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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

## A Celebration of Talent and Promise

Vienna State Opera, 18.12.2024 [ENA]

The annual Matinee der Ballettakademie at the Wiener Staatsoper offers an unparalleled opportunity to witness the next generation of ballet artists in action. This year's event was a resounding success, showcasing the remarkable skills of the academy's students while celebrating the timeless artistry of the ballet repertoire and the bold creativity of contemporary choreography.

From the classic romanticism of La Bayadère to the poignant intimacy of Martin Schlöpfer's Quartz and the vibrant premiere of Christina Stefanou's Prisma, the program was an exquisite blend of tradition and innovation. The evening began with selections from La Bayadère, a masterpiece of Romantic ballet with choreography after Marius Petipa. This production, adapted by Christiana Stefanou, Diliانا Nikiforova, Robert Gabdullin, Alena Weber, and Zsolt Elek, retained the grandeur and emotional depth of the original while tailoring its complexity to the abilities of the students.

The young dancers rose admirably to the challenge, bringing elegance, precision, and emotional maturity to their roles. The Kingdom of the Shades scene, always a test of technical prowess and ensemble unity, was particularly impressive. The corps de ballet delivered the iconic arabesque sequences with a remarkable steadiness, creating a hypnotic tableau of symmetry and grace. Their synchronization was flawless, a testament to the rigorous training and dedication of both students and instructors.

The soloists brought a refined artistry to their performances. The leading ballerina demonstrated exceptional control and expressiveness in her variation, imbuing each movement with a sense of narrative purpose. Her partner, meanwhile, displayed a natural strength and charisma, executing the demanding lifts and turns with apparent ease. Together, they embodied the romantic and tragic essence of La Bayadère, captivating the audience with their chemistry and technical brilliance.

The production's visual elements added to the enchantment. The costumes, adapted by Maria Alati and Katrin Böge, paid homage to the traditional designs of La Bayadère while incorporating subtle modern touches that enhanced the dancers' movements. Robert Eisenstein's lighting design was atmospheric, bathing the stage in warm, ethereal tones that underscored the ballet's dreamlike quality.

Next on the program was Quartz, a poignant miniature ballet by Martin Schlöpfer, performed by the academy's youth company. Set to an eclectic score featuring Rickie Lee Jones, traditional Albanian folk

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music, and Marianne Faithfull, Quartz is a chamber work that explores themes of intimacy, distance, and solitude.

The dancers' portrayal of these universal emotions was profoundly moving. Despite their youth, they demonstrated a maturity and depth that belied their years, capturing the complexities of human connection with subtlety and sensitivity. The choreography, with its intricate interplay of duets and group formations, highlighted their versatility and expressiveness.

Moments of physical closeness were juxtaposed with sequences of isolation, creating a compelling narrative that resonated deeply with the audience.

Particularly striking was the duet between two principal dancers, whose seamless partnership brought out the emotional core of the piece. Their movements, alternately tender and turbulent, spoke volumes about the fragility and resilience of relationships. The hauntingly beautiful violin and piano accompaniment, performed live by Cristian Rusciur and Konstantinos Diminakis, added a layer of immediacy and intimacy, drawing the audience into the ballet's introspective world.

The evening concluded with the world premiere of Prisma, a dynamic new work by Christina Stefanou set to the evocative music of Philip Glass. As its title suggests, Prisma offered a kaleidoscopic exploration of movement and emotion, with the dancers embodying the shifting facets of a prism through fluid, ever-changing formations.

Stefanou's choreography was bold and innovative, blending classical ballet technique with contemporary influences. The dancers embraced the physical and emotional demands of the piece with enthusiasm and aplomb, their movements embodying the intricate rhythms and patterns of Glass's music.

The ensemble sequences were particularly captivating, with the dancers forming geometric shapes that dissolved and reformed in mesmerizing synchronicity.

The soloists shone in their roles, each bringing their own unique energy and interpretation to the choreography. One standout performance came from a dancer whose fluid extensions and powerful leaps captured the expansiveness of the music, drawing spontaneous applause from the audience. Another dancer excelled in a more introspective solo, their delicate phrasing and nuanced expression revealing the quieter, more reflective side of Prisma.

The production's visual design enhanced the ballet's impact. Eisenstein's lighting created a vibrant, multi-hued environment that mirrored the shifting moods of the music, while the costumes—simple yet

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striking—allowed the dancers’ movements to take center stage. The overall effect was a feast for the senses, leaving the audience both exhilarated and contemplative. The Matinee der Ballettakademie is more than a performance; it is a celebration of the hard work, passion, and potential of the academy’s students. This year’s program was a testament to their extraordinary talent and dedication, as well as to the exceptional guidance of their instructors and choreographers.

Each work on the program offered a unique perspective on the art of dance, from the timeless beauty of La Bayadère to the introspective poignancy of Quartz and the vibrant innovation of Prisma. Together, they demonstrated the versatility and creativity of the academy’s dancers, as well as their readiness to carry the traditions of ballet into the future.

For the audience, the matinee was an unforgettable experience—a chance to witness the artistry of tomorrow’s stars today. The prolonged ovation at the end of the performance was not just a celebration of the evening’s achievements, but a heartfelt acknowledgment of the promise and potential on display.

The Matinee der Ballettakademie at the Wiener Staatsoper was a triumph, a perfect blend of tradition, innovation, and youthful energy. It showcased the immense talent of the academy’s students, while also highlighting the importance of nurturing and celebrating the next generation of ballet artists.

With performances like this, the future of ballet looks brighter than ever. It is a privilege to witness these young dancers on their journey, and one can only look forward with excitement to their continued growth and success.

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