

Rebecca Davis – Journey in Russia
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Dancing on Christmas Eve at The US Consulate General

When I was little, my biggest Christmas tradition was preparing my *Christmas Eve Show*, which was performed annually in our living room in front of a very attentive audience: mom, sister and dog. Ten years later, I find myself spending December 24th in much the same fashion: performing my dance choreography, but this time the audience is The US Consulate General and the location is Saint-Petersburg, Russia.

The Creative Process: Step One – Theme & Music

Last October, I began preparing a special piece of choreography to perform at the Christmas Eve party on December 24th at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Hughes, the current representatives of The US Consul General in Saint Petersburg.

To craft this piece, I chose four contrasting musical selections that were composed by Eric Haeker, a composer in Philadelphia. I wrote and recorded text that captured the Christmas theme using the poem *Twas The Night Before Christmas*. I also wanted to celebrate the achievements of Russians and Americans, such as the annual *White Nights Festival* and *The Summer Olympic Games*, and I created my own text that described these events.

In December, I went to Moscow to work with two electronic music engineers. We recorded my voice reading the text, and then blended it with the music into a single track. This type of recording is a common characteristic of my choreographic style. With the music finished, I was ready to start rehearsing, but there was still one problem – I needed to find dancers!

Step Two – Dancers

At The Saint Petersburg Conservatory, I constantly hear choreography students complain: “It’s impossible to find artists (ie professional ballerinas and dancers). Everyone is always busy. How can I choreograph without good dancers?” (I must admit that I have also chimed in on these “dressing room rant sessions.”)

However, for this dance piece, I was lucky to find an extremely pleasant young ballerina who was interested in discovering what it would be like to work with an American choreographer. She helped me recruit two other dancers from *The Saint Petersburg Conservatory Ballet*. Together with me, I had four dancers.

Step Three - Rehearsals

Working with professional Russian dancers is a dream come true. I choreographed freely in the classical genre without fears that the dancers would have sloppy technique or poor

musicality. Yet, I encountered two other obstacles: acquainting these dancers with my *modern*-ballet style, and finding rehearsal times.

Modern is still a very new concept in Saint Petersburg. My Russian dancers struggled to understand the parallel leg positions and jagged arm lines found in much of my choreography. Nevertheless, their willingness to try new movement and an overall persistence paid off. By the time December 24th had come, they fully understood all the steps.

Of course, working with professionals is always desired, but the hitch is that professional ballet companies often go on tour. My dancers headed off to Belgium for ten performances of *Swan Lake* the week before our show at The Consulate. This made finding rehearsal times a challenge, but I recorded extra copies of the music before they left, and they took the initiative to review the choreography while in Belgium. Upon their return, we had time for one last rehearsal in the studio, a dress rehearsal at The Consulate, and then it was show time!

Step 4 – Lights, Camera, Action!

At 6:00pm on December 24th, I was leaving The Saint Petersburg Conservatory after six hours of classical ballet and language classes. With my three Russian dancers following behind me (each of whom is about half my height), we scrambled through rush-hour traffic on the St Petersburg metro. When we arrived at The Consulate, there was just enough time to put on our costumes, touch up our make-up, and warm up.

Our dance, which was just seven minutes, was filled with smiles, turns, leg extensions and jumps. Our act was followed by an appearance of Santa Claus and Christmas caroling. My dancers performed well and I was happy for the opportunity to share my artistic work with the Russians and Americans in attendance.

By far, the best part of this experience was teaching and explaining my choreography in Russian to Russians. My dancers were patient with my pronunciation and learned my choreographic style accurately. It is important for me to practice working with Russian artists as I hope to build cross-cultural artistic works in the future. To achieve this, I know that experience is required, and thus it is a good thing I started choreographing Christmas shows when I was 12 years old!

To Learn More About Rebecca Davis' studies and travel experiences, visit The Rebecca Davis Dance Company website at www.rebeccadavidance.com or email davis@rebeccadavidance.com

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Performing at the US Consulate General