

The 1958 Tour of the Moiseyev Dance Company: A Window into American Perception

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'We know there are some members of our State Department who feel that the President's Fund for Cultural Exchange is a gesture, nice, but unimportant. They are willing to go along with it, but not very far. We think they are wrong. It is extremely clear that a large part of the American public is enjoying, and being affected by, Russian propaganda currently here in the form of the Moiseyev Dance Company. Conversely, the companies we send abroad also make vivid, important impressions. They should be given every possible assistance, not only financially, but morally, too. If there must be a cold war, we think that the best possible weapons are those of the arts. We want our artists, and specifically our dancers, of whom we are very proud, to represent us abroad, with glory. For we know, first-hand, the pleasure and the enlightenment to be gained from such exchanges.'¹

Beginning in April of 1958, as part of the Lacy-Zarbuin Agreement, the Moiseyev Dance Company visited the United States with performances in multiple cities including New York, Montreal, Toronto, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Cleveland, Washington, Boston and Philadelphia. The Moiseyev fascinated American audiences and Americans drew direct comparisons between themselves and their culture with that of the Soviet Union, as presented on stage by the Moiseyev dancers. The company evoked a multitude of responses ranging from protest and fear of cultural inferiority, to admiration and enthusiasm for the United States to send over its own cultural representatives to demonstrate American cultural excellence. Newspapers and magazines widely discussed how the group influenced political relations, whether writers felt the company demonstrated that cultural performance was a non-political space in which mutual respect between the two superpowers could be achieved or that it was pure propaganda, and possibly even dangerous propaganda at that (as suggested above). With regard to what the Moiseyev itself hoped to achieve, it is clear that the group wanted to depict a positive picture of a unified Soviet Union through the use of distilled folk dances from multiple cultures living within Soviet borders. With dances from the Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and other territories, as well as those from Soviet bloc countries like Poland and Hungary, an image of precisely executed, coordinated dances could be interpreted as representing a corresponding unified *esprit* amongst the different peoples living under direct

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¹ L. Joel, 'The Moiseyev Dance Company: What is it? What is its Appeal? What is its Lesson?' *Dance Magazine*, Vol 6 (June, 1958), p. 57.

and indirect Soviet control. The 1958 tour of the Moiseyev Dance Company in the United States can function as a window into the American mind in order to gauge perception of Soviet and American identity in this pivotal moment of Cold War relations. This commencement of cultural exchanges between the superpowers also marks a moment in which culture is privileged as both expressing a national and multi-ethnic identity and one way in which the United States and Soviet Union could 'fight' during the Cold War.

Recent scholarship highlights the role of culture in this conflict, such as the use of jazz as diplomacy. Accordingly, initiatives like Willis Conover's jazz programming on Voice of America can be viewed as tools or weapons in the Cold War and represented moments of negotiation of American identity and what it entailed. In Conover's obituary, this impact is very much emphasized: 'In the long struggle between the forces of Communism and democracy, Mr. Conover ... proved more effective than a fleet of B-29's. No wonder. Six nights a week he would take the A Train straight into the Communist heartland.'² Indeed, these scholars see jazz as both an effective and increasingly important tool in this conflict. As he greeted listeners with the 'A Train' at the start of each program, Willis Conover became a participant in the Cold War. Lisa Davenport, in her book *Jazz Diplomacy*, points to 'how American jazz as an instrument of global diplomacy dramatically transformed superpower relations in the Cold War era as jazz reshaped the American image worldwide.'³ Jazz proved able to ease tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union even during crises, such as integration at Little Rock and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Jazz diplomacy, Davenport argues, is a unique tool of warfare. This is in part due to the many paradoxes of its usage, such as the fact that choosing jazz to represent American culture and democracy meant using black Americans, a group who faced persecution and discrimination at home, as the face of America.⁴

