

# The First Russian Neo-Nationalist Ballet: *Firebird* by the Ballets Russes

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## 0. Preface

On 18 May 1909, the Ballets Russes, led by the legendary Russian impresario, Sergey Diaghilev (1872-1929), made their historical Western European debut in Paris. Despite *Ballets Russes* meaning Russian Ballets in French, anyone watching performances during their first year in Europe would have noticed that, apart from *The Polovtsian Dances* from Borodin's opera *Prince Igor*, there was surprisingly little Russian 'colour' to be had in their repertoire.<sup>1</sup>

Immediately after the premiere of *the Firebird* Alexandre Benois (1870-1960), a famous painter, Diaghilev's close friend and a leading figure in the Ballets Russes, contributed the following editorial to the 18/7/1910 edition of the Russian newspaper, *Rech'*.

Two years ago, in a dialogue about ballet which appeared in a collection of articles about the theatre published by the *Shipovnik*, I gave voice to my dream that the "true Russian (or even Slavic) mythology" would one day appear in ballet. I imagined it to be entirely possible, since all the elements for a wonderful choreographic drama are to be found in the imagery and the psychological aspects of our ancient *bilini* [epic] and fairy tales.

I felt that once we got away from the trite clichés found in *The Humpbacked Horse* if those who were in love with our ancient days only looked for ways to bring them to the stage and works of musical act, it would all follow naturally on from there.<sup>2</sup>

What Benois emphasizes here is that, until 1910 and the premiere of *the Firebird* in Paris, a true Russian or Slavic style did not exist in ballet.

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1 The ballet repertoire of the Ballets Russes in 1909 in Paris as follows:

*Le Pavillion d'Armide*, *Les Sylphides*, *Cléopâtre*, *Prince Igor* (Polovtsian Scenes and Dances – Act II of the opera), *Le Festin*.

2 Alexandre Benois, "Khudozhestvenniye pis'ma: russkiye spektakli v Parizhe: 'Zhar-ptitsa,'" *Rech'* 18 (31) July, 1910.

In 1908, prior to this performance, Benois wrote in the aforementioned collection of articles that longed for a new style of ballet which delivered a “Slavic” atmosphere.<sup>3</sup> From this we can understand that it was not only Western audiences but also the Russian people who eagerly awaited the arrival of a true “Russian” or “Slavic” style ballet.

As already noted, Benois cites *the Humpbacked Horse* as a typical example of the trite clichés to be found in the Imperial theatres. While it is evident from the title that *the Humpbacked Horse* is a ballet based on a Russian folk tale, if we take a closer look, we can see that the ballet is in fact worlds apart from the settings of the traditional tale, something which I will address later. For the members of the Ballets Russes eager to realise a true “Russian” or “Slavic” style ballet on stage, the “trite clichés of *the Humpbacked Horse*” became a huge motivation in their production of *the Firebird* and its presentation to the audiences in both the West and Russia.

In the late 1890s, Russians in other fields of art such as writing, painting and composing were immensely inspired to produce something “Russian” or “Slavic.” Folklore tales were then especially popular subjects. Only ballet was left out of this trend. The purpose of this study is to review how the Russian national theme developed in the history of Russian ballet and also to reconsider and define *the Firebird* as the first Russian neo-nationalist ballet. The definition of “neo-nationalism” in art is discussed in the next section.

## **1. Definition of “neo-nationalism” in the nineteenth century Russian art**

In the nineteenth century, the search for new artistic themes in all things national was a trend in throughout Europe and Russia was no exception. In the mid-nineteenth century Russian art (in the academic sense) — which had previously undergone a process of considerable Western-Europeanization as a result of the policies of enlightened absolutism imposed by the likes of Peter I and Catherine II — turned its eye to national themes for the first time, prompting what we can call the first outbreak of a (non-neo) nationalist art movement.

In art forms such as painting, the first “national” art appeared to assign a purpose to art beyond art itself. The Wanderers, Russia’s first realist painters, whose original members had belonged to the art academies yet subsequently protested against academicism. They depicted ordinary Russians as one of the themes of their works, conveying onto canvas the poverty and oppression that the artists witnessed in their everyday lives. The Wanderers put more value on

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3 Benois, “Beseda o baletе,” in V. Meyerhold et al., *Teatr* (St. Petersburg: Shipovnik, 1908), pp. 114-15.

revealing and conveying the realities of social inequity in society therein, than they did to the importance of aesthetic expression.

