Mariano Andreu’s Costume and Set Designs for “Jota Aragonesa”

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Glinka’s “Capriccio on the Jota Aragonesa”\(^1\) formed the basis of Michel Fokine’s ballet, “Jota Aragonesa” a revival of that which he had first produced back on the 29th of January 1916 at the Maryinsky Theatre in Petrograd, here using sets and costumes by the Russian designer, Alexandr Golovin (1863 – 1930).

René Blum had chosen Mariano Andreu to design the sets and costumes for this ballet. A letter in the HAA, dated 16th November 1936 from René Blum to Mariano Andreu from his hotel in Durban, South Africa, shows that contact between the two men was already underway.

Michel Fokine choreographed the ballet. The female ballerinas included Lucia Nifontova, Nathalie Leslie (who later became Nathalie Krassovska) and Raya Kousnetsov\(^2\) and it opened in London at the Coliseum Theatre on 17th June 1937, produced by the Ballets de Monte Carlo.

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1. Glinka’s inspiration to compose this piece, stemmed from his visit to Spain in 1845.
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The ballet ran for several days after the Première on the 17th June (June 21st to 26th), usually together with Les Sylphides, Scheherazade or Ygrouchka (Poupées Russes), but also with Un Soir, Don Juan (also designed by Andreu), Petrouchka, Ygrouchka, Lac des Cygnes, Les Elements and Spectre de la Rose. The Ballet went on to tour, for instance at the Prince’s Theatre in Manchester on 2nd November 1937 or Monte-Carlo itself on 26th April 1938.4

Andreu again chose Madame Karinska to make the costumes from his designs.5 Barbara Karinska (1886 – 1983) was perhaps the greatest costumer of her day,6 winning a 1948 Academy Award for her collaboration in the film “Joan of Arc”, starring Ingrid Bergman.

One of Andreu’s original designs for Jota Aragonesa, dated June 1937 bears a personal dedication to Mme. Karinska, “A Mme. Karinska, avec toute ma Sympathie”.7

Reproduced in, Cyril W. Beaumont,
Design for the Ballet, The Studio special winter Number for 1937, p. 128.


4. Excelsior, 24th March 1938, Année 29, no. 9.961, p. 8: an article, “Le Printemps à Monte-Carlo - Avril”, in which is listed ‘Aragonesa’ (Jota Aragonesa) as taking place on 26th April, costumes by Mariano Andreu. The same also mentions a performance of ‘Igrouchky’ on 14th April, with costumes by Andreu, but this is incorrect. Costumes for Igrouchky were by Nathalie Gontcharova.

5. Karinska had made all the costumes for Don Juan (premiered 25th June 1936 at the Alhambra Theatre, London. The costumes themselves were all destroyed in a fire, but luckily Andreu’s designs were saved and Mme. Karinska re-made all of the costumes in record time for the opening.


George Balanchine, with whom she had a long professional relationship at the New York Ballet, once said: “There is Shakespeare for literature and Madame Karinska for costume”.

We can see from contemporary photographs of the dancers in their different costumes, that there must have been at least a dozen designs.

But, where are these designs today?

In 1939, along with many artists in France, Andreu was invited to send some designs to the New York World’s Fair. The French Pavilion (on the bel étage) was one of the grandest buildings and hosted the exhibition, ‘Les Décorateurs de Théâtre’.

8. 30th April – 31st October 1939, in Flushing Meadows, Borough of Queens, New York. The World’s Fair continued again from 11th May up until 27th October 1940, but the emphasis (and some exhibits) had changed due to the outbreak of war and French capitulation.
In fact, the whole collection of works of art from France were to be shipped over from the port of Le Havre to New York on the impressive French liner, the 35000 Tonne “SS Paris”.

What happened is not short of a mystery, in fact it was deemed a possible act of ‘sabotage’. On 18th April 1939, whilst still in the harbor, the ship caught fire. The fire, which started in the Bakery, was at first thought to be containable but attempts to extinguish it took longer than expected, due to locked doors. The ship subsequently capsized.

The French Press were quick to allay fears about the works of art and it was intended to send the works out to New York, once recovered, on the liner “Champlain”. An article in Le Populaire, 20th April 1939 reported that all the works were saved.⁹

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The luxury French liner “SS Paris” capsized in the Port of Le Havre, 18th April 1939.
However a week later in *Beaux-Arts* it reports on some of the works of art by name that have been lost and furthermore specifically mentions Andreu: “Nous savons, d’autre part, que la section de decoration théâtrale est éprouvée par la perte de deux caisses contenant les maquettes de l’Opéra et les maquettes de Mariano Andreu pour les Ballets de l’Opéra et les maquettes de Mariand[Sic] Andreu pour les Ballets de Monte-Carlo.”

