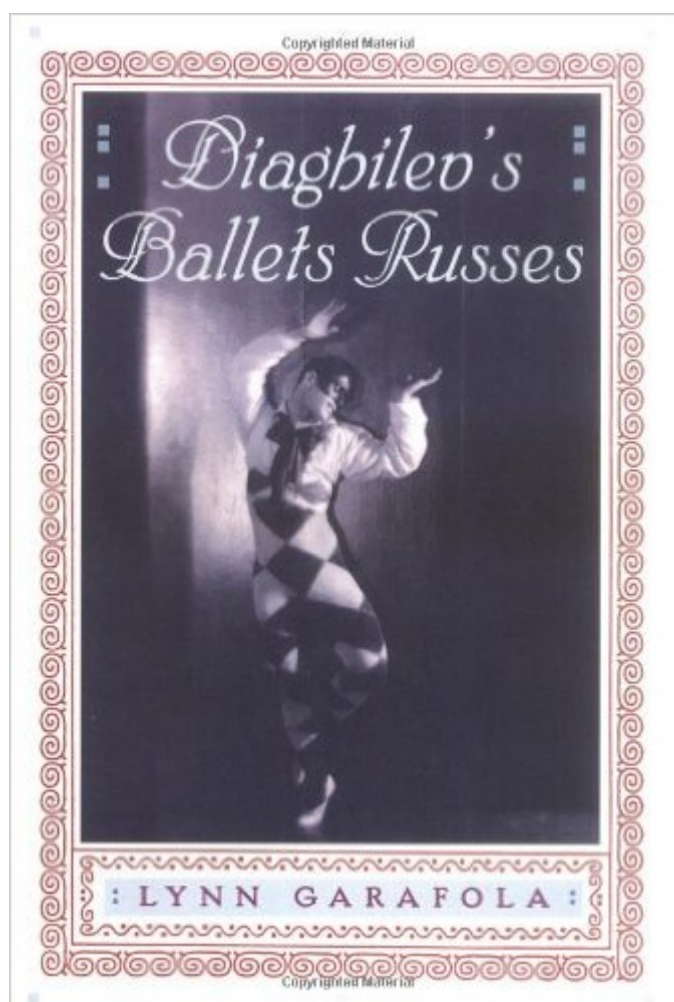


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# Diaghilev's Ballets Russes



## Synopsis

In the history of twentieth-century ballet, no company has had so profound and far-reaching an influence as the Ballets Russes. Under the direction of impresario extraordinaire Serge Diaghilev (1872–1929), the Ballets Russes radically transformed the nature of ballet; its subject matter, movement idiom, choreographic style, stage space, music, scenic design, costume, even the dancer's physical appearance. From 1909 to 1929, it nurtured some of the greatest choreographers in dance history; Fokine, Nijinsky, Massine, and Balanchine; and created such classics as *Les Sylphides*, *Firebird*, *Petrouchka*, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, *Les Noces*, and *Apollo*. Diaghilev brought together some of the leading artists of his time, including composers Stravinsky, Debussy, and Prokofiev; artists Picasso, Braque, and Matisse, and poets Hoffmansthal and Cocteau. Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* is the most authoritative history of the company ever written and the first to examine it as a totality; its art, enterprise, and audience. Combining social and cultural history with illuminating discussions of dance, drama, music, art, economics, and public reception, Lynn Garafola paints an extraordinary portrait of the company that shaped ballet into what it is today.

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## Customer Reviews

The Ballets Russes and their impresario, Sergei Diaghilev, are celebrated for their impact on the art of ballet starting in the early 20th century, through Diaghilev's sudden death in 1929. Garafola takes pains to stress in her introduction that she is dealing not only with the art of the Ballets Russes,

which others before have also done, but also to cover the business side of Diaghilev's work (the second part, "Enterprise") and the development of an audience attuned to modern trends in ballet (the third part, "Audience"). Accordingly, the first part, "Art", does not claim to be an exhaustive treatment of all the Ballets Russes productions, but is more an overview of the artistic ethos of the company, with coverage given to particularly celebrated productions, including "Le sacre du printemps", of course, as well as "Jeux". The "Enterprise" section shows how Diaghilev had to schmooze and charm wealthy and powerful patrons, and how he sometimes failed at that, alienating the wrong people at the wrong times on more than one occasion. The emphasis in the "Audience" section is on the cultivation of the ballet audience in Paris, naturally enough as Paris was the home of the Ballets Russes, but also in London, which is interesting because Diaghilev evidently had uneasy feelings towards England. Garafola tells the story well, and the photos include selections that may not be all that familiar. The Appendices compile lists of ballets created by Fokine, as well as operas and ballets produced by Diaghilev. In her Epilogue, Garofola rather forlornly notes that ballet had started artistically on the sidelines before Diaghilev, and he brought it center stage in his lifetime, but ballet has been sidelined gradually in the world since his time in overall cultural consciousness. This takes on extra meaning in such difficult economic times as these, where the arts tend to come under the budget ax first.

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