

DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF ALBANIAN CHARACTER DANCE



Creative and Performing Arts

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Abstract

The choreography and dancing progress in Albania are closely related to folk dance, as a very important part of Albanian folk culture. Folk dance diversity is reflected in stylistic richness, rhythmic, dynamic, structural and aesthetic creativity and original works. When the first ballet was created, great attention was given to the process of unification and harmonization of stylistic language to not only ethnic plastic dancing values, but to a substantial one as well, which brought innovation not only to the characters' language. They offered new aesthetics to Albanian dance, already the most studied, the most demanding and the most qualitative in aesthetic and artistic value. Capable and talented creators as Panajot Kanaçi and Agron Aliaj incorporated tastefully the Albanian traditional dance elements in expressive elements of national ballet, in language and style, in dancing and interpretation. Today, we conclude that it was a very important professional and artistic innovation, which opened a gateway to the next creators for an original and identification research despite of the strict censorship during the communist regime time in Albania (1945-1990).

Introduction

Ballets with national themes naturally should have an ethnic connotation, so the attention of the creators of romanticism period (in Russian ballets) extended in traditional culture. Dancers began to learn and know better the character of people's dances, known by the dancing terminology as the "dance character", where except movements and steps, were included even gesture, dynamics, temperament, pose, etc.

Albanian choreographic art developments are closely related to folk dance. 1956 is one of the most important years for Albanian art and culture, once established the first powerful basis of classic-professional ballet system. (1-Selimi S., 2006, p.110)

Folk dance diversity reflected in rhythmic, dynamic, structural and aesthetic richness of scenic work creativity. Albanian choreographic creativity has seen considerable success in the cultivation of various forms of elaborated traditional dance, in the implementation of the Albanian national ballets, as well as in the treatment of the other national dances in the miniature creations or ballets.

'Folk dance' - stated one the most notable choreographers of XX century Maurice Bejart - 'is the main food for various choreographers' researches, and their thoughts and views are found in the majority of contemporary creations in different countries with aesthetic preference distinct from one another'. (2-Janku A., Gazeta Shqiptare, 2015).

Discussion

In the first stage, the so-called choreographic picture, staged during the years 1957 to 1970, along with the folk dance, some elements of classical dance displayed, modelled on the Soviet school, where the first Albanian classical choreographers and dancers were educated. Choreographers of that time experimented by mixing two different aesthetic dances. When the first national ballets were created, a large professional attention was paid to this process, especially to the stylistic values of dance, and to the substantial one as well, which brought innovation not only to the characters' language, but they provided a new aesthetic of Albanian dance as well, already the most studied, the most demanding and with a high aesthetic value and artistic one. Capable and talented creators as Panajot Kanaçi and Agron Aliaj incorporated tastefully the Albanian traditional dance elements in expressive elements of national ballet, in language and style, in dancing and interpretation.

These achievements, definitely, have been a great, historical value to our cultivated chorographical heritage, a further step in a qualitative and conceptual change, which came lately in Albanian chorography by other young creators.

In the beginning, our ballet performances appeared only as a direct quotation of folk dance, with all the Albanian ethnographic wealth that this heritage has. Slightly above, it is mentioned that the dance material processed by choreographers was a product mainly based on main motives of folk dance. To bring a more pleasing aesthetic performance, later, they started to mix elements of theatricalism with a better construction of composition, and more flourishing, more developed and more conceptualized forms, of course, without escaping its origin, parallel and in harmony with national characteristic clothes design.

In their early stage, choreographers used dancing entertainment form, where it was often noticed the encounter of academic (classical) dance with folk dance. It was clearly seen and distinguished that this material was just entertaining, introduced mainly in the form of the suite and had no relation to the subject and the theme of the ballet itself. Later on, during the second stage of the historical development of Albanian scenic dance, began to appear another choreography which mechanically shuffles movements of classical aesthetics with ethnic motor elements. This stage, seen at a distance of time, seems as an intermediate one, where legs move in classical dance steps and hands move in traditional dance.

This phenomenon is also observed in variations of the main characters of the first Albanian national ballet "Halili and Hajria", whose choreographer is Panajot Kanaçi. There, the upper part of the body, especially the arms, is dominated by elements and details of Albanian folk dance, with or without the handkerchief, while legs movement is dominated by elements of classical dance.

This path or intermediate stage, served for another third stage, with a more organic composition through a deeper research into the folk dance, with a more required language, that organically melts into a new, technically and emotionally accomplished expression, where the intuition and imagination inbreathed the creative laboratory of choreographers mentioned above, so that it made that the stylistics of classic dance be shaped in substance with folk dance, in a quasi – natural fusion, from which the element of national dance is distinguished from an aesthetic dance, which in its entirety strives to preserve the intrinsic value of the best academic tradition.

