

Development of Russian Classical Ballet Traditions in the Hamburg Ballet Stagings (Germany)

Tatiana V. Portnova¹

Abstract

The article reveals the problem of the development of the Russian ballet traditions in European choreography. The research purpose is to identify the main traditions of Russian ballet, which have been preserved in European choreography on the example of the Hamburg Ballet productions. The research objectives are the following: to conduct a content analysis of the scientific literature on the topic of research; to identify the main criteria for analyzing the productions of the Hamburg Ballet; to analyze the productions of the Hamburg Ballet from the standpoint of statistical analysis. The materials of the study were 50 productions of the Hamburg Ballet for 2015-2022.

The research methodology is based on a systematic approach and includes the methods of the general scientific group (analysis, synthesis, deduction, induction); as well as a number of special methods: content analysis of scientific literature on the topic of research, the method of scenographic analysis, the method of statistical analysis. The main criteria for analyzing the productions of the Hamburg Ballet were: the style of dance, the method of plastic speech; the form of ballet production. Each criterion was evaluated at a 10-point school in the Neural Designer program for advanced analytics: 1-3 points low level, 4-6 average level, 7-10 high level of evaluation of the criterion for the frequency of use in the productions of German choreographers. As a research result, the following main features of Russian traditions were revealed in the works of German choreographers: character-dance to reveal the behavior of characters; intonation of plastic speech (posture, facial expressions, angle and gestures according to the method of M. Petipa; polyphonic forms.

Keywords: *choreography, Russian ballet, Hamburg Ballet, statistical analysis, postmodern.*

Introduction

The research relevance is due to the fact that the alethas been the dominant genre in the Western dance theater since its development as an independent form began in the 17th century. Its characteristic style of movements was still based on the positions and steps developed in court dances of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Perhaps the most basic feature of the ballet style was the position of the legs and feet, in which the legs are rotated at an angle of 90 degrees with respect to the torso (i.e., the feet look to the sides)[26, p. 91]. This position gives the body a symmetrical appearance and contributes to the high elevation of the legs, which was typical for ballet. Even when the dancer performed fast or energetic steps, his hands rarely move smoothly, calmly and gracefully, and often the dancer placed his hands in positions that either framed the face or just so that they looked harmonious in relation to the position of the legs.

¹ Doctor of Arts. Professor of Art History Department, Kosygin State University of Russia. Moscow, Infotatiana-p@mail.ru, ORCID: 0000-0002-4221-3923

Another feature of the ballet was the vertical position of the body. Ballerinas rarely moved close to the ground. On the contrary, they often seemed to defy gravity with the height of their jumps and energetic «Batteries» (kicking their foot while jumping). Also, the ballerinas amazed the audience with the speed of turns and the speed of steps, which seemed to occur without much effort, almost without touching the floor. In ballet, the eternal stress and great efforts of the dancers have always been hidden behind the smooth graceful movements of the dance [26, p.90].

Ballet, of course, has undergone many stylistic changes. The romantic style from the early to mid-19th century was much softer, less teeming with virtuoso jumps and turns than the classic style of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Russian ballet is often seen as a paradigm of the classical school, as it is a mixture of the soft and decorative French school, the fragile and virtuoso style of the Italians and the energetic athleticism of Russian folk dances.

The design of classical ballet has traditionally been symmetrical, both in relation to the dancers and their position on stage and even the structure of the entire dance. For example, if the two main dancers performed the pas de deux (a dance for two), the other dancers on stage were positioned symmetrically relative to them or moved in harmony with the main dance without distracting from it. Even when large groups of dancers performed at the same time, they tended to be arranged in a line or circle.

In their productions, modern choreographers from Western Europe strive to convey as many nuances of meaning as possible in the intonation of plastic speech, which is based on the traditions of the Russian ballet school. In the postmodern productions of German ballet, the traditional character-dance for Russian ballet is especially strongly manifested to express the behavior and actions of the characters [26, p. 37].

