
RESEARCH AND TRADITION

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Amra Latifić*

Singidunum University in Belgrade
Faculty of Media and Communications

THE LEGEND OF OHRID – RECEPTION OF BALLETTIZATION OF THE DANCE TRADITION

Abstract: The paper discusses the interpretations of the choreographic aspects of different versions of the performance of the ballet *The Ohrid Legend* by Stevan Hristić. In the choreographies of this ballet, ballet vocabulary is combined with folklore motifs, using the principle of balletization of folklore. This choreographic approach has produced a pluralism of opinions on the ballet critical scene – from the modernization of folklore elements to views that the work still belongs to the traditional ballet choreographic structure. Pluralism of opinion provides an opportunity to open new approaches in the interpretation of the choreography itself. In this paper, an anthropological approach is treated, based on the intersection of different styles of play.

Keywords: ballet, balletization, folklore, folk dance, modernistic, postmodernistic, anthropological, syncretism

The four-part ballet by composer Stevan Hristić, *The Legend of Ohrid*, is one of the most frequently performed and popular performances in the history of

* Author's contact information: amra.latific@gmail.com

the national ballet. It achieved great success, both in the country and at numerous guest appearances abroad. According to Sonja Marinković: “Impressive statistics confirm this: more than 1,300 performances, 24 stage presentations (premieres and renewals) involving four foreign and ten Yugoslav choreographers (some have addressed this work several times)”¹ Today, this ballet performance is not on the repertoire and has not been the subject of choreographers for several decades.² Our efforts to find recordings of all-night ballet performances of *The Legend of Ohrid* were unsuccessful. We also contacted the relevant institutions.³ The paper analyzes the reception of the choreographic aspect of the ballet. Since recordings of the aforesaid all-night performance do not exist, the only thing left as a trace that can shed light on the choreographic aspects of this ballet are written texts, reviews and essays. The aim of the paper is to remind us again of the exceptional importance of *The Legend of Ohrid* and to point out that following its example, new ballets can be composed and new choreographies inspired by folklore and modern ballet can be created. The paper does not include the musicological aspect of this ballet.⁴

Balletization of the dance tradition

Numerous performances, with *The Legend* performed in different ways, led to a pluralism of opinions on the ballet critical scene. The balletization of the dance tradition changed and adapted, primarily by approaching or moving away from folklore. Throughout the entire history of this ballet's performances, from 1947 to 1985, choreographers faced difficulties – how to incor-

¹ Sonja Marinković, *Stevan Hristić. The Legend of Ohrid. Ballet – integral version*, Belgrade, RTS Music Production, RTS Symphony Orchestra and Choir, 2015, 4.

² After more than three decades, we are looking forward to this play choreographed by Vladimir Logunov. The premiere was postponed. The only premiere performance of *The Legend of Ohrid* in the past thirty-six years was choreographed by Lidija Pilipenko (premiered on the 21st/23rd October, 2000, National Theater in Belgrade). After only a few performances, this version of *The Legend* was removed from the repertoire.

³ Radio Television of Serbia, the National Theater in Belgrade and the Museum of Theatrical Arts of Serbia.

⁴ For the needs of musicology, the following significant literature is referred to: Dimitrije Stefanović (Ed.), *The life and work of Stevan Hristić*, Belgrade, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1991 and Sonja Marinković, *Stevan Hristić. The Legend of Ohrid. Ballet – integral version*, Belgrade, RTS Music Production, RTS Symphony Orchestra and Choir, 2015.

porate folklore motifs into the performance without it being folklore, that is, how to find the right combination of folklore motifs and ballet. In the interpretations of leading ballet historians, the most dominant are disagreements over the concept of the “modernization” of ballet. Ana Radošević attributes the subsequent changes, when the whole play was performed on toes, to the preference of the moment and a different approach to the work, and not to the categories of “modern” and “modernization”; Jelena Šantić believes that tradition can be interpreted in a different way, and not only with folklore elements; Nadežda Mosusova emphasizes the possibility that the folk tradition can be preserved through ballet. The pluralism of opinions about the performance of *The Legend of Ohrid*, as well as several different versions of the play, with opposing starting points in relation to the method of balletization of the dance tradition, open new approaches in interpreting the play itself such as: modernist, postmodernist and anthropological.

