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Legendary Russian Choreographer Yury Grigorovich Dies at 98

By AFP

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Yury Grigorovich, the towering figure of Russian ballet who led Moscow's Bolshoi Theater as chief choreographer for three decades, has died at age 98, the Bolshoi announced Tuesday.

Born in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) into a family of ballet dancers, Grigorovich's career as a performer and choreographer spanned eight decades. He rose to become the driving creative force behind the Bolshoi, which he was long said to have ruled with an iron fist.

"Yury Grigorovich, one of the key figures in the world of ballet in the second half of the 20th century, has died," the Bolshoi said on social media.

"An entire era has come to an end," the Mariinsky Theater, where Grigorovich began his career, wrote in its own statement.

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Grigorovich earned acclaim for staging ballet classics including "The Nutcracker," "Swan Lake" and "The Stone Flower" — the latter regarded as his signature work, set to music by Sergei Prokofiev.

"He was able to see in artists what we ourselves did not notice," Bolshoi principal dancer Denis Rodkin told the state-run TASS news agency. "He helped us fully express ourselves on stage, making us feel and experience every moment."

Grigorovich choreographed the opening ceremony of the 1980 Moscow Olympics and served on juries for major competitions, including France's "Benois de la Danse," known as the "ballet Oscars."

In 1995, he parted ways with the Bolshoi amid criticism that the theater had grown artistically stagnant during his final years in charge. He returned in 2008 as a choreographer, and critics said his influence on Russia's most famous stage never waned.

"It is an era without which much would not have happened," Russian-Georgian ballet star Nikolai Tsiskaridze wrote on social media. "It is a greatness that cannot be overcome. It was a life that will be remembered... Genius."

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