

Historiography, Iconography and Semiotics of Russian Ballet Seasons: On the Issues of World Touring Practice

Tatiana V. Portnova

The Kosygin State University of Russia, Moscow, Russian Federation

Abstract

This article addresses the challenges of iconography and historiography related to the "Ballets Russes" by Sergei Diaghilev. The modern understanding of the role of material sources is quite important, as sometimes these sources are the only available information about Diaghilev's ballets. Furthermore, despite the growing interest in such materials, these sources remain a significant phenomenon that does not always meet the expectations of contemporary art critics. The paper highlights the role of the Ballets Russes by Diaghilev in creating the conditions for the emergence of a unique professional and artistic experience in Russia and abroad. Based on a profound and skillful reinterpretation of foreign practices related to international theater tours, it is emphasized that Russia has developed design technologies of a high level, established the foundations of artistic and organizational approaches, which are now considered international standards. The formation of specific knowledge and the study of design strategy dialectics in the twentieth century indicate an increasing importance of historical context. Semiotic choreographic images created during the tour of the Russian ballet by Diaghilev have become iconic for global culture.

Keywords: Russian seasons, Tours, Historiography, Iconography, Semiotics, Performances.

Introduction

The Russian ballet is famous all over the world. This type of art is the hallmark of our country. And it is hard to believe that some 300 years ago it did not exist. Jean-Baptiste Landé is the founder of Russian ballet. The French ballet-master opened the first ballet school in Russia in 1738. Graduates of this school formed the first ballet company. The most august persons highly admired the new type of art, among them: Tsar Peter I, Empresses Elizabeth and Catherine II. During their rule, the ballet art gradually developed and by the turn of the XVIII – XIX centuries achieved the first serious successes.

Ballets Russes — the most famous theatrical tours in the world, which successfully lasted from 1908 to 1921. Sergey Diaghilev was the permanent head of the theatrical enterprise. Through the art of opera and ballet, he told Europe and America about Russian culture with its national traditions and the latest avant-garde attitudes of mind. On the best theater stages of the world, the primas of the Imperial theaters shone, the famous Russian and foreign artists designed the performances, and the well-known classical composers and experimenters wrote the music for the performances. The productions of Diaghilev became a real revolution in the theatrical world: each became a colorful show with luxurious costumes, enchanting scenery and music. The main goal of the research is to analyze the design idea, historiography, iconography and semiotics of "Russian ballet seasons" at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries. Identifying their potential for worldwide theatre practice.

The following objectives are to be achieved:

- to define empirical contours that form problem field of phenomenology "Russian ballet seasons";
- to revise the traditional ideas about the significance of individual cultural and historical periods in the addition of the idea of "Russian seasons";
- analyze ballet iconography as a source of semiotic meanings transformation.

The theoretical significance of this work lies in the fact that, firstly, the arsenal of approaches to the study of Russian seasons by S. Diaghilev has been enriched. Practical significance is due to the possibility of using materials of research in the history of ballet dance-directing project activity, and teaching choreography, as well as in any other choreographic work of creative format.

Literature Review

It is necessary to highlight various theoretical approaches in the available sources on the study of the topic “Russian seasons” by S. Diaghilev. One is presented by the historical-cultural direction in the works, but there is no consistent historical analysis of all ballet seasons (Buckle, 1979; Chernyshova-Mel'nik, 2011; Grigoriev, 1993; Haskell, 1968; Kochno, 1970; Laskin, 2013; Lifar, 1940, 1950, 1993, 1994a, 1994b; Pastori, 2014; Zilberstein & Samkov, 1982).

A separate group of publications are devoted to the artistic design of the performances of Diaghilev Ballet (decorations and costumes). In Russian language one can refer to a number of studies on scenic painting (Davydova, 1974, 1999; Kostina, 2002; Pozharskaya, 1988; Vlasova, 1984). Deserves special attention album M. Pozharskaya (1988) "Russian seasons in Paris: Sketches of scenery and costumes, 1908-1929". The album-theatrical portrait of the late 19-early 20 centuries, with a small introductory article by E. A. Pankratova (1973) contains general material about the reflection of the theater within the visual arts, in particular with concern to the portrait.

