Avatar of Modernity
The Rite of Spring
Reconsidered

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Diaghilev's Ballets Russes: A New Kind of Company

The Rite of Spring was a new kind of ballet, and it took a new kind of company to produce it. What elements converged in the Ballets Russes in the early years of its existence that made the creation of such a work even remotely possible? What galvanizing vision drove it forward? Who were the dancers of Nijinsky's pre-Slavonic horde, and what did their labor contribute to the making of this monumental work? Finally, how did the Ballets Russes differ from other ballet-producing organizations as the long nineteenth century drew to a close? What made it a new kind of company?

Although common wisdom holds that ballet outside Russia was in the doldrums in the late nineteenth century, it was in fact alive and well, though to appreciate this, one must look elsewhere than the opera house. To be sure, the so-called “classical” repertory — meaning the Petipa-Ivanov repertory of Russia’s late Imperial period — was unknown, and the few attempts at reproducing it outside Russia had met with little success. (The abbreviated version of The Sleeping Beauty staged by Giorgio Saracca at La Scala in 1896 with Carlotta Brianza reprising her original role bored its audiences, and the production quickly vanished.1) Groups of Imperial dancers, led by ballerina Olga Preobrajenska, had appeared from time to time in Monte Carlo, performing character numbers and short Petipa ballets like Halt of the Cavalry, but, applauded as they may have been, those performances had few lasting artistic consequences. However, even without the occasional Russian visitors, the Monte Carlo public enjoyed a steady diet of ballets. Most had their origin at the Paris Opéra or La Scala, and most of the choreographers and leading dancers were Italian.2) Italians, in fact, were responsible for much of Europe’s

ballet fare in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They seemed to be everywhere, crossing borders of nation and genre, circulating an idea of ballet that was spectacular, virtuosic, and largely female.

Although ballet retained its position in the opera house, the production of new works steeply declined, and in most venues, including the Paris Opéra, the dancers appeared mainly in operas. Elsewhere, however, they kept very busy. Music halls across the continent featured huge in-house companies of dancers, and they performed every night on every program in one if not two or even three ballets. Between 1871 and 1913, writes Sarah Gutsche-Miller, “Parisian music halls premiered more than 400 ballets. All were new productions written, composed, and choreographed by the era’s leading authors of French theatre and comic opera, and many were staged on a grand scale.”3 As historians Ivor Guest, Alexandra Carter, and Jane Pritchard have shown, the situation was similar in London.4 To be sure, these ballets did not look like Swan Lake, though one or two “fairy” ballets may have distantly recalled it, and most could be described as a leg show. They were popular entertainment, with stars and ballet masters – and ballet mistresses, for some of the most successful choreographers were women5 – who worked and toured internationally, and made money for those who employed them. They came from all over Europe and produced a supranational product, that is, a form of embodied expression that eluded national definition, appealed to an audience that was mainstream in taste, and proved to be commercially viable.

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5 Among these were Katti Lanner (Empire Theatre, London), Madame Mariquita (Folies-Bergère, Paris), and Rita Papurello (Olympia, Paris).
For Russians of the cultural elite, a category that included Sergey Diaghilev and his circle, music-hall ballet, however vibrant a phenomenon, was something to disdain. “I was averse to short ballets,” wrote Alexandre Benois, explaining why he opposed cuts in the scenario of his first ballet, Le Pavillon d’Armide, “because the fashion for them revealed [...] the influence of music-hall and variety entertainments. Short ballets were included in the programs only as gay and frivolous entertainments.” In Russia, by contrast, ballet was serious business, a state monopoly, performed in Moscow only at the Bolshoi Theater, in St. Petersburg only at the Mariinsky, and until 1882, when the ban on foreign troupes was lifted, otherwise proscribed in those cities. It was an art, moreover, identified with the country’s Westernized élite, an imported art, with foreign stars, illustrious Western ballet masters, and a repertory of works often adapted from European models, all sustained by the Tsar’s own purse. The Mariinsky was the jewel in the crown of Russia’s subsidized arts institutions. During the 1903–04 season its ballet troupe consisted of 122 women and 92 men, not counting the students who took part in productions, the musicians who played for them, the artistic and administrative personnel – beginning with the venerable ballet master Marius Petipa – who conjured them into being and tended them, plus a legion of backstage workers, from wig makers to electricians, scene painters, stagehands, wardrobe masters, and tailors, to ensure the very highest standards of professionalism. No other company enjoyed largesse of such magnitude or stood so close to the beating heart of state power, though this proximity, as Diaghilev and countless others were to discover, could be a double-edged sword. With its discriminating, aristocratic public, an élite of class and taste, the Mariinsky audience was a far cry from the music hall’s middle-class pleasure-seekers out for a night on the town.

