



Ballet stars who fled Russia's Ukraine war reunite in US

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Joy Womack dances during rehearsal at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa, California Frederic J. BROWN AFP

Costa Mesa (United States) (AFP) – Joy Womack built herself a fairytale life in Russia's notoriously tough world of classical dance after becoming the first American to graduate from the Bolshoi Ballet Academy.

But a career that inspired a Hollywood film exploded as Moscow's first bombs rained down on Ukraine, and she became one of dozens of dancers who fled Vladimir Putin's war.

"I mourned because it was the end of knowing what was next. And for me, it felt almost in some ways like the end of my career," Womack told AFP in California.

As Russian troops rolled into Ukraine in February, the Texan was in Poland choreographing "Joika."

The film, starring Diane Kruger, tells the story of Womack's life: from arrival in Moscow at the age of 15, not speaking a word of Russian, to a lead role in the Kremlin Ballet.

Womack knew at that moment that she could not return to Russia, and must leave behind her belongings, her friends and the years of sacrifice that had helped her to succeed in one of the world's most competitive ballet environments.

"I was building a future in Russia. I was trying to walk both lines being a ballerina from America, but also working in Russia.

"And my career and my education in Russia led to an international career in the West. So for me, it's really hard to say goodbye to that chapter," she says, pulling off her shoes to reveal feet scarred by her trade.

- 'Fear and sadness' -

Dozens of foreign and domestic dancers had already fled Russia for fear of being called to the frontlines, before Putin ordered a mass mobilization of 300,000 people to bolster his flagging war effort.

But even without a call-up, the drumbeat of conflict was crowding out the cultural spaces, says Ilya Jivoy.



Joy Womack (C) and fellow dancers rehearse at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa, California Frederic J. BROWN AFP

A native of St. Petersburg with a 26-year career, Jivoy left Russia with his Ukrainian wife as war broke out.

They did not know what they would do, or where they would go, but he remains convinced it was the best decision.

"We couldn't work normally since it all started," he says.

"I think now to work in the cultural space in Russia... it may be impossible.

"It's not about the art. It's just about fear and about sadness."

Now exiles in the United States, Womack and Jivoy know they are comparatively lucky because they were able to leave.

Others were not.

"I have a beautiful partner that I used to work with last year," Womack said.

"He was served papers. He's a ballet dancer, not in the army, and it's the end of his career."

- Reunited -

Some exiled dancers have now reunited with one-time colleagues from the Russian stage for a single performance near Los Angeles next month.



Dancers rehearse at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa, California Frederic J. BROWN AFP
The Segerstrom Center for the Arts, a state-of-the-art cultural center in the small town of Costa Mesa, will host "Reunited in Dance."

The one-night-only performance will showcase choreography and recreate some of the repertoire that has wowed Moscow audiences.

The performance's artistic director is Xander Parish, a Briton who lived and worked in Moscow for 12 years, including at the Mariinsky Theater.

Parish, who trained at the Royal Ballet in Britain, recounts the emotional weight of the uprooting these dancers have endured.

"The theater becomes your family. You work with these people, you dance with them, you get to know them very intimately, working in such close proximity. Your coaches are like your parents," he said.

During rehearsals that AFP watched, the camaraderie is evident, as the cast slips in and out of Russian and English, discussing how each minute of the performance should work.

The November 12 show could, Parish thinks, be the springboard for something bigger: a more permanent ballet company that would have space for these talents in exile.

"That's going to take a long time to sort out. But I mean, that'd be my dream, if we can build that in the future," he says.

"These are the first small steps, the foundations, that bring us together."

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Aux États-Unis, le nouveau destin des danseurs qui ont fui la Russie et la guerre

Par Figaro avec AFP

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Quelques anciens élèves du Bolchoï, russes ou étrangers, ont émigré aux États-Unis depuis l'attaque de l'Ukraine par l'armée russe. *AFP/Frederic Brown*

Quelques espoirs de l'école de danse du Bolchoï et de la troupe du théâtre Mariinsky, étrangers ou Russes, vont donner un spectacle unique, le 12 novembre, en Californie où ils ont trouvé refuge.

Joy Womack s'était forgé un nom dans le monde ultra-compétitif de la danse classique en Russie. Mais le déclenchement de la guerre en Ukraine a fait voler en éclats la carrière de cette Américaine, comme celle de dizaines de danseurs qui ont fui les conséquences du conflit. Loin de la mobilisation pour rejoindre le front et de la chape de plomb qui s'est abattue sur Moscou,

la ballerine s'allie désormais en Californie avec de nombreuses étoiles de la scène russe, qui préparent ensemble une représentation unique le 12 novembre.

