

Authenticity and stylization in Romanian folk dance

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Abstract: *Although folk dances remain the first sources of stage dance, it is important to make a distinction between the dances that are performed in traditional contexts and those which, through processing, have reached European royal courts and later, the stage. The academization of the folk-dance repertoires of professional folk dance ensembles and the stylizations of various choreographers raise a signal in terms of the paradigm of the authenticity of a dance. Few of the so-called traditional dances keep their original characteristics unaltered, thus becoming poor imitations of folk dance. If folk dance preserves the imprint of national specificity, Romanian character dance contributed to the 20th century to the birth of the cultivated Romanian dance, through choreographers who have “balletized” or put folklore to the rhythm. Clarification is therefore necessary on these dance genres that fall within the scope of folklorism, but without diminishing the specific values of each esthetic.*

Key words: *authentic; stylization; folk dance; traditional dance; folklore; character dance;*

Introduction

This paper is based on the conference „Folk Dance between authenticity and stylization” which took place on March 21st, 2024, at the N. Roman County Library in Constanța. The conference was designed on two distinct levels, and I invited a folk-dance specialist, choreographer and connoisseur of authentic folklore, Elena Dordea, to present with me. She presented and demonstrated the steps of four folk dances from Dobrogea, with score and accordion accompaniment, and I spoke about the loss of authenticity of folk dance and its forms of stylization. Our presentation also included projections of archival footage and photographs which were provided by the National Center for Dance Bucharest, images of score for the dances, authentic costumes, and excerpts from shows of the National Academic Ensemble Folk Dance „Joc” and the „Igor Moiseyev” Ensemble.

1. Traditional dance

Dance, music, traditional clothing, customs, and traditions are the last bastions of traditional culture. Up until the Middle Ages, the term folk dances did not exist, they were called peasant dances. As in any other country, Romanian dance has gone through various stages, developing with the existential timeline of its people. Dances were part of the daily life of the entire village community, to mark various events (weddings, funerals, festivals, harvests aso.) and were danced by untrained people, young and old. The dance was passed on within the family or between friends, more rarely in an organized form. For example, the little dance (children’s dance) was organized, where children in the village would gather and learn or practice what they were being taught at home, and the older children had the opportunity to gain experience the big

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(grownup) dance from a relative. In traditional culture, dance was a key component in the culturalization of the young peasants.

Traditional society survived until the end of the first half of the 20th century. As to the term *traditional dance*, it is a new one, used by connoisseurs, and refers to traditional contexts in which dance takes the form of events that have their own significance in local tradition. In Romania, the first references to Romanian dance appear from the 15th century through the chronicler Grigore Ureche. Then, in the 19th century, the first written collections appeared, in which many folk dances were included. The main terms used were dance, hora (for Muntenians and Oltenia) and joc, for the other geographical regions. Over time, folk dances underwent changes (they became *jocuri*), or retained their ritualic character (as is the case for Drăgaica, Lazarul, Cununa, Chiperul, Călușul).

Folk dances and the “elements of realist expressivity” they contain are the earliest sources of stage dance, although there are few processed movements and folk dances that have retained their origin and even their characteristics. On European royal court stages, in a courtly manner, some stylized folk dances are performed, but they retain their basic characteristics (such as: the minuet, the farandole, the galliard, the contradance, which means folk dance, from the English country-dance). The great Enlightenment reformer Jean Georges Noverre (1727-1810) also used national dances and folk elements in his performances, aiming to develop these aspects in ballet. At the end of the 18th century, posters for ballet shows included the following terms: *danse de caractère* and *ballet demi-caractère*. Mythological, heroic, and allegorical ballets are thus replaced.

