

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

COSTUMES FOR THE BALLETS RUSSES 1909–1933*

Teacher's Notes

This education kit includes 11 images of costumes and designs from the exhibition *From Russia with Love*. They represent most of the famous productions, and the work of the major designers, of the Russian Ballet. The text on the reverse of each image includes production details, a synopsis of the ballet's story, background about the designer and descriptions of the costumes. This is followed by quick comprehension questions, then suggestions for essays, activities and discussions, specific to each ballet. Further general questions and activities are included in these notes below.

The discussion topics and activities have been designed to address all the areas of the Arts curriculum: dance, drama, media studies, visual arts and music. The three strands of making, criticising and researching have also been covered.

Comprehension questions

- Hand out the A4 sheets and ask students to answer the quick comprehension questions. Set a time limit for each sheet.

Use of essay and activity questions

- Ask students to write essays on the topics on the back of each A4 sheet.
- There are suggested practical activities on the back of many of the A4 sheets.

Topics to be discussed in class

- Dance is not as important as theatre because there are often no written words. Discuss.
- Is ballet today less culturally significant than it was in the period of the Russian Ballet? Discuss.
- Escapism and sensationalism are entertaining. How does the subject matter of the Russian Ballet's repertoire reflect the needs of the time? Compare with modern entertainment.

In-class comparison exercise

- Divide class into four groups. Compare and contrast the following pairs:
Schéhérazade and *The Ball*
Thamar and *The Song of the Nightingale*
Petrouchka and *The Buffoon*
The Sleeping Princess and *Sadko*

Compare the stories, the approach of the designers and the actual costumes.

When visiting the exhibition

- There are two audio tours, one for children consisting of the ballet stories and one for older students/adults, which concentrate on the designers and the costumes.
- There is also a track on the audio tour which presents the music of each ballet.
- There are extended labels and wall text within the exhibition.
- There is a free trail for young children for use within the exhibition and at home.

* The costumes in this exhibition reflect the period of the Russian Ballet between the first ballet produced by Serge Diaghilev, *Le Pavillon d'Armide* (1909) and one of the first triumphs of the de Basil Russian Ballet, *Les Présages* (1933).

An exhibition organised by

■ national gallery of australia

Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth 6 February – 5 April 1999
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra 15 May – 22 August 1999

Answers to comprehension questions

Schéhérazade

1. Zobeida
2. Four years
3. 'Maestro' Enrico Cecchetti

The Blue God

1. Vaslav Nijinsky
2. His skin was blue
3. Lotus

Thamar

1. He is murdered
2. Interest in exotic cultures of the East
3. To reflect the stage lights

Petrouchka

1. Admiralty Square, St Petersburg, Russia in 1830
2. Vaslav Nijinsky
3. Benois designed more than 10 productions of *Petrouchka*

The Sleeping Princess

1. Spain, England, Italy and India
2. 1921, Léon Bakst
3. The costumes and sets were too expensive

The Firebird

1. Princess Tsarevna
2. 1906
3. An iron hoop

The Golden Cockerel

1. The Queen of Shemákhán
2. Russian peasant art
3. Michel Larionov

Sadko

1. Princess Volkova
2. 1916
3. Four

The Buffoon

1. Cyril W. Beaumont
2. Golden Fleece
3. Cubism, Futurism

Song of the Nightingale

1. 50
2. A model stage
3. Deer symbolise longevity

The Ball



FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

COSTUMES FOR THE BALLETS RUSSES
1909-1933

1. Greece
2. Dream-like paintings
3. Doric



Count Jean de Strelecki
Portrait of Serge Diaghilev
St Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music

Introduction

Serge Diaghilev and the Russian Ballet

Serge Diaghilev's Russian Ballet (Ballets Russes), which existed from 1909 to 1929, represents the golden age of modern ballet. From this company came the masterpieces *Petrouchka*, *Schéhérazade*, *The Golden Cockerel* and *The Magical Toyshop*, that are still in the repertoire of ballet companies around the world.

Serge Diaghilev was born in Novgorod, Russia in 1872. He moved to St Petersburg in 1890, where he became associated with a group of young writers and artists. Russia at this time was open to artistic influence from Western Europe, with many modern French and German artists selling works to Russian collectors. There was a similar European fascination with Russian culture. Both the exotic, or oriental, and the peasant cultures of Russia were recreated in Diaghilev's ballets.

Diaghilev was not a dancer, choreographer, composer or designer, but he was an impresario of genius. He transformed traditional ballet by turning it into a theatrical production embracing all forms of the arts. Short, dramatic ballets, often radically different from each other, were presented on the same night. Audiences, used to the staid and predictable choreography and stage design of traditional ballet, were enraptured by Diaghilev's productions. He encouraged exciting collaborations between choreographers such as Fokine and Massine, composers such as Stravinsky, Ravel, Debussy and Satie and artists such as Benois, Bakst, Goncharova, Picasso, Matisse and Derain.

De Basil's Russian Ballets

When Serge Diaghilev died in Venice in 1929, the Russian Ballet fell apart. However, many of the designers, composers and choreographers joined another company formed by Colonel W. de Basil. This company toured the world for many years and visited Australia three times between 1936 and 1940.

