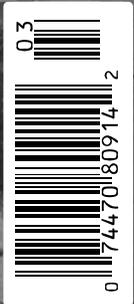


Fall 2010

Ballet Review





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Tatiana Legat on Yuri Soloviev

Joel Lobenthal with
Lisa Whitaker

I interviewed Tatiana Legat, Yuri Soloviev's widow, in 2000 for an article that appeared in these pages in Fall 2003. The following August, I interviewed her again at her home outside Boston. With me was Lisa Whitaker, a friend both of Legat and Soloviev, and the daughter of the French Consul-General in Melbourne when Soloviev, along with Kaleria Fedicheva and Alexander Godunov, appeared as guest artists during the Moiseyev Classical Dance Theater's 1969 tour of Australia. Whitaker was then a Russian studies student who worked for impresario Michael Edgley as a translator and guide for visiting companies. At the end of the Soviet era, Whitaker traveled to Russia to learn more of Soloviev's fate and to meet his family.

Whitaker describes Soloviev as "an animist," who possessed "a Wordsworthian concept of deity, of infinity." His family was tied to the land, and he numbered among his ancestors the manager of a noble estate. In 1976 Soloviev told his former-classmate Elena Shatrova that he wanted to leave ballet and become a forest ranger. A few months later, he was found dead, an apparent suicide, in the country dacha he loved. It is tragic to think that in a dark hour he was drawn back to his roots. – J.L.

*

Tatiana Legat: At the Kirov, you did what you were told. If somebody decided that you were going to do this or you were not going to do that, you didn't have any right ever to say "No." Yura was not the exception to the rule. The exceptions to the rule were people like Rudi Nureyev, who had incredible strength of character, and lack of concern for what anybody else said. However, every once in a while, Yura would put his foot down and say, "I won't do it." But it was only because of his position that he was able to do that. Usually Yura would be-

have properly and correctly, and then come home and blow up. "How can he have us do this? This is idiotic. It doesn't make sense!"

When Baryshnikov defected in Canada in 1974, they told Yura to replace him. He said, "I don't want to go." It was a scandal; everyone was saying, "Are you a fool? Why don't you want to go?" He replied, "They didn't take me in the beginning and I won't go now." He had his pride and he was a man of his word.

Alla Sizova was like Yura: she was easily wounded, very sensitive. They were together from adolescence, and he loved her and she loved him. They were happy dancing together.

BR: Is it true that they danced the *Swan Lake* Pas de Trois on the Kirov stage before graduating?

TL: Yes, I think it was their last year.

BR: Diana Vishneva danced before graduating in the 1990s; was it normal then, in the 1950s?

TL: It was extremely rare. I think Lubov Voichnis was still in school, during the 1940s. Vaganova, who had influence, felt that she could do it.

Sizova would arrive and everybody would fall in love. Her legs could go some strange way, or her head would stray on the turns, but she was so charming and delightful that the gates opened. But it was much harder to partner her than, for example, Irina Kolpakova. Yura was always afraid when he had to support Sizova in pirouettes that she would fly off somewhere.

BR: She would spontaneously try to fit in an extra turn?

TL: She would throw herself into it, and try to do as many as possible. She'd spin around like a sausage. You really had to watch it with Sizova. You had to keep your eye on her. Yura said, "You cannot control her." But Kolpakova knew exactly how many to do and that was that.

I remember his *Giselle* in London with Sizova in 1970. They were able to respond to each other on the same level, in the same unique way. They were in complete unison. It was the symbiosis of their two personalities which fit

together so well. That was magical and was felt in the entire audience. I saw people had tears in their eyes. That was the extraordinary fit between the two of them. Maybe [Kirov Artistic Director] Konstantin Sergeyev didn't see it, or he just didn't want to do it, but he could have made this wonderful partnership between Sizova and Soloviev.

BR: Fortunately they were filmed in a number of things. She lost two years because of her back injury.

TL: Yes. Yura never got to pick his partners. He was never able to say, "Look, I would prefer just to dance with her." Of course, Sergeyev was the one who was supposed to pick. But Pyotr Rachinsky, [general director of the Kirov opera house], would lean on Sergeyev and say, "Give him to Fedicheva."

Yura was frequently in pain when he danced. Another dancer would jump flat footed and land flat footed, but he never got hurt, because he never straightened his knees and ankles; he couldn't. Yura sprang like a cat. He would go up as if off a springboard, and he would also straighten his knees completely.

He had injured his back as an adolescent in school because the girls he had to lift were pudgy, although later they would lose weight to dance in the theater.

In the West they have great ballet shoes, but we had terrible ones. He was always bruising the pads of his feet, exactly the spot on his ballet slippers where a seam stood up. We used to open up his shoes, and use a razor to shave off the inside seams in order to flatten them as much as we could.

Lisa Whitaker: I think he also suffered from malnutrition. He was evacuated to Tashkent with his mother. A woman who survived WW II there told me, "We lived on spinach. People's skin turned green from it."

TL: We talked some with his family about the war. I told stories of how we lived and his mother told me how she was evacuated by sled during the first winter across the frozen Lake Ladoga. But Yura and I didn't talk to each other about our experiences during the war. We were just happy that we had survived.

