

# **R-Evolution in Dance**

## **The Genesis of Eclectic Choreography**

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# 1. Introduction

Choreographers of today are borrowing, cutting and pasting from diverse dance styles and techniques in order to achieve innovative movement vocabulary. As a consequence this puts further expectations on the classically trained dancer. Due to the popular demand of eclectic choreography in ballet companies repertoires, the ballet dancer of today must be of a protean type; more versatile, comprehensive and adaptable with their movement. Their movement identity develops into a collage and reflection from the exposure to the manifold of choreographies and the aesthetic goals from each choreographer. Nevertheless, these demands are not just pushed upon the professional ballet dancer but also and perhaps more so on the pre-professional ballet student. In Joshua Monten's essay *Something old, Something new, something borrowed... eclecticism in postmodern dance* he discusses how "Eclectic choreography places very specific demands on dancers. In one sense, the imperative to be highly skilled in different dance techniques means that the aspiring performer must learn to negotiate physical imperatives that often seem mutually exclusive" (2008, p. 60). Monten's statement focuses towards the postmodern dancer, nevertheless it is also relevant for the current professional and pre-professional ballet dancer. Prestigious ballet companies like The Royal Ballet and The Paris Opera Ballet are commissioning contemporary choreographers such as Wayne McGregor and Crystal Pite in order to introduce innovative ideas and new movement vocabulary to their repertoire for the dancers and their audiences.<sup>1</sup> The ballet dancer of today must therefore train their body in order to respond to any movement that is required by a choreographer. The end result, dancers need to learn with the body in ways that may seem impossible and certainly unconventional from classical ballet technique.

To what extent however is this idea of eclectic choreography innovative and current? Monten states "Taking disparate movement styles and quoting from them directly, assembling dance spectacles eclectically, borrowing freely from various

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne McGregor was The Royal Ballets first ever-resident contemporary choreographer. The success of his first piece 'Chroma' (2006) became a break through leading him to his current engagement as choreographer for The Royal Ballet. Canadian contemporary choreographer Crystal Pite recently created *Flight Pattern* (2017) for The Royal Ballet. She became the first female dance maker in eighteen years to be commissioned by The Royal Ballet. Pite also challenged the ballet dancers body with a new form of modernity in her work *The Season's Canon* (2016) for the Paris Opera Ballet.

sources- these formal devices have become common in the choreography of the past thirty years” (2008, p. 52). Where this may be relevant to the evolution of postmodern dance, eclectic dance forms, vigorous athleticism and compelling stage craft are facets that are popularised in classical ballet choreographies not just in the last 30 years but also since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The parameters of classical ballet were collectively explored from artists of different disciplines. The embellishing Romantic period ballets were being rebelled against and a diverse controversial modernist revolution in dance evolved. Ballet choreography was redefined into an entire new dance vocabulary of neoclassicism and modern dance and eventually, the technical demands as well as the physical and aesthetic vision of a dancer metamorphosed.

This innovative collaboration and turning point in dance began with Russian born arts enthusiast and impresario Serge Diaghilev and his company Ballets Russes. Most of Diaghilev's choreographers and dancers were products of the Russian Imperial Ballet School and the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg. However it was in Paris where Diaghilev's Ballet Russes took the Western World by storm. Lynn Garafola describes in *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* how “Nothing was left untouched: subject matter, movement idiom, choreographic style, stage space, music, scene design, costuming, even the dancer's physical appearance- all felt the imprint of the quest for new forms” (1989, p. viii). In its twenty years existence from 1909-1929 the company “transformed ballet into a vital, modern art” (1989, p. vii). Infamously known for his innovative collaborations, Diaghilev joined forces with emerging artists of that time such as, Alexandre Benois, Léon Bakst, Pablo Picasso and Coco Chanel. Musicians such as Igor Stravinsky, Claude Debussy and Sergei Prokofiev and introduced choreographers such as, Michel Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, Léonide Massine, Bronislava Nijinska and George Balanchine. During the twenty years of continuous artistic reinvention, Ballets Russes was immersed in an “ongoing experiment, the result of which was to extend the expressive possibilities of ballet” (1989, p. viii). These “expressive possibilities of ballet” eventually surfaced into new neo-classical dance vocabulary, innovative modern dance techniques and established ballets companies and dance schools throughout the world; all of which having been fabricated or influenced from the Ballets Russes' diaspora of alumni dancers and choreographers.

## 1.1. Thinking Outside of the Box

The collaborative artists of Ballets Russes fearlessly stretched beyond the limits of dance and searched for alternative unconventional measures to create unforgettable masterpieces. Success or not successful, each choreographer experimented and established a new form of movement respective to the subject and energy of the music. The first to test waters Michel Fokine, was resident choreographer and ballet master of Ballets Russes from 1909-1914. Some of his most influential works are still performed today in many ballet company's repertoires, including *Les Sylphides* (1909), *Scheherezade* (1910), *Firebird* (1910), *Spetres de la Rose* (1911) and *Petrushka* (1912). Fokine ventured further from the stereotypical traditional ballets of those created by predecessor Marius Petipa where mime was predominately used to depict an unworldly story. Lucy Moore explains in *Nijinsky* how Fokine reduced the pantomime from the story ballets by "using flowing movement rather than mime to create drama" (2013, p. 255). He also freed the ensemble dancers from decorating the stage behind the hierarchal ranking of soloist dancers. Instead he unified the soloists within the ensemble while giving them small moments to dance their solos. Both of these aspects combined with his devotion to collaborating with other artists and musicians, where all art forms were equal throughout production were the starting point of something new. In his manifesto published in the London Times in 1914, (as cited in Michel Fokine- The Fokine Estate Archive, 2017, May 27) Fokine declares:

