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Artistic Director

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for the Performing Arts

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Pointe Shoe Manager / Assistant Ballet Mistress

Joysanne Sidimus

Guest Balanchine Répétiteur

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Nijinsky

A Ballet by John Neumeier

Choreography, Sets*, Costumes* and Lighting Design: John Neumeier

*based partly on original sketches by Léon Bakst and Alexandre Benois

Music: Frédéric Chopin, Robert Schumann, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Dmitri Shostakovich

Premiere: The Hamburg Ballet, Hamburg, Germany, July 2, 2000

The National Ballet of Canada Premiere: March 2, 2013

Lead philanthropic support for *Nijinsky* is provided by The Catherine and Maxwell Meighen Foundation, an anonymous friend of the National Ballet, The Volunteer Committee of The National Ballet of Canada and The Producers' Circle.

The Producers' Circle: John & Claudine Bailey, David W. Binet, Susanne Boyce & Brendan Mullen, Gail Drummond & Bob Dorrance, Sandra Faire & Ivan Fecan, Rosamond Ivey, Judy Korthals & Peter Irwin, Mona & Harvey Levenstein, The Honourable Margaret Norrie McCain, C.C., Julie Medland, Sandra Pitblado & Jim Pitblado, C.M., Sandra Simpson and Noreen Taylor, C.M. & David Staines, O.C., O.Ont.

The company's Canadian tours are made possible with the generous support of The John and Margaret Bahen Fund of The National Ballet of Canada, Endowment Foundation.

Performance Dates:

November 22 – 26, 2017

Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts

January 25 – 27, 2018

National Arts Centre, Ottawa

In addition to being one of contemporary choreography's most important voices, John Neumeier is a world authority on the life and work of Vaslav Nijinsky. Who better, then, to create a work that delves into the mind and spirit of one of ballet's most legendary figures? Renowned for his unforgettable stage presence, technique and groundbreaking approach to choreographic expression, Nijinsky shattered all prevailing notions of the male dancer as well as the limitations that convention had imposed on the range of dramatic possibilities in dance itself.

Neumeier's *Nijinsky* is part memory-ballet and part biographical narrative, focusing on the key events and relationships of his life, his reflections on his art, his identity as a man and artist, and the tumultuous times in which he lived. Designing the sets, costumes and lighting as well as choreographing the work, Neumeier has created a moving and unforgettable

ballet that charts the delicate line between genius and madness. *Nijinsky* is a brilliant homage to the man once known as “Le Dieu de la Danse”.

Quotes

“The National Ballet of Canada is finally in Paris after a long absence have surpassed themselves with an outstanding performance. All the dancers were excellent, exceptional interpretation.” [Danser Magazine](#)

“Sublime.... truly breath-taking. The performance by Guillaume Côté is worthy of the greatest dancers. He would have surely impressed the great dancer he embodies on stage.” [On Sort Ou Pas](#)

“The beauty of this work stems from the emotional interpretation by the dancers of The National Ballet of Canada who share with us the story of a tormented genius”
[Chroniques De Danse](#)

“A fantastic performance... *Nijinsky* is a great success for the company” [Kulturkompasset](#)

“The National Ballet of Canada’s production of John Neumeier’s *Nijinsky* is a triumph on all fronts... the ballet is so complex that it will take many repeated performances to reveal its riches.” [The Globe and Mail](#)

“A triumph of dramatic intensity... the National Ballet rises to the challenge of presenting John Neumeier’s *Nijinsky*, a spectacular, sprawling, surreal and often mind-bending homage to ballet’s most legendary male dancer.” [Toronto Star](#)

“*Nijinsky* soars to intense heights... a richly detailed production” [National Post](#)

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John Neumeier

Choreographer, Set, Costume and Lighting Designer, *Nijinsky*

John Neumeier was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he received his first dance training. He continued his dance studies in Chicago as well as at Marquette University in Milwaukee where he created his first choreographic works. After further ballet study both in Copenhagen and at The Royal Ballet School in London, John Cranko invited him in 1963 to join Stuttgart Ballet, where he progressed to Soloist and continued his choreographic development.

