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A Gaze into the Personal Aesthetics of Three Sons of the Silver Age of Russia

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**A Gaze into the Personal Aesthetics and Accomplishments of Three Sons of the Silver Age
of Russia**

By Karl David Green

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

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Virginia Commonwealth University
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I find that I must, without question, thank those whom I have not met face to face, but hope that I have grown to have some level of understanding about who they were. First, I would like to thank Sergei Diaghilev for his enormous heart and generosity in his support of the arts, all of the arts. If he had not brought artists from outside of Russia into Russia, would the arts scene in that country have been as rich as it was? He perhaps saved ballet from an uncertain death with his astounding company, the Ballet Russes. Could it be that ballet would not even be on stages in the United States today had it not been for Diaghilev, and if so, in what shape would they be? His charisma must have changed the energy of every room that he entered. Second, I have to thank Mikhail Kuzmin, because before learning of him, I was guilty of taking my sexual orientation for granted. He lived at a time where the impact of the borders of gender identity/homosexuality went from being free, to being considered a mental illness, to imprisonment or even assassination. Today in 2009, the major issue among homosexuals might be considered having the privilege to get married, not exactly a life or death situation. His life just makes me more aware of what it is to be gay, whereas before, I did not, or at least I said that I did not define who I am by my sexual orientation. Even if we want to, we cannot divorce ourselves of any part of ourselves. Third, and most importantly, I have to thank Nicolas Evreinov, for he has invited me into the circle that is the theatre. Until meeting him, I felt like an outsider, that I did not understand theatre and honestly, was not sure I wanted to truly understand it. Evreinov broke down my 'fourth wall.' His theory of theatre in nature is the way that I see the world. It is the theatricality in nature that brings me to a higher place and allows me to be happy, to be a more centered person. When I observe nature's talent, I am lifted to a higher place which is the main concept of Evreinov's theory of theatricality, to take yourself out of your daily life, to

be enlightened, to be a better person. When I speak of Evreinov, I get choked up because he has changed the way that I see, and at my age, that is something. This is powerful stuff, that someone whom you have never met could make such a difference in one's life.

I would not be at this place in my life, not finishing a Masters of Fine Art Program and certainly not in theatre, if it had not been for my 'Auntie Mame,' Dr. Noreen C. Barnes. For one thing she said "yes" when I ask if she thought that I would be good enough to enter the program. Believe me, I certainly had my little notebook writing down all the words that I did not understand and thought that I would faint when I had to write my first paper. After all, before graduate school, my last paper was written on a typewriter; let's just say a few years back, a bit of history. Dr. Noreen Barnes has been a wonderful facilitator, mentor, advocate, confidant, and I would like to say now lifetime friend. In the spring semester of 2009, I signed up for History of Directors with Dr. Barnes among a class of directors and actors, of which I am neither, yet in some small way, I am both. Not for one minute did I feel uncomfortable or unwelcomed, for after all, I would define myself as a designer/technician/visual artist. Our first paper and presentation was to be on an early twentieth-century director; I was totally clueless as this was clearly new territory. When asking Dr. Barnes if she could suggest someone, she said with a twinkle in her eye, that she thought the Evreinov would be a good fit. I was hooked immediately, and because of this little nugget, I find myself writing a history paper for my thesis which all started on the day that I was introduced to my new friend, Nicolas.

I would like to thank Chris Burnside, my life partner, now of twenty-one years and eight months, who at this point has not left me for a woman as Kuzmin and Diaghilev experienced over and over. Chris has supported me always, without question, as I do him. Over the past two plus years, he has put up with all of my research, writing, excitement and frustration that

graduate school has to offer. He is at this point also open to what may come from my completing this portion of my education, for life does not stand still and should not.

I would like to thank all of the amazing teachers that I have had throughout my now three degrees, for these mentors have affected how I see as an artist and how I teach. I also have to thank all of the bad teachers that I have had over the years, because, they taught me what not to do in a class room which perhaps is more valuable than knowing what to do. I would also like to thank all of the students that have been in my classroom over the last thirteen years, as they have allowed me to come into their lives, which has only made mine the richer, for wealth has nothing to do with money.

Being a homosexual was how Kuzmin defined himself. To the world, I define myself by my sense of fashion, my personal aesthetic. When looking back, it is difficult to guess where this came from, for no one in my community or immediate family had any style or desire to be stylish except for my grandmother on my father's side. She wore lots of make up as I recall, horn rimmed glasses, bee hive hair dos always in an array of colors. My favorite was her Lucille Ball-red, fancy 50's dresses, spike-toed stilettos, and stockings with seams up the back. We understood each other. Once, I remember seeing her in the hospital; I was pretty young and had just died my hair blue-black. My mother was appalled. Even though my grandmother was ill, dying in fact, she noticed everything aesthetically and told me not to change for anyone. I think that I owe a great deal to her for introducing me to glamour which in turn will never leave me.

Lastly, before this thesis becomes a dissertation, I would like to thank my wonderful committee for reading all of this; in addition to Dr. Barnes, Heather Hogg and Glynn Brannan as

well as Sally Southall for her editing prowess and for being a lovely friend, and K Stone who enlightens my aesthetic sensibility as well as being a great friend who I will always cherish.

Preface

To be an artist, one must take a journey: some of us know exactly where we are traveling and some of us choose to let one experience dictate our next trip. I find myself at the vortex of writing my thesis for my MFA in theatre arts, and where I have landed ironically enough has very little to do with my beginnings because I am the kind of person who keeps going forward, looking for that nugget that will illuminate the next path to take. When I began this process two and a half years ago, I was working towards a focus in design, but soon realized, well actually knew, that I am a designer and technician and had little to gain by continuing my education as a costume designer. I was desperately needing to expand my knowledge base, to re-learn how to read, to research, and to write. For me, when I began my undergraduate work some thirty years ago in the visual arts, I forfeited all paths to a scholarly education for that of being a working artist. I found that I had to submerge myself into my craft which left no time or energy to grow academically. Initially, I thought that my thesis would be the beginning of a patternmaking book, because patternmaking and draping is something that I have been teaching for twelve years and something that I experience almost on a daily basis. Over the years, I have as a technician developed new ways of thinking and teaching and have had every intention of sharing my discoveries. Perhaps this will be another chapter in my personal development. I believe that education is about stretching the mind and looking for something which will make us more complete and more valuable. Prior to this journey and coursework for this degree, I had little to no knowledge or education in the theatre arts and particularly theatre history and found myself as an outsider or at least, that was my impression. I still think that I have not totally broken through, but because of my research, I have a better understanding of theatre and have a totally

different take on what theatre actually is because of the many artists that I have discovered, especially Nicolas Evreinov. Evreinov somehow spiritually changed my way of seeing; because of him, I finally feel that I have a connection to theatre, one that did not exist before learning of his theories or accomplishments.

I am writing about the personal aesthetics and accomplishments of three theatre artists who flourished during the Silver age of Russia: Nicolas Evreinov, Sergei Diaghilev, and Mikhail Kuzmin. Each of these men did not limit themselves to one form of art; they were multi-disciplined and understood the connection and value of the arts as a whole unit. They looked to history to inform their choices to move them forward and understood the circularity of the art world as to how, for example, painting might inform literature or how literature might inform fashion. I feel very connected to this concept. I value history and must research history when I am designing for theatre, dance, or fashion. I believe that we cannot go forward if we do not know what has happened in the past, we must base our choices as we understand the development of each individual form. No one art form can stand alone. I believe all art is interconnected and makes its statement because of what is happening culturally, geographically, and spiritually.

When describing myself, I say that I am an artist. Diaghilev was not considered an artist, but more a supporter of the arts, yet his contributions brought work previously unavailable to Russia to the Russian people. He made careers and without his contributions, the world of art today would have a totally different landscape. Evreinov's contributions were extremely diverse, yet his greatest gift to the art and theatre world was his theory that theatre had the ability to transform the soul, to make humans better. Kuzmin is known more for his contributions as a

poet and prose writer, yet was an accomplished composer and playwright and openly homosexual.

I find myself connected to these men not just for their accomplishments, but also for their personal aesthetics. I find that I am controversial and complex as these men were controversial and complex. I see everything around me aesthetically, and my taste and feeling of the way that I look to the world deeply influence my choices in life. I do not choose visually to blend in with society. I do not feel dressed properly if I look like everyone else and not myself. I have a memory of what I was wearing on the first day of school in the first grade, and it made me feel special; it made me feel smarter, for some reason. I wonder on a personal level if we accomplish what we do because of the way in which we present ourselves to society, and I wonder how successful Evreinov, Diaghilev, and Kuzmin would have been if they had aesthetically presented themselves differently than they did.

I find it interesting how artists during the Silver Age of Russia were connected together and how they influenced and helped each other's art forms. It is a very romantic notion today to consider that artists during the Silver Age were purely artists and that money was not the motivational force behind the work. Evreinov and Kuzmin were, more often than not, impoverished, and at the end of his life, Diaghilev was broke because he had given all that he had monetarily to support the arts. Artists then lived in a time where it seems they spent their entire waking moments creating; they were totally immersed in their craft and able to explore all of their artistic endeavors without being labeled just a playwright, just a painter, or just a theatre manager. These were extremely political times, yet somehow creativity brought catharsis. We live in a different world today. As we are forced to decide what we are, we are dictated by our wallets. Art is not of much value to the average person. I find myself not concerned about

prosperity or notoriety, but interested in maintaining my true self regardless of the outcome or how others may see me. I think somehow, that Evreinov, Diaghilev, and Kuzmin felt the same way; therefore, all four of us are kindred spirits.

Abstract

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For each of us, I wonder how much our geographic location and time of existence affects us as humans: the way we think, respond, grow, and live our daily lives. More importantly, I question how our environment dictates who we are as people, the way that we choose to represent ourselves. How many of us are making conscious decisions about the way that we style our hair, dress our bodies, inflect our voices, and structure our walk - our personal aesthetic. What is the value in having a strong personal aesthetic, and does it have interest to the society in which we inhabit beyond our own personal vessels? Are we successful because of who we are, or because of what we do, or can we separate these two things? Do we choose to be gay or straight, or is it a choice, and how does society judge our gender during any particular time in history or location? Can a person flourish because of or in spite of his or her degree of masculinity or femininity? Do we choose to represent ourselves by announcing our sexual identity, or do we choose to blend into society? How much does the way we look and think about

who we are affect what we are able to achieve in our lifetime? If time travel exists, would an artist of notable talent have the same voice or dominance in a different culture, decade, or millennium? Could it be that in 2009, Russian artists like Nicolas Evreinov, Sergei Diaghilev, and Mikhail Kuzmin, not be successful in their professions and remain anonymous? Personally, would I have survived the Silver Age of Russia?

Within a play, the characters or actors tell the story, but are the only characters people? The place and the time are also characters because they have life, emotion, style, and aesthetic: all of the traits that we as humans have. The Silver Age of Russia is such a character. This time in history is rich, diverse, and extremely controversial. Even the actual dates have even been disputed, yet lie within a small variance among scholars writing about this era. During this time, there existed huge variance in wealth and poverty, joy and grief, creativity and complacency. There was a great deal of unrest and uncertainty. Many committed suicide, whereas others flourished because they felt free to explore what was possible, to be whoever they wanted to be on any given day, to present personas that may or may not have been true depictions of who they were, to change or present to society a personal aesthetic in order to mask the atrocities of the day. Having nothing to lose can bring about total freedom of exploration. Today in 2009, we are also living in similar conditions throughout the world, but the one issue that separates Russia during the Silver Age and today is that this was a time where artists were revered and were important to society because the arts represented salvation, light, and diversion from what was happening.

Although the Silver Age of Russia housed a multitude of gifted artists in all fields, I will focus on three of these ‘characters,’ each of whom were known for their personal aesthetics and even after their passing, continue to contribute to the ‘World of Arts.’ The arts during this time

owed much of its success to Sergei Diaghilev who created and supported a group of artists who would influence not only the performing and visual arts, but the literary arts. Diaghilev was not perceived as an ‘artist,’ but an impresario. Nicolas Evreinov had a style that was all his own, and his talents were as diverse as humanly possible. Mikhail Kuzmin is known to be the first openly gay Russian writer of significance. Kuzmin was an extremely prolific writer and the effects that his personal journals had on his circle of friends and lovers were life - altering. ‘Gay’ was not a term used in Russia in 1905, but by today’s language, Diaghilev and Kuzmin were of this persuasion, yet one can only speculate Evreinov’s true sexual desires and practices. Kuzmin gives credit to Diaghilev for his notoriety and had short working relationships with Evreinov; therefore, these three men were connected and would go in and out of each other’s lives throughout their careers.

All three of these men were multi-talented, individualistic, and brilliant: always creating, always working, and always supporting art. Each of them, made important contributions, although Kuzmin and Evreinov remain obscure outside of scholarly circles. Each of these men had many traits in common such as their tireless passion for the arts and their personal representations on aesthetics.

Introduction

Evreinov, Diaghilev, and Kuzmin were at the zeniths of their creative geniuses during the Silver Age of Russia. One of the greatest *faux pas* a student of history can make when trying to uncover and discover the choices and accomplishments of any artist is not to understand the time period and geographical origin of the subject's birthplace. One must also look at the gender, religious beliefs and/or practices, standing in society, relationships biased by one's sexual orientation, and the circle of friends who support or discourage the work. It is imperative that the student look at an artist of the past not through her or his present gaze.

The first, Evreinov, tackled practically all creative mediums, and could not sit still long enough to only be a stage director or stage writer and whole heartedly believed in his theories with no regard to the opinions of others. The second, Diaghilev, was a grand supporter of all forms of art and premiered and presented works from outside of the country to Russia as well as 'new' Russian ballet to Paris and beyond. The third, Kuzmin, broke through all of the taboos of being sexually active amongst his own gender and as a writer changed the lives of those within his circle. All three men were connected by their culture and heritage, artistry and passion, insight and determination, as well as their view of the world and personal aesthetics. Each was able to create because of the time in which he lived: the Silver Age of Russia, which set the stage for one of the most creative and progressive times in the history of 'the world of art.'

Controversial men living and working in controversial times: even the exact dates of the Silver Age of Russia have been blurred. At least three scholars argue the time frame: Golub's 1905-1915, Elliot's 1893-1910, and Bowlt's placement of between late 1890's –late 1910's.

The Silver Age of Russia presented a time in which: "Socially alienated and questing individuals sought relief, clarity and self-definition in retrospective and utopian, mystical and

formalist, symbolist and futurist, elitist and popular solutions to art and life” (Golub, *History of Russian Theatre* 278).