In addition to music halls and state-supported companies, late nineteenth-century ballet was delivered to audiences by touring groups. Sometimes these were elaborate companies, like the ones assembled for The Black Crook, which wowed New York in 1866, or for Manzotti’s Italian spectacles at the Eden-

7 “Spisok artistov Imperatorskikh teatrov, S.-Peterburg” (List of Artists of the Imperial Theatre St. Petersburg), Ezhegodnik Imperatorskikh Teatrov (Yearbook of the Imperial Theaters, hereafter Ezhegodnik), 1903–04 season (St. Petersburg: Izdanie Direktsii Imperatorskikh Teatrov, [1904]). The dancers of the Imperial Ballet are listed on pp. 68–77.
Theatre in Paris in the 1880s. Others were small, family-based groups like Thomas Nijinsky's. Still others were pick-up companies, like the hastily assembled ensemble of dancers from Milan and Vienna that served as the corps de ballet when Virginia Zucchi made her St. Petersburg debut at one of the city's summer theaters. None of these companies was permanent, even if they sometimes reassembled for an engagement. They did not articulate an aesthetic position, engage in movement research, or privilege originality in their choreographic strategies. They operated, in other words, within the conventions of nineteenth-century frameworks and models.

To a very large degree this was also the case with the Russian dancers who began to tour in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1905. This had caused havoc at the Mariinsky, and beginning in 1906 many set their sights abroad. With the exception of Lydia Kyasht, who became the première danseuse at London's Empire Theatre in 1908, and those like Alexander Shiraev who were eased out of the Mariinsky because of their political activities, few dancers intended to abandon the Imperial Theaters. They were looking only to spread their wings, supplement their income, and see what lay beyond the narrow confines of the Petersburg ballet world. Many joined the Imperial Russian Ballet, a small touring company organized by the Finnish music impresario Edvard Fazer and headed by the ballerina Anna Pavlova. But the repertory, which included such ballets as Halt of the Cavalry, Giselle, Coppélia, and the second act of Swan Lake, as well as sundry divertissements, was standard Mariinsky fare, even if this was new to German and Scandinavian audiences. A similar conventionality characterized the repertory offerings of ballerinas such as Tamara Karsavina and Olga Preobrajenska, who appeared in London in 1910 with even smaller companies in abbreviated versions of Giselle and Swan Lake, respectively. Again, the idea of departing

10 Johanna Laakkonen, Canon and Beyond: Edvard Fazer and the Imperial Russian Ballet 1908–1910 (Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 2009). For the list of dancers who participated in the company's tours, the venues where it performed, and for the repertory see Appendices 1–4.
in any way from established repertory or performance models simply did not arise.

From the start the Ballets Russes was a very different kind of company, even if it had elements in common with existing models. For one thing it was a touring company, an itinerant theater, as Alexandre Benois called it, rather than an enterprise with a “settled way of life.” For Benois, writing in 1911, at the end of Diaghilev’s third Paris ballet season, this was not necessarily a bad thing: the “special psychology of the itinerant theater,” he told readers of the Petersburg newspaper Rech,” “is even conducive to the special effervescence of creation.” But now, for the Diaghilev enterprise to move “further along the path to perfection,” it needed the time and “possibilities of ‘re-checking’” that come with a “settled routine . . . . In an itinerant theater you risk something fundamental each minute, and thus somehow never get

Figure 1

Diaghilev and Stravinsky in Beausoleil (1911). The figure in the background is “General” Nikolai Bezobrazov, a well-known St. Petersburg balletomane, critic, and sometime member of Diaghilev’s circle. Photographer unknown. Igor Stravinsky Collection, PSS
to the point of polishing your work." Although the Ballets Russes did find a succession of temporary homes over the years, it never abjured touring. During its initial seasons it disbanded once the summer performances were over; in Venice, where Diaghilev vacationed, and Russia, where he wintered, he recharged his creative batteries. In the spring of 1911 his newly founded company spent several weeks in Monte Carlo rehearsing, performing, and readying the season's premières. The following spring, after the company's first full year of existence, Monte Carlo again served as a launching pad, while during the winter of 1913, the company spent six weeks in London working solely on The Rite of Spring.

