

# DEVELOPING A PLAY: A DANCE FOR LENINGRAD

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This thesis play explores the boundaries of the form of Naturalism using dance movement as part of the *lingua franca*. The play presents a unique view of the life of a Soviet artist during 1941-1955 covering the period of World War Two and the siege of Leningrad. It shows the courage of a gifted ballerina who endures a repressive regime, near starvation, and cultural detente. The play has at its centre the themes of repression, oppression and betrayal, and debates the question of power between the state and the forces of nature.

DEDICATED TO

JOHN STEPHEN TYAS

WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO  
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# A DANCE FOR LENINGRAD

Heather Jeffery

## **Set in Leningrad 1941-1955**

### Characters

**Dmitri Pokrovsky** (Mitya/Dima)

**Galina Lepinsky** (Galya)

**Alexei Pleshakov** (Alex)

**Kasyan** – Madam's daughter

**Madam** – ballet mistress and mother of Kasyan

**Zhdanov** – Central Committee

**Gromykin** – NKVD (Secret police)

### Extras

**Delegate**

**Henchman**

**Aide**

## ACT 1

**Act 1 Scene 1 – Cultural ‘show event’ in the theatre 1946. There is a large table with four chairs downstage. A huge portrait of Stalin overshadows the proceedings.**

*Shostakovich’s eighth symphony is playing quietly in the background. Zhdanov (aged 50) and Gromykin enter. Zhdanov is very pale and looks unwell. They are talking as they enter.*

Zhdanov        There’s a question surrounding that.

Gromykin       No one seems to know.

Zhdanov        We’d better see how we get on. Let’s discuss that after.....

*(Turns to Gromykin)* How do I look today?

Gromykin       /Very well.

Zhdanov        /Are there bags under my eyes?

Gromykin       I don’t think so.

Zhdanov        Pity. I wanted to make an impression. Perhaps there’s time for one more vodka?

Gromykin       Perhaps, but the delegates are already here.

Zhdanov        So they are, so they are. Yet another delegation of ‘Western humanists’. Do they really think they’re fooling anyone with their ‘concern’ for the way in which we treat our Soviet Artists?

Gromykin       It’s easier to believe what you see.

Zhdanov        Give them a cultural tour and a meal ticket and they disappear soon enough.

Gromykin       Of course, they believe what they want to believe.

Zhdanov        Should I give them a few words of welcome?

Gromykin       I’m sure that would be appreciated.

Zhdanov I'd really like to. You'll make the announcement?

Gromykin Now?

Zhdanov I think we've waited long enough.

*The music is turned up. Gromykin and Zhdanov seat themselves on the left. Dmitri and Galina enter and are seated on the right of the table (the two dancers are in their early 20s). Gromykin and Zhdanov stand. The music stops.*

Gromykin Comrade Zhdanov would like to give you a few words of welcome.

*Gromykin sits.*

Zhdanov Welcome to Leningrad. It is so gracious of you to accept our invitation to join us, at a time when we are rebuilding the very fabric of our lives, here in this monumental city. Your humanitarianism is commendable and we thank you for your concern for our Comrades Pokrovsky and Lepinsky. These two ballet dancers whom you believe performed so well in the ballet *The Red Poppy*.

It is my humble belief that some people in the West think that we are uncivilised; they think that we are too harsh in our treatment of our Soviet Artists, but we take our responsibilities very seriously. Our Russian ballet dancers lead the way; they set an example to the West. Regrettably, after the 1917 revolution ballet became too liberal - gymnastic and unsightly ballets, influenced by the undisciplined rhythms of jazz music. Comrade Stalin brought a more stable, and traditional influence to the field of arts in the Soviet Union. The frivolous ballets of the 1920s and 30s have been replaced with ballets showing the real and urgent drama of class struggle. They uplift and inspire with the noble ideals of socialism.

So what is it that concerns you?

*Zhdanov sits.*

Gromykin Are there some questions you wish to ask? To the dancers? Yes?

*A delegate in the auditorium stands up.*

Delegate: My question is for Mr Pokrovsky. What do you think of the resolution of the Central Committee of the Party and, in particular, Mr Zhdanov's speech?

*Delegate sits.*

Zhdanov: This is the speech in which Pokrovsky and Lapinsky were used as examples is it not?

Delegate: Yes Sir, it is.

Zhdanov: And what was said? *He turns to Gromykin.* Would you read it out for the record. I can't quite remember.

*Gromykin riffles through his papers. He stands.*

Gromykin: Comrade Zhdanov said and I quote "Pokrovsky is an unprincipled and conscienceless hooligan of balletic falsity. He has a rotten and decayed socio-political and balletic mug" (*face*).

*Silence. He sits.*

Zhdanov: What was the question again?

*The delegate's voice comes from within the auditorium*

Delegate: Mr Pokrovsky, How does that speech make you feel?

*Dimitri stands.*

Dimitri: I consider both Comrade Zhdanov's speech and the resolution to be absolutely correct.

*Silence. He sits.*

*Gromykin riffles through his papers again.*

Gromykin: Of Lapinsky, Comrade Zhdanov said, and I quote “Lapinsky is poisoning the consciousness of Soviet youth with her rotten and putrid spirit of her dancing”.

*Silence.*

Delegate: And may I ask the same question to Miss Lapinsky, please?

*Galina stands and begins an appeal*

Galina: At first I didn't understand, you see, I didn't understand either Comrade Zhdanov's speech, or the resolution. I thought to myself, how can I be poisoning the consciousness of Soviet youth, because, well, you see, the ballet in which I have been performing is all about a young girl who sacrifices herself for her comrades, and for her country. At the time, it seemed unfair to me to, to suggest that there is anything rotten or putrid about the spirit of my dancing. I even wrote a letter. I...I wrote a letter to Comrade Stalin ..... to Comrade Stalin himself....to explain that my motives are good. But then, when I started to think about it, I realised that many of the accusations were fair and just. I realised that I have dedicated myself wholly to the art of dance when I should have been thinking about my duties, my duties to Mother Russia ...and I should have been thinking about the important values of Soviet society...

*She fades and sinks back down on to her chair. Pause. Applause from the auditorium*

Gromykin: If there are no more questions, please would you make your way to the dining hall. You all have your meal tickets, I trust. Please .....follow the attendant.

Gromykin *(Turning to ballet dancers)* You may go.

Zhdanov Do you think that went well?

Gromykin As well as could be expected.

Zhdanov We need some refreshments.

Gromykin They should be with us soon. Can I ask you a question?

Zhdanov I don't know, can you? Oh, very well, what is it?

Gromykin I thought *Poppy* was very successful, certainly during the war and even after..... for a time at least?

Zhdanov: When Chairman Mao came to visit, he was invited to the Bolshoi to see some Soviet art. Comrade Stalin and myself joined him there. We thought to give the Chairman a performance of *The Red Poppy*, but the Chairman specifically requested to see *Swan Lake* instead. You see, in China the poppy is the raw material for opium and it's unhappily associated with narcotics and vice. It's not the symbol of revolutionary fervour that these ballet dancers had thought. Not everything that blushes scarlet is revolutionary.

*Pause.*

Gromykin Perhaps we could call the ballet "The Red Flower".

*An aide enters and places a tray of champagne and vol-au-vonts on the table. Zhdanov downs one glass of champagne and takes another one.*

Zhdanov Did you actually see *Red Poppy*?

Gromykin (*Defensively*) I've never been to a ballet in my life.

Zhdanov Never?

*The Shostakovich is played, as the characters exit, and the set is changed.*

**Act 1 Scene 2**– A storeroom in the Gomerovsky Ballet School – June 1941. It is a cellar room with only one high window along the back wall. There is a door along one wall. Part of the corridor leading to the door and the steps leading up to the street, from behind the wall, are visible. There are the boarder’s trunks, a floor standing radio with a record deck on top, long playing records, some old furniture including tables and chairs and a pile of tatty well used point shoes. There is some ballet scenery and free standing trees from *Swan Lake*. A small portrait of Stalin hangs on the wall.

*Kasyan (19) and Alexei (18) are outside in the corridor. Alexei pushes her against the wall and they kiss. The storeroom door is off the latch. Alexei notices the door and pushes it open. He looks inside.*

Alexei            Look at this.

*They enter and look at the scene in awe.*

Kasyan            This place is creepy. It’s like a tomb.

Aren’t these the boarder’s trunks?

Alexei            Old boarders maybe. They’re covered in dust – must be twenty or thirty years old.

Kasyan            Who would leave a trunk behind? It’s giving me the creeps.

Alexei            I’ll look after you.

*He kisses her. He tries to close the door but it springs off the latch again.*

*He kisses her again.*

Kasyan            No don’t.

Alexei            Why not? What’s the matter?

Kasyan        Someone will see us.

*He opens the lid of the trunk.*

Alexei        Not if we're in here.

*He tries to take her inside, but she draws back.*

Kasyan        It's dirty.

Alexei        Behind here then. No one will see.

*He takes Kasyan into the shadows of the scenery.*

Kasyan        Is it safe (*the scenery*)?

Alexei        It's fine. It's been standing here for years. Can't you see that? Don't you  
love me?

Kasyan        Yes, of course I do.

Alexei        Well then.

*They engage in an awkward and clumsy sexual exploration.*

Kasyan        We'd better not.

Alexei        It's okay. I'll be careful.

*Dmitri comes down the corridor and waits.*

Kasyan        Did you hear that?

Alexei        It's nothing.

Kasyan        I can hear someone.

*Dmitri hears the voices and then notices the door and puts his head round.*

Dmitri        Alexei, is that you?

*He enters the room and sees the two figures in the dark. He backs up.*

Dmitri        Sorry. The door was open.....I didn't mean to.....

Kasyan I told you!

*Dmitri exits. Alexei follows him.*

Alexei Mitya, Mitya, you idiot, it's me.

Dmitri Alex! How did you get in there?

Alexei I don't know. The door was open when I arrived.

Dmitri You'll get into a bloody war with the ballet master if you're caught in there.

Alexei Get in here and close the door

*He tries but the door springs open again. He puts a chair against the door.*

Dmitri It's damp in here.

Alexei It's been shut up for years.

Dmitri Have you got yours?

Alexei Arrived this morning, but I haven't opened it yet. Waiting for you, puss ball.

*Kasyan appears from the shadows, still adjusting her dress.*

Dmitri Hello Kasyan. Milking the cows again?

Kasyan Don't be disgusting Mitya. *(To Alexei)* Why didn't you tell me you'd got your telegram?

Alexei I promised I'd open mine at the same time as Mitya and Galya.

Kasyan What about me?

Alexei What about you? Mitya and Galya came to this school at the same time as me.

Kasyan Doesn't it make any difference that we're going out together?

Dmitri Staying in more likely.

Kasyan           What's Galya to you anyway? Anyone would think you prefer her to me!

Alexei           Look Kasyan, I can be friends with anyone I want, alright? *(To Dmitri)* Is Galya coming?

Dmitri           We said 11.00, between classes. She's a bit fussy about missing classes.

Alexei           Most people are puss ball.

*(To Kasyan )*What was that? Did you say you had to go Kasyan?

Kasyan           No, I'm not .....not until you open your telegram.

*The boys look at one another and grab Kasyan.*

Kasyan           What're you doing? No, stop it. Don't.

*They lift her off the ground. She's smiling and they are laughing.*

Dmitri           In the trunk.

Kasyan           No, don't, it's dirty.

*Kasyan start struggling as they dump her in the trunk. The boys are about to close the lid.*

Kasyan           What're you doing! **No don't!**

Alexei           Shush Kasyan, not so loud.

*Kasyan gets out with as much grace as she can muster. She has a fit of hysteria and hits Alexei.*

Kasyan           What did you do that for? I was really really scared. What if I'd been trapped in there?

Alexei           We weren't going to leave you in there, were we Mitya?

Kasyan           I didn't know that.

Alexei           Girls and their little fits of hysteria.

Kasyan I'm not hysterical. I can't stay, in any case. I've got to go.....to meet my mother.

Alexei Oh, your mother.

*She stops at the door to remove the chair, then turns to Alexei.*

Kasyan You will call on me won't you?

Alexei If you want.

*Kasyan exits along the corridor.*

Dmitri Do me a favour Alex, and make yourself scarce.

Alexei Why should I?

Dmitri I want to talk to Galya alone.

Alexei But she asked me to be here.

Dmitri I'll make it up to you.

Alexei But Galya wanted me to be here. I can't let her down.

Dmitri Please.

Alexei She expects me to be here.

Dmitri Please. Just this once.

*Pause*

Alexei Why should I?

Dmitri Three's a crowd.

*Pause*

Alexei You'll owe me for this my friend.

Dmitri Okay

*Alexei exits onto the street. Dmitri stands in the corridor to wait for Galina. Galina enters down the corridor carrying a pair of ballet shoes.*

Galina Mitya! Have you got yours?

Dmitri Yep.

Galina Mine's only just arrived. Did you remind Alexei?

Dmitri Urh! I forgot.

Galina Mityaaa!

Dmitri I've only just remembered myself. We could give it a few minutes if you like.

Galina Alright, but I can't wait too long, I've got class.

Dmitri There's something I want to show you.

*He opens the door into the storeroom.*

Galina How did you do that?

Dmitri Well, you know.

Galina It's out of bounds. I don't want to get into trouble.

Dmitri Have a look....there's loads of scenery.

*They go inside.*

Galina If we get caught.....

Look at this scenery.

Dmitri I'll close the door. Just in case anybody comes.

*Dmitri closes the door and puts the chair under the handle.*

Galina It's from Swan Lake, isn't it?

Dmitri I think so. There's going to be a new production. Did you hear?

Galina Madam told us about it.

Dmitri I saw them bringing some scenery in. It's been dumped here, like all this other stuff.

Galina           It's beautiful. How do they do it? Look at the painting, it's so real.

Dmitri           From a distance.

Galina           The paint's peeling off here.

Dmitri           Don't touch it Galya. It doesn't look safe. I don't want anything to fall on your head.

Galina           Guess what we're doing in rep?

Dmitri           What?

Galina           The Cygnets. Oh! what's the time?

Dmitri           Keep it down Galya. It's ....11.15. Don't worry, I won't let you miss it.....I'll keep an eye on the time.

Galina           Thanks Mitya. I can't miss rep.

Dmitri           Maybe you're being tried out in the role.

*Dmitri has got distracted by the sight of the radio with the record deck. During the following dialogue he checks the moving parts, finds a record and puts it on the deck.*

Galina           That's what I think. Madam spent the whole of the first class just teaching us how to make our entrance. Would she really have spent so much time on it, if it wasn't for anything?

Dmitri           A whole hour?

Galina           We had to run on and stand in our line of four. We had to be absolutely identical, even our eyes had to follow in the same direction. You wouldn't believe how difficult it was.

Dmitri           A whole hour just for that?

Galina           This is the scenery for the woodland scene, isn't it?

Dmitri        A whole hour?

Galina        *She stands in her starting position for the Cygnets.*

Galina        Did I tell you who/ I saw after the class?

Dmitri        /A whole hour.