The costume collection in the National Gallery of Australia

The National Gallery of Australia owns one of the most exciting and significant collections of modern theatre art in the world. The large group of costumes from the Russian Ballet companies of both Diaghilev and de Basil form the core of this collection. Most of these costumes were acquired by the Gallery in 1973, at the last of three large auctions organised by Sotheby's in London. For years the costumes had lain, forgotten, in storage in a warehouse in Paris, the property of Anthony Diamantidi, who was a friend and financial backer of the Russian Ballet.

At the auction in 1973, the National Gallery of Australia purchased 47 lots, comprising about 400 assorted items, for just over £3000.

It has taken years of conservation and research to piece together

(over) Léon Bakst *Costume for Shah Zeman*
1930s (detail) National Gallery of Australia



these various items — hats, belts, boots, coats, trousers, dresses — into about 100 complete or nearly complete costumes. What has emerged in the process is one of the finest collections of this material in existence.

Schéhérazade

Scenery and costumes: Léon Bakst

Music: Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Choreography: Michel Fokine

Story: Léon Bakst and Michel Fokine

Principal dancers: Ida Rubinstein, Vaslav Nijinsky, Alexis Bulgakov, Vassily Kisselov, Enrico Cecchetti

First performance: Théâtre National de l'Opéra, Paris, 4 June 1910

Story

Schéhérazade is a short, dramatic ballet set in the harem of Shar Shahriar, king of an imaginary Eastern country. The story combines the themes of forbidden sex, high drama and violent death. The Shah's wives, preferring the slaves to their husband, often persuade the Chief Eunuch to let them into the slaves' quarters when the Shah is away. Suspecting this, the Shah pretends to go hunting and returns to a scene of erotic dancing. The soldiers and the Shah murder all of the revellers except Zobeida, the Shah's favourite wife, who stabs herself to death.

By giving the ballet an oriental setting, the designer was able to create an atmosphere that was both exciting and exotic. A bright green silken tent was used to create the seductive set. It contrasted with the gold and silver of the slaves' costumes and the moody blues and violets of the costume of the Shah.

Designer

Léon Bakst was originally a St Petersburg portrait painter, whose consummate graphic and design skills were recognised by Diaghilev. Bakst was to become one of his most famous designers, creating the sets and costumes for most of the ballets produced by the Russian Ballet company, between 1910 and the beginning of the First World War in 1914.

This costume

Costume for the Chief Eunuch

Conservators at the National Gallery rescued the original 1910 harem trousers of the Chief Eunuch's costume from under two later levels of patchups and alterations. The original trousers are made of deep orange hand-dyed silk and decorated with yellow silk horizontal bands. On the bands can be seen impressions where golden medallions were previously sewn. On the lining is a German customs stamp, placed there when Diaghilev's Russian Ballet company visited that country in the spring of 1912. These trousers and the cap are believed to have been worn in the original performance of *Schéhérazade* by 'Maestro' Enrico Cecchetti, the famed Italian-born ballet master whom Diaghilev enticed to join his company from the Imperial Ballet.

The overskirt of red artificial silk is decorated with appliquéd white silk hearts, delicately stencilled with a purple Persian-style design. The hearts are possibly from the ballet's 1910 production. The jacket, cummerbund and keys are from later productions, possibly from the 1930s. The short, orange silk jacket with long sleeves is inset with panels of red, blue and olive green silk. The cummerbund of brown silk is handpainted with gold crescent shapes. The Chief Eunuch's three large keys are made of wood.

Questions

1. What was the name of the Shah's favourite wife?
2. For how many years did Bakst design ballets?
3. Who may have worn this costume?

Topics for essays, discussions, activities

1. What do the words 'exotic' and 'fantasy' mean? What are the main elements of exoticism and fantasy in this ballet? Which countries are exotic for you?
2. Design a stage costume for a Keeper-of-the Keys in a modern-day prison.
3. Create a dance sequence that moves from joyous abandon to extreme violence.
4. Prepare a media headline which summarises this ballet's story.
5. Bakst based his colours on the Symbolist idea that colours evoke emotions. Discuss the colour red and the way it is used to create a mood.



The Blue God (Le Dieu bleu)

Scenery and costumes: Léon Bakst

Music: Reynaldo Hahn

Choreography: Michel Fokine

Story: Jean Cocteau and Frederigo de Madrazo

Principal dancers: Vaslav Nijinsky, Tamara Karsavina, Lydia Nelidova, Max Frohman

First performance: Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, 13 May 1912

Story

A young Hindu man is about to be consecrated as a priest in the Lotus Temple. A girl, who loves him, rushes in and begs him not to enter the priesthood. The High Priest orders her to be thrown to the temple monsters and devoured. Her prayers for help are answered by the Goddess and the Blue God (Krishna), who save her from the monsters and reunite the lovers.

The Blue God was originally conceived as a work to display the virtuoso dancing of Vaslav Nijinsky, who danced the role of the Blue God, Krishna. Actually, Nijinsky did very little dancing in the traditional sense, as he mainly held statuesque poses inspired by Hindu sculpture.