Historical Events

At the turn of the twentieth century, the population of Russia was approximately 150 million, with ten percent of the people living in the cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow. Beginning in 1903, the stability of Russia’s politics was deteriorating. Strikes in the south among workers led to massacres by Tsarist troops under the rule of Nicholas the II. These strikes began in Rostov and Odessa and then continued to Saint Petersburg. 1904 marked Russia’s war with Japan in which Russia was defeated and the minister of the interior was assassinated, which left the morale of the country badly bruised. 1905 set the stage for what was to come during this age. January 9, 1905 was penned ‘Bloody Sunday’ as 150,000 Russian workers marched on the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg to petition the Tsar for reforms. During this rally, 200 were killed and over 2000 were seriously wounded which led to the world’s condemnation of Russia as well as major insubordination throughout the country. Then on October 5, a mass general strike occurred, forcing the Tsar to concede a constitutional manifesto recognizing basic civil liberties. Maxim Gorky was the artist leader in the revolt who saw the revolution as a chance to destroy those who shamed Russia. When some of the censorship was relaxed, satirical anti-establishment magazines ran rampant. Many other artists joined Gorky and rallied to educate the public through these magazines as well as through political cartoons. When life did calm down, it was obvious that the Tsar was not interested in reform. Gorky, who supported Lenin’s Bolsheviks, was forced out of Russia and did not return until 1913 when political amnesty had been declared. In 1913 only half of the population was

literate, and there were approximately 25,000 homeless in St. Petersburg alone with rampant poverty, disease, and malnutrition. At the beginning of the Silver Age, two camps were forming, and they were in complete opposition with contrasting philosophies. Half of society spiritually withdrew into an idealistic utopian world, whereas the other half was overcome by hopelessness and deep depression. Suicides among intellectuals increased; for example, Sarva Morozov, one of Stanislavsky's patrons blew his brains out, and Sergei Sergeievich, the son of a successful art collector, drowned himself in the Moscow River. 1914 marked the date when Russia entered World War I with Germany which led to an upsurge of popular patriotism, yet as history indicates, the war ended in defeat which only meant the continuation of poverty and acute inflation (Elliot 9-12).

To avoid confusion, it is important to point out that throughout the contents within this paper, the city of St. Petersburg, would not maintain her name. In 1914 St. Petersburg's name changed to Petrograd which would remain until 1924. With Lenin's death, Petrograd would again change her name to Leningrad until 1991, when her name would return to St. Petersburg.

Happenings in the Arts

The Silver Age of Russia was the period of 'isms.' During this time we can see Impressionism, Fauvism, Surrealism, Futurism, and Cubism, to name a few, but the philosophical and aesthetic driving force was Symbolism. Symbolism refers to the denial of the world of appearances with the search for pure artistic forms, beyond what was popular or traditional. The Symbolists looked for collective individuality and questioned to what extent they play with all of its production value, the painting, the literary work, the dance, or the musical composition was based on the internal process and demands of the artist; Symbolists emphasized

the private experience. They wished to deepen artistic understanding and representation of reality as they looked at human instinct and the subconscious. They were interested in creating aesthetics that were unique, yet also representational of their national character and a reflection of their heritage: Stravinsky's most controversial work, *Rite of Spring*, 1913, featured costumes and sets by Nicolas Roerich and investigated early Russian pagan ritual with the hope for a new appreciation of ancient myth and legend (Bowlit, Moscow and St. Petersburg 26).

The Symbolists questioned the solidity of material reality and in their search for an ulterior harmony, approached the mirror not as a virtual reflection of the concrete world, but rather with its distortions, haunting shadows, and sudden luminescence, thus the self portrait using the mirror became quite popular during the Silver Age (Bowlit 92).

The Silver Age looked at and was fascinated with the Russian Orthodox Church as there was a quest for new identity through religion. The Symbolists looked at religion as it was closely related to and juxtaposed against sexuality and sensuality. Evreinov's 1907 production of *The Fair for the Ancient Theatre on the Day of Saint Dennis*, mixed sensual and religious ecstasy: the idea of profane and sacred actions and locations; brothels and churches in an outdoor town setting. Religion was very important to Russia during the Silver Age as her people looked at the Orthodox Church separately from other religions. Religion was at the forefront of creating as well as censoring art, as it was responsible for banning theatrical work such as Wilde's 1908 production *Salomé* from Russia's audiences. Political events did not change the dominance of the Orthodox faith. By 1910, there were 480 Orthodox Churches in St. Petersburg alone. Religion had a major impact on the arts as some of the most original thinkers of the day were priests such as father Sergei Bulgakov and Pavel Florensky, and many of the popular visual artists of the day painted iconic figures (Bowlit, Moscow and St. Petersburg 24-26).

Artists during the Silver Age were much more diversified than the artists working at the beginning to the 21st century. Many studio painters were afforded the opportunity to try their hand at costume and set design to great accolades. Among his many talents and interests, Evreinov was a surrealist painter and insisted on creating the first sketches for his set designs as theatre manager/director. Artists were not pigeon-holed into one medium. Most artists and writers studied music. Kandinsky played the violin; Kuzmin was a composer; Nijinsky played duets with Ravel; and Diaghilev took singing lessons and entertained his group, 'the World of Art,' singing Rubinstein, Schubert, and Wagner. Diaghilev was interested in the cross-pollination of the arts between the visual and performing arts and music as well as literature: he was the leader that made careers.

Russian theatre during the Silver Age was dominated by men as practically all directors and writers were male. One of the major focuses of the theatre of the Silver Age was the reconstruction of the spectator, collapsing the boundaries between the stage and the auditorium which was a contribution of Evreinov with his concept of the Monodrama and Theatre in the Life. Theatre houses could be found in mass numbers in Moscow as stages ranked in the hundreds; additionally, St. Petersburg hosted nearly forty theatres at any given time. Many theatres were small and found their homes in private houses, clubs, and cabarets to attract the widest range of audience members. The theatre of the small form shed a new light on traditional Russian theatre as it did so in a non-stogy way. Small theatres and cabarets produced work that the larger houses would not as they appealed to high as well as low culture. The small stage could produce work that was on the cutting edge because these houses were more interested in theatre for art's sake and were not afraid to offend and were not often interested in being politically correct. They had little, so they had little to lose. Most small theatre houses were

short-lived, some for only a matter of months; their demise could be for any number of reasons: censorship, poverty, or lack of patronage. The featured performances of the day included farces, comedies, vaudevilles, melodramas, and Russian Classics. Gothic horror, neurosis, pathological sex, and madness were often the subject matter of plays and short stories as the feelings of moral decay spread. Many houses shared actors and directors. Major houses would raise their curtains at 8:00 pm, whereas cabarets would begin productions much later; this would allow many of the stars of the day to moonlight, giving two performances of different genres in two different venues on the same evening (Golub, *History of Russian Theatre* 281). “In the hands of Evreinov, Meyerhold, and playwrights such Blok, Kuzmin, and Sologub, *Commedia* and *Balagan* darkened and became more ironically conscious of the unlimited human need to role play” (Golub, 288)

Chapter 1

Evreinov: Artist for Life

Evreinov was labeled a dilettante, an original, uniquely talented, pretentious, a character, harlequin, decadent, conjurer, dandy, eccentric, reactionary, antidemocratic, charming, tasteful, witty, courageous, persuasive, vague, banal, paradoxical, flashy, deceitful, passionate, vain, condescending, coquettish, foppish, insincere, very Russian, very European, self-dramatizing, egotistic, light-minded, premeditative, bombastic, and individualist, and a fanatic (Golub, *Paradox* 18).

Nicolas Evreinov was a paradox, and it is extremely difficult to discover the true soul of this man without looking at his entire life, the many hats that he wore over his long career, his influences, the time and place in which he lived, his theories about the complexities of theatre, as well as his concepts of the importance of the natural world. It is not until one reads Evreinov's plays that the scope of his talent, intellect, virtuosity, compassion for life, and personality can be uncovered. Evreinov embodied complexity, yet valued the importance of simplicity and the powers of transformation through theatricality.

Evreinov, on first glance, may appear to have had lofty concepts and a flippant personality, but the heart of his writing on many levels has to do with the romanticism of love, the beauty of life, and whether people have the capacity to value every day and live life to its fullest. He was a funny, puzzling, and yet beautiful soul. It is sad to realize that he is basically unknown to most outside of academic theatrical circles and that many students of theatre pass him by due to the fact that most journals only represent his life and career in short passages.

Evreinov lived in the best and the worst of times to be an artist. The peak of his career was in the Silver Age of Russia, 1905-1917, when artists and artistic souls stood out and were revered for their ability to cure or place a curtain over the injustices of the world. Evreinov's work and life was affected greatly by the Russian Revolution of 1917, when Communism took over the political issues of the day and had the power and force to veil the soul of the true artist. Russian realism became the only acceptable means for theatre after the revolution, which forced Evreinov to exit his homeland to live with his wife in Paris until his death in 1953. Evreinov must have been a savvy individual as he fared much better than Meyerhold who was imprisoned and murdered at the prime of his life.

To add to his love of contradiction, Evreinov's staging of the *Storming of the Winter Palace* was premiered on the third anniversary of the Revolution and was not only accepted by the Communist government, but was funded by it. It is important to note that someone who was so opposed to realism would be the main director for this mass spectacle. It did much to support Evreinov's love of history and his love of his theory of Theatre in Life, as he brought many of the actual participants in the original event back to perform in the re-enactment. Evreinov is so very intriguing because he never revealed his true self: he preferred to wear masks and present himself to the world as a character; he almost seemed to enjoy the fact that he was a walking contradiction. He enjoyed the idea of play and loved to play tricks on his public. "Evreinov truly seems to believe that he wants to share, to achieve communication with the audience; however, he cannot resist playing the audience" (Golub, *Paradox* 142).

Evreinov identified himself as Harlequin-Christ (which alone is a great example of dichotomy), representing himself as half joker and half god. Some critics failed to see the joke and reprimanded him for much of his work as well as his self-created persona. One aspect that

did remain constant throughout his life was that he was the consummate artist. Evreinov spent his career knocking down the fourth wall so that through his theory of theatricality (perhaps his greatest contribution to theatre), he and theatre could heal what ailed the world. Yet, looking deeply into his methods, one sees that he enjoyed playing tricks on the public and that he did not necessarily enjoy working with actors or going to the theatre. It seemed that his love was in the making of his art which may not have allowed time for him to admire all of his accomplishments. He felt his work to be remarkable and did not need the audience to confirm what he already knew. Evreinov thought himself to be an original, yet he borrowed his concepts from many artists and not just those in the theatre world. His concepts and views of women were deeply rooted in his love of the depiction of women as painted by Beardsley and Rops, as well as his admiration for modern dancer Isadora Duncan. He replaced Meyerhold in several positions, enhancing Meyerhold's theories, yet falsely criticized Meyerhold for not being an original and for blatantly stealing Evreinov's ideas. Evreinov's concepts were often considered lofty, yet he had his feet deeply planted in the natural world as can be demonstrated by his theories of Theatre in Life. All of Evreinov's concepts may not have been totally his own, but in regards to his personality, he was truly an original.

Biographical Information

Evreinov was a multi-talented, consummate, and apparently tireless artist who seemed at times to never stop working. Over his career, he filled his time as a circus performer, actor, playwright, composer, critic, Novelist, historian, surrealist painter, set designer, graduate of law, government official, teacher, world traveler, theorist, stage manager, artistic director, director,

and musician who played the piano, flute, cello, cornet, and piccolo (Goldberg 439). “Evreinov was among the most versatile, significant, and even if not for all tastes, the most profound of theatrical innovators of the Silver Age of Russian Culture and Russian Theatre’s Golden Age” (Golub, *Paradox* xvii).

Evreinov was born in Moscow in 1879 and died in Paris in 1953. As a child, he became a comic actor and an accomplished pianist. At the age of seven, he wrote his first play. In 1901, he graduated with honors in law from the Imperial School of Jurisprudence. His thesis titled *The History of Corporal Punishment* was published. Also in 1901, he began four years of study at the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music. He developed a theatrical manner, dressing rather flamboyantly in the style of one he greatly admired, Oscar Wilde. In 1908, he was invited to replace Meyerhold at Vera Komissarzhevskaya’s theatre. His first season at the theatre was tarnished as his erotic production of *Salome* was banned by the authorities during dress rehearsal, thus never making it to production. The highlight of his career and reputation in Russia was established between 1910-1917 with his direction and success of the 750 - seat Crooked Mirror Theatre in St. Petersburg. With the onset of the Russian Revolution, he moved south to the Caucasus where he wrote *The Chief Thing* in 1919 which was his most successful play. In 1925, Evreinov and his wife, Anna, traveled to Warsaw where his play *The Ship of the Righteous* was translated and produced. The premiere of this work was a great success, but he was accused of being a Soviet agent, which began a downward spiral of his career. Shortly after, in 1925, Evreinov permanently moved to Paris, his wife’s birthplace (Proffer 5).

For his contributions in theatre, Evreinov has been ranked as a dramatist with Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Tairov, Ivanov, Briusov, Bely, and Pirandello. After his emigration to

Paris from his home land of Russia, his plays *The Chief Thing* and *Theatre of the Soul* were produced by noted directors; Luigi Pirandello, Jacques Copeau, and Charles Dullin. In 1926, he traveled to New York City with Rudolf Valentino where the Theatre Guild presented *The Chief Thing* on Broadway with Lee Strasberg and Edward G. Robinson. During his tenure as a director, he worked with set designer/artists such as Sudeikin, Chagal, Bilibin, Dobuzhinsky, Annenkov, and Roerich (Leach 285).

Influences

As Evreinov developed his theories of Theatricality, Theatre in Life, and Monodrama, he was influenced by Schopenhauer's *The Work as Presentation*, Nietzsche's *Superman*, Bergson's *Creative Evolution of Self Perfection*, the Symbolist idea of the artist-individual as the hero of his own life, and Commedia dell' arte's creation of the mask as a representation of a real life persona (Golub, *Cambridge Guide* 332). Evreinov's theory on wit and humor was influenced by Freud's discussion of how they related to the subconscious. His Monodrama also follows the Freudian dream structure which attempts to apply the single person point of view (Goldberg 51).

Evreinov's directing was influenced by Gordon Craig and Meyerhold. As a dramatist, it appears that he was mostly in sync with Pirandello in Italy. Evreinov was approximately ten years ahead of Pirandello, yet Pirandello received more recognition for his work, most likely because of the effects from the Russian Revolution. Evreinov based a great deal of his ideology on a reaction to realism. Realism was being replaced by trends such as Symbolism, Impressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Neo-Raphaelism, and Surrealism (Golub, *Paradox* 2). Evreinov not only borrowed

from Wilde aesthetically (he was often called the Russian Oscar Wilde), but also adopted the concept that life should imitate theatre (Golub, *Paradox* 56).

Evreinov's theory of monodrama can be seen in Buster Keaton's film *The Playhouse*, in which trick photography is used to allow Keaton to play every role. Playwright Eugene O'Neill used elements of monodrama in *The Emperor Jones*. Evreinov's format of satire is alive and well in the performances of *Monty Python*, *Second City*, and *Saturday Night Live* (Goldberg 451).

Theory

Theatricality

The central premise for Evreinov's work as a director, dramatist, and theorist/historian was based on theatricality. He had the desire to revitalize theatre but not to stylize it, which was actually his major criticism of Meyerhold. In opposition to Stanislavsky's concept to re-experience life on stage, Evreinov chose to rediscover the origins of theatricality and theatre in life (Golub, *Cambridge Guide* 332). Evreinov said that transformation was at the core of theatricality as a rejuvenating principle that brings back the sensation of life. He also shares with Artaud the idea of theatricality as a primordial trait that humans have suppressed in their everyday existence (Jestrovic 51). "Within evolution, we are all born with this feeling in our souls; we are all essentially theatrical beings. Theatrically is a pre-aesthetic, more primitive and more fundamental than our aesthetic feeling. Transformation is the essence of all theatrical art whereas formation is the essence of the aesthetic arts" (Evreinov, *Theatre in the Life* 30).

Evreinov also looked at theatricality among savages; he looked at tattooing, piercing, and removing of teeth, all forms of transformation which he believed to be the purist forms of theatricality (Evreinov 22-33).

