

Daily Telegraph Tues Aug 15 2000

Kirov unlocks Russian soul

Review: *The Sleeping Beauty, Romeo and Juliet*

The second half of the Kirov's superb visit to London has reinforced the impression of a sea-change. I fancy we are seeing less of the exhibitionist Barbie dolls of dance, and more of the Russian soul, which ballet has a uniquely powerful key to unlock.

The mixture of ballets on offer - ranging in period from 1890 to 1940 - has made you notice how vastly societies change in short periods, it was she who opened the second Fokine programme in 'Schéhérazade' and 'The Firebird' last Wednesday, reminding us of her serpentine but unmysterious glamour.

What we will more fondly remember this summer is beauty and truth, in the sublime person of Altynai Asylmuratova, at 39 now about to move on to directing the Kirov's great school. It's an agony to lose her.

The marvel of Asylmuratova is how she subsumes herself in the style of the work she is dancing. Last Monday, in the Kirov's fabulous restoration of the 1890 'The Sleeping Beauty', the black-haired stunner from Kazakhstan etched into one's heart an experience of Aurora that reached out beyond the usual excellences of style, technique and interpretation, and into the music of the spheres, in Jacob Bronowski's phrase, where technical rules and miraculous harmony coalesce.

Looking ravishing in the Tsarist opulence of the designs, she brought the grand decorum of a 19th-century Imperial princess to her dancing hands in her radiant Act 3 wedding.

This is what ballet is all about. In the famous 1940 'Romeo and Juliet' of Leonid Lavrovsky, created with Prokofiev, its composer, she switched styles effortlessly. Kenneth MacMillan at the Royal Ballet created, 25 years later, a more naturalistic, ardent 'Romeo and Juliet', b

Her Romeo, Igor Zelensky, was there in magnificent body, but his mind was apparently set on his next engagement. Andrian Fadeyev, her Prince Desire in 'Beauty', showed a fine seriousness which many of the Kirov's young men now share. And the ethereal, soulful purity of rising ballerinas such as Irina Zhelonkina and Daria Pavlenko in 'Chopiniana' on Wednesday and Natalia Sologub as Princess Florine in 'Sleeping Beauty' is also enormously cheering. Deeper emotion, sweeter temper, more subtle expression, seems to be the new Kirov style.

Tickets 020 7304 4000; till Aug 19