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MIKHAIL BARYSHNIKOV AND HIS CREATIVE WORK IN BALLET

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МИХАИЛ БАРЫШНИКОВ И ЕГО ТВОРЧЕСТВО В БАЛЕТЕ

Annotation

This article is devoted to describing of creative work in modern ballet by Mikhail Baryshnikov. The aim of the article is to provide the reader some material on famous ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov as dancer, choreographer, actor, ballet teacher and patron of the arts. The authors draws to the conclusion Mikhail Baryshnikov's leading role in development of world ballet art

Key words: classical ballet, Mikhail Baryshnikov, choreographer, dancer, male ballet techniques, *Baryshnikov Arts Center*.

I. Introduction. Mikhail Baryshnikov, considered by many to be the greatest classical dancer in the world today, is easily one of the most adventurous. Not only has he enlarged his dance repertoire to include George Balanchine's neo-classicism, the sharply focused style of tap and jazz and the intricacies of modern dance, but he has also expanded his artistic ambitions to embrace acting.

Baryshnikov is a magician – always has been – but his appeal remains aesthetic. He is our Beethoven of the body, his expressive powers no less diminished with time. You see that in the fullness of his arms, their simple, majestic shapes, and in the snappy little jig he dances at the end, shimmying his hips and slapping his hands, playing to the seats as only he can [12].

At the Leningrad ballet school at which Baryshnikov trained, and where the intimations of his star power were noted early, «We were forced to read Russian plays: Turgenev and Gogol», he explains in a heavy accent, still formidable nearly 40 years after his defection to the West. Theater tickets were dispensed to the students, «and I went every night when I was free [13]».

Nobel prize-winning poet Josef Brodsky and ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov were good friends. Brodsky wrote in 1976:

Михаилу Барышникову

*Классический балет есть замок красоты,
чьи нежные жильцы от прозы дней суровой
пиликающей ямой оркестровой
отделены. И задраны мосты.*

*В имперский мягкий плюш мы втискиваем зад,
и, крылышкуя скорописью ляжек,
красавица, с которою не ляжешь,
прыжком выпархивает в сад.*

*Мы видим силы зла в коричневом трико,
и ангела добра в невыразимой пачке.
И в силах пробудить от элизийской спячки
овация Чайковского и Ко.*

*Классический балет! Искусство лучших дней!
Когда шипел ваш грог, и целовали в обе,
и мчались лихачи, и пелось бобэоби,
и ежели был враг, то он был – маршал Ней.*

*В зрачках городских желтели купола.
В каких рождались, в тех и умирали гнездах.
И если что-нибудь взлетало в воздух,
то был не мост, а Павлова была.*

*Как славно ввечеру, вдали Всея Руси,
Барышникова зреть. Талант его не стерся!
Усилие ноги и судорога торса
вращением вокруг собственной оси
рождают тот полет, которого душа
как в девках заждалась, готовая озлиться!
А что насчет того, где выйдет приземлиться, –
земля везде тверда; рекомендую США [33].*

The ballets for which he's best remembered encompass the classical canon, and his acting roles on film have sometimes been in highly commercial ventures. He is small for a dancer, just 5-foot-7, but muscular and fit in his T-shirt and slacks. His familiar face is expressive, his smile easy, and his conversation alternately lively and intense [3; 19].

But mirroring his movement toward modern forms later in his dance career, Baryshnikov's theater tastes tend to run in a far more experimental vein. Some

playgoers may recall that Baryshnikov made his stage debut back in 1989 as Gregor Samsa, the office worker in Kafka's novella «The Metamorphosis» who wakes up one morning transformed into a dung beetle [13].

«I never thought I would dance for so long», said Mikhail Baryshnikov when he was 48. Mr. Baryshnikov, 65 (was born 27.01.1948), remains one of the most extraordinary dancers of this century. He continues to receive high praise for his dancing, as he has done since he was an 18-year-old living in Russia. «Encouragement from Merce (Cunningham) and Martha Graham, even Mark (Morris) and Twyla (Tharp) and Paul Taylor gave me a new life», he said recently. Unlike Rudolf Nureyev, another great 20th-century Russian dancer who danced classical roles deep into middle age with depressing results, Mr. Baryshnikov knew when the days of white tights and leading romantic roles in ballet were over [2].

And now this week he arrives in Washington with «Man in a Case» [14], a mixed-media performance piece adapted and directed by choreographers Annie-B Parson and Paul Lazar that fuses two little-known short stories by Anton Chekhov, «Man in a Case» and «About Love». The 75-minute work, with a cast of five, begins a 17-performance run at Shakespeare Theatre Company's Lansburgh Theatre on Dec. 5, 2013. M.Baryshnikov will be continuing his role in the stage adaptation of Anton Chekhov's «Man in a Case», which had its world premiered at Hartford Stage last season, with a national tour of the mixed media show [13].

