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Embodying Spanishness in Latvian Ballet (1923–1941): Exoticism, Identity, and Propaganda

Spāņu ietekme latviešu baletā (1923–1941): eksotika, identitāte un propaganda

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Summary

Spanishness, the imagined perception of Spain, played a major role in interwar Latvian ballet. We located forty-five Spanish-themed ballets, *divertissements*, and concert miniatures performed between 1923 and 1941. Dancing bodies act as cross-cultural archives that enable us to comprehend the identities projected through inherited gestures. This article proposes that Spanishness, perceived as an exotic and distant Other, may have enhanced the identity of the pre-war Republic of Latvia. We examined the ballets *Paquita*, *Jota Aragonesa*, *Don Quixote*, *Boléro*, and *Laurencia* through primary visual sources supported by Latvian press data. These case studies depicted a polyhedric image of Spain firmly based on Andalusian archetypes, intertwined with Orientalist motifs, and the *jota* of Aragon. Spanishness can be seen as an integral aspect of the multicultural manifestation of Latvian interwar society. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 marked a turning point that increased interest in this multilayered mirror. In late 1930s with increasing political and military pressure of the Soviet Union, Spanishness evolved into a soft power strategy and, ultimately, became a Soviet propaganda tool.

Kopsavilkums

Spāniskumam jeb iedomātajam Spānijas tēlam starpkaru periodā bija liela ietekme uz Latvijas baletu. No 1923. līdz 1941. gadam atradās 45 spāņu tematikai veltīti baleti, fragmenti un koncertminiāturās. Dejotāju ķermeņi var uzskatīt par starpkultūru "arhīvu": tas palīdz izprast idejas un identitātes, kuras projicējas kā noteikti žesti. Šajā rakstā izteikts pieņēmums, ka spāniskums, kas tika uztverts kā eksotisks un tāls "citādaiss", varēja veicināt pirmskara Latvijas Republikas identitātes veidošanos. Baleti *Pahita*, *Aragonas jota*, *Dons Kihots*, *Bolero* un *Laurensija* pētīti, izmantojot vizuālos pirmavotus, kā arī Latvijas preses materiālus. Šajos baletos daudzšķautņains Spānijas tēls veidots, stingri balstoties uz Andalūzijas arhetipiem, kas savijušies ar orientālisma motīviem un Aragonas hotu. Spāniskumu var uzskatīt par starpkaru Latvijas multikulturālās sabiedrības neatņemamu izpausmi. Spānijas pilsoņu kara sākums 1936. gadā iezīmēja pagrieziena punktu, pēc kura pastiprinājās interese par šo daudzveidīgo "spoguļi". 30. gadu beigās, sakarā ar Padomju Savienības politiskā un militārā spiediena palielināšanos, spāniskums transformējās par "maigās varas" stratēģiju un galu galā izvērtās par padomju propagandas ieroci.

Introduction

On December 1, 1922, the Latvian National Ballet performed *La Fille mal gardée* for the first time. This performance marked the beginning of Latvian ballet (Bite 2002: 34; Bāliņa 2018: 482). Or, at least, this has been the mainstream notion. In this article, we believe that the trajectory of ballet in Riga is richer than its literature has portrayed so far. Between 1922 and 1941 there were five ballet masters. Nikolai Sergeyev, the former Russian *régisseur* of the Imperial Ballet, became its first director. During his time in Saint Petersburg, Sergeyev annotated the choreography of dozens of Marius Petipa's ballets using the Stepanov system (Fullington and Smith 2024: 7-15). Sergeyev fled Russia with these choreographic notations in the wake of the 1917 Revolution. In 1921, the impresario Sergei Diaghilev invited him to stage a revival of *The Sleeping Beauty* for his Ballets Russes in London (Garafola 1989: 124).¹ There he met Latvian dancer Voldemārs Komisārs whom he invited to Riga (Bite 2002: 25).²

Nevertheless Ēriks Tivums considered that Aleksandra Feodorova-Fokina,³ Mikhail Fokine's sister-in-law,⁴ became the actual "founder of Latvian ballet" (Tivums 2000: 192).⁵ During one of her last interviews for *Dance Magazine*, she declared that "[w]e started with 11 dancers and in 3 or 4 years, we had 120 on stage" (Horosko and Fedorova 1971: 28). Between 1925 and 1932, Feodorova-Fokina staged 22 productions that had been previously premiered mainly in Saint Petersburg and Paris (Preciado-Azanza 2022a: 304-305). Not only she had been a soloist with the Imperial Ballet for 18 seasons (Horosko and Fedorova 1971: 24) but also she had been part of Diaghilev's breakthrough ballet season in the French capital.⁶ Anatolii Viltzak, a prominent Lithuanian principal dancer of the Imperial Ballet as well as Diaghilev and

1 The production *Sleeping Princess* had additional choreography by Bronisława Niżyńska.

2 Before joining Diaghilev, Komisārs was a ballet master of the Latvian opera (Bite, 2002: 21-25), a precursor of the Latvian National Opera (Čeže 2000: 278).

3 In this article, we use her name as displayed on her calling cards in Riga and Kaunas. Later, her ballet studio in New York bore the name Alexandra Fedorova Fokine (NYPL *MGZMD 110).

4 Feodorova-Fokina married Alexandre, Mikhail's older brother, who founded the *Troitsky* theatre of miniatures in 1911 (Suquet 2012: 231).

5 [Ī]sto latviešu baleta dibinātāju.

6 On May 18, 1909, Feodorova-Fokina performed *Le Pavillon d'Armide* at the Théâtre du Châtelet alongside Mikhail Mordkin, Tamara Karsavina, and Wacław Niżyński (Garafola 1989: 383-384).

Ida Rubinstein's companies (Garafola 2004: 341),⁷ substituted Feodorova-Fokina at the helm. Even though his tenure lasted for merely a season, he introduced cutting edge ballets by Fokine and Léonide Massine to Latvian audiences.⁸ Afterwards, Mieczyslaw Pianowski, a Polish dancer and ballet master of Anna Pavlova's troupe (Jonīte 2019: 679), produced several one-act ballets that Ivan Clustine had choreographed for the Russian ballerina (Bite 2002: 95-98).⁹ In 1934, Osvalds Lēmanis became the first Latvian ballet master to lead the company. Despite the tumultuous years of World War II, Lēmanis continued to be at the forefront for a decade, until he passed the baton to Helēna Tangijeva-Birzniece (Bāliņa 2018: 483).

Latvian ballet has not yet been fully studied to comprehend its international relevance. The history of ballet in Riga constitutes a transnational cultural crossroads that can be traced back to, at least, the mid-19th century. On August 29, 1863, Riga's first professional theatre, the Stadt-Theater in Riga – Rīgas 1. pilsētas teātris –,¹⁰ moved to the new building designed by Ludwig Bohnstedt. It was renamed Rigaer Stadt-Theater (Čeže 2000: 278) and it played a key role for the heterogeneous Baltic German community (Spārītis 2000: 24).¹¹ The theatre has served as a venue for dynamic choreographic activity. Since its inception, there have been several female ballet masters, such as the French Jeanette Procher, Polish Elina Grinitzka, Italians Emilie Bellini and Adelle Fiori, German Helena Thiele-Leonhardt, and, most notably, Austrian Katti Lanner (Tivums 2000: 187). After working in the Baltic capital during the 1868/69 season, Lanner settled in London where she established herself as a

7 In 1921, Viltzak starred in Sergeyev's *Sleeping Princess*. After his time in Riga, he joined René Blum's Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo where he danced *Don Juan's* title role in 1936 (Garafola 2004: 341). Both Viltzak and Feodorova-Fokina emigrated later in the United States. Cuban ballerina Alicia Alonso expressed how relevant they were for her ballet education in New York (Alonso 2020: 445).

8 Such as *Petroushka*, *Pulcinella*, and *The Steel Step*. These productions were performed only four times (Štāls 1943: 51).

9 Clustine had been Paris Opera Ballet's director between 1911 and 1914 (Guest 2001: 319).

10 It was founded in 1782 by German philanthropist Otto von Vietinghoff-Scheel. Elias Vogt was the first ballet master of the troupe (Bāliņa 2018: 481). Among others, Louis Duport, Lola Montez, Julius Heisinger, Marius Petipa, Nadezhda Bogdanova, Katti Lanner, and Lucile Grahn performed in this theatre (Tivums 2000: 186-187).

11 It was considered the German theatre. Rīgas 2. Pilsētas teātris – currently, the Latvian National Theatre – hosted numerous performances of Russian dancers, such as Anna Pavlova and Jekaterina Geltzer (Tivums 2000: 187). In addition, Stadt-Theater in Riga can be considered a socio-political thermometer. It had eight different appellatives between 1914 and 1919 (Čeže 2000: 278).

prominent figure within the Empire Ballet (Guest 1992: 93–101). It seems that Riga contributed to the shaping of Europe’s cosmopolitan culture (Figs 2019),¹² as well as international ballet history. It is a history of migration (Jonite 2019), a multilayered diaspora that goes beyond prevailing histories that barely acknowledge Russian influence.

