**Swan Lake**

**(Лебеди́ное О́зеро)**

On Sunday 4th February 2017 our group of Russian language and culture enthusiasts made another at-a-distance visit to the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, via the Atkinson, for a performance of Swan Lake.

A stroll through the foyer and corridors reminded us of the beauty and sumptuousness of the building and we were treated to a glimpse behind the scenes. The presenter, tri-lingual Katya Novikova, never ceases to amaze with the ease with which she switches seamlessly between Russian, English and French, and a bit of German thrown in this time too.

Tchaikovsky’s ballet was composed between 1875 and 1876. At first it was not a success, due to a bad production, but went on to captivate generations, in Russia then in Europe and around the world.

The story, based on a German folk tale, is of Princess Odette who has been put under a spell by the Evil Genius. By day she is a white swan but regains her human form at night. The spell can be broken only by the power of eternal love. Walking by the lake, Prince Siegfried comes upon Odette and falls in love with her, swearing unending devotion. However, he fails to take account of the Evil Genius.

At a ball given by Siegfried’s mother to vet prospective brides, the Evil Genius’s daughter Odile, who has taken on the form of Odette, captivates Siegfried and he is tricked into breaking his vow. Now trapped into remaining a swan for ever, Odette chooses to die. In this version, choreographed by Yuri Grigorovich, Siegfried is left grieving and bereft. Other versions have seen Odette and Siegfried both dying in a suicide pact. In the Soviet era, an optimistic happy ending was encouraged with them vanquishing the Evil one and living happily ever after.

The settings and costumes in this production were simple yet luxurious. Denis Rodkin was lithe and acrobatic as well as being tender and emotional as Siegfried. Svetlana Zakharova combined bird and human characteristics as Odette, particularly with her fluttering wings effect and almost liquid arms, but was equally able to convey the wickedness of Odile by contrast. Artemy Belyakov was suitably menacing as the Evil Genius.

The story is a backdrop for the principals and members of the corps de ballet to exhibit their artistry both as individuals and as part of an ensemble. The Bolshoi shone at this once again and we can be grateful to modern technology for giving us the opportunity to enjoy this experience so close to home.

May Hamilton

U3A Russian Group