

Timeless folk tale told through Ru

Russian National Ballet Theatre presents classic 'Cinderella' on Friday at LMC Mendel Center

By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO
Sight & Sound Editor

BENTON HARBOR — The classic folk tale of a young woman living in unfortunate circumstances, suddenly changed to remarkable fortune has been presented in thousands of variants throughout the world in pages, on stage and on screen.

The oldest documented version comes from China around 830; the oldest European version from Italy in 1634. The most popular telling of the story was first published by Charles Perrault in "Histoires ou contes du temps passé" in 1697, and in the 19th century by the German brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in their folk tale collection "Grimms' Fairy Tales."

Although the name of the title character has often changed depending on the language for which it is told, in English folklore the heroine is simply known as Cinderella.

For Alexander Daev, ballet master and assistant artistic director of Russian National Ballet Theatre, however, there is something that feels distinctly Russian about the tale.

"Cinderella" is well known the world over and loved because of its universal theme (that) leads the audience on an emotional ride that ends with hope, that all things truly, are possible," Daev says in an email interview through a Russian-to-English translator. "Ballet tells this human story. Ballet has played a very large part in Russian culture and tradition for centuries. It has been passed down personally from teacher to student. While our technique has been fine-tuned over the centuries, the importance of the acting, portraying characters and their emotions is as strongly emphasized in our training as the technique."

On Friday, Russian National Ballet Theatre will dance its adaptation of composer Sergei Prokofiev's 1945 bal-



IF YOU GO

What: Russian National Ballet Theatre presents "Cinderella"

When: 8 p.m. Friday

Where: Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

How much: \$32-\$54

Contact: 927-1221 or themendelcenter.com

AT LEFT: Elena Khoroskov, as the blue-eyeshadowed stepmother (Evgeniy Rudakov), have a dance lesson, they leave for the ball.

room, subsequently watch synchronicity through space," Daquence. "The precis for accomplishing th many hours of rehec

Founded in 1989 t famous Mariinsky T tersburg and the I Moscow when many reographers of the S let institutions wen creative freedom, I Ballet Theatre is nc pendent ballet comp

In 1994, Radchen Bolshoi principal d the company's first j director. Since then, cus has been on ma

let "Cinderella" at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.

Directed by artistic director Elena Radchenko from Rostislov Zakharov's choreography of the original production, this version of "Cinderella" is unmistakably Russian ballet in style with its big gestures and even bigger emotions. Prokofiev's ballet has long been notable for its jubilant music, lush scenery and for the comedic double-roles of the stepsisters, which have been described as more mad than bad in this treatment.

"Yes, this is true," says Daev, a graduate of the Voronej Ballet School and a former member of the Kremlin Ballet, who has been a principal dancer with the company since 2003. "Our

production is purely classical ballet, choreographed to Prokofiev's music and follows the storyline, but we have our own interpretation in the staging, the costumes, the sets and the lighting. The original choreography is by Rostislav, but classical ballet is always evolving. The technique of contemporary dancers is superior to the technique of dancers in 1945. However, while we have a higher level of technique, our bodies still convey through the movement of classical ballet, emotions that are both timeless and universal."

The company's performance of "Cinderella" begins with the title character, danced by Maria Klyueva, a graduate of the Nesterova Moscow Ballet Academy, looking on as her

stepsisters (Elena Khorosheva and Milena Stashina) fight over a piece of cloth they are sewing. After they, and the blue-eyeshadowed stepmother (Evgeniy Rudakov), have a dance lesson, they leave for the ball.

Cinderella, who is left behind, begins to dance alone only to be transformed from rags to riches by her fairy Godmother (Olga Gudkova). She then arrives at the castle on the shoulders of dancers, surrounded by the fairies of the seasons – Spring (Alexandra Krukova), Summer (Galina Ishenko), Autumn (Viktoria Baldanova) and Winter (Hanna Zimovchenko).

While the stepsisters duke it out over the prince (Ivan Zviagintsev) to comedic effect, he instead finds Cinderella, and they dance together in the ball-

Russian lens



Photos provided / Russian National Ballet Theatre

eva and Milena Stashina, as the stepsisters, and Evgeniy Rudakov as the stepmother, dance in Russian National Ballet Theatre's "Cinderella," which will be performed Friday at the Lake Michigan College Mainstage Theatre. ABOVE: Maria Klyueva as Cinderella and Ivan Zviagintsev as the prince, dance in "Cinderella."

alling in love. works in Russia's storied ballet repertoire of this particular piece when the corps de ballet performs as one living ballroom dancer with elegant precision. Russian National Ballet Theatre of its country's finest dancers. "It's a joy to the eye to see bodies moving so gracefully," says Daev of the season and elegance is attributed to the dancers. "The members of the theatre in St. Petersburg are the best dancers and choreographers in the world. The Russian National Ballet is the only company in Russia. It is the only company, the legendary Bolshoi, was named after the permanent artistic director of the company's fostering the major

works in Russia's storied ballet repertoire, including the full works of famed classical choreographer Marius Petipa – "Don Quixote," "La Bayadere," "Swan Lake," "Paquita," "Coppelia" and "La Sylphide" – as well as modern ballets to the music of Mozart, Bach, Ravel and others. While Russian National Ballet Theatre has previously brought its productions of "The Sleeping Beauty" (2011), "Swan Lake" (2013) and "Don Quixote" (2015) to LMC, Daev says, it may be this production of "Cinderella" that truly demonstrates what the company is all about. "Ballet is a visual expression of the music, and Prokofiev's music is sublime," he says. "Prokofiev composed very emotional music that tells the story with all of its mood swings – from the disappointments to the triumphs, from the harsh reality of life to the magic of the ball, from the lows to the highs. We (just) want our audience to feel all of the emotions the story evokes."

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Maria Klyueva as Cinderella, right and on the cover, and Ivan Zviagintsev as the prince, dance in Russian National Ballet Theatre's adaptation of composer Sergei Prokofiev's 1945 ballet "Cinderella," which will be performed Friday at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.