

FAREWELL TO DIAGHILEV

I. The Brilliant Impresario

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FROM A CARTOON BY M. LARIANOV

FOR twenty years Diaghilev was at the head of the contemporary movement in art. His name was synonymous with "revelation." Through his aid many young musicians and painters first reached the footlights. Constantly seeking novelties, he constantly disclosed some new phase of his own temperament. He changed collaborators frequently and in this perpetual variety was the secret of his

work's youth and vitality. Stravinsky, I believe, is the only artist whose music covered the twenty-year span of life of the Ballet Russe—1909, *L'Oiseau de Feu*, 1928, *Apollon Musagètes*. Between these dates Diaghilev created *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Le Rossignol*, *Pulcinella*, *Renard*, *Les Noces*, *Mavra*, *Oedipus Rex*. How fortunate that these two met! In Stravinsky, Diaghilev had an inexhaustible source of marvels. With Diaghilev, Stravinsky was sure to have his works produced in a worthy style. As a matter of fact, *Petrouchka* first appeared as a concerto for piano and orchestra. Diaghilev, charmed by this extraordinary music, decided to give the work the form of a ballet.

The arrival of the Ballet Russe in Paris, 1909, was a sensational event. For the first time we were presented with a perfect union of dance, music and décor. Paris had never seen stage designs like those of Bakst and Benois, whose brilliance so well set off the music of *Scheherazade*, of *Cleopatra*, of *Prince Igor*. Paris had never beheld such clever choreographers, a man like

Fokine, or dancers of such extraordinary skill and vigor. The *Spectre of the Rose*, with Nijinsky and Karsavina, for those who saw it is an imperishable memory.

Diaghilev, a real autocrat, was adored by his troupe. Not only could he bring together a painter and a musician, often in a way that a priori would have seemed paradoxical, but he was able to make a perfect realization of their ideas. I have seen this stimulating, never-at-rest person giving the movements to the orchestra leader during a rehearsal, making cuts, criticizing the brightness of the lights or a detail of costume, perpetually unsatisfied with the evolutions of the dancers. At performances he studied the most minute fragments of the spectacle through his lorgnette and nothing escaped that implacable eye.

Diaghilev would have found it easy to exploit his success and present only his triumphs, but he despised success just as much as he despised money. Financially, this huge troupe playing only occasionally was a yawning gulf. Each new season meant an enormous deficit. The sacrifices Diaghilev made to stage a new spectacle were not enough to meet his large budget. Here the impresario became a diplomat. Between two dinners Diaghilev could always find a wealthy person to underwrite the season.

Though faithful to all that the art of his country could bring him, Diaghilev did not make the Russian his specialty. Even before the war, he drew on foreign composers for *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*, the *Jeux* of Debussy, and *Daphnis et Chloé* by Ravel, at the same time that he was abetting revolution in the art of music with the creation of *Le Sacre du Printemps*. The Champs Elysée Theatre had just been opened. The first presentation of *Le Sacre du Printemps* caused an unprecedented commotion with fighting in the theatre, whistling, cries, shouts. Three weeks later, at the concert performance of the same work, the same people listened religiously and carried Stravinsky in triumph. Paying no attention, however, to the variations of public temper, in the dark hours of 1917 Diaghilev created a work as consequential as the *Sacre*, and which met equal hostility—*Parade*. *Le Sacre* closed one chapter in the history of music and the ballet, *Parade*, opened another. The clear music of Satie, whose influence on contemporary art is like a beneficent ray of

light, appeared together with the first cubist manifestations inspired by Picasso; décor and costumes also created a scandal.

After the war, Diaghilev inaugurated a true new renaissance. Outstanding among the Russian works (not counting Stravinsky's to which he always remained faithful) he put on those of Prokofiev: *Chout*, then the *Pas d'Acier*, a product of the working life of Soviet Russia, and, last season, *Le Fils Prodigue*. Among the painters, Picasso was often honored. Matisse, Sauvage, Gontcharova, and Bauchant collaborated with Stravinsky. Dancers, choreographers succeeded one another from Nijinsky to Balanchine and finally Serge Lifar, who will always be linked with *La Chatte*, as Nemchinova and her white gloves will always recall *Les Biches*. In 1924 the works of some of the group of Six were presented, *Les Biches* by Poulenc, with stage designs by Marie Laurencin and *Les Facheux* by Georges Auric. Diaghilev also liked to bring forward certain composers in a light in which the public was not accustomed to view them. Thus he asked me to write a dance operetta for the debut of Doline, *Le Train Bleu*, and Auric was commissioned to write two ballets, *Les Matelots* and *Pastorale*, both staged with designs by Pruna, the young Spanish painter who was just becoming known. During the last season, he called on a still younger element, Henri Sauguet for *La Chatte* and Nabokov for his *Ode* with choruses. He also produced ballets by musicians of other countries, notably Rieti's *Bal*, with extraordinary settings and costumes by Chirico inspired by architecture and a fine, noble feeling for antiquity.

And together with all these works by young, contemporary men, Diaghilev continued to put on ballets of an older music, *Cimbarosiana*, Tchaikovsky—*Le Lac des Cygnes*, and *La Boutique Fantasque* after fragments from Scarlatti. Nor in considering Diaghilev's career should one overlook his attempt, unsuccessful as it was, to restore the old opéra-comique by having contemporary musicians write the recitative. Just after placing his ballets under the patronage of the Princess of Monaco, he amused himself by staging in the Monte Carlo theatre, *Le Médecin Malgré Lui*, with recitative by Satie, *La Colombe* by Gounod with recitative by Poulenc, and *L'Education Manquée* of Chabrier for which I wrote the recitative.

My last glimpse of Diaghilev was this summer in Baden-Baden at the end of July. He had come to hear the works of Hindemith from whom he had asked a ballet. A sixteen year old musician, whom he was planning to launch, was with him. Dining with Diaghilev and Hindemith, I was struck by his thinness and poor appearance. Two weeks later I learned of his death in Venice. It was in Venice, so beloved by Diaghilev, and to which he returned every summer, that he was buried. His funeral cortege was worthy of the man who had organized and created so many of the most beautiful spectacles of our time. A procession of funeral gondolas bore him to the Marine Cemetery, that isle of the dead where his remains now rest forever.

II. Though Far From Russia

ANDRE SCHAEFFNER

IN Europe, Paris and London particularly, the short Ballet Russe season had come to be the principal event of the year. This was true almost from the formation of the troupe — that is after the first performance of *Boris Godunov*, put on by Serge de Diaghilev in 1908. The dazzling effects of *Firebird* and *Petrouchka*, the tumult of the *Sacre*, the simple grandeur of *Noces*, these manifestations of Stravinsky's genius helped to sustain public interest and enthusiasm. The straying to Ravel, Debussy, Satie, Georges Auric, Francis Poulenc, Darius Milhaud and Sauguet, were developments which, while significant to the French school and to other modern music, were not able to divert the Ballet Russe from its own strictly Russian path. The Ballet's ever growing fame only served to emphasize the Russian influence on the art of our day. The methods, the traditional melodic idioms of Russia found their way into all musical "languages," especially that of the French school. Contemporary French music, despite its debt to Gounod, Saint-Saëns, Bizet and Chabrier (and through them to their masters, Mendelssohn, Liszt, Wagner, Meyerbeer), to Italian opera and to Spanish folklore, realized its most fruitful development only by intermittently absorbing the music of the Five, and later, Stravinsky. The same conclusion may be drawn about the work