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Staging Soviet Ideals: The Birth of Soviet Ballet and its Reception 1927-1932

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Staging Soviet Ideals: The Birth of Soviet Ballet and its Reception 1927-1932

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies & The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Introduction

Reckoning with Ballet's Aristocratic Roots

Ballet was brought to Imperial Russia by Peter the Great in the late seventeenth century as a part of the tsar's effort to westernize Russia. From then on, the monarchy promoted the art form by importing ballet masters from western Europe to organize dance schools in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Catherine II was the first to offer state sponsorship to the ballet when she established the Directorate of the Imperial Theaters in 1766.¹ This encompassed not only ballet but opera and theater as well, and solidified the idea that ballet was truly "a child of aristocratic court culture."² Thanks to the tsars' active funding and support, Russian ballet flourished throughout the nineteenth century, specifically in the two state-sponsored theaters: the Mariinsky in St. Petersburg and the Bolshoi in Moscow. The nineteenth century also saw the rise of great choreographers in Russia, such as Marius Petipa, who produced some of the most famous ballets we have today, including *Don Quixote* (*Don kikhot*, 1869), *La Bayadère* (*Baiaderka*, 1877), and *The Sleeping Beauty* (*Spishchaia krasavitsa*, 1890). His assistant Lev Ivanov went on to produce *The Nutcracker* (*Shelkunchik*, 1892) and *Swan Lake* (*Lebedinoozero*, 1895) with Petipa's help.³

Thanks to these legendary nineteenth century choreographers, by the turn of the century Russian ballet had made a name for itself in the European dance world. This allowed Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, a troupe of Russian émigré dancers and artists, to succeed in Western Europe. Although the original company only existed for twenty years (1909-1929), Diaghilev's Ballets Russes not only reinvigorated ballet in the west but also mapped the trajectory of the art

¹ Jack Anderson, *Ballet and Modern Dance: A Concise History* (Princeton Book Company, 1986), 84.

² Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 2.

³ Anderson, 87-93.

form for the remainder of the twentieth century. Lynn Garafola, a leading scholar on the Ballets Russes, attributes much of their success to the company's ability to realize the Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a synthetic, total work of art, within their productions.⁴

Prior to the inception of his company, Diaghilev worked with many art forms, first intending to be a composer and then moving to the visual arts as a critic and curator. He co-founded the magazine *Mir Iskusstva* (The World of Art, 1898-1904), which sought to bring modern, western art and literature to Russian society, as well as highlighting the accomplishments of Russian art. *Mir Iskusstva* was the leading voice of artistic innovation at the time and Diaghilev attracted several artists, such as Alexandre Benois and Léon Bakst, who later would work with the Ballets Russes. Following the Revolution of 1905, Diaghilev left St. Petersburg for Paris, where he organized exhibitions of Russian visual art, opera, and ballet along with members of the *Mir Iskusstva* group and revolutionary choreographers like Michel Fokine from the St. Petersburg Imperial Ballet.⁵

Thanks to Diaghilev's appreciation and connection to various art forms, Ballets Russes productions showcased intense artistic collaboration between dancers, choreographers, composers, musicians, librettists, and set and costume designers. Garafola notes how "...the Russian artists demonstrated an ability to subordinate personal values and goals for the benefit of a larger whole born of collaboration."⁶ In other words, the group successfully created total works of art because every participant equally contributed their specialized skills for the betterment of the overall production, not in hope of individual fame. This is not to say that nineteenth century ballets did not already incorporate each of these elements, but rather the Ballets Russes were able

⁴ Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*. (Oxford University Press, 1989), xii.

⁵ *Ibid*, x-xi.

⁶ *Ibid*, 47.

to put them together in a more successful, cohesive manner than audiences had previously seen.⁷

This thesis will discuss ballet productions within the Wagnerian theoretical framework of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, to equally analyze every element, which would have been perceived and judged by audiences.

As Diaghilev's company thrived in the west, the fate of ballet in Russia came into question following the October Revolution in 1917, due to its long-standing association with imperial court culture. The dancers themselves were often financially supported by the tsar and his court. Even the act of going to the ballet was reserved for upper classes. Immediately following the revolution, all theaters were nationalized, but it was the Mariinsky, now the State Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet (GATOB), and the Bolshoi which were subsidized and regulated by the government.⁸ The board of directors at both theaters was composed of theater staff and artists, as well as representatives from the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros).⁹

To help the economy recover from the revolution and civil war (1917-1922), Vladimir Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1921-1928), which allowed for private ownership of agriculture and small businesses. In addition to helping the economy recover, NEP also allowed for liberal experimentation within arts and culture. While nationalized artistic institutions, like the state theaters and film industry, did not have much funding in the 1920s, their artists enjoyed unprecedented freedom in their work. Choreographers, librettists, and

⁷ Ibid. See Garafola's explanation of the French critics reacting to the Ballets Russes in comparison to French companies.

⁸ I will now refer to the former Mariinsky as the abbreviation GATOB (*Gosudarstvennyi Akademicheskii Teatr Opery i Baleta*). It was renamed the Kirov in 1935 after Sergei Mironovich Kirov, and once again became the Mariinsky in 1992 after the fall of the Soviet Union. See https://www.mariinsky.ru/en/about/history/mariinsky_theatre/ for more information on the history of the theater.

⁹ Elizabeth Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s*, trans. by Sally Baner (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 10. I will now refer to the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment by its abbreviation Narkompros (*Narodnyi Komissariat Prosveshcheniia RSFSR*).

composers at GATOB and the Bolshoi used this freedom to experiment with the classical traditions still held in their repertoire to justify ballet's existence within the new socialist state.¹⁰

At GATOB, the ballet director Fedor Lopukhov began this work by restaging classical favorites, such as *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Raymonda* (Raymonda), and *The Little Humpbacked Horse* (Konyok-gorbunok), to reanimate works he thought worth saving. While restaging Petipa's old ballets, he chose to incorporate scenes and music that had been cut as early as the original productions. To his dismay, critics and audiences then found the ballets, especially *The Sleeping Beauty*, too long or even boring at certain points.¹¹ He also staged several versions of Fokine's works performed by the Ballet Russes, including *The Firebird* (Zhar-ptitsa) and *Petrushka* (Petrushka). Having only seen these productions a few times, he decided to choreograph his own versions that used Igor Stravinsky's score as a formula for the steps, a choreographic practice Lopukhov developed throughout the 1920s.¹² But by 1924 audiences and critics were itching for new ballets with contemporary themes (revolution and life in the Soviet Union), instead of Lopukhov's revivals. Alexei Gvozdev, a ballet critic at the time, wrote that the goal of the state theaters should be to "respond to modern times" when creating and staging new productions.¹³

Lopukhov took on this challenge with his 1924 production of *The Red Whirlwind* (Krasnyi vikhr). Choreographed and written by Lopukhov himself, *The Red Whirlwind* depicted the October Revolution on the lyric stage for the first time. It pitted sailors, workers, and the red guard against drunkards, hooligans, and plunderers in a dance of "drunken rabble" where the good Soviet citizens won and went about building their new society. To represent these

¹⁰ Ibid, 48.

¹¹ Ibid, 258.

¹² Ibid, 256-267. See Fedor Lopukhov, *Puti baletmeistera*, (Berlin: Petropolis, 1925) for more information on his formulaic choreography.

¹³ Ibid, 278.

contemporary themes, Lopukhov chose to use movements that seemed more athletic than balletic. This choice was heavily criticized by critics who wrote “that the dancing was simplified, reduced to marching around.”¹⁴ The ballet was also criticized for being too formalist, as it had too many abstract ideas that did not translate well into dance, making the revolutionary theme difficult for audiences to interpret. Due to these complaints, it was only performed once. However, it still played a crucial role in early Soviet ballet as it was the first actual attempt at staging contemporary Soviet ideals within a state theater.¹⁵

As the decade continued, new ballets became shorter, one act instead of the traditional three, choreography became more experimental and movement-based rather than theatrical, and librettos became further removed from fairy tale themes. Still, the board of directors at the Bolshoi and GATOB remained insistent on its request for ballets with contemporary themes. *The Red Poppy* (Krasnyi mak, 1927) was an answer to this request as it was ““interesting in terms of content and desirable for production in the Bolshoi theater during the present season.””¹⁶ Broadly speaking, it followed the story of a Soviet ship docking in China and bringing communism to a new land. It also reverted to the classical three act form and incorporated more pantomime and theatricality than other ballets of the period.

The ballet garnered mixed reviews, the negative of which came from militant, proletarian forward critics like Yuri Brodersen, who wrote for the journal *Rabochii i Teatr* (Worker and Theater). Brodersen described *The Red Poppy* as “an example of vulgar adaptability” and a “mechanical transferal of new technique into the sublime framework of courtly spectacle,” which ultimately removed it from the “line of Soviet art.”¹⁷ However, by most critics, audiences, and

¹⁴ Ibid, 280.

¹⁵ Ibid, 282.

¹⁶ Ibid, 232.

¹⁷ Yuri Brodersen, “Legalizatsiia prisposoblenchestva,” *Rabochii i Teatr*; November 6, 1930, n/p. While Brodersen’s “line of Soviet art” was subjective and not defined in his writing, he does use it as a measure to judge *The Red Poppy* and several of the ballets this paper will examine further on.

theater staff, it was considered a success. An article entitled “The Collective Opinion of Fifty Workers on *The Red Poppy*,” which was published in a state academic theater program, endorsed the Soviet theme present in *The Red Poppy*, and claimed that it was a successful Soviet ballet, because the surveyed factory workers had enjoyed the performance. The article ended with the statement: “Trade Unions, buy your theater tickets for *The Red Poppy*.”¹⁸ So, despite several primarily negative reviews, the production was regarded as a successful first attempt at Soviet ballet as demonstrated by its endorsement in a state sponsored publication. *The Red Poppy* would continue to be restaged and edited throughout the twentieth century, returning to the lyric theaters in 1949, 1957, and 2010.

After the partial success of *The Red Poppy*, improved contemporary Soviet ballets were expected to follow. This thesis investigates three ballets which all attempted to fill this void: *The Golden Age* (*Zolotoy vek*, 1930), *The Bolt* (*Bolt*, 1931), and *Flames of Paris* (*Plamya parizha*, 1932). They each premiered between 1930 and 1932, and incorporated revolutionary and/or contemporary themes but were received very differently by audiences and critics alike. The first two ballets discussed, *The Golden Age* and *The Bolt*, were set to music by Dmitri Shostakovich, a young and rather experimental composer at the time. Both feature Soviet subject matter, the former took place at an industrial exhibition and western-style music hall, which as I will demonstrate became problematic for Soviet critics, and the latter, handled the problem of factory sabotage. Both were deemed failures and seen as sad attempts at revolutionizing the ballet by militant, proletarian critics. On the other hand, *Flames of Paris*, with music by Boris Asafiev and choreography by the young Soviet choreographer, Vasily Vainonen, was lauded with praise for being a successful new Soviet ballet. Unlike the contemporary themes Shostakovich’s ballets

¹⁸ Souritz, 250.

included, *Flames of Paris* was based on the storming of the Tuileries palace during the French Revolution.

This thesis seeks to understand why *The Golden Age* and *The Bolt* were remembered as failures, while *Flames of Paris* was not. As they all premiered prior to the implementation of the doctrine of Socialist Realism, which set parameters for all cultural production within the Soviet Union from 1934 onward, they were not judged by a consistent set of ideas. However, they did premiere within the period historian Sheila Fitzpatrick has termed “the proletarian cultural revolution,” a time of class war conducted to proletarianize Soviet culture through the purging of old intelligentsia and the cultural right.¹⁹ The cultural right Fitzpatrick refers to were citizens who held tight to the bourgeois, cosmopolitan culture of tsarist times. This period also coincides with the end of NEP and start of Joseph Stalin’s first five-year plan (1928-1932), which, in addition to the drive to develop industry, saw a push towards cultural conservatism, strict adherence to Marxist-Leninist ideology, and a lower tolerance for experimentation in the arts. As a result of the dramatic turn toward conservative ideology, the press began labeling all cultural production, ballet included, as either Soviet or not and everything deemed not Soviet was denounced.

The purpose of this project is to gauge the critical receptions of the three ballets mentioned above. Examining the ballets as *Gesamtkunstwerk* productions, I argue that their differing receptions were caused by unclear expectations of what Soviet art should look like as critics, censors, and the party formulated the tenets of Socialist Realism. As these guidelines remained ambiguous until 1934, Soviet ballet makers had no choice but to continue experimentation until they found acceptable themes and ultimately a genre of ballet which

¹⁹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Cultural Revolution in Russia 1928-32,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 9, No. 1 (1974): 33–52.

aligned with Socialist Realism while remaining blind to the doctrine's requirements. Brodersen's "line of Soviet art" is a good example of these ambiguous guidelines. The critic clearly had a set of expectations for what Soviet art was, but never enumerated these needs when condemning certain ballets. In some cases, Soviet censors employed by the state theaters agreed to produce shows, only to be condemned by critics for not doing enough to promote the revolution and proletarian class.²⁰ Some ballets ran entire seasons with enthusiastic audiences and were later condemned.²¹ The five-year period this project studies, 1927-1932, was a time of ever-changing political expectations for culture, creating difficult limitations and often very unclear expectations for what Soviet art should have been.

Chapter one provides an overview of the cultural-political environment from the start of NEP in 1921 to the first formal step towards Socialist Realism in the form of the party Decree on the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations (1932). Through an overview of cultural theories held by various communist party members and cultural groups like Proletkult, an abbreviation of Proletarian Culture (*Proletarskaia kul'tura*), and the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM), I explore how these fluctuations impacted ballet at the state lyric theaters and its ultimate purpose as a Soviet art form. This chapter contextualizes the ballet criticism analyzed in the following chapters and explores the extent to which these ideologies were influential in the formation of greater Soviet cultural policy.

Chapter two provides an in-depth analysis of *The Golden Age* and its critical reception in the press to understand why it was deemed a failure and regarded as such in popular memory. Beginning with a close examination of the Leningrad State Theater Directorate's libretto competition's stipulations, this chapter places the ballet in the increasingly culturally

²⁰ Brodersen, n/p.

²¹ A.M. Goltzman, "Sovetskie balety," in *Sovetskii Kompozitori*, Moscow, 1985, n/p.

conservative period of the proletarian cultural revolution. It analyzes a critical review published in *Rabochii i Teatr* to gauge the critics' and state's feelings towards the production. It also looks at private letters and remarks about the ballet written by its makers.

The third chapter analyzes *The Bolt* to understand why, like *The Golden Age*, it was deemed a failed Soviet ballet by the critical press. The chapter uses an advertisement published in *Krasnaya Gazeta* (Red Newspaper) written by the director of the state Leningrad theaters as well as a secondary account of materials included in the performance program to gauge the makers' intentions in creating *The Bolt*. Following this, it analyzes two critical reviews published in *Leningradskaya Pravda* (Leningrad Truth) and *Rabochii i Teatr* to understand why the production was deemed a failure.

Chapter four begins with an explanation of the emerging ballet genre, *drambalet*, and its relationship to Socialist Realist ideology. It provides an analysis of *Flames of Paris*, the third attempt at Soviet ballet this project studies. The chapter uses an advertisement written by the ballet's makers to understand their reasoning for certain artistic choices. Finally, it gauges the success of the performance based on two critical reviews published in *Krasnaya Gazeta* and *Smena* (Shift).

Chapter 1

Cultural-Political Experimentation in the 1920s

Soviet policy makers knew the power that lay in arts and culture. Their biggest challenge was choosing what to do with said power, that is, how to use culture to disseminate ideology in service of the state. Not only were government and party officials concerned with producing Soviet cultural material, but the revolution had paved the way for the proletariat to take part in crafting a new culture themselves. The decade following the revolution saw many groups attempt to define what they thought Soviet culture should become. Experimentation was spearheaded by the government, established artists, and the proletariat alike. However, the freedom of experimentation was constantly in flux, and ceased to exist by the mid 1930s. This chapter provides an overview of the cultural-political environment from the start of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921 to the end of the first five-year plan in 1932. By studying the fluctuation between liberal experimentation and conservatism shown through major cultural-political trends of the period, this chapter contextualizes the production, performance, and reception of *The Golden Age* (Zolotoy vek), *The Bolt* (Bolt), and *Flames of Paris* (Plamya parizha), as experimental steps toward a new Soviet ballet.

