

George Balanchine's *Funeral March*: Rediscovering the Lost Work of a Master

Submitted by
Bridget Vander Hoff
Dance

To
The Honors College
Oakland University

In partial fulfillment of the
requirement to graduate from
The Honors College

Mentor: Elizabeth Kattner, Assistant Professor of Dance
School of Music, Theatre, and Dance
Oakland University

2/15/18

George Balanchine's *Funeral March* was well-received when it was first performed, but unfortunately, the choreography has since been lost. For my Honors College thesis, I chose to research this ballet, to get an idea of what it would have looked like. To obtain much of my information, I visited the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and listened to recorded interviews of Alexandra Danilova, a soloist in the piece, at the Oral History Archives. Upon completing my academic research, I traveled with my mentor, Elizabeth Kattner, to Grand Rapids to observe the reconstruction process. There, the ballet was pieced together and set on the Grand Rapids Ballet through movement research based on text and oral history describing the piece. This paper will describe both the academic research, the movement research process, and how both were used to bring the reconstruction of *Funeral March* to fruition.

Balanchine is one of the most revered creatives in the world of ballet. He disregarded the rigid regulations of traditional, classical ballet vocabulary, and was a real pioneer in the world of dance. Credited for inventing Neoclassicism, his pieces are known for angular shapes and intricate partnering. However, his early work is quite different. He spent the beginning of his choreographic career as a modernist, incorporating acrobatic movements (Garafola, 135), such as overhead lifts and bridges. Upon close examination of the words of Danilova, one of Balanchine's closest collaborators, it has been found that his style evolved over time to become what one thinks of as a "Balanchine ballet".

Balanchine first began choreographing in the 1920s, during the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. Due to the unstable political climate, there was a newfound freedom that could clearly be seen in the arts. The czar no longer had the power to regulate the works of choreographers, and Stalin had not yet taken control. Balanchine was greatly influenced by Constructivist artists, which was made evident in the choreography of *Funeral March* (Kattner,

Marche, 89). The state-run theaters, however, did not approve of this new style of movement, preferring the classical ballets. Balanchine, a member of the Mariinsky¹ at the time, realized he would not have much of a chance as a choreographer there, and formed a group of dancers called the Young Ballet, who performed his pieces elsewhere, in his style of movement (ibid.).

Danilova described his style in a documentary, *Reflections of a Dancer: Alexandra Danilova, Prima Ballerina Assoluta*: “It was new movement, new approach, much freer, not such afraid movement, that is breaking the old tradition of classical dance [sic]” (Reflections). She explained that his movement was not necessarily difficult, but that it was “different” and “strange” (Danilova, Interview with Alexandra Danilova, 1978).

Unfortunately, there is very little known about Balanchine’s early choreographic style. His earliest work performed today is *Apollon Musagète*, now titled *Apollo*. It premiered on June 12, 1928 (Buckle, 44). All of his previous ballets have failed to be carried down through performers, and there are no videos of them to reference. In addition, there are no individuals alive today that have performed in them or saw them.

There are incredibly strict rules regarding copyrighting of Balanchine’s works, and one must obtain special permission from the George Balanchine Trust, which is “the center from which the business operations relating to the licensing of George Balanchine’s creative output emanate” (George Balanchine), to even stage one of his known pieces. It is quite difficult to obtain permission to attempt to reconstruct one of his lost pieces. Many argue that since not all the movement vocabulary can be retrieved, it should not even be attempted, since the piece would not exactly resemble what it once was. Take, for example, Jennifer Homan’s thoughts on Millicent Hodson’s reconstruction of Vaslav Nijinsky’s *Rite of Spring*:

There is no reason to believe, however, that Hodson's choreography has anything to do with Nijinsky's. Her new *Rite* consists of ritualized stomping, sharply angled elbows, and flinging, free-form movements: it is American postmodern dance masquerading as a seminal modernist work. What was by all accounts a radical and shocking dance is thus rendered tame and kitschy, a souvenir from an exotic past. It is a sign of our times that some of the world's most prestigious ballet companies rushed to embrace this travesty as a way to regain a past they had lost- or, in the case of the Kirovⁱⁱ, never had. *Rite* was originally created by Poles and Russians in Paris; what the Kirov brought home was instead a "ready-made" pieced together from found historical objects by an American from Berkeley (Homans, 545).

There are others that argue, however, that we need to keep history alive, and that just because a piece has been lost, that does not mean we should not at least attempt to reconstruct it, to get an idea of what it must have looked like. One of those people is Kattner. She argues that:

despite the problems associated with dance reconstruction, it remains a vital part of our field. Reconstructing lost works gives us a more tangible, kinesthetic understanding of our past and allows us to better contextualize the work of this generation. (Kattner, What, 5)

She has taken it upon herself to reconstruct *Funeral March*. After many years of research, she had the opportunity to take the information that she gathered and set it on the Grand Rapids Ballet. As her assistant, I had the opportunity to observe the reconstruction process close-up.

Methodology and Literature Review

The methodology that was used was created by Hodson and Kenneth Archer, who together have successfully reconstructed many ballets. Their first step in reconstruction is to figure out what knowledge of the piece that they are working on is already available to them. They do this by examining their resources. Next, they put all their resources together, like pieces in a “puzzle”. These resources can be things like the music that the piece is set to, any text concerning the piece, any photographs of the piece, and/or oral recounts of the piece. Anything that cannot be found is re-choreographed in the same style of the choreographer during that time period (Hodson Archer, Ballets).

