

“Serge Lifar: His excellent reform in Paris Opera and his sexuality”

Prof. Shizuka YASUDA
Nihon University, Japan

Abstract

Purpose: Closely collaborating with Jacques Rouché, Director of the Paris Opera (1914-45), Serge Lifar devoted himself to improving and raising the status of ballet art and ballet dancers. This paper highlights Lifar’s administrative/artistic achievements which have not been sufficiently evaluated even today, and try to relate them with his sexuality.

Introduction: Though his classical choreographies are still staged, his achievement as a ballet master is underestimated. However, he was one of the very first people who could treat female ballet dancers as artists, not as objects of sexual gaze; and according to a personal interview conducted by this author with one of Lifar’s contemporaries, a former première danseuse (=first soloist) of Paris Opéra, this may have been thanks to his sexuality.

Methodology: The documents in *Fond Lifar*, archived by himself, at Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra de Paris and personal interviews with a former première danseuse de l’Opéra who performed in his main works. **Results and conclusion:** Already engaged as premier danseur in 1929, he worked ardently as a house choreographer/ballet master (1930-44; 1947-58) to improve both the artistic level and social status of Ballet de l’Opéra de Paris. Although he did not openly talk about his homosexuality, we consider that his sexuality, attested by one of the dancers in the company, was a reason contributing to his ability to keep (sexually) calm and detached from female ballet dancers; this background may have supported him and consequently his Director, Rouché, in banishing the old and harmful habit of a too-close relationship between dancers and rich male “abonnés”, the subscribers. (251 words without small title words: “Purpose”, “Introduction”, “Methodology” and “Results and conclusion”)

Keywords: abonné; Ballet; dancer; Opéra de Paris; Jacques Rouché