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IN THE SHADOW OF *PETROUCHKA*: CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY IN THE WORK OF ANNA PAVLOVA, LA ARGENTINA, AND KATHERINE DUNHAM

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Abstract

This paper will examine efforts of Anna Pavlova, La Argentina (Antonia Mercé), and Katherine Dunham to use folk and vernacular movement to create modernist narratives of national and cultural identity. Critics have noted the many connections that existed between Pavlova and La Argentina. Both were divas, adored by the public, with La Argentina frequently referred to as «the other Pavlova» or the «Pavlova of Spanish dance». Preeminently solo artists, although both founded companies, they embarked on tours that took them to the four corners of the world. Although considerably younger, Katherine Dunham shared many of the qualities that distinguished the other two. In Chicago, where she lived from 1928 until 1940, she saw Argentina perform and studied with teachers who had danced with Pavlova. By 1937, when she created her first «ballet», *L'Ag'Ya*, her performances followed the structure of theirs, featuring at least one longer narrative work along with short dances that often spotlighted a particular form. Like both Pavlova and La Argentina, Dunham headed a company of her own creation, traveled the world to great acclaim, and was a diva —this at a time when racial segregation was the rule in most walks of American life. Dunham's debt to La Argentina remains unacknowledged. Yet the latter's repertory —mining folkloric, flamenco, and classical Spanish dance forms and performing them on a single program— may well have represented an idea of national identity as inspirational as the African diasporic identity that Dunham sought to represent in her own repertory.

Keywords: National Identity, Cultural Identity, Vernacular, Modernism.

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A LA SOMBRA DE *PETROUCHKA*: CONSTRUCCIONES DE IDENTIDAD EN LA OBRA DE ANNA PAVLOVA, LA ARGENTINA Y KATHERINE DUNHAM

Resumen

Este artículo examinará los esfuerzos de Anna Pavlova, La Argentina (Antonia Mercé) y Katherine Dunham por utilizar movimientos folclóricos y vernáculos para crear narrativas modernistas de identidad nacional y cultural. Los críticos han señalado las múltiples conexiones entre Pavlova y La Argentina. Ambas fueron divas, adoradas por el público, y con frecuencia se hacía referencia a La Argentina como «la otra Pavlova» o la «Pavlova de la danza española». Principalmente artistas solistas, aunque ambas fundaron compañías, emprendieron giras que las llevaron a los cuatro rincones del mundo. Aunque considerablemente más joven, Katherine Dunham compartía muchas de las características que distinguían a las otras dos. En Chicago, donde vivió entre 1928 y 1940, vio actuar a La Argentina y estudió con maestros que habían bailado con Pavlova. Para 1937, cuando creó su primer «ballet», *L'Ag'Ya*, sus actuaciones seguían la estructura de las de Pavlova y La Argentina, incluyendo al menos una obra narrativa más extensa junto con danzas más cortas que destacaban una forma particular. Al igual que Pavlova y La Argentina, Dunham dirigió su propia compañía, recorrió el mundo cosechando elogios y fue una diva, algo excepcional en una época en la que la segregación racial era la norma en la mayoría de los ámbitos de la vida estadounidense. La influencia de La Argentina en Dunham sigue sin ser reconocida. Sin embargo, el repertorio de la primera —que exploraba formas folclóricas, flamenco y danza clásica española en un solo programa— bien pudo haber representado una idea de identidad nacional tan inspiradora como la identidad diaspórica africana que Dunham buscó representar en su propio repertorio.

Palabras clave: identidad nacional, identidad cultural, vernáculo, modernismo.

Long overshadowed by *The Rite of Spring* and now dogged by accusations of racism, *Petrouchka* left a deep mark on artists in search of new forms of dance theater. Produced by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in 1911, the ballet featured music by Igor Stravinsky, choreography by Michel Fokine, and a fairground setting visualized by Alexandre Benois. *Petrouchka* was set in nineteenth-century St. Petersburg during the city's traditional Butter Week fair, a time of revelry before the lean months of Lent. It looked and sounded nothing like ballet as most people knew it. Modern in style and nationalist in expression, it offered a model for transforming popular traditions into the raw material of a high modernist art. Among the works it inspired were Alejo Carpentier and Amadeo Roldán's unrealized *La rebabaramba*, depicting an Afro-Cuban carnival; *Caaporá*, an Argentine «Indigenous» work, also unrealized, with designs by the painter Alfredo González Garaño and a libretto by the writer Ricardo Güiraldes; and the choral ballet *Sahdji* (1931), with a libretto by Alain

Locke and music by William Grant Still, based on African folk materials (Tomé 2-25; Clayton 13-17; Babino, *Ricardo Güiraldes*; Babino, *Caaporá*; Molesworth 56-59; Harris and Molesworth 251-58; Geduld 95-105).

Few enthusiasts of this new form of popular expression were dancers or choreographers. When Vaslav Nijinsky visited La Argentina in 1917 on tour with the Ballets Russes, his would-be local collaborators begged him to choreograph their ballet —they knew the dances and the popular lore bur needed somebody to animate them. And that somebody had to be like them— a man. But in Buenos Aires, and throughout most of Europe and the Americas, ballet meant legions of «ballet girls» in semi-undress or ballerinas in huge, fluffy tutus. To all appearances, the dream of a «muscular» new dance of national identity was doomed because of a distaste on the part of male artists and writers for ballet's overwhelming perfume of femininity.

