

Mikhailovsky, Duato Ready for Prokofiev

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ST. PETERSBURG — The Mikhailovsky Theater unveils the first ballet premiere of the season this week with choreographer Nacho Duato's new production of Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet."

It will be the second full-length production that Duato has staged for the Mikhailovsky Theater following last year's "The Sleeping Beauty."

"Prokofiev's 'Romeo and Juliet' is, in my opinion, the most beautiful score ever created for the ballet stage," he said via the theater's press service. "I have already worked on this music before — in Spain in the late 1990s — but I am creating a new version now for the Mikhailovsky Theater."

Duato first worked with Prokofiev's score in 1995, staging "Romeo and Juliet" for the Compania Nacional de Danza. The two productions have some dramatic differences, with 20 people involved in the previous production and more than 60 dancers in the new show.

"I am writing new choreography for the main characters, because there will be wonderful dancers with phenomenal capabilities. I have put in some pas de deux especially for Natalia Osipova and Ivan Vasiliev," Duato added.

Starring as Juliet will be Natalia Osipova, Olesya Novikova and Valeria Zapasnikova, while the part of Romeo will be danced by Ivan Vasiliev, Leonid Sarafanov and Ivan Saitzev. International husband-and-wife star dancers Osipova and Vasiliev, who joined the Mikhailovsky from Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet Theater, will dance the opening night.

Osipova has previously performed in "Romeo and Juliet" in London and New York. It will be her Russian debut as Juliet.

"I think that 'Romeo and Juliet' is one of the most important shows this season, if not the most important," Osipova said via the theater's press service. "It is a large-scale, enthralling work, and when performing it I realize that this is the artistic freedom I have always dreamed of, this is the interesting role I have yearned for. Working with Nacho Duato is like learning a new, complex and beautiful language. He has such a fine-tuned perception of the music — picking up on this yourself gives you an incredible sense of satisfaction," she added.

Duato told Iskusstvo TV that he sees Juliet as "very young and quite crazy."

"To run away that night, and to sleep with a guy on the first night in those times and get poison, you know — that's a mad woman. I wanted something like that. Very young, innocent, not knowing what to do, very irresponsible — and the same with Romeo."

Duato does not seek to be abstract in his new version. "Shakespeare sets the action in Verona, you must be able to sense the Mediterranean atmosphere of sunlight, proximity to the sea, and the smells of orange and jasmine," he said.

"The drama of the events spills out onto the streets and squares of the Italian city, and to me it is important to combine the legendary story of the two lovers and the aura in which it unfolds," he added.

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