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Diaghilev's Groundbreaking Ballets Russes to be Showcased at National Gallery of Art, Washington May 12–September 2, 2013—Sole US Venue

Renowned artists include Nijinsky, Stravinsky, Picasso, and Chanel



Léon Bakst

Costume design for Vaslav Nijinsky as the Faun, from L'Après-midi d'un Faune, 1912

graphite, tempera and/or watercolour with gold paint on illustration board

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund.

Washington, DC—The Ballets Russes—the most innovative dance company of the 20th century—propelled the performing arts to new heights through groundbreaking collaborations between artists, composers, choreographers, dancers, and fashion designers, with such familiar names as Picasso, Stravinsky, Balanchine, Nijinsky, and Chanel, among many others. On view from May 12 through September 2, 2013, at the National Gallery of Art, Washington—the sole US venue—***Diaghilev and the Ballets***

Russes, 1909–1929: When Art Danced with Music showcases some 150 original costumes, set designs, paintings, sculptures, prints and drawings, photographs, posters, and film clips in a theatrical multimedia installation in the East Building.

On view for the first time in a museum in the United States are the largest objects ever exhibited inside the Gallery: Natalia Goncharova's backdrop for *The Firebird* (1926), measuring 51.5 feet wide by 33.5 feet tall, and the front curtain for *The Blue Train* (1924), 38.5 feet wide by 34 feet tall, designed by Pablo Picasso and painted by Prince Alexander Schervashidze, Diaghilev's principal set designer. Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev (1872–1929) founded the Ballets Russes in Paris in 1909.

"This landmark exhibition celebrates one of the most dazzling cultural enterprises of the 20th century," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "These historic collaborations initiated by Diaghilev revolutionized the art of ballet. We are very grateful to lenders from around the world, particularly the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and to the sponsors and supporters who have made it possible for the Gallery to present this exhibition."

The exhibition has been adapted from ***Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes, 1909–1929***, conceived by and first shown at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in 2010. In Washington, the exhibition includes some 80 works from the V&A's renowned collection of dance artifacts, as well as some 50 objects not seen in London, on loan from 20 museums and private collections, among them the Dansmuseet in Sweden and the National Gallery of Australia.

Exhibition Organization and Support

Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes is organized by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, in collaboration with the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

The exhibition is made possible by generous grants from ExxonMobil and Rosneft.

Adrienne Arsht also provided leadership support.

Additional funding is kindly given by Sally Engelhard Pingree and The Charles Engelhard Foundation, Jacqueline B. Mars, Leonard and Elaine Silverstein, and The

Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art.

"The ***Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes*** exhibition serves to foster better understanding between the American and Russian people," said Rex W. Tillerson, chairman and chief executive officer, Exxon Mobil Corporation. "We are honored to join Rosneft and the National Gallery of Art in promoting dialogue, interaction, and commerce between our two countries."

"The project will be a momentous event," stated Igor Sechin, Rosneft president and board chairman, "marking a milestone in the development of the partnership between OJSC Rosneft Oil Company and ExxonMobil. We may now say that we are discovering not only new oil fields in the interest of future energy security, but also new depths of our cultural heritage in the interest of mutual understanding and respect."

Serge Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes

In 1898 Diaghilev inaugurated Russia's first art journal, *Mir iskusstva (World of Art)*, a lavishly illustrated publication with an international outlook. He also began organizing exhibitions of European and Russian art both at home and abroad. His presentation of Russian ballet in Paris in 1909 broke new ground, revolutionized the performing arts in Europe, and led to the establishment of the Ballets Russes. Until Diaghilev's death in 1929, the pioneering dance company drew upon both Russian and Western traditions to thrill and shock audiences with its powerful fusion of choreography, music, design, and dance.

Diaghilev's success resulted from his ability to identify, inspire, promote, and bring together the most creative and innovative artists of his day. Collaborators included the artists Léon Bakst, Alexandre Benois, Jean Cocteau, Giorgio de Chirico, Sonia Delaunay, Natalia Goncharova, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Georges Rouault, and composers Igor Stravinsky, Erik Satie, and Sergei Prokofiev. His dancers and choreographers included Mikhail Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, Léonide Massine, Bronislava Nijinska, and George Balanchine. Diaghilev tapped the most talented, cutting-edge artists of his day and inspired them to work together to create aesthetically unified experiences.

French couturier Coco Chanel used 1920s fashions as inspiration for costumes for the ballets. Chanel also acted as a patron, underwriting an important revival of *The Rite of Spring* in 1920. Although the great couturier Paul Poiret never designed for the Ballets Russes, many of his ensembles were acknowledged at the time as inspired by the company's costumes and performances.

Using Paris to showcase new productions, the Ballets Russes toured throughout Europe, the United States (including Washington, DC), and South America. Its influence continues to be felt today.

In 2013 performing arts venues around the world will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the premiere of *The Rite of Spring*. With Stravinsky's avant-garde score and Nijinsky's shocking, angular choreography, the debut on May 29, 1913, sparked a riot at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris. Since then, *The Rite of Spring* has become an integral part of the Western canon of music and dance, and Stravinsky's daring composition continues to influence countless composers and choreographers.

Exhibition Highlights

The exhibition in Washington is organized chronologically and divided into five sections.

The First Seasons: The exhibition opens with the company's first seasons in Paris (1909–1912), when the Ballets Russes created visual spectacles that drew on a fascination with both Orientalism and Russian culture. Marked by the expressive choreography of Fokine and the jewel-like designs of Bakst and Benois, productions such as *Scheherazade*, *Cleopatra*, *Prince Igor*, and *Petrushka* brought to the stage dazzling color, sensual forms, and entrancing music.