Jazz itself represented an intersection of conceptions of America national identity, political ideologies, and race. As mentioned above, black jazz musicians came to be used not just due to the popularity and alleged universal accessibility of jazz, but also to try to combat the image of a racist America (which the Soviet Union tried to highlight with news of racial incidents or civil rights protests). Davenport convincingly argues that studying the intersection of the issues of race and culture during the Cold War is essential to understanding that time period and that the U.S. government used jazz to try to combat this very visible contradiction in the American image of liberty and ever present domestic racism. Davenport points out that the U.S. government was very conscious of how the international audience viewed American racism, such as the international controversy created in 1955 when a 14-year-old black boy named Emmett Till was murdered for flirting with a white woman.⁵

In a similar way, the Moiseyev Dance Company represented the intersection of conceptions of American national identity and of nationalities of the Soviet Union, political ideologies, gender and race. As will be discussed below, while on the surface the tours of the Company are a cultural and entertainment phenomenon, an analytical lens conscious of this intersection can yield larger conclusions beyond reception. In the same manner as jazz

² R. McG. Thomas Jr., 'Willis Conover is Dead at 75; Aimed Jazz at the Soviet Bloc,' *The New York Times*, (19 May 1996).

³ L. E. Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era*, Jackson (MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

diplomacy, the Moiseyev Dance Company hoped to represent the races and nations living within its borders in a harmonious fashion.

As with jazz, recent scholarship also highlights the use of dance in cultural exchange. In *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War*, Naima Prevots offers a perspective on the American side of the use of dance in the Cold War.⁶ In addressing the Moiseyev Dance Company and its impact, particularly on its first tour to the United States in 1958, she argues that the company proved able to win over even those critics and Americans who were not enthusiastic about this step toward greater cultural exchange.⁷ Authors such as Prevots discuss the positive reception of the group among American audiences and points to how these audiences celebrated the company's dancers. This project picks up on Prevots findings and adds an ethnicity, gender and multicultural perspective. Anthony Shay sheds light on the importance of groups like the Moiseyev Company in *Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation and Power*. Shay notes how 'these cultural representations [like those of the Moiseyev Dance Company] are in fact multilayered political and ethnographic statements designed to form positive images of their respective nation-states.'⁸

While this project focuses on American reception to the Moiseyev, it is useful to discuss, albeit briefly, the goal behind the group and the impetus for its formation. In Soviet discourse prior to the 1917 Revolution, both Lenin and Stalin argued for recognition of nationalism and self-determination, especially where it thrived in resistance to empire. In *Marxism and the National Question* published in 1913, Joseph Stalin defined a nation as 'a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.'⁹ Along with this definition came the belief that nationalism was an 'historic phase' which, once passed through, would lead to socialist internationalism. Once in place, the Bolshevik regime put these ideas into practice and encouraged nationalism among the peoples living within what was now the former Russian empire.¹⁰ Thus in 1923, the Soviet regime issued resolutions marking official recognition of nationalism that 'did not conflict with a unitary central state.' In practice, the resolutions meant supporting national languages and elites and support of the development of national cultures in a policy of *korenizatsiia* or indigenization. This policy would furthermore make Soviet power 'seem 'native', 'intimate', 'popular', 'comprehensible'...'¹¹ According to this policy, the Soviet regime would stress and even form national identities in its various territories. This meant drawing borders if necessary, supporting natives to join the Communist party to hold important positions within the government and use of native national languages. Languages sometimes needed to be standardized and adjusted in order to be used and preserved and this approach

⁶ E. Foner, 'Introduction', in N. Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998), p. 3.

⁷ N. Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998), p. 72.

⁸ A. Shay, *Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation and Power* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), p. 2.

⁹ As quoted M. Rouland, 'A Nation on Stage: Music and the 1936 Festival of Kazak Arts,' in N. Edmunds (ed.), *Soviet Music and Society Under Lenin and Stalin: The Baton and Sickle* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), p. 183.

¹⁰ M. Rouland 'A Nation on Stage', p. 183.