The new ballet, refusing to be the slave either of music or of scenic decoration, and recognizing the alliance of the arts only on the condition of complete equality, allows perfect freedom both to the scenic artist and to the musician.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In 1904 Michel Fokine attempted to introduce a revolutionary platform for dance that was sent to the Imperial Theatre directors. In 1914 he wrote five principles that were published in the London Times. These principles can now be read in the Fokine Estate Archive website under the Fokine's Revolution page.

Fokine's devotion to combining the arts and his ability to transform dance into a new era of experimentation became the groundwork for his modernist and neoclassical successors.

The star dancer of Fokine's ballets and Diaghilev's protégé Vaslav Nijinsky, was next in line to revolutionize dance. Nijinsky choreographed four ballets for Ballets Russe, *Prelude a l'apresmidi d'un Faune* (1912), *Le Sacre du Printemps*(1913) and *Jeux* (1913) and *Til Eulenspiegel* (1916) Nijinsky managed to step over the threshold into the "new ballet" (Garafola, 1989, p. 50) where he introduced a significant transformation into modernism. This shift towards modernism created controversial upheaves from the public due to the choreographies sexual innuendos, minimalistic movements, uncontrolled rigid and sharp movements, stamping and turned in placement. Garafola continues to describe Nijinsky's choreographic milestones as "*Faune*, in its movement design; *Jeux*, in its intimation of neoclassicism; *Sacre*, in its creation of primitive movement and style." (1989, p. 50) Nijinsky remained deeply involved in the technique of classical ballet however Moore explains how "he recognised its limitations. He was determined to speak for his own, modern world rather than to create exotic historical fantasies" (2013, p. 255) This "modern world" was notably portrayed in *Jeux* music by Debussy with choreography depicting a tennis game between one male and two female dancers. Sport, and the modern way of life from that time were integrated with the Imperial Russian ballet technique. In an article titled *The Lost Nijinsky* from The New Yorker, the writer explains how Nijinsky's choreography in *Jeux* "ushered in the so-called neoclassical ballet of the later twentieth century. This piece had a newness, a coolness, an atmosphere of the future." (2001) Nijinsky was infamously known for his virtuosity as a dancer however as a choreographer his work was generally the antithesis to classical ballet. His ballets displayed complexity and idiosyncratic movement that crossed the threshold into modernity, shocking the audiences at the time nevertheless later becoming masterwork and a genius, ahead of his time.

Collective influences continued to evolve throughout Ballets Russes with Léonide Massine as the next principle male dancer and resident choreographer. During his engagement with Ballets Russes between 1915-1921 his creative stimulus derived from a diversity of sources ranging from sculptures, paintings, architecture, puppetry and commedia dell'art literature. His collaboration with high end avant-garde artists and composers such as Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Stravinsky and Prokofiev helped lead him

towards an inventive approach to choreography that was seen in his most influential ballets *Parade* (1917) and *Pulcinella* (1920). The Estate of Léonide Massine (2017, May 29) describes his choreographic language to have been “notorious for its inventive use of diverse styles, ranging from commedia dell'arte to modernism and its synthesis of classical movements with folkloric dance. His works are infused with vivid characterizations articulated through expressive movement.” Massine continued to choreograph after his dismissal with Ballets Russes and became one of the most significant figures in modernist ballets in the 1930’s. However it was through his successor Branislava Nijinska, sister of Nijinsky who effectively transformed dance into its first signs of neo classicism on Diaghilev’s stage. First as a dancer for Ballets Russes from 1909-1913, Nijinska returned to Diaghilev as a choreographer between 1921-1925 where she choreographed *Les Noces* (1923), *Les Biches* (1924) and *Le Train Bleu* (1924). *Les Noces* composed by Stravinsky was seen as a tribute to *Le Sacre du Printemps* displaying at times similar choreography as her brother. The use of varying spatial designs of interweaving group patterns from the dancers with abstracted classical lines of the body were displayed throughout the choreography. Nijinska did not ignore the classical pointe shoes, nevertheless rather than illustrating the conventional femininity of movement that was normally employed with the pointe shoes, she “challenged this ideology” (Garafola, 1989, p. 128) by creating striking hard rhythms and stamping movements in order to narrate a story. While Nijinska’s ballets are noted by Garafola as “early masterwork of neoclassicism” (1989, p. 139), her choreography can also be seen as an influence to her successor George Balanchine. British dance historian Cyril W. Beaumont describes Nijinska’s influence as “something rarely mentioned in discussions of Balanchine’s early choreography” he continues to describe how similarities from Balanchine’s early work can be seen in *Les Noces* from the “gymnastic element (...) and the treatment of groups as architectural blocks” (as cited in Garafola, 1989, p. 139). Balanchine continued on from Nijinska as choreographer for Ballets Russe from 1925 and until the death of Diaghilev in 1929. From the ten ballets Balanchine choreographed for Diaghilev, some have remained a significant influence to the evolution of neoclassicism and are still currently performed in ballet companies repertoires throughout the world. These ballets include *Apollon Musagete* (1928) now known as *Apollo* and *The Prodigal Son* (1929). Balanchine’s contribution to the early twentieth centuries revolution in dance derived from his extraordinary knowledge and

