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Ballet

Classical Ballet is Alive and Well on Long Island



Hovhannisyanyan and Engel

by Michelle Isabelle-Stark

Now in its 27th year, the annual ballet benefit performance at the Staller Center last weekend for the Ballet Education and Scholarship Fund (BESFI) of St. James was a tribute to the rich historical traditions of classical ballet. The format of the program allows for the Seiskaya-trained dancers of all ages to shine, from colorful character dances performed by the junior corps to brilliantly executed pas de deux by Seiskaya principals paired with four dynamic professional guest artists – Boyco Dossev, David Hovhannisyanyan from Milwaukee Ballet, Jonathan Jordan from Washington Ballet and Luciano Lazzarotto from Louisville Ballet. Choreography by Petipa features prominently in this concert, with two dances each from *Le Corsaire* and *Swan Lake*.

Act I featured two pas de



trois, *Pas Des Odalisques* and *Swan Lake* pas de trois, providing the perfect platform for exhibiting the technique, musicality and personality traits of each of the three Seiskaya Principals and two featured soloists. Sara Dowd always makes her mark with balanced and sustained arabesques en pointe, while the elegant Kiersten Engel etches perfect balletic lines in space and the radiant Christina Schifano is a sparkling vision moving with a quality of lightness in the *Odalisques* pas. Partnered by the dazzling Mr. Lazzarotto, soloists Christina Pandolfi and Liliana Janson capture the contrasting styles of the cygnets in the *Swan Lake* pas, with Ms. Janson's sophisticated grace and poise providing an interesting counterpoint to Ms. Pandolfi's joyful ingénue.

Included in Act I was a neo-classical ballet set to Vivaldi's *Concerto in D Major*, a flowing study of symmetries in space danced by a very polished corps de ballet. The highly entertaining and colorful character dances *Carmen* and *Persian* in Act I, and



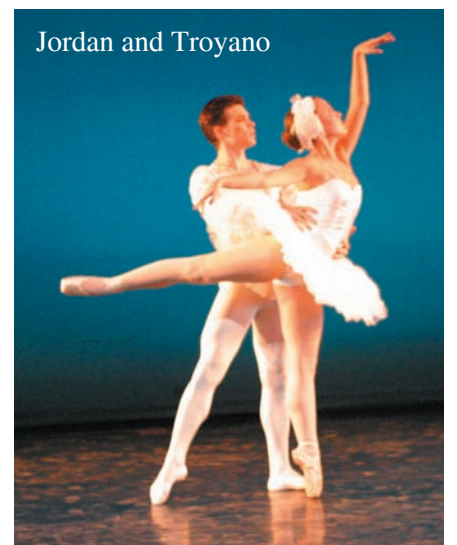
Hovhannisyanyan and Schifano

Kazachok and *Syrtaki* in Act II, with their rhythmic folk-inspired combinations, are always an audience favorite. Rounding out Act I are two fun and flirtatious pas de deux – the contemporary *Hooligans*, perfectly suited to the comedic talent and athleticism of Emily Miller, partnered by the stunning dynamo Mr. Jordan, and the romantic *Le Corsaire*, Act II, featuring the sensual and vibrant dancing of Ms. Schifano, partnered by the muscular and powerful Mr. Hovhannisyanyan.

Act II included four diverse pas de deux, each highlighting the range and strengths of the Seiskaya dancers. The assured technique of Sara Dowd, partnered with Mr. Hovhannisyanyan in *Le Corsaire* pas d'esclave was displayed throughout. Initially veiled, Ms. Dowd revealed a dazzling interpretation of *Gulnare* with the unveiling of her face. I was delighted to see Kristen Troyano as *Odette* in the *White Swan* pas de deux. Partnered deftly by Mr. Jordan, Kristin danced this role communicating the vulnerability and expressiveness of *Odette* with delicate arm and upper body movements. She was enchanting. Danielle Morano was sweet and flirtatious in the *William Tell* pas de deux. Partnered by Mr. Dossev, Danielle charmingly interpreted the piece with a buoyancy that was highly entertaining. Last, but certainly not least, was the elegant Kiersten Engel, partnered by Mr. Hovhannisyanyan in the *Diana and Acteon* pas de deux. Ms. Engel was a joy to watch, especially her turns, which contain a tension and completeness that,



Dossev and Morano



Jordan and Troyano

coupled with the dramatic leaps of Mr. Hovhannisyanyan, made this a riveting piece.

The final ballet of the evening presented in Act III was *La Boutique Fantasque*, and clearly carries the inventive choreographic stamp of Valia Seiskaya. This fantasy piece set in a magical toy shop features a number of melodic divertissements that move the action along. Standouts include a group of spirited tarantella dancers, regal court cards danced to a mazarinka, and a couple of precocious poodles. The *Can-Can* dancers, Christina Pandolfi and Boyco Dossev, are the prized dolls of the shopkeeper and coveted by both a Russian and American family, who bargain fiercely for possession of the pair. Ms. Pandolfi and Mr. Dossev make a delightful pairing, projecting an exuberance that permeates the entire ballet.

Michelle Isabelle-Stark is a professional freelance writer who has written several reviews and articles about ballet.