

REVIEW

by

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on Dissertation work for awarding educational and scientific degree

“Doctor” in specialty “Ballet Art”

Professional field 8.3 “Music and dance Art”,

Doctoral program “Choreography”

Topic: The role of the Russian ballet school in the creation of ballet in America in the 20th century. Comparative analysis between the American and the Russian ballet schools

Doctoral student: Dushanka Gradishki Ivanova – Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv, Faculty of Musical Folklore and Choreography, Department of Choreography, doctoral student in specialty “Ballet Art”

Scientific adviser: Prof Lilyana Draguleva

The review is prepared on the basis of presented by the doctoral student: dissertation; abstract and autobiography.

The dissertation consists of 193 pages, including introduction, presentation in 7 main parts, conclusions, scientific contributions. The bibliography contains mainly foreign and internet sources. The main text includes 119 images illustrating and proving the presented material. She has also presented a list of 4 publications on the topic of her dissertation.

In this review, I will allow myself a slight departure from the strict academic style, due to the transparent sentimentality of the dissertation, related to the rich performing and artistic career of the author, and with respect for the huge amount of work done by her and her scientific adviser. I will presented some highlights in order to emphasize their scientific value.

We are witnessing an extremely interesting topic, which so far has not found its place in the scientific database of dance art and has not been interpreted and studied, for one reason only “*the lack of literature in Bulgarian, Macedonian and Serbian*”. This fact determines the relevance of the dissertation. And, its uniqueness lies in the artefacts found by the author in five American libraries in major cities (Tampa, St. Petersburg, Miami Florida and the Library

of Performing Arts in New York), which has provoked her to put together the “*missing pieces of the puzzle*” related to the development of the most exquisite dance art, the Ballet in the land of the dreams - America.

The author has built a logical structure in order to develop and defend the **problem** set in the title (comparative analysis between the American and the Russian ballet schools, which emphasizes the role of the Russian ballet masters) related to the specific **object** (ballet in America) and **subject** of work (the establishment and development of ballet in America). The **author argues** that in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, French, Italian and Austrian dancers tried to spread ballet in America, *but the Russians were more persistent in this direction*.

The choice of comparative analysis as the main tool in the methodology of the dissertation is suitable for this type of qualitative research. It supports the development of the author's argument. As an empirical type of research, it uses the following methods: research of sources with information and research of historical data and facts related to the object and subject of the research. Library sources have been studied, which in this work are the legitimate sources of information. The exposition of the text contains interesting quotations, which can be used today in the choreographic practice.

Before starting the actual part of the research, the doctoral student includes an **Overview of the researches done on the topic**. It would be more correct for the reader to call this introductory part an **Overview of the research topic**, due to the fact that it outlines in chronological order events and names that completely changed the idea of dance of the American nation: the dances of the **indigenous people**, the Native Americans – dance is a form of social affirmation and a well-developed system of communication; the **first settlers**, English colonists, who introduced popular English folk dances; the **Puritans** criticize the dances, claiming them to be temptation; **theatres** during the American Revolution (1775-1783) became dance centres in the 18th century; **George Washington** (1732-1799), as the nation's first president, encouraged the noble Americans to learn sophisticated European dances; after the Great French Revolution (1789-1799), **French dance masters** emigrated to America and brought with them the traditional folk dances quadrille and cotillion; the author also mentions the **Italian dance masters**, who in the 18th and 19th centuries took over, presenting their virtuoso ballet technique and giving their unique individual contribution to the development of the new American dance style of several successive generations; the 19th-century **Austrian ballerina** Fanny Elssler, who left her mark on the popularity of romantic ballet in the United States and on America's first dancers; there are also dancers from the late 19th and early 20th centuries who explore the **relationship between the body and the soul**

while completely avoiding classical ballet forms - Loie Fuller, Maud Allan, Isadora Duncan, Ruth Saint-Denis, Ted Shawn and Martha Graham; **20th century** – **Anna Pavlova** and **Mikhail Mordkin**, with their pedagogical activity in New York, created whole new generations of American dancers, which changed the attitude of the Americans towards ballet. The time of the “*American Renaissance*” began, in which concepts of traditionalism and modernism were created. Other leading names of the Russian ballet are also mentioned, for their contribution in changing the attitude towards ballet as a dance art, and making it an exclusive art.