He continued his look at theatricality with the discussion of children and how they naturally play. He thought that children, instinctually and without any guidance were natural actors, that they had the instinct to make something from nothing, as in an altered view of reality. A child may turn a lowly piece of paper into a crown to manifest himself into a king or may take a common broom stick and transform it into a pony. As adults, we continue to practice theatrical elements as we learn the art of masquerading. We try to make ourselves appear younger, older, slimmer, to hide what we may see as our defects or flaws: all examples of theatricality. Evreinov believed that theatricality is present in every aspect of our lives. If we examine human activity in general, we see role playing and characters such as kings, politicians, warriors, and businessmen. Women and men play roles and transform their appearances to attract a mate or get a job. He said that we spend at least three quarters of our lives living in an imaginary world and states that the most important thing is that we not be ourselves, for if we truly become ourselves, there is really nothing left to do than die (Evreinov 46-76).

In 1911, Stanislavsky wrote: “Theatricality is an evil to which one cannot reconcile oneself” (Evreinov 150). At this time in Western Europe, the concept of theatricality was not supported except in Germany with Max Reinhardt who borrowed his theories from George Fuchs. Being an ‘original’, Evreinov did not agree with Reinhardt’s concepts of theatricality (Evreinov 150).

Theatre for Oneself

Evreinov presented the idea that theatre could be a private matter and that it did not have to happen on a grand scale and in his concept of Theatre of Oneself, he invited the individual to play roles. Evreinov presented three sketches of plays from his repertory of the Theatre of Oneself. The first he called *A Buffoon at a Dinner Party*. Evreinov was in love with the buffoon and the value of laughter, and he loved to make fun of people's weaknesses. Evreinov stated that one should always invite a buffoon to a party to entertain everyone: he does not have to dress the part and actually should not be aware of his role, but what is important is that if this particular guest does not fulfill his role, that it becomes the host's duty to take over. The second sketch was entitled, *The Joy of Recovery*. Here he looked at the idea that we as humans find a strange pleasure in falling ill. He stated that being sick is in opposition to being well, and it takes us out of our everyday existence and puts us in a new scene which, in turn, will give us a new point of view. It offers us an opportunity for transformation. When we return to our wellness, we find a joy in coming back to our routine, a sense of rejuvenation, and a finer and cleaner point of view. Finally, in *Trying on Deaths*, he said that we should pick a day when we are feeling out of sorts and when the world appears unfriendly and just try it on. He also recommended that you contact a physician before trying this. "If your physician raises no objections open your veins for a little while. Do this in his presence, lying in a warm bath. To have the complete illusion of a classical death, use a marble tub. After you die classically, you will return from life with a regenerated soul" (Evreinov 291).

Critics of the day panned Evreinov's theory of theatre for oneself, calling it pretentious, didactic, light-minded, and illogical (Golub, *Paradox* 56).

Theatre in Nature

Evreinov believed strongly that theatre did not have to be confined to a building. He believed that theatre was alive and well within the natural world and in the animal kingdom. “There is just as much theatre in nature as there is nature in theatre” (Evreinov, *Theatre in the Life* 11). Evreinov examined three topics that appear outside of the theatre space created by humans-seeing parallels within the concepts of role playing, mimicry, and pantomime. Role playing is best exemplified by the cat and the mouse. The cat plays the dominant role and perhaps is imagining the mouse as her toy. Mimicry exists as insects and animals have the ability to camouflage their bodies to stay alive. In the insect world, we see creatures that blend into their surrounding such as the walking stick resembling the branch on which it is perched or the butterfly that has the markings of a particular moth that may be poisonous to its predator. “Nature resorts to most artistic and artful devices to conceal her creatures from dangers surrounding them on all sides” (Evreinov 17). Evreinov describes pantomime as a flower silently opening to begin its day as the sun rises. We may also think of animals, birds in particular, as forming Greek choruses not only because of their socialization techniques, but the stories that they tell (Evreinov, 11-21).

Monodrama

Prior to Evreinov’s theory of Monodrama, the concept already existed. Originally, it was a series of scenes from famous tragedies which were performed by a single actor to showcase his abilities. Evreinov introduced his theory of Monodrama in December of 1908 in a lecture with his presentation of his essay *Apology for the Theatre*. “It is not enough to do away with the footlights and Stanislavsky’s mythical fourth wall. The theatre must destroy the footlights which

prevent the spectator from completely entering the drama on stage” (Evreinov, Golub, *Paradox* 35). Evreinov’s passion and development of the Monodrama actually came into being because of his love of *Commedia dell arte*. At the heart of *Commedia* lies the human condition, represented by the idea of art as the transformation of life. Within his theory of Monodrama, the actor/individual transforms his world as it is manifested onstage to a highly personal perspective. Monodrama, quite simply, is meant to bring the audience into a total understanding of the performance, so that he or she becomes one with the production. Within this experience, a hero is presented in the play and all of the other characters as well as the set dressings, costumes, and any effects support the hero. This would result in a transformation of the spectator, causing him or her to identify with the hero and become a part of the play. He believed that the spectator should experience himself playing the role (Golub, *Paradox* 36).

Anti- Realism

Upon viewing Chekhov’s *Three Sisters* directed by Stanislavsky, Evreinov turned to a fellow theatre patron in the next seat with his response to the play. He stated that Stanislavsky did not truly represent realism. In Evreinov’s opinion, the play should have begun with a small two-story house somewhere in the suburbs of Moscow. The audience/spectators should be out on the town looking for apartments, at the gate house; one would purchase his or her ticket and then would have to come back to the house several times. The spectators would go from room to room and peer through either a cracked door or through the key hole (Evreinov, *Theatre in the Life* 128-131).

Evreinov's View of Actors, Directing, and Attending Performances

On Actors

Apparently Evreinov was not in love with actors: “An actor is an impersonating machine, the goods are tested, and the defective ones are thrown overboard, while the satisfactory ones are sold for money” (Evreinov 153). Evreinov's dislike of actors seems to reinforce his ongoing contradictions as to how someone could spend his life working in theatre and not receive pleasure from the instruments (actors) who introduced the work to the public. It seems that Evreinov would rather have worked with an amateur over a professional actor. He thought that the amateur was aware of his inexperience and that he would work much harder, that he would be responsible to his public, do as much research as possible to conquer the role, and that he would respect his stage manager/ director. He felt that the amateur would do all that he could for overall quality of the production. In contrast, Evreinov felt that the professional was mostly selfish, would make the role with as little effort as possible and would look for the most personal success without regard to the totality of the performance, cast, or production. In other words, Evreinov thought that the professional actor was doing the work for the money and not for the artistry. One may come to the conclusion that, if we look at Evreinov's persona, he would not have wanted to share his notoriety with anyone; that he wanted to be the only star in his theatre (Evreinov 165).

On directing

“The playwright is the author of the literary dramatic work whereas the director is the author of the theatrical work” (Evreinov, Golub, *Paradox* 162).

When speaking of his job as a director, he thought of his duties in the following ways: to be the interpreter of the author’s work, to translate the written text into a living language of gesture and mimicry, to be the artist/designer who sketches the original scene design, to be the composer of the melody of the stage speech, to be the sculpture of the line material, and to be the actor/teacher, therefore himself playing the roles through the souls of the actor (Golub, *Paradox* 162).

On attending theatre

In a letter written on attending the public theatre, Evreinov wrote about how he felt about attending performances. He did not make it a habit to attend the theatre after opening night. He thought of himself as better than the crowd, and he felt that his time would be better spent working on his next masterpiece. He had no desire to talk to anyone during intermission, and he felt that theatre was a personal experience which leads to his theory of Theatre for Oneself. “Intermissions alone would suffice to kill all of the pleasure that I would get out of it... imagine at a moment when one feels like concentrating, one is assaulted by a crowd of ‘friends’” (Evreinov 170).

In truth it is difficult to really know if Evreinov loved or hated attending performances, but one may speculate that he may not have been telling the entire truth, for if we look at anyone who has given themselves a persona, they are obviously trying to hide something. Deep down,

Evreinov may have been a shy man who did not want his cover to be blown; he also may have been one of those artists who was very sensitive and did not react well to any negativity and just wanted to move on with a positive position into his next creation.

Directing

The Ancient Theatre (1907-09, 1911-12)

Evreinov claimed to have conceived the idea for the Ancient Theatre in 1905. He was interested in the reconstruction of theatrical forms of the past which goes back to his idea of theatricality originating from primitive cultures. For the Ancient Theatre, he was most interested in producing work from the Middle Ages because none of these plays had been translated into Russian at this time. Controversy emerged because even though he wished to produce historically accurate works and no translations were available, he would at times just make up the scripts and label them authentic. In addition to this, the idea for the Ancient Theatre was not a new concept, because the Symbolists, in particular Ivanov and his 'friend' Meyerhold had come before him. In 1907, Evreinov joined forces with Baron Nikolai Driegen, theatre administrator, censor, and editor to open the Ancient Theatre. The Critic Anatolij Kremlev pointed out that to reproduce a medieval play written in the Middle Ages was one thing, but to have it be written by a contemporary author was something altogether different.

Evreinov called what he did at the Ancient Theatre, "retrospectivism" or the reconstructive method. To look at his theory of the monodrama, one might call it the reconstruction of the spectator. To bring the audience into the piece, he would compose a group

of actors in period costumes onstage to watch the play. This was meant to draw the real spectators/audience into the performance, as he had hoped that they would envision themselves on stage as part of the set. Meyerhold, one year earlier, had a very similar concept, but he placed actors dressed in period costumes peppered throughout the audience (Golub, *Paradox* 113-138).

Vera Komissarzhevskaya's Theatre (1908-09)

Evreinov's tenure here was short lived as it seemed that the writing was on the wall from the beginning. His production of *Salome* was halted by the police after the first dress rehearsal because it was considered scandalous (Bernstein xiv).

Merry Theatre for Grown up Children (1908-09)

Evreinov's work at the Merry Theatre preceded the genre of theatre to be presented at the Crooked Mirror Theatre. Evreinov's direction of *Night Dances* by Sologub and inspired by Isadora Duncan was quite scandalous yet was very well received despite the fact that the dancers were almost totally nude except for their sheer stockings and tutus. The cast included famous writers and artists from the day and the production was choreographed by Fokine (Gerould 79-82).

Crooked Mirror Theatre (1910-1917)

Evreinov was invited by Aleksandr Kugel to become the artistic director of the Crooked Mirror Theatre in 1910. Kugel had attended Evreinov's Lecture on Monodrama and saw his work at the Merry Theatre for Grown up Children where Evreinov produced *A Merry Death* in the spirit of the Crooked Mirror. The whole concept of the theatre was about parody. When we

look at the meaning of the term “crooked mirror,” we are asked to look at the reflection in the mirror; if we see anything askew, we must realize that we are looking at current society and, therefore, looking at ourselves. Prior to Evreinov’s direction, the theatre had been an afterhours cabaret house whose curtain rose at midnight. The advantage to the late hour was that it could employ all of the best actors whose evening performances in their regular theatre houses had ended. The work was about parody and it was handled as simply as possible especially in regards to technical aspects. Evreinov wanted the Crooked Mirror Theatre to become serious theatre with a curtain at 8:30 pm. He also changed the space entirely by moving it from basically a small nightclub/bar into a new space which would seat 750 patrons. Evreinov served as the artistic director for seven seasons where he claimed to have worked on 100 plays and directed 80 productions. Critics commented that Evreinov had welded the troupe of the theatre into an ensemble of impeccable harmony (Golub, *Paradox* 148-156).

Mass Spectacle on a Grand Scale

The Storming of the Winter Palace took place in Petrograd, Russia on the 7th of November in 1920. This was in celebration of the third anniversary of the Russian Revolution of October 1917. Prior to this grand scale exhibition, the event had been commemorated all over Russia and in any city that was under the control of revolutionary forces. In 1918, Meyerhold staged Mayakovski’s *Mystery Buffe* to honor the first anniversary and in 1919, the Red Army Theatre Workshop staged *The Play of the Third Internationale*, both on a small scale. On the Third anniversary, Evreinov would lead his team of directors Petrov, Kugel, and Annenkov. This would be the largest restaging of a historical event employing more than 8000 participants that included a 500 member orchestra and attracting more than 100,000 spectators. The staging

involved a partial reconstruction of the events preceding the revolution and of the actual storming of the winter palace where the provisional government was making its last stand. The event was staged in three areas: the oval formed by the buildings of the general staff across the street from the winter palace, the Uritzky Square, and the Winter Palace. Just within the first area, two platforms were built sixty yards wide by eighteen yards deep. The left or red platform belonged to the proletariat and consisted of three levels. The right or white platform belonged to the provisional government and had four levels. The white platform alone employed 2,685 participants including 125 ballet dancers, 100 circus artists and 1750 extras. The entire event was lighted by strong search lights. The white platform was directed by Kugel and Annenkov, whereas the red platform was directed by Petrov. Evreinov positioned himself in directors headquarters located in the middle of the square using field phones, light signals and motorcycle carriers to communicate with the other directors. To make the event as realistic as possible, Evreinov took the actual participants from the event and placed them in the performance; by doing so, he demonstrated his theory of "Theatre in the Life and of Theatre of Memory" (Deák 7-20).

As a Playwright

Evreinov has more than thirty plays to his credit. His most popular and/or most original are listed below:

A Merry Death (1908)

Evreinov claimed *A Merry Death* to be his favorite. After reading this play, we can deduct that he was very special on the inside as that he never took his life or a day of his life for

granted. This is a lovely one-act play with five characters: the Harlequin (also his favorite persona), Pierrot and his wife; a Columbine, a Doctor, and Death. As the play progresses, we find the Harlequin is not well; in fact, he is dying. The doctor attempts to give the bad news and feels sorry for the Harlequin, but the Harlequin points out to the doctor that he should in fact feel sorry for himself because he is wasting his life and that when death knocks on the door, he will not be ready. Harlequin is ready for death because he has paid attention and he has captured all of the moments of life that were necessary, he has caught so many, and that he does not require more. “Oh it’s just coming at the right time! The man who lives wisely always desires death” (Harlequin 14). The moral to this piece is that if we live each day to the fullest, if we take nothing for granted, that when death does come, we will be satiated and ready.

The Inspector General (1912)

Evreinov presented five versions of Gogol’s *Inspector General* at the Crooked Mirror theatre all on the same night and what made it an even more original concept was the fact that each set was on stage at the same time in a horizontal row. Four productions would be curtained while the current piece was being performed. Evreinov’s *Inspector General* was meant to ridicule the trend towards directorial reinterpretation of the classics. To make his point, he represented the first version as it had been written. It was such a popular piece that the audience knew the play by heart. The second staging was in the style of Stanislavsky as he had presented it at the Moscow Art Theatre. The third staging was in the style of Gordon Craig representing his stage craft techniques and his depiction of Shakespeare. The Fourth staging was in the style of Max Reinhardt poking fun of the way in which Reinhardt would dress a Russian work in

gaudy Ukrainian folk costumes. Finally, the fifth staging was presented as a film in protest of the harm caused to theatre by the basic elements of slapstick in silent movies (Senelick 113-117).

The Fourth Wall: A Buffoonery in Two Parts (1915)

The Fourth Wall was written to satirize the Moscow Art Theatre because of its over use of realism, the St. Petersburg Opera who wanted to present Opera as realistically as possible, and Fyodor Kommissarzhevshy who directed *Faust* in Moscow (Senelick 17). With this piece, Evreinov goes as far as possible to spoof the operatic production of *Faust*. The Ivan Potapych (Faust) is forced to sleep on the set to digest the part as much as possible and is never allowed to change out of costume. To make the set completely realistic, it must possess that lived-in fragrance while huge rats are running around. As the absurdity continues, it is decided that Faust is speaking inside of his head so he could not sing or speak, but pantomime. To add insult to injury, because this is a private matter, the audience would not be allowed to witness all the action, so a fourth wall would be added with a window. The audience would only be permitted to gaze at Faust as he passed the open window.