In the wake of the revolution, various voices began to share their opinions on socialist culture, resulting in many ideological distinctions between groups. The first division was between the intelligentsia and the Bolshevik party. Within the party opinions were split between old or moderate Bolsheviks, like Anatoly Lunacharsky the head of the People's Commissar for Education (abbreviated as Narkompros), left Bolsheviks, such as members of Proletkult (an abbreviation of *Proletarskaia Kul'tura*), and the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians

(RAPM). Lunacharsky and the old Bolsheviks favored the intelligentsia and the preservation of historical objects, monuments, literature, and art from the tsarist period. On the other hand, the left Bolsheviks believed in militant and forcible politicization of culture in favor of proletarian hegemony.¹ They aimed to radically break from all old cultural practices towards a new proletarian working class aesthetic designed for the masses.

Even within these two Bolshevik standpoints, divisions and groups existed. For example, Leon Trotsky leaned more towards the moderates by suggesting that proletarians learn from bourgeois specialists and utilize their knowledge in service of the revolution. Differing from Lunacharsky, Trotsky claimed, paradoxically, that it was incorrect to compare bourgeois and proletarian art as “the latter will never exist, because the proletarian regime is temporary and transient. The historic significance and the moral grandeur of the proletarian revolution consist in the fact that it is laying the foundations of a culture which is above classes, and which will be the first culture that is truly human.”² Trotsky also coined the term “fellow travelers” to describe cultural producers, mainly writers described in *Literature and Revolution*, who continued working in the Soviet Union and followed the tide of the Revolution without joining the party.³

On the other side of the Bolshevik spectrum, militant groups such as Proletkult and art form specific organizations like RAPM and Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), shared the ideology of the left Bolsheviks. These groups were able to define the communist party's stance on culture in favor of their position and completely against the intelligentsia, causing difficulty for moderates during the mid to late 1920s. As Sheila Fitzpatrick explains, “the militants often appeared to be arguing for ‘Communist’ principles, while the moderates seemed

¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Introduction” in *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) 3. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv3s8p7n.14>.

² Leon Trotsky, “Introduction,” in *Literature and Revolution*. Trans. by Rose Strunsky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968), 14.

³ Ibid, 70.

to be resisting them on grounds of expediency, cost, or more damningly ‘softness’ on the intelligentsia.”⁴ This definition made any old Bolshevik success appear to be a compromise with, or even a failure of, communism on the cultural front.

Similarly, on the intelligentsia side of the debate there were various subgroups, including avant-gardists, Marxists, realists, constructivists, symbolists, traditionalists, preservationists, and “fellow travelers.” Out of these subsections of the intelligentsia, the avant-gardists were most like the left Bolsheviks, as they attempted to assert control over intelligentsia ideology in the early 1920s. However, unlike their counterparts, they were much less successful in exerting influence as the broader intelligentsia was apprehensive of their willingness to impose politics on culture. Ultimately, Fitzpatrick argues, “it was the ‘eternal’ cultural values of the non-avant-gardist mainstream—preservationist, humanist, apolitical, more or less pluralist—that came to be accepted as *the* intelligentsia values.”⁵

Throughout the 1920s, power shifted back and forth between these various factions. Militant Bolsheviks were more successful from 1917-1921, the moderates gained power during NEP from 1921-1928, and gave way to the militants during the cultural revolution in 1928. Militants then held power until 1932, when the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) put forth a Decree on the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations, resulting in the liquidation of all cultural subgroups (RAPP, RAPM, etc.), replaced by the Union of Soviet Writers.⁶ So, how were these ideologies disseminated, and what did organizations actually do in terms of cultural production? How did political and economic policy affect cultural policy?

⁴ Fitzpatrick, 3-4.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party Decree on the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations, 1932” in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*, ed., and trans. John E. Bowlt (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 288-284. Unions for all other Soviet art forms such as visual art, theater, and music were formed following the Union of Soviet Writers’ model.

Proletkult was a key actor in the dissemination of proletarian centered ideology within the arts. Based on pre-revolutionary ideas, Alexander Bogdanov founded Proletkult in 1917. Initially, it was a string of local groups that melded together union club participants, university students, educational circles, and the adult education movement.⁷ After the revolution, Proletkult was financially supported by Narkompros, as the group was seen as a trusted ally of the Soviet regime. A national Proletkult was founded as a division under Narkompros and local groups were given funding and property by the state, as well as a publication *Proletarskaia Kul'tura* (Proletarian Culture). Local divisions quickly multiplied all over the Soviet Union, most often with a goal of educating communities through specifically proletarian literature and guidance put forth by the journal *Proletarskaia Kul'tura*.⁸

Despite the rapid growth of the organization, tensions between Proletkult and their benefactor Narkompros arose as the government solidified. Proletkult sought to operate autonomously or free from state intervention.⁹ This worried both the party and the government, specifically Narkompros, as both feared opposition. The biggest issue between Proletkult and Narkompros was the delegation of roles, especially as their interests often overlapped. It was eventually decided that Narkompros would handle educational development, while Proletkult could oversee cultural production.¹⁰ Still, as historian Lynn Mally correctly notes, “Proletkult would not be just another cultural organization; instead it would be a creative ‘laboratory,’ with all the exclusivity that this implied.”¹¹

⁷ For more information on the pre-revolutionary proletarian art movement see Lynn Mally, “Proletarian Culture and Revolution” in *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia*. Studies on the History of Society and Culture: [9], (University of California Press, 1990), 1-31.

⁸ Ibid, 44-45.

⁹ Proletkult theorists did not equate the party with the state as the state was required to take non-proletarian classes into account, which they saw as antithetical to their purpose of creating a dictatorship of the proletariat.

¹⁰ Mally, 43.

¹¹ Ibid, 59.

Despite this delineation of responsibility, Proletkult members were often confused as to what their purpose as a group was. Mally describes their position as “simultaneously vanguardist and populist, agitational and educational, a continuation of pre-revolutionary trends and an attempt to make something entirely new.”¹² Local centers continued educational work, sometimes educating working class citizens in pre-revolutionary culture and at the same time encouraging new forms of art which broke from pre-revolutionary style. This included the rejection of “museum or easel art” in the visual arts, experimental theater, and experimental music, all of which were intended to be performed and practiced by the proletariat.¹³

Due to the high demand for agitational performances and the fact that most participants, being members of the proletariat, did not have formal artistic education, many worried about the quality of work being produced. On top of these concerns, Proletkult was widely known as being nihilistic to a fault as they sought to destroy traditional culture without solid plans to rebuild. Vladimir Lenin accused the group of aiming to completely replace Russia’s cultural heritage in their effort to craft something Soviet.¹⁴ By the end of the civil war this criticism had accumulated, causing Proletkult to lose most of its power. The introduction of NEP made matters even worse as attention shifted away from the proletariat and artists were able to work independently without maintaining ties to groups.

In response to the difficult living conditions brought on by the civil war and war communism, Lenin introduced the first waves of NEP at the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921.¹⁵ There he proposed a tax on grain rather than nationalizing the entire industry and allowed

¹² Lynn Mally, “Iron Flowers: Proletkult Creation in the Arts” in *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia*. Studies on the History of Society and Culture: [9], (University of California Press, 1990), 124.

¹³ Ibid, 123.

¹⁴ Ibid, 130-153.

¹⁵ War communism refers to the mass nationalization of industry, private enterprise, and grain requisitioning introduced by Lenin to ration supplies for the civil war from 1918-1920. This severe implementation

peasants to freely sell any goods left after taxes in local markets and bazaars. The state aimed to use this time to gather a large amount of manufactured goods, which they could exchange for the peasants' surplus grain. However, as the year went on, the number of private businessmen multiplied, and the government slowly gave up on this goal in official policy. By May 1921, all citizens were permitted to engage in small-scale trade.¹⁶

From August 1921 through 1922 private property ownership, publishing houses, and medical centers, as well as the sale of agricultural tools and equipment, ownership of foreign currency and precious metals, and the right to use credit, savings, and loans were legalized. Due to the lack of resources in the state industrial supply, state factories were allowed to buy and sell on the free market. Bourgeois specialists were allowed to continue working and subsequently train the new generation within their specialization. The state lyric theaters, GATOB and the Bolshoi, had been nationalized in 1917 and remained so despite NEP. However, their nationalization did not leave them untouched by NEP, rather their funding was significantly lowered resulting in a budgetary crisis in the summer of 1921. Staff and artists at the Bolshoi were not paid their salaries and went on strike in response.¹⁷

These financial hardships resulted in the question of whether the Bolshoi, and by association all lyric theaters, should still exist under communism. This question was hotly debated from 1921-1922, first in December 1921 at a public debate held by the Central Theatrical Division where the director of the Bolshoi Elena Malinovskaya described the hardships faced by the theater. At the same time, Lunacharsky was also pushing for support of the theaters by describing their value as cultural centers. He reminded VTsIK of the financial

of communism left citizens and soldiers alike malnourished and lacking other vital goods. While private trade was technically banned, most people, especially those in urban centers, relied on private networks to obtain food.

¹⁶ Alan Ball, *Russia's Last Capitalists: The Nepmen, 1921-1929*. 1st paperback [ed.]. (University of California Press, 1990) 1-20.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s*, Trans. by Sally Baner (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 45-46.

burden closing the theaters would be, as artists and staff would need to be paid severance and the buildings themselves would need to be guarded. These financial statements were even published in the 1922 eighth edition of the *Ezhenedelnik Petrogradskikh Gosudarstvennykh Akademicheskikh Teatrov* (Weekly Publication of the Petrograd State Academic Theaters) to demonstrate to the public that the theaters should remain open.¹⁸

By fall of 1922, the Politburo (Party Central Committee) resolved to drastically reduce funding to all state theaters and still existing Proletkult theaters. By November 1922, both the Bolshoi and GATOB were given notice of these cuts and told that funding would gradually decrease each year, eventually resulting in a necessary closure of both theaters. However, in December 1922 the management of the state theaters put forth a statement detailing their intentions to continue the work of the theaters despite the significant financial setbacks. Through reducing production costs, raising ticket prices, and cutting repair costs the theaters were able to stay afloat. At the same time, critics were pushing for new ballets that did not linger on old aristocratic themes. This criticism and lack of funding culminated in the declaration “Goals and Objectives of the State Academic Ballet,” published in the November 1922 *Ezhenedelnik*, stating that the ballet needed to continue its natural evolution to meet the needs of contemporary (Soviet) art.¹⁹

As the theaters ensured their survival in the Soviet state, the economy was continuing to grow thanks to NEP. Subsequently, so did the population of Nepmen (businessmen and entrepreneurs who benefited from NEP), and staunch communists began to worry whether the revolution would ever be fully realized.²⁰ Lenin’s ambiguous remarks concerning the duration of

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 47-50.

²⁰ The term Nepman often carried a negative connotation as Nepmen were seen as antithetical to communism and sympathetic with the west.

NEP did not offer much solace. By March 1923, in an effort to control the Nepmen, Sovnarkom (Council of People's Commissars) and VTsIK issued a decree requiring all private businessmen to register with the government. The businesses were then screened and those found to violate NEP rules were rejected. At the same time the state regained control of foreign trade, and the film industry was nationalized.²¹

The State Press's Music Section (*Muzykalnyi sektor gosizdata*), another nationalized industry, had created an Agitational Department (Agitotdel) in 1922 with the explicit goal of satisfying demands for mass and proletarian music. The department worked to make connections with amateur musicians and music educators and help connect them to suitable (proletarian centered) composers and repertoire. To aid this process and create a community of composers, musicians, critics, and educators sympathetic to Agitotdel's cause, three Agitotdel employees, Lev Shulgin, David Chernomordikov, and Aleksei Sergeev, formed RAPM in 1923.²²

However, once the group began publishing in their state sponsored journal, *Muzikalnaia Nov* (*Musical Newness/Novelty*), they were criticized for publishing too many ideological rather than educational articles. This led Shulgin and Sergeev to leave RAPM and found the Association of Revolutionary Composers and Musical Activists (ORKiMD) with the same original intentions which RAPM was founded.²³ Most former RAPM members followed Shulgin and Sergeev or joined the Association of Contemporary Music (ASM), which posed as RAPM and ORKiMD's rival as it aimed to connect Soviet musicians to contemporary western music.²⁴ After the split, RAPM lost most of its power and ASM was favored throughout NEP as the period saw friendlier attitudes towards the west. However, ASM's power, which relied on the

²¹ Ball, 28-29.

²² Neil Edmunds, "Music and Politics: The Case of the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 78, no. 1 (2000): 67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4213008>.

²³ Ibid, 67-68.

²⁴ ASM would eventually change to VOSM (All-Russian Association of Contemporary Musicians) in 1928 to appear more patriotic. See Edmunds, 69.

strength of NEP, did not last long as the government continuously struggled to procure adequate amounts of grain to feed its population, one of the main problems NEP aimed to remedy. By 1928 these shortages had become so dire that a drastic change in economic policy was required, resulting in the implementation of Joseph Stalin's first five-year plan. Just as ASM's strength had been tied to NEP, the massive shift in economic policy altered the course of cultural policy as well.

Stalin's first five-year plan (1928-1932) implemented mass agricultural collectivization through the formation of the *kolkhoz* (collective farm), the destruction of the *kulak* class (wealthy, landowning peasants), and the rapid nationalization of all industry. Following an order to forcibly requisition grain in the Shakhty region of the Donbas, allegations of industrial sabotage at a local factory emerged. Workers were fed up with the NEP era reliance on bourgeois skilled engineers who remained in charge of industry. From the factory, the sentiment bled into arts and culture. A conservative, anti-intelligentsia wave, led to a resurgence of class warfare, such as the social purging of schools where children of non-proletarian parents were expelled due to their class, and the condoned harassment of bourgeois intellectuals, all resulted in what Fitzpatrick has termed the "proletarian cultural revolution." To its leaders, the revolution was seen as a "proletarian seizure of power on the cultural front."²⁵

Who exactly were the cultural revolutionaries? Proponents of proletarian culture included the Bolshevik left within the party, as well as lower-ranked authorities such as the agitprop department of VTsIK, the Komsomol and local party activists, Proletkult, RAPP, and RAPM. Although RAPP, RAPM, and Proletkult had made concerted efforts to establish proletarian cultural dominance during NEP, the campaign against old Bolsheviks and the intelligentsia

²⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Cultural Revolution in Russia 1928-32." *Journal of Contemporary History* 9, no. 1 (1974): 33-52.

spearheaded by the first five-year plan, finally allowed for proletarian centered groups and institutions to thrive.

Fitzpatrick notes that, while Stalin was a proponent of proletarian dominance during the first five-year plan, it was only to weed out the opposing force of old or right-wing Bolsheviks in the party. Still, as she explains, “in [those] four years the proletarian organizations exercised great administrative and coercive power; every kind of harassment of bourgeois intellectuals, non-party specialists and Soviet bureaucrats was encouraged; and discrimination on grounds of social origin as well as party status universally practiced.”²⁶

It was during this period that RAPM regained dominance in the musical field. Western, and by association, intelligentsia supporters, like ASM/VOSM were no longer tolerated, causing the group to disband in 1931. Two years prior, RAPM had gained a slew of new members from the Productive Collective (Prokoll) a group of conservatory composition students who shared RAPM’s beliefs. This gave RAPM more power than ORKiMD, causing the latter to disband and cease publication of its journal *Muzyka i Revolutsia* (Music and Revolution). The dissolution of these two groups gave RAPM power within the field of music, which it consolidated through two state sponsored journals: *Proletarskii Muzykant* (Proletarian Musician) and *Za Proletarskuyu Muzyku* (Towards Proletarian Music).²⁷ Between 1929 and 1932, 70 issues of these journals were published, local branches were established in Moscow, Leningrad, Kyiv, and Tbilisi, RAPM groups appeared in conservatories, radio stations, theaters, and the State Music Press (*Muzgiz*), and the organization held two conferences in 1931. Because of RAPM’s wide reach over the

²⁶ Ibid, 37.

