

**Red Swans: The Transformation of Ballet after the Russian  
Cultural Revolution (1924-1937)**

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## Introduction

On February 6th, 1935, choreographer Fyodor Lopukhov was greeted by the *Pravda* article “Ballet Fraud.” Written by high party officials, the article viciously criticized Lopukhov’s latest ballet *Bright Stream*, simultaneously ending his career and the experimental age of proletarian ballet. After years of debate, “Ballet Fraud” signified the regime’s official stance on culture. While the Soviets continued to claim that their new ballets were developments in proletarian art, the regime had co-opted the culture of the old intelligentsia, reverting ballet to its pre-revolutionary state.

At the time of the Russian Revolution, the Russian proletariat was not far removed from the peasantry with a distinct proletarian consciousness only beginning to coalesce, and there was no “class enemy” for the Bolsheviks to fight rhetorically since the civil war had destroyed the upper class.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the revolution, the industrial working class—the proletariat in Marxist terms—disintegrated because of the closure of factories and conscription of workers into the Red Army.<sup>2</sup> Without an actual proletariat to represent, the regime became the vanguard of a nonexistent class, having to decide whether or not to be proletarian, and what “being” proletarian entailed.<sup>3</sup> Since Marxist philosophy suggested that the ruling class would be invested with cultural hegemony, the regime was aware that a distinctly “proletarian” consciousness was expected to emerge, eventually superseding the imperial high culture of pre-revolutionary Russia.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. In the “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” Engels and Marx describe the proletariat as the modern working class which increases with the development of industry.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Within the Party, the regime's identity crisis produced conflicting opinions on cultural policy. Vpered, a branch of left Bolsheviks, believed cultural transformation had to come before social and political change, and the masses needed to gain an appreciation of high art.<sup>5</sup> Anatoly Lunacharsky, the first People's Commissar of Enlightenment, was a notable member of Vpered. Unwilling to abandon his personal bourgeois preferences at the expense of a new revolutionary aesthetic, Lunacharsky championed a conciliatory approach to culture.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, others believed culture was in need of radical modernization because it had been corrupted by its imperial past.<sup>7</sup> Led by Aleksandr Bogdanov, the Vperedists advocated the creation of new culture with its own art, literature, habits, and ethics.<sup>8</sup> Opposed to those who wanted to passively wait for proletarian culture to emerge naturally, the Vperedists created Proletkult, an organization built to ensure the creation of proletarian art.<sup>9</sup> Lenin, unconvinced money needed to be spent on the arts, withdrew his support from proletarian organizations such as Proletkult, regarding them as breeding-grounds for political dissent.<sup>10</sup>

During the period which was later termed the "Cultural Revolution,"<sup>11</sup> the regime's leftward turn in rhetoric led to the ascendancy of the proletarian organizations which had previously been denounced by Lenin in the early 1920s.<sup>12</sup> Coinciding with Stalin's launch of the

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<sup>5</sup> David L. Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 38.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Grace Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 53.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Tyerman, "Resignifying the Red Poppy: Internationalism and Symbolic Power in the Sino-Soviet Encounter," *Slavic and East European Journal* 61, no.3 (2017): 448.

<sup>8</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 38.

<sup>9</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Daria Khitrova, "'This Is No Longer Dance': Media Boundaries and the Politics of Choreography in The Steel Step," *Critical Inquiry* 40, no.3 (March 2014): 136.

<sup>11</sup> In Western Soviet historiography, the concept of the Cultural Revolution came to mean the militant repression of intelligentsia and the promulgation of proletarian art during the years of the First Five-Year Plan (1928-32).

<sup>12</sup> Marina Frolova-Walker, "From Modernism to Socialist Realism in Four Years: Myaskovsky and Asafyev," *Muzikologija* 2003, no.3 (2003): 200.

First Five-Year Plan,<sup>13</sup> a large group of mining engineers from the Shakhty area of the Donbass were accused of conspiracy and sabotage. The resulting “Shakhty Trial” marked a turning point in the regime’s attitude towards members of the “old” intelligentsia because they were no longer regarded as allies.<sup>14</sup> Since the objective of proletarian organizations was the destruction of “bourgeois hegemony,” they gained the support of the regime to assault non-party specialists and intellectuals in the economic and cultural spheres of the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup> Capitalizing on the emergent class-war spirit, proletarian organizations gained the power they needed to push their agendas within their disciplines.<sup>16</sup> Ballet became a field of experimentation, and ballet masters were expected to find creative ways of distancing the art form from its imperial past. When the Cultural Revolution ended in 1931, however, the regime dissolved proletarian organizations and began to recruit the old intelligentsia in matters of industry and culture. For ballet, the end of the Cultural Revolution marked its reversion to classicalism, the regime choosing to restore quality performances to the stage rather than push truly proletarian works.

Previous literature has analyzed the concept of the Cultural Revolution in depth. Sheila Fitzpatrick explored the relationship between the Bolsheviks and the old intelligentsia during the 1920s and 1930s in terms of “culture” and “power.” Examining hundreds of novels, plays, and poems, Vera Dunham used popular literature to understand the rise of the *meshchanstvo*, Russia’s middling urbanites, and the emergence of a symbiotic relationship between the party

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<sup>13</sup> The First Five-Year Plan was based on Stalin’s policy of “Socialism in One Country” (the idea that the Soviet Union should build its military and industrial base before spreading Socialism worldwide) and was launched in 1928 to increase industrialization throughout the Soviet Union.

<sup>14</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 117. The Shakhty trial was based on fabricated charges and was used by Stalin to undermine moderates within the Party, such as Nikolai Bukharin. Out of the fifty-three people charged, eleven were sentenced to death (only five were eventually executed), thirty-four were imprisoned, four were acquitted, and four were given suspended sentences.

<sup>15</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Kiril Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 16.

and this class during the late 1930s. Contextualizing the regime's tolerance of classicalism within the context of European modernity, David Hoffman questioned the Soviets supposed abandonment of socialism during the late 1930s, arguing that the regime's toleration of traditional culture revealed their attempts to further promote socialism. Kiril Tomoff researched the Union of Soviet Composers to investigate the relationship between composers and the regime to examine the social prestige awarded to musicians from 1939 to 1953.

This paper seeks to build on existing literature by situating ballet history within the history of the Cultural Revolution, using sources about Soviet culture as a lens to contextualize and analyze ballet's transformation throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s. While an abundance of literature exists on the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath, its influence on ballet has been glossed over, ballet only being briefly mentioned in conjunction with music and theatre. The works of Mary Grace Swift and Natalia Roslavleva provide detailed accounts of Russian ballet history during the first half of the twentieth century; however, they do not explore its connection to Soviet cultural policy in any depth.

In the first chapter, I discuss the development of proletarian art before and during the Cultural Revolution, focusing on the works of Fyodor Lopukhov to explore initial interpretations of proletarian ballet. In the second chapter, I analyze the ballet repertoire after 1932 in light of the Soviet's doctrine of Socialist Realism to reveal ballet's reversion to classicalism. In the third chapter, I use the condemnation of *Bright Stream* to explain the regime's official denunciation of proletarian ballet, and explore the reasons why the Soviets decided to abandon proletarian art and reinstate tradition. In doing this, I argue that the regime appropriated the intelligentsia's culture as its own. Wanting to enlighten the masses, create social harmony, provide entertainment

desired by audiences, and further socialism's development, the Soviet leadership promoted classical ballet as a means to achieve its agenda.

### **The Cultural Revolution and the Era of Proletarian Art (1924-1932)**

During the Cultural Revolution, traditional art styles came to be regarded as incapable of capturing the country's transformation during industrialization and collectivization.<sup>17</sup> This assumption affected ballet, which was criticized for its imperial past and inability to reflect current times. To understand ballet's reversion to classicalism after the Cultural Revolution, it is necessary to explore the Soviets' initial interpretation of proletarian ballet inspired by the zeitgeist of the 1920s. I believe the original work of Fyodor Lopukhov in Leningrad exemplifies the influence of proletarian organizations in ballet, since he tried to revitalize the art form by rendering it more appropriate for revolutionary culture.<sup>18</sup> Through a brief investigation of his work throughout the 1920s, it becomes clear that proletarian ballet was understood as having to challenge imperial classical forms, ultimately failing because its aesthetics were dismissed.

In 1922, Lopukhov became artistic director of the Leningrad State Theatre of Opera and Ballet (hereafter GATOB).<sup>19</sup> Supportive of the Theatre of Working-Class Youth (TRAM)<sup>20</sup> and principles encouraged by Proletkult, Lopukhov's choreography challenged classical conceptions of ballet through the use of acrobatics, folklore, constructivist décor, and physical-culture movements.<sup>21</sup> Lopukhov's *Dance Symphony*, also known by its subtitle "Magnificence of the Universe," premiered at GATOB in 1923. Choreographed to Beethoven's Fourth Symphony, the

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<sup>17</sup> Lynn Mally, "The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Youth Theater TRAM," *Slavic Review* 51, no.3 (Autumn 1992): 419.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Souritz, Lynn Visson, and Sally Banes, "Fedor Lopukhov: A Soviet Choreographer in the 1920s," *Dance Research Journal* 17, no.2 (Autumn 1985): 3.

<sup>19</sup> Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No Fixed Parts: Dance in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 245. GATOB stands for *Gosudarstvenniy Akademicheskii Teatr Operi i Baleta*.

<sup>20</sup> TRAM was a Soviet proletarian youth theatre during the late 1920s and early 1930s with the objective of formulating a distinctive aesthetic through the integration of arts and politics.

<sup>21</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 62.



ballet explored the rapprochement of dance with symphonic music by attempting to create choreography analogous with Beethoven's composition.<sup>22</sup> Lopukhov tried to modernize Marius Petipa's use of non-representational dance—the creation of poetic imagery through the juxtaposition of different steps—by having the dancers perform movements symbolizing ambitious concepts.<sup>23</sup> This resulted in an abstruse ballet; the “awakening of nature by the Spring Sun” was represented by a dancer unfolding her leg *à la seconde*<sup>24</sup> and an “ultimate ‘cosmogonic’ spiral”<sup>25</sup> was embodied by dancers lying, sitting, and crouching on stage in a link-formation.