The balletization of the dance tradition is recognizable in the 19th and 20th centuries. The term itself implies the procedure of using elements of folklore and their inclusion in the structure of a ballet performance. Jelena Šantić explains: “As early as in the ballets of academic classics, [...] there is a balletization of folklore, which means that it was a process of using folklore elements by introducing them into another structure, which recognizes the details of the chosen motif, but with more elements of ballet code”.⁵ In relation to the procedures of using folklore elements, she also points out two methods of incorporating motifs from folklore sources into ballet works.

The first is the case when the choreographer takes a larger original set, a folk dance and when he performs it in its entirety on the theater stage. The new theatrical context within the content and form of the ballet work erases the original motif meaning of this play. [...] The second is the way of applying parts, elements or motifs, and not the play as a whole. [...] A step in the choreography can be stylized in many ways, it can keep the integrity, character and structure, but also

⁵ Jelena Šantić, “Incorporation of Folk Elements in the Choreography of Domestic Ballet Composers”, in: Nadežda Mosusova (Ed.), *Serbian music stage*, Belgrade, Institute of Musicology SASA, 1995, 501–510. Paper read at the scientific conference of the same name on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the National Theatre in Belgrade, held at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts from 15th to 18th December 1993, in: Amra Latifić (Ed.), *Life without compromise for art and peace. Jelena Šantić: essays, notes, comments*, Belgrade, Jelena Šantić Foundation, Group 484, Historical Archives of Belgrade, 2021, 137.

change in the fragment. [...] Balletization occurs when basic or stylized elements of folklore are associated with ballet lexicon, with the ballet canon predominating.⁶

Today, in Serbia, the balletization procedure is almost never applied. Writing about the importance thereof, Nadežda Mosusova concludes: “The balletization of the living dance tradition deserves not only to be reconstructed, but also to live on. Perhaps the lost and forgotten folk tradition will be preserved thanks to ballets based on folklore models”.⁷ Jelena Šantić explains the reason why Russian emigrants, choreographers and dancers, studied our folklore with great inspiration and interest and transferred it in different stylizations to the stage of the National Theater, citing the statement of the sisters, Ljubica and Danica Janković:

The form of the dance, as something that is only its external framework, does not seem to attract a Serbian man, who does not lean towards formalism and is less interested in its spirit than what that framework should fulfill. This may explain the relatively small number of Serbian oro forms, on the one hand, and the very large variety of steps and their combinations, on the other. We believe it is not an exaggeration to say that the Serbian dances are extremely elaborate in this regard.⁸

It is due to the variety of steps and their combinations that our folklore was not only an inspiration to local artists and Russian emigrants in Belgrade. Jelena Šantić points out this fact as well: “Little is known about the fact that Maurice Bejart subtly incorporated our folklore elements of the kolo into the ballets *The Rite of Spring* and *Bolero*. He created his style in the synthesis of ballet, dance and ideology”.⁹

Choreographic modernist experiment: the search for tradition and eclecticism

At the beginning of the 20th century, the search for tradition as a concept and eclectic experiment, with its various goals and manifestations, as various

⁶ Ibid., 137, 138.

⁷ Nadežda Mosusova, “Are the folkloric ballets an anachronism today?”, in: Nadežda Mosusova, *Serbian Musical Theater: Historical Fragments*, Belgrade, Institute of Musicology SASA, 2013, 117.

⁸ Ljubica and Danica Janković, Some characteristics of oro patterns in Serbia, *Bulletin of the Ethnographic Museum*, Belgrade, 1953, 113. Cited in: J. Šantić, op. cit., 138.

⁹ Ibid., 137.

styles of dance, were an integral part of modernism. American modernist choreographers were looking for inspiration in folk dances of various nations and primitive cultures. Julia L. Foulkes writes: “In search of the primordial experience of the world and aesthetics, many European artists of modernism turned to African art and culture in general. Following the exact impulse, Martha Graham found the same primitive inspiration on the American land”.¹⁰ Further on, interpreting the connection between modernism, tradition and culture, Foulkes refers to sources in the field of anthropology. It is a well-known fact that Helen Tamiris got a job at the Metropolitan Opera at the beginning of the 20th century, where she first performed folk dances, and only then ballet.¹¹ Tamiris concludes in her manifesto from the late 1920s: “There are no general rules”.¹² Educated in a diverse repertoire, she learned that she should “allow the movement to flow out from the chest thru the arms and legs [...]to start each movement from the center—the seat of the heart and lungs—and from the soul”.¹³ She soon notices that the ballet is artificial and writes: “Dancing on our toes [...]. Why don’t we dance on our hands too?”¹⁴ The bare feet of modern dance, as well as the movement that is not strictly fixed in advance, gave the poor dancers the opportunity to accept the complete freedom of the new movement: “Poverty influenced the political ideology of the pioneers of modern dance who wanted to move carried by ‘that proletarian sense of joint movement, movement in a group, and they could all raise a little money for one leotard.”¹⁵ Escaping from the sentimental image of a woman offered by ballet, choreographers incorporate a mix of different dance styles. Ruth St. Denis performs a mix of ballet, Isadora Duncan also dances Asian dances.¹⁶

