Soviet and American Cold War Ballet Exchange, 1959–1962

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Accessibility
Soviet and American Cold War Ballet Exchange, 1959–1962

A dissertation presented

by

Anne Ashby Searcy

to

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Soviet and American Cold War Ballet Exchange, 1959–1962

Abstract

The spring of 1959 marked the beginning of a hugely successful ballet exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union that lasted over three decades. In this dissertation, I examine the opening years of this exchange, when ballet suddenly became an important arena for political and aesthetic conflict between the world's two superpowers. Ballet had a significant place in the cultural Cold War. Russians considered it a national art form, while Americans were proud of their young but innovative companies. Soviet and American ballet underwent surprisingly similar aesthetic shifts during the mid-twentieth-century, away from realistic narrative ballets and towards musically-focused ballets. Despite these similarities, critics and audiences often saw the touring works through their own domestic political and aesthetic lenses, interpreting them in very different light from their creators and creating a series of deep aesthetic misunderstandings. The exchange tours were enormously popular, and yet the curtain onstage could be just as iron as the one in the middle of Europe.

I employ a transnational perspective, drawing on a combination of Russian and American sources to investigate both the conciliatory and the alienating effects of the exchanges. Using reception theory as a model for understanding cultural diplomacy, I show how ballet played a substantive role in developing the Soviet-American relationship, though not always for the better. In the short term, the goodwill generated by the successful tours helped normalize relations between the Soviet and American governments at a time when nuclear conflict was a real threat. However, the cultural misunderstandings raised by the ballet tours also formed part of a pattern of
miscommunication and circular internal discourse that contributed to the inability of the two superpowers to resolve or mediate their opposing world views. At the same time I argue that the very misunderstandings generated by Cold War exchange continue to inform American attitudes towards ballet. Reexamining the ballets performed during the tours through the defamiliarizing process of exchange can suggest new ways of interpreting 20th-century ballet aesthetics.
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for Frederick, my best friend
“The Bolshoi is a hard outfit to pan, because then all your intellectual friends who know nothing about dancing will say you’re just a hireling of the capitalist press and making Cold War propaganda. Sorry — hold on to your little red shirts, kids, cause here goes.”

It is the summer of 2013, and I am sitting in a musty reading room on the outskirts of Moscow, browsing through a folder of old American ballet programs, when I come across a small booklet (Figure 1). It is cheaply made, with thin paper, and the cover is printed in light blue and black on a cream background. Fixed in the center is a studio photograph of two dancers. Their
limbs balance each other perfectly, an image of classical perfection, but their costumes are
preposterously mismatched to their actions. He wears a cowboy hat; she sports a showgirl’s ruffly,
undignified tutu. At the top of the page, in an elongated cyrillic font, are the words “Новости
Американской Культуры,” [transliterated: Novosti Amerikanskoy Kul’turi] or “News of
American Culture.” This strange object was the handiwork of the American Embassy in Moscow,
who printed the booklet in anticipation of the New York City Ballet’s 1962 tour of the Soviet
Union.¹

Nowhere on the cover, however, are the words “New York City Ballet” to be found. Instead
the booklet advertises “Нью-Йоркский Городской Балет” [“Nyu-Yorkskiy Gorodskoy Balyet”].
Flipping through the pages, I am struck again and again by these names that I know so well made
strange, conquered even, by foreign characters. Violette Verdy becomes Виолетт Верди [Violett
Verdi]; Melissa Hayden is Мелисса Хейден [Melissa Kheyden]; Arthur Mitchell is Артур Митчел
[Artur Mitchel]; and perhaps most jarring, there is the Balanchine’s own name. It is not Георгий
Баланчивадзе [Georgiy Balanchivadze], the ethnically Georgian name that Balanchine was born
with in St. Petersburg in 1904. Instead we see his Western name, Джордж Баланчин [Dzhordzh
Balanchin].² The names have been transferred from English to Russian through the process of
transliteration, in which words from one script are rewritten into another script, in this case
converting English’s Latin alphabet into Russian’s cyrillic. Unlike translation, which focuses on
conveying the information contained within a set of words to its audience, transliteration only
conveys the sounds, the sensory impressions, of the language. As no two scripts are perfectly alike,
strange gaps and misunderstandings can arise as the sounds of one language are displayed through
the letters of another. Moving from English to Russian, the soft “g” in George is transliterated as

¹ “News of American Culture” brochure, RGALI f. 2966 o. 1 d. 454 l. 47.
² “News of American Culture” brochure, Akiva Diner, Scrapbook, RGALI f. 2337 o. 2 d. 204.
“дж,” [dzh] separating out the letter’s dull attack from its buzzing finale. George Balanchine’s name in the booklet, then, would have sounded strange and foreign to his former countrymen.

The defamiliarization of the artists’ names through transliteration can serve as a metaphor for the larger process of cultural diplomacy in which the New York City Ballet was taking part in 1962. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, as the Soviet Union and the United States began a longterm exchange of performing artists, audiences on both sides of the Iron Curtain suddenly got a glimpse of a cultural life from which they had been cut off for decades. It was an exciting and heady experience for everyone involved. The performers were able to travel to places that only a handful of their fellow citizens would ever visit.3 They were feted by the elites and cheered by the masses. Fans could watch on eagerly as celebrity ballerinas performed new works and beloved classics. Critics sank their teeth into a whole new repertoire. Impresarios counted their money and basked in the press. Nearly everyone spoke publicly of a new era of friendship opened up by cultural understanding.

But Soviet-American cultural understanding, however well intentioned, was rarely complete or clear-sighted. As in the process transliteration, the sensory impressions produced by a particular ballet were maintained from one country to another. But those sensory impressions - seeing a dancer wave her arm or hearing a trumpet ring out - were experienced through the prism of the host country’s cultural expectations. Just as the sounds of George Balanchine’s name were transliterated into their closest equivalent cyrillic letters, so too was his choreography processed by its Moscow, Leningrad, and Tbilisi viewers through the closest equivalents in Soviet dance. Likewise, when the Bolshoi Ballet came to the United States in 1959, American audiences interpreted the Soviet ballets through their own cultural experiences, just as the press transliterated the name of Soviet composer Прокофьев as Prokofiev.

Both the American and Soviet governments did their best to control the impressions they were creating abroad through cultural diplomacy. With its booklet on NYCB, for example the American Embassy attempted to control how the company’s Soviet audiences would experience the ballets. They likely selected a picture of ballet dancers in cowboy outfits to remind their Soviet audiences that the visiting company was American and to evoke memories of Soviet ballets in which dancers wore similarly stereotypical folk costumes. Yet in the face of these efforts, Soviet critics tended to arrive at their own interpretations of Balanchine’s works, using filters that included new Soviet choreography by Igor Belsky and Yuri Grigorovich and older Russian works by Michel Fokine and Fyodor Lopukhov.⁴

The processes of performing, seeing, and interpreting, which lay at the heart of the Soviet-American cultural exchange, are the subject of this dissertation. I explore how political needs and cultural anxieties shaped the early Soviet-American ballet tours. I also analyze the ways in which political and cultural difference affected their reception. The ballet tours were greeted on both sides of the Cold War divide with almost uniform acclaim, but very often that acclaim masked or battled with xenophobia, political bias, and simple confusion. At times, the most complex aspects of foreign ballets were totally ignored in an effort to fit the visiting culture into teleological Cold War narratives. Despite these aggressive critical battles, however, the touring ballets and ballet companies were nearly always the object of intense admiration, and even longing, on both sides of the exchange.

The very act of examining Cold War reception, and thus defamiliarizing these famous ballets, can open up new windows on mid-20th-century aesthetics. For instance, Soviet critics discussed NYCB’s performances with respect to socialist realist aesthetics, an analytical approach that, needless to say, few American scholars take. The Soviet essays on Balanchine can therefore help us reconsider a style of dance that is central to the balletic canon. Most of the major composers, choreographers, and dancers of 20th-century American and Soviet ballet were represented in some

⁴ See chapter 4 for more on this booklet and the Soviet reception of Balanchine.
form on the tours, and analyzing their transnational critical reception can illuminate new facets of
their art. By turning back to the Cold War exchange, then, we can both recover a moment of intense
Soviet-American encounter and reconsider 20th-century ballet aesthetics.

**Founding and Administering the Cultural Diplomacy Programs**

The growth of official American and Soviet cultural diplomacy began slowly and
haphazardly in the years just before World War II.\(^5\) By the early 1950s, the dissolution of the major
European colonial empires led to the creation of new countries and thus potential new Cold War
allies. During this period, the Soviet Union began to shape an extensive and systematic program of
cultural diplomacy, sending artists abroad in an effort to win allies amongst the intelligentsia of
other countries. Anxious that these strategies would enable the Soviet Union to gain an upper hand
in the global struggle for power, American embassy officials soon began to request the State
Department to sponsor similar tours.\(^6\) Thus the cultural diplomatic programs of the two countries
developed in tandem, the one’s existence encouraging and justifying the other.

American cultural diplomacy was split into two halves. The cultural presentations program,
which was dedicated to sending performing artists abroad on tour, was one half. The other half,
organized by the United States Information Agency (USIA), arranged the dispersion of American
cultural products abroad; its activities, therefore, are largely outside the bounds of this study.\(^7\)
Officials at the State Department ran the cultural presentations program but delegated artistic
decisions to the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA), which formed expert panels to

\(^5\) Emily Abrams Ansari, “Masters of the President’s Music: Cold War Composers and the United States
Government” (PhD Diss, Harvard, 2009), 22–33. Danielle Fosler-Lussier. *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy* (Oakland,

193–214.

\(^7\) Abrams Ansari, “Masters of the President’s Music,” 34.
decide which groups could perform in the cultural presentations program.\textsuperscript{8} The ANTA dance panel was made up of twelve to fifteen members from the dance community, mostly choreographers, administrators, and critics. Though the State Department was adamant that the cultural exchange program was designed to advance American foreign policy interests and not to support the arts, the ANTA panel was fairly effective at providing reliable funding for its favorite groups. In the end, the cultural presentations program became one of the most important sources of American government funding for the performing arts in the mid-20th century.\textsuperscript{9}

Like the Americans, the Soviets divided their cultural diplomacy program into two sections, though they separated the two halves differently. The Union of Soviet Societies of Friendship (SSOD), which reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organized the international exchange of cultural objects, individual scholars, and tourists. The State Committee for Cultural Ties (GKKS), a body that was under the control of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and maintained close ties with the KGB, was also responsible for planning cultural diplomacy policy.\textsuperscript{10}

The State Concert Association (Goskontsert) organized the Soviet cultural diplomacy tours.\textsuperscript{11} Goskontsert was founded in 1958 by order of the Minister of Culture, and its leader was likewise selected by the Minister of Culture. It was tasked with organizing concert tours of foreign companies in the Soviet Union, of Soviet companies abroad, and of Soviet companies within the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{12} Most studies of Soviet cultural diplomacy, such as those by Nigel Gould-Davies and

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\textsuperscript{8} ANTA was an organization dedicated to the promotion of American Theater, which had been established in 1935 by Congress as part of the New Deal. Fosler-Lussier, \textit{Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy}, 2. Croft, \textit{Dancers as Diplomats}, 22. Naima Prevots, \textit{Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy in the Cold War} (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 37.

\textsuperscript{9} ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes September 25, 1958, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3393. Croft, \textit{Dancers as Diplomats}, 15–17


\textsuperscript{12} Orders of the Ministry of Culture of the USSR relating to the Bolshoi Theater, Part 3, Order No. 590, August 23, 1958, On Regulating Guest Tours - Concert Activities; Supplement No. 1 to Order No. 590, RGALI f. 648 o. 7 d. 269.
Cadra Peterson McDaniel, conclude that the Soviet Union’s primary goal in cultural diplomacy was to influence other countries. McDaniel goes so far as to claim that the Soviet government used cultural diplomacy as a “weapon.”\textsuperscript{13} As Gould-Davies points out, Soviet diplomats did try strenuously to achieve parity in cultural negotiations, and some Soviet officials expressed anxiety about allowing their own citizens to visit the United States as tourists.\textsuperscript{14}

Nevertheless, unlike their American counterparts, not all Soviet officials hoped to use cultural diplomacy for export alone.\textsuperscript{15} The founding documents for Goskonsert asked the organization with ensuring the high artistic and ideological quality, not just of Soviet cultural representatives going abroad, but also of foreign groups touring the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{16} Similarly, the SSOD recommended foreign books to be printed in Soviet presses and staged exhibitions and events in honor of foreign cultural achievements.\textsuperscript{17} Soviet cultural diplomacy, then, was not conceived only as a means of exporting Soviet ideas abroad, but also a means of allowing Soviet artists to engage with foreign cultures in a carefully controlled environment. Goskonsert did not just control the ideological content of foreign performers touring their country, though this type of control was undeniably important, but also monitored the artistic merit of those performers. As we will see, Goskonsert officials consistently expressed both ideological and artistic concerns with respect to the exchange.


\textsuperscript{14} Gould-Davies, “The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy,” 209. For arguments about parity, see chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{15} As Danielle Fosler-Lussier has shown, the American government sometimes described cultural diplomacy as a river of information flowing out from American sources towards other areas. Fosler-Lussier, Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy, 3–6.

\textsuperscript{16} Orders of the Ministry of Culture of the USSR relating to the Bolshoi Theater, Part 3, Order No. 590, August 23, 1958, On Regulating Guest Tours - Concert Activities, RGALI f. 648 o. 7 d. 269. Original Russian: “\textit{Обязать Отдел внешних сношений и Госконцерт СССР проводить всю гастрольную работу советских исполнителей за рубежом и зарубежных артистов в СССР на более высоком уровне, достойно пропагандировать лучшие достижения советской культуры за рубежом, знакомить советского зрителя с лучшими исполнительскими силами театрального, музыкального и эстрадного искусства}.”

\textsuperscript{17} Plans for American Countries 1961, GARF f. 9576 o. 8 d. 84. Materials of the Bureau on Questions of Literature, Science, Theater, January–December 1959, GARF f. 9576 o. 8 d. 28.
The Soviet-American Relationship and the Development of Cultural Exchange

Up through the mid-1950s, both the Soviets and the Americans used their cultural diplomacy programs to influence third-party countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. During this period, the governments of the United States and Soviet Union developed a highly antagonistic relationship that did not accommodate direct cultural diplomacy between the two countries. But in 1953, Stalin’s death triggered a series of strategic shifts that gradually led towards Soviet-American cultural exchange. Stalin's successors in power, particularly Nikita Khrushchev, the new General Secretary of the Communist Party, did not believe that war with the capitalist countries was inevitable. Khrushchev planned to reorganize the Soviet Union's finances in order to raise the domestic standard of living. In order to decrease government spending on the military and on heavy industrial investment, therefore, he was willing to begin more peaceful diplomatic relations with the United States. Similarly, the American government moved away from containment and began to adopt a strategy of “competitive coexistence.” In essence, political leaders in both the United States and Soviet Union decided that aggressive military posturing would be less effective and more destructive than simply waiting for the tide of history to destroy the other country. Officials on both sides believed that their own system was destined to win out in the end and that if they could

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patiently wait for this to happen, the Cold War would resolve in their favor.\textsuperscript{20} Members of both the Soviet and American governments continued to feel a deep sense of competition.\textsuperscript{21}

In this climate of aggressively competitive waiting, cultural exchange emerged as a productive way of engaging in Cold War diplomacy. Neither capitulating to the enemy nor blatantly threatening them, it was a way of interacting that could cautiously advance one’s ideological arguments. As early as the 1955 Geneva Summit, some American politicians expressed the hope of pursuing a program of cultural exchange with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{22} Despite the newly advantageous political climate for cultural diplomacy, however, it was a highly fraught topic involving numerous practical difficulties, and negotiations on cultural exchange went back and forth for three years. In 1958 the United States and the Soviet Union finally signed the Lacy-Zarubin Agreement, which provided for the exchange of a limited number of artists, media, objects, scientists, and students between the two countries. Under this agreement, there was to be a reciprocal exchange of performing arts groups, through which equal numbers of Soviet and American artists would tour the United States and Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{23}

Due to the emphasis on reciprocity, ballet occupied a central position in the early Soviet-American exchange. Soviet dance companies played a key role in their country’s wider cultural diplomacy programs, so when tours to the United States started, the Ministry of Culture selected the Moiseyev Folk Dance Company, the Bolshoi Ballet, the Beryozka Folk Dance Company, and the Kirov Ballet to participate within the first three years.\textsuperscript{24} In an effort to maintain reciprocity with their

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{23} Caute, \textit{Dancers as Diplomats}, 30.
\end{thebibliography}
Soviet counterparts, the State Department focused on sending dance companies, particularly ballet companies, to the Soviet Union. American Ballet Theatre (ABT) toured in 1960, the New York City Ballet (NYCB) in 1962, and the Joffrey Ballet Company in 1963. After the Joffrey’s tour in 1963, the Americans stopped sending as many dance companies to the Soviet Union, organizing just one tour by the American Ballet Theatre during the entire remainder of the 1960s.\(^\text{25}\)

**Diverse Interests and Actors**

Explaining the reasoning behind the official negotiations for the Soviet-American cultural exchange tours, however, only accounts for a small portion of those persons involved in creating, administering, and fulfilling them. The artists who participated in the tours, the impresarios, the audience members, the diplomats, all had their own diverse goals, and some exerted an enormous impact on the exchange. In particular, Russian-American impresario Sol Hurok played as central of a role in shaping the Soviet-American tours as any government representative.\(^\text{26}\) Hurok had been importing Russian artists to the United States since the 1920s, and was largely responsible for ballet’s growing popularity with American audiences during the mid-20th century.\(^\text{27}\) Following the introduction of the Lacy-Zarubin Agreement, Hurok arranged the bulk of the Soviet cultural diplomacy tours in the United States, including all of the tours by the Bolshoi. In many instances, Hurok was more important to negotiating Soviet-American cultural exchange than the official representatives from the American State Department or Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He would typically conduct his own, private negotiations with the Soviet Ministry of Culture and the


\(^{26}\) Gould-Davies argues that “The Cold War, however, was a contest between two superpowers, both formidably strong; private actors played little role in comparison with formal diplomatic and military relations.” Gould-Davies, “The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy,” 193.

\(^{27}\) Hurok worked with Anna Pavlova, Fyodor Chalyapin, and the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, among many others. According to Hurok, he advocated for the exchange because delivering the Bolshoi to the United States had been one of his dearest goals for almost his entire life. Harlow Robinson, *The Last Impresario: the Life, Times, and Legacy of Sol Hurok*, (New York: Viking, 1994).
Bolshoi Theater before the official negotiations took place, and to some degree the State Department officials were locked into the decisions that Hurok had already made. Unlike the government officials, Hurok’s motivations seem to have been commercial and cultural more than political, though he often spoke publicly about a desire to encourage Soviet-American friendship.

Hurok, however, was not alone in exerting influence on the cultural exchange program as a private actor. The State Department and the ANTA Dance Panel gave company and artistic directors a certain latitude to shape the content of their presentations, so Lucia Chase, George Balanchine, and Lincoln Kirstein were all able to change the course of cultural exchange. On the Soviet side, it is more difficult to separate out the interests of individuals and the state who employed them. Nevertheless, some figures from the theater itself had a great deal of power in shaping the cultural exchange programs, including the two general directors of the Bolshoi Theater acting during this period, Georgi Orvid and Mikhail Chulaki, as well as choreographers Leonid Lavrovsky and Asaf Messerer and prima ballerina Galina Ulanova. Even the dancers, whose actions can seem confined by choreographers, directors, and politicians, had decisions to make with regard to how they would interact with local audiences and how they would perform their parts. Arthur Mitchell and Allegra Kent, for example, brought a sensuality to their pas de deux in Agon that played a major role in its Soviet reception and the political impact of the New York City Ballet’s 1962 tour.

Soviet and American artistic figures had agendas of their own that could run parallel or even contradictory to the goals of their governments. As Clare Croft has shown, the State Department’s

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28 See, for example, the material on negotiations in chapters 1 and 3.

29 For more on Hurok, see chapters 1, 3, and 4. Also see: Harlow Robinson, The Last Impresario: The Life Times, and Legacy of Sol Hurok (New York: Viking, 1994).


31 For more on the performance, see chapter 4.
cultural presentations program financed American dance companies in an era when all other government funding was disappearing. Participation in the program was for some simply a way to pay for dance at a time when public money was scarce. Nevertheless, many American performers also participated out of feelings of patriotism or desire to travel the world. Similarly, the Soviet cultural exchange tours became an important venue for Soviet dancers to advance their careers and provided them with a rare opportunity to travel abroad to places that were off-limits to regular Soviet citizens. At the same time, some Soviet artists clearly expressed feelings of patriotism and pride about their form of ballet and the consequent desire to impress foreign audiences with the accomplishments of Soviet dancers, choreographers, and composers.

**Transnational Methodologies**

In recent years, scholars of cultural diplomacy, including Danielle Fosler-Lussier and David Caute, have issued calls for research that uses non-American or transnational sources. In this dissertation, I participate in this budding movement towards transnationalism by studying Soviet and American cultural diplomacy side by side, focusing on the early years of the cultural Cold War and drawing from both American and Soviet sources. By evaluating the claims of cultural diplomacy on

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32 Emily Abrams Ansari has similarly shown how American composers used the State Department to further their own goals. Abrams Ansari, “Masters of the President's Music.” To some extent, Ansari and Croft are also responding to claims from Francis Stonor Saunders that American artists were essentially apolitical figures unwittingly dragged into nationalist American politics by the CIA. Hugh Wilford has also demonstrated that the artists and intellectuals had some power in this relationship. Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 1999), 1–6.


34 For more on these motivations and personal investment in the tour, see chapters 1 and 3.

both sides of an exchange, I am able to compare the planning and outcomes of the tours, measuring the impact that the cultural exchange could have on politics and aesthetics. This comparison reveals, most of all, the real power that the receiving country had in cultural diplomatic relationships.

I conducted this research in Moscow, Boston, New York, and Fayetteville, Arkansas. In the Russian State Archive for Literature and Art (RGALI), I examined collections from the Bolshoi Theater, Goskontsert, and the Soviet Ministry of Culture. Each of these collections houses documents relating to the organization of the tours, and, in the case of the Bolshoi Theater, the documentation covers the planning and staging of the theater’s ballet productions. In general, the documents at the RGALI vary greatly depending on the ballet, but they can include information on artistic committee meetings, speeches, libretto drafts, budgets, and set and costume designs. The RGALI also contains a number of useful personal collections, including the papers of Soviet choreographer and Bolshoi artistic director Leonid Lavrovsky, whose personal accounts of the tours in letters to his wife have proved invaluable. In addition, the collections of the Soviet dance critic Natalia Roslavleva and of the dancer Akiva Diner furnish clippings files regarding the Soviet reception of American ballet companies. I also conducted work in the Bolshoi Theater’s own archive, which includes clippings of its press reception in the Soviet Union and the United States, as well as programs and photographs of the ballets performed on their stage in Moscow, and in some cases notes from artistic committee meetings about staging the ballets. Finally, I examined the files of the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies (SSOD) at the State Archive of the Russian Federation; these provide information about wider Soviet cultural diplomacy practices, even though the SSOD itself did not administer the cultural exchange tours.

In the United States, I conducted research in the University of Arkansas Library, which houses the State Department documents on cultural exchange, including internal memos about negotiations, plans for the tours and the minutes from every ANTA dance panel meeting, at which the members discussed their plans for the dance exchange with great frankness. The American Ballet
Theatre (ABT) Collection at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts has provided a wealth of documents regarding their tour of the Soviet Union in 1960. The ABT Collection includes substantial correspondence between company director Lucia Chase, business manager John Onysko, and board member Charles Payne regarding their efforts to stage ABT’s Soviet tour. In addition, Lucia Chase’s personal collection includes her diary from the tour. The Balanchine Collection at Houghton Library in Cambridge and the New York City Ballet collection at the New York Public Library furnish similar documents regarding NYCB, though in less detail than ABT’s archive. In addition, I searched both Soviet and American newspapers for reviews of the cultural exchange tours, using ProQuest and microfilm collections.

I have also had the privilege of interviewing two of the performers from the tours. In Moscow in May 2013, I interviewed Marina Kondratieva, one of the ballerinas who starred in the Bolshoi’s 1959 and 1962 tours of the United States. In Toronto in June 2014, I interviewed American drummer and composer Michael Colgrass, who performed in the orchestra for ABT’s 1960 tour of the Soviet Union. My conversations with these artists gave me a better sense of the day-to-day experience of touring as well as information about the diversity of individual motivations held by artists participating in the tours. In addition, I have interviewed Judith P. Zinsser, who was a young audience member at one of the Bolshoi’s 1959 performances at Madison Square Gardens; she described the atmosphere in the audience during the Bolshoi’s American performances.36 I also consulted the published memoirs of many of the participants of the tours; for almost every one, their experience as a cultural diplomat was a major event in their lives.

Aesthetics on Tour

Positioned amidst this diverse source base, the ballet performances emerge as the still point at the center of a whirlwind, the artistic events that brought performers, choreographers, audiences,

36 Judith P. Zinsser, Interview with Author, November 14, 2014, Iowa City.
critics, and politicians together. The performances, their physical and temporal reality, form the backbone of the dissertation. As such, I deal explicitly with the works themselves and the impact they had on their foreign audiences. This study thus takes part in ongoing discussions about the effects of culture, or so-called soft power, on global politics.

Historians of cultural diplomacy, including Gienow-Hecht and Fosler-Lussier, have had a conflicted relationship with political scientist Joseph Nye’s division of global power into “soft” (cultural, diplomatic) and “hard” (military, economic). While Nye was an early figure in pointing out the importance of cultural power, he places these powers in a hierarchical and gendered relationship in which culture is at the bottom. Moreover, Nye never totally explicates how culture can exert power in the world, relying on an index of “attractiveness” to describe how much foreign populations admire or despise American cultural products. This single variable “attractiveness” belies the complex relationships between a work of art and its audiences.

I argue that the relationship between politics and aesthetics during the tours hinges on the role of reception. Just as any diplomatic relationship has two or more partners, any work of art, according to reception theory, is the product of a relationship between the creator and the audience. That is to say, the meaning of a work of art is not reliant wholly on the author’s intentions but also on the audience's understanding. In the exchange discussed in this dissertation, ballets bridged the gap between artist and audience, between Soviet and American. The audiences had complex interactions with those works of art based in the aesthetic, social, and political environment in which they lived. As they interpreted the foreign ballets, audiences narrativized and theorized those works

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of art in ways that fit with their own world views. The ballets could produce complex, even paradoxical, effects on their audiences. Thus, though American audiences in 1962 loved the Soviet work Ballet School, that fact did not necessarily convince them to love the Soviet Union. Instead, many appreciated the ballet precisely because it gave them the buoyant impression that the United States was winning the cultural Cold War. While it was “attractive” to American audiences, it did not advance the Soviet government’s geopolitical goals.

The second reason to bring aesthetics to the center of this study is that it shows how the Cold War cultural exchange has affected our understanding of ballet. The tours had a powerful hold on the minds and actions of dancers, choreographers, audience members, and critics. It should hardly come as a surprise, then, that the patterns of discourse regarding ballet, particularly foreign ballet, that were formed during the exchange continue to influence American and Russian thinking about the art form over half a century later. During the Cold War itself, participants on both sides described the aesthetic differences between their art and their enemy’s art in binary terms: American critics believed that their country produced abstract art, while the Soviets made narrative works; the Soviets believed that their own artists cared about meaning, while the Americans were formalists. Such binaries, however, masked deep similarities between ballets on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In the Soviet Union up through the 1950s, the officially accepted genre of ballet had been the drambalet, which merged dramatic theater with dance, often bringing to life classic literature in a stylized aesthetic that bore a close relationship to silent film. Around 1960, many younger artists began to promote a new style, choreographic symphionism, in which dance, while still narrative,

40 To analyze reception separately from production actually opposes the American government’s own designs for the cultural exchange tours. As Clare Croft has discussed, the State Department at this time frequently invoked dance’s “universality” as one reason to include it in the cultural exchange tours. Whether or not music and dance are truly universal is a topic that has been investigated at great length. While I tend to come down very strongly on the non-universal side of the debate, I am intrigued by Carol Hess’s arguments in Representing the Good Neighbor, in which she argues some of the benefits of seeing music as a universal art, relating it to the impulse to respect the equal validity of other nationalities’ music. In the American Cold War tours, the cry to universalism tended to assume the inherent superiority of white upper-class American art, as Croft alludes to in her study. Hess, Representing the Good Neighbor, 1–13. Croft, Dancers as Diplomats, 7, 39, and 71–74.
would take its cues from musical structure, developing full-length works out from short choreographic motifs and using counterpoint between different parts of an ensemble.41

Similarly, during the 1930s and ’40s, American choreographers had been creating short ballets with many similarities to the Soviet drambalet, works such as Rodeo, Billy the Kid, Fall River Legend, and Fancy Free that featured folkloric settings and nationalist references. They were short ballets choreographed in naturalistic pantomime and driven by explorations of the characters’ psychological development. By the mid-20th century, however, much like in the Soviet Union, ballet in the United States underwent a profound shift. George Balanchine, the most prominent American choreographer of the mid-20th century, began to base his ballets closely on musical works and to abandon realistic narrative. Balanchine’s ballets responded to minute musical details in their scores, from texture and melody to instrumentation and form. These similarities between American and Soviet dance make the binary narratives constructed during the Cold War all the more interesting and all the more revealing of the ways in which political and aesthetic arguments could be intertwined.

I based my analyses of these ballets on close viewings of film recordings. Every ballet in this dissertation but one – the 1962 Ballet School – is available in multiple film versions, and almost all of them include film versions made within ten years of the exchange tours. This includes a great deal of archival footage housed at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, but in many instances also includes commercially available recordings. I also supplemented this film viewing with the experience of seeing today’s live iterations of these ballets, including productions of Romeo and Juliet, Spartacus, Stone Flower, Fancy Free, Rodeo, Serenade, Agon, and Interplay. Neither archival footage nor modern-day experiences in the theater can accurately reproduce the experience

41 Ezrahi has discussed this shift in Swans of the Kremlin. Ezrahi, Swans of the Kremlin.
of seeing ballets live in their Cold War context. I therefore ground my own understandings of these works within the writings and commentary of the people who produced or saw the performances themselves.

In both the United States and the Soviet Union, the appropriate role of music in ballet, its meaning and relationship to dance, was a major focus of aesthetic discussions in the mid-20th-century. Thus, a musicological perspective is vital to the study of this period of ballet history. I draw on the work of such scholars as Irene Alm, Stephanie Jordan, and Julia Randel, who have demonstrated that music and choreography can be productively examined in relation to one another. All three scholars have focused largely on the abstract ballets of Western choreographers, primarily Balanchine. I expand on these methodologies in order to apply them to narrative ballets. Musical parameters such as form, orchestration, phrasing, and harmony have an important impact on ballet as an art form, whether that ballet is narrative or abstract, Soviet or American.

Chapter Structure

The dissertation is comprised of four chapters, each of which explores a single ballet tour, by the Bolshoi Ballet in 1959, American Ballet Theatre in 1960, and both the Bolshoi and the New York City Ballet in 1962. The chapters also divide into pairs, instances in which the companies were exchanged either directly or almost directly. The first chapter discusses the Bolshoi Ballet’s 1959 tour

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42 It is a topic of debate in dance studies whether dance can ever be understood or studied by people who did not see them live, since dance is a fleeting art in which each performance is different, based on the bodies of the people who performed it and the space in which they performed. Over time, these works change as they are passed from dancer to dancer. While I regard this as a productive and interesting philosophical quandary, I do not see the ontological problems of dance history as insurmountable ones, particularly in the latter half of the 20th century, when there is so much available video footage, and so many contemporaneous critical accounts. Indeed, they are the same ontological problems that any historian is confronted with. The level of uncertainty regarding these performances is no greater than our level of uncertainty regarding a particular musical performance or a set of diplomatic negotiations. Selma Jeanne Cohen, Next Week, Swan Lake: Reflections on Dance and Dancers (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982).

of the United States, the first time a Soviet ballet company ever appeared in the Western hemisphere. On this trip, the Bolshoi highlighted two works by Sergei Prokofiev, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Stone Flower*. The two ballets represented the pinnacle of both the old and new styles of Soviet ballet, and thus were chosen to impress American audiences with the company’s stylistic breadth. The tour organizers also picked these ballets because they believed the composer’s international reputation would help ensure that American audiences and critics understood and appreciated Soviet ballet. I show that this strategy, while successful with American audiences, failed to win over American critics, almost all of whom dismissed the choreography as old-fashioned. At the same time, reviewers lavished praise on the Soviet ballerinas for their virtuosity. In praising only the performance, the most “feminine” side of the productions, American reviews downplayed the political threat posed by Soviet ballet.

The second chapter documents the first American ballet tour of the Soviet Union, by American Ballet Theatre in 1960. Lucia Chase, the company’s director, initially hoped to present a full program of American ballets. I examine the extensive correspondence between Chase and her fellow managers from the late 1950s and 1960, when the company struggled desperately to convince Soviet and American bureaucrats to authorize ABT’s performances. Pressure from the State Department as well as from Soviet agencies slowly convinced Chase to add more Russian works, such as the *Swan Lake* Act III *pas de deux* and *Les Sylphides*, and remove some American ones, such as *Billy the Kid* and *Fall River Legend*. This balance between American and Russian aspects of the tour highlighted the United States’ position as a participant in elite cosmopolitan culture, an image that was also supported by the diverse performers in the ABT cast. This turned out to be a surprisingly effective strategy. Despite early fears that an American company could not measure up to Soviet standards, most Russian critics acknowledged the talent and technical virtuosity of the American dancers. The tour’s success could also be attributed to the fact that *Rodeo* and *Fancy Free*, the only remaining American works, bore great similarities to Soviet *drambaleti*. Like *drambaleti*, *Rodeo* and *Fancy
Free portrayed essentialist versions of national identity, and so, ironically, the Soviet reviewers were prepared to understand the works as uniquely American precisely because they were so like the ballets they already knew.

In the fall of 1962, as Khrushchev and Kennedy came perilously close to starting nuclear war over missiles in Cuba, the Soviet and American governments directly exchanged the Bolshoi Ballet for the New York City Ballet. In my third chapter, I contend that the Bolshoi’s 1962 tour was simultaneously the most diplomatically successful of the early exchanges and the most artistically disappointing. John F. Kennedy used the Bolshoi’s appearances on the east coast in November 1962 to help diffuse political tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, American critics continued to show hostility towards realist Soviet choreography, in this case panning a new production of Aram Khachaturian’s ballet *Spartacus* so thoroughly that the Bolshoi removed the work from its programs after only three performances. Even works that had been met with approbation in 1959, such as *Swan Lake*, faced sharp criticism in 1962. The poor critical reception of these works reflected not only the competitive spirit of the exchange but also American ambitions about their country’s new imperial powers and ballet critics’ concerns about the status of their genre. The criticisms gradually coalesced into one complaint, that the Bolshoi’s productions failed to demonstrate “taste,” a preoccupation related to the unusually high wealth and social status possessed by the company’s American audiences. The company’s only unquestionable success in 1962 was *Ballet School*, which had been staged specifically for the tour. The work split the difference between American and Soviet models of ballet, appealing broadly while managing to avoid taking sides on aesthetic or political questions.

At the same time that the Bolshoi was touring the United States in 1962, the New York City Ballet was performing in the Soviet Union, led by artistic director and choreographer George Balanchine. In the past, Balanchine’s historians have seen this tour as a triumph for American foreign policy, as Soviet intellectuals grasped the extent to which their ballet had been “left behind”
by advances in the West. For the first time in English-language scholarship, I examine the full gamut of Soviet criticism of NYCB, from both newspapers and television, demonstrating that while the Soviet dance establishment welcomed Balanchine’s ballets, they rejected the choreographer’s aesthetics and implicitly his politics. Before the tour began, both Balanchine and the US State Department tried to control the Soviet reception of NYCB by disseminating information on the company’s style to the Soviet dance establishment. Despite this advance information, however, Soviet critics did not read Balanchine’s works in the ways that the Americans had hoped. Many saw Balanchine’s success as a product of his Russian heritage and training, while they rejected his political interpretation of aesthetics. Indeed, the Soviet audiences and especially the dance critics seemed to prefer the works of Balanchine’s colleague, Jerome Robbins, who used many of Balanchine’s musical and choreographic techniques while avoiding the dogmatic appeal to abstraction that Balanchine advocated in his Soviet newspaper interviews.

In this dissertation, I challenge the notion that the United States won the cultural Cold War. American viewers were as impressed with the Bolshoi as Soviet audiences were with the American companies and often expressed an envious admiration for the support that the Soviet Union gave to the arts. Audiences and critics interpreted the works onstage in complex ways that could create paradoxical effects on public opinion. While the tours’ diplomatic successes could promote friendly relations between the two superpowers, in the end performers and audiences on both sides refused to engage deeply with each others’ aesthetic philosophies.

Throughout the dissertation, I highlight these misunderstandings, which have as much bearing on our current grasp of 20th-century ballet as the works themselves. The styles of ballet performed by the two companies were remarkably similar in ways that were at the time hidden or twisted in reception. These misunderstandings, some accidental and some willful, have shaped the ways in which Americans understand Russian ballet and the ways in which Russians understand American ballet. The transliterations of the cultural Cold War have never been undone, and each
version, the Soviet version of American ballet, the American image of Soviet ballet, remains a powerful and strange cultural object in its own right.
Chapter 1

A Cold War Welcome:

The Bolshoi Ballet’s 1959 U.S. Tour Shows the Limits of Cultural Diplomacy

“O body swayed to music, o brightening glance
How can we know the dancer from the dance?”
- William Butler Yeats, “Among School Children” (1928)

Thunderous applause, screaming, whistling, flowers and shredded paper filling the air. Press coverage running for three months in every conceivable news outlet across the country. Private parties and lavish dinners. Such was the tumult that greeted the Soviet Union’s Bolshoi Ballet when it appeared in the United States in 1959 for its first ever engagement in the Western hemisphere.

American critics and observers at the time noted with hope that the ballet troupe had accomplished what no amount of formal diplomacy had managed - bringing Americans and Soviets closer together. Today, Bolshoi ballerina Marina Kondratieva asserts that the troupe’s tours of the United States changed Cold War international relations.¹ In very real ways then, the Bolshoi’s visit allowed some level of human sympathy to lessen the tensions between the world’s two superpowers.

Yet there were limits. In his memoirs, Bolshoi conductor Yuri Faier claimed not that the company generated goodwill but that it “conquered” the United States.² American critics were notably cool towards the company’s repertoire. These contradictory assessments, hopeful and derisive, welcoming and forbidding, developed out of the diverse motivations of the actors involved in the tours. The exchange was organized in part by the Soviet and American governments to facilitate Cold War diplomacy, but it was also the brain child of Russian-American impresario Sol

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¹ Marina Kondratieva, Interview with Author, Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, May 14, 2013.
² Yuriy Faier, O sebe, o muzïke, o balete (Moscow: Vsesoyuznoye izdatel’stvo sovetskiy kompozitor, 1970), 414. Original Russian: “Да, мы хотели завоевать Америку и, если не ошибаюсь, завоевали ее.” All translations are my own.
Hurok, who had strong ties to the Soviet government and was one of the greatest advocates for Russian culture in the United States. Hurok expected to earn $150,000 from the tour, a figure that would equate to approximately $2,690,000 in 2013.³

Moreover, dancers, choreographers, musicians, critics, and even audience members had individual motivations that could help or frustrate the broader geo-political goals for the exchange. For the Soviet dancers, government-sponsored tours were the only way to travel internationally. The performances were also a way for the artists to reach an entirely new audience, one that turned out to be the most receptive and enthusiastic of their careers. For many American critics, the exchange represented an important opportunity to gauge the success or failure of American ballet companies vis-a-vis their Soviet counterparts. Thus, while the American critics were rapturous about the Soviet dancers, many expressed more hesitation about the works they performed.

While on tour, the Bolshoi highlighted the music of Sergei Prokofiev, hoping that the composer's international fame would help make Soviet aesthetics palatable to Western viewers. Rather than help bridge the aesthetic gap, however, the tour instead persuaded American reviewers that Prokofiev’s Soviet ballets were artistically frozen in the 19th century. Behind these criticisms of the Bolshoi’s repertoire lay two interlocking arguments; on the one hand, a political critique accusing the Soviet government of resembling the tsars, and on the other, an aesthetic critique based on the assumption that only the West could define modernity.

Nevertheless, while American reviewers were severely critical of Soviet choreography, they simultaneously lavished praise on the Bolshoi performers. The company’s ballerinas, in particular, were the objects of endless fascination in the American press. Rather than treating the dancers as intellectual, political actors, however, the American newspapers turned their attention entirely to the

ballerinas’ physical beauty and virtuosic technique. In doing so, the critics drew on a long tradition in Western philosophy of separating ballet out into two parts: choreography, which they understood as intellectual and masculine, and performance, which they understood as corporeal and feminine. This enabled reviewers to disavow any political power the Bolshoi might have over American viewers, but it radically clashed with ideas about womanhood in the Soviet Union, particularly as embodied in the company’s greatest ballerina, Galina Ulanova.

In this chapter, I analyze the ballets of the 1959 tour from the perspective of Soviet documentary sources and aesthetic philosophies, comparing this domestic understanding of the ballet to the Bolshoi’s reception in the United States. By juxtaposing multiple understandings and experiences of the events of 1959, I demonstrate the tour’s successes and its failures, the points at which exchange was possible and the points at which it broke down. The Bolshoi’s tour of 1959 lit a candle of hope for Soviet-American relations, but it also demonstrated the elusive and mercurial nature of that hope, a tiny flame that twisted and danced in the cold winds of international politics.

**Negotiating the Tour**

Founded in 1776 by Prince Urusov, the Bolshoi Ballet, located in Moscow, had a long and illustrious history under Russia’s imperial government, second in prestige only to the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg. The Bolshoi gained new significance following the Russian Revolution and the relocation of the national government to Moscow. As Leningrad was held under increasing suspicion for its imperial and Western ties, Moscow grew in power, and the Bolshoi became a prominent symbol of state authority. Visiting dignitaries were customarily taken to see the ballet, and portions of the company toured internationally under the sponsorship of the Soviet

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5 Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin*, 72–73.
According to the memoirs of dancer Maya Plisetskaya, Khrushchev complained that he was forced to accompany so many foreign ambassadors to the Bolshoi’s performances of *Swan Lake* that his dreams were haunted by a mixture of swans and tanks. As one of the Soviet Union’s premiere cultural exports, the Bolshoi was a natural choice for the Soviet-American exchange. In April 1959, a little more than a year after the signing of the Lacy-Zarubin Agreement, the Bolshoi made its first appearance in the Western Hemisphere.

Throughout planning for the tour, there was a constant struggle for balance between the United States and the Soviet Union. The principle of reciprocity, or, more cynically, the fear that the other country might get more out of the exchange, was regarded by many government officials as paramount. At the same time, these state goals were in constant negotiation with the interests of the private sphere, particularly as embodied in the person of Sol Hurok, the impresario who organized the tour. A letter from Hurok, located in the Bolshoi’s archival collections, demonstrates that his initial negotiations for the Bolshoi’s tour concluded in March 1958, only months after the exchange agreement was negotiated between the American and Soviet governments. On March 13, Hurok wrote to Mikhail Chulaki, the general director of the Bolshoi, “I am delighted to think that as a result of our negotiations we are to work together in the future. Believe me, I shall do everything in my power to implement our plans successfully and to the benefit of good understanding between

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our peoples.” Hurok wasted no time to let the world in on his success; news of it appeared in the
*New York Times* on the very same day that the impresario wrote his letter of thanks to Chulaki.9

Hurok’s relationship to the State Department was at times unclear and frequently antagonistic. The State Department initially hoped that ANTA could run the Soviet cultural exchange tours in the United States, but the Soviet government much preferred working with Hurok.10 According to Harlow Robinson, Hurok began working energetically to curry favor with the Soviet government in the 1930s by avoiding public criticism of the Soviet government, even during the purges. During World War II he staged benefit performances for Russian war relief and following the war he continued to ingratiate himself with Soviet diplomats stationed in the United States.11 The impresario’s arrangements always provided the Soviet Ministry of Culture with an impressive share of the profits. As part of their deal for the 1959 Bolshoi tour, the Soviet government received $50,000 per week.12 Moreover, Hurok knew his trade as a ballet impresario well and was a native speaker of Russian. While the company was in the United States he was constantly around to smooth the way, helping the company put on its performances and assisting Soviet dancers in adapting to life in America.13

This type of individual initiative was often frustrating to the American State Department and Central Intelligence Agency, since it could undermine concurrent official negotiations. As Guy E. Coriden wrote in an intelligence brief,

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9 Letter from Hurok to Chulaki, March 13, 1958, RGALI f. 648 o. 7 d. 285.


11 Report on Moiseyev and Bolshoi, RGALI f. 2329 o. 8 d. 913 l. 6.


13 Agreement between Hurok Artists, Inc. and State Academic Bolshoi Theatre, RGALI f. 2329 o. 8 d. 1233 l. 25.

14 Kondratieva remembers Hurok fondly, recalling his efforts to organize fun activities for the dancers and his understanding of their lives. Kondratieva, Interview with Author, Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, May 14, 2013. Report on Bolshoi Ballet Tour of US and Canada, RGALI f. 2329 o. 8 d. 1233 l. 34–35.
Since not only the US and Soviet Governments, but also private US citizens originate exchanges, EWC has some problem with those who, proceeding from newspaper accounts of an open exchange policy, make elaborate arrangements for entertaining Soviet visitors in the United States without considering either the principle of reciprocity or the possibility that other negotiations might be going on for exchange visits in the same field of interest.\textsuperscript{15}

Hurok was the most powerful private actor on either side of the exchange, and thus the most capable of undermining Soviet-American parity in the arrangements. As early as September 1958, after the success of the Moiseyev Dance Troupe in the United States, the State Department began to send Hurok letters urging him to remember the principles of reciprocity in conducting the exchanges. Soviet authorities, learning about the letters, expressed excitement that the American government was already worried about the effectiveness of Soviet cultural exchange.\textsuperscript{16}

While it only took a matter of months for representatives of the American and Soviet governments to agree on the broad outlines of the Bolshoi's tour to the United States, working out the tour's exact schedule took much longer. In fact some details were still unsettled when the troupe arrived a year later in April 1959. One problem that persistently beset the company was the fact that American stages were generally much smaller than the company's home theater in Moscow. The Bolshoi Theater was immense, and the productions performed by the company were designed in commensurately epic proportions.\textsuperscript{17} When the company performed on tour, they brought modified versions of their ballets with new sets to fit smaller spaces, but there were few American cities with theaters large enough to host even these adjusted productions. There was no stage in Washington, D.C., that could fit any of the full-length ballets, but Soviet officials worried that skipping the capital


\textsuperscript{16} Discussions with Hurok and B. N. Krïlova, September 8–9, 1958, RGALI f. 2329 o. 8 d. 907 l. 9-10.

\textsuperscript{17} Press Release, Embassy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, April 9, 1959, Bolshoi Theater Museum Archive.
would be seen as an insult to the American government. In the end, Hurok and the Bolshoi directors decided to send a small cast to Washington to perform just one gala program.

Hurok also ran into difficulty in planning the company's stop in San Francisco, a city that was technically on a list of places that barred all Soviet citizens from entry. This policy had been instituted by the American government as a response to a similar Soviet law that banned American citizens from certain areas of the Soviet Union. Access to San Francisco held no particular security risk, and for previous cultural exchange efforts, Hurok had convinced the State Department to grant exemptions. Nevertheless, just as the first wave of the Bolshoi dancers arrived in the United States, the State Department indicated that it would be unwilling to release the ballet company from this policy. It was not until late April that Hurok convinced the State Department to open the California city to the Bolshoi.

The prickly nature of the San Francisco negotiations spoke to the fact that some Americans opposed allowing Soviet citizens into the United States at all. A few weeks before the Bolshoi arrived, the Daughters of the American Revolution passed a resolution decrying all attempts at

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18 The Bolshoi's home stage was 86 by 77 feet, the stage of the old Metropolitan Opera House was 63 feet wide, and the DC Capitol Theater 55 feet wide. Richard Lee Coe, “The Bolshoi May Pass Us By,” Washington Post and Times Herald, April 1, 1959.


20 Letter to Senator Hart from Max Isenbergh, Acting Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs, February 2, 1962, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Historical Collection (ABECA) MC 468, Box 50, Folder 75.


22 “S.F. Ballet Guild to Sponsor Bolshoi Opening June 5,” San Francisco Examiner, April 29, 1959. The negotiations over the city of San Francisco revealed the American government's difficulties in trying to make the exchanges fully reciprocal. The Soviet government banned Americans from entering certain parts of their country - a ban to which no exceptions were made. If the Americans were to make the exchanges completely even, a principle that many in the intelligence and diplomatic community held to in an attempt to assure that the US did not lose out in the transaction, they too would have to close off certain areas of the United States to Soviet citizens. In doing so, they would exercise the same kinds of restraints that they claimed were a product only of communist governments, and would in fact deny Soviet artists and intellectuals the experience of freedom that they hoped would be a part of their trip to the United States. Memo of conversation about US USSR Agreement, Dr. Rainink, Mr. J.A. van Houten, Philip H Coombs, November 1, 1961, ABECA, Box 50, Folder 75.
cultural exchange with communist-bloc countries, a statement they clearly directed at the incoming ballet dancers. Despite such rumblings of antagonism, however, the bulk of the country seemed to await the Soviet company’s arrival with eagerness. American newspapers and magazines, from the *New York Times* to *Dance News* and *Women’s Wear Daily*, ran nearly endless articles describing the company, its dancers, and its repertoire. On April 13, 1959, a picture of the Bolshoi graced the cover of *Newsweek* over the title “Direct from Moscow - Russia’s Best” (Figure 2). On the Sunday before the company began performances, *New York Times* critic John Martin ran an article jokingly titled “Dance: Please! Messrs. Hurok, Khrushchev, Bolshoi, What Are You Doing to Us?,” in which he claimed that:

> The coming visit of the Bolshoi Ballet from Moscow (is there anybody alive who does not know that it opens at the Met on Thursday?) has caused more strife and dissension in this country than anything since the War Between the States. […] Politics? Anti-communism? Send the Reds back where they came from? Nonsense; it is just that everybody wants tickets... People not only want to see it, but they will commit arson, perjury, mayhem and murder to do so.

Martin’s complaints, though exaggerated, were understandable. Tickets almost completely sold out to Hurok’s pre-subscribers, a cadre of devoted dance fans who were given the opportunity to make advance purchases. Demand was so high that Hurok added a secondary New York engagement for the company at Madison Square Garden, hardly an ideal stage for presenting ballet.

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Life on Tour

Amidst this flurry of excitement, expertly stirred by Hurok, an advance group from the Bolshoi touched down at Idlewild Airport in New York on April 9, 1959. The party included conductors Yuri Faier and Gennady Rozhdestvensky, who arrived early to begin work with the American orchestra, and the leading technical directors, who likewise started working with the American stagehands. More importantly for the press, however, the advance group also included the Bolshoi’s most famous ballerina, Galina Ulanova, who gave a short press conference to warm the American media to their incoming visitors.27 What puzzled and fascinated the reporters the most about the dancer, however, was not her words but her physical appearance, which

lacked the glamour traditionally associated with an internationally acclaimed star. She has gray-streaked blonde hair casually combed back, a wide smile revealing a gold canine tooth, a pale complexion with little if any makeup, and dazzling blue eyes. She appears more the housewife than the dancer.  

