

Understanding Bakst through Daphne and Chloe Ballet

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Abstract: Russian ballet in the late nineteenth century in the history of Western European art enjoys a great reputation, "Daphnis and Chloe" as a representative of, and by its author Ravel called the dance symphony works. This paper will explain how Leon Bakst, the designer of the stage costumes in the Daphne and Chloe ballet, has gained a reputation in European and world fashion from a musicological and historical-philosophical perspective.

Keywords: Leon Bakst; Daphne and Chloe ballet; Stage Costumes; Neoclassical and Philosophical Theory

1. Introduction

Ballet draws from the art forms of ancient Greek dance and Roman theatre vaudeville, while also bringing together the religion, philosophy, science and aesthetics of the Ancient Greek period. Dance as a type of art, a genre of art using the human body as a vehicle, is the crystallization of human spiritual civilization. Choreography refines, processes, and embellishes movements in the real world, and then uses non-vocal language to express personal emotions, opinions, and even sensitive social phenomena. As researchers, we should consider not only the art form of dance itself but also the choice of costumes. In this essay, we will discuss Bakst's influence on ballet in terms of costume design and his neo-classical, naturalistic, and philosophical ideas.

2. The Message of Dance Costumes

Socrates said, "All beautiful people, colors, pictures and sculptures are visual pleasure." [1]. Dance costumes reflect the era, culture and tradition of dance and convey specific artistic messages, such as the historical period of the work, as well as the thematic expression. Dance costumes emphasize expressiveness in function. Dancers fully present every movement through careful use of costumes and combination of various factors, and finally show it to the audience.

3. Stage Costumes before the 19th Century

The costumes of dance theatre before the 17th and 18th centuries were very ornate and the costumes created brought heaviness to ballet. Not only did the stiff dance movements fail to reflect the beauty of the characters, but at the same time the dancers failed to convey an image of the theme to the audience. This in a way goes against the theme of the script. As Lean Coteau says, the heavy costume structure robs the dance of all its lyrical power. Ballet is the archetype of a work that belongs to no genre. It falls like a meteorite from the earth into our hearts, and its laws are always mysterious and beyond our comprehension. [2]. However the first person to break out of this heavy staging was none other than Leon Bakst, who in 1901 designed the stage costumes for Ravel's ballet Daphne and Chloe, which in their shape and staging fully demonstrated the theme of the dance and the composer's creative intentions.

4. Daphne and Chloe Opera

Daphne and Chloe is an idyllic novel written during the time of the Roman Empire depicting the monumental romance between the main characters, Daphne and Chloe. Produced by Diaghilev Decision, Baxter designed the costumes, Fokine and Ravel wrote the libretto, and Ravel composed the music. Ravel wanted to create a huge musical fresco with this work, which he saw as a natural expression of his ideal Greece rather than a faithful reproduction of Greek mythology. Bakst, wanted to present his studies and experiences of ancient Greece in a concise and refined manner. Despite initial stage of creation have differences of opinion, their empathy for an ideal Greece inspired a natural, unified of work. Bakst's costume designs ultimately liberated the art of ballet from the many limitations of form and dance.

5. Léon Bakst

In the complex cross-cultural movement of the early 20th century, from 1910 to 1920, the

public gradually embraced new colours such as purple, orange, green, red, turquoise and black. Leon Baxter was one of the creators of many such theatrical extravaganzas[3]. According to him, "Fashion must be written in capital letters. There is fashion in art, just as there is fashion in clothes; they are closely related." [4]. This is especially important for artists who design Russian ballets.

Bakst was an innovative stage designer and official costume designer of the Ballets Russes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His work was exclusive to the Ballets Russes and he worked as a costume, set, interior and textile designer. In particular, from 1909 to 1914, he not only designed sets for Greek tragedies, but was also elected to the Royal Academy of Arts. He has long enjoyed a legendary reputation as a leading figure in the fashion world and still sets trends today.

As you can see from the picture, Bakst's designs were bold and avant-garde, detailed, with dazzling colours and dramatic lines that matched the movements of the dancers.[5]. Known for his brilliant control of colour, line and decoration, his designs were orientalist in nature, influenced by the Chinese movement of the 18th century. He expressed moods through variations in tone and light. For example, one tone expresses sensuality and chastity, another pride and despair. His partner, Fokine, believed that ballet's dance movements, costumes and music had to be subordinate to the theme, an idea that was revolutionary at the time and liberated the female dancer's body.

Bakst's design philosophy led the way, with dancers becoming colourful paintbrushes on stage, creating a sensual and romantic energy. When his work was first shown in the West, it sparked unprecedented appreciation and enthusiasm.



