

Cultural Heritage in Historical Perspective

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"New Ballet Criticism" (1993–2003) About "Soviet" Ballet: Forms of Cultural Recycling*

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Abstract. In post-Soviet Russia ballet criticism, similar to opera criticism, has an almost 30-year-old history, but the period perceived as the brightest and most significant is the first period, spanning the 1990s and the early part of the first decade of the 21st century. For this New Ballet Criticism (as it has been labelled by Vadim Gaevsky), as a part of New Russian Music Criticism (as defined by Olga Manulkina and Pavel Gershenson), a number of features have become normative: provocative styles and titles, a demythologization of works and of choreographers, the use of comparisons with mass culture in narratives, and ironic subtext. Similar to opera, political discourse has become important in ballet receptions of that time.

Reviews of Soviet-era ballet productions (as well as other types of performance) often refer to the main elements of Soviet mass art — Soviet films, as well as symbols of the totalitarian culture, such as sculpture and ideological materials. The styles and headlines exploit numerous Sovietisms that are familiar and recognizable by the audience. Just like in opera reviews, the recent "Soviet" element in ballet receptions is synthesized with Soviet mass culture and fashionable trends in the country via the cult of Western cinema and the influence of domestic and foreign literary, scholarly and epistolary texts.

But unlike opera criticism, ballet narratives clearly record the diversity of genres of "Soviet" ballet (ranking Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich among them); ballets since 1961 have been interpreted as a transformation of the "Soviet" element under the influence of George Balanchine's choreography; the concept of "Soviet choreography" also implies the unreachable, for example, in the embodiment of heroic moods and the creation of mass scenes. Four forms of cultural recycling in ballet receptions are identified: recycling, recycling à la ballet, double recycling and quasi-recycling.

Keywords: ballet, New Russian music criticism, new ballet criticism, receptions, cultural recycling, Soviet culture, Pavel Gershenson, content analysis

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■ Культурное наследие в исторической оценке ■

Научная статья

«Новая балетная критика» (1993–2003) о «советском» балете: формы культурного ресайклинга

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Аннотация. В постсоветской России балетная критика, как и оперная, имеет почти 30-летнюю историю, и наиболее ярким и значимым видится первый период, охватывающий 1990-е — начало 2000-х годов. Для этой Новой балетной критики (так её называет Вадим Гаевский) как части Новой русской музыкальной критики (по определению Ольги Манулкиной и Павла Гершензона) нормативным становится ряд особенностей: эпатажность стилистики и заголовков, демифологизация произведений и хореографов, использование в нарративах сравнений с массовой культурой, ироничный подтекст. Как и в опере, политический дискурс стал важным в балетных рецепциях этого времени. В рецензиях на постановки балетов советского времени (и не только) часто упоминаются главные элементы советского массового искусства — советские фильмы, символы тоталитарной культуры — скульптура и идеологические материалы. В стилистике и заголовках эксплуатируются многочисленные советизмы, которые хорошо знакомы и узнаваемы аудиторией. Как и в оперных рецензиях, недавнее «советское» в балетных рецепциях синтезируется с советской массовой культурой и модными тенденциями в стране — культом западного кинематографа и влиянием отечественных и зарубежных литературных, научных и эпистолярных текстов. Но, в отличие от оперной критики, в балетных нарративах чётко фиксируется разнообразие жанров «советского» балета (причисляя к ним балеты Сергея Прокофьева и Дмитрия Шостаковича); балеты с 1961 года интерпретируются как трансформация «советского» под влиянием хореографии Джорджа Баланчина; понятие «советская хореография» подразумевает и недостижимое, например, в воплощении героини и создании массовых сцен. На основании проведённого анализа в статье выделены четыре формы культурного ресайклинга в балетных рецепциях: ресайклинг, à la балетный ресайклинг, двойной ресайклинг и квази-ресайклинг.