²⁷ Glaviskusstvo (Central Arts Committee) financially supported RAPM, giving the group an office space, funding for two staff, and funding for their journals. See Amy Nelson, “The Struggle for Proletarian Music: RAPM and the Cultural Revolution.” *Slavic Review* 59, no. 1 (2000): 110-111. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2696906>.

music sphere, it is safe to say that RAPM held great power over the state music industry from 1929-1932.²⁸

Since its establishment, RAPM had published three manifestos, the first in 1923, then 1926, and finally, its most influential in 1929. The 1929 manifesto clearly delineated the group's stance on contemporary music, which they divided into two groups: "on the one hand the music of the toilers, the exploited and the oppressed classes; ... on the other hand, feudal, bourgeois music."²⁹ Bourgeois music was described as "virtually the entire bulk of written cultured music," while the title of proletarian music was reserved for "folk music." Still, folk music was tainted by "urban romances, gypsy music, sacred songs, certain so-called 'patriotic songs' and jazz."³⁰

Despite the name, gypsy music (*tsyganshchina*) often did not mention and was not written by gypsies themselves. Instead, the term, dated back to the end of the eighteenth century to describe non-narrative music dealing with the "pain of love," which sometimes referenced gypsies.³¹ The genre was quite popular in early twentieth century Russian music halls, which only added to the disdain held by RAPM members. The manifesto's condemnation of jazz also included popular jazz dances such as the foxtrot and charleston. Lev Lebedinsky, a Proletkult and RAPM musicologist, justified the group's reasoning against jazz as "the American dance music comes to us from a country where slavery was, and still is, widely practiced, with all the spiritual degradation that goes with it..."³² They were also opposed to any music extolling "'decadent moods' [that] resulted in an over-emphasis on the 'sensual and pathologically erotic, the exotic, the barbaric, the mystic, and the naturalistic.'"³³

²⁸ Edmunds, 73.

²⁹ Ibid, 74.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, 75-76.

³³ Ibid.

While RAPM was clear in describing what they did *not* want to hear, their only main suggestion on what kind of music one should produce was mass song, or songs designed to educate and agitate the masses in the spirit of revolution. RAPM cited the French Revolution and the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 as historical examples of mass song energizing the proletariat. The group also saw the genre as the foundation for future, large-scale symphonies that would use stylistic features such as “basic language,” and “a march with an irregular meter.”³⁴

While RAPM would be disbanded along with all other proletarian cultural groups in 1932 by the Decree on the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations, the group’s influence was surely made known in its heyday. The following two chapters analyze critiques that condemned *The Golden Age* and *The Bolt* for their use of music and dance styles not belonging to RAPM or proletarian sanctioned repertoire. While neither critique was published in one of RAPM’s journals, the language employed by the authors and general disdain for bourgeois elements of the ballets reflect the attitudes put forth in RAPM’s 1929 manifesto as well as the larger cultural-political turn taken in 1928 at the start of the proletarian cultural revolution.

As mentioned earlier, the 1932 Decree on the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations and subsequent inauguration of the Union of Soviet Writers, was the first formal indication of the onset of Socialist Realism, the cultural policy which succeeded the proletarian cultural revolution, at the first All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. At the congress, the secretary of the Communist Party Andrei Zhdanov stated that literature and art “must depict reality in its revolutionary development” while “...truth and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction must be combined with the task of the ideological transformation and education of the

³⁴ Ibid, 79.

working people in the spirit of Socialism.”³⁵ Despite the name, Socialist Realism was classified as idealized realistic depictions of life that celebrated the victory of the proletariat, and the utopia the Soviet Union was intent on becoming. Although Socialist Realism was not officially in effect until 1934, the years prior saw a major push towards idealized realism which valorized the revolution in arts and culture. The ballets and criticism analyzed in the following chapters found themselves in a complicated limbo between the militant proletarian hegemony indicative of the cultural revolution and the onset of Socialist Realism.

³⁵ “Contributions to the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers [*Extracts*], 1934 in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*, ed. and trans. John E. Bowlit (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 291-296.

Chapter 2

The Fate of *The Golden Age*

By the end of the 1920s, *The Red Poppy* (Krasnyi mak) was still the most successful attempt at Soviet ballet in either state academic theater's repertoire. In response to the lack of acceptable ideological productions, a writing competition for a new Soviet libretto was announced by the Leningrad State Theater Directorate in the Leningrad-based magazine *Zhizn' iskusstva* (Life of Art, 1922-1929).¹ The first prize of 300 rubles and ultimate production of the ballet at GATOB went to the well-known film director Alexander Viktorovich Ivanovsky's *The Golden Age* (Zolotoy vek). Fedor Lopukhov, the director of GATOB, assigned the choreography to three young ballet masters: Vasily Vainonen would choreograph the first and third acts, Leonid Jacobson the second, and Vasily Chesnakov the final dance of the second act. Emmanuel Kaplan was assigned to direct the production. Valentina Khodasevich would design the set and costumes. And finally, the ballet would be set to music by the up-and-coming composer Dmitri Shostakovich, making *The Golden Age* the first of his three balletic scores.

Despite the makers' goal of creating a Soviet ballet and their strict adherence to the state sponsored libretto competition's parameters, *The Golden Age* was harshly condemned in the critical press and deemed a failed, opportunistic, attempt at Soviet ballet. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of *The Golden Age* and its critical reception to understand why it was unsuccessful and recorded as such in popular memory. Could it have been a partial success like *The Red Poppy*, or was that not an option in the increasingly conservative climate of the proletarian cultural revolution? Why, despite its nineteen performances from 1930-1931 in Leningrad, Kyiv, and Odessa, was *The Golden Age* deemed a failure?

¹ *Zhizn' iskusstva*, "Usloviia konkursa na libretto sovetskogo baleta," January 6, 1929, n/p.

On the third page of the January 6, 1929 issue of *Zhizn' iskusstva*, the Leningrad State Theater Directorate announced the stipulations for a libretto competition. The winning libretto would be the basis for a new Soviet ballet produced at GATOB. From 1918-1922 *Zhizn' iskusstva* was published as a daily theatrical newspaper with small sections devoted to theatrical music. In 1923 it became a magazine with weekly publications, and in 1930 it was reorganized into the journal *Rabochii i Teatr*. While the journal had no outward affiliation with Proletkult, RAPM, or RAPP, the ideology of the proletarian cultural revolution was widespread by 1930, meaning that most critics writing for *Rabochii i Teatr* and similar publications would have written with a bias towards militant, proletarian hegemony. As the libretto competition was written by the Leningrad State Theater Directorate, a nationalized institution, its stipulations give insight into what the state constituted Soviet art and requested of the ballet theater.

The libretto competition announcement included eight detailed requirements for what the libretto should and should not include, as well as a brief explanation as to why the competition was being held. The announcement began with the following statement:

“Choreography, which until recently, has been a courtly-aristocratic art form, now must become – through themes and formally – Soviet art...The contemporary ballet libretto – is not only a chance framework to showcase dance, not connected together, and not in a logical sequence from the main action – but a choreographic drama, obliged to satisfy all the requirements for Soviet dramaturgy, in general.”²

The Directorate stated that the first step in creating a Soviet ballet was to write a Soviet libretto, hence the competition.

The first requirement was a revolutionary theme, preferably something about the civil war or “construction,” referring to the building of the Soviet Union following the October

² Ibid.

Revolution. The announcement suggested the libretto include urban and everyday themes, as well as ethnographic material from the republics of the Soviet Union. It also suggested the use of science fiction, but “categorically [rejected] any use of mystical themes.”³ This was a direct distinction between pre-revolutionary ballets and the desired contemporary ballet, as most old ballets included some form of mysticism to further the plot.

In addition, the libretto needed to be based on a “concrete perception of reality, and not built on abstract dance form with symbolic or allegorical themes.”⁴ This section directly references the “tornado” in the first act of Lopukhov’s *The Red Whirlwind* (*Krasnyi vikhr*). As previously mentioned, Lopukhov’s ballet was heavily criticized in the press for its abundance of symbolic, and therefore, unclear images, which the board of directors clearly wished to avoid moving forward.⁵ The third point called for scenes of mass movement, such as “gatherings, demonstrations, fighting, large crowds at train stations, and street scenes.”⁶ Next, it once again emphasized the need for a simple storyline that could be understood by working class audiences through only balletic movement and pantomime, not explanatory text, or speech.

The announcement also reminded the librettist to make use of all modern dance techniques and theater technology, especially set changes, radio, television, and film when constructing the storyline. The sixth point suggested several themes the librettist could choose from but was not technically required to portray. These included a “Soviet review, a lyric-heroic poem, a choreographic comedy and satire, and a contemporary extravaganza.”⁷ The librettist was suggested to use new dance forms like acrobatics, sports, and pantomime. It also stated that the scenario must give the choreographer material in which pantomime could easily be inserted,

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Elizabeth Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s*, Trans. by Sally Banes (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 282.

⁶ *Zhizn iskusstva*, “Usloviia konkursa...”

⁷ Ibid.

echoing the second and fourth points. Finally, the last stipulation required the entire production to last 2-3 hours, a full evening performance. This was in direct contrast to the shorter, one act ballets produced both at Soviet theaters and abroad by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in the 1920s.

The competition included prizes of 300, 200, or 100 rubles to be awarded to the first, second, and third place winners, as well as the address to submit the libretto. In her paper on Leonid Jacobson's choreography for *The Golden Age*, ballet historian Janice Ross discusses the libretto competition at length. Ross first notes that the prize of 300 rubles was approximately the annual income for the average worker in 1929, emphasizing the importance of this endeavor to the Leningrad State Theater Directorate. She also reminds us that although the competition seemed quite democratic, the sheer number of librettists in Leningrad was so small that the winner could only come from a specific set of working artists.⁸

Still, the publication of the libretto competition in a popular journal demonstrated the ballet theater's dire need for successfully Soviet ballets. The Leningrad State Theater Directorate would have been aware of the small pool of contestants, meaning they most likely saw this as a chance to explicitly state to both artists and the public what was required of Soviet ballet. The announcement gave clear guidelines, something which had been missing earlier in the decade, presaging the prescriptive nature of the Doctrine of Socialist Realism.

The winning libretto was written by the Leningrad based film and musical theater director Alexander Ivanovsky, who at the time was working for the state-run film industry.⁹ Ivanovsky's libretto followed the competition regulations extremely closely, resulting in an over-the-top portrayal of Soviet life and culture. The ballet was three acts long and took place in

⁸ Janice Ross, "Aestheticizing Sport: Leonid Yakobson's Muscular Choreography and the 'Golden Age,'" in *Russian Movement Culture of the 1920s and 1930s: A Symposium Organized by Lynn Garafola and Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, February 12-14, 2015*, (Harriman Institute: Columbia University), 47.

⁹ Ibid, 48.

a large capitalist city, meant to be an amalgamation of the west, during an industrial exhibition called “The Golden Age.” The main characters include: the director of the industrial exhibition, Diva a dancer and fascist, her partner named Fascist, a chief of police, four secretaries who double as detectives, the captain of a Soviet soccer team who is also a factory worker, a Soviet Komsomol woman (the Komsomol was the Youth Division of the Communist Party), a Western European Komsomol woman, a white boxer, a black boxer, and lastly several referees and trade representatives.

Diva, her partner Fascist, the chief of police, and his detectives are all called fascists throughout the libretto. At least one character, as seen through the costumes photographed in the Mariinsky Theater Archives, displayed a swastika on his jacket. Although Hitler and the Nazi party had not yet come to power, fascism was on the rise in western Europe following the First World War. As all non-Soviet characters in *The Golden Age* were described as fascists, I argue that the term was used as a catch-all for western, capitalist, bourgeois characters, whom the Soviets wished to condemn.

The curtain opens on a mass procession of honorable guests attending the industrial exhibition including a group of fascists who make a grand entrance and a Soviet soccer team, who by contrast enter quietly. Onlookers are inspecting the exhibition when suddenly the referee for a boxing match makes himself known. A fight between a white boxer (also referred to as a fascist) and a black boxer takes place. The white boxer makes an unfair blow, and the referee lets him win causing the onlookers to jeer at and assault the referee. The young Soviet Komsomol woman enters the stage and slaps the referee, ending the first scene.

The second scene of the first act takes place in a cabaret within the exhibition. Fascist youth are dancing with the director of the exhibition, the chief of police, and several secretaries,

all of whom are awaiting Diva's entrance as they want to see her dance. She arrives and performs a long *adagio* for her enthusiastic fans. The Soviet soccer team then enters the dance hall and Diva is attracted to the captain. Diva asks her partner, the Fascist, if she may dance with the soccer captain, he refuses, and the two dance a *pas de deux*, symbolizing their love. Several dances take place including a *pas de trois* with the black boxer and two Soviet soccer players to symbolize comradeship. Following this, Diva tries to get the captain of the soccer team to drink a toast to fascism, which he refuses. The other fascists in the dance hall are enraged and ready to attack, when suddenly he raises his soccer ball above his head. The onlookers think he has a bomb and quickly retreat allowing the team to leave. When they realize their mistake, the dance hall goes back to normal, and the patrons perform a foxtrot.

The second act opens on a street in the capitalist city where the black boxer, Soviet soccer captain, and Soviet Komsomol woman are sightseeing. The chief of police and several detectives arrest the group; however, the black boxer and the Komsomol woman escape. The second scene in act two flips to a workers' stadium where the workers and soccer players are playing many different sports. There is a montage of different sports including boxing, discus-throwing, tennis, fencing, and basketball, followed by a soccer game played by the Soviet team. Two films are shown in the stadium: the first entitled "Everyone to his own pleasure" which shows fascists playing card games, gambling, and "developing evil instincts."¹⁰ The second film shows the black boxer and the Komsomol woman running from the police towards the stadium.¹¹ This

¹⁰ Cyril Beaumont, "The Golden Age," in *Complete Book of Ballets: A Guide to the Principal Ballets of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (G. P. Putnam's Sons: New York, 1938), 842. The games the fascists are shown playing are not specified but based on the language Beaumont uses to describe them, "playing for high stakes," I infer that they are shown gambling in the first film.

¹¹ Beaumont's libretto synopsis is the only source I have found which explains the entire libretto with attention to detail. I have not found any other sources which mention the inclusion of the two films. Despite this, we do know this technology was available as the libretto competition suggested the use of all modern technologies available to the theater, including film. Most likely, the films were shown on the backdrop of the set from a projector placed in the audience.

blends with the onstage action and the workers' stadium bands together in a "Red Front" to stop the police chase.¹²

The third act opens back on to the music hall within the exhibition, where several dances are shown, including a tap dance, a polka, and a can-can. There is also a "Dance of Reconciliation of all Classes" between Diva and her partner who has disguised himself as the Soviet football captain. After their dance, the Soviet Komsomol woman reveals the Fascist's disguise and the bourgeois public fly into a panic. Once the panic dies down, there is a final dance of cooperation between the Soviet soccer team and the western European workers, symbolizing the joy of labor.¹³

While there is no record of the second or third place winners of the libretto competition, it is clear why Ivanovsky's contribution won the first prize. His work fulfilled each of the requirements as well as several suggestions laid out in the announcement. First, the ballet took place in an industrial city, giving it an urban setting. It strayed away from abstract themes that could not clearly be told through pantomime. It included demonstrations, processions, fighting, and street scenes, all of which the third point suggested. It also incorporated several films, which made use of the modern technical abilities of the theater. Almost the entire second act was a sports scene highlighting new forms of dance. And finally, it was a full-length, three act ballet which fulfilled the announcement's eighth requirement.

