



[Swan Lake](#)

by Saint Petersburg Classic Ballet
at Storyhouse Theatre, Chester

Reviewed by [Andrew Marsden](#) February 2018

Tchaikovsky's ballet is widely regarded as one of the most popular ballet pieces. It is, in effect, the ballet for people who don't like ballet. Elements of Tchaikovsky's score have been used in television adverts, film soundtracks, and popular music. This staging of **Swan Lake** came courtesy of the St. Petersburg Classic Ballet company, performing at Chester's Storyhouse Theatre.

While the house was not quite full for the Sunday matinee performance, it wasn't far off. The Hungarian Sinfonietta Orchestra could be heard practising and tuning up while the audience took their seats. As the lights came down, the orchestra began playing a brief overture before the curtain raised and the ballet began. The opening scene established several characters and their relationships to one another: Prince Siegfried and his mother, the Queen, the amiable Jester, and the rest of the Royal Court. In ballet, of course, there is no dialogue. It's all performed through dance and the opening scene gave many of the performers the chance to display their prowess.

Of particular note was the Jester, sprightly performed by **Mikhail Bogomazov**, who toward the end of the scene executed a sublime variation by pirouetting nearly twenty times, all the while maintaining his characteristic smile. The Jester did much in this opening scene to help ease the audience into the ballet. His costume was distinctive, and its patterning of black opposite white highlighted the theme of duality which ran through the ballet. While much prominence was paid to

Borchenko

Pyotr

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Siegfried, his chance to display his finely-honed ballet techniques would be explored in more depth in the subsequent Acts. By the end of the opening scene, most of the ballet dancers, be they principals or corps de ballet (the 'rank and file' of the ballet company) had been given a fair chance to demonstrate their impressive skills.

After a brief pause, the second scene of Act One opened with the interior of Siegfried's castle replaced with a dry ice filled vista, representing the titular Swan Lake. Through the mist, danced the black clad figure of Rothbart (performed by **Evgeny Silakov**). Rothbart was quickly established as the villain of the piece. His black costume contrasted sharply with the white costumes of Siegfried and the swans. Silakov endowed Rothbart with sharp, precise arm movements, befitting a wizard who uses his magic to control others. Here, the female ballerinas took on the roles of the cursed swans. Their arms gracefully rose up and down like wings to

indicate when they were swans and to contrast when they assumed human form. It was now that the Prima Ballerina, **Natalia Romanova**, entered the stage as Odette, Queen of the Swans. Her dancing opposite Borchenko's Siegfried was tightly choreographed and both performers displayed exquisite control, especially on the occasions when Borchenko had to lift Romanova high into the air.

Act Two had the most impressive set of the show, with a beautifully painted backdrop which contained a gauze screen which played a key part in the climax of the Act. Here, Romanova took on a second role - that of Odille. In an astonishing moment of no less than thirty pirouettes, Odille ensured that she not only captured Siegfried's heart but that of the audience as well. Romanova's prowess throughout the show earned her much applause from the audience. Borchenko likewise proved his skills as a Premiere ballet dancer but there was a moment in this Act where he may possibly have fished for one round of applause from the audience more than was necessary. At least that was the impression given by a knowing look between two of the background dancers! In addition to the performance of Odille, the Black Swan, this Act gave the other dancers a chance to shine and the members of the company who danced in the styles of Spanish, Polish, and Hungarian dancers did excellent work at capturing the spirits of their characters.

The third and final Act, the briefest of them all, saw Siegfried break the curse which afflicted Odette and the swans by besting Rothbart and claiming Odette as his true love. This Act was the one which enabled Silakov to have his moment of glory as Rothbart. He was so convincing as the evil wizard that he was rewarded with some good natured 'boos!' from the audience during the curtain call!

This performance of *Swan Lake* was a wonderful achievement, made even more remarkable by being performed on the stage of the Storyhouse, which was a good deal tighter than the stages

most ballet performances take place on. It is a testament to the skill of the Saint Petersburg Classic Ballet company that this did not affect or hinder their performances at all.