Ключевые слова: балет, Новая русская музыкальная критика, новая балетная критика, рецепции, культурный ресайклинг, советская культура, Павел Гершензон, контент-анализ

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Introduction

The article presents a continuation of the research on the functioning of features of the Soviet element in contemporary Russian culture from the perspective of cultural recycling. *Cultural recycling of the Soviet element in the modern discourse of academic music is a phenomenon of a special type of remembrance and the embedding of fragments of the past into a new post-Soviet context, active reference to and use of actual personalities and musical compositions of the Soviet period in the post-Soviet era.* About the comprehension of recycling Soviet attributes to date, see the large section *Cultural Recycling: The Experience of the (Post) Soviet Element* in the journal of *New Literary Observer* (2021, No. 3) and, in particular, a historical-theoretical article by Valery Vyugin¹ and other articles in this

scholarly field. [1; 2; 3; 4, 5; 6; 7] Back in 2020, my article provided a prescriptive analysis of the newspaper articles that appeared in the first volume of *Opera*² from the 2015 three-volume anthology titled *New Russian Music Criticism*. [7] Hence, we are presently posing the following question: does the Russian ballet criticism about “the Soviet element” differ from opera criticism at the turn of the 20th and the 21st centuries? In the article, the basis for the analysis³ was the 2nd issue of this three-volume book.⁴

What is “New Ballet Criticism”?

Already in the first volume of the anthology, Olga Manulkina and Pavel Gershenson not merely identified the phenomenon of NRMC⁵ (which includes “new ballet criticism,” as Vadim Gaevsky labels it⁶), but also emphasized *the years 1993–2003 as the period of its formation.*

¹ Vyugin V. “Kul'turnyi resaikling”: k istorii ponyatii (1960–1990-e gody) [“Cultural Recycling”: A Contribution to the History of the Concept (1960s–1990s)]. *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* [*New Literary Observer*]. 2021. No. 3, pp. 13–32.

² *Novaya russkaya muzykal'naya kritika. 1993–2003. V 3 t. T. 1. Opera: sb. st.* [*New Russian Music Criticism. 1993–2003. In 3 Vols. Vol. 1. Opera: Collection of Articles*]. Author-compiler O. Manulkina, P. Gershenson. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015. 575 p.

³ Content analysis is used as the leading method, being essentially a formalized method of analyzing the content of document texts, in which textual information is reorganized into quantitative indicators with their further statistical processing. With the help of such factor analysis, latent tendencies that determine the content of texts can be revealed, and conclusions can be drawn about the extra-linguistic situation behind the text.

⁴ See: *Novaya russkaya muzykal'naya kritika. 1993–2003. V 3 t. T. 2. Balet: sb. st.* [*New Russian Music Criticism. 1993–2003. In 3 Vols. Vol. 2. Ballet: Collection of Articles*]. Author-compiler P. Gershenson, A. Ryabin, B. Korolyok. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015. 664 p.

⁵ This title and its abbreviation were suggested by the authors themselves in the abstract of the publication: *Novaya russkaya muzykal'naya kritika. 1993–2003. V 3 t. T. 1. Opera: ...* [*New Russian Music Criticism. 1993–2003. In 3 Vols. Vol. 1. Opera...*] P. 4.

⁶ Gaevsky V. *Novye imena* [New Names]. *New Russian Music Criticism. 1993–2003. In 3 Vols. Vol. 2. Ballet...* P. 7.

This period can be labelled as revolutionary, since during that time the main objective was to overcome the stereotypes of Soviet music criticism, to interest Russian society in academic music in the atmosphere of fierce competition with mass culture and the absence of a policy of ideological coercion. At this time, the main path of development of newspaper music journalism was outlined. Depending on its place of formation and public orientation, it can be called *full-range (universal)* journalism [8, pp. 118–119]. This type of journalism is represented for the most part not by specialized publishers, but rather by universal-cultural types, in its ballet version — such are the theatrical and literary magazines: *Moskovskii nablyudatel'* [*The Moscow Observer*], *Teatral'naya zhizn'* [*Theatrical Life*], *Sankt-Peterburgskii teatral'nyi zhurnal* [*St. Petersburg Theater Journal*], *Neva* and *Sibir'* [*Siberia*]. Moreover, they appear in a number of general-political and even in economic magazines, such as *Segodnya* [*Today*], *Telegraf* [*Telegraph*], and *Kommersant* [*Financier*].