Yves Guilcher highlighted the main characteristics of traditional folk dances in “La danse traditionnelle en France: d’une ancienne civilisation paysanne à un loisir revivaliste” (1998): folk character, regional diversity, historic imprint and the distinction between the terms folklore, folk, regional. As early as 1846, archaeologist W. J. Thoms proposed the term *folklore* to designate the creations collected from the people. In the mid-20th century, the term folk begins to be avoided, in favor of the term *traditional*. Within the International Council for Traditional Music, the study of folk dance evolved into the study of all forms of dance in a culture, under the name of *ethnochoreology*.

2. The influence of the soviet model on traditional dances

„Few folklore collectives are aware of the importance of passing on our ancestor’s dance. Most of them tend to copy professional dance ensembles, captivated by academic trends. Then, the attempts to revive the dance are sometimes accompanied by damaging attitudes towards the good tradition. Girls have begun to dance as dynamically as the boys. They jump up, they do acrobatic moves, which go against tradition. The men must execute the strong, quick movements. But a woman is a woman: younger or older, she must remain graceful. That is the way God made her”².

² Nicolae Gribincea. 2005. „Problematika dansului autentic în actualitate”, Rezumat. *Buletinul științific al Muzeului Național de Etnografie și Istorie Naturală a Moldovei*, Vol. 3 (16), 234. Retrieved March 3, 2024, from https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/Problematika%20dansului%20autentic%20in%20actualitate.pdf.



Fig. 1. *Portul popular din Dobrogea*

Source: „*Portul popular românesc*” (1971), *Cantemir Enăchescu Alexandra*

The study of folk dance includes the knowledge of musical folklore and costume. In fact, the women’s costume, with the tight *catrință* (apron) that would not allow them to lift their legs too high or step too far, only showed their ankles and limited their movements.

But nowadays, some choreographers seek to bring new forms of dance expression to the stage. The academization of the repertoires of folk-dance ensembles led to a distortion of simple elements, a modification of the choreographic text, seeking to raise the technical bar by increasing the tempo and by the takeover of the men’s steps by women, as well as the interpretation of the folk songs. In this case, creativity opposes precisely the bringing out of the value of the folk dance. For example, the invention of certain choreographic designs can distort the content of the folk dance (*joc*). It is sufficient that the stage alters a series of aspects that are specific to the *hora* in the village: it limits the viewing of the performers from a single direction, requires a reduction or amplification of gestures, mimics, shouts, shrieks, and whistles.

At this point, it is important to explain two terms that help this paper make sense:

- authentic – meaning a fact that is in accordance with the truth, which cannot be doubted; recognized as belonging to an author or an era.
- stylization – meaning the processing of a choreographic³ or folk music motif while preserving the essential original elements.

Romanian ethnographers have noticed the influence that the Soviet vision had during communism on the representation of traditional Romanian dance. Silviu Petac discussed this issue in his article „*Dansul de tip etnografic – o formă a patrimonializării dansului tradițional*” (2015) (*Ethnographic dance – a form of patrimonialization of traditional dance*), in which he

³ *The choreographic motif* means distinctive and recurrent movements used to provide a theme or a unifying idea; choreographic devices, which can be gestures, movements, or a short phrase of movements. These choreographic movements serve as foundational elements to the entire choreography. A motif contains „the essence” of the dance, a dominant characteristic that repeats itself, like a recurring theme all throughout the dance. It is usually introduced at the beginning of the dance, then once established, it is developed and diversified.

Folk dances begin with a motif movement, which is then modified and repeated using various compositional instruments as the performance progresses.

makes clear arguments against the “attack” on the structure of traditional choreographic language. „Once dance is «separated from its traditional context and framed into another cultural system, defined by other parameters, it ceases to be a fact of folklore in the strict sense of the term»...”⁴.

Among the instruments of propaganda of communism was the folkloric show, in which traditional dance underwent changes in its composition and in its transmission. The aim was to eliminate local traditional events, to control this social class to which it belonged, and to uproot it. The dance within folklore shows became a mere imitation of traditional dance, because no account was taken of the need to harmonize the canons of the stage to the canons of folklore. Also, based on the idea of socialist egalitarianism, they sought to standardize the dances in the repertoires of professional and urban folklore ensembles, through so-called “dance suites” from various geographical regions in the country.

