

## The Bolshoi Theatre honors its beloved composer

Festival to commemorate 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky will be held from September to December on all stages of the Bolshoi Theatre. Program includes four operas, five ballets and five concert programs.

**“Opera and only opera brings you close to people, allies you with a real public, makes you the property not merely of separate little circles but—with luck—of the whole nation” \***

*The Queen of Spades* staged by Rimas Tuminas (16-20 September, conductor – Tugan Sokhiev) will open the program. This is the third revival of *The Queen of Spades* for the past thirteen years. Expressionistic and psychological drama of Lev Dodin, German’s real ‘medical history’ (2015) replaced a lacy black and white performance of Valery Fokin with its aesthetics of cards and reflections (2007). The latest revival premiered on 15 February 2018. Production by Rimas Tunis is discreet, rigorous and incredibly stylish, with graphical clarity of lines and nearly ballet-like graceful mis-en-scènes – all based on contrasts and undertones. Together with set designer, Adomas Jacovskis, director is painting an elusive, phantom image of Petersburg; opera characters emerge out of the city’s fog like on film tape. All reviewers marked the director's exceptional boldness to be able to step aside and to let Tchaikovsky’s music speak for itself.

*Iolanta* will continue the opera part of the festival (2-4 October, conductor – Tugan Sokhiev; 1 December, conductor – Alexander Soloviev, 2 December, conductor – Anton Grishanin). Unique point here is that like during the opera premiere in 1892, *Iolanta* is performed together with *The Nutcracker* (in the form of symphonic suite rather than full-length ballet). This unusual performance premiered on 28 October 2015. *Iolanta* was Sergei Zhenovach’s, its director’s, opera debut and he took it with a special awe. “This story is quite poetic. First thing that I would like to avoid is basic domestic naturalistic existence. This opera is gentle, fragile, and gullible. Once an act becomes domestic, it can simply fall apart. Therefore, it is important that our performance is poetic. This story is not tied to any particular time or place. Moreover, we would not like to make it neither physiological essay nor abstract story about medieval princes and princesses. Our goal was to find a real human story through those poetic images: what is light, what is darkness, what is blindness and enlightenment, what are two worlds – “carnal and spiritual”. First of all, our task was to find figurative spatial expression of poetic opera language. To create the world of darkness and world of light onstage”.

In October Bolshoi will present opera *Eugene Onegin* (7-11 October, conductor – Tugan Sokhiev). Evgeny Arie presented his version of opera last year (it premiered on 15 May 2019). “I really wanted to stage both classic and modern performance at the same time, – says the director, – I am not striving to literally modernize the story and I am not trying to fit it into any purposefully designed concept. My main goal is to make opera sound fresh”. Evgeny Arie managed to intertwine poetry of Tchaikovsky with the irony of Pushkin, intimacy of ‘lyrical scenes’ with versatility of ‘Encyclopedia of Russian life’. *Eugene Onegin* in his interpretation indeed sounds like “sundry chapters, half humorous, half pessimistic”; performance turned out to be both funny and tragic, ironic and passionate, kitschy and lyrical. “Evgeny Arie was able to walk on a fine line, which separates author’s vision from author’s outrage almost without any loss. What we saw at the Bolshoi was Tchaikovsky, Pushkin and Arie – all of them together. Director showcases his own concept, but he translates it with such care towards original creators that we cannot argue here: he has all the rights to do so...There are enough epithets to describe performance. Obviously, they are: moving, funny, amusing, ironic, piercing, and burlesque”. (*Izvestiya*, 16 May 2019).

Festival's opera part will be finished off by *Cherevichki* at Boris Pokrovsky Chamber Stage (25-27, 29 and 30 December). *Cherevichki* is a real opera rarity and, perhaps, the lightest and the most joyful among other Tchaikovsky's operas. Besides, precisely at Bolshoi, at the premiere of *Cherevichki*, it was Tchaikovsky's debut as conductor. Current production at the Chamber Stage was directed by Olga Ivanova in 2008. "Performance was rich: unforgettable national tints, bright costumes: fur coats, sundresses, jewelry. Throughout the whole performance, guest is as in a fairy tale, atmosphere that is created by hand painted tulle. Characters either appear or disappear, and it gives the feeling of length and lightness to the scene. Interestingly enough, that mechanism of motion of decorations is recreated based on the eighteenth century. Yet there was one innovation – separation between stage and orchestra, which creates the effect that musicians are directly involved into the act" (*Russian newspaper*, 02 December 2008).

### **"Ballet is same as symphony"\***

Ballet program of festival consists of *Onegin* (18-20 September, conductors – Pavel Sorokin, Pavel Klinichev, Alexey Bogorad), *The Nutcracker* (23 & 24 September, 18 November, 23-24, 26-31 December, conductors – Pavel Sorokin, Pavel Klinichev, Alexey Bogorad), *Swan Lake* (26, 27 September, conductors – Tugan Sokhiev, Alexey Bogorad), *The Sleeping Beauty* (30 September, 1-4 October, conductors – Tugan Sokhiev, Anton Grishanin, Alexey Bogorad, Pavel Sorokin) and *Jewels* (11-14 November, conductor – Pavel Sorokin).

