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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This project places the art form of Soviet classical ballet within the political and cultural context of the Khrushchev-era Thaw. It traces the Soviet Union’s long-standing nationalities policy—envisioned by Lenin even before 1917 and championed by Stalin throughout his tenure—and its connection to the proliferation of state-sponsored classical ballet theatres across the ethnically diverse, non-Russian regions and republics of the USSR. Classical ballet served a dual purpose in fulfilling the Soviet Union’s claim to be the most culturally, scientifically, economically, and politically advanced country on earth. First, the internationally-heralded achievements of Russia’s two oldest ballet institutions—the Bolshoi and Kirov Theatres—served to demonstrate Soviet cultural superiority to the rest of the world. Second, by founding state-sponsored ballet theatres in its peripheries, the Soviet Union utilized the art form of classical dance as a part of its civilizing mission to spread culture to its own “backward” regions. The artistic achievements of these provincial and republic ballet theatres served as a powerful source of propaganda, not only to Moscow and Leningrad, but also abroad, emphasizing the Soviet Union’s dedication to cultural development even in traditionally under-developed regions.
NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

The Library of Congress transliteration system for Russian has been used except for well-known proper names, i.e., Maya Plisetskaya instead of Maiia Plisetskaia. All translations of the newspaper Sovetskaia kul'tura are my own.
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INTRODUCTION

Imperial Russia adopted the art form of classical ballet from Italy and France in the eighteenth century: in 1738, the first ballet academy, the Imperial Theatre School, was established in St. Petersburg and housed at the Winter Palace. It was soon followed by the Imperial Russian Ballet, forerunner to today’s Mariinsky Ballet Theatre. The Bolshoi Ballet of Moscow was established only thirty-eight years later in 1776. Since those formative decades, ballet played a tremendous role not only in the lives of the imperial nobility, but in the general cultural development of the two major Russian cities that cultivated the first Russian ballet theatres. Ballet provided important links with Europe throughout the remainder of the tsarist period: Italian ballerinas often danced entire careers in Russia.¹ The Frenchman Marius Petipa, most famous for his long tenure as choreographer and balletmaster of the Imperial Ballet, often staged his ballets on these ballerinas. Additional French, Swedish, and Italian dancers and choreographers abounded in Russian ballet: the Imperial Ballet itself was founded by a French ballet master, Jean-Baptiste Landé.² Russian ballet continued to be colored by international influences until 1917, when the disorder caused by the successive February and October Revolutions caused most European guests to return to the West. Moreover, many Russian dancers and choreographers were also prompted to leave once it became clear that classical ballet, if it survived the general chaos of the revolution—particularly the onslaught of avant-garde

¹Most famous among the Italian ballerinas in Russia were Marie Taglioni, Pierina Legnani, Carlotta Grisi, Carlotta Brianza, and Virginia Zucchi.  
²Other noteworthy foreign ballet workers in Russian include the French choreographers Charles-Louis Didelot and Jules Perrot, the Swedish dancer and balletmaster Christian Johansson, and the Italian dancer and pedagogue Enrico Cecchetti.
condemnations on traditional art forms—would exist within an environment that was impossible to predict.  

The environment into which Russian—and afterwards, Soviet—ballet eventually settled had indeed greatly changed in many aspects from the days of the Tsar, yet ballet itself succumbed neither to the system-wide chaos nor to the harsh attacks from radical revolutionaries who believed that imperial-era, “bourgeois” art forms had no place in a future-oriented socialist utopia. On the contrary, the heritage of the imperial era of Russian ballet continued to play an immensely influential role in the development and proliferation of the art form across the Soviet Union.

This paper will demonstrate the ways in which ballet functioned as a political tool of the Soviet state from 1953-1968, when the cultural-artistic atmosphere was again in flux at the end of Stalin’s rule. The years 1953-1968, which surrounded and encompassed the period commonly known as the Thaw, are a fruitful time to analyze Soviet ballet, as these years were fraught with many political transitions that allowed space for the somewhat stagnant ideas concerning aesthetics and experimentation to be challenged by a new generation: what where the practicalities involved in making a proletarian-friendly ballet? How was a choreographer to “correctly” experiment, given the artistic and cultural paradigm of socialist realism? The political timeline serves as an important contextualization for an analysis of the cultural arena, beginning with the death of Stalin in March 1953 and the ascent of Nikita Khrushchev over his political rivals (1953-1955). Khrushchev’s Secret Speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956 ushered a

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3 Sergei Diaghliev decided to stay abroad permanently after 1917, Mikhail Mordkin, appointed director of the Bolshoi Ballet in 1917, left that same year, and Mikhail Fokine left Russia for Sweden in 1918. The young dancers Georgii Balanchivadze (Balanchine), Alexandra Danilova, Tamara Geva, and Nikolai Efimov were some of the first to defect from the Soviet Union in 1924.
decade of relative liberalization into most spheres of Soviet life; however this initial relaxation was tempered by harsh military crackdowns on protests in Hungary and Poland during the same year. The tumultuous period that followed was a study in contrasts and contradictions in the form of unpredictable relations with the Europe, the United States, and China, the constant reorganizing of government and Party organizations, and inconsistencies in policies ranging from cultural, economic, agricultural, and national.4

Nikita Khrushchev was ousted from power in 1964 by a coalition led by Leonid Brezhnev. The following year, the writers Yuli Daniel and Andrei Siniavsky were arrested for smuggling their literature abroad to be published. In 1966 they were both sentenced to hard labor. In 1968, the Soviet military and other Warsaw Pact countries invaded Czechoslovakia to halt the Prague Spring, an outburst of liberal reforms passed by the Dubček government. This crackdown signaled the unequivocal end of the Thaw. Brezhnev, whose era became defined by economic stagnation and heightened repression, would occupy the seat of power as General Secretary until his death in 1982.

Using these political events as a backdrop to the Soviet artistic sphere, this paper’s intention is to examine the dual political role of ballet both as a means to demonstrate artistic superiority domestically and abroad, and as a technique to create kul’tura—the particularly Russian understanding of “culture”—as part of the Soviet Union’s mission civilisatrice. It will pay particular attention to how official press coverage of ballet companies sheds light on post-Stalin nationalities policy. In 1934, Joseph Stalin contributed to the official organ of the Union of Composers, Sovetskaia muzyka, thusly:

Under the conditions of a dictatorship of the proletariat within a single country, the rise of cultures national in form and socialist in content has to take place, so that when the proletariat wins in the whole world and socialism is a part of ordinary life, these cultures will merge into one culture, socialist both in form and content with a common language. 5

The Soviet Union’s nationalities policy had, since its inception, been deeply intertwined with the state’s civilizing mission that sought to expedite the cultural development of the thousands of nationalities living within the borders of the former Russian empire. The Marxist theory of history held that for each society, the basic stages of primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, and capitalism must be achieved before that society is advanced and industrialized enough for a transition to socialism. With the surprise ascent of the Bolshevik Party to power in 1917, Lenin found it necessary to interpret Marxism so as to explain how a socialist revolution could take place in a mostly rural, agricultural state, the bulk of whose population consisted mostly of uneducated peasants—not urbanized workers. In addition to the Russian peasants, the territory of the former empire—most of which would be re-appropriated as Soviet by 1922—contained thousands of non-Russian peoples whose developmental level supposedly lagged far behind the Russians’. Lenin therefore theorized that the time spent during each “stage” of history on the path toward socialism could be dramatically decreased, or even skipped altogether if the society at hand had the proper resources to make a “cultural leap.” These involved the proliferation of schools, electricity, industry, urban centers, and cultural institutions. State ballet and opera theatres, as well as music conservatories, based on their predecessors in Europe and Tsarist Russia, were among the very first of these

cultural institutions to be multiplied across the Union during the 1930s. The ballet theatre was an instrumental piece of the Russian-cum-Soviet concept of kul’turnost’, or the quality of being cultured, traditionally denoted by performing and fine arts, literature, and scholarship.

Two broad themes run through the course of the paper that relate to socialist realism in all forms of Soviet art. These two themes are neatly represented by Stalin’s formula that national cultures be “national in form and socialist in content.” The theme of “national in form” refers to the aforementioned aim of revealing details of Soviet nationalities policy via analysis of ballet companies as represented and reported upon in the media. “Socialist in content” denotes the sections of the paper that concern the aesthetics of socialist realism and the debate that surfaced after 1953 over the particularities of what constituted a properly Soviet, socialist realist ballet.

The methodology for this project consists of the systematic analysis of four streams of information: the primary source is the Moscow newspaper, Sovetskaia kul’tura (Soviet Culture), the official Organ of the Ministry of Culture and the Central Committee of the Union of Professional Cultural Workers. Sovetskaia kul’tura provides coverage of a wide range of “culture”—effectively defining the parameters of the Russian/Soviet concept of kul’tura, including operas, ballets, classical music, fine art, literature, chess, and even the circus. The newspaper also provides a fair amount of coverage of samodeiatel’noe iskusstvo (literally, “self-performed” or amateur art), including amateur ballet companies and folk troupes. The political and artistic functions of samodeiatel’nyi

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8 “Sovetskaia kul’tura: organ Ministerstva kul’tury SSSR i Tsentral’nogo komiteta Professional’nogo soiuza rabotnikov kul’tury”
balet embody a distinctly different sphere of Soviet art and culture, and are surrounded by a separate discourse; therefore, this paper will focus specifically on professional, state-sponsored ballet companies.

The second source of information comes from the Soviet magazine Kul’tura i zhizn’ (Culture and Life), published by the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, formerly the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. After its 1956-1957 reorganization, the conspicuous addition of the word “friendship” was added to the Society’s name, reflecting the positive shift in Soviet relations with the international community begun after the death of Stalin. The magazine itself underwent great changes in 1956-1957, beginning primarily with being published more frequently (monthly rather than every other month). In 1957, Kul’tura i zhizn’ also became more colorful, modern, and “savvy” in its use of photography and especially in its replacement of ideology-heavy, propagandistic articles, in favor of celebratory, more reader-friendly content. Unlike Sovietskaia Kul’tura, which was an internal newspaper for Soviet consumption, Kul’tura i zhizn’ was published in French, English, Spanish, and German, in addition to Russian. Especially during the 1950s and 1960s, this magazine served a heuristic, proselytizing purpose: its content was clearly directed toward recently-independent Third World nations who were either sympathetic to the Soviet Union or politically unaligned and undecided. For the purposes of Kul’tura i zhizn’, the realm of culture becomes extremely general and broad: the arts

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9 This magazine changed names when the organization responsible for its publication underwent restructuring during the years following the death of Stalin. Until January 1957, Kul’tura i zhizn’ was published as the Biulleten’ VOKS (Vsesoiuznoe obschechestvo kul’turnoi sviaszi s zagranitsei). In 1957 VOKS became the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and its Biulleten’ became Kul’tura i zhizn’. Both forms of the publication were published in several European languages for consumption abroad.

10 After December 1955, Kul’tura i zhizn’ was published monthly except for the bizarre year 1957, in which January to June was published monthly, and July to December was published on alternate months.
and literature occupy only one section of the magazine. Other sections are dedicated to scientific achievements, cultural contacts, economic achievements, and travelogues. Like \textit{Sovetskaia kul’tura, Kul’tura i zhizn’} advertised and promoted the Russian/Soviet concept of \textit{kul’turnost’} to the world abroad. The content of the magazine is designed to present the Soviet Union as the most culturally, scientifically, economically, and politically advanced country on earth.