The choreography of traditional dances followed the Soviet model of folklore ensembles (called „State” ensembles), which imposed a choreographic vision that was characteristic of ballet performances, and the taking over of elements specific to classical dance. Through this stylization, or „balletization,” some aspects of performance, uniformity and standardization were forcibly introduced. It is obvious that the introduction of technique in traditional dances has led to the stylistic distortion of these dances and to an impression of artificiality.

„Unnatural amplitudes of gestures, foreign corporal attitudes, meaningless theatrical facial expressions, the search for spectacular postures, an excessive control of the gesture, high or remarkably high tempos, an elimination of those dimensions of the gesture that do not «conform» to the pattern imposed by classical dance”⁵.

Unlike this model where the focus is on the technique of the dance, its form, and its exposure to the public, in traditional dance the emphasis is less on the form and more on the interpretation of the artistic act, its social and cultural function. In the Romanian cultural space, we can distinguish between three types of dances that fall under the incidence of choreutic folklorism:

- ethnographic dance, with direct influences from traditional dance;
- character dance, influenced by the vision and elements that are specific to classical dance;
- dance-theatre, inspired by contemporary dance and stage movement, developed especially after the communist period.

But what exactly was the moment in the history of dance when folk dances began to be stylized?

Choreographer Arthur Saint-Léon⁶ laid the foundation for the creation of character dance. By combining a few national dance movements with the *passés* in classical dance, along with other body movements, he gave these elements a vivid national character. An edifying example of this is the *pas de bourrée*, which is used in several national dances, and takes on various

⁴ Silvestru Petac. 2015. „Dansul de tip etnografic – o formă a patrimonializării dansului tradițional”. *Studia Universitas Musicae* Nr. 1, 6. Retrieved January 16, 2024, from

<https://ro.scribd.com/document/410022979/4-Dansul-de-tip-etnografic-RO-FINAL-p-pdf>.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁶ Arthur Saint-Léon (1821-1870), was a composer, violinist, choreographer, and dancer, considered one of the best dancers of his time, he had a beautiful *ballon* (suspension in jumping), and height in jumping. He danced and was a ballet master throughout Europe, and in 1851, a professor of the Paris Opera Company. He created a dance notation system which he published in 1852, „La Sténochorégraphie”. In 1870, the year of his death, he choreographed the last great ballet of the period, *Coppélia* or *The Girl with Enamel Eyes*, to a score by Léo Delibes, based on the story of „The Sandman” by E.T.A. Hoffman.

characters depending on how it is performed: on the whole foot sole, on the relevé or on the heels, in a certain tempo, and depending on how the feet are changed. Friedrich Albert Zorn wrote, in „Grammar of the Art of Dancing, Theoretical and Practical” (1923), that character dances are a representation of folk dances and can reach the level of ballet dances only by arrangement or by adaptation – in other words, through stylization.

3. Folk dances from Dobrogea

The four dances presented by choreographer Elena Dordea were collected by Ghe. Popescu Județ on July 28, 1963, from the dance team of the Cultural House in the village of Tufani, Băneasa county.

3.1. Balta de la Pietroșani

The Tufani variant: it is a dance brought from Muntenia, from the folkloric area of Teleorman. In Dobrogea, there are several variations, but the one from Tufani resembles the original from Muntenia the most.

Description: Men and women standing in a circle and holding hands as for a hora mare (great hora) perform the eight and four-step motif, with a stamp at the end. Then a three-step motif with a two-stamp ending. The steps in measures 1-2 are performed to the right; the steps in measure 3 are performed to the left; the steps in measure 4 are performed to the right, the steps in measures 5-6 are performed to the left.

Time signature: 2/4.