Ulanova’s inability or unwillingness to play the part of traditional celebrity continued to puzzle the American press corps throughout the tour.

Three days later, on April 12, the advance group was joined by the main part of the company, making up a contingent of exactly one hundred Soviet dancers and twenty-four support staff. Despite arriving in a new city located eight time zones away from Moscow, the dancers got to work immediately on April 13. The opening days of rehearsal in the United States, however, were somewhat rocky. In the days leading up to the premiere, many complained that the stage floor at the old Metropolitan Opera House was seriously pitted. Though stagehands rushed to fix the problem, the theater never quite met the expectations of the Soviet visitors. Choreographer and artistic director Leonid Lavrovsky described the stage in a letter to his wife as “excellent and comfortable, but dirty to the point of indecency.”

Lavrovsky, indeed, felt that the entire city of New York was dirty, a “silver-gray with terrible buildings and boring streets.” The other members of the Soviet delegation tended to agree with him, but, despite widespread ambivalence about New York itself, the Bolshoi dancers immensely

32 Letter from Lavrovsky to Chidson, April 19, 1959, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 195. Original Russian: “Очень хорошо и удобен, но грязен до неприличия.” The company toured during the old Metropolitan Opera House’s final decade of use. Photographs from the era seem to confirm Lavrovsky’s impressions of the building, particularly the outer façade’s very dirty appearance and location in the middle of a bustling Manhattan intersection. This would have certainly appeared as a great contrast to the cleanliness and grandeur of the Bolshoi’s home theater, which opens up onto a fountain square (much like the new Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center). Photographs from Library of Congress, HABS NY, 31-NEYO, 79–3.
33 Ibid. Original Russian: “Город серо-грязный с ужасными зданиями и скучнитетшими улицами.”
enjoyed visiting the United States. According to Kondratieva, “We were very interested in the stores because at that time there was nothing [like that in the USSR] absolutely nothing. The 1950s was a very hard time. ... And of course, for us it was interesting just to go and not to buy anything. Just to look and see what is stylish there...For us it was like a museum.”

Many of the artists were able to connect with friends or family who had emigrated from Russia following the Revolution. Yuri Fayer, who had believed his brother to be dead for thirty years, was reunited with his sibling during the company’s stay in New York. In their limited spare time, members of the company were put through their paces with a sight-seeing schedule that included a boat ride around the city, a trip to the zoo, and a viewing of *West Side Story*.

Following the stop in New York and a one-day engagement in Washington, the Bolshoi traveled to Los Angeles for a series of performances at the Hollywood Bowl. The premiere drew out a vast contingent of Hollywood celebrities, including Clark Gable, Gregory Peck, John Wayne, and Dinah Shore. Members of the Bolshoi enjoyed life on the west coast much better than in New York; many remarked to local newspapers that Los Angeles was a more beautiful and clean city and that they liked the palm trees. Lavrovsky wrote home that LA reminded him of southern cities in the Soviet Union, but “more grandiose.” In Los Angeles there was “lots of green, air, and you feel...

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34 Kondratieva, Interview with Author, Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, May 14, 2013. Original Russian: “Нас интересовали магазины. Потому что, у нас в то время вообще ничего не было. Просто ничего не было...в пятьдесят годы очень тяжёлые годы были. И, конечно, вот для нас было интересно поэтому магазины для ничего покупать просто посмотреть что там шико, что это. Для нас это было как музей.”

35 Fayer, *O sebe, o muzike, o balete*, 422. Kondratieva also recalled meeting with a woman she had known as a small child. Kondratieva, Interview with Author, Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, May 14, 2013.


better. In New York there is no air and it is impossible to breathe.” The glamour of Los Angeles aside, life on tour was hard. Long rehearsals took up most of the dancers’ day hours, and it was sometimes difficult to communicate with family back home, as many of Lavrovsky's letters attest.

**Prokofiev as Unexpected Mediator**

The Bolshoi performed four full-length works in North America: two classical 19th-century ballets, *Swan Lake* and *Giselle*, and two Soviet works, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Stone Flower*. The latter set, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Stone Flower*, both had scores by Sergei Prokofiev. The tour came at an important moment in Prokofiev’s posthumous canonization in the Soviet Union, and it helped reveal one of the composer’s most useful properties to the Soviet government - the very ties to the West that had once been seen as his greatest flaw.

Prokofiev’s personal biography was unfortunately and inexorably entangled with the rise and consolidation of Soviet power. In 1918, just after the Russian Revolution, the young pianist and composer traveled, via Siberia and trans-Pacific ship, to the United States. He spent over a decade of his life in the West, mostly in the United States and France, where he composed for Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. In the mid 1920s, having taken fairly firm control of its empire, the Soviet government began reaching out to cultural figures who had left the country in the wake of revolution. Prokofiev, one of the artists approached, was promised a great deal of artistic support from the Soviet government if he would return home, and in 1936 the composer moved his family to the Soviet Union. The support of the Soviet government, however, did not turn out to be all that had been promised. Some bureaucrats held Prokofiev in deep suspicion for his ties to the United

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38 Letter from Lavrovsky to Chidson, May 22, 1959, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 195. Original Russian: “Много зелени, воздуха, и здесь чувства себя лучше, в Нью-Йорке нет воздуха и дышать нечем.”

39 Kondratieva, Interview with Author, Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, May 14, 2013. Letter from Lavrovsky to Chidson, May 5, 1959, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 195.

States and Western Europe. Moreover, the composer never developed any real belief in
communism, and his resulting failure to take part in civic activities counted against him.41

American musicologists long narrated Prokofiev’s life in the Soviet Union as a political
tragedy, a descent into artistic control, political struggle, and eventually death. Simon Morrison’s
2009 biography did much to clarify the story, showing how Prokofiev worked within the Soviet
system, viewing the state arts network as a stable and well-endowed forum for staging his works.
Moreover, though he struggled greatly with the bureaucracy of the state theater, he managed to
achieve periods of substantial public success, culminating in the mid 1940s, when he received Stalin
prizes for many of his compositions, including the Fifth Symphony and Cinderella, his second Soviet
ballet. Nevertheless, this period of success was only brief.42 In 1948, a series of denunciations at the
Union of Composers shook the Soviet musical world. Prokofiev and other prominent composers
were accused of “formalistic distortions and anti-democratic tendencies.”43 During the same period,
Prokofiev developed severe health problems, and the last years of his life were painful, financially
difficult, and artistically frustrating.44

Despite the relative disapprobation in which he died in 1953, over the next few decades,
Prokofiev was eventually canonized by the Soviet government as a great composer. His rise to
posthumous glory was driven by two entangled processes: the Soviet government’s new decision to
harness cultural diplomacy as part of its Cold War strategy and the Thaw-era debates about
composition. The decade following Stalin’s death in 1953 saw a gradual re-evaluation of the


42 Morrison, The People’s Artist, 1–6, 247–295.

events of 1948 were not entirely driven by aesthetic concerns. Kiril Tomoff has pointed out the important role that
financial constraints played in these events, with anger being directed at Shostakovich, Khachaturian, and Prokofiev for
their success in monopolizing the funds of the Soviet musical world. Kiril Tomoff, Creative Union: The Professional

44 Morrison, The People’s Artist, 341–392.
dictator’s political policies. This new period of political debate also freed up the nation’s cultural institutions and led to a period known as the Thaw, in which there was a much wider latitude to question Stalinist artistic formulations. As Peter Schmelz has chronicled, younger composers used the artistic period of the Thaw to develop new compositional techniques, many modeled after Western avant-garde figures such as Stravinsky and Schoenberg. Prokofiev died on the exact same day as Stalin, so while the composer himself never benefited from the period of cultural Thaw that followed the dictator’s death, his posthumous reputation became deeply entangled in its debates. Schmelz has shown that in these debates Prokofiev’s cause was initially taken up by conservatives, who valued the composer’s rejection of Schoenberg and Stravinsky’s compositional technique.

Moreover, as Leonid Maximenkov has outlined in his article, “Prokofiev’s Immortalization,” it became apparent soon after his death that Prokofiev could become useful to the Soviet government for the very ties to the West that had once been seen as suspicious. Because Prokofiev had spent time in the United States and Europe between 1917 and 1936, Western audiences were familiar with his compositional style. Prokofiev himself had conducted his *Suite no. 2 from Romeo and Juliet* with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1938. This made Prokofiev and his ballet music ideal for the purposes of the exchange, a kind of midway point between American and Soviet tastes. In 1956, the Bolshoi Theater selected *Romeo and Juliet* for its tour in London, one of the first major milestones in the process of establishing Prokofiev’s place in the Soviet compositional firmament. London audiences received *Romeo and Juliet* with fervor, an event that affirmed Prokofiev’s value to

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47 Morrison, *The People’s Artist*, 72.

48 Maximenkov, “Prokofiev’s Immortalization.”
the Soviet government. A year later, in 1957, Prokofiev was posthumously awarded the Lenin Prize for music, the highest honor in the Soviet arts.

When the Bolshoi came to the United States, therefore, Prokofiev’s music was advertised as one of the tour’s major attractions. Souvenir programs for the Bolshoi’s performances at the Metropolitan Opera House featured a full-page biography of Prokofiev which named him “one of the foremost musicians of this century” (Figure 3). The biography suggested that Prokofiev’s music bridged the gap between the Russian ballet that American audiences already knew well and the Soviet forms they were seeing for the first time. The program claimed that the composer’s “musical language is highly individual as he combines the traditions of Russian classical music with bold and even daring innovations.”

Figure 3. Prokofiev Biography from the Bolshoi Souvenir Program, 1959. NYp, Maya Plisetskaya Collection.

49 Ezrahi, Swans of the Kremlin, 156–159.

50 Maximenkov, “Prokofiev’s Immortalization,” 298–299.

51 The combination of Russian and Soviet repertoire was important to the entire Soviet cultural diplomacy program. In 1961 the Ministry of Culture took steps to ensure that more Soviet artists traveling would combine classical works designed to show of their mastery of performance with newer works written by Soviet composers. The ballet theaters were held up as an example of how to carry out this type of programming successfully. Information on the Repertoire of Theaters, Artistic Collectives, Artistic Groups, and Soloists Traveling Abroad, RGALI f. 2329 o. 3 d. 1192 l. 31.

52 Illustrated Programs Bolshoi 1962, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 326 l. 48. Despite the name of the delo, this is clearly a program from 1959; Galina Ulanova (who didn’t perform in 1962) is listed as the lead dancer and the program includes information for Romeo and Juliet and Stone Flower, both of which were performed in 1959 but not in 1962.
Romeo and Juliet as Drambalet

Though such advertising made an obvious plea for the sympathies of the Bolshoi’s American audience, it did contain a kernel of truth regarding Prokofiev’s Soviet innovations. Soviet ballet experts considered the composer’s Romeo and Juliet to be one of the most important 20th-century ballets, the pinnacle of the drambalet, a genre that reflected the values of socialist realism and had reigned supreme in Soviet dance theaters in the 1930s and 1940s. These ballets were often based on literary classics and were prized for their ability to demonstrate both the massive scale of history and the internal psychology of their characters. They accomplished this through a type of pantomime, or stylized silent acting, developed by Lavrovsky and other choreographers such as Vasily Vainonen and Rostislav Zakharov. The acting in drambaleti was more realistic than 19th-century pantomime and relied less on the audience’s presumed knowledge of pantomime vocabulary. Drambaleti operated on a grand scale, both in terms of duration and in terms of production. Grandiose, historically-accurate sets and large casts not only endowed the ballets with a sense of grandeur and spectacle, they also lent an air of realism to the work, as mandated by the official Soviet aesthetic policies of the Stalinist period.

century, attempting to create a strictly realist style that would communicate both the outer and inner truth of a play. In order to accomplish this, Stanislavski demanded intensive preparatory work and psychological analysis from his actors.\textsuperscript{55} Stanislavski’s methods had a wide and immediate impact on the theatrical arts of Russia; by the second decade of the 20th-century, choreographers such as Michel Fokine and Aleksander Gorsky had already begun to adapt the MXAT methods for the ballet stage. Fokine, who had choreographed for St. Petersburg’s Imperial Mariinsky Theater before moving with Diaghilev to Paris, attempted to recreate realistic and psychologically incisive visions of the past, particularly by diversifying the actions of the \textit{corps de ballet}. In the opening of \textit{Petrushka}, for example, Fokine created a series of richly individuated characters realistically drawn from contemporary Russian life.\textsuperscript{56} Similarly, Gorsky shocked Moscow audiences in 1900 by encouraging the Bolshoi corps to act naturally in his production of \textit{Don Quixote}.\textsuperscript{57} Gorsky even collaborated with Nemirovich-Danchenko on a production of \textit{Swan Lake} in 1920.\textsuperscript{58} The \textit{drambalet} choreographers of the 1930s and 40s continued to expand the ties between the MXAT and the ballet. Much as Stanislavski’s actors were called on to find the emotional truth in their parts, dancers were called upon to find the emotional and psychological underpinnings of their characters. Rostislav Zakharov introduced the Stanislavskian methods of table work to the ballet, requiring dancers to research their characters before learning new choreography.\textsuperscript{59}

\textit{Drambalet} choreographers and librettists also introduced a major shift in the subject matter of ballets. Where 19th-century choreographers had adapted fairy tales, comedic stories, and swashbuckling adventures, \textit{drambalet} choreographers adapted classic literary works by authors such as


\textsuperscript{58} History of Ballet Production of “Swan Lake,” Bolshoi Theater Museum Archive, Swan Lake Collection.

\textsuperscript{59} Ezrahi, \textit{Swans of the Kremlin}, 54.
Pushkin, Shakespeare, Balzac, and Chekhov. As Lavrovsky stated in later essays, by turning to the great figures of literature, the Soviet ballet was able to address much more serious subjects and complex characters than before. Lavrovsky described the impact of this change in his essay “Shakespeare and the Ballet,”

In the last decade of Soviet ballet, it is significant that ballet masters have had a special weakness for creating choreographic spectacles on the themes of classic works...But this was not the narration of events, the skeleton of a masterpiece's plot. We recreated the essence, the internal ... idea of the work, the true passions and conflicts of the characters, the great immortal themes of human existence. And we conveyed them through the language of choreography - through dance, plastic arts, pantomime, mimicry, gesture.\(^{60}\)

Much like Stanislavski’s actors of the early 1900s, Lavrovsky’s dancers attempted to search for psychological truth in their dramatic portrayals. Katerina Clark has discussed the growing importance of intimacy and lyricism across the Soviet arts during the late 1930s. As Clark points out, certain authors and cultural critics hoped to turn socialist realism away from the depiction of monumental composite figures and towards the portrayal of highly-individualized characters.\(^{61}\) By adapting classical literary works, drambalet choreographers and composers, particularly by the late 1930s, could depict such complex characters on the ballet stage. In praise of Lavrovsky’s *Romeo and Juliet*, Kondratieva remarked, “In one evening, you experience the entire life of this Italian girl.”\(^{62}\)

\(^{60}\) “Plastic arts” [plastika] is a Russian word that refers to the performing arts related to movement - including dance, eurythmics, and acrobatics. Lavrovsky, “Shakespeare in Russian Ballet,” 1944–45, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 143. Original Russian: “Последнее десятилетие советского балета отмечено особым пристрастием балетмейстеров к созданию хореографических спектаклей на темы классических произведений... Но это не был пересказ событий, сюжетный скелет шедевра. Мы существо внутреннюю ... идею произведения, живые страсти и конфликты героев, великие бессмертные темы человеческой жизни. И передавали их языком хореографии-танцем, пластикой, пантомимой, мимикой, жестом...”

\(^{61}\) Katerina Clark, “Shostakovich’s Turn to the String Quartet and the Debates about Socialist Realism in Music,” *Slavic Review* 72, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 573–589.

\(^{62}\) Kondratieva, Interview with Author, Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, May 14, 2013. Original Russian: “Проживаешь полную жизнь этой итальянской девушкой за один вечер.”
Prokofiev's Score

While Soviet choreographers produced *drambaleti* throughout the 1930s and ’40s, the genre culminated with Prokofiev and Lavrovsky’s *Romeo and Juliet* in 1940. Prokofiev completed his score to *Romeo and Juliet* in the mid 1930s, one of his first compositions following his return to the Soviet Union after over a decade living in the West. As Simon Morrison has chronicled, Prokofiev was deeply concerned when his new ballet languished in developmental purgatory for many years. While the composer managed to get a partial staging of the ballet in Brno in 1938, the work was not produced in full until 1940, when it was taken up by Leonid Lavrovsky, serving then as a choreographer for the Kirov Ballet in Leningrad. Lavrovsky persuaded an unwilling Prokofiev to make certain changes to the score, including some alterations to the orchestration and the addition of two variations and some incidental music for Act I, changes that made the work more palatable to the Soviet ballet establishment. With Lavrovsky’s additions, the ballet premiered on January 11, 1940, at the Kirov Theater.

Even before Lavrovsky’s interference with the score, *Romeo and Juliet* had filled the musical requirements of the *drambalet* nearly perfectly. Prokofiev took care to transcribe the events of the Shakespearean play faithfully, including even such minor scenes as Mercutio and Benvolio teasing Juliet’s nurse. The work is divided into fifty-two numbers, each very short, unlike the typical 19th-century ballet score, which was divided into long scenes and shorter set dances. Each one of the fifty-two numbers in *Romeo and Juliet* corresponds with some change in the dramatic action onstage and is titled by those actions, for instance “The Duke’s Order,” “Preparations for the Feast,” and “Romeo Resolves to Avenge the Death of Mercutio.” Internally, the form of these numbers also

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63 The new name for the Imperial Mariinsky Theater.

64 Morrison, *The People’s Artist*, 106–110.

65 This is of course following the early version of the ballet in which Prokofiev gave the work a happy ending. The happy ending version was criticized heavily at the Bolshoi Theater, so Prokofiev changed the plot but kept much of the same music. Morrison, *The People’s Artist*, 34–40.
corresponds closely to the drama onstage. The ballet bears a much closer resemblance to Prokofiev’s through-composed operas, such as *Fiery Angel* and *Betrothal at a Monastery*, than to his Diaghilev-era ballets.

In the Act I, Scene 2 balcony *pas de deux*, for example, Prokofiev transforms the 19th-century *pas de deux* from a rigid formal structure into a flexible work of dramatic theater. In classical 19th-century ballet, a *pas de deux* consisted of four distinct parts: an opening *adagio* for two dancers together, two relatively up-tempo solo variations -- one for each character, and a fast coda for the two dancers again. Over the arc of this four-part structure, tempos increased, culminating in a heart-pounding coda designed to show off the dancers’ virtuosity. In the *Romeo and Juliet* balcony *pas de deux*, Prokofiev abandoned this classical structure in order to follow the emotional arc of Shakespeare’s play. The balcony *pas de deux* does contain three sections of the 19th-century *pas de deux*: an opening, one variation for Romeo, and a final “Love Duet.” Unlike in the classical *pas de deux*, however, in which there is a break between each short section for the dancers to bow, all three parts of the balcony *pas de deux* are played continuously, blending into one dramatic scene. Rather than constantly increasing in tempo, Prokofiev’s duet both begins and ends slowly. This structure reflects the text of Shakespeare’s balcony scene, which climaxes near the middle, as Romeo and Juliet swear love to one other, and then lessens in tension as the characters make more prosaic arrangements to meet the following day. While the *pas de deux* retains some of the structures of the classical *pas de deux*, in that it has a solo section surrounded by two duets, those structures are reworked to emphasize the dramatic actions and emotions, not the form.

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67 Simon Morrison has even remarked that early versions of the libretto read more like an opera scenario than a ballet. Morrison, *The People’s Artist*, 32.

68 Romeo’s solo variation was one of the few additions that Lavrovsky requested from Prokofiev. Morrison, *The People’s Artist*, 107.
In order to narrate the story of *Romeo and Juliet* fully, Prokofiev also relied on a complex system of leitmotifs. Ballet composers had used such techniques long before Prokofiev. Nevertheless, they were particularly suited to the *drambalet*, since they allowed the audience greater understanding of elaborate literary plots. For instance, the opening theme of the "Dance of the Knights," ["Tanets rïtsarey"] perhaps the most famous musical selection of *Romeo and Juliet*, is strongly tied in the ballet to the Capulets (Example 1). When this music first appears, as a diegetic dance at the Capulet’s ball, the melody outlines an E minor triad in dotted rhythms with a heavy string, percussion, and brass orchestration. The same leitmotif returns in Act II to accompany Mercutio’s fatal duel with Tybalt. In this later incarnation, the dotted minor triad serves as an accompaniment for a higher, screeching melody in the violins. In Act III, the same motif plays as Lord and Lady Capulet try to force their daughter to marry Paris. With each new appearance, the theme relates feudal restrictions and violence to the power and prestige that the Capulet family displayed at their ball. In another example, the music that foreshadows and later accompanies Juliet’s death is linked to one of the most prominent love themes in the ballet, a melody that first appears at the beginning of the balcony *pas de deux* (Example 2). Both themes are characterized by a chromatically descending triplet at the end of the first measure. By associating these two musical themes, Prokofiev reveals the characters’ star-crossed fate: their very love is what dooms them to death.

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a) Dance of the Knights, No. 13, mm. 1-4

b) Tybalt fights Mercutio, No. 32, R. 249, mm. 1-4

c) Juliet’s parents force her to marry Paris, No. 41, R. 305, mm. 1-5.

Example 1. “Dance of the Knights” motif as it appears in three places in Romeo and Juliet. Arranged for Piano by L.T. Atovm’yan.
a) Opening of “Love Dance,” No. 21, mm. 4-6 (melody in left hand)

b). Friar Laurence gives poison to Juliet, No. 44, R. 314, mm. 5-6


Lavrovsky and Drambalet: Realism and class struggle

When Lavrovsky choreographed the premiere of the ballet in Leningrad, he drew on Prokofiev’s theatrical score and its leitmotif structure to transform the Shakespearean play into a drambalet. Like Prokofiev’s music, Lavrovsky’s choreography stayed as close to the original play as possible. In many instances the transformation from Shakespearean text to dance could be incredibly slight, a tiny exaggeration of the movement an actor might make onstage. In

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70 Choreographic analysis of Romeo and Juliet in this paper is drawn from two video sources, one the movie version of Romeo and Juliet directed by Lavrovsky and L. Arnstam from 1954. It stars Galina Ulanova and Yuri Zhdanov. The other is a film of the stage production at the Bolshoi from 1976, starring Natalia Bessmertnova as Juliet and Mikhail Lavrovsky, the choreographer’s son, as Romeo. Romeo and Juliet performed by the Bolshoi Ballet, directed for film by L. Arnstam and Leonid Lavrovsky, 1954 (VAI International, 2004). Romeo and Juliet performed by the Bolshoi Ballet, 1976 (Kultur, 2004).
Shakespeare’s play, just before Romeo enters the Capulet ball, he has a strange foreboding feeling about the evening, saying to his friends, “... for my mind misgives/ some consequence yet hanging in the stars/ Shall bitterly begin his fearful date/ With this night’s revels...” He ends this speech by remarking, “But he that hath the steerage of my course,/ Direct my sail. On, lusty gentlemen!”71 In Lavrovsky’s version, Romeo is about to exit stage left, going into the ball, when he pauses. The orchestra plays a fragment of the theme that will later appear in the balcony pas de deux, and Romeo turns, steps forward to the audience, and slowly touches his heart, a look of bewilderment on his face. He swings his arm back towards the ball, still looking at the audience, before collecting himself and heading off.

In addition to using a relatively naturalistic style of pantomime, Lavrovsky also went to great efforts to stage his Romeo and Juliet in the style of historical realism that was fundamentally important to the drambalet. Lavrovsky’s collection at the Russian State Archive for Literature and Art includes a transcript of a speech he delivered to the dancers and designers of Romeo and Juliet in the first days of work on the ballet.72 There, Lavrovsky began by presenting the artists with copious historical information on life in 15th- and 16th-century Italian city states. He encouraged his dancers to better understand their characters by learning about the violence of the Crusades, the importance of


72 This is an example of the Stanislavskian table-work expected of drambalet artists. Exposition on Romeo and Juliet, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 4.
a) men’s costumes for *Romeo and Juliet* (on the right, likely a sketch of Tybalt)

b) women’s costumes for *Romeo and Juliet*

Figure 4. Costume sketches for *Romeo and Juliet* by Vilyams, RGALI f. 2336 o. 1 d. 26.
Figure 5. Set designs for Acts II and III of *Romeo and Juliet* by Vilyams, RGALI f. 2336 o. 1 d. 26.
family in the Renaissance, and the accumulation of wealth by aristocratic clans. Lavrovsky claimed that his choreography would also draw from dance sources of the 15th- and 16th-centuries, for instance, that his realization of “The Dance of the Knights” was taken from a 16th-century English dance. Set designer Pyotr Vilyams met Lavrovsky’s demands, crafting sets and costumes with exquisite period details (Figures 4 and 5).

Part of a Soviet approach to historical realism was the interpretation of the past through the lens of class struggle. Lavrovsky therefore claimed that the ballet would be a story about a meeting of two “epochs,” the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In the work, the earlier era, as embodied in the lives of older aristocrats, is depicted as particularly oppressive, with great wealth disparity and gender inequality. In the “Dance of the Knights,” the rich women of the Capulet family move so as to show off their elaborate and heavy dresses, and when the men drop pillows as part of the dance, a rank of servants comes onstage to pick them up. The new epoch is represented by the younger aristocrats, including Romeo, Juliet, and Mercutio, as well as by the townsfolk, who are given a large role in the ballet. In rebelling against their parents, therefore, Romeo and Juliet are fighting against an older, oppressive class system.

Unlike Prokofiev, Lavrovsky did not systematically use leitmotifs, but the choreographer did employ one such motif to symbolize Romeo and Juliet’s love for one another. As the two sweep together for the first time in the balcony pas de deux, the dancers arrange themselves standing side-

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73 Lavrovsky, “Romeo and Juliet” Directorial Notes on Ballet of Prokofiev, as staged in Kirov Theater, 1939, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 5. Chernova also argues that Lavrovsky incorporated details from the historical epoch into Romeo and Juliet, Chernova, “Balet 1930-1940x godov.”

74 Designs for Sets and Costumes of Romeo and Juliet, RGALI f. 2336 o. 1 d. 81. Set designs for Romeo and Juliet, RGALI f. 2336 o. 1 d. 26.

75 Exposition on Romeo and Juliet, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 4. Conductor Yuri Faier also mentions in his memoirs that Lavrovsky’s conception of the ballet relied on these sharp contrasts between young and old and that this interpretation was well supported by the structure of brief musical numbers. Fayer, O sebe, o muzike, o balet, 526–527.

76 In his speech at the opening of the ballet’s production, Lavrovsky drew particular attention to the plight of women during the Middle Ages, saying that the most important virtue of a woman at this time was submissiveness, total obedience to her husband. Exposition on Romeo and Juliet, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 4.
by-side, Juliet performing an arabesque, with their inner arms raised above their heads and their outer arms pointing out to the sides. Rather than supporting her at the waist, as is common in 19th-century ballet partnering, Romeo holds Juliet’s upraised hand. Though the man still supports the woman, here that support does not imply that the woman is weak. Rather, the symmetry of the arabesque motif emphasizes the equality of their relationship. The motif is distinctly reminiscent of Worker and Kolkhoz Woman, the monumental sculpture created by Soviet artist Vera Mukhina for the 1937 Paris World’s Fair (Figure 6). In both statue and choreographic leitmotif, the man and woman are positioned in parallel, arms held up and striding forward into a new world. Both the wedding and farewell pas de deux of Lavrovsky’s Romeo and Juliet are also saturated with iterations of the symmetrical arabesque motif. In all three duets, Lavrovsky also uses a modified version of the motif, with the two dancers’ inner arms wrapped around each other rather than held up high (Figure 7).

Figure 6. On the left, still of Mikhail Lavrovsky and Natalia Bessmertnova in Act II of Romeo and Juliet. On the right, Vera Mukhina’s sculpture, Worker and Kolkhoz Woman.

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77 Susanne Ramm-Weber discusses the greatly increased number of women depicted in Soviet art in the 1930s, just as women were moving out of political positions. These art works, including Mukhina’s famous statue, depict many highly-feminized women characters. Susanne Ramm-Weber, Mit der Sichel in der Hand: Mythos und Weiblichkeit in der sowjetischen Kunst der dreissiger Jahre (Köln: Böhla, 2006).
a) first instance in the balcony *pas de deux*

b) in the wedding *pas de deux*

c) in the farewell *pas de deux*, as a lift

d) in the farewell *pas de deux*, modified

Figure 7. Four stills of Mikhail Lavrovsky and Natalia Bessmertnova in *Romeo and Juliet*. From *Romeo and Juliet* performed by the Bolshoi Ballet, 1976 (Kultur, 2004).
While the first version shows the revolutionary power of their love, this second hints at the characters’ intimacy. Together, they help narrate the unfolding of Romeo and Juliet’s relationship over the course of the ballet, tying together with the musical leitmotifs to elaborate and comment on the events of the play.

Prokofiev shared neither Lavrovsky’s historicism nor his Marxism. Just as the composer complained that Lavrovsky added traditional incidental numbers to the ballet, thus obscuring its narrative flow, so too did the choreographer discuss the anachronisms of Prokofiev’s score, such as including a Baroque gavotte at a Renaissance ball. That Prokofiev and Lavrovsky disagreed about certain details of the production, however, did not prevent them from creating the premiere example of the drambalet in the Soviet canon, a work that helped propel Lavrovsky into the artistic directorship of the Bolshoi in the mid 1940s. In 1946, when Lavrovsky restaged Romeo and Juliet for the Bolshoi, again with Galina Ulanova in the lead role, the work won the Stalin Prize, first class. It is hardly surprising then that, thirteen years later, when the Bolshoi performed in the United States, Romeo and Juliet, starring Ulanova, was the crown jewel of their repertory.

The American Reception of Romeo and the "Great Retreat"

On April 16, 1959, the Bolshoi opened their tour of the United States with a performance of Romeo and Juliet at the Metropolitan Opera House. At the premiere, Galina Ulanova was called back onstage for seventeen curtain calls. American audiences loudly and clearly expressed their love of the company, setting a pattern of ecstatic popular reception that would continue throughout the tour. On the last night of performances at the Met, for a performance of Giselle, the audience

78 Lavrovsky, “Romeo and Juliet” Directorial Notes on Ballet of Prokofiev, as staged in Kirov Theater, 1939, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 5.
went wild. Walter Terry labeled the scene “a happy riot,” noting that “fans in boxes and balconies shredded programs and tossed them as a rain of confetti upon the stage.”

Lavrovsky tried to describe it in a letter to his wife:

It was not merely success, but something furious. People screamed, cried, tore up their programs and threw them into the air, whistled, which is an expression of very great recognition. They threw flowers here and there.

The mania of the American fans stunned everyone, including the dancers. According to Kondratieva, the troupe had never encountered such an extreme reaction at home. When the company performed at Madison Square Garden, they garnered 13,700 viewers, the biggest ballet audience in American history. Overall, the tour was expected to gross over two million dollars.

The reviews that began appearing in local and national newspapers over the following week, however, were not overwhelmingly positive, particularly for the two Soviet ballets. Most American critics praised the Bolshoi dancers for their superb technique but skewered Lavrovsky for what was perceived as old-fashioned choreography. Vilyams’s sets and costumes for the ballet came under similar scrutiny. As harsh as the criticisms were, they tended to reveal as much about the American authors as they did about their Soviet subjects. They reflected the widespread American belief that the Soviet Union was historically “behind” the West.

At the core of the ideological conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union was an argument about which economic and ideological system, communism or capitalism, was the more

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82 Letter from Lavrovsky to Chidson, May 5, 1959, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 195 l. 39. Original Russian: “В связи последнем спектаклем Метро-политен. Шла ’Жизель’ рассказать тебе о том, что делалов в зале это трудно. Это был не просто успех, а что-то неистовое. Орали. Кричали, бросали в воздух разобранные программы, свистели, что есть выражение очень большого признания. Бросили цветы туда и обратно,”

83 Kondratieva, Interview with Author, Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, May 14, 2013.

84 “Biggest Audience,” Telegraph and Morning Post, May 14, 1959

modern. Soviet politicians believed, as Marxist theory taught, that the communist revolution had been an inevitable and righteous product of historical progression. At the same time, American politicians argued that historical forces properly led to their own democratic and capitalist system. One early supporter for this argument on the American side was sociologist Nicholas Timasheff. In his 1946 book, *The Great Retreat*, Timasheff claimed that, while originally the Bolsheviks may have pursued a revolutionary course of action, Stalin’s government had abandoned these policies in the 1930s in favor of a retreat into 19th-century bourgeois values. Timasheff’s Great Retreat thesis had an enormous impact on Soviet studies in the U.S., essentially defining American historiography of the Soviet Union until the mid 1990s.\(^{86}\) Even today, the veracity of the “Great Retreat” thesis is a major debate within Soviet history.

It was this ideological framework of comparable progress and retreat that shaped American dance criticism during the Bolshoi’s 1959 tour. In an article in *New York Herald Tribune* entitled “Bourgeois Decor at Bolshoi,” Emily Gennauer called the sets “inferior … old-fashioned, heavy and unimaginative,” and remarked that “Their choreography generally conforms more closely to tradition than ours.”\(^{87}\) Walter Terry of the *New York Herald-Tribune* claimed that the ballet featured “very hearty and old-fashioned acting and some dancing.”\(^{88}\) Critics in 1959 largely ignored the score to *Romeo and Juliet*, probably because it was already widely known in the United States from Prokofiev’s three orchestral suites from *Romeo and Juliet*. Those who did mention the score generally pointed out how Lavrovsky had failed to live up to Prokofiev’s modernist vision. In the *New York Journal-American*, Miles Kastendieck remarked, “Pantomime and dancing are closely interwoven…The impression remains that [Lavrovsky] has not achieved the contemporaneity Prokofieff expresses.”\(^{89}\)

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Many American critics directly linked what they saw as artistic conservatism to political conservatism, sometimes merely insinuating but more often boldly stating in their reviews that the communist government resembled the tsarist autocracy. Emily Gennauer noted that while American viewers may have expected a Diaghilev style of ballet from the Soviets, they should be aware that Diaghilev fled Russia “in specific protest to the tradition-strangled Imperial ballet in Russia.” Thus Gennauer not only suggested that ballet in Russia was more conservative than in the West, she also equated the imperial institutions of the 1900s directly with the Soviet institutions of the 1950s. In a review for the Sunday News, John Chapman remarked that “The Bolshoi company is a great, wonderful representative of Russian culture, but it doesn’t seem to represent Soviet culture to any political degree. It is, admittedly, a holdover from distant times.” In this instance, Chapman claimed to approve of the theater’s conservatism, remarking “What was good enough for the Czars is good enough for me.”

Many critics delighted in pointing out the hypocrisy of the fact that the Soviet government, supposedly dedicated to overturning the luxuries of the past, lavished such outrageous funding on a ballet company. In Women’s Wear Daily, Thomas Dash noted with irony that Romeo and Juliet was “a sumptuous production, which only communists can afford.” In a more pointed attack, Irving R. Levine wrote

In Russia, where food is a problem, clothing is a luxury, housing is a joke and nothing is in large supply except propaganda, the Bolshoi Ballet carries on with an opulence undreamed of by Britain’s Royal Ballet, the Paris Opera Ballet, or the New York City Ballet.

Levine went on to describe the Bolshoi theater itself as a manifestation of this funding policy, illustrating for his readers the hall’s “six red-gold tiers and a center box once occupied by Imperial

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93 Irving R. Levine, “Khrushchev’s Prettiest Propaganda,” This Week Magazine, April 19, 1959.
Czars, now by Communist czars.” Levine’s article was primarily political, and most of the theater reviewers were more circumspect. Overall, however, the newspapers suggested that by retaining the imperial trappings of the tsars, the Soviet government demonstrated that it was stuck in the 19th century.

As historian Matthew E. Lenoe has pointed out, Timasheff’s *Great Retreat* accepted as a premise “an extremely simple version of modernization theory in which ‘backward’ societies progress in geometrical fashion toward democracy, market economies, government provision of welfare benefits, and all the other fine characteristics of the ‘advanced’ Anglo-American states.”

This simple version of modernization theory permeated dance criticism of the 1950s as well, where it was assumed that ballet would progress naturally from its representational origins towards a more abstract aesthetic. Many American critics thus deemed *Romeo and Juliet* conservative because it did not resemble contemporaneous American ballet, specifically Russian-American George Balanchine’s abstract works. Louis Biancolli commented “They have much to teach us in how to stage a 3½-hour ballet without skimping on wardrobe or decor. But they have much to learn from companies like our City Center Ballet [Balanchine’s company] in bold experimentation and freedom from stereotype.”

Tellingly, John Martin of the *New York Times*, the only prominent American critic to defend Lavrovsky, did so by comparing *Romeo and Juliet* to one of Balanchine’s works, *Orpheus*.

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Thus, while Martin could acknowledge the worth of Lavrovsky's choreography, he could only do so from within the confines of modernization theory, by reference to an American choreographer.97

**Prokofiev’s Stone Flower**

*Romeo and Juliet* had actually faced similar accusations about “traditionalism” and “conservatism” during the Bolshoi’s 1956 tour of London, the first time that the company had ever appeared outside of the Soviet Union.98 On that outing, however, the pleas for something more “modern” could be taken literally. At Covent Garden, the Bolshoi dancers performed *Giselle, Swan Lake, Romeo and Juliet,* and *The Fountains of the Bakhchisarai.* Of those four, *Romeo and Juliet* was the most recent, having premiered in 1940. In 1959, however, the Bolshoi brought a much newer ballet, *Stone Flower,* a work that had premiered only two years previously and that was supposed to represent the forefront of new choreographic methods in the Soviet Union.

*Stone Flower* was one of Prokofiev’s last compositions. The libretto was based on a short story written in a folk style by Pavel Bazhov. In the ballet, a young stone carver named Danila aspires to craft a malachite vase in the shape of a flower so life-like that it will embody the real beauty of nature. He journeys to the Copper Mountain, where the magical Mistress of the Copper Mountain, after testing his resolve and selflessness, gives him the secrets of the stone flower. At the same time, however, the Mistress has fallen in love with Danila and attempts to keep him in the Mountain. Back in the village, Danila’s fiancée Katerina devotedly looks after the old stone carver Prokopyicha and

97 John Martin, “The Dance: Lavrovsky,” *New York Times,* April 26, 1959. On April 26, 1959, Martin dedicated his weekly dance column solely to Lavrovsky, calling him the third star of the Bolshoi, in the same rank as Ulanova and Prokofiev. Martin noted that *Romeo and Juliet* was “a characteristic creation of the contemporary Soviet ballet,” [emphasis mine]. The column praised Lavrovsky for his “superb dramatic instinct” and “enormous invention,” especially in the form of the “highly acrobatic lifts [that are] not for the purpose of exhibiting virtuosity but for the communication of emotional states that transcend the ordinary dimensions of normal experience.” Lavrovsky himself, who could speak English, read the article and was delighted by it, writing back home to his wife that this was one of the best reviews he had received in his life. Letter from Lavrovsky to Chidson, undated, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 195.

98 Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin,* 148–156. As Ezrahi points out, the criticisms about Soviet ballet’s conservatism were relatively moderate in England, particularly with reference to *Romeo and Juliet.*
fends off the advances of the corrupt foreman Severyan. In the end, after seeing Danila and
Katerina’s love for each other, the Mistress of the Copper Mountain kills Severyan and allows the
young stoneworker to return to his beloved.99

*Stone Flower* was far more explicitly inflected with Marxist-Leninist ideology than *Romeo and
Juliet*. As Simon Morrison explains, Mira Prokofieva and Lavrovsky worked the scenario out during
the late 1940s and early 1950s, a period in which composers and other artists were reeling from the
Zhdanov denunciations and in which, therefore, it was almost mandatory to use the libretto as a
form of political education for the audience.100 As described in the story, Danila hopes to harness
the stone carving technique to help “the people,” though of course it is unclear why the people need
flower-shaped vases so very badly. Severyan, the foreman, cruelly whips the villagers and leers at
Katerina. The third act is set in a craft fair, so as to give an excuse to present a large number of folk
dances.101

While the ballet represents a narrative shift for Prokofiev, away from classic literature or fairy
tale and towards Marxist parable, musically *Stone Flower* closely resembles Prokofiev’s other two
Soviet ballets, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella*. Like those earlier works, *Stone Flower* is constructed from
a string of relatively short numbers, although a few of the numbers in *Stone Flower* are longer
fantasies than the quick, plot-driven scenes typical of *Romeo and Juliet*. Again, most of the structure is
derived from leitmotifs, most prominently the brass fanfare that introduces the Mistress of the
Copper Mountain and saturates the rest of the ballet.102

99 *Stone Flower* Libretto, RGALI f. 648 o. 5 d. 901.

100 Morrison, *The People’s Artist*, 349.

101 *Stone Flower* Libretto, RGALI f. 648 o. 5 d. 901.

Choreographic Symphonism and Stone Flower

While Prokofiev originally wrote the score of *Stone Flower* for a 1954 drambalet production, the version performed on the Bolshoi’s American tour was a much more successful and innovative staging done in 1957 by choreographer Yuri Grigorovich. Grigorovich was the leader of a group of young artists who were advocating in the late 1950s for a new style of Soviet ballet known as choreographic symphonism or symphonic dance.\(^{103}\) Choreographic symphonism began to develop in the 1950s as a response to the shifts in government policy triggered by Stalin’s death in 1953 and his successor Nikita Khrushchev’s repudiation of Stalin in 1956. As the country moved away from Stalinist policies, or at least was open to debates about the benefits of such policies, strict adherence to the tenets of socialist realism was also called into question. In ballet, this manifested in increased criticisms of drambalet. Instead of focusing on ballet’s ties to dramatic theatre and literature, the choreographic symphonists wanted to turn towards music as the inspiration for dance. They did not necessarily mean, however, that dance structures in a particular ballet had to follow the corresponding music exactly in real time. Rather, they advocated that choreographers make use of musical techniques such as motivic development and counterpoint. Choreographic symphonism did not reject narrative subjects for ballets, but rather embraced them as part of the music; the dance in a choreographic symphonic work was supposed to express the same “content” as the music.\(^{104}\)

When Yuri Grigorovich and his designer-collaborator Simon Virsaladze approached *Stone Flower* in 1957, they introduced many of the artistic techniques that would shape choreographic

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\(^{103}\) Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin*, 118–136.

symphonism. Foremost here was a new pacing of the ballet, which jettisoned almost all the pantomime that had been so central to the *drambalet*. Instead of using pantomime, Grigorovich’s new work was danced from beginning to end. Grigorovich delineated the personalities of his main characters by creating a distinctive movement vocabulary for each one. The Mistress of the Copper Mountain, who in the story alternately takes the form of a lizard and a beautiful woman, dances with her elbows jutting out from her body, and often bends her wrists to display her splayed-out palms (Figure 8). Like the libretto and music, Grigorovich’s choreography also reflects Marxist ideology and Soviet symbolism. Danila flies across the stage with fists and legs outstretched, as though constantly fighting his way through the world; not only does his martial posing suggest the power of the working classes, but his leaping shows that he is literally uplifted, morally clarified. In contrast, Severyan’s choreography is characterized by downward motion: a ponderous, wide swinging step with an extra stomp on the ground.

Figure 8. Still of Liudmila Semenyaka as Mistress of the Copper Mountain. From *Stone Flower* performed by the Bolshoi Ballet, directed for film by Motoko Sakaguchi, 1990 (Arthaus Musik, 2005).

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In this context, meaning was created more than ever by choreographic leitmotifs, which Grigorovich combined, layered, recalled, and developed much in the manner that Prokofiev used his musical leitmotifs. Grigorovich would later expand on this technique further in works such as the 1968 *Spartacus*, but already in *Stone Flower* certain choreographic combinations return over the course of the ballet, linking important events and characters. For instance, Katerina’s choreography constantly recalls the steps of one of the dances performed in the celebration of her wedding to Danila. She moves with her arms in front of her, palms facing out (Figure 9). The constant return to this pose endows Katerina with an innocence and moral purity as well as a connection to the peasant class.

Figure 9. Picture of Ekaterina Maximova as Katerina. From “Direct from Moscow: Russia’s Best,” *Newsweek*, April 13, 1959.

Simon Virsaladze, the designer for *Stone Flower*, rejected the strictly realistic set designs of the *drambalet* era. In their stead, Virsaladze, who would go on to collaborate with Grigorovich on almost all of the choreographer’s ballets, crafted a simple set that stood at the back and allowed the rest of
the stage to be occupied by the dancers. This stylized backdrop takes the form of a giant malachite vase, a set-piece which opens up to reveal more realistic backdrops at various points in the action (Danila’s peasant hut, the woods, the folk festival). The intense green of the malachite backdrop dominates the ballet, and while costumes are often realistic, they too make symbolic use of color — jewel tones, particularly green, for the supernatural characters, contrasting reds for the folk festival scene, and white for the main characters and their friends.

**Ural Rhapsody**

A scene from the second act of *Stone Flower*, titled in the score “Ural Rhapsody,” demonstrates the new principles of choreographic symphonism and the capacity artists working in this genre had to create longer dance sections without pantomime. Within the plot of the ballet, “Ural Rhapsody” depicts the opening of a craft festival in the Ural Mountains. Unusually for Prokofiev’s Soviet ballet scores, the number is quite long, lasting over nine minutes. The form of the “Ural Rhapsody” is made up of a series of contrasts within contrasts. On the broad level, the number has two main sections. Within each of these sections, one or two main melodies are contrasted, rondo-style, with subsidiary melodies (Table 1). Much of Prokofiev’s melodies have a folk-like flair, appropriate for the setting. The two main melodies of the second half are taken from folk dances from the Act I betrothal scene, one from the Dance of the Maidens and the other from the Dance of the Bachelors. So while the music has a formal structure independent of the plot, it is tied to extra-musical associations.

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106 By far the longest musical selection in *Romeo and Juliet* lasts just over seven minutes, and was written to accommodate Juliet’s long funeral procession.
Table 1. Form Chart for Prokofiev and Grigorovich, *Stone Flower*, “Ural Rhapsody”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Rehearsal Numbers</th>
<th>Musical Theme</th>
<th>Dance Motif</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>Opening Fanfare</td>
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<td>1 Running</td>
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<td>217</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>225</td>
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<td>(2) Virtuosic hooligan antics - related to Dance of Bachelors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>231</td>
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<td></td>
<td>234</td>
<td>F Dance of Bachelors</td>
<td>2 Dance of the Bachelors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>236</td>
<td>G Passagework in strings</td>
<td>2 Dance of Bachelors - confusion of styles resolves into unison</td>
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<td>241</td>
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<td>4/2/1 Dance of Maiden ribbon dance revolves one way around stage, through them wind runners, around Dance of Bachelors</td>
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<td>243</td>
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<td>2 Unison Dance of Bachelors into Tableau vivant</td>
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In traditional *drambalet* stagings, Soviet critics would have expected this scene to be staged with a pantomime of a craft fair. Instead, as critic Mikhail Gabovich writes “we see an amazing whirlwind of movement … where dance finally absorbs and assimilates pantomime.”

Like the music, motivic building blocks in the dance refer specifically to Russian folk traditions. Two of the main choreographic motifs, the Dance of the Bachelors and the Dance of the Maidens, are drawn from the same betrothal scene in Act I, and the dancers are dressed in a range of peasant costumes.

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Grigorovich’s choreography follows a similar formal layout to Prokofiev’s music, juxtaposing contrasting motifs. While these motifs align with the musical accompaniment at some points, at other points they depart from the music, creating an independent formal structure and establishing an intriguing tension between dance and music. Indeed, Grigorovich’s full dance is more definitively a rondo than the music. Quotations of Dance of the Bachelors alternate with sections of running and quotations from the Dance of the Maidens. The choreography is often layered contrapuntally; certain dance steps continue in the background while other steps are performed in the foreground. Towards the end of the Rhapsody, all three dances are woven in and out of each other until they converge into a unison of Dance of Bachelors, which quickly resolves into a tableau vivant. Together, this “whirlwind” that could both tell a story and reflect formal musical principles, pointed to a new direction for ballet, one that would reign triumphant in the Soviet Union for the next thirty years.108

The Critical Reception of Stone Flower in the United States

Two years after its premiere in Leningrad, Grigorovich restaged his production of Stone Flower at the Bolshoi. The work’s Moscow premiere took place in March 1959, just weeks before the company began its American tour.109 Soviet critics were delighted with Grigorovich and Virsaladze’s production of Stone Flower at the Bolshoi. Dmitri Shostakovich, who reviewed the production for Muzïkal’naya Zhizn’, was impressed with the degree to which music, dance, and design were combined in the production “as though created by one artistic will.”110

The excitement that the new production was generating at the Bolshoi trickled into American newspapers at the same time. In the days leading up to the Bolshoi’s arrival in the United States, Grigorovich’s Stone Flower was hailed in the American press as the Soviet Union’s first real

108 Grigorovich was made artistic director of the Bolshoi in 1964, and he held this position until 1995.


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foray into modern ballet. Margaret Lloyd of the *Christian Science Monitor* again brought the question of aesthetics back to politics, claiming, “Artistically, ‘The Stone Flower’ is probably the first revolutionary ballet in the history of revolutionary Russia.” Once again, Prokofiev’s name on the playbill guaranteed a certain level of interest and respect from American critics. In *Saturday Review*, Irving Kolodin wrote that the ballet was “Obviously meant to be a work of consequence - Serge Prokofiev would hardly have put himself out to write so much music, some of it good, otherwise…”

American critics generally seemed to believe that the purportedly “modern” section of the ballet must be the scene in the Mistress of the Copper Mountain’s lair, which included two long dances for the stones, played by women in brilliant, skin-tight costumes. While these two dances have a place in the story-arc of the ballet, as they show Danila first admiring the stone garden and then mastering his powers, they are essentially plotless dances. In many ways this scene was reminiscent of some of Balanchine’s work. As in many of Balanchine’s ballets, ranks of ballerinas move about the stage in abstract patterns and perform modified versions of classical steps. Grigorovich’s jewel-women have their hands held up behind their heads with their elbows out, transforming ballet’s traditional, soft *port de bras* into something sharp and jewel-like. Furthermore, Virsaladze’s open, uncluttered set and skin-tight costumes were similar to the black-and-white New York City Ballet productions, in which dancers danced on a bare stage and wore practice costumes.

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of leotards and tights.113 In a March 22nd article anticipating the Bolshoi’s arrival, John Martin informed his readers

The present production [of *Stone Flower* …] is the first Soviet ballet to go in for ‘modern’ ideas of décor, with Versaladze [sic] as the designer. Undoubtedly influenced by the company’s recent contacts with Western Europe, where its productions were generally considered old-fashioned, this revival appears to have been conceived specifically for the American tour.114

The American reviewers’ focus on the Act I jewel dances indicates how little they understood the Bolshoi’s new aesthetic. These dances were not the element of the ballet most important to the work’s Soviet reviewers, most of whom instead focused their attention on the Act II Folk Festival scene, with its choreographic whirlwind. The American critics, however, trained to view skin-tight costumes and plotless ballet as modern, searched for modernity in those sections of Grigorovich’s ballet most similar to what they knew.