Designer

With his first commissions for Diaghilev's Paris productions, Léon Bakst's career began to flourish. After the success of *Schéhérazade*, he went on to design most of Diaghilev's pre-war ballets. The most impressive aspect of this ballet was Bakst's set and costumes. British ballet historian Cyril W. Beaumont described the set: 'Imagine a great orange-coloured cliff silhouetted against the deep blue sky of an Indian night, powdered with scintillating stars, and jutting from the centre of the cliff, a group of gigantic heads hewn out of rock, symbols of the deity worshipped by the natives and their priests. At the base of the cliff was a rock-girt pool, on the surface of which floated the sacred lotus.'

This costume

Costume for the Blue God

In Indian mythology, the God Krishna is nearly always depicted with blue skin, the result of being bitten as a child by the evil serpent Kaluja. There are still traces of blue make-up on the inside of the bodice.

The bodice of cream watered silk is dominated by an inset of musk-pink silk satin, which is embroidered in green, yellow and black and features a closed lotus flower (the symbol of the God Krishna) highlighted with rays of gold thread and small gold metal studs. The back of the bodice is appliquéd with fine stripes of green ribbon speckled with green glass beads. The short sleeves of blue silk satin are banded with cream watered silk. The entire bodice may represent the body jewellery that is often seen on sculptures of important Hindu deities.

The stiffened circular skirt is richly decorated with a printed floral silk and is embroidered with large arabesques in pink, yellow and cream. The broad hem-band of cream watered silk is trimmed with embroidered green triangles and two rows of gelatin 'mother-of-pearl' discs. Over the front of the skirt are appliquéd two sash-ends of cream silk, which are decorated with embroidered diamond shapes and triangles in blue and gold.

Questions

1. Who danced the role of the Blue God?
2. Why was Krishna called the Blue God?
3. What is the name of the flower embroidered on the bodice of the costume?

Topics for essays, discussions, activities

1. Find out as much as you can about Krishna and the episodes in his life.
2. Write a short biography of the life and career of Léon Bakst.
3. Design a modern costume for a Hindu god of your choice.
4. Orientalism was a popular influence on art in the late nineteenth century. Find a painting by Jean Dominique Ingres which shows this influence.
5. What instrument would you use as the voice of a god? Why?



Thamar

Scenery and costumes: Léon Bakst

Music: Mily Alexeyevich Balakirev

Choreography: Michel Fokine

Story: Léon Bakst

Principal dancers: Tamara Karsavina, Adolph Bolm

First performance: Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, 20 May 1912

Story

The setting is the castle of Thamar, Queen of Georgia. The queen signals through a window with a scarf to a mysterious prince that he may enter her castle. When he arrives she refuses his advances, but as her followers engage in frenzied dancing, the queen's passions are aroused and she leaves the room with the prince. When they reappear the prince is staggering and the queen is grim. The queen stabs the prince while kissing him and he falls through a secret panel into the river below. The scene then becomes as before: the queen signals through a window with a scarf ...

Designer

Orientalism, that is, an interest in the exotic cultures of the East, was popular in nineteenth-century art and literature. However, it was not until audiences saw *Schéhérazade* and *Thamar* in the early twentieth century that this style influenced fashion and interior design.

Scenarios, combining themes of forbidden sex, high drama and violent death with locations drawn from Persia, India, Central Asia and Egypt, gave the designers many opportunities to create imaginative and exotic sets and costumes. In 1912 Léon Bakst and Michel Fokine worked together on this erotic melodrama, set in the central Asian country of Georgia. They based their designs and choreography on the costumes and dances of this far off place.

This costume

Costume for Queen Thamar

Queen Thamar's costume consists of a dress, vest, overskirt, veil and crown, in lilac taffeta, white and blue silk, silver lamé and silk. It is embellished with white cotton, lilac acetate, silver metallic braid and medallions, blue and silver paint, imitation turquoise and pearls and blue glass jewels.

Notice how Bakst designs costumes with decorative elements around the edges of the fabric, where the maximum movement takes place. Parallel lines of silver metallic braid follow the curve of the overskirt and dark stripes and geometric shapes emphasise the hem. The veil of cream silk is decorated with a stencilled overall pattern of geometric shapes in shiny silver paint. These reflective surfaces would have sparkled under the stage lights, increasing the sense of luxury and icy danger associated with the queen.

Questions

1. What happens to the prince?
2. What does 'orientalism' mean?
3. Why was the veil designed in this way?

Topics for essays, discussions, activities

1. Design a costume that is distinctively and recognisably Russian in character.
2. Why were melodramas so popular in early film making?
3. Make a short melodramatic video with no dialogue.
4. This ballet was first performed on 20 May 1912. Find out about the Russian Revolution of that year.
5. How does Léon Bakst emphasise movement in his costumes?