The late ballet style of the 20th century was influenced not only by the «Ballet Russe», but also by modern dance. It has become common practice for choreographers to expand traditional ballet vocabulary through modern dance techniques such as bending and tilting the body or performing a dance close to the floor with legs bent [26, p.38]. For example, G. Balanchine, influenced by jazz, used syncopated rhythms in his phrasing, and also included in his ballets the steps of such popular dances as ragtime and rock and roll. His movements were, as a rule, wide and sweeping, but at the same time they were performed very quickly and clearly [26, p.39].

The most striking example of this ballet type is the Hamburg Troupe, which is quite widely known on the world ballet stage.

The Hamburg Ballet is a world-renowned ballet company based in Hamburg, Germany. Since 1973 it has been staged by American dancer and choreographer J. Neumeier. There is also a ballet school founded in 1978. Performances of the Hamburg Ballet usually take place at the Hamburg State Opera, and the training facilities are the BalletZentrum Hamburg. The Hamburg Ballet is well known for touring at home and abroad. In the 2012 season, the company celebrated its 40th anniversary. On August 16, 1973, J. Neumeier took up the post of director of the ballet and chief choreographer of the ballet department of the Hamburg State Opera. At that time, dancers worked in the opera all the time, as the opera house included a stage and ballet studios.

The first performance of the troupe under the new direction was the Ballet Workshop called «Classical Technique in Modern Choreography» on September 9, 1973. Later, ballet workshops turned into a visiting card of the theater. Hamburg Ballet. On September 30, 1973, the artists presented their first program – «Divertissement No. 15», «Diamond Allegro», «Desire» and «Jeu de cartes» [7, p.19].

In January 1974, the first premiere of the Hamburg Ballet took place: «Romeo and Juliet», originally staged by John Neumeier for the Frankfurt Ballet in 1971. Neumeier danced Romeo. For the 40th anniversary, this ballet to the music by S. Prokofiev was revived on

April 11, 2013 on May 12, 1974, the first world premiere of J. Neumeier's ballet took place in Hamburg. The ballet «Meyerbeer – Schumann» tells the story of composers G. Meyerbeer and R. Schumann.

In 1974, the Hamburg Ballet was invited to perform abroad for the first time since then. then tours are part of every season of the Hamburg Ballet. Over the past 40 years, the company has visited 29 countries on 4 continents, including France, Russia, China and Brazil. In the 2013-2014 season, they performed in Costa Mesa (California) and Vienna (Austria). On June 14-22, 1975, the first Hamburg Ballet Days (Hamburger Ballett-Tage) were held. Together with the final Days of ballet «Nijinsky Gala», they became a tradition [7, p.19].

On January 1, 1978, John Neumeier founded the Hamburg Ballet School. Initially, students studied at the Hamburg State Opera. The school later moved to Birpalast, and on 23 September 1989 the «Balletzentrum Hamburg» was opened. The ballet center is home to a company, a school and the National Youth Ballet, founded by John Neumeier in 2011 [26, p. 87].

The historiography of the topic is quite extensive and includes the works of Russian and foreign authors. In particular, the traditions of Russian ballet are considered in the works by such authors as A. J. Curley, I. D. Engler [1], J. De Wet, R. Venter [2], C. Farmer, J. Brouner [3], K. Gardner [4], M.Yu. Gendova [5], L. Glasser, M. Frey [6]. Studies of European choreographic schools are presented in the works by such authors as S. C. Greenbluff [7], A.P. Grutsynova [8], A.M. Haussler, G.M. Earhart [9], N. Isenberg [10], S. Jones [11], Sh. Kamble, S. Bhise [12], M. A. Kapinosova [13], D. N. Khisamov [14], L. A. Kochetkova [15]. An analysis of modern productions of the German ballet is presented in the works by such authors as K. S. Kopunova [16], A. Krys [17], N.Y. McClam [18], J.A. Meglin [19], Yu.Yu. Padyan [20]. The scenography of modern European ballet is analyzed in the works by such authors as G. Pogrebniak [21], O. Polissadova [22], G. Saims [23], S. Shearer [24], Ting Liu [25], A. Wesemann [26], Yu Zhou [27], A. Zafeiroudi, A. Chatzipanteli [28].

