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**BALLET CRITICISM
BY ALEKSANDR CHEREPNIN:
FROM GLORIFYING ACADEMIC
TRADITION TO IDEOLOGICAL
AND POLITICAL INTENTION**

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The purpose of the article is to find out the main aspects of shifts in conceptual and ideological focuses in the criticism by Alexander Cherepnin after October 1917. The research methodology is based on a combination of analytical (analysis of literature and sources, events, facts), historical and cultural (retrospective reproduction of the conceptual positions of A. Cherepnin's criticism, taking into account the socio-cultural context), comparative (comparison of publications of the critic before and after October 1917) methods, which allowed us to fully reveal the range of problems related to the subject of research. Scientific novelty. For the first time, the essence of shifts in Aleksandr Cherepnin's ballet criticism from the glorification of the academic tradition to the ideological and political intention was revealed. Conclusions. At the beginning of his ballet and critical career, A. Cherepnin was a supporter of pure classical dance. He considered that the source of inspiration for the choreographer should be no drama or music, but choreography only. He had a rather negative attitude to the appearance of modern dance on the ballet stage, considering it alien to Russian ballet. The article has stated that after October 1917, the critic moved away from singing the academic tradition, promoting pathos-imbued art for the new proletarian audience. He considered dance as a "living art" that could respond to not only artistic but also to socio-political changes quickly. He joined the supporters of the sociological approach in the evaluation of art. At the same time, he considered that the need for ballet art in communist society would disappear. We found out that after October 1917, the ideological and political intention in the work of A. Cherepnin is clearly traced. Still, some reviews indicate the impossibility of an unambiguous interpretation of his post-revolutionary critical discourse.

Keywords: ballet criticism; Aleksandr Cherepnin; ballet; choreography, dance

Introduction

The activities of ballet critics in the epoch of socio-political transformations of the 1910s–1920s in Tsarist Russia and later in the USSR met changes following new historical realities and ideological dogmas. The well-known theatre and ballet critics A. Hvozdiev, A. Piotrovskiy, I. Sollertynskiy, Ya. Tukhenhold and others contributed to the development of critical discourse in ballet theatre; their activities often fell into the circle of scientific reflection. Unfortunately, much less attention is paid to A. Cherepnin's work, but his role in the development of the critical and evaluative discourse of the ballet theatre is no less significant.

The analysis of A. Cherepnin's some publications is mentioned in the researches by H. Dobrovolska (2004), Ye. Surits (2006), N. Korshunova (2009), N. Sheremetievskaya (Sheremetyevskaya, 1985) and others, but the changes in the conceptual and worldview focuses of A. Cherepnin's critical activity was left unresearched.

Scientific novelty. For the first time, the essence of shifts in Aleksandr Cherepnin's ballet criticism from the glorification of the academic tradition to the ideological and political intention was revealed.

Purpose of the article

The purpose of the article is to learn the main shift aspects of A. Cherepnin's conceptual and outlook focuses after October 1917.

Main research material

Aleksandr Cherepnin began his career as a dance critic and theorist in 1913 (Nudel, or Li) when his articles published in the "The Teatralna Hazeta" for the first time. Before the October Revolution of 1917 and for

some time after it, A. Cherepnin remained a supporter of “pure” classical dance, paid much attention to the relation of dance and music. M. Fokin’s productions had a significant influence on changes of views on the interrelation of dance and music in ballet. It is worth noting that this issue, having become relevant in Russian ballet in the early 20th century, continued to remain topical even after October 1917. A new stage in the mastering of music in ballet was integral to M. Fokin’s findings, as composer, music and ballet critic B. Asafyev stated: “The essence of Fokin’s conquests hides in insightful penetration into the process of sounding, in the “grip” of those points of departure, gravity, support and rotation on which the movement of music (the sounding substance) is based and under rhythmic alternations and comparisons of which a strong cohesion of music elements or fusion and interpenetration of particles of musical fabric is born. Fokin, having keen senses and noticing these “nodes”, or moments of concentration of sound particles, reacted subtly to changes in rhythmic beats and colour, and the dynamics of sonority, and the alternation of durations, and the logic of musical accents” (Asafyev, 1974, p. 45).

A new relation of music and choreography appeared, which opened prospects for a deeper understanding of the spiritual world of a person. In this context, B. Asafyev named two of M. Fokin’s most essential qualities as “a detailed adherence to the melodic and rhythmic lines of music and the identification, possibly impulsive, of psychological data of the plot” (Asafyev, 1974, p. 28). A. Cherepnin, in unison with B. Asafyev, supported M. Fokin, considered that it was necessary to create new ballet music not dancing one, which did not explain the experiences of actors and dancers, did not emphasise the dance pattern, but one that was adequate to dance symbols in its symbolic content.