Both ballet and opera magazine texts are beginning to address themselves for a new audience. For example, the readers of *Kommersant-Daily*, a newspaper with a universal profile, have become the new “middle class,” oriented towards Western ideals and values, having received a higher education and possessing a good command of foreign languages, albeit, not specialists in academic music or ballet at all. As a result, a model of music and ballet journalism has been formed within the framework of “mass” journalism, which combined professionalism

in the fields of music and ballet, problem-related discourse of presentation, spectacular publicity and modern intellectual and everyday slang. This model of journalism performed educational tasks among certain audiences, using a language they understood, and inserting academic music and ballet into their perspective of the world. In this situation, the predominantly subjective, partly shocking use of the review genre, in which the associations towards politics, mass culture, and a general “lowering of pathos” are brought in intentionally, as are the somewhat shocking titles of the ballet articles themselves.⁷ For example:

Khochu byt' kichem [*I Want to be Kitsch*] (about Yuri Grigorovich's *Corsair* at the Bolshoi Theater, 1994),

Ona v otsutstvii lyubvi i Grigorovicha [*She, in the Absence of Love and Grigorovich*] (about August Buornonville's *La Sylphide* at the Bolshoi Theater, 1994),

Skushal sorok chelovek [*He Ate Forty People*]⁸ (about the situation at the Bolshoi Theater, 1995),

Grob s muzykoi [*A Coffin with Music*] (about Vyacheslav Gordeev's *Last Tango* at the Bolshoi Theater, 1996),

Trup na stsene [*A Corpse on the Stage*] (review of performances in Moscow, 1995),

Kakoe ozero lebedinee? [*Which Lake is Swanier?*] (about Vladimir Vasilyev's *Swan Lake* at the Bolshoi Theater, 1997),

Myl'naya opera v Aleksandrinskom teatre [*A Soap Opera at the Alexandrinsky Theater*] (about Boris Eifman's *Red Giselle*, 1997),

Vtoroi sostav obskagal pervyi [*The Second Cast Outperformed the First*] (about

⁷ For examples of such an approach to titles in opera reviews, see: [7, pp. 122–123].

⁸ The second line is taken from Kornei Chukovsky's children's teaser poem *Barabek* (*Robin-Bobin Barabek*, a translation of an English folk song), which was published in 1929 and became a bestseller in Soviet times.

Vladimir Vasilyev's *Giselle* at the Bolshoi Theater, 1998),

Seksual'naya revolyutsiya zakhlebnyulas' v vanne [*The Sexual Revolution Suffocated in the Bathtub*] (about Dmitry Bryantsev's *Salome* at the Moscow Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater, 1998),

Parizhskii gamen v lokhmot'yakh akademizma [*A Parisian Gamin in the Rags of Academism*] (about Roland Petit's *Carmen* at the Mariinsky Theatre, 1998),

Ne skuchai, Odetta, prorvemsya! [*Don't be Bored, Odette, We'll Make It Through!*] (a review of events in Moscow, 1999),

Mumiya voskresla [*The Mummy has Risen*] (about *Pharaoh's Daughter* at the Bolshoi Theater, 2000),

Zolotaya rybka v tselofanovom pakete [*A Goldfish in a Cloth Bag*] (about *Pharaoh's Daughter* at the Bolshoi Theater, 2000),

"Spyashchaya krasavitsa": rep v stile khip-khop [*"Sleeping Beauty": Rap in the Style of Hip-Hop*] (about Karin Saporta's *Bright Red Tears* in Yekaterinburg, 2000),

Raskladnye kartinki s vystavki [*Fold-Out Pictures from an Exhibition*]⁹ (about Mikhail Shemyakin and Konstantin Simonov's *Nutcracker* at the Mariinsky Theater, 2001),

Elektorat dozrel [*The Electorate has Matured*] (about Yuri Grigorovich's *Ivan the Terrible* at the Kremlin Ballet, 2001),

Umnye nogi [*Smart Feet*] (about George Neumeier's ballets at the Mariinsky Theater, 2001),

Kal'yany, veyera, popugai [*Hookahs, Fans, Parrots*] (about Marius Petipa's *La Bayadere* at the Mariinsky Theater, 2002),

Staraya "Raimonda" prikhromala v Bol'shoi [*Old "Raymonda" Limped to the Bolshoi*] (about Yuri Grigorovich's *Raymonda* at the Bolshoi Theater, 2003),

A byl li lebed' [*And Was There a Swan*]¹⁰ (about the Royal London Ballet at the Bolshoi Theater, 2003),

Toska posle orgazma [*Yearning After an Orgasm*] (about the New York City Ballet's tour of the Mariinsky Theater, 2003).

This model can be designated as universal cultural journalism, in which music and ballet are closely integrated into the broad socio-cultural landscape of Russia.