In the fall of 1932, the renowned African-American musician and choral conductor, Hall Johnson, invited Doris Humphrey to do the choreography for *Run, Li'l Chillun*, a play with elements of folklore based on the works of anthropologist and writer Zora Neale Hurston. Johnson wanted to use the ‘primitive and almost [...]

¹⁰ Julia L. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey*. Belgrade, Clio, 2008, 32.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹² *Ibid.*, 27.

¹³ Helen Tamiris, “Tamiris in Her Own Voice”, 12, in: Julia L. Foulkes, *op. cit.*, 25.

¹⁴ Helen Tamiris, “Manifest” (1927), in: Julia L. Foulkes, *op. cit.*, 26.

¹⁵ Faith Reyher Jackson, reminiscences, 21 April 1979, CUOHROC, 93, in: Julia L. Foulkes, *op. cit.*, 26.

¹⁶ Julia L. Foulkes, *op. cit.*, 27.

unchanged' movement of Bahamian dancers in the play and felt that Doris Humphrey only needed to adapt the rituals and 'fit their dance into the play'.¹⁷

Stylistic eclecticism developed in response to key questions related to the ideals of American society.

The search for tradition at the beginning of the 20th century was not accidental. We will take into account that romanticism and national revivals in general in the 19th century found inspiration in folk art. Jelena Šantić cites examples of this:

In the ballets of romanticism, one can find characters of black, oriental, Spanish, Hungarian, German and other people. The great choreographers, Jules Perrot, Joseph Mazilier, Arthur Saint Leon, Filippo Taglioni and August Bournonville use elements and motifs of various nations' dances within their ballet lexicon. At the end of the 19th century in Russia, Lev Ivanov and Marius Petipa, as part of the ballets of classical academicism, such as *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, *Raymonda*, *Paquita* and others, created entire divertissements with various dances.¹⁸

Mikhail Fokin abandons academicism and changes dramaturgy – by characterizing the characters in a ballet performance, the movement becomes freer. In such innovations, Fokin is more at liberty to turn to folk dances while modifying the ballet canon. Examples of this include the ballets: *Petrushka*, *Polovtsian Dances*, *The Firebird*, *Scheherazade*.

The choreographic search for folklore: a ballet experiment in our region

In the first half of the 20th century, in our region, the very concept of interest, research, introduction and citation of elements of folk dance, is realized for the very first time as an all-night ballet performance in *The Legend of Ohrid* by Stevan Hristić. Incorporating elements of folk dance into the structure of a ballet performance was an aesthetic experiment in our region, while in America this act was mostly related to social and political struggle. The first attempts to develop and promote folk dances in the former Yugoslavia are attributed to Maga Magazinović and her work in the first private School of Rhythmics and Plastics, which she opened in Belgrade in 1910. At the beginning of 1926, Maga presented the "dance elegy" *Jelisavka, mother of Obilić*, as well as the "plastic ballad" *The Death of Mother Jugović* the following year.

¹⁷ Doris Humphrey, "Dance, Little Chillun", *American Dancer*, 6-10, July 1933, 8, in: Julia L. Foulkes, op. cit., 69.

¹⁸ Jelena Šantić, op. cit., 137.