In 1969, Ulrich Erfurth appointed Mr. Neumeier Director of Ballett Frankfurt, where he soon caused a sensation due to his new interpretations of such well-known ballets as *The Nutcracker* and *Romeo and Juliet*. In 1973, he joined The Hamburg Ballet as Director and Chief Choreographer and, under his direction, The Hamburg Ballet became one of the leading ballet companies on the German dance scene and soon received international recognition. In 1972, he set his first work for The National Ballet of Canada, *Don Juan* with Rudolf Nureyev in the title role and in 1993, he created *Now and Then* for Karen Kain. As a choreographer, Mr. Neumeier has continually focused on the preservation of ballet tradition, while giving his works a modern dramatic framework. His ballets range from new versions of evening-length story ballets to musicals and to his symphonic ballets, especially those based on Gustav Mahler's compositions, as well as his choreographies to sacred music. His latest creations for The Hamburg Ballet are *Duse* (2015) and *Turangalila* (2016).

Mr. Neumeier holds the Dance Magazine Award (1983), Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany and French Order of Arts and Letters and the Legion of Honour. In 2006, he was awarded the prestigious Nijinsky Award for Lifetime Achievement. He received the Herbert von Karajan Musikpreis in 2007 and the Deutscher Jubiläums Tanzpreis in 2008. In 2007, he was made an honorary citizen of the city of Hamburg. In 2015, the Inamori Foundation presented Mr. Neumeier with the Kyoto Prize for his contributions to the Arts and Philosophy and in 2016 he received the renowned Prix Benois de la Danse for Lifetime Achievement.

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On January 19, 1919 at five o'clock in the afternoon in a ballroom of the Suvretta House Hotel in St Moritz, Switzerland, Vaslav Nijinsky danced publicly for the last time. He called this performance his Wedding with God.

Nijinsky begins with a realistic recreation of this situation. The choreography which follows however, visualizes his thoughts, memories and hallucinations during this last performance.

Act I

Prompted by the imagined appearance of his former mentor, impresario and lover, Sergei Diaghilev, Nijinsky recalls images of his sensational career with the Ballets Russes. Dancers, as aspects of his personality, perform fragments from his most famous roles. Harlequin, the Poet in *Les Sylphides*, the Golden Slave in *Schéhérazade* and the *Spectre de la Rose* merge and mingle with characters from his private life. His sister Bronislava (later a choreographer), his older brother Stanislav (trained also to be a dancer, but marked from childhood by signs of madness), and his mother, the dancer Eleonora Bereda, who along with his father Thomas were the children's first teachers, also appear in his dreamlike fantasy.

In another scene of the ballet, Nijinsky remembers his search for a new choreographic language. His experiments with movement result in his own original ballets *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, *Jeux*, *Le Sacre du printemps* and later *Till Eulenspiegel*.

A woman in red, Romola de Pulsy who will later become Nijinsky's wife, crisscrosses his confused recollections. He relives their first encounter on a ship to South America and their abrupt marriage – an event causing the ultimate break with Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes.

Act II

Nijinsky's madness drives him more and more inside himself. Memories of childhood, family, school, and the Mariinsky Theatre blend with nightmare visions of World War I – and his wife's infidelity. The scandalous premiere of his ballet *Le Sacre du printemps* appears juxtaposed with the brutality of World War I and his brother Stanislav's death. Romola is with him through difficult and bad times. In Nijinsky's eyes, it is the world around him – not Nijinsky that has gone mad...

The Suvretta House performance and the ballet end with Nijinsky's last dance – the War.

John Neumeier's *Nijinsky* By Michael Crabb

His dancing career lasted scarcely a decade. He choreographed just four works, only one of which has survived with any serious claim to authenticity. Yet, 63 years after his death, Vaslav Nijinsky remains an iconic figure – and a haunting presence in the life of American-born choreographer John Neumeier whose two-act *Nijinsky* now joins the National Ballet's repertoire.