The third source of information is \textit{Current Digest of the Soviet Press}, the important weekly published by the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies that presented Soviet news articles, translated into English, mostly from \textit{Pravda} and \textit{Izvestiia}, the official organs of the Communist Party and Soviet government, respectively. Because the selection of articles in \textit{Current Digest} was hand-picked by a board of scholars in the United States, this publication can only be relied upon for secondary coverage, and will therefore serve an auxiliary source to inform trends observed in \textit{Sovetskaia kul’tura} and \textit{Kul’tura i zhizn’}.\footnote{On the selection process at \textit{Current Digest}: “The most important items from these two papers [\textit{Pravda} and \textit{Izvestiia}] are given in full in the Current Digest; others are condensed.” From the 80+ other publications occasionally used by Current Digest, “only material of special or lasting interest to persons engaged in the study of Soviet developments is reprinted from these papers and magazines.” “About the \textit{Current Digest of the Soviet Press},” \textit{Current Digest of the Soviet Press} XXVII, no. 12 (1975): 28.}

For these three sources, careful attention is paid to the language of the articles and headlines, repertoire, plots of ballets, and reviews of new ballets. The frequency of coverage of tours (both of Soviet ballet troupes abroad and foreign companies in the USSR) and of national \textit{dekady}, ten-day festivals devoted to the demonstration of art and culture of a particular republic or nationality within the Soviet Union, were particularly noted for any political implications. Every ballet-related article has been documented in a master database for each source.
Finally, a fourth stream of information comes from the memoirs of important Soviet ballet dancers whose work coincides with this time period. They include the relatively short chronicle of Galina Ulanova and the detailed life stories of Maya Plisetskaya and Valery Panov. Their stories serve as a point of departure from the official media sources and provide a personal, unofficial dimension to the analysis.
In order to understand the aspirations of choreographers as well as contextualize the aesthetic and ideological battles that characterized Soviet ballet during the Thaw, it is necessary to briefly engage with the past. Ballet in Russia originally functioned as entertainment for the tsar and his family as early as the seventeenth century. The first official ballet theatres were established during the eighteenth century, and it is due to their labor that some of today’s most famous and enduring ballets have been maintained. Under the patronage of the Russian imperial court, early European classics, including *La Fille mal Gardée* and *Giselle*, flourished; however, the form of the academic full-length ballet, the category to which *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Nutcracker* belong, was developed in Russia by the French balletmaster Marius Petipa. Petipa arrived in Russia in 1847, initially accepting the position of premier danseur at the Imperial Theatres of St. Petersburg, and he continued to work as principal ballet master from 1869 until his death in 1910. He is credited with nothing less than developing classical ballet as an art form in and of itself. Ballet’s separation from pantomime, the process of making classical dance an abstract vehicle for human emotions, as well as the more technical developments of virtuosic bravura dancing for men and pointe technique for women all led Soviet ballet historian Elizaveta Surits to the following conclusion:

The aspiration to virtuosity, so characteristic of the epoch of Petipa, was an important and natural stage in the development of dance. Without it, the further improvement of ballet, enrichment of its language, and consequently, the solution

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13 Ibid, 86, 97, 123.
to difficult problems which the art of ballet would soon face in the near future, would have been impossible.15

These problems, which challenged all spheres of art in the early twentieth century, were engaged by the avant-garde movement: Symbolism, Russian futurism, Cubo-Futurism (early Malevich), Constructivism (Tatlin), and later Suprematism (Malevich) all reflected the increasingly restless, revolutionary state of Russia in the first two decades of the twentieth century.16 This period in Russian ballet was marked by the choreographic innovations of Mikhail Fokin (Fokine) and Alexander Gorsky, representing “new” ballet.17 They both consciously worked against the paradigm of what they termed “old” ballet of their part-predecessor, part-contemporary, Petipa. On the one hand, Fokine sought to free the structure of ballet from the rigid forms imposed by Petipa’s full-length academic ballets. This was accomplished by his early ballets Le Pavillon d’Armide (1907), Les Sylphides/Chopiniana (1908), and The Dying Swan (1907).18 Fokine left Russia in 1918 for Europe and later the United States, but his ballets were re-embraced in the Soviet Union during the Thaw.19 On the other hand, Muscovite Alexander Gorsky distinguished his works from Petipa’s by emphasizing realism, drama, mime, and acting elements over bravura virtuosity.20 Gorsky worked in Moscow for his entire career, but was most influential not for his own choreographic creations, which did not long survive

18 Ibid., 24-26.
19 Valery Panov describes the Maly Theatre’s 1961 revival of Fokine’s Petrushka with music by Stravinsky. It was the first time a Stravinsky ballet had been performed in the Soviet Union since 1921. Valery Panov and George Feifer, To Dance (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978),
20 Roslavleva, Era of the Russian Ballet, 214; Souritz, Soviet Choreographers, 30-31.
1917, but for his reworking of imperial classics. Along with the “anti-classicism” of choreographer Boris Romanov, Gorsky and Fokine defined the period of “new” ballet up until the October Revolution.

Following October and the difficult years of the Civil War, classical ballet’s very survival was threatened numerous times, both by financial hardships—which challenged all spheres of the new socialist society—and more so by more treacherous ideological battles. Its critics claimed it should be destroyed because of its inaccessibility to the masses—it was backwards, obsolete, and even “senile.” Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky’s campaign to preserve classical ballet in its traditional form has already been well documented—after years of effort, it was not until 1922 that the Bolshoi and Mariinsky Theatres were no longer under immediate threat of being shut down by the Bolshevik government.

The 1920s were years of rapid development for Soviet ballet: artistic pluralism and radical experimentation flourished during the years of Lenin’s New Economic Policy (NEP). New balletic experiments were dominated by three choreographers: the aforementioned Gorsky, Kusin Goleizovsky, and Fyodor Lopukhov, all of whom would have great influence on Soviet ballet not only in the 1920s, but into the 1950s and 1960s. Sally Banes notes that this period was “germinal” not only for Soviet ballet, but also for American ballet, as this generation of Russian dancers and choreographers produced

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21 Souritz, Soviet Choreographers, 31-34.
23 Ibid, 48.
25 NEP allowed for limited market activities and private property in order to aid in Russia’s recovery from the trauma of World War I and its Civil War.
George Balanchine, founder of New York City Ballet, and Mikhail Mordkin, whose company eventually gave rise to American Ballet Theatre.26

Experimental Soviet ballet in the 1920s has traditionally been perceived as being in diametrical opposition to the more conservative ballets of the 1930s, created in a different atmosphere under the influence of a new Soviet leader. During 1932-1934, Socialist Realism was institutionalized as the official and therefore the only correct vehicle of artistic expression.27 While it is true that ballet, like all art forms, had to adjust its experimentation in order to align itself with this new policy, there is evidence to suggest that by the late 1920s and early 1930s, avant-garde experimental ballets were no longer in demand by the new “proletarian” audiences.28 In the newly established Soviet Union, a “settling” was occurring: weary citizens who had been both excited by the revolutionary atmosphere of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as traumatized by World War I, the Russian Civil War, and the chaos of constructing a new system of government from the ground up, were in dire need of normalization. Accompanying this desire was a re-negotiation of art and modernity’s relationship to one another. Rather than reflecting the revolutionary times via the abstraction of the avant-garde, a more concrete depiction of contemporary reality (sovremennaia real’nost’ ) and “ideality” of the present socialist society was more and more in demand.29 With these changes in perspective, it is important to emphasize that continuity—rather than sharp divergence—is a more accurate way to conceptualize the development of Soviet ballet

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28 Souritz, Soviet Choreographers, 320.
29 Ibid, 319.
between the first and second decade of the Soviet Union’s existence. While the increasingly unpopular avant-garde ballet productions ended, their choreographers—Gorsky, Goleizovsky, and Lopukov, among others—continued to lead the way in creating the new forms of realistic, contemporary ballet.

The most important ballet reflecting this transition toward concrete, contemporary realism was 1927’s Krasnyi mak (The Red Poppy). This extremely successful production established a new model for a genuinely Soviet ballet, subsequently influencing the themes and forms of ballet in the 1930s. Thus, Krasnyi mak served as a bridge to Soviet ballet’s “dramatic period.”

The “dramatic ballet” or drambalet reigned supreme during the 1930s and 1940s. The frequent use of mime and close cooperation with the dramatic theatre characterized the most important drambalety created under the new standard of socialist realism, including Plamia Parizha (Flames of Paris, 1932), Laurencia, Pushkin’s Bakhchisaraiskii fontan (The Fountain of Bakhchisarai), and Romeo and Juliet, set to a new score by Prokofiev. Plamia Parizha, a ballet celebrating the French Revolution, was of a new type: choreographed by Vassily Vainonen, it was “a synthetic work, wherein music, song, and dancing were blended into one whole.” Vainonen’s ballet also pioneered the creation of ballet dramaturgy, which, as the name suggests, involves composing and/or editing the specifically dramatic component of a ballet. It is no accident that the Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theatre in Moscow added a ballet company to its corpus during this time. Viktorina Kriger—one of the defenders of

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31 Music by R. M. Gliere, choreography by Lev Lashchilin and Vassily Tikhomirov.
32 Roslavleva, Era of the Russian Ballet, 220.
33 From dramaticheskii balet and also known as “choreodrama.”
34 Roslavleva, Era of the Russian Ballet, 221.
classical ballet during the 1920s—incorporated her ballet company, the Moscow Artistic Ballet, into the Musical Theatre in 1939, with the goal of combining ballet with the realism of Stanislavsky’s and Meyerhold’s acting methods.\textsuperscript{35}

Ballet in the 1940s followed the vector of the \textit{drambalet} as best it could during the intense trauma of World War II. The war itself provided dramaturges, librettists, and choreographers with a powerful, contemporary source for the creation of new Soviet ballets, as well as operas and symphonies. Wartime heroism and patriotism would entrench themselves as popular, ideologically-politically correct themes for ballets in the coming decades.

The Soviet Union saw intense changes as well as nuanced continuities during the 1950s. In March 1953, the death of Stalin—who had led the country through two turbulent decades involving forced collectivization, rapid industrialization, famines, population transfers, purges, and World War II—was a catalyst for changes instituted by the unanticipated ascendance of Nikita Khrushchev to the post of General Secretary. Khrushchev’s Secret Speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 denounced \textit{kul’ i lichnosti}, the “cult of the personality” surrounding Stalin, which enabled and exacerbated his excessive abuses of power. The continuities between the Stalin years and Khrushchev’s Thaw can be discerned in the silences and omissions of the Secret Speech; namely, while Khrushchev introduced the possibility of peaceful coexistence with the rest of the non-socialist world, it is significant that his vision of the world as divided into the two fundamentally different “camps” of socialism and capitalist-imperialism remained

intact.36 Another continuity not directly acknowledged in the Secret Speech was the Soviet Union’s nationalities policy, developed by Lenin and Stalin over the course of two decades. A short review of the policy’s development will aid in the contextualization of provincial as well as central ballet companies, their repertory decisions, and their experimentation during the Thaw.