Galina        Dima! Well, maybe not for a whole hour. Didn't I tell you who I saw?

Dmitri        No.

Galina        Ulanova. She was rehearsing in the junior's studio

She looked so fragile and so small, and I'm just like her.

*Dima puts the radio on and it crackles/squeals loudly. He switches it off straight away.*

Galina        What are you doing Mitya? You'll get us into trouble. Someone will hear.

*They both listen. Dmitri listens at the door.*

Dmitri        It's okay.

Galina        Look at these shoes. Have any of them got names in them?

Dmitri        I don't know. Would you bother to write your name in them?

Galina        Yes, I would. Every single pair.

*She looks at the shoes but she's disappointed to see that none of them are named. She continues to look through them and puts a pair on.*

Dmitri        Have you never had an injury Galya? With all that point work?

Galina        Never, I've been really lucky.

Dmitri        You've got such tiny feet. It's a wonder they can support your body.

Galina        You've never had an injury either, have you?

Dmitri        Not exactly, but my shoulders are always aching after pas de deux. The ballet Master's given me the biggest girl. I wish you were my partner.

You're so tiny Galya.

Galina            You should have seen Ulanova.....

Dmitri            What about her?

Galina            You should come and watch company class more often. You really missed something. I hardly saw her feet land once, she was so light. And she's so good at character.

*Galina stands on her points, then takes them off and continues to rummage in the pile.*

Dmitri            Like Alexei?

Galina            Not exactly. When she's Odette she's showing this kind of childlike fear and then when she's Odile, she becomes, this.... stately, austere person – it's a Leningrad look! She's not at all like that in real life - she blushes most horribly - and she pokes her chin and hunches her shoulders. But when she starts to dance, all that goes away. She makes the most beautiful lines with her body. She really is as beautifully formed as a swan and, when she dances, she leaves ripples in the air like cascading water.

Dmitri            I haven't missed much then.

Galina            Mitya, I didn't have to come down here. Oh! What's the time?

Dmitri            It's okay. I promise you won't miss your class.

Galina            You look worried.

Dmitri            You do too.

Galina            I am a bit.

Dmitri            Scared even.....

Galina            I'm really petrified, aren't you?

Dmitri            It's okay.

Galina            We've waited so long for this moment.

Dmitri            And now/...it's here.....

Galina            Alexei!

Dmitri            He must have forgotten.

Galina            We always said we'd do it together. How could he  
forget? *Pause.* Did you know he asked me to be his girlfriend once?

Dmitri            Did he?

Galina            When he was ten.

*Dmitri looks at his watch.*

Dmitri            We can't wait any longer.

*They look at their telegrams*

Galina            Mine smells of point shoe shellac.

Dmitri            That's funny, mine smells of sweat.

Galina            It's not hand written.

Dmitri            It's not? Mine is. It's got kisses on the back from Madam.

Galina            Let me see.

*Galina takes Dmitri's telegram.*

Galina            No it hasn't. But I wouldn't be surprised. She loves you so much.

Dmitri            I don't think so.

Galina            You're her favourite. She can't stop talking about you.

Dmitri            What does she say?

Galina            That you can jump higher than any of the other boys and that we'd all better  
work harder if we want a chance of catching you.

*Dmitri takes her telegram, holds it above her head and begins opening it.*

Galina            Let me do it Mitya. Give it to back Mitya. Stop it Mitya. Give it to me, please. *He hands it back. Pause.* I hardly dare look. What does it say?

Dmitri            It says....I am pleased to advise you....  
You've got into the Maryinsky.

Galina            What?

Dmitri            You've got in.

Galina            Have I? Are you sure. Let me see. Let me see.

*She takes the telegram in shaking hands.*

I can't believe it. Father Stalin has been listening after all. I'm so relieved.

Dmitri            No one's worked harder than you have.

Galina            I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't got in. It's all I've ever wanted in my whole life.

Dmitri            You needn't have worried. They were always going to take you.

Galina Lapinsky, prima ballerina assoluta, before the Supreme teacher (*Stalin*) and all the good Soviet citizens of Leningrad. *Beat* You're so pretty Galya.

*Galina snatches his telegram and runs off with it. He chases her to the portrait of Stalin and catches her from behind and holds her tight.*

Galina            Mityaaa.... What are you doing?

Dmitri            Come on, Galya, you must know I fancy you rotten, even more than flying a pilot's dream.

*She pushes him off.*

Galina I don't want to be flown.

Dmitri Are you sure...I'd be an excellent pilot. Look at these hand manoeuvres.  
I'm really in control.

Galina Mityaaaa....

Dmitri I know all about these things, Galina, after years on a farm. I've seen it all.  
I can think of lots of nice things to do together.

Galina I'm not interested in being fondled like a cow, thank you very much.

Dmitri Not like a cow, look like this.

Galina No! Mitya, I can't believe you're doing this. I thought we were friends.

*Beat*

Dmitri Let's just forget it, shall we? Forget it ever happened. You can rip open my letter now Galya, if you like. Take it out of its envelope and tear it to shreds for all I care.

*She pretends to be about to tear it in half*

No. Read it first. I want to hear it and then I'll be on my way. Is that alright with you?

Galina Mitya.....

Dmitri Just do it.

Galina Fine!

*Galina turns towards the audience and opens the telegram with shaking hands, and reads quickly, her face falls.*

Galina I'm so sorry. I can't believe it.....

*Dimitri removes the chair and opens the door. He exits. He tries to close the door but it springs open. Galina picks up her shoes and follows him.*

Galina           Mitya...

*We hear Madam voice calling from offstage.*

Madam           Dimitri Pokrovsky!

*She comes round the corner into the corridor. Dimitri and Galina stop dead and look at her.*

Madam           So, this is where you're hiding!

*Dimitri sinks his head. Madam looks at them coldly.*

Madam           *(To Galina)* Get to your class.

*Galina exits down the corridor.*

*Madam stares at Dimitri and then she slaps him round the head.*

Madam           Are you trying to make a fool of me? I was the one who stuck up for you at the auditions and now you let me down. A stubborn backward farm boy like you. You have been given this opportunity to raise yourself up to the glory of the people. You, with hardly any formal training before you came here. You do not deserve your place here at the school. There are so many others who would take your place. I am thinking of sending you back to your Kulak father in disgrace and shame.

Dimitri          I'm no good at ballet. In any case, I never wanted to be a dancer. I wanted to stay at home and become a pilot. My dad says if I can control a plough, I'll be able to control a plane. You have to be really strong. So, I don't care if you send me home. I want to go home.

Madam Mitya, Mitya. That's not true. A brilliant boy like you, you could join the perfection class. You above all. But you must work, work, work.

One day, Dmitri Pokrovsky, I will write a libretto for a new ballet and it is you who will dance the principal role. You will see...

Now get to your class.

*Dmitri exits down the corridor. Madam is shocked to see the storeroom open; she tentatively goes inside and looks around as though expecting to find intruders. Madam goes to the table. She pulls out a leaf and is relieved to find what she expected to find. She takes out an icon which is hidden inside. She puts it on the table. She sits and looks at it. She takes a photograph out of her pocket.*

Madam Moislav, Moislav. Papa, where are you now? May you rest in peace. *She folds her hand and is silent in prayer. She puts the icon back inside the table and then as an after thought puts the photograph in with the icon. Kasyan enters from the corridor expecting to find Alexei.*

Madam Kasyan, you startled me. Where've you been? I've been waiting for you.

Kasyan I've been looking for you. This place is creepy.

Madam It's just a store room. Hasn't been open for years. Someone brought in some scenery... from the Maryinsky by the look of it. They've forced the lock.

Kasyan Why would they do that?

Madam I don't know. Perhaps the key is lost. I'll have to get someone in to mend it. Come on now. Let's go home.

Come on Kasyan, don't dawdle.

*Kasyan and Madam exit closing the door, which springs back open. They exit onto the street.*

**Act 1, Scene 3 – The next day - morning. A table and two chairs are now centre stage. There are two glasses, two bottles of vodka (one half empty), some bread and a pack of cards on the table. A chair is under the door handle.**

*Dmitri and Alexei are drinking at the table. Every time they take a shot, they eat a little of the bread.*

Alexei            Do you think anyone saw us?

Dmitri            What?

Alexei            Coming in here.

Dmitri            Does it matter? What are they going to do? Throw us out of the school?

Alexei            I was so sure you'd get into the company.

Dimitri           I'm glad you have so much faith in the system.

Alexei            A system that lets talent go to waste, wouldn't you say?

Dmitri            Why, thank you Alexei, that's very decent of you.

Alexei            I was talking about me!

*Pause*

Do you doubt the system?

Dmitri            No! No, of course not.

Alexei            A toast. To the system!

Dmitri            The system!

Alexei            What will you do now pussball?

Dmitri I'm going home, at the end of term. I'm dreading it.  
Dad will kill me.....  
It's all he's ever wanted for me. He was expecting great things of me. A rising star, better than an aviator, better even than an astronaut,/ better than.....

Alexei /Not better than a striker.

Dmitri All you every think about is football.

Alexei That's not strictly true.

Dmitri My father thinks I'm worthless. This was the only thing I was ever any good at and now I've made a mess of it. He thinks I'm nothing. I don't know what I'm going to do....

Alexei I don't know what I'm going to do either. I can't do anything else.

Dmitri So, we just sit here, doing nothing?

Alexei I'm not giving up. I'm going to fight this thing. I'm going to all the classes I can get..... and hope that somebody falls and has a serious spinal injury. Failing that....maybe I could start up my own company. If you play your cards right, I might invite you on board. You can be in charge of launching new ballets into orbit.

*Alexei makes the noise of a rocket, going up and plunging down.*

Dmitri I've been thinking of trying for the air force. But, I don't know. My father probably thinks I'll make a mess of that too. Maybe I'd better just stick around here and see if I can find some kind of work.

*They hear someone coming. Galina comes down the corridor to the door.*

Dmitri        It's Galya.

Galina        Dmitri! Are you in there?

*Alexei opens the door.*

Alexei        Oh! It's you Galya. I thought I heard your little feet.

Galina        Hello Alexei. What are you doing in here?

Alexei        Celebrating.

Galina        I'm so sorry to hear you didn't get into the company.

Alexei        Don't worry about me Galya, I've got other plans.

Galina        What are you going to do?

Alexei        I'll tell you about it some other time Galya. You got in I heard.

Galina        Yes.

Alexei        What are you doing down here in the dark depths of the underworld?

Galina        Looking for Mitya.

Alexei        He's here. Do you want to speak to him?

Dmitri        What do you want Galina? We're in the middle of a game.

Galina        I just wanted to make sure you're alright?

Dmitri        You can see I'm okay....is there something else I can do for you?

Galina        Don't be horrible Mitya.

Alexei        Why don't you join us for a drink? I could do with some pleasant company for a change.

Galina            Thank you Alexei, but I can't. I've got to go and be fitted for new point shoes.

Dmitri            Don't be late for your class.

Galina            I won't.

*Galina exits onto the street. Alexei replaces the chair.*

Alexei            To Galina, the most puritanical girl in Leningrad.

Dmitri            She's a slut. She slept with the ballet master's son.

Alexei            The ballet master's son?

Dmitri            Some people'll do anything to get on.

Alexei            Who told you that?

Dmitri            I heard it from Kasyan, it was years ago.

Alexei            Then it must be true. She is a whore after all, and all the men have slept with her, from here to Kronstadt..... I touched her up once.

Dmitri            No you didn't.

Alexei            I did my friend.

Dmitri            But tell me Alexei, was she any good?

Alexei            I don't know, she wouldn't fuck me! I had both her breasts in my hands for one brief moment and then she ran off.

Dmitri            She wouldn't let me do anything either.

                          And I showed her some of my best manoeuvres, I'd learnt on the farm.

Alexei            Really, and she didn't like them?

Dmitri            Didn't seem to.

*Pause*

Alexei            Forget her, Mitya

If you're looking for love, why don't you speak to Katerina. She's got a pair of cushions for you....or anyone else for that matter!

Dmitri            To Katerina!

Alexei            Katerina!

*Pause*

Dmitri            But how can I forget her. She's on my mind all the time.

Alexei            I don't know. Perhaps you should just try being friends with her. Girls like that.

Dmitri            You know we're already friends. The best of friends.

Alexei            Well that's your problem then. She doesn't see you in that way. The problem with women Mitya, is that they're all different.

Dmitri            And how's a man supposed to cope with that?

*Pause. During the next dialogue there is a low and prolonged rumble of thunder.*

Alexei            I think you're wrong about Galya.

Dmitri            I don't think so.

Alexei            I've never seen her with any boys....

Dmitri            Apart from you and you don't count.

Alexei            Wouldn't let me do anything would she? When you think about it.....are you so sure Kasyan's telling the truth?

Dmitri            I believe her.

Alexei           Galya's had a really gruesome time of it.

Dmitri           Has she? Oh! You mean her parents?

Alexei           One after the other....that's hard.

Alexei           I saw her after she heard about her father. I was there, outside that  
changing room, the one next to the studio.

Dmitri           Just above here?

Alexei           That's the one. I heard the matron telling her. When she came out of that  
room she was, sort of retching, like this.....but she wasn't being sick.

Dmitri           What did Matron say?

Alexei           I couldn't hear the actual words, but I knew by the sound of her voice.....I  
knew it was something serious. I only found out later what it was all about,  
same as everybody else. She changed a lot after that.

Dmitri           Matron?

Alexei           No, puss, Galya. She became a nicer person.

Dmitri           She's stuck up. All she ever talks about is ballet.

Alexei           maybe, but I still don't think she slept with the ballet master's son.

Dmitri           She might have.

Alexei           You said it yourself. She's too stuck up. She keeps herself all alone.  
She doesn't talk about her family or anything personal at all. She's weird.

Dmitri           You never talk about your family any more either.

Alexei Don't I? That's odd. What do you want to know?

*Beat.*

I have a mother and a father, the same as everybody else.

*Beat*

Dmitri You didn't land in a rocket from out of space?

Alexei Careful, you'll get struck down puss ball.

*There's a roll of thunder*

Alexei What did I tell you?

*There's another roll of thunder*

Dmitri That one's for you little green man. (*He looks through the window. It's a sunny day.*)

Alexei I'll tell you something about my family you don't know.

Dmitri Go on then.

Alexei My father works in a bottle factory.

Dmitri I know that.

Alexei If you keep quiet puke, I'll tell you. Sometimes there's no money....

Dmitri Usually there's no money.

Alexei No listen! There's no money to pay the workers. So, do you know how they get paid when that happens?

Dmitri No.

Alexei In bottles.

Dmitri In bottles?

Alexei In bottles. Isn't that funny?

Dmitri What kind of bottles?

Alexei        Empty bottles.

Dmitri        What good are empty bottles?

*Alexei tries to speak more quietly*

Alexei        Shh! Shh! Not so loud. More than you think. What can you make with a couple of buckets, some tubing, a boiler, a large wooden spoon and..... some snow?

*Pause*

Dmitri        A distillery? Vodka?

Alexei        Yes, my friend.