Richard Taruskin pointed out the following:

This national character, however, had far less to do with style than with subject matter and what might be described as ethos, that is, the proper attitude of sympathy toward that subject matter.<sup>4</sup>

The Wanderers believed that art must be useful for society, rejecting the idea of art for art's sake. They emphasized the subject matter of their work, not attaching much value to elements of "style" such as colour, texture or line.

John E. Bowlt had the following to say about this realist generation of paintings & painters:

...these works move us in the same way as Flaubert, Tolstoi, Zola move us, i.e. through a narrative sequence, rather than through a purely aesthetic or painterly progression. With the exception of Surikov and, at times, of Repin, the Russian Realists discounted the inner properties of colour, texture, weight, line.<sup>5</sup>

In the latter period, however, there gradually appeared painters who showed their concern with the aesthetic components of a picture rather than merely conveying social messages through it. Bowlt called this new generation of painters, "artists who were concerned more with the aesthetic and decorative values of art than with its narrative topicality."<sup>6</sup>

That is, whereas for the first (non-neo) nationalist painters it was the topic or object which was more important, these so-called neo-nationalist painters placed greater importance on how to express or paint the topic or object. The neo-nationalist painters who were more concerned with decorative values were strongly influenced by farmers' tools or everyday goods that were decorated with amateur carvings or embroideries, which is to say, folk art.<sup>7</sup>

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4 Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), vol. 1, p. 497.

5 John E. Bowlt, *The Silver Age: Russian Art of the Early Twentieth Century and the "World of Art" Group* (Newtonville, Mass.: Oriental Research Partners, 1979), p. 17.

6 Ibid. p. 24.

7 Russian "neo-nationalism" is a term referring to an art style or movement, as used by Taruskin or Bowlt, where the artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Russia put more importance on aesthetics

Painters such as Yelena Polenova (1850-1898) or Ivan Bilibin (1876-1942) were fascinated with and involved in producing illustrations for collections of folk tales, where we meet *Koshchey*, *Baba Yaga* or *Zhar-ptitsa* [Firebird] as Russian mythical beings (figs. 1&2). The realm of folklore is one which is divorced from the ideologies of the real world. The two-dimensional decorative style found in books of folk stories was ideal for these painters who sought for unadulterated beauty and who had been so influenced by the philosophy of art for art's sake.

Neo-nationalist artists rejected the idea of producing art for the purpose of bringing about social reform. They recaptured and perceived Russian national art as an important element in the philosophy of "art for art's sake".

This Russian neo-nationalist style was fostered and prospered in Abramtsevo, where the railway king, Savva Mamontov (1841-1918) had founded an artists' colony. The painters who gathered in Abramtsevo were the central artists of the neo-nationalist art movement. The painters were also involved in a theatrical enterprise, the Russian Private Opera, which was patronized by Mamontov. The Russian neo-nationalist style was introduced to the theatre by the Abramtsevo artist, Viktor Vasnetsov (1848-1926). Vasnetsov worked on set design and costumes for Rimsky-Korsakov's (1844-1908) opera *the Snow Maiden* which was performed by the Russian Private Opera (fig.3). Vasnetsov's designs were inspired by the illustrative style of Russian folk stories. This style was later also brought to stage with the Imperial theatres by painters such as Aleksandr Golovin (1863-1930) and Konstantin Korovin (1861-1939). Both left the Abramtsevo circle and became resident artists with the Imperial theatres.

## 2. Opera and Ballet in the Imperial Theatres of the 1900s

A detailed research that I carried out of the repertoire of ballet and opera in the Imperial theatres of the 1900s revealed that most of the ballets performed at the time were choreographed or revised by the great ballet master Marius Petipa (1818-1910) in the nineteenth century classical or orientalist style, and only four ballets were created on the theme of Russian folk stories.<sup>8</sup> These were *the Humpbacked Horse* (1864), *the Golden Fish* (1867), *the Magic Mirror* (1903) and *the Vermillion Flower* (1907).

