
Cultural Warfare

Russian made head of the Spanish ballet

by Katherine Kanter

People who scoff at the importance of culture in military terms, would do well to ask themselves why the Russians are expending, at this very moment, so much time, money, and effort, to take over every leading ballet company in the West.

In February in Milan, Oleg Vinogradov, the director of the Leningrad-Kirov Ballet, announced with fanfare that he had acquired the rights to the ballets of Georges Balanchine during his 1986 tour of the U.S.A., and that Maurice Béjart, an intelligence operative, Sufi convert, and self-confessed satanist, who runs the Belgian Ballets du XXIème Siècle, would be working with him in Leningrad. He also announced a lengthy tour of the European countries, including the first tour in the company's history to Italy, and a two-month tour of France, for 1987-88.

That same week, Patricia Neary, director of Balanchine's New York City Ballet School, was appointed director and ballet master to the La Scala Opera House at Milan.

Why all this flurry of balletic activity between East and West? Why are all the balletic dissidents like Mikhail Baryshnikov, returning to the fold?

The case of Balanchine

The answer is given, albeit posthumously, by the case of Georges Balanchine. Balanchine, born Yuri Melitonovich Blanchinadze, who was to become one of the most influential and powerful men in U.S. cultural life, trained in a Russian Orthodox seminary before the Revolution, and actually planned to become a priest. His parents decided that he might serve the faith more effectively in what was then the Petersburg Maryinsky Theater, now the Leningrad-Kirov. Balanchine remained a fanatical Orthodox throughout his life, along with his close crony, Igor Stravinsky.

Balanchine, under the sponsorship of the Warburg banking family, was imported into the United States in the early 1930s, precisely the period when his compatriot, the pederast Serge Lifar, was sent to France to stamp out the ancient

traditions of the Paris Opera, and for the same reason: to create a "typically American" style of "classical" dance, in fact, a mirror image of the Russian soul: orgiastic athleticism, the nightmare vision of eternal youth.

The influence of Balanchine, then, and now, the influence of the Kirov and Bolshoi Ballets, in the United States and Western Europe, is based on a public relations hoax: the hoax that ballet is a Russian art. Ballet, as we know it today, is about 500 years old, and was developed by the Italians and the French. Virtually every leading dancer in Russia, until Anna Pavlova at the turn of the century, was imported from one of those two nations. Anna Pavlova herself, was the pupil of the Milanese teacher Antonio Cecchetti.

However, it is fair to say that today there does exist a Russian school of so-called classical dance, a school which has developed, if one can call it that, since the death of that ambiguous figure, Agrippina Vaganova, in 1953. This school, of which Maya Plisetskaya is, or rather was, the supreme incarnation, takes a classical form, hollows it out, and presents the scaly shell as "beauty," standing in the same fraudulent relation to art, as the 19th-century British posturers called the Pre-Raphaelites, stand in relation to Giotto, the giant of Italian painting before Raphael.

Essence of classical ballet: circular action

To be very concrete: The technical and artistic basis for classical ballet, in order that it be compatible with classical music, is based on an inescapable principle: Only action which is circular, or rather spiral, is permitted, and only forms which are essentially spherical, no Egyptian sideways-moving flat figures, no broken angles, no undulating like a cobra around an axis. The spiral may rotate outwards—that is the position known as *effacé*, or inwards—that is known as *croisé*, in a relation which is parallel to the *chiaroscuro* (dark and light) play in painting, or in music, to the major-minor relation of the keys.

The greatest technical challenge to the dancer, leaving aside for a moment the dramatic aspects, is, in the case of women, to present, not gross flesh, but the ethereal, the immaterial, and in the case of men, to defy gravity, to soar, to fly. Both these ideas, are the idea of immortality. If this were easy to do, we could all clump about thickly and call it dancing. The most difficult thing in dancing is to soar, to be immaterial. Therefore, that is precisely what has to be done. Otherwise, there would be no need for art, if only that which is easily accessible, were what attracts the mind toward universal ideas.

But here we are with a paradox: through a movement of the flesh, to present what is not the flesh.

This concept is too sophisticated for the Russians. It does not fit with their theology. Therefore, they have decided to eliminate it, from their music, and from their dancing.

They have done this, by substituting for the principle of flight, the principle of vertical thrust. If one studies still

photographs of the present generation of Russian dancers, led by Plisetskaya, one notices how they all, whether men or women, lunge forward, or upward, or whatever, seemingly tearing themselves with enormous, sinuous energy off the ground. In the case of the women, they have replaced grace with a snakelike elegance, which is not quite the same thing. Lamentably, the spectators in the West like this sort of thing, because they have gotten used to it, and they accept it as "art," because our society worships the quivering thigh and the twitching muscle.