Theatre of the Soul (1915)

Critics wrote: “crude psychology,” “extremely original and striking,” “a weird clever piece,” “poor, puerile, and portentous” (St. John 8).

The most striking quality about this piece would have to be the set which Evreinov designed. It is placed inside the body in the chest cavity. We can see the ribcage, heart, and lungs. Evreinov felt the world would have little furniture inside of the soul because “what takes place there is simple.” Edith Craig first produced *Theatre of the Soul* to mixed reviews. Next, it would travel

to the Alhambra Theatre to become part of a benefit, but unfortunately was removed from the program: the manager vetoed the work after seeing the dress rehearsal (St. John 10). The major premise of the work is that Evreinov presented the soul as three characters: M1- the rational self, M2- the emotional self, and M3- the eternal self. This piece, like many of Evreinov's plays, is based on the love and conflicts between men and women. A fight ensues, M2 strangles M1, and then M2 shoots himself, and M3 carries on.

The Chief Thing (1919)

The *Chief Thing* remains Evreinov's most successful work. Although it was not well received in America when it debuted on Broadway, it went on to be produced all over Europe and was translated into twenty seven languages (Bernstein, xiv).

The Chief Thing was a *Commedia*-based play in which Evreinov placed his self given persona of Harlequin Christ in the title role or as in his Monodramas, the hero of the piece. This play also represents the most complete embodiment in dramatic form of his theory of Theatre in life. Here we see an example of his writing that portrays most of his theoretical views in one beautifully written package. This piece demonstrates the transformational power of theatre. The hero, or Paraclete, as Evreinov labels him, takes on several identities within the text. It is interesting to note the controversy which surrounded the meaning of the words Harlequin and Paraclete. George Kryzycky, perhaps Evreinov's harshest critic, looked at it as the conflict between the theatre and the church. Kryzycky also traced the origins of the word "Harlequin" to the devil from Dante- referencing to "helequin" as one of the levels of hell. According to Evreinov, Paraclete means counselor or helper thus we should consider Paraclete as an ecclesiastical paraphrase of the Holy Ghost (Golub, Paradox 64).

At the top of the first scene, Evreinov's hero is represented as a fortune teller. Several people are living at a boarding house and it seems that they are all having crises in their lives such as attempting suicide, unhappiness to the detriment of health, and a cheating husband. As each comes to visit the fortuneteller, he is assured that his life will improve. We come to find out that the fortune teller is also a doctor. In his next incarnation, he goes to the theatre with the theatre manager to hire three actors to come back to live at the boarding house. Each actor is given a role to play in order to transform the tenants' sadness and depression into happiness. With this synopsis, we are able to clearly see Evreinov's idea that theatricality has the magical element of healing.

Evreinov Epilogue

What a rare artist we see in Evreinov, not just because of the massive body of work that he produced, but because he was living in an extremely political climate and still managed to stay true to his art and theory. Perhaps, his public persona was so iron clad that it prevented the world from coming in and destroying his dreams. The best example of the diversity of Evreinov's repertory lies in his work in the Ancient Theatre as he developed his theory of reconstruction and at the Crooked Mirror Theatre where he developed his genius for parody. Not often do we find historians with such a grand sense of humor. The one thing that did remain constant within all of his work was his theory of how theatricality has the power to transform, to make the world a better place and our daily lives not quite so unimportant and boring.

Throughout his theatrical career, Evreinov remained a primitive in style and spirit as a matter of principle. He was a rare combination of artist and scholar, able craftsman, able charismatic, improvisatory performer; who by his grand passion, his talent for storytelling, his vividly sympathetic imagery, his wit and grace, transformed history into first person narratives and the world into his audience (Golub, *Paradox* 211)

Chapter 2

Diaghilev: a Man of Generous Proportion

His previous technical training in law, in aesthetics, in music, his inherent gifts of taste, his consciousness of the chic, his appreciation of social snobbery and his passion for the beauty of surprise and of youth- these in combination of brilliant energies and practical qualifications made him the isolated genius that he was (Kirstein 106).

Diaghilev was Russian, Russian without question, even though he spent a great portion of his life traveling outside and living outside of his home country. The sole reason for him to organize and tour grand painting exhibitions and ballet performances was to show the world what Russia had to offer. No matter where he went, he took Russia with him. Diaghilev perhaps remains as one of the greatest advocates the art world has ever known. He was interested in the cross pollination of the arts between visual and performing, music and literature. He brought the outside world to Russia through his journal, *The World of Art*, along with an impressive circle of friends, and through numerous gallery exhibitions. He then brought Russian culture and dance to the rest of the world through his majestic company, the Ballet Russes which would thrive for twenty years. Even in the light of World War I, when it seemed that everyone else was struggling financially, Diaghilev's company definitely had its ups and downs, but made it through the lean years with style. The Ballet Russes traveled all over Europe from October 1916 to February 1917 and performed in no less than fifty towns in the United States. According to Lincoln Kirstein, Diaghilev's bringing Picasso to his Ballet Russes as his premiere set designer would be the reason that Picasso's name is recognized internationally and his career unparalleled. After

meeting Picasso in 1917, Diaghilev always wanted Picasso to design for his company. Kirstein felt that the grand physical scale of his dramatic backdrops as well as the mass number of patrons who would witness Picasso's genius only added to and aided Picasso's popularity regardless of the fact that he was the creator of Cubism (Kirstein 104-109).

Biographical Information and Accomplishments

Sergei Pavlovich Diaghilev was born on March 19, 1872 in the Selistchev barracks in the Novgorod province of Russia. His Grandfather, Pavel Dmitrivitch was of the country aristocracy. They had many serfs, but what made Pavel different was that he paid his servants. Dmitrivitch inherited an estate from the Perm government that had a distillery attached. The distillery basically did all of the work itself, thus making Sergei's grandfather a wealthy man of leisure. His father, Pavel Pavlovich was an army officer with a jovial carefree personality. Diaghilev's mother, Evrenova was also from a wealthy family. Sergei apparently made his first major statement upon entry into the world as his mother died just a few short days after his arrival. It has been rumored that Diaghilev's enormous head was directly related to his mother's death. Diaghilev was brought up by his nanny, Dunia who would stay by his side until her death in 1912. Some of Diaghilev's early human relationships were with his nanny, valet, and chief technician, all in service to the Diaghilev family. Diaghilev's father remarried two years after Evreinova's death to Helen Valerianova Panaïeva (Percival 9-12). Diaghilev's stepmother would have the greatest effect on his development in that she loved him as she did her own children and supported him by understanding and encouraging his special gifts. He called her mother. It was she who told him never to use the phrase 'I cannot', but instead, one must always

say that 'I can.' The family would spend Sergei's early years in St. Petersburg, but due to financial difficulty in the city, would move to live in the family estate located in Perm when Diaghilev was ten years old. The Diaghilev household was one filled with music as they would spend countless evenings singing together and playing the piano. Diaghilev attended secondary school at the Gymnasium in Perm. Diaghilev was bored in school; for he was more interested in the education and discipline he would receive from his stepmother who would teach him what he would need to know to be successful in the world. It was as if he was too advanced for school to get anything from it. Even his teachers felt that he was a superior individual and more advanced than what they were able to contribute. He never did his homework, but at the last possible moment would get the answers from the best students at school. No one seemed to mind helping Diaghilev out or even considered that they would get in trouble for cheating because they all liked him and enjoyed being around him as if they were honored to be in his presence (Haskell 6-14). In 1890, at the age of eighteen, he moved back to Saint Petersburg where he attended law school. Diaghilev would attend law school with his cousin Filosofov and two founding members of the World of Art circle, Benois, and Nouvel. Benois said that at the time it was typical for wealthy young men to attend law school; otherwise they would have to join the army, and besides, it was the easy way out and required little study. Benois, Nouvel, and Filosofov were all cultured intellectuals, whereas at this time, Diaghilev was still considered a wealthy uncultured country boy. Diaghilev hated law school, whereas his friends excelled (39-40). It was obvious that Diaghilev's interests were elsewhere as Benois said of Diaghilev's participation in this endeavor: "Diaghilev didn't read anything, did not go to real lectures, but at more informal soirées he used to sing with that beautiful and extraordinary voice of his" (40). Diaghilev's first artistic interest was in music composition, and in 1894; he took music theory

classes at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory. His music career was not to be, but he did share his talents at his many social gatherings with his friends and family and particularly enjoyed singing Rubinstein, Schubert, and Wagner. Diaghilev would also go on to promote the careers of Poulenc, Prokofiev, Rachmaninov, Ravel, Skriabin, Stravinsky, and Taneev (Bowl, *The Silver Age* 150-153).

Diaghilev has been credited with publishing *The World of Arts Journal* which he did in 1898, but the group of highly educated artists, writers, musicians and aestheticians who would come together to create this publication were already friends as they had begun their association in 1890. The *World of Art* founding members included Bakst, Benois, Diaghilev, Serov, and Somov later to be joined by Bilibin, Dobuzhinsky, Lancéray, Anna Ostroumova-Lebedeva, and Roerich as well as others. The magazine featured Symbolist poets, and the group was responsible for setting art exhibitions. It was Diaghilev's cousin and lover, Filosofov, who would introduce Diaghilev in 1895 to this group headed by Benois, and it was also Filosofov who would introduce him to the arts outside of his music circle. Filosofov's travels outside of Russia to the west would influence Diaghilev to collect art from outside of his home country. In 1895, Diaghilev would travel without his cousin and purchase art directly from artist studios. Also, in 1895, he was inspired by his tours of museums throughout the west to start his own museum in St. Petersburg under his own name. The *World of Art* would present its first Gallery show in Russia in 1898 which included 300 modern European works that had never been seen in Russia. Artists from St. Petersburg and Moscow were showcased among the likes of Monet, Degas, and Whistler. This was the first time that Russian citizens would have the privilege to view art created outside of their country; likewise, The *World of Art* journal was the only magazine presenting literary work coming from the West (Elliot 9). In 1901, he wanted to create a Russian

National Gallery containing only Russian work. His idea was that patrons and artists would donate the work, therefore not spending any of his own money. By 1901, Diaghilev knew what he wanted to do with his life and even six years prior to this; in a letter addressed to his stepmother he shared a glimpse of what was to become of his career (Bowl, *The Silver Age* 153-154).

.....Firstly, I'm a great charlatan, albeit a brilliant one; secondly, I'm a great charmer; thirdly a great lout; fourthly, a man with a great amount of logic and with few principles; and fifthly, it would seem, untalented; anyway, it would seem, if you like, that I've found my real objective – art patronage. Everything is available except money, *mais ça viendra* (Diaghilev, Bowl, *The Silver Age* 181).

In 1895, Diaghilev would make his debut as a critic and would have his writing published. His first article was for *Novosti I Birzhevaia Gazeta*, a newspaper in St. Petersburg. In 1896, he published two articles, *European Exhibitions and Russian Artists* and *Concerning the Dutch Exhibition*. (155)

Diaghilev, although a collector and supporter of the arts was not in the best of favor with all artists as that Russian artist Surikov: “ never allowed Diaghilev into his house and would only talk to him through a chink in the door” (Nesterov 175).

In 1899, Diaghilev would combine his knowledge of painting and music into the worlds of Ballet, Theatre, and Opera. He was appointed the rank of Government Secretary under Prince Sergei Volkonsky, the director of the Imperial Theatres. Diaghilev's first assignment was to edit and/or redesign the *Annual of the Imperial Theatres*. In typical Diaghilev style, he hired his friends Bakst and Somov to ‘redecorate’ the publication. Unfortunately, Diaghilev was

terminated after eighteen months of service. Volkonsky had asked Diaghilev to oversee the ballet *Sylvia* with sets and costumes by Bakst, Benois, Kovovin, and Serov and then with pressure from his peers, Volkonsky withdrew the offer. Diaghilev, insulted, said that if he could not direct the ballet, then he would have no desire to continue his association with the *Annual of the Imperial Theatres*. Volkonsky, respected, Diaghilev's wishes and fired him on the spot. Diaghilev made the best of the situation as that he had made friends and patrons that he would call on for future endeavors (Bowlt, *The Silver Age* 158-160).

In the spring of 1901 until the end of 1902, Diaghilev would spend most of his time traveling to visit museums, exhibitions, and artist studios outside of Russia. While outside of Russia he was able to gather new perspective which is evident by the follow quote: "While sitting in the bog, I'm not really capable of writing about the bog" (Diaghilev). In 1904, he traveled throughout Russia searching for portraits and borrowing paintings throughout Europe. His collecting led to a grand exhibit in the Tauride Palace of St. Petersburg which was partially financed by the Emperor. The exhibit opened in February of 1905 and contained 4000 portraits with thirty-five of Peter the Great, forty-four of Catherine the Great, and thirty-two of Alexander I. Between February and May when the show closed, 45,000 visitors experienced the grandeur. The show was dedicated to the widows and children of fallen Russian soldiers and raised 60,000 rubles for their cause. This exhibition inspired the people of St. Petersburg to collect ancestral portraits, was significant because it represented a record of Russia's Imperial past and would point the direction to enter into the new Russia. This exhibition opened during the first Russian Revolution. Although this exhibition was a major accomplishment, Diaghilev still wanted to export Russian art to the west. Diaghilev would organize one more art exhibit in Russia in 1906, before moving on to Paris where he presented work from Russia in the Salon d'Automme. This

exhibition would include 750 pieces of art from 103 Russian Artists. Diaghilev was very much interested in the aesthetics of the show. Each artist's work would have a designated color background as well as style and color of frame. Russia's first artistic exportation to Paris was so successful that the show traveled to Berlin at the close of 1906, and then to Venice in the early part of 1907. This event was important to Diaghilev in that it would begin his international career, one that would last until his death in 1929 (Bowlit, *The Silver Age* 163-171).

Diaghilev's crowning achievement and greatest contribution to the world of dance was his company, the Ballet Russes which ran from 1909-1929 under his tutelage, although it did continue after his death. Sergei Diaghilev's Ballet Russes exemplified a new form of ballet outside of Russia. He would take the traditional and make it completely new, but it is imperative to understand that although he changed the face of the ballet, he was not the first to present Russian Ballet to the West. Lydia Kyasht brought Russian ballet to the London stage with Karsavina and Pavlova (Spencer 133).

The Ballet Russes was one of the most dazzling cultural enterprises of the 20th century, not only did the company transform critical and public perceptions of the performing arts in general, but it also placed the Russian Silver Age within the international arena, emphasizing the essential, interdisciplinary engagement of the new ballet with painting, poetry, photography, cinema, plastic movement, haute couture, literary criticism, music, and many other media (Bowlit, *Moscow and St. Petersburg* 224).

The productions of the Ballet Russes were all encompassing, for they were not just about ballet; they presented a complete, coherent, and stylized world whose imagery would inspire aesthetically beautiful new trends. The audience would change the way that they viewed fashion

for their bodies as well as their homes. The collaborative efforts of all of the artists who created the work would have a profound personal effect on the audience (Percival 7).