relationship to music. For Balanchine the narration of a ballet was secondary to the influence music encompassed on a movement's creation. Like Nijinska he created structural patterns with his dancers, utilising quick syncopated steps, parallel positions, flexed hands and abstracted classical lines of the upper body. His "emphasis on steps, his de-emphasis of acting, his preference to plotless as opposed to narrative forms" (Garafola, 1989, p 48) became Balanchine's neoclassical signature to choreography.

## **1.2. The Butterfly Effect of Ballets Russes**

While dance precepts were being "broken in search for new forms" (Garafola 1989, p48) during Ballets Russes twenty years of artistic collaboration, Garafola explains how alumni dancers and choreographers continued laying the groundwork carrying on with "Diaghilev's experimentalist traditions" (1989, p. 376). These dancers and choreographers each held different visions and influenced British and American ballet for decades after and impacted dance, as we know it today. Of Ballets Russes dancers, Ninette de Valois founded The Royal Ballet School and the Vic-Wels Ballets which later became The Royal Ballet. Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin were co-founders of The English National Ballet, Marie Rambert founded the oldest running dance company in England, Rambert Dance Company and Tamara Karsavina was one the founding committee and devised the Royal Academy of Dance Syllabus. In America the Ballets Russes veterans spread across the east and west coast opening dance schools and companies. However it was Balanchine's choreographic prestige and genius with his company New York City Ballet and the American Ballet School that impacted the American dance industry. Twenty-five years after Diaghilev's death and in honour to his profound contribution and significance to the arts, Balanchine had written an article for Anatole Chujoy's *Dance News*:

Perhaps it is only today, almost twenty-five years after his death, that all contemporary choreographers begin to realize the true proportions of the enormous artistic debt we all owe to Serge Diaghilev. If we analyze the work we have done since his death in 1929, we see that we are still following his footsteps, still adhering to the principles laid down by him during the twenty years he guided the fortunes of his unique Ballets Russes. Were he alive today, Diaghilev would probably find a new direction

in his beloved art form, a new approach to the creation and presentation of ballet. He was always twenty-five years ahead of his time (1968, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., p. 522).

Years after this article was published, he explains in *Balanchine's New Complete Stories of Great Ballets* how this extract from the *Dance News* article had still remained true to him. While Diaghilev was “ahead of his time” and Ballets Russes veterans spread their knowledge and expertise, the development of ballet and modern technique in choreography evolved and continues to emerge into an eclectic industry of dance. All dancers of today could undoubtedly look further into their own ancestral tree of dance teachers, mentors and choreographers and discover the connection and influence they may have endeavoured with the profound and momentous prestige of the Ballets Russes. As Garafola states, “Had the Ballets Russes not existed, the history of twentieth-century ballet would have been very different” (1989, p. vii).

## **2. When Classicism Danced with Modernism**

The balancing fusion of Classicism and Modernism became synonymous to the creators of Ballets Russes. All of Diaghilev's choreographers, composers and artists each contributed to the awakening of an avant-garde movement that's impact is still prominent today. One of the most significant icons of these creators was George Balanchine. Born Georgy Melitonovich Balanchivadze in 1904 his name was later changed by Diaghilev intended to be better understood for Western Europe. Balanchine made Classicism dance with Modernism into a signifying movement vocabulary of Neoclassicism. He concurrently combined his love and understanding of music with his Russian Imperial dance background by modifying the classical technique with syncopated, off-balanced, geometric and turned in movements that later became Balanchine's trademark of Neoclassicism.

During the Ballets Russes twenty years exploration within the modernistic movement, all choreographers experimented with obscuring classical ballet steps and reducing the narration of a ballet. However it was Balanchine who renounced from the chronological details of a ballet, simplified the costumes and stage design into an empty space ready for new movement vocabulary, acrobatic elements and complex group



formations. Balanchine states in Solomon Volkov's *Balanchine's Tchaikovsky* how; "You have to manage without plot, without scenery and opulent costumes. The dancer's body is his or her main instrument, and it must be visible" (1985, p.121). Balanchine's Neoclassicism became a representation of dance itself in its purest and most aesthetic form. He believed just like his predecessors in stretching beyond the boundaries and explained, "in general there are certain rules in art, but no laws. You must know the rules and you may break the laws" (1985, p. 151). This statement is a manifestation of his appreciation and insight into classical ballet, and yet characteristically illustrates his ability in eschewing against the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century traditions into what we know these days as a dateless neo-classical dance genre.