¹¹ T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 12.

continued in terms of preserving national cultures and history.¹² Lenin and Stalin consciously wanted to avoid being labeled as an empire despite the vast territory and variety of peoples living with Soviet borders.¹³

The cultural policy enacted in the 1920s mirrored that of the nationalities policy outlined above. With regard to music as one area of a nation's culture, the policy consisted mainly of 'the idea that each nation had its own music that would be systematically collected, studied and used as a basis for composition,' and that the music of different nations should be celebrated and disseminated as part of this policy. Similar to the general nationalities policy, Moscow believed that promoting national music idioms was a stepping stone toward an eventual all-encompassing musical institution promoting a universal view of music in which there would be no distinction between nationalities.¹⁴ In Armenia, this cultural policy meant institutionalizing folk orchestras and selecting the best known Armenian folk instrumentalists to be a part of these orchestras. This often meant combining folk instruments that previously had not been played together and bringing together more instruments than ensembles usually consisted of. Finally, a conductor became a part of folk orchestras, which was a completely new addition.¹⁵ This change in composition of folk ensembles and the institutionalization of folk orchestras in turn led to an emphasis on musicians learning notation and writing music down so that by the 1950s, all members of folk orchestras could read musical notation.

This initial policy regarding nationalities shifted from the mid-1930s until Stalin's death. Different cultures and nationalisms, rather than being celebrated and even created, became feared and condemned. This change became most notable leading up to and during WWII when the question of loyalty to the Soviet regime became ever more important. Stalin defined this new policy as part of a speech about the Friendship of the Peoples in December of 1935.¹⁶ He proclaimed that the distrust between the different peoples of the USSR was now replaced with friendship and a 'complete mutual trust.'¹⁷ As part of the Friendship of the Peoples, Russian identity and culture, which had been pushed aside as part of Lenin and Stalin's early nationalities policy, came to the forefront once more since Stalin's rhetoric claimed the various Soviet peoples now trusted Russia and saw Russia as a friend.¹⁸ This is perhaps best highlighted by a *Pravda* article of 1 February 1936 which claimed '...the first among equals is the Russian people, the Russian workers, the Russian toilers, whose role in the entire Great Proletarian Revolution, from the first victory to today's brilliant period of its development, has been exclusively great.'¹⁹ Even with this introduction to the change in policy, a festival took place in 1936 in which peoples of all different nationalities came and showed off their culture, including dance. Shortly after this festival, many of the dancers and dances were brought together under the leader, director and choreographer, Igor Moiseyev, in the State Academic Ensemble of Folk Dances of the Peoples of the USSR, more popularly known as the Moiseyev Dance Company or just the Moiseyev. Besides the dancers and dances present at the Moscow

¹² Ibid., p. 13.

¹³ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁴ A. Nercessian, 'National Identity, cultural policy and the Soviet Folk Ensemble in Armenia,' in N. Edmunds (ed.), *Soviet Music and Society Under Lenin and Stalin: The Baton and Sickle*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), p. 152.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 154-5.

¹⁶ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 432.

¹⁷ As quoted in Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 439.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 451.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 452.

festival, *Dance Magazine* reported that he 'has traveled throughout the Soviet Union studying local dance traditions and has endeavored to preserve the most vital and typical elements in the dances he has arranged for his company.'²⁰ When the Moiseyev came to the United States, it was described in similar terms and as being representative of 'authentic' folk dances and character.