Dmitri        In your own home? I raise a toast. To empty bottles!

Alexei        Empty bottles!

*They drink and eat.*

Dmitri        Doesn't the workers committee kick up a rumpus.....about being paid in empty bottles?

Alexei        What could they do? There's no money, there's no money. They'll only cause trouble for themselves.

Dmitri        What kind of trouble?

Alexei        All kinds of trouble in Kronstadt; sailors fighting, neighbours disappearing, neighbours putting salt in each other's soup or maybe a little spit.

Dimitri I'm glad we don't live in an apartment. Which neighbours disappeared?

You've never told me about that.

Alexei An Estonian family. Been there as long as I can remember. We all gathered on the stairs to watch them go.

Dmitri What did you do?

Alexei What could we do? We were all far too busy enjoying feeling very sorry for ourselves. We all know that the enemy never sleeps and it might be our turn next. There are always informants in Kronstadt.

Dmitri But that's good isn't? Always be vigilant?

*Silence*

Alexei Yes, of course, that's good. What about your family. They survive.....despite the informants?

Dmitri What do you mean?

Alexei Do you eat well?

Dmitri What?

Alexei The collectives are a good thing aren't they?

Dmitri That's not what the old man says. He swears by old farming methods, handed down.... from his father, but what choice do we have?

Alexei Now you're talking like a man! But Mitya, there are choices aren't there?

Dmitri            We have to survive, Alex. Don't you have to survive?

Alexei            To survive in Kronstadt it's necessary to have something up your sleeve. A  
                         little bit on the black market.

Dmitri            You're...you're proud of that?

Alexei            No! I'm not proud of that. It's just....it's just a fact of life.  
                         You're alright if you know the right people.

Dmitri            You mean 'an of-ficial'?

Alexei            A party..... official's always useful. Let's drink to..... officials.

Dmitri            I think.....I think we've had enough to drink.

*Dmitri turns the bottle up and pours out the last drop.*

Alexei            Why? We're having fun aren't we?  
                         We don't have to go to class today.....nor tomorrow.

Dmitri            Nor the day after that.

*They drink.*

Alexei            Nor the day after that.

Dmitri            Nor the day after that.

*There's a commotion up on the street and a muffled radio announcement from loud  
speakers (on telegraph poles on the street).*

Dmitri            What's going on? Shush! Shush! I can hear something.

Alexei            It's coming from our there on the street.

Dmitri            Go and have a look.

*Alexei goes to the window.*

Dmitri        What is it?

Alexei        I don't know.

Dmitri        What can you see?

Alexei        There's lots and lots of people on the street.

Dmitri        Lots and lots of people?

Alexei        Lots of people.

Dmitri        What are they doing?

Alexei        Let's...let's go....let's go and find out.

*Galina comes down the steps from up on the street and knocks on the door.*

Alexei        Shush! /Shush!

Dmitri        /Shuuush!

Galina        It's Galya. Let me in.

Alexei        It's Galya.

Dmitri        Galya? Galya's come to see me....

*They clumsily manage to take the chair away in a joint effort in which Dmitri falls to the floor. Galina opens the door.*

Dmitri        Hello Galya.

Galina        Have you heard?..... Have you heard the news?

Alexei        What news?

Galina        Kronstadt's been bombed. / I came straight away as soon as I heard.

Alexei        /What? What's that?

Galina        It's war.

*Blackout*

**Act 1 Scene 4 – The storeroom in the Gomerovsky Ballet School – July 25<sup>th</sup> 1941 –**

**Daytime. There are now strips of newspaper criss-crossed over the window. The door has been mended and is shut.**

*Madam enters the room from the street. She is using a walking stick. She goes to the table and is about to take out the leaf. She hears someone coming and waits. Gromykin enters, also from the street. She's breathing heavily and leaning against the table.*

Gromykin I'm sorry Comrade. I didn't mean to frighten you.

Madam I'm a little out of breath.

Gromykin It's a long way, down all those steps. *Pause.* This room must be very important to you.

Madam *Pause.* I just came down here for a moment's reflection.

Gromykin I saw. I followed you.

Madam I often used to come in here.

*Pause*

You may wonder why? It's just a storage room and there's so little light, but as you can see we keep all sorts of memorabilia down here. Many years ago, every child's trunk was stored in this room.

Gromykin It's a good place for secrets.

*Pause.*

Madam            Every child who comes to study at the Gomerovsky makes sacrifices. They put away their childish toys. Instead of playing games they think only of their ballet training. Instead of rushing outside to play or meet with their friends after school, they are practising their ballet steps; discussing who will be dancing the roles in all the company ballets. We take away their childhoods and in return we give them art. It's as though we pack them up and leave their true selves locked in empty cases.

*Silence.*

Madam            Did you want me for something?

Gromykin        No, Comrade. I understood that you wanted to speak to me.

Madam            Oh! *Pause.* You're Kasyan's friend?

Gromykin        She said there was something you wanted me to help you with.

Madam            Yes. There is something.

Gromykin        You want me to make sure you have safe passage out of here.

Madam            No, no. As you know, our Leader values great art and, he will want to preserve the Maryinsky ballet and the Gomerovsky ballet school which feeds that company. I have no doubt of this. For myself..... I do not plan to go with the company. I was born in 'Piter', I have always lived here, and there is no better place to die. No, I have other concerns. When the ballet company has gone, I propose that Comrade Stalin would want there to be a new company, a company in its stead, here in Leningrad, to boost the morale of the people.

*He laughs into his fist.*

Gromykin You want me to help with this?

Madam There is a boy, Dimitri Pokrovsky, who should have got into the ballet company but he's a lazy boy, and a wilful boy. He has been defying me, but inside, he has soul. Do you know what that means?

Gromykin I'm not sure about 'soul' Comrade, now that you come to mention it.

Madam He's going to be a great dancer one day, a great choreographer, a great company director. He will be an ambassador of the arts for the Soviet state. He has talent. He really does. He just needs time to become what he is. He must be a part of this new company and you must arrange it.

Gromykin And why must I arrange it?

Madam Because after this war, if we survive it, Comrade Stalin will ask questions, and you would want to be of use to him. My daughter can help you in this. She's a popular girl. A lot of the dancers trust her with their thoughts.

Gromykin It's an interesting idea Comrade. I'll give it some thought, and now.....and now I will leave you to your secrets.

Madam I.....

Gromykin Let's not insult each other, 'Madam'.

*He exits onto the street. Madam goes to the table and takes out the icon and the Photograph.*

Madam Moislav, Papa. You were a good man. Where are you Papa? I'm waiting for you. Come and get me Papa. Don't be too long I beg you.

*She puts the icon and photograph inside her jacket and exits slowly down the corridor leaning heavily on her walking stick.*

*Kasyan and Alexei enter from the street. Alexei is carrying a bag of groceries which he slings on the floor. He amorously pushes her arms against the wall.*

Kasyan        Should we be in here?

Alexei        I heard a siren. Didn't you hear a siren?

Kasyan        Certainly I heard a siren. Deep inside.

*They start necking and are becoming deeply involved when an actual siren sounds.*

Kasyan        Don't stop.

*Dmitri and Galina enter from the street. Galina has plasters on her thumb and finger.*

Dmitri        Sorry, we didn't know you were in here.

*Alexei and Kasyan are embarrassed.*

Alexei        You'd better come in.

*They listen for a while.*

Galina        Can you hear anything?

Dmitri        Probably another false alarm.

Alexei        You two going out together now?

Kasyan        Staying in together more likely.

Dmitri        Kasyan! Galya and I are friends, close friends. And what were you two doing in here?

*Beat*

Kasyan        Poetry reading. I know a lot of poetry.

Alexei        I like your poems.

Dmitri        Which poets?

Kasyan        All of them.

Dmitri           Why don't you give us a poem Kasyan?

Alexei           Yes, why not?

Kasyan           I'll give you a poem. Later.

Galina           *(Turning to Alexei)* Did you get hold of your parents again yesterday?

Alexei           Yep.

Galina           Are they alright?

Alexei           Dad's joined the people's militia.

Galina           What about your mother?

Alexei           Taken the two boys to her sister's in the country.

                  Wanted me to join her, but how can? I can't let the fascists have Kronstadt.

                  It's where I grew up.

Kasyan           I feel exactly the same way. Leningrad's my home. We've always lived here.

Galina           We're all from round here, except Dmitri.

Dmitri           Leningrad has become my home too, I've lived here so long.

*Pause*

Galina           *(To Alexei)* Have you been out today?

Alexei           Kasyan and I went out to buy food. I even bought some canned food.

*He takes out some of the food and they inspect it during the following dialogue.*

Kasyan           It was such chaos on the streets.

Dmitri           I wouldn't eat this!

Kasyan        You should have seen it. Everybody with money in the bank wants it out and everybody with cash in the attic wants to exchange it for something they can barter, and everybody but everybody wants to buy food; I stood in a queue for six hours and when I got to the front I found out that the prices were so high I couldn't afford a thing.

Galina        You should have come with us to the summer gardens.  
We saw so many people we knew. You wouldn't believe it was war.

Kasyan        It's more important to have food to eat.

Galina        (To Alexei) The gardens are gorgeous. All the limes are flowering, and you should have smelt the forsythia and jasmine. It was so delicious.

Alexei        Listen!

*After a moment we hear the approaching roar of Russian planes flying at low altitude.*

Dmitri        They're low.

Alexei        Bombers?

Dmitri        They're coming from the East.

Alexei        Are you sure.

Dmitri        They're ours!

*Dmitri gets a chair and stands at the window. He strips some of the paper off to try and get a look.*

Dmitri        Come on.... let's get a look at you.

*The planes have passed. He jumps off the chair.*

Dmitri        They're ours. / Monoplanes. Heavily armoured.

Alexei        /Yesss!

Kasyan        Is it over?

Dmitri I don't know.

*They wait. The all clear siren sounds.*

Galina I hope they blast them to hell.

*They all look at Galina.*

Dmitri Are you alright Galya?

Kasyan What happened to your hand Galya? It's bleeding.

Galina I've been sewing all day.

Kasyan You need a fresh plaster for that.

Galina It's fine.

Kasyan Are you making your own ballet costumes now?

Galina Of course not. We were sewing nets, for the war effort....they're to cover the military HQ at Smolny. They're hoping it will look like the summer gardens.

Kasyan Really! What a thing to do to the hands of a ballet dancer. You poor thing.

Dmitri Galya's had some good news.

Alexei Galya has all the good news.

Galina Mityaa, I told you not to tell anyone until it was certain.

Dmitri You know it's certain. Galya's dancing in Swan Lake.

Galina I might be doing the cygnets. We learnt it in repertoire.

Alexei That's why you've been chosen. You already know it.

Dmitri It's an achievement to be given that role straight away, in her first month and besides, that's not all. She's going to be given a solo.

Galina I might be. It's not definite yet. I'm being rehearsed in the tarantella.

Alexei New soloists are often given that role, just to see if they're any good.

Kasyan Well done Galya. Why don't you go and get in some practise?

Galina I'm too tired, I've been sewing all day.

*Kasyan takes Galina by the shoulder and stands her up.*

Kasyan Nonsense. You're never too tired to dance.

*Galina does not respond.*

Kasyan We'd like to see it, wouldn't we?

We'll clear the table and chairs for you. Come on, lend a hand.

Galina It's not fully rehearsed yet.

*Alexei reluctantly helps her to clear away the things and set up the scene.*

Kasyan There.

Galina If you really want. *Galina demonstrates some of the solo*

*Dmitri occasionally joins in with the male supporting role.*

Kasyan It's a very jolly dance isn't it?

Alexei Oh! Yes, very jolly. Go on keep going. We want to see it, right to the end.

*The dance is finished. Kasyan claps.*

Kasyan It's beautiful Gayla.

You two should be dancing together. You're so well matched.

Alexei So well matched.

Galina Why don't you give us one of your poems Kasyan?

Kasyan My poems? Oh, my poems.

Dmitri Kasyan's very keen on poetry, so I've heard.

Kasyan I know one of Akhmatova's off by heart.

Galina Akhmatova? She's my favourite poet.

Kasyan Maybe you know this one. It starts....

*'Even though the signal fire is not burning'.*

It's about Leningrad.

Galina I know. I've heard it. Go on Kasyan.

Kasyan *'Even though the signal fire is not burning  
And in unprecedented darkness the city is drowning,  
The voice of Leningrad speaks to us:  
I am ready for hard work and resistance'.*

*Silence. Alexei's mood is broken.*

Alexei I wish I'd get my mobilization papers.

Dmitri Me too!

Alexei What?

Dmitri I've joined the people's militia.

Alexei You're too young pussball.

Dmitri Not if you know the right place to go.

Alexei But why?

Dmitri My father doesn't want me home.

Alexei When did he tell you that?

Dmitri He didn't. I just know. In any case I want to get out there and whip the fascists arses.

Alexei Join the line.

Dmitri: I've been trying to figure something out.

Galina What's that Mitya?

Dmitri It's been bothering me. Something about going to the front has made me think about it.

Alexei Best not to think about going to the front too much Mitya.

Dmitri It's not that.

*Pause*

Alexei           We should live a little.

*Alexei puts his arms around Kasyan.*

Dmitri:           No, listen to me. I'm trying to say something. Do you believe in God?

Alexei           I don't know anything about that Mitya. Maybe 'eternal rest'. A release from life.

Dmitri           But that's what I'm trying to tell you.

It's made me realize that

I'm afraid of eternal rest, because....

*Pause*

'Without our mortal bodies

There'll be no more dancing'.

Alexei           I thought you didn't want to be a dancer?

Dmitri           I thought so too.

Galina           Mitya, how bitter to find out now.

*She kisses him lightly on the cheek. Dmitri takes her in his arms. Galina pushes him away.*

Galina           Mityaaa! How could you.

Dmitri           What's the matter with you Galina. I'm going to the front. I may never see you again. Doesn't that mean anything to you?

Galina           That's just it Mitya. I'm being evacuated soon....the sooner the better.

*She runs out and exits via the stairs, onto the street.*

Dmitri           All you ever thinks about it ballet.

Alexei           Shut the door on your way out would you Mitya.

*Dmitri exits onto the street.*

Kasyan           What's this? Darkness?  
                    'Oh, sweet night is young  
                    The wind blows stifling hot,'

Alexei            I love it when you recite poetry.

Kasyan            'The sun has burned my arms',  
                    Take me now....  
                    'Over me, a dome of air  
                    Like dark blue glass'  
                    Wait a moment.

Alexei            Is this better?

Kasyan            'Let me die with the last white storm'.

Alexei            That's good.

Kasyan            'The vineyard is breaking into blossom,  
                    And I am twenty years old tonight'.

Alexei            Are you ready?

Kasyan            Now, do it now.....

Alexei            Is this okay?

Kasyan            Faster.....

Alexei            I'm going as fast as I can.

Kasyan            Pushkin, Go-gol, Turgenov, Ler-montov, Ak-manova, Blok, Pushkin,  
                    Pushkin, Pushkin.

Alexei            Uhhhh!

Galina            Ak....Ak....Ak...

*They straighten out their clothing. Kasyan walks to the chair and sits with an ecstatic look on her face.*

Kasyan        I'd do anything for you. You know that don't you. You won't let me down, will you?

*Pause.*

Alexei        I think I will. I'm a soldier now Kasyan.

Kasyan        Please don't, don't think about that. Everything will be okay, I promise, I promise.

*Kasyan sits on his knee and starts caressing him again.*

Alexei        We can if you like. Just give me a few moments.

*Gromykin is coming down the stairs with Dmitri. Kasyan gets off quickly and Alexei stands abruptly. Gromykin enters with Dmitri.*

Gromykin     Ah! Here you are. Look who I've found. The very man I've been wanting to speak with. Isn't that fortunate?

*Gromykin indicates for Kasyan to leave them, and she exits onto the street.*

Official        Do you know why I'm here?

Alexei        I think so Comrade.

Official        And do you also know why I'm here?

Dmitri        No! I don't know.

*The official laughs softly into his fist.*

Official        You've heard nothing!

Dmitri        No!

Official        A kulak boy like you from the Ukraine; you know nothing?  
Ah yes, that's right Comrade Pakrovsky. I have been making investigations about you.... and your family.  
Do you know about the losses we are experiencing? Outside of your privileged world?

*A henchman has come down the steps and into the room.*

Dmitri        I think so, comrade.

Gromykin     Comrade! Ah! Comrade. *Long pause.*

Those are very good shoes you're wearing, comrade.

Dmitri        These shoes?

Gromykin     Yes! Those shoes. The ones you're wearing.

Did the store keeper thank you when you bought them?

Dmitri        He may have done.

Gromykin     Because you had been fortunate enough to afford such a wonderful pair of shoes?

Dmitri        I don't think so.

*Pause*

Gromykin     Some people think we are parasitic gluttons, just because we can afford such shoes of such quality.

Dmitri        Yes, yes, you're quite right. That would be gluttonous. I'll take them off and throw them away.

Gromykin     That won't be necessary. A waste, wouldn't you say?

Dmitri        Yes, I'm sorry

Gromykin     Are you wasteful comrade?

Dmitri No! No, I'm not

Gromykin Are those your only pair of shoes?

Dmitri These are my only pair of good shoes.

Gromykin And what about boots? Do you have any boots?

Dmitri Yes I do, comrade. For the snow.

*Gromykin takes out some papers, and studies them for a moment.*

Gromykin Amongst those who graduated at the same time as you: Who was the best dancer?

Dmitri I don't know.

Gromykin What a waste of those expensive new shoes.

Well?

*Pause*

Dmitri Galina Lapinsky, comrade.

Gromykin Did she get into the company?

Dmitri Yes.

Gromykin (*He writes*) Wait outside.

*The henchman takes Dmitri out onto the street. Gromykin looks at Alexei's shoes; they are very shabby.*

Gromykin And do you also have other pairs of shoes?

Alexei Yes! Yes, I do, I have ballet shoes and character shoes... all supplied by the school.

Gromykin I'd like to see those shoes. Show them to me.

Alexei I don't have them with me comrade.

Gromykin Then whose shoes are those?

*He points to the pile of used point shoes.*

Alexei They're girl's shoes.

Gromykin Only for girls? The boys don't wear them?

Alexei They're for dancing on the points of the toes.

Gromykin The boys couldn't do that?

Alexei No, comrade.

Gromykin Surely they could.

*Gromykin looks at Alexei expectantly.*

Alexei No, comrade.

Gromykin The boys, for instance, couldn't dig out their own families from underneath a pile of rubble, but a girl could?

Alexei No! Yes, Comrade! A boy could do that.

Gromykin Then why can't a boy stand on the tips of his toes?

Alexei The shoes are all too small.

*Gromykin walks over to the pile and picks out the largest pair.*

Gromykin These will fit I think.

*Gromykin throws one to Alexei who catches it deftly. Gromykin walks over to the table and bangs the point shoe loudly on the table.*

Gromykin      What's it made of? I always wanted to know.

Alexei          I think its hessian and tissue paper, I believe, glued / together and  
then...

*/Gromykin throws the other shoe to Alexei who catches it. He puts  
one on. They are too small but they cover his toes and he stands on point.*

*Gromykin waits. Alexei puts on the other shoe and stands on both points. There is  
a pause. Gromykin looks disappointed.*

Gromykin      You look ridiculous. Take them off.

*Alexei takes them off and throws them onto the pile with some force. Gromykin drops his  
poker face for one moment. A fleeting moment of respect passes over his face before he  
regains his former expression.*

Gromykin      Are you a good Soviet, comrade?

Alexei          Yes comrade.

*Gromykin takes another good long look at his papers before turning back.*

Gromykin      Stalin and Molotov take a personal interest in the Department of Culture  
and Propaganda. If it was left up to me, I would brand all ballet dancers  
anti-Soviet. But comrade Stalin is most interested in the art form called  
Socialist Realism, but can this really be done with ballet?

Alexei          Yes! Yes, it can Comrade. Those are all the ballets we love most.

Gromykin      That's all very well, but which ballets?

Alexei          In Giselle for example, the peasant girl saves Albrecht from certain  
death.

Gromykin     Albrecht? It's not really a good Russian name is it? In fact, it's a German name isn't it?

Alexei        Yes, it is! But he's clearly the enemy of the people.

Gromykin     Not really a Soviet ballet? It's an imperialist ballet isn't it? Isn't it?

Alexei        You are quite right. It is from another age. There are other ballets, new ballets/ which .....

Gromykin     /Comrade Stalin isn't interested in the formalist ballets of the last few decades. A new ballet is needed for today, for Leningrad.

Alexei        Yes, yes, I see. Perhaps if I had a chance to discuss this with the ballet master/ I could...

Gromykin     How are you going to do that? The ballet master is going to Kiubyshev with the school children and the company is going to be evacuated to a safe haven, in Perm.

Alexei        There must be somebody, /who could

Gromykin     There is only you.....

Alexei        *(quietly)* I see.

Gromykin     You are being given the opportunity of imagining that you are the director of this new ballet.....and you don't have anything for me?

Alexei        Yes! Yes, I do. It's a ballet about a girl.

Gromykin     A girl? A good Soviet girl?

Alexei        Yes, of course, one of the workers. She's wearing Russian red and she's/ a .....

Gromykin     A worker in such good clothes? I've never seen a ballet, but many years ago my mother, and all the workers in her factory were given free tickets, by Lenin himself. She walked the 14 miles from her village to reach the theatre in Moscow; the Bolshoi Theatre. Do you know what she was wearing? She was dressed in her old workers clothing, and they were a bunch of thick felt rags tied together with a string. She had nothing better. And to walk up those steps and past those columns into the foyer and then to tread on that carpet and walk through the corridors into that grand auditorium, with its gold leaf and tier upon tier of balconies. Her legs nearly gave way under her, and those were her good worker's legs. She used to tell us that she saw a vision on the stage that day, one which she would never forget. But, I've never seen a ballet, comrade, so all I can think of is her dirty rags in that grand auditorium with its plush red velvet.

Alexei        Yes, yes, you're right. The girl is dressed in her decent workers clothes but behind her there is a huge Soviet flag waving in the winds. It's as though it is set here in Leningrad. I imagine it at our large port with our sailors and the heroine dancing in front of a huge battle ship

Gromykin     A battle ship? And where will you get this battle ship, you idiot?

Alexei        Yes, yes, you're quite right, comrade. *Pause.* I've got it now, instead of the flag, there are billowing white clouds all around which are coming from the factories belching out smoke. She's collecting wood for the factory but a German soldier finds her, and to stop him from finding the other workers she distracts him by dancing for him.

Gromykin     Go on.

Alexei           The German soldier shows her some of his dancing and he wants her to copy him, but she refuses. He gets angry with her and finally he shoots her...

*Alexei is searching about for inspiration.*

Gromykin       It's rather a short ballet isn't it? Where are the woodcutters, the swans: the little swans and big ones, dying ones and recuperating ones, dances all about swans? *Pause* Perhaps he doesn't shoot her and something or somebody saves her?

Alexei           The German soldier does shoot her...but she doesn't die and in a last act of defiance she keeps dancing, but she refuses to dance to his oompah music and she continues with her graceful Russian ballet. She dies in a burst of machine gun fire and right there, some wildflowers grow.

Gromykin       Go on.

Alexei           Now the workers are upon him and they kill him with their bare hands. The Soviet flag is raised and many people come to worship her grave.

Gromykin       And what's the title of this ballet? It needs a good title.

Alexei           I have it. The Red Poppy.

Gromykin       The Red Poppy?

Alexei           I was thinking of the desperate struggle of all those good Chinese workers. They are our comrades.

Gromykin       And who would be in this ballet?

Alexei           Anyone left behind, here in Leningrad.

Gromykin       Who do you think is the best dancer in your year?

Alexei           Galina Lapinsky! But, comrade, Dmitri Pakrovsky should have got into the ballet company. He's the best male dancer.

Gromykin      Then why didn't he?

Alexei        I don't know.

Gromykin      Are you sure? Doesn't he toe the party line as well as you do? Perhaps he has other political interests?

Alexei        No, comrade, he doesn't.

*Gromykin knocks on the window to signal to the henchman who brings Dmitri back into the room. Gromykin ignores him and walks slowly over to the trunks. He idly lifts the lid of the trunk and looks inside. Dmitri visibly starts to tremble. Gromykin lets the lid fall and it slams down. Dmitri's legs go weak and he falls to his knees. The henchman brings him a chair and helps Dmitri to sit. Gromykin stands over him.*

Gromykin      The trouble with you ballet dancers is, you're all too fond of the West.

Dmitri        No Comrade.

Gromykin      You all want to leave mother Russia and live in exile.

Dmitri        Not me, comrade.

Gromykin      What was that man's name? He took some of our best dancers to those decadent cities, to Paris, London and Monte Carlo and then he never came back. What was his name?

Dmitri        Diaghilev!

Gromykin      Yes..... that's right, I remember now. Diaghilev. He was a traitor, wasn't he?

Dmitri        Yes, comrade.

Gromykin      What was he?

Dmitri        He was a traitor.

Gromykin      What was he?

Dmitri        He was a traitor

Gromykin He was a traitor, that's right. (*He looks at his papers*)  
What about Anna Pavlova. What was she?

Dmitri She was a traitor, comrade.

Gromykin Vaslav Nijinsky. What was he?

Dmitri A traitor/ comrade

Gromykin Bronislava Nijinska?

Dmitri A traitor.

Gromykin Tamara Karsavina?

Dmitri A traitor

Gromykin Michel Fokine?

Dmitri A traitor, a traitor, a traitor, a traitor/, a traitor, a traitor, a traitor, a traitor, a traitor, a traitor....

Gromykin /Galina Lapinsky!

*Silence.*

Gromykin Are you sure you don't have other political interests. Don't the Ukrainians sympathize with the fascists?

Dmitri Not me Comrade.

Gromykin Not me Comrade.

Dmitri No Comrade

Gromykin *Pause.* I hear that you've got soul. I didn't realize it was such a useful commodity.

*Fade out.*

**End of Act 1**

## ACT TWO

**Act 2 scene 1 - Storeroom of the Gomerovsky Ballet School – October 1941 – early evening. All the trunks, the scenery and the ballet shoes have gone. There is plywood over the window. The table and chairs are on one side of the stage. There is a free standing ballet barre across the back of the stage and the floor standing radio with record deck is downstage.**

*We hear the sound of a siren. Alexei enters down the corridor followed by Galina. They put the light on.*

Galina           Why's it got so cold in here?

Alexei           I told you. The water pipes have ruptured. Why don't you ever listen?

The pipes don't mend themselves, they're a work of engineering.

Someone has to come and do the job.

Galina           How can we dance in these conditions? The electricity keeps going off and the toilets aren't working properly.

Alexei           We've got someone coming to fix it tomorrow. Look, Galya, it's not wise to complain. If everybody complained no work would ever get done and industry would come to a standstill. How would that be for the war effort?

Galina           I can't help it. I'm just so tired, my muscles are aching all over. All I want to do is dance, but my legs won't obey my mind.

Alexei           They'll obey; you've just got to give them the right commands: Let's get back to work.

Galina            This floor's too hard. I can't dance any more today.

Alexei            That's fine! Before you leave and go to your bed, tell your understudy I  
want to see her.

Galina            Why?

*The all clear sounds.*

Alexei            If you're not going to dance then your understudy will have to do it.

Galina            But Alex...

*Galina puts her arms around Alexei. He takes her arms away.*

Alexei            It would be better if you did as you were told. There are plenty of dancers to  
take your place.

Galina            Oh! You mean, that scrawny woman? Why is she so thin?

Alexei            You can say that when there are people collapsing on the streets?

Galina            Don't be horrible Alex. I don't believe you.

Alexei            Galya, are you on a tram line from the rehearsal studio to that flat you are  
so proud of? Do you never look around you?

Galina            Alright! I'll carry on with the rehearsal, but I will only be pushed as far as  
my body will allow.

Alexei            We'll start again from the second movement.

*Alexei puts the record on. It is a track from Gliere's The Red Flower.*

Galina            Can we at least go back to the studio.

Alexei            Let's not waste any more time.

*They listen to the music.*

Alexei            Six, seven, eight.....

*Galina*            *She begins to dance.*

Alexei            Stop, stop (*He takes the needle off*). Your arms are hanging like wet washing on a line.

*Dmitri enters from the street.*

Alexei            You're late. Where've you been?

Dmitri            In a stinking trench. Do you really need me?

Alexei            I don't know when I need you. It could be any time from eight in the morning until ten at night. You should be here at all times.

*Dmitri sits on the floor and Alexei turns back to Galina.*

Alexei            Again.

*He puts the music on.*

Alexei            Six, seven, eight....

*Galina*            *Galina takes the movement again but it is badly executed.*

Alexei            Stop. Stop. (*He takes the needle off*). All your lines are wrong. I don't know what you're doing today Galya. It just looks terrible.

*Galina*            I'm just tired Alex. I promise I'll do better tomorrow.

*There's a power cut.*

*Galina*            Ohh!

Alexei            Well, now you've got your wish. But come back in ten minutes. I may want you again.

*Galina exits. Dmitri starts to follow.*

Alexei            You can wait Mitya. It'll come back on any minute.

*The lights come back on.*

Alexei        There you are. What did I tell you! Let's get to work. I've got some new choreography for you.

Alexei        *Alexei demonstrates.*

Dmitri        *Dmitri copies the steps.*

Alexei        The *jetes* don't have to be so turned out! I'll tell you a story. When I was rehearsing for the graduation, one of the soloists from the Kirov Ballet came by to watch. He caught me practising one of my character roles. He asked me to show him how I was managing to give so much depth to the role. So I told him; he shouldn't be too technical. I told him; just imagine what physical traits the character would have and use those instead. Don't just use your face. It's the angle of the head, the tilt of the body, the movement through the arms right into the fingertips. It's the details that will give nuance to the role. When it's done well, it shows human emotions. He was very grateful. He went away very pleased with himself. I promise you, it will work just as well for you. We'll go through the whole of it.... with the addition of the new step.

