

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF BALLET PERFORMANCE AND PEDAGOGY TRADITIONS AT THE NATIONAL OPERA OF UKRAINE

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Abstract. This study is devoted to the formation of the ballet theater in Ukraine. Italian dancers took part in the creation of classical ballet in Ukraine at different stages. French, Polish and Russian choreographic schools, in close relationship with Ukrainian folklore, configured its originality. The author, former Kyiv National Opera of Ukraine soloist, focuses on the events taking place in this theater in the period from its foundation to the twenties in the twentieth century. Particular attention is paid to the activities of prominent choreographers, such as Bronislava Nijinska, Mikhail Mordkin, Serge Lifar, Vasyl Verkhovynets and others, as well as to the outstanding drama director Les Kurbas.

Keywords: classical ballet, Ukrainian ballet, Bronislava Nijinska, Serge Lifar, Mikhail Mordkin, Oleg Stalinsky, Les Kurbas.

Resumen: Este estudio está dedicado a la formación del teatro de ballet en Ucrania. Los bailarines italianos participaron en la creación del repertorio del ballet clásico en Ucrania en diferentes etapas. Escuelas coreográficas francesas, polacas y rusas, en una estrecha relación con el folclore ucraniano, conformaron su originalidad. La autora, ex solista de la Ópera Nacional de Kiev de Ucrania, se centra en los eventos que tienen lugar en este teatro en el periodo desde su fundación hasta los años veinte del siglo xx. Se presta especial atención a las actividades de los destacados maestros de coreografía Bronislava Nijinska, Mikhail Mordkin, Serge Lifar, Vasyl Verkhovynets y otros, así como al destacado director escénico Les Kurbas.

Palabras clave: ballet clásico, ballet ucraniano, Bronislava Nijinska, Serge Lifar, Mikhail Mordkin, Oleg Stalinsky, Les Kurbas.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY IS TO show the process of ballet art formation in Ukraine from its origins to the twenties of the twentieth century, and to consider the influence of various choreographic schools, related arts, in particular drama, music drama theater, to highlight the activities of prominent artists, connected with Ukrainian ballet art during the period in question.

The researchers date the beginning of ballet performance' and professional training' history in Ukraine back to the early nineteenth century. According to Ukrainian theater researcher Yuriy Stanishevsky [2002: 38], the first ballet performance that Kyivans saw was the mythological ballet *Venus and Adonis* by D. Lefebvre, staged by the Italian choreographer F. Morelli, who was specially invited from the Bolshoi Theater of Moscow, and performed by the troupe of landowner Dmitry Shirai, consisting of 40 dancers and a serfs' orchestra.

The high professional level of artists and musicians is evidenced by the memoirs of Prince P. Shalikov of Moscow, quoted by Stanishevsky [2002: 39], who wrote:

Brilliant ballet impressed us. Picturesque Terpsichorean groups, expressive positions of which, turnings, views, figures eloquently explain the history of events; soloists, like lightning at the speed of their feet, which our eyes didn't have time to follow, reflect with the plasticity of the hands and facial expressions various passions of the soul and heart with all their nuances; luxurious costumes, beautiful scenery, a wonderful orchestra - all this stuns, fascinates us.

It was a complete ballet performance. The high technical level of the dancers and the expressiveness of the performance, the synthesis of virtuosity and emotional richness became the distinct feature of the Ukrainian Ballet Theater. Until 1810, D. Shirai was an entrepreneur of the first Kyiv City Theater, opened in 1805, and his activities greatly influenced the development of classical ballet and dancers' choreographic skills. He «did not burden his serfs with other work, hired professional teachers, and gave to the best of them the opportunity to receive professional education», as Stanishevsky admitted [2002: 39].

An important role in the process of distribution and development of ballet art in Ukraine belongs also to the famous Kharkiv entrepreneur I. Stein dancer, and choreographer, who staged in his troupe not only

dramatic pieces and operas, but also ballet performances, as well as choreographers L. Mlotkovsky and M. Piona. In 1863-1867 in Kyiv the ballet troupe under the direction of the Austrian choreographer A. Opfermann performed ballets *Esmeralda* by C. Pugni, *Giselle* by A. Adam, *The Magic Flute* to the music of V.-A. Mozart from the repertoire of famous Viennese and Parisian theaters.

