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Ukrainian Ballerinas Turn Swan Lake into Subversive Anti-Putin Performance

By Anna Dolgov

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Ukrainian ballerinas performed the Swan Lake ballet in protest of President Vladimir Putin.

Ballerinas in the Ukrainian city of Odessa have performed a dance from the Swan Lake ballet for Russian President Vladimir Putin — but the gesture was far from salutary.

The dance, performed to music by composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky outside Odessa's military history museum, was a nod to a Soviet-era tradition, the performance's organizer said, noting that state-run television traditionally aired classical music during periods of great change in the Soviet Union.

"For millions of Soviet people, televised performance of the world-renowned ballet 'Swan Lake' always signaled a change in the country's leadership — either the death of the Secretary-General, or his ouster as a result of a coup," regional lawmaker Oleksiy Honcharenko said when introducing the performance in front of Ukrainian television cameras.

"Because Vladimir Putin has made a fatal mistake by unleashing aggression against Ukraine, today Odessa, as a cultural capital, performs for him this portentous composition," he said in footage that aired on Ukrainian television and was posted online Wednesday.

The four ballerinas then proceeded with the pas de quatre from "Dance of the Little Swans."

It was not the first time that people in Odessa — a Black Sea port city famed around the former Soviet Union for its residents' wry humor and quick ripostes — have used music to demonstrate their views about Putin's annexation of the Crimea peninsula, just to the southeast.

In late March, artists from Odessa's philharmonic showed up at the city's Privoz market to perform Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," the national anthem of the European Union. The four-minute concert was greeted with applause and cheers from market-goers.

Earlier, when Russia dispatched troops to Crimea citing the need to "protect" Russian speakers in Ukraine, Odessa's artists and comedians posted an online video, with various people pretending to call Putin on the phone to tell him, in Russian: "Vladimir Vladimirovich, go home."

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