Following *Dance Symphony*, Lopukhov staged the first ballet to be deemed “Soviet” on October 29, 1924: *Red Whirlwind* to the music by Vladimir Deshevov.<sup>26</sup> Attempting to metaphorically represent the revolution with the image of a vortex sweeping away the old, Lopukhov combined naturalistic portrayal with allegory to convey forms from agitprop theatre.<sup>27</sup> *Red Whirlwind*'s prologue depicted the repudiation of tsardom and the victory of socialism through the overtaking of a cross by a star.<sup>28</sup> Traditional “acts” were called “processes” because the word “act” was too reminiscent of pre-revolutionary theatre, and Lopukhov avoided the use of steps he thought “unmodern” to further distance the production from ballet's imperial past.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Souritz, Visson, and Banes, “Fedor Lopukhov,” 4. George Balanchine, one of the most important choreographers of the twentieth century, was one of the performers in *Dance Symphony*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> In classical ballet, *à la seconde* is used to qualify other ballet terms to explain that the movement is done “to the side.” In this case, the dancers were doing *développés à la seconde*, drawing their working leg to the knee of their supporting leg and then extending their working leg to the side.

<sup>25</sup> Reynolds and McCormick, *No Fixed Parts*, 246.

<sup>26</sup> Natalia Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet* (Great Britain: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1966), 193.

<sup>27</sup> Souritz, Visson, and Banes, “Fedor Lopukhov,” 8.

<sup>28</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 194.

<sup>29</sup> Souritz, Visson, and Banes, “Fedor Lopukhov,” 9.

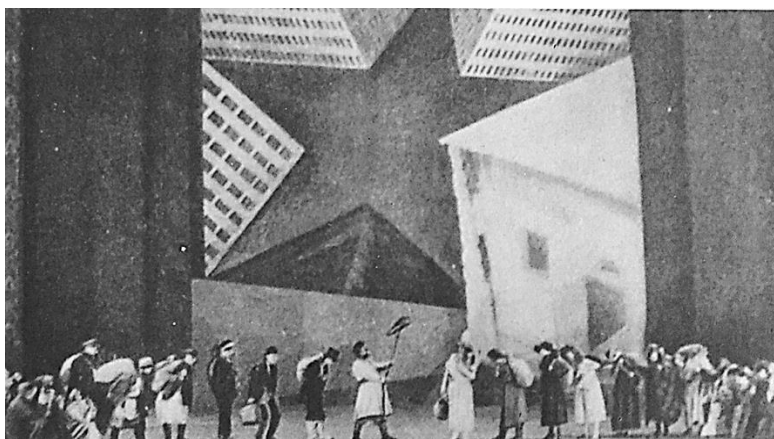


Figure 1: Scene from *Red Whirlwind*.<sup>30</sup>

Despite Lopukhov's revolutionary intentions, both *Dance Symphony* and *Red Whirlwind* were only performed once.<sup>31</sup> *Dance Symphony* resulted in a *succès de scandale* because the movements were so obscure the audience believed them obscene.<sup>32</sup> According to Nikolai Soliannikov, a dancer at GATOB, no applause followed *Dance Symphony*'s showing—the audience “didn't clap, didn't laugh, didn't whistle—it was silent.”<sup>33</sup> Yuri Slonimsky, a prominent Soviet dance writer, stated that like *Dance Symphony*'s audience, those who witnessed *Red Whirlwind* “refused to accept its absurdity.”<sup>34</sup> Lopukhov's attempt to omit “unmodern” steps in his choreography resulted in the ballets being criticized for their limited use of the dance lexicon and overreliance on Sokol gymnastics.<sup>35</sup> The fate of *Dance Symphony* and *Red Whirlwind* foreshadowed the complicated situation of ballet masters trying to create proletarian art;

<sup>30</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 73.

<sup>31</sup> Reynolds and McCormick, *No Fixed Parts*, 246.

<sup>32</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 204.

<sup>33</sup> Souritz, Visson, and Banes, “Fedor Lopukhov,” 6.

<sup>34</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 63.

<sup>35</sup> Souritz, Visson, and Banes, “Fedor Lopukhov,” 9. The Sokol was a gymnastics society founded in Prague in 1862. Emphasizing the use of mass calisthenics, the objective of Sokol was to create gymnasts with “a strong mind in a sound body.”

Lopukhov was expected to galvanize balletic tradition while simultaneously producing choreography which was still considered “ballet.”

Undeterred by his first failures, Lopukhov continued to experiment. Believing that “caustic joke[s], malicious mockery, and bold laughter” could be used to revolutionize ballet, Lopukhov staged *Tale of a Fox, Rooster and Ram* (also called *Renard*) in January of 1927 to music by Igor Stravinsky.<sup>36</sup> Wanting everything in the ballet to challenge tradition, Lopukhov not only employed acrobatics in the choreography, but “insisted that the dancers learn to walk easily on stilts and climb a pole.”<sup>37</sup> He casted the smallest performers as hens and had them “lay eggs” on stage.<sup>38</sup> The composer Boris Asafiev believed Lopukhov’s choreography successfully captured Stravinsky’s score since it was “not a realistic reproduction of animal habits and steps, but a buffoon-like, performer’s imitation in rhythm and movement, in dance and acrobatics.”<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, *Tale of a Fox, Rooster and Ram* was received by “continuous hissing on part of the public.”<sup>40</sup> The ballet was performed three times and was so enraging for the audience that arguments and near-fights followed each performance. The Soviet newspaper *Zhizn' Iskusstva* claimed that “passions [were] so inflamed” by *Tale of a Fox, Rooster and Ram* that “energetic measures” had to be taken after each showing including the detention of several zealous balletomanes.<sup>41</sup> Once again, Lopukhov’s attempt to create proletarian art was rejected—this time without equivocation.

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<sup>36</sup> Souritz, Visson, and Banes, “Fedor Lopukhov,” 12.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>38</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 206.

<sup>39</sup> Souritz, Visson, and Banes, “Fedor Lopukhov,” 13.

<sup>40</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 206.

<sup>41</sup> Souritz, Visson, and Banes, “Fedor Lopukhov,” 14. Stravinsky composed *The Rite of Spring* in 1913. The composition is remembered by its infamous performance by Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes on May 19th, 1913 at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. The combination of Stravinsky’s score, Vaslav Nijinsky’s choreography, and Nicholas Roerich’s set-design resulted in a near-riot by the audience.

By restraining his experimentation and reinterpreting a fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen, Lopukhov, a few months later, finally found success with his ballet *Ice Maiden*.<sup>42</sup> Deeming it a “classical ballet in a 1927 interpretation,”<sup>43</sup> Lopukhov attempted to break tradition with an unconventional heroine. Traversing *en pointe* across the stage and then transitioning into a series of masculine jumps and athletic lifts, the Ice Maiden’s “ice-cold” persona was captured by her modern choreography and passionless style of performance.<sup>44</sup> In the second act, Lopukhov’s choreography drew inspiration from Norwegian folk dance. Andrei, Lopukhov’s brother, claimed that Norwegian spectators confirmed the dances “somehow succeeded in stumbling upon ethnographic truth” even though they were “staged purely intuitively and constructed on a theoretical basis.”<sup>45</sup> Unlike Lopukhov’s other creations, *Ice Maiden* was well-received and remained on stage until the mid-1930s.

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<sup>42</sup> Reynolds and McCormick, *No Fixed Parts*, 247.

<sup>43</sup> Souritz, Visson, and Banes, “Fedor Lopukhov,” 18.

<sup>44</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 201.

<sup>45</sup> Souritz, Visson, and Banes, “Fedor Lopukhov,” 17.



*Figure 2: Olga Mungalova and Pyotr Gusev in Ice Maiden (1927).*<sup>46</sup>

Satisfied with *Ice Maiden*'s success, Lopukhov tested himself by updating a celebrated Russian ballet. In October 1929, he modernized *Nutcracker*<sup>47</sup> by equipping the once classical production with moving panels for décor—carried by the corps de ballet<sup>48</sup>—and acrobatic choreography. During the snow scene, the prima ballerina was carried in inverted splits, her head downwards to the floor, and the snowflakes arranged themselves into a line like chorus girls and assumed the splits in union.<sup>49</sup> While *Ice Maiden* had been praised, Lopukhov's artistic decisions in *Nutcracker* caused an uproar. The magazine *Rabochii I Teatr* asserted the ballet revealed “artistic bankruptcy” on behalf of the directors and an “absolute lack of understanding of the tasks facing Soviet theatre.”<sup>50</sup> Agrippina Vaganova, who was Lopukhov's assistant at the time,

<sup>46</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 196.

<sup>47</sup> *Nutcracker* was originally choreographed by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov in 1892.

<sup>48</sup> The corps de ballet usually performs as a group and is comprised of the lowest members of the ballet company.

<sup>49</sup> Alexandra Chiriac, “Fedor Lopukhov and ‘The Bolt’,” *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 36, no.3 (2016): 250.

<sup>50</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 66.

viewed the ballet as an “encroachment on what was sacred to her art.”<sup>51</sup> While Vaganova had remained impartial to Lopukhov’s experimentation throughout the decade, *Nutcracker* now solidified her position as one of Lopukhov’s adversaries.<sup>52</sup> *Nutcracker*’s reception was so disastrous that Lopukhov was forced to write a written apology.<sup>53</sup>

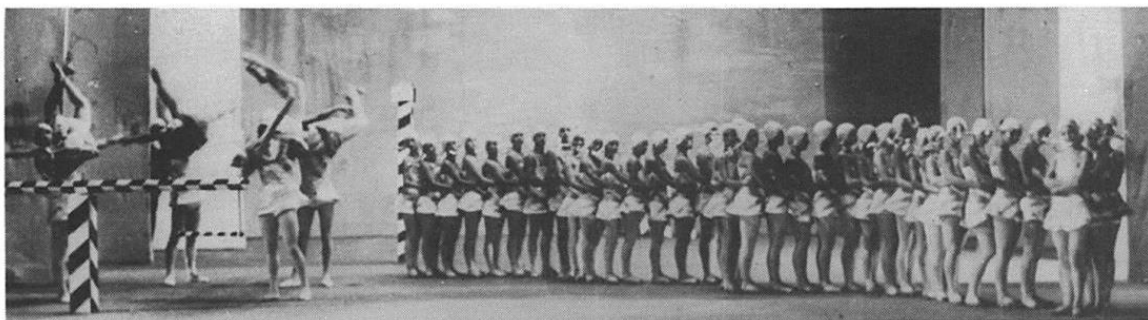


Figure 3: *Snowflakes in Nutcracker (1929)*.<sup>54</sup>

During the time of Lopukhov’s ballets, a contest was announced in *Zhizn’ Iskusstva* for the creation of a new ballet libretto.<sup>55</sup> The competition’s criteria were significant, since they revealed the Soviets’ understanding of proletarian ballet after years of experimentation. To qualify for a cash prize, the submitted librettos were expected to explore a revolutionary theme “primarily orientated towards contemporary events”—such as the civil war or revolution—that was “developed on the level of a concrete perception of reality”<sup>56</sup> without use of symbolism and allegory like in *Red Whirlwind*. “All attempts at mystical themes” were to be rejected, and

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<sup>51</sup> Catherine E. Pawlick, *Vaganova Today: The Preservation of Pedagogical Tradition* (Florida: University of Florida Press, 2011), 48.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Reynolds and McCormick, *No Fixed Parts*, 246. Valerian Bogdanov Beresovsky claimed that Lopukhov’s “interpretation” of *Nutcracker* discredited the ballet to the point where it did not return to the stage until Vasili Vainonen’s 1934 version.