Concerning the problem we have raised concerning the semiotics of ballet, there are articles dealing with these questions in general, but they do not consider the iconographic depictions of the artists, scenes of performances depicted by artists during tours of the Russian Ballet and associated iconic schemes and meanings (Atitanova, 2000; Cogan, 1982; Gevelenko, 2009; Kirillov, 2004; Vagabov, 2004).

If the role of scenic painting is quite clear in the history of art, the work of artists-easel painters who worked on images of ballet always remained outside the public attention. In monographs about the separate artists whose works repeatedly were the subjects of studies and publications, there is an analysis of the most famous papers. But there is no more solid and fundamental research devoted to the reflection of the ballet within the field of visual arts. None of the authors conducted an analysis of Russian ballet in the designated aspects of the study.

Methods and Materials

This paper applies to: method of systematization, historical-chronological method, and iconographic methods. The very form of choreographic art, which has a sign-communicative character, is included in the semiotic analysis of specific performances shown during the tour of the Russian Ballet at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries. The diverse iconography of graphic, pictorial

and sculptural images captured by artists can rightfully be attributed to the semiotic categories of discourse, text, symbol, which has a strong potential for preserving artistic images, dance movements and other visual characteristics.

Sources and materials included both direct museum collections and exhibition catalogs, including those devoted to Diaghilev's Russian Ballet Seasons (Bowl, 1982, 1990; Collection de peintures de nos jours appertien and a Serge Lifar, 1929; Homage a Diaghilev, 1973; Musée des Arts décoratifs, 1939; Palmer & Wagstaff, 1965; Sheng, 2012).

The Main Provisions of the Topic. Historiography

Before the first theatrical tour, Sergei Diaghilev organized an exhibition of Russian art at the Autumn salon in Paris. He brought icons and masterpieces of the XVIII–XIX centuries to the capital of France. He paid special attention to the artists from the "World of Art" movement. Previously he was the member of this movement. The exhibition featured paintings by L. Bakst, K. Somov, M. Dobuzhinsky and V. Serov. Later, they participated in the production of many ballets for Ballets Russes.

The idea to bring the ballet abroad came to the impresario S. Diaghilev in 1907. Then at the Mariinsky theater, he saw a production "Le Pavillon d'Armide" by M. Fokin, a ballet to the music of N. Cherepnin with a theatre set by A. Benois. At that time, there was a certain opposition among young dancers and choreographers to classical traditions, which, as Diaghilev said, M. Petipa "jealously guarded". "Then I thought about new short ballets," Diaghilev wrote later in his memoirs, "Which would be self-sufficient phenomena of art and in which the three factors of ballet — music, painting and choreography — would be in much more close combination than was so far" (Vydrin, 2003, p. 63). With these thoughts, he began to prepare the fourth Ballets Russes, which was in tour schedule of 1909.

At the end of 1908, the impresario signed contracts with leading ballet artists from St. Petersburg and Moscow: A. Pavlova, T. Karsavina, M. Fokin, V. Nijinsky, I. Rubinstein, V. Karalli and others. In addition to ballet, the program of the fourth Ballets Russes included Opera performances: Diaghilev invited F. Chaliapin, L. Lipkovskaya, E. Petrenko and D. Smirnov to perform on stage. With the financial support of his friend, the famous fine lady Misi Sert, Diaghilev rented the old Parisian theater "Chatelet". The theater interior passed special redesign for the premiere of Russian performances in order to increase the stage area.

The theatre group of Diaghilev arrived in Paris at the end of April 1909. The new repertoire of Ballet Russes included the ballets "Le Pavillon d'Armide", "Cleopatra" and "The Sylph", as well as "Polovtsian Dances" from the Opera "Prince Igor" by A. Borodin. The rehearsals were in a tense atmosphere: under the sound of hammers and screeching saws during the reconstruction of the "Théâtre du Châtelet". M. Fokin, the chief performance choreographer, often made scandals for this reason. The premiere of the Ballets Russes fourth season happened on May 19, 1909. Most part of the audience and critics did not appreciate the innovative choreography of the ballets, but everyone admired the theatre sets and costumes of L. Bakst, A. Benois and N. Roerich, as well as with the dancers, especially A. Pavlova and T. Karsavina.