Such cross-culturalism can also be seen on stage. This text addresses the impact of Spanish-themed choreographies. Manuel Lucena Giraldo points out that “[t]he national image is a cultural construction which makes a collective identity through reading of signs into an existed narrative” (Lucena Giraldo 2006: 219). Spanishness has been constructed as a mixture of cultural stereotypes,¹³ often associated with the pejorative Black Legend.¹⁴ This imagined Spain contributed to the creation of characters such as bullfighters, bandits, and *manolas* (a woman from Madrid’s lower classes).¹⁵ These portrayals showcased mostly an oriental depiction based on Andalusian archetypes that strongly relied on the country’s extensive Muslim heritage. Riga’s audiences became acquainted with this imagery during the 19th century. On March 5, 1863, Marius Petipa and his wife, Marie, performed the ballet *La Perle de Seville* at the Stadt-Theater in Riga (ULL R6790/63).¹⁶

Spanishness has shaped the Latvian ballet repertoire for years. Between 1868

12 Figs (2019: 39–47) considers the emergence of a cosmopolitan culture as a result of the increasing number of transnational train lines. Between 1837 and 1839, Richard Wagner worked as a conductor of the Stadt-Theater in Riga.

13 In this article, we follow Homi Bhabha’s interpretation of a stereotype as “what is always in place, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (Bhabha 1994: 66).

14 This term, defined by Julián Juderías in the early 20th century, encompasses the stereotypes that were once used, mainly by Europeans, to counteract the rise of power of the Spanish Empire in the 16th century. Spaniards were perceived as a barbaric, cruel, despotic, and religious Other (Lucena Giraldo 2006: 220–224).

15 Spanishness must not be confused with the colonial term Hispanic. In Spanish, the word *hispánico* not only includes people from Spain, but also different cultures that were once conquered by the Spanish Empire. In English, Hispanic often tends to be used as a synonym for Spanish culture. This misunderstanding seems to be related to the fact that in Spanish, another word (*hispano*), functions with analogous purposes. During the Roman Empire, the Iberian Peninsula was known as Hispania. Thus, we believe that the term *hispano* reflects more accurately what Spanish culture encompasses.

16 Petipa choreographed this ballet in 1844 while he was a principal dancer and choreographer of the Teatro del Circo in Madrid (Hormigón 2010: 416).

and 1869, Lanner choreographed the miniatures *La Mancha*,¹⁷ *Pas de Tambour de Basque*,¹⁸ *La Sevillana*,¹⁹ *La Gallegada*,²⁰ and *Los Toreadores* for Rigaer Stadt-Theater's ballet troupe.²¹ Spanish-themed choreographies flourished in the 20th century. The Latvian National Ballet and Liepāja's professional ballet company performed productions of *Paquita* (1923, 1929, 1974, 1989), *Jota Aragonesa* (1930), *Don Quixote* (1931, 1932, 1936, 1941, 1945, 1960, 1982), *Bólero* (1936, 1942, 1958, 1983), *Capriccio espagnol* (1937), *Laurencia* (1941, 1949), *Rapsodie espagnole* (1961), *The Gold of the Incas* (1969), *Carmen* (1971), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1987), *Guernica* (1990), and *Don Juan* (1997) (Bāliņa 2018: 487-574; Zvirgzdiņš 2018: 338-361). This list would be endless if we were also to include the large number of Spanish-themed *divertissements* that can be found in *Swan Lake*, *Coppélia*, *Raymonda*, *Nutcracker*, and *Scaramouche*, among others.

This article focuses on the period of the interwar Republic of Latvia. Dace Ļaviņa highlights that "[i]nterpretations of passionate Spanish emotions were very popular in the 1920s" (Ļaviņa 2019: 133). The magazine *Atpūta* showed how deeply Spanishness had permeated Latvian art and society. In a previous study, we located 115 references covering a wide range of topics. In terms of news published about Spain and its inhabitants, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War as well as the picturesque portrayals of Andalusian clothing, the Carnival, and the *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) often appeared in Emīlija Benjamiņa's publication (Preciado-Azanza 2022b: 89-90). This magazine also reproduced several Spanish-themed international artworks, whose stereotypes highly influenced several Latvian artists (Preciado-Azanza 2022b: 91-92), such as Gustavs Šķilters, Kārlis Brencēns, Jazeps Grosvalds, Aleksandra Beļcova, Oto Skulme, and Sigismunds Vidbergs.²² Aija Zandersone and

17 On August 18, 1868 (ULL R6815/147).

18 On October 13, 1868 (ULL R6815/202).

19 On November 3, 1868 (ULL R6815/223).

20 On November 10, 1868 (ULL R6815/230).

21 On February 20, 1869 (ULL R6816/53).

22 Šķilters became one of the first Latvian artists to visit Spain. Not only did he meet his friend, Oleguer Junyent, but also became profoundly inspired by this country. Between 1902 and 1908, Šķilters produced numerous watercolours – *Spānietis*, *Skats Kordovā*, *Pilsētas vārti Burgosā*, *Pilsdrupas Spānijā*, and *Alambras muri, Granadā* – and the pastel *Spāniešu dejotāja* (1908) (Zandersone and Kalnača 2024: 160-161; 187). Brencēns portrayed Hermenegildo Anglada Camarasa and Ignacio Zuloaga, whom he met in Paris. Later on, he became acquainted with Antonio Gaudí during a trip to Spain (Zandersone and Kalnača 2024: 166; 188). Particularly interesting is Grosvalds's sketch-

Ieva Kalnača emphasize “how closely the worlds of [the] young Latvian and Spanish artist were intertwined” (Zandersone and Kalnača 2024: 176) The vibrant performing arts scene in Riga showcased this notable connection. The multiple Spanish-themed opera, ballet, and theatre productions displayed by *Atpūta* – *Carmen*, *Fidelio*, *Don Juan*, *Paquita*, *Ernani*, *Fuenteovejuna*, *Don Carlos*, *Il trovatore*, *The Star of Seville*, *Don Quixote*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Jota Aragonesa*, *Boléro*, and *The Marriage of Figaro* – depicted bullfighters, shawls, fans, guitars, and especially *manolas* (Preciado-Azanza 2022b: 93-98). Spain was perceived as an exotic and distant Other in Latvian society.

Spain and Latvia are located on the outer edge of Europe. This geographical location caused both countries to be considered to be on the periphery. Both Spain and Latvia have often undergone a process of Orientalization. Edward Said explored how the difference between cultures was conceived “first, as creating a battlefield that separates them, and second, as inviting the West to control, contain, and otherwise govern [...] the Other” (Said 1979: 47-48). A clear example is when Napoleon invaded Spain and Russia. The French writer Louis Viardot compared the similarities between the impact of the Muslims in Spain and the Mongols in Russia: “[The] Orient has entered Europe from its two extremes” (Viardot 1846: 86). In other words, the people of Spain and Russia were considered barbaric, savage, and uncivilized (Figes 2019: 36). However, despite being situated on the continent’s margins, both countries shared cultural ties.

The Baltic and the Mediterranean regions are connected by a mutual interest in their cultures and imageries. Alison Sinclair has analyzed “the vision of Russia as the primitive, erotic and erotic (br)other of Spain” in the early 20th century (Sinclair 2004: 214). Even though Spain recognized the independence of Latvia on March, 23 1921 (AHN H 1637/Exp. 4),²³ the image of Latvia often intermingled with the perception of Russia. Particularly striking is the vision of Spanish politician Rodrigo Soriano. Not

book *Spānija* (1913), which included several landscapes from Seville, Córdoba, Castile, Toledo, and Segovia (Zandersone and Kalnača 2024: 189-191). After visiting a small Spanish town near the border with France, Beļcova created the large-format plate *Korīda/Spānijas motīvi* in 1926 (Ļaviņa 2019: 133), while four years later she authored the canvas *Spāniete* (Jevsejeva 2019: 175). In 1929, *Atpūta* published a Spanish-themed drawing by Skulme (Preciado-Azanza 2022b: 94). Beatrise Vignere’s students inspired the graphic work *Spaņu deja* by Vidbergs (Bērzina 2015: 68), who also designed the vase *Dejotāja* (c. 1929–1939) reminiscent of a female Spanish dancer.

23 A few months earlier, Spanish journalist Enrique Domínguez Rodiño discovered the tomb of renowned Spanish writer Ángel Ganivet, who committed suicide in the Daugava River in November 1898 when he was the Spanish Consul in Riga. Domínguez Rodiño published three influential articles in the Spanish newspaper *El imparcial*, which contributed to the repatriation of Ganivet’s body (Preciado-Azanza 2022a: 309). We believe that the impact of this discovery on Spanish society prompted recognition of the Latvian state.

only did he compare Riga with Galicia (Sinclair 2004: 208),²⁴ but he also portrayed his vision of Latvian women. In *San Lénin (Viaje a Rusia)* (1927), one of the most influential Spanish travel books about Russia in the 1920s (Sinclair 2004: 211), Soriano declared that “[b]eautiful Latvian women of one’s dreams, in the pallid Northern light that shrouds them in whiteness, enter the sea like marble statues or ivory figures from an ancient museum” (Soriano 1927: 35).²⁵ Simultaneously, in Latvia, the perception of Spanish women was based on Carmen (Preciado-Azanza 2022b: 100).

In this text, we believe that Spain and Latvia share an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983),²⁶ that can be traced through dance. Dancing bodies act as cross-cultural archives that enable us to comprehend identities projected by inherited gestures,²⁷ that is, by means of the “gestural imaginary” (Ruprecht 2019). This research is based on the hypothesis that Spanishness, perceived as the Other, may have enhanced the identity of the prewar Republic of Latvia. Therefore, “Spain [might have been] used as a facade (Meglin 1994: 269), an imagined mirror that projects the issues facing society. Joellen A. Meglin analyzed the influence of Spanish dance on French society. We believe that such a perspective can also be used in the Latvian context.