The starting point of Balanchine's choreographic interest and talent began while he was training at school. At the age of nine he began studying dance at the Imperial Ballet School in St. Petersburg. He explains in his book *Balanchine's New Complete Stories of Great Ballets* how he disliked his first year at the Imperial Ballet School and had no interest or care for dance. During his second year at school his dislike for ballet turned into love after his first performance on stage in 'Sleeping Beauty' with the Maryinsky. He described how his first experience on the stage in such an elaborate production helped him see "then what ballet was in terms of a theatre"(1968, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., p. 517) Throughout his studies he was given opportunities to perform with the Maryinsky Theater and later joined the company at the age of seventeen. During his final years at the Imperial Ballet School he began illustrating a natural aptitude for innovative movement ideas with strong influences from Soviet avant-garde choreographers Kasyan Goleizovsky and Fyodor Lopukhov<sup>3</sup>. Balanchine's first *pas de deux* choreography *La Nuit* (1920) by composer Anton Rubenstein and dancer Alexandra Danilova described (as cited in Gottlieb 2004, p. 46) how Balanchine created the "revolutionary one-arm lift that had startled the audience". Another remarkable step also shocking the students and directors from the same ballet was an arabesque balanced *en pointe* and supported by a kiss. At that point of time this experimental choreography was somewhat controversial considering it was created by a sixteen year old with the arabesque balance being

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<sup>3</sup> Kasyan Goleizovsky was one of the first avant-garde choreographers in the Moscow dance scene. His experimental acrobatic styles influenced Balanchine's work. Fyodor Lopukhov was the brother of Russia's famous ballerina Lydia Lopukhov. He danced for Diaghilev and like Balanchine made significant importance to music's relationship with dance and choreography.

classed as erotic. However these first signs of risk-taking were only just the beginning of Balanchine's impacting artistic journey.

While dance appeared to be his main focus of training, it was music that influenced his creative input and remained most significant and close to his heart. His extraordinary knowledge and understanding of music originated from childhood. His comprehension of music exceeded other choreographers of his time and had become the most vital and important resource for his dance creations. Along side his work as a dancer with the Maryinsky, Balanchine enrolled in the Conservatory of Music where he studied for three years. Regarding his respect for music, Balanchine explained to musicologist Solomon Volkov how: "I began to learn to make my own judgements. I learned all these things- a little music theory, some harmony and counterpoint. I played piano, and I started to compose" (1985, p. 2). His attainable musical knowledge made communicating with highly prestigious composers more viable and became his key tool for creation. Before choreographing a new piece he explained in his book *Balanchine's New Complete Stories of Great Ballets* how: "I familiarize myself with the score thoroughly and try to understand what the composer had in mind musically when writing it" (1968, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., p. 553). This ability even made it possible for Balanchine to learn scores on the piano where he would play in order to translate music into dance.

For Balanchine living in Russia became impossible due to the repercussions from the Russian Revolution. An opportunity arose to perform in the West where Balanchine formed a small dance group called "The Soviet Dancers" and joined forces with Alexandra Danilova, Nicholas Efimov and Tamara Geva. It was from this dance tour in 1924 where the small group of dancers were introduced to Diaghilev and invited to dance with Ballets Russes. Balanchine began choreographing for the opera ballets and proved successful with his energy, natural aptitude and experimentation of new forms and extensions of traditional steps. He soon became ballet master and was offered his first commission a year later to choreograph for Stravinsky's *Le Chant du rossignoll* (1925). His work as choreographer for the Ballets Russes continued with nine more ballets and ended in 1929 when the company dissolved after the death of Diaghilev. For Balanchine, Diaghilev was the "deciding factor in his artistic life, the man who identified his talent, educated him, polished him, granted him extraordinary opportunities. "It is because of Diaghilev", he would say, "that I am whatever I am today" (Gottlieb 2004, p 52). Balanchine's earlier work for Diaghilev was modernistic and was classed as acrobatic

with the use of high extensions, distorted classical lines, unconventional yet extraordinary *pas de deux* sequences with diverse lifts and promenades *en pointe* where the female dancer turned close to the ground in *plie*. His ballets remained an ongoing experimentation. “Ballet Russes audiences, particularly in Paris, had been conditioned always to expect something new, and it would now be up to Balanchine to provide it” (Gottlieb 2004, p. 35). His diverse choreography was eclectic and open to both the expectations typical of the Ballets Russes futurist reputation and that of the Parisian audience. His work was the beginning of something colossal, innovative and revolutionary for ballet.