Ironically, it would be women who rescued the dream of the popular as high modernist dance art. This essay will examine efforts by Anna Pavlova, La Argentina (Antonia Mercé), and Katherine Dunham to use folk and vernacular movement to create modernist narratives of national and cultural identity. Critic Roger Salas has noted the many connections that existed between Pavlova and La Argentina. Both were divas, adored by the public, with La Argentina frequently referred to as «the other Pavlova» or the «Pavlova of Spanish dance». Preeminently solo artists although both founded companies, they embarked on tours that took them to the four corners of the world (Salas 45)[1]. However, Salas seemed unaware of Pavlova's experiments with national dance forms, such as her balleticized *El Jarabe Tapatío*, which opened conversations about post-revolutionary Mexican dance identity[2], and the India-themed vignettes that launched Uday Shankar's career as a culture bearer of Indian identity in dance[3].

Although considerably younger, Katherine Dunham shared many of the qualities that distinguished the other two[4]. In Chicago, where she lived from 1928 until 1940, she saw La Argentina perform and studied with teachers who had danced with Pavlova. By 1937, when she created her first «ballet», *L'Ag'Ya*, her performances followed the structure of theirs, featuring at least one longer narrative work along with short dances that often spotlighted a particular form[5]. Following in the footsteps of Pavlova and La Argentina, Dunham established her own dance

[1] For Pavlova's life and career, see Money.
[2] For a detailed discussion of Pavlova's contribution to Mexican dance modernity, see Reynoso («Choreographing Modern Mexico» 80-98); and Reynoso (*Choreographing Politics*), especially Chapter 2 («"Eliticizing" the Folk and the Popular in Constructing Mestizo Modernity: Anna Pavlova's Refined El Jarabe Tapatío"»).
[3] For the Pavlova-Shankar collaborations, see Erdman's («Performance as Translation: Uday», 64-88; «Dance Discourses»). There are a number of variants of the titles. I have used the titles that appeared in contemporary reviews such as «Madame Pavlova as Priestess» (8); and Griffith (10).
[4] Pavlova was born in 1881, La Argentina in 1890, and Dunham in 1909.
[5] For Katherine Dunham's early life and career, see Das.

company, gained international acclaim through global tours, and rose to diva status —all during an era when racial segregation pervaded much of American society.

Dunham's debt to La Argentina remains unacknowledged. Yet the latter's repertory — mining folkloric, flamenco, and classical Spanish dance forms and performing them on a single program— may well have represented an idea of national identity as inspirational as the African diasporic identity that Dunham sought to represent in her own repertory. Both «collected» dances, Dunham in a more formal way as a trained anthropologist, but in their theatrical renderings of that material, both went to great lengths to dignify it, enhance it with music of quality, and prune it of demeaning stereotypes, especially those associated with popular entertainment. And both claimed a place for their art on the concert stage or in legitimate theaters or opera houses, even if they sometimes played music halls and night clubs.

By now we have traveled a long way from *Petrouchka*. But in the three women who are the focus of this paper, one finds a similar approach to folk and vernacular movement, the same respect for the popular source, and the same sensitivity in stylizing it for theatrical presentation. Finally, one encounters a similar aspirational intent, a desire to give cultural standing to dances widely perceived as having little cultural value. Ultimately, all three sought to construct national, racial, and cultural identities through vibrant evocations of the dancing body. Just as Pavlova, in her role of Radha to Uday Shankar's Krishna, redeemed the subaltern of colonial India on the main stage of the British empire, so La Argentina and Katherine Dunham claimed a place in the cultural body politic for the rejected and disdained, using their female bodies and stardom to articulate the muted identities of their people.

The flower of the Maryinsky's last pre-revolutionary generation, Anna Pavlova exemplified the traditional image of a Russian ballerina. She was a great Nikiya in *La Bayadère* and an even greater Giselle; she danced *The Dying Swan* so often she asked to be buried in its costume. But she was also a rebel who flung convention to the winds, donned sandals and a tunic *à la* Isadora Duncan, and gave herself over to the suggestion of bacchanalian delights.

Pavlova's repertory had always contained «Oriental» items, frequently on themes suggested by dancers like Serge Oukrainsky and Hubert Stowitts, whose specialties lay outside the realm of classical dance. In September 1923, when Pavlova returned to Covent Garden after her first extended tour of South and East Asia, the season included the ballerina's first efforts to introduce European and North American audiences to authentic Asian dance styles. By contrast with the exotica of older ballets, *Ajanta's Frescoes* and *Oriental Impressions* incorporated genuine elements of Indian and Japanese dance vocabulary learned through observation of practicing theater artists and first-hand acquaintance with the artistic patrimony of the civilizations that had nurtured them.

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In conceptualizing these works, Pavlova approached her material with something akin to a quasi-ethnographic impulse. Like Fokine before her, she was a passionate if untrained observer of movement —sympathetic to cultural difference and curious about its expressive forms. In Mexico in 1919, her balleticized rendition of local folk dances offered a glimpse of what scholar Jose L. Reynoso calls an «embodied *mestizo* modernity that resonated with efforts to construct a post-revolutionary modern nation» (Reynoso «Choreographing Modern Mexico» 80). Wearing pointe shoes, a wide *china poblana* skirt, embroidered blouse, and sombrero, Pavlova exemplified the cultural ideology of «whitened refinement» by which the «raw» cultural material of the Mexican poor was transformed into high art. However, as Reynoso notes, Pavlova herself transcended this «eliticizing» process, by «perform[ing] for the popular masses in places considered by Mexican socialites as of ill repute, [while] also engag[ing] corporeally with people who performed there by learning their dances» («Choreographing Modern Mexico» 89). Both La Argentina and Katherine Dunham would also engage in an «eliticizing» process, treating their material and its practitioners with respect and performing it in popular as well as elite venues.

In 1922-1923 Pavlova visited Asia for the first time. In Japan, where her company enjoyed great success, she attended dance and theater performances, while encouraging members of her company —especially the young English dancer Harcourt Algeranoff— to study with local teachers. In his memoirs Algeranoff describes hours spent with Matsumoto Koshiro, the great Kabuki dancer-actor, and his wife Madame Fujima mastering the technique of Japanese stage dance. The result was a series of sketches performed by Algeranoff, with choreography credited to his teachers, that Pavlova would incorporate into the ballet *Oriental Impressions* (Algeranoff 70-80).