The concepts of nationalism and Marxist-Leninist socialism, at the most basic levels, describe divergent, almost irreconcilable visions of statehood. While nationalism champions the preeminence of one nationality or ethnicity within a state with no prescribed political system, Marxist-Leninist socialism is, by definition, strictly *international*: realizing their common oppression, the laboring classes would overcome all differences of nationality or ethnicity, in order to unite and overthrow their bourgeois masters, while they simultaneously jettisoned the inherently oppressive capitalist system in favor of socialism. Why would a state that based its identity on the international unification of peasants and workers give nationalism a place of prominence? Why did Lenin and Stalin—the Bolsheviks’ original expert on nationalities, trained by Lenin’s own hand—work “to harden the differences between nationalities and create the conditions for greater national consciousness?”37

The question of nationalism and its role in the destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was of profound importance to Lenin in 1917. In order to accommodate nationalist agitation within the territories of the old Russian Empire, while simultaneously preserving the integrity of these territories for the benefit of the newly-

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socialist state, Lenin—with increasing input from Stalin—developed what Terry Martin termed the world’s first “Affirmative Action Empire.” In short, Lenin and Stalin chose to foster nationalism—which they argued was an unavoidable stage in the process of Marxist historical development—in the hopes of controlling and “disarming” these sentiments in service of the greater, long-term goal of international Communism.38

The defense of nations and their right to self-determination was a radical, initially unpopular set of ideas that seemed to betray the very internationalist foundations of Marxism. Yet with persistence, Lenin enacted his nationalities policy at the Eighth Party Congress in 1919 because, while his detractors were loathe to admit that national movements were “normal or desirable,” most delegates had been convinced that they were a “‘necessary evil’ that had to be tolerated.”39 This insistence on a federalist solution led to the creation of the Soviet Union as an entity that grew to consist of fifteen national republics, including thousands of national territories across the vast space of the former Russian Empire. For each territory, a national language was established, new schools were built, and new national elites were trained and groomed for positions of power. Most importantly for the purposes of this study, the Soviet government promoted and funded national culture, including everything from operas, books, films, news media, folk ensembles, plays, and, of course, ballets.40 National culture had to be, by definition, “national in form, socialist in content.”41 While Soviet nationalities were granted “forms” of national expression through their territory, elites, language, and culture, it is

41 Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 144.
important to note that Soviet republics and national territories had no substantial federative powers of their own. The Bolsheviks had always intended to run the state as a centralized political entity, which is why the Russian nation itself, as opposed to all other “oppressed-nations,” at first could not exist. If the Russian nation had existed, the center of power—Moscow—would be located in Russian territory, which Lenin feared would lead to accusations of the dirtiest of words to socialist ears: empire.42

The nature of the Soviet nationalities policy changed drastically after 1933, wherein the Russian nation—formerly, the greatest “oppressor-nation” of all—along with Russian culture, were formally “rehabilitated.” Moreover, the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) was now assigned the role of protector and leader of družba narodov, or “Friendship of the Peoples,” a metaphor coined by Stalin in 1935, with “peoples” being the different nationalities of the Soviet Union.43 The opening lyrics of the Hymn of the Soviet Union (original poem written in 1938, adopted as national hymn in 1944)44 illustrate Russia’s post-1933 role within the Soviet state:

Soiuz nerushimyi, respublik svobodnykh
Splotila naveki Velikaia Rus’!
Da zdravstvuet sozdannyi volei narodov
Edinyi, moguchii Sovetskii Soiuz!

This first stanza eloquently combines the description of Great Russia (Velikaia Rus’) as uniter of the unbreakable Union of free republics (first two lines) with the affirmation, “long live the united, powerful Soviet Union, created by the will of the People” (third and fourth lines). Thus the new myth of the Soviet Union, as expressed in the Hymn, can be interpreted to mean that while the narod may have created the Soviet Union as an idea,

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42 Martin, Affirmative Action Empire, 20.
43 Ibid, 432.
its physical realization could not have happened were it not for powerful Russia’s role as unifying actor. By conceptualizing Russia as an entity that had fulfilled the will of the diverse peoples of the Soviet Union, the Russian nation now had the freedom to take its rightful place as first among equal nations, while simultaneously avoiding the negative epithet of “empire.”

What is most interesting about the rehabilitation of the Russian nation and Russian culture is that it did not signify an onset of Russification of the Soviet Union, nor did it imply the end of korenizatsiia (indigenization) policies set into motion during the 1920s. Rather, coexistence of Russian (in its role as unifier) and local national culture was emphasized: “national cultures would continue to be patronized by the Soviet state. Affirmative Action and nation building would continue, though not in such a way as to insult or demean Russians.” Finally, national minorities (non-Russians) were now required to learn the Russian language and to embrace Russian culture: “Indeed, the Russian culture should in some important way become part of their national cultures.”

This new emphasis on Russian and national culture had solidified by the Great Terror of 1937-1938 and continued to characterize Soviet nationalities policy at the end of Stalin’s tenure and the beginning of the Thaw. It is not difficult to understand why this policy continued to be championed by Khrushchev after Stalin’s death. It served as an exceptionally powerful point of propaganda during the 1960s, as many colonies of Europe’s old empires had recently been granted independence and were searching for models of government. Potent, too, was the awareness of these new nations, as well as the world at large, of the United States’ struggle with issues of race and civil rights.

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46 Ibid, 461.
equality. This use of nationalities policy in juxtaposing the Soviet Union as racially equal and enlightened against the prejudiced, segregated United States is evident chiefly in Kul’tura i zhizn’, with its heavy emphasis on promoting African, Middle Eastern, and Asian cultural achievements. Through Khrushchev never broke completely with Stalinist Russo-centrism, aspects of his nationalities policy can be gleaned from the distribution of ballet theatres covered by the official press.

At the advent of the Thaw, Leninist-Stalinist nationalities policy—represented by the formula “national in form, socialist in content”—had been shaping the contours of nations and their cultures for three decades. Independent of but closely intertwined with the development of these national cultures was socialist realism, the heavy-handed guide to ideologically-correct Soviet art. Because the arts were an integral part of culture (according to the Soviet formulation) the development of national cultures mandated the vigorous establishment of “culture-producing institutions.” At the end of the 1930s, “all Union republics had their own writers’ unions, theatres, opera companies and national academies that specialized primarily in national history, literature and language.” And although these institutions of culture were national in “form,” they were expected to create art in accordance with socialist realist doctrine. Thus, it is fitting to turn the discussion to socialist realist ballet in conjunction with Soviet nationalities policy and the Soviet civilizing mission.

50 Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 447.
MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE BOLSHOI AND KIROV THEATRES: BALLET AS A DEMONSTRATOR OF SOVIET SUPERIORITY

This section will focus on Soviet artistic media covering the two dominant ballet companies, both located within the RSFSR, and will elaborate upon the aesthetic debate shaping the art of Soviet ballet. While the “Russian nation” did enjoy “rehabilitation” after 1936, nationalities policy never applied to Russia in the same manner as it did to all other nationalities. While the other Soviet peoples were to work on raising their level of culture, as the bearers of October 1917, “the Russians had been transformed from a revolutionary people into ‘the most outstanding of all nations comprising the Soviet Union.’” As the vanguard of ballet theatres, the Bolshoi and Kirov led the way in demonstrating Soviet superiority to the world at large.

During the Thaw, the sphere of ballet itself experienced a renegotiation of the principles of socialist realism as they applied to classical dance. This reassessment was illustrated by clashes between the drambalet establishment, characterized by extreme realism and the emphasis of content over form; and the proponents of symphonic dance, also known as “choreographic symphonism” (khoreograficheskii simfonizm), which was a re-emerging trend championed by a new generation of choreographers reacting against what they perceived to be the strictures and choreographic dead-ends of the hyper-realistic drambalet. Symphonic dance’s supporters “began to call for a return of complex classical dance structures and insisted that ‘realism’ in ballet had to take into account the

51 Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 448.
specificity of ballet as an art form, namely, the role of classical dance as its main expressive means.”

Drambalet and choreographic symphonism provide two opposing points of reference along a continuum of choreographic trends during the Thaw, with drambalet representing conservative traditionalism, and choreographic symphonism representing contemporaneity (sovremennost’) and innovation (novatorstvo). It is important to note that the association of drambalet with tradition, and dance symphonism with innovation are completely contingent upon generation and time period. A similar dichotomy was observed only one generation previous during the late 1920s and early 1930s, when choreographers were rejecting the symphonism of Petipa, Fokine, and Ivanov in favor of new, contemporary themes, which, in turn, led to the development of drambalet. Thus, the proponents of dance symphonism in the 1950s and 1960s did not have exclusive ownership of the terms novatorstvo or sovremennost’, but rather were able to appropriate them to define this trend against the qualities of the now-orthodox drambalet.

“In the reformist discourse of the Thaw ‘contemporary’ was code for opposition to dogma, to the atrophied forms and sclerotic cultural institutions that were Stalinism’s legacy.” For the sphere of ballet, in the highly symbolic language of the Soviet press, novatorstvo and sovremennost’ served as code words for opposition to the choreographic form of the drambalet and its establishment. Specifically, simfonizm functioned as code for “quasi-abstract” dancing—that is, ballet characterized not by a concrete plot, and the

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expression of said plot by narrow, realist-infused choreography, but by complex
classical—even virtuoso—choreography, whose purpose may have been only to express
emotion non-literally.54 While “pure” dancing—art for art’s sake, à la Balanchine—
would still elicit charges of formalism in the 1950s, the Thaw allowed the proponents of
choreographic symphonism space to work against the paradigm of drambalet as the only
acceptable form of Soviet ballet. A particularly germane illustration of the aesthetic clash
revolves around dueling versions of Stone Flower, a new drambalet choreographed by
Leonid Lavrovsky in 1954, but revised in the style of simfonizm only three years later, by
a young choreographer of the Thaw generation.

In order to attain a more complete understanding of the types of socialist ballets
being choreographed by both traditional ballet theatres in the RSFSR, and by the national
ballet theatres, created for the explicit purpose of developing and raising “national
culture,” analysis of the Soviet artistic media will aid in fusing the heretofore separate
discussions of Soviet national culture and socialist realist ballet during the Thaw.

When analyzing official artistic media coverage of professional ballet during the
1950s and 1960s, it is important to keep two contexts in mind: first, nationalities policy
emphasized both the development of essentialized national cultures as well as the
incorporation of elements of Russian culture into each minority culture. This was
understood on the basis of the Russian nation leading and uniting all cultures and peoples
of the Soviet Union. How was post-Stalin nationalities policy affected by the general
liberalizing atmosphere of the Thaw? Did nationalities policy for Khrushchev represent
an area of change or continuity? Second, mainly in the ballet capitals of Moscow and
Leningrad, the actual form and content of ballet itself was being fiercely renegotiated in a

dispute between the *drambalet* establishment (for the purposes of this paper, “traditionalists”) and supporters of choreographic symphonism (who had appropriated the terms “innovation” and “contemporary” to describe their cause). Based on official media coverage, is it possible to discern which trend had triumphed at the close of the Thaw?