So he was familiar with back pain, and yet, knowing that, he had to dance with Fedicheva. She had strong, muscular legs. I cannot remember a time when she was svelte. She probably tried, but she was a big girl, and it was hard. She was tall enough as it was, and when she was on pointe she was of course even bigger. In fact, Fedicheva was so tall that they used to put little heels on Yura.

BR: Nicolas Dromgoole wrote in his *Telegraph* review of their *Swan Lake* on the opening-night of the Kirov's Covent Garden season in September, 1966: "She was too large for her partner Yuri Soloviev, who wore high-heeled shoes to keep level and nipped into the wings for ballet shoes before actually dancing himself." But it was also a tradition in the theater to change from formal shoes to ballet slippers during the performance—for instance in act 3 of *Beauty*.

TL: Once Yura was supposed to dance a concert with Kalya [Fedicheva]. They got it all ready; they went through the rehearsals. And then his temperature spiked, and we called the theater and said, "Yura can't dance tonight." So they had to find somebody for Kalya. They asked, "Well, is he really sick?" So they didn't send the district doctor, they sent the doctor from the theater to come in an ambulance and take his temperature. "Oh, yes, Yuri Vladimovich, yes you do have a temperature. Take it easy, lie down." He was enraged. "They wouldn't believe my word . . . Rachinsky had to send somebody to check if I was faking?"

And Kolpakova was becoming prominent, and she wanted to dance with Yura. Without a doubt, he inspired her. It was a complicated and delicate situation. There was this one woman pulling on him, and this other woman pulling on him.

BR: Like *Bayadère*.

TL: Yes, just like that! Moiseyev's troupe invited him and Fedicheva, people from various theaters, from the Bolshoi, to go to India, to Australia. I don't know how Kalya behaved in these places, but Moiseyev said, "I am not taking Fedicheva anywhere anymore. I'll take Soloviev but I'm not taking Fedicheva." And Kal-

ya said, "If you don't take me, there'll be no more trips." And Yura replied, "How can you do that? If you're going to be like that - After you've done this to me . . . I'm not going to dance with you ever again." And he wouldn't, and Kalya begged him, and they asked me to speak to him. But if somebody did something to him, they were finished. I went to him because they leaned on me. He said, "I won't do it. I just won't do it."

BR: Eventually almost everyone was refusing to partner her.

TL: And then she became very depressed, and gained weight. So that was when she found an American to marry her, and she emigrated.

But you know, Fedicheva *did* help him. Because of her position in the theater, because of her relationship with Rachinsky, she was able to push Yura forward. And Kolpakova also helped him. She was always able to organize that their rehearsals were right after class. They had the best hall, the best piano player. It was an optimal situation for him to work and therefore it brought out a perfection in his work.

Yura was always so stressed before a performance. "What if I do this wrong? "What if I do *that* wrong?" But Kolpakova was such a master of her craft, that although, yes, she was nervous, she never showed it. So it was reassuring for him to dance with her.

Kolpakova was like an encyclopedia: she was very smart, very musical. In fact when I would stage something, I would watch what Kolpakova did because I knew that she had studied it and knew exactly how it was. But she wasn't a natural actress. Tatiana Vecheslova would show her how you drink the potion, and how you're supposed to react, how to show her love. She would learn it, but she didn't feel it. It was studied, and so it didn't project, didn't convince. She was lucky that she had Vecheslova, who pushed and pulled and pounded. If she hadn't had her, she would never have been able to do *Romeo and Juliet*.

BR: Did Kolpakova herself understand that?

TL: Yes I believe she did. Therefore she

would work very hard. She had enormous discipline. She was the kind of person, when she went on a diet, she would drink coffee and nothing else for three days. And she was similar to Yura in that they always showed respect to the ballet master. If it was a good one, then you knew it came out of their hearts. If it wasn't someone good, they still maintained proper courtesy.

Our theatrical upbringing demanded that level of courtesy and intelligence. Whereas a ballet master might tell Fedicheva to do something and she would say, "I'm not going to do that. I'll do this instead," that wasn't the severe discipline that Kolpakova and Yura had. Whether it was hard, or whether they thought it was good, unless the ballet master said that they could change it, they didn't.

BR: Did you and he dance together before you were dating?

TL: Yes. Probably that is what brought us together. At first I didn't pay much attention to Yura because Nureyev just took all the attention. Yura was very shy. He wouldn't just come out and say something. We danced the *Swan Lake pas de trois*, the *Giselle pas de deux*, Fokine's *Carnaval*, the *Laurencia pas de six*. He began courting me. I fell in love with him. Yura wanted to marry me, but I said, "I'm twenty-five and you're nineteen. Let's wait for one year."

BR: Before you married, where were you living?

TL: I was living with a married couple, the Yefremovs. He was from the aristocracy, a very cultured family. He was an engineer. His father was a well-known mathematician. A teacher at the school, Leonid Semyonov, had been a student of Nikolai Legat, my grandfather. He knew the Yefremovs. They must have met at the hunting society. Semyonov had bird dogs, and the Yefremovs kept a hunting dog. So Semyonov probably told the Yefremovs about me, that there was this little girl, a descendent from Legat living in the boarding school part of the school, no parents- I never saw my father after my parents divorced; my mother died during the Leningrad Siege.

