

## BALLET REVIEW

# Love, jealousy, and a thousand arabesques

Boston Ballet shines in *La Bayadère*

## *La Bayadère*

Boston Ballet Company

The Boston Opera House

Oct. 24 – Nov. 3, 2013

By Angelique Nehmzow  
and Grace Young

ARTS EDITORS

Last week the Boston Ballet began their 2013–14 season with *La Bayadère*, a classical ballet set in a fantastical-version of ancient India, that artistic director Mikko Nissinen

describes as “one of the most iconic and quintessential pieces in the classical ballet collection.”

First performed in 1877 by the Imperial Ballet at the Bolshoi Kamenny Theatre in St. Petersburg, *La Bayadère* is a technically challenging ballet that American companies often avoid. However, the Boston Ballet performed the world premiere of choreographer Florence Clerc’s production of *La Bayadère* in 2010, and rose to the challenge again this year. Clerc based her version of the ballet closely on the original by Marius Petipa (1818–1910), the renowned choreographer of over fifty ballets including *Don Quixote*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Nutcracker*.

Despite a lavish set, one is hard-pressed

to recognize that the story takes place in India, and not some fabricated fantasy world. The music by Ludwig Minkus is wonderfully expressive and well-matched to the choreography, but there is nothing particularly ‘exotic’ about it. The costumes hint at Indian style — with some flowing pants, turban-like headgear, a few veils, and some sashes — but there are also plenty of standard white tutus, and one of the leading ballerinas, Gamzatti, wears a particularly imperious royal blue tutu with gold embroidery and white fur trim. Of course, it can’t be helped that none of the dancers look Indian either, and by the third act there is no longer the pretense of being in India since by that time the story has moved on to nirvana. Nevertheless, suspending belief in deference to artistic license allows the viewer to fully appreciate the superb performance of the dancers, which is after all the most important aspect of the ballet.

The dancing is emotionally evocative and convincing, while at the same time technically impressive. Principal dancer Lia Cirio steals the first act as the lead temple dancer, the eponymous *bayadère*, Nikiya. By a sacred temple in the forest, she rejects the advances of the High Brahmin and joins her fellow *bayadères* around a fire with other religious leaders and the savage-like *fakirs*. The *bayadères* perform elegantly in ensembles, wearing matching long skirts and light satin pointe shoes, while the shirtless *fakirs* fight for space around the fire in rough-and-tumble dances that contrast with and highlight the *bayadères*’ sylph-like beauty.

The story becomes increasingly complicated and wondrous as the ballet continues. Nikiya and the warrior Solor (Lasha Khozashvili) share a passionate *pas du deux* in which they swear eternal love to each other over a Sacred Fire. Solor lifts Nikiya onto his shoulder with effortless ease, then balances her back on her pointe shoes as if the two have been dancing together for centuries. Their oneness makes the second scene, in which Solor agrees to marry the Rajah’s daughter Gamzatti, puzzling if not heartbreaking. In a consequent scene, Gamzatti and Nikiya engage in a ballet-style catfight, in which Gamzatti moves proudly, almost aloof, and Nikiya moves slyly, and more desperately. Their fight escalates from a slap in the face to near-murder by knife, reminding the audience how jealousy and love are often intertwined.

Solor and Gamzatti’s wedding is an extravagant affair, with a posing Solor carried onto stage atop an elephant, and numerous soloists and groups dancing in celebration. A glorious golden idol dances too. His spot-on technique and glimmering masculinity contrasts with the adorable little children accompanying him. In the final scene of the wedding, distraught Nikiya dances a heartrending solo, at first despondent at Solor’s betrayal, and then temporarily gladdened by the gift of