After that, Diaghilev focused entirely on ballet theatre enterprise and significantly upgraded the repertoire, as well as the program of Ballet Russes "Sheherazade" to the music of N. Rimsky-Korsakov and the ballet on the basis of Russian folk tales "the Firebird". The entrepreneur asked A. Lyadov to write the music for the ballet, but he failed — and the young composer I. Stravinsky got the offer. From this moment became the start of his long-term fruitful cooperation with Diaghilev.

The previous success of the ballets allowed Diaghilev to stage his performances of the Ballet Russes new season at the Grand Opera; the premiere of the fifth Ballet Russes seasons happened in May 1910. Lev Bakst (2016), who traditionally participated in the creation of costumes and scenery, remembered: "The astonishing success of "Scheherazade" (all citizens of Paris dressed in Oriental style!)" (p. 88).

The premiere "Firebird" occurred on June 25. The theatre hall of Grand Opera was full with the artistic elite of Paris, as well as M. Proust (there are more than one mentions of Ballets Russes in the pages of his seven-volume magnum opus "Remembrance of Things Past"). The famous episode with live horses that appear on the stage during the performance became the mark of Diaghilev's original vision. M. Fokin made a mixture of a pantomime, grotesque and classical dance within one performance. All this was in harmony with the scenery of A. Golovin and music of Stravinsky. "The Firebird", as the Parisian critic Henri Gheon noted, was "a miracle of the most brilliant balance between movements, sounds and forms..." (Zinoviev, n.d.).

Already in the first period of the "Russian Ballets," Fokine put dance into the context of the artistic quest of his time. He renewed the content and form of the ballet. The theme of his choreographic works brought them closer to the works of Russian poets and artists.

In 1911, S. Diaghilev made a permanent venue for his Ballets Russes ("Russian ballet") — in Monte Carlo. In April of that year, the new Ballets Russes opened at the Monte Carlo Theater with the premiere of the ballet "The Spirit of the Rose" by M. Fokin. In it, the jumps of V. Nijinsky

surprised the audience. Later in Paris, Diaghilev presented "Petrouchka" by the music of Stravinsky, which became the main hit of this season. After M. Fokin's departure from Sergei Diaghilev, two more ballets by Stravinsky were choreographed by V. Nijinsky (The Faun's Afternoon Rest, 1912; The Sacred Spring). As a choreographer, Nijinsky first turned to forms of expressionist (Sacred Spring) and plotless (C. Debussy's Plays; 1913) ballets. Possessing a phenomenal leap, he returned the priority to male dance (C. Weber's Vision of the Rose).

The following Ballets Russes, in 1912-1917, as well as due to the war in Europe, were not so successful for Diaghilev. Among the most sad failures was the premiere of the innovative ballet to the music of I. Stravinsky "The Rite of Spring", which the audience did not accept. However, Igor Stravinsky's music for his ballet The Sacred Spring, which paints pictures of pagan Russia with its bold consonances and rhythms. Nijinsky guessed the musical theme of Vesna, translating it into *plastique en dedans* ("closed" leg position: toes and knees brought together). At the same time, Diaghilev stopped his cooperation with Nijinsky and Fokin and invited a young dancer and choreographer, L. Myasin, to join the theatre company.

The impresario more often began to use the services of modern Western composers and artists. So, in the season of 1917, he presented the ballet "Parade" to the music of E. Satie; the author of the libretto was the playwright J. Cocteau, and the creation of the scenery belonged to P. Picasso. Later, the artists J. Miro and M. Ernst made theatre sets for the ballet "Romeo and Juliet".

The years 1918-1919 successfully passed in London tours — the theatre company spent a whole year there. In the early 1920s, Diaghilev had new dancers S. Lifar and G. Balanchine. Balanchine again turned to the music of Stravinsky, composing the ballets Fireworks Song of the Nightingale" and "Apollo Musaget" (1928), as well as "Ball" by V. Rieti (1925), "Cat" by A. Sauge (1927), and the expressionist ballet "Prodigal Son" by S. Prokofiev (1929). C. Lifar danced choreography by M. Fokin, V. Nijinsky, L. Myasin, B. Nijinskaya, and the young G. Balanchivadze. In 1929, Lifar tried his hand at stage choreography, staging for the "Russian Ballet" a performance to music by Igor Stravinsky, "The Tale of the Fox, the Rooster, the Cat and the Ram". B. Nijinska invited these choreographers. As a result, after the death of Diaghilev, they both became the founders of national ballet schools: Balanchine — American school of ballet, and Lifar — French school of ballet.