From the start, too, Diaghilev's dance enterprise was a creature of the marketplace, with all the risks and possibilities that entailed. However, even when Diaghilev transformed his seasonal enterprise into a year-round one, his company remained dependent on the Imperial Theaters. This was especially true with respect to the dancers, many of whom, unlike Nijinsky, refused to resign from the company that guaranteed not only a secure living but also a pension when they reached retirement age. Imperial dancers had to request permission to travel and a leave of absence to dance for Diaghilev; in fact, he counted upon the generosity of the Mariinsky management to staff his company. Even Serge Grigoriev, the régisseur in charge of maintaining the new company's repertory, did double service until resigning from the Mariinsky at the end of 1912, though during the preceding season he had danced only three performances.

Diaghilev was also indebted to the Mariinsky for repertory. In fact before Nijinsky's ascendance as a choreographer, Diaghilev produced a number of works already familiar to Petersburg audiences. Giselle (Paris, 1910; London, 1911) and Swan Lake (London, 1911) were the most notable examples of the "old ballet" staged in these years, but they were not the only ones. Petipa's Grand Pas Classique from Raymonda and the Blue Bird pas de deux from The Sleeping Beauty both figured in the 1909 divertissement Le Festin, with Blue Bird reappearing under different titles in later seasons. Not all the works from the Mariinsky storehouse that Diaghilev helped himself to were old. Beginning in 1907 with Le Pavillon d'Armide, several Fokine ballets had appeared on the Mariinsky stage. In 1909, just weeks before Diaghilev's first troupe of


dancers left for Paris, the Mariinsky presented two all-Fokine programs—Pavillon, the "suite" Chopiniana, and Egyptian Nights in February and Egyptian Nights, Chopiniana, and Eunice in March—with Le Pavillon d'Armide being paired throughout the 1908–09 season with La Fille mal gardée, Paquita, and Swan Lake. Although the Mariinsky had yet to appoint Fokine as ballet master (it would do so only in 1911), it seems to have tried to upstage Diaghilev by presenting what amounted to a festival of Fokine's works. Diaghilev, to be sure, countered by editing, redressing, and retitling the works that went to Paris, leaving his mark on them and revealing for the first time his creative hand as a ballet producer. Thus, Chopiniana became Les Sylphides and acquired a new orchestration by Stravinsky, while Egyptian Nights was overhauled and turned into Cléopâtre. Even Le Pavillon d'Armide was refitted with new sets and costumes.

Although Diaghilev had nothing but disdain for the music hall, his enterprise in some respects was not that different. From the start, the Ballets Russes was a business. Not a very successful one sometimes, and in the early years, when bankers could be tapped for loans and patrons were flush, seldom one that lived within its means or kept to budget. But it had to sell tickets and fill seats, meet payroll and underwrite production, and create a demand for what it presented and a public that craved it. At the same time, it had to produce a reliable product. Although Diaghilev disdained conventional theatries and conventional ballerina stars, he understood the need for spectacle and virtuosity. He wed gorgeousness with "art" and virtuosity with expressiveness. He created new stars, and many of them were men, including Nijinsky, whom he transformed into a sensation identified uniquely with the Ballets Russes. He appropriated the erotic, all but banned from ballet on the "serious" stage, though pervasive in the music hall, and made it a key component of his new artistic product, while also crucially associating it with the male dancing body, which was practically absent from late nineteenth-century

14 For a full list of the Mariinsky performances, see the repertory section (vol. 3) in the Ezhegodnik (see note 7) for the 1908–09 season.

15 The diaries of Vladimir Telyakovsky, the Director of the Imperial Theaters, indicate that in 1907 Diaghilev hoped to have the sets and costumes for operas that he intended to present in Paris the following year made in the workshops of the Imperial Theaters. This, however, Telyakovsky refused to allow. But he did express the willingness to give or sell Diaghilev finished productions, with the approval of the Minister of the Court. See the entry for 25 August 1907 in V[ladimir] A[rkadyevich] Telyakovskiy, Dnevniki direkτora imperatorskiх Teatrov (Diaries of the Director of the Imperial Theaters), 1906–1909, Saint Petersburg, ed. M[arina] G[rigoryevna] Svetava (Moscow: Artist. Rezisser. Teatr, 2011), pp. 228ff. In 1911 Diaghilev purchased the Bolshoi production of Swan Lake designed by Konstantin Korovin and Alexander Golovin; see Grigoriev, The Diaghilev Ballet (see note 13), p. 57.
ballet outside Russia. Finally, Diaghilev viewed ballet as a site of imaginative possibility, as evocative and exotic in its way as the very names of music halls like the Alhambra.

