

*F.B. Mussina<sup>1</sup>*

*<sup>1</sup>Kazakh national Academy of choreography  
(Nur Sultan, Kazakhstan)*

## **GEORGE BALANCHINE'S BALLETS ON THE STAGE OF THE ASTANA BALLET THEATER**

### **Annotation**

*The article is devoted to the features of the neoclassical technique of George Balanchine. The author considers the influence of master classes held by representatives of the G. Balanchine Foundation in the context of expanding the creative range of the Astana Ballet Theater troupe.*

*The stages of work on the "Serenade" and "Concerto Baroque" ballets to be premiered in 2017 and 2019 at the Astana Ballet Theater are traced.*

**Key words:** *George Balanchine, neoclassical style, Astana Ballet Theater, dance technique, "Serenade", "Concerto Baroque".*

*Ф.Б. Мусина<sup>1</sup>*

*<sup>1</sup>Қазақ ұлттық хореография академиясы  
(Нұр-Сұлтан, Қазақстан)*

## **АСТАНА БАЛЕТ ТЕАТРЫНЫҢ САХНАСЫНДАҒЫ ДЖОРДЖ БАЛАНЧИННИҢ БАЛЕТТЕРІ**

### **Аннотация**

*Мақала Джордж Баланчиннің неоклассикалық техникасының ерекшеліктеріне арналған. Дж. Баланчин қорының өкілдері өткізетін семинарлардың «Астана балет театры» труппасының шығармашылық шеңберін кеңейту аясында әсері қарастырылады. 2017 және 2019 жылдары премьералық серенада және концерттік барокко балетіндегі жұмыс кезеңдері қарастырылған.*

**Түйінді сөздер:** *Джордж Баланчин, неоклассикалық стиль, Астана балет театры, би техникасы, Серенада, Барокко концерті.*

*Ф.Б. Мусина<sup>1</sup>*

*<sup>1</sup>Казахская национальная академия хореографии  
(Нур-Султан, Казахстан)*

## **БАЛЕТЫ ДЖОРДЖА БАЛАНЧИНА НА СЦЕНЕ ТЕАТРА АСТАНА БАЛЕТ**

### **Аннотация**

*Статья посвящена особенностям неоклассической техники Джорджа Ба-*

ланчина. Автор рассматривает влияние мастер-классов, проводимых представителями Фонда Дж. Баланчина, в контексте расширения творческого диапазона труппы театра Астана Балет. Прослеживаются этапы работы над балетами «Серенада» и «Кончерто барокко», премьеры которых состоялись в 2017г. и в 2019 г. на сцене театра Астана Балет.

**Ключевые слова:** Джордж Баланчин, неоклассика, театр Астана Балет, техника танца, «Серенада», «Кончерто барокко».



**Fig.1.** A scene from the ballet *Serenade*.  
Soloist – Tatyana Ten.

The idea to include George Balanchine's neoclassical ballets in the repertoire was born in the early years of the Astana Ballet Theater. In 2015, Nanette Glushak, a representative of the Foundation which was, established in 1983 to preserve the heritage of the choreographer, was invited to master classes on Balanchine technique.

But the theater received an official permission to stage performances of the American neoclassic from the George Balanchine Foundation later, when the technical perfection of the troupe became undeniable. On May 25, 2017, the premiere of the *Serenade* ballet to the music of P.I. Tchaikovsky. The most popular Balanchine ballet, staged in 1934 for students of the ballet school created in America, is today the most performed and beloved by audience.

Victoria Simon, one of the reputable transmitters of the choreographer's legacy, came to staging a half-hour ballet. She staged 25 Balanchine performances in 80 theaters of the world.

Victoria Simon took the technique of the neoclassical choreogra-

pher at first-hand. After graduation from the American Ballet School she joined the New York City Ballet troupe where under the guidance of the master, she made a brilliant career and left the stage as a soloist. Therefore, she knows well about all the pitfalls, which seems so simple and clear, of Balanchine's choreography. "First of all, the artists must have very good training in classical ballet," the choreographer said. "But the Balanchine technique has its own peculiarities, and one of them is very fast, technical work of the feet." This is the problem of many ballet schools in the world. When preparing Balanchine's ballets it is also necessary to master special classes on his technique" [1].

Classes in Balanchine technique became a real revelation for the artists of the Astana Ballet troupe. The lesson began with careful work on each movement, special attention was paid to tendu battement - the basic basis of stop work.

"About two hundred different tendu battement combinations were given by Victoria Simon," notes Mukaram Avahri, the chief choreographer of the theater. - at the lesson he the following principles guided of building an exercise: a special culture and technique of feet, diverse musical alignment of the same combination of movements, lack of visible preparation (préparation) for the main movement, strong and free, sometimes stylized hands" [2].