From 1927 onwards, Diaghilev was less and less satisfied with his work in the ballet. The Ballet Russes successfully functioned until the death of Diaghilev in 1929. In his memoirs about new trends in twentieth-century ballet, I. Stravinsky noted: "...would there be any of these trends without the impact of Diaghilev? I don't think so" (Stravinsky, 2005, p. 113).

The Main Provisions of the Topic. Iconography and Semiotics

In this part of our research, we will turn directly to works of art history that somehow touch the iconographic problems of Russian ballet at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries.

There are a number of works by unknown and little-known artists are in lists of museum collections. Ballet Russes, with its tremendous scope of artistic findings and achievements, was not yet under the study or investigation in this regard. Only in this sense, the knowledge of these masters artworks is extremely perspective.

Under the principles of analytical research, currently it is necessary to study the structure of the "Ballet Russes" on another level of the visual image analysis. The historiography involves iconography, and iconography contributes to the interpretation. Together they are as one, we cannot separate them from each other or oppose to each other. But at the same time, they are not identical. The historiography of the issue, which reflects the real life of "Ballet Russes" of Diaghilev under study, does not reproduce them literally, but, rely on them, explains their sense by its own means. At the turn of the centuries, the ballet theater became an important factor in the cultural life of society, it became the center of the most creative intelligentsia and almost all famous artists.

For each of them, the ballet played an ambiguous role, it was part of their creativity with different degrees of organicity and different psychological content. But the ability to operate the imaginative perception and stand in the way of arts combinations within the process of artwork creation is one of the main and distinctive features of thought in those years. The study of ballet iconography shows that the composition of the collections is diverse: easel paintings and graphic works, sketches of costumes and scenery, projects of theatrical curtains design, posters and affiches, book illustrations, easel and monumental sculpture, plastic of small forms. In addition to the artistic design of the theatre performance, most of the artistic heritage consists of easel works about ballet. The archives, museums and private collections of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, as well as foreign materials, carefully store photographs, artistic works, therefore, visual materials that constitute the iconography of the Diaghilev ballet. There are many individual "models" of dance images, and there are more and more options for artistic solutions in this area, although at first glance it may seem that the artist who refers to the iconographic material associated with ballet put this material into too limited frame of reference. Nevertheless, "Ballet Russes" of S. Diaghilev gives different versions of the artistic structure that have a different relationship to the topic of dance, and each of these different versions can be equally relevant and important.

The most attractive elements for the artist are the plot, semantic commencement, where the basis of the artistic image is the interaction between characters and circumstances. The plot usually bases on a multi-figure composition. If the dancer is the main object of the image, one can define it as the portrait iconography. The existing iconographic structures of ballet images can be in the works of B. Anisfeld, L. Bakst, A. Golovin, M. Dobuzhinsky, K. Somova, K. Korovin, B. Kustodiev.

Another iconographic layer includes the plots of various ballet performances from large multiple-act performances to choreographic miniatures and short scenes. In the artistic culture of the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, the most brilliant masters who left the largest number of works by the topic of the play in graphics and painting were V. Gross, J. E. Blanche, E. Oppler, L. Kainer, P. Irib, R. Vull, in the field of sculpture G. Lavrov, S. Sudbinin, B. Fredman-Klusel, V. Beklemishev, A. Burdel, M. Goffman. The best features of their images refer to the fact that they realize the essence of the ballet theme - the theme of Russian choreography, meaningful in direct comparison with the performances, ballet artists and roles created by them during the existence of Russian ballet at the turn of the centuries. Their works already contain the accurate information about the actors, the names of their works indicate the theatre performance, sometimes the role, so the works acquire a documentary and ethnographic character, as well as have a great educational value.