II. The aim of the article is to investigate theoretical material that is accumulated up to nowadays and to analyze literary and art works on this theme. To achieve the aim we have defined such **tasks**:

1. Analyze and to learn the theoretical material on this topic.
2. To describe the creative work of world-renowned dancer and actor Mikhail Baryshnikov.

III. The Results. Mikhail Baryshnikov [18] is widely hailed as one of ballet's greatest performers of all time. Born in 1948 in Latvia, he began dance studies at age nine and became a principal dancer for the prestigious Kirov Ballet in 1969.

At age 19, as protégé of the great ballet teacher Alexander Pushkin, he entered Leningrad's famous Kirov Ballet School. In 1969 he made his debut as a soloist with instantaneous impact. In 1970, on tour with the Kirov in London, he savored his first triumphs in the West, and caught a glimpse of the new choreographic approaches being developed outside the Soviet Union. He toured Japan, Australia, Spain, England and Holland and saw ballet reaching a wider public with new innovations and styles expressive of the contemporary scene, whereas in Russia, it seemed to Baryshnikov there was «a stifling lack of enthusiasm and a rigid conforming to political lines [28]».

In 1974 Baryshnikov defected to Canada, and then settled in the U.S. at the American Ballet Theatre, where he later became artistic director [25]. He left in 1989 to cofound a modern dance company and take on film, theater, and TV roles. He is now the artistic director of the Baryshnikov Arts Center and, at age 65, still performs.

We would like to give a piece of one interview, in which M.Baryshnikov characterizes a dance:

R: *You said in an interview, «Dance is one of the most revealing art forms». Do you feel the same way about photography, another passion of yours?*

M.B: *I think we have to go back to Martha Graham's comment that «movement does not lie». A dancer is always who they are onstage: makeup, costumes, whatever. They can't hide the person underneath. With photography, the images are more my take on what the dance is about. It's revealing and essential for me, but not in the same way as live performance [16].*

These words and his soul are personalized in *Baryshnikov Dancing from the Heart H 264 800Kbps Streaming* [5].

North American critics found in the Soviet dancer an unequalled combination of acting and athletic talents. Unlike most dancers, Baryshnikov's dramatic expressions on stage were hailed as utterly convincing and stirring, while his technical capabilities – including his extraordinary leaping capacity – continue to be unmatched [5; 7;8].

«Don Quixote» was brought from Russia to other countries first by Anna Pavlova's company in 1924 in an abridged version of Gorsky's 1902 production, Mikhail Baryshnikov mounted his own version in 1980 for American Ballet Theatre, a production that has been staged by many companies, including the Paris Opera Ballet [10; 11].

«The Nutcracker» [23] is the magical and lighthearted story of a small girl's dream on Christmas Eve. Mikhail Baryshnikov is the toy Nutcracker-turned-Prince in this exhilarating production that marked his initial and universally acclaimed choreographic effort. Gelsey Kirkland, is little Clara – the dreamer and Alexander Minz is Drosselmeyer, the wizard who conjures up the dream and eventually dispels it. The athleticism and precision of Mikhail Baryshnikov's solo variations will make you gasp and take your breath away. *The Nutcracker*, a holiday perennial on public television, is a truly remarkable treasure that will be enjoyed by all, for generations to come [35; 36].

As a dancer, as well as an artistic director, Baryshnikov has continued to push for innovation in the dance by promoting performance opportunities for younger dancers, injecting minimalism and improvisation into his performances, and cofounding the White Oak Dance Company with choreographer Mark Morris (1990) [6]. In addition to his successes on stage (he has danced over one hundred different works during his long career), Baryshnikov has also acted in several films, and his public appearances have made him well known as a celebrity [17; 9; 26; 29].

Morris has created many works for his friend, the last one being «The Argument» in 1999; it was a serious piece with dark undertones. Baryshnikov was

devastating in it, a little dangerous. There are flashes of darkness in «A Wooden Tree», but Morris undermines our expectations.

«A Wooden Tree», a piece unveiled last fall in Seattle, was accompanied by the crackly recorded vocals of Ivor Cutler, the Scottish poet and humorist who has a 6-year-old's way with words and an old salt's attention to life's frailty (among his songs heard here were «Cockadoodledon't» and «I Love You but I Don't Know What I Mean»).