The artists quickly learned the text, the tutors worked out the synchronism of the corps de ballet movements, but the troupe had the main task - to master the style of neoclassical choreography. It took almost a year. And when the music ceased to be just accompaniment for the dance, when it entered the blood and flesh of the performers, then they began to dance not "to the music", but to dance the music itself. And the magical String Serenade of Tchaikovsky led them along the vast expanses of abstract plotlessness, in which everyone can find close and understandable feelings and images to him. "Serenade" performed by the Astana Ballet Theater, has become romantic "dancing under the moon" with filigree shades in changing moods, subtle stylization and freedom of indirect citation, a kind of neoclassical anthem to classical dance and romantic ballet.



**Pic.2.** *A scene from the ballet Serenade.  
Soloists – Tatyana Ten, Dilara Shomaeva, Farhad Buriev*

As the researchers of Balanchine's creativity note the founder of the neoclassical trend introduced two main principles of American society into ballet – business logic and artistic freedom. Unlike the strictly canonized positions of the St. Petersburg school, of which he was a pupil, the choreographer brought into his choreography the emotional spontaneity of free dance, whose homeland is rightly considered America. To a greater extent this was expressed in the freedom of hands, in a less degree – the body and very little in the technique of legs, it remained classic, except that it became faster and more masterly in the allegro section. “At the same time, freedom of hands is not just an expression of emotions, but also a technical necessity. This is very important for the swiftness and speed of rotation, with which the choreographic text is rich in allegro, hands need to be squeezed closer to the body, then the speed will be higher” [3] – said the leading soloist of the theater Tatyana Ten, who brilliantly performs the main parts in *Serenade* and *Concerto baroque*”.

Balanchine’s choreography is a good guide for artists to cultivate taste, sense of style and measure in the art of dance. A different way of expressing classical choreography appears in the minds of artists: “The body speaks of the greatness of the classics, and at the same time, a certain game of freedom and immediacy is always present in the choreography of Balanchine. There is no plot dramaturgy in this duality, but the plot exists. There is always a plot, but it is like a plot in music or in abstract painting” [2].

The choreographer did not like when his ballets called plotless, he

preferred to say “storyless” (without narration), really, what story can be in “Concerto Baroque” or Stravinsky’s Violin Concerto? The subject of the story here is the music “I think like a dancer; I think in ballet pas. I don’t care about characters, plots, philosophy” [4]

Balanchine’s art researcher O. Levenkov accurately noted that “... the plot speaks of what happened. The abstract metaphysical ballet of Balanchine speaks of what happens and what can be” [4].



**Fig.3.** Scene from the ballet "Concerto Baroque".  
Soloists – Tatyana Ten, Farhad Buriev

The troupe and tutors needed considerable efforts to achieve this metaphysical ease and freedom - to dance the essence of music in its technical and emotional perfection. Especially in the work on the second masterpiece of Balanchine's "Concerto Baroque" to the music of the Concert for two violins and strings D-moll by I.S.Bach. The ballet appeared in the repertoire poster of Astana Ballet quite recently – on October 4, 2019. With this premiere the theater opened its seventh season. “The test here for the dancers was musicality,” says Nanette Glushak, spokesman for the George Balanchine Foundation. “Concerto Baroque is a very complex ballet. And they learned the text in four days, which was the whole choreography. We also prepared the second composition. In the second week they worked on the style. I am amazed at the performance of the troupe, the artists now have a very high level I saw this company in the first years of its work and for six years there has been an incredible leap in technology, I am amazed at such progress! Not every company can reach such level in a short time” [5].

Nanette Glushak, a graduate of the American Ballet school of, at the beginning of her creative career, danced in the troupe of the New York City Ballet, then became the soloist of ABT (American Ballet Theater). For a long time she was the leader and choreographer of the ballet troupe in Toulouse. Since 1987 Nanette Glushak has been a tutor for the George Balanchine Foundation and a certified choreographer who knows the style and choreographic text of the famous neoclassical ballets. Energetic and persistent in work, she transferred Balanchine's performances to the stages of the most prestigious theaters – Covent Garden, La Scala, Berlin Staatsopera, Mariinsky Theater, Stuttgart Ballet, Swedish Royal Ballet, Flanders Ballet, Sweden and many other famous groups. They performed the seemingly impossible ballet with the Astana theater artists – in two weeks of hard work, they prepared a ballet that was the most difficult in style and musical pace.

The researchers noted that George Balanchine understood music as a structure, and choreography as architecture and construction, and built the play of dance and musical forms in his ballets based on pure composition. In the Double Concert, a perfect example of Bach's clavier-concert style, the choreographer only followed the music, by making it visible.