The "Soviet" Ballet Canon Plus Stravinsky and Shostakovich

A content analysis of the index of names and compositions in the second "ballet" volume demonstrates not only the clear attempt to provide a distance from the Soviet past (still remaining at a very close proximity both in the artistic practice of theaters and among critics), but also the construction of the "Soviet" element already from a different position and under different conditions.¹¹ A special feature of the subject of this period's new ballet criticism is the attention to the long-established Soviet canon of ballet works and composers, such as Piotr Tchaikovsky, Sergei Prokofiev, and Rodion Shchedrin — their ballets and musical compositions. At the same time, Igor Stravinsky and the

⁹ An ironically-reduced allusion to the title of Modest Mussorgsky's cycle *Pictures from an Exhibition*: here instead of pictures (sketches from life) there are puzzles (a puzzle game).

¹⁰ A reference to the catch phrase "Was there a boy?" (a quote from Maxim Gorky's last novel *The Life of Klim Samgin*).

¹¹ Here and further, see: Ukazatel' proizvedenii [Index of works]. *New Russian Music Criticism. 1993–2003. In 3 Vols. Vol. 2. Ballet...*, pp. 629–645; Ukazatel' imen [Name Index]. *Ibid.*, pp. 647–662.

early ballets of Dmitri Shostakovich invade sharply and powerfully from abroad. The specific features of the ballet as a genre have always allowed new choreography to be presented set to “old” music and even compilations of music in a production. Thus, it is not surprising that the main character of the Silver Age and Nikolai Findeisen’s *Russkaya muzykal'naya gazeta* [*Russian Musical Gazette*] and then of the entire Soviet ballet, Piotr Tchaikovsky, has been mentioned 297 times (70 references to the composer and 227 references to his specific compositions, or his music, in general). In fact, Tchaikovsky’s phenomenon in ballet of this time is unique, because all historical and cultural intentions have been focused in him: this includes the imperial ballet of the Petipa era (the Silver Age), the symbol of Soviet academic ballet (even sometimes with a political flavour), Balanchine’s neoclassical ballet, and further modern choreographic miniatures using the composer’s music. In this manner, Tchaikovsky combined the incompatible, having remained a favourite composer for choreographers and dancers, as well as for the audience for more than a hundred years.

The second place is occupied by Igor Stravinsky, a representative of Russian musical culture abroad, the Diaghilevian Igor Stravinsky — 134 references (49 times of the composer himself and 85 of his works). On the third line of this peculiar hierarchy is the “Soviet” Sergei Prokofiev — 104 mentions (21 and 83 respectively). Three other “Soviet” composers stand a great amount lower than him: Dmitri Shostakovich — 36 times (12 and 24), Rodion Shchedrin — 23 (6 and 17), and Alfred Schnittke — 15 (11 and 4). It should be pointed out that for the critics the specific musical works themselves probably present the most important object of their reviews: as a rule, they are two

or three times more significant than any generalized references to the composers themselves. The exception to this has been Schnittke, whose name has appeared almost three times more often in review texts than the titles of his compositions have; probably due to the composer’s priorities of genre. It is indicative that in opera criticism Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Schnittke are arranged in a similar hierarchy, but without the overwhelming supremacy of the first in texts about ballets. Stravinsky, on the other hand, has been mentioned in opera reviews on par with Shostakovich, but by no means equally with Prokofiev. It is noteworthy that on the pages of ballet criticism the personality of Sergei Diaghilev, the brilliant interpreter of the *Ballets Russes*, appears 26 times, more often than the composer Shchedrin.

The described “ballet” hierarchy only implicitly hints at the hierarchy in the sphere of opera, where the unquestionable leaders are not Stravinsky or Prokofiev, but popular European and Russian composers primarily from the second half of the 19th and the early 20th century, such as: Giuseppe Verdi (70 references), Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (62), Richard Wagner (58), Piotr Tchaikovsky (56), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (54), and Modest Mussorgsky (44). [8, p. 121]

