance at another monument of Stalinist construction, the Moscow-Volga Canal, built by convict labor and completed in 1938, the year the film hit the screens. This film, like its predecessors, brought its heroes from the Russian outlands to the center, linking them to the newest architectural manifestation of the Stalinist order, the Moscow River Station, constructed at the terminus of the prisoner-built waterway. It bared the device of the Aleksandrov films, staging its song and dance in, literally, a song and dance competition.

Aleksandrov's aesthetic was most fully realized in the last of the pre-war films, Radiant Path. Here the plot, and the journey of the heroine Tanya Morozova, most faithfully tracks the visual metaphor of time and space represented by the zoom lens. The zoom-in at the beginning of the film makes explicit the assumed breadth of the motherland that precedes the other films, as the caravan of cranes flies into the generic Russian village over the steppe expanses. There is no bodily dance in Radiant Path, no need to stage a spectacle within the spectacle, because the heroine herself is now the choreographer and not the choreographed, having achieved full Soviet agency. Her dancers are no longer her fellow performers and comrades, but the things of Soviet life, the shuttles and looms of the factory where she rises from the rank of washerwoman to hero-laborer. First sixteen, then thirty looms whirl under her command, with the express encouragement of Molotov, and then 150 looms with the endorsement of Sergo Ordzhonikidze. As the looms dance through their record-breaking eight-hour shift, Morozova sings her classic “March of the Enthusiasts.”

In the long penultimate chapter of the film, Tanya emerges from the Georgievskii Hall of the Kremlin Palace with her award for Stakhanovite labor, only to confront her own image in a mirror. As she first gazes into and then steps through the mirror, she sees the various iterations of herself in time, finally stepping into the future and flying away through the skies. Her journey begins at the Kremlin, traverses the entire Union including the Caucasus mountains, and returns from the old Moscow to the new, the great exhibit of VDNKh, which opened the year that the film reached the screens. This long tracking shot replays and reverses the zoom-in at the beginning of the film, mirroring the visual metaphor of time and space at the heart of all the films.

In Radiant Path, work, play, and art became one, as Marx had predicted they would under communism. In similar fashion, Aleksandrov's lens in his four films united the little person and the grand, the periphery with the center, the old and new sacred spaces of Russia. He created a visual space that the average Russian viewer could identify as one that they might share; and at the same time, created an aesthetic of the new Moscow that accommodated the growing power of the Soviet state, centered in Moscow and the Kremlin.
The Red Poppy and 1927: Translating Contemporary China into Soviet Ballet

Edward Tyerman

Abstract

The Red Poppy (Krasnyi mak), a dramatic spectacle about a Chinese dancer who sacrifices her life to save a Soviet naval captain, was canonized in posterity as the first properly “Soviet” ballet. Its reception on debut in 1927 was more ambiguous. This paper reads The Red Poppy’s original production as a combined response to two significant contemporary imperatives: the aesthetic imperative to demonstrate ballet’s ability to shake off its past preoccupations with the exotic; and the political imperative to represent Soviet internationalism as the inverse of tsarist imperialism. In both cases, the inversion of the past remained incomplete. In the name of psychological symbolism, an exotic, fantastical China was retained in the opium dream that dominated Act II. The choice of the poppy as a symbol of Chinese national liberation, meanwhile, raised uncomfortable associations with the Opium Wars, the paradigmatic moment of imperialist incursion into China. The Bolshoi production’s attempt to repurpose the meaning of the poppy was marked by a persistent act of mistranslation. The heroine’s name approximates the Chinese word for “peach blossom”: “táohuā.” However, the various participants in the original production repeatedly insisted that it meant “red poppy.” By tying the flower’s identity to that of the lead dancer, The Red Poppy sought to transform the poppy’s meaning, and the meaning of Sino-Russian relations, by analogy with the redemptive path travelled by the heroine towards revolutionary consciousness.
This paper makes the argument that during the final years of the 1920s in Russia the question of how to make ballet worthy of the new Marxist-Leninist state played a significant role in transforming aesthetic experience.

It helped spur the interpenetration of economic processes and modes of social organization with new aesthetic categories. In the process there were fundamental changes in understanding the idea of art as non-alienated labor. It was hoped that a shift in content, audience, and style would allow the worker (ballet dancer) to be related to the product of his labor and engage in it as a meaningful part of his existence. The athletic and acrobatic body could thus become a new index to the status of performing between labor and play. In tandem with the new economic policies and their quest for a simpler and noncapitalist relation to production, circulation, and consumption, dance was routed through acrobatic and athletic movement vocabularies.

A rich perspective from which to view this transformation is the before-during-and-after stages of the ballet The Golden Age, the work that effectively capped much of the creative momentum of the Silver Age. At the same time the reception afforded The Golden Age would unintentionally herald the retreat of these earlier decades of creativity into more covert and coded forms of innovation. More broadly it was retrospectively a signpost marking the subsequent turn toward a loss of tension between aesthetic categories and economic systems, as art was called upon to perform an increasingly structural function and position.¹

In place of the nineteenth-century ballets exemplifying the grand classical aesthetic categories of the sublime and the beautiful, the athletic and acrobatic were now looked to as offering a more direct medium and aesthetic for reflecting on the relation between art and society.

This is the historic moment that Leonid Yakobson, the 25-year-old choreographer for the second of the three acts of The Golden Age, inherited. He was still new to ballet, having only joined the corps of the Leningrad State Academic Theatre for Opera and Ballet a year earlier, after discovering ballet as a 17-year-old orphan. Yakobson had already choreographed 19 miniatures, brief dances of 5-7 minutes in length, for his fellow dancers at GATO (renamed the Kirov Ballet in 1935). He had also carved a name for himself as a polemicist. He was agitating and alienating ballet traditionalists with his articles against classicism as part of the rich ferment of ideas about art in the 1920s. The story begins with the announcement of a ballet libretto competition in a full-page notice in the January 13, 1929 issue of Zhizn’ iskusstva (Life of Art), a Soviet newspaper devoted to literature and art.

The winner would receive a large cash award and the distinction of having his libretto produced as an evening-long ballet. Although the idea for a competition had originally been proposed at a 1927 meeting of theatrical workers, the decision to implement it now, two years later, was in response to the dearth of Soviet-appropriate ballets. The announcement of the competition carried with it a detailed listing of eight stipulations. Effectively these form a de facto position statement of the values of the new Soviet ballet theatre.

The broad public solicitation of submissions for a new ballet libretto seems egalitarian on the surface. In reality it was disingenuous because the number of possible librettists, choreographers, and composers in Leningrad was not legion but rather a small, well-known pool of people. The prizes were listed at 300, 200, and 100 rubles, presumably a first, second, and third place, although no mention is ever made of any runners-up. Based on the value of the ruble in 1929 the size of these prizes is remarkable – 300 rubles was the amount that the USSR government defined in May 1929 as the annual income for an average industrial worker or well-off kulak farmer – a
testament to the extraordinarily high value placed on the competition, since the winning work would be produced on the former Mariinsky stage, the major venue for ballet in Leningrad.

The context of this search for a new Soviet ballet librettist offers a glimpse into the tightly scripted ideological constraints shaping artistic imagination during the New Economic Program (NEP) period, which had formally begun in 1921 and ended in 1928, although its impact was felt earlier in the disappearance of several of the private ballet studios that had supported innovative work. Ideology, not choreography or even the musical score, was positioned as the genesis of a ballet; instead it was a text-based scenario. This approach also intensified the reach of Communist Party oversight into the actual act of ballet creation – so that the Party’s desires and standards literally dictated even the conceptualization of a ballet. The announcement of the libretto competition noted that the new work would premiere at the State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet, the company Fyodor Lopukhov was still actively directing. He would be fired the following year, in part for failing to produce successful “Soviet” ballets. The Party’s interference in the personal affairs of the company was deepening, removing the decision-making about repertory from Lopukhov and reducing his role to that of someone who matches choreographers to received projects.

The competition’s call for submissions was effectively what the committee hoped would be a recipe for ideologically correct ballet. The opening paragraph and summaries of the eight demands the libretto must satisfy exemplified this tone:

**Stipulations of the Competition on the Creation of a Libretto for Soviet Ballet**

Having announced a contest on the composition of librettos for Soviet ballet, the State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet is directed by the following considerations:

Choreography, until recent times an art preeminently of the court aristocracy, now must become, thematically and formally, Soviet art. The old ballets have outlived themselves and have ceased to satisfy the mass of spectators. The new spectator demands that the choreographic theatre bring meaning to scenic activity taken from events near to us. The libretto of contemporary ballet is not just an accidental frame for the display of dance which lacks inner cohesion and does not issue from the basic activity – but the libretto is a choreographic drama, obligated to satisfy all the demands laid upon Soviet dramaturgy in general.

To write a really contemporary scenario for ballet is to take a first step along the way in the path of creating a Soviet choreographic theatre.

A libretto presented to the contest must satisfy the following demands:

1) Revolutionary theme […].

2) Themes must be developed on the level of a concrete perception of reality, and not by constructing abstract dance forms loaded with symbolic or allegorical meaning […].

3) It is desirable to build a spectacle on mass movements […].

4) It is necessary that intrigue in the scenario be sufficiently uncomplicated for it to be understood as a whole from pantomime […].

5) It is necessary that the librettist take into account the achievements of contemporary theatrical technique […].

6) Not presenting any kind of categorical demands concerning the genre of the scenario, the State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet points to the possibilities of use of the following genres: contemporary revues, Soviet revues, lyric-heroic poems, choreographic comedies and satires, contemporary fairy-plays.

7) It is desirable that the scenario of the ballet give the balletmaster material for pantomime […], but also new forms of dance: acrobatics, physical culture, and others – and new pantomime gestures.

8) The scenario of the ballet must be calculated as a whole evening performance (two or three hours of pure activity).³

There is no gray here – everything is focused with the deliberateness of factory production. The last item, Number 8, signals the return of the full-length ballet, replacing the short miniature or etude associated with earlier modernism.⁴

The libretto selected as the winner was written by a forty-eight-year-old film and musical theater director, Aleksandr Viktorovich Ivanovsky, a man employed by the Soviet State-controlled film industry in Leningrad. Ivanovsky seems to have checked off all the boxes as he drafted his libretto, resulting in a narrative so crammed with ideological clichés that it reads like a spoof of Soviet art. Ivanovsky’s libretto is set in a capitalist city where an industrial exhibit, “The Golden Age,” the ballet’s title (Zolotoi vek, 1930), is taking place. Approaching the guidelines like a shopping list, Ivanovsky scripted a plot across three acts about the fictional adventures of a
Soviet soccer team (Dinamo) at an industrial exhibition, where they have a series of altercations both ethical and physical with a delegation from a capitalist country called Fashlandiya. The number of characters and events depicted in the first act alone is huge – African American boxers, corrupt Fascist boxing referees, Soviet citizens, football captains, fascist cabaret dancers, and a diva argue, fight, and flee. In the second act a Soviet Komsomol woman and an African American man walk around the city, and the fascist police frame and arrest them. The third and final act happens in a music hall near the exhibition where a series of popular dances — a tango, tap dance, and polka — are performed along with the screening of film footage of the Red Front rescuing prisoners. It culminates with a grand finale dance symbolizing the cooperation of workers in the joy of labor.

Once Ivanovsky was announced as the winner in the spring, Lopukhov was delegated to select the choreographers to realize the libretto. Deciding to divide the choreography up among three choreographers – one for each long act – Lopukhov picked two better known choreographers, Vasily Vainonen and Vladimir Chesnakov, for Acts I and III, and then, surprisingly, he selected the young, unknown ballet artist, Yakobson, and assigned him Act II, the sequence with the most direct sports and acrobatic references. Shostakovich, in a period of rising success and fame, was commissioned to create the score, the first of the three ballets he would compose in the period 1929-1935 (The Bright Stream and Bolte were the others).

Shostakovich’s score masterfully and ironically animates the libretto, sectioning it into thirty-seven numbers, each marked by rich melodic and harmonic invention. The score is witty and densely rhythmic, giving the choreographers a musical platform that is far more kinesthetically suggestive than the libretto. The music unfolds with a lively expansiveness, taking the listener on a tour of physical rhythms linked to sport and art, with just enough dissonance and musical quotations to suggest the composer’s ironic detachment from the political subject at hand. Shostakovich said he was striving to suggest the composer’s ironic detachment from the political subject at hand. Shostakovich said he was striving to suggest the composer’s ironic detachment from the political subject at hand. He did this through his use of dance melodies to tell social tales in tandem with the choreography. Many of the predictable scenes of political, racial, and class conflict in The Golden Age were filtered through the medium of movement itself — especially the vocabularies of sports and popular dances of the 1920s. These were augmented with milling crowds at the industrial exhibition, police, detectives, young people dancing the tango and foxtrot, athletes posturing, and even a Josephine Baker-styled Diva character dancing an erotic adagio. Shostakovich made the libretto danceable and gave the choreographers a dramatic and sonic floor on which to visualize these complex movement battles.

The Golden Age score percolates with melody, harmonic invention, and a gentle sarcasm evident in the “Overture” that opens the ballet, where scurrying musical lines seem to rush in from all directions at once, like the overload of themes in the plot. Shostakovich’s use of popular dance and music-hall music melodies in The Golden Age makes them sound like parodies to contemporary ears. This consciousness was an important aspect for the composer at the time, and a critical distinction, since any other use of these “decadent” forms could be read as an embrace of them. Early in 1930 Shostakovich’s sentiments about this appeared in print in the RAPM (Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians) journal Proletarskii muzykant (Proletarian Musician). Responding to the work of composers who wrote “light music” such as foxtrots, etc., he used the term “wrecking activity” to signify the danger of the publication and performance of this kind of popular music. Fitzpatrick, who summarizes the major interpretive paradigm for the Soviet Cultural Revolution as an assault on the pre-Revolutionary Russian intelligentsia, suggests that Proletarskii muzykant was the vehicle of a newly emerged cadre of communist specialists during the first Five-Year Plan – who effectively played out a class war in the cultural arena of journals like this one during its brief life from 1929-32. Shostakovich’s remarks against light music were published a few months before the premiere of The Golden Age, and they underline how carefully he used “light music,” i.e., dance references, in his score.

The Golden Age occupies a curious place in Soviet
cultural lore because it was born at a moment of enthusiasm for what ideology and art conjoined might produce and because such a stellar cast of young artists assembl ed to realize it. Yet it disappeared within a few performances of its première. Reportedly it was a failure; certainly the Soviet leadership lashed out at it, and all of its various components were essentially lost. The choreography vanished, and what remained were scattered accounts and a couple of Valentina Khodasevich's sketches for her remarkable costumes. Shostakovich's score was put away. It remained unpublished in his archives for 34 years until 1994, when conductor Gennady Rozhdestvensky's recording of the ballet's score, played by the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, appeared.

What has not been recovered is just how monumental a dance event the première of *The Golden Age* was, and what a remarkable act of experimentation and artistry from deep within Soviet and Russian culture it represented. It has been called the first anti-fascist ballet, because of its plot details, but it is also the first major ballet of the emerging "neo-traditionalism," although with modernist elements. *The Golden Age* maps a future for ballet, wrapped inside a Soviet skin, and made at a moment when the fault lines of control and creation were being firmly established. The question of why it was so important, both in terms of its impact, and the hasting of its burial, leads directly into the consolidation of the modernist strains and disruption of the equation between art production and economic production that Yakobson would shield inside his ballets over the next several decades. Here is where the innovations collided: ballet modernism hibernated in Soviet Russia in Yakobson's works because the government needed just enough new works to keep ballet alive, yet wanted to control them as much as possible just short of suffocating them.

The question of how *The Golden Age* passed into Soviet history as a failure, when it was initially a popular success with audiences, suggests the ways failure and success could be designated retrospectively by the Soviet censorship apparatus. *The Golden Age* premiered on October 26, 1930 to enthusiastic audiences while the assessments of proletarian critics were much more negative. As part of the 1930-31 season at the Mariinsky Theater it was performed eighteen times, almost every other week for the length of the season from October to June. As Manashir Abramovich Yakubov, director of the DSCH publishing house and president of Russia's Dmitri Shostakovich Society, has noted, this extended run of so many performances over several months is generally what happens to a ballet that is an artistic and popular success. The ballet was given ten performances in 1930 and eight in 1931, with additional performances mounted in Kiev in 1930 and Odessa in 1931. Yet the official cultural memory constructed around *The Golden Age* labeled it a flop, a stigma that remained attached to it for the next sixty-five years.

What this remarkable team of artists had done was to take a seemingly impossible set of constraints, honor every limitation, and come up with a witty, moving, sophisticated, and successful work of art. The surface message may have been obedient to the Party line, but the medium, tone, aesthetic, and style of the best of it were wonderfully disobedient. Much more dangerous to the Soviet position than a short-term success, *The Golden Age* was overwritten as a failure, thus revealing the essential problematic of making art to please the Soviet state. It was evidence of the capacity of even the mildest messages to be subversive and frightening to the regime. Although he was young, Yakobson was a logical choice for Lopukhov when it came to selecting the choreographer to stage the second act of *The Golden Age*. He had been advocating the use of more athletic vocabularies in his published writings as well as the use of more pantomime and acrobatics to increase ballet's accessibility to the general public through works such as *Sports March*. At this point in his career he believed sincerely that both could be possible and that a dance work of serious artistry, but hewing to Party lines and guidelines, could be achieved.

One dancer who appeared in the Sports and Games scene of *The Golden Age*, Natalia Sheremetyeva, then a 13-year-old student in the Leningrad Choreographic Institute, recalled how minutely detailed Yakobson's shaping of each individual's actions in the sports sequences had been. He structured his staging so that all of the athletes for the various sports were in motion simultaneously in different parts of the stadium, just as in a real warm-up for a sports event — possibly an echo of V. E. Meyerhold's stagings. In her memoirs, written at the age of 90, Sheremetyeva recalled vividly the meticulous care Yakobson took to construct the sports and games sequence of the ballet so that it looked spontaneous. “We had to recreate precisely the moves of a volleyball game, the teams were next to each other, and there was an imaginary net separating them. After the ball was put in play, it was hit back either with a high jump or at the level of the floor and we had to keep constantly moving from place to place. All this was put together with a spritely rhythm and so it looked very good and was effective and attractive,” she wrote. “But it was not satisfying because the rehearsals were as a rule very painful and torturous. Portraying a live game made you want to improvise, but instead Yakobson demanded we reproduce exactly each movement staged by him.” As Sheremetyeva recalls, Yakobson also saw that the effect was stilted, but rather than back off, he kept inserting revisions until the young dancers were lost, and then he grew even more impatient, shouting his disapproval at them.

Two small black-and-white rehearsal photos from Act II Scene 4 of *The Golden Age* in the St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music, and reproduced in Soviet ballet critic Galina Dobrovolskaya’s 1968 Russian monograph on Yakobson, *Baletmeister Leonid Yakobson*, provide one of the few glimpses of Yakobson's original choreography for the ballet. The first thing one notices is that these photos document labor. In each photo,
a quintet of dancers, four men and one woman, are captured in a moment of work, arrested in the midst of a big physical action. This makes their formation feel not so much static as temporarily arrested.

In the more dramatic of the two, 20-year-old Galina Ulanova stands on the stomach of Konstantin Sergeyev, who lies stretched on the floor. He holds his right arm and right leg with rigid straightness at 45-degree angles. With one foot balancing on Sergeyev's abdomen Ulanova curves over backward in a deep and beautifully arched backbend. Ulanova's hands walk along Sergeyev's uplifted leg as if at any moment she might kick her legs over her head and do a complete 360-degree back flip onto her feet.

Only two years in the Leningrad State Academic Theatre and Ballet at this point, Ulanova already projected the elegance, lightness, and pliant ease that would become her signature qualities as she ascended to the rank of prima ballerina. For a classically trained female ballet dancer her action looks like an unusual assignment and a stretch for her as a ballerina, but the character she portrays is not. In The Golden Age Ulanova plays a Soviet Komsomol woman, the “good” female who offsets the “Diva” — the dangerous and seductive evil female lead representing the Capitalists.

It is not likely at this early stage of both their careers that Yakobson knew enough about Ulanova’s evolving politics to be consciously making an inside political joke, but casting her as a member of the Komsomol, the category of junior members of the Communist Party in their teens and early twenties, was neatly apt. Since 1922 the focus of the Komsomol had shifted toward a new emphasis on the physical, specifically to engage members in health activities and sports among other industrial and service projects, so the actions and theme were also realistic and Ulanova herself within a few years would be the ballerina most emblematic of The Party. Recalling her role in Yakobson’s choreography for The Golden Age in a memorial essay she wrote nearly fifty years later, Ulanova noted, “I remember as well, how Yakobson had been assigned to stage one act of the ballet, The Golden Age, in which, it turned out, my four partners and I danced the sportsmen number. [But] alas, informally at work, I met Yakobson only once. He was one of the three choreographers who staged the ballet The Golden Age, to the music of Dmitri Shostakovich. I danced the role of the Komsomol Sportswoman, the so-called positive heroine of the ballet. To me, the physical culture scene remains the best in the ballet. In it Yakobson elicited from us not a replica of gymnastic movement, but the figurative sensation of athletic lightness, the beauty of the human body in action.”20

The second rehearsal photo, Scene 4 of the ballet, “Dance of the Western Komsomol Girl and Four Sportsmen,” like the first with Ulanova, appears to represent labor performed by athletic bodies arranged aesthetically — a curious hybrid that looks consciously and provocatively experimental, as if Yakobson were taking the proletariat vocabulary of daily actions, done by real people, and grafting them onto a classically trained cast. This is the figurative sensation of athletic lightness Ulanova mentions. In this second photo Yakobson stands in a deep squat in the center of a semicircle of three men, each frozen in the pose of a Herculean sportsman hurling a discus or a spear, or shooting a bow. The “sport” in which Yakobson poses however, is anomalous, or perhaps prophetic. He grasps the hands and ankles of Olga Mungalova, a dancer with exquisitely long legs and about whom the young George Balanchine once said, “Every acrobatic trick was a snap for her,” when she had performed as a student in Balanchine’s 1920 work La Nuit.21 Mungalova’s expression, as she rehearses with Yakobson, is calm, while her body is held in a bowed backward curving shape, as if she were a human projectile that he was about to scoot along the floor and then hurl into space.

What makes Yakobson’s use of these non-dance vocabularies different is the manner in which he works to integrate the shapes and dynamics of non-dance gestures into the bodily form of classical ballet. It is not a clean sweep like the birth and refinement of dance modernism in America in the 1920s and 1930s, or the theatrical inventions of Meyerhold and Stanislavsky in pre- and postrevolutionary Russia. Rather Yakobson is taking the first steps in The Golden Age toward what will become his credo — “I do what the music tells me” — and the creation of a classically-based yet eclectic movement vocabulary. It’s an accommodation from the sensibility and vocabulary of classical ballet into a non-literal and less presentational form of movement. Askold Makarov, a leading member of the Kirov Ballet who danced the leads in several later Yakobson ballets, has spoken about the interior experience of this style from his years of performing Yakobson’s work, in prose that applies equally well to The Golden Age:

Leonid Yakobson was obsessed by a quest for new ways in the ballet art. Eschewing the classical dance, he staged his works, both in large or small genres, on principles of physical culture. He grasped the gymnastic acrobatic style as one expressive of his times. Power, youth, the beauty of the human body, a heartiness of spirit, energy—should these not be the attributes of a new idiom in choreographic art?22

Beyond the daring of the physical postures that Yakobson assigns both Ulanova and Mungalova in the athletic sequences, their costumes by the ballet’s modernist designer, Valentina Khodasevich, were equally avant-garde. Photographs of two of the surviving costume sketches in the St. Petersburg State Museum of Theater and Music, both for female dancers, suggest how Khodasevich’s costumes and visual designs must have extended this aesthetic of athleticism and symbolic political commentary. One of the sketches is labeled
with the headline “Soviet Dance,” a reference to the allegiance of the character. Khodasevich’s costume for a sportswoman is dynamic and functionally fashionable, depicting a female dancer in a short skirt and blouse. The texture of the costumes conveys sleekness and shininess, and Khodasevich writes on the sketch specifying silk, leather, or oilcloth, as a less expensive alternative for the fabrics. The colors she chooses are intense and pure with red, black, or white sections appliquéd onto the skirts and blouses. The realism of Khodasevich’s costume carries through to the little accoutrements of a red kerchief knotted functionally around the female dancer’s hair, fashionable red and black sports shoes, and a black wristwatch with a red band. Khodasevich has also noted that the woman in her sketch is one of four female soloists in The Golden Age, that her energy is “impetuous and wild,” and her dance style “folkish and not at all classical.” A second sketch for a much more sparsely costumed female, identified as being in “Dance of the World (based on Class (system))” is for a woman in a brightly striped hard hat who stands on her full pointes, her body bare except for a narrow bandeau across her breasts and a tennis skirt of red and white stripes with a patch of blue stars over the crotch. The narrow bandeau she wears over her breasts and the wristbands are both in the colors and designs of the French flag, with pockets and points in the Italian and other nationalities’ colors. Despite these allegiances she is left essentially uncovered. The impression is that every element of the production is working overtime to pack in the details of its cultural references and to shape its political message without ambiguity.