*Alexei puts on another track. Dmitri does not move.*

Alexei        Dima!  
  
                  Have I got to show you?

*Alexei puts the needle on again.*

Alexei        *Alexei demonstrates comically.*

Alexei           It's not so difficult.

*Alexei puts the track back on.*

Dmitri           *Dmitri executes the steps but unlike Alexei he is not suited to the role.*

*Alexei takes the needle off.*

Alexei           You just haven't got it, have you? There's not enough life in your body;  
it's wooden, where is the dance? It needs to be much more co-ordinated.

*Alexei puts the music on again.*

Dmitri           *Dmitri tries part of it again*

*Dmitri takes the needle off.*

Alexei           What's the matter with you? Where is the problem?

Dmitri           I think this is a mistake.

Alexei           I don't think you've got the right to tell me anything, have you? I'm the  
one that's been given this task. I earned it. So let's just do it again and get  
it right this time.

Dmitri           I think this could be done another way. That's all I'm saying.

*Galina returns.*

Alexei           Just because you're struggling with the character, doesn't mean that you  
can change everything just to suit yourself, whenever you feel like it. We  
all have to adapt!

Galina           Alex. You should have a rest. You're working too hard. Come  
on Alex, let's have some fun.

Alexei           Not now Galya, we're working.

Galina           It doesn't much look like it.

*Galina tries to put her arms around Alexei, but he takes them off.*

Galina           Why don't you join me in my room?

Alexei           I'll accept your invitation Galya, in a minute.... when I've finished with  
Dima.

Galina           Don't leave it too long.

*She exits.*

Dmitri           How long has this been going on for?

Alexei           What?

Dmitri           You and Galya.

Alexei           Didn't you know?

Dmitri           Know what?

Alexei           I'm the director and the director gets the girl.

Dmitri           What if the girl doesn't want the director?

Alexei           Don't be stupid. Galya's always been hot for me.

Dmitri           What do you mean?

Alexei           Are you stupid?

Dmitri           What do you mean?

Alexei           I think you know what I mean.

Dmitri           No I don't.

Alexei           Galya doesn't fancy you.

*Dmitri tries to punch Alexei, but Alexei's reactions are too quick.*

Alexei           That's quite a temper you've got there Mitya.

*Dimitri descends on him and the two scuffle. Alexei pushes him off.*

Alexei           You really are just a farmyard oaf.

Dmitri           What did you call me? I think you should take that back.

*Dmitri raises his fists.*

Alexei            I don't think you want to do that.

*Alexei moves in towards Dmitri throws a few punches. He lands a lucky one on Alexei.*

*Alexei staggers back hurt.*

Dmitri            Don't ever speak to me like that again.

*Alexei recovers himself.*

Alexei            This isn't over yet.

*He exits.*

Dmitri            *Dmitri begins to dance around the stage in a series of jumps and turns. We see he is graceful and powerful.*

*Galina and Alexei enter.*

Galina            Play something nocturnal.

*Alexei puts a record on the deck. It is Rimsky Korsakov.*

Galina            *Galina starts dancing. The two men watch her. The music becomes more sensuous in tone and Galina responds. Her dancing becomes very avant-garde, more acrobatic and sensual.*

Dmitri:            What are you doing?

*Alexei picks up the needle.*

Alexei            We're having a bit of fun. Loosen up will you.

Dmitri            What's it for?

Galina            It's just a bit of fun. An experiment with some of my own choreography.  
Do you like it?

Dmitri            You don't think it might be dangerous?

Galina            What do you mean?

Dmitri           Rather strange dancing, don't you think? Isn't it a little excessive, maybe a little uncontrolled for a trained ballet dancer.

Galina           What are you talking about, Mitya, you're so funny.

*Dmitri lowers his voice*

Dmitri           It could even be branded modernist, couldn't it..... To be Soviet is to be anti-modernist, isn't that right? The ballet must be respectable.

Galina           How dare you! I know why you're doing this.

Dmitri           Don't be foolish. I'm not jealous of your little flirtation with Alexei..... I just think your dancing isn't very respectable.

Have you danced like this before? *Pause* I see. Do you think the performance will go ahead without someone checking up on us? Don't let them see you dancing like that. Have you thought how you might get yourself shot?

Alexei           You're overreacting, Mitya. Nobody's going to say anything.

Dmitri           And I Alex? Am I going to say nothing?

Galina           *In defiance Galina starts dancing again.*

*Alexei puts the needle back on.*

*Gromykin enters and observes. The lights flicker.*

*Alexei notices Gromykin and takes the needle off.*

Galina           *Galina continues to dance.*

Gromykin       What's going on?

Galina           *Galina stops dancing.*

Dmitri           Is there a problem Comrade?

Gromykin       I repeat, what's going on?

Alexei            Please let me explain.....I'd..... I'd like to clear up any misunderstanding. This isn't the choreography for *Red Poppy*. This is some exercise which I.....I have devised for suppleness. It's good for the body to keep flexible.

Gromykin        Then it isn't a suitable exercise.

Dmitri            The Comrade is quite right. This is a bad exercise. We'll take it out of the practice. There are better exercises, are there not Alex? At the ballet barre?

Gromykin        I must tell you that Comrade Zhdanov is taking a personal interest. He wouldn't approve of this practice, dance and prance. Better make sure you do remove it. *Pause*. A new performance date has been set. *Pause*. Your first performance will be at the barracks this Thursday night.

Galina            But we won't be ready.

Gromykin        Won't be ready? ...Comrade Zhdanov will be most disappointed.

Galina            I'm sorry. It's just that we can't work any harder. We're already/ stretched...

Dmitri            /Galina! Please have more respect for our guest. I am surprised at your attitude. We can always work harder. Aren't I always telling you that it's always possible to work harder for the war effort, to further the communist future with our labour. The ballet will be ready for Thursday. But Comrade, why don't you watch our rehearsal. I would be most interested in your opinion.

Gromykin        No, that won't be necessary.... Send your engineer to the barracks tomorrow to set up.

Dmitri            Yes, Comrade.

*Gromykin exits.*

Galina           What have you done? There isn't time to finish the rehearsals.

Alexei           Don't you ever think of anyone but yourself. The truth is, we covered for you today. I should have listened to Mitya. I was out of my mind to let you dance like that.

Galina           I thought you liked my choreography.

Alexei           No! Galina, I like you. Your body has bewitched me! You're so unpredictable..... it fascinates me to see it.

Dmitri           When you two have finished.....I've been thinking about making some changes to *Red Poppy*.

Alexei           What changes are those?

Dmitri           As I've said before, I don't think it's a good idea for the Nazi to be seen on stage. It's what Madam said, that ballet has its own poetic language, its own metaphors.... a variety of philosophic interpretations. I think if we use lighting instead, it would be much more effective at this point. The dancer appearing at the end will have much more dramatic impact. Maybe we could try it that way?

*Pause*

Alexei           As we're running out of time.

Dmitri           And while I think about it. I'd like Galya to show me the second movement. I have some ideas which may help her.

*Pause*

Alexei           Well, if you have some ideas that might help...we should use them.

Dmitri           Galya. Would you please....

*Galina is reluctant.*

Alexei        I think it's worth a try.

Galina        *She performs the same few steps as in the rehearsal.*

Dmitri        Okay, just stop there.    Try turning this way a little and move the hand forward a bit, but keep your back lifted and your eye line a little stronger. Try it again.

Galina        *Galina repeats the steps and there is a transformation from something ugly, to something beautifully executed.*

Dmitri        Will you listen to me now? I have some other thoughts I'd like to share with you.

Alexei        I've always listened to you.

Dmitri        The aspiring dancer must make his or her own instrument- the body. The owner has complete control and responsibility in acts of quality of movement, musical response, personal expression and technical execution. Exercising control over ones own muscles, joints, shape and form....Inside the body, is the soul, the seat of the muscle memory where so much more can be expressed. But first and foremost every dancer needs a good teacher. Don't forget that a good teacher can see how just small changes can make all the difference between success and failure.

*The lights flicker and then there is a power cut and they are all left in the dark. Galina gasps.*

Galina        How are we going to finish the rehearsal now!

**Act 2 Scene 2 - Storeroom of the Gomerovsky Ballet School – November 1941 -**

**Day.** The table is now under the window and a gun sits on a makeshift stand on the table. A couple of pieces of plywood have been ripped off to make a large gap for the gun. There are several mattresses on the floor. A wicker lamp stands ready for use. **There is the sound of bombs and shelling throughout the scene.**

*Dmitri is on the table stationed at the gun, Alexei is sitting reading some letters and Galina has a badly printed portrait in her hands. There is no electricity or heating and all of them are wearing thick clothes. It is the coldest winter for decades.*

Galina           What can you see?

Dmitri           Feet mostly, but it's a good view across the square. I think I could take out quite a few.

                    What have you got there Galya?

*She is nailing the portrait to the wall next to the portrait of Stalin.*

Galina           It's a picture of Comrade Zhdanov. He may be no friend but at least he's here... He's not sitting comfortably at home in Moscow with our noble leader.

Dmitri           You know what I think? *Pause.* Stalin's left Zhdanov here for a reason. Because he fears that Zhdanov's going to replace him.

Galina           Zhdanov's loyal to Stalin; he's passionate about the communist cause.

Dmitri            Maybe if Zhdanov and all of Leningrad disappeared Stalin wouldn't mind.

Galina            Stalin would never let the fascists have this city.

Dmitri            Who would have thought the enemy would get so close.

*Long pause*

Alexei            Have you seen these letters? Every one delivered by hand. Galya's had a proposal of marriage.

Galina            Let me see.

Alexei            People are even beginning to recognise her in the street.

Dmitri            Good for you Galya.

*Galina picks up a photograph.*

Galina            He's sent a photograph of himself .....in uniform. *Pause.*

Where's the next performance?

Alexei            The hospital.

*Uneasy silence*

Galina            When I visited my aunt....I passed an apartment block that had just had a hole blown out of it. Some people were running away from it and others were running towards it. I just kept on going. But later on....., a woman was brought in on a stretcher and her little girl, couldn't have been more than three years old, was running behind it trying to keep up. *Pause.* I can't imagine what they'll think of us. *Pause.* I wish my aunt could see me dancing again. She always believed in me.

Alexei Listen to this one. “The dancing was so beautiful...it takes you to somewhere else. I nearly cried. And then that shadow and that music, I nearly went to get my gun to shoot the ‘b’.....”..... He’s blanked the word out....

Galina That’s sweet.

Alexei And then he’s written....”but, I couldn’t see where he’d gone”. *Pause*.

Dmitri He’d have shot me! *Pause*

Alexei And this one: “It’s food for the soul. Thank you so much”.

Galina We need real food.

Alexei Listen to this one then: “There’s no food or fuel coming into Leningrad. How will we survive; on art? We can’t eat flimsy costumes and pretty dancing”. *Pause*. There are lots of things you would have thought you can’t eat. Like wallpaper paste.

Galina You can’t eat that.

Alexei The women make it into a kind of jelly.

Galina I’m so cold. I haven’t felt warm for days. My legs are like lead. I can’t even give a passably good performance. They’re not the only ones who are hungry.

Dmitri When Ladoga freezes over, there’ll be food – they’re going to bring it in over the ice, in any case, there’s still enough food in the store houses.

Galina           Haven't you heard? Didn't you tell him?

Alexei           I thought you told him.

Galina           The main warehouse has been hit. Didn't you see that red light? It was like mist all over the floor of the city?

Dmitri           There are always mists in Leningrad.

Galina           Not like this there aren't. It was creeping like algae down all the streets and over the rivers.

Dmitri           I did see something like that. I thought it was a little strange. I just forgot about it.

Galina           There's sugar running down into the cellars. They'll be real food shortages now.

Alexei           Galya's right. There's already talk of cutting rations.

Dmitri           But we're already struggling to eat and we get more food being classed as military. People our age are dying.

Alexei           It's because our bones are still growing.

Dmitri           Then why aren't teenagers getting extra rations?

Galina           What are we doing here? What are the woman and children doing here? We should all have been evacuated. Is one life more precious than another?

*Long pause*

Dmitri           Have we got anything left to trade?

Alexei I'd love to chop up that old piano for firewood.

Dmitri We might have to.

Alexei No, we can't. It's the only live accompaniment we've got.

Dmitri We could borrow the Maryinsky's grand piano.

Alexei What a good idea. The philharmonic is still here but of course, when they go you can help me carry it all over Leningrad.

Galina If the philharmonic is taken out of here they'll probably take it with them.

Those precious things from the museum have been labelled up and taken away. But we've been left behind. We've been forgotten.

I wish I'd been allowed to go with the Company.

*Long guilty silence, broken by the sound of bombers approaching. They listen.*

Galina Are they ours?

Dmitri No.

*Fearful silence and then as the bombers are overhead, pamphlets are dropped and we see them, through the window, drifting down.*

Galina What's that?

Alexei Snow.

Dmitri It's the largest flakes of snow I've ever seen. It's pamphlets. Come and look.

Alexei Why don't you go and get one Galya?

Galina No, I daren't. People are being lynched out there. I don't want to be accused of being a fascist spy. Everyone is so geared up for an invasion. Mitya could try to reach for one.

Dmitri Alright.

*Dmitri takes down another piece of plywood, puts his hand through the window and reaches for one that has landed on the snow nearby.*

Dmitri           It's addressed to the women. 'Take every opportunity to convince your husbands, sons and friends, of the senselessness of struggling against the German Army. Only by ending the battle of Leningrad can you save your lives.'

*Pause*

Galina           What do you think to that?

Dmitri           The Nazis would raze the city to the ground, that's what I think.

Alexei           Yes. Hitler would raze the city to the ground, but Stalin has an answer to that. I heard that he's put orders into place to detonate the entire city. He intends to leave nothing for the fascists.

Galina           You don't really believe that?

Alexei           That's what I heard. But some of the city is to be saved.

Galina           Yes?

Alexei           Some of the charges have been taken out of the historic places. They are to be preserved.

*Silence*

*Galina takes down Stalin's portrait and turns it to face the wall. There is the sound of more planes. They wait. We hear the 'dragon's shriek' of falling bombs and then a tremendous din, a crackle and a crunch. They all crouch with their hands over their ears in shock. Fade out. As the scene is being changed the sound of bombs is replaced by the sounds of people celebrating; firing guns into the air.*

**Act 2 Scene 3- Storeroom of the Gomerovsky Ballet School – Snowy moonlit night.**

**The gun, table and chairs and mattresses have all gone. Through the window we can discern people celebrating on the streets. There is bunting and red flags up around the room. The portrait of Stalin is back in its place.**

*There is crackling from the radiogram and then a woman's voice speaking on the radio*

Voice            This snowy moonlit night of January 1944 will never vanish from the memory of those who experience it. Some of us are older and others are younger. All of us will experience happiness and grief in our lives. But this happiness, the happiness of liberated Leningrad, we will never forget. 900 days of blockade, of torment, of desperation and expectation, but we held out.

