

## Reassessment Optics for Albanian Ballet over the Years 1950-1973



### Choreography

**Keywords:** choreographer, ballet, history, language arts, dance, dance, master ballet, lexicon, value, body, professional.

Roberta Ndokaj

Center for Albanological Studies, Tirana, Albania.

### Abstract

As a young art, elevated to the status of a professional art only in the early 50s, the period of its consolidation from 1950 to 1973 mark an important period for the development of its capital. They include at least seven key moments: a) Establishment of professional ballet troupe and the creation of a new artistic status of choreography in general; b) Putting on stage several important ballets repertoire of well-known world, who served as a training school for young artists; c) Abroad education of many artists in the Soviet Union; d) The creation of national ballets by Albanian authors; e) The establishment of "School of Ballet" and then inclusion as a separate branch of the ballet at the Higher Institute of Arts (1966); f) The preparation and exit of some difficult personalities recurring; g) Support of Russian ballet master for the qualification troupe and staging of a part of the repertoire. Although Albanian ballet, like all other arts, underwent a strict ideological censorship in content and in form, rich in prohibitions, restrictions and mutilations of repertoire, it made significant artistic value. This period, first by looking at the present, is revalued in those segments that mark merit that once were criticized as "foreign influences", as they or exceeded the form of solid and the imposed mapping by the canons of realism, or had with little presence of ubiquitous propaganda element. On the other hand, excessive estimates for some works of creations made by critics of the time, by today's judgment could not pass the test of truth.

### Introduction

It is known that ballet is a new art that takes side in the XVI century, but with roots in the diverse forms of popular dance. Although the meaning is the same with promenade and dance, in fact it is the art of cultivating, subject to certain rules, that is processed, exalted and in an advanced state. While an art without words, "dumb", where there is no meaning to direct, however it has meaning and their messages, which are expressed through movement, gesture expressive, expressing a plastic-rhythmic body, pantomime and mimicry as well as an arsenal rich artistic tools. Ballet is as dynamic visual art, held simultaneously in time and space; is a type of synthetic art that includes the conception of performing some of the arts, especially music, is also a kind of art where execution is usually done collectively by a group of dancers.

The art of choreography in Albania, compared with other European countries, is very young. Its origins start in the '20s of the last century, and as a professional body and artistic institution it rises exactly in the early '50s, when was established the Albanian Philharmonic. Despite the delay was dramatic, coming from deep backwardness and caused by five centuries of Ottoman occupation, however this stylish art, charming and full of subtlety and grace quickly became loved and preferred by the viewer. This love for it by the people as similar as the promoting and supporting policies of the government of the day, made to mark progress in the number of premieres, especially in qualitative growth of artists, their professional education, improvement of structures and technical conditions of the performance, the addition of personnel, creating continuity and generations of artists.

The tradition of dance in Albania and strands of ballet forms and amateur rudimentary start in the '20s with the opening of traditional dancing center in Tirana "Cerklle Dansie". The rich heritage in popular folk dance, with its military momentum, with longing epic, heroic pathos, lyrical tones, erotic or funny, served as a healthy premium for the birth and nurturing of ballet. In various artifacts known existence of Illyrian-Albanian dances through the centuries as one of the most vital signs gestures and cultural rights of Albanians as a nation. The making of the occasionally highlight of this transcendence and bridge between inspiration popular and cultivating of art, the ballet turned into an explanation opportunity, especially in the use of identity dancing elements mold in surprising typologies dance of the north and the south, which created the conditions that arise later refinements and fine embroidery work of the cultivated art of classical ballet, where the game of choreographic art actually starts, unlike say Dansie, ballet. The first names that would create the beginnings of

cultivated art dance in the most contemporary choreographic forms were Dimosten Koci Stathi, the little dancer Eleni Qirici Petraq Mina from Boston ,Nuri Beshiri with the American tip-tapi etc.

The beginnings of institutionalized Albanian ballet of the 50s tell about youth efforts and several Albanian artists immediately after World War II to build the foundations of a new and unknown art in our country: the ballet. Belul Hatib, Lola Gjoka then the talented and enthusiastic Panayiotis Kanaçi have observed their unquestionable contributions. In the early years of 1944-1949 raise the "small group of the ballet" and "large ballet group" or "Great Ballet", included in the National Theatre. The group "Great Ballet" was structured later after in the Ensemble of Songs and Dances within Philharmonic Albanian, while the group "Small Ballet" continued its preparatory work to acquiring specific and difficult vocabulary of classical ballet through two routes: a) the acquisition of techniques of classic dance through exercises and continuous assistance provided by foreign specialists who came to Albania with short contracts and b) through the use of world choreographic literature, where it is worth mentioning, among other things, recognition and execution of several popular works by composers such as Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, Brahms, Glier with ballets "Swan Lake", "Romeo and Juliet", "Lulekuqja", "Hungarian Dance" etc. On February 1, 1950 with the decision of the Council of Ministers was established Albanian Philharmonic, which included the group of "Small Ballet" which was called "professional". For the first time was established a professional classical ballet corp dancers, with funds and salaries, with clear repertoire, professional and training development plan.

