

ZDRAVKOVA-DJEPAROSKA, SONJA: MACEDONIAN BALLET REPERTOIRE ANALYSIS – LAYER OF CLASSICAL BALLET PRODUCTION

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Absztrakt

A macedón balett 1949-ben alakult, 2019-ben az együttes fennállásának 70. évfordulóját ünnepelte. Ez adja az apropóját a repertoár elméleti áttekintésének és elemzésének. A macedón balettrepertoár értelmezésének kiindulópontja a feladat, hogy meghatározzuk a felismerhető kifejezőmódokat, azok legjelentősebb jegyeit. Az időkeret két végpontja: 1949, a professzionális balettszínház megalapításának éve a Macedón Nemzeti Színházban, és a 2019/2020-as évad. A teljes repertoárt elemezve három réteg különböztethető meg. A szerző kutatási érdeklődését az első rétegre irányul: a klasszikus balettprodukciókra, és olyan darabokra amelyek e stílushoz közel állnak.

#macedonbalett #macedonnemzetiszinhaz #macedonopera #balettrepertoar #balettstarsadalom

Abstract

Macedonian ballet was founded in 1949, and in 2019 the ensemble celebrated its 70th anniversary. That was a reason for a theoretical review and analysis of the repertoire. A starting point in the interpretation of the Macedonian ballet repertoire is the task to determine a recognizable expression with emphasized characteristics and features. The time frame comprises 1949, the year of founding of the professional ballet group within the Macedonian National Theatre, and its cease with the season 2019/20. Analyzing the whole repertoire, three layers can be distinguished. The research interest of the author will be put on the first this layer: classical ballet productions, and the performances that gravitate towards this stylistic format.

#macedonianballet #macedoniannationaltheater #macedonianopera #balletrepertoire #balletandsociety

The ballet in Macedonia is over 70-year old tradition. Its formation is related to the creation of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia within Yugoslavia which was part of wider cultural processes. Macedonian ballet has its authentic development and characteristics. The main goal of this paper is the analysis of repertoire of the Macedonian ballet in the last seven decades and detection of main stylistic constructs. Analyzing the repertoire of the national ballet ensemble, we can distinguish three stylistic layers. The first most dominant is the classical heritage and works that gravitate towards this stylistic format. The next is the formation of ballets with a strong national characteristic (at a level of script, music and choreography). The last group is associated with modern dance performances. This paper focuses on the first layer of classical ballet repertoire. Not only would the analysis discover process of the implementation of fixed ballet repertoire (such as *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Coppelia*, *Giselle*), but it would also note new performances based on the ballet vocabulary and style.

Macedonian ballet was founded in 1949, and two years ago the ensemble celebrated its 70th anniversary. That was an additional reason for a theoretical review and analysis of the repertoire. A starting point in the interpretation of the Macedonian ballet repertoire is the task to determine a recognizable expression with emphasized characteristics and features. In the concrete discourse it is treated as a fixed lexical-formative complex, aesthetically determined on a level of a ballet script, music and most dominant on a level of dance / choreographic structures. The time frame comprises 1949, the year of founding of the professional ballet

group within the Macedonian National Theatre (MNT)¹, and its cease with the last season, 2019/20. Analyzing the whole repertoire, three layers can be distinguished.

- Classical ballet production (performances that gravitate towards this stylistic format)
- National ballet production
- Modern and contemporary performances

The first group is based on performances with fixed choreography (*Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, La Bayadère, Giselle, Don Quixote*, etc.), but the performances had also been made in the stylistic format (based on classical ballet vocabulary). The second group refers to a production that emphasizes the national characteristics. The formative matrix of this genre uses features from dance, literature and music linked with national background (dance steps, characteristic postures from folk dances in choreography; legends, folktales, historical events in script; melodies, rhythms in music part). The last group refers to choreographies with an innovative and experimental characteristics using new dance styles and vocabulary.

The first layer is dominant in comparison to the other two. Continuity and interest for this type of ballet performances can be followed in the repertory of the Macedonian ballet from the beginning till nowadays. My research interest will be put on this layer, and eventually there would be an attempt to analyze the national and contemporary performances in some future articles.

