

British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

Cinderella

David Nixon

Northern Ballet

Sheffield Lyceum

24–28 September 2019

David Nixon's interpretation of the *Cinderella* story is a mile away from traditional English pantomime versions. The Ugly Sisters are beautiful and not performed by men, the Fairy Godmother is replaced by a Magician and the transformation scene does not include a pumpkin and mice transformed into a coach and horses.

Instead, the story is set in Imperial Russia with members of the Russian aristocracy in key roles and a corps de ballet of peasants and entertainers. This setting rings true to the heart of the story, an innocent young girl forced to become a kitchen slave until rescued by the power of magic and a handsome prince.

The action is set in two time periods. In the first, we meet the Young Cinderella and the Young Prince at a rural birthday celebration which is marred by tragedy, and later the mature Cinderella and Prince performed by different artists.

There is a wide range of attractive settings designed by Duncan Hayler which are enhanced by Tim Mitchell's effective lighting design, so as well as the initial idyllic party scene, we see a winter market with circus entertainers and a magician, a crystal lake with skaters, the winter ball at the Prince's Palace and the gloomy kitchen where Cinderella lives.

Rachael Gillespie is delightfully expressive as the Young Cinderella, full of optimism and the joy of youth, and Kevin Poeung is impressively vigorous as the Young Prince Mikhail. Abigail Prudames takes over as the mature Cinderella and gives a sensitive performance with her usual wide emotional range. She and Joseph Taylor as the mature Prince Mikhail complement one another in the set piece pas de deux.

The Sisters, performed by Kyungka Kwak and Ayami Miyata, are thoughtless and silly rather than vindictive and particularly effective in sequences in which their movement is simultaneous or in imitated patterns. As Countess Serbrenska, the stepmother, Mariana Rodrigues adds a chill to the proceedings and specialises in vicious stares and violent gestures which leave Cinderella quaking.

Mlindi Kulashe is a convincing Magician and his magic tricks surprise and delight. The winter market scene is full of circus entertainers and interesting animals, performed with great aplomb by the extended cast.

In some ways, the ballet is reminiscent of *Swan Lake*, with a crystal lake providing a magical setting for balletic skating and the unfolding love of the two adult protagonists expressed in an accomplished pas de deux.

The costumes, designed by David Nixon with support from Julie Anderson, evoke the style of the period perfectly, with attractive multi-coloured outfits for the peasants, helpfully colour-coded costumes for the aristocratic group and designs which reinforce role or characterisation as with the Magician and the Stepmother.

The choreography, again by David Nixon, reflects the dance style of the Russian peasantry and is delivered by the company with boundless energy and enthusiasm. The more plangent and formal scenes are reminiscent of more traditional choreography.

The production is successful in evoking the magical qualities of the story and will be particularly enjoyed by young ballet enthusiasts.

Reviewer: [Velda Harris](#)