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than utility as the purpose of art. The neo-nationalist artists often took their artistic themes or topics from folk tales. They became a bridge between Russian realism (Wanderers if painting) and symbolism (*Mir iskusstniki*). In this sense the late Wanderers and some *Mir iskusstniki* painters can be regarded as neo-nationalist painters.

8 Hirano Emiko, "Baree 《Hi no tori》 no kigen: 20 seiki shoto rosia bunka to teishitsu gekijyo" (PhD diss., University of Tokyo, 2010).

The fact that very few ballets had Russian themes was in direct contrast to the number of Russian-themed operas composed by Russian composers; a figure which reached almost half of all performed works.<sup>9</sup> However, although the aforementioned four Russian-themed ballets were all based on folk stories, the subjects of the Russian-themed operas performed in the 1900s were limited to glorifications of Tsar, *bilini* [Russian epic poems] or life in the late nineteenth century Russia such as *Ruslan and Ludmilla* (1842), *Sadko* (1898), *Eugene Onegin* (1879) or *the Queen of Spades* (1890). There were no operas based on Russian folk stories.<sup>10</sup>

In 1908 Benois noted:

In Slavic mythology any kind of episode can become the subject of ballet. However, in our time, it is not easy for us to approach this, possibly, most valuable of treasuries. The theatre stage is overly full of opera in the "truly Russian" style, and it is necessary to find a new style to deliver a "Slavic" atmosphere, without resorting to the clichés of Rimsky-Korsakov (Am I not his admirer? I am, but still it is true, it is "overfilled"! ) And what horizons would open here? How I wish this would happen tomorrow or the day after tomorrow while we have such theatrical artists as Korovin and Golovin, while we still have a real Russian captivating village and all Russia has not yet turned into electoral districts or factory meetings...<sup>11</sup>

The article was published the year before the debut of the Ballets Russes in Paris, which was 2 years before the premiere of *the Firebird*. What the "truly" Russian style Benois and his contemporaries longed for was not to be found in the supposed prosperity of Imperialism nor in the epic poems or heroic Russia of *Ruslan and Ludmilla* but rather in the realm of folk stories. Characters such as *Koshchey* or *Zhar-ptitsa* [Firebird] are familiar to ordinary people as examples of the indigene's way of life. The surge of interest in the folk stories which was already apparent in the fields of literature, painting and music, extended to ballet as well. Attempts to create a new, neo-nationalist ballet based on a folklore story were under way in the Imperial theatres.

Next, we will take a look at the actual content of those folklore-themed ballets

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9 *Ibid.*

10 Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) wrote an opera, "Koshchey Immortal", which premiered in the Solodovnikov Theatre in Moscow in 1902. The opera, however, was regarded as "reactionary" and was therefore never included in the repertoire of the Imperial theatres.

11 Benois, "Beseda o balete," p. 115.

performed in the Imperial theatres in the 1900s.

### **3. Folklore-themed ballets performed in the Imperial Theatres in the 1900s**

As already mentioned, there were four ballets, *the Humpbacked Horse* (1864), *the Golden Fish* (1867), *the Magic Mirror* (1903) and *the Vermillion Flower* (1907) created based on Russian folk stories and performed in the Imperial theatres. These ballets were still performed in the 1900s, however, *the Golden Fish*, *the Magic Mirror* and *the Vermillion Flower* are no longer performed today, and only *the Humpbacked Horse* has been staged with different choreographies. Although the other three ballets were no longer popular in the 1900s and disappeared from the stage after only a few performances, *the Humpbacked Horse* gained great popularity and was performed more often than any other ballet in Moscow and St. Petersburg throughout the 1900s.

Hence, the questions are, why did Benois accuse *the Humpbacked Horse* of “trite clichés” and how was the ballet perceived by ordinary audiences and other intellectuals?

#### **3-1. *The Humpbacked Horse* (1864)**

In many of the world’s folk stories there is often a certain universality, provided by freedom from a particular place or time, and maintained by anonymity (ex: “long, long time ago in a certain place there was an old man and an old woman.”) Nevertheless, in Saint-Léon’s (1821-1870) ballet, the site is named “Krasnovodsk,” the first deviation from a typical folk story. In the second act, Ivan and the Humpbacked Horse fly away to the khan’s yurt in Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia not to the tsar’s palace as is written in Pyotr Yershov’s (1815-1869) original folk poem.<sup>12</sup> However, this may merit attention if we remember that the mid-nineteenth century was a time when the Russian Empire was pursuing expansionist policies in Central Asia.