Political background and cultural policy

After the Second World War and the victory of the partisan troops organized and led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia headed by Josip Broz Tito, a new social order was introduced. A new federation with six socialist republics was formed on the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. This involved a development of one's own political, economic and cultural system. In this period, Macedonia was recognized for the first time as an equal member of the Federation which was effected through a right to self-determination, recognition of a language as an official on a governing level, participation in the federal agencies etc. It should be emphasized that the intention of the leadership of the state was to equalize the constituent units in all spheres, implicitly in culture: "up to the level of the other Yugoslav nations so that they could exercise their full national equality".² This resulted in a cultural revolution, expressed by a formation of majority of cultural institutions such as: theaters, (for the first time the Macedonian audience was given the opportunity to listen to and watch opera and drama in Macedonian language) orchestras, museums and many others, which received the attribute - *Macedonian*. In the book *Yugoslavia from a Historical Perspective*, the article, "Macedonia and Macedonians in Yugoslavia in Search for Identity" emphasizes this:

"This was a period when Macedonian culture was truly affirmed both in Yugoslavia and internationally, mostly thanks to the Tanec folk troupe (established in 1949), the federal and international Evenings of Poetry in Struga (Struške večeri) launched in 1961, the Ohrid Summer (Ohridsko leto, started in the same year), the Macedonian National Theater, the Macedonian Opera and Ballet, and the Theater of Nationalities staging a multitude of events, both domestic and international – all of which represented symbols of Macedonian identity."³

¹ The Macedonian National Theatre consisted of three ensembles - Drama, Opera and Ballet; in 2004 the institution was renamed the Macedonian Opera and Ballet (MOB), while in May 2019 in NOB (National Opera and Ballet of the Republic of Northern Macedonia).

² Majstorović, Stevan. *Cultural Policy in Yugoslavia: Self-management and Culture*. Paris: UNESCO, 1980, 32.

³ Jačeva, Ljubica; Litovski, Aleksandar. "Macedonia and Macedonians in Yugoslavia in Search for Identity." In *Yugoslavia from a Historical Perspective*, edited by Latinka Perović et al., 163-186. Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2017, 177.

MNT⁴ became the most important institution in the field of performing arts. The task of this national culture exponent was a reflection and an echo of official politics. The deeply centralized way of governing as the highest political interest set an implementation of a high culture, which in the previous period the Macedonian audience had the opportunity to view incidentally, only by foreign professional guest performance. It has become a yardstick for a young society that has been fighting simultaneously on “multiple fronts” - economy, industrialization, education and culture. Especially culture was an image of a new political organization and a confirmation of a value and capacity of the new social order. For the very idea of forming a ballet ensemble at the beginning for the needs of the Opera, and later as an independent unit, the first Opera manager Todor Skalovski said: “Having established the Opera we also had to consider creating a ballet ensemble for the needs of the Opera itself and for realization of independent ballet performances”.⁵ The ballet ensemble was created instantly; students of different ages 8-14⁶ (group of children) and 14-18 (group of youth) stood beside the professionals who mostly came from Belgrade. One of the pioneers of the Macedonian ballet Emilija Djipunova remarked: “We have entered the scene as professionals with a six-month course”.⁷ If we take into consideration the fact that ballet is an eight-year education with intense daily training, what the Macedonian dance culture did in a few month time speaks of an incredible result which, from today’s point of view, is impossible to repeat under any circumstances.

Conditions, resources and productions in the first period

The foundation of the ballet art in Macedonia included professionals, some of whom incidentally started working in Macedonia as a result of military conditions, while others were redistributed from other backgrounds. However, the performing corps de ballet were the new young Macedonian pioneers who made their first steps on the stage. The first performance was the Soviet ballet in the authorship of the composer Boris Asafiyev, *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, performed on the stage on December 30, 1949. The only criticism that appeared in the newspaper *Nova Makedonija* [*New Macedonia*] confirms the enthusiasm for the formation of a new high artistic stage type:

“The day before yesterday, on 30th this month, our working people joyfully welcome the great and significant event in our cultural and artistic life - the first premiere of our Macedonian ballet – »The Fountain of Bakhchisarai«. This premiere proved that we can assuredly believe that in the shortest period of time we will acquire a high-quality ballet, showing the perspectives the ballet has for its further development and progress in our Republic ... The day before yesterday’s premiere of our ballet was warmly and cheerfully greeted by the audience, which saw it as another great achievement in the challenge of raising our new culture and creating a rich artistic life, another major benefit of the struggle for socialism in our country”⁸

The absence of a critical approach and performance assessment is evident. In this period, it is impossible to speak of any criticism, which is conditioned by the inability to compare. From the very excerpt we can notice that the emphasis is placed on the social discourse, that is, the ability of the new socialist community to take such a step. In the first years (1949-1953), the ensemble retained the works that presented national features that reflected both through music and choreography, a sphere covering the discipline of character dances (*Bolero*, choreography by G. Makedonski, 1951; *Second Rhapsody*, *Polovtsian Camp*, 1952; *Scheherazade*

⁴ Integrally for the development of the Macedonian theatre with Sonja Zdravkova-Djeparoska (2016, 2006).