Indeed, Tivums noted that “Latvian ballet [fell] in love with Spanish dances and Spanish passions for many years” (Tivums 2000: 194).²⁸ Despite such a significant role, there have been no in-depth studies. In the pioneering *Latviešu balets* (1943), Štals briefly covered early Latvian ballet productions. After the hiatus of Soviet stagnation, Bite (2002) broadened this outlook by including numerous reviews in her noteworthy *Latvijas balets*. Bāliņa (2018) provided relevant updated data in *Latvijas baleta un dejas enciklopēdija*, while Zvirgzdiņš (2018) compiled an exhaustive chronicle of choreographic productions in *No skices līdz izrādei*. Spanish-themed ballets were influenced by the Ballets Russes’ *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Thus, prominent Latvian artists oversaw their designs. Jevsejeva (2024), Tišheizere (2024), and Vanaga (2014)

24 Galicia is a northern region in Spain. Soriano portrayed these similarities in *La bomba* (1932).

25 Las bellas letonas del ensueño, a la lívida luz del Norte que las amortaja en blancuras, entran en el mar cual marmóreas estatuas o marfilinas esculturas de museo antiguo.

26 In this article, we follow Beatriz Martínez del Fresno’s interpretation of Benedict Anderson’s term as a transversal concept that does not necessarily need to coincide with the prevailing borders of nation-states (Martínez del Fresno, 2016: 50). By doing so, we can connect geographically distant communities, such as Spain and Latvia.

27 This perspective was introduced by Lepecki (2010).

28 Latviešu balets uz ilgiem gadiem iemīlējās spāņu dejās un spāniskās kaislībās.

highlighted Ludolfs Liberts' work for *Jota Aragonesa*, Jevsejeva (2016) disclosed the reasons for Romans Suta's removal from *Don Quixote*, while Tišheizere (2021) studied Niklāvs Strunke's Spanish dancers' sketches for *Scaramouche*. In our previous works, we have conducted initial research to examine *Paquita*, *Jota Aragonesa*, and *Don Quixote* (Preciado-Azanza 2020, 2022a, 2023a), in addition to the relationship between dance and Latvian identity (Preciado-Azanza 2021). This article examines the image projected by Spanish-themed choreographies during the interwar Republic of Latvia.

We located 45 Spanish-themed ballets, *divertissements*, and concert miniatures performed between 1923 and 1941 (Table 1). All choreographies were danced in Riga, except for Liepaja Ballet's *Capriccio Espagnol*. Although the majority of the performances took place at the Latvian National Opera²⁹ we also located Spanish-themed choreographies at the Latvian National Theatre and on the premises of the Riga Latvian Society. Most miniatures were danced between 1936 and 1940. We believe that the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War might have boosted interest in Spanishness. Indeed, in the midst of World War II, Latvian dancer Marta Alberinga performed her repertoire of Spanish dances across Europe with the aid of the Blue Division (Brancis 2002: 104-105).³⁰ It is beyond the scope of this article to fully cover this broad panorama. Therefore this article proposes an initial framework for further research by analyzing five case studies – three full-length and two one act ballets – premiered in Riga: *Paquita*, *Jota Aragonesa*, *Don Quixote*, *Bólero*, and *Laurencia*.

This interdisciplinary research combines historical, social, and cultural analyses based on primary sources in Latvian, French, and American institutions. First, we elaborated a catalogue of Spanish-themed choreographies performed during the interwar Republic of Latvia (Table 1). Our data is based on the program notes held in the Museum of Literature and Music,³¹ the Latvian National Opera and Ballet

29 Not all the choreographies were danced by members of the Latvian National Ballet.

30 The Blue Division was a Spanish unit of Francoist volunteers serving in the Nazi Army.

31 RMM 227095; RMM 852251.

Archive,³² and the Latvian State Archive.³³ This information has been completed with existing literature: Štāls (1943), Tivums (2000), Brancis (2002), Bite (2002), Bāliņa (2018), and Zvirgzdiņš (2018). This preliminary task enabled the selection of the case studies and their primary sources. Our focus lies mainly on photographs as well as costume and set designs. Spanishness can not only be seen visually, but also choreographically. Therefore this study lies at the intersection of Art History and Dance Studies. In addition to applying iconological analysis (Panofsky 1955), we also included the corporeal semiotic approach (Forster 1986). Finally, our outcomes have been supported by Latvian press data. The reviews published by *Jaunākās Ziņas*, *Sociāldemokrāts*, *Aizkulisēs*, *Pēdējā Brīdī*, *Latvijas Kareivis*, along with *Cīņa* served as a thermometer to fully understand the constructed image of Spain in Latvian society.

Table 1. The author’s own graphical depiction of Spanish-themed Latvian ballets, *divertissements*, and concert miniatures performed during the interwar Republic of Latvia. 1923–1941.

	Choreo-graphic Work	Date of premiere	Typology	Theatre	Chore-ographer	Stage director	Composer	Libretto	Dancers (selection)	Designs
1	<i>Paquita</i>	1923: May 22	Full-length ballet	Latvian National Opera	Joseph Mazilier, Marius Petipa	Nikolai Sergeyev	Édouard Deldevez, Ludwig Minkus	Marius Petipa	Jelena Lukoma, Boris Savrov, Nikolai Sergeyev	Eduards Vītols
2	<i>Panaderos (Raymonda)</i>	1924: April 28	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Theatre	Marius Petipa	E. Sveķis	Alexandr Glazunov	-	Eiženija Sveķis, Harijs Plūcis	-
3	<i>Acts II and IV dances (Carmen)</i>	1924: December 17	Opera <i>divertissement</i>	Latvian National Opera	Nikolai Sergeyev	Pytor Melnikow	Georges Bizet	Georges Bizet	-	Ludolfs Liberts

32 Not all the programs that we have been able to locate are from the first performance of each production. Next, we specify each date. LNOB 483; LNOB 646 – *Carmen*: December 27, 1925 –; LNOB 641 – *Swan Lake*: May 9, 1926 –; LNOB 680 – *Coppélia*: October 12, 1926 –; LNOB 746 – *Raymonda*: April 28, 1927 –; LNOB 781 – *Nutcracker*: April 13, 1928 –; LNOB 855; LNOB 1114 – *Jota Aragonesa*: November 16, 1930 –; LNOB 1215 – even though we located the program notes of the premiere of *Don Quixote*, they have not been catalogued. Therefore the earliest performance we can document dates from November 12, 1931 –; LNOB 1678 – Lēmanis’s *Don Quixote*: February 18, 1936 –; LNOB 1805; LNOB 1990 – *The Song of the Desert*: September 22, 1936 –; LNOB 1895; LNOB 1981 – *Scaramouche*’s Spanish dance and *Boléro*: December 28, 1936 –; LNOB 2171 – *Clivia’s Pasodoble*: November 2, 1937 –; LNOB 108; LNOB 2042; LNOB 2275; LNOB 2396 – *Tobago’s* Spanish dance: February 4, 1939 –; LNOB 2771 – *Laurencia*: January 4, 1941 –.

33 LSA 2256/3.

4	<i>Spanish dance (Swan Lake)</i>	1926: March 30	Ballet <i>divertissement</i>	Latvian National Opera	Marius Petipa	Aleksandra Feodorova-Fokina	Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky	Vladimir Begichev	Sīra Jurgense, Klara Gentele, Georgs Brants, Eižens Leščevskis	Eduards Vītols
5	<i>Bolero (Coppélia)</i>	1926: May 20	Ballet <i>divertissement</i>	Latvian National Opera	Arthur Saint-Léon, Marius Petipa	Aleksandra Feodorova-Fokina	Léo Delibes	Charles Nutter, Arthur Saint-Léon	Aleksandra Feodorova-Fokina	Eduards Vītols
6	<i>Grand pas espagnol (Raymonda)</i>	1926: November 30	Ballet <i>divertissement</i>	Latvian National Opera	Marius Petipa	Aleksandra Feodorova-Fokina	Alexandr Glazunov	Lydia Pashkova	Melānija Lence, Georgs Brants	Eduards Vītols
7	<i>Spanish dance (Nutcracker)</i>	1928: April 4	Ballet <i>divertissement</i>	Latvian National Opera	Lev Ivanov	Aleksandra Feodorova-Fokina	Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky	Marius Petipa	Helēna Tangijeva-Birzniece, Georgs Brants	Ludolfs Liberts
8	<i>Grand pas classique (Paquita)</i>	1929: February 7	Ballet <i>divertissement</i>	Latvian National Opera	Marius Petipa	Aleksandra Feodorova-Fokina	Ludwig Minkus	Marius Petipa	Aleksandra Feodorova-Fokina, Lev Lvov	Eduards Vītols
9	<i>Jota Aragonesa</i>	1930: November 6	One-act ballet	Latvian National Opera	Mikhail Fokine	Aleksandra Feodorova-Fokina	Mikhail Glinka	-	Helēna Tangijeva-Birzniece, Osvalds Lēmanis	Ludolfs Liberts
10	<i>Don Quixote</i>	1931: October 30	Full-length ballet	Latvian National Opera	Marius Petipa, Alexander Gorsky, Fyodor Lopukhov	Aleksandra Feodorova-Fokina	Ludwig Minkus	Marius Petipa	Helēna Tangijeva-Birzniece, Osvalds Lēmanis	Sigismunds Vidbergs, Romans Suta (unofficial)
11	<i>Spanish dance (Swan Lake)</i>	1934: November 3	Ballet <i>divertissement</i>	Latvian National Opera	Marius Petipa	Osvalds Lēmanis	Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky	Marius Petipa	-	Eduards Vītols
12	<i>Two Spanish Impressions: Cadiz, Jota</i>	1935: December 1	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	Beatrise Vignere	Beatrise Vignere	Isaac Albéniz, Emmanuel Chabrier	-	Marta Alberinga, A. Priede	-
13	<i>Don Quixote</i>	1936: January 23	Full-length ballet	Latvian National Opera	Marius Petipa, Alexander Gorsky, Fyodor Lopukhov, Osvalds Lēmanis	Osvalds Lēmanis	Ludwig Minkus	Marius Petipa	Helēna Tangijeva-Birzniece, Osvalds Lēmanis	Sigismunds Vidbergs
14	<i>Pasosoble, Spanish group (The Desert Song)</i>	1936: September 19	Opera <i>divertissement</i>	Latvian National Opera	Eižens Leščevskis	Jānis Zariņš	Sigmund Romberg	Sigmund Romberg	Eižens Leščevskis	Pēteris Rožlapa
15	<i>Beggars</i>	1936: October 4	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	Osvalds Lēmanis	Osvalds Lēmanis	Manuel de Falla	-	Helēna Tangijeva-Birzniece, Osvalds Lēmanis	-