Neumeier's fascination with Nijinsky began when, as a dance-loving Grade 6 student in Milwaukee, he came across a stirring titled book: Anatole Bourman's *The Tragedy of Nijinsky*. "It made Nijinsky a real person in my mind," Neumeier recalls. From then on Neumeier devoured whatever information could be gleaned about Nijinsky, as an incandescent performer and innovative choreographer, and as a tortured soul. He even interviewed Nijinsky's widow, Romola. "Such a clever woman. I'm quite kind to her in my ballet," he says, in oblique reference to the way Romola has often been disparaged. By then Neumeier had a well stocked library of works about his idol and had begun building what is now the most extensive Nijinsky collection in private hands. Apart from artistic representations of the dancer there are photographs, costumes, the only plaster cast of his foot and an autographed menu from Nijinsky and Romola's wedding breakfast. It all resides in Neumeier's house. "It's quite full," he says laconically.

Nijinsky, born in Kiev in 1889, was a product of the Russian Imperial Ballet in St. Petersburg. He entered young adulthood during an era of revolutionary rumblings that spilled over into the ballet. Michel Fokine, nine years Nijinsky's senior, offered a choreographic challenge to what he regarded as the formulaic conventions of Russian classicism, epitomized by the sprawling spectacles of Marius Petipa.

When the great impresario Serge Diaghilev presented a season of Russian ballet in Paris in 1909, Nijinsky was already one of the Imperial Ballet's brightest hopes. Under Diaghilev's tutelage and with a succession of Fokine ballets to showcase his unparalleled talents – *Petrushka*, *Le Spectre de la rose* and, most famously, *Scheherazade* – Nijinsky quickly became an international sensation.

During successive Ballets Russes tours, Western audiences were astounded by Nijinsky's athleticism, animal magnetism and miraculous ability to absorb himself totally into every role. His fame, fuelled by a tantalizing aura of androgyny and the frisson of scandal surrounding his scarcely discreet relationship with Diaghilev, made Nijinsky a celebrity.

In 1912 Diaghilev encouraged his lover-protégé to try his hand at choreography. The results were startling. *L'Après-mid d'un faune*, to the Debussy score, shocked audiences with its unabashed eroticism and Nijinsky's presentation of himself in radically stylized, almost minimalist movement.

Nijinsky followed in 1913 with *Jeux*, a quasi-abstract ballet that used the metaphor of a tennis game to depict, again with carefully symbolic movement, the tangled relations of a man and two female companions.

The biggest shock came later the same year with Nijinsky's *Sacre du printemps* to Stravinsky's seismically controversial score. Nijinsky, hailed as a god of the dance, excluded himself from the limelight, choosing instead to emphasize group patterns in his savage portrayal of ritual sacrifice in pagan Russia. The Paris premiere provoked a riot. According to Neumeier, Nijinsky "broke new and original paths towards modern choreography ... completely independent from the classical brilliance of his own virtuosity and the astounding projection of his performance presence."

When Nijinsky choreographed *Till Eulenspiegel* in 1916, there were already indications of the schizophrenia that was prematurely to terminate his career. In January 1919, he gave his last public performance, a solo recital, in the ballroom of a St. Moritz, Switzerland hotel, the Suvretta House, which Neumeier photographed before its demolition and meticulously evokes in his designs.

This poignant farewell is depicted by Neumeier in a prologue where Nijinsky imagines Diaghilev, from whom he's been long estranged, among the audience. It triggers a cascade of memories, flashbacks that in the course of the first act trace his years as a Ballets Russes star with references to key roles, but also to the complex interweaving of Nijinsky's professional and private life.

Neumeier describes the second act as "more an interior landscape," a war-ravaged world viewed through the prism of Nijinsky's own wounded psyche.

"A ballet can never be a documentary," says Neumeier, characterizing his *Nijinsky* as "a biography of the soul, a biography of feelings and sensations." It is, he says, "a choreographic approach" to the complex puzzle of a dance phenomenon.

Michael Crabb writes about dance for The Toronto Star. A longer version of this article originally appeared in Canada's Dance International magazine.

