



ballet riot

Two seasonal ballet festivals are competing for Moscow tourists this summer, which is great if you like your ballet classical and frilly. The Summer Ballet Seasons and the Summer Ballet Festival present Terpsichore with all the dainty trimmings.

TEXT FRANCIS MERSON



teria of indignation in an audience of today. Something involving mass hypnosis? Pedophilia? Infanticide? All the same, the 1913 ballet uprising was more interesting for its aftermath than anything else. As a historical event, "The Rite of Spring" echoed its libretto, which chronicles a pagan renewal ritual in which a virgin dances herself to death. It was both a birth and a death for European art. For music, it was the birth of the 20th century, which was thereafter spent trying to live up to the terrifying magnificence of Stravinsky's score. But it was also the demise

Russian National Ballet, part of the Summer Ballet Seasons. Sound confusing? You haven't seen the repertory. The ballets staged by the two companies are also virtually identical. It's a diet of Tchaikovsky, followed by Tchaikovsky, then watered down with some Tchaikovsky's weeder predecessors, like Adolphe Adam ("Giselle") and Leon Minkus ("La Bayadere"). In fact, both companies perform Tchaikovsky's family favorite "The Nutcracker" on the same nights, this Friday and Saturday, to garner the lucrative weekend market. The Russian National Ballet Theater then moves on to

this sounds like the dispassionate logic of business rather than the ethereal glow of art, it should be kept in mind that for the companies performing at the festival it's either classical ballet, or no ballet. "The companies are struggling to stay afloat without government funding, to offer their dancers normal working conditions, insurance, a decent salary and so forth." If the Russian National Ballet, or the Russian National Ballet Theater, decided to stage Alfred Schnittke's "Labyrinths," they'd end up dancing for kopecks in the perekhod at Teatralnaya. Accordingly, the two summer festivals represent ballet at its most accessible — necessarily so, as it is ballet molded by the forces of the market. In any case, since classical ballet is all we're getting this summer, we may as well just enjoy it, I suppose.

A summer festival means classical ballet, romantic music, large troupes, lavish sets and swathes of chiffon.

of ballet as a popular art form. Anything that's been written since has not taken root in the hearts of its viewers, with a few, meek Soviet exceptions, like Sergey Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet." Although ballet may have died of a stroke during the premiere of "The Rite of Spring," it was gleefully embalmed in Russia, much like the cadaver of Lenin, and continues to look pretty much like it did at the beginning of the century. The Russian idea of ballet is still a rhapsody of pink tutus, pirouettes and pointe slippers. And the stereotypes of the West are hardly any more modern.

The two ballet festivals running simultaneously this summer in Moscow are a case-in-point. Aimed mainly at tourists, both are commercial ventures and so represent the most ploddingly popular tastes. In ballet terms, this means classical dance, romantic music, large companies, lavish sets and kilometers of silk and chiffon. But the resemblance between the two summer festivals doesn't end here; in fact, their similarities would be comic if they weren't so bewildering. Performing at the Novaya Opera is the Russian National Ballet Theater, part of the Summer Ballet Festival; while at the Russian Academic Youth Theater (RAMT), we have the

Tchaikovsky's "A Sleeping Beauty," while the Russian National Ballet migrates to Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake."

This is all grand if you like your dying swans swathed in taffeta, which, it seems, most people do. Ivan Vorontsov, producer of the Summer Ballet Festival, explains: "We stage classical ballet because it is the most popular sort [...] Forty percent of our guests are foreigners, and a great proportion of the rest are people visiting Moscow." If

The Summer Ballet Festival runs to Aug. 28. The Summer Ballet Seasons run to Aug. 25. For full schedule and booking information, go to summerballet.ru and ballet2007.ru respectively.

ADDRESSES

Novaya Opera, 3 Karetny Ryad Ul. (Hermitage Garden), Metro: Tverskaya, Tel. 200-0868; **Russian Academic Youth Theater**, 2 Teatralnaya Pl., Metro: Teatralnaya, Tel. 292-0069

What would make you start a riot? What kind of event, act or spectacle would make you abandon your quaint civilities and really lash out at the world? I suspect a ballet performance isn't the first thing that comes to mind. But there was a time when people took their ballet more seriously. In 1913, impresario Sergey Dyagilev, long before he started opening nightclubs in Moscow, staged Igor Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," a dissonant, primitivist work with choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky. The premiere of the ballet on May 29 at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees in Paris sparked the most important riot in ballet history. Some chap called Carl van Vechten, who was at the performance, gave a particularly fruity descrip-

tion: "A certain part of the audience was thrilled by what it considered to be a blasphemous attempt to destroy music as an art, and, swept away with wrath, began, very soon after the rise of the curtain, to make cat-calls and to offer audible suggestions as to how the performance should proceed. The orchestra played unheard, except when a slight lull occurred. The young man seated behind me in the box stood up during the course of the ballet to enable himself to see more clearly. The intense excitement under which he was laboring betrayed itself presently when he began to beat rhythmically on top of my head with his fists. My emotion was so great that I did not feel the blows for some time."

It's difficult to conceive what kind of staged performance could arouse the same hys-

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