Khodasevich was already a respected theatrical designer when she joined The Golden Age team. Her pedigree as an artistic radical stretched back to the early 1920s when, influenced by Kazimir Malevich’s sets and figures for Victory Over the Sun (1913) and other works, she had designed the violently asymmetric and angular sets and costumes for the 1922 constructivist theater production of Archangel Michael (Arkhangel Mikhail). Prior to The Golden Age her work had been featured in the Exhibition of Russian Stage Designs 1917-1927, held at the Academy of Arts in Leningrad in 1927. So when she was selected for The Golden Age the producers were picking a serious and adventurous artist. Khodasevich was a theater designer who, in the spirit of the earlier Cubo-Futurist artists Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova, was boldly applying an overall design concept linking performers’ costumes to makeup and hair, so that the effect was of a tightly unified yet radical aesthetic. Khodasevich’s costume designs appear simultaneously dynamic yet logical, and their lines are clean and sharp. Her bold play with geometrical elements and ornamental patterns in her costumes refer to both everyday clothing and traditional theatrical costumes. Khodasevich’s designs, like Yakobson’s choreography and Shostakovich’s score, merge everyday elements. In this instance the modernist hybrid of the costumes parallels the choreography and décor, which also play between historical and realistic clothing and traditional theatrical costumes.

The myth of The Golden Age as an artistic failure lingered until 1995, when a Shostakovich scholar, Manashir Abramovich Yakubov, made the first in-depth investigation of its reception. He discovered that, anxious about what their competition had yielded, the officials in 1930 sought to bury The Golden Age retrospectively. The journals Proletarskii muzykant and Rabochii i teatr both published withering ideological critiques. Proletarskii muzykant noted that “such a coarse alloy of nauseating fox-trots and other decadent dances…is insufferable on the academic stage,” and “the ideological harm of such productions is evident.” Ten days following the premiere of The Golden Age, Rabochii i teatr (Worker and Theater) published a lengthy assessment of the ballet by Yury Brodersen, entitled “Legalization of Time-serving.” “How could it happen that the ideology of the bourgeoisie music hall, that urbanist mongrel, that ideology so hostile to the Soviet theater – how could it penetrate to the stage of the state ballet theater, and what is more, in such an excessive dose?” he asked. “Instead of using every means to prevent elements of bourgeois art from penetrating to the Soviet stage; instead of completely exposing the producers who insinuated the ideology of the western pigsty on to the stage under the guise of satirical interpretation, the Arts Political Council did everything it could to justify the staging of this unfortunate performance.”

Brodersen, who had sparred with Yak kobson in print, tempered his remarks about the young choreographer’s work in The Golden Age, praising him for resisting the libretto’s formalism more effectively than the other choreographers did. He praises Yakobson as an undoubtedly talented choreographer, while cautioning that individual formalist successes cannot justify the cultivation of a subject-less dance.

In contrast to the party-dominated media, the arts press responded to the aesthetic dimensions of the performance itself. The musical director of the production, the conductor Aleksandr Gauk, noted in his memoirs that the adagio that Vainonen choreographed for Olga Iordan, who danced the seductive role of the Diva with virtuoso turns to tango and foxtrot rhythms mixed with classical ballet, generally resulted in demands for an encore in mid-performance. Gauk also recalled that even the orchestral entrance in the third act was received with enthusiastic applause and demands for an encore. Ballet critic Boris Lvov-Anokhin, reflecting on Yakobson’s career, noted that it was in The Golden Age that he developed a new “plastic language in keeping with the present time and based on springy, strong, athletic movements.”

Shostakovich, a man who could be deeply self-critical, gave a series of measured and extended assessments of the production, beginning two days after the premiere, when he wrote the following letter to the director of the Leningrad State Theaters, Zakhar Lyubinsky, who had been out of town for the premiere:

Dear Zakhar Isaakovich, the première of The Golden Age took place the
day before yesterday… In short, the performance went well. All of us who were responsible for writing it were very successful. There have not been any notices, but that is of little importance. What is important is that yesterday and the day before the audience judged our work… The performance was so successful that on 6 November it will be performed… at a gala session of the Leningrad City Soviet. It was the second and third acts that were the most successful. For some reason the first act left the audience unmoved. I put this down to the dance numbers being somewhat refined. So come along and see for yourself.

Shostakovich thought highly of the music he had written for the ballet, calling the score “unusually successful compared to many that I have done.” His most extended analysis of The Golden Age came in a reflective essay, “My Artistic Association with Leonid Yakobson,” in which he recalled Yakobson's visually arresting images. Shostakovich described these as encompassing both broad political humor as well as subtler tones, through the construction of cinematic images that play with both the quality and genres of theatrical time:

Pupils of the famous Leningrad Choreographic Institute participated in this ballet, depicting a game in which one dancer represented a capitalist. Dressed in tails and a top hat, the Capitalist suddenly disappeared into the general crowd where, unexpectedly and unnoticeably, his costume was ripped off, and before the spectators, lo and behold, stood a Pioneer. The chuckle emanating from the auditorium was the reward for this clever gimmick. Especially memorable was the mass-sporting scene, with its yellow décor that so resembled patches of sunlight, and matching costumes by Valentina Khodasevich. In this scene all types of sports were represented, transformed by Yakobson into choreographic statements. The entire presentation had been so harmonically unified into one whole, that after an extraordinarily dynamic action, the entire ensemble abruptly stopped and slowly floated as in slow motion filming. I no longer heard the music, because of the ovation from the auditorium acclaiming this choreographic device.

An unforgettable evening! It seemed to me that Yakobson and I were being born into art, and that through his choreographic interpretation, my music began to resonate in a new way. From that time on, Yakobson's artistic path never ceased to interest me.\(^{30}\)

The Golden Age’s Legacy

Shostakovich’s score for The Golden Age has in retrospect has been called the next stage in the development of Russian ballet music after Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky. Yakobson provided choreography that endeavored to move Russian ballet forward in that same way. However, as the revolutionary ideology of the new Soviet state shifted again, the ballet found itself answering questions that had been asked in one ideological moment and were now being answered in a far different and more hostile climate.\(^{32}\)

In retrospect that call for the competition became what might be called a Yes-and-No Manifesto for Yakobson. In the process of responding to it via The Golden Age Yakobson was on the cusp of discovering aesthetic strategies for how to appear accommodating on the surface while pedaling swiftly against the tide below.

It took him forty-one years to find a way to pursue such strategies. It’s called Exercise XX, and it remounts the edge of abstraction with which The Golden Age flirted. Here the metaphor is a ballet class – but take away the barre, and its formalism and inversion of classicism become evident. The officials thought it was mocking Russian ballet – they did not see that it was an homage through amplification and extension.

Key innovations of The Golden Age that Yakobson carried forward include the stripped-down athleticism, acrobatic movements, and cinematic effects rendered choreographically so the artifice and art are simultaneously in view. Those on the NO side of the equation include his favoring dance miniatures rather than full-length works, a Yes and a No to the accessibility of his subjects, and a refusal to hew to Party narratives. In inviting possible satire in their call for submissions (#6), the officials’ discomfort when it was delivered was a stark reminder to Yakobson about how quickly the Party could do an about-face through its directives. This lesson would also become part of Yakobson’s arsenal of approaches in his “Yes and No” of accommodation and resistance to the Soviet state, born out of these two decades of possibility.

Notes

1 As Frederic Jameson has noted, the increasing interpenetration of culture and economy “destabilizes art’s more specifically modernist 20th century mission of producing perceptual shocks,” and thus weaker aesthetic categories emerge (Sianne Ngai, Our Aesthetic Economy, 154).


4 Lynn Garafola, correspondence with author, November 2012. As Lynn Garafola has noted, the “drambalet” was not only a full-evening form, it was also strongly plot driven, unlike the “etudes” of Goleizovsky and Nijinska, which tended to be plotless.

5 “Dinamo” is also the name of a real, still-operating soccer team founded in Leningrad in 1922.

6 Swift, Art of the Dance, 88.

7 Derek C. Hultme, Dmitri Shostakovich Catalogue: The First Hundred Years and Beyond (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 52.


9 This quality of Shostakovich’s score is one of the features that drew Russian choreographers Yury Grigorovich and Alexei Ratmansky to stage their own versions of The Golden Age. Grigorovich premiered his in 1982, and Ratmansky has made recreations of all three Shostakovich ballets in the twenty-first century.


11 Ibid.

12 The performance on October 26, 1930, at the Mariinsky Theatre had the following cast: Galina Ulanova (Komsomolka), Olga Jordan (Diva), Olga Mungalova (Western Komomolka), Boris Shavrov (Fascist), and Alla Shelest (Angel of Peace).

13 There is a video recording of the 1982 Yury Grigorovich choreography at the Bolshoi with Natalia Bessmertnova and Irek Mukhamedov in the leading parts. The conductor was Yury Simonov.

14 Lopukhov’s plotless Dance Symphony: The Magnificence of the Universe (1923) and Goleizovsky’s The Faun at Joseph the Beautiful are earlier plotless modernist works, as Lynn Garafola has noted (correspondence with author, 2012). Shelia Fitzpatrick has noted, in her Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times, that the term “Neotraditionalism,” is used in Ken Jowitt, New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 121–58; and Graeme Gill, The Origins of the Stalinist Political System (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 129–30.


16 DSCH is the Moscow publishing house that brought out the 150-part New Collected Works of Dmitri Shostakovich in 2005.


22 Askold Makarov, “Nestorov i Yakobson” [The tempestuous Yakobson], in Muzika i khoreografiia sovremenego baleta [The music and choreography of contemporary ballet], ed. Kremsh skeia, 2:166; trans. Ruth Rischin.


25 Proletarskii muzykant was published by the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (1923-1932). According to the Russian Wikipedia entry (http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Российская_ассоциация_пролетарских_музыкантов), it operated in the spirit of “bolshievization” of music culture. It was an organ of “tchekist” control and viewed many forms of classical music and jazz as ideologically alien to the proletariat. The entries on “Rabochii i
teatr" in Bolshaya Rossitskaya Entsiklopediya, 1992 (http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enc_sp/2183/ Pafovuiti) and Bolshaya Sovetskaia Entsiklopediya, 1969-78 (http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ bse/125543/Pafovuiti) do not state any relation to communist activities. A. V. Lunacharsky was one of the collaborators of the journal.


28 Ibid., 200.

29 Ibid., 194.

30 Ibid., 197.


32 What stands out in these accounts of Yakobson’s work in The Golden Age is the fluency with which he speaks in different registers through his choreography. He can play for the enchantment of spectacle by giving the audience an easy to grasp visual of the capitalist character that spirals into a Pioneer, presumably through a shift in his bodily attitude as well as his costume. But Yakobson can just as quickly raise the demands up a notch, and sample how in a young art form like film, spectators change so that tricks of cinema return us to the world with new perceptions about time and motion. The capacity of art to make the familiar strange (which Viktor Shklovsky theorized as “defamiliarization”) unfolds in these dance passages: they transform the familiar into the unfamiliar, and convey an aesthetic dimension to sports that is deeper than the mere sprinkling of athletic moves throughout a classical dance.

Finally what sealed the fate of The Golden Age was the progressing of the period of the Great Break, the ending of a short spell of semiprivate economic policy, and the beginning of the deadly period of forced collectivization and industrialization and tightening of control over Soviet culture that Stalin proclaimed in 1929. Two decades earlier, in his 1902 pamphlet, What Is to Be Done? (Chto delat?), Lenin had argued that the working class will not spontaneously become political simply by fighting economic battles with employers over wages, working hours, and the like. To convert the working class to Marxism, Lenin argues that Marxists should form a political party, or “vanguard,” of dedicated revolutionaries to spread Marxist political ideas among the workers. Yakobson had placed himself in that vanguard. Even after it became far too dangerous for that vanguard among artists to continue publicly, he persisted privately through his dances, taking the success, and failures, from The Golden Age forward.

55
The prestige that Russian ballet enjoyed internationally in the twentieth century and the complicated and competing agendas of promoting European high-culture forms, while simultaneously developing national identity, fostered the spread of ballet to the capitals of the new Soviet Republics in the 1930s. The installation of a properly Soviet ballet in the borderlands is most vivid in the case of Azerbaijan. The first step in this process proved the most difficult: the fusion of European and local art forms; the second involved their exhibition in Moscow and the ways in which the Dekadas of National Art, ten-day celebrations of a republic’s art forms, played a role in both celebrating and evaluating these nations’ artistic achievements.

Existing European opera theaters in Tbilisi and Baku made Georgia and Azerbaijan early targets for the development of high-art musical theater forms in those republics. Tbilisi could boast a small ballet troupe led by a Moscow dancer shortly after its opera and ballet theater opened in 1851 and became a popular destination for touring ensembles from the Russian capitals. Ballet in Baku developed later, and much faster, than in Tbilisi. The introduction of Western theatrical dancing in Baku required more than mere buildings or institutions: an art form that featured women and exposed legs would require more difficult marketing strategies in a Muslim nation. Yet ballet in Baku developed and built an audience in the 1930s and 1940s, and Azerbaijan’s ballet-makers played a prominent role in the creation of Soviet ballets in the 1950s and 1960s.

The training of Azerbaijani dancers and the development of ballet audiences in Baku proved problematic in the early Soviet period. Muslim prohibitions on public appearances – and performances – by women meant that at the première of the first Azerbaijani opera, Uzeyir Hajibeyov’s Lesi and Majmun (1908), the female lead was performed by a man, and the women in attendance sat behind heavy draperies, watching the performance through holes in the curtains, just as Russian women had witnessed the first local theatrical spectacles in the seventeenth century. The story of Gamar Almaz Ade, the nation’s first Azerbaijani ballerina, continues to be told as a heroic narrative: Gamar secretly studying ballet in Baku in the 1920s, her father’s death threats should she continue, and Gamar’s marriage to the director of the theater to save face.

At the same time, the Soviet project of the 1930s, to deploy “academic” art forms throughout the empire, demanded more than mere copies of Swan Lake or Don Quixote in the republics’ capitals; it called for local “national” ballets. Essentially, and despite the famous dictum of the time, these were often Muscovite in both form and content, though splashed through with local color – nods to native traditions in music, dance, and design. In “National in Form, Socialist in Content: Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics,” Marina Frolova-Walker describes what she calls this “unique and bizarre project” as:

The attempt to create, within the Caucasian and Central Asian republics of the USSR, national musical cultures that would reflect the musical nationalism that grew up in Moscow and St. Petersburg during the previous century. This project took shape during the early 1930s at the behest of Stalin, and did not lose momentum until some years after his death (1998, 332).

The situation in Azerbaijan provides a useful starting point in an investigation of the national dance question, given that the problem of Sovietizing conflicted with a variety of religious and social mores, most obviously the place of women in the new society. Azerbaijan did not lack a dance tradition; it merely lacked one tradition that could be easily adapted to the ballet stage. The local dance tradition featured two main types of dances: those for men, mostly in double rhythms, and those for women, usually in triple meters. These dances were performed in isolation: women danced for women or husbands; men danced for other men. Thus, the Soviet mission civilatrice in the Caucasus and Central Asian republics – and a viable national theatrical dance tradition – could only succeed once these cultural practices had been overcome. Ironically, the situation was similar to the one Peter the Great had faced in trying to modernize Russia, as was the solution. Just as Peter’s assemblies, or balls, were a means of forcing Russian women to socialize publicly, so theatrical dance would play a somewhat analogous role in the socialist socialization of the southern Soviet republics, with the example coming from a higher, European art tradition. The national works created in these republics were often created with direct aid from Moscow. Once established, these local cultural products could, in turn, be exhibited and consumed across the Soviet Union, and function as small celebrations of the socialist brotherhood among the republics of a diverse nation.

In Baku, operas and plays began to include local dances late in the nineteenth century, usually in scenes depicting court entertainments. These dances were performed by men or Russian women (Shikhlimskaya, 27, 28). Konstantin Stanislavsky, who saw national dances performed in an opera, noted that the female dancer “little
resembled a Turkish or a Spanish woman, as is usually the case in the balleticized versions of national dances” (29).

Gamar Almaz Ade was the first Azerbaijani woman to enter the ballet school, in 1924, four years after the local theaters and ballet studios were nationalized. Her exceptional promise led to study in Moscow and Leningrad, at composer Uzeyir Hajibeyov’s urging. The composer created the Azerbaijani Folk Dance Ensemble under the auspices of the State Philharmonic in 1934, three years before the Moiseyev group received its charter in Moscow. Hajibeyov put Almaz Ade in charge of the group in 1937. Almaz Ade recalled that

Hajibeyov assigned this ensemble the task of collecting folk dances from all of the regions of Azerbaijan and then introducing them onstage. We organized special expeditions of musicians, composers, and cameramen, and then sent them to various regions of Azerbaijan, where they collected folk dances. Those dances were later included in the repertoire of the ensemble and thus performed on a professional level (58).

Leila Shikhlinskaya’s history of the Azerbaijani ballet views those events as central to the dancer’s development as a choreographer and performer. “This journey became a new school of folk dance for Almaz Ade. It enriched her interpretative mastery and influenced her future creative work not only as a ballerina, but also as a future choreographer” (45). More to the point, “A master of the classical dance, Almaz Ade brought a more refined and exquisite manner of performance to the dance folklore of the republic, lending it a new artistic coloring” (ibid). The same writer enumerates the resulting “improvements” to the local dances: they became more difficult technically and gained plots. Both innovations speak to the major concerns of Soviet dance in the 1930s, the professionalization of approved dance forms (ballet and folk) and the preoccupation with narrative — the “dramatic” element of the drambalet, a new ballet genre in the 1930s that attempted to approximate the scale of Marius Petipa’s nineteenth-century classics as it explored new means of narrating the works’ often complex storylines.

Almaz Ade chose a suitable subject for her first attempt at choreography — an ancient legend of the people rising up against a despotic Khan — but Shikhlinskaya’s history lays the blame for its failure on the institution: “The Azerbaijani ballet theater had still not found the synthesis of musical and dance forms that would lead to the birth of an original national choreography” (48). In fact, Almaz Ade’s ballet was too short to qualify as a legitimate choreographic work in the 1930s. Tarlán (1939) had only one act, and one-act effusions scarcely suited the scale of Stalin-era monumentalism.

Almaz Ade might have also misjudged her audience or the lack of clarity in the assignment itself. Were the Azerbaijani dances to be incorporated into multi-act classical ballets for the benefit of Baku audiences, or those in Moscow or Kiev? Would the Baku public wish to see their folk epics performed as ballets? And how many national ballets would one nation need? In truth, these works were designed in part for export. Russian-language discussions of the national ballets produced in the Stalin era rarely mention their effect on local audiences.

As these national ballets were being created in the 1930s, Soviet arts bureaucrats devised a stunningly efficient system to exhibit, assess, and fine-tune the republics’ creative outputs: the ten-day arts festivals, called “Dekadas of National Arts.” Typically, these involved herding the artistic and creative elites of each nation onto a train bound for Moscow. The likes of Dmitry Shostakovich or Galina Ulanova would be among those meeting the delegation at the station with flowers, speeches, and brass bands. Pravda articles, ostensibly written by leading Moscow artists (Ulanova and Shostakovich again), punctuated the week of performances, art exhibits, and in post-World War II dekadas, poetry readings. Once the artists had gone home, the real assessment of their achievement began. Eventually, large volumes were produced documenting each step of the process, including the hosts’ final evaluation of the visiting nation’s progress in the mastery of mostly imported forms.

At the time of the Azerbaijan dekada in February 1938, Almaz Ade had not yet created her best-known national work: The Maiden’s Tower (1940). Yet the program of the final, gala evening of the 1938 dekada shows rather clearly that these events were meant not only to celebrate national culture, but also to develop, with the assistance of Moscow artists and intellectuals, that curious interaction of Western and local artistic forms and practices that characterized the creation of national ballets.

The program features five names often and prominently: Hajibeyov, Almaz Ade, the composer and conductor Niyazi, the poet Suleiman Rustama, and Byul-Byul, the famous bass. The first number on the program, “Greetings to Stalin!,” is built around a text by Rustama, with music by Hajibeyov and dances arranged by Almaz Ade. The text is in two parts, a celebratory “Salaam to you, Stalin!” and then a litany of Azeri achievements under Soviet rule: the strong, young, and rich nation has blossomed like a spring flower. The division encapsulates the desired relationship between the two nations, the flowering of a new, great nation thanks to Great Russian intervention. Another text, set to a lyrical folk melody, celebrates the nation’s oil production. Works such as Hajibeyov’s “Komsomol Girl” or “The Field of the Collective Farm” are interspersed with more “authentic” performances of Azeri folk music, including mugam, the popular improvisational form, although many of these are performed by the choir of the Baku Philharmonic.

The volumes produced after dekadas reveal a very
obvious intention not only to celebrate national identity, but also to offer helpful criticism, as they also provide material documentation of the event. The Belorussian volume of 1955 shows how, in the second, post-WWII cycle of dekadas, this process had crystallized, although earlier volumes have similar content and ordering. The table of contents is divided into 1) participants, 2) repertory, 3) a “diary” of daily events, 4) Moscow press on the performances, 5) post-dekada discussions, 6) and finally, awards. The Belorussian volume suggests the importance of the discussions. In the 400-page volume, these critiques of the Belorussian offerings take up more than one-fourth of the pages. The discussions generally begin on a positive note, listing the achievements of the artists of the republic, then move on to a section that begins, with a “however,” or “nonetheless,” commenting on quite specific areas for improvement.

Christina Ezrahi’s book has given us an important window into the way that interactions between artists and state apparatuses shaped the development of the Soviet ballet of the 1950s and 1960s. I believe the published traces of the dekada movement reveal rather clearly many of the ways in which the national art forms were developed and shaped, with Moscow’s help in the 1930s. Artificial as some of their plots and settings may seem to us, many of them continue to be popular and celebrated works in the repertories of the local theaters. Almaz Ade’s Maiden’s Tower, for example, was reworked in the early post-Soviet era to eliminate a scene of incest in order to bring the ballet in line with Muslim values, thus prolonging its life in the national repertory.

Notes

1 The construction dates of opera theaters in the Caucasus give some indication of when opera and ballet arrived in the region: Tbilisi’s opera theater opened in 1851, Baku’s in 1911, and Erevan’s in 1933. My research focuses primarily on Azerbaijan, with some discussion of the situation in Georgia. In most cases, claims made about the general state of dance in the Caucasus would apply as well to Armenia. The names of the dance companies in Georgia remain a source of confusion. The company known in English as the National Ballet of Georgia is a folk-dance ensemble, founded by Iliko Sukhishvili and Nino Ramishvili in 1945. The Ballet Company of the Paliashvili Opera is now known as the State Ballet of Georgia.

2 The term “academic” was conferred on the former Imperial Theaters in 1919 to affirm their role as tools of enlightenment and education. The designation stuck and continued to be applied throughout the Soviet realm.

3 One-act works are still termed “ballet miniatures” in post-Soviet Russia.

4 “Dekada” denotes a ten-year period in Russian, but the name for these festivals indicated a ten-day festival of the arts. The Soviet theater encyclopedia of 1963 gives their official title as “Dekada of Art and Literature in Moscow” and explains their function: “Moscow showings of the artistic achievements of the union and autonomous republics of the USSR.” The first dekada was devoted to the Ukrainian arts, in 1936. Georgia staged its Moscow dekada in 1937, Azerbaijan in 1938, and Armenia in 1939.
A public hall in a small spa town on the Black Sea during the Russian Civil War. A motley crowd of “former people” is searching for a momentary escape from their broken future, desperately hoping on to the brittle remains of a lost world irrevocably shattered by the Russian revolution. White officers, ladies, gentlemen, and grammar-school students are moving in an atmosphere of doom, interrupted only by the reckless, jaunty dance of an anarchist-sailor and his vulgar girlfriend. An elegant lady in a white dress, a feather boa, a white beret, and evening shoes loses herself in a melancholy dance reminiscent of Fokine’s miniature The Dying Swan. A woman in black breaks into a tango full of despair and fear. This crowd of lonely individuals, each in his own way a representative of the dying bourgeoisie, is momentarily united in a waltz. In their midst, two grammar-school students are dancing, so enraptured with each other that they are moving faster than the music and against its rhythm.

