



Christe, Härm and S

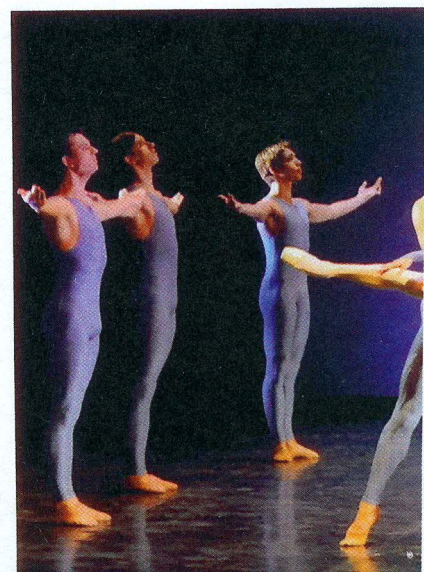
DANCE
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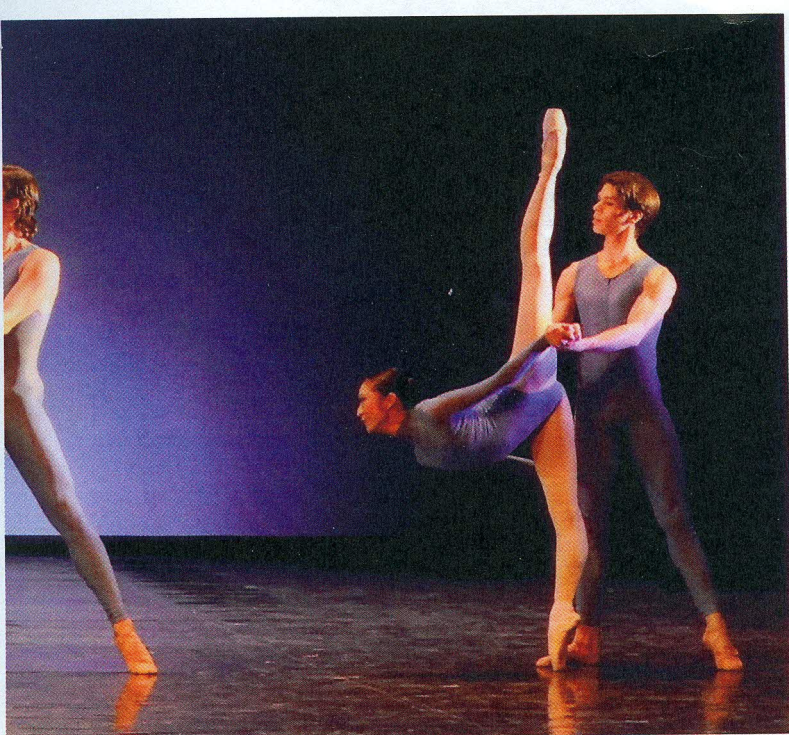
MIKE DIXON assesses
Thomas Edur's inaugural
impact in Tallinn

Triple bills are frequently more useful for gauging the strength of a company in depth than full-length ballets. With more principal dancers on display there are opportunities to assess the skills and attributes of a greater cross-section of performers. On the evidence of the recent Ballet Evening at the Estonian National Opera House I can declare that this is an ensemble in vigorous health. After five months in the post of artistic director, Thomas Edur, himself a paragon of classical style, has galvanised the company and seems determined to turn them into an international-class troupe. He is ably supported by his wife, Agnes Oaks, who, as assistant to the artistic director, must take much of the credit for the current standard of dancing.

Before Nightfall by Nils Christe has a cast of six couples. The women are dressed in veined black and grey knee-length dresses and the men, bare-chested, in similarly patterned tights. The patterning is echoed in the black set, with white organic shapes resembling waves or vegetation. The general mood of the ballet is edgy, thrusting and urgent but with no obvious emotional connection between the participants, which deprives the piece of theatrical power. The first duet features Marika Muiste, a blonde, pleasingly lyrical dancer, and Artjom Maksakov, who is an able partner with a strong jump. The ensuing pas de six for a supporting group of couples is distinguished by supported turns and high lifts. The second pas de deux features Heidi Kopti and Andrei Mihnevits making the most of Christe's suggestion of a relationship, and the final pairing of Eve Andre and Sergei Upkin delivers two dancers in superb form: she has a lovely extended line and he displays effortless ballon. *Before Nightfall* maintains a mood of generalised angst without seeming to say anything in particular, but as a vehicle for the company it prompts many sharp individual performances.

Pelléas and Mélisande by Tiit Härm, using Schoenberg's vibrant score, attempts to distil the story of the tragic lovers, replete with its watery imagery, into one act. It fails, through being too episodic and by trying to recount too accurately each stage of the narrative. The result is a work that is too long and repeats itself. At half the length this ballet would have doubled its theatrical impact. As the lovers, Maksim Tsukarjov as Pelléas (in blue) and Svetlana Danilova as Mélisande (in white) look attractive but don't have the choreographic material to suggest a real relationship, let alone





Estonian National Ballet in *Symphony No. 2*. Photo: Harri Rospu.

Scholz in Estonia

a tragedy. The result is picturesque but empty. However Anatoli Arhangelski, as the jealous Golaud, is charismatic and uses his dramatic eyes to maximum effect. Consequently he becomes the most interesting and sympathetic character on stage. His performance rescues the show. The rising and falling of a piece of drapery that appears to be a rumpled celestial tablecloth only adds bathos to the proceedings.

Taking its title from Schumann's music, *Symphony No. 2* by Uwe Scholz (who died aged 45 in 2004) is a strongly constructed work washed in a mid blue, with leotards for the women and sleeveless unitards for the men. This mode of costuming can reveal all manner of physical imperfections and inadequacies but the Estonians look fit and toned in these costumes. The ballet opens with the image of two women forming a single winged figure; and female solos continue to form a linking motif throughout. The most substantial roles, however, are for two couples, the first of which, Olga Malinovskaya and Artjom Maksakov, demonstrate a good rapport in complicated partnering as Maksakov reveals the promise demonstrated in the first ballet with manly attention

to his ballerina, making the many high lifts look effortless. Eve Andre and Sergei Upkin prove equally good in their pair work and one felt constantly elated at the quality of the partnering on display. This foursome provides the focus for the strongest section of the piece, in Schumann's slow movement, when the men support their women from the floor, then in arabesques and pirouettes. There are many felicitous moments in this ballet but sometimes Scholz over-eggs the pudding by repeating some of the more successful motifs, like the women leaping backwards into their partner's arms, to the detriment of the ballet as a whole. In general, repetition and movement in cannon is used well throughout the ballet and it is obvious that Scholz was a craftsman, although not really in the major league of choreographers. However, his ballet pushes the limits of the dancers; and the fearsome overhead lifts for the male corps, all lifting their partners on the same beat of the music, would test any major company. At some point in the near future it would be wonderful to see this talented ensemble in London, but hopefully in works chosen by their new artistic director, Thomas Edur.

Estonian National Ballet in *Symphony No. 2*. Photo: Harri Rospu.

