



## A Man for All Seasons: Enrico Cecchetti and the Ballets Russes

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### Abstract

This article investigates the relationships between Italian ballet master Enrico Cecchetti and Diaghilev's Ballets Russes by drawing upon a number of rare and hitherto unpublished sources.

### Keywords

Enrico Cecchetti; Sergej Diaghilev; Léonide Massine; Italian Ballet; Ballets Russes; Carlo Blasis; ballet mime

According to a number of sources,<sup>1)</sup> Serge Diaghilev asked Enrico Cecchetti's opinion about *Le Sacre du Printemps* just after the ballet's notoriously stormy premiere. The sixty-three-year-old ballet master answered:

I think the whole thing has been done by four idiots. First: M. Stravinsky, who wrote the music. Second: M. Roerich, who designed the scenery and the costumes. Third: M. Nijinsky who composed the dances. Fourth: M. Diaghilev, who wasted money on it.<sup>2)</sup>

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<sup>1)</sup> See the sources cited in the following note as well as Luigi Rossi, *Enrico Cecchetti: il Maestro dei Maestri* (Milan: Edizioni della Danza, 1977), p. 56; Jean-Marie Montalto, "Cecchetti!!!", *Le Ballet*, Autumn 1952, 4, p. 37.

<sup>2)</sup> Cyril W. Beaumont, *Enrico Cecchetti, A Memoir* (London: C. W. Beaumont, 1929), pp. 34-35. See also Olga Racster, *The Master of Russian Ballet* (London: Hutchinson, 1922), p. 226. In Ractser, however, the anecdote reads: "I think the whole thing has been made by four idiots. First M. Stravinsky, who wrote the music. Second: M. Bakst, who did the

Given that accounts such as Olga Racster's 1922 *The Master of Russian Ballet* and Cyril W. Beaumont's 1929 *Enrico Cecchetti, A Memoir* were mostly, if not exclusively based on Cecchetti's personal recollections, it is possible that the amusing anecdote was made up by the man himself, not unlike other stories perpetuated, rather naively, by other historians. Cecchetti's critical view of the "modernism" of the Ballets Russes, however, is corroborated by another, less known anecdote, found in an interview with his son Grazioso:

[...] in 1912, during a matinee, Diaghilev invited my father and me to accompany him for a cup of coffee and a cigarette outside the theater. I noticed that, during the conversation the famous impresario kept looking at the time. Eventually he said, "Well, it is over, we can go back." The invitation outside had simply been a ruse to keep my father away from the theater during Nijinsky's *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*, which, as Diaghilev knew far too well, my father hated despite his immense love and affection for Vaslav.<sup>3)</sup>

Finally, sounder, more reliable evidence of Cecchetti's negative opinion about the Diaghilevians' radical move toward modernism, is found in a letter he wrote to Léonide Massine:

To my excellent pupil and friend Leonid [*sic*] Massine,

As it is very frequently the case in the arts world, the passing of time plagues, tempers, and even changes what once were feisty youthful passions and ideals. Futurism, Cubism, and all the artistic decadence that surrounds us today, will soon make room for a rebirth of Classicism; as a great man from the past used to say: "Do you want something beautiful, something good, something truly modern? Go back to the past, go back to antiquity."

One day, re-reading this book will remind you of our good classes. . . . Read it, read it now and then, as, above all, it will remind you of your Old Friend, Maestro Enrico Cecchetti<sup>4)</sup>

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*décor*. Third: M. Nijinsky, who is the choreographer. Fourth: M. Diaghilev, who has put so much money into it!"

<sup>3)</sup> In Livia Brillarelli, *Quaderni Cecchettiani* (Civitanova Marche), No. 1 (2001).

<sup>4)</sup> Draft, in Italian, undated.