The Ministry of Culture’s official organ, *Sovetskaia kul’tura*, was chosen for analysis because it strove to cover all aspects of “culture,” which led to the following question: how large (or small) a share of coverage was dedicated to classical ballet in publication claiming to represent Soviet culture? Though classical ballet had to fight for its very existence in the 1920s, by 1953 the art form had established its place as one of the Soviet Union’s artistic “crown jewels.” After establishing that *Sovetskaia kul’tura* dedicated a large amount of space to ballet within the larger Soviet cultural project (although film, dramatic theatre, and literature clearly dominate the paper), each February and September of every year was perused not only for the obvious articles, but also for the most minute mentions of ballet. These months were selected as representations of the entire artistic season: September marked the beginning of the season and was fruitful in that it provided coverage not only of events happening during that month, but strove to highlight the entire upcoming season. February was chosen because it represented a “normal” month toward the end of the season, and was not affected by any major holidays.

Coverage of ballet in *Sovetskaia kul’tura* falls into three categories: first, ballet reviews reveal significant information on contemporary choreographic experiments and opinions of the artistic community on experimentation, with the potential to contribute to the *drambalet*-choreographic symphonism narrative. Second, tour coverage, both of
foreign companies in the USSR and Soviet companies abroad, discloses details on
repertoire decisions and demonstrates the interconnectedness of Soviet politics, foreign
policy, and ballet. Third, *dekada* coverage fuses information about artistic products—
natsbalety, or national ballets, in particular—of national cultures that were created and
cultivated under Soviet nationalities policy. Finally, a miscellaneous non-category
includes everything from short notices of season openings to notices of debuts by
particular dancers and ballet premieres.

What is immediately clear about *Sovetskaia kul’tura* is its attempt to equalize and
diversify coverage of ballet: from Bulgaria to Uzbekistan, troupes not only within the
Soviet Union proper and Eastern Europe’s fraternal socialist republics, but also in foreign
countries friendly to Communism (Cuba, China, India, etc), are covered in larger
proportion than to the Bolshoi or Kirov Theatre. This is also characteristic of *Kul’tura i
zhizn’*; however, this magazine’s central purpose is to depict the cultural progress of the
Soviet Union abroad, and to cover interactions between the Soviet Union and all of its
friendship societies. Therefore, the diversity of its ballet coverage is less surprising.

September marks the start of the theatrical season in Moscow, and in the Soviet
Union at large. *Sovetskaia kul’tura* is rife with theatrical announcements of what to
expect in the upcoming season. In September 1953, out of four total ballet-related articles,
only one concerns the Bolshoi, marking Galina Ulanova’s twenty-fifth season on stage.
The remaining three short announcements concern the Bashkir, Bulgarian, and
Novosibirsk Ballet and Opera Theatres’ new seasons.55 From this small amount of ballet
coverage in 1953, the number of ballet-related pieces increases steadily every year with a

55 In the Soviet Union, following the traditional European system, a state theatre almost always consisted of
a ballet and an opera company; thus ballet and opera companies were often covered together in the Soviet
press, due to their organization into one theatre.
high in 1966. Despite this overall rising trend, coverage of the Bolshoi remains disproportionately low until 1957. In September 1957, the Bolshoi is featured in a surprisingly numerous twelve articles (out of a total of nineteen for the month). What is noteworthy about this increase in coverage is that the Bolshoi was not garnering attention from Sovetskaia kul’tura for its own accomplishments in Moscow; on the contrary, the coverage was nearly all related the Bolshoi’s unprecedented tours to Japan and Argentina.

The reason for the heightened amount of coverage of the Bolshoi in conjunction with its tours to foreign states points to changes in cultural policy, directly resulting from Khrushchev’s Thaw: more precisely, the increase is due to the opening up of cultural contacts between the Soviet Union and foreign countries that began to occur in the Soviet Union following Stalin’s death, and the further normalization of these relations following the Twentieth Party Congress. As late as July 1955, over two years after Stalin’s death, Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov rejected a joint attempt by the French, American, and British foreign ministers at the Geneva Summit to open up the Soviet Union to “normal” exchange in culture, as well as in science, sports, tourism, etc. Yet even as Molotov persisted in the “hostile-isolationist” mentality of Stalinism, the Geneva Summit was considered to be a foreign relations success, due to the simple fact that the Soviet Union engaged with other world leaders for the first time since the end of Second World War. Soon after the Twentieth Party Congress, cultural exchange agreements were signed between the USSR and Belgium and Norway in 1956, and France in 1957.

That the Geneva Summit was relatively successful, despite the failure to agree on the cultural exchange element, demonstrates the complexities and inconsistencies of post-

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56 English, Russia and the Idea of the West, 60-61.
57 Naima Prevots, Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 69.
Stalin liberalization and openness to the rest of the world. For example, it is too simplistic to suggest that the impetus toward cultural exchange did not exist before the Twentieth Party Congress. Even before 1953, the Soviet Union had been sending groups representing Soviet art and culture to some foreign countries: these visits were usually arranged by the foreign country’s Soviet friendship society. For example, in 1954 Bolshoi dancers Irina Tikhomirnova and Gennadii Lediakh accompanied a group of Soviet artists to Greece, covered by VOKS biulleten’ with the usual fanfare, high praise, and necessary homage to the importance of cultural contacts. The same dancers accompanied a similar group to Iran in 1951, to Denmark in 1955, to Egypt in 1956, and to the United Arab Emirates in 1958.

This major shift in Soviet outlook toward foreign policy did not simply happen overnight: the “incubation period” in which minute steps were taken away from the Stalin-era mentality of the Soviet Union as an “eternally surrounded, besieged fortress,” began in March 1953 and culminated in 1956. For it is in 1956, that the frequency and diversity of Soviet cultural exchange really increases, unmistakably reflecting the full opening of the Thaw: after the Twentieth Party Congress, the Soviet Union more frequently sent abroad not only single performers or groups of art and culture representatives, but entire performing companies. These Soviet troupes served both as emissaries of peaceful political relations and as demonstrators of Soviet cultural and artistic superiority. An important change resulting from the Twentieth Party Congress and the subsequent increase in cultural contacts was that the Soviet government began to

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61 Quoted in English, Russia and the Idea of the West, 60.
engage directly with foreign governments on issues of exchange, rather than with the
Soviet friendship societies—which had been perceived as vehicles of Soviet propaganda,
run by communist party members and “fellow travelers,” and often marginalized by their
own governments.62

The heavy coverage of Bolshoi dancers’ tour of Japan and Argentina in
September 1957 is a direct effect of this new impetus toward increased cultural contact.
The Japanese tour was particularly successful, with eight separate articles demonstrating
the formulaic structure and the language in which tours would be reported on in the
future. Phrases like “the concerts take place with unfailing success” (kontsery prokhodiat
s neizmennym uspekhom)63 or even more often with “triumphant success” (s triumfal’nym
uspekhom) always accompanied Soviet press reports on foreign tours. Another essential
piece of the tour coverage formula was the predictable praise heaped upon the Soviet
company by the host country’s own press. Valery Panov, then a new dancer in
Leningrad’s Maly Theatre, recalled being unable to attend the company’s tour to Finland
in September 1957:

There was no time to rehearse me for the long-planned Finnish expedition, let
alone complete the procedures for getting a passport. So I could only read
dispatches about the Maly’s ‘victories,’ which were reported largely in the form
of quotations from Finnish critics. This was on the principle that if the corrupted
bourgeois press said something good about us amid their raving anti-Soviet lies, it
must be true.64

Panov’s observation about Soviet attention to praise from foreign media introduces a
noteworthy inconsistency: why did the Soviet press rely so heavily on quotations from

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63 “Triumfal’noe shestvie sovetskogo baleta,” Sovetskaia kul’tura, September 3, 1957. The phrase
“neizmennyi uspekh” is also used to describe the concurrent tour of Bolshoi dancers in Buenos Aires.
64 Panov, To Dance, 98. Emphasis added.
the foreign press when reporting on the success of Soviet troupes abroad? Robert English notes how Soviet citizens, having been starved for outside information and contacts during Stalin’s rule, voraciously devoured sources of foreign literature, culture, and news, made available after Stalin’s death. It seems that the press had become savvier by 1957, realizing that Soviet superiority abroad was most convincingly demonstrated to readers at home through the evidence of foreigners’ own testimony. If Soviet citizens clamored for foreign news, the Soviet press delivered—but it was also careful to collect and publish diatribes against “hostile voices” from abroad. Kul’tura i zhizn’ printed a harsh response to The Book of the Ballet, published in West Germany. The article’s author scolded the book’s editors for ignoring the Soviet ballet in general, and for emphasizing balletic “fantasies” over the realism of Soviet ballet, in particular. Thus, a “respected” foreign critic could become a “hostile spokesman for the bourgeoisie,” (or vice-versa) depending upon whether the Soviet press needed to communicate praise or censure.

Both the Argentine and Japanese tours of 1957 were no exceptions to the trope of Soviet brilliance as proven by the foreign press: an example of such testimony was provided by Japanese composer Kosaku Yamada, who wrote a guest column for Sovetskaia kul’tura, entitled, “The Impression is Simply Stunning.” Nine years later, when the Novosibirsk Ballet Theatre toured Japan, this tactic of utilizing foreign praise was still widely in use: “One of the leading newspapers in the country, Yomiuri, [reports]: ‘The exact calculation, magnificent performance, youth, and good taste which were demonstrated to us testifies to the fact that Soviet ballet has a strong, extensive

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foundation [prochnaia i shirokaia baza].’ ‘We saw a very fresh, original ensemble,’ said
director Senda Koreya.”69 Whenever a Soviet ballet troupe toured a foreign county,
testimony to the Soviet ballet’s superiority by the foreign press, and sometimes even by a
noteworthy foreigner, recurs again and again in the pages of Sovetskaia kul’tura and
Kul’tura i zhizn’ throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

The Kirov Ballet Theatre, like the Bolshoi, was covered in depth when it toured
foreign countries. In February 1958, the Kirov performed in Romania, a “fraternal”
socialist republic aligned with USSR. Reports on the tour generally follow the style of
coverage already established. The touring repertoire included Swan Lake, Giselle, and
Stone Flower (Kamennyi tsvetok): two imperial classics and one new ballet. Stone Flower
was based on an old Urals folk tale recorded by Pavel Bazhov in a popular 1939
collection entitled, “Malachite Casket” (Malakhitovaia shkatulka).70 Stone Flower first
premiered in 1954, with music by Prokofiev and choreography by Leonid Lavrovsky,
who was a staunch adherent to the drambalet style.71 His version provides a useful
eample of the types of devices used in a drambalet:

Above all else, the social aspect attracted Lavrovsky to Stone Flower. His version
recounted how before the Revolution, the bosses (khoziaeva) oppressed the
Russian people of the Urals, and how they belittled their traditional folk
(narodnye) talents [i.e., stone carving].72

Lavrovsky ensured that the plot was infused with realistic details, such as showing
laborers dragging heavy boulders around stage, being whipped by the cruel foreman,
Severian. Lavrovsky’s version of Stone Flower was largely considered to be a failure.