<sup>54</sup> Souritz, Visson, and Banes, “Fedor Lopukhov,” 4.

<sup>55</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 85.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

spectacle built on “mass movements” was to be applauded.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the scenario of the libretto needed to provide the ballet masters with “material for pantomime” and “choreographic experiment,”<sup>58</sup> since it was assumed that acrobatics and physical culture would be used in the production.

*Zhizn' Iskusstva's* contest resulted in the ballet *The Golden Age* (1930), written by Aleksandr Ivanovsky, a cinema screenwriter and producer, to a score by Dmitri Shostakovich.<sup>59</sup> The setting of the ballet was an international expedition in Western Europe where at a boxing match, a pro-fascist referee rules against a boxer because he is black, resulting in the referee being slapped by a girl from the Communist Youth League (Komsomolka). A fascist singer, known as the Diva, tries to woo the Soviet captain of a soccer team, but is rejected. After a kerfuffle involving a soccer ball being mistaken for a bomb, the captain, Komsomolka, and black boxer escape from the Diva's fascist cronies. The trio is arrested, but the black boxer and Komsomolka free themselves. The ballet culminates with the captain being saved by his teammates, the Komsomolka revealing the Diva's dancing partner—who was pretending to be the captain—is a disguised fascist, and a dance of solidarity between working class Europeans and the soccer team.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to *The Golden Age*, Lopukhov's *Bolt* (1931), also to music by Shostakovich, became the first industrial ballet to be staged in the Soviet Union.<sup>61</sup> The libretto, written by Viktor Smirnov, was based on an incident occurring at the Red October factory. In *Bolt*, a teenager is persuaded to throw a bolt into a machine by the drunkard, Lenka Tulba. The teenager

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<sup>57</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 86.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>60</sup> Carolyn Pouncy, “Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism: Ballet in Leningrad, 1927-1937,” *Russian History* 32, no.2 (Summer 2005): 179.

<sup>61</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 89.

tries to blame Boris, a shock worker, but he feels ashamed and reveals his guilt. Choreography representing machines, industry, and the Soviet Calvary follow, and Tulba is arrested. The ballet ends with Boris and his Komsomol girlfriend Olga celebrating their victory with the workers.<sup>62</sup> Although Lopukhov and Shostakovich were unenthusiastic about the libretto, in the wake of the Shakhty Trail, they were in no position to refuse its production.<sup>63</sup>

Both *The Golden Age* and *Bolt* adhered to the criteria proposed by the contest in *Zhizn' Iskusstva*—the ballets had contemporary revolutionary themes, rejected mysticism, and employed experimental choreography that rejected classical ballet. However, both productions were considered failures. Writing in the 1940s, author Vera Vasina blamed the ballets' lack of success on their librettos.<sup>64</sup> While the plots of *The Golden Age* and *Bolt* are admittedly absurd, I believe Shostakovich's fraught relationship with the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM)—one of the proletarian organizations gaining power during the Cultural Revolution—largely contributed to the ballets' failures. Although RAPM's mission was to identify “bourgeois” and “proletarian” trends in music, Fitzpatrick argues that RAPM's understanding of “bourgeois” was formalism and “light” music: foxtrots, gypsy tunes, and jazz.<sup>65</sup> In *The Golden Age*, Shostakovich used Vincent Youmans's “Tea for Two” to parody the decadence of the capitalists, and in *Bolt*, Shostakovich's score included jazz undertones and a fox-trot riff to provide background themes for the dances of the factory clerk Kozelkov—a character ridiculed for his poor fashion sense and bourgeois tastes.<sup>66</sup> Even though Shostakovich employed light music to parody antagonistic characters, RAPM's journal *Proletarskii Muzykant*

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<sup>62</sup> Pouncy, “Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism,” 180.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Vera Vasina, “Music of the Soviet Ballet,” in *The Soviet Ballet*, ed. by Yuri Slonimsky (New York: Da Capo Press, 1947), 34.

<sup>65</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 190.

<sup>66</sup> Chiriac, “Fedor Lopukhov and ‘The Bolt’,” 248.



criticised his decision.<sup>67</sup> The guidelines in *Zhizn' Iskusstva* had unwittingly allowed Lopukhov and Shostakovich to create a “Zoshchenko-like satire of the Soviet system,”<sup>68</sup> resulting in Lopukhov’s termination as artistic director of GATOB—the position being given to Vaganova, his former assistant.



*Figure 4: Rehearsal for the dance of the textile workers in Bolt (1931).<sup>69</sup>*



*Figure 5: Rehearsal for the dance of the Red Army Cavalry in Bolt (1931).<sup>70</sup>*

<sup>67</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 88.

<sup>68</sup> Pouncy, “Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism,” 181. Mikhail Mikhailovich Zoshchenko was a popular satirist during the 1920s. Denounced by the Zhandov decree in 1946, Zoshchenko spent the end of his life in poverty.

<sup>69</sup> Chiriac, “Fedor Lopukhov and ‘The Bolt’,” 247.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 251. Some of the audience denounced the Red Army Cavalry’s music hall number for being a mockery of the cavalry.

Lopukhov's experimentation as artistic director reveals the tenuous situation of ballet during the decade after the revolution.<sup>71</sup> Expected to distance ballet from its imperial past, Lopukhov employed modern choreography, sets, and themes in his ballets. Despite his attempts, however, Lopukhov was criticized—his only surviving ballet was *Ice Maiden*, his least experimental work. The failure of *The Golden Age* and *Bolt* shows the power of proletarian organizations during the Cultural Revolution and the problematic nature of creating proletarian art. Audiences, critics, and proletarian organizations did not provide constructive criticism for productions' improvement because like the ballet masters, they had little idea what proletarian ballet should look like. Lopukhov's interpretation of proletarian ballet was comparable to the modern dance of the West, largely promoted at the time by Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.<sup>72</sup> Desperate to find answers, the Soviets knew they needed to change course—the Central Committee's decision to dissolve all independent proletarian organizations in 1932 set the stage for classicalism's return.<sup>73</sup>

### **Socialist Realism and the Re-emergence of Classical Ballet (1932-1934)**

Official sponsorship of the Cultural Revolution ended with the supposed rehabilitation of the technical intelligentsia, announced in Stalin's 1931 speech, "New Conditions—New Tasks of Economic Construction," at a conference of business executives.<sup>74</sup> The successful industrialization and collectivization drives were thought to have rid the pre-Soviet intelligentsia

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<sup>71</sup> At the same time Lopukhov was experimenting at GATOB, Kasian Goleizovsky was attempting to revitalize ballet in Moscow. In 1925, dancers performed barefoot with their bodies painted in *Joseph the Beautiful*. The ballet resembled a *tableau vivant* more than it did a ballet, the ballerinas assuming an array of sharp-angled poses like enlivened statues. In 1927, Goleizovsky's attempted to allegorize the revolution in his ballet *Whirlwind*, also known as *Smerch*. This ballet faced similar criticism as Lopukhov's *Red Whirlwind*, as audience members left their seats before the production's competition.

<sup>72</sup> Reynolds and McCormick, *No Fixed Parts*, 251. Lopukhov's sister, Lydia Lopokova, ended up becoming one of the stars of the Ballet Russes and the wife of British economist John Maynard Keynes.

<sup>73</sup> Tomoff, *Creative Union*, 16.

<sup>74</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 143.

of their counter-revolutionary tendencies.<sup>75</sup> Since the intelligentsia was thought to show “definite signs of a change of attitude in favour of the Soviet regime,”<sup>76</sup> Stalin believed policies towards them had to change accordingly. In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the old intelligentsia emerged relatively unscathed. The regime was not only willing to tolerate members of the intelligentsia, but wanted to “enlist their cooperation more boldly”<sup>77</sup> in matters of industry and engineering.

By examining the developments in ballet after the Cultural Revolution, it becomes apparent that Stalin’s belief in the recruitment of the old intelligentsia for the Soviet cause extended into the arts. The repertoire after 1932 demonstrates a complicated negotiation between the regime and professionals to restore the excellence of the stage. Analyzing the repertoire of the Soviet Union’s ballet companies after 1932, it is clear that the Soviets abandoned their dreams of proletarian ballet, choosing successful performances over their doctrine of Socialist Realism and general Communist ideological influence. Although the Soviets continued to claim that their new ballets, such as *Flames of Paris* (1932), Agrippina Vaganova’s restaged *Swan Lake* (1933), and *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* (1934), were developments in proletarian art, I believe that the Soviet ballet of the 1930s was returning to a classical form, similar to dance before the revolution.

In the wake of the Cultural Revolution, Stalin’s official coinage of the term “Socialist Realism” marked a significant change in the development of proletarian art. At the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, Socialist Realism was described by Andrei Zhdanov as being “truthfulness and historical concreteness” combined with the “ideological remolding

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<sup>75</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 40.

<sup>76</sup> Joseph Stalin, “New Conditions—New Tasks in Economic Construction,” Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1931/06/23.htm> (accessed 16 February 2019).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism.”<sup>78</sup> Art was to capture socialism’s purposeful struggle and eventual victory in the creation of the ideal state.<sup>79</sup> While the Soviets’ conception of the state did not match reality—shortages in food, housing, clothing, and consumer goods were widespread—Socialist Realist art was expected to expound the idea that a better future was emerging.<sup>80</sup>

Stalin deemed writers the “engineers of the human soul,”<sup>81</sup> charged with the duty of transforming the societal consciousness of the masses. Aware that they were expected to follow literature’s lead, ballet masters and dancers took part in the promulgation of Socialist Realism. Since the doctrine was a new phenomenon, however, the bureaucracy did not produce practical guidelines for its artistic production. With no homogenous understanding of what the regime expected, artists and critics during the 1930s were placed in a precarious situation, attempting to discern the regime’s expectations.<sup>82</sup> Manning the boundaries, critics were tasked with denouncing works they thought went beyond the unwritten dogma, while ballet masters engaged in self-censorship and found ways of arguing their productions’ worth.<sup>83</sup>

On March 17, 1932, an article by Walter Duranty was published in the *New York Times* detailing a contest organized by the Moscow Bolshoi Opera and the *Komsomolskaia Pravda* newspaper. The contest was for the creation of a libretto and music for a new opera and ballet for the fifteenth anniversary of the October Revolution. By examining the article, the artists’ understanding of Socialist Realism at the time is revealed. Duranty explained that qualifying submissions had to be developed on ten themes: socialistic industrialization, socialistic

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<sup>78</sup> Stalin, “New Conditions—New Tasks in Economic Construction.”