In Chapter 1, 1.0. **The beginning of dance as a form of cultural expression in America in the 17th and 18th century**; Chapter 2, 2.0. **The Italian influence on dance in America**; 2.1. **Malvina Cavalazzi and Luigi Albertieri**; 3. **The influence of Fanny Elssler on the popularity of romantic ballet in America**, the author presents in detail some of the events, facts and names outlined in the **Overview of the researches done on the topic**. Of great interest are the accounts describing their American destiny, and especially their contribution to the development of ballet in America, as we already know what happened to them in Europe from other studies in the field of ballet, such as the work of Elitsa Lukanova “Establishment, development and comparative analysis of Italian, French, Danish and Russian ballet schools”.

Here it is worth noting that the author very accurately in her study first points to the historical event (political, economic), which directly affects the development of dance art as a new cultural phenomenon in America.

The work very accurately discusses the initial role of dance in the young emerging nation of America, from its religious significance, to the shy rhythms on secular level with the arrival of the first colonizers. It presents how dance is gradually changing its function and role, as “*dance is gradually becoming one of the most effective ways to reinforce class division in colonial society, where class is based, quite uncertainly, solely on wealth*”. The first dance handbook, John Playford's *The English Dance Master, or Plaine and easie Rules for the Dancing of Country Dances, with Tune to each Dance*, is also presented.

All mentioned dances, starting with the native Indian, going through the dance of the English colonists Virginia Reel, as well as the Kentucky Running Set, the later established Quadrille, Cotillion and others, are presented in detail – way of dancing, style, shape, grip, so that the reader can imagine them figuratively and travel to the specific period.

3.1. **The first American dancers**. An intriguing and contributing part of the dissertation, which presents in detail for the first time one place, in 15 pages, Mary Ann Lee,

Julia Turnbull, Augusta Maywood and George Washington Smith. It answers the questions – who are they; where did they come from; who are their teachers; how they develop their dance career and where; names of performances and shows; places where they played? Information worthy of ballet history textbooks.

Chapter 4, 4.0. **Feverish search for new forms of dance.** In this part of the research, the author Dushanka Ivanova introduces us to the revolutionary names in the art of dance in America and worldwide - Loie Fuller, Alan Maud, Isadora Duncan, Ruth Saint-Denis, Ted Shawn and Martha Graham, their fundamental importance in changing the dance forms and dance techniques, directly related to the Industrial Revolution and the change of human thinking, the change of the inspirational model in the art of dance. The author argues that some of these names are not accepted in America, but are welcome in Europe - Loie Fuller, who is still considered to be a real magician on the stage, because of her technological stage innovations (described on page 55). The fates of the other abovementioned dancers are also interesting – Allan's career of performer in the history of modern dance spanning 30 years; the dancer Isadora Duncan revolutionizes dance in a way that goes beyond her refusal to use classical steps and techniques, or to wear costumes acceptable to the ballerina. The summary of Duncan's life on page 63 is worthy of an encyclopaedic dictionary. Ruth Saint-Denis and Ted Shawn are presented as followers of the Duncan's work. Saint-Denis is presented as the first non-conforming dancer accepted in America, inspired by the Eastern art. Her work with Ted Shawn resulted in the creation of a system that *became a tool for elevating dance into a respected art in America* (pp. 67-71). Martha Graham is remarkably presented as one of the greatest choreographers of the 20th century and a pioneer in the field of contemporary dance.

Chapter 5, 5.0. **The Origin of Ballet in America.** Immersed in her reflections on the development of ballet in a country with unlimited possibilities, the author logically comes to a part of the narrative, in which she speaks about the fact that the beauty and splendour of ballet, as an expression of greatness of the world's imperial centres, is contrary to democratic thinking of America. The ballet and its immigrant representatives face a curtain that will either open for their performances, or fall down like a guillotine. Ballet art is a supreme form of plastic expression and as such finds a way to sow its grain in America, through *the vaudeville, variety shows and musicals*. Several important points are highlighted in this initial period: (1) pedagogical ignorance, (2) hostility to the art of ballet, (3) the search for suitable training facilities, (4) until coming to a point where *the immigrant teachers with academic Euro- Russian traditions work both to educate the American audience in classical ballet, and to build a ballet according to American taste*. This part of the dissertation is characterized by

sophisticated logical thinking, such as the summary on page 81: *America's task in this direction is to develop its own style: American ballet will give shelter to Russian traditions, while at the same time reflecting those qualities, which represent the core of the American national identity.* Ballet is a victim to the American pluralism and the imperial orthodoxy.

