

British Theatre Guide

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Ave Maya Gala – in memory of Maya Plisetskaya

Russian Ballet Icons
Ensemble Productions
London Coliseum
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From tragic beginnings to global renown, the irrepressible Maya Plisetskaya (November 1925 to May 2015), *prima ballerina assoluta* of the Bolshoi, touched many lives on and off stage. Her life knew personal tragedy as a daughter of “enemies of the people”, political repression under the Soviet regime, eventual world recognition, many awards, and now posthumous tributes.

She had incredible presence, a strong personality, a dramatic theatrical style and a brilliant technique. It is London's turn to pay respect to, and celebrate, a great artist and an indomitable woman.

Le beau monde russe is out in force; gowns, jewels, furs and mobile phone screens light up the Coliseum. Illustrious guests, celebrities and ordinary folk come together in appreciation of a generous programme—three and a half hours, but no one is complaining—that sparkles with seventeen gems, a few modern ones sprinkled amongst the well-worn classics.

Stalwart gala fare, duets from *Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *Le Corsaire*, *Don Quixote*, *Spartacus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Onegin* and *Carmen Suite* are presented amongst lesser known works such as *The Talisman* by Pyotr Gusev after Marius Petipa, *The Bright Stream* resurrected by Alexei Ratmanský after Fyodor Lopukhov and Vassily Vainonen's (of *The Flames of Paris* fame) charming *Moshkovsky Waltz*.

The modern world is represented by Benjamin Millepied's *Together Alone*, Russell Maliphant's *Spiral Twist* and Christopher Wheeldon's *After The Rain*. These come as welcome sorbets after the richness of the classics with their *fouettés*, *grand pas*, *grands cabrioles*, *écarts* and *jetés*, *tours en l'air*, *revoltades*, in a variety of *manèges*, fish dives, one-hand lifts, each cheered and applauded as if at the circus.

Plisetskaya, of course, danced in many of them, and she was always keen to promote and encourage new choreography. Artistic director of the *Ave Maya Gala*, Andris Liepa (son of legendary Bolshoi dancer Maris Liepa), has put together a programme highly appropriate to a woman he knew and revered. As he says all that matters is that “Maya would be happy.”

The dancers giving their time are *la crème de la crème*. The evening opens with a ballet fit for royalty, *The Sleeping Beauty*. Mikhailovsky Ballet's Angelina Vorontsova's balance and high extensions are matched by the lightest of feet from partner Victor Lebedev.

The Royal Ballet fields Sarah Lamb and Federico Bonelli in Kenneth MacMillan's balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*—a kiss and they are lost—and Marianela Núñez dancing with Thiago

Soares in *After The Rain*, so intimate and private, to Arvo Pärt's lulling music, fitting each other's bodies like a glove.

RB's Matthew Golding partners Vienna State Ballet's Liudmila Konovalova, her legs like daggers, in the *Black Swan pas de deux*; Kristina Shapran partnered by Xander Parish, both of the Mariinsky Ballet, gives us a *Giselle* with the softest of arms.

ABT's Daniil Simkin is a dynamic slave Ali equal to, if not excelling, Baryshnikov's memorable performance from *Le Corsaire*, as he partners San Francisco Ballet's Maria Kochetkova. Also from the Mariinsky, Kimin Kim matches him in dynamism in the oriental-flavoured *The Talisman* from 1889 reworked in 1955, Yekaterina Osmolkina's delicate footwork in sharp contrast.

Stuttgart Ballet's Jason Reilly reprises the last scene from Cranko's [*Onegin*](#) with Berlin State Ballet's Polina Semionova, the Bolshoi's Vladislav Lantrantov and Maria Alexandrova take on *Spartacus* and Ivan Vasiliev now with ABT shows his tricks in [*Don Quixote*](#) with the Bolshoi's Kristina Kretova.

Fifty-two-year-old Farukh Ruzimatov stands in for Plisetskaya in a curious *Bolero* solo by Nikolai Androsov, not the *Bolero* created for her by Maurice Béjart, a favourite of hers, where she is on a table surrounded by some forty men (Sylvie Guillem also performed it). And Sergio Bernal performs Antonio's flamenco-inflected cape-swirling matador solo from *The Three-Cornered Hat* inspired by Manuel de Falla's music.

Who better than the English National Ballet's Tamara Rojo and Isaac Hernández to relish Cuban Alberto Alonso's *Carmen Suite*, which was Plisetskaya signature ballet... It premièred in Moscow in 1967 and in London in 1969, its music is composed by her husband Rodion Shchedrin after Bizet, and she danced it well into her seventies.

Recently retired Daria Klimentová and Vadim Muntagirov revisit their former partnership in a delightfully brief *Moshkovsky Waltz*: a dance of young love, she is undimmed, girlish, as she twirls and dives securely into Vadim's arms. The Bolshoi's Andrei Merkuriev and Ekaterina Krysanova are a revelation in *The Bright Stream* set against a 1930s social realist dream country *paysage*. Ratmanský's witty choreography matches the hidden irony in Shostakovich's score.

Finally, the two modern creations that refresh the palate: Malipiant's *Spiral Twist* and Millepied's 2015 *Together Alone*, both in the first two-hour-long half. Bavarian State Ballet's Lucía Lacarra and Marlon Dino spin to beautiful music by Max Richter, their bodies compasses drawing circles on the floor under a spotlight—Malipiant tropes all.

Paris Opera Ballet's Hervé Moreau and recently retired Aurélie Dupont, who is holding the fort after Millepied's recent announcement that he is leaving as director of the ballet after only a year in place, in jeans and T-shirts, swim in each other's arms on a stage dappled with wintry light to Philip Glass's contemplative piano. Lost in each other, dreamy, they are in a world of their own.

Plisetskaya was in a class of her own. A collage of her roles is projected on to the backcloth before each half and flowers are laid at her imaginary feet. Nina Kobiashvili's back projection designs place each piece in some sort of context, the English National Ballet Philharmonic under Valery Ovsyanikov gives a musical concert to match that on stage and the indefatigable balletomane Graham Watts OBE must be mentioned for his invaluable programme notes on each ballet and his absorbing interview with Plisetskaya.

A long evening that needs some unpicking, almost too much to absorb, as was Plisetskaya. She claimed to have performed her version of *The Dying Swan* 20,000 times... Maybe now we know

what it is to dance and dance and never stop.

Reviewer: [Vera Liber](#)