American critics looked to Grigorovich’s jewel dances as the place to measure the Soviet Union’s artistic progress vis-a-vis the United States, and in evaluating it by these standards, they found it old-fashioned. This time, most accused the production, not of resembling 19th-century ballet, but rather of being a passé imitation of 20th-century American ballet. Kastendieck, for the *New York Journal American* wrote that the *Stone Flower* showed that “what is new in Russia has become almost routine in New York” and compared the jewel scenes to Radio City Music Hall productions.115 Martin noted that “its modernity is definitely dated,”116 and Walter Sorell remarked that “Most of its choreographic conceptions strike us as scarcely modern; some of it would be

113 Osgood Caruthers, “Russians Cheer Bolshoi Ballet that Breaks Classical Pattern” *New York Times*, March 9, 1959, Claudia Cassidy, “On the Aisle: Bolshoi Ballet Picks Provocative Time for 1st Tour,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, March 15, 1959. “Direct from Moscow - Russia’s Best,” *Newsweek*, April 13, 1959. Cassidy notes that *Stone Flower* looks more modern and that the dancers have a new kind of freedom, “the kind George Balanchine talks so eloquently about.” *Newsweek* claims that the ballet features simple backdrops and abstract designs instead of cumbersome traditional scenery, and states that while foreign critics have pointed out similarities with Western ballet, Bolshoi Director Orvid and dancers are “reluctant to admit it.”


tagged vintage in 1930.”117 This time, even Prokofiev did not escape the general criticism. Jay Harrison accused it of being “nothing but a nineteenth century score brought up to date by the inclusion of a wrong note here and there and the observance of some rhythmic amenities said to be modern.”118

Separating Choreography and Performance

In contrast to their overwhelming rejection of Soviet choreography, the American press was deeply enamored of the Bolshoi performers. However much time the American reviews spent eviscerating the Bolshoi’s choreography, set designs, and music, they spent even more time in extravagant praise of the company’s dancers. In doing so, the reviews bring to mind William Butler Yeats’s “Among School Children.” In the poem, Yeats ponders the possibility of separating out the dancer from the dance, likening it to separating out the joys of life from the sorrows. The poet strongly implies that such a task is not just unwise but impossible, a warning that rings true, perhaps in a more literal fashion than Yeats intended, in relation to the American reviews of the Bolshoi’s 1959 tour. By glorifying the dancers while simultaneously ridiculing the ballets they performed, the American critics also separated the dancers from their places as Soviet citizens, diplomats, and politicians.

The critical framework that American reviewers employed during the 1959 tour was based on an understanding of ballet that split the act of choreography from the act of performance. Western philosophers from Aristotle through Descartes have often posited that the mind is separate from the body, and both dance and gender scholars have frequently pointed out that this split has been associated with a gender binary. As Elizabeth Grosz wrote in the introduction to her 1994 work *Volatile Bodies*, “Women are somehow more biological, more corporeal, and more natural than

In the world of classical ballet, while women are the majority of performers, audience members, and even teachers, men have traditionally held powerful positions as artistic directors and choreographers.

When the Bolshoi ballet company performed in the United States, their roles as diplomats brought a newly political set of meanings to the traditionally gendered split between choreographer and dancer. American politics during the Cold War, particularly foreign politics, were also highly gendered. Not only did men occupy almost all important American diplomatic and geopolitical positions, but gendered language and concepts enforced a certain code of masculinity on those working in the State Department. In historian Robert D. Dean's words, the American diplomatic elite was an "imperial brotherhood." American dance critics, while not members of that brotherhood, were part of a society that believed foreign policy to be a masculine arena. In reviewing these productions, therefore, these critics often approached the "masculine" parts of the production, the choreography, music, and set design, as political, while they approached the "feminine" side of the production, the performance, as non-political.

Ulanova as the “New Soviet Person”

In the spring of 1959, there was no dancer who occupied the pages of American newspapers as much as Galina Ulanova, the elegant, lyrical ballerina who starred in the title roles of both Romeo and Juliet and Giselle. Ulanova was a major celebrity in the Soviet Union. By the late 1950s,

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with over a decade of solo tours abroad as well as the international distribution of her ballet films, she had become a worldwide star as well. When the Bolshoi came to the United States, the American press was already aware of her talent and breathlessly eager to observe her dancing in person. Many early articles about the tour ran headlines such as “Russian Ballerina to Tour U.S.” and “Galina Ulanova: Long-Awaited Visitor Arrives” as though the other ninety-nine dancers were there for backup. Sol Hurok paid Ulanova $100 per performance, a sum which dwarfed even the next highest-paid stars, Maya Plisetskaya and Raissa Struchkova, who were paid $40 per performance.

Despite this acclaim, Americans critics did not entirely know how to respond to Galina Ulanova. Many found her “quite aloof, dry and rather cold.” Such reactions to Ulanova’s persona were in part a result of the difference between American and Soviet models of ideal femininity. During the 1930s and 40s, when Ulanova was shaping her most famous roles as well as her public persona, the Soviet government sought to alter the position of women in society, promoting, all at the same time, aggressive pro-natalist policies, an industrialization plan that required women to mobilize for work, and a chaste morality that would prevent women from undermining the revolution via their sexuality.

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123 Financial Records 1959 Tour, RGALI f. 648 o. 7 d. 882. Ulanova performed less frequently, so while her total salary was higher than any others ($1100), it was not double. Plisetskaya and Struchkova each took $810 for the whole tour. Faier and Rozhdestvensky, the conductors, as well as dancers Nikolai Fadeychev and Yuri Zhdanov, were each paid $25 per performance. The other soloists received $15–20, and the members of the corps $5 per performance (though they were guaranteed $9/day). As Plisetskaya discusses in her memoirs, however, none of the dancers kept much of the actual profits from these fees. Instead, the dancers were expected to hand over their American salaries upon return to the Soviet Union. Plisetskaya, I, Mysa Plisetskaya, 206-217. The 2013 equivalent of Ulanova’s per-performance salary is $1800, using the economic status measurement. Plisetskaya’s is $718. Measuring Worth, accessed December 1, 2014, http://www.measuringworth.com/.


In this period, Ulanova in many ways represented the female version of the New Soviet Person [новый советский человек], an idealized figure of strength, often associated with athletic male professions: pilots, arctic explorers, steel workers, what Lilya Kaganovsky describes as a “fantasy of extravagant virility.”

Like the imagined New Soviet Person, Ulanova was prominently engaged in state activities. She served on important committees and published articles in the major Soviet newspapers on both artistic and political subjects. Public accounts of Ulanova’s life, in both the Soviet Union and in the United States when she was on tour, emphasized the dancer’s intense training routine and her willingness to sacrifice herself to her country. Her bio for the programs at the Metropolitan Opera House stresses this narrative.

Sent to ballet school as a little girl, she cried frequently and demanded to be taken back home. Her extreme shyness was a great obstacle. … She hated the daily ballet drill and had not the slightest desire to become a ballerina. … A sense of duty and a kind of early drive to perfection helped her.

The biography goes on to describe how Ulanova devoted “indefatigable work” to practicing ballet. The repeated emphasis on her long hours of training mirrored the Soviet press treatment of successful athletes.

In addition to modeling the behavior of the New Soviet Person, Ulanova’s talents as an actor-dancer helped shape the socialist realist drambaleti of the 1930s and 40s. Ulanova starred in the premieres of many of the most famous drambaleti, including Fountain of the Bakhchisarai, Flames of

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128 Illustrated Program from Metropolitan Opera House, New York, April to May 1959, RGALI, f. 3045 o. 1 d. 326. There is a similar program note in the Bolshoi’s program for Los Angeles, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 317. The bios in both programs are similar, and even use some similar language, but they are different essays. The similarities (including some of the same phrases like “early drive to perfection”) seems to indicate that the authors of both bios were working from the same notes or press release, probably provided by Hurok and/or the Bolshoi.

129 Julie Gilmour and Barbara Evans Clements, “‘If You Want to Be Like Me, Train!’: the Contradictions of Soviet Masculinity” in *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, ed. B.E. Clements, et al. (Chippenham, Wiltshire, Palgrave: 2002), 210–221.
Paris, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Her ability to convey her characters through movement alone allowed the choreographers she worked with to narrate complicated stories through pantomime. Moreover, her performances endowed her main characters with an internal, emotional strength that transformed them into the New Soviet Person that Ulanova modeled in her private life. Her Juliet, for example, is proudly independent, taking an equal weight with Romeo in all their interactions. In her portrayal, when Juliet runs to Friar Laurence’s cell in an attempt to avoid marriage to Paris, Ulanova’s head is held high, her chest out; her steps are assured and passionate. Ulanova interprets the bold thundering of the brass as the outpourings of Juliet’s own heroic personality. Her performance endows Juliet with emotional strength, independence, and equality in her interactions with Romeo.130

**Ulanova in American Criticism**

American critics almost unanimously declared that Ulanova was one of the greatest dancers of all time, some comparing her to Anna Pavlova.131 The ballerina particularly impressed audiences and critics with her dramatic characterizations. Martin declared she was “surely one of the greatest of Juliets, spoken or unspoken.”132 Ulanova’s virtuosity, however, was systematically separated from the productions she performed in. Critics sometimes excoriated Lavrovsky for the same dramatic practices that they praised in Ulanova’s performances. Walter Terry wrote that Ulanova “makes every gesture a poem in dance: her very walk is like a thermometer of emotional changes; her runs are alive with urgency ….” This was a part of the same review in which Terry called *Romeo and Juliet* “heavy, ponderous, and, at times, dull.”133

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American critics were highly interested in Ulanova’s age, an admittedly astounding 49 during the American tour. Many drew attention to Ulanova’s skill at seeming to morph into the figure of a young girl for her role as Juliet. As Milt Freudenheim described in the *Chicago Daily News*, “Ulanova, by daylight a plain woman of 49, miraculously evoked the youth and beauty of a teen-age Juliet...” Terry called her Juliet “girlish ... impulsive, unsure, questing, eager.” The critics’ emphasis on Ulanova’s girlishness in the part of Juliet, however, belied the confidence and heroism that the ballerina brought to the role. Moreover it represented an attempt to shoehorn Ulanova into mid-20th-century American models of non-political femininity. The critical treatment of Ulanova drew attention away from the political and ideological sides of the dancer’s work, stripping politics away from her extraordinary artistic power.

**Maya Plisetskaya, the “Bolshoi Bombshell”**

The only dancer whose fame could begin to compare with Ulanova’s was Maya Plisetskaya, a ballerina whose relationship to the Soviet state was the polar opposite of Ulanova’s. Plisetskaya came from a prominent family of artists and dancers, including her aunt, dancer Sulamif Messerer, and her uncle, ballet master Asaf Messerer. Plisetskaya’s father, a bureaucrat and communist-party member, was executed during the Great Purges of the 1930s. Her mother, silent film actress Ra Messerer, was arrested shortly thereafter for having married an “enemy of the people” and sent to the Gulag with her infant son. Using what influence they had as state-decorated dancers, Sulamif and Asaf persuaded the camp to semi-release their sister, allowing her to live in the nearest town rather than in the camp proper. For three years, until 1941, Ra Messerer remained in exile, forbidden to return to Moscow; during this period, the young Plisetskaya lived with her aunt.

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Plisetskaya’s family history made her, understandably, deeply distrustful of the Communist Party. The feeling was apparently mutual; from a single tour of India in 1953 up until the American tour in 1959, someone in the Soviet bureaucracy, probably in the Ministry of Culture, made sure that Plisetskaya was unable to leave the communist bloc. Whoever this person, or group of persons, were, they seem to have been somewhat at odds with the Bolshoi Theater leadership. Leading up to the Bolshoi’s appearance in London in 1956, the theater directors had assumed that Plisetskaya would play a major role in the expedition. She had been slated to star in most of the *Swan Lake* performances and the theater placed orders to print short English booklets about the dancer to distribute to British fans. At the last minute, however, her name was removed from the touring roster, ostensibly to keep up the standards of the Bolshoi’s performances at home. She was similarly kept away from the 1958 tour to France and Belgium. For the American tour in 1959, the decision on whether or not to take Plisetskaya was pushed back for weeks. In February 1959, Hurok flew to Moscow to convince the State Committee on Cultural Ties to allow Plisetskaya to tour with the Bolshoi, but Georgi A. Zhukov, head of the

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137 Numerous documents from the planning phases of the tour list Plisetskaya as one of the major figures. She was going to star in the first cast for *Swan Lake*, the Bolshoi was preparing biographies about her to be printed in English for fans. Her name is on the list for hotel rooms. A list of artists going to London from an unknown date then has Plisetskaya’s name crossed off. Materials on Tour to London 1956; GABT Order No. 275 28 June 1956; Plan for Rehearsals on Stage of London Theater, September 1956; Preparation of Materials for Press. Printing for Tour of Bolshoi Ballet Theatre in London; Repertoire of the Guest Tour in London October 1956; Program Contents for Ballets; Program for Swan Lake, RGALI f. 648 o. 7 d. 473. List of People Going to London; Program for Concerts in London; Letter from Director of GABT to Shashkin, June 20, 1956; Letter from Director of GABT to Shashkin about costumes, RGALI f. 648 o. 7 d. 474.

138 The reported reason for Plisetskaya staying in the USSR during the 1956 London tour was to keep up the level of dancing in Moscow. In 1958, however, the Bolshoi was closed for renovations and did not need anyone to stay home. Chulaki, then director of the Bolshoi, explained in a letter to the Ministry of Culture that on the London tour, the company had explained Plisetskaya’s absence through the split in the company. Chulaki mentioned in the letter that Plisetskaya was one of the most talented dancers in the company, that she herself was very nervous waiting the decision about her participation in the tour to Belgium, and that the entire company was waiting to see the decision on her role in the tour. He requested that some other job be found for the dancer while the Bolshoi performed in the West, suggesting a tour to Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. In the end, this request seems to have been effective, as a special smaller tour to Czechoslovakia starring Plisetskaya was approved. Letter from Chulaki to Ministry of Culture, Mikhailov, May 7, 1958, Approval of Trip trip to Czechoslovakia, starring Plisetskaya and A. Makarov, RGALI f. 648 o. 8 d. 88.
committee, refused to speak with him on the matter. As late as March 20, 1959, it was still undecided whether or not Plisetskaya would accompany the Bolshoi theater to the United States. In the end, though, just a few days before the start of the tour, Plisetskaya’s inclusion was approved. Likely, the change in policy was partially a result of Plisetskaya’s recent marriage to composer Rodion Shchedrin, who remained in Moscow during the company’s tour, essentially serving as a hostage to guarantee that Plisetskaya would return to the Soviet Union. Plisetskaya may have also been helped by Shchedrin’s meeting with a KGB agent to convince them that Plisetskaya would not defect, as well as Sol Hurok’s adamant insistence that Plisetskaya should be included in the tour.

American reporters knew some of the political trouble that Plisetskaya had been facing in the Soviet Union and these rumors were occasionally printed in the American press, particularly by Walter Terry. In general, however, American newspapers were equally happy to run rumors that the dancer was being kept off of the American tour because she had fallen in love with a British diplomat or because Ulanova was jealous of her. Oddly, this depoliticized the dancer even when her political opinions would have served to promote the American cause.

Once she appeared in performances, any remaining interest in Plisetskaya’s personal or political life was overtaken by praise for her stunning dancing. Kastendieck called her “electrifying”

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139 Notes on Discussion between Hurok and Zhukov, February 24, 1959, RGALI f. 2329 o. 8 d. 1234 l. 40.

140 Press conference by Georgiy Orvid, Director of GABT with Soviet and foreign journalists, March 20, 1959, Stenography, RGALI f. 648 o. 7 d. 308.

141 Telegram, April 9, 1959, RGALI f. 2329 o. 8 d. 1234 l. 80. This is a request to speed Plisetskaya’s visa through in order for her to come with the other dancers.

142 Plisetskaya, I, Maya Plisetskaya, 182–183, 188–197.


and Winthrop Sargeant of the New Yorker named her the company’s most thrilling dancer.\footnote{Miles Kastendieck, “Brilliance by Bolshoi,” New York Journal American. Winthrop Sargeant, “Musical Events: A Stunner” New Yorker, May 59, 1962.} While Ulanova was famed for her portrayals of Giselle and Juliet, relatively demure roles, Plisetskaya was renowned for her version of Odette/Odile in Swan Lake. Her beautiful classical form, unusually flexible upper body, and fiery stage presence made her the ideal magical queen (Figure 10). It didn’t hurt that, unlike Ulanova, Plisetskaya was considered a stunning beauty. Ed Sullivan of the Daily News called her the “Bolshoi bombshell.”\footnote{Ed Sullivan, “Little Old New York,” Daily News, May 8, 1959.}


The American Press and the Soviet Ballerinas

Ulanova and Plisetskaya received the most attention of any performers on the tour, but the type of attention they received, and the erasure of their political personas, was highly typical for the way in which the Soviet ballerinas in general were treated in the United States. In addition to regarding these ballerinas’ performances as non-ideological, the American press portrayed them as
objects of extreme fascination, even fetishization. American papers followed their every movement with great interest and reported constantly on their activities both on and off stage. Of course, the newspapers reviewed the male performers and reported on their movements as well, but interest in the Bolshoi men paled in comparison to the women.

Critics and reporters endlessly described the physical presence of the female dancers. Milton Bass jokingly remarked that the Bolshoi dancers refuted American propaganda about how ugly Russian women were, writing, “I don’t know about the girls they left behind them, but every one of the Bolshoi dancers has a marvelously slender body and a pixie-like charm that is upsetting....” Many versions of a photograph of six of the Bolshoi ballerinas appeared in American newspapers to announce the Bolshoi’s arrival (Figure 11). In these images, the women are displayed in a long line-up, each with a bouquet of roses; the props and dress highlight their femininity and the pose suggests to the viewer the dancers’ interchangeability and their desire to please their audiences.

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Towards the end of the Bolshoi’s stay in New York, the distinction between the political, intellectual side of diplomacy and the physical, emotional performance of the Bolshoi dancers was made explicit in a remark by Drew Pearson of the *New York Mirror*:

> So far, diplomats have not been able to bridge the gap between the political animosities of the United States and the Soviet Union; nor have the scientists sitting in Geneva; nor even the heads of states meeting at the summit in 1955. But the lithe beauty of Ulanova’s body and face; the suppleness of Susanna Zayugina in the Sabre Dance and the ragged expressive hands of Yuri Faier as he led 70 American musicians and 100 Russian dancers in perfect rhythm - they did what trained diplomats and skilled politicians have not been able to do. They helped the Russian and American people understand each other.\(^{150}\)

In his remark, Pearson carefully juxtaposes Ulanova’s and Zayugina’s innate feminine physicality against the masculine heads (literally the minds) of state, not to mention the “scientists sitting in Geneva.” In doing so, he exaggerates the irrationality of the performers’ power and the strange juxtaposition he sees between politics and dance.

The only male performer that Pearson singles out, conductor Yuri Faier, was probably the most publicized man from the Bolshoi’s tour. It can hardly be coincidental that articles about the artist often mentioned his supposed “blindness,” a quality that, like Ulanova’s girlishness and

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Plisetskaya’s beauty, could make the Bolshoi performers seem less threatening. Louis Biancolli wrote an article on Faier’s supposed disability entitled “Stirring Sight of a Gifted Man.”\textsuperscript{151} Faier himself, in his memoirs, took note of the fact that American reporters seemed to find it impossible to discuss him without mentioning the fact that “I don’t see well.”\textsuperscript{152} It is noticeable, moreover, that the power Pearson assigns to these performers is of a conciliatory nature, the power to soothe rather than the more frightening power to convince.

**Conclusions**

To some degree, the Bolshoi’s self-presentation welcomed this treatment. The company performed ballets with virtuosic main roles, drawing attention to the women who performed in them. Moreover, Hurok, anxious for the tour to play well to American audiences, constantly put the ballerinas in front of the cameras. The picture of the six ballerinas may well have been staged by Hurok for the press. Moreover, since audiences were happy and critics pleased with the dancers, it was to a large degree a success for the Bolshoi Theater and for the Soviet government.

Nevertheless, the Bolshoi’s tour to the United States in 1959 represented the first opportunity for American critics and audiences to get a full and multifaceted look at Soviet ballet, and reviews from that tour helped define the American perspective on Prokofiev, Soviet ballet, and Russia itself for decades to come. The criticisms of Prokofiev and his Soviet ballets, grounded in Timasheff’s Great Retreat thesis, did not disappear following the Bolshoi’s 1959 tour; rather, they have continued to influence the Western reception of Prokofiev and of Soviet music in general.\textsuperscript{153}


\textsuperscript{152} Faier, *O sebe, o muzike, o baleti*, 423.

\textsuperscript{153} Marina Frolova-Walker quotes Katerina Clark in remarking that it was impossible in the 1980s to discuss Socialist Realist music without adopting the “tones of outrage, bemusement, derision, or elegy.” Frolova-Walker then asserts that two decades later, “outrage” and “elegy” now dominate. Marina Frolova-Walker, “Stalin and the Art of Boredom,” *twentieth-century music* 1, no. 1 (March 2004): 101–102.
Moreover, because he re-emigrated to the Soviet Union from the West, Prokofiev’s music has become particularly important to discussions of the Soviet government’s impact on the arts. Richard Taruskin, for example, has repeatedly discussed the composer’s conservatism following his return to the Soviet Union.\footnote{Richard Taruskin, “Tone, Style, and Form in Prokofieff’s Soviet Operas,” originally published in \textit{Studies in the History of Music}, vol. 2. (New York: Broude Bros., 1988), reprinted in \textit{On Russian Music} (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 236-270. Taruskin, “Prokofieff’s Return” in \textit{On Russian Music} (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 233–245.} Simon Morrison’s Prokofiev biography complicates this assessment, showing how the composer negotiated his new aesthetic style within the demands of Soviet society.\footnote{Morrison, \textit{The People’s Artist}.} As of yet, however, there has not been similar re-evaluations of the Soviet productions of Prokofiev’s ballets in either dance or music scholarship.\footnote{Christina Ezrahi has reanalyzed choreographic symphonism as a form of resistance to the Soviet state. She continues to view it as a return to the 19th century but reads that as a rejection of Soviet drambalets, which she also considers an artistic dead-end. Ezrahi, \textit{Swans of the Kremlin}.} In her history of ballet, Jennifer Homans punctuates the title of her chapter on Soviet dance with a question: “Left Behind?”\footnote{Jennifer Homans, \textit{Apollo’s Angels, a History of Ballet} (New York: Random House, 2010), 341.} Morrison himself accuses Lavrovsky of “traditionalizing” Prokofiev’s work.\footnote{Morrison, \textit{The People’s Artist: Prokofiev’s Soviet Years}, 106.}

for modernism in ballet. While not a problem in and of itself, these definitions of modernism led American critics of the late 1950s, as well as many subsequent music and dance scholars, to conflate departures from this turn-of-the-century Western European aesthetic with conservatism. Soviet critics and bureaucrats also recognized “modernism” as a Western phenomenon and quite explicitly condemned it. Yet they did not juxtapose “modern” [модерный] art with “conservative” but rather with the highly-desired “contemporary” [современный]. “Modern,” in Soviet policy-speak, connoted Western modernism and any of the techniques that could be associated with it. “Contemporary,” in contrast, described an artistic work that was up-to-date by Soviet aesthetic standards.

American reviews of the Soviet ballerinas continue to reverberate in current political discourse. International Relations scholar Kimberly Williams, in her monograph Imagining Russia, analyzes representations of Russia in American popular culture since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. According to Williams, Americans, rejoicing in their Cold War triumph, frequently personify Russia as a victimized woman in need of an American cowboy to rescue her. Williams believes that this representation of Russia has had practical political ramifications, in particular excusing and encouraging mail-order bride services run from Russia to the United States and shaping the terms of post-Cold War American aid to Russia. Williams posits that this type of gendered representation of Russia probably developed out of Cold War-era American culture. The Bolshoi’s tour of the United States in 1959 and the American reaction to it represents just such an early instance of the gendered representation that Williams describes.

The simultaneous desire to fetishize the Soviet ballerinas and to relegate them to an apolitical status betrayed a genuine nervousness on the part of Americans about the potential power of dance

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162 Schmelz, Such Freedom, if Only Musical, 41

in the Cold War. Some American writers made jokes about the Bolshoi ballet “conquering” Americans, and others tittered that their loyalties could not so easily be bought, however much they liked the Bolshoi dancers. Inez Robb, for instance, joked that “I have survived my brush with Communist culture unscathed in my devotion to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, no less than in my dedication to freedom, democracy and the capitalist system.” These comments were rarely posed as anything but punch lines, but the laughter still betrayed their authors’ uncertainties. Americans genuinely worried that appreciation for Soviet culture might slide ever so gradually into appreciation for communism. The American critics both loved and feared their Soviet visitors, and they dealt with this fear by turning to the traditional language and ideology of gender dualism - excoriating the mind (the male choreography) but admiring the body (the female performances). In doing so, they could in effect both welcome and disarm the Soviet threat.

The cognitive split between loving Soviet dancers and hating Soviet choreography and ideology embodies a tension at the heart of Cold War cultural exchanges. These tours were meeting places for people with a vast array of divergent interests: American State Department officials who hoped that human diplomacy would win the Cold War; Sol Hurok who wanted to put on the most spectacular tour of his career; Bolshoi dancers eager to perform their best works for a new audience; audience members who craved some glimpse of life behind the Iron Curtain; balletomanes who paid hundreds of dollars to travel to New York for an evening with the great Ulanova. Many had motives that were confused even to themselves — to use human diplomacy to prevent nuclear holocaust or to win at any cost? To see a great new art form or to assure oneself of American superiority? As the tours continued, these tensions would only become more entangled.

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Chapter 2

Cosmopolitan and National:

American Ballet Theatre’s 1960 Tour of the Soviet Union

Until September 13, 1960, no American ballet company had ever danced in the Soviet Union.¹ Yet on that day, nearing the height of the political Cold War, American Ballet Theatre (ABT) stepped out onto the stage of the Stanislavsky Theater in Moscow, Russia.² As the curtain rose, the audience was greeted by a familiar sight: ranks of ballerinas in tutus, each one with her feet in perfect fifth position and arms resting in a graceful port-de-bras. Lupe Serrano, a Chilean-born and Mexican-trained principal dancer, and Igor Youskevitch, a Ukrainian émigré, led the ensemble in Theme and Variations, choreographed by Russian émigré George Balanchine to the music of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.³ The cast of ABT’s tour through the Soviet Union was studded with international stars, including Danish premier Eric Bruhn and Maria Tallchief, a principal dancer of Native American decent. They pirouetted and arabesqued to the steps of choreographers foreign and domestic, modern and classical, to the music of composers including Jacques Offenbach, Frederic Chopin, and Leonard Bernstein.⁴ Some of these dancers and choreographers, including Youskevitch, were returning to their home countries, now representing the United States as naturalized citizens.⁵ Others, such as Bruhn, had never been naturalized as citizens of the United States and continued to make their careers in multiple countries simultaneously.

¹ Letter from Onysko, April 8, 1960, sent out to many different group ticket organizations, similar letter April 1, 1960, from Rubin to Buyers, New York Public Library (NYp), American Ballet Theatre Collection * MGZMD 49 (ABT), Folder 3162. Seymour Topping, “US Troop Charms Throng,” New York Times, September 14, 1960. These letters advertise that ABT will be the first American ballet troupe to perform in the Soviet Union.
² Report on European Tour, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3187.
³ Programs USSR, September 8, 1960, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3183.
ABT’s 1960 tour, under the leadership of Lucia Chase, took the company to Moscow, Tbilisi, Leningrad, and Kiev. The tour was financed by the United States State Department and received approval from the ANTA. To conduct such a expedition, by an American company just twenty years old, into the heart of ballet’s home country, took courage, perseverance, and a great deal of compromise. Up until the month before ABT opened in Moscow, it seemed more likely than not that the company would never make it to the Soviet Union. When Lucia Chase and the ANTA dance panel first envisioned a tour, they dreamed of introducing Soviet audiences to American choreography. But as the long years leading up to ABT’s premiere eroded confidence in the company’s ability to secure the tour and presented diplomatic problems, the venture turned into a goodwill tour designed to please its audience in any way possible.

Ballet was brought to the United States by touring artists and immigrants, largely Russian-American immigrants, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Up through the mid-20th century, it was still considered a Russian art form in the United States, and that opinion was shared in many other countries in the world, including in Russia. As Naima Prevots and Lauren Erin Brown have argued, Cold War diplomacy helped make ballet appear more American to those living in the United States.\(^6\) Even as they went on tour for the American government, many of the dancers in those companies, especially in ABT, were immigrants, and some were neither American citizens nor even full-time residents. Throughout the tour, the company embodied two different images: one, a home-grown, patriotic American ensemble with American repertoire and dancers, and the other, a cosmopolitan body of international stars conversant in a variety of classical and contemporary styles.

That the company presented such seemingly contradictory images was not a weakness, however, but rather one of its great strengths. Balancing its image of American nationalism and elite

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\(^6\) Prevots, *Dance for Export*, 9. Brown, “Cultural Czars,” Introduction. Ballet was popular in the United States throughout the 1940s, but it was usually presented as a Russian import.
cosmopolitanism, all wrapped up in a light-hearted package, Ballet Theatre managed to walk the tight-rope of early Soviet-American cultural exchange. The company fulfilled its promise to show American ballet to the Soviet Union, using a style of ballet that actually resembled Soviet *drambalet*. These new works, especially *Rodeo* and *The Combat*, impressed Soviet critics with the artistic capabilities of American choreographers and composers. At the same time, the tour demonstrated the virtuosic talent of its dancers, as well as presenting the United States as a country that took part in an elite, cosmopolitan art exchange.

By reintroducing this tour back into the story of Soviet-American cultural exchange, I blur the stark contrasts that are often set up between American and Soviet art. The tour demonstrated the similarities between American and Soviet ballet, and even offered moments for collaboration between Soviet and American artists. Both Soviet critics and viewers responded positively to the ABT’s performances. By all accounts, the shows were almost all sold out and audiences applauded enthusiastically. Soviet critics welcomed the company’s Russian works and appreciated the chance to see contemporary American ballet. In short, the tour was a surprising success.

**Taking a Report Card to Russia**

When it was founded in 1939, ABT was a semi-Russian establishment. Its first incarnation had been as the Mikhail Mordkin Ballet Company, a group formed by one of Anna Pavlova's former partners to showcase his own choreography. As Mordkin was being pushed out in the following year, the company was simply renamed Ballet Theatre — the appellation ‘American’ was not added until the early 1950s when the company began touring internationally. In its early days, legendary impresario Sol Hurok advertised the group as "the greatest in Russian Ballet." The tagline not only brought audiences streaming in but also reflected the company’s renowned Russian choreographer, Mikhail Fokine. Despite the commercial benefits of calling the company Russian, however, some of

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the group’s American managers, including dancer and financier Lucia Chase, wanted the troupe to be recognized as a home-grown organization with a national repertoire. The company produced a number of the most popular and respected American ballets of the 1940s, commissioning Robbins’s *Fancy Free*, de Mille’s *Tally-Ho* and *Fall River Legend*, Eugene Loring’s *The Great American Goof*, Michael Kidd’s *On Stage!*, Catherine Littlefield’s *Barn Dance*, and John Taras’s *Graziana*. The troupe also took on revised versions of de Mille’s *Rodeo* and Loring’s *Billy the Kid*. In 1946, Chase and scenic designer Oliver Smith wrested control away from Hurok and took over management of the company. The two directors set up an artistic committee to plan the company’s aesthetic direction and included such prominent Americans as Aaron Copland, Agnes de Mille, and Jerome Robbins.\(^8\)

ABT began its international touring schedule as early as 1950, when the group performed in Europe for the first time; the company was thus a major player in the early, ad-hoc days of American cultural diplomacy. Blevins Davis, a theater producer, millionaire philanthropist, and ABT’s president, secured the US Air Corps to transport the dancers across the Atlantic and persuaded ANTA to sponsor the tour. This initial trip to Europe cemented ABT’s status as a national organization and proved that such expeditions were beneficial for the United States’s image abroad.\(^9\) In the mid 1950s, when the President’s Special International Program for Cultural Presentation was established to systematize government-sponsored cultural tours, ABT was frequently chosen to represent the United States. Both Lucia Chase and Agnes de Mille sat on the ANTA panel.\(^10\)

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\(^8\) Ibid. Lucia Chase was ABT’s primary patron in the 1940s. Chase began her career with the company as a minor soloist. She came from a wealthy society family and married Robert Ewing Jr., who died in 1933, leaving her and her two sons a small fortune. In the company’s early days, Chase single-handedly met the deficit in ABT’s yearly expenditures, a role which gradually led to a more and more firm administrative role. She preferred to remain relatively anonymous, however, at least as long as she was still one of the dancers.


\(^10\) Prevots, *Dance for Export*, 37–43.
By 1956 and 57, the ANTA dance panel became aware that a major exchange with the Soviet Union was on the horizon. Many on the panel were concerned that this would not be a good idea. Ballet had been defined in the West as an inherently Russian art form since the early part of the 20th century, and Soviet ballet was still a vast unknown. At that point, the major Soviet troops had only toured a couple of times in Western Europe and never in the United States, and therefore only a few wealthy Americans had ever seen them. To the panel, the idea of bringing American ballet to Russia seemed a risky proposition. One member commented, “Bringing a ballet company to Russia is like bringing in a report card.”

Lucia Chase, however, quickly saw the benefits of being the first American company to tour Russia. Her organization would make a certain amount of money from the exchange, but far more importantly, it would get the permanent cachet of being the first American troupe to dance in the USSR. As early as October 1956, ABT’s leadership began lobbying the ANTA panel for the Soviet tour. The ANTA panel was divided. ABT may have been the most important American ballet company in the 1940s, but over the course of the 50s, it had lost a certain amount of prestige to Balanchine and Kirstein’s New York City Ballet, which had been founded in 1946. Some of ABT’s best dancers, including Maria Tallchief, moved to Balanchine’s company. Nevertheless, early in the discussions, Kirstein claimed that NYCB had no interest in touring the Soviet Union, partially because they feared Soviet audiences would object to American ballet. When NYCB was put out of the running, ABT was chosen almost as a default. Originally, the ANTA panel assumed that ABT

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11 ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, October 17, 1957, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3388; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, December 19, 1957; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, October 18, 1956, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3384. One of the major conflicts for American ballet companies during the 1930s and 40s was to hold on to their status as ballet companies while seeming American. For more on this, see Charles Payne, American Ballet Theatre; James Steichen, “The American Ballet’s Caravan,” Dance Research Journal 47: 1 (April 2015): 69–9; and Sally Banes, “Sibling Rivalry,” in Dance for a City: Fifty Years of the New York City Ballet, ed. Lynn Garafola, et al., 73–98 (New York: Columbia University Press).


13 ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes December 19, 1957, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3388.
would visit Russia as part of its 1958 European tour.\textsuperscript{14} As plans for 1958 floundered, however, the date was persistently delayed.\textsuperscript{15}

**Deciding Who is a Part of American Ballet Theatre**

From the time when ABT became the front-runner for being the first ballet company to tour the Soviet Union, problem after problem beset the company. Chase was particularly faced with difficulties regarding her company’s personnel, questions that were intimately tied, not only to the quality of the dancing and the viability of ABT as a company, but also to the question of sending an American company abroad. As soon as conversations moved in the direction of ABT for the Soviet tour in fall of 1957, debates erupted in the ANTA panel over the state of Ballet Theatre’s roster. Many believed that the company ought not to perform in Russia without Alicia Alonso, Nora Kaye, and Igor Youskevitch, important dancers who had formerly performed with the company but who had all moved on to other jobs.\textsuperscript{16} Others panel members were concerned about sending any dancer without American citizenship, including two of ABT’s remaining principals, Violette Verdy and Eric

\textsuperscript{14} American Ballet Theatre Bookings European Tour 1958, and ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, September 17, 1957, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3387 and 3388.

\textsuperscript{15} On March 20, 1958, Chase claimed the company was still willing to go to Russia. There was more discussion on October 2, 1958. In the summer of 1958 there was discussion about trying to get the tour for 1959. By October of 1959, the 1961-62 season began to be discussed. By November 19, 1959 the State Department had officially accepted ABT. On December 17, 1959, the August and September 1960 dates were suggested for the tour. ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, March 20, 1958; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, October 2, 1958; Letter, June 8, 1958, Payne to Mary Stewart French; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, October 22, 1959; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, November 19, 1959; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, December 17, 1959, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folders 3393, 3394, and 3396.

\textsuperscript{16} On October 17, 1957 there were long arguments about Alonso. The arguments arose again in 1959, when the 1960 tour became a real possibility. At the meeting on November 19, 1959, Terry claimed that Kaye was essential to the performance of de Mille’s works, and also discussed bringing Alonso and Youskevitch. Again in the meeting of May 21, 1959 de Mille wanted to make sure Alonso and Youskevitch would be performing. ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, October 17, 1957; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, May 21, 1959; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, November 19, 1959, NYp, ABT, ANTA Folders 3388 and 3396.
Bruhn, who were, respectively, French and Danish. Chase was enraged, stating at the meeting in October 1957, “If you want to choose a Company, start your own. This is the Ballet Theatre.” Gradually, however, circumstances would force her to revise this bold statement.

In 1958, an unexpected calamity befell the company, diminishing their chances of securing the Soviet tour. While on a tour of Western Europe, a truck containing ABT’s scenery, costumes, and personal effects caught fire and was reduced to cinders. The equipment for twelve ballets was lost. The accident made the Soviet trip even more alluring, as the government's financial support could have helped put the company back on its feet. However, just as Chase desperately needed ANTA’s help, the State Department decided to issue a crackdown on the panel's use of the cultural exchange program to finance only a few prominent dance groups. No longer would federal largesse support dance companies that could not support themselves. ABT was not allowed to tour anywhere in Europe until 1960. Chase and Smith disbanded the company for a year, and the dancers found new jobs. During the aftermath of the fire, in the fall of 1958, Jerome Robbins's Ballets U.S.A. became the favored company of the ANTA panel for a Soviet tour. Chase continued to press the ANTA panel at every opportunity for a European and Soviet tour for her company, and in the

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17 Bruhn was Danish, Verdy French. Neither ever became United States citizens, and Bruhn was still a soloist with the Royal Danish Ballet. ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, September 17, 1957; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, October 17, 1957, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3388.

18 ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, October 17, 1957, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3388.

19 At the meetings of August 28, 1958, September 25, 1958, and October 2, 1958, the panel discussed limits on how much the State Department could fund companies rather than tours. Again on May 21, 1959 the panel discussed the limits of what the state department could provide in building up the company, this time stating that it could not fund ABT until the company was already established again because they could only fund a tour; this was followed by furious discussion about whether or not ABT was 'suitable' following the disbandment and retrenchment. “$400,000 Fire Hits U.S. Ballet in France,” New York Herald Tribune, July 31, 1958. ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, August 28, 1958; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, September 25, 1958; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, October 2, 1958; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, May 21, 1959, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folders 3393 and 3396. Letter, July 31, 1958, Carter to Onysko, Enclosed check of $10,000 to overcome difficulties of fire and destruction of costumes and effects by fire, NYp, ABT, Chase Correspondence, Folder 3514. Letter, Chase to Hurok, October 15, 1959, Scenery and costumes for Rodeo lost in fire in Europe, NYp, ABT, Sol Hurok, Folder 3371.

20 ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, October 2, 1958, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3393.
spring of 1959, following information that the Soviet Ministry of Culture had deemed Robbins’ company unsuitable, the panel’s opinion swung back in the favor of Ballet Theatre.\footnote{ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, May 21, 1959; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, April 16, 1959, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3396.}

Thus it was a somewhat worn out and diminished company that finally secured the coveted Soviet tour for 1960. Perhaps as a result of the debilitating company losses and the break in company continuity in 1959, Chase became more accommodating about recruiting dancers to join ABT just for the summer tour. Members of the ANTA panel sent out letters badgering important dancers to accept the contract by claiming that participation was a patriotic duty.\footnote{ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, February 18, 1960. NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3402.} In her memoirs, Maria Tallchief recounts the unusual pressure she was under.

It was explained to me that this was a very important tour with political consequences. Ballet Theatre would be breaking barriers, and the State Department was very much involved in working out the logistics. A great deal was at stake. No one wanted to risk the off chance that a major American performing arts institution might have anything less than a triumph in the Soviet Union. So, after talking to government representatives, I felt that as an American I owed it to my country. I gave in.\footnote{Maria Tallchief with Larry Kaplan, \textit{Maria Tallchief: America's Prima Ballerina}, (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1997), 256.}

**Challenges to the Tour**

The process of arranging a tour in the Soviet Union was vastly more complex than simply getting approval from the ANTA panel. Over the course of 1960, ABT faced repeated challenges to its status as a selected group. These challenges continuously demonstrated two principles: the interaction between private and state interests in mounting the tours and the balance the company had to strike between its national and international profiles.

The first challenge came from the home front, when the company opened its two week spring season at the Metropolitan Opera House in April 1960. The newly assembled company, essentially patched together by Chase from the fragments of her old troupe, was able to rehearse...
only briefly before the opening performance.  The season was a disaster. John Martin eviscerated the company in the May 15th issue of the New York Times, declaring, "If the American Ballet Theatre actually goes to the Soviet Union (which heaven forbid!) to represent the United States under the auspices of the President's Special International Program for Cultural Presentations, it will be a profound national humiliation." Martin criticized the fallen state of dancing in the company, particularly on the part of the inadequately rehearsed corps, but focused the bulk of his wrath on Chase for failing to hire an artistic director. The review went on to remark that "to send a drab, hastily thrown-together Gopher Prairie Civic Ballet to a country where the ballet has had 200 years of richly subsidized, carefully administered, deeply dedicated, universally honored achievements, is irresponsible in the extreme." Martin's review immediately took a heavy toll on ABT's business prospects. Letters pored in from American venues, asking if the company was still dancing at its former high standard. In particular, many of ABT's business contacts expressed concern that ANTA might withdraw support for the Soviet tour. Some booking agents threatened to cancel their engagements, and two of them, the impresarios in Philadelphia and Corpus Christi, went through with it.

Their concern was not unfounded. On May 13, the ANTA panel convened a meeting at which they discussed the the disastrous Met season and debated the possibility of canceling


25 Ibid.

26 In a letter of June 14, 1960, John Onysko, the ABT Business Manager, claimed to Chase that “I know how difficult it is for you to realize, being so far removed from New York, how unpleasant it has been here since the May 15th New York Times article. For two weeks after that date, there was constant pressure from local managers to cancel their bookings with us. I had to assure and reassure manager after manager that ABT is an excellent company and that after the European tour, it would develop into a great performing company.” Letter, June 14, 1960, from Onysko to Chase, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3173. In a letter from May 18, 1960, Onysko reports that the Corpus Christi and Philadelphia engagements had been cancelled. A memo from May 20, 1960, also explains that one business contact in Chicago, Charlie Gilbert, expressed concern over Martin's review and the possibility that ABT's likely failure in Europe would make the Chicago engagement disastrous. Letter, May 18, 1960, Onysko to Chase; Memo, May 20, 1960, NYp ABT Bookings, Folder 3169.
negotiations for the Soviet tour. The panel promised to maintain their support, but reserved the right to cancel in the event:

1) That Nora Kaye would not be available for guest appearances in Russia.
2) That Maria Tallchief's contract is not extended to include the entire Russian tour, or at least through the premiere of the last stand in Russia.
3) That general reports should be unfavorable with reference to the conducting department.
4) That Agnes deMille does not approve of 'Rodeo' and it therefore cannot appear in Russia.27

These conditions were meant to make sure that the company’s former star ballerinas, Nora Kaye and Maria Tallchief, would be performing on the tour, and that Rodeo, perhaps one of the most famous American ballets, would be staged with sufficient accomplishment. They also attempted to remedy the conducting, which was reportedly very bad at the Met performances. The three latter demands were all followed. While Nora Kaye considered joining the company and assisted Tallchief in learning some of her parts, however, in the end she declined to sign the contract to appear in the Soviet Union.28 Nevertheless, the panel never again threatened to revoke the tour.

At the same time that the fallout from Martin’s review threatened the status of ABT’s Soviet tour, the choice of an impresario turned into an unexpected difficulty for the company. Initially, Sol Hurok had expressed interest in conducting the negotiations, but the impresario quickly backed out of the arrangements.29 In his place, the State Department was forced to find a new tour manager who had the necessary Russian language skills and contacts to organize the visit and negotiate the contract with the Soviets. They chose Anatole Heller, a concert organizer who led the Parisian agency Bureau Artistique International.30 Heller and his company had worked with ANTA before,

29 Letter, January 2, 1960, Mr. Reed; Letter, January 28, 1960, from Reed to Charles (probably Payne); Letter, March 25, 1960, Chase to Thayer, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Box 40, Folders 3156 and 3160.
organizing trips for the Cleveland Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic.\textsuperscript{31} Unfortunately, Heller had also worked with ABT in the past and not at all to Chase's liking. Even before the impresario was considered for the Russian part of the 1960 tour, Chase had complained that on a previous trip to Europe Heller had tried to come between the director and her dancers, believing that he could run the company better.\textsuperscript{32} To make matters worse, following Martin's disastrous \textit{New York Times} review, Chase and the rest of the Ballet Theatre staff were convinced that Heller was circulating the bad press around Europe in an attempt to poison their reception.\textsuperscript{33} In his dealings with the ABT staff, Heller was at times dismissive. Charles Payne commented that he thought Heller was impressed by the Russians and "more convinced than ever of the stupidity of Americans and, I would guess, the poor quality of American ballet."\textsuperscript{34}

Despite these fears, Heller did turn out to be a competent negotiator, capable of working with the Soviets, which was important, because in addition to the domestic complications that ABT faced, they also encountered stiff resistance from Goskonsert. The bureau proved strangely reluctant to sign a contract with ABT, despite a binding agreement in which the Soviet Union had promised to host another American group in 1960. Goskonsert's hesitation was likely due in part to financial pressure from their own government. When ABT asked for its invitation in spring 1960, Goskonsert had already used up its 1960 budget, as well as a portion of the 1961 budget, on a very successful tour of \textit{My Fair Lady}.\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, Goskonsert, which had only been founded a few years previously, operated under a directive to ensure the ideological and artistic quality of the groups

\textsuperscript{31} Donald Rosenberg, \textit{The Cleveland Orchestra Story} (Cleveland, OH: Gray and Co.), 286. Anatole Heller Correspondence, New York Philharmonic Digital Archives, Communications/Public Relations, Folder: Bureau Artistique International.

\textsuperscript{32} Letter, January 2, 1960, to Reed from unidentified, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3156.

\textsuperscript{33} Letter, undated, Onysko to Priscilla; Letter, June 21, 1960, Onysko to Chase, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3170 and 3174.

\textsuperscript{34} Letter, July 6, 1960, Payne to Chase, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3176.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
touring in the Soviet Union. The Soviet bureaucrats from Goskontsert, according to Heller's information, felt that European impresarios were passing off inferior attractions on them, and they did not want to be hoodwinked into taking ABT. As time went on, the delay itself became part of the problem in securing Soviet booking. The possibility of arranging for theaters on such short notice in multiple Soviet cities seemed slimmer and slimmer. In the summer of 1960 Heller struggled to pin Goskontsert to a firm contract. He flew back and forth to Moscow for negotiations while ABT conducted their tour of Western Europe. All the while the tour’s September fate hung over their heads. Would they go home, disappointed, or journey on to Moscow? Chase, other ABT managers, and even Heller fretted over the uncertainty of the tour’s future.

Some progress was made in late June, when Goskontsert agreed to accept Ballet Theatre as long as a specialist from the Soviet Union saw and approved them. During the company’s performances in Holland, Alexander Tchitchinadze, a ballet master at the Bolshoi Theater, arrived to observe the company. ABT’s regisseur, Dmitri Romanoff, who spoke Russian, met Tchitchinadze at the theater and accompanied him to his seats. After the evening’s performance, Tchitchinadze sat down with Romanoff to give his opinions on all the ballets. Tchitchinadze felt that *Graduation Ball*, *Les Sylphides*, *Fancy Free*, and both *pas de deux* should be taken to Moscow. Antony Tudor’s *Miss Julie*

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36 Orders of the Ministry of Culture of the USSR relating to the Bolshoi Theater, Part 3, Order No. 590, August 23, 1958, On Regulating Guest Tours - Concert Activities, RGALI f. 648 o. 7 d. 269.

37 Letter, July 6, 1960, Charlie (Payne) to Lucia (Chase), NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3176.


40 Draft telegram, from Chase to Schnitzer, Chase comments that she has seen Heller on his way to Moscow and the impresario is “worried.” Letter from Heller to Chase, July 21, 1960, remarks, “Up to now, unfortunately, I have not received the ‘green light’ from the US Embassy in Moscow, which worries me very much.” Letter Onysko to Chase, August 12, 1960. “We are all anxiously awaiting definite confirmation that our Russian engagement is set. Just as soon as you know, I would appreciate your cabling this information. It would be perfect if this news arrived before the Trustees Meeting on the 23rd.” NYp, ABT Bookings, Folders 3176, 3177, and 3181.

and Agnes de Mille's *Fall River Legend* were not for Russia, according to him, but on balance, Tchitchinadze agreed to recommend the company to Goskontsert. Following Tchitchinadze's favorable report in mid-July, the bureaucratic wheels began to turn again, but another month of stalling once more tried everyone's already frayed nerves. Finally, on August 17, Chase received word that the tour negotiations were complete. She sent a telegram to the Ballet Theatre offices in New York that read: "Contract signed cheers."43

### The Diplomatic Advantage of Mixed Bills

The long process of securing the Soviet tour had a palpable effect on programming choices. Initially, Chase and other ABT advisors hoped to use the trip to introduce Soviet audiences to American choreography, and many saw the ability to do this as the company's primary strength. In a 1956 letter to Virginia Portia Royall Inness-Brown, chairperson of the ANTA dance panel, Alexander C. Ewing, the president of Ballet Theatre Foundation (and Lucia Chase's son), outlined the reasons that ABT should be the first ballet company to tour the Soviet Union. Ewing wrote:

> The Ballet Theatre would be especially welcome because it has the widest existing repertory of ballets conveying the spirit of America. Ballets such as *Billy the Kid*, *Interplay*, *The Fall River Legend*, *Rodeo*, and *Fancy Free* would delight the Russian public which is reputedly half-starved for entertainment and whose ballet diet is restricted, according to recent reports, primarily to the old classical works. And because there is no language barrier in ballet, it would be particularly effective in bringing Russians to understanding and liking Americans.44

John Onysko, ABT’s business manager, argued that presenting American ballets in Russia would “prove that American ballet is creative and not merely imitative … show that American ballet is vital, original and distinctly American in character […] and] present a vivid picture of American life in

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42 Letter, July 8, 1960, Payne to Chase, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3177.

43 Telegram, August 17, 1960, Chase to Ballet Theatre Offices, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3182.

44 Letter, October 17, 1956, Alexander C. Ewing to Inniss-Brown, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3382.
ballets such as ‘Rodeo’, ‘Fancy Free’, ‘Billy the Kid’ and ‘Interplay.’”\(^{45}\) Not only did these early pleas focus on ABT’s impressive American repertoire, they also advertised a specific type of ballet, all populist works by artists born in the United States.

