

Troupe embodies Bolshoi history, holds its future

By RUDY CORDOVA JR.

The Bolshoi Ballet is as deeply rooted in history as the Soviet Union itself. Except for a brief period during World War II, a ballet company has resided in Moscow for more than 200 years.

In the Russian language, the word bolshoi literally means "big." And that is exactly what the Bolshoi Ballet is all about. With over 250 dancers, a tremendously talented teaching staff that prepares the performers for a huge rehearsal and a magnificent school associated with the company, it is no joke that Texas A&M is dealing with something not just big but enormously outrageous in proportion.

In 1776, the Moscow Orphanage debuted its first dancers. Filippo Becarri, a dancer in the St. Petersburg court theaters, started out with 62 students in 1773, and in three years, 24 of them were ready for the stage. Becarri was paid not for his instruction but for his results. For every soloist that came out of his teaching, he was paid 250 roubles.

That was only the beginning of the Moscow Ballet and what was to prove one of the most well-known ballets in dancing history. From the Znamensky Theater to the Petrovsky Theater, the Moscow Ballet made its presence known in Moscow.

It wasn't until 1856, when the Petrovsky Theater burned down that architect Alberto Cavos designed the Bolshoi Theater, a magnificent building whose entrance is decorated with eight honey-colored Doric columns. The Moscow Ballet then changed its name to Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet.

Moscow was not at this time the cultural center it was to become in the 20th Century. For many years, the ballet suffered behind its rival ballet in Imperial St. Petersburg, the Tsar's capital. Because the Bolshoi was far removed from the capital, it was able to create its own character known as the "Moscow style." It was a style full of emotion, dramatic effect and governed by a freedom of academic rule.

In the October Revolution of 1917, the government seat was moved to Moscow; the artistic center of the USSR also relocated to Moscow. The dancing school had to prove itself in a new socialist setting by producing fine dancers and successful ballets like "The Red Poppy" and the first ballerina of the Soviet era, Marina Semyonova.

The Bolshoi troupe continued to grow until the outbreak of World War II when the

Bolshoi Ballet moved to the city of Kuibyshev on the Volga. Leonid Lavrosky staged one of his most successful masterpieces of theater in 1940 with "Romeo and Juliet" in Leningrad.

When the company moved back to Moscow, Lavrosky became director and took control of the ballet's reconstruction period after the war. He also led the first visits by a Soviet ballet company to the West.

Yuri Nikolaivich Grigorovich became the artistic director and chief choreographer of the Bolshoi Ballet in 1964 as Leonid Lavrosky's successor. In contrast to past directors, Grigorovich staged mammoth ballets with the male dancer becoming as dynamic a force as the ballerina, instead of a mere supporter.