After the founding of the Kyiv Opera Theater in 1867, ballet did not immediately take the leading place as Stanishevsky [2002] admitted. On October 27, 1867, the stationary Kyiv Opera Theater was opened, where in 1893-1909 a ballet troupe worked under the direction of Polish choreographers S. Lenczewski and M. Lange. They staged the ballets *Harvest in Malorossia*¹, *Seaside Holiday* (1893), *The Fairy Doll*, *Coppelia* (1903). The local government supported only opera productions, taking ballet as a frivolous art. Ballet is mentioned episodically when it comes to dancing in operas or touring performances. In a letter to his brother after the premiere of *The Queen of Spades* at the Kyiv Opera, Tchaikovsky [1977: 303] wrote: «The interlude *Sincerity of the Shepherdess* turned out to be especially meager, but this was to be expected. After all, ballet in Kyiv consists of only four couples».

The formation of academic ballet in Ukraine at the beginning of twentieth century has several features that predetermined its further development.

Firstly, there was a radical reform of the theater: conceptions of K. Stanislavsky, V. Meyerhold, G. Kregg, that were related to the organization of human movement; «physical actions» were also used in the choreography. A. Lunacharsky² [1925] wrote that the combination of dance, whose beauty and significance no one can deny, with the story, supernaturally expressed by mimicry and gestures, stylized with choreographic elements, seemed and seem now unacceptable by many and therefore requires reforms.

1 Malorossia – Little Russia –so called Ukraine in Russian Empire

2 Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky (born Anatoly Aleksandrovich Antonov, 23 November [old stile 11 November] 1875 – 26 December 1933) was a Russian Marxist revolutionary and the first Bolshevik Soviet People's Commissar (Narkompros) responsible for Ministry of Education as well as an active playwright, critic, essayist and journalist throughout his career.

The reformers appear such as M. Fokine, who sought to return action and imagery to the ballet performance³, I. Duncan, who aimed to create the «dance of the future», reversing the laws of classical ballet, Emile Jacques-Dalcroze with his «solfeggio for the body» – the system of rhythmic gymnastics, which aims «to create new lifestyle» [Chepalov, 2005: 100-104].

Secondly, there was a problem of the exchange of classical ballet with folklore choreographic traditions, which were previously represented in Drama Theater. Most performances of Ukrainian drama theaters (some of them were named so - musical-dramatic) were accompanied by songs and dances, and the choreographers and performers of these scenes were often dancers of high level, as, for example, Khoma Nijinsky, who combined in his interpretations elements of classical choreography and different national dances' style, such as Polish, Russian and Ukrainian ones. A lot of pieces of K. Nijinsky show in the theatrical arrangement of Ukrainian national dances, the development of virtuosity.

Vasyl Verhovynets (1880-1938), who became the first theorist of Ukrainian dance, demonstrated another point of view. He sharply criticized those who vulgarized Ukrainian dance and urged leading artists and dance researchers to study ethnographic material, because real folk dance is not a soulless, ostentatious equilibrist «trickster in Ukrainian clothes», but human emotional feelings' manifestation with the language of choreography and plasticity. Later V. Verhovynets took part in the staging of the first ballet based on a Ukrainian literary libretto *Pan Kanevsky* by M. Verikivsky. Ukrainian stage dance synthesized folklore and classical ballet elements, fidelity to folk traditions and virtuosity of performance too.

This problem of balance between stylistic unity and virtuosity in stage performance turned into a set of rules and a statement of the artistry of dance art: seeing «in artistry, a special expressive quality,

3 Fokine believed that in traditional classical ballets very little attention was paid to the dramaturgy of the performance, and the *mise-en-scenes* served as a link between the extended dance suites. At the same time, pantomime in classical ballets was conditional (like the alphabet for the deaf and dumb). Fokine introduced psychologism and dramatic development into *mise-en-scenes* and dance in a ballet performance.

showing the most important antinomies of creativity», then artistry itself «turns the world of art into a field of more intense experience, than life itself» as noted by Kryvtsun [2008: 142, 144]. This maximum «intensity of experience», represented in dance, is possible while high professional level and virtuosity take place.

