

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

## II. Though Far From Russia

ANDRE SCHAEFFNER

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

of the young Italian (Malipiero to Rieti) and the young Spanish (de Falla to Halfter etc.) schools.

Ours is a Russian age, its most striking feature the permanent existence of a ballet troupe, a sort of peripatetic Bayreuth which from 1909 to 1929 collaborated with Russian and non-Russian painters (Picasso, Matisse, Derain, Braque, Laurencin, Juan Gris, Pruna, Utrillo, Miro, Bauchant, Rouault, G. de Chirico); with conductors mainly non-Russian (Pierné, Monteux, Holbrooke, Ansermet, Goossens, Messenger, Désormières); which presented the works not only of Russian and French musicians but Spanish (Falla), Italian (Rieti), English (Lord Berners, Lambert) and was even preparing to put on a German work that Hindemith will now be spared the necessity of writing. The product, despite its numerous appeals to foreign elements, remained obdurately Russian, due as much to the fascination of the school, which from Glinka to Nabokov had never ceased to renew itself, as to the personality of Serge de Diaghilev.

Saying farewell to Diaghilev, Roland Manuel recently wrote: "Wherever he turned his eyes, Serge de Diaghilev saw an object which owed something to him. Our neckties, our cigarette cases, the dresses of our wives, the toys of our children, the draperies of our rooms, the posters on our walls, succumbed quickly to the extraordinary influence of this man who, with his sign manual, marked the changing design of our universe."

This was the very real effect, it is quite true, of what was once even called the "art Ballet Russe," but which, as we can clearly see today, rested on a doubtful premise. Russian decorative art, with which Diaghilev before 1914 thought he would revitalize scenic décor, remained essentially academic in spite of having recourse to the sources of peasant art or the oriental preciousness of Indo-Persian miniatures, no matter how bright or dazzling; more academic perhaps than had been the program music of a Rimsky-Korsakov and a Balakirev. However, the decorative academism of a Bakst, a Benois, could only create illusion for the eyes of those who were still unacquainted with the art of Cézanne, Vuillard, Rouault, Matisse, Picasso; could have merely a temporary influence and only on objects of fashion, from the color of a foulard to the varied hues of a perfumer's advertise-

ment. When this decorative art had encompassed all the objects of elegant daily life, it became obvious that, while it had followed from afar the evolution of contemporary painting, it was merely external and did not conform to the new logical principles of architecture. Meanwhile, Le Corbusier, with his flat surfaces, metallic cubes, his completely utilitarian architecture, devoid of ornament, had appeared, to dissipate the faith in the old "Modern Art." I will not go so far as to say that Diaghilev had foreseen the "art nouveau" of Corbusier, but he had what amounted to a great clairvoyance, he was ready to gain the collaboration of the masters of tomorrow. His false Persian motives, his false popular Russian art had won him a vast public; he had dazzled them with the pseudo-bold colors of his first painters; he had made them decide to follow the trail in all his future adventures. Since the "mode of the Ballet Russe" had extended even to the dressmakers, it was necessary to go on to something more serious. In 1909 the Wagner of the new Bayreuth, Igor Stravinsky, was discovered; in 1913 the choreography of *Jeux* and the *Sacre du Printemps* attacked the graces of the obsolete academic ballet; in 1917 began the collaboration with Picasso, and little by little, everything from the brilliant orchestral effects and the reassuring Russian cast of Stravinsky's music to the enlarged miniatures of the Russian painters, gave place to the barer forms of an art more free, more grave, of which *Noces* and *Apollon* are the noble peaks. To be sure, many easy little tricks sometimes concealed the hesitating course of an idea which missed its mark, but a strange tenacity prevented Diaghilev from exploiting an acquired position, so that he always started from scratch with the new, the unseasonable. In this "temporary" and peripatetic theatre where one often, especially in the latter years, saw too much of the papier maché and the ill-concealed frame work, many eternal things were first brought to the light of day.

