



MODERN CREATIVE METHODS OF BALLET STAGING AND THEIR REFLECTION IN THE KAZAKH BALLET *ZHUSAN*

Ilzat AUKHADIYEV¹ , Daulet DOSBATYROV², Heili EINASTO³

¹*Department of Pedagogy of Choreography, Faculty of Choreography, Temirbek Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts, Str. Panfilov 127, 050000 Almaty, Kazakhstan*

²*Department of Scenic Plasticity and Physical Education, Faculty of Theater Arts, Temirbek Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts, Str. Panfilov 127, 050000 Almaty, Kazakhstan*


³*Baltic Film, Media and Arts School, Tallinn University, Tallinn Narva mnt. 25, 10120 Tallinn, Estonia*

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Abstract. The manuscript explores the evolution of ballet staging, focusing on the integration of modern dance and classical ballet. It traces this trend to the second half of the 20th century, highlighting the impact of modern dance's flexibility on classical ballet's rigidity, leading to a postmodern era in ballet theater. The study acknowledges significant Western European, American, and Russian researchers in ballet. It discusses how the fusion of classical ballet and modern dance has enriched choreography and led to innovative staging techniques. The manuscript examines the transformation in the definition of ballet, the rejection of strict genre boundaries, and the rise of individual authorial signatures in contemporary ballet productions. The work delves into the postmodernist quest for creative freedom, with choreographers like Merce Cunningham (1919–2009) seeking to break traditional dance constraints. It addresses contemporary ballet trends such as polystylism, eclecticism, collage, and complex performance structures. Focusing on Kazakhstan's *Zhusan* ballet, the manuscript analyzes its choreography, music, and artistic interpretation. *Zhusan* exemplifies the fusion of classical, Kazakh, and contemporary dance, featuring a poetic *libretto* and a compilative score. In conclusions, the manuscript emphasizes the contemporary ballet's shift towards the choreographer-director's subjective vision, a departure from traditional approaches. This critical analysis offers a historical overview and examines the dynamic nature of ballet staging, showcasing a blend of tradition and innovation.

Keywords: ballet staging, choreographic innovation, classical ballet, creative methods, Kazakh ballet, modern dance, postmodernism, theatre.

Corresponding author. E-mail: ilzataukhadiyev@gmail.com

1. Introduction

One of the distinctive features of modern ballet can be considered the diversity of genres and styles. The search for the origins of this phenomenon leads us to the second half of the last century. Modern dance, by its nature, stood in opposition to the strictness of classical dance. By the mid-20th century, modern dance had acquired crystallized features of style, a defined set of themes, specific principles for constructing a choreographic lexicon, and interaction with music and stage space. The development of artistic forms and expressive means in modern dance led to the canonization of its fundamental staging methods, which in turn led to a gradual loss of novelty. The desire to renew outdated dance principles led young choreographers of the postmodern era to a synthesis of various dance directions, searching for a new choreographic language. Various techniques of modern dance merged with classical,

thereby enriching the lexicon of theatrical choreography. Thus, the ballet theater entered a new era of postmodernism, characterized by an increasing blurring of distinctions between different styles, genres, directions, and schools of dance.

The purpose of this study is to identify modern methods of ballet staging and to discover how these methods are used in Kazakh choreographic art on the example of the ballet *Zhusan*.

Transformation of ballet of the second half of the 20th century is devoted to the publications of such Western European and American ballet researchers and historians as Anderson (1993, 1997), Bremser (Bremser & Sanders, 2011) Au (2002), Jordan (2000), Lee (2002), Reynolds and McCormick (2021), Gottlieb (2004), Naughtin (2014), Lawson (1991), and others.

Among the researchers of modern dance and ballet theater of the second half of the 20th – early 21st century we can highlight monographs and articles by Surits (2004), Vasenina (2005, 2013), Nikitin (2004, 2020), Ozdzheviz (2015), the collection of articles *Contemporary Dance: Discourse and Practices* (Kuryumova, 2017), as well as numerous articles in the journals *Ballet*, *Bulletin of Vaganova Ballet Academy*, and the almanac of the Russian Institute of Theatre Arts (Russia) – *Theatre. Fine Arts. Cinema. Music*. The research of the aforementioned authors and the latest publications in periodicals form the basis of this article.