Lorsque l'invasion russe en Ukraine a débuté en février, *«j'ai beaucoup pleuré»*, raconte à l'AFP la Texane, première Américaine à être diplômée de l'académie de ballet du révérend théâtre Bolchoï. *«C'était comme un deuil, car je ne savais pas ce qui allait arriver. J'ai eu l'impression que c'était la fin de ma carrière.»*

Au début des combats, la danseuse se trouve temporairement en Pologne pour chorégrapier *Joika*, un film avec Diane Kruger qui retrace son parcours depuis son arrivée à Moscou à 15 ans, jusqu'à ce qu'elle devienne danseuse étoile pour le ballet du Kremlin. Elle décide alors de ne pas rentrer en Russie, laissant derrière elle ses affaires, ses amis et toutes ces années de travail pour arriver au sommet. *«Je me construisais un avenir en Russie. J'essayais de trouver un équilibre, étant une ballerine venue d'Amérique, mais qui travaillait aussi en Russie. (...) C'est très difficile pour moi de fermer ce chapitre de ma vie,»* confie-t-elle en se déchaussant après une répétition, les pieds marqués par les heures de danse.

Ilya Jivoy quitte la Russie avec sa femme ukrainienne

Des dizaines de danseurs, russes et étrangers, ont quitté la Mère Patrie par crainte de ne plus pouvoir travailler, ou, pire, d'être appelés au front, bien avant que Vladimir Poutine n'ordonne mi-septembre une *«mobilisation partielle»* qui concerne 300.000 Russes.

Après 26 ans de carrière, Ilya Jivoy a ainsi quitté la Russie avec sa femme ukrainienne. *«Quand la guerre est arrivée, j'étais en état de choc. Nous ne pouvions pas travailler normalement, nous ne savions pas quoi faire. C'est pourquoi nous sommes partis»*, explique ce chorégraphe, ancien membre de la troupe du théâtre Mariinsky.

Aujourd'hui, il reste persuadé d'avoir fait le bon choix. *«Il est quasiment impossible de travailler dans la culture en Russie. Ce n'est pas une question d'art, mais de peur et de tristesse.»*

Malgré les affres de l'exil, Joy Womack et Ilya Jivoy se sentent chanceux. D'autres n'ont pas réussi à partir. *«Un collègue avec qui je travaillais l'année dernière vient d'être appelé par l'armée. C'est un danseur de ballet, il n'est pas militaire. C'est la fin de sa carrière»*, souffle la danseuse américaine.

Un spectacle exceptionnel le 12 novembre

Avec d'autres danseurs en exil et d'autres passés par la Russie, elle jette désormais toutes ses forces dans le spectacle de novembre, intitulé *«Réunis dans la danse»*, qui aura lieu au Segerstrom Center for the Arts de Costa Mesa, ville située au sud de Los Angeles.

Dans ce centre culturel, ils présenteront des chorégraphies exclusives et d'autres déjà connues, qui ont conquis des milliers de personnes dans les salles les plus célèbres du monde. La troupe opère sous la houlette du directeur artistique britannique Xander Parish, un ancien danseur étoile du théâtre Mariinsky qui a passé 12 ans à Moscou.

Lors des répétitions, il tente de composer avec la charge émotionnelle que portent certains danseurs, éprouvés par leur départ forcé. *«La troupe devient une famille. On travaille et on*

danse avec elle. On apprend à se connaître intimement en travaillant de si près. Vos professeurs sont comme vos parents», raconte-t-il pour expliquer le déracinement de chacun. Pendant les entraînements, une nouvelle camaraderie affleure désormais. Les membres de la troupe discutent de chaque geste, chaque mouvement, en alternant entre le russe et l'anglais.

Et au milieu de cette effervescence, de nouvelles aspirations émergent. Le spectacle pourrait ainsi devenir la première pierre d'un projet plus ambitieux: la création d'une troupe permanente, capable d'accueillir les talents en exil. *«Cela prendra beaucoup de temps à mettre en place, mais ce serait mon rêve»,* confie Xander Parish. *«Ceci, ce sont les premiers pas, les fondations qui nous unissent.»*

Dancers reunite at Segerstrom Concert Hall after leaving Russia

Seegerstrom Center for the Arts announces one-day performance in November



By [MINDY SCHAUER](#) | mschauer@scng.com | Orange County Register
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A one-night performance reuniting 18 dancers from various elite Russian ballet companies, several of whom left the country shortly after the invasion of Ukraine, has been announced for Nov. 12 at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall.

“Reunited in Dance,” will feature new choreography as well as beloved classics, center officials said in the announcement about the special performance.

Featured dancers come from Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Slovak Republic, Brazil, Switzerland and Australia and have performed with companies such as the Bolshoi Ballet, Mariinsky Ballet, Mikhailovsky Ballet, Stanislavsky Theatre and others.