LW: They survived on one bowl of soup a day, made from carpenter's glue. Tatiana's younger brother Gherman was so weak he couldn't walk at all. She would carry him on her back.

TL: Yes. My grandmother survived, and she enrolled me in the ballet. But she was so poor that she would come to the school for a meal. Vaganova had also studied with my grandfather, and she attended my mother's christening at the Vladimirovsky Church in St. Petersburg. After the war, Vaganova called my grandmother to the school, and they hugged and cried. She gave my grandmother a note for my birthday with a fifty ruble bill: "Your grandmother will buy you a present with this." It was a lot of money.

The Yefremovs fed me, they sewed clothes for me because all I had to wear was the brown flannel school uniform. My grandmother sent my brother to a trade school. Then he was sent to Ukhta, way out in the sticks, as a laborer, and he worked alongside ex-convicts who were in exile. He was doing very poorly, so to save his life, my grandmother wrote to whatever office it was, not mentioning me, but saying "This boy is the only person I have left in my family, I'm dying, I need my grandson to come back." And so that way she was able to bring him back to Leningrad. She knew that she was ill; she knew she wasn't going to last much longer. She wanted my brother and me to be together in the same town. He lived with my grandmother until she died, in a long, narrow room on the top floor, and I went to live with the Yefremovs. It was their dog that Yura and I used to walk at night before he'd walk home to his family's communal apartment on Fontanka Street.

I was never at the Soloviev's place before we were married. The whole year that he was courting me I never went there. Only when Yura turned twenty, that was when we decided that we would register at the marriage bureau on Nevsky Prospect.

His family had a large room. The apartment building had been built by the Elyseyevskys, the merchant family, and so there was a beau-

tiful white porcelain fireplace, beautiful plasterwork. In the middle there was a large table. They had a big wardrobe, a divan. They had sold their dog Amur to the border patrol because it shed. There were too many people, too much fur. They were very sad about it, but with that money his parents bought a convertible sofa for us. His parents were in one corner in a large enamel and wrought iron bed. Then on the diagonal halfway down the room was our convertible sofa. And then a little folding bed that Yura's brother Igor slept on.

The cult of the personality in the family was all about Yura. Everything was about him. He would always say, "How wonderful it is that you have no relatives. That way Mama doesn't have anybody to fight with." At the beginning, his father liked me but his mother didn't very much. She objected to the fact that I was older. At first she would go after me and push me around me a bit. His father would say, "Leave her alone, leave her alone," and take me in the kitchen.

A guest at our wedding celebration was head of the local Komsomol, and I believe it was he who helped us get our first room alone together. After Igor also moved out of their room, Anna and Vladimir were given an apartment in a very bad area. People used to wait years to change apartments, but Kolpakova arranged for them to have a studio in a new area where the dry docks were. Vladimir was eligible for it also because he was a veteran and had been wounded in the war.

The Kirov gave us our last apartment, on Klimov Street, near the theater. Yura was supposed to be given a regulated amount of square meters as a People's Artist of the Soviet Union. I was allowed to have a certain number of meters because I was an Honored Artist of the Russian Federation. When they put those numbers together, the apartment was actually three square meters larger than was legal for us. Again Kolpakova went and said, "Give them the apartment."

Yura's mother was instrumental in taking care of Alyona because we were traveling all

the time. When I was pregnant she said, "If you give birth to a boy I am not sitting with him. I am done with boys. I have had it up to here with boys." But a little girl, she was absolutely delighted at that.

Yura also wanted a daughter. In Russia the family didn't go to the hospital when you give birth. You weren't allowed. There was no waiting room. You stayed in your place and when the baby was born they'd let you know. And so they called Yura in a rehearsal and told him Alyona was born, and he cried for joy.

BR: Researching my article I was somehow surprised both by how much he had loved ballet at one time and by how many interests he had outside ballet. Of course we in the West knew he loved to fish; that's part of what I'd call the standard Soloviev mythology.

TL: The love for fishing definitely came from his father because even when they were little boys he would take them fishing. And so, later on, when Yura would come back, and he'd have all the lures and the reels and everything, then nothing else existed in the world. The three guys would be sitting together going over all the lures, sitting on the floor almost like little kids. They would watch all the sports, and if there were some match on TV, they'd sit cheering and clapping. If the women wanted to watch a movie, it was out of the question.

LW: Yuri Vasil'kov, a premier danseur at the Maly theater told me, "Yura was always very kind, very generous." Then he added, "But he was so happy in the country, there he was even kinder and more generous as a host."

TL: Our neighbors there would say, "If the Solovievs have gone by, there'll be no mushrooms left in the woods."

BR: He was so attuned to the forest.

TL: In those days, jazz was forbidden. It was an evil, capitalistic thing. You couldn't do it, but some guys in the company, Alexander Pavlovsky, Vasili Ivanov, decided that they would start up a jazz band.

BR: Ivanov was known throughout the company for his extensive knowledge of jazz.

TL: He played piano beautifully. Pavlovsky played saxophone. They told Yura, "Well, since

you have big lips you should play the trumpet. You could be like Armstrong."

BR: Did he know how to play?

TL: Well, he learned! But the trouble was that Alyona had just been born and I said to him, "Go on the balcony" of the apartment on Lanskaya street where we were now living. But when he would practice out there, he was threatened by the neighbors! The guys worked for a few months and then they realized that this wasn't going anywhere, so it was disbanded. But they were just enamored with jazz.

