BWW Review: SWAN LAKE at Festival Ballet Providence

by Barb Burke   May. 12, 2019

Festival Ballet’s Swan Lake opened Friday at Veterans Memorial Auditorium, Providence RI, filling the stage with moment after moment of take-your-breath-away beauty. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s iconic ballet is one of the world’s all-time favorites with all the elements that make the story ballets so popular such as love, romance, folkloric charm, magic and beauty. Festival Ballet Providence’s production adds another element - strength - in the strength and athleticism of the dancing and the strong character development of the major roles.

In addition to the excellent dancing, there were so many moments of this performance that created gorgeous tableaus just from the combination of the assembled dancers on stage, the new costumes and sets by Peter Farmer and the illumination of Alicia Colantonio’s lighting design. Farmer’s sets evoke the ballet’s 19th century Romantic-era origins. The trompe l’oeil effect of the gothic-inspired castle interior was particularly striking.

As the enchanted swan princess, Odette/Odile, Eugenia Zinovieva is a dream. She dances every step with a clear love for the role, evidenced in the care she gives to every movement from the slightest wave of a finger to the notoriously challenging turn sequences of Act III.

João Sampaio’s Prince Siegfried, is elegant, yet powerful. Sampaio is those rare gifted dancers whose leaps seem to hover in air.

Ricardo Rhodes was an audience favorite both for his exuberant execution of some of the evening’s most athletic dancing and for the endearing and emotive performance he gave as the Jester of the Court. David DuBois’s dramatic portrayal of the evil sorcerer Von Rothbart was strong and dramatic, with raptor-like movements that gave the character a threatening, otherworldly characteristic.

The namesake swans of the ballet were portrayed by Katherine Bickford, Charlotte Nash, Athina Alimonos, Jessica Alvarez, Eleanor Ambler, Sara Clarke, Kailee Felix, Julia Guineen, Emily Lovdahl, Louisa Mejeur, Elizabeth Mochizuki, Dara Nicole, Brenna DiFrancesco, Kristy DuBois, Raechel Sparreo and Mellissa Wong with that combination of beauty and strength that flavored the whole production, particularly in the case of the swans, in the precise arm work.

The joyous spirit to the party scenes of Acts I and III, provided a nice contrast to the serious nature of Acts II and IV. Of particular note was the exquisite performance of Act I’s Pas de Trois by Charlotte Nash, Jay Markov, and Rachel Sparreo.

Unfortunately, the audience was not able to applaud some of the fine dancing of the those party scenes as it appeared some of the cast was absent for the final bow.
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Barb Burke, a writer and a life-long New Englander, loves the arts in all its forms. She also volunteers at living history events.

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