Nadežda Mosusova points out that Maga Magazinović, unlike the dancers hired by the National Theater, did not have any special support in Belgrade. “Best wishes and declarations are one thing, and direct support is another, and Maga Magazinović (who was obviously never given material support or introduced to the stage of the National Theater) continued her dedicated work until the closure of her school of rhythmic in 1935.”¹⁹

Projects involving interest in folklore and folk dances, supported by the National Theater in Belgrade, went to ballet dancers from the Russian emigration.²⁰ Margarita Petrovna Froman staged ballets in the operas of Petar Konjović *The Prince of Zeta* and *Koštana* (1929 and 1931), while Nina Vasilievna Kirsanova in 1933 staged čoček dances in the play *Impure Blood*. The dramatization of Stanković’s novel was done by Arton Mihailović, and the music was composed by Jovan Bandur. Ksenija Šukuljević-Marković explains that the greatest results in transposing our folklore into an artistic dance were given by Anatolij Žukovski:

The choreographic stagings of the performed ballets were original choreographic achievements, which greatly contributed to the development of our choreographic art. Among them, in our opinion, the most prominent place belongs to Anatolij Žukovski who, by having the largest number of choreographic stagings, based on study and many years of persistent research and commitment to our national folklore (which he transposed for the stage art dance), achieved the greatest results. This was, in fact, confirmed by the professional critics, who evaluated his performances and his choreographic-directing work.²¹

The first attempt to make an all-night ballet performance, to the music of a local composer, in which the transposition of folk dances into ballet would be performed, was made by Nina Kirsanova in the ballet *The Legend of Ohrid* by Stevan Hristić. According to Sonja Marinković:

The Legend was a typical expression of late romantic national aspirations: conquering the genre of all-night ballet in a tradition close to *The Firebird*, *Polovtsian*

¹⁹ Nadežda Mosusova, op. cit., 100.

²⁰ In 1927, Ana Pavlova was a guest at the National Theater in Belgrade. The next year, Tamara Karsavina was also a guest.

²¹ Ksenija Šukuljević-Marković, “Yugoslav ballets on the stage of the National Theater in Belgrade between the two world wars”, in: Nadežda Mosusova (Ed.), *Serbian music stage: proceedings of the Scientific Conference held from 15th to 18th December 1993, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the National Theatre*, Belgrade, Institute of Musicology SASA, 1995, 480.

Dances and *Scheherazade*, with a typical dualistic dramaturgy of confronting real and fantastic events, where the authenticity of the musical substance was ensured by the use of songs from Mokranjac's *Tenth Garland* (*Biljana Whitened Her Linen* and *Leave Me*), as well as the motifs of the popular folk song *Biljana* as the basic leitmotifs of the ballet.²²

Kirsanova played the main role in this ballet – *Biljana*, “on her toes”. According to Nadežda Mosusova, “This is the first appearance of stylized Serbian and Macedonian folk dances on the stage of the National Theater, if we do not count Margarita Froman's stagings of ballet in the operas of Petar Konjović”.²³ For this play, Anatolij Žukovski also studied the folklore of South Serbia and Macedonia, but his name does not appear on the posters.²⁴ At the premiere of *The Legend of Ohrid*²⁵ – which was a Yugoslav premiere – only one act was performed. The one-part version of the ballet essentially included the core of the whole idea, which will be elaborated in its four-part form. The complete work would be on the repertoire again only after the war, in 1947, choreographed by Margarita Froman. She incorporated elements of Macedonian folklore and retained the original kolo. Froman stylized the steps by adding an intermediate step. She rhythmicized the whole body of the dancer and thus also contributed to the closeness with the authentic folk dance expression. Two years after the premiere staged by Margarita Froman, Pia and Pino Mlakar staged *The Legend* in Ljubljana. Their view of the relationship between folklore and ballet differed significantly from all other choreographers who had worked on this play until then. Pino Mlakar says:

Of course, kolo is a dance factor, but we have to ask ourselves whether folk dance is what can satisfy and justify the choreographic realization of this beautiful legend? It is not that I would not appreciate dance folklore, on the contrary, it is a treasury for many things in our ballet language, but not like this, on such a scale as it was done in the *The Legend of Ohrid*. During the realization of this *Legend*,

²² Sonja Marinković, op. cit., 6.

²³ Nadežda Mosusova, op. cit., 100.

²⁴ According to the statement of Ksenija Marković, in: Jelena Šantić, op. cit., 138. During the Second World War, in the building of the National Theater, damaged during the bombing, the program included, in addition to short ballets and divertissements, one domestic work staged by Žukovski – *In the Morava Valley*.