“On this special evening, all these artists, wherever they came from, will become a single remarkable group, not just standing up for what we believe, but dancing for it,” Artistic Director and British dancer Xander Parish said.

Many of the dancers have also previously performed at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa, where the concert hall is located.

“I know the arts have always had the power to bring people together,” said Elizabeth Segerstrom, whose Henry T. and Elizabeth Segerstrom Foundation is helping make the performance possible. “I am humbled to be able to play a role in bringing together these artists, who come from many different countries and backgrounds to bring unification to us all.”

Tickets start at \$59 and go on sale today, Oct. 11, at 10 a.m. at scfta.org.

Daily Pilot

‘Reunited in Dance’ at Segerstrom to feature a cast of international ballet artists



Ballet dancers Andrea Lassakova and Adrian Blake Mitchell rehearse at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa.

(Kevin Chang / Staff Photographer)

BY [SARAH MOSQUEDA](#) STAFF WRITER

OCT. 13, 2022 2:57 PM PT

Partners and dancers Adrian Blake Mitchell and Andrea Lassakova performed in St. Petersburg, Russia with the Mikhailovsky Ballet for years, but as the political climate became more tense, the couple began to make plans to leave.

“We were already thinking to change before, but it was hard with COVID,” said Lassakova, “and the way things were escalating.”

“We kind of had this inkling that it was time to move on,” said Mitchell, who grew up in Los Angeles. “Politics were getting a little dicey, and also I was hoping to come back home to my family. I only see them once a year.”

Then war broke out, and they made their plans with more haste. The couple were among those lucky enough to escape Russia following its invasion of Ukraine, and on Nov. 12, they will join other renowned ballet dancers from around the world for a one-night-only performance of “Reunited in Dance” at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa.



Ballet dancer Jasmine Henry during rehearsals at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa. (Kevin Chang / Staff Photographer)

“We are so proud to be joining probably one of the best groups of dancers in the entire world right now,” said Mitchell. “You just don’t see this kind of group put together and for it to be Orange County.”

“Reunited in Dance” will bring together multiple dancers who danced with Russia’s most elite companies, such as the Bolshoi and Mariinsky ballets and Stanislavsky Theatre, before fleeing the country. The program is under the artistic direction of British dancer Xander Parish, former principal dancer at the Mariinsky. The show itself is made possible thanks to Elizabeth Segerstrom and the Henry T. and Elizabeth Segerstrom Foundation and presented in association with Segerstrom Center for the Arts.

“We have had such wonderful favor from Elizabeth Segerstrom, who has given her whole-hearted support, love and kindness to us,” said Parish, “and enabled us to come together as a reunion.”

Parish danced in Russia for 12 years and met his wife there.

“My wife is Russian and we met there, in the theater,” said Parish. “When the war began, we and many of our friends left the country and crossed the border by bus.”

Mitchell and Lassakova said they secured plane tickets the day the war began, but the flight was canceled within a few days.



Ballet dancer Katia Raj rehearses at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa.
(Kevin Chang / Staff Photographer)

“We have a small dog, and we couldn’t fly with him on certain airlines. We weren’t allowed to take the train out of Russia because it was closed to people who were not Russian or Finnish, and the buses were getting turned away sometimes,” said Mitchell. “We ended up taking a car, a taxi to the border.”

They crossed the border into Estonia by foot, with their luggage and white Maltese in tow.

“It was a rough ride, but that was nothing compared to what the people of Ukraine are going through,” said Mitchell.

At a closed rehearsal on Sept. 30 at Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, many of the dancers saw each other for the first time since leaving Russia.



Director Xander Parish, center, shares a laugh with ballet dancers during rehearsals at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa.
(Kevin Chang / Staff Photographer)

“We are all friends in Russia,” said Lassakova, “and we always wanted to dance together somewhere.”

Parish said some dancers left the day after the war began, and he didn’t see them again until this rehearsal.

“This is a big reunion for us to have that feeling of comrade and bring us back together to perform as a family again,” said Parish.

“Reunited in Dance” will feature new choreography, like the premiere of a new ballet choreographed by Parish to Tchaikovsky’s Children’s Album as well as classics like choreographer Christopher Wheeldon’s “After the Rain.” Music will be directed by Gavriel Heine, and the show’s executive producer is

Christopher Minev, both formerly of the Mariinsky. The Hettema Group has specially designed a digital set for the once-in-a-lifetime performance.

“This is one of the most exciting things that I have heard about since we left Russia,” said Mitchell, “or maybe since I started dancing professionally.”

Tickets are on sale now at [scfta.org](https://www.scfta.org) and start at \$59.



