

Giselle is a perennial favourite

Review by Moira de Swardt: Just when one thinks that if one never saw another classical ballet again it would be OK, there comes a performance which charms.

Giselle is a perennial favourite with many dance companies because it has so much going for it. Using the traditional choreography makes it free of performance rights, the music by Adolphe Adam is lovely, the costuming in part as for the "white ballets", and the big bonus is that audiences know and love it. Thus it is no real surprise that the South African Ballet Theatre's spring season at the Joburg Theatre finds it on the billing for the Arts Alive Festival.

I attended the Sunday matinee performance at the beginning of the run and was pleased to learn that the role of Giselle was to be danced by Senior Principal Dancer, Angela Malan, who also features on the programme cover. Malan's technical proficiency is always pleasing and she never once faltered or made an ugly move. However, this time it was not her flawless execution of the steps that thrilled me, but the sheer magic she created on stage. Pretty and flirtatious in the first half of Act 1, she rose to stupendous heights in the latter part of the act when she enacted the "mad" scene so realistically that its pathos tugged at my heart. Even her hair managed to disengage from the clips holding it in place earlier to fall around her face, enhancing her distraught attempts to reconcile with the faithless Albrecht, wonderfully danced by guest dancer from the English National Ballet, Junor Oliviera de Souza. In the second act my focus went back to Malan's remarkably disciplined dancing which enabled her to glide across the stage, almost without touching the floor. I was spellbound.

Humberto Montero was a confident Hilarion and his leaps are both graceful and athletic. His acting also added much to the role and he comes across as jealous, petty and somewhat sneaky. The other named male roles, Wilfred (Lee Fennell) and the Duke of Courland (Anton Labuschagne), don't get much decent choreography and nothing meaty to convey in the dramatic line either. The role of Berthe, Giselle's mother, was portrayed by Natasha Ireland, and the role of Bathilde went to Nicole Ferreira. Most of the acting was good, the staging and theatrical direction for this production being of the highest quality. Smoke gently wafted from the chimney of Giselle's home, while Berthe's loving concern for her daughter was as apparent as her dislike of Albrecht. I found Ferreira a little remote and there seemed to be none of the empathy two women sharing their hopes for their futures with their much loved sweethearts would have for one another and which would prompt the one to give the other a valuable string of pearls as a betrothal gift.

The peasant Pas de Quatre with Haydee Baker and Chase Bosch and Lauryn Summerley and Hyun Kyung Cho left me a little disappointed in Bosch's technical abilities and wondering if his recent prolonged rest to recover from the injuries which were plaguing him last year has been detrimental to his overall performance. I do hope that whatever it

is that caused the problems at the performance I saw is soon resolved as he showed so much promise in the early part of last year. Hyun Kyung Cho never put a foot wrong through his time on stage. Baker and Summerley were both lovely.

The second act found Sanmarie Kreuzhuber as Myrthe, Queen of the Wilis, with Shannon Glover as Moyna and Sarah King as Zulma. It was all lovely in the way that it should be. It really isn't terribly plausible that the ghosts of young girls who die before their marriages would force young men to dance until they die of exhaustion, and the idea of a fit young ballet dancer collapsing after only a few minutes is every bit as ridiculous as some of the other ballet and opera plots. However De Souza managed to look quite, quite exhausted several times before rising to do some more energetic love-making with the Wili Giselle has become.

The corps de ballet are doing so well in recent years and they moved as a single unit throughout their time on stage, never distracting with bad timing and uneven movements. I was pleased to see this as there are many people who believe that the strength of a ballet company is not in its soloists and principals, but in a good, solid, disciplined corps de ballet. While the corps de ballet may be wonderful, the fact that there are so few male dancers with any experience is very worrying indeed. All in all this was an excellent production and there were some most commendable performances.

*Giselle will be at the
Joburg Theatre until
September 20. The
Johannesburg Philharmonic
Orchestra is under the
baton of Allan Stevenson.*

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