²⁵ In the same year (1933), Nina Kirsanova led the first guest appearance of the Ballet of the National Theater abroad, in Athens, at the Olympia Theater; the Russian House in Belgrade was opened, called the Russian House of Emperor Nicholas II; Byzantine historian George Ostrogorsky comes to Belgrade.

there was a shift and the folklore choreographic element prevailed. But, the art of ballet remained only as a beautiful but primitive girl. The poetry and ethical drama of this *Legend* were all too equated with the decorativeness, temperament and theatricality of the patterned origin. But it is fortunate that the music and the script, the work printed before us, leave open opportunities for poetry and lyricism and drama to be told in ballet language.²⁶

Unfortunately, reviews after the performance of the version of *The Legend* of this artistic couple, in Ljubljana, have not been preserved.

Dimitrije Parlić made new changes to this work on 29th December, 1966. He preserved the ambience of Macedonia and raised the whole *Legend* “on the toes” – he used the classic dance technique in stylizing the steps of folk dances, and the kolo was performed in ballet shoes. Milica Jovanović believes that these changes “in a way impoverished the ballet”²⁷ and adds: “This version of *The Legend of Ohrid* may have been more ballet, but it ceased to be an ‘Ohrid’ legend by needless generalization”.²⁸ Stana Đurić-Klajn, on the contrary, interprets Parlić’s changes as a top artistic quality. By simplifying the libretto and excluding the pantomime, the play became more modern, according to S. Đurić-Klajn. “However, the folklore character was not lost because Parlić, combining classical ballet technique with original folk choreography, found an extraordinarily harmonious balance of stylization.”²⁹ Parlić approached this play with the intention of gaining a continuous flow, and thus a unique language that would unite different dance styles. Interpreting the conversion of the traditional national folklore repertoire into ballet, Branka Rakić singles out the term “anti-ballet” and connects it with our national style, which as such includes us in contemporary trends on the international scene.³⁰ When it comes to the combination of folklore and ballet, Jelena Šantić emphasizes the validity of the quote:

In solo sections, he uses more ballet vocabulary with which he combines a folklore motif or sign, so that the principle of folklore balletization is applied. Even

²⁶ Cited in: Ana Radošević, *On Stevan Hristić’s Ballet “The Legend of Ohrid” on Yugoslav Stages: A Contribution to the Historiography of the Serbian Ballet Scene*, Belgrade, Institute of Musicology SASA, 2017, 36.

²⁷ Milica Jovanović, *Ballet of the National Theater in Belgrade. The first seventy years*. Belgrade, National Theater in Belgrade, 1994, 252.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Stana Đurić-Klajn, *Modern version of The Legend of Ohrid*, *Politika*, Belgrade, 3rd January 1967.

³⁰ Branka Rakić, *In Search of National Style*, *Telegram*, Zagreb, 13th January, 1967.

then, the quote represented a legitimate relationship of recent works. Thus, at the beginning of the first act, Parlić decomposes, completes the elements, and later collects and quotes them and creates a new work. By modernizing the stage and costumes, the famous painter Milo Milunović contributed to a new visual expression.³¹

Milica Zajcev interprets Parlić's version as an aesthetic intervention:

In a purely craft sense, Dimitrije Parlić put *The Legend of Ohrid* on its toes, that is, he used the classic dance technique in stylizing the steps of folk dances. But it would be completely wrong to see Parlić's efforts only as a brilliant attempt to combine folk and classical dance. He did much more with his staging. With his characteristic invention, he searched for new movements, for a whole scale of dance expression which, especially in the first and fourth acts, captivated with refinement, exuberance and imagination, as only a gifted choreographer can do.³²

National ballets were extremely popular: "The audience responded to the premieres and plays and influenced their stage and repertoire life".³³ Jelena Šantić explains the popularity as follows:

The long life of this ballet and the exaltation of the audience can be explained in many ways. National-romantic music easily reached the audience. The author himself, on the tenth anniversary of the ballet, says: 'Macedonian motifs attracted me as the most expressive and most suitable for modeling'. The ballet is inspired by a story based on the heroic liberation from the Turks. In those times, that heroism was a parallel to the liberation from the Germans. Then there is the omni-Balkan idea. *The Legend of Ohrid* had freshness, originality, vitality of stylization and immediacy in its expression.³⁴

According to Mirka Pavlović³⁵ Hristić saw the special quality of his music in the fact that it provided different possibilities to the dancers and the choreographer. As a conductor of his *Legend*, he had a specific relationship with the dancers: "At the beginning, Hristić conducted *The Legend of Ohrid* by heart, but later he started conducting only from the score, leaving the dancers to

³¹ Jelena Šantić, *Incorporation of Folk Elements...*, op. cit., 140.