Finally, the formation of the Ukrainian academic ballet developed simultaneously with various attempts of theoretical reflection on choreography as a specific type of art. In Ukraine such theoretical works, through the creative and pedagogical activity of Bronislava Nijinska reflected the reforming processes in the choreographic art of the early twentieth century. Instructive programs were formed in private ballet studios, as well as educational recommendations based on the generalization of pedagogical experience, although there was not yet a single state institution for classical ballet learning.

In turn, it was choreography that created a particularly favorable ground for the development of the conceptual basis of interpretology⁴ as a general theory of performing arts, and public demand was determined by the situation of the epoch: «In times when the world lacks its own destiny, triumph comes to the performing arts. The figure of an acrobat, dancer, gymnast becomes the most capacious allegorical equivalent of a poetic act as a generalized image of an artist-performer», as Kryvtsun [2008: 127] admitted.

All these circumstances affected the formation of the theatrical repertoire as well as the development of ballet education in Ukraine. In 1892–1909, choreographer and dancer S. Lenczewsky worked as the artistic leader of the ballet of the Kyiv Opera, from 1910 - K. Zalewsky, then - A. Romanowsky; they tried to increase the number of dancers of ballet troupe and expand its repertoire.

In the years before the outbreak of the First World War, there were numerous tours of Russian artists, in particular, E. Geltser, M. Kshesinskaya, O. Smirnova, M. Obukhov, L. Egorova, M. Mordkin, and it

4 Interpretology is a scientific discipline that combines experience and demonstrates unity, the best achievements of theoretical and performing musicology. In Ukraine, the Department of Interpretology and Music Analysis works at Kharkov National Kotlyarevsky University of Arts. Interpretology is mentioned here as a general theory of performing arts.

was due to them that the Ukrainian audiences got acquainted with the masterpieces of classical choreography in the interpretation of different schools. Whereas the St. Petersburg school was characterized with academicism and purity of performance, the Moscow school was famous for its virtuosity and dramatic expression of dance, which became a characteristic of the synthesis of the best traditions in the Ukrainian ballet school.

In 1915 the ballet troupe of the Kyiv Opera was headed by Aleksander Kochetovsky and Bronislava Nijinska, who transferred to the stage of the Kyiv Opera (Kyiv City Theater) the productions of M. Fokine *Cleopatre (Nights in Egypt)* by A. Arensky (1909), *Carnaval* (on the Kyiv stage, the ballet was called *Ball in crinolines*) by R. Shumann (1910) and *Petrushka* by I. Stravinsky (1911). All these works had been performed by Serge Diaghilev's *Les Ballets Russes* previously. Nijinska also staged the ballet *The Little Humpbacked Horse* in A. Gorsky's version. Nijinska and Kochetovsky themselves performed leading parts in these ballets.

The process of founding choreographic schools by M. Mordkin, B. Nijinska, A. Romanovsky, L. Lange, I. Chistyakov, O. Gavrilova, and others is of great importance for the development of a ballet pedagogy' traditions in Kyiv. B. Nijinska's *School of Movement* –theater and ballet studio for the education of dancers-actors, opened in 1919– was characterized by a focus on modern choreography, which was reflected in teaching methods (apart from dance disciplines, students studied expression in movements or facial expressions, style in movements, theory of music, notation of movements, etc.), as well as in educational performances on the stage of the city theater.

The director M. Tereshchenko, who often visited them, wrote:

The clarity of the lines of the external figure of the performances, the organization and coherence of the ensemble, the technical dexterity of the body and movements were striking. But ... I did not see live human individuality in the coherence of the figure. The performers of the ensemble became impersonal [Quoted by Volkhonovych, 1997: 10-13].

At that time, Nijinska was fascinated by the rhythms of Jacques-Dalcroze and the constructivism' ideas, which affected her work in some way: in particular, she considered movement, not pose, to be the basis

of dance, referring to a new way of interpreting ballet classics demonstrated by A. Pavlova and V. Nijinsky. The performing style of these great ballet masters very harmoniously combined the traditions of the classical school and the new trends of the times.

Remember as Pavlova stood up in arabesque. Here's how to learn to move. Or Nijinsky: remember how many passages, how many nuances were in the trajectory of his jump. All these nuances and passages created the illusion that he was dancing without touching the ground. Remember how Pavlova approached performing her *pas*. Exactly this approximation, these approaches, that is the real movement. All the charm of Pavlova was in the way *how* she stood in attitude, arabesque or other pose [Quoted by Ratanova, 1998:15].

