


PANAJOT KANAÇI (1924-1996) <i>AN ARTIST PROFILE</i>			Art History
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Abstract			
<p>Panajot Kanaçi is the most compelling and greatest figure of Albanian ballet. He was a very creative dancer and choreographer. He was a passionate organizer and leader of the historical processes of the development of ballet in Albania. He is considered the father of Albanian choreography. Graduated as a choreographer-director in Moscow, upon his return to Albania, Panajot Kanaçi was appointed choreographer and artistic director of the ballet troupe at the National Theater of Opera and Ballet. In 1963 Kanaçi choreographed the first Albanian national ballet <i>Halili and Hajria</i>. Perhaps the most expressive dance, which can be appreciated as one of his rare findings and choreographic elaborations, was the dance with the motifs of northern Albania: <i>The dance of the Eagles</i>. It marks an extraordinary creation, with the highly displayed and exhilarating symbolic layering of eagle wings, the proud posture of the bird-man, the moment of flight, a unique metaphor in terms of visuals that became an expressive part of our national ethno-psychological marking. This dance has been performed hundreds of times in numerous concerts at home and abroad, always causing enthusiasm and pride. In his artistic method of working with dancers he paid attention to the approach to the character, his character and the way of physical embodiment, insisting on three levels: a) the rhythmic movement closeness of the character with those of the dancer, b) the closeness of psychological expression and depth of experience, giving priority to the element of acting, c) experimentation to find means of expression and visual ways different from the psycho-physical data of the dancer, from his achievements and clichés, to transcend the format of previously set and come out in other still unproven formats. This led the dancers to constantly search for other habits, as if to "go out of themselves" while being "within themselves".</p>			

Introduction

Panajot Kanaçi is the most compelling and greatest figure of the Albanian ballet. He was a very creative dancer and choreographer. He was a passionate contributor and leader of the historical processes of the development of Albanian ballet. He is considered the father of Albanian choreography. Kanaçi was born on August 2, 1924, on a large family in Delvina / South Albania, altogether with four sisters and two brothers. After finishing primary school, his family moved to Tirana. During the childhood, he was inspired by the Delvina environment folk orchestra (*saze*) and folk dances. He was only 12 years old when he became involved as a performer in a folk dance show. His love for dance never abandoned him. He had that "instinct that will push him towards the knowledge of human body movement".¹ "I was surprised with myself, when with the greatest ease, I interacted with them and facilely, adopt the movement of the dancers",² says the dance historian Albert Janku in his book dedicated to Panajot Kanaçi.

¹ Janku, Albert. "Kështu e njoha unë Panajot Kanaçin", Botimet "Toena", Tiranë 2009, f. 47.

² Po aty.

He finished elementary school in Saranda, while he attended private piano lessons in Tirana. In 1943 he completed the Lyceum (High School), following some dance lessons too. In his memory were recorded the stable old structures of folk dances, which he had adopted and often danced as Gajtanaqi, Fibuni, Pullaqi, Kallamatjona, Sirto, Kafto etc. Deepening in research, observation, and study, he managed to distinguish in detail the expression and dance steps of folk dances, which would turn into rich sources of his creativity in his career as a choreographer.

After World War II, with his typical enthusiasm, just like in his concrete choreographic projects, he quickly became the organizer of a group of teenagers who loved dancing. In 1946 he became the leader of the first ballet group. This group, called "Little Ballet", was located at the People's Theatre (National Theatre later), and the boys and girls of the group soon became pioneers of Albanian ballet group. Persistent as he was, he identified the Albanian ballet personalities' talent, among them Melushe Bebeziqi, whose talent became known among the most successful students of the Bolshoi Ballet Academy. He also discovered Agron Aliaj, who later became one of the most prominent dancers and choreographers in Albania, as well as Albert Janku, Faruk Koka, Nexhat Agolli, Ylli Bebeziqi, Hiqmete Fanan, Apostol Sahatçiu, Nini Fishta, Afroviti Metulin (Lipe) etc.

