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Stéphanie Gonçalves, *Danser pendant la guerre froide: 1945-1968*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2018. 261 pp. Figures, bibliography, and index. 24€ (pb.) ISBN 978-2-7535-7486-1.

Review by Olivia Sabee, Swarthmore College.

In *Danser pendant la guerre froide: 1945-1968*, historian Stéphanie Gonçalves recounts the international tours undertaken by five of the “Big Six” ballet companies: London’s Royal Ballet (known as the Sadler’s Wells Ballet until 1956), New York City Ballet, Leningrad’s Kirov Ballet, and Moscow’s Bolshoi Ballet. (The last of the six, American Ballet Theatre, is omitted, an interesting choice given the company’s key role in the tours as the first American ballet company to tour to the Soviet Union in 1960.) Gonçalves’ intention is to present a pluralistic vision of the tours, and the narrative draws on extensive British and French archival materials to render the complexity of the period and its diplomatic goals by not only focusing on tours that crossed the Iron Curtain but also transatlantic ventures such as the Paris Opera Ballet’s New York tour in 1948.

The book, based on Gonçalves’ doctoral dissertation in modern history, weaves together the diplomatic history underpinning these tours while maintaining a strong focus on the individuals, both dancers and diplomats, who participated in them. It opens with an anecdote recounted by Claude Bessy, the Paris Opera *étoile* who would later serve as director of the company’s affiliated school. Bessy, training and rehearsing in Moscow, describes an instance of cultural exchange at a personal and artistic level. Overwhelmed by Asaf Messerer’s strenuous ballet class, anchored in demi-pointe work and arduous jumps, Bessy shared with the class a turn *à la seconde* incorporating a *développé*, as yet unknown to the Soviets. Moments like this one return throughout the book, revealing themes including artistic exchange among professionals and curiosity among western dancers and patrons regarding Soviet practices, but also mistrust on both sides, emphasized in accounts of the negotiations required for these tours to go forward within the politically delicate climate that characterized the immediate postwar years through the post-Stalin-era Khrushchev Thaw.

Gonçalves begins by laying out the histories and stylistic priorities of the companies involved in the tours, but, more importantly in the context of this particular narrative, she also emphasizes each company’s recent history. For example, in the years after World War Two and leading up to its first tour to the United States, the Paris Opera Ballet had been embroiled in a series of conflicts about how to treat artist-collaborationists under the Vichy government, particularly Serge Lifar. In November 1944, both Lifar and his ballets were banned from the Opera, the latter being particularly consequential in that the choreographer’s work made up a

substantial portion of the Opera's repertory at that time. In 1947, this ban would be lifted, per the dancers' wishes, and Lifar would return to his post just in time for the company's New York City tour.

In the USSR, ballet's long history was indebted to French and Italian influences that came together under the direction of French ballet master Marius Petipa in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Alexander Gorsky, Gonçalves writes, had updated Petipa's Russian Imperial style with emphasis on danced drama anchored in realism and ultimately, after the Revolution of 1917, he was tasked with fully re-envisioning ballet for Soviet society. In both this overview and the British and American histories to follow, Gonçalves' narrative lacks the nuance that characterizes her synopsis of the Paris Opera Ballet's history, in this case omitting Fyodor Lopukhov and Leonid Yakobson, key players in the re-envisioning of Soviet ballet. Another major figure, Leonid Lavrovsky, whose death is among the closing book ends for this history, is introduced in another context. Meanwhile, Russian modernist and avant-garde culture had penetrated western Europe and the United States, marked by the arrival of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes at Paris' Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and the company's subsequent touring. In Great Britain, Gonçalves skips over ballet's early and less institutionalized history, marking its official presence with the establishment of the Royal Academy of Dancing in 1920. Emphasizing the influence of both the Russian Imperial Ballet and the Ballets Russes on British dancing, she also notes the movement of French dancers across the Channel and the role they likely played on the development of national style. Like British ballet, ballet in America also owed a substantial debt to Russian training and repertoire, though Italian influences were present as well through the lineage of Antony Tudor and Margaret Craske. Tudor was a student of Craske, who had trained with Italian master Enrico Cecchetti in London. This chapter closes with a consideration of the role of transnational exchange in the world of ballet, emphasizing both the historically fluid borders between these national schools as well as the shared vocabulary and repertory across national lines.

