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Review: Moscow Festival Ballet tells familiar stories with grace and beauty

By L. KENT WOLGAMOTT / Lincoln Journal Star Apr 20, 2016

The best measure of Tuesday's Lied Center for Performing Arts performance by the Moscow Festival Ballet could be seen in the effectiveness of its storytelling, not through words or even dramatic facial expressions but through the bodies of the dancers.

Presenting two short ballets -- a two act "Romeo and Juliet" and a one-act version of Bizet's "Carmen," the troupe told the stories so well that one wouldn't have had to be familiar with the originals to perceive and be moved by the romantic tragedies that rapidly unfolded with grace and beauty.

That was particularly true for "Romeo and Juliet," which took place in front of exquisite backdrops that evoked a palace courtyard and Juliet's bedroom under beautiful lighting that accentuated the motion, whether bright white or in the gorgeous red opening of the second scene in the bedroom.

The principals -- Olga Gudkova as Juliet and Nurlan Kinerbaev as Romeo -- danced well together, particularly in the duo-only piece when he comes to her room.

The company delivered pure classical ballet against the familiar Tchaikovsky score that played via a recording.

The star of the show, however, was Maria Klyueva who danced the lead role in "Carmen." Playful, sensual and dramatic, Klyueva moved beyond technical skill to create a captivating, eye-grabbing character as the independent Carmen, a performance made even more moving by the nature of the story.

She was well matched by her male counterparts, particularly Alexander Daev as her determined suitor Don José. The final passage of a bullfight resonated with a power that raised contemporary issues inside the classical form, including violence against women and the phasing out of bullfights in Spain and Latin America.

Sergei Radchenko, the legendary principal dancer of the Bolshoi Ballet, founded the Moscow Festival Ballet 27 years ago to bring together the classical elements of the Bolshoi and Kirov companies within the framework of classic Russian ballet.

Those elements, from the styles and techniques to the striking costumes and effective sets, were on view Tuesday. But most important was the grace and skill with which the dancers, in their 20s and 30s, told the classic tales.

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