From Japan the company went to India, where houses were packed and many expressed the hope that Pavlova would produce an Indian ballet. Such a work, she told a reporter from the *Times of India*, would have to be «built up on the art of the Indian peoples —their methods of presenting a dramatic story, their folk dances and their music» («A Chat with» 10)[6]. However, it was not until she discovered the magnificent Ajanta frescoes and rock sculptures, and accidentally witnessed Hindu wedding ceremonials in Bombay that she felt she had material for a ballet (Algeranoff 99, 103; Money 313-314). In fact, there was little opportunity for someone like Pavlova to witness Indian dance first-hand at the time. According to Indian dance scholar Joan Erdman:

> For the few dancers who traveled to India and sought indigenous dance forms, the showy (and tawdry) street dances of the Kathaks… the sitting dances of the *thumri* artists, the rarely approachable tribal and village festival dances, the inaccessible temple dancers designated as prostitutes, and an absence

[6] The *Times of India*, which published numerous articles about the tour, was the country's leading English-language daily newspaper.

> of opera and staged dance performances left foreign visitors with only fragmentary information. (Erdman 254)

In London, Algeranoff was dispatched to the Victoria & Albert Museum to do costume research, and to the British Museum to select prints to enlarge for the scenery (Algeranoff 103). He was also sent to a recital of Indian music by Comalata Banerjee, whom Pavlova quickly engaged to compose the score. Banerjee, in turn, introduced Pavlova to a young Indian dancer who was studying painting in London. This was Uday Shankar (104)[7].

The son of a court official and occasional producer of staged events, Shankar was born in 1900 and raised in the princely state of Jhalawar and in a tiny village near Benares. He spent his youngest years with villagers at their festivals and celebrations and his teens watching court performances; in Bombay, where he was sent to study painting, he added music to the list, so when his father wired him to come to London, he arrived with «a firm… grounding in Indian culture», which he incorporated into performances for the elite circles in which his father moved. At the same time, his eyes were opened «to the greatness and beauty of India and her arts» by Sir William Rothenstein, Principal of the Royal College of Art, where Shankar was studying (Erdman, «Performance as Translation» 69-71).

Pavlova invited Shankar to join her in creating two ballets —*A Hindu Wedding* and *Krishna and Radha*. For the first he drew on memories of a wedding in Rajasthan; for the second, he created a sequence of decorative poses and movements. The costumes were based on Indian miniatures and made from fabric that Pavlova had brought from India, while Banerjee's music, based on traditional forms, was played by an orchestra of western instruments («Pavlova at Rehearsal» 7). Algeranoff was especially taken with *Krishna and Radha*. Here, he wrote, «Pavlova was all submission, and Shak-kar [sic] handsome, masculine and graceful, was indeed Krishna, the Eternal Lover» (Algeranoff 105). Although *The Observer* responded warmly to these Indian-inspired scenes, finding «their simplicity, their colour, and their movement... delicious», they fared poorly with other critics.

C. K. Scott Moncrieff, better known as the translator of Proust, had nothing but scorn for *Ajanta Frescoes*, which «attracted to Covent Garden a number of those Seekers after Truth, who pursue their quarry "irrespective", in their own words, "of race, sex, colour, caste or creed"» (Moncrieff 298) —a thinly veiled reference to the presence of non-whites in the audience (Griffith 10). And although critics waxed lyrical about Pavlova in *Fairy Doll* and other roles, they passed

[7] According to one source, Banerjee was the daughter of the Dewan of Mysore State (Erdman, «Towards Authenticity» 94).

over her «tender and submissive» Radha, as if by donning Indian dress and outlining her eyes in kohl, she had abandoned whiteness.

Nor was there any mention of Shankar, who as a real Indian —and a very handsome one at that— not only authenticated the Indianness of the episode, but also embodied the subaltern, interracial desire that exclusionary laws throughout the British empire were intended to suppress. For the British, «imperialist superiority colored all Indians as outsiders», the reason, perhaps, that Shankar's choreographic contribution was seldom acknowledged in programs[8].

Although Pavlova stood at the head of a company, critics often referred to her as a soloist. Her programs invariably ended with a generous selection of divertissements, solos and small group works that served, among other things, as a platform for national dances. The star as soloist was even truer of La Argentina, whose career would rival Pavlova's in both its international reach and single-minded ambition. Born in 1890 in Buenos Aires, she grew up in Madrid, where she danced at the Teatro Real before embarking on a career in variety[9]. She began at the bottom, dancing in music-halls before the curtain rose and in Nickelodeons while the reels were being changed. In the years that followed, she toured throughout Spain, gradually remaking herself as a flamenco dancer[10]. Her travels introduced her to the country's rich tradition of regional dances, which joined the flamenco and classical dances in a concert repertory that over time became enormous and bore witness to what Roger Salas has described as an «effort to *efface* the boundaries between folklore, flamenco, and the academy» (Salas 41). She caught the eye of influential writers such as Valle-Inclán and Jacinto Benavente —the first of numerous Spanish artists and intellectuals who would advance her career and support her efforts to «dignify» her material while ridding it of clichés of Spanishness (Salas 47).

By the time she went to Paris in 1910, La Argentina was an accomplished artist, «Queen of the Castanets», as she was called in the publicity for her debut at the Jardin de Paris. The Jardin was the summer outpost of the Moulin Rouge, managed like the celebrated music-hall by Josep Oller, a Catalan who prided himself on discovering new talent. La Argentina's debut at the Moulin-Rouge soon followed. For Emery, writing in the theatrical newspaper *Comoedia*, her performance in the «Franco-Spanish operetta» *L'Amour en Espagne* was sensational. «Tomorrow this

[8] Pavlova was certainly aware of Shankar's physical attractiveness. According to one account, she told Rothenstein that «Shankar is… endowed with one of the finest and most perfect bodies I have ever seen in men in any country. God never gives such rhythmic bodies to painters and sculptors. They do not need such bodies. But Shankar's entry into the dance world will enrich the art of dance. He is a born dancer. He must dance» (in Koomer; in Erdman, «Towards Authenticity» 94). For the description of Pavlova as «tender and submissive» and the failure to credit Shankar for his choreographic contribution, see Money (325).