Apart from this, in Yershov’s poem, Ivan had a feather of the Firebird and was asked by the tsar to capture the Firebird. In the ballet, however, this episode is neglected. Instead, the khan demands that Ivan show him the beautiful ladies seen in the khan’s dream. Ivan then, with help of the Humpbacked Horse, shows beauties from different countries of the world such as South America, North Africa, India, Switzerland, etc. Here we see the conventional method

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<sup>12</sup> Pyotr Yershov, “Konyok-Gorbunok,” in *Suzge: stikhotvoreniya, dramaticheskiye proizvedeniya, proza* (Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoye knizhnoye izdatel’stvo, 1984), pp. 5-66.

Petipa established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ballet, namely, *divertissement*.

In addition to this, the Princess is accompanied by nereids from Greek mythology, who are not to be found in Russian or Slavic mythology. Nymphs are indispensable characters in the nineteenth century classical ballet but they are out of place in the Russian folk tale ballet. (fig. 1)

In short, although *the Humpbacked Horse* had a Russian folk story as its subject and was the first attempt to turn a folk tale into ballet on stage, it failed in its depiction of the true world of Russian folklore. Because of its elements of Greek mythology and orientalism, the ballet was to a great degree closer to the typical nineteenth century classical ballet style and only slightly tinted by Russian folklore. Although this absurd mixture of Russian folklore, Greek myth and orientalism was criticized by intellectuals like Benois, it amazed ordinary audience and gained great popularity, becoming the single most performed ballet of the 1900s in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

### **3-2. *The Golden Fish* (1867)**

*The Golden Fish* is based on Aleksandr Pushkin's (1799-1837) folklore poem *The Tale of a fisherman and a fish*.<sup>13</sup> Saint-Léon's ballet, composed of three acts and seven scenes was, however, completely dissimilar as the Pushkin's original poem, and fell into disrepute.

In Pushkin's original story, an old fisherman released a Golden Fish he caught back into the sea. The Golden Fish showed his thanks by granting all the wishes of the old fisherman and his wife, but, in the end, because of wife's avarice, the couple end up back in poverty. In 1869's version of Saint-Léon's ballet, the scene was the Dnieper River, not the sea, and instead of the old wife, it is a young Cossack girl who makes many requests of the fisherman. The Golden Fish transformed the heroine's servant and the ballet also includes Izmir Khan and a mechanical flying carpet and so on and so forth. Saint-Léon's ballet was more absurd than *the Humpbacked Horse* and far removed from its folk origins.<sup>14</sup> After the failure of *the Golden Fish* in 1869, Saint-Léon left Russia without having his contract renewed by the Imperial theatres. He died in 1870 soon after creating what was probably his best work, "*Coppélia*."

On 16 November 1903, a new production of *the Golden Fish* by Gorsky premiered at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. Although the ballet was never performed in St-Petersburg

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13 Aleksandr Pushkin, "Skazka o ribake i ribke," in *Sobranie sochineniy v desyati tomakh* (Moscow: Khdozhestvennaya literatura, 1975), vol. 3, pp. 304-309.

14 Vera Krasovskaya, "Russkiy baletniy teatr nachala XIX veka (1963)," in *Istoriya russkogo baleta* (St. Petersburg, Moscow, Krasnodar: Planeta muziki, 2008), p. 133.

during the 1900s, it was one of the most frequently performed works in Moscow during the period.<sup>15</sup> Korovin, who often had charge of Gorsky's revival works, handled the scenic art of the ballet.