*The radio starts crackling again, Galina comes down the steps. She looks at the portrait of Stalin and then exits onto the street. The lights go down and then come up again.*

*Galina, Dmitri and Alexei enter. The sun is streaming through the window.*

Galina            It's warm in here today.

Alexei            I'd like to have another look at the Port de bras.....

*Alexei prepares the record.*

Alexei I want you to work from the centre of your backs. Stretch down into your feet and lift the upper back. Extend your arm line from your shoulder blades right into the fingertips, now just take the shoulder forward and continue into arabesque epaule. Galya lift your eye line; don't leave your head behind. You don't have to look up quite that high. That's it. Extend from fingertip to fingertip. Hold that a moment, now I want you to bring that back within your own square and become more self-contained. Let the head follow the left arm. Left arm down, keep both arms moving until you arrive back at the centre, and pick up both of the hands with your eyes. There's something important inside your hands and I want you to give it to the audience.

*Alexei handles the music.*

Dmitri/Galina *The two practise their port de bras and repeat it on the second side.*

Alexei Alright. That's good, you're keeping right in the heart of the musical beat. Let's see it with the new choreography.

Galina/Dmitri *They stand efface, and chase forward, extending to arabesque as they raise their legs.*

Alexei Hold it right there.

Dmitri/Galina *The dancers legs are en l'air.*

Alexei Dmitri your arm needs to be in line with Galya's.

Alexei *Alexei adjusts Dmitri's arm to the correct height.*

Galina/Dmitri *Both dancers continue the movement to Alexei's instructions.*

Alexei Pivot to croise. Both of you need to tilt the body to the left as your eyes pick up the left hand, transfer of weight into the next movement, pick up your hands, follow through with your eyes and give this pride you feel for the motherland into the arms of the audience. Hold that moment, pulling back and extending into an upper backbend and go.....

Dmitri/Galina *The dancers start a fast forward momentum and then stop and return to their starting positions. The music starts up and they repeat the movement.*

*Kasyan enters from the street and watches the dancers. She is wearing a blue party uniform. She looks very official.*

Alexei The line is good but be careful with your placement. Your body must move in one piece. You're almost swinging round.

*Alexei looks over to Kasyan.*

Alexei Yes, what is it? Kasyan!

Galina Kasyan!

Kasyan Galya! You were so pretty out there last night. I had to come and congratulate you.

Galina I hardly recognised you. You've changed so much.

Kasyan So have you all.

Alexei I can't believe it's you. It's so good to see you

Dmitri Where have you been, we've been looking for you.

Kasyan I saw you at the theatre last night and decided I must visit.

Alexei           Why didn't you come before?

Kasyan           Exhaustion.

Alexei           We thought you must have died!

Dmitri           When we heard that your mother was very ill right back at the start of siege,  
Alexei went to your apartment but there was no one there at all. We heard  
that everyone in the block had died!

Kasyan           Not everyone; as you see.

Dmitri           And your mother.....

Kasyan           My mother....

Dmitri           When?

Kasyan           That first December.

Galina           I'm so sorry. Was it really bad?

Kasyan           She was very ill. It was hard to find any morphine..... and then the rations  
were getting smaller and smaller...

Galina           That good Russian soul.

Dmitri           Why must someone die like that?

Kasyan           All my neighbours died. I was the only one left in the entire block. I would  
have died myself..... but I got help.....

Alexei           Help?

Kasyan           By girls from the 'blue brigade' coming to clear out the dead. They were  
asking "is anyone alive in here". They were surprised to find me. They  
gave me some work and I got better rations. If it hadn't been for that....

Alexei           What kind of work?

Kasyan All sorts of work; mending water pipes, standing up to my knees in dirty water often enough, digging people out of rubble and worst of all, getting rid of the dead in big carts. The pile growing daily. Until the winter of course, when food could be brought across Ladoga. Then death became a much rarer sight.....

Galina I don't know how you survived it.

Dmitri We've all survived. Never mind how.

Kasyan We're Leningraders....

*Kasyan tries to lift the mood.*

Kasyan It was much longer than the siege of Paris, you know.

*Beat*

Alexei The food was scarce....

Dmitri .....but the wine was plentiful!

Alexei I know, we've heard it.

Kasyan Everyone's heard it!

*Pause*

Kasyan Now it's over....what are you all going to do?

*Pause*

Dmitri Dance....anything at all....whoever will have me. Failing that choreography, direction, teaching, anything....I want to do it all.

Kasyan           It's finally got its hold on you. I saw it with my mother, the absolute passion. She was always completely driven. She'd be pleased. What about you Galya?

Galina            I'd like that chance to dance in Swan Lake. I was this close.

Alexei            At the Maryinsky?

Galina            The Maryinsky, the Bolshoi, anywhere.

Alexei            I'd stay here. I'm thinking of developing a new company with new ballets.

Kasyan            What kind of ballets?

Alexei            As it happens, we've been working on a new ballet. I'm calling it the 'Arch of Triumph'; to thank the troops who liberated Leningrad.

Kasyan            It sounds rather modern.

Alexei            No, not at all. We have to think about traditional values.

Galina            Are you so sure that a choreographer of dance can really stand still and offer no new forms to keep the ballet alive?

Alexei            Those early Soviet values, when those avant-garde experiments were encouraged have just become an embarrassment.

Galina            What!

                  That's because it's no longer a matter of appealing to the peasants. It's appealing to Father Stalin's new aristocracy; the engineers, red army officers, and bureaucrats.

Kasyan            *(To Galina)* Wasn't your father an engineer?

                  Is he one of the new aristocracy that you're talking about?

*Silence*

Galina            You're right Kasyan, he was an engineer, but he didn't find favour with father Stalin.

Kasyan           I thought Father Stalin needed engineers.

Dmitri            *(To Galina)* You'd better/ put your warmers on.

Galina            /Perhaps my father was too good at his job.

Kasyan           What do you mean?

Dmitri            Galina.

Galina            No one can afford to make our leader jealous.

Dmitri            *(To Galina)* Your muscles will be getting cold. Come and get some warm clothes. If you'll excuse us?

Kasyan           Of course. Come back and see me when you're ready. We have a lot of catching up to do.

*Galina and Dmitri exit.*

Kasyan           Did I say the wrong thing?

Alexei            No, no, I'm sure its fine.

Kasyan           Galya seems a little sensitive about her father. It's alright. I know all about it anyway. My mother told me.

Alexei            About what?

Kasyan           Galya's father. She told me.

Alexei            Told you what, Kasyan?

Kasyan           She said that he was executed..... as an enemy of the people.

Alexei            I believe it was something like that.

Kasyan Perhaps Galina has sympathies with his 'cause'.

Alexei The only 'cause' he had was to support his workers. He was a good man.....he supported communism..... he was always for the people.

Kasyan You seem to know a lot about it.

Alexei People talk.

Kasyan And you, how do you feel.

Alexei I'm a good Soviet Kasyan.

Kasyan That's what I thought. I haven't just come here to see all of you.

Alexei That's what I thought.

Kasyan I have duties now.

*Kasyan puts her arms around Alexei.*

Kasyan Alex. I miss your company. When I saw Galya with Mitya just now, I was jealous. Yes, really. They seem so happy together. I was worried that you might have found another girlfriend.

Alexei No. None other.

Kasyan You can be very useful to me in my new career. Do you want to be useful Alex?

Alexei Kasyan, we need to talk. It's been three years.

Kasyan Alex, let's just enjoy a little freedom.

*Kasyan kisses Alexei. Alexei tries to disengage himself.*

Alexei            Let's continue this conversation at a later hour.

*Galina and Dmitri enter wearing warmers. Kasyan steps away from Alexei.*

Galina            I'm sorry about earlier.

                    What are you smiling about?

Kasyan           Nothing. The sun is shining, and I've found all of you again.

Galina            You look so happy.

Kasyan           And you Galya, are you happy?

Galina            I can't believe how happy I am. I'm dancing for joy. Before the war, I lived only for ballet. After my parents died, ballet was the only remnant of our lives that lived on.....and I clung to that. But then my aunt died.....and there was so much death, all around us: The first time I saw a woman taking her child to the cemetery wrapped in sheets on the child's own sledge; seeing people dead on the streets, just sitting there, sometimes for days. I thought I couldn't survive that. But now....now I'm ready to live again. I'm not afraid of anything any more.

*She goes to Alexei and holds his hand. Kasyan looks at the hands and then at Alexei.*

*Alexei lets go of Galina's hand.*

Alexei            Let's have some music.

*He picks up a record at random to put on the radiogram. We hear the music of*

*Shostakovich's eighth symphony.*

**Act 2 Scene 4 - Cultural 'show event' in the theatre 1946. There is a large table with four chairs downstage. A huge portrait of Stalin overshadows the proceedings.**

*Zhdanov and Gromykin are on stage. The music stops. Lights up. An aide enters and places a tray of champagne and vol-au-vonts on the table. Zhdanov downs one glass of champagne and takes another one.*

Zhdanov        Did you ever see *Red Poppy*?

Gromykin        (*Defensively*) I've never been to a ballet in my life.

Zhdanov        Never? I saw that first performance at the barracks.

Gromykin        That performance was brought forward for you, at your request.

Zhdanov        Mm! So you didn't see it?

Gromykin        Was it a tear jerking performance?

Zhdanov        Better than that..... it was morally edifying....with a good dose of folk culture. A nice piece of war propaganda.

*Zhdanov downs his second glass of champagne.*

Gromykin        Are you prepared to answer that other question now?

Zhdanov        Question?

Gromykin        What will become of the dancers?

Zhdanov        The dancer's responses to the delegates were most revealing.....were they not?

Gromykin They were.....hers were.....not entirely appropriate to the occasion.

Zhdanov Comrade Pekrovsky is a perhaps a reasonably good ambassador or may prove to be so, with a little coaching. Let's keep a close watch on his activities.

Gromykin And the woman?

Zhdanov As you have observed, Comrade Lapinsky has an unfortunate attitude. I'm still thinking about what we should do with her.

Gromykin She has.....not meant to insult Father Stalin.

Zhdanov Our leader is not called 'Father Stalin' for nothing. As both her parents are dead, she's a child of the state, but .....

*Gromykin gives him a sideways look*

Zhdanov .....call it a personally problem - she complains too much. What do you think we should do with her?

Gromykin I'm not /sure I....

Zhdanov You know these ballet dancers. What is she going to give us?

Gromykin I'm not /sure....

Zhdanov Trouble?

*Pause*

Gromykin I did hear something about her.

Zhdanov Go on....

Gromykin She's interested in new forms of choreography.

Zhdanov        Josef won't like that.

Gromykin        There's more.

Zhdanov        Yes.

Gromykin        She said something about Comrade Stalin. *Pause* She said..... he was a  
jealous man.

Zhdanov        Did she? He won't like that either.

Gromykin        We don't need to tell him.

Zhdanov        Wouldn't that be disloyal. I can't have that. What else can you tell me?

Gromykin        I have some doubts about her myself. I saw her dancing.... in rehearsal  
once.

Zhdanov        And?

Gromykin        It was.....I'd call it .....ballet pornography.

Zhdanov        Ha! Ballet pornography....I like that! And what did that look like?

Gromykin        Fit only for acrobats, and music hall.

*Pause*

Zhdanov        I like music hall. Are you saying there's something wrong with music hall?

Gromykin        I.... I'm saying music halls.....I'm saying that Comrade Lapinsky..... It's  
....well, it's a personality thing. She was being ..... frivolous! It was  
Bourgeois..... frivolity.

Zhdanov        There's always the larger picture to consider.

Gromykin       She could prove herself as a good ambassador.....in the right circumstances.

Zhdanov        Do you really think so?

Gromykin       Only in the right circumstances.

Zhdanov        And which circumstances, exactly, were you thinking of?

Gromykin       Why don't we take advantage of the popularity of Russian ballet in  
America for ourselves. I can see her gaining the ear of valuable contacts.

Zhdanov        Do you think she would? With the problems we've been discussing?

Gromykin       I suppose Comrade Stalin will want to hear all that's been said?

Zhdanov        We're all just passing through this life; like so many ants you would tread  
under foot.

Gromykin       Pity....the girl might have made an excellent ambassador.

Zhdanov        Let me tell you something that happened during the siege. In the first  
winter.....after you were called to Moscow. Many people died of  
starvation, and those people who survived were so severely weakened that  
the slightest illness resulted in death. There were so many that we couldn't  
cope with the burials. A member of our staff, a young woman, collapsed  
and died outside the building. Her colleagues were so weak that they  
walked right around her body every day - waiting for her to be collected for  
burial. Then finally the body disappeared and so they no longer had to  
walk around her body. When the ice thawed, they saw a hand sticking up  
out of the ice. They were horrified to realize that they had been walking  
over her body.

Zhdanov cont. Peter 'The Great' spent countless lives building this city on marsh land.

We are standing on top of thousands of bodies. What is important here are the buildings, the monuments and the works of art; those are the things that last, those are the things that stand the test of time.

But do you know where the real power lies?

This earth is the real power and whoever you are, wherever you are, your life is always dictated by that in the end. Historians may judge us; but they too will perish and only their vain empty words may remain.

*Zhdanov downs his third glass of champagne.*

Zhdanov Is there nothing stronger?

Gromykin There's some vodka in the car.

Zhdanov Let's go to it.

Gromykin Do you ever have any regrets?

Zhdanov Regrets? There is nothing better than serving the communist cause. Socialist ideals. They count. Let me explain. In life, there are only ever two things that count for anything. There's good and then there's best!

**Act 2 Scene 5 – Communal gardens - 1955**

*Dmitri, Galina and Alexei are now 31/32 years old. A woman is seen upstage, gardening.*

*She is wearing a worker's tunic top and loose trousers.*

*We cannot see her face. Alexei enters using a walking stick. He is waiting for someone.*

*He stares at the woman and she exits. After another pause Dmitri enters.*

Alexei            There you are. It's good to see you my friend.

Dmitri            It's good to see you too.

Alexei            This is a pleasure. And on such a beautiful day. Just look at that clear sky.

Dmitri            And the colours of the leaves. And look at you....you've grown comfortable since the last time I saw you.

Alexei            This? This is a wife and a mother who feed me pancakes with syrup and sour plums. What chance do I have?

Dmitri            It's better than bread made with sawdust. How are you Alex?

Alexei            This and that. My hip is still bothering me, but I'm allowed no rest.

Dmitri            It's good to know that somebody's busy.

Alexei            Managing the company is not without its difficulties. Needs must when the devil drives. You look tired my friend. Are you doing okay? Are you quite well?

Dmitri            Where should I start? My life is fraught with difficulties. Don't look so worried. I'm not ill. I'm as fit as a fiddle, but I'm a troubled soul, Alex.

Alexei            You always were a troubled soul. Didn't I hear that you're dancing again?

Dmitri            A bit, wherever I can.

Alexei           That's good.

Dmitri           But it's hardly a living. No one wants to employ me. And yet there's such a demand for my choreography..... a whole team of individuals, have set themselves up to pass it on to future generations.....all over the world.

