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## **THE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN BALLET**

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### ***Annotation***

*This article is devoted to describing of history of Russian ballet. The aim of the article is to provide the reader some materials on developing of ballet in Russia, its influence on the development of ballet schools in the world and its leading role in the world ballet art.*

*The authors characterize the main periods of history of Russian ballet and its famous representatives.*

**Key words:** Russian ballet, choreographers, dancers, classical ballet, ballet techniques.

**1. Introduction.** Russian ballet is a form of ballet characteristic of or originating from Russia. In the early 19th century, the theatres were opened up to anyone who could afford a ticket. There was a seating section called *a rayok*, or «paradise gallery», which consisted of simple wooden benches. This allowed non-wealthy people access to the ballet, because tickets in this section were inexpensive.

It is considered one of the most rigorous dance schools and it came to Russia from France. The specific cultural traits of this country allowed to this technique to evolve very fast reach his most perfect state of beauty and performing [4; 22].

**II. The aim of work** is to investigate theoretical material and to study ballet works on this theme.

***To achieve the aim we have defined such tasks:***

1. To analyze and to learn the theoretical material on the topic.
2. To describe the infinite variety of Russian Ballet.
3. To give characteristics of Russian Ballet technique and dancers.

**III. The Results.** The formal beginning of Russian ballet can be traced back to a letter written in 1737 to the Empress Anne (1693-1740, reigned from 1730) by the teacher of gymnastics at the Imperial Cadet School. The letter states: «I humbly ask Your Majesty that I shall be given twelve children – six males and six females – to create ballets and theater dances using twelve persons of comic and serious character [25].

The history of the Russian ballet consists of the gradual absorption of this foreign knowledge by the Russians themselves until the art became indigenous.

In 1765 Catherine the Great brought the Italian dancer-composer-choreographer Domenico Angiolini (1731–1803) to St Petersburg. Angiolini composed the first heroic Russian ballet *Semira* in 1772. He was one of the first choreographers to move away from ballet as a divertissement, a mere history in costume, to a psychological drama.

In 1801 Charles-Louis Didelot (1767–1837) sparked the first great period of ballet. He is considered to be the «father of the Russian ballet». His productions were seen at the St. Petersburg Bolshoi Theatre, latter called the Maryinsky, and later still the Kirov. He was invited to St Petersburg by Paul I. Didelot said that «ballet is an action explained by a dance» and from this premise created a plasticity of movement free from the conventionalities of baroque ballet, using effective changes of scenery, and combining the dance of soloists and the corps de ballet which prompted the developments of ensemble dance in the Romantic period.

By the late 19th century ballet in Russia was a stagnant form where the virtuoso demonstration of classical technique had become an end in itself while the narrative was enlivened only by character dances. It was Frenchman, Marius Petipa (1818–1910), who decisively refashioned this failing art form, structuring the haphazard tradition he had inherited, making a virtue of what would later be seen as its weakness - the deliberate lack of dramatic unity [25].

As the new century began, people started to get tired of Petipa's ideas and principles of ballet and looked for fresh ideas. By now the Russian ballet had surpassed the French ballet and many Russian dancers had become international stars. Probably the most notable ballerina of this time was Anna Pavlova, (1881–1931), who is known for dancing *The Dying Swan* [7].

Mikhail Fokine (1880–1942), started to push the rules of costume in the imperial theatre and also chose to use serious music, rather than dance music.

In 1909 Sergei Diaghilev (1872–1929) created the Ballets Russes. This dance company started with strong Russian Character works.

During the 1930s in Leningrad a ballerina made artistic director of the former Imperial Ballet, Agrippina Vaganova, (1879–1951), started to make her mark. It was in 1935 that the ballet became the Kirov Ballet [23; 28].

There are several methods of ballet in Russian ballet. The most widely used is the Vaganova method, which was named after the very famous ballerina and teacher, Agrippina Vaganova [4; 27; 28].

Vaganova method is the technique which derived from the teaching methods of the old Imperial Ballet School (today the Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet) under the Premier Maître de Ballet Marius Petipa throughout the mid to late 19th century, though mostly throughout the 1880s and 1890s. It was Vaganova who perfected and cultivated this form of teaching the art of classical ballet into a workable syllabus. Her *Fundamentals of the Classical Dance* (1934) remains a standard textbook for the instruction of ballet technique. Her technique is one of the most popular techniques today [5; 27; 28].

The Russian ballet remained a mystery to the West, but as the European dancers returned from their Russian tours with stories of the beautiful theatres and the tremendous salaries paid guest artists, caused many of the great dancers and teachers to flood the Russian market: Jean-Batiste Lande, Louis Duport, Jules Perrot, Arthur Saint-Leon, Marie Talioni, Lucile Graham, Fanny Cerrito, Fanny Elssler, and Carlotta Grisi all danced in Russia [25].

