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News Briefs

A New Generation Blossoms at Seiskaya Ballet's BESFI Benefit Performance

By: Christina Pandolfi

For forty-four years, Seiskaya Ballet has empowered and trained some of the nation's most accomplished dancers. With such a rich history and proven methodologies, the St. James, NY ballet institution could just rest on its laurels and stay satisfied with the status quo.

Instead, Seiskaya Ballet continues to challenge its dancers at every turn, demanding they rise to any occasion with polish and professionalism, which is exactly what the company did during its 39th BESFI performance at the Staller Center for the Performing Arts. Forgoing their traditional performance format,



Sleeping Beauty Pas De Deux, danced by Eva Pyrros and Guest Artist, Nicholas Sipes.

The start of Act II's *Don Quixote Divertissement* began with exciting energy and color, as the corps de ballet danced with fervor in the Village Square. Showing off their penchant for performance, Guest Artist, Alexandra Tsivitis and Julia Virnelli lit up the stage with synchronized chaînés and développés. Other standouts included the adorable Toreadors, Principal Dancer, Brianna Jimenez as Mercedes, who danced with dazzling bravura and solid technique, and



La Bayadère Pas De Deux, performed by Graciela Carrero-Sagona and Guest Artist, Alvin Tovstogray.



Don Quixote Divertissement scene 1 was danced with energy and passion.

Seiskaya Ballet presented a show consisting of a mixture of pas de deux, character dance miniatures, and a Seiskaya Ballet original series, staged by longtime friend and teacher, Vaso Kikna entitled, *Don Quixote Divertissement*.

The show opened with the beloved *Sleeping Beauty Pas De Deux*, danced by Eva Pyrros and Guest Artist, Nicholas Sipes. Blessed with long, lithe limbs, the couple complemented each other well in both stature and artistry, showing off their control of Petipa's choreography. The dramatic and contemporary *Hooligans Pas De Deux* followed, danced by a lovely Lara Caraianni and newly minted Principal Dancer, Max Lippman. The couple's technique was clean, and Max continues to shine as a strong, capable partner. But it was his commitment to the performance that shone the brightest. Brand-new *Kati Neo Character Dance Miniature* was up next, choreographed by Seiskaya Ballet veteran, Nicole DiFiore.

A dynamic piece that featured the company's junior corps members, the group danced with infectious energy and enthusiasm.

The program continued with the ethereal *La Bayadère Pas De Deux*, performed by Graciela Carrero-Sagona and Guest Artist, Alvin Tovstogray. Carrero-Sagona's facilities are easy to see: sky-high extensions, soaring jétés, and precise pirouettes. But as time progressed, it became clear that her true talent is confidence: her ability to deftly navigate choreography and move through the steps into a well-rounded performance was more than impressive. It was memorable. Tovstogray provided the perfect balance to Carrero-Sagona, offering her strength and support at every turn. Act I ended with the romantic *Les Sylphides Pas De Deux*, danced by Julia Virnelli and a returning Sipes. Virnelli's sweetness and supple movement quality were a delight to behold, and the two made a handsome pair.

a returning Max Lippman as Basilio with guitar. A passionate dancer, Lippman puts extreme care into every step of the choreography, and always works to make sure his partner shines.

In this instance, Lippman's partner was Principal Dancer, Diana Atoian, dancing the coveted role of Kitri. A calm and collected dancer with confidence to spare, Atoian brings her truest self to every ballet she dances. Blessed with a solid command of ballet vocabulary and port de bras, Atoian's consistency was captivating, performing a series of complicated variations and pas de deux with composure. Accompanied by a returning Tovstogray, it was thrilling to behold and concluded the performance on a high note.

It's always a joy to see how far Seiskaya Ballet has grown every year. But more so than that, it's a privilege to have a small place in this company's history.

Christina Pandolfi is a professional copywriter and contributor to Broadway World Dance. She is also an accomplished dancer who attended NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.