Petrouchka

Scenery and costumes: Alexandre Benois

Music: Igor Stravinsky

Choreography: Michel Fokine

Story: Igor Stravinsky and Alexandre Benois

Principal dancers: Vaslav Nijinsky, Tamara Karsavina, Alexander Orlov, Enrico Cecchetti

First performance: Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, 13 June 1911

Story

This is a sad story, set in a mid-winter fair in Admiralty Square, St Petersburg in 1830. Petrouchka is one of three puppets owned by a mean showman, the others being a Moor and a Ballerina. Petrouchka falls in love with the Ballerina, but she rejects his advances. When he finds her alone with the Moor, the latter kills Petrouchka with a scimitar. In the last scene Petrouchka's ghost appears and scares the showman.

This ballet was possibly the most famous produced by Diaghilev. It has been revived more than 80 times and is still in the repertoire of many ballet companies. One of the reasons for the spectacular success of *Petrouchka* was the performance of Vaslav Nijinsky as the puppet. It was not an easy role to dance. As Alexandre Benois described: 'The great difficulty of Petrouchka's part is to express his pitiful oppression and his hopeless efforts to achieve personal dignity without ceasing to be a puppet.' Although this role did not offer Nijinsky many opportunities to display his technical virtuosity, it did enable him to interpret, with jerky and awkward movements, the puppet's complex imprisoned emotions.

Designer

Russian-born Alexandre Benois was especially fond of *Petrouchka*, associating it with his childhood when fairs and Punch and Judy type puppet shows were part of St Petersburg life. His designs captured the simple charm of these memories and were complemented by the abrupt patterns of Fokine's choreography, which in turn followed the discordant combinations of Stravinsky's music. Design, dance and music were perfectly integrated.

This costume

Costume for Petrouchka

The costume consists of a tunic, trousers and boots. The long-sleeved white cotton tunic has a deep Pierrot collar edged with red silk satin ribbon. The bottom of the tunic is finished with vandyke edging trimmed with stripes of red and blue satin ribbon. The sleeves have cuffs of pink satin outlined with black lace. The three-quarter-length trousers are chequered with pink and yellow squares on a base of linen. Under the patches are pieces of fabric, in slightly paler colours, from an earlier version of the costume. The trousers have a vandyke edge, which is trimmed in blue satin ribbon to match the border on the tunic. The boots of soft blue leather reach to above the ankle. The costume was originally completed by a tasselled hat, striped belt and black mittens.

Benois produced designs for more than 10 different productions of *Petrouchka*. It is therefore difficult to date any costume precisely.

Questions

1. When and where was the ballet set?
2. Who danced the role of Petrouchka?
3. Why is it difficult to date the Petrouchka costume?

Topics for essays, discussions, activities

1. Write and illustrate the story of Petrouchka for children.
2. Design and make a puppet stage and two glove puppets.
3. Research modern puppeteers such as Phillippe Genty. How do puppeteers choreograph movements?
4. Create a logo for a modern Punch and Judy show.



The Sleeping Princess

Scenery and costumes: Léon Bakst

Music: Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky with additions by Igor Stravinsky

Choreography: Marius Petipa with Bronislava Nijinska

Story: Marius Petipa and I. Vsevolozhsky

Principal dancers: Olga Spessivtseva, Lydia Lopokova, Carlotta Brianza, Lubov Tchernicheva, Bronislava Nijinska, Pierre Vladimirov, Anatole Vilzak, Stanislas Idzikovsky, Leon Woizikovsky, Léonard Treer, Vera Sudeikina, Jean Jazvinsky

First performance: Alhambra Theatre, London, 2 November 1921

Story

The ballet tells the classic story of Sleeping Beauty. The first scene is the christening of Princess Aurora. The wicked fairy Carabosse, arrives and places a curse on the baby: one day the princess will prick her finger and die. The Lilac Fairy reassures the king and queen that their daughter will not die but only fall into a sleep, from which she can be awakened by a prince's kiss. The second scene is sixteen years later. Princess Aurora dances with four princes, Spanish, English, Italian and Indian. An old woman hands her a spindle on which she pricks her finger, then falls down as if dead. The third scene is a hundred years later, when Prince Charming is guided by the Lilac Fairy to the Sleeping Princess. The final scene is in the palace, where Prince Charming wakes the Sleeping Princess with a kiss. The Bluebird is among the many fairytale characters who attend the marriage celebrations.

Designer

After the success of *Schéhérazade*, Leon Bakst went on to design most of Diaghilev's pre-war ballets. During the war years, Diaghilev selected designers, such as André Derain and Natalia Goncharova, who were associated with modern art movements. In 1921, however, Diaghilev again turned to Bakst, commissioning him to design *The Sleeping Princess*. Diaghilev wanted to recreate this classical ballet in the most glamorous and spectacular way, hoping to save his financially ailing company. In fact, the opposite happened; the production almost bankrupted the company. By the end of the 105 performances the production closed leaving Diaghilev with a £11,000 debt. The costumes and backdrops were seized in lieu of payment and stored under the stage of the Coliseum Theatre.

One of the reasons for this financial disaster was Diaghilev's and Bakst's desire to create an effect that transported the audience into a fairyland. Bakst designed six scenes and about 300 costumes in less than six weeks. The costumes were exquisitely crafted, costing twice the original budget.

