

# ALEKSANDRS LEMBERGS IN THE BALLET PRODUCTIONS BY THE CHOREOGRAPHERS HELĒNA TANGIJEVA-BIRZNIECE AND JEVĢEŅIJS ČANGA

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## Summary

Aleksandrs Lembergs (1921–1985) was a premier danseur in a highly important period of Latvian ballet history. He started to dance in Latvian National Opera in 1939, and within a few years he became the principal soloist in the Latvian ballet. He was a premier danseur from 1949 until 1965 in the period when two prominent ballet masters Helēna Tangijeva-Birzniece (1907–1965) and Jevgeņijs Čanga (1920–1999) created productions in Latvian State Opera and Ballet Theatre.

Tangijeva-Birzniece was a pupil of Agrippina Vaganova and she represented the pure and virtuoso St. Petersburg ballet school. She was one of the most fruitful choreographers in the Latvian ballet, as well as an outstanding re-stager of classical ballets. Čanga was the graduate of the Department of Choreography of the Moscow State Theatre Institute, and he was a notable representative of *dramballet*, a direction in Soviet ballet. The two ballet masters worked in different styles and created a variety of performances. They quarrelled much in professional terms, and altogether the period between 1945 and 1965 was very fruitful and rich in ballet performances. This was also the bright era of several generations of prominent Latvian ballet dancers.

Lembergs was an excellent dancer who had been taught by Russian Imperial Theatre ballerinas Alexandra Feodorova and Lubov Egorova, as well as famous Latvian ballet teacher Harijs Plūcis. Lembergs was slender and attractive, with nice stage temperament and magnetism, he was a gifted artist and dancer and a remarkable partner for ballerinas. Shortly after World War II the Latvian ballet was in a very difficult situation since most members of the ballet company had emigrated to the West. Lembergs was the only male dancer in the Latvian ballet who could dance premier danseur roles in a technically high level and virtuoso manner. Nevertheless, as a result of political intrigues Lembergs was arrested and sent in exile to Siberia in 1945. He returned in ballet in 1948.

Lembergs is one of the remarkable Latvian ballet dancers in the after-war period. He performed a lot in the main male roles in classical ballets, like *Raymonda* by Alexander Glazunov, *Giselle* and *Le Corsaire* by Adolphe Adam, *Don Quihote* by Ludwig Minkus, *La Esmeralda* by Cezare Pugni and *Riccardo Drigo*, where his virtuoso leap, attractive way of dancing the male variations and spectacular performing confirmed

his special quality of the leading soloist. Lembergs is one of the most outstanding Siegfried performers in the Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* in Latvian ballet history. He was also an acclaimed performer in the new productions and performances of the Soviet ballet. Expressive hero of the Soviet ballet era, like Frondoso in *Laurencia* by Alexander Krein was among his created roles, as well as Romeo and Thybalt in *Romeo and Juliet* by Sergej Prokofiev, Prince in *Cinderella* by Prokofiev, Franz in *At the Blue Danube* by Johann Strauss, title role in *Ali-Batyr (Shurale)* by Farit Yarullin, roles in *The Youth* by Mikhail Chulaki, *The Red Flower* by Reinhold Glière, *On the Seashore* by Julius Juzeliunas, etc. He was also a notable performer in Latvian ballets *Staburadze* by Alfrēds Kalniņš, *Laima* by Anatols Liepiņš, *Brīvības sakta (The Brooch of Freedom)* by Ādolfs Skulte, *Rigonda* by Romualds Grīnblats. Most of these ballets were choreographed by Tangijeva-Birzniece and Čanga, and Lembergs created a wide spectre of roles in the ballets, both the roles of young lovers and evil, nasty characters. He was well known as performer of impressive character roles in Tangijeva-Birzniece's and Čanga's ballets, like Spaniard in *Bolero* by Maurice Ravel, Durvasa in *Shakountala* by Sergej Balasanian, Baron in *The Brooch of Freedom* by Ādolfs Skulte, etc.

Lembergs retired in 1965. He became a ballet master and was the head of the Latvian ballet until his death in 1985. He has created many remarkable ballets, such as *Inku zelts (The Gold of Incas)* and *Pāns un Sīringa (Pan and Syrinx)* by Oļegs Barskovs, *Sprīdītis (Tom Thumb)* and *Lolitas brīnumputns (Lolita's Firebird)* by Arvīds Žilinskis, *Peer Gynt* by Edvard Grieg. He also revised the classical ballets *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty* by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, *Don Quihote* by Ludwig Minkus and made his own versions of *Romeo and Juliet* by Sergej Prokofiev, *Anthony and Cleopatra* by Eduard Lazarev, *Carmen (Carmen-Suite)* by George Bizet/Rodion Shchedrin, *Notre Dame de Paris* (previous *La Esmeralda*) by Cezare Pugni and Riccardo Drigo.

Lembergs' performances have always been marked by a special colouring, and his monumental ballet productions had well-weighed dramatic structure. Still, as a choreographer he always relied on classical ballet dance, and classical dance for him always was a source for endless innovations for modern ballet choreography. At the same time, Lembergs cannot be named as choreographer-innovator, as even *Carmen* (Bizet-Shchedrin *Carmen-Suite*), his most brilliant performance with powerful contemporary choreography, was not revolutionary in the Latvian ballet. Lembergs never aimed at becoming Latvian ballet pioneer, but every time he entered the ballet room he had a very clear idea of the performance he wanted to create and the means he would be using. It was nonessential for him if it was not innovative, unprecedented and original.