"Little Ballet" led and guided by Kanaçi participated in the World Youth Festival organized in Prague in 1947. In 1948, the same festival took place in Budapest, where this group won the third award with *Tirana's Dance*. At the same time, he led the group and danced as well. With this group, he tried to realize performances of classical ballet and dances from the provinces of the country, such as the Tirana's dance, the Dance with Swords, the Dance of Zerqan. In 1951 he would become the assistant choreographer of the prominent Russian ballet master Georgi Perkun, who came to Albania invited by the Albanian government to set up a professional ballet troupe. In both performances of Perkun: *Bahçisarai Fountain* and *Esmeralda*, Kanaçi was at the same time assistant choreographer and the first soloist. In the first ballet he played Khanin Kiri-Girej, and in the second one, the priest Klod Frolo. Both roles differed from each other and represented his creative personality, where he stood out with his dramatic power and expressiveness. In the first one he was rude, a violent man, an unbearable despot, with a plastic as if released, heavy, full of "weight". In the second role he presented the double, insidious world of a tempted clergyman, eroded by sin, jealousy, gloom, jealousy. Khani Kiri-Girej, although in his savagery and open in intentions, in front of two aspiring women, the first, Zarema as the leading wife of his forgetfulness and the second, and the Polish beauty Princess Maria, as the woman he aspired to make him part of the sultan's forgetfulness - he reveals a contradictory nature, albeit a violent and ruthless ruler. Klod Frolo, though of an insidious nature and seemingly possessing apostolic serenity, inwardly he boils with resentment and jealousy, and the dancer carries his spiritual antinomies thanks to a physical, and psychological interaction of his clear figure. The game is all in light-shade, with expressive mime, walking, and hand movement. Kanaçi gives an impressive form the clergyman possessed by erotic passion for *Esmeralda*, troubled and unbalanced, between crime and punishment, revenge and temptation, anxiety and nightmare, part of a world, sensitivity, and occult power, which leads him to finally in stalemate and crime.

With the founding of the Albanian Philharmonic in 1950 finally, Panajot Kanaçi became a professional dancer and a ballet master who would try and create choreographic performances with the group of the "Great Ballet". On March 31, 1952, together with Georgi Perku, he conceived the choreographic play "Flag of Peace", where he had an irreplaceable help thanks to his knowledge of Albanian folk dance's typology in the territories and areas of south-northern Albania. He became the most excellent connoisseur of our ethno-choreography, of the primitive forms of dance, in-depth research and brilliant interpretations of the motifs, originalities, diachrony, patterns, knowing even in detail the invariants of each type of dance. He brings back the choreographic structures of our ethno-choreography in dynamic models, with even moderately deeply dressed clothes, which raise them to particular expression levels.

In the opera *Ivan Susanin*, he performed *krakowiak dance* with his partner Mellani Terca, full of charm, expressive gestures and movements, talent and the redeemed body that realized various figures. This Polish dance became one of the most attractive in this opera which gave it a unique expression. Panajot Kanaçi turned his love and passion for dance into the primary goal of his life. Being a master of their execution and a prominent connoisseur of ethno-choreographic structures, he brought the beautiful and expressive dance "Sword Dance" in the *Guyane* ballet of the composer Khachaturian. While in the ballet *Raymonde* elaborated the unique style of the Spanish Dance. Then he played in the Hungarian Rhapsody of Franc List and other characteristic dances that became a natural part of ballet, injecting them more beauty, aesthetics, visuals, elegance, and talent. He was the first choreographer to promote and stage ballet pieces by Albanian composers such as *Gum Sharaveli* music by Ramadan Sokoli, *Light over Albania* by Prengë Jakovë. The latter, as it is well known, was the first Albanian opera *Mrika*.

Thus, appreciating his undisputed talent, the Albanian state sent Kanaçi to study ballet in Moscow. During the years of studies at the Russian Ballet Academy, he created four dances: *Eagle Dance*, *Chestnut Harvest*, *Tirana Suite*, *Dropulli Dance*. He did not abandon all four of these dances; on the contrary, in the following years, he would revive them under a new charm and dynamics, making them part of the Ensemble of Folk's attractive repertoire Songs and Dances, for 60 years until today. In the "Moisjev" Dance Ensemble, he staged the *Dibra Dance*. Albert Janku wrote in monography dedicated to Kanaçi the following: "I liked it not only for its uniqueness in the choreographic material but also for the conception and structure that he built himself. This ensemble kept this creation of Panajot for a long time in their repertoire".³

Perhaps the most expressive dance, which can be appreciated as one of his rare findings and choreographic elaborations, was the dance with northern Albania's motifs: *The Dance of the Eagles*. It marks an extraordinary creation, with the highly displayed and exhilarating symbolic layering of eagle wings, the bird-man's proud posture, the moment of flight, a unique visual metaphor that became most expressive part of our national ethno-psychological marking. This dance has been performed hundreds of times in numerous concerts at home and abroad, always

³ Janku, Albert. "Kështu e njoha unë Panajot Kanaçin", Botimet "Toena", Tiranë 2009, f. 121.

causing enthusiasm and pride. This dance and the symbolic element of the opening of the eagle's wings he repeated as a leitmotif and metaphorical choreographic mark in many other dances and ballets, as in the choreographic duo “Eagles” (1966), in the ballet “*Halili and Hajrija*”, music by Tish Daia, in the ballet “*Delina*” music by Çesk Zadeja and in the ballet “*Shota and Azem Galica*”, music by Nikolla Zoraqi.

“The creative intellectual P. Kanaçi, - appreciates the choreographer and researcher Engjell Tërshana, - occupies a dignified place in the pantheon of Albanian art and culture. Without him, the national stage art would be deficient. He has special merits in creating an expressive choreographic fund, which will always remain a reference to the national ballet. The brilliance of his genius is related to creating earth-connected figures, with the focus of phenomena and sublimes for the nation”.⁴

From an early age, P. Kanaçi had in his head and was elaborating a choreographic vision on the subject of the well-known drama of Kole Jakova, *Halili and Hajrija*. Together with his professor P. Shatin, he enabled the stage realization of his project and had even started the preliminary work of the culmination of the first national ballet *Halili and Hajrija*, in one of the stages of Bolshoi Theater. But the circumstances prevented the completion of this ambitious and passionate project due to the break-up with the Soviet Union, consequently his return to the homeland. He partially performed the ballet, such as the monologue and the duet of the last part of the third and fourth act. When he returned to his homeland in Tirana, he revived this piece and performed it in front of the public, who welcomed him with enthusiasm and applauded him for the artistic power and the originality of his creation.

Graduated as a choreographer-director in Moscow in 1961, upon his return to Albania, Panajot Kanaçi started working as a choreographer and artistic director of ballet at the Opera and Ballet Theater in Tirana. Shaping his work and creative energy, in January-June 1962, he brought to the audience through a lively choreographic language full of originality the part of Spanish dance in the opera *Carmen*. He treated the choreographic elements unprecedentedly before, especially those of hand, foot, posture, gestures, stage opening, and throws. These brought not only movement synergy, but also joy, cheerfulness, a counterpoint function that moved between challenge, seduction and severity, hatred, drama, where the movement in addition to treatment in *masshtab* (scale) and horizontally, unified also comes in the form of face-to-face confrontation of eye to eye. Then he choreographed Tchaikovsky's symphonic poem *Francesca da Rimini*, which brings to life vivid *mise-en-scène* (staging) shifting from the lyrical and erotic pathos of suffering lovers -Francesca and Paolo - to the dramatic pathos and suffering caused by irrational jealousy, destruction the threat of death and death itself.

In the ballet *Paganini*, he brought an innovative choreographic concept, which from the findings, brought him out in symbolic and expressionist models in his treatment of the figure of

⁴ Tërshana, Engjëll. *Panajot Kanaçi (Monografi)*, Tiranë, 1997, f. 77.

Paganini and the mass around and against him. This was seen in the artist-inspiration relationship, where despite the malicious crowd, the object of his inspiration was the woman turned into a Muse (played by Zoica Haxho and Mukades Erebara). The other character, Suffering (played by G. Vendresha and M. Jakob), brought the musician's dramatic experiences, the anathemas made by the church, the envious and hostile environment, as well as the suffering of creation. Further on, Kanaçi's vision treated initially the two figures of Paganini and Muse, who appeared and what was inside the artist, physics and psyche, in a complementary and contrasting correlation with each other. Choreography gave expression to both sides, real and imagined, the state of dreaming and creation, significantly increasing the suggestive and hallucinatory effect.