This was one of the phenomenon that began with the first national ballet "Halili dhe Hajria" by Panajot Kanaçi, and went on until the last ballet during the socialist period 'The tenth wound of Gjergj Elez Alia' composed by Agron Aliaj. In the first ballet, the ballet master, Kanaçi uses somehow the word for word quotation of the northern dances, like the dance of the men in the first picture, while the "entertaining" parts play a crucial role in the ballets such as "Halili and Hajria" and "The mountain girl". But the pictures of these two ballets dramatically differ in their dramatic content in the dance, as a result of an achieved stylisation that has helped to better convey the story and dramatic developments of the libretto.

The composition of these pictures, images and relationships and the dialogue of characters with the group prove that every dance material is a function of all topics, indicative line, and drama of the work. For this aspect and the main expression elements in his first ballet, in an interview in 1983, Panajot Kanaçi himself stressed out that classical elements of choreography play a crucial role in this show without creating any sort of eclecticism or anachronisms, to that they are combined with new national elements, thus achieving organic fusion of choreographic material, which, in his view lead to the elimination of the risk of falling into folklore. **(3-Janku P., 2009, p.172)**

Choreographic language created by these authors is a result of the deep knowledge of the two traditions of classical and folklore dance, as well as artistic, stylistic and conceptual research. For example, Panajot Kanaçi did not hesitate to harmonize Tropoja folk motives with those of Devoll, Middle Albania ones with those of Dibra and so on and so forth. In special moments, he managed to paint and to harmonize these folk elements in a uniquely coloured national feature in spite of being distributed in different regions. By doing this, he succeeded in constructing leitmotif with a clear and powerful structure. "Drum dance" in the first picture, the first act of Halili and Hajria is fantasized as a youth dance based on more dynamic elements and dancers of Tropoja, whose expression reinforces generosity to the classical dance element. Their grace gives away a new charm to the dance in the ballet.

In the picture of Aga Bektash's house, it is clearly distinguished the traditional dance motive, the play between Sokol and Rusha. Based on the area of Tirana ethnographic dance, the choreographer uses movement with extended limbs, a romantic situation with a slight veil of the loving couple. The style of dance is harmonized fluently with a general dancing language giving the appearance of a new style, and with the clarity of the constituent classical and folk elements to it. During Halili, Sokol and Musta trio, master Kanaçi used dynamic steps with strong emphasis on Devoll dance that, perhaps coincidentally, resembles a classical dance step. Their dance expresses the protest against the presence of the Ottoman Pasha and soldiers in our lands. The process of connecting the traditional motor element with that of classical ballet is intended specifically by the creator firstly to give national overtones to expressive choreographic language, walking at the same time in parallel with the musical character of the masterpiece. These creations are known for solid composition, variety of means of expression, intonational, choreographic fragility, finesse, elegance, dynamic, imposing and monumental character, aesthetic dimensions and emotional load. **(4-Bogdani R., 1998, p. 170)**

Details of flying birds have been present in several shows of classical and romantic ballet throughout the world. But plastics and qualities of movements of arms which actually received "Albanian character" by Panajoti when selected properties of the eagle, the excitement that this bird disperses when flying as a heavenly beauty, proud and combative, reflected so much on the Northern Albanian folk dance. It must be considered as a rare figurative motor detection, which exceeds the level of a merely Albanian realization to unique values of world dance. Artistically, he matched Albanian moving arms, a beautiful aesthetic motor element, and the symbol of Albanian male beauty, with the traditional pace of Great Highland, an energetic step, disconnected from the ground in a *passé* character, and significantly perceived as identification of Albanian character while dancing.

This motif along with its derivatives is used not only to "Halili and Hajria" but to other creations in miniature (composition "Dance of Eagles", "In the nest of eagles") or even other works such as: (Ballet: Shotë and Azem Galica). This expressive motive is also used and preferred, perhaps by chance and independently by the contemporary choreographer Mats Eg in the dancing form of the Swans, a highly original and contemporary ballet "Swan Lake" by Tchaikovsky. In 1974, within the famous manifestation at that time, the May concerts, the ballet troupe of Opera and Ballet Theatre presented in two large classical parts: "Trio drum" and "Eagles", created respectively by Panajot Kanaçi and Agron Aliaj. These creations express new aesthetic attitude of authors, enriching the expressive language, somewhat hardy for that time.

Since the presentation of these creations is noticed, especially in the "Trio drum", that in the choreographic phrases the traditional element is present, but it doesn't dominate the overall plastics. It is, as it were, inside, in the depth of the cells, and does not appear gross; it does not affect the beauty of advanced classical dance. In all creation dominates the celebration as a symbiosis of folk pace with the classical, traditional dance, which has given a new and more dynamic, more emotional expression by the end of XX century.

As mentioned above, the transformation of the Albanian ballet expressive language, did not affect the basic principles of a traditional ballet performance. The structure suffers no major changes. Authors, despite expressive language transformation, did not avoid the classical forms of structure variation, monologue, duo, quartet and dance group.

