The Powerhouses of Parisian Society: Female Patronage and the Ballets Russes

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The Powerhouses of Parisian Society: Female Patronage and the Ballets Russes

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Advisor: Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, Music

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I am the fourth generation of women in my family to attend an all-women’s college, and I am so lucky to have had such strong female role models throughout my life to inspire me to succeed. I dedicate this thesis to all the women in my family, but especially to my mother, Susan Weddle, and my grandmother, Marion Harsh Corderman. I cannot thank you enough for your listening ears, encouraging conversations, and endless love throughout my entire life. This thesis would not have been possible without both of you.
Introduction

The city of Paris lures many to its sweeping boulevards, famous landmarks, and quaint city cafés. My thesis concerns itself with the City of Lights, where in the early twentieth century poets, composers, artists, society figures, and intellectuals flocked to experience the cultural life of Paris. Sergei Diaghilev’s ballet company, the Ballets Russes, dominated this glamorous social scene for twenty years from 1909-1929, and attracted many prominent figures to its circle. Behind the glitz of their lavish productions, the quiet figures of female patrons shaped and guided Diaghilev in his endeavors, making their prominent mark on the legacy of the Ballets Russes.

The act of musical patronage has been in effect since the beginning of music itself. In earlier times, composers had no way to support themselves financially without the aid of a direct system of patronage. For hundreds of years, the norm was to be reliant upon another person or an institution’s generosity and commissions as a means of support. In the medieval period, the Catholic Church requested works for religious services, and in the fifteenth century, the nobility began to compete for commissioned works as well. Well-known and generous patrons in the history of European music include Prince Esterházy (supporter of Joseph Haydn), the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II (supporter of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart), King Victor Emanuel II (supporter of Giuseppe Verdi), and King Ludwig of Bavaria (supporter of Richard Wagner). It is significant that all the examples I have given here involve men. While histories of European music tend to favor examples and images of male patrons—the word patron, in fact, derives from the Latin word for father, patrem—narratives of musical patronage often document a patriarchal society, thereby brushing over, until recent years, notable female patrons who have been central to the legacy of many composers and music.
Why do the names of female patrons not grace the pages of history textbooks as frequently as those of their male counterparts? Eleanor of Aquitaine, Isabella d’Este, Maria de Medici, Christina of Sweden, and Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge all contributed with great generosity to the furthering of music in their own times. Why hasn’t their impact on the history of music been recognized as important as that of their male counterparts? The scholar Ralph P. Locke explains in his article, “Paradoxes of the Woman Music Patron in America,” “…we should be careful not to hold women up to standards higher than those we apply to men…when women were not even granted a voice in government and men were far more directly responsible for the governmental and social policies that produced economic injustice, gender inequality, modernized warfare, and so on.”¹ Social inequality between men and women has not only affected the way history has been recorded, but also created negative stereotypes surrounding influential female patrons. A lack of access to power in other realms of society pushed these women towards becoming involved with the arts, although their gender prevented their names from being immortalized in textbooks.

My thesis questions the extent to which a patron’s role may be removed from the study of musical works. In addressing this imbalance, I consider why scholars have been more interested in the composer’s personal compositional process than their relationship with the commissioner of the work; why history attempts to erase the “dirty business of money”; and why scholars have tended to exclude women from these discussions. Locke writes, “Women’s work in and for

music has gone underreported or else been ridiculed.”² It is worth speculating on why the history of male patronage has not been subject to such underreporting and ridicule.

My interest in the topic of female patronage can be traced back to the figure of the Princesse de Polignac who accompanied me across the world in pursuit of ideas for this thesis. She lived an incredible life alongside such creative figures as Isadora Duncan, Gabriel Fauré, Violet Trefusis, Nadia Boulanger, Igor Stravinsky, and Diaghilev. The Ballets Russes figured a great deal in Sylvia Kahan’s rich biography of Polignac that I read during a summer internship in Venice.³ I visited Polignac’s palace located on the Grand Canal where I stood on the same balcony where Stravinsky had been photographed with Polignac. I journeyed to the island of San Michele, and visited the graves of Stravinsky and Diaghilev, who I learned had worked closely with Polignac on various projects. I walked the streets and squares of Venice, retracing the same steps many cultural figures had tread before me. I found within the world of the Ballets Russes three other formidable women, along with Polignac, who had aided Diaghilev in his innovative, and often, risky ideas.

When Diaghilev arrived in Paris in 1909 to begin his venture with the Ballets Russes, he could not have imagined the success he would achieve in the realms of ballet, music, dance, and the visual arts. In Paris, the close relationship between the arts provided a vast pool of talent for Diaghilev to utilize in many different ways. The ambitious scale of his ideas, and a precarious financial situation, often forced Diaghilev to become reliant upon the patronage of Russian aristocrats, London high society, and elite Parisian circles. Female patrons, particularly those in Paris, opened their doors to supporting new avant-garde ideas like his within their private salons.

In these enclaves, musicians, artists, and other creative figures mingled with the upper echelons of society to gain financial backing, personal support, and encouragement for their pursuits.

In my research, I found a surprising lack of discussion about the influential roles of these 
*salonistes* and patrons who seemed to hold most of the financial responsibility for the Ballets Russes. Even leading Ballets Russes scholars rarely explored the depth of female patrons’ contributions to their endeavors. I repeatedly found the same basic biographical information about four prominent patrons: the Comtesse Greffulhe, the Princesse de Polignac, Misia Sert, and Coco Chanel. Sources tended to place emphasis on their financial contributions, which often seemed focused on a particular composer, era, or project. A lack of attention to the specificities of their contributions startled me. I kept asking myself why, despite their central role in Parisian society, these women continued to evade scholarly discussion and criticism. Over time, my thesis became preoccupied with one question: how far did the effects of the contributions of the four women really reach within the Ballets Russes? That few scholars had asked these types of questions before inspired me to explore the lives and accomplishments of women who devoted their existence to furthering the growth of music and art under the banner of the Ballets Russes.

The Comtesse Greffulhe, the Princesse de Polignac, Misia Sert, and Coco Chanel contributed in very specific and unique ways to the ongoing success of the Ballets Russes. With the help of a Jerome A. Schiff Fellowship, I traveled to New York City in 2014 to undertake primary research at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. I examined the finances of the Ballets Russes with a view to learning more about their artistic and musical achievements. My thesis began to be shaped by the complex relationships and collaborations between pairs like the Comtesse Greffulhe and Gabriel Astruc, Polignac and Stravinsky, Sert and
Erik Satie, and Chanel and Jean Cocteau. The lives of these four women began to form before my eyes, and the significance of their work became more apparent as I recorded their stories.

My first chapter focuses on the financial and artistic support that the Comtesse Greffulhe established for the Ballets Russes. Her position in Parisian society opened up many doors for Diaghilev; he knocked on these doors to solicit money and to find emerging talent. Her previous work with the Société des Grandes Auditions refined Greffulhe’s knowledge of publicity and patronage, which she passed onto Diaghilev. She also introduced Diaghilev to the figure of Astruc, who managed the finances of the first few seasons of the Ballets Russes. Eventually, Greffulhe withdrew from society life, and effectively handed the Ballets Russes to the charge of other women.

The second chapter discusses the financial and aesthetic contributions of the Princesse de Polignac. Her salon premiered the works of many well-respected composers including Fauré, Reynaldo Hahn, and Francis Poulenc. She became involved with the Ballets Russes through her close collaborative relationship with Stravinsky, whose music she championed from 1914 until her death in 1943. Polignac aided Diaghilev during the Ballets Russes’s transitional years after World War I by helping them to articulate their new musical aesthetic. She also helped to provide financial stability in their later years through collaboration with the royal family of Monte Carlo.

Chapter Three traces the influence of Misia Sert, who became Diaghilev’s closest advisor throughout the twenty-year history of the Ballets Russes. She introduced Diaghilev to future collaborators like Maurice Ravel, Satie, Pablo Picasso, and Cocteau. She was the mastermind behind the collaborative productions of Daphnis et Chloé and Parade, and remained one of Diaghilev’s dearest friends until his death in 1929.
My final chapter concludes with a consideration of Coco Chanel’s work with the Ballets Russes. A romantic affair between Chanel and Stravinsky brought together Stravinsky’s primitivistic “Russian” style with Chanel’s classic chic look, and influenced both of their work with the Ballets Russes. She contributed her style philosophy to the melting pot of the Ballets Russes aesthetic through her work as costumière on productions like Le Train Bleu. Chanel’s growing popularity and celebrity status brought publicity to the Ballets Russes during the twenties, a time when the company’s reputation was somewhat in decline. Her glamorous image imprinted a romanticized impression onto the legacy of the Ballets Russes, which continues to this day.

The roles of Greffulhe, Polignac, Sert, and Chanel completely redefine the definition and image of the female patron. Each of these women contributed greatly to the financial, musical, and artistic aspects of Ballets Russes productions because of their personal relationships with Diaghilev, composers, and artists. My hope in writing this thesis is to provide recognition for their significant involvement in the foundation and development of the Ballets Russes and its legacy.
Chapter One: Founding the Ballets Russes

The Russian Impresario Sergei Diaghilev came to Paris with a hope to rejuvenate music, dance, and art while acquiring fame and fortune. In 1909, his first full season in Paris began with a collection of operas and ballets from his native Russia including Boris Godunov. His vision brought forth several exoticist trends in music and dance that were voraciously consumed by the Parisian elite. At the start of a long, successful, twenty-year career, Diaghilev’s rise into stardom began in the ballrooms and salons of the Parisian elite. His ability to navigate the complex social scene of Paris provided him with ample opportunity to infiltrate wealthy aristocratic circles and the crowds of bohemian artists, from which he plucked individuals with the goal of establishing his own group, which came to be known as the Ballets Russes.

Alongside Diaghilev, the Comtesse Greffulhe assumed a pivotal and influential role for the Ballets Russes. She was one of the troupe’s first sponsors in Paris. Throughout their professional relationship, Greffulhe acted as an advocate for Diaghilev and his vision for the Ballets Russes. Greffulhe’s unique role as the founder of the Société des Grandes Auditions, an organization that presented public concerts, brought her into contact with the financier Gabriel Astruc. She introduced Astruc to Diaghilev, granting Diaghilev access to the Théâtre du Châtelet, where Astruc was Director from 1906-1913. While Greffulhe’s influence opened doors for Diaghilev’s entry into the salons of Parisian high society, her financial contributions throughout the prewar period of the Ballets Russes ensured their public popularity. Along with the experience she gained in finance and publicity from the Société des Grandes Auditions, Greffulhe used her societal status to consolidate the earliest undertakings of the Ballets Russes.
She provided a financial foundation for the troupe through which she was able to subsidize much of Diaghilev’s early work in Paris, and eventually, his first Ballets Russes collaborations.

_Sergei Diaghilev_

Sergei Diaghilev was born on 31 March 1872 in Russia to a wealthy and cultured family, headed by his father, Pavel Pavlovich. Diaghilev’s mother died during childbirth, and his father soon remarried Elena Valerianovna Panaeva early in Diaghilev’s life. Diaghilev’s stepmother became a strong maternal figure and helped foster Diaghilev’s love for the arts. By 1890, when Diaghilev was eighteen years old, his father and stepmother had spent their wealth and were bankrupt; the family’s financial responsibility thus fell to Diaghilev. He began studying law at the St. Petersburg University later that year. While there, he also took courses at the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music where he studied art history, vocal performance, and composition. He pursued his musical studies, but eventually abandoned his dreams of becoming a composer in 1892 after his professor, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, told him he had no compositional talent. Diaghilev kept pursuing his passion for the arts, however, and abandoned his studies in law. The Ballets Russes scholar Lynn Garafola describes Diaghilev as, “…a man of ferocious will and infinitely discerning taste, encyclopedic knowledge and passionate curiosity—a Napoleon of the arts and a Renaissance man in one.”¹ Diaghilev continued to expand his growing knowledge by working in the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg throughout the 1890s. He established his artistic and musical credentials by working on plays, operas, and ballets, before pursuing his own endeavors.

Diaghilev’s distinct artistic vision resulted in a separation from his homeland during the years of 1900-1905 when Russia was amidst political turmoil. During these years, the poorer population of Russia began to revolt against the aristocratic regime headed by Czar Nicholas II of the noble Romanov family. Class division in Russia had reached its peak by the early twentieth century; the upper classes still ruled over the majority of the population, while the lower classes remained poverty-stricken and overworked. During the nineteenth century, some European countries had undergone major political overhauls, many of which led to democratic governments that offered people of all backgrounds more opportunities for monetary growth than before. The heavy financial burden on the lower classes caused them to rebel against their oppressive and wealthy rulers. By 1905, the clash between the upper and lower classes reached a violent conflict on January 22, when a crowd of industrial workers marched to the Czar’s Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. The Czar’s imperial troops opened fire on the crowd, killing and wounding hundreds of protesters. Garafola remarks, “In the ensuing months the cry of civil liberties and autonomy moved from the factory districts of St. Petersburg to Tsardom’s most privileged cultural institutions.”

This included the St. Petersburg Conservatory, which in 1905 dismissed Rimsky-Korsakov from his post as conservatory director after he published controversial letters about the rebellion. The unstable politics of Russia began to overwhelm every aspect of life, and Diaghilev’s position as an experimental figure in the art world, as well as a known homosexual, ostracized him in the eyes of the repressive regime. As a result, Diaghilev began to look outside of Russia towards Western Europe for outlets to hone his artistic vision. Eventually, he was led to France, specifically to the powerful and influential figure of the Comtesse Greffulhe.

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2 Ibid., 3.
The Comtesse Greffulhe

The Comtesse Greffulhe was born Princess Élisabeth Caraman-Chimay on 11 July 1860 in Paris to the Belgian Prince of Chimay and Caraman, Joseph de Riquet, and his wife Marie de Montesquiou de Fezensac. Her grandfather and father worked as diplomats for Belgium, the former as Ambassador to the Netherlands, and the latter as minister of foreign affairs. The Comtesse grew up in a musical family and was given a strong education in the arts. The Caraman-Chimay family held a long history and reputation as patrons of music. Greffulhe’s great-grandfather helped found the Brussels Conservatory, while her father studied violin with Charles de Bériot and Henri Vieuxtemps, who were also frequent guests at the family’s concerts. Her mother studied piano with Clara Schumann, while Franz Liszt reputedly gave his first public performance in their home and premiered some of his works there. Greffulhe played the piano well, although as an aristocratic woman she was not allowed to perform publicly. Instead, Greffulhe’s family—like many other upper class families—pushed her to pursue musical education as a way to woo potential husbands. By the age of twenty-one, familial expectations pushed her into a marriage with Comte Henri Greffulhe, a descendent from a successful family of Belgian bankers. After their marriage on 28 September 1881, they settled in Paris and the Comtesse began to ascend into society life.

Greffulhe’s marriage to Henri was more a marriage of convenience than a happy union. As a member of a noble Belgian family, the Comtesse had the aristocratic pedigree that Henri and his family sought to accompany their vast fortunes. When they were married, Greffulhe’s dowry contributed around 5000 francs per year to their income, while Henri’s income averaged

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4 Ibid.
about 400,000 francs per year. Although her dowry did not contribute greatly to the Greffulhe family’s already vast fortune, her background nevertheless added a fashionable French sensibility to the Greffulhe family reputation. Her controlling husband and mother-in-law tried to groom her “…to represent their social ambitions,” as Jann Pasler describes:

Henry and his mother wanted her to appear perfect, to please everyone—Henry consulted with all his relatives for suggestions on her education. With this in mind, they employed four dressmakers and two designers. If it weren’t for her beauty, her clothes alone would have been enough to attract attention and commentary at the Opéra, the Société des Concerts, and the Concerts Colonne, where they paraded her in public.

Pasler describes Henri as using the Comtesse’s beauty and education for his social gain. Soon her name began to appear in many social columns and newspapers (Figure 1.1). After giving birth to her daughter Elaine in 1882, the Greffulhes began to subsidize concerts within their home, like many other aristocratic families. During the first few years of her marriage, these events served as intimate gatherings. Musicians like Jean-Baptiste Faure and Eugène Sauzay were hired to perform works by Beethoven, Chopin, Haydn, Rossini, and Robert Schumann, while the family also performed in some concerts—Greffulhe played the piano while Henri sang. By 1886, their gatherings became more renowned amongst Parisian circles, and Greffulhe began to present new music by Camille Saint-Saëns, Hector Berlioz, Charles Gounod, and Richard Wagner (his music was rarely heard in France during this time). While Greffulhe’s audiences grew, and the content of her concert programming became more liberal, her marriage began to dissolve. Finally, when Henri no longer attended his wife’s concerts, she began to put together programs that were even more daring and innovative.

