

## **Professional Ballet Education in Bulgaria**

### **70 Years State Ballet School – State Choreographic School (National School of Dance Art)**

*Elitsa Lukanova PhD*

#### Abstract

The idea of starting a professional ballet education in Bulgaria was conceived back in 1914 by Pesho Radoev, one of the Bulgarian ballet activists, a founder of the first private 4-year ballet school. His cause with the struggle for professional ballet education was continued by Anastas Petrov, the Patriarch of Bulgarian ballet, until 1951. On February 5 (18), 1951, the **State Ballet School (State Choreographic School) was founded in Bulgaria, with the only discipline of classical dance**. The Russian ballet teacher Vladimir Beliy was appointed Principal of the newly established ballet school. The ballet school recruited teaching staff and planned the curricula, concerts and ballet performances. The higher education disciplines of Ballet Pedagogy and Ballet Directing were introduced in Bulgaria.

## **Evolution versus Revolution or against Development Models in Classical Dances**

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#### Abstract

Historical development of dance, respectively of ballet – development that is most of all the result of a centuries-long evolution, an enormous amassment of practical experience and theoretical knowledge. Revolutions in the development of classical ballet - Académie Royale de Danse – 1661, Paris; Marie Camargo; Marie Taglioni; dance symphonization – **The Sleeping Beauty** ballet by P. I. Tchaikovsky, the choreographer Marius Petipa; George Balanchine; Maurice Béjart.

# PRECURSORS OF PROFESSIONAL BALLET IN BULGARIA

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## Abstract

The founders of dance art in Bulgaria – choreographers, folklorists and gymnastics teachers familiar with folklore. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a growing interest in the new modern dances which were popular in the European halls. 18<sup>th</sup> October 1908 marks the revival of Sofia Opera Society - some of the most prominent champions of dance art in Bulgaria at that time **Ruska Koleva, Aleksandar Dimitrov** and **Pesho Radoev**.  
Book summary based on a thesis research

This thesis research consists of 187 pages. Its development includes an introduction, six chapters, implications and contributions. The reference list contains thirteen information sources.

### **1.1 Objectives, tasks and methods of research**

The purpose of this scientific work, we would call it a research and collective paper work, is to trace the historical creation of classical dance, its establishment and development; the establishment and development of some schools of classical dance (the ones mentioned in the paper title) and the stages of their development towards bringing the classical dance to its most perfect form, the drama ballet performance. To uncover these implications, we will focus on the four main ballet schools: the Italian, the French, the Danish and the Russian schools, and also on their founders. We have tried to follow consistency and rigor of thinking that are typical of most of the referenced authors and their studies in the field of dance, or rather in the establishment and development of the abovementioned schools of classical dance. It is no coincidence that their rigor of thinking, or rigor in expressing their thoughts, happens to bring them together. We have sought to discover the truth they were looking for, the truth they believed in, and the truth to which they remained faithful.

### **1.2 An overview of scientific research on the issue**

Being one of the most ancient arts, dancing has always demonstrated its incredible liveliness resulting from its continuous development on one hand and, on the other, from its constant

returning to its roots, the folkloric dance. Although, herein we are not going to discuss the historical evolution of dancing or its background, we will take the liberty of noting that before becoming an entertainment dance, people used it to communicate with each other, it reflected the work and life of people, their beliefs, feelings, thoughts and aspirations. The vitality in dancing is also evidenced by the fact that it has been in the focus of attention of the greatest minds, i.e. scientists, philosophers, play-writers, from ancient times to the present day. This was also supported by the numerous and quite successful attempts to theorise this eternal art and the preservation of historical data on its centuries-old development. In the Middle Ages, the dance survived the Inquisition's persecutions and prohibitions and burning of its representatives at the stake.

Classical ballet was evolving over centuries; it took four centuries, from the 15th to the 19th century, for it to evolve. Some of its features and characteristics died out throughout this long and complex period of development to create new, more perfect, and richer techniques.

In the 20th century, ballet received a broader interpretation as its range greatly expanded. Classical ballet gave rise to contemporary ballet, modern ballet, etc.