In this analysis, they are somehow trying to rethink the choreographic development or innovation in the political context and social conditions of the time. In ballet "Shota and Azem Galica" Panajot Kanaçi could have run afoul with what he had done before the "Trio drum" if he had not insisted that the movement and dance were the only and main means of expression to convey the idea and the content of the booklet by D. Agolli, somewhat different in concept from other librettos and performances realized earlier. Master Kanaçi, focused on choreographic folklore of Kosovo, was inspired by the peculiarities of the traditional dance of this largest ethnic Albanian area (and not only), without falling prey to some unnecessary elements and details, which he avoided

when he was looking forward to bringing numerous treasures that distinguished this area (now an independent country) in endless dancing nuances.

The main characters in this show are ordinary people who become special in their works and dancing motives, after starting from the beginning to speak with expressive language until their awareness of heroic features are revealed from the inside depth. They were not treated as mythologized captains (outside reality) bloating with hypocritical steps and artificial attitudes. The choreographer left aside such a phenomenon, which was observed in any creation a few years ago. Shota and Azem are all the time in continuous operation, moving together with the others, among them, they are recognised by dancing, gesture, pantomime, mise-en scene. They are a continuation of the way he worked and created his ballet pieces, leaving aside the "quote" and kinds of processing and stylisation that had already done their time. **(5-Janku A., Gazeta Shqiptare, 2015)**

The ballet "The tenth wound of Gjergj Elez Alia" and especially, the ballet inspired by Migjeni's life and work, implemented by Agron Aliaj, the premiere was in the mid- 80s, and 'Migjeni' in the early 2000s, choreographer Agron Aliaj exhibited an innovative approach. In the ballet "The tenth wound of Gjergj Elez Alia", the author deeply explored on documents and artworks where ancient traditional and Albanian ethnographic traditions were preserved. Dancing, poses, costumes and the overall plastic appearance correspond to the civilisation of the setting. All this sounds neoclassical, moreover in style and in expressive motor elements, similar to the ballet style of the well known dancer and choreographer George Balanchine.

In "Migjeni" ballet, the choreographer aimed, perhaps for the first time, to reflect modern overtones, different in language and choreographic and directorial approach from the one that appeared in works created before 1990. The life and work of our great poet Migjeni inspired the already elderly choreographer but without the pressure of censorship of the old regime, opening a new window to his fantasy, in order to stage figurative, choreographic images based on a fragmentary dramaturgy.

Nowadays, we often hear rumors once allegedly for lack of original and artistic image in our ballets. It is often mentioned that many ballets created by our choreographers are cliché of ballets realized by foreign authors, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. No matter how it happened, and although the existence of real socialism imposed by ideological pressure to push these authors for not being modern in form and means of expression, those with wisdom and talented mastery, managed to bring elements of their own with a new expression and presentation different from the one of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, from that they found path to come up with contemporary means of expression, which definitely makes them today, be called innovative for that time. **(6-Janku A., Gazeta Shqiptare, 2015)**

It is not clear whether the choreographers in Albania today are sufficiently in touch with the traditional folk dance.

If I stop in a performance created by the choreographer Gjergj Prevazi titled "WE-WHERE-IN" premiere dating on 25 February 2011, in its overall appearance, I will underline the fact that in this dance – theater style show, the contemporary Albanian choreographer's costume "is cut beautifully and tastefully". Not only the theme, atmosphere, intonation and sound of the show are Albanian, in this contemporary premiere, the author (who is at the same time choreograph, director, dramaturge) operates differently with popular dance movements, by showing them the dynamics often inverted in shape, designing the merging definitely with the dramatic action of the premiere.

He has also tastefully curated it with Albanian music. Folk motor element is present during the premiere such as dancing movements, dramatic, comic and sarcastic ones. With a very professional culture, Prevazi is not simply satisfied with the description in the episodes of libretto, where obviously our world is felt, as it is experienced with wisdom and mettle in everyday life. But he constructs somewhat invisibly an original dance style that does not scream, and has no form or outside appearance, but it has an internal impulse and sensation that appears through the expression in the function of the idea of the display. This is due to the folk motor elements tastefully and professionally elaborated.

Conclusion

What was discussed above, we note that among Albanian traditional and contemporary choreographers, there is a node that joins them: creative originality, enriched by life, the world and our soul, from the folkloric tradition of the ancient people of Balkan, but also from the increasing communication with the European dancing achievements which have encouraged and inspired such artists as early as the professionalism of the Albanian choreography in the 1950s to the present day that we live. Today, there are such creators that the Albanian contemporary dance does not lack originality, continuity and success.

As in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe and America, even to us the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the XXI century, it was noticed a variety of research for expressive elements in all genres and new choreographic expressions, where some elements of folk dance are still an inexhaustible source in this contemporary art. Perhaps it should be emphasized that the tradition exists and cannot possibly serve as an experience that prevents new stage expressions. Rather it should give rise to enable the opening of paths and alternatives with various approaches for further artistic, aesthetic and communicative research of Albanian choreography.

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