Though ballet *Onegin* by John Cranko was born thanks to Tchaikovsky's opera, yet not a beat was added from it. German composer Kurt-Heinz Stolze created the score for ballet. He constituted it based on other works of Tchaikovsky: piano pieces *The Four Seasons* and other cycles, fragments from opera *Cherevichki*, overture fantasy *Romeo and Juliet*, symphonic poem *Francesca da Rimini*. Cranko offered his view on paradigmatic history for every Russian person. His *Onegin* is not an 'Encyclopedia about Russian life', neither an ethnographic essay (he was blamed for that on numerous occasions); rather it is the story about human emotions, improbable emotional intensity. This ballet was created in the middle of 60s (first version – in 1965, second in 1967) and is considered to be modern classics. It is performed in over twenty countries in the world, each time witnessing a tremendous success. At Bolshoi, *Onegin* appeared relatively recently, and it became audience favorite.

*The Nutcracker* is a main hit of winter repertoire not only of the Bolshoi Theatre, but also at all music theatres around the globe. Permanently and for a long time, it is associated with the magical period of waiting for a miracle and sensing something new and uncharted. Musical critic Boris Asafyev wrote about this ballet: "*The Nutcracker* is absolutely another and solitary phenomenon: it is a symphony about childhood. Or rather when childhood is on watershed. When hopes of unknown adolescence are already troubling the mind, yet children's skills and fears are not faded away... When dreams entail thoughts and feelings forward, into subconscious – into anticipated life. Like walls of children's room slide open, and hero and heroine's thoughts and dreams break out into fresh air – into the forest, nature, towards wind, blizzard, to the stars and pink ocean of hopes". Yuri Grigorovich noted about his *Nutcracker* production: "I was dreaming about the embodiment of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*. I wanted to express his genius music from my own understanding. In other words, I decided to completely entrust the composer and his score. So after the premiere I could say – I just listened to music and followed it". This performance became one of the theatre's signature. It was shown more than a hundreds of times

during tours in different countries, repeatedly it was recorded and broadcasted. Yuri Grigorovich's *The Nutcracker* was staged over fifty years ago at the Bolshoi, and each time met ongoing success.

*Swan Lake* is Tchaikovsky's first ballet and it was created thanks to the Bolshoi. "I am writing music for ballet *Swan Lake* upon invitation from the Moscow direction. I wanted to try this form of music for a long time" – Tchaikovsky shared with Rimsky-Korsakov. *Swan Lake* was meant to become a major ballet in Russian repertoire, while his author – a reformer of the genre. At the Bolshoi, *Swan Lake* was staged time and again. Few revivals were presented by Alexander Gorsky (to one of them Nemirovich-Danchenko laid a hand himself), later – Asaf Messerer. Yuri Grigorovich first staged his version in 1969. In his interpretation, ballet was transformed from a fairy tale into a philosophical parable about duality between good and evil, with a theme of evil fate, illusion and duality. However, to the fullest extent, ballet was manifested in 2001 only – this version that we now have at the Bolshoi.

*The Sleeping Beauty* (is a legendary ballet – extravaganza by Pyotr Tchaikovsky and Marius Petipa became a first premiere in the renovated historic building of the Bolshoi Theatre (premiered on 18 November 2011). It was staged by Yuri Grigorovich and set designer Ezio Frigerio. This performance – vivid, gala and incredibly beautiful – became a peculiar manifesto for theatre. Yuri Grigorovich: "Stage, as if it furthers, incorporates revamped space of historic building of the Bolshoi Theatre. Therefore, it will create a feeling of integration of present time theatregoers into a performance spectacle at Royal court of Louis XIV. Efforts of people from different times and different cultures and their expectations converge in one point at the same moment".

*Jewels* by George Balanchine, initially staged at New York City Ballet in 1967, made it into history as the first full-length plotless ballet. Three composers set its three parts on music: *Emeralds* to music by Gabriel Fauré, *Rubies* to I. Stravinsky, *Diamonds* to P. Tchaikovsky. For *Diamonds*, Balanchine took II-IV parts from *Symphony No. 3* by Tchaikovsky. *Symphony No. 3* has a special place in composer's artwork: the only major, the only that has five parts; it is 'odd', 'suite', diverse – and so dancing. It is presumed that all three parts of ballet reflect three counties, three cultures and three ballet epochs. *Diamonds* represent the magnificent image of emperor St. Petersburg ballet, and it is like crowning this sparkly festival of dance.

**"It is a magnificent area of music art which contains literature which is richer than any other forms of music" \***

Tchaikovsky's chamber music will be played at Beethoven Hall. Orchestra artists at the Bolshoi have prepared three wonderful programs. Three pieces from *The Seasons*, *Nocturne* and *Pezzo capriccioso* for cello and piano, *Piano Trio In Memory of a Great Artist* are on 20 September. 25 September – *String Quartet No. 1* and *No. 2*. 29 October – *String Sextet Souvenir de Florence* and *Variations on a Rococo Theme* for cello with orchestra.

We need to highlight Tchaikovsky's romances separately, as this genre takes a special place in a composer's life. His chamber and vocal lyrics reflect the path which composer went through from his first drafts at the age of seventeen and all the way to his last minutes of life. Romances resemble the composer's diary: we can see his development, search for new expressive means, traces of his future operas and symphonies. Young Artist's Opera Program of the Bolshoi will present Tchaikovsky's romances at Beethoven Hall on 24 and 26 November. It is going to be the third evening of vocal lyrics of Tchaikovsky at Beethoven Hall of the cycle "Anthology of Russian classic romances" – beloved for our audience project of Young Artist's Opera Program.

\*Pyotr Tchaikovsky