**Lopukhov, Fedor Vasilievich (b. 8 [20] October 1886, St. Petersburg, Russia; d. 28 January 1973, Leningrad, USSR)**

**Summary**

The most prolific choreographer of the early Soviet period, Fedor Lopukhov was associated with two seemingly contradictory developments in the development of Soviet ballet in the 1920s: his interest in experimental dance, especially his theories of the relationship between movement and music, and his work to restore the ballets of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, notably those of the choreographer Marius Petipa, whose legacy had suffered in the chaotic years following the 1917 Revolution. Lopukhov had some connection to virtually every innovation in early Soviet ballet practice. From his attempt to stage a non-narrative ballet to Beethoven’s *Fourth Symphony* in 1923 (*Dance Symphony: The Magnificence of the Universe*) to choreography that celebrated the October Revolution with avant-garde scenography (*Red Whirlwind,* 1924), and finally, the scandals surrounding his collaborations with composer Dmitry Shostakovich (*Bolt,* 1931; *The Bright Stream,* 1935), he remained a tireless innovator and theoretician of the new Soviet dance.

**Training and Early Career**

A 1905 graduate of the St. Petersburg Theatre School (now the Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet), Lopukhov began his career as a dancer in the Maryinsky Ballet, appearing in some leading roles and in character dances. He was transferred to Moscow’s Bolshoi Theatre for a brief period brief period in 1909 and toured with Anna Pavlova’s company in North America during the 1910-11 season. Upon his return to St. Petersburg, Lopukhov embarked on a fairly typical career for a budding choreographer: he began to compose concert numbers for himself and his sister Evgenia. Summer appearances in suburban theatres necessitated abridged stagings of repertory works, and Lopukhov’s talent for creating new works and adapting older ones established him as a promising young balletmaster. His work as a rehearsal director in the former Maryinsky Theatre attracted the administration’s attention, and in 1922, Lopukhov was named that theatre’s artistic director.

**Contribution to the Field and to Modernism**

At the time of his appointment, Lopukhov was at work on two intimately related projects: the writing of *Paths of a Ballet Master*, published in Berlin in 1925, and the creation of a ballet that would embody many of the theoretical principles the choreographer was then formulating.

Lopukhov believed that a choreographer should work from a full musical score, rather than a redaction for piano or violin, in order to devise movement which could respond more adequately to musical qualities such as timbre and texture. His writings describe an idealised marriage of dance and music and often include complicated recommendations for achieving the desired integration of the two media. Many of these strike the modern reader as over-literal, but nonetheless reveal the choreographer’s deep interest in utilising the ballet’s nineteenth-century legacy as it developed into a twentieth-century art form. Lopukhov’s writings from the 1920s presage the modernist interest in non-narrative dance that would largely dominate ballet choreography in Western Europe and North America in subsequent decades. Shown only twice, the choreographer’s *Dance Symphony: The Magnificence of the Universe* (set to Beethoven’s *Fourth Symphony*) was deemed a failure in 1923. Its portentous, allegorical references did not make a compelling case for the so-called ‘symphonisation’ of dance Lopukhov then championed.

His subsequent attempts to modernise the ballet addressed more pressing, post-Revolutionary problems, such as the need for ballets on Revolutionary themes, as they also made full use of many of the latest developments in the Soviet musical and dramatic theatres, especially the dynamic, multi-planar stage sets of the Russian constructivists. An advocate of contemporary music, Lopukhov set many of his ballets in the 1920s to scores by prominent modernist composers, notably Igor Stravinsky.

Even though Lopukhov’s 1929 *Nutcracker* included hallmarks of the Russian avant-garde theatre of the 1920s (spoken texts and ‘eccentric’ dances, including acrobatics), the choreographer played an important role in maintaining the Russian ballet repertoire and technique of the late nineteenth century at a time when the importance of the ‘old’ ballet was questioned. Upon assuming the directorship of the former Maryinsky Ballet, Lopukhov pledged to rid the older ballets he revived of ‘distortions’, yet his versions featured their own amendments to the original choreographic texts, setting a precedent in the Soviet ballet for editing classic works to achieve greater narrative clarity and all too often, jettisoning aspects of the works considered old-fashioned. Even as Lopukhov demonstrated a continued interest in refurbishing classic works, he was anxious to introduce new ballets from the Diaghilev ballet into the Soviet repertoire. His versions of ballets originally choreographed by Michel Fokine or with music by Igor Stravinsky – such as *Firebird* (1910) and *Pulcinella* (1920) – typically departed from their original choreographic texts, reflecting Lopukhov’s own understanding of how best to set movement to music.