Nevertheless, despite the extensive historiography, empirical research is needed in the topic study of the topic, based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the specific criteria for the productions of German ballet. The article is intended to fill the historiographical gap, since the author of the article presents the results of an empirical study of the productions of the Hamburg Ballet.

Materials and methods

The materials of the study were productions of the Hamburg Ballet. Among them are productions by such choreographers as John Neumeier (chief choreographer), Silvia Azzoni, Hélène Boucher, Madoka Sugai, Christopher Evans.

Table 1. Distribution of staging by different choreographers in the survey.

Choreographers	Number of ballets
John Neumeier	15
Silvia Azzoni, Hélène Boucher	15
Madoka Sugai, Christopher Evans	20

The selection of performances was made using a mechanical method: every 10th performance in 10 years. A representative sample was 50 productions for 2012-2022.

Table 2. Methods and objectives of the study.

Method group	Research objectives
General scientific methods	Analysis of scientific literature on the research topic Scientific synthesis of the information received
Special methods	Content analysis of ballet stagings Qualitative survey Statistical generalization of the obtained results

The research methodology is based on a systematic approach and includes the methods of the general scientific group (analysis, synthesis, deduction, induction); as well as a number of special methods: content analysis of scientific literature on the topic of research, the method of scenographic analysis, the method of statistical analysis.

The empirical study was carried out in three stages.

Table 3. Stages and timing of empirical research.

Empirical research stages	Survey schedule
Collecting material	1-17. 01. 2022
Sampling	18-20. 01. 2022
Analysis of examples	21-30. 01. 2022

The main criteria for analyzing the productions of the Hamburg Ballet were: the style of dance, the method of plastic speech; the form of ballet production.

Table 4. Methodology for evaluating according to the analysis criteria.

Criterion	Rating scale
The style of dance	1-3 low level 4-6 average level 7-10 high level
The method of plastic speech	
The form of ballet production	

Each criterion was evaluated by a 10-point school in the Neural Designer program for advanced analytics: 1-3 points low level, 4-6 average level, 7-10 high level of evaluation of the criterion for the frequency of use in the productions of German choreographers.

Results

As a result of the study, the following results were obtained: according to the first criterion of analysis, a tendency to increase the frequency of using the character-dance technique was revealed (Figure 1).