One-Night-Only 'Reunited in Dance' to Feature International Ballet Artists

The event is on November 12, 2022.

by Stephi Wild Oct. 11, 2022



On November 12, 2022, renowned ballet dancers from around the world will gather for an intimate one-night-only special ballet performance, Reunited in Dance, in the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall. Reunited in Dance brings together dancers with ties to Ukraine and Russia. Many formerly danced with Russia's preeminent companies, including the Bolshoi Ballet, Mariinsky Ballet, Mikhailovsky Ballet, Stanislavsky Theatre, and others and left Russia following the invasion of Ukraine. The program, under the artistic direction of British dancer Xander Parish, former principal dancer at the Mariinsky, is made possible by Elizabeth Segerstrom and the Henry T. and Elizabeth Segerstrom Foundation and presented in association with Segerstrom Center for the Arts.

Reunited in Dance will feature new choreography as well as beloved classics:

The world premiere of a new ballet choreographed by Parish to Tchaikovsky's Children's Album performed by special guest artist pianist Behzod Abduraimov, who appears in collaboration with the Philharmonic Society of Orange County

A performance of Christopher Wheeldon's After the Rain

Selections from Le Corsaire, Raymonda, Paquita, La Bayadere, Don Quixote and more

"On this special evening, all these artists, wherever they came from, will become a single remarkable group, not just standing up for what we believe but dancing for it," Xander Parish

said. "We are deeply grateful to Elizabeth Segerstrom for giving us this unprecedented opportunity to perform together and bring the light of our art to new audiences, despite the difficulties of the past months."

Elizabeth Segerstrom said "I know the arts have always had the power to bring people together. I am humbled to be able to play a role in bringing together these artists, who come from many different countries and backgrounds to bring unification to us all."

Participating dancers, in addition to Xander Parish, will be Jacopo Tissi (Italy, formerly with the Bolshoi), Svetlana Bednenko (Ukraine, formerly with the Mikhailovsky), Christine Shevchenko (Ukraine, currently with ABT), Andrea Laššáková (Slovak Republic, formerly with the Mikhailovsky), Adrian Blake Mitchell (U.S., formerly with the Mikhailovsky), Boris Zhurilov (Russia, formerly with Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theatre), Ilya Jivoy (Russia, formerly with the Mariinsky), Lizi Avsajanishvili (Georgia, formerly with the Mariinsky), David Motta Soares (Brazil, formerly with the Bolshoi), Jasmine Sophie Henry (Australia, formerly with the Mariinsky), Vsevolod Maevisky (Ukraine, formerly with the Mariinsky), Anastasia Demidova (Russia, formerly with the Mariinsky), Katia Raj (U.S., formerly with the Saint Petersburg State Academic Leonid Yacobson Ballet Theatre), Veronika Selivanova (U.S., formerly with the Mariinsky), Alexis Tutunnicque (Ukraine, formerly with National Opera of Ukraine and currently with The United Ukrainian Ballet), Joy Womack (U.S., formerly with Astrakhan Opera and Ballet Theatre), Maxim Zenin (Russia, formerly with the Mariinsky), and Laura Fernandez (Switzerland and Ukraine, formerly with Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theatre).

Many of the dancers who will perform in Reunited in Dance have appeared over the years at Segerstrom Center for the Arts. This extraordinary performance is in part a tribute to Judy Morr, the Executive Vice President behind the longstanding tradition of world-class ballet programming at Segerstrom Center.

"We are delighted to bring this new, special, one-night performance for our patrons and to honor Judy's contributions," said Casey Reitz, President of Segerstrom Center for the Arts. "Judy has been instrumental in growing and cultivating our dance and education programming with great ardor over the past decades. Judy gets it; dance connects us in numerous ways for various reasons, as is evident in the dance programming she has created for the Center for the past decades. Her understanding for the art of dance performance, her passion to bring talented performers and choreographers, and her commitment to bolstering and advancing the development of new works with international and national dance companies, season after season, is the driving force that continues to unite and bring people together at the Center."

Jane Fujishige Yada, Chairwoman of Segerstrom Center's Board of Directors, said "Judy has built a globally-respected dance audience at the Center over the years. Without her, our Center would not have the foundation or infrastructure to welcome these beautiful dancers to our side of the world and bring them back together in this most unexpected way. She dedicated her life to introducing patrons to new cultures and traditions through music and the art of physical dramatic movement that expresses cultural heritage and identity in a unique, storytelling way.

Judy is always a step ahead, knowing what will entertain our audiences. We are excited to welcome this new performance at Segerstrom Center for the Arts that so meaningfully encapsulates Judy's lifetime work for the Center."

Gavriel Heine, formerly of the Mariinsky, is the music director. Christopher Minev, formerly an international tour producer for the Mariinsky, is the executive producer. The performance will feature digital scenic design created especially for the evening by The Hettema Group.