Though the nationalities policy changed, the Moiseyev survived this shift. Indeed, the Company exists today, after the fall of the Soviet Union, and while the regime was still place, toured within and without the Soviet Union extensively, earning a world renowned reputation. With smiling faces, colorful costumes and stylized folk dances representing the different cultures of the USSR, the Moiseyev danced its way across the Soviet Union and across the world. Again, though the official government policy changed, the Dance Company maintained the spirit of the original policy. According to Moiseyev, 'the Soviet Union is a multi-national country, extremely rich in folklore...The folk art of the many ethnic groups of the Soviet Union is our richest source; it unfolds before us the most diverse aspects of people, who differ so greatly in their character, temperament, customs, cultural development, methods of expression...'²¹ Moiseyev hoped to share the folk dances of these different peoples (though usually in a synthesized or distilled version) to demonstrate how peoples in the Soviet Union lived and expressed themselves, but always in an affirmative way that did not criticize the Soviet regime. The Moiseyev Dance Company promoted a multicultural vision of the Soviet Union and projected this view both domestically and abroad.

The Moiseyev got the chance to share this message with the United States in 1958, when it first visited. Much has been written about the Lacy-Zarubin Agreement of 1958, but it serves here to just touch on the fact that this agreement was negotiated at the highest levels of government and was intended to promote exchange between the two superpowers, though strictly regulated and monitored exchanges. Included in the agreement were stipulations regarding the 'Exchange of Theatrical, Choral and Choreographic Groups, Symphony Orchestras and Artistic Performers.'²² This section of the agreement promised that the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra would visit the Soviet Union and that the Moiseyev and Bolshoi Ballets would visit the United States. The Moiseyev, aided by the lobbying and arrangements of the impresario Sol Hurok, became the first of the groups to come to the United States, and indeed was noted as 'the first time that a major Soviet company will have toured the United States and Canada...' and with over one hundred dancers, the 'largest dance troupe ever to visit this country from abroad.'²³ In this initial tour beginning in April of 1958, the Moiseyev visited multiple cities across North America, including New York, Montreal, Toronto, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Cleveland, Washington, Boston and Philadelphia. In his statement after the signing of the agreement, President Eisenhower noted that 'I sincerely trust that through such agreements a better understanding will result between the people of the United States and the Soviet Union.'²⁴ It is with these highly publicized negotiations and news reporting that Americans anticipated the arrival of the Moiseyev Dance Company.

²⁰ M. Clarke, 'Moiseyev Dancers from Moscow' *Dance Magazine*, Vol. 2 (February 1956), p. 20.

²¹ I. Moiseyev, 'Folk Art: A Living, Moving Process,' *Boston Globe*, (30 May 1965), p. 14.

²² 'Exchange Agreement Signed: N.Y. Awaits Moiseyev Group,' *Dance News* Vol. 32, No. 3 (March 1958), p. 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 1

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

The initial response to the Moiseyev by American audiences was one of wild enthusiasm. The first performances in New York sold out, and after the initial performances in April at the Metropolitan Opera, Hurok further arranged for four more days of performances in late June at the larger venue of Madison Square Garden since 'New Yorkers can't get enough of the Moiseyev Dance Company.'²⁵ The Company experienced similar success in ticket sales and reception throughout the country (though it should be noted that while the performances encountered no real difficulty in finding an excited audience, there were often protests at Moiseyev performances as well by those who disliked the nature of the cultural exchange program and wanted a more hard line stance towards the Soviet Union). Across local New York and other American papers it was unanimous that the debut of the Moiseyev Dance Company was a huge success:

'The Metropolitan Opera House nearly burst its aging seams last Monday when the Moiseyev Dance Company from Moscow made its American debut. On stage, approximately one hundred dancers performed with explosive exuberance and stunning virtuosity while on the other side of the footlights, the audience exploded with applause and cheers... At the close, every one applauded everyone else and a fine Russian-American rapport was achieved as the result of the new cultural exchange agreement which made it possible for S. Hurok, the indefatigable impresario, to present the Moiseyev dancers in America.'²⁶

The fervor of the American welcome to the company is ever-present in contemporary reviews, as is the sense that the Moiseyev dancers expressed the same eagerness in the meeting.

