Alexander Rumnev (Alexander Alexandrovich Ziakin, 1899-1965) was one of the primary innovators in early Soviet ballet and yet is one of the most neglected. Little has been written on his dancing techniques and choreographical systems, and his vivid reminiscences, excerpted below, still await full annotation and publication. As he observed long after the artistic ferment of the 1920s, "... experimentation back then was considered to be an essential exigency of contemporary reality." The primary aim of this essay is to focus attention on Rumnev as dancer, actor, and memoirist.

Born in Moscow on January 24, 1899, Rumnev (the name derives from a country place that the family frequented) was drawn to the theater at an early age. He was only six when he attended a matinee ballet at which "he could not believe that the persons dancing were alive and not automatons." When he was fourteen, Rumnev saw Alexander Tairov's production of the pantomime Der Schleier der Pieretta [Veil of Pierrette] at Konstantin Mardzhanov's Free Theater in Moscow. In those days, pantomime was a rare cultural event in Moscow, although both Vsevolod Meierkhold and Mardzhanov were already investigating pantomimic elements in their own dramatic productions such as the Scarf of Columbine and Tears. Rumnev was attracted to pantomime because he felt it enabled actors to express themselves in a manner that could be readily understand and later on his performance as Pierrot in the Veil of Pierrette during his tenure at the Chamber Theater confirmed his acting abilities (he acted with the Theater from 1920 to 1923). But Rumnev also studied the esthetic and critical literature on theater, including Sergei Volkonsky's essays such as the collection Vyrazitelnyi chelovek [The Expressive Human Being], and from such sources learned about the

1. A. Rumnev. "Minuvshee prokhodit predo mnoiu" (1963-64). Manuscript in RGALI f. 2721, op. 1, ed. khr. 34, l. 44. This and other personal documents were given to TsGALI in 1971 by the dancer's sister, Nadezhda Volk-Levonovich. Translated extracts from this memoir follow this article.
2. Ibid, l. 5.
3. Tairov staged Arthur Schnitzler's pantomime, Der Schleier der Pierette, with music by Ernő von Dohnányi, on November 4, 1913 at the Free Theater, Moscow.
4. Meierkhold staged Schnitzler's Der Schleier der Pierette as the Scarf of Columbine at the House of Interludes, St. Petersburg, in the autumn of 1910.
5. Mardzhanov staged Alexander Voznesensky's Tears, with music by Ilia Sats, at the Moscow Art Theater in 1911.
rhythmic movements of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze and the plastic expressions of François Delsarte, body systems that, during the course of his career, Rumnev had ample opportunity to verify and interpret.

Rumnev met his first dance teacher quite by chance, when, in 1915, he happened to meet Elena and Gulia Buchinskaia, sisters of Teffi (pseudonym of the satirical writer, Nadezhda Buchinskaia). After the October Revolution Gulia introduced Rumnev to the Moscow Café of Poets, a bohemian rendezvous of poets, painters, musicians, and performance artists, including David Burliuk, Vasilii Kamensky, Vladimir Maiakovskiy, and Georgii Yakulov. Gulia Buchinskaia also presented Rumnev to the world of bosonozhki (lit. barefoot dancers), the followers of Isadora Duncan, and, as a keen student of Liudmila Alexeeva, convinced Rumnev to enroll in the studio. Alexeeva was an ex-student of Elia Rabenek, one of the first bosonozhki who in 1913 had opened her own school in the Artistic Electro-Theater, Moscow. Wearing red chitons, the students here performed a variety of exercises in gymnastics, plastic movements, coordination, concentration, and gestural expression. Rumnev was a diligent student and Alexeeva thought very highly of him; in fact, in 1919 she choreographed three of his exhibition pieces: Prelude (music by Sergei Rachmaninoff), Etude No. 24 (music by Hern), and Etude No. 12 (music by Chopin).7

In 1918 Rumnev attended Nina Alexandrova’s Institute of Rhythmic Education, a center for the promotion of Jaques-Dalcroze’s method of rhythmic gymnastics, where he took courses in gestural and verbal expression with Volkonsky. There can be no question that Volkonsky left a deep imprint on Rumnev’s general conception of dance and pantomime. The same year Rumnev enrolled in the ballet section of the KhPSRO Theater (Theater of the Artistic Educational Union of Workers’ Organizations), one of Moscow’s most innovative theaters. Directed by Fedor Komissarzhevsky, the Theater specialized in acrobatics, dance, fencing, and rhythmical gymnastics, disciplines that reinforced Rumnev’s appreciation of movement and gesture, as well as classical ballet.

But Rumnev was not just a passive learner, for immediately he began to develop his own visual and choreographic dance system. Much under the influence of Delsarte and Duncan, he formulated a theory of the plastic arts, arguing that plastic art or the art of movement was not only a determinant in the exterior beauty of a theatrical spectacle, but also had a deeper significance: “Plastic movement is the art that develops intuition within us, an apprehension of beauty and intellectual capacity . . . [It is] an art that permits us to learn and be the master of our bodies . . . [It is] an art that makes our body become an instrument that reacts intensely to the emotions of the heart.”8 Like Duncan, Rumnev referred to Ancient

7. RGALI, Call No.: f. 2721, op. 1, ed. khr. 98, l. 1.
8. A. Rumnev, “Ob iskusstve dvizheniia.” Manuscript in RGALI, Call No.: f. 2721, op. 1,