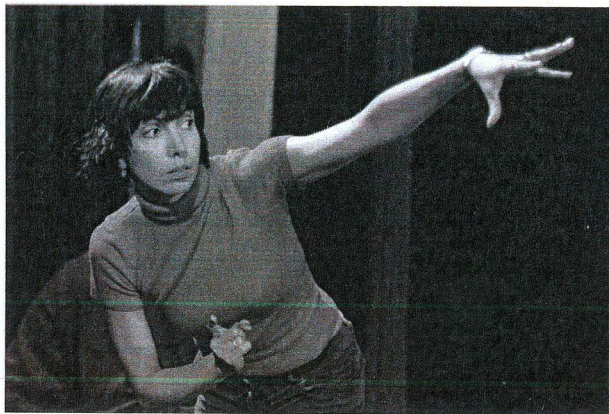


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# Libahunt, the ballet

Marina Kesler

Choreographer, Estonian National Ballet



I read August Kitzberg's play at the age of ten and was deeply impressed. When, much later, in 2007, I had an opportunity to

turn it into a ballet, I wanted to bring the old story up to date, to make it meaningful for today's young people. Women like Mari are typical of our age, they are not at all rare. In Kitzberg she is meek and mild, but in today's world she is no longer bound by a restrictive moral code; my Mari is prepared to fight for what she wants, not just accept the circumstances, as she did in Kitzberg. Which means that she is a stronger, more determined character, while my Tiina is softer than Kitzberg's, capable of forgiveness. Kitzberg originally made Tiina into a defiant rebel who wanted unconditional love and would accept nothing else.

When I started work on the ballet, the working title was *Tiina*. There is a ballet of that name already, composed by Estonian Lydia Auster; I used some of her music. Our marketing people, however, decided that the finished product should be called *Libahunt*. The music I used came from a number of Estonian composers; it was a compilation, with Arvo Pärt's *Fratres* providing possibly the most forceful section.

In 1912 when Kitzberg's play was first published, the nation saw itself as uniformly blond and fair-skinned. Kitzberg's Mari is fair and Tiina dark, even swarthy, and I retained this contrast although I brought in equality as far as the costumes went, with everybody dancing in identical simple shifts.

## Heidi Kopti

Dancer, Estonian National Ballet

I was given the role of Mari and I liked it – it suited me, I felt comfortable in it. However, there was some initial confusion and I thought I was going to be Tiina – I could have equally well managed that. In

private life I am also a fighter and do not give in easily, which is why Mari suited me. To dance the role, I was asked to lighten my hair although I am a natural blonde. A visible, stark contrast was needed – Tiina (danced by Luana Georg and Eve Andre) was dark-haired.

When Kitzberg wrote his play, the Estonians thought of themselves as a cohesive, fair-haired and fair-skinned nation, which is why the outsider, Tiina, is dark. Now, I think, the picture is confused. People travel and it is not at all clear who is a 'true Estonian'.



Photo by Harri Rospu

[Editor: There are people in Tallinn who wonder why *Libahunt* is no longer performed. They say that the National Ballet should perform Estonian works at all times. I think they are right to wonder and the ballet should indeed be revived].