This costume

Costume for the Bluebird

The Bluebird costume may have been worn by the dancer Stanislas Idzikovsky, who danced the Bluebird role in the original production and again in 1922. The costume consists of a doublet and cap. The doublet of royal and pale blue satin was worn with matching tights. The garment is intricately detailed with imitation pearls, jewels and appliqué. The sleeves are puffed to the elbows and emblazoned with painted gold crescents outlined in braid. The matching royal blue cap is studded with imitation pearls and has a striking jewelled centrepiece.

Questions

1. Where did the four princes come from in the second scene?
2. When was this ballet designed and by whom?
3. Why did this production nearly bankrupt the company?

Topics for essays, discussions, activities

1. Discover what 'The Bluebird of Happiness' meant in more recent times.
2. Write a story for children, using modern characters, based on the story of Sleeping Beauty.
3. Design and make some fairy costumes based on Australian plants.
4. Write a short play focusing on the character of the wicked fairy.



The Firebird (L'Oiseau de feu)

Scenery and costumes: Aleksandr Golovin and Léon Bakst

Music: Igor Stravinsky

Choreography: Michel Fokine

Story: Michel Fokine

Principal dancers: Tamara Karsavina, Vera Fokina, Michel Fokine, Alexis Bulgakov

First performance: Théâtre National de l'Opéra, Paris, 25 June 1910

Story

The ballet is set in Russia. The young Prince Ivan shoots an arrow at a magical Firebird in the forest. He misses, but catches the bird in his arms. In return for her release, the bird gives Ivan a golden feather, with which he can call her in times of danger. Ivan needs the bird's help when he is captured and imprisoned in a castle by wicked Koshchei, who is also holding a beautiful girl with whom Ivan is in love. The Firebird helps Ivan kill Koshchei, breaking a spell on the girl, who turns out to be the Princess Tsarevna. Ivan and Tsarevna are then married with great celebration.

The Firebird was one of the most regularly performed ballets in the repertoire of the Russian Ballet. It was praised for its marvellous synthesis of music, choreography and scenery. As the French critic Henri Gheon wrote: '... and as one listens, there issues forth the very sound of the wizard shrieking, of swarming sorcerers and gnomes running amok. When the bird passes, it is truly the music that bears it aloft. Stravinsky, Fokine, Golovin, in my eyes, are but one name.' The ballet was set in the overgrown garden at the base of Koshchei's castle. Golovin used soft colours and intricate patterns to create a magical and sinister atmosphere.

Designer

Aleksandr Golovin studied at the Moscow Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture and was actively involved in the revival of interest in Russian folk art at the end of the nineteenth century. From 1901 he became resident designer at the Imperial Theatres, St Petersburg, where he designed many productions. Six of Golovin's theatre designs were shown at the exhibition organised by Diaghilev at the Paris Salon d'Automne in 1906.

This costume

Costume for an attendant of the Immortal Koshchei

The two tiered tunic with full sleeves is similar to the traditional festival costumes worn by Russian women. By adding a high neckline and a wide belt Golovin creates a masculine look. The white cotton tunic is patterned with vertical bands of curved lines, spots and lozenges, painted in pale blue and gold. Painting and stencilling are a cheaper and quicker way of applying pattern than embroidery and appliqué and are just as effective from a distance. The hem of the skirt is threaded with an iron hoop, creating a defined shape, that would have billowed and swayed over the underskirt.

Questions

1. Who is the girl the prince is in love with?
2. What year was the exhibition organised by Diaghilev?
3. What is in the hem of the costume?

Topics for essays, discussions, activities

1. Write a modern version of the age-old battle between good and evil magic.
2. Design a costume for a royal attendant in a twenty-first century court.
3. By using paint and stencils, decorate calico, which could be used in your own royal attendant's costume.
4. Compose some music that describes a wizard shrieking.
5. Paint or draw an image of the magical Firebird.



The Golden Cockerel (Le Coq d'or)

Scenery and costumes: Natalia Goncharova

Music: Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Choreography: Michel Fokine

Story: Vladimir Belsky, revised by Alexandre Benois

Principal dancers: Tamara Karsavina, Alexis Bulgakov, Enrico Cecchetti

First performance: Théâtre National de l'Opéra, Paris, 24 May 1914

Story

An astrologer gives the aged King Dodon a golden cockerel that will warn him of danger. In return the king promises to give the astrologer anything he wishes. On the cockerel's advice, the king sends troops to fight invaders. When he inspects the battlefield the king sees a vision of the beautiful Queen of Shemakh, who agrees to marry him. Back at court the astrologer demands the queen as his reward. The king refuses and kills the astrologer. The cockerel avenges his master by striking the king dead. After the curtain falls the astrologer appears to explain that the queen and he were the only real people, the rest was a dream.

The Golden Cockerel was an outstanding success. The audience was surprised and delighted by the bright colours of the fairytale Russian folk art set. The show was presented as an opera-ballet, with the dancers miming the action described by the singers who sat on either side of the stage, dressed in dark red caftans. The success of *The Golden Cockerel* signalled the end of the history-oriented ballets designed by Benois and Bakst, that had dominated the Russian Ballet before the First World War.