Photographs of Gorsky's *Golden Fish* were published in the fourteenth issue of *the Annual of the Imperial theatres (1903-1904)*. The germination of the neo-nationalist style may be felt in the costume and the old wife's house in the first two acts. (fig. 2) But if we take a further look, the ballet story departs from Pushkin's original poem and Korovin's scenic art also harks back to the nineteenth century. For example, the garden in the second act is absolutely conservative in style, and the rose and butterfly's dance performed by Mendes and Volinin at odds with the subject matter of Russian folk tales. (fig. 3&4) *The Golden Fish* also doesn't have a Russian atmosphere, resembling instead a banal scene from a nineteenth century ballet. (fig. 5)

Pushkin's original folklore poem has a rather simple setting which might not permit many dance highlights, and quite obviously, Korovin spoiled the ballet by stuffing it with a lot of elements that had little to do with a Russian folk tale in order to amaze the audience. We can therefore see little progress in *the Golden Fish* from *the Humpbacked Horse*.

Mamontov, however, was full of appreciation for *the Golden Fish*.<sup>16</sup> We must be careful when reading his positive comments because he was a patron of Korovin. When considering the work as a ballet, it can be hardly said that its contents made great progress compared with Saint-Léon's other nineteenth century ballets. Nevertheless, in terms of the introduction of neo-nationalist movement to the theatre, we can see signs of its emergence on the art scene.

### 3-3. *The Magic Mirror (1903)*

*The Magic Mirror* premiered as a memorial performance for Petipa's and is considered to have been a great failure. According to reviews at the time, nobody seems to have been satisfied with the music composed by Arseniy Koreshchenko (1870-1921). It might well have been that it was hard for conservatives to accept Golovin's innovative scenic art. (fig. 6) Some may well have regarded Petipa's production as out of date.

Golovin was in charge of stage art. According to Petipa, costumes and props designed by decadent artists (Petipa hated "decadence") such as Golovin and Mrs. Telyakovskaya (wife

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15 The Golden Fish was performed 29 times in the 1900s in Moscow. (Hirano. "Baree 《Hi no tori》 no kigen.")

16 *Russkoye slovo* 20 (1903). (Cited in: Vladimir Telyakovsky, *Dnevnik direktora imperatorskikh teatrov: 1903-1906* (Moscow: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr, 2006), p. 747.)

of the general manager of the Imperial theatres, Vladimir Telyakovsky [1861-1924]) were unpopular with the audience and critics and were responsible for the failure of the production. As Golovin was intimate with Telyakovsky, who was a great enemy to Petipa, this served to further outrage the ballet master.

It is difficult to identify the real reason why *the Magic Mirror* “failed,” since the ballet no longer exists. It is not appropriate to accredit this “failure” solely to Golovin’s stage art as Petipa remarks, as the same scenic art had shown itself to be worthy of publication in major art magazines such as *the World of Art* or *the Golden Fleece*. He was also already a scenic artist of high repute, who had been in charge of many ballet and opera works in the Imperial theatres. It is possible that the older generation to which Petipa belonged were unable to understand Golovin’s innovations.

The original story of the ballet was Pushkin’s folklore poem *Tale of the Dead Princess and the Seven Knights* and also the Grimm fairy tale *Snow White*.<sup>17</sup> The plot of the ballet itself seems to be a poor adaptation of the Grimm tale. The setting of *Snow White* is moved from Germany to Russia and the seven knights replaced with seven dwarfs. The ballet was again populated with dryads and zephyrs from Greek mythology.

The scenario of the ballet was written by Petipa and Ivan Vsevolozhsky (1835-1909), the former general manager of the Imperial theatres, although the fact that Vsevolozhsky was one of the authors was not disclosed at the time. Petipa, Vsevolozhsky and Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) — for whom the representative work was the extravagant *Sleeping Beauty* — were the “golden trio” of the nineteenth century Russian ballet.

The ballet marks the confrontation between the older generation of Petipa’s nineteenth century ballet and the neo-nationalist generation of Telyakovsky or Golovin. *The Magic Mirror* marked the retirement of Petipa, the long reigning ballet master of the Imperial theatres and the transition of power between generations.