Although undated, the letter was almost certainly written in 1922, since it was intended to accompany the recently published *Manual of the Theory and the Practice of Classical Theatrical Dancing (Méthode Cecchetti)*.<sup>5)</sup> By that time Cecchetti had been teaching artists of the legendary Ballets Russes for fourteen years and had created roles in successful works such as *Carnaval* (1910), *Schéhérazade* (1910), *Firebird* (1910), *Petrouchka* (1911), *Le Coq d'Or* (1914), *The Good-Humoured Ladies* (1917), *La Boutique Fantasque* (1919), and *Pulcinella* (1920). Groundbreaking as those works may have been, they were not as radical as *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, or *Parade*, works that heralded and marked major changes in ballet aesthetics and history. Indeed, Vaslav Nijinsky had conceived the role of Ancestor in *Sacre* for Cecchetti, but the Italian artist did not appear in the production of this controversial work.

Probably the utter subversion of the classical formulas did not suit the old ballet master, whose attachment to well-established performing tenets had found a suitable context in the less extreme though still modern titles mentioned above. Even so, it would be historically misguided to assume that modernist dance makers drew on those skills, and Cecchetti's mime abilities in particular, simply because they represented a colorful and slightly nostalgic echo of a bygone era. Contrary to what many dance writers continue to argue, nineteenth-century ballet mime was everything but a strictly prescriptive sign language that left little or no creative freedom to the interpreter. Cecchetti had studied mime acting both with his father, a popular mime dancer hailing from the late Romantic era, and with teachers such as the highly regarded mime Marino Legittimo, with whom he had worked privately at Giovanni Lepri's school in Florence. Thus, from a very early age he had learned the significance of silent acting, by performing in works that relied heavily on that idiom, in line with the Italian tradition of *coreodramma*, or choreodrama, which originated in the early nineteenth-century works of Salvatore Viganò.<sup>6)</sup>

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<sup>5)</sup> Cyril Beaumont and Stanislas Idzikowski, *A Manual of the Theory and the Practice of Classical Theatrical Dancing (Méthode Cecchetti)* (London: C. W. Beaumont, 1922).

<sup>6)</sup> The genre of the *coreodramma* is associated with the creative genius of Salvatore Viganò, who gave new vital impulses to the renewal of theater dance in Italy during the first decade of the nineteenth century. In *coreodramma* the rhythmic use of mime gestures was accorded greater prominence than pure dancing, which occurred only intermittently in what could be regarded as a gigantic mime drama performance.

At the time of Cecchetti's debut as *primo ballerino assoluto* in Florence,<sup>7)</sup> the standard structure of every Italian ballet company was still characterized by a division between *ballerini di rango italiano* or "dancers of Italian rank" and *ballerini di rango francese* or "dancers of French rank." Regardless of the actual geographical provenance of the artists, the former category encompassed those who excelled as mime artists, thus perpetuating the "Italian" *coreodramma* tradition. Dancers of the "French rank" were those who had developed their skills in line with the principles of the French *danse académique*,<sup>8)</sup> which, contrary to what is generally believed, had been imported to Italy by the likes of Carlo Blasis.<sup>8)</sup>

Although dancers of the "Italian rank" relied on gestural codes stemming from commedia dell'arte traditions of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, they also had a personal repertoire of visually effective narrative poses and gestures, derived from subjective adaptations of those same codes. Enrico Cecchetti too, like his father Cesare, had learned how to break free from the constraints of the old formulas and captivate audiences with his unique repertoire of expressive movements, which he combined with his equally dazzling technical dancing skills. Indeed, much of his success in the second half of the nineteenth century depended on the fact that he was one of the first, if not the very first, to cross the boundaries between one category and the other, thus being a mime and a pure dancer at the same time. Interestingly, it was not long after he started touring Italy as a *primo ballerino assoluto* that the old division between dances of the "Italian" and "French" ranks disappeared altogether from posters, programs, and librettos.