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70 “Bazhov, Pavel Petrovich” Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 3rd edition.
(Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1976), 152 (my translation).
Sovetskiaia kul’tura’s negative review of its premiere especially takes issue with Lavrovsky’s over-editing of Prokofiev’s score: “In the finished version, the cuts imply a violation of the harmony of the entire musical dramaturgy, and deny the logic of the development of the musical forms to this masterly work of art [meaning Prokofiev’s composition].”

The young Kirov choreographer and future Bolshoi director, Yuri Grigorovich, revised Lavrovsky’s production in April 1957 to much controversy: Grigorovich was accused of “modernist” tendencies, “Western” abstraction, and of using insufficiently realistic details in his new version. The premiere of Grigorovich’s Stone Flower “marked the beginning of an open confrontation between the defenders of drambalet and the supporters of symphonic dance.” The Kirov presented this bold new example of sovremennyi—a term appropriated in the 1950s to signify opposition to drambalet—Soviet ballet on its Romanian tour, to great success. Sovetskiaia kul’tura dutifully reported on the Romanian press reporting these successes by way of telephone conversation with Kirov director Orlov. Added testimony of the Soviet ballet’s superiority came in the form of an article entitled “Soviet Ballet Artists Conquered (pokorili) Bucharest,” written—for extra emphasis—by a Bucharest ballerina, Irinel Lichiu. This particular article expresses the dominant role played by the Soviet state in establishing its cultural project on to the newly socialist states of Eastern Europe. The title is especially forceful, especially in light of the then-recent history of World War II, involving Romanian resistance to the Soviet Union. Finally, General Secretary of the Romanian Communist

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Party, Gheorghiu-Dej, was in attendance for none other than *Swan Lake*, following the Soviet tradition of displaying its balletic prowess to foreign heads of state, thereby demonstrating the “passionate attachment of the Soviet leadership to ‘culture.’”

The Bolshoi’s tours to Japan and Argentina in 1957 and the Kirov’s tour to Romania in 1958 provide a wealth of detailed press coverage which informs several observations about how ballet and the Soviet political system interacted during the Thaw. Once the events of the Twentieth Party Congress signaled that foreign contact, especially in the realm of cultural and scientific exchange, was not only to be allowed, but even, at times, encouraged (albeit in a limited and often contradictory manner), the Soviet Union had the opportunity to maximize its use of state-sponsored troupes like the Bolshoi and Kirov to demonstrate Soviet superiority in the realm of ballet. Art and culture were inextricably linked to the mission of Soviet socialism, as a system encompassing not only politics, but all spheres of human life. Theoretically, therefore, demonstrations of Soviet balletic superiority implied that the governing system that facilitated and supported such accomplishments was also superior—thus, cultural superiority indicated the superiority of Communism. This message was imparted by several media strategies. First, the Soviet press reported heavily on its ballet companies’ tours abroad, incorporating numerous quotes expressing the highest praise from foreign media. This was a means of proving Soviet culture’s superiority *via* the art form of ballet to both domestic and foreign audiences: significantly, this strategy implied that foreign praise carried great weight in affirming Soviet ballet’s image of itself as “best in the world.” On the other hand, as Panov astutely observed, negative press coverage by foreign media was rejected by the

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77 “Vystuplenie v Bukhareste baletnoi truppy Leningradskogo teatra opery i baleta,” *Sovetskaia kul’tura*, February 11, 1958
Soviet press as outright lies and attempts at sabotage by foreigners. Thus, the changes in Thaw-era thinking were rendered visible in that opening the Soviet Union to the outside world through ventures like cultural exchange reflected the nascent atmosphere of “new thinking,” defined by English as a “global integrationist outlook, rooted in the cultural thaw, domestic liberalization, and burgeoning foreign ties of the early post-Stalin era.”

At the same time as positive foreign press was being utilized to advertise, and to an extent “prove” Soviet ballet superiority, most critiques triggered “hostile isolationist” responses from the press, thereby demonstrating the co-existence of English’s two “types” of thinking about the Soviet Union’s place in global affairs, with the understanding that the types represent two ends of a spectrum, and that any type of thinking was by no means exclusive and could indeed coexist with any other point along the spectrum, contingent upon the given situation. In other words, contradictory mentalities could and often did exist concerning an artist, a musical score, a piece of choreography, or a foreign reviewer.

Second, and in conjunction with the above strategy, prominent foreigners often wrote guest columns for Sovetskaia kul’tura and Kul’tura i zhizn’—these also attested to the great achievements of Soviet ballet. If foreigners lavishly praising the achievements of Soviet ballet in their own country’s newspapers was an important strategy for the Soviet media’s effort to advertise Soviet superiority, then the act of a prominent foreigner

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80 For example, both Panov and Plisetskaya played the role of hero and enemy of the Soviet state simultaneously: their dancing was unrivaled and both were immensely popular and artistically successful. At the same time, they were politically suspect because of their Jewish background—even though neither practiced the religion or identified as Jewish—and in Plisetskaya’s case, a father who was shot as an “enemy of the people” in 1937.
contributing an entire article to a Soviet publication provided that much more evidence of that superiority.

Finally, the Soviet ballet performance was often quite literally “an affair of state,” which meant that high-ranking members of both the Soviet and foreign governments alike often attended ballets, not necessarily because they themselves were personally devoted to the arts, but because ballet concerts served as sites where the power, dominance, and ideals of Soviet socialism were performed by means of demonstrating the superiority of Soviet ballet. That foreign leaders from Ribbentrop, Gheorgiu-Dej, Tito, and Mao to President Kennedy were obliged to attend such performances (in both senses of the word) attests to the fact that ballet was an immensely powerful political tool for the Soviet Union.  

LENINGRAD VERSUS MOSCOW: BIAS IN MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE BOLSHOI AND KIROV BALLET THEATRES

While the coverage of the Bolshoi Ballet Theatre increased as a result of improved foreign relations during the Thaw, the Kirov Ballet did not experience similar treatment by the press. Despite the relatively detailed coverage of the Kirov Ballet’s tour to Romania (totaling four articles in February 1958), there exists a decided dearth of coverage of this oldest, most respected institution of ballet. Since the Bolshoi Ballet enjoyed a large share of this otherwise diverse inter-Union coverage, it is logical to expect that the Kirov would be covered with a similar amount of attention. The Kirov’s lack of coverage remains surprising especially during the month of September, when countless announcements on upcoming seasons for ballet theatres across the USSR fill the pages of Sovetskaia kul’tura.

While newspapers intended for domestic consumption, like Sovetskaia kul’tura, focused on “equal coverage” of ballet troupes across the USSR, how did publications designed for foreign consumption, like Kul’tura i zhizn’, treat the two most prestigious ballet companies of the Soviet Union? From 1953 to 1968, this magazine dedicated an impressive fifty-four articles to the Bolshoi Ballet. Coverage included pieces on foreign tours, new choreographic innovations,82 the superiority of the Bolshoi,83 and news on individual dancers of the Bolshoi.84 During the same time period, however, the Kirov Ballet Theatre received only one-fifth the amount of coverage of the Bolshoi, with a total of eleven articles. The next most-covered companies were the Moiseyev Folk Ensemble,

84 Principal Bolshoi dancers (Ulanova, Plisetskaya, Raisa Struchkova, Vladimir Vasiliev, Yekaterina Maximova, Natalia Bessmertnova, Yelena Ryabinkina, etc.) were genuine celebrities in the Soviet Union who often (but not always) enjoyed privileges available only to high Party and government officials.
the Kyrgyz Ballet Theatre, and the Lithuanian Ballet Theatre, with a total of six articles each. What could possibly explain this loud silence in both Sovetskaia kul’tura and Kul’tura i zhizn’? 

The Kirov Ballet Theatre received a startlingly small amount of space primarily due to an old rivalry between Moscow and St. Petersburg/Petrograd/Leningrad that dates to the latter city’s creation. The rivalry has engaged (and still engages) many of the cities’ institutions, including the Bolshoi and Kirov Theatres.85 Sovetskaia kul’tura was a Moscow publication intended for consumption by Muscovites—as such, it naturally focused on events in Moscow, which included not only Bolshoi performances, but also the many tours passing through by provincial, republic, and foreign companies. Even though Kul’tura i zhizn’ was published in Moscow, the magazine’s target audience was far from exclusively Muscovite. Indeed, the reach of this particular publication aimed to be worldwide; therefore its concentration on the Bolshoi indicates a de-facto status for that company as the Soviet Union’s representative for classical dance. 

Despite its own long history as the premiere ballet company of Russia, by the 1950s the Kirov had already been surpassed by the Bolshoi in terms of stature. As the two flagship Russian ballet companies, the Bolshoi and the Kirov had long been engaged in a great rivalry—yet the company in the forefront seemed to switch according to the location of the seat of political power. That the Kirov became the second-place company of the Soviet Union was due to several factors, yet one of the most basic certainly involved the transfer of the capital from Leningrad to Moscow:

As the birthplace of classical ballet and protector of its highest standards the present Kirov was still considered the final arbiter of taste. But when the capital was shifted after the Revolution, Moscow got the ministries, the foreign visitors, 

and the need for display for both. Since ballet was still the showpiece of Russia’s rulers, the Kirov could no longer compete in prestige, whatever its excellence. The Bolshoi was where Stalin—and therefore the money—went. 86

Aesthetically speaking, ballet historian Alexander Demidov attributes the transition to the rise of the “heroic style,” which arose in conjunction with the Soviet drambalet. The Mariinsky Imperial Theatre was indeed the birthplace of ballet in Russia: there, Petipa created the academic classics that demanded the precise, neat, linear style for which the Mariinsky/Kirov has always been known. “Any slovenliness or carelessness is alien to it. It is based on austere taste and a wise rationalism,” much like Leningrad itself. 87 The Bolshoi school’s “broad style…democratic character and disdain for petty detail” best captured contemporary Soviet ballet’s demand for the “stormy expression of passions and thrilling virtuosity.” 88 That Galina Ulanova, the quintessential Soviet ballerina, relocated to the Bolshoi from the Kirov in 1944, was evidence of this trend. Persistent rumors implied that Stalin himself had Ulanova transferred: “Stalin closely watched the triumphs of the Kirov troupe; many of its brightest figures, including leading choreographers, were transferred to the Bolshoi.” 89 The passive “was transferred” is significant here, for without direct evidence linking the relocation to him personally, the ultimate reason(s) for Ulanova’s move must remain in the realm of speculation, so as to avoid the common conflation of Stalin’s personal directives with all events that happened during his rule.

86 Panov, To Dance, 215.
88 Ibid, 77.
There is possibly an additional reason that may contribute to the lack of press attention to the Kirov Theatre: it ties into the Bolshoi-Kirov rivalry and involves the Soviet Union’s policy towards its national minorities. *Sovetskaia kul’tura* certainly emphasized—even overemphasized, at times, newly established companies, which included the vast majority of ballet theatres in the provinces of the RSFSR and the Union republics, arguably at the expense of the Kirov’s coverage. It is likely that the Muscovite intelligentsia, who were the primary consumers of *Sovetskaia kul’tura*, would most likely have much preferred to read more frequent and detailed news about the Kirov, instead of the Kyrgyz, Lithuanian, or Novosibirsk ballet theatres, for example. However, this sentiment did not seem to be in keeping with Khrushchev’s interpretation of the Soviet Union as a truly multinational state.