Designer

Natalia Goncharova and her partner Michel Larionov were notorious leaders of the Moscow avant-garde and were known for their outrageous public performances rather than for their theatre design. Surprisingly, the most conservative of Diaghilev's designers, Alexandre Benois, recommended Natalia Goncharova for the job of designing this ballet. He had noticed her interest in Russian peasant art evident in her 'neo-primitivist' paintings.

In 1937, the Russian Ballet of Col. W. de Basil staged a revival of this ballet, for which Goncharova redesigned the set and costumes.

This design

Set design for Act III

Goncharova's set presents a fairytale extravaganza of Russian folk art, festooned with bold floral patterns, with odd perspectives and strange size relationships, painted in irrepressibly bright colours. In 1914 it was as if the world of Russian peasant decoration had suddenly come to life. The ballet historian Cyril W. Beaumont stated, '*The Golden Cockerel* inaugurated a new phase of stage decoration.' Goncharova's interest in popular imagery was not prompted by nostalgia or historical authenticity. Rather, she wanted to recapture the simplicity and spontaneity of Russian folk art.

Questions

1. Who agrees to marry King Dodon?
2. What sort of art was Natalia Goncharova interested in?
3. Who was Natalia Goncharova's partner?

Topics for essays, discussions, activities

1. Compile a short biography of Natalia Goncharova.
2. Draw or paint the most splendid Golden Cockerel you can imagine.
3. Create the choreography for a dance, focusing on the movements of the cockerel.
4. Research some of the artists of the Russian avant-garde of 1914. Why were they considered outrageous?
5. Design a poster for this ballet.



Sadko 1916 production
Scenery and costumes: Natalia Goncharova
Music: Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov
Choreography: Adolph Bolm
Story: Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Vladimir Belsky
Principal dancers: Adolph Bolm, Miss Doris, Jean Jazwinsky
First performed: Manhattan Opera House New York 9 October 1916.

Story

Sadko is a poor minstrel from Novgorod in Russia. His friends ignore his songs, so he sings them alone beside Lake Ilmen. Princess Volkova, youngest daughter of the King of the Sea, is captivated by his singing and they fall in love. Later, while becalmed on board a ship, Sadko offers himself as a sacrifice to the King of the Sea to bring the winds. He descends into the watery depths and charms the king with his songs. Sadko is offered the hand of Volkova and during the courtship ceremony marine monsters dance and sing. A commentator stated 'Great fish of bright colours hung above the heads of the dancers, who were dressed as goldfish, sea horses and flowers swaying back and forth in the watery currents of the submarine foliage.'

Originally performed in Paris in June 1911, this ballet was restaged in New York in 1916. With its fantastic plot and exotic music by Rimsky-Korsakov, Sadko was as popular as *Schéhérazade*, *Thamar* and *The Blue God*.

Designer

Russian avant-garde artist Natalia Goncharova was first commissioned by Diaghilev to design costumes for the Russian Ballet in 1914. The amazing success of her first commission, *The Golden Cockerel*, led to a long association between Goncharova and the Russian Ballet. She undertook numerous commissions during the years of the First World War, among which was *Sadko* in 1916.

This costume

Costume for a seahorse

This costume consists of four parts. There is a wired and padded headdress. It has a scarlet tipped horn, and is appliquéd with gold lame star-shaped eyes. The blouse is covered with flame-like yellow and scarlet tiers. Over this is worn a wired shell made from stylised zigzag bands of yellow, brown and cream satin. A central spine with fins ends in a curled tail. A pair of full-length tiered scarlet and yellow trousers completes the costume.

Questions

1. What was the name of the princess who fell in love with Sadko?
2. When did Goncharova design Sadko?
3. How many parts are there in the costume?

Topics for essays, discussions, activities

1. Write and illustrate a fairytale set underwater.
2. Draw or design a fantastic monster from the deep, using marine patterns and colours.
3. Create a dance sequence that suggests an underwater environment.
4. Using a disposable underwater camera create some images of sea monsters.
5. Make a mask based on a seahorse image.
6. Design an advertising poster for this ballet.



The Buffoon (Chout)

Scenery and costumes: Michel Larionov

Music: Serge Prokofiev

Choreography: Michel Larionov and Thadée Slavinsky

Story: Serge Diaghilev

Principal dancers: Thadée Slavinsky, Lydia Sokolova, Jean Jazvinsky, Catherine Devillier

First performance: Théâtre de la Gaîté-Lyrique, Paris, 17 May 1921

Story

A young village practical joker pretends to kill his wife and then restore her to life with a magic whip. He sells the whip to seven old duffers, who kill their wives but then failed to bring them back to life. To escape the anger of the old duffers, the young buffoon disguises himself as a cook. A rich merchant, invited to choose one of the seven daughters of the old duffers as his wife, chooses the cook instead. The cook runs away, leaving a goat in 'her' place. The story becomes very complicated, full of misunderstandings resulting from practical jokes and disguises.