³² Cited in: A. Radošević, op. cit., 57.

³³ Ksenija Šukuljević-Marković, *Yugoslav ballets ...*, op. cit., 481.

³⁴ Jelena Šantić, op. cit., 139.

³⁵ Mirka Pavlović, "Composer of 'The Legend of Ohrid' Stevan Hristić – as an individual and a theater man", in: Dimitrije Stefanović (Ed.), *The life and work of Stevan Hristić*, op. cit., 126.

find their way and to follow him, and not vice versa. His constant looking at the score inspired the joke that he was the only man who had never seen *The Legend of Ohrid*.³⁶ From the time when Hristić became the director of the Opera until the premiere of the one-act *Legend* in 1933, he conducted eight ballet premieres, out of a total of twenty-two premieres at the National Theater. According to Mirka Pavlović, Hristić had luck in composing *The Legend* because he was accompanied by excellent ballet experts who helped him “capture” the traditional aspects of folk dance in an appropriate way and translate it into a cultivated form needed for the ballet stage.³⁷ At that time, most of the male part of the ensemble was taken over from folklore groups, and women, according to Ana Radošević, studied classical ballet and were more professional as ballerinas.³⁸ The influence of folklore and its stylization in the post-war period is explained in more detail by Ana Radošević:

As for the first post-war choreographies, they were stylized folklore in Act I and IV. For the most part, the choreographers also wanted to stay true to the spirit of the score, to avoid pure folklore and to raise the dance to an artistic level through stylization. Of course, the degree of stylization was different from one play to another – more or less successful. The approach to the work itself certainly depended on the creator himself, his artistic *credo*, the result of his education and approach to ballet as an art. It was not only about the Act I and IV, that is, about folklore acts. There was a completely different Act II – pure classics, and Act III – *divertissement*.³⁹

The first act takes place in Macedonia, in a village near Ohrid. The second one takes place on Lake Ohrid. The third – *divertissement*, takes place in Constantinople, at the Sultan’s court. The fourth (finale) takes place again in a village in Macedonia. For the third act, Nadežda Mosusova points out that it can be visually and musically connected with *Scheherazade* by Rimsky-Korsakov or *Raymonda* by Glazunov, that is, with the orient of the Russian style.⁴⁰ According to Ana Radošević, *The Legend* is based on the dramaturgy of classical Russian ballet – it is a simple folk story, with elements of a fairy tale and a happy ending for the couple in love.

³⁶ Mirka Pavlović, op. cit., 134.

³⁷ Ibid., 146.

³⁸ Ana Radošević, op. cit., 18.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See N. Mosusova, Sources of Inspiration of *The Legend of Ohrid* by Stevan Hristić, *Musicological Annual*, XXV, Ljubljana, 1989, 67–79.

From all the above, it can be concluded that the most common disagreements in the reception of this ballet stemmed from a different understanding of the choreographic process of the transposition of folklore elements into ballet. On this note, the concept of “modernity” of the ballet itself is also problematized. Commenting on the response and criticism of *The Legend of Ohrid*, Ana Radošević singles out three stages that this ballet has gone through since 1947:

The first stage performance by M. Froman, stylized folklore in acts I and IV, some pantomime scenes between dances, some pro-choreographed continuous action. The second act – classic, the third – divertissement, except for the Mlakars and Horvat, where everything merged through the deepened content into one whole. The second stage, a completely balletized performance. All four acts on toes, with great dramaturgical moves (Parlić, 1966). The third stage, in which *The Legend* descends again to demi-pointe and the whole foot (with the exception of the choreography by Vera Kostić in Novi Sad, 1981).⁴¹

Radošević connects the central problem with the concept of “modernization” of the ballet in its second stage: “When the whole *Legend* was done on toes, it was said to be a ‘modernization’ of the play. It is not clear why the show would be more modern if everyone danced in classic shoes, which are 19th-century props. It is just a different approach to the work, a different preference at that moment”.⁴² According to A. Radošević, the biggest disagreements between ballet critics happened in the second stage – due to the use of folklore elements: “Some critics of *The Legend* from the second stage, that is, that balletized *Legend*, considered, as we could see, a great step forward in the history of our ballet, while others did not accept the same choreography”.⁴³

Disagreements over the interpretation of choreography and the connection of dance styles

Based on everything we have mentioned in connection with the reception of the balletization of the dance tradition, we can make the following conclusion. The central problem that defines each of these three historical stages is the methodology of connecting folklore dance elements with the ballet structure. The first approach implies that in acts I and IV, **folklore becomes an integral part of the ballet** (classical ballet and folklore, the clearest example:

⁴¹ Ana Radošević, op. cit., 93.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 94.