[9] For Angentina's early life, see Manso (31-55); and Bennahum (25-44). For the detailed timeline, see Sánchez Casado (165-189).

[10] For her early career in variety, see Bennahum (34-38); Rodrigo (29); Luján (123). For the early twentieth-century variety stage in Madrid, see Martínez del Fresno and Menéndez Sánchez (160-66, 177-79).

marvelous Argentina will be one of our idols», he predicted[11]. Making Paris her home, she embarked on long tours throughout Europe. It was a hard school, but work was La Argentina's discipline, and it was on the road in show after show that she perfected her artistry as a performer. Writing to the young Argentine ballerina Maria Ruanova in 1934, she passed on advice that reads like a memoir of La Argentina's younger self. Study hard, she tells Ruanova, and don't let anybody influence you. Ignore company politics. «Your only defense is to get better and better, and fight on stage, with the public as judge… Don't forget that one never ceases to learn, one never *arrives*, which means that sacrifices *never stop but go on forever*». It is tempting to dismiss La Argentina's apprenticeship on the music-hall stage as unworthy of a great artist. But as André Levinson once remarked, variety performers, whatever their genre, were «consummate virtuosi, flawless technicians, imbued with age-old traditions… who spend ten years elaborating and completing a turn» (Levinson 401)[12].

The outbreak of World War I found La Argentina in Russia. By the time she returned to Spain, all her savings were gone and her contracts cancelled[13]. But loss became an opportunity. In Madrid she attended the premiere of *El amor brujo* (1915), a *gitanería* with music by Manuel de Falla that La Argentina would later produce as a hugely successful ballet. She renewed contact with Spanish artists and intellectuals, and began the process of transforming herself and her repertory, adding new musical voices and recasting her music-hall «turns» as concert dances. In New York, where she gave two recitals at the Maxine Elliott Theatre in addition to appearing at society events, her program found a select and appreciative audience, many from the city's upper-crust Spanish community. Critics commended her musicality, intricate footwork, castanet playing, and general air of refinement, linking this to her exceptional social position («the only dancer officially appointed to the Court of Spain»), the social luminaries in the audience, and her looks («the more refined beauty of the upper-caste woman of her race»). As the *New York Times* commented, «The result is a total absence of the vulgar quality sometimes suggested by the dancers of her country» («La Argentina Appears» 20)[14].

Obviously, work had more to do with La Argentina's approach than bloodlines. In Mexico the following year she explained that she had «banished the coarseness, acrobatic at times, from

[11] For La Argentina at the Jardin de Paris, see «Jardin de Paris» (3); for her debut at the Moulin-Rouge, Emery (2); for Oller and the Jardin de Paris (Picasso). For an in-depth discussion of the representation of Spain in French popular entertainment of the period, see Power (143-258). Another enthusiastic critic was Curnonsky (the pen name of Maurice Edmond Sailland), who wrote in *Le Music-Hall* that La Argentina's talent should be «shouted from the rooftops» (quoted in Power 200).
[12] Levinson wrote this in his commentary on the Ballets Suédois production of *Within the Quota*.
[13] For the harrowing journey from Moscow to Spain, see Bennahum (61-63).
[14] See also «The Week's» (C7) (for «the Court of Spain»); «La Argentina Arrives» (6); «Spanish Dancer in Debut» (9); «New Spanish Dancer» (7); «Spain's "Greatest" Dancer» (11).

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Spanish dance, revealing its primitive beauty and impressing on it the seal of its special significance and color». She had done this, she added, after «constant study and observation», molding «her temperament and personal way of seeing to theories that… serve[d] not only to delight the eye but also the spirit, as refined as this may be» (qtd. in Manso 129). After the Maxine Elliot concerts La Argentina returned to the variety stage as a Palace headliner and a star attraction on the Keith vaudeville circuit. The Palace pulled out all the stops to promote her: «the Palace presents La Argentina as the most Beautiful, Richest Costumed, Most Aristocratic, Most Interesting, Most Gifted Spanish Dancer in the World», adding that «La Argentina is to Spain what Karsavina is to Russia»[15]. In New York as elsewhere La Argentina used the publicity generated by recitals and society performances as a stepping stone to lucrative commercial engagements.

La Argentina had come to New York at the invitation of Enrique Granados who wanted her to dance in the world premiere of *Goyescas* at the Metropolitan Opera. However, the Met had other ideas, and as compensation the composer helped her find backing for the Maxine Elliott concerts and wrote a new piece of music for her to use. The mishap was a blessing in disguise, for La Argentina's stay in the United States coincided with Ballets Russes seasons at the Century Theatre and Metropolitan Opera House, and with Anna Pavlova's at the Hippodrome. Although she was certainly acquainted with the Ballets Russes in Europe, it may have been in New York that La Argentina took a closer look at the company's stagecraft and repertory, which combined nationalism with an increasingly modernist sensibility. With Stravinsky's *Firebird* and *Petrouchka* in the New York repertory, along with *Midnight Sun* and *Sadko*, Russian-themed folkloric ballets with designs by the avant-garde painters Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharonva, respectively, the season suggested a model for La Argentina's Ballets Espagnols[16]. To be sure, by the time *El amor brujo* was produced by La Argentina in 1925 and the Ballets Espagnols made its debut three years later, the Russianness of Diaghilev's enterprise was muted, although works like *Petrouchka* and *Firebird* continued to be danced. In a sense, the Ballets Espagnols carried on Diaghilev's older

[15] Advertisement for «B. F. Keith's Palace» (B5). Tamara Karsavina was the great ballerina of Diaghilev's Pre-World War I company. She did not take part in the U. S. tour because she was pregnant.

