

Sensational Debut

Shale Wagman as James in "La Sylphide" at the Mariinsky Theater St. Petersburg

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St. Petersburg - By Sabine Proll

On July 19, 2019 during the "Stars of the White Nights" Festival in St. Petersburg, the ballet "La Sylphide" was performed at the Mariinsky Theatre. That night was the personal debut of a young dancer and one that made history. At only 19 years old, Canadian Shale Wagman danced the part of James, partnering Olesya Novikova (soloist with the Mariinsky company). For the first time ever Wagman danced a principal role in a story ballet, and he is the youngest dancer ever to be invited to the Mariinsky to perform as a guest principal.

In 2018, Shale Wagman attracted much international attention for the first time, when he won the Gold Medal and simultaneously the Nureyev Award for exceptional artistry at the Prix de Lausanne. His first engagement led him to the English National Ballet (ENB) in London. There he was entrusted with small solo parts in "Swan Lake" (D. Deane), "Manon" (K. McMillan) and "Nutcracker" (W. Eagling). He was a brilliant finalist in ENB's "Emerging Dancer" competition. Recently, he performed as lead 'Autumn' and 'Summer' in Wheeldon's Cinderella.

In April 2019, Wagman was invited to St. Petersburg to the "Dance Open" Festival. Alongside Jun Masuda, he performed in Marco Goecke's "Hungarian Dances". The contact with Fateyev, which was established during the Prix de Lausanne, continued with the invitation to the White Night's Festival.

To entrust extraordinary young talents with solo parts, and even principal roles at a very early stage in their career, is a major principle of Yuri Fateyev.

Thus the bold decision was made to give the role of James to this young, highly gifted and versatile dancer. The promise it held was exceeded by his brilliant performance.

With great enthusiasm and stage presence, Wagman mastered the tricky Bournonville style effortlessly. The lightness of his high jumps, elegant arabesques, perfectly controlled turns and precise and speedy entrechats impressed the audience from his first step on stage.

The gestures and mime when interacting with Effi, Madge and the Sylph, so typical for this ballet, were also performed convincingly and not exaggerated. His natural grace and visible passion for dance were very apparent and his port de bras very eloquent and expressive.

Spontaneous applause after every variation and seven curtain calls, demanded by the surprised St. Petersburg audience were the reward for a difficult rehearsal process. Wagman had rehearsed the part alone in London. Only a few days before the performance he went to St. Petersburg for intense rehearsals with Novikova and the corps.



„La Sylphide“ von August Bournonville, Shale Wagman, Mariinsky Ballet
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