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Ballet Ireland's Swan Lake premiere makes big promises

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Swan Lake
Ros Kavanagh

Ballet Ireland's Swan Lake

Rating: ★★★★★

When first performed in 1877, Pytor Illyich Tchaikovsky's, *Swan Lake* didn't initially impress. Since then it has become a classic of the ballet canon. This transition to success might well apply to Ballet Ireland's latest production of *Swan Lake*, which kicked off its national tour with a tentative premiere at The Draiocht. Showing an unusually high degree of first night jitters, Ballet Ireland's *Swan Lake* opts for a tragic telling of the doomed love affair between Prince Siegfried and the swan maiden Odette. Based on the 1895, Petipa/Ivanov collaboration, the result was a performance of excellent quality for the most part, but one that suffered from a lack of self-assurance on occasion, along with several lighting issues, in a production which grew stronger with each successive act.

Choreography by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov, with additional choreography by Richard Bermanage, was strong for the most part, while leaning towards the conservative side. Spatial arrangements and groupings were exquisite at times, most notably during the final swan sequence in Act Four as Prince Siegfried searches for Odette. But some groupings were less successful, lacking clarity and energy, with the final departure of the swans suggestive of ducks in a shooting gallery. Opening night nerves appeared to have an impact, with loose lines, lack of precision, poor timing and synchronisation on occasion contrasting with moments of exquisite beauty and technical excellence which dominated for the most part.

Visually there were problems, successes and curious choices. Lighting Design by John Gallagher was again conservative, but also problematic. A case in point being the approaching storm signified by a pulsing, orange light suggestive of a road assistance vehicle parked in the wings. Palace scenes were functionally lit, but forest scenes were disappointingly poor with Prince Siegfried frequently flitting in and out of near darkness. The final image of Odette as the curtain descended in Act Four was significantly diminished by being drowned in shadow. Costumes by Werner Dittrich, Norbert Klos and Richard Bermanage were also conservative, with Von Rothbart's, villainous black cape curiously reminiscent of a silent movie or pantomime villain. As was Set Design by Seigfried Unruh, but the inspired storm scene, where Prince Siegfried struggles with the raging waters, was both incredibly compelling and visually stunning.

The unquestionable strength of Ballet Ireland's *Swan Lake* lies with its principal dancers. Micheal Revie as Prince Siegfried, Niklas Blomqvist as The Jester and Diarmaid O'Meara as Von Rothbart were all excellent, if greatly under used. Principal dancer, Ryoko Yagyu, as Odette/Odile, gave a master class performance which was elegantly and exquisitely executed crafting moments of power and beauty.

If Ballet Ireland's *Swan Lake* is conservative in its ambitions with technical issues that need to be resolved, its dancing went from strength to strength with each successive act. Yes, there were opening night jitters, but like a fleck of black material on a pristine, white costume, these perhaps unfairly drew attention away from the high standards generally on offer. Tentativeness might be attributed, in part, to the high number of dancers in their first season with Ballet Ireland. But with opening night now under their belt nerves should be replaced with self confidence, with the promise of those perfectly executed moments being realised throughout. When they are, this two and a half hour performance, which never felt anyway near as long, promises to deliver a terrifically entertaining night at the ballet.

Ballet Ireland's *Swan Lake* goes on tour nationally till December 21st. For more information on dates and venues go to:

<http://www.balletireland.ie/swan-lake/>



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