

SWAN LAKE

Music by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Choreography by Marius Petipa, Lev Ivanov and Peter Wright

Birmingham Royal Ballet

Virginia Arts Festival

May 7-9, 2010 Chrysler Hall

For tickets: (757)282-2822

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

The grand Birmingham Royal Ballet crossed the Atlantic to pay an exclusive visit to Hampton Roads. They gave three performances in that many days and then packed up their tons of scenery and lights, hundreds and hundreds of costumes, organized their company of 107 people including 62 dancers and headed for home. We have the fabulous Virginia Arts Festival to thank for this honor.

This version of a tale of the power of love caught in the vice of supernatural evil lasts for two hours and forty some minutes. While these story book ballets are enthralling in their beauty, they do indeed have dinosaur like characteristics as they lumber along. There have been shorter two act renditions of the piece done in the past. All were based on the original choreography of Petipa and Ivanov. This full length presentation by Peter Wright made its debut in Manchester on November 27, 1981 to generally highly favorable reviews.

The present company of dancers is indeed an ultra-talented lot who bring incandescent life and spirit to Peter Wright's Gothic interpretation of the dance. Without exception, the principals have strong technical skills and display a keen sensitivity of characterization. In the tradition of classical ballet each principal is given an opportunity for individual expression in countless solos, pas de deux and other combinations. In the lavish fantasy world created by the enormous sets, lush lighting and the emotionally charged Tchaikovsky score, the dancers transport us to realms of ethereal beauty. The younger members of the Company's corps de ballet perform a variety of roles with promising expertise. Our own Virginia Symphony Orchestra conducted by Philip Ellis made an enormous contribution to the dramatic intensity of the evening.

Peter Wright's concept of Swan Lake taking place in a cosmos ruled by a supernatural power of darkness and evil is a valid one. However, in his attempt to realize Mr. Wright's ideas, Designer Philip Prowse resorts to black and dark earth tones in the set pieces and many of the costumes. In ACT III, especially, the three princesses from foreign lands who come to dance for Siegfried are in costumes that do not move well. Other dancers are in heavy dark garments that are burdensome. One London critic expressed my feelings better than I can. He said, "The costumes wear the dancers." The over all mood is dark, gloomy and heavy instead of being enticingly evil and luring us into its exciting web of the mysterious supernatural.

Even so it was an elegant and highly satisfying feast of classical ballet. The company's director in the 1950's and 60's, Ninette de Valois, said that the company should have one foot in the future and one foot in the past. The next time they visit us I would like to see that foot that's in the future.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.