⁵ Skalovski, Todor. Risto Stefanovski (editor). *Makedonskiot naroden teatar 1945-1985* [Macedonian National Theater 1945-1985]. Skopje: Macedonian National Theater, 1985, 111.

⁶ Numerous students from this group became future dancers including soloists and prominent dancers of the Macedonian Ballet.

⁷ Džipunova, Emilija. *Makedonski naroden teatar 1945-1985* [Macedonian National Theater 1945-1985]:139. Skopje: [Macedonian National Theater, 1985, 139.

⁸ N. A. “The Fountain of Bakhchisarai - First Premiere of the Young Macedonian Ballet”. [Bahčisarajska fontana – prva premjera na mladiot makedonski balet] *Nova Makedonija* (1950): 7. Skopje: NIP Nova Makedonija.

choreography A. Dobrohotov, 1953). Due to the chronic shortage of staff who were indirectly part of the productions, they often performed several functions including positions of choreographers, ballet masters and pedagogues. Georgi Makedonski was a choreographer, a pedagogue, a dancer and a head of the ballet. Analize Asman, along with her teaching practice also danced; she performed the role of Assposia in *Walpurgis Night* and Zarema in the *Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, 1949.

Years of development

The ensemble not only simultaneously acquired a stage routine, but it also improved the technical level of interpretation. The period of staging works from the classical repertoire actually corresponded with the completion of the first generation of students-performers of the secondary ballet school⁹. Consecutively each year, one of the most famous classical titles was put on (*Coppelia*, 1954; *Sleeping Beauty*, 1955; *Giselle*, 1956, and *Swan Lake*, 1957). Highly professional staff were hired to produce works of the classical repertoire. Of the above four classical works three were made by Nina Kirsanova¹⁰, while Gjorgji Makedonski choreographed one. This trend was repeated throughout the years. Quality was of great importance and, for the most part, the production of the original choreographies were made by foreign professional guests choreographers¹¹. An evident qualitative leap was observed again in the 1970s with the engagement of Yuri Myachin. With a dose of humor immanent to Myachin, in his book he writes: “For seven years I worked in Yugoslavia (dominantly in Macedonia – author note) first as a senior engineer, as it was encrypted in the classification of a Soviet advisor book, which involved a ballet master, and later to become a chief engineer or head of ballet”.¹² The author, Emilija Djipunova, marks “impressive growth”,¹³ with his stay in Macedonia, which involved work in several fields. He worked as a ballet master and teacher in the theater, where he delivered stagings of several classical ballets, but he also created a number of new choreographies (*Mirandolina*, 1979; *The Steps of Terpsihora*, 1988 etc.). In addition, he was assigned a class of talented students in the ballet school, which significantly contributed to implementation of new methods in the ballet education and preparation of staff who became replacements over generations in the professional ensemble.

⁹ The establishment of the ballet school took place after the first performances of the ballet ensemble. The primary ballet school was established in the school year 1948/49 by a decree of the Council for Education of the People’s Republic of Macedonia. A secondary ballet school was established in 1951/52. The higher education that encompasses the education of ballet pedagogues with two majors (classical and contemporary) was established in 2010/11 at the Faculty of Music Arts Faculty within “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” University, Skopje. In the same year, the Contemporary Dance Department opened at EFTA’s private faculty in 2010/11. The department was moved at “Goce Delcev” University, in Shtip in 2018/19.

¹⁰ Nina Kirsanova, a Russian ballet dancer, teacher and choreographer, had performed in the theaters in Voronezh, Lviv, before she came in Yugoslavia. In the period when she left Yugoslavia, she was a part of the troops of Ana Pavlova and Bronislava Nijinska. In MNT she staged *Coppelia*; *Sleeping Beauty*; *Giselle*; *Straussiad*, *La Sylphide*, and choreographed *Man and Destiny* and *La Boutique Fantastique*.

¹¹ Foreign professional guests from the USSR and the countries of the eastern bloc were usually invited for staging classical works with determined scenic text. *Raymonda*, 1968; *Don Quixote*, 1972 staged by Yuri Myachin; *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* choreography by Witold Borkowsky, 1981; *Giselle* staged by Rose-Marie Bot 1984 and 1994; *Swan Lake* staged by Ekaterin Aksjonova, 1986.

¹² Mjačin, Juurij. *Son i jav’ baleta* [Dream and Reality of Ballet]. St. Petersburg: Mjačin, Juurij, 2003, 143.