The image displays two pages of a musical score for the dance 'Balta de la Pietroșani'. The left page, numbered 36, is titled 'BALTA DE LA PIETROȘANI' and 'VARIANTA TUFANI'. It features a coreographic notation system with rhythmic patterns and step directions (e.g., 'D', 'S', 'D', 'S') corresponding to the dance steps. The right page, numbered 37, is titled 'BALTA DE LA PIETROȘANI' and 'VARIANTA TUFANI' and contains the musical notation for the piece, including a treble clef, a 2/4 time signature, and various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamics.

Fig. 2. Partitura coregrafică și muzicală a jocului Balta de la Pietroșani
Source: „Jocuri populare din Dobrogea” (1966), Ghe. Popescu-Județ

3.2. Bogăreasca

The Tufani version: it is a sârbă in two parts. This version, along with the one from the village of Lunca, Istria district, was introduced into the repertoire of the teams from Dobrogea by master Ion Buruc.

Description of the dance: While standing in a circle, men and women holding hands as for hora mare (the great hora) perform double hop steps on their right foot, taking their left foot to the right, followed by two steps on the right and left foot. They do a double ending on the right foot, to turn the dance to the left. The steps from measures 1-2 are performed to the right; the steps for measures 3-4 are performed to the left.

Time signature: 2/4.

3.3. Brîul din Tufani

The Dobrogean brîu is known as Brîul mocănesc or Brîul bătrânesc. Some brîu dances in Dobrogea are performed on eight beats and others, such as the one at Tufani, on six beats. Style wise, the Dobrogean brîu dances are different from the ones in Muntenia, they include more hops and a series of figures that are unknown in the other regions of the country. It is a dance for men made up of five movements (also called *Figures 1-3* by Tudorache Marin, *Figure 4* by Tudor Gheorghe, and *Figure 5* by Călin Vasile), where dancers hold each other by the shoulders.

Description: the steps of the movements (figures) 1-5 are danced on the spot. In a circle, the dancers perform as follows: Figure 1 – a syncopated step on the right foot and a double stamp with the left foot, on measures 1-2; ending on the right and left foot, on measure 3. Figure 2 – an out of step scissors-step performed with the right foot behind the left foot, and the left foot behind the right, followed by a heel tap of the right foot in the left one, on measures 1-2, ending on the right and left foot, on measure 3. Figure 3 – syncopated steps on the spot with the right foot on the ground, left foot in the air, followed by a heel tap of the right foot into the left one, on measures 1-2, ending on the right and left foot, on measure 3. Figure 4 – two accentuated steps on the right foot sideways to the front right, on measure 1; double stamp with the left foot, and the right foot waved in the air, on measure 2; a Dobrogean ending on the right and left foot, on measure 3. Figure 5 – a scissors-step to the back and a step to the right with the right foot, on measure 1; stamp with the left foot, and double step with the right foot in front over the left foot, on measure 2; Dobrogean ending on right and left foot, on measure 3.

Time signature: 2/4.

3.4. Cazanul de la Tufani

Is a dance originated from Muntenia, from the folkloric area of Ialomița. All the communes in southern Dobrogea dance it after the original model, with slight differences in the last two measures. The dance is also known as Căzăneasca in this region.

Description: men and women standing in a circle, holding hands, with their arms above their heads, perform the steps of jitianca (a quick hora from the mountain area of Râmnicu Sărat, Vrancea or Buzău). The steps from measures 1-5 are performed on the spot; the steps from measures 6-7 are performed to the left; the steps from measure 8 are performed on the spot; the steps from measures 9-10 are performed to the right.

Time signature: 2/4.

4. Romanian character dance

Oleg Danovski said: „as for Romanian folk dance, it represents a source of physical and spiritual movements which can be the foundation of an autochthonous dance academy. If we

conducted a sort of archeological research of folk-dance movements, we could retrace our entire social history. All the great moments of our becoming are marked not only by anthological poems or fiery songs, but also by folk dances that are memorable for their emotional charge. In this respect, we are the repositories of a fabulous treasure trove”⁷.