Politics were often in mind, though, in press coverage of the Moiseyev. For instance, Drew Pearson of the *New York Mirror* touted that: 'events which five years ago would have been considered unbelievable occurred in Moscow and New York this week, illustrating the new look in American-Russian relations.'²⁷ Assessment of the dancers' abilities and the performances themselves played on Cold War discourse and events, such as 'if Russia soon puts a man into space it is quite likely to be one of the agile, gravity-defying artists of the Moiseyev Dance Company... and one of these fellows would need no rocket or missile propulsion – just his own.'²⁸ In a similar vein, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that, 'there were times in the Civic Opera House last night when so much rocket power exploded on stage that I suspected those sputniks had been launched by especially selected Moiseyevs.'²⁹ The Moiseyev dancers' bodies frequently became described in mechanical or aerospace terms and adjectives – the persistent association of the space and arms races with the Soviet Union is quite clear.

While positive, there were those who viewed the abilities and popularity of the Moiseyev Dance Company as a challenge that the United States would have to meet when deciding who or what to send to the Soviet Union in order to best demonstrate the merits of American culture. Critic Walter Terry pointed to how the Soviet Union had made a smart choice in sending the Moiseyev and had left the United States with the question of who they could send to compete on the international level with the skill and artistry of the Moiseyev. Terry pointed

²⁵ 'Still More Moiseyev Performances,' *Dance Magazine* Vol 6 (June 1958), p. 3.

²⁶ W. Terry, *New York Herald Tribune*, (20 April, 1958).

²⁷ D. Pearson, 'Cultural Exchanges: Keeping the Peace??' *New York Mirror*, (20 April, 1958).

²⁸ P. R. Allerup, 'Russian Dancers Surprise New York,' *L A Examiner* (16 April 1958), p. 4.

²⁹ C. Cassidy, 'On the Aisle: Something New in Russian Virtuosi: the Combustible Moiseyevs,' *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (17 May 1958).

to how American folk dance would simply not be able to contend with the folk dance of the Soviet Union – ‘For the truth of the matter is that America’s folk dance heritage is barely three centuries old (with the exception of the ceremonial dances of the American Indian), while the Russian folk dance draws from many nationalities and many centuries of accomplishment.’³⁰ These dances, furthermore, were not often performed or cultivated by professional dancers. Terry instead suggested that dance as envisioned by the likes of Agnes de Mille, Jerome Robbins and Martha Graham would be far more effective in cultural exchange to demonstrate how American culture translated into dance.³¹ However, some critics claimed ‘the reception given by the American people to the Moiseyev Dance Company is a sensational one... completely ignoring the political implications, the U.S. public has lovingly accepted the dancers from Soviet Russia.’³² Though of course, articles such as this had to first mention the political in order to then claim it did not influence Americans.

In addition to this spirited welcome by the American audience, Americans were also interested in the dancers as people. Indeed, for Americans in 1958, the tour offered a chance to see what people from the Soviet Union actually looked like, eliciting ‘the indisputable excitement that comes of seeing Russians – real people – laughing, dancing, waving.’³³ The American perception of people living in the Soviet Union prior to the tour was not a particularly nuanced one; Americans did not necessarily understand that all people living in the Soviet Union were not Russians or that they did not fit the negative stereotype of Communists as put forth by American media, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), and Senator Joseph McCarthy.³⁴ The Moiseyev, as the first major group to come from the Soviet Union in decades, represented a crucial moment in American-Soviet relations, especially since Americans had ‘known Soviet citizens only by hearsay.’³⁵

Moiseyev himself voices some of these concerns about whether cultural understanding and appreciation can be achieved through the tour given the lack of recent personal contact between the superpowers. He noted: ‘our first performance at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York was an experience no member of our dance company is ever likely to forget. It was our first introduction to an American audience, and a more enthusiastic, more exciting one it would be hard to imagine...’ This was a pleasant surprise since, according to Moiseyev, ‘we had come to dance for American audiences with some misgivings. We really had no idea of what we could expect. We were afraid, for one thing, that Americans would not understand our dancing and perhaps might not take to it.’ These concerns were deemed justified because it had been so long since there had been any real, meaningful direct contact between the cultures. The company therefore had some doubts about whether or not Americans ‘would or would not understand our national art.’ Luckily ‘it was an unexpected and happy surprise for us to find how much American audiences had in common with the Soviet people. We found the same warmth, the same openness and expansiveness, the same feeling for humor. It was a constant astonishment to us to see how similar the reactions were.’ Indeed Moiseyev pointed out that the Company did not have to change or adjust any of its dances in order to foster understanding;

³⁰ Terry, *New York Herald Tribune*, 20 April 1958.