In this section, I will describe what is known about *Funeral March* and other ballets he created in his youth. Much of my information is gathered from published material regarding the works of Balanchine. This includes the autobiographies of Danilova and Tamara Geva, a biography about Balanchine by Richard Buckle, and articles by Kattner, Hodson, and Yuri Slonimsky. Slonimsky quoted Vera Kostrovitskaya extensively in his writing, which was used in my research as well. I also obtained information at the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. There, I listened to interviews of Danilova describing Balanchine’s work that cannot be found anywhere else.

Funeral March

Funeral March was choreographed by George Balanchine and was first performed by the Young Ballet, his group of dancers, on June 1, 1923 at the Alexandrovsky Hall in Petrograd, Russia. It was set to the second movement of *Sonata No. 1 in B-flat minor, Op. 35* by Frederic Chopin. The scenery was produced by Boris Erbshtein, and the costumes were designed by

Vladimir Dimitriev. It was divided into three movements: *Tragic*, *Lyric*, and *Tragic*. The first movement was performed by Olga Mungalova and Tamara Geva, as alternates, along with three men and six other women. The second movement was performed by Danilova with an ensemble. The entire cast took part in the third and final movement (George Balanchine Catalogue).

In the following section, some of the choreography will be described. This piece was designed to be seen in a round, meaning that the audience would be seated on all sides around the stage. Three men entered through the audience, carrying a woman onto the stage on their backs, as if she were a corpse (George Balanchine Catalogue). The men set the woman down, and then Danilova entered the stage. She touched each dancer, allowing them to rise, acting as a sort of angel of grief. The audience loved the piece so much that they pleaded for an encore, and the ballet was immediately performed a second time (Kendall, 188). Danilova later recalled the piece during an interview with Andrew Wentink:

First of all, I remember in this *funèbre*, we had caps on the heads; no hair. Then we had leotards and little skirts, not traditional, but it was all light blue, sort of grayish-blue with black. Somebody was carrying like procession- mourning procession- very gloomy, carrying the body and everybody was mourning [sic] (Danilova, Interview with Alexandra Danilova, 1975).

In 1978, Danilova spoke more about the costumes in an interview conducted by Peter Conway:

We all had tunics... with short skirts, and we wore caps, and our hair were... inside of caps, which...really unites every dancer, because you couldn't see different color of hair. It was because we wore these... caps, I would say. It was

really more lilac. We look more like Amazon, I want to say [sic] (Danilova, Interview with Alexandra Danilova, 1978).

Unity as a metaphor for death seems to be a major theme within this piece. This can be seen in the fact that all the dancers were dressed the same, and even hair color could not differentiate them from one another (Kattner, Early, 82).

The dead had no personality to and no physical characteristics to tell them apart, no wealth or lack of it to give them a place in society. Since death was the one certain thing for every person who has ever lived, the theme itself united the performers and the audience together in their common fate (ibid.).

Funeral marches happened daily in Petrograd, because so many people were living on the streets and starving to death due to deprivations caused by the Russian Revolution. Chopin's piece was typically played for these funerals. The ballet must have felt very personal and relatable to the audience. Slonimsky, an audience member at the performance, states:

The slightest opportunity was taken to lay a bridge between audience and the stage, emphasizing the unity of what was being performed and what had been experienced, the unity of spirit between the audience and the stage heroes. This explains the passage of dancers followed by light through the audience and the modeling of sculptural groups as if to generalize individual experience (Slonimsky, 65,66).

Danilova spoke briefly of formations of this piece as well: "we'd been carted... on in certain group, instead of on the floor, it was group in the air [sic]." In that particular interview, she

claimed that it was all she remembered about the piece (Danilova, Interview with Alexandra Danilova, 1978).

In 1924, Balanchine set the piece on some dancers in a studio for Serge Diaghilev, the artistic director of the Ballets Russes, as an audition. Diaghilev was so impressed with Balanchine's work that he gave Balanchine a job as chief choreographer in the Ballets Russes (Taper, 73).

Other Balanchine Pieces

Though Kattner managed to find most of the information that was needed to piece together the work, there were still some holes that needed to be filled. According to Hodson and Archer, the best way to accomplish this is by researching other ballets by Balanchine. However, it is important to remember that the piece needs to be choreographed in the style of twenty-year-old Balanchine, and not in the style of the Neoclassical Balanchine that is known today. Because of this, mainly pieces from the 1920s and the early 1930s will be examined here. The names for most ballet steps are French terms. In this paper, the French terminology will be used, with descriptions available in the endnotes.

Balanchine choreographed his first piece when he was sixteen years old. It was a duet performed at the Mariinsky Theatre School's annual performance called *La Nuit*. It was performed by Mungalova, and Balanchine, himself. In her memoir, *Choura*, Danilova writes:

The boy conquered the girl: he lifted her in *arabesque*ⁱⁱⁱ and held her with straight arm overhead, then carried her off into the wings- so she was *his!* [sic] This was the first time we had ever seen a one-arm lift in arabesque, which is now commonplace (Danilova, *Choura*, 44).

Danilova also noted that the way emotions were expressed was through the movement, not in form of miming, which is a traditional way of conveying messages to the audience in ballets. Balanchine was almost expelled from the Mariinsky Theatre School for this choreography (Danilova, Interview with Alexandra Danilova, 1978). It would have been considered obscene at the time, because there were such strict regulations regarding what parts of the female dancer the male could touch. Lifting a woman above his head in *arabesque* would not have been considered appropriate.