The principle of competition, which are conducted by two violins in this concert, is embodied on stage by two soloists (Tatyana Ten and Nazerke Aymukhametova); a greater or lesser thematic saturation of the entire musical fabric and an almost unceasingly active melodic movement in the parts of the bowed ones were given to the corps de ballet. And this is a real test for the troupe. Artists can't enrich Balanchine's laconic choreography with either the flowery baroque style of Sleeping Beauty or the actor's expressiveness of the usual dramatic ballets. There is only a complete immersion in music, a complete merger with it, and impeccable technical performance. Any inaccuracy, technical flaws or even unnecessary brush movement breaks the graphic picture, thereby interrupting the sound of music on the stage.

At the same time, in the first and third parts the most prominent thematic events are entrusted to the sound of the entire orchestra or to the unison of the soloists and the orchestra. All these are clearly expressed in the dance, the whole structure of the three-part concerto is visible in the structure of the choreography, which means the corps de ballet is constantly on the stage, and sensitively follows the music. When the strings lead voices that are counterpointing to the melodic lines of the soloists and participate in "episodes" of a developmental character, it is very important for the corps de ballet to enter on time, which is a stumbling block for many artists

"In Balanchine's complex choreographic score, there is a shift in emphasis to a weak proportion, and counterpoints, and polyphony. And the movements fall on almost every note," says Tatyana Ten, the leading

singer or dancer of the Astana Ballet Theater. – In order to be in time, it is necessary to correctly place accents. And yet, it's very important to consider that, the soloists and corps de ballet do not work synchronously, everyone takes their own topics, and therefore, if you don't hear music the way the choreographer does it, it's very easy to go astray" [3].

Balanchine was professionally versed in music and easily read the score from the sheet, seeing the main and secondary themes, their development, and ornamentation. He came to the hall with a ready-made vision of choreography and gracefully translated music into a choreographic text. Moreover, he was always in tune with time. The development of jazz in the 40s could not but affect the sensitive to everything new George Balanchine. The choreographer is well known for his use in dance the offbeat term, which is typical for jazz music, the essence of which is to shift the supporting beats from the first and third beats to the second and fourth. This is not reflected in the musical notation, rather it is the internal state of the performers. The nature of the sound in this case becomes more intense. The jazz rhythmic pulsation inside the meter with a slight "falling" of alternating beauties introduces additional rhythmic tension due to the conflict with the soloist's metro rhythm. Balanchine brilliantly heard this pulsation in Bach's music (not without reason the great musician of the 18th century jokingly called the first jazz composer) and revealed it in the rich rhythmic pattern of the dance. Hence these syncopations, the "despair", each group has their own dancer's score, they take their beat, creating a complex picture of baroque music on stage.

"... It's not so easy to come up with dances of appropriate intensity, rhythmic constancy, diversity, technical mastery or proportional asymmetry," Balanchine wrote in the book "101 Tales of the Big Ballet". – As a cabinet-maker has to select wood for each particular product – palisander, rosewood, heather or pine – so the choreographer is forced to look for a dominant gesture, shade or palette of shades, a sequence of movements, a spectacular range of changing patterns that will reveal to the eye that sensitive hearing distinguishes in music" [6].

So in the middle, slow part of the concert, the orchestra (and on the stage the corps de ballet) modestly recede into the background, while in Adagio they are completely silent. The solo clavier enters into sovereign rights and sings his lyrical melody in full tune. On the stage at the same time, a lyrical duet reigns (Tatyana Ten, Farhad Buriev), which creates a captivating and poetic contrast with the boiling life of the first and third parts of the ballet. The cantilena of movements is not interrupted for even a second, the beauty of the lines, the masculinity of Farhad Buriev, the tender femininity of Tatyana Ten, contrary to all statements about the ballet's plotlessness, give rise to a story, an eternal story about the confrontation and interconnection of male and female principles, about harmony and love.



**Pic.4.** Scene from the ballet "Concerto Baroque".  
Soloists – Tatyana Ten, Farhad Buriev

In this performance, talking about dance can only be inextricably linked with Bach's music, which was excellently performed by a string orchestra conducted by conductor Arman Urazgaliev. It should be noted that throughout the rehearsal period, the artists worked under the phonogram of the concert recording performed by the Chamber Orchestra of French Radio and Television, with prominent soloists – Yehudi Menuhin and David Oistrakh. Therefore, Kalamkas Dzhumabaeva and Madina Mukhamet-Yakupova, two solo violins, had to follow the pace that the artists were used to during the rehearsal period. But the musicians not only corresponded to a high standard, but also brought to life their own, unique and harmonious sound.

The "Concerto Baroque" of George Balanchine performed by the Astana Ballet troupe was enthusiastically accepted by the audience, and the artists brought new experience and new breath. The future plans of the theater include staging one of George Balanchine's most complex ballets, "Jewels," sparkling with purple colors and virtuoso dance, the scene "Rubies". And then the evening of George Balanchine's choreography will sparkle with all the facets of the talent of the great choreographer, and the troupe, having mastered this masterpiece of the master, will go one step further in its performing excellence.



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