[16] The Ballets Russes performed at New York's Century Theatre from January 17-29 and at the Met from April 3-29; a third season took place from October 16-28 at the Manhattan Opera House, when La Argentina was on tour. For the repertory and critical response, see Macdonald (136-181). The music for Midnight Sun and Sadko was by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, whose music Diaghilev tapped for several ballets: Schéhérazade (1910), Sadko (1911; revised version 1916), and Le Coq d'Or (1914). The choreography of Midnight Sun was by Massine, the original version of *Sadko* by Fokine, and the revised one by Adolph Bolm. In an article about Stravinsky, written around the time the Ballets Russes made its debut in Madrid with a repertory that included both *Firebird* and *Petrouchka*, Falla wrote in defense of is much admired Russian colleague: «Let us not forget, too, that Russian composers —Glinska and Rimsky-Korsakov among others— were the first to write symphonic music, and let us show Stravinsky the gratitude that we owe to the nation he so brilliantly represents by awarding him the admiration and the high artistic respect which his own work inspires in us» (quoted in Lee Harper 73). The Ballets Russes opened at Madrid's Teatro Real on May 26, 1916. For Ballets Russes performances see Pritchard (108-198).

tradition of national celebration, coupling modernism with Spanish art in all its expressions and presented in an elite context. «Thanks to Madame Argentina, her will and initiative», announced *Femina* in 1927, «we will have... a season of Spanish ballets presented as artistically as the Russian ones» («Après les Ballets Russes» 36).

A more immediate model for La Argentina was Pavlova. By 1916, the ballerina had been in the United States nearly two years. She had crisscrossed the country several times, collaborated with an opera company, and filmed *The Dumb Girl of Portici*. Now, in August 1916, she and her company began a long run of *The Sleeping Beauty* at the huge New York Hippodrome, where every day 5,000 people saw a truncated version of Petipa's ballet dressed by Léon Bakst. It is hard to imagine that La Argentina didn't get to see Pavlova —either in *The Sleeping Beauty* or in one of the mixed bills that replaced it in November. Moreover, Pavlova's image was everywhere in the popular and national press. She was the woman with million-dollar feet who shared her favorite Russian recipes; she endorsed the new social dances and spoke out against corsets. She was also a fashion icon, donning garments that consolidated her image both as an artist and a New Woman[17]. Moreover, it cannot have been lost on La Argentina that the Pavlova organization, unlike Diaghilev's, was female-led and female-centered. When La Argentina returned to Paris in 1922, she had shed her youthful plumpness and embraced the sleek lines of 1920s fashion[18]. She made her *rentrée* at a «Fashion Friday» sponsored by the women's magazine *Femina* —consisting of a «lecture» by the celebrity caricaturist Sem (Georges Goursat) on Hats and Coiffures followed by a variety show.

Abandoning her old sobriquets, La Argentina now became «the Spanish Pavlova», evoking the ballerina's Paris successes of the previous year. After a few more dates, including a reception in honor of the Italian ambassador, La Argentina was dancing at the Olympia, one of the city's most prestigious music halls[19]. It was in these closing months of 1922 that André Levinson, the great Russian dance critic who had settled in Paris the year before and now wrote for the influential theater newspaper *Comoedia*, experienced the *coup de foudre* that remade her career. La Argentina became Levinson's idol, the embodiment of an idea of Spanish dance that began with the Phoenicians, flowered in the meeting of occident and orient, and triumphed in her unique metamorphosis of flesh into spirit. His columns referred to her again and again, and in September

[17] For Pavlova's engagements in the United States between 1914-17, her fashion transformation between 1908 and 1914, and her fashion image in the 1920s, see Money (203-251, 141-148, 357-364). For her engagement with fashion, see Pritchard and Hamilton; Mears; and Garafola («Anna Pavlova). For Pavlova and popular culture, see Carbonneau Levy.

[18] For this transformation, see the generous selection of photographs in Homenaje; for La Argentina's fashion-influenced costumes of the 1920s, reproduced in color, see Bennahum.

[19] See: «Réceptions» (2); «Carnet de Critique» (3); «Olympia. Débuts de La Argentina» (4); «Théâtre Femina» (3).

1923, in the original version of his influential essay «The Spirit of the Spanish Dance», Levinson hailed her as the star of an «extinguished firmament», an artist in whom the nobility of a lost Iberian dance had miraculously survived (Levinson, «Jadis et naguère» 4). The essay became the basis of one of Levinson's celebrated «conversations about the dance», a lecture-demonstration that introduced La Argentina to a select audience of the Paris arts intelligentsia. With Levinson as her paladin, she entered the uppermost ranks of the dance elite, an artist fully the equal of Carlotta Zambelli, the Paris Opéra's long-reigning *étoile*[20]. Meanwhile, Levinson's Spanish essay —cut, pasted, and translated— was endlessly recycled, adding to La Argentina's growing fame[21]. By now, she had acquired another champion in the person of *Femina* coeditor Robert Ochs, with whom she embarked on a long-term personal relationship. Doubtless at his behest, the magazine covered her generously, endearing her to the community of its well-to-do female readership[22].