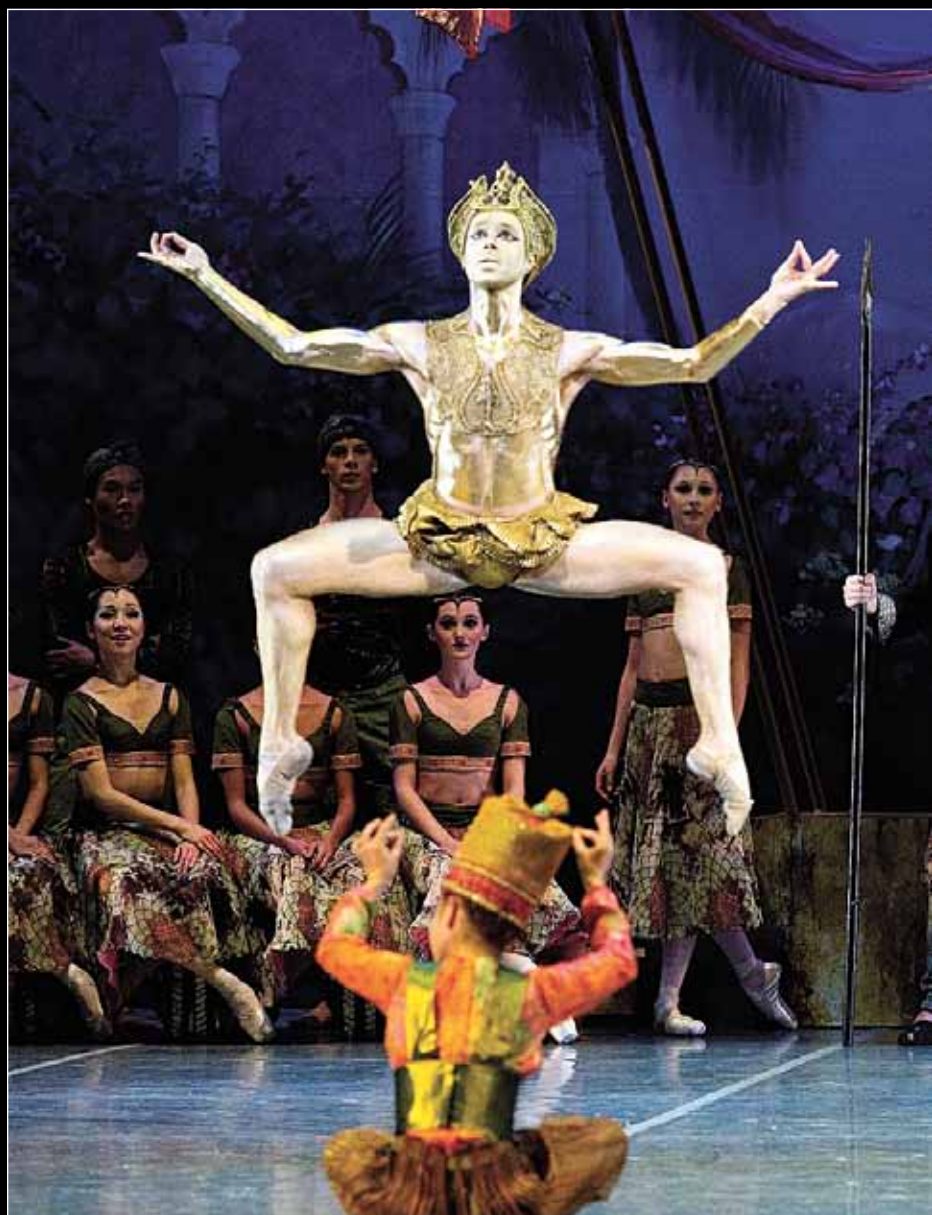


Lia Cirio in Boston Ballet’s *La Bayadère*.

flowers she believes are from him. Solor’s callous and cowardly inactivity is enraging, but his dancing is so magnificent you forgive him against your will. His leaps are so high that his 360° turns seem like he’s moving in slow motion because it takes so long for him to reach the ground again!

The final act, *The Kingdom of the Shades*, is one of the most celebrated excerpts in all of classical ballet. The Boston Ballet performs to perfection. In Solor’s dream, twenty-four dancers in white tutus descend diagonally onto the stage in a repetitive sequence of *arabesques*. By the end of the act, they have performed at least a hundred *arabesques* each. The ensemble is visually stunning, and almost hypnotic. The soloists (Kathleen Breen Combes, Ashley Ellis, and Misa Kuranaga) truly shine in what artistic director Mikko Nissinen describes as “notoriously demanding” roles. The pace quickens towards the end, as Nikiya and Solor have their final, cathartic, duet, and he twirls her in midair. The two are fearlessly athletic in their passionate dance, but also happy and finally at peace.

In a dramatic ending, the white tutu-clad dancers *arabesque* out the way they came, and the lovers follow close behind, with Solor solemnly holding aloft Nikiya’s long white veil, like a marriage train, and the two boldly striding up and out towards the light. The curtain falls, waking the audience from the dream of love, lust, unattainable desires, and slightly absurd circumstances.



Joseph Gatti in Boston Ballet’s *La Bayadère*.

GENE SCHIAVONE



Kathleen Breen Combes and Lasha Khozashvili in Boston Ballet’s *La Bayadère*.

GENE SCHIAVONE



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**INTERVIEW**

# “Your future starts with your choices today”

The Tech talks with Boston Ballet company member Diana Albrecht about *La Bayadère* and her career in ballet

By Grace Young  
ARTS EDITOR

Boston Ballet corps de ballet member Diana Albrecht spoke with *The Tech* about her career in ballet as well as her favorite moments of *La Bayadère*. A native of Paraguay, Albrecht has been dancing since she was three years old, and professionally since she was 16 years old. In *La Bayadère*, her roles include dancing as a *bayadère* (Hindu temple dancer) in the first act, in the fan waltz in the second act, and as a shade in Solor’s dream in the third act.