Such artistic versatility proved a winning card for Cecchetti when he toured abroad and gave him an unusual freedom to migrate and fit within diverse choreographic contexts. He thus moved easily from one artistic

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<sup>7)</sup> The first time Cecchetti was billed as *primo ballerino assoluto* was at the Teatro Borgognissanti in Florence in 1868, not at Milan's La Scala Theater in 1870, as stated by most dance historians.

<sup>8)</sup> Blasis, the alleged "father" of modern ballet, has been wrongly credited by several generations of historians with creating the so-called "Italian school." Trained in France, Blasis imported the principles of that school to Italy, where he taught for several decades. For a re-appraisal of the birth of the Italian school see Flavia Pappacena, *Dance in Italy: From the 18th Century to the Present Day* (Roma: Gremese, 2001) and *Carlo Blasis' Treatise on Dance* (Rome: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2005).

epoch to another, creating ballets by Marius Petipa as well as by Michel Fokine, the choreographer who had proposed a less prescriptive and constraining approach to ballet mime than the traditional nineteenth-century one in his famous 1914 letter to *The Times*.<sup>9)</sup>

For innovative dance makers such as Fokine and Massine, therefore, Cecchetti was more just than a colorful link with the past—as some have claimed—for his presence in any of the works mentioned above was fully justified by his evergreen, almost “modern,” chameleonic adaptability as well as by his interpretative bravura. Works such as *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, and, above all, the Cubist *Parade*, did not leave much space for that versatility or for the dance artist's traditional interpretative input. It is not surprising, therefore, that Cecchetti disapproved of those works, because he saw them as a threat to his profession, and, on a more personal level, he felt cast aside. While most of Fokine's and Massine's works drew upon values in which Cecchetti firmly believed, radical creations such as *Sacre* and *Parade* totally subverted those values, thus drawing the criticism and the derision of a man who, at his age, was not prepared to accept the any radical rethinking of his long held artistic creed.

The overt attack on Cubism betrays clearly the effect a work such as *Parade* must have had on Cecchetti. As an expressive dancer-mime, he must have regarded the obliteration of any subjective interpretative freedom caused by some of Picasso's sculpture-like costumes as unacceptable symptoms of the “decadence” that he mentions in the letter. Likewise, there is little doubt that the reference to Futurism was prompted by Giacomo Balla's *Feu d'artifice*, in which the blazing set constituted the ballet's sole action.

Similar ideas to those expounded in the draft of his letter to Massine are reiterated in the draft of the dedication that Cecchetti wrote for the copy of the *Manual* that probably accompanied the letter:

To my dearest friend Leonid [*sic*] Massine, read, read this book, as it will remind you of our classes. Most of all it will be good for you with your excessive love for everything modern as it will calm down your youthful futuristic

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<sup>9)</sup> Michel Fokine, “The New Russian Ballet. Conventions in Dancing. M. Fokine's Principles and Aims” [Letter to the Editor], *The Times*, 6 July 1914, p. 6.

fantasies, with a reminder of the old, everlasting Classicism. Read it often, it will also remind you of your old friend Maestro Enrico Cecchetti.<sup>10)</sup>

Once again, Futursim, an art movement created by his own compatriots, comes under fire—unsurprisingly, given that in the 1917 *Manifesto della Danza Futurista* Giacomo Balla and other Futurists advocated a radical and somewhat comically irreverent revision of the art of ballet. Cecchetti's stern opposition to Futurism and to other Modernist currents, however, should not be regarded as synonymous with the blinkered conservatism of the diehard supporter of the old tradition. The Ballets Russes experience had indeed been an eye-opener for him, as highlighted by a brief passage in a letter that he wrote in French to one of his first English pupils, Molly Lake.

Boulevard de Capucines 25  
Pension Guinot  
Paris  
Sunday, 4 December 1920

My dear Molly,

I have received your letter, and I thank you for your lovely enthusiasm and for the news you give me.

I want to say « bravo » for your tenacity and your commitment to work. And I want to say « bravo » also to all the girls who keep constantly working, especially Marguerite [possibly Margaret Craske] and Orsoline [Ursula Moreton].

