

Bournonville

in London and Tallinn



Estonian National Ballet in *La Sylphide*. Photo: Harri Rospu

MAGGIE FOYER
compares ballets by
the man who made
poetry out of
normal people
and normal life

José Martín in *Napoli*.
Photo: Bill Cooper

“**W**hat we are looking for primarily, is the honesty.” Frank Andersen, who has just staged *La Sylphide* for the Estonian National Ballet, was adamant that this was the essence of August Bournonville, that this was what made his ballets so distinctive. Even the ballets that take their inspiration from more exotic climes - like *Napoli* or *Abdullah* - have, at their heart, ordinary people. As Andersen said, “Bournonville was about making poetry about normal people and normal life”. Bournonville was acknowledged to be one of the most educated and cultured men in the European dance world of his day. His passion for dance was all embracing, leading him to refer to dance as “an important element in the spiritual development of nations”. This philosophy, grounded in a fine technique, carved out for Denmark an enviable place in dance history.



However, it is the humanity that still draws audiences today. His characters are the sort of folk you wouldn't mind having a drink with at your local (sylphs excepted, of course - I don't think they drink). There are echoes of James in every generation; the poetic young man unnerved by the thought of matrimonial responsibilities, ready to succumb to the charms of an errant Sylph. Likewise, Gennaro, the handsome penniless lover pitted against the moneyed older suitors, is an archetypal story. You know the ending, but Bournonville's astute characterisation makes sure that the audience cares about the characters. We usually see only the third act, although Dinna Bjørn, who has a Danish pedigree as long as your arm, staged the entire *Napoli* for her Finnish National Ballet recently. Despite the fiendishly difficult combinations in the choreography, Bjørn said that it is the mime that is the most difficult. "Mime for the Danes is something very realistic, while still

Laura Morera in *La Sylphide*.
Photo: Bill Cooper



Estonian National Ballet in *La Sylphide*. Photo: Harri Rospu

having a style. It is different from the Russian, which is more theatrical, and the English, which is somewhat more academic. The Danish students learn from watching the ballets, so they have it somehow inside them. It is something about how you stand on your feet when you do the mime. To teach that in a short time can be very difficult."

Both Andersen and Bjorn stressed that the technical difficulties were less of a problem, although both agreed that a "good strong classical training" was a prerequisite. However, the technical difficulties encountered by non-Danish dancers were noticeable in the Royal Ballet's *Napoli Divertissement*. There is certainly no shortage of strong coryphées at the Royal but, in the opening sections, while the dozen dancers got their feet round the tricky steps, they strained to achieve a synchronised ease of delivery. But once the soloists took over, we got down to a humdinger of a tarantella. Steve McRae who, I suspect, knows how to throw a party, launched into action and in ones, twos, threes and mores, the dancers bounded and rebounded. Laura Morera and José Martín attacked the steps with down-to-earth passion, embellished with quicksilver feet, while Marianela Nuñez looked as radiantly at ease as she always does. In fact, it was such fun that the colour wheel flipped (or gremlins got into the lighting board) and we were treated to the full technicolour range.

Frank Andersen admitted that "many of the Bournonville combinations are extraordinarily difficult". However, the dancers at the Royal Ballet proved his point about the technique not being a major problem for the well schooled classical dancer. Johan Kobborg's production of *La Sylphide* has been a delight. The reel is, well, almost on home ground and the men seem to be enjoying showing off fine jetés and batterie. While the sylphs, with delicate ports de bras and

neat footwork, were outwardly demure and just a little mischievous at heart.