2. Synergy of classical ballet and modern dance in the late 20th century

In the second half of the 20th century, the synergy of classical ballet and modern dance led to the enrichment of the expressiveness of choreographic art, its dance vocabulary, and the emergence of new approaches to staging ballet performances. One of the earliest examples of this trend was José Limón's ballet *The Moor's Pavane* (1949). "It was with this piece that the slow reciprocal movement of modern dance and classical dance, which had previously functioned autonomously, began, especially the turn of modern dance towards ballet theatre" (Kudryavtseva, 2012, p. 319). This led to the dismantling of the previously strictly canonized principles of directing. The novelty and originality of the author's concept of ballet, its profound psychologism, and the opposite of it – abstraction, the search for an individual style, and a system of expressive dance tools – all became one of the main trends in the choreographic art of postmodernism.

The very definition of the term *ballet* underwent a significant transformation. At the end of the 19th century, ballets typically had a plot, a system of characters, music composed specifically for the production, and classical dance as the primary expressive medium. However, in the latter half of the last century, dance historians began to categorize a diverse range of works under ballet performances: plotless productions by George Balanchine; dramatic ballets such as those by Frederick Ashton, Kenneth MacMillan, John Cranko, Rostislav Zakharov, Leonid Lavrovsky, and others; performances by Maurice Béjart, Mark Morris, Jiří Kylián, William Forsythe; as well as new versions of classical heritage ballets by Mats Ek, John Neumeier, Matthew Bourne, Akram Khan, etc. It can be said that the genre of ballet now encompasses all performances in which the concept is conveyed through dance and movement.

The refusal of choreographers to adhere to strict genre and stylistic constraints, specific staging principles, and the traditional literature-centric or music-centric direction of ballet led them to creative freedom, diversity of forms, and expressive means in performances. In ballet, a wide variety of directorial techniques and solutions were amalgamated. As a result, the customary classification of choreographic productions by form, genre, and stylistic characteristics lost its relevance. Instead, contemporary dance theorists have advanced and established a method of distinguishing performances based on the individual authorial signature of the choreographer, which, in the 20th century, became the most vivid indicator of the key differences between full-length and chamber ballets.

The individualization of approaches and methods in staging performances has made post-modern ballet theater fundamentally authorial. The main criterion relied upon by the producers is the personal, subjective vision-concept of the choreographer. To realize this vision, a ballet master can choose a variety of methods: from abandoning the plot, music, or decor to using a compilation of music composed of different works and blending several dance styles (classical, folk, modern, and others) to create an original choreographic style of the performance, helping to reveal the concept. Thus, the ballet master either creates a unique artistic world of the performance each time, possessing a unique style, form, and specially created expressive means (as Michel Fokine did), or applies his signature style in a series of productions. Therefore, ballet scholar Ryazanova (2016, pp. 94–95) asserts that in the latter case,

“a personal language and specific expressive means are developed throughout the entire creative path of the ballet master regardless of the themes of his productions. Examples of such style and favorite techniques can be traced in the works of George Balanchine, Yuri Grigorovich, John Neumeier, Boris Eifman, Hans van Manen”

and many others.

3. Postmodernists’ quest for unrestricted creative expression in dance

The aspiration for free creative self-expression and liberation from the dogmatism of classical ballet and modern dance led postmodernists to reject any constraints. One of the first and most influential choreographers on this path was Cunningham. His innovative explorations undoubtedly influenced not only contemporary dance but also ballet theater in the second half of the 20th century. John Cage and Cunningham were among the first to affirm the independence of the arts in dance performances. Denying their mutual influence, the composer, artist, and choreographer treated music, design, and choreography in the production as independent elements. Cunningham asserted the essence of dance by freeing it from traditional influences, such as music and narrative subtexts. His approach emphasized experimenting with movement and expanding its possibilities in space and time:

“On his creative path, the choreographer abandoned the traditional type of figurative-emotional expressiveness in favor of fundamentally new content of choreographic performances. Cunningham and Cage avoided the ‘literariness’ and ‘descriptiveness’ of an artistic work, which should not have any plot, should not narrate anything, and should not express anything. The content of the music should be music, of dance is dance, of painting is painting” (Pereverzeva, 2018, p. 81).

Thus, another innovative approach entered the array of staging methods in ballet, which eliminated the dominance of the synthesis of scenario, music, and choreography.

