
ID: 11880

'Spartacus', 1979

Ballet in 4 Acts

Composer: Aram Khachaturian

Libretto:

Choreography: Yuri Grigorovich

Production Designer: Simon Virsaladze

Conductor: Algis Zhuraitis

Performers: Vladimir Vasiliev Spartacus (captive King of Thrace)

Ekaterina Maximova Phrygia (Spartacus' wife)

Tatiana Golikova Aegina (concubine to Crassus)

Mikhail Gabovich Crassus (Roman consul)

Running time: 2:17:46

History of the ballet:

Spartacus is known as one of Khachaturian's best known works and is prominent within the repertoires of the Bolshoi Theatre. The work follows the exploits of Spartacus, the leader of the slave uprising against the Romans. The greatest acclaim the ballet received was when Grigorovich staged his version in 1968.

The ballet is based on the fame acquired novel by Raffaello Giovagnoli, Spartacus, which explores with great interest the historicism and especially the spirit of struggle that greatly infects the reader. Both notions are explicitly and vividly explored within the ballet and formulate a very enticing piece of drama. It is particularly interesting, that given the themes explored within the novel by Giovagnoli of oppressed slaves staging an uprising, the book was severely censored in the Soviet Union.

The storyline concerns the ultimately unsuccessful revolt of the slaves, led by Spartacus the Thracian slave and gladiator, against the Roman Empire. However, the narrative is portraying the oppression of the common people by a cruel and corrupt imperial regime.

This heroic story of love and struggle, of the brave Spartacus, captured in captivity by the Legion of the Roman Empire with the cruel Crassus as the leader. The stage is filled with the reign of intrigue and gladiatorial fights, jealousy and despair. Spartacus, who blindly won in gladiatorial combat and killed his friend, cannot accept this tragedy and decides to fight for freedom, calling for an uprising of the gladiators.

Plot summary:

The Roman consul, Crassus, return to Rom following his latest conquests in a triumphal procession. Among his captives, is the Thracian king Spartacus and his wife Phrygia. Spartacus laments his captivity and bids a bitter farewell to Phrygia, who is taken away to join Crassus' concubines. To entertain Crassus and his entourage, Spartacus is sent into the gladiatorial ring and is forced, whilst blind, to kill a close friend of his. Horrified at his deed, Spartacus incites his fellow captives to rebellion.

The escaped captives celebrate their freedom. Meanwhile, Crassus entertains the Roman patricians with lavish entertainment including fights between blindfolded gladiators. The seductive Aegina incites a sexual orgy, when Spartacus and his men disrupt the orgy and rescue the

slave women, including Phrygia. Aegina is insulted and spurs Crassus on to pursue the slave army immediately. The lovers celebrate their escape to the familiar 'Adagio of Spartacus and Phrygia'.

Aegina discovers Spartacus' camp and observes the lovers emerging from their tents the next morning. Aegina sends word to Crassus, who sends out his army and fighting breaks out among Spartacus' forces. Finally, Crassus' forces discover Spartacus and impale him upon their spears. Spartacus' closest followers recover his body and carry it off while Phrygia mourns her loss.

Performance history:

Spartacus is regarded as one of the greatest works of Aram Khachaturian, after the war. A score of the ballet was completed in 1954 and on December 27, 1956, it was premiered at the Leningrad Theatre of Opera and Ballet. For this composition, Khachaturian was awarded a Lenin Prize. Since that time the ballet has often been performed on some of the best stages in the world.

The Bolshoi Theatre first staged the performance in 1958, by the choreographer Igor Moiseev and in 1962 Leonid Yakobson's edition of the ballet was premiered.

The current version of Spartacus was released April 9, 1968, and in 1970 the ballet production of Spartacus, reformed by Yuri Grigorovich, which shook the foundations of basic ballet theatre for its time was awarded the Lenin Prize of the USSR.

As acknowledged by the critics of the world, with the ballet Grigorovich began a new era in the annals of the Bolshoi Theatre. Spartacus has crossed all the established stereotypes, turned all the views of the heroic-romantic genre in the ballet; it shaped the structure, the relationships between the hero and the corps de ballet. Classical dance is presented in its entire splendor and diversity of forms in the new production has become a major, if not the only, means of expression. It is a classical dance reigned in the monologues, duets, crowd scenes - virtuosic and powerful, imbued with feeling and thought. The choreographer came up with a detailed response for each of the four characters' dances.

Memorable images created magnificent dancers, unwittingly overshadowed in this predominantly male ballet gallery of remarkable scenic female portraits - strong and clever courtesan Aegina performed by Nina Timofeeva, two such different Frigo - lyrical and dramatic Ekaterina Maximova and tragically bruised Natalia Bessmertnova.