Suddenly, a group of partisans bursts in like a purifying storm, sweeping away the dense, gloomy atmosphere of the dying world of the bourgeoisie. Militant, impetuous, and triumphant, the partisans spread with drawn swords into a wide circle. After the disorganized, crowded chaos of the waltz, they sweep the stage, taking possession of it in a wide, jump-like run, their feet hardly touching the ground between the steps, their legs almost spreading into jétés as they are running, their upper-bodies sharply thrown backwards, as if preparing to strike down with the sabers they are holding uplifted in their hands. Forming a wedge, they are proudly squatting down (prisiadka), their upper-bodies turned halfway, their hands. Forming a wedge, they are proudly squatting down (prisiadka), their upper-bodies turned halfway, their arms tensely bent at the elbows, one arm extending forwards, the other backwards. Their legs are gradually straightening, their feet pounding an intensifying staccato rhythm (perestupania). They look like an elemental force, pushing its way through the crust of the earth and growing taller with each step. As the movements of the legs are becoming increasingly sharp and fast, their whole bodies straighten to their full height. The partisans’ movements are so full of temperament that they seem to be rushing toward the audience, even though they are dancing in place.1

First among equals are Nastia, a spirited young Cossack girl, and Kerim, a proud Caucasian highlander and partisan. Nastia had been forced into an engagement with a rich but cruel young Cossack, Andrei. On the eve of the wedding, Andrei’s father, the leader of the stanitsa (a large Cossack village), had arrested the leader of a partisan detachment. As the wedding celebration was unfolding, Nastia had torn off her veil and engagement ring, disgusted with a rich but cruel young Cossack, Andrei. On the eve of the wedding, Andrei’s father, the leader of the stanitsa (a large Cossack village), had arrested the leader of a partisan detachment. As the wedding celebration was unfolding, Nastia had torn off her veil and engagement ring, disgusted.

The ballet’s original concept represents a high point in Vasily Vainonen’s choreographic experiments. One of the most influential Soviet choreographers of the 1930s, Vainonen is primarily remembered for The Flames of Paris and his 1934 production of The Nutcracker, still performed every year by the Academy of Russian Ballet, the Vaganova School. Working at a time when a ballet, the aftermath of the anti-formalist campaign, with its attack on Fedor Lopukhov’s and Dmitry Shostakovich’s ballet The Bright Stream in February 1936. Partisan Days is the only ballet in the Kirov’s history to have been based exclusively on character dance, with a heroine created not by one of the company’s classical ballerinas, but by the most popular female character dancer of the time, Nina Anisimova, dancing in ordinary clothes and shoes.

Experiments in Character Dance: From Leningrad’s Estrada to the Kirov Ballet

Christina Ezrahi
But the big questions facing the ballet theatre as a whole potentially offered a unique chance for character dance to emancipate itself from its secondary role in classical ballet, where it had been largely restricted to providing national or exotic flavor in divertissement numbers, and to carve out a new, more significant role for itself. The ballet theatre as a whole was struggling to reform itself and to prove its relevance to a new dictatorship that expected art to become an important propaganda tool. Ballet was supposed to become more “democratic,” more accessible to the masses. Ironically, the masses themselves seemed to have no problem with the old ballets, but the inherently “democratic” nature of national dances offered a way to bring ballet closer to the people to keep the regime happy. Maybe the most difficult problem for ballet throughout the Soviet period, however, was how to comply with the regime’s demand that there should be new ballets on contemporary, Soviet themes.

From the start of his career, Vasily Vainonen was passionately interested in choreographic experimentation and in finding a language to represent everyday, contemporary life in ballet. Having graduated in 1919, he participated in 1923 in “Young Ballet,” the experimental group of young Mariinsky dancers that had formed around George Balanchine, and he began to choreograph numbers for the estrada – the variety stage. In the early 1920s, many ballet artists were performing on the estrada stage in their free time, despite the former Mariinsky’s official prohibition. During the hungry years after the revolution, many simply needed to earn extra money – the basic salary of a corps de ballet dancer was enough to provide food alone only for half a month – but many also wanted to gain additional experience, perform as soloists, or try themselves out as choreographers in an environment that gave much greater scope to experiments than the academic stage. Ballet dancers performed at the numerous cinemas, where movie showings included small variety performances. An intermediary office – Posredrabis – at Rabis, the Union of Art Workers, distributed work among the estrada artists. Ballet dancers were often invited to perform at various concert halls, and in summer, in outdoor performance spaces (letnikh ploshchadok) but there were also performances at miniature theatres, where divertissement numbers alternated with small plays, at gambling clubs and private restaurants.6

Vainonen began to choreograph small numbers for himself and his friends. He was naturally drawn to one of the most burning questions for the ballet theatre at the time: how to express new, contemporary characters in dance. Fedor Lopukhov attested that Vainonen had an unusual talent for composing dances “from nature.”7 One of his most successful miniatures for the variety stage, Progul’shchiki (The Truants), staged in 1929, took its inspiration from a scene he had witnessed on the banks of the Neva. Vainonen described the scene ten years later:

I was walking on the banks of the Neva.
Two young guys with a mandolin and guitar were sitting on the parapet. A rakishly
cocked cap, trousers with a crease, a bright tie and dirty nails. On the sidewalk, girls of
the same style are marking time, producing the movements of the Charleston, which
was then popular. And I wanted to show this genre number on stage.

The miniature for three dancers was staged to songs of the New Economic Policy era.8 Vainonen wanted to show a specific type of the NEP period whom everybody in the audience knew from the street—free-and-easy, deliberately careless, with a hooligan’s way of walking, in love with the fashionable foxtrots—but he wanted to do so in a humoristic, slightly satirical form, as if the movements had been distorted in a concave mirror.9 Vainonen’s most successful numbers for the estrada included other genre numbers with everyday characters, such as his character dance numbers Finnish Polka (1931) and Iablochko, one of the first Russian sailor dance numbers for the ballet variety stage, created in 1927 at the same time as the Bolshoi Ballet was working on The Red Poppy with its own version of Iablochko.

Vainonen’s search to find a language to express contemporary, everyday characters on the variety stage, and his exploration of character dance prepared the ground for his breakthrough in 1932 with The Flames of Paris. The first ballet to have “the people” – the revolutionary French masses – as its hero, the ballet also presented character dance as a way to express choreographically two key ideological messages: popular revolutionary enthusiasm and heroism. Most famously, these ideas found their expression in the dance of the Basques and the character of Thérèse, a Basque woman from the street so aflame with revolutionary fire and thirst for revenge that she is capable of intoxicating everybody around her with combative revolutionary ecstasy. The character dancer Nina Anisimova created this part, and has become synonymous with it. Known for her fiery temperament on stage and in everyday life, Anisimova would get herself so worked up in the wings in preparation for her performance as Thérèse that some dancers remember her impulsively shouting “After me!” as she was running onto the stage.10

Within the Kirov Ballet, the decision to stage Vainonen’s Partisan Days, unlike The Flames of Paris a ballet based entirely on character dance, without any pointe work and without any roles for the classical ballerinas of the company, was extremely controversial. One is left to wonder whether the production would have seen the light of the day if it hadn’t been for the political context. Work on the ballet began in earnest in March 1936, just a few weeks after Pravda’s damning attack on Lopukhov’s ballet The Bright Stream within the context of the anti-formalism campaign. In the editorial “Balletic Falstaff” (“Baletnaia fal’sh’”), Shostakovich and Lopukhov were ripped apart for having staged a ballet set on a collective farm in the Kuban without having seriously studied and accurately reflected the folk art of this region in either the music or the choreography. The result was condemned as
unrealistic and vulgar, repeating the worst mistakes of prerevolutionary ballet.11

In this atmosphere, it is understandable that the Kirov Ballet was paranoid about repeating the mistakes of The Bright Stream when it began to work on Partisan Days, especially as the first act of each ballet was set in a similar locale: The Bright Stream was set in a kolkhoz in the Kuban, a region in southern Russia, and Partisan Days opened in a Cossack stanitsa in the Kuban. On 30 March 1936, just a few weeks after the fateful Pravda editorial “Balletic Falsity,” the Kirov Ballet held a meeting about Partisan Days. The Kirov Theatre’s Director Ruvim Shapiro opened the meeting with the following words:

You all know perfectly well, comrades, that our theatre is now at the centre of exceptional attention from the side of the party and the government with respect to all those processes, which are taking place inside this theatre. . .

The Pravda articles had accused the country’s music theatres of being full of formalism, of entertainment provided by form, while the most important element was absent: ideological content. In order to successfully transmit ideological messages, the theatres needed to create art that was simple, comprehensible, and narodnyi – connected with the toiling masses and with their art, folk art. Shapiro pointed toward amateur art in collective farms and factories and stressed that art had to take the people’s art as its basis.12

By deciding to stage Partisan Days, the first ballet about the Civil War, the Kirov Theatre was playing with fire: the ballet’s subject matter was so politically sensitive that one wrong step could drag the whole production team and the theatre down the abyss. Shapiro did not beat around the bush: all of them were extraordinarily sensitive whether they would find a choreographic language to create an ideologically stirring, convincing, simple, and “narodnyi” production. Fearful of repeating the mistakes of The Bright Stream, Shapiro drew the logical conclusion that Partisan Days would constantly have to be checked against reality. Already, leaders of the partisan movement had been consulted about the libretto. Partisans from the Kuban, Caucasus, and Don should be consulted about every possible aspect throughout the production process. Sources would be carefully studied, and looming over all of this would be the newly founded Committee on Artistic Affairs. There would be no puppet-heroes and no balletic falsity.13

A character dance ballet on the Civil War was a brave, but potentially inspired attempt to counter the accusations of the Pravda editorial, and to prove that ballet theatre could find a language to express contemporary propaganda plots in dance. But as so often in Soviet ballet, the creative origins of Partisan Days had actually nothing to do with the anti-formalism campaign of 1936. Inspired by Anisimova’s rousing portrayal of Thérèse in The Flames of Paris, Vainonen had decided back in 1933 to stage a special concert number for Anisimova about a female partisan leading a small partisan detachment uniting people of different nationalities. A score was put together by Boris Asafiev, who had composed the score of Flames of Paris and who would do the same for Partisan Days. The number was first performed at the variety stage of the “Sad otdykha,” and then included in concert performances at the Leningrad Philharmonic. It later found its way into the complete ballet in the scene I described at the beginning of my talk. Soon after the number’s successful premiere in 1933, Vainonen and his close friend, mentor and collaborator, the artist Vladimir Dmitriev, decided to use the partisan dance and its female heroine as the nucleus for a new ballet libretto about the Civil War.14

It thus seems likely that the Kirov started discussing the potential ballet before 1936;15 but in 1936/1937, several political currents came together which would push the ballet into active production, and determine its history. On the one hand, in December 1935, a new steering body for culture, the All-Union Committee on Artistic Affairs was founded. The creation of the committee marks a watershed in Soviet cultural politics, bringing the progressive centralization of all aspects of culture under one body, and increasing scrutiny over all fields of culture as opposed to the heavy focus on literature of the early 1930s. The highly publicized anti-formalism campaign directed at all art forms thus unfolded within the context of this new bureaucratic machine flexing its muscle. Its twin attack against “formalism” and “naturalism” was essentially an attack on modernist and Western tendencies in art. From around this period, narodnost’ became one of the guiding characteristics expected of Soviet art: culture was supposed to be accessible to the masses, full of national or even folk traditions, and patriotic.16

Simultaneous to these changes in cultural administration, there was another, separate political reason behind the call for narodnost’. The regime was making a concerted effort to give a greater platform to national art to propagate the idea of the Soviet Union as a “family” of happy nations, a slogan celebrated noisily within the context of the new Stalin constitution of 1936. In the year of the new constitution, it was decided to start organizing dekadas of national art in Moscow, cultural festivals held at the Bolshoi Theatre and lasting ten days, to showcase “the highest cultural achievements” of the brother republics, including folk art. In addition, in March 1936, the Theatre of Folk Creativity (Teatr narodnogo tvorchestva) opened in Moscow. About 1,500 folk artists from all over the union participated in its first program. In the autumn of the same year, more than forty nationalities were represented at the first All-Union Festival of Folk Dance in Moscow. In 1937, the All-Union Ensemble for folk dance was founded under the leadership of Igor Moiseev.17

Even though the ideological demand for narodnost’ in Soviet art and the official promotion of national dances seemingly opened the way for choreographers like Vainonen, who wanted to experiment with character
dance on the academic stage, it soon became clear that there was an inherent, dangerous conflict between official and artistic interests. Official pronouncements were often difficult to interpret, and even more difficult to put into practice, but they seemed to prescribe an ethnographic approach to transcending national dances onto the academic stage, demanding authenticity and a close study of sources. The approach of artists like Vainonen, however, was interpretive: taking the original national dances as their starting point, they wanted to offer a much looser, artistic interpretation of national dances on stage.

Within the theatre, there was a lot of opposition to Vainonen's character dance ballet. Some of the classical ballerinas opposed the ballet especially bitterly, fearful that Vainonen’s victory would signify the beginning of their end. But even though Vainonen managed to withstand the ballerinas’ intrigues, he was powerless to reject the changes demanded by the theatre’s leadership after the ballet was shown to the public at the end of 1936. Rather absurdly, now that the ballet was finished, Vainonen was told that the ballet’s plot location should be moved to Georgia. This would essentially have meant creating a completely new ballet, so a compromise was reached: Vainonen added a “Georgian act,” where partisan-Cossacks fraternized with mountain dwellers. The new act had little connection to the acts preceding and following it, but added a suite of Georgian dances, which the all-pervasive fear of classical dance as formalism quickly killed. Vainonen's interpretive artistic vision of national dances would be incomprehensible without enough pantomimic scenes, including the public hall scene described at the beginning of this paper, and to introduce many tedious, supposedly “explanatory” but incomprehensible pantomimic scenes in order to make the production more realistic, completely destroying the ballet’s dynamic structure.18 The mutilated ballet turned out to be a failure, and soon disappeared.

Partisan Days was both a product and a victim of its times. The all-pervasive fear of classical dance as formalism gave an unprecedented platform to Vainonen and his collaborators to experiment with character dance on the academic stage. At the same time, the fear that the ballet would be condemned if character dance didn’t stay close enough to its ethnographic origins, and that the plot would be incomprehensible without enough pantomimic scenes, killed Vainonen’s interpretive artistic vision of expressing the libretto primarily through a new type of character dance. In Stalin’s Russia, utopian dreams and paralyzing fear were walking hand in hand. Fear ultimately killed the ballet, and fear was fully justified. The anti-formalism campaign ushered in a shift in cultural policy as the country was moving relentlessly toward the big show trials, and then the Great Terror of 1937 and 1938, soon claiming its victims among those involved in producing Partisan Days. Darkness had descended.

Notes
1 The description of this scene is based on a description of the first version of the ballet Partisan Days, not on the final version subjected to numerous changes demanded from above, including serious cuts to this scene. K. Armashevskaia an N. Vainonen, Baletmeister Vainonen (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988), 147-52.
3 Yurii Sizimniku, Sovetskii balet (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1950), 164-65.
4 K. Armashevskaia and Vainonen, Baletmeister Vainonen, 154-62.

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MODEST L. GOFMAN AS THE GHOSTWRITER OF SERGE LIFAR’S EARLY BOOKS

PATRIZIA VEROLI

My text is part of ongoing research on the role that the so-called Russian first-wave émigré culture played in relation to dance, its theoreticians, and its performers. One of my aims is to ascertain the legacy of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in Europe, and specifically how it responded to aesthetic and political contingencies through the end of World War II. In a previous article, I focused on the clandestine literary activities made in Paris by Modest Ljudevich Gofman, a renowned émigré Pushkinist, for Sergei Lifar, the last of Diaghilev’s choreographers.1 I have also recently explored Lifar’s two main endeavors of the 1930s: the exhibition Pouchkine et son époque, which opened in Paris on March 16, 1937, and the exhibition Les Ballets Russes de Diaghilew 1909 à 1929, which was held at the Pavillon de Marsan (a part of the Louvre) in April and May 1939. Gofman’s assistance and ghostwriting for the first event was crucial for Lifar, who came to be celebrated, both in “Russia Abroad” (as Marc Raeff dubbed the émigré community)2 and in French intellectual circles, as a passionate and well-informed collector of Pushkiniana.3 Although Diaghilev himself procured and paid for the precious items that Lifar exhibited as his own, no written mention of the impresario was made either by Lifar or Gofman on the occasion.4

I shall focus here only on the books that Gofman wrote for Lifar. As happens with ghostwritten texts, it is hard, if not altogether impossible, to credit each author for his or her personal contributions. After the war (Gofman died in 1959), Lifar bought the old scholar’s archives. A subsequent discovery after Lifar’s death of a bundle of papers that belonged to Gofman has added almost nothing to the state of knowledge concerning this matter. Consequently, no possible drafts, no letters exchanged between the two men, and no written and/or oral evidence of their collaborative efforts are available for a philological study. One can suppose that the most historically minded parts of these books were provided by the erudite Gofman, while the sections related to more recent events were provided by Lifar. The mystery remains, however, as to how the texts were negotiated and integrated, and what discussions or possible quarrels arose between the two men. For instance, in La danse a comment between square brackets occasionally appears, followed by the initials “S. L.,” for Serge Lifar. Is this sufficient to let us infer that the remaining text was written by Gofman? Couldn’t those insertions have been occasioned by differently timed revisions and an imperfect final editing of the text? The genre to which these works belong, their date of publication, and their addressee are obviously important considerations as well. Can one read them, however, as organic outputs, characterized by a consistent intention and a truly autonomous system of thought? Obviously not.

My aim here is to sketch the complex interaction between the texts written by Gofman in the thirties, and the context of their publication within the Russian postrevolutionary emigration. As with all texts written by émigré authors (see Leonid Livak’s work for further scholarly background on this topic),5 they tell us a great deal not only about Lifar’s unscrupulous thirst for success and Gofman’s obvious need for economic survival, but also about Russian emigration: both its quests and its necessity to reformulate a “Russianness” capable of providing the émigrés with a role in their host country, in this case France.

I shall examine four books: Du temps que j’avais faim (1935), La danse (1938), Diaghilev (1939), and Histoire du ballet russe (1945). They were all published in Russian and French. The focus of my reading is the French edition, with the exception of Diaghilev, which I read and quote in its English version of 1940. Whether the Russian edition of these works included or lacked parts, which in their turn are missing or present in the French or English edition, I am frankly unaware. For the purposes of this paper I shall assume there were no changes, and that, if there were any, they were minor, and of little consequence to significantly modify the discourse.

Du temps que j’avais faim

When this book was published, Lifar, aged 30, was known as an excellent dancer, a maître de ballet at the Paris Opéra, and a teacher of the class of adage at the school of the same theater. His first choreographies, which focused on the male protagonist (embodied by Lifar himself) and characterized by a mild experimentalism, had not been impressive. The main émigré dance critic, André Levinson, crowned Lifar as the protagonist of a new dance epoch in his posthumously published book of 1934, Serge Lifar: Destin d’un danseur.6 As Lynn Garafola and Joan Acocella have emphasized (as editors of an anthology of Levinson’s dance commentaries), Levinson initiated a new course of dance criticism in France.7 With his impressive knowledge of all the arts, dance and literature above all, and his unusual mastery of the French language, he served as one of the main mediators between the two dance cultures: Russian and French. As we shall see, his role in reformulating “Russianness” in dance was critical.

The year 1935 saw the start of Lifar’s self-promotional strategy in French Russia Abroad. The publication of Du temps que j’avais faim was anticipated in January by a meeting at the “Union des écrivains et journalistes russes,” where Nikolai Evreinov read an extract of the upcoming book; during the same year Lifar became a constant

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La danse

An imposing dance treatise daringly written in the first person in 1938, La danse: Les grands courants de la danse académique is a hybrid work, with a discourse shifting from aesthetics to history, from personal memoir to dry listings of ballet titles. The reasoning is mainly impressionistic and associative, and the author frequently resorts to quotations. Aesthetic considerations, the stress on rhythm, and the explanation of art as the union of Apollonian and Dionysian components, reflect the rich contemporary context of anthropological and ethnological studies of which Paris was an outstanding center. The book also echoes Curt Sachs's encompassing Weltgeschichte des Tanzes of 1933, which appeared in French in 1938, the same year as Lifar's La danse. Not only did Gofman speak and read German, but Sachs, a Jew, had taken refuge in Paris and collaborated with the recently opened Musée national des arts et traditions populaires. This explains the authors' stress on popular dances, seen at the intersection between a legacy proper to all people belonging to Indo-European cultures (or with a term no more in use today, the Indo-Aryan speaking areas), and a seed "essentially" inscribed on each population. The tendency to "invent traditions" belongs to that era (the 1930s) as does a static conception of dance, in this case academic dance and its positions, seen as circulating worldwide. This "circular theory of culture" is also indebted to Sachs.

The Russian émigrés' philosophical and religious output also played a crucial role in this book, which from the standpoint of the semiotics of exile, is the most significant of Lifar's works of the 1930s. "A l'origine était la danse": the author paraphrases the very first verses of the Gospel according to Saint John, and inscribes a religious goal onto the dancing body. The historical vision is unilinear and teleological. The survey starts at the seventeenth century, when the code of danse d'école was set by Louis XIV, and most naturally evolves towards Russia. As was true for Levinson, the core of dance aesthetics is seen as depending on the relationship between French dance formalism, its rational "esprit de géométrie" that risked omitting a humanist eloquence, and the Russians' call for liturgy. In extolling the classicism of dance, Levinson had identified Russian dance as a "French dance of Slavic expression." To émigré dancers, and specifically to Lifar, he assigned the mission of "welding the broken chain," by giving back to the French the precious legacy that French choreographers transmitted to Russia in the nineteenth century, a treasure lost in France and surviving in Russia untouched. This was in accord with the view, held both by a few Russian émigré intellectuals and certain French circles, that permeating culture with religion could redeem a society too prone, in Europe as well as in Russia, to surrender to a materialism that arose from both rationality and a certain kind of modernity. Echoing the "culturophilosophical" and religious perspectives emanating from thinkers like Nikolai Berdiaev and his journal Put' (The Way), as well as from a breeding ground like the Saint Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, the sense of a Russian mission permeates La danse. What changes here with reference to Levinson's rhetoric is that, written in the first person, this book implies that Lifar is...
now the one to take up the calling. *La danse* functions as
a solemn charge taken by Lifar vis-à-vis both his émigré
countrymen, whose culture he stands to embody and
represent, and his French hosts, to whom classical dance,
*la danse d'élevation*, reputed as forever lost, is offered
again in its supposedly original purity. If Russians are
naturally endowed with the “soul” capable of transforming
French ballet into a religious mystery, 22 all choreographers
working between the 1832 advent of Marie Taglioni’s
dance on pointe, and Lifar himself, are but transient
episodes that may even go mostly unmentioned. One
episode, however, is inescapable, and that is Diaghilev’s
Ballets Russes, which is constantly present in the texts
Lifar fictitiously authored. This is the aesthetic “home”
that he would incessantly try to underplay, but that he
needed all along to claim his legitimacy as a dancer and
choreographer. Indeed, such duplicity regarding Diaghilev,
both celebrative and critical, characterizes Lifar’s public
stands and literary endeavors in the 1930s and early
1940s.

**Diaghilev i s Diaghilevym**

*Diaghilev i s Diaghilevym* (Diaghilev and with
Diaghilev) is another hybrid work, partly a history of the
Ballets Russes, related by an omniscient narrator, and
partly Lifar’s memoir of his six-year collaboration with the
company. 23 Once more, Lifar was drawing his authority
as a dance author from his own past with Diaghilev.
Negotiating evaluations of choreographers and ballets
must have proven a hard task, as shown by recurrent
long quotations from Levinson’s reviews, sometimes
commented upon as “too severe,” and followed just a few
lines later by a (possibly Lifarian?) criticism even harsher
than the one by the deceased critic. 24 A contradictory
stand is taken both here and in *La danse* with regard
to Michel Fokine, both lauded for his innovations and
condemned for making dance subservient to the other
scenic arts, and also represented as indebted to Diaghilev
for his ideas. While Nitinsky is viewed as an excellent
dancer but dismissed as an insignificant choreographer, 25
and Massine’s talents are noted, 26 Nitinsky’s modernity is
acknowledged begrudgingly; this indicates a negotiation
between Lifar and Gofman, a longtime friend of
Diaghilev and certainly a constant presence in his theater
audience. 27 As for Balanchine, he is treated as a true
foreigner, described as having no connection at all with
academic ballet. 28 Not one word is spent on his *Apollo
musagète* (1928), though Lifar himself had been his much-
praised protagonist. No contemporary French dance
critic is mentioned in these books, as if Lifar, as the only
representative of Russia Abroad, were to assume *en masse*
all charges related to dance: performance, choreography,
criticism, and aesthetics.