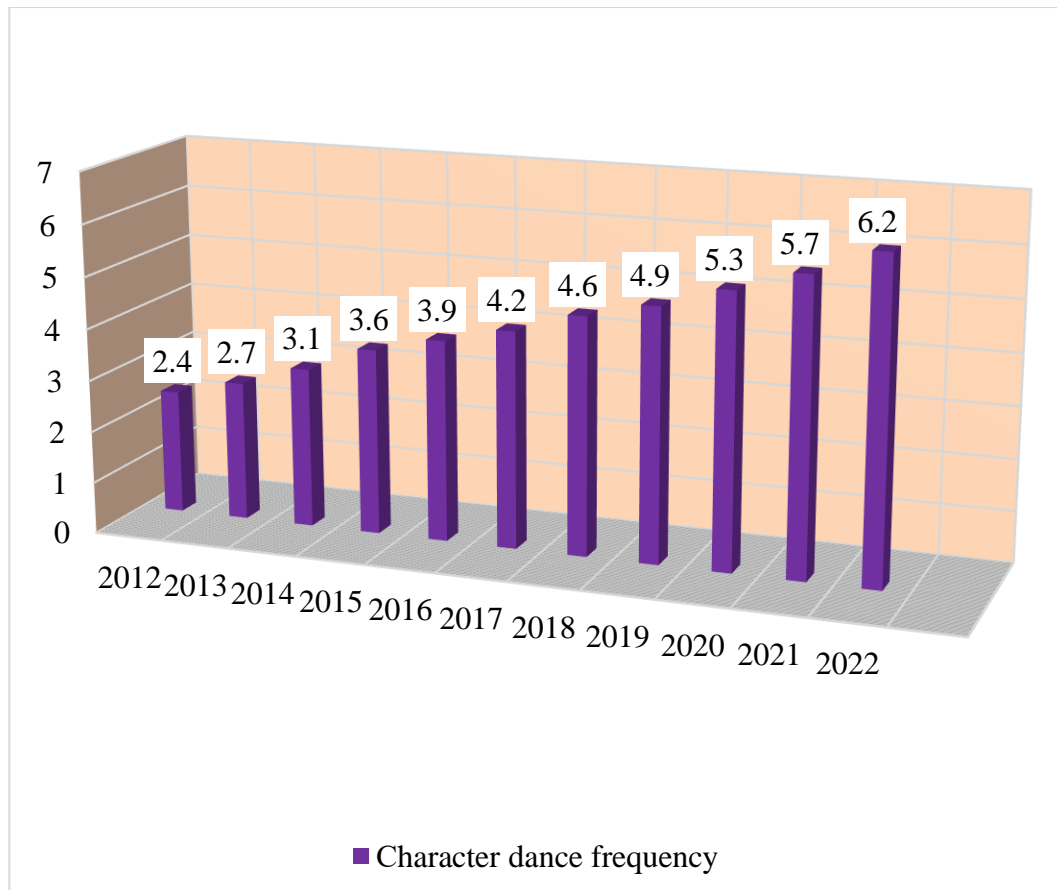


Figure 1. Character dance frequency in Hamburg Ballet the productions (2012-2022)

As can be seen at Figure 1, in the productions of the performances of the Hamburg Ballet, the traditional Russian classical technique of character-dance is used more and more often every year. Moreover, in productions of modern ballets (for example, «St Matthew Passion» staged by J. Neumeier), this technique is used as the main style of the character's representation. The most developed in postmodern choreography are the tendencies of purely plastic experimentation, the focus on the disclosure of the mechanism of movement of the human body, as well as the combination of dance and sports techniques.

Indeed, postmodern ballet incorporates elements of the dance art of the East (Indian classical dance *bharat-natyam*, modern Japanese *buto* dance), techniques of rhythmoplastic folklore of American Indians, Afro-Caribbean dance technique. Mosaic combination of remakes of yogic meditation and ancient bodily texture, classical pa and polyrhythmism of ragtime, hi-life, jive, swing, break, flamenco, country dance (music of different cultures, eras, social strata, etc.) create the world of postmodern «absolute dance» as a trace of our time, imprinted in the micro- and macro-world, the life of nature itself. Nevertheless, in the works by choreographers of the Hamburg Ballet, a high frequency of using the techniques of Russian classical ballet was revealed.