5.1. The Russians from Imperial Russia laid the foundations - Pavlova and Mordkin. The contribution of the two ballet masters to the popularize ballet art in America through their tours is presented in detail. Their first tour is almost impossible, but they continue with second season, at the end of which they separate due to professional jealousy. Pavlova's star shines all over America with many performances in various places, but not on the classical stage – *Pavlova becomes a personal inspiration for a whole generation of dancers.* Anna Pavlova's love of freedom and ambition found ground in America and was rightly called the "*greatest*" dancer of the twentieth century.

5.2. Anna Pavlova. Has the art of ballet seen another Anna Pavlova? The answer to this question is discussed in detail in this part of the dissertation. The narrative claims that the answer is “no”, however, the generation of dancers trained by her, and her unique style show that Pavlova's star is perpetual. *“She almost mesmerizes the audience, carrying within her the nature of divinity.”* The text chronologically describes the life and professional path of the ballerina around the world.

5.3. Mikhail Mordkin. Here again, in chronological order, the author introduces us to the career of the Russian-American artist. There are several main findings in the section: (1) Mordkin's teaching puts artistry in dance in the focus of training at the risk of missing some technical details. (2) he is forefather of the expressive approach to ballet in America, through the Russian avant-garde plastic movement. (3) Mordkin is both the greatest guardian of the past and the prophet of the future. (4) Mordkin practically laid the foundations of modern ballet in America. After the exposition we come to the conclusion that Mordkin's work in America is of fundamental importance in several directions – performance technique, choreography, teaching and directing. With these qualities he laid the foundation of the American Ballet Theatre. Lucia Chase is mentioned as his zealous follower.

Chapter 6.0 The Age of the “American Renaissance” in the Art of Dance and Its Aesthetic Principles of Abstraction and Expressionism and Diaghilev's reforms as a concept of traditionalism and modernism

At the beginning of the chapter Mrs. Ivanova very accurately presents the reasons for the ascent of the so-called Age of the “American Renaissance”, discussed in details on p.109: *The merging of traditional dance with modern dance marks the beginning of a new wave of*

theatrical dance. The influence of each of them reaches the art of dance through the aesthetic principles of abstractionism and expressionism. They guide the taste of the audience in evaluating the form and content in the abstract expression of the body and its emotions.

The author asserts that Sergei Diaghilev's Russian Ballet (*Ballets Russes*) is the most famous troupe in the history of ballet, which for twenty years (1909-1929) presented the energy and vitality of the Russian ballet and *brought back the classical dance to the forefront of European culture. At the same time, he managed to bring the Imperial Ballet out of its nineteenth-century matrix, and to border it to modernism.* The whole exposition is introducing us to Diaghilev's personality, his techniques in building the performance, his ability to unite the most famous artists in one team; the development of his ballet troupe; his erudite revolutionary thought backed by names such as Mikhail Fokine, Enrico Cecchetti, Leonid Massine, George Balanchine and Serge Lifar, Vaslav and Bronislava Nijinsky, Pablo Picasso and many other composers, artists, choreographers and playwrights.

6.1 The revolutionary rebirth of modern classical ballet as a remarkable art in Europe and the triumph of the Russian Ballet in Paris and Monte Carlo, which influenced the further development of dance in America

The scientific fairytale takes us very smoothly to France, where the center figure is again the innovator Diaghilev. The author describes with great detail the theatrical seasons and the programs with which he captivated the Parisian audience, and completely changed their opinion about ballet, and of course, his success is a result of his experience and his skills to work with the refined sensitivity of the artists from his entire team. In his face, the Russian ballet expanded its prestige on the Western stages and across the Atlantic. His troupe was the first to be exempted from the Imperial regulations and subsidies, due to which there are certain problems, but quickly solved by the adaptive nature of the leader. It is this freedom that attracts many performers, who rediscover their dancing qualities thanks to the solo roles given to them. Ivanova compares the personalities of Pavlova and Diaghilev with their contribution to ballet on p.122.

