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## **RUDOLF NUREYEV AND HIS BALLET**

Rudolf Nureyev made a great contribution to the reappraisal of male ballet and, by working with contemporary choreographers, went far beyond the "classical / modern" divisions. His influence on ballet compares with the significance of that made on opera by Callas: the way characters in opera behaved and sang was never the same again. Since Nureyev, it has become essential for ballet dancers to put tremendous effort into their roles [4].

Rudolf Nureyev was born March 17, 1938, in Irkutsk, Russia. After graduating from the Leningrad Ballet School, he became a soloist with the Kirov Ballet. In 1961, he made his London debut at Margot Fonteyn's yearly gala for the Royal Academy of Dancing. He took his first stab at choreography in 1964. In the years before his death, he started conducting. He died January 6, 1993, in Paris [2], 20 years ago...

It was whilst he was appearing with the London Royal Ballet that R.Nureyev was able to meet choreographers such as Frederick Ashton, Kenneth MacMillan, Glen Tetley, and Roland Petit. He got to know their language, discovered also some of the youngest choreographers such as Rudi van Dantzig, and helped them to become better known.

R.Nureyev liked the choreographers very much. He always maintained that ballet could not progress without them. Nureyev gauged the importance of the explorations of the contemporary ballet well. Having himself trained in American "modern dance", from Martha Graham to José Limon – a ballet rooted in the ground as opposed to classical ballet which tries to distance itself from it – he started to include, in his own choreographies, and in his interpretations of the Marius Petipa "classics", certain elements copied from "modern" techniques" [4].

Going from one ballet to another, whether they are Marius Petipa adaptations or personal creations, we find several themes which Nureyev, choreographer, used time and again and which seem to emanate from his own biography : 1) *The revolt against tyrannical authority*. This is the Prince from *Lake Swan* who refuses the fate imposed on him by his mother and his tutor; this is the lovers, *Romeo and Juliet*

(tragedy) or Basilio and Kitri (comedy), who escape the will of their parents (reminiscent of Rudolf Nureyev in confrontation with his father who does not want him to become a dancer; Nureyev in dispute with the management of the Kirov ballet who had decided not to take him on tour to Paris, or Rudolf in hiding from the KGB when asking for political asylum at Bourget airport), 2) *The self-made individual*. This is *Cinderella* changing from her humble status to that of a star (the path taken by Rudolf), 3) *The dream as a transgression of reality*. The strange and sensual Abderam from *Raymonda* appears before the young girl in her dreams. The Saracen, who is in principle the "enemy", takes the place of Jean de Brienne, her mild-mannered fiancé, held distant captive. Initiatory dream and "catharsis" of the suppression of what is prohibited (temptation of forbidden fruit).

A theme we come across when going through other of Nureyev's productions adapted from Petipa, where he portrays the two possible sides of the same personality: the Good and the Bad. This duality haunts *Swan Lake* (the white Odette and the black Odile, as well as Rothbart, the devilish split personality of Wolfgang, the tutor) and *Sleeping Beauty* (the Lilac fairy and Carabosse being shown as two sisters in dispute over the destiny of the young Aurora).

The dream returns in *The Nutcracker* (under the control of the toy's double which comes to life and takes on the mannerisms of Drosselmeyer, the godfather who helps Clara to leave her childhood behind).

Dreams can be used to achieve a freedom which is not authorized in the real world: Solor, by smoking opium, is able to meet up with his "Bayadère", his Indian temple dancer, in another world, that of the Kingdom of the Shades; the Nutcracker Prince / Drosselmeyer frees Clara from her nightmares to take her to a wonderful world where she becomes his princess; Siegfried, suppressing his homosexuality, falls in love in his dreams with an unattainable woman/swan.

Dreams appear as a revenge against life, but sometimes fortune can give destiny a helping hand: a heaven-sent film producer takes Cinderella away from the ill-treatment of her step mother and half-sisters to make her screen debut; Prince Desire wrests Aurora from her sleep and Carabosse's longstanding superstitions with a kiss, marries her and takes her into a changed world [6].

R.Nureyev in his interpretation of the great ballets has revived the role of the male ballet. Of course, R.Nureyev helped himself first, and fashioned the variations to suit him. However, he did not stop at improving the male soloist roles; he also took

the male dancers from the corps de ballet into consideration, as is proved by *The Polonaise* in *Swan Lake* (danced by 16 male dancers), the fantastic waltz in *Raymonda*, or even the flights of groups of male dancers in the third act of *Cinderella*. He maintained the force and the technique of the male dancer, but improved their elegance beyond recognition [5].

There is no doubt that he was a virtuoso dancer, but, in addition to his outstanding technique acquired from relentless practice, he also knew how to act his dancing roles, giving his ballet a dramatic reality equal to that of the theatre or the cinema.

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