'Reunited in Dance' at Segerstrom Center on Nov. 12 Features Dancers Impacted by the War in Ukraine

By **Christopher Trela** -October 28, 2022



Dancers from "Reunited in Dance"

Dance has the power to move audiences through movement. Dance can express emotions when words alone fail. Dance can provide hope in hopeless times.

And for one night at Segerstrom Center for the Arts, dance displays the resilience of dancers during a time of monumental change.

On Saturday, Nov. 12, renowned dancers from around the world impacted by the war in Ukraine are coming together for an extraordinary performance called "Reunited in Dance."

Led by British-born Artistic Director Xander Parish, a former principal dancer at the Mariinsky Ballet, the dancers taking part in "Reunited in Dance" were previously part of Russia's elite companies, including the Bolshoi Ballet, Mariinsky Ballet, Mikhailovsky Ballet, Stanislavsky Ballet, and others.

According to information from Segerstrom Center, "Reunited in Dance" features new choreography as well as beloved classics: the world premiere of a new ballet choreographed by Parish to Tchaikovsky's "Children's Album," performed by special guest artist and pianist Behzod Abduraimov, who appears in collaboration with the Philharmonic Society of Orange County; a performance of Christopher Wheeldon's "After the Rain" plus selections from "Le Corsaire," "Raymonda," and "Paquita," and other pieces.



Many of the dancers who will perform in "Reunited in Dance" have appeared at Segerstrom Center for the Arts, which thanks to Elizabeth and Henry Segerstrom has become one of the world's leading presenters of international ballet.

Segerstrom Center for the Arts is paying tribute to Judy Morr, the Executive Vice President behind the longstanding tradition of world-class ballet programming at Segerstrom Center.

For "Reunited in Dance," the featuring dancers include:

- Xander Parish (UK, former principal dancer at the Mariinsky)
- Jacopo Tissi (Italy, formerly with the Bolshoi)
- Svetlana Bednenko (Ukraine, formerly with the Mikhailovsky)
- Christine Shevchenko (Ukraine, currently with ABT)
- Andrea Laššáková (Slovak Republic, formerly with the Mikhailovsky)
- Adrian Blake Mitchell (U.S., formerly with the Mikhailovsky)
- Boris Zhurilov (Russia, formerly with Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theatre)
- Ilya Jivoy (Russia, formerly with the Mariinsky)
- Lizi Avsajanishvili (Georgia, formerly with the Mariinsky)
- David Motta Soares (Brazil, formerly with the Bolshoi)
- Jasmine Sophie Henry (Australia, formerly with the Mariinsky)
- Vsevolod Maevsky (Ukraine, formerly with the Mariinsky)
- Anastasia Demidova (Russia, formerly with the Mariinsky)
- Katia Raj (U.S., formerly with the Saint Petersburg State Academic Leonid Yacobson Ballet Theatre)
- Veronika Selivanova (U.S., formerly with the Mariinsky)
- Alexis Tutunniq (Ukraine, formerly with National Opera of Ukraine and currently with The United Ukrainian Ballet)
- Joy Womack (U.S., formerly with Astrakhan Opera and Ballet Theatre)
- Laura Fernandez (Switzerland and Ukraine, formerly with Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theatre).

Reunited in Dance is made possible by the generous support of Elizabeth Segerstrom and the Henry T. and Elizabeth Segerstrom Charitable Foundation.

Tickets start at \$29. Visit www.scfta.org for more information.



fjord

Victoria Looseleaf

Reunited in Dance

Xander Parish leads a troupe of former Bolshoi, Mariinsky, and Mikhailovsky dancers in a gala performance in the U.S.



Vsevolod Maevsky and cast in class. Photograph by Karolina Kuras

In 2019, Xander Parish, then principal dancer with the Mariinsky Ballet—the first and only British dancer in the troupe’s history—was awarded an OBE for services to dance and to UK/Russia cultural relations. Fast forward to November 2022 and the world has, to say the least, radically changed. While a global pandemic still factors into daily life, in February of this year, Russia did the unspeakable by invading Ukraine.

With some 14 million Ukrainians having been displaced, and casualties and deaths numbering north of 16,000, Parish has gathered a group of 18 dancers from troupes that include the Mariinsky Ballet, the Bolshoi Ballet and Stanislavsky Theatre, to perform at Segerstrom Center for the Arts on November 12. Under the banner, “Reunited in Dance,” the concert that has been

made possible, in part, by Elizabeth Segerstrom and will be simulcast for free that evening on the Center's plaza, will have performers once again taking to the stage to do what they do best: touch the human soul by creating magnificent art.

Explained Parish by Zoom from Oslo, where he became a principal with Norwegian National Ballet in August, having fled from Russia with his Siberian-born wife, dancer Anastasia Demidova, days after the invasion began and finally landing in London: "It felt like time stood still for several months and being without work, especially at the Mariinsky, where we work like slaves often seven days a week from morning to night, it was like hitting a brick wall.