**Histoire du ballet russe**

Although lacking the presumptuously wide goal
of the treatise *La danse, Histoire du ballet russe depuis ses
origines jusqu’à nos jours* is also written in the first person
and has a complex temporal genesis. It started in
1940, then interrupted, to be published in Russian in
1945 and in French five years later. Its antecedent was
in Russia*, which, perceived as strongly needed after the
striking success of Diaghilev’s ballet, was mainly based on
Alexander Pleshcheyev’s *Nash ballet* (1896), and limited to
Saint Petersburg. In his preface to the *A History of Ballet in
Russia*, André Levinson wrote one of his most passionate
endorsements of Russian dance, as a “French dance of
Slavic expression,” 29 whose restoration in France he saw
as the Russian émigré’s mission. By contrast the authors
of *Histoire du ballet russe* distanced themselves from such
a notion. Their comprehensive survey acknowledged the
contributions of dance masters of different countries
and eras and credited Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes with
showing the West the existence of a true academic Russian
school, a dance made unique by the “Russian soul” of
its dancers and the “elementary Russian genius” of its
choreographers. 30 Daringly, *La danse* had offered to an
émigré context a vision of the Soviet ballet that was but
a continuation of the prerevolutionary school, owing to
its stress on *danse d’élevation*. The same blurring of the
émigré/Soviet dichotomy can be found in *Histoire*, with
contemporary ballet in Russia described as “more Russian
than ever” (with the adjective in italics). 31

All in all, one can feel in *Histoire* the sense that an
urgent need (both characterizing Lifar’s thirst for
success and the émigré’s longing for rootedness) has
softened. After 1940 Russia Abroad did not exist any
more in France, or it existed with other modalities. As a
consequence of Levinson’s death and thanks to Gofman’s
erudition, Lifar had been for some years the only mediator
between the Russian and the French dance cultures.
But the new world that issued forth after World War II
dramatically changed the cultural landscape and led to the
rejection of many of the parameters upon which Lifar and
Gofman had based their literary endeavors.

**Notes**

1 Gofman had been in Paris since 1922 with his son,
Rostislav Michel, later a musicologist. See Patrizia Veroli,
“Serge Lifar as a Dance Historian and the Myth of Russian Dance
in zarubezhnaia Rossiia (Russia Abroad) 1930-1940,” Dance

2 The classical reference is Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A
Cultural History of the Russian Emigration 1919-1939* (New


4 I am referring to the exhibition catalogue *Centenaire
de Pouchkine 1837-1937: Exposition Pouchkine et son époque*, eds.
Serge Lifar, Modeste L. Hofmann, and Nicolas Pouchkine (Paris:
Coopérative Etoile, 1937).

5 Leonid Livak, *How It Was Done in Paris: Russian
Émigré Literature and French Modernism* (Madison: University of

6 André Levinson, *Serge Lifar: Destin d’un danseur*

Veroli, “Serge Lifar as a Dance Historian,” 133n36.

It was published with the title Dny Turbinykh [The Days of the Turbins] (Paris: Editions Concorde). In the same year an adaptation of the novel went on stage in Paris at the Théâtre Albert Premier in front of a very limited audience (Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu, “Une rencontre manqué: Boulgakov au Vieux Colombier,” Les Cahiers de la Comédie Française [1996]: 109). In the English-speaking countries the work has enjoyed greater visibility. It was translated by Michael Glenny in 1967, and subsequently by Marian Schwartz (2008) and Andrew Upton (2010), published on both sides of the Atlantic, and performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company (1979), BBC 1 (1982), and National Theatre, London (2010).


It premiered at the Paris Opéra on December 13, 1932, with commissioned music by Sergei Prokofiev and décor by Larionov. Lifar danced the main role.


Beginning in 1931 the Archives Internationales de la Danse, both an institution and a journal financed by the Swedish philanthropist Rolf De Maré, hosted a large number of events and testimonies. It strongly contributed to the circulation of theoretical ideas advanced by dance experiments in Germany since the 1910s (Inge Baxmann et al., Les Archives Internationales de la Danse 1931-1952 [Pantin: Centre National de la Danse, 2006], passim).

Icare premiered at the Paris Opéra on July 9, 1935. Igor Markevitch wrote a score for the ballet initially imagined by Lifar in two acts. The music was played at Salle Gaveau in June 1933 for a select audience, but the choreographer finally decided not to use it; instead he asked the Opéra conductor J. E. Szyfer to take some notes while watching his choreography. Szyfer was to use the rhythm as the basis for a simplified score of a shorter one-act ballet (Pierre Michaut, Le ballet contemporain [Paris: Plon, 1950], 135-41).

His father, Ludwig Leopoldovich Gofman, was born in Vilnius in 1849, and was a Prussian citizen (André Hofmann, email message to author, January 28, 2015).


Lifar, La danse, 12.

Levinson, Serge Lifar, 57.

Lifar, La danse, 194.


The first section of Diaghilev i s Diagilevym (Paris: Dom Knigi, 1939) is devoted to the impresario’s biography since his birth. A second part consists of Lifar’s memoirs of his years with the company. The English edition of the book reproduced both parts in one volume, while in France they were published separately after the war. The second part appeared in 1947, as A l’aube de mon destin chez Diaghilev: Sept années aux Ballets Russes (Paris: Albin Michel, 1947), while the first was published only in 1954 (Serge de Diaghilev: Son œuvre, sa vie, sa légende [Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1954]).

Lifar, La danse, 186-87, 192. Levinson was also harshly criticized in Serge Lifar, Diaghilev: His Life, His Work, His Legend. An Intimate Biography (London: Putnam, 1940), 247, 256-60.

Lifar, Diaghilev, esp. 274-80.

Ibid., 303-11.

Lifar, La danse, 216-20; Lifar, Diaghilev, 316-20.

Lifar, Diaghilev, 339-40.


Ibid., 255.
Serge Lifar and the Question of Collaboration with the German Authorities under the Occupation of Paris (1940-1949)

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Abstract: This article examines the political and artistic activities of dancer and choreographer Serge Lifar during and immediately after the occupation of Paris. Although Lifar was cleared of charges of collaboration with the German authorities after the war, the question of collaboration has arisen again in light of the rehabilitation of his aesthetic by the Paris Opéra and other dance companies. Using archival materials usually ignored by dance scholars, the article examines Lifar’s political activities, his political convictions, and his political ambitions. Two of his successful ballets of this period are also discussed: Joan de Zarissa (1942) and Suite en blanc (1943).

Keywords: Serge Lifar, Paris Opéra, Jean Cocteau, Occupation, collaboration, French ballet
Questioning the Lifar-evidence: Oral Histories of the Archives Internationales de la Danse
Sanja Andus L’Hotellier

This brief presentation will examine Serge Lifar’s role in the life and survival of the Archives Internationales de la Danse during the Occupation. After an overview of the history of the Foundation, I shall contrast Lifar’s presence in the written documents of the A.I.D. archives with the oral histories of two lifariennes—François Adret and Maryelle Krempff—and analyze the construction of the Lifar-evidence, which presents Serge Lifar as an untouchable master-teacher and savior.

The Archives Internationales de la Danse (commonly referred to as A.I.D.) was a pioneering dance foundation created by Rolf de Maré in Paris in 1931 in memory of the Ballets Suédois and its principal dancer/choreographer Jean Böslin. It was directed by Pierre Tugal (né Ilija Mikhailov Epscltein), a doctor of law of Russian-Jewish descent, and it was the first such organization devoted exclusively to dance.

This unique venue (Photo 1) comprised a dance museum, library, archive, a sociology and ethnography section, conference hall, and an exhibition and performance space. Created as a response to the institutional void in dance, A.I.D. focused its activities in four general areas: exhibitions, choreography competitions, research, and publication. Between 1932 and 1947 A.I.D. produced thirteen exhibitions and three international choreographic competitions, in addition to promoting research through its collections and ethnographic projects, and publishing a quarterly journal, La Revue des A.I.D., from 1933-37. In a landscape marked by the pre-eminence of classical dance, A.I.D. supported modern forms of choreography, the exploration of non-Western traditions, and the creation of an innovative research environment. With its broad vision to give all dance forms the status of an independent discipline, A.I.D. remains a unique adventure in the history of dance in France.

In 1951, after twenty years of activity, the Foundation was dissolved. De Maré’s loss of interest and postwar financial difficulties as well as conflicts with his head curator, Pierre Tugal, contributed to its slow decline and eventual demise. With Ferdinando Reyna, Tugal established the Centre International de Documentation pour la Danse (International Documentation Center for Dance), but it was short-lived, and its failure left France without any comparable institution until the creation of the Centre National de la Danse (National Dance Center) in 1998. With the Foundation’s demise, the A.I.D. collections were split between France and Sweden. The donation to the Bibliothèque Nationale took place in January 1952 after a protracted legal procedure, while the East Asia and Ballets Suédois collections served as the basis for the Dansmuseet – or Dance Museum – established in Stockholm in 1953. Today the materials from the old A.I.D. collection constitute one of the most important collections of the Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra in Paris.

Serge Lifar’s importance to the life and survival of the A.I.D. during the Occupation has been viewed as a self-evident fact, largely adopted by dancers as well as dance scholars, and reinforced by his autobiography Ma vie, in which he claims to have been appointed the A.I.D.’s curator. It is precisely this Lifar-evidence that we shall question.

According to the historian François Hartog, the word evidence belongs more to rhetoric and philosophy than to history. For the French, one thinks immediately of Descartes: evidence is conceived as an intuition, a complete vision offering certainty of a clear and distinct knowledge. If one goes back to Antiquity and etymology, evidence comes from the Latin evidentia, which Cicero coined from the Greek enargeia. For Homer, the adjective enargès indicates the appearance of a god who shows himself in full light. The word therefore suggests an epiphany, the emergence and visibility of the invisible.

The figure of the master-teacher weighs considerably in the dancers’ narratives, making any distance from Lifar nearly impossible. The vision suggested by the evidence becomes – through the narratives of the dancers – a case of willful blindness. This figures in the larger project of constructing the figure of Lifar, and his rehabilitation and legend, which contradicts other elements in our research, starting with the written documents, in what is left of the archives of the Archives.

Portrait of Lifar in Written Documents

Indeed, in these documents, not only is Lifar’s presence extremely scarce, but it also paints the décor for future disputes. During 1931 and in preparation for the three competitions held in 1932, Pierre Tugal conceived of a questionnaire and addressed it to sixteen eminent artists in order to design the modalities of the competitions, later to be submitted to Rolf de Maré for final approval. Together with six “ballerinas and studio owners” (Lubov Egorova, Alice Wr-onska, Lilia Krassovska, Nathalie Boutkovsky, Ludmilla Schollar, and Lydia Nesterowska), three “first class dancers” (Alexandre Volinine, Anatole Vilza, and M. Bondikov), two “choreographers” (Bronislava Nijinska and Hélène Gontcharova), and finally four “world-renowned choreographers” (Ivan Clustine, George Balanchine, Nicolas Sergeyev, and Serge Lifar), Lifar was asked to reply to a number of questions such as what the length of a
submitted work should be who should be invited to take part. And yet, a few months later, in June 1932, he was not chosen to sit on a panel of judges that included Albert Aveline, Rudolf Laban, and Max Terpis, among others, for the 1932 International Competition at which Kurt Jooss won first prize for The Green Table.

Years later, in 1941, Tugal wrote de Maré: “[Lifar] never forgave us for not being a member of the jury. We still have his first letter, arrogant, dry, refusing all collaboration with A.I.D.” 6 Not only does this rich archival document give us a clearer idea of what the aesthetic project for a good dancer-competitor was in the early 1930s, but it also indicates A.I.D.’s strategy and craftiness in deciding to involve Lifar just enough, but not too much; its members showed their independence from the very start.

Undeniably, a great doubt hangs over Lifar’s exact role in A.I.D. during the Occupation. In his autobiography, Lifar claims that he put the Foundation under the protection of the Swedish Consul Raoul Nordling and that in return, Nordling appointed him curator during the war. Yet there is not a single document that we have consulted that attests to this or clarifies the exact role that Rolf de Maré gave to Lifar. Although Lifar is present in certain photographs, such as exhibition openings, in the archival A.I.D. collection at Stockholm’s Dansmuseet, his trace in actual written documents is very much lacking.

What the archives do tell us is that with de Maré in Stockholm during the war, and Tugal in Nice in the south of France, A.I.D. was left without its director and curator. The Foundation was placed under the protection of the Swedish legion, which enabled de Maré to rely on the Swedish diplomats living in Paris. Together with his friend, the banker Rolf Eksand, the management of A.I.D. was in the hands of the two consuls, Gustav Fossius and Raoul Nordling, diplomats Einar Henning and Åke Malmaeus, as well as Gunnar Lundberg, the founder of the Swedish Tessin Institute in Paris, although de Maré continued to finance it somewhat loosely from abroad. De Maré also relied on members of the Russian diaspora for everyday functions of the Foundation; the building was requisitioned by the German authorities from June 1940 until August 1944. 7 Both Lifar’s and Neymann’s names are quoted in correspondence with Tugal.

In December 1939, Tugal wrote to de Maré, noting how helpful Lifar had been in organizing a canteine for drafted artists and POWs as part of the l’Aide aux Artistes Mobilisés. 8 But Tugal’s departure for the free zone in Nice was a turning point. Considering himself the sole curator, Tugal continued to inform de Maré about A.I.D.’s current affairs on a regular basis, thanks to his friends who stayed in Paris. He was therefore more and more conscious of Lifar’s growing presence. While Tugal was an active member of the Résistance with the Organisation juive de combat from 1942 until the Libération, he ceased his professional activity for five long years; his resentment and distrust of Lifar, who was present and thriving in Paris, is understandable. Alan Riding 9 indicates Lifar’s name as a dancer, choreographer, or both, listed on 272 programs out of 837 performances presented at the Paris Opera during the Occupation.

As of December 1941, Tugal warned de Maré against “too much Lifar” at A.I.D. Tugal described Lifar as a hypocrite, based on Lifar’s refusal to collaborate with A.I.D. after not being invited to be on the jury in 1932. This photo (Photo 2), 10 taken in 1939, anticipates the battle over curatorship, with Lifar sitting at the head of the table right next to Tugal, not on the side-lines with the Tansman and the members of A.I.D.’s executive team.

Despite the scarcity of A.I.D. archival documents, the narratives draw quite a different portrait of Lifar’s wartime role. I began my work on A.I.D. oral histories by entering the archives. Coming from a dance background and considering that dance history is first and foremost about and for the dancers, my aim was to emphasize the dancers’ words, which French scholarship often ignores; in so doing I hope to follow the idea of bringing oral history into the heart of historic practice. This resulted in a series of interviews 11 conducted with those most affected by the creation of A.I.D. These interviews aimed to modestly contribute new resources for studying the Foundation.

Lifar sparked a wide variety of reactions in these interviews: Bengt Häger described him as an opportunist, while Lifar was barely mentioned at all in the narratives of Françoise and Dominique Dupuy, the pioneers of modern dance in France. Others were provoked to immediately stop the dictaphone upon hearing his name. Of the oral histories that were collected, 12 those of two lifariennes, Françoise Adret and Maryelle Krempf, suggest a portrait of Lifar as their untouchable master-teacher and savior.

Dancers as Narrators— Setting the Record Straight

Françoise Adret, née Bonnet, was born in 1920. Eclectic and unusual because of her professional choices, she was a dancer, choreographer, ballet mistress, company director, teacher, and inspector at the Ministry of Culture. She studied with Madame Roussane, Victor Gsovsky, Boris Kniaseff, and Nora Kiss, and in 1948 was promoted to étoile at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Coming from a bourgeois background, not a member of the Opéra, she has a particular place in dance history.

Regarding the fate of A.I.D. during the war, and more specifically, whether Lifar saved A.I.D. during that time, Adret asserts that even though she was not a direct witness, this is what she had always heard. She continues by enumerating his achievements: there was no swastika flag on the Opéra, unlike the Comédie Française and other institutions, and the ballet de l’Opéra did not go on tour to Berlin. She concludes that Lifar’s involvement with the Germans was incorrectly reported and overstated: Lifar was a remarkable man.

The most interesting part starts with the affirmation, “Lifar is my master-teacher,” introducing a particular temporality in her narrative. The frontiers between past and present tense are blurred—“the man whom I love/loved and respect/respected indefinitely”—and she hesitates on his actual absence.
Adret here refers to their most important artistic collaboration, when Lifar choreographed Le Pas d'acier for her in 1948; she took a leap of faith by choosing Adret, a demi-caractère dancer, not a member of the Opéra, someone from outside the seraglio. Performer par excellence, who humbly placed her “body and soul” at the service of the choreographer, Adret as a narrator, fifty-four years later, defends her master-teacher Lifar, never Serge, with the same fervor and as if no time had passed.

Here we face all the complexity and ambiguity of the master-disciple relationship in dance. The artistic debt that Adret feels for him matches her sense of his power and immunity. Lifar is the savior, and there is no need for any visible proof. For her, the Lifar-evidence corresponds to her unconditional faith in the master-teacher. It is interesting to note that Adret only met Lifar after the war, but this does not prevent her from defending him. Even though she cannot prove what she says, she has doubts.

Another lifarienne, but with very different training, is Maryelle Krempff (1922). As a pure product of the Opéra, she entered the corps de ballet before the war and became a grand sujet. She was a student of Lifar’s but also secretly took classes with his rival, Carlotta Zambelli. At the time when Adret was collaborating with Lifar, Krempff left Paris for Bordeaux, where she became étoile, then étoile at the Opéra-Comique. Later she had a long career as a teacher at the Conservatoire de Saint-Maur.

In 2003, Krempff gave an account in which the issue was not A.I.D., but the importance of setting the record straight. Lifar neither denounced nor harmed anyone. From the very beginning, Krempff introduces us to a different setting. Unlike Adret and the exclusive relationship between “me and my master-teacher,” Krempff uses the pronoun “we,” requisitioned by the Germans, and speaks as a member of the corps of the Opéra. Lifar is the Opéra or the Opéra is Lifar, suggesting that her reputation is at stake as much as his.

She describes working in difficult conditions; dancers were easily fired or deported if disobeyed. Without naming them, she quotes two fired Jewish dancers for whom Lifar could not do anything and reassures us that they did return after the war. Krempff describes the era after the Liberation as a witch hunt. After stating that Lifar did, indeed, dine with the Germans, she uses the rhetorical question, “Qu’est-ce que vous voulez?” thus conveying resignation, passivity, and fatalism. It was like this and not otherwise. Resistance in the context of the ballet de l’Opéra was apparently an impossible concept.

In Guise of a Conclusion

The study of oral histories, which divulge elements that the writings do not, is an attempt to understand the spirit of the dancers in the 1940s whose points of reference are very different from ours; they wish to historicize their feelings and representations, and their passion for Lifar, rather than seek the truth. The strength of these oral histories lies in the strategies that Lifar adopted in order to insure his posterity as the savior beyond the Foundation itself. Who better to do this if not those who owe him everything, a debt of artistic life, through this particular relationship that links master-teachers to their disciples? They will never doubt the Lifar-evidence, his evidence, his truth, the authoritative word of god, a system of thought in which there is no place for contradiction and confrontation. Paradoxically, in spite of all Lifar’s efforts to disown Pierre Tugal intellectually and physically after Lifar’s definitive return to the Opéra in 1945, it is thanks to these very oral histories that Tugal -- described as the pillar of A.I.D. -- was rendered posthumous justice through the narratives of classical and modern dancers, from inside and outside the Opéra, who performed at the Foundation.

Notes


4 Le Concours de petites danseuses et de petits danseurs, Le Concours de maquettes et de costumes de ballet, and the Concours de chorégraphie en souvenir de Jean Börlin.


6 Pierre Tugal to Rolf de Maré, December 17, 1941, Archives of the Dance Museum, Stockholm.

7 It is interesting to note that in autumn 1941 and in spite of the Occupation, Rolf de Maré gives Gustav Forssius the authorization to open the A.I.D. to the public.

8 Pierre Tugal to Rolf de Maré, December 14, 1939, Archives of the Dance Museum, Stockholm.
Museum, Stockholm. In 1939, acting on behalf of Rolf de Maré, the A.I.D. took the initiative to organize at its premises the Centre d’Aide aux Artistes Mobilisés (A.A.M.) et prisonniers de guerre (the Aid Center for Drafted Artists and POWs). A.I.D. placed at the organization’s disposal two large halls, their staff, and working capital. Actively involved in this amicable and material assistance were Pierre Tugal, Alexandre Tansman, and Serge Lifar, as well as journalists and art critics: Amory, Cogniat, Guenne, Novy, Zahar, Warnod, and Cousin. For a detailed analysis of this period, see Erik Näslund, *Rolf de Maré: Art Collector, Ballet Director, Museum Creator* (Alton, UK: Dance Books, 2009).


13. Originally choreographed by Léonide Massine and premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées in 1927 by the Ballets Russes with Serge Lifar as a soloist.
PUSHKIN’S 1830 LETTERS TO GONCHAROVA: THEIR TWENTIETH-CENTURY FATE

EDWARD KASINEC

Summary Abstract

for the panel on “The Problematical Career of Serge Lifar”

For much of the long twentieth century, the ten French-language letters (dating from 1830) exchanged between Alexander S. Pushkin (1799-1837) and his future wife, Natalia N. Goncharova (1812-1863), were part of a well-advertised and exhibited (e.g., in the prestigious Salle Pleyel, Paris, 1937) collection of rare books, art, and artifacts belonging to Sergei M. Lifar (1905-1986). In his remarks Edward Kasinec traced the passage of these letters from Pushkin’s immediate descendants—daughter and granddaughter, both Countesses of Merenberg—to Sergei Diaghilev (1872-1929), Lifar, and their eventual sale in 1989 (through Sotheby’s Julian Barran) by Lifar’s executrix and companion Countess Lillian Ahlefeldt (1914-2008) to Pushkin House, St. Petersburg.1

The movement of these letters through three countries and many hands was used by Kasinec as a case study to illustrate the larger issue of Russian Imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet attempts to recapture, repatriate, and “rehabilitate” the cultural legacy of “Russia Abroad” in general, and that of Lifar in particular.2

References


Contents:
Préface, par Serge Lifar.
Discours prononcés à l’occasion de l’inauguration de l’exposition “Pouchkine et son époque” à la salle Pleyel, le 16 mars 1937
Trois commémorations de Pouchkine, par Serge Lifar.


Other Titles: Neviesta i zhena Pushkina

Notes: At head of title: M. L. Gofman i Sergiev Lifar Introductory matter (p. 7-20, 23-28) by Serge Lifar:
“Primiechanlia k pis’manam sostavleny professorom M. L. Gofmanom”–p. 28
“Neviesta i zhena Pushkina, ocherk prof. M. L. Gofmana”: p. [81]-158


Notes: Sale code: DIAGHILEV. Place of sale: Sporting d’Hiver, Monte Carlo. 826 lots.
Columbia Rare Book copy: Corrigenda tipped in. Date of sale: November 28-30 and December 1, 1975.


Notes


2. “Thirteen [sic, EK] letters written by Aleksandr Pushkin were handed over to a Soviet official [the Deputy Minister of Culture, Iurii M. Khilchevsky. EK] at a ceremony in a Geneva hotel Wednesday night...The Soviet Union paid an undisclosed sum for the yellowed letters in a deal arranged by Sotheby’s. The money came from a commission the Soviet Union received from Sotheby’s $3.5 million auction of contemporary Soviet art - the first of its kind - in Moscow last summer [which included Grisha Bruskin’s painting “Fundamental Lexicon ”. EK] The letters will go to the Pushkin Museum [sic., House. EK] in Leningrad...”

Mr. Kasinec’s presentation was accompanied by twenty-three power point slides, and was also delivered in Russian at a conference at Pushkin House, St. Petersburg on June 25, 2015.
In the early 1920s everyone was looking to Berlin:

Some out of fear, the others full of hope: for in this city the fate of Europe for the coming decades was being decided… In the autumn of 1922 I, like everyone else, was waiting for the revolution. … Berlin must have looked very odd to out-of-towners – with its Russian shops, cafes, restaurants, cabarets… The Germans don’t care, they have got used to us. … In a year or so, the Russian Refugee Republic is going to be proclaimed. — Ilya Ehrenburg.

The Russian Refugee Republic was not proclaimed, but Russian society continued to pour into Berlin, the city that was already so exciting and full of avant-garde experiments that it formed the center of the European cultural universe.