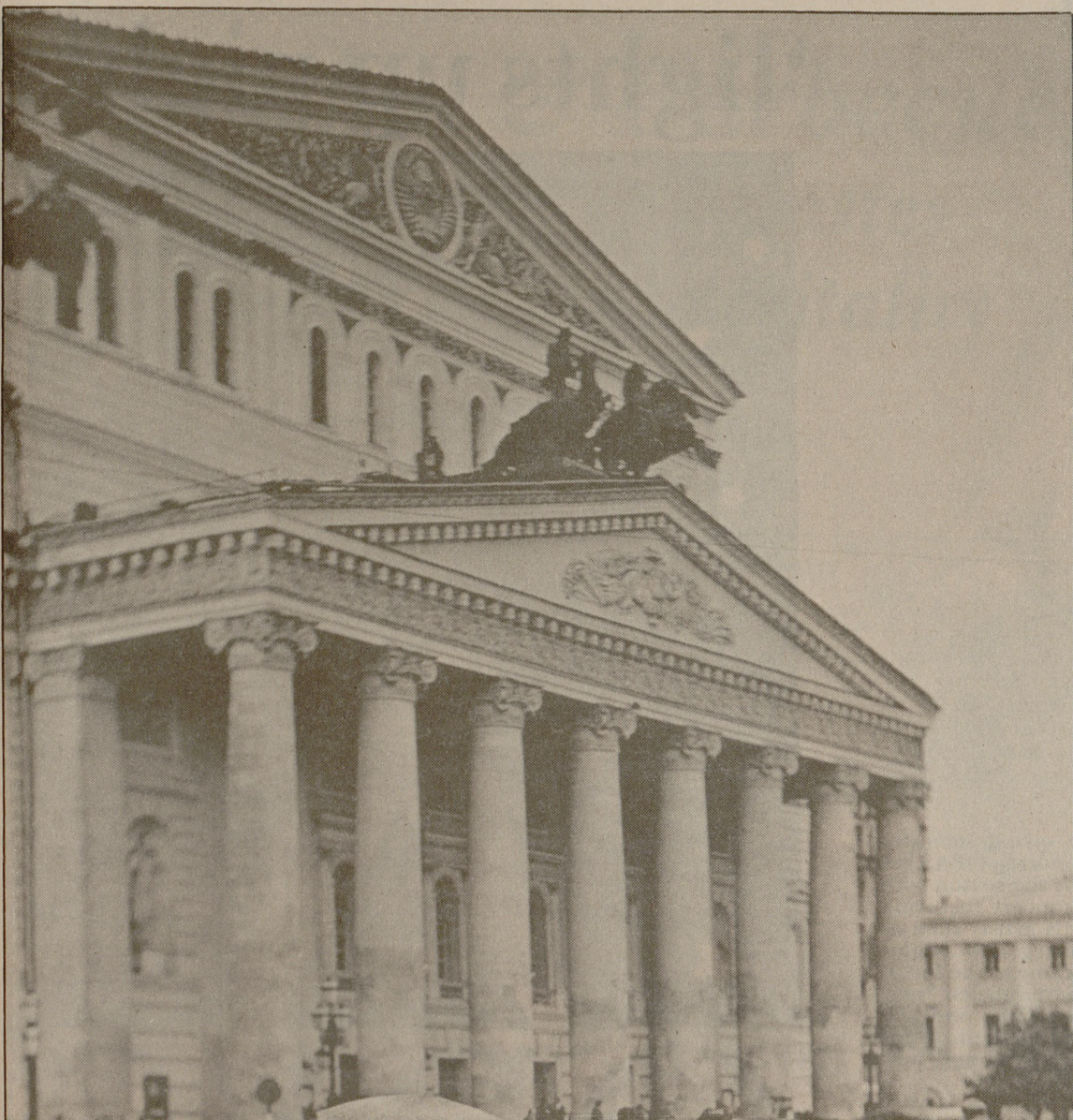
Grigorovich has made the Bolshoi the grand ballet company that it has become in recent years. He uses his experience with the Kirov and the traditional "Moscow style" to blend the efforts of a talented ballet troupe. Grigorovich completed his studies at the Leningrad Ballet School in 1946 and until 1954 was a soloist with the Kirov Ballet. While at the Kirov, Grigorovich choreographed many ballets including "The Stone Flower" (1957) and "Legend of Love" (1961).

In 1963, the Bolshoi Ballet offered Grigorovich a chance to produce a revival of "Sleeping Beauty" in Moscow. This began his career with the Bolshoi. The road to success has not been smooth for Grigorovich but together with his troupe he has triumphed. Turmoil has erupted in recent years as reports indicate an opposition group headed by Vladimir Vasiliev objects to the Bolshoi as a "one-ballet-master theater." Members of the troupe went on strike, demanding that the government regulate the situation.

Grigorovich says in a July 1990 interview with "Dance Magazine" that "A theater takes shape around a particular personality, gathering a group of disciples who voluntarily accept his aegis. A theater cannot be omnivorous. One theater differs from another in that it has its own artistic line."

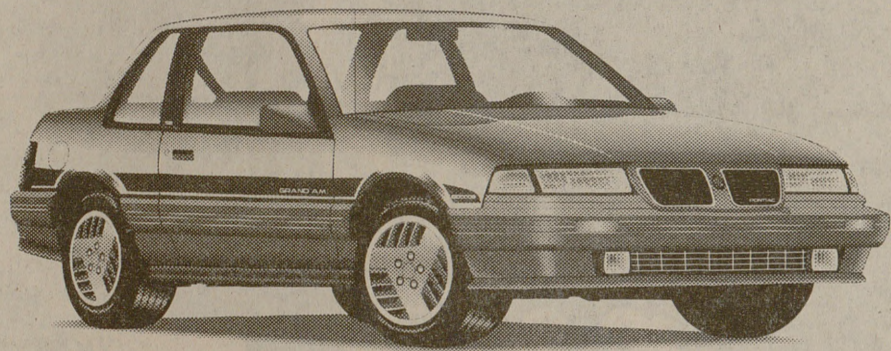
Now a new company carries the Bolshoi name. The Bolshoi Ballet-Grigorovich Company has its artistic line firmly rooted in Yuri Grigorovich, its artistic director and chief administrator.

The troupe embodies the history of the Bolshoi and holds its future. That future debuts Friday night at Texas A&M's Rudder Auditorium.



The Bolshoi Theater is considered by many to be the finest example of mid-nineteenth-century Russian architecture. After a devastating fire in 1853, the building was reconstructed by architect Albert Kavos, and the horses on the pediment were sculpted by Pyotr Klodt. In 1922, the building housed the First All-Union Congress of the Soviets, which passed the resolution on the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

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