The key elements of a ballet performance, e.g. dramatic art, music, choreography and fine art, determine its essence as a synthetic art. Choreography plays the role of the unifying element. In a ballet performance these elements cannot exist apart but they also cannot be mechanically assembled; they are interrelated, mutually complementing each other, to mix into a single alloy called 'ballet'.

European ballet was born during the Renaissance. In the 14th-15th centuries, under the influence of folk dances in Western Europe, the ballroom dancing was created (more detailed information about the structure of balls, types of ballroom dances and their performance follows in our scientific work – E.L.). Throughout its development, albeit with some delay, dancing always follows the well-trodden path of music. Certain rules, methods of performance and structural forms were established; these were prerequisites for its evolving into professional art. Just like the newborn opera was called “drama through music” (*dramma per musica*), ballet was called “drama through movement” (*dramma per movimento*). Ballet originated in Italy in its syncretic form, but later it appeared as a full-fledged spectacle in other countries which were ahead of Italy in their development, France and England. Theorists and their historical and scientific works started emerging both in music and in dance art.

It is very difficult and almost impossible to consider apart the development of various European dance schools, especially the Italian and the French schools. Classical dance was born in Italy but later was brought to France, and then spread out across all of Europe. The same tutors, or as they were called dance masters, travelled freely from one country to another, each propagating their own school. Each school was finding its way back to where it started, but now enriched, more developed and changed in one way or another.

This interpenetration and mutual enrichment between different schools makes it hard to strictly tell them apart, and we can only see their individual nuances which make them look similar or different. We would rather say that this is a single school of classical dance, with different shades and nuances in different countries. The European art of dance developed almost at the same time. While each nation had its own history of dancing, the laws of choreography and dance standards were common to all prominent cultural nations. Preserving their typical and national dance features, they learned the common choreographic standards and the dance grammar that was being written at that time. Originally it started in Italy and then was further completed in France. In the 17th century, Paris became the ruler of dance worldwide due to the fact that the French capital laid the foundations of classical dance, with the creation of the **Royal Academy of Dance (L'Académie Royale de Danse) by King Louis XIV in 1661.**

**2. Italian ballet was born during the Renaissance.** The foundation of the previously unseen **BALLET PERFORMANCE** was laid in the 16th century. In Italy, for the first time dancing found its theoretical development and adopted conditional scientific forms, and defined its own terminology. *“The Italians, without a doubt, were the first to give rules to the dance which were covered in a few books written by Rinaldo Rigoni and Fabrizio Caroso.”* Guglielmo Ebreo wrote the *Treatise on the Art of Dancing (Trattato dell' arte del ballare)* which was published in 1463. Therein he revealed in detail the national celebrations, balls, masquerades and pantomimes performed in his time.

Domenico da Piacenza, Guglielmo Ebreo and Antonio Cornazzano were among the most prominent Italian dance theorists of the mid 15th and early 16th centuries. At the beginning of the 17th century, Fabrizio Caroso and Cesare Negri, who were considered to be the founders of the Academic Dance School in Italy, published their treatises (textbooks on dancing). The first **Dance Academy for Professional Training in Ballet of Italy was founded in Naples in 1812** (151 years after the foundation of the French Dance Academy in 1661 in Paris).

**3. At the end of the 15th century, France opened its doors wide to many figures of the Italian art,** including choreographers and dance tutors, who brought to France a ready-made school. However, the pupils, mastering the developed techniques of dancing, also brought the typical features of their national characters.

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It should be noted that the books on dancing written by the Italians Fabrizio Caroso and Cesare Negri, and by the Frenchman Thoinot Arbeau, left us a legacy and they were the only historical pieces that explained the technique of the 16th and early 17th century dance. Then the new ballet genre that was first established in France returned to Italy and made a great development.

In the 17th century, the Italian performing school was created which differed from the sophisticated French school for its technical virtuosity and artistic expressiveness. The famous Italian families, Vestris, Taglioni, Angiolini, etc., became popular then and in the 18th–19th centuries conquered Europe with their talents. Yet at the late 18th century, the difference between the French and the Italian ballet schools became noticeable. It turned out that the Italian influence was quite strong and the French dance took the path of masterful performing.

