

Art Dawn  
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# The art of the ballet

THE world famous Bolshoi Ballet Theatre's second and final performance for Lahorites was held on Friday evening.

The event was organized and managed by Samina Pirzada for the Volunteer Women's Organization.

The Russian company, here for the first time ever, will stage two performances in Karachi on Feb 18 and 19.

Evidently, the history of ballet goes back to the 16th century, when it was introduced to the French court from Italy by Catherine de Medici. At that time, the ballet consisted of a number of entrees by masked dancers in elaborate costumes and this type of performance was concluded by a 'grand ballet' in which even the king and queen often participated.

The entrees for the ballets of Louis XIII (1601-43) were usually based on a theme which was explained to the audience via a speech or a song. Many of the ballets also had political significance and attempted to convey some message of importance.

During the reign of Louis XIV (1638-1715), ballet performances assumed a spectacular dimension with ever more elaborate sets and themes. Some of the ballets even took place outdoors,

using the natural surroundings as part of the setting.

The ballets at the turn of the century still continued to combine dancing, music and singing, but dancing continued to be subservient to singing. It was in 1717 with *The Loves of Mars and Venus* at Theatre Royale in London that dancers conveyed meaning through movement and a clear distinction was made between the steps performed by male and female dancers.

The 18th century saw the rise of many famous dancers and also the combination of dance with a story. The first comedy ballet in 1789 was also a step forward and in 1796, the dancing 'on point' (on block dancing shoes) was put into practice. The development of dancing on point paved the way for the romantic ballets of the early 19th century.

In the 19th century, the Romantic Movements in literature and art, also spread to the ballet. The marks worn by the ballet dancers were now abandoned and dancers began to act out the emotions required in the ballets, expanding the technique to express various moods.

By the mid-19th century, Romantic ballet fell into decline in Europe. Dancers, choreographers

and musicians now turned to Russia, where the state ballet school had been founded in 1735. The artistic tradition of the ballet was kept alive by men such as Marius Petipa (1819-1910), a Frenchman who went to St Petersburg to become a principal dancer. *The Sleeping Beauty* is generally considered to be his masterpiece, with an inspired score by Tchaikovsky. Petipa, together with his assistant Lev Ivanov, also created *Swan Lake*, one of the greatest of all ballets. Another significant ballet master, Michel Fokine (1880-1942), rebelled against many of the traditions of Petipa ballets, abolished the antiquated mime and replaced the classical ballet skirts with other costumes. The young Michel Fokine with his innovative ideas was soon to be picked up by the impresario Sergei Diaghilev.

Diaghilev's own ideas were based on the philosophy that ballet was part of a complex performance which combined poetry, literature, painting, music and choreography. He eventually broke away from the Russian Imperial theatre and formed the Ballet Russes, which became one of the world's greatest ballet companies.

When Diaghilev died in 1929, his company dispersed, spreading his ideas throughout the



TWO Bolshoi Ballet Theatre artistes perform at Alhambra on Friday evening. — Dawn

western world, where subsequently other ballet companies were opened. However, companies which already had a strong tradition of their own were not so affected by Diaghilev. Thus the Royal Danish Ballet continued to train dancers in the style of

August Bournville and in Russia, the two major companies, The Kirov in Leningrad and the Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow, still present their post-revolutionary works and spectacular dancing as the principal ingredient of their performances. — SAIRA DAR