A. Pavlova's contemporaries, who were lucky enough to see her on stage, recall how she created the illusion of flight even in a static pose. This effect can be seen in the drawing of the artist A. Serov - the poster of Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*. The ballerina stands on her toes in an arabesque pose, but her center of gravity is shifted slightly forward, her shoulders are open and pushed back, which adds balance and harmony to the whole posture. This pose is unstable, Pavlova seems to be resting, clinging to some invisible cloud, ready to fly up at any moment. The actress was able to capture such moments of «unstable balance» for as long as possible, impressing the audience with her own ephemeral verve.

This way of dance, characteristic of the first ballerinas of the Romantic era like M. Taglioni, C. Grisi, L. Gran, was supplanted with the victorious academic style of Petipa due to its aplomb, stability, and confident style of performance. In the era of Petipa classical dance reached its highest development, its technique improved, the most complex forms of dance as *pas de deux*, *pas d'action* appeared, but the drama in a ballet became secondary, giving way to entertainment, demonstration of technical perfection of performance. Mikhail Fokine took out ballet of this crisis, restoring action of dance by using the experience of Romantic «Taglionic» ballet, «orientalism» and ancient dances.

B. Nijinska understood the significance of this work in the context of the time, combining in her pedagogical practice the best traditions

and innovative experiments. It was in the studio of B. Nijinska that famous ballet dancer and choreographer S. Lifar began his acquaintance with the ballet art. However, he did not attend the *School of Movements* itself, but free classes for proletarian people in the experimental theater-studio *Centrostudio* (Central Ballet Studio), which, on March 11, 1921, was renamed as the All-Ukrainian State Studio with the rights of higher art school.

Together with the activity in her studio B. Nijinska worked at the Kyiv Conservatory, the Central Ballet Studio mentioned above, the drama studio of the Jewish Cultural Center, the Molodyi Theater⁵ founded by Les Kurbas, and later at the Ukrainian School of Drama. B. Nijinska shared the creative principles of Les Kurbas, an outstanding Ukrainian drama director, who was subsequently repressed by the Soviet authorities and shot in a Soviet concentration camp in 1937. L. Kurbas attached great importance to the plasticity of the actor. He sought to create a new, philosophical theater, free from everyday beliefs and excessive realism. To implement this idea, he needed the education of a new type of actor. The director created his own system of training for actors including the complete control of her or his body and voice and several specific acting techniques. The choreography was a very important part of this system.

Nijinska was invited to lead the ballet troupe in the newly created Ukrainian Regional Opera, but in 1921 due to the illness of her brother, she was forced to leave for Vienna. Her later life related to S. Diaghilev enterprise, where she staged her best ballets (*Les noces* by I. Stravinsky, *Les Biches* by F. Poulenc, *Le Train Bleu* by D. Milhaud), and then with many troupes in London, Paris, Berlin, Buenos Aires and in the United States.

It is especially important to stress that Nijinska was the first choreographer who staged Ravel's *Bolero* for the company of actress and dancer Ida Rubinstein⁶, who had earned fame for her plastic expressiveness while interpreting main characters in M. Fokine's performances of *Cleopatre* and *Shecherezade* with *Ballets Russes*. I. Rubinstein

5 English Translation: Young Theater

6 Ida Rubinstein was born in 1883 in Kharkov in a wealthy Jewish family.

engaged Maurice Ravel for creating an exotic composition in Spanish style. The premiere took place at the Paris Opera, on 22nd November, 1922. The scene became a tavern in Barcelona, where beautiful Ida danced just on the round table surrounded by 18 female and male dancers who gradually became involved in a common dance. Maurice Bèjart admitted that in his production he used the idea of B. Nijinska, who made the choreography.

Nijinska brought up a lot of talented ballet dancers and choreographers. It is important to mention the prominent Ukrainian ballet dancer Oleg Stalinsky who was one of the most beloved students of Nijinska in the *School of Movement*. She even wanted to take him with her when she left Kyiv to join Diaghilev's enterprise, but his parents were against it.

