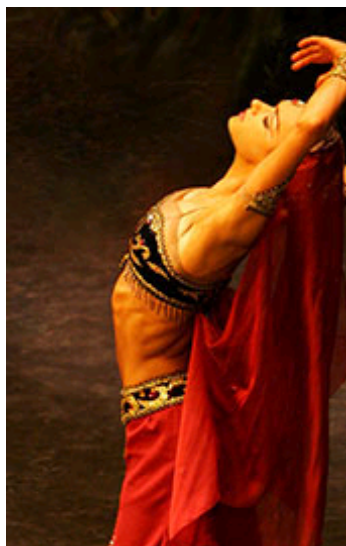


JUNE 2009

REVIEW

ballet.*magazine**St Petersburg Ballet Theatre**'La Bayadere'**May 2009**London, Coliseum**by Lynette Halewood*

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It's very clear that this one off date at the Coliseum is about one person only. IRINA KOLESNIKOVA it says on all the posters. And in very much smaller type it also says "La Bayadere" and "St Petersburg Ballet Theatre". The tension between these font sizes (as it were) made for a very curious evening's viewing.

If you were to choose a vehicle for your leading lady in which she was guaranteed to shine, La Bayadere might not be the first of the grand classical works to spring to mind. To succeed it needs three really strongly characterised (and brilliantly danced) leads for the warrior Solor and the two women he is torn between, the lovely temple dancer Nikiya and the snooty Rajah's daughter Gamzatti. And the work's major set piece, the Kingdom of the Shades is above all the test of a coherent and well drilled corps. This is a work that the leading lady can't carry on her own.

And so it proved: there was some attractive dancing from certain individuals but it was an uneven experience and not an involving one.

The text of this version is similar to that brought

here by the Kirov, with an extended wedding scene in the second act including the drum dance, and ending with the Kingdom of the Shades – no fourth act with the destruction of the temple included in the Makarova version for the Royal Ballet. The scenery is handsome and fairly elaborate for a touring production such as this. (Alas the portrait of Solor which is supposed to be present in the

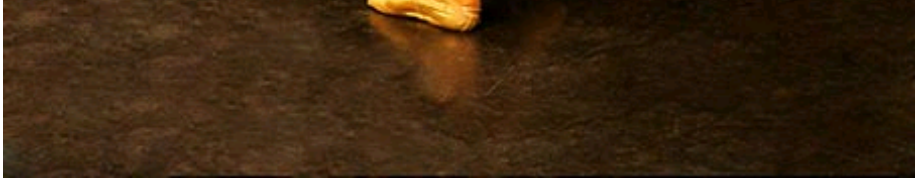


second scene refused to appear leading to much confusing gesturing on stage if you were not already familiar with the plot. Such are the hazards of a different theatre every night). The costumes are a little on the bright side but we are spared stuffed tigers.

The Solor was Yuri Kovalev, a late replacement due to injury. Perhaps understandably, some of his partnering looked a little on the careful side. He did not really register as a dramatic presence much at all, though he went dutifully through the steps. Much more interesting was the Gamzatti, Marina Vezhnovets, a strong and confident presence, determined to get rid of her rival. She really brightened up the stage. However, in the scheme of things in this production and in this company, she doesn't even get to be at the final curtain call.

Because this is all about one person. I've been putting this off: but is all the hype worth it? Because there is a lot of hype. The programme is in no doubt. It features more than 25 colour photos of Kolesnikova and there are three full pages of reprints from comments left in her guest book from her web site, for example "You are my idol!! You are the best ballerina in the whole world . I saw you dance Swan lake in Sheffield , and La Bayadere and Sleeping Beauty!!!! I Love You!!" There's also a page of press quotes including "Irina Kolesnikova could join the ranks of Fonteyn, Guillem and Bussell , as a prima ballerina whose fame extends outside hard core ballet fans (Metro)."





Irina Kolesnikova as Nikiya in *La Bayadere*
© Konstantin Tachkin



Well. Perhaps not. Kolesnikova's Nikiya was a pleasant enough performance. It was polished and secure, and she demonstrated a lovely pliable back to great effect. But she didn't seem particularly responsive to the music. For me she had no great impact as an actress and there was no sense of any chemistry with her partner. Quite good but by no means up there with the greats.

The presentation of the Kingdom of the Shades was a sadly truncated thing, with a very small ramp capable of taking only four dancers at once as they descended. Presumably this is because the production tours theatres of varying sizes. What a pity, given the huge spaces of the Coliseum stage. Despite this it was well danced by the corps with a real sense of unanimity to a warm reception from the audience. It was a moment which made me wish that the publicity concentrated on the virtues of the company as a whole rather than a single individual. Other choices in the production are a little more odd: the dance of the bronze idol is accompanied by a group of students (from Tring) done up in blackface which I was somewhat surprised to see.

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