Federico Bonelli, as James, has footwork as precise as laser surgery, and there must have been a Danish fairy hovering at his birth who gifted him batterie of such sublime clarity. But the modesty of

Gurn, Aleksandr Prigorovski, was a winner; fine dancer, looked good in a kilt and too well earthed to be distracted by fairies.

the tour that comes from no preparation and lands so nonchalantly was almost, but not fully, achieved. Alina Cojocaru comes about as close as one gets to the truly ethereal and, with technique of seemingly magical powers, she was enchanting. Her pointes barely grazed the earth and her line was meltingly Romantic. Her offering of the bird's nest to her love was devastating in its tenderness. Tamara Rojo, the Maria Callas of ballet, has simply too much red blood in her veins and too much passion in her soul to be an ideal sylph. She can play the skittish and wilful temptress, but her vulnerability is less than convincing. Effie in this cast was Laura Morera, tempering her rather exotic looks to become the country lassie, and José Martín was perfect as salt-of-the-earth Gurn.

Frank Andersen's insistence that honesty is central, that the mime must be believable, is nowhere more evident than in the role of Madge. Sorella Englund is quite magnificent. Her beauty and stature, contrasted with her ragged outcast status, created a woman with an intriguing past and each action deepened the drama. In contrast, Gary Avis's interpretation relied over much on theatrical gestures, narrowing Madge down to a stereotype witch.

August Bournonville declared that mime "encompasses all the feelings of the soul". Frank Andersen's recent production, assisted by Eva Kloberg and Anne Marie Vessel Schlüter, which recently premiered in Tallinn, has made these feelings paramount. The story is

blinding in its clarity. Olga Titova, who plays Nancy, Effie's friend, spoke for the company when she enthused over the creativity of the rehearsal period: "We were each given our own story". These subtexts enabled the company to become villagers we cared about, real people who possibly wondered if James, with his poetic fancies and harshness towards old Madge, was, in fact, the right man for Effie. As James, Artjom Maksakov was totally enraptured by the Sylph. His astonishment was clearly reflected on his expressive face. His distraction throughout the reel was effectively managed and his brief dance solo showed good ballon and neat batterie.

Frank Andersen, who has produced Bournonville works all over the world, said that it often came as a surprise to dancers that in Bournonville you continue dancing while you are acting. "In *Don Q*, you do your variation and get on with the acting afterwards. But James, in Act 1 - he is on stage the entire act. The entire act from waking up, thinking he is going to get married to running away with another girl into the forest! Can you imagine the mood change involved in his body and his psyche?"

Estonian Olga Rjabikova's Sylph was beautifully phrased, with a light easy jump and melting arms. Hers was a joyous creation embracing life so absolutely that her death was doubly tragic. Maksakov was gutted at his part in the tragedy and Madge was on hand to rub salt into the wounds.

Vitali Nikolajev made of Madge a strong, embittered and vindictive woman; a dominant figure and a fine storyteller.

Effie, Ingrid Gilden, was possibly a little too prim; I can see her as the champion of

the Highland Dance

Competitions, needle sharp feet and pretty as a picture. Gurn, Aleksandr Prigorovski, was a winner; fine dancer, looked good in a kilt and too well earthed to be distracted by fairies. Mikael Melbye, another multi-talented Dane, was responsible for the designs. They were less misty and romantic than most; the brightness of the exterior view making an interesting contrast with the gloom of the baronial hall and the trees in Act two, brooding and heavy. A mention, too, for Mikk Murdvee, making his debut as conductor, who conjured such quality playing of Herman Løvenskiold's music from the orchestra.

The strict schooling of classical ballet can make a change of style less easy. Dinna Bjørn spoke of changing habits, "the steps are still the same, but you are doing them in another way, linking them together in another way." And because one of the characteristics of Bournonville is that it should be so effortless and natural, this can be difficult. Finnish dancer and choreographer Jorma Elo, who wrote a curtain raiser to the Bjørn's production of *Napoli*, was well aware of this problem. *Offcore* was a thrillingly virtuosic piece of contemporary ballet; his answer to Bournonville, which he found "...excruciatingly difficult. My own experience was completely at variance with the illusion I was seeking to produce. It was an incredibly frustrating and stressful physical struggle against gravity. I believe that the contrast between



Left: Olga Rjabikova in the Estonian National Ballet's *Sylphide* - photo: Harri Rospu; above - Steven McRae in The Royal Ballet's *Napoli* - photo: Bill Cooper

what the audience sees and what a dancer has to force his body into is greater in a Bournonville ballet than with any other dance technique."

