



Estonian National Ballet - Nanae Maruyama and Jonatan Davidsson in Thomas Edur's *Sleeping Beauty*. Photo: Harri Rospu

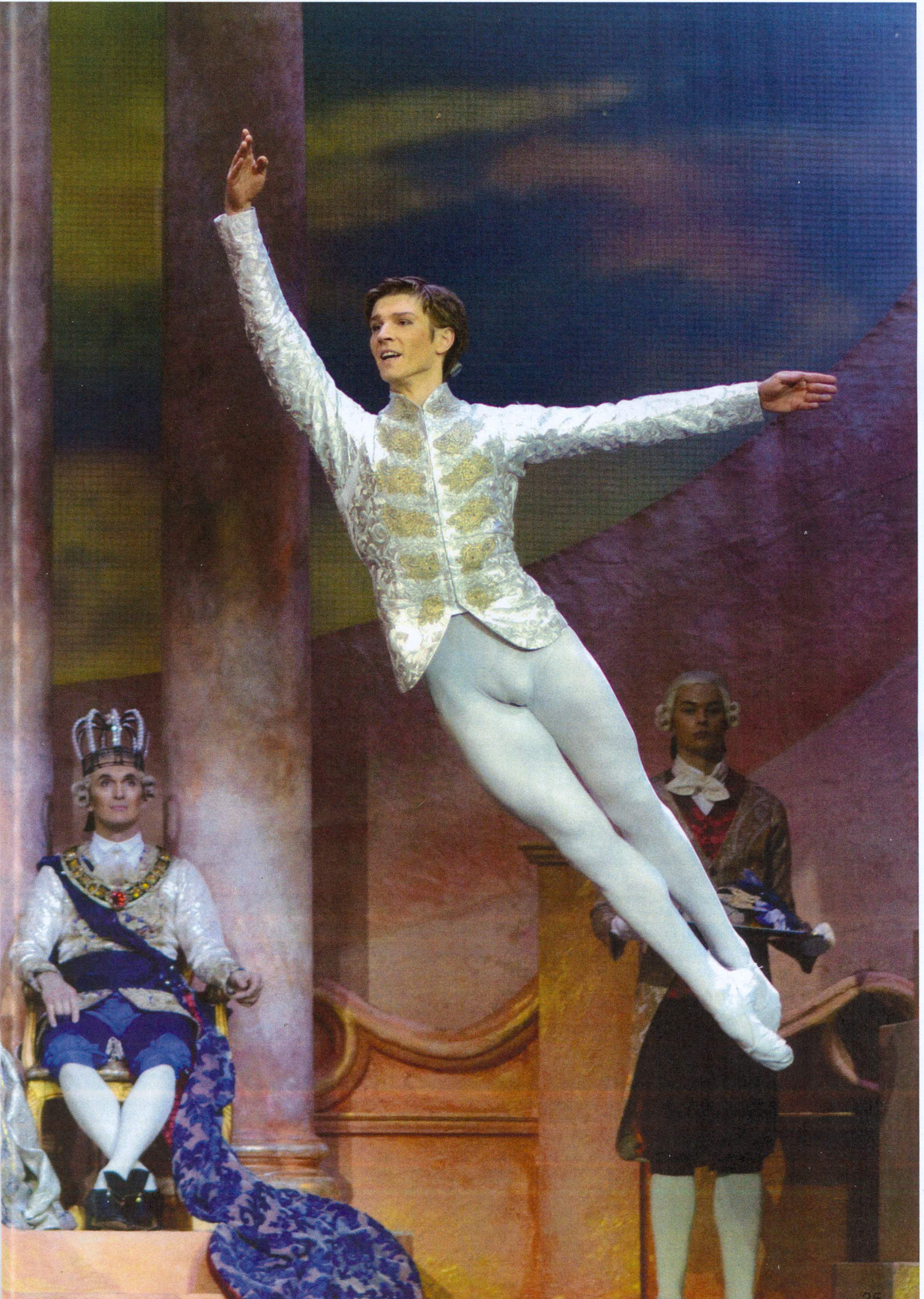
ESTONIAN Beauty

MIKE DIXON
applauds Thomas
Edur's new
production of the
Tchaikovsky classic in
Tallinn

Thomas Edur proved conclusively with his production of *La Bayadère* that he has an outstanding talent for editing and re-shaping full-length classical ballets to the needs of a smaller company of dancers. With his new production of *The Sleeping Beauty* (*Uinuv Kaunitar*) for the Estonian National Ballet he has taken a traditional route based on Petipa's original work, subtracted some elements, added others and created a new pas de deux for the Vision Scene and some very difficult choreography for his male dancers. The outstanding quality of this production is clarity of focus: for instance, the Prince's athletic friends, first encountered during the hunt, reappear in the last act (which takes the form of a masquerade party) as they dance with their partners representing various fairy tale characters but retaining their original identities. It is an intelligent concept, which works neatly and allows four virtuoso males to appear in both acts.

In consequence, the variations for Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, Cinderella and her Prince, and the White Cat and Puss in Boots are all newly minted with bravura steps, complementing the largely traditional choreography of the Bluebirds.

Peter Docherty's designs offer elegant solutions to the relative lack of dancing space with the use of substantial three-dimensional Corinthian columns with gilded bases and capitals, which are cleverly re-configured for most scenes. The interior walls and some costumes feature designs of leaves, bringing the idea of the forest into the palace and looking just as effective in the exterior scenes. The Fairies' tutus are in subtle pastel shades, which identify individual identities but do not clash in the ensembles, and are in contrast to the glistening black of Carabosse in her scintillating snake headdress. Triinu Leppik-Upkin is a sinuous, beautiful, evil fairy, and the thunderflash of her exit illuminates the previously unseen presence





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of Nadežda Antipenko's Lilac Fairy standing at the bottom of a flight of stairs between two pillars; just one of many smart innovations in this production.

The conductor, Vello Pähn, draws out the voice of each orchestral instrument, and listening to the Overture is like acquiring a new set of ears as previously unheard details are presented to the unwary listener. He is an excellent conductor and, although some of the first night tempi were somewhat pedantic, at the expense of visual and aural excitement, the second performance amply demonstrated his capacity for creating musical tension and propelling the performance forward in an urgent manner.

Alena Shkatula as Aurora has a long, ravishing line reminiscent of Zakharova and other tall Russian ballerinas. She shapes the choreography beautifully and is able to be soft and lyrical or add sharp punctuation as required. Her balances are strong in the Rose Adage and she displays impressive technical control throughout the ballet. Her Prince is Denis Klimuk, who is a little lacklustre until he sees the vision of Aurora, whereupon he develops a stronger stage personality, and his partnering is attentive. In the new Vision Scene pas de deux both dancers are tested by the technical demands of Edur's choreography but rise confidently to the challenge and absolutely triumph in their later variations at the climax of the ballet. In the last act Heidi Kopti and Eneko Amoros are a wonderful pairing of Cats, highly comical, expressive and precise. Abigail Sheppard and Jonathan Hanks make a handsome couple as Cinderella and her Prince in a pas de deux that is characterised by a series of exits and entrances, culminating in the fitting of the slipper. Hanks has clearly developed exponentially over the last few seasons and is

one of the company's outstanding young dancers. Nanae Maruyama and Jonatan Davidsson, both of whom are polished performers, pull out the stops for the Bluebird pas de deux to great effect. She has refinement and delicacy and he has confident attack; they complement each other well. In another cast the petite Luana Georg demonstrates her experience as a leading ballerina with a poised and crystalline interpretation of Aurora. Sergei Upkin as her Prince has a velvety quality that serves to finesse every moment, with silent landings from his jumps and an unhurried elegance even in the fastest moments of his dancing.

This *Sleeping Beauty* is deeply satisfying at many levels because the various creative strands that Edur has drawn together are of high quality and are complementary. The new elements of the choreography, Pähn's instinctive musical choices in editing the score to match Edur's conception of the ballet, and the imaginative designs of Peter Docherty, which constantly delight, all seem forged on the same anvil of imaginative thinking. Edur and Oaks danced this ballet many times in their performing careers and understand it better than most. In preparing the new production for the stage they have drawn upon their extensive experience to capture the essence of the piece, to refine its nature and to train the dancers of the Estonian National Ballet to the pitch of perfection necessary to present a coherent and satisfying version of this most classical of all Petipa ballets. What Edur has achieved with this *Sleeping Beauty* is rare: demonstrating that with an artistic conception that goes to the very essence of an iconic work of the canon, it is possible to present a viable reading that does not depend for success on limitless funds.