Diaghilev encouraged his designers to create sets and costumes that presented a moving, sculptural unity. This approach was still experimental when *The Buffoon* was produced and it was not well received by the audience. In fact, ballet historian Cyril W. Beaumont said 'the colour contrasts, accentuated by the angular shapes composing the design, were so vivid and so dazzling that it was almost painful to look at the stage, and the position was not improved when brilliantly clad figures were set in movement against such a background.'

Designer

Michel Larionov and Natalia Goncharova met in Moscow, when they were both art students. They were closely associated with the historic *Golden Fleece* exhibitions held in Moscow from 1908 to 1910, which brought to Russia the latest art from Paris. They were also associated with groups inspired not by Western art movements, but by indigenous folk art of Russia, with its roots in the East. After the spectacular success of *The Golden Cockerel* in 1914, Michel Larionov and Natalia Goncharova were invited by Diaghilev to leave Russia to join him in Geneva, where they were given a villa in which to design ballet sets and costumes. It was during this year that Larionov began working on *The Buffoon*. However this ballet was not produced until 1921, possibly for financial reasons. Diaghilev may have also doubted the audience's readiness for Larionov's unorthodox ideas.

With influences from Cubism and Futurism, the costumes designed by Larionov were heavy and almost impossible to dance in. Boris Kochno, Diaghilev's secretary recalled, 'Before the dress rehearsal of *The Buffoon* in Paris, Diaghilev had to threaten the dancers with fines to persuade them to appear on stage in costumes that were so heavy and cumbersome that they interfered with the movement of the dance.'

This costume

Costume for a Buffoon's wife

This costume comprises a collar, blouse, trousers, and a stylised apron fixed to a cane frame that wraps around the body diagonally from shoulder to hip. The blouse is orange cotton sateen, with hot-pink appliquéd shapes that are now somewhat faded. The irregular collar of white cotton flannelette is appliquéd with a brown zigzag pattern. The design on the white flannel trousers varies from one leg to the other — one side is decorated with a hot-pink floral design, while on the other are abstract geometric shapes in lilac, blue and black cotton sateen.

Questions

1. What was the name of the ballet historian who discussed the colour contrasts?
2. What was the name of the series of exhibitions in which Goncharova and Larionov were involved?
3. What were the art movements that inspired these costumes?

Topics for essays, discussions, activities

1. If you were to design a ballet influenced by contemporary art movements, what would it look like?
2. Draw a comic strip that tells the ridiculous story of *The Buffoon*.
3. What influences can you detect from Cubism or Futurism in this costume?
4. Compose some music to suit the character of a buffoon.



The Song of the Nightingale (Le Chant du rossignol)

Scenery and costumes: Henri Matisse

Music: Igor Stravinsky

Choreography: Léonide Massine

Story: Igor Stravinsky and Léonide Massine

Principal dancers: Tamara Karsavina, Lydia Sokolova, Serge Grigoriev, Stanislas Idzikovsky

First performance: Théâtre National de l'Opéra, Paris, 2 February 1920

Story

The Emperor of Japan presents a mechanical songbird to the Emperor of China, who is so pleased by the gift that he sends his real nightingale away. A short time later, the Emperor of China falls ill and it seems that nothing can cure him. Death comes to claim him, but at the last moment the real nightingale flies in. Its beautiful song saves the Emperor's life.

Designer

Henri Matisse was 50 years old, a respected artist in the middle of his career, by the time Diaghilev approached him to design this ballet. Matisse had spent his winters in the Mediterranean city of Nice since 1917 and the bleached colours of this sun-drenched environment affected his art. The audience associated the Russian Ballet with lavish spectacle, instead they saw elegant simplicity and monochromatic colour. As Matisse said in 1919, while working on the design, 'I'm planning to have a curtain as white as porcelain, for it's to be a Chinese curtain, after all.'

To work out his overall design, Matisse constructed a small stage out of a wooden crate. 'All my decor, my accessories and my characters were represented by little pieces of coloured paper which I moved around inside.'

The costumes were made by the Paris firm of Marie Muelle, closely supervised by Matisse, who appeared to thoroughly enjoy the process. He realised that embroidering patterns was expensive and time consuming and often used paint or appliqué to create dramatic, sculptural effects.

This costume

Costume for a mourner

This Chinese-style robe of white felt is appliquéd with triangles and bands of dark blue velvet. The hood, with long trailing back panel, has attached ears and horns handpainted with stripes. The costume represents an animal, probably a deer, which symbolised longevity in Chinese mythology. The pattern on the robe is similar to the markings of a Chinese deer, which has a spotted body and short horizontal stripes running along its backbone. Depictions of the deer are common in Chinese art, and Matisse might have seen examples at the Musée Guimet, Paris, which he visited while preparing his designs.

Questions

1. How old was Matisse when he designed this ballet?
2. What technique did he use when he was designing?
3. What is the significance of the animal associated with this costume?

Topics for essays, discussions, activities

1. Explore the mythology of the nightingale throughout history.
2. Design a costume for a mourner.
3. Find some more stories about nightingales.
4. Who was the Emperor of Japan in 1920? Find out about his coronation.
5. Why was there an interest in Chinese and Japanese motifs in 1920? How was this reflected in Western European fashion?
6. Create some collages using cut paper shapes in a limited colour range.
7. Find other works by Henri Matisse.



