

The Struggle of the Magicians

For over three decades Gurdjieff's ballet *The Struggle of the Magicians* (henceforth *Struggle*) was an ongoing conception for him. In 1914 he first advertised it in the political newspaper *Golos Moskvi* (*Voice of Moscow*) and in 1948 he had it rehearsed in New York.¹ The ballet was mostly a focus from 1919 to 1921 at which time Gurdjieff believed, according to Ouspensky, that it should itself become a school.² *Struggle* was never performed in its entirety, though a programme from a Movements demonstration in 1919 given in Tiflis includes a "fragment of a round dance from the 3rd Act of *The Struggle of the Magicians*."³ At least this one 'fragment', then, had been presented to the public. The de Hartmanns interpreted the ballet as an exercise in attention and effort, where the end product was basically irrelevant. One morning Gurdjieff was found destroying props pupils had made for the ballet with an axe. He explained, "We have done it, so we don't need it anymore. Now it can go to the dump."⁴

At times, however, Gurdjieff appears to have been serious about having *Struggle* performed. In 1920 he announced to pupils his intentions to have it staged at the Tiflis State Theatre and asked de Hartmann to give up music work outside the Prieuré to dedicate himself fully to the project (de Hartmann declined, as this was not possible for him financially).⁵ Decades later Gurdjieff also wished to have the ballet performed in New York, as stated above, though there are no details of his plans. Attesting to Gurdjieff's devotion to the ballet, the homily given at the high requiem mass at his funeral in the Alexandre Nevski Cathedral in Paris concluded with a quotation from the ballet: "God and all his angels keep us from doing evil by helping us always and everywhere to remember our Selves."⁶

1 An earlier version of the research presented in this appendix was published in Johanna Petsche, "Gurdjieff and de Hartmann's Music for Movements," in *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2013, 118–121.

2 James Moore, *Gurdjieff The Anatomy of a Myth A Biography* (Shaftsbury, Dorset: Element, 1991), 349; Thomas de Hartmann and Olga de Hartmann, *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff*, eds Thomas C. Daly and Thomas A.G. Daly (London: Arkana Penguin Books, 1992 [1964]), 141–147, 153; P.D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous: The Teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff* (San Diego: Harcourt Inc., 1977 [1963]), 382.

3 Gert-Jan Blom, *Oriental Suite: The Complete Orchestral Music 1923–1924* (Netherlands: Basta Audio Visuals, 2006), 36.

4 de Hartmann and de Hartmann, *Our Life*, 147.

5 de Hartmann and de Hartmann, *Our Life*, 141–142, 147.

6 Moore, *Gurdjieff The Anatomy of a Myth*, 349.

Set somewhere in the Middle East, the plot of *Struggle* concentrates on the efforts of Gafar, a wealthy Parsi prince, to win the affection of Zeinab, a devoted disciple of a white magician. Gafar engages the services of a black magician to help him achieve his aim and the struggle between these two opposing forces forms the foundation of the ballet. A rough scenario of the ballet survives,⁷ along with a number of detailed paintings of scenes by Alexandre de Salzmann.⁸ Ouspensky describes *Struggle* as a series of scenes “accompanied by music and intermixed with songs and dances” that Gurdjieff had remembered from his travels throughout Central Asia and the Middle East.⁹ Where Gurdjieff and Ouspensky wrote verses for the scenario, Alexandre de Salzmann painted the stage designs, and Gurdjieff and de Hartmann composed the music. The music was first conceived in 1919, thus representing some of their earliest compositions.

De Hartmann gives brief accounts of their collaboration on the music for *Struggle*, describing Gurdjieff whistling music for the second act, which de Hartmann transcribed spontaneously. Gurdjieff also gave de Hartmann different musical modes (or scales) that corresponded with the different nationalities of the people in the dances. These modes later served as music for exercises that Gurdjieff gave pupils,¹⁰ and some of the ballet music was later orchestrated for the Movements demonstrations of 1923 and 1924.¹¹ Recordings of these orchestrations were made by the Metropole Orchestra in 2003 and 2005 and can be heard as part of Gert-Jan Blom’s *Oriental Suite*.¹² It is likely that most of the fifteen pieces comprising the addenda of Blom’s second CD come from *Struggle*.¹³

De Hartmann must have originally memorised the music for *Struggle* as it was not notated for piano until late 1925, though one piece from the ballet, known in the Schott edition as Fragment No. 6, was notated some time between 1920 and 1924 (see Appendix D).¹⁴ After Gurdjieff’s death, the 1925 batch of original final manuscripts of the Gurdjieff/de Hartmann piano music, which also included music from *Struggle*,

7 G.I. Gurdjieff, *Scenario of the Ballet The Struggle of the Magicians* (Cape Town: Stourton Press, 1957).

8 Dushka Howarth and Jessmin Howarth, *It’s Up To Ourselves: A Mother, A Daughter, and Gurdjieff* (New York: Gurdjieff Heritage Society, 2009), 41. To view these paintings see Howarth and Howarth, *It’s Up To Ourselves*, 43, 47.

9 Ouspensky, *Search*, 16–17.

10 de Hartmann and de Hartmann, *Our Life*, 141, 145–146.

11 Blom, *Oriental Suite*, 34.

12 Blom, *Oriental Suite*.

13 Gert-Jan Blom, pers. comm. (25 October 2009). For a list of these pieces and information about them see Blom, *Oriental Suite*, 196–203, 213.

14 Linda Daniel-Spitz, Charles Ketcham, and Laurence Rosenthal, “Chronological Order of Compositions,” in *Gurdjieff/de Hartmann: Music for the Piano*, Vol. 4 (Mainz, Germany: Schott, 2005), 109–110.