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Russian Dance in 2023: Back to the Soviet Model of Isolated Development?

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Ballet “Liturgy.” **zaryadyehall.ru**

In 2023 the Russian world of dance went largely inward, focusing on Russian traditions of dance, supporting regional initiatives, and organizing festivals. There were few exchanges of dancers and joint projects, and only with non-Western countries.

Losses or gains?

On the regional level there were several somewhat positive developments. In 2022, Ivanovo University has opened a bachelor's program called "Education in Choreography." Leading teachers and practitioners from all over the country come to Ivanovo with modular courses, allowing students to learn about contemporary choreography in central Russia.

In the spring of 2022, the renowned Urals Provincial Dances theater finally got a permanent venue: the building of the former Ekaterinburg Coliseum movie house. In December 2023, the theater produced two premieres based on folklore and Old Russian epics. One was "Paper Serpent" based on the bylina "Alyosha Popovich and Tugarin Zmeyevich" and choreographed

by theater dancers Ruslan Trushkin and Vladislav Miroshnichenko. The second was "The Scent of Wormwood" created by CoDa Dance Company in collaboration with the Zvontsy folklore ensemble under the direction of choreographer Anastasia Mironova.

But at the same time, the two Moscow contemporary dance theaters, Ballet Moscow and Novy Ballet, lost their independence and were merged with the companies of the New Opera and MAMT respectively. Only time will tell what will come of these mergers. For now, many experts believe that this decision has destroyed a part of the Moscow contemporary dance scene. Yelena Tupysyseva, former director of Ballet Moscow, became the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's new executive director in September of this year.

Last year the Voronezh Chamber Theater Dance Company celebrated its five-year anniversary. The theater, which was an important platform and initiator of the International Platonov Festival, supports young Russian choreographers and dancers. In November, Mikhail Bychkov, the theater's artistic director, was dismissed from his post and there were fears that the dance company would be dissolved. But for now dance performances remain on the theater's schedule, and the dancers hope to continue their cooperation with the theater.

Meanwhile, Maxim Petrov, a young promising choreographer, officially became the new Artistic Director of the Ural Opera Ballet in Yekaterinburg. He replaced Vyacheslav Samodurov, who had devoted 12 years of his career to the theater. This is a unique example of voluntary rotation of artistic directors in contemporary Russian ballet.

Festivals: a trend in industry development

Context. Diana Vishneva Festival has been one of the highlights of the dance season in Moscow and St. Petersburg since 2013. Since its inception, it has grown from a three-day festival to a whole week of events in two cities. Over the years, the festival has presented works by 40 of the best choreographers in the world and Russia and became an important laboratory to showcase new names of young Russian choreographers. The festival continued in 2023 and was partly transformed into a residency and all-year working platform for contemporary dance productions.

The Sdvig Performative Arts Studio is a chamber space in the heart of St. Petersburg, supported by a team of artists: Anton Vdovichenko, Kamil Mustafaev, Anya Kravchenko and Maria Sheshukova. In July-August 2023, through a crowdfunding campaign, the young choreographers held a new contemporary dance festival called "Dance Mad About Itself and Love." Held in various venues across the city, the festival presented productions, performances, labs and other events, establishing itself as a spontaneous and self-organized research institute of dance. This initiative has become very important for the contemporary dance underground and young choreographers of the country.

The TanzSoyuz festival supporting young choreographers was held for the first time in January 2023 at the Innovative Cultural Center of Kaluga. It offered a unique model of professional networking with productions, showcases, discussions of current industry challenges, masterclasses and pitching of new projects by contemporary dance artists. The format was so well received that it was replicated by initiators in other regions on a smaller scale.

Dance heritage and the search for cutting-edge solutions

This year Kaluga also became home to the Electronic State Archive of Russian Contemporary Dance, formed in order to gather archives of Russian companies and projects from the 1990s-2020s.

One of the important events in dance this year was the December 2023 Moscow premiere of "Liturgy" by choreographer Olga Tsvetkova to music by Sergei Akhunov.

This ballet has a fascinating pre-history. In the 1910s choreographer Leonid Myasin's ballet "Liturgy" was never brought to the stage. It was supposed to be a production of Sergei Diaghilev with sets by Natalia Goncharova. Diaghilev wanted to buy in bulk several of Stravinsky's scores including the "Liturgy," but he refused to sell. Then he tried to get the scores of ancient "strochny chants" (a form of polyphony) from Kyiv, but WWI made that impossible. The final straw was when it became apparent that Goncharova's sets were going to cost 3 million Swiss francs. The project was abandoned.

More than a century later, from 2020 to 2023 Moscow composer Sergei Akhunov worked on his "Liturgy," using elements of the ancient liturgical chant technique and reflecting Stravinsky's legacy. Meanwhile Olga Tsvetkova assembled the choreography of the new "Liturgy" from "micro" quotations of movements by Nijinsky, Myasin, Loy Fuller and even hip-hop and krump. The Intrada Vocal Ensemble and OperaSoundOrchestra helped the Cannon Dance Theater create a contemporary reflection on the sublime through modern choreography.

In St. Petersburg students of the BA program "The Art of Contemporary Dance" at the St. Petersburg State Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatory have also cast their eyes to both the past and present. Under the supervision of choreographer Alexander Lyubashin they have been working on a reflection of the dance heritage of both ballet theater and contemporary dance. The project is called "Recomposition: A Vision of Tradition." They focus on the romantic ballet "Giselle" and the "Ophelia 4x4" production (a 2006 Russian-Swedish project initiated by Alexander Pepelyaev and created by choreographers Daria Buzovkina and Martin Forsberg). The two new productions are being performed on the New Stage of the Alexandrinsky Theater.

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