Yura soaked everything up like a sponge; he wanted to know and understand things about the world, about many things. We subscribed to the literary journals, and to "Around the World," which was like *National Geographic*. He loved to read about trips, travelers, nature. Thor Heyerdahl. He read and re-read Jack London. I'd say, "But look you just read that." He said, "I like to read Jack London, so leave me alone."

LW: He loved the Russian classics and foreign literature, *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, also Hemingway and Dreiser. We talked about *Sister Carrie*, and Somerset Maugham, whom I loved. Yura had read "Miss Sadie Thompson." It was anti-clerical, so it was translated. We discussed Rudyard Kipling; he had read *Mowgli* and I had lived in India. He had danced in India, in Delhi, he told me. I remembered that the food was delicious. "Oh, no, too hot, just like the weather," he retorted.

TL: It was difficult to buy good books, the classics, in Leningrad. Whenever we traveled in Russia he would always look at the kiosks because you could find stuff that the people in that particular town had no use for, but that you couldn't keep on the shelves in Leningrad because there was such an educated population. He'd come back carrying loads of books, and the books didn't go on the shelf until he'd read them. Yura read so much that one eye became near-sighted; the other one wasn't. Once when we were in Japan, they did special glasses for him.

He also bought records, and he had a very

large collection, all kinds of music, from jazz to classical to popular. He loved it. Of course, you just couldn't get things like that in Russia. He would give them to people, or people would say, "Sell me this one!"

LW: He was obviously educated by his travels, an autodidact, mainly. Soviet people were not encouraged to discuss foreign ideas. But as he traveled he picked up ideas that were different from anything he had been exposed to at home.

TL: We were always happy to go abroad. For all these big tours, we were sent on our vacation time. "If you don't want to go, okay, too bad, don't go." But they could do whatever they wanted with us. That's why Yura would say, "Let us not say that we're going on this trip because we'll ruin it." We were superstitious. We only talked about it when we were on the plane leaving.

We thought, ooh America! They said to me in 1961, "You can go to Paris or you can go to America." I thought, forget Paris, I'd rather go to America. But mainly it was because Yura was going to be away in America for three months, and I didn't want to be away from him that long. I'd been to Yugoslavia, which for us was a capitalist country, but America was mind blowing.

First the Bolshoi theater went to New York and then the Kirov. It was wonderful. I was rooming with Gabriela Komleva, but nonetheless, it was almost like our honeymoon, because Yura and I were there the whole time together. We lived very well, and they gave us a week in New York to get ready for the first performance.

BR: He danced the *Swan Lake* pas de trois on the opening night?

TL: Yes, Natalia Makarova, Sizova, Soloviev. A unique pas de trois. It was a sensation.

BR: Inna Zubkovskaya told me that when she looked up to begin the White Swan pas de deux on that opening night, partnered by Vladilen Semyonov, she saw the audience fanning themselves because it was so hot. It was September but they had no air conditioning.

TL: At the Met they were dancing and they

looked up, and rain was coming down onto the floor.

BR: Holes in that old roof.

TL: In America, there were a lot of the old Ballets Russes émigrés who were still alive. We met them; it was incredible for us. We wanted to walk around a bit, to be free. We took the subway and got off at the wrong station. We wound up in Harlem, and we were terrified. So we got into a taxi, which was absolutely forbidden, and returned downtown. Thank God nobody caught us.

We'd never seen chewing gum before, so everybody was chewing, and backstage when they had to go onstage, they'd drop it. A couple of people fell because they got stuck on the gum. Sergeyev was furious, and he got all of us together and he banned chewing gum.

BR: In Chicago, where the Kirov toured after the Met, Soloviev tore his Achilles tendon.

TL: Yes, his plié on the left leg was never entirely the same after that. The stage of the theater was very hard, but Sergeyev said, "Our Russians will dance." It was in *Leningrad Symphony*, when the battle starts, but I can't remember what the step was. I was in the wings. It was horrible to see. I think the audience must have noticed, but Ivanov performed Yura's steps for him because Yura was in such pain that he couldn't get up. He crawled offstage. They took him right to the emergency room and repaired it there. A few hours later he was back in the hotel.

Everybody came to see him. Kalabashkin from the administration brought him five apples. We were expecting that Sergeyev as artistic director would make his presence known, that he and Dudinskaya would at least make an official visit. They didn't and they never said anything about it.

It was very pleasant, however, that it was the Americans who put the cast on him because in America in the old days they would use a sort of a stocking, and then on top of the stocking, they would put the plaster. They didn't do that in Russia. In Russia, when they would take off the plaster, it would rip all the hair off your leg.



Tatiana Legat and Yuri Soloviev in New York City, 1961. (Photo courtesy of Tatiana Legat)

In Leningrad, the doctors went to take the cast off. The whole staff came because nobody had seen an American plaster cast. They used to have a rubber heel that you put in at the bottom so that you could walk on your cast, whereas in Russia you either jumped, hopped, or somebody carried you, or you went on crutches. "I got on the table," Yura told me, "and I steeled myself to be ready," and then nothing happened; there was no pain. And his crutches, too, weren't anything like Soviet crutches. He gave them to Nina Ponomareva, one of our répétiteurs. She wanted them, they were so interesting. "Take 'em! I never want to see 'em again."