### **3-4. *The Vermillion Flower* (1907)**

The scenario of the ballet published in the *Annual* is as follows:

Once upon a time in a certain town in a certain kingdom, there lived a rich merchant named Marco Lugano. He had three beautiful daughters. The youngest of

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17 Aleksandr Pushkin, “Skazka o myortvoy tsarevne i o cemi bogatiryakh,” *Sobraniye sochinenii v desyati tomakh* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1975), vol. 3, pp. 310-323.

those, Angelica was the most beautiful. One day, the merchant was to go far away on commerce. He asked his daughters what souvenirs they wanted him to bring back. The eldest, Annunciata asked for a golden crown, the second, Flaminia a crystal mirror, the youngest Angelica, asked for a vermillion flower, which is the most beautiful flower in the world ever.<sup>18</sup>

The original story for *The Vermillion Flower* was taken from a folk tale of the same name by Sergey Aksakov (1791-1859), but the characters' name show that the ballet turned far removed from the Russian folklore tale.<sup>19</sup> The stage resembles a port town somewhere in Italy, and, besides the daughters' Italian names, there are also many Arabic names, such as Abubeker or Mustapha, which puts us in mind of Abderakhman in *Raymonda* (1898), another typical Petipa ballet of the nineteenth century.

An interesting review was then published in the 346 issue of *the Peterburgskaya Gazeta* (1907).

The names of the acts are written in Russian: “*Gavan’ v Venetsii* [Port of Venice],” “*Bazar na Vostoke* [Bazaar in the East]” ... etc. On the other hand, the names of dances and scenes are written in French: “*scène mimique*.” Why not the Russian “*mimicheskaya stsena* [mime scene]”? And why do the authors feel the need to announce that the “mime scenes” are to be performed? The entire ballet is, after all, a series of mime scenes. It is high time that Russian ballet be made by Russians and all these “*Entrée de filles* [entrance of the girls]” apparitions (appearances) and the like be dispensed with. Not to mention *danse des esclaves* (dance of the slaves), *des sauvages danse de la troupe de la rue* (the wild dances of the troop of the street) (this must be an arbitrary translation of “street” artists [*ambulants* <tinkers> ]!) This is forgivable in a French ballet-master such as M. Petipa, but the “French” style is not appropriate for Russians such as Mr. Krupensky or Mr. Legat and is all the worse since the ballet derives its story from a Russian folk story by S. Aksakov.<sup>20</sup>

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18 *Yezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov* 18 (1907-08), pp. 102-105.

19 Sergey Aksakov, “Alen’kiy tsvetochek,” in *Sobraniye sochinenii v chetiryokh tomakh* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoy literatury, 1955), vol. 1, pp. 583-603.

20 *Peterburgskaya Gazeta*. 346 (17 December. 1907).

*The Peterburgskaya Gazeta* had a reputation for hostility towards the Imperial theatres, and so we cannot take everything on faith. Further, the use of French terminology is common practice in ballet. What one feels, however, is a profound hope to return the national ballet, for so long dominated and influenced by Western European choreographers such as Petipa or Saint-Léon, to Russian control. If *the Vermillion Flower* had really taken its subject from Russian folklore, the ballet should have been full of true Russian characteristics. *The Gazeta's* attack is therefore a severe criticism of fake-Russian ballets to be found in the Westernized Imperial theatres. The words "It is high time that Russian ballet be made by Russians" are in accord with Benois' claims. Even in such conservative bastions as the Imperial theatres there emerged an aspiration to escape Western European influence and for Russians themselves to create a true Russian ballet.

We can see from the above that in the course of producing the Russian folklore-themed ballets such as *the Humpbacked Horse*, *the Golden Fish*, *the Magic Mirror* and *the Vermillion Flower* there was no full development of a truly neo-nationalist ballet in the Imperial theatres.

#### **4. The Ballets Russes' *Firebird***

While the characters of the *Firebird*, *Koshchey*, Prince Ivan and Princess Yelena existed in Aleksandr Afanasyev's (1826-1871) collection of folk tales, there is no folk story, which correlates exactly to that of the Ballets Russes' *Firebird*.

The ballet's plot is as follows:

Prince Ivan captures the *Firebird* as it is pecking at a golden apple in a garden. The *Firebird* bargains for her life by granting the prince one of her magical feathers. Prince Ivan then encounters thirteen beautiful maidens and falls in love with one of their number, Princess Yelena. The thirteen maidens are all hostages of *Koshchey* Immortal. At the very moment that *Koshchey* turns Prince Ivan into stone, the *Firebird* ignites and helps to save the prince. The *Firebird* shows Prince Ivan the egg which contains *Koshchey's* soul, which the prince destroys, thereby killing *Koshchey*. Twelve young men, who were similarly petrified by *Koshchey's* spell, are returned to life joined together with the twelve maidens. The ballet ends with the coronation ceremony of Prince Ivan and Princess Yelena.