However, from the start Diaghilev’s new company rested upon a different set of ideological imperatives than its predecessors and contemporaries. First and foremost the Ballets Russes was galvanized by a sense of national purpose and identity, imbued with a commitment to cultural nationalism. In a 1916 interview with the music critic Olin Downes of the Boston Sunday Post Diaghilev described himself in his early days as a revolutionist “fighting for the cause of Russian art."

A new movement like this cannot be the expression of one man. It is the result of the need of a race. Think of the men we have! We have Bakst, Golovine, Larionoff and others [...], each exceptionally gifted for decorations and costumes. We have in Stravinsky a composer surely of the very first rank, and furthermore, a composer who in my belief finds his most complete expression in music for ballets. There are many other Russians who are especially talented as regards composition for the ballet. Fokine and more lately other Russian masters of the ballet have with a superb independence and initiative developed what is almost a new art of the dance. This art, in a word, is so vital and distinctive because it represents a national movement that comes from the consciousness of a people.16

Although Diaghilev commissioned scores from Debussy and Ravel and produced ballets to Chopin and Schumann, his company was above all a platform for Russian music. The vast majority of composers utilized by Diaghilev up to 1915 were Russian, with Rimsky-Korsakov the most heavily represented. Diaghilev produced no fewer than three operas by the composer, used his music in several ballets, and featured it in symphonic interludes throughout the 1916 American tour.17 He staged some of the greatest works of the Russian opera repertory – Boris Godunov and Ivan the Terrible (both twice), Khovanshchina, Prince Igor, The Golden Cockerel, May Night, and excerpts from

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17 The third movement (Allegro risoluto) of Rimsky’s Antar Suite was performed throughout the 1916 tour, usually with the descriptive title “Le Pouvoir.” The music was also performed along with songs by Rachmaninoff and Musorgsky at the gala performance given by the company at the Paris Opéra before it departed for the United States. Programs for the US tour are in the Metropolitan Opera Archives; the “Programme Officiel” for the 29 December 1915 performance in Paris is in *MGZB-Res. 99-1115, JRDD (see note 1).
Ruslan and Liudmila. Visually, too, the company’s identity was thoroughly Russian. Indeed, it was not until 1914, with Legend of Joseph, that Diaghilev commissioned scenery from a visual artist (the Spaniard José-Maria Sert) from outside the national fold. Russian designers painted scenery, and Russian ateliers built costumes for many ballets, including those for The Rite of Spring, while the subject matter of many works was Russian. Among these were Stravinsky’s Firebird, Petrushka, and Rite, as well as the Polovtsian Dances from Borodin’s Prince Igor, and several works by Rimsky-Korsakov, including Sadko, Le Coq d’or, and Midnight Sun. At the same time ballets set in the non-Russian East, such as Thamar (Georgia), Schéhérazade (Persia), and Cléopâtre (Egypt), became Russified in sight and sound, while their Orientalism only heightened the otherness associated in the West with Russia.

Diaghilev’s earliest seasons were all-Russian affairs. Onstage, backstage, and in the pit everybody was Russian. He hired his first troupe of dancers from the Imperial Theaters of Petersburg and Moscow. Most came from the Mariinsky, where they had trained together, lived together, and performed together for years. Many had studied and worked with Fokine and supported him during the 1905 dancers’ strike at the Mariinsky, of which he was a ringleader. Now they brought to Paris not “our solid and deadly academy of dances,” as Benois wrote after the first, thrilling season, “but a transformed ballet, something young, full of enthusiasm, passion, strength, full of genuine life and color.” 18 Senior stars were not invited. Clearly miffed, Mathilde Kschessinska, the Mariinsky’s prima ballerina assoluta (who announced that she would soon lead all 200 of the company’s dancers to Paris with the full support of the Imperial Court, a project that never materialized), and Olga Preobrazjenska, the Mariinsky’s second ballerina, both wangled invitations to dance at the Paris Opéra during the Diaghilev season, with Kschessinska being partnered by the Mariinsky’s second ballet master, Nikolai Legat. 19 Instead, Fokine and his muse, Anna Pavlova, were to lead Diaghilev’s new troupe, with Nijinsky and the young Bolshoi stars Mikhail Mordkin and Vera Karalli seconding them. Tamara Karsavina, Alexandra Baldina, Elena Smirnova, and Sophie Fedorova, on the women’s side, and Alexey Bulgakov, Adolph Bolm, and Feodor Koslov, on the men’s, completed the roster of

