



## **Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes 1909-1929**

**25 September 2010 – 9 January 2011**

The V&A's major autumn exhibition, *Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes 1909–1929*, will explore the world of the influential artistic director Serge Diaghilev and the most exciting dance company of the 20th century. Diaghilev combined dance, music and art in bold ways to create 'total theatre'. A consummate collaborator, he worked with Stravinsky, Chanel, Picasso, Matisse and Nijinsky.

Diaghilev's dramatic performances transformed dance, reawakening interest in ballet across Europe and America. This major retrospective will celebrate his enduring influence on 20th-century art and design and will include more than 300 objects from the V&A's own unrivalled collection and from a variety of lenders. The energy of the Ballets Russes' performances will be brought to life through giant backcloths, costumes, art, film and sound. Specially created films will be on show throughout including footage of composer and broadcaster Howard Goodall explaining the development of music that accompanied the Ballets Russes.

Treasures on show will include Picasso's huge front cloth for *Le Train Bleu*, as well as original costumes and set designs, props and posters by artists and designers like Léon Bakst, Georges Braque, Jean Cocteau and Natalia Goncharova. These will tell the story of a company which began in the social and political upheaval of pre-revolutionary Russia and went on to cause a sensation with exotic performances that had never been seen before.

The exhibition begins with Diaghilev's life in St Petersburg. With an overview of the dance scene he was set to transform, it will explore his early work in Paris, displaying the magnificent costume for Modest Mussorgsky's *Boris Godonov* worn by Feodor Chaliapin. This gallery will include a rich array of costumes designed by Bakst and tell the story of the Ballets Russes up to the outbreak of War in 1914. The turban for *Le Pavillon d'Armide* and the gold and pearl tunic from *Le Festin*, both

worn by charismatic dancer Vaslav Nijinsky at the dazzling opening performance of the 1909 Saison Russe will be displayed along with sculptures of him by Auguste Rodin and by Una Troubridge. Radically choreographed by Nijinsky and scored by Igor Stravinsky, the Ballets Russes' 1913 production of *The Rite of Spring* sensationalised Paris, causing a riot in the aisles of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées at its first performance. The first gallery will conclude with a group of nine costumes designed by Nicolas Roerich for this very performance.

The second gallery will take visitors behind the scenes of the Ballets Russes' productions - their inspiration, choreography, music and creation of the sets. Nijinsky's notation for *L'Après-midi d'un faune* will be displayed for the first time as it was intended to be read, as will the musical score for *Pulcinella* by Stravinsky. Another highlight will be a presentation of *The Firebird*, examined through a series of designs for Goncharova's coronation scene, concluding dramatically with the actual backcloth. Pablo Picasso became an integral member of the Ballets Russes during the War. His enormous front cloth for *Le Train Bleu*, dedicated and signed, will be on show as well as a costume he designed for *Parade*. The exhibition will look at how the Ballets Russes survived during the War having been cut off from their roots in Russia with little access to the cities they performed in before 1914.

The final gallery will present Diaghilev and his company in the 1920s - a period when he had achieved great status in European culture. The works of artists, authors and musicians he knew or was associated with will be shown – including manuscripts by Joyce, Proust and Eliot. There will be a large selection of costumes in this gallery from the exotic – Léon Bakst's *The Sleeping Princess* and Henri Matisse's *Le Chant du rossignol*, and the wacky – Mikhail Larionov's *Chout* and Giorgio de Chirico's *Le Bal*, and the chic – Coco Chanel's bathing costumes for *Le Train Bleu*, Georges Braque's *Zephyr and Flore* and Marie Laurencin's *Les Biches*.

Mark Jones, Director of the V&A said: "*Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes redefined ballet. Our exhibition will tell the story of this groundbreaking entrepreneur and artist. Diaghilev's dedication to pushing boundaries and collaborating with the best designers, choreographers and artists of his time left an inspiring legacy. The V&A is delighted to be showing its unrivalled collection of Diaghilev and Ballets Russes' objects in this timely exhibition.*"

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### **Notes to Editors**

- Diaghilev and The Golden Age of the Ballets Russes will be at the V&A from 25 September 2010 until 9 January 2011
- The exhibition design is by Tim Hatley with Drinkall Dean
- An accompanying book of the same name, edited by Geoffrey Marsh and Jane Pritchard, will be produced by V&A Publishing. For PRESS information about the book, contact Julie Chan on 020 7942 2701 or 07747 607 822 or email [j.chan@vam.ac.uk](mailto:j.chan@vam.ac.uk) (not for publication)
- For PRESS information about V&A shop merchandise accompanying the exhibition, contact Lee Kendall on 020 7942 2681 or email [l.kendall@vam.ac.uk](mailto:l.kendall@vam.ac.uk) (not for publication)

With thanks to the Blavatnik Family Foundation and The Linbury Trust.

### **Advance Ticket Information**

- Tickets: £10 (concessions available)
- Tickets can be booked from July 2010

**For further PRESS information about the exhibition contact the V&A Press Office on 020 7942 2497/2500 or email [press.office@vam.ac.uk](mailto:press.office@vam.ac.uk) (not for publication)**

**There is a selection of high resolution press images available to download from <http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk>**