The folk story in Afanasyev's collection which most closely resembles the plot of the

ballet is *The Tale of Prince Ivan, the Firebird and the Grey Wolf*, where Prince Ivan captures the Firebird when it comes to eat a golden apple in his royal father's garden.<sup>21</sup> Prince Ivan obtains one of the Firebird's feathers but the bird does not help him as it does in the ballet. Prince Ivan finally attains the Firebird, charming Princess Yelena and the Golden-maned Horse with help of the Grey Wolf. However, *Koshchey* does not appear in the folk story and there is no Grey Wolf in the ballet.

In the tale, *Koshchey Immortal* from Afanasyev's collection,<sup>22</sup> Prince Ivan finds and destroys the egg which contains *Koshchey's* soul and thereby rescues the princess, just as in the Firebird ballet. In this tale the princess is Princess Vasilisa the Beautiful, one of the daughters of King Kirbit. She is imprisoned in until golden tower, until found and rescued by the prince. The Princess is subsequently abducted by *Koshchey*, but Steel the Goodman helps the prince to rescue the princess again. The Firebird does not appear in this folk tale. While the Firebird is seen in *the Firebird and Vasilisa the Beautiful* and other tales, there is no folk story where the Firebird and *Koshchey* appear together or even fight each other.<sup>23</sup> Taraskin notes, however, that Yakov Polonsky's (1819-1898) poem *Winter's Journey* (1844) has the same plot as the ballet and contains all of the characters.<sup>24</sup>

Benois, Fokine and other creators of the ballet do not reveal the original source of the Firebird. Further, Fokine says, "...there did not exist a complete story about the Firebird which would, in its entirety, be suitable for a ballet."<sup>25</sup>

There is no single folk tale which is identical to the ballet. It is a combination of different folk stories and the ballet's structure and story line resemble those of *the Humpbacked Horse*. *The Firebird* was, however, composed only of indigene characters of Russian folk stories and did cut ties with the nereids of Greek mythology or the khans of Central Asia. In so doing, *the Firebird* represented the world of Russian folklore tales in an unadulterated form and became the first neo-nationalist ballet.

## 5. Conclusion

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21 "Skazka ob Ivane-tsareviche, zhar-ptitse i o serom volke," in *Narodnie russkiye skazki A. N. Afanasyeva v tryokh tomakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), vol. 1, pp. 331-343.

22 "Koshcei bessmertniy," in *Ibid.*, pp. 285-300.

23 "Zhar-ptitsa i Vasilisa-tsarevna," in *Ibid.*, pp. 344-349.

24 Taruskin. *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, pp. 556-557.

25 Michel Fokine, *Memoirs of a Ballet Master*, Vitale Fokine, trans., Anatole Chujoy, ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961), p. 158.

Apart from a very few exceptions, there had seldom been any ballet of true Russian or Slavic style in the Imperial theatres until the late 1900s. In fields of art other than ballet anything national was popular and the “art for art’s sake” principal turned into a major idea. As a result, folk art came into the spotlight and the style demonstrated in illustrations found in collections of folk tales became popular and was introduced into stage art by the neo-nationalist painters. Ballet, however, focused mainly on the works choreographed by Petipa, the style of which was still the nineteenth century classics which included much from Greek mythology and orientalism.

There did appear new ballets in the late 1900s, whose subjects were taken from the folk tales. Among these, *the Humpbacked Horse* was the most popular and the most performed. The content of these ballets was still full of elements of the nineteenth century classics and diverged considerably from what was traditionally found in the world of folklore. Nevertheless, the attempt to produce them illustrated the birth of the first neo-nationalist ballets.

Even before the Ballets Russes made their debut in the West in 1909, intellectual Russians in Russia involved in the theatre were awaiting the birth of a new, truly Russian or Slavic style ballet. Members of the Ballet Russes picked up stories from Afanasyev’s collection of folk tales and produced the new ballet, *the Firebird*. Although its structure and story line resemble those of *the Humpbacked Horse*, there are no nereids or khan but only Russian folk tale beings such as *Koshchey* or the Firebird. *The Firebird* for the first time represented the world of Russian folklore in a ballet.

