



Eesti



# years of love

Text: MARI ROONEMAA · Photos: RÜNNO LAHESOO, LIINA VIRU, HARRI ROSPU, VIKTOR JELISSEJEV

In „Midlife Joys”, an Estonian cult movie from the 1980s, two energetic elderly ladies talk about how love repeats itself once in 100 years. Although the Estonia Theatre is long past midlife, having celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary last autumn, the theatre remains youthful and offers spring-like freshness every season.

**L**ove for the national theatre sprouted even before construction began on the building, Tallinn's largest Art Nouveau masterpiece. Designed by Finnish architects Armas Lindgren and Wivi Lönn, it was largely financed by public donations. Later it was given a new roof and, in 2010, a new, dramatic curtain.



The theatre has witnessed many historic events for both the nation and the state: in 1990 it hosted the Estonian Congress, which was demanding independence from the Soviet Union. Then, in 1991, it hosted Estonia's first parliament, the so-called Constituent Assembly. Every few years it rolls out the red carpet for the president's National Day receptions.

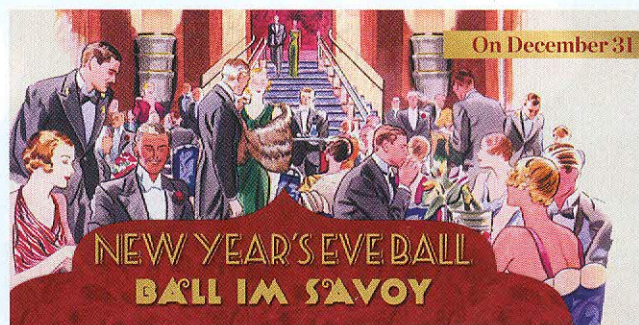
During the recent 100<sup>th</sup>-anniversary celebrations, one was reminded of how guests arrived for the original inauguration in horse carriages, wearing long gowns, laced gloves and high hats. The opening monologue in 2013 was a passage from „Hamlet”, which also inaugurated the theatre in 1913.

### An active season

The theatre's jubilee brings together artists from near and far, in a programme that is overwhelmingly festive.

In September was the premiere of Tõnu Kõrvits' opera „Butterfly”, which depicts time-travel to the early days of Estonia. During the kaamos, when the days are getting shorter and nights longer, the theatre is showing two new ballet performances: „Symbiont(s)”, by Wayne McGregor, one of the hottest names in ballet today, and „Petrushka”, directed by Mai Murdmaa, the grande dame of modern Estonian dance.

2013 will be sent off revue-style with a ball-in-a-ball: „Ball im Savoy”, the Pál Ábrahám operetta directed by Mart Sander. Those who cannot take





Pähklipureja / The Nutcracker  
Alena Shkatula ja / and  
Gabriel Davidsson

part in the hedonistic year-end festivities will have to wait until 15 January, when it will be included in the regular programme.

March will delight fans of dance with the world premiere of „Medea”, a ballet by Gianluca Schiavoni to the music of Igor Stravinski and Alfred Schnittke. With the help of an Italian creative team, Schiavoni has recreated the ballet for dancers from the Estonian National Ballet. Based on a Greek tragedy, „Medea” is likely to become the next big hit on the Estonian calendar.

April marks the 100th birthday of one of Estonia’s greatest talents, opera star Endel Pärn. In the operetta gala „Man with a Monocle”, many beloved actors, including Ago Anderson and Tõnu Kark, will perform the best of Endel Pärn.

The final premiere of the jubilee season will be Donizetti’s comical opera „The Elixir of Love”, directed by Georg Malvius, who brings along his team, including Ellen Cairns (artwork) and Palle Palmé (lighting).

A regular feature on the programme, „Tannhäuser” is the romantic opera of Richard Wagner, born 200 years ago this year. In Estonia it will be staged by internationally acclaimed British director Daniel Slater.

Early next summer, maestro Eri Klas will celebrate his 75th birthday by grabbing the conduc-

tor’s baton for a performance of Verdi’s immortal „La Traviata”.