Many Russian dancers have gone on to reach worldwide acclaim; notable Russian dancers include: Anna Pavlova [7], Galina Ulanova [1], Maya Plisetskaya [24], Nina Ananiashvili, Mikhail Baryshnikov [9; 10; 29; 16], Natalia Bessmertnova [12], Vakhtang Chabukiani, Natalia Dudinskaya [17], Nikolai Fadeychev, Alexander Godunov [26], Tamara Karsavina [7], Mathilde Kschessinska, Olga Lepeshinskaya, Larissa Lezhnina, Maris Liepa [13; 14; 15], Ulyana Lopatkina [8], Natalia Makarova [7], Vladimir Malakhov, Léonide Massine, Ekaterina Maximova, Vaslav Nijinsky [3; 19], Rudolf Nureyev [2; 17; 18; 21], Alla Osipenko, Marina Semenova, Konstantin Sergeyev, Olga Spesivtseva, Vladimir Vasiliev [12], Vyacheslav Gordeev, Nadezhda Pavlova.

Yuri Grigorovich (1927, St Petersburg) connected with the Imperial Russian Ballet. He graduated from the Leningrad Choreographic School in 1946 and danced as a soloist of the Kirov Ballet until 1962. His staging of Sergey Prokofiev's *The Stone Flower* (1957) and of *The Legend of Love* (1961) brought him acclaim as a choreographer. In 1964, he moved to the Bolshoi Theatre, where he worked as an artistic director until 1995. His most famous productions at the Bolshoi were *The Nutcracker* (1966), *Spartacus* (1967), and *Ivan the Terrible* (1975). He reworked *Swan Lake* to produce a happy end for the story in 1984. In 1997, he left the Bolshoi over disagreement with the policies of the then theatre managers. There upon he choreographed for various Russian companies before settling in Krasnodar, where he set up his own company. Grigorovich has been heading the juries of numerous international competitions in classical ballet. After the death of his wife, the great ballerina Natalia Bessmertnova, on February 19, 2008, he was offered the opportunity to return to the Bolshoi again in the capacity of ballet master and choreographer. In Moscow, January 2, 2012 Ballet World acclaimed Russian choreographer Yuri Grigorovich (at the Bolshoi's gala celebrating his 85th birthday). It was performed Grigorovich's *The Nutcracker* ballet performed at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow on January 6 [11].

*Spartacus* is the Bolshoi doing what the Bolshoi does best: interpreting contemporary works whose thematic origins are classic. Vladimir Vasiliev, «a dancer

of unshakable heroic optimism, exceptional virtuosity, and irresistible dynamism» (Horst Koegler), is perfect as Spartacus. Natalia Bessmertnova, one of the Bolshoi's most lyrical, feminine dancers, is also seen in one of her finest roles.

Anna Kisselgoff, dance critic of The New York Times, writes «Yuri Grigorovich's *Spartacus* already familiar to American audiences, comes into its own here as both ballet and film. The inherent cinematic approach in Mr. Grigorovich's staging of Aram Khachaturian's score falls perfectly in place. Vladimir Vasiliev, as the slave who leads an unsuccessful revolt against the Romans, dances and acts on a heroic level that is the performance of a lifetime. Marius Liepa matches him on every point magnificently as the villain, the Roman general Crassus, Natalia Bessmertnova and Nina Timofeyeva round out the ballet's great original cast. With its phalanxes confronting the camera head-on and its slow-motion shots of Mr. Vasiliev soaring through the sky, the film takes its chances. It is also one of the best dance films ever made [12].

Māris Rūdolfs Liepa (1936–1989) was a Soviet Latvian ballet dancer. He graduated from Riga Choreography School where he was taught by Valentīn Bļinovs. At the height of career, Liepa was considered one of the finest male dancers in the world and one of the most versatile, at home in a wide range of roles. In 1953 Liepa began studies in Moscow Choreography School in a class taught by Nikolay Tarasov and initially was developing as character-role dancer, yet upon graduation transformed into a classic ballet dancer [15].

First ballet company was the Imperial School of Ballet in St. Petersburg in the 1740s. The Ballets Russes was a ballet company founded in the 1909 by Sergey Diaghilev, an enormously important figure in the Russian ballet scene. The headquarters of his ballet company was located in Paris, France. A protégé of Diaghilev, George Balanchine, founded the New York City Ballet in 1948.

Today, the Kirov Ballet company (now known as the Mariinsky Ballet) and the Bolshoi Company are two world-renowned Russian ballet companies that tour the world. There are also a number of companies who have been called, or included in their name, Russia Ballet [4]: Mariinsky Ballet (formerly Kirov ballet), Bolshoi Ballet Ballets Russes (1909), Moscow State Academy of Choreography (1773), Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet, founded in 1738 as the Imperial Ballet School, Saint Petersburg Eifman Ballet (1977), Mikhailovsky Theatre Ballet (1930), Perm Theatre Ballet (1896), Novosibirsk Theatre Ballet (1945), Russian State Ballet of Siberia (1978) [20].

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