Under the jurisdiction of the Symbolist theory, the Ballet Russes looked at tradition to uncover the future of Russian Dance. Ultimately, Diaghilev wished to create a new ballet for Russia as he wanted to move away from what was currently being shown by the Royal Ballet, yet the major players of the Ballet Russes were Russian born and traditionally trained at the Royal Ballet. The most famous of these dancers was Nijinsky, one of the greatest male ballet dancers in the history of dance, also one of Diaghilev's great loves, along with Fokine, Pavlova, and Karsavina. Diaghilev would also include the talents of Russian born; Bakst, Benois, and Roerich for set and costume designs and Stravinsky for musical composition. Later, European and American artists would join the company (Bowlit, *Moscow and St. Petersburg* 224).

Diaghilev would invite some of his friends from *The World of Art* to the world of theatre with his masterful company the Ballet Russes which he created in 1909. His most influential and successful ballets were *Cleopatra*, 1909; *Scheherazade*, 1910; *Petruska and Narcissus*, 1911; *Afternoon of the Fawn*, 1912; and *Rite of Spring* and *Jeux*, 1913. These ballets communicated *The World of Arts* fascination with Neo-Primitivism, Cultural Reconstruction, the rhythmic body and the cult of beauty (Golub, *History of Russian Theatre* 278).

The Ballet Russes would carry on the Russian tradition of spotlighting beautiful male dancers as other countries that produced ballet highlighted the talents of Ballerinas, only using men as props or even part of the scenery. Who could be a better director of ballet to spotlight the talents of male dancers than Sergei Diaghilev, for after all, he greatly appreciated the well-chiseled male form. Diaghilev was sexually attracted to men, yet he had a tremendous amount of

respect for women. Because there was no sexual tension between him and his ballerinas, he treated them differently than he may have, had he been a heterosexual man. He had a detached judgment and a good understanding of women. Just as much attention was placed on the women as the men in the company and many careers were made. When selecting women for the company, he preferred women who were slim with boyish physiques. He detested them being costumed in the classical stereotypical tutu as he felt they did not flatter women's bodies by stopping at the upper thigh, the thickest part of the leg (Haskell 42-46).

Diaghilev's company would go through transitions and difficulty during the war years of 1914-1917. 1915 and 1916 were considered bad times for dance in London and in Paris as no one was hiring. Because of this the company scattered, but when Diaghilev signed on with the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City in 1915, he would be faced with having to put his company back together again. He especially wanted to take Fokine, Karsavina, and Nijinsky to America, but Fokine was in Military service and Karsavina was forbidden to leave her country. Through sheer tenacity, Diaghilev was able to take Nijinsky out on loan. At the time, Nijinsky was being held as a prisoner of war in Austria. So along with Nijinsky, Diaghilev gathered a new group of dancers for his tour overseas. Diaghilev was not the type of man who would ask for or required support, but the war years proved to be very difficult, so he went outside of himself, and gladly received all the help that he could get. Diaghilev's greatest challenge for the journey to America was his tremendous fear of the water and crossing the Atlantic, for it was one thing to be afraid of drowning and totally another that the sea was full of German submarines. While making the voyage, he would lock himself in his cabin, fully dressed with his hat and coat, and three life jackets strapped to his body. While on tour in America, Diaghilev would try to mend his friendship with Nijinsky, but this would prove very difficult as Nijinsky's wife,

Romola would do everything within her power to keep them separated. When the war ended, the company would resume in Paris. The 1917 season brought Picasso on the scene as set and costume designer, he would become great friends with Diaghilev (Lifar 209-211).

1929 was a tremendous year and the final season for the Ballet Russes under Diaghilev. Diaghilev was beginning to grow tired of the company and really just tired in general, given the fact that he had spent most of his life living out of suitcases and in tiny hotel rooms. Diaghilev was now fifty-seven years old, and he was exhausted and felt alone. At this time, most of his friends were no longer in the picture, even his friends from the World of Art circle had moved on except for Nouvel. He was still on friendly terms with Stravinsky, but Stravinsky's career at this time did not allow for much of a social life. Picasso and he were also still good friends, but Picasso's attentions were placed on his wife who was in poor health. Diaghilev had become reclusive, yet he did still have feelings for and wanted to visit Nijinsky. At this time, Nijinsky was spending his time in a mental institution. Diaghilev and his premiere male dancer, Lifar, traveled to see Nijinsky and would take him to see *Petrouchka* which allowed for a nostalgic photo opportunity with Nijinsky, Diaghilev, and the cast of *Petrouchka*, including Lifar. 1929 proved to be a very successful year for the Ballet Russes, yet on August 7, 1929, Diaghilev became ill while in route to Venice and by August 12, he had become bed-ridden with acute rheumatism and what was thought to be an attack of typhoid fever. On August 19, 1929, Diaghilev died; his body rests in Venice, Italy. Even up to the day before he died, Diaghilev was concerned with his appearance, so on the day of his demise, Lifar shaved his face one last time, trimmed his moustache, arranged his hair, applied cologne, made up his face and tidied Diaghilev's clothing (Lifar 343-371).

Personal Aesthetics

The first fleeting glance is that of a dandy in the general allure, of someone intensely interested in his person, the actual physical rather than the adornment. One can divine the careful toilette from the very first moment, and it is that that gives the sense of smartness, in spite of a dinner-jacket that may be sadly frayed, or of boots that are much worn. Then comes the sense of poise – his whole stance shows his knowledge of his absolute superiority. It is the easy poise of a man who has been born to command, and not the restless, arrogant truculent manner of the self-made man who has his doubts. Diaghileff has not the slightest doubts, and never has had, and with him the strength is accompanied by that grace and charm which are the prerogative of the born leader (Haskell xxx).

Diaghilev's physicality had the power to speak to who he was as a man and was representational of his professional life; even as a child, he was a miniature of his mature self, showing all of the confidence and power of what was to come. Could it be that part of his respect as an impresario came from his physical appearance? To offset the fact that his head was so large, he was often spotted in a heavy coat with a generously proportioned nutria fur collar which added weight to his broad shoulders. He had thick brown hair which he wore higher on the right than on the left side. He had imposing deep-set brown eyes which were often accompanied by circles below when he did not get enough sleep, a snub nose with wide nostrils, thick lips that appeared even thicker because of his severely manicured moustache, a strong jaw line that jutted forward, teeth that were on the side of being animalistic, and memorable flabby hands with flabby fingers that seemed to brim with dexterity (Haskell xxix-xxxi).

In a memorial service M. Henri Prunières had the following to say about Diaghilev:

Those who did not know him cannot imagine the extraordinary attraction of this big, snub-nosed man, with the enormous head, the black hair parted with a large white lock, heavy jaws, sensual lips, fine eyes of velvet darkness. He wore a monocle and had a slouching walk like the Monsieur de Charlus portrayed by Marcel Proust. He was reputed to be at once the wickedest and kindest man in Europe, the stupidest, the most vulgar, the shrewdest, and the most smart (Kirstein 119).

Diaghilev ordered his clothes from Savile row and dyed his forelock silver as a young man to impart a greater sense of wisdom and maturity (Bowl, *Moscow and St. Petersburg 182*).

Love Interests

His love for the virile man doomed him to constant unhappiness and disappointment. It was obvious that as soon as his loved one had fully developed, he would leave Diaghilev for the first attractive woman who crossed his path...always he was saddened, surprised- and felt himself betrayed. In all these unions the mental aspects predominated. Later in his life his friendships were more paternal in spirit than anything else. The search for the true permanent companion was perhaps the personal tragedy of his life (Arnold Haskell, biographer, *Out of the Past 192*).

Diaghilev's desires as a homosexual man were different than the desires of other homosexual men. Looking at Kuzmin, born in the same year, one can easily come to the conclusion that he was inspired by and required to have sex with men; his lifestyle defined who he was, whereas with Diaghilev, the attraction was more of an intellectual rather than a sexual

experience. Diaghilev selected his lovers for their natural talent having had the gift of spotting potential. Within his relationships, he was interested in helping to form their careers and giving them creative outlets to share their gifts with the world. The bottom line was that Diaghilev was not considered to be an artist by himself or by his peers; therefore, he was allowed to live as an artist through the lives of his lovers. Diaghilev was the kind of man who was faithful to his lovers-protégés and who would remain faithful until they had become famous and would abandon him for a woman. (Haskell 41)

Diaghilev only had one sexual encounter with a woman. When he was seventeen years old, his father coerced him or practically forced him to do this. Diaghilev received a mild infection from his encounter which was easily cured, but he never got over the experience; he was traumatized by the event and said that he never truly recovered from the ordeal (Haskell 46).

Diaghilev would find his first lover in 1890, his relationship with his cousin Dima Filosofov would last fifteen years. Filosofov was said to be aristocratic and cultured. Physically, Dima was the exact opposite of Diaghilev being tall, thin, blonde, and with blue-gray eyes. Even his fingers were different - thin and willowy, compared to Diaghilev's which were described as 'fat.' Their temperaments were also in opposition. Dima was thought to be reserved, even cold, quick witted and often cruel whereas Diaghilev was quick to win an audience, quite charismatic, and diplomatic especially when he needed to be. Diaghilev toned down Filosofov's sharpness and Filosofov, along with his mother would help Diaghilev move from his country awkwardness to a finely cultured city dweller (Haskell 41-43). In 1898, Filosofov would be the co-founder along with Diaghilev of the very influential journal, *The World of Art*. The premiere issue would feature the work of poet, Zinadia Gippius. Unfortunately, Gippius set her sexual sights on Filosofov and planned to entice him by offering a ménage à trois with her husband, writer and

critic Merezhkovski. Filosofov left Diaghilev in 1904 and would co-habitat with Gippius until 1919. Diaghilev was so upset by losing his partner that he shut down the publication in 1906 and moved to Paris (Miller 189-192).

In 1908, Diaghilev was planning his first season, presenting his Ballet Russes to Paris when he met his second lover, Vaslav Nijinsky. Nijinsky would be his lover, protégé, and then choreographer. Nijinsky, although a brilliant dancer, did not fare as well in school; he failed his exams twice in secondary school and finished a year later. Diaghilev, in contrast, saw brilliance in Nijinsky that others including himself did not see. Nijinsky was a star in the dance world in Russia, but Diaghilev made him an international star. In 1913 while in transit to South America where the Ballet Russes were to perform, Nijinsky met a young Hungarian woman named Romola and practically instantly proposed marriage to her. Nijinsky and Romola did not even speak the same language. It appeared that Nijinsky was confused by Diaghilev's love and felt strangled in a way. He saw marriage to this beautiful young woman as his way out. Diaghilev fired Nijinsky from the company after two months of consultation with his friends and dancers from the company. Nouvel described Nijinsky as someone who had never fully sexually awakened, rather someone who poured his total emotional self into his art. Nijinsky would return to the company two years later as Diaghilev had a new lover by this time, his new principal dancer, Leonid Massine (Haskell 224-232). In 1913, Diaghilev saw Massine for the first time from the audience as he was attending the Bolshoi Ballet. Diaghilev was so impressed with Massine's performance that he invited him to join the Ballet Russes (Drummond 165-174). Even though Diaghilev had moved on, he really had never gotten over Nijinsky. Nijinsky would ultimately go mad over his conflicted sexual identity, although his illness was thought to be

hereditary. To the detriment of Diaghilev, Massine would leave him for an English female dancer after a seven-year relationship (Miller 189-192).

In 1923, Diaghilev met Serge Lifar; Lifar was nineteen years old and Diaghilev was fifty. Lifar joined the company in 1923 and two years later became a principal dancer. He would create many roles choreographed by Massine and Balanchine. Diaghilev was very jealous of Lifar and would not even allow anyone to visit him in his dressing room. Lifar would be very close to Diaghilev until the day that Diaghilev died.

Legacy

Diaghilev's Ballet Russes with his many talented designers would have a tremendous influence on all aspects of the arts outside of dance and none more than in the arena of fashion. Perhaps the largest contribution would come when *Scheherazade* premiered in Paris in 1910. Jacques-Emile Blanche's article for the popular magazine, *Les Arts Plastique* penned the following: "The first performance was an important evening for the theatre, for dressmakers, for interior decorators, for jewelers, and for all branches of decoration" (Spencer 153). *Scheherazade* featured the costumes and sets of Leon Bakst which were highly influenced by the Orient, specifically India, Turkey, and Egypt. (Spencer 153-162) Paul Poiret, for those who know a bit about fashion history, is truly known as the "King of Fashion," for his contributions to the fashion industry which actually began with his first couture collection in 1911 based on the oriental elements which were featured one year prior by Bakst. On a side note, for those interested in popular culture, Poiret is credited with creating the concept of the supermodel when he used his wife, Denise, who he felt was the most beautiful of women to display his clothing.

No one had ever before seen the silhouettes that he showed as this was just after the height and fall of the corset. The clothing was soft and draped, and the shapes were foreign to fashionistas with his minaret skirts shaped exactly like lampshades having wire at the bottoms to hold their silhouette, jupes culottes or as we may recognize them today in 2009, as harem pants, and hats and headpieces, direct copies of turbans. Poiret claimed that his soft silhouettes came from the fact that he was not a good tailor and had poor sewing skills, but if one could have the opportunity to examine his work, any of his work, he would immediately realize that Poiret was either extremely modest or at the very least unaware of his mastery of the subject. Poiret may not have credited Bakst, but the similarity in form, color, and style are evident. Poiret designed for the theatre as well and his *Eight Pence a Mile*, a revue at the Alhambra Theatre paralleled his fashions du Jour as well as the costumes of *Scheherazade*. Poiret was immersed in the oriental style as he continued his fascination with the East for which he threw the party of the century, a lavish costume ball; his theme - the thousand and one nights where famous and wealthy Parisians would adorn themselves in all things in the style completely parallel to the costumes of Bakst. As an additional connection to Diaghilev's Ballet Russes, Poiret and his wife dressed in a gown by her husband in the style reminiscent of *Scheherazade*, attended the opening and unfortunately the closing night of Stravinsky's highly controversial *Rite of Spring* (Poiret, Metropolitan Museum of Art 2007). Poiret did not stop with fashion and costume; he ventured out into the perfume business. His scents were inspired by and named after fragrances of the orient. Jean Lavin, also a most influential early 20th century fashion designer, would branch out into décor as she found inspiration from Persian headdresses when designing the light fixtures in the shape of turbans for the Theatre Danou (Spencer 153-162).

Design is so much more than shape in that one must also consider texture, pattern, and, most importantly color. Diaghilev's *Scheherazade* would bring to Paris colors that had not been seen since the introduction of aniline dyes which were introduced in 1851. Aniline dyes could produce intense colors that were not previously easily accessible. The new colors were bright as well as rich. Color combinations would be bold as those found readily in nature, juxtaposing colors that represented those of India, Turkey, and Persia. The new palette included intense shades of blues - turquoise, lapis, and sapphire; reds - vermillion, ruby, and coral; oranges - fire opal, zinnias, and marigolds; greens - emerald, malachite, and verdigris; and purples - amethysts, grapes, and aubergines. Prior to the production of *Scheherazade* colors were muted and in the spectrum of navy, olive, khaki, grey, and prune. The new hues would be named after the Orient such as *rose vit*, *nuit d'orient*, begonia, and cerise, etc. It is not fair to give Diaghilev all of the credit for the new colors, for the Fauves' painters such as Matisse and Rouault were working in similar palettes but because their work at the time was not reaching the mass audiences, as the Ballet Russes, their work did not possess the same powerful appeal or influence. The ballet presented art on such a grand scale for it was not just dance, or music, or design, or theatre, but all of these things. The ballet presented theatricality on the grandest of scales. The work that the Ballet Russes created also influenced what was happening in textiles, furniture, jewelry, ironwork, glass, and bookmaking (Spencer 162-164).

Diaghilev's Ballet company would branch out and have a new life as company members would form their own companies, and after his death in 1929, the Ballet Russes would continue with new directors. Thirteen of the Ballet Russes' repertoires are still being performed throughout the world today. In 1928, Ida Rubinstein formed her own company. Rubinstein was a featured dancer in *Cleopatra* and *Scheherazade* in Diaghilev's company. Rubinstein had the

ability to attract wealthy lovers who would finance her business. Diaghilev was not pleased with the formation of Rubinstein's company as she took Alexandre Benois as her designer and Massine and Nijinska as her choreographers. Her company would continue through 1934. In direct competition with Diaghilev's company was the formation of the Ballet Suédois in Stockholm Sweden from 1920-1925 who adopted Fokine after he broke with Diaghilev. Germany was not heavily influenced by the Ballet Russes, but Max Reinhardt with his mime drama *Sumurun* was influenced by Diaghilev's use of Orientalism. German innovators Kurt Joos and Mary Wigman helped in the development of modern dance: Wigman choreographed her own version of *Rite of Spring* in a much looser Isadora Duncan style which is ironic because in actuality, it was Duncan who originally inspired Diaghilev to create his new ballet style (Spencer 133-139).

Diaghilev's death in 1929 would not be the finale of the Ballet Russes, but it did halt the company from continuing for two years. Lifar, the premiere male dancer upon the dismantlement of the company, joined the Paris Opera where he greatly influenced the development of French ballet, therefore taking with him a bit of the Ballet Russes. In 1931, René Blum, manager of the Monte Carlo Theatre, and Colonel de Basil formed the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo and hired Diaghilev's colleagues; Fokine, Massine, Balanchine, among others. The new company adopted Diaghilev's former repertoires as well as his existing costumes and sets. The Ballet de Monte Carlo continued for thirteen years. Blum and de Basil would part ways; Blum would take Massine with him, keeping the company name and performing mainly in the United States, and de Basil would take Pavlova's husband, Dandre with him, remaining in Europe and renaming the company, The Royal Ballet Russes de Colonel W. de Basil (Spencer 139-142).

Diaghilev Epilogue

Sergei Diaghilev's early desires to be an artist led to a career of giving. Early in his life, he realized that he would not be an artist, so instead he looked at the talents that he did possess. He knew that he had great organizational skills and that he could support and promote the arts and that is exactly what he did. His contributions to the art world were so much more than taking Russia and presenting her to the rest of the world, so much more than helping Russia to examine her own artists, her own culture, and so much more than bringing the outside world to Russia. Diaghilev allowed individual artists to see outside of their own special talents to view those of all of the other artists that he encountered. Diaghilev liked to collect knowledge, to personally view artists working in their studios; he loved to go to museums, he loved to look at things and he believed in sharing his experiences with all of his friends. Even in love, at the heart, he was more interested in developing the young man's talent and career than satisfying his own personal needs. He was definitely aesthetically inclined with his good taste in fashion and even though he did buy nice clothes from the best shops, he was not extravagant. He had only two suits, one grey and one blue, a dinner jacket, a dress coat, a summer coat, and a heavy winter coat, all of which, towards the end of his life, were moth eaten. He was interested in how he looked, but in retrospect, he spent very little on himself, for he spent all of his money on the artists and art that he supported (Drummond 293). Diaghilev was a gentle man who died young at a place in his life where he was still searching and still trying to find his inner artist.

Chapter 3

Kuzmin: Artist Driven by Insecurities

I have to be candid and truthful, if only before myself, as regards the chaos that is reigning in my soul. But if I have three faces, there are even more men within me and all of them are howling, and at times one of them shouts down the other, and how will I harmonize them-do I know myself? Now, my three faces are so dissimilar, so hostile one to another, that only the subtlest eye would not be attracted by this difference, which outrages all those who love one or the other of them. They are: the one with a long beard, resembling in some way Da Vinci, very pampered and seemingly kind, of a certain suspicious holiness, seemingly simple, but complicated. The second, with the pointed goatee-a bit foppish-of a French correspondent, more coarsely subtle, indifferent and bored...The third, the most terrifying of all, without a beard or a mustache, not old and not young, the face of a fifty-year old youth and old man, of Casanova, half-charlatan, half-abbé, with a crafty and childlike fresh mouth, a face dry and suspicious (*Kuzmin diary, Oct.5 1905, A life in Art pg 92*).

Mikhail Kuzmin was the first major gay writer in Russian History, labeled a Symbolist poet, prose writer, playwright, critic, and composer. Kuzmin wrote for the *World of Art* and Symbolist periodicals. He shared with the Symbolists the idea of art above reality or realism (Bristol 423). Kuzmin's greatest poetry was compared to Constantine Cavafy, (1863-1933) the Greek poet who wrote of male beauty without any shame or guilt of any kind (Bailey 17). In the literary world at his time, he was thought to be a celebrity, although there were successful gay and lesbian authors before and during his reign. It is interesting and important to understand

why someone becomes recognized over someone else for their accomplishments. Kuzmin's notoriety occurred because his novel, *Wings*, provided an anthem to celebrate and embrace male homosexuality and represented male on male affection as serious and important. *Wings* was about freedom. The lesbian equivalent to Kuzmin was Lydia Zinoviena-Annibal who liberated women from their self-doubt with her novel *Thirty-Three Freaks* and a collection of stories, *The Tragic Zoo*. Zinoviena- Annibal's husband, Viacheslav Ivanov, was also an accomplished writer, friend to Kuzmin, and bisexual (Karlinsky 354).

Kuzmin's presentation of his personal aesthetic to his friends and the fact that he was gay had just as much value to the art world during the Silver Age of Russia as the content of his writing. His being gay would be the impetus for all of his work, for he could not separate who he was from what he did. Kuzmin knew how to put on the mask, to put on the face that he felt that his circle of friends wanted to see. He was known to play a good game and never really revealed his true self. It is interesting to realize that the more one reads about Kuzmin, the less informed one might become as he constantly contradicted himself. Within his journals, it was as if he wrote out of stream of consciousness; therefore, he would claim not to be something and then in a journal entry in the following month act in a way that totally negated what he had previously written. He did not like to be labeled. If one reads between the lines, several things about Kuzmin are certain. He never questioned his sexuality, at least after he accepted his first homosexual relationship, even when the climate grew hostile towards gay men, even when his friends and lovers left or masked their homosexuality by marrying women. He was insecure and relied on his friends to lift his spirits and direct him in his life choices. One might wonder if he would have been successful at all without his mentors, lovers, and artistic circle. Above all things, Kuzmin was a lonely man who greatly valued companionship and who wanted to be

loved. Even though Kuzmin was a practicing homosexual and openly gay, one might question if he completely felt comfortable in his skin with the choice that he made sexually in the time and the place in which he lived. If he was secure, would he have altered his personas throughout his career and would he have been able to be strong and complete on his own? He liked to try on costumes to represent himself visually to the world by what he was interested in at the time, the period of history that he was studying, or to represent himself to his friends in a manner that he would be accepted by them. Aesthetically, Kuzmin, just like Evreinov, was known as the Russian Oscar Wilde, but should also be known as the Russian Samuel Pepys for his never-ending journal entries. Because of his multitude of personal journals, one is able to uncover his successes and his failures. His journals are most important not just because of what one is able to uncover about Kuzmin himself, but the ramifications that occurred to his friends and acquaintances once these journals were brought into public domain. Kuzmin kept nothing that he experienced from the page.

Kuzmin accredited his accomplishments and notoriety to his circle of friends. In 1923, Kuzmin said to an interviewer; “If I had not met Diaghilev, Stravinsky, Somov, Sudeikin, and others at the right time, I of course would not be now, what I am now” (Kuzmin, Bogomolov 100). He was very fortunate to have two mentors over the course of his life that would keep him centered when he became unbalanced. Kuzmin was a fragile man and unlike Evreinov and Diaghilev, was unable to stand alone as he was constantly questioning the value of his life. He was often suicidal as well as impoverished. His work reflected his current relationship because his partners completed him and allowed him to be a whole person, a whole artist. It seems evident that Mikhail Kuzmin was the kind of person who could not be alone. His writings reflected who he was in bed with as well as the places that he traveled with his lovers. His work

was personal. At first glance, we see that he had four important relationships over his lifetime making one see him as a romantic; but upon closer inspection, one will find that he slept with a great number of men, most of them anonymous. When he was celebrating, he sought out sex; when he was lonely, he sought out sex; when he was afraid, he sought out sex; and when he was sad, he sought out sex. The weight of his accomplishments existed almost completely on the fact that he was a homosexual living and working during Russia's Silver Age. Gay was not a term recognized during the Silver Age of Russia: *Muzhelozhstuo* is the Russian word that translates as lying with men. Kuzmin's circles of friends were either homosexual, bi-sexual, or at the very least were supportive of his lifestyle.

A Brief History of Homosexuality in Russia and its Relationship to Kuzmin

Because of the importance of his sexual choices and how they affected Kuzmin's work, it is of great value to look at a brief history of homosexuality in Russia and how the government responded to these 'practicing' individuals. Medieval Russia was found to be tolerant of homosexuality although it was considered a sin in the eyes of the Russian Orthodox Church: no legal sanctions were documented. During the 16th and 17th centuries, acts of homosexuality were openly seen in public among all classes (*Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*). The first laws against homosexuality occurred during the 18th century under the rule of Peter the Great. 1706 marked a new military code which would condemn and punish male homosexuals. The fine would be death; the offender would be burned at the stake. Interestingly enough, Peter the Great was known to dabble in bisexuality and turned his head to the crime; therefore, no one suffered this punishment. 1716 brought about a new code which was only applicable to the military. This

code mandated corporal punishment for sodomy and the death penalty if rape had occurred. This law only applied to men who were active in the military and did not touch any other area of Russian society. In 1832, homosexual life changed under the reign of Nicholas I in that all men, not just the military would be punished. Article 995 forbade Muzhelozhstuo or anal intercourse between men with the punishment to be exile to Siberia for up to five years. Article 996 referred to homosexual rape, sex with minors, or mentally retarded men with the punishment to be exiled to Siberia and hard labor for up to twenty years. Rarely was either legislation applied and practically never to the upper class. 1861 marked a huge breakthrough for human rights as Alexander II came into power. He called for the abolition of serfdom, or as westerners would call it, slavery, as he set free fifty-two million people and relaxed censorship. Homosexuality became more visible in life, literature and art. Predating Kuzmin, Nikolai Przhevalsky (1839-1888), explorer, naturalist, and writer took his lovers on his excursions which were funded by the government. Lesbians came to the forefront under the rule of Alexander such as the couple Anna Yevreinova (1844-1919) and her lover Maria Feodorova who were the co-founders and editors of the much respected *Northern Herald* as well as Polyxena Soloviova (1867-1924), the Symbolist poet who was the first to translate *Alice in Wonderland* into Russian. In 1903, Kuzmin's father, Alexksey Alekseevic founder of the Constitutional Democratic Party, published an article on the legal status of homosexuals in Russia. He compared Russia having any say in one's sexual preference to slavery. In 1905, Nicholas II created a manifesto that would abolish preliminary censorship on all books and periodicals which would afford artists the opportunity to freely express themselves. In the time between 1906 and 1923, Kuzmin wrote novels, short stories, several plays, and a great deal of poems about homosexual life, love, and sex mainly because censorship had been lifted and he felt free to explore his craft and sexual

bent. His writings were published in the most respected journals, though his plays never made it to the most respected houses and were performed by amateurs instead of the most celebrated actors of the time. Kuzmin was fortunate to have lived in the Silver Age of Russia because of its views of homosexuals and abundance of inspirational and influential artists. By contrast, Kuzmin's harshest critic was G.P. Novopolin whose book, *The Pornographic Element in Russian Literature* states that homosexuality was only for peasants and uncivilized people and that Kuzmin and Zinoviena-Annibal were out to corrupt youth. Gorky, a popular revolutionary writer, member of the Bolsheviks, and a friend to Lenin, had a different response to Kuzmin's work when he wrote about Kuzmin and Ivanov (Karlinsky 348-356):

They are old fashioned slaves, people who can't help confusing freedom with homosexuality. For them for example, personal liberation is in some peculiar way confused with crawling from one cesspool into another and at times reduced to freedom for the penis and nothing more (Karlinsky, Gorky 356).

Between 1905 and 1917, Symbolists and Acemists believed that gay and lesbian writers were important new talents; additionally, homosexuals were abundant in all fields of the arts. The period from 1905-1917, known as Russia's Silver Age was considered to be the Golden Age for Russian homosexuals as many important figures led openly gay lives including members of the Imperial court. Many argue the effect the Bolshevik Revolution had on the rights of homosexuals. With the October Revolution of 1917 and the rule of Lenin and Trotsky, all laws against homosexuals were abolished including articles 995 and 996. Unfortunately, all laws against crimes such as rape and incest were also eradicated. Kuzmin saw the 1917 revolution as a "long awaited miracle." 1922 noted a change in the climate; new codes prohibited sex with minors, prostitutes, and panderers, but for the moment nothing against homosexuality. What did

change was the view of homosexuality by society. In the 1920s, homosexuality was not thought of as a crime, because it was considered a mental illness and Russia chose not to punish or incarcerate her mentally ill. Because of society's view of homosexuals, censorship came back into fashion; therefore, work from openly gay individuals was not published or at least certainly not reviewed. Kuzmin was said to be producing his best work in the 1920s yet could not get his work into print, or if he was lucky enough to get a small publisher to produce his work, it was not distributed. Homosexuality may have been legal, but to protect themselves and to be able to continue their passion and their art, gay men had to marry women to be accepted. One of Kuzmin's greatest confidants and mentor, Georgy Chicherin, after joining the Bolshevik party in 1918, broke all ties with Kuzmin as well as all of his gay friends and acquaintances (Karlinsky 356-361). On December 17, 1933, article 121 would mark another blow against homosexuality in Russia in that it would outlaw sexual relations between men. This all occurred under the reign of terror of Stalin. The punishment: five years of hard labor for consensual sex and eight years of hard labor for using violence, force, or sex with a minor. In 1936 homosexual prose writer, Leonid Dobychin disappeared never to be found and in 1937, homosexual poet, Nikolay Klyvev was arrested and shot. Article 121 coincidentally would parallel the treatment of homosexuals in Nazi Germany. The treatment of gays was unforgiving even beyond Stalin's death in 1953 (*Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*). Because of the harsh treatment of homosexuals, hundreds of young military cadets committed suicide because their wealthy sexual partners would have to go into hiding and therefore would not be able to support them financially in the way that they had become accustomed (Bailey 21). Between the years of 1933-1980, a record number of up to one thousand homosexuals were incarcerated each year. It was not until 1993, under the jurisdiction

of Gorbachev, that article 121 was rescinded and men who were still imprisoned for their sexuality were released (*Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*).