The Golden Age premiered Sunday, October 26, 1930, to an enthusiastic audience at GATOB. According to the Mariinsky Theater's Shostakovich archives, audiences overwhelmingly enjoyed the production, and it was even presented at a ceremonial meeting of

¹² The "Red Front" refers to the German *Rotfront* symbol of a raised fist. This was used to signal solidarity and membership within the *Roter Frontkämpferbund* (RFB), a paramilitary organization affiliated with the Weimar Republic era German Communist League.

¹³ Beaumont, 840-843.

Leningrad Soviets the following month.¹⁴ However, less than two weeks after the original premier, a condemning critique was published in *Rabochii i Teatr*, formerly *Zhizn Iskusstva*, the publication in which the libretto competition was announced. Yuri Brodersen, a Soviet ballet critic and former secretary for the publication, entitled his critique “Legalizing Opportunism” (*Legalizatsiia Prispoblenchestva*), in which he harshly criticized almost every aspect of the ballet.

Brodersen began by discussing the failures of *The Red Poppy* and the most recent version of *The Nutcracker* (Shelkunchik, 1919). He addressed both the popular success and critical failings of *The Red Poppy* by stating that it “was praised by reactionary critics and compared to the Mecca of Soviet ballet, but it turned out to be full of sticky eclecticism which removed it too far from the line of soviet art.”¹⁵ By “reactionary critics,” Brodersen is likely referring to the defenders of bourgeois culture. On *The Nutcracker*, he attacked its unsuccessful attempt at incorporating new forms of dance into classical ballet, making it present too formalist, and too close to the “western music-hall.”¹⁶ The music-hall can be compared to North American vaudeville, encompassing dance, song, comedy, specialty acts, and variety entertainment. For the Soviet critics and censors, a comparison to music-hall culture was a death-knell, as it was a clear emblem of the western culture they so adamantly avoided.

Building off his critiques of *The Red Poppy* and *The Nutcracker*, Brodersen accused *The Golden Age* of making the same mistakes and straying from the “line of Soviet art.” According to the critique, the inclusion of music-hall was to blame more than anything else. Throughout the

¹⁴ Olga Makarova, “Shostakovich v Mariinskom: Zolotoy vek, 1930,” Mariinsky Theater, https://www.mariinsky.ru/about/exhibitions/shostakovich111/golden_age1930/ accessed November 4, 2022.

¹⁵ Yuri Brodersen, “Legalizatsiia prispoblenchestva,” *Rabochii i Teatr*; November 6, 1930, n/p.

¹⁶ Ibid.

article, the critic never outwardly defined the “line of Soviet art,” but rather drew a picture of what this line was by condemning and praising certain components of the ballet.

Following the initial condemnation, Brodersen questioned why and how the censors (the Artistic Political Council, *Khudpolitsovet*) could have allowed so many “elements of bourgeois art” to be presented on the Soviet stage. The article included a quote from the censors stating that: “‘*The Golden Age* in form – is not a Soviet production, simply a modern one, that uses elements of western bourgeois culture. However, the Artistic Political Council accepted the libretto, and considered work on it as it serves as a transitional stage to Soviet ballet.’”¹⁷ In this context, “transitional” refers to the use of “elements of bourgeois art” to condemn the west and compare it to Soviet triumphs on stage. Brodersen directly attacked the censors’ justification by claiming that it was too far past the Revolution for “transitional” performances to still take place. The article implied that any presentation of western culture would automatically make a ballet non-Soviet.¹⁸

By establishing that *The Golden Age* was not, as it strived to be, a Soviet ballet, Brodersen condemned the libretto as whole. After this, the critique was broken up into sections, describing the faults made by each choreographer within their respective act(s), and finally discussing the shortcomings of the set and costume design. The following section of this chapter will follow this sequence, to understand what role the critique played in the popular memory of the ballet.

On the choreographers, Brodersen praised GATOB for exclusively using young ballet masters and incorporating a director for the first time, claiming that “despite the overall failure of

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The censors’ statement is quoted in “Legalizing Opportunism” and cannot be found in prior documentation, making us assume it was released before Brodersen’s condemnation. However, the libretto competition for *The Golden Age* explicitly stated that this would be a Soviet ballet and should include themes of the socialist society’s construction. Possibly, the censors realized during the staging of the production that critics would not allow this, causing them to release this statement to protect their validity.

The Golden Age, its principle worth and these new innovations cannot be argued.”¹⁹ Not only was the critic referring to the makers of the ballet, but also the inclusion of young dancers from the Leningrad Choreographic School in several scenes, especially Jacobson’s second act sports dances. However, this praise did not last for long.

Brodersen called Vasily Vainonen’s first and third acts “the most perverse acts in their essence.” His main criticism of Vainonen was that his dances did not follow a clear motif, relied too heavily on dance form which made the storytelling hard to follow, and were generally not innovative. According to the critic, Vainonen implemented many “western” dance forms, such as the foxtrot, waltz, and can-can. To portray Soviet soccer players, he used stereotypical “Russian folk-dance” (*prisyadka*), rather than creating new movement. The choreographer’s portrayal of Diva was too “erotic,” although Brodersen did not cite a specific dance to blame and later praised her variations. My analysis of her costume will give more insight into this attack, possibly taking some of the blame away from Vainonen’s choreography.

For Vainonen, Brodersen’s worst criticism was of the final “Dance of Reconciliation of all Classes” because there was “...no logical motif. It is not connected to the main theme and this dance looks like a strange mixture of the Polovtsian dances and Walpurgis Night.”²⁰ What’s good for Prince Igor and Faust is not good for the workers’ consolidation. Overall, it must be said that Vainonen is susceptible to over-formalization. His stagings do not have thematic justification and are divorced from the content.”²¹ Brodersen recognized the difficulty in choreographing from

¹⁹ Brodersen, n/p.

²⁰ The reference to the Polovtsian dances comes from the opera *Prince Igor* (*Knyaz Igor*, 1890) by Alexander Borodin. The dance is intended to look exotic. Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes premiered the second act of the opera, which they called *Polovtsian Scenes and Dances*, on May 18, 1909, at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. This performance included a full orchestra and choir and popularized the dances. In later seasons the piece was presented as simply *The Polovtsian Dances*, without singers. See Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*, (Oxford University Press, 1989), 384. The reference to Walpurgis Night refers to the Feast of Saint Walpurga, a Christian holiday which celebrates the canonization of Saint Walpurga. Traditional celebrations include lighting bonfires to ward off witchcraft. Brodersen’s comparison means the dances invoked a wild feeling.

²¹ Brodersen, n/p.

such an unclear libretto, but still pinned this problem on Vainonen, as it was his responsibility to make the storyline understandable for audiences.

Despite these choreographic shortcomings, he was praised for several dances including the tap dance (which is still criticized for being too long), the *pas de trois* between the black boxer and Soviet soccer players, the boxing match, and all of Diva's variations. Brodersen ended his section on Vainonen with the following statement: "Having overcome his own formalist sins and after supplying the dance with socially meaningful content, Vainonen may actually appear to be a useful choreographer for the ballet theater. But in order to get there it is absolutely necessary to break away with the old traditions of ballet performance."²² This statement proved to be true as Vainonen's later work *Flames of Paris*, discussed in chapter four, was an overall success.

Like Vainonen, Leonid Jacobson, the choreographer of the second act, was criticized for "nurturing subjectless dance," referring to his reliance on dance form rather than pantomime or some clearer expression of the theme.²³ However, he was highly praised for his depiction of physical culture on the dance stage. Brodersen wrote, "the most successful of the dances that Jacobson choreographed was the sporting quintet, in which he implemented in a very interesting way, new devices that come from physical culture. This number is fresh and technically sophisticated."²⁴ Historian Janice Ross cites Natalia Sheremetyevskaya's experience as a young dancer working with Jacobson on *The Golden Age*. The dancer recalled pain-staking rehearsals in which Jacobson worked hard to accurately portray various athletes and sports simultaneously.²⁵ Brodersen's relatively positive review of the second act showed the success of these rehearsals.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ross, 50.

The final choreographer, Vasily Chesnakov, was not afforded the same praise as Jacobson. Chesnakov choreographed the final dance of the second act in which the “Red Front” stops the police from chasing after the black boxer and Soviet Komsomol woman. Brodersen did not say much on this dance, or its choreographer except that, “[Chesnakov] is incapable of managing the masses, creating an obvious compilation of formations.”²⁶ This dance took place in the worker’s stadium and almost the entire cast was involved, requiring a choreographer who could handle that many bodies on stage. To Brodersen, Chesnakov was not the correct choice. However, the critic did add that “it may be too early to judge him based on one dance,” referring to his future at the state theater.²⁷

After Chesnakov, the critic turned to the director Emmanuel Kaplan. Possibly because Vainonen, Jacobson, and Chesnakov were all young and fairly inexperienced, Kaplan, the director of the opera, was asked to oversee the whole production. This production of *The Golden Age* was the first instance in which a director was used in a ballet production at GATOB.²⁸ According to the critique, Kaplan was most to blame for the disconnect between the libretto and choreography. “It seemed that the director was expected to do more. He had to destroy from within the stale and aestheticized nature of imperial ballet theater. And Kaplan didn’t quite manage to attain this objective.”²⁹ This would be a challenging task for a ballet itself to fulfill, let alone a single director. Still, it seems that to Brodersen, Kaplan could have done more to move ballet towards the “Soviet line of art.”

After completing the critique of the choreography and staging of *The Golden Age*, the article moved to Valentina Khodasevich’s costume and set design. Khodasevich’s designs, which

²⁶ Brodersen, n/p.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ This practice would continue in all following stagings of new ballets at the theater.

²⁹ Brodersen, n/p.

the Mariinsky Theater archives have several images of, were visual manifestations of the characters' titles. For example, Figure 2.1 depicts one of Diva's costumes, a two-piece set made of western flags including the United States, France, and Italy. This costume, along with a flapper-esque dress seen in Figure 2.2, possibly led to her characterization as "erotic." These costumes were a clear step away from the traditional Romantic long skirts or platter tutus worn by female dancers. Diva's male counterparts, the fascists, are characterized by their suits, top hat, and even a swastika shown in Figure 2.2.

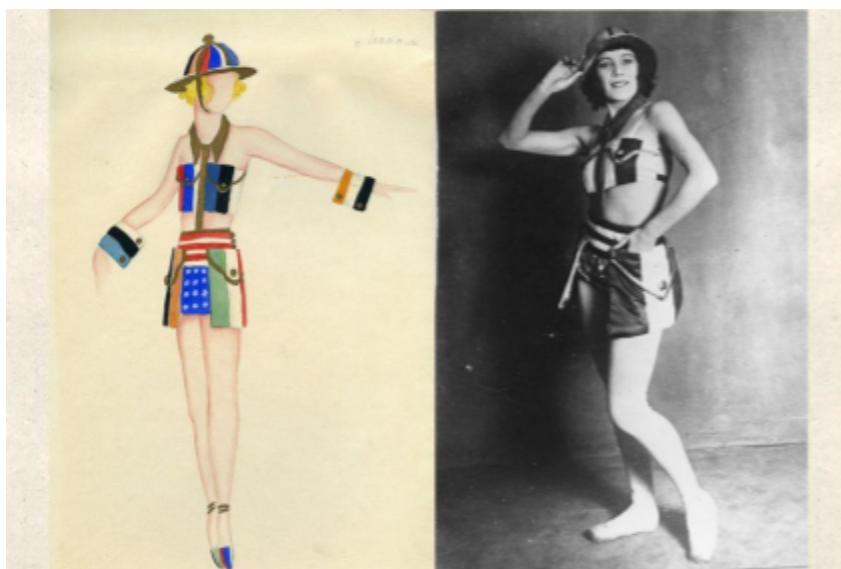


Figure 2.1 Left: Valentina Khodasevich's sketch of Diva's costume. Right: Olga Jordan as Diva wearing the same costume. Published in: Olga Makarova, Shostakovich at the Mariinsky: The Golden Age, 1930. Mariinsky Theater, https://www.mariinsky.ru/about/exhibitions/shostakovich111/golden_age1930/, accessed November 4, 2022.



Figure 2.2 Olga Jordan as Diva, Rostislav Slavyaninov, and Leonid Lavrovsky as fascists. Published in: Olga Makarova, Shostakovich at the Mariinsky: The Golden Age, 1930. Mariinsky Theater, https://www.mariinsky.ru/about/exhibitions/shostakovich111/golden_age1930/, accessed November 4, 2022.

Brodersen criticized Khodasevich's costumes for incorporating "the art of dressing up (*iskusstva odevatsya*)" and for designing the "production in her typical aesthetic way."³⁰ "The art of dressing up" likely refers to haute couture, or any practice of dressing up in a non-practical way. Brodersen also used the term "aesthetic" in a negative sense when referring to Khodasevich's costumes and set design.

Brodersen's condemnation of *The Golden Age* was summed up well by the critique's final paragraph and is worth quoting at length:

"...*The Golden Age* (by the way, why such a stupid title?) did not advance ballet theater toward Soviet shores. Moreover, it set it back in a completely opposite direction, in the direction of the decadent, bourgeois music-hall...All of the current dancers should really be trying to master the new artistic method to create a plot based and contemporary dance production. Not to legalize opportunism but to fight it. If this is not done the ballet theater will continue to remain a foreign body in the system of Soviet theaters. Some sort of theatrical compromise which doesn't have the right to exist."³¹

This paragraph unearthed the revolution-era question of whether ballet had a right to exist in Soviet society, a question which had been positively answered a decade prior to *The Golden Age*'s premier. Almost everything, including the name of the production, was harshly criticized in Brodersen's "Legalizing Opportunism."

Following the critique was a statement noting that Dmitri Shostakovich's score would be discussed in the next issue of *Rabochii i Teatr*. Yet, the mere exclusion of comments on the score in this condemning critique suggests that the music was not seen as problematic, at least not as

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

much as the libretto or certain choreography. Shostakovich himself said the main problem of *The Golden Age* was “in the fact that the libretto writers, in trying to demonstrate our current reality by means of ballet, did not at all take into consideration the specifics of ballet,” conferring with the critical response, and taking some of the blame off his own shoulders.³²

Despite the critique, *The Golden Age* finished its season in Leningrad, as well as several performances in Kyiv and Odessa. There is evidence that the name of the ballet was reworked for these shows, likely in response to the critical review mentioned above. Options included the following titles: *Who will have the upper hand?*, *Dinamiada*, and *European Days*.³³ The final of which was chosen for the ballet’s Odessa premier on April 30, 1931.³⁴ Unfortunately, *The Golden Age* was completely removed from GATOB’s repertoire at the end of the season due to the critical response it received. As the ballet was never filmed and choreographers did not keep written records of the movement, the original choreography and staging has been lost. Shostakovich composed his op. 22a based on the ballet, which was comprised of four movements, the Introduction, Adagio, Polka, and Dance, allowing some of the ballet’s music to live on in the twentieth century.

The ballet’s removal from GATOB’s repertoire and resulting loss of choreography were the biggest indications of its “failure” as a production in popular memory. Based on the critique and Shostakovich’s own remarks, this was due to a weak libretto, portrayal of the western music-hall, and reliance on dance form rather than pantomime. Ivanovsky’s attempt to fulfill every stipulation of the libretto competition resulted in a confusing plot, which was difficult to translate into dance. In addition to this, it seems that the expectations of what constituted as

³² A.M. Goltsman, “Sovetskie balety,” in *Sovetskii kompozitor*, Moscow, 1985, 8-9.

³³ This is a reference to the Soviet soccer team “Dynamo,” who the dramatic soccer players may have been based on. See Ross, 49.

³⁴ Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich, *Pisma I. I. Sollertinskomy*, Saint Petersburg, 2006, 61.

Soviet were different in the eyes of critics and the Artistic Political Council, shown by the disagreement on whether a “transitional” ballet could be a Soviet ballet.