³¹ Ibid.

³² L. Joel, ‘The Moiseyev Dance Company: What is it? What is its Appeal? What is its Lesson?’ *Dance Magazine*, Vol. 6 (June 1958), p. 30.

³³ Joel, ‘The Moiseyev Dance Company’, p. 30.

³⁴ A. Shay, *Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation and Power* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), p. 59.

³⁵ Ibid.

instead Americans 'got it.' In the *City Quadrille* dance, which pokes fun at pre-revolutionary Russia, Moiseyev and the company 'evoked the same spontaneous laughter in America as it would in any Soviet city.'³⁶ Much of the press reaction to the dancers included simply recognizing the similarity between Russians and Americans, as Moiseyev himself pointed out. This is the multicultural message of the Moiseyev Dance Company: beyond showing mutual appreciation and validity among the different nationalities of the Soviet Union, here it also attempts to show equal validity of American and Soviet culture and society.

Moiseyev saw this new understanding going both ways. He pointed to how one could read about America and Americans but this did not give a full 'picture of American life' – direct contact was necessary to achieve this. Moiseyev furthermore played on American fears of cultural inferiority, noting how in Europe he was told that the U.S. was lacking in a theater scene and focused too much on films instead. Moiseyev allays these fears by pointing out that he himself attended performances of productions like *West Side Story*, *My Fair Lady*, and *The Diary of Anne Frank*, all of which he found well done and enjoyable.³⁷

While overall the press coverage focuses on the performances themselves, there are also numerous articles that try to highlight members of the dance company as people, and people Americans can relate to. For instance, the *New York Herald Tribune* related an anecdote about one member of the company, Lydia Skiabina, who, like any tourist to New York, saw a stuffed bear 'which operated on batteries, poured water from a bottle held in one paw into a cup held in the other and proceeded to drink' at a store on seventh avenue and forty-sixth. Lydia 'screamed through her fingers, then doubled in delight. The seven girls crowded round the counter...[with] paroxysms of laughter' to inquire how much the bear cost. However, the five dollar price was too much for Lydia, and she left the store empty-handed. The *Herald Tribune* reporter could not let this stand and bought the bear. Upon bringing it to Lydia's hotel, she claimed she could not accept it, saying 'Nyet' repeatedly and 'making it clear Mother Russia does not permit her daughters to accept gifts from Americans.' However, upon further offerings, Lydia said 'Nyet' again, but this time with a smile, 'as if it was ... her mother's advice against accepting gifts from strange men.'³⁸ After further negotiations, mostly through hand gestures, Lydia agreed to accept the gift, as long as it was a personal gift and nothing more. The reporter had the bellboy bring the gift to her room, and reported back that 'he had put the box on her dressing table next to a picture, two feet high, of her son in Moscow.' While certainly the political under and over tones are present in this anecdote, in the end Lydia is like any mother visiting a new place who wishes to bring a toy back to her child and she goes from listening to 'Mother Russia' to her own mother. Such details about the dancers' experiences outside of performances were common filler in articles about the Moiseyev. Indeed, there appeared to be an American obsession with the Moiseyev dancers, their likes and dislikes, what they ate (especially if it was pie), where they shopped, what they wore, etc.

