In celebration of a major exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum
25 September 2010 – 9 January 2011
www.vam.ac.uk/diaghilev

DIAGHILEV and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes 1909–1929

1. Covent Garden Underground Station
2. The Bush Theatre
3. Earlham Street
4. Charing Cross Road
5. The Porcupine
6. The Rumpus Room
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The V&A’s major autumn exhibition explores the world of the influential artistic director Serge Diaghilev and the most exciting dance company of the 20th century, the Ballet Russes. 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.

The Covent Garden area of London has a long history of theatre and it is therefore no surprise that it was the part of London in which the Ballets Russes had its roots. The walk is designed to take in key buildings and landmarks that were important to the company, both on and off the premises.

The tour will take about two hours.

To book tickets go to www.vam.ac.uk/diaghilev
1. TURN STARTING POINT: COVENT GARDEN UNDERGROUND STATION

2. On exiting the station TURN RIGHT and then LEFT again into Floral Street. After passing under the distinctive 300-foot Bridge of Aspiration that links the new Royal Ballet School with the Royal Opera House, note the tall wooden doors on the right to allow sets to be delivered to the stage. Just follow Floral Street on the left at a slate plate that reads: ‘In this building Painted by Leopoldo Pasco painted the backgrounds for Diaghilev’s ballets’. This was the shop hired to enable Vladimir and Elisabeth Polunin to paint the sets for the Ballets Russes between 1913 and 1916. Here was the front door for Triomphe (The Three-Cornered Hat) created but also the clothes for Andre Derain’s La Boutique fantasque.

3. At the end of Floral Street TURN RIGHT into Bow Street where you see the façade of the Royal Opera House. Although most of the auditorium looks similar to the theatre Diaghilev knew, the front of house and backstage has improved radically. Early in the twentieth century the layout under the entrance portico still existed. The Royal Opera House is usually open to visitors to view front of house (10.00–15.30). Backstage tours may be booked.

4. It was at the Royal Opera House in June 1911 that Diaghilev’s Company made its London and Britain debut for the coronation of George V. The Ballets Russes presented two seasons at the Royal Opera House in season 1911 (looking for Nijinsky and Anna Pavlova dance together for the last time) as well as appearing there in 1912, 1913, 1914 and 1915. When Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes performed at Covent Garden they were always by a season or two including opera and dance. The only exception is in 1915 (their second season) when after the first week there was a continuous run of ballet.

5. Leaving the Royal Opera House, continue down Bow Street and TURN LEFT into Russell Street. At the corner of Russell Street and Catherine Street you will see the façade of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane.

6. The Theatre Royal Drury Lane was used for seasons promoted by Joseph Beckham pre World War I (with his son Thomas conducting some performances) in 1913 and 1914. These combined opera and ballet and thanks to Beckham’s investment Sir Thomas acquired sets and costumes for the opera ballet Le Coq d’or by Gabriel Fauré (Boris). It was at Drury Lane that Nijinsky’s production of The Rite of Spring received its four London performances in 1913.

7. After looking at the façade continue along Russell Street and TURN RIGHT into Drury Lane where just after the theatre, you will see a specialist in ancient art. On number 51 Drury Lane, now Brodie & Middleton and Russell & Chappell, is still a manufacturer and supplier of theatre drapes, paintings, prints and brocades. The Ballets Russes used Brodie & Middleton as a significant supplier. At the end of the Aldwych because of the large cast involved, the stage of the Aldwych Theatre was used for rehearsals of Nijinsky’s Rite of Spring here when the performance was produced at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane.

8. Follow the theatre round by TURNING LEFT into Exeter Street and then TURN LEFT into Bedford Street and RIGHT into The Strand. Across the road located between The Strand and the Back Passage was the old Club Room to which the dancers initially came when leaving the Royal Opera House to hold court overlooking the Thames. Other leading members of the company stayed here and it was in the ballroom here that the Spanish dancer Felix performed for Tamsin and Karasvina in the early hours of the morning.

9. From the Strand TURN RIGHT into Southwark Street and then LEFT into Maiden Lane. It was in a now destroyed studio in the basement of Chandos House, Maiden Lane that Léonide Massine worked in 1910 with the dancer Lydia Sokolova (Roksolana Hilda Munning’s son) on the second version of The Rite of Spring and coached another British dancer Vera Savina (real name Vera Clarke) in Le Sylphides. Massine fell in love with Savina and married her, leading to his dismissal from the Company.

10. Continue along Maiden Lane which turns into Chandos Place. At the triangle on your left emerged by Chandos, Agar and King William IV Streets stood Charing Cross Hospital (it is now a police station). When on 20 July 1910 Diaghilev cancelled the last night of his Covent Garden season because the theatre management had not fulfilled their contracts, bouquets of flowers sent to the dancers and company were donated to Charing Cross Hospital.

11. At the Charing Cross stop Chandos Place. The Coliseum, the theatre that really saved the Ballets Russes in 1918, when at the end of War Diaghilev was finding it impossible to find work. The Coliseum was used for rehearsals of Nijinsky’s Le Coq d’or which was used for two seasons – in the spring of 1916 and 1917. The Coliseum was fully occupied by the Army. The Club Room had inadequate changing facilities. shaftesbury avenue that the dancers rehearsed at the end of the War, when drill hall in Aldwych was used for rehearsals of Nijinsky’s The Triumph of Neptune.

12. From the Coliseum walk up St Martin’s Lane, Upper St Martin’s Lane and into Monmouth Street reaching Seven Dials. One of the streets off on your right is Earlham Street. This was formerly Great Earl Street and it was in a warehouse at the far end that sets were stored during the Coliseum season, as there was little room backstage and it was impossible to keep their full repertoire there.

13. Continue north along Monmouth Street – formerly Great Andrew Street. On the right was located The Shaftesbury Hotel and it was in the club room on the first floor overlooking Shaftesbury Avenue that the dancers relaxed when Drill Hall in Aldwych was occupied by the army. The Club room had inadequate changing facilities. The piano for rehearsal was played by Mrs Lucas whose son Leighton was employed as a dancer. Leighton Lucas would later become a key composer for films (and arranger of the music of Karel Pokorny) and it was in the Coliseum that the Ballets Russes performed a ‘popular season’ sponsored by lord Rothermere of the Daily Mail.

14. At the end of Monmouth Street TURN RIGHT into Shaftesbury Avenue to the Shaftesbury Theatre which in the 1920s was known as the Princess Theatre. This was probably the least successful London venue for the Ballets Russes and, although it presented musical theatre, there was insufficient room for the corps de ballet to dress at the Holborn Baths (now the Oasis swimming pool) and had to cross the road to the theatre’s dressing rooms. Diaghilev’s season sponsored by C.B. Cochran was presented there in 1911 and the Company performed there from 1913 to 1919.

15. Retrace your steps along Shaftesbury Avenue having crossed the road and then TURN RIGHT up St Giles Passage to Compton Street. Here, at the rear of the Odeon (formerly the Saville Theatre) stood a ‘tiny house’ where an Italian boot-maker named Anello worked. Character dancer Leon Wodzikowski asked him to repair his dancing boots. He did this so well and became so interested in dancers’ shoes that he was given others to mend, leading eventually, with the patronage of the Ballets Russes, to the setting up of Anello and Davide.