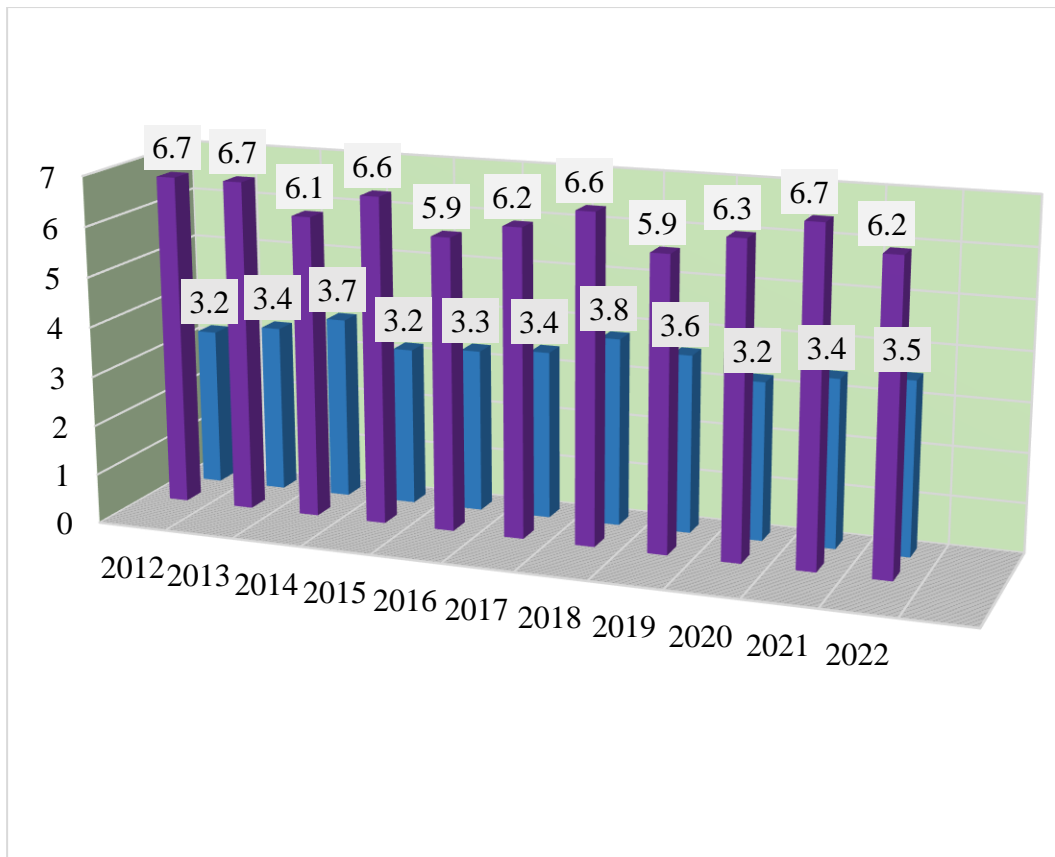


Figure 2. Plastic speech frequency in the productions of the Hamburg Ballet

As can be seen from the data at Figure 2, tendency to the most frequent use of gesture techniques was revealed about the criterion of plastic speech, facial expressions are used to a lesser extent. The frequency of gesture reception has increased compared to the frequency of using facial expressions as a technique of plastic speech. Both techniques are used on the basis of the choreography of M. Petipa.

At the same time, in the productions of such choreographers as Silvia Azzoni, Hélène Boucher, Madoka Sugai, Christopher Evans, gestures are used both in character dance and in reprise and mass scenes. The ironic ritualism of postmodern ballet is largely due to its «message» to the public. The principles of pleasure, joy, human contact with the audience formed the basis of the concept of ballet as a «live performance», coming from the idea of dance as a way of life.