A. Cherepnin took the view that M. Fokin mastered the new interrelations of dance and music intuitively (Dobrovolskaya, 2004, p. 402). At the same time, unlike B. Asafyev, the critic who admired the musicality of M. Fokin’s choreography, considered the art of dance to be a self-sufficient art that did not depend on either drama or music. He advised looking for the source of pathetic moods “only in the choreographic moment, just as the musical mood is drawn not from the programme of the title of a musical work, but from the special, musical energies of the work itself” (Cherepnin, 1916).

A. Cherepnin wrote one of the last pre-October reviews for the premiere of the play *Salome* based on the O. Wilde’s play at the Chamber Theatre on October 9 (22), 1917, in which M. Mordkin staged Salome’s dance. Making a critical analysis of the choreographic component of the performance, he, first of all, noted that M. Mordkin’s dance did not correspond to the nature of the performance and, the most important, its design, which determined the entire style of the performance. According to A. Cherepnin, the dancer “ignored the connection between the graphics of the dance and the plastic system of the production, cubist in painting and partially – only partially – in the movements. Instead of showing special techniques of dance movements that would be just as realistic as a cubistically decomposed body is perceived realistically, Salome’s dance is a set of choreographic phrases in the spirit of stereotyped pseudo-exotic salon Duncan of a completely realistic nature” (Cherepnin, 1917). The negative attitude to I. Duncan’s dances, the sprouts of modern dance, can be traced. Analysing K. Goleizovsky’s experimentations, despite the general positive attitude to the choreographer, the critic speaks of modernism, considering it as the one “established in the art of dance today, but is not the dance art of today” (Li, 1924a).

After the turbulent events of 1917–1918 and active involvement in the process of art creation for the new spectator – the proletariat – A. Cherepnin’s views, his diversion from the understanding of art as a self-sufficient phenomenon independent of practical life forms were transformed. From the columns of such publications as “Theatre”, “Izvestia”, he supports the change of the “sweetish perfumery of love stories” of pre-revolutionary ballet performances to the showing of the heroic struggle for the future, permeated with revolutionary pathos. Besides, A. Cherepnin was a supporter of dance art, which he called “living art” in one of his articles. “Dance, – the critic writes, – should sound like a means of encouragement, reinforcement, refreshment, that should be equivalent to swimming in a river, a bright rally speech, an impulsive exclamation of “Dance now!” (Li, 1924c, p. 5). It reminds of Plato’s vision of an ideal state, in which only joyful music and the one that praises the rulers-philosophers should sound.

A. Cherepnin considered K. Goleizovsky’s dance innovations in the same aspect, seeing them “not in folklore, not in the plot, but only in a clear, expressive, mastered rhythm, on the one hand, and in the simplicity and clarity of emotional speech, on the other hand. Everything is done in a broad, unprecedented dance-poster manner – economically, brightly, without curls and bows. Dance ... charged, toned, captured in its rhythmic circle. It was real art” (Li, 1924a). This attitude indicates the critic’s understanding of one of K. Goleizovsky’s main programme theses and intentions about the leading role of rhythm as a source of life and. Therefore, the choreographer attached great importance to it in his productions.

And if A. Cherepnin had a positive attitude to K. Goleizovsky's dance experiments, since they fit into the concept of "living art", he opposed the creative rethinking of ballet heritage (first of all, M. Fokin's ballets) and any reformative searches categorically. Fokin's success, as well as "Diaghilev's ballets" in general, he explained by "a brilliant flash of the aesthetic individualism of that time". The critic considered this kind of "pure art", which he had recently supported, obsolete, inconsistent with the spirit of the epoch, to be "internally alien to the moods of our day" (Li, 1925).

N. Korshunova, analysing A. Cherepnin's unpublished work, entitled "Theoretical Study of the Art of Choreography" and written, according to the researcher, in the early 1920s, draws attention to the paradoxical idea expressed by the critic. Thus, he believes that ballet as a stage art will disappear soon because there will be no need for it in the new communist society (Korshunova, 2009, p. 246). At this stage of his critical activity, A. Cherepnin connected with the development of the art of dance with the socio-economic system, which corresponded to the sociological approach to the development of art, which became widespread at the time.

A. Cherepnin paid attention to the activities of the workshop studio "Mastfor", opened by choreographer N. Foregger in 1920, which existed until 1924. Satire, buffoonery, grotesque as the main genre techniques of aesthetics of the workshop allowed for the first time in the Soviet theatre to present negative social images generated by the new economic policy (merchants, NEPmen, political bureaucrats) on the stage in a sharp theatrical form with proletarian culture pathos, revealing their negative qualities. "Foregger is of great talent –, wrote A. Cherepnin. – His dance stroke is rough, unexpected, muscular, and constructive movement is taken broadly, in all its completeness: if we are throwing, let's throw, if we are falling, let's fall". These dances, which are rough in form, but particularly in the sharpness of the compositions, the critic also defines as "living art" (Li, 1924b).