"It was a hard time," added Parish, "and if we could have started working on [this project] earlier we would have. But it worked out in the end. And at the same time to be working with our producer Chris Minev [formerly an international tour producer for the Mariinsky], and all of my colleagues and friends—it was an amazing silver lining. Or more like a diamond lining. It's such a blessing to have such an exciting project to work on. It's given me a real purpose to try to make the most of this situation.

In addition to dancing at Segerstrom in Eric Gauthier's "Ballet 101," and performing the "White Swan Adagio," with Christine Schevchenko, a Ukrainian currently with American Ballet Theatre, Parish is presenting the world premiere of his piece, "The Ballet Class." Set to Tchaikovsky's Children's Album—24 short piano pieces—the work features a dozen dancers and will be accompanied by pianist Behzod Abduraimov. (The other works on the program, including Christopher Wheeldon's "After the Rain," will be heard on tape.)

"I wasn't intending to create a piece," noted Parish, 36, "but as it turned out there was a Russian pianist who loved the idea of our group. He told Chris about this and Chris asked me if he could join our group and play for us. I said, "Of course he can." He desperately wanted to play Tchaikovsky's Children's Album and [Abduraimov] said, "You guys just dance to it."

"But it's not quite as simple as that," acknowledged Parish. "It's not like you're going to improvise with 20 people onstage."

However, as Parish listened to the music, he realized he could create a classroom type atmosphere and also inject comedy into the number. "I wanted to weave some humor and some stories inside the structure of the piece, like Jerome Robbins' "The Concert." If he made a class, I can create something nice that looks beautiful and fits the dancers and shows off their skills. I did my best so that the audience can get an impression of a baby class from any company."

One of the dancers in Parish's work is his good chum, the award-winning dancer, choreographer, and director Ilya Jivoy. A native of St. Petersburg who was formerly with the Mariinsky and is currently based in Sarajevo with his wife, the pair left Russia six days after the war began. And while he recently choreographed a triumphant "Carmina Burana" for the State Ballet of Georgia, the Segerstrom program also resonates with him, both personally and professionally.

Articulating his feelings on a Zoom call from Sarajevo, Jivoy, who was born in 1989, sounded resilient. "The [project] is really, really important in the current situation, because many talented dancers left Russian [companies]—and are from many countries—Adrian [Blake Mitchell] is

from the U.S., Jacopo [Tissi] is Italian, Xander is British. So, it's good, because now we need to keep moving, to keep dreaming, to keep doing what we love to do.

“For me,” added Jivoy, “dancing and choreographing is my life, my mission, and I can't live without that, if you know what I mean. To continue the creative part for me is the most important thing. This event in California, it's a huge step forward for all of this.”

To that end, Jivoy will perform the North American premiere of a short solo excerpted from his 50-minute work, “BA//CH,” a dance first seen in June at Switzerland's Origen Festival. The complete work is set to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach and recomposed by Peter Gregson and Vikingur Ólafsson, with Jivoy's solo promising to be a showstopper among the evening's many balletic baubles.

Educated at the Vaganova Ballet Academy and having made numerous dances while at the Mariinsky, where he was a member for nearly 15 years, Jivoy had his name removed from his works at the famed company's theater. In effect, he was being cancelled because of politics.

At first, Jivoy said he was angry about this. “How dare they do this with my name,” he said passionately, “but then I could read a few articles, including an interview with the famous writer Boris Akunin. His name was also just erased from theaters, from bookstores, his books are not on sale. He was like, “Okay, my name is not there, but my performances are there. My books are still there and it's much more important than having a name of one person.”

Jivoy realized, as well, that his productions were also still being mounted. “It's much more important for the audience to keep watching it, keep taking something from it, but of course, it's sad.”

It's equally sad that Russian-born Alexei Ratmansky was also cancelled. The former artistic director of the Bolshoi Ballet from 2004-2009 and current artist-in-residence at ABT, Ratmansky had his name removed from his works at both the Bolshoi and Mariinsky theaters.

“I'm on a list with Ratmansky,” Jivoy said stoically, “and I'm okay with that, to be honest, but I wrote an official email to the [Mariinsky] board and asked them to provide me an official statement why they did it, an official reason of cancellation. They haven't answered me.”

But Jivoy's work, both dancing and choreographing—he premieres a new work with Cleveland Ballet in April, 2023—is helping him get through this extremely trying time. “It's kind of a light for me; it fills my life, because I can express myself through my choreography. I can speak with people through my choreography.

“It's so universal, because, okay, I can speak English, I can speak Russian, but body language, it has no borders. It has no age. It's the only bridge in the current situation—between cultures, between countries, between people.