Gonçalves then turns to the tours themselves. Unlike other major studies of this time period centered on the Soviet-West exchanges—Naima Prevots' *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War*, Clare Croft's *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange*, and Christina Ezrahi's *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* (the main English-language source on the Soviet side of the exchanges)—Gonçalves begins prior to the USSR's involvement in the tours by considering cultural exchange between allies during the period before Stalin's death, when the Soviet borders were effectively closed off to the West. Competition for artistic supremacy very much characterized this period, too. For instance, there is the tension between Lifar and George Balanchine, who had recently spent a period at the Opera in which he choreographed the work *Le Palais de Cristal* (an early version of *Symphony in C*). The following year, Lifar accepted an invitation to perform at New York's 1948 Golden Jubilee in celebration of the unification of the five boroughs. Though the French press emphasized this tour's success, it neglected to mention problems with competition from the Ballet du Marquis de Cuevas (performing concurrently at the Metropolitan Opera and thus forcing the Paris Opera Ballet to dance on the smaller stage at City Center) and the controversy around Lifar, who dominated American press coverage. Lifar was deemed politically and artistically problematic by the American press: his collaborationism and continued employment were issues, alongside the fact that his ballets and direction were critically uninteresting. Four years later, the New York City Ballet's tour to the CIA-sponsored Festival du XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle in Paris, organized by Nicolas Nabokov under the guise of promoting

free expression, was met with comparative enthusiasm, selling out houses despite Lifar's critique of the festival on the grounds that France, not the United States, ought to be considered the paragon of free expression and individual liberty. The company, however, extended its stay to tour Europe more broadly, and met with failure in England, where audiences and critics disliked Balanchine's "extremely athletic" choreography (*The Dancing Times* qtd. on p. 100).

The proxy wars of the Cold War period also had an effect on artistic exchanges. On May 7, 1954, following an eight-year war in French Indochina and the horrific Siege of Dien Bien Phu, the French surrendered. French Prime Minister Joseph Laniel was faced with the difficult decision of whether the recently arrived Soviet dancers, drawn from both the Bolshoi and Kirov companies and scheduled to perform as part of the reciprocal agreement that had brought the Comédie-Française to Moscow the previous month, should dance the following evening. The government ultimately cancelled the May 8 opening and, five days later, the entire engagement. Debate about what was referred to as "The Soviet Ballet Affair" erupted in the press, with members of the intellectual left arguing that art ought not to be "victim of politics" (*Le Monde*, qtd. on p. 112). After two weeks spent shopping and visiting the sites, the Soviet company departed Paris, accepting an invitation to appear instead in East Germany. With the failure of this first attempt at Franco-Soviet cultural exchange—a direct result of more obviously politically oriented events—Laniel resigned.

In September 1956, the Bolshoi Ballet presented a four-week season in London, with the Sadler's Wells Ballet scheduled to appear in Moscow later the same year. Though this was not the first time Soviet dancers had appeared in London, this was the first time the full company would perform in the west. Gonçalves' archival research illuminates negotiations between the British Council, David Webster, director of the Royal Opera House, and the Soviet embassy in London that took place prior to the performances, emphasizing both the negotiations' duration and the specific priorities weighed in the context of the tour. Webster was adamant that the Bolshoi appear only at Covent Garden, in an exchange of official venues that would underscore the reciprocity of the arrangement. On the Soviet side, Sergei Shashkin, the Bolshoi's assistant manager, and Alexander Slavnov, Deputy Minister of Culture, visited London in preparation for the tour. The Soviets decided to produce a book on the Bolshoi's history to be sold in advance of the tour as publicity. Meeting minutes, interestingly, reveal that the Soviets were unconcerned with making a profit on the book, but rather focused on its educational potential. Gonçalves argues that this places the tour and its goals fully within the artistic and political realms, rather than the commercial, something she underscores was not always the case with other tours considered in her study.

On August 29, however, the tour was put in jeopardy when Soviet discus thrower Nina Ponomaryova was arrested for stealing five hats in a C&A store in London. In the intervening six weeks between Ponomaryova's arrest and her court appearance, British-Soviet relations were tense. Andrei Gromyko, former Soviet ambassador to the UK, threatened to cancel the Bolshoi's upcoming visit if the situation was not resolved. A week later, Galina Ulanova and a number of Bolshoi dancers signed a letter circulated by the Russian News Agency (TASS) stating that, given the circumstances, they could not travel to London. By the end of September, things had calmed, largely due to the Soviet Minister of Culture's reiteration of friendship between the two countries during a reception for the London Philharmonic Orchestra in Moscow. Two days later, on September 29, the Bolshoi departed for London.