<sup>79</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 92.

<sup>80</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 227.

<sup>81</sup> Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 29.

<sup>82</sup> Frolova-Walker, “From Modernism to Socialist Realism in Four Years,” 200.

<sup>83</sup> Pouncy, “Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism,” 191.

reconstruction of agriculture, the technical revolution, socialistic labour, the transformation of the people's consciousness, the youth and its struggle, cultural improvement, the Red Army and national defense, the union of Socialist Soviet Republics, and the history of the revolution from its inception in 1905.<sup>84</sup> Although Socialist Realism was supposed to be a “realistic” depiction of life, the artists were aware that it needed to show how life in a socialist state ought to be—a construction of a reality that did not exist.<sup>85</sup>

The first Socialist Realist ballet in the Soviet Union was staged in 1927 before the doctrine was officially coined. Vasily Tikhomirov, a proponent of conservative ballet during the 1920s, choreographed what was to become the first major success in Soviet ballet: *Red Poppy* to music by Reinhold Glière.<sup>86</sup> After reading a notice in *Pravda* about the detention of the Soviet steamer *Lenin* in a Chinese port, Mikhail Kurilko, the author of the libretto, imagined a ballet in the “same temporality as the newspaper.”<sup>87</sup> What resulted was a ballet exploring imperialism, documenting the struggle of the Chinese people to rid their home of Westerners. During the time when the ballet was produced, the Soviets formally broke their diplomatic relations with the Kuomintang.<sup>88</sup> After discovering that the All-Russian Co-operative Society (ARCOS) in London was a centre of Soviet espionage, the British broke diplomatic relations with the Soviets.<sup>89</sup> In the 1927 version of *Red Poppy*, therefore, the antagonists in the ballet are British, embodied by the vengeful Sir Hips.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Walter Duranty, “Prizes Offered for Soviet Opera and Ballet Interpreting Proletarian Socialist Regime,” *New York Times*, March 17, 1932, 23.

<sup>85</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 161.

<sup>86</sup> Gregory Sporton, “The Conservative Revolution: the Bolshoi Archives,” *Scene* 1, no.1 (December 2012): 93.

<sup>87</sup> Tyerman, “Resignifying the Red Poppy,” 448.

<sup>88</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 72. The Kuomintang (also known as The Nationalist Party) was a political party that emerged in China in 1912. Leadership of the Kuomintang passed to Chiang Kai-shek after the death of Sun Yat-sen in 1925. Governing parts of China from 1928 to 1949, the Kuomintang moved with Kai-shek to Taiwan during the 1950s when the Communist Party of China emerged victorious during the Chinese Civil War.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*.

*Red Poppy* follows Tao-Hoa, a Chinese teahouse dancer who falls for a Soviet naval captain who has docked in a Chinese port. To the dismay of the British imperialists, the captain and his crew aid the local coolies, which results in his assassination being planned by Sir Hips and Li Shang-fu, Tao-Hoa's evil fiancé. Witnessing a failed attempt on the captain's life, Tao-Hoa copes by smoking opium and has an opium dream equipped with dancing butterflies, grasshoppers, lotus flowers, and poppies. After simultaneously confessing her love and warning the captain of the danger he faces, Tao-Hoa foils another assassination attempt, is stabbed by Li Shang-fu, and dies onstage as the captain sails away and the coolies rise against their overlords.<sup>91</sup>

Although *Red Poppy* had a contemporary theme, in terms of its aesthetics, it was a nineteenth-century Oriental ballet. Many of the hallmarks of Oriental ballet—enslaved heroines, treacherous rivals, opium dreams, and sacrificial love—were present in *Red Poppy*.<sup>92</sup> Petipa's *The Pharaoh's Daughter* (1862) and *La Bayadère* (1877) both had opium dream sequences, and dancing flowers and oriental enslavement were in Adolphe Adam's *Le Corsaire*, first presented in 1856.<sup>93</sup> Narratively, *Red Poppy* was a trans-ethnic tragic love plot, popularized by Pierre Loti's 1887 novel *Madame Chrysanthemum*, which was later made into the opera *Madame Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini in 1893.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Tyerman, "Resignifying the Red Poppy," 451.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.



Figure 6: Catherine Geltzer as Tao-Hoa in *Red Poppy*.<sup>95</sup>

Initially staged before the Cultural Revolution and the dissolution of proletarian organizations, *Red Poppy* was criticized by Leftists for following imperial tradition.<sup>96</sup> In his 1930 play *The Bathhouse*, Vladimir Mayakovsky ridiculed the ballet's decadence by having the character Ivan Ivanovich remark that "everywhere you looked [in *Red Poppy*], they were dancing, and singing, and flitting about—all those different elves and...syphilids."<sup>97</sup> One critic claimed that the ballet confirmed the impossibility of "put[ting] new wines in old skins," and another deemed it a "piece of pseudorevolutionary French Rococco Chinoiserie."<sup>98</sup> However, even though *Red Poppy* was derided by the Left, audiences were captivated. Not only did the

<sup>95</sup> Yuri Slonimsky, *The Bolshoi Ballet: Notes* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1963), 24. At the time of *Red Poppy*'s first performance, Catherine Geltzer was married to Vasily Tikhomirov. She performed the role of Tao-Hoa when she was nearly fifty.

<sup>96</sup> Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2010), 349.

<sup>97</sup> Vladimir Mayakovsky, "The Bathhouse," in *Mayakovsky: Plays* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 229.

<sup>98</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 77.

ballet appeal to workers, NEP<sup>99</sup> businessmen, and apparatchiks,<sup>100</sup> but the ballet inspired the creation of themed consumer goods, such as soap, perfume, and candy, and a *Red Poppy* café.<sup>101</sup> Reinhold Glière's score, which was reminiscent of works by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and Alexander Glazunov, was commended—his use of the civil war song “Yablochko” for the sailor's dance even inspired the formation of amateur dance groups.<sup>102</sup> Despite its classical forms, *Red Poppy* became the hallmark of Socialist Realist ballet and was performed over 200 times in two seasons.<sup>103</sup>



Figure 7: Scene from *Red Poppy* (1933).<sup>104</sup>

<sup>99</sup> The New Economic Policy (NEP) was an economic policy enforced by Lenin from 1921 until 1928. While the NEP was thought to be necessary in order to improve the Soviet Union's economy after the revolution, it signified a retreat from the extreme centralization of the previous years.

<sup>100</sup> Apparatchiks were those who held bureaucratic or political positions within the Party apparatus.

<sup>101</sup> Homans, *Apollo's Angels*, 349.

<sup>102</sup> R. Townsend, "Russian Ballet—Hammer and Sickle Version: An Imperial Entertainment Maintained, but Sovietised," *Illustrated London News*, October, 7, 1933, 556.

<sup>103</sup> Slonimsky, *The Bolshoi Ballet*, 44.

<sup>104</sup> Townsend, "Russian Ballet—Hammer and Sickle Version," 556.



Convinced that *Red Poppy* proved it was “possible to create ballets that [were] new in style”<sup>105</sup> Nikolai Volkov, a historian of theatre and dramatist, decided to stage his own Socialist Realist ballet. Using *Red Poppy* as inspiration, Volkov teamed with Vladimir Dmitriev to write the libretto for *Flames of Paris* (1932), employing Asafiev to compose the score. To embody principles of Socialist Realism, the ballet had a revolutionary theme where the *sans-culottes* were the moving forces and heroes.<sup>106</sup> The choreographer, Vasili Vainonen, attempted to capture the divide between the aristocracy and peasantry through the contrast of eighteenth century court dance with folk dancing.<sup>107</sup>

The ballet begins with Gaspar, a southern French peasant, gathering wood with his children Jeanne and Pierre. An aristocrat tries to embrace Jeanne, and Gaspar is beaten and arrested for trying to protect his daughter.<sup>108</sup> Jeanne encourages the people of Marseille to free her father, and the prison is stormed. Accompanied by family and friends, Jeanne and Pierre march on Paris to stop a conspiracy planned by King Louis XVI and the autocracy against the revolution.<sup>109</sup> Mireille de Poitiers, a court actress, prevents the conspiracy by revealing it to the crowds outside, resulting in the storming of the Tuileries. The ballet ends in celebration; the peasants rejoice their victory over the aristocrats.<sup>110</sup>

The score was a mixture of music and songs from the French Revolution and composition in the style of the time period.<sup>111</sup> Each act revolved around a French Revolution song: “The Marseillaise,” “Ça Ira,” and “La Carmagnole.”<sup>112</sup> On November 6, 1932, during the fifteenth

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<sup>105</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 220.

<sup>106</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 96.

<sup>107</sup> Pouncy, “Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism,” 181.

<sup>108</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 96.

<sup>109</sup> Pouncy, “Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism,” 181.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 182.

<sup>111</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 222.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 221.

anniversary celebration of the October Revolution, the second act of the ballet—revolving around “Ça Ira”—premiered in Leningrad.<sup>113</sup> The impression left by the scene solidified the ballet as a success, even before its first official performance the next day.<sup>114</sup> In the Soviet theatrical world, *Flames of Paris* was “regarded as a work of great significance, especially in questions of principle, and as marking a definite and reforming stage in Soviet choreography.”<sup>115</sup> Vaganova believed that *Flames of Paris* was a “genuinely Soviet spectacle” because it “reflect[ed] the spirit of [the] times” through its depiction of class warfare and the liberation of the oppressed masses.<sup>116</sup> Writing in the 1940s, George Mamontov, a contributor in Slonimsky’s *Soviet Ballet*, deemed *Flames of Paris* the “father of the modern heroic ballet.”<sup>117</sup>

Although the *Flames of Paris* was considered a successful Socialist Realist ballet, like *Red Poppy*, its revolutionary topic was the only untraditional aspect. A champion of modernism and a leading polemicist of the Association of Contemporary Music (ASM)<sup>118</sup> during the 1920s, Asafiev abandoned his modernist tendencies, producing a largely classical score for *Flames of Paris*.<sup>119</sup> To justify his artistic decisions and argue that his composition was modern, Asafiev claimed that his score only contained “all the best, ‘fireproof,’ ‘nondecadent’ elements” found in nineteenth century European music.<sup>120</sup> He asserted that his music was Socialist Realist because it

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<sup>113</sup> Lenin’s favourite novel, Nikolai Chernyshevsky’s *What Is to Be Done?*, opens with the protagonist Vera Pavlovna singing “Ça Ira.”