Another work that Balanchine had created in his youth was *Poèm*, where he “lifted Danilova in a classic *arabesque* and lowered her softly on pointe”, and then later, at the end of the piece, “carried Danilova off, lifting her high in an *arabesque* with her arms extended” (Buckle, 21). Lifting dancers in an *arabesque* was a concept that Balanchine was experimenting with a lot during this time period. This *arabesque* was used in the reconstruction of *Funeral March*.

In another of his pieces, *Enigma*, Geva arched into a “bridge”. This was the first time that this had been seen in a ballet and was used by Balanchine often afterward. Balanchine, who performed in this piece, then leapt over Geva. Slonimsky quotes Pyotr Gusev, one of Balanchine’s closest friends at the time, in saying that Balanchine made “a grand jeté with his bent leg”. Many people encouraged Balanchine to discard the jump, but he refused (Slonimsky, 67). This movement was used in the reconstruction of *Funeral March*. According to Kattner, Balanchine was very interested in the acrobats who performed in the circus, which served as an inspiration in his choreography. This movement could easily have been seen by him there. It could also have been inspired by other choreographers that he admired, like Lopukhov or Goleizovsky, who both used elements of acrobatics in their choreography (Garafola, 135).

In addition to acrobatics, Balanchine also experimented with the non-balletic movements of the legs being in parallel, as opposed to rotated, as they would be in classical ballet. This was used extensively in his work, *Valse Triste*, and was used in the reconstruction process (Kattner, Early, 94). Just as he was in *Funeral March*, Balanchine here was dealing with some rather heavy subject matter. In this piece, a woman was “pursued by an evil force, a terrible fate, which some critics interpret as death itself” (Hodson and Archer, Sad, 2). The use of the dark theme in this piece was likely again influenced by the distress of the Revolution (Kattner, Early, 96).

Balanchine choreographed *La Pastorale* for the Ballets Russes in 1926, which was a ballet about film stars (Danilova, Interview with Alexandra Danilova, 1978). It was a good example of the modernist movement, with experimental, acrobatic choreography, which according to André Levinson, “resembled the acrobatic dancing which has been familiar for some years in music-hall”. These influences can be seen in the acrobatic movements of *Funeral March*, as well. Levinson also described the *pas de deux*, or duet, as a “parody of the classical *pas de deux*” with “*développés*^{iv}, passing over the head of the cavalier like choreographic slaps, and the *promenade*^v where the danseur pivoted the star while holding her calf are distortions that amuse” (Garafola, 135). Danilova recalled the pivoting movement as well, remembering that the man was on one knee, turning the woman around by her leg (Danilova, Interview with Alexandra Danilova, 1978).

In 1927, Balanchine choreographed *La Chatte*. Olga Spessivtseva played the only female role, partnering with Serge Lifar. During their *pas de deux*, she did a slow *pirouette*^{vi} to the ground, while being supported by him (Buckle, 42). Cyril W. Beaumont described a lift in the piece:

leaping, bending, twirling, finally to mass into an impressive group...There was one memorable moment when Lifar made his entrance carried in a triumphal car formed from his companions. Three youths stood in line abreast, the outer two bending forward, so that Lifar could set one knee on each back; the centre [sic] youth rested his elbows on the backs of his companions and locked his forearm about each of Lifar's knees. Three more youths stood in front the centre [sic] one holding his rear arm upright for Lifar to grasp, his other arms being held horizontally forward, and grasped at the wrist by the youth on either side of him. The whole group was held together by the two outer youths in the back row gripping the belts of those immediately in front of them (Garafola, 138).

This description is reminiscent of Danilova's quote regarding the groups in the air, as opposed to groups on the floor. It makes me think of how the corpse in *Funeral March* is carried onto and off of the stage by three men. Both lifts involve many people carrying just one person as a grand entrance, which is not something that would have been seen in a traditional ballet.

Balanchine choreographed *Apollo* in 1928, and it was the first of his ballets to survive in his repertory. It was referred to heavily during the reconstruction process because it was choreographed so early in Balanchine's career, and because Danilova had one of the soloist roles. Since both *Apollo* and *Funeral March* contain solos that were created on Danilova, it is likely that they would be somewhat similar. *Apollo* centers around the god Apollo and three of his muses, Calliope, Polyhymnia, and Terpsichore. The ballet tells of his birth, his education by the muses, his taking command of them, his choosing among them, and ends with him being summoned to lead them to Parnassus (Buckle, 45). Since this is the first of Balanchine's ballets

to survive, it is a valuable resource in the study of early Balanchine and will be discussed extensively here.

According to Danilova, *Apollo* “gave birth to a new era” (Danilova, Choura, 96). It was full of syncopated movements and passages that would not even include one single ballet step (Buckle 45). The performers danced on flat feet, and often stood with their feet together and in parallel, which was uncommon, being that classical ballet technique dictates that dancers dance on *relevé*^{vii} with their feet turned outward (Danilova, Choura, 97). The use of parallel could be seen in Balanchine’s *Valse Triste* as well, where it was used extensively in the lead’s pointe work (Kattner, Early, 94), and in steps like “the Duncan^{viii} signature *sissonne* step in parallel” (Hodson and Archer, Sad, 2). This work in parallel served as an inspiration during the reconstruction process.