From left: Botkon, P. Korbut-Kubitovitch, Tamara Karsavina, Nijinsky, Stravinsky, Benois, Diaghilev, Botkin; seated: Mme Bezobrazov. Monte Carlo (April 1911). Photograph by Nikolai Bezobrazov. Igor Stravinsky Collection, PSS

Figure 2

principals. With nearly eighty dancers, the Diaghilev enterprise was larger than any of today’s American companies, with the exception of the New York City Ballet and American Ballet Theatre. But it was less than half the size of the Mariinsky and Bolshoi companies, which boasted 192 and 158 dancers, respectively. It also differed from these companies in gender composition. Although the 1909 Diaghilev company had more women than men (42 to 34), it more nearly approached gender parity than the state companies, and the difference tended to decrease over the years. This near parity is all the

20 This is based on Grigoriev’s list, in an undated draft for the Appendix of his book, bMS Thr465(6), S. L. Grigoriev Papers, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University (hereafter Grigoriev Papers).

21 The numbers for the New York City and American Ballet Theatre come from those companies’ websites (www.nycballet.com and www.abt.org, accessed 10 January 2012). For the Mariinsky and Bolshoi see the lists of dancers in Ezhegodnik (see note 7), 1908–09 season.
more striking given the high degree of feminization of ballet outside Russia, both in the opera house and on the music-hall stage. Thus from the first the Diaghilev company privileged men, built upon the male presence, created ballets with male stars, and provided a different viewing experience for the audience, infecting spectators with the unfamiliar thrill of testosterone.

If the dancers who appeared in Diaghilev’s earliest seasons came almost wholly from the Imperial Theaters, the formation of what he called “ma troupe” in the winter of 1911 changed the nationality of his company dramatically. As the director of an independent organization, he needed dancers all year round, not just for the months of May, June, and July, when Imperial dancers enjoyed a long summer break. However, only a handful of dancers proved willing to submit their resignations. The most celebrated was Vaslav Nijinsky, who resigned in January 1911 after a scandal in which Diaghilev almost certainly had a hand and one that he loudly trumpeted abroad. Nijinsky’s sister, Bronislava Nijinska, resigned, or “left the service” (in the official phrase) on 15 February; Adolph Bolm followed on 12 March, and both Nikolai Kremnev and Alexander Gavrilov in September. But this hardly sufficed to fill the new company’s ranks. By 1912, the year Nijinsky choreographed his first ballet, L’Après-midi d’un faune, the composition of Diaghilev’s Russian company had vastly changed.

Polish dancers had always played a role in Russian ballet. The Kschessinsky clan was Polish, as were the Nijinskys and family friends like Stanislav Gillert, who had danced at the Mariinsky and taught at the Imperial Ballet School. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, moreover, many Polish dancers found lucrative engagements on Russia’s “private” stages, appearing in the occasional ballet but chiefly dancing in the operas that were the mainstay of provincial theatrical life. Like Nijinsky’s parents, most Pol-

22 See, for example, Gabriel Astruc’s letter to Diaghilev dated 14 February 1911, explaining what he has done to publicize the scandale. “In any case,” wrote Astruc, “you will see that I made a big play within half an hour of the arrival of your wire. All Paris is in an uproar. All the columnists and balletomanes of Paris were at the Pavillon de Hanover [where Astruc’s offices were located], and thus we were able to get an article by [Louis] Schneider on the first page of Le Gaulois, an inside article by [Robert] Brussel in Le Figaro, an illustrated article in Excelsior, and [Georges de] Pawlowski and [Louis] Vuillerm on the first page of Comedia.” GA45–7, Gabriel Astruc Papers, JRDD (see note 1).

23 Ezhegodnik (Supplement), 1911–12 season (see note 7). Resignations were routinely published in the Ezhegodnik, though Nijinsky’s name simply disappeared without comment. The Bolshoi dancer Alexander Kotchetovskiy (who married Nijinska in July 1911) seems to have remained on the Imperial payroll until the end of 1911.

