

Virtuosos of theatre costume change

Success of performance depends on quick actions of wardrobe masters

By Taisia Yevgenieva

Anticipation is high backstage and front of house at the Belarusian State Academic Musical Theatre as the prima ballerina in *Spanish Miniatures* prepares to appear. Her outfit is being changed by two pairs of hands, as every second is vital. With only 15 seconds to change outfit, efficiency is imperative; otherwise, the performance can be derailed. Audiences barely notice and rarely think of the wardrobe masters 'on duty' backstage but the success of any performance depends on their quick actions.

"Translated from French, a wardrobe master is an artist," notes Galina

Serdyukova, the head of the Belarusian State Academic Musical Theatre's costume department. "Despite designs being created by costume designers and drawings being brought to life in the sewing department, wardrobe masters have plenty of opportunity for creativity. We receive ready-made clothes in which to dress actors but we can 'polish' their image with fine detail. Sometimes, we even add vital details. We can make a set of costumes, which aren't involved in a performance. While designers and seamstresses help a costume appear in the world, we enable it to live."

Costumes tend to last quite a long time. The theatre has been performing *A Night in Venice* for 40 years, yet its costumes were only recently updated. If a performance leaves the repertoire, costumes are given to amateur troupes. Nothing is ever simply thrown away, as costumes can always be adapted to create something new.

It's difficult to imagine how much space is needed to accommodate several hundred items and accessories. In fact, 186 items of clothing, as well as 44 pairs of shoes and 52 hats are used for *Twelve Chairs*, while *Blue Cameo* involves 108 pairs of shoes, 33 hats and around 200 costumes. "Costumes should be in ideal condition before each performance; washed, ironed, repaired, packed and brought to the dressing rooms," explains Ms. Serdyukova. "A week before the premiere of *Twelve Chairs*, we were working with actors for 12 hours daily without a break at weekends. Rehearsals took place in the mornings while, in the evenings, we gave performances. We had to be present. During rehearsals, we fit costumes and, sometimes, even mend them. Also, we usually stand backstage during performances to help actors change their outfits."

The costume department isn't large, employing just eight wardrobe masters, a



Costumes play major role in *Blue Cameo* musical, staged at Belarusian State Academic Musical Theatre

repair seamstress, a knitting expert, a boot-maker and a laundry operator. The theatre's prestige, the artists' success and audiences' enjoyment are in their hands.

During the ballet *Twelve Chairs*, 15 changes of dress occur, each only allowing five minutes, with several actors simultaneously requiring help. Usually, only one wardrobe master is available. In special cases, two or three are allocated to tackle tricky fastenings: snaps, hooks, hook-and-eye fasteners, zips, buttons and lacing. Of course, it's far more difficult to work with the last two, but the wardrobe master's experienced hands can cope with almost anything — from long lengths of buttons to corset laces.

"Many want to become wardrobe masters but, of course, some are quickly disappointed and leave," notes Ms. Serdyukova. "Only those who truly love theatre remain."

Regarding the professional qualities required of a wardrobe master, Ms. Serdyukova responds, "Responsibility, patience, benevolence and love for the theatre. We often joke that costumes are like mothers to the actors; supporting, calming and taking care of them. Actors are people with fine and sensitive souls."

Sergey Smirnov gives encore in French capital

Performance by Belarusian pianist enthusiastically welcomed by music fans

By Veronika Artemieva

Sergey Smirnov's solo piano concert, organised by the La Vie En Musique — LVEM French-Belarusian musical association, was hugely successful with the French audience. Some were allured by his romantic performance of Chopin's Scherzo No. 2 while others were enchanted with *Songs by a Venetian Gondolier* by Mendelssohn and *Barcarole* from Tchaikovsky's *Seasons*.

The central place in the evening programme was occupied by *Réminiscences*

graduate of the Belarusian Academy of Music, specialising in the piano. He was a pupil of Prof. Vladimir Nekhaenko and now lives and works in Paris, accompanied by his family. Sergey believes that the Belarusian musical school is one of the strongest in the world. "I'm proud that I represent Belarus and try to underline this with my creative activity," he notes. The concert was organised at the Place de la Concorde (Square of Peace) at the Residence of the Commander-in-Chief of the Naval Forces of France.

This is not the first experience of co-operation between the musical association and the French Naval Ministry, which occupies one of the most beautiful palaces in the French capital. Constructed between 1757 and 1774, it was designed by architect Gabriel to house royal property: decorations, books, tapestries and furniture. In 1789,

the palace became home to the Naval Ministry. Several years ago, its interior halls received a facelift, with various architectural and finishing details restored. Gold-leaf wall-mounted decorations were restored to their former glory and certain rooms were opened to the public in their original splendour.



Sergey Smirnov surprises French audience with his play

The palace is generally closed to public visits but often hosts receptions, organised by the Ministry or by organisations with which it co-operates. La Vie En Musique — LVEM is one such. Once a year, it organises a musical evening for the benefit of two medical foundations, and to support young musicians.