

Title: Make Me a Sarafan and Kokoshnik:  
Russian Costumes in the Early 20C American Social Performance  
Author: Suk-Young Kim, UC Santa Barbara

Until the Moscow Art Theater (MAT) made its debut in 1898, Stanislavsky was less of a theatre impresario than a manufacturer of gold thread used to adorn wealthy Russian clientele. The fact that Stanislavsky chose *Tsar Fyodor*, a drama featuring the seventeenth century robes with heavy golden embroidery for the first production of MAT invites historians to explore an intrinsic relationship between society fashion and stage costumes. Traditional Russian costumes as featured in *Tsar Fyodor* or Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov*, boasting glittering embroidery, were well known in the early twentieth century western fashion capitals for their outrageous extravagance. As much as the west adored Russian fashion, it viewed the Romanov Court in St. Petersburg as a kind of theatre where everyone supposedly paraded in sumptuous garments. The 1903 Romanov Anniversary Ball held in the Winter Palace had a particular impact on the American public: images of Russian nobility in seventeenth century court costumes similar to the ones in *Tsar Fyodor* were recorded in a photo album to which Americans had access. These costumes for a court ball would be feverishly embraced and copied by American socialites as exemplified in the 1913 New York Russian costume ball, or the enthusiastic reception of MAT's 1923 New York premier of *Tsar Fyodor*. This paper explores the theatrical lives of traditional Russian costumes in early twentieth century American society with a particular emphasis on these costumes' impact on shaping a special branch of orientalism in urban America and the intersections of theatre performance and the fashion industry.