In the episode "Enemies", the choreographer had built a *mise-en-scène* with philosophical and allegorical convey. A group of dancers, placed in the dim light, playing the "envious violinists", were not only treated en-bloc as part of evil, of shadows but also by treating their movement as the diabolical powers of darkness represented with gestures, mimicry and their movements, especially of the hands, the evil part and the slanderer to the artistic communities, towards extraordinary talents like Paganini. The choreographer used three groups of dancers, the first envious, the slanderer, interpreted by H. Shtuni, P. Agalliu, D. Suli, H. Këllezi, Ll. Nako, R. Kruja, F. Voci, M. Hasa, while the latter, hypocrites, shooters, supposedly talented and art lovers, two-faced people, those who cursed and accused the violinist of satanic inspirations, were performed by dancers A. Agolli, B. Jazenxhiu, A. Cara, F. Voci, V. Konjari, R. Demetja, K. Rada, S. Bakalli, A. Cano, R. Bogdani. The third group, Paganini's declared enemies played by M. Papa, L. Shtino, E. Shaqiri, A. Agolli, B. Jazenxhiu, the choreographer treated with movements that represented their reciprocity, pretence, grotesque alienation, as well as savagery and intolerance. The jump itself reflected this dichotomy between the external imposition and the inner nervousness's grumbling, approaching and moving away. In a whirlpool of witches, they gathered and opened there, always in the semantic and allegorical relationship with Paganini. The movements resembled a pivot where the axis, radiation and light were Paganini and his solo interpretation. In addition to these two groups, choreography as contrasts and contrasts had created the third group of young ballet dancers. They brought beauty, empathy, worship, love and momentum. The choreography puts them in function of sounds of Paganini's violin, his violin improvisations and whims, transforming them into vivid and correlative images that associate music with the plastic form of dance of dancers, especially young, beautiful and elegant ballerinas.

Kanaçi had the ability to free dancers from the numbness or various problems and encourage them to overcome clichéd movements towards another, more dynamic and redeeming dance rhythm where freedom of movement had to be complemented by the expression and possibilities of choreographic figuration. Among the orchestral sound, the vocals of the soloists and the chorus on the one hand, and the performance of the dancers, on the other hand, he managed to build a fruitful interaction in the form of interaction, where harmony and balance between the two sides of the spectacle, musical execution-choreographic execution, never to be violated.

In his artistic method of working with dancers, he paid attention to the approach to the character, his character and the way of physical embodiment, insisting on three levels: a) the rhythmic movements closeness of the character with those of the performer dancer, b) the closeness of psychological expression and depth of experience, giving priority to the element of acting, c) research to find means of expression and visual ways different from the psychophysical data of the dancer, from his achievements and clichés, to transcend the format of previously set and come out in other still unproven formats. This way leads the dancers to constantly search for other habits as if to "go out of themselves" while being "within themselves". Thus were added the dancers' new interpretive plans, musical structures, and motifs developed in parallel with the choreographic code of movements.

Having part of his artistic awareness and thinking, in 1963 Kanaçi choreographed the first Albanian national ballet *Halili and Hajria*, based on the drama with the same title by Kolë Jakova. Tish Daija's music offered unique opportunities to make visible, dramatic and exciting some of his favourite motifs. The ethno-choreographic substratum, known, studied and much loved by him, would be treated in a new form, and matched the choreographic paradigm of classical ballet. And he succeeded. Thanks to his concept, he made visible and emotional the sharp contradictions of ballet's interior, the customary layer of faith as a historical ethnological substratum with high stability. He turned into the unwavering social and moral norm, virtue and human value, despite infidelity and betrayal. The choreographer casually used the ethno-choreographic area of northern Albania to treat characters such as Hajria, Halili, Musta, Bejtash Aga etc. The motifs taken from Malësia e Madhe, Tropoja and Dibra were introduced to treat the brothers of Hajria and the brave highlanders through an in-depth elaboration. In the course of the ballet, he again gave the symbolism and the way of imitation movements of the Albanian dance a significant configuration, with an original dioptr, which took the immovable structures of the traditional folk dance only as premises for their further development, through the dynamism of movement and the recycling of figurativeness to the size of the choreographic symbol. This revitalization of the form of folk dance with the renewal and modernization of the movement's state created deep emotions and images. However, the story of Hajria itself was tragic and extremely hurtful. With the ballet *Halili and Hajria*, he made the best and most successful model of Albanian ballet. Kanaçi also staged this ballet with Kosovo Ballet on 1979. This Ballet was performed in France, Greece and Italy.