The years 1950-1990 marked a period of crucial importance to the development of the Albanian ballet. They do at least seven key moments:

- a) establishment of professional ballet troupe and the creation of a new artistic status of choreography in general;
- b) putting on stage several important ballets repertoire of well-known world, who served as a training school for young artists;
- c) abroad education of many artists in the Soviet Union;
- d) the creation of national ballets by Albanian authors;
- e) the establishment of "School of Ballet" and then inclusion as a separate branch of the ballet at the Higher Institute of Arts (1966);
- f) the preparation and exit of some difficult personalities recurring;
- g) support of Russian ballet master for the qualification troupe and staging of a part of the repertoire.

As we examine the historical development of ballet before 1990, it clearly that it can be divided into two major periods: before and after 1990. Designation as separation barrier relates to the political factor exerted on art and artists, consequently drastic restriction of freedom of establishment, but also with the artistic factor in terms of the application of some new codes of choreographic knowledge and experimentation in the language of modern art, opening and dealing with global experiences, which have been present in the '50s, first half of the 60s, especially in the early '70s. A neuralgic issue that brought negative consequences of emergency in the Albanian arts consequently the choreography, it was 1973 with decisions of Plenum IV Labour Party giving a blow to creative freedom and every inclination to embrace the achievements and styles contemporary breathing in Western Europe and beyond. In this year and after it emerged an extreme tightening of censorship, artists penalties, offenses and a stultifying critical to any aesthetic beautiful and attractive creation.

The 50s mark the beginning of a prior art without essence and space in our country. It goes without saying that the first premieres, like every start, always take a deserved place in the assessment and review of relevant studies. Should be mentioned here the first two premieres seem to assume the role of promoting this art in professional status already, "Flag of Peace" and "Brotherhood of the people" with the Russian choreographer

Georgi Perku. Exactly the contribute of this choreographer was the first decisive step of our ballet, which in our studies before 1990 has not been assessed on merit and real dimension that he had.

The first show, "Flag of Peace",<sup>296</sup> was conceived as a folk dance suite of different regions of the country folk, with the group dance, symphony orchestra, folk orchestra and choir, selecting those most characteristic of them. Besides the dances, the second part was created a choreographic proper subject, consisting of the parts: undefeated partisan (executed by M. Terca prologue Tërshana E. & M. Mufti), partisan flag dance memories (executed by T. Pope), Happy Day (executed by L. Cape, S. batku) and People's Pledge.

The appearance of the second show, "Brotherhood of the people"<sup>297</sup>, although it has not the format of a ballet libretto and music specially composed, as an original inaugural show, it was a mix of dances and dance from different nations to "popular democracies" and the Soviet Union, a fantasy choreographic and final dance "Brotherhood of the people", an overview of all peoples dance. The idea was that of strengthening the love of all people, a utopia strongly manipulated by communist propaganda for political effects, including the will to protect the peace. In both performances, movements and the scenes of dance, directed by choreographer Georgi Petku created images of beautiful, dynamic images of moving swinging and finesse, expressing the soul of people, and what distinguished each of them, national signs, anthropological features of everyone and the whole conduct of a choreographic colorful mosaic. Regarding the Albanian ensemble dancer, it was noticed the attempt of mastering professional movement, dance, facial expressions gesture harmony, rhythm with plastic elegance.

The 60s brought a new phenomenon in the history of the Albanian ballet. Is inspiring the fact of creating the first national ballets from Albanian writers, composers, librettists, choreographers, which mark the cornerstone to national culture as "Halili and Hajria" "Delina", "Cuca mountains," Sons of the Fisherman", "Anusha", "Partizan" etc. It seems that over the period of 40 werw conceived and tested genders and the main forms of ballet: classical ballet but also experimental forms and the application of modern choreographic language; They are put ballets with dramatic brand, with mythical subjects of fabulous ballets-comic poem ballets, children's ballet and dance spectacle, choreography in theatrical or choreographic parte in opera and operetta. All this range of genres and prosperous choreographic forms of demonstration is an interesting fact that have to be counted and recorded. The word is that some of their criticism of the time did not find the right space, and experimentation in the language of ballet in the early '70s are criticized and some artists have been removed even from work.

