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IRIS research report - Department of History

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“Pas de deux: The Soviet ballet in Paris and Franco-Soviet cultural exchange in the 1950s-60s”

With the support of an Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS) Summer Fieldwork Award, I spent seven weeks in Paris, France conducting preliminary research for my dissertation. In preparation for a year of research in France during the 2016-2017 academic year, the IRIS Fieldwork Award allowed me the time to survey the archives in preparation for the deep archival work that I have since begun. This preliminary research allowed me to prioritize the archival collections that I need to consult, and provided context to help me understand and sort through documents more quickly as my project developed. My dissertation examines the 1950s-60s Franco-Soviet diplomatic exchange of ballet troupes in Paris. Assessing French perceptions of Soviet performers, I analyze the entanglement of ballet with artistic taste, consumerism, ideology, and national affiliation. This project aims to reveal how the French and their Soviet visitors imagined political and cultural differences between East and West in order to explore the cultural construction of the Iron Curtain. During this summer’s research, I examined how Franco-Soviet ballet exchanges were portrayed and discussed in two publications that were aimed at promoting friendship between the two nations. I also sifted through thousands of pages of administrative documents from the Paris Opera, which helped me understand the bureaucratic, financial, and diplomatic considerations at work when ballet exchanges were planned and executed.

I spent the first three weeks of my summer work at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, where I examined two magazines, *France-URSS* and *La Femme Soviétique*, from 1945 to 1970. *France-URSS* was the official publication of the France-URSS Association—a French association (connected with a sister organization in Moscow) founded after World War II and aimed toward promoting Franco-Soviet friendship and exchange. *La Femme Soviétique*, on the other hand, was a Soviet publication intended to inform French audiences about the lives of women in the Soviet Union. These sources shed light on how publications aimed at Franco-Soviet exchange understood the role of ballet as a means to develop friendship between the two nations, allowing me to evaluate whether or not, in the view of these international publications, ballet had a special place among the tools that France and the USSR used to bridge their two cultures and governments.

I spent the remaining 4 weeks consulting the archives of the Paris Opera at the Archives Nationales at Pierrefitte, located just outside of Paris, and at the archives of the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra. At Pierrefitte, I examined thousands of pages of administrative documents, including correspondence between Opera administration, planning and budgetary records for ballet performances (including those for ballet tours), correspondence with various national embassies about coordinating dance exchanges, as well as diverse records about the internal workings of the Paris Opera and the management of its staff. At the Bibliothèque Musée de l'Opéra, I looked at programs, booklets, posters, and photographs printed for and during Soviet performances in Paris, along with diverse documents from within the Paris Opera administration. This was helpful in part because I was able to

identify the key players in the Paris Opera from 1945-1980 and to piece together the “when” and “where” of the ballet tours completed by Paris’s ballet performers during this time period. Furthermore, my research at the Archives Nationales helped clarify the nuts and bolts of how ballet tours were organized with the Soviet Union and other nations. These documents also shed light on the French embassy’s and the Paris Opera’s reasons for taking part in ballet exchanges. These exchanges were extremely expensive, relying on immense financial resources and manpower. My research will reveal why dance exchanges were worth the cost and how these resources were allocated depending on the nation with which the exchange was conducted. This IRIS grant has provided me the opportunity to understand the context necessary to explore my key research questions, which I will pursue this year with further research at the Archives Nationales, the Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France at Richelieu.