Nijinsky

A Choreographer and Nijinsky: Facets of a Fascination By John Neumeier

I

My fascination with Nijinsky began very early - and quite by chance. I was born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, far away from any dance tradition. Nevertheless, so long as I can remember, dance was a part of my life, without my actually knowing what dance, what dancing, really was - except for the technicolour images in Hollywood musicals of the time - which I loved. But, in my neighbourhood, on a special shelf in The Llewelyn Library, there were 4 or maybe 5 books about dance. I read them all: The "Borzo Book of the Ballet", two little books by Kay Ambrose explaining classical technique and terminology, and Anatole Bourman's "The Tragedy of Nijinsky". Even the title - "The Tragedy..." - excited my fondness for romantic drama and dreams of fatal destiny. I was probably in the sixth grade then, about 10 or 11 years old, when I borrowed and devoured this early Nijinsky biography. The Nijinsky scholar Richard Buckle was later to call it a "bad book" and (material) "for the bafflement of future biographer, but for me it was magic! I could not put it down. I remember being completely engrossed in reading it one day during recess at Mound Street School. My sixth grade teacher, Mr. Mehail, noticed my obvious entrancement, and asked what I was reading. Still under the spell of the book, I showed him, with awe and a certain pride, the pink bound volume. I remember so well his reaction - the astonished and critical expression on his face - and his words "You shouldn't be reading this" - seemed to indicate that I was reading something obscene! Even today, I don't really understand his apprehension or exactly what he meant. At the same time his obvious concern made the book - more exciting, enigmatic, special, and at the same time - Nijinsky into a real person. Nijinsky was the first dancer who was also a human being for me. I lived in a city devoid of almost any exposure to ballet, where neither local ballet company or professional dance school existed. The Ballets Russes de Monte-Carlo (the last distant replica of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes) and Ballet Theatre (later American Ballet Theatre) visited the city each year giving two or three performances. But strangely enough, these performances, awaited with anticipation and attended religiously, did not actually bring dance closer to me. Wonderful dancers like Frederic Franklin, Nora Kaye, or my favorite John Kriza, were ideal, illusionary beings. The world of theatre dance remained a distant magic place - so beautifully wonderful I could never imagine myself being worthy of being a part of it. On the other hand, Nijinsky, the person - the dancer in my book - seemed closer to me. Obviously, I have never seen Nijinsky dance - never experienced the excitement of his performance. Instead, at the age of 10, I began studying the facts of his life; his childhood, his education, his success, and with fascination the path towards his madness. The seed of Nijinsky fascination grew, sending its roots deeper and deeper within me as it, and I, grew. I've never grown out of my "Nijinsky phase", nor has the constantly accumulated knowledge about the dancer ever disappointed my original, naive infatuation.



Everything I've since learned has made the man more complete and his artistic motivation remains my constant professional and moral example. Anatole Bourman's book, read before puberty, planted the seed.

II

My next - literary - encounter with Nijinsky happened about 1960 while I was studying Theatre and Dance at Marquette University and already attempting my first choreographic experiments. The book that brought us closer this time was Romola Nijinsky's biography of her husband. I had already started collecting dance books by then - but only when they could be had for next to nothing. Hours were spent searching any and every second hand bookshop to find bargain treasures describing dance or dancers. As a student, I was quite poor and remember standing in front of a shop window displaying a used copy of Agnes de Mille's "Dance to the Proper" for 99 cents and realizing sadly that I simply couldn't afford it. But, I received Romola's very personal, subjective book "Nijinsky" as a gift. It illuminated another side - her side - of the man Nijinsky. I loved Romola's vivid descriptions of backstage ballet life, their elegant social world, the triumph of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in Paris, the details of Nijinsky's private life, and the long difficult years of his decline. Now, the man Nijinsky became more clearly a dancer, an artist for me - although the true importance of his choreographic creativity had not yet struck me. At nearly the same time another dance publication appeared, "The Dictionary of Modern Ballet", of which I found a slightly soiled copy on a bargain table. This book excited me tremendously because of its numerous color illustrations of costumes and decor from the Ballets Russes. The pictures were very small but there were a great many of them and they fired my imagination. Nijinsky danced through these tiny illustrations, becoming the center of a brilliant theatrical world. Among other strong impressions, the shock of Leon Bakst's green, pink, and red decor for "Sheherazade" inspired my vision of what ballet might be - a colorful, mysterious, exotic drama. A year later, I came even closer to this very drama when the Ballets Russes de Monte-Carlo reached Milwaukee and needed "supers" for the last scene of "Sheherazade". I signed up. Our entrance as the guards of Sultan Shariar was never rehearsed. In the ballet, the Sultan returns home from a hunt unexpectedly and surprises his Mistress Zobeide and the other harem ladies during an orgy with the slaves of the household - (Nijinsky as the Golden Slave originally lead this turbulent scene!). We supers were dressed and simply sent out on stage with scimitars and instructions to "punish" the unfaithful women. Terribly excited about my ballet debut, I "concentrated" according to the Stanislavsky Method I was then studying and rushed out, not quite sure exactly what I should do. I was surprised to find the corps de ballet girls giggling softly as they writhed on the floor in their Bakst costumes, which had obviously seen better days. Suddenly one of them whispered "Kill me, kill me".