In addition to the great Romanian choreographers, professional folklore ensembles have showed interest in putting on shows influenced by the Soviet vision, particularly that of Igor Moiseyev⁸. These shows did not aim at the patrimonialization of traditional culture but used the language of traditional dance as entertainment. We therefore have a duty to make a clear distinction between traditional dance and character dance. The latter is not a landmark of national, local, or regional authenticity.

As early as 1974, Andrei Bucșan recommended the way folk dance can be transposed on the stage:

- a) to state the degree of proximity or separation honestly and clearly from folklore: authentic folklore, processing, stylization, balletization or any other form that might arise;
- b) to respect the limits of that degree;
- c) to be of appropriate value in both conception and execution”⁹.

Silvestru Petac speaks of the gesture that is specific to traditional dance as being „... as natural as possible, it is an unrefined and relative gesture, expressing without mediation the pleasure of the dancer. But it is in these very qualities of the gesture that the humanity of the traditional dance resides. The «balletization» of the gesture consists in bringing it to the spatial-temporal-energetic dimensions that are specific to classical dance, placing it into a foreign esthetic, contrary to its original one. In classical dance the gesture is very well controlled, refined and precise, qualities acquired after a long exercise of the body. The typical long exercises in training the body produce articulation skills that the dancer will perform unconsciously. It is therefore relatively difficult for a dancer trained in classical dance to be able to adapt to the folkloric stylistics of the gesture. Of course, we are not undertaking a depreciative approach towards ballet, on the contrary, by highlighting these essential differences, we are trying to highlight the specific values of each choreutic esthetic”¹⁰.

In the history of Romanian theatrical dance, there are several names of choreographers who have felt the importance of exploring the folkloric heritage. They studied folk dances and stylized them in various ways, according to their own experiences and choreographic directions. Choreographers such as Floria Capsali, Mitiță Dumitrescu, Vera Proca Ciortea, Gabriel Negry, Oleg Danovski, Vasile Marcu, Tilde Urseanu were preoccupied by the Romanian folkloric phenomenon, and they transposed folk dance in a cultivated language using various means. Three of them stand out for their successful original approaches: Floria Capsali, Vera Proca Ciortea, and Oleg Danovski.

⁷ Marian Constantinescu. 1989. *Dirijorul de lebede*. București: Editura Muzicală, pp. 77-78.

⁸ Igor Moiseyev (1906-2007), born in Kyiv, is thought to be the greatest character dance choreographer of the 20th century. By combining classical dance with folklore, rituals, modern innovations, upbeat music, and amazing costumes, he reinterpreted folk dances, thus giving birth to a new form of national dance.

⁹ Andrei Bucșan. 1974. „Unele sugestii pentru punerea în scenă a dansului popular” (I). *Revista de Etnografie și Folclor* 1/19, p. 15.

¹⁰ Silvestru Petac, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

4.1. Floria Capsali (1900-1982)

„The character dance of our days is the sum of the various movements, most of which are an interpretation of folk-dance motifs. This interpretation bears the stamp of different artistic styles, which have overlapped over the course of several centuries”¹¹.

Floria Capsali presents dances in the Romanian folk style in recitals along with her female students, to compositions by Romanian authors such as Paul Constantinescu, Mihail Jora¹², Sabin Drăgoi or Marțian Negrea. She wrote several librettos dedicated to Romanian character ballets inspired from the life of the Romanian people. They reflected autochthonous rituals, traditions and customs. One of these librettos was the foundation of the first Romanian character ballet, „Nuntă în Carpați” (Wedding in the Carpathians), originally called „Nuntă în Fundul Moldovei” (1939). Inspired by the rich Romanian folklore, Floria created ballets on original Romanian compositions together with Mitiță Dumitrescu (1909-1992), thus succeeding in shaping the Romanian character dance.