On October 14, 1982, an updated version of *The Golden Age* premiered at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow. Rather than using Ivanovsky’s contested libretto, a new scenario was written by Isaac Glikman and Yuri Grigorovich. Grigorovich also choreographed the ballet, ameliorating the disconnect between the libretto and choreography found in the original. This version takes place in the Soviet Union during the 1920s at a restaurant called “The Golden Age,” which has music-hall type entertainment. It tells the story of a love triangle between Boris, a young fisherman seen as the “good” character, Yashka, a gang leader seen as the “bad” guy who also doubles as Monsieur Jaques when in the restaurant, and Rita, the heroine who doubles as Margot, Monsieur Jaques’ dancing partner.³⁵ By completely scrapping the original libretto but keeping the title, score, and some music-hall dances from the 1930 version, Grigorovich and his team were able to draw interest from the popular myth of the “failed” ballet, while creating a “successful” production in the eyes of audiences. This success is evidenced by its 49-performance run and subsequent revivals in 1994, 2006, and 2016.

³⁵ Goltzman, 154.

Chapter 3

The Bolt and Ballet Theater's "Last Warning"

The leading issue critics held against *The Golden Age* (Zolotoy vek) was its portrayal of bourgeois, western art forms on the Soviet stage. Despite the ballet makers' original intentions to ridicule the west by including characters which represented negative western archetypes, such as Diva, the Fascist and the chief of police, critics saw their mere portrayal on stage as outdated, recalling the "transitional" period allowed immediately following the revolution.¹ Despite constant trial and error throughout the 1920s, the state lyric theaters still had not been able to create a ballet which pleased the critics', censors', and party's demand for Soviet or proletarian themes successfully interwoven with classical ballet. Brodersen's criticism, as analyzed in the previous chapter, was certainly heeded as GATOB began its 1931 season, but as we will see, Leningrad's critics had become even more particular in their requirements for what constituted Soviet art. *The Bolt* (Bolt), GATOB's newest experiment, became the target of harsh criticism flung at the ballet theater despite its vision of itself as a contemporary, Soviet ballet. As Soviet cultural policy lost interest in experimentation and inched closer to Socialist Realism, critics' demands echoed the tenets of Socialist Realism without explicitly stating their expectations, resulting in *The Bolt's* label as a failed production in popular memory.

Riding on the unexpected success of his folkloric ballet *The Ice Maiden* (Ledianaia deva, 1927), Fedor Lopukhov, the director of GATOB, choreographed *The Bolt*.² Despite the disappointment of *The Golden Age*, Dmitri Shostakovich was once again commissioned to

¹ Yuri Brodersen, "Legalizatsiia prisposoblenchestva," *Rabochii i Teatr*, (Nov. 6, 1930), n/p.

² I refer to *The Ice Maiden* an "unexpected success" as it was a fairytale ballet based on folklore from Northern Russia which returned to tsarist era structure and theme. It used sets, costumes, and some storylines from Pavel Petrov's 1922 ballet *Solveig*. Despite its lack of contemporary Soviet themes and reliance on folklore and fantasy, the ballet remained in GATOB's repertory from 1927-1937. See Elizabeth Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s*, trans. by Sally Baner (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 301-315.

compose the music and Alexander Gauk to conduct the performance. Constructivist designer Tatiana Bruni and her husband Georgi Korshikov designed the set and costumes. And finally, Victor Smirnov, the director of the Moscow Art Theater 2 (MXAT-2) wrote the libretto.

Like *The Golden Age*, *The Bolt* was based on a contemporary theme, in this case factory sabotage, and was packed with a cast of topically titled characters. Olga, the leader of a local Komsomol unit (All-Union Young Communist League), and her boyfriend Boris, a shock brigade worker at the factory, are the lead protagonists. Historian and musicologist Simon Morrison notes that Olga and Boris were originally named Tania and Petka after the dancers who performed their roles, Tatiana Vecheslava and Pyotr Gusev. However, both Vecheslava and Gusev were replaced by Olga Mungalova and Boris Shavrov mid-way through rehearsals, resulting in the character name change. Because of this change, some sources refer to Olga and Boris as the original Tania and Petka.³

They are antagonized by a hooligan named Lenka Gulba (Lazy Idler) and his friends Ivan Shtopor (Ivan Corkscrew), Fedor Piva (Fedor Beer), and Manka Fart (Manka Luck), with the help of Goshka a teenage boy (*shketik*). There are several factory employees including the factory director, a pretentious clerk named Kozelkov, and his friends Charlie, Stan, and Prishpektov.⁴ Outside of the factory, we meet a priest named Podnebesnensky (Heavenly), a sexton (church groundskeeper) named Prichta, gossips called Ficus and Patchouli, and a pub-goer called Opara. Each act has several character (also referred to as folk) dancers who participate in divertissements, a short dance that displays the dancer's technical skill rather than

³ Reasons for the cast change will be discussed later in this chapter. Simon Morrison, "Shostakovich as Industrial Saboteur: Observations on *The Bolt*," in *Shostakovich and His World*, edited by Laurel E. Fay, 52: (Princeton University Press, 2004), 134. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1j6677t.10>.

⁴ While Kozelkov is not defined as a Nepman (businessman who benefited from capitalism during NEP) in the character list, he is ridiculed by the Komsomol members for demonstrating a "city" dance in act two and has friends whose names sound American, meaning the character was probably a depiction of a western sympathizer or Nepman.

moving the plot along: Truant, Drunkard, Bulletin, Flyer, Opportunist, Bungler, Bureaucrat, and Blacksmith in act one, Russian and Caucasian Komsomol members in act two, Young Lady, Collaborator, Drayman (beer seller), Colonial Worker, and Red Army men in act three. The corps de ballet dances various roles of workers, Pioneers, Komsomol members, cleaners, and pilgrims.⁵

Like the contemporary cast list, Smirnov's libretto was filled to the brim with references to problems of Soviet factory, leisure, and religious life. The issue of factory sabotage was a real concern for the Soviets, especially by 1931. As referenced in chapter one, the 1928 trial of industrial saboteurs at a factory in the Shakhty region of the Donbas signaled the start of cultural revolution and a mass turn away from the liberal cultural environment of the 1920s.⁶ Two years later, a show trial in which scientists and economists were accused of planning a coup against the Soviet government via industrial sabotage took place from November 25 to December 7, 1930. The widely popularized Industrial Party Trial (*Protsess Promparti*) was the first show trial in the Soviet Union post NEP. As the 1928 Shakhty trial had not been as prominent to the public, the 1930 Industrial Party Trial acted as a mass reminder of the consequences industrial sabotage would incur. Five defendants were sentenced to death, which ended up being long prison terms, while the rest were sentenced to various shorter lengths in prison. *The Bolt* premiered just months after the Industrial Party Trial took place, meaning the theme of industrial sabotage would have certainly been in the forefront of the Soviet public's mind.⁷

According to Lopukhov, *The Bolt* was conceived of as a satire: "We saw before us the discoveries of the Blue Blouse and TRAM and dreamed of doing something of equal value... We

⁵ The Pioneer characters in *The Bolt* refer to the Soviet organization the Young Pioneers who were similar to western boy and girl scout troops. Although they had similar responsibilities and goals to the Komsomol, the two remained separate groups. A.M. Goltsman, "Sovetskie Balety," in *Sovetskii Kompozitor*. Moscow, 1985, 152.

⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Cultural Revolution in Russia 1928-32," *Journal of Contemporary History* 9, no. 1 (1974): 40-42.

⁷ Morrison, 118.

were attracted to the possibility of putting into dance the motifs of political satire.”⁸ Unlike Ivanovsky’s libretto, Smirnov was not following a list of requirements when creating *The Bolt’s* scenario, so the choreographer’s assertion, albeit post-premier, that the ballet was a satire of Soviet life provides reasoning for its inclusion of a multitude of Soviet stereotypes, both good and bad. As we will see, Lopukhov’s statement may have been conceived post-premier but is still certainly worth keeping in mind when dissecting the following libretto.

The curtain opens onto a factory yard, where, having just finished their morning exercises, the workers walk to the workshop floor. Lenka Gulba is the last worker to appear, suffering from a hangover and struggling to walk straight. Inside, the factory director and several workers finish an inspection of the new workshop. Deciding that everything is in order, the cleaners and workers get down to business. While they are supposed to be working, Lenka Gulba and his friends decide to get drunk and proceed to fall asleep. Their machines stop working and Boris discovers them sleeping. Boris, along with Lenka’s fed-up coworkers, kick the hooligans out of the factory.

Act two leaves the factory for a nearby village where Olga is leading Pioneers and Komsomol members, including Russian and Caucasian representatives, to a demonstration carrying a large puppet modeled after a *kulak*, which reads “down with the *kulak*!” The *kulaks* were wealthy, landowning peasants, a class which Stalin’s first five-year plan worked to eradicate. The demonstration attracts the attention of two gossips (*sallopnitsy*), who have just been blessed by the priest, along with Prichta the sexton. The three begin to dance a chaconne (a medieval carnival dance) and the sexton dances with the *kulak* puppet. The priest, who had been

⁸ Fedor Lopukhov, *Shestdesyat let v baletе: vospominaniya i zapiski baletmeistera*, ed. Yuri Slonimsky, (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966), 257. The Blue Blouse Troupe was an agitprop ensemble that performed newspaper headlines as a “living newspaper” in the 1920s, a theatrical version of the political poster “ROSTA windows” displayed in storefronts. See Morrison 142.

sleeping while the revelers danced, suddenly wakes up and takes the worshippers with him back to the church.

Kozelkov, the factory clerk, shows up and tries to impress the Komsomol members, who proceed to make fun of him. A group of drunkards led by Lenka Gulba spill out of the nearby pub, in which they had been drinking since getting kicked out of the factory. The hooligan is angry about being kicked out and loudly persuades his friends to get revenge by putting a bolt in the factory machine, sabotaging his hated workplace. Unfortunately for the drunks, Boris happens to be walking by as they hatch their plan. The shock worker tries to reason with the conspirators, but they hit him over the head with their bolt, causing him to pass out. The priest then reappears and blesses Lenka and his friends for this act.

As the drunk hooligans plan their sabotage, Kozelkov follows Olga and her fellow Komsomol members into the pub. He tries, unsuccessfully, to flirt with Olga as Boris wakes up from the blow. Boris stands up stumbling and tries to go into the pub, however, as he appears drunk, he is denied entry and taken off stage, delighting Kozelkov, who can continue to flirt with the lead *Komsomolska*.

Act three opens back on the factory floor, where workers are just getting let off. Lenka Gulba and his fellow saboteurs send their teenage friend Goshka to place the bolt in a machine. Remembering what he overheard, Boris heads to the factory, where he catches Goshka in the act. He runs toward him but the boy escapes, trapping Boris on the factory floor. Goshka tells Lenka what happened as the machine short circuits. The factory director appears, concerned as to what just happened, and Lenka blames everything on Boris who was caught “drunk” earlier and was at the scene of the crime. Boris is arrested, leaving Olga in shock, bewildered by her boyfriend’s uncharacteristic actions.

Just as the hooligans seem to have gotten away with their sabotage, Goshka begins to feel guilty. He calls together the workers and confesses, freeing Boris and placing Lenka in custody instead. Olga asks Boris to forgive her for having doubted him, while Goshka, having learned what a clean conscience feels like, joins the pioneers. The ballet ends with the workers celebrating in the factory's House of Culture, where Red Army men appear and join the fanfare, dancing, singing, and making merry.⁹

The Bolt premiered on April 8, 1931, at GATOB to an enthusiastic audience, as costume and set designer Tatiana Bruni recalled in her memoir *On Ballet with Undying Love (O balete s neprekhodiashchei luboviu)*:

“At the time, the dress rehearsals were open to the public at large. The theater seemed overcrowded. As soon as the curtain opened, applause rang out; when the factory started to move, it transformed into an ovation that did not let up until the end of the spectacle. The dancing chapel and individual costumes delighted the public. I swear by all that is sacred this took place. The catcalling of those in opposition (manifest philistinism!) was drowned out by the applause.”¹⁰

Despite these crowded rehearsals, *The Bolt* was only performed once, and was completely removed from GATOB's repertoire following the premiere.¹¹ So, if the theater-going public so greatly enjoyed the ballet, why was it canceled after only one performance? Why did Bruni show such conviction in her assertion that audiences loved *The Bolt* and why would Lopukhov want

⁹ Goltsman, 152-154.

¹⁰ Tatiana Bruni, “O balete s neprekhodiashchei luboviu,” in Morrison, “Shostakovich as Industrial Saboteur,” 122.

¹¹ There is some speculation as to whether *The Bolt* was canceled during its last dress rehearsal, following the premier, or after two performances. Alexander Gauk, the conductor, asserted that there were two performances but all other sources I have encountered agree with one. Possibly, because the dress rehearsals were open to the public as Bruni recalled in her memoir, the premier and dress rehearsal were confused by the conductor.

audiences to view it as a satire? Finally, why has *The Bolt*, like its predecessor *The Golden Age*, been recorded in popular memory as a failure?

As we know, *The Bolt* was produced as an attempt to answer the call for Soviet ballet. Two texts were provided alongside the program for *The Bolt*: the first a preface written by Smirnov, the second a pamphlet written by Ivan Sollertinsky, a ballet and theater critic as well as Shostakovich's close friend and frequent correspondent.¹² Smirnov's preface explained his inspiration for the ballet, a visit to the Red Hercules Factory, where he was shown a collection of objects which had been thrown into the factory machines and destroyed. A banner "proclaiming the factory administration's intolerance for acts of sabotage" hung above the display.¹³ The preface explained the necessity of portraying labor and factory life through the choreographic and theatrical stage. It demonstrated how in tune Smirnov was with the problems faced by the ballet theater and his hope that *The Bolt* would fill the void of Soviet ballet.

If Smirnov's preface indicated his belief in *The Bolt* as an innovative Soviet work of art, Sollertinsky's pamphlet entitled "*The Bolt* and the Problem of Soviet Ballet" seemed to show the opposite. The author was not enthusiastic about *The Bolt*'s revolutionary nature: "The divertissement character of the spectacle is still non liquidated... True, the places of 'Bluebird,' 'Prince Whooping-Cough,' and 'Cinderella,' are in turn taken by the stage 'entrées' of *osoaviakhimovtsy* [aviators], motorcyclists, cavalrymen, and so forth. But all the same old devices of ballet 'plot development' make themselves known."¹⁴ Here, Sollertinsky recognized that not much had actually changed between pre-revolutionary ballet and Soviet ballet; divertissements were still present, the characters were now just contemporary figures rather than

¹² Unfortunately, I do not have access to these documents firsthand and rely on their descriptions and quotations in the Morrison text cited above.

¹³ Morrison, 131.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 139.

mystical. He did, however, praise Lopukhov for his innovative choreography which moved past not only classical, pre-revolutionary dance techniques, but also formalist technique of the 1920s, inspired by acrobatics. In *The Bolt*, Lopukhov replaced formalist *fizkultura* with a “‘dance spectacle’ based on ‘Soviet thematics,’” by combining pantomime, acrobatics, and classical ballet technique.¹⁵

Prior to going to the theater and reading these pamphlets, audiences may have seen an advertisement for *The Bolt* in the Leningrad publication *Krasnaya Gazeta* (Red Newspaper), printed on the day of the premier, April 8, 1931. *Krasnaya Gazeta* was an organ of the central, provincial, and city committees of the Communist Party and Leningrad Soviet, and has been described as the second most influential propaganda paper in Leningrad, after *Leningradskaya Pravda*, which will be referenced shortly.¹⁶ The advertisement was written by V. S. Bukhshtein, the director of the state Leningrad theaters. The piece, having been published in a party sponsored publication, gives us not only insight into what the theaters themselves wanted *The Bolt* to accomplish, but what the party wanted the ballet to do.

The advertisement began with a statement asserting that *The Bolt* “wants to use the theme of production in an attempt to create a Soviet choreographic spectacle [i.e., ballet]. That is why *The Bolt* does not resemble any of the current ballets that are playing at our theater right now, (*The Red Poppy* and *The Golden Age*).”¹⁷ Bukhshtein’s assertion that *The Bolt* was something completely new shows the director’s confidence that the production would be seen as a Soviet ballet, unlike the two previous attempts mentioned. Following this ambitious opening statement, the director seemed to anticipate a negative critical response regarding the inclusion of “negative

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ V. S. Izmozik, N. B. Leбина, *Soviet Petersburg: a ‘New Man’ in the Old Space, 1920-1930s*, (St. Petersburg: Kruga, 2010), 13.