The dance is kooky, charming and very funny, and also a little bit sad, in a way that makes you ache. It leaves you with a strange, mixed-up feeling, though the dancers seem to be having a grand time, and none appears happier than the slim, gray-haired dancer with a distinct lightness in his step.

As Cutler chants «Little Black Buzzer» in a monotone dee-dee-dee-dit / da-da-da-DAH, and you think of the last living human sending a message to no one, Baryshnikov is curled up on the floor, tapping Morse code onto the seat of a chair with his fingers, with a look that is both focused and faraway. In «I Got No Common Sense» he giddily jiggles every joint like one of those antique jumping-jack toys on a string. In other words, he's a throwback, a relic. Baryshnikov is the perfect dancer to make us think of what has vanished and is vanishing [12].

Television (particularly PBS) and film introduced the three-time Emmy-winner to the world beyond NYC, and though a charismatic screen presence, Baryshnikov's greatest contributions to such movies as «The Turning Point» (USA, 1977) [26], «White Nights» (USA, 1985) [29], «Dancers» (USA, 1987) [9] were his dancing and choreography, although he earned a Best Supporting Actor Oscar nomination for the former [18].

M. Baryshnikov made his debut as a dancer-actor in «The Turning Point» (1977, USA, Director Herbert Ross). *The Turning Point* is a movie about women who have the power to choose for themselves, unlike the week's other films, in which authoritarian men rule the world of ballet. In *The Turning Point*, the choice is family or career. This film tells the story of friends and former competitors in the world of ballet, as well as the daughter/godchild of one of the women who is starting a career in ballet of her own [27].

«Dancers» are one of those films in which life imitates art - and in this case, for good reason. The film draws parallels between the characters in the famous ballet *Giselle* and the offstage lives of the people who perform in the ballet [9].

With «White Nights» [28], it's evident that he's almost as much of a powerhouse personality in films as he is in the dance world.

«White Nights» (USA, 1985, Director: Taylor Hackford) [29] tells such a tortuous story there's only one way to account for it: This screenplay was dreamed up to accommodate two dancers with little else in common. If the movie had allowed them to truly communicate about (and through) their dancing, that might have been enough. But «White Nights» has been made in a cynical world where it is actually believed that a dance movie will interest more people if it is also a thriller: a pas de deux between the CIA and the KGB. The movie tells the story of a Soviet ballet dancer who has defected to America and an American tap dancer who has defected to the Soviet Union. The Russian is on a flight to Japan when the jet is forced to crash-

land in Siberia, and so he is once again in the hands of the society he has rejected. The Soviets do not imprison him, however; they hope to score a propaganda victory by re-programming him to accept his Russian homeland once again. And one of the ways they hope to do this is to send him to live with the American dancer and his Russian-born wife. Hines portrays an American dancer who several years earlier fled to Russia in a moral protest against America's involvement in Vietnam. Having fallen out of favor with the Soviet authorities and relegated to performing in the provinces, Hines is given a chance for redemption when he and his wife, played by Rossellini, are assigned to convince Kolya, played by Baryshnikov, to remain in Russia.

Baryshnikov opens the movie dancing opposite Florence Faure in Roland Petit's ballet «The Young Man and Death». It is an extraordinary performance, filled with athletic grace, as in one dazzling moment when he climbs onto a chair back, rides it to the floor and continues effortlessly. Hines has a no-less-amazing sequence in which he uses words and dance to explain to Baryshnikov why he chose to leave the United States and settle in the Soviet Union. The moments when the two dancers are together on the screen are the moments when the movie is alive [20; 30; 31].

Music has always been an important element in Hackford's films, and superstars Lionel Richie and Phil Collins each contributed their talents to the film. «Say You Say Me» [24] is written, co-produced and sung by Lionel Richie. Phil Collins duets with Marilyn Martin on «Separate Lives», the love theme from «White Nights», written by Stephen Bishop.

We can read in the Internet some references, e.g., «My favourite part of the movie «White Nights» with Mikhail Baryshnikov and Gregory Hines. This is the most beautiful dance I've ever seen in my life», «Thanks to all of you for the comments!! I never thought the video would be so popular» [32], «I like a song «Say you, say me» by Lionel Richie, that was awarded with Oskar Prize. I saw again this film 3 times one after the other. A luxurious movie! [24]», «Dancing «Koni» by Baryshnikov – fantastic!» [20].

M.Baryshnikov brings to the screen all of the dynamic force and intelligence that distinguish his dance performances. «White Nights» is made by people who seem much more comfortable with dance than with the requirements of the Hollywood thriller. It comes to life in the dance sequences, and then drifts away again.