It can be said that postmodern ballet does not simply deny the cultural traditions of previous epochs but rather equalizes all means, methods, and principles of ballet production without exception: from the strict stylistic frameworks of 19th century academicism to the newest techniques of working with movement, space, body energy, and weight, etc. The absence of limitations led ballet theater to a mixture of previously incompatible staging methods and approaches. Modern dance, which existed as an alternative to classical ballet, became part of the expressive tools of theatrical choreography. In a single performance, one could now hear compositions by various epoch composers, sounds of nature, urban noise, electronic music, and a synthesis of several dance directions. Choreographers, whose performances were considered successful, were invited to different theaters to stage their ballets. Thus, another distinctive characteristic of postmodernism became the gradual erasure of cultural and national boundaries.

With ballet theater stepping beyond the boundaries of traditions, overthrowing dogmatic canons and authorities, and expanding and equalizing all artistic means, styles, genres, and forms, various problems have emerged:

“Standards that could serve as a measure of perfection for genuinely innovative works do not exist. It is not surprising, therefore, that the eternal problem of ‘the correspondence between form and content’ in contemporary art has once again gained relevance. The extent to which new dance-plastic means express a new theme, or an interpretation of a traditional theme, remains the primary objective criterion merit of artistic work. Creating genuinely innovative works today is both easier (nothing constrains the choreographer’s creative imagination) and immeasurably harder, as the demands for form, its correspondence to the choreographer’s concept, have significantly increased” (Komarov, 1989, p. 5).

4. Leading trends and principles in contemporary ballet production

Key tendencies and principles in the staging of contemporary ballet can be identified as polystylism, eclecticism, collage, and compilation. The structure of performances is constantly becoming more complex. Ballet masters create multiple stylistic layers from various dance directions, integrate references to other artworks, and parody or ironically quote fragments of classical heritage ballets. The expressive possibilities of ballet performances are expanded. Elements of folk, traditional Eastern dance, acrobatics, and jazz are incorporated into classical dance and contemporary choreography directions (examples include works by Béjart, Kylián, and Khan). Furthermore, choreographers turn to improvisation, which today possesses its various authorial methods of working with movement (Steve Paxton, Wayne McGregor, Forsythe, and others).

In postmodern ballet, the relationship between music and dance has also reached a diversity of approaches. The origins of this tendency take us back to the end of the 19th century when choreographic art came to the innovative symphonization of ballet music, opening paths for further development of musical–choreographic synthesis. The relationship between music and dance has been thoroughly studied by contemporary composer and researcher Yuriy Borisovich Abdokov. In his research *Musical Poetics of Choreography: Plastic*

Interpretation of Music in Choreographic Art (Abdokov, 2009), the author extensively analyzes various methods choreographers work with musical pieces. Dividing the research into four chapters, Abdokov (2009) examines the choreographic embodiment of...

- ...melody, harmony, texture, and polyphony;
- ...meter, rhythm, tempo;
- ...the correlation of orchestration and choreography;
- ...issues of interpreting non-theatrical music in contemporary choreography.

If at the end of the 19th century composers specifically wrote music for ballet, and in the first half of the 20th century choreographers turned to non-theatrical works (both purely instrumental and vocal-instrumental), then in the second half of the last century the range of musical interests of ballet masters expanded even further. It included church, national, popular, electronic music, and even sounds of nature, urban noise, etc. At the same time, the approaches of ballet masters to working with musical material changed. Choreographers like Cunningham and Forsythe prefer to work with a single composer who writes music specifically for their productions. In this context, "the composer creates a certain acoustic landscape for the choreography, and the choreographer constructs movements in this sound space" (Lavrova, 2018, p. 135). Others compile the ballet score from various compositions of one or several composers. Additionally, a specific musical piece can serve as a source of creative impulse for the choreographer, providing an impression as the basis of the concept. However, the actual staging by the ballet master may be performed to different music by another composer.

Abdokov considers the interpretation of various aspects of musical works as the main indicator of the synthesis of the two arts (dance and music). However, English musicologist and ballet scholar Jordan (2000) views the interrelationship of dance and music somewhat differently. She considers interpretation as a directorial method of choreographic composition, in which dance can reflect the figurative-semantic, meter-rhythmic structure of music in the most complete correspondence, or embody its own content through parallelism, or contrastingly oppose the music (Jordan, 2000).

Another important factor that defines ballet masters' approaches to working with musical material is the presence or absence of a plot in the production. For instance, Roland Petit, Ashton, MacMillan, Cranko, Neumeier, and Yuri Grigorovich could compile music to align it with the director's concept and the scenario of the performance. In other cases, Balanchine, Kylián, Béjart, and Neumeier followed the principle of musical direction in plotless ballet, where choreography is entirely subordinate to the music, which became the "main impulse, starting point" (Lavrova, 2015, p. 31). Finally, in a third approach, Cunningham, Leonid Yakobson, McGregor, Forsythe, and Ohad Naharin relied on experimenting with the movement itself and its development. In this case, neither the plot nor the music determines the structure of the production – it is formed by the dance.