24 For the nomadic life of the Nijinsky family on the private stages of Russia and the Ukraine see Nijinska, Early Memoirs (see note 8), chaps. 1–8. For ballet in Kiev during this period see Iurii Oleksandrovyich Stanishevskyi, Baletnyi Teatr Ukrainyi: 225 rokov istorii (Ballet Theater of the Ukraine: 225 Years of History) (Kiev: Muzichna Ukraina,
ish dancers received their training at Warsaw's Wielki Theater. Fully subsidized by the Russian government, which ruled the eastern third of a long dismembered Poland, the Wielki was a poor cousin of the Imperial Theaters inside Russia proper. Russian stars — along with Western ones — danced on the Wielki stage, and influences of both East and West were evident in the Wielki repertory, including its modern works.25 In December 1908, barely nine months after Fokine's Chopiniana had premiered in St. Petersburg, it was staged at the Wielki.26 The theater and its affiliated school trained outstanding dancers.

Thus it was only natural that Diaghilev's thoughts should turn to Poland. Here was a source of well-trained and disciplined dancers27 who were Russian subjects, with names as impossible to pronounce as Russian ones, and speakers of a language not that different from Russian. For a company that made Russianness a key part of its identity, Polish dancers were thus a godsend. In 1911, for the first Monte Carlo season of Diaghilev's independent company, no fewer than eleven of the company's twenty-four women and two of its twenty-four men came from the Wielki Theater; by 1912 the number of men


26 Ibid., p. 186.

27 Italy, of course, was another source of disciplined and well-trained dancers. In 1912 or thereabouts the designer René Piot, who was working for Jacques Rouché’s Théâtre des Arts, became so disgusted by the “disorderly habits” and lack of professionalism of the French dancers hired by the choreographer Léo Staats that he advised Rouché to contact an agency in Milan to replace them. “You can find […] what you want for as little as 70 frances a month!! […] The school of Milan, although based on old principles, is perhaps the best in the world. Technically, their dancers appear to be of the first order.” René Piot, letter to Jacques Rouché, n.d. [1912?], Fond Rouché, Th. Des Arts R8(4), Pièce 15(28), Bibliothèque de l’Opéra, Paris. Piot complained that Staats’ “cows” (veaux) failed to appear for rehearsals, ruined his costumes by sitting on the skirts, and chattered in the wings during performances — behavior that he contrasted with the exemplary discipline of the Ballets Russes dancers, when he had visited backstage with designer Léon Bakst (ibid., Pièce 15[19]).
had risen to eight. Filling the men's ranks proved difficult. To remedy the situation Diaghilev signed up a troupe of dancers that he had seen performing in Brussels. The Molotzoff Troupe was directed by Dimitri [sic] Molotzoff and included two of his brothers, seven other men, and two women who were probably married to them. None of these dancers ever played an important role in the Ballets Russes, but they filled out the large ensembles that were a feature of most of Diaghilev's early ballets. During the Monte Carlo season the Molotzoff men danced in *Giselle* (peasants), *Schéhérazade* (adolescents), the *Polovtsian Dances* from *Prince Igor* (Polovtsian warriors and adolescents), *Le Pavillon d'Armide* (bawds, barons), and *Cléopâtre* (Egyptian dancers and Sileni) — roles that indicate they were chiefly character dancers. Although Dimitri and his brothers vanished from Grigoriev's company rosters by the end of 1911, S. Oumansky and Goudine (to use the version of

28 The eleven Wielki women hired for the 1911 Monte Carlo season were Anna(?) Gachewska, (?) Gnatawska, Maria(?) Gasiorowska, Jadwiga Jezierska, Joulitzka (possibly Emma Zulicka), Leokadia Klimontowicz, Kazimiera Kopycinska, Jozefa Kowalewska, Bronisława Kuczycka, Wanda Mieczkowska, and Aleksandra Wasilewska; the two men were Franciszek Warzynski and Piotr Zajlich. The list appears in "Composition of the Standing Troupe 1911 in Monte Carlo," Grigoriev Papers (see note 20). The spelling of names varies wildly. For those listed in the Appendix "Wykaz Choreografow, solistek, solistow, koryfejek i koryfeusz baletu Warszawskiego w latach 1867–1915" (List of Choreographers, Soloists, and Coryphée(s) of the Warsaw Ballet in the Years 1867–1915) in Pudelek's *Warszawski balet* (see note 25) I have given the original Polish version. Otherwise I have used the versions published in the 1911 Monte Carlo programs. The six additional Wielki men engaged in 1912 were Waclaw Kegler, Stanisław Kostecki, Lyuwidk Kowalski, Kazimierz Lobożko, Maksymilian Statkiewicz, and Jan Zielinski. Additional Wielki dancers who danced for the Ballets Russes in the prewar years were Aleksandra Hubert, Henrietta Majcherska, Stanisława Pajewska, Maria Pawinska, Zofia Pflanz, and Helena Staszko.