¹⁷ V. S. Bukhshtein, “Bolt,” *Krasnaya Gazeta*, April 8, 1931, n/p.

types” such as “philistines,” “drunkards,” and “slackers.”¹⁸ He reminded audiences and critics that these “difficult roles” would be performed by skilled dancers and directly compared with “positive mass scenes, which serve as a convincing counterpoint to the ‘negative...’ [providing] the viewer with positive and robust energy.”¹⁹ This statement references the backlash against *The Golden Age*’s depiction of negative characters, emphasizing the more prominent “positive mass scenes,” present in *The Bolt* using language which appeased RAPM calls for mass song.²⁰

After preemptively defending the libretto, Bukhshtein highlighted Shostakovich’s score, claiming that unlike ever before, his music was “very emotionally loaded and at the same time extremely comprehensible.”²¹ Again, this statement referenced *The Golden Age*, as it had been ridiculed for its incomprehensibility and frequent use of light, western music. Finally, the theater director concluded with a positive statement on Bruni and Korshikov’s set design. The advertisement highlighted the couple’s experience decorating workers’ clubs, which he claimed helped them create an authentic looking set.

Unlike Lopukhov, Bukhshtein never referred to *The Bolt* as a satire. Despite the choreographer’s assertion that satire was their goal, I have not found any pre-premier indication of this. It surely seems that negative characters were included as a comparison to their positive counterparts, but I have not encountered other primary sources which classify *The Bolt* as a satire, even if the choreographer did view it as such. Had the ballet indeed been a satire, critics did not take this into consideration and Bukhshtein’s defense of including “negative type” characters proved necessary.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Neil Edmunds, “Music and Politics: The Case of the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians.” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 78, no. 1 (2000): 79. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4213008>.

²¹ Bukhshtein, n/p.

Immediately following the premier, negative critical reviews began to appear in the Leningrad press, as if following the cue of Bukhshtein's prediction of how the negative characters would be interpreted. Sollertinsky's subtle disagreement on the innovative nature of the ballet was echoed tenfold. The first review appeared in *Leningradskaya Pravda* (Leningrad Truth), the press organ of the Leningrad regional and city committees of the Communist Party and the sister publication of Moscow's *Pravda*. The review signed by V. G. was entitled "Opportunistic Production: The Bolt in the State Ballet Theater" and published April 10, 1931, just two days after the premier. About two weeks later, *Rabochii i Teatr* published a longer critique simply named "Bolt" by M. I. Yankovsky, a member of the publication's 1930 editorial board, on April 21, 1931.

As discussed in chapter 1, by 1931 the party line on the content of Soviet arts and culture was that all cultural production should align with Proletkult, RAPM, etc. ideology of energizing the proletariat while condemning western, bourgeois influences. The *Leningradskaya Pravda* critique analyzed below sprung from this ideological background, as it came from a party press organ, signaling the allegiance of the party with militant, proletarian centered ideology. While *Rabochii i Teatr* was not an explicitly party sponsored publication, Yankovsky's review echoed the others, showing a consensus on cultural politics throughout the Leningrad critical press.

Both the *Leningradskaya Pravda* and *Rabochii i Teatr* reviews began with statements conceding that yes, *The Bolt* did present a contemporary theme with contemporary characters. The *Rabochii i Teatr* critique even referred to Sollertinsky's pamphlet, which highlighted the inclusion of Soviet themes. Unfortunately for the fate of the ballet, this was some of the only praise it garnered from the critical response. In *Leningradskaya Pravda*, V. G. called *The Bolt* a "kind of production which vulgarizes the new Soviet theme in ballet."²² In *Rabochii i Teatr*,

²² V. G., "Prisposoblencheskii spektakl': 'Bolt' v gosbalete," *Leningradskaya Pravda*, April 10, 1931, n/p.

Yankovsky proceeded to summarize the plot in two sentences, calling it “simple...not very imaginative,” and telling of “where we stand in terms of reconstructing the ballet theater: at the very beginning of reconstruction.”²³ Both critics’ use of strong, negative language condemned the ballet overall, despite any positive elements that may have been included. V. G.’s claim that *The Bolt* “vulgarized” Soviet themes was worse than if the ballet had lacked a Soviet theme altogether. To vulgarize Soviet life on a state theater stage was inexcusable. Yankovsky’s choice of the word “reconstruction” when discussing the ballet theater recalls the economic reconstruction of the country immediately after the revolution and civil war. Although less harsh than V. G.’s statement, Yankovsky implied that the ballet was behind in its development by almost ten years and recalled Brodersen’s description of *The Golden Age* as a “transitional” ballet.

On the plot’s transmission into choreography, Yankovsky stated that the actions were too abstract and, echoing Sollertinsky’s remarks, relied on traditional forms of divertissement to move the storyline along. He also took issue with the structure of the ballet, claiming that the three acts had nothing to do with one another, while the entire “plot unfolds within five minutes in act three.”²⁴ V. G. agreed, calling the structure “haphazardly put together,” and questioned the “social significance” of the divertissements.²⁵ Yankovsky began the assessment of the choreography with a condemning statement on Lopukhov’s ability to translate the libretto into dance: “When the choreographer gets hold of this kind of material, he displays not only a complete lack of understanding of this material, specifically the factory environment, but he also shows his political inadequacy to create a Soviet show.”²⁶

²³ M. I. Yankovsky, “Bolt,” *Rabochii i Teatr*, April 21, 1931, 11.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ V. G., n/p.

²⁶ Yankovsky, 11.

To Yankovsky, Lopukhov's "political inadequacy" was evident in the dance of the Blacksmith, which he claimed was "making fun of industrial thematics," as well as the military dances which "reveal an extreme mixture of ignorance, that grows from the dance of the cavalryman to reach a grotesque jab at our cavalry."²⁷ On top of his transgressions against the Soviet work force and armed forces, Yankovsky accused Lopukhov of focusing his attention solely on the depiction of "negative heroes" such as Kozelkov and friends' dances. Yankovsky's negative critique of Lopukhov's choreography concluded with the statement: "We cannot name any single piece in the entire ballet which would give any type of hope to think of it as the next link in the reconstruction of the ballet performance."²⁸

V. G. also critiqued the dance of the Blacksmith and Red Army men, taking particular issue with the latter's portrayal: "The dance called 'Red Army' is nothing but a joke at the expense of the real Red Army. These pampered and fancily dressed youths resemble pleasant little soldiers from some officer club's folk spectacle. It is necessary to expunge this politically harmful scene, which in addition to everything else, is presented under the guise of propaganda."²⁹ Figure 3.1 shows the dance of the Red Army men in rehearsal, in which a row of dancers pose joyfully on Viennese chairs. Neither critic suggested how the Red Army men should have been depicted, but they made clear that what they saw was not realistic, nor politically correct.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ V. G., n/p. The officer clubs referenced here would be pre-revolutionary, tsarist officer clubs in which small dramas were frequently performed.



Figure 3.1 Dance of the Red Army men in rehearsal. Published in Bogdan Korolek, *Shostakovich at the Mariinsky: The Bolt*, 1931. Mariinsky Theater, <https://www.mariinsky.ru/about/exhibitions/shostakovich111/bolt/>, accessed April 11, 2023.

Despite this harsh negative criticism, both critics did recognize some positive elements in the production, namely Shostakovich's score. The *Leningradskaya Pravda* critic called it "both melodic and expressive," while also avoiding western influence.³⁰ With such high praise of the score, both V. G. and Yankovsky lamented the fact that the music and choreography did not live up to one another. Yankovsky observed "a huge rift between the choreographer and the composer, so much so that the music in the show was perceived as being completely autonomous."³¹

Thanks to the critical praise Shostakovich's score earned, much has been written about the composer's involvement in the ballet's production and the music's afterlife. In her biography of Shostakovich, Laurel Fay describes some of the issues faced by the composer and dancers

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Yankovsky, 11.

during rehearsals. For example, the original lead dancers Pyotr Gusev (Boris) and Tatiana Vecheslava (Olga) frequently complained about the difficulty of dancing to the score's complicated rhythms, recalling Ballets Russes dancers' complaints about Igor Stravinsky's modernist scores.³² Both dancers were replaced midway through the rehearsal process, resulting in the change of character names discussed earlier. The act of naming characters after dancers was not commonly done in ballet. Perhaps it was an attempt to portray realistic, contemporary Soviet characters by using realistic names, but I have not encountered a source which explains this choice. The difficulty dancers faced when adjusting to the music also clarifies the critical remarks on the disconnect between dance and music. Perhaps dancers needed more rehearsal time, or Lopukhov needed to adjust the choreography, or the score needed to be altered to better fit the dancers' needs. This all may have been the case, but as the music was one of the only positive aspects detailed in the critical response, Shostakovich was once again spared the sharp allegations his ballet co-workers faced.

Other than the score, both V. G. and Yankovsky praised two dances: the Bureaucrat's dance and the dance of the "textile women." Yankovsky named these as the only two positive aspects of the choreography, while V. G. went slightly further in their analysis. The critic praised Lopukhov's minimal use of *fizkultura* and increased portrayal of "the decay of work morals." Still, V. G. wrote that the negative type characters "did not reveal the social essence of certain occurrences," that is, they did not condemn nor reveal the negative qualities of those characters, specifically the priest's dance and the drunks at the pub.³³ This piece of criticism shows a disconnect between what Smirnov and Lopukhov intended to show and what the audience was able to understand.

³² Laurel Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000, 60-61.

³³ V. G., n/p.

Finally, V. G. praised the skilled dancers for their performance and the set designers Bruni and Korshikov, noting that their sets were “not that bad.” Still, the critique concluded with the following statement: “But all of these cannot save this production in general from our categorical condemnation. In this present state *The Bolt* discredits Soviet ballet.”³⁴ Yankovsky made the same, if not much harsher, assessment at the end of his critique:

“And so, *The Bolt* is a show that did not work. At this juncture we would like to ask a question as to what time will our ballet continue to experiment blindly and crawl like a swaddled baby losing even that formal mastery, which it was able to display before. Clearly the ballet theater is experiencing an artistic conundrum. And we will not be able to make any positive changes without identifying this problem. Because *The Bolt* is not just a failure of a single theatrical happening—it is a failure that attests to the corruption of the method itself...I think that ‘*The Bolt*’ is the last warning.”³⁵

Here, Yankovsky goes as far as to praise ballet’s tsarist roots, claiming that at least choreographers and dancers could claim “formal mastery” of the art form.

The critical response given to *The Bolt* answered its creators’ worst fears, that their latest attempt at creating a Soviet ballet would once again not be viewed as Soviet. In her memoir, Bruni recalled the removal of several machine dances after the first dress rehearsal, as ordered by the council of artistic censors (*khudsovet*), possibly in an effort to avoid accusations of formalism or undecipherable dance movement.³⁶ Bruni’s statement and Bukhshtein’s advertisement on the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Yankovsky, 11.

³⁶ Tatiana Bruni, “O baletе s neprekhodiashechei luboviu,” in Morrison, “Shostakovich as Industrial Saboteur,” 159.

day of the premier indicate how much was at stake for the ballet theater when producing *The Bolt*.

Critics, if not audiences, saw *The Bolt* as a superficial or fake (*lipovyi*) attempt at creating a Soviet ballet.³⁷ It had all the right characters, themes, artists, dancers, and music, so what did critics and the party actually want from the ballet theater? They desired a more sincere depiction of Soviet life which got to the root of the problems it was presenting, or perhaps denied the existence of any problems, in order to be a meaningful contribution to Soviet art and culture. While the dance form was improving, themes were still unclear to audiences leaving critics wanting more, especially in terms of punishing “negative type” characters for their wrongdoings. Critics were quick to attack, condemning the ballet in both party sponsored and independent publications for “vulgarizing the Soviet theme.” As protesters had already attended dress rehearsals and this criticism was widely circulated immediately after the premier, it can be inferred that the ballet was canceled and removed from GATOB’s repertoire due to the brutal criticism it received.

So, while *The Bolt* was a step ahead of *The Golden Age* in reaching Brodersen’s “Soviet line of art,” by 1931 expectations for what constituted as Soviet were already ten steps further, with the “blind baby” of a ballet theater only crawling to catch up. Although never specifically stated, the end goal was Socialist Realism as we know it today, an idealized portrayal of communist society, rather than the realistic or as Lopukhov claimed, satirical, portrayal of contemporary life presented in *The Bolt*. Following this production GATOB seemed to finally

³⁷ Another condemning critique titled *Lipovyi ‘Bolt’* written by B. Rod. was published in the art section of the journal *Smena* (Shift) on April 12, 1931. *Smena* was a bi-monthly arts and culture journal founded in 1924 as an organ of the Komsomol’s literacy and propaganda campaign. “Fake ‘Bolt’” addressed the same issues analyzed by the *Leningradskaya Pravda* and *Rabochii i Teatr* critiques.

read between the critics' lines and completely shifted its choreographic and dramatic trajectory toward a style more compatible with the Soviet Union's progression of cultural policy.

Chapter 4

Dramatizing Revolution: The Success of *Flames of Paris*

After the premier of *The Bolt* (Bolt), the Soviet Union's cultural policy drastically changed due to the 1932 Decree on the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations and formation of the Union of Soviet Writers, the first formal step taken by the party toward Socialist Realism. In addition, Stalin had given a speech in June 1931, just months after the brutal critical attack on *The Bolt*, reestablishing the position of bourgeois specialists in society, and ending discrimination against non-party intelligentsia by organized Communist groups. This speech gave authority back to pre-revolutionary institutions, like the ballet theater, and instituted a resurgence in respect for nineteenth century culture. Ballet historian Christina Ezrahi credits this speech as the end of the cultural revolution in the Soviet Union. She cites Nicholas Timasheff's theory of the "regime's 'great retreat' from revolutionary ideology" towards a "partial revival of the past to ensure its political survival" as reasoning for the increased production of cultural material inspired by nineteenth century Russian culture.¹

For ballet, this change in cultural policy, as well as years of theoretical debate on the development of ballet, resulted in the sole backing of the genre of *dramaticheskii balet* or *drambalet* which prioritized "dramatic content and narrative plausibility...over choreographic inventiveness."² Structurally, *drambalet* productions were classified as full-length (three or four act) narrative ballets which used folk dances and realistic, highly detailed sets and costumes to tell a story inspired by literary classics or contemporary propaganda. Formally, these ballets were

¹ Christina Ezrahi, "Ideological Pressure: Classical Ballet and Soviet Cultural Politics, 1923–1936," in *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 46. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1b4cx8t.7>.

² Ibid, 32.

void of divertissements, or dances that highlighted technical accomplishment rather than advancing the plot, and normally included scenes where dance would happen naturally in real life, such as weddings and celebrations.³ Like these spaces, *drambalet* relied on folk dance coupled with classical ballet to once again, make the inclusion of dance realistic. They also made dance continuous throughout the production, removing entrance and exit poses customary of individual variations, to make the performance feel less staged and more natural in movement.

Thematically, *The Golden Age* (Zolotoy vek) and *The Bolt* differed from *drambalet* ballets, as they focused on portraying contemporary Soviet themes in which the proletariat vanquished negative, bourgeois archetypes, while *drambalet* portrayed similar revolutionary themes but in an idealized realistic manner. Meaning that in *drambalet*, negative type characters were punished, ridiculed, or reformed in some way, making it easy to distinguish between positive and negative characters. The requirements of *drambalet* echoed calls for Socialist Realist “revolutionary romanticism” and utopian reality of the future, which celebrated the victory of the proletariat. While both the old and new types valorized the revolution, only *drambalet* did so in a clear fashion, unburdened by incomprehensible dance scenes, in spaces where dance could realistically occur. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze *Flames of Paris* (Plamya parizha, 1932), the third of early Soviet ballet productions which was hugely successful and lauded both by critics and audiences as it fit into the new genre of *drambalet*, which answered calls and search for a new Soviet ballet with contemporaneous themes portrayed in a positive, idealized way.