BR: He had a difficult relationship with Sergeyev. I guess the dancer/director relationship is never too smooth, except if the dancer is a special favorite.

TL: Yura received the gold medal at the Paris International Dance Competition [during the Kirov's season there in December 1965]. After he came back to Russia, all those who received awards were then invited to perform in a gala in Paris. But the authorities, Sergeyev probably, said, no he is busy, he is working, and they sent Maya Plisetskaya instead.

BR: It could have been a higher hand. Sergeyev and Dudinskaya had to be extra careful because they were not Party members.

TL: I don't exactly understand their relationship. But it does seem to me that Sergeyev saw Yura's usefulness. Sergeyev was always good at choreographing variations for himself. He added a variation for Albrecht in the first act of *Giselle*, and Yura was the only other person who was allowed to dance it. He would give Yura something but then he would

wound him. There was this complicated relationship between them that ended with Sergeyev's *Hamlet*.

BR: Right before Makarova's defection in 1970, which led to Sergeyev's being replaced as artistic director and transferred to head the school. Soloviev worked on *Hamlet*?

TL: Yes, but he pulled out of it.

BR: What was the matter?

TL: I don't know. Was it because of his relationship to Sergeyev? Was it because of his choreography? But he got a lot from Sergeyev artistically; Yura was always very attentive when he understood that somebody could teach him something.

LW: Sergeyev was a link to the old Imperial traditions.

BR: Yes, he'd only entered the school after the Revolution, but his teachers were all from the old world. Maybe Sergeyev helped Soloviev's acting, too, he was so invested in the Stanislavsky method. Alla Osipenko said that when he rehearsed her for Lilac Fairy in his new *Sleeping Beauty* in 1952, he constructed a matrix of subtextual relationships between the fairies and the King and Queen.

Soloviev had a major success creating the role of the Cosmonaut in Sergeyev's *Distant Planet* in 1963.

TL: That was so much work. Every time he'd finish a variation, he'd collapse in the wings, and his nose would bleed from the exertion.

LW: Yura said that his relationship with Sergeyev was ruined after he attended the graduation performance of Sergeyev's son Nikolai in 1965. Yura was in the wings and could not suppress a snort of laughter and surprise. It was reported to Sergeyev, who never forgave him. I saw Nikolai dance; he was on the tour to Australia, too. He had started ballet late, and he was awful, and quite short.

BR: What made Soloviev decide to take English lessons?

TL: He wanted to. We started going out to places abroad, and it was the right thing to do. You needed to speak English. But I was no good at it. Not at all.

LW: Of course he couldn't go to the univer-

sity and say, "Oh, I want to enroll in a foreign language course." Instead it was arranged, and someone came to the house.

TL: Yura would work with the teacher in our apartment, or with me. I still have my little notebook where I would write. Alyona always says, "You've been working on English, working on this notebook for thirty years, and it hasn't gotten anywhere."

LW: He could speak English sufficiently well to read a newspaper article, decipher a review in the press. He understood enough grammar to make sense of the sentences. He might not know all the words, but he got the gist of it. He was highly intuitive, in language and in most ways. He'd pick up a book in English or French and chew on it. He did very well.

BR: They all learned French in Rossi Street. For a time during the mid-1950s, English was being taught in the junior high schools in Leningrad.

LW: Nevertheless, if it had been found out that he was studying English on his own initiative, as an adult, he would have been flagged as a defection risk.

TL: Yura was always being pressed to join the Party. If the Kirov performed in Moscow they would have this big send-off at the airport. There would be top brass from the Ministry of Culture. Alexandrov, who was the deputy minister, came up to Yura, and said, "Look, Yura you've got such a high position. You're an embodiment of what a Russian Communist is. You need to join the Party." "Yes," he said, "it would be an enormous honor for me, but I don't feel that I'm sufficiently mature to make a good Communist."

BR: With deadpan humor.

TL: Yes. He just blew him off, and he knew he was blowing him off, and Alexandrov knew he was being blown off, and it was extremely irritating to him.

LW: Yura teased a good friend of his for succumbing to pressure and joining the Party. As his friend told me years later, he told Yura, "It's easy for you to resist, you are a People's Artist of the Soviet Union. I had to join. I've been divorced three times, and it's the only

way I can survive." Given the official puritanism, he had no other choice.

TL: A dancer who was secretary of the Party in the ballet would always go to me: "You know, Tatiana, if you'll join, then maybe Yura will join too. You've got to do it."

But I never asked Yura to join. We would laugh about it. Before each tour we were given certain papers to study on Marxism. We would read them over and over again, but we didn't understand anything and we didn't want to understand anything.

And then the secretary was demoted. He stayed on as a dancer. But he said to me, "I lost my job because you couldn't get Yura to join the Party." He came to Yura and asked him to lend him some money, and Yura did.

BR: How did he enjoy being on the Art Soviet council at the theater?

TL: He was chosen to be on that Art Soviet because he was a very honest person. They appreciated him telling the truth, but at the same time they didn't really respect it too much, because the directors were doing whatever they needed to do. The Art Soviet was just like -

BR: Window dressing.