Reporters, furthermore, wanted to prove the success of American culture abroad and that certain American symbols were universal. When questioned by *The Detroit Times* about their musical tastes, an article claimed that 'Russian girls like Elvis Presley too – for his 'good guitar playing.' Apparently his 'gyrations' and performance style were not as well received, being "too crude" with Bing Crosby touted by the dancers as better than Elvis. Indeed in the

³⁶ I. Moiseyev, 'We Meet America,' *Dance Magazine* (10 Oct 1958), p. 26.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ D. Hogan, 'Soviet Chorus Girl Gets Toy Bear She Admired: Cautious About Accepting Gift,' *New York Herald Tribune*, (12 April 1958).

lunch conversation between four of the dancers and the reporter, the conversation was not political but rather more about fashion and the girls' likes and dislikes. The reporter claimed that 'they live with their respective families in Moscow, and fill in spare hours just as American girls do – by dating boys.' There is a note of a more conservative outlook though – when dancer Valentina noted that 'we are whistled at' and 'this whistling we don't understand. Is it a compliment? It seems cheap.' They had to be assured that this was indeed 'high flattery' to which the 'four Soviet girls beamed, giggled and blushed.'³⁹ Once more, though differences are noticed in mannerisms and humorous depictions of a cultural disconnect displayed, it is done so in a very human, sympathetic manner.

It is noteworthy, that many of these anecdotes are related to consumerism and shopping. There were multiple articles across American newspapers, for instance, covering a shopping trip made up of a few female dancers, Mrs. Moiseyev and accompanying reporters. Across the board, press coverage emphasized the fact that Russian women loved to shop just as much as American women. For instance, the *New York Journal-American* entitled its article 'Communist or Capitalist...Girls will be Girls Russian Dancers See, Sigh and Buy in N.Y. Shops.'⁴⁰ The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* claimed that when 'Russian Women [were] on [an] American Shopping Spree... You Can't Tell Them from Capitalists.' The reporters and dancers exchanged cigarettes and songs, like 'You Are My Sunshine' and 'Moscow Is Smiling at Me,' described as 'a snappy ditty with lots of hand-waving.'⁴¹ The press reported that 'they're just as bargain-minded as any American housewife.'⁴² The dancers sighed over American film stars, like Tyrone Power and Robert Taylor. Indeed, reporters described the dancers' enthusiasm for shopping and how they tried to buy almost everything that was 'made-in-U.S.A.' including Tyrone Power, though unfortunately Power 'isn't on sale.'⁴³ It seems that the American media felt Americans would be better able to relate to and understand the dancers by situating them within an American context and participating in an American practice, shopping.

The Moiseyev Dance Company represents more than a view of Russo-American relations and notions of American and Soviet culture. The company and its reception demonstrate American notions of gender and ethnicity as the Moiseyev presented dances meant to put heterosexuality and national identities on display. Notions of sexuality and gender played a major role in American self-identity and concern during the Cold War, with those men having Communist leanings or more liberal ideas often being depicted as more effeminate, and more conservative figures in society being depicted in culture as more masculine. Indeed, in David K. Johnson's *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*, it discusses how hand-in-hand with the persecution of potential communists, the McCarthy investigations sought out potential homosexuals within the State Department.⁴⁴ K.A. Cuordileone goes on to describe how American Democrats struggled to move away from effeminate images associated with liberal ideas and that John F. Kennedy Jr. carefully constructed a masculine image for himself in order to make being a Democrat and liberal

³⁹ O. Curtis, 'Red Ballerinas Dig Elvis,' *The Detroit Times*, (April 1958), p. 10.

⁴⁰ 'Communist or Capitalist...Girls will be Girls Russian Dancers See, Sigh and Buy in N.Y. Shops,' *New York Journal-American* (25 April 1958), p. 17.

⁴¹ 'Russian Women on American Shopping Spree: Dancers Have Gay Time in New York Stores – And You Can't Tell Them from Capitalists,' *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (29 April 1958), p. 2D.