III

It was another book which spiraled the phenomena of Nijinsky deeper into my soul. In London, during the early 60's, while I was finishing my dance studies at the Royal Ballet School, Nijinsky's diary was republished. Of course, at that time it was the version his wife Romola had edited - reworking, rearranging and severely censoring it. Nonetheless, the book touched me deeply, and I was mesmerized by the simple, direct yet profoundly spiritual observations about art, life, and religion. Again, Nijinsky was not only a dancer, but took on new and deeper dimensions as an incredibly sensitive and intuitive human being,

expressing concerns above and beyond the problems of the dance world. I was moved to read the words of this man once the greatest, the most famous dancer in the world, candidly revealing the innermost layers of his soul. His philosophy of "feeling" as opposed to "thinking" struck an important emotional chord in me. Again, I discovered an aspect of his personality which echoed my own deep feelings, intuitions and longings. His natural spirituality inspired and strengthened my own conviction that dance can and may express metaphysical or even theological aspects of humanity. The ballet "Messiah" is the latest fruit of these seeds. People who cannot accept the spiritual in dance (or who are embarrassed by it), are exactly like those who deny or would censor the erotic aspects of movement. The art of dance has as its subject the human being as a whole, in all his aspects. Nijinsky was clearly not a superficial star performer - but a whole man - a tortured soul, wounded by the horrors of war and by man's inhumanity to man. His diary manifests this intense human concern and reflects his deep spirituality. Reading his own words moved me deeply - moved him closer to me.

IV

Another book deepened my understanding and consequently my appreciation of Nijinsky. It was not, however, a book specifically about Nijinsky, but Lincoln Kirstein's comprehensive dance history, "The Book of the Dance". I met the author in New York during the early 70's and remember well our conversations about Nijinsky. For Kirstein, Nijinsky was foremost a choreographer - a belief he defended and explained most eloquently in several of his books. I, too, am convinced that Nijinsky did, in fact, pave the way for modern choreography. He conceived each ballet as a completely choreographed whole, creating for every ballet a specific formal movement language, without the aid of mime or the help of any gesture language to forward the plot. He broke, in fact, completely with the idea of story - a "story" that is which can be related in words - as a pretext for dance. The story was the dance. The dance was the story. His ballets consisted of images projected directly through the substance of choreography. Choreography itself being the theme and action of the piece. For his first ballet "L'après-midi d'un faune", Nijinsky did not simply reconstruct positions



from ancient Greek vases, but from his research material created a new language - movements joined seamlessly to express a mood, a conflict, or emotion without the interruption of pantomime. Everything which has since been published on the subject, all research and attempts at reconstruction of his few ballets tend to confirm Lincoln Kirstein's theory. Nijinsky's ballets broke new and original paths towards modern choreography. The truly amazing fact for me is, that Nijinsky developed a choreographic vision - completely independent from the classical brilliance of his own virtuosity and the astounding projection of his performing presence. The characters of his ballets were in no sense based on either his incredible technical skills nor the roles which had already made him a legend! In Nijinsky we have the unique phenomenon of a great dancer becoming choreographer - who did not use his own creativity to spotlight his own special performing artistry, as for example Martha Graham or more recently the genius dancer turned

