

## THE “RUSSIAN BALLETS OF SERGEY DIAGHILEV” IN EUROPEAN CULTURE CONTEXT

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The creative work of Russian people of culture that found themselves in exile due to the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 in Russia is enormous and many-sided. The author of this article sets the goal to study only one aspect of the above-mentioned issue, Serge Diaghilev and his private theatre company “The Russian Ballet”.

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The creative work of Russian people of culture that found themselves in exile due to the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 in Russia is enormous and many-sided. The author of this article sets the goal to study only one aspect of the above-mentioned issue, Serge Diaghilev and his private theatre company “The Russian Ballet”. The figure of this person like a colossus towers above numerous chosen ones by the Muses. He managed to conquer not only Europe but also amaze the whole world with Russian ballet. One French critic was very precise in his saying about Diaghilev: “As Moses he extracted water from the rock” [1, p.102]. Diaghilev’s career abounds in turning points and significant events. It is enough to mention the art magazine “The World of Art” founded by him and his companions at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It started a new period in the history of Russian art.

Diaghilev’s creative work in Western Europe began in 1906 when he organized in Paris the “Russian Art Exhibition”. Then in 1907 he astonished the French people with “Historical Concerts of Russian Music”, but in 1908 he introduced them to the opera “Boris Godunov”. It is difficult to imagine but before Diaghilev the West had not heard of Mussorgsky, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakov who are acknowledged nowadays by all masters of modern music. It is one of Diaghilev’s contributions.

After introducing Russian painting, Russian music, Russian opera to Europe, Diaghilev decided to unveil Russian ballet as well. This idea was very brave especially if we take into account that by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe ballet was almost ruined. Nevertheless, this amazing person, an amateur, an ex-official of the Board of the Imperial Theatres, not only took the right direction but also managed to organize ballet companies of the

Maryinsky and The Bolshoi Theatre so that they created a world dance event.

For the first Russian ballet season Serge Diaghilev gathered well-known creative people: ballet-dancers A. Pavlova, M. Fokine, V. Nijinsky, T. Karsavina, A. Bolm, designers A. Benois, L. Bakst, N. Rerih, K. Sudeykin, composers I. Stravinsky, N. Tcherepnin and others. Russian ballet season of 1909 in Paris had not only success but an absolute triumph. After first performances – “Ivan Grozny”, Knyaz Igor”, “Judith” in which the main part was presented in the form of ballet the French press went into raptures. Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Augusts Rodin, Romaine Rolland, Marcel Prevost and many other people of culture were delighted with Russian ballet. So Russian Seasons entered the history of world art. A. Lunacharsky wrote:

“During Russian Seasons Diaghilev stated that Russia is among the first places and sets an example to Europe in the art of theatre, music, ballet and vocal” [5, p.117].

After 30 years the academician Luis Gillet remembered: “It was an event, a surprise, a thunderstorm, a kind of shock. Scheherazade! Knyaz Igor! The Firebird! Swan Lake! Le Spectre de la Rose! In a word, without any exaggeration I can tell that my life is divided into two parts: before and after Russian ballets” [2, p.19].

Serge Diaghilev became an idol for Europe. Later thankful French people called a square in Paris after him. This magician was able to inspire a living soul into a pretty but sleeping beauty – he showed Russian ballet in such a way that all the spectators were delighted and worshipped it. It was not a surprise. Many ballet-dancers of Diaghilev’s private ballet company were a kind of dissidents, rebellious adventurers in the art of dance. Innovation in the interpretation of the romantic ballet of 19<sup>th</sup> century determined for example a long run

of such ballets as “Les Sylphides”, “Le Carnaval”, “Giselle”, “The Rite of Spring” and dozens of others.