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6 Pasler, “Countess Greffulhe as Entrepreneur,” 293.
The Comtesse Greffulhe was renowned for her beauty, in particular, her dark eyes. Philip de László (1869-1937), Comtesse Henri Greffulhe née Élisabeth de Caraman-Chimay, 1909, oil on canvas, 105 cm x 74 cm, Private Collection, The Catalogue Raisonné of Works by Philip De László.
Greffulhe’s independence from her husband and his controlling family began to manifest itself within her private salon, and ultimately sparked her interest in pursuing more musical opportunities in the public sphere, for the purpose of expanding her musical influence. By 1888, Greffulhe’s salon was welcoming more attendees, including her notorious cousin, the writer Robert Montesquiou, as Pasler describes:

Perhaps seeking to increase her sphere of influence and inspired by her own father, the diplomat, she began to invite to her receptions not only the literary friends of her cousin Robert de Montesquiou but also politicians ranging far beyond those of her mother-in-law’s political orientation. Her salon quickly became known as ‘mixed,’ which, for her, meant that it had interesting people, including those who could contribute to her emerging power outside the home.7

Greffulhe’s opposition to the strict social code determined by her mother-in-law came out after her father-in-law’s death in 1888, when she and Henri inherited his father’s fortune and title. Their new financial position allowed Greffulhe to become even more liberal and relaxed within her salon. Around this same time, Greffulhe encouraged her husband to go into politics, and she aided his pursuits, particularly with the publicity of his campaign. Through Henri and her association with powerful political figures and continued engagement with Parisian aristocrats, Greffulhe’s celebrity status began to skyrocket even more. Her new connections and skills in publicity inspired her to pursue professional ventures outside the limits of her so-called feminine reach. Greffulhe founded and became president of the Société des Grandes Auditions Musicales de France in 1890 through, as James Ross describes, her “…social position at the centre of so many artistic and political circles…”8 This new musical society formed after a hopeful collaboration with the Société Nationale and the Société Philanthropique failed. The Société des Grandes Auditions thus combined Greffulhe’s passion for music with her growing independence.

7 Ibid., 300.
Greffulhe intended the Société to present new musical works by foreign composers, some of which were never performed in France, alongside older and new music by French composers. Her work with the Société also inspired Greffulhe to pursue more avant-garde musical avenues:

In recent years, Élisabeth Greffulhe had spread her wings, artistically speaking, using her high position in society to promote modern music and musical artists. Under her directorship, the Société des Grandes Auditions had sponsored the Paris debuts of pianist Arthur Rubinstein and conductor-pianist Alfred Cortot and the presentations of two rarely performed operas, Berlioz’s epic Les Troyens and Boito’s Mefistofele.9

The Société funded these grand concerts through memberships and donations, where certain amounts of money bought certain privileges, much like contemporary symphony subscriptions. The Princesse de Polignac gave 10,000 francs along with Greffulhe for the first season, the largest contributions to the Société, while the rest of the membership fees ranged down to 25 francs for the lowest level of membership; remaining seats were sold for profit.10 Greffulhe’s work with the Société taught her how to use her popularity to solicit money and donations in the aristocratic world. She also focused her attention on overseeing all aspects of the musical production. Pasler describes the detailed planning that went into the premiere concert of Greffulhe’s Société:

After choosing the first work to be produced, [Hector] Berlioz’s two-act opera comique Béatrice et Bénédict, a French premier, she initiated a collaboration with one of the most prestigious conductors in Paris, Charles Lamoureux…By 23 April, she and Lamoureux had decided on a program that would begin with an orchestral work by Berlioz, followed by a short poem, “A Berlioz,” commissioned for the occasion, which would explain in verse what the society was all about. The next day she was advised on how much to charge for the tickets and what the projected revenue would be. Lamoureux, too, wrote asking for her approval in the choice of soloists and their fees.11

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10 Pasler, “Countess Greffulhe as Entrepreneur,” 304.
11 Ibid., 304-5.
Greffulhe maintained complete control over all monetary and production aspects of the Société, managing the programming, pricing, and profits of her concerts. Her business acumen and command in the realm of the salon contributed to her success as entrepreneur; scholars Emily Bilski and Emily Braun remark, “Despite the supposed neutrality of the domestic realm, pure of marketplace motive and profit, the salon took on financial and managerial roles in the business of culture and ideas.” Greffulhe’s main philanthropic motivation in creating this musical society was to spread awareness to Parisian audiences of older, forgotten musical works and to emerging new musical talent. More personal motivations were sparked by her desire for independence from her husband’s power-hungry and micromanaging family. Greffulhe used her experiences with navigating and soliciting the members of Parisian society to help aid new talent, including Diaghilev, as he began his Parisian career.

The Financial Conundrum

Diaghilev’s debut in Paris set off an obsession amongst Parisian audiences with an exotic Russian aesthetic. Throughout 1904, Diaghilev had travelled around Russia in search of works of art by unknown artists, and in 1905 he had staged a large exhibition of these paintings in St. Petersburg. The exhibition became so popular that Diaghilev was invited to present it across Europe, including in Paris. The Grand Duke Vladimir, one of Diaghilev’s Russian patrons, approached Greffulhe to help fund the show. During his exhibition of Russian art in 1906, Greffulhe met Diaghilev and became interested in his passion for the arts. Diaghilev’s charming personality and intelligence worked to convince Greffulhe of his potential as a director.

Greffulhe began to invest both financially and aesthetically in facilitating Diaghilev’s emerging vision.

Greffulhe enlisted the help of Astruc, an important Parisian financier, through her work with Diaghilev. She had developed a strong relationship with Astruc on their previous Société collaborations. Kahan describes the partnership, “In recent years, Élisabeth Greffulhe had spread her wings, artistically speaking, using her high position in society to promote modern music and musical artists…Greffulhe’s silent partner in these enterprises was Gabriel Astruc, who, since 1904, had administered the practical and financial details of the performances through his production company.”

Greffulhe utilized Astruc’s moneymaking talents for her new and avant-garde productions for the Société giving her more time to devote to the programming of the concerts. Astruc, on the other hand, also used Greffulhe for her aristocratic title and connections. As Garafola writes, “No matter how wealthy and cultivated, however, Jews lacked the prestige to guarantee full-blown social success. For this, Astruc enlisted Comtesse Greffulhe, that blueblood of bluebloods…”

Together, Astruc managed to establish his own publishing house in 1904, called la Société Musicale G. Astruc & Cie, and began to represent various musical groups and persons, including the Société des Grandes Auditions. In the spring of 1906, Greffulhe introduced Diaghilev and Astruc, and the beginning of their financial partnership was born.

Greffulhe chaired the patronage committees of Diaghilev’s 1906-1910 seasons, and in so doing, brought together other wealthy aristocrats to support Diaghilev’s saisons russes into an organized group. The popularity of his Russian art exhibition had incited interest in Russian style and aesthetics from Parisian audiences. The new and jarring nature of these Russian

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exports thrilled Paris and inspired aristocrats like Greffulhe to support and fund new projects. Diaghilev thrived in the welcoming arms of Paris, and he convinced many of Russia’s great dancers, musicians, artists, and choreographers to immigrate there. By this time, the repressive Russian regime had begun to cut funding for the arts, including the Russian Ballet, while also restricting the types of choreography and music that could be performed. In particular, emerging choreographers and composers had trouble finding venues to perform their works, and most, including Diaghilev, sought patronage in the stable political and cultural societies of Western Europe. Through his partnership with Greffulhe, Diaghilev began to understand how to navigate Parisian salons of high society; Sarah Sonner writes, “In contrast to Imperial patronage of the theatre in Russia, no single entity exclusively underwrote the Ballets Russes. For Diaghilev’s ventures, this meant shifting from state support to a committee of individuals, gathered and organized by the impresario, and modernizing the practical means of cultural production.”

Greffulhe’s social and political connections that had aided her work with the Société helped underwrite Diaghilev’s Russian productions. Along with her financial support, the popularity of the Russian arts helped launch his company, the Ballets Russes.

By the time of the Ballets Russes’s inaugural season in 1909, Diaghilev had developed plans to establish his status in Parisian society. This decision to present Russian operas and ballets allowed him to create an entirely new experience for Parisian audiences. Ballet had fallen out of public favor in Paris by the early twentieth century, while in Russia the genre had flourished. The Russian ballet had the strong financial backing of the Czarist government during the nineteenth century. Ballet academies prospered, including the prestigious Imperial School of Ballet in St. Petersburg, and many dancers across Europe traveled to Russia to classically train

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with some of the greatest dancers and teachers. Russian dancers prided themselves on their technical and conservative training, always striving for perfection. The Mariinsky ballet troupe, which Diaghilev worked with in his early career, produced lavish productions of established classics like Tchaikovsky’s The Sleeping Princess, Swan Lake and The Nutcracker. As the political situation in Russia grew unstable, the Russian ballet received less funding and creative attention.

The repressive and bankrupt Russian regime pushed some of the greatest Russian ballet stars to Paris and to Diaghilev’s productions. This included the prima ballerinas Anna Pavlova and Tamara Karsavina, choreographers Mikhail Fokine and Vaslav Nijinsky, and great artists and composers like Léon Bakst and Igor Stravinsky. In Paris, Diaghilev began to capitalize on this influx of Russian artistic émigrés and the variety of talent they brought to the genre of ballet: “The ballet stage would provide a venue for a synthesis of arts – what Wagner had intended to achieve through opera. In other words, Diaghilev was creating the formula for a new kind of ballet, one which would become universal much later, in the mid-twentieth century.” In 1908, Diaghilev gave the first performance outside of Russia of Modest Mussorgsky’s Boris Godunov to great acclaim. The next year, Diaghilev’s first full saison russe programmed a mix of operas and ballets, which included Sergei Prokofiev’s Ivan the Terrible, Mikhail Glinka’s Ruslan and Ludmilla, Nikolai Tcherepnin’s Le Pavillon d’Armide, and excerpts from Alexander Borodin’s Prince Igor. Diaghilev indulged Parisian audiences in the lavish and nationalistic opera productions; as musicologist Elaine Brody explains, “And finally, with every artifice he could muster, and fortified with funds from friends and patrons—throughout his career he was lavish

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17 Personal communication with Stanley J. Rabinowitz, March 6, 2014.
18 Ibid.
with other people’s money—he landed in the French capital with a troupe of dancers, scenic
designers, choreographers, musicians, and artists who would change the course of dance in
Western Europe.” Diaghilev had at his disposal some of the greatest artistic minds of the
century, along with the pocketbooks of half the aristocratic elite of Paris, thanks to Greffulhe and
Astruc.

Throughout Diaghilev’s creative awakening during 1908-1909, Greffulhe maintained her
ability to solicit financial contributions while becoming increasingly involved with the musical
direction of the *saisons russes*. Greffulhe assembled the patronage committee for the 1906-1907
“Russian Historical Concerts,” which premiered works by Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov,
Rachmaninoff, and Scriabin for great society figures, including the prominent salon leader, the
Princesse de Polignac. The music highlighted in these concerts was conceived on a similarly
grand scale including monumental works by Richard Wagner, which Greffulhe’s Société had
premiered in the 1890s. Greffulhe’s considerable financial role within Diaghilev’s *saisons
russes* granted her substantial artistic influence within Diaghilev’s circle. Greffulhe first became
interested in Diaghilev’s work due to its exotic, romanticizing, and grandiose nature. Within her
salon, Greffulhe probably acted as a catalyst for brainstorming sessions and debates with
Diaghilev about his productions. The immense amount of financial support Greffulhe attained
from other members of high society show how much she championed Diaghilev’s ideas. Her
musical and artistic knowledge became an asset for Diaghilev as she helped to guide his
“Russian Historical Concerts,” and when he was ready to venture into the genres of opera and
ballet.

When Greffulhe began to rally patrons for the 1908 premiere of *Boris Godunov*, she
capitalized on her aristocratic connections. Greffulhe’s significant clout in fashionable circles

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and Astruc’s established business attracted a significant number of patrons to *Boris Godunov*.

Kahan describes Greffulhe’s tactics for seeking financial support:

> Much of the monumental work of securing funding was carried out in the musical salons themselves. Greffulhe played on her “snob appeal” to promote the Russian enterprises, while Astruc, who had his own influential contacts among the artistically inclined aristocracy, as well as the wealthy bourgeoisie, brought all of his talents to bear in convincing people to support the projects. For a full year, society luminaries, such as the Napoleonic Princesse Murat and the Grand-Duke Paul, hosted gala soirees featuring full acts of *Boris Godunov* and other Russian operatic music.\(^\text{21}\)

Greffulhe gathered together a patronage committee which was comprised of both French and Russian aristocrats, including Greffulhe herself and the Princesse de Polignac, who later went on to contribute generously to Stravinsky’s work with the Ballets Russes. On 19 May 1908, *Boris Godunov* premiered to Parisian audiences to great acclaim by music critics and the general audiences alike. Kahan explains its immense popularity, “The audience—high Tsarist officials, the literary intelligentsia, and Paris’s throngs of opera-lovers—returned again and again not only to hear Musorgsky’s music sung by the stars of the Russian operatic roster, but to feast on the visually lavish sets and costumes created by Diaghilev’s old friends from The World of Art.”\(^\text{22}\) Paris had not experienced such a rich, detailed, and all-encompassing grand production in recent years. Diaghilev created a fantastical world in *Boris Godunov* that he continually repeated throughout the 1909 season as well. Greffulhe easily found patrons to support these romanticized and imaginative productions in Russian and French aristocrats. Yet, this type of financial support proved to blight Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes’s finances over time, eventually causing tension between the impresario and Astruc.

\(^\text{22}\) Ibid., 153.
for his services. Beginning in 1908, Diaghilev worked exclusively with *G. Astruc & Cie* for use of the Théâtre du Châtelet. Diaghilev often bargained with Astruc to lower his prices, asking in one letter to bring down the price of using the Théâtre du Châtelet to no more than 40-45 million francs per month, since extensive renovation work had to be done on the theater.\(^\text{23}\) After these extensive financial negotiations, Diaghilev signed a contract in 1908 to solely work with *G. Astruc & Cie*, putting them in charge of Diaghilev’s administrative representation, including publicity and programs (Figure 1.2).\(^\text{24}\) Astruc charged Diaghilev for each production, resulting in massive bills that Diaghilev could very seldom pay. One such bill for Diaghilev’s inaugural 1909 Ballets Russes season outlined the following charges:

- 32,000 francs for choirs
- 21,000 francs for ballet corps
- 26,000 francs for orchestra
- 8 operas at 10,000 francs each = 80,000 francs
- 6 ballets at 5,000 francs each = 45,000 francs

Total owed = 204,000 francs.\(^\text{25}\)

Letters from Diaghilev pleading with Astruc to grant him extensions dominate their correspondence. Diaghilev argued that he was at a loss for money since his troupe had not been established into the Parisian art world. He relied heavily upon many patrons for their contributions, which often came at unexpected times, at the whim of the individual. This precarious financial situation continued to plague Diaghilev throughout his life, particularly during and directly after the crippling effects of World War I on Parisian and Russian aristocratic fortunes. The extent of Astruc’s financial losses due to Diaghilev is unclear, but their collaboration ended in 1913 when the season ended in financial ruin. Astruc resigned as the Director of the Théâtre du Châtelet, cutting off his partnership with Diaghilev.


\(^\text{24}\) Contract from 1908. Ibid.

\(^\text{25}\) Bill to Diaghilev from the *Société Musicale G. Astruc & Cie* dated 27 May 1909. Ibid.
Figure 1.2 One of the first advertising posters for the Ballets Russes’s 1909 season with an image of Anna Pavlova by Valentin Serov. The name of G. Astruc & Cie is visible in the bottom left corner. Color lithograph on paper, 231 cm x 177.7 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.
Greffulhe began to retreat from public life around this time, and withdrew her patronage of Diaghilev as well. By 1913, Greffulhe was 43 years old, and a well-established society hostess, patron, and advisor to many. While very active in promoting new works of music from 1890-1910 with her Société des Grandes Auditions, Greffulhe began to withdraw from this never-ending lifestyle of constant political schmoozing and parties: “The career of the successful salon leader was an exacting one for even the cleverest of women. She must have grace, sensitivity, a talent for organization and the energy of a field marshal. When a woman embarked on the career of a salon leader, she had time for little else.”

