

The London Ballet Circle

Daria Klimentova
and Vadim Muntagirov
interviewed by Laura Dodge

Monday 30th September 2013
Civil Service Club, SW1



Laura opened the talk by asking Vadim about his introduction to ballet. He spoke of growing up in Russia and running around with imaginary wings on his back whilst his parents, both principal ballet dancers, performed at Chelyabinsk Theatre. He never felt pushed towards the ballet and had no thought of going to ballet school. Then at the age of nine he was sent to the Perm Ballet School, where the style of teaching was such that the students were pushed beyond their limits, screamed at and even hit. To Vadim this was natural and he learned to take correction without getting upset. Vadim's attitude towards criticism is clearly seen in the documentary 'Agony and Ecstasy' with the choreographer Derek Dean (BBC, 2011).

Vadim didn't plan on coming to Britain but after winning the Prix de Lausanne in 2006, he was given a scholarship to the Royal Ballet School, an opportunity not to be missed. After seeing Vadim dancing at the RBS graduation, English National Ballet Artistic Director Wayne Eagling offered him a contract. He quickly rose from First Artist to Principal. According to Vadim the partnership with Daria was 'meant to be'. His intended partner was injured, fate stepped in and Daria was asked to take the role. Vadim was thrilled; Daria was not! In fact, when she heard the news, she burst into tears and said "no way". But as we all know she did, the partnership flourished and they became the best of friends. Vadim has enjoyed with other great ballerinas, including Tamara Rojo and Alina Cojocar. He emphasized the importance of understanding the stories of the ballets and the background to each role in order to make the most of his character. He is grateful to his teachers for this, especially to Maina Gielgud.

Talking about favourite roles, Vadim said he loves dancing energetic roles in ballets such as *Spartacus*, *Flames of Paris*, *Don Quixote* and *Le Corsaire*. Ironically the ballets he didn't want to dance are the ones that have become his favourites, for example *Apollo*, *Song of A Wayfarer* and Rudolf Nureyev's *Romeo and Juliet*. Maurice Bejart's *Song of a Wayfarer*, choreographed on Nureyev, struck a chord with Vadim. The similarities between his life and Nureyev's were obvious and the role had deep meaning for him.

Touring with ENB is a pleasure for Vadim. He recalls dancing at the Mariinsky Theatre with special fondness as the audience included his teacher from the Perm School. When asked about his thoughts for the future, Vadim said that he knew for certain that he's rather teach ballet than choreograph.

At this point, Laura turned to Daria. At the age of five, Daria began gymnastics. She loved it and her goal was to be a member of the Czech Olympic Team. However this was not to be. A ballet teacher noticed her talent and so Daria was taken out of gymnastics and put into ballet, even though she had never seen a ballet and didn't know what ballet was! She was trained in the

Vaganova Method which emphasizes speed, use of the body and jumping, qualities Daria possessed.

Daria joined the Czech National Ballet aged 18. She admits she was spoiled going straight into the company as a principal rather than having to work her way up from the corps. Whilst with CNB, she entered a competition in Johannesburg, won a gold medal and met Galina Samsova and Veronica Paeper. Paeper offered Daria a contract in the Cape Town City Ballet. She decided to guest with the company for two months and ended up staying a year. She saw it as an opportunity to learn English, experience new teachers and new repertoire. Even though she loved Cape Town, when Samsova invited Daria to join Scottish National Ballet in 1992, she went. Needless to say the weather in Glasgow came as a nasty surprise after South Africa. While at SNB, she sent a video to Derek Deane and English National Ballet and was invited to take class in London. In 1996, she joined ENB as a principal and has remained there ever since.

During her 17 years with the company Daria has worked with several artistic directors. After Paeper and Samsova, Derek Deane's style came as a shock but from him, she learned the meaning of hard work. For many years she had been unhappy with her partner and, during his directorship, Matz Skoog understood this. It was with Wayne Eagling that Daria was happiest. He trusted his dancers, gave them freedom, encouraged them to guest with other companies and, most important of all, he gave her Vadim. Now Tamara Rojo is the director and a new era begins. When asked about what she would impart to young dancers if she were a director, choreographer or teacher, Daria says she would support her dancers and instil confidence in them

After enduring an unhappy twelve year partnership, finally her Romeo has come and his name is Vadim. His youth and great sense of humour are contagious and since Vadim, Daria finds retirement harder to contemplate. When will she stop dancing? When it hurts too much or the Director doesn't want her anymore and not before!

As well as being a ballet superstar, Daria has other talents. She has written her autobiography, 'Agony and Ecstasy: My Life in Dance', in collaboration with Graham Watts. She is also a keen photographer and hopes one day to produce a book of photos of Vadim.

In conclusion, Daria and Vadim reminded everyone they will be performing *Le Corsaire* and *The Nutcracker* at the Coliseum. Laura thanked them for a delightful evening.