29 For the Molotzoff troupe see the undated copy of the contract drawn up in Paris between Diaghilev and Dimitri [sic] Molotzoff covering the period of 1 April 1911 to 1 April 1912, GA64/11–13, Gabriel Astruc Papers, JRDD (see note 1). See also the handwritten "Nom et prénom de la troupe Molotzoff," GA67–3, and the note in GA66–1. The names as they appear on Grigoriev's handwritten lists, the Astruc materials, the Monte Carlo playbills, and programs for the 1911 Covent Garden season are Adolphe and Senka Molotzoff (Molotzow/Malatsoff), Senka Brombergoff (Bromberg/Braunberg), Androcha Chkrobsky, Goudin (Goudine/Gudin), J. Ja(c)iel, Lardin, Alojza Lorosoff (Larosev/Larozov/Larozoff/Lazaroff), Michel Marchant (Machot/Machat/Mashat), Marteni, Volodia Orlik, S. Oumansky (Umansky). The women, who seem not to have performed for Diaghilev unless their names were completely changed, were Liena Dimitri and Olga Brombergoff. For the Monte Carlo programs see Georges Détaille and Gérard Mulsy, *Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo 1911–1944*, with a preface by Jean Cocteau (Paris: Editions Arc-en-Ciel, 1954), pp. 18–40; for the members of the company who performed at Covent Garden see Macdonald, *Diaghilev Observed* (see note 11), pp. 26, 33. Grigoriev's various company lists for 1911 are in bMS Thr 465 (8), Grigoriev Papers (see note 20).
their names that appear most frequently on programs) spent several seasons with the Ballets Russes. Diaghilev also began to hire women trained outside of the Imperial Theaters. Lydia Nelidova came from her mother’s studio in Moscow; Olga Khokhlova (Picasso’s future wife) and Liudmila Guliuk from the Petersburg studio of the former Mariinsky ballerina Evgeniya Sokolova. In 1912 the first English dancers appeared on Grigoriev’s rosters: Hilda Munnings, Doris Faithfull, and Anna Broomhead, all dancing under various names. A dancer named Crosti – probably Italian – joined the company for a season in Monte Carlo; Marie Rambert (known as Ramberg), a Polish-Jewish teacher of eurhythmics, was recruited from the Dalcroze colony in Hellerau (see Figure 3). Of these dancers many have vanished from history – women with names like Poiré, Razoumovitch, and Boni; men such as Leon Kanissow, Nikolai Ivanovsky, and a Rachmanow whose name appears in multiple versions. Most of the dancers were young and, apart from the principal and soloist ranks, few were seasoned performers or even especially gifted. It was that rawness and inexperience that made them ideal material for Diaghilev: they came to him unburdened by traditions they were unwilling to shed and game for experiment. Nijinsky’s first ballet, L’Après-midi d’un faune, was not simply a declaration of choreographic modernism, but also a sign of the company’s new corporeal identity. Of the eight performers only Nijinsky and his sister Bronislava had graduated from the Imperial Theater School and danced at the Mariinsky, though Anna Tcherepanova had trained at the Bolshoi. Lydia Nelidova, the Chief Nymph, and Olga Khokhlova had studied at private Russian studios, while Henrietta Majcherska, Leokadia Klimontowicz, and Kazimiera Kopycinska had come from the Wielki.  

30 In joining the Ballets Russes they became part of an organism whose corporate identity represented the antithesis of Imperial orthodoxy and Great Russian nationalism. 