In *Apollo*, each of the muses performs a solo while Apollo sits and watches her. This is the only time when Apollo is given an opportunity to rest. He is onstage throughout the entire piece. Calliope, the Muse of Heroic Poetry, writes on her scroll, and then puts it down to clutch her side, conveying pangs of inspiration. She then reaches her hand from her open mouth in the direction of the audience. Polyhymnia, the Muse of Mime, does a continuous allegro with her finger to her lips. Terpsichore, the Muse of Dance, performs many little kicks and runs, with fluttering hands. She also does a backbend (Buckle, 45).

Danilova was cast as Terpsichore, and recounts performing in the piece:

We stood in a line, waiting our turn to dance our variations. I was last. When Tchernicheva finished her variation, Doubrovska and I jumped forward and began mine. The other two muses went offstage, they could run to the wings and

collapse and breathe, the way all three of them do today. But I stayed on the stage all the time until my variation, and the I immediately started the adagio.

Dobrovolska and Tchernicheva didn't come back until the coda (Danilova, Choura, 98, 99).

Twice during his second variation, Apollo stands in fourth position^{ix}, with his left leg forward and bent. His left arm is behind his back, with his hand in a fist, and his right arm is pointed upward, with his fingers separated. Then he switches the shape of the hands, clenching the right and extending the fingers of the left. He continues to switch back and forth a few times. This movement is meant to convey that Apollo is aware of his divinity (Buckle, 45). This is a good example of the focus that Balanchine placed on the hands. His gestures are incredibly detailed. Not only did he put much thought into the shape of the hands, he also gave them meaning. This can be seen in *Funeral March* and will be discussed in detail later.

Apollo ends his variation by lowering himself to the ground. He faces towards the wings of the stage with his arm reaching behind him and his finger pointing. Terpsichore comes towards him and she presses her finger to his. They proceed to perform an *adagio*^x together. At one moment, Terpsichore lies on Apollo's shoulder, facing upward. He then lowers her to the floor in a split and drags her *en pointe* in an *arabesque* (ibid., 46).

Richard Buckle describes the excitement of the following section, the Coda.

As Apollo stands behind the line of Muses, they grasp his wrists, extending their free arms as they take an arabesque; to an urgent, cantering music, he drives them as of [sic] they were pulling a chariot around the stage. Finally the Muses walk away from Apollo, turn about, prance toward him on their heels, clap their hands

on a pizzicato chord and extend their open palms, conjoined. On the final pianissimo chord, Apollo abruptly lays his head in their hands (ibid.).

The Apotheosis comes next. Apollo hears his father calling to him in the opening musical chords. The curtain does not rise until the principal musical theme sounds again. This theme continues to repeat throughout the remainder of the piece, but Balanchine ignored it in his choreography. Instead, the dancers match the steady rhythm of cellos and basses (ibid.). The same concept of moving to the secondary line of music is also present in sections of *Funeral March*.

One interesting thing about this piece is that it has greatly evolved over the years. The *Apollo* that exists today is quite different than what it was when Balanchine first created it. Danilova claimed that the steps for the Terpsichore variation are now different than when they were created on her. What she danced was “lighter, smaller, and quicker” (Danilova, Choura, 99). She did “fifth^{xi}, arabesque, fifth, arabesque” and her *sissonnes*^{xii} were “jumpier” (ibid.). These descriptions were used during the reconstruction process when setting the piece on the dancers. Balanchine changed this part when Suzanne Farrell was cast as Terpsichore in the 1960s. Farrell was unable to jump as fast as Danilova, because she was taller. Danilova described one example of amended choreography: “...in the first part, she goes down in *plié*^{xiii} and turns on a bent knee in *arabesque* where I did *sissonne en tourant*, jumping and turning at the same time. It’s the same movement, really, but with a different accent- my accent was up, hers was down” (ibid.).

Lew Christensen, who eventually played the role of Apollo, speculates that it was changed for him as well:

I really got his style, his way of thinking....Lifar didn't dance like I did. He danced more- easy. I danced hard, fast, sharp, quick. That's what Balanchine liked about it. I was wondering if he changed it for that one reason- if there was a change I really don't know. He didn't say anything about it. There were some very fast *pirouettes* in it- which I'm sure Lifar didn't do (Buckle, 104, 105).

Danilova also noted that the piece has changed somewhat in the way that the dancers perform it. "Now dancers go very light on the toes but then stamp their feet when they go on their heels. We didn't do that, and I don't think Balanchine wanted it to be done that way. The idea was to make all things part of a whole, not to show the contrast between them" (Danilova, Choura, 99).

Another piece by Balanchine that seems to be greatly influenced by *Funeral March* is *Serenade*, which was an important source in recreating lost sections of the ballet. *Serenade* has been performed consistently since 1935. This piece is particularly interesting because of the way in which Balanchine choreographed it. Much of what ended up being the final product was based on mishaps during the creative process in the studio. In one rehearsal a cast member, Leda Anchutina, arrived late, which was incorporated into the piece. At one rehearsal only nine girls were present, and at another, only three. According to Lincoln Kirstein, "For them he arranged other portions of action, exactly as if they had been especially summoned and scheduled" (Buckle, 85). Another dancer, Heidi Vosseler, fell while rehearsing, and Balanchine instructed her to stay there. Then he placed Kathryn MULLOWNY behind Charles Laskey, who happened to be nearsighted. Kathryn propelled him forward towards Heidi, while holding his hands over his eyes, because, according to Balanchine, "He can't see anyway" (ibid., 151).