Early on, Lucia Chase, with some support from the ANTA panel, singled out two works from ABT’s large repertoire as particularly promising: *Billy the Kid*, with music by Aaron Copland and choreography by Eugene Loring, and *Fall River Legend*, with music by Morton Gould and choreography by Agnes de Mille. Both pieces had already achieved great critical success on ABT’s tours of Europe. According to a report of the company’s 1950 tour, reviewers in London declared *Fall River Legend* ”the first truly great ballet tragedy.”\(^{46}\) Critics in the Netherlands also singled out *Fall River Legend* as particularly impressive.\(^{47}\) During the summer of 1960, Chase declared to Brady, the Counselor for Cultural Affairs at the American Embassy in Moscow, that ”The Panel feels strongly that [*Fall River Legend*] is one of our most important American works.”\(^{48}\) In almost every draft of programming for the USSR, Chase included both *Fall River Legend* and *Billy the Kid*.\(^{49}\)

The plan to present populist American choreography almost immediately faced resistance, both at home and abroad. The ANTA panel, Chase included, worried that by avoiding standard ballet “classics,” such as *Giselle* or *Swan Lake*, ABT might imply that American dancers were too technically deficient to perform them. Panel members were also nervous that American ballet would seem strange and shabby compared to the lavish spectacles of the Bolshoi Theater.\(^{50}\) Other advisors,

\(^{45}\) Letter, October 15, 1956, Onysko to Schnitzer, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3387.


\(^{47}\) Ibid.

\(^{48}\) Letter, July 8, 1960, Chase to Brady, NYp, ABT, ANTA Folder 3401.

\(^{49}\) “1960 Suggested Programs for Russia”; Mr. Leslie Brady, July 1, 1960, “Suggested Programs for Russia”; Programs for Russia, August 7, 1960, NYp, ABT, Programs, Folder 2465. Letter, July 8, 1960 from Chase to Brady (does not include *Billy the Kid*), NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3401. Documents Shown to Mr. Hurok, January 24, 1960, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3156.

\(^{50}\) ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, December 19, 1957, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3396.
more familiar with the art scene in the Soviet Union, including tour impresario Anatole Heller, Lee Brady of the American Embassy in Moscow, and Alexei Tchitchinadze, specifically urged Chase to cut both *Fall River Legend* and *Billy the Kid* from the schedule.\(^51\) While in Tbilisi, in addition to the company’s public appearances, Chase arranged for her dancers to perform a stripped-down version of *Billy the Kid* for local dance professionals. While the private audience was polite and reportedly liked it, no one wanted ABT to perform the ballet for the general public, and some mentioned that they preferred *Rodeo*.\(^52\)

According to Emily Abrams Ansari, Leonard Bernstein's performances of *Billy the Kid* elicited similarly shocked responses during the New York Philharmonic's 1958 tour to the Soviet Union. During these performances, Bernstein tried to promote peace between the two nations by demonstrating the similarities between Soviet and American music. He performed *Billy the Kid* and Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony no. 7 side by side and gave a speech to the audience about the similarities between the two pieces. However, the Soviets refused to translate Bernstein's concert speech for their audience, reacting badly either to his message or to Copland's music.\(^53\) When ABT was preparing its tour, impresario Anatole Heller explicitly cited the poor official response to "Lenny's" (presumably Bernstein’s) performance as a reason the company should avoid performing *Billy the Kid* in the USSR.\(^54\) Similarly, Hans Tuch of the American Embassy in Moscow, cautioned Chase against performing *Billy the Kid* because of the Soviet reaction to the New York Philharmonic performances.\(^55\)

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\(^{51}\) Letter, July 6, 1960, Payne to Chase; Undated letter answering a letter from July 1, 1960, Tuch to Chase, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folders 3176 and 3177.


\(^{54}\) Letter, July 6, 1960, Payne to Chase, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3176.

\(^{55}\) Letter answering a letter from July 1, 1960, Tuch to Chase, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3177.
The various misgivings about *Billy the Kid* and *Fall River Legend* stemmed from the fact that these ballets violated the conventions of socialist realism, the official aesthetic doctrine of the USSR since the 1930s. Socialist realist ballets were supposed to inspire the audience through the depiction of heroic individuals, as Galina Ulanova did in her portrayals of the courageous Juliet and Giselle. Moreover, Soviet works were supposed to demonstrate that the world was constantly improving, moving through the dialectic struggle into a glorious future. Billy the Kid and Fall River Legend, which show the tragic fate of violent and largely immoral characters, violated both these principles. At Heller’s and Tchitchinadze’s requests, the two ballets were eventually dropped. Despite the many hesitations towards performing these two works in a Soviet context, however, ABT eventually did perform them on their return trip to the USSR in 1966. This time both ballets were received with enthusiasm. Soviet critic Natalia Roslavleva reserved special praise for de Mille’s *Fall River Legend*, remarking that “at its core, the ballet is humane and truthful and national.”

After all the negotiations, ABT presented a rotation of three different programs for its 1960 tour (all ballets are listed with their composer and choreographer):

**Program I:**

*Theme and Variations* - Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, George Balanchine  
*Rodeo* - Aaron Copland, Agnes de Mille  
*pas de deux* from *Swan Lake* Act III (*Black Swan pas de deux*) - Tchaikovsky, Marius Petipa  
*Graduation Ball* - Johann Strauss, David Lichine

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56 A more thorough discussion of socialist realism is found in Richard Taruskin’s *Oxford History of Western Music*, Vol. 4. In general, conventionally tragic endings were permitted as long as they demonstrated how the tragedy affecting the central characters actually improved society as a whole. For an example closer to the time period discussed in this essay, Chernova, a scholar of Soviet ballet, wrote in the 1970s that one particular ballet was a tragedy, "but its tears were nevertheless bright. In the 'hope for glory and good,' the authors of the ballet produced an appeal to the fight for “the realization of a new world order.” Taruskin, *Oxford History of Western Music*, 4:778–780 and 791–796. Chernova, “Ballet 1930-1940s,” 120.


Program II:
*Les Sylphides* - Frederic Chopin, Michel Fokine
*pas de deux* from *Don Quixote* - Ludwig Minkus, Petipa
*Fancy Free* - Leonard Bernstein, Jerome Robbins
*Bluebeard* - Jacques Offenbach, Michel Fokine

Program III:
*Lady from the Sea* - Knudåge Riisager, Birgit Cullberg
*The Combat* - Raffaelo de Banfield, William Dollar
*Jardin aux Lilas* - Ernest Chausson, Antony Tudor
*Theme and Variations* - Tchaikovsky, Balanchine

As Catherine Nepomnyashchy has argued, Chase's final programming provides a mixture of classical Russian and contemporary American works. Every performance contained at least one selection with a Russian score. At least a few dancers showcased 19th-century Russian choreography on the first two programs in the form of the *pas de deux*, and on the second set the company performed an additional Russian classic, *Les Sylphides*. ABT could therefore prove that its dancers were as technically proficient at the balletic canon as their Russian counterparts. The company did not, however, abandon the plan to introduce Soviets to American works. Every night, the group performed ballets created in the United States in the mid-20th century. There was also an unusually high number of comedies; one set contained *Rodeo* and *Graduation Ball* and the second *Fancy Free* and *Bluebeard*.

Program three was startlingly different. There was no traditional Russian choreography and no comedy. The only explicitly virtuosic piece was *Theme and Variations*. Two of the four ballets, *Lady from the Sea* and *Jardin aux Lilas*, were by European artists. *The Combat* was the closest thing to a “representative American work” on the program, with choreography by Russian-American immigrant David Lichine and music by Raffaelo de Banfield, a European neo-classicist. Perhaps because of these differences, the third program was performed only seven times in the entire tour.

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60 *Bluebeard* is a raucous comedy choreographed by Michel Fokine for the company in 1941, and *Graduation Ball* is a farce about a graduation ceremony. Payne, *American Ballet Theatre*, 359, 363.
out of thirty-five total performances. In addition, on the final pass through Moscow, the company performed a modified version of the second program that included *The Combat* in place of *Fancy Free*.

**The Appearances in Russia**

ABT’s first performances in Russia were for demanding audiences. On September 12th, after a few days of practice in the Russian theater, the company staged an open rehearsal for Soviet ballet professionals. The dress rehearsal was followed by a public debut on September 13th at the centrally located Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Academic Musical Theater (Figure 12). Some of the greatest stars of international ballet, including Galina Ulanova and Maya Plisetskaya, were in attendance. Political figures also came to premiere; while the General Secretary himself did not appear, Nikita Khrushchev’s wife was at the performance, as was the American Ambassador to the Soviet Union. Soviet citizens enthusiastically lined up for their first opportunity of seeing American ballet. The opening performance was completely sold out.

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62 Some accounts of Balanchine’s 1962 tour imply that dancing on the Stanislavsky stage was a subtle insult, as it was a less prestigious venue than the Bolshoi theater. Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats*, 60. While NYCB may have regarded the stage in this light, however, ABT had actually campaigned early on to be allowed to perform on this smaller stage. They feared (probably correctly) that the Bolshoi’s cavernous main stage would make their company seem small and their ballets seem awkward. ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, December 19, 1957, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3388.

63 Press Clippings from September 13th, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3183.
Following the premiere, ABT performed two more nights at the Stanislavsky Theater. They then traveled to Tbilisi, Georgia, on September 20th, where they gave another twelve performances at the Tbilisi Opera House, each to a sold-out audience of 2000. Next, the company gave ten performances in Leningrad from October 5th through the 12th at the 2100-seat Theatre of the Cultural Cooperative Center, again to sold out crowds at every performance. From October 15th through the 18th, ABT performed five times in Kiev at the Theater of the Palace of Culture, filling the 3000 seat hall at each performance. Finally, the tour wrapped up with a second appearance in Moscow, this time with five performances at the monumental Lenin Palace of Sports, a stadium that held 12,000 people.64 While in Leningrad and again in Moscow, the company was filmed by Soviet

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64 “Report on European Tour,” NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3187. In addition to noting the seating capacity for all the theaters, the report indicates whether or not the performance was sold out. There is no mention made for the final performances in the Lenin Palace of Sports about how full to capacity the stadium was, presumably not sold out. This gigantic athletics center was a site for the 1980 Summer Olympics.
TV studios for a live television broadcast. Khrushchev himself attended the final performance and afterwards held a private dinner party for the principal dancers and company leadership.

In each of the theaters, the dancers were accompanied by an orchestra of local musicians, led by ABT’s own conductor, Kenneth Schermerhorn. The troop also traveled with assistant conductor, Urey Krasnapolsky, pianist Irving Owen (likely a rehearsal pianist), and three “ringers”: violinist Jan Tomasov, percussionist Michael Colgrass, and trumpeter Fred Mills. Mills and Colgrass were included to bolster the orchestra for the “jazzy” sections of *Fancy Free* and *Rodeo*. The orchestra provided by the Russians was, according to Colgrass, “the smallest third-rate ballet orchestra any of us had ever seen,” because the Bolshoi, the most promising provider of ballet musicians, needed its own instrumentalists for its opera and ballet season, which was going on concurrently. Colgrass recalls Schermerhorn and Krasnapolsky negotiating for the orchestra with Russian officials after an elaborate welcome dinner, during which their hosts had made several toasts with vodka. Moreover, the musicians in the orchestra did not speak English, and Kenneth Schermerhorn, the American conductor, did not speak Russian. Nevertheless, Colgrass does not recall language having been an issue during rehearsals.

All the performers, musicians and dancers alike, faced an intense and stressful six weeks in the Soviet Union, which unfortunately came on the heels of an already exhausting progress through Europe. The American performers conducted themselves under strict rules from both the Soviet and U.S. governments, designed to keep the performers on their best behavior and to limit their

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65 Telegram, October 16; Telegram, October 22, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folders 3186 and 3187. The telegrams guarantee to the company that the performances will be filmed for immediate broadcast, not recorded.

66 Tallchief, *Maria Tallchief*, 266. Lucia Chase Personal Diary, Sunday, October 23, NYp, Lucia Chase Collection, *MGZMD 51 Box 3, Item 45.*

67 List of People on Trip, NYp, ABT, Visas and Passports, Box 40, Folder 3154. Michael Colgrass, *American Composer* (Galesville, MD: Meredith Music Publications, 2010), 105. This was standard practice for the exchange tours. When the Soviet companies came to the United States, they worked with American musicians.


69 Colgrass, Interview with Author, June 19, 2014, Toronto.
access to their surroundings. No American was allowed into the city on their own. Everyone was ferried around on the same bus and had to eat all meals together.\textsuperscript{70} There was a heavy load of pre-arranged sight-seeing for the company when it was not in rehearsal or performance. In addition, the troupe believed itself to be constantly under surveillance. They were accompanied on all outings by a group of government-hired interpreters, who the dancers assumed were reporting back about their activities.\textsuperscript{71} The American State Department advised performers that their hotel rooms in the USSR might be bugged. They were also warned not to sell anything on the black market in communist bloc countries.\textsuperscript{72} More prosaically, the food was very bad, with few vegetables and no fruit. When Colgrass queried one of the translators about the fruit, she replied that there was plenty of it but there had been “a distribution problem.” Kenneth Schermerhorn became sick with a terrible cold.\textsuperscript{73} In a letter composed in Tbilisi, Chase lamented, “We feel far away and completely out of touch.”\textsuperscript{74}

The spirits of company members picked up in Leningrad, where they were received with particular enthusiasm by local audiences. In an ANTA report, Charles Payne noted that the Leningrad audiences “understand the American ballets, laugh in the right places, and applaud enthusiastically (even for Fancy Free).”\textsuperscript{75} Beginning in Leningrad, the troop was also able to perform with a steady orchestra of musicians on loan from the Bolshoi Theater. These musicians played at a higher standard than the previous temporary orchestras. Furthermore, we can only assume that the entire production benefited from a steady pit orchestra that gradually accumulated rehearsal hours

\textsuperscript{70} ABT Important Notice, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3183.

\textsuperscript{71} Tallchief, \textit{Maria Tallchief}, 259–260 and 267. I have not discovered any documents that either confirm or refute the belief that the dancers were under surveillance.

\textsuperscript{72} Colgrass, \textit{American Composer}, 105. This warning included other communist countries that the company visited on the tour, Romania.

\textsuperscript{73} Colgrass, Interview with Author, June 19, 2014, Toronto.

\textsuperscript{74} Letter, September 24, 1962, from Chase to Onysko, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3184.

\textsuperscript{75} Letter, October 8, 1962, from Chase to Thayer, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3188.
with the dancers.\textsuperscript{76} Rules seem to have been relaxed somewhat by the latter half of the trip. In her private journal, Lucia Chase recounted her trips shopping with only a few other members of the company.\textsuperscript{77}

Moreover, despite the grueling performance schedule, unfamiliar invasions of privacy, and homesickness, the performers felt a sense of pride in the work they were accomplishing in the Soviet Union, especially the enormity of proving to the Soviet people that Americans could really dance. Maria Tallchief recalls in her memoirs an instance in which an old woman came up to her on the street in Moscow, handed her a bouquet of flowers, and said “Miss Tallchief, we love you.” Tallchief believed that “Leading an American troupe here was surely the pinnacle of my career.”\textsuperscript{78} Both Tallchief and Colgrass also felt that the tour helped promote goodwill between the two countries, giving them an opportunity to meet real Soviet people and vice-versa.\textsuperscript{79}

While everyone felt that the tour was a success in convincing foreigners of the worth of American dance, attitudes in the Soviet Union had an impact on ABT as well. Some company leaders were impressed with the support they received in the Soviet Union. Possibly they felt the difference between the way they were treated by their own State Department and the way the Soviet ballet companies were treated by their government. ABT’s report to ANTA concludes,

> What impressed us was the importance they give to art, and we were important because of our art. I feel sure America can stand up to any country on its product, but unless the country attaches importance and helps to make ballet survive, we will not have the opportunity to create and hold our place in the cultural world.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{76} Letter, October 10, 1962, from Chase to Onysko, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3186.

\textsuperscript{77} Lucia Chase Personal Diary, 1960, October 21, NYp, Lucia Chase Collection, Box 3, Item 45.

\textsuperscript{78} Tallback, \textit{Maria Tallchief}, 260 and 265.

\textsuperscript{79} Tallback, \textit{Maria Tallchief}. Colgrass, Interview with Author, June 19, 2014, Toronto.

\textsuperscript{80} “Report from 1960,” NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3401.
The tour allowed for a two-way exchange of ideas and values. In his memoirs, Colgrass remarked, “the tour to Leningrad, Kiev and Tbilisi drew big crowds that cheered the company and demanded encores. By the time we finished, we and our hosts had a fresh view of each other’s countries...”

According to both ABT Reports on the tour and critical reviews from the Soviet newspapers, the Soviet audiences applauded enthusiastically for the ABT. The company opened with a good night in Moscow, according to Chase, who telegraphed back to Onysko on September 15, “company marvelous form great success.” In addition to this positive note, the State Department got word back to the United States that ticket sales were “dramatic,” a phrase that Onysko and the rest of the ABT business office spun into wild press reviews across a variety of American papers. In Tbilisi, the reception seems to have been good, if not overwhelming; Chase mentions that the audiences there especially favored Bluebeard, a satirical ballet choreographed by Michel Fokine to the music of Offenbach. When the company reached Leningrad, they received their first real raves. Chase wrote home that it was a “shame there are no correspondents here, we’re such a success.”

Lucia Chase’s programming selections were an overall triumph with critics, though the construction of the diverse programs raised some concerns. The traditional Russian works were by far the most popular; critics were very pleased to have the opportunity to see Michel Fokine’s final ballet, Bluebeard, as well as his ultimate rendering of Les Sylphides, a work that was still performed in the Soviet Union in an earlier version. Not only did they approve of the American performances of Russian classics, the Soviet critics also frequently commented on the surprise of seeing new

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81 Colgrass, American Composer, 111. The anecdote is also about drinking vodka for toasts at the opening ceremony, and the quote ends “- with no small thanks to that clear white liquid.”

82 Telegram, September 15, 1962, from Chase to Onysko, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3183.

83 Letter, September 20, 1962, from Onysko to Chase; Articles from American Press, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3183.

84 Letter, September 24, 1962, from Chase to Onysko, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3184.

85 Letter, October 10, 1962, from Chase to Onysko, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3186.

86 Under the original title Chopiniana.
works on the same program with classical ones. V. Gaevsky remarked that while *Rodeo* should have been at aesthetic odds with its classical parings, in reality “there was no disagreement at all, but rather mutual gain and support.” Other critics were much less favorable on the subject of the diverse programs, including the critic for the magazine *Teatr*, who argued that the combination of such different pieces on the same program demonstrated that the company did not know what direction it should develop, and that such diversity bordered on a lack of principles.

However kind they may have been to their American guests, the Soviet critics at no point conceded that American ballet was as good as their own. Rather, they saw ABT’s trip to Russia as something of a pilgrimage to the ballet’s source, and their success as more proof of the triumph of Russian ballet as an artistic school. Mikhail Gabovich claimed that the troupe had arrived in the “holy place, the Mecca or Medina of the ballet world.” Moreover, the strategic decision to include so many comedic ballets, which was largely the result of jettisoning the more provocative tragedies such as *Billy the Kid* and *Fall River Legend*, was successful in so far as it rendered the company less intimidating and more ideologically acceptable. Nevertheless, it did make American ballet seem somewhat frivolous, a fact that is attested to by the attitude with which the Soviet critics approached the American dancers’ comedic talents. Yeteri Gugushvili perhaps summed up the attitude of the Soviet critics best when he wrote,

*American Ballet Theatre is young. It is all of twenty years old. And this youth is apparent in everything - in its healthy, youthful playfulness and ease of movement.*

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87 Igor’ Smirnov, “Udachi i proschetï,” RGALI f. 2337 o. 2 d. 202, ABT Scrapbook, 82.


90 Mikhail Gabovich, “Amerikanskiy Balet v Moskve,” RGALI f. 2337 o. 2 d. 202, 94. Original Russian: “священным местом, Меккой и мединой для балетных деятелей всего мира.”

And in the technical fine-honing and coherence, with marks the harmonious movement of the *corps de ballet*, and the professional ‘strengths’ of the soloists.92

**The Pas de Deux: Small but Mighty Classics**

Convincing the Soviet critics that an American company included accomplished dancers was one of the tour’s important goals. To this end, most of the heavy lifting was done by a pair of very short works, each no more than ten minutes in length. These were the two *pas de deux*, one excerpted from *Don Quixote*, the other from *Swan Lake*. By performing these highly virtuosic duets, ABT demonstrated that its dancers had technical skills on par with other international stars. Even better, the *pas de deux* established this fact at extremely low production and transportation costs, since the duets were performed with little scenery.

*Swan Lake* and *Don Quixote* had both been choreographed and performed originally at St. Petersburg’s Mariinsky Theater in the late nineteenth-century. *Don Quixote* was choreographed by Marius Petipa to the music of Ludwig Minkus, while *Swan Lake* was choreographed by Petipa and his assistant Lev Ivanov to a score by Tchaikovsky.93 Marius Petipa, himself a French émigré to Russia, controlled the ballet of the Mariinsky Theater for the final thirty years of the 19th century and was credited with introducing a classical style of ballet that married Italian bravura technique with French lyricism.94 The *pas de deux* from both *Don Quixote* and *Swan Lake* were transported through Western Europe to the United States by a variety of Russian émigré dancers. ABT’s version

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92 Yeteri Gugushvili, “*Sporno, no interesno,*” *Zarya Vostoka*, September 22, 1960. Original Russian: “*Американский балетный театр молод. Ему всего двадцать лет. И эта молодость ощущается во всем - и в задорной, юношески игровой легкости движений, и в технической отточенности и слаженности, с которыми отчеканиваются дружные движения кордебалета, и в профессиональной ‘крепости’ солистов.*”

93 *Swan Lake* was originally composed and choreographed for the Bolshoi ballet in Moscow by Julius Riesinger, but this version quickly fell out of the repertory. The version choreographed by Petipa and Ivanov in 1895 for St. Petersburg’s Mariinsky Theater is the production of the ballet that became famous and the basis for performances of companies around the world during the 20th and 21st centuries. Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky’s Ballets*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

of *Swan Lake* had first been staged by English dancer Anton Dolin. Dolin had presumably learned the choreography either from the dancers in Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, with whom he worked in the 1920s, or from Russian ballet master Nicholas Sergeyev. The ABT version of the *Don Quixote* pas de deux had originally been staged by Russian dancer Anatole Oboukhoff. While there may have been some differences between the Soviet versions of these duets and the ABT ones, the overall structure and many of the most virtuosic steps were common to both countries.

When performed in their original ballets, these two pas de deux work as both choreographic and narrative climaxes. As Sally Banes has argued, *pas de deux* form the consummation of a marriage plot in many 19th-century ballets. When performed on their own, however, as they were in the context of the Soviet tour, the *pas de deux* have a very different function, and to an extent even a different look. As excerpted numbers, Petipa’s *pas de deux* are tight works with a highly formalized structure, designed to show off the dancers’ talents. They use repetitive musical and choreographic structures that gradually increase tension with the goal of impressing the audience with the dancers’ virtuosity.

The *pas de deux* from *Don Quixote* and *Swan Lake* begin with an up tempo duet that quickly slows into an *adagio*. In both numbers, the opening section is a brisk waltz, which allows the dancers to begin with quick turns, jumps, and lifts. During the *adagio*, the ballerina, supported by her partner, molds her body into a set of classical poses — long and elegant arabesques, powerful back attitudes, daringly off-balance side extensions. The music provides a stirring and lyrical melody, which in turn helps focus the viewers’ attention on the length of the ballerina’s line and the grace of the two dancers’ movements. In the *pas de deux* from *Swan Lake*, the music for the *adagio* is an extended violin cadenza. The virtuosic solo playing and its extreme Romantic styling heighten the chemistry between the two dancers. The *adagio* is followed by two solo variations, one for each performer. The

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variations can be highly individualized, with the choreography varying from dancer to dancer depending on that person’s strengths. Concluding the pas de deux structure, the two dancers join together onstage for an up tempo coda, the fastest and most stirring moment of the duet.

The two pas de deux chosen for the tour of the Soviet Union are among the most challenging and virtuosic duets in the classical repertory. Furthermore, the combinations of music and dance used in these pas de deux, as in many of Petipa’s creations, are crafted to emphasize the virtuosity of the actions onstage. The dancer often executes a single step multiple times to show off consistency and build up tension and excitement. The music is repetitive to complement the repetitive steps, and it cadences frequently, providing a space for the audience to applaud before the dancers move into their next sequence. Particularly virtuosic steps are often performed at moments of harmonic tension, daring gravity to break the spell and bring the dancer crashing back to earth.

Perhaps there is no greater example of this technique than the coda to the third act pas de deux from Swan Lake, in which the lead ballerina famously executes 32 fouettés, a type of whipped turn that takes an enormous amount of coordination, balance, and physical strength to perform. The music of the coda is in a rondo form; the returning material is a thunderous G major, the B section hangs on a harmonically unstable dominant, while the C material settles in E minor (Example 3). The fouettés begin exactly as the music triumphantly returns to G major for the first time following the B section in the dominant. The build up to the fouettés is usually performed with a molto accelerando. The ballerina’s turns are timed so that her leg whips out exactly on the crashing downbeat of each measure. She continues turning through C section and finishes in an exultant pose as the music cadences in D major, ready for the return. The music primes the audience for awe: the fouettés begin and end at moments of cadence, setting this movement up as satisfying, even triumphant. The brass...
and percussion sections crash along with enthusiasm. The second cadence, and the brief pause that is usually taken at this moment, allow the audience a moment to applaud the dancer.\footnote{A film of the Bolshoi's \textit{Swan Lake} from 1957 starring Maya Plisetskaya shows the orchestra pausing at this location to allow the audience to applaud - although Plisetskaya did a different series of turns in this spot. The tradition continues in Russia today. \textit{Swan Lake} performed by the Bolshoi Ballet, directed for film by Z. Tulubyeva, 1957 (Kultur, 2008).}

Each of these duets takes up a brief ten minutes, making them the shortest two works that ABT performed in the USSR. By including one \textit{pas de deux} in each of the two main programs, however, the company demonstrated that its dancers were masters of balletic technique, capable of performing at the same high standard as the Soviets. Nor was this the first time that the short duets had performed such a function for Ballet Theatre. At the company's performances in London in 1946, \textit{Les Sylphides} and the Black Swan \textit{pas de deux} ensured that audiences and critics considered the company a ballet ensemble rather than, in the words of Charles Payne, “a semiclassical dance company, presenting American musical comedy in pseudo-ballet style.”\footnote{Payne, \textit{American Ballet Theatre}, 144.}

The Soviet critics were generally impressed by the American renditions of Russian classics. Many remarked on the dancers' impeccable training, as demonstrated by their mastery of the \textit{pas de deux}.\footnote{Igor' Smirnov, “Udachi i proschehi,” and Mikhail Gabovich, ”Amerikanskiy balet v Moskve.” N. Volkov, “Pervaya Vstrecha,” \textit{Izvestia}, September 15, 1960. L.S. “20-let Ameriken ballye tietr.” This final author is the only one who had anything negative to say about the \textit{pas de deux}, claiming that they distorted the choreography and that Maria Tallchief was a disappointment.} Erik Bruhn's performance in both was widely recognized as virtuosic in the extreme, and for the most part Lupe Serrano and Maria Tallchief, his partners, were similarly praised for their classical technique. Vera Krasovskaya claimed that Serrano's dance exhibited “true freedom and calm virtuosity.”\footnote{Vera Krasovskaya, “Na spektaklyakh amerikanskogo baleta,” \textit{Leningradskaya Pravda}, October 12, 1960. Original Russian: “В ее танце - подлинная свобода и спокойствие виртуоза.” Yeteri Gugushvili, “Sporno, no interesno,” \textit{Zarya Vostoka}, September 22, 1960. N. Volkov, “Pervoye znakomstvo,” \textit{Izvestiya}, September 15, 1960. L.S. “20-let Ameriken ballye tietr.” This final author is the only one who had anything negative to say about the \textit{pas de deux}, claiming that they distorted the choreography and that Maria Tallchief was a disappointment.} One of the highlights of the tour came in Leningrad during the \textit{Don Quixote pas de deux}, when the applause for Serrano's solo was so overwhelming that she had to perform an encore of her variation. A letter from Lucia Chase to John Onysko describing Serrano's triumph attributed
part of the audience’s excitement to the new orchestra that the company had picked up in Leningrad. Chase wrote that the harpist in the new orchestra knew the *Don Quixote* variation and that it sounded “marvelous.”

ABT’s leading performers of the Black Swan *pas de deux* were Maria Tallchief and Eric Bruhn; the two had worked previously as partners, and Bruhn had helped convince Tallchief to join the Soviet tour. Bruhn and Tallchief had never before performed the Black Swan together, however, and Tallchief had only performed the number about ten times in her life. They worked together during the European part of the tour to perfect their version of the piece. Nevertheless, Tallchief recalled her worries about performing this canonical Russian work in front of a Russian audience:

> I had been worried about doing the pas de deux all along, imagining the Russians saying, ‘Who’s this American dancer? What does she think she’s doing?’

Despite her fears, opening night was a huge success.

> Once Erik and I started dancing, my anxieties subsided. He was sheer perfection. He didn’t make one mistake, and the audience was in ecstasy. His textbook purity and inner dramatic fire was a revelation for the Russians, and they showed it in their applause.

Ulanova and Plisetskaya, the latter of whom was internationally renowned for her *Swan Lake* interpretation, came backstage after the performance to congratulate Tallchief.

Not only were Tallchief and Bruhn stunningly good dancers, probably the best two in the company, but their union onstage in the Soviet Union symbolized ballet company’s overall presentation, blending the company’s American and international profiles. Tallchief, who was born in Fairfax, Oklahoma, was an Osage Indian. Her presence in the cast helped solidify the company as genuinely American, despite its international personnel and repertoire. At one point, when the principals were taken to meet Nikita Khrushchev, each of them was announced to him by

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101 Letter, October 10, 1960, from Chase to Onysko, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3185.

nationality, either by birth or ancestry. Tallchief proudly remembered that she was announced only as “American.” Bruhn was a Danish dancer; while he was a regular performer with Ballet Theatre, he retained his Danish citizenship and performed as a principal dancer with the Danish Royal Ballet as well.

The Tallchief-Bruhn collaboration did not ensure that the ballet company was fully “American.” Instead, their performances of the Black Swan pas de deux helped demonstrate that America was taking an equal part in a cosmopolitan form of high art. The very mingling of stars of different countries suggested that American companies were the focal point of a new world ballet order. This cosmopolitanism did not undercut the United States’ Cold War position; far from it. Instead, the intermingling of dancers from various European and American countries represented the growing alliance among Western elites. The United States’ need to make international alliances during the Cold War, epitomized in the development of NATO, helped foster this sense of international community, a phenomenon film historian Vanessa Schwartz has termed “triumphant Occidentalism.” Just like the French-American film collaborations that Schwartz points to in her book, the ABT’s employment of Danish, Canadian, Brazilian, Iranian, Dutch, Chilean, French, and British dancers symbolized the United States’ new position as a world leader in politics and the arts.

103 Ibid., 266–267.
106 1960 Visas, Passports, inoculations, and Customs; List of People filed with Air France, NYp, ABT, Box 40, Bookings, Folder 3154.
American Populist Ballet and Drambalet

For all the company’s cosmopolitan profile, with its international roster of stars and its presentation of Russian classics, ABT was still in the Soviet Union to show off American dance, and part of that meant showing off American choreography. The two remaining characteristic American works, Rodeo, by Aaron Copland and Agnes de Mille, and Fancy Free, by Leonard Bernstein and Jerome Robbins, presented a picture of American 20th-century choreography based more in the populist styles of the 1930s and 40s than in the abstract neoclassicism made popular by Balanchine and Robbins in the 1950s and 60s. This populist aesthetic was surprisingly reminiscent of the Soviet drambalet, a fact which undoubtedly helped the company through its 1960 performances in the Soviet Union. Soviet critics were particularly impressed with Rodeo, a work that they felt showed off the folk art of the United States. Thus, ironically, the Soviet critics were taken with a style of ballet that they (and their American visitors) believed to be a nationalist American creation, despite the fact that the aesthetic principles of these works were deeply influenced by Russian and Soviet artists of the early-20th century.

The most obvious similarity between Soviet drambaleti and American populist ballets such as Rodeo and Fancy Free was their approach to story and acting. Like drambalet choreographers, de Mille and Robbins preserved the narrative function of 19th-century ballet while rejecting its pantomime.

107 In Russia, ABT also performed one of Balanchine’s works, Theme and Variations, but unlike New York City Ballet, ABT made no effort to present this work as distinctly American. Russian reviews of the tour clearly saw Rodeo and Fancy Free as a distinct category of ballet.

108 See Chapter 1 for a more thorough discussion of the drambalet.

The choreography for *Rodeo* and *Fancy Free* turns natural, everyday gestures into dance, and incorporates more traditional balletic movement into a type of silent acting. For example, in the opening scene of *Fancy Free*, the three sailors purchase beers and play a game of odds and evens to determine which one will pay. Their acting for this section is quite stylized and is often stretched to become a dance movement. For instance, as they turn away from the bar, all three lift their legs behind them and spin around. But there is never a set pantomime in all the acting scenes — unsurprising, as the traditional mime vocabulary did not cover such distinctly quotidian moments as, “Who will pay for this beer?”

De Mille and Robbins each created a unique language of movement for their works that helped give personality and specificity to their characters. In *Rodeo* de Mille developed a new vocabulary for the cowboys: lunges with both hands shooting forward and corkscrewing jumps combined with a lassoing motions in the arms. The cowboys’ default position is to squat slightly with their legs spread out and their arms raised to shoulder height, a danced approximation of horse riding. This set of steps has its basis in classical ballet: the cowboys essentially rest in a modified second-position *demi plié*, but the new movement tells a story. Despite the emphasis on continuously danced acting, *Rodeo* and *Fancy Free*, like many drambaleti, include a few dances in places where they naturally occur in real life - diegetic dancing. *Rodeo* has two such diegetic dance numbers in the second act, the Saturday Night Waltz and the Hoe-Down, both of which are social dances that take place at the party. Likewise, *Fancy Free* includes four diegetic dances: a duet in the first act and three solos in the second act.

In order to accommodate a complex narrative conveyed by continuous danced acting, the scores to *Fancy Free* and *Rodeo* are fairly loose in form, propelled by dramatic action, much like

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110 The 19th-century ballets included something like this stylized acting, but much of the dialogue was symbolized directly by a standardized pantomime language. For instance, to say someone is beautiful, a dancer moves his hand in a circular gesture over his face, and then smiles or makes a kissing gesture. To mention marriage, a dancer points at her ring finger.
Prokofiev’s music for *Romeo and Juliet*. Soviet Dance historian Bodgdanov-Berezovsky, in a 1952 volume on Galina Ulanova, claimed that one of the most important developments of Russian ballet in the late-19th and early-20th centuries was the creation of a music that was designed for psychological development, that had a “dramatic unity” created for interpretation by plastic image onstage.\(^\text{111}\) The scores by Bernstein and Copland for *Fancy Free* and *Rodeo* are similarly crafted for dramatic development onstage. In certain scenes, especially those with a great deal of narrative material, the composers string together multiple short themes, each one reflecting the onstage action for that moment. Copland’s opening scene for *Rodeo* stands as an example (Table 2). The form of the music matches perfectly with the action onstage. Almost every change in melody is reflected in a change either in performing forces onstage, in the introduction of a new character, or in a narrative shift. Like the scores to many *drambaleti*, then, the music for *Rodeo* and *Fancy Free* is structured much more similarly to a through-composed opera than to a 19th-century ballet or to the ballets typical of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes.

Table 2. Form Chart for Copland and de Mille, *Rodeo*, “Buckaroo Holiday”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rehearsal Numbers</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Harmony</th>
<th>Action Onstage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening - 5</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>C with some Bb and Ab</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C to F to Eb to Ab</td>
<td>Background cowboy solo, cowboys leave for work, Cowgirl forced to stay behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-11</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>vaguely C minor</td>
<td>Cowgirl prepares for solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-13</td>
<td>Static, plodding music</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td>Cowgirl solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Ab major, with hints of F minor</td>
<td>Cowboys charge onstage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>unstable harmony</td>
<td>Cowboys dance (second group enters) - this choreographically is same section as previous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-26</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Db major to D major</td>
<td>Cowgirl makes entrance on plodding figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-29</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Eb major</td>
<td>Group cowboys perform for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-30</td>
<td>D in canon</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td>Entrance of Cowgirl, out of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>Women mock Cowgirl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Head Wrangler escorts Ranch-owner’s Daughter across stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34-36</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>D major</td>
<td>Cowboys dance, Cowgirl enters, out of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-37</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Unstable</td>
<td>Cowgirl is stopped by Head wrangler and Champion Roper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37-42</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F Major, common tone modulation to F</td>
<td>Cowboys dance in circle - Cowgirl comes on again, disrupts and is sent away in pause at 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42-43</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E major</td>
<td>Cowboys dance together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>E major</td>
<td>Cowboys ride off</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perhaps even more fundamental than their shared approach to dramatic structure, the American populist ballets shared with Soviet *drambalet* a common emphasis on folk art. By the end of the 1930s, nationalism and its relative, exoticism, had become a fundamental aspect of the Soviet aesthetic style.\(^{112}\) Soviet choreographers and composers were frequently applauded for incorporating folk art into their ballets. Sometimes these folk quotations were nationalistic — as with Khachaturian’s ostensibly folk-inspired scores — but other times they simply evoked a particular time and place for the setting of the ballet. For instance, musicologist and composer Boris Asafyev used his knowledge of the 18th century to craft a period-appropriate score for the 1932 work *The Flames of Paris*, which takes place in the midst of the French Revolution. His collaborator, choreographer Vasily Vainonen, set this music using French folk dancing for the working-class characters and traditional ballet steps for the aristocrats.\(^{113}\)

The original program notes for *Fancy Free* stated simply, “The ballet concerns three sailors on shore leave. Time: The present, a hot summer night. Place: New York City, a side street.”\(^{114}\) With similarly terse strokes, the ballet’s score and choreography evoke that exact time and place, New York City in the mid 1940s (the era when the ballet was first premiered). Like Asafyev and Vainonen in *Flames of Paris*, Robbins and Bernstein sought to ground their work in a definite time and place, creating for *Fancy Free* what Carol Oja calls a “here and now” aesthetic.\(^{115}\) At the time of the ballet’s creation, Robbins was very interested in choreographing a work that would depict contemporary New York. His notes about possible ballet scenarios from the early 1940s are filled with scenes from


\(^{114}\) *Fancy Free*, Playbill, 1944, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 2289.

the New York cityscapes — brownstones, Harlem, parties, even one scene set at a ballet audition. In *Fancy Free*, Oliver Smith’s set, a seedy bar behind which one can see the lights of New York, evokes the requisite place; moreover, the music and dance also incorporate jazz and popular idioms characteristic of New York in the 1940s. Bernstein’s score is steeped in a jazz; the ballet opens with "Big Stuff," a blues written by Bernstein. Likewise, Robbins introduces elements from jazz and stage dancing into his choreography, including heel clicks, over-the-tops, and cartwheels.

*Rodeo* is also meant to evoke a specific time and place, albeit a more nostalgic one: Texas around 1900. De Mille includes numerous folk quotations; at one point eight dancers perform a square dance, accompanied only by onstage clapping and dance calls. Elsewhere, de Mille’s hero and heroine, the Champion Roper and the Cowgirl, distinguish themselves from their peers by incorporating tap dance into their movements. Tap dance was a dance form that developed out of African and Irish interactions on the American east coast, and thus is utterly alien to de Mille’s setting in a whitewashed 20th-century Texas. Nevertheless, its status as an American folk art helped bolster *Rodeo*’s claims as a nationalist ballet, under the exoticist, essentialising rubric of nationalism common to both the populist American style of the 1930s and 40s and to Stalinist-era socialist realism.

Similarly, Copland’s score for *Rodeo*, as the composer acknowledged in the notes to the piano reduction, drew some of its themes from Ruth Crawford Seeger and John A. and Alan Lomaxes’ *Our Singing Country* and Ira Ford’s *Traditional Music of America*. The opening scene of *Rodeo* contains a number of original melodies, as well as two themes draws from the folk songs “Sis Joe” and “If he’d be a buckaroo by his trade.” Both songs are quoted in full, and as Copland mentions, “The rhythmic

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oddities of ‘Sis Joe’ provided rich material for reworking.” In the version of the song published by Seeger and the Lomaxes, the chorus to ‘Sis Joe’ consists of four short bursts of music, each on the upbeat leading to the downbeat, with one or two beats of silence between each one. In quoting “Sis Joe” and “If he’d be a buckaroo,” Copland usually leaves in the rhythms produced by syllabic singing; where the singer would perform two or more syllables on the same note, Copland writes repeated articulations for his instrumentalists.

As Elizabeth Crist, Barbara Zuck, and Emily Abrams Ansari have argued, the populist American aesthetic formed during the 1930s, particularly through Aaron Copland’s music, bore certain undeniably similarities to Soviet music of the same period. Zuck and Crist, along with Howard Pollack and Richard Taruskin, have hypothesized that the leftist politics of Copland and his fellow populist composers may have propelled them to mimic Soviet music. Ansari argues that the common purpose of the Soviet and populist American schools, that is creating music that was broadly appealing to a wide audience, fostered the similarity in methodology. Thus, *Fancy Free* and *Rodeo* may have born similarities to the Soviet *drambaleti* because of a shared sense political foundation. To some degree, this is reflected in the heroes of the two ballets, who are everyday people — cowboys in *Rodeo* and sailors in *Fancy Free* — an element that resonated with Soviet aesthetic ideologies. However, *Fancy Free* and *Rodeo* were both created in the 1940s, an era in which American populism had turned to blatant nostalgia and patriotism. As such, they also used folk

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121 Ansari, “Masters of the President’s Music,” 229–234.
music in nationalist sense, an emotion which they could hardly have hoped to appeal to in their Soviet audience.

While politics may have played some hand in creating the similarities between the American populist style of ballet in the 1930s and 40s and the Soviet drambaleti, the two schools also shared an immediate heritage in early 20th-century modernist ballet, particularly related to the teachings of actor-director Konstantin Stanislavski. Mikhail Mordkin, the Russian dancer-choreographer who would go on to found Ballet Theatre, had collaborated with Stanislavski before he left Moscow. Mordkin was invited by Stanislavski to teach movement to his actors. In the United States, Mordkin taught and collaborated with both Lucia Chase and Jerome Robbins. His knowledge of the Stanislavskian methods and his interest in narrative ballet probably helped direct the company towards producing works like Rodeo, Fancy Free, and Billy the Kid.

Mikhail Fokine was another Russian choreographer who may have provided a link between Stanislavski and the American choreographers. As Lynn Garafola has discussed, Fokine drew inspiration from the Russian theater director in creating his dramatic innovations for the ballet. Fokine began his work in the Russian Imperial theaters in the early 20th century, where was seen by later Soviet dancers and choreographers, and ended his career as a choreographer for ABT in the 1940s, where Jerome Robbins and Agnes de Mille were familiar with his work. This connection between the American choreographers and the Russian Stanislavskian heritage was apparent to Soviet critics. In the later 1960s, Soviet critic Natalia Roslavleva wrote to de Mille, telling her “If ever there was choreography according to Stanislavsky’s method, yours is.” Even the reliance on folk music and dance may have been more the result of shared modernist heritage than shared politics.

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122 For more information on Stanislavski’s impact on the drambaleti, see chapter 1.
125 Letter, October 26, 1967, from Roslavleva to De Mille, RGALI f. 2966 o. 1 d. 118.
Morris Dickstein has suggested that Copland’s Americanist quotations also derive from an anthropological impulse experienced by modernist artists in the 1920s.\(^{126}\)

Of course, ABT’s narrative repertoire had other sources and influences that were not Russian. In particular, English choreographer Antony Tudor worked regularly for ABT during the first decade of the company’s existence. His ballets provided one of the backbones of Ballet Theatre’s repertory, and the choreographer had a particularly close relationship to de Mille.\(^{127}\) Moreover, both Jerome Robbins and Agnes de Mille would go on to spend a considerable portion of their careers working on the Broadway stage, and that influence as well can be seen on *Fancy Free* and *Rodeo*, probably playing a role in the naturalistic, populist styling of the two works.\(^{128}\)

Nevertheless, the influence of Fokine, Mordkin, and through them Stanislavski, on the early American ballet was palpably felt in *Rodeo* and *Fancy Free*.

Ironically then, because of the many elements that *Rodeo* and *Fancy Free* shared with *drambaleti*, because they were speaking in a common language of exoticist nationalism, the Soviet critics accepted these works as demonstrations of a uniquely American style of choreography.\(^ {129}\) Gaevsky remarked “The ballets are interesting in that their authors emphatically cast aside traditional themes and traditional choreographic language, attempting to give the ballet production a specifically American color.”\(^{130}\) In general, the critics were much more favorable about *Rodeo* than *Fancy Free*,

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\(^{130}\) Gayevsky, “Klassika prikhodit na pomoshch.” Original Russian: “Балеты любопытны тем, что авторы их решительно порывают с традиционной тематикой и традиционным хореографическим языком, стремясь придать балетному спектаклю специфически американский колорит.”
perhaps because the latter skirted some of the same issues of propriety as *Fall River Legend* and *Billy the Kid*. While the main characters in *Fancy Free* are no criminals, the ballet is unapologetic about their pursuit of one-night stands. Mikhail Gabovich called the women in the ballet “dubious” though he noted with approval that Robbins had avoided “open sex” in the production. Undoubtedly, it was this negative press that convinced ABT to replace *Fancy Free* with the much more popular *The Combat* in its last performances in Moscow. Moreover, *Rodeo* paraded a type of pastoral Americanness that perhaps fit better with Soviet conceptions of essentialized national identity than *Fancy Free*. Dance historian and critic Vera Krasovskaya, writing in Leningrad, applauded the expressive depiction of the characters in de Mille’s work as well as the use of folk art in the square dancing section. Nevertheless, many critics had a good word even for *Fancy Free*. Natalia Roslavleva claimed that it was full of “energy” and Mikhail Gabovich praised its “lively humor.” Most promising in favor of both ballets, however, was not any one comment, but rather that the reviewers almost unanimously described the two American works as “contemporary” (современный) rather than as “modern” (модерный).

**Collaboration with Chabukiani and Masculinity**

The similarities between the ABT and Soviet styles of ballet moved beyond the purely choreographic and into performance technique, a fact revealed by the brief story of the collaboration between ABT and the Soviet dancer Vakhtang Chabukiani. Lucia Chase hoped to use

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134 Soviet critics used the word sovremennïy to describe Soviet ballet in a positive way and modernïy to describe Western art negatively. For more on this, see chapter 1. Mikhail Gabovich, “Amerikanskiy Balet v Moskve.” Roslavleva also refers to *Fancy Free* as such in one of her review drafts. Roslavleva Articles 1960-1961, RGALI f. 2966 o. 1 d. 15.
the company’s time in the Soviet Union to the best possible effect. This included, in her plans, acquiring a new ballet while in Russia. As early as June, long before the tour was secured, Chase expressed her intent to pick up the Bolshoi version of *Giselle* while the company was in the Soviet Union.\(^{135}\) While the troupe was performing in Tbilisi, she hired Chabukiani to train the company in his version of the ballet. The first rehearsals went well, and preliminary plans were made to fly the choreographer to the United States to finish training the company in his production and star as Albrecht in the first performances.\(^{136}\) As far as I can tell, however, these plans never materialized.

This brief, and ultimately unsuccessful, attempt at collaboration provides a unique insight into Ballet Theatre’s aesthetic. Today, Chabukiani is remembered primarily for the men’s variations that he choreographed for such ballet classics as *La Bayadère*, *Le Corsaire*, *Swan Lake*, and other works. Chabukiani’s variations were filled with huge jumps, often combined with difficult acrobatic contortions in the air.\(^{137}\) His dancing was not merely technically proficient but also possessed a masculine allure that Maria Tallchief noted in her memoirs: “I had heard of him for years. Renowned not only for his phenomenal technique but because of his fabulous presence, he had a sex appeal - there was no denying it, with his smouldering eyes and pouting smile - that came across onstage.”\(^{138}\) One of Chabukiani’s most famous roles was as the original Jerome, one of the principal characters in *The Flames of Paris*. Jerome, a worker hero of the French revolution, is notable for his aggressively flamboyant trick steps; in the coda of his *pas de deux*, Jerome jumps high into the air, after which he falls into a kneeling position on the ground and leans back; the physical prowess and

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\(^{135}\) Letter, June 9, 1960, from Chase to Onysko, NYp, ABT, Bookings, Folder 3172.


\(^{138}\) Tallchief, *Maria Tallchief*, 263. Tallchief also compares Chabukiani to Rudolf Nureyev, another dancer known for his incredible sex appeal on stage.
huge space conquered by this step are echoed in the exaggeratedly militaristic brass music, complete
with cymbal crashes.\footnote{Choreographic analysis from a 1953 video of \textit{Flames of Paris} starring Chabukiani. Presumably, when he originated the role during the height of his physical prowess in 1932, the jumps were even more impressive. \textit{Flames of Paris} starring Chabukiani, posted on youtube, accessed, November 5, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7736Go1uNw.}

Chabukiani’s manner of dancing was not so different from the male style of performance at ABT in 1960. One Soviet reviewer, Mikhail Gabovich, specifically lauded the men of ABT for their masculine way of dancing. He juxtaposed this masculine quality with a style of “androgynous” movement popularized in the West by Serge Lifar.\footnote{Lifar was one of the last stars of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. Following Diaghilev’s death, he began working for the Paris Opera Ballet, where he choreographed more than 50 works. The Paris Opera Ballet was the only Western company to perform in the Soviet Union before ABT, so Lifar was a major point of comparison for Soviet critics seeing American choreography for the first time.} The critic cited Eric Bruhn as the best and most masculine of the ABT stars, but also pointed out that Royce Fernandez, John Kriza and Scott Douglas were similarly free from the “crippling, anti-art influence” of European mannerisms.\footnote{Gabovich, “Amerikanskii Ballet v Moskve.” Original Russian: “калечащего мужской танец антихудожественного явления”} In the opening two Moscow performances, where Gabovich saw the troupe, Kriza and Douglas played the lead roles in \textit{Fancy Free, Graduation Ball, Les Sylphides,} and \textit{Rodeo,} so it is possible that the reviewer noted this masculinity quality in the populist American works.

\textit{Rodeo} and \textit{Fancy Free} each paints its own picture of rugged masculinity, with every-day heroes performing broad jumps and spins to heavy brass music, not unlike Jerome in \textit{Flames of Paris.}

Perhaps the section of \textit{Fancy Free} that best demonstrates the sailors' exaggerated masculinity is the set of three solos in the second half of the work. At this moment, the three sailors and their two female companions are seated at a table in a bar. One by one, the sailors perform a dance to impress the other four characters. The first solo is energetic and over-the-top. The number is taken at an immense clip, with heavy percussion emphasizing almost every beat. In the second half of the number, the percussion switches to the upbeats, pushing the tempo along with even more drive.
Over these pounding drums are layered trumpet and trombone solos, which are periodically interrupted by brass fanfares. Onstage, the sailor wildly drinks two beers, performs forward summersaults, and dances on top of the bar. Finally, he jumps off the bar onto the stage, flying through the air with both legs splayed outward. His athletic jumps and musical vigor are absurd, but they also speak, in balletic terms, of his sincere physical prowess. Moreover, they remind the viewer of a younger Chabukiani, who also flew through the air to the pounding of the drums and the fanfare of trumpets.