The previously mentioned features of the ballet genre have directly influenced the “ranking table” of choreographers in this index: the great choreographer of Russian academic ballet, Marius Petipa and the founder of American ballet, the extravagant George Balanchine, have become most significant for the new ballet critics — they are associated with Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky, respectively (130 references). The second place is held by the Soviet stage coryphaeus Yuri Grigorovich and the young talent Alexei Ratmansky (70 and 63), followed by the academic Vladimir Vasilyev

and the creative provocateur Boris Eifman (57 and 50). The fourth place is taken by two major French choreographers of the 20th century — Maurice Béjart and Roland Petit, along with the founder of Soviet ballet, Fyodor Lopukhov (37, 33 and 31). The fifth place is shared by the benchmarks of modern dance George Neumeier and William Forsythe with the unique Mikhail Fokin and the reconstructor of Petipa's ballets Sergei Vkharev (27 and 28). And it is especially legitimate to see three extremely different names in sixth place: the “prince of Soviet ballet” Konstantin Sergeyev, the outstanding Soviet choreographer Leonid Lavrovsky and the legendary ballet realist Kenneth MacMillan (23 and 22). In this way, Soviet choreographers of different years are organically combined with both masters from other countries and contemporary, post-Soviet ballet masters.

The same tendency of mixing together different eras has prevailed in the *special rating of references to dancers*. Along with young talents, such as Ulyana Lopatkina (55 mentions) and Diana Vishneva (47), the ballet genius of the “Saisons russes” Vaslav Nijinsky (31) and the universal Nina Ananiashvili (30) have often appeared in texts about ballet, the spectacular Nikolai Tsiskaridze (27) is highlighted, and the promising Andrian Fadeev and the young Svetlana Zakharova stand adjacent to the elegant Sergei Filin and the symbol of Soviet Ballet, Maya Plisetskaya (23 and 22).

“Soviet” Ballet and Sovietisms in a New Context

“Soviet” ballet is presented by new ballet criticism quite extensively in historical terms: from Lopukhov's dance symphony and Sergey Vasilenko's comedy (*Mirandolina*) of the 1920s, the “choreodrama” (dramballet)

of the 1930s–1950s (*Taras Bulba* by Vladimir Soloviev-Sedoy, *Gayané* by Aram Khachaturian, and *The Flame of Paris* by Boris Asafiev) and the “symphballet” of the 1960s–1980s. Prokofiev's ballets *Romeo and Juliet* (34 references) and *Cinderella* (23), as well as Khachaturian's *Spartacus* (17) have attracted the greatest amount of attention in the articles. Shchedrin's *The Humpbacked Horse*, Asafiev's *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* and Shostakovich's *The Bright Stream* (9 and 8), Shchedrin's *Carmen Suite* and Lopukhin's *The Greatness of the Universe* (6 each) come next in descending order. Valery Gavrilin's *Anyuta* and Shchedrin's *The Stone Flower* have been mentioned four times, while Andrei Eshpai's *Angara*, Shchedrin's *Anna Karenina* and Alexander Krein's *Laurencia* have been mentioned three times. Ballets created by choreographers to music by Prokofiev (Grigorovich's *Ivan the Terrible*), Shostakovich (Konstantin Boyarsky's *The Young Lady and the Hooligan*, Leonid Yakobson's *The Bug* and Igor Belsky's *Leningrad Symphony*) have also not been forgotten. Consequently, it can be argued that the genre of choreodrama has remained very attractive, even in the post-Soviet times, albeit, mostly in Prokofiev's version. The absence of a single mention of Reinhold Glière's *The Red Poppy* (although his ballet *The Bronze Horseman* is mentioned), although the composer is regarded as the founder of Soviet ballet, and the choreodrama genre, in particular, is telling, as is the absence of the name of Ivan Sollertinsky, the leading ballet critic of the 1930s, a polyglot and a friend of Shostakovich.

The “political” trend could be considered as one of the central trends in ballet criticism of this time, as well as in opera criticism. It is expressed not only in references to politicians and cult persons of the Soviet era:

Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Arkady Gaidar, Ekaterina Furtseva, Yuri Gagarin, Joseph Kobzon and Alla Pugacheva. The adjective “Soviet” and the derivatives of it, iconic cultural phenomena and paraphrases of Sovietisms (words and expressions that were created and became common in the Soviet era) are actively used in the titles of the articles. As a rule, these signs of the “Soviet” element are combined with trends that contradicted them earlier — associations with Orthodox Christian subject matter, Western avant-garde art and mass cinema, for example:

Maiya Plisetskaya i sovetskaya imperiya [*Maya Plisetskaya and the Soviet Empire*] (about Plisetskaya’s anniversary at the Bolshoi Theater, 1993),

Smutnyi ob"ekt zhelaniya sovetskogo baleta [*The Vague Object of Desire of Soviet Ballet*]¹² (about Balanchine’s *Symphony in C major* at the Mariinsky Theater, 1996),