The lion’s share of the success fell to designers who very often were the authors of libretto and they were specially selected by Diaghilev. The setting and costumes made by Bakst, Benois, Rerich, Golovin were discussed not less than ballet performers. The richness of colour, diversity of costumes, setting aliveness, historical liability was astonishing. By that time in the West the profession of designer was equal to soulless craft but attempts of some French theatres to involve such decorators as Maurice Denis and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec – were not successful and forgotten. Later the Noverre’s dream to adapt setting to costumes and vice versa was fulfilled by Russian masters. Setting made by Alexander Benois was called an eye feast because of compositional integrity and theatricality of his works. In particular it referred to the opera “The Song of the Nightingale” with Igor Stravinsky’s music. A tremendous success of the ballet “Scheherazade” (Rimsky-Korsakov’s music) that conquered the West with its Oriental exotics was gained thanks to Leon Bakst, the author of libretto and decorator. His sketches were immediately purchased by the Paris Museum of Decorative Arts. Parisian women began to wear turbans and transparent tunics.

The ballet “The Firebird” with Stravinsky’s music amazed the spectators with its Old Russian originality. The press pointed to the skillful blending of choreography, music and setting. The critics claimed that colors, rhythm and setting perfectly matched with the draping of the orchestra and they saw perfect understanding between the choreographer M. Fokine, decorator M. Golovin and I. Stravinsky whose efforts created a unified performance.

Diaghilev was also the patron of premier danseurs. His disciples were Mi-

chel Fokine, Vaclav Nijinsky, Lemonade Massine, M. Romanov, Bronislava Nijinska, George Balanchine and Serge Lifar.

Until 1911 Diaghilev organized Russian Seasons in Europe, particularly in Paris, a kind of Russian Imperial Ballet Tour. After this moment he moved to the West forever, choosing Monte Carlo as his residence. There he established the permanent ballet organization: "Russian Ballet of Sergey Diaghilev" ("Les Ballets Russes de Serge de Diaghilev"). "Russian Ballet" remained close to traditions and principles set by Diaghilev and his companions at the basis of private ballet company. Its task was to integrate all aspects of art: dance, music, setting and poetry. In this sense "Russian Ballet" is considered the most important deed by Serge Diaghilev.

One of the most important reasons of the success of his theatre is that "The World of Art" that was its source and appeared in the epoch of Romanticism, found corresponding to its principles forms that united the achievements of Impressionist painting and a new search for fine arts at the beginning of the century.

Possessing a perfect feeling and taste, Serge Diaghilev was ready to accept new tendencies in art and new life requirements. Russian art, shown to Europe, was closely connected to European tendencies and Diaghilev successfully struggled with vague symbols of Romanticism and colorfulness of Impressionism. After settling down in the West he established a new art center. Pablo Picasso took the place of Alexander Benois. The influence of Russian avant-garde painters – Natalya Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov - increased. After WWI Leonide Massine became the premier danseur. The Frenchman Jean Cocteau - the herald of Surrealism and the theoretician of artistic rebellion wrote librettos, articles, painted posters, influenced the choreography. Diaghilev's theatre entered the path of modernism, involving the most outstanding musicians and artists. Igor Stravinsky and Sergey Prokofiev, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, Erik Sati, Georges Auric wrote operas and ballets for him. Among decorators there were Goncharova and Larionov, Henri Matisse, Andre Deren, George Braque, Pablo Picasso and others. Ballet genres extend to choreographic comedies,

opera-ballets, ballets with singing, etc. In 1917 the attempt to add illustrations to the Stravinsky's symphonic poem "The Fireworks" was successful. Giacomo Balla prepared the color- and light-changing cub futuristic setting.

The sensation became the staging of the ballet "Parade" inspired by Cocteau and music written by Sati - the leader of the musical avant-garde. To create setting Pablo Picasso was invited. It was a great scandal. Its possible reason could be the opposition of French and American managers to the human world. One of them had a house and trees behind, the other – a skyscraper and banners. Cocteau and Sati tried to get rid of ladies who were eager to put out their eyes. Diaghilev limited himself then with few performances. In 1962 this performance was renewed in Brussels by Mauric Bejart. Notwithstanding all this, Diaghilev was true to his convictions. In 1920 instead of burned setting by Bakst for "Cleopatra", a new one was created by artists-simultaneists Robert and Sonya Delaunay. The lost setting for "The Song of the Nightingale" was replaced with the setting by Henri Matisse, the setting for the ballet "The Doll's Fairy" was commissioned to Andre Derain. The repertoire of the company now included the ballet "Les Fvcheux" by George Auric, the ballet by Vladimir Dukelsky "Zephyr et Flore" with the setting by Georges Braque.