TL: He said, "They asked me if I liked it or not. I can say I don't like it, and they didn't like my answer." But most of the time he just kept quiet. For example they would ask members of the Art Soviet, "Did you like that opera? How did you like it? Should we release it or not?" And he said to me, "I was there, I was listening to it, but is it good? Is it bad? What do I know?"

BR: There is of course mixed opinion concerning how good Soloviev's acting was on the ballet stage.

TL: Yura was a product of this extraordinary, wonderful school. We had that drilled into us and it stayed for life. We didn't need to be taught any gestures, we did all that in school. And it was wonderful for Yura I believe, and for me, when we would perform in the children's ensembles; we were supposed to leave right afterward, but many of us would escape to the top balcony and watch the rest of the

performance. To have the opportunity to see all that on stage was an incredible learning experience for us.

At the beginning of his career, however, Yura was an inhibited boy. His face was inhibited. But the success that he had, going to London in 1961, being thrown into *Stone Flower* and *Swan Lake*, he developed and he developed, but it took time.

Mikhail Mikhailov was from Balanchine's generation, and he used to play kings and Brahmins in the Kirov. He was a very interesting actor. Yura said that Mikhailov came to him and praised his entrance in act 2 of *Sleeping Beauty*, moving around with his walking stick, when he took his cape off, when he took his hat off. Mikhailov said to him, "You know, you look as if you grew up in that atmosphere, that you're from that background." And Yura said to me, "It was so wonderful to hear Mikhailov say it to me." For somebody on that level, to say that about him was very important.

BR: Who had the grand manner himself.

TL: Exactly. He developed his mastery to a level where somebody like Mikhailov could actually say something like that to him. But it took a while to get there.

In *Beauty* Yura heard the Lilac Fairy's music, and went to that fantastic dream world that was so much a part of him. That's where he went in *Chopiniana*, in act 2 of *Giselle*. At the beginning of the act, when he was looking for Giselle, there was this feeling of freedom when he could unwrap himself and do things that he was never able to do. There was nothing that he specifically had to do there, so he was, he told me, free to fantasize, "to bring to life the fantasies that were inside me."

BR: Equally, what makes his *Chopiniana* so impressive on video is not only his jump, his arabesque, his continuity, but the spiritual intensity.

TL: It was again a place where he could let his emotions break free. The administration made him do *Corsaire pas de deux*, and he would do it very well, but he wanted lyrical roles.

BR: What was it like to dance *Spectre de la Rose* with him, at his "Creative Evening"?

TL: I didn't see anything. You don't dance in the real world in this ballet. You're somewhere else. On the one hand certainly you're just in your body, in your physical world when you're dancing, because you're using your technique, but at the same time, it is not the real world. You remember the ball and it is so beautiful. And what is very difficult that this physique that Yura had could be so soft and gentle, to create a pure living spirit. He was very lyrical; that's why it was not very difficult for him. He found it in himself, despite the fact that he had this physique.

BR: But I think he wanted to do more than lyric roles; he wanted to expand his *emploi*.

TL: He was always looking for somebody, for some way to express himself.

BR: It's interesting that Georgi Alexidze cast him not as a lyricist, but as a heavy: first Sergei opposite Fedicheva's Katerina in a duet that Alexidze made suggested by *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. Then Aegithus in *Orestia* for Fedicheva's evening at the Kirov. How did he like working with Alexidze?

TL: Very much. It was very interesting to work with him. He was very musical, and emotional like a true Georgian. Very charming. Later I rehearsed his *Les Petits Riens* for Baryshnikov's Creative Evening in 1974. It was wonderful. When we re-staged it with Xenia Ter-Stepanova and Valery Yanitz, it was very good, but with Misha and Ira Kolpakova it was like champagne.

LW: Yura said to me in 1969, "There's this young dancer in the company. . . . Oh, you should see Misha! He's such a fantastic dancer. And when the girls see Misha they all go crazy."

TL: They were very different. Nobody could do grand pirouette like Baryshnikov. Nikolai Zubkovsky worked with Yura on grand pirouette. He was very good, and he helped him, but still Yura's working leg would drop. Baryshnikov's par terre work was absolutely genius. But he only did Blue Bird once, because he didn't have the elevation for the repeated *entrechats sixes*.

BR: At one time I think that Soloviev was

artistically very ambitious. He wanted to try everything.

TL: Yura badly wanted to do the full-length *Don Quixote*. He had performed only the Grand Pas de deux. But twice in rehearsal he injured his back trying to do the one-hand lift in act 1, carrying Fedicheva and Valentina Gannibalova. Finally he went to Moscow because he thought that Alexei Yermolayev could teach him, the same way he had taught Vladimir Vasiliev. We didn't know Yermolayev; we didn't know his phone number. But you couldn't just call up and say, "I'm going to come down to Moscow and I want to work." The way you would do things is to go to the Bolshoi, and say hello to Vasiliev, and say, "Do you think you could put in a good word for me and ask Yermolayev?" Yura went to Moscow, but Yermolayev was on a bender, and not long after that died.

Yura's acting skills were very much developed by his relationship with his partners, because he'd dance, for example, *Swan Lake* with Osipenko, Fedicheva, Makarova, with Olga Moiseyeva, and each one would lift him up higher. What he got out of Fedicheva was dynamism, strength, courage.