Dan prikaz emu na zapad [*The Order Was Given to Him — to the West*]¹³ (about Ratmansky in *Giselle*, 1997),

Sovetskii balet v postsovetskom Kreml'e [*Soviet Ballet in the Post-Soviet Kremlin*]

(about Grigorovich’s *Romeo and Juliet* at the Kremlin Ballet, 1999),

Mariinka razbudila babushku baletnoi revolyutsii [*The Mariinsky Theater has Awakened the Grandmother of the Ballet Revolution*]¹⁴ (about Petipa’s *Sleeping Beauty* at the Mariinsky Theater, 1999),

Dama ot khoreodramy [*The Dame of Choreodrama*] (about MacMillan’s *Manon* at the Mariinsky Theater, 2000),

Vo slavu bol'shevikov [*To the Glory of the Bolsheviks*]¹⁵ (about the situation at the Bolshoi Theater, 2000),

Sovetskaya orgiya v Mariinke [*The Soviet Orgy at the Mariinsky*] (about an evening of Soviet choreography at the Mariinsky Theater, 2001),

Chisto sovetskaya predostorozhnost' [*Purely Soviet Precaution*]¹⁶ (about Oleg Vinogradov’s *Vain Precaution* at the Moscow Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater, 2001),

Nazad, k sovetskomu baletu [*Back to Soviet Ballet*]¹⁷ (about ballets created to the music of Shostakovich at the Mariinsky Theater, 2001),

¹² *Etot smutnyi ob"ekt zhelaniya* [*This Vague Object of Desire*] (1977) is the last film of the great Spanish surrealist director Luis Buñuel.

¹³ The ballad song *Proshchanie* [*Farewell*], or as it is also called, *Dan prikaz: emu — na zapad...* [*The Order was Given to Him — to Go to the West...*],” was created in 1937 (music by Dmitry and Daniil Pokrass, lyrics by Mikhail Isakovsky).

¹⁴ A paraphrase of a fragment of a famous aphorism by Vladimir Lenin from the 1912 article *Pamyati Gertsena* [*In Memory of Herzen*]: “...the Decembrists woke up Herzen. Herzen began revolutionary agitation ...” [Lenin V. I. *Complete Works*. 5th Edition. Moscow: Publishing House of Political Literature, 1968. Vol. 21. P. 261]. The second half of the title probably points as a model to the expression “the grandmother of the Russian Revolution”: this was the nickname given by Alexander Kerensky to the revolutionary, the leader of the Social Revolutionary Party Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaya (1844–1934).

¹⁵ Here there is an obvious reference to the expression “Vo slavu Bozhiyu” [“To the Glory of God”] — this is how an Orthodox Christian praises God.

¹⁶ A paraphrase of the title of the cult English detective television series that ran for 26 seasons from 1984 to 2010.

¹⁷ Most likely, a reference to the American science fiction film *Back to the Future* directed by Robert Zemeckis, which has become a popular trilogy (the films were released in 1985, 1989 and 1990).

Staryi prints i devushka s metloi [*The Old Prince and the Girl with a Broom*]¹⁸ (about Maria Bolshakova's *Cinderella* at the Mikhailovsky Theatre, 2001),

Klyuchi pod kovrikom [*Keys under the Mat*]¹⁹ (about Balanchine's *Prodigal Son* at the Mariinsky Theater, 2001),

Kollektivizatsiya Bol'shogo teatra [*The Collectivization of the Bolshoi Theater*]²⁰ (about Ratmansky's *The Bright Stream* at the Bolshoi Theater, 2003),

Svetlyi ruchej bez Michurina [*A Bright Stream without Michurin*]²¹ (about Ratmansky's *The Bright Stream* at the Bolshoi Theater, 2003),

Mal'chishki i devchonki, a takzhe ikh roditeli [*Boys and Girls, as well as Their Parents*]²² (about Radu Poklitaru's and Declan Donnellan's *Romeo and Juliet* at the Bolshoi Theater, 2003).