When *Serenade* first opened in 1935 (George Balanchine Catalogue), it only consisted of three movements: Sonatina, Waltz, and Elegy. A fourth section, Tema Russo, was added in 1941. Although that movement was intended by Tchaikovsky to be a rather lively finale, Balanchine decided to place it instead as the third section, so that the piece would have a more dramatic ending (Buckle, 93, 123). Balanchine's theme of death, like that of *Funeral March*, and *Valse Triste*, is present in this ballet as well.

Buckle notes that *Serenade* contains some "slow sculptural episodes", like in the opening of the ballet, where a "strange band of women are aligned, as it appears, to salute the moon." However, parts of the ballet are incredibly fast-paced.

...the most novel and wonderful element of the work is the surge of Balanchine's corps de ballet. The unprecedented speed, first seen in the central allegro section of the Sonatina, with which the girls sweep across and twirl around is a quality that has been associated ever since with Balanchine and America. It necessitated a new kind of partnering- a pulling-apart or a brief "interlocking of horns." The girls rush at the boy, either to fling themselves away or to be thrown aside, or, after a series of wild twists, to collapse on the floor (ibid.,124).

The ballet ends with three men carrying a woman in a standing position, who "opens her arms and face to address the heavens" (Macaulay, 92). This is a similar idea to the ending of *Funeral March*, where three men carry off a corpse in a backbend. Not only is the movement quite similar, but the overall theme of departing to enter another life or stage of life is repeated in many of Balanchine's works. This concept can be seen in both *Serenade* and *Funeral March*, as well as *Apollo*, in how the piece ends with Apollo ascending to Parnassus (ibid.).

Based on all of the above accounts, it is quite clear that Balanchine was clearly breaking the mold in the world of ballet. In the early years of his career, he was creating new ways of moving, from movements as simple as walking in parallel to movements as grand as never-before-seen lifts. He was basically discarding the rigid rules of classical ballet. This is very important to keep in mind when reconstructing one of his lost works, as are the concepts of death and unity that seem to be so prevalent in his early work.

Reconstruction Process

When it was time to set the piece on the Grand Rapids Ballet, Kattner began by showing the *corps de ballet*, the group of dancers who support the lead, photographs from the piece. The first section of the ballet, *Tragic*, opens with the six women entering the stage in a straight line. They walked on stepping from fourth position to fourth position, while maintaining full *pointe*^{xiv}. We knew from text written on *Funeral March* that this movement was part of the piece, but there were still many smaller details that were unclear. We had a photograph of a Kostrovitskaya, a dancer in the piece, in the fourth position *en pointe*, and Kattner and the dancers tried to determine which way the head was tilted, whether the steps were parallel or rotated, and the exact position of the fingers (see figure 1).



Figure 1: Vera Kostrovitskaya in Funeral March, courtesy of Vaganova Academy Museum.

It first had to be considered that the photograph was taken of a dancer who was posing for the camera and was not a candid action shot. It is possible that certain details were changed from the actual choreography for the sake of what looked good for the picture, or what was easy for the Kostrovitskaya to hold while posing for the camera. In the photograph, her head is tilted on a downward angle, possibly so that her face could be seen better. One of the dancers suggested that the tilt of the head might have switched from side to side with each step taken. This movement felt unnatural to the dancers however, and Kattner decided to have the dancers simply looking down in front of them, assuming Kostrovitskaya only tilted her head for the sake of the picture.

Kostrovitskaya appeared to have her front foot in parallel, as opposed to being rotated. However, her knee looked like it was more turned out. Classical ballet technique would be to rotate the legs, but since Balanchine was rebelling against proper, rigid technique, that was not

really something that could be considered. Since it was difficult to tell, it was decided that the dancers would step in a rotated position, because it would be more stable for them.

Something that the dancers considered when figuring out the arm position was the choreography of *Serenade*. Some of the company members had recently performed in the piece, and remembered that in it, their arms were crossed in a similar position. Using Hodson and Archer's methodology, it was assumed that since *Serenade* was also choreographed early on in Balanchine's career, some of the vocabulary would have been similar between the two pieces. This arm position is very similar to the traditional pantomiming gesture of death, except for traditionally, the hands would be in fists. Kattner reasoned that this position was simply an extension of the death gesture, because in *Apollo*, there is an instance where Apollo brings his arms above his head, which is an extension of fifth position of the arms^{xv}. It would make sense that Balanchine would use the same logic when choreographing *Funeral March*.

Another question that came up during the process was whether the dancers' legs bent through a *coupé*^{xvi} when taking each step or remained straight. Both possibilities were tried out, and the dancers said that they felt equally stable either way. It was decided that they would bend them, however, because it looked awkward when the dancers were not bending their legs to take a step.

After the dancers have all entered the stage, they pivot in different directions to continue the same walks to their places in a circular formation. When they arrive, they raise their crossed arms, and then lower them, taking a knee. This is described by Kostrovitskaya in an article by Slonimsky:

In the first tragic section of the march, six female dancers stepped out slowly on pointe, one after another, bowing their heads with sorrow and crossing their arms downward. Reaching the center of the stage, all of them separated with the same steps into a large circle. Raising their crossed arms into the air for a second, they dropped to one knee, facing the outer part of the stage. They bent forward, arms and head toward the floor (Slonimsky, 64).

At this point, the three men and the woman playing the role of the corpse, Cassidy Isaacson, enter the theater. They come in through a door in the back of the theater, to the right of the audience, and they travel down the stairs, all the way to the stage, which is reminiscent of the acrobatics that were so common in Balanchine's early works, such as the group lift in *La Chatte*, and the overhead *arabesque* lift that appeared in many pieces. Kostrovitskaya describes the lift in Slonimsky's article:

Then, to a new musical phrase from the same passage, three young men carried away a girl lying on her back, whom they had lifted high on extended arms. They proceeded slowly across the entire stage, slowing down even more at moments of *forte*, and lowering the girl to the floor at the opposite exit. At the same time, they dropped to their knees in the same pose as the others (Slonimsky, 64).