Greffulhe’s role in Diaghilev’s circle required an immeasurable amount of work and dedication. With the onset of World War I in 1914, Greffulhe turned her efforts towards other philanthropic issues, finally departing from the Ballets Russes circle, but not before making her mark on the troupe.

Alongside her considerable financial contributions and publicity efforts, Greffulhe acted as a creative advisor for Diaghilev. Her heavy involvement with the programming of her own salon and Société concerts show her considerable expertise and experience with curating content for large concerts. Greffulhe’s financial position within the Ballets Russes circle gave her an invitation to actively participate and collaborate with Diaghilev on productions. Greffulhe counseled Diaghilev in his financial matters, but she also probably acted as a sounding board with regards to artistic and musical decisions. Unfortunately, informal conversations in Greffulhe’s salon between her and Diaghilev have not been written down or recorded, but one might speculate that these intellectual discussions were taking place, spearheaded by Greffulhe. Given the considerable financial power Greffulhe held over Diaghilev, it is likely that she was an

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active participant in conversations and dialogues concerning artistic and musical aspects of productions.

**Conclusion**

The Comtesse Greffulhe’s contributions to the Ballets Russes facilitated longstanding effects on the troupe. The financial foundations laid by Greffulhe provided Diaghilev with the connections and resources to continue funding the Ballets Russes. Her collaborations with Astruc brought Diaghilev prominent publicity and favorable audiences, as it had previously for Greffulhe’s *Société des Grandes Auditions*. Yet, with the onset of World War I, the structure of Parisian society began to overturn, as old, established, and wealthy French and Russian aristocrats lost their fortunes and positions in society. James Ross describes the effects of the failing salon institution due to “…the lack of a new generation of salonnières with both the inclination and the means to renew the institution…” 27 After the war, Diaghilev relied heavily on the advice and experience given to him by the Comtesse Greffulhe as he pondered the unstable financial future of the Ballets Russes.

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Diaghilev sought much support from the Parisian aristocracy, and he found a keen supporter in Winnaretta Singer who after marriage became known as the Princesse de Polignac. As with the Comtesse Greffulhe, her high position in Paris granted Diaghilev access to the upper echelons of society where he sought to premiere his works in her famous salon amidst the Parisian elite. Diaghilev was a favored recipient of Polignac’s generosity; her large fortune enabled commissions of works from leading composers of the day, including Gabriel Fauré, Manuel de Falla, Erik Satie, Francis Poulenc, and Igor Stravinsky. Polignac’s salon remained one of the few that held unwavering influence amongst the twentieth-century artistic elite, and kept composers dependent on salon culture at a time when the aristocratic class was slowly disappearing. Polignac’s musical commissions of Stravinsky’s work defined her association with Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes. Her salon supported the Ballets Russes during an unstable moment in their history by commissioning Stravinsky to write the chamber opera-ballet Renard, and by providing financial support for the premiere of his ballet, Les Noces. The Princesse de Polignac also used her aristocratic connections to give the Ballets Russes a permanent home base in Monte Carlo. Her professional relationships with Diaghilev and Stravinsky defined her financial and artistic contributions to the troupe. Moreover, her musical commissions of Stravinsky and strong connections to Monte Carlo brought much needed support for the Ballets Russes during the uncertain years between 1916-1922. Polignac aided this company’s transition from a highly romanticized Russian aesthetic—manufactured for Parisian high society—to a collaborative, neo-classical French and Russian avant-garde that sought to keep the Ballets Russes at the forefront of artistic innovation after the war.
The Princesse de Polignac

The Princesse de Polignac was born Winnaretta Singer on 8 January 1865 in Yonkers, New York, to Isabella Boyer and Isaac Singer, the inventor of the Singer Sewing Machine. She received a large inheritance from her father’s vast fortune after he passed away in 1875 and when she was only ten years old. Her portion of the estate was worth $900,000, and this sum only increased over time.¹ After her father’s death, her mother Isabella moved the family to Paris in 1878, and the family joined the ranks of the Parisian elite as facilitated by her mother’s French background, not to mention her numerous love affairs. While Polignac had a difficult relationship with her mother, her knowledge and passion for music can be attributed to her mother’s own musical salon, where Polignac was introduced to chamber works by Beethoven, Mozart, and Schubert.² As Polignac writes in her memoirs, “The principal and largest room—my mother’s ‘Grand Salon’—soon became a centre for musical and artistic gatherings, and I can never forget that in it I first responded to great classical music.”³ Her mother, however, discouraged Polignac’s pursuit of musical studies. Polignac was a talented painter, and continued to paint throughout her life. Because she had been labeled the “artistic” child, Polignac was not allowed to pursue more advanced musical studies: “As was usual in large families, the parents decided very early which child should become a musician, a painter, an architect, or a diplomat; and it was decided that I was not to study music but to learn painting at an atelier in the Rue de Bruxelles, conducted by a Monsieur Félix Barrias.”⁴ Her mother’s

3 Princesse Edmond de Polignac, “Memoirs of the Late Princesse Edmond de Polignac” in *Horizon* (1945), 111.
4 Ibid., 111-2.
controlling grip continued to strain their relationship, and in 1887 Polignac married, finally breaking away from her mother’s suffocating command.

For women like Polignac, the only possible release from an overbearing family was marriage. On 28 July 1887, she married the Prince de Scey-Montbéliard. The marriage provided Polignac with even greater access to the upper echelons of society, whose aristocratic salons she attended before finally establishing her own. She devoted herself to her salon and carved out a role for herself as a patron of the arts. While her salon grew, her marriage to the Prince deteriorated. The differing sexual preferences of the couple were never resolved. Polignac had realized long ago she was a lesbian, while her husband had gone into the marriage expecting a heterosexual relationship with his wife. Even as the marriage fell apart, Polignac continued to present musical works in her salon. In 1891, Gabriel Fauré provided Polignac with one of the earliest works dedicated to her, his *Cinq mélodies ‘de Venise’*. When her marriage was finally annulled in 1892, Polignac had already established herself as a *saloniste* within the Parisian salon culture, and this prestige would only increase throughout the next few years.

In 1893, Polignac married Prince Edmond de Polignac. The two had been introduced a few years earlier through the Comtesse Greffulhe and Greffulhe’s cousin, Robert de Montesquiou, who were good friends of both Edmond and the Princesse de Polignac. Born in 1834 to a noble but bankrupt French family, Prince Edmond was seen as an outsider in Parisian society and struggled with poor finances throughout his life. He was a homosexual, who had had a relationship with Montesquiou himself. Greffulhe and Montesquiou decided that what Prince Edmond needed was a rich wife to soothe his financial troubles, while enabling him to pursue his hobby as an amateur composer. His interest in octatonic scales was featured prominently in his compositions, and this specific technique would prompt the Princesse de Polignac to notice the
work of Stravinsky later. When Greffulhe and the Princesse de Polignac were introduced to one another, the latter’s fortune and her sexual reputation preceded her, prompting Greffulhe to approach Polignac with a proposition. Her impending annulment with the Prince de Scey-Montbéliard would strip her of her aristocratic title, and her salon would fall back into the sphere of the bourgeois, rather than remain in the rankings of aristocrats. Edmond held a title, had a compatible sexual preference to Polignac’s; furthermore, he loved music, as did she. Their marriage thus based itself on a partnership built upon their mutual affection for music and art.

Together, they dominated Parisian musical circles, and their salon gained prominence through their collaborative efforts. The Polignacs turned their salon into a powerful social center for musicians, artists, writers, aristocrats, and the likes. The happy marriage ended, however, in 1901, with Edmond’s death. Afterwards, Polignac spent the rest of her life devoted to her salon, commissioning new and avant-garde compositions, and through these efforts, to celebrating Edmond’s memory. Throughout her life, her salon would continue to dominate as the premier gem of Paris, continuing the long held tradition in France of a vibrant salon culture.

_The French Salon_

The rich history of French salons began in the seventeenth century and continued through the middle of the twentieth century. This cultural institution sustained its position for over 400 years with women at its head. Elaine Leung-Wolf describes the influence and effects of salons on the history of musical culture: “The history of the French salon has indeed been directly involved with the formation and development of some of the most significant aspects of French culture, and in turn French culture has visibly exerted its influence upon many other cultures of...
The salon was the entryway into the realms of high society, where the aristocracy held the key to musical success given their social influence and significant financial contributions to the arts. French aristocratic women dominated the sphere of the salon, as it was one of the few spaces in which women could express their artistic views within a patriarchal society. The private atmosphere of the salon allowed women to voice their opinions freely, even if they were at odds with those of the male-dominated public sphere. Composers, artists, and intellectuals responded equally to the masculine space of the public concert hall and the feminine domestic sphere. Within the salon, women’s tastes and aesthetic viewpoints contributed greatly to the formation of the cultural legacy of France. Leung-Wolf describes the need to recognize their importance on history:

> The institution of the salon provided one of the most important venues for private patronage of literature, art, and music. Women played crucial roles in Parisian musical life by using salons as forums for musical activities. They supported, promoted, and encouraged composers and championed their works.⁶

> Salons were places where women could engage with composers, artists, and productions. Women could express their opinions on contemporary subjects in a socially appropriate and domestic setting while impacting musical life in the public sphere. As James Ross writes, the salon “…was an institution that reflected yet also challenged prevailing gender divisions. Men and women could perform as equals in the salon as they could not in the male-run public domain.”⁷ The aristocracy of France abided by strong societal rules, but the privacy of the salon allowed women to showcase their intellect, musical performing capabilities, and artistic influence without caution or restraint. The salon environment provided an idyllic environment

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⁶ Ibid., 3.
where experimentation, gender equality, and new avant-garde ideas flourished. A historically defined feminine space, the salon became the breeding ground for collaborations between musicians, artists, writers, and leading figures in avant-garde circles.

At the fin de siècle, Parisian salons fostered a great deal of musical and artistic experimentation. The salon continued to act as the cultural center of Parisian high society, and the women who led them supported many new avant-garde movements. As Ross writes, “These salons connected musicians with the worlds of art and literature, publishing, politics and patronage, and provided an informed and sympathetic ambience for new works.”

Elite salon culture provided many benefits to emerging composers and artists. This included providing venues for presenting new works, and creating further connections to other major cultural figures and powerful salonistes who could grant financial support. Thus Paris provided the perfect cultural center for Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes to flourish. As Leung-Wolf describes,

From approximately 1870 to 1925 Paris became the musical capital of the world. The intense interrelationship between artists, writers, musicians, and poets created an atmosphere of fertile productivity and inspiration, and some of the century's most significant and brilliant works of art, poetry, and music were created during these stimulated years. The salon played a major role in the musical and artistic life of society by providing not only much-needed financial and moral support to its creative elite (which the conservative government did not generally support), but also by providing the perfect environment in which to meet the cream of society socially, politically, and artistically.

With the salon’s role as the central hub of artistic production, women became the main protagonists in the story of musical patronage.

Salon culture dominated Paris until World War I, when the fragile post-war economy financially destroyed the aristocracy’s vast fortunes and social calendars, broke down many class barriers, and resulted in the glamorous bohemian lifestyle of the 1920s. Still, Polignac’s salon

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8 Ibid., 91.
headed the list of these exclusive gatherings until her death and retained its status as the place where many premieres of the newest and most groundbreaking music of the twentieth century took place.

*The Politics of Paris*

For Diaghilev, Stravinsky, and other composers and artists based in Paris, the culture of the salon was more of a political game than a simple social gathering. The political opinions of salon leaders defined salon attendance, particularly at the turn of the century when the Dreyfus Affair was at its peak.\(^\text{10}\) The music historian Jane Fulcher writes, “…the ‘elegant world’ of the Parisian salons could not avoid awareness of the debates in the press, the meanings it propagated, or the ‘labels’ it assigned French composers…Hence there was a simultaneously social, political, and cultural logic to the musical taste of important patrons who held salons in Paris.”\(^\text{11}\)

Composers and artists seeking support within the sphere of salons had to understand and navigate the politics of salon culture in order to gain backing from the *salonistes*. With their support, composers began to be grouped together by their patrons’ political opinions, dividing Paris between the liberal and conservative salons.

Sergei Diaghilev aligned himself with the more left-leaning liberal salons, such as that of the Princesse de Polignac. Diaghilev and Polignac met in 1906 at the home of a mutual friend of

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10 In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus was convicted of treason for having communicated French military information to Germany. Two years after his conviction, new evidence came to light that identified Major Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy as the informant. Higher-level government officials hid this evidence, acquitted Esterhazy, and forged documents that blamed Dreyfus for more criminal charges. His Jewish heritage made it easy for him to be used as a scapegoat, as anti-Semitic opinions were rampant in Paris. Until he was finally exonerated in 1906, Parisian society divided itself between the Dreyfusards and the anti-Dreyfusards, and social circles divided themselves between these two groups. Salon leaders who linked themselves with one side often detached themselves from leaders of the opposing sides. There are many records of political debates and fights that broke out over the dinner table if the two opposing sides mixed. For further reading see Jane F. Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics & Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

theirs, the Grand-Duke Paul of Russia, who was the brother of Alexander III and uncle to Tsar Nicolas. Sylvia Kahan dates their first meeting to around late November or early December of 1906, when “…the Princesse de Polignac too had fallen under the spell of the fascinating man [Diaghilev]…” Polignac gained keen interest in Diaghilev’s new, fast-growing ideas. She was probably encouraged by her friend the Comtesse Greffulhe, who was not only behind most of the funding of Diaghilev’s first few saisons russes, but also keen to have the Princesse become more involved with the impresario. Diaghilev sought Polignac’s patronage due to her salon’s high prestige in Parisian society, although it is also likely that his unconcealed homosexuality seemed to ostracize him—or make entry difficult—into other salons. Diaghilev thus sought outliers of society like the similarly homosexual Princesse de Polignac and the outspoken Comtesse Greffulhe who shared his political and musical tastes.

Polignac’s patronage of Diaghilev probably began in the spring of 1908 when his production of Mussorgsky’s Boris Godunov became the focus of discussion amongst musical circles in Paris. Kahan writes, “Winnaretta joined the patronage committee assembled by Greffulhe, a group that united the Russian and French aristocratic community with a broad range of important composers. When Boris opened on 19 May 1908, Winnaretta’s name appeared prominently in the printed program’s list of patrons, just under that of the name of the Comtesse Greffulhe; it is reasonable to assume that her financial contribution was considerable.”

Polignac’s desire to be at the forefront of the musical avant-garde motivated her to show financial interest in Diaghilev’s works. The popularity of the exotic Russian aesthetic increased her interest in the project, as most of Parisian society was becoming greatly enamored of this primitive art, music, and dance. Polignac’s interest in the Ballets Russes, however, stayed

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12 Kahan, Music’s Modern Muse, 150.
13 Ibid., 152-3.
minimal throughout the first few *saisons russes*. Her involvement in the Ballets Russes world was fueled mainly by Diaghilev’s desire to keep her interested in his projects, as Polignac’s opinions held much musical sway in Paris at the time. Polignac’s early financial contributions to the first few Saisons Russes were given partly due to her friendship with Greffulhe. She continued to hold interest in Diaghilev’s projects, but was not considered a member of the Ballets Russes circle. It wasn’t until Diaghilev brought Polignac into contact with the work of his new composer, Igor Stravinsky, that she became actively involved with the Ballets Russes.

It was at this point that Polignac became one of Diaghilev’s main supporters and financial contributors, although some Ballets Russes scholars claim her patronage began earlier.14 Sylvia Kahan, discusses the discrepancy:

Subsequent chroniclers of the era have portrayed Winnaretta as one of Diaghilev’s main patrons and most dependable supporters. The viewpoint has remained in force right up to the present day in the most current scholarship of the Ballets Russes. Curiously, however, there is no documentary evidence whatsoever that provides a clear picture of Winnaretta’s patronage of the Ballets Russes, or the extent of her participation. This is more than a little curious, given her general interest in trendsetting artistic enterprises, and the frequent – indeed persistent – linking of her name with Diaghilev.15

Polignac’s first substantial introduction to Stravinsky’s music was the premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps* in 1913, and it was this moment that sparked her interest in Stravinsky’s music, and eventually, later productions of Ballets Russes.