I would also like to thank you for the good wishes for Madame Cecchetti, which we reciprocate with wishes from the depth of our hearts and which we extend to your mother and to all our students.

As for us, we do not have very good news. The sea journey was marred by a horrible storm; everyone was sick, and I more than anyone else. Just imagine that the nervous reaction paralyzed my legs!

For a good two hours after arriving I could not move my legs. At the moment, everything is better, thank God, and we have already started working; every morning the regular classes, every day the rehearsals, and both Katherine [unknown] and Errol [Addison] rehearse everyday, as they appear in every ballet.

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<sup>10)</sup> Draft, in French, undated.

Our opening was magnificent, with great success; even the ballets I did not believe to be successful met with appraisal, for example *La Boutique Fantasque*, which was liked a lot. How the taste of the public changes. . . .

For the last few days we have not been working as the Opéra [...] is affected by the strike of the musicians and the stagehands, and God knows when they will reach an agreement!<sup>11)</sup>

The remarks on *La Boutique Fantasque* and on the public's taste are quite revealing, for they are symptomatic of a somewhat surprisingly open-minded attitude toward the changes that had transformed, in less than eleven years, the art of ballet. Massine's 1919 creation could be regarded as the last of a long stream of ballets revolving around dolls coming to life. Its plot was very similar to that of *The Fairy Doll*, a popular and fashionable prerevolutionary ballet, adapted from the old Viennese ballet *Die Puppenfee* (1888) and first staged in St. Petersburg by Sergei and Nikolai Legat at the Hermitage Theater in 1903.

Cecchetti's doubts are likely to have been prompted by the fact that the 1919 ballet was, in his eyes, too "retro" for a public that had been carefully brought up and spoiled with modernist exploits of a different, radical, and even scandalous nature. In admitting that he did not believe that Parisian audiences, always looking for the new and the radical, would have liked Massine's creation, Cecchetti confessed, more or less implicitly, to having accepted—implicitly, at least—Diaghilev's aesthetic credo. The remark casts significant light on the man's artistic sensibility and on his enlightened flexibility—typical of an artist who accepts change in the name of his art. In line with his witty persona, the then seventy-year-old artist adds a slightly ironic remark on the ever-changing, unpredictable taste of the public. The sentence ends with a cleverly placed ellipsis, as if to say that after all he was right in believing that, because of that unpredictability, the novelties were unlikely to stand the test of time, and only the centuries old, "classical" tradition would ultimately survive.

It is difficult to ascertain whether the Classicism that Cecchetti invoked was the same Classicism that had inspired Carlo Blasis almost a century earlier—namely a mid-to-late eighteenth-century reinterpretation of ancient

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<sup>11)</sup> In French, *Letters Cecchetti/Beaumont*, Theatre and Performance Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

aesthetics—or the rather different notion of Classicism that informed the late nineteenth-century *danse classique* in Western Europe and Russia. What is certain is that in promoting a return to the classical forms the old ballet master was, more or less unconsciously, invoking artistic principles similar to those that would shortly inform George Balanchine's choreography and twentieth-century neoclassical ballet in general.

Cecchetti's bitter criticism makes one wonder why he had agreed to work with a company that was innovative and revolutionary from the outset. At the same time, one also wonders why Diaghilev did everything in his power to keep such a die-hard representative of all that he and his collaborators were questioning, challenging, and ultimately fighting against. Despite their different artistic views, the two men had a great deal in common, and their relationship went far beyond mutual professional admiration and respect, as the following telegrams—the originals of which are all in French—indicate.

London, 20 December, 1924

How [*is*] health Maestro if work [*does not*] tire could you take classes [*at*] Montecarlo [*from*] fifteenth January [*to*] first May.

Telegraph [*your*] conditions [*with*] friendship.