In the book that is bound to be written about Serge de Diaghilev, the writer will not only have to take into account his fine culture, his knowledge of the world's museums and the history of opera, that active indolence which carried him wherever there was something to be seized, but he will also have to consider the circle with which this often inscrutable man consorted

and held endless discussion, the atmosphere which he and his familiars were able to create together and in which they lived again—far from Russia—and yet so near her.

With personalities so strongly attached to their country as Diaghilev and Stravinsky, it is in vain that their external characteristics change continually and even contradict themselves; the spirit of their nationality persists and enriches itself with acquisitions from foreign elements; yet it never loses its identity.

Serge de Diaghilev died at the Lido, August 19, 1929. What did we get from the last season, which we saw towards the end of spring in London, Berlin and Paris? *Le Bal* of Victor Rieti gave us a new score, quite appropriate to the choreography, but without definite personality. The choreography, by Georges Balanchine, was neither unified nor delicate. The principal impression was given by the inventiveness and the sad plastic poetry, like Michael Angelo's, of the painter Giorgio de Chirico. *Le Fils Prodigue* of Serge Prokofiev, without attaining the melodic richness of *Chout* or even certain passages of *Pas d'Acier* was the work of an artist of unequal talent, but always of a musician. The choreography by Balanchine tried rather incoherently to ally simple pantomimic drama with a purely plastic structure. Certain frenzied tones of the painter, Georges Rouault, made one regret that he had never been considered for the stage design of Richard Strauss' *Salomé*. Finally, a repetition of Stravinsky's *Renard* enabled Serge Lifar to disclose himself as a choreographer. To be frank, I had the impression of a decline, even an eclipse. Balanchine, to whom we owe the choreography of *Apollon Musagètes*, seemed quite inferior to Massine or Nijinska, who, criticized as they were by ballet specialists, were nonetheless the creators of *Chant du Rossignol*, of *Pulcinella* and *Les Noces*—three equally perfect spectacles, although the last rises above the others and has given to theatrical expression an emphasis that the *Sacre* could not produce.

In short, no message, unless a negative one, and which acquires significance only by the death of Diaghilev. There is decadence in the ballet each time that the music does not rise to Stravinsky's level. Many elegant sophistries have been deduced from the theory that music should disappear beneath the steps of the

dancers whose movements it inspires. Whatever may have been the merit of a Fokine, a Nijinsky, a Massine, each time that they met a work of Stravinsky, they were carried away. Except for the *Danses du Prince Igor*, except for the *Spectre de la Rose* (to whose memory remains attached the name of that living corpse, W. Nijinsky), except for a few happy moments in other spectacles, *Les Biches*, *Les Matelots*, *Le Tricorne*, *La Boutique Fantasque*, *Parade*, etc., nothing remains of all the repertory of the Ballet Russe but the eight ballets by Stravinsky. Only the composer of *Petrouchka*, of the *Sacre*, of *Noces*, of *Pulcinella*, of *Apollon*, created music sufficiently persuasive for the lines of the spectacle to gleam as if illuminated from within. Whether it is classical ballet, choreographic recital or pure rhythm, it is Stravinsky, every time, who supports the spectacle with his vigor of rhythm, his powerful conceptions. Stravinsky's ballets can dispense with stories, even with action, for on the foundation pillars of his rhythm, his tempo, is reared a pure and vast pediment, a mobile marble, the evidence of a great idea conceived by a musician. With other composers, ballets which have no subjects fall short of complete realization. On the other hand it is impossible to have a Stravinsky ballet without *action* for the idea of its *subject* would illuminate it just the same. A pure musician, Stravinsky has always been his own poet. Unlike Wagner, he has no need to write the text of his dramas; he has only to ponder on his art and let his spirit shine through.

Had Diaghilev done nothing but enable Stravinsky to create these eight ballets, would not his work share their immortality?

### III. A Lone Fighter

NICHOLAS ROERICH

Diaghilev has gone. Something far greater than an individual force has passed with him. We may regard the entire achievement of Diaghilev as that of a great individual, but it would be still more fitting to regard him as a true representative of the whole movement of synthesis, an eternally young representative of the great moment when modern art shattered so many conventionalities and superficialities.