Another profound figure among Ballets Russes’ artistic collaborators and coequally the founder of Neoclassicism’s evolution was Balanchine’s long time artistic partner and musical genius Igor Stravinsky. Where Balanchine pushed the boundaries in ballet choreography so did Stravinsky with musical composition. Stravinsky gained international fame from his diverse, daring and ingenious scores with Ballets Russes. The first ballet that he composed was Fokines *Firebird* (1910) and he continued collaborating with futurist artists within the mainstream of Diaghilev’s enterprise. Historians have noted how Stravinsky’s turning point with infusing Classicism with Modernism was with his scandalous and creatively epoch score *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913). Classical music critic Ivan Hewitt describes in his article ‘*The Rite of Spring 1913: Why did it provoke a riot?*’ how Stravinsky’s *Sacre*’s premiere was described as “the most famous scandal in the history of arts” (2013). Where Balanchine experimented with modifying classical technique with modernistic movement vocabulary, Stravinsky comparably displayed through some of his scores by adding “an exciting element of modernist collage to colourful Russian folklore” (Hewitt, 2013). Nevertheless, *Sacre* was somewhat different and displayed a cacophony of sounds and irregular rhythms. For 1913, this music was extremely aggressive for audiences who weren’t quite ready for it. Hewitt question’s “Was it the choreography that annoyed people, or the music?” and he continues stating how “it’s often said that the pulsating rhythm of the Rite of Spring are what caused the outrage”(2013). Whether it was Nijinsky’s notorious choreography or Stravinsky’s abstractive score, “*Sacre* cut deep into the consciousness of its time” (Garafola, 1989, p. 63). Stravinsky’s journey throughout his life was an artistic one. He was at the cutting edge of art where he consistently reinvented himself. His diversity was seen early as a Russian ballet composer through to his neoclassical period and later

with his curiosity in serialism<sup>4</sup>. He provoked emotion through musical patterns, stripped back a score with simple musical lines and like his fellow artists and choreographers from the Ballets Russes; influenced and pushed the boundaries of musical composition.

## 2.1. Apollon Musagète: The Turning Point

Balanchine's first collaborative project with Stravinsky was his 1925 ballet *Le Chant du rossignoll*. Their first encounter with this ballet was the beginning of "a relationship that was to have much consequence for the history of ballet as did Petipa's with Tchaikovsky" (Gottlieb, 2004, p.37). Of the more than 400 works choreographed by Balanchine, Stravinsky composed 39. They were of one mind with music and dance and collaboratively turned classical ballet into modern art as innovators and risk-takers. The most important collaboration and turning point for not only neo-classical ballet but also for Balanchine's artistic life was *Apollon Musagète* (1928) later shortened to *Apollo*. With Stravinsky's score and libretto, he became a significant mentor for Balanchine that lasted their lifetime. The score from *Apollo* became Balanchine's self-discovery for illuminating simplicity by establishing moderation and discipline between story telling and movement. He described Stravinsky's *Apollo*:

In its discipline and restraint, in its sustained oneness of tone and feeling, the score was a revelation. It seemed to tell me that I could, for the first time, dare not use all my ideas; that I, too, could eliminate. I began to see how I could clarify, by limiting, by reducing what seemed to be myriad possibilities to the one possibility that is inevitable. In studying the score, I first understood how gestures, like tones in music and shades in painting, have certain family relations. As groups they impose their own laws. The more conscious an artist is, the more he comes to understand these laws and to respond to them. Since working with Stravinsky on this ballet, I have developed my choreography inside the framework such relations suggest" (Balanchine, 1968, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., p. 22).

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<sup>4</sup> Serialism is known as a twelve-tone technique in music. Derived by Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg. The musical score of Stravinsky's *Agon* (1957) used the twelve-tone technique and was choreographed by Balanchine with twelve dancers.

The creation of *Apollo* with its minimised narrative and embellished ballet technique became the forerunner to all of Balanchine's future ballets. His preference for simplicity was influenced from Stravinsky's celestial trimmed down score for a strings only orchestra. With only three females and one male dancer, the choreography showcased "many of the essential elements of classical ballet, many bold modernizations of that vocabulary, and several tableaux that appear two-dimensional and are strikingly reminiscent of Greek vase paintings and friezes"<sup>5</sup> (Ledbetter G., n.d., p. 4). The ballet essentially depicts Apollo as a young God who obtains maturity and integrity through art. The original version begins with Leto's birth scene of Apollo. Once unwrapped from swaddling clothes, Apollo tests his physical capabilities displaying awkwardness like an infant learning how to walk. He learns to play the lute in his first solo while displaying movement qualities of contractions and arches of the back, flexed hands, parallel legs and jazz styled held poses. During the course of the ballet he interacts with three muses, Calliope the muse of poetry, Polyhymnia the muse of mime and Terpsichore the muse of dance. Apollo partners the three muses while forming them into picturesque positions displaying linked arms and visually effective intertwining *promenades*.<sup>6</sup> The experimental use of *promenades* in the choreography move low to the ground where the dancers are partnered and turned *en pointe* in *grand plie* as opposed to the traditional held *arabesque* or *attitude promenades*. The muses dance frequently in canon while moving in and out of jazz-like slides and lunges, through classical arm positions abstracted into side bends and with quick parallel heel shuffles as opposed to the classical *bourrée* from fifth position. The three muses dance a variation for Apollo while he quietly sits on a chair and judges their performance. Each solo, highly individual from each other mirror the music's ethereality with quick syncopated steps and springs *en pointe*. The solos explore off balances and the use of weight through the hips and knees, pushing classical positions past the limits in order to abstract and extend not only the movements line but also the experimental use of point shoes. Apollo eventually chooses Terpsichore as his favourite and during the course of the ballet he takes his rightful

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<sup>5</sup> Professor of Philosophy Grace Ledbetter's specialises in Ancient Philosophy and Greek Poetry. Her article *Translation into Dance: Adaptation and Transnational Hellenism in Balanchine's Apollo* acknowledges how the ancient Greek sources may have played a role in Balanchine's ballet and how or to what measures he reconstructs and adjusts the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*.