<sup>114</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 223.

<sup>115</sup> Beresovsky, *Galina Ulanova*, 72.

<sup>116</sup> Pouncy, “Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism,” 183.

<sup>117</sup> George Mamontov, “Soviet Choreographers” in *The Soviet Ballet*, ed. by Yuri Slonimsky (New York: Da Capo Press, 1947), 63.

<sup>118</sup> The Association of Contemporary Music (ASM) was an organization founded by Nikolai Roslavets for musicians wanting to create avant-garde compositions.

<sup>119</sup> Frolova-Walker, “From Modernism to Socialist Realism in Four Years,” 200.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 203.

embodied a historical zeitgeist “in clear images, full of the ideological and emotional influence of [Soviet] reality.”<sup>121</sup>

Like Asafiev, the program of *Flames of Paris* also felt obligated to defend the ballet, arguing in its first paragraph that the ballet was of “fundamental significance in the development of the Soviet dance.”<sup>122</sup> According to the pamphlet, in comparison with other arts, ballet was behind in satisfying the demands of the revolution. Its backwardness was attributed to the “extreme rigidity and conservatism of ballet tradition, which necessarily exert their influence on the content as well as on the artistic interpretation of each subject.”<sup>123</sup> The program’s claims were significant since they reveal that the ballet masters were aware of their production’s shortcomings. It suggested that those involved in the staging of *Flames of Paris* knew that it was traditional—the inherently conservative nature of ballet was blamed so the work would be accepted by the censors and the regime.

Throughout the 1920s, ballets of the traditional repertoire were still being staged across the country. Because of Socialist Realism and increasing censorship under Stalin during the 1930s, this practice became increasingly problematic. In 1933, Vaganova believed that the old ballet repertoire needed revision, so she decided to stage an updated version of *Swan Lake*.<sup>124</sup> What resulted was a ballet that can hardly be considered Socialist Realist, yet succeeded in convincing the regime of its worth.<sup>125</sup>

In the classical version by Petipa and Ivanov, Prince Siegfried, who is living in medieval Germany, has to choose a bride on his 21st birthday. Uninterested in the noblewomen of the

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<sup>121</sup> Frolova-Walker, “From Modernism to Socialist Realism in Four Years,” 203.

<sup>122</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: In the USSR: Gluck-Sandor Reports on the Ballet Theatre of Soviet Russia,” *New York Times*, July 8, 1934, X5.

<sup>123</sup> John Martin, “The Dance: In the USSR,” X5.

<sup>124</sup> Pawlick, *Vaganova Today*, 52.

<sup>125</sup> Pouncy, “Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism,” 186.

court, he runs off into the woods to hunt and encounters Odette, an enchanted princess who is a woman by night and swan by day. If Siegfried swears to love Odette, she will be freed, but if he forsakes her love, she is doomed to remain a swan forever. The couple's conversation is overheard by a sorcerer who sends his daughter, Odile, to seduce Siegfried. The seduction a success, Odette, who is unable to bear life as a swan, throws herself into a lake. Siegfried redeems himself by killing the sorcerer and committing suicide. In the end, the couple is reunited after death.<sup>126</sup>

In order to make *Swan Lake* understandable for modern audiences, Vaganova decided to embrace the “realist” part of Socialist Realism, disposing of all pantomime and magical elements.<sup>127</sup> Other than its setting being moved to East Prussia, the beginning of Vaganova's *Swan Lake* remained relatively faithful to Petipa and Ivanov's version, Siegfried finding himself in the woods to hunt. However, since there was no longer magic in the ballet, the swans were not enchanted princesses, but regular swans—Siegfried deludes himself into falling in love with the main swan, even though she is only a bird.<sup>128</sup> In Vaganova's version, the sorcerer is replaced with Rothbart, an angry neighbour, who sends his daughter Odile to woo Siegfried so she can marry well. Siegfried rejects Odile, Rothbart kills the main swan, and Siegfried stabs himself in despair. The ballet ends tragically—the main swan's body covered by other white swans while evil black swans try to carry her corpse away.<sup>129</sup>

By editing a ballet by Petipa and Ivanov, Vaganova was aware that she was taking a risk by preserving the classical heritage.<sup>130</sup> To argue that the production was Socialist Realist,

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<sup>126</sup> Pouncy, “Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism,” 184.

<sup>127</sup> Pawlick, *Vaganova Today*, 53.

<sup>128</sup> Pouncy, “Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism,” 185.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Pawlick, *Vaganova Today*, 54.

Vaganova and the GATOB staff cited Maxim Gorky, the “father of Socialist Realism,” as its source and Asafiev wrote a forty-page pamphlet defending the ballet under the pen name “Igor’ Glebov.”<sup>131</sup> In addition to the staff’s obligation to defend the ballet, a glance at the plot suggests the ballet’s artificial adherence to Socialist Realism. Siegfried is not a politically-aware positive hero—characterized by Katarina Clark as being stern and simple, representing the people and obtaining a clear political mission by the end of the plot.<sup>132</sup> In *Red Poppy*, the archetype positive hero is the Soviet captain, who avoids romance with Tao-Hoa because of his dedication to his naval men and commitment to higher ideals.<sup>133</sup> In Vaganova’s *Swan Lake*, Siegfried falls in love with a swan, which not only reveals his lack of awareness but secures his downfall.<sup>134</sup>



Figure 8: Galina Ulanova as Odette in *Swan Lake*.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Pouncy, “Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism,” 185.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>133</sup> Pouncy, “Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism,” 185.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Beresovsky, *Galina Ulanova*, 49.

The classicalism of the Soviet stage was recognized by Gluck-Sandor, an American dancer observing and participating in the Soviet dance scene. In a 1934 *New York Times* article, he asserted that at the dancing in Leningrad and Moscow was classical, causing spectators to “draw [their] cloak[s] about [themselves] with somewhat that chill that goes with museums and very old churches.”<sup>136</sup> Not only did he believe that ballet was stagnant in the Soviet Union, but claimed that it seemed unaware that there had been a revolution. “The ballet seems to be asleep,” claimed Gluck-Sandor; it is “dreaming only of technique and virtuosity, and that at its best is not too good.”<sup>137</sup> Gluck-Sandor’s observations were echoed by C. Hartley Grattan, an American economic analyst and historian, who also noticed the revival of classicalism in the Soviet Union. Unlike Gluck-Sandor, however, Grattan believed that the Soviet’s reversion to their cultural heritage was not evidence of them “going soft,” but the “principle of cultural continuity asserting itself.”<sup>138</sup>

Despite its denunciation of the imperial past, by the mid-1930s the regime began to champion patriotic heroes and Russian literary classics.<sup>139</sup> In 1934, the first nationwide Congress of the Union of Soviet writers was held, aligning ballet with literature by asserting classical literature’s role in the preservation of national heritage.<sup>140</sup> Pushkin was characterized as a “people’s poet”—a fervent revolutionary neglected by his noble parents and raised by a serf nanny who gave him a love for commoners.<sup>141</sup> The revitalization of Pushkin’s works seeped into ballet, resulting in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* (1934)—Volkov’s attempt to visualize Pushkin’s poetic ideal by constructing the libretto as a psychological conflict between

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<sup>136</sup> Martin, “The Dance: In the USSR,” X5.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> C. Hartley Grattan, “Soviet Admits Need For Broader Culture: New Communist Civilization Finds It Must Consider Heritage of the Ages,” *Washington Post*, December 22, 1934, 9.

<sup>139</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 146.

<sup>140</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 226.

<sup>141</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 161.

characters.<sup>142</sup> For months, choreographer Rostislav Zakharov worked with the ballerinas to fully develop the motives of each character by discussing and analyzing Pushkin's poem.<sup>143</sup> Versed in the Stanislavsky method, Zakharov adopted this practice in the ballet so he could create real human characters with thoughts, feelings, and passions.<sup>144</sup>

When raiding a Polish estate, the Crimean Tatar Khan Girei captures Maria, a woman whose fiancé is killed during the raid. Bringing her to Crimea with him, Girei introduces Maria to his wife, Zarema, who instantly regards Maria as a threat. Although she is repulsed by Girei and wants nothing to do with him, Maria is stabbed by Zarema and dies artistically on stage. Unable to personally punish his wife, Girei has his men seize and throw Zarema from the battlements. The ballet ends with Girei commissioning the construction of a fountain to commemorate Maria's passing.<sup>145</sup>

For the score, Asafiev resorted to the same method he used for *Flames of Paris*, incorporating Alexander Gurilyov's nineteenth century romance "To the Fountain of the Bakhchisarai Palace" and a nocturne by the pianist John Field.<sup>146</sup> Once again, Asafiev had to defend his artistic decisions, claiming that the "melodious idiom of the ballet [was his] own"<sup>147</sup> and that the score did not restore romanticism but attempted to "hear the epoch through Pushkin's poem and to convey the emotions that moved the imagination of the poet."<sup>148</sup> In addition to the score being classical, the program of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* claimed that

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<sup>142</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 227.

<sup>143</sup> Homans, *Apollo's Angels*, 350.

<sup>144</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 230. The Stanislavsky method was developed by in the early twentieth century by Konstantin Stanislavsky. It provided actors with a systematized set of techniques to help them portray emotions on stage.

<sup>145</sup> Pouncy, "Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism," 187.