Conclusions

When ANTA first began considering an American ballet tour of the Soviet Union, it was a frightening concept; almost everyone on the panel assumed that Russian dancers were inherently better than American ones, and that even if this were not the case, the state-controlled press would condemn American dancing for political expediency. In the spring and summer of 1960, anyone following ballet news was well within their rights to expect just such a massacre, if they even believed that the Soviets would agree to let ABT perform at all.

It was to almost everyone’s surprise then, and to ABT’s great delight, that Soviet audiences were accepting and enthusiastic about their foreign visitors. On Chase’s last day in Moscow, following the final performance and the surprise dinner party with Khrushchev, she arrived back at the hotel to find a gathering of her dancers, who sang in her honor “For she’s a jolly good fellow.” Chase concluded her journal entry for the day:

What an eve! The tour has been fantastic and a really enormous success here - far more than I ever dreamed. Our corps has amazed them and boy, am I proud of them they've all done a marvelous job and I pray we can keep them going. What a finale!  

142 Lucia Chase Personal Diary, 1960, Sunday, October 23, NYp, Lucia Chase Collection, Box 3, Item 45.
In order to achieve this startling result, Lucia Chase had crafted a set of programs carefully designed with the help of every artistic and political advisor available to her. While Chase originally planned to present exclusively American choreography, the Soviet programs balanced that American choreography with traditional Russian ballet works. They also performed American works that had a number of similarities with Soviet _drambalet_— inclusion of popular or folk music, blending of acting and dancing, and a more brash masculine style. As a first foray into the world of Soviet ballet, ABT’s tour was not edgy, politically questionable, or pushing any aesthetic boundaries. On the other hand, it was amazingly, surprisingly successful in demonstrating that American ballet could hold its own in the ballet capital of the world.
Chapter 3

A Question of Taste:

The Bolshoi Ballet’s 1962 Tour of the United States

The first three years of exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union were marked by a series of stunning successes. American audiences welcomed the Bolshoi Ballet and its fellow Soviet dance companies – the Kirov, the Moiseyev, and the Beryozka – with open arms. Soviet viewers likewise met American Ballet Theatre with sympathy and applause, and the American symphony orchestras that toured fared equally well or better.¹ It seemed as though nothing could stop cultural exchange. It hardly surprised anyone, then, that in 1961, representatives from the United States and the Soviet Union signed a second renewal of the Lacy-Zarubin agreement. The renewal encompassed a wide variety of cultural activities, but one of the centerpieces on the Soviet side, yet again, was a tour by the Bolshoi Ballet.²

When the Bolshoi appeared in the United States in the fall of 1962, however, the diplomatic relationship between the world’s two superpowers had measurably worsened. In October of 1962, while the Bolshoi Ballet was performing in California, the Cuban Missile Crisis rocked the unsteady relationship, and the company found itself in a much more precarious political position than it had previously faced. American audiences were constantly aware of the crisis; the same newspapers that covered the Bolshoi’s tour ran dire headlines about missiles in Cuba. As Harry MacArthur wrote in the Evening Star on November 14, “There still is a sort of Alice-in-Wonderland quality about an evening of this much fun with the Russians, the way things are in the world.”³

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¹ On the success of American orchestras: Emily Abrams Ansari, “Masters of the President’s Music,” (PhD Diss, Harvard University, 2009), 63.

² “USSR Attractions to US under Exchange Agreement,” ABECA, Box 50, Folder 75.

Diplomatically, the tour was a rousing and encouraging success in the midst of the Missile Crisis. For the most part, American audiences continued to applaud warmly for the Bolshoi, the President of the United States appeared at one of the company’s performances of *Swan Lake*, and American newspapers across the country reported stories of friendly personal interactions between dancers and fans. In terms of its artistic reception, however, the tour was a disappointment. The company pursued the same artistic agenda in 1962 that it had in 1959, a combination of 19th-century classics and Soviet-era ballets headlined by internationally popular composer Aram Khachaturian. However, this time the strategy was noticeably less effective. Khachaturian’s *Spartacus*, with choreography by Leonid Yakobson, was a disaster with both American critics and American audiences. On opening night at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, the audiences booed the new production. Newspaper critics compared *Spartacus* unfavorably to epic Hollywood films. American reviewers were also cooler towards the Bolshoi’s classical repertoire than they had been in 1959, particularly towards the company’s performances of *Swan Lake*.

In their critiques, many American critics mentioned that they were disappointed in the Bolshoi’s lack of taste, indicating that the issues they had with the Soviet company revolved around the group’s cultural capital or lack thereof. The Bolshoi’s American audiences, particularly in New York and Los Angeles, were composed largely of economic and cultural elites, a fact that influenced perceptions of what the company was supposed to offer its audiences. To many Americans, the Bolshoi could show good taste either by displaying their imperial Russian inheritance or by following New York trends. The one critical success that the Bolshoi had during its 1962 tour was *Ballet School*. Choreographed by Asaf Messerer to a mélange of Russian and Soviet light music, the short ballet ostensibly demonstrated the hard work necessary to transform a child dancer into a star of the Bolshoi Theater. The work drew on tropes from other practice-clothes ballets, such George Balanchine’s black-and-white ballets and Harold Lander’s *Études*. *Ballet School* appeared to some American critics as a demonstration that Soviet choreographers had finally abandoned their previous
aesthetics in favor of better, modernist American ones. Other critics praised the work for its success in showing off the stunning virtuosity of the Bolshoi’s dancers. Ballet School demonstrates, again, the difficulty with declaring victories and defeats for the cultural Cold War. Its seeming capitulation to American styles of ballet did little to convince Americans of the superiority of Soviet culture. Diplomatically, however, its very opaqueness served the company well. The seeming compromise that the ballet created between Soviet and American aesthetics matched the more productive truce that the two countries reached at the end of the Cuban Missile Crisis. However, the underlying tensions between Soviet and American understanding of the ballet betrayed deeper conflicts that the cultural exchange did not resolve.

**Negotiating the 1962 Exchange**

The American and Soviet governments did not institute cultural exchange in perpetuity when they started the program in 1958. Rather, they renegotiated the exchange every few years to encompass a set number of people and organizations for a very limited period, often two years at a time. This meant that the status of cultural exchange between the Soviet Union and the United States was in constant flux, and its very existence was a delicate thing. This was particularly apparent in the lead up to the 1962–63 exchange, which was fiercely negotiated in February of 1962 by representatives of the Soviet Ministry of Culture and State Committee for Cultural Ties (GKKS) and officials from the American State Department.4

American diplomats were determined, finally, to achieve full reciprocity in the tours. Officials at the American State Department felt that over the course of the previous two agreements, their country had been getting the shorter end of the exchange, and they were determined to fix this

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4 Nigel Gould-Davies outlines the succession of Soviet committees and organizations that oversaw the cultural exchanges. The GKKS was established in 1957 essentially to function as an arm of the Central Committee of the Communist party, though its leader, Zhukov, complained that it was being treated as (in Gould-Davies’s words) “a mere state organ.” GKKS operated until 1967, when it was replaced by a new Department of Cultural Relations within the Foreign Ministry. Gould-Davies, “The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy,” 206.
problem with the 1962–63 agreement. Under the previous exchanges, Soviet groups such as the Bolshoi had toured for many months in a diverse array of American cities, while American groups had only been given access to four or five Soviet cities and consequently had both shorter performance schedules and restricted contact with the Soviet population. In addition to their concerns about reaching Soviet audiences, the State Department was worried about domestic American opposition to cultural exchange. Local and state groups within the United States were increasingly voicing hostility towards engaging in cultural diplomacy with the Soviets, and the State Department was nervous about the potential reaction to yet another uneven exchange.5

Throughout the negotiations, American officials felt that their position was being undermined by Sol Hurok’s private agreements with the Soviet government. In August of 1961, State Department officials yet again tried to convince Hurok to consult the American government’s interests, particularly the importance of reciprocity, before concluding his personal negotiations with Soviet officials.6 Despite these attempts, in the fall of 1961, Hurok traveled to Moscow to organize contracts and performances for the Bolshoi and Ukrainian Dance Ensemble without approval from the State Department.7 During the official negotiations, American diplomats Max Isenbergh, Frank G. Siscoe, Jack R. Perry, and Guy Coridon tried to pressure the Soviets into giving their tour groups longer schedules in a wider range of cities.8 In response, the Soviet negotiators, Slavnov and Volsky, pointed out the fact that Hurok and other American impresarios, not the Soviet Ministry of Culture, set the tour schedule for Soviet groups in the United States. They claimed, correspondingly, that it was an internal Soviet matter what cities the American groups could visit within the USSR.9

5 Memo to Bohlen from Frank G. Siscoe, August 18, 1961; Memo from William H. Tyler to Mr. Johnson (marked urgent), undated but discusses negotiations for 1961 tours, ABEC, Box 50, Folder 75.
6 Memo to Bohlen from Frank G. Siscoe, August 18, 1961, ABEC, Box 50, Folder 75.
7 Letter from Sol Hurok to Max Eisenberg, Department of State, October 27, 1961, ABEC, Box 50, Folder 75.
8 Memo of Conversation, February 6, 1962; Memo of Conversation, February 9, 1962, ABEC, Box 50, Folder 75.
9 Memo of Conversation, February 5, 1962; Memo of Conversation February 6, 1962 ABEC, Box 50, Folder 75.
also, on occasion, exerted direct pressure on the American government. When the State Department threatened to refuse the Ukrainian Folk Dance Ensemble entry into the United States, Hurok wrote back telling them that if they did, he would report it to the American press.\(^{10}\)

At the heart of these arguments lay the undeniable fact that American tours in the Soviet Union lost money while Soviet tours in the United States made money. American audiences were happy to pay Hurok’s high prices for Bolshoi tickets.\(^{11}\) Moreover, while Hurok paid the performers, they were expected to turn over whatever remained of their salaries when they returned to the USSR.\(^{12}\) Meanwhile, American dancers were able to keep their salaries, which were paid with funds provided in part by the State Department, with some small help from Goskonserts and the ballet company itself.\(^{13}\) The fact that American groups lost money on tours and Soviet groups gained money clearly rankled American diplomats, both as a matter of pride and of practicalities. Because the American tours cost so much, it was difficult to achieve parity with the Soviet tours. Sol Hurok was willing to schedule long, multi-city tours for the Soviet ballet companies, while the Soviet government was both unwilling to help finance long tours by the Americans and delighted if that meant that American dancers would spend less time performing in the Soviet Union.\(^{14}\)

Eventually, the Soviet Ministry of Culture and American State Department worked out an agreement in which three Soviet ensembles — the Bolshoi Ballet, the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra and the Ukrainian Dance Ensemble — would be exchanged directly for three American ensembles — the New York City Ballet, the Robert Shaw Chorale, and the Benny Goodman Record of Conversation between Hurok and Zhukov, March 1, 1962, RGALI f. 2329 o. 8 d. 2308 l. 3.

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10 Record of Conversation between Hurok and Zhukov, March 1, 1962, RGALI f. 2329 o. 8 d. 2308 l. 3.


12 Plisetskaya, I, Maya Plisetskaya, 206–217.

13 Estimated Weekly Budget of Expenses for Tour, including Europe and Russia; Letter from Onysko to E.B. Carter at ANTA, April 22, 1960; Letter, Onysko to Carter, December 2, 1960, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folders 3397 and 3404.

14 Memos of Conversations, February 5, February 6, and February 9, 1962, ABECA, Box 50, Folder 75.
Orchestra. Thus, the Bolshoi Ballet arrived in New York on September 1, 1962, and opened at the Metropolitan Opera on September 7, while the New York City Ballet opened in Moscow a month later, on October 9. It was thought that, by pairing the attractions in this way, it would be easier to make sure that they were of similar duration and scope, though practice continued to favor the Soviets. The touring schedule for 1962 would bring the Soviet company to an even greater number of cities than its previous trip had: New York, Los Angeles, Cleveland, San Francisco, Washington, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Boston.

**The Cuban Missile Crisis**

The constantly worsening relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union provided a frosty background to the 1962–63 exchange negotiations and to the Bolshoi’s second tour. Tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union had grown increasingly worse during the early 1960s. The two countries struggled over the continuing division of Berlin and the absence of a formal peace treaty with Germany, a situation that came to a head in 1961 with the construction of the Berlin Wall. On one occasion, a State department official worried that possible cancellation of an exchange tour would negatively impact “the Berlin Situation.”

During the early 1960s, the two countries also clashed over influence in Vietnam and in the newly independent Cuba. In May 1960, Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro concluded an economic agreement with the Soviet bloc, the first time any country in the Western hemisphere had taken such a step. In October of 1962, following repeated attempts by the American government to destabilize Castro’s new

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15 Memo to Isenbergh from Coridon, March 8, 1962, ABEC, Box 50, Folder 75.
16 Memo to Max Isenbergh from Alfred v. Boerner, January 4, 1962, ABEC, Box 50, Folder 75.
18 On one occasion, a State Department official wrote in a memo that the Soviets might cancel the Leningrad tour, which would have unfortunate repercussions against the background of the “Berlin Situation.” Memo of Conversation, August 30, 1961, Ralph A. Jones and George Perper, ABEC, Box 50, Folder 75.
government, Khrushchev attempted to secure his ally in Cuba by placing nuclear missiles there. The United States government found out about the incoming missiles on October 14, and Kennedy decided to set up a naval blockade of the island. When the president informed the American populace about the nuclear missiles and the blockade, there was widespread anxiety and even panic across the country. After two weeks of intense and aggressive talks, American and Soviet diplomats reached an agreement for the removal of the missiles in Cuba in exchange for a public promise from the Americans not to invade Cuba and a secret promise to dismantle the United States’ Jupiter IRBMs in Turkey.19

In the midst of the intense fear caused by the Cuban Missile Crisis, the success of the ballet exchange alleviated some concerns about Soviet-American relations. Newspapers in the United States and the Soviet Union treated the Bolshoi and New York City Ballet tours as a kind of weather balloon, arguing that loud applause from local audiences could signal an end to hostilities. The Washington Post, Times Herald ran an article on the exchange titled “Harbingers of Hope,” and Harry MacArthur wrote in the Evening Star, “It is reassuring, in view of the events and tensions of recent weeks, to have the Bolshoi Ballet with us once again. Down here at the across-the-footlights level, which is somewhat lower than, but possibly as important as, the exchange of diplomatic-notes level, the rapport between Russians and Americans is splendid.”20 Similar sentiment was felt in the Soviet Union as well. In the months following the Bolshoi’s tour to the United States, Sovetskaya kultura published an article explaining the importance of cultural exchange. The article cited the Bolshoi’s performances during the Cuban Missile Crisis, writing “In spite of the fact that the winds of the


Cold War were howling like an Arctic blizzard, the warmth of meetings of the Soviet performers with Americans [...] failed to die out.”

Moreover, in the direct aftermath of the crisis, as temperatures ran high, the Bolshoi became a pawn in the political negotiations, one channel for Kennedy to signal his goodwill to the Soviet government and to demonstrate his powers as a statesman. Historians of the period claim that the president felt that the entire Cuban Missile Crisis was a test of his personal leadership. He emerged from the thirteen-day conflict a much stronger political figure at home and abroad. Even Republican leaders praised Kennedy for his leadership during the crisis, and Khrushchev came out of the negotiations with a much improved impression of the American president. When the Bolshoi Ballet appeared in Washington, DC, in November, just a few weeks after the Cuban Missile Crisis had been resolved, the Kennedy family went out of their way to stage as many public appearances with the dancers as possible. John and Jackie Kennedy together attended the premiere of the Bolshoi in Washington, at which the troupe performed Swan Lake (Figure 13). In a highly symbolic gesture, the Kennedys sat in a box across the horseshoe-shaped auditorium from the Soviet ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin, who arrived with his wife and a party of Russian advisors. In between acts, Kennedy went backstage to greet the troupe personally and congratulate them on the performance. The president had, he claimed, seen the Bolshoi perform in 1939 in Moscow, and told the troupe that they were “better than ever.”

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21 Yuriy Malashev, “Muzi ne molchat,” Sovetskaya kultura, November 17, 1962. Original Russian: “Все это говорило о подлинных настроениях простых людей Америки. Несмотря на то, что ветры холодной войны взывали арктической вьюгой, теплота встреч советских артистов с американскими не только не угасла, а наоборот. Именно в эти дни я был свидетелем почти невероятного успеха и проявления огромной симпатии к советским артистам, которые были тогда в Америке как бы представителями советского народа.” The same article was clipped and stored by the State Department. Article from Sovetskaya kultura, ABECa, Box 47, Folder 23. Translated by State Department official.

22 Powaski, The Cold War, 143–144. Zubok and Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War, 236–274.

Following the opening performance, the Kennedys invited the company to the White House for a special tour and another personal meeting. Jackie Kennedy also took her daughter Caroline to one of the troupe’s rehearsals, where Maya Plisetskaya presented the little girl with presents, including a canister of film highlights from her career. Caroline Kennedy, who was only four years old at the time, also attended a second performance with a group of friends from her ballet classes. After the troupe left Washington, the larger Kennedy family continued to give the Bolshoi dancers a warm welcome. While the company was in Boston, John F. Kennedy’s mother and his brother

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Robert invited a portion of the dancers to a pre-Thanksgiving dinner, which was combined with a thirty-seventh birthday party for Maya Plisetskaya.25

Surprisingly enough, no such official attention had been lavished on the Bolshoi when they first appeared in the United States in 1959; Eisenhower had not attended a single performance. Soviet politicians, on the other hand, including Khrushchev, had been active in attending American performances in the Soviet Union. Of course, the Kennedys were much more prominent supporters of the arts than Eisenhower had been.26 Nevertheless, there was no advance warning that the troupe might be graced with the President’s presence before the events of October 1962, nor did any of the Kennedys become involved in hosting the dancers until November. This might simply have been a result of the fact that the troupe was located in New York for the opening of its tour and did not arrive in Boston or Washington until after the Missile Crisis. It seems, however, that the Kennedys took advantage of the Bolshoi’s high profile and its fortuitously timed appearances to create more positive public interactions with the Soviet government and its representatives. At the very least the tour allowed John and Jackie Kennedy to stage public events that helped soothe domestic fears about deteriorating American-Soviet relations in the wake of the Missile Crisis. Appearing in public with the Bolshoi thus helped the president reinforce his new image as a statesman.

The Daily Strains of Life on Tour

While the Cuban Missile Crisis may have had an enormous impact on the Bolshoi Ballet’s time in the United States, both in terms of its official activities and its reception, the crisis and the international political situation were not necessarily foremost on the performers’ minds as they toured the country. Instead, dancers of the Bolshoi were intensely preoccupied with the day-to-day


26 Margaret Jane Wyszomirski, “Congress, Presidents, and the Arts: Collaboration and Struggle,” Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 499 (September, 1988): 126. According to Wyszomirski, Kennedy was “the first president to take an active, albeit largely symbolic, leadership role with regard to federal arts policy.”
life of touring activities, the process of rehearsal, staging, and practice that governed their existence. As always, the tour was hard on its participants, requiring long hours of work, constant classes and performances.\textsuperscript{27} When they were not performing or rehearsing, the dancers were yet again subjected to a long tourism program to expose them to the culture of the United States and allow them to meet American citizens. In New York, they toured the UN and attended a performance by the Alvin Ailey Dance Troupe, as well as productions at the Ice Review and Radio City Music Hall and two movies.\textsuperscript{28} In Washington, DC, the company visited the National Gallery and in Detroit, the Ford Museum. In Boston, they went to a rehearsal of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and met with professors from Harvard University.\textsuperscript{29}

Homesickness and anxiety played heavily on Lavrovsky, and presumably on the other Soviet artists. In one letter written in early September, the choreographer wrote home to his wife “In general everything is difficult, and in reality, boring. It would already be better to leave.”\textsuperscript{30} By September 20, just weeks into the tour, Vasily Pakhomov, the current director of the Bolshoi Theater, returned to the Soviet Union with the troupe’s director — Vladimir Preobrazhensky — and choreographer Leonid Yakobson, who was leaving in disgrace following the failure of his production of \textit{Spartacus}.\textsuperscript{31} The tour also went very badly for conductor Yuri Faier, a surprise given

\begin{itemize}
  \item[27] Letter, Lavrovsky to Chidson, September 7, 1962, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 196 l. 1.
  \item[31] Pakhomov was director for only a very short time between Orvid and Chulaki. The director of the theater was a separate person from the director of the ballet troupe. Letter, Lavrovsky to Chidson, September 20, 1962; Letter, Lavrovsky to Chidson, October 12, 1962, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 196 l. 18 and 26. According to Janice Ross, Yakobson remained with the Bolshoi in the United States, though perhaps she means that he stayed briefly following the \textit{Spartacus} performances, because according to John Martin, whom Ross also quotes, Yakobson met with Balanchine in Leningrad in early November, 1962, well before the Bolshoi finished its tour. Ross, \textit{Like a Bomb Going Off}, 290–291. John Martin, “City Ballet Ends Leningrad Stand,” \textit{New York Times}, November 9, 1962.
\end{itemize}
his near rapturous acceptance on the 1959 tour. The conductor was over seventy and his health was suffering. Hurok had to pay his brother to take care of him during the tour. The musicians complained that they could not understand him, and the dancers that he conducted their solo numbers in the wrong tempi.32

As with their appearances in 1959, differences between their stage in Moscow and the stages they performed on in the United States plagued the company. In many of the theaters, choreography had to be reworked, particularly in ballets with large stage patterns for the corps de ballet, such as the final act from La Bayadère. Traditionally, this piece begins with a row of women from the corps processing down a ramp at the back of the stage, slowly stepping forward and doing an arabesque over and over again. However, with the smaller stages, only a certain number of women could fit at any given moment, and Lavrovsky was forced to rework the choreography.33 In this revised version, the women did not appear one at a time but rather rushed out all at once. This produced an effect similar to the opening of Swan Lake Act II, rather than the hypnotically slow entrance of the traditional choreography.34

The Bolshoi dancers also came under some pressure to defect to the United States, particularly from Rudolf Nureyev, who sent Maya Plisetskaya flowers in New York along with a note requesting that she join him “dancing in the free world.” The incident only brought further scrutiny on Plisetskaya, who had already experienced a great deal of surveillance and pressure from the KGB.35 Nureyev’s actions also provoked some degree of furor within the troupe. One member of

32 Report on Bolshoi Tour, September 28, 1962, signed Pokarzhevsky, RGALI f. 2329 o. 9 d. 292 l. 36.

33 Letter, Lavrovsky to Chidson, November 19, 1962, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 196 l. 73.

34 Allen Hughes, “Ballet: Bolshoi at Madison Sq. Garden,” New York Times, November 29, 1962. Lavrovsky faced similar problems in Washington, DC, and in Boston. Letter, Lavrovsky to Chidson, November 19, 1962, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 196 l. 73. This was despite the fact that, in anticipation of the Bolshoi’s visit, the Boston Globe had run a story claiming that the city was enlarging the stage of the music hall specifically so that the company could perform in conditions similar to the Metropolitan Opera, if not to their stage in Moscow. “Enlarged Stage for Bolshoi,” Boston Globe, September 27, 1962.

35 Plisetskaya, I, Maya Plisetskaya.
Hurok’s company, Semenov, expressed the desire to gather a few dancers together to meet with Nureyev, and apparently discussed the possibility with Yakobson and dancer Maris Liepa. The troupe’s administration was not pleased, and tried to persuade Hurok to send Semenov away. In the end, all the commotion came to nothing; not one of the dancers defected.

A different kind of trouble arose around the figure of Galina Ulanova. The ballerina had retired from the stage in 1960, at the age of fifty. Nevertheless, she continued to work at the Bolshoi as a coach for the younger dancers, particularly the young Ekaterina Maximova, and so accompanied the troupe when they came to the United States. She was also in New York for the release of a new book of photographs of her that had been taken by American photojournalist Albert Eugene Kahn. The book, *Days with Ulanova*, was being greeted with a large release party at the New York Public Library, which also displaying an exhibition of Kahn’s photographs. Hurok was concerned that Ulanova’s presence and the book’s release would distract attention from the Bolshoi’s performances, particularly away from Maya Plisetskaya, who he was now advertising as the prima ballerina of the company. Shortly after the company’s arrival, Ulanova, perhaps swept up with the radiant American welcome, decided that she might come out of retirement to perform a few short numbers on the company’s programs in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Hurok, who was delighted with Ulanova as long as he could advertise her to the benefit of the tour, sent out announcements to the California stops of her imminent arrival. After seeing Plisetskaya’s success in “Dying Swan,” however, one of the short pieces that Ulanova had planned to perform herself, the older dancer rethought her decision, and informed Hurok that she would not be able to perform in California.

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36 Report on Bolshoi Tour, September 28, 1962, signed Pokarzhevsky, RGALI f. 2329 o. 9 d. 292 l. 35.

37 Letter to Ulanova, May 7, 1962, RGALI f. 2329 o. 8 d. 2314 l. 18.

38 Letter from Ralph Parker to Butrova, August 24, 1962, RGALI f. 2329 o. 8 d. 2314.


40 Report on Bolshoi Tour, September 28, 1962, signed Pokarzhevsky, RGALI f. 2329 o. 9 d. 292 l. 36.
In general the tour showed that the company’s prima ballerina was not Ulanova but Maya Plisetskaya. In advance of the company’s arrival, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a feature on Plisetskaya as the “personality of the week.” The article claimed that she was one of the greatest ballerinas in the world, the black swan to Ulanova’s white.\(^{41}\) *Vogue* ran a spread on Plisetskaya, noting her great beauty as well as her spectacular dancing.\(^{42}\) The American critics greeted Plisetskaya’s performances with enthusiasm, praising the fluidity of her arms and her technical achievements.\(^{43}\)

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42 “Plisetskaya, the Greatest Living Ballerina,” *Vogue*, September 1962.

Because Plisetskaya was famous for her portrayal of Odette/Odile and because the company had received such favorable reviews for their performances of the ballet in 1959, Swan Lake became the centerpiece for the company’s American tour (Figure 14). Swan Lake was advertised most prominently of all the Bolshoi productions and was the company’s opening night performance in every city. The reception for this ballet, however, was mixed. American audiences continued to applaud enthusiastically for Bolshoi productions, and particularly for the dancers, especially Plisetskaya’s stunning swan. However, despite praise for the Bolshoi performers, the general critical appraisal of the Bolshoi’s production of Swan Lake was fairly lukewarm. Many critics expressed the opinion that the Bolshoi’s version of Swan Lake did not measure up to the Swan Lake that American audiences had seen on the Kirov Theater’s tour of the United States in 1961. According to Allen Hughes, the “performances of the Kirov Ballet of Leningrad last year, made us demand much more than tricks and fireworks...”

Ironically, given that most American critics had excoriated the Bolshoi in 1959 for its conservatism, the same writers now expressed the opinion that the company had not done a good enough job preserving the 19th-century Russian tradition. Many reviewers complained that the Bolshoi’s version of Swan Lake was too different from from the classic Ivanov-Petipa production of 1895, which they believed that the Kirov had preserved much better. Hughes, for example, claimed


that the Kirov’s production of *Swan Lake* was more “incandescent” because the version they performed was better preserved. Claudia Cassidy called the Bolshoi’s choreography somewhat “conventional” in comparison to the versions performed by the Kirov and Stanislavsky Theaters.\(^{47}\)

Claims that the Bolshoi version of *Swan Lake* departed too much from the canonical Petipa-Ivanov version belied the degree to which the ballet was, and is, a fluid work. Julius Reisinger’s choreography for the original 1876 production, performed at the Bolshoi Theater, was quickly lost. In 1895, after Tchaikovsky’s death, French-Russian choreographer Marius Petipa restaged the ballet for St Petersburg’s Imperial Mariinsky Theater with the help of his assistant, Lev Ivanov and composer-conductor Riccardo Drigo.\(^{48}\) It is this latter version of the work that is considered canonical, and it is this production against which American critics claimed to measure the Bolshoi and Kirov productions. Even this version, however, had been revised multiple times in both Soviet and Western theaters.\(^{49}\) Comparing the Kirov and Bolshoi versions with modern restagings of Petipa’s choreography, moreover, shows that while the Kirov retained a slightly closer relationship to the Petipa original, in reality the two Soviet versions were very similar to one another, much more similar than either one was to the 1895 production. Many changes in the Black Swan *pas de deux* from Act III, for example, were shared between the two Soviet theaters. For instance, towards the end of the *adagio* in both the Bolshoi and Kirov versions, Odile performs a *jeté entrelacé* before sinking into

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the ground in a swan-like pose. This step is not in the original Petipa version, as there were no swan references in this duet until the 20th century.\footnote{Odile was not labeled the “Black Swan” until the 20th century. Fullington, “After Petipa.”}

American reviewers, however, were less likely to be familiar with this Black Swan \textit{pas de deux} than they were with the second act of the ballet. Surprisingly enough, in 1962, five years before American Ballet Theatre’s landmark 1967 production, it was difficult to find an American ballet company performing a complete version of \textit{Swan Lake}.\footnote{ABT has long claimed to have staged the first American full-length \textit{Swan Lake} in 1967. ABT 75th Anniversary Exhibition at Library of Congress, accessed July 21, 2015, http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/american-ballet-theatre/tradition-and-innovation.html. San Francisco Ballet, however, claims that they staged the first American \textit{Swan Lake} in 1940. “History,” San Francisco Ballet Website, accessed July 21, 2015, https://www.sfballet.org/about/history. In either case, before the late 1960s, this was an incredibly rare phenomenon in the United States.} Numerous companies, however, performed a modified version of the ballet’s second act.\footnote{Mary Clarke and Clement Crisp, \textit{The Ballet Goer’s Guide} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 271.} It was in this crucial second act that the Kirov and Bolshoi \textit{Swan Lake} differed in a few details. During the white swan \textit{adagio}, the centerpiece of the second act, as Siegfried and Odette express their love for the first time in dance, they are surrounded by the other swan maidens. Asaf Messerer, who staged the version for the Bolshoi, used the same steps for Odette and Siegfried as the choreographer for Kirov, but he changed the steps for the swan maidens.\footnote{Messerer was one of the main artistic forces at the Bolshoi, serving as a stager and repetiteur. Messerer was also Maya Plisetskaya’s uncle, had been a star dancer at the Bolshoi in the 1930s. He was also responsible for the choreography for \textit{Ballet School}, discussed below.} As with the Black Swan \textit{pas de deux}, however, neither production actually maintains absolute faithfulness to the original choreography, in which there was an extra dancer onstage.\footnote{The original version had a part for Benno, the prince’s friend, who was there to help Paul Gerdt, the aging star of the ballet, with the more difficult sections of partnering. Cohen, \textit{Next Week, Swan Lake}, 5.} In the same act, Messerer also altered the dance of the little swans. In the original Petipa and in the Kirov version, four dancers clasp hands and perform intricate and rapid steps in unison.\footnote{Wiley, \textit{Tchaikovsky’s Ballets}, 264.} In the Bolshoi version, there are six swans, not four, and while they begin with the classic hands-
clasped choreography, they quickly let go of each other and perform new steps. While the Kirov's version of *Swan Lake* was therefore slightly more true to the original Petipa version, the differences were modest.

**Moscow vs. Leningrad and the Issue of Taste**

The American critical reaction to these minor changes was surprisingly vociferous, a fact that was tied to American perceptions of the Bolshoi and Kirov companies. As much as the American critics may have complained about the Bolshoi's choreographic conservatism, it was precisely a sense of conservatism that the critics actually hoped to see in Soviet companies. Conservatism could be associated with the Russian empire, and the Russian empire represented something prestigious and elusive. Those writers who did have laudatory things to say about the company often emphasized its imperial lineage; *San Francisco Examiner* critic Alexander Fried called the Bolshoi a “historic, originally aristocratic attraction.”

Harry MacArthur, writing for the *Evening Star* in Washington, argued to his readers that those who had seen only excerpts or truncated versions of *Swan Lake* had not really seen the ballet; the Bolshoi could perform the work as it should be, “since it was commissioned by and first performed at the Bolshoi theater back in 1877.”

Despite MacArthur's claims, many reviewers assumed that this very classicism had been better preserved at the Kirov. The Kirov was located in Leningrad; before the revolution it had been named the the Imperial Mariinsky Theater. The Bolshoi was based in Moscow, the seat of the Soviet government. The Kirov’s preservation of the original Petipa choreography was read as a symbol of the city’s retention of its imperial heritage. Furthermore, Western observers often equated the city’s ostensible imperial nature as a covert sign of its sympathies towards the West, in part because Peter the Great had built the city in a European style and in part because it was a sign of the Soviet

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government’s contested relationship with the city.\textsuperscript{58} For ballet dancers, the Kirov’s Western connections were personal, as many of the Russian dancers who had defected to the West during the middle part of the twentieth century had trained and performed at the Kirov.\textsuperscript{59} One audience member, Kenneth Rexroth, writing into the letters section of the San Francisco Examiner to complain about the deficiencies of the Bolshoi, made the political comparison explicit:

Stalin lived in Moscow and got the kind of ballet he liked. The leaps are Olympic and the splits are physiologically unbelievable: if they make a point they underline it three times.

Up in Leningrad the Kirov was a ballet for those rotten diversionists, wreckers and Trotskyite mad dogs — in other words, Western European intellectuals, just like me.\textsuperscript{60}

Rexroth very explicitly hinged his comparison of the two companies on the question of “taste,” which he claimed was “really the point of the whole matter.”\textsuperscript{61} He expressed the opinion that the the Kirov and its fans possessed this taste, while the Bolshoi, as an extension of the communist leaders, had little. Nor was Rexroth alone in denigrating the Bolshoi’s level of taste. Many American critics agreed, including P.W. Manchester of the Christian Science Monitor, Allen

\textsuperscript{58} Books about the soviet Union published in the United States during the 1950s and 60s refer to Leningrad as the more European or Western city. Georges Jorré, The Soviet Union: The Land and its People, Translated by E.D. Laborde (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1961, Original French 1950). David Hooson, The Soviet Union People and Regions (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1966). Taper also mentions that Balanchine thought Leningrad and the dancers from the Kirov were more accepting of his ballet because the city was more cosmopolitan. Bernard Taper, Balanchine: A Biography (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 276.

\textsuperscript{59} Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes had been largely comprised of dancers from the Mariinsky Theater, and many of those dancers settled permanently in the West following the Russian Revolution. Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes 189–193. George Balanchine, the central figure of American ballet in the mid-20th century, had also been a dancer at the same theater before his defection to France. Elizabeth Kendall, Balanchine and the Lost Muse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 155. During the Cold War, the Kirov continued to be the most prominent source of ballet defections, Nureyev being the most famous example in 1961. Caute, The Dancer Defects, 493–501.

\textsuperscript{60} Kenneth Rexroth, “Bolshoi vs. Kirov,” San Francisco Examiner, October 24, 1962. Rexroth ingeniously anticipated my critique of his writing, claiming “The Bolshoi is a hard outfit to pan, because then all your intellectual friends who know nothing about dancing will say you’re just a hireling of the capitalist press and making cold war propaganda. Sorry – hold on to your little red shirts, kids, cause here goes.”

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
Hughes of the *New York Times*, and Jean Battey of the *Washington Post, Times Herald*.\(^{62}\) Rexroth and the others refer to taste as something ineffable, a sort of easily-recognizable quality of refinement.

As Pierre Bourdieu argues in his 1984 book, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, taste is often conceptualized in this way, as an innate or inexpressible capacity for discernment and yet is in reality closely linked to educational level and economic class.\(^{63}\) In other words, while Rexroth suggests that there is something inherently more elevated about the Kirov, in reality his perceptions of the company were shaped by his assumptions about the cultural capital that they would give to their audiences.

The tastes of the audiences at the Bolshoi were distinctly upper class, a fact related to the wealth and social standing required to get a ticket, particularly in New York and Los Angeles. Hurok’s ticket prices were widely considered to be inordinately expensive. For the New York performances, tickets topped out at $15 at regular performances and at $25 on opening night. Resale prices could reach $100, the equivalent of $782 in 2014.\(^{64}\) Moreover, Hurok restricted first access to tickets to a special list of loyal subscribers.\(^{65}\) Non-profit groups sometimes purchased large swathes

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\(^{65}\) Advertisement, *New York Herald Tribune*, April 6, 1959. During the 1959 tour it was difficult to get tickets if one was not on this list. For 1962, Hurok had the Met Box Office open for six days in June, two months in advance of the performances. Lines started two hours before the box office opened, so even purchasing tickets through this more open method required a substantial investment of time and effort. “Bolshoi Draws Crowd 2 Months in Advance,” *New York Times*, June 26, 1962.
of seats and resold them for benefit evenings. Newspapers reported on the who’s-who of attendees, in some cases describing the audiences’ clothing in as great detail that they discussed the dancing. Such audiences expected an artistic display that they would consider commensurate with the status and wealth required to purchase a ticket.

In the 1960s, the Bolshoi’s genre alone could not secure an elite status with American audiences. As Lawrence E. Levine theorized in 1988, American culture of the 20th century was divided into levels of respectability delineated by class, what Levine and others have referred to as highbrow and lowbrow. Early-20th-century ballet had a very ambivalent position in this hierarchy; it was tied to Vaudeville, Broadway, and Hollywood. It was not until the 1940s and 1950s that ballet was established as a highbrow art, largely through the efforts of Balanchine and the New York City Ballet. The Bolshoi fit uneasily into this aesthetic hierarchy, particularly in comparison to the Kirov.

The juxtaposition between the Kirov and the Bolshoi, combined with the elite tastes of the wealthy American audiences, created a strange situation in which American reviewers perceived themselves as allies of the Kirov Theater because they thought it was an Imperial and Western institution. Such claims resonate strongly with the American Ballet Theatre’s presentation of American identity during its tour of the Soviet Union in 1960. This was not a patriotic vision of the

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70 Steichen, “George Balanchine in America.” By the time that Life published its famous, comical Highbrow/Lowbrow chart in 1949, Balanchine’s works were literally the definition of highbrow. A small picture of the choreographer’s work Orpheus illustrated highbrow theatrical tastes. “Everyday Tastes from Highbrow to Lowbrow are Classified on Chart,” Life Magazine, April 11, 1949.
United States insulated from the outside world. Instead, it was a patriotic vision of the United States as a leader of international art forms, perhaps even as a symbolic heir to the Russian empire.

**Khachaturian and Spartacus**

Issues of taste in particular affected the American reception of the Bolshoi’s *Spartacus*, a full-evening narrative ballet with music by Aram Khachaturian. Much as in 1959, the Bolshoi’s 1962 programming evidenced a deliberate mixture of Russian and Soviet works, this time focusing on Khachaturian’s music. Unlike Prokofiev, Khachaturian had never traveled to the United States, so American audiences were not as familiar with him. During the 1940s, however, when the United States and the Soviet Union had been allies, American orchestras had started playing a great deal of Khachaturian’s music, particularly “Saber Dance,” which was part of a suite of pieces from his ballet *Gayane*. In 1959, the Bolshoi had performed excerpts from *Gayane* and from the 1958 production of *Spartacus* on their highlights program. When they returned in 1962, the company brought their new production of *Spartacus*, with choreography by Leonid Yakobson, as a centerpiece of the tour.

There was, however, another reason for the Bolshoi to bring *Spartacus* to the United States. Hollywood epic films featuring ancient Roman and Greek settings dominated the American film market in the 1950s. Movies such as *The Ten Commandments, Quo Vadis?, The Robe, Ben-Hur,* and Stanley Kubrick’s film version of *Spartacus* made millions of dollars at the box offices. Presumably Sol Hurok had this financial success in mind when he encouraged the Bolshoi to bring their ballet version of *Spartacus* on the 1962 tour. If so, however, his plan backfired enormously, when the

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71 This piece was played so often worldwide that Khachaturian complained about how it had come to represent his music. Victor Yuzefovich, *Aram Khachaturyan*, trans. N. Kournokoff and V. Bobrov, (Sphinx Press, Inc.: New York, 1985), 145–146 and 200.  
72 Illustrated Programs 1959, Program: Shrine Auditorium, Music Magazine of Los Angeles, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 317.  
conflation of the Khachaturian *Spartacus* and Hollywood epics undermined the ballet’s reception with American critics.

In some ways, *Spartacus* had been conceived as the ideal Stalinist ballet. The libretto had been written in 1933 by Nikolai Volkov, the same author who wrote such important *drambaleti* as *Flames of Paris*, *Fountain of the Bakhchisarai*, and *Cinderella*. Khachaturian finished composing the score in 1954. The work was written in the high-Stalinist style of the 1930s and 40s, full of bombastic chromatic harmonies, syncopated rhythms, and winding lyrical melodies. The ballet’s plot was transparently meant to be a metaphor for the Bolshevik revolution, and Spartacus to stand in for its leaders. Nevertheless, despite its seeming perfections for the Soviet stage, *Spartacus* had a long and complex history in the Soviet Union. Following its premiere at the Kirov Theater in 1956, with choreography by Leonid Yakobson, the ballet was produced numerous times by Soviet theaters, and the Bolshoi alone staged three different versions of the ballet, in 1958, 1962, and 1968. The first two of these productions were heavily criticized and removed quickly from the Bolshoi stage. Only in 1968, fourteen years after Khachaturian finished the score, did the Bolshoi finally create a version of the work that met with lasting approval.\textsuperscript{74}

It was the second of these three productions, the Bolshoi’s 1962 version, that the company brought to the United States. Leonid Yakobson, who had staged the ballet’s premiere in Leningrad, revised his choreography for the Moscow company over the early months of 1962. Yakobson’s production of *Spartacus* was highly unusual. As Christina Ezrahi has described in *Swans of the Kremlin*, the cultural Thaw of the late 1950s and early 1960s opened up possibilities for Soviet choreographers to challenge the tenets of the *drambalet*.\textsuperscript{75} Yakobson’s revisions, however, bore little resemblance to those of the other Thaw choreographers, most of whom, such as Igor Belsky and


Yuri Grigorovich, were much younger and primarily interested in highlighting music-choreographic relationships. Yakobson instead hoped to improve the ballet through the use of nationalist gestures. He himself had been trained as a character dancer, a performer who specialized in the nationalist or exotic divertissements that supplemented the classical dancing in 19th-century ballets. Yakobson believed that through the application of nationalist dancing he could create more nuanced and realistic characters. In his 1969 book Letters to Noverre, Yakobson repeatedly likened himself to 18th-century French choreographer Jean-George Noverre and early-20th-century Russian choreographer Michel Fokine, both of whom were famous for creating more realistic characters by abandoning some tenants of classical choreography. Yakobson’s resulting ballet earned only lukewarm reviews in Moscow; critics and audiences complained about the work’s over-reliance on pantomime.

Aesthetic Similarities between Spartacus and Hollywood Epic Films

Yakobson’s version of Spartacus bore numerous similarities to Hollywood epics of the 1950s, a fact that reveals the United States’s and the Soviet Union’s common cultural backgrounds and geopolitical goals. To start, the ballet and the Hollywood films were created on an monumental scale, using a grandiose production style that drew attention to its own expenditure. As classicist Joanna Paul notes of Ben-Hur, “the marketing of the film […] emphasizes spectacle and scale over everything else, employing the ‘rhetoric of numbers’ with […] enthusiasm.” Yakobson’s Spartacus required similar investment, including two-hundred dancers. When advertising the ballet to

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76 See chapters 1 and 4


78 Leonid Yakobson, Pis’ma noverru (Tenafly, NJ: Hermitage Publications, 2001), 97.

79 Searcy, “The Recomposition of Aram Khachaturian’s Spartacus at the Bolshoi Theater.”

American audiences, Hurok chose to use the same techniques as the Hollywood studios, focusing on the size of the production and using specific numbers to draw attention to that size. The impresario claimed that this would give American audiences a chance to sense the “enormous scope of the Moscow stage.”

In addition to sharing a grand sense of scale, both the epic Hollywood films and Yakobson’s *Spartacus* were created in a historical, realistic style, where period-accurate costumes and elaborate sets dominated the visual palette. Soviet *drambalets* had always employed realistic sets and costumes, and their creators had used extensive historical research. Yakobson, however, took this approach to an extreme, using historical research to shape his choreographic style as well as the ballet’s production. In preparation for his version of *Spartacus*, the choreographer spent copious time examining Roman and Greek art at the Hermitage museum. At key moments of the ballet, such as during the death of Spartacus’s fellow gladiator, the dancers froze into *bas-relief*, motionless but dynamic *tableaux* that evoked the friezes of ancient Greek and Roman art. Throughout the ballet, the dancers performed in soft shoes, not on *pointe*, and they bent their elbows and knees, creating twisting, oppositional images similar to those found in Roman art.

Yakobson’s attention to historical research echoes the approach of the Hollywood directors, who exhibited, in the words of musicologist Stephen Meyer, an “authenticity anxiety” regarding their creations. These directors often went to great lengths to assure audiences of the historical accuracy of their productions. They hired academic consultants and provided voiceovers to explain the historical context. As with the self-conscious epicness of the Hollywood films, these voiceovers drew the audience’s attention to the historical scope and detail of the film. In early plans for


83 Ross, *Like a Bomb Going Off*, 249–250.

the ballet, Yakobson hoped to create a similar buffer zone in his production of *Spartacus* at the Bolshoi, an opening scene in which dancers depicted the story of Spartacus’s youth solely through *bas-relief*. Yakobson referred to this scene as the “altar,” and he also intended to return to this altar at the end of the ballet. Had it been achieved, this would have been similar to Stanley Kubrick’s opening credits for the film version of *Spartacus*. In fact, Yakobson’s description of the opening sounds so filmic that it is somewhat unsurprising that he was eventually forced to change it.

Like the American Hollywood epics, *Spartacus* focuses on a central, heroic male character. Paul notes that Hollywood epic films often bear the titles of their central masculine characters: *Spartacus, Ben-Hur, Gladiator, and Alexander*. As in these Hollywood epics, the heroic figure of Spartacus occupies a central position in the Bolshoi’s 1962 production, this time as the ancient embodiment of the New Soviet Man. Strong and virile, he was meant to provide inspiration to audiences, showing them how their government could transform human nature for the better. In Yakobson’s *Spartacus*, the main character was played by Dmitri Begak, one of the theater’s largest, most muscular dancers, so that the hero would literally evoke the images of the ultra-muscular male figures of Soviet socialist realist sculpture.

There were also strong aural connections between the Soviet *Spartacus* and American epic films. The typical Hollywood film score of the 1950s featured lush orchestration and chromatic tonal harmonies similar to Soviet orchestral music of the 1930s and 40s. This was partially because some Hollywood composer turned to Soviet film scores, particularly Prokofiev’s *Alexander Nevsky*, as

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86 Paul, *Film and the Classical Epic Tradition*, 178.

87 For more on the New Soviet Man, see chapter 1.
a model for composing for epic movies. According to Meyer, the “full orchestral timbres” of the Hollywood epic scores evoked monumentality in similar ways to the movies’ grand sets and large casts. Similarly, Khachaturian’s ballet score demands a large orchestra and frequently relies on massive brass and percussion sections to create grand effects.

In addition to sharing similarly full orchestrations, Khachaturian and the American Hollywood composers drew on similar exoticist musical tropes to depict the ancient Rome’s Mediterranean empire. Miklos Rózsa’s overture to Ben Hur, for instance, includes comparably quick, winding chromatic appoggiaturas to those composed by Khachaturian for the “Dance of the Gaditian Maidens” in Spartacus. Moreover, according to Meyer, Rózsa used “modal parallelism” in his epic film scores, often employing scales with a flat-7 and flat-3 in order to suggest a Dorian mode. Khachaturian too used modal alterations, particularly flat-7, throughout Spartacus. Moreover, just as Meyer locates the origin of Rózsa’s modal harmonies in Hungarian nationalist tropes used by Bartok, Khachaturian owed his modal harmonies in part to imitations of the Kuchka, the nineteenth-century Russian composers who served as models for much Soviet music.

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88 Kevin Bartig quoted in “Kevin Bartig on Famous Russian Film Score,” MSU College of Music, February 23, 2015, accessed May 2, 2016, http://music.msu.edu/news/kevin-bartig-on-famous-russian-film-score. The influence may have run the other way as well, but further research is required to know whether the Hollywood epic films were performed in the Soviet Union.

89 Meyer, Epic Sounds, loc. 406.

90 Ibid., loc. 1774–1800 and loc. 3263.

91 Marina Frolova-Walker, Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 142 and 167–69. Searcy, “The Recomposition of Aram Khachaturian’s Spartacus at the Bolshoi Theater.” Rózsa employed block-like parallel harmonies in his epic scores, which evoked the sound of parallel organum, creating an admittedly ahistorical association between the ancient world depicted on screen and impressions of ancient Christianity, a central theme to many Hollywood epic films. Khachaturian, by contrast, rarely used parallel motion, preferring instead to use smooth contrapuntal voice-leading, often moving from chord to chord by altering one voice at a time by step or half-step. Thus, while Khachaturian’s Spartacus sounded similar in some respects to Rózsa’s epic film scores, it also contained fundamental sonic discrepancies linked to the differences between Soviet and American ideologies.
Eroticism in the American Movies and on the Soviet Stage

One of the most striking aural and visual tropes shared by the Hollywood epic films and the Bolshoi’s 1962 Spartacus was an emphasis on the erotic. Oddly enough for a group of films depicting biblical texts, Hollywood films such as Ben-Hur were notable at the time of their release for their use of sexuality and violence. Indeed, the biblical nature of the films seemed to give license to use greater sex and violence than other Hollywood movies of the same era. Meyer describes a “simultaneous disavowal and indulgence of the erotic” as a fundamental aspect of the genre.

As Meyer discusses, many Hollywood epic films, such as Cecil B. DeMille’s 1949 Samson and Delilah, focused on a love triangle between a heroic central figure and two women, one domestic and virtuous, the other exotic and sexual. Victor Young’s score for the opening credits to Samson and Delilah contrasts Delilah’s slippery Carmen-like chromaticism and leaping angularity for Samson’s music.

Figure 15. Photograph of Mikhail Lavrovsky in the role of the slave in Spartacus. From V. Zalesskiy and I. Kuznetsova, “Vtoraya Popitka,” Sovetskaya Muzika 9 (1962).

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93 Meyer, Epic Sounds, loc. 624.
The Soviet Spartacus similarly indulges in an erotic aesthetic while ostensibly disavowing it. Volkov’s libretto clearly juxtaposes the virtuous Phrygia, Spartacus’s lover, with the evil, exotic concubine Aegina. The costumes for Yakobson’s production of the ballet were short and the dances, particularly at the Roman feast in the second act, were highly sexualized in nature (Figure 15). The dance of the three slaves at Crassus’s feast, for instance, involved two men rubbing their hands up and down a woman’s body. In a description of the ballet that Yakobson gave to the artistic advisory committee at the Bolshoi, he recounted the scene in which Aegina seduces a Roman slave, again and again returning to the sensual nature of the dancing: “Aegina twists her lithe body in languor and voluptuousness. She clings to the slave, she spurns him, inflaming him with passion.”