5. Contemporary ballet choreography: diversity of methods and approaches

"Currently, there is a multitude of methods and techniques for exploring choreographic themes, which ballet masters select based on the genre and type of their works" (Karpenko et al., 2016, p. 93). Choreographers form the lexicon of ballet from a composite alloy of

various dance techniques. However, this approach should not be interpreted as a negation of the traditions of ballet theater. On the contrary, a thorough command of a wide range of different forms of dance, accumulated by choreographic art over several centuries, gives modern ballet masters the freedom to operate with movement and its variants in the process of creating images. Within this context, several general directions can be identified in which the lexicon of a ballet performance is developed:

- Neoclassical choreography (Balanchine, Ashton, MacMillan, Cranko, early Neumeier);
- Synthesis of classical and various modern dance techniques (Ek, Kylián, Neumeier, Bourne, Nacho Duato, Morris, Boris Eifman, Alexei Ratmansky);
- Abstract and conceptual dance (Cunningham, Forsythe, McGregor, Naharin, Khan, Angelin Preljocaj).

In the first category *Neoclassical choreography*, two main approaches can be observed. For Balanchine, music serves as the defining source of inspiration, as noted by musicologists and ballet scholars. In contrast, for Ashton, MacMillan, and Cranko, who focus on narrative productions, music, and choreography are derived from the narrative tasks of portraying the plot. Both approaches use classical dance as the choreographic lexicon basis, with ballet masters expanding the expressive possibilities within classical key canons of dance.

In the second category, involving the synthesis of classical and contemporary dance, there is a diverse range of approaches to choreographic lexicon composition. Elongated lines, fluidity, virtuosity, and pathos of classical dance are combined with the expressiveness, psychologism, curvilinearity, and angular poses of modern dance. This combination leads to a complex spatial organization of the choreographic text, enriching its associative and metaphorical content. The relationship of dance to music in this context is unique, often conceived as parallel or entirely independent, forming a complex polyrhythmic structure (Komarov, 1989, p. 71). Thus, the choreography in the ballets of Ek, Kylián, Neumeier, Bourne, Duato, Morris, Eifman, and Ratmansky forms a stylistically and content-wise complex, multi-layered fabric. It can narratively (sometimes parodically) depict plot twists, stemming from the peculiarities of the imaginative, melodic, or meter-rhythmic structure of the music, etc.

Abstract and conceptual choreography share key principles in dance composition. The main focus of the choreographer is movement, which becomes central to artistic creation. Experimentation with movement, such as through improvisation, allows extensive self-expression for both the performer and ballet master. In this style, music often assumes a secondary role, acting as an acoustic landscape, as described by Svetlana V. Lavrova, while the plot is typically excluded. Despite this, traditional dramaturgy principles like exposition, development, climax, and denouement can still be used, interpreted, or rearranged in unexpected ways within the production's structure.

Since movement has its laws of development, in composing such choreography, the ballet master may follow an intuitive path, turning to the subconscious, the sensual perception of stimuli originating from the initial form of movement-impulse. One of the first dance theorists who sought to answer the question of the origins of movement was Rudolf von Laban (1879–1958). According to him, “the impulse activating our nerves and muscles is generated by an inner drive” (Maximov, 2019, p. 83). However, the sources of the choreographer's artistic search can also be external factors: impressions from various events, listening to music, viewing a painting, or a film, and much more.

In the intuitive development of movement variations and their translation into a sequential chain, the choreographer's ability to embody a holistic artistic image in a dance combination becomes equally important. In this regard, contemporary choreography researcher Yur'evich Nikitin offers his definition of abstract dance and its place in the choreographic art of postmodernism. He believes,

"A dance can be called abstract when it creates something that concentrates the common qualities or properties of several objects. It is possible to abstract forms and images, not only human but also natural. Abstract dance implies that the choreographer abstracts a thought about one or several concepts or objects and shows them through movements that retain a remote resemblance to these concepts or objects. It is abstract dance that is the main genre of dance in the postmodern era" (Nikitin, 2020, p. 324).

In conclusions to all of the above, it can be noted that contemporary ballet direction, in the vast majority of cases, implies the embodiment of the author's subjective vision of the concept. Therefore,

"in contemporary ballet, the main and often the only creator of the performance is the choreographer-director [...]. He composes the libretto, selects and compiles the music, and creates the main thing – the choreographic text. He alone – the choreographer-director – is responsible for the success of the performance" (Ivanov, 2010, p. 107).

