

British Theatre Guide

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Giselle

Choreography Marius Petipa after Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot, music Adolph Adam, production Miyako Yoshida, staging & additional choreography Alastair Marriott

National Ballet of Japan

Royal Ballet & Opera

24–27 July 2025

Giselle is pure, early nineteenth century Romanticism, premièring at Paris Opera in 1841 to a libretto by Théophile Gautier based on Heinrich Heine's poem *Über Deutschland*. It has hardly left the classical repertoire since Marius Petipa refreshed Coralli and Perrot's original choreography in Saint Petersburg late nineteenth century. It is irresistible to tweaking.

There is a [Mary Skeaping version at English National Ballet](#), [Alexei Ratmansky has done a new interpretation](#), and of course we have [Akram Khan](#) and [Dada Masilo's](#) contemporary takes on it. Naturally, [Birmingham Royal Ballet](#) has it in its repertoire. What draws us in, doomed love or Adolphe Adam's score?

I've lost count of how many I've seen at the Royal Opera House itself—with the most amazing casts: [Natalia Osipova](#) and Marianela Nuñez remarkable Giselles, [Carlos Acosta](#) and [Vadim Muntagirov](#) outstanding Albrechts... to name but a few. The first I reviewed there was [in 2009](#) when Nuñez made her debut in the role.

Tonight, we have another astonishing debut—The National Ballet of Japan comes to the UK for the first time with five performances of their production of *Giselle* in the careful hands of Miyako Yoshida, the company's artistic director since 2020.

Yoshida's connection with the Royal Ballet goes back a long way (promoted to principal dancer in 1988): "having spent nearly three decades dancing with Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet (now Birmingham Royal Ballet) and The Royal Ballet, the UK holds a very special place in my heart. I am therefore deeply moved to witness the National Ballet of Japan take the stage in this remarkable venue." This production is also her homage to mentor and example Sir Peter Wright.

It is a brave and ambitious project for Yoshida to raise the profile of the National Ballet of Japan, and she has succeeded perhaps beyond her wildest dreams. Tenacity, high standards, overcoming conditions that are not on the level of the Royal Ballet, this *Giselle* created in 2022 in collaboration with Alastair Marriott (also formerly of the Royal Ballet) is profoundly touching.

A company of seventy-five full-time dancers, the National Ballet of Japan was formed in 1997, so in balletic historical traditional terms it is a fairly young company, but it's that freshness that has paid off—*Giselle* feels reborn. Their first visit here must be a milestone. And Yoshida must be relieved. The accolades are reward indeed for dedication and hard work.

Aided and assisted by the best: the Royal Ballet Sinfonia under Paul Murphy is particularly sound, their playing sensitive, gentle, moving—that memorable moment when Albrecht walks with white lilies in his arms to Giselle's grave in the mist-shrouded forest sends shivers down the spine.

Is this the music in his head? Is this his memory of Giselle? Is he a reformed character? Does he really dance with her or his image of her? What about the flower she has dropped for him to find—her beautiful soul. No wonder the audience goes bonkers with delight. A bit of escapism from a world in turmoil.

Lighting by Rick Fisher subtly amplifies Dick Bird's beautiful new set, contrasting the after with the before (wooden houses, smoke rising from the chimneys, surrounded by tall birch trees), the happy peasant village, its wine festival, its superstitions and feudal regime in which an aristocrat, Albrecht, feigns his role and drives an innocent girl, Giselle, to her death.

Bird excels his brief in the nocturnal second act in the forest graveyard: a low moon brooding over crosses scattered on the hillsides, glow-worms in the undergrowth, dampness rising like miasma, graves wrapped in tree roots, from which rise the twenty-four implacable Wilis commanded by Akari Yoshida's fiercely regal Myrthe with assistance from Moyna (Yuzuki Hanagata) and Zulme (Honoka Kinjo) dancing unfaithful men to their graves.

Albrecht's role is happy-go-lucky then contrite after his lies, but Giselle's must span so much more—trust, faithfulness, determination in the face of impossible odds and forgiveness after Albrecht is exposed as a cad by Hilarion, the woodcutter.

The role of Hilarion always mystifies me. Why is he driven to his death by the vengeful, jilted on their wedding days, Wilis? He doesn't jilt Giselle. He is jealous, but he loves her genuinely. Albrecht is shallow by comparison. Masahiro Nakaya brings out his maturity. I'm quite taken with him.

Yui Yonezawa's Giselle's is delicate, weightless, her feet barely skimming the surface when she is in Albrecht's arms. Shun Izawa's Albrecht seems a nice boy with not a care in the world till his uncle, the Duke of Courland, appears with his hunting company and Bathilde, Albrecht's arrogant betrothed, in tow.

Together, Izawa and Yonezawa make a fine pair, her fragility and strength and his *ballon*, I counted nineteen entrechats (in his dance to the almost death), which always delay the action. A chap on the bus home counted eighteen. A pity if that's all we remember.

Particularly pleasing is the Peasants' *pas de deux* from Risako Ikeda and Shunsuke Mizui, backed by charming villagers. I'm not normally taken with the first act, always waiting for that gothic second, but the performances thrill—unostentatious, genuine, the dancers completely in their roles down to the finest individual details, especially Giselle's mother (Yuna Seki).

Tonight's (fourth performance, though first night cast) reception is extraordinary and well deserved. I've never seen the Wilis cheered so much during curtain call by an elated audience. For their effortless precision work... which requires much invisible effort.

I do hope we see the company again now they've broken the ice and made their triumphant mark.

Reviewer: [Vera Liber](#)