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Russian Musical 'Lukomorye' Looks to Folk Tales

By Alli Rath

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Although aimed at children, adults can also enjoy the fantastical sets and over-the-top drama of "Lukomorye."

Musicals come and go in Moscow, but most are Russian versions of famous works like the "The Sound of Music," a recent arrival in town. Few local musicals deal directly with Russian culture and history, but one exception is the Triumph company's "Lukomorye," now on at the Izmailovo Concert Hall.

"Before this, only foreign musicals played here. This is truly the first musical based on Russian folk stories," said actor Sergei Sorokin, who plays Leshy, a forest spirit. "We don't have a lot of patriotism here in Russia, so I feel that perhaps this a step in the right direction."

The musical's story line is a Russian literary and folkloric "greatest hits" compilation of sorts, featuring snippets of stories, with characters ranging from Alexander Pushkin's Swan Princess to Baba Yaga. The title, "Lukomorye," is most commonly recognized from Pushkin's

poem “Ruslan and Lyudmila,” but references to a land called “Lukomorye” date back even further in Russian folk history.

The musical features original dialogue and music entirely in Russian — one tip would be to brush up on Russian vocabulary involving mythical creatures and magic before you go. The story line revolves around the impending once-in-a-millennium birth of a new wizard who has the power to ensure that peace, wisdom and kindness reign for a thousand years to come.

Things aren’t that simple, though, as the forces of evil, led by Koshchei the Immortal and his sidekick, Leshy, also have the power to take control.

The show pulls out all the stops with fantastical sets as it portrays the journey of three Russian princes who head out to free three beloved Russian princesses, Vasilisa the Wise, Yelena the Beautiful, and the Swan Princess, all of whom have been captured by Koshchei.

“I come from a Caucasian background, and I understand that Russia is an enormous country with many heritages and nationalities,” said Yelena Gazayeva, who plays the Swan Princess. “This play represents many of them. My character, for example, has an oriental influence in her music and appearance.”

Noticeably, composer Yevgeny Zagot has the “good” characters sing Russian folk music, while the evil characters, like Koshchei, perform songs of different genres, such as rock.

Traditional Russian clothing inspired many of the costumes for the prince and princesses in the show. The many animals and mystical creatures also adorn beautiful costumes, with some of the beasts using stilts or wearing elaborate wings or headdresses.

The stunning gowns of the Russian princesses stand out in particular in what is perhaps the best number of the entire show. The song, called “Razdolye” (“The Expanse”), is beautiful and undulating, with a heavy folk influence that will likely continue playing in the heads of many audience members for the rest of the day. It is accompanied by an elegant, swirling folk dance.

Though the show is geared toward children with its colorful costumes, fantastical plot, and even a kids’ fair in the lobby, there is more than enough wry humor and beautiful music to please the tastes of most theater-going adults.

Sorokin, who plays Leshy, said the reason the play focuses so much on pleasing children is because the main goal is to educate Russian youth about their culture and history in order to reinstill some patriotic pride. Anyone looking for a basic grounding in Russian fairy tales and a display of Russia’s love for over-the-top drama would be well-advised to start with “Lukomorye.”

“Lukomorye” is on Saturday and Sunday, then Dec. 3, 10, 11, 18, 24, 25 and Jan. 2 to 8 at the Izmailovo Concert Hall, 71E Izmailovskoye Shosse. Metro Partizanskaya. Tel. 225-9577, www.lukomorie-musical.ru.

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