Soviet nationalities policy originally established one of the most essential ideals of the Soviet Union: that it could be a country of equal opportunity under the unifying cause of international socialism. Once Lenin died, Stalin was able to rout that ideal of international socialism as championed by Trotsky in favor of his own ideology of “socialism in one country.” While the ideals of affirmative action remained, the “rehabilitation” of the Russian nation in the 1930s, and the Russo-centrism that accompanied Stalinism in general, in practice counteracted many of Lenin’s well-intentioned ideas concerning the promotion of ethnic minorities to positions of real power and influence, and the eradication of “oppressor-nation” nationalism and Russian chauvinism. Under Stalin, while the *language* of equality and unity was advocated, too strong an expression of nation often brought about the charge of “nationalist deviation.” How Nikita Khrushchev decided to re-interpret nationalities policy after Stalin’s death is
significant in answering the question of why the Soviet press continued to give republic and provincial ballet theatres places of prominence in the media throughout the 1950s and into the late 1960s, even though they were under no circumstances able to compete with the quality or the prestige of the Bolshoi and the Kirov theatres.\textsuperscript{90}

If Khrushchev’s reformist vision was “an attempt to return to ‘an unsullied Leninism,’”\textsuperscript{91} then one may postulate that his interpretation of nationalities policy would resemble Lenin’s original “wise and forward-looking policies,”\textsuperscript{92} that subdued the role of the Russian nation. However, Khrushchev’s plan involved more than a simple switch from a “Stalinist” to “Leninist” understanding of nationalities policy. The Soviet Union’s policy toward its national minorities was not one of the areas directly attacked by Khrushchev in his efforts to carry out de-Stalinization. Rather, Lavrenty Beria, head of the NKVD, was the first to attack Stalin’s practice of “russifying non-Russian Soviet republics,” and proceeded to condemn Russian predominance in these republics.\textsuperscript{93} Khrushchev, in his usual contradictory manner, seemed both to support and oppose Beria’s nascent reforms of nationalities policy. Initially, Khrushchev “not only supported Beria’s nationality reforms…but borrowed wholesale from them in his own similar reports on Latvia and Estonia.”\textsuperscript{94} Unsurprisingly, after he orchestrated Beria’s arrest,

\textsuperscript{90} Valery Panov describes how the second-rate quality of dancers at Leningrad’s Maly Theatre was still far better than at any provincial or republic theatre. Panov, \textit{To Dance}, 106-107.
\textsuperscript{94} Taubman, \textit{Khrushchev}, 249.
Khrushchev attacked him for excessive liberalism, yet once Khrushchev bested his own rivals and attained power, his reforms resembled many of Beria’s.\textsuperscript{95}

After the 1956 Secret Speech, in addition to de-Stalinization, Khrushchev embarked on a campaign of decentralization, which significantly amplified the influence and power of the national republics.\textsuperscript{96} At the same time, however, Khrushchev scorned “petty-bourgeois nationalism” and, in keeping with Stalinist nationalities policy, actively promoted Russian language instruction in non-Russian republics, provoking opposition from non-Russian citizens.\textsuperscript{97} How are these contradictory sentiments to be interpreted? One must keep in mind that Khrushchev, having been “raised and trained by [Stalin’s] own hand,” could not have totally broken with the only system he and the other men of the Kremlin knew.\textsuperscript{98} The inertia was simply too great to be completely overcome. Thus, as much as Khrushchev might have wished to reform in line with a somewhat mythical “pure Leninism,” the rubric according to which he worked was still very much ensconced in the atmosphere of Stalinism. Furthermore, in attempting to walk a fine line between condemning certain parts of Stalin’s legacy while acknowledging others as indispensable to the modernization of the Soviet Union, Khrushchev’s often conflicting policies led to much confusion and criticism:

There are two N. S. Khrushchevs in the Central Committee of the CPSU: the first N. S. Khrushchev with complete [adherence to] Leninist principles directly exposes and wages battle against the personality of Stalin; the second N. S. Khrushchev defends the actions of Stalin that he personally perpetrated against the people and party during his twenty years of personal dictatorship.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid, 245.
\textsuperscript{96} Freeze, \textit{Russia: A History}, 353.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 362.
\textsuperscript{98} Taubman, \textit{Khrushchev}, 244.
\textsuperscript{99} Quoted in Freeze, \textit{Russia: A History}, 358.
Contradictory policies and backsliding were evidence of the difficulties of reforming while maintaining his position of power. Therefore it is unsurprising that Khrushchev’s take on nationalities policy seemed to be a mixture of pro-Russian sentiment while including measures to strengthen power at the republic level. One real difference that had an effect on nationalities policy, however, was Khrushchev’s determination to engage the Soviet Union with the international community. His changes in foreign policy allowed for a truly international—and not just inter-Union—scope when engaging the Soviet Union’s national minorities.

At the Twenty-Second Party Congress in March 1961, in addition to officially increasing his de-Stalinization campaign by publicizing many anti-Stalin speeches, encouraging real critiques of Stalinism and its legacies, and removing Stalin’s body from its place next to Lenin’s in the mausoleum on Red Square, Khrushchev elucidated his approach to the Soviet nationalities by officially presenting his policy: it was boldly utopian, calling for the rapprochement (sblizhenie) of nations and eventually predicted the fusion (sliianie) and unity (edinstvo) of all nations within the system of communism. He “urged an integrative or ‘internationalist’ strategy for the ‘formation of a future unitary culture of communist society,’” but at the same time conceded that “state and national differences will exist long after the victory of socialism in all countries.” For the time being, these differences were to be celebrated, rather than stifled by Russian chauvinism. Thus Khrushchev sought an approach to nationalities policy that would ideally bolster unity and equality amongst nations at home, while his

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100 English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, 82.
foreign policy initiated the integration of the Soviet Union as a whole into the international community. Evidence of these reforms lies in the Soviet media’s decisions to heavily cover provincial and republic theatres. In doing so, the Ministry of Culture, through its official organ, Sovetskaia kul’tura, demonstrated fidelity to the new atmosphere of the Thaw.

*Kul’tura i zhizn’*, too, sought to demonstrate that the Soviet Union’s civilizing mission was succeeding. By allotting substantial coverage to theatres in the provinces and republics, *Kul’tura i zhizn’* portrayed to its global audience one aspect of how Soviet power was transforming the periphery into a culturally rich and technologically modern land fit for habitation by hardworking, well-educated, optimistic Soviet citizens. The changes made to *Kul’tura i zhizn’* themselves illustrate how Thaw-era reforms affected the Soviet cultural world. During 1956-1957, the publication transitioned from a dull, black-and-white journal with few pictures and long, propagandizing, ideologically-based articles to a colorful, modern publication. In 1957, *VOKS biulleten’* changed its name to *Kul’tura i zhizn’* to reflect ongoing government and Party restructuring: the new publication was skillful in its use of color photography, and most significantly, it featured articles with reader-friendly content that celebrated Thaw-era Soviet Union’s new, friendly engagement with foreign countries. Likewise, *Kul’tura i zhizn’* appealed to readers eager to know more about other cultures and countries—knowledge that had been denied to Soviet citizens at least since the end of the Second World War. *Kul’tura i zhizn’* also dedicated a substantial amount of coverage to over forty professional ballet companies, most of them within the Soviet Union. This magazine’s emphasis on diverse coverage of provincial theatres, its championing of the Bolshoi, and its subsequently
minor coverage of the Kirov Theatre, illustrates that Kul’tura i zhizn’ communicated to foreign audiences the same trends in ballet coverage as Sovetskaia kul’tura to domestic readers.

Despite the fact that the Kirov and the Bolshoi were unmatched in terms of technical prowess and prestige, other provincial and republic troupes, such as the Georgian or Uzbek Ballet Theatres, received greater amounts of press coverage than the Kirov, as a result of nationalities policy’s interaction with the traditional Moscow-Leningrad/Bolshoi-Kirov rivalry in the sphere of the Moscow artistic press. Due to the Bolshoi Ballet Theatre’s dominance as first place ballet company of the Soviet Union—a status it acquired, through no small part, due to its location in the capital, Moscow—the Kirov Ballet Theatre suffered from a dearth of coverage, at least in the two publications of Muscovite origin at hand. Further research is necessary to definitively discern whether a shift in nationalities policy occurring under Khrushchev exacerbated the Kirov’s stature in the artistic press. To be sure, the Bolshoi Ballet benefited from unmatched media attention because of its status as Moscow’s ballet theatre. The RSFSR, unlike all other Union republics, never named an official state theater to represent the Russian nation. Perhaps it was that the Bolshoi served as the de facto—although unrecognized—state company of the RSFSR. If Russia was “first among nations,” then evidence from these analyses certainly indicates that the Bolshoi had attained first place status in the world of Soviet ballet.
UNION REPUBLIC AND PROVINCIAL BALLET THEATRE COVERAGE: BALLET AS A CREATOR OF CULTURE

If ballet theatres outside of Leningrad and Moscow were so frequently reported upon in Sovetskaia kul’tura and Kul’tura i zhizn’, in what capacity were these theatres being covered? It has already been shown that the Bolshoi and Kirov Theatres’ tours abroad were popular subject matter for Soviet media, especially as the press strove to depict Soviet cultural—and therefore political—superiority to domestic and foreign audiences. Most republic and provincial ballet theatres were not able to tour abroad very often, or even at all; furthermore, when regional companies were able to travel abroad, they would not have gone to Western countries—this privilege and responsibility was reserved for theatres bearing the honorific title of “academic,” like the Kirov or Bolshoi. Thus, while republic and provincial theatres did not tour much outside of the Soviet Union and the “fraternal” socialist countries of Eastern Europe, they did have opportunities to tour internally. One such opportunity was associated with the dekady iskusstva i literatury narodov SSSR, ten-day celebrations celebrating the art and literature of a particular nationality that took place in Moscow. This section will discuss the history of the dekada and its association with national cultures, created to be “national in form, socialist in content” under Stalin’s nationalities policy. Keeping this larger political setting in mind, articles from Sovetskaia kul’tura and Kul’tura i zhizn’ will be analyzed for evidence of ballet’s role as a “creator” of these national cultures. In conjunction, several national ballets produced for the dekada celebrations of the 1950s and 1960s will be examined within the context of the contemporaneous struggle between the drambalet establishment and supporters of choreographic symphonism. How did provincial ballet

theatres interpret “national in form, socialist in content” when faced with the prospect of choreographing for and performing in front of Moscow audiences?

The initial round of dekady was established in 1936 in conjunction with Stalin’s newly-modified nationalities policy to demonstrate the cultural achievements of each of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union. At each dekada, the national theatres of each republic would perform plays, ballets, and operas that were ostensibly representative of each nation’s (newly discovered/created) cultural heritage. The dekada itself was an affair of state, planned by the Ministry of Culture after the governmental restructuring in 1952, and organized by a host of Party officials, local officials, and artistic directors involving strict ritualistic behavior and parameters. Since “the triumph of the Leninist-Stalinist national policy [found] one of its most striking manifestations in the organization of these ten-day festivals,” an ideologically correct, Party-minded (partiinaia) dekada was crucial to its overall success; therefore, ballets produced for a dekada were not likely to be of the experimentally risky type. The vast majority of these ballets were very short-lived and not of particularly high quality. Aram Khachaturian, the famous Armenian composer of the ballets Spartacus and Gayane, once lamented:

How many times have we put up with obvious deficiencies in a work of art, only because of its façade, which depicted such noble and exciting themes as love for the homeland (rodina), the battle for peace, and the friendship of peoples (druzhba narodov).

