



Rojo is queen of the Swan Queens

Ismene Brown reviews Swan Lake by the Royal Ballet, Covent Garden and St Petersburg Ballet Theatre, Touring

by **Ismene Brown**

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There's nothing like the challenge of the leading roles in Swan Lake to sort out the grown-ups from the children, and there are a lot of the latter about in the Royal Ballet's further casts for this masterpiece of musical and physical poetry.

For all the opening promise of Alina Cojocaru and Johan Kobborg, the one great pair are Tamara Rojo and Carlos Acosta - two people of exceptional intelligence, fervent soul and utmost technical control, who ask every question of the story's epic mystery and answer every last passion and thrill.

Rojo has dared more than any other ballerina - she makes an intensely feminine Swan Queen, with long, fine musical phrasing and tender emotional suspense; Acosta, a Siegfried of heartfelt simplicity, seemed in rapt awe, sinking into her spell. As the doppelganger Odile, she made those famous stunts glitter, an arabesque frozen in time, fouettes of mesmerising speed and complexity. Seductive, audacious, Rojo knows what

those stunts are for - to dazzle Siegfried and us with the temptations of evil. Acosta responded competitively with a fusillade of jumps and spins that rang with happiness. This Cuban with the athlete's body and the noble poet's soul is a dancer one can hardly have enough of. (Their final performance is on Saturday.)

By comparison, the majestic and handsome Darcey Bussell and Roberto Bolle were not terribly interesting. Bussell has shown a rediscovered juiciness in her dancing this year, but in Swan Lake her mind did not appear to be on apocalyptic matters of good and evil, and Bolle's punctilious courteousness opened no more imaginative doors.

Jaimie Tapper made her debut with Ivan Putrov. She has just been promoted to principal, which mystifies me; a hearty, stolid 23-year-old, proficient in the leg department, wooden in arms, torso and expression. The marvellous violinist, Vasko Vassilev, might as well have been playing to a cupboard for all her response to the magic he was spinning. Putrov, 22, though, may make a Siegfried when he learns to be less flustered - he plays a very young princeling, dancing beautifully, arrogant and petulant by turns, not the kind of guy to fall for Tapper's kind of girl.

The fussiness of the Royal Ballet's Art Nouveau production is thrown into sharp relief by the classic version of the touring St Petersburg Ballet Theatre, a good, young, Vaganova-trained company that I saw in Woking. The setting of Gothic medievalism, of swans in pure white plate tutus, of a ball so well lit that you can actually enjoy the dances, of the delicacy of Russian female arms and some of the feet, all made up for the Soviet "happy" ending and some lack of musicality. Irina Kolesnikova was a grand, soulful Odette; even better was Yuri Glukhikh as Siegfried, whose every move shows how he longs to be a danseur noble. Cheers for such rare aspirations.

- Royal Ballet 'Swan Lake' until Dec 17. Tickets: 020 7304 4000. St Petersburg Ballet Theatre tours until Feb 2003, including 'Swan Lake' at the Albert Hall, Dec 26. Tickets: 020 7589 8212.

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