choreographer, Rudolf Nureyev. Nijinsky did not conceive choreographic texts to display his famous jumps - but searched seriously and persistently in each new work for a movement language to be danced without reference to the collective past or his own individual facility. We must remember, at this time, there was no "Modern Dance". Although the revolutionary theories of Isadora Duncan were known, her dances were generally in a flowing, naturally



harmonious style. Although certainly revolutionary, the aesthetic quality of these movement studies were probably closer to the lyrical flow of classical dance than (for example, Mikhael Fokine's "Les Sylphides") Nijinsky's clear cut shapes and broken staccato movements in "L'après-midi d'un faune". His "Sacre", using large massed groups, seems to have anticipated something of the style of Mary Wigman's later choreographies. As with Wigman, the strength of this choreography lies in the use of strong, potent, sometimes awkward body positions and the movement resulting in passing from one of these unconventional and traditionally speaking "ugly" positions to the next. This is, of course, a completely different method of composing dances to that of the classical ballet, where until this time the arranging

and rearranging of established classical steps, spiced occasionally with the possible addition of exotic or birdlike arm movements, had for the most part constituted choreography. In other words, new movements of the complete body were not invented. As a choreographer, I deeply respect and admire Nijinsky's courage. I often imagine him entering the studio to rehearse his first work and see him, standing in front of a group of dancers - colleagues with whom he must continue to perform - none of whom (except his sister Bronislava) prepared for what he would demand of them. Nijinsky must have possessed incredible inner power and conviction, even to attempt to inspire these dancers - who at that time had neither knowledge nor experience of "modern dance" - to follow him. Each time I myself must stand before a new company - the Paris Opera Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, or stars like Natalia Makarova, Erik Bruhn, Mikhael Baryshnikov or Darcey Bussell - I think of Nijinsky beginning his ballets. One always has inhibitions. One always has doubts. I ask myself each time, how far can I really go, how much can I trust. Do they trust me. How can I reconcile what I envision for the ballet with that which the dancer expects or hopes for himself. How to respect strictly both a personal concept and the desire dancer, who has trained for years and is obviously anxious to put into practice the technique he's mastered. These thoughts, it seems, may also have passed through Nijinsky's mind, but did not inhibit him. When he began to choreograph "L'après-midi d'un faune" it seems as if he'd simply said, "forget what you've learned, what you know you can do - just simply stand in these positions I show you - and forget everything else". He was prepared to alienate fellow dancers, friends, and even Diaghilev himself (who had serious doubts about "L'après-midi" before its premiere), to achieve the vision he believed in! In his next project, "Jeux", Nijinsky followed the natural consequences of his first experiment by abandoning the established aesthetic framework and formula of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Until then the greatest challenge in the conception of a new work was, as Harry Graf Kessler once stated, to "find a new costume". That is, in the next ballet, to reveal yet another remote realm of garish

color and strange, unknown modes and manners. Since May of 1909, the fresh, wild wind of the Ballets Russes, carrying a series of lavish exotic decors and costumes clothing scenes of barbaric sensuality had blown across Parisian stages. This Russian tempest upset the French ballet tradition grown pale and decadent, bound to 19th century clichés. The audience, however, was excited and awaited with anticipation the next chapter of Diaghilev's "1001 Nights". Then came Nijinsky's "Jeux" - the first ballet danced in modern dress. Taking its basic idea and form from popular culture, "Jeux" was also the first ballet to use sport as a metaphor for subliminal erotic currents in human relationships. The ritual and routine of the tennis court suggested the "game" between people. There was no plot one could explain in words, no libretto, nor real story - hardly any external action. The theme of "Jeux" was in a sense "non-action" - the choreography a reflection of interior emotional states. A ball rolls onto the stage - one, two, three dancers enter, leave, return - the ball rolls. No words can explain what actually happened... Until this time, every ballet had been composed following a libretto, First, an author wrote a synopsis. Then, someone wrote music, someone else designed scenery and costumes, and another the choreography. Of course, sometimes libretto and choreographer were identical, but the "author" was always primary and listed first in the program. Not so with "Jeux". Although there are contradicting versions of its genesis and the exact origin on the "author" of this ballet is unclear - it is certain that no written libretto dictated the direction of the choreography. Inspired by the painter Gauguin, the sculptural shapes of the ballet represented, as Richard Buckle remarks, "an essay in formal relations". Was "Jeux" the first abstract ballet? The final consequence followed: In his middle twenties and at the height of his career as a dancer, Nijinsky in his third ballet, "Le Sacre du printemps", choreographed himself out of the piece! This scrupulous decision reflects clearly for me Nijinsky's essential lack of concern for fame, personal ambition or vanity. He was a choreographer of absolute and rigorous values.