Ballet masters have several approaches to working on a script. If the choreographer's vision is a narrative ballet based on a literary work, a traditional method of preparing the script for the future performance is employed. However, today's directors have more freedom in interpreting the literary source: drawing parallels with other works, freely rearranging key events, etc. (Petit, Ashton, Béjart, MacMillan, Cranko, Neumeier, Grigorovich, Ek, Eifman, Bourne).

One of the trends in contemporary art is anti-narrative. Therefore, in the case of an abstract, plotless ballet, the functional characteristic of the script significantly diminishes. In such productions, the key impulse is an experiment with the nature of movement, and its duration in time and space. Therefore, the choreographer's thought is led by movement, not the other way around. The libretto for such performances is usually written in the final part of the staging work, when the ballet acquires distinct content and form, based on the intuitive, associative development of the choreographic lexicon (Balanchine, Cunningham, Yakobson, Forsythe, Kylián).

Music in contemporary ballet direction also has several fundamentally different functional roles. If for Balanchine and Kylián, it is the basis of choreography, then for Ashton, MacMillan, Cranko, Neumeier, and Eifman, the compilation of various musical pieces facilitates the directorial embodiment of the dramatic twists of the ballet's plot. Furthermore, today there is a separate category of abstract performances where choreography and music are independent of each other (Cunningham), or an acoustic landscape is created for the dance (McGregor, Forsythe).

The infusion of contemporary ballets with symbolism and metaphors opens pathways for their translation into the realm of stage decorations, background photos, and video projections. Concurrently, the costumes of the participants in ballet performances are becoming more ascetic and minimalist. A positive aspect of this trend is that it allows performers to move more freely, which in turn removes limitations from the choreographer in developing choreographic images and their dance lexicon.

In light of all the above, it can be noted that the development of postmodern ballet theater has been influenced not only by internal factors of experimentation with movement but also by its connection with other arts, which are integral synthetic components of ballet performances. Choreography of the second half of the 20th century, like in earlier times, turned to the achievements of other arts:

“From music, it adopted polyphony, principles of symphonic dramaturgy; from cinema – montage, rapid pacing, close-up; from sculpture – posing, figurative reminiscences, etc. Now, it seems, it’s time for the influence of television with its mosaic quality, the unpredictability of documentary” (Churko, 1999, p. 48),

as well as contemporary visual technologies, which can be considered a new synthetic component of performances, one of the expressive means of postmodern ballet theater.

6. A prominent example of national ballet in postmodern directing style in Kazakhstan: the *Zhusan* ballet

One of the striking examples of national ballet staged in the postmodernist directing style in Kazakhstan is the *Zhusan* ballet, which has become a repertoire piece of the Astana Ballet Theater (ABT, Kazakhstan) since its premiere and is regularly presented to audiences during the theater’s performances.

The premiere of the one-act ballet *Zhusan*, set to music by Kuat Abdullaevich Shildebayev, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Arvo Pärt, and Karl Jenkins, took place on 10 December, 2014, at the ABT (Astana Bajlet Teatry, 2019). The libretto for the performance was written by the renowned Kazakhstani film director, screenwriter, and poet Bakhyt Kairbekov. The scenography and costumes were entrusted to the theatrical designer Olga Shaishmelashvili. Video decorations were developed by designer Vadim Dulenko. The choreography for the performance was set by the theater’s principal ballet master Mukaram Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva (Avakhri). The ballet *Zhusan* can be considered a new national synthetic performance, in which a group of co-authors-directors combined a poetic libretto, a compilative score, choreography, decorations, and visual technologies into a single work. Each of the listed components of the performance enters into a multi-layered symbiosis with the other elements, forming a new type of ballet.

The synthetic essence of *Zhusan* encompasses some characteristic features of musical and choreographic postmodernism, in which, by the end of the 20th century, “the one-act ballet-miniature began to dominate [...] The postmodern era proclaimed freedom from any canons and narratives in dance” (Kasimanova, 2017, p. 190). One of the first features of the ballet *Zhusan* is its reference to national history without a narrative. Poet Kairbekov proposed a poetic libretto, deliberately steering the ballet’s concept away from plot and concrete imagery. Within this approach, the authors needed to find the most generalized, large symbolic images from the history of the Kazakh steppe nomads. This also determined the visual component of the ballet *Zhusan*. “Reproducing the model of the material world of the performance, scenographers create a corresponding metaphor, both in the space of decorations and in costumes” (Vellington, 2016, p. 127). The structure of the ballet included the following episodes:

1. Prologue;
2. "Wormwood";
3. "Centaur";
4. "Heavenly gift";
5. "Hunting";
6. "Great famine";
7. "Awakening";
8. "Invasion";
9. Epilogue.