But occasionally a dekada ballet, such as former Kirov star Vakhtang Chabukiani’s Othello, or the Tajik ballet Leili and Mejnun, would enjoy such success that the Kirov or

Bolshoi would incorporate it into its repertoire. The *dekada* was one holdover from the Stalin years that Khrushchev chose to continue: a second round of *dekady* began with the Azeri celebration in 1950, just three years before Stalin’s death, and ended in 1965 with the Tajik *dekada*, just after Khrushchev had been ousted from power. If the 1930s *dekady* featured only the constituent republics, then the second round included a much more diverse group of nationalities from the Soviet Union’s autonomous oblasts, including the Yakut, Karelian, Dagestani, Tatar, and South Ossetian ASSRs.

By the 1950s, when the second round of *dekady* began, those republics that had not succeeded in presenting a national ballet for the 1930s *dekady* (most Central Asian republic theatres hardly had the artistic infrastructure, not to mention the cultural repertoire to produce ballets and operas) were now able to present these art forms to Moscow audiences. These official republic theatres themselves had been created as a result of Soviet nationalities policy and of the Soviet civilizing mission. Beginning in the mid 1930s, talented young people were plucked from their home republics, trained at the ballet academies in Moscow and Leningrad (in special classes for non-Russian minorities), and sent home after graduation to develop the art of dance in their own republic theatres. If, however, a non-Russian student demonstrated exceptional talent—as did minority classmates Rudolf Nureyev, of Tatar descent from the Bashkir ASSR, and Valery Panov (né Shulman), an ethnic Russian with a Jewish surname who

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107 *Othello* was choreographed by Chabukiani, who also danced the lead role. Music was by Georgian composer A. D. Machavariani. It premiered in Tbilisi in February 1958, and in Moscow for the Georgian *dekada* in March 1958. *Leili and Mejnum* was choreographed by G. Balamat-zade in 1947, with music by S. Balasanian. It was presented in Moscow for the September 1949 *dekada* of Tajik literature and performed by the Bolshoi Ballet beginning in 1964.


109 Swift, *The Art of Dance in the USSR*, 159. Valery Panov provides personal experiences of his ballet training in a national minority class alongside students from the Kyrgyz republic, one of whom would become lead dancer and artistic director of the Kyrgyz Opera and Ballet Theatre. Panov, *To Dance*, 37-38.
came of age in Lithuania—he or she could be invited to dance with a Leningrad or Moscow ballet theatre after graduation from the ballet academy.

Coverage of these festivals dominated not only publications dedicated to the arts, but also the two major newspapers, Pravda and Izvestiia. The ballet theatres that earned so much press coverage in Sovetskaia kul’tura and Kul’tura i zhizn’ were the very same ones that were created on the principle of raising the level of culture across the Soviet Union. Creating kul’turnost’ was the main reason that ballet theatres (among other institutions dedicated to many other art forms) were cultivated so widely across the Soviet Union. The dekada served as a central stage to demonstrate the results of the center’s investment in artistic labor in the periphery—to demonstrate that culture itself was being created in the vast, diverse spaces of the Soviet Union.

That ballet was used as a technique to create “culture” is evident when examining the frequent press coverage of these celebrations of republic and national art. A common theme found in coverage of dekada celebrations is the development of art and culture in remote, formerly “backwards” regions with the help of Soviet—usually implying Russian—support. An article from Kul’tura i zhizn’ demonstrates:

A festival of Bashkir art and literature was held in Moscow at the end of May and the beginning of June [1955]. It proved to be a comprehensive exposition of the attainments of the national culture of a people who only 37 years ago had no written language of their own, to say nothing of professional art. [...] In the past, this was a backward region of semi-nomad cattle-breeders and primitive agriculture. In the fraternal family of Soviet nations…it is well known not only for its petroleum, metal, grain and timber, but also for its rich and original culture.110

In an similarly themed article detailing the history of achievements of the Tajik National Opera and Ballet (imeni Aini), the author asserts,

Prior to 1934, the Tajik Musical Theatre did not even have its national repertoire, the artists had no professional training, knew nothing of the fundamentals of dramatic, vocal, or choreographic art. All they had was innate talent and the ardent desire to serve their people.\textsuperscript{111}

With the help of Russian artists, the “innate talent” of the Tajiks and Bashkirs was harnessed, developed, and demonstrated to the Moscow public within the rubric of the \textit{dekada} celebration. The first Bashkir national ballet, \textit{Crane Song (Zhuravlinaia pesnia)}, was performed at the 1955 \textit{dekada}, along with the popular Soviet \textit{drambalet, Laurencia}. \textit{Crane Song} was based on native folklore and told a classic tale of good versus evil, with the young shepherd, Iumagul, and his love, Zaitungul, representing good, while Arslanbai, a cruel, wealthy man who covets Zaitungul, is the force of evil. This triangle of characters is ubiquitous within the plots of many socialist realist ballets, as it is a simple formula that clearly and unequivocally illustrates three types of characters essential to contemporary Soviet ballet: the male hero represents the “new Soviet man,” a noble worker from humble origins; the “new Soviet woman” is similar to the man—a hardworking, honest laborer—but is also involved in a struggle for independence from a father, suitor, or other oppressive male figure. The forces of good always triumph in socialist realist ballets, be they national or Russian, but usually not without an element of tragedy.

By 1955, the Bashkir Opera and Ballet Theatre boasted a large and diverse repertoire, including national ballets and operas, Russian ballets and operas (\textit{Swan Lake}, \textit{The Red Poppy}, \textit{The Queen of Spades [Pikovaia dama], Evgenii Onegin}), and European operas (\textit{Carmen}, \textit{Madame Butterfly}, \textit{Faust}).\textsuperscript{112} Though much emphasis was placed on developing national, contemporary art forms within the rubric of socialist realism, clearly

\begin{footnotes}
\item[112] “Literature and Art of the Bashkir People,” 90.
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there remained room for not only Russian but also European classics. Did the development of the Bashkir Theatre’s resemble its Tajik and Uzbek counterparts? More specifically, how does the Tajik and Uzbek repertoire compare with the Bashkir repertoire’s Russian/European classical focus? What information can studying the repertoires of non-Russian republic theatres impart about creating “culture” in the Soviet Union?

The Tajik SSR participated in three dekady, the first in April 1941, the second in April 1957, and the third in June 1965. Significantly, Russia maintained its role as leader and uniter of Soviet nations: success at the 1941 dekada, including the first Tajik national ballet Dugul, (Two Roses) demonstrated considerable Tajik “artistic development.” Moscow was often perceived by touring groups as “the supreme test.” That is, as the USSR’s seat of power, it also functioned as the most important place to tour in the Soviet Union—a performance deemed successful by Moscow audiences “proved” the worth of the touring troupe. Thus the successful 1941 dekada proved that the Tajik Theatre was capable of undertaking full-scale productions, in which “the excellent Russian ballet school would blend with the national color of Tajik folk dances and old Eastern melodies.” However, the first full-length ballet produced at the Aini Theatre was La Fille mal Gardée (also known in Russia under the title Vain Precautions), in 1943. It was accomplished only with “much assistance…given by the leading Moscow and Leningrad performers then working in Dushanbe.” La Fille mal Gardée hardly fit the previous description of a full-scale national production—it was not even Russian, but an old French ballet from the eighteenth century. By the 1960s, the Aini Theatre, like the

114 Valamat-Zadeh, “National Opera and Ballet.” 29
115 Ibid.
Baskhir Theatre, boasted a repertoire that included both Russian/European classics and Tajik national pieces, including European ballets (*Giselle*), many Tchaikovsky ballets and operas, Verdi operas (*Aida* and *La Traviata*), and the national ballets *Dugul*, *Dil’bar* (presented at the 1957 *dekada*) and *Leili and Mejnun*. As aforementioned, the success of *Leili and Mejnun* led to its adoption by the Bolshoi Ballet in 1964. The Tajiks hailed it as “the most successful combination of classical choreography and Tajik national dances.” *Leili and Mejnun* represented the culmination of Tajik and Russian cooperation: as a single ballet, it incorporated classical (Russian) and national (Tajik) influences, thus serving as a symbol for the repertoires of non-Russian republic theatres, which consisted of both classical Russian/European and contemporary national art forms.

The three *dekady* of Uzbekistan illustrate a similar path of development to the Tajik and Bashkir stories. The first Uzbek *dekada* took place in May 1937, two years before the Uzbek Ballet and Opera Theatre (*imeni Navoi*) was created. Obviously, there could be no national ballet without a national ballet theatre, and thus no ballet was presented at the first *dekada*. When the second *dekada* took place in November 1951, the only ballet pieces the Uzbek Theatre presented were variations from *Swan Lake*. In 1952, outside of the rubric of the *dekada*, however, the first national Uzbek ballet, *Ballerina*, centered around life on a cotton-growing *kolkhoz* in rural Uzbekistan, came to fruition.

The third *dekada* of February 1959 merits attention because of the large amount of press coverage dedicated to it by *Sovetskaia kul’tura*: for that month, no less than half (eleven out of twenty-two) of the ballet-related articles were dedicated to this Uzbek

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dekada, including a full front page article.\textsuperscript{119} For the Moscow festival, the Navoi Ballet Theatre presented two new ballets: \textit{Masquerade}, based on a story by Lermontov, and \textit{Mechta (Dream)}, another ballet set on a kolkhoz and dedicated to the “selfless labor of the Uzbek cotton pickers.”\textsuperscript{120} Like the Tajik and Bashkir Ballet Theatres, the Uzbek Ballet Theatre presented a mixture of both classical Russian/European ballets as well as national ballets on contemporary themes.

What does this combination of European-Russian influenced pieces and locally-inspired national pieces in the repertoires of republic and provincial ballet theatres mean in the larger context of Soviet nationalities policy? What information do the repertoires impart about the art form of ballet as a creator of culture, and about the use of ballet by the Soviet state as a demonstrator of cultural superiority? The most basic, utilitarian explanation for the mixed nature of these repertoires is that it would have been impossible for these newly created republic ballet theatres to perform national ballets alone: repertoires would have needed to be “filled” by pre-existing classics. Yet this phenomenon of building a mixed European, Russian, and national repertoire did not exist only in the newly established theatres of Central Asia: a mixture of European/Russian and national ballets was common to the repertoires of all non-Russian republic ballet theatres, even to those in Ukraine, Georgia, and the Baltic States, whose ballet companies existed before the Soviet Union was formed. Finally, this inclusion of the cultural legacy of Europe and imperial Russia in the repertoires of Soviet ballet companies existed throughout the Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev periods.

