

Bolshoi Theater Gets New Artistic Director

By [Raymond Stults](#)

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The Bolshoi named a new ballet artistic director Friday. Filin was given a five-year contract and creative control. **Igor Tabakov**

After more than a week of turmoil surrounding leadership of its renowned ballet troupe, the Bolshoi Theater announced the appointment of former Bolshoi premier danseur Sergei Filin as its new ballet artistic director.

Filin, who has been in the same post at the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater for the past three seasons, succeeds Yury Burlaka, ballet artistic director of the Bolshoi since the beginning of 2009.

A native of Moscow, Filin graduated in 1988 from the Bolshoi's training school, the Moscow Choreographic Academy, and the same year joined the theater's ballet troupe. He quickly rose to prominence in classical roles with his [elegant style](#), superb characterizations and faultless partnering of female soloists.

Among the parts for which he is particularly remembered are Basil in Ludwig Minkus' "Don Quixote," Ta-Hor in Cesare Pugni's "The Pharaoh's Daughter," the Prince in Sergei Prokofiev's "Cinderella" and, in an exceptional display of comic talent, the Classical Dancer in Dmitry Shostakovich's "The Bright Stream."

In an interview last year with this correspondent for Dance Gazette, Filin was asked what changes needed to be made at the Bolshoi.

"The ballet troupe needs to be completely reformed," he answered, "starting with a reorganization of its pedagogical team. Beyond that, it needs a different ideology of repertoire, which means seriously deciding what to preserve and what to add. The theater should also develop a program for young dancers and create ballets especially for them. And it needs to exercise strict control over the dancers' outside activities and work schedules. It sometimes seems like no one really wants to be a ballerina anymore. What they want is to find a rich husband or become a television personality or, like [prima ballerina] Svetlana Zakharova, be elected to the State Duma. Unless those questions are addressed without delay, the company is simply going to fall apart."

Filin was also asked what qualities should be looked for in choosing a new artistic director.

"He should be an organizer and a manager," Filin replied, "and neither an active dancer nor a choreographer. I would still like to dance and perhaps try my hand at choreography. But if I were to do either one, I couldn't fulfill my duties to my dancers."

Bolshoi general director Anatoly Iksanov had originally named Makhar Vaziyev, head of ballet at St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theater from 1995 to 2008 and currently in charge of the ballet troupe of Teatro alla Scala in Milan, as the Bolshoi's prime candidate for artistic director.

Burlaka's contract with the theater expired last Tuesday and, the very same day, Vaziyev was expected to arrive in Moscow for negotiation of a possible contract. On the eve of his arrival, however, Vaziyev sent word that he was no longer interested in the post.

The obvious candidate to assume temporary artistic direction of the ballet troupe, while a search continued for a permanent director, had been its longtime manager, soloist Gennady Yanin, but a week before last a widely circulated e-mail called attention to a sex video involving him that was posted on the internet. The theater responded by dismissing Yanin as troupe manager and transferring his duties to another veteran soloist of the theater, Yan Godovsky.

Left in the lurch, the theater turned to Filin offering him a five-year contract and terms that, according to a member of his team who asked not to be named, allow him considerable freedom in choosing repertoire and performing the many other functions of the post.

Filin has been widely hailed for his accomplishments at the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, bringing fresh young blood to the troupe, presiding over a nearly unbroken string of successful premieres, both of ballet classics and of works by such master contemporary choreographers as Nacho Duato, Jorma Elo, Jiri Kilyan and John Neumeier, and raising the quality of dancing to a level that frequently rivals the best to be seen at the Bolshoi.

He leaves behind a tight-knit group of dancers and will now come face-to-face with a company that, numbering roughly 220, is more than twice as large, filled with enormous egos, notorious for its incessant intrigues and far more tradition-bound. Overcoming the disarray left behind by his predecessor and effecting changes like those he outlined last July will undoubtedly test Filin's skills as a balletmaster, to say nothing of his diplomatic skills, to their very limit.

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