In the ballet *Zhusan*, there is no historical sequence of events. For instance, the "Hunting" scene takes the viewer back to the times of matriarchy, the following "Great famine" to the early 20th century, and "Invasion" can be attributed to a wide period of history from ancient times to the 19th century. The authors deliberately refuse narrativity and disrupt chronology. However, it cannot be said that the performance lacks an appeal to the laws of dramaturgy. The direction by Abubakhriyeva includes a sequence of episodes based on the principle of increasing contrast and escalating tension between prosperity and fateful collisions. The scenes of the ballet resonate with each other in metaphorical interaction. In this, one can find "the manifestation of postmodernism, which has turned metaphors and emotions into meaning-bearing constructs of the work" (Ryzhankova, 2017, p. 40). Towards the end of the ballet, the choreographer leads the climactic intensity to a cathartic denouement.

The rejection of narrativity is reflected in the music of the ballet, particularly in the works of contemporary Western composers such as Jenkins and Pärt. In analyzing Pärt's work, researcher Argamakova (2018, pp. 47–48) comes to the following conclusion: "The rejection of the classical paradigm of compositional logic (i-m-t), of eventfulness as such, created an effect of novelty in minimalism, as it was overall consonant with the anti-narrative idea of new music". The score of the ballet also includes works by the well-known contemporary Kazakhstani composer Abdullaevich Shildebayev. One of the features of his multifaceted work is its metaphorical nature, the incorporation of ancient symbols and signs, which are refracted in a modern interpretation. In shaping forms and choosing expressive means for his compositions, Abdullaevich Shildebayev turns to various styles, traditions, and genres of both European and Eastern national musical cultures. Following the composer's ideas, ballet master Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva strives to reflect in dance symbolic generalizations the distinctive features of Abdullaevich Shildebayev's music. Piano Concerto No. 2 (Rachmaninoff) is included in the ballet's score as the final episode, in which the ballet master finds a vital image of wormwood as a life force sprouting through historical collisions. The music of the ballet also incorporates sounds of the steppe wind and rain, used in transitions between musical numbers and complementing the artistic image of the episodes following the content of the stage action.

7. Choreography and music in *Zhusan* ballet: interpretation and artistic execution

The ballet *Zhusan* begins with an expository presentation of wormwood – a female *corps de ballet* in green dresses with long skirts. Wormwood, the main image of the ballet, is created plastically, using various bends of the torso and *port de bras* work, reminiscent of

grass swaying in the wind. The dancers' hands, like the edges of stems, stretch in sinuous plasticity from the ground up to the sky. This leitmotif of *Zhusan* sets the atmosphere of the performance, becoming its plastic core, and immerses the audience in the artistic world of the ballet. When addressing the polyphonic development of dance and its pattern, Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva distributes the plastic motifs of wormwood among several groups of performers, moving in turn, creating a sensation of the wave-like swaying of the grass. Notably in the lexicon of *Zhusan*, the choreographer builds it on *par terre* choreography, work of the torso and hands, excluding all other dance elements. Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva shows extraordinary imagination and uses the broad expressive possibilities of *port de bras* in various forms. The "Awakening" episode is set to the music of Pärt, whose artistic thinking "is characterized by introverted spiritual-meditative contemplation" (Argamakova, 2018, p. 44). Abubakhriyeva develops the image of wormwood in dance *en pointe*: for the first time, various poses of arabesque and turns are added. The dance lexicon of this episode is entirely subordinate to the plasticity of the hands and torso – it dominates and sets the direction of development of each movement and the dancers' movements in the stage space. The choreography of the legs is built from the plasticity of the hands, setting the tone of the movement. Here, Abubakhriyeva first departs from the polyphonic structure of choreography – the principle of dance multi-layeredness (when different groups simultaneously perform various choreography). Following the minimalism in Pärt's music, the ballet master builds the plasticity of *Zhusan* on a homophonic development of *port de bras*. The ballet master consciously limits the techniques and lexicon of the episode, the immersion in meditative contemplation is enhanced by the simplicity of the dance's plastic structure, forming one continuous movement of wormwood. In the finale of the ballet, the second part of Piano Concerto No. 2 (Rachmaninoff) for piano and orchestra is played. Moving across the stage with small beaded *pas de bourrée suivi*, sprouts of *Zhusan* appear. Gradually, the dancers fill the entire stage space. In the final part, Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva combines all previously used compositional techniques. She constructs the epilogue with a mixed application of homophonic and polyphonic development of dance leitmotifs, adds choreographic echo (when performers one after another alternately repeat a certain combination or movement), creating wave-like *port de bras*, introduces and adds performers in various patterns, bringing the diversity of compositional solutions to a climax. In the cathartic finale of the ballet, the choreographic image of *Zhusan*, symbolizing vitality with an endless cyclical return to life, is presented to the audience in its highest development. The plastic motif of *Zhusan* runs like a red thread through the entire ballet in four episodes (prologue, "Wormwood", "Awakening", epilogue) and becomes its dramatic core.