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Stravinsky and Le Sacre du Printemps

Igor Stravinsky began his career in Paris in the world of salons and alongside the rising status of the Ballets Russes. He was introduced into the Ballets Russes circle in February 1909 when Diaghilev heard the young composer’s *Scherzo fantastique* and *Feu d’artifice* in Saint Petersburg. Soon after, he persuaded the young Stravinsky to compose ballets for his troupe in Paris. This collaboration produced the three groundbreaking works of *Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *Le Sacre du Printemps*, bringing Stravinsky into contact with Parisian high society and salon culture.

On 29 May 1913, Stravinsky, Diaghilev, and the dance choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky, made history with the infamous premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps*. The riot that ensued at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées elicited many differing opinions on the work, both positive and negative, but the Ballets Russes held the satisfaction of being the talk of the town. All members of Parisian musical circle attended the premiere that night, including the Comtesse Greffulhe, Misia Sert, Coco Chanel, and Polignac. Ballets Russes historian Lynn Garafola describes the scene experienced by many on opening night: “One smart lady slapped a hissing neighbor; another called Ravel ‘a dirty Jew’; whistles hissed; a composer yelled for the ‘sluts’ of the sixteenth arrondissement – where many of Diaghilev’s boxholders lived – to ‘shut up.’ Musically and choreographically, Sacre bid adieu to the Belle Époque. Few among the era’s fashionable public were ready to do the same.”

While some audience members were not ready for the harsh, primitive sound of *Sacre*, Stravinsky’s experimental music attracted the attention of Polignac, who had, by 1913, already established herself as one of the strongest supporters of new music and young composers. As historian Ruth Brandon writes, “…it seems clear that from

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the time of Edmond’s death, Winnaretta drew the greater part of her satisfaction in life from the discovery and support of new talent, especially in the musical world.” Stravinsky’s emerging style captured the attention of Polignac, who was intrigued by the composer’s use of the octatonic scale, an innovation her husband Edmond had also experimented with in his compositions, and one that Stravinsky had presumably learned from his teacher, Rimsky-Korsakov.

While Polignac continued to work on plans for her salon seasons during World War I, she expected the music of Igor Stravinsky to figure prominently. The problem was that Diaghilev also expected the same for his leading composer. Predictably, Polignac’s and Diaghilev’s agendas collided in 1915 when Stravinsky began work on a commission from Polignac entitled Renard that spearheaded the transition of Stravinsky and the Ballets Russes towards a new musical style.

**Transitional Times**

In 1915, Polignac commissioned Stravinsky to write Renard for her salon’s 1916 season (Figure 2.1). This short work marks the beginning of a transitional period for the Ballets Russes during which time Polignac was instrumental. World War I had a strong negative impact on the finances and social stability of the aristocracy. Many of Diaghilev’s pre-war patrons saw themselves losing their fortunes and positions in society, including his Russian supporters. In their place, Diaghilev turned to Americans like Polignac who, as Garafola writes, “…had penetrated the barriers of the French aristocracy, restoring with their millions its threadbare

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Figure 2.1 Stravinsky’s dedication to the Princesse de Polignac in the score of Renard. Copied from Igor Stravinsky, Renard (Miami, FL: Edwin F. Kalmus, 1993).
façade” after the war. Diaghilev did not have the financial means to commission new works by composers without substantial support from patrons. In the seasons after World War I, he tried to revive older ballets, but the Parisian public had grown accustomed to the fresh and new productions of the pre-war seasons.

Diaghilev had experience working with the elite, and knew how to work the aristocracy’s social and political game: “Each of these people knew ‘everyone,’ or interlocking segments thereof, and they brought their friends, and their friends brought their friends, to the ballet. Diaghilev petted them, asked their opinions, took them backstage to meet the dancers during intermissions.” Polignac’s salon, in particular, was popular amongst society figures, composers, and artists alike in Parisian society. She created an environment where hopeful composers and artists came to garner interest from the rich aristocracy in their work. With her first collaboration with Stravinsky on Renard, she intentionally aligned herself with the fashionable and exotic aesthetic of the Ballets Russes, providing Diaghilev with an opportunity for the Ballets Russes to gain prominence in post-war aristocratic circles.

Diaghilev’s desire to retain Stravinsky as the Ballets Russes’ primary composer brought him into conflict with Polignac and her plans for Renard. During this post-war period, tension grew between Diaghilev and Polignac as they each sought to employ Stravinsky’s talents for their personal agendas. Diaghilev was known for his jealous nature; Stravinsky recalled, “He was incredibly jealous toward his friends, especially those of whom he was fondest. He would

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18 Garafola, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, 285.
19 Before World War I, productions included Stravinsky’s Firebird, Petrushka, and Le Sacre du Printemps; Claude Debussy’s Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune and Jeux; and Maurice Ravel’s Daphnis et Chloé. After World War I, productions included a mix of older ballets and new ballets like Gioacchino Rossini’s La boutique fantasque orchestrated by Ottorino Respighi, Satie’s Parade, Stravinsky’s Pulcinella, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s The Sleeping Princess and Aurora’s Wedding. These works show the shift in the Ballets Russes aesthetic towards a style called neoclassical by critics of that time. Stravinsky began to move towards a neo-classical aesthetic in Renard, Les Noces, and Oedipus Rex.
never permit them to work for anyone else. If they did he considered it treason.” Polignac’s overwhelming attention to detail and slightly controlling nature, inherited from her mother no doubt, was also well known in Parisian circles. Her tedious work with other composers shows the large musical role Polignac desired to fulfill with her commissions. Ideas for musical content, storyline, and ultimately the performance of Renard were probably discussed in depth with Polignac. Stravinsky would need her approval before pursuing any musical subject, since she held ultimate control over the performance venue, the production budget, and the main source of Stravinsky’s income. The overall idea of Renard as a burlesque suggests that Stravinsky and Polignac had ideas for the Ballets Russes to perform Renard eventually, but the premiere was intended solely for her salon and contractually obligated as such.

Polignac paid Stravinsky 10,000 francs for Renard, and their agreement gave her absolute control over performances of the work for five years after its completion, as was typical with Polignac’s commissions. The work calls for a small chamber orchestra and singers who perform vocal parts not intended for the characters of the production. The story was inspired by a moralizing Russian folk tale about a fox that tries to deceive a cock, a cat, and a ram. The fox captures and almost kills the cock twice, but his friends the cat and the ram save him just in time. The first time the fox gets away, but the second time they kill the fox, and the three friends dance and sing of their victory. Stravinsky intended for the work to be performed as a burlesque that requires more involved, acrobatic choreography danced separately from the vocalists. While

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22 The results of a commission in 1891 of Gabriel Fauré for a large work in collaboration with Paul Verlaine show how controlling Polignac could be in regards to the content of her salon. Polignac paid Fauré 25,000 francs to compose this work, but the increasingly sporadic nature of Verlaine, who was an alcoholic, prevented the production of new poetry. Instead, Fauré found inspiration on a visit with Polignac to Venice, and the work evolved into his Cinq melodies ‘de Venise’, but the process to get there was long and difficult. Polignac only eventually accepted the fact that her wish for a one-act opera would never be fulfilled when Cinq melodies ‘de Venise’ was premiered in 6 January 1892. See Graham Johnson, Gabriel Fauré: the songs and their poets (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009) for more information.
23 Kahan, Music’s Modern Muse, 198.
most of the music was composed during 1916, the premiere of Renard took place in 18 May 1922 at the Théâtre de l’Opéra as a production of the Ballets Russes. The complete work was not performed in Polignac’s salon until 20 May 1929, the same year the Ballets Russes produced their revival production of Renard. Michael de Cossart, a historian of Polignac’s life, wrote, “Although Winnaretta had sections of the music performed in her salon, the work as a whole was unperformable in a domestic situation. Stravinsky clearly seems to have conceived it as a balletic burlesque in the hope that Diaghilev might add it to his repertoire. But, despite his real fondness for Winnaretta, Diaghilev was enraged by what he regarded as an attempt to usurp his role as patron.”

Diaghilev’s issues with Polignac arose from these jealousies, but also originated with Diaghilev’s insecurity about his financial issues. The commission of Renard brought out fury in Diaghilev: “Through her independent projects with Stravinsky—Renard and the Scherzo production—Winnaretta had aroused the wrath of the pathologically jealous Diaghilev, who was still nursing his wounds from the defection of Nijinsky.” Kahan writes that Diaghilev’s jealousy issues originated from the dramatic betrayal of his star choreographer, the dancer, and one-time lover, Vaslav Nijinsky. For a man as intelligent and aware of social politics as Diaghilev, this explanation seems trivial. Polignac’s new collaborations with Stravinsky exacerbated Diaghilev’s complex relationships with his finances. Diaghilev’s unstable finances defined most of the early years of the Ballets Russes. After the war, the Ballets Russes fought to maintain their position as the premier ballet troupe of Paris. Competing ballet troupes like the

26 In 1913, Nijinsky married Ballets Russes dancer Romola de Pulsky during a tour with the dance company in South America. Diaghilev and Nijinsky had been in a sexual relationship since 1909, and this sudden marriage completely destroyed their personal relationship. Diaghilev immediately dismissed Nijinsky from the company when he returned to Europe, and kept his distance from the choreographer for the rest of his life.
Ballets Suédois and Ida Rubinstein’s troupe gained the interest of patrons and new composers alike through their own brand of commercial exoticism. These new groups undermined Diaghilev’s ability to commission new talent in the avant-garde circles of Paris as they also requested new musical works from prominent composers. Diaghilev felt that Polignac’s work with Stravinsky acted as another obstacle in the way of his troupe’s post-war success. Within due time, however, Polignac’s desire for Stravinsky’s success, and ultimately her salon’s success, began to coincide with the agenda of the Ballets Russes.

Polignac to the Rescue

By 1921, the Ballets Russes’s position in Parisian culture remained unstable, and Diaghilev found himself in a compromising situation. Parisian audiences did not receive his staging of Tchaikovsky’s *The Sleeping Princess* well, and he sensed an urgent need to reinvent his troupe’s overall aesthetic. Audiences were not as enthralled by the foreign, exotic flavor of Russian compositions as they had been in 1911 and 1913 with *Petrushka* and *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Instead, Diaghilev was moving “…a long way from the ‘folkloric’ approach associated with the early days of the Ballets Russes and was now taking an ultra-modernist approach.” Diaghilev’s fragile finances, already depleted from World War I, were in a state of rapid decline. World War I had significantly shaken up old Paris, breaking apart aristocratic fortunes while simultaneously allowing more opportunities for growth within the lower and middle classes. Composers, musicians, and businessmen like Diaghilev who had relied so heavily on the generosity of aristocrats and now bankrupt *salonistes* received little from the government: “The artistic policies of the Third Republic were the sorry inheritance of the French

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monarchy’s patronage. The Ministry of Public Instruction and the Fine Arts devoted a very small portion of the national budget to music, most of this being spent in Paris on the Opéra Garnier, the Opéra-Comique and the concert halls. The result was that individual music lovers were essentially obliged to take the initiative.”

Yet, these individuals were few and far between. Aristocrats were scrambling to find enough money to feed and house their families, while the middle classes had neither the time nor finances to commission works on the same scale as salonistes had before the war. Diaghilev found himself in a strange, unstable period, which would only be alleviated by the intervention and support of the Princesse de Polignac.

Polignac’s support during this transitional time gave the Ballets Russes the stability they needed to continue producing groundbreaking productions throughout the 1920s. Stravinsky had been working on the score of Les Noces since 1916, but his constant revisions to the score made the prospect of staging the work for the 1922 season grim. Diaghilev, in desperate need of an already completed but brand-new work, found himself looking back towards Renard, although hesitantly because of his strong objection to the work’s original commissioning. De Cossart explains Diaghilev’s motivations for staging the work: “Still jealous of the ascendancy which Stravinsky’s music enjoyed in Polignac programmes, in time of crisis he did not hesitate to ask her permission to mount the work as a balletic burlesque as originally intended. She gladly gave him the score as well as a large sum of money to enable him to bear the cost of production.”

This support ensured that Parisian audiences stayed interested in their new productions, but the small production of Renard could not change the dire financial situation Diaghilev found himself in by 1921. The prospect of Renard gave Diaghilev time to try to work out his financial

28 Ibid., 355-6.
29 De Cossart, The Food of Love, 143.
difficulties, but by February 1922, Diaghilev had suspended the Ballets Russes due to his bankruptcy.

In May of 1922, the company reformed in Monte Carlo with a six-month residency at the Monte Carlo Opera, partly due to Polignac’s connections with the royal family of Monaco. Polignac’s nephew, Pierre de Polignac, had married Princess Charlotte of Monaco in 1920. Prince Pierre, like his aunt, was interested in contemporary art, music, and dance, and he became an important patron of the arts in Monaco during the 1920s. For Diaghilev, the prospects of the Ballets Russes looked especially bleak given their temporary suspension. In contrast, an invitation to reside in Monte Carlo in 1922 provided a glimmer of hope in the form of financial stability. Polignac’s close relationship with Prince Pierre, and his involvement with establishing the Ballets Russes residency, has prompted scholars like Sylvia Kahan to speculate that Polignac was instrumental in proposing the collaboration. Pierre had visited his aunt during the summer of 1921 at her palace in Venice, where family legend says Polignac bemoaned Diaghilev’s constant financial struggles. Pierre offered to help her create a more stable situation for the troupe.\(^\text{30}\) The extent of her influence in this partnership cannot be confirmed, but we can assume she definitely played an important role in introducing and fostering the partnership between Pierre and Diaghilev.

In their first season as the “Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo,” Polignac’s financial contributions to the production of *Les Noces* allowed the Ballets Russes to produce the ballet after many delays. Stravinsky’s constant revisions to the score, even up until a few weeks before the premiere in 1923, caused difficulties for the choreography. Yet besides this initial struggle, *Les Noces* and the 1923 season completely revitalized the Ballets Russes’s aesthetic style and stabilized their place in the Parisian art world. Scholar Drue Fergison writes that *Les Noces* \(^\text{30}\) Kahan, *Music’s Modern Muse*, 230.
brought together Stravinsky’s older primitive and flamboyantly rich style in the storyline with “…the clean, mechanical precision of the 1920s aesthetic and its fascination with pianolas, radios, phonographs, and other new technologies.”31 Les Noces highlights the Ballets Russes’s transition towards the burgeoning neo-classical style of the 1920s.

The work’s premiere highlighted the changing role of the salon as well. Previously, premieres of Les Noces had been planned for both 1919 and 1922, but the unstable finances of the Ballets Russes caused plans to fall through. Finally, with Stravinsky finishing the score on May 5, the work premiered in Paris on 13 June 1923. Two days before the public premiere of Les Noces, the work was performed in Winnaretta’s salon to an audience of Paris’s social elite, artists, composers, and the Ballets Russes circle. This performance gave Diaghilev the opportunity to showcase the Ballets Russes’s changing musical style for the upper echelons of society in the cultural center of Paris. Fergison writes, “That Diaghilev ‘saved’ Les Noces, Le Sacre du Printemps, and Pulcinella for Paris indicates that he considered the city a venue capable of supporting both the expatriate/Russian and cosmopolitan/avant-garde sides of his repertory, as well as works like Les Noces that straddled the two.”32 Stravinsky’s music combined with the avant-garde choreography of Bronislava Nijinska created a standout production that brought the Ballets Russes back to the forefront of Paris. The long hours spent rehearsing in Monte Carlo with Stravinsky pounding out music on the piano resembled the long hours spent working on Sacre. Moreover, Polignac’s continued involvement fastened her name to a revitalized Ballets Russes.

Monte Carlo allowed Diaghilev and his choreographers, artists, and composers the freedom to incubate more ideas in a financially stable environment. They were able to

32 Ibid., 183.
experiment with new ideas, providing the troupe with the opportunity to reinvent themselves and their artistic image. Monte Carlo relieved Diaghilev of some of his ongoing financial strain, and ensured the troupe’s financial stability for many years. In this open environment, Diaghilev finally pursued his long-lasting love for Russian classical and Romantic music, which had never been well received by Parisian audiences. With Stravinsky leading the neo-classical aesthetic, *Les Noces* defined the Ballets Russes’s post-war style, and by premiering the music in her salon, Polignac aligned herself with Diaghilev, Stravinsky, and the Ballets Russes’s newly emerging musical style.

