

CLEVELAND PREMIERE

The miracle that the whole theatrical Cleveland was waiting for has happened. On the stage of one of the world's largest theaters, Connor Palace at Playhouse Square (2,800 spectators), Cleveland Ballet presented the premiere of Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake* staged by its artistic director, winner of the Ohio Governor's Award for Achievements in Art Gladisa Guadalupe. Beautiful decorations created in their OWN production hall, luxurious costumes made in the workshops of Cleveland Ballet, magnificent lighting design framed the main thing - the talented, impeccable work of a large ballet troupe. Without a doubt, the creativity and skill of the corps de ballet and the soloists of Cleveland Ballet are head and shoulders above what they were last season. This was especially influenced by the invitation to the troupe of world ballet stars - dancers and coaches. Ekaterina Bakhtiyarova, writer and journalist, Master of Columbia University, attended the premiere as a correspondent for Prospect. We offer readers her poetic impressions of the play.



Ekaterina Bakhtiyarova

When, on the evening of Saturday, Oct. 22, the red curtain of Playhouse Square's Connor Palace split into two, what emerged was the white face of dark magic. It was the face of Von Rothbart, the sorcerer of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, levitating in the center of a black sky, his body not a body at all but an enormous cloak, billowing. Far below, a girl in her soft virginal gown is consumed by him.

What emerged by this consumption - this affliction, this meeting, this genesis act of magic - was the portrait of a prologue. An infatuation turned to wicked possession: a girl turned into a swan. Austere in her tutu, she is the portrait of countenance. The sharp white lines of her precise body against the tall black curtain recall a poem by Sylvia Plath: "Pillar of white in a blackout of knives, I am the magician's girl who does not flinch."

All this, the story before the story had even begun. As the story began that evening at Prince Siegfried's Birthday Celebration, a

scene represented on stage as four stone arches against an idyllic painted lake, whose colors changed as the night fell, from greens to purples. What extreme difference the light - or lack therefore - makes, a lesson taught initially by the Impressionists who obsessively painted the same backyard scene in every variety from dusk to dawn, and a lesson repeated this evening, backdropping the costumes of ancient fairytales: a Jester crowned in equal parts dark and light, a Queen in a shimmering pearly headpiece; and, her dozens of courtiers and guests - the full breadth of the company inducing hypnosis with a collective mechanical precision of choreography.

In the 145 years since its birth on stage, the story of *Swan Lake* is one embedded into the collective consciousness. For some, particularly those with access to Soviet State Television in August 1991, that embedding came in the form of manic recursion, when a film of the ballet played on loop to cover up a coup. A tyranny

of beauty. Flashing images. How they differed then. The flashing images of now, from this latest iteration: A full moon, a cape of dark feathers. Holographic light. Aurora Borealis. A night so bright it is not black but blue. Red walls of an ornate palace, through its windows a dark barren forest. High cheekbones. A revolution: a Ukrainian Princess, where there was once a Polish suitress. A crown of rubies, on the possessed head of Odile, the black swan. Who spins out in her 32 perfect fouettés. A Hamlet of a Prince seduced by the perfection of black magic, of the power of precision and speed. Some mistakes cannot be mended. A marriage of synchronous suicide. A single black rose for a dead Prince.

Equal parts dark, equal parts light. A mosaic of coherence and deep emotion all arranged by the visionary eyes and hands of Gladisa Guadalupe, the Artistic Director of Cleveland Ballet and singular talent, in teamwork with her partner and Co-Founder, Dr. Michael Krasnyansky, the President & CEO of Cleveland Ballet.

WHITE SWANS/BLACK MAGIC



In the words of their executors...

EMMANUEL MARTIROSYAN, THE JESTER:

PROSPECT: Ballet feels like, to those who aren't dancing, something austere. But to be somebody who is making everybody laugh, to be relaxed and happy - how does it feel to be that person?

MARTIROSYAN: "It is very hard. I've done the Jester a lot. In my opinion, the Jester is a very underrated character. He's not the main main person, he's not somebody minor. He is a soloist. In my opinion, it is the hardest part of the ballet. It's one things, dancing and showing technique. It's another thing, acting. Technique-wise, you have to show your whole arsenal. Emotion-wise, you have to show your whole arsenal. If you don't love this role, you can't deliver it as much. But I love this role."

NAREK MARTIROSYAN, VON ROTHBART:

PROSPECT: For the audience, you represent evil. Do you think of your character as evil?

MARTIROSYAN: "You must look at background. If a character is malevolent, you must ask why, and how they came to be that way. He had a love unrequited for Odette. And what does unrequited love turn people into?"

When playing a 'mean person,' one cannot just put on a mean face and show the world your evil. You must also show your weakness and your kindness. Your character is still, at the end of it all, a person, one who once knew light, who once loved. And one who is constantly in pain from seeing the one he loves in love with another. At the end of the ballet, when Rothbart is killed by his own swans, he is in pain from all that he has done. All of this must be felt."



ZACHARY CATAZARO, PRINCE SIEGFRIED:

PROSPECT: You play a 21-year-old manic in love. How do you find this character in yourself?

CATAZARO: "It's a very human emotion, falling in love with somebody - real love - and it not working out. I think we've all been there, had some sort of relationship that didn't happen the way we wanted it to. I find it fairly easy to tap into that emotion... Tchaikovsky's score is so heart-wrenching, it's an intense feeling for me. I get very emotional at the end, especially when I see her kill herself."

PROSPECT: How does it feel to jump after her?

CATAZARO: "It feels pretty good. You put everything into the jump and you free fall. You let it all go and it's gone. You feel completely gone afterward."



ANA SOPHIA SCHELLER, ODETTE/ODILE:

PROSPECT: How do you balance the energy you bring to the black swan and the lightness of the white swan?

SHELLER: "Going from one role to the other is much easier when I have the music. Many times the music can tell me the story by itself. The white swan is delicate, but not stiff. When I'm doing the black swan, you can see the power."

PROSPECT: Do you feel more connected to one side?

SHELLER: "I like both. The more I do it, the more I'm comfortable with both. but maybe some people would say I am more of a black swan."

GLADISA GUADALUPE, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR:

PROSPECT: Why is it important to represent darkness as well as light?

GUADALUPE: "Von Rothbart was not an evil bird from the beginning. He was in love with a princess that didn't want anything to do with him. That's why he became dark. Then, the struggle of Siegfried who says: I've been deceived. Somebody took advantage of my heart. He died of that. His heart was taken by evil, by Odile, the black swan. Odette, she jumps [to her death], because she cannot handle the struggle between evil and light. That's happening to all of us. The struggle we saw on stage is happening now. Not only between countries, but between all of us here. It's a love story that is happening someplace around the world."