<sup>6</sup> The choreographic analysis of *Apollon Musagète* is based on the viewing from New York City Ballet's 1957 revision, 1968 film. Principle dancers: Peter Martins, Susanne Farrell, Marnee Morris, Karin von Aroldingen

place as the muses leader. There are playful narrative moments in the choreography representational of Balanchine's passion for movement expression rather than simple mime. Some of the moments simulating these ideas are with a playful chariot race and Terpsichore's swimming lesson from Apollo. The ballet concludes with Apollo's ascending return to Parnassus taking up his calling as God of music.

Is this eclectic choreography? Young dancers of today may look at this ballet from 1928 and arguably question where the eclecticism lies within *Apollo's* choreography. These days the ballet is seen as an authentic representation of neoclassicism. The choreography nevertheless displayed acrobatic elements, jazz influenced movements and new ways of partnering that had not yet been explored during this time. Many elements within the solos were executed from parallel. A position that is customary nowadays in contemporary techniques and choreographies was however a profound deviation in the 1920's. One of *Apollo's* original dancers Alexandra Danilova who performed the role of Terpsichore, described her experience with Balanchine's heterogeneous choreography as:

We were the first ones to interpret Balanchine's movements, to find that path. The steps were very difficult to perform. It was for the second generation to take what we had done and build on it...we had a hard enough time grasping the new style and finding a way to express it. On opening night, we all felt the excitement of being in on something new...we knew that we had done something great (as cited in Gottlieb, 2004, p. 49).

Like most of Diaghilev's innovative ballets, the premiere of *Apollo* was highly criticised. The distorted classical technique and infused acrobatic elements showing the dancers lifted in the air or on the floor in the splits was generally nothing new to the western stage when compared with music-hall acrobats, however the acrobatism of Balanchine's work was suddenly applied to aristocratic subject matter. Despite the contention against the ballet, *Apollo* was Balanchine's significant moment of self-discovery as a choreographer. Dance critic Arlene Croce (as cited in Ledbetter G., n.d., p. 4) suggests how *Apollo* "can be looked at as a kind of manifesto, setting out the terms and predicting the direction of many later masterpieces".

While Stravinsky's score of *Apollo* "gave him the courage to eliminate the unnecessary from his work" (Gottlieb, 2004, p. 48), Balanchine continued working within this framework years after by stripping the ballet down further. André Bauchant's stage design with a four-horse chariot was discarded, as was *Apollo*'s wreath, gold tunic and sandals laced around his calves. The muses Grecian-like costumes radically changed from long tutus with bodices into simple leotards and short skirts resembling practise clothes. While dancing on a bare stage in the New York 1957 revival, the dancer's mythological identities were only recognisable by their symbolic characteristics. By the 1970's, Balanchine simplified the ballet further by removing the birth scene and the final ascension up the stairs, leaving only the solos, *pas de chat* and *pas de deux* as the ballets content. What was left for the audience to see and what became Balanchine's distinctive trademark to neoclassicism was the dance itself; a modernised ballet, maintaining the *pointe* shoe aesthetic with sophisticated, intricate and refined movement vocabulary. It was Stravinsky's *Apollo* that helped Balanchine "grasp that a given ballet must have a vocabulary of its own, steps and gestures that all inhabit a single universe" (Gottlieb, 2004, p. 48).

## **2.2. Post Ballets Russes: The Balanchine Effect**

The death of Diaghilev and closure of Ballets Russes saw a dispersion of talented artists struggling and searching for new projects. It was the end of "the most important and entertaining twenty years of creativity in music and painting and dancing that Europe had seen since the Renaissance" (Balanchine, 1968, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., p. 524). For Balanchine it took four years for him to find his status again as a stable choreographer. He ventured in and out of various jobs as ballet master for The Royal Danish Ballet, choreographing for musical comedies in London and creating new ballets for the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo. In 1933 Balanchine founded his own company called Les Ballets performing his avant-garde ballets in London and Paris. It was during this period when American arts patron Lincoln Kirstein, invited Balanchine to travel to the United States to open the School of American Ballet. It was the first of Balanchine and Kirstein's collaborations with the incentive to reshape and enrich America's ballet culture. His first masterpiece in America was Tchaikovsky's *Serenade* (1934) choreographed on students. With several attempts in creating companies, and choreographing for Operas, Hollywood and Broadway, it took until 1948 for Balanchine and Kirstein to obtain

permanent residency at the New York City Centre which became the emergence of New York City Ballet.