The creative activity of O. Stalinsky related to the formation and development of the Ukrainian national ballet. During the twenties, he worked in Kyiv Opera and Ballet Theater, where he performed premier and solo parts in classical and newly staged ballets, then in theaters of Sverdlovsk, Tbilisi, Odessa, Minsk. During the Second World War, he went to the front as a volunteer, was wounded and received a serious back injury, but managed to recover and a year later appeared on the stage of the Abai Theater in the ballet *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* as Khan Giray, and his partner was Galina Ulanova. The artist devoted most of his creative life to the Lviv Opera and Ballet Theatre Ivan Franko (now called Solomiya Krushelnytska). O. Stalinsky was distinguished by an enviable creative longevity: at the age of 75, he still played character roles. In total, he performed more than a hundred roles of the classical, national and modern repertoire. Later, he passed on his rich creative experience to his students when he taught a course of stage movement and dance. His dance style tended to create bright, colorful images. With his art and his very personality, O. Stalinsky left a significant and bright mark in the history of Ukrainian ballet.

Anna Vorobyova, who was not only a pupil, but an assistant to B. Nijinska and who supervised *Centrostudio* during her absence, later became one of the founders of the Bulgarian Ballet. A. Vorobyova was ballet soloist at the Opera di Roma (1924-1926), Ida Rubinstein's company (1928-1931), Russian Opera in Paris (1932), Opera de Marseille (1933), Sofia National Opera (1927-1928 and 1933-1934), where she

performed the role of Swanildha in *Coppelia* by L. Delibes, that was the first ballet performance in Bulgaria (1928). She participated in the creation of a ballet troupe at the Stara Zagora Opera House, which she directed in 1946–1952; and the Plovdiv Opera, which she also directed in 1953–1961, where she staged many ballets, dances in operas and concert pieces, among them *Coppelia* (1951, Stara Zagora), *The Fairy Doll* (1957, Plovdiv), dances in the operas *The Bartered Bride*, *Rusalka*, *Carmen*, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, *La Traviata* etc. She took part in the creation of the ballet school in Sofia and headed it between 1934–1946⁷.

Olena Krivinska, who also studied at Nijinska's *School of Movement* (1919–1924) and participated in performances of it in Kyiv City Theater, worked later as a choreographer at the Berezil Theater under the direction of Les Kurbas (1924–1928). Due to a disease of her legs she had to abandon ballet. Having the ability to paint, Olena entered the Kiev Art Institute at the Faculty of Theatre. Then she studied in Moscow and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) at the Higher Art and Technical Institute. She became a theater artist and worked in different theaters of the former USSR.

Serge Lifar was brought by B. Nijinska to France to join Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, where he studied with the eminent teacher Enrico Cecchetti and became premier danseur of the company. He created the title roles in several George Balanchine's early ballets, including *The Prodigal Son* by S. Prokofiev, *Apollo* by I. Stravinsky and *La chatte* by H. Sauguet. After Diaghilev's death, in 1929, Lifar joined the Paris Opera Ballet as premier danseur and director and started to stage his own ballets. Lifar raised the professional level of the Paris Opera Ballet and increased the number of ballet performances in the repertoire. He worked as a coach with the Opera dancers and pupils of the Paris Opera School. Lifar reformed the ballet education system, particularly, in addition to the traditional daily class for ballet dancers, he set obligatory duet dance lessons. Lifar gave the company a new strength and purpose, initiating the rebirth of ballet in France. Most of his ballets were considered modern but classical in structure. Lifar introduced many new elements to classical dance; he codified two additional foot positions. The cho-

7 According to Ballet: Encyclopedia (1981): edited by Y. Grigorovich.

reographic style of his productions is neoclassical. Lifar believed that dance was more important than the music and decor in a ballet, and when composing a ballet, choreography is primary.

That conception was demonstrated in his ballet *Icare*, where percussion accompaniment was added after the choreography had been completed. Lifar staged more than 50 works for the the Paris Opera Ballet. The most successful are *Les Créatures de Prométhée* (1929), his personal versions of *Le Spectre de la Rose* (1931), *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1935), the above mentioned *Icare* (1935), *Istar* (1941) and *Suite en Blanc* (1943)⁸.

Even though he spent most of his life in France, Lifar considered himself Ukrainian and dreamed of staging his ballets in his homeland. An interesting fact is that among the productions of Lifar, there is a ballet on the Ukrainian plot *On the Dnieper (Sur le Borysthène)*, which premiered on the stage of the Grand Opera on December 16, 1932.