Kuzmin's Beginnings and Accomplishments

Mikhail Alexeyevich Kuzmin, 1872-1936, was born in Yaroslavl, Russia. He was the son of a naval officer, Alexksey Alekseevic. His mother Nadezhda Dmitrievna was the daughter of land owners; she was once an inspector of classes at the Imperial Theatre School. When Kuzmin was born, his mother was forty and his father was twenty years her senior, at sixty. Kuzmin would always be close to his mother and he attributed his admiration for the arts to her as she had pushed culture on him at a very young age. She exposed him to French literature, painting, and music and took him to see opera and theatre productions. As a child, he was aware of the prejudices against homosexuals which was marked by the trial and conviction of Oscar Wilde in 1885 (Bailey 11-16). In 1894, Kuzmin would move to Saint Petersburg where he would call his home for the rest of his life and would live with his mother until her death in 1904. In 1891, Kuzmin attended the Saint Petersburg Conservatory where he studied music composition. He was not popular in school and was considered to be ugly. Kuzmin left the conservatory in 1894 without a degree after only completing three years of the seven-year program and after his first suicide attempt. Kuzmin was not a good student and he did not value or respect his teachers or care what they had to say. Habitually, he refused to turn in his work (Bogomolov 13). After exiting the conservatory, he would become entranced with languages and studied Italian, German, Greek, Latin, French, and English. His proclivity for language would serve him well as he translated many works from around the world into his native

Russian. He was first interested in being a composer and did write many songs; his poetry came to him as a natural progression from songwriting. His first published poetry, *The History of the Knight d'Alesso* was described as a libretto (Green, *Selected Prose* ix-xii).

During the Silver Age of Russia, there was actually a cult following of Oscar Wilde, if not just for his work, for his personal aesthetic. This all began when Mikhail Lykiardopoulo, who was the secretary of the Moscow Art Theatre, published translations of Wilde's work for the first time in Russia. Kuzmin immediately became an extreme admirer, so much so that his most noted work *Wings* from 1906 was based on Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*. *Wings* was published by the Symbolist journal, *Scales*, where the entire issue was dedicated to his novella. This November issue immediately sold out and was immediately re-published. Kuzmin did more than reference Wilde's writing. He directly copied Wilde for one of the three personas that he would adopt over his life time. 1906 was a prolific year for Kuzmin. He wrote a collection of poems; perhaps his most famous were his *Alexandria Songs*, written about a homosexual who lived in ancient Alexandria, Egypt and finished his play *The Chimes of Love*. Additionally, he wrote two more pieces for the theatre, a mine ballet, *A Choice of the Bride* and *Dangerous Precaution* with music by one of his great friends and mentors, Walter Nouvel. It was Nouvel who would also introduce Kuzmin to Diaghilev who would greatly enhance his career. When the two plays were published in 1907 along with an additional play written in the same year, *A Pastoral for Masquerade-Two Swans and a Nymph in a Cottage*; the entire collection was confiscated, most likely because of the subject matter of *Dangerous Precaution*. The plot of this play was centered around a man having sex with a boy (Senelick, *Lovesick* 104).

1906 also marked an important time for Kuzmin as he frequently attended productions at the theatre of Vera Kommisarzhenskaya where he met Meyerhold. Meyerhold would stage

manage/direct the first season of the theatre during 1906-1907. The two became very good friends, and this relationship and mutual admiration would continue throughout their lives. As a composer, Kuzmin would create the music for Meyerhold's production of Blok's *Puppet Show*. Meyerhold complimented Kuzmin by calling him the new face of Russian Theatre and was so impressed with Kuzmin's work that he asked Kommissarzhevskaya if she would produce Kuzmin's play, *The Comedy of Alexis, a Man of God*. She did not share in Meyerhold's veneration, when she said: "I have read Kuzmin's play and this is my impression; a dull totally pointless picture in a fancy frame" (Senelick, *Lovesick* 105).

Ironically, Kommissarzhevskaya's brother would produce the work during World War I in his theatre in Moscow boasting her respected name. Meyerhold did not have a successful year at this theatre and was fired by Kommissarzhevskaya to be replaced by Evreinov. Kuzmin out of support for his friend, Meyerhold, no longer patronized this theatre. With Kuzmin's hopes to be presented in the prestigious Kommissarzhevskaya's theatre dashed, he would turn his attentions to writing operettas and operas, working more on his poetry, prose, as well as his work as a translator and critic (Senelick, *Lovesick* 105).

In 1907, Evreinov and Baron Nikolay Driezen planned to open "The Ancient Theatre" which would focus on educating the public of ancient works. They invited Kuzmin to join them by translating a twelfth century mystery play about Adam and Eve. Unfortunately, the theater opened in December and then closed in January of 1908 (Bogomolov 142).

In 1908, Kuzmin wrote three religious comedies that were admired by Blok:

Kuzmin's creativity does have roots, maybe the deepest, most forked, crooked ones that burrow into the dense darkness of the Russian past. For me the name Kuzmin is

always associated with the awakening of Russian dissent with the murky religious presentiments of fifteenth-century Russia, with memories from the dense swampy marshlands to squat smoky huts. Kuzmin is an artist to the marrow of his bones, most subtle in lyricism and most witty in dialectics in his art (Blok 123).

Kuzmin would become a literary critic in 1909; as he worked for *Apollo*, a new magazine dedicated to aesthetics. In 1910, Kuzmin would move away from the Symbolist movement with his article, *On Beautiful Clarity*, which was a manifesto towards the new Acemists Movement. This Russian Poetry movement advocated clarity and sensory vividness (Bristol 423).

In 1911, Kuzmin's operetta, *Maiden's Pleasure*, was a hit at St. Petersburg's Maly Theatre. Also in 1911, along with Meyerhold, Evreinov, Remizov, and Nouvel, he would become a founding member of the Intimate Theatre Society which brought the Stray Dog, one of St. Petersburg's most famous cabaret theatres, which occupied the cellar on Italyanskaya Street for around eighty patrons. One of Kuzmin's friends attended a production in 1914 and wanted to take the troupe on tour which unfortunately was not to be as this was the beginning of the World War I (Green, *Out of the Blue* 117-122).

Kuzmin's early years with his lover, Yurkin, were productive as that he wrote *Travelers by Land and Sea* about the relationships formed by the writers for the Stray Dog Theatre in 1914. In 1915, he wrote *The Quiet Guardian* and *The Wondrous Life of Joseph Balsamo Count Cagliostro* and from 1915-1917 approximately seventy short stories. Even with all of his writing, he still found time to compose as well as work in the theatre. In April of 1917, Kuzmin was elected with Blok, Mayakovski, and Punin to the new association of artists in Petrograd. The

end of the war would show signs of what was to come for Kuzmin's financial difficulty was on the rise. He was in such dire straits that he was forced to sell many of his collections of old books and art work from his friends. In 1918, he wrote *A Happy Day or The Two Brothers*, a children's play utilizing puppet theatre. Also, in 1918, he was appointed as chief composer to the New Bolshoi Theatre. 1921 would bring some financial relief in that Petropolis; a new publishing company issued a collection of Kuzmin's poems, *Other Worldly Evenings* and his play, *Live or Wooden Dolls*. *Wings* was republished in Germany in 1923, but was being censored in Russia (Green, *Selected Prose* xxi-xxiv).

By 1923, Kuzmin's career was failing because of the lack of support and because he did not change his style with the times. Critic, Leon Trotsky wrote: "Kuzmin's books were completely and entirely superfluous to the modern post October man, like a glass bead to a soldier on the battlefield" (Green, *Out of the Blue* 117). Kuzmin would receive no more reviews in the Soviet Press after 1926. Also in that year, he wrote his last poem, *The Trout Breaks Ice*, and, having difficulty making a living, he translated nine of Shakespeare's plays into Russian. By 1928, Kuzmin thought that his career was over and that the public was no longer interested in his life's work, yet to his surprise when he gave his last reading of *The Trout Breaks Ice* at the Leningrad Literary Institute, a mob of homosexuals with flowers in hand packed the hall and gave him a standing ovation. In 1933, Kuzmin sold his archives of work to the state library museum which included his published and non-published manuscripts as well as a multitude of letters and nineteen bound volumes of his diaries for 25,000 rubles. He stipulated that the diaries could only be published after his death. The director of the museum, Vladimir Brugevich, who purchased the work, was interrogated by the central party committee and all of the work was confiscated by the NKVD (the group preceding the KGB). The homosexual men who were

mentioned in Kuzmin's journals were called traitors and were shot by firing squad; Yury Yurkin was one of them. Kuzmin died from complications of pneumonia and emphysema in 1936. His death was given no mention in the press (Green, *Out of the Blue* 117-122).

Personal Aesthetics

The way in which Mikhail Kuzmin chose to physically and emotionally present himself, his personal aesthetic, brings up many questions for individuals to ponder. Are we aware of how we look to the world and do we care, are we trying to stand out or blend in and why, are we making conscious choices, are we influenced by our culture, religious beliefs, what we are studying or if we are studying; level of education, friends, jobs, sexual persuasions, marital status, social standings, upbringing, political associations, or security or insecurity in ourselves? Through Kuzmin's journals, we can clearly understand that all of these questions influenced the way in he dressed and how he defined himself. Kuzmin presents a prime example of a connection between the way that we dress and the way that we perceive ourselves. Kuzmin actually called himself an aesthetic; meaning a cult of beauty, to turn oneself into a work of art.

Kuzmin was fragile from early on in his development as he states in this diary entry which tells us a great deal about his emotional status as a child. It also gives us a glimpse into his sexual orientation.

I was alone. My brothers were in Kazan at cadet school, my sisters away at women's college in St. Petersburg and then married. I had only girls as friends, not boys, and I loved to play with dolls, to play at pretend theatricals, to read and perform light potpourris of old Italian Operas, as my father was a great admirer of them, especially

Rossini. I felt a kind of worshipful adoration for my male school companions, and finally fell in love with a student in the seventh grade class of gymnasium, Valentin Zaitsev, who later became my teacher at school. I was in love with my aunt, however. I was terribly possessive (Kuzmin, Bogomolov 10).

Kuzmin would always value the opinions of his friends and mentors as it seemed that he could never stand alone. He lived and loved to write, constantly write, either for his life's work as an artist or in letters to express how he was feeling on any given day or to have the blessings from the recipients of his letters. He was constantly striving for validation. This portion of a letter written to Chicherin, early mentor to Kuzmin, on July 18, 1898 shows that he was often self absorbed and also that he was quite a contradiction. He defined himself by who he was sleeping with and his circle of friends. One might get the impression that he really did not know what he was saying or that he was not conscious of what he was saying. If he was not interested in social life, then why did he change his persona completely when he was invited to join Diaghilev's circle of artists? "For some reason or other I have always had little interest in social matters: class interests, comradeship, speeches in honor of somebody, benefit concerts – all this is insignificant to me. To me personal interests have always been on the forefront." (Kuzmin, Bogomolov 24).

On September 6, 1895, Kuzmin wrote to Chicherin about the fear of being absorbed in art itself. What we do see is that for Kuzmin, the work was all encompassing and all important. The obvious difference between the visual, literary, and performing arts is in the settings for the creation of the work. The performing arts are all about collaboration whereas the visual and literary arts often are practiced in a solitary state. It is easy to see how a writer would feel disconnected from the world, yet here again we see a contradiction even from Kuzmin's earlier

letter to Chicherin: “How strange more and more I am losing touch with life and everything for me is concentrated in but a few books, and all important concepts. And this does not oppress, but somehow cleansed me, and when I see people from the world, it seems we’re speaking a different language.” (Kuzmin, Bogomolov 24).

In 1903, Mikhail Kuzmin would present his first look as an adult to the world, that of an Old Russian Believer. At this time, he immersed himself in the study of early Russian culture and his costume personified this. “Costume” is a more appropriate term over clothing choice, because he was not dressing in the manner of other Russian citizens in this time period. He grew a long beard and wore a *poddneka*, a heavy and textured long coat, heavy peasant boots and a peaked hat. Kuzmin wanted to show his roots in Russia (Bogomolov 560). “An elegant master of stylization an affected marquis in life and in art and at the same time a genuine old believer, a man who loves the simplicity of the Russian countryside.” (Znosko-Borovsky, Bogomolov 9)

In 1906, Kuzmin’s look would change drastically as he was introduced to Diaghilev’s *World of Arts* circle by his new mentor, Walter Nouvel who would later replace Chicherin. Kuzmin questioned the modernity of his old believer’s garb and whether it would fit in with his new group of intellectual friends. Kuzmin needed a new image and needed to look no further than his admired and fashionable Oscar Wilde for inspiration; he would become a dandy. He felt that he had to develop this new look to reflect and to live up to his reputation as a serious writer in the contemporary world, especially with the events that took place in Russia in 1905. By October 1 of 1906, Kuzmin owned three hundred and sixty five ornate and colorful waistcoats/vests, became known for his fitted top coats especially in cherry red velvet and called himself the ‘Prince of Aesthetics’; his old look became just one more piece of history as he would never go back. Not only did Kuzmin alter his mode of dress, but he cut his hair in a

fashionable new length, shaved his face clean except for a jet black goatee, artfully applied rouge to his cheeks, and doused himself with heavy musky perfume, and allowed his friend Somov, occasional bed partner and respected painter, to place beauty marks that were originally chic during the 18th century to cover up blemishes all over his face (Bogomolov 121). “He glued a heart near my eye, a half-moon and star on my cheek, and a small phallus behind my ear” (Kuzmin, Journal June 21, 1906).

Kuzmin, like Evreinov, loved to pose and loved to be painted and represented for all of his splendor. Somov would paint Kuzmin many times during their friendship as did many other popular painters of the Silver Age of Russia. Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but by twenty-first century Western standards, neither Kuzmin nor Evreinov were attractive men. Kuzmin even called himself ugly. One has to wonder why they loved having their portraits made and why they would choose to accentuate their features with make-up.

Prior to Kuzmin’s new personal décor the following comments were made about men’s fashions: “Our clothes (referring to men’s) are the least aesthetic of all the clothes that I know and our fashions are hideously ugly” (Andrew Bely, Bogomolov 121). “The costume of the nineteenth century is detestable. It is so somber, so depressing. Sin is the only real color-element in modern life.” (Lord Henry Wotton, Bogomolov 121)

In his journal on December 8, 1909, Kuzmin gives another look into his likes and dislikes. This may appear to be a shallow entry, but it actually explains a great deal about what he thought and the types of subjects he wrote about. From this we can see that he loved objects that were complex and had history. He thought that flowers that had no fragrance were of little value as compared to those with fragrance.

I like pearls, garnets, opals, and such semi-precious stones as bull's eye, moonstone, and cat's eye. I love silver and unalloyed bronze and amber. I like roses, mimosa, narcissus, and stock. I don't like lilies of the valley, violets, and forget me knots. I don't like vegetation without flowers. I like to sleep nude under fur (Kuzmin, Bogomolov 130).

Mentors, Lovers, and Sex

While in his teens, Kuzmin met and became long-time friends with Georgy Chicherin who in 1918 would become Russia's first important diplomat. They met in St. Petersburg when they were attending the same gymnasium (Green, Selected Prose ix). Chicherin never admitted to being gay, but he was thought to be a non-practicing homosexual. Chicherin would be Kuzmin's confidant and mentor, until severing all ties with Kuzmin in 1918 with his political appointment. As homosexuality was to be considered a mental illness, it would not have been politically safe to have continued his relationship with Kuzmin or any of his homosexual friends. Chicherin and Kuzmin were never sexual partners, but Kuzmin did consider him to be his best friend up to the period of their estrangement. Chicherin did not approve of Kuzmin's homosexual lifestyle, many lovers, and many sexual partners who included soldiers, sailors, and artists, nor did he approve of Kuzmin's openly homo-erotic writings, but Chicherin was instrumental in getting the fragile Kuzmin through his early years as a struggling artist (Bailey 17).

