For immediate release November 30, 2012

Groundbreaking book takes readers inside Russia’s famed ballet troupes

PITTSBURGH—Classical ballet was perhaps the most visible symbol of aristocratic culture and its isolation from the rest of Russian society under the tsars. In the wake of the October Revolution, ballet, like all of the arts, fell under the auspices of the Soviet authorities, and many feared that the imperial ballet troupes would be disbanded.

Instead, as Christina Ezrahi explains in her new book Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia, the Soviets attempted to mold the former imperial ballet to suit their revolutionary cultural agenda and employ it to reeducate the masses. Ezrahi’s groundbreaking study reveals they were far from successful.

Swans of the Kremlin offers a fascinating glimpse at the collision of art and politics during the volatile first 50 years of the Soviet period. Ezrahi shows how the producers and performers of Russia’s two major troupes, the Mariinsky (later Kirov) and the Bolshoi, quietly but effectively resisted Soviet sway. Despite all controls put on them, they managed to maintain the classical forms and traditions of their artistic past and to further develop their art form. These aesthetic and professional standards proved to be the power behind the ballet’s worldwide appeal.

Ezrahi follows the struggles of these famed dance troupes during the post revolutionary period, their peak during the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s, and concludes with the elaborate productions staged to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the revolution in 1968.

“Ezrahi’s study addresses the basic questions surrounding the mysteries of the production of art in the Soviet Union: Who called the shots, and how did they do it,” said Tim Scholl, Oberlin College. “Her meticulous archival research finally answers questions regarding the autonomy of the artist and institution, with analyses that are thoughtful, provocative, and illuminating.”

Ezrahi is an independent scholar and historian of Russian culture. She resides in Tel Aviv, Israel.

# # #

SWANS OF THE KREMLIN: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia, by Christina Ezrahi, is published by the University of Pittsburgh Press.

366 pp. • 6 x 9-1/4 • 50 illus. • ISBN 978-0-8229-6214-4 • Cloth $27.95