Literature global choreographic repertoire of ballet came in the years 1950-1973 represented Albanian except mellow artistic level, a premium for the acquisition of the language of classical ballet, self development and training of ballet troupe. Shows such as "Shatrivani of Bahçisarajit", "Zhurale", "Esmeralda", "Care in vain", "Romeo and Juliet", "Lola", "Francesca da Rimini", "Petya and the Wolf", "Fadeta" "Laurencia", "Sheherazade", "life artist", "Paganini" created an increasing performance of ballet troupe and an enrichment of artistic forms, which was observed especially in the interpretation of the dancers, the implementation of their roles, but notwithstanding all other ingredients, from libretto and beating problems, ideas discussed, the characters embedded, music and motives basic concept and the scenes dance, the lexicon of figures choreographic used, range and technique of dance dancers, Stage and Action environment, costumes and to the little things. Of course shifting plans in second hand information of the subjects and content of the works mentioned above, spaces dominant critique of time was to evaluate the concept choreographic of ballet masters, while the one on the art of dancing is significant in most cases in the possession of a descriptive style, without disclosing properly

<sup>296</sup> Shih Flamuri i Paqes, revista "Ylli" (Mars-Prill), nr. 3-4, 1952.

<sup>297</sup> Shih Jakova, Kolë. *Një sukses i madh në lëmin e artit, Grupi i valleve të Filarmonisë shqiptare çfaqti premierën "Vëllazërimi i popujve"*, Zëri i Popullit, 1. 05. 1950.

by professional aesthetic viewpoint language, signs and artistic codes specific to this art, which was a major shortcoming of the time. From various sources and alternative to our studies since 1990 show that the very quality of interpretation of dancers, especially the realization of the main characters of the world famous ballet expressed originality of artistic interpretation thereof, as well as shortcomings of growth, Poor technique etc.

One of the great achievements of Albanian ballet in the period 1950-1973 has been the creation of national ballets written by Albanian authors, as "Anusha", "Halili and Hajria", "Delina", "Partizan", "History of a song", "Rhapsody dance", "Eagle fearless", "Sons of the fisherman", "High revolutionary spirit", "Cuca e maleve." A significant part of the case and the analysis of time is devoted to criticism of the content structure of the works, including the subject, vicissitudes, characters, conflict, ideas and other elements of the interior.<sup>298</sup> In terms of historical chronology are distinguished ballet "Anusha", which is regarded as the first attempt of a national ballet entitled Albanian genuinely, albeit a small dimension and structure. Librettist and choreographer was Skender Selimi, while the music was composed by Cesc Zadeja. The theme is taken from the resistance of the Albanian people in the first half of the fifteenth century, linked this to the Turkish invasion and abduction as captives young girls in the harem of the military and powerful feudal empire.

On January 13, 1963, in the Opera and Ballet hall, was awarded with great success and deserved the premiere of the first Albanian classic ballet dimension of the broader "Halili and Hajria" three acts and seven picture, according to the beautiful drama "Halili and Hajria" of Kola Jakoves, music was composed by renowned composer Tish Daija and choreography by master-ballet Panayiotis Kanaçi. Plastic and rhythmic surface choreographic action in all the paintings was conceived of as a mosaic ballet master dance where intersected the Albanian dance motifs carefully harvested rich areal popular folklore. It was developed with taste, being transfigured and adapted to the typical signs characteristic of classical ballet dance. Ability to create a harmony between the two types of dance, where the first type of popular dance feeds and enrich the second (type of classical ballet), respecting its codes, earning power, especially shades, colors and connotations choreographic without marking its contaminated classic dance with strict rules.

Although many of the Albanian ballets mentioned above, appear restrictions and conceptual thematic that were imposed at that time, in my view it has been present the assessment original needs contributions in the field of composing music, as well as libretto, concept Choreographic and broadly interpreting of dancers. Part of the original national assessment ballets have been the plastic appearance of action and rhythmic choreographic mosaic of movements and original dance structures. While specific value marked especially motives of Albanian original dance, the elements that were borrowed by rich folk areal which are processed further by adopting the codes and language of classical ballet, thereby rising to a higher level. This is especially prominent in the choreographic concept in ballet Kanaçi Panayiotis "Halili and Hajria" and "Children of the Fisherman" and also those of Agron Aliaj the ballet "Cuca e maleve." But, on the other hand, this trend essentially innovative and, in some cases create confusion and discussion in maintaining specific language of classical ballet, mixing and "in contamination" two quite different aesthetic languages.

Our choreographers and dancers from year to year the choreographic lexicon was being acquired, processed and executed more and better.

<sup>298</sup> Some of the main articles are:

-Grimci, Abdulla, "Baleti i parë nacional "Halili dhe Hajria" vepër serioze e kompozitorit Tish Daija", gazeta "Drita", 20 janar 1963.  
 -Bogdani, Ramazan, *Shfaqja e baletit "Delina" dhe disa probleme lidhur me karakterin nacional*, Drita, e diel 13 shtator 1964.  
 -Filja, Hysen, *Baleti "Fatosi partisan" – muzika e tij*, Drita, e djelë 27 tetor 1967, f. 4.  
 -Kaceli, Gëzim-Dhimitri, Petro, "Baleti "Cuca e maleve", një krijim i bukur i baletit tonë", Bashkimi, 8 mars 1970.  
 -Kalemi, Spiro, "Baleti "Shqiponja sypatrembur", Drita 13. 02. 1972, f. 4 dhe 14.  
 Shiko Simixhiu, Xhemil, "Bijtë e peshkatarit", Ylli, nr. 6, qershor 1972, f. 24.

During that time was noticed the attempt of our best choreographers (P. Kanaçi, S. Selim A. Aliaj, Angel Tërshana etc.) to create a harmony between the two types of dance, the popular and the classic, respecting mandatory codes of the second, then classical ballet, along with experiment and test prove a particular aspect of the authenticity of the creativity of these choreographers. They managed to convey nuances, colors and connotations with Albanian origins in the choreographic lexicon of classical ballet forms. And it showed, in fact, a matter choreographic treatment of the traditional modernist coming from global ballets. The use of signs and language of popular folk dance from all Albanian lands and their integration into the modern classical ballet or contemporary was a specific phenomenon for choreographers, dancers and our ballet in general.

Recognizing that critical thinking generally suffered from the presence of censorship and narrowness aesthetic judgment and evaluation, was necessarily that the product feature of this period should be seen and faced by today's perspective, avoiding politicization, thrusting critical assessment of the time as the unfair attacks, so and the panegyric and that excessive enthusiasm shown for the show that historical process has disqualified today. In other cases, care should be taken because some works in the art of choreography, overlooked by the lack of assessment as a result of application of the outside artistic criteria, be re-evaluated within a new logic; as criticism inappropriate, which nowadays seem to be unilaterally distortions and judgments, as happened in fact in several ballets that marked nevertheless artistic value to time as: "Partizan", "History of a song", "Rhapsody dance", "Eagle fearless", "Sons of the fisherman", "High for the revolutionary spirit."<sup>299</sup> Reassessment and new modern optics, free of ideologization and politization of the criticism of those years, should include and be done today exactly the height of a fair and balanced. Despite the ideological pollution and schemes in the context of historical evaluation of the cited works are part of the process of developing Albanian ballet in the period 1950-1973. Most of them realized was "Cuca e maleve."

The choreographer Alia Agron brought an expressive artistic language, displaying the found images and beautiful tropes perceptible in breaking down the events and the personality of the characters, and overall the idea-emotional relationships content. He used carefully rich fund of Albanian folk dances but also "character dances" with variations, adaxhiot, plastics characterization attitudes. The music of Nikola Zoraqi distinguishes the clarity and purity of the melodic line which becomes the bearer of events and conflict, it expresses a beautiful characters language ballet, their character is communicating with the public, and together with the choreographic concept of Agron Ali create a symbiosis harmonious which complement each other mutually while maintaining the dramatization as the basic tone of the work. The Ballet "Cuca e maleve" was a record attendance, of over 130 thousand people since 1970-1976, from spectators of the different categories.

---

<sup>299</sup> Some of the current articles:

-Çefa, Sandër, "Shqiponja sypatrembur", *balet për fëmijë nga Çesk Zadeja*, Nentori, nr. 3, 1972, f. 178.  
 -Vero, Llazar, "Partia na dha lirinë", "Cuca e maleve në ekran", *Bashkimi*, 13 mars 1974.  
 -Bogdani, Ramazan, "Lart frymën revolucionare", gazeta "Drita", 19. 01. 1969.  
 -Gaci, Pjetër, *Mungesa e një drame e ka dobësuar veprën*, Drita, 10 nëntor 1968.