<sup>146</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 229.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

the ballet's underlying theme was the "impossibility of winning love by force,"<sup>149</sup> *The Times* asserting that such a bourgeois topic would be unheard of in Soviet theatre. The article claimed that ballet in the Soviet Union bore "an unexpected likeness to the very bourgeois form of it that existed in Tsarist days . . . still based on the classical tradition, still influenced more by Petipa than Fokine."<sup>150</sup> Nevertheless, *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* was a success, remaining in the repertoire because of its reliance on the dancers' dramatic capabilities—especially those of Galina Sergeeyna Ulanova.<sup>151</sup>

Ulanova was an integral part of Soviet ballet during the 1930s. Dancing the roles of "Young Communist Girl of a Western Country" in *The Golden Age*, "Mireille de Poitiers" in *Flames of Paris*, "Odette" in Vaganova's *Swan Lake*, and "Maria" in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, Ulanova came to embody the Soviet school.<sup>152</sup> In works on Soviet ballet, Ulanova's style is often discussed at length, and understandably so—clips of her performing later in her career attest to her brilliance as a ballerina. Examining works on ballet published in the 1940s by Soviet authors, it becomes clear that Galina Ulanova was an inheritor of the imperial ballet tradition, her style being reminiscent of Anna Pavlova and Catherine Geltzer. Nikolai Volkov asserted that Pavlova and Geltzer were both known for imbuing classical dance with emotional content.<sup>153</sup> Writing about Geltzer, Viktor Iving described her style as a "profound penetration of psychology of the character, careful choice of the pattern of the dance, unmistakable emotional colouring, subordination of all parts to the whole, a happy combination

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<sup>149</sup> "Ballet In Russia: The Classical Tradition," *The Times*, September 14, 1936, 10.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. Michel Fokine taught at the Imperial Ballet School in the early twentieth century. He became the resident choreographer of the Ballet Russes in 1909 and established the New York-based American Ballet Company in 1924.

<sup>151</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 231.

<sup>152</sup> Beresovsky, *Galina Ulanova*, 20. In *Galina Ulanova*, Valerian Bogdanov Beresovsky apologizes on behalf of Ulanova for her involvement in *The Golden Age*.

<sup>153</sup> Nikolai Volkov, "Traditions of the Russian Ballet," in *The Soviet Ballet*, ed. by Yuri Slonimsky (New York: Da Capo Press, 1947), 21.



of technique and the dramatic sense.”<sup>154</sup> These characteristics are almost identical to claims made by Beresovsky in *Ulanova*, who reiterates Ulanova’s ability to coordinate classical dance with psychological content throughout his book.<sup>155</sup> In addition, contemporaries who witnessed Ulanova’s dancing often compared her style to that of the imperial stars. Gluck-Sandor commented that Ulanova’s dancing in Vaganova’s *Swan Lake* “recall[ed] memories of Pavlova,”<sup>156</sup> and Romain Rolland, a French writer and a Soviet sympathiser, claimed that Ulanova as Maria “reminded [him] of the wonderful performances of the Russian ballet in Paris in 1910.”<sup>157</sup> Ulanova’s motto of “laconism”—the economical use of movement to convey themes—was not only Anna Pavlova’s motto, but a precept of the imperial ballet.<sup>158</sup>



Figure 9: Galina Ulanova as Maria in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*.<sup>159</sup>

<sup>154</sup> Victor Iving, “Catherine Geltser” in *The Soviet Ballet*, ed. by Yuri Slonimsky (New York: Da Capo Press, 1947), 70.

<sup>155</sup> Beresovsky, *Galina Ulanova*, 22.

<sup>156</sup> Martin, “The Dance: In the USSR,” X5.

<sup>157</sup> Beresovsky, *Galina Ulanova*, 83. Although the Ballets Russes are remembered today for their modernist designs and provocative productions, their Paris “Saisons Russes” included classical ballet.

<sup>158</sup> Slonimsky, *The Bolshoi Ballet*, 50.

<sup>159</sup> Beresovsky, *Galina Ulanova*, 81.

Analyzing the ballets of the period after the Cultural Revolution, it is clear that the Soviet doctrine of Socialist Realism was erratically adhered to during the early 1930s. Even when Socialist Realism was employed by ballet masters, the resulting productions were steeped in classicalism. While performances were still subject to censorship, the ability of the ballet masters to successfully stage work that barely qualified as Socialist Realism demonstrates the authority given to cultural institutions by the regime. Echoing Fitzpatrick's statement, "as party values penetrated culture, the cultural values of the old intelligentsia were penetrating the party,"<sup>160</sup> the ballet masters knew what they needed to argue for their work to be accepted, and were able to find ways of reintroducing classical ballet into the repertoire. In a 1935 diary entry titled "New Ballet," Vaganova stated that "between the conventionality of classical dance and the demands of 'realism' there is no contradiction."<sup>161</sup> The ballets of the 1930s attest to the truth of Vaganova's words—the ballet masters had convinced the regime of classical ballet's worth.

### **"Ballet Fraud" and the Death of Proletarian Ballet (1935-1937)**

Vaganova was not incorrect when she claimed that the "new spring of our ballet [had] begun,"<sup>162</sup> in 1935. During the first half of the 1930s, Soviet ballet had reverted back to classicalism, and the regime was now determined to make sure this "new spring" continued. In 1935, the *New York Times* reported that the Central Committee had split its cultural and propaganda department into five divisions, *Pravda* claiming that the reorganization was Stalin's idea to "considerably improve guidance over culture, the press and propaganda and make it more objective and more concrete."<sup>163</sup> The Committee on Artistic Affairs, a ministry-like institution,

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<sup>160</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 239.

<sup>161</sup> Pawlick, *Vaganova Today*, 57.

<sup>162</sup> Pouncy, "Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism," 171.

<sup>163</sup> "Soviet Reds Re-Form Control of Culture: Press, Schools, Clubs, Theatres, Architecture and Science Will Be Directed," *New York Times*, May 16, 1935, E11.

was created in 1936, uniting expertise-based professionals under a single umbrella organization.<sup>164</sup> The creation of the Committee on Artistic Affairs signified the regime's first major intervention into culture, the *New York Times* remarking that its control over the arts meant that the "leisure of the plain man" was "brought directly into the orbit of the party policy."<sup>165</sup> Since ballet productions now had to be reviewed by the Committee during dress rehearsal, directors had to create ballets they believed would be safe by the date of their premiere months later.<sup>166</sup> Deciphering vague directions in *Pravda*, artists had to predict the future political climate and avoid "formalism"—a term applied to dissonant art associated with the West.<sup>167</sup>

The creation of the Committee on Artistic Affairs coincided with the regime's condemnation of Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1934) and Lopukhov's ballet *Bright Stream* (1935).<sup>168</sup> In ballet, I believe that the "Ballet Fraud" debacle involving *Bright Stream* signified the official end of proletarian ballet in the Soviet Union since the regime actively ended experimentation. After *Bright Stream*'s condemnation, ballet returned to Socialist Realism; the productions *Lost Illusions* (1935) and *Partisan Days* (1936) were comparable to the ballets discussed in the previous chapter, albeit they were received less successfully. Using the regime's dismissal of *Bright Stream* as a launching point, I argue that classical ballet triumphed during the 1930s because it was the ideal form for the regime to push its agenda of *kul'turnost'*.

Two years before its completion, the Soviet press anticipated Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* to be the "best Soviet work, the chef-d'oeuvre of Soviet

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<sup>164</sup> Tomoff, *Creative Union*, 21.

<sup>165</sup> "Soviet to Cultivate Talent: Development of Skill and the Promotion of Culture Are Being Favored by the State," *New York Times*, February 21, 1937, 53.

<sup>166</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 101.

<sup>167</sup> Tomoff, *Creative Union*, 23.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

creativity.”<sup>169</sup> Two year after its 1934 premiere at the Leningrad State Academic Maly Opera Theatre, the opera was already being produced outside of the Soviet Union in both Europe and the United States.<sup>170</sup> In 1936, however, the fate of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was forever altered; to Shostakovich’s dismay, Stalin, Molotov, Zhadanov, and other high party officials walked out during the third act of the opera at a Bolshoi performance on January 26, 1936.<sup>171</sup> Days later, an unsigned editorial in *Pravda* deemed *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* “muddle instead of music,” criticising its “fragments of melody” that “dissolve[ed] into a general roar, scrunch and scream.”<sup>172</sup> The music was branded as “un-Soviet, unwholesome, cheap, eccentric, tuneless and Leftist,”<sup>173</sup> contrasting the “acceptable” music of Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Glinka and Rimsky-Korsakoff. Since it had found success in Europe and the United States, the opera was also criticized for suiting the perverted tastes of the West, solidifying its “formalist” stamp.<sup>174</sup>

In June 1935, *Bright Stream* premiered in Leningrad, the libretto and choreography by Lopukhov and music by Shostakovich.<sup>175</sup> The ballet was a comedy, celebrating the lives of the kolkhoz<sup>176</sup> by playing on the regime’s recent plans to absorb the kolkhoz into the Red Army.<sup>177</sup> In the ballet, a group of dancers are sent to the kolkhoz Bright Stream to provide entertainment for the people. Zina, a farm worker who is friends with one of the visiting dancers, becomes

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<sup>169</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 184.

<sup>170</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 103.

<sup>171</sup> Homans, *Apollo’s Angels*, 356.

<sup>172</sup> Harold Denny, “Soviet Denounces ‘Leftism’ in Music: Shostakovich, Once Hailed as Favorite Living Composer, Is Dashed into Disrepute,” *New York Times*, February 15, 1936, 17.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 188. In the ensuing discussion, some former RAPM members believed that the regime’s attack on formalism meant RAPM’s program of creating proletarian music could make a comeback, but they were mistaken. Claiming in a speech that *Pravda* had “taken RAPM’s side,” Boris Steinpress, a musicologist and former RAPMist, created such an uproar he was unable to finish speaking and was rebuked in *Pravda* days later.

<sup>175</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 236.

<sup>176</sup> A kolkhoz is a collective farm in the Soviet Union.

<sup>177</sup> Homans, *Apollo’s Angels*, 356.

upset when she discovers her husband Pyotr is infatuated with her friend.<sup>178</sup> After a series of farcical rendezvous with the dancers, the farmers realize their unfaithfulness and apologize to one another. Shostakovich claimed that he “sought ‘clear, simple forms’ which were ‘equally comprehensible to the public and the performer in the new ballet.’”<sup>179</sup> After its premiere, *Bright Stream* was praised by audiences, critic Yuri Brodersen declaring it a “realistic scenic fulfillment of a Soviet theme” successfully depicting the “new, happy people of [the] country and a bit of the joy of kolkhoz life.”<sup>180</sup> According to the *New York Times*, the regime’s initial reception of the ballet was lukewarm.<sup>181</sup> The article predicted that the ballet would “probably end in the archives of the theatre;”<sup>182</sup> however, the fate of *Bright Stream* was much worse.