Shortly after she arrived in Paris, La Argentina wrote to Manuel de Falla, asking the composer for letters introducing her to friends in the French capital. She told him about her «stupendous» success and how much she would like to do a ballet at the Opéra-Comique, almost surely a reference to *El amor brujo* (Murga Castro *et al.* 6-7) However, it was only in 1925, as part of a program produced by the soprano-turned-entrepreneur Marguérite Beriza that the work returned to the stage as a ballet. Like *Petrouchka, El amor brujo* depicted a tragedy of love and an encounter with the supernatural, drew on national folklore, and melded themes of «local inspiration» with a modernist approach to composition[23]. However, the protagonist of Falla's work, unlike Stravinsky's, was a woman, a beautiful young gypsy named Candelas (La Argentina), who loves the handsome and gallant Carmelo (Vicente Escudero) but is haunted by an old flame, The

[20] Levinson's conversation series, entitled «Six entretiens sur la danse», began with «Le pas de deux, poème de danse», featuring Carlotta Zambelli and her partner Albert Aveline, on November 16, 1923. «L'Esprit de la danse espagnole», with Argentina, followed on November 30. *Comoedia* covered these events closely. See, for example, «Les Conférences. Les "six entretiens sur la danse"» (2); «Les Conférences. Le Pas de Deux par M. André Levinson» (2); Rigaud (2). Levinson reprised his lecture on Spanish dance, again with Argentina, on Februay 29, 1924 (L. H., «A la Comédie des Champs-Elysées. Sixième et dernier entretien de la Danse», *Comoedia*, 29 Feb. 1924, 2; André Rigoud, «Les Conférences. L'Esprit de la danse espagnole», *Comoedia*, 3 Mar. 1924, p. 5.

[21] See, for example, Levinson («Argentina et le génie» 229-256); «The Spirit of the Spanish Dance» (307-329); «Argentina» (739-744); Levinson (*La Argentina: A Study*). The *Theatre Arts Monthly* articles are included in Levinson (*André Levinson on Dance* 49-55, 95-99). I am grateful to John Goodman for sharing his research about the essay's many permutations.

[22] See, for example, «La Argentina, La Pavlova espagnole» (31), which went to press shortly after her first Femina event. The caption read in part: «She is the best, the finest, the most sensitive, expressive, and diverse of all Spanish dancers». For the Grande Nuit de Paris, an haute couture event organized by Femina and the newspaper Figaro, La Argentina led the opening défilé wearing a red and gold silk lamé dress by Callot Soeurs (L. G. 13). For Argentina's relationship with Ochs, see Bennahum (66). Beginning in the mid-1920s when she settled in Paris, the Viennese fashion photographer Dora Kallmus, known professionally as Madame d'Ora, photographed La Argentina extensively.

[23] The phrase «local inspiration» comes from Jean Gandrey-Rety's review of the music (3). For the Bériza production, the French title was used— *L'Amour sourcier*.

Spectre (Georges Wague). *El amor brujo* marked La Argentina's debut as a ballet master, and Levinson, much as he admired her, felt that her choreography as a whole felt short, not only for the «very young Spanish girls» of the ensemble, but also for the soloists. «To realize the work of their illustrious compatriot», Levinson wrote, «the astonishing Argentina as well as the valiant Escudero have sacrificed their personal opportunities and deliberately limited their means of action». Nonetheless, he ended his review with an encomium of La Argentina as a soloist.

> For those who saw Argentina last Saturday at the Comédie des Champs-Elysées, with only the polished surfaces of an open Pleyel as scenery, the vision was unforgettable. To impose herself this artist needs not the rivalry of theatrical action, but the splendid isolation of the stage. The plenitude of her art, saturated with music, her virtuosity and her warmth, defies succinct analysis. But happy is the country that possesses a Manuel de Falla, a Maria Barrientos, and an Argentina to testify to its nobility and artistic vigor. (Levinson, «"L'Amour Sorcier"» 3)

Like Pavlova, La Argentina was the lone star among a company of woman when one was needed. Otherwise, only men, as partners, might occasionally share her glory. La Argentina never commented upon Pavlova in connection with her own work. However, in 1931 she sent a statement to *The Dance Magazine* to include in an article about the recently deceased ballerina that suggests she knew her both personally and as an artist: «Anna Pavlova joined knowledge and grace, taste and emotion. Each of her gestures was a miracle of sensibility and technical perfection. She designed movements that had the fluidity of music and were like sculpture in sound. Her loss is irreparable» (Murga Castro *et al.*104). La Argentina might have been talking about herself.

Like Pavlova, La Argentina entered imaginatively into each of her dances, infusing them with emotional and mimetic expressiveness, no matter what the subject matter. «She surrounds every number with an atmosphere of its own, provides it with character and climax», John Martin commented after her first, wildly successful New York recitals in 1928. He was impressed by the effortlessness of her movement, the «genius» of her «theatrical skill», and the way her carefully planned dances «upon repetition … [were] not only exact in outline but as fresh and alive as upon their first performance» (Martin, «The Dance» X11)[24]. Two years later Martin was still speculating on the «eternal freshness and spontaneity of even her oldest dances». The answer, he explains, is that «she creates them anew she says, for each audience... because she gets a genuine joy out of showing... things which are of her own making and which she knows are beautiful» (Martin, «The Dance» 118).

[24] Martin was reviewing La Argentina's first two concerts, which took place at Town Hall and the Gallo Theatre. Subsequent concerts took place at Carnegie Hall and Town Hall, venues closely associated with classical music.

During her last great United States tours, La Argentina not only touched hearts but also offered a «tonic for blues», a «blithe spirit» who, when the Great Depression was at its worst, brought a «smile to the face of the most devout depressionist» (Moore 17). She offered what John Martin called a «gallery of portraits» (Martin, «The Dance» X6)—rollicking peasants, fish vendors, gypsies, characters from all over Spain as well as its former empire with their music and their dances. In his numerous writings about La Argentina, Levinson viewed her as a living incarnation of Spain and its art (Levinson, *La Argentina: A Study* 7). It was not simply that she had regenerated a dance long cheapened by «music-hall gypsies» but because «[i]n her the spirit of the Occident triumphs over the lure of the Orient. She has once more reconquered Andalusia from the Arabs» (Levinson, *André Levinson on Dance* 96). Of course, La Argentina never espoused this proto-Fascist cosmography. Her Spain image was inclusive, a big tent that welcomed losers as well as winners. «It was her great hope», wrote Martin in his obituary of the artist, who died only a day after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, «to be able to travel into all the far corners of Spain and salvage the rare old dances that are on the verge of disappearing» (Martin, «The Dance» X6). Rather than reenacting the battle of Christians and Moors, her art celebrated the diversity of Spain, its intermingled peoples and their dances. She had fought for the dignity of those dances, for their right to be respected and celebrated for their beauty. This was not a struggle that Pavlova, a ballerina with the imprimatur of Russia's Imperial Theaters, ever had to face, although she, too, was a populist.