In the second half of the 18th century, Denmark experienced a boom in arts, music, opera and dance. It seems not plausible to say that Danish ballet developed independently and that a single nation was responsible for the birth of ballet as an art form. Ballet, both throughout Europe and in Copenhagen, was part of the French and the Italian ballet schools.

**4. The arrivals of Vincenzo Galeotti, an Italian dancer, tutor and ballet master, in Copenhagen in 1759, and later of the Frenchman Antoine Bournonville, were of great importance for the development of Danish ballet.** However, the most significant figure who moved Danish ballet up to a world level was the founder of the National Danish Ballet School, **August Bournonville**, son of Antoine Bournonville.

The Danish ballet school was characterised by purity of movements, elevation, and a lot of batteries in the small and big jumps, and the strength of feet made the performers look light and airy.

**5. The birth of ballet art in Russia** and the foundation of the Russian ballet school took place much later compared to Italy, France and other European countries. In Petersburg, a representative of the Italian ballet school was Antonio Rinaldi–Fossano, and Jean-Baptiste Landé was a

representative of the French school. With the arrival of Giuseppe Canziani, an Italian tutor and ballet master, in Russia, ballet education started booming. Canziani's pupils immediately took lead roles in the ballet company established at the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1742. Russian dancers mastered, with remarkable ease and speed, all technical challenges and special techniques of the French and the Italian stage dancing. Thus, soon they were able to freely use these techniques, tailoring them to their national artistic principles. Hence the implication that the Russian ballet school was not just a mere combination of the French and the Italian schools, but an absolutely independent phenomenon.

Looking back at the Russian ballet theatre, the second half of the 19th century can be called the **era of Marius Petipa** (1818–1910). This man staged more than 60 ballet performances in Russia in support of ballet academicism. His ballet masterpieces, including the *Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *Don Quixote*, and *Raymonda*, are still performed on world stages even to this day.

One of the brightest names in Russian ballet pedagogy is **Prof. Agrippina Vaganova** (1879–1951). Vaganova learned the best aspects of the Russian ballet school from her tutors and herself later contributed to its modernisation and further cultivation.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a reverse process began. Having reached its peak, the Russian ballet sent back the French and the Italian schools to Europe, in a more organised academic form.

Following the October Revolution in 1917, some of the greatest Russian ballet artists, tutors and ballet masters left Russia. Some of them founded their own schools all over Europe and they trained many future stars of the world ballet. The prima ballerinas of the Mariinsky Theater, Matilda Kshesinska, Olga Preobrazhenska and Lyubov Egorova, and Bronislava Nizhinska, the sister of the great Russian dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, were teaching in Paris.

In London, the celebrated Russian ballet artists Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina, Vera Volkova, Nikolai Legat, Mikhail Fokine, etc. founded their private schools. George Balanchine (Balanchivadze), the giant of Russian choreography and graduate of the Leningrad Choreographic School, opened the School of American Ballet (the future New York City Ballet company) in New York in 1934. All the artists mentioned above definitively establish the Russian ballet school as the leader in world ballet.

## **6. Implications and scientific contribution**

1. The first and key implication is the continuity in ballet education throughout Europe. One can see the interpenetration and interdependence between different schools. An example is Auguste Vestris, an Italian dancer who became a representative of the famous French school. His pupils

(the Italian Carlo Blasis, the French Charles Didelot, Jules Perrot, Marius Petipa and the Dane August Bournonville) contributed to the creation of classical ballet in France, Italy, Denmark and Russia.

2. Another key implication is that classical dance is a historical phenomenon in constant development.

Any new technique introduced to a ballet school got very quickly adopted by the rest, further developed and returned to its starting point; there were numerous examples in the Italian and the French schools.

3. It seems not plausible to say that Danish ballet developed independently and that a single nation was responsible for the birth of ballet as an art form. Ballet, both throughout Europe and in Copenhagen, was part of the French and the Italian ballet schools. The Danish ballet school combined the techniques of the Italian school and the finesse, purity and elegance of the French school, adding to them the Danish perfection of the small and big jumps with batteries.