The angle of politics in the interpretation of music is also demonstrated by the symbols of Soviet culture inserted into the texts:

the newspaper article “Ballet Falsehood,” the sculptural group “The Worker and the Kolkhoz Woman,” the main fountain of the VDNKh [Exhibition of National Economic Achievements] “The Friendship of Peoples,” the VDNKh fountain “Kolos,” *Time, Forward!* by Georgy Sviridov, the films — *Kuban Cossacks* by Ivan Pyryev, *Chapaev* by the Vasiliev brothers and *Girls* by Yuri Chulyukin, *Spring on Zarechnaya Street* by Felix Mironer and Marlen Khutsiev, *Ordinary Miracle* by Mark Zakharov, the title of ballets — *Optimistic Tragedy* (1985, music by Mark Bronner, based on the play by Vsevolod Vishnevsky), *Quiet Don* (1987, music by Leonid Klinichev, based on the novel by Mikhail Sholokhov), and *Red Giselle* (1997, Boris Eifman's ballet about Olga Spesivtseva).

In addition to politicization, ballet criticism — similar to opera criticism — listens to and interprets the works while being in close context with *the best-selling*

¹⁸ There are both exact paraphrases and allusions in this title. For instance, the sculpture “A Girl with an Oar” is one of the classic symbols of the Soviet era during the period between the 1930s and the 1950s, created at different times by the sculptors Ivan Shadr and Romuald Iodko. This name became a common one for the similar gypsum statues (“gypsum socialist realism”), which in the Soviet times decorated parks of culture and recreation. Allusions to the first half of the title may be related to Alexander Galich's bard song *Staryi Prints* [*Old Prince*], which was written in 1961 and dedicated to Boris Pasternak.

¹⁹ A somewhat ironic reference to one of the mythologized elements of Soviet everyday life, which states that in the Soviet Union life was easy, bright and carefree, crime was practically non-existent (as were the perpetrators of crime), all people were brothers and sisters to each other, and society was so trusting of its neighbours that even apartment keys were usually left under the mat before the front door. See, for example: *Biznes na butylkakh i klyuch pod kovrikom. Chto my delali v SSSR i ne delaem v Rossii* [Business on Bottles and the Key under the Mat. What did We Do in the USSR and do not Do in Russia?]. *Guberniya Daily*. 01.11.2017. URL: <https://gubdaily.ru/lifestyle/obzor/biznes-na-butylkax-i-klyuch-pod-kovrikom-chto-my-delali-v-sssr-i-ne-delaem-v-rossii/> (accessed: 28.09.2023).

²⁰ The state policy of merging individual peasant farms into collective farms (kolkhozes and sovkhoses), carried out in the USSR from 1928 to 1937 (and in the western part of the country — until 1950).

²¹ Ivan Vladimirovich Michurin (1855–1935) — a famous Russian biologist and an outstanding breeder, whose surname became a common noun, used in everyday life as a synonym for zealous adherents of everything connected to collective farming.

²² Since 1974, the famous song about “girls, boys and their parents” with lyrics by Alexander Khmelik and music by Alexei Rybnikov had been played in the splash screen to each issue of the film magazine *Eralash*.

Western avant-garde art and mainstream cinema, which uses in the texts: *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang), *Some Like it Hot* (Billy Wilder), *Shoulder Arms* (Charlie Chaplin), *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (Miloš Forman), *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone), *And the Ship Sails On* (Federico Fellini), *Kill Bill* and *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino), *Stargate* (Roland Emmerich), *The Matrix* (the Wachowski brothers), and *The Terminator* (James Cameron). It has become natural to implement *mass culture and high fashion phenomena* into the ballet texts: Nikolai Rastorguev's *Atas*, Edith Piaf's *Non, je ne regrette rien* and *Santa Lucia*, the pantomime miniature *Asisyai* (Vyacheslav Polunin), the names of pop stars — Philipp Kirkorov, Nikolai Baskov, Natasha Koroleva, Freddie Mercury and Vanessa May, actresses — Carole Bouquet, Uma Thurman and Vera Kholodnaya, world couturiers such as Givenchy and Pierre Cardin and legendary film director Alfred Hitchcock.

A great place is given to *Russian and foreign literary, scholarly and epistolary texts*, or rather references to them: from *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* by Gaston Leroux, novels by Alexandre Dumas and Jerome K. Jerome, as well as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* — to the memoirs of Maurice Béjart and Andrei Konchalovsky, the postmodernist poem *Moscow — Petushki* by Venedikt Yerofeev, the scandalous essay *Male Wealth* by Viktor Yerofeev, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Milorad Pavich's novel *The Khazar Dictionary*, and even Vladimir Paperny's *Culture Two* and Charles Jencks's *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*. This approach

also resembles the opera criticism of this period.