After the war, Berlin had become a kind of caravansary where everyone travelling between Moscow and the West came together. … In the apartments round the Bayrische Platz there were as many samovars and theosophical and Tolstoyan countesses as there had been in Moscow… In my whole life I’ve never seen so many wonderful rabbis or so many Constructivists as in Berlin in 1922. — Marc Chagall.

This invasion of the intelligentsia happened after the October Revolution of 1917. From 1919 onward, large waves of emigrants from Russia arrived in Berlin. By the mid-1920s the German capital housed one of the largest Russian refugee communities – somewhere between 100,000 and 300,000 people lived in Charlottenburg or “Charlottograd,” as it was renamed: “The most diverse personalities, ideas, and events were encountered.” Later, Paris and New York overtook Berlin as Russian emigration centers. But first stop for the exodus from Russia was Berlin, and an affinity to the city remained and exists even today.

Among the Russians in Berlin were dancers, choreographers, pedagogues, and critics. They brought with them the old and the new ballet, a ballet with the revered, “classical” tradition of Petipa and that of the modern constructivist and revolutionary style that German audiences knew only from touring companies – if at all.

It is an odd coincidence that together with the Russians and their ballet aesthetic, the proponents of German dance arrived in Germany: German dance had been developed outside of the country, mainly in Switzerland, and now needed to be brought back to establish itself in the mother country. Rudolf von Laban moved to Germany in 1919, the same year that so many Russians decided to leave Soviet Russia. Mary Wigman also organized her own return in 1919 and settled in Dresden at the end of the year.

Thus two dance factions arrived at the same time in Germany, and very quickly became fierce opponents. Both Laban and Wigman – and thus modern dance – rejected ballet. The battle between German dance and ballet was a confrontation between existential cultural claims, and it had profound and long-term implications. At stake was nothing less than the development and propagation of an appropriate movement culture for one of the most powerful countries of Europe. No other country saw the conflict between ballet and modern dance carried out with such force and such viciousness. There might have been a middle-European reluctance to accept ballet. But only in Germany did this collision of interests lead to an extreme interpretation of aesthetics and to an attitude that sought the exclusion, even elimination of ballet. That confrontation was also fueled by the peculiar Weimar climate that sharpened this, as all other debates. As a result of this history, the views of modern dancers were more than opinions; they were connected to political campaigns and agendas, linked to national educational systems, and influenced financial decisions of the governmental agencies of Weimar institutions. Above all, these interests led to a constant and well-organized assault on the networks of ballet schools, theatres, and opera houses – for political, educational, and economic reasons.

But the Russians in Berlin seemed oblivious to such enmity and cultivated their ballet aesthetic, classical and modern. In the early 1920s ballet and dance schools sprouted in Berlin like little mushrooms after a warm rain. One of the most famous was the Russian Eduardova School that bore the name of Evgenia Eduardova (1882–1960), a former coryphée at the Mariinsky theatre who had arrived in Berlin in 1920. Josef Lewitan (1894–1976; Joseph Levitan once he emigrated to New York in 1946), Eduardova’s lover and later her husband, who had studied law in St Petersburg, managed the school. But he did much more: he founded the first comprehensive German dance magazine – Der Tantz – that covered all aspects of dance rather than advocating for one particular genre. For Levitan, ballet provided the measures of dance from which he developed his own aesthetic theory; using Akim Volynsky as a point of departure, whose book Kniga Likovanii (The Book of Exaltations) he translated and...
published in his journal as “Buch des Jubels.” He also organized tours and performances for many Russian artists in Germany. For instance, he found opportunities for the Eduardova students to perform: in Die Fiedermaus with the celebrated Fritz Massary and Max Pallenberg, cabaret evenings and the highly successful variety revues in the Wintergarten. Among the Eduardova students were Lilian Karina, Raja Dembo, Gerda Renen, Nina Tikonova (Tikanova), Natascha Trofimova, Vera Zorina (born Eva Brigitta Hartwig, later married to Balanchine), Gustav Blank, Alexander von Swaine, and Sabine Ress, who took over the school after Eduardova followed Levitan into exile.\(^9\) German dance critic Horst Koegeier, who reigned supreme as the German critic and writer on dance for many decades, remembered the Eduardova school as a formative factor in the making of a German ballet. He traced his own affinity to ballet back to early encounters with the choreographer and teacher Gustav Blank, and thus saw himself as part of the Eduardova tradition. He considered Akim Volynsky to have been the most significant dance critic of the twentieth century.

In short, Levitan plunged the Russian ballerinas (or ballerinas to be) and the German students of Russian ballet into the German theatre and cabaret scene, and exposed German theatre to the Russian ballet traditions: he arranged tours across Germany and Austria (to the Hamburger Schauspielhaus or to the Apollo Theatre in Vienna, for instance); he was responsible for the visit of the Habima Theatre in Germany; he organized the Berlin tours of Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina, and Olga Preobrazhenska, who performed in the Bluthner-Saal, the Philharmonie, and the Scala respectively, and he also guided the press releases of these artists and shaped their public image. In addition, he managed Oskar Schlemmer’s presentation of the Triadic Ballet in Paris in 1932 during the Choreography Competition sponsored by the Archives Internationales de la Danse—when all German modern dancers boycotted this work. Modern performers refused to participate in the original but also odd work that was so different from modern ballet or modern dance. They would not wear the costumes Schlemmer had designed and would not dance on point he insisted on, rather than following the barefoot aesthetic of German dance. At this point of desperation and rejection, Levitan became involved in the Paris performance of the Triadic Ballet in 1932 and offered the Eduardova students as performers.\(^10\)

Levitan’s work demonstrates how quickly German and Russian affairs became intertwined and how deeply and immediately Russians influenced the German dance scene. The Russians were conduits through which ideas, aesthetics, theories, and practices flowed to and fro—between East and West. Levitan, in particular, is an example of this journey of thought and practice, for he made and sold the public face of ballet and shaped its perception—ballet with a wide range of aesthetic options. In the factious atmosphere of the 1920s, that was an extraordinary program: through Levitan’s promotion of ballet as one aspect of a larger set of aesthetic perspectives, dance theory, criticism, education, and performance became more significant. Weimar offered fertile soil for any kind of dance investigation, and the symbiosis of modern dance and literature or poetry had already fascinated the public. But the systematization of ballet and the experience of Russian education in particular made a serious impact on general dance instruction. It was, therefore, the ballet schools in Berlin that were considered the most serious rivals and a threat to an independent and supreme modern dance and the aesthetic of the individual anchored within a community. The Russian ballet schools forced German ballet dancers and modern dancers alike to reconsider their methods of teaching, their training logic, and aims; above all, the Russians forced the Germans to clearly articulate the concept of the ideal moving body.

Another, more influential teacher, with a much more significant concept of pedagogy than Eduardova, was Victor Gsovsky (1902-1974), who shuttled between Berlin and Paris starting in the mid-1920s. He taught ballet classes at the Berlin State Opera (Max Terpis was ballet master at the time) from 1925 on. Between 1930 and 1933 he worked as choreographer at UFA, the big German commercial film company. Francesca Falcone and Patrizia Veroli have written extensively on his career and the principles of his pedagogical methods and I am not going to repeat their findings.\(^11\) (In any case, we rely on the same source of information in regard to Gsovsky: Lilian Karina.) For Victor Gsovsky, German dance embodied the worst of Germanic vices: deep thoughts, deep searching for deep meaning, and invisible bodies, as opposed to ballet’s clarity of structure and principle. For him, ballet exercise formed the center of all dance activity and was the means to master the vocabulary of the classical tradition and the classical repertoire—which was and belonged on stage. “Why do I need soulfulness, if I can dance?” he asked in 1950. And he told the German dancers that their so-called “expression is laziness.”\(^12\)

Victor Gsovsky brought with him his wife Tatiana Issachenko (1901-1993), who would transform ballet in Germany and define its modern choreographic image after World War II. Both danced together and both created choreographies. Tatiana’s career as a pedagogue began in 1928. In 1975 she put her last choreography on stage but continued to teach for many years afterward. Tatiana Issachenko\(^13\) was the daughter of Claudia Issachenko (Claudia, Baroness Eggert von Eckhofen), a performer and “free dancer” in the Duncan style. Her father, the tsarist general Vladimir Abramov (of the Galitsin dynasty), died when she was seven years old. Her stepfather, the lawyer Vassily Issachenko,\(^14\) was considered left-leaning. Tatiana described her upbringing as “free” and full of art, books, and theatre performances. She received her first movement lessons from her mother, who had studied “Anatomy of bodily expression.” Then she was sent to ballet school and Gsovsky said of her dance teachers and their styles:

They were strict and inapproachable. The mathematically clear technical foundation of Noverre seamlessly

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Another, more influential teacher, with a much more significant concept of pedagogy than Eduardova, was Victor Gsovsky (1902-1974), who shuttled between Berlin and Paris starting in the mid-1920s. He taught ballet classes at the Berlin State Opera (Max Terpis was ballet master at the time) from 1925 on. Between 1930 and 1933 he worked as choreographer at UFA, the big German commercial film company. Francesca Falcone and Patrizia Veroli have written extensively on his career and the principles of his pedagogical methods and I am not going to repeat their findings.\(^11\) (In any case, we rely on the same source of information in regard to Gsovsky: Lilian Karina.) For Victor Gsovsky, German dance embodied the worst of Germanic vices: deep thoughts, deep searching for deep meaning, and invisible bodies, as opposed to ballet’s clarity of structure and principle. For him, ballet exercise formed the center of all dance activity and was the means to master the vocabulary of the classical tradition and the classical repertoire—which was and belonged on stage. “Why do I need soulfulness, if I can dance?” he asked in 1950. And he told the German dancers that their so-called “expression is laziness.”\(^12\)

Victor Gsovsky brought with him his wife Tatiana Issachenko (1901-1993), who would transform ballet in Germany and define its modern choreographic image after World War II. Both danced together and both created choreographies. Tatiana’s career as a pedagogue began in 1928. In 1975 she put her last choreography on stage but continued to teach for many years afterward. Tatiana Issachenko\(^13\) was the daughter of Claudia Issachenko (Claudia, Baroness Eggert von Eckhofen), a performer and “free dancer” in the Duncan style. Her father, the tsarist general Vladimir Abramov (of the Galitsin dynasty), died when she was seven years old. Her stepfather, the lawyer Vassily Issachenko,\(^14\) was considered left-leaning. Tatiana described her upbringing as “free” and full of art, books, and theatre performances. She received her first movement lessons from her mother, who had studied “Anatomy of bodily expression.” Then she was sent to ballet school and Gsovsky said of her dance teachers and their styles:

They were strict and inapproachable. The mathematically clear technical foundation of Noverre seamlessly
merged with the pulsing insights of Petipa and Cechetti who supervised the Mariinsky Theatre for many years—a well-balanced tablature of classical ballet. It offered a wide array of possibilities and the study of it was relentless. Just to name a few teachers: they were Novikoff, Bekeffi, Alexandrova, Gevergeieva [sic], Matiatine, and for some time Preobrazhenska.\footnote{15}

She too took lessons in the Moscow Duncan studio, learnt ballet, and also visited the Hellerau school of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze.

After World War I, Tatiana Gsovsky went to the theatre in Krasnodar; Samuel Marshak, the well-known writer of children's literature, engaged her to create dance scenes and introduce the actors to movement. In 1918 she had married the lawyer Alexander Moshevitinov, and her daughter Lena was born in 1920.\footnote{16} In Krasnodar she met Victor Gsovsky, with whom she left Russia in 1924 or 1925—\footnote{though nothing is clear or transparent in the Gsovsky case; everything is a mystery and could be completely different. In 1928, not least because Tatiana could not find work as a dancer and then suffered an accident during an audition, the Gsovskys opened a ballet school in the Fasanenstrasse in Berlin.} though nothing is clear or transparent in the Gsovsky case; everything is a mystery and could be completely different. In 1928, not least because Tatiana could not find work as a dancer and then suffered an accident during an audition, the Gsovskys opened a ballet school in the Fasanenstrasse in Berlin.

My second husband Victor and I, we came from Russia with great hopes; we knew nothing about the situation of classical ballet in Germany. We settled down and then tried to continue the work that we had begun in Russia—classical ballet, proper classical ballet. Now we had to learn that just at this moment expressionist dance had chased the classical ballet from the stage. Perhaps that was justified; what had been deemed classical ballet in Germany previously had, in fact, nothing to do with the real school of classical ballet. Time was against us. A period of unleashed art. The wave of dance reform degenerated into acrimonious battles. Everything that smacked of ballet was stamped out, with the help of carefully targeted death stabs by the press. The principle of classical ballet was thrown over board. The vision of beauty broke, collapsed into itself. That time demanded gesture rather than pose, explosion rather than precision.\footnote{17}

The late 1920s were a difficult time to secure an engagement at a German theatre or opera: unemployment among dancers and choreographers was extremely high. Therefore, Tatiana drew fashion designs for the textile studios in Berlin, purely to make ends meet, and she designed costumes for the dancers whom Victor trained. Her relationship to modern dance, which she experienced as that destructive force that had swept away all of the classical ballet aesthetic, was informed by curiosity and the desire to learn. Why would the modern dancers hate ballet so much? Why did they refuse to appreciate, even less comprehend, a different movement logic?

The so-called German Dance, expressionist dance, was quite alien to me. In Russia we knew about Isadora Duncan, who had introduced a modern, I call it modern though I do not like the word, school. When I arrived here, when I was confronted with the phenomenon of Mary Wigman, it was a shock for me. Everything I knew about dance was questioned. I was always prepared to take something new. Perhaps I was lucky to have had that attitude when I met Wigman, then Jooss and his “Green Table.” That left its mark on me. I understood that every time makes its own impression, and that many new elements are added to one’s life so that new areas of tension and new relationships emerge with which one has to reckon.\footnote{18}

Between 1925, their arrival in Berlin, and Victor’s final departure for Paris and the rise of Nazism in 1933, the couple trained dancers and created many small dance scenes for their group called Gsovsky-Ballett, most of them staged on demand in theatres, variety shows in the Scala and Wintergarten, and small entertainment venues. By doing that, by creating “kitsch,” the Gsovskys confirmed the worst prejudices of modern dancers against ballet: namely, its insignificance and shallowness, made merely to satisfy the appetite of an audience seeking superficial thrills. Though Tatiana Gsovsky, in retrospect, acknowledged the danger—that a complete misconception of her actions might arise—she insisted that behind the sweet façade lay serious exploration and the first attempt to find a new form for modern ballet. She knew, she said, that her time as a choreographer of the ballet form would eventually arrive.\footnote{19}

Tatiana Gsovsky’s career as a choreographer and pedagogue, independent of her husband’s, began in 1935/36, when she accepted an engagement as ballet mistress (with Jens Keith as ballet master) at the Municipal Opera Essen, where she occupied Kurt Jooss’s position after he had emigrated. She also taught at the Folkwang school—where Jooss had coached dancers and choreographers. She joined the Reich Theatre Chamber (a precondition and necessity in order to work as a
professional performing artist), demonstrated her Aryan descent, and swore allegiance to the new regime. Her first sovereign choreographies were performed on October 25, 1935 in Essen: *Don Juan* by Christoph Willibald Gluck; *Till Eulenspiegel* by Richard Strauss, two dances to Claude Debussy music, and some *Slavonic Dances* by Antonín Dvořák. Nothing earth-shattering: solid contemporary repertoire suspended somewhere between appearing daring and playing safe. One year later, on December 5, 1936, *Landsknechte* (Mercenaries), a dance of nine pictures, with music by Julius Weismann (1879–1950), was presented, and with it emerged a clearer orientation of a new ballet (or, perhaps, a ballet that initially took its cues from Jooss and his *Green Table* – one that did not give up the classical vocabulary but modernized it by exposing it to contemporary storytelling. The libretto had been written by Tatiana Gsovsky – in the future she would produce most scenarios for her works.

(Victor Gsovsky danced the main role.) An innovative interpretation of Ballett-Tanztheater, “ballet dance theatre,” could be glimpsed.

Gsovsky claimed that it was General Intendant Gustav Gründgens – the Mephisto of Nazi theatre and one of the most powerful men in that theatre world – who best understood her artistic ambitions, whereas most other theatre directors were unsympathetic or rejected her work and her vision. She also claimed that it was with Gründgens that her concept of a new ballet came to life – a specifically German ballet, for an international or Russian ballet would have offended German racial sensibilities. In 1938, at Gründgens’s Berlin Staatstheater, she presented several choreographies from Essen, and also some new scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*, with music by Tchaikovsky. This was a breakthrough.

If Gründgens was one of her great supporters, then Hanns Niedecken-Gebhardt (who had replaced Laban as temporary master mind of the Nazi dance universe) was the other. In 1939 she was employed at the Deutsche Meisterstätten, the German Master Workshops, and its ensemble the Deutsche Tanzbühne, the German Dance Theatre. She taught and choreographed there and had arrived at the place at the center of cultural power, of decision- and dance-making. But she was “stateless,” since she had cast off her Russian nationality and citizenship (that is, the nationality of Nazi Germany’s enemy, and she now emphasized her sympathies for the White side of politics); without a passport she would find herself in a very dangerous situation that could easily have contributed to her disappearance. The fact that it did not demonstrates her resilience and cleverness at surviving critical situations in Nazi Germany.

Her productions of Carl Orff’s *Catulli Carmina* in 1942 really caught the public’s as well as her colleagues’ attention. These were ambitious works; they combined word, music, movement, and image, and depended on close collaboration among all the contributors. Tatiana Gsovsky was inventing a new scenic and dramatic, operatic as well as symphonic ballet; she was developing a specific form, perhaps even genre, that depended on close interaction with contemporary composers and a narrative technique of literary and art allusions, but also full of erotic innuendos. Her role was not confined to that of the choreographer: as mentioned, she wrote the libretto and often also designed sets or costumes. She was well on her way to becoming the leading modern ballet choreographer, more ambitious and more successful than Rudolf Kölling or Lizzie Maudrick, when suddenly, in 1942, her fortunes seemed to turn: a ban on all abstract or narrative ballet works was announced by the Propaganda Ministry, and her name was mentioned as a negative example. The attempt to forbid the creation and performance of ballet raised a storm of protest and the outrage of composers such as Richard Strauss, Werner Egk, or Carl Orff, all of whom had collaborated with Gsovsky and respected her. Their reaction lead to the repeal of the prohibition. In May 1943 she was cautioned by the Gestapo, the secret police, for employing unregistered dancers. But in October 1944, Gsovsky was commissioned to devise a film-choreography for two ballet dancers, Lieselotte Köster and Jockel Stahl, the darlings of the Berlin ballet scene. The Special Productions Department of the news show described Gsovsky in the application to the Reich Film Chamber as a “unique” and “exceptional” artist. In her last work in the *Third Reich*, Gottfried von Einem’s *Prinzessin Turandot*, produced and choreographed in the Dresden State Opera in February 1944, she continued the exploration of a new ballet aesthetic. Thus Gsovsky, the stateless Russian, continued to work until the end of World War II.

Despite resistance from modern dance advocates, Gsovsky cleverly appropriated the term “dance drama” or “dramatic dance,” which thus far had only been defined within the German modern movement context. Laban had coined the term but Gsovsky used it to describe her own approach and her own style. In postwar Germany this method would be called the “Berlin Style.”

After World War II, in August 1947, she was questioned by the British military government. “No objection” was raised against her and her past; she did not need to undergo the denazification procedures of the Allies and prove her anti-Nazi or democratic credibility. Tatiana Gsovsky had made her name and her career as a choreographer – not during the 1920s but under the Nazis in the 1930s. More importantly, she adopted the rhetoric of German dance and used it to her own advantage: her analysis of the concept and then synthesis of the components of “dance drama” and “dance theatre” pushed the limits of dance as well as ballet. During the 1930s she incorporated this terminology into her vocabulary; it evolved with her choreographic work, and both became stronger and more coherent. After 1945 and the collapse of the Third Reich, critics internalized Gsovsky’s vocabulary (linguistic as well as movement vocabulary) and acknowledged her contribution to a modern German ballet. The discussions around the “Berlin style” from 1946 onward were part of a discourse that had already integrated “Russian ballet” by redefining, resetting, and renaming it as profoundly German and no
longer Russian. The Russian influence and tradition here effortlessly fused into a true German ballet culture.

For critic Horst Koegler, Tatiana Gsovsky epitomized the “dancerly,” choreographic ideal: she was “neo-classical” (high praise from Koegler); she managed to combine narrative tension, dramatic plot, and acrobatic technique; she opened up psychological, even psychoanalytical dimensions in her characters, yet never left the classical movement canon. Analysts saw a completely convincing combination of her husband Victor’s classical culture and her mother Claudia’s free – plastic – plyaska dance practice merged into an unique Tatiana-mixture. She has to be credited with the invention of a new musical-dramatic dramaturgy and a new place for dance in contemporary operas. In 1983, on the occasion of receiving the German Tanzpreis award, Kurt Peters emphasized that Tatiana Gsovsky had created a truly German ballet. Whether this really was a new ballet and new “synthesis,” or merely a compromise, or even pure rhetoric to please and persuade German critics like Koegler or Peters (who had their own Nazi skeletons in their various closets) and to imply a new orientation, I leave open at the moment. But the transition from Russian to German and from a modern dance concept to a ballet aesthetic in this way had not happened before – and its successful accomplishment remains a remarkable achievement for Gsovsky and her sense of when to employ this type of master strategy. This strategy was as much a political victory as an aesthetic innovation.

What some supporters of Gsovsky hailed as a new conceptions of modern ballet was, as they conceded themselves, not entirely new: Duncan, “plyaska,” drambalet, symphonic ballet, some realism yet not too much, dance drama, and dance theatre – all these were ingredients in the ballet of Tatiana Gsovsky that dominated the German ballet stage in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Gsovsky’s and the dance critics’ endeavors to cast her ballet in the light of innovation and experimentation would have had the benefit of leaving previous political encounters behind and realigning the German dance scene, according to the principle of “Stunde Null” – “Zero Hour,” with the movement preferences of the Allies – Americans, British, French, and Russians had their respective views on ballet. Yet her summary of ballet is strikingly conventional, non-avant-garde, and lacks any sense of innovation:

May “modern dance” find its salvation near the ground, the classical dancer takes to the air; he wants to be bound to the ground only by the tip of his toe, just forced to fulfill the laws of gravity. His flight is the embodiment of all our desires, which Icarus realized with insufficient means.

What has happened to the Russian legacy, to that of Levitan and the Gsovskys?

As far as the assessment and reassessment of the 1920s is concerned, the Russians in Berlin have always stood in the shadow of the inventors and practitioners of modern German dance. The mighty force of the new dance led to a new movement culture, and the legend of a magical rebirth of movement culture in Germany still requires that modern ballet be as “decadent” and hopelessly old-fashioned as the ballet of the nineteenth century. Modern dance, convinced of its own superiority, trivialized, even belittled the contribution of ballet. All the more important then, to recognize the influence of the Russians.

For a long time, Joseph Levitan’s presence in Berlin was forgotten and erased, not because he was Russian but because he was a Jew. Very gradually his extensive critical work has been reintroduced into German dance history. Victor Gsovsky is remembered selectively. He is recalled when it suits the construction of artistic genealogies but has always been of secondary importance in relation to Tatiana’s choreographic and artistic design work.

But an assessment of Tatiana Gsovsky’s choreographies has been extremely difficult: she forbade any filming, systematic photography, or notation of her ballets. Her archive has been opened to research only recently. Her choreographies have not been performed for many years and herself never intended to build a repertoire of her own oeuvre that could be integrated into the playbills of modern ballet companies. Partly she is to blame for this situation: Gsovsky refused the re-staging of her ballets. On the other hand, new choreographers and artistic directors in the opera houses where she was once engaged focused on staging new works rather than compiling an historically conscious catalogue of ballets.

She too achieved a synthesis of ballet and modern dance, though of a different kind in comparison to that of Kurt Jooss’s Tanztheater. Jooss used modern dance as the basis for his new approach, and his modern dance theatre was fused with conceptions and practices that he had learnt from Rudolf von Laban. Tatiana Gsovsky came from the “other side” to dance theatre: from ballet. She continued to explore the different ways in which the Russian ballet tradition could contribute to a new sophisticated theatrical dance culture in post-war Germany. We should, therefore, speak of her choreographies also as part of this Tanztheater tradition. She studied the philosophies of modern German dance closely and always acknowledged its influence on the evolution of her views. This inventor of a modern Russian-German ballet needs to be brought back to our attention once more.
Notes


6 Laban (1879-1958) had argued that ballet was at best mechanical but most often worse, an aberration of the gift of human movement, when he outlined a College of Dance (Tanzhochschule) in the mid-1920s or when he published his philosophy of dance in Die Welt des Tänzers in 1928, or in his speeches at the Dance Congresses (1927 in Magdeburg, 1928 in Essen, and 1930 in Munich). In her response in 1929 to an analysis of German dance by André Levinson, Wigman explained how ballet and German dance were defined by racial features and symbolized essential properties of body, soul, and nation. Ballet was French, modern dance German: they stood as inalienable opposites of movement aesthetics. In 1933 Mary Wigman had argued against ballet and for German dance as an expression of true blood and a defense against alien attacks in a lecture series that was published as Deutscher Tanz in 1935 (a book that was a huge embarrassment after WWII). Wigman systematically targeted Levinson and his dance critical work and declared it un-German, not part of the national program. The Nazis followed her advice and intensified the Aryanization process already under way.

