

MESSENGER

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Seiskaya Ballet's BESFI 2019 Takes a Modern Approach with Classical Standards

Dancing ballet and watching ballet are two very different things. But if the dancing is executed at a high-enough caliber, the watching becomes a sport itself. It requires active participation and attention, because the energy is pulsing, vibrant, and ALIVE. This is exactly the experience of watching Seiskaya Ballet's annual Ballet Education and Scholarship Fund Inc. performance this past spring. The dancers, all whom have taken the Staller Center stage many times, took their rightful places under the spotlight, and put their own twist on classical ballet standards.

Up first was a personal favorite, one that I danced back in my days at Seiskaya Ballet, called Flower Festival in Genzano Pas de Deux. Danced by Julia Virnelli and Guest Artist Daniel Wagner, I was impressed at the pair's clean execution and sweet on-stage chemistry. It was a delightful way to kick off the show. The premiere of Altalena followed, which showcased the Corps de Ballet's striking harmony, as they danced together as one unit to create stunning shapes across the stage. Sgouramani's choreography is both lyrical and athletic, which made for an exciting piece to behold.

The evening continued to deliver with the timeless classic La Esmeralda Pas de Deux, danced by Brianna Jimenez and Guest Artist Alvin Tovstogray. A Seiskaya Ballet veteran, Jimenez unsurprisingly delivered strong technique and panache, but it was her confidence that set the stage on fire—and Tovstogray matched her with ease. Punctuated by the delightful Kazachok that gave the Junior Corps de Ballet a chance to shine, Act I closed with the terrific, yet less-performed classical standard: Grand Pas Classique. Graciela Carrero-Sagona and Daniel Wagner danced with stylistic finesse. Carrero-Sagona's natural facilities are boundless—sky-high extensions, precise pirouettes, ease of movement—and you can truly feel the passion she has for ballet. But what was more impressive was the synchronicity between her and Wagner, because it felt natural and spontaneous.

For Act II, Seiskaya Ballet strayed from their traditional BESFI format in favor of a full-length ballet in the form of La Bayadère



The La Bayadère Divertissement corps provided several stunning moments.



The delightful Flower Festival in Genzano Pas de Deux opened the program.

Photos by Erik Muller



The principal dancers are captured here in a dramatic scene. Seated are Diana Atoian (Gamzatti), Alvin Tovstogray (Solar), standing Jenna Lee (Nikiya) and Andrew Nittoli (High Brahmin).

Divertissement, adapted by Kikna's unique perspective on Petipa's choreography. A timeless love story fraught with intense betrayal and satisfying redemption, it was so exciting to see the company commit to an entire ballet that demanded an incredible amount of re-

silience and power.

As Gamzatti, Diana Atoian was expectedly striking. A dancer whose confidence and bravura precedes her, Atoian demands the audience watch her—and only her—and that's just something you can't teach. Similarly, but in different ways, Jenna Lee as Nikiya brought her own blend of dynamics to the mix. Lee has continued to evolve into an incredibly thoughtful dancer, one whose every arabesque and pique turn has meaning. The two are so different, but complemented each other beautifully. La Bayadère Divertissement was also special to watch, because it gave more dancers the opportunity to stand out. Notable examples include the Pas de Quatre and the Jump Dance.

With each passing year, I'm reminded more and more how privileged I am to witness this company continue to grow and evolve. As a former dancer of ballet, it's now an honor to be a watcher.

Christina Pandolfi is an Associate Creative Director and frequent contributor to Broadway World. She's also an accomplished dancer.