It is important to remember that the makers of *Flames of Paris* did not fully know the tenets of Socialist Realism, nor that *drambalet* as a genre fit so neatly within them when creating their ballet in 1932. What they were aware of, however, were the dire circumstances the ballet

³ Ibid.

theater's failed thematic and formal experimentation had resulted in. So instead of once again bringing contemporary problems to the stage, GATOB chose to produce a ballet based on the safer theme of revolution in honor of the fifteenth anniversary of the October Revolution, which infused folk dance with classical ballet and left long divertissements in the past.

Flames of Paris was based on the 1896 novel *Les Rouges du Midi* (The Reds of the South) by Felix Gras, a bonafide literary classic, which librettists Nikolai Volkov and Vladimir Dmitriev reworked for the ballet stage. Vasily Vainonen, who had worked on *The Golden Age*, returned as the choreographer. In addition to the libretto, Vladimir Dmitriev designed the set and costumes. Instead of working with Shostakovich again, the theater chose the older, less experimental Boris Asafiev as the composer, and V. A. Dranishnikov as the conductor. Finally, the well-known theater director Sergei Radlov, who had recently been appointed artistic director of GATOB, directed the ballet.

GATOB's decision to appoint a theater director as the artistic director of both the theater and *Flames of Paris* showed its newfound commitment to increasing the importance of drama over dance form in ballet. By highlighting the dramatic element in ballet, the art form could move past accusations of formalism and make "the expressive nature of ballet more verbal."⁴ Clear, dramatic elements, rather than a reliance on movement, made ballet more appealing to mass audiences, and in turn a more reliable art form in which propaganda could be infused.

Flames of Paris is a four act ballet, which takes place in France during the summer of 1792, beginning in Marseille and ending with the storming of the Tuileries Palace in Paris. The production included almost 200 dancers in total, making for impressive scenes of mass dance.⁵ Gaspard, a peasant, and his children Pierre and Jeanne, originally danced by Boris Shavrov and

⁴ Ibid, 51.

⁵ S. E. Radlov, V. A. Dranishnikov, et. al., "'Plamya Parizha': Gosteatr Opery i Baleta," *Krasnaya Gazeta*, November 5, 1932, n/p.

Olga Jordan, are the first characters we meet. They are joined by two Marseillais, Phillipe and Jerome, originally played by Alexander Pushkin and Vakhtang Chabukiani. Also in Marseille are the Marquis Costa de Beauregard, his son Count Geoffroy, and the mayor. The second act takes place at Versailles in the court of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette. There we meet an actress Mireille de Poitiers, danced by Natalia Dudinskaya, an actor Antoine Mistral, danced by Constantine Sergeev, Amour an actress at the court theater, and the Master of Ceremonies. The final two acts take place in Paris, where we meet a Basque actress turned revolutionary named Therese, played by Nina Anisimova, a Jacobin orator, and a Sergeant of the National Guard. The corps de ballet dance the roles of Marseillais, Basques, Auvergnats, Parisians, Ladies of the Court, Officers of the Guard, and the Swiss Guard.⁶

The curtain opens in the Marseille forest, where Gaspard and his children Jeanne and Pierre are gathering firewood. Count Geoffroy appears and tries to force himself on Jeanne. She cries out in fear and Gaspard comes running to save his daughter. The peasant tries to defend Jeanne, but Count Geoffroy and his royal servants capture Gaspard, taking him away.⁷ The next day the royal guard brings Gaspard through the town square to the prison, while Jeanne and Pierre inform the townspeople of their father's innocence. While in the square, they notice the Marquis de Beauregard and his family fleeing to Paris. Upon hearing this news, the townspeople grow angry and storm the Marseille prison, freeing its captives. Here the townspeople and prisoners join in dance performing a *khoro vod-farandole*, a lively folk dance performed in a circling pattern, and a *pas de quatre* by Jeanne, Pierre, Jerome, and Phillipe. At the end of the

⁶ For dancers in lead roles see Evgeni Gershuni, "Aktery v baletе 'Plamyа Parizha,'" *Rabochii i Teatr* 34, 1932, 8-9.

⁷ Ezrahi, 52. Ezrahi recounts these scenes as the prologue of the ballet. The remainder of the libretto synopsis comes from Cyril Beaumont's explanation in "The Flames of Paris," in *Complete Book of Ballets: A Guide to the Principal Ballets of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (G. P. Putnam's Sons: New York, 1938), 844-851. Beaumont refers to the prologue but does not explain the details, while Ezrahi does. Perhaps this section was included later or removed from the original at some point.

dance, the four announce a need for volunteers to join a detachment going to Paris to fight the Marquis, his family, and the aristocracy. As they leave, “La Marseillaise,” a French revolutionary song as well as the inspiration for the Worker’s Marseillaise, the unofficial anthem of the provisional government following the Russian Revolution, begins to play.

The second act takes place in Versailles, where the Marquis de Beauregard has fled. The court is found dancing a sober sarabande, a baroque court dance, which serves as a sharp contrast to the peasants’ lively folk dances in act one. Once the dance ends, the Marquis tells the royal officers of the events in Marseille and asks the court to join him in upholding the monarchy. The Master of Ceremonies enters, inviting the court and its visitors to a performance and subsequent banquet. At the performance, Mirielle de Poitiers and Antoine Mistral perform a play and *entr’acte* (a dance performed between two acts in a play). Following the performance everyone sits down for the banquet where King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette make their appearances while the room pays their respects to the monarchy.

Once the King and Queen have left the banquet, Count Geoffroy reads his friends a petition to the King, asking him to crush the Marseille revolutionaries. The royal guards sign the petition as Mireille and Mistral are brought in to join the banquet. The actors and courtiers dance together, now much more relaxed after enjoying the banquet’s wine. Some of the officers fall asleep, while a few keep dancing with Mirielle. Mistral sits down at one of the tables and sees Count Geoffroy’s petition. The Count observes the actor reading the petition, becomes angry, and fatally stabs Mistral. The actor falls to the floor still clutching the petition as members of the court take the Count away to another table, where he proceeds to drunkenly pass out.

Mirielle, having not seen the murder occur while dancing, calls out for Mistral, and discovers his body on the ground. As she is mourning, the sounds of the Marseillais entering

Paris become louder. She finds the petition in Mistral's hand and reads it, realizing why her friend had been killed. At this moment, she decides to warn the revolutionaries and runs out of the palace towards the sound of "La Marseillaise." After she leaves, Count Geoffroy wakes up to find his petition gone.

The third act opens in the streets of Paris at night, where crowds of Parisians meet with armed detachments from the provinces including Marseille, Auvergne, and Basque. Therese, an actress-revolutionary, is among the Basques. The groups dance a series of folk dances from the Basque and Auvergne regions. Mirielle interrupts the dancing and runs in to inform the crowd of the court's anti-revolutionary petition, causing the revolutionaries to enthusiastically praise Mirielle. The crowd brings out two dolls modeled after the King and Queen and the people jokingly bow before the dolls. As the demonstration becomes rowdier, the crowd dances wildly, jumps over burning trash, and fires off muskets.

At the same time, a group of ladies of the court are escorted across the square by Count Geoffroy and his officers. The officers are outraged by the disrespectful dolls and take them away from the revolutionaries. Among the crowd, Jeanne recognizes Count Geoffroy, runs up to him, and smacks him for having attacked her in the Marseille forest. The Count raises his sword, and Gaspard once again comes to his daughter's defense. The father wins the fight just as the angry crowd starts to chase away the aristocrats. Therese takes the head of the doll representing King Louis XVI and places it on a pike in the middle of the square. The crowd dances a *carmagnole*, a wild folk dance which originated during the French revolution. A Jacobin orator enters the crowd and announces the march to the Tuileries Palace, to which the crowd responds positively singing "La Marseillaise" and "Ça ira," an emblematic French revolutionary anthem.

The second scene of the third act opens onto the grand staircase in the palace where the Swiss guard is on duty. Breaking the silence, a distant sound of drums and “Ça ira,” is heard as a group of court ladies, the Marquis, and Count Geoffroy appear in the hall. Suddenly the doors of the palace burst open, and the crowd rushes in where they begin to fight the guards. One of the revolutionaries tries to reason with the guard, saying they will be spared if they hand over the King. But just as the guard agrees, the Marquis shoots and kills the girl causing mass fighting to ensue. Amidst the fight, the Count finds Jeanne and tries to get his revenge, but Pierre comes just in time and stabs the Count, killing him once and for all. One of the Basques runs in holding the tricolor flag but is killed by an officer. Jeanne captures the flag but is shot by a courtier just moments later. The battle ends with the revolutionaries victoriously capturing the palace and either killing or driving out the courtiers and the Marquis.

The fourth and final act opens as the Parisians somberly take away the bodies of those killed in the fight. Then we are back at the square in Paris as a statue of the King is being taken down. A group of dancers dressed in ancient Roman costumes enter carrying Mirielle in a chariot dressed as Nike, the goddess of victory. She is placed on the now empty base of the King’s statue as a skilled dance is performed.⁸ Following the spectacle, there is general joyful dancing, culminating in a climatic *carmagnole*, which concludes the ballet.⁹

Among the most apparent and important elements of *drambalet* in *Flames of Paris* are justifications for dance scenes. While every action is “danced” given its nature as a ballet, every dance scene is either a folk dance representative of a specific culture or class, and when a dance does rely on classical technique it is classified as a performance within the story. This was one of

⁸ This dance is described as a contrast to the earlier folk dancing scenes and is said to be performed by “artistes of the State Theatres.” We can assume this dance was a technically challenging, classical ballet dance and not inspired by folk dance. See Beaumont, “The Flames of Paris,” 850.

⁹ Beaumont, 844-851.

the first instances in the ballet theater where folk dance was artistically equal to classical dance. Instead of the traditional pointe shoe, most dancers wore character shoes (flexible, short heels worn for character/folk dance), again placing the emphasis on folk dance and pantomime to convey the dramatic action. Volkov and Dmitriev's use of a literary classic as inspiration for the ballet would also become a defining feature of *drambalet*.¹⁰

Flames of Paris premiered at GATOB November 7, 1932, in celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution. Like *The Bolt*, an advertisement for *Flames of Paris* was published prior to the premier in *Krasnaya Gazeta*, the second most influential press organ of the Communist party in Leningrad at the time. Published on November 5, 1932, the advertisement was broken up into sections written by the ballet's makers: Radlov discussed the overall production as the director, Dranishnikov, the conductor, discussed the music, Dmitriev, his set and costume designs, and finally Vainonen wrote on his choreography.

The advertisement began with a statement by Radlov asserting that "revolutionary masses are the hero of our big, synthetic production."¹¹ Here, the director immediately recognized two important themes that distinguished *Flames of Paris*: the mass hero and the fact that a ballet was a synthetic production. Traditionally, the hero in a ballet was the female protagonist, danced by the company's prima ballerina (Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty* (*Spiashchaia krasavitsa*), Odette in *Swan Lake* (*Lebedinoe ozero*)). The hero of *Flames of Paris* could have easily been Jeanne, Pierre, Jerome, Phillipe, or even Therese, but none were singled out. Instead, each of these characters demonstrated distinct groups equally a part of the revolution, emphasizing the collective over the individual. Radlov's second point, that ballet was a synthetic production, references the Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art, and solidified his role

¹⁰ Ezrahi, 52-54.

¹¹ Radlov, Dranishnikov, et. al.

as a director, one who brings together each separate piece of a ballet to produce *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This recognition also preemptively negated accusations of disconnect between various aspects of the ballet, something critics cited as one of *The Bolt's* failings.

Radlov also highlighted the “high quality of music...the importance of the theme [i.e. revolution] and its novelty in ballet,” the plausibility of dance thanks to the libretto, and the unified work of musicians, choir, dancers, and dramatic director.¹² The director ended his statement by reinforcing the idea that while dance is the basis of ballet, it “should be a kind of dance that does not kill the image created by the actor, but actually reinforces it.”¹³ That is, dance should support the dramatic content of a ballet, not make it implausible or unclear by relying too heavily on dance form, for the ballet theater to portray “socially relevant themes.”

Next, Dranishnikov discussed Asafiev’s music, praising the composer for his use of French revolutionary music by André Gretry, Etienne Méhul, Luigi Cherubini, and others in composing the score. Echoing Radlov’s remarks on the unity of the production, the conductor also praised Asafiev for finding the “inner logic in the arrangement of the musical material,” resulting in a unified score which matched the action on stage.¹⁴ Here, *Flames of Paris* fixed Shostakovich’s mistakes in *The Golden Age* and *The Bolt*. A major complaint against *The Golden Age* was the composer’s use of jazz and “light” music, even when used to portray negative western characters. Asafiev used pre-revolutionary music to show both types of characters, but was praised for this action, rather than condemned, as the music had a revolutionary background. In *The Bolt*, critics loved Shostakovich’s music but noted a disconnect between it and the choreography, again remedied by Asafiev in *Flames of Paris*.

¹² Radlov repeatedly referenced a choir in this statement, who most likely sang the revolutionary songs while dancing. In “The Flames of Paris,” 850, Beaumont notes that the role of Mirielle de Poitiers was originally double cast between a trained singer and a trained dancer, again elevating the role of other performance art (in this case song) to that which dance traditionally held in ballet.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Dmitriev's section on the costumes and set was quite brief, but effectively emphasized the artist's use of realistic imagery and set design inspired by revolutionary France. To give the dancers a full range of motion, the artist designed costumes inspired by French Revolution era costumes, rather than adhering to complete historical accuracy. Vainonen's section on the choreography was also quite short, compared to Radlov and Dranishnikov. He emphasized his use of both character/folk and classical dance in order to remove the "courtly-sugary mannerisms" of ballet without harming pantomime or the plot. The only section of *Flames of Paris* which surrendered to the "emptiness of classical dance" was the second act at Versailles, intended to further contrast the monarchy with the positive, revolutionary mass hero.¹⁵ Like his fellow ballet makers, Vainonen seemed to anticipate references to his use of pure classical dance in the second act, necessitating his justification of the movement style.

As cautious yet confident as the makers were in their production, *Flames of Paris* proved to be an immediate success in the eyes of the critics and party. Primarily positive critiques were published in *Krasnaya Gazeta* on November 11, 1932, and in *Smena (Shift)*, the Komsomol's bi-monthly arts and culture journal, on November 10, 1932. The *Krasnaya Gazeta* review was published anonymously, while the *Smena* review was signed by M. Yankovsky, the same critic who condemned *The Bolt* in *Rabochii i Teatr* just a year and a half before.

Once again, both critics began by emphasizing the ballet theater's need for a successful Soviet production. Yankovsky cited Lopukhov's *The Nutcracker*, *The Red Poppy*, *The Golden Age*, and *The Bolt*, which he referred to as "*Bolotom*," translating to "swamp" in Russian, as GATOB's most recent failed attempts.¹⁶ They recognized that *Flames of Paris* was an

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ While this may have been a mistake or misprint as the grammatically correct spelling would have been "*Bolotom*," it seems that Yankovsky made a pun using the ballet's name to indicate how much of a failure the production had been. M. I. Yankovsky, "*Plamya Parizha*," *Smena*, November 10, 1932, n/p.

“unquestionable accomplishment which [spoke] about the possibility of creating a Soviet ballet theater.”¹⁷ Finally, one of GATOB’s attempts had passed the critics’ test.

