

NEW/ADVENTURES RE;BOURNE



SPOTLIGHT – Michela Meazza, Irina Boronskaja in The Red Shoes
Wed 12 April 2017

Tell us a bit about your role in Matthew Bourne's production of The Red Shoes:

I play Irina Boronskaja, the Prima Ballerina of the Lermontov Ballet Company. She was born in Russia and trained in ballet since she was little, she is very dedicated and has given everything to ballet. Her mother was with her all the way through this journey. She has no husband or partner as ballet is her life. She can be quite dramatic and grand on and off stage. Irina loves expensive high heel shoes (just like Dame Alicia Markova, English ballerina and choreographer). She adores Boris Lermontov, a father and lover figure and is very close to Ivan, her dancing partner. Although very different people Irina and Ivan have a unique dance relationship, they dance as one.

What is your favourite moment in The Red Shoes for your character?

There are several wonderful moments for my character. I particularly enjoy the section we call 'Sylph 1', where Irina rehearses holding her white dress and directing the follow spot operator around the stage. It's a unique moment being able to walk towards the audience in silence and taking in all the people sitting in the auditorium, connecting with them without doing any dance movements. I love the fact that this section is based on a real anecdote of Alicia Markova doing her stage calls in high heels and fur coat, placing her tutu in the right spot. Matthew read about this anecdote and told me about it a couple of years ago and I am so pleased it's now an iconic moment of the show. Not many people realise it's based on true facts. But I also really enjoy the section called 'Good Versus Evil' in Act 2, a new ballet by the Lermontov Company (inspired by Ashton's Dante's *Sonata*) because Irina explores a different style of movement, a bit more avant-garde (for that era) and very sharp and dramatic.



Alicia Markova practicing a lift in wedges... and still with perfectly pointed feet!

What has inspired how you created and play your character?

As always, with Matthew's shows, dancers get the chance to develop the characters through a lot of research: reading books, watching videos, sharing anecdotes and personal experiences. I read and watched a lot about Alicia Markova and Tamara Toumanova (Russian-born American prima ballerina and actress). I was inspired by their determination in their careers, how they started very young and committed to a profession that was relatively new and unpredictable in those days. I was also fascinated by their sense of style and beauty on and off stage.

If you've been in a New Adventures show other than The Red Shoes, how does this new work differ in terms of what may have been asked from you thematically?

Having worked on almost all of Matthew's large-scale productions, I often play dramatic characters. For Irina, Matthew wanted her to be dramatic but also real. So, her deep passion for ballet had to feel real and the humour had to come from an authentic place, rather than a caricaturesque interpretation. I really enjoyed this challenge.

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If your role is played by someone else also how has this informed how you develop/play the character yourself?

It's always great having someone alongside you while creating a new character. It challenges one's choices, we ask each other questions about how Irina would feel about a situation or how her journey through the piece evolves. We also play certain scenes quite differently so I always enjoy watching my part played by another person, I am constantly learning from them. Playing a character on stage can feel very different to what it looks like from the front.

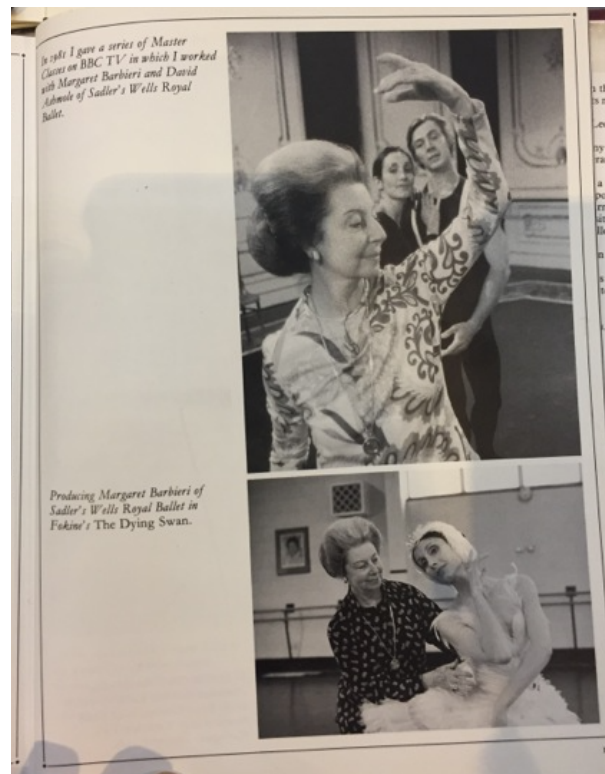
Being able to watch another dancer in my role allows me to have a wider picture of how Irina fits in the whole story and whether her journey is clear from beginning to end.

How do you reflect on your performance after the show other than receiving notes from other company members/resident director etc.

The audience reaction is always a very clear gauge to understanding if the show went well. In general I try to acknowledge what worked and what didn't, but I try not to hold on to things that went wrong too much, it can bring a negative energy to your next performance. There is always room for improvement in any show and that's what we work on every day and it's also what keeps the show alive through a long tour.



***The golden statue of a foot on point that you see in the show was made on Michela's foot (Act 2, Lermontov's room)
I had to keep my foot in that position for 1 hour. I couldn't feel my toes***



The pictures above are very dear to Michela as it shows Alicia Markova tutoring Margaret Barbieri.

Margaret was her main teacher when Michela moved to London and started training at London Studio Centre. She was very kind and supportive toward her and was a great inspiration. The classical graduate course was created under both Alicia and Margaret's guidance and Alicia came to mentor Michela's class a few times. She was very specific about details and quality of movements, always holding her hands and feet very elegantly while watching Michela and her classmates rehearse.