Fig. 3. *Floria Capsali*

Source: *Archives of the National Dance Center, Bucharest*

Upon returning from an ethnographic trip in which she had accompanied Dimitrie Gusti¹³, Floria expressed in a conference her conviction that folklore should be brought to the stage in a balletized form, transformed into what would become Romanian character dance. In 1937, Profira Sadoveau was writing in the newspaper „Adevărul” about the choreographer’s enthusiasm for the value of our folk dance and her wish to develop cultivated Romanian dance: „These are wonderful things, of rare originality and artistic value; - Floria Capsali said, with her eyes ablaze; - an inexhaustible source of rhythms and spirited steps and completely new ballet

¹¹ Floria Capsali. 1939. *Bazele dansului de caracter*. București: donation to the library of the Highschool of Choreography.

¹² Composer Mihail Jora (1891-1971) is considered the creator of Romanian ballet music.

¹³ Dimitrie Gusti (1880-1955) was a sociologist, historic, ethnologist, philosopher, voluntarist and ethician. He would also later become a member, then president of the Romanian Academy, the minister of Public Instruction, Cults and Arts, thought to be the creator of Romanian sociology.

forms. It is high time for us too to work on a Romanian ballet group, exploiting this intact treasure of folk dance and creating a cultivated Romanian choreographic art”¹⁴.

She was a ballet teacher and master in the „Ciocârlia ensemble”. There she collaborated with Tamara Capp and Gheorghe Popescu-Județ, a master of folk dances. She created „Dansul maramelor” (Dance of the scarves), the „Târg pe muntele Găina” tableau and „Tablouri din Galeria Națională” (Tableaus of the National Gallery) (a reprise of George Enescu’s „Rhapsody I”), for which the paintings of Nicolae Grigorescu and Theodor Aman inspired her. Some of the ballets that were inspired by the fabulous Romanian choreographic folklore were „Demoazela Măriuța” (1942), „Priculiciul” (1943), „Când strugurii se coc” (1953), „Domnițele”.

4.2. Vera Proca Ciortea (1912-2002)

Vera Proca Ciortea was also concerned with the development of Romanian cultivated dance. Born in Sibiu, she discovered her inclination for dance by observing the originality of the folklore area of her homeland. A state scholarship to study in Germany was the turning point for her subsequent training. She studied with the great German expressionist choreographers, but as a pedagogical method, she would assume what she had learned at the Güntherschule Institut für Tanz, i.e., the Günther-Orff system, in which structures and sound help the learner to fully understand rhythm. This is why Vera, a former student of Floria Capsali, would later state in an interview given to Lucian Cursaru for the book „Argonauții marilor iubiri” (Argonauts of Great Love) (1987) that she admired her teacher but did not imitate her, because Floria had „balletized” folk dance by bringing it on stage and transforming it into character dance, whereas she had put it on rhythm, according to the thinking of modern structures she had assimilated in Germany, deeply marked by Carl Orff’s style”¹⁵.

¹⁴ Liana Tugearu. 1982. „Floria Capsali, doamna baletului românesc”. *România literară*. Retrieve March 25, 2024, from <https://dosaresecrete.ro/floria-capsali-doamna-baletului-romanesc/>.

¹⁵ A German composer, Carl Heinrich Maria Orff (1895-1982) was born in Munich. At the beginning of the 1920s, Orff formulated his concept called *elementary music*, which was based on the unity of arts symbolized by the muses of Ancient Greece, which involved dance, music, poetry, image, design, and theatrical gestures. In 1924, he founded a school with dancer Dorothea Günther, „The Günther School” for gymnastics, music, and dance. He would develop his own musical education theory and work with children until his death. Orff is also famous for creating the „Carmina Burana” cantata (1935-1936). The history of the famous cantata begins with a banal happening: the composer discovered a volume of medieval texts in a catalogue of used books. The manuscript was found in 1803 in Benediktbeuern, a Benedictine monastery 100 km south of Munich (the manuscript is called „Codex Latinus Monacensis” and is currently found at the National Library in Munich). Although the manuscript contained traces of songs, Orff composed latest music based on these texts, which had Renaissance and early Baroque influences.