It is no accident, that the Russians have only one piece by Auguste Bournonville in their repertory, "La Sylphide," and that the Bournonville method is not taught in their schools. It is not taught, because it is too difficult. The works by the 19th-century Danish ballet master, put great stress on the dancers, as actors, and as technicians. The head, the eyes, the expression on the face, are the focal point of his pieces, whereas, the body and the legs, are the focal point of Russian choreography. Furthermore, the system of Bournonville is very taxing, because it is "thorough danced," i.e., the dancers must use all the music and dance all the time they are on stage, instead of the Russian method of flashing a spectacular pose at the end of a dead patch where there are only walking steps to the music, but no dancing.

The two systems are incompatible: Since man is ruled by his head, not by his legs, it does tend to tell one something

about how the Russians think, if one can call it that.

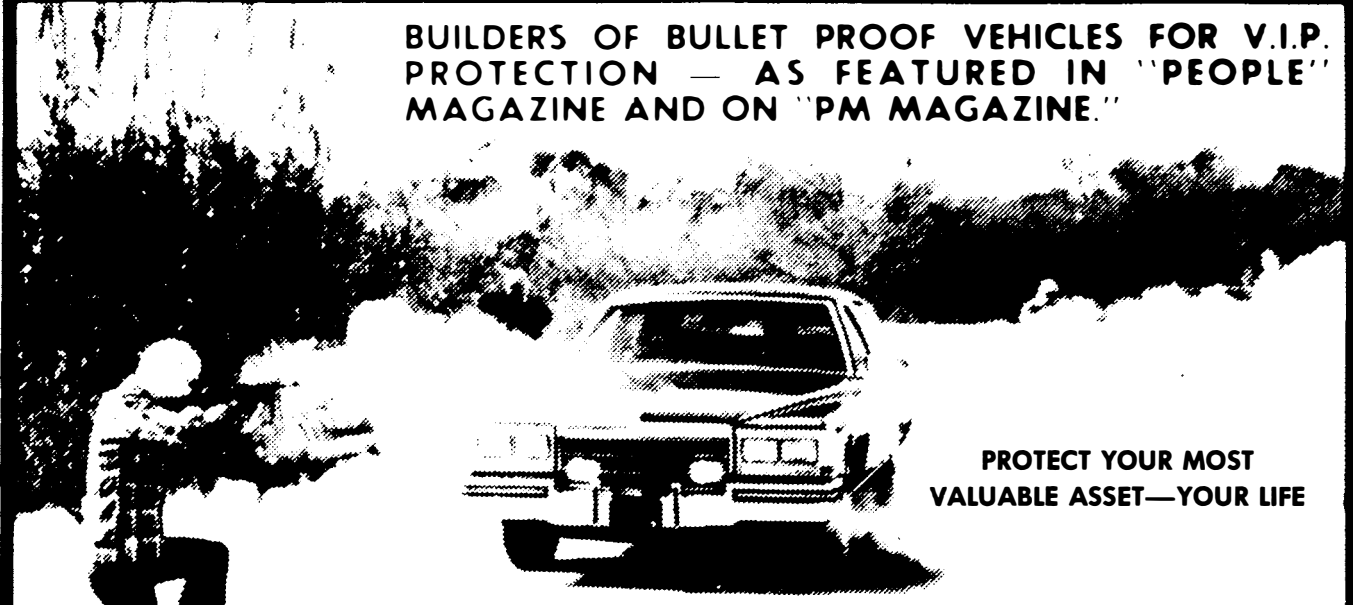
Why Spain?

Now the Spanish have gone and fallen for the hoax. It was recently announced, that José Manuel Garrido, of the culture ministry, signed in Moscow a contract, which will cost the Spanish state about \$100,000, to purchase the dubious services of the Bolshoi bigshot, Maya Plisetskaya, as director of the Spanish Classical Ballet.


Maya is now 58 years old and should have stopped dancing 18 years ago. Her every public appearance nowadays is a painful embarrassment for anyone with even an inkling of knowledge about dancing. As for her ability to teach, or to run a company, she is a narcissist who is mainly, extraordinarily fond of money. Her musical abilities are limited to the fact that she is married to a state-subsidized cacophonist, a composer named Rodion Shchedrin. How can the Russians palm people like this off onto the Ballet Nacional Clásico de España?

The answer is simple: The Spanish government has a policy of compromising with the U.S.S.R. on every important issue, and Maya sits on the board of the all-powerful Soviet Culture Fund, created a few months ago by Raisa Gorbachova, on which also sits the composer A.M. Balanchinadze, brother of the late unlamented anti-Semite Georges Balanchine.

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