After all, Mikhail Baryshnikov is still dancing, and now in his 65th, he is still recognized as the quintessence of his art form. In «In Paris» (2012), a story of love and loss in 1930s Paris, Mikhail Baryshnikov mesmerized the audience at *The Broad Stage* in Santa Monica in his role as an actor, using gesture, movement, words and a few dance flourishes, too. Spoken in French and Russian, and subtitled in English, the production's U.S. premiere featured Baryshnikov as a Russian General in the French capitol. Anna Sinyakina played his love interest, painting a compelling and poignant portrait. For the multi-media adaptation of Nobel Prize winner Ivan Bunin's short story, set designer and director Dmitry Krymov created a stunning visual environment to bring the play into the twenty-first century [15].

The most important point is the Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York City (2005), which provides space and support for creating art. He talked about his illustrious ballet career and nurturing young dancers and choreographers with PBS News Hour correspondent Jeff Brown [4].

Baryshnikov Art Center (BAC) is the realization of a long-held vision by artistic director M.Baryshnikov, who sought to build an arts center in New York City that would serve as a gathering place for artists from all disciplines. BAC's opening in 2005 heralded the launch of this mission, establishing a thriving creative space for artists from around the world. Located in the Hudson Yards neighborhood of Manhattan, BAC comprises a total of 20,000 square feet, including the 238-seat Jerome Robbins Theater, which opened in 2010; the Howard Gilman Performance Space, a black box performance space seating 136 people; four column-free studios; and office space. BAC serves approximately 500 artists and more than 22,000 audience members annually through presentations and artist residencies.

BAC's Artist Residency Program supports artists by providing space for creative investigation. Each year, BAC hosts approximately 30 artists in residence to develop ideas, projects, and collaborations. Support can include three weeks of free studio time, honoraria, technical and administrative services, advocacy, and work-in-progress showings.

BAC residencies are a pressure-free environment for artists, who are encouraged to focus on their current priorities without the expectation of delivering a finished product. However, works created here often go on to premiere at venues around the world – including BAC's own stages [6].

IV. Conclusion

To sum it up, M.Baryshnikov is one of the greatest ballet dancers of the 20th century. After a promising start in the Kirov Ballet in Leningrad, he defected to Canada in 1974 for more opportunities in western dance. After freelancing with many companies, he joined the New York City Ballet as a principal dancer to learn George Balanchine's style of movement. He then moved to New York to dance with the American Ballet Theatre, where he later became artistic director [22].

In summary Mikhail Baryshnikov is considered one of the preeminent ballet dancers and instructors of the 20th century. His performances and dance direction since his relocation to the United States are legendary, among the best ballet performances of our time. Baryshnikov melds an eccentric personal dancing technique with his love for both classical and modern ballet, creating an irresistible form of contemporary dance that has often been emulated, but never fully duplicated.

Baryshnikov Arts Center is a creative laboratory, meeting place, and performance space for a vibrant community of artists from around the world.

He broke new ground with his Broadway debut as Gregor Samsa in «Metamorphosis» (1989), adapted from the Franz Kafka novel, earning a Tony nomination as Best Actor in a Play. Following his tenure as artistic director at ABT (1980–89), Baryshnikov founded (with Mark Morris) the White Oak Dance Project, a

modern dance company, in 1990 and still leads and dances with the troupe despite various injuries and knee surgeries. Though past his peak, Baryshnikov remains a superstar of dance, but he wears his fame loosely, moving almost unrecognized through the NYC streets.

Baryshnikov noted, the arts through music, literature and dance, raises our awareness and understanding of the full spectrum of elements that make us human. Baryshnikov's words: «I found that dance, music, and literature is how I made sense of the world... it pushed me to think of things bigger than life's daily routines ... to think beyond what is immediate or convenient».

On a final note, dance as a discipline, can make us focused and structured, and it can shape our character by making us tenacious, determined, creative, and ready to take on challenges. In closing, here is another quote along the same lines by an internationally renowned dancer of the 19th century, Isadora Duncan ...

My art is just an effort to express the truth of my being in gesture and movement [21]».

«The only wisdom I can offer is related to the arts. Specifically – the arts have made me, in my opinion, sort of a better person – a better human being. A few months ago I was in the subway in New York and there was a poster inside the train that said, and I'm paraphrasing, «Are you a better person today than you were yesterday?» At first it seemed cliché, but I thought about it and realized that, in fact, the only, only way I've managed to be inspired to be better – is through the arts. Sadness, elation, fury, love... it's all there in music, literature, and dance. That's what the arts have made possible for me – to find those elements in myself and in the world. And I'm better for it. Not like being a saint, but just by being aware of what it means to be human [34]».

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