The New York City Ballet became Balanchine's experimental ground until his death in 1983. Lynn Garafola describes Balanchine's motives, artistic influences and experimentations for his ballets in the 1940's and 1950's similar to that of Diaghilev's from the late 1910's. She explains how Balanchine was:

gripped by a frenzy of experiment. He transformed the look of dynamics of classical dancing, redefined the relationship of choreography to narrative and visual design, and extended the boundaries for acceptable music for ballet- all of which Diaghilev had done before him. And like his mentor, Balanchine created an ensemble that served as an instrument for experiment while also catering to a broad public. (1989, pp. 377-378)

His immeasurable competence and continuity for new ideas extended with a diverse range of choreographies. He reinvented 19<sup>th</sup> century classical full-length ballets such as the *Nutcracker* (1954), experimented with ultramodern works such as Stravinsky's *Agon* (1957) and pleased the American audiences with Americana themed ballets such as *Stars and Stripes* (1958) and *Who Care's?* (1970). His ballets were all very different, and yet all rooted within the classical language. Many of his ballets including *Apollo* were passed down generation after generation and not only remained in the New York City Ballets repertoire for the rest of his life but have been and still are performed extensively worldwide. Balanchine not only built upon the classical ballet technique with his ballets, he revolutionised ballet choreography and initiated an eclectic trend that became the influence to many innovative choreographers of today.

### **3. Balanchine's Protean Dancer**

The revolution in dance and impact from The Ballets Russes' innovative choreographers not only reconstructed classical ballet choreography but they also reshaped the physical aesthetics and technical demands of today's ballet dancer. This modern day ballet dancer will be referred to as the protean dancer. One who is equally capable of performing skilfully in traditional ballet technique and in diverse modern



dance choreographies. According to The Merriam-Webmaster's Dictionary (2017) the term protean originates from the Greek mythology Proteus; the "original master of disguise (...) having a varied nature or ability to assume different forms. Displaying great diversity or variety". While each choreographer experiments and establishes a new form of movement vocabulary respective to the concept and energy of the music, the protean dancer must adapt and embrace the new form comprehensively.

While Diaghilev was responsible for the innovative collaboration of emerging artists, he also brought back the eminence of the male dancer. He created phenomenal male stars of that time such as Vslav Nijinsky, Leonide Massine and Serge Lifar. As choreography revolutionised and evolved throughout the last century, so did the image and demands of the ballet dancer, in particular the ballerina. Contrary to Diaghilev, Balanchine saw ballet solely as a female thing. From the extract *Words by George Balanchine* (as cited in Gottlieb, 2004, p. 201) Balanchine wrote how "Ballet is one place where art flourishes because of the woman; woman is the goddess, the poetess, the muse. That is why I have a company with beautiful girl dancers." Aside from introducing neoclassicism to ballet choreography while adding to the demands of a ballet dancers technique, Balanchine concurrently changed the image of the female dancer. He also wrote:

The old dancer was short with big busts and behind a corset, and all that hair piled up with bird of paradise feathers in it. Now we have stripped the girls almost naked; who wants to see a costume dance? We have taller, better-looking dancers and they are a million times better. The bodies are ready for anything, we use them faster. People now look at the dancers, not a story. (Gottlieb, 2004, p. 203)

From Balanchine's ideal aesthetic vision, we cannot detract from how the ballerinas physique changed. Dance writer Sanjoy Roy so accurately describes Balanchine's inflection to the classical ballerina as how "he changes the image of the ballerina from a graceful fairy into a sleek greyhound" (2009, para. 8) In Elizabeth Kattner-Ulrich's dissertation titled *The Early Life and Works of George Balanchine (1913-1928)* from the Free University of Berlin, she compares the early twentieth century dancer with the modern ballerina describing how the dancers of today are taller, thinner, and technically

stronger with higher extensions. These attributes change the line of the choreography not only in Balanchine's works or modern ballets, but also in the full-length traditional classics. She continues to explain how:

The transformation of dance has been so complete that no dancer would consider dancing even the classics in its "original form;" dancers always use the full extent of their extensions. This change also determines the direction that choreographers after Balanchine have taken; dances are made on the dancers available (2008, p. 190).

The "dancers available" of tall, streamlined, versatile and sleek began as Balanchine's vision, became his creation and eventually expanded worldwide. As the professional dancer became more eclectic, so did choreographies.

The changes of the ballet dancers physical aesthetics, movement dynamics, higher extensions, and athleticism are not only attributes from Balanchine's preferences, but also over time expanded throughout dance schools tuition worldwide. The American Ballet School became Balanchine's experimental ground for sourcing out, preparing and shaping young dancers into his ideal creative vision. Back in Russia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Imperial Ballet School was the foreground for the Mariinsky Ballet, just like The American Ballet School was for Balanchine's New York City Ballet. The young dancers were trained for that particular period and artistic movement. Their curriculum was comprised with classical ballet, ballroom dancing, Russian folklore traditional dance and mime, with the intension to build and prepare their dancers for the Mariinsky's full-length Petipa Ballets. However, while Ballets Russes' innovative and avant-garde ballets were revolutionising dance in Western Europe, the classically trained ballet dancer of that time was potentially not prepared for this modernistic trend. In 1919, Bronislava Nijinska opened her own school Ecole de Mouvement in Kiev where she explored further with her own pedagogical and choreographical projects. In Nijinska's essay (as cited in Garafola, 1989) written in 1930 titled *On Movement and the School of Movement* she wrote:

The contemporary school must broaden itself, must enlarge its technique, to the same degree that contemporary choreography has by departing from

old classical ballets... Today's ballet schools do not give the dancer the necessary training to work with choreographic innovators. Even the Ballets Russes... did not create a school to parallel its innovations in the theatre. The dancers of this company were always transient, invited from other theatres and schooled by masters of the old style, who trained them in a mechanics too primitive for today's choreographic demands (...) A choreographer who worked for Diaghilev was required above all to abjure the old school but nevertheless to expand the artistic possibilities of the classical dance." (pp. 123-124)