4. The Russian ballet school has preserved and cultivated the best techniques of these schools. It is no coincidence that great part of the ballet companies and ballet schools in Europe and America are populated and managed by celebrated Russian performers, tutors and ballet masters even today.

### **7. Contributory nature:**

1. This thesis covers the study of enormous pile of scientific evidence, including publications that have not been translated into Bulgarian (*translations from Italian, French, English, Russian, summaries and conclusions*).

2. This thesis provides detailed information about the most famous world ballet performers who contributed to its birth and development, where and when they were born, who were their teachers, where they studied and worked.

3. This thesis provides data on the scientific publications related to the development of ballet art, the titles of scientific papers and the names of their authors, where and when they were published.

4. The discovery and use of evidence that are difficult to access even today, such as *LE MAÎTRE À DANSEUR* by Pierre Rameau, published in 1725 in Paris (our own copy from the National Library in Paris); *MA VIE THEATRALE 1848-1878* by August Bournonville, published in 1979 in London, etc.





# INFLUENCE OF THE RUSSIAN BALLET SCHOOL ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF BALLET ART IN BULGARIA IN THE 20TH CENTURY

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## Summary of Habilitation Work

When the first attempts were made to study the history of Bulgarian dance art, both folk and ballet art, the artistic facts were poorer than it was suggested by the theoretical interest in it.

This work, along with the brief tracing of the emerging dance art, particularly the ballet art in Bulgaria, will reveal a more detailed picture of the influence of the Russian ballet school and Russian ballet specialists on the development and consolidation of this art. We will discuss a sufficiently large period of time, from the 10s of the 20th century to the 70s of the same century. A period filled with hard work and efforts, with a lot of suffering and adversity, but also with no little satisfaction and joy from the achieved results. The work includes an introduction, five main parts, a conclusion, a collection of images, quoted and referenced literary sources.

The purpose of this work is the search, summarisation and organisation of existing printed materials, given the fact that information kept in the State Archives, the archives of the National Opera, the National School of Dance Art and many theatres across the country is scarce and incomplete.

**Part One:** *The Dawn of Ballet in Bulgaria (before Anastas Petrov)* traces the historical and social changes from the beginning of the last century that gave rise to an increased interest in the dance culture in Sofia and the major Bulgarian towns. In this Part One, we get to learn about the professional growth of the pioneers who invented the dance from the gymnastics classes through the interpretation of some folk customs to the staging of ballet parts in dramatic and opera performances. It analyses in detail the influence of the Russian ballet artists touring at that time in Bulgaria, noting that the emerging critical attitude towards this type of stage performances made many Bulgarian performers want to attend specialised classes with leading Russian tutors. This Part briefly outlines a short period of time during which the Bulgarian performers were greatly influenced by the modern European school (the German school) which then was in conflict with the Russian school.

**Part Two:** *The Beginning of Professional Ballet Dancing in Bulgaria: Anastas Petrov.* This Part is dedicated to the challenging and at the same time auspicious creative biography of Anastas Petrov, the Patriarch of ballet art in Bulgaria. Part Two provides details about his personality from early childhood to his top creative (novel for this period of time) achievements in classical dance, ballet school, original interpretations with innovative construction of the artistic image within the story line, a pioneer of the establishment of a ballet school with an enhanced curriculum. We introduce the Sofia Opera, the institution without which ballet would have been an orphan. Anastas Petrov was fortunate to work with professional musicians; here you will find a detailed description of the on-stage performance groups for all his productions, and also the ballet dancers who participated in them.

**Part Three:** *Bulgarian Ballet after the World War II.* Part Three follows the bold steps of Nina Anisimova and Nikolai Holfin, Russian ballet artists. The time covered is the period after World War II. Here we have introduced the names of the first professional ballet dancers and the ballet production of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* by Nina Anisimova. Her work changes the culture of perception of the Bulgarian audience in terms of ballet art and changes in the mindset of the audience to be prepared for the more sophisticated ballet dramaturgy. During this period, the Sofia Opera ballet reached a higher professional level and the established ballet school gives new hope for development. Part Three also refers to Nikolay Holfin and his presence in Bulgaria, the *Haidushka Pesen* ballet.

**Part Four:** *Professional ballet education in Bulgaria.* Part Four reveals information which is most unknown in a historical aspect. It provides evidence for the first time showing the early years of training in the State Choreographic School (DHU) – 1951, a professionally organised structure, and also the selection, the organisation, the first alumni and the first tutors. Thanks to Irina Yukhnovich, a research assistant with the museum of the Academy of Russian Ballet in St. Petersburg, we discover the biography of Vladimir Belyi, a wonderful teacher and the first head of the Ballet School of Sofia. We have also included an interview with Kalina Bogoeva, a prima ballerina and one of the first alumni of Vladimir Belyi class in Bulgaria. We have highlighted a constellation of names that played a pivotal role in the art of ballet in the Soviet Union. Part Four provides information about Nikolai Tarasov, a leading and significant educator in Russian history, who trained the greatest names in the Soviet Union performance arts, pedagogy and choreography, from the very generation of Belyi, including Belyi himself. We have shown the undeniable professional and spiritual influence of the Soviet dancers on the parameters and structure of ballet education being currently developed in Bulgaria.

**Part Five:** *Russian and Bulgarian Choreographers Who Contributed to the Evolution of Modern Classical Ballet in Bulgaria.* We have studied in detail a considerable amount of information about the choreographers who contributed to the development of modern classical ballet in Bulgaria. This Part analyses outstanding stage achievements from the 60s and 70s of the last century. We have also attached a list of all alumni of the ballet educational programmes in Moscow, Leningrad (St. Petersburg) and Kyiv, a fact that proves once again the enormous contribution of the Russian ballet school.

**Considering our goals, the implications that we could define as of contributing nature include:**

Being the pioneers of the establishment and development of ballet art in Bulgaria, Ruska Koleva, Alexander Dimitrov, Pesho Radoev, as well as Anastas Petrov, who is the founder of the Bulgarian ballet, and his numerous followers chose absolutely the right place at the right time and took on the path of mastering classical ballet. They neither accepted, nor outright ignored the contemporary trends in ballet art, but on the contrary, they creatively adopted their best aspects and mixed them with the classical vocabulary in a homogeneous alloy. We should also highlight the fact that the first Bulgarians who decided to go for the art of ballet, in spite of spending their early years of ballet education in the West, most often preferred to be tutored by Russian specialists who fled Russia after the Revolution of 1917. The connection between the Bulgarian ballet and the Russian ballet school deepened, particularly after the World War II. Some of the best Russian ballet tutors and choreographers, who contributed to raising the professional level of Bulgarian ballet, were more and more invited to hold classes. The Russian tutor Vladimir Belyi and Anastas Petrov together played significant roles in the opening of the State Ballet School in Sofia, which became a source of ballet dancers not only for the Sofia National Opera, but also for the non-capital opera and ballet theatres. In the second half of the 20th century, many Bulgarian pupils completed their ballet education in the Soviet Union (mainly in Leningrad and Moscow) and became the backbone of the solo ensemble of our National Ballet. Many Bulgarians completed their higher ballet education (ballet pedagogy and ballet stage direction) in Moscow and Leningrad and, working in Bulgaria, they have greatly contributed to the Sofia Opera ranking among the best ballets worldwide.

The Russian school of classical dance, founded on the basis of the Italian, French and Danish schools, took the best of them and became the central pillar of classical ballet over the years. It is no coincidence that even today the Russian ballet specialists are in demand both as performers and as tutors all over the world. The Bulgarian people of ballet perceive the Russian

school of classical dance (a school that has repeatedly shown to be the best in the world) as their own and successfully implement it in the development of the Bulgarian ballet art. They try to preserve it in its purest form and contribute to its evolution.

Due to the enormous amount of the organised and analysed material, this work only covers the period up to the mid20th century. My next scientific work (which is already in progress) will cover the period up to the late 20th and early 21st century, wherein, in addition to the Russian specialists who operated in Bulgaria, I will discuss in detail their Bulgarian alumni; their dedicated work, expertise and contribution to the Bulgarian ballet should be greatly acknowledged.