

## Ballet Falsity

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*The Bright Stream* is the name of a collective-farm. The libretto helpfully indicates the exact address of this collective-farm: the Kuban. Before us is a new ballet, its authors and producers have attempted to centre all the action on present-day collective-farm life. Depicted in the music and dances is the end of the field-work and the harvest festival. According to the concept of the authors of the ballet, the collective-farm workers have put all hard work behind them. On stage everyone is happy and joyful. The ballet should radiate light, the festive spirit, youth.

One cannot object to this attempt on the part of ballet to get to know collective-farm life. Ballet is one of our more conservative art forms. It is very difficult for it to break with the traditions of convention, inculcated by the tastes of pre-revolutionary audiences. The oldest of these traditions is a doll-like, false attitude to life. It is not people, but dolls, that take part in ballet built on such traditions. Their passions are doll-like passions. The main difficulty with Soviet ballet is that here dolls are out of the question. They would not be tolerated, their falsity would offend the eye.

This has placed on the authors of the ballet, its producers, on the Theatre, very serious obligations. If they wanted to present the collective-farm on stage, they should have studied the collective-farm, its people, its way of life. Since they set themselves the goal of presenting a Kuban collective-farm, they should have acquainted themselves with the characteristics of Kuban collective-farm life. A serious theme requires serious treatment, hard and conscientious work. The authors of the ballet, the composer would have found very rich sources for their art in the local folk songs, folk dances and games.

The life of the collective-farm, its daily round, which is still in the process of formation, its holidays – is, after all, a major, very important theme. It cannot be approached without preparation, in a perfunctory manner – whether in theatre, opera or ballet. He who really treasures the new relationships, the new collective-farm people, will not allow himself to turn this theme into a play with dolls. No one is hurrying our ballet and music. If you do not know what a collective-farm is like, if you do not know, in particular, what a Kuban collective-farm is like, do not hurry, do your homework, but on no account turn your art into mockery of the audience, do not debase a life that is full of joy and creative work.

According to Lopukhov and Piotrovsky's libretto, depicted on stage is a collective-farm in the Kuban. But, in point of fact, here both Kuban and collective-farm are absent. Instead what we have are sugary 'paysans' from off a pre-revolutionary chocolate box, who depict 'joy' in dances that have nothing in common with the folk dances of the Kuban, or of anywhere else for that matter. Not long ago, on this very Bolshoi Theatre stage which today is crammed with dolls painted a la 'collective-farm worker', genuine collective-farm workers from the North Caucasus presented their stunning folk-dancing art. It displayed a trait that is characteristic of the peoples of the North Caucasus, namely, individuality. There is no cause to directly re-produce these dances and games in ballet but, taking them as a basis, one can create a folk, collective-farm ballet.

The librettists, incidentally, were not a bit concerned with verisimilitude. Doll-like collective-farm workers figure in Act One. In the following acts all traces of the collective-farm, if such it may be termed, vanish. There is no meaningful content. Ballet dancers perform numbers that are not consistently linked together. Some people in clothing that has nothing in common with the clothing of the Kuban Cossacks, leap about the stage, in a frenzy. Ballet nonsense, in the worst meaning of the word, reigns on stage.

Under the guise of a collective-farm ballet, we are offered an artificial mixture of false folk dancing with numbers danced by ballerinas in tutus. 'Paysans' have been shown in ballet in different ages. Decked out, doll-like male and female peasants, shepherds and shepherdesses, made their entrance and performed so-called folk dances. This was not deception as such. It was the doll-like art of its time. Occasionally, these ballet peasants tried to preserve an ethnographic accuracy in their costumes. In 1866, Nekrasov wrote in ironic vein:

*«But Petipa appeared  
In a peasant shirt - and the theatre groaned!..  
Everything – right down to the white gussets in his shirt –  
Was accurate: there were flowers on his hat,  
Russian audacity in each swing...»*

Such falsity is intolerable in ballet, and Nekrasov turns to the ballerina with the following plea:

*«...Guriya heaven!  
You are sweet, you are ethereally light.  
So keep on dancing The Maiden of the Danube,  
And leave the peasant in peace!»*

Without doubt our artists, masters of dance, masters of music can depict the contemporary life of the Soviet people in realistic, artistic images, making use of its art, songs, dances and games. But in order to achieve this one has to put in a lot of work, conscientiously study the new life of the people of our country, avoiding in one's works and productions both coarse naturalism and aesthetic formalism.

D. Shostakovich's music is on the level of the whole ballet. True, in *The Bright Stream* there is less hocus pocus, fewer weird, wild accords than there are in the opera *The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. The music for the ballet is simpler but it has definitely nothing in common with either collective-farm workers or with the Kuban. The composer's attitude to the folk songs of the Kuban is just as slapdash as is that of the authors of the libretto and the ballet producers to the folk dances. The music therefore lacks character. It strums away and it expresses nothing. From the libretto we learn that it was in part transferred to the collective-farm ballet from the composer's unsuccessful 'industrial' ballet, *Bolt*. When the same music has to express different phenomena it is obvious what the result will be. In point of fact the only thing it expresses is the composer's indifference to the theme.

The authors of the ballet – both producers and composer – evidently consider that our public is so undemanding that it will accept everything that is concocted by slick, high-handed people.

In point of fact it is only our music and arts' criticism that is undemanding. It often praises works that do not deserve it.