In 1999 Frank Andersen produced *La Sylphide* for the National Ballet of China. He related how principal dancer Zhu Yan had given a wonderful performance at the general rehearsal. At the press conference afterwards the question came up, "what have Eva and Frank taught you that you were never taught before?" She thought for a while, then said, "They taught me to dance with my heart". At that point Andersen said "we can go home now" - his mission was complete.

Maggie Foyer

Bournonville Londonis ja Tallinnas

Maggie Foyer võrdleb ballette, mille lõi mees, kes muutis tavalised inimesed ja tavalise elu poeesiaks

„Mida me eelkõige otsime, on ausus.”

Frank Andersen, kes lavastas äsja Rahvusooperis Estonia balleti „Sülfiid”, on kindel, et just ausus oli August Bournonville’i olemus ja see muutis tema balletid nii erilisteks.

Isegi eksootilisest õhkkonnast inspireeritud ballettide „Napoli” ja „Abdullah” keskmes on tavalised inimesed. Andersen ütles: „Bournonville muutis tavalised inimesed ja nende elu poeesiaks.”

Bournonville oli tuntud kui üks haritumaid ja kultursemaid mehi selle aja Euroopa tantsumaaailmas. Tema kirg tantsu vastu oli kõikehõlmav, pannes teda viitama tantsule kui olulisele osale rahvuste vaimses arengus. See filosoofia põhineb filigraansel tehnikal, mis loodi Taanis, tantsuajalooliselt kadestusväärses paigas.

Inimlikkus on ikkagi see, mis tänapäeval publikut tõmbab. Tema karakterid on seda sorti inimesed, kellega oleks tore kohalikus pubis klaasi tõsta (muidugi v.a sülfiidid, sest ma ei usu, et nad joovad). James’i taolisi noormehi on igas põlvkonnas: poeetiline noormees, kes on paanikas pulmadega seotud kohustuste pärast ja on valmis alistuma rändavale sülfiidile. Samuti Gennaro, nägus rahatu armastaja, kes on vastamisi rahakate vanemaealiste kosilastega – see on arhetüüpne lugu. On ette teada, kuidas see lõpeb, kuid Bournonville’i nutikas portreteering paneb karakteritest hoolima. Harilikult näeme ainult kolmandat vaatust, hoolimata sellest, et taani päritolu Dinna Bjorn lavastas hiljuti oma Soome Rahvusballetile kogu „Napoli“. „Hoolimata kuratlikult keerukatest koreograafilistest kombinatsioonidest, on miimika kõige raskem,“ ütles Bjorn. „Taanlastele on miimika midagi väga realistlikku, samas on tegemist stiiliga, mis erineb vene teatraalsest ja inglise akadeemilisest miimikast. Taani tudengid õpivad ballette vaadates, nii et see on neil juba veres. Asi on selles, kuidas jalgadel seisad, samal ajal kui miimikat teed. Õpetada seda lühikese perioodi jooksul võib osutada väga keeruliseks.”

Nii Andersen kui Bjorn rõhutasid, et tehnilised raskused tekitasid vähem probleeme, kuigi nad nõustusid, et „hea klassikaline treening” oli eeltingimus. Sellest hoolimata oli mitte-

taanlastest tantsijatel Kuningliku Balleti „Napoli divertismendis“ märgatavaid tehnilisi raskusi.

Kindlasti pole Kuninglikus Balletis puudust tugevatest korüfeedest. Esimeses osas said tosin tantsijat hakkama raskete sammudega, kuid pingutasid, et saavutada ühtsena mõjuvat näilist kergust. Kohe kui solistid tantsima hakkasid, saime näha erakordset tarantellat. Alustas Steve McRae, kes teab, kuidas pidu püsti panna ning artistid tantsisid ühe-, kahe-, kolme ja mitme kaupa.