**Conclusion**

The Princesse de Polignac’s patronage of Stravinsky shaped her involvement in the Ballets Russes, and her work aided the troupe during a period of considerable stylistic and financial worry. Although her interest in Stravinsky originated with the exotic production of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, her involvement with *Renard* and *Les Noces* helped to reestablish the Ballets Russes as the foremost leading ballet troupe of Paris. The Ballets Russes of the 1920s once again defined the musical and artistic styles of the Parisian avant-garde.
Chapter Three: 
Diaghilev’s Social Butterfly

Misia Sert née Godebski arrived in Paris and took the artistic world by storm. Her first marriage to her cousin Thadée Natanson introduced her to some of the great artists of the nineteenth century including Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, and Édouard Vuillard. Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Vuillard captured her beauty in numerous portraits, and her talent as a pianist caught the admiration of composers like Gabriel Fauré, Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Erik Satie. When she was introduced to Diaghilev in 1908, the meeting jumpstarted a partnership that would define both of their careers. Sert’s work with Diaghilev, Ravel, Satie, Stravinsky, and Jean Cocteau established her influential role in Ballets Russes circles. Unlike other patrons such as the Princesse de Polignac, her first objective was to help Diaghilev champion his ideas among collaborators. Misia Sert remained one of the select few who advised Diaghilev throughout the entire twenty-year run of the Ballets Russes. As Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale describe in their biography of Sert, “To know Misia was a card of admission to Diaghilev’s circle, for she was one of the few women whose opinion he valued and whose advice he sought.” Sert’s close personal friendship with Diaghilev gave her the opportunity to advise him and encourage Ballets Russes composers, choreographers, and artists. The scope of Sert’s influence throughout the history of the Ballets Russes can be felt especially in Ravel’s Daphnis et Chloé, and the collaborative production of Satie’s Parade. Sert’s wisdom, intelligence, and societal knowledge of bohemian Paris contributed greatly to Diaghilev’s musical and artistic vision for the Ballets Russes.

1 Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale, Misia: The Life of Misia Sert (New York: Knopf, 1980), 4. I refer to Misia Sert throughout this chapter (and thesis) by her last surname, Sert.
Misia Sert was born Misia Godebski in St. Petersburg on 30 March 1872 to a Polish family of a distinguished artistic background. Her father, Cyprian Godebski, a well-known Polish sculptor, left Sert’s mother, Zofia Servais, while she was pregnant to live with his mistress in St. Petersburg. Her mother died during childbirth, and Sert was sent to Brussels to be raised by her maternal grandparents. Sert’s grandfather, Adrien-François Servais, was a prominent Belgian cellist, and she began her musical education with him. Franz Liszt often visited the household, providing infrequent piano lessons to Sert. She moved back to Paris in 1881 with her father, and attended the Sacré-Coeur convent boarding school. She continued her piano studies in Paris by taking lessons with Gabriel Fauré for six years. When she left her father’s home, after clashing with him and her stepmother, Fauré helped Sert find piano students to help her earn money. By 1893, Sert had separated herself entirely from the oppressive environment of her childhood home, and had sought her familial freedom through marriage.

At age twenty-one, Sert married her cousin Thadée Natanson and found herself immersed further into Parisian society. Natanson was one of the founders of the magazine La revue blanche, which highlighted the work of writers, artists, and musicians such as Marcel Proust, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, and Claude Debussy. Sert’s social circle grew immensely through her marriage to Natanson, and she involved herself with many of La revue blanche’s artists. She even aided Natanson with the magazine through her close friendships with artists; for example, the cover for the magazine was a portrait of Sert by Toulouse-Lautrec (Figure 3.1). The magazine encountered troubling financial times around 1900, as the magazine’s strong political views on the infamous Dreyfus Affair turned anti-Dreyfus readers away. Natanson teamed up

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2 Other visitors to the Servais household included Hector Berlioz, the pianist Anton Rubenstein, violinist Henri Vieuxtemps, and conductors Hans Richter, Hans von Bülow, and Charles Lamoureux. See Gold and Fizdale, Misia: The Life of Misia Sert, 12.
Figure 3.1 Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, Image of Misia Sert, *La revue blanche*, 1895. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.
with Alfred Edwards, the wealthy founder of the Parisian newspaper *Le Matin*, in trying to bolster the finances for *La revue blanche*. During this time, Edwards had fallen in love with Sert, and Natanson encouraged her to begin an affair with Edwards. Sert was not new to extramarital affairs, having had at least one with artist Édouard Vuillard during her marriage to Natanson. From the start, Sert’s marriage to Natanson was one of convenience rather than passion, and the affair with Edwards began naturally, with encouragement from Natanson. The affair flourished, and Edwards requested that Natanson divorce Sert; in 1905, Edwards and Sert married. During their marriage, both Edwards and Sert carried on extramarital affairs, and they eventually divorced in 1909. During her marriage to Edwards, Sert had been involved with the Catalan painter José-Maria Sert, who became her third and last husband in 1920.

While Sert was romantically involved with a stream of men throughout her life, she maintained an independent spirit from her husbands and lovers. Within the artistic circles of Paris, Sert held a strong and influential position amongst composers and artists alike. Wherever she resided, avant-garde figures gathered in her informal salon, only to increase its popularity. Sert wrote that when beginning her relationship with José, “…I was starting life as an equal…I imagined all that we could do together, and I marvelled at it.”³ Her relationship with José became an equal partnership, and they dominated the Parisian art scene together. While her salon was more informal and bohemian than that of her contemporaries the Comtesse Greffulhe or the Princesse de Polignac, Sert’s knowledge of art, music, and literature gained the respect of many of her salon attendees. Elaine Leung-Wolf describes Sert as “…an extraordinary woman who lived surrounded by music, musicians, literature, writers, art, and artists, was known as ‘The Queen of Paris’…who was highly regarded by artists, writers, and musicians for her keen artistic sensitivity, understanding, and strong aesthetic sense. She promoted and encouraged new works

and had the ability to discern the qualities of a masterpiece.” It was this image that Diaghilev encountered in 1908 when he met Sert after a performance of his production of *Boris Godunov*. Shortly afterward, they began a close friendship and a professional partnership that brought Sert’s influence into the social circle of the Ballets Russes.

Sert’s intelligence and independent spirit gave her the inspiration to further support and foster Diaghilev’s vision for the Ballets Russes. Eventually her “…drawing-room in the Rue de Rivoli became the informal headquarters for these friends of the ballet.” In the earlier seasons, Sert often helped Diaghilev out of tricky financial situations. One event, often recounted by Ballets Russes historians, tells of the costuming scandal during the premiere of Stravinsky’s *Petrushka* on 13 June 1911. Diaghilev’s costumier refused to finish dressing the performers for the show until he was paid the 4,000 francs he was owed. Diaghilev ran to Sert’s box and asked her for the money. She ran home and brought the money back to the costumier, and the show went on to great acclaim. Scholar Mary Davis wrote, “Diaghilev found perhaps his most ardent supporter in Misia Sert, a Polish beauty and gifted pianist who had forged connections to the Parisian artistic and intellectual elite…” From 1908 onwards, Sert became involved in all of Diaghilev’s productions, and was instrumental in introducing Ravel and Satie to the impresario.

**Working with Ravel**

By 1909, the year of the Ballets Russes’s first season, Sert’s reputation and salon were fully entrenched in elite circles of Paris’s artistic avant-garde. Her friendship with Diaghilev granted him access to many established artists and composers, while her salon served as a venue

to find new talent. Diaghilev brought Sert into his innermost circle, which directly involved her with his productions: “At the heart of everything was Diaghilev’s informal inner cabinet of advisers, friends, colleagues and sponsors, who were consulted on suggestions for and approval of productions.” Sert stood at the center of this circle, and through her influence, she introduced Diaghilev to the modern French musical style of Maurice Ravel, resulting in the production of *Daphnis et Chloé*.

By 1908, Sert and Ravel had been friends for a few years because of Ravel’s professional involvement with Sert’s half-brother, Cipa Godebski. Ravel and Sert met at Godebski’s salon, where they socialized with other prominent society figures. Elaine Brody wrote, “Ravel’s acquaintance with prominent writers and artists was extensive. He was very friendly with Cipa Godebski, Misia’s half-brother; and he benefited from his frequent visits to the Godebski apartment on the Rue d’Athènes, where the elite of writers, artists, and musicians would meet.”

Sert’s new friendship with Diaghilev brought him into her salon, but also gave him access to her brother’s salon. Godebski and his wife Ida aligned their salon with avant-garde figures, and they “…welcomed such figures as Ravel, Fauré, Roussel, and Satie. Misia Sert, as well, encouraged the nonofficial Debussystes, in addition to major figures such as Fauré, Debussy, and Ravel.”

Sert and the Godebski’s alignment with these composers gave Diaghilev access to one of the two schools of music, which began to dominate the Parisian musical scene.

Paris at this time was divided by two vastly different musical schools of composers. Debussy and Ravel headed the “Debussystes” group, which composed music in a more unorthodox style and sought inspiration in contemporary subjects and other disciplines like the

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visual arts. Composer Vincent d’Indy led the opposing group, called the d’Indyists, which based its music on more classical and academic ideals. D’Indy critiqued the Debussystes for their experimental tendencies. Diaghilev’s work for the Ballets Russes definitively aligned itself with the more abstract aesthetic of Debussy and Ravel; earlier productions by the Ballets Russes highlighted nineteenth-century Russian composers such as Modest Mussorgsky and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov whose works were also influential for Debussy and Ravel. By 1911, with his star composer Igor Stravinsky composing in a new primitive “Russian” sound, Diaghilev found more inspiration in contemporaneous music. Audiences received these primitive and romanticized images of Russia with much approval, along with contemporary music based on popular classical themes; listeners also recognized and appreciated music by both French schools. Diaghilev relied on his connection with Sert to start collaborating with both Debussy and Ravel on productions for the 1912 season.

Ravel began work on Daphnis et Chloé in 1909, but the ballet wasn’t completed until 1912. For the 1912 season, the troupe was also working on Debussy’s Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune, which premiered on 29 May 1912, only ten days before the premiere of Daphnis on 8 June 1912. Scholar Mary Davis writes about both Ravel and Debussy’s motivations for collaborating with the Ballets Russes: “…the opportunity to collaborate with Diaghilev and his artists on projects that aspired to the same goal of reviving classical ideals through new expressive means proved compelling.” Putting together the Daphnis production, however, caused a lot of tension and strain between all contributors. Vaslav Nijinsky took the leading role in the Prélude, which he choreographed with a completely new and avant-garde visual aesthetic,

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10 Early productions include Mussorgsky’s Boris Godunov (1908), and Rimsky-Korsakov’s Ivan the Terrible (1909) and Schéhérazade (1910).
11 Davis, Ballets Russes Style, 172.
inspired by the Greek revival dance style of Isadora Duncan.\textsuperscript{12} He was also dancing the lead in \textit{Daphnis}, which, in contrast to the \textit{Prélude}, was choreographed by Ballets Russes veteran, Mikhail Fokine. Fokine had been the main choreographer of the Ballets Russes since its first season in 1909, and his choreography was similarly inspired by classical Greek gestures, but it also incorporated aspects of his classical ballet training. Conflicts soon arose between Fokine and Ravel during the weeks preceding the premiere.

Fokine and Ravel had very different aesthetic images for \textit{Daphnis} that clashed with one another. Roger Nichols describes \textit{Daphnis} as a conflict of ideals and visions of Ancient Greece.\textsuperscript{13} Gurminder Kaur Bhogal reaffirms this statement by writing, “The evocation of ancient Greece may have differed from one artist to the other.”\textsuperscript{14} Scholar Simon Morrison claims, “…Fokine’s drama derived as much or more from the fanciful Hellenic illusions in Duncan’s dancing than from his own imagination.”\textsuperscript{15} He was very interested in the flatness of figures on Greek Vases (Figure 3.2), and tried to incorporate this idea of two-dimensionality into his choreography. Fokine and set designer Léon Bakst had previously worked together, so their collaborative vision for \textit{Daphnis} worked well together. Bakst found similar inspiration for his \textit{Décor for Acts I and II} (Figure 3.3) in the art of Ancient Greece. The flatness of the landscape and the deliberate use of outlines mimicked the two-dimensionality of Fokine’s choreography. This contrasted greatly with Ravel’s image, which he later described in detail: “My intention in writing it [\textit{Daphnis}] was to compose a vast musical fresco, less concerned with archaism than with fidelity to the Greece of my dreams, which is similar to that imagined and

\textsuperscript{12} Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) was an American dancer who captivated Parisian artists with her avant-garde dancing. She gave performances in the salons of the Comtesse Greffulhe and the Princesse de Polignac. Her dancing was inspired by Ancient Greek art, and grew out of natural movements rather than the more formal ballet technique that dominated nineteenth-century dance. See Isadora Duncan, \textit{My Life} (New York: Liveright, 1927).


Figure 3.2  This Greek vase, *Stamnos with Lid*, was painted in the Classical Period, and represents the sharper, Hellenistic aesthetic envisioned by Fokine. Ceramic, Red Figure, Athens, Attica, Greece, 33.3 cm in height, about 450 BCE, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts.
depicted by French artists at the end of the eighteenth century. Ravel may have been inspired by eighteenth-century paintings such as Antoine Watteau’s Pélerinage à l’île de Cythère (Figure 3.4) in composing the music of Daphnis. His use of the term “vast musical fresco” in describing Daphnis implies his intention to create a musical depiction of a painted scene. We might hear Ravel’s music as imitating the hazy landscape behind the figures. Ravel sought this sense of fluidity, visually represented with Watteau’s frothy, rounded brushwork and delicate mixing of colors. Ravel, Fokine, and Bakst continually clashed during production work on Daphnis, while Diaghilev focused all his attention on the Prélude.

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Diaghilev was preoccupied with Nijinsky’s work on the Prélude during this time, which added tension to the already conflicted creative team of Daphnis. Since the Prélude and Daphnis premiered only ten days from one another, rehearsals occurred simultaneously, and Diaghilev spent more time working with Nijinsky on the Prélude, ostracizing Ravel and Fokine during the process. Diaghilev’s obsessive focus on Nijinsky during the rehearsal period granted him an inordinate amount of rehearsal time, with around 120 rehearsals in all. Diaghilev’s focus on Nijinsky didn’t provide Fokine with support during the frantic weeks before the Daphnis premiere. Ravel, who had begun work on the ballet in June 1909, was still revising the finale during the week preceding the premiere. This gave Fokine little time to adapt his choreography to the finale’s rhythmically difficult music, creating what Morrison describes as “…a ballet of
contrasting neoclassicisms, its visual layer composed of flowing lines and bright colors, its aural layer of floating motives and blended timbres.”

The clashes between Fokine, Ravel, and Diaghilev during Daphnis affected the public and critical reception of the ballet. Reviews of both the Prélude and Daphnis favored Debussy and Nijinsky’s collaboration over Ravel and Fokine’s production. The critic Louis Laloy wrote mainly positive reviews for both works, but the review of the Prélude focused on Nijinsky’s groundbreaking choreography:

From these forced positions his indistinct deduced bold, realistic attitudes, as a skilful poet finds in the required rhyme the germ of a thought. We cannot forget that body, partially mottled in memory of the primeval fur, those limbs bending in the lassitude of an unnecessary strength, that elemental cupidity which is deflected by an animal timidity.

In contrast, Laloy praised Ravel’s music, but made little note of the production as a whole. The conflicting aesthetic visions made less of an impact together when compared against Debussy’s familiar music and Nijinsky’s startling choreography. Other reviews of the period critique Fokine’s “…lack of clarity in the choreography.”

Musicologist Richard Shead writes, “What keeps a ballet in the repertory over a period of many years, or, failing that, what ensures that it preserves its freshness when it is revived? The answer would seem to be good music and good

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19 Laloy’s full review of Daphnis et Chloé was in the same edition of La Grande revue as his review of Debussy’s Prélude: “Maurice Ravel is a magician in sound, who at birth was given the secret of capturing sounds with subtle threads, and assembling them despite their resistance in unstable states of balance which do not seem to arise from the laws of this world. That is why his music is ravishing and disconcerting; rarely can a definite image be associated with it; or when it is close to nature, it only touches the farthest boundaries: fountains, whisms of light, childish expressions of tenderness, chimeras of exoticism, melancholy birds, wary insects. The seriousness of human feelings, and especially the simplicity of antique feelings, are outside his domain. Sooner would butterflies or cicadas dance to these slight rhythms, than these shepherds in floating tunics. But we marvel at this symphony in which we guess at supernatural presences amid the rustlings of night; and dance tunes, though it is not easy to bring a bodily cadence to them, abound in delicate line which we would wish to savour at leisure.” See Louis Laloy, Louis Laloy on Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky, 162.
20 Nichols, Ravel, 145.
choreography, in that order…”21 With the case of Daphnis, Fokine’s choreography, in contrast to that of Nijinsky, did not have the same abruptness and angularity that shocked Parisian audiences. This shock value was balanced by Debussy’s music, written in 1894, which was well loved by audiences at this time. The constant comparison with the Prélude contributed to the unpopular response to Daphnis et Chloé, as well as Diaghilev’s overall dislike of the production.

