



Estonian National Ballet - Ekaterina Oleynik as Ganzatti and Denis Klimuk as Solor in *La Bayadère*. Photo: Emma Kauldhar

As Nikiya, Alena Shkatula brings a long-limbed, epic dimension to the choreography. Her ravishing line is reminiscent of the Bolshoi's Svetlana Zakharova, but Shkatula also has an attractive, coltish aspect that brings out the vulnerable quality of the character she is playing. Her balances are formidable, her supple back a joy to behold and her pointe work is strong. She is less a temple dancer than a goddess incarnate. Denis Klimuk as Solor is tall and handsome, with fabulous cheekbones, and is a strong, considerate partner and fine actor; never has Solor's misery at his forced marriage to Ganzatti been so evident in the body language of the hero. His dancing with Shkatula in the various pas de deux of the Shades scene is both sensitive and exciting. Ekaterina Oleynik's playing of Ganzatti is vibrantly human and passionate and she dismisses the technical difficulties of the wedding pas de deux with aplomb. She is a natural foil to Shkatula and they interact intelligently with each other.

Anatoli Arhangelski is a cool customer and brings great stage experience to his role as the High Brahmin, and fearlessly fixes his subduing gaze upon the audience at moments of high drama. Vitali Nikoleyev is also a powerful presence as the Rajah, animated and ruthless, and using unambiguous gestures to convey his intentions. In this production Solor has two soldier companions who have partnering duties with Ganzatti during the wedding celebrations and have some bravura



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classical choreography to dance. The excellent Yevgeni Grib and Jonathan Hanks are both fresh and buoyant in these roles. The Golden Idol is danced with precision by Zachary Rogers with his group of well-trained young supporters from the famous

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ballet school in Tallinn that produced both Agnes Oaks and Thomas Edur. Rogers is super-slim, and unusual casting, but the technicalities hold no terrors for him. This role has also been danced by Hanks, and Bruno Micchiardi, who here performs the fakir Magdayeva with high-octane, almost feral energy. The Indian drum dance is led at a hell of a lick by Enoko Amerós, whose high-legged strides are executed with almost impossible speed and intensity. He

is joined by Urve-Ly Voogand and Ali Urata in a breathtaking trio that stops the show.

In the Kingdom of the Shades scene, which forms the second half of the evening, the corps de ballet of the Estonian National Ballet perform the famous Entry of the Shades with a uniform, rippling lyricism that is deeply satisfying. Their coaching deserves appreciative recognition. The three solo bayadère variations are performed by Heidi Kopti, Marta Navarsadyan and Nanae Maruyama with appropriate individuality and general success. At the conclusion of the ballet blanc we are returned to Solor's bedroom, where Ganzatti finds her future husband dead, in the briefest and most effective of conclusions.

In another cast, Ekaterina Oleynik (Nikiya), Jonatan Davidsson (Solor) and Luana Georg (Ganzatti) bring different but rewarding gifts and technical fireworks to the leading roles. Evgeny Dokoukine dances a very physical Golden Idol and Enoko Amorós brings fiery energy to Magdayeva. That the Estonian National Ballet can cast such difficult roles in depth is admirable. Bravo, too, to Franco Bolletta, La Fenice's dance consultant, who had the prescience to bring this exciting production to Venice to suffuse us with exotic warmth on the edge of the grey and cold Adriatic.