¹³ Džipunova, Emilija. *Makedonska baletska scena* [Macedonian Ballet Scene]. Skopje: Panili, 2011, 44.



Figure 1. *Giselle*, 1956. Courtesy of Macedonian Opera and Ballet, Ballet Collection

In the first decades the only Macedonian choreographers were Gjorgji Makedonski and Olga Milosavleva. Georgi Makedonski made choreographies for *Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, 1949; *Swan Lake*, 1957; *Tamara* 1966; *Legend of Ohrid* 1966 on the ballet scene in Skopje. Makedonski was guest choreographer in the Croatian National Theater, Split and the Serbian National Theater, Novi Sad. Milosavleva worked on her debut with the choreography of *Labin and Dojrana* together with the choreographer Dobrohotov in 1958. In the years that followed, Milosavleva created the fragment of *Romeo and Juliet* (1959), *Bolero* (1976), *Straussade* (1983), *The Legend of Dubrovnik* (1986). Apart from Milosavleva, the 1980s brought the creations of Ekrem Husein, Aleksandar Stojanovich, Marin Crvenov, prima ballerina Natka Penusliska and others on stage. These performances oscillated within the classical ballet vocabulary, with tendency for its modernization and innovation. In the 1980s, a production increase of about three premiers annually, unlike the previous period when the figure was not two complete works approximately per season. This brought new kind of performances adapted to the changing demands and tastes of the audience.

The phenomenon of actualization of choreography that is predominantly related to Russian production is interesting, regardless the epoch of creation. Modern dance techniques penetrated slowly on the Yugoslav scene, and there were none in Macedonia. The ballet body became an exponent of the achievements of an official culture- branded as national when toured and presented outside the borders of Yugoslavia. The first presentation of the Macedonian ballet ensemble was in Greece in 1955, with *Sleeping Beauty* and *Coppelia*. Other visits followed in the countries of the Eastern Bloc¹⁴. During the last decade of the existence of federation, tours had a particular intensity and frequency: Canada (1984 and 1989), Greece (1985), France, Italy and Austria (1986), China and Bulgaria (1987).

On average, the first forty-two years of Yugoslavian period passed in the spirit of a classic ballet production. The strategic commitment to building and promoting forms of high culture continued to the end of the socialist governance. The quality of this production determined the status of the art measured on the world stage. Yugoslavia, apart from the political presence, (which had potential in the global positioning and strong influence of the general processes), built a strategy of visibility and impact through sports, culture and science.

¹⁴ Slovakia, 1964; Romania, 1969; Bulgaria 1975 and 1978; Poland, 1978; Ukraine, 1981.

Period of independence

The independent Republic of Macedonia failed to make any changes related to the classical repertoire. The program constantly includes classical ballets. The repertoire has also had works with a neoclassical style (*The Lady with Camellias*, *Samson and Delilah*, *Cleopatra*, *Libertango*, *Carmina Burana*) and children's ballet (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Peter Pan*, *Doctor Aybolit*), while a minor number of works fall under the category of modern and contemporary dance. Apart from the fluctuations in the repertoire policy, classical ballet performances remained a dominant corpus. The analysis of all theatrical seasons in this period indicates that, on average, not less than two classical works were represented as a premiere on a program annually. The efforts for quality transfers carried out by representatives of a particular national dance practice continued. The tendency of implementing performances of all styles and epochs can be easily recognized. From the group of "classical ballet legacy", not only does the Macedonian audience, but the ballet management also, focus on several titles that, with short discontinuance are permanently present in the theater seasons. That is *Swan Lake* with two editions, *Giselle* and *Don Quixote*. At the time of independence, several performances belonging to the 19th century legacy (*Le Corsaire*, 1996; *Nutcracker*, 2001; *La Esmeralda*, 2006; *La Sylphide*, 2005; *Conservatory*, 2017; fragments *La Bayadère*, 2004) were staged for the first time on the Macedonian scene. They were not performed in the previous forty-two years.



Figure 2. *La Bayadère* 1994. Courtesy of Courtesy of Macedonian Opera and Ballet, Ballet Collection

The valorization of the national culture took place through this artistic institution, because its program was produced in a matrix represented and dictated by the state policy and subsidized financially, as a strategy for the development of culture. Through this layer of the classical ballet repertoire, developing high-aesthetic, elitist and representative art, MNT / MOB / NOB has built and nurtured a product of a national interest. However, it would have been at least unusual if we had noted something different from the current state. In fact, the national theater troupes set the classical creation as a basic creative recourse, therefore the Macedonian ballet kept to the established constants.

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