On February 6, 1935, *Pravda* published “Ballet Fraud,” an article produced by the highest echelons of the Party. In the article, *Bright Stream* was harshly criticized for its depictions of kolkhoz life, which the article asserted was “converted into a game with dolls.”<sup>183</sup> *Bright Stream*’s characters were deemed “tinsel ‘paysans,’ coming off a prerevolutionary candybox, who depict joy, but having nothing in common with the folk dances of the Kuban or elsewhere,” and Lopukhov and Shostakovich were condemned for believing the public had “simple tastes” and would accept “everything which clever and indifferent people concoct.”<sup>184</sup> Weeks after *Pravda*’s dismissal of *Bright Stream*, similar articles appeared criticizing other art forms, such as “Against Formalism and Naturalism in Painting” and “Cacophony in Architecture.”<sup>185</sup> The *New York Times* asserted that the prospects of Soviet art were now clear,

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<sup>178</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 107.

<sup>179</sup> “Moscow Sees Ballet by Shostakovich: Composer’s Effort to Show Joys of Socialism Gets Lukewarm Reception at Bolshoi Theatre.” *New York Times*, December 9, 1935, 25.

<sup>180</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 108.

<sup>181</sup> “Moscow Sees Ballet by Shostakovich,” 25.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 111.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

since the regime was clearly advocating a combination of the “mastery of the classics” and the “majestic language of the people.”<sup>186</sup> For Lopukhov, *Bright Stream* signalled the end; *Ice Maiden*, which was still being performed, was officially removed from the repertoire.<sup>187</sup>

The *Bright Stream* debate returned ballet to Socialist Realism, *Lost Illusions* premiering in 1935 and *Partisan Days* in 1936. Based on Balzac’s novel *Les Illusions Perdues*, *Lost Illusions* followed composer Lucien and ballerina Coralie as they navigate the artistic realm of bourgeois society. The ballet concludes with Coralie and Lucien living unhappy lives—Coralie realizes her hopeless dependence on her patron, and Lucien goes into debt after becoming a sell-out by writing bourgeois ballets.<sup>188</sup> Like he did in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, Zakharov did not break with classical balletic traditions and instead attempted to imbue *Lost Illusions*’ choreography with dramatic content.<sup>189</sup> *Partisan Days* detailed the struggle in the North Caucasus between the partisans and the White Guard Cossacks.<sup>190</sup> To avoid being criticized like *Bright Stream* for failing to depict culture realistically, the choreographer Vasili Vainonen had the ballerinas dance entirely off-pointe.<sup>191</sup> *Partisan Days* “succeeded as ideology but not as art,”<sup>192</sup> since it relied on dramatic theatre to convey its confusing plot.<sup>193</sup> After its performance, Vaganova, who was still artistic director of GATOB at the time, withdrew into teaching after discovering a note on a theatre door explaining her “resignation” as director.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Harold Denny, “Soviet Denounces ‘Leftism’ in Music,” 17.

<sup>187</sup> Reynolds and McCormick, *No Fixed Parts*, 248. In response to the tense climate, Agrippina Vaganova wrote an article called “No Ballet Falsitudes” where she outlined the errors she saw in *Bright Stream*.

<sup>188</sup> Beresovsky, *Galina Ulanova*, 101.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>190</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 238.

<sup>191</sup> Pouncy, “Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism,” 190.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 239.

<sup>194</sup> Homans, *Apollo’s Angels*, 357.

The regime's official dismissal of *Bright Stream* and subsequent reversion to Socialist Realism raises a question: why did the regime favour the classical work of the intelligentsia over the proletarian work of the 1920s? While the answer is complicated, in the case of ballet, I argue that classicalism's return happened because it was the perfect form to accomplish the regime's agenda of enlightening the proletariat, creating social harmony, providing entertainment desired by changing audiences, and advancing socialism's development in the state.

The regime tolerated the intelligentsia because they had a common goal. In the mid-nineteenth century, the intelligentsia grew aware of Russia's backwardness and blamed tsarist autocracy for failing to ameliorate the abhorrent state of mass education.<sup>195</sup> The regime, sharing the same sense of moral superiority as the intelligentsia, also desired to enlighten the masses. Since it had led the country to revolution, the regime believed it was their duty to guide the country as it transitioned to socialism.<sup>196</sup> Motivated both altruistically and politically, the regime wanted to instill cultural norms in the proletariat, such as cleanliness, sobriety, discipline, and thriftiness to create a more productive workforce.<sup>197</sup> Although they resented one another, the two groups were interdependent—the regime required experts to aid in the country's development, and the intelligentsia needed toleration so they could continue to enjoy their economically and socially privileged status.<sup>198</sup>

For both the regime and intelligentsia, culture was regarded as the perfect way to enlighten the people while simultaneously bridging class antagonisms and promoting social harmony.<sup>199</sup> In his *Pravda* article "On Formalism," Gorky asserted that the people needed

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<sup>195</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 16.

<sup>196</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 5.

<sup>197</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 18.

<sup>198</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 6.

<sup>199</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 159.

harmonious art forms to “make their [lives] happier and more beautiful, not complex and depressing.”<sup>200</sup> By allowing the lower classes access to the old cultural canon, the regime was able to educate and unite the people through shared values and common cultural heritage.<sup>201</sup> In the case of ballet, I believe classical forms were better at capturing natural harmony and beauty, especially compared to the experimental ballet of the 1920s. Combining the best traits of the French and Italian schools, the “Vaganova method” emphasised harmonious co-ordination where the dancers’ head, hands, arms, and eyes were expected to move synchronously with their legs and feet.<sup>202</sup> Characterized by Lyubov Blok as “strong, bright optimism,”<sup>203</sup> the method was the perfect form to reflect the regime’s desire to celebrate the life, beauty, and harmony of the Russian people. In addition, the method gave consistency to the entirety of Soviet ballet by unifying training under a single pedagogical system. By 1937, ballet in Leningrad was already regarded as being “Vaganova’s style.”<sup>204</sup> As Kirov dancers were transferred to the Bolshoi, the pedagogical system eventually made its way to Moscow, and presently it is known worldwide as being an inherently Russian style of ballet.

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<sup>200</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 199.

<sup>201</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 147.

<sup>202</sup> Homans, *Apollo’s Angels*, 355.

<sup>203</sup> Pawlick, *Vaganova Today*, 38. Lyubov Blok was an actor, choreographer, and music critic. She was the daughter of Dmitri Mendeleev, the chemist known for formulating the Periodic Law.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*





*Figure 10: Agrippina Vaganova teaching at the Leningrad Choreographic Institute.*<sup>205</sup>

The desire to promote classical ballet did not only come from the regime, but also from the concert-going public. In the mid-1930s, the intelligentsia was changing sociologically and politically because of a new group of graduates: the *vydvizhentsy*. The *vydvizhentsy* comprised of the workers and peasants recruited to higher education during the First Five-Year Plan.<sup>206</sup> During the Cultural Revolution, the *vydvizhentsy* were expected to replace the old intelligentsia who were being targeted for their supposed counter-revolutionary tendencies.<sup>207</sup> Since the negative rhetoric about the intelligentsia vanished by the time the *vydvizhentsy* graduated, the intelligentsia's replacement never occurred; instead, the *vydvizhentsy* joined the intelligentsia and

<sup>205</sup> Pawlick, *Vaganova Today*, 32.

<sup>206</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 141.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

embraced its understanding of high culture. Nevertheless, the *vydvizhentsy*'s presence in the workforce was significant—the class grew from 40 000 to 120 000 between 1928 and 1931.<sup>208</sup> Coming from humble backgrounds, the *vydvizhentsy* did not have political agendas and were not versed in Marxist theory like the Communist intelligentsia that emerged during Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP).<sup>209</sup> Rather, their “purpose was to learn”<sup>210</sup> and the old intelligentsia was to guide them; the *vydvizhentsy* were eager to obtain the cultural expertise that their new status required.<sup>211</sup>

The rise of the *vydvizhentsy* coincided with the regime's promotion of *kul'tura*, which Duranty defined in 1934 as “self-respect, courtesy, loyalty, kindness, honor, truthfulness and courage”—the characteristics that differentiate a “gentleman” from a “loutish, dirty, ignorant peasant.”<sup>212</sup> Duranty's definition coheres with Fitzpatrick's later description of *kul'tura* and *kul'turnost'*, the former referring to high culture in the arts, literature, and scholarship, the latter referring to the attribute of acquiring culture through “cultured” means.<sup>213</sup> For the regime, *kul'turnost'* was a way to characterize the *vydvizhentsy*'s “bourgeois” desires—want of consumer goods and status—as an acceptable and necessary step in the acquisition of culture.<sup>214</sup> While the Soviet audience in 1925 was described as wearing, “soft collars, Tolstoyan shirts, sporting caps and high boots,”<sup>215</sup> by the mid-1930s, the audience wore “bright shawls, lots of

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>209</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 147.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Walter Duranty, “Russia Now Sows the Seeds of Culture: In Various Ways the State Helps the People to Acquire Manners And a New Way of Life,” *New York Times*, March 25, 1934, SM6.

<sup>213</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 218.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Zakhary McLove, “Russian Ballet has risen in Revolt: Goleyzovsky and Erdman Chiefly Responsible for Upheaval That Followed the Search for New Forms of Expression,” *New York Times*, November 15, 1925, SM8.

‘costume’ jewelry, fancy blouses and berets of the best quality.”<sup>216</sup> According to a 1935 *Washington Post* article, the “increasing clamor for luxury goods, for silk stockings, for powder puffs, and perfume” marked a visible difference between the “passionate proletarian of the revolution, convinced that wearing a white collar was counter-revolutionary” and the “modern comrade.”<sup>217</sup> In *Ogonek*, a Soviet short-story magazine, people could even test their “level of culture” by doing a questionnaire with tasks such as “recite by heart one poem by Pushkin,” “name and characterize five plays by Shakespeare,” “name three of [your favourite composer’s] best-known works,” and name your favourite three paintings from an “art exhibition you saw last season.”<sup>218</sup> To be considered cultured, the *vydvizhentsy* thought they needed to be versed in the high culture of the past.