While the Ballets Russes alumni dancers carried on the dancing world expanding artistic possibilities, they not only established ballet companies worldwide enduring Diaghilev's experimentalist traditions, they also transmitted their knowledge through dance schools striving to teach the necessary training for innovative choreography. When the students from The American Ballet School graduated into the company, they were trained how Balanchine wanted them to look and how a step should be executed. This incentive was no different to that of The Imperial Ballet School. Nevertheless as ballet choreography revolutionized away from the conventional classical traditions, so did Balanchine's teachings.

What defines a Balanchine dancer? Robert Gottlieb portrays the Balanchine dancer with "energy, clarity, speed, articulation-these are the qualities that identify a Balanchine dancer. And an expressivity that comes from full investment in the steps rather than from emoting". (2004, p. 196) In an essay from the Dance Heritage Coalition about Balanchine's life as a dancer and choreographer, dance historian Damien Jack describes how Balanchine dancers represented a "distinctive open arabesque, fast footwork, big extensions, and full turnout." In regards to Balanchine's teaching methods, he continues to explain "in class he often forced the dancers to focus on the simplest elements of training: *tendu* and the presentation of the foot, *plié*. His dancers' mastery of these elements allowed them to move with a stunning strength and ease." (2012, p. 16) The dancers from The American Ballet School and New York City Ballet were fashioned in a way to deliver distinctively Balanchine's idiosyncratic style. His choreographical demands precisely imprinted his dancers, forming a categorical and protean distinct

body, one that met the standards of his aesthetic vision and one that proliferated throughout the world.

## 4. Conclusion

It is easy to perceive eclectic choreography as a catalyst for contemporary and other modern dance art forms. Classical Ballet; the hierarchy of dance technique and foundation for movement principles has proven over the years to not only be consistent with its conventional traditions, but a juxtaposition for the avant-garde innovators. Or how Joan Acocella's (as cited in Bales, 2008, p. 77) specifically describes how "ballet has good digestion: you can feed it almost anything". Looking back into the genesis of eclectic choreography from the innovative artistic collaborators of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, their history undoubtedly affirms how these artists embraced a modernistic evolution impacting Western European audiences, and in addition opening the doors for further experimentation. The unification of choreographers, composers and artists all stepped beyond the boundaries of their individual art forms fusing the latest in arts, music and dance in performances that astonished audiences. Diaghilev's entrepreneurial modernizations became the cutting edge for the Parisian avant-garde where artistic expression was developed redefining ballet for the twentieth century.

One can also say that eclecticism was already revealing its traces within Marius Petipa's full-length story ballets from the late nineteenth century. Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* (1876) for example illustrated a fusion of folklore dance in the third act with the Czardas, Polonaise, Spanish and Tarantella dances. These national character dances from Petipa's choreographic influence conclusively evolved into an entity and integral part of classical dance training. However it was Diaghilev's collaborative artists who transformed dance further into a contemporary generation of eclectic experimentation. There was Fokine's devotion with merging the arts, reducing pantomime and setting the foundations for his modernist and neoclassical successors. Then Nijinsky's anti-ballet style and outstanding performance quality; evoking diverse emotional possibilities for dance as well as fearlessly incorporating primitive-like and modernistic elements to choreography. Massine's inventive and expressive use of folkloric dance, *commedia dell'arte*, and modernism infused with classical ballet movements. Then Neoclassicism's early manifestations were seen with Nijinska's innovative approach, increasing the

energy of movements with distortion and taking choreography to another level with architectural group formations.

Finally there was Balanchine; a prolific choreographer whose name together with Stravinsky's became indistinguishable with neoclassicism. Having remained a traditionalist, he modified and expanded on the classical ballet technique into an entire new movement vocabulary of neo-classical dance. The conceptual essence of *Apollo's* choreography being the turning point and prototype to Balanchine's later plotless ballets. The absence of narrative in his works became a blank canvas on the stage ready for experimentation. His new works for New York City Ballet together with the frequently reconstructed older ballets from Ballets Russes were suffused with an eclecticism of streamlined dancers in costumes representing training attire, performing new ways of partnering, sleek, jazz-like and highly dynamic movements authentic to Balanchine's visions of modern ballet and the modern ballet dancer.

Balanchine believed that the future of ballets development "depends on the rise of new choreographers capable of furthering its development" (Balanchine, 1968, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., p. 552). While ballet companies and choreographers of the twenty-first century are venturing into an eclectic era of experimentation, the modern ballet dancer just like those of the Ballets Russes are encountered with challenges requiring dancers to be more versatile, comprehensive and adaptable. Nowadays, the Balanchine dancer would not be looked on as a protean type, since all their attributes are imperative for what is technically expected from a pre- professional and professional ballet dancer. However while he introduced a fusion of styles within ballet choreography and expanded on classical ballet technique, Balanchine idealistically enhanced the ballet dancers virtuosity into a protean dancer of his time.

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