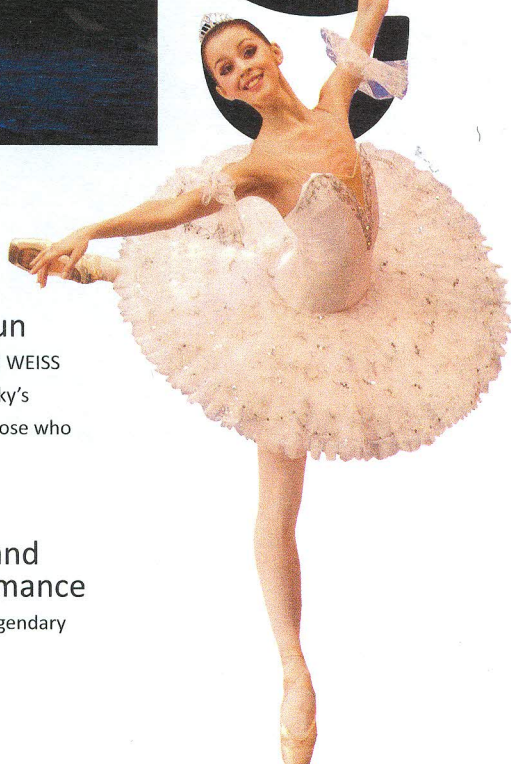


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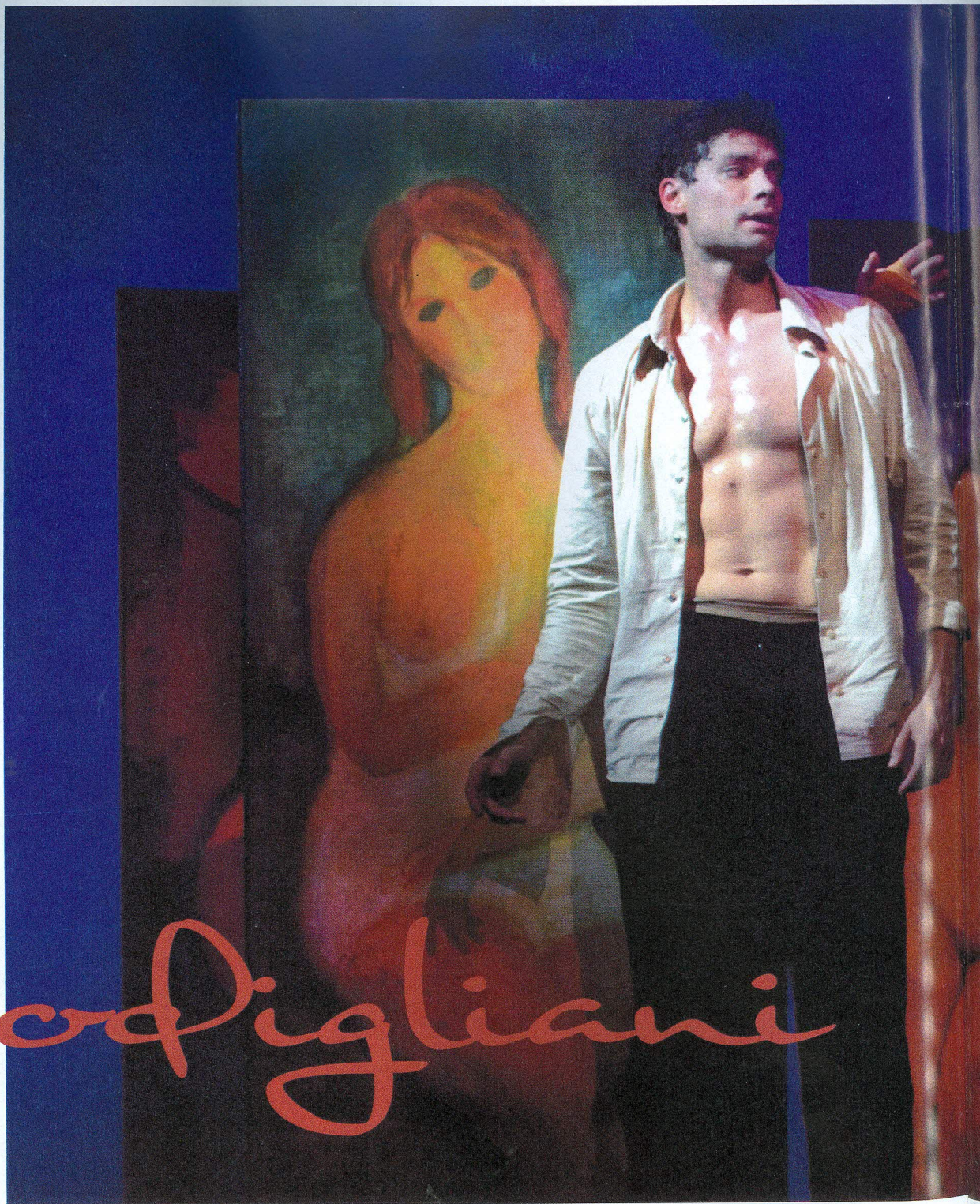
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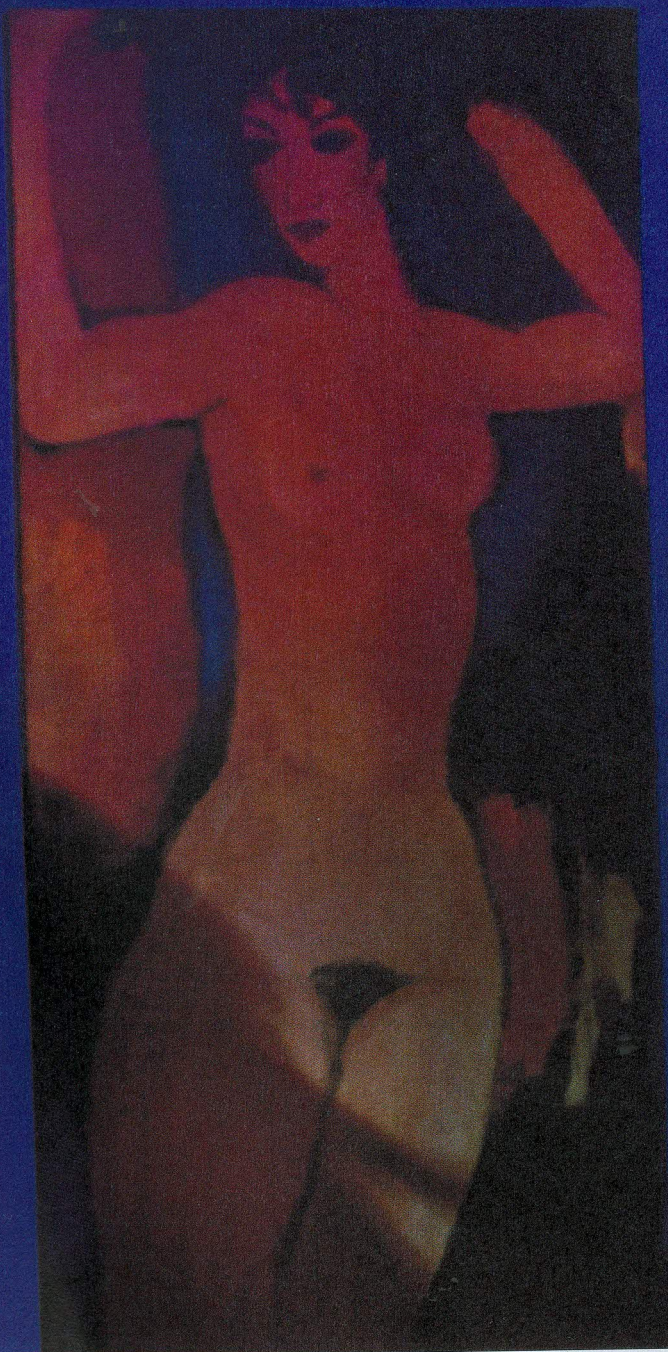