Diaghilev Savoy

London, 22 December 1924

Happy [*to have received*] your telegram accept 4000 [*francs*] classes [*will*] start [*on*] 14 January embrace you both—Diaghilev

London, 24 December 1924

Your announced return [*has been*] received with enthusiasm by company that wishes you happy festivities—Diaghilev

Cecchetti's departure from London in 1923 had, among other things, deprived the company of a significant artistic point of reference in the English capital, which by then had become almost a second home for the Ballets Russes. Fortunately, Turin, where Cecchetti resided before assuming the directorship of La Scala ballet school in 1925, was not far from Monte Carlo, where the company had its headquarters. Like many close friends of the Cecchettis, Diaghilev could hardly believe that the old Maestro would have truly enjoyed the idleness of retirement and did

all he could to secure the continued collaboration of the irreplaceable ballet master.

Not even the prestigious appointment at La Scala deterred the Russian impresario from inviting Cecchetti to teach. Aware of the time constraints imposed by the Maestro's new post, he found all possible expedients to have the Maestro look after at least the company's new rising male star, Serge Lifar.

Grand Hotel Paris  
12 Boulevard de Capucines  
Paris, 8 June 1926

My good Maestro and dear friend,

You can hardly imagine the joy of receiving your letter. I am sure that [*the time in Venice*] will be more [*a time of*] rest for you. You will only have to give one daily class to that *petite canaille* Serge Lifar, who is already indebted to you for the start of his brilliant career.

I have only one request to you, namely to accept 5,000 francs instead of the 4,000 you have asked me for, and, obviously, travel [*expenses for*] two.

I really want you to spend the month of August lacking for nothing, and I think the sum mentioned above will cover better your stay and necessities.

I will inform you of the exact date of your arrival in *la Bella Venezia*. I am fairly sure that the date will be August 1st.

We love you very much, and it will be a real joy to be able to spend together the short time of your well-deserved holiday.

With all my friendship,  
Serge de Diaghilev

P.S. I will leave Saturday to go to London where my address will be His Majesty's Theatre.<sup>12)</sup>

Hotel de L'Europe  
Venice  
18 August 1927

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<sup>12)</sup> The original of this and the Diaghilev letters that follow are in French.

My good Maestro and dear friend,

I have sent you a telegram because they told me that you have gone to the seaside.

I will thus do my best to convince you to change seaside and come to visit us for three weeks in Venice.

Last year you suffered greatly from the heat and the bad food at the Lido.

This year the time of unbearable heat has ended; it is cool and pleasant, and we are not at the Lido, but in Venice, where the food is excellent and cheap.

Given that your engagement at La Scala will not start until September 15, I wonder whether you could make another sacrifice for me and spend the last three weeks of your holidays with me and, in that time, give daily classes to Lifar, who is getting bored and truly needs [*your classes*].

You cannot imagine to what extent I miss you during our seasons and how impatiently I look forward to your telling La Scala to go to hell!

I embrace you both with deep affection,

Serge Diaghilev

I did not write before as the doctor prescribed total rest for Lifar during his first month of holidays.

Hotel de l'Europe

Venice

17 August 1928

My dear and much beloved Maestro,

How is your health?

Are you doing anything nice?

When are you going to start again at La Scala?

Serge Lifar wrote to you twice. Did you receive his letters, together with the check and the programs? He really longs to have news of you.

Should you go back to La Scala he would really like to start working with you again at the end of September for one month. You know how good is for him to work with you and how much he loves it.

If, by any chance, you have taken time off in Turin, would there be any chance for him to take class with you there?

We have been informed of the brilliant results of your students at the yearly exams, and we congratulate you with all our hearts.

Do please give us news of you, as I will be here for two more weeks.  
 Believe me, dear Maestro in my profound and old friendship.  
 Serge Diaghilev.