Laura Morera ja Jose Martin tantsisid kirega, nende jalad liikusid imekiirelt ning Marianela Nunez tantsis särava kergusega nagu alati. See oli nii ilus, kui värvituled pöörlesid (või sattusid lihtsalt kiuslikud haldjad valgustaja kabiini) ja saime osa värvivalgusmängust kõigi tehnikavõimaluste ulatuses.

Frank Andersen märkis, et „paljud Bournonville`i kombinatsioonid on erakordselt rasked“. Ometi tõestasid Kuningliku Balleti tantsijad, et tehnika pole hästikoolitatud klassikalise tantsija jaoks peamine probleem. Johan Kloborg`i lavastatud „Sülfiid“ on vaimustav. Reel on peaaegu kodumaal ja näib, et mehed tunnevad tantsust rõõmu. Haprad sülfiiidid näitasid delikaatset kehahoidu ja puhast jalgade tööd, olid rõhutatult tagasihoidlikud ja sisimas ainult veidike vallatud.

Federico Bonelli (James) jalgade töö on täpne kui laseroperatsioon ja tema sünni juures pidi ilmselt olema haldjas, kes talle selle võime kinkis. Arenguruumi on pöörete osas, mis jäid tagasihoidlikeks, sest polnud piisavat ettevalmistust ning pöörete lõpud olid lohakad. Alina Cojocar u tehnika lubas eeldada, et tantsijannal on maagilisi võimeid ning Cojocar u lummas õhkõrna ebamaist olemust suurepäraselt tabades.

Cojocar u varvastants riivas vaevu maad ja tema tantsujoon oli liigutavalt romantiline. Linnupesa pakkumine armastatule oli oma õrnuses lausa relvituks tegev. Tamara Rojo (balleti Maria Callas) on lihtsalt liiga kuumavereline ning temas on liiga palju kirge, et olla ideaalne sülfiiid. Ta võib mängida ülemeelikut ja kangekaelset kiusajannat, kuid tema haavatavus pole sugugi veenev. Effie osatäitja oli sel õhtul Laura Morera, mahendades oma eksootilist välimust, et sobida maatüdrukaks ja Jose Martin oli täiuslik maa soolana mõjuv Gurn.

Frank Anderseni nõue, et ausus oleks keskne, et miimika peaks olema usutav, on kõige ilmsem Madge`i rollis. Sorella Englund on suurepärane. Tema ilu ja vaimne suurus vastandus räbaldunud heidiku olukorrale, lõi intrigeeriva minevikuga naise ja iga teoga süveneva draama. Kontrastiks on Gary Avis`e interpretatsioon, mis toetus rohkem teatraalsetele žestidele, tehes Madge`ist stereotüüpse nõia.

August Bournonville väitis, et miimika „ümbritseb kõiki hinge tundeid”. Frank Anderseni viimane, Tallinnas esietendunud lavastus, mille assistentideks olid Eva Kloborg ja Anne Marie Vessel-Schlüter, on teinud neist tunnetest ülima. Lugu oma lihtsuses on pimestav. Olga Titova, kes mängib Nancy't, Effie sõbrannat, rääkis trupi eest, olles vaimustunud prooviperioodi loovast õhkkonnast: „Me saime igatüki oma loo”. Need alltekstid võimaldasid trupil muutuda külaelanikeks, kellest hoolitakse. Nad muutusid tõelisteks inimesteks, kes muretsevad seepärast, kas poetiliste luuludega ja Madge'i vastu karm James on tegelikult õige mees Effie jaoks. Artjom Maksakov oli James'ina täielikult sülfidi lummuses. Tema häämingut oli väljendusrikkas näos selgelt näha. Jamesi eemalolek reeli ajal oli hästi edasi antud ja lühike tantsusoolo näitas head hüppetehnikat ning jalgade tööd. Reeli ajal kujutas ta efektselt hajameelsust ja tema lühike tantsusoolo näitas hüpetel head õhuspüsimist ja kiiret jalgade tööd.