16	<i>Zambra</i>	1936: October 4	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	Dolores Moreno	Mirdza Griķe	Modesto Romero	-	Mirdza Griķe	-
17	<i>Spanish dance (Scar- amouche)</i>	1936: December 10	Ballet divertisse- ment	Latvian National Opera	Osvalds Lēmanis	Osvalds Lēmanis	Jean Sibelius	Osvalds Lēmanis	Tatjana Fokina, Tatjana Vestene, Karmena Burkeviča	Niklāvs Strunke
18	<i>Boléro</i>	1936: December 10	One-act ballet	Latvian National Opera	Osvalds Lēmanis	Osvalds Lēmanis	Maurice Ravel	Osvalds Lēmanis	Mirdza Griķe, Rūdolfs Saule	Pēteris Rožlapa
19	<i>Capriccio Espagnol</i>	1937: April 4	Full-length ballet	Latvian National Opera	Alberts Kozlovskis	Alberts Kozlovskis	Nikolai Rimsky- Korsakov	Alberts Kozlovskis	-	E. Gūtmanis
20	<i>Alegrias</i>	1937: March 9	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	-	Mirdza Griķe	-	-	Mirdza Griķe	-
21	<i>Spanish dance</i>	1937: March 9	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	-	Mirdza Griķe	-	-	Mirdza Griķe	-
22	<i>Male Variation (Don Quixote)</i>	1937: June 3	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	Marius Petipa, Alexander Gorsky, Fyodor Lopukhov, Osvalds Lēmanis	Osvalds Lēmanis	Ludwig Minkus	Marius Petipa	Jānis Grauds	Sigismunds Vidbergs
23	<i>Female Variation (Don Quixote)</i>	1937: June 3	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	Marius Petipa, Alexander Gorsky, Fyodor Lopukhov, Osvalds Lēmanis	Osvalds Lēmanis	Ludwig Minkus	Marius Petipa	F. Tracevska	Sigismunds Vidbergs
24	<i>Jota (Don Quixote)</i>	1937: June 3	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	Osvalds Lēmanis	Osvalds Lēmanis	Guerrero	Marius Petipa	Melānija Lence, Eižens Leščevskis	Sigismunds Vidbergs
25	<i>Flamenco (Don Quixote)</i>	1937: June 3	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	Osvalds Lēmanis	Osvalds Lēmanis	Massotti	Marius Petipa	Osvalds Lēmanis, Melānija Lence, O. Titovs	Sigismunds Vidbergs
26	<i>Pasodoble (Clivia)</i>	1937: October 30	Operetta <i>divertissement</i>	Latvian National Opera	Eižens Leščevskis	Jurijs de Būrs	Nico Dostal	Eižens Leščevskis	Jānis Grauds, Pauls Fibigs	Jānis Rozenbergs
27	<i>Seguidilla (The Last Waltz)</i>	1937: November 25	Ballet <i>divertissement</i>	Latvian National Opera	Eižens Leščevskis	Eižens Leščevskis	Johan Strauss, Josef Strauss, Eduard Strauss	Eižens Leščevskis	Mirdza Griķe	Pēteris Rožlapa
28	<i>Spanish dance</i>	1938: January 6	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	Victor Gzovski	Mirdza Griķe	Enrique Granados	-	Mirdza Griķe	-

29	<i>Serenade</i>	1938: January 6	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	Dolores Moreno	Mirdza Griķe	Isaac Albeniz	-	Mirdza Griķe	-
30	<i>Tonadilla</i>	1938: December 12	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	E. Moreno	Tatjana Vestene	Enrique Granados	-	Tatjana Vestene	Elf. Kainavārņa
31	<i>Intermezzo (Goyescas)</i>	1938: December 12	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	Dolores Moreno	Vera Ļiĥaĉeva	Enrique Granados	-	Vera Ļiĥaĉeva	M. Jakobi
32	<i>Gitana</i>	1938: December 12	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	Dolores Moreno	Vera Ļiĥaĉeva	Juan Mostazo	-	Vera Ļiĥaĉeva	-
33	<i>Jota</i>	1938: December 12	Concert Miniature	Latvian National Opera	Dolores Moreno	Vera Ļiĥaĉeva	Laveja	-	Vera Ļiĥaĉeva	-
34	<i>Spanish dance (Tobago)</i>	1939: February 2	Opera <i>divertissement</i>	Latvian National Opera	Osvalds Lēmanis	Jānis Zariņš	Mārtiņš Jansons	Mārtiņš Jansons, Aleksandrs Grīns	Helēna Tangiņeva- Birzniece, Klāra Gentele, Jānis Grauds, Pauls Fibigs	Pēteris Rožlāpa
35	<i>Moresca</i>	1939: February 27	Concert Miniature	-	Dolores Moreno	Edīte Pfeifere	-	-	Edīte Pfeifere	-
36	<i>Corrida</i>	1940: January 30	Concert Miniature	-	-	Mirdza Griķe	-	-	Mirdza Griķe	-
37	<i>Granada</i>	1940: February 12	Concert Miniature	Riga Latvian Society	Marta Alberinga	Marta Alberinga	Villaroso	-	Marta Alberinga	-
38	<i>Sevillana</i>	1940: February 12	Concert Miniature	Riga Latvian Society	Marta Alberinga	Marta Alberinga	Santis	-	Marta Alberinga	-
39	<i>Bulerías</i>	1940: February 12	Concert Miniature	Riga Latvian Society	Marta Alberinga	Marta Alberinga	Piervano	-	Marta Alberinga	-
40	<i>Asturiana</i>	1940: February 12	Concert Miniature	Riga Latvian Society	Marta Alberinga	Marta Alberinga	-	-	Marta Alberinga	-
41	<i>Seguidillas</i>	1940: February 12	Concert Miniature	Riga Latvian Society	Marta Alberinga	Marta Alberinga	-	-	Marta Alberinga	-
42	<i>Tango</i>	1940: February 12	Concert Miniature	Riga Latvian Society	Marta Alberinga	Marta Alberinga	Font	-	Marta Alberinga	-
43	<i>La Corrida</i>	1940: February 12	Concert Miniature	Riga Latvian Society	Marta Alberinga	Marta Alberinga	Quinito Valverde	-	Marta Alberinga	-
44	<i>Jota Aragonesa</i>	1940: February 12	Concert Miniature	Riga Latvian Society	Marta Alberinga	Marta Alberinga	Vicente Costa Nogueras	-	Marta Alberinga	-
45	<i>Laurencia</i>	1941: January 3	Full-length ballet	Latvian National Opera	Vakhtang Chabukiani	Osvalds Lēmanis	Aleksandr Krein	Vakhtang Chabukiani	Mirdza Griķe, Jānis Grauds, Osvalds Lēmanis	Pēteris Rožlāpa

***Paquita* (1923, 1929), a ballet inspired by the Sieges of Zaragoza**

Paquita initiated the path of Spanishness in Latvian ballet by introducing a theme, the Sieges of Zaragoza, which was fairly familiar to the audience in Riga. In 1908, Anna Pavlova included this ballet in the repertory of her first Northern European tour (Fullington and Smith 2024: 325). Riga was the first stop on this trip.³⁴ Both cities, Riga and Zaragoza, had experienced the invasion of Napoleon. The capital of the Governorate of Livonia was unsuccessfully occupied in 1812. However, the *Grand Armée* eventually conquered Zaragoza. Despite that its inhabitants initially resisted the French in 1808, this northern Spanish city surrendered after the second siege in 1809. Such iconic battle of the Peninsular War inspired numerous artists and writers across Europe. Goya became a pioneer with his prints *The Disasters of War*, while Victor Hugo and Leo Tolstoy included this episode in *Les Misérables* and *War and Peace*. Undoubtedly, Agustina, also known as *Maid of Saragossa*, symbolized the resistance of heroic female civilians (Lasa Álvarez 2020). It is most likely that *Paquita* was inspired by her courage.