Only after the death of the great choreographer, when Ukraine gained its independence, were his best ballets *Suite en blanc* by E. Lalo, *Romeo and Juliet* by P. Tchaikovsky and *Aubade* by F. Poulenc staged at the National Opera of Ukraine. The staging of ballets from the creative heritage of S. Lifar was of paramount importance both for the artists of the National Opera and for Ukrainian culture in general.

Suite en Blanc, which is considered Lifar's most perfect ballet, was staged at the National Opera in honor of the 100th anniversary of his birth. «In *Suite en Blanc* I worked on pure dance; my only wish was to create enchanting visions –a picture, in which there would be nothing «complicated», mental. The result was a series of small technical etudes, independent choreographic sketches, combined with a common neo-classical style», –said Lifar [2007]. Compositionally, the performance consists of several independent choreographic forms– variations, adagio, trio. The famous French dancers Christine Vlassi and Gilbert Mayer, who worked with Lifar and participated in the first performances of this ballet, were invited as coaches for the Ukrainian dancers. They worked on the stylistic nuances of the performance. G. Mayer noted as

8 *Suite en Blanc* staged when France was under the occupation of Nazi Germany.

a feature of S. Lifar's choreography a peculiar, inclined position of the ballerina's body in the arabesque pose, «which creates the illusion of an elongated horizontal line of the pose.» «Lifar said that the dancer's body was like a symphony orchestra. Hands - sing, feet - reflect and draw rhythm,»- said G. Mayer in interview [Polishchuk, 2004]. Daily classes given by French teachers during the preparation of the performance, were of great benefit to the Kyiv ballet dancers, as they allowed all of us⁹ to get acquainted with the peculiarities of the French school of classical ballet, revived by Serge Lifar from Kyiv.

The period of the Ukrainian ballet theater' formation coincided with the fiercest battles of the Civil War after the October Revolution of 1917. In January 1919, the Provisional Workers' and Peasants' Government of Ukraine accepted a resolution «On the transfer of all theaters and cinemas to the Department of Education». The Kyiv City Opera was nationalized and renamed the Karl Liebknecht State Opera Theater, the ballet troupe was headed by M. Froman and M. Mordkin. They staged *Giselle* and *Walpurgis Night*, which was no coincidence because Count Albert's part was one of the best in M. Mordkin's repertoire. The artist paid attention to such details as the performance design, costumes, props, stage lighting. For example, he omitted his spectacular variation in the second act, believing that it breaks the general lyrical mood of the «white act».

The duet of M. Mordkin and Margarita Froman in *Giselle* enchanted the Kyiv audience. B. Lvov-Anokhin [1991: 44-47] describes the details of the image of Albert created by M. Mordkin in *Giselle* and the process of working on it. For example, when Mordkin, as Albert, came to Giselle's grave in Act II of the ballet, he wore a long cloak that stretched out behind him. «It's not just a cloak, it's a «requiem», a mourning procession, a rite that takes place in the soul of Albert. A long cloak, which hardly stretch out behind me, or rather, with me, helps to convey my mood to the public».

One of Mordkin's demands for decorators was a huge cross on Giselle's grave. «I need just such a cross,» said the artist, «this is my stage decorative partner, I can't do without it, it must be very large, against its background my figure must seem small, crushed by this cross. You

9 The author of this article participated in that performance.

will say that there can't be such a cross on Giselle's lonely grave, but the theater should not adhere only to plausibility, it needs exaggeration» [Lvov-Anokhin,1991: 44-47].

Mikhail Mordkin appears not only as a dancer, but first as an actor who cares for the performance with its dramaturgy, and not only for his place in it. It was only natural that his creative destiny, as well as in the case of Nijinska's, crossed paths with the prominent Ukrainian drama director L. Kurbas: M. Mordkin worked in the studio of the Molodiy Theater and helped the director in staging plastic scenes in the play «Oedipus Rex».