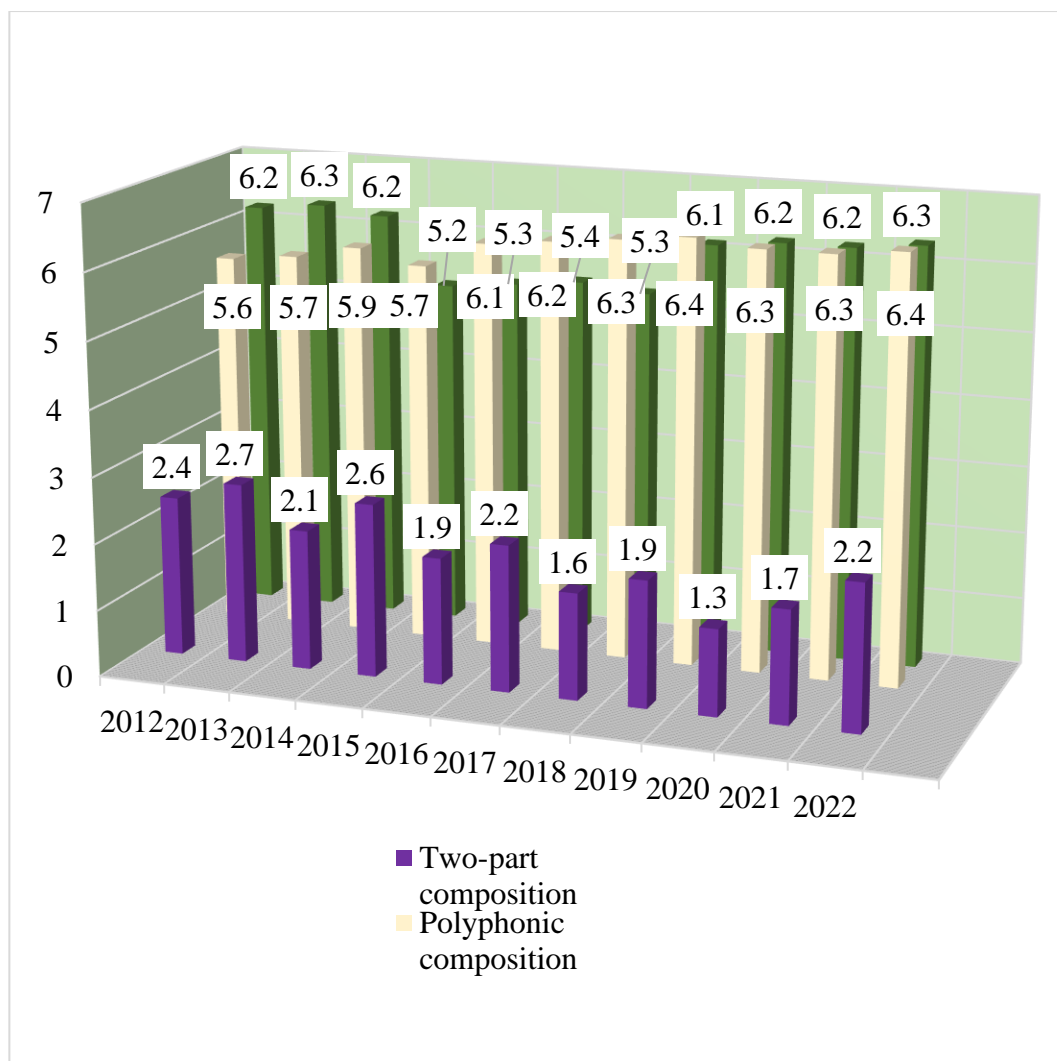


Figure 3. Frequency of classical composition techniques in the productions of the Hamburg Ballet (2012-2022)

As can be seen from the data presented in Figure 3, the most frequent technique in the deliveries of the Hamburg Ballet is the polyphonic composition (canon, fugue, polyphonic variations). At the same time, the classical two-movement composition is the least popular. For the productions by choreographers such as H. Boucher and M. Sugai, polyphonic variations are most characteristic. In the productions by S. Azzoni and Ch. Evans, reverse compositions (postmodern) are most often used, and these choreographers practically do not use classical compositional forms.

For the sake of completeness of the analysis, we also compared the frequency of all the criteria we have identified for each of the productions of the choreographers of the Hamburg Ballet, it was revealed that the most often classical techniques of the Russian ballet school are used by J. Neumeier and H. Boucher. At the same time, there is a synthesis of traditional forms with stylistic author's postmodern techniques (light, shadow, musical accompaniment, special effects, lack of scenery). The most significant the result that the study gave is the establishment of a scientific fact - in modern German ballet, Russian traditions are very actively used by choreographers in synthesis with postmodern scenography. Postmodern ballet aesthetics focuses on the idea of the integrity of life, uniting the micro- and macrocosm, human and nature in a great historical time.

Also, an analysis of the productions of the Hamburg Ballet showed that for German postmodern ballet searches, it is characteristic to focus on the philosophical nature of

dance as a synthesis of spiritual and physical, natural and artificial, past and present. Polemicizing with the aesthetics of the avant-garde, postmodernism returns to ballet emotionality, psychologies, complicated metaphoric, «humanizes» the hero.

This is emphasized by the inclusion in the ballet action of elements of theatrical play, dance solos and duets, built on the principle of close-ups and freeze frames in the cinema. The improvisational principle emphasizes the conceptual openness, openness of the choreography, its free associative nature.

This is associated with the fundamental rejection of the choreographer's dictate, the installation on the equivalent role of choreography and music ballet.

