

**SERGE LIFAR IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FRENCH  
INTELLECTUAL TRADITION:  
A CULTURAL-PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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The history of culture across different historical epochs brings to the forefront and reinterprets various factors of artistic life, highlighting certain phenomena, figures, and artistic practices as representative of their time. These processes become especially pronounced during periods of intense cultural rupture, when art functions not only as a sphere of aesthetic expression but also as a space of intellectual inquiry and philosophical reflection. Such an exceptionally rich and contradictory period in artistic terms was the twentieth century, marked by profound transformations in European choreographic art, the emergence of new aesthetic systems, experimental forms of dance, and a reconsideration of its status within the arts. One of the key figures in this process was our compatriot Serhii Mykhailovych Lifar (1905–1986), an outstanding dancer, choreographer, ballet reformer, and intellectual of European stature, whose work became an important component of modernization processes within the French artistic environment. Despite difficult life circumstances, exile, and numerous historical cataclysms that accompanied his fate, he consistently remained faithful to his artistic and aesthetic principles. He did not deviate from his chosen philosophy of creativity, which combined a drive to renew ballet with a deep engagement with its classical foundations.

Thanks to the large-scale developments of Y. Stanishevsky, O. Chepalov, O. Zinich, and M. Pogrebnyak, such areas of thematic analysis of S. Lifar's work as the interaction of music and dance, his creative method and aesthetics of neoclassical dance, and the features of the individual choreographer's style have been deeply developed. This study aims to identify the cultural-philosophical meaning of S. Lifar's creative explorations and their determination by the cultural constellation of the French intellectual milieu. Without claiming to provide a comprehensive coverage of the stated topic, we seek to outline its potential directions.

The Encyclopedia Britannica correctly describes Serge Lifar as a Ukrainian-French dancer and choreographer. In 1929, Lifar began working at the Paris Opera Ballet as principal dancer and choreographer. He introduced weekly ballet performances, thereby abolishing the Opera's former practice of staging ballet only in conjunction with opera productions. In 1932, he was awarded the title of Professor of Dance. He initiated reforms of the Opera's school to enable its dancers to perform contemporary ballets, including his own works. From 1935 onward, at the Paris Opera, he implemented reforms in the movement, technique, and aesthetics of dance, which, according to his own definition, came to be known as "neoclassical" ballet [2].

In the same year, Lifar created the "Choreographer's Manifesto," in which he called for an expansion of the repertoire of expressive means and the renewal of choreographic forms. The author advocated the independence of music from dance. In ballet art, primacy belongs to dance. A foundational element of his philosophy is rhythm, which functions as the connecting link between music and dance. Since antiquity, the concepts of rhythm and harmony have been understood as categories essential not only for comprehending art, but also the macrocosm and microcosm. These are categories of cultural creativity. The inseparable unity of these concepts shapes the collaboration between the musician and the choreographer. By giving priority not to music but to choreography, and by criticizing the original predominance of the musical component in the concept of performance, "...S. Lifar does not reject music as such, but radically transforms the meaning and 'appearance' of this component of ballet" [1, p. 155].

Obviously, the emergence of the "Choreographer's Manifesto" was driven by the desire to establish dance as a field of study on a par with any other discipline. Indeed, since the beginning of the twentieth century in Europe, there had been a growing awareness of the need for this art form to move beyond its traditionally ephemeral status [3]. Somewhat earlier, in 1928, the Austrian educator R. Laban introduced an invented system of movement notation, known as Labanotation, which was based on the analysis of the human body and its energy unfolding in time and space. The creation of this system contributed to the transformation of dance into a serious object of artistic analysis.

S. Lifar presented himself as an author of books and scholarly treatises. The choreographer was a co-owner of S. Diaghilev's archive and was concerned with preserving the memory of the impresario and his friend. Alternatively, recalling J. Derrida's essay, it can be argued that Lifar was affected by an "archive fever." The dual meaning of the word "archive" as both "origin" and "command," as examined by the French philosopher, helps clarify Lifar's passion for the archive and interpret the authoritarian, self-referential manner in which he managed it throughout his life.

S. Lifar participated in the 2nd International Conference on Aesthetics and Art History, held at the Sorbonne on 11 August 1937, where he delivered a paper and also performed excerpts from the ballet *Icarus* [4]. This ballet resonated with the ideas set out in the "Choreographer's Manifesto," as the musical accompaniment was replaced by rhythm, thereby embodying the principle of dance's independence. Notably, P. Valéry and other renowned artists and thinkers were present in the audience.

The facts presented above attest to Lifar's establishment not only in French ballet but also in the French intellectual milieu. The scale of his creative output and influence, the strength of his connections, and his unwavering determination to address the challenges of emigration, achieving success not only as a dancer and choreographer but also in terms of his social impact as an intellectual, should also be considered. As a public figure, admired by photographers and frequently giving radio interviews, Lifar became a true media icon throughout the 1930s.

S. Lifar's academic career cannot be overlooked: from 1955 onward, he taught the history and theory of dance at the Sorbonne, introducing his own system for training ballet dancers. In the same year, he was recognized as the best dancer and choreographer in France and awarded the prestigious international distinction in choreography – the "Golden Shoe" award. In 1957, he founded and served as rector of the Paris Dance University.

S. Lifar's authored publications were not only the result of reflection on choreography but also aimed at stimulating broad public interest in the problems of ballet and its history. Among such works, it is worth mentioning *The History of Dance* (1938), *Treatise on Academic Dance* (1949), *Auguste Vestris: The God of Dance* (1950), *Music through Dance: From Lully to Prokofiev* (1955), and *Dance: Academic Dance and Choreographic Art* (1965). The popularization of choreography was facilitated not only by the scholarly and publishing activity of the "god of dance." In 1973, our compatriot was among the initiators of the International Dance Council at UNESCO. Lifar was elected honorary president of this organization.

Serge Lifar embodies a direct link to the modernist era. Having directed the Paris Opera for thirty years, he brought to French ballet a spirit of revival of its glorious traditions, grounded in the autonomy of dance, discipline, and an awareness of the dancer's essential role. Without him, the Paris Opera Ballet would not be the world-renowned institution it is today.

He became a significant figure comparable to the great eighteenth-century ballet reformers, on the scale of J.-J. Noverre. In Paris, Lifar took on ballet as an art form and, at the same time, became a researcher of dance, producing numerous publications. S. Lifar's activity was multifaceted: creative and performative, choreographic, pedagogical, and scholarly. The philosophy of his creative explorations was shaped within the French intellectual milieu. For a deeper understanding of Lifar's embeddedness in this context, it is necessary to conduct a detailed analysis not only of his substantial works but also of the archive preserved in Lausanne.

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