7 Evgenia Eduardowa/Eduardova (1882–1960) graduated in 1901 from the Imperial Ballet Academy in St. Petersburg and was engaged at the Mariinsky as a leading demi-caractère dancer. She toured with Anna Pavlova.

8 Much of this information is based on long conversations and a telephone interview about Joseph Levitan, on 5 April 2001, in particular, conducted by the author with Lilian Karina.


10 Cf. Oskar Schlemmer’s and Artur Michel’s correspondence, 1932, in NYPL, Collection Artur Michel (S)* MGZMD 84.

11 Cf. Falcone and Veroli, “Teaching of Victor Gsovsky.” From 1938 he taught in Paris and became ballet master after Serge Lifar at the Paris Opera in 1945. From 1950 to 1952 he was ballet master in Munich where his student Luitpold Marcel Fenchel had worked.


13 Born Tatjana Abramoff. For an extensive biography see Michael Heuermann, Tatjana: Leben und Werk der Choreographin und Pädagogin Tatjana Gsovsky (Munich: K Kieser Verlag, 2007); and Max W. Busch, Tatjana Gsovsky – Choreographin und Tanzpädagogin (Berlin: Akademie der Künste/Alexander Verlag, 2005).

14 His name could have been Sokolov – an adviser of Alexander Kerensky’s (1881-1970). He would have changed his name for security reasons. Cf. Michael Heuermann, “Tatjana Gsovsky und das ‘Dramatische Ballet’: Der Berliner Stil zwischen Der Idiot und Tristan” (PhD diss., Universitaet Bremen, 2001), 21.

15 Tatjana Gsovsky, memoir, no date, in Busch, Tatjana Gsovsky, 13.

16 Cf. Busch, Tatjana Gsovsky, 17.

17 Tatjana Gsovsky, memoir, no date, in ibid., 21.


19 Ibid., 24.


21 Cf. Klaus Mann, Mephisto: Novel of a Career (1936), and Istvan Szabo’s film, 1981, after the novel with Klaus Maria Brandauer.

22 Tatjana Gsovsky’s aesthetics and choreographic style were later summarized as: “a literary-artistic sensibility of intense feminine and erotic charm and based on a sovereign academic vocabulary” (Friedrichs-Ballettlexikon).
On the other hand, Tatiana Gsovsky, unlike Wigman, Palucca, et al., did not immediately remove her Jewish pupils from her school, as the examples of Mia Pick and Marianne Silbermann prove (ibid., 111). For the ban on ballet see Lilian Karina and Marion Kant, Hitler’s Dancers: Modern German Dance and the Third Reich (Oxford/New York: Berghahn 2004), 136ff.


25 Ibid.


27 Cf. “plastic” as a term and practice introduced by and realized through the Duncan aesthetic into Soviet Russia.


30 She was a member of the Academy of Arts in Berlin (West), Department of Performing Arts, between 1955 and 1993, thus much of her collection is in the Academy and combined with the papers of Gert Reinholm.
NIJINSKY’S AFTERIMAGES IN EISENSTEIN’S AND CHAPLIN’S EYES

DARIA KHITROVA

Let me start off with a comment on the word “afterimage” used in the title of this paper. I use it as a metaphor, of course, yet by its origin “afterimage” is a scientific term. It comes from optics, or, to be more exact, from the physiology of vision. Afterimage is a retinal image: the one that stays at the bottom of the eye if the original image it has been exposed to abruptly disappears. The image is gone, has vanished, ceased to exist, yet its optical ghost haunts our vision for a brief time. A glitch of nature, afterimages turned out to be a blessing for the movies. Perceptual inertia, known as the persistence of vision, is why we see motion pictures as a continuous movement, not as a succession of frames. This makes afterimage a useful metaphor as well: the cultural afterimages I want to discuss help explain the persistence of tradition.

What I’ll be mostly talking about are Nijinsky’s afterimages in the eye and imagination of two filmmakers: Sergei Eisenstein and Charlie Chaplin. The afterimages that they each experienced were of a different nature.

Chaplin met Nijinsky in 1916 as he was making Easy Street. As Chaplin recalls in his book of memoirs, the god-like young man, with an otherworldly face, came to the set of the film and spent three days watching Chaplin at his funniest without a single smile (Nijinsky does smile on this cropped picture taken on the set, but probably because he was told to do so). Chaplin did notice something strange about Nijinsky when, on a reciprocal visit, he watched Nijinsky prepare for L’Après-midi d’un faune in his dressing room – but only later the wisdom of hindsight told him these could have been signs of approaching insanity.

Some twenty years later, in the middle of the 1930s, Chaplin sat down to write a screenplay that would have been, had he completed it, a melodrama about a Russian ballet genius. He tried out many names including Naginsky and even Nijinsky; after many years and changes, the film became Chaplin’s famous Limelight. The dramatic themes Chaplin was toying with in the 1930s included the aging genius dance, “his sense of justice,” his loyalty toward less fortunate members of the company, his socialite infidel nymphomanic wife, and his death after a magnificent leap off stage (just like in Le Spectre de la Rose). At one point our Naginsky makes a bond with a girl on the basis of spiritual, “non-bestial” love. This latter motif is a probable testimony of Chaplin’s familiarity with Romola Nijinsky’s biography of her husband in which Romola complains about impertinent followers of the Tolstoyan teaching imposing themselves upon Nijinsky, thus virtually depriving her of any direct communication with her husband. Apparently, Chaplin associated Tolstoyan teaching with sexual abstinence.

Chastity is an explicit issue in Chaplin’s script. Naginsky has trouble with his impresario Daghaloff who wants him to perform sensational roles, like the one in L’Après-midi d’un faune. In the scenario, this part is discussed in a family party conversation:

- I’d like to see The Afternoon of a Faune but for some reason mother won’t permit it.
  Why, mother dear?
- You may hear it at the Philharmonic but I’ll not permit you to see it here.
- But, mother darling, it has great beauty. The sex part of it is incidental.
- Don’t use such a term.

As we know, Chaplin saw Nijinsky dance the Faune in 1916, the same week that Nijinsky paid that visit to Chaplin’s studio. To believe Chaplin’s memoirs, the company wanted Chaplin to see Nijinsky in L’Après-midi d’un faune, and because of this the ballet was added to the program. There is a way we can account for this mutual curiosity. The two media in which the two artists excelled had points of overlap from which both Nijinsky and Chaplin could take away something. Nijinsky was, among other things, a balletic comedian and clown, most obviously in Petrochka, but also in Till Eulenspiegel, a slapstick ballet that Nijinsky created in the same year that he met Chaplin. As Chaplin proudly remembers, Nijinsky came up to Chaplin after seeing Chaplin’s comedy in the making, and said: “Your art is balletique, you are a dancer.”

Afterimages may be accurate or unfaithful, but they do sometimes tell us untold things about the original image. Chaplin starts his scenario with a sketch of Nijinsky’s character that, in my mind, hits the core of controversy about Nijinsky’s artistic legacy. The controversy I have in mind is this. Nijinsky the dancer left the same afterimage in the eyes of those who witnessed him on stage. God-like, hypnotic, electrifying – those are Chaplin’s words about Nijinsky, and no one I can imagine would contradict this verdict. Things become more complicated as soon as we turn to Nijinsky the choreographer. People could like or dislike his choreography, but the real controversy was about whether
or not this choreography was his.

Indeed, many memoir sources we use to get a sense of Nijinsky’s work – like Stravinsky’s or Serge Lifar’s – question if the “poor boy,” as Stravinsky called him, was capable at all of putting together a coherent choreographic work. The reason for this was, of course, Nijinsky’s apparent intellectual inferiority (or, perhaps, his inability to communicate adequately with intellectuals). I am not asserting this myself; what I want to stress is the prevalent presumption. As long as you remain a performer, no one cares if you are an intellectual or not; once you claim that you are a creator, expectations are raised. An author must be an intellectual or, at least, educated in the arts and culture.

This presumption presented a particular problem for ballet. In Diaghilev’s era, and largely owing to his efforts, the reputation of ballet was transformed: no longer entertainment, it was now seen to occupy the topmost rungs of the artistic hierarchy. The schooling that most Imperial/early-Diaghilev dancers had received, however, was anything but intellectually demanding; hence not all dancers could keep up with their art’s rapidly rising renown. By educating himself, Fokine was able to jumpstart his career. Diaghilev became a personal university for most of his other choreographers; however, as much as lessons with Diaghilev could have influenced Nijinsky as an artist, he was not an easy man to engage in an intellectual conversation, or rather a type of *causerie* that implied belonging.

The character traits that Chaplin imparts to his genius dancer serve as seeds for the dramatic development of the future film. From the outset,

Naginsky, the great genius <sic> of the Russian ballet, was a simple, shy, inarticulate man who came from humble origins. He was the son of a poor cobbler who could not afford to give him the education that he desired. This made Naginsky shy and hesitant whenever he tried to express himself, for he was conscious of his grammar and sensitive to the sound of his unmusical voice, which was husky and uncultured. These defects tormented him and affected his character so that people who met him casually thought him a surly individual who never said much and who was difficult to get along with, yet he had great capacity for love and friendship and was, by nature, kind and considerate.

It was easy for Chaplin to relate to this. A celebrated actor, he was not always sure of his grammar and felt handicapped around intellectuals like the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein or the physicist Albert Einstein. The cultural status of cinema, let alone slapstick comedy, was even shakier than that of ballet. We can see as we read different versions of Chaplin’s script how Naginsky becomes closer and closer to being Chaplin himself. The last draft which features the Nijinsky character starts with this: “Charlot was once a famous ballet dancer until he became too old. Then he joined the circus and became a clown.”

Here Figure 1
the dancer ultimately morphs into the clown character familiar to us from Chaplin's *Limelight*.

While the genius dancer character vanished from Chaplin's film, the afterimage of Nijinsky stayed. The metamorphosis of a dancer into a clown was possibly triggered by Nijinsky himself, who in his diary (familiar to Chaplin) famously called himself a Clown of God. Chaplin, it seems, took this metaphor literally.

Let me now turn the page and look at Nijinsky's afterimage in the eyes of Sergei Eisenstein. Distinct from Chaplin's, this was an afterimage of the unseen. The reason is that, for all his love for choreography, the relationship between Eisenstein and modern ballet was, to use Anna Akhmatova's coinage, a story of non-encounter, *nevstrechi*. Classical as well as drambalet were, of course, readily available to Soviet ballet-lovers, but the sole glimpse Eisenstein caught of more modernist productions was a handful of Mikhail Fokine's works that Eisenstein saw (and immensely admired) at the Mariinsky theater before the Revolution.

While it is true that Eisenstein never saw any of the Ballets Russes productions on stage, he was aware of them and eager to learn more. Eisenstein's encounters with ballet were mediated by his encounters with books and resulted in drawings of Nijinsky's dancing as Eisenstein restaged them in his imagination.

Of several dance-related books that Eisenstein once had, only two remain on his bookstand to this day: a biography of Vaslav Nijinsky by his wife Romola and another biography, Arnold Haskell's 1935 *Diaghileff*. There must have been more. As we know, Eisenstein asked Jay Leyda to send him Paul Magriel's *Nijinsky: An Illustrated Monograph*, which did indeed arrive in 1947, now missing. Three other books on ballet, all by Serge Lifar, may have inhabited Eisenstein's library at one time. Lifar's biography of Diaghilev is mentioned as a source in one of Eisenstein's notes. Another missing volume, Lifar's *Ballet: Traditional to Modern*, can be tracked by a piece of information Eisenstein is unlikely to have found elsewhere. That the third one, a book-size selfie entitled *Serge Lifar à l'Opéra*, was once among Eisenstein's books is no more than an educated guess based on a similarity between two drawings.

Eisenstein's curiosity about Nijinsky was not limited to these books. There are two newspaper clippings folded accurately and placed under the cover of Romola Nijinsky's story of her husband. One of the two clippings is a flattering review of the very book we find it in; the other, a story from *Life* magazine about Nijinsky's reaction to what appears to be Serge Lifar's attempt at reenactment therapy: brought to a dance rehearsal hall, Nijinsky, now a heavy, full-suited man in his forties, suddenly jumps high into the air, as if to emerge for a brief moment from lunacy and oblivion (Fig. 1).

There is Eisenstein's handwritten note inserted in Haskell's book as well, also about Nijinsky, this time, Nijinsky at the peak of his art, not at the depths of lunacy (Fig. 2):

*L’après-midi d’un Faune* by Nijinsky

The fluid Debussy and torn staccati of “changing poses”

and

*Icare* by Lifar

(d’apres M-me Sazonova)

This note is a self-addressed memo whose beginning appears easier to figure out than the sequence of names it ends with. Why Lifar, his *Icare*, and what does Sazonova have to do with both? Here is my theory about this.

The thought with which Eisenstein's note begins belongs to the theme that emerges in his writings more than once: the art of film, unlike the art of drama, which Eisenstein believed cinema was bound to replace, depends on the counterpoint, not synchrony, between what we see and what we hear. “Vertical montage” was the term Eisenstein had coined to stress the non-automatic, mutually emancipated relationships between sounds and visuals in films. And not in films alone: Eisenstein's note observes elements of “vertical montage” in Nijinsky's dance in *L’Après-midi d’un faune*, whose staccato structure, he claims, worked in counterpoint to the legato flow of Debussy's music.
Elimination is the most logical conclusion of emancipation. This is what Eisenstein's note appears to be saying when it jumps from Nijinsky to Serge Lifar's 1935 ballet Icare, whose featured innovation in choreography was the absence of music (or near absence, since a number of percussion instruments did accompany the work). This is where Julie Sazonova comes in: a lengthy passage on Lifar's Icare from her book, La Vie de la Danse, is proudly quoted in Lifar's own book Ballet: Traditional to Modern. Sensitive to music and therefore submissive to it at the start of his career, Lifar the dancer and Lifar the choreographer set himself free from the dictate of music as his art evolved, Sazonova insists. Eisenstein's input into this conversation is a timeline that traces Lifar's creative evolution back to Nijinsky's L'Après-midi d'un faune.

What began as a disagreement between the angularity of movements and the fluidity of music in the latter ended in a virtual separation in Icare.

Eisenstein's theoretical interest in dance's quarrels with music is matched by his curiosity about what he perceived to be the opposite dynamics: rapprochement between dance and visual arts. Here, too, L'Après-midi d'un faune came in handy, with its famous reliance on mythological figures from ancient vases. What Eisenstein made of this ballet may tell us more about the workings of his own synthetic mind than about Nijinsky's ballet as such, but this is exactly what makes intellectual histories worth telling.

In his Notes on the General History of Film (1948), Eisenstein draws a parallel between the genesis of L'Après-midi d'un faune and, of all things, the technology of animated films:

> The art of animation, i.e., the comparison of drawing phases — of drawings in separate moments in the continuousness of motion, has its forerunner in ballet (by the way, in animation's highest form: audiovisual!). At least in Fokine's <ballets for> Diaghilev. The reading of poses from vases. The arrangement of these poses in phases of motion through their union by means of a moving human-dancer.

Cf. Lifar (“Diaghilev”) on his understanding of Nizhinsky's rehearsals of “L'après-midi d’un faune.”

Great

According to Eisenstein’s logic, Fokine and Diaghilev are, in a sense, “forerunners” of Walt Disney. Both arts achieve what they do best using audiovisual signals; and in both still pictures come to life. Here, different phases of movement blend into one inside the projection machine; there, they do so due to the moving human body that links up these phases via dance. As he used to when pleased with what he did, Eisenstein dots this passage with the English “Great.”

As he later explained in his book of memoirs, dancing and drawing were inseparable twins: any line is a trace of movement and every movement a line drawn in the space of time. It was dialectics like this that allowed Eisenstein to move freely between media: from drawing to animated cinema to dance and on to various mythological narratives as fables, fairy tales, or sylvan mythology.

Indeed, another kind of reality that made Eisenstein liken L'Après-midi d’un faune to animated cartoons was the imagined reality of “animal epos.” Stories from animal lives, Eisenstein believed, belonged to the oldest epochs in the history of human civilization and consequently to the deepest layer of our collective unconscious – the layers whose suppressed energy great artists are able to tap and channel into art. Making animals act instead of humans is one way of waking up the beast we once have been. Nijinsky’s faun is one case in point; Mickey Mouse is another.

It is hardly by chance, Eisenstein might add, that both Faune and Mickey Mouse belong to the half-and-half brand of imaginary beings. The artist’s task is twofold: one of its folds is open to the past, the other to the future. Nijinsky’s choreography is boldly innovative; his character is deeply archaic. Disney’s animals go back to Aesop; the technology Disney uses to animate them looks forward to the future. The same unity of opposites applies, on a different level, to beings like Mickey Mouse or Faune. Both are demi-beasts, demi-humans; one half of each helps us sink back to the prelogical, sensuous, animalistic stage of human evolution; the other gives hope for a better tomorrow.

To draw is to make your pencil dance. It is true that Eisenstein never saw Nijinsky dance, but then, he made Nijinsky dance for him on paper. A number of drawings exist, a good half of which depict the provocative last gesture of the ballet and the erotic ecstasy the Faune experiences with the help of the scarf, the only trophy of his amorous quest (Fig. 3-7). Two even go beyond and refer to what happens after the performance is over: Fig. 8 is titled “After the curtain fell”; Fig. 9 – “L'après d’une après-midi d’un faune.”

Not only the Faune as a stage character, but also the artistic persona of his creator and first performer interested Eisenstein the draughtsman. Among the many phenomena of life that Eisenstein thought hid traces of pre-historic bestiality, riddles of sex were
Figures 3-5.
Figures 10-11.
by far his favorites. Was Nijinsky asexual (Chaplin’s idea), or bisexual (yet-un-divided, pre-human being for Eisenstein),\(^{10}\) or more than pan-sexual perhaps, considering his half-reptile appearance on Fig. 10 (yes, the man on the right is Diaghilev)?

This may sound weird, but Eisenstein did want to go to extreme limits in his search for the origins of art, or, as he used to call it, finding sources of art’s productive “regress.” L’Après-midi d’un faune was a perfect case for him to return to for new relics of regress. What he saw in this ballet were zoological roots of human culture, and also Nijinsky’s biographical bisexuality, which Eisenstein saw as a token of that primordial state of evolution when species were not yet divided into genders.

Ambiguities of species and gender segue easily into ambiguities of costuming. Consider the following syllogism. The faun is half animal; animals walk naked. Nijinsky is human; humans wear clothes. As a result, Nijinsky has to be dressed to look naked — wear a costume that, dialectically, is a costume in denial. A negation of a negation results in a synthesis: a naked dress (Fig. 11).

The dialectics of nakedness and dress-ness was something that intrigued Eisenstein about the art of ballet. We know this for a fact: another of Eisenstein’s drawings, captures Lifar — not Nijinsky this time — wearing the naked costume in Lifar’s Le Roi Nu. This brings us to the last question of this paper and the last dialectical ambiguity that we will hardly ever resolve. Is Eisenstein’s Nijinsky a real Nijinsky or perhaps Lifar? Technically, Eisenstein could have seen Lifar’s version of L’Après-midi d’un faune (Fig. 12) during his visit to Paris in 1930, even though there is nothing among his notes and memoirs to testify that he actually did. If we admit, if only for interest’s sake, that Eisenstein did see Lifar perform the Faune in Paris, his afterimages of Nijinsky acquire yet another dimension, a higher degree of complexity and ambiguity. It would mean that Eisenstein’s mind and pencil reconstructed the afterimage of Nijinsky not only based on what he read in books, but also by means of what we can call choreographic after-images — Vaslav Nijinsky, the divine half-beast and dancer, dressed in Serge Lifar’s all human flesh.

Notes

1 See also the original full photograph.
5 Chaplin, Footlights, with Robinson, World of Limelight, 23.
7 See, for instance: Igor Stravinsky, An Autobiography (London: Gollancz, 1935), 41-42. Lifar simply claimed that Nijinsky’s ballets were in fact Diaghilev’s creations (see Serge Lifar, Serge Diaghilev; His Life, His Work, His Legend: An Intimate Biography [New York: Putnam, 1940], 191, 200-201). On the twists and turns of Nijinsky’s fame before and after his retirement from stage, see Hanna Järvinen, “Fans, Fawns and Fauns: Ballet Stardom, Dancing Genius and the Queer Afterlife of Vaslav Nijinsky,” to be accessed online.
8 Both Nijinsky’s wife and sister Bronislava thus explained Nijinsky’s seeming remoteness in their respective memoirs.
10 Chaplin, Footlights with Robinson, World of Limelight, 26.
11 Not only did Eisenstein introduce thoughtfully choreographed dance sequences in his films, most notably October and Ivan the Terrible (see Daria Khitrova, “Eisenstein’s Choreography In Ivan The Terrible,” Studies In Russian And Soviet Cinema 5, no. 1 (2011): 55-71; also available online), he also tried his hand at pure choreography. After finishing work on Ivan, he created a Carmen-inspired short ballet called The Last Encounter for two Bolshoi character dancers and was preparing (at least, as far as we can judge by a number of sketches that survive) to choreograph Pushkin’s Queen of Spades. That was, indeed, his last project.
15 Eisenstein’s phrasing could have been influenced by a quote he could have known from another book, Lifar’s biography of Diaghilev. Discussing the critical response to L’Après-midi d’un faune, Lifar quotes Pierre Lalo’s review in Le Temps: “The production of the Faune is a great error in itself: nothing can relieve the glaring contradiction between the slavish archaism and hardcast rigidity of the choreography and the flexible flow of Debussy’s music...” (see Serge Lifar, Serge Diaghilev, 195).
19 Figures 3-6 and 8-11 are from the Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts; Fig. 7 is part of Herbert Marshall’s archive from Special Collections in the Hesburgh Library at the University of Notre Dame (I am grateful to the head of Special Collections, Natasha Lyandes, for her help and for this picture).
20 On Eisenstein and bisexuality, see Yuri Tsivian, Ivan the Terrible (London: BFI, 2002), 60-73.
Cotillion, Balanchine, and the Baby Ballerinas

Elizabeth Kendall

My subject is Balanchine’s semi-lost ballet Cotillon, which he made for the rebirth of the Ballets Russes in Monte Carlo in the spring of 1932 (three years after Diaghilev’s death). It portrays a contemporary debutante ball permeated by manic jolts of energy, strange happenings, and haunting dance images: the “Girl of the house” standing on a stool and holding a mirror; a pas de deux between a young man and Fate — another girl; a final image familiar from Balanchine’s later La Valse — hunched-over party-clad dancers running around the spinning heroine. Cotillon is important for several obvious reasons. It was the first youthful collaboration by young ex-Diaghileviens without “the old man’s” supervision: libretto by Boris Kochno, age 28; ballroom set and beautiful gowns — huge spangled tulle skirts with different-colored velvet bodices — by Christian Bérard, age 30; music by the nineteenth-century music visionary, Chabrier, but orchestrated by Vittorio Rieti, 32; steps by Balanchine, 28. Cotillon guaranteed ballet an existence beyond Diaghilev, by featuring the next dancer-generation: three circa 13-year-old “baby ballerinas” whom Balanchine had “discovered” in Parisian Russian-émigré dance studios. It can be seen as a bridge between the European, Ballets Russes-linked Balanchine, and the American master Balanchine, but it’s also sui generis, with an atmosphere uniquely gay but ominous. People who saw it never forgot it. Lincoln Kirstein thought it Proustian. British dance writer Irving Deakin called it (in 1935) Balanchine’s masterpiece.

Balanchine never chose to revive Cotillon, though it was staged by dance reconstructionists Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer in 1988 for the Joffrey Ballet.

Two filmed fragments of Cotillon can be found on YouTube — one from a 1940s Ballets Russes performance in Australia, filmed backwards; the other from Joffrey Ballet’s 1988 revival. In them you can see Cotillon’s manic energy (jumping!), the weird gestures and formations… I don’t want to analyze Cotillon here — I can’t — it doesn’t exist. If all of history has by its very nature disappeared, our dance history has double-disappeared, because dance only exists when it’s being performed. Instead I want to suggest a few points — about what, in terms of Balanchine’s life and also Balanchine’s own body — and brain — might have gone into it. This is more of a sketch than a paper. I’m still immersed in the research, and the late 1920s-early 1930s were an incredibly complex time in ballet history.