I would also like to point out that it was only through parting ways with the ancient regimes of the Imperial theatres that *the Firebird* was able to become the epoch-making neo-nationalist ballet that it did. *The Humpbacked Horse* and *the Golden Fish* were choreographed by French ballet master, Saint-Léon and *the Magic Mirror* by Petipa, who was also French. Only *the Vermillion Flower* was choreographed by a Russian choreographer, Nikolay Legat (1869-1937), who was also the principal dancer of the Imperial Mariinsky Theatre, which was unable to get rid of the influence of great foreign ballet masters. The Ballets Russes’ *Firebird* was the first ballet produced solely all by Russians –choreographed by Fokine, composed by Stravinsky, written by Benois and danced by Russian dancers. But it was never performed in the Imperial theatres in Russia.

The first new neo-nationalist ballet, which Russian intellectuals had been striving for for so long, was finally realised with the Ballets Russes’ *Firebird* which premiered in Paris in 1910.

## 『火の鳥』——最初のロシア・ネオ・ナショナリズム・バレエ

平野恵美子

『帝室劇場年鑑』を資料として、1900年代のロシア帝室劇場のバレエのレパートリーについて調査したところ、マリウス・プティパの手による作品、すなわち19世紀的な西欧あるいはオリエンタル主題のバレエが中心だった。バレエに関わるロシア人達は、自国のバレエにロシアを主題にした作品が生まれることを切望していた。オペラではロシアを主題にした作品が多かったが、オペラにおける「ロシア」は、帝政の栄華や叙事詩に描かれたような「ロシア」だった。

西欧寄りだったロシアのアカデミックな芸術は、19世紀半ば頃から自国の文化に目を向け始めたが、最初のナショナリスティックな芸術は移動派に代表されるように、芸術を社会のために役立てるといふ、芸術以外の目的に重きを置いた。次のネオ・ナショナリストと呼ばれる芸術家達は、伝える内容よりも表現や様式を重視し、民衆芸術、とりわけ民話の世界に着目した。民話の挿画のようなスタイルは、ゴロヴィーンやコロヴィンらによって帝室劇場の舞台に持ち込まれた。

新しいバレエの登場を望むベヌアのような芸術のリーダー的存在の人々は、その主題をロシア民話の世界に求めた。帝室劇場においても少しずつロシア民話を主題にしたバレエが現れた。中でも《せむしの子馬》は、1900年代を通してモスクワ、ペテルブルク共に、最も多く上演された。しかしその実態は、ロシア民話の世界からかけ離れており、帝室劇場では真のネオ・ナショナリズム的バレエ作品の発展には至らなかった。

それは後に、ようやくバレエ・リュスの《火の鳥》(1910)で完成を見た。バレエ《火の鳥》はそれと全く同じ話は民話には存在せず、複数の民話の寄せ集めである。しかし19世紀的なギリシア神話や中央アジアの汗等とは手を切り、真のロシア民話の世界をバレエで表現しようとした最初の作品であり、最初のネオ・ナショナリズム・バレエと位置づけることができる。そしてそのような作品は、帝室劇場の轡を初めて離れて可能になった。



fig. 1



fig. 2

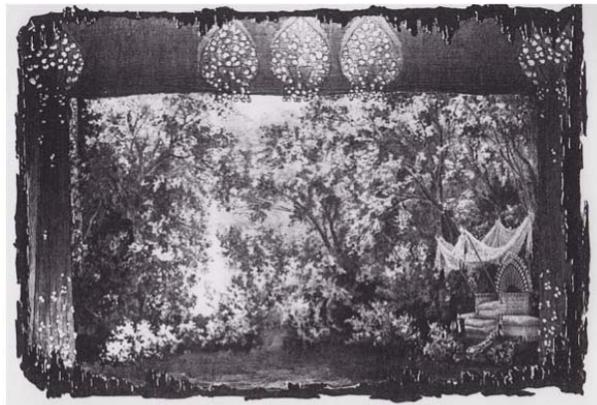


fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5



fig. 6