⁴² 'Communist or Capitalist...Girls will be Girls Russian Dancers See, Sigh and Buy in N.Y. Shops,' *New York Journal-American* (25 April 1958), p. 17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ D. K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 1.

appropriately masculine. Kennedy made being a liberal Democrat, a wealthy background, and an Ivy League education into markers of refinement rather than 'softness' or femininity. Kennedy was able to do this in part by coveting a virile and womanizer image as well as a competitive edge through rumors of affairs and general admiration for women and athleticism. He used his history of childhood illness and then succeeding in joining the military and acquitting himself admirably to further his masculine image.⁴⁵ Similarly, the reception to the Moiseyev Dance Company reflected American conceptions of sexuality. In its dances, the company acted out 'traditional' relationships (including several dances that involved courtship), displaying their bodies in heteronormative interactions on stage. For instance, in the Spring Dance from the Ukraine Suite, the story of a male and female lover is told. At first, the 'girls of the village' are sad, 'they step slowly across the stage, in simple but continually changing groups and formations, conveying by the inclination of their heads and bodies as well as by facial expression, a mood of gentle melancholy.' However, after the male dancers have entered and the lovers reunited, 'the entire company launch into a Hopak which is full of life and joy.'⁴⁶ It is only after the male dancers enter that the female dancers depict fulfillment and happiness. The dances suited American conceptions of sexuality as supposedly expressed in folk cultures within the Soviet Union according to the figures on stage.

Similarly, American critics and audiences became fascinated by Soviet bodies. Newspaper articles and other reactions emphasize over and over again the incredible athleticism and the toned muscles of the male dancers: 'The men, with their breathtaking leaps, seem a mixture of rubber and steel. They can kick up their legs from almost a floor squat without moving their upper torsos. It looks fantastic.'⁴⁷ While the male members of the Company remained firmly masculine and athletic in descriptions throughout the 1958 and later tours, reactions to the female dancers varied. Some described the girls and women as 'pretty' and 'feminine',⁴⁸ while others likened them more to their male counterparts and as far too muscular: 'Girls in the company are pretty but heavy of hip and thigh. Hair is frizzy and they could learn precision from the Rockettes.'⁴⁹ As discussed above, reactions to the Moiseyev often played into American discourse of fear of cultural and general inferiority vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, and the way in which Soviet bodies on stage are discussed by reporters reflects this.

The Moiseyev Dance Company represents a window into the American mind during the Cold War and American constructions of gender and the body, race and both Soviet and American identity. Representing a pivotal moment in Cold War history – the same year as events such as the launch of the American Explorer satellite to try to help the US compete in the Space Race and American troops sent into Lebanon, this research adds to the very healthy scholarship on the role of culture in the Cold War and adds new layers of understanding to such terms as understood in this time period. Americans saw, read and talked about the dancers in the Moiseyev Dance Company and these dancers became humanized through such exposure. While for many Americans, this was the first time to see a 'genuine Soviet' and the political aspects of this exposure were never far from mind, in the end the dancers not only came across as very likeable and worthy of admiration but also as people Americans could relate to and get along with in everyday life. The reaction to the Company on the part of Americans demonstrates that rather than a view of the world divided between Soviet and American, the American audience and the members of the dance company demonstrated a somewhat more nuanced understanding and appreciation between American and Soviet societies.

⁴⁵ K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), p. 170.

⁴⁶ M. Clarke, 'Moiseyev Dancers from Moscow,' *Dance Magazine*, Vol. 2. (February, 1956), p. 20.

⁴⁷ F. Herridge, 'Russian Dance Troupe Cheered at Metropolitan,' *New York Post*, (15 April 1958), p. 45.

⁴⁸ C. Manos, 'A Moscow Girl in Detroit: Dancing, Kissing, Pie,' *Detroit Times*, (14 May, 1958).

⁴⁹ F Quinn, 'Soviet Dance Troupe is Breath-Taking,' *New York Mirror* (15 April 1958).

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