Alexei           But not here in mother Russia. I tried my friend.

Dmitri           Provided my name is obscured on the programme, it has even been sold here. If only I received even a little bit of the profits.

Alexei           You know I would help if I could.

Dmitri           I'm not asking you to risk your reputation on my account. I find it's best to keep to the shadows. Times change...there's some hope of a brighter future.

Alexei           That's something, that's good. But why don't you leave; go to Paris, New York, London?

Dmitri           You don't think I've thought of that? Maybe I should have written to Iosif Stalin to ask whether he would let me go, but he would never have done it.....never. You know that. But then....do I really want to go? Now, it's too late..... I can't go.....I can't leave Galya.

Alexei           Ah!

Dmitri           I can't even begin to think of it. She doesn't have anyone else. Do you see Alex? I'm the only person she has. I'm a true Leningrader now.....this city has its hold over me.

Alexei           An iron grip.

Dmitri           You see, if she's free, this is where she'll come. Where else would she go?

Alexei           I've thought of that.

Dmitri I got your message. I was told that you have some news for me?

Alexei I do have some news for you my friend.

Dmitri If it's bad news, can't it wait a little longer?

Alexei No, nothing like that. Are you really still looking for Galya?

Dmitri I've never stopped looking.

Alexei Yes, but....do you really want to find her?

Dmitri I've spent many hours waiting, at the prisons mostly, trying to find out where she's been taken, and no one seems to want to tell me.

Alexei If you found her what would you do?

Dmitri I would have peace of mind.

Alexei Sometimes hope is better than reality.

Dmitri If you're asking me how I would feel....

Alexei No...no....nothing so banal. Just.....She's been sighted my friend. I'm not sure, but she might have found work here.

Dmitri Here in Leningrad?

Alexei Yes, yes, in Leningrad. You were right. In Leningrad. Here, in these gardens.

Dmitri Galya? Here.

Alexei I think so. But Mitya, if it is her, she's much altered.

Dmitri Are you sure, it's her?

Alexei I thought I saw her here, just now, there was a woman in working clothes.

Dmitri Where?

Alexei She's gone now Mitya, but I'm sure she'll be back. She's working here.

Dmitri Working? As a gardener? And you didn't speak to her?

Alexei            There wasn't time. It all happened so fast. But an old school friend of hers thought she recognized her a few days ago.

Dmitri            Did she speak to her?

Alexei            No. She was just passing through. Not really interested, but good enough to speak to me about it.

Dmitri            You really think it might be her?

Alexei            I'm not absolutely certain.

*Galina enters and continues gardening.*

Alexei            I'll leave you now my friend. Good luck!

*Alexei exits.*

Dmitri            Galya. Is that you?

*The woman continues gardening as though she has not heard.*

Dmitri            It is you. I would know your little feet anywhere.

*Dmitri goes up to her and takes her by the arm. Galina is a little afraid.*

Galina            Let go of my arm Comrade.

Dmitri            Galya?

Galina            I'm sorry comrade but I think you've made a mistake. I don't know anyone of that name.

Dmitri            I'm sorry, please forgive me. I...I was so sure....

*The woman continues with her gardening. Dmitri moves to go and stops.*

Dmitri            Galya, it is you isn't it?

*Silence*

Dmitri            Will you just speak to me?

*Galina continues with her gardening.*

Dmitri I've been looking for you everywhere. All these years....I haven't forgotten you. I've been waiting for you to come back. Galya....Galya!

*Galina continues with her gardening. At some point during the next speech Galina starts to hear what is being said.*

Dmitri Alright then, just listen. I once knew a girl....her name was Galina Lapinsky. She was a ballerina, of exceptional talent. We were.....good friends. I knew a lot about her. She loved flowers; poppies were her favourite. She used to talk about the 'fragility of their petals and the dramatic impact on the eye of their striking colour'. She said things like that. She loved the first snow, just to watch it drift into the doorways and to catch a single flake on her finger to marvel at its configurations. She loved beautiful things. She especially loved the art of ballet, 'the beauty is in the details', she used to say. She was so committed...long before I felt that deeply about dancing. When the world is deprived of a person like that it mourns....it grieves, but it can't let go....it can't go on alone. Galina. Can you hear me now?

*Silence*

Dmitri I promise I'll be back tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow and the day after that.

*Galina resumes her gardening and sweeps the leaves off the stage.*

Dmitri Galya....Galya....please....

*He exits, broken. She continues sweeping the leaves.*

**END**

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ESSAY

DEVELOPING A PLAY:

A DANCE FOR LENINGRAD

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## DEVELOPING A PLAY: A DANCE FOR LENINGRAD

### History Plays and their challenges

Writing a history play about ballet dancers and politics in Leningrad between 1941 and 1955 offered some considerable challenges because it spanned such a broad period of time. I had to consider how to show the audience the passing of time, the aging process of the characters and the changing world of the play. At the same time I had to induct the audience into the milieu of the play. To help with this I would need to have a believable linguistic idiom whilst also making the play relevant to modern day audiences. To help me to find the answers to some of these challenges I researched the history fully. My research was three fold. Firstly I wanted an overview of the Russian people to gain more of an understanding of their culture and the elusive 'Russian soul'. Secondly I wanted to understand the political situation and how this impacted on the lives of the people. Thirdly I wanted to know more about the siege and how the people survived the 900 days. As a trained ballet dancer and ballet teacher myself, I was able to draw on my own experiences for the dance aspect of the play, however I still found myself searching for sources of information about Soviet ballet and the dancers of the time. Before this however, I wanted to get an overview of the cultural, the political and military history. In the first place I turned to *Orlando Figes, Natasha's Dance, A Cultural History of Russia* and Harrison Salisbury's *The 900 Days; The siege of Leningrad*. I was particularly fascinated by the difference in perspectives between the Soviets and the West and thought that this had a relevance to contemporary British society.

This difference in point of view between the Soviets and the west was to give me one of the broader debates which I wanted to develop in the play: The West believes in the individual and we incline towards being humanists; Soviet Russia believes in the collective and appears to have a more cynical attitude towards humanity. There is one essential difference in particular which I found fascinating, namely that the Russian's see themselves as passing through life and that what is really important are those things that stand the test of time including the arts, the artefacts, the buildings, and the cities. In an addition of my own I have thought that it is quite correct that we are passing through life and that the real power is not political, it is natural; it is the forces of nature. In these times of climate change, I feel this is very pertinent. Having decided to keep an historically accurate picture of Leningrad during the period of 1941-1955, I wanted to find a way in which the play could have a contemporary edge. During the first month of writing *A Dance for Leningrad* I had written a manifesto for the theatre. I had wanted to see a new form for the theatre in which the spectator would be presented with a different perspective. I have since thought about what new forms of art are in our society in Britain today and how my play might fit in with contemporary movements. I have thought that in art we see a relatively new form prosaically named 'installation' because it has to be installed in the art gallery or other space in which it is being shown. This kind of art often involves the public not just as spectators but as a physical part of the installation itself. An important factor for me is that this involvement often results in the individual coming out of their comfort zones, into a place of disquiet and unease.

In terms of my play, I have in the first scene engaged the spectator in the action; the individual is now playing a part - the role of the Western humanist. In the light of the Western humanist's inability to change the Soviet regime or to affect indoctrination he might as well sit back and enjoy the culture and the fine food and then leave feeling he has done his job. Being cast in that role, we might as well enjoy the show and go home and move on, but I hope that the effect will be to create an experience so memorable that it engages the audience in talking about or thinking about the themes and the debates raised in the play, having seen them from their own perspective and also an entirely new perspective; the perspective of the Soviet dancers and their 'masters'. This is what I have tried to achieve. Although in my manifesto I had wanted to develop a new form, I found that the subject matter of the play dictated the form and that I was being drawn towards Epic Theatre and Naturalism. I had to consider which would be the most suitable form for my play.

#### Epic Theatre versus Naturalism

Considering the broad scope of the play, and its political bias, the idea for the play felt epic in proportion, not least because it would span a period of time (1941-1955) which not only covered part of the Stalinist period in Russia but also covered WW2 and the siege of Leningrad. At first I found myself naturally drawn to the work of Piscator and Brecht for suitable techniques to use as the vehicle for this play.

In the notes to Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* (p.86 Plays: Volume 2), Brecht writes that 'So long as the masses are the object of politics they cannot regard what happens to them as an experiment but only as a fate. They learn as little from catastrophe as a scientist's rabbit learns of biology.' It is not Brecht's concern that the character must see his own situation but that the spectator must see. *A Dance for Leningrad* shows the people as the object of politics. The play also breaks with realism, in terms of time lines and jumps in time. In the 'show trial' scenes, the scenery is sparse and no fourth wall is needed, there is *verfremdungseffekt* in the occasional juxtaposition and some characters speak directly to the audience as the spectators are cast as the 'western humanists'; a technique used by Brecht to help the audience to see things more objectively. The epic form would work well for the political and historical aspect of *A Dance for Leningrad* but there is another strand to the play. It is also a story about the lives of three ballet dancers. In order to tell their story with greater impact I would have to consider another form.

It needed to be a very personal story to engage the audience in the characters and to make them care about what might become of them. Firstly, I wanted to induct the audience into the world of the ballet dancers, and turned to a more subjective although still scientific approach: Naturalism and the poetics of shock. J.L. Styan sums up the scientific naturalist as a playwright who tries to 'show that powerful forces governed human lives, forces of which we might not be fully aware and over which we might have little control – the forces of heredity and environment' (*Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 1*, p6).

In *A Dance for Leningrad* the environment is the ballet school which is a microcosm of the macrocosm of the political forces at work in the play. In terms of the heredity, I am not thinking in literal terms of genetics but of dancers passing on their knowledge to the next generation of dancers. At the same time I also needed to show the dancers as ordinary people in their natural setting and to have an idea of the physical and social influences from which they are made. I have tried to engage the audience on an empathetic level with the characters, after the first scene of the show trial, in order for the audience to respond differently when the show trial scene is continued in the second act. Therefore there is now a fourth wall which gives a more realistic setting. The dancing is part of the action and is part of the character's lives and is therefore naturalistic rather than being designed to give the audience objectivity (in the way Brecht's songs are designed to work). Finally, to enable the audience to fully engage with the characters I had to begin to think more about their development.

### Character Development

As I researched the topic, I began to develop the story and to discover the characters in that story. It was not until the story and the plot began to take shape that the themes began to emerge. It was easy to see that repression and oppression would figure largely, but it was not until playwright Steve Waters pointed out to me that it was unfolding into a story about betrayal that I saw this as the major theme of the play. What interested me were the reasons for those betrayals; the cause and effect. I felt some affinity with the playwright Arthur Miller, particularly because of his interest in developing character in conjunction with the milieu of the play.

I was interested in *The Crucible*; often seen as a parable of the McCarthy trials in America which reminded me so much of the terror associated with the Stalinist period. Miller says that before this play he was most interested in building a play around “the revelation of guilt”, but in researching the witch trials in Salem for *The Crucible* he became interested in the “handing over of conscience to another” which is exactly what happens to the western humanists in *A Dance for Leningrad*. They allow themselves to be reassured that they do not need to worry about the welfare of the artists by the rule of *habeas corpus*.

If they can see the artist looks well and particularly if the artist is able to speak freely as Galina does, putting her case before them, they will go away satisfied that they have done their job. Never mind what happens to that artist after they are gone; their conscience is clear. Miller also talks about humanitarianism and comes to the conclusion that it is difficult for the West to conceive of a person of pure evil, “to conceive, in effect, of Iago”. Miller says that he believes that, “from whatever cause, a dedication to evil, not mistaking it for good, but knowing it is evil and loving it as evil, is possible in human beings who appear agreeable and normal” (p44 *Plays: I*). I agree with this, but when considering the characters of the controlling party members, Zhdanov, Gromykin and Kasyan, I wanted to paint a more ambivalent picture. What interests me, in the context of human nature, is not the painting of a character of evil and sadistic intent but the cause and effect involved in the relationship between good and evil. One man might have a larger degree of sadism in his character than another man, but there is surely always a catalyst to bring that sadism into full force. In Soviet Russia this sadism might be fuelled, for example, by jealousy or a sense of injustice. Neither am I interested in the painting of a ‘good’ character of piety and innocence. I am interested in characters with some self-awareness and wanted to develop several of my characters along these lines, leaving Galina and Dmitri as the characters with less self awareness and more naivety.

In order to understand the role of politics in the development of character in the people of Leningrad I returned to my research. I found three biographies that were particularly helpful as the people were all Leningraders: the composer Dmitri Shostakovich; the opera singer Galina Vishnevskaya and the ballet dancer Maya Plisetskaya. These provided much inspiration for the characters in the play who would become the catalyst for the story; developing the particular in the universal. Indoctrination, and fear would play a large part in shaping character, but other factors would also be important to make the characters much more real. It was important to consider what each character wanted to achieve in their lives.

In a seminar at Birmingham University (11.11.08) Lin Coghlan, spoke about character's objectives in terms of their emotional needs and their practical tangible needs and "what have they got to change to make it possible". This creates the conflicts between the characters and also allows the possibility of personal growth and change. I have used a contrast in my characters particularly in Kasyan, Madam and Galina who have very different needs but also between Alexei and Dmitri who respond differently to the same set of circumstances. These have also been contrasted with the representatives of state Gromykin and Zhdanov who display a set of practical tangible needs without giving away much of their personal emotional needs. Coghlan also talked about contradictory characteristics and how character should be shown through actions. I have let the characters breath and become contradictory, and at times unpredictable, as in human nature. I have also tried to show character through their actions, so that each one reacts differently to a given set of circumstances. One essential component of the play showing character through action comes through in the body language of the three dancers.

### Language and subtext

The dancer's body language is a rich and complex source of expression and forms part of the *lingua franca* of the play. It can enhance the plot, show emotions that are not being voiced, and things can happen in dance which can have an impact on the scene. Although dance is discussed throughout the play, there are few moments of actual physical movement. These are used sparingly, to enable them to have the desired impact on the scene. One of the functions of the dancing is to impart some knowledge about the dancers. In the telegram scene Galina's enthusiasm for her art is shown as she stands in a preparatory position. She is right at the beginning of her career and with this imagined debut, all possibilities remain open for her; the future is hers. The next time we see Galina dancing she has achieved a coveted place in the Maryinsky ballet company and she demonstrates a solo, to an audience of friends. It appears that she has largely achieved her main objective. However, when we see her dancing again, she is clearly failing. She is not on form, she is like 'wet washing on a line' and this is designed to express her feelings of depression because instead of being evacuated with the ballet company, she is dancing in the besieged city. Similarly, at the point when Dmitri has punched Alexei, the feelings of satisfaction, of strength and power are displayed in his triumphant *tour de force* of *grand allegro* steps in a private moment, observed only by the audience. Dance is also used to impart some of the story element of the scene. In the rehearsal scene Galina is showing off some of her own avant-garde choreography. Anything new was likely to be related to formalism and regarded with suspicion by the Soviet state.