# Modigliani

MIKE DIXON  
considers Thomas  
Edur's first full  
length ballet in  
Estonia

**M**odigliani was the artist who famously starved in a Paris garret and died of consumption at an early age, thus fulfilling a media prototype of the romantic bohemian whose genius is unrecognised in his own lifetime. The reality was pretty sordid and unromantic, and in the Estonian National Ballet's production *Modigliani – Accursed Artist* his drunken behaviour, drug-taking and womanising are not ignored; but his legend is examined through the poetic eyes of Thomas Edur, who recognises that every artist has to search for personal expression and must suffer the agony of fragile self-confidence and esteem. There are also elements of *Modigliani – Accursed Artist* that have aspects of both the hallucinogenic and impressionistic, and although this is Edur's first full-length narrative choreography, his theatrical and choreographic instincts are courageous and well-tuned. The music by Tauno Aints is tuneful, atmospheric, rhythmically strong and full of contrasts: it is cinematic in all the best senses of the word. There are a few moments in the first half where the music is not sufficiently balletic in nature to propel the stage action with vigour and where the orchestral colours and lyrical tone are at variance with the urgent mood of the dancing, but these moments are rare. In the second half of





Estonian National Ballet - Anatoli Arhangelski in *Modigliani - Accursed Artist*. Photo: Harry Rospu

the ballet the music and choreography form a spiritual whole and the result is a powerful emotional synthesis. It must be stated that Tauno Aints is a huge talent. Edur contributes to both the libretto and the design concept, the former with Irina Müllerson and the latter with Liina Keevallik. The designs are very unusual, and in the first scene the viewer looks into a dark void beyond a busy Paris street scene where, above the Café La Rotonde and the flower stall, disembodied roofs float and the buildings seem attached to artists' easels. This conceit is developed later, when pictures slide up and down in their frames or figures emerge from paintings. Tiit Urvik's moody lighting enhances Keevallik's sets to good effect.

