



Alla Osipenko: Beauty and Resistance in Soviet Ballet

Joel Lobenthal

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Alla Osipenko is the gripping story of one of history's greatest ballerinas, a courageous rebel who paid the price for speaking truth to the Soviet State. She studied with Agrippina Vaganova, the most revered and influential of all Russian ballet instructors, and in 1950, she joined the Mariinsky (then-Kirov) Ballet, where her lines, shapes, and movements both exemplified the venerable traditions of Russian ballet and propelled those traditions forward into uncharted and experimental realms.

She was the first of her generation of Kirov stars to enchant the West when she danced in Paris in 1956. But dancing for the establishment had its downsides, and Osipenko's sharp tongue and marked independence, as well as her almost-reckless flouting of Soviet rules for personal and political conduct, soon found her all but quarantined in Russia. An internationally acclaimed ballerina at the height of her career, she found that she would now have to prevail in the face of every attempt by the Soviet state and the Kirov administration to humble her.

In *Alla Osipenko*, acclaimed dance writer Joel Lobenthal tells Osipenko's story for the first time in English, drawing on 40 interviews with the *prima ballerina*, and tracing her life from Classical darling to avant-garde rebel. Throughout the book, Osipenko talks frankly and freely in a way that few Russians of her generation have allowed themselves to. Her voice rises above the incidents as unhesitating and graceful as her legendary *adagios*. Candid, irreverent, and, above all, independent -- Osipenko and her story open a window into a fascinating and little-discussed world.

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