6.2. An exceptional manifestation of expressionism and modernism in the dance of the "Russian Ballet" of the great Sergei Diaghilev as a new Russian invasion of America.

Diaghilev's footsteps in America are the focus of the study here, a prologue to his appearance are the exhibitions of the avant-garde artists, which provoke mixed feelings in the viewer. The arrival of the troupe overseas was provoked and at the same time prevented by the World War I in Europe, but Diaghilev succeeded. They start in North America. Again, the

author describes in detail the itinerary of the troupe, indicating all the dates and names. Of interest are the quotes from the critics, which are positive. The changes in the construction of the dance and the overall performance are noted. Special attention is paid to Nijinsky as a dancer and choreographer.

The text presented 147-152 pages summarizes precisely the activities of Sergei Diaghilev and ends with the words, *“that Diaghilev's Russian Ballet is an individual phenomenon, supported by his unique combination of aesthetics, critical insight, business acumen, social charm and pure willpower. He has the remarkable ability to make the art market serve him, to gain support from wealthy patrons, and to win over the people who determine the tastes of the masses. Without Diaghilev, the 20th-century history of ballet in Europe and America would have been quite different. Under his protection, ballet in America not only prospered, but also gained enormous prestige”*.

6.3. Mikhail Fokine's contribution to choreography in Russia and Europe and his influence on ballet in America in the 20th century. The focus of this part of the study is Fokine and his genius. It emphasizes that the basis of his work is the praise of beauty by depicting the individual and his feelings, as stated by the doctoral student on page 157, and it is also noted that his revolutionary creative thought consists in changing some classical traditions in ballet technique in favour of image construction and stage action. In his work he is influenced by the dance of Isadora Duncan. His five principles in the construction of a ballet performance are presented, which are still valid today. The presentation of the chronology of Fokine's work, is impressive with Ivanova's ability to flow smoothly from choreography to choreography, to make smooth jumps in time dotted with many facts and names. Fokine is presented as the artist who changed the syntax in ballet. He managed to make this change through his work in America, which was carefully described in **6.4. Fokine's influence through his teaching and choreography in America.** It presents interesting facts related to difficulties in staging the choreography, due to the fact that there were no professional dancers in America yet. We read curious details (fragments of conversations) of a conflict with Martha Graham in 1931, as the choreographer did not approve the modern dance. Every step of the controversial and genius Fokine is represented, with his rebellions and ups and downs. His struggle with the commercial was impossible, but the power of his work succeeded with the help of the “Russian Ballet”, which arrived in America in 1933. Here, too, the author's conclusions about the artist are worthy of a textbook. The strength of this last part of the work is also due to the fact that Dushanka Ivanova does

not miss the fact that Fokine's genius lives on today, through his blood followers – his granddaughter Isabelle Fokine.

7. Conclusion – Comparative analysis between the Russian and American Ballet School. This concluding part is a kind of summary in the context of the whole work of the doctoral student. The essential finding is that Russian influence in America achieved its apotheosis with the work of George Balanchine, through the Academy of American Ballet, which he established in 1934, where he taught students the “Balanchine technique” he had developed. The large ballet troupes created under the influence of the Russian Ballet are mentioned, as well as the young American dancers.

The contributing characteristics of Dushanka Ivanova's dissertation are indisputable for the development of science in the field of ballet. The in-depth analysis, which clearly shows the professionalism of the candidate and her deep emotional connection to the elegance of dance, leads her to the development of this difficult topic, in which she manages to unravel the relationship and interaction of the Russian ballet school, and its influence in the birth and establishment of a classical Imperial dance tradition in free-thinking America.

Recommendation: After a positive evaluation by the scientific jury, the work should be published in the form of a textbook in order to reach educators and educational institutions in the field of dance.

In conclusion, in my opinion the dissertation of Dushanka Gradishki Ivanova **The role of the Russian ballet school in the creation of ballet in America in the 20th century. Comparative analysis between the American and the Russian ballet schools**, presents an in-depth analysis of the topic of encyclopedic nature.

I propose to the Scientific Jury **to award** the doctoral student Dushanka Gradishki Ivanova with the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”, professional field 8.3. “Music and dance art”, doctoral program “Choreography”.

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