As the men set the corpse down, Danilova's character enters the stage, and the second section, *Lyric*, begins. Danilova's role was played by a dancer named Yuka Oba. Oba begins with a brief solo, which Kostrovitskaya described in Slonimsky's article:

The middle, lyric section of the march began... Danilova appeared; with light, flying steps she went around each kneeling figure as if to waken the pure, human

soul from an eternal sleep. Scarcely touching them, she gave them life and, making them rise slowly one by one, she executed slow turns in attitude (Slonimsky, 64).

This solo required a lot of playing with the timing. This was really the first instance where the timing of the movement was not so clear. During the first section, there are obvious counts and transitions in the music that match the movement quite well. Because the steps created for Danilova in *Apollo* were described as “light” (Choura, 99), and her solo in this piece was described by Kostrovitskaya as having “light, flying steps”, it is possible that she was not dancing to the main part of the music, but to the second line of it, because the hand of the pianist playing would have to have the same light quality to play that part of the music, due to the keys being so far apart from one another. Balanchine himself played piano, so this could have been something that he was thinking of whilst choreographing to the music. This is also likely due to Balanchine’s history of using all parts of the music, the way he did in *Apollo*.

Oba begins her solo by executing a *piqué arabesque*^{xvii}. She does many *arabesques* in the solo, most of them coming from fifth position, and *sissonnes*, which were both taken from Danilova’s description of her *Apollo* solo. She does *bourrées*^{xviii} in parallel, reminiscent of those in *Valse Triste*. As she does the *bourées*, she holds her arms in a hopeful position, which will be described later. She does many light jumping steps, including a *precipité*^{xix} and a *brisé*^{xx} to match the light quality of the solo. She also does a turn in *attitude*^{xxi}, like the one Kostrovitskaya described.

After her solo, Oba begins to touch all the dancers, causing them to awaken and rise. She does her *bourées* in parallel, taken from *Valse Triste*, and turns in *attitude* described by Kostrovitskaya after awakening most of the dancers. Figuring out exactly how the dancers would

rise was another collaborative effort. The description that we had, which was written by Geva, another performer in the ballet, was somewhat vague:

In the second act of *Giselle*, there are indeed dead souls, but they are pretty ethereal, flitting about in white tutus to lilting music in a romantic setting. And here we were, twelve youngsters in stark linen tunics, our heads encased in tight hoods, building a design of uncompromising grief to the dark downbeat, changing from the mourners into the dead, into whirling spirits, our bodies twisting into arches and crosses (Geva, 300).

A quote by Kostrovitskaya from Slonimsky's writings was used as well:

Everything somber disappeared; the folded arms became straight; the expression of the faces changed; their eyes became bright, focused on something beautiful far away... There were arabesques on the floor with the body bent forward followed by deep backbends (Slonimsky, 64).

Based on the comparison to *Giselle*^{xxii}, and the mention of “*arabesques* on the floor”, “deep backbends”, and “twisting in arches and crosses”, Kattner reasoned that the movement could be similar to that of the wiles^{xxiii}, and that served as an inspiration in the reconstruction of this section.

The dancers also viewed another photograph from the work with a dancer in the piece, Nina Stukolkina, on her knees, her arms quite angular and raised in front of her (see figure 2). This is another unclassical position with which Balanchine was experimenting. In one of his works, *Le Chant du Rossignol*, one of the characters moves in a very stiff and angular manner, and it is a reasonable assumption that the arms in this pose would have been quite angular as well

(Vimeo). According to Kattner, this was meant to be a gesture of hope. Since the dancer was on her knees, and the *corps de ballet* dancers were on their knees in this section, Kattner reasoned that this arm motif was probably present in this section of the piece.



Figure 2: Nina Stukolkina in Funeral March, courtesy of Vaganova Academy Museum.

One detail that was especially focused upon in this gesture was the hands. Normally in a ballet, the fingers are separated, and the hands have a generally soft appearance to them. However, as mentioned above, Balanchine did not feel the need to adhere to the traditional style, and it is evident based in the gesture from *Apollo* that he gave much focus to the detail of the hands. One question that came up was whether the hands were rounded, or if they were straight. Both the photographs depicting the hopeful position and the death position were viewed. It was considered whether the hands in the hopeful position would have the same straight fingers that the hands in the death position do. It was also considered whether all the fingers were touching one another. The dancer in the photograph with her hands in the death gesture appears to be

keeping her three middle fingers together and separating her little finger and her thumb. Stukolkina appears to be separating her thumbs from the rest of her fingers. This seems to be inspired by Nijinsky's "spatula hands" (Rite), where the hands are quite flat with the fingers all together. However, the dancer's hands also seem like they could be slightly curved. It was ultimately decided that the fingers would all be touching, and that the hands would be somewhat rounded, instead of being held at such a severely straight position. This motif was used by the performers throughout the rest of the piece.

Kattner asked the dancers kneeling to try to interpret the passages, and then come up with some movement to match it. They all worked individually, and then showed what they had. The final product begins with the dancers bringing their arms to the hopeful gesture. They then sit back on the heel of the leg that they were kneeling on, extending the other leg, and folding their upper bodies against it. Then they rise back up to their knee, wind-milling their arms to an arabesque position, so that one arm is at an upward angle in front of them, and the other arm is in a downward angle behind them. They kept their fingers quite straight and flat in this position.

