


*Ismene Brown*

# English National Ballet's star ballerina infuriates fans

📅 19 November 2014, 12:00am

AA Text settings / 💬 Comments / Share    

**W**hich would you rather dance in: Milton Keynes or Moscow's Bolshoi? It's that age-old dilemma for a star ballerina like Alina Cojocaru, who last week decided not to fulfil a matinee performance with English National Ballet in Bucks in order to fly to Russia to save a Bolshoi show. It left fans fuming.

The Bolshoi are presently fielding *La Dame aux camélias* by the distinguished American choreographer John Neumeier, from which their ballerina Olga Smirnova had to withdraw because of injury. No other dancer, it is said, were available in Moscow to cover. The tiny, sweet-faced Cojocaru is one of Neumeier's favourites. ENB's star freed herself from her scheduled *Swan Lake* on Saturday 16 November in Milton Keynes and dashed off to Russia.

Now, a perfectly honourable substitution was made in Milton Keynes for the ENB performance, the rising junior Laurretta Summerscales, but the fact is that ENB has made a justifiably big media deal about hiring the illustrious Cojocarú from the Royal Ballet last year, and as she had not been seen in the regions with the Royal Ballet, this has caused great excitement.

Fans expressed their disappointment and anger on ENB's [Facebook page](#) and on fan sites. 'This is shocking! ... You do not expect to find out that the principal has, in effect, had a better offer,' ran a typical comment.

Another reflected *real-politik*: 'A matinee in MK or a gig at the Bolshoi? A "no brainer" these days... provided that your main company contract permits such flexibility.'

ENB's social media pages stayed shtum in the face of complaints, and [@TamaraRojo1](#) and [@DancingAlina](#) have tweeted only on other topics.

I asked ENB for a response and got this unapologetic reply: 'As sometimes happens, the cast change was due to unforeseen circumstances and we communicated this as quickly as possible. We were confident we could put on a fantastic performance in Milton Keynes and from the feedback we received audiences really enjoyed it. We received two letters of disappointment, which we are responding to personally.'

That essentially conveys that the fans who can't tell the difference between Cojocarú and a junior are more important to ENB than those who can. In which case, one can understand Cojocarú tripping off to epicurean Moscow to be adored by a knowledgeable crowd. It's an untenable attitude in a company aiming to raise expectations of its standards and widen public sensitivity to ballet. Contrition and apology would have gone a long way here.

The devil's advocate might argue that ENB was thrust into a difficult position when the Bolshoi rang. The world-renowned Neumeier is allowing ENB to give the UK premiere of one of his ballets at its showcase Sadler's Wells programme next spring – starring Cojocarú. 'It's a dream come true,' she said in the company announcement. So did ENB's artistic director Tamara Rojo put relations with an important choreographer and an insistent star ahead of relations with English fans?

We don't know, but regardless of the details, the point was made. Cojocarú, with company permission, took Moscow over Milton Keynes, and for the fans (who subsidise ENB too) *tant pis*. This is common in Russia, but not as yet in England – and I'd say we want to keep it our way.

WRITTEN BY

*Ismene Brown*

 Comments /  Share    

---

Most popular

*Brendan O'Neill*

**Why were these Afghan r  
even in Britain?**