Beyond the sly and flattering prose that Diaghilev used to convince Cecchetti to give Lifar private classes, there is a clear sense of close camaraderie and friendship. In the letter dated 8 June 1926, for instance, the impresario refers in a rather informal and even, intimate way to Lifar, the last *premier danseur*<sup>13)</sup> of his company with whom he had an affair. Such informality and the fact that toward the end Diaghilev switches from the first person singular to “we” and “us,” seems to indicate a strong and unpretentious bond between Cecchetti and Diaghilev. A similar tone and a similar theme are found in the letter dated 18 August 1927, in which Diaghilev refers to Lifar’s boredom. Yet it is the generous offer that the great impresario makes Cecchetti, together with the apparently sincere expressions of care, love, and friendship that leave no doubt about the closeness between Diaghilev and Cecchetti—a proximity that justifies the Maestro’s unabashedly critical remark about *Sacre* quoted earlier.

Such closeness surely stemmed from a shared and multifarious experience of the rich history of the Ballets Russes. According to Cyril W. Beaumont, it was Tamara Karsavina who first asked Diaghilev to engage the Maestro, for she did not

[...] wish to interrupt the lessons she was receiving from Cecchetti [in St. Petersburg]; the same reason was pleaded when Diaghilev sought to obtain the services of other dancers. This decided him to ask Cecchetti to join his company, for he would then not only secure the dancers he required, but also a *maitre de ballet* and mime of genius.<sup>14)</sup>

The invitation to become part of the Ballets Russes arrived in 1911, when Diaghilev set up the company as an independent entity and severed for good most links with the Imperial Ballet. Cecchetti, however, had been invited to work with Diaghilev’s dancers the previous year, for the second Paris dance season, during which he had created three memorable and truly

<sup>13)</sup> As Sjeng Scheijen refers to him in *Diaghilev, A Life* (London: Profile Books, 2009).

<sup>14)</sup> Beaumont, *Enrico Cecchetti*, pp. 25-26.

diverse roles—Pantolon in *Carnaval*, the Chief Eunuch in *Schéhérazade*, and Kotschei in *Firebird*.

It was probably seeing the old artist both on stage and in the studio that convinced Diaghilev that there was more to engaging Maestro Cecchetti than just providing the company with stylistic and technical consistency. Indeed, the Maestro's classes were never just a drearily repetitive set of empty exercises, for both the adagio and the allegro sections were structured in a way that aimed at refining and enhancing the artistry of the dancers—not just their technique.<sup>15)</sup> Those classes, together with the living example provided by Cecchetti on stage, were an immense inspiration for the dancers and other performance-makers, even after Cecchetti himself had left the Ballets Russes.

There was yet another affinity between the impresario and the Maestro: both had clashed with the masters of Russia's arts bureaucracy. Like Diaghilev, who was fired and ultimately barred from working in the Imperial Theaters, Cecchetti was often at odds with the Imperial Ballet, ostracized by colleagues and the object of bitter rivalries: Marius Petipa, for example, disliked him intensely. Cecchetti was an unusual artist in that he could be both mime and pure dancer. As a *primo ballerino assoluto*, he surprised ballet-goers all over Europe by lacking the prescribed *physique du rôle*. Indeed, all the parts he created had to be devised especially to accommodate his unusual non-*danseur noble* body and his irresistible combination of mime and technical skills. Even the famous Blue Bird pas de deux in Act III of Marius Petipa's *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890) was originally conceived as a "character" role, becoming a "classical" role only when Georgii Kiaksht took over the part from Cecchetti and had the choreography changed.

As a choreographer, Cecchetti was also very much the odd one out. The first creation of his performed in Russia, a duet based on a balleticized version of an Italian popular dance that he performed with his sister Pia in 1878, was described by the puzzled critic of a St Petersburg newspaper as a "modern dance," being different from everything to which Russian ballet-goers were accustomed.<sup>16)</sup> Later, after he joined the Imperial Ballet,

<sup>15)</sup> See Toby Bennett and Giannandrea Poesio, "Mime in Cecchetti's Method," *Dance Research*, 18, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 31-43.

