



The heavy curtain dropped. The audience, hoarse from the enthusiastic shouts of "Bravo," spilled out into the foyer of the Connor Palace Theatre. "What was this? How did they do it?" - shocked by what they just saw, the audience was looking for an answer. The man of the hour, Cleveland Ballet President Dr. Krasnyansky smiled: "We took a big risk, and the reward justified it."

An experienced businessman, Michael Krasnyansky bet his entire career, eight years of painstaking work in creating Cleveland Ballet, the search for dancers, artists, costume designers, service personnel and, most importantly, the sponsors for this enormous project. Together with his wife, Gladisa Guadalupe, who led the new troupe and managed to bring to life a number of difficult productions in a short time, they moved steadfastly towards winning their place among dozens of ballet companies. The events that culminated this season completely changed Cleveland Ballet's standings in the world rankings.

For the first time, the ballet company has its OWN orchestra led by a European star, conductor Caleb Young.

For the first time, the company COMMISSIONED the writing of the score for its new performance - the music of *Symphony of Life* was created especially for Cleveland Ballet by the famous Israeli composer Anna Segal.

For the first time, the rising star of world choreography, one of the most highly awarded young choreographers, Iliia Zhivoi was COMMISSIONED to produce the new ballet.

For the first time, the company decided to "encroach" on the holy of holies and to stage in Cleveland the masterpiece of world choreography, George Balanchine's *Serenade* to the music of Tchaikovsky.

The phrase "to stage *Serenade*" infers long negotiations with The George Balanchine Trust, the George Balanchine International Foundation, which holds the exclusive right to the staging of Balanchine's choreography around the world and strictly controls the compliance of productions with the highest standards of dance. The world-famous ballerina Deborah Wingert, one of the few who is entrusted with reproducing the choreography of the great choreographer, was sent by the Foundation for the staging - to transfer Balanchine's choreography to the Cleveland stage. Every movement, the costumes and the lighting had to recreate the performance exactly as it was created ninety years ago.

All these first-time events required incredible infusions by sponsors and endless coordination. If anything went wrong, the consequences would be dire. The stakes were high: enormous funds and prestige.

"Well? Did it work?" I put this simple question to Deborah Wingert.

Deborah Wingert: Well, of course it worked. You have no idea what a gift it is for a repetiteur to see their work. The Balanchine ballet, embodied on stage here in Cleveland, is especially dear to me. After all, Gladisa and I studied together at the New York School of Ballet, we both grew up on this style of dance. Now that Cleveland Ballet has stood this test, it has undoubtedly risen to the international level. By re-staging such ballets at different venues, we perpetuate them. But, most importantly, by rehearsing them, the dancers become ever better, reaching the level of great choreography. Now, having managed to rise to the level of world choreography, Cleveland Ballet can get permission from the Foundation for other productions. In general, this is a great lesson not only for ballet, but for sponsors as well. It proves and shows that **when you invest in something worthwhile in the right way, even if at a risk, the returns are hundredfold.**

It is curious that Balanchine himself did not accept the romantic interpretation of his ballet and denied the presence of a hidden plot in it. "Too much imagination!" he wrote, "I simply taught my students and created a ballet where you can't see how badly they dance."

In fact, in this performance of *Serenade*, the dancers of Cleveland Ballet demonstrated the highest level of choreography. Refined beauty, spirituality and transcendence are all necessary qualities for the performance of Balanchine's work. The masterpiece of the great choreographer has been

meticulously and reverently renewed, and the success of this production on the stage of the Connor Palace Theatre is great and obvious. The very fact of staging *Serenade* appears to be a wonderful symbol: Cleveland Ballet has reached the international level.

"Did it work?" - I ask the same question to Anna Segal and Iliia Zhivoi, the authors of *Symphony of Life*.

Anna Segal: I think it worked. Even though we only had three rehearsals with the orchestra.

Bakhtiyar Bakhtiyarov: But the orchestra sounds powerful, each instrument plays its part glowingly and sounds great. The orchestration is really luxurious and is enhanced by the unsurpassed skill of the Berlin-based conductor Caleb Young.