“And people are still the same inside. They know the truth. If you can explain your message for them correctly, you can do this with your body and with the bodies of the dancers you're working with, and the audience can feel it, no matter how old they are or where they're from.”

Svetlana Bednenko, who was born in Donetsk, Ukraine, in 1991 and currently lives in Dusseldorf, where she dances with Ballett am Rhein, had been a member of St. Petersburg's Mikhailovsky Theatre from 2013 until 2022. Speaking through a translator by Zoom from Germany, she recalled leaving Russia on March 2. "I left really fast and came to Berlin, because my family lives in Berlin. Of course, for me it was a hard decision to leave, because before Mikhailovsky I worked in Eifman Ballet and worked with huge choreographers and ballet masters; it was my home.

"I had a plan," continued Bednenko, who took top honors at the Serge Lifar International Ballet Competition. "I created my course and didn't think about leaving at all. I thought I could just be there and travel, but it was hard, because I had a feeling that I want[ed] to be very close at that moment to my family. My grandmother still lives in a small village in Ukraine. I called her every day, but she doesn't want to leave her house. It's hard to say that it's safe, but it's calm there, and she doesn't want to come to Germany. We tried."

The ballerina, who will perform in Parish's piece and also dance, "The Dying Swan," conceded that, "the war is horrible, and I feel very sorry for all the Ukrainian citizens, but as an artist, when you go onstage you're a different person. It helps you escape your reality. Even if you don't feel good, or [you're] not in the mood, when you go onstage, you can usually forget about everything. Performances help me to feel better about the current situation."

As for Fokine's iconic choreography, Bednenko asserts that it's always a challenge, because with each teacher, from her first in Donetsk to those in St. Petersburg, she likes to include something unique in every performance. "When you really feel every centimeter of your body, it takes a very special part in my repertory.

"Of course, you can go onstage and do technically everything right, but it will not work out until you put all your soul into it, put something in each movement—how you raise your head—your finger," exclaimed Bednenko, who became a Knight of the Order of the Arts of Ukraine in 2020.

"And it depends on your current emotional situation, what you have in your life. You try to bring all of this together and put it into the solo. I'm very happy to dance this special piece again, to live through this experience again and again."

Bednenko, like many of her compatriots, is imbued with that Ukrainian life-force, and acknowledges that she's "a strong person inside. For me, it was a hard decision to leave my country, like going to St. Petersburg when I was 20.

"But I have a strong feeling inside, maybe now it's a new part of my life, work[ing] in a beautiful company in Dusseldorf with interesting contemporary choreographers. I'm not afraid to continue and I am sure the Ukrainian spirit is helping a lot. They won't give up and I won't give up."

Another fiercely committed dancer who never gives up is Joy Womack, the first American woman to graduate from the Bolshoi Ballet Academy, and the second American woman to sign a contract with the Bolshoi Ballet. Formerly with Astrakhan State Opera and Ballet Theatre,

Womack will be performing in Parish's work, as well as dancing with Vsevolod Maevsky in the pas de deux from, "The Flames of Paris."

Catching up with Womack in Tennessee by Zoom, where she was teaching at Nashville Ballet, the dancer said she was in Poland in February when the conflict broke out. "They couldn't get me a flight back to Russia. I left everything I had in Russia, and I was scheduled to dance "Don Quixote."

Following the news closely, Womack, whose life is the subject of a biopic, *Joika*, inspired by her time at the Bolshoi and features Talia Ryder as a 15-year old Womack and Diane Kruger as the ballerina's mentor, with Womack choreographing the ballets, admitted she goes through bouts of anxiety where she is unable to sleep at night.

"Some of the friends I was working with were served papers to be drafted into the army and who have had to walk over the border to get out. In the Stanislavsky Theater, they were drafting a lot of soloist boys, and people waited until things got worse and then they started mobilizing people in the theater.

"There was a big wave back in March," exclaimed Womack, "and now there's another big wave. People I was speaking to in my theater were trying to get me to come back, even as recently as last week. They thought I was a traitor, that I had no loyalty, how could I do this when Russia gave me so much?"

The dancer, 28, was awarded Russian citizenship last year and said that prior to the war, she was feeling patriotic and part of a culture that had embraced her. "I think this production is a statement that we don't like what's happening. So being able to come together and share what we learned in front of an audience that hasn't gotten to see us is important, because we don't want to lose those traditions that we learned over there.

"It's been a really hard time for most of us. We feel lost as artists," added Womack. "We made our homes in the theaters of Russia. It's like a church the way it works. For eleven months a year, the repertory rotates. You make your home with the roles you dance; in the West you are limited in your performance opportunities. You can visit "Swan Lake" every few seasons, but in Russia, it's every two months.