This is also the movement where the "backbend" was incorporated. Traditionally in ballet, a dancer might execute a *cambré*, which is an arch of the back without tilting the pelvis forward. Since the pelvis must remain straight, a *cambré* arch most likely would not quite resemble a "backbend". The dancers were doing proper *cambrés* initially, but Kattner encouraged them to really try and arch their back so that what they were doing would really appear to be a "backbend". The dancers found that this was easier when they lunged forward on their front leg.

The dancers then come to both knees, just like the Stukolkina. They then bring their arms straight out to their sides and turn their torsos from side to side. This was an interpretation of

Geva's "crosses" that the dancers twisted into. They then bring their arms back to the hopeful motif.

After awakening a couple of the dancers, Oba awakens the male dancers, signaling them to begin to move, which begins with the *arabesque* on the ground. An *arabesque* is a basic ballet position where the dancer is placing their weight on one leg and the other leg is extended behind. There are various arm positions that can accompany an *arabesque*, but one arm is always extended in front of the dancer, at an upward angle. There are already numerous versions of arabesques that exist within classical ballet technique, so it is difficult to know exactly what this position is when adapted to take place on a different level. This could be referring to the leg position of the arabesque, one of the arm positions, or both. Kattner believes that the description was referring to the leg position. The dancers ended up doing a sort of push-up with one leg in the air. This is not at all a classical movement, and Kattner's reasoning was that since Balanchine was going through such a rebellious phase at the time, it makes sense that he would include such a non-traditional movement in this particular ballet. The male dancers all do this *arabesque* one by one after being signaled by Oba, and the two female dancers who have already been awakened do the movement along with the third man. All three men do the *arabesque* together one more time, as Oba signals the Isaacson to rise, who sits up and brings her arms into the hopeful gesture.

Oba then goes around to signal to the remaining four female dancers. They all react by doing the hopeful gesture through the backbend. When all the dancers have been awakened, they all fold to the ground and come up once more in unison, as Isaacson comes to standing, maintaining her arm placement. Oba exits the stage, and Isaacson begins her part.

Isaacson *bourrées* around to one of the men. As she does this, the corps de ballet does their twisting cross from side to side, and then do a *port de bras*^{xxiv} in a circle around their head, to emulate the “whirling spirits” of which Geva spoke. They then return to their arm-crossing motif. As they come to this position, the corpse lies back on the male dancer’s shoulders, one leg bent in the air, and the other leg bent towards the ground, and he comes to standing. This position was also taken from a photograph of *Enigma*. He walks her in a circle, and then the two other male dancers lunge forward to touch his ankles, with their other arms extended behind them at an upward angle. They stand up, and Isaacson is set down on her feet. She immediately goes into a back bend while the dancer who lifted her supports her torso.

Then the two other male dancers leap over her, with both of their legs bent into an *attitude*. This was taken from text written on *Enigma*. Again, timing was difficult to work out. The dancers tried to do the movement based on the counts of the upper line of the music, which felt more obvious to them. However, since they were jumping with the same quality of Danilova’s solo, Kattner reasoned that they would be dancing to the same line of music that she was dancing to. Another challenge with reconstructing this section was that it was difficult for the dancers to leap over Isaacson, because even though she was in a bridge, she still acted as a fairly high barrier for them. Some ideas that they tried out were to have Isaacson lower from her hands to her forearms. She also tried lengthening the distance between her hands and her feet, therefore lowering her torso. This is what she ended up doing, which lowered her by about half of a foot, giving the men more room to jump. After the dancers leap over her, she straightens her legs, and the dancer who lifted her pushes her legs over her so that she can come back to standing. She then comes to an *arabesque*, and he lifts her above his head, probably much like

Balanchine himself lifted Mungalova in *La Nuit*. He takes a few steps backward, and she brings her arms back to the hopeful arm position.

The third section, *Tragic*, begins. He sets her down, and all the *corps de ballet* members rise and circle their arms above them to come to the crossed position. They go into the same walks that they did in the beginning, this time walking inward towards the middle of the stage. Then they turn to face stage left, bring their arms to the hopeful gesture, and lower themselves from full *pointe* to a flat-footed parallel.

Oba then walks onstage towards the line of dancers, the same way that they just finished walking to the line. They step aside for her in pairs, one to the left, and one to the right, so that she can continue walking. After she has broken through the line, she turns to face in the same direction as the *corps de ballet*, and they all cross their arms to the death position.

Then the male dancers lift Isaacson above their heads into the bridge position that she executed earlier. They bring her behind Oba, and Oba brings her arms up in the hopeful motif. They all walk through the pathway in between the other female dancers, and then turn right, traveling around in front of them. The female dancers follow their pathway, their arms in front of them in the hopeful position. They exit stage right, stepping fourth to fourth, which Kostrovitskaya described in Slonimsky's writings:

In the third section of the *March*, musically analogous to the first, all of the dancers- Danilova first, followed by the young men with the girl on their arms and the other six girls- went slowly from the stage one after another, as in the beginning, stretching their arms forward in a gesture of hope (Slonimsky, 64, 65).