This romantic two-act ballet opened on April 1, 1846, at Paris Opera's Salle Le Peletier. Joseph Mazilier choreographed this ballet with music by Édouard Deldevez. *Paquita* is set in Zaragoza under Napoleonic rule. Paquita (Carlotta Grisi), a young gypsy, falls in love with the hussar Lucien d'Hervilly (Lucien Petipa). Íñigo (Georges Élie), the gypsy leader, disapproves of the union and arranges a conspiracy with the governor of the province, Don López de Mendoza (Coralli), to assassinate the French officer (BNF MS-7166). *Paquita* was also known as *Empire* (Gautier 1846: 1). Its debut occurred only two years before Napoleon III came to power.³⁵ Thus, by extolling the French patriotic victory, this ballet may have played a significant role in the use of the imagery of the Sieges of Zaragoza as a political tool (Preciado-Azanza 2023b: 173). A year later, Marius Petipa restaged *Paquita* in Saint Petersburg. By then, Europe had been immersed in a cross-cultural exchange (Figes 2019) that enabled Budapest, Naples, Moscow, Munich, Hamburg, Milan, or Saint Petersburg to witness *Paquita* during the second half of the 19th century. In 1881, Petipa choreographed a new version with musical additions by Ludwig Minkus that emphasized its evolution towards classicism through the *Grand pas classique* (Fullington and Smith 2024: 264–327).

Paquita premiered at the Latvian National Opera on May 22, 1923 (Bāliņa 2018: 542). Sergeyev staged the production of Petipa. As previously stated, he notated

34 Pavlova also danced in Helsingfors (Helsinki), Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Berlin.

35 In 1848, Napoleon III became the only President of the Second French Republic because he proclaimed the Second French Empire in 1852.

dozens of works of the French choreographer with the Imperial Ballet which would become the legacy of classical ballet. In Riga, Sergeyev completed this vast material, currently known as the Sergeyev Collection (Wiley 1976: 99). On December 10, 1922, the ballet master wrote the libretto of *Paquita* (HTC MS Thr 245/29),³⁶ it was to be danced by Jelena Lukoma (Paquita), Boris Savrov (Lucien), and Sergeyev himself (Īñigo). *Jaunākās Ziņas* published an unflattering review. Ernests Brusubārda (1923: 5) considered this ballet old-fashioned and reproached Sergeyev's choice. Nevertheless, his work "gives hope that performances will some time reach an even higher level".³⁷ Unfortunately, the ballet did not receive sufficient support from the theatre management, prompting Sergeyev's departure from Riga. Even though *Paquita* was merely performed twice (Stāls 1943: 51), this production marked a milestone for ballet history. It was the last time that *Paquita* was danced as a full-length ballet during the 20th century.

This ballet was chosen mainly because of poor economic conditions in the early 1920s. It was suitable for the relatively small Latvian ballet company which could not afford scenery, costumes, and props of their own and had to use, instead, existing items from opera productions (Bite 2002: 35–36). *Paquita* included a mixture of designs by Eduards Vītols. Although there are no original sketches,³⁸ his depiction of Spanishness can be studied through the photographs preserved at the Museum of Literature and Music. Most of the portraits feature *pas de trois* dancers Melānija Lence and Alberts Kozlovskis, but the first-act images depict a visual potpourri (Fig. 1).³⁹ Besides Lukoma and Savrov, the female corps de ballet appears to wear *La Fille mal gardée* costumes. Instead of the original bullfighter capes in Paris, female dancers en travesti used elongated straw packages for the *pas de manteaux*. In doing so, *Paquita* acquired a rustic atmosphere. However, wigs are unsuitable for these purposes. On the left, a young shepherd appears with a blackened face. Such makeup disguised racist stereotypes intertwined with Orientalist motifs, as previously depicted by *Schéhrazade's* Golden Slave and *Petrouchka's* Blackamoor in the Ballets Russes (Järvinen 2020). The backdrop of mountains most likely portrayed the Pyrenees. Eurocentric viewers perceived these mountains as an imagined border that placed Spain outside the boundaries of Europe.

36 This libretto became the basis for subsequent international productions.

37 [D]od cerību, ka [...] izrādes reiz sasniegs vel lielāku pilnību.

38 Between 1918 and 1935, Vītols worked as a Latvian National Opera designer. He oversaw *Swan Lake* and *Raymonda's* Spanish-themed *divertissements*.

39 RMM 256146.



Fig. 1. Unknown author. Performers of the ballet *Paquita* in Riga. 1923. Paper, 8.9x13.9 cm.
National Museum of Literature and Music of Latvia

On February 7, 1929, Riga witnessed again the *Grand pas classique* of *Paquita* (Bāliņa 2018: 542). Despite that this *divertissement* includes few Spanish elements musically, Fullington and Smith (2024: 264–327) have located several gestures, such as the *pas de basque*, *saut de basque*, and *cabrioles*, that we believe Petipa introduced from the *jota* (Preciado-Azanza and Vela, 2024: 434). The *Grand pas classique* was staged by Feodorova-Fokina,⁴⁰ who played the leading role alongside Lev Lvov. Among the soloists were Tangijeva-Birzniece. *Paquita* was included in a triple bill with *Les Sylphides* (also known as *Chopiniana*) and the Polotskian Dances from the opera *Prince Igor*. Feodorova's brother-in-law, Mikhail Fokine, starred in both of his choreographies (Zālīts 1929: 7). Most critics praised the Russian dancer and choreographer. However, *Aizkulises* (1929: 5) dared to tell the truth: "Fokine's career as a solo dancer is over [...] Fokine has no strength left in his arms. In *Chopiniana* you can see that his hands are even shaking".⁴¹ Fokine was about to turn forty-nine. Because of his age, his level did not meet expectations. Latvian audiences witnessed what would probably be Fokine's last performance. At that point, Riga stood as a

40 During her tenure as soloist with the Imperial Ballet, Feodorova-Fokina performed excerpts of *Paquita* alongside Viltzak and Pierre Vladimiroff in different summer tours (Horosko and Fedorova, 1971: 26).

41 Zolo dejotāja Fokina karjera jau beigta [...] Rokās Fokinam vairs nemaz nav spēka. Šopenianē var redzēt, ka tam rokas pat dreb.

benchmark that could rival with Paris, London, and Saint Petersburg. In fact, Fokine told the press: "It has been a rare pleasure and a great satisfaction for me to work with such a great ballet company" (LNOB 856).⁴² The fourteen shows of *Paquita's Grand pas classique* (Stāls 1943: 51) not only strengthened the international excellence of the Latvian National Ballet, but also initiated a Spanishness cycle between 1929 and 1931 (Preciado-Azanza 2020: 109).

***Jota Aragonesa* (1930), an allegory of Spanishness in the Baltics**

The ballet *Jota Aragonesa* displayed a picturesque palette of colors and rhythms. *Jota* is the dance of Aragon, a northern Spanish region whose capital is Zaragoza. This dance embodies the vivacity, known as *rasmia*,⁴³ of the people of Aragon, whose refusal to even consider surrendering was Napoleon's despair. Even though the *jota* is performed all around Spain, only the Aragonese *jota* captivated prominent 19th and 20th century choreographers such as Petipa, August Bournonville, Léonide Massine, Mikhail Fokine, and George Balanchine. So far, we have located over 50 Spanish-themed choreographies that included this dance (Preciado-Azanza 2023c). We consider the *jota* to be one of the dances that best symbolizes Spanishness. Its *rasmia* often constituted the climax of several Spanish-themed ballets *The Three-Cornered Hat* and *Don Quixote*, among others. In Riga, we encounter several *jotas* performed as concert miniatures (See Table 1). Alberinga finished her program at the Riga Latvian Society with an Aragonese *jota* (LSA 2256/3). Here, we focus on the case study of *Jota Aragonesa* by Fokine.

This modern one-act ballet premiered in Saint Petersburg on January 29, 1916, at the Mariinsky Theatre. Fokine choreographed Glinka's *Capriccio Brillante on the Jota Aragonesa* after visiting Madrid, Sevilla, Granada, and Malaga during the summer of 1914. The outbreak of the World War I forced him to stay in Spain for three months, where he studied a wide range of local dances (Beaumont 1935: 114). The plotless ballet *Jota Aragonesa* enabled him to accomplish his groundbreaking choreographic approach. The five principles, published by *The Times* in 1914, laid the theoretical foundation that was expanded in 1916 through the article *The New Ballet* published by the Russian magazine *Argus*. Fokine called "[t]o free the dancers of the future ballet from unnecessary rules" (NYPL *MGZMC-Res. 11). Fokine pursued a more

42 Man bija rets prieks un liels gandarījums strādāt ar tik lielisku baleta trupu.

43 The cultural term *rasmia*, mainly used in the Aragon and Navarre regions, indicates a combination of eagerness, strength, activeness, courage, tenacity, and gracefulness (Merino, Velázquez, and Lomas 2020).