The choreographer continued to stage national ballets with a national spirit. In 1964 he staged the ballet *Delina*, on music by Çesk Zadeja, and in 1968 the ballet *Fatosi Partisan*. Even in these creations, Panajot Kanaçi has known how to make even more expressive folklore's essential features by giving them visuality and spectacle with his high-quality choreographic elaborations. This is expressed both in the mass dances and in the characters' musical language, from where their characteristics are embodied movingly. The Albanian dance character occupied an essential place in his ballets. They are diverse in terms of topics and typology. The treatment in an original and recreative spirit has enriched the folk motifs and intonations with dance and cultivated music elements.

In 1968 he was appointed choreographer in the dance group of the National Folk Song and Dance Ensemble. He created complete ethno-choreographic literature of a new format adapted for stage and choreographic performance. Suppose there is a point, a product, a value or a name with which an artist identifies. In that case, this is the beautiful dance *Festë të madhe ka sot Shqipëria* (Albania has a Great Celebration Today) which turned into an anthem of enthusiasm, pride, identity and artistic attraction. Rarely can find a dance that has occupied such a dignified place in the golden fund of Albanian choreographic creativity, such as the choreographic creation "Albania has a great holiday today"⁵. This creation full of light and excitement is based on the folklore motifs of Tropoja and Gjakova, and gained year after year the status of enthusiastic closing of countless concerts that the National Ensemble of Folk Songs and Dances has given on important events, also with the tours abroad in the European scenes and world metropolises, such as of Milan, Rome, Paris, New York, Athens, Beijing, Thessaloniki, Bucharest, Helsinki, Pyongyang, Cairo, Chicago, Toronto, Stockholm etc. The dancers alternate during the dance with features of choreographic intonations, with a brilliant and perfect technique, creating an artistic space, which makes the dance gain a lot of life and light.⁶ In Dijon, France, this ensemble won the Golden Necklace, this thanks to the artistic direction and unusual choreographic ideas of Panajot Kanaçi. Kanaçi has made an irreplaceable contribution to the National Ensemble of Folk Songs and Dances as its undisputed leader.

Another significant creation of Kanaçi is the choreographic painting *Kreshnikët e Lirisë*. The symbol of Albanian, embodied with charm and prominent character, performed by the great character dancer Besim Zekthi, is associated with dynamic motifs and figures borrowed from Northern Albania's territories. This creation praises the heroism of our centuries-old struggle for national liberation. Master Kanaçi manages to escape the typical schematism of the time through numerous rhythmic, moving and symbolic breaks. The work looks like a living monument whose limbs stretch to the depths of time.

In the ballet *The Fisherman's Family*, he created new scenes, different plastique from previous years' ballets, giving each character an individual language. At the beginning of the years '80, in close collaboration with the composer Nikolla Zoraqi*, he created the ballet *Shota and Azem Galica*. "I do not want to repeat in my work what other authors have created in professional and character dance," said P. Kanaçi. - I want to build on land unfamiliar to other authors, I want to bring and embody my inspiration in topics I like and create conceived forms and content, to convey new emotions where the choreographic material is for the most part created by me".⁷

He opened a new chapter in Albanian choreography, whose aesthetics dominated Albanian ballet in 1963-1990. His choreographic structures, especially on the Albanian dance of character, served as a reference for other choreographers for about 40 years. Also, composing the movements

⁵ Dedin Suli, "Besim Zekthi, korife i vallëzimit shqiptar", Shtypshkronja Mihal Duri, Tiranë 2003, f. 71.

⁶ Ramazan Bogdani, "Koreografi dhe art i kultivuar", Mësonjëtorja, Tiranë 1998, f. 269.

⁷ Janku, Albert. "Kështu e njoha unë Panajot Kanaçin", Botimet "Toena", Tiranë 2009, f. 148.

of the Kanaçi, became a school on the new tradition of outstanding Albanian choreography. He holds the outstanding award “**People’s Artist**”.

Panajot Kanaçi died in July 15, 1996, leaving behind a precious creative asset, becoming an essential part of Albanian ballet and choreography history.

Methodology

In terms of this study's type, the methodology I have applied has been the research, adequately addressed in the period identified as the object of study, than intertwined with the analysis. In the final, I proceeded with the conclusions. I have taken care that the examinations carried out in the historiographical, aesthetic and analytical planes come complex and unified in their diachrony and synchronicity.

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