There is no more detailed description of the ending, but it sounds like it resembles the ending of *Serenade* greatly. The dancers are all in the same formation, and they are carrying off a dancer in an overhead lift. Since there are not specific details from text to pull from, this section was heavily inspired by *Serenade*, which can be seen in the choice that the dancers exited stage right. The men who were carrying Isaacson had performed the similar roles in *Serenade*, which was helpful. Instead of carrying a girl who was standing, they carried Isaacson in a bridge, so she needed to be supported by the arms. The formation as a whole, however, greatly resembles *Serenade*.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have described much of the history of Balanchine's *Funeral March*, as well as movement vocabulary of other early Balanchine ballets, which were largely obtained from text and oral accounts. I have also described how this information was used in the reconstruction of *Funeral March*.

A lot was accomplished in this process, but there is still more work to be done, especially in the final section. The available text concerning this section is quite vague, so we are not sure that what was placed there is really what the choreography was. Currently the final section is largely made up of pieces from other early Balanchine ballets.

However, the ballet ended up coming together quite nicely. It is truly astounding what can be pieced together with only music, words, and a couple of photographs. Because this project was carried out, we now have a much clearer idea of what *Funeral March* would have been like. I believe there is much that one can learn from ballet reconstruction. With the realization of this

piece, we now have a better understanding of Balanchine as a young choreographer, and ballet history in general.

Works Cited

- Buckle, Richard, and John Taras. *George Balanchine, Ballet Master: a Biography*. Random House, 1988.
- Danilova, Alexandra. *Choura: The Memoirs of Alexandra Danilova. April 25, 1975*. Knopf, 1986.
- Danilova, Alexandra. *Interview with Alexandra Danilova*. Jerome Robbins Dance Division NYPL.
- Danilova, Alexandra. *Interview with Alexandra Danilova April 25, 1975*. Jerome Robbins Dance Division NYPL.
- Garafola, Lynn. *Diaghiliev's Ballet Russes*. New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 1989.
- “George Balanchine.” *Balanchine.com*, balanchine.com/george-balanchine/.
- “George Balanchine Catalogue.” *George Balanchine Catalogue*, 2007, balanchine.org/balanchine/display_result.jsp?id=37.
- Geva, Tamara. *Split Seconds: A Remembrance*. New York, NY, Limelight Editions, 1972.
- “Hodson Archer - Ballets Old & New.” *Hodson Archer - Ballets Old & New*, www.hodsonarcher.com/Hodson_Archer_-_Ballets_Old_%26_New/home.html.
- Hodson, Millicent, and Archer, Kenneth. “The Sad Twist of *Valse Triste*: Balanchine’s Tragic Solo Reconstructed.” *The Dancing Times*, vol. 93, no. 7, pp. 1-2.
- Homans, Jennifer. *Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet*. New York, NY, Random House, 2010.

Kattner, Elizabeth. "Early Life and Works of George Balanchine (1913-1928)." *Freie Universität Berlin*, http://edocs.fu-berlin.de/diss/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/FUDISS_derivate_000000007745/Early_Life_and_Works_of_George_Balanchine.pdf;jsessionid=0B66056953972EFCD722AD9C78EDCFAA?hosts=

Kattner, Elizabeth. "Marche Funèbre: A Lost Work of Balanchine." *Ballet Review*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 88-93.

Kattner, Elizabeth. "What Does Dance History Have to Do with Dancing?: Making College Dance Usable for Dancers." *Journal of Dance Education*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2016 pp. 1-10.

Kendall, Elizabeth. *Balanchine and the Lost Muse: Revolution and the Making of a Choreographer*. New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2013.

Macaulay, Alistair. "Serenade: Evolutionary Changes." *Ballet Review*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2016-2017 pp. 74-120.

Reflections of a Dancer: Alexandra Danilova, Prima Ballerina Assoluta." Seahorse Films, 1982.

"Rite of Spring" lectures and workshops, based on reconstruction of the 1913 ballet by Kenneth Archer and Millicent Hodson, Oakland University, Michigan, September 2017.

Slonimsky, Yuri. "Yuri Slonimsky." *I Remember Balanchine: Recollections of the Ballet Master by Those Who Knew Him*, edited by Francis Mason, Doubleday, 1991, pp. 64-67.

Taper, Bernard. *Balanchine: A Biography*. Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1987.

Vimeo, Millicent Hodson, 6 Feb. 2018, vimeo.com/14292064

-
- ⁱ A state-run ballet company in St. Petersburg
 - ⁱⁱ Mariinsky
 - ⁱⁱⁱ A position where the weight is placed on one leg, while the other extends behind the dancer
 - ^{iv} A kick where the leg begins bent, and then straightens
 - ^v A slow turn
 - ^{vi} A turn
 - ^{vii} Heels lifted
 - ^{viii} Isadora, an early modern dancer
 - ^{ix} One foot placed in front of the other
 - ^x A slow dance
 - ^{xi} Fifth position: One leg in front of the other, with the front heel against the back toe
 - ^{xii} A jump from two feet where the legs separate in the air
 - ^{xiii} A bending of the knees
 - ^{xiv} All the way up on the box of their pointe shoes
 - ^{xv} In fifth position, the arms would be rounded.
 - ^{xvi} Foot connected to the opposite ankle
 - ^{xvii} An arabesque that the dancer steps into with a raised back leg
 - ^{xviii} Small steps
 - ^{xix} One leg is extended, then the dancer jumps to switch legs
 - ^{xx} A traveling jump where the back leg beats to the front before landing
 - ^{xxi} With a bent leg
 - ^{xxii} A popular Romantic-era ballet
 - ^{xxiii} Characters in *Giselle*
 - ^{xxiv} Arm movement