LW: I thought Fedicheva was fantastic. I saw her dance Odile opposite him in Washington in 1964. My father was then First Secretary of the French embassy, and I was studying ballet with Igor Schwesov at the Washington School of Ballet.

The Kirov split up the role: Makarova was Odette. Fedicheva's Odile was very sexual, sexually aggressive. She brought out that part of him. "When you dance with your ballerina you fall in love with her," he later told me. And onstage he really did: you could see the connection between the two.

TL: Moiseyeva was spiritual; he got more from her emotionally, expressively. She was taught by Vaganova, she preserved the Imperial traditions.

BR: Moiseyeva at her graduation performance in 1947 reminded people of Pavlova.

TL: Makarova was as lyrical as he, and they would just flow together.

LW: They were beautiful together in Washington

TL: Osipenko was a senior master, but she wasn't a typically standard type of dancer. She was interesting . . . complex. He was so young, and he was beside himself with excitement that he was going to dance with her.

LW: He adored and admired her. He told me that she was kind and generous to him, as an inexperienced partner.

BR: Soloviev was asked to coach a young corps dancer for Danila in *Stone Flower*.

TL: He was big but he had no talent, no ability, but he was the boyfriend of a ballerina. Yura said, "My God, I've been stuck with this guy." He tried everything. He did everything to pull whatever there was out of this person. "There was nothing I could do with him," Yura said. "And look what's going to happen: because what they're going to say is, 'Hah, you see, Soloviev is no teacher. Soloviev is not able to do it, because we gave him this boy and he wasn't able to do anything with him.' And it's going to look like it's me. And it's not."

BR: But Evgeni Scherbakov said he was brilliant coaching him in his own role in *Distant Planet*.

TL: Yura's teacher Boris Shavrov went somewhere for about ten days, for some kind of symposium, and he said, "Yura help me out, teach my classes." Yura walked unannounced into the studio, and the boys were of course beside themselves with surprise and excitement. During the center adagio, one boy was trying so hard that he hyperventilated and fainted to the ground. Yura was afraid that it was his fault. Afterward, he asked some of the other teachers if they thought the problem was that he had given combinations that were too difficult. Everybody laughed it off; it was just that the boy was overwhelmed at being taught by his idol.

Everything that he did he wanted to do with his whole heart. He couldn't do it just half way. That's why he was unsure sometimes, about whether he needed more knowledge to be able to pass it on.

LW: He would have been an excellent teach-

er. He helped me with my Russian. He taught Alyona gymnastics, how to repair things. He was a tinkerer, a good mechanic, and she's a do-it-yourselfer. Could Shavrov have helped him to become a teacher at the school?

TL: Shavrov was really quite a selfish individual and felt "I have done what I needed to do for you and you're going to have to do the rest for yourself, and I have no intention of using up my pull to do something for you or for anyone else." It was just his style. Pushkin would try to do things for people. Other people would.

LW: But Yura was fond of Shavrov, and grateful to him for making him the dancer, the technician he was. Yura once told me, "They say that Pushkin trained both Nureyev and me. It's not true. Shavrov was my pedagogue. And I'll say one thing further, when I left Shavrov's class and went to Pushkin's [at the theater], I started dancing worse."

TL: Shavrov was teaching the exact positions, and he was very precise. He was demanding and he was very dry. Pushkin was much softer, first of all, and at the same time he created such combinations that the pupils would learn the right positions. He didn't have to ask for them. I'm sure that Yura must have rehearsed *Chopiniana* with Pushkin.

BR: Why?

TL: Because of the result. Because he got so much out of *Chopiniana*

BR: I suppose Soloviev meant that his dancing had become less academically pristine. Nureyev, of course, was Pushkin's student at the school and he accused Shavrov of turning everyone into "Shavrovchiki."

LW: But his son Sasha said with pride, "We were all known as Shavrovchiki, the Shavrov Gang, always recognizable because of our clean techniques, especially jumps, entrechats. We could out-entrenchat anyone in the yearly exams!"

TL: Nureyev's comment was a scandal. It was at an official meeting. To say such a thing at an official meeting was outrageous. I don't agree with him. It was not good manners. But Nureyev would always do things that nobody

else would. I remember when we were in Egypt in 1959, we were all climbing up the pyramids. It was so difficult; our legs burned even going up, but going down was worse. It was all picturesque and very, very beautiful. The bazaar was bizarre because people were also washing themselves, getting haircuts. We had never seen anything like this. We all were buying plates and wooden art work, but Rudik bought only one thing: a tiny, round cameo. It was probably very expensive.

BR: Was Soloviev intrigued by the new style of Nureyev? The high arabesque, the high relevé?

TL: We didn't feel that it started with Nureyev. We just felt that we went overseas and we noticed different things, and so we started changing too, lifting up higher on the turns. It was actually Moscow that was the first to respond. Dudinskaya started telling us, higher legs, higher turns. But it was just considered an evolution, a development. We understood that the world was changing, and it was Rudik who learned it from other places. We all changed, and every time there was something new, of course it was interesting for Yura to see and to do and to emulate.