A month later, 23rd May 1939, *Ce Soir* reported that most of the artists had agreed to redo all their designs, amongst which Andreu’s name was again specifically mentioned.11

One has to presume – simply because there exist no originals today\textsuperscript{12} – that the designs for \textit{Jota Aragonesa} (and therefore \textit{Capriccio Espagnol}) were amongst those lost. If one is to believe the press report, then his works for ‘Les Ballets de l’Opéra’ (this must be a reference to the Maquettes for \textit{Sonatina}, 1929, at the Opéra-Comique de Paris) must have shared the same fate. However several designs for \textit{Sonatina} exist. Perhaps meant was \textit{Capriccio Espagnol} for the ‘Opéra de Monte-Carlo’ and the Press thought there were two different sets of Maquettes. But as we know, Jota and Capriccio used the same designs.

\textsuperscript{12} However, in the “Exposición – Homenaje Mariano Andreu” at the Palacio Güell, Barcelona, 1963 the catalogue does list ‘Figurines Jota Aragonesa/Glinka/Coliseum/London’ (Section V. Figurines), although none are today in the collection of the Barcelona Institut del Teatre.
Apart from a few illustrations in the Ballet literature, I had not come across any original Maquettes of *Jota Aragonesa*. 

In 2006, however, I noticed an upcoming auction in Paris with 2 backdrop scenes and 11 costumes for designs for *Capriccio Espagnol*, which were attributed in the catalogue to Leonide Massine. I immediately spotted these were costume designs for *Jota Aragonesa* (and therefore for *Capriccio Espagnol*). Only one or two were illustrated in the catalogue. 

I travelled to Paris and inspected the 13 designs at first hand. It was then that I realised they were not in “Andreu’s hand”, there was none of the fluent pencil under drawing, the annotations were not in Andreu’s handwriting and what struck me most of all was the cleanliness of the reverse of each (except for one!). In all the stage drawings I have seen by Andreu, the reverse of the paper is either annotated, or one sees paint marks, finger marks from the artist’s workings. In any case the reverse is very rarely spotlessly clean, as were this series of ‘duplicates’.

The collector who purchased these designs at the sale, at some later stage took up contact with me believing he had found a collection of original Andreu gouaches. I informed him of my opinion, having inspected them carefully at first hand, that they were not in the Artist’s hand, but were nevertheless very interesting items, probably drawn by the costume maker or an assistant. And certainly showed what the lost originals must have looked like to some extent. Although they came from the Estate of Leonide Massine, I do not think he, personally, would have drawn them!

Leonide Massine who choreographed “Capriccio Espagnol” for the Ballets de Monte-Carlo (premiered 4th May 1939 at the Opéra de Monte-carlo) would have needed these ‘duplicates’ for his production, hence they remained in his personal collection.

Indeed, much later, he choreographed a revival performance of *Capriccio Espagnol* held at the Opéra-Comique de Paris on 22nd February 1952.

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14. The maquettes came from his Estate.
15. “Stage Backdrop”, 52 x 64.5 cm., for which see separate illustration on the last page.
16. Leslie Norton, Léonide Massine and the 20th Century Ballet, pub. McFarland & Company, Inc., Jefferson North Carolina, and London 2004. Pp. 221 – 225: a comprehensive description of *Capriccio Espagnol*. It importantly mentions that the costumes were first used for *Jota Aragonesa* in 1937 and that the main set for this Fokine ballet used large curtains which masked the forestage and were pulled back to reveal the main setting of an Andalusian village, although for “Capriccio” these remained pulled back throughout the entire ballet. By far the best Synopsis to date on this one act ballet.
The 12 ‘Massine’ Gouaches are illustrated below (Photographs HAA):

Left: No. 2 “Rideau de fond (duplicatta)”  
Right: No. 11 “Chantillons des couleurs pour les costumes de different personages”

Left: No. 9 “1.er Paysanne Biche”  
Right: No. 10 “2.me Paysanne Biche”

Left: No. 1 “Maya”  
Right: No. 2 “2.me Maya”

Left: No. 6 “3.me Maya”  
Right: No. 3 “Jouer de Gitare”.

Left: No. 4 “Paysan”  
Right: No. 5 “Majos”
Here a comparison between ‘Massine’ No. 8 (Paysanne) and an original work (No. 5) published in 1937\footnote{Reproduced in Design for the Ballet, op. cit., p. 128.}

Later, on during my research, I came across the above mentioned reports in the French press that some of Andreu’s designs for ‘Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo’ had been lost in the fire and subsequent capsizing of the French liner, “SS Paris”.

That, indeed, had squared the circle.

\textit{Stage Backdrop, by Mariano Andreu (52 x 64,5 cm. Inscribed on reverse, ‘L’original, y compris le mur devant’)}