
Reviewed by Tara Wheelwright (Brown University)

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Commissioned by Hanna Chuchvaha (University of Calgary)

After the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Lacy-Zarubin Agreement in January 1958, inaugurating official cultural exchange between the two nations, the State Academic Ensemble of Folk Dances of the Peoples of the USSR arrived in New York later that year in April. Better known as the Moiseyev Dance Company after the founder, Igor Aleksandrovich Moiseyev (1906-2007), the Moiseyev toured through all the major American cities, culminating in an appearance on the widely watched *Ed Sullivan Show*. Performing highly polished versions of folk dances from the various ethnicities and nationalities found throughout the Soviet Union, the Moiseyev popularized folk dance as a theatrical spectacle. In this new book, Victoria Hallinan examines the impact of this multiethnic production on American audiences during the Cold War. With consideration of political framing and issues of gender and race relations at the time of the tour, she argues that the positive reception of the Moiseyev complicated the dominating Cold War narrative of enemy nations. Rather than viewing the Moiseyev as ideological adversaries, the heteronormative and harmonious multiethnic image of the Soviet Union that the company displayed eased Americans’ own societal tensions and led to curiosity about the company, not just as a foreign entity but as fellow human beings.

Hallinan is not the first to devote scholarly attention to the Moiseyev, but here her focus on the American reception of the group’s first international tour complements recent books by dance historians Anthony Shay and Clare Croft. In *The Igor Moiseyev Dance Company: Dancing Diplomats* (2019), Shay offers an in-depth analysis of the origins of the Moiseyev, arguing that they created a new dance genre of “ethno-identity dance” that was wielded as a powerful political tool during the Stalinist era and then later during the Cold War. Likewise, in *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange* (2015), Croft
focuses on American dance companies sent abroad for cultural exchange during the Cold War. Hallinan’s focus thus examines the flip side of such cultural exchanges, detailing how the Moiseyev developed into a government-sponsored propaganda tool and the enthusiasm with which postwar American culture accepted Moiseyev and his dancers.

Divided into three parts, Hallinan devotes the first to the formation of the company and the steady support from the Soviet authorities that it was able to maintain. Moiseyev had served as the choreographer for the All-Union Folk Festival in November 1936, after which he decided to form an ensemble from the performers involved. With a background in classical ballet, Moiseyev traveled to different regions of the Soviet Union to collect folk dances and then alter them to make the dances more entertaining. The question of authenticity lingers because while Moiseyev spoke of these as genuine folk dances, he also supported the changes he made to make them more accessible to a broad audience. Along with the dances, he also altered the folk costumes, changing the fabrics to lighter materials that were easier for the dancers to move in and adding details to make them more visually appealing. The vibrancy of the costumes was important because Moiseyev rarely used scenery; instead the national character of the costumes acted as the sole visual feature against a simple backdrop. While Hallinan’s focus is not on the costumes, she includes numerous photographs throughout the book that highlight the various costumes. Given that the Moiseyev achieved popularity during the Great Terror, Hallinan also discusses how Moiseyev navigated Stalin’s favor during this time, leading to six hundred performances in thirty-five Soviet towns between 1937 and 1940. During the Second World War, the company served as an internal propaganda tool, performing throughout the Soviet Union to raise morale. By embracing the nationality policy that sought to celebrate all the various ethnicities within the Soviet Union and socialist realism, the Moiseyev “produce[d] a dance form that broke with Russian ballet tradition and could be described as representing contemporary Soviet life” (p. 51).

The second part examines the post-Stalinist era, covering the process of the Soviet Union opening cultural exchanges with the United States and the political framing of the 1958 tour, both from the Soviet perspective of the Americans and from the American side of the Soviet dancers. Given that the company was selected for the first planned cultural exchange between the two nations, Hallinan emphasizes that “Americans saw in the Soviet dancers people who were not so unlike themselves, despite their political, ideological, and cultural differences” (p. 68). Hallinan, using newspaper articles focusing on the tour and letters that Moiseyev and dancers from the company received, reveals the frenzy and anticipation Americans felt about the tour. Box-office sales broke records and many Americans, feeling a personal connection, wrote to Moiseyev asking for his assistance in purchasing tickets. The Moiseyev, furthering their success, even added the “Virginia Reel” as an encore to performances after quickly learning and mastering the American folk dance. Such an addition elated audiences but also did little to assuage the “sense of inferiority” amongst Americans worrying about whom the United States would send to the Soviet Union, as folk dance was not taken as a serious art form by any American dance company (p. 98). Moiseyev was, however, impressed with certain aspects of American culture, particularly with the dancer, choreographer, and director Jerome Robbins (1918-98), whose recent production of West Side Story (1957) mixed classical ballet and contemporary dance. For the dancers of the Moiseyev, American newspapers turned them into celebrities, questioning them on everything from diets to their impression of Disneyland. While the presence of KGB officers mostly likely muted their responses, Americans nevertheless sought to hear comparisons between
the two nations, reveling in any answer that suggested American superiority.

The final section views the reactions of Americans through the lenses of gender and ethnicity/race. Hallinan finds that due to “American anxiety about emasculation, changes in traditional gender roles, and homosexuality, Americans found the Moiseyev's depiction of heteronormative relationships soothing” (p. 137). Given the preoccupation of American self-identity during the Cold War, Hallinan argues that Americans were particularly attuned to sexuality and gender. Despite the prevailing image of gender equality in a Soviet communist society, Americans were surprised by the very feminine qualities of Soviet women. In performances, the costumes accentuated this femininity—for example women, had long, colorful skirts that whirled about and were strikingly different from the men's costumes. Furthermore, in the dances, men often competed for the women in a markedly athletic and masculine way that was a signature style of Moiseyev's choreography. The men provided entertaining virtuosity that differentiated them from male ballet dancers, while the women tended to perform the more graceful, slower dances. Views of ethnicity and race were similarly welcomed for their simplicity and idealized form. While there was tension in the United States between the image of the harmonious melting pot and the reality of race relations, the Moiseyev presented themselves as not only performing a multicultural program but also doing so with dancers from diverse backgrounds. Having the dancers excel at all these different folk dances “melted the different identities of the dancers into a singular identity and one in which they could all understand and celebrate the multiple ethnicities and nationalities in the Soviet Union and its neighbors” (p. 164). While the situation of ethnicity within the Soviet Union was more complex than this, for Americans this depiction of a unified multicultural group benefited the Soviets’ goal of enhancing their reputation abroad.

This book will appeal to those interested in more nuanced views of Cold War history, dance history, folk dance, and Soviet culture. As a historian, Hallinan does not go into depth about the more artistic elements of the Moiseyev, offering only a few details about the choreography and costumes, and very little about the music. However, she does offer a rare, in-depth account of the other half of a performance, the audience's reception. Given that the Moiseyev's tour was the first encounter for many Americans with people from the Soviet Union, such an account is valuable addition to the existing literature on Soviet dance and US-Soviet relations during the Cold War.
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