The exquisite design, music, and choreography of pieces such as *Les Sylphides* and *Daphnis and Chloe* draw on romanticism and classicism, and reveal the company's gift for transforming a wealth of different artistic traditions into elegant, entertaining performances.

Vaslav Nijinsky—Dancer and Choreographer: The first of Diaghilev's male

protégés, Nijinsky was a dynamic and sensual dancer and choreographer who was celebrated for his technical brilliance and his ability to inhabit a wide range of characters. Nijinsky's emergence as a cult figure inspired paintings, drawings, and sculptures by several artists, including Auguste Rodin, and sparked a fascination with the figure of the male dancer. The imagery of the Ballets Russes and the circulation of promotional photographs and illustrations in the media are firmly rooted in the history of an emerging modern gay culture.

Nijinsky's skill as a dancer was matched by his creativity as a choreographer, and this section examines two ballets he choreographed: *Afternoon of a Faun* (1912) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913), the watershed production that formally introduced modernism to the ballet stage.

The Russian Avant-Garde: By the outbreak of World War I in 1914 the exiled Russian artists Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov joined Diaghilev's circle, creating striking costumes and innovative stage designs that introduced Russian futurist aesthetics to a broad audience. Their work for a variety of ballets is on view with the largest piece in the exhibition, Goncharova's backdrop for the production of *The Firebird*.

The International Avant-Garde: Toward the end of World War I, the company turned to the French avant-garde for inspiration and collaboration. Picasso designed the sets, costumes, and curtains for *Parade* (1917), the first "cubist" ballet with music by Satie, libretto by Cocteau, and choreography by Massine. Diaghilev—aware of the latest trends in modern art—engaged cutting-edge artists, including Matisse, known for his bold, colorful costumes for *The Song of the Nightingale*, as well as the team of Sonia and Robert Delaunay, who redesigned the costumes and sets for the ballet *Cleopatra* in 1918. The watercolor sketch and costume for Cleopatra are on view together in the exhibition.

Modernism, Neoclassicism, and Surrealism: The final section of the exhibition examines several major productions of the 1920s, including *The Blue Train* (1924). This is the most important of the company's modern-life ballets, bringing together the choreography of Nijinska (Nijinsky's sister) and the costumes of Chanel with the music

of Darius Milhaud in a witty parody that explores themes of modern sexuality and an emerging body-beautiful culture.

This section also celebrates the emergence of Balanchine as the company's last and greatest choreographer. His production of *The Prodigal Son* (1929), with set designs by Rouault, and his collaboration with the artist De Chirico on the surrealist ballet *The Ball* (1929) are represented by designs and costumes. Also included is experimental work by the Russian émigré artist Pavel Tchelitchev for the ballet *Ode* (1928).

Audio-Visual Components: The exhibition includes archival films that bring individual ballets to life, evoking the movement and creative energy of the company and its iconic performances. The clips may include the only existing footage of a Ballets Russes performance, as well as subsequent productions ranging from the Joffrey Ballet's *The Rite of Spring* to a breathtaking performance by Mikhail Baryshnikov, who was coached by Balanchine in *The Prodigal Son*. Accompanying these film clips is a Gallery-produced documentary that explores Diaghilev's Russian roots and early cultural forays, his genius for orchestrating avant-garde composers, dancers, painters, and designers, and the legacy of the Ballets Russes. The Gallery film is made possible by the HRH Foundation.

Curators and Exhibition Catalogue

Sarah Kennel, associate curator of photographs, National Gallery of Art, is the curator of the exhibition.

The exhibition at the V&A was curated by Jane Pritchard, curator of dance for the theatre and performance collections, V&A, and Geoffrey Marsh, director of the theatre and performance collections, V&A.

From V&A Publishing in association with the National Gallery of Art, the exhibition catalogue features two additions to the volume published in 2010 by the V&A: a new essay by art and dance historian Juliet Bellow detailing the centrality of the visual arts to the Ballets Russes and a partially illustrated checklist of the works exhibited in Washington. Edited by Jane Pritchard, V&A, the catalogue will be available in softcover and hardcover for purchase in the Gallery Shops. To order, please visit

<http://shop.nga.gov/>; call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail mailorder@nga.gov.

Café Ballets Russes at the National Gallery of Art

Award-winning Washington-based chef Michel Richard and Restaurant Associates will present Café Ballets Russes in celebration of the exhibition. Continuing the Gallery's popular themed menus inspired by exhibitions, Café Ballets Russes will open in May 2013 in the West Building Garden Café. Culinary artist Chef Richard will combine his inspiration from French and Russian bistro classics, such as blinis, beef stroganoff, caviar, and borscht, with the art, fashion, movement, and music of the Ballets Russes, to create a distinctly modern Café menu.

Related Activities

In 2013, the Gallery will present an array of activities celebrating the dynamic Ballets Russes, including on-site ballet performances and instructional programs, an online brochure, lectures, concerts, and a symposium as well as film screenings, gallery talks, podcasts, an audio tour, and a variety of offerings in the Gallery Shops.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) is the world's leading museum of art and design with collections unrivaled in their scope and diversity. It was established to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, the V&A's collections, which span more than 2,000 years of human creativity in virtually every medium and from many parts of the world, continue to intrigue, inspire, and inform. The V&A is home to the UK's national collection of theater and performing arts www.vam.ac.uk.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353 e-mail: pressinfo@nga.gov

Deborah Ziska

Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

ds-ziska@nga.gov