Babies are difficult companions for traditional theatre-goers. The Estonia Winter Garden has remedied this problem by creating a programme for parents and children alike. The theatre will host concerts of classical masterpieces by the Opera Quartet for children up to age three. As music is a universal language, children from all over the world can attend. There will be a full-floor activity space in the house, so little ones can roam around as they please.

More mature theatre-lovers will enjoy Mark Twain’s „The Prince and the Pauper”, starring twin brothers Märt and Priit Pius, in the adjacent theatre. As Pippi Longstocking performs her tricks for the children next door, the adults can have a chance to see a show, too.

What will the national theatre be like in 100 years’ time? The New Year’s wish of the forever modern Estonia Theatre is best summed up in this 1930s quote from poet Marie Under: „May achievements never become restrictive – let’s keep dreams in our blood and remain energetic!”

For more details, please visit the Estonia Theatre website, [www.opera.ee](http://www.opera.ee).

Most performances have Estonian and English subtitles. ✱

## Travelling is a nut waiting to crack

■ Travelling with a large troupe is never without its surprises. A year ago the Estonian National Ballet performed Tschaikovski's „Nutcracker” five times in the famous La Fenice Theatre in Venice, to a total of 6,000 spectators. The troupe was 86-people strong, including 19 young dancers from the Tallinn Ballet School. Since many were underage, the organisers dealt with unexpected challenges from Italian bureaucrats. Meanwhile, all the stage decorations had to be delivered to the theatre by boat. During one lengthy rehearsal, dancer Aleksandr Prigorovski tore his Achilles heel and had to be sent to Estonia for surgery. Fortunately, he had an understudy and all five performances played to a full house. During the intermission, tiny Nutcracker rats handed out candy to the public.

Toomas Edur



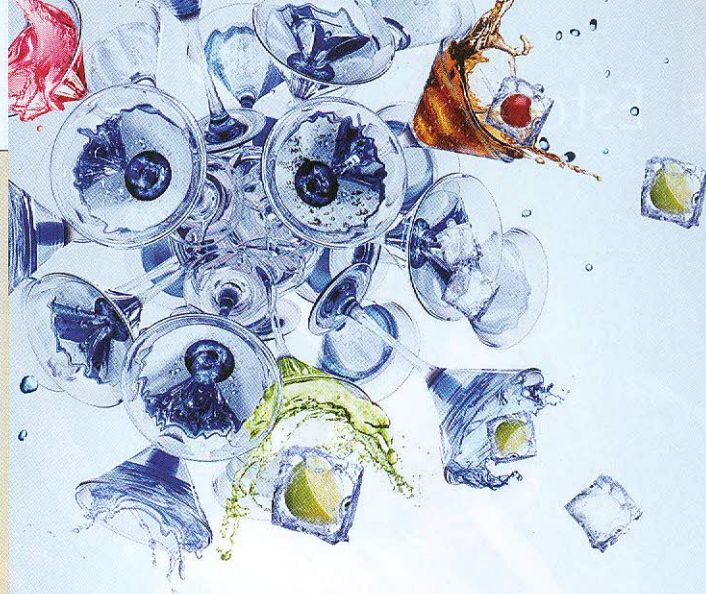
## Estonians wonderful adventures

■ Performing to other cultures can create all sorts of unexpected situations. Our children's ballet „Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” included lots of fireworks, but in Hong Kong we were prohibited from using our own fireworks and made to use the local devices. In Macao, local authorities (possibly suspecting the Estonians were planning to blow up the city) had 10 policemen standing by during our daytime rehearsal, in addition to the usual security. For the evening performance there were rescue teams, two sets of stretchers and an ambulance and fire truck waiting in the courtyard.

Ülla Veerg, marketing director

■ A totally unexpected situation occurred in China, when the stage crew was half local. A wicked witch being chased by the dwarfs was supposed to run to the hill in the middle of the stage and plunge to her death. Because of an error in communication, one separating wall had been left down, blocking the path to the hill. The poor dwarfs had no option but to „beat” the witch until she understood that she had to find another way out.

Toomas Edur, artistic director of the Estonian National Ballet



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