Stepan Bondarchuk, one of the participants in that historical production, recalls:

Working with Mordkin fascinated for its originality, temperament, and grace of plastic forms. The exercises were not those of a standard classical barre, as we knew it, nor were they ordinary academic dances. Rather, they could be called creative sketches. Mordkin «sang to music» with his beautiful body, and we tried to reproduce it for ourselves. ... These exercises not only gave us physical strength and skills, but also elevated us internally: after executing them, we breathed, felt, and thought more easily [Bondarchuk, 1991:143],

M. Mordkin was also the chief choreographer of the State Ukrainian Musical Drama, the first national opera and ballet theater in the history of Ukrainian culture. Among Mordkin's productions were I. Gutel's ballet *Asiadé*, where L. Kurbas played the role of Sheikh. Unfortunately, because of the fighting of the Civil War, Kyiv was captured, and the theater was destroyed. According to Lifar [2007: 19],

Kyiv has changed owners eighteen times in two years, both red and white. In the summer of 1919, the darkest terror reigned. ... houses were set on fire, hostages were killed, mutilated corpses were thrown on trucks like slaughtered cattle.

But, despite the difficult circumstances, Kyiv lived through a tumultuous creative life. «Culture began to 'purify' the spiritual space from the vein and secondary, although, for the sake of justice, it must be admitted: 'the mass culture' intensified», as Korniienko wrote [1998: 80].

In opera and ballet, the situation was especially difficult. A. Messerer recalls the report of a «comrade» at a meeting of the Council of People's commissars, who said that during this phase, the Bolshoi and Mali Theaters were not needed for the workers' and peasants' republic, because they were presenting the same bourgeois plays and operas, such as *La Traviata*, *Carmen* or *Eugene Onegin* in their repertoire, and that precious fuel should not be thrown into the voracious furnaces of Moscow theaters» [Messerer,1990]. The same discussion arose about the Kyiv Opera. The theatre collective went through difficult times.

The choreographer of the troupe in 1922 was Robert Balanotti, who performed experimental productions of «flying ballet» (*Charms of Dream, A Travel on an Air Ballon*). The effects of flights had been used in performances before, and therefore the stage of the Kyiv Opera had all the necessary technical equipment.

The well-known dancer, premiere of the Lvov Opera O. Stalinsky (mentioned above), described in his memoirs the impression of the performance, which took place on the stage of the Kyiv Opera House in 1913:

Once, our mother took me and my brother to a children's morning show, a so-called «flying ballet». I still remember like now the stage of the Kyiv Opera House, which was filled with charming creatures in short, bouffant colorful skirts and flower shaped hats: roses, tulips, poppies ... And above these fresh flower beds, which constantly changed their figures in the dance, huge butterflies fluttered ... -- also ballet dancers [Stalinsky, 1994].

Anton Romanovsky, Ilya Chistyakov and Mikhail Diskovsky staged their performances. The latter's works were marked by eclecticism, use of acrobatics and rhythmic pantomime elements. The neglect of classical dance was especially evident in the experimental production of *Swan Lake*, which quickly went off the stage. Similar processes took place in Kharkov and Odessa opera houses. There were, on the one hand, many experiments in ballet theatre, both interesting and plainly dilettante, and on the other one -- staging of classical traditional performances.

In contrast to the dramatic theater, where the revolutionary pursuits of directors-experimentalists found widespread support among

the masses, in ballet the audience wanted to see more traditional classical choreography. Ballet troupes began to expand, choreographic studios and private ballet schools became more active, and the first national opera and ballet theater, the State Ukrainian Opera, was established in Kharkov, at that time the capital of Ukraine, by a special decision of April 24, 1925.

Thus, in 1900-1920 in Ukraine the process of the creation of a national ballet theater took place. This process was accompanied by the opening of new ballet schools and studios, improving the performing skills of artists who were able to perform classical works. The theater went through all the stages of experimentation, but eventually returned to the academic classics as a sign of their professionalism. The activities of the outstanding masters of choreography in Ukraine during the period of modernism were not appreciated in the Soviet period, but it was thanks to them that the prerequisites for the development of the Ukrainian national ballet theater were created. During this period, new dance styles germinated in Ukrainian ballet art, which were developed only outside the Soviet Union, such as, for example, in the work of Serge Lifar, whose ballets became available to Ukrainian artists and audiences only after Ukraine gained independence.

The performing skills of Ukrainian ballet dancers, which include technical excellence, and the so-called «school» were organically combined with artistry and expressiveness, intrinsic in the very nature and character of the Ukrainian people. The early twentieth century in Ukraine marked the decisive first steps taken towards the creation of academic ballet. Moreover, the codification of artists' creative experience combined with the experimental research were the necessary preconditions for the formation of stage virtuosity and artistry.

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