Like Pavlova, La Argentina was tireless in bringing the beauty and sensuous experience of dance to people around the globe, summoning her expressive gift day after day. A nationalist in art, La Argentina was a democrat in defining her body politics.

Among the crowds at Chicago's Studebaker Theatre, where most of La Argentina's concerts in the late 1920s and 1930s took place was an aspiring young dancer named Katherine Dunham. Dunham was African American, born in 1909 and raised in Joliet, Illinois, and a student of anthropology. In high school she joined the Terpsichorean Club, where she discovered the enchantment of «pink satin slippers» and wild Russian hopaks, the era's twin faces of ballet[25]. But it was only when Dunham followed her brother to the University of Chicago and joined the racially integrated «little theater» known as the Cube, that she could even contemplate becoming a ballet dancer.

In the 1920s and 1930s segregation barred most African Americans from studying ballet and

[25] Dunham recounts these and other early dance experiences in *A Touch of Innocence: Memoirs of Childhood* (187-194). The book was originally published by Harcourt, Brace & Company in 1959. For most of the biographical information about Dunham's youth, see Das (13-34).

modern dance, even in the North. However, at the Cube Dunham found a mentor in Mary Hunter, the future Broadway producer, who introduced her to Mark Turbyfill, a poet, painter, and dancer, begging him to «undertake the training of an ambitious Negro girl, who... wanted to become a ballet dancer» (in Barzel, Turbyfill and Page 93). But when classes began, Turbyfill discovered it was hard to rent studio space once landlords realized the dancers were Black and even harder to raise money for an all- Black ballet company (in Barzel, Turbyfill and Page 98)[26].

Dunham, meanwhile, immersed in the atmosphere of the Chicago Black Renaissance, had moved beyond the enchantment of «pink satin slippers». As Turbyfill wrote in November 1930:

> We are not suggesting that the darker ballerina confine herself to the ballet of Pavlova. We would merely place at her disposal the technique which would enable her to express her own individuality and the genius of her race. Thus, we can create a genuine choreography, a dance form symbolic of a self-conscious race» (qtd. in Das 22).

Guiding Dunham through this transition was the Russian-born dancer-actress Ludmila Speranzeva. More of a character dancer than a classical one, she had studied modern dance in Germany with Mary Wigman[27]. In the early 1930s, Speranzeva became instrumental in Dunham's growth as an artist and in her creation of a language that fused ballet, modern, and character dance styles within a framework of theatricality. In 1932 the two women established the Negro Dance Art Studio, and under its aegis a new company, which they called «The Modern Dancers». Dunham and Speranzeva (as Luda Paetz) were the enterprise's Manager-Directors, with Speranzeva also «Director of Choreography» and «Instructor in Modern and Spanish Dance». The Modern Dancers made their debut at an Artists' Ball in December 1932, performing a «ballet" choreographed by Speranzeva to a prize-winning score by the Black composer Florence B. Price. The *Chicago Defender*, the nation's leading Black newspaper, could not have been more complimentary. «The modern dancers», wrote the newspaper's anonymous critic, «are beginning a new era in the history of the Race dancer» («Modern Dancers» 12)[28]. Other performances followed, and in 1934, with

[26] See also Orme (191).

[27] Speranzeva, whose maiden name was Emilia Adele Paetz, had performed with Alexander Tairov's movement-centered Kamerny Theater before the Russian Revolution, and after it, with Boris Romanov's Russian Romantic Ballet in Germany. In 1924 she joined the Chauve-Souris, a Russian émigré cabaret, and with it came to the United States, where she settled in Chicago with her husband, Jacob Diament. Diament was a Russian-speaking Jew born in Poland, who built up a confectionary business in Chicago before becoming a high-level employee of J. Lyons & Company, a British conglomerate. During the 1930s Speranzeva used different variants of her name, which is reflected on the ephemera documenting her early collaborations with Dunham. I am grateful to Sergey Konaev for his assistance in documenting Speranzeva's Russian beginnings.

[28] The Defender was one of the leading Black newspapers in the country. In addition to Dunham and Paetz, the Negro Dance Art Studio's letterhead lists Mary Hunter as «Instructor in Pantomime and expression» and Florence B. Price and Allison (better known as Margaret) Bonds as «Pianists-composers». Why Speranzeva reverted to her maiden name

Speranzeva, Dunham choreographed a «Negro spiritual», *Please Don't Let This Harvest Pass*, which was played by the African American pianist Margaret Bonds, one of the group's accompanists (Dunham, *Survival* 100)[29].

In Chicago's interracial Bohemian artistic milieu Dunham found a home and a group of women who cushioned the racism of the larger society (Mazer 420)[30]. She worked with former Pavlova dancer Ruth Page, who hired her for a minor role in *La Guiablesse*, then gave her own starring one to Dunham[31]. Major touring attractions passed through Chicago, and Dunham saw them all —performances by Colonel de Basil's Ballet Russe (including *Petrouchka*) and the Mordkin Ballet (including *Giselle*), recitals by La Argentina, Escudero, and Harald Kreutzberg, and many of the ouring artists dropped by the studio to teach (Dunham, *Survival* 99-100; Dunham, *Dunham Technique Prospectus* 527) «Those were my most impressionable years», she later wrote, «and whole new vistas were opening» (Dunham, *Survival* 100). «I was starry-eyed», she told an interviewer, «influenced by almost everything that came through Chicago during the period» (Clark 469).