<sup>16)</sup> Anon., "Echo of the Theaters," *Peterburgskaia Gazeta*, 26 May 1878, p. 3.

his stagings of nineteenth-century classics such as *Caterina*, *La Fille du Bandit*, and *Coppélia*, as well as his choreographic contributions to *Cinderella* were often bitterly criticized for being too radically removed from the era's staging and choreographic canons. Such alleged "modernism" turned him into an outsider, though a much respected and revered one. In this he was not dissimilar to Diaghilev, and it is significant that both were compelled to leave the constraining environment of the Imperial Theaters to pursue their careers either abroad or in Russia, but outside government-run institutions. Thus, despite differences in age and views, the two men had more in common than has been generally thought.

Finally, Cecchetti was the man responsible for the artistic and technical development of the three male stars with whom Diaghilev was involved in multiple ways—Vaslav Nijinsky, Léonide Massine, and Serge Lifar. As revealed by the interview with Grazioso Cecchetti quoted above, Cecchetti was particularly fond of Nijinsky, the dancer able to dazzle audiences in the same way as the teacher had done a few decades earlier. Likewise, his relationship with Massine was based on mutual admiration and father-like care on the Maestro's part, as the letter reproduced earlier indicates. Finally, Lifar, like all talented artists, gave Cecchetti a great deal of satisfaction. Given that Lifar was not very popular in Diaghilev's circle, the great impresario must have cherished the old pedagogue's affection for his favorite. Hence the reiterated requests for private classes and the fairly relaxed way that Diaghilev talked about his protégé, using at times pronouns such as "we" and "us" in his letters to Cecchetti.<sup>17)</sup> According to Cyril W. Beaumont,

Cecchetti's association with Diaghilev lasted some fifteen years in all. During this time he maintained the company's technique at a high standard, so that its members should be fitted to meet the demands made upon them in turn by Fokine, Nijinsky, Massine, Nijinska and Balanchin [*sic*]. He strengthened muscles and joints that had become weak through over-use, and those who could barely rise from the ground he taught to fly.<sup>18)</sup>

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<sup>17)</sup> Despite being a man of the theater, Cecchetti merely tolerated homosexual behaviour and displays of effeminacy, as stated by one of his last pupils, Ria Teresa Legnani, in an interview with the author. See Giannandrea Poesio, "Il maestro e i trentadue giretti—conversazione con Ria Teresa Legnani," *La Danza*, Spring 1987, pp. 25-30.

<sup>18)</sup> Beaumont, *Enrico Cecchetti*, p. 26.

It is difficult to ascertain in retrospect what were the secret ingredients of Maestro's teaching. Difficult, because the 1922 publication of the *Manual*, as it is generally called, has led many to believe that the exercises of the Cecchetti method were the same as those he taught the artists of the Ballets Russes. This assumption has been disproved by conversations that this author has conducted in the recent and not so recent past with former Ballets Russes dancers such as Dame Alicia Markova, Dame Ninette de Valois, Serge Lifar, and Laura Wilson. According to their recollections and those of non-Ballets Russes artists such as Ria Teresa Legnani, Cecchetti's classes for the Ballets Russes dancers differed considerably from those so carefully codified in the *Manual*. Laura Wilson, for instance, claimed that some company classes were structured around either a specific choreography or around a specific star—so that there was, for example, a Karsavina class and a Pavlova one. Both Dame Ninette de Valois and Dame Alicia Markova insisted, moreover, that company classes differed greatly from the ones Maestro created for a particular dancer, generally a principal one, or a select group.

In spite of possible differences, all Cecchetti's classes shared a well-conceived, cogent structural framework that helped dancers cope with a variety of choreographic demands and styles, something that other systems could not boast at that time. Whether that system was fully reproduced in the codified method or not is up to other dance scholars to prove. What is certain is that Enrico Cecchetti was not only an artist but also a teacher for all seasons.