N. Foregger created a new version of *The Swan* by C. Saint-Saëns, maintaining the scheme of Fokin's production, but presented a different solution to this topic than the latter at the same time. He also tried to convey the movements of the shot bird as accurately as possible but in his style. The performance did not become an eccentric parody, because, no matter how paradoxical it is, it was permeated by a nagging and mournful intonation, due to the performing skills of ballerina T. Batasheva too. Her somersaults, as one of the eccentric tricks, stunned with their alogism at first, but gradually a viewer began to discover this last confused, irregular, zigzag flight of a fatally wounded bird, which made a touching impression. Critics noted that *The Swan* was interpreted not as a "conditional and emotional gesture" but as a "true physiological dynamics that achieves deep pathos". And if the modernism aesthetics of Fokin's choreography in *The Swan* was significant for the epoch of Fin de siècle ("end of the century"), then the image created by N. Foregger and T. Batasheva was in the discourse of avant-garde aesthetics. According to A. Cherepnin, it is as significant as "the figure of a Jew glued to the sky in Chagall's *Over Vitebsk*" (Li, 1924b).

The presence of ideological and political intention in A. Cherepnin's critical discourse is evidenced by his reaction to the report on rhythmoplasticity by choreographer, pianist, and dance theorist M. Pozniakov, who in 1923-1924 worked in the choreology laboratory of the State Academy of Arts (the Academy), studying the coordination of plastic movements and musical forms. The choreology laboratory as a structural subdivision of the academy was a research body, where the methodology of studying the art of dance was developed by experimentation. "For too long, this area has been captivated by not always aesthetic emotions, said O. Sidorov, a head of the laboratory and a well-known art critic and historian. – Its right to attention from the Academy was indicated at the beginning of plenary sessions, when dance and movement as such were considered as synthesised art, to find which was one of the first goals of the Academy" (Sidorov, 2017, pp. 81-82). It should be noted that O. Sidorov was the author of the book *Modern Dance*, which was published in 1922. Almost a hundred years ago, he wrote: "The world seems tired of sitting still. Our epoch is a time of movement... To hear a constant call to dance, go in for sports, go to the cinema. In its essence, dance is an artistic organisation of physical culture" (Sidorov, 1923). These ideas were accordant to A. Cherepnin's ideas about catalysing role of art in the epoch of socio-cultural transformations.

The subject of art study is movement, dance, problems of choreographic notation, and the development of Taylorism (scientific management), the emergence of biomechanics, the study of rhythm, the mutual influence of plasticity, circus acrobatics and sports, forms of reception of new European dances. The term "art of movement", according to the researcher of N. Mislér's choreology laboratory activities, covered the activities of the latter and many related to it scientists and artists comprehensively. The plastic arts of body movements are begun to be considered not only in aesthetic parameters but also as a possible way of formation of a developed personality, as a revolutionary way of liberation of the spirit through the emancipation of the body (Mislér, 1997).

The laboratory hosted practical demonstrations, performances, seminars and theoretical disputes constantly, which became a characteristic feature of these open events. Having attended one of these events, where M. Pozniakov's lecture as a verbal text was accompanied by dance compositions, acrobatic and other rhythmoplastic movements to the appropriate music, A. Cherepnin concluded that this was "a complete deviation of the author's ideology from the command requests of current life". Also, he accused the speaker of "aesthetic subjectivism", since he "acts on the shaky ground of analogies" (Li, 1924d). Probably, the critic did not understand the supertask that the choreology laboratory faced – to teach a person to see the beauty of movements themselves, to appreciate the "abstract" qualities of movement – its geometry, intensity, and rhythm.

This misunderstanding turned out to be mutual, since A. Cherepnin's last article "Dialectics of Ballet", published in 1927 on the pages of the journal *Life of Art*, was discussed at a meeting of the same choreology laboratory of the Academy, but, as N. Korshunova writes, referring to archival sources, it did not arouse interest (Korshunova, 2009, p. 249), although, information about this meeting of the laboratory is missing in the fundamental two-volume publication on the activities of the Academy (Plotnikov & Podzemskaya, 2017). The article is the last in A. Cherepnin's creative heritage, paying attention to the importance of the problems posed in it, it requires independent analysis.

