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Entertainment News

# Sleeping Beauty Was Just The Beginning

By Michelle Isabelle-Stark

Opening the 2008 Long Island Spring Arts Season last weekend at the Staller Center at SUNY Stony Brook was the 29th annual BESFI (Ballet Education and Scholarship Fund) benefit performance, performed by members of the Seiskaya Ballet Company. The benefit is traditionally a three-act evening with three extraordinary international guest performers partnering the amazing Seiskaya ballerinas. What a treat – for them and us!

The Sleeping Beauty, with a lovely symphonic score by Tchaikovsky and choreography by Marius Petipa, figured prominently in Act I. Partnered by the elegant Russian guest artist Evgueni Tourdiev, principal dancer Stephanie Scutari delivered a delicate and sweet interpretation of Aurora in The Sleeping Beauty pas de deux, maintaining a solid attitude position throughout – the Aurora trademark – and demonstrating a beautiful classical line.

The Bluebird pas de deux was a perfect harmonious partnering of Alexis Lucena and Ashton Hsu, both exhibiting the strength and confidence that are the hallmarks of Seiskaya Ballet Academy training. Ms. Lucena lent a sparkling and dramatic flair to her role as the Enchanted Princess, punctuating every piqué and échappé with a sustained dramatic intent that was complemented by the fluidity and agility of Ashton Hsu, with both



Guest artist Evgueni Tourdiev paired with Seiskaya Ballet principal Mariana DeMarco in the exuberant Flames of Paris pas de deux.

in sync for a series of airy lifts, resulting in an absolutely electrifying performance.

A delightful interlude between the two Sleeping Beauty pas featured a cast of spirited young dancers who gave us the character piece Persian, with that little sprite Catherine Sperduto, a la Shirley Temple, stealing hearts just as she did as the baby sheep in The Nutcracker last December.

The final performance of Act I, Dance of the Hours, highlighted the ensemble work of the corps de ballet and displayed the talents of three diverse Seiskaya dancers. Featured soloist Ashley Cook as Night exhibited a buoyant energy and quicksilver footwork, while principal Christina Pandolfi as Day was a lyrical study of poise and grace.

Featured soloist Victoria Loza as Time completed the trio with a strong performance that combined the lyricism and energy of both of the other roles.

Act II opened with the exuberant “revolutionary” ballet Flames of Paris pas de deux. Newly promoted principal dancer Mariana DeMarco was a stunning vision of technical virtuosity, performing many series of difficult turns with extraordinary finesse. She was well partnered by Evgueni Tourdiev, who thrilled the audience with a series of gravity-defying tours en l’air.

Colombianas, a sunny and sultry flamenco-infused dance with choreography by Regina Marsh followed. Set to the rich score of a single flamenco guitar, the corps showed off their percussive technique in vibrantly colored skirts and fans. Seiskaya-trained soloist Justin Meyers, all 6 foot plus of him, danced with a combination of power and passion, reveling in this role with a theatrical flair.

Minkus pas de trois continued the Spanish influenced style with a variation on the renowned Paquita performed by Shana Goldberger, Danielle Troyano and David Hovhannisyann. A flourish of beats, leaps, and jumps permeates the ballet. The three dancers perform a series of difficult steps in unison interspersed with Ms. Goldberger and Ms. Troyano mirroring each other across the stage. Extraordinary timing and musicality are required here and the overall effect was most satisfying.

Bringing Act II to an exhilarating close were principal Danielle Morano and Boston Ballet’s Boyco Dossev in the Le Corsaire pas de deux. Ms. Morano possesses a cool grace and brilliant technique and this piece, in particular, gave her ample opportunity to show off her gorgeous stretched limbs and extensions, as well as her speed with a glorious display of piqué, chaîné and fouetté turns. Mr. Dossev was riveting, spending most of his time powering turns in the air or stretched in space in perfect parallel to Ms. Morano.

The captivating Christine Pandolfi was a delight to watch as the flirtatious Kitri in the opening dance of Act III, the Don Quixote pas de deux. She radiated a sensual warmth and owned the stage as she dazzled guest artist David Hovhannisyann with her balance and a bravura style that echoed the earlier Colombianas flamenco dance. Mr. Hovhannisyann returned the fire with high jumps and whipping turns.

There was a neoclassical tone to A Night on Bald Mountain, the final ballet of the evening choreographed by Valia Seiskaya and set to the music of Moussorgsky. The gorgeous set design by Terrence Netter, an abstract wash of cool tones, and the teal and lavender costumes by Karen Kralik added to the modernist feel of the piece. Ashton Hsu as Satan and Justin Meyers as Lord vie for the soul of Innocence, the embodiment of virtue, danced with a mesmerizing clarity by Karissa Kralik. Innocence, never judged, is finally engulfed in the cloak of Eternity. Ms. Kralik possesses an intelligence and emotional depth that is manifested in her dancing with a purity and expressiveness in every movement she makes. Guest artist Boyko Dossev in the role of Eternity, a powerful dancer who generates awesome speed in his turns, provided an explosive counterpoint to the graceful interpretation of Innocence by Ms. Kralik. He was totally awesome!! And not hard to look at...

This was a dramatic Coda to the evening! Brava Valia!! Michelle Isabelle-Stark is a professional freelance writer who has written several reviews and articles about ballet.



Guest artist Boyko Dossev (Eternity) and Seiskaya Ballet principal Karissa Kralik (Innocence) were riveting in their pas de deux in A Night on Bald Mountain.