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Flower-sellers, a street violinist and happy couples populate the first scene, where Amedeo Modigliani (Anatoli Arhangelski), his two feckless fellow artists (Jevgeni Grib and Andrus Laur) and the energetic art dealer, Leopold Zborowski (the astonishing Sergei Upkin), dance a joyously brilliant routine. Modigliani's carefree public nature is captured in giving the violinist the few last coins from his pocket and stealing a bouquet to hand to a passing girl. After an adroitly choreographed tango for four couples and a section where six men rattle off double tours, the mood darkens with Modigliani's fight with a client and drunkenly lifting women's skirts before dropping his







## Modigliani - Accursed Artist

World premiere - 11 May 2012  
Estonian National Opera, Tallinn

**Choreographer/Stage Director:**  
Thomas Edur

**Music:** Tauno Aints

**Libretto:** Irina Müllerson  
and Thomas Edur

**Music Director and Conductor:**  
Risto Joost

**Conductor:** Mihhail Gerts

**Concept of Set Design:**  
Thomas Edur, Liina Keevallik

**Designer:** Liina Keevallik

**Lighting Designer:** Tiit Urvik

**Repetiteurs:** Thomas Edur, Viktor  
Fedortšenko, Marina Kesler, Agnes  
Oaks

**Casts:**

*Amedeo Modigliani:*

Anatoli Arhangelski, Jevgeni Grib,  
Aleksandr Prigorovski, Sergei Upkin

*Jeanne Hebuterne, his wife:*

Luana Georg, Olga Rjabikova,  
Alena Shkatula

*Leopold Zborowski, art dealer:*

Sergei Upkin, Jonathan Hanks,  
Andrus Laur, Bruno Micchiardi

*Modigliani's artist friends:*

Jevgeni Grib, Anatoli Kanapljov,  
Daniel Kirspuu, Andrus Laur,  
Aleksandr Prigorovski

*Berthe Weill, gallery owner:*

Nadežda Antipenko, Galina Lauš,  
Triinu Leppik

*Florist:*

Eve Andre, Galina Lauš, Marika Muiste

*Townfolk, a doctor, a violinist, a bar owner,  
a teacher at Académie Colarossi, students,  
portraits, a vision, the police, prostitutes, a  
model, flower maidens:*

Estonian National Ballet



Estonian National Ballet - Andrus Laur and Yegor Zdor in *Modigliani*. Photo: Harry Rospu

trousers to shock onlookers. The private face of the artist follows: drunk and alone, he throws his drawings on the floor in frustration, before a vision of his great love and muse Jeanne Hebuterne appears, heralded by an ocean of dry ice. The moment is theatrical and musical magic and Alena Shkatula as Hebuterne, in diaphanous black, looks beautiful.

Succeeding scenes take us through a painting class at the Académie Colarossi, Modigliani's studio, the opening of his exhibition at Berthe Weill's gallery, which is raided by the police, a brothel characterising his descent into degradation, his violence towards Jeanne Hebuterne and a final scene in a hospital for the poor, where the artist dies. Edur connects the addiction to stimulants and sexual activity with the creative impulse. The libido, he recognises, is a crucial aspect of the process of artistic generation. In each scene the works of Modigliani are present, covering the set in frames or projected onto dust cloths; the walls and ceiling fly in or fold back like a painter's drawing pad; painted nudes cavort across the stage and dance with the artist, lifting him high in an ecstatic moment. The visual invention is remorseless.

The choreographer is served well by his entire company: the dark and brooding Arhangelski

resembles the doomed artist and has a striking emotional range and sound technique; Alena Shkatula comes into her own in the latter part of the second act where she dances a solo, then a duet with her former self, before a final scene with Arhangelski. This is a long and exposed sequence for any dancer but Shkatula carries it off with aplomb. The powerful final scene features Arhangelski rising from his deathbed and surveying his mourning lover before examining his paintings with satisfaction. The artist dies, the work lives on, and the artist's spirit triumphs for future generations. Thus the message seems optimistic; but Edur ends with the moment of the pregnant Hebuterne's suicide in a coup de théâtre that causes the window sill on which she stands to rise from the stage before her fatal leap. The audience, unsurprisingly, greeted this radical new dance piece with appropriate enthusiasm and lengthy applause, and flowers arrived in profusion upon the stage. Thomas Edur has already set his seal on the world of ballet as one of its greatest dancers, but with his confident stewardship of the Estonian national company and with the remarkable choreography of his first full-length ballet he has put down a marker of emphatic significance of which we should all take note.