Conclusions

At the beginning of his ballet and critical career, A. Cherepnin was a supporter of pure classical dance. He considered that the source of inspiration for the choreographer should be no drama or music, but choreography only. He had a rather negative attitude to the appearance of modern dance on the ballet stage, considering it alien to Russian ballet. After October 1917, he deviated from the glorification of the academic tradition and promoted art permeated with pathos for the new proletarian audience. He considered dance as a "living art" that could respond to not only artistic but also to socio-political changes quickly. He joined the supporters of the sociological approach in the evaluation of art. At the same time, he considered that the need for ballet art in communist society would disappear. In the period after October 1917, the ideological and political intention in A. Cherepnin's work can be clearly traced, but a number of reviews indicate the impossibility of the unambiguous interpretation of his post-revolutionary critical discourse.

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**БАЛЕТНА КРИТИКА ОЛЕКСАНДРА
ЧЕРЕПНИНА: ВІД ОСПІВУВАННЯ
АКАДЕМІЧНОЇ ТРАДИЦІЇ
ДО ІДЕЙНО-ПОЛІТИЧНОЇ
ІНТЕНЦІЇ**

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Мета статті – з'ясувати основні аспекти змін концептуально-світоглядних орієнтирів в критиці Олександра Черепніна після жовтня 1917 р. Методологія дослідження ґрунтується на поєднанні аналітичного (аналіз літератури та джерел, подій, фактів), історико-культурного (ретроспективне відтворення концептуальних позицій критики О. Черепніна з урахуванням соціокультурного контексту), порівняльного (співставлення публікацій критика до та після жовтня 1917 р.) методів, що дозволило найповніше розкрити коло проблем, пов'язаних із предметом дослідження. Наукова новизна. Вперше виявлено сутність змін у балетній критиці Олександра Черепніна від оспівування академічної традиції до ідейно-політичної інтенції. Висновки. Виявлено, що на початку балетно-критичної діяльності О. Черепнін був прихильником чистого класичного танцю. Вважав, що джерелом натхнення балетмейстера повинна слугувати не драма чи музика, а виключно хореографія. Досить негативно ставився до появи танцю модерн на балетній сцені, вважаючи його чужорідним для російського балету. Встановлено, що через деякий час після жовтня 1917 р. критик відійшов від оспівування академічної традиції, пропагував пронизане пафосом мистецтво для нового пролетарського глядача. Вважав танець «живим мистецтвом», що може швидко відгукуватися не лише на художні, а й соціально-політичні зміни. Долучився до прибічників соціологічного підходу в оцінці мистецтва. Одночасно вважав, що потреба у балетному мистецтві в комуністичному суспільстві зникне. З'ясовано, що після жовтня 1917 р. чітко простежується ідейно-політична інтенція в творчості О. Черепніна, але ряд рецензій свідчить про неможливість однозначного трактування його пореволюційного критичного дискурсу.

Ключові слова: критика балету; Олександр Черепнін; балет; хореографія, танець

**БАЛЕТНАЯ КРИТИКА АЛЕКСАНДРА
ЧЕРЕПНИНА: ОТ ВОСПЕВАНИЯ
АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОЙ ТРАДИЦИИ
К ИДЕЙНО-ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ
ИНТЕНЦИИ**

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Цель статьи – выяснить основные аспекты изменений концептуально-мировоззренческих ориентиров в критике Александра Черепнина после октября 1917 года. Методология исследования основана на сочетании аналитического (анализ литературы и источников, событий, фактов), историко-культурного (ретроспективное воспроизведение концептуальных позиций критики А. Черепнина с учетом социокультурного контекста), сравнительного (сопоставление публикаций критика к и после октября 1917 года) методов, что позволило наиболее полно раскрыть круг проблем, связанных с предметом исследования. Научная новизна. Впервые выявлена сущность изменений в балетной критике Александра Черепнина от воспевания академической традиции до идейно-политической интенции. Выводы. Виявлено, что в начале балетно-критической деятельности А. Черепнин был сторонником чистого классического танца. Считал,

что источником вдохновения балетмейстера должна служить не драма или музыка, а исключительно хореография. Весьма негативно относился к появлению танца модерн на балетной сцене, считая его чужеродным для русского балета. Установлено, что через некоторое время после октября 1917 года критик отошел от воспеания академической традиции, пропагандировал пронизанное пафосом искусство для нового пролетарского зрителя. Считал танец «живым искусством», что может быстро откликаться не только на художественные, но и социально-политические изменения. Присоединился к сторонникам социологического подхода в оценке искусства. Одновременно считал, что потребность в балетном искусстве в коммунистическом обществе исчезнет. Выяснено, что после октября 1917 года четко прослеживается идейно-политическая интенция в творчестве А. Черепнина, но ряд рецензий свидетельствует о невозможности однозначной трактовки его послереволюционного критического дискурса.

Ключевые слова: критика балета; Александр Черепнин; балет; хореография; танец