Throughout this entire period, Sert acted as a peacemaker between Ravel and Diaghilev while they were working on Daphnis. Since she was instrumental in pushing Ravel towards collaborating with Diaghilev, Sert sought to smooth over problems that arose between the two. Ravel was upset at the lack of attention his work from Diaghilev because of his lack of focus on the Daphnis production. Diaghilev had issues working with Ravel, who wanted to have more control over the production than Diaghilev was willing to give. Richard Buckle writes in his biography of Nijinsky: “One reason that Diaghilev may have been averse to ‘Daphnis’…was that it was the first work he had presented…that did not preserve the unities of time and place.”22 Diaghilev also had financial concerns about the production: “Certainly it was expensive, with a large orchestra and an off-stage chorus, and Ravel refused to countenance cuts in what has sometimes been felt to be an over-extended score.”23 On the other hand, Sert encouraged Ravel’s creativity, and wrote later, “I always believed that artists were more in need of love than of respect. I loved them, their pleasures, their work, their troubles and their joy in life, which I shared with them…I prefer to have the privilege of having loved them in my own way and as persons.”24 Sert’s greatest strength was her ability to coax and coddle artists, composers, and intellectuals, to work together and through their artistic differences. Her empathy worked well to

23 Nichols, Ravel, 144.
24 Sert, Two or Three Muses, 44.
salvage some remnant of a relationship between Ravel and Diaghilev, but in the end their stark differences in aesthetic viewpoint overcame her facilities.

Ultimately, Diaghilev’s musical tastes didn’t match up to Ravel’s compositions, and \textit{Daphnis} suffered due to his lack of interest. Diaghilev cancelled two of the four performances of \textit{Daphnis} to show the \textit{Prélude}, which was garnering more publicity. The premiere was delayed, and there was no open dress rehearsal, making the entire production seem rushed and disjointed. Nichols explains that Diaghilev’s actions showed a general disinterest in Ravel’s work:

“…Diaghilev clearly had no love for \textit{Daphnis} and there have never been definitive explanations of this.”\textsuperscript{25} A similar event occurred in 1920 when Ravel had finished writing \textit{La Valse} for Sert:

In the company of Stravinsky, Massine and others, Diaghilev finally heard \textit{La Valse} in its two-piano version played by Marcelle Meyer and Ravel at Misia Sert’s house. His immediate response was the infamous remark…’Ravel, it’s a masterpiece … but it’s not a ballet … It’s the portrait of a ballet … It’s the painting of a ballet’…Ravel was furious and never forgave Diaghilev.\textsuperscript{26}

After these unsuccessful collaborations, Ravel and Diaghilev never worked together again, although Sert and Ravel remained close friends throughout their lives. Sert’s energy and social status brought Diaghilev into collaboration with another avant-garde French composer, this time creating a much more successful production in the form of Erik Satie’s \textit{Parade}.

\textit{Satie and Parade}

After trying to salvage Ravel and Diaghilev’s relationship during \textit{Daphnis et Chloé}, Sert continued to provide additional social connections for the Ballets Russes, while her role as Diaghilev’s artistic and musical advisor continued to grow throughout the 1910s. Stravinsky benefitted greatly from her support as he was preparing to enter into the Parisian musical scene.

\textsuperscript{25} Nichols, \textit{Ravel}, 144.
\textsuperscript{26} Deborah Mawer, \textit{The Ballets of Maurice Ravel} (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 152.
in 1913 with *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Ballets Russes historians often recount the story of her providing last-minute money for the imploding costume drama with *Petrushka*, but Sert’s involvement with Stravinsky reached its climax during rehearsals for *Sacre*. Sert’s informal salon gatherings brought Diaghilev, Nijinsky, and Stravinsky together with Ravel, Debussy, Fauré, Jean Cocteau, and other members of elite artistic circles; it was at her home that the piano duet version of *Sacre* was first heard. Diaghilev won everyone over with Stravinsky’s primitive and pulsating music before the controversial premiere of 29 May 1913.

The premiere brought Stravinsky and the Ballets Russes more publicity and acclaim than any previous productions, thereby causing scandal and outrage among more conservative audience members. After the premiere, Stravinsky presented Sert with the original sketches of *Sacre*’s score as a way to thank her for her support during the production. Sert later wrote in her memoir how musically moved she felt upon hearing *Sacre*, and how she encouraged Stravinsky’s work during this period. Later, she often acted as a mediator for Diaghilev and Stravinsky as their relationship became more strained. After the success of *Sacre*, the Ballets Russes enjoyed a brief surge in publicity before the onset of World War I caused a temporary disbandment of the troupe. At this point, Diaghilev knew he had to produce a ballet that would cause as much of a stir as *Sacre* had previously, an aim that drew the public eye and patrons back onto the Ballets Russes. Sert’s brainstorming brought together the four figures of Jean Cocteau, Erik Satie, Pablo Picasso, and Léonide Massine to produce the groundbreaking ballet, *Parade*.

Sert’s social connections aligned four unlikely figures who would redefine the artistic and musical direction of the Ballets Russes at a time of considerable instability caused by World War I. The onset of the war had fragmented Parisian audiences, as well as many of the Ballets Russes.

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28 Sert, *Two or Three Muses*, 111.
composers, dancers, and artists. As the war raged on from 1914 to 1918, disturbing and overthrowing societal norms in countries across Europe, it destroyed the Russian aristocracy, forcing aristocrats to flee to cities in Western Europe. The warfront never reached Paris, but the capital felt the effects of the political and financial turmoil of Europe, including the Ballets Russes.

Before the war, Diaghilev had primarily employed Russian choreographers and designers; his star composer, Stravinsky, had thrown the Ballets Russes onto the avant-garde scene with the strikingly rhythmic and primitive work of *Sacre*. Diaghilev had dismissed Nijinsky in 1913; by 1914, he was desperately searching for a work as groundbreaking as *Sacre* to perpetuate the profitable popularity of the Ballets Russes. On 28 June 1914, Sert introduced Diaghilev to Erik Satie, a French composer who was gaining prominence among musical circles. Sert felt that Satie’s music, with its satirical sense of humor, could push the Ballets Russes back into the forefront of the Parisian avant-garde. Recounting the event in her memoir, Sert writes, “Diaghilev was in Paris at the moment, and I had been reproaching him for some time for not paying more attention to Erik Satie. He had ended by responding to my injunctions, and I brought them together in my house to give Serge the opportunity of hearing the music of the Arcueil hermit. Sitting at the piano, lean little Satie, his pince-nez precariously balancing on his nose, had just finished playing his *Morceaux en forme de poires*…”29 Sert’s introduction of Satie began a professional relationship between the composer and Diaghilev, but this partnership really jumpstarted with a collaboration with the writer and artist, Jean Cocteau.

Throughout the 1910s, Cocteau had connected himself to the Ballets Russes social scene through his friendship with Sert. He collaborated with Diaghilev and composer Reynaldo Hahn in 1912 on the work *Le Dieu bleu*, which was ultimately unsuccessful when it premiered on 13

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29 Ibid., 139-40.
May 1912. Davis remarked, “For years Cocteau had been desperate to insinuate himself into the Russian entourage, but his efforts had been stymied: his orientalizing fantasy Le Dieu bleu, created in collaboration with Reynaldo Hahn for the 1912 season, had failed, and he quickly found himself excluded from the troupe’s creative team, relegated to the backroom work of creating art and publicity materials for its productions.”30 While Cocteau had been involved with the Ballets Russes since 1910, his unsuccessful work with Le Dieu bleu ultimately pushed him outside of Diaghilev’s inner circle. By 1916, however, Cocteau and Satie were in discussion about the possibility of working together on a ballet. Cocteau began writing a scenario about a publicity parade for a circus, in which the performers try to attract an audience for their show; Satie began work on the music. Their need for a troupe and a venue to perform their work brought Misia Sert into the project.

Following the scandal of Sacre, Sert’s influence over Diaghilev was well known in Paris. Cocteau’s record with Diaghilev had pushed him towards the edges of the troupe’s social circles, but he relied on his friendship with Sert to keep him informed as to the company’s goings on. Satie tilted his relationship with Sert in his favor during 1916 when he proposed the collaboration with Cocteau. Sert was hesitant at first to present their work to Diaghilev; she knew, “Only rarely did Diaghilev employ the services of a separate scenarist. The theme of a ballet was most often worked out by Diaghilev in conference with his balletmaster and intimates.”31 Cocteau’s record with the Ballets Russes worked against him, but the rising popularity of Satie’s music was probably the deciding factor that encouraged Sert to introduce the collaboration to Diaghilev. Since Diaghilev valued Sert’s opinion above many of his other advisors and partners, he seriously considered her proposal and support of Cocteau’s and Satie’s

30 Mary Davis, Classic Chic (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 94.
abilities. Serge Lifar, Diaghilev’s last choreographer and close partner, wrote in his biography of Diaghilev, “…ideas for new ballets were first discussed, and then decided on in concert with Misia Sert. Diaghilev knew he could always count on the latter for material and moral support, for she was genuinely devoted to him. And it was this devotion, thanks to her position in Parisian society, which was so instrumental in assuring Diaghilev’s success.”\(^{32}\) Sert’s musical education and her early exposure to avant-garde music made her an invaluable asset to Diaghilev’s circle. She was not afraid to voice her opinions with regards to production efforts. Her influence was also felt across Parisian avant-garde circles particularly by such figures as Satie and Cocteau. Her friendships with the composer and writer took their talents and ideas for a new piece, *Parade*, to the Ballets Russes at an unstable time for the troupe.

With the story and music planned out, Diaghilev and Sert had to find the last two members of the creative team: the designer and choreographer. Sert’s connections to the art world culminated at the parties she held in her salon, which drew the figure of Pablo Picasso into the Ballets Russes circle. Sert wrote about the artist, “Picasso’s glory never ceased to grow nor his prices to rise…It was for Diaghilev that he did the entrancing white-and-pink décor of *Tricorne* and the unforgettable curtain for *Parade*. Cleverly introduced by Paul Guillaume, Picasso penetrated the salons of intelligent people sandwiched between Negro art and the Douanier Rousseau. In the same way, Society ladies passed gaily in one leap from Jacques Émile Blanche to Picasso, and from Reynaldo Hahn to Stravinsky.”\(^{33}\) Picasso’s popularity in France began immediately after his first visit to Paris in 1900. He was introduced to Gertrude and Leo Stein in 1905, and immediately became a favorite fixture in Gertrude Stein’s salon. When Picasso developed the analytic cubist style alongside fellow artist Georges Braque in 1909-1912,
his work and renown allowed him to become the premier star of the Parisian art scene. Picasso’s talents, along with his connection to Gertrude Stein granted him access to many elite salons, including Sert’s, where she witnessed his ever-growing popularity. It was probably in Sert’s salon that Diaghilev and Picasso were introduced. Diaghilev, with Sert’s help, convinced Picasso to do the scenic design and costumes for \textit{Parade}, marking his first venture into ballet. Diaghilev also brought in Léonide Massine, the principal choreographer of the Ballets Russes who took over after Nijinsky’s dismissal in 1913. With Massine and Diaghilev as the only Russians working on \textit{Parade}, this cosmopolitan and diverse team came together to produce another groundbreaking production, which confirmed the popularity of the Ballets Russes in Parisian society.

The production work on \textit{Parade} came together very smoothly, considering the number of strong personalities working together. Music, design, and choreography fell together without too much drama, unlike what had occurred between Ravel, Fokine, and Diaghilev during \textit{Daphnis et Chloé}. \textit{Parade} premiered on 18 May 1917 to both acclaim and dismay from a divided audience, who reacted similarly to that of the first audiences of \textit{Sacre}. Davis describes the production and its completely new modernist aesthetic as enthralling and repelling audiences: “Modernism à la Cocteau and Satie drew its materials from the ephemera of everyday life, including fashion, advertising, cinema, and popular song, and expressed itself in a slangy tone that was both colloquial and sophisticated. Casual yet cosmopolitan, this mix matched the heady mood that prevailed after World War I and appealed to high-society patrons as well as avant-garde provocateurs.”

Post-war Parisian society had changed considerably, as the long-established aristocracy declined while the nouveau riche and newly defined artistic circles began to dominate the social scene. Satie’s music fused “…neoclassicism, jazz, America, the music-hall, the

\footnote{Davis, \textit{Classic Chic}, 117.}
Figure 3.5  Pablo Picasso’s curtain for Parade shows the diverse and cosmopolitan characters of the ballet. 1917, tempera on canvas, 34 feet x 54 feet, the Centre Pompidou.

circus—all the characteristic obsessions of the 1920s.” His score embodied the burgeoning new musical style that would reach its peak in the 1920s with the music of Les Six, who also worked with the Ballets Russes. Picasso’s Cubist curtain brought a modernist element to the visual aesthetic, alongside Massine’s choreography (Figure 3.5). More than anyone, however, it was Picasso’s contribution that cemented the association of the Ballets Russes with the elite artistic avant-garde. Richard Shead describes the work as, “… a major manifestation of the

35 Shead, Music in the 1920s, 39.
36 Les Six was the name given to a group of six composers working in Montparnasse during the 1920s by music critic and composer Henri Collet. The members were Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, and Germaine Tailleferre. All six composers felt an urge to rebel against the music of Ravel, Debussy, and Richard Wagner, instead drawing inspiration from their friend and mentor, Satie. This bias connected the six different composers to form Les Six, as well as their frequent attendance together at the café “Le Boeuf sur le Toit.” The popularity of the name Les Six and its appeal to the public also helped to group the composers together. They rarely collaborated with one another, however, partially due to their diverse musical styles.
avant-garde of the period. It was also Picasso’s first venture into the field of theatrical design. It created a stir.” Critic and poet Guillaume Apollinaire famously called the work “surrealist,” coined the term that would later define the resulting art movement. Cocteau’s story, inspired by contemporary circuses, moved the Ballets Russes away from the pre-war productions based on classic mythological themes that catered to an older, aristocratic generation. Parade established a new period in the history of the Ballets Russes, and gave the troupe enough fresh material and publicity to jumpstart their post-war career.

**Conclusion**

Sert’s social skills and musical and artistic background brought together the musical and creative minds that created Daphnis et Chloé and Parade. Her close relationship with Diaghilev granted her a position as his advisor, which allowed her to influence many Ballets Russes productions. For twenty years, Sert and Diaghilev remained so close that scholars have likened their relationship to one of brother and sister. The full effect of Sert’s influence on the Ballets Russes is not measurable, but by examining her involvement with Daphnis et Chloé and Parade, it shows that her impact is more profound than Ballets Russes scholars have previously attributed. Davis describes that with Sert’s idea to partner the four collaborators, “… Parade reinvigorated and reconfigured the fashionable life that had developed around the Ballets Russes prior to the war…Their vision of French culture was defined accordingly: just as money, fashion, and art blurred the boundaries of class in the 1920s, the modernism embraced by post-war high society mooted the traditional categories of old and new.” Parade brought change to Diaghilev and Sert, the Ballets Russes, and to Parisian society as a whole. Its cubist aesthetic altered the

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38 Davis, *Classic Chic*, 129.
direction of the Ballets Russes, so as to keep Diaghilev’s company at the forefront of experimentation in music and art during the 1920s.
Chapter Four: 
Glamour and Glitz

During the 1920s, Coco Chanel dominated the fashion markets, the social scene in Paris and artistic avant-garde circles. Chanel’s acquaintance with Diaghilev began an interesting relationship that would shape the second half of the Ballets Russes’s history. Her early monetary contributions saved Diaghilev from the desperate financial situation he found himself in after the war, while also involving herself directly in the work of Stravinsky. By 1924, Chanel had begun to contribute her own designs and glamorous image to the troupe. Chanel’s position as a high fashion couturier lent the Ballets Russes a chic edge to its post-war image. Although developments in fashion and the avant-garde design in the visual arts had been overlapping for some, Chanel redefined the idea of fashion as art by bringing her ideas to the Ballets Russes. Her fashion, inspired by modern life and contemporary subjects, worked in parallel with the music of Les Six, and the modernist creations of the Ballets Russes. Chanel’s initial socializing with Stravinsky, and her later costuming for Ballets Russes productions, linked the troupe with the growing popularity of haute couture. Her image of the chic and fashionable modern woman brought glamour to the Ballets Russes during the twenties, when their status in Parisian society was in decline. Although Chanel became one of Diaghilev’s last patrons, her work established the elegant and enchanting image of the Ballets Russes that survives today.

Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel

Gabrielle Chanel was born on 19 August 1883 in Saumur, France, to Eugénie “Jeanne” Devolle, and Albert Chanel, who were unmarried at the time of her birth. Jeanne and Albert had four other children, and the family lived together until Jeanne died of bronchitis when Chanel
was twelve years old. Chanel and her two sisters went to live in a convent where Chanel stayed until she was eighteen before becoming a seamstress during the day. At night, she worked as a cabaret performer where she earned her nickname, “Coco.” However, her stage career did not flourish, and eventually Chanel left the theater to pursue other interests. She met the English playboy Arthur “Boy” Capel, who became her lover in 1909, and he encouraged her to pursue fashion as a career. In 1913 she began her ascent into stardom by opening her first boutique in Deauville, financially backed by Capel. The store featured high-end casual clothing and sportswear made in jersey, a controversial move since the fabric was usually reserved for men’s underwear at the time. She sold hats, jackets, and sweaters to many upper class customers, and her business flourished enough for her to expand her enterprise. She made enough money during World War I to open a store in Paris, where she relocated permanently during the twenties.

Chanel’s fashion aesthetic liberated women from the confines of dresses and corsets, and set off a revolution in the fashion world. Although her designs were inspired by the world of her lower class upbringing, she mixed them with a more luxurious edge to appeal to the wealthy. She found inspiration in “…riding gear, military uniforms and work clothes, and gave a new elegance to fabrics formerly seen as commonplace, including gabardine, white cotton drill, tweed, chiné jersey and knits. She also had a preference for black, white and gold in an age in which bright colours were all the rage.”¹ At the beginning of her career, her small boutiques capitalized on the aristocracy’s fascination with the lower classes, similar to Diaghilev’s use of a popular Russian aesthetic in the first few Saisons Russes. Chanel’s combination of the use of lower grade fabrics such as tweed, jersey, and knits with more masculine silhouettes attracted the attention of the fashion-forward elite. Chanel’s style focused on a minimalist visual, which

contrasted greatly with previous fashion trends in the Edwardian era that tended to emphasize the female figure through bright colors, tight corsets, and large accessories. Her designs at first shocked the older, conservative members of high society, but her use of less luxurious fabrics and darker colors during World War I eventually appealed to many, including the aristocracy. Chanel’s use of darker colors focused attention on the cut and shape of the clothes, as well as the face and figure of the woman wearing it. Creating her designs for the modern, free, independent woman of the 1920s, Chanel herself became the poster child of her fashion line.

Chanel never married; throughout her life she had a constant stream of high-powered lovers. Chanel said, “Very young, I had realized that without money you are nothing, that with money you can do anything. Or else, you had to depend on a husband…Ultimately, money is nothing more than the symbol of independence.”\(^2\) While Chanel placed herself on an equal footing to her male peers through her sexual freedom and financial independence, her belief in growing independence for women was projected in her masculine styles. Chanel’s popularity grew with her work in sportswear, and her introduction of separates into female fashion, elements usually reserved for men’s clothes. Chanel married the ideas of chic and comfort together after a period of strict, tight, and uncomfortable dresses, while her fashionable lifestyle inspired many women of the 1920s to throw off their corsets, sit in cafés with men, and enter the publicly masculine world.

Fashion became an integral part of a woman’s identity in the 1920s, a notion that continues on to this day in women’s fashion. Mary Davis describes the popularity of Chanel’s designs, writing that during this decade, “…her designs came to be viewed as emblematic of social change and shifts in attitude that portended greater freedoms for women following the war…these challenges to male prerogatives were manifested in fashion most obviously in a taste

Chanel altered the fashion industry through her powerful image of masculinity as re-imagined for the modern woman. She lived and breathed fashion, and the fame and glamour that surrounded her reputation held an authority in many different social circles. Chanel’s chic lifestyle became widely publicized, partly due to her connection with Misia Sert and the Ballets Russes.

Soon after Chanel relocated to Paris in 1916, she met Misia Sert in May 1917. The two became fast friends and Sert predictably introduced Chanel into her social circle. Sert had just returned from Rome where she, Cocteau, and Picasso, were working on Parade. Meanwhile Satie, the composer of Parade, was still in Paris working on Socrate for the Princesse de Polignac, when she and Chanel met at a mutual friend’s party. A few years later, Boy Capel died in a car crash on 21 December 1919, and Chanel was heartbroken. Her intense affair with him had ended in 1918 after his marriage to another woman, but the two still continued to harbor romantic feelings for each other until his death. After seeing how depressed she was after Capel’s death, Sert invited Chanel to join her and her new husband, José-Maria Sert, on their honeymoon to Venice. Diaghilev was also vacationing there, so the Serts visited him and brought Chanel along. The four met together, and Diaghilev discussed with them his ongoing financial troubles:

… the Russian impresario was struggling to resuscitate the Ballets Russes both aesthetically and financially in the wake of the war: not only had ballet audiences and public taste changed dramatically between 1914 and 1919, but his financial network, which consisted in large part of the French and Russian aristocracy, had collapsed. Hoping for a dramatic comeback, he was seeking financing for a planned Paris revival of The Rite of Spring…Diaghilev no doubt arranged to meet with Misia and José-Maria Sert in hope that they would come to his rescue…

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By this point, the Serts were not in a great financial situation either, and had been forced to reduce their financial contributions to the Ballets Russes, including their contribution to the 1920 Sacre revival. They could not afford to underwrite it, nor did they attempt to do so. During the summer of 1920, Chanel quietly listened to Diaghilev’s troubles, and by the fall of 1920, “…she visited Diaghilev at the Hotel Continental in Paris, leaving him with a cheque for 200,000 francs to cover the costs of The Rite’s production but stipulating that the gift remain anonymous—a promise that Diaghilev quickly broke, as Chanel no doubt expected he would.”

Chanel’s desire for anonymity worked in her favor, as Diaghilev immediately revealed to Sert and Stravinsky that the famous couturier had paid for the entire production. Her friendship with Sert introduced Chanel to Diaghilev, but her decision to show financial interest in the Ballets Russes secured her position in Diaghilev’s inner circle. Chanel, by this time, had made a substantial fortune with her clothing lines only six years after her first boutique opened, and her ascent to the top of Parisian society was unstoppable.

Chanel had personal and professional motivation in underwriting the Sacre production. With her working-class background, many society circles before the war never allowed her to attend elite salons or parties. Post-war society, however, opened up opportunities for Chanel to enter into this high society world. For Diaghilev, the demise of the aristocracy hurt his troupe financially, but the more lenient, artist-based post-war social scene turned him into a Parisian celebrity. Artists, writers, musicians, and cultured intellectuals dominated the new Parisian social scene rather than the aristocrats of pre-war society. Diaghilev, by this time, had already aligned himself with popular figures of the avant-garde through his production of Parade.

Scholar Mary Davis writes, “His first collaboration with Picasso and Satie, the work [Parade] signaled Diaghilev’s eagerness to engage with artists further on the fringe of the avant-garde and

\(^5\) Ibid.
underscored his commitment to maintaining his troupe’s relevance, even if this required radical aesthetic adjustments.”

French society as a whole began to change, and Diaghilev altered the image of the Ballets Russes in response to these changes.

By the time of Chanel’s financial contribution, the Ballets Russes were still under substantial financial strain. Her donation towards the Sacre revival put her immediately at the forefront of Diaghilev’s busy life. After her meeting with Diaghilev, Chanel began to receive invitations to Ballets Russes parties and events from Sert with Diaghilev’s approval, and it was there that she met great figures like Cocteau, Stravinsky, and Picasso. During the 1920s, artists mingled with one another in a more informal social sphere in contrast to the formal salons that dominated at the turn of the century. Within their circle, Chanel’s name was linked to these popular avant-garde artists, connecting her fashionable celebrity status with Diaghilev’s troupe. Her collaborations with Stravinsky and Cocteau on Ballets Russes productions developed out of this social circle and continued the already firm relationship between ballet and fashion.

**Haute Couture and the Avant-Garde**

With the foundation of the Ballets Russes in 1909, Diaghilev’s artists connected themselves to the fashion world in Paris. Ballets Russes scholar Lynn Garafola wrote, “Paris of the twenties was the capital of fashion as much as it was the capital of art. Ballet, as we have seen, played an important part in advertising the city’s artistic wares; it played a similar role in

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6 Ibid., 191

7 The Serge Diaghilev Papers at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts mainly consist of correspondence to Diaghilev from many London society figures. By the 1920s, the Ballets Russes had revived their image with works like *Parade*, and Diaghilev had become a celebrity. Letters in the Serge Diaghilev Papers show the demand for Diaghilev’s presence at various homes of figures like Lady Ripon, and general newspapers and journalists who wrote to him requesting interviews. See Sergei Pavlovich DIAGHILEV Papers, *ZBD*-163, Jerome Robbins Dance Division at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts for more information.
promoting its haute couture.”

Paris became the capital of fashion in the homes of the aristocratic class, where the Ballets Russes also launched itself into society. The wealthier classes could afford luxurious fabrics and hired seamstresses to create extravagant one-of-a-kind dresses for high society events and parties. Parisian socialites at the start of the twentieth century held very strict social calendars and adhered to specific rules and manners that included dress codes. By the 1920s, this rigid observance of tradition conflicted with the boundary-pushing ideas of the Parisian avant-garde. Edith Wharton, a frequenter of France during this time, wrote, “The French have nearly two thousand years of history and art and industry and social and political life to ‘conserve’; that is another of the reasons why their intense intellectual curiosity, their perpetual desire for the new thing, is counteracted by a clinging to rules and precedents that have often become meaningless.” In fashion, women found a way to adhere socially to a more formal decorum while experimenting with forward-thinking ideas. Fashion was a way for women to express their ideas within an appropriate medium, while linking themselves with contemporary designs and movements.

Paris at the turn of the twentieth century stood as the uncontested capital of style, and the collaborative ideology of the Ballets Russes thrived within this environment. Women who headed exclusive social circles held influence over fashion, art, music, and literature, as we have seen with the Comtesse Greffulhe, the Princesse de Polignac, and Misia Sert. The fashion industry had grown considerably within the French economy, making up as much as 15% of France’s export trade. The multi-faceted nature of the Ballets Russes incorporating music, dance, and art became one of their many strengths. This collaborative environment attracted figures from all disciplines, including couturiers. As Mary Davis writes, “…the French capital

10 Bouvet and Durozoi, *Paris Between the Wars*, 147.
was the uncontested world capital of style, known for its fashions, decorative arts and devotion to defining good taste. Diaghilev capitalized on all the available advantages as he moved his base of operations from St Petersburg to Paris, assiduously cultivating the tastemakers who set the agenda for style in the city.”11 The Ballets Russes became one of the leading troupes to feature new and fresh ideas for chic Parisian audiences and patrons.

In particular, the connection between art and fashion flourished within this period. Léon Bakst, one of Diaghilev’s first stage designers, worked on productions like the Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune, Daphnis et Chloé, Jeux, and Le Dieu bleu. Alongside his work with the Ballets Russes, Bakst capitalized on the emerging fashion market: “…the line between stage and couture salon collapsed: in 1912 Diaghilev’s designer, Léon Bakst, offered his first fashion collection to the public.”12 While fashion and art had been connected to each other in the past, the Ballets Russes’s constant linking of fine art with the more commercial world of fashion gave them a stylish and profitable image, particularly during the post-war period. Before the war, Bakst’s work paled in comparison to the achievements and controversy of the primitive music and dance privileged by Stravinsky and Nijinsky. Post-war audiences, however, had grown tired of idealized images of primal, exotic Russia, but Diaghilev found a way to reinvent his troupe so as to satisfy the changing tastes of his audiences. Chanel’s emergence onto the Ballets Russes social scene offered a new opportunity for collaboration to Diaghilev and his star composer, Stravinsky.

11 Mary Davis, Ballets Russes Style, 24.
12 Mary Davis, Classic Chic (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 22.
**Chanel and Stravinsky**

Chanel’s contribution to the 1920 *Sacre* revival solidified her social position within Parisian society, as well as her professional position in the Ballets Russes. During the summer of 1920, she became better acquainted with Stravinsky, who was in the midst of another financial crisis that made moving from Switzerland back to France very difficult. Chanel, upon hearing about his troubles, invited Stravinsky and his family to live in her mansion in the Parisian suburb of Garches. The Stravinskys stayed there from September 1920 to May 1921; during the same time, the Ballets Russes were working on the revival of *Sacre* (Figure 4.1). Stravinsky wrote later in his autobiography, “As Diaghileff’s affairs were at this time in very low water financially, the reproduction of the *Sacre* had been made possible only by the backing of his friends. I should like especially to mention Mlle Cabrielle [sic] Chanel, who not only generously came to the assistance of the venture, but took an active part in the production by arranging to have the costumes made in her world-famous dressmaking establishment.”

This personal and positive account of Chanel probably stems from the close romantic relationship that intensified between the two during 1920-1921.

Although evidence of the relationship is scarce, many scholars believe that the romantic relationship blossomed during the time the Stravinskys were living with Chanel. Chanel spoke of the affair during an interview with Paul Morand, published thirty years after the deaths of both Chanel and Stravinsky, in which she confirmed the relationship had occurred. The affair had a profound emotional affect on Stravinsky and Chanel, while introducing Chanel to new ideas about Russian art and music that eventually inspired her collections. These months also sparked

Jean Cocteau sketched *Stravinski chez Coco Chanel* in 1930. Cocteau added his signature humorous details to this sketch, including the painting of a harlequin by Picasso to the left, the cat on the piano, and the music erupting out of Stravinsky’s ear.
a productive period for both of them, and helped to form their burgeoning neoclassical styles, which continued to develop throughout the twenties.

Stravinsky had been producing works within the neoclassical style a few years prior to his affair with Chanel. While Chanel cannot be attributed to inspiring Stravinsky’s new creative gesture, her work certainly promoted Stravinsky’s interest in the subject. Mary Davis writes, “For Stravinsky, the time at Garches was critical for the development of the new musical style…the stripped-down, simplified sound called ‘Neoclassicism’. For Chanel the months of the affair were crucial to her refinement of her own simplified approach to haute couture…”¹⁵ Chanel tried to fight against, “All those gaudy, resuscitated colours…those reds, those greens, those electric blues, the entire Rimsky-Korsakov and Gustave Moreau palette, brought back into fashion by Paul Poiret…”¹⁶ Instead, she wanted to create “…a universal standard that was characterized by simplicity, a streamlined silhouette and a distinct lack of unnecessary detail.”¹⁷ Stravinsky, encouraged by her philosophy, began to shift his compositional focus from the Russian primitive style of his earlier works towards finding beauty in simplified forms. He had already started to focus his attention on more traditional genres, such as chamber works, oratorios, and sonatas, and eventually began producing fewer ballets for Diaghilev, his last being the neoclassical Apollon musagète in 1928. During his time with Chanel, Stravinsky composed works such as the Concertino for String Quartet, Symphonies of Wind Instruments, La Marseillaise, and Les Cinqs Doigts.

Both Stravinsky and Chanel experimented with their techniques during this period. Stravinsky reworked the score of Sacre and continued working on Les Noces and Renard.

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¹⁵ Mary Davis, Ballets Russes Style, 204.
¹⁶ Morand, The Allure of Chanel, 47.
Chanel’s “Peasant Look” grew in popularity during the early twenties. This drawing was an advertisement placed in Vogue, showing Chanel’s detailed embroidery inspired by Russian fashion. Copied from Amy de la Haye and Shelley Tobin, Chanel: The Couturiere at Work (New York: The Overlook Press, 1994).