Tamara Toumanova in the 1932 Cotillon.
First point: When 20-year-old Georgi Balanchivadze joined the Diaghilev Ballets Russes in the fall of 1924 and was re-baptized “Balanchine” by Diaghilev, he was confronted by at least four forceful personalities.

The first — Diaghilev himself, then aged 52, with his top hat, his cane, his kindness and cruelty…his immense authority. To Balanchine, he was a “barin” or “grand seigneur” of the old school.

The second was Bronislava Nijinska, the then 34-year-old sister of Vaslav Nijinsky, who was then Diaghilev’s resident choreographer, a forceful and colorful character. She was about to leave the Ballets Russes.

The third was the beautiful, swarthy 19-year-old Serge Lifar, Nijinska’s former student in Kiev, who had grown as a dancer and who had just seduced Diaghilev, or vice versa, as they knelt together on Giotto’s tomb in Padua. The next step in this mutual seduction would have been for Diaghilev to make Lifar a choreographer (as he’d done with Nijinsky and Massine), the threat of which was partly the cause of Bronislava Nijinska’s leaving the Diaghilev troupe, just as Balanchine came on as a choreographer.

The fourth was another former Diaghilevian (the master’s earlier choreographic protégée who’d left the company), now brought back specifically to replace Nijinska as the choreographic “heavy”: 29-year-old Léonide Massine — he of the soulful eyes — who reappeared in Monte Carlo in January of 1925, having wrangled a huge yearly salary from Diaghilev.

Amid all this drama, the very young Balanchine, with his extremely modest salary, slipped into the rehearsal studio and started making dances. He was slight, quiet, and he no doubt still had that Soviet taint of poverty about him. “Colorless” was the word used to describe Balanchine by Boris Kochno, Diaghilev’s young right-hand-man and Balanchine’s instant new friend. “Some people, when you see them on the street, are so magnified that they fill up the street by their presence,” Kochno continued. Not Balanchine.

Yet this junior choreographer could make steps quickly and without fuss. He put dancers at ease — and he got choreographic information from them. “He never arrived with preparation for every note of music,” wrote Kochno. “He started doing this movement and that, showing the dancers what they had to do. Then at a certain moment…he started to work as a somnambulist.”

Here’s the point: young as he was and fresh from Russia, Balanchine already displayed this particular uncanny choreographic facility. Dancers in motion in front of him seemed to tap into his unconscious, and blend there with the music, allowing him to make surprisingly original steps at great speed. That’s important for understanding all of Balanchine, but especially Cotillon, his first, semi-independent ballet, which had the surreal atmosphere of a dream.

Second point: joining Diaghilev’s circle restored Balanchine to the mental operations we could summarize as “wit.” The 20-year-old had spent his adolescence in post-revolutionary Petrograd, an atmosphere not strong in humor. His most ambitious work so far had been a solemn group dance to Chopin’s Marche Funèbre. Diaghilev and his followers shared a culture of wordplay, puns, mental games, and exuberant references to past and present aesthetics. Such wit extended to the actual dancing, as Diaghilev’s last three 1924 premieres before Balanchine (all by Nijinska) attest: Les Biches (about a decadent French house-party); Les Facheux (after a Molière comedy); Le Train Bleu (about risqué young people on the Riviera). Why is this point important or related to Cotillon? Balanchine’s nuclear family, especially his Georgian father, had been witty too. I don’t want to be essentialist here, but Georgians are funny, reacting to frustrating situations with elaborate irony and absurdist jokes. Games, jokes, and wordplay were salient features of life in the pre-revolutionary Balanchivadze nuclear family. Now, the mid-1920s Ballets Russes atmosphere must have released a hidden spring in the young personality, allowing him access to earlier, pre-Soviet parts of himself. Maybe that’s one reason he grew hugely as a choreographer during his Diaghilev years. You can see this by comparing Balanchine’s revolutionarily earnest early work, the 1923 Marche Funèbre, to his 1928 witty, playful, yet majestic masterpiece Apollon Musagète, the eighth of his ten ballets for Diaghilev.

Third point: besides getting information from life inside the studio, Balanchine got it from outside too — from a life situated, at least in part, in Paris’s Russian émigré community. Around 1927, Balanchine, his then common-law wife, Alexandra Danilova, together with their “manager” Vladimir Dmitriev, rented a two-room apartment (their first home in the West) in the same building as the ballet studio of the former Mariinsky ballet.
master Nikolai Legat (on the rue des Petites Écuries). Paris’s émigré Russia was vast (population over 100,000), mostly self-contained and impoverished, containing Russian stores and restaurants, Russian magazines, books, and newspapers (including a substantial daily paper, Poslednie Novosti), club meetings, poetry readings, literary debates, historical debates, orchestras and choruses (military, balalaika, gypsy), a famous Russian nightclub, Scheherazade, and ballet. “On every block – there was one, possibly two Russian churches, and the same number of ballet studios,” wrote émigrée Nina Tikhonova in her fascinating 1992 memoir, Devushka v sinem (Girl in Blue). Ballet obviously stood for a glamorous lost culture, but it also promised employment to émigré daughters, since along with the studios came a profusion of little “Khaltura” (hackwork) ballet companies in various stages of imitating the “big players,” Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes and Nikita Balieiev’s Chauve-Souris cabaret troupe. 8

The point relating to Cotillon: if Balanchine found specific young dancers for this ballet, he didn’t have to discover the fact of baby ballerinas – they were all around him in the 1920s. Nina Tikhonova herself was one. Born in 1910, she’d trained with Olga Preobrazhenskaya (whom Balanchine knew from his Petrograd ballet school days); she’d gone into the Russian Romantic Theater at age 15; she then joined Ida Rubinstein’s and Bronislava Nijinska’s companies and became Nijinska’s ideal ballerina. As a teenager in the late 1920s she was studying with Legat, as were Balanchine and Danilova. Because Tikhonova had nothing to do between morning ballet class and an afternoon French class, she was invited to hang out at their apartment. “Perched on the divan,” she wrote, “I gossiped with Dmitriev, admiring the adorable Danilova flitting around looking after Balanchine….” who, according to Tikhonova, was courteous, even jokey with her, but was usually sitting at the piano “fingering the keys,” or conjuring his “unforgettable” borsch from a saucepan, or grilling cutlets, or playing chess against himself. 9 Another frequent visitor was young Alicia Markova, now 16, who’d danced the Nightingale in the 1925 Le Chant du Rossignol, Balanchine’s first Diaghilev ballet, and had also been “adopted” by Danilova and Balanchine.

We can imagine Balanchine, present-yet-not-present, in this social grouping, listening, “out of the corner of his ear” to the thoughts of these baby ballerinas, taking in the nature of that tremulous teenaged feminine sensibility that he would capture in so many ballets from Cotillon on.

The fourth point relates to the effect on this world of Diaghilev’s sudden death on August 19, 1929. A mad scramble ensued among company members to grab whatever could be grabbed from the enterprise, or just get some work, even if it meant edging out your colleagues. At first Lifar and Kochno attempted to keep the debt-ridden company going, to no avail. Massine, who was in America when Diaghilev died, made desperate trips back and forth to Europe, searching for backers for a new company he would direct… 10 Such job-finding pressure may have been a factor in Balanchine’s falling seriously ill. Though he’d gotten one offer – a commission from the Paris Opera (Les Créatures de Prométhée, Beethoven) — he also contracted pneumonia, which turned into pleurisy, then into tuberculosis (Balanchine’s long-time personal assistant, Barbara Horgan, said that Balanchine used to say his TB was caused by the bad Paris air. But, as Horgan observed, everyone in post-revolutionary Petrograd had TB). 11 He had to pass the Paris Opera commission on to Lifar to finish, the bargain being that Lifar got the ballet and Balanchine got the fee – which is what presumably paid for four months in a sanatorium in the Haute Savoie, 12 possibly in the village of Passy on the Plateau d’Assy, famous then for its sanatoria. 13

Imagine you’re Balanchine, only 25 years old, wrapped up on a balcony, feverish and weak, forced to rest and eat – he ate a pound of butter every day, he once said – and stare at Mont Blanc (this was before the T antibiotic streptomycin was discovered in 1946). Your highly
trained body – therefore your very self – has disappeared. The doctors are pessimistic. And you’re alone.

A partial lung removal operation was proposed. Balanchine refused. Miraculously, after four months, he got better. In early January 1930, he was released and went back to Paris, where, according to Bernard Taper, the city, the people – everything – felt different.14

So, a question rather than a point. Did Balanchine’s near-death sanatorium experience have anything to do with the manic energy and emphasis on youth in Cotillon, which he made a year and a half later? Even removed in time from Balanchine’s illness, it was his first full ballet after he recovered.

5. That year and a half between Balanchine’s “return to life” and his making of Cotillon can be thought of as a sandwich: two stints in London with a filling of Copenhagen.15 In London for spring 1930 and again in 1931, he worked on the chic, Charles B. Cochran Revue, the first time with Boris Kochno, Sergei Lifar, and Diaghilev dancer Alice Nikitina (who had replaced Danilova in the Revue’s cast when her “protector,” the Daily Mail magnate, Lord Rothermere, became an investor, thus hastening the demise of Balanchine’s and Danilova’s “marriage”); the second time with English playwright/song-writer Noel Coward. The small dimensions of the London Pavilion stage required imaginative use of gloves and hands, both elements that resurfaced in Cotillon. During that in-between job at the Royal Danish Ballet, from June 1930 through January 1931, Balanchine reprised Ballets Russes history by restaging six Diaghilev ballets, work uninteresting to him. But he was forced on one Copenhagen occasion to dance the Poet in Fokine’s Les Sylphides. His re-experiencing Fokine’s ghostly corps de ballet “from the inside” may have led in part to the look of Cotillon’s corps de ballet, all of them sporting their own full tulle skirts. Was the Franco-Russian Cotillon Balanchine’s own first gloss on Les Sylphides, itself a commentary on Giselle’s Wilis? And was the American Serenade that Balanchine made two years later (even if the costumes weren’t sylph-like until later) his second? Maybe Balanchine chose never to restage Cotillon because of Serenade’s very existence.

6. The final burst of energy for Cotillon probably came from the rebirth of the Ballets Russes. In autumn 1931, Monte Carlo opera director Rene Blum and Russian “impressario” Colonel Wassily de Basil invited Balanchine to join their re-envisioned Ballets Russes – probably at the insistence of Balanchine’s friend Kochno, whom they had hired earlier. The two reunited young Russians immediately planned what seems in hindsight a reprise of their final work for Diaghilev, Le Bal (1929), another surreal ballroom ballet, apparently spoiled at its premiere by de Chirico’s heavy costumes. Their new “heartbreak ball,” Cotillon, would be lighter, quicker, less narrative-driven — younger. To cast it and also recruit new company dancers, Balanchine visited ballet studios to find the latest whiz-kids. He took twelve-year-old Tamara Toumanova and Irina Baronova from Olga Preobrazhenskaia’s studio, and fourteen-year-old Tatiana Riabouchinskaia from Kshessinskaia’s, though she had studied earlier with Volinin. All three young girls were already seasoned performers at the many concerts and benefits held routinely in the émigré community, especially Toumanova, who shows up frequently in émigré newspapers as “the talent” in such events, from 1929 (when she was 10) on. Having picked these girls, Balanchine based the ballet on them, especially on Toumanova, who played Cotillon’s heroine, the “girl of the house.” (Toumanova came with a built-in old-world family, a Mama who was some kind of Georgian and an older ex-Naval-officer Papa – as was Baronova’s father. Forever after, Balanchine would mostly pick girl-mom units as his friends/lovers.) All three would go on to have long and important careers in ballet, careers that would intersect with Balanchine’s own many times in both
Europe and America.16
  From those girls and the kind of dancers and people they were, Balanchine wove the first ballet of a new era — Cotillon. Two other new Balanchine ballets shared the Ballets Russes season of 1932: Concurrence (about the competition between two tailors, which featured all three baby ballerinas performing, among other complicated steps, 32 unison fouettés); and Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, after Molière, but it was pulled after a few performances when its composer, Richard Strauss, took away his music.
  Yet Cotillon had already established several things important to ballet's future. The corps de ballet could be modernized and humanized. Story-driven libretti were not strictly needed: music, and the atmosphere arising magically from it, could furnish enough inspiration and material to make a ballet. And girls — not Petipa's ballerina-divas, nor Diaghilev's beautiful boys — could be vessels of modernism, because their inner lives were mysterious and their futures tenuous.
  At the end of that first reborn Ballets Russes season, the more prestigious Massine finally managed to succeed Balanchine as the company's new chief choreographer and artistic guiding spirit. Kochno left with Balanchine, and the two formed the one-season-long Les Ballets 1933 — which, seen by the young would-be impresario Lincoln Kirstein, prompted him to invite Balanchine to come to America and establish a ballet company there. But even before Balanchine got the chance to emigrate, his first post-Diaghilev ballet, the 1932 Cotillon, had already shown the way to the art's future.

Notes

1 In Irving Deakin, To the Ballet! (New York: Dodge Pub., 1935), 119.
2 See, on YouTube, “Cotillon – George Balanchine – Chabrier – Charlene Gehm MacDougal,” and “Balanchine’s ‘Cotillon’ – Tamara Toumanova.”
3 For these details, see especially Serge Lifar, A L'aube de Mon Destin chez Diaghilev: sept ans aux Ballets Russes (Paris: A. Michel, 1948).
4 160,000 francs per year, as opposed to Balanchine’s salary of 2,500 francs per month. See Vicente García-Márquez, Massine: A Biography (New York: Knopf, 1995), 185.
6 Ibid., 84.
7 From the author’s conversations with the Balanchivadze family in Tbilisi, 2006-.
8 Nina Tikhonova, Devushka v sinem (Moscow, 1992): see 111-15 on Tikhonova in Balanchine and Danilova’s apartment; 115-21 on the Paris Russian émigré community in general.
9 Ibid., 112.
10 See García-Márquez, Massine, 206-8.
11 Barbara Horgan in conversation with the author, Fall 2014.
13 Google-inspired speculation by the author.
15 See Buckle, George Balanchine; and Taper, Balanchine.
Of all Diaghilev’s choreographers, none became more of a fixture of the interwar Paris émigré world than Bronislava Nijinska. From the moment in 1925 when she moved her family from Monte Carlo to Paris, she made her home in neighborhoods crowded with displaced Russians, first in the 15th, then across what is now the Périphérique in Neuilly-sur-Seine. She sent her son Levushka to Russian summer camps and her daughter Irochka to Russian ballet teachers; she had a Russian housekeeper, and her closest friends inside and outside the ballet world were Russians.

Nijinska had a hard time making her way in the West when she left the Ballets Russes in January 1925. The chamber company she formed later that year quickly collapsed, plunging her into debt. An offer from Jacques Rouché, director of the Paris Opéra, to reform the company’s ballet school came to naught, and she found herself choreographing dances in works conceived and commissioned by others. In 1926 and 1927 she spent nine-month seasons in Buenos Aires at the Teatro Colón, where she restaged nearly a dozen works and did much to professionalize the young company, but found herself deeply unhappy. She missed her mother and her children but also Paris, her “native town,” as she calls the city in one of her diaries.1 “I dream of the moment when I will be back home with you,”2 she wrote to her ailing mother in Polish as the second season drew to an end. “There is no way I am going to sign a contract here next year.... I will stay in Paris, and maybe the Lord will help me earn there what is necessary for our family.”3

In this paper I want to sketch Nijinska’s career during the late 1920s and early 1930s in the Paris community of Russia Abroad. Although her activities have been overshadowed by the critical attention paid to Léonide Massine, George Balanchine, and Serge Lifar, she played a crucial role in the consolidation of the generation of Russian dancers born in the last years of tsarist Russia and chiefly trained in emigration.4 Nijinska, moreover, was the first of Diaghilev’s choreographers of the 1920s to create an émigré repertory distinct from that of the Ballets Russes and the first to experiment with plotless and semi-plotless choreography. At the same time, she believed, as did Diaghilev, that ballet could — and indeed should — express the choreographer’s personal voice, move beyond the nineteenth-century forms codified by Petipa, and challenge the heteronormative conventions embedded in ballet practice. Although she denied that her work was influenced by Duncanism or Dalcroze (a charge leveled against her by André Levinson for most of the decade before he died), she believed in expanding the lexicon and grammar of ballet to accommodate the needs of contemporary artistic expression. While she never returned to the Soviet Union, in some ways she remained what she had been when she first emigrated: an artist of the Soviet avant-garde.

In 1928 Nijinska was engaged by Ida Rubinstein to choreograph most of the works for her newly formed company, Les Ballets de Madame Ida Rubinstein. Born in 1883 in Kharkov to a wealthy Jewish family,5 orphaned and raised in St. Petersburg, enamored of the arts, and inspired by Isadora Duncan, Rubinstein danced briefly for the Ballets Russes, before striking out on her own and becoming a Paris celebrity. Immensely rich, she paid for everything. Her productions were lavish, and she hired only the best — Meyerhold to direct, Bakst to design, Debussy to compose, Fokine to choreograph, and d’Annunzio to write plays. As a dancer and actress, she traded in Orientalism and the fin-de-siècle, and she was always the star.

When World War I arrived, Rubinstein responded to the xenophobia sweeping French cultural and artistic circles by remaking herself as a French tragedian. In 1921, at the age of 38, the former dance recitalist remade herself once again, this time as a ballerina, wearing pointe shoes and tutu, and posing for the photographer James Abbe as an Anna Pavlova look-alike. Rubinstein actually danced on pointe in Artemis Troublée (1922), a little ballet conceived
by Bakst for the Paris Opéra, and at a few charity performances even assayed Pavlova’s signature solo, *The Dying Swan.* Then Rubinstein put away her pointe shoes.

In 1928 she took them out again. Bakst was dead, so she turned to Alexandre Benois, a former Petersburger now living and working in Paris, to create not simply a ballet that she would present and pay for using the resources of the Opéra, but a whole company, staffed by émigrés and offering a platform for the young generation of émigré artists and theater people, who brought Nijinska into the project. In her diary she records running into him in 1927 after the premiere of *Les Impressions du Music-Hall,* a ballet she had choreographed for the Paris Opéra, and his commiserating with her about the difficulty of working at the celebrated house.8

Preparations for the new company were underway as early as May, June, and July 1927, when Benois noted in his diary the many evenings spent with Rubinstein listening to the gifted, Conservatory-trained pianist Marcelle Atoch. The entries are telegraphic, but it is clear that Benois was following Diaghilev’s “time-traveling” approach of a decade earlier — choosing musical sources for a contemporary composer to orchestrate. First, they listened to the Schubert-Liszt “Soirées de Vienne,” selections from which became *La Bien-Aimée* (The Beloved), a ballet set in the Romantic period. Then they moved on to Bach, whose music inspired an eighteenth-century mythological subject. They also listened to Debussy and Ravel’s *Tombeau de Couperin.* Ravel (but not Debussy) would figure in the new enterprise — both with *La Valse,* which Rubinstein was the first to produce as a ballet, and *Bolero,* which she commissioned.9 Benois also had a hand in shaping Stravinsky’s score for *Le Baiser de la Féée* (The Fairy’s Kiss), based on themes of Tchaikovsky. “Do you like the idea of fixing up Uncle Petya’s music and making something new of it?” Benois asked him. Rubinstein’s largesse made the idea extremely attractive, and Stravinsky accepted most of Benois’ musical suggestions.10

Early in 1928 Nijinska signed on as ballet mistress and chief choreographer of Rubinstein’s new company. “I assume responsibility for creating five ballets for your repertoire and for your company,” she wrote to Rubinstein, outlining their arrangement. “I must complete this work within six months, from 1 March to 1 June 1928 and from 15 August to 15 November 1928, for a fee of 20,000 French francs per month.”11 The troupe of 50 or so dancers that Nijinska recruited was a microcosm of the “international” enterprises that flourished in the 1930s. Nijinska had an eye for talent, and along with the Ballets Russes veterans who had formed her own corps of dancers since 1925, she brought to the company youngsters who would prove themselves in the years to come — future choreographers Frederick Ashton and David Lichine (still dancing under his real name, David Lichtenstein), designer William Chappell, leading men including Roman Jasinsky, and “interesting” dancers such as Nina Verchinina, who had studied modern dance in Germany, Rubinstein’s partner was Anatole Vilzak, a Maryinsky graduate who had worked with Nijinska at the Teatro Colón; his wife, Ludmilla Schollar, one of Nijinska’s oldest friends, was the senior ballerina; Anna Ludmilla and Nadejda Nicolaeva (Nikolai Legat’s wife) were soloists. The dancers came from all over — Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, England, the United States; there were White Russians, Soviet Russians, and Russians brought up in Paris.12 Rubinstein, reminisced William Chappell many years later, “had beautiful manners, she knew every single nationality of every person in the company [and] addressed them in their own language.”13

Nijinska worked the polyglot company hard. Classes — which were compulsory — and rehearsals took place at the Salle Jouffroy, only a few blocks from Bakst’s former studio on the Boulevard Malesherbes. “Nijinska is a wonderful woman more wonderful than I had ever imagined, her efficiency is overwhelming & her knowledge & vitality something quite super-human & inspiring,” Ashton wrote to Marie Rambert. He described the grueling schedule:

We have two groups for classes and they take place alternate weeks at 9 am & 10 am after them we rehearse till lunch & back at 3 or 4 till dinner.

*Illustrirovannaya Rossiia,* 1 December 1928, with cover photo of Ida Rubinstein by Lipnitzki. This coincided with her company’s season at the Paris Opéra.
& then back at 9 or 10 till 11:30 or 12 pm. Generally one doesn't rehearse more than twice a day sometimes 3 as she takes people in groups till the ballet is finished & then calls full rehearsal.... But I have been going 3 times a day as I have been understudying.14

Everyone, Nijinska reported to Rubinstein that fall, “is working well and enjoying their work.”15

The repertory unveiled at the Paris Opéra in November and December 1928 looked forward to the 1930s rather than back to les années folles. Rejecting modernist irony, a new romanticism perfumed several ballets. La Bien Aimée (The Beloved), with its Liszt-Schubert waltzes and poet hero yearning for his departed Muse, set the new tone; it was the “first of the new romantic ballets,” as the critic Arnold Haskell observed in the late 1930s. Another was La Valse, which Haskell called a “near-masterpiece,” with its “whirling mass of couples in an enfilade of brightly lit and mirrored rooms.”16 “Poetic and mysterious” was how Nina Tikanova remembered the ballet, words that applied as well to Le Baiser de la Fée (The Fairy’s Kiss), with its cradle-snatching fairy whose “fatal kiss” left the imprint of genius on her victim.17

Mystery, memory, dream, suggestion, the irrational and unconscious — all were ingredients of Surrealism, even if Russia Abroad steered clear of Breton and Aragon with their pro-Soviet sympathies and Freudian obsessions. With Benois and Nijinska at its helm, Rubinstein’s company became — like the Ballets Russes — the incubator of a distinctly émigré sensibility in ballet that not only melded modernism and neoclassicism but also embodied a hybrid idea of Russianness. Indeed, only La Princesse Cygne (The Swan Princess), with music from Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera The Tale of Tiar Salian and a “dazzling cascade of dances inspired by Russian folklore,”18 openly proclaimed a straightforward Russian identity.

Rubinstein disbanded her company within a year, but several of her works had long afterlives. No fewer than four entered the international repertory — La Bien-Aimée, which Nijinska revived (as The Beloved) for the Markova-Dolin company in the mid-1930s and for Ballet Theatre in the 1940s; Le Baiser de la Fée, which Nijinska staged for the Teatro Colón in 1933 and which Ashton choreographed for Sadler’s-Wells in 1935 and Balanchine for the American Ballet in 1937; La Valse, which Balanchine produced for the New York City Ballet in...
1951, and Ashton for La Scala in 1958 and for the Royal Ballet a year later; \textit{Boléro}, which Serge Lifar staged for the Paris Opéra Ballet in 1941, Pilar López and her sister Argentinita for Ballet Theatre in 1943, and Maurice Béjart (in a version that used the table featured in Nijinska’s original) for the Ballet of the Twentieth Century in 1960. Except for \textit{La Bien-Aimée}, all remain living scores in the library of twentieth-century ballet music.