Frank Andersen, kes on lavastanud Bournonville töid kogu maailmas, ütles: „Bournonville tantsides tuleb näidelda ja see on tantsijatele tihti üllatav. „Don Quijotes“ sooritad oma variatsiooni ja siis näitled edasi, aga James on laval terve esimese vaatuse. Oled laval kogu vaatuse alates üles ärkamise stseenist, läbi abiellumismõtete stseeni, kuni teise neiuga metsa pagemise stseenini. Kas suudate ette kujutada meeoleumuutusi tema kehas ja vaimus?”

Eesti Sülfidid (Olga Rjabikova) oli kaunilt fraseeritud, kerge ja muretu hüppe ning sujuvate käeliigutustega. Ta lõi kujutluse rõõmsast olendist, kes elab niivõrd intensiivselt, et tema surm tundub kahekordselt traagiline. Maksakov täitis oma osa selles tragöödias ning Madge hõõrus haavale raputatud soola sisse. Vitali Nikolajev tegi Madgest tugeva, kibestunud ja kättemaksuhimulise naise, dominantse figuuri ja suurepärase jutustaja. Effie (Ingrid Gilden) oli ehk liiga pirtsakas. Kujutan teda ette Mägismaa Tantsuvõistluse võitjana – nõelravate sammudega ja piltilus. Gurn (Aleksandr Prigorovski) oli parim. Ta on esmaklassiline tantsija, nägi kildis hea välja ja oli liialt realist selleks, et lasta end haldjatel võluda. Mikael Melbye, teine mitmekülgelt andekas taanlane, tegi lavakujunduse. See polnud nii õrn ja romantiline kui enamik selle balleti lavakujundusi; väline heledus tekitas põneva kontrasti sünge suursuguse saali ja puude vahel teises vaatuses. Tuleb märkida Mikk Murdvee dirigendidebüüti, mis võlus orkestrist välja Herman Lovensjöldi muusika esmaklassilise esituse.

Eelnev range klassikaline koolitus võib teha stiili muutmise raskemaks. Dinna Bjorn rääkis harjumuste muutmisest: „Sammud on küll samad, kuid sa teed neid teistmoodi, seod neid teisiti.” See on raske, kuna Bournonville'i stiilile on iseloomulik, et tantsimine peab näima pingevaba ja loomulik.

Soome tantsija ja koreograaf Jorma Elo, kes kirjutas Bjorni lavastusele „Napoli“ eelmängu, oli sellest teadlik. „Offcore“ oli kaasakiskuvalt virtuoosne kaasaegne ballett – see oli tema vastus Bournonville`ile, mille ta leidis olevat „...piinavalt raske. Mu oma kogemus oli täiesti erinev illusioonist mida otsisin lavastamiseks. See oli uskumatult närvesööv ja raske füüsiline pingutus, et eirata maa külgetõmbejõudu. Ma usun, et kontrast sellega, mida publik näeb ja mida tantsija peab oma keha tegema sundima, on suurem Bournonville balletis kui ükskõik millises tantsutehnikas.”

1999. aastal lavastas Frank Andersen „Sülfiidi” Hiina Rahvuslikus Balletiteatris. Ta jutustas, kuidas peaosaline Zhu Yan andis peaproovis imelise etenduse. Hiljem toimunud pressikonverentsil küsiti temalt: „Mida õpetasid sulle Eva ja Frank sellist, mida sulle varem ei õpetatud?”

Ta mõtles veidi ja ütles: „Nad õpetasid mulle südamega tantsimist.” Siinkohal ütles Andersen: „Nüüd võime koju minna”. Tema missioon oli täidetud.

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