

Dressing Vitovt in modern style and manner

Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre audiences may never suspect that about 50m of fabric are needed for a single costume

By Lyudmila Kazakova

We become inspired by acting, wonder at the size of sets and admire the 'royal' costumes of our stage heroes but we probably never think about how these amazing outfits are made. Naturally, audience's first thoughts are for the skill of opera singers and the mastery of ballet dancers. The work 'behind the scenes' often fails to receive proper recognition. Some might even say that costumes are of little importance but, without a convincing outfit, our ability to believe in a character may be affected. A whole performance could dissolve for want of accurate details in set and costume.

To find out who designs these costumes, how much fabric is used for each and how long it takes to sew an outfit, we dropped by the Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre's wardrobe department. The building is so huge that you can't help but think of it as a factory, 'producing' culture. The wardrobe department, unsurprisingly, does resemble a sewing factory. In the first room, fabric is cut, in the second, sewing is organised and, in the third, actors try on their outfits and have fittings. Superintendent Larisa Melnik directs the whole 'pageant', telling us, "One opera may need 300,

400 or 450 costumes. There are always a great many needed for Russian classical operas such as *Boris Godunov*, *Prince Igor* and *Khovanshchina*. Ballets use a smaller number, perhaps 150 to 170. However, 240 costumes were needed

it. Larisa tells us, "We gather all the specialists, designers, technologists and foremen so the actor can describe the conception behind their performance and make suggestions. Some say they want their fabric to glitter or move



Working magic to create costumes

ready been working for many months. Ernst Geidebrecht, the artistic director, has made several visits from Germany although we tend to speak by phone, sharing ideas, and listening to advice and suggestions. In the first act, Prince

rapher disagrees. After much argument, we found a solution: a beaded belt. It was the original idea of one of the dressmakers. As you can see, we don't just sew; we use our brains to tackle problems innovatively."

the costumes are bright and colourful; it's interesting to create the atmosphere of another culture and age. We like to make costumes which appeal to modern audiences but I must say that I'm not keen on classical performances of Mozart's and Wagner's operas in which the costumes are utterly modern. If you stylize a costume it should not be recognisable as being tied to any definite period; it should be a mixture. Theatre Director Mikhail Pandzhavidze demanded just his for *Aida* and *Nabucco*."

Naturally, experimentation is the best way to find new solutions, as Larisa admits. "I remember sewing a Spanish dress for (now retired) ballerina Raisa Krasovskaya in *Swan Lake*. She wanted the whole skirt to be ruffled from top to bottom, which made it huge. While an ordinary costume uses 5-7m of fabric, this one took 51m!"

In her fifty years at the theatre, Larisa has accumulated many interesting stories and created a wealth of dazzling costumes. She smiles, "I'd love to see a museum inside the theatre, in which to display costumes, since each one tells a story! Each one also represents much hard work and, even, a part of the soul of each talented person responsible for making it. They love their work."



Bolshoi Theatre's wardrobe department holds amazing collection of costumes

for the last *Nutcracker*. Meanwhile, we have just 30 people in our department to make everything."

Each costume begins with a sketch and consultations with the actor who is to wear

in a certain way. We always do our best to make them happy." The department is currently sewing costumes for the ballet *Vitovt*. Larisa continues, "The premiere is planned for 5th September but we've al-

Vitovt will have a naked torso for Kupalie Night, then needs a shirt. We pondered for a long time what length the shirt should be, as the dancer in the role wishes it to reach the floor while the choreog-

At the same time, costumes are being sewn for the ballet *Seven Beauties*, designed by Yekaterina Bulgakova. She tells us, "The premiere is planned for November. The ballet is set in the East, so

Giuseppe Verdi 'has landed' in Upper City

Minsk concert of music features famous Italian composer and pianist Luciano Bellini

By Yuri Chernyakevich

Honoured Artist of Belarus, soprano Anastasia Moskvina — a laureate of many international contests — performed pieces by Verdi, at the Upper City concert hall, in the capital's centre, accompanied by the piano, played by Luciano Bellini. Entrance to the performance was free so, unsurprisingly, more people wanted to attend than could be seated. Few Minsk concerts feature works by Italian composers although Verdi's operas *Aida*, *Otello* and *Il Trovatore* (The Troubadour) are well loved. Additional works

performed were composed by such masters as Sergio Rendine, Nino Rota, Ferruccio Busoni and, additionally, pianist Bellini.

Journalists attended a rehearsal before the concert, which passed very quickly, so delightful were the melodies. At times, it seemed as though Verdi himself had arrived in Minsk to charm Belarusian audiences. Mr. Bellini commented that, like all Italians, he adores Verdi's works, which seem to unify people's spirits. He explained, "Verdi's music has a connecting power which rallies us and inspires devotion for our country. I think that



Luciano Bellini and Anastasia Moskvina

a great composer is a man whose music is dramatic and theatrical; this aspect is very

important to me."

Mr. Bellini tries to inspire a similar adoration in

his students, teaching them love to classical music. He teaches at one of Rome's conservatoires but his own performances take him worldwide. This was his first visit to Belarus and he is yet to tour Russia, Ukraine or other CIS nations. His impressions of Minsk have been positive, and he comments on how much light is found everywhere, as well as fresh air, unlike other European countries. He admits that he'd love to return and views Belarusian audiences as true connoisseurs of music.

The Cultural Attaché of the Embassy of Italy to the Republic of Belarus,

Giuseppe Bosco, adds that Mr. Bellini may return sooner than we might expect. He notes, "In a year, we plan to hold a gala featuring Luciano Bellini in Minsk. We want to change the format a little, using two pianos at the same time, probably with the participation of Belarusian composers. I hope this will attract the attention of many music lovers." Mr. Bosco explains that, this year, the Embassy of Italy to Belarus plans to hold a variety of events in Minsk and across the Belarusian regions, bringing the culture of the Apennine Peninsula to our republic.