**TT:** How did you prepare for your roles in *La Bayadère*?

**DA Albrecht:** *The Kingdom of Shades* is one of the most challenging parts for the corps of ballet. We started rehearsals back in August and slowly increased the amount of *arabesques* [lift of the leg behind the back] each day in order to gain strength and avoid hurting our backs since we do around 40 *arabesques* consecutively.

**‘I love how contemporary pieces push the body to new places, ... creatively exploring the unknown.’**

— Diana Albrecht  
BOSTON BALLET MEMBER

Also I did some balancing and strengthening exercises on a “bosu” (half of a rubber ball attached to a flat rigid platform) at the gym. You basically try to balance your body standing on a leg on a bosu ball for a couple minutes, so when you are standing on the ramp or the stage floor, your body recognizes it as a much more stable surface and your balance becomes a lot easier.

**TT:** As young students we’re often wondering if we’re on the right track, or if we should switch fields, etc. Did you ever consider giving up dance and pursuing another career?

**DA:** I never seriously considered giving up. There are many difficult times we go through, as any other career. But once you pass through them, you get stronger and more mature. I do feel like in the beginning of my career I didn’t think as much about the future as I do now. I always wanted to continue studying as I did ballet, I just never had the resources or time to do it. It takes time to get comfortable with speaking and writing in English and I was more focused on being part of a new environment and building the base of

my career.

But now I have the opportunity to take college classes and it is so rewarding! Just to get a feel that there is so much more out there and so many opportunities after our dancing careers or even new opportunities merging arts and business, it is empowering and exciting.

So I wouldn’t switch fields if I felt I could do it. I always tell dancers who are starting their careers to follow their instincts and to not give up if they really think they can do it. But it is also important to prepare your future, and your future starts with your choices today.

**TT:** What’s your favorite part of *La Bayadère* and why?

**DA:** The part that always touches my heart is in the Third Act when we are all down the ramp and ready to start the *adagio*. I find the music to be sublime. It brings so much serenity and stillness to the moment that it is very uplifting to both dance and watch.

**TT:** Which is your favorite ballet?

**DA:** I don’t think I can pick one, the traditional classical ballets are very challenging and it is great to succeed at a role of a classical ballet and to watch a well done full length.

But I love how contemporary pieces push the body to new places making beautiful shapes and creatively exploring the unknown.



COURTESY OF THE BOSTON BALLET  
Diana Albrecht, a Corps de Ballet dancer in the Boston Ballet Company.

**CONCERT REVIEW**

# Frankie Rose and Franz Ferdinand rock the Orpheum

A rousing night of indie rock and dance mashups

By Chennah Heroor  
STAFF WRITER

The Orpheum Theater in Boston is a beautiful old opera house in Boston that seems a little past its glory days, but it was perfect for the indie rock and dance mashups of Casual Sex, Frankie Rose, and Franz Ferdinand.

Casual Sex, a Glasgow based band, was the opener for the night. While they were clearly excited to be opening the show, their songs were a little cliché. It was hard to hear their lyrics over the sound of the bass, but most of the words seemed to be puns about one-night stands.

The crowd really started to filter in as Frankie Rose took the stage. She played some songs from her new album, including “Night Swim” and “Sorrow.” Unlike some of her recordings, Frankie has a much deeper voice in person. Her raspy, throaty renditions gave the sweet songs a sinister

**Unlike some of her recordings, Frankie has a much deeper voice in person. Her raspy, throaty renditions gave the sweet songs a sinister bite and more depth.**

bite and more depth. She managed to fill the theater with her new wave renditions, and got the audience to cheer along with several of her songs. While her stage manner was a little off at times, she won me over with her beautiful voice and whimsical songs.

The live performance also gave Frankie the chance to speed up a cou-

**Frankie Rose and Franz Ferdinand**

**Opened by Casual Sex**

**Orpheum Theater**

**Oct. 20, 2013**

ple of her slower songs, as well as try different echoes of her performance. The stage was a little too small for her to move around, but the constraints made the music seem more “real.” The mesmerizing display of light and color gave her ethereal, ominous songs a solid grounding.

Franz Ferdinand was the last band of the night, and they roused the crowd with their enthusiastic renditions of songs from several of their previous albums. Their live performance allowed lead singer Alex Kapranos to try different tempos for some of their hits. I was less familiar with the material from their new albums, but listening to their sweet rendition of “Stand on the Horizon” encouraged me to listen to their new songs as soon as I returned home.

Franz Ferdinand looked like they really enjoyed being out in front of the crowd. At various points, Kapranos and Nick McCarthy, the guitarist, reached out to the crowd, and Kapranos even held up a fan’s signs, encouraging us all to sing the lyrics to “Do You Want To.” The blinding lights from their performance made it difficult to watch at times, but the music certainly made up for the strange lighting.

Overall, I was thrilled to attend this concert. Frankie Rose and Franz Ferdinand were even more fun to listen to live than recorded. I’m definitely anticipating their return to Boston.



COURTESY OF FAT POSSUM RECORDS

Artist Frankie Rose, who just released her new album *Herein Wild*.