A number of performances in the 20's was connected with the attempt to create the ballet with a modern plot. The ballet "Romeo and Juliet" was full of surrealistic spirit with decorations by Max Ernst and Joan Miry, in which the lovers flew in the end by plane and the ballet "Le Bal" in which Giorgio de Chirico transformed the participants of the ball-masquerade into the life ruins. The tendencies of constructivism were clearly observed in the performances of 1927 – "Le Chatte" by Henri Sauget set by Antoine Pevsner and "Le Pas d'acier" by Sergey Prokofiev set by Sergey Yakulov.

During his lifetime Diaghilev's "Russian Ballet" had influence on ballet of all countries. About the springing of the Swedish ballet the theatrical critic Andrej Levinson wrote: "One beautiful day the magician Fokine came to a laughing city with white and golden houses – in Stockholm there had never been a dancing tradi-

tion in contrast to Copenhagen. In a single gesture this Russian stamped his feet and out of nowhere there was the "Swedish ballet" [3, p.19].

To some extent the revival of the French ballet depended on Diaghilev and his company. It took its proper place in 30's and 40's, the first place that belonged to it in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Grand Opéra and The Academic Paris Theatre founded by Louis XIV in 1661 were leading now. More than 40 years its premier danseur, soloist and pedagogue was Serge Lifar. This Diaghilev's disciple founded the Institute of Choreography in Paris, led the course in Dance History and Theory in Sorbonne. He put forward a number of French ballet-dancers, revitalized French ballet and returned its prestige. In his book "The Memoirs of Icarus" Lifar wrote: "I can say not without truthful pride that for me, a Russian dancer and choreographer had the honor and hard work to reorganize or to be more precise to create anew French national ballet" [4, p.86]. In Paris there appeared also Paris Training School of Academic Ballet that represented a direct heritage of The Russian Imperial Theatres and Diaghilev's "Russian Ballet". Among its founders and leaders were Zucchi, Cecchetti, Kchessinska, Yegorova, Lifar, Balashova, Coralli, Sedova, Spesivtseva, Goncharova, Viltzak, Gzovsky.

"Russian Ballet" had a beneficial influence on German ballet. In 50's in Germany there was a number of classic schools but first who brought Russian training schools of classic dance to Berlin were Eduardova, Gzovsky. German and French Ballets existed during Diaghilev and before him but he showed them a new path.

In regard to English ballet, it can be said that it did not exist before Diaghilev. In 1931 Ninette de Valois, who was among members of Diaghilev's "Russian Ballet", gathered in London a small ballet company whose prima ballerina was Markova. Every year the prestige of the company increased and in 1939 this company got the name "Sadler's Wells Ballet" and staged "The Sleeping Beauty" by Tchaikovsky. After numerous tours The Royal Opera Covent Garden acknowledged it as England's National Theatre. From this company The Royal Ballet of Covent Garden takes a start.

In the USA among several dancing companies (e.g. Lucy Chase, Martha Gram) the most popular was the one run by Balanchine "New York City Ballet". It remained faithful to the traditions of the Russian ballet. The American dance life was represented by Fokine, Viltzak, Mordkin, Nijinsky, Massine, Danilova, Nemchinov, Gavrilov, Novikov and others.

Japanese and Australian ballets with companies of classic ballet were direct offspring's of Diaghilev and his colleagues. A certain place took the company of Academic Theatre in Yugoslavia led by

Polyakova and Coralli. Nijinska founded Polish ballet, Nemchinova and Obuhov – Lithuanian, Sergeyev and Fyodorov – Latvian, Kocherovsky and Turau – Belgian, Borovsky - in Argentina, Unger – in Mexico, Leskova and Vershinina – in Brazil, Voytsechovsky, Slavinsky, Borovansky – in Australia. Ballet of Latin America was very much influenced by Nijinsky, Fokine and the duet of Smirnova and Romanov.

So did national ballets appear that were founded and led by the Diaghilev's followers. It was the Golden Age of Terpsichore's triumph, Russian by origin.

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