BR: Dudinskaya had her antennae out. Sizova said that she and Soloviev learned *Flower Festival* from a tape that Dudinskaya had gotten hold of. And of course she'd brought John Taras to Leningrad to stage Balanchine's *Symphony in C* for one of her evenings at the Philharmonic. When I interviewed you in 2000, she was just about to arrive in Boston for what turned out to be her last trip, staging *Bayadère*. She was eighty-eight.

TL: It was such an honor for us, we had such respect for her. If she even pointed at someone once and said, "I didn't like this gesture; it should be this way," we would already feel blessed.

BR: What did Soloviev contribute to *The Creation of the World*, as they were rehearsing?

TL: A lot. Steps, details, gestures.

LW: Yura was a fabulous comic mime. For example, he'd see a dog trotting down the street and mimic its gait, its manner, and then start

a long riff of the dog's reminiscence of the life it had lived and whom it had loved. Yura's vignette was understanding, sweet and touching, albeit somewhat melancholy.

TL: Misha and Yura were so funny together. [Natalia] Kasatkina and [Vladimir] Vasilyev were molding the dancers like sculptors to the roles, because they knew what they could demand from them, and they were creating together with the dancers.

BR: So you watched the rehearsals?

TL: I was working with Vecheslova, who was a repetiteur. When Vecheslova left the company, they trusted me to stage it in Tashkent; Kasatkina and Vasilyev came for the last ten days. I was already a teacher, but once at the Kirov Svetlana Yefremova got sick and at the last minute I had to dance the She-Devil. Misha was Adam.

BR: Was Soloviev God?

TL: No, Scherbakov danced that performance.

BR: Artistically, Soloviev's last great statement was perhaps Leonid Lebedev's *The Infanta* as a guest artist at the Maly in 1976 opposite Kolpakova.

TL: He was very enthusiastic about doing *Infanta*. We saw something that Lebedev had done and thought, "Ah." Yura so wanted to show his talents, to do something new, rather than repeating what somebody else had done. Lebedev was not a classical choreographer, but he was very gifted, very musical, and his themes were always very good.

The music, sort of Spanish style, was written by one of the dancers of the Maly theater. He was a page who was in love with his mistress, and she is indifferent to him, and so because of that he kills himself. It was very difficult. It was at least twelve minutes long, and he and Kolpakova were both on the stage the entire time. One would dance, the other would dance, they would dance together. It was extraordinary. Vera Krassovskaya noticed it, and she wrote about it. But the choreographer said after that performance, nobody else would ever dance it again. And it was never put on again.

BR: His last months seem to have been an ordeal.

LW: Yura paid dearly for his resistance, for the lines he drew in the sand. Reminds one of Mark Antony's words in Shakespeare "It was a grievous fault and grievously hath Caesar answered it."

TL: In the spring of 1976 he'd been in Moscow with the Kirov, where they performed in honor of the 200th anniversary of the Bolshoi. Then we went to Japan, where he had an incredible work load. We returned to Leningrad in September just before the new season opened. Kolpakova left for a month's vacation, but they didn't allow Yura any time off. "I can't, I can't leave," he said. "I have to do it." Igor Belsky, who was now the ballet's artistic director, invited the choreographer Elizarov to create *Tyl Eulenspiegel* at the Kirov. He was Belsky's student at the Conservatory.

Tyl was a very difficult ballet to dance and the rehearsals were awful. He gave Yura all kinds of extremely difficult things to do. At one point he had to stand on his head and turn, and he got a splinter in his scalp. Since it had gone deep in his skull, they had to shave the top of his head. And so he was in this terrible state of exhaustion, doing this ballet which was so difficult and unpleasant, "I can't do this," he would say. "These are horrible steps; they're awful." But he would go back, and push himself to the limit in the rehearsals, no matter what. I think that is what did him in.

He wasn't sleeping. I tried to make things as quiet as possible for him. When he could not sleep, we tried this, we tried that, I gave him warm milk, we tried acupuncture. If he happened to fall asleep, I left him alone and made sure that nobody bothered him. Finally

he found a way to kind of slip out of it; I don't think he ever danced it on stage. Anyway they only had two performances.

Sometimes I would come in the room and he would sort of move the book he was holding to give the impression that he had been reading, but I would think, he's not reading, he's just lost in his thoughts.

Yura always felt this obligation and this sense of duty. But his psychology was such that he didn't believe enough in himself. Before his last performance, the last *Romeo*, he said, "I'm supposed to do this variation," in the *Balcony pas de deux*.

But his back hurt, his legs hurt. And I said, "Well, don't, just stand and strike some poses." He said, "I can't. You know who I am and you know what my position is, that I'm a People's Artist, etc. I have to do it. How can people come to the theater and say, 'But he didn't dance.'" I said to him, "It doesn't matter if you don't do it. Any pose that you do, you will do it right and beautifully and everybody will love it."

In *Romeo and Juliet* there's a lot of running, and he was in such pain. He couldn't run. He still ran, because he felt he had to. He was just happy that he hadn't disappointed anybody – Kolpakova, his Juliet, or the public: "Thank God I got through everything."

TL: "My head is breaking open," Sasha Godunov wrote me from Moscow. "I cannot comprehend it. A person with the rarest soul has left us, and a great dancer. My beloved nightingale [into which "Soloviev" translates in English]. . . ."

LW: Osipenko said to me that his death was "a weeping wound," a wound that never heals.