Fig. 2. Unknown author. Performers of the ballet *Jota Aragonesa*. 1930. Glass, 13x18 cm.
National Museum of Literature and Music of Latvia

expressive and reliable vision of Spain prompted by the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal. Alexander Golovin included numerous Aragonese leitmotifs in the designs, but we cannot say the same about the choreography. Despite that Fokine (1961: 236) stated that it “was the closest approach to authentic Spanish dancing the Mariinsky ballet company had ever performed”, his *jota* also included other Spanish dances (Sokolov-Kaminsky 1992: 55), such as *panaderos*, *sevillanas*, and *peteneras* (Siliņa 1930: 505). Unfortunately, we have little data, as this ballet has been considered lost after its performances in Riga and London.⁴⁴

Feodorova-Fokina staged *Jota Aragonesa* at the Latvian National Opera on November 6, 1930 in a triple-bill of Fokine's ballets, alongside *Le Pavillon d'Armide* and *The Firebird* (Bāliņa 2018: 491). 36 dancers performed in this choreographic production in Riga (LNOB 1114). Among its soloists were Tangijeva-Birzniece and Osvalds Lēmanis, both future ballet masters. *Jaunākās Ziņas* praised *Jota Aragonesa* by highlighting its Spanish rhythms as the peak of a night that paid homage to

44 The Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo danced *Jota Aragonesa* in 1937 (Murga Castro 2012: 262).

Russian ballet (Zālīts 1930: 7). We believe that the public was delighted by Fokine's choreography according to its 16 shows (Štāls 1943: 51).

Much of its success has been attributed to the designs of Ludolfs Liberts.⁴⁵ He is widely regarded as the epitome of Art Deco in Latvia (Jevsejeva 2024; Vanaga 2014: 351). In *Jota Aragonesa*, each costume combined numerous Art Deco golden mosaics with strident colors that became "a colorful feast for the eyes" (Sudrabkalns 1930: 6).⁴⁶ Elsa Fortsmane's costume can be seen as a clear example (Fig. 2).⁴⁷ Her comb and curly hair, as well as the abundant ruffles of her flamenco dress, represent Andalusian influences that we can also appreciate in the scenography. The "magnificent sets [were] created with rich imagination" (Zālīts 1930: 7).⁴⁸ Despite that both versions of the backdrop included a mountainous landscape, probably the Pyrenees, the final sketch, captured by Andrejs Senakols (RMM 777536),⁴⁹ showcased the typical whitewashed houses of Andalusian towns. This depiction reinforces Spain's Orientalization intertwined with Andalusia. The influence of this southern region seems to dominate this ballet, starring characters considered exotic (Preciado-Azanza 2023a), such as bandits, bullfighters, and the typical male Andalusian *traje de corto* (working dress) (Fig. 2).⁵⁰ At the forefront, we can see two dancers kneeling. This vigorous movement is usually performed as the final step of the Aragonese *jota* (Vittucci and Goya 1993: 17). Therefore, we believe that the ballet *Jota Aragonesa* can be seen as an allegory of Spanishness, a constructed image that combines Andalusian and Aragonese stereotypes.

45 Between 1924 and 1937, Liberts authored more than 40 operas, ballets, and operettas designs at the Latvian National Opera.

46 The translation from Latvian has been done by Vanaga (2014: 352).

47 RMM p91518.

48 [K]rāšņās dekorācijas [...] bagāta izdomā veidotie.

49 The Zuzāns Collection includes an earlier version featuring several flamenco dancers (ZK GL 02070).

50 Simons Šapiro is one of them.

***Don Quixote* (1931, 1936), a polyhedric image of Spain turned into a soft-power tool**

Don Quixote was the turning point for Spanishness in Latvian ballet. Cervantes's novel is a milestone not only in Spanish literature, but also in the literature of the whole humankind. Since its publication in the early 17th century, *Don Quijote de la Mancha* has crossed all artistic and geographical boundaries. Latvia became acquainted with the idealist knight, Alonso Quijano, in 1922. After Ādolfs Erss's first approach, Konstantīns Raudive was in charge of translating this work again into the Latvian language in 1937.⁵¹ Raudive's edition materialized through the mediation of the diplomat and historian Arnolds Spekke, who in his preface praised Spanish culture as an epic land (Cimdīņa 2006: 215). Thereafter, *Don Quixote* established in Latvian culture. Indeed, during the Soviet occupation, Vismā Belševica's poem *Spanish motif: The eternal Quixotes* (1969) highlighted the windmill metaphor as an expression of desperate struggles under seemingly hopeless conditions.

There have been many choreographic adaptations of *Don Quixote*. In 1614 it was already performed as a *ballet de cour*, while during the 18th and 19th centuries Jean Georges Noverre, Louis Jacques Milon, and August Bournonville left their imprints (Martínez del Fresno 2007; Murga Castro 2016). Camacho's wedding seems to have been the excerpt that inspired the most. On December 26, 1869 Marius Petipa's choreography debut took place at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow with music by Minkus.⁵² This *grand ballet*, set in Barcelona, includes a prologue and four acts. It follows the love story of the barber Basilio (Sergei Sokolov) and Quiteria (Anna Sobeshchanskaya), in spite of the obstacles presented by her father, Lorenzo, and her fiancé, Camacho. Petipa included *seguidillas*, *boleros*, *fandangos*, and *jotas*. Two years later, he restaged this ballet in Saint Petersburg, introducing the virtuoso *pas de deux* and the dual role of Quiteria and Dulcinea. In 1900, Alexander Gorsky revitalized the corps the ballet with realism, while Fyodor Lopukhov rearranged Legat's fandango in 1923 (Souritz 1990: 31).

Don Quixote opened at the Latvian National Opera on October 30, 1931 (Bāliņa 2018: 502).⁵³ Despite the profound impact of the Great Depression (Vanaga 2014: 352),⁵⁴

51 In 1934, the Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno entrusted to Raudive the translation of *Niebla* (RMM 470665).

52 Some sources indicate that it premiered on December 14.

53 On September 11, 1932, Viltzak staged a revival (Bāliņa 2018: 502).

54 Between 1929 and 1934 numerous operettas were included in the repertoire (Bite 2002: 101–106).

Feodorova-Fokina finished her Spanish-themed choreographic cycle. She staged a mixture of Petipa, Gorsky, and Lopukhov's choreography. *Don Quixote* became her last important success in Riga and it was the first major ballet in which Tangijeva-Birzniece starred alongside Lēmanis. Tangijeva-Birzniece went to Saint Petersburg to prepare for the role of Quiteria with her teacher, the renowned Agrippina Vaganova (Bite 2002: 62). *Jaunākās Ziņas* highlighted the effusive reaction of the audience towards her technical display (Zālits 1931: 5). Whilst *Latvijas Kareivis* published a nationalistic plea by Latvian army officer and writer Edvīns Mednis (1931: 4) who wondered "when will we see a Latvian ballet?"⁵⁵ He also questioned the appropriateness of using foreign, rather than Latvian, imagery and criticized the stereotypes depicted. Such comments need to be understood in the complex socio-political context that emerged after the economic recession. Spanishness was of great interest in 1931. Besides *Don Quixote's* 19 performances (Štāls 1943: 51), Spanish dancers Bonifacio, Vicente Escudero and Antonia Mercé *La Argentina* also delighted Riga's audiences with their eclectic programs (RMM 227158; LNOB 1177; RMM 227156).

As a result, Sigismunds Vidbergs portrayed a polyhedric image of Spain in his theatrical debut "crowned with success" (Madernieks 1931: 14).⁵⁶ Despite that Romans Suta had been chosen first, he did not fit in with the prevailing atmosphere of the opera's atmosphere (Jevsejeva 2016: 417). The reasons for the removal of Suta cannot be determined with certainty. *Atpūta* (1930: 3) depicted a promotional image of Tangijeva-Birzniece, whose black and white costume is reminiscent of the sketch LNMM SB 74. Thus, it seems that at least some of his sketches were used. *Aizkulises* (1931: 2) pointed out that *Don Quixote* combined Vidbergs's work alongside existing costumes from Liberts's operas and *Jota Aragonesa's* designs. This is the case of Espada (Eižens Leščevskis), the bullfighter, dressed in an Andalusian *traje de corto*. On October 29, *Jaunākās Ziņas* published several images of the dancers. The costume worn by Quiteria's friend (Mirdza Kalniņa) included abundant ruffles, earrings, and a comb (Fig. 3),⁵⁷ while Mercedes (Sira Jurgense) looked like a flamenco dancer. Besides the costumes for Don Quixote, Basilio, and Sancho Panza, Vidbergs designed the first act's backdrop based on a cobbled wall, surrounded by rustic houses, as showcased by *Pēdējā Brīdī* (1931: 10). This was merely the starting point of *Don Quixote* in Riga.

On January 23, 1936, Lēmanis staged another version of *Don Quixote* that would be danced 15 times (Štāls 1943: 51). Vidbergs completed his work with 80 more costumes and sets, as noted by *Pēdējā Brīdī* (1936: 6). So far, we have located a dozen.

55 Kad redzēsīm latvju baletu?

56 [N]ozarē vainagojas panākumiem.