The veneration of Richard Wagner, the idol of the entire Silver Age, also appears similar: the ballet texts mention all the operas by this great German composer. This fact allows us to speak of a new wave of Russian Wagnerism, another cultural recycling of the early 20th century, which emerged a century later.

Nonetheless, *the attitude to the Soviet heritage in the reception of ballet differs from those of operas*. In the latter, neither Prokofiev nor Shostakovich are considered to be Soviet composers, therefore their operas (and all their compositions) written in the USSR are counted as non-Soviet. Consequently, a possible and naturally predictable conclusion for the reader is the following: the phenomenon of the “Soviet opera” for the Russian public of the early 21st century simply does not exist, whereas this term implies either an exclusively mythologized interpretation of any opera work and composer who wrote it (not limited to those from the Soviet era) in support of the Soviet ideology, or opera productions of the Soviet era recreated by theaters without obvious directorial alterations.

In the sphere of ballet, the situation is precisely the opposite. The authors explicitly record the variety of genres of “Soviet ballet” during the course of the country's long history, attributing Prokofiev and Shostakovich to them, in the first place. In addition, the ballets from the period of the “Thaw” (1961) are emphasized, which is interpreted by critics as an attempt to transform the Soviet element under the influence of Balanchine's choreography.²³

²³ Gershenzon P. Smutnyi ob"ekt zhelaniya sovetского baleta [The Obscure Object of Desire of the Soviet Ballet]. *New Russian Music Criticism. 1993–2003. In 3 Vols. Vol. 2. Ballet...*, pp. 109–114.

Many texts often make use of the notion of “Soviet choreography” as an estimative one, implying something successful and qualitative, which looks good even now and in some ways is unrivalled: for example, in the creation of mass scenes and heroic images.²⁴ The hypothesis expressed in 1993 by Pavel Gershenson — that the Soviet element is not something unchangeable in the art of the ballet, and Maya Plisetskaya is an emblem of a ballerina of this changing Soviet empire: from the empire of the late Stalin period to the early 1990s,²⁵ — is quite convincing to us.

Conclusions

As a result of analyzing the array of texts presented in the second volume of *New Russian Music Criticism*, we can name *four types of cultural recycling* that are found in these ballet receptions:

1. The actual *recycling itself* — the return of the ballets from the early Soviet era, primarily those of Shostakovich, to the stage after a long oblivion;
2. *Recycling à la ballet* — new choreography and staging of Soviet-era ballets, primarily those of

Prokofiev, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries;

3. *Double recycling* — reconstructions of Petipa’s, Tchaikovsky’s and Glazunov’s ballets that were altered during the Soviet era;
4. *Quasi-recycling* — making use works by “Soviet” composers to create modern ballets.

As a preliminary conclusion, we can cautiously summarize that during this period (1993–2003) there was a gradual erosion of “Soviet” ballet as a historical and cultural phenomenon and its fusion with both the Imperial ballet of the turn of the centuries (e.g., Tchaikovsky and Glazunov) and the productions of Diaghilev’s enterprise and the post-Diaghilev Russian ballet abroad, particularly that involving Stravinsky’s works. All of these tendencies have resonated in many ways with the new concept of 20th-century Russian music²⁶ articulated in the collective monograph named “Russian Music and the 20th Century,” published in 1998, which has become the basis for numerous subsequent texts on academic musical culture of the previous century.

²⁴ Kuznetsova T. Sovetskii balet v postsovetskom Kremlе [Soviet Ballet in the Post-Soviet Kremlin]. *Ibid.*, pp. 299–301; Yuryeva Ya. Dama ot khoreodramy [The Lady of the Choreodrama]. *Ibid.*, pp. 363–325.

²⁵ Gershenson P. Maiya Plisetskaya i sovetskaya imperiya [Maya Plisetskaya and the Soviet Empire]. *Ibid.*, pp. 30–34.

²⁶ For an analysis of this concept, see: Kupets L. A. Kontsepsiya “russkoi muzyki” v postsovetskoj Rossii kontsa 1990-kh godov [The Concept of “Russian Music” in Post-Soviet Russia in the Late 1990s]. *Zarubezhnaya muzyka o Rossii (zarubezhnaya rossika): kol. monografiya [Music from Abroad about Russia (Musical Rossica): Collective Monograph]*. Ed.-comp. L. Kazantseva. St. Petersburg: Soyuz khudozhnikov, 2023, pp. 36–43.

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