Another group of works can be designated "sign" (semantic) iconography of ballet. Showing the image of dance, the artist seeks to capture the most spectacular, expressive and at the same time typical, recognizable motif. The classical forms of arabesque, attitudes, pas de deux, écarte pose, and the swan motif become universal subjects for artists who symbolize the poetics of Russian ballet. They represent an ideal model that does not so much illuminate the artist with new things as it attracts by the power of artistic logic, by the clarity and persuasiveness of the concept expressed; they are an expression of the emblematics of meaning. The iconography observed in the works of artists V. Serov, S. Sorin, S. Erzya, V. Beklemishev, S. Sudbinin, G. Lavrov, G. Deryuzhinsky, P. Picasso and others reads as symbolism, abstraction. Canonical poses, depicted by artists, are interpreted in terms of psychological, spiritual and emotional, as well as in terms of physiology, as an indication of a persistent model of a certain anatomical image of a symbol, an emblem of Russian ballet. They are typical in their uniqueness and unique in their typicality.

Finally, another facet of iconographic representation, which became widespread in the era of the Russian Seasons, is a peculiar form of expression associated with capturing not the entire figure of the dancer, but only her feet - the semantic iconographic palette of art is not reduced only to the representation of dance in the forms of dance itself, it is not alien to other conventionality, not only

metaphorical, but also metomimic imagery. G. Lavrov and B. Fredman-Klusel created several casts of Pavlova's and M. Kandaurova's feet, a cast of Nijinsky's foot, A. Majol's graphic sketches of S. Lifar's foot, Rodin's drawings of artists' feet for his ballet sculptures and S. Sorin's sketches of Pavlova's feet. This new material of ballet iconography (fragmentary depiction) allows one to look into the problematics of the theme of dance from within. Such images should be considered as semantic analogies of genetic order. By them one can quite accurately imagine and study the anatomico-plastic structure of the legs of the great artists who have long passed away from us. On the other hand, in these works, as in montage phrases, the entire ballet is encapsulated.

So, an image in ballet is always a sign. The multifarious memorable images of the performances of the "Russian Seasons" are particularly iconic and significant for the practice of world ballet. Pictorial images on the theme of Russian ballet created by artists are often symbolic, as they preserve iconographic schemes of recognizable fragments of performances or the appearance of dancers. Considering the features of the choreographic language of dance from the semiotic point of view, its possibilities as a communication channel and director of the stage performance, it can be argued that the choreographic plastic in the stage space is the most important dramaturgical link, performing the function of communication between the director, the artist and the audience.

Having highlighted the main features inherent in the nature of the considered arts - the ability to create temporal images (images unfolding in time), the ability to create images (models) of their peculiar copies through other arts - we can present the semantic relationship between dance, the fine arts (graphics, painting and sculpture) as follows:

- Dance is characterized by the creation of temporal images and the depiction of relations between characters;
- The visual arts are characterized by the creation of iconographic images (models), but it is impossible to create images that unfold in time with the help of their iconic means;
- The representation of ballet images in the visual arts is characterized by the means of familiarization, with the help of which the artist creates typological images (figure, portrait, group, plot, individual detail), allowing them to be evaluated as a semiotic phenomenon.

Conclusion

In order to make the conclusion, we note that Russian ballet of the 19th century is a specific phenomenon of the world culture. Having passed the path of formation throughout the 18th century,

at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, the domestic ballet theater not only competed with the other European theaters, but also began to surpass them in many ways. In 19th century, Russian ballet gradually reached the height of creative self-determination, developed its own traditions of stage performance, and by the end of the century Russia became the center of world choreographic art

The effective research methods included the historical-chronological and iconological studies and concomitant art criticism of iconographic sources-works of graphics, painting, sculpture, theater and decorative arts with regard to the ballet of Diaghilev. In combination with the basic historiographical review, analysis of literature and interpretation of content, they thus concretize the theoretical knowledge of specialists in this field and lead them to a deep subsequent comprehension of the issue under study.

The analysis of iconographic materials provides the new information about the content of the "Ballet Russes" and the features of the creative search for dance masters within the creation of a new choreographic form, the nature of images, and also clarifies our comprehension of S. Diaghilev's role in the artistic life of foreign countries.

In general, the study of historiography and iconography in relation to the issue under study helps us to understand the atmosphere of the era, shows the aesthetic search in regard to artists, choreographers, artists-managers of the cultural process as a complex system of creative forces.

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