The expression of such aesthetic turn in ballet technique was the rejection of frontality and centrality, the transfer of attention to spontaneity, improvisation; emphasis on gesture, posture, facial expressions, dynamics of movement as the main elements of the dance language; the exposure principle of physical efforts, legitimization outside of dance poses and gestures with the help of such characteristic techniques; interest in the energetic dance, psychosomatic states of joy, anger, bodily hysteria; the effect of compressed and sparse dance, achieved by counterpoint of smooth musical flow and ragged rhythmoplasty, viscous, smooth, wide line of movement and small, fractional, large-frame gestures; combination of archaic and super-complex techniques (running in circles and rhythm and plastic symphonism, through leitmotifs and plastic intonations).

Discussion

The results of our study are confirmed in the works by Yu Zhou [27], A. Zafeiroudi, A. Chatzipanteli [28], who argue that the influence of Russian classical ballet in modern European choreography lies in classical techniques and the style of teaching. In their researches, O. N. Polisadova [22], G. Saims [23], S. Shearer [24], Ting Liu [25], A. Wesemann [26] confirm our result: out of 10 productions of European ballets, 8 stagings show Russian ballet traditions. In part, the results of our research are confirmed in the works by A. Krys [17], N.Y. McClam [18], J.A. Meglin [19], Yu.Yu. Padyan [20] and G. Pogrebniak [21], who believe that the most frequent technique from classical Russian ballet, stylistically constantly used by European choreographers, is a character dance that reflects the behavior of the character.

In their works, Sh. Kamble, S. Bhise [12], M.A. Kapinosova [13], D.N. Khisamov [14], L.A. Kochetkova [15], K.S. Kopunova [16] confirm the stylistic reception of characteristic characters with the help of sharp unennobled movements, which became known in our study.

Rejecting the possibility of a utopian transformation of life through art, the representatives of postmodernism accepted existence as it is and, having made art extremely open, filled it not with imitations or deformations of life, but with fragments of the real-life process. The latter here is usually only critically corrected, and not transformed entirely into something new and unprecedented. (Often this concept is used broadly, calling «postmodern» all the last decades of the 20th century as a whole, with their new, that is, computer, scientific and technological revolution, the collapse of the socialist system, etc.).

The postmodernism refuses to replace art with philosophy, religion or politics (without abandoning, however, various types of artistic express analysis of all these spheres of culture). The restoration of the purity and autonomy of creativity entails the strengthening of its independent, in its own way «post-ideological», free social sensitivity.

In their works, L. Glasser, M. Frey [6], S.C. Greenbluff [7], A.P. Grutsynova [8], A.M. Haussler, G.M. Earhart [9], N. Isenberg [10], S. Jones [11] confirm the thesis that German ballet is characterized by a synthesis of Russian traditions and postmodern trends in

modern ballet productions. In their researches, A.J. Curley, I.D. Engler [1], J. De Wet, R. Venter [2], C. Farmer, J. Brouner [3], K. Gardner [4], M.Yu. Gendova [5] confirm the thesis that in the Hamburg Ballet the greatest attention should be paid to the synthesis of classical techniques with postmodern choreography.

Conclusion

As a research result, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. On the example of the Hamburg Ballet choreography productions, it was revealed that the techniques of the classical school of Russian ballet are still used with a stable and even increasing frequency. The following techniques are most characteristic: the form of the classical polyphonic production (polyphonic variations); methods of plastic speech intonation (gestures and facial expressions); as well as the technique of character-dance to represent the behavior of the character.
2. The study showed that European ballet, in particular the German modern ballet school, is characterized by the traditions of the Russian school by M. Petipa and the synthesis of these traditions with postmodern author's methods of choreography.

