

**Rebecca Davis – Journey in Russia**  
**Journal Entry #3 – October 15, 2004**

***The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly:***  
***The Art of Choreography – Хореография***

“There are three variants of choreography. First, there is choreography that is crafted and performed so well that everyone enjoys it, and thus it must be good work. Second, there is dance that is very intricate and creative. You may not understand it, but it is incredibly compelling and interesting to watch. This is also good choreography. Finally, you have work that is neither beautiful nor interesting. And, this is just bad choreography.” – Nikolai Boyarchikov

***Learning from a Master: Nikolai Boyarchikov (Маэстро в балете: Николай Боярчиков)***

The quote above was the first lesson I had in choreography here in Russia. My teacher, Mr. Nikolai Boyarchikov, is the current Artistic Director of The St. Petersburg Opera and Ballet Theater. A world re-known figure in ballet, Mr. Boyarchikov graduated from the Vaganova Russian Ballet Academy in 1954. (The Vaganova Academy is arguably the best classical training school in the world for classical dancers.) He performed with The Maly Opera and Ballet Theater, which later became The St. Petersburg Mussorgsky State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater. (This is the institution where I am taking my professional ballet classes.) Mr. Boyarchikov became the Ballet Master in 1977 and the Artistic Director in 1990 after winning multiple national cultural awards, including the People’s Artist of Russia, the State Prize of Russia, and the Order of Friendship.

His written credentials are obviously impressive, but I have had the great fortune of experiencing his unique character in the classroom as well. His brutal honesty, combined with a sharp, witty sense of humor, creates an effective teaching style. This isn’t to say his classes are in the least bit easy – quite the contrary.

***My First Attempt: Первая проба***

My first assignment was supposed to be simple: choreograph sixteen counts of movement to a theme by Beethoven. Well, it’s three weeks later, and I still don’t have it right!

Why the difficulty? The Russian approach to choreography at The Conservatory emphasizes “properly” interpreting music when choosing dance movement. The initial reaction to this philosophy from a young Western choreographer like myself could be something like, “That’s impossible. There is no *one* right way to interpret music. In fact, the choreographer enjoys the liberty of making that creative choice.” I must admit that I used to believe this; however, my Russian teacher has completely convinced me otherwise now. There really is *one* right way and *many* wrong ways to listen to music and choose corresponding movements.

***The Wrong Way: Неправильный Путь***

When I first choreographed the sixteen counts of Beethoven’s theme, I chose elegant poses for the first eight counts and contrasting sharper leg extensions for the last eight counts. My goal was to create a paradox that could serve as the foundation for a narrative context and future choreography.

After showing my first piece to Mr. Boyarchikov, he explained to me that my choreography and approach were wrong (“не правильно”). “You are choreographing with your heart instead of your ears. It’s good that you have an idea, but you have superimposed your idea on this piece of classical music. Your job, as a choreographer, is to interpret the story that is written in *these* musical notes – not the story that you have created in your own mind. Only then will the movement match the music and you will have created harmony. *This* will be understood by your audience and thus be good choreography.”

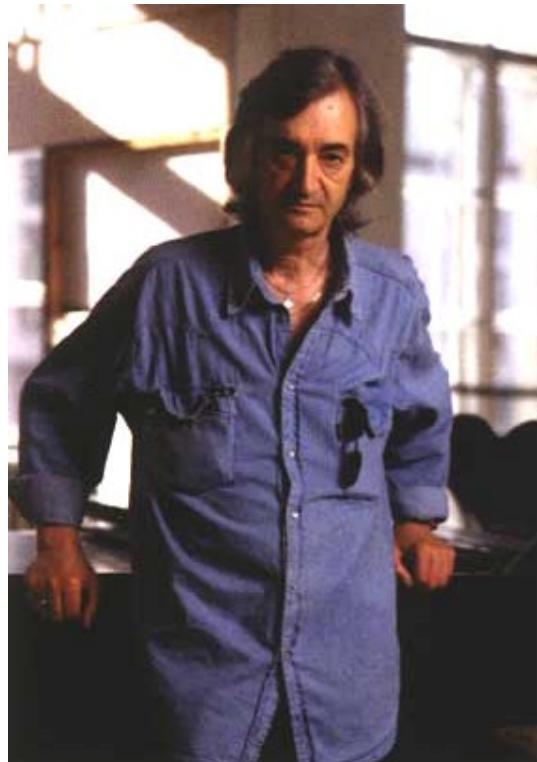
After three weeks of early mornings, late evenings, and weekends in the studios of The St Petersburg Conservatory, I know he’s right.

***The Right Way: Правильный Путь***

Once I master this skill, I will have added another entire layer to my modern and narrative choreography repertoire. I look forward to sharing the benefits of *the right way* to choreograph with my future audiences in The West!

**To Learn More About Rebecca Davis' studies and travel experiences, visit *The Rebecca Davis Dance Company* website at [www.rebeccadavisdance.com](http://www.rebeccadavisdance.com) or email [davis@rebeccadavisdance.com](mailto:davis@rebeccadavisdance.com)**

**To Read About Rebecca's other professors at The St. Petersburg Conservatory, join "The Journey in Russia" listserv. Sign up for the listserv at [www.rebeccadavisdance.com](http://www.rebeccadavisdance.com).**



***Mr. Nikolai Boyarchikov  
Artistic Director  
The St. Petersburg Mussorgsky State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater***