

THOMAS EDUR'S

# *La Bayadère*

MIKE DIXON reviews the Estonian National Ballet at La Fenice in Venice

**T**he chill December air blowing from the Venetian lagoon might have emptied the city's streets of tourists, but it did not penetrate as far as the stage of La Fenice. Within the famous turquoise and gold auditorium, only the exotic warmth and energy of Thomas Edur's beguiling staging of *La Bayadère* held sway. Incorporating all the jewels of Petipa's choreography in his production, Edur cuts to the chase and edits out all unnecessary passages of mime or explication, relying instead on the potent imagery of individual scarves being exchanged to symbolise human relationships. Thus, Solor's bronze-coloured scarf is presented and paired with the virginal white one of Nikiya in the opening scene; and Gamzatti's luxurious red scarf is paired with a reluctant Solor's later, in the Rajah's palace, to celebrate their arranged marriage. Through this economical device Edur is able to introduce urgency into the narrative, and delivers *La Bayadère* in two substantial acts. His own choreography forms seamless bridges and decorations and is indistinguishable from Petipa's, creating a rich feast of dancing. The designs by Peter Docherty are colourful and versatile, with the Rajah's palace opening out like a magic box to reveal a rich interior. The lighting by Tiit Urvik is excellent.

Musically, it is hard to imagine a more sumptuous rendition of the score. The resident orchestra of La Fenice, under the baton of Estonian wunderkind Risto Joost, produce an exciting sound: the violin, cello and harp solos possessing a lyrical beauty and clarity of tone rarely heard in performances of this ballet. Sometimes Joost's tempi lack urgency during bravura moments of dancing, but the richness of orchestral colour is a huge compensating factor. From a purely aural point of view, this score has only been surpassed in execution in the famous recording conducted by Richard Bonyngue. The artistic collaboration between Joost and La Fenice's orchestra has clearly been felicitous.



Estonian National Ballet - Ekaterina Oleynik as Gamzatti in *La Bayadère*. Photo: Emma Kauldhar