The Rite of Spring was probably Diaghilev’s most profoundly Russian work of the prewar years, but also the one that pushed the idea of Russianness far beyond the exoticism of earlier ballets. It was set in pre-Slavonic times, evoked pagan myths and rituals, and drew upon a bank of living folk materials that Stravinsky transformed beyond all recognition. Yet only eighteen of the ballet’s forty-six dancers were identifiably Russian. Fifteen were Polish and three English, while ten remain unknown (though they probably included a few Russians). So what did Russianness mean in a company that had made cultural nationalism a core element of its identity? Was Russian­ness a masquerade, a pseudo-identity donned for the stage then removed like make-up after a performance? Was it a matter of culture rather than birth, a

30 According to Nijinska, Tcherepanova died prematurely of pneumonia in 1912; Early Memoirs (see note 8), p. 452.
behavior that could be learned, an identity constructed by outsiders? Many of the Polish dancers who joined the Ballets Russes beginning in 1911 remained with the company for most of the following decade. Their names were Russified (so that Klimontowicz became Klementovitch and Majcherska became Maicherska, Maikerska, or Meiechkovska). Some Polish women married Russian men, while at least one English dancer (Hilda Munnings) sampled men of both nationalities. Lodging houses and dressing rooms must have sounded with an inter-Slavic din that outsiders took to be Russian and in all likelihood became increasingly Russified, but was also infused over time with French and even English. But Russianness was also tied up with a particular kind of performance – vivid, emotionally generous, full-bodied, and committed. As Lydia Sokolova (née Hilda Munnings) and the company’s other English dancers clearly demonstrated, one could learn to dance like a Russian (see Figure 4); Russianness in this sense could be impersonated, passed on to bodies that hailed far from the Neva. Indeed, one of the signal accomplishments of the Diaghilev company in the 1920s was the transformation of Alicia Marks from London’s Muswell Hill into a Russian ballerina-in-training, who,
as Alicia Markova, would learn to inhabit the Mariinsky roles of Odette-Odile and Giselle and make them her own.

From the start, then, Russianness was a category distinguished by hybridity. As a company the Ballets Russes never danced in Russia. First by election and then by necessity it existed only as a foreign entity. For the many dancers who expatriated themselves by joining the Ballets Russes and subsequently found permanent exile in the West, Russia ceased to be home but existed instead as an imagined community. However, Russianness for a Diaghilev dancer was not wholly a reflection of his or her exilic condition. For audiences that shuddered with pleasure at the antics of Diaghilev’s itinerant tribe, his dancers, no matter what their national origin or place of birth, were “Barbarians from the North,” as the music critic Émile Vuillermoz put it in 1912, “come to demonstrate to us Latins the superiority of their instinct over our culture.”

Thus Diaghilev’s dancers experienced Russianness in a number of ways. For some it was the blood that ran in their veins, for others the language they spoke or the person they married, the roles they danced and how they danced them, or the discipline they brought to the studio; it could allude to a community lost, abandoned, imagined, or found in performance. Whatever their background, Diaghilev’s dancers were uniformly viewed as alien Russian others, even those born and raised in the West.

Real, displaced, and faux Russian dancers thus brought the pre-Slavonic world of The Rite of Spring to corporeal life. In its way the company that Diaghilev coaxed into existence was as unorthodox as Nijinsky’s choreography. Both grew out of Diaghilev’s own ambitions, his quest for the new and his need for talent willing to subordinate itself to his powerful creative will. The company that danced Nijinsky’s pathbreaking work was a new kind of company. It articulated an ideology of cultural nationalism that would have profound ramifications for modernist dance enterprises up to World War II, from the Ballets Suédois and Argentina’s Ballets Espagnols to the movement known as British Ballet. At the same time this ideology was complicated by issues of exile, expatriation, and cultural difference, and the enactment of a public identity by multiple cultural others. Russianness, as embodied by the Ballets Russes, was the sign of a virtual identity, closely attuned even during the pre-Revolutionary period to the imaginative daring and exilic cosmopolitanism of Diaghilev’s own personality. In this the Ballets Russes more closely resembled a modern dance company of the 1920s or 1930s than a traditional ballet company. Conjured into being like the groups that consolidated around

Mary Wigman or Martha Graham, the Ballets Russes had as its center a figure as charismatic and innovative as those choreographers, even if he never performed a spiral, contraction, or pirouette. Diaghilev’s dancers wore with pride their identity as Ballets Russes artists. Like Diaghilev, they had abandoned the familiar touchstones of past and place; rather than stick to a steady job back home, they looked forward rather than back to days in the studio, making landmark works like The Rite of Spring that carried ballet across the threshold of modernism.