



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Dreams and Reality Collide in Jolanthe und der Nussknacker

Volksoper Vienna, 13.11.2024 [ENA]

The production *Jolanthe und der Nussknacker*, presented by the Volksoper Wien under the direction of Lotte de Beer and choreography by Andrey Kaydanovskiy, weaves together Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* and *The Nutcracker* into an enchanting, poignant experience. This unique fusion of opera and ballet is a journey into both the innocence of childhood and the complexities of coming of age.

The performance is blending two beloved masterpieces into a profound tale about the discovery of reality and the power of imagination. Through de Beer's thoughtful vision and Kaydanovskiy's dynamic choreography, *Jolanthe und der Nussknacker* offers a multi-layered performance that appeals to children and adults alike, capturing the audience with its emotional depth and visual magic. At the heart of this production is the character of Princess Jolanthe, a blind young woman living in a sheltered, almost fantastical world. Unaware of her blindness, Jolanthe imagines herself in a realm filled with colorful creatures, from loyal attendants to the looming presence of the Mouse King.

This imaginative life reflects her inner world—a space of innocence, where reality and fantasy coexist. The blending of *Iolanta* with *The Nutcracker* enriches this narrative, as Jolanthe's journey mirrors Clara's voyage into a dreamland where a nutcracker becomes a prince and ordinary toys spring to life. De Beer and Kaydanovskiy's interpretation of Jolanthe's blindness as a metaphor for the innocence and limitations of childhood adds depth to the character's arc. Jolanthe's encounter with Vaudemont, her future lover, becomes a turning point where she confronts the idea of sight for the first time, both literally and metaphorically.

This revelation initiates a profound transformation: Jolanthe begins to see not only with her eyes but also with her mind and heart. In this context, the Mouse King and his minions become symbolic of her fears and the internal resistance to change, emphasizing the bravery required to embrace the complexities of the real world. Kaydanovskiy's choreography is a true highlight of the production, capturing the duality of childhood wonder and adult realization through expressive, varied movement. The ballet sequences transition seamlessly between the innocence of Jolanthe's imaginary world and the more grounded, poignant moments as she grapples with her blindness.

The dancers of the Vienna State Ballet embody these shifts beautifully, using fluid, graceful movements that contrast with the rigid, almost menacing steps of the Mouse King and his entourage. The famous

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Nutcracker scenes are reinvented to reflect Jolanthe's perspective, portraying the figures that populate her inner life. Kaydanovskiy's choreography is especially striking in the scenes featuring the snowflakes and flowers—traditional motifs in The Nutcracker—which here represent aspects of Jolanthe's imagination. The dancers' movements here are delicate and dreamlike, capturing both the beauty of Jolanthe's world and the fragility of her protected existence.

The Mouse King's choreography is equally compelling, marked by sharp, assertive gestures that bring an edge of danger to Jolanthe's dreamscape. This contrast between fluidity and rigidity underlines the tension within Jolanthe's world as she begins to step out of her sheltered life. The entire cast, from the lead dancers to the youngest performers from the Ballett Akademie of the Vienna State Opera, brings this magical world to life with skill and sensitivity. The children, portraying sweets and whimsical characters, add to the sense of wonder and contribute to the opera's charm, embodying the lighter, more playful aspects of Jolanthe's dreams.

The young dancers are disciplined and focused, their movements adding texture to the fantastical landscapes crafted by de Beer and Kaydanovskiy.

The role of Jolanthe is performed with incredible grace and emotional complexity, conveying her journey from naivety to a more mature understanding of the world. The dancer's movements are precise, yet imbued with an innocence that makes her eventual transformation all the more touching. The scenes with Vaudemont, her love interest, are a delicate blend of romantic awakening and self-discovery, as Jolanthe begins to understand concepts of light and vision.

Their duet is one of the production's most moving moments, as Vaudemont gently guides her in her exploration, allowing the audience to witness her vulnerability and her courage. Vaudemont's dancer complements Jolanthe's innocence with a mature presence, performing with an understated strength and tenderness. His movements convey the character's empathy and admiration for Jolanthe, creating an onstage chemistry that is both tender and compelling. His role in Jolanthe's transformation is sensitively portrayed, allowing her to take center stage while supporting her journey of self-discovery.

The visual elements of Jolanthe und der Nussknacker are breathtaking. Katrin Lea Tag's set design combines simplicity with a surreal beauty, transforming the stage into an enchanted garden and a mysterious dreamscape with equal ease. The set's walls and gates create a sense of confinement, representing Jolanthe's limited perception, while also serving as a canvas for her imagination. When Vaudemont enters her world, the set opens up, symbolizing Jolanthe's newfound awareness and the possibilities that lie beyond her inner sanctuary.

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The costumes by Jorine van Beek add another layer of visual richness. The Mouse King, with his imposing seven-headed costume, is both whimsical and sinister, embodying Jolanthe's fears in physical form. Jolanthe's costumes evolve as her character does, beginning with soft, flowing garments that reflect her innocence and later incorporating more structured elements as she gains awareness. The attention to detail in each costume contributes to the opera's dreamlike atmosphere, with the dancers' attire enhancing the story's fairy-tale elements while grounding it in emotional realism.

The music, combining selections from Iolanta and The Nutcracker, is performed with great sensitivity under the baton of Omer Meir Wellber. Wellber's conducting captures the delicate balance between Tchaikovsky's lush, emotive score for Iolanta and the whimsical, rhythmic vibrancy of The Nutcracker, crafting a soundscape that flows seamlessly between drama and enchantment. The orchestra's performance heightens the emotional impact of each scene, echoing the characters' internal struggles and triumphs with expressive nuance.

The opera's vocal sections, performed in German with English surtitles, allow the narrative to unfold with clarity and emotional intensity. The singers, particularly those portraying Jolanthe and Vaudemont, demonstrate a deep understanding of their roles, merging the operatic style with the ballet to create a cohesive storytelling experience. Their voices blend beautifully with Tchaikovsky's score, elevating the production and ensuring that the music remains central to the opera's narrative.

Jolanthe und der Nussknacker is more than a fairy-tale-inspired opera; it is a thoughtful exploration of growth, perception, and the courage it takes to confront the unknown. De Beer's direction and Kaydanovskiy's choreography combine to create a performance that is both visually captivating and emotionally resonant, offering audiences a profound reflection on the journey from innocence to self-awareness. The production's success lies in its ability to present a well-known story in a fresh and innovative way, drawing from Tchaikovsky's masterpieces to craft a narrative that speaks to the timeless themes of love, fear, and transformation.

In Jolanthe und der Nussknacker, audiences witness not only the enchanting dreams of a young princess but also the courage she must find to confront reality. This production invites viewers to see the world through Jolanthe's eyes, offering a reminder that while imagination is a source of comfort, true growth comes from embracing life in all its complexity. In a perfect synthesis of dance, opera, and storytelling, Jolanthe und der Nussknacker is an unforgettable experience that leaves a lasting impression on audiences of all ages.

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