In *Era of the Russian Ballet*, Roslavleva asserts that Socialist Realist ballets, in particular *Red Poppy*, ended formalism because their “success was greater than anything that could be produced by opponents of the classical school.”<sup>219</sup> While this statement is an over-simplification, it is not without merit. During the 1920s, audience’s expectations, perceptions, and assumptions about ballet often left them feeling “insulted by dancers in street clothes, constructivist sets or modern music,”<sup>220</sup> as demonstrated by Lopukhov’s previously discussed failures. By the 1930s there was an expectation for people to be familiar with past culture, so the audience’s desire to see classical work increased. Even ballet dancers themselves needed to have *kul’turnost*; Slonimsky stated that in the 1930s, dancers were supposed to have the cultural knowledge to independently solve choreographic and scenic problems in the “spirit of historic and artistic

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<sup>216</sup> Lonelle Davison, “Soviet Youth Go ‘Bourgeois’: They Have a Taste for Expensive Forms of Sport,” *Washington Post*, July 7, 1935, B12.

<sup>217</sup> Davison, “Soviet Youth Go ‘Bourgeois,’” B12.

<sup>218</sup> Harold Denny, “Russian Magazine Testing Culture: Readers Are Asked to Answer Ten Questions, One on Shakespeare Plays,” *New York Times*, February 9, 1936, N12.

<sup>219</sup> Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 217.

<sup>220</sup> Sporton, “The Conservative Revolution,” 96.

truth.”<sup>221</sup> Writing in the 1940s, Pyotr Gusev, a dancer and choreographer, asserted that the ballet students in both Moscow and Leningrad had acquired a higher level of culture than their predecessors because of their required study of ballet, theatre, music, and art history.<sup>222</sup>

The people’s desire for culture agreed with the regime’s concept of the “New Soviet Person,” an archetype figure whose values and thinking differed than those living under capitalism.<sup>223</sup> New Soviet People were expected to be selfless and willing to sacrifice personal interest for the sake of the collective.<sup>224</sup> In ballet, Ulanova came to embody this figure; in official literature, she was made into a model Soviet citizen and idealized worker.<sup>225</sup> Able to convince the audience that she herself was the heroines she portrayed, Ulanova extolled the qualities of the New Soviet Person through her dancing.<sup>226</sup> She was “elevated to the position almost of a deity”<sup>227</sup> by the public, and her devotion to her art was characterized as being the best way she could serve the nation.<sup>228</sup> Ulanova’s numerous awards attest to her popularity and significance. She was honoured with the Order of the Labour Red Banner and title of “Honoured Artist of the R.S.F.S.R” in 1939, the Badge of Honour and title of “National Artist of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic” in 1940, and the title “National Artist of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic” for her work with the Kazakh Music-Theatre. In addition, she was elected to become a member of the City Soviet by Leningrad workers and won the coveted Stalin Prize four times.<sup>229</sup> The Stalin Prizes provided a “crucial interface between the Stalinist political

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<sup>221</sup> Yuri Slonimsky, “The Soviet Ballet,” in *The Soviet Ballet*, ed. by Yuri Slonimsky (New York: Da Capo Press, 1947), 11.

<sup>222</sup> Peter Gusev, “Choreographic Education in the USSR,” in *The Soviet Ballet*, ed. by Yuri Slonimsky (New York: Da Capo Press, 1947), 38.

<sup>223</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 45.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> Homans, *Apollo’s Angels*, 352.

<sup>226</sup> John Gregory and Alexander Ukladnikov, *Leningrad’s Ballet* (London: Robson Books Ltd., 1981), 21.

<sup>227</sup> Hélène Bellew, *Ballet in Moscow Today* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956), 10.

<sup>228</sup> Beresovsky, *Galina Ulanova*, 133.

<sup>229</sup> Beresovsky, *Galina Ulanova*, 132.

leadership and the creative intelligentsia,”<sup>230</sup> Ulanova’s multiple honours revealing the regime’s commitment to traditional culture. By characterizing Ulanova as an ideal worker, the regime legitimized classicalism and endorsed the people’s appreciation of her work. By the 1950s, it was possible that Ulanova’s name was “more frequently on the lips of the average Soviet citizen than any other living politician, writer, or artist.”<sup>231</sup>



*Figure 11: Galina Ulanova coaching Ekaterina Maximova at the Bolshoi.*<sup>232</sup>

Leon Trotsky believed that the Soviet leadership’s changes in cultural policy were a retreat from socialism. Deeming the changes as the “Soviet Thermidor” when he was writing in exile, Trotsky deduced that the bureaucracy had embraced traditional bourgeois institutions to

<sup>230</sup> Tomoff, *Creative Union*, 236.

<sup>231</sup> Bellew, *Ballet in Moscow Today*, 10. Although there is no evidence, there are rumours that Prince Philip had an affair with Galina Ulanova when she was touring with the Bolshoi in 1956.

<sup>232</sup> Slonimsky, *The Bolshoi Ballet*, 123. Galina Ulanova died in 1998 at the age of 88. In 2001, her apartment in Moscow was converted into the Galina Ulanova Museum. Monuments were also erected in both Saint Petersburg and Stockholm honouring her memory.

secure its power and status.<sup>233</sup> It easy to follow Trotsky’s lead and argue that the cultural policy of the Soviets during the 1930s was a departure from socialism. While I agree that the regime embraced ballet that was traditionally “bourgeois” and abandoned what they had established to be “proletarian ballet” during the Cultural Revolution, I believe that the regime did not regard their adoption of classical ballet as a retreat from socialism, but as a part of its progression. According to a 1937 *New York Times* article, during the course of the First Five-Year Plan, the regime realized that technical knowledge and skill was needed to continue the revolution, as enthusiasm was only sufficient for the establishment of socialism, not its exploitation.<sup>234</sup> The First Five-Year plan had supposedly inspired every worker to give their “physical and spiritual utmost”<sup>235</sup> for its accomplishment, so the regime believed the masses no longer needed to be inspired by proletarian art. Since the Cultural Revolution was seen as having purged the intelligentsia of their counter-revolutionary ways, the regime was convinced that imperial traditions were now divorced from their problematic past and could be employed in socialism’s development.<sup>236</sup> Therefore, the regime ultimately believed that Stalinism had stayed true to Leninism. To quote an article by Duranty, one of Lenin’s goals was “not merely to establish socialism in Russia but to make a disciplined and self-respecting race out of a nation of slaves”<sup>237</sup>—something the promotion of high culture was regarded as having accomplished.

## Conclusion

Analyzing the transformation of Soviet ballet during the 1920s and early 1930s, it is clear that after the Cultural Revolution, the regime abandoned its dreams of proletarian ballet,

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<sup>233</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 2.

<sup>234</sup> “Soviet to Cultivate Talent,” 53.

<sup>235</sup> Sergei Radamsky, “Soviet Composers’ New Freedom: Edict, Setting Up Creation as Dominant Aim, Halts Conflict Between Proletarian and Conservative Factions,” *New York Times*, September 18, 1932, X5.

<sup>236</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 53.

<sup>237</sup> Duranty, “Russia Now Sows the Seeds of Culture,” SM6.

deciding to co-opt the culture of the old intelligentsia as a means to promote *kul'turnost'*. While Fedor Lopukhov succeeded in invigorating ballet through modern choreography, sets, and themes during the period, the public's dismissal of his unconventional aesthetics led the authorities to question whether ballet could be completely severed from tradition. Because the regime believed that the members of the old intelligentsia had been cleansed of their counter-revolutionary tendencies after the Cultural Revolution, ballet was regarded as being divorced from its imperial past. This belief allowed ballet masters to conform half-heartedly to the tenets of Socialist Realism, since classical productions were tolerated by the regime as long as they were advertised as developments in proletarian art. *Bright Stream's* dismissal in 1935 signified the official death of proletarian ballet, since the denunciation of Lopukhov's work showed the regime's active involvement within the ballet sphere. By analyzing the development of the ballet repertoire through the lens of Soviet cultural policy, I argue that classical ballet triumphed in the Soviet Union because it was the ideal form to enlighten the masses, create social harmony, and provide entertainment for the newly-emerged *vydvizhentsy* audience. Since classical ballet had allowed the proletariat access to the old cultural canon, its promotion was not viewed as a retreat from socialism, but a means to elevate the masses and promote socialism throughout the country.

Today, Russia is highly regarded for its classical ballet. The Mariinsky in Saint Petersburg and the Bolshoi in Moscow are world-renowned companies, exhibiting dancers of phenomenal technique, strength, flexibility, and quality. Although it is unlikely that they recognized their significance during their time, I believe that the Soviet ballet masters of the 1930s—particularly Agrippina Vaganova—were integral to the development of ballet.<sup>238</sup> Through their choreographic abilities, adaptability to the cultural atmosphere and determination

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<sup>238</sup> Agrippina Vaganova's book, *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet*, is still used by ballet teachers today.

to stay true to classical principles, the Soviets during the 1930s set the stage for generations of future dancers. Ballet masters found ways of preserving and developing the achievements of the imperial ballet, and the star dancers of the period, such as Ulanova, continued to provide their expertise to new ballerinas throughout the rest of the twentieth century.



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## Appendix

GATOB (*Gosudarstvenniy Akademicheskiy Teatr Operi i Baleta*) refers to the Leningrad State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet. GATOB became Kirov State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet in 1935 (Kirov).

<b>Date of Premiere</b>	<b>Title of Ballet</b>	<b>Ballet Master(s)</b>	<b>Composer</b>	<b>Location of Premiere</b>
7 March 1923	Dance Symphony (Magnificence of the Universe)	F. Lopukhov	Beethoven	GATOB
29 October 1924	Red Whirlwind	F. Lopukhov	V. Deshevov	GATOB
2 January 1927	Tale of a Fox, Rooster and Ram (Renard)	F. Lopukhov	I. Stravinsky	GATOB
27 April 1927	Ice Maiden	F. Lopukhov	E. Grieg B. Asafiev	GATOB
14 June 1927	Red Poppy	L. Lashchilin V. Tikhomirov	R. Glière	Bolshoi
27 October 1929	Nutcracker	F. Lopukhov	Tchaikovsky	GATOB
26 October 1930	The Golden Age	V. Vainonen L. Yacobson V. Chesnakov	D. Shostakovich	GATOB
8 April 1931	Bolt	F. Lopukhov	D. Shostakovich	GATOB
6 November 1932	Flames of Paris	V. Vainonen	B. Asafiev	GATOB
? 1933	Swan Lake	A. Vaganova	Tchaikovsky	GATOB
28 September 1934	Fountains of Bakhchisarai	R. Zakharov	B. Asafiev	GATOB
4 April 1935	Bright Stream	F. Lopukhov	D. Shostakovich	Leningrad State Academic Maly Opera Theatre
31 December 1935	Lost Illusions	R. Zakharov	B. Asafiev	Kirov
10 May 1937	Partisan Days	V. Vainonen	B. Asafiev	Kirov