This becomes clear when Gromykin catches Galina in the act of performing contrary to the preferred art form of socialist realism. The story enhances and enriches the ballet, but the ballet also raises the story. To the dancers, ballet is as simple and unremarkable as breathing, but to audiences it can be seen as a magical feat of breathtaking beauty, and extraordinary technical expertise. Although ballet technique and the demands on the ballet dancer have changed considerably since the period of the play, the language of dance is timeless and so little adjustment was needed to represent the period.

When considering a suitable linguistic idiom for the period I found that the three biographies were very helpful again. In reading translations of these autobiographies I decided that the best idiom for the language would be to use similar language used in England during WW2 which largely meant avoiding any colloquialisms from the present day. It was important to imagine myself inside the Stalinist regime and to keep this perspective at all times. The biographies showed some bitterness and irony. In some cases they express the belief that Soviets experience some loss of family unity due to soviet indoctrination and also to the fracturing of the family unit through communal living, banishment, imprisonment, torture and execution of close family members and neighbours; Stalin is the most powerful presence in their lives. All of this impacted on the language chosen for the characters. There were other points which helped to give the characters some linguistic authenticity, such as speaking quietly as they are living in the shadow of a repressive regime and are always aware of secret police and informants.

In his introduction to Shostakovich's memoirs, the interviewer and editor, Solomon Volkov, explained that "Shostakovich reminisced about himself, but he reached himself by talking about others, finding the reflection of himself in them". Volkov added that "This 'mirrored style' is typical of Petersburg, a city on water, shimmering, spectral" (p56 *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*). I have used this method of speech for the character of Dmitri. This forms some of the subtext of the play.

I have always been interested in Pinter's use of subtext; of saying one thing while meaning another gives his writing a feeling of menace. I found this very useful in my scenes with the authorities, the NKVD secret police and other scenes in which soviet machinations come to the fore. I enjoy the sense of confrontation being somewhat distorted. The balance of power changes from one character to another, sometimes with surprising effect. At other times my authority figures deliberately use arguments that have no logical reason because it is harder to make a case for the defence against something that does not make any sense.

In addition to helping me to find characters and a linguistic idiom, the autobiographies also gave me several story lines which helped me with the back story for the dancers. I wrote several scenes about the three young dancers and Kasyan at various stages in their developments which gave me the biographical details of their lives. These scenes would not appear in the play itself, but formed instead one of the important subtexts in the play. This form of subtext first came to my attention when reading Hemingway and below is a quote on his theory from *Death in the Afternoon* (en.wikipedia.org).

‘If a writer of a prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of the iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. The writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing.’

This form of subtext is visible when the author knows more about the characters backgrounds, the location and the times than can possibly be in the writing.

I found this extremely useful as my characters arrive in their late teens and they needed to live in the dialogue; to be real people within a very short space of time. As a result of this exercise the characters began to feel like real people who would be able to take part in driving the story line.

### Story line and plot

Finally I had found the story that I wanted to tell that combined the art of ballet, politics and the personal stories of the three individuals. Now I needed to organize these into an overall plot and then to plot each scene. The decision to start and end the play with the show trial would enable the spectator to see this scene from two different perspectives. At first he could be objective, but after he has met the dancers he can view the scene in a more subjective way and feel some change in his sympathies. The show trial is also the scene in which the spectators find themselves cast in the play as the ‘western humanists’ and it was important to place this scene at the beginning. This scene also sets up the personal and political stakes of the play and locates it in mid-century Soviet Russia.

I then turned to the body of the play, going back in time to show the audience how it came about that two of the dancers are publically humiliated and ridiculed. In early drafts all three dancers were the protagonists. It was not until the characters themselves told me their story that I began to see that Galina has the central role. It was important to introduce the other characters in the play at an early stage, and to induct the audience into the world of ballet. The second scene shows the dancers in their late teens as they receive their graduation telegrams informing them of whether they have succeeded in gaining a place in the ballet company. This important scene also suggests to the audience that a *ménage a trois* is developing between the three dancers and that a fourth character, Kasyan, offers some rivalry to Galina. Madam, the ballet mistress, is also introduced and Galina's enthusiasm for ballet is made clear. Ballet is an important strand in the play and is weaved throughout the plot, so that the audience does not lose sight of the tangible aims of the dancers.

There are very few places where the plot loses sight of ballet, so that in those instances it does seem significant. Alexei is taken away from the world of ballet by his relationship with Kasyan, but by the end of the play Kasyan is frozen out of the *ménage a trois*. In the drinking scene Dmitri and Alexei begin to turn the conversation away from dance towards politics as a foreshadowing of the interrogation scene with Gromykin. Chillingly Gromykin never loses sight of ballet; it is kept central to the scene.

At the beginning of Act Two, the world of ballet seems to be the saviour for all three dancers, but as the siege begins to impact on their lives, the pressing needs of survival come to the fore. In the final garden scene, Galina is no longer a dancer. In this liminal scene Galina has been re-educated to become a worker. If ballet is the breath of life to Galina, then she has passed into another world and yet her physical body remains. In this last scene of the play, there is the possibility that she could make the transition back into the real world. There is irony as Galina was a ballerina, and ballet is often seen as ephemeral. This forms part of the poetry of the play.

There is a poetic effect throughout the play in cause and effect. Kasyan's rough treatment at the hands of the boys results in her seeking power through becoming a party member. Galina's role in *The Red Poppy* in which she sacrifices herself and rises again as the wild flowers has resonances in the final 'show trial' and garden scenes. The structure of the play is designed to show that however hard Galina tries to rule her own destiny she is at the mercy of the greater powers of the state, and that, in a poetic sense, the state is at the mercy of the greater powers of the forces of nature.

### Time and space

Having established story, plot, action and character, I needed to begin to concentrate on locating my play in time and space. I began to think about the naturalistic aspect of the scenery; to imagine where the storeroom was located in the building and to arrange the set so that there is one exit onto the street and another into the interior of the building. This enabled more of a division between the outside world and the inner world of the ballet school. An important aspect of the setting and properties was to use something that works in a similar way to subtext in dialogue to give the audience different levels of engagement.

I had seen how Anthony Weigh had used symbolism to add dimension to his play, *2,000 Feet Away*. At the beginning of the play we see a realist painting depicting a man with a pitchfork standing in front of a young woman. A weatherboard house with imitation gothic attic windows is in the background. It pictorially represents the town in which the play is set with all its quaintness, contradictions and anomalies on display. I have used the portraits of Stalin and Zhdanov to illuminate the way in which the political leaders and politics of the day cast a constant shadow over professional and personal lives. In a seminar with Anthony Weigh (Birmingham University 27.10.08) he explained how he looks at character details, and gives his characters relevant properties to handle.

I have used the ballet shoes both for Galina and Alexei, as well as the graduation telegrams for all three dancers and vodka for the two young men. Dmitri is the gunner because he has a farming background. Galina receives the fan letters because she is the ballerina. Weigh also explained that he is interested in how landscape works on a character and that he sees space as metaphoric in a play. This is very pertinent because dancers are, from a very young age, surrounded by representation of their art, the studios, the scenery, the pianos, wooden floor, barres, the costumes, props, portraits and sculptures of dancers. Going against this obvious setting, I have decided to place my dancers inside a basement storeroom of the school, where some of these things are kept, in a confined space. Everything in the room is already used. The room and the ballet props no longer have a current use, and as the plot progresses the ballet props are gradually taken away, and replaced by the portraits of the leaders and the paraphernalia of war.

The freedom that ballet dancers once had before communism, no longer exists as art is strictly monitored and regulated by the state. Any possible free choice that the dancers may have is gradually being taken away from them. I have set the final scene in the communal garden to suggest that the dancers have triumphed over the power of the state because there is no greater force than the power of nature. Here the dancers are able to exercise some free will; to make a choice. In addition to thinking about the set and properties, time also had to be represented so that the characters daily lives had a structure.

In a seminar, with David Edgar (Birmingham University 7.10.08) the participants were encouraged to think about devices used in films to change the tempo of the action, and to increase the pressure. Edgar talked about how John Grisham films give a short time span and then shorten it, which I have used when the debut performance of the ballet, *The Red Poppy*, is brought forward. The characters react to this pressure and it changes the focus of the scene; instead of bickering over the hierarchy of power, they now begin to work co-operatively and with more sense of purpose. Edgar also spoke about having a clock on the scene, which I have translated into Galina's worry about missing her classes. She is often asking about the time. Another idea that Edgar suggested was that we build the tempo of the dialogue and then puncture the speech. I have used this device occasionally for various effects, sometimes to frustrate characters desires and to throw obstacles in their way. It was useful in the moment of *coitus interruptus* when Dmitri discovers Alexei trying to seduce Kasyan. In another scene the courting couple are surprised twice, not just by Dmitri and Galina, but also when the party official Gromykin first enters into the storeroom. There are other factors of time, including the pressure of war, of getting a place in the ballet company; of succeeding in developing a successful ballet for the purposes of war propaganda, and surviving the siege.

### The broader consideration of major turning points in the play

There were a number of turning points in the development of the play: reading the first draft, the playwrights' workshop, and the process of revision. Early on in the process I found myself not in control of my writing. I had a story which I wanted to relate in dramatic terms but did not have the necessary skills to shape the play. I had experience of writing in the narrative form for fiction writing, and was disappointed to find that this did not translate at all well into playwriting. I did not feel I knew the consequences of the scene I had written but that I would write it and then find out whether it worked or not. I was also very keen on my research into Soviet Russia and its people and this was often dictating the plot and taking it in many different directions. One of the turning points came when I put aside my historical research and started concentrating on developing character. Once I began to know my characters, I began to have more control over the plot and the turn of events. Some stages in the process helped me to think more deeply about character.

Right at the beginning of the process, after writing my first scene, we had a practical session with actors, and the *dramaturg*, Caroline Jester, from Birmingham Repertory Theatre (Birmingham University 4.11.08). She spoke about objectives at the beginning of a scene for each actor and the obstacles which stopped them from achieving their objectives. The other characters could be the obstacles and one clear objective works well. Inarticulacy could also be used as an obstacle. She stressed the importance of showing obstacles and objectives through character and not through exposition.

I struggled with this concept and several weeks later, at the reading of my first draft at Birmingham University (1.12.08) I was able to discern that I was still resorting to exposition as a means of story telling. I finally understood the concepts explained by Jester when they were expressed from another angle at the rehearsals for the student workshop (8.6.09) with director Alison Sutcliffe of the Bridgehouse Theatre, Warwick. Sutcliffe used the method of 'actioning' devised by Max Stafford Clark in which she would look for a transitive verb/action for each thought/sentence. I learnt how this worked by watching her work on my script with the actors. She gave me a list of transitive verbs and explained how "this character 'transitive verb' (embitters/educates/soothes etc.) the other character". It is a lengthy process which works wonders and brought out detailed characterisations and nuances in my script that I not imagined were there. Whilst I have not found this useful to use in my writing as it spoils the flow of creation, it was informative and allows me to check characters motives if I doubt whether I have correctly achieved the effect that I had wanted. A few days after this rehearsal I watched the first 20 minutes of the play in performance at the George Cadbury Hall, Birmingham (11.6.09) and several problems emerged. At this stage there were still several scenes showing the dancers as children. Sutcliffe had already explained that as a director this would be problematic; casting adults in the roles of children and having them age throughout the production. I felt, in watching the play, embarrassed by the childlike appeal of these scenes and happily cut them as they did not seem to fit with a play for adults.

They would now usefully form some of the subtext of the play, as I understood the dancers as children. I was also conscious that there was still some exposition being used at the expense of dramatic action, and also of using a lot of story-telling which slowed the action down. In my rewrites I had to decide whether this story-telling was valuable to the play.

In reading Chekhov's *Three Sisters* I noticed that he used a lot of story-telling which had the effect of slowing down the action. This was once acceptable but has now become unfashionable. In its day Chekhov's writing was a step forward towards the new dramatic form of realism and also Chekhov had a very sensitive approach to his characters and their concerns and therefore I felt that his work was still very valuable. Reading *Three Sisters* I understood that although Chekhov's action is very slow, there is a clear through line as Natasha is steadily driving the sisters out of the house. I found that my writing was similarly inclined towards story-telling, but that the large number of different story strands was rather confusing and I was losing the overall objective and so I needed to think about the through line. I also needed to make the story more active and show things happening on stage so as to avoid the unpopular Chekhovian languor. However at times, in my play, when the three protagonists are in 'limbo' for example after they have received their telegrams but before they begin their work in the artists division, this languor is useful.

It changes the pace for the audience and shows them how the characters are feeling, in the same way as Chekhov uses this sense of stagnation to show that the sisters are unable to act; they want to change their lives but they are impotent. However I also notice some thinly disguised exposition in Chekhov's writing which I found rather clumsy. I cut out as much of the exposition as possible in my own writing and sharpened the sense of through line, bringing Galina forward as the protagonist.

Another turning point came when I researched the now very dated melodrama and the well made play. In the well made play the writer usually starts with the denouement in mind and his characters are subordinate to the plot. Also he uses devices such as lost letters, with which to tell the story. I cut the story telling devices that I was still clinging to, but I allowed a small amount of melodramatic flourishes in some of the language and also in some of the action. I rather like the small residual melodrama still contained in some naturalist plays including Emile Zola's *Therese Raquin*, and August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*. Life is not without melodrama and I find the resulting overt theatricality to be beneficial in raising the excitement of the play. Overall the story I have wanted to tell, really has dictated the form but clearly I have made choices according to my nature. It is very pleasing to shape a work of dramatic import. Just as a ballet teacher shapes her pupil both physically and artistically, I believe that the craft and art of playwriting should unite in creating the poetic.



### Seminars at Birmingham University

Waters, Steve	<i>Voice and Power</i>	29.9.08
Edgar, David	<i>After Aristototele: Story, Plot, Action and Character</i>	
	<i>Genre</i>	6.10.08
Edgar, David	<i>Shaping a scene</i>	
	<i>Devices: Time and Space</i>	7.10.08
Waters, Steve	<i>Forms and Aesthetics</i>	14.10.08
Weigh, Anthony	<i>Case Study: 2,000 Feet Away</i>	27.10.08
Jester, Caroline and Actors	<i>Actions and Objectives</i>	4.11.08
Coghlan, Lin	<i>Story-telling Through Character</i>	11.11.08

### Playwrights Workshop

MPhil (B) in Playwriting studies Playwrights' workshop

George Cadbury Hall 12.6.09

### Live performances of plays

Miller, Arthur	<i>The Crucible</i>	
	Birmingham Repertory Theatre	2004
Miller, Arthur	<i>A View from the Bridge</i>	
	Duke of York's Theatre	2009

Secondary Research

Figes, Orlando

*Natasha's Dance, A Cultural History of Russia*

Allen Lane, Penguin, London 2002

Salisbury, Harrison E.

*The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad*

MacMillan Publishers Ltd., London 1969

Styan, J. L.

*Modern drama in theory and practice 1:*

*Realism and Naturalism*

Cambridge University Press, New York 1995