Khachaturian’s music for the ballet, much like Young’s for Samson and Delilah, creates a contrast between Spartacus’s relatively clear-cut, often militarized melodies, and the sinuous woodwind lines used to depict women in the ballet. In the scene of Aegina’s seduction, Khachaturian emphasizes the erotic tension by sustaining a tritone between a solo clarinet and the strings. The clarinet repeatedly ascends chromatically, but remains stuck on the D a tritone away from the strings’ G# (Example 4).

The decision to show such actions on the Bolshoi stage raised questions about national morality related to the politics of the Thaw era. As David Hoffman describes in Stalinist Values, the 1930s and 40s had seen an intense campaign in public life to purify Soviet morals. Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders had fairly Victorian ideas about sexuality, and during the early years of communist rule in Russia, in Hoffman’s words, “bodily, sexual, and linguistic purity were linked with ideological conformity.” In some cases, Khrushchev’s reforms in the late 1950s and early 1960s allowed a relaxation of these moral standards, but this often came with a commensurate backlash from


popular audiences and Soviet bureaucrats. Yakobson’s lewd dances and scandalously short costumes played into these debates, and members of the artistic advisory committee at the Bolshoi were divided about their appropriateness to the stage. During one of the artistic committee meetings, Yakobson gave his explanation for his highly sexualized dances:

The morals at these [Roman] feasts were such that it is now impossible to speak of them. That which we wanted to show — it is trivial in comparison with what was then at the feasts, but from our point of view, it is perhaps a bit too much.

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Much like the Hollywood filmmakers, Yakobson thus justified the presence of the erotic by assigning it to the Romans, rather than the heroic Spartakans.

Khachaturian and Yakobson created their *Spartacus* thousands of miles away from Hollywood, divided by an Iron Curtain, so the similarities may be surprising. Nevertheless, the two genres developed from very similar artistic sources. As Meyer points out, epic Hollywood films drew on 19th-century opera aesthetics. Wagner’s operas, in particular, became a touchstone for the makers of Hollywood biblical epics, especially for DeMille’s *Ten Commandments*. The Soviet *Spartacus* drew on a similar background of 19th-century opera. At four and a half hours, the full production was much more similar in scope to an opera than to a ballet, and the composer created a thorough leitmotif system to narrate the slaves’s story. 19th-century novels also served as an inspiration for both Hollywood script writers and the creators of *Spartacus*. This is likely the reason, for example, that Volkov’s libretto features a similar two-woman narrative trope to many Hollywood scripts. Volkov and Yakobson drew on the work of Italian novelist Raffaelo Giovagnoli, who wrote two female characters into his 1874 version of *Spartacus*, one chaste love interest who supports the hero and one salacious villain who destroys his cause. In Volkov’s libretto, as in Giovagnoli’s novel, seduction and repudiated love plays a major role in Spartacus’s downfall, though in the novelization it is Spartacus’s own seduction and in the libretto his friend Harmodius’s that

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99 Ibid., loc. 3171.

causes the problems. Presumably, Volkov wanted to displace any possible moral failing onto another character so that the hero of his libretto could serve as an ideal New Soviet Man.

The Geopolitics of Claiming the Ancient World

Underlying the aesthetic parallels between the Soviet ballet *Spartacus* and the Hollywood epic films was a similar desire to ground contemporary political ideologies in a respected and ancient historical past. Both the ballet and the films were saturated in modern political parallels that emphasized the righteousness of their contemporary political systems. Classicist Maria Wyke, for instance, argues that Hollywood epic films drew on political tropes connecting American democracy to ancient civilization that had been used in the national political discourse since the founding of the United States government. It is highly notable, however, as many film scholars have pointed out, that the heroes of the Hollywood Biblical epics are not the Romans but rather the oppressed peoples of the Roman empire. At the same time that they relied on the authority of ancient Rome to soothe their audience’s anxieties about the present, these films also presented the American

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102 In his essay on the libretto, Volkov derided the Giovagnoli novel and other accounts of Spartacus that reduced his exploits down to love and sexuality. Given the content of the libretto, however, this does seem to be a case of Volkov protesting too much. There is nothing in the ancient sources to justify the creation of Aegina. Yakobson also discusses the novel when speaking about his ballet to the Bolshoi’s artistic committee. Again, though he says they decided against using the novel (this time for reasons of efficiency), it seems that Giovagnoli figured as one of the artistic inspirations. Volkov, “Tragediya o Spartake,” 1958, RGALI, f. 648, op. 7, d. 417. Stenogramma rashirennogo zasedaniya partbyuro baleta tsekhovogo komiteta, komsomol'skoy organizatsii i aktiva po voprosu: informatiya L.V. Yakobsona: ‘O khode rabotii nad baletom ‘Spartak.’ October 23, 1961, Museum of the Bolshoi Theater, Spartacus Collection, 3–4.

103 Ibid., 15 Classicist Adeline Johns-Putra similarly argues that the postwar Hollywood epics were designed to soothe American audiences in the face of postwar anxieties. In her words, the 1950s Hollywood epic films display “a completely nostalgic embrace of an utterly coherent past,” a type of comfort to a people dismayed by the toll of the world wars. Adeline Johns-Putra, *The History of the Epic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 191.
government as an anti-imperial force. \textsuperscript{104} In \textit{Ben-Hur}, the main character is a leader of oppressed Jews, while in \textit{Spartacus} he is the general of rebelling slaves. As Michael Wood has noted, Hollywood filmmakers employed British actors to portray the Romans and American actors to portray the main characters. \textsuperscript{105} In the American film \textit{Spartacus}, composer Alex North paints the slave army as an American group; their recurring musical theme is a Coplandesque brass fanfare.

The same, of course, is true of the Soviet \textit{Spartacus}, in which the slaves serve as symbolic Bolsheviks. Marxists had been using the ancient slave rebellion as a metaphor for their efforts since the 19th-century. Both Marx and Lenin had praised Spartacus and associated him with their movements. During World War I, a prominent German communist group led by Rosa Luxembourg called itself the Spartacus League. \textsuperscript{106} In both Soviet ballet and American films, the Romans could easily be read as stand-ins for the fascists as well. Mussolini and Hitler had used Roman iconography, making the comparison between fascists and Romans quite easy. In \textit{Ben-Hur}, for example, the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate very clearly leads the audience at the chariot race in a Hitler salute. \textsuperscript{107} Khachaturian and Yakobson worked with similar tropes in their production of the ballet \textit{Spartacus}.

Both the Soviet production of \textit{Spartacus} and the American epic films present their heroes as allies of ethnic and racial Others, suggesting a parallel to the superpowers’ efforts to align themselves with various post-colonial states during the 1950s and 60s. At the same time that they present the heroes as allies of racial Others, however, these works all maintain a racial hierarchy to centralize their white characters and to allow their audiences to take pleasure in Orientalist spectacle.

\textsuperscript{104} Film scholar Geraldine Murphy, for example, has argued that in \textit{Spartacus} (1960) and \textit{Ben-Hur} (1959), Americans are represented on two different levels, both as imperial rulers and as revolutionaries. On the one hand, the heroic central groups rebelling against the Roman empire could be read by mid-century audiences as Christian Americans fighting against an oppressive Soviet state. Simultaneously, however, the Americans could seem themselves reflected in the more charismatic, heroic Roman roles, such as Julius Caesar in \textit{Spartacus}. Geraldine Murphy, “Americans in Togas,” \textit{Journal of Film and Video} 56, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 3–19.


\textsuperscript{106} Murphy, “Ugly Americans in Togas,” 10.

In *Ben-Hur*, for example, the hero is a Jew who allies himself with an Arab sheik. Welsh actor Hugh Griffith, who played the role of the sheik in blackface, won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. While Sheik Ilderim is undoubtedly Judah Ben-Hur’s friend, supplying him with the horses he needs to compete in the chariot race, his exotic and lascivious ways also serve to contrast with and therefore highlight Judah Ben-Hur’s chaste, Jewish morality. In the same movie, a group of black dancers perform a primitivist dance at the Roman feast; they are dressed in almost nonexistent costumes and consistently shot in wide frames and at oblique angles that reduce their personhood. While the film associates this display with Roman immorality, it simultaneously encourages the viewer to enjoy it.

Yakobson’s production similarly highlighted the ethnic diversity of the slave characters in the ballet, using them as a symbol for the Union of Soviet nationalities. While the choreographer tried very consciously to demonstrate the ethnic diversity of the Spartakans, however, he maintained a hierarchy between peripheral, exotic characters and central, white characters. Notably, Yakobson’s highly erotic characters were mostly exotic female slaves, shown performing for the Romans. Again, while the production ostensibly condemned Crassus and the Romans for their sexual deviancy and exploitation of other ethnic groups, the viewers were drawn into a sensual visual experience in which they were encouraged to take pleasure in that same exploitation. In both the Soviet Union and the United States, these epic stories encouraged their intended audiences to imagine their own country as the heroic ally of newly independent postcolonial nations. Khachaturian even remarked in an essay on his ballet score that Spartacus could be compared to revolutionaries in Vietnam and Korea. Yet in both cases, the artistic effect was to emphasize the moral authority and historical centrality of the United States and the Soviet Union, and in both cases the viewer was encouraged to indulge in exoticist fantasies.

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108 Searcy, “The Recomposition of Aram Khachaturian’s *Spartacus* at the Bolshoi Theater.”

The Politics of Staging Spartacus in America

Despite, or rather because of, the deep similarities between Soviet ballet and American films, the Bolshoi’s performances of Yakobson’s *Spartacus* were perhaps the greatest artistic disaster of the early Soviet-American cultural exchange. The New York audiences at the opening night performance booed loudly, and critics followed with excoriating reviews. Allen Hughes bemoaned in the *New York Times* that “the fact that one of the greatest ballet companies in the world would invest so much talent, time, money, and, presumably, belief in the staging of a dull pageant is simply beyond understanding.” By the week after its American premiere, it was clear that *Spartacus* was a flop. Hurok cancelled the ballet’s final three performances in New York, replacing it with a production of *Giselle* and two triple bills that would include *Ballet School*, the much more popular new offering on the Bolshoi’s tour. The cancellation and the derision in the press were very hard on Yakobson. Maya Plisetskaya, who stood firmly by the production, recalled in her memoirs: “Only after the last performance of *Spartacus* in New York [...] did Yakobson sit down on the metal stool in my dressing room at the Met and break out into silent weeping. Large, heavy tears dropped from his blue eyes.”

It is possible that the strangely mirrored geopolitics behind *Spartacus* and Hollywood epic films bothered audiences, that seeing the Soviets invoke the same ties to the authority of ancient Rome upset its American viewers. Most American critics were cagey about addressing the ballet’s

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114 This is the argument that Janice Ross makes in her biography of Yakobson. Janice Ross, *Like a Bomb Going Off*, 282–289.
politics, though some did parenthetically allude to the similarities between Lenin and the character of Spartacus. Allen Hughes remarked, “Perhaps parallels can be drawn between the story and events in Russian history that give the work a special patriotic or ideological appeal for Russians it does not have for us.”

More than politics, however, the aesthetic comparison between the Bolshoi Spartacus and Hollywood films bothered New York audiences because the resemblance threatened to undermine the ballet’s highbrow status. Over and over again, reviews compared the ballet Spartacus to Hollywood sword and sandal epics, but the comparisons were not flattering. According to Alan Hughes, the music was “very much in the style of Hollywood sound tracks, and this may be significant, for the work as a whole represents a sadly disappointing attempt to do something that Hollywood manages better.”

The critical dismissal of the Bolshoi Spartacus actually reflected a similar reaction on the part of film critics to the Hollywood epics. While audiences flocked to films such as The Ten Commandments, and the movies occasionally swept the Academy Awards, mid-century film critics were generally quite cool to them. Often, the very spectacle that defined the genre could undermine its artistic credibility. In a review of the 1951 film Quo Vadis? for the New York Times, Bosley Crowther wrote “Here is a staggering combination of cinema brilliance and sheer banality, of visual excitement and verbal boredom, of historical pretentiousness and sex.” Even the makers of

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obviously ‘epic’ Hollywood films could shy away from the label, recognizing, as Ben-Hur star Charlton Heston did, that “Films labelled epics are almost invariably bad ones.”119

The New York dance critics’ negative reaction to the Bolshoi Spartacus thus mimicked American film critics’ reaction to Hollywood epics, in particular because the Bolshoi style of production already played into similar concerns. Critical objections to the expense and decoration in the Bolshoi Spartacus echoed the film critics but also harkened back to the American reception of Romeo and Juliet in 1959 as a production “only communists can afford.”120 Similarly, the comparison resonated with American beliefs that the Bolshoi was hopelessly old-fashioned in its productions, because the Biblical epics were also seen as somewhat passé.121 Cecil B. DeMille had first achieved success with the genre in the 1920s and 30s, and by the 1950s, many believed that his type of filmmaking was not innovative enough for a new generation of viewers.122 Many of the American critics compared the Bolshoi’s Spartacus specifically to these earlier epic films.123 P.W. Manchester of the Christian Science Monitor, for instance, remarked that “Sad to say, it is a bore on a colossal scale; the kind of spectacle which old silent movies did very much better.”124

American critics often invoked concerns about taste when discussing Spartacus.125 Jean Battey wrote in the Washington Post, Time Herald that “it is the heavy-handed portentousness, the outright schmaltz and the overdone emotionalism that make ‘Spartacus’ so tasteless.”126 It seems that

121 Johns-Putra, History of the Epic, 190.
122 Meyer, Epic Sound, loc. 515.
audiences also reacted poorly to the ballet on the grounds of taste. Rosie Novellino-Mearns and Wendy Perron, two Americans who served as supernumeraries during the Bolshoi’s 1962 performances, have each suggested a reason for the audiences’ disappointment, both of which, I believe, play into this concept of taste. Novellino-Mearns suggests that the audiences were most angered by the lack of pointe shoes in the ballet, an element so strongly identified with the art form that it could potentially signify the cultural importance of the genre. Perron, on the other hand, has suggested that the eroticism in the ballet may have offended the audiences, an aspect of the ballet most similar to the Hollywood epics and reflecting Crowther’s complaints in his review of Quo Vadis?

There were some hints that the ballet was, to certain viewers at least, enjoyable if not respectable. Walter Terry remarked in his review of Spartacus that “it is great fun every now and again to have a mad feast, rather like one who diets permitting himself the abandon of a butterscotch sundae (with nuts) (with cream too) (and marshmallows).” This type of pleasure, however, could be purchased by any film-goer for $0.70. The Bolshoi’s audiences had paid much higher sums of money to attend a performance. John Chapman, a Los Angeles critic who enjoyed Spartacus, noted how much price factored into the American reaction to Spartacus, arguing that “anybody who pays $15 for one ticket is bound to take ballet as seriously as a death in the family.”

In the end, it was the very connection to the Hollywood epics, Spartacus and Ben-Hur, the connection that must have seem so promising before the tour, that doomed Yakobson’s balletic Spartacus in the United States. I find it wistfully fulfilling to speculate on an alternate past in which

127 Novellino-Mearns, “Ah ... Spar-tac-ous.”

128 Perron, “My Spartacus.”


the Bolshoi did not scrap _Spartacus_ after three performances but instead took it on the road to its other cities: Los Angeles, Cleveland, San Francisco, Washington, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Boston. Possibly, in these cities, farther away from the concerns of the New York critics, the production would have found kinder reception, audiences who could have recognized the emotional and kinetic power of Khachaturian’s score, the subtlety and charisma of Plisetskaya’s performance as Phrygia, and the aesthetic innovations of Yakobson’s semi-exoticist dancing and _bas-relief_ scenes. And perhaps could have enjoyed the sight of two hundred people on a stage filled with lush Roman spectacle.

**The Success: Ballet School**

While _Spartacus_ was panned and _Swan Lake_ compared unfavorably to the Kirov’s version, the Bolshoi did have surprising success with a short work entitled _Ballet School_. _Ballet School_ was the first ballet, and as far as I know the only one, created specifically for the Soviet-American cultural exchange tours. Sol Hurok, after attending the graduation exercises of the Moscow Choreographic Academy, requested that the Bolshoi bring something similar to the United States for its tour. In response, Asaf Messerer choreographed a ballet that would show the growth of a dancer in the Soviet system, starting as a young child and eventually blossoming into a principal in the company.132

_Ballet School_ opens with small children, between the ages of eight and thirteen, performing basic warm-up exercises at the _barre_.133 These children are eventually replaced by members of the _corps de ballet_, who begin doing basic steps as well, gradually increasing the speed and complexity of their combinations. The work ends with a series of virtuosic feats from the company’s biggest stars; in

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1962, Maya Plisetskaya, Nikolai Fadeychev, Ekaterina Maximova, Vladimir Vasiliev, and Mikhail Lavrovsky wowed audiences with their jumps, turns, and lifts. Throughout the ballet, Messerer himself stayed on stage, playing the role of the ballet teacher.\footnote{Allen Hughes, “Ballet: Bolshoi and American Children,” \textit{New York Times}, September 18, 1962. Claudia Cassidy, “On the Aisle: Bolshoi’s ‘Ballet School’ Bravura Showpiece for Russian Virtuosi,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, October 31, 1962. John Chapman, “Bolshoi Skill Is Shown in New ‘Ballet School,’” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, September 19, 1962. P.W. Manchester, “Bravura at the Bolshoi,” \textit{The Christian Science Monitor}, September 29, 1962. This much we know from newspaper reviews of the original production. Today, a version of the ballet is performed at the Bolshoi itself, but it cannot be an exact replica of the original, since Messerer’s own part has been removed from the ballet. Nevertheless, I have used footage of the current production of \textit{Ballet School}, or \textit{Class Concert} as it is currently titled, to fill in some gaps about the overall structure of the ballet and the types of movement that are included within it. In 2011, the Bolshoi broadcast a performance of \textit{Class Concert}. Although this is not available commercially, many different people have posted the recording online. Where my information is from this production, I have cited it as such.}

In its structure and design, \textit{Ballet School} closely resembled Danish choreographer Harald Lander’s \textit{Études}, which he created for the Royal Danish Ballet in 1948.\footnote{Clarke and Crisp, \textit{The Ballet Goer’s Guide}, 116.} Indeed the works are so similar that it seems highly probable that Messerer had seen \textit{Études} before choreographing his own version.\footnote{An interview with Mikhail Messerer, Asaf Messerer’s nephew, for \textit{Ballet magazine} Charlotte Kasner claims that Lander’s work was the inspiration for \textit{Ballet School}. Charlotte Kasner, “Mikhail Messerer and the Bolshoi Ballet and Class Concert,” \textit{Ballet Magazine}, September 2007, accessed 8 July 2014, http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr_07/sep07/interview_mikhail_messerer.htm.} It is almost certain that Hurok had it in mind when he requested that Messerer adapt the Bolshoi graduation exercises for the American tour, since American Ballet Theatre had had a resounding success restaging \textit{Études} in the United States just the year before.\footnote{Jean Battey, “Soviets, Too, Captured by the Storyless Ballet,” \textit{The Washington Post, Times Herald}, October 14, 1962.} Superficially \textit{Ballet School} and \textit{Études} resemble one another quite strongly. Each is danced on an empty, or near empty stage, devoid of any setting beyond the occasional presence of a couple \textit{barres}. Dancers wear the same clothes they would wear to practice, or at least a stylized version of them in which all the dancers appear in the same leotard and tights. Both \textit{Ballet School} and \textit{Études} are structured around the minute-by-minute accounting of a ballet class, beginning with simple work at the barre, then proceeding to work on the floor, which generally follows the outlines of a class — center \textit{adagio}, turns, small jumps, big jumps. Both works also end in a flurry of virtuosity.
While the two works are structured similarly and have a very similar look, however, they depart from each other rather sharply in their aesthetic aims, a contrast that is most apparent from their musical settings. In general, *Études* is the more concentrated, almost proto-minimalist work, with long stretches of repeated movement, while *Ballet School* treats its dancers as human characters, emphasizing full body movement and expression. The score to *Études* is a set of piano études by Carl Czerny, orchestrated by Knudåge Riisager.\(^\text{138}\) For an overture, the orchestra plays minutes on minutes of scales. These simple musical exercises didactically inform the audience of the ballet's subject: the movements performed by the dancers are similar to the scales that a musician practices. The style of the piano études, the atomized chunks of musical information that are repeated again and again, also reflects the style of the choreography. In the opening scene, a line of women at the barre perform *tendus*, *battements*, and *coupés*, all exercises that utilize one leg shooting out to the side, front, or back, often in the air. The stage is entirely black and the women are lit only around their legs, so that it seems as if the legs are moving independently. The women are entirely dehumanized, separated from the mechanical processes of their bodies. Though for the rest of the ballet, the entire stage and all the dancers are lit, the choreography continues to be demonstrated in small chunks, often repeating one step over and over. Throughout, the almost invariably unemotive music separates the viewer emotionally from the dancer, making the figures onstage appear doll-like or mechanical rather than human.

*Ballet School*, in contrast, is set to a score pasted together by Alexander Tseytlin from bits of Glazunov, Liadov, Liapunov, Rubinstein, and Shostakovich.\(^\text{139}\) Most of the musical selections are frothy 19th-century dance pieces, often with a solo instrument carrying a lyrical melody over a steady rhythmic accompaniment. These pieces help connect the audience with the dancers onstage, granting their movements a more humanizing element. A greater emphasis is placed on the dancers’


musicality and on their entire bodies; at no moment are the dancers lit only in pieces. For instance, in the second barre sequence of Ballet School, the dancers perform some smaller steps to a delicate, ornamented clarinet melody, but as the strings swell up romantically, the dancers perform stretches, elegantly bending backwards. The step sequences also tend to be longer, with a more diverse sets of elements in each one, more like choreography for a performance than simple exercises.\footnote{This information is from the Class Concert recordings.}

One of the goals of staging Ballet School on tour was to demonstrate the stunning virtuosity of the Bolshoi’s lead principals, who showed off their most impressive steps in the final moments of the ballet. P.W. Manchester wrote that “at one point the stage seemed to be filled with boys and girls running across it at top speed, girls thrown into the air and caught again in flight, and all smiling away as though it were the simplest thing in the world.”\footnote{P.W. Manchester, “Bravura at the Bolshoi,” The Christian Science Monitor, September 29, 1962.} Presumably Manchester was referring to the end of the pas de deux section, in which four different couples engage in virtuosic partnering techniques, the one running over the other. One ballerina leaps into a fish dive in her partner’s arms, another comes flying on into a more complex jump, and a third is casually brought on in a one-armed, over-the-head lift. All the while, a light-hearted waltz plays and the dancers smile as though this were all absurdly easy.\footnote{This information is from the Class Concert recordings.} By staging these stunning technical elements at the same time, the Bolshoi could emphasize the depth of its talent. This assemblage of virtuosity was one aspect of the Soviet company that was intimidating to its American viewers. American ballet companies were in general much smaller than their Soviet counterparts, and they had fewer stars. In 1959, American critics had frequently noted, with a combination of admiration and dismay, that the second and third Bolshoi casts were often as good as the first night casts, demonstrating the enormous wealth of
Soviet talent. Gala and highlight programs, with their multitude of small ballets, similarly demonstrated the company’s abundance of talented dancers (Figure 16).  


Messerer’s decision to display the Bolshoi dancers as virtuosic and human subjects, rather than as Lander’s machines, reinforced the ballet’s dramatic purpose, to demonstrate the hard work involved in becoming a Bolshoi dancer. The emphasis on hard work, seen on stage in the reproduction of the dancers’ daily drills, correlated with the aggrandizement of heroes and celebrities in the Soviet Union, including Galina Ulanova, whose fiercely exacting training regime was advertised in the Bolshoi’s 1959 programs, as discussed in chapter 1. As Julie Gilmour and Barbara Evans Clements argue in their article “If you want to be like me, train!” athletes were often touted in Soviet publications as examples of the New Soviet Man, a heroic figure meant to inspire his fellow citizens to better themselves. Articles about these athletes emphasized their daily training

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regimes as evidence that a scientific approach to work could transform human nature.\textsuperscript{144} Ballet School did something similar in demonstrating the scientific approach to dance training. The work was so appropriate to Soviet sensibilities that when the company returned to Moscow, they kept Ballet School in their repertoire under the title Class Concert.\textsuperscript{145}

However much Ballet School may have appealed to a Soviet aesthetic, however, many American critics, particularly those located in the Northeast, accepted Ballet School as a practice-clothes ballet descended from the works of Balanchine and Lander. Critics complimented the Bolshoi for showing its dancers unadorned, and for celebrating movement for movement’s sake. Jean Battey saw Ballet School as a capitulation to the abstract ballet and wrote that the Soviets had created the ballet because they were influenced by Balanchine’s choreography. Walter Terry described the work as a celebration the dancers’ exertions, but he also compared Ballet School directly to Balanchine’s work, and praised it for contrasting so sharply with the Bolshoi’s narrative works.\textsuperscript{146} John Chapman called Ballet School the “masterpiece” of the season.\textsuperscript{147}

Critics who were not full-time dance specialists or who lived further away from New York were less likely to read Ballet School as an attempt at neoclassicism and more likely to take the production at face value, accepting it as a demonstration of Soviet educational methods. Allen Hughes, for instance, who wrote for the New York Times primarily as a music critic praised the work as a depiction of a ballet class.\textsuperscript{148} Similarly, Alexander Fried of the San Francisco Chronicle, approached the ballet as a pedagogical display, even complaining that the work could lead to “a false inference

\textsuperscript{144} Gilmour and Clements, “‘If You Want to Be Like Me, Train!,’” 210–221.

\textsuperscript{145} Ministry of Culture Order 705, November 11, 1966, RGALI f. 648 o. 12 d. 6 l. 183. The Bolshoi revived Class Concert in 2007. Kasner, “Mikhail Messerer and the Bolshoi Ballet and Class Concert.”


that sheer acrobatics are the ultimate Bolshoi achievement.”149 The split within in the American critical reading of *Ballet School* was another reflection of the ballet critics’ concern with taste. The New York dance critics were more concerned with fitting *Ballet School* into their parameters of highbrow modernist ballet, while other American critics were happy to let the ballet stand as a testament to the hard work of ballet dancers or a demonstration of superb virtuosity.

**Ballet School as Person-to-Person Diplomacy**

*Ballet School* was vitally important to the success of the Bolshoi’s 1962 tour, not merely for its on-stage triumph but also for the person-to-person opportunities it created. Person-to-person diplomacy refers to the many ways in which artists interact with local populations offstage.150 In a memo from 1966 reviewing the cultural exchange program’s accomplishments, Charles Frankel, the Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, wrote that the program stimulated a flow of sympathy between peoples of other countries and the United States and created ties between creative people in the United States and other countries.151 While such statements were usually invoked in support of American artists’ appearances abroad, they were also used by some to justify importing foreign groups into the United States.152 Similarly, the Soviet authorities scheduled numerous such opportunities for their dancers to meet Americans face-to-face.153


150 Joint State Department - ANTA Panel and Committee Meeting, June 16, 1960, ABCECA, Box 95, Folder 26. At this meeting, it is brought up by representatives of Academic/Community Music Panel. In the United States, the USIA ran a specific “People-to-People” named after these interactions, intended to promote cultural diplomacy, Emily Abrams Ansari, “Masters of the President’s Music,” 48–51.

151 Memo, May 11, 1966, to panels from Charles Frankel, asst. Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, ABCECA, Box 95, Folder 29.

152 Joint Meeting, State Department and ANTA, June 16, 1960, ABCECA, Box 95, Folder 26.

153 Information on the Bolshoi Ballet Tour in Canada; Account of the Bolshoi Ballet Tour in Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Washington, Boston, New York; Reporting Notes, RGALI f. 2329 o. 9 d. 292, l. 4, 14 and 35.
In order to depict the full education of a Soviet dancer, *Ballet School* required the participation of about fifteen to twenty small children. Since transporting and then caring for Soviet children for twelve weeks in a foreign country was unfeasible, the Bolshoi employed a small group of local children in each of their destination cities. Before arriving in each tour city, the company would release a press announcement calling for young dancers to audition, often specifying the appropriate ages and heights – children ages 10 to 13, between 4ft 5 inches and 4ft 9 inches. These young people would perform basic ballet movements for Soviet observers. Hundreds of students arrived for each of the auditions, hoping to appear onstage with the famous troupe. Messerer, who was the Bolshoi’s head ballet coach, conducted the final part of the auditions himself. The winning children rehearsed briefly with the company before appearing in the final productions. This meant that not only did the lucky winners get to work with the Bolshoi dancers, but that many more local children were able to meet Soviet ballet coaches and even the great Messerer.

The opportunity for person-to-person diplomacy in the form of dance education was best thematized by *Ballet School*, but it also appeared more spontaneously during the company’s visit to New York. Many of the supernumeraries working on *Spartacus* were American dance students, and two of them, Anya Deinitzin and Linda Cohen, had the courage to invite Messerer to visit their ballet classes at the High School of Performing Arts. When Messerer arrived, the class requested that he teach them, and he acquiesced, much to the delight of the students and of newspaper reporters. While this instance was particularly well-publicized because it came with such a lovely story, interactions within the dance classroom were common for the ballet exchange tours. On

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NYCB’s simultaneous tour of the Soviet Union, Balanchine staged classes for Soviet visitors and the Americans in return observed a Soviet class conducted by legendary teacher Elizaveta Gerdt.\(^{157}\)

It is worth questioning, however, the ultimate point of any of these person-to-person interactions, particularly the auditions for Ballet School. It seems likely that, even more important than the person-to-person interactions themselves was the press coverage that the company received for engaging in them. Because of the Ballet School auditions, the Bolshoi’s arrival in every city was heralded over a week in advance with newspaper articles.\(^{158}\) Moreover, in this press coverage, Americans could see or read about the Bolshoi staff and their interest in dance education. Similarly, in the 1962, the Bolshoi brought with them the first American citizen ever to perform with a Soviet company, Anastasia Stevens. Stevens was the daughter of Edmund Stevens, a Moscow correspondent for Time magazine, and a Russian mother.\(^{159}\) The American newspapers were utterly enamored with her; almost every major publication ran a feature article about the dancer.\(^{160}\) Again, this press coverage gave the Bolshoi an opportunity to demonstrate a positive, friendly side to its American audiences, particularly to the American audiences who could not afford a ticket to one of their performances.\(^{161}\)


\(^{161}\) See also the epilogue. This is also an issue that Danielle Fosler-Lussier discusses in Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy. Fosler-Lussier, Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy, 207–218.
Conclusions

The Bolshoi’s 1962 tour of the United States was a jumble of brilliant success and abject failure. On the one hand, in terms of aesthetic exchange, the tour was a stark defeat. The company had difficulty maintaining an elite, highbrow status, particularly in comparison to memories of the Kirov’s performances the year prior. For the first time in the tours, an audience booed one of the productions, and the Bolshoi was forced to take that ballet, Spartacus, out of their touring repertoire. The company’s performances, then, did little to undermine American notions of Soviet backwardness.

Despite these artistic difficulties, however, in the short term the tour could be considered one of the most politically successful of the early ballet exchanges. The Cuban Missile Crisis gave the company’s appearances an even greater political weight and importance. John F. Kennedy used the tours to signal his future goodwill to the Soviet government as well as to project the aura of a great statesman. The tour’s ability to bring Soviets into contact with American citizens, from the president to the children who participated in Ballet School, made it a kind of model for the collaborative and humanitarian aims of the tours. As Fosler-Lussier argues, cultural détente led the way towards more peaceful political relations between the Soviet Union and the United States in the early 1960s. The Bolshoi’s 1962 successes in the face of the Cuban Missile Crisis represent the height of the exchange’s ability to foster real goodwill between the nuclear superpowers.

Nevertheless, the failure of the audiences and the artists to come to find a shared aesthetic serves as an uneasy happy ending to the tour. While the Bolshoi company’s small role in preventing nuclear war was surely a good thing, the critical responses to the Bolshoi’s 1962 tour demonstrate how far American audiences were from understanding their Soviet visitors and vice-versa. The only success that the Bolshoi could truly find was its Ballet School, which was extolled in the American press under a completely different interpretation than it was in the Soviet Union. Soviet reviewers

162 Ibid., 200–203.
misread American ballet in similar ways during the New York City Ballet’s simultaneous tour to the Soviet Union. Such miscommunications foreshadowed the difficulties faced by the United States and the Soviet Union, and even its successor state Russia, in finding a more permanent diplomatic common ground.
Chapter 4

“Ballet is Like a Flower”:
The New York City Ballet’s 1962 Tour of the Soviet Union

Over the course of October and November 1962, just as the Bolshoi Ballet was touring the United States, the New York City Ballet, led by Russian-American artistic director George Balanchine, performed to packed halls across the Soviet Union. From the State Kremlin Theater, a futuristic hall built during Khrushchev’s administration to house meetings of the full Communist Party, to the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, the elegant 19th-century stage that had seen the premieres of Tchaikovsky’s *Sleeping Beauty* and *Nutcracker*, the company was greeted by cheers, bravos and thunderous clapping. The joyous welcome came as a great surprise to the American participants and observers, who had feared a critical and popular debacle. They had been assured that Balanchine’s non-narrative choreography would be sharply criticized in the Soviet Union for political reasons and because it was too advanced for the tastes of Soviet audiences. Because of this supposed clash of aesthetic styles, the New York City Ballet’s 1962 success has broadly been considered as a major American political-aesthetic victory and has thus received by far the most scholarly attention of all the dance tours of the Cold War. In the popular consciousness, the tour has become known, in the words of Jennifer Homans, as “another crack in the Soviet Union’s confident cultural façade.”

In reality, however, the significance of NYCB’s success has been greatly exaggerated. Balanchine’s choreography was not as starkly different from contemporaneous Soviet ballet as both

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2 Homans, *Apollo’s Angels*, 376.
critics of the time and subsequent scholars have assumed. Because the New York City Ballet arrived in Moscow when Soviet ballet was already undergoing a major stylistic revolution, moving from the realist drambalet of the 1930s and 40s towards the new style, choreographic symphonism, the works that the American company performed in the Soviet Union bore a great deal in common with the new ballets being performed in Soviet theaters. At the heart of both Balanchine’s aesthetics and the new Soviet school of ballet lay an emphasis on the importance of music to dance. In the Soviet Union, the transition to choreographic symphonism was firmly couched in official aesthetics and played out in the official theaters. Thus, Soviet ballet experts and casual audiences alike were to some degree prepared to understand Balanchine’s work; moreover, the language of official Soviet aesthetics was easily applied to the analysis of the New York City Ballet repertoire, and most of the reviewers were able to discuss Balanchine’s aesthetics in a positive, appreciative tone.

Contrary to American accounts of the 1962 tour, most Soviet reviewers were much less antagonistic than Balanchine himself, who chose whenever possible to provoke the Soviet dance establishment by making statements about the importance of abstraction to ballet. These statements directly contradicted the more cautious publicity campaign designed by the American State Department, and they were taken up by the company’s Soviet reviewers as a sign of Balanchine’s moral emptiness. Despite this antagonistic relationship, however, most Soviet critics praised Balanchine and his choreographic style, often drawing connections to the Russian balletic past or to contemporary choreographic symphonists.

Strikingly, however, the appreciative tone of these critical reviews has been overlooked or ignored, as the relatively moderate praise undermines the argument that NYCB succeeded with audiences by defying official Soviet aesthetics. In crafting accounts of the tour, dance historians have generally quoted very selectively from the reviews, looking, in fact, for the sharpest criticism. Almost paradoxically, this reading allows historians such as Jennifer Homans, Bernard Taper, Nancy

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3 For a longer explanation of this revolution, see chapters 1 and 3.
Reynolds and David Caute to use the reviews to bolster their arguments about the company’s success, as the wild Soviet applause in the face of such negative reviews demonstrates, they believe, the absurdity of Soviet censorship. Nancy Reynolds, who has delivered to date the most thorough examination of Balanchine’s Soviet reception in her 1992 paper “Raising the Red Curtain,” focuses almost solely on the criticisms of Balanchine’s style. As Reynolds remarks, “I have deliberately chosen the most provocative viewpoints; there was much praise for Balanchine in the press, but not all of it makes interesting reading.” Reynolds implies that many of the most accepting critics were held back from expressing their true thoughts, writing “it stands to reason that critics were not about to praise abstractionism, whatever they may have thought about it in private.” 4

In this chapter, I reassess the Soviet critical essays on Balanchine by placing New York City Ballet’s performances within the context of Soviet ballet aesthetics. Comparing George Balanchine’s and Jerome Robbins’s ballets to their contemporaries in the Soviet Union, I show how similar many of the New York City Ballet works were to ballets from the new Soviet genre of choreographic symphonism. Soviet critics approached Balanchine’s choreography through the debates about choreographic symphonism and argued for or against his works using official aesthetics as a guide. The Soviet critical response to Balanchine was thus much more moderate than histories of the cultural Cold War have allowed, and was more shaped by domestic debates about the direction of Soviet art than by geopolitical concerns.

Perhaps most strange, the Soviet criticism of New York City Ballet actually provides a new and provocative lens through which to view American ballet of the mid-20th century. The juxtaposition of these two aesthetics brings to light the dogmatism and political posturing that lay behind Balanchine’s artistic philosophies, just as it lay behind the more extreme statements of Soviet aesthetics. Examining this interplay between Balanchine and his Soviet critics reveals the extent to

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4 Reynolds, “The Red Curtain,” 49 and 54. Souritz, a Russian dance historian, surprisingly focuses on similar things, the inability, as she sees it, of the Russian critics to understand Balanchine’s style and their resulting criticisms of his work. Souritz, “Balanchine in Russia,” 53–55.
which abstract ballet, Balanchine’s greatest achievement, was a political construct as much as, or more than, it was an aesthetic one.

New York City Ballet: History and the State Department

George Balanchine (1904–1983) grew up in St. Petersburg, Russia, and trained there at the Imperial Ballet School. He began choreographing in the early 1920s, and in 1924 left Russia for France, where he joined Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. His works for the Parisian company included Apollo (1928) to a score by Igor Stravinsky, with whom the choreographer developed a close friendship and longterm collaborative partnership. In 1933, Balanchine moved to the United States at the behest of American impresario Lincoln Kirstein, and together the two founded the School of American Ballet. During the 1930s and 40s, Balanchine and Kirstein struggled to create a permanent company together. Balanchine choreographed for a number of American ballet troupes, as well as for Broadway and Hollywood musicals. In 1941, the two had their first experience with cultural diplomacy, touring Latin America in execution of the United States government’s Good Neighbor policy.

During this period, the choreographer began to develop his neoclassical style in works such as Serenade (1933, Tchaikovsky), Crystal Palace, later renamed Symphony in C (1947, Bizet), and Theme and Variations (1947, Tchaikovsky). In 1946, Balanchine and Kirstein finally found permanent success with their Ballet Society, the group that would eventually be renamed New York City Ballet. For this new company, Balanchine restaged many of his neoclassical works and began choreographing as well in a second abstract style, producing pieces such as The Four Temperaments (1946, Hindemith), Agon (1957, Stravinsky), and Episodes (1959, Webern). These “black-and-white” or “leotard” ballets

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5 Taper, Balanchine, 67–73, 97–121.


were usually choreographed to austere modernist scores, and the dancers performed in practice
clothes on bare stages. The spare stagings were partly a response to the new company’s meager
funding, but they also, as Lynn Garafola has argued, fit comfortably within the aesthetics of the
1950s New York avant-garde, the world of Piet Mondrian and Jackson Pollock.  

Kirstein and Balanchine had been involved with the earliest phase of the State Department’s
cultural diplomacy program, and during the 1950s the relationship deepened. From 1955 to 1960,
Kirstein sat on the ANTA dance panel. Along with American Ballet Theatre, whose director Lucia
Chase also served on the panel, the New York City Ballet was one of the companies most frequently
chosen for State Department-funded tours. At one meeting of the panel, Kirstein claimed that his
company needed the steady income from State Department tours to survive. Though Kirstein and
Chase recused themselves from direct votes on their companies, their presence on the board almost
certainly helped secure funding. In 1959, eager to bolster the relationship, Balanchine wrote to
State Department officials with a suggestion that he could stage his works on foreign companies
under the umbrella of their cultural exchange programs. As Balanchine explained, he had already
been giving these ballets away for free, without charging any kind of licensing fees for their use.
Thus, the State Department, for no money at all, could be seen to be benevolently giving away
valuable ballets to foreign countries. The State Department happily accepted the offer, though

8 Lynn Garafola, “Dance for a City,” in Dance for a City, ed. Foner and Garafola (New York: Columbia University Press,
1999), 5–8.  Taper, Balanchine, 255.

9 Prevots, Dance for Export, 147–149

10 ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, October 17, 1957, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3388.

11 ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, March 21, 1957; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, January 13, 1955;
ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, October 2, 1958; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, December 18, 1958;
ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, February 19, 1959; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, October 22, 1959,
ABECA Box 101.

12 Letters August 21 and September 3, 1959, Harvard Theater Collection (henceforth CAh), Thr 411, Balanchine
Collection, Folder 1943. Intriguingly, John Martin, who was generally quite vocal in his opposition to the State
Department’s exchanges, seemed to approve of Balanchine’s “lend-lease” ballet program. John Martin, “The Dance:
confusion about which companies were going to receive ballets ended up causing some degree of embarrassment to both Balanchine and the American government. Nevertheless, the company continued to participate in cultural diplomacy activities; in the later 1960s, NYCB helped sponsor participants in the State Department’s “reverse flow” program, which allowed foreign artists to spend time in the United States.  

Balanchine’s efforts to work in collaboration with the State Department seem to have been motivated both by sincere feelings of patriotism and opportunism. Both the company and Balanchine himself certainly benefited from the relationship. Money from exchange tours helped sustain the company, and, moreover, Balanchine was able to ask local embassies and consulates for assistance when traveling abroad. At the same time, Balanchine seems to have possessed genuinely heartfelt patriotism for his adopted country, of which he became a citizen in 1939. More than one of his ballets from the 1940s and 50s tapped into post-World War II patriotic fervor, including *Stars and Stripes*, a work set to the marches of John Philip Sousa in which dancers dressed in military uniform clustered in front of a giant American flag (Figure 17).

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13 Letter, June 12, 1964 from Mary Stewart French to Betty Cage, CAh, Thr 411, Balanchine Collection, Folder 1943: “The Department is also deeply grateful for the assistance given by the New York City Ballet to many visiting artists and it gives one a warm feeling in particular to see it extended to this brave little country [Finland].”

14 Letter, October 13, 1959 from Thayer to Balanchine, CAh, Thr 411, Balanchine Collection, Folder 1943. Thayer offered the help of the Italian consulate to Balanchine and his assistant while they were in the country.

Figure 17. Photograph of Melissa Hayden and members of the New York City Ballet in George Balanchine’s *Stars and Stripes* (1958) with music by John Philip Sousa arranged by Hershey Kay. Photograph by Martha Swope. Choreography by George Balanchine © The George Balanchine Trust.

**Negotiating for the Tour**

Despite the company’s close and productive relationship with the State Department, for a long time Kirstein and Balanchine were reluctant to tour the Soviet Union on behalf of the United States. When the possibility of an American ballet tour of the Soviet Union was first announced to the ANTA panel in 1957, Kirstein informed them that NYCB would not take part. He explained to the group that Balanchine was “violently anti-Russian; the political situation might put [NYCB] in a difficult position – they could be criticized for their lack of scenery and costumes, and for the 'decadent music' they use. The effect of a wholly new vision and sound might appear very peculiar to the Russians.”

Again on October 2, 1958, Kirstein expressed concern that the company could not compete with the “technical extravagance” of the Soviet theaters and declared that he did not

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16 ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, December 19, 1957, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3388.
want to enter a “slugging match” with Russia.\textsuperscript{17} While Balanchine’s personal anxieties about returning to his homeland and staunchly anti-Soviet politics may have played a role in this hesitation, Kirstein and Balanchine were also reluctant to expose their company to potentially critical Soviet reviews.\textsuperscript{18}

Kirstein and Balanchine remained opposed to a New York City Ballet tour of the Soviet Union up through the end of the 1950s. In 1961, however, Kirstein abruptly did an about-face and began campaigning State Department officials to grant the New York City Ballet exactly the Soviet tour they had previously and repeatedly refused. Despite having resigned from the ANTA panel in 1960 in order to avoid a conflict of interest, Kirstein still had a great deal of influence with the people managing the State Department’s cultural exchange programs. In 1961, he traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with Heath Bowman, the chief of the Presentations Division Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the State Department, whom Kirstein asked to arrange a Soviet tour for NYCB. At this point, however, the ANTA panel had become more hesitant to approve the tour. While they greatly admired the New York City Ballet and Balanchine, they had planned on recommending either Jerome Robbins’s Ballets: U.S.A. or Martha Graham’s company for the tour.\textsuperscript{19} Kirstein, however, was adamant, and, perhaps more importantly, the Soviets were more enthusiastic about hosting New York City Ballet than Jerome Robbins’s less famous company (which had, moreover, recently been the object of critical scorn in the \textit{New York Times}).\textsuperscript{20} The new cultural

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[17]{ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, October 2, 1958, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3393.}
\footnotetext[18]{For more information, see chapter 3}
\footnotetext[19]{ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, January 26, 1961 and March 16, 1961, ABEC, Box 101, Folder 17.}
\footnotetext[20]{Letter October 27, 1961, from Hurok to Max Eisenberg, ABEC, Box 50. After writing a relatively positive account of the company’s first New York program on October 9, John Martin gave the company a very bad review on October 18, in which he said that their performance was “depressing” and that \textit{Afternoon of a Faun} was “not danced very well, since this is not basically a ballet company at all.” John Martin, “Robbins’ Dancers Open at the ANTA,” \textit{New York Times}, October 9, 1961. John Martin, “Dance: Robbins’ Troupe,” \textit{New York Times}, October 18, 1961.}
\end{footnotes}
exchange agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union that was signed in 1961 specified that the New York City Ballet would tour the USSR.\textsuperscript{21}

Once the new agreement had been signed, however, and much to the surprise of the ANTA panel and the State Department, Kirstein and Balanchine demurred again, claiming that they did not want the company to tour in the Soviet Union. Rather, the two hoped at this point that they could leverage the agreed-upon Soviet tour into a more expansive program that would include the countries of Western Europe. Balanchine announced “that the only reason the Company would accept the Russian tour would be as a means of getting to the major capital cities of Europe.” Since NYCB had been unable to raise the money for such a trip, the State Department was solicited for the requisite funds to make up the deficit. Balanchine also demanded that the length of the Soviet tour, set at eight weeks, be reduced to five or six, since he considered spending time in the Soviet Union to be a “hardship” assignment, where the company would have poor food and accommodations.\textsuperscript{22} Unsurprisingly, the State Department was enormously reluctant to hand over the funds requested, which came to approximately $80,000, or the equivalent of $2.2 million in 2013.\textsuperscript{23} In the end, it was Sol Hurok who financed this section of the tour. Hurok was concerned that if the New York City Ballet tour of the Soviet Union fell through, the Soviet government would be unwilling to send the Bolshoi Ballet to the United States.\textsuperscript{24} He therefore gave NYCB $25,000 to help


\textsuperscript{22} ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, April 17, 1962, ABECA, Box 101. It is possible that Balanchine’s impression of touring as “hardship” activity was at least partially related to the tragic circumstances of NYCB’s 1956 European tour, on which Balanchine’s wife, ballerina Tanaquil LeClerq, contracted polio; LeClerq was paralyzed for life. At a meeting of the ANTA, Kirstein claimed that LeClerq’s polio should make the panel consider “the terrific strain of an arduous tour.” ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, November 15, 1956, NYp, ABT, ANTA, Folder 3384. Balanchine’s claims about the food in the USSR were possibly based on accurate reports from the ABT dancers in 1960 (see ch 2).

\textsuperscript{23} Measuring Worth, accessed Dec 31, 2014. The income value and economic status conversion is $1,300,000. The economy cost conversion (the proportion of the GDP that this represents) would be $2,200,000.

\textsuperscript{24} ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, April 17, 1962; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, June 19, 1962, ABECA, Box 101.
finance their tour in Europe, money that he agreed would not be returned, even if their performances turned financial profit.\footnote{1962 Agreement between ICES of ANTA and New York City Ballet, ABECa Collection, Box 73, Folder 77. Measuring worth puts this at $408,000 for economic status and $693,000 for economy cost.}

\section*{Choreographic Symphonism versus the Storyless Ballet}

Even as they prepared for the tour, and even though the Soviet government had specifically requested the New York City Ballet, Balanchine, Kirstein, and various members of the ANTA panel continued to express concern that Soviet reviewers would reject the company’s spare aesthetic. The Soviet government had repeatedly denounced “formalist” art, most recently in the late 1940s, and Balanchine’s relatively abstract, storyless ballets contrasted sharply with the spectacular, realistic aesthetic of the drambalet. The American understanding of Soviet aesthetics, however, was based on knowledge of the Soviet Union in the 1940s and 50s, before the Soviet theaters had begun, through the process of de-Stalinization, to develop the genre of choreographic symphonism. This turn, away from the drambalet and towards the choreographic symphony would make the NYCB works much more palatable to Soviet critics.\footnote{See chapters 1 and 3}

The development of choreographic symphonism was formed from two related trends: one, a re-acceptance of the balletic styles of the late-19th and early-20th centuries, particularly of Marius Petipa and Fyodor Lopukhov, and two, a greater focus on the connections in ballet between musical score and dance.\footnote{Ezrahi, \textit{Swans of the Kremlin}, 112.} During the early-20th century, particularly in the Ballets Russes, the musical score of a ballet began to take on a much greater role of importance. Michel Fokine, the company’s first choreographer, created works in which the dance and narrative were directly inspired by the score, an overturning of the traditional 19th-century manner of writing ballet works, in which the score was tailored to fit the choreographer’s plans. Though for the most part Fokine’s works had strong
narrative and realist elements to them, one of his most famous pieces, *Chopiniana*, was a semi-abstract romantic fantasy, a suite of dances to orchestrated piano music by Chopin. A decade later, in the Soviet Union in 1923, choreographer Fyodor Lopukhov used the music of Beethoven’s 4th Symphony for a work titled *Magnificence of the Universe*, a ballet that was supposed to depict the origins of the cosmos.²⁸ During the 1930s, the Soviet government suppressed this musical aesthetic in favor of ballets in which the musical and choreographic structures were wrapped around a realistic and often literary narrative — such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Fountains of the Bakhchisarai*.

However, as de-Stalinization progressed in the mid 1950s, the ballet theaters of the Soviet Union expanded and changed their ideas about the relationship between music, dance, and narrative. As Christina Ezrahi describes in *Swans of the Kremlin*, Lopukhov, who was reinstated as the head of the Kirov Theater in 1955, became a leader of this new movement, and commissioned many works by the young choreographers who formed it.²⁹

The style of choreographic symphonism placed a greater emphasis on music than the Soviet ballets of the 1930s and 40s. Yuri Grigorovich, a leader of the choreographic symphonists, continued to make full-length narrative ballets, such as *Stone Flower*. Despite retaining the narrative structure of the ballet, Grigorovich took a more musical approach to his narrative choreography than the *drambaletists*. He arranged his dancers to create visual counterpoint that reflected the score and conveyed the narrative through leitmotivic development.³⁰ Other choreographic symphonists created works even more closely tied to musical scores. Often these works had less of a realistic than a purely symbolic meaning, and some had more of a suite-like construction than a narrative one. The most extreme example of the style was Igor Belsky’s 1961 ballet *Leningrad Symphony*, set to the Shostakovich score of the same name. The ballet uses the first movement of the symphony to

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²⁹ Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin*, 248–249.