Margarita Froman's staging at the National Theater in Belgrade in 1947). In this approach, the part with folklore seeks a special show, since both the music and the style of its existence are related to the aesthetic norms from the time of its creation. Disagreements over the interpretation of this version of the performance stem from a vaguely defined connection of styles. The aim of this approach is to present and preserve cultural heritage. The second one implies that in Act I and IV **ballet becomes an integral part of folklore** (neoclassical dance vocabulary and elements of folklore, e.g.: Parlić's staging at the National Theater in Belgrade 1966 and especially his later stagings in Skopje in 1979 and in Zagreb in 1980). The aim of this approach is to overcome the stylistic isolation of classical ballet. The third one involves a new, **hybrid form** that transforms both folklore and classical ballet. In line with this thinking, Jelena Šantić's proposal stands out, according to which tradition can be interpreted in a different way, and not only by folklore elements. She is one of the few who gave a specific proposal on how this work can be further developed artistically:

The idea of the project 'New choreographic approaches to *The Legend of Ohrid*' is to completely displace the traditional opinion about this ballet. First of all, the musical pattern would be the original suite of *The Legend of Ohrid*. A new, modern choreographic key, completely aesthetically suits this project. Artistic experiences in America and Europe with similar material achieve excellent results. It is especially important to show in Belgrade that tradition can be interpreted in a completely different way, and not only by folklore elements.⁴⁴

Until today, we have not been able to see the new, choreographic key of this ballet. It has not been on the repertoire for more than three decades. As Sonja Marinković states: "The story of fame remains in the memory of those who had the privilege to see the play on stage. New generations and young audiences could only get confused thinking about the contradictions of that former great fame and complete negligence towards Hristić's masterpiece in contemporary musical life."⁴⁵

Based on all the above, today we can connect this ballet with the artistic methods and strategies of modernism (the search for tradition), postmod-

⁴⁴ Jelena Šantić, "New Choreographic Approaches to *The Legend of Ohrid*". Project in family documentation, in: Amra Latifić (Ed.): *Life without compromise for art and peace. Jelena Šantić: essays, notes, comments*, Belgrade, Jelena Šantić Foundation, Group 484, Historical Archives of Belgrade, 2021, 407.

⁴⁵ Sonja Marinković, op. cit., 11, 12.

ernism (citation) and theatrical anthropology (syncretism). In the first half of the 20th century, the modernist search for tradition and the incorporation of elements of folk dance into the structure of a ballet performance was an aesthetic experiment in our region. Modernist eclecticism, with the dominant process of taking over a folklore citation, represents a step towards a post-modernist experiment. Crossing styles as an anthropological procedure is a syncretic aspect in which ballet and dances from Ohrid are united, as different stylistic and cultural patterns. The greatest chance for further development of this ballet lies in its anthropological potential.

Crossing different dance styles as an anthropological procedure

The syncretism process was developed by Eugenio Barba in the methods of theatrical anthropology. He points out that the Balinese dancer, Japanese *kabuki* actor, Indian *Odissi* dancer, European jester in the Middle Ages, as well as the classical ballerina, have the same principles that control the stage behavior of performers, with only the performances being different. The syncretic aspect in which ballet combines with its “strict rules”, which originates from France, and traditional dances from Ohrid, also precisely stylistically based, can be said to jointly represent *a kind of step towards an anthropological experiment*. “Different performers, in different places and at different times, despite the stylistic forms characteristic of their traditions, start from principles that are repeated. The main task of theatrical anthropology is to search for these common principles.”⁴⁶ Strict rules in performing artistic disciplines that make the style closed can put the performance at risk of isolation. In this case, Barba recognizes stylistic isolation, and therefore raises the question of the future of such disciplines. “The risk of isolation is that pureness is often paid for with sterility. Those teachers who imprison their students in a fortress of rules – which, in order to be sustained, must not be relative – and deprive them of the benefit of comparison, certainly preserve the quality of their own art, but endanger its future.”⁴⁷ Further on, he argues, syncretism should, above all, be a deliberate act. “Openness to diversity does not necessarily mean falling into syncretism or linguistic confusion. On the one hand, the risk of sterile isolation and, on the other hand, opening at any

