

When "The Fountain of Baghchesarai" is traditionally performed by Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet, it tends to be a showpiece for the prima of the times.

"Not primarily as a technical work," points out visiting artist Raissa Strushkova, "but as a demonstration of dramatic expression."

And yet, ironically enough, the dramatic shoe which the Russians fondly place on the foot of the soulful 'lead' Maria, the Polish princess, gets put on the other foot in Tehran, of the rejected first lady of the Khan's harem. No doubt, everyone thought that the Tehran company would simply serve as decorative embellishment around the power of Bolshoi virtuosity, displayed by Russia's top Strushkova and partner Fadeychev. But what a surprise when Iran's own prima ballerina steals the show!

Haideh Changizian sends an electric thrill through the audience, as the oriental wife, Zarema. And more credit to the Bolshoi's Nina Konus for letting her do it!

The artistic wisdom of the radiant Mme. Konus — a wonderfully warm and generous person, who kissed all her Iranian proteges in the opening night bows — is all the more notable when it is discovered that she is not only the choreographer for the Tehran production, given full powers by

ROUDAKI HALL'S production of the ballet, "The Fountain of Baghchesarai" gives Tehran audiences more than just an opportunity to see a classic of the Bolshoi Ballet with two of the Bolshoi's top dancers in leading roles. It also gives Tehranis the unique opportunity to see two styles of dance as exemplified by the two prima ballerinas. Bolshoi star RAISSA STRUSHKO-

VA a ballerina of experience demonstrates the 'classical' classical ballet style as perfected by the Bolshoi in years of traditional form. Tehran's Haideh Changizian demonstrates the 'new' classical ballet style that can only come from a new company like the National Iranian Ballet Organization.

TERRY GRAHAM reports:

A tale of two ballerinas...

the original stager, Zakharov, but she is also a veteran of the role of Zarema herself.

Recognizing Changizian's special genius, Mme. Konus not only accepted but even encouraged what a dour traditionalist would regard as an 'unorthodox' style. Changizian uses her hands dynamically when she dances. That's a 'no-no' for traditional ballerinas, for whom the hands are simply the well-mannered extensions of disciplined arms which serve merely as a rudder, a stabilizer. Mme. Konus told her to "use those hands, but shape them even more. Make those lovely little oriental bends and curves."

Raissa Strushkova has been equally loving with her Iranian stage rival. If she was busy getting stabbed in the back before Hajji Ghorbani's sensuous Tartary draperies, backstage, says Haideh, "she was like a loving sister, fixing a loose snap in my costume, giving me a tender pat and an affectionate word."

Interestingly enough, although both ballerinas prefer dramatically expressive roles, their projection of character is radically different, even allowing for the contrast in their roles.

"The special quality of this ballet," says Strushkova, "is not that it is technically dif-

ficult but that it shows the tremendous emotional development. It requires a great artist to convey the transition from the innocent young girl falling prey to the Tartar invaders to the mature woman who stands up with dignity to the Tartar Khan.

The ability to put this emotional development across, says the Russian ballerina, is long hours of training. She recounts life in the ballet classes in Moscow, where "the balletmaster treats us all equally. From prima ballerina to a member of the corps de ballet, we're all entitled to a slap from him if we need it!"

When Raissa Strushkova, as

an eight-year old, entered the ballet school in Moscow, she was stepping into a time-honored profession, while Haideh Changizian at seven had an uphill battle. "I was lucky to have understanding parents," says the slim Iranian, whose great round eyes upstage her delicate thin mouth. "They were enlightened enough to realize that my urge to dance was not just an idle interest to keep up as a hobby. My father sacrificed to send me to Germany, where I got my foundational training; then two years in Russia, then to Frankfurt, back in Germany, to dance with a new company for seven years before I returned to Iran."

"In the lush harem of Crimea, we are presented the art of the ballerina dancing Zarema. She rushes up to welcome her husband on his triumphant return, only to be rebuffed by his coldness. After a 20-minute sequence of numbers, wherein other concubines dance their willowy seductions of their lord and master, Zarema rises from her reclining position on the favorite's seat. With her muscles cold from inaction she is now challenged to perform perhaps the most difficult maneuver in the ballet. Changizian stretches her arms and body upward at the downstage left corner — a stretch which is really a coiling of forces — then unwinds into an enchainment across the stage to stop on point before the Khan, in a last plea to regain his affections; but the stop on point does not simply end there.

With her leg raised behind in arabesque, she twists her torso in a thrillingly elegant turn which positions her for the headiest dancing sequence in the production.

In comparison, Strushkova seems passive, even when she dances her poignant scene of remembrance of her tragically lost love. Nonetheless, according to Haideh, "she is a superb actress to play against. She is so involved and gives me such emotional response. When I go after her with my dagger, she whispers to me with such terrified eyes: 'Nyet! Nyet! Neyt!'"

The difference lies in the companies themselves. The Bolshoi has two centuries of tradition to support it and scores of talented artists. The Tehran company is young, but if the talent does not come in such quantity, it still exists. More important, members of the troupe are aware of the value of experimentation and innovation, and without two centuries of tradition, feel quite at liberty to try them.

But one thing stands clear. With all the classical foundations the Iranian company stands to learn from the visiting Russian stars, it also has the opportunity to develop a whole new very Persian style out of all these Russian traditions, even as the Russians themselves did two centuries ago, when the first French ballet masters showed up in the court of the czars.