V

At first there were books. By reading about him, the image of Nijinsky grew in my imagination acquiring more and more shading, contour, and facets. The more I knew of him, the greater grew my interest. In June of 1975, the concurrence of the first Nijinsky Gala in Hamburg with one of the last great Russian Ballet sales at Sotheby's in London was the stimulus propelling me to begin a collection of works of art depicting Nijinsky. My collection of dance books had grown considerably, and of course the library included everything ever printed about Nijinsky and the era of the Ballets Russes. But, until then, my small dance-art

collection was restricted to a handful of Romantic prints. With this auction, the first at which I bid, the situation changed drastically. The Una Troubridge bronze of Nijinsky's head as the Faun was first to enter my collection. This sculpture, supposedly the only of his face modeled from life, is a bronze casting of the plaster bust found by Lydia Sokolova in October 1954. It is a version of the bust modeled originally in wax and based on the sketches Troubridge did in London in 1913, observing Nijinsky during his daily classes in the Drill Hall in Google Street, and watching him from the wings before his stage entrances. The 1913 poster of Nijinsky in "Le Spectre de la rose" designed by Jean Cocteau followed. Then, more and more followed. The Nijinsky collection became a passion. Each new piece - each drawing, painting, porcelain, or lithograph illuminated another nuance, multiplying the visual aspects of this artist - this man who obviously was so many things to so many people. It's quite revealing to analyze how the visual artists of his time saw Nijinsky, whose fame bridges the span between Art Nouveau and Art Deco to the Modern. Many of the



works are charmingly decorative: such as Montenegro's decadent pen and ink studies or Dorothy Mullocks water colors used as illustrations in Geoffrey Whitworth's 1913 book, "The Art of Nijinsky", Valentine Hugo's action sketches of the dancer, on the other hand, suggest more immediately the reality of the dancer in his various roles. Hugo never tired of drawing Nijinsky and it is interesting how the artist's pencil drawings of one of the most famous poses from "Le Spectre" (it must have been her favorite!) becomes in each successive version more and more abstract. In the end, the figure becomes a study in pure curving lines, a series of intertwining circles - prefiguring Nijinsky's own fascinating with circles in his own later drawings. Unfortunately, the incredible draftsmanship of Georges Barbier's beautiful gouaches reveal more about the design skills of the painter and the decorative taste of the day than the tactile values of Nijinsky's body. In spite of the delicate interpretations of Nijinsky in his early roles, in studying these many pen and ink drawings by Barbier, one becomes conscious of the limitation of the Art Nouveau style to capture the essence of a revolutionary choreographer. George Barbier designed two portfolios of lithographs published in 1913, one dedicated to Nijinsky, the other to Tamara Karsavina of which almost all the original drawings are in my collection. In Karsavina's portfolio, however, Nijinsky is frequently pictured as her partner. In both albums, the most successful studies are those of typically Art Nouveau themes - the drawings of "Le Spectre de la rose", "Carnaval", or "Les Sylphides" for example, are truly splendid and in their striking spacial dynamic and precise technique, comparable to the best of Audrey Beardsley. Quite the opposite is Barbier's representation of "Jeux", which seems stiff and awkward - a drawing without energy. The basically illustrative art of Barbier, it seems, could not apprehend the new bolder experiments of Nijinsky's choreography. The drawing seems particularly weak in comparison to Gauguin's striking modern lyricism which had inspired the choreographer. Nijinsky's vision was clearly not only ahead of his time, but ahead of most the visual artists attracted to visualize him. The visual impact "L'après-midi d'un faune" was, I think, less shocking that the famous scandal would lead us to believe. The set and costume designs by Léon Bakst - similar to those for "Narcisse" and "Daphnis and Chloe" - were certainly less progressive than the choreography. The sense of opposition between new ideas in "old clothes" becomes apparent studying its representations by various artists of the period. Valentine Hugo's oil painting of Nijinsky as the Faun for example gives a rather sweet,