57 RMM 102128.



Fig. 3. Sigismunds Vidbergs. Costume design for Quiteria's friend for the ballet *Don Quixote*. 1931. Pencil and gouache on cardboard, 36.8x23.5 cm. National Museum of Literature and Music of Latvia



Fig. 4. Sigismunds Vidbergs. Costume design for the Dryad Queen for the ballet *Don Quixote*. 1931. Pencil and gouache on cardboard, 36.8x23.5 cm. National Museum of Literature and Music of Latvia

Besides Quiteria's friend and Mercedes, Vidbergs's sketches also include bullfighters, gypsies, a Moor, and the Dryad Queen (Fig. 4),⁵⁸ whose costume was typical of the fashion of the Roaring Twenties. Vidbergs was influenced by the use of geometric forms and Art Deco ornamentation (Bērzina 2015: 7), as well as the forms and aesthetics of the Ballets Russes' designers Coco Chanel, Pablo Picasso, and Léon Bakst (Preciado-Azanza 2022a: 313). The impact of these sketches was extensive. The sets were used until 1941, whereas the costumes were used up until 1960. On a choreographic basis, Lēmanis introduced six new dances (Bite 2002: 121): *jota*,⁵⁹ *bolero*, *flamenco*, Sancho Panza's dance, the Dream Scene waltz, and the final *pasodoble*, *España cañi*, composed by Pascual Marquina.⁶⁰

58 RMM 102129.

59 It seems that the new *jota* choreographed by Lēmanis, with music by Guerrero, became a relevant concert miniature, at least, during the season 1936/37. It was performed on October 4, 1936 (LNOB 1805), and June 3, 1937 (LNOB 1895).

60 Aivars Leimanis's *Don Quixote* (2004) includes most of these dances (except the *jota*).

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War on July 17, 1936 increased the interest of Spanishness in Latvian society. We believe that the rise of Spanishness in Latvian ballet might have been used as a “soft-power” strategy. Joseph Nye emphasized how political leaders “have long understood the power of attractive ideas or the ability to set the political agenda and determine the framework of debate in a way that shapes others” (Nye 1990: 166). Spanishness not only became an internal mirror, in which to construct their identity based on the Other, but also an external tool within Latvian state cultural policies. Ballet performances represented a unique opportunity to showcase their fellow European neighbors what Latvia had achieved in the interwar period. On October 9, 1936, the new *jota* and the *pas de deux* from *Don Quixote* were included in a tour to Helsinki,⁶¹ alongside the Latvian-themed ballet *The victory of love*.⁶² *Latvijas Kareivis* (1936: 4) explained the company travelled together with politicians and press members.⁶³ Finnish audiences were particularly enthusiastic about Spanish-themed ballets.⁶⁴ *Brīvā Zeme* (1936: 10) stated that *Don Quixote*’s solos were danced by Harijs Plūcis and Tangijeva-Birzniece who also starred in the miniature *Beggars*. Lēmanis had premiered this work, with music by Manuel de Falla, in a concert that took place at the Latvian National Opera on October 4 (LNOB 1805).⁶⁵ We think that this choreography might be a reinterpretation of the *Ritual Fire Dance* from Falla’s *El amor brujo* (The Bewitched Love).⁶⁶

61 Between 1930 and 1939, the Latvian National Ballet also performed in Brussels, Berlin, Budapest, Stockholm, and Warsaw (Bāliņa 2018: 575).

62 Latvians understood the potential of dance as a tool for reinforcing their national consciousness, as shown by the Latvian Song and Dance Festival. It was founded in 1873 as a singing festival that incorporated folk dances in 1948 (Muktupāvels 2018).

63 Cīrulis (1936: 3) pointed out that three ministers from Prime Minister Kārlis Ulmanis’s cabinet came to see Tangijeva-Birzniece, Aleksandrs Birznieks’s wife, at the premiere of *Don Quixote*.

64 On October 21, 1930, George Gé, a pioneer of Finnish ballet, choreographed his own production of *Don Quixote*. There are similarities between the Finnish and Latvian ballet companies, both founded in 1922 (Vienola-Lindfors and Hällström 1981).

65 Mirdza Griķe also danced in *Zambra*.

66 In 1931, both Bonifacio and Antonia Mercé, *La Argentina*, performed the *Ritual Fire Dance* at the Latvian National Opera (RMM 227158; RMM 227156).

***Boléro* (1936), *España Negra* in the midst of Spanish Civil War**

Boléro unconsciously showcased

a darker image connected with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Latvia, just as the rest of the world did, was concerned about the evolution of a conflict that would become the prelude to the World War II. *Atpūta* (1936: 24) published a large number of battle scenes, while *Brīvā Zeme* (1936: 7) wrote an extensive article that opened like this: "The whole world observes with horror by the terrible fratricidal war in Spain".⁶⁷ After this powerful phrase, the article covered the polyhedral image of Spain by speaking of its diverse geography, Muslim heritage, prominent artists and writers such as Cervantes and Goya, the iconic characters of Spanishness Don Quixote and El Cid, plus the intricate political situation in Catalonia and the Basque country. Yet there was one more theme that was not mentioned: the *España Negra* (Black Spain).⁶⁸ In 1899,⁶⁹ Belgian poet Émile Verhaeren and Spanish illustrator Darío de Regoyos showcased a darker perception of Spain in the travel book *España Negra*. At that point, Spain was facing a profound moral crisis due to the loss of its last transatlantic colonies in 1898. A year earlier, Spanish writer and diplomat Ángel Ganivet published *Idearium español* (1897) during his posting in Helsinki. This influential work enhanced the intellectual debate about Spain's crisis of identity. Shortly afterwards, Ganivet was transferred to Riga. Thus, we could state that the Baltic region contributed to shaping Spanish identity.

The one-act modern ballet, *Boléro*, premiered on December 22, 1928, at the Palais Garnier in Paris. Ida Rubinstein commissioned Maurice Ravel this work for her company. Originally, Rubinstein wanted Ravel to orchestrate Isaac Albeniz's *Iberia*. Unfortunately, Spanish conductor Enrique Fernández Arbós had done so before (Garafola 2020: 258). Instead, Ravel decided to compose a new piece that can be regarded as a musical icon of Spanishness.⁷⁰ Bronisława Niżyńska choreographed a ballet inspired by Ravel's "machinist aesthetic", connected with a "sexual connotation

67 Visa pasaule ar šausmām vēro briesmīgo brālju karu Spānijā.

68 This term must not be confused with the pejorative *Leyenda Negra*.

69 They travelled through the Basque Country, Navarra, Aragon, Castile, and Madrid.

70 It might seem paradoxical that a French composer contributed to such an extent in the construction of Spanishness. Nonetheless, this imagery played an important role in the French Third Republic. Samuel Llano recently explored how "Spain [became] a discursive site on which to project shared anxieties over the definition of a French identity" (Llano, 2013: 3), that can be traced musically between 1908 and 1929. Furthermore, Ravel was born in Ciboure, a small village located in the French Basque Country rather close to the Spanish border.

and violent, bloodthirsty outburst" (Mawer 2006: 220–221) that seems to showcase the dramatism of *España negra*.⁷¹ It remains unknown if Nižyńska used bolero dance movements. Only the scenic concept of the female soloist (Rubinstein) dancing on a table surrounded by an entourage of twenty men – led by Viltzak – had remained in later stagings.⁷² After being performed in London, New York, and Copenhagen, Boléro's international journey arrived in Riga.

Boléro was performed at the Latvian National Opera on December 10, 1936 (Bāliņa 2018: 495) in a triple bill together with *Scaramouche* and *La Boutique Fantasque*. This format allowed Lēmanis to introduce modern ballet trends. The ballet master spoke with *Brīvā Zeme* (1936: 16) about the two months he spent in Paris, London, and Berlin. Lēmanis attended numerous ballets by Fokin, Nižyńska, Massine, Serge Lifar, and Kurt Joos and brought back with him several scores that he wanted to choreograph; *Boléro* and *The Three-Cornered Hat* were two of them. Unfortunately, Riga did not witness Massine's ballet. We do not know the reasons, but the political shift resulting from the Soviet occupation could be behind its cancellation. Even so, *Boléro* was danced and it catalyzed modernity. Brants (1936: 10) highlighted that Lēmanis constantly moved groups of dancers as a means of expressivity. *Boléro* was a success for the whole company, who danced it 24 times (Štāls 1943: 52). Mirdza Griķe shone in the leading role alongside Rūdolfs Saule. Griķe had already danced Quiteria that year, as well as the miniatures *Spanish dance* by Victor Gzovski and *Zambra*, choreographed by Dolores Moreno (Bite 2002: 123). The press praised her vigorous portrayal. Grosbergs (1936: 10) noted her "truly Spanish flexibility and expressiveness".⁷³ However Brants pointed out her performance was "a bit too robust for the Spanish type".⁷⁴ It seems that Latvian critics thought of Spanish women through the prism of pre-established stereotypical misconceptions of the Other that had circulated across Europe for centuries.⁷⁵

España negra appeared in the libretto and the designs. This production continued Nižyńska's concept of a Spanish tavern full of people (LNOB 1981). However, the plot twists toward a darker end. The knife fight abruptly finished their lively dancing. Cīrulis (1937: 91) spoke in *Daugava* of a "bloodshed". Pēteris Rožlapa's backdrop

71 In Riga, such debauchery concerned theatre management (Bite 2002: 125).

72 In 1961, Maurice Béjart included this in his production.

73 [I]sti spānisku lokanību un izteikemi.

74 [D]rusku par robusta spānietes tipam

75 *Carmen* became the epitome of that constructed image (Lucena Giraldo 2009: 224: 227).