Not long after Rubinstein disbanded her company, another émigré group claimed the spotlight. Organized in 1930 by Prince Alexei Tsereteli, with financial backing from the singer Maria Kuznetzova and her husband Alfred Massenet, the Opéra Russe à Paris was a Russian opera company. However, it had a sizable troupe of dancers, including many veterans of the Rubinstein company, who appeared in the ballet scenes of \textit{Ruslan and Liudmila}, \textit{Sadko}, and \textit{Rusalka}. (Boris Godunov and Prince Igor joined the list in later seasons.) The company was a Who’s Who of émigré Paris musical theater: Nikolai Evreinov and Alexander Sanin were stage directors; Boris Bilinsky and Ivan Bilbin designers; Michel (or Mikhail) Steiman and Albert Coates conductors; the legendary basso Fedor Chaliapin led the distinguished roster of singers. Nijinska, the sole woman among the creative personnel, presided over the ballet troupe, and from time to time staged a program of dances. She revived her own version of \textit{Petrouchka} (first staged in Buenos Aires and the first production after the demise of the Ballets Russes); choreographed \textit{Capriccio Espagnol}, a Spanish-themed ballet to a score that Massine (with Argentinita) later turned into a work for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo; and slipped in a ballet that was close to her heart. \textit{Etude}, sometimes known as \textit{Holy Etudes}, was set to excerpts from Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos. The first sketches dated to Nijinska’s years in Kiev. A chamber version, with designs by Alexandra Exter, followed in 1925, and an expanded version a year later in Buenos Aires. Now, in Paris, she created what she considered the definitive version. Nina Tikanova, one of its dancers, wrote that Nijinska had “translated in an absolutely new and magisterial way Bach’s sublime and abstract music.”

A few days after the première Anna Pavlova died, and Tikanova remembered dancing the ballet that night as a “De Profundis for the greatest dance artist of all time.” Nijinska had commissioned new designs from Boris Bilinsky, inspired (Tikanova thought) by Byzantine frescoes, but far more literal than the abstract architecture of Exter’s designs or Nijinska’s plotless choreography. While memorializing the breakthroughs of her Kiev years, she was also retreating from their astringency.

The late 1920s and early 1930s were not a happy time for Nijinska. She may have been productive, but as her journals reveal she was profoundly depressed. Her mother had a leg amputated in 1928, and her screams ripped through her daughter’s soul. Eleanora survived, maimed like her son; Nijinska, as always, soldiered on. Although she practically lived in the studio, the dancers knew only the hard-driving teacher, obsessed with intrigues. “She saw traitors everywhere,” recalled Tikanova. Usually it was the dancers who bore the brunt of her temper, but she must have been only too aware of the forces transforming the émigré ballet world now that Diaghilev was dead. Waiting to step into his shoes was Colonel Wassily de Basil, a director of the Opéra Russe along with Tsereteli. In the early 1930s de Basil and René Blum, who booked ballet attractions at the Monte Carlo Opera, began planning a new company based in Monte Carlo. De Basil offered Blum the dancers, repertory, and properties of the Opéra Russe as the nucleus of the new company. Blum was to secure financial support and provide the theater. Meanwhile, Diaghilev’s former secretary Boris...
Kochno, with whom Nijinska had often clashed, and Diaghilev's last resident choreographer George Balanchine were enlisted as “artistic advisor” and “maître de ballet,” respectively. De Basil offered Nijinska 30,000 francs to create two new works, a huge amount, but Nijinska said no. It was the height (or depths) of the Depression, not the most propitious time to launch a ballet company, but Nijinska pressed forward, and in 1932 the Théâtre de la Danse, as she called her new company, gave its first season. In the next two years, before it collapsed because of the financial chicanery of her impresario, Michél Kachouk, it was effectively sidelined both by the immensely successful de Basil-Blum enterprise with Massine at its helm and by a reinvigorated Paris Opéra Ballet led by her former student Serge Lifar.

During those years, nonetheless, Nijinska mounted a major retrospective of old works while creating a number of new ones. In addition to Boléro and La Princesse Cygne, she revived her two great Diaghilev works, Les Noces (1923) and Les Biches (1924) – her “soul” and her “body,” as she referred to them in her diary — commissioning new designs and enlisting the support of the great émigré choirs in Paris. In many corners of the press she was spoken of as heir to the legacy of the Ballets Russes, an identification solidified by her link to Chaliapin, with whom she shared the 1932 season at the Opéra-Comique. For years he had been her idol and obsession, and although she sometimes decried his “tastelessness,” she linked the fortunes of her company to his unfailing popularity. Bilinsky and Georges (or Yury) Annenkov defined the company’s new visual look. (She had initially approached Chagall but canceled the project, apparently unable to pay even his reduced fee.) One of the new ballets, Les Variations (Variations), was set to music by Beethoven, anticipating by several years Massine’s use of that composer, while another, Les Comédiens fâlous, was to Alfredo Casella. Here, Nijinska seized on the opportunity to choreograph another in a long line of travesty roles for herself — the commedia figure of Pedrollino, a cousin of Pierrot and Petrushka. Another travesty role followed in her 1934 Hamlet. The ballet was not, she wrote, “a return to the use … of a form of literary libretto, [but]… a symphonic poem inspired by Shakespeare’s tragedy. Hamlet is what is created in my choreographic imagination by the action and interaction of Shakespeare’s tragedy.”29 To a friend in Buenos Aires she confided: “The sets are transparent black tulle with painting and drawing on them (not exactly what I wanted but still extraordinarily beautiful) … I had a wonderful Ophelia – a sixteen-year-old American — Ruth Chanova — “with long golden hair just made for Ophelia, who is very talented and has good taste and style.”30 This was the last role Nijinska created for herself, and, as it turned out, the last time she danced in public. The gender-ambiguous body she had first conjured to life in Kiev, then explored in various roles with Diaghilev, had culminated in her interpretation of the greatest of Shakespeare’s tormented heroes.

By then she had become a pillar of the émigré community. Yet her diaries record no sense of achievement. Rather, she seems plagued by doubt and the fear that her creativity is dying, that inertia has sapped her strength and will. To be sure, the life of a free-lance choreographer in Depression-era Paris wasn’t easy. She had invested a fortune in sets and costumes (most of which disappeared during World War II), but few engagements materialized. In 1933, desperate for money, she left for another long stint at the Teatro Colón. “There is nothing in Paris in terms of work,” wrote one of her dancers.31 But one also feels that Nijinska’s malaise had an émigré component, even if, as a ballet artist her art “fused, in one way or another, with the European current,” allowing her to live what Nina Berberova called “a more ‘normal’ life” than literary exiles.32 For Nijinska and countless others, by the 1930s exile and emigration had become a permanent condition (to paraphrase Marc Raeff).33 There was no going home, and for many, including Nijinska, a second diaspora lay ahead. As an artist and an émigrée, she would always remain an outsider.

Notes

2. BN to Eleanora Bereda, 12 Sept. [1927], Box 78, Folder 35, BNC.
3. BN to Eleanora Bereda, 19 Sept. 1927, Box 78, Folder 36, BNC.
4. Elisabeth Hennebert, in “Coureurs de Cachet: Histoire des danseurs russes de Paris (1917-1944)” (PhD diss., University of Paris I, 2002), 1:19, identifies three generations of Russian dancers who worked in France between 1917 and 1944: the first was born before 1890, the second between 1891 and 1910, the third between 1911 and 1930.
5. According to the birth records of the Kharkov rabbinate, Rubinstein was born on 21 September 1883 (Old Style). I am grateful to Natalia Lazareva Dunaeva of St. Petersburg for this information and for arranging for me to receive a photocopy of the birth record, in Hebrew and Russian.
7. Nina Tikanova, La Jeune Fille en bleu: Pétrograd-Berlin-Paris (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1991), 86. Benois had worked with Rubinstein since 1924, designing two of her most successful productions, a revival of La Dame aux Camélias (1923) set in the Romantic period, and L’Idiot (1925), a play by Fernand Nozière and Vladimir Bienstock based on Dostoevsky’s novel.
8. Bronislava Nijinska, Diary 1927-29, Box 59, Folder 2, BNC.


11. Nijinska, draft letter to Rubinstein, [early 1928], Nijinska Archives. I first consulted the Nijinska Archives in 1992, when they were still housed at the choreographer’s former residence in Pacific Palisades, California. Although I subsequently located most of the Nijinska-Rubinstein telegrams and letters at the Library of Congress, I have yet to discover the whereabouts of this particular item.

12. For the identity of the dancers, see Tikanova, La Jeune Fille en bleu, 88.


15. Nijinska, draft letter to Rubinstein, [Sept. 1928], Nijinska Archives. According to Nina Tikanova, rehearsals for the new company began on 1 Aug. 1928 (La Jeune Fille en bleu, 91).


18. Tikanova, La Jeune Fille en bleu, 93.

19. Ibid., 186-8. See, also, the Opéra Russe à Paris souvenir program, Spring 1930.

20. Tikanova, La Jeune Fille en bleu, 107.

21. Ibid., 188.

22. Exter’s set design is in the Word and Image Department, Victoria and Albert Museum, Accession No. E792-1963, and reproduced in Kovalenko, Alexandra Exter, 2:191; for one of her costume designs, see Nancy Van Norman Baer, Bronislava Nijinska: A Dancer’s Legacy (The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1986), 49.

23. 4 May [1928], Diary 1927-29, Box 59, Folder 1, BNC.

24. Tikanova, La Jeune Fille en bleu, 95.


26. Diary 1927-29, Box 59, Folder 2, BNC.

27. [4?] June 1929, Diary 1927-29, Box 59, Folder 2, BNC.

28. Marc Chagall, letter to Nijinska, [20 Apr. 1932], Box 71, Folder 9, BNC.


30. Nijinska to “Miss Allan,” [1934-35], Box 70, Folder 1, BNC.

31. Sergei Unger, letter to Nijinska, 18 Apr. 1933, Box 77A, Folder 25, BNC.


DANCING IN SOVIET RUSSIA

Friday, 13 February 2015

Boston Waltz (1934)

From the feature film Nastenka Ustinova, directed by Konstantin Eggert, with Marina Semenova in the role of a nightclub entertainer.

Ribbon Dance (1940)

Performed by Asaf Messerer and choreographed by him and Lev Lashchulin to music of Reinhold Glière, this concert number was originally created for The Red Poppy (1927).

Moszkowski Waltz (1940)

Choreographed by Vasily Vainonen to music by Moritz Moszkowski; performed by Olga Lepeshinskaya and Pyotr Gusev.

La Bayadère (1940)

Performed by Natalia Dudinskaya (Nikiya), and Chabukiani (Solor), and members of the Kirov Ballet.

Taras Bulba (1940)

Choreographed by Fedor Lopukhov to music by Vasily Soloviev-Sedoy; performed by Vachtang Chabukiani, Mikhail Dudko, and members of the Kirov Ballet.

Gayané (1940s-early 1950s)

Choreographed by Nina Anisimova to music by Aram Khachaturian (1942); performed by Tatiana Vecheslova and members of the Kirov Ballet.

Raymonda (late 1940s-early 1950s)

Performed by Natalia Dudinskaya (Raymonda), Konstantin Sergeyev (Jean de Brienne), and members of the Kirov Ballet.

Romeo and Juliet (1940)

Choreographed by Leonid Lavrovsky to music by Prokofiev; performed by Galina Ulanova and Konstantin Sergeyev.

Swan Lake (1953)

Excerpts from Act II and Act IV performed by Galina Ulanova (Odette), Konstantin Sergeyev (Siegfried), and Vladimir Bakanov (Rothbart).

The Fountain of Bakhchisarai (1953)

Choreographed by Rostislav Zakharov to music by Boris Asafiev (1934); performed by Galina Ulanova (Maria), Maya Plisetskaya (Zarema), and Pyotr Gusev (Khan).

Flames of Paris (1953)

Choreographed by Vasily Vainonen to music by Boris Asafiev (1932); performed by Vakhtang Chabukiani (Philippe) and Musa Gottlieb (Jeanne).

DANCING IN “RUSSIA ABROAD”

Saturday, 14 February 2015

Monte-Cristo (French, 1929)

Directed by Henri Fescourt, with designs by Boris Bilinsky, and Olga Spessivtzeva dancing with the corps de ballet of the Opéra-Comique.

Florian (U.S., MGM, 1940)
Feature film directed by Edwin L. Marin, with Irina Baronova as the ballerina Trina.

**Gay Parisian** (U.S., Warner Bros., 1941)

Short film directed by Jean Negulesco based on Léonide Massine's ballet *Gaité Parisienne* (1938) and featuring the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

**Spanish Fiesta** (U.S., Warner Bros., 1942)

Short film directed by Jean Negulesco based on *Capriccio Espagnol* (1939), choreographed by Léonide Massine and Argentinita, and featuring Massine, Tamara Toumanova, and the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

**On Your Toes** (U.S., Warner Bros., 1939)

Musical directed by Ray Enright, with music by Richard Rodgers and ballets choreographed by George Balanchine, including “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue,” with Vera Zorina, Eddie Albert, and members of the American Ballet.

**I Was an Adventuress** (U.S., Twentieth-Century Fox, 1940)

Musical directed by Gregory Ratoff, including an abbreviated version of the second act of *Swan Lake* choreographed by George Balanchine, with Vera Zorina (Swan Queen), Lew Christensen (Prince), Charles Laskey (Evil One), and members of the American Ballet. Balanchine, under the stage name Fortunio Bonanova, conducts.

**Goldwyn Follies** (U.S., United Artists, 1938)

Musical directed by George Marshall with two ballets choreographed by George Balanchine: “Romeo and Juliet Ballet” (with tap consultant Sammy Lee), to music by George Gershwin, with Vera Zorina, William Dollar, and members of the American Ballet; and “Water Nymph Ballet,” to music by Vernon Duke/Vladimir Dukelsky, with Vera Zorina, William Dollar, and members of the American Ballet.

**Invitation to the Dance** (U.S., MGM, 1956)

Musical directed and choreographed by Gene Kelly. “Ring Around the Rosy,” to music by André Previn, features Tamara Toumanova (The Girl on the Stairs) and Gene Kelly (The Marine).

**Tonight We Sing!** (U.S., Twentieth-Century Fox, 1953)

Biographical film about the life of Sol Hurok, choreographed by David Lichine/Lichtenstein, with Tamara Toumanova as Anna Pavlova dancing *The Dying Swan* and variations from the *Don Quixote* pas de deux.

**The Red Shoes** (UK, The Archers, 1948)

Written, produced, and directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, with Léonide Massine as the Shoemaker.

**Fantasia** (U.S., Walt Disney Pictures, 1940)

Dance of the hippos and ostriches to the Dance of the Hours from the opera *La Gioconda*, modeled on Balanchine's Water Nymph Ballet from *Goldwyn Follies* (1938).

**Excerpts from Alexei Ratmanskys recreations of Bolt and The Flames of Paris.**

Introduced by Irina Klyagin.

Friday afternoon, 13 February 2015

**Bolt**

Ballet in Two Acts

Music: Dmitry Shostakovich

Choreography: Alexei Ratmansky

Libretto: Viktor Smirnov

Scenography: Semyon Pastukh

Premiere: Bolshoi Theater, 2005

Recorded live at the Bolshoi Theater in 2006, with Anastasia Yatsenko (Nastya), Denis Savin (Denis), Andrei
Merkuriev (Yan, a Shock Worker), and members of the Bolshoi Ballet.

Excerpt: Act I, Scene 1

*Flames of Paris*

Ballet in Two Acts

Music: Boris Asafiev

Choreography: Alexei Ratmansky (“Farandole” and “Ça ira” after Vasily Vainonen)

Libretto: Alexander Belisky and Alexei Ratmansky, after the original libretto by Nikolai Volkov and Vladimir Dmitriev

Premiere: Bolshoi Theater, 2008

Recorded live at the Bolshoi Theater in 2010, with Natalia Osipova (Jeanne), Ivan Vasiliev (Philippe, a Marseillais), Denis Savin (Jerome, her brother), and members of the Bolshoi Ballet.

Excerpts: Act I, Scene 1 (“Farandole,” “Volunteers,” “The Marseillaise”); Act II, Scene 4 (“Ça ira”)
Christina Ezrahi is an independent scholar based in Tel Aviv and London specializing in the history of Russian ballet. She was educated at the universities of Princeton, Oxford, and the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London. Her recent book Swans of the Kremlin. Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia investigates the collision of art and politics at the Maryinsky/Kirov and Bolshoi Ballet companies during the volatile first fifty years of Soviet power. A frequent commentator on Russian ballet in the international media, she is currently working on a biography of the Kirov Ballet character dancer Nina Anisimova (1909-1979).

Mark Franko is Professor of Dance and Coordinator of Graduate Studies, Boyer College of Music and Dance, Temple University, and Professor in Performance and Visual Studies, School of Performing Arts and Media, Middlesex University (London). He has published six books: Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work; Excursion for Miracles: Paul Sanasardo, Donya Feuer, and Studio for Dance; The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s; Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics; Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body; The Dancing Body in Renaissance Choreography. He is editor of Dance Research Journal and founding editor of the Oxford Studies in Dance Theory book series. He is recipient of the 2011 Outstanding Scholarly Research in Dance Award from the Congress in Research in Dance.

Lynn Garafola is Professor of Dance at Barnard College, Columbia University. A dance historian and critic, she is the author of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and Legacies of Twentieth-Century Dance, and the editor of several books, including The Diaries of Marius Petipa (which she also translated), André Levinson on Dance: Writings from Paris in the Twenties (with Joan Acocella); Rethinking the Sylph: New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet; and The Ballets Russes and Its World. She has curated the exhibitions Dance for a City: Fifty Years of the New York City Ballet (at the New York Historical Society); 500 Years of Italian Dance: Treasures from the Cia Fornaroli Collection (with Patrizia Veroli), New York Story: Jerome Robbins and His World, and Diaghilev's Theater of Marvels: The Ballets Russes and Its Aftermath (all at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts). A former Guggenheim Fellow, she is writing a book about the choreographer Bronislava Nijinska.

Susan Grant, Ph.D., is an Irish Research Council/Marie Curie postdoctoral fellow, based for two years at the University of Toronto and now at University College Dublin. Her research interests include Russian and Soviet history, the history of sport and physical culture, and the history of health care. Her monograph, Physical Culture and Sport in Soviet Society: Propaganda, Acculturation, and Transformation in the 1920s and 1930s (2012), focuses on physical culture during the first two decades of Soviet power, examining the origins of Soviet physical culture and showing how the ideology of physical culture was applied in an attempt to modernize and civilize Soviet citizens. She is currently working on a history of Soviet nursing during the interwar period, exploring issues of professionalism, gender, and care.

Marion Kant earned her Ph.D. in Musicology at Humboldt University, Berlin. She teaches at the University of Cambridge in the German Department and at the University of Pennsylvania. Her areas of research focus on modernism and its manifestations in nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe, particularly on German movement cultures, Romantic ballet, the history and aesthetics of early twentieth-century avantgarde movements and the arts during the Weimar Republic, the evolution of Nazi ideology and Nazi aesthetics, and the anti-fascist exile of artists and critics. With the musicians Sam Hsu and Marshall Taylor she organized a concert series on “Degenerate Music,” that is, the music banned by the Nazis. More than ten concerts have taken place.

Edward Kasinec holds graduate degrees from Columbia University (M.A., 1968, M.Phil., 1979), and Simmons College (M.L.S., 1976). In addition he has been awarded a Certificate in Appraisal Studies (Fine and Decorative Arts, 2010) from New York University. His professional career includes service as Reference Librarian/Archivist for the Harvard University Library and the Ukrainian Research Institute Library (1973-80); Librarian for Slavic Collections, University of California, Berkeley, (1980-84); and Curator, Slavic and Baltic Division, The New York Public Library (1984-2009; 2009-2011, as Staff Advisor to the Exhibitions Program). He presently holds appointment as a Staff Associate, Harriman Institute, Columbia University. He is the author of more than 200 refereed articles and books and has been acknowledged in equally as many academic publications.

Elizabeth Kendall is a dance and culture critic and a professor of Writing/Literary Studies at New School (Eugene Lang College and Liberal Studies). Her book, Balanchine and the Lost Muse: Revolution and the Making of a Choreographer,
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Sanja Andus L’Hotellier is a dance historian. She received her Ph.D. from the Université de Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis, where she is Associate Researcher. Her monograph, *Les Archives Internationales de la Danse: Un projet inachevé 1931-1952*, was published in 2012. She has served on research projects with the Dance Museum, the Centre National de la Danse, IMÉC, and Mas de la Danse, and has received research awards from the French Ministry of Culture, Rolf de Maré Foundation, and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She was a Visiting Scholar in History at Columbia University from 2011 to 2013, then Fellow of the Columbia Oral History Institute. In June 2015 she contributed to Event Danse: A Glossary, organized by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in New York. She currently serves on the editorial board of the SDHS as managing editor of *Conversations Across the Field of Dance Studies*.

Nicoletta Misler was until she retired, Professor of Russian and East European Art at the Università di Napoli “L’ Orientale” in Italy. Her academic interests range from the artists and philosophers of Russian Modernism, such as Kazimir Malevich, Pavel Filonov, and Pavel Florensky, to the free dance in Soviet Russia in the 1920s and 1930s, and she has published widely on these subjects. She has organized major exhibitions in Rome and Moscow and is now preparing an English-language version of her Russian monograph on the art of movement in Moscow in the 1910-1930s, *V nachale bylo telo* [In the beginning was the body]. She has also written extensively on Soviet architecture, publishing articles on Ivan Leonidov, Yakov Chernikhov, and others. The recipient of many international fellowships, she has conducted research in Japan, the Netherlands, Russia, and the United States. She has been a visiting scholar at universities in Australia, Israel, and the United States.


Janice Ross, Professor, Theatre and Performance Studies Department, Stanford University, is the author of *Like A Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet at Resistance in Soviet Russia* (Yale University Press January 2015). Her books include: *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance* (2007), *San Francisco Ballet at 75* (2007) and *Moving Lessons: Margaret H’Doubler and The Beginning of Dance in American Education* (2001). Her awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship, Fulbright Scholar Fellowship, Stanford Humanities Center Fellowships, Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture Fellowship, and the Djerassi Resident Artists Program. For ten years she was staff dance critic for *The Oakland Tribune* and for twenty years the San Francisco contributing editor to *Dance Magazine*. She is past president of both the Society of Dance History Scholars and the Dance Critics Association.
Tim Scholl is a scholar of Russian and a dance historian who has written two books on the history of Russian dance: *From Petipa to Balanchine, Classical Revival and the Modernization of Ballet* (Routledge, 1994) and *Sleeping Beauty, A Legend in Progress* (Yale, 2004). Professor of Russian and Comparative Literature at Oberlin College, Scholl is also a docent in the Theatre Research Department of Helsinki University, where he held a Fulbright teaching/research fellowship in 2000-1. His current research examines Russian and Soviet ballet as an artifact of empire and explores the ballet’s engagement with borders and borderlands, from the purported foreign “domination” of the Russian ballet in the nineteenth century through the cultural exchange process of the Cold-War period.

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Edward Tyerman is Term Assistant Professor in the Slavic Department at Barnard College, Columbia University. His research focuses on Russian literature and culture of the twentieth century, with a comparative interest in modern Chinese culture and experiences of socialism and post-socialism across greater Eurasia. He is currently at work on turning his Ph.D. dissertation, “The Search for an Internationalist Aesthetics: Soviet Images of China, 1920–1935” (Columbia, 2014) into a book manuscript. This project argues that the aesthetic representation of internationalist ideology in early Soviet culture found its fullest expression through the variety of aesthetic strategies used to re-imagine China, via multiple media including film, theater, ballet, and documentary writing, as the next scene of socialist revolution.

Patrizia Veroli is an independent dance scholar from Rome. The author and co-author of several books, she taught at the University of Rome “La Sapienza” from 2004 to 2010. In addition she co-edited the journal *La danza Italiana* and curated with Lynn Garafola the exhibition *Five Hundred Years of Italian Dance* (New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, 2006). The volumes she has coedited include *Les Archives Internationales de la Danse 1931-1952* (2006), *Omaggio a Diaghilev* (2011), and *I Ballets Russes di Diaghilev tra storia e mito* (2013). A member of the Advisory Board of *Dance Chronicle* and *Recherches en danse*, she is currently President of the Italian Association for Dance Research.

James von Geldern is Professor of International Studies and Russian at Macalester College, where he teaches courses on Soviet culture and international law. He is author of *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920*, co-author of *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays and Folklore, 1917-1953* (1995), and *Entertaining Tsarist Russia: Urban Entertainments, 1798-1917* (1998, and co-developer of the website *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History* (soviethistory.macalester.edu). He is also a practicing attorney, representing asylum seekers pro bono in collaboration with Advocates for Human Rights of Minneapolis, Minnesota.