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REVIEW

ballet.*magazine**Vienna Festival Ballet**'Coppelia'**May 2009**Worthing, Pavilion Theatre**by Richard Amey*

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To convey more sense of fun and to have more people involved in the action were two of Eva Koniavitou's aims in restaging classical ballet's top comedy for Vienna Festival Ballet. And if you can't have fun in *Coppelia*, it's time to head into retirement. Koniavitou, at only 24 the company's new ballet mistress, is a long way physically and artistically from that hiatus.

The Athenian who danced in her nation's 2004 Olympics opening ceremony a year before graduating from Rambert and joining the Vienna Festival Ballet as a dancer is poised to depart their ranks for one of Britain's hottest ballet properties.

But the natural quality of acting she drew from the company and the enjoyment they transmitted

during this frivolous yet inventive story, to probably ballet's most remarkable pre-Tchaikovsky score, will leave its mark.

As her main instrument, there was the freshness, vitality and the sense of being always "up for it" that is VFB's trademark, along with its touchstone element, its costumes. Such an easy summery feel to Acts 1 and 3 came from the subtly blooming colours and textures.

Especially strongly felt here were the flowing greens of the corps in the Morning and Working Hours of the last act, Melanie Cox's tangy tangerine tutu in her Dawn solo — a fine account that had to go without applause because of her sudden exeunt — and the entire look and jovial atmosphere of Koniavitou's Act 1 outside Dr Coppelius' house.



Here, lead boy Steven Windsor was blessedly cast as Franz on his debut in the role. His passion was light but sincere and he made one feel that Swanhilda's indignation at his apparent fascination with Coppelia was needless.

His was a strong stage presence, not just physically, and his playful chivalry immediately won hearts.

His previous four years have been spent in Japan and he now has here a Japanese, ex-Royal Ballet School girl lead partner in Saori Ishiyama. She established an assured musicality from her first appearance, with a warmth of gesture and communication once her woes were absolved.

But every Coppelia stands and falls by its Dr Coppelius and VFB are working wonders with the discovery of two lads amply capable of this eccentric old man role.

I saw Carl Hale, another Rambert School product, continue to pull off his first character part for VFB with a certain aplomb.

He starred with Ishiyama in the magnetic Act 2, when Delibes achieves a musical miracle of variety and innovation that Tchaikowsky was able to take forward even deeper into the suggestion of the supernatural in his Nutcracker first act.

Hale, constantly active in a swiftly changing sequence of dramas, held the stage. He alternates in the role with Australian, Paul Skelton, who reportedly is showing on tour an exciting aptitude for the part.

Trevor Wood in the role last time VFB presented Coppelia here was a hard act to follow but this pair are showing that much young men can convince.

Koniavitou also got to dance Prayer in Act 3, which she delivered with a calm authority.

Windsor and Ishiyama are paired as the Lakeside couple of Swan Lake Act 2 in the half-dozen VFB performances of their Tchaikowsky Gala which intersperses Coppelia on this tour. It can be caught at Southsea on May 19.

VFB will be back next autumn with The Nutcracker.



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