Fig. 4. *Vera Proca Ciortea*

Source: *Archives of the National Dance Center, Bucharest*

„I have collected the main elements using a modern technique. I sought to feel that which is of main importance in folklore. Corporal rhythmicity and the affect. A certain effect that goes towards an orthodox spirituality of religion. The first dances I created, I made them after church frescoes”¹⁶. To Vera, native choreographic folklore is the kinetic language closest to nature. Her choreographic approach was not a copy of folklore, but a contemporary rethinking of rhythm and natural body movements.

In Germany, during an improvisation class on the music of Béla Bartók that took place at the Deutsche Meister-Stätten für Tanz, she had the revelation of creating a specific Romanian dance form. Upon returning to the country, she worked on the creation of a kinetic language which had „European rhythmic dance” as its foundation, to which she imprinted the Romanian character, thus revolutionizing the tradition of vernacular dance. The success she achieved abroad came because Proca managed to transpose Romanian folk dance on a language that was known in Germany in the 1930s, where modern dance was seen as a form of art that supported national specificity.

Liana Tugearu wrote, on „Panoramicul de balet contemporan” (The Contemporary Ballet Panorama) in 1984 about the works of Vera Proca Ciortea that they were „not an imitation of folk movement, but a creation in its spirit”¹⁷. The choreographer stated on various occasions that her method was based on a mutation, a transfer of certain elements of traditional dance into modern dance. In fact, the elements of folk dance were reorganized by her in a personal language. Also, together with another choreographer interested in the values of Romanian

¹⁶ Liana Tugearu. 2022. *O lume întreagă din fărâme Cronici de dans 2012-2022*, vol. IV. București: Editura Vellant, Centrul Național al Dansului, p. 544.

¹⁷ *Idem*. 2015. *O lume întreagă din fărâme Cronici de dans 1972-2012*, vol. I. București: Editura Eikon, Centrul Național al Dansului, p. 143.

folklore, Gabriel Negry (1919-2000), she imposed the name of rhythmology, a term attributed to the folkloric substrates of Romanian dance.

4.3. Oleg Danovski (1917-1996)

Another choreographer who turned his attention to the folklore area by approaching specifically autochthonous themes is Oleg Danovski. Despite his successes with the productions of classical ballets that would make him renowned abroad, following the Russian model, Danovski became preoccupied, like his teacher Floria Capsali, with the knowledge of the variety of Romanian folk dance and its elevation to the level of character dance inspired by the folkloric dance of other peoples. Before proceeding to create such a ballet, he travelled the country for rigorous historical documentation. He was dedicated to the idea of a Romanian national ballet, and he succeeded to integrate national themes into a universal language throughout his vast creation.

In his grandiose shows, which were based on Romanian librettos and musical compositions, specific elements of national spirituality transpire as, for example: in „Harap Alb” (1949), „Când strugurii se coc” (1953), „Priculiciul” (1959), „Iancu Jianu” (1964), „Miorița” (1981), „La piață” (1987)). In 1979, Danovski achieves fulminant success in the country and abroad with „Rapsodia I”, set to the music of George Enescu. The forty-two¹⁸ young women created magical images which reflected the space of Romanian spirituality, in an impressive and extremely demanding choreographic score. The description that Doina Jela (2011) offers is more than telling:

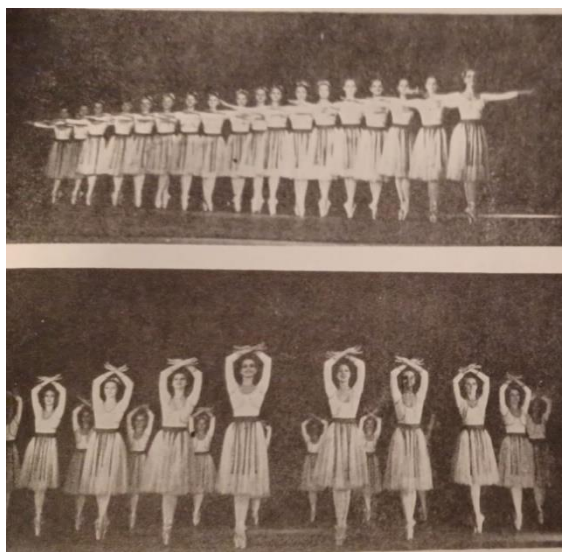


Fig. 5. „Rapsodia I”
Source: *Personal Archive*

¹⁸ The distribution and the number of the young women changed with time.

„The ballet dancers look, it has been said numerous times, as if they were one, multiplied 42 times. Their supple legs vibrating, square shoulders, proud and elegant head stance, slender waists girded with a sort of narrow, woven, black and red girdle on which several long ribbons are attached, in a sort of stylized apron, more loosely resembling the Romanian folk costume. A white bodice, with minimal design, fitted, three-quarter sleeves, with a border marked by fine embroidery. ... It has been said numerous times that the impression created by this number of their show is that Enescu himself had written his work inspired by the image of these young women dancing, or that it seems to have been composed especially for this dance, like the great musical-choreographic works of the golden age of ballet. Especially when the violins reach the first measures of the famous <<Ciocârlia>>, when the choreography imitates the detachment from the ground and the soaring into flight, through the fluid, perfectly synchronized movement of the arms”¹⁹.

Speaking about Romanian compositions, Danovski confessed that his music has its own story and considers that doubling the music with ballet is not the best idea. In this respect, he revealed in an interview with Marian Constantinescu (1989) that he worked on Enescu’s music while thinking of movement as a language in and of itself, with Romanian folklore as its source of inspiration.

These three great Romanian dancers and choreographers have researched autochthonous folklore and transposed Romanian dance steps into various expressive forms, dreaming of placing them alongside consecrated character dances. Through their Romanian shows, they focused on the Romanian reality and sought to discover a new choreographic language, by stylizing folk steps in as many variations as possible, thus contributing to the enrichment of national ballet.

Currently, also in the Republic of Moldova, traditional norms and values are influenced by globalization and technological development. The most eloquent example of making the most of traditional dance elements and of its stylization is the „Joc” National Academic Ensemble of Folk Dances, founded in 1945 in Chişinău.

5. Conclusions

A preference for academic dance over authentic dance has been observed in recent decades. Certainly, stage dance that is enriched by the stylizations of folk dance will be pleasing to our sight and we are often amazed by the creativity of the choreographers. But folk dance is an essential element of cultural heritage, of national memory and culture, its technical elements preserving the mark of national specificity. In the context of globalization, when traditional society is on the verge of extinction, traditional dance is increasingly stylized to make it more attractive, and thus it is also threatened by the loss of its essential function. Both genres, folk and character dance, have their well-deserved place on the stage, but the protection of the choreographic heritage is extremely important, which is why it is important to make a clear distinction between the two, as well as to have access to valid information on the influences, stylization, theatricalization, dramatization, academization, breaking from context etc. which are

¹⁹ Doina Jela. 2011. *Oleg Danovski – omul, artistul, legenda*. Bucureşti: Curtea Veche, pp. 5-6.

found in dance performances. The deviations noted because of the stylistic manner of interpretation have drawn the attention of specialists, who are sounding alarm bells on the need to return, before it is too late, to our primordial source, to the values of the rural community and to the specifics of folk dance – in other words, to authentic dance.

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