Chanel’s collections during these early years were influenced to the same degree by his Russian style. The influx of Russian émigrés after the Bolshevik Revolution into Paris inspired many French couturiers, including Chanel. Fashion historians call her work from 1920-23 “the Slav period” (Figure 4.2), a label that also reflected her affair with Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovitch, an exiled Russian aristocrat. While her silhouettes remained the same with their emphasis on simplistic forms, Chanel hired Russian aristocratic women—forced to find work after leaving Russia bankrupt—to embroider the plain textiles with designs inspired by Russian fashion. Chanel historians Amy de la Haye and Shelley Tobin write, “Chanel’s fashion collections drew extensively upon Russian influences during the early 1920s, but regrettably it appears that no
items of dress have survived. However, fashion magazines of the period describe her loose shift dresses, tunics, crepe de chine blouses, waistcoats and evening coats made in dark or neutral colours and adorned with exquisite, vividly coloured embroidery in naive Russian peasant designs.\textsuperscript{18} The embroidered designs evoke a similarly nostalgic and primitive image of peasant Russia, but Chanel combined it with her classical shapes and neutral color palette. Stravinsky and Chanel’s time together caused a collision of styles that spilled over into the Ballets Russes during the unstable and transitional seasons of the early twenties.

Stravinsky and Chanel’s relationship ended sometime around February of 1921, marking a distinctive shift in the history of the Ballets Russes. At the end of their relationship, Stravinsky initiated his affair with Vera de Bosset, who would later become his second wife, and he also began to break away from the Ballets Russes. Stravinsky worked with Diaghilev on a few more productions during the 1920s, including \textit{Renard} and \textit{Les Noces}, both supported by the Princesse de Polignac. But Stravinsky, amidst some personal issues with Diaghilev, began to pursue his neoclassical style as his reputation as a composer and conductor continued to grow as well.

Chanel, on the other hand, used her connections to the Ballets Russes to increase her influence as a fashion designer. Her involvement with productions like \textit{Le Train Bleu} aided Diaghilev in defining the new glamorous contemporary image of the Ballets Russes.

\textit{Cocteau, Costumes, and Le Train Bleu}

Chanel became involved with the Ballets Russes during a transitional moment when Diaghilev was searching for new musical and artistic direction for the troupe. Chanel’s friendship with Misia Sert exposed her to new inspirations found in the contemporary bohemian

café lifestyle. At cafés such as “Le Boeuf sur le Toit,” Chanel met the writer, artist, and scenarist Jean Cocteau, up and coming composers Darius Milhaud and Francis Poulenc, Picasso, and other members of the Ballets Russes circle. Much as parties did before the war, social gatherings held there and around Paris brought these figures together, thereby giving Diaghilev access to the newly emerging great artistic minds of the twenties. Sarah Sonner wrote, “Diaghilev’s commissioning of new artists encouraged innovative productions, but emerging talent also had the advantage of being cheaper than established names. A successful artist could contribute as a patron, as did Coco Chanel.”19

The artistic direction of the Ballets Russes after the wars remained dependent on its unstable financial situation, making it cheaper to hire unknown composers, but Diaghilev also used this to his advantage. His work continually set the standard for new avant-garde interdisciplinary productions. Musicologist Elaine Brody writes, “For Diaghilev as for Wagner in the nineteenth century, his fantasies demanded a synthesis of the arts.”20 During the 1920s, Diaghilev worked with Stravinsky, Les Six composers, like Darius Milhaud, cubist artists like Picasso and Henri Matisse, and choreographers Léonide Massine, Bronislava Nijinska, and Serge Lifar. Diaghilev’s life goal was to create glamorous “synthesis” productions, the first of which was Parade. His work also remained culturally diverse. Jean Cocteau wrote in his memoirs, “When asked to name the great French artists of my time, I could answer: Picasso, forgetting he was Spanish; Stravinsky, forgetting he was Russian; Modigliani, forgetting he was Italian. We formed a common front where contention was ordinary enough but where a kind of international


Jean Cocteau’s involvement with the Ballets Russes began in 1910 when Misia Sert introduced the writer to Diaghilev. He became a member of their social circle during this time. His previous work with Diaghilev included \textit{Le Dieu bleu}, an unsuccessful ballet with Reynaldo Hahn. The more successful \textit{Parade} brought Cocteau back into Diaghilev’s good graces. Cocteau was friendly with many Ballets Russes figures like Nijinsky, Sert, Stravinsky, the Princesse de Polignac, and Satie. He eventually became acquainted with Chanel through Sert, and they began a close professional relationship with the production of Cocteau’s \textit{Antigone}. Cocteau’s neoclassical play, inspired by the classical myth written by Sophocles, brought together Chanel, Picasso, and \textit{Les Six} composer, Arthur Honegger. Chanel’s costumes were inspired by classical Greek dress, but she infused them with her modern style (Figure 4.3). She used neutral tones, such as brown and black, and wool fabrics, in keeping with her contemporary collections. Chanel also dabbled in making jewelry during this production, producing a gold headband encrusted with jewels. Soon after Chanel began to create her own jewelry line in earnest, inspired by the costume jewelry of theater and her personal fashion belief that jewelry “…should be worn to decorate rather than to flaunt wealth.”\footnote{Haye and Tobin, \textit{Chanel: The Couturiere at Work}, 51.} Picasso worked with Chanel on outfitting the actors, as he was responsible for their masks and shields, linking her to his artistic celebrity. With this production, Chanel, Cocteau, Picasso, and Honegger, created a new interpretation of the neoclassical ideals that were popular in artistic circles. In tandem with
Figure 4.3  Chanel designed the costumes for Jean Cocteau’s play *Antigone*, inspired by classical Greek dress. Copied from Amy de la Haye and Shelley Tobin, *Chanel: The Couturiere at Work* (New York: The Overlook Press, 1994), reproduced from the *Vogue* Archives.
Stravinsky, Picasso continued to paint and develop his works in this classical style throughout the twenties. In contrast, other collaborators moved past this style and became inspired by the changing, modern world around them.

Chanel and Cocteau collaborated again two years later with Darius Milhaud and the Ballets Russes on the production *Le Train Bleu*. The story draws inspiration from contemporary activities and places. The title was taken from the name of the train that ran from Paris to Deauville, the popular beachside town where Chanel’s first store opened. The characters in the story are all athletes, including tennis players, swimmers, and weight lifters, and the satirical *operetta dansée* combined acrobatics and pantomime in a similar vein to *Parade*. Cocteau first wrote the scenario for Diaghilev, after which Milhaud set it to music, and Bronislava Nijinska, sister of Vaslav Nijinsky, choreographed the ballet. Haye and Tobin described the ballet as a production where Diaghilev “…sought to inaugurate a new era of Modernist realism in dance.”

By the times of the ballet’s premiere on 20 June 1924, the production team had successfully created this “Modernist realism” not only in dance, but also in the sets, costumes, and music.

Milhaud worked to create a new sound in French music that reacted against the impressionist music of Debussy and Ravel. *Le Train Bleu* marks his first work with the Ballets Russes and his second collaboration with Cocteau, the first being the ballet *Le boeuf sur le toit* in 1920, which premiered alongside works by Poulenc, Satie, and Georges Auric. Nijinska danced with the Ballets Russes from 1909 until 1919, when she left to open her own dancing school, but in 1921 she returned as a choreographer, working on Stravinsky’s *Les Noces*, Poulenc’s *Les Biches*, and *Le Train Bleu*. Her choreography was often enriched with satire and inspired by her contemporary surroundings, like Chanel’s clothes. Picasso designed the curtain, and later signed

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it, although the artist Prince Schervachidze painted the image on the curtain. Sculptor Henri Laurens designed the sets in a cubist style, while Chanel made the costumes.

Chanel’s involvement with *Le Train Bleu* brought publicity to both her fashion line and to the Ballets Russes, solidifying their position in the Parisian art world as arbiters of art, music, and chic style. The modern story, music, and choreography inspired Chanel to outfit the dancers in clothes from her collections, rather than create new costumes as she had for *Antigone*. Haye and Tobin’s use of the term “Modernist realism” describes perfectly the ballet’s role in establishing the chic image of the Ballets Russes. Chanel dressed the dancers in her woolen bathing costumes, tennis dresses, wool sweaters, and sporting wear that were readily available to audience members from the House of Chanel (Figure 4.4). This bold move by Chanel firmly aligned her work as a couturier with the artistic avant-garde of the Ballets Russes, while the troupe established their role as the trendsetters of the twenties. In contrast to the early reputation of the troupe, which attempted to shock and shake the public’s senses and ideas about music and art, the Ballets Russes of the twenties became leaders of the fashionable world of art. They continued to explore new avant-garde styles, but within the confines of Diaghilev’s new modernist aesthetic that had gained inspiration from modern life, including new technology, the lower classes, and newly emerging forms of music, like jazz and ragtime, new forms that had also inspired Chanel’s style.

Chanel’s involvement with the troupe solidified her relationship with Diaghilev, and helped to shape the Ballets Russes’s image in the twenties. She continued to aid and advise Diaghilev throughout the rest of the troupe’s run until 1929: “In the 1920s, Chanel and Misia Sert also acted as arbiters of taste, scrutinizing the costumes, deciding whether a tutu was the correct length, whether colours were right, whether trims should be added or removed, but
Chanel’s costumes for *Le Train Bleu* were comprised of clothing from her own fashion line. Lydia Sokolova (right) danced the role of Perlouse in a woolen bathing costume, while Léon Woizikovski wore sporting dress. Copied from Amy de la Haye and Shelley Tobin, *Chanel: The Couturiere at Work* (New York: The Overlook Press, 1994), reproduced from the Monte-Carlo Société des Bains de Mer Archives.
always testing the costume in movement before making a final decision.”

Chanel’s work on Le Train Bleu not only helped to shape the Ballets Russes’s image, but it also strengthened her friendship with Sert. Together, they continued to advise Diaghilev on aspects of productions, such as costuming, and helped with more collaborative works. Chanel designed costumes for Stravinsky’s last ballet for the troupe, Apollon musagète, later re-titled Apollo, and both Sert, Chanel, and the Princesse de Polignac contributed money, advice, and time to Cocteau and Stravinsky’s production of Oedipus Rex, which was written specifically for Diaghilev. Chanel’s final contribution to Diaghilev occurred in Venice, when she and Sert visited him on his deathbed. After his death on 19 August 1929, Chanel paid off his debts and took responsibility for his funeral services as her final contribution to the impresario who had shaped her rise in society.

**Conclusion**

Chanel’s role as a patron and collaborator brought a sense of chic modernism to the Ballets Russes while changing the role of the couturier forever. Historians Bouvet and Durozoi describe this shift: “Before 1914, couturier were regarded simply as purveyors of goods, but since that time they had carved out a place for themselves as an elite group within Paris society. They were members of the artistic scene—working frequently with the worlds of theatre and cinema—and possessed sufficient wealth to be able to extend their patronage to writers and musicians, and to commission work from architects, sculptors, and interior designers.”

Chanel’s involvement with the Ballets Russes redefined the role of the fashion designer as an artist, while glamorizing the troupe’s image with her chic style. This legacy left behind by the

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Ballets Russes, with its fashionable costumes, unique choreography, and the foremost avant-garde music and art, continues to influence artists, composers, and choreographers today, shaped by the contributions of Chanel, Sert, Polignac, Greffulhe, and many other collaborators.
Conclusion

The golden era of the Ballets Russes ended on 19 August 1929 with the death of Sergei Diaghilev. Figures in the Ballets Russes circles remained in shock for months afterward, unable to fill the gaping hole left in the troupe by the death of the impresario. With no one to lead them, the Ballets Russes disbanded, and its composers, choreographers, artists, and patrons spread apart, leaving only its dynamic legacy behind.

The impact of the four women I have discussed can be seen within the Ballets Russes legacy. Greffulhe, Polignac, Sert, and Chanel often relieved Diaghilev’s innumerable financial worries without question, granting him more creative freedom than that of similar ballet troupes such as the Russian ballet, who were subsidized by restricting governments. Diaghilev took advantage of the many dynamic cultural figures of Paris to create grandiose, groundbreaking productions. The collaborative work on productions such as Le Sacre du Printemps, Parade, and Le Train Bleu brought the Ballets Russes fame and celebrity that continues to affect audiences today. Revival productions of such Ballets Russes works as Le Sacre or Daphnis et Chloé try to recapture the excitement, drama, and creative ingenuity of these original productions.

Contemporary visual artists, fashion designers, and interior decorators look back to costumes, curtains, and set designs for inspiration to aid their own artistic expression. The Ballets Russes has been recorded in history as being ahead of its time, at the forefront of the greatest musical and artistic movements of the early twentieth century, and scholars have seated Diaghilev at the head of this dynamic enterprise. Collaborations between composers and Diaghilev have been recorded in detail, and this thesis is one of the first attempts to show the larger group of female supporters that also influenced the legacy of the Ballets Russes.
Greffulhe, Polignac, Sert, and Chanel contributed in their own unique ways to help form the Ballets Russes’s musical and artistic visions. I have tried to examine the full effects of their contributions, but it seems impossible to completely describe how far their influence reached within the Ballets Russes. There are financial records, dedications on scores, and personal photographs that reveal to a certain extent the power patrons held within Diaghilev’s circle. Yet scholars have not been able to capture the conversations, debates, and brainstorming sessions that occurred in Greffulhe’s or Polignac’s salon, at parties held by Sert, or during intimate exchanges between Chanel and Stravinsky. There are still many answers to be explored to the questions I have posed throughout this thesis, particularly the tendency by scholars to underplay the roles of patrons in the complex financial history of the Ballets Russes.

Insufficient scholarly attention to the role of female patrons in the history of the Ballets Russes has led to scholars placing more emphasis on the composer’s compositional process, while ignoring the role of a work’s commissioner. Why do scholars still feel the need to brush aside the importance of patrons to the history of music? Does the inclusion of these figures undermine the idea of a composer’s musical genius? The origins of the separation of work and process can be traced back to the early nineteenth century and the Romantic period. Scholar Lydia Goehr writes, “If [composers] continued to receive patronage from church or court, they did so on the understanding that patrons were not to interfere with or control their creativity…What seemed to matter most to composers was their freedom from worldly demands. Their romantic role willingly adopted, composers enjoyed describing themselves and each other as divinely inspired creators—even as God-like—whose sole task was to objectify in music something unique and personal and to express something transcendent.”¹ In keeping with Goehr,

my thesis proves this idea wrong for certain composers, showing that well into the twentieth century some musicians still relied heavily on financial and other types of contributions from individuals to make a living. In this thesis, I have shown that Igor Stravinsky, Maurice Ravel, and Erik Satie all depended on Polignac, Sert, and Chanel in their careers. Diaghilev’s Parisian career began with significant financial help from Greffulhe, while the Ballets Russes as an entity could not have survived without all four women’s vast artistic and musical contributions.

Recent scholarship has attempted to bring attention to the trends of patronage in the history of music. For example, scholars Ralph P. Locke and Cyrilla Barr write:

Less often, in contrast, are we encouraged to think in some detail about the different ways in which other members of the social body – the professional or amateur performer, the patron, the music educator, the critic, and the audience member or compact-disc purchaser – experience and influence music. All these individuals play essential roles in the musical life of a given place and time, enabling as they do the creation – and the continued, meaningful existence, in performance and interpretation – of those great musical works that we are taught to admire and love. Indeed, they could be said to ‘make music,’ in the sense that they make music possible, whether or not they actually set notes on paper, or strike bow against string.²

Locke and Barr emphasize the critical roles of many other members of society, including the patron, critic, and audience, to the understanding and interpretation of music. My thesis shows that many twentieth-century composers relied on the financial support and intellectual stimulation provided by patrons, but I have chosen to focus specifically on the effects of Parisian female patrons. Patrons from Russia and England also contributed to the Ballets Russes in its twenty-year run. Further research can and should be conducted on the impact of figures like the Marchioness of Ripon, Constance Gwladys Robinson, who was one of Diaghilev’s main London patrons and helped establish his popularity across the rest of Europe. At a later opportunity, I hope to recover these lost narratives and give recognition to marginalized groups and figures that

have been largely ignored. By discovering new historical narratives, we only increase our appreciation for music.

My thesis has attempted to reveal the importance of women’s contributions to our society and culture today. My hope is that we continue to rediscover these principal figures in the narratives of our past and give overdue credit to their roles in the history of music.
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