There the company performed a mixture of classic Russian Imperial ballets and newer highly narrative *drambalets* such as Leonid Lavrovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* and Rostislav Zakharov's *La Fontaine de Bakchisarai*, both very popular in the USSR. Criticism was mixed, characterized by praise for the massive scale of the company's work and an image of "Oriental-Soviets possessing latent eroticism," alongside complaints about what was considered an excessive use of pantomime (p. 157). The tour, however, was unexpectedly cut short, the company returning to Moscow on November 4, aboard a single airplane, as the Red Army had entered Budapest that very day, and the dancers seem to have received an order to depart before word of the invasion was reported by the international press. Given the circumstances, Covent Garden opted to break their contract with the USSR and cancel the Sadler's Wells tour to Moscow. Once again, the delicate political balance required for reciprocal cultural exchange had been compromised.

The period from 1958-1961 is represented as a period of *détente* in cultural relations between the West and the USSR. 1958 was marked by the most well-known event of whole era: Rudolf Nureyev's defection during the Bolshoi's first tour to Paris. Here Gonçalves focuses not on the myth around Nureyev, but the larger relations between the Western bloc and the Soviets, which continued amicably despite Nureyev's widely publicized defection. The tours of this era were marked by increased involvement of impresarios and the scheduling of performances in "popular" venues such as Paris' Palais des Sports, with a capacity of 4,600 spectators. Impresario George Soria, a fluent Russian speaker and member of the French communist party, hoped that the use of a space of this size would make culture accessible to all. The reviews, as in Britain, were mixed, with the only unanimity a glowing praise for Nureyev. Others cited overdone realism in the décors, a classical east closed to modernist influences, and a purity of style lacking in the West.

After Nureyev's defection, the company's tour continued on to London, although impresario Victor Hochhauser, responsible this time for negotiations, believed Nureyev's failure to appear with the company to be a breach of contract. Later, in June and July 1961, the Royal Ballet toured to both Moscow and St. Petersburg, the first appearance of a full British ballet company in the USSR. Despite material hardships, Margot Fonteyn referred to the tour as the "apogee" of her career (p. 193). A diplomatic and artistic success, Fonteyn, director Ninette de Valois, Fonteyn's frequent partner Michael Somes, choreographer Frederick Ashton, and conductor John Lanchbery were each awarded the Bolshoi Medal.

The Royal Ballet had planned another tour for the USSR for June 1966, following on the heels of the Bolshoi's appearance in London in the spring of 1965, again organized by Hochhauser, and this time in the larger London Festival Hall. After an unsuccessful attempt to reschedule for the following fall, however, the Royal Ballet ultimately opted for a tour of Eastern Europe. Unlike in the past, uproar about the cancellation was largely artistic and not political, signaling a shift in perception of the tours, which had become routine. The company stopped in Luxembourg, Prague, Brno, Bratislava, Munich, Belgrade, Sofia, Bucharest, and Warsaw, presenting repertory that included *Swan Lake* (a "yardstick" by which to judge British ballet [p. 217]) but also Ninette de Valois' *Checkmate* and John Cranko's *The Lady and the Fool*. Nureyev, though not officially an artist of the Royal Ballet, had begun to appear with Fonteyn by this time, and thus became a desirable component of the Royal Ballet's touring engagements. This became a point of contention in the context of the company's Romanian appearance. The British cultural attaché wanted Nureyev's name to be mentioned, as it would help sell tickets.

The Romanian authorities on the other hand, acting with concern for recent defections by Romanian dancers, did not want to appear tolerant of Nureyev's defection. Ultimately the UK Foreign Office and the British Council decided not to risk losing the tour; Nureyev would not appear. The reviews of the tour were decidedly mixed, and a lack of interest among the authorities in Prague was particularly disappointing.

Despite the presence of ballet at its center, the emphasis in *Danser pendant la guerre froide* rests firmly on the relations between and among diplomats, artistic personnel, impresarios, and dancers, and does not touch on aesthetics except tangentially. The narrative truly hits its stride after the historical overview, following which there is ample space to engage with the rich diplomatic and artistic correspondence that forms the core of the book's source material. The story Gonçalves recounts is an important one both for dance scholars as well as historians of the cultural Cold War, demonstrating how tightly intertwined politics and art were at this historical moment and what it meant for organizers, audiences, critics, and performers. It reveals the delicate interplay between battles fought between governments and elite institutions for cultural supremacy and attempts by impresarios to make culture accessible to wider publics. Adding a new chapter to the histories of ballet's role in cultural diplomacy and embracing a multidirectional approach to cultural exchange, *Danser pendant la guerre froide* is an important contribution to an expanding field.

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