almost fairy-tale or sentimental impression of this supposedly shocking piece. Could this really be what she saw, how she experienced the ballet which cause such controversy because of its erotic directness? On the other hand, Mikhail Larionov's spontaneous pencil sketch of Nijinsky rehearsing the same ballet (which unfortunately I do not own!) reflects for me the original elemental strength the dance and dancer must have had. Nijinsky's being is there alive on the page - in fact, he bursts the dimensions of the paper as his head springs through the upper edge! His figure has the tactile values of a Masaccio. This drawing, emphasizing Nijinsky's powerful neck, recalls the wonderful early caricatures of Cocteau. Actually, only a few artists have captured the pure strength of the man and suggested the power of the dancer in movement. The decorative drawings of George Lepape, Ludwig Kainer, or André Marty, present beautiful but superficial impressions of what the artist may have been to some or many people. Jean Cocteau on the other hand, especially in the sketches from or before 1913, offers the essence. Seeing Nijinsky sit squarely filling the page with the potent thrust and span of his knees or seeing him move vigorously at a rehearsal of "Le Sacre", his neck like a powerful tree trunk in movement. One reads and feels Nijinsky's might and energy in these few lines. In contrast, one is touched by the strong gentleness in Gustav Klimt's simple portrait drawing. Nijinsky's own drawings remain enigmatic. At the same time, they radiate life, project energy, and warm my rooms.

VI

I continue to collect, to search for new images - for more pieces to this puzzle - Nijinsky. I collect not to exhibit as a museum would do, but simply to live with these manifestations of a man I've learned truly to love - more and more deeply through the years. In my living room, my study, my studio, and the long hallways of my apartment I am quite literally surrounded by Nijinsky. My favourite pieces are kept in the dining room where at breakfast, one of the most intimate moments of my day, I can glance at or study intensely Georg Kolbe's exciting nude sculpture done in 1913. Although this bronze figure is surely an idealized interpretation of Nijinsky's body, (- the small Froedman-Cluzel bronze surely gives a more accurate account of Nijinsky's anatomy and physical appearance), sketches in the Kolbe Museum in Berlin prove the dancer did pose for the artist. Kolbe's dynamic, archaic figure projects the impression of vitality, bodily coordination and power the dancer's presence must have given, and can therefore be considered a portrait. My only regrets regarding to the collection are for those items I failed to buy. I am haunted by the memory of objects passed by in doubt or for lack of funds. I remember well the Malvina Hoffmann bronze of Nijinsky as the Faun offered to me in the early 70's in New York City, and later the truly gorgeous oil painting of the dancer in "Les Orientales" by Jacques-Emile Blanche. Then, in the early 90's, when his diary was sold again, I remember holding it, touching it, studying, feeling, turning page after page - and then not buying it. Today my collection includes hundreds of objects: Oil paintings, water colors, drawings, lithographs, photographs, bronzes, porcelain figures, press cuttings, and documents such as contracts or the menu of his wedding brunch signed by himself, his wife, and all important guests, and a collection of condolence letters and cards sent to his wife after his death. The act of collecting is a labor of love. - The fulfillment of this labor would be one day to establish a center, a combination Research Institute and Museum dedicated to Nijinsky. With this vision, this dream, I continue to try to "rescue" the traces of Nijinsky from becoming financial investments for blasé businessmen. The experiences of an intimate contact with the presence radiating from the walls, the rooms of my "Live-in Museum" is the ultimate

motivation for my collecting. A spiritual adventure, approaching Nijinsky, encountering his images each day, I discover him - discover new aspects through the facets of my fascination.

John Neumeier - January. 3, 2000