³⁰ See chapter 1.
depict an idyllic life shattered by invading Nazis; the movement’s incessantly repeating melody is choreographed with a series of interlocking and constantly repeating dance motifs for the invading troops. The agonized countermelodies are given to the tormented Soviet characters.31

Philosophically, the debate over the works of the choreographic symphonists hinged on the issue of “content,” [содержание]. According to most Soviet descriptions of ballet aesthetics, a good work of art had to have some inner idea that could galvanize its audience to lead better, socialist lives. During the 1930s and 40s, “content” was defined in very limited terms, essentially allowing only for realistic narratives. By the late 1950s, however, many choreographers and theorists began to argue that good dance could reflect other types of content, including philosophical and spiritual, the type of content that could also be present in classical forms of instrumental music such as the symphony, suite, or concerto.32

Choreographic symphonism was not immediately accepted by the Soviet ballet establishment. Those choreographers who were still devoted to the drambalet aesthetic opposed choreographic symphonism vehemently, and the period of the Thaw in ballet was marked by intense


32 A. A. Sokolov-Kaminskiy, Sovetskiy balet segodnya, 81. Grigorovich criticizes the dance of the 1930s-40s for caring only about content and not realizing that new content demands new form (his implication is that the choreographers of the 1950s have fixed this by balancing it out). Yuri Grigorovich, “Traditsii i novatorstvo,” in Muzïka i khoreografiya sovremennogo baleta ed. I.V. Golubovskiy (Leningrad: Muzïka, 1974), 7–9. A.P. Petrov, a Soviet composer, wrote in an essay that he attributed this flowing of content out of music into dance to early 20th century (to the Diaghilev company), A.P. Petrov, “Kompozitor i Baletmeyster,” in Muzïka i khoreografiya sovremennogo baleta, 53–54. Schmelz makes a similar argument regarding content - which he generally equates with musical mimesis. According to Schmelz, the Soviet Union encouraged mimetic art throughout, and that, while in the 1960s non-mimetic or abstract music burgeoned in the unofficial musical scene, by the late 1960s and 1970s many Soviet composers were returning to mimesis, even in their unofficial works. Schmelz, Such Freedom if only Musical, 10–13 and 220–221. Christina Ezrahi, “The Thaw in Soviet Culture and the Return of Symphonic Dance,” discusses rise of ‘content-rich’ dance in 1930s. Ezrahi, “The Thaw in Soviet Culture and the Return of Symphonic Dance,” International Symposium of Russian Ballet, Harrison Institute. Reynolds has also noted this in discussion in the Balanchine reviews. Reynolds, “The Red Curtain.” As to the humanist nature of that content: Roslavleva discussed in a 1954 article about Ulanova “Ulanova’s performance, inspired by humanism, is one of the summits of realistic dance art.” from Article of June 3, 1954, in RGALI f. 2966 o. 1 d. 428. Original Russian: “Игра Улановой, проникнутая гуманизмом, представляет собой одну из вершин реалистического искусства танца.” At the 1963 All Union Choreographer’s Meeting Zakharov argued that Soviet dance brings humanism to a million people. Stenographic minutes of the All Union Meeting of Choreographers June 1963, RGALI f. 2329 o. 3 d. 1928 l. 3.
debates between proponents of the two styles of choreography. In an essay of 1962, the Bolshoi’s lead ballet choreographer and staunch drambaletist Leonid Lavrovsky argued that ballet was an art capable of conveying content, and that Soviet audiences wanted, even waited for, ballets that expressed that content. According to Lavrovsky, the choreographic symphonists, or as he called them proponents of the “world of agitated feelings,” rejected content in the ballet and therefore were dangerously treading down the path of the Ballets Russes and the degenerate art of the West. Lavrovsky’s opinions, however, were not shared by everyone in the Soviet ballet world, and by the mid 1960s, he had entirely lost his fight against the “world of agitated feelings.” He was replaced in 1964 as the artistic director of the Bolshoi ballet company by Yuri Grigorovich. Moreover, even Lavrovsky, despite his rhetoric, embraced choreographic symphonism to some degree with his ballet Paganini, which the Bolshoi performed on their 1962 tour of the United States. Paganini, set to Rachmaninov’s Variations on a Theme by Paganini, purportedly told the life story of the famous violinist, but in reality was a series of brief scenes structured around the variation form of Rachmaninov’s score.

This new Soviet style of ballet was much closer in line with Balanchine’s aesthetic than the realist works of the 1930s. Those early-20th century choreographers who exerted such a strong influence on the choreographic symphonists had also impacted Balanchine’s developing style. Balanchine worked with Lopukhov in Magnificence of the Universe and the Soviet choreographer had a profound effect on Balanchine’s choreography. Balanchine himself credited Lopukhov with inventing the dance symphony. Fokine’s Chopiniana, too, is thought to be a predecessor to some of

33 Leonid Lavrovsky, “Development of Soviet Ballet,” RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 159 l. 27
34 Ezrahi, Swans of the Kremlin, 245.
36 On Lopukhov’s birthday, Balanchine sent him a telegram thanking him for his support during his early days as a choreographer, claiming “my young dancers know you were the first one to show that symphonies could be used for dance.” Telegram, from Balanchine to Lopukhov, CAh, Thr 411, Balanchine, Folder 1091.
Balanchine’s neoclassical works such as Serenade.\textsuperscript{37} That the new Soviet dance philosophies were closer to Balanchine’s might have been apparent to American experts by 1962, had they been paying attention. When the Bolshoi visited in 1959, they brought with them Grigorovich’s Stone Flower, which, though still narrative, was a far cry from dramaticsuch as Romeo and Juliet. When the Kirov toured in the United States in 1961, they performed Belsky’s Leningrad Symphony, which, intriguingly was retitled Shostakovich’s 7th Symphony in the American programs, presumably in attempt to sound more like Balanchine’s works.\textsuperscript{38} Moreover, the two Goskonsert officials who approved the New York City Ballet programs in mid-1962 accepted almost the entirety of the New York City Ballet repertoire, much to the surprise of the ANTA panel. The Goskonsert representatives seemed to have slightly preferred the neoclassical works, listing five in their suggestions for NYCB’s opening night performance in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, they also approved some of Balanchine’s most difficult black-and-white works to twelve-tone scores, including Agon and Episodes.\textsuperscript{39}

These hints and signs of the new Soviet approach to ballet, however, were broadly ignored by American experts, who continued to believe that the Soviets would reject the NYCB aesthetic as overly formalist or incomprehensible. Just before NYCB embarked on the tour, John Martin questioned

How will the Soviets respond to the abstractions of Balanchine’s choreography? Those of us who are accustomed to the New York City Ballet […] are apt to forget that they seem revolutionary to most of the rest of the world. Germany, Switzerland and Austria seem to have been captivated by his style and the dancing it has produced. But for all its choreographic sluggishness, Europe is still decades ahead of the Soviet Union, and it will be a miracle of the Russians understand what Balanchine is up to.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{37} Jordan, Moving Music, 128–129.

\textsuperscript{38} Kirov Leningrad Ballet, program, 1961, CAh, Thr 411, Balanchine, Folder 2744.

\textsuperscript{39} ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, June 19, 1962; ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, February 20, 1962, ABECA, Box 101.

American and Soviet Aesthetics Brought Into Dialogue

Contrary to Martin’s expectations, the disappearing fault lines between American and Soviet ballet would not be the focus of Soviet responses to the NYCB tour. They would, however, be Balanchine’s focus. The tour was hardly underway when the aesthetic debates between Soviet and American ballet were set off by Balanchine himself. In a now legendary anecdote, when the company arrived at the Moscow Airport, a radio interviewer greeted the choreographer by exclaiming, “Welcome to Moscow, Home of classical ballet!” Balanchine replied, “I beg your pardon … Russia is the home of romantic ballet. The home of classical ballet is now America.”

This comment would set the tone for Balanchine’s subsequent interviews with Soviet media outlets. Balanchine was interviewed on multiple occasions for Soviet periodicals, and in every case he made provocative statements designed to contrast sharply with the Soviet official aesthetics. He particularly emphasized the idea that his ballets were superior because they were self-contained, works that were intended to address ballet and nothing else. In an interview with Sovetskiy Artist, Balanchine argued that ballet should be above simple “illustration,” no matter how elevated the literary source. Presumably this was intended as a criticism of the drambalet and its focus on literary adaptations. Instead, Balanchine argued, ballet “can speak about itself by itself and for itself.”

Balanchine continued, claiming, “Ballet — it is flowers, it is beauty, it is poetry, and one should speak of it only in terms of aesthetics, if one must speak of it at all.”

Much as he did at the Moscow airport, Balanchine constantly emphasized the newness of his approach to ballet, which he opposed to the conservatism of Soviet ballet. When asked about his purpose in Moscow, Balanchine responded, “We want to acquaint Soviet viewers with the distinctive

41 Quoted in Clare Croft, Dancers as Diplomats, 61.
42 “Rasskazivaet Dzh. Balanchin,” Sovetskiy Artist, October 19, 1962, RGALI f. 2337 o. 2 d. 204.
43 Ibid. Original Russian: “Он сам по себе и сам за себя скажет о самом себе. Балет — это цветы, это красота, это поэзия, а об этом обо всем надо говорить только с позиций эстетических, в том случае, если надо говорить.” This was a favorite metaphor of Balanchine's, often deployed in interviews to ridicule audience members who sought meaning in dance gesture. Arlene Croce, “Balanchine Said,” New Yorker, January 26, 2009.
features of American dance, with our quests and our discoveries. After all, art should not be bound by cast-iron forms [застывшими образами]. It should always live and grow, and it is for this reason that we are searching for the course of choreography’s subsequent development.”44 With such statements, Balanchine likely knew that he was provoking the Soviet ballet establishment. Indeed, Reynolds, a dance historian who was personally acquainted with Balanchine, wrote of his press interviews in the Soviet Union, “Balanchine — and if I know him, with somewhat diabolic intent — thus provided a platform wide open to attack […]”45

Balanchine’s attempts to distance his ballet from Soviet aesthetics was sharply at odds with the approach taken by the State Department. Following common practice for the State Department’s cultural exchange program, the American Embassy in Moscow released a short Russian-language booklet describing the company’s history and aesthetic in an attempt to educate local audiences.46 I found copies of this booklet in the personal archival collections of two different ballet experts in Moscow, the critic Natalia Roslavleva and the dancer Akiva Diner.47 It seems therefore to have had at the very least a moderate circulation amongst the Soviet ballet elite. The booklet attempted to make Balanchine’s ideas as palatable to a Soviet audience as possible, in particular soft-pedaling the importance of abstraction in his work. Instead, it focused on Balanchine’s recent Midsummer Night’s Dream (1962, Mendelssohn) and Western Symphony. Both works shared some remarkable similarities with the Soviet drambaleti; Midsummer Night’s Dream, as a full-length narrative ballet based on a Shakespearean subject would seem similar in topic and structure to

44 “Vstrecha s Moskvichami raduyet,” RGALI f. 2337 o. 2 d. 204. Original Russian: “Мы хотим познакомить советских зрителей с особенностями американского танца, с нашими поисками и находками. Ведь искусство нельзя ограничить застывшими образами, оно всегда должно жить, расти, и поэтому мы ищем пути дальнейшего развития хореографии.”
45 Reynolds, “The Red Curtain,” 49.
46 According to Danielle Fosler-Lussier, it was common for American embassy staff to produce this type of material for local audiences. Fosler-Lussier, Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy, 43.
47 RGALI f. 2337 o. 2 d. 204 l. 150. RGALI f. 2966 o. 1 d. 454 l. 47.
the Soviet works such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Lost Illusions*. *Western Symphony*, a short work with a score by Hershey Kay that drew on American folk-tunes and featured dancers dressed in cowboy outfits, may have appealed as an example of the same essentialized nationalism that made *Rodeo* so popular in the Soviet Union in 1960. The cover of the booklet featured a picture of Diana Adams and Nicholas Magallanes in *Western Symphony*, dressed up in cowboy and saloon girl outfits (Figure 18).

While the booklet did mention the black-and-white ballet *Agon*, it described the work only as “difficult,” avoiding any mention of the ballet’s potentially controversial aspects, such as its abstraction or twelve-tone score.

Figure 18. American Embassy in Moscow, “News of American Culture” brochure. Choreography by George Balanchine © The George Balanchine Trust. Programs of New York City Ballet, RGALI f. 2966 o. 1 d. 454 l. 47.

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48 See chapters 1 and 2.
The program notes for the company’s performances were almost as conciliatory as the Embassy’s booklet. While the notes drew attention to Balanchine’s innovations, including plotless ballet, they underlined some of the aspects of choreography that aligned with Soviet artistic values. For instance, they mentioned that Balanchine’s works sometimes expressed the “national character of the music,” using the Scottish Symphony and Western Symphony as examples.\textsuperscript{49} The program notes also pointed out that Balanchine had choreographed some narrative works, including La Sonnambula, one of the ballets being performed on the Soviet tour. The program booklet even attempted to make Agon more palatable according to Soviet aesthetics by emphasizing the connections between the score and 17th-century music, rather than pointing out its ties to serialist composition.\textsuperscript{50}

Performing in the Soviet Union

The New York City Ballet opened its tour of the Soviet Union on October 9, 1962, in the Bolshoi Theater. All tickets were sold out in advance.\textsuperscript{51} After opening night, the company moved its performances to the Kremlin Palace of Congresses, a newer, larger theater seating 6000 people that had been built inside the walls of the Kremlin itself to house the meetings of the full Communist Party.\textsuperscript{52} After its performances in Moscow, the company went on to perform in Leningrad (Oct 31-Nov 8), Kiev (Nov 11-18), Tbilisi (Nov 21-25), and Baku (Nov 28-Dec 1).\textsuperscript{53} By all accounts the performances were sold out, and the audiences cheered enthusiastically, even wildly.\textsuperscript{54} According to

\textsuperscript{49} Program notes, RGALI f. 2337 o. 2 d. 204 l. 23. Original Russian: “национальный характер музыки.” It is unclear who wrote these program notes.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{52} Croft, Dancers as Diplomats, 37. ANTA Dance Panel Meeting Minutes, December 20, 1962, ABeca, Box 101. As Ezrih discusesses, the Kremlin Palace of Congresses functioned as a secondary stage for the Bolshoi. Ezrih, Swans of the Kremlin, 214.


one famous anecdote, during a performance of Donizetti Variations, Edward Villella was greeted with such fervent applause that he repeated his solo, breaking an NYCB company policy that forbade any encores.55

For Balanchine, despite the success, the trip to the Soviet Union was emotionally taxing. It was the first time he had returned to Russia or seen his family since his departure in 1924. Balanchine’s brother, composer Andrei Balanchivadze, met the company at the airport in Moscow, and there was reportedly an emotional reunion.56 According to Balanchine’s biographer, however, even this meeting with his brother provided a source of strain. The two siblings had not been in contact since Balanchine’s emigration in the 1920s, and, moreover, Balanchine did not approve of Andrei Balanchivadze’s (socialist realist) music. Taper recounts that Balanchine began to have nightmares about being trapped in Russia, and eventually skipped the company’s performances in Kiev, choosing instead to return to the United States for a week of rest before rejoining the company in Tbilisi.57

Surprisingly, NYCB’s trip remained relatively unaffected by the Cuban Missile Crisis. According to Clare Croft, who has interviewed surviving members of the company about their experiences in the Soviet Union, some experienced anxiety about the political situation, and many remembered having to leave the embassy quickly at times to avoid protestors. Nevertheless, much like the Bolshoi dancers in the United States, their days were mostly occupied, not with politics, but with rehearsals and performances that gave little extra time for broader concerns. There were, however, two difficult confrontations between the company and Soviet citizens outside the theater. During one of the protests outside the American Embassy, someone put his cigarette out on Kay

55 Croft, Dancers as Diplomats, 54.
57 Taper, Balanchine, 278–279.
Mazzo’s arm. Later, Shawn O’Brien, one of the dancers, was arrested for filming scenes in a public park with his 8 mm camera. O’Brien was held and questioned in a nearby building for four and a half hours. He was eventually released and the film was returned to him, but Hans Tuch, the company’s State Department handler, was outraged that the Soviet police would hold an American performer for such a long time without notifying American authorities. While this was the only incident involving a run-in between the American dancers and the Soviet police, these two fairly aggressive interactions between the dancers and their Soviet hosts speak to the tense and suspicious atmosphere of the Cold War, which can often be forgotten in the pomp and celebration surrounding the exchange tours.

Balanchine and the Soviet Aesthetic in Practice: Serenade

The New York City Ballet opened in each Soviet city with the same program: Tchaikovsky’s Serenade, Stravinsky’s Agon, and Kay’s Western Symphony, all with choreography by Balanchine, and Morton Gould’s Interplay, with choreography by Jerome Robbins. In every new city, therefore, the company opened its performances with Serenade, an ethereal ballet choreographed by Balanchine in 1933 to Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s 1880 Serenade for Strings. Like many of Balanchine’s neoclassical works, the choreographic techniques in Serenade bore great similarities to the works of the choreographic symphonists and to the early 20th-century ballets that were coming into such prominent favor in the 1950s and 60s. Much like Belsky in Leningrad Symphony or Fokine in Chopiniana, Balanchine used shifts in performing forces, returning motifs, and other choreographic devices to endow the musical structure of the work with a narrative.

58 Croft, Dancers as Diplomats, 51.

59 Ibid., 51. Memo to Alfred Boerner from Heath Bowman, ABEC, Box 73, Folder 28.

Balanchine’s choreography interprets the formal structure of Tchaikovsky’s *Serenade for Strings* in mimetic terms. Like Tchaikovsky’s 4th Symphony, *Serenade for Strings* is unified by the use of a motto theme, a slow homophonic declaration that is played at the opening and closing of the first movement and again at the close of the fourth. In the first movement, this stark, melancholic music provides a frame in which to enclose the lighter, ebullient textures of a sonatine. Throughout Balanchine’s *Serenade*, the motto theme is always choreographed for the entire female corps of the ballet, seventeen women in flowing white dresses arrayed in a double diamond (Figure 19). At the opening of the first movement, the dancers all perform a series of very basic gestures in unison, mirroring the slow, prayer-like atmosphere of the music. When this motto theme returns in the conclusion, the dancers hold their opening poses, but there is an empty place on stage, in the front position of the left diamond. A soloist walks in from the wings, as though she has arrived late to the stage and is trying to figure out her place in it. She settles into her spot at the front of one of the diamonds and proceeds to perform the gestures from the ballet’s opening; at the same time, the rest of the women perform new choreography, in which they slowly process offstage, leaving the soloist alone. The moment dramatizes the repetition of the motto theme, bringing this formal gesture to life by the story of a dancer who appears late to a rehearsal and becomes disoriented. This plot line is then extended through the rest of the ballet; this same dancer engages in a romantic waltz in the second movement and in the final movement collapses onstage and is carried off in the arms of the male dancers.

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Throughout the ballet, Balanchine associates certain musical themes with specific dancers. Apart from the opening of the exposition, the introduction of each musical theme is performed by a soloist. The entrances of theme two in both the exposition and recapitulation are performed by the same dancer — associating her specifically with this music. The build up to the recapitulation is choreographed with a line of dancers who peal off and run offstage, leaving the space open for the entrance of the soloist (Table 3).
In the concluding two movements, Balanchine alters Tchaikovsky’s music to provide the ballet with a more emotionally satisfying narrative. The original Tchaikovsky score places the slow movement, marked *Elegy*, third, followed by a brisk *Tema Russo*, which concludes the *Serenade for Strings*. When Balanchine originally choreographed the ballet in 1933, he skipped the *Tema Russo* movement, only adding it in 1940.\(^{62}\) When he chose to add the *Tema Russo* back into the ballet, however, he added it as a new third movement, choosing keep the *Elegy* in the final place. Adding the *Tema Russo* last would have provided a formal symmetry to the ballet, since the movement ends with a late reappearance of the motto theme. Instead of choosing to end the ballet in this formally

symmetrical way, however, Balanchine decided to retain his more melancholic, poetic close from the 1933 version.

Figure 20. Still of male soloist, female soloist, and “dark angel” in the final movement of Balanchine’s Serenade. From New York City Ballet in Montreal, Vol. 1. Choreography by George Balanchine © The George Balanchine Trust.

The music to the Elegy is in the form of a rondo, ABACA, with a returning A theme that is halting, its phrases constantly cut off in strange places. In the opening of the movement, a female soloist lies collapsed on stage (the same one who earlier had appeared “late” to the ballet). A man crosses the stage to reach this fallen woman, accompanied by a soloist referred to by NYCB dancers as the “dark angel.” As the man crosses the stage, this dark angel stands behind him, covering his eyes. According to Balanchine stager Suki Schorer, the dark angel “should place her foot as close to
[the man’s] as possible. They should walk as one creature.” When the A theme returns later in the movement, the characters of the fallen soloist, the male soloist, and the dark angel come back. The man clutches the hand of the female soloist, this time lowered again to her fallen position onstage, while the dark angel hides behind him, her arms stretched out to provide him wings (Figure 20). At a particularly intense moment in the music, the angel begins to flap her wings; it looks as if the man himself is a winged creature. This highly suggestive moment, in which an angel bends over a fallen woman, brings to light the narrative content of the ballet. Balanchine’s use of such mimetic gestures as the fallen angel and the latecomer to a dance rehearsal bear similarities to Belsky’s use of narrative fragments in *Leningrad Symphony*. Both choreographers used such narrative gestures to illustrate the musical form of their chosen scores.

**Censorship and the Soviet Sources**

Beginning the morning after NYCB’s first show in Moscow, the company’s performances set off a wave of reviews in the Soviet press and on television. It seemed that everyone in the Soviet dance world, including composers, choreographers, dancers, coaches, and historians, had an opinion to express about the Balanchine and his company. The American scholarly interpretation of these reviews has tended to fixate on the idea that they were heavily censored. This accords with the model of Soviet censorship as it was understood by Americans up through the early 1990s, which conceptualized the process as top-down, in which the Party General Secretary could directly impose his will on all published material. More recent scholarly accounts of Soviet censorship, however, such as that by Samantha Sherry, emphasize the multi-person nature of censorship as practiced in the USSR. This model holds particularly true for the post-Stalin period, during which the Soviet

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63 Dance notations: Serenade, CAh, Thr 411, Balanchine, Folder 2167.

64 Reynolds, “The Red Curtain.”

censorship board (Glavlit) was encouraged to act in partnership with the editorial boards of journals, rather than above them. During this period, moreover, the objects of censorship were, at least ostensibly, to be primarily state and military secrets, rather than political views.\footnote{Ibid.} Taking this new research into consideration, it seems unlikely that any of the reviews of NYCB was subject to strict political censorship after being written.

Furthermore, as Alexei Yurchak has argued in \textit{Everything Was Forever Until it Was No More}, though public political acts and public discourse became increasingly frozen during the late Soviet period, this immutability, paradoxically, opened up “spaces of creativity and unanticipated meanings in the context of strictly formulaic ideological forms, rituals, organizations.”\footnote{Alexei Yurchak, \textit{Everything Was Forever, Until it Was No More} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 14.} The transformation of the word “content” in Soviet ballet discourse represents a case of the phenomenon that Yurchak describes, and thus the Soviet reviews of New York City Ballet fit into this paradigm as well: by following certain rigid discursive strictures, Soviet reviewers demonstrated their political orthodoxy, yet within those strictures the critics could express a variety of opinions. Russian dance historian Elizabeth Souritz, who was one of the Soviet reviewers of the NYCB performances in 1962, has recently published an article describing the tone that the government demanded in the NYCB reviews. Souritz claims that the reviewers were encouraged not to insult Balanchine and his company, for fear of creating an international incident and riling up American reviewers against Soviet companies, but at the same time to assert the superiority of Russian ballet.\footnote{Souritz, “Balanchine in Russia,” 53–55.} Just as Souritz describes, a careful search through the Soviet reviews shows that they were largely positive, though they tried to co-opt Balanchine as a figure of Russian rather than American culture. I would add, further, that the reviews almost all contain some direct affirmation of realism or rejection of
abstraction, and that this direct statement may have been understood as necessary in reviewing Balanchine’s works.

Within the strict constraints that Souritz describes, however, critics expressed a broad array of opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of the company and on Balanchine’s style of choreography. Alexander Lapauri opened his review of Balanchine’s troupe with the statement, “Without doubt, the performances by the troupe ‘NYCB’ […] are an important artistic event. And, as with any event, it creates its admirers and critics. And where there are two sides, there will arise argument, and in argument is born truth.” The diversity of opinions that Lapauri mentions is not difficult to see in the reviews. Furthermore, as Souritz herself asserts, we should not assume that, because they were subject to political pressure, these reviewers did not believe in the statements they were writing or in the Soviet aesthetics they espoused. As Yurchak claims,

What tends to get lost in the binary accounts is the crucial and seemingly paradoxical fact that, for great numbers of Soviet citizens, many of the fundamental values, ideals, and realities of socialist life (such as equality, community, selflessness, altruism, friendship, ethical relations, safety, education, work, creativity, and concern for the future) were of genuine importance, despite the fact that many of their everyday practices routinely transgressed, reinterpreted, or refused certain norms and rules represented in the official ideology of the socialist state.

Many Soviet reviewers truly believed in the superiority of Russian ballet, a fact that cannot be dismissed simply because it was politically important for them to affirm that superiority in writing. Similarly, just because the reviewers all had to reject abstraction is not a sign that they did not genuinely value ballet with content.

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69 A. Lapauri, “Раздумья после спектакля гостей,” RGALI f. 2337 o. 2 d. 204 l. 123. Original Russian: “Несомненно, выступления труппы ‘НИСБ’ основателем и бессменным руководителем которой является талантливый хореограф Дж Баланчи, – значительное художественное явление. И, как всякое явление, оно создает своих поклонников и противников. А где есть две стороны, там возникает спор, а в спорах рождается истина. Поспорили и пришли к единому решению. Вот было бы здорово!”

70 Alexei Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, Until it Was No More, 8.
Praise for Balanchine and NYCB

Overwhelmingly, Soviet critics praised Balanchine for his innovation, his “original choreographic vocabulary” and “compositional fantasy,” as composer Aram Khachaturian wrote. Critic Maria Sabnina remarked, “It is impossible not to be delighted by his inexhaustible imagination.” As had been noted by many American critics of the time and since, Balanchine’s works often introduced unorthodox movement into the balletic vocabulary, bending arms, using sharply bent wrists, emphasizing the hips. Soviet dance critics had long been concerned about the lack of new steps in drambalet choreography, so it is unsurprising that Balanchine’s choreography seemed particularly rich in this area to his Soviet viewers.

In addition to praising Balanchine for his originality, the Soviet reviewers were also uniformly impressed with the “impeccable classical technique” of the New York City Ballet dancers. Yu. Gerber remarked that “it is impossible not to recognize the high professional mastery of the American artists, their keen technique, their clean performance of difficult, virtuosic


72 M. Sabnina “Iskaniya ... Vo imya chego? Gastrol N’yu-Yorskoy Baletnoy Truppi” RGALI f. 2337 o. 2 d. 204 l. 115. Original Russian: “Нельзя не восхищаться его неиссякаемым воображением...”

73 Many of these changes, as Sally Banes has pointed out, were adapted by Balanchine from African-American dance. These movements, as original as they were to American of the 1950s, may have been even more startling for a Soviet audience, largely unfamiliar with the black dancers on Broadway and in Hollywood musicals who influenced Balanchine. Sally Banes, “Balanchine and Black Dance,” in Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 53–69.

74 Bogdanov-Berezovsky, in his 1952 account of Ulanova’s career complained that many of the great drambalet did not break with classical dance steps, in particular that arabesques were overused. V. Bogdanov-Berezovsky, Ulanova and the Development of the Soviet Ballet, trans. Stephen Garry and Joan Lawson (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1952).

Many of the Soviet critics, however, attributed the NYCB’s technical prowess to Balanchine’s time in the Leningrad Dance Academy. Historian and reviewer Anna Ilupina, for instance, asserted that the entire character of the New York City Ballet could be attributed to Balanchine’s Russian birth and education. The claims to NYCB’s Russianness were not completely unfounded, since Kirstein and Balanchine’s School of American Ballet, where most of the NYCB dancers had studied, boasted a number of Russian-trained teachers. In the publicity leading up to NYCB’s tour, the School of American Ballet had been mentioned multiple times as one of Balanchine and Kirstein’s great accomplishments in the United States and as one of the main reasons that the company was so successful. The Soviet critics, however, constantly emphasized and exaggerated Balanchine’s connections to Russia. More than just attributing the technical excellence of his dancers to Balanchine’s Russian training, many Soviet critics counted all of Balanchine’s works and actions as part of a Russian ballet school. Sabnina, who was one of the staunchest defender’s of Balanchine’s works in the Soviet press, remarked as an opening gambit in her review, “[Balanchine’s biography] confirms the fact that all the strongest developments of contemporary foreign choreography are directly or indirectly connected with the Russian school and its traditions.” Balanchine was quite angered by these claims. Indeed, according to Clare Croft’s

76 Gerber, “Pervoye znakomstvo.” Original Russian “нельзя не признать высокого профессионального мастерства американских артистов, их острой техники, чистоты исполнения сложных, виртуозных комбинаций.” I am not yet sure of this author’s first name, but he is probably the Yu. Gerber who in 1954 performed on the Bolshoi’s Romeo and Juliet film. Thus, the dancer is likely Yuriy Gerber, the only Gerber listed in the RGALI as a member of the Bolshoi.

77 A. Ilupina “Balet Balanchina,” RGALI f. 2337 o. 2 d. 204 l. 68.

78 Eugenie Ouroussow, the director of the School of American Ballet, was Russian, as was Felia Doubrovska, another prominent teacher. Jack Anderson, “Felia Doubrovska Dies at 85; Ballerina and Noted Teacher,” New York Times September 21, 1981.

79 “N’yu-York Siti Balet’ v Moskve,” RGALI f. 2337 o. 2 d. 204 l. 40. New York City Ballet Program, RGALI f. 2337 o. 2 d. 204 l. 23.


81 Sabnina, “Iskaniya ... vo imya chego? Gastroli N’yu-Yorskoy Baletnoy Trupp.”
interviews with many of the New York City Ballet dancers, Balanchine bristled at every attempt on the part of the Soviet government to assert that he was Russian and instead tried to emphasize either his Georgian or American nationality.\(^82\)

**The Issue of Content: Balanchine in the Soviet Context**

While Soviet reviewers were near unanimous in their praise for Balanchine’s originality and the technical excellence of the NYCB dancers, their reviews varied wildly on the validity of Balanchine’s aesthetic philosophies and the ways those aesthetics were revealed in dance. In many cases, the reviewers’ opinions of Balanchine were folded implicitly or explicitly into ongoing debates about the relative merits of choreographic symphonism and the *drambalet*. Those Soviet critics who supported *drambalet* choreography over choreographic symphonism unsurprisingly took a strictly negative view of Balanchine’s works. This opinion was most fervently expressed by Rostislav Zakharov, one of the founding choreographers of the *drambalet* school. While Zakharov claimed he appreciated the talent of the New York City Ballet dancers and the innovation of certain movements in Balanchine’s works, he attacked Balanchine for the lack of content in his ballets, arguing that the choreographer’s goals were only technical in nature.\(^83\)

Unlike Zakharov, most Soviet critics did not reject Balanchine’s aesthetics out of hand. Instead, many reviewers praised the music to Balanchine’s works, arguing that these scores expressed real content to their audiences. These reviewers questioned, however, whether or not Balanchine accurately translated that musical content into dance. Yu. Gerber, Boris Lvov-Anokhin, and Natalia Roslavleva, for example, believed that Balanchine had not succeeded in conveying the content of the dance through music, arguing instead that he succeeded only in translating the superficial or exterior features of the music into choreography. Gerber, for example, argued that Balanchine demonstrated

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\(^{82}\) Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats*, 61–64.

\(^{83}\) Zakharov, “Perviy spektakl’ gostey.”
great musicality in his works, but objected that "music is not just a musical and rhythmic pattern that the choreographer strives to dance out […]. It has definite content that reflects the worldview of the composer, it manifests various thoughts and feelings." In Gerber’s view, because Balanchine failed to take into consideration the emotional and intellectual content of the musical scores he worked with and only focused on the music’s surface features, his works failed to demonstrate real content.

This distinction between the interior content and exterior features of a musical score allowed these writers to criticize Balanchine’s works while still defending the choreographic symphonists and their models, Fokine and Lopukhov. In his review for *Nedelya*, Boris L’vov-Anokhin recognized the musicality of Balanchine’s works but drew an unfavorable comparison between Balanchine’s *Serenade* and Fokine’s *Chopiniana*. L’vov-Anokhin argued that while *Chopiniana* transmits the emotional shades and nuances of Chopin's music "with astonishing accuracy," even "embodies that music's soul, the same cannot always be said of Balanchine's *Serenade.*" Similarly, dance critic and historian Natalia Roslavleva used her review of Balanchine's works to defend plotless dance, particularly in the works of Fyodor Lopukhov. Again, Roslavleva drew her distinction between exterior facets of music, which she argued Balanchine expressed well in works such as *Symphony in C* and *Serenade*, and the inner content of the music.

Some Soviet critics, including Maria Sabnina and dancers Mikhail Gabovich and Olga Lepeshinskaya, used the same distinction between the interior and exterior facets of music to provide a limited defense of Balanchine’s works. Gabovich argued that despite Balanchine’s statements to the contrary, his works did contain content. Gabovich’s first line of argument to prove

84 Gerber, “Pervoye Znakomstvo.” Original Russian: “Но ведь музыка — это не только музыкальный и ритмический рисунок, который балетмейстер стремится отанцовывать. В музыке заложено гораздо больше: она имеет определенное содержание, отражает миропонимание композитора, в ней выражаются самые разнообразные мысли и чувства.”


86 Roslavleva, “Etogo nikogda ne budet.”
the content of Balanchine’s works was musical; according to the critic, musical works by such composers as Bach and Mozart, Tchaikovsky and Glazunov, Mendelssohn and Ravel, Prokofiev and Stravinsky already had internal worth, and that by embodying and reinterpreting that music so vividly onstage, Balanchine’s art also expressed valid content. Gabovich’s second line of defense of Balanchine’s choreography that the classical dance vocabulary had its own kind of content, exploring the workings of the human body; by using this classical vocabulary, Balanchine also demonstrated an attention to content. Gabovich’s review is an impressively complex essay on Balanchine’s choreography, and is even, I believe, the source of an aphorism that is now almost universally associated with Balanchine: “See the music, hear the dance.”

Nevertheless, even critics such as Sabnina or Gabovich, who found ways to support Balanchine’s works within the parameters of Soviet aesthetics, also rejected some of the choreographer’s stated principles. While Gabovich lauded Balanchine and his ballet, he argued against Balanchine’s statements in the Soviet press that suggested that the NYCB style was the only

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87 It has long been known that Balanchine took many of his most famous sayings from earlier writers, and it has been assumed that Balanchine took the “see the dance” aphorism from a Glenway Wescott article published in December 1963. Arlene Croce, “Balanchine Said,” New Yorker, January 26, 2009. However, a year prior, in November, 1962, Gabovich wrote in his “Dance Panorama,” “[Balanchine] truly ‘sees’ music and ‘hears’ dance.” Mikhail Gabovich, “Panorama tantsev,” f. 2337 o. 2 d. 204 l. 119. Original Russian: “он поистине 'видит' музыку и 'слышит' танец.” The quotation was included in Terry’s truncated version of Gabovich’s article, so it is possible either that Wescott saw the phrase and printed it, or that Balanchine himself pulled it from the Gabovich review.

88 That Sabrina particularly pointed to the strong contrasts in Balanchine’s works drew a connection between the American choreographer and choreographic symphonists. In Grigorovich’s works contrast between good and evil, human and magical, dark and light were painted in very sharp contrasts; this was one of the aspects of his works for which he garnered the most praise amongst Soviet critics. Lepeshinskaya remarked on La Valse that “and though one could not call Ravel’s La Valse a narrative ballet in the full sense of the word, at the same time this impressionistic scene, staged brilliantly by Balanchine, has its own thought and its own theme.” Original Russian: “и хотя вальс Равела нельзя назвать сюжетным балетом в полном смысле этого слова, все же в этом импрессионистический картиной блестящая поставлена Баланчиним есть своя тема и своя мысль.” V. Katanyan, Amerikanskij balet v Moskve (Tsentr’naya Ordena Krasnogo Znameni Studiya Dokumental’nikh Fil’mov Moskva, 1962), Located in Personal Collection of Wenshuo Zhang.

89 Sabrina, “Iskaniya ... vo imya chego?”
appropriate future of ballet choreography. Instead, Gabovich’s article called for artistic understanding between proponents of drambalet style, proponents of choreographic symphonism, and proponents of Balanchine’s style. The final paragraphs of Gabovich’s second review of the company defended Soviet ballet while calling for greater artistic acceptance within the Soviet Union. Gabovich pointed out that Balanchine, too, had choreographed story ballets, *Prodigal Son* and *La Sonnambula*. Drawing from Balanchine’s interviews in Soviet papers, Gabovich quoted his claim that “Ballet is like a flower,” and responded:

That is quite right, even the symbolic comparison with beautiful flowers. Yes, the flowers that Albrecht holds in his hands as he walks towards Giselle’s grave are beautiful. But three times lovelier are the sadness, the anguish and the repentance felt by the man who kneels and scatters white flowers on the grave. Man and flowers, that is the poetic symbol of romantic ballet.

Gabovich’s answer to Balanchine draws on the heritage common to them both, citing the quintessential Romantic ballet, *Giselle*, which was created in 1830 with music by Adolph Adam and choreography by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot. In pointing out the power of the moment when Albrecht lays his flowers on Giselle’s grave, a moment portrayed purely in pantomime, Gabovich argued for the relevance of narrative ballet and pantomime to the future of the art form. More importantly, he drew attention to the importance of human emotion to the ballet by contrasting it with the unemotive beauty of the flowers. While defending narrative ballets, however, Gabovich continued to maintain that both plotted and plotless works of ballet had validity.

Within the style itself, big differences can be noted, as for instance in ‘Symphony’ of Bizet-Balanchine and ‘Symphony’ of Shostakovich-Belsky. In the former there is

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90 Translation from Balanchine’s personal files. CAh, Thr 411, Balanchine, Folder 2239. Original from Gabovich, “Panorama Tantsa.” Original Russian: “Все это справедливо. И даже символическое сравнение с красотой цветов. Да… красоты цветы в руках Альберта, идущего на могилу умершей Жизели. Но трижды прекраснее та скорбь, мука и раскаяние, которыми живет этот человек, преклоняя колени и осыпая могилу белями цветами. Человек и цветы – поэтический образ романтического балета.”
no dramatic content, whilst it exists in the latter. Both styles have a right to existence, just as much as other kinds and aspects of choreography.\textsuperscript{91}

That Sabnina and Gabovich, despite their overall admiration for Balanchine, still felt need to address Balanchine’s artistic philosophy as stated in the \textit{Sovetskiy Artist} interview is an indication of the degree to which Balanchine’s interview and his works were conflated in the Soviet reception of NYCB’s 1962 tour. Many of the newspaper and journal critics, including Lapauri, Sabnina, Gabovich, and Lepeshinskaya directly referenced Balanchine’s \textit{Sovetskiy Artist} statements in their reviews, demonstrating that the article had been widely read, widely discussed, and was considered an integral component of Balanchine’s appearance in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{92} Their approach suggests that Balanchine’s works were not considered inherently “abstract” simply because they were closely related to music. Rather, the ballets were abstract, or devoid of content, because Balanchine had claimed that in his interview.

**The Presence of Content: Jerome Robbins and Interplay**

The Soviet ambivalence about Balanchine’s statements in the press can be brought into sharper relief when compared to the broad acceptance of fellow American choreographer Jerome Robbins, whose ballets \textit{Interplay} and \textit{Fanfares} were also performed on the tour. Robbins had worked for NYCB on and off during the 1950s after his sudden catapult to nationwide fame with the 1944 ballet \textit{Fancy Free}.\textsuperscript{93} His second ballet, \textit{Interplay}, which was premiered as part of \textit{Billy Rose’s Concert Varieties} at the Ziegfeld Theater a year later, shared a number of common features with \textit{Fancy Free}.

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{91} Ibid. Original Russian: “Наконец, и внутри самого жанра нельзя не видеть резких различий, скажем, между ‘Симфонией’ Бизе – Баланчина и ‘Симфонией’ Шостаковича – Бельского. В первом случае нет программной драматургии, во втором она есть. И тот, и другой жанр имеет право на существование, равно как и другие жанры большого объемного понятия – хореографии.”
\item \textsuperscript{92} Lapauri, “Razdum’ya posle spektakley gostey.” Sabnina, “Iskaniya ... vo imya chego?” Gabovich, “Panorama Tantsev.” V. Katanyan, \textit{Amerikanskiy balet v Moskve}.
\item \textsuperscript{93} Deborah Jowitt, \textit{Jerome Robbins: His Life, His Theater His Dance} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004) 150, 239, 250, and 296.
\end{footnotes}
For _Interplay_, Robbins used a concerto by American composer Morton Gould titled _American Concertette_, which, much like the majority of Bernstein’s score to _Fancy Free_, was written in the genre of symphonic jazz. Moreover, Robbin’s choreography for _Interplay_, again like _Fancy Free_, introduced vernacular movements, many derived from African-American dance, into the more traditional ballet language.\footnote{Ibid., 102–103, 207.}

Formally, however, Robbins set out to choreograph _Interplay_ in direct contrast to the narrative one-act _Fancy Free_. Instead of following the examples of Fokine and Tudor, Robbins choreographed his second ballet along the same lines as Balanchine’s works of the same period, such as _Serenade_. As _New York Times_ critic John Martins remarked in his review of the work’s premiere,

> Jerome Robbins’ _Interplay_ set out quite deliberately to prove that not all American dance theatre works had to be storytelling, genre or period pieces, but that a purely formal approach could be made to composition in a strictly native vein and still be good. Mr. Robbins certainly made his point.\footnote{Quoted in Jowitt, _Jerome Robbins_, 103.}

Like Balanchine, Robbins used narrative elements to dramatize the classical forms that Gould crafted in his score, a piano concerto in four movements.\footnote{Choreographic sources: _Interplay_, 1945, NYp *MGZH 4-981; _Jerome Robbins’ Ballets U.S.A._, NYp *MGZH 12-1891; _New York City Ballet and Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo_, NYp *MGZH 12-2539. Live Performance: New York City Ballet, February 12, 2012.} Broadly, the score follows the plan of a classical symphony; the two outer movements are up tempo, the second movement is labeled ‘Gavotte’ and the third is slow ballad in ABA form. At the same time, Gould mixes this classical symphonic form with elements of jazz.

Just as Balanchine illustrates changes in formal sections of _Serenade_ with changes in the performing forces onstage, Robbins uses the play between solo and ensemble dancing to bring out the play between solo and ensemble music. In the opening of _Interplay_, a male soloist leaps expansively across the stage; one by one, three other male dancers join him. The four men clasp arms in the back and sway back and forth as the orchestra sets up a vamping accompaniment
pattern. When the solo piano enters at rehearsal 2, one dancer separates out from this line and performs a solo to the accompaniment of the men behind him, who are still pacing back and forth. With the entrance of the second theme, a more lyrical exploration of the opening fourths in score, a solo woman darts across the stage, weaving her way through the men. She too is quickly joined by four other women, delineating the first thematic area as a place for the men and the second as a place for the women. Similarly, in the fourth movement of *Interplay*, the main theme of the fourth movement of the ballet includes an internal repetition. In the choreography, the dancers divide into two teams in this section and compete to see who are the better dancers. The internal repetition of the movement’s main theme allows Robbins to stage the two groups in competition; each time the music repeats, the first team takes the first iteration to show off their most impressive steps and the second team takes the second iteration.

*Interplay*, as the title might suggest, is a choreographic exploration of children’s games. Robbins uses leap-frogs, cartwheels, a game of follow-the-leader, and an athletic lift in which the women allow the men to roll over their backs. At one point in the first movement the dancers rush to the front of the stage, and stare out at the audience as though unsure of what to do next, reflecting the music’s momentary pause on a long trill in the piano. Suddenly, one dancer performs a jazz-like shake in his body. The others emulate him, or perform their own jazz and boogie moves—shaking their hips and moving their arms up and down. Similarly, in the third movement, the slow movement, the lead female dancer tries to convince the second movement soloist to perform with her, but when he shoos her off, she chooses a different man and performs a sensual *pas de deux*.

While less frequently discussed in either the American or Soviet press than Balanchine’s ballets, Jerome Robbins’s works were very well-received by both Soviet audiences and critics. Hans Tuch wrote to Robbins two years later, “As you know, ‘Interplay’ was one of the most popular ballets performed on that tour. In many discussions we had with Soviet choreographers during that
tour they asked about you and expressed a desire to meet you. Again and again in the newspaper reviews of the NYCB tour, Soviet critics differentiated Robbins’s work from that of Balanchine — and from the problems they saw with it. Gabovich suggested that Robbins was on the path to democratize the classics, that he was "widening the boundaries of the familiar."

The second Robbins work on the NYCB programs, Fanfare, is also strikingly similar to some of Balanchine’s works. In the ballet, Robbins painstakingly and literally translates the form of Benjamin Britten’s Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra into movement. Britten’s score, written to teach children the instrumental groups in a traditional symphony orchestra, consists of a series of variations on a theme by Purcell for successive instruments — flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, violin, viola, and so forth. This is followed by a fugue for all the instruments together. For the ballet, Robbins assigns a specific group of dancers to each instrumental group; their leotards even depict the instrument on the front (Figure 21). During the final fugue, the dancers conspicuously continue to perform the part of their individual instruments, giving a visual demonstration of the music’s counterpoint and instrumentation. In a Soviet film made about the NYCB tour, ballerina Olga Lepeshinskaya, who provided commentary, notes that Fanfares was made for children but that adults as well can watch it with pleasure.

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97 Letter, Tuch to Robbins, August 11, 1964, NYp, Jerome Robbins Papers, Box 131, Folder 1. In the letter, Tuch tried to persuade Robbins to travel alone to the Soviet Union as part of the Soviet-American exchange in order to work with dancers and choreographers. While Robbins appears to have agreed, the exchange fell through. Many thanks to Jennie Scholnick who found this correspondence.

98 Gabovich, “Panorama Tantsev.”

99 Katanyan, Amerikanskiy balet v Moskve. It’s worth noting that Lepeshinskaya herself may not have written these voice-over commentaries.
Figure 21. Still of Gloria Govrin as a harp in Robbins’ *Fanfares*. From Katanyan, *Amerikanskiy balet v Moskve*.

Of course, it is worth noting that Robbins may have also received a slightly warmer reception from the Soviet press than Balanchine because he was perceived as less threatening. He was not as famous as Balanchine was, and moreover, he, unlike Balanchine, was not a Soviet defector. However, it does seem that Robbins’s relative silence to Balanchine’s on the subject of abstraction in ballet may have also aided his cause in the Soviet theater.

The Absence of Content: Agon

The acceptance that many of Balanchine’s works and all of Jerome Robbins’s found in the Soviet Union, however, was notably not extended to two ballets: *Agon* and *Episodes*. Both works were set to serialist scores, the former by Igor Stravinsky and the latter by Anton Webern. Since the Soviet critics who argued for the worth of Balanchine’s abstract style did so based on his musicality and the translation of musical content into dance, the quality of that music was central to their arguments. For Balanchine’s works set to composers such as Bizet, Tchaikovsky, Mendelssohn, Kay, and Prokofiev, the close connections between music and dance could justify the ballets within the
confines of Soviet aesthetics. For serial works by Stravinsky and Webern, however, the close relationship between music and dance condemned the ballets.

During the 1930s and 40s, representatives of the Soviet government had repeatedly railed against Western music, particularly by modernist composers such as Schoenberg. During the 1948 denunciations at the Union of Composers, Tikhon Khrennikov, the newly named head of the Union, labeled works by foreigners such as Stravinsky, Hindemith, Krenek, Berg, Britten, Messiaen, Menotti, and Max Brandt as "a conglomeration of wild harmonies, a reversion to primitive savage cultures ... eroticism, sexual perversion, amorality, and the shamelessness of the contemporary bourgeois heroes of the twentieth century. As Peter Schmelz discusses in his book, Such Freedom if Only Musical, the cultural Thaw of the 1950s led to a broadening of taste in the Soviet Union and the gradual reintroduction of some Western composers to the Soviet music scene. Younger composers, some of whom taught for the conservatories, began listening to music by Bartók, Stravinsky, Britten, Honegger, Poulenc, and Milhaud. As Schmelz recounts it, during the 1960s the "floodgates" opened, allowing more and more Western music into the Soviet Union. One of the many ways in which this occurred was through the exchange program between the United States and the Soviet Union. The New York City Ballet’s 1962 tour was part of the flood. Their performances of Agon gave Soviet audiences one of their first tastes of Stravinsky’s later, serialist style. Despite the new flood of Western music, however, this style was still controversial in the Soviet Union in the 1960s, even amongst the musical elite.

Similarly, the ballet establishment was very reluctant to accept serial music in conjunction with ballet or to accept the visual translation of it in Balanchine’s Agon or Episodes. Soviet criticisms of Agon almost uniformly employed metaphors about science or mathematics to deride the ballet. Lvov-Anokhin described it as "choreographic geometry, algebra, chemistry, the audacious fission of

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100 Schwarz, Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 225.

101 Schmelz, Such Freedom if Only Musical, 39–54.
an atomic nucleus in dance, anything at all, only not inspiration, not art if we take that to be the expression of living human emotions." Even a critic such as Gabovich, who was generally quite sympathetic to Balanchine, called the work cold and mathematical. Gabovich went on to comment that the music of *Agon* added up to “difficult problems solved by the legs (to their credit without the aid of a logarithmic ruler).” Many reviewers, like Gabovich, felt that Balanchine had choreographed Stravinsky’s score because of its difficulty rather than its artistic worth.

Intriguingly, the scientific metaphors used by Soviet dance critics to describe *Agon* were highly reminiscent of the metaphors employed by American composers themselves to justify their music during the Cold War. In “Who Cares if You Listen,” Milton Babbitt claimed that there had been “a half-century of revolution in musical thought, a revolution whose nature and consequences can be compared only with, and in many respects are closely analogous to, those of the mid-nineteenth-century evolution in theoretical physics.” Similarly, in a letter to Paul Fromm from 1958, Ernst Krenek discussed a conversation he had with Robert Oppenheimer and his excitement that Oppenheimer might voice support for the Princeton Seminar in Advanced Musical Study. In both instances, the composers implied that music could be rationalized and investigated like a science. It is hard to imagine that so many Soviet reviewers could have independently arrived at these

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103 Gabovich, “Moskovskiy Debyut.” Original Russian: “не столько танцуют, сколько решают ногами сложные задачи (к чести их, без помощи логарифмической линейки).”

