

## Mixed Bill

*Les Sylphides,*  
*Black Swan pas de deux,*  
*The Dying Swan,*  
*La Vivandière,*  
*Walpurgis Night*

**Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo,**  
**The Lowry, Salford –**  
**January 29, 2013**

No wind, no rain, nor even winter's snowy deluge can stop those supreme ballerinas of Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, who, in January, arrived in Salford to launch their UK regional tour, complete with the requisite crates of mascara, be-jewelled bodices, wigs and massive egos that barely fit under them. We have come to adore their manic capers and their reverence for the ballet Ur-texts upon which their performances are based (many of the stagings are by the former ballerina Elena Kunikova), and it is thanks to the financial assistance of Dance Consortium that in more recent years a wider portion of the country has also fallen in love with their art.

I have thought, though, in recent touring seasons that the company's repertoire had become a little stale and a little too expectant of regional audiences' appetites: and the umpteenth performance of their *Swan Lake* Act II is no longer something I look forward to with much enthusiasm. Recently, however, they have sought to refresh their repertoire – they staged a new version of *Laurencia* in New York before Christmas – and the bill that came to the UK would have made any balletomane's heart sing.

Opening it was their familiar version of *Les Sylphides* which, though missing its once star ballerina Margeaux Munday who has sadly retired, is a gift to its current crop of soloists, especially Olga Supphozova (Robert Carter) who attacks (quite literally) the Mazurka with a bravura that would have Violetta Elvin in tears, and Viacheslav Legupski (newcomer Paolo Cerverellera) who dances with that wonderful vacantly

self-obsessed air. But this *Sylphides* is very much about the unit of the corps de ballet, its bitchy relations, the little elbowings out of the way, the cat's cradle-like ensembles that get so horribly entangled and their general sense of lethargy. To my mind it has become just a little too forced these days, a little too "rudge and a wink" and I would like to see it pared back a little, so that more of its subtle humour might shine.

Not so the "Black Swan" pas de deux, which is the glory of the evening. Yakatarina Verbosovich (Chase Johnsey) is exceptional in the highly technical passages, but also superb in those moments when she must suggest the lakeside swan (wonderfully rippling arms and a delightful pas de bourrée) and her fouettés are as good as those of Natalia Osipova, delivered with a laser-beam gaze as if to say, "don't mess with this bitch". Her Siegfried, Innokenti Smolotumuchsky (Carlos Hupoy) has a really strong and very Cuban technique, and he is a superlative partner. But the pas de deux was almost completely stolen from them by the hilarious Von Rothbart of Marat Legupski (Giovanni Ravelo), whose cloak-flicking skills brought back hideous memories of the times when Anthony Dowell used to dance Drosselmeyer with The Royal Ballet.

Ida Nevasayeva (Paul Ghiselin) reprised her now legendary *Dying Swan*, a work that with age she has turned into a comic masterpiece, milking the stage and the audience with the comic precision of a Dame.

Olga Supphozova (centre) and dancers of Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo in *Walpurgis Night*. Photograph: Courtesy of Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo.



The final two works were presented almost straight. The great joy of the Trocks is to be able to compare and contrast them with productions and performances we have known and loved and it is perhaps more a judgement on the current state of the repertoire of the world's top ballet companies that any comparison of the *La Vivandière* pas de six or of *Walpurgis Night* is well nigh impossible, without a serious expenditure of time on YouTube, and thus detrimental to the enjoyment of an audience.

*La Vivandière* is very much a historical piece, after Arthur Saint-Leon, with detailed and intricate footwork that well suited the Katia and Hans of Lariska Dumbchenko (Raffaella Morra) and Jacques d'Ambrosia (Scott Austin), whose difference in height bore much of the work's comic weight. *Walpurgis Night* is more rampant in style, based as it is on an old Soviet warhorse by Leonid Lavrovsky, and sadly a work that has departed the repertoire even of the Bolshoi. It is an orgy of nymphs and fauns, of Bacchus and Bacchante – Supphozova (Carter) again, pirouetting like a dream – and it is very enjoyable, though not up there with the Trocks' best. This is partly because it is almost too straight-faced, and partly because knowledge of the source is not easily at an audience's fingertips. Yet the company dances superbly, and benefits hugely from a recent influx of younger dancers whose techniques are of world-class calibre. These ballerinas still reign supreme.

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