Figure1. [5]



Figure2. [6]

6. Natural Elements of Costume in Daphne's Dance Theatre

Early stage of dance drama creation theatre,

verisimilitude was demanded. Bakst, as the costume designer for this opera, was bound to follow the direction of the libretto. Not only should the set images for this opera be purposefully designed, but they should also be dominated by naturalistic elements. As can be seen from his designs, the beige wool coat of 1912 is made of the same material as the coats used in the "Homeric" period, which was similar to the simple, free, winding style of the Classical period. [7]. Léon Bakst's main advocacy of naturalism fits perfectly with this ballet. As Mara Chagall says, it's too close to the classical image of Greece. [8]. Bakst's watercolours show off his brilliant designs, in tune with Ravel's impressionistic style, rendering a mask-like hazy beauty. With the music and sets perfectly complementing each other, Daphne and Chloe becomes a true reflection of Greece. [9].

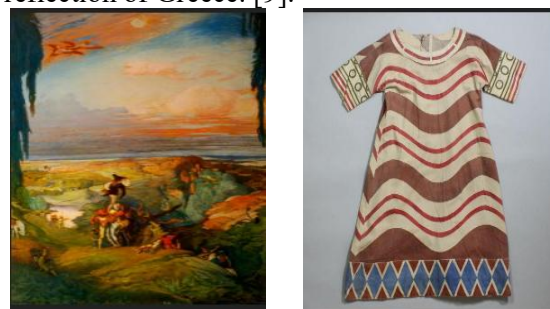


Figure 3. Costume Designed by Leon Bakst for a Greek in Fokine's Ballet Daphnis and Chloe

7. Bakst's Empiricism, Neoclassicism and Theoretical Philosophy in Daphne's Opera

Bakst Empiricism

Bakst's understanding of Greece was not invented out of thin air. In the years leading up to the premiere of *Cléopâtre* in 1909, he visited Greece to complete his designs for Greek theatre and engaged in a variety of activities. He designed sets for Diaghilev's exhibition of Russian art and created several works of Greek tragedy, such as *Hippolytus*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus of Coronos*. These attempts demonstrate his keen interest in Greek forms and emotions. They were his first attempts to express his interest in Greek form and emotion. [11]. Inspired by Isadora Duncan, he experimented with Fokine and Nijinsky in combining traditional ballet style with Greek movement, and although the results were not entirely satisfactory, the ideas were further developed in future collaborations. Early in his

career, Bakst was already recognised as an expert on the ancient world and pursued sensationalism, combining Greek themes closely with art to rich and refined effect. Despite being Russian, he had a keen interest in Greek culture and art, with a strong desire to explore, which stemmed from his neo-classical ideas.

8. Neoclassicism

Any art is formed by drawing on the experiences of those who have gone before, and Bakst's creations are renowned throughout the nineteenth century and up to the present day because of the continuation of neo-classical elements and the unique power of his work to create the playwright's visual effect. In Bakst's document on classicism it is recorded that "the artistic atmosphere flourishes only when truth-seeking artists co-operate in the name of friendship, [12]. moving in a common direction." If we want to gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics of earlier art, it is indispensable to explore this culture of change by following the path of those who have gone before us. Not only can we learn from the creative experience of our predecessors. More importantly, we can learn about the impact that the art of the time had on modern art. As Bakst puts it: "Our tastes, our fashions, slowly but surely, year by year stronger and stronger, inexorably, bring us back to the path of antique art! Our eyes are tired of elegant and overly refined art. [13].

9. Bakst theory philosophy

From the perspective of Plato's philosophy, "only those who are able to make sense of everyday experience can they explore the real world through experience and thus be seen as possessing truly reliable knowledge.[14]. In Léon Bakst's designs, he presents his experiences in Greece to the public. In his clothing designs, the sleeves and lower part of the corset give the body freedom of movement [15]. As a designer, his work sparked unprecedented appreciation and enthusiasm when it debuted in the West. His unique style of clothing set him apart from his contemporaries.

10. Conclude

Léon Bakst's dance costumes were intended to liberate the dancers of his time, however his bold ideas and avant-garde colours led the way

in 19th century fashion. He defended the beauty of classical models and saw himself as an artist in the classical tradition. In Daphne's Opera, his designs fit perfectly with the naturalistic costumes of ancient Greece.

Archaeologist Arthur Evans and his mentor Federico Hubble revealed "a new order in classical art", a discovery that inspired young artists to create neo-classical art. They revitalised classicism by staying true to the real form and the human body.[16]. Neoclassicism is a thoughtful reflection on the past that has influenced the field of European art and culture. Many of its assumptions are derived from tradition and modified in accordance with current beliefs [17]. According to Plato, there is no beauty comparable to perfection in any of the arts, and others can only be regarded as copies or images.[18]. Bakst is heavily influenced by neo-classicism and blends exotic oriental colours with Greek naturalistic elements, resulting in an artistic design that is both unconventional and traditional.

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