104 Ibid. Gabovich wrote: “Of course, I understand that on the whole *Agon* is a difficult test for the ballet master and troupe in its mastery of music of such a constitution. But, possibly, overcoming these difficulties is more interesting as ‘scientific-sport’ than aesthetically.” Original Russian: “Я, конечно, понимаю, что в целом ‘Агон’ - труднейший экзамен балетмейстеру и труппе на освоение музыки такого склада. Но, пожалуй, преодоление этих трудностей носит скорее ‘научно-спортивный’ интерес, чем эстетический.”

105 Milton Babbitt, “Who cares if you listen,” *High Fidelity*, February 1958. Handwritten letter, Ernst Krenek to Paul Fromm, March 21, 1958, CAh, Paul Fromm Manuscripts, b 90M-52, Box 2, Folder "Ernst Krenek." Thanks to Monica Hershberger for directing me towards these sources.
mathematical and scientific metaphors on their own without having heard the Western descriptions. Presumably, then, this indicates that some Western descriptions of serialism were in broad circulation amongst the Soviet ballet establishment by the early 1960s.

At the same time it is also easy to see how *Agon*'s elaborate structure and emotional distance could have made mathematical metaphors appealing to the Soviet critics who disliked the ballet. The ballet is ordered around the grouping and regrouping of twelve dancers — four male soloists, four female soloists, and four female members of the *corps*. These twelve dancers form various combinations onstage — the four men together, the eight women together, all twelve dancers together, and so forth. The middle section of the ballet consists of three sets of smaller groups — two women and a man, two men and a woman, and a man and woman. Even within sections, the dancers onstage are constantly grouped and regrouped into smaller sets, often in ways that balance the genders of the groups. According to Charles M. Joseph, Stravinsky was most interested in the divisibility of numbers into symmetrical subsets, and that *Agon* was a ballet about “figures and the relation of figures.” This grouping and regrouping of the dancers, which draws attention to the number twelve’s many divisors, could plausibly have a “mathematical” or “geometric” quality.

Moreover, the dancers in *Agon* performed in a relatively detached style, making few overtly emotional gestures and using calm and unmoving facial expressions. The Soviet critics frequently took issue with the ballet’s dry, emotionless qualities. Sabnina wrote in her review of the piece, “It is difficult to argue with Balanchine regarding his high opinion of [Stravinsky’s] rhythmic ingenuity — and in that sense *Agon* truly provides extensive material that the choreographer makes physically


107 Irene Alm and Stephanie Jordan have both described the structure of *Agon*, musical and choreographic, in great detail. Some researchers, such as Don McDonagh, have suggested that the grouping and regrouping of twelve dancers may have had symbolic connections to Stravinsky’s use of serial techniques in the ballet score, although Alm points out, Balanchine and Stravinsky devised the dance’s structure long before Stravinsky decided to compose in a serialist style. Alm, “Stravinsky, Balanchine, and *Agon*,” 254-269. Stephanie Jordan, ”Music Puts a Time Corset on the Dance,” *Dance Chronicle: Studies in Dance and the Related Arts* 16, no. 3 (January 1, 1993): 295–321. Don McDonagh, *George Balanchine* (Boston, 1983), 119.
manifest in new and varied ways. But the deliberate rejection of emotion in this dodecaphonic composition is fatally reflected in the choreography, which is just as emotional and dry.”

Roslavleva, who had close ties to Western art, revisited the subject of Balanchine’s tours a few months after the company had left the Soviet Union. She argued, “Even in the atomic century, the subject of art will be man. […] what world is opened to us by the ‘higher mathematics’ of *Episodes*?

This isn’t an easy question to answer.”

The Agon pas de deux

The only section of *Agon* that met with the approval of Soviet critics was the *pas de deux*. First-hand accounts also indicate that, though the opening of the company’s first program was met with only polite applause, the audience screamed and cheered for the *pas de deux*, a sign of the wild enthusiasm that would greet the rest of the company’s performances. The *pas de deux* appealed to Soviet viewers, however, not because Balanchine finally convinced the audience to abandon Soviet artistic taste but rather because this duet contrasted so sharply with the rest of the ballet.

From the opening of the *adagio*, the music for the *pas de deux* is strikingly different from what has come before. Instead of the sharp staccato attacks that characterize the rest of the piece, the *pas de deux* uses long, held notes. The parts are marked *espressivo*, which is only the second time Stravinsky uses any indications for expressivity in the score. The violin and viola open the movement by repeating wide intervals (a seventh for the violin and a ninth for the viola). The

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108 Sabnina “*Iskaniya ... vo imya chego?”* Original Russian: “Трудно спорить с Баланчином по поводу высокой оценки ритмической изобретательности композитора - в этом смысле балет ‘Агон’ действительно дает обширный материал, который балетмейстер воплощает оригинально и разнообразно. Но нарочитый отказ от эмоциональности в этом додекафонном произведении роковым образом отражается на хореографии, столь же эмоциональной и сухой.”

109 Roslavleva, “*Etogo nikogda ne budet.*” Original Russian: “Но и в атомный век предметом искусства будет человек. Искусство, с нашей точки зрения, экзамен на постижение мира. А какой мир открывается нам в ‘высшей математике’ ‘Эпизодов’. Ответить нелегко.”

instrumental parts grate against each other; at the end of the second bar, the cello plays a D-flat against a D-natural in the viola, and C-flat, B-flat, and E-natural in the violins. The striking, drawn-out dissonances give a sense of emotional tension to the piece. The ninths and sevenths in the opening are carried throughout the movement; one of the repeating motifs of the piece is an an alternation in the solo violin part between a D-flat played alone, and the same D-flat played with a D-natural a diminished octave below it. As the dissonance is added and subtracted in the long, espressivo string lines, the tension in the music ratchets up.

Meanwhile, onstage, the dancers engage in an erotic adagio. In the adagio of a classical pas de deux, the man helps the woman show off her best extensions and balances. Here, that practice is pushed to its limits, as the man stretches the woman’s body out into radically erotic poses (Figure 22). Often, these stretches draw attention to the woman’s pelvis, as during a lift in which the woman opens her legs up in a V-shape towards the audience. The two dancers are almost constantly in physical contact, bodies draped across one another or hands clasped as they contort into various seemingly-unfeasible poses. The combination of music and dance suggests an intense sensuality and genuine emotional connection. The ending of the pas de deux is particularly dramatic, as the man kneels and the woman drapes herself over his body, a gesture that is reminiscent of the pietà.

To the Soviet critics, this duet compensated for all the problems they had previously found with Agon, most particularly its rejection of human emotion and character. L’vov-Anokhin, who was scathing regarding the rest of the ballet, wrote of the pas de deux, “The laborious invention of form gives way to the stirring plastic expression of extremely strained and complex, but at the same time natural and therefore excellent, human emotion.”111 L’vov-Anokhin’s reaction to the pas de deux thus demonstrates that the problems that the critics had with Agon were not necessarily because the music

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111 L’vov-Anokhin, “Asketï Tantsa.” Original Russian: “вымученная надуманность формы отступает перед волнующим пластическим выражением весьма напряженного, сложного, но вместе с тем естественного, а потому и прекрасного человеческого чувства.”
was dissonant (it would, after all, be difficult to argue that the *pas de deux* is not dissonant) but rather because they perceived that dissonance as meaningless.

![Image of Allegra Kent and Arthur Mitchell performing Agon](image)

Figure 22. Still of Allegra Kent and Arthur Mitchell performing *Agon* in Moscow, 1962. From *Amerikanskiy balet v Moskve*. Choreography by George Balanchine © The George Balanchine Trust.

**Arthur Mitchell, Allegra Kent, and the Politics of Performance**

That the Soviet critics admired the *Agon pas de deux*, however, cannot be attributed entirely to the work of George Balanchine. Much of the credit must be given to the performers, Arthur Mitchell and Allegra Kent, who were beloved by Soviet audiences. What positive things the Soviet reviewers had to say about the ballet were almost always discussed as evidence of Kent and Mitchell’s talents. Sabnina thought that Kent’s “intensity” and “exciting lyricism,” were such that even in “aimless” dances such as *Agon*, the dancer performed “poetically, with inspiration.”

Similarly, Zakharov wrote that Arthur Mitchell “immediately won the sympathy of our viewers with

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112 Sabnina “Iskaniya ... vo imya chego?” Original Russian: “Аллегры Кент – актрисы исключительного по глубине, волнующего лиризма. Талант этой балерины настолько ярок, что и ’беспредметные’ танцевальные эпизоды (например, в ’Симфонии до мажор или ’Агоне’ Стравинского) она исполняет поэтично, вдохновенно.”
his exceptional plasticity, his dancing, and his genuine inspiration. He dances freely and easily, with a beautiful, noble manner, maintaining a clear plastic image in both the adagio and allegro.”

As Clare Croft has discussed, the fact that Mitchell, alone in the company, was black, put him in a particularly sensitive position, marked as separate from the rest of the company and worshiped, almost fetishized, by the Soviet audience. Croft points out that the tour gave Mitchell the opportunity to partially redefine Americanness to include a black man, while simultaneously drawing attention to the white hegemony of the ballet company by “refusing to blend in.” Croft documents that the ANTA panel hoped to use Mitchell’s presence in the company as a token to distract foreign observers from race problems in the United States; Mitchell’s astounding performances in the Soviet Union and his celebrity status there helped them accomplish this goal. But American newspaper coverage of the tour tended to discount Mitchell’s importance to the company’s success, choosing instead to focus on Balanchine’s abstract ballets. Indeed, since the American newspaper critics and the ANTA dance panel believed so strongly that Balanchine’s ballets were totally abstract, they thought that works such as Agon inherently could not explicitly comment on race relations. Modernist works thus seemed to the ANTA dance panel and the State Department a perfect form in which to package “blackness” for a foreign audience. As Croft describes, however, Mitchell’s presence and his performance in Agon defied this thinking, foregrounding racial difference and the hegemonic white construction of the ballet company and of American cultural diplomacy in general.

113 Zakharov, “Pervyi spektakl’ gostey.” Original Russian: “Ее партнер Артур Митчелл сразу завоевал симпатии наших зрителей своей исключительной пластичностью, танцевальностью и подлинной одухотворенностью. Танцует он свободно и легко, в красивой благородной манере, и в адажио и в алегро сохраняя четкий пластический рисунок.” Similarly, in the film of the NYCB performances, Lepeshinskaya claims that Agon is “cold” but that she liked the performances by Arthur Mitchell and Allegra Kent. Katanyan, Amerikanskiy balet v Moskve.

114 Croft, Dancers as Diplomats, 61.

115 Croft, Dancers as Diplomats, 76–83.
A re-examination of the 1962 Soviet reviews largely supports Croft’s reading. Contrary to reports by American critics covering the tour, Soviet reviewers, and likely Soviet audiences, were not all taken with Balanchine’s black-and-white style, particularly Agon. They were, however, enthralled by Kent and Mitchell as performers. Indeed, Sabnina saw the two dancers’ abilities to overcome the dryness of Balanchine’s choreography in Agon as proof of their exceptional talent. While Mitchell was a particular favorite, however, he was not the only American performer who found fans in the Soviet Union. Many of the company’s performers were singled out in reviews for their astounding technique, including Gloria Govrin and Edward Villella. Video footage of the performances also suggests that the Soviet audiences were excited by the company’s virtuoso dancers. During a performance of Western Symphony that was recorded for Soviet television, it is possible to hear the audience applauding rhythmically in the middle of Gloria Govrin’s solo, a mark of the Russian audience’s highest approval for her ferocious pointe technique. The voice-over from Olga Lepeshinskaya claims, “one must mention that Balanchine’s troupe has first-rate training. The ballerina dances with great skill, very intricately. It is very difficult to convey this kind of visible dexterity in performance.” In this way the Soviet reception of New York City Ballet in 1962 resembled the American reception of the Bolshoi Ballet in 1959. In both instances, reviewers were much quicker to praise the dancers than to praise choreography, although the Soviet reviewers were much kinder to Balanchine and Robbins than the American reviewers to Lavrovsky and Grigorovich. For both groups, the dancers seemed to be regarded as a politically neutral group to praise, while discussions of choreography were fraught with political anxieties.

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116 Katanyan, Amerikanskiy balet v Moskve.

American Press Coverage of the 1962 NYCB Tour

A full report of the Soviet reviews, however, never reached the United States. American newspapers, particularly the New York Times and New York Herald Tribune, were eager to print news of NYCB’s success, but were willing to forego nuance in order to foreground the company’s accomplishments. John Martin, who had just retired as the New York Times dance critic, traveled to the Soviet Union with NYCB in order to report back to the US on their progress. New York Herald Tribune critic Walter Terry, a member of the ANTA Dance Panel, also reported eagerly on NYCB’s tour of the USSR. Their reporting, however, constantly exaggerated the conflict between NYCB and the Soviet dance establishment.

In the weeks leading up to the New York City Ballet’s tour in the Soviet Union, the New York papers frequently reminded their readers of the potential conflicts between the Soviet style and the Balanchine style. In the New York Times, Theodor Shabad explained to readers, “The arrival had been awaited here with great interest because the company’s elegant style, with little spectacle and a dominant musical basis, contrasts with the big romantic productions, the large movements and the dramatic story-line performances of the Bolshoi Ballet.”

While the company was in the Soviet Union, John Martin repeatedly referenced the revolutionary nature of Balanchine’s ballets, claiming that

The [Soviet] public, accustomed to productions larger and louder than life consisting of a full evening of swashbuckling stories punctuated by designedly applaudable bursts of bravura, was required to make a major adjustment in the face of this repertory made up entirely of dancing shaped along musical lines and without drama or spectacle.

Following the first performance, the American newspapers generally reported on the enthusiastic applause from the audience, but as a few critical comments appeared in Soviet newspapers, the American reporters expressed confusion and frustration at their lack of

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appreciation for Balanchine’s works. Many of the American reporters seemed to regard Moscow reviews as wildly unfavorable, though, as we have seen, most were actually positive reviews, and many of them were qualified raves. Perhaps the biggest blow came when the Moscow News, the only English-language newspaper in the city, published a fairly negative review of the company. Since American reporters relied on translations of Russian-language reviews, this one negative assessment in English may have had a particularly harsh effect on their understanding of the company’s Soviet reception.120

On the other hand, so much had been written in the United States about the purportedly revolutionary nature of Balanchine’s choreography in the USSR that any positive response from Soviet audiences or critics was regarded as, in Martin’s words, “an esthetic revolution.”121 The genuine applause from the Soviet audiences, the excitement about both Balanchine and the New York City Ballet performers, all of which really existed, was reinterpreted in the American press to be a sign of political rebellion. On November 25, 1962, Walter Terry published selections of Mikhail Gabovich’s review of NYCB in an article entitled “A Revelation for Russians.” In this essay, Terry quoted selectively from Gabovich’s article to demonstrate how well Americans were performing in the ballet exchanges. According to Terry, Gabovich’s article was recognition of the fact that “Russian ballet, choreographically speaking, is way behind the times.” Moreover, Terry argued, the Soviets would soon turn to Balanchine as their new choreographic model. Terry’s triumphant language brought forward all the positive points that Gabovich made about Balanchine’s style of dance, yet stripped them of all context. In particular, Terry did not quote any of Gabovich’s writing from the final section of his article, in which he argued that Balanchine’s style should be allowed to exist alongside choreographic symphonism and drambalet. Rather than an argument for aesthetic


tolerance, Terry’s version of “Dance Panorama” seems to be a recognition of Balanchinian (and American) exceptionalism.  

Perhaps the American press’s most important distortion of the NYCB tour was its persistent foregrounding of *Agon* and *Episodes*. Despite their relatively cold reception in the Soviet Union, particularly in comparison to other works by Balanchine and Robbins, these two ballets appeared again and again in American accounts of the tour. Articles in the *New York Times*, the *Sun*, and the *New York Herald Tribune* all mentioned the success of *Agon* with audiences. John Martin’s article on October 22nd about the tour mentioned the ballet again, following this up with a discussion of the censure the ballet found in the Soviet press. Finally, John Martin wrote on October 30 that the “biggest surprise” of the tour was the “tumultuous favor” that met *Episodes* during its performances. These ballets have continued to play a large role in histories about the New York City Ballet’s triumph in the Soviet Union.

**Abstract Ballet**

The reason that these two works, *Agon* and *Episodes*, have played such an outsized role in stories about the tour is that these two works best conform to the classic Cold War binary: the

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126 Caute focuses on *Agon* in his descriptions of the ballet exchange. Clare Croft, who otherwise has one of the most balanced views of the NYCB tours, still uses *Agon* and *Episodes* as examples of a style that contrasted sharply with the ballets the Bolshoi performed in the United States. Caute, *The Dancer Defects*, 46. Homans, *Apollo’s Angels*, 377–378. Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats*, 46.
Soviets danced narrative ballet while the Americans, led by Balanchine, invented abstract ballets.127 Neither the difference between the two aesthetics, however, nor Balanchine’s own works, can be reduced to such simple contrasts. Rather, Balanchine’s ballets developed out of trends from the early 20th century that had a major impact on both Soviet and American ballet. As James Steichen has argued, Balanchine’s reputation as an elite abstract choreographer was mostly constructed in hindsight. In their early days, Balanchine and Kirstein’s companies, like most American dance enterprises in the first half of the 20th century, presented a diverse array of musical and choreographic styles, one day performing on Broadway, the next at a ballet concert.128 Steichen in particular focuses on Serenade, which has come to occupy a highly symbolic place in Balanchine’s repertory, as the choreographer’s “first American ballet,” in large part because of its purportedly abstract nature.129 As Steichen remarks, “there always ‘seems’ to be some story at work in Serenade, it’s just that no one can agree on what it is, even as they must assiduously reassert its ‘storyless’ status.”130 Steichen claims that by endowing Serenade with a reputation as an abstract work and as Balanchine’s first ballet in the America, Balanchine and Kirstein stabilized the narrative of what was, in reality, a rather rocky start in America.

Part of the stabilization of New York City Ballet in the 1950s was its increasingly close relationship with the United States government and, in particular, the US State Department. In the context of this relationship and the 1962 tour, another reason for Serenade’s crystalized status as

127 Homans, Apollo’s Angels, 352–379. Homans is more circumspect - her writing about it more nuanced, and she allows that some changes were happening in Soviet ballet in the early 1960s, though she continues to identify Soviet ballet strongly with drambalet. Caute, The Dancer Defects, 468. Jordan writes that “it is the plotless or ‘storyless’ (or more or less so) music ballet that undoubtedly epitomizes Balanchine” Jordan, Moving Music, 107.


129 James Steichen has challenged the validity of Serenade’s place as Balanchine’s ‘first American ballet,’ pointing out that it actually debuted on a program with Dreams, and that during the company’s first season the most publicized ballet was Alma Mater, a work with a campy plot, comedy, scenery, and other elements not commonly associated with the New York City Ballet aesthetic. James Steichen, “The Stories of Serenade: Nonprofit History and George Balanchine’s ‘First Ballet in America’” (Princeton: Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Studies, Spring 2012). Jordan, Moving Music, 128–150.

“storyless” and quintessentially Balanchinian is revealed: it allowed Balanchine to distance himself from Soviet ballet and claim, instead, a place as the ultimate American choreographer. By labeling the ballet as “storyless” and attempting in interviews to distance that quality as much as possible from Soviet works, Balanchine was able to use Serenade as ammunition in his own Cold War fight against the Soviets. Steichen remarks that by 1971 Kirstein was identifying Serenade as the direct descendent of Fokine’s Chopiniana (Les Sylphides), a modification of the historical narrative that helped establish Balanchine as the direct successor to the Russian imperial tradition, in opposition to the Soviet ballet companies.

Almost all discussions of “abstraction” or “storylessness” in ballet have revolved around the degree to which those works are structured around their musical accompaniment, rather than a narrative. In 1965, dance critic Edwin Denby claimed that “The more ballet turns to pantomime, the less intimate its relation to the music becomes; but the more it turns to dancing, the more it enjoys the music’s presence, bar by bar.”131 Stephanie Jordan, whose book, Moving Music, explores the connections between music and dance in three 20th century choreographers, including Balanchine, continues to play with Denby’s statement. Jordan acknowledges that within narrative ballets there are close relationships between score and choreography. Moreover, she also argues that “music, sometimes considered the most abstract of arts, is nevertheless a site of meaning.” At some point, however, Jordan seems to concede Denby’s point, claiming that “it does make sense that story ballets concentrate our attention on the narrative content at the expense of the music.”132

131 Edwin Denby, “Forms in Motion and in Thought.” 1965, in Denby, Dance Writings (London: Dance Books, 1986), 571, quoted in Jordan, Moving Music, 73. Matilde Butkas, in Cambridge History of Ballet, does not claim that the abstract ballet was inherently more musical, but implies that there is a relationship, stating “That most Balanchine ballets are plotless provides further complexity; it also affected his choices and uses of music. […] Since Balanchine so often did not rely on plot, he could focus purely on combining bodies in motion with sound, without undermining the importance of either.” Matilde Butkas, “George Balanchine,” in Cambridge History of Ballet, ed. Marion Kant (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 225. Again, Homans implies rather than states that there is a relationship between abstraction and music in Balanchine’s works, “Balanchine’s emphasis on technical and musical precision, and on formal composition as opposed to stories and dramatic acting, has been misunderstood.” Homans, Apollo’s Angels, 509.

132 Jordan, Moving Music, 73 and 65.
The Soviet reviews of Balanchine’s works provide another perspective on this hypothesized
give-and-take between narrative and music in ballet. Many of the Soviet reviewers, including
Gabovich, Sabrina, Roslavleva, and Lvov-Anokhin regarded Balanchine’s rejection of meaning in
his works as a failure to realize the true potential of the music, rather than as a sign of his devotion
to the score. While this explanation is as clearly tied to ideology as Denby’s, it does disrupt the
music-narrative continuum. Just as music historians have increasingly refused over the course of the
late-20th and early-21st centuries to see music as inherently abstract, I would argue that abstract
ballet should not be regarded as inherently more musical.

New York City Ballet’s performances in Moscow have become a touchstone moment of the
cultural exchange tours and the cultural Cold War, because they work so well as a case study in the
binary narratives of the Cold War. The Russian-language sources for the tour, however, demonstrate
that the events of 1962 were too complex and contradictory to fit easily into those binaries. These
reviews do not reveal a direct opposition between West and East, free and shackled, abstract and
narrative. The Soviet reviews of Balanchine’s company, instead, demonstrate the simple truth that
these complex political and aesthetic encounters were still propelled by individual people, who had
complicated webs of political loyalties, personal ties, and aesthetic prejudices. And this was no less
true of the Soviet participants than of the American.

On the flip side, the Russian sources suggest a reading of Balanchine’s aesthetics that is
closely tied to mid-20th-century politics. Over the course of the 1950s and 60s, Balanchine
reclassified and recounted his oeuvre as abstract or “storyless” precisely because it contrasted so
strongly with official Soviet aesthetics. American critics such as Walter Terry and John Martin were
only too happy to follow suit in order to craft a stirring political story that thrilled their readers and
encouraged government patronage of American ballet.

Ballet historians often hold up American ballet as a mirror to show what Soviet ballet could
have been if only freed from government influence and censorship. Janice Ross, in her biography of
Leonid Yakobson, sets Balanchine up as a foil to the Soviet choreographer. She writes, “Balanchine would spend the next sixty years advancing Russian imperial ballet into the plotless, neoclassical grandeur of modernist ballet while also creating several important story ballets. Yakobson […] would live his artistic life within the erratic and capricious restrictions of the Soviet state.”¹³³ But this comparison assumes that American ballet was unaffected by the Cold War and American geopolitics. Balanchine was freer than Yakobson, but his works were also influenced by the political world that he lived in, by the pressures of working with the State Department, and by his own personal history.

¹³³ Ross, *Like a Bomb Going Off*, 96.
Epilogue
Closed-Loop Conversations and Finding Meaning in Ballet

In 2011, the Bolshoi Theater hired South Dakota-born David Hallberg as a principal dancer, making him the first American to occupy the highest rank in the Moscow company. Momentarily, ballet was in the national American spotlight. Interviewing the dancer for his Comedy Central TV show, Steven Colbert jokingly needled Hallberg, claiming “Americans don’t defect to go to the Bolshoi, the Russkies defect to come here.” When Hallberg gently reminded Colbert that the Cold War was over and assured him that he would continue to dance with American Ballet Theatre, Colbert quipped, “American Ballet Theatre and the Bolshoi at the same time … so you’re a double agent!”

What was then essentially a joke has become startlingly more real over the course of the past four years, as Russian-American relations have taken a decisive turn for the worse. Since Putin’s return to the presidency in 2012, the Russian leader has used harsh anti-American rhetoric to appeal to his supporters. American leaders, particularly in Congress, have likewise taken sharp anti-Russian stances. In 2012 Congress passed the Magnitsky Act, which allowed the United States government to punish Russian leaders accused of human rights violations by freezing their assets and denying their visa applications. The bill, tied to normalizing trading status with Russia, was written to replace a Cold War-era act that sought to punish the Soviet Union for preventing its citizens from emigrating. Days later the Russian Duma retaliated by passing a bill that banned Americans from


adopting Russian children. In 2014, the relationship between the two countries soured further after Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its support of insurgents in southeastern Ukraine.

Just as the political relationship between Russia and the United States has turned towards its Cold War precedents, rhetorical battles between Russian and American ballet have returned to a frostier stage. In 2014, the Bolshoi Ballet toured in New York City and Washington D.C., performing *Giselle*, *Swan Lake*, *Don Quixote*, and *Spartacus*. Many American commentators accused the Bolshoi of being conservative, drawing on Cold-War-era criticisms of the Russian company. Alastair Macaulay’s reviews in the *New York Times* would have been at home on the front page in 1962. Macauley wrote “Returning to New York after nine years, the Bolshoi Ballet […] seems keen to prove that it has reverted to the ghastly artistic torpor it enjoyed in the last two decades of the Soviet era.”

American audiences expressed some of the same concerns. On the American and English internet forum, *Balletalert!*, one commenter claimed that *Spartacus* displayed Soviet and Russian aggression and that Putin “must love *Spartacus*.” Other comments reflected the Cold-War-era concern with the Bolshoi’s level of taste. Numerous posters on *Balletalert!* complained about the

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“dirty” pointe shoes worn by the Russian dancers. In the New Yorker, Joan Acocella introduced the 1968 Grigorovich production of Spartacus to her readers in a short essay that predicted, “New York’s former-Soviet community will no doubt be out in full force. They are faithful dancegoers. But Russians aren’t the only people who like things big and vulgar.”

Different Spartacus production, same American reviews. Of course, as during the Cold War, this type of rhetoric was not limited to the American side. Macaulay’s criticisms were devoured by the readership of the Russian language ballet forum Balet i Opera, most of whom responded to the New York Times articles with outrage, some disparaging American culture in light of the reviews.

The rhetorical anger that the tours inspired online and in print directly contradicted the atmosphere at the performances themselves. I saw the Bolshoi perform twice in New York, in Don Quixote and Spartacus. The applause was generous and effusive, and I was particularly struck by the audience response during Spartacus. The atmosphere started out slightly muted, with little applause during any of the dancing; in the middle of the second act, however, something seemed to snap, and the crowd became boisterous and excited. When the curtain came down on Maria Vinogradova, stretching her arms out to the ceiling in an expression of Phrygia’s pain, the audience screamed and cheered, a raucous noise that reminded me of accounts of the Bolshoi’s performances in 1959.

The complaint was that the bottoms of the pointe shoes looked grey or black. There was speculation that this ‘dirty’ look was possibly a result of the fact that Russian dancers generally wear longer-lasting Gaynor Minden pointe shoes and can thus pick up more grime from the floor. The criticism was reminiscent of the American reporting on the Sochi 2014 Games, which emphasized the dilapidated state of the facility hotels in the run up to the Olympics. “Summers 2014 NYC Saratoga Tour,” accessed November 4, 2015 http://balletalert.invisionzone.com/index.php?topic/38497-summer-2014-nyc-saratoga-tour/page-10. On the Sochi Coverage: Stent, The Limits of Partnership, 274. “The Russians Think We’re Engaging in Olympic Schadenfreude. They’re Right,” New Republic, February 6, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, http://www.newrepublic.com/article/116507/russians-hit-back-west-cool-it-olympic-schadenfreude.


Don Quixote, performed by the Bolshoi Ballet at Lincoln Center, July 23, 2014. Spartacus, performed by the Bolshoi Ballet at Lincoln Center, July 26, 2014.
The Bolshoi’s 2014 reception in New York echoed its American reviews from the Cold War. The cultural relationship between the United States and Russia remains delicate and contested. For all the work that Cold War cultural exchange did in improving diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, the ballet tours did not fix the cultural antagonism between the two countries. Instead of attempting to understand foreign ballet, critics writing about the exchange tours continually retreated into the aesthetic system they already knew. However much audiences and critics appreciated the ballets of the other country, they were eager to affirm the superiority of their own artwork and aesthetic system.

Explanations of American triumph in the Cold War often stress how appealing American cultural products were to Soviet citizens, undermining the authority of the communist government with its own people. Instead, the cultural exchange had a paradoxical affect on Soviet-American relations. On the one hand, it improved the connection in the short term by creating public diplomatic events at which American and Soviet representatives interacted on friendly terms. On the other, it established patterns of internal discourse in each of the countries that emphasized the righteousness of local structures of thinking about culture and the arts. In the long term, the failure of American and Russian citizens to break out of these internal loops was probably damaging to the political relationship between the two countries.

Local Media in the Pseudo-Event and the Closed Loops of Communication

As Danielle Fosler-Lussier has recently articulated, the reception of a cultural diplomacy performance is central to its impact. Fosler-Lussier draws on Daniel Boorstin’s 1961 concept of the pseudo-event to explain how cultural diplomacy can affect broad popular audiences. Boorstin defined the pseudo-event as a production, meeting, or other event staged, not for its actual in-the-moment purpose, but rather with the intent of being reported through mass media to a wider

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audience. Fosler-Lussier argues that in operating as a pseudo-event, cultural exchange tours gave foreign audiences agency to draw their own conclusions about the visitors while encouraging them to make those conclusions positive. In this way, cultural exchange performances were a more effective means of improving global opinion than outright propaganda, because propaganda made audiences feel manipulated.  

Within this model for understanding cultural diplomacy, local reception plays an important, and largely under-reported, role. Audiences took meaning from the ballet performances in their own ways, through their own interpretations. Critics and other reporters passed their interpretations onto much broader audiences. For example, during the Cold War tours, audiences in the United States received information about the Soviet government’s cultural policies through articles about the Bolshoi Ballet in the American press. This meant that, though they were receiving information about the Soviet government’s staging of great ballets, they were also bombarded with American reviews claiming that the Bolshoi performances were conservative, imperialist, and tasteless. Similarly, Soviet audiences received information about the United States’ impressively virtuosic ballerinas, but also information about the lack of funding for the arts in the United States and the importance of Russian ballet to world culture.

During the Cold War cultural exchange tours, those productions that performed the best were works that were either already international standards or that fit in easily with currently popular repertoires on the other side of the Iron Curtain. For example, the Bolshoi’s production of Swan Lake in 1959 and American Ballet Theatre’s classical pas de deux in 1960 played well in part because they were already established in the balletic canon worldwide. Local critics were usually quite excited

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about seeing new choreography but preferred when it fit easily into their pre-conceived aesthetic models. For instance, the Soviet critics in 1960 wanted to see American Ballet Theatre’s American ballets *Rodeo, Fancy Free,* and *The Combat* in part because they bore a close resemblance to *drmabaleti.* Similarly, American critics praised *Ballet School* in some measure because it looked like Balanchine’s practice-clothes ballets. Fosler-Lussier recounts a parallel case with the Tamburitzans, a musical group that was chosen by the American State Department to play popular American music in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe but which most impressed its foreign audiences through its mastery of Eastern European folk music.\(^\text{16}\)

Even in these instances, the local discussions about touring ballet betray an inability on the part of local critics to engage fully with their visitors. Soviet critics discussed American ballet only using the rhetoric and vocabulary that they already had to discuss their own ballets. Thus, while the NYCB and ABT performances provided serious fodder for further discussion, they did not permanently alter, undermine, or destroy the Soviet patterns of thought about ballet. Similarly, American critics and audiences engaged with Soviet ballet on American terms, never understanding the thinking behind ballets such as *Romeo and Juliet,* *Spartacus,* or *Ballet School.* The American critics transliterated Soviet ballet, but they never translated it. They observed and interpreted the sensory experience of that ballet through their own terms, but they never tried to understand how the Soviet performers comprehended it. Nor did Soviet reviewers try to understand American aesthetics.

During the Cold War exchanges, both American and Soviet audiences often demonstrated admiration, respect, and even longing for art created on the other side of the Iron Curtain. This respect, the personal connections developed between Soviet and American citizens, helped demonstrate that the two countries could work together at a time when that seemed impossible. As Fosler-Lussier argues, cultural exchange may have helped diffuse the most extreme tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States in a period in which nuclear war threatened both countries.

Nevertheless, the isolated conversation loops generated in the United States and the Soviet Union prevented long term and substantive impact on the ways that American and Soviet citizens viewed each other.

American accounts of the Cold War have consistently over-exaggerated the “victory” that the United States won through cultural diplomacy. In the words of international relations scholar Kimberly Williams, “This is the hegemonic national/ist narrative that not only claims that the United States ‘won’ the cold war because it deserved to win (based on its allegedly superior economic, military, and political systems), but is also the basis for U.S. unilateralism in world affairs after 1991.”\(^{17}\) Williams argues that cultural stereotypes about Russia have impacted Russian-American relations in the years since the Cold War.\(^{18}\) Assumptions that the United States defeated the Soviet Union through rhetoric and culture have helped give rise to the belief that the current American government can exert influence on the Russian domestic political scene, despite arguments to the contrary from foreign policy experts such as Angela Stent and former US Ambassador to Moscow John Beyrle.\(^{19}\)

The past four years have demonstrated that American and Russian populations were never brought together by the end of the Cold War, despite the seeming popularity of American cultural products in the Soviet Union. Indeed, Colbert’s joke that David Hallberg is a double agent reflects a persistent antagonism between the two countries that the cultural Cold War never broke through and perhaps even stoked. This is due to the fact that, though the cultural Cold War fostered temporary good will and helped develop diplomatic ties between the two countries, it also fostered a sense of competition and a belief on both sides of the universality and inviolability of their own cultural products and aesthetic systems.

\(^{17}\) Williams, *Imagining Russia*, 2.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, 267.
Ballet Still Transliterated: Abstract versus Narrative

By interpreting foreign ballets through their own domestic aesthetics, American and Soviet critics tacitly asserted that their own way of looking at dance was correct and universal. Each side adhered fairly dogmatically to a certain structure for understanding meaning in ballet. As I discussed at the end of chapter 4, American critics and Soviet critics had very different models for conceptualizing the relationship between music, dancing, and narrative. American critics of the 1960s positioned ballet on a continuum, with narrative at one end and music at the other (Figure 23). The more musical a ballet was, under this system of thought, the less meaningful/narrative, and vice-versa. This is a system of thinking that relies on the notion that music (or at least elite music) is inherently abstract and is closely tied to Cold War-era notions of taste and American cosmopolitanism.

Figure 23. Graph of the American Cold War paradigm for understanding the relationship between music, narrative, and dance.

The Soviets, on the other hand, conceptualized meaning and narrative as something filling music, which could then be translated into dance. Meaning could also directly fill the form of dance (Figure 24). Much as with the American ontology of dance in the mid-20th-century, this is a system of thought clearly grounded in Soviet ideology, in which form is a vessel for socialist content.20

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20 Under socialist realist aesthetics, form was to be molded to fit content perfectly. Sherry, “Better Something than Nothing,” 749.
While each system is as politically grounded as the other, looking at these two systems side-by-side raises the question of how the relationship between music and meaning should be conceptualized for both mid-20th-century dance and for contemporary dance.

Abstraction is still tied to notions of taste and modernity in the West. In 2015, dance scholars Jill Nunes Jensen and Kathrina Farrugia-Kriel defined contemporary ballet as a “genre […] driven by an urge to disavow narrative…”21 When the National Ballet of Canada announced that their 2016–17 season would contain six full-length narrative ballets, *The Globe and Mail* ran a story titled “National Ballet of Canada goes traditional for 2016–17,” despite the fact that the season was programmed to contain a full-length world premiere.22 In reality, numerous Western choreographers have created full-length narrative ballets since the 1960s, including John Cranko, Kenneth

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MacMillan, Frederick Ashton, and more recently Christopher Wheeldon, Liam Scarlett, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, Alexei Ratmansky, and John Neumeier.\textsuperscript{23}

There is some room for hope that the conversations between abstract and narrative, and between Russian and American, will begin to overlap. In recent years, scholars such as Julia Randel and Emily Erken have turned to film studies and literary studies to posit new ways of examining the networks of meaning in 20th- and 21st-century ballet, implicitly rejecting the Cold War paradigms of understanding the relationship between music, dance, and narrative.\textsuperscript{24} Performers bridge the gap as well. Russian choreographer Alexei Ratmansky, whose career has spanned the United States, Russia, Western Europe, and Australia, has embraced both narrative and abstract styles of dance. Moreover, whether working on a full-length story ballets or short, musical works, his choreography evokes many of the meaningful, narrative potentials contained within music. In other words, much like David Hallberg, he flits back and forth over the artistic and geopolitical lines of the Cold War. Nor are Hallberg and Ratmansky, for all their fame, the only ballet artists who do this. Fellow choreographers Yuri Possokhov, John Neumeier, and Wayne McGregor all have active East-West careers, as do dancers Natalia Osipova, Maria Khochetkova, and Diana Vishneva, their artistry equally beloved on both sides of the old Iron Curtain.

Perhaps, then, these “double agents” will one day wrench open the closed loops of conversation. It would undoubtedly be a painful experience. It may never happen if the political relationship between the United States and Russia does not change. And perhaps the political relationship between the United States and Russia will not change until the loops of conversation are connected, until transliteration becomes translation.

\textsuperscript{23} Including Christopher Wheeldon and Jobi Talbot’s 2011 \textit{Alice in Wonderland} and 2014 \textit{The Winter’s Tale} and Liam Scarlett and Lowell Liebermann’s 2016 \textit{Frankenstein}, all staged at both the Royal Ballet in London and the National Ballet of Canada in Toronto. Annabelle Lopez Ochoa choreographed \textit{A Streetcar Named Desire} in 2012 to music by Peter Salem at the Scottish Ballet. Alexei Ratmansky, Yuri Possokhov, and John Neumeier have all staged full-length narrative works in the both the West and Russia.

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DVD


Life Performance

Agon, performed by New York City Ballet. New York: Lincoln Center, June 12, 2011.

Don Quixote, performed by the Bolshoi Ballet. New York: Lincoln Center, July 23, 2014.


Fancy Free, performed by Miami City Ballet. Ft. Lauderdale: Broward Center for the Performing Arts, November 8, 2015.


Rodeo, performed by American Ballet Theatre. New York: City Center, October 18, 2012.

Romeo and Juliet, performed by the Mariinsky Ballet. St. Petersburg: Mariinsky Theater, June 8, 2010.
Serenade, performed by New York City Ballet. New York: Lincoln Center, May 1, 2012; May 2, 2012; and January 16, 2013.


Stone Flower, performed by the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Moscow Music Theater. Moscow, March 2, 2013, afternoon.

Spartacus, performed by the Bolshoi Ballet. New York: Lincoln Center, July 26, 2014.

Appendix 1

Repertoire Performed by the Bolshoi Ballet on their 1959 Tour of the United States

Full-length ballets:

Swan Lake
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography: Alexander Gorsky (Acts I, II, III) and Asaf Messerer (Act IV)
Revised by Asaf Messerer and Alexander Radunsky
Libretto: V. Begitchev and V. Geltser
Designer: Simon Virsaladze

Romeo and Juliet
Music: Sergei Prokofiev
Choreography: Leonid Lavrovsky
Libretto: Lavrovsky, Prokofiev, and Sergei Radlov, based on a tragedy by William Shakespeare
Designer: Piotr Viliams (Pyotr Vilyams)

Stone Flower
Music: Sergei Prokofiev
Choreography: Yuri Grigorovich
Libretto: Mira Prokofieva, based on story by Pavel Bazhov
Design: Simon Virsaladze

Giselle
Ballet in Two Acts
Music: Adolphe Adam
Libretto: T. Gautier, V. Saint-Georges and J. Coralli
Choreography: Jean Coralli, Jules Perrot, and Marius Petipa, reproduced by Leonid Lavrovsky
Designer: V.I. Volkov

“Highlights” programs included the following works:

Chopiniana
Music: Frederic Chopin
Choreography: Mikhail Fokine

pas de deux from Sleeping Beauty
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography: Asaf Messerer

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1 Sources: Illyustirovannyiye programmii gastroybol’shogo teatra v Pol’she i SSHA. S uchastiyem L.M. Lavrovskogo. 1959-1960, RGALI f. 3045 o. 1 d. 317. Illyustirovannyiye programmii gastroybol’shogo teatra v SSHA 1962, RGALI f. 3045, o. 1, d. 326. 1959 Program, NYp, Maya Plisetskaya Collection.
Walpurgis Night
Music: Charles Gounod
Choreography: Leonid Lavrovsky

Polanaise and Krakowiak from the opera Ivan Susanin [A Life for the Tsar]
Music: Mikhail Glinka
Choreography: Rostislav Zakharov

pas de deux from The Flame of Paris
Music: Boris Asafyev
Choreography: Vasily Vainonen

“Dance of the Acrobat” from The Red Poppy
Music: Reinhold Glière
Choreography: Leonid Lavrovsky

“Rose Adagio” from Sleeping Beauty
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography: Asaf Messerer

“The Dying Swan”
Music: Camille Saint-Saëns
Choreography: Mikhail Fokine

“Spring Waters”
Music: Sergei Rachmaninov
Choreography: Asaf Messerer

“Dance of Three Warriors” from Spartacus
Music: Aram Khachaturian
Choreography: Igor Moiseyev

“Sabre Dance” from Gayane
Music: Aram Khachaturian
Choreography: Nina Anisimova

“Romance”
Music by Reinhold Glière
Choreography: Alexander Lapauri

Dance Suite
Music: Dmitri Shostakovich
Choreography: Alexander Varlamov

“Ostap’s Variation” from Taras Bulba
Music: Vasily Solovyev-Sedoy
Choreography: Rostislav Zakharov
“Waltz”  
Music: Moritz Moszkovsky  
Choreography: Alexander Lapauri

“The Forest Devil” from Shurale  
Music: Fārit Yarullin  
Choreography: Leonid Yakobson

pas de deux from The Nutcracker  
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky  
Choreography: Vasily Vainonen

“This is Unforgettable”  
Music: Vasily Solovyev-Sedoy, arr. Potapov  
Choreography: Alexander Lapauri

pas de trois, “The Ocean and the Pearls”  
Music: Cesare Pugni  
Choreography: Alexander Gorsky

“Mountain Dance”  
Music: Balanchivadze  
Choreography: Leonid Lavrovsky

“Swan Queen”  
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky  
Choreography: V. Varkovitsky and S. Vlasov

“Gopak”  
Music: Vasily Solovyev-Sedoy  
Choreography: Rostislav Zakharov

Classical Duet [probably from Flames of Paris]  
Music: Boris Asafyev  
Choreography: Vasily Vainonen

“The Blind Girl”  
Music: Pons-Heifets  
Choreography: Leonid Yakobson

“Tartar Dance” from The Fountain of Bakchisarai  
Music: Boris Asafyev  
Choreography: Rostislav Zakharov
Dances on a Russian Theme

“Troika”
Music: Igor Stravinsky
Choreography: Leonid Yakobson

“Tsarevich Swan”
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography: Stanislav Vlasov

“Snow Maiden”
Music: Sergei Prokofiev
Choreography: Leonid Yakobson

“The Cygnet”
Music: Sergei Prokofiev
Choreography: Tatiana Ustinova

Dances on a Modern Theme

“We Stalingraders”
Music: Potapov
Choreography: Vladimir Varkovitsky

“The Homecoming”
Music: Vasily Solovyev-Sedoy
Choreography: Alexei Yermolayev

“Not to Be Forgotten”
Music: Vasily Solovyev-Sedoy
Choreography: Alexander Lapauri

“Fly Doves”
Music: Isaak Dunayevsky
Choreography: Stanislav Vlasov and Vladimir Varkovitsky

Night on Bald Mountain
Music: Modest Mussorgsky
Choreography: Rostislav Zakharov

Bashkirian Dzhigit Dance
Choreography: Asaf Messerer

Triptych
Music: Claude Debussy
Choreography: Leonid Yakobson
I. The Idol
II. Eternal Spring
III. The Kiss
Bulgarian Folk Dance
Choreography: Mansura Kamaletdinov

“Huntsman and Bird”
Music: Edvard Grieg
Choreography: Leonid Yakobson

“The Flight of the Bumble-Bee”²

Appendix 2

Repertoire Performed by American Ballet Theatre on their 1960 Tour of the Soviet Union

Program I:

Theme and Variations
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography: George Balanchine
Set Design: Andre Levasseur

Rodeo
Music: Aaron Copland
Choreography: Agnes de Mille
Set Design: Oliver Smith

pas de deux from Act III of Swan Lake
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Marius Petipa

Graduation Ball
Music: Johann Strauss
Choreography: David Lichine
Set Design: Rolf Gerard

Program II:

Les Sylphides
Music: Frederic Chopin
Choreography: Michel Fokine
Set Design: Eugene Dunkel after Jean Corot

pas de deux from Don Quixote
Music: Ludwig Minkus
Choreography: Marius Petipa

Fancy Free
Music: Leonard Bernstein
Choreography: Jerome Robbins
Set Design: Oliver Smith

Bluebeard
Music: Jacques Offenbach
Choreography: Michel Fokine
Set Design: Marcel Vertes

Program III:

Lady from the Sea
Music: Knudåge Riisager
Choreography: Birgit Cullberg
Set Design: Kerstin Hedeby

The Combat
Music: Raffaeo de Banfield
Choreography: William Dollar
Set Design: Georges Wakhevitch

Jardin aux Lilas
Music: Ernest Chausson
Choreography: Antony Tudor
Set Design: Hugh Stevenson

Theme and Variations
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography: George Balanchine
Set Design: Andre Levasseur
Appendix 3

Repertoire Performed by the Bolshoi Ballet on their 1962 Tour of the United States

Full-length ballets:

Swan Lake
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography: Alexander Gorsky (Acts I, II, III) and Asaf Messerer (Act IV)
Revised by Asaf Messerer and Alexander Radunsky
Libretto: V. Begitchev and V. Geltser
Designer: Simon Virsaladze

Giselle
Ballet in Two Acts
Music: Adolphe Adam
Libretto: T. Gautier, V. Saint-Georges and J. Coralli
Choreography: Jean Coralli, Jules Perrot, and Marius Petipa, reproduced by Leonid Lavrovsky
Designer: V.I. Volkov

Spartacus
Music: Aram Khachaturian
Libretto: Nikolai Volkov
Choreography: Leonid Yakobson
Designers: Vadim Rindin and V.A. Klementiev

One Act Ballets:

Paganini
Music: Sergei Rachmaninov, “Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini”
Choreography: Leonid Lavrovsky
Designer: Vadim Rindin

Walpurgis Night
Music: Charles Gounod
Choreography: Leonid Lavrovsky
Designer: Vadim Rindin

Ballet School
Music: Anatoly Lyadov, Sergei Lyapunov, Alexander Glazunov, Dmitri Shostakovich
Produced: Asaf Messerer
Designer: Vadim Rindin

Chopiniana
Music: Frederic Chopin
Orchestration: Alexander Glazounov
Choreography: Mikhail Fokine
Revived in 1958: E.N. Geidenreich
Designer: Vadim Rindin

Bayaderka, Act IV, “The Kingdom of the Shades”
Music: Ludwig Minkus
Choreography: Marius Petipa
Designer: Vadim Rindin

Gayane, Act IV
Music: Aram Khachaturian
Choreography: Nina Anisimova
Designer: Vadim Rindin

Divertissements:

Polanaise and Krakowiak from the opera Ivan Sussanin [A Life for the Tsar]
Music: Mikhail Glinka
Choreography: Rostislav Zakharov

“Diana and Acteon” pas de deux
Music: Ricardo Drigo
Choreography: Agrippina Vaganova

“Spring Waters”
Music: Sergei Rachmaninov
Choreography: Asaf Messerer

“The Dying Swan”
Music: Camille Saint-Saëns
Choreography: Mikhail Fokine

“Étude”
Music: Franz Liszt
Choreography: Leonid Lavrovsky

Grand pas de deux from Don Quixote
Music: Ludwig Minkus
Choreography: Alexander Gorsky
“Songs My Mother Taught Me,”
Music: Antonín Dvořák
Choreography: Kasyan Galizovsky

*pas de deux* from *The Flame of Paris*
Music: Boris Asaf'yev
Choreography: Vasiliy Vainonen

“Narcissus”
Music: Alexander Tcherepnin
Choreography: Kassian Golezovsk[y]

“Pursuit”
Music: Arno Babadzhanian
Choreography: Natalia Kasatkina and Vladimir Vasilov

“Waltz of the Flowers” from *The Nutcracker*
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography: Vasily Vainonen

*pas de deux* from *The Nutcracker*
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography: Vasily Vainonen

“The Fawn”

“Melody”
Probably Music: Antonín Dvořák
Probably Choreography: Asaf Messerer

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Appendix 4

Repertoire Performed by the New York City Ballet on their 1962 Tour of the Soviet Union

Program 1:

Serenade
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography: George Balanchine

Interplay
Music: Morton Gould
Choreography: Jerome Robbins

Agon
Music: Igor Stravinsky
Choreography: George Balanchine

Western Symphony
Music: Traditional American Melodies Orchestrated by Hershey Kay
Choreography: George Balanchine

Program 2:

Raymonda Variations
Music: Alexander Glazunov
Choreography: George Balanchine

Allegro Brillante
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography: George Balanchine

Fanfare
Music: Benjamin Britten
Choreography: Jerome Robbins

Symphony in C
Music: Georges Bizet
Choreography: George Balanchine

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7 Akiva Diner NYCB Scrapbook, RGALI f. 2337 o. 2 d. 204. Programs of tours in the USSR by New York City Ballet, 1962, RGALI f. 2329 o. 8 d. 2320.
Program 3:
Scotch Symphony
Music: Felix Mendelssohn
Choreography: George Balanchine

Concerto Barocco
Music: Johann Sebastian Bach
Choreography: George Balanchine

Donizetti Variations
Music: Gaetano Donizetti
Choreography: George Balanchine

La Sonnambula
Music: Vittorio Rieti
Choreography: George Balanchine

Program 4:
Divertimento No. 15
Music: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Choreography: George Balanchine

Prodigal Son
Music: Sergei Prokofiev
Choreography: George Balanchine

Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography: George Balanchine

La Valse
Music: Maurice Ravel
Choreography: George Balanchine

Program 5:
Apollo
Music: Igor Stravinsky
Choreography: George Balanchine

Allegro Brillante
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreography: George Balanchine
Episodes
Music: Anton von Webern
Choreography: George Balanchine

Western Symphony
Music: Traditional American Melodies Orchestrated by Hershey Kay
Choreography: George Balanchine

Listed separately without program:
pas de deux from Midsummer Night’s Dream
Music: Felix Mendelssohn
Choreography: George Balanchine