The *Krasnaya Gazeta* critic began by praising Vainonen’s choreography and Radlov’s overall directorial skill. The critic was especially impressed by *Flames of Paris*’ ability to do away with the old clichés of ballet theater “such as ‘dames and cavaliers/ladies and gentlemen’...static decorative poses, which, in ballet, prepare and conclude the dancers’ performances [resulting in] a line of unbroken dramatic play...or continuous movement.”¹⁸ Both critics praised the *khorovod-farandole* and *pas de quatre*, danced by Iordan (Jeanne), Pushkin (Phillipe), Shavrov (Pierre), and Chabukiani (Jerome), in act one. The second act, which Vainonen felt the need to justify in the advertisement analyzed above, was interpreted the way the choreographer had intended. The *Krasnaya Gazeta* critic said it “revealed a piece of revolutionary tragedy of the past which is memorable and exciting due to its truthful dramatism.”¹⁹ This act, which took place in a royal court with mostly bourgeois, anti-revolutionary figures, portrayed these negative characters in a light so effectively negative, that critics and audiences could correctly interpret them, completely unlike the negative characters included in *The Golden Age* and *The Bolt*.

Overall, Vainonen and Radlov received much praise for their ability to manage large groups of people and show “the principal protagonist, the revolutionary mass, not as an anonymous dancing mass but as a lively pulsating collective organism composed of very memorable individuals.”²⁰ The revolutionary mass as the main protagonist, was another

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Krasnaya Gazeta*, “*Plamya Parizha*,” November 11, 1932, n/p.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Yankovsky, n/p.

distinguishing and innovative element of *Flames of Paris* and seems to be one of the leading factors in its success as a Soviet production.

In addition to the choreography and overall staging, Asafiev's music was praised for its ability to rearrange French revolutionary songs to create a "completely autonomous work of art" which elevated Soviet music and theater.²¹ Not much was said about Dmitriev's costumes or sets, save for a short statement in which the *Krasnaya Gazeta* critic positively called them "stylish."²² The lack of attention paid to the sets and costumes in either critique suggests that they were fine and did not garner any distinctly negative attention.

While the overall tone of these critiques was positive, both did note weaknesses in Volkov and Dmitriev's libretto, as well as one of Vainonen's dances in the fourth act. Both agreed that the libretto started to fail by the third act, causing the fourth act to suffer the consequences as well. The *Krasnaya Gazeta* critic argued that the third act, which should have connected the threads between the successful first and second acts, did not complete this task. Instead of showing the revolutionary fervor of the Marseillais, Basques, Auvergnats, and Parisians as intended, the third act's wild dances result in "purely biological cheerfulness of dance [while] the outer dynamic of the revolution remains artificial, something that is well known ahead of time and its meaning not spelled out."²³ To the critics, the series of third act folk dances did not further the plot as they simply showcased dance, rather than revolutionary spirit conveyed through dance as the makers intended.

As the third act's plot did not make sense, neither did the fourth act. Tellingly, the *Krasnaya Gazeta* critic noted that "the pictures of a funeral procession and official celebration which were noted in the program were for some reason removed and the final dances in the

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Krasnaya Gazeta*, "Plamya Parizha," n/p.

²³ Ibid.

ballet come about without any artistically logical transition.”²⁴ In his account of the libretto, Cyril Beaumont noted that the plot had gone through the editing process several times, even while in rehearsals, so it is possible that the funeral scene had been omitted so close to the premier that even the program had not been updated.²⁵ With the absence of the funeral procession opening the fourth act, Mirielle de Poitiers, and her ensemble’s performance in honor of the victory would appear jarringly sudden, and possibly an unnecessary performance of classical dance technique to audiences. Both critics described this dance as a “highly skilled,” and “technically superior” performance in which “with one stroke they destroy the painstaking and difficult work to present an expressive dance which characterize the first and second acts.”²⁶ The lack of context, because of the omission of the funeral scene, appears to have made a grave impact on the critics’ view of the libretto.

Still, both Yankovsky and the *Krasnaya Gazeta* critic ended their reviews positively, praising GATOB’s long awaited Soviet ballet. Yankovsky deemed “*Flames of Paris* a respectable answer [from] the ballet theater for the 15th anniversary... [noting with pleasure] that the most stagnated wing of our theater arrived at the October days with victory.”²⁷ This overall positive criticism was certainly felt as *Flames of Paris* finished its season at GATOB and subsequently traveled to the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow in spring 1933, Dnepropetrovsk, now known as Dnipro, in winter 1933-1934, and Odessa in spring 1934.²⁸ After a revival in 1947, the ballet would go on to win the Stalin Prize, the Soviet Union's state honor.²⁹

Flames of Paris’ was able to be such a success for several reasons. The first being its genre, *drambalet*, which ameliorated many of the issues critics held with *The Golden Age* and

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Beaumont, 850.

²⁶ *Krasnaya Gazeta*, “*Plamya Parizha*,” n/p.

²⁷ Yankovsky, n/p.

²⁸ Beaumont, 851.

²⁹ Ezrahi, 52.

The Bolt. It did not rely on dance form alone to convey revolutionary themes, in fact it primarily included dance scenes which would make logical sense even if the production was not a ballet. It equated folk dance with classical ballet technique, again justifying the inclusion of dance. This made for a clear plot, from which the audience could easily discern the message. Lastly, it was based on a literary classic with a historical, revolutionary theme, making the portrayal of both positive and negative characters easier and safer to interpret, than positive and negative characters contemporary to Soviet life.

Outside of the ballet's genre, *Flames of Paris* premiered at the end of the cultural revolution, just as the tenets of Socialist Realism were becoming increasingly clearer. The ballet makers were keenly aware of what critics, and the party sponsored journals in which they were published, did not want to see from the ballet theater, making them much more prepared than they had been in making *The Golden Age* and *The Bolt*. In addition, militant, proletarian-focused critics did not have the same credibility or influence they had held in 1930 and 1931. Yankovsky, whose critiques are analyzed in chapters three and four, used significantly less militant and aggressive language when discussing *Flames of Paris*. Overall, *Flames of Paris* proved to be the first successful Soviet ballet which remained unchanged in GATOB's repertoire due to its genre, the knowledge gained from experimentation within the theater, and the comparatively clearer guidelines of what constituted Soviet art in 1932 than in prior years.

Conclusion

Factories or Fairy Tales? Defining Soviet Ballet

Through intense experimentation in theme and form during the fifteen years following the October Revolution, ballet proved its capability to benefit the regime, solidifying its position as a Soviet art form. As definitions of Soviet culture were constantly evolving, it was often difficult for ballet makers to know what to produce and given ballet's deep aristocratic roots, pressure to innovate in order to create a truly Soviet ballet theater was multiplied tenfold. *The Golden Age* (Zolotoy vek), GATOB's answer to the first explicitly detailed call for Soviet ballet, was ridiculed by critics for its portrayal of the western music-hall and reliance on subjectless or formalist dance. The theater's second attempt, *The Bolt* (Bolt), was condemned by critics even faster than its predecessor despite its contemporary theme of factory sabotage. Critics again ridiculed the production for its reliance on dance form, and thematically, for the lack of punishment given to "negative type" characters. Premiering in 1930 and 1931 respectively, *The Golden Age* and *The Bolt* felt the brunt of militant proletarian definitions of Soviet culture, indicative of the proletarian cultural revolution.

However, by the fall of 1932, ideas of Soviet culture had drastically changed in the wake of the Decree on the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations, which disbanded proletarian cultural organizations and indicated the onset of Socialist Realism. As the makers of *Flames of Paris* (Plamya parizha) began creating the ballet in spring 1931, they were able to learn from the lessons of the failed productions and create a ballet which finally fit what critics and the party desired: a production which valorized revolution, portrayed the masses as a collective hero, and infused drama theater techniques with dance to clearly express actions on

stage, making ballet understandable to all audiences, while avoiding accusations of formalism. These characteristics classify *Flames of Paris* as a *drambalet* production, which I credit as the defining feature of its success.

While *drambalet* had certainly become the favored genre of the party and critics, some choreographers, namely Fedor Lopukhov, fought against the trend. Lopukhov and his supporters felt that by dramatizing ballet, choreography could never be innovative, as choreographers were limited to the same classical dance steps that could easily lend themselves to pantomime. Following the failure of *The Bolt*, Lopukhov had been dismissed as ballet director of GATOB and moved by the Leningrad Regional Committee (*oblastnoy komitet*) to the Maly Opera House, a smaller opera house in Leningrad, and tasked with the creation of a ballet company which would produce comedies.¹

On April 4, 1935 at the Maly, Lopukhov premiered *The Bright Stream* (*Svetlyi ruchei*), once again working with the composer Dmitri Shostakovich. *The Bright Stream* was set on a collective farm (*kolkhoz*) in the Kuban region, where a visiting group of artists from the capital celebrate the farm's productivity while a series of romantic entanglements ensue. The ballet intended to show the common goal of "constructing socialist life" shared by the metropolitan artists and collective farmers.² The production was an immense success with audiences and garnered mixed critical reviews before traveling to the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow in celebration of Stalin's birthday on December 21, 1935.³ The ballet's life at the Bolshoi did not last long however, as two damning, anonymous critiques were published in *Pravda* on January 28 and February 6, 1936, respectively: the first entitled "Muddle instead of Music" (*Sumbur vmesto*

¹ Christina Ezrahi, "Ideological Pressure: Classical Ballet and Soviet Cultural Politics, 1923–1936," in *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 54-57.

² Laurel Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000, 81.

³ Ezrahi, 54. Despite the mixed critical reviews, the selection of *The Bright Stream* to be performed in celebration of Stalin's birthday indicates the mass success the production must have been at the Maly Theater as the Bolshoi chose only the best, most reliable productions for the event.

muzyki) on Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (*Ledi makbet mtsenskogo uyezda*, 1934), the second entitled "Balletic Falsity" (*Baletnaya Falsh*) in response to *The Bright Stream*.⁴

"Balletic Falsity" criticized *The Bright Stream* for its unrealistic portrayal of *kolkhoz* life, which lacked folk song and dance, as well as Shostakovich's recycling of music from *The Bolt* for this new and thematically different ballet.⁵ Still, the most incriminating element was Lopukhov's use of "unrealistic" classical dance, echoing the complaints against subjectless, formalist dance in each of the ballets this project analyzes.⁶ Lopukhov's aversion to the *drambalet* structure, which either dramatized all dance or provided logical reasoning for its inclusion, had finally caught up with him. The *Pravda* reviews signaled the start of the 1936 anti-formalist campaign which marked the official party condemnation of "'formalist art,' which was stylized, modern, pessimistic, inspired by the West..." in favor of "realistic, traditional, optimistic...folk art."⁷ As the critical response to *The Golden Age*, *The Bolt*, and *Flames of Paris* presaged the anti-formalist campaign, the 1936 movement marked the definitive end of formalist choreography rather than offering an initial warning, and consequently solidified *drambalet* as the sole acceptable genre for ballet in the Soviet Union.

Alongside *Flames of Paris*, two 1930s productions became the quintessential examples of *drambalet*: *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* (*Bakhchisarai fontan*, 1934) and *Romeo and Juliet* (*Romeo i dzhul'yetta*, 1940). *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, choreographed by Rostislav Zakharov with music by Boris Asafiev, premiered September 28, 1934, at GATOB. The ballet

⁴ Ibid, 75-85.

⁵ Ibid 85. For more information on the critical response to *The Bright Stream* prior to "Balletic Falsity" and an interpretation as to why this critique was so condemning, see Ezrahi, 60-62.

⁶ Ezrahi, 61.

⁷ Ibid, 60.

was based on Alexander Pushkin's poem by the same name and tells the story of Maria, a Polish princess, who is captured by a Tartar Khan Girei and killed by his jealous wife Zarema.⁸

Romeo and Juliet, choreographed by Leonid Lavrovsky with music by Sergei Prokofiev, told Shakespeare's classic tragedy, but not at first. The idea for a ballet based on *Romeo and Juliet* was first proposed in 1934 for the GATOB stage. Under the direction of Sergei Radlov, the original libretto gave the classic tragedy a happy ending, to align with the Socialist Realist theme of an idealized, positive future where good triumphs evil.⁹ As a result of administrative problems, the GATOB production fell through and the ballet was given to the Bolshoi to produce, which premiered October 4, 1935. Despite its adherence to Socialist Realist doctrine, the production was not well received, resulting in a reworking of the libretto to match the original Shakespeare spearheaded by choreographer and librettist Leonid Lavrovsky. This version returned to GATOB (then the Kirov Theater) where it premiered January 11, 1940, and lauded as a success, winning the Stalin Prize and international acclaim.¹⁰

Romeo and Juliet's history raises an interesting question: after ballet theater found success in the structure of *drambalet*, how necessary were revolutionary, Soviet, and, by 1934, Socialist Realist themes to ballet? Had critics and the party moved past these issues once they satisfied the need for at least one Soviet ballet in the repertoire? Had the implementation of Socialist Realism been a clear enough cultural definition that thematically, ballets could return to classical traditions? Perhaps the success of *Flames of Paris*, which answered the thematic call for Soviet ballet, combined with the audience-friendly structure of *drambalet*, had been enough. As

⁸ Ibid, 54.

⁹ Much like this happy ending alteration, Agrippina Vaganova (Fedor Lopukhov's successor as artistic director of GATOB) staged an updated version of *Swan Lake* (*Lebedinoye ozero*, 1933) in which Odette and Prince Siegfried are reunited in the afterlife showing the triumph of good over evil. See Ezrahi, 48.

¹⁰ "Romeo and Juliet: Ballet by Sergei Prokofiev," Bogdan Korolyok, Mariinsky Theater, accessed April 28, 2023, <https://www.mariinsky.ru/en/playbill/repertoire/ballet/romeo/>.

the Soviet Union moved past its formative years, perhaps ballets could revert to non-specifically Soviet themes and settings, like those present in literary classics.¹¹

Yet, *Flames of Paris* was not Soviet ballet theater's sole accomplishment, in fact it marked the beginning of a period in which ballet was given space to flourish and eventually become a tool of cultural diplomacy. So, were revolutionary, contemporary, or Socialist Realist themes even necessary for success?

As non-*drambalet* productions had been condemned for "vulgarizing Soviet themes" while *drambalet* productions were renowned for their success, Soviet ballet became defined by the genre of *drambalet*, not the inclusion of contemporary Soviet life and problems as the makers of *The Red Poppy* (*Krasnyi mak*), *The Golden Age*, and *The Bolt* had once thought. In practice, critics and audiences did not want to see issues of contemporary life portrayed on stage. They wanted ballets with simple storylines that audiences could easily interpret, which its makers could then infuse with ideology, a difficult act to achieve in a non-verbal art form like ballet. In order to accomplish this goal, complicated dance scenes in which ballet technique was showcased (what critics would describe as formalist) were replaced with pantomime and other elements which brought ballet closer to theater, an art form which relies on words, thus resulting in clearer messages, easily interpreted by audiences.

Ironically enough, this dramatization allowed for a reversion to classical themes, or oftentimes, the revival of pre-revolutionary ballets justified in some way as Socialist Realist. Neither *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* nor *Romeo and Juliet* had any outwardly Soviet themes, but their *drambalet* structure made them successful. Lopukhov's *The Bright Stream* did have a clear Soviet theme but relied too heavily on dance, rather than drama, for the anti-formalist

¹¹ *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, *Romeo and Juliet*, Yuri Grigorovich's *A Legend of Love* (*Legenda o lioboviu*, 1965), *Spartacus* (*Spartak*, 1968), *Ivan the Terrible* (*Ivan groznyi*, 1975) are all based on literary classics or historical episodes. Each premiered in Soviet Russia and remain in the Bolshoi Theater's repertoire today.

critics to tolerate. Nineteenth century classics like *Swan Lake* (Lebedinoe ozero) and *Esmerelda* (Esmerel'da, 1844) were revived and infused with *drambalet* elements allowing them to become staples of the state lyric theaters' repertory.¹² So, while *drambalet* gave ballet theater a place in the Soviet cultural landscape, it resulted in a reversion to the art form's aristocratic roots, despite the original revolutionary fervor to innovate ballet for the Soviet cause, leaving the revolution ultimately unrealized in Soviet ballet theater.

¹² Carolyn Pouncy, "Stumbling Toward Socialist Realism: Ballet in Leningrad, 1927-1937," *Russian History* 32, No. 2 (2005): 187-191.

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