A.S.: It's just that the musicians are very good, they like the music, they understand the concept.

B.B.: It seemed to me that you have some kind of your inner connection with the great Czech Jewish composer Gustav Mahler.

A.S.: You are correct. While I work, Mahler's scores are always on my desk. I really love his music, I love his complex thinking.

B.B.: After a dramatic passacaglia with Jewish tunes in Mahler's style of (I remind readers of this being an old, sad procession dance), you follow with a frantic, sinister tango, somewhat reminiscent of the famous Libertango by Astor Piazzolla. On the stage, this was embodied in some kind of exodus of doomed people surrounded by dancing monsters. I developed absolutely clear associations with the Holocaust and the events of our day. Let me remind you that the name of the brilliant choreographer of *Symphony of Life*, Iliia Zhivoi, was recently scrubbed from all posters in St. Petersburg, and his performances disappeared from the repertoire of the Mariinsky Theatre. This "public execution" took place after Iliia openly condemned the "special military operation."

Iliia Zhivoi: Yes, I saw my own history in this music. The theme of otherness and dissent. Anna's music helped me a lot in this - I didn't have to forcefully extract anything out of myself, I only had to hear and see; and I listened to this work more than 150 times. We did a lot of work with the lighting designer who was able to accommodate my requests. My greatest task was to precisely transfer the musical idea onto a light canvas, where each stroke would turn into a picture. Our performance turned out to be beautiful; it is beautiful from the moment the curtain rises, and it is beautiful until the moment it drops.

B.B.: Your words remind me of the testament by the great film director Sergei Parajanov, from whom I learned a lot. He said: "The director must shoot in such a way that any frame could be cut out, framed, and hung on the wall."

Your entire performance is an alteration of canvases of incredible depth and beauty.

...There's a moving crowd, indifferent and lonely. Inspired by ideas of superiority, they turn into an aggressive, gray mob. It is ruthless and senseless, acting as if under hypnosis. Ready to break any dissent, to suppress and humiliate. Here, the idea of exclusivity inspires the crowd, and they line up in walking ranks, reminiscent of the marching hammers from "The Wall," the famous Pink Floyd video. Another moment, and the dancing couples turn into swastikas. Another metamorphosis, and the whirlwinds of time wash them all away.

Symphony of Life has no scenery nor colorful costumes. Only semi-transparent tunics. The ballet seems to have no stated plot, and still, people in the theater were crying. It is because the arrows of grief and suffering hit the hearts so directly. I believe that if *Symphony of Life* could be transferred, right now, to European theater stages, it would become a powerful anti-war force.

I congratulate all the creators of this performance, the entire troupe, and the directors of Cleveland Ballet, Gladisa

Guadalupe and Michael Krasnyansky, on a phenomenal triumph!

Amazing piece of workmanship!

P.S.

George Balanchine, the greatest choreographer, arrived from England to America on October 17, 1933. Albert Einstein, the greatest physicist, emigrated from Nazi Germany to America, fleeing anti-Semitism, on the same day, October 17, 1933.

Premier performances of the anti-war ballet *Symphony of Life*, set to the music of the Israeli composer Anna Segal and Balanchine's *Serenade* by Cleveland Ballet took place in Cleveland on April 21, 2023.

Maxim Tkachenko, the cousin of Anna Segal, who created the music for *Symphony of Life*, died at the hands of Russian storm troopers calling themselves "musicians" of Wagner PMC in the battles for Bakhmut in Ukraine, on the same day, April 21, 2023.

The decision to expand the Third Reich through the annexation of districts and regions with a predominantly German population, as well as the return of territories with a German population torn away from the country became the main item on Hitler's agenda.

Expansion of the Russian Federation at the expense of Ukrainian districts and regions with a predominantly Russian population, as well as the return of territories with a Russian population torn away from the country are the objectives set by Putin for the war with Ukraine.

Quite similar, isn't it? The Russian tsar-president decided to start a "gathering of lands." And hundreds of thousands of people, still having enjoyed life yesterday, today are crushed by the infernal war machine. For the sake of his diabolical ambition.

Symphony of Life is about this, as well.

Translated by Michael Moskowitz