References

- Curley A.J., Engler I.D. Hip Pain in Ballet Dancers: Evaluation and Management. *The Journal of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons*. 2022. Vol. 30(23). – P. 1123-1130.
- De Wet J., Venter R. Recovery-Stress States of Professional Ballet Dancers During Different Phases of a Ballet Season. *Journal of dance medicine & science: official publication of the International Association for Dance Medicine & Science*. 2021. Vol. 26(1). – P. 45-59.
- Farmer C., Brouner J. Frequency of upper body muscular actions in ballet and contemporary dance performance. *Conference: IADMS 32nd Annual Conference*. 2022. – P. 104-132.
- Gardner K. Revealing the Subconscious: The Dream Ballet in Movie Musicals. *The Oxford Handbook of the Hollywood Musical*. 2022. – P. 10-37.
- Gendova M.Yu. The performing style of Russian ballet is a unique spiritual value. *Bulletin of culture and arts*. 2017 Vol. 1. - P. 134-140.
- Glasser L., Frey M. Ballet Rehabilitation: A Novel Return to Sport Protocol. *Cureus*. 2022. Vol. 14(8). – P. 55-78.
- Greenbluff S.C. The School of the Hamburg Ballet. *Dancing Times*. 2017. Vol. 11. – P. 18-26.
- Grutsynova A.P. Russian plot in Western European ballet of the 19th century. *Theater questions*. 2017 Vol. 1. - P. 170-182.
- Haussler A.M., Earhart G.M. The Effectiveness of Classical Ballet as a Therapeutic Intervention: A Narrative Review. *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*. 2022. Vol. 7. – P. 34-72.
- Isenberg N. Tangled Relations: Shakespeare and Ballet. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*. 2021. Vol. 9(3). – P. 44-59.
- Jones S. Samuel Beckett's Brush with Ballet. *Dance Research*. 2022. Vol. 40. – P. 123-138.
- Kamble Sh., Bhise S. Revealing the Subconscious: The Dream Ballet in Movie Musicals. 2022. – 122 p.
- Kapinosova M.A. Traditions and Modernity in Ballet. *Science, education and culture*. 2021 Vol. 5. - P. 2-7.
- Khislamov D.N. Russian ballet and postmodern trends. *Philosophy and culture*. 2022 Vol. 10. – P. 66-74.
- Kochetkova L.A. Typology of the heroic role in Russian ballet. creative practice of M.L. Lavrovsky. *Theatre. Painting. Movie. Music*. 2021 Vol. 2. - P. 66-78.

- Kopunova K.S. Continuity of the choreographic tradition of the Mariinsky Theatre and the Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet. *Art and culture*. 2022. Vol. 6. – P. 78-99.
- Krys A. Dramaturgy of Stage Ball Choreography in Ballet-Musicals. 2022. – 104 p.
- McClam N.Y. A Letter Re-Membering Ballet Class: My Young Black Self Writes Her White Ballet Teacher. In book: *Dancing Across the Lifespan*. 2022. – P.11-25.
- Meglin J.A. «Ghosts of Harlem»: A Blues Ballet. In book: *Ruth Page*. 2022. – P. 157-178.
- Padyan Yu.Yu. Dialectics of traditions in the choreographic art of ballet. *Culture and civilization*. 2017 Vol. 7. - P. 597-606.
- Pogrebniak G. Directing Ballet Performances on Stage and Screen. *National Academy of Managerial Staff of Culture and Arts Herald*. 2022. Vol. 3. – P. 56-72.
- Polisadova O.N. Theatrical and choreographic innovations of the first seasons of the «Russian ballet». 2020 Vol. 1. - P. 22-30.
- Saims G. *Contemporary Ballet West Collection*. 2022. – 407 p.
- Shearer S. *Hamburg Ballet in New York*. 2018. – 88 p.
- Ting Liu. The interpretative function of singing in the «score» of a modern ballet performance. *Problems of Interaction Between Arts Pedagogy and the Theory and Practice of Education*. 2022. Vol. 62. – P. 79-92.
- Wesemann A. *The Hamburg Ballet*. Voltz. 2017. – 144 p.
- Yu Zhou. Flexibility training improves elegance in ice ballet. *Revista Brasileira de Medicina do Esporte*. 2022. Vol. 29(2). – P. 22-47.
- Zafeiroudi A., Chatzipanteli A. Exploring Self-Compassion among Recreational Dancers: Differences Between Tango and Ballet - Dance Teaching Implications Through Somatic and Embodied Disciplines. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*. 2022. Vol. 12(6). – P. 15-37.