In 1904-05, only a few members of Diaghilev's world of art had ever heard of Mikhail Kuzmin. His transition to become a member of the most creative circles of the day was made

possible when Walter Nouvel, who attended law school with Diaghilev, brought him into the group. Nouvel was openly homosexual. Thanks to Nouvel, Kuzmin found people who valued his writing as well as supported his lifestyle. Kuzmin did not become the best of friends with Diaghilev, but Diaghilev did consider Kuzmin to be one of the influential modern Russian writers. They did, however, spend quite a bit of time together in the fall and winter of 1907 and there were rumors flying that the pair had become lovers. Diaghilev did make advances towards Kuzmin, but the actions were not reciprocated because Kuzmin was not attracted to Diaghilev. Kuzmin's sexual activities were rampant at times, but only when he had an aesthetic interest. As Chicherin supported Kuzmin through his beginnings, Nouvel would remain his confidant and mentor during his most successful and then lean years (Bogomolov 80-93). "Kuzmin's new awareness and assertiveness of articulate groups of gay men such as Nouvel, Somov, and Diaghilev could only have acted as reinforcement for his own coming out and emboldened him to give literary voice to an emerging homosexual identity" (Bogomolov 80).

Kuzmin defined himself by his sexuality, and because of this it appeared that he was always in a relationship or was having sex. Kuzmin had affairs with typical male 'pinups' of the day, but never picked his lovers because of the social class or level of intellect. He was mostly attracted to younger men because he was only interested in what he found to be aesthetically pleasing. He was not attracted to effeminate men, but virile types, so he had a penchant for soldiers and attendants (Bogomolov 145-154). Kuzmin also had brief affairs with painter Somov and writer Sergey Sudeikin as well as with Viacheslav Ivanov. He would remain friends with Somov and Sudeikin, but would break off his friendship with Ivanov because Ivanov wanted Kuzmin to marry his step daughter when she became pregnant with Ivanov's child (Green, Selected Prose XX).

Aside from a multitude of affairs, Mikhail Kuzmin had four major relationships, with his final partnership lasting for twenty five years. Three of the four were bisexuals. At the age of eighteen, Kuzmin met his first great love in 1893 when he fell deeply for an officer in the Calgary regime. Kuzmin never gave the name of this man, but called him ‘Prince George.’ Kuzmin experienced deep emotional trauma with this relationship because at this time he was dealing with his sexual orientation. In 1894, he attempted suicide because he was in love with a man and this was in conflict with his religious beliefs. He woke his mother from a deep sleep to inform her of what he had attempted. She called the doctor, and he was rushed to the hospital where he was forced to vomit up the poison, prussic acid in laurel water. Kuzmin would then travel to Egypt, Constantinople, Athens, Alexandria, Cairo, and Memphis on vacation for healing purposes had a much easier time having an affair with a man away from his homeland. This trip lasted two months and would influence Kuzmin’s writing of *Alexandrian Songs* ten years after the journey. While taking time away from their travels together, George, visiting his Aunt in Vienna, would die of a heart attack (Bailey 19). Early in 1907, Kuzmin would cruise the parks with his friends Somov and Nouvel. In the summer of 1907, Kuzmin had a stormy affair with Pavel Maslov, a young army officer who Kuzmin’s friends considered to be a ‘professional.’ Kuzmin was not interested in what his friends thought of his sexual encounters. Kuzmin was so much infatuated with Malsov that he wrote twelve poems professing his love in a collection called *The Love of this Summer* which would open his book of verse *Nets*, published in 1908 (Bogomolov 106-108). In 1910, Kuzmin would meet his next great love, Vsevold Knyanez, an army officer who was also a writer and bisexual. To complicate the situation, Knyanez was in love with actress Olga Glebova-Sudeikina. Knyanez was in love with both, yet wrote much of his poetry about his affection for Kuzmin. Knyanez’s father took it upon himself to censor the

writing by removing all masculine pronouns from the text so that the readers would not know that his son had a male lover. Knyanez was so conflicted with his sexual identity that he committed suicide in 1913 (Green, *Selected Prose* xx). Yury Yurkin was only seventeen years old when he and Kuzmin became lovers in 1913. Kuzmin was thirty-eight years old. In 1915, the couple would move in together and in 1921, Yurkin would fall in love with and marry Olga Arbenina. For a short time, Yurkin would move out, but then would return to Kuzmin's apartment with his new wife and his mother. If we believe in karma, Kuzmin would ultimately receive his revenge on Yurkin. Kuzmin had many journal entries about his life with Yurkin; the journals were made public, and because of article 121, Yurkin was arrested in 1934 and then shot, execution-style for his homosexual behavior. What a dramatic way to end their twenty-five year relationship (Bailey 22)! Throughout his life, Kuzmin did have many mentors, lovers, and sexual partners, but he was looking for more than just a lover, as he was looking for someone to share his creative ideas.

Views on Politics

Kuzmin was a walking, breathing, and writing contradiction, especially when it came to politics. By his own admission, he claimed to be apolitical, yet his actions and writings found in his diaries as well as his work show quite the contrary. Perhaps when one is writing in his private journal, he notes whatever is on his mind at the time and has no intention for his private thoughts to be released to the public.

Kuzmin's own play, *The Death of Nero*, was clearly political as it was based on the politics of Rome's first century empire. The play is about a Russian writer, Pavel Lukin, who is visiting Rome in 1919 and is writing a play about Nero and is paralleling the life of an artist with

that of an emperor or hero. He looks at Nero and the artist as they rise to power and explores the dangers of a socialist society as each travels from poverty to wealth. This play is about utopian dreams and cannot be viewed as apolitical (Kalb 164).

When speaking about who was in power in Russia, one of Kuzmin's friends, Erikh Gollerbakh said that Kuzmin had stated that it was all the same to him who was at the top; it could be a horse for all he cared. Kuzmin may have claimed to have chosen not to be political, yet he did have his opinions. In his diaries in the beginning of 1905, he did not mention politics as his entries were about his work, readings, and conversations that he had with his friends. By August of 1905, in a letter addressed to Chicherin, we see a change in that he is more concerned about social issues. In this letter, Kuzmin considered politics an interruption and as an act of barbarism. He thought that politics stood in the way of the creative process and wanted to expound his energy on the work, not on political climates. To continue the contradiction, in November of 1905, Kuzmin would join a group called the Black Hundreds, a union of right wing, anti-Semites who asked its members to be orthodox Christians and patriots. He did join the group, but did not participate in their activities. Kuzmin thought that Jews were radical and liberal and the cause for the revolution. How could Kuzmin make this statement and not consider himself political? In his journal entry on December 2, 1905 Kuzmin wrote: "Revolutionaries were cursed and yids and those insolent types that act like them, traitors, and villains are destroying Russia" (Kuzmin, Kalb 166).

1917 marked new political thought for Kuzmin. In the spring of this year, he joined the new union of Art Workers and was elected to their executive committee with Blok, Marakovski, and Punin. Additionally in the same year, along with Marakovski, and Meyerhold, he joined the Freedom of Art Group which rejected any power that political conservatives would have over the

world of art. In 1917, he supported the Bolsheviks and even considered himself one of them. The irony here is that the Bolsheviks were liberal and yet in 1905, Kuzmin considered Jews liberal and radical. How can this be and especially from someone who considered himself not interested in politics? By 1918, we see another turn, as Kuzmin was no longer interested in the Bolsheviks or the revolution. He said that his comrades were acting like Attila the Hun which takes us back to his pre-August 1905 concepts. We may conclude that Kuzmin's on again, off again political view point was sparked by the arrest of his lover, Yurkin in 1918 by the Red Party and by the execution of his homosexual poet friend, Nikolai Gumilev in 1921 (Kalb 167-168).

Kuzmin Epilogue

Mikhail Kuzmin was a remarkable mix of strength and frailty. If we could ask him today, he would say that he was a weak person with suicidal tendencies; he would say that his career was successful because of the friends he met along the way, he would say that his writings were about the people in his life; he would say that his relationships allowed him to be a whole person; he would say that he needed to be loved and valued and that he wanted to share his artistic innermost thoughts with someone, that he was afraid to be alone. I do not think that Kuzmin really knew how strong he was, for he lived in a very difficult time when the identity of being a homosexual was constantly being challenged and in a time when one's safety was constantly unknown. He lived in a time when one day, one's sexual orientation was acceptable, then another labeled as a mental illness, and then later as a criminal offense. It must have been like growing up wealthy, having all at one's fingertips, only experiencing the best things in life and then becoming a homeless person. It must have been extremely difficult. Kuzmin lived in a

time when so many of his lovers were coerced into heterosexual marriage out of fear. Kuzmin was strong because he accepted his sexuality whole heartedly. He knew who he was and what was important to him. He never gave in and he never stopped being an artist, not for anything. He presented an anthem to all homosexual men of future generations.

Conclusion and Afterthoughts

The question and there should always be a question, is what did I gain from this paper and what could possibly be next? I have gained so many things and am not sure of what is next, but I hope that I will have the energy, venue, and unfailing curiosity to continue in my research. Ironically at the beginning of my education for this master's degree, I took historiography and at the time did not know the meaning of the word and actually did not look to my future when beginning this process, only knew that I wanted to explore something that I knew little to nothing about, Theatre History. One of the problems with learning about history in any arena is looking at who wrote it, when it was written, and whether the author had a personal agenda. With this in mind, I began to look at the lives of three influential men who were at their most creative during the Silver Age of Russia. Interestingly enough, I had previously looked at Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* which gave me only a glimpse into the artists that I would later encounter and began to look at the life of Evreinov without any knowledge at all about what was happening politically in Russia at this volatile time, and yet naively wrote anyway. I know a great deal more now, but with this knowledge, have the understanding that I have only begun my process, which is both exciting and terrifying.

When researching Evreinov, Diaghilev, and Kuzmin, I had to look at each of them for their personal aesthetics, lives, and achievements and had to honestly look at my thoughts and conclusions about them through the lenses from whom I gathered my information. Each was very different, for the information came from a variety of sources with various writing styles and points of view.

Evreinov, I felt, was the easiest to uncover, because he was such a Renaissance Man and a lovely writer. I think that I learned the most about who he was because of his plays, how they were written and how they were centered around a genuine love. I identified with his theories, particularly those of theatricality, the theatre in life, and theatre in nature. I learned about him through his writings. I believe that to him, his art was everything and that he never stopped working. He was controversial mainly because he formed his opinions and some of them were actually similar to those of Meyerhold, (whom he did not admire coincidentally), yet for some reason he stood by his convictions. Evreinov must have been quite a character in that he loved to play, he loved to create, and thankfully, he loved to pose. The one avenue that I was not able to get any insight into was his sex life. Yes, he was married to a woman, but in the time period in which he lived, his marriage perhaps allowed him to experiment sexually without any incrimination. In 1979, Evreinov's wife held a retrospective of his work in Paris and in interviews, said that her husband was eccentric and not of everyone's taste, but that she loved, respected, and accepted him for exactly who he was. She must have been quite a remarkable woman. My personal conclusion, is that Evreinov did not define himself by his sexuality, whatever sexual orientation he may have chosen, but he defined himself by his life as an artist, a consummate artist. It could have been that Evreinov was not a sexual person, that he had no taste or time for it and that his wife was more of a companion and confidante than a sexual partner. I believe that the possibilities for relationships are endless.

I found Diaghilev to be so much more about what he had to contribute to the world than who he was as an individual as can be defined by his own statement: "I am not interesting to anyone, but my work is. Ask me about that, and I will tell you as much as you would like" (Diaghilev). Diaghilev, like the other two men, really did not like school, and I think all for the

same reason. I think that each of these men knew what he wanted to do at a young age and actually each was perfectly capable of training himself. Diaghilev's instructors felt that he was superior to anything that they could have given him. Each of these men did poorly in school not because they were not smart, but because they were bored with the status quo. Artists have a special way of doing things and they need to find their own way. Diaghilev was basically a country boy who just happened to be wealthy. When his cousin Filosofov introduced him to the World of Art circle, who were all cultured, Diaghilev would find himself having to catch up especially if he were to lead this group of newly found friends. Diaghilev brought the world to Russia and presented Russian culture to the world; he perhaps saved ballet from becoming extinct and through his artistic friends changed visual aesthetics of all that was art. Diaghilev made careers. He perhaps has given more to the art world than any other man in history, yet the tragedy of his life was his affinity for lovers who would betray him for a heterosexual relationship. Unlike Kuzmin, Diaghilev was discreet about his sexual orientation at least until he left Russia to work his magic with the Ballet Russes. The tabloid-type information that I found while looking at Kuzmin was not on the table when I was trying to discover Diaghilev. I was very excited to find a book co-written by Haskell and to my great surprise Walter Nouvel, member of *The World of Art*, and a good friend to Diaghilev as well as to Kuzmin. Nouvel had introduced Kuzmin to Diaghilev. I was expecting to gain insight and perhaps some dirt on Diaghilev, but it just was not there. The writing was very discreet for which I can gather two things: the writing style in 1935 when this book was written and that Nouvel had a great respect for Diaghilev and his privacy.

Kuzmin was difficult as that even his friends said that he never truly presented who he was. If his friends did not know him, then what chance did I have? One of the difficulties that I

encountered was that the facts (or I thought that they were facts), changed within my research which totally proved to me that one cannot and should not believe everything that one reads. Even the date of his birth was up for discussion and I found that one respected scholar had confused the name of his father. The date of the research was also important because some of Kuzmin's journals were released at various times and after some of my research had been written. I also experienced this with Evreinov due to the 1979 retrospective which brought additional information to the forefront. My process was to read as much as possible, take handwritten notes, type my notes, organize my thoughts and then write, but when looking over my notes, I would get lost because of conflicting data. Even the city where he spent most of his life would change her name four times over the course of my research and until looking separately at the history of the name, I found myself confused as to the exact location of each event or experience. Kuzmin's sexual identity was as important to him as was his life's work which put his documentation in various journalistic formats as I found some of the research to appear more tabloid gossip than what may have really occurred. While reading at first, it appeared that Kuzmin was interested in love and monogamous relationships, but with additional research, it looked as if he were the stereotypical homosexual man with a tremendous appetite for sex, and who enjoyed the hunt, and actually would cruise the parks with his friends Nouvel and Somov for men whom he found aesthetically pleasing. Kuzmin may have had a sexual addiction. I think that Kuzmin sold himself short and did not realize how strong he was, living in the time and place that he did. As *The Crooked Mirror* invites us to look at our reflection to see clearly, I wonder if Kuzmin ever saw who he truly was. Kuzmin's greatest contribution may have been his novella, *Wings*, which provided an anthem for gay men to accept their sexual identity. Learning about Kuzmin forces me to look at my sexual identity and the perceptions and

discriminations that exist in the United States in 2009 against homosexuality. On the flip side to what Kuzmin contributed to the gay male culture, his journals were directly responsible for the outing of his gay companions and friends who were assassinated during the terror that was Stalin's reign. It is sad to say that Kuzmin was lucky enough to die from emphysema rather than by a firing squad.

So what is next? I would like to continue learning more about each of these men, but I would also like to have a greater understanding of Russian history. I want to know what life was like for people who were not artists during the Silver Age for I have looked only at the creative sides of three artists, but what about what was going on just outside of the studios, theatres, and offices? I would like to perhaps explore what homosexual women were experiencing during this time or if they were even recognized by society and what their contributions were. What voices did they have? I would like to also begin to look at each member of the World of Arts Group. I am fascinated with connections between people and in this case in how artists related to each other. When gazing into the Silver Age of Russia, I am excited by the idea that artists explored more than one medium which is so much the opposite of what is considered valuable today. I find that I relate to each of these artists, not so much because of their sexual preferences, but because they just wanted to live in their artistic world as do I, that they were not concerned with their wealth, and that they presented themselves aesthetically to represent who they were or who they felt they needed to be.

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Vita

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