⁴⁶ Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*, Belgrade, Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Institute of Theater, Film, Radio and Television, 1996, 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

cost is avoided, which can turn into confusion.”⁴⁸ Syncretism also does not mean creating a common theater, but above all the possibility of creating a common pedagogical basis. “Arts’ wrote Decroux, ‘are reminiscent of each other because of their principles, not because of their works.’ I could add: it is the same with theaters: they are reminiscent of each other because of their principles, not because of their performances.”⁴⁹

For the future generation of choreographers of the ballet *The Legend of Ohrid*, the pedagogical basis would include an empirical approach to the problems of dancers. This specifically means overcoming specialization in a particular dance technique, discipline, or aesthetic. This is not about knowing and presenting the mastered technique, as it has been done so far in various versions of *The Legend of Ohrid*, but about the *empirical experience* that will be gained by crossing the two mentioned styles, classical ballet and dances from Ohrid. In line with this, Eugenio Barba introduces the term “empirical theory.”⁵⁰ It is clear that this approach focuses on the ballet dancer, his stage experience and collaboration with the choreographer. On the other hand, the result of an anthropological approach to this ballet can contribute to creating a vision of the authentic language from our region. The new generation of choreographers is certainly faced with a challenging task in the key of eclecticism. Given that eclecticists choose from existing traditions what they like and put it into their own learning,⁵¹ eclecticism becomes a potential for creating new pedagogical foundations. “Today, the question arises as how to dance to *The Legend of Ohrid* after the experience of the postmodern, which allows eclecticism and which – respecting the classics – brings a new form. That key awaits the choreographer of modern sensibility.”⁵² In the new choreographic approach, from an aesthetic standpoint, the highly “artificial” form of both dance styles needs to be replaced by a sphere of experience, which will surpass the previously acquired knowledge of strict technique. By releasing the external effects that the technique brings with it, a new hybrid form will be created along the line of the empirical.

We can conclude that the biggest disagreements between the 20th century ballet critics over the interpretation of the choreography of *The Legend*

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., IX.

⁵¹ *Dictionary of Philosophical Concepts*, Founded by Friedrich Kirchner and Carl Michaelis, Belgrade, BIGZ, 2004, 157.

⁵² Jelena Šantić, “Fifty years since the premiere of *The Legend of Ohrid* in Belgrade. An all-time ballet legend”, in: *Orchestra*, 9-10, Spring 1998, 22.

arose because they wanted to preserve the canon of both dance disciplines. Additional disagreements arose when assessing which dance technique was more dominant and why. On the contrary, it is necessary to create a new authentic dance language in the interaction and integration of these two techniques through direct stage experience. That is exactly the task of the *new choreographer*.

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Summary

Different versions of the performance of Stevan Hristić's *The Legend of Ohrid* ballet in which the balletization of the dancing tradition changed and adapted, primarily through approaching or departing from folk dance, produced a pluralism of opinions on a ballet critical scene. The most dominant was the dispute over the term "modernization" of ballet. Ana Radosevic, in a performance that was entirely done in pointe, those discrepancies attribute to a different approach to the act, and not to the category of "modernization"; Jelena Santic believes that tradition does not need to be interpreted solely by elements of folk dance; Nadezda Mosusova emphasizes the possibility that folklore may be preserved by ballet itself.

The pluralism of opinions, as well as several different versions of the performance, with opposing approaches regarding the method of the balletization of the folk dance tradition, opens up some new approaches in interpreting the performance itself, such as modernistic, postmodernistic, and anthropological. The beginning of the 20th century, marked by the concept of the search for tradition as well as an eclectic experiment was a constituent part of the search for more contemporary expression. For example, modernistic choreographers on the American continent largely seek their inspiration in folk dances and so-called primitive cultures. The very concept of interest, exploration and incorporating elements of folk dance were first realized within the frameworks of the art of ballet in our country in the first half of the 20th century in *The Legend of Ohrid*. The modernistic eclectics of the *Legend* may represent a step farther toward a postmodernistic experiment. The overlapping of styles as an anthropological deed represents a syncretistic aspect which combines ballet and dances from Ohrid, as well as a different stylistic and cultural form. Today, this ballet provides the opportunity for new interpretations thanks to the said syncretism: a new hybrid form has been created and it has surpassed the stylistic isolation of the classical ballet, thus becoming open for both new theoretical, as well as performing interpretations.