The Ball (Le Bal)

Scenery and costumes: Giorgio de Chirico

Music: Vittorio Rieti

Choreography: George Balanchine

Story: Boris Kochno

Principal dancers: Alexandra Danilova, Anton Dolin, André Bobrow, Serge Lifar, Eugenia Lipovska, Felia Dubrovskaya, Leon Woizikovsky, George Balanchine

First performance: Théâtre de Monte Carlo, Monte Carlo, 7 May 1929

Story

A young officer attending a masked ball is attracted to a lady who is escorted by an old astrologer. The young man persuades her to remove her mask but is shocked when she reveals a wrinkled old face behind it. The woman now pursues the young man. As the ball ends and the young man is about to leave, the woman takes off her mask again, showing the wrinkled old face. She then removes a second mask to reveal the face of a beautiful young woman. At the same time the old astrologer is changed into a handsome youth. Overcome with confusion, the young man faints.

The designer

Giorgio de Chirico was born in Greece of Italian parents and trained in Athens and Munich before arriving in Paris in 1911. He became known for his dream-like paintings of stark and deserted piazzas with odd architectural perspectives painted in lurid and seedy colours. *The Ball*, while being the last ballet commissioned by Diaghilev, was the first public success for de Chirico, who went on to design the decors for 23 theatrical productions.

This costume

Costume for a male guest

This costume comprises a frock-coat, trousers and 'dicky' (false shirt-front), decorated with appliquéd and painted motifs representing both artificial structures and the natural elements of water and air. The frock-coat of terracotta-coloured wool is decorated with Doric columns. The back of the jacket is grey; a floating cloud above a pediment fragment, two Doric columns and a pattern of bricks create the effect of a classical monument set against the sky. A light green waistcoat is sewn within the jacket. The cream trousers contribute to the overall effect, with their painted black wavy lines suggesting water. The dicky, appliquéd with the volute of an Ionic column, is worn with the frock-coat in place of a tie.

Transformed by their costumes, most of the guests resembled moving fragments of architecture; some of the men wore top hats fluted with painted pilasters, epaulets shaped like Ionic capitals and the women wore stockings decorated with the pattern of brickwork.

Questions

1. Where was Giorgio de Chirico born?
2. What was de Chirico famous for?
3. What sort of columns decorate the frock-coat?

Topics for essays, discussions, activities

1. Write a story about masks and deception set in modern times.
2. Make a pair of masks that are as opposite to each other as possible.
3. How do you dance like an architectural form? Become a moving monument.
4. Prepare a press release which dramatises an aspect of this ballet.
5. Find a painting of a piazza by Giorgio de Chirico. Describe the mood of this painting.

The Russian Ballet

Glossary of terms

Acetate	A silky fabric made from artificial fibres of pure cellulose
Appliqué	Technique whereby pieces of fabric are sewn onto a background to create a pattern
Arabesque	Ornament in which flowers, fruits, vases and figures are represented in a fanciful pattern
Artificial silk	Fabric with a silky feel
Barathea	Fine cloth made from wool, sometimes combined with silk or cotton
Bodice	Upper part of a dress, from shoulder to waist
Buckram	Coarse linen or cloth stiffened with gum or paste
Buffoon	A person who mocks, plays the fool
Choreography	Arranging or designing of ballet or dance steps and movements
Cockerel	Male chicken
Cubism	Style of art based on geometric forms in a shallow space
Cummerbund	Wide belt made from fabric, often worn by men
Deities	Gods
Dicky	False shirt front
Doublet	Man's close fitting body garment
Duffers	Silly people
Ebullience	Exuberance, excitement
Epaulets	Ornamental shoulder piece for a uniform
Eunuch	Castrated man
Felt	Cloth made by rolling, pressing and shrinking wool
Fluted	Vertical grooves in a column
Frock-coat	Man's long skirted coat, not cut away in front
Futurism	Style of art expressing movement and growth using fractured shapes
Harem	Part of an oriental palace reserved for women
Ionic	Greek architectural column decoration
Melodrama	Sensational dramatic production
Monochromatic	Representation in one colour
Moor	A Muslim person of mixed Berber and Arab descent
Neo-primitivist	Deliberately simplified style, based on Russian peasant art
Orientalism	Ornate style associated with countries East of the Mediterranean
Pantaloon	Trousers
Persia	Country now known as Iran
Piazza	Public square especially in Italian cities
Pierrot	French pantomime character
Pilaster	Rectangular column
Porcelain	Type of earthenware with translucent quality
Prussian blue	Deep blue pigment
Punch and Judy	Puppets associated with outdoor theatres for children
Sateen	Type of shiny, slippery cloth
Scimitar	Oriental curved sword
Statuesque	With the dimensions and stillness of a statue
Symbolist	Style of art which uses symbols and poetic suggestion to express feelings
Vandyke	Border of garment with a series of points around the collar
Volute	Spiral scroll; Greek architectural ornament