She studied Spanish dancing with Quill Monroe, who designed costumes for the Modern Dancers (and was reputed to be a former partner of La Argentina), and through Speranzeva met both La Argentina and Vicente Escudero. When Speranzeva began spending long periods in Europe because of her husband's job, Dunham worked closely with Vera Mirova (née Podolsky), who exposed her to East Indian, Javanese, and Balinese dance forms, while coaching her in Spanish dance. Indeed, Dunham's first ballet of social protest was inspired by the Spanish Civil War, and in preparation she «practiced hell-stamping and castanets as often as [she] found studio space to rehearse and Vera Mirova to coach» (104). In searching for what her own body could do and for what might «develop out of black people», she told an interviewer in the 1970s, «people like La Argentina and Kreutzberg and Mary Wigman gave me a great deal of hope» (470).

From the start, Dunham understood that if she wanted to dance, she had to create her own ensemble, given that opportunities for African American dancers in ballet and modern dance were so limited. But like Speranzeva and Mirova she was also a soloist, who, even before she went to the Caribbean in 1935, had absorbed a long list of world dances that could be performed singly or

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and used a diminutive of her stage name is unknown. I am grateful to Joanna Dee Das for sharing a Dunham letter written in 1933 on the studio letterhead.

[29] Bonds, a pianist, composer, and student of Florence B. Price, is best remembered today for her popular arrangements of African American spirituals and frequent collaborations with Langston Hughes («Margaret Bonds», Wikipedia).

[30] In 1976 Dunham confided in Gwen Mazer, «I think the only way a person inclined toward intellectual and artistic freedom could survive in those times was within a group of people considered bohemians» (420).

[31] For Dunham, Page, and the genesis of La Guiablesse, see Joellen A. Meglin (445-465).

adapted to group use. «She created dances based on the cultural traditions of Cuba, Brazil, Russia, Spain, and Native Americans before she ever left the country», remembered Carmencita Romero (née Lilly Mae Butler), who began studying with Dunham in the early 1930s (qtd. in Sherrod 208) *L'Ag'Ya*, her first ballet set in the Caribbean, revealed the fusion of these early influences. Produced by the dance unit of the Federal Theater Project, it was a love triangle inspired by *Giselle*, but embedded in a folk atmosphere like *Petrouchka*; it included the stately Creole mazurka, or *mazouk*, the uninhibited *béguine*, the Cuban *habanera*, the Martinica *ag'ya*, a male fighting dance, as well as a balletic pas de deux (Notes on *L'Ag'Ya*). The work showcased Dunham's theatrical and choreographic gifts as well as her ability to present folkloric material without stereotyping it. And like Pavlova's *Radha and Krishna* and La Argentina's *El amor brujo*, *L'Ag'Ya* had a woman as its protagonist.

The history of twentieth-century ballet has traditionally been written as a narrative of choreography and the organizations that both promoted and fomented it. With only a few exceptions (Ninette de Valois being one), this choreo-institutional history gives pride of place to the men who created the vast number of works and served as teachers, ballet masters, and company directors rather than to the women who brought those works to life. It is a view that all but negates the many ensembles headed by women, including the companies of Anna Pavlova, La Argentina, Bronislava Nijinska, and Ida Rubinstein, and discounts choreography by women realized on other stages. By effacing this women's world, it also effaces the connections among its practitioners and the ideologies they pursued, which departed in significant ways from the master choreo-institutional narrative.

Shedding light on this submerged history is one of the goals of this essay. Anna Pavlova, La Argentina, and Katherine Dunham are all well known, and each has been the subject of a body of scholarship. But generally speaking, they have not been viewed as belonging to a succession. Yet each built in some way upon the earlier artists' achievement, leading companies, tending their public image, and «dignifying» material that lay outside a narrowly conceived classical norm.

Each, moreover, took a broad view of «world dance», treating this as a means of conveying both a national and an international identity. Pavlova's development of this repertory was the most traditional and only gradually moved away from its origins in character dance. However, it was in her celebration of subaltern dance forms and her fusion of them with traditional ballet practices that prompted a reevaluation of national dances in both Mexico and India, even if it was left to others, including her protégé Uday Shankar, to bring that reassessment to fruition. With La Argentina the transformation from a technically accomplished dancer of the variety stage to an artist whose repertory embraced all of Spain was also gradual. It, too, involved shedding the past,

in her case a theatrical system that enabled her to make a good living but was predicated on the exploitation of *españolada* stereotypes (Murga Castro and Marinero Labrador 6). By the time Dunham attended her performances in the 1930s, La Argentina was performing exclusively in concert halls and legitimate theaters, using music by Spain's leading modern composers. Her vision of a «refined Spanish dance» (16) offered a model for Dunham in approaching African diasporic material. Finally, through Dunham's ability to fuse African diasporic material with concert techniques, ballet dramaturgy, and a modern sensibility, she created an African American art dance for the concert stage. And she continued to call her stage works «ballets».

Petrouchka expanded the notion of ballet to incorporate vernacular and folk material, academic forms, and free movement. More than any other work in the Diaghilev repertory, it was both local and universal —its popular echoes speaking to Petersburgers in the audience and its broader themes to others. Like the dances brought into being by Anna Pavlova, La Argentina, and Katherine Dunham, *Petrouchka* suggested how a «ballet» could take many different forms and convey ideas about identity and style that had nothing to do either with Russia or the *danse d'école*. And, for whatever reason, those who chose to explore the possibilities the ballet opened were women working outside the early twentieth century's choreo-institutional complex.

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