In the prologue of the performance, which includes scenes of three yurts and a lyrical duet, it can be said that Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva turns to the polyphonic development of dance episodes as one of the main directorial staging techniques. The principle of such an approach is applied not only in the "lexical material" but also in the composition. Adhering to the goal of self-expression of each dancer, the ballet master in modern choreography splits the space into zones of action. Thus, the dance acquires immense dynamism, elusive to the viewer's eye at first glance. "The idea of philosophical thought, in this way, is embodied in an abstract multi-layered form of dance" (Usachyov, 2015, p. 10). For Saydakimovna

Abubakhriyeva, the polyphonic development of action is not only the simultaneous independent choreography of each performer but also the interaction of the complete *corps de ballet* with soloists in a lyrical duet. Here, the pattern and lexicon of the *corps de ballet* are no less interesting than the parts of the "Youth" and the "Girl". Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva strives to balance the significance of the performers. The choreographer overcomes the traditional principle of interaction between the *corps de ballet* and soloists: a hierarchical structure in which the former are subordinate and complement the latter. Here we see the continuous action of the soloists, forming a unified developing plastic duet, interacting with an equal and self-sufficient dance of the female *corps de ballet*.

On the background display, a wheel appears. The second scene of the ballet, named "Centaurs", evokes a metaphorical generalization of the image of nomads, most of whose lives were spent on horseback. People in black clothes enter the stage in rapid leaps, as if in a gallop. The flickering of the spotlights is added, as well as a video sequence that echoes the dance leitmotifs of this episode. The soft plasticity, smooth lines, and melodious fading poses of Zhusan are interrupted by sharp choreography, a continuous dynamic change of groups of dancers moving across the stage in rapid leaps to the sound of drum rolls. All this creates a contrasting tension between the episodes. The fundamental opposition of scenes in the choreographic aspect, as mentioned earlier, serves as the basis of the ballet's direction. With the departure of Zhusan and the appearance of people, the *par terre* plasticity and graceful curves of wormwood are replaced by dynamic leaps and an intense change of dancing groups. Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva also polyphonically develops the lexicon and patterns of the episode. The choreography is characterized by richness with big jumps: the development and combination of all types of big jete in classical dance. Only towards the end does the polyphonic multi-planar solution transition to a homophonic one: the entire mass of dancers unites in a single pattern and choreography. From the center of the stage, people in leaping gallops move frontally toward the audience. The episode ends abruptly and unexpectedly. With the completion of the last jump, darkness ensues.

The next scene, "Heavenly gift", begins against the backdrop of a blue sky. The smoke released across the stage floor adds to the atmosphere, resembling clouds upon which a spirit descends to earth. The "Heavenly gift" represents both the guardian spirit of the steppe and beauty embodied in a feminine image. All female dancers are dressed in white gowns with long skirts and wide sleeves. The costume conceals leg movements, creating an impression of smooth movement across the stage. This episode contrasts with the previous one – it contains almost no choreographic lexicon. After the preceding episode, rich in dense and dynamic dance text, the "Heavenly gift" scene is built exclusively on beauty and the development of the pattern. Here, the movements of the performers across the stage are embellished with the work of the torso and hands, creating wave-like, rounded moving lines. At the end of the episode, parts gradually break away from the swaying circle, which then disperses – one by one, the dancers, twirling, leave the stage in different directions.