The tireless quest for dance innovation which marked Lopukhov’s creative output of the 1920s largely ended with the 1929 *Nutcracker,* which was widely criticized and deemed more interesting in theory than in practice. Lopukhov’s leadership of the Petrograd/Leningrad ballet had been controversial from the start: the choreographer’s interest in new, non-balletic movement (‘eccentric’ in Soviet parlance), was met with hostility from the theatre’s more conservative wing of dancers and pedagogues, including Agrippina Vaganova, whose name still graces the St. Petersburg ballet school. Vaganova would go on to stage her own versions of the classics following Lopukhov’s removal to the Leningrad Maly Theatre in 1931. The conflict over proper stagings of the old ballets would continue well beyond their respective tenures.

Lopukhov’s interest in the music of contemporary composers reached its apogee in his collaborations with Dmitry Shostakovich. Unfortunately, these occurred at a time when the modernist experiments of the 1920s began to be characterized as bourgeois formalism. *Bolt* (1931), the first Soviet ‘industrial’ ballet celebrated the machine and mechanized movement, but succeeded in offending ballet conservatives, party ideologues and proletarian theatre critics alike. *The Bright Stream* (1935) marked the end of both Lopukhov’s and Shostakovich’s involvement with ballet modernism. A humorous meditation on life on a collective farm, the ballet aroused much the same indignation and censure from *Pravda* that the composer’s opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* provoked the year before.

Lopukhov would return to the former Maryinsky/Kirov Ballet for the 1944-45 season and then again from 1951-6, after an appointments at the Leningrad Maly Theatre from 1931-5 and at the Leningrad Choreographic Institute (now, the Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet) from 1936-40. In 1962, he began teaching choreography classes at the Leningrad Conservatory.

In later life, Lopukhov returned to the writing that marked him as a pioneering theoretician of dance early in his career. Yet the choreographic innovations he strove to implement in the 1920s were no longer possible, even with the choreographic laboratories of the Leningrad theatres once again at his disposal. Stalin’s death in 1953 marked a new openness in the Soviet arts, yet a younger generation of choreographers would bypass Lopukhov, even as they embraced some of his formerly radical innovations. The ‘symphonization’ of Soviet dance was underway, three decades after Lopukhov’s own *Dance Symphony* was roundly considered a failure. In his own last decades Lopukhov worked primarily as a choreographer of traditional, narrative ballets and a restager of those by Petipa. He was named a People’s Artist in 1956, the same year that Stalin and the excesses of his regime were formally denounced.

**Legacy**

Despite being sidelined at what might have been the height of his choreographic career, Lopukhov’s influence on ballet in both the Soviet Union and around the world may be seen in the work of any number of the twentieth century’s leading choreographers. George Balanchine, who danced in Lopukhov’s *Dance Symphony,* would establish non-narrative dance, intimately linked to the musical score, as the twentieth century’s predominant mode of ballet composition. Yuri Grigorovich, the author of the Moscow Bolshoi Ballet’s ‘heroic’ style of the 1960s and 1970s, was also a student of Lopukhov and developed a dance style in Moscow that pushed at the boundaries of Stalin-era taste and propriety. If little of Lopukhov’s own choreography has survived, his legacy may be seen in the works of Balanchine, Grigorovich and others who developed competing models of dance modernism in the twentieth century, and who nonetheless owe a debt to Lopukhov’s multi-faceted view of ballet: its structure, its history and how it might develop as a vital theatrical form in the twentieth century. In recent years, several of Lopukhov’s ‘lost’ ballets have been re-choreographed by Alexei Ratmansky. The success of Ratmansky’s reworkings of such ballets as *Bolt* (2007) and *Bright Stream* (2003) speaks to a renewed interest in the Soviet ballet of Lopukhov’s time and the choreographer’s tireless efforts to make ballet a vital art for the twentieth century.

**Selected List of Works**

*The Mexican Saloon* (1918)

*The Dream* (1918)

*Firebird* (1921)

*Dance Symphony: The Magnificence of the Universe* (1923)

*Night on Bald Mountain* (1924)

*The Red Whirlwind* (1924)

*Pulcinella* (1926)

*Le Renard* (*The Fox*, 1927)

*The Ice Maiden* (1927)

*The Serf Ballerina* (1927)

*The Red Poppy* (with Vladimir Ponomaryov and Leonid Leontiev) (1929)

*The Nutcracker* (1929)

*Bolt* (1931)

*Harlequinade* (1933)

*Coppélia* (1934)

*The Bright Stream* (1935)

*Christmas Eve* (with Vladimir Bourmeister) (1938)

*The Nightingale* (with Aleksei Yermolaev) (1939)

*Taras Bulba* (1940)

*Akbilyak* (1943)

*Spring Fairy Tale* (1947)

*Love Ballad* (1959)

*Pictures at an Exhibition* (1963)

**Restagings**

*The Sleeping Beauty* (1922)

*Harlequinade* (1922)

*The Little Humpbacked Horse* (1922)

*The Nutcracker* (with Aleksandr Shiryaev) (1923)

*Eros* (1923)

*Egyptian Nights* (with Aleksandr Chekrygin) (1923)

*Le Pavilon d’Armide* (with Aleksandr Chekrygin) (1923)

*Don Quixote* (1923)

*Swan Lake* (1945)

*Swan Lake* (with Konstantin Boyarsky) (1958)

*La Bayadère* (1962)

**Selected Writings**

Lopukhov, F. (2002) *Writings on Ballet and Music*, ed. Stephanie Jordan, trans. Dorinda Offord, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. (A very useful compilation and translation of Lopukhov’s most important writings on dance, including the early writings on the relation of dance to music)

Lopukhov, F. (1966) *Shestdesyat let v balete* [*Sixty Years in Ballet*], Moscow: Iskusstvo. (A reminiscence by the choreographer of his life and work in the Russian and Soviet ballets world)

Lopukhov, F. (1972) *Khorograficheskie otkrovennosti* [*Choreographic Revelations*], Moscow: Iskusstvo. (An in-depth study of several well-known choreographic passages and a mediation on the role and craft of the balletmaster/choreographer)

**References and Further Reading**

Devereux, T. (1998) ‘Legend of a Lost Choreographer’, *The Dancing Times,* January: 339-41, and February: 432-4. (A useful introduction to Lopukhov’s role in the development of early Soviet dance)

Dobrovolskaya, G. (1998) ‘Lopukhov, Fyodr’, *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, New York: Oxford University Press. (A useful overview of Lopukhov’s career written by his Russian-language biographer)

Dobrovolskaya, G. (1976) *Fedor Lopukhov.* Moscow/Leningrad: Iskusstvo. (In Russian, the only monograph devoted to the choreographer’s life and work)

Souritz, E. (1990) *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s*, trans. Lynn Visson, ed. Sally Banes, Durham, NC: Duke University Press. (Includes a chapter on Lopukhov’s work in the former Maryinsky Theatre in the 1920s)

**Moving Image Material**

*Bolt.* (2007) Bel Air Classiques. (Alexei Ratmansky’s 2005 version of the Shostakovich ballet, in a production by the Bolshoi Ballet)

*Bright Stream*. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJqw8UBZhqc>

(A pas de deux from Alexei Ratmansky’s 2003 version of the ballet.)

*Classic Kirov Performances.* (1992) Kultur International Films. (Includes footage from a film of *Taras Bulba,* c. 1940)

*The Ice Maiden pas de deux:* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6BJg2oPdzQ>

(A 1974 film of the pas de deux showing the daring, acrobatic lifts from Lopukhov’s 1927 ballet)

*The Revelations of Balletmaster Fedor Lopukhov:* [*http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIkFu7v85FY*](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIkFu7v85FY)(A one-hour documentary film in which Lopukhov reminiscences about the triumphs of Russian and Soviet ballet in the twentieth century.)

*A Tribute to Fedor Lopukhov.* (1986) Prod./dir. Nikita Dolgushin. (Performing Arts Research Collections/Dance, The New York Public Library videotape of performance celebrating the 100th anniversary of Lopukhov’s birth given in Leningrad in 1986. The recording includes a number of shorter works or fragments of larger ones unavailable elsewhere on video, including the reconstruction of *Dance Symphony*.)

**Paratextual Material**

Images of *Dance Symphony* from the souvenir program, 1923. Source: Lynn Garafola ([lg97@columbia.edu).](mailto:lg97@columbia.edu).) No copyright holders.

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