Fig. 5. Pēteris Rožlapa. Set design of the ballet *Boléro*. 1936. Tempera on cardboard. 45x60.8 cm. Zuzāns Collection

depicted the terrace of the tavern based on dark tones (Fig. 5).⁷⁶ The red dress of the *flamenco* dancer stands out, as well as the mysterious hooded figures on the left side. We can read them not only as a mirror of the bloody conflict on stage, but also as a metaphor for the ongoing war in Spain. Rožlapa's evolution from Art Deco into monumentality (Vanaga 2014: 360) can be appreciated here. He emphasized the palms and the metallic structure reminiscent of Ravel's machinist aesthetics. This effect was amplified by the introduction of smoke. These costumes were inspired by Andalusian clothing. Griķe's dress included prominent ruffles, while Saule's apparel continues the influence of the *traje de corto*, as reported in *Jaunākās Ziņas* (1936: 3). Siliņa (1936: 748) considered *Boléro* to be among Lēmanis's finest choreographies. This was largely due to the "music, choreography and scenery merging into one",⁷⁷ as stated in *Latvijas Kareivis* (1936: 4). Lēmanis followed the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal, previously introduced in Riga by Feodorova-Fokina and Viltzak.

76 ZK GL 04037.

77 [M]ūzika, choreografija un dekorācijas saplūst viena veselā.

***Laurencia* (1941), a Soviet propaganda tool**

Ultimately, the work *Laurencia* used Spanishness as a Soviet propaganda tool. The choreographic adaptation of Lope de Vega's play, *Fuenteovejuna* (1617), became the first ballet premiered in Latvia after the Soviet occupation. Such a political shift was immediately perceived at the Latvian National Opera, a socio-political thermometer renamed LPSR Opera and Ballet Theatre. Ballet became a major political tool in the Soviet Union. Despite Lenin's initial will to dismantle Bolshoi and Mariinsky theatres, considered Imperial symbols, Bolshevism finally understood the power of this silent art with the first Soviet ballet titled *The Red Poppy* (Khitrova 2014: 136). In 1933, Vasily Tikhomirov staged his choreography in Riga, and it became one of the most successful interwar Latvian ballet productions.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, communist ideology had come to dominate in the Republic of Latvia. *Laurencia* embodied the new regime dogmas as highlighted by Čīņa (1941: 5).

This Soviet three-act ballet opened on March 22, 1939, at the Kirov Theatre (Mariinsky) in Leningrad (Saint Petersburg). Vakhtang Chabukiani choreographed *Laurencia*, with music by Aleksandr Krein, in a context where Spain was fashionable as a consequence of the Spanish Civil War. Lope de Vega spoke of fighting against tyranny in *Fuenteovejuna*. Although authorities might have interpreted this choreographic adaptation as an allegory of the 1917 Revolution, the chosen theme is striking —considering Stalin's Great Purge (Chiginskaya 2016: 345–347). Chabukiani portrayed the so-called *dramballet* by combining the choreographic language of character dance and classical ballet in addition to stylized ordinary movements and exaggerated pantomime that carried forward the libretto. This genre strongly shaped the Soviet ballet repertoire, in which dance symbolized the regime's cultural policies (Ezrahi 2012; Stern, 2019). *Laurencia* is set in the Andalusian village of Fuente Obejuna. The commander Gomez (Boris Savrov) opposes the union between the peasant couple consisting of Laurencia (Natalia Dudinskaya) and Frondoso (Chabukiani himself), whose imprisonment inflamed the villagers. Laurencia calls for an insurgency and the evil commander is eventually killed. The female protagonist's strength was unfairly reduced. Chabukiani divided the features of Lope de Vega's *Laurencia* into three different women: Laurencia, Jacinta, and Pascuala (Chiginskaya 2016: 349).

Laurencia's debut in Riga took place on January 3, 1941 (Bāliņa 2018: 532). Lēmanis staged Chabukiani's choreography and also danced the role of the

⁷⁸ It was danced sixty-four times, the same amount as Feodorova-Fokina's *Swan Lake* (Štāls 1943: 51).



Fig. 6. Unknown author. Performers of the ballet *Laurencia*. 1941. Paper, 8x12 cm.
National Museum of Literature and Music of Latvia

commander. Jānis Grauds became Frondoso, while Griķe performed Laurencia. Latvian Modern dance pioneer Beatrise Vīgnere (1941: 7) noted that Griķe displayed outstanding technique and expressive movements. *Laurencia* included several Spanish dances such as the *flamenco*, *farruca*, and the final *jota* before the rebellion (LNOB 2771). The newspaper *Brīvais Zemnieks* (1941: 5) highlighted the Spanish color and authenticity brought by use of the castanets. The whole nation was pointed out as this ballet's actual hero, the main theme was ironically described as "the struggle of the people against violence and injustice".⁷⁹ *Cīņa* (1941: 5) included an extensive indoctrinating pamphlet about the role of art in the very recently established Soviet republic. It is no coincidence that *Laurencia* was the first ballet to be performed in Soviet Latvia and later in other republics as well (Chiginskaya 2016: 352). It clearly followed the ideological path previously established by *The Red Poppy* and Rostislav Zakharov's *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. Lēmanis astutely staged Zakharov's work some weeks before the occupation, a strategic move to survive under oppression of the new regime.

79 [T]autas cīņa pret vardarbību un netaisnību.

Laurencia needs to be understood as a means of subjugation, a Soviet propaganda tool to unify its vast empire.⁸⁰ Such a political statement can be seen in the image chosen by *Cīņa* to promote the ballet (Fig. 6).⁸¹ This photograph clearly embodied Soviet ideology. Laurencia and Frondoso held a revolutionary flag, in front of the rest of the cast, as an allegory of the triumph of communism in 1917. Rožlāpa was in charge of the designs. *Brīvais Zemnieks* (1941: 5) noted the contrast between the picturesque clothing and austere Spanish nature. In addition to the spotted Andalusian flamenco dresses, the peasant apparel for the corps de ballet (RMM 402903) may have been inspired by Aragonese *baturros* (a rustic apparel from Aragon) (Boone and Lorente 1999). The commander appears to have followed Niklāvs Strunke's earlier visualisation for *Fuenteovejuna's* theatrical adaptation in 1927 (Tišheizere 2021: 544), which was based on the black tone associated with the hegemony of the Habsburg Spanish Empire. Rožlāpa emphasized the mountainous Spanish landscapes on the sets – later used in the staging of *Don Quixote* in 1941. We could continue to analyze Spanish-themed subsequent productions by Lēmanis, but this would require further research about its role in Soviet Latvian ballet. Across the second half of the 20th century, Spanishness not only acted as a tool of Soviet colonization but also represented a call for freedom, symbolized by Gerardo Viana's *Guernica*, the first ballet in Latvia after regaining its independence. For now, it seems evident that, for many years, Latvian ballet carried on a love affair with Spanish dance (Tivums 2000: 267).

Conclusion

Spanishness played a key role in interwar Latvian ballet. We identified 45 Spanish-themed ballets, *divertissements*, and concert miniatures performed between 1923 and 1941. This article examined the ballets *Paquita*, *Jota Aragonesa*, *Don Quixote*, *Bólero*, and *Laurencia*. These case studies depicted a polyhedric image firmly based on Andalusian archetypes intertwined with Orientalist motifs displayed visually by set designers Eduards Vītols, Ludolfs Liberts, Sigismunds Vidbergs, and Pēteris Rožlāpa. Such exoticism often relied on picturesque characters such as bandits, bullfighters, gypsies, *trajes de corto*, and *flamenco* dancers. Paradoxically, the influence of this southern region seems to dominate *Jota Aragonesa*.

80 Curiously, *Laurencia* takes place in the 15th century. In 1469, the marriage of Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile, the Catholic Monarchs, symbolized the unification de facto of both kingdoms, which initiated the formation of Spain. Soon after, the first conquests of the Spanish Empire began. We do not know if this was intentional or a mere coincidence.

81 RMM 402906.

This ballet can be seen as an allegory of Spanishness, constructed mainly as a mixture of cultural stereotypes from Andalusia and Aragon. The *jota* embodies the vivacity, known as *rasmia*, of the people of Aragon, whose refusal to consider surrendering to Napoleon inspired *Paquita*. We consider *jota* to be one of the dances that best symbolizes Spanishness. Its *rasmia* often constituted the climax of several Spanish-themed ballets. *Paquita*, *Jota Aragonesa*, *Laurencia*, and especially *Don Quixote* included this dance.

In this article, we conducted an initial approach to showcase how Spanishness, perceived as the Other, has contributed to the shaping of the identity of the pre-war Republic of Latvia. Spain and Latvia are located on the outer edge of Europe. Both countries seem to be connected by a mutual interest in their cultural differences. We traced this imagined community through dance. In the 1920s, Spain was perceived as an exotic and distant Other in the Latvian society. The Latvian National Ballet progressively incorporated this imagery, reaching its pinnacle with *Don Quixote*. The choreographic adaptation of Cervantes's novel became the most frequently performed Spanish-themed ballet during the interwar period. In the 1930s, *Don Quixote* evolved from a foreign choreographic language to a soft power strategy within Latvian state cultural policies. Since 1936, Spanish-themed choreographies can be found in the repertoire of the Latvian ballet troupe performing abroad.

As a whole, we believe that Spanishness can be seen as a facade of interwar Latvian society. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 marked a turning point that notably increased interest in this multilayered imagined mirror. *Boléro* unconsciously depicted a metaphor of the ongoing war in Spain based on the aesthetics of *España Negra*. This ballet catalyzed modernity based on the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal. However, the introduction of cutting-edge choreographies was unduly brief. The first ballet premiered in Latvia after the Soviet occupation, *Laurencia*, was staged as an allegorical triumph of communism. Spanishness became a Soviet propaganda tool. Further research will be required to fully understand the role of Spanishness in the development of the history of ballet in Riga, a transnational cultural crossroads that contributed to the shaping of European culture.

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