The fifth scene of the ballet, "Hunting", sees the video backdrop transition from the blue sky to ancient rock drawings of animals and warriors. In staging this episode, Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva divides the performers into three groups and again turns to the polyphonic development of leitmotifs for each trio of dancers. From a single leitmotif pose of huntresses

with bows in their hands, an entire series of dance combinations emerges. If the lexicon of *Zhusan* reflects the melodic structure of the music, then the precise movements of the huntresses grow out of the meter-rhythmic structure of Abdullaevich Shildebayev's musical composition. Such correspondence is achieved through strictly rhythmic plasticity and choreography: only those dance movements are selected that can fully correspond to the tempo set by the composer Abdullaevich Shildebayev. Notably, Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva does not illustrate the hunting scene with a chase after prey. The choreographer metaphorically represents the episode in the development of the image of huntresses and their dance.

The scene "Great famine" is resolved by the ballet master in sculptural groups. The theme of the episode transports the viewer from antiquity to the beginning of the 20th century. The video sequence shows a desolate steppe, with lines of white fabric in the background (symbolizing lines of life). To the mournful sounds of the kobyz, a group of wanderers appears, tired from their journey, seeking refuge and salvation from hunger. In contrast to the dynamics of the "Hunting" scene, Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva constructs the famine scene statically. Here, the audience sees various sculptural groups, the patterns of which evolve from one another. These are pleas for salvation, and disputes between men and women in search of ways to leave the lifeless steppe. The entire episode looks like the movement of performers across the stage, symbolizing despair and wandering through the dead land. In the end, the white fabric, piece by piece, falls to the floor, and life is cut off. Along with it, people fall (die) one after another.

In the next scene "Awakening", the sound of rain is heard. People appear. In the background, a projection of the green steppe emerges. Life is reborn on earth. To the sounds of the Kazakh folk song *Yapurai*, *Zhusan* grows. Here, Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva again turns to polyphony, dividing the dancers into three groups and developing the plastic motifs of the previous episode in a multi-layered manner. The lines of dancers move in a circle, changing places in intricate patterns. Each group performs its choreographic text, based on the initial leitmotifs of *Zhusan*. Here, for the first time, the image of wormwood is developed in an expanded polyphonic variety. In terms of the ballet's dramaturgy, *Zhusan*, the main character of the ballet, evolves choreographically.

Next, under the ostinato rhythm of drums, the lines of wormwood are suddenly intersected by men. An image of bonfire smoke appears on the display. In the "Invasion" scene, people seem to push *Zhusan* off the stage. There is no conflict of characters or people that war implies. Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva consistently, as in the entire ballet, avoids illustrativeness and metaphorically constructs the image of "Invasion". After the harmonizing steppe "Awakening" and the rebirth of life, the ballet master again transitions the action into a tensely escalating dynamic of invasion. Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva stages a three-part mass dance, in the middle of which warriors with spears appear. The lexicon of the episode includes wide lunges, sharp turns, jumps, gestures, and sculptural-heroic poses of groups, and is characterized by expressiveness. At the moment of the musical-choreographic climax of the episode, the action abruptly stops. A deathly silence ensues.

In the background, the open sky, warmed by the sun's rays, is visible. In the finale of the ballet, the second part of Piano Concerto No. 2 (Rachmaninoff) is played. Gradually, amid the people rising to their feet, moving with small beaded *pas de bourrée suivi*, the sprouts

of *Zhusan* emerge. The number of performers increases. Unnoticeably, *Zhusan* fills the entire stage space. In the last episode, we again see choreography focused on the plasticity of the torso and hands. In the cathartic finale of the ballet, the choreographic image of *Zhusan*, symbolizing vitality with an endless cyclical return to life, is presented to the audience in its highest development.

8. Conclusions

In a concise characterization of the ballet *Zhusan*, one can highlight “Marked intellectualism, a taste for inventing new ways of organizing choreography, interest in movements from real life, inclination towards prolonged immersion” (Kiseeva, 2017, p. 69). Saydakimovna Abubakhriyeva has created a ballet that introduces the audience to a world full of metaphorical generalizations, mixing the real and the mystical, where the poetic principle, music, choreography, and visual technologies have formed a performance of a new form. The methodology of postmodern ballet direction is manifested in the refusal of eventful narrativity; poetic generalization and metaphoricity; the structure of the ballet, based on growing contrast between episodes; polyphonic development of dance scenes; choreography that combines different directions (classical, Kazakh dance, and contemporary choreography); the compilative score of the performance and its diverse interpretation (from depicting melodic richness to the dance embodiment of its meter-rhythmic structure); the use of video projections as an expressive means, filled with symbols and complementing the ballet both externally and in terms of content.

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