\textsuperscript{119} “Dnevnik dekady” \textit{Sovetskaia kul’tura}, February 19, 1959.
\textsuperscript{120} Iu. Pospelovskii, “Dekadnye spektakli teatrov Uzbekistana” \textit{Sovetskaia kul’tura}, February 5, 1959.
In his tome on culture and the Cold War, David Caute argues that the broad notion of *kul’tura* in the Soviet Union derived from the legacy of the European Enlightenment. “From Marx, Engels, and not least Lenin, Stalinism inherited an inherently classical-realist aesthetic in literature and art, claiming to be the genuine heir to the Greek drama, the Renaissance, Shakespeare, Rembrandt, and Goethe.”

That this conception of *kul’tura* as a legacy of the Enlightenment, appropriated by the Soviet Union under Stalin, continued throughout the Brezhnev era is confirmed through the analysis of repertoires of republic ballet theatres before, during, and after the Thaw. The demand for socialist realist productions on contemporary themes did not preclude the need for the classics of world culture. If establishing ballet theatres in the provinces and non-Russian republics served as a technique to create culture, then the inclusion of classics like *La Fille mal Gardée*, *Giselle*, and *Swan Lake* in the Bashkir, Tajik and Uzbek Ballet Theatres served as the practical mode of transmission for culture itself.

A brief analysis of the plot of the first Uzbek national ballet, *Ballerina*, illustrates an example of a typical Central Asian national ballet. This ballet, like its descendant, *Mechta*, was based on the contemporary theme of collectivized cotton growing—a good indication of how the Uzbek culture had been coded to according to reductionist national characteristics that solidified under Stalin. It tells the tale of Giul’nara, a cotton worker who is also an amateur dancer in her spare time. When a choreographic institute sees her talent, they attempt to recruit her to study at a ballet school; however, her father refuses to allow her to leave the collective farm (*kolkhoz*). Giul’nara rightly Disobeys him (for her father is somewhat “backwards” and stuck in the patriarchal, “oriental” ways of pre-Soviet Central Asia), enrolls in the city’s ballet school, and becomes a successful dancer.

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121 Caute, *The Dancer Defects*, 3-4, 8.
When word of her triumphs as a participant at an international festival reaches her father, he embraces her talent, realizing that “in the land of the Soviets the work and calling of the ballerina is as important to the state as that of a cotton grower.”

*Ballerina*, too, serves as an excellent foil against which to demonstrate how the cultural level of Soviet national minorities was being “raised” according to nationalities policies originally enacted by Lenin and Stalin. The ballet’s location, setting, and plot, illustrate aspects of the essentialized Uzbek nation. The location—the rural cotton fields of Uzbekistan—informs the local culture in a somewhat stereotypical manner, including national costumes, folk dances, and folk songs of the region. The *kolkhoz* setting speaks to aspects of Sovietized Uzbek culture and the “progress” of Soviet Uzbekistan since 1924: the collective farm was a mainstay of Soviet agriculture, forced upon the country by Stalin during 1929-1941. The theme of a modern, educated, enlightened Soviet woman defying her oppressive father is a common plot line found in national ballets attempting to depict realism and *sovremennost*, although many such ballets do not have outright happy endings, as *Ballerina* does. The artists who created and performed the ballet were a mixture of guest artists as well as native products of indigenization: trained, no doubt, in Leningrad or Moscow, to be the bearers of *kul’tura* upon returning to Tashkent. *Ballerina* was composed by Georgii Mushel’, a Russian native of Tambov, who “made successful use of folk melodies” in his creation, and choreographed by Pavel Iorkin and Mukarram Tugunbaev. That Iorkin and Tambov were not ethnically Uzbek

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123 For example, in Azeri composer Kara Karayev’s racially-themed *Paths of Thunder* (libretto by Yuri Slonimsky), Sari, the daughter of Gert, a cruel landowner in South Africa, falls in love with Lenny, an educated man who happens to be bi-racial. In open defiance of her father, she plans to run away with Lenny, but when Gert finds out about their plans, he kills Lenny. The ballet ends on a note of hope as Lenny’s death unites the previously embattled African and mulatto communities against the oppressive colonial landowners. Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 154-156.
was irrelevant, as fraternal assistance from Russian masters was to be expected, especially in the early development of national repertoires for Republic Theatres. Indeed, the Union republics and provinces often provided places of opportunity for Russian artists trained in Moscow and Leningrad—and working in the periphery was “by no means merely a shrewd career move for mediocrities.”124 From the 1930s into the 1950s, a plethora of Soviet composers became involved in the campaign to “jump-start” the cultural production of national minorities. Mushel’ himself was officially honored with the title, “Merited Art Worker of the Uzbek SSR” in 1944 for his efforts at Uzbek culture creation.125

As far as the reception of the fledgling ballet was concerned, critics, though mostly full of praise and official optimism of the day, gently commented on the “superficial manner” in which ballet training was depicted as “easy and effortless.” Extreme attention to realistic detail as the most important aspect of a drambalet was reinforced by the critics, who declared that “audiences would be interested in the difficulties encountered by Giul’nara at the school where she triumphed.” Furthermore, “the main shortcoming…is that the plot breaks off long before the finale. The conflict between Gyulnara [sic] and her father is actually exhausted in the third scene, and the ballet then becomes a divertissement, devoid of tension.”126 Ballets that contained “pure” dancing without psychological components and dramatic development did not fit the drambalet rubric, and thus were not properly socialist realist. The quote from Raisa Struchkova’s article in Pravda, on the idea that working as a ballet dancer is equally important to agricultural labor in the “land of the Soviets,” also speaks to the

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significant—but perhaps slightly idealized—place of ballet within the lives of Soviet citizens not only in Moscow and Leningrad, but in places as far away as cotton kolkhozy in Uzbekistan.

The tropes of “fraternal assistance” and druzhba narodov are common to press coverage of ballet throughout the Thaw and into the late 1960s, thereby demonstrating a measure of continuity between the Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev periods in the way that Soviet media thought and wrote about its nationalities. That the Tajik ballet, Leili and Mejnun, a “Romeo and Juliet of the East,” became part of the Bolshoi repertoire—albeit as a new version by the experimental choreographer Kasian Goleizovsky, who had had experience in Dushanbe, having directed Dugul there in 1941—demonstrates how culture creation in the periphery can affect culture creation in the center. Although it may be easier to identify surface-level center to periphery streams of influence, cultural influences moved from periphery to center, often in less perceptible yet significant ways.

Developing ballet theatres in the provinces and in the Union Republics was a small part of the Soviet civilizing mission to modernize, educate, and create national cultures in the territories of the former Russian Empire that had for so long languished in uncultured, “backwards” conditions. The dekada was used to demonstrate the culmination of progress of the periphery to the center—Moscow.
CONCLUSION

Analysis of official Soviet newspapers and magazines demonstrates that the Soviet Union used the art form of ballet as a political instrument according to two different yet integrated strategies. Companies bearing the honorific “academic”—like the Bolshoi and Kirov—were sent abroad to demonstrate their superior talents that had been achieved under Soviet socialism. Since art and culture—indeed most spheres of Soviet life—were intimately connected to the political system, artistic superiority implied cultural superiority, which in turn, pointed to the political superiority of the Communist system. Furthermore, a publication like Kul’tura i zhizn’ served as a colorful promotion of idealized Soviet values, rooted in kul’turnost’. This message was directed toward a global audience, thereby advertising the Soviet Union as the most rapidly progressing, peaceful, cultured, and modern country in the world.

At the same time, the Soviet Union utilized ballet as a means of creating and spreading culture to its own “backward” regions. This initiative was associated with the more basic goals of the Soviet civilizing mission, including the spread of electricity, literacy, and the development of local educational infrastructures. Having cultivated an official state-sponsored ballet and opera theatre in each Soviet republic, the press was then able to use each triumphant performance or dekada celebration of these non-Russian theatres to boast to domestic audiences of the advancing state of kul’tura in the periphery. Moreover, emphasizing cultural development and successes in traditionally underdeveloped regions served as a powerful source of propaganda that was directed abroad. One of the main messages of Kul’tura i zhizn’ was that Soviet power could do for India or the Congo what it has already done for Tajikistan or Cuba, for example. In the context
As part of this effort to promote provincial and regional ballet theatres, it is clear that the Kirov Ballet Theatre suffered from a lack of coverage by at least part of the official cultural press. This dearth of attention to the oldest ballet institution in Russia was due largely to the historic rivalry between Moscow and Leningrad, and correspondingly, between the Bolshoi and Kirov Theatres. A hypothesis that necessitates further investigation is whether the Kirov was further overlooked due to a shift in Khrushchevian nationalities policy: despite some contradictions, for the most part Khrushchev delegated more authority to republic-level governments and attempted to scale back the Russo-centrism that had dominated under Stalin. Achievements of non-Russian ballet theatres could have been highlighted in conjunction with this shift as part of de-Stalinization. The scant attention paid to the Kirov is even more striking when contrasted with the large amount of press coverage that the Bolshoi Ballet Theatre enjoyed. Research involving additional non-Moscow based artistic publications would be necessary to determine whether the Kirov Ballet Theatre—despite its eminence and high stature—was disregarded due to its being caught between the weighty forces of the Bolshoi on the one hand, and the necessity of buttressing the small, but significant achievements of provincial and republic theatres on the other.

Finally, during the Thaw the drambalet slowly lost its status as the ideal style of contemporary, socialist realist ballet. This was partly a generational as well as an aesthetic shift: older choreographers like Leonid Lavrovsky and Rostislav Zakharov who had matured during the three decades of the reign of the choreodrama (concomitant with

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Stalin’s rule) found it difficult to adapt to different balletic styles, even after the 
drambalet had fallen out of favor by the early 1960s. Younger choreographers like  
Yuri Grigorovich came to fruition on the upswing of the choreographic symphonist  
revival, and older choreographers who had never subscribed to the drambalet standard,  
and whose careers had suffered for it—like the wildly experimental Kasian Goleizovsky,  
or Fyodor Lopukhov, whose 1935 ballet, Bright Stream, set to music by Shostakovich,  
elicited the catch-all charge of formalism from the authorities and thus brought censure  
upon himself and Shostakovich—also benefited from this aesthetic paradigm shift.  

In this final look at the aesthetics of the socialist realist Soviet ballet, a fitting  
political comparison can be made. Khrushchev’s attempt at de-Stalinization and reform  
of the Soviet system could only be an incomplete transition, limited by the his insistence  
on preserving most of the system created under Stalin on the domestic front; and his  
persistence in interpreting the world as divided into two mutually exclusive political  
camps on the foreign policy front—despite the fact that relations with the international  
community greatly improved under “peaceful coexistence.”  

In the world of ballet, too, choreographic standards from the drambalet  
establishment that reigned during Stalin’s years were subject to reinterpretation and  
outright rejection after 1953. Yet despite the victory of the aesthetic “camp” of the  
choreographic symphonists, they too did not—or perhaps could not—experiment beyond  
the overarching strictures of socialist realism, which mandated that art be rich in content  
(soderzhatel’nost’). Soviet ballet during the Thaw, like Khrushchev in his attempts at de-  
Stalinization, ultimately could not overcome the inertia of the past. Despite reforms and  

advances in both spheres, neither Khrushchev nor Soviet ballet managed to defeat the limitations of the environment into which it was born.
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