"I don't believe art should be related to politics. I believe art is an organic cultural bridge between nations. When we start to build walls, we block roads from communication. I'm very disappointed, and in a way," Womack bemoaned, "it's a burial. I've been lost for the past six months. But it's okay because we have the barre, our routine, and performances like this keep you focused and you can concentrate on your daily routine instead of asking big questions that can make you depressed."

Boris Zhurilov, formerly with Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theatre, was born in St. Petersburg, and after completing his training at Vaganova, joined the Mariinsky. Speaking by Zoom through a translator from Budapest, where he is currently a member of Hungarian National Ballet, the 34-year old recalled that everyone was in shock when the war broke out.

“From the beginning, we don’t understand what was going on and how long it’s going to be, how serious this situation with Ukraine was, that tomorrow I will wake up and everything will be fine. We hope, but nothing is changing, and the situation is worse and worse and worse.”

Dancing, though, helps ease the emotional toll the war continues to take, and Zhurilov will be performing the pas de deux from “The Nutcracker,” with Laura Fernandez, the pas de quatre from “Raymonda,” as well as performing in Parish’s work.

He, too, believes there is no place for politics in art. “It’s hard for artists to talk about their politics, because they need to continue to work, to earn money to feed their families. Dancers—people of art—their main role is to go on the stage, do a good performance and make people happy. Dancers aren’t good at understanding politics and maybe they shouldn’t even try.

“People of art shouldn’t be punished for this,” added Zhurilov. “I know a lot of friends and colleagues from Russia who are scared to say anything about war and their opinions, because they need to continue to work, to earn money to feed their families.”

As for Parish, he recognizes that in the Russian government, art is a soft power, “probably more than in the West. I’ve learned a lot about this, being there 12 years—just how powerful the arts are and the people you meet, it’s a privilege. Especially now, the arts are one of the strongest threads that are difficult to surrender.

“When all else fails,” added Parish, “probably the arts will be the first thing to return. I hope that we, as artists, have this responsibility, that we, as a group, didn’t make this concert for political purposes, but because we wanted to dance together. As friends and ex-colleagues, we didn’t want to lose that thread—our love for Russia and Russian culture—separate from the regime, of course. It’s our responsibility to honor what we’ve learned and take it forward.

“If I can take what I’ve learned,” Parish avowed, “the great weight of classical ballet from my coaches at the Mariinsky, who learned from their coaches, Fokine, Petipa—you get fed at the Mariinsky and the Bolshoi, which is such an honor and can’t be thrown away—if we can dance together, this gives us momentum to continue.”

“Reunited in Dance” gala will be performed at [Segerstrom Center for the Performing Arts](#), Costa Mesa, California on November 12, 2022.

Reunited in Dance: Xander Parish Brings Together Dancers Displaced by War

By Claudia Bauer

November 7, 2022

Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, dancers around the world have held dozens of benefit performances for the Ukrainian people. Now Xander Parish, who left Russia and his principal position at the Mariinsky Ballet after the invasion (he is currently dancing with the Norwegian National Ballet), is doing something for the displaced dancers—getting them back on the stage.



Xander Parish in “Ballet 101.” Photo by Karolina Kuras, courtesy The Segerstrom Center for the Arts

In association with the Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa, California, and with the support of the Henry T. and Elizabeth Segerstrom Charitable Foundation, as well as Elizabeth Segerstrom, a foundation board member whose family fled the Soviet regime during World War II, Parish will present *Reunited in Dance*, a one-night-only performance in Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall. The event will feature an all-star cast of nearly 20 dancers with ties to Ukraine and Russia, including Christine Shevchenko, Jacopo Tissi, Joy Womack, David Motta Soares and Parish himself. On Saturday, November 12, they'll perform an array of gala favorites, including classical excerpts

from *Le Corsaire*, *La Bayadère*, *Paquita*, *Raymonda* and *Don Quixote*, as well as Christopher Wheeldon's *After the Rain* pas de deux and a world premiere choreographed by Parish set to Tchaikovsky's *Children's Album*. Due to overwhelming demand for tickets, the performance will also be simulcast for free on the Segerstrom Center's Julianne and George Argyros Plaza. Over email, Parish told *Pointe* about how *Reunited in Dance* came together.



VERONIKA SELIVANOVA IN "THE DYING SWAN." PHOTO BY KAROLINA KURAS, COURTESY THE SEGERSTROM CENTER FOR THE ARTS.

A show like this is a massive undertaking. How long did it take to put together?

This project has felt like a full-time job on top of my work as a dancer, but it's been worth every second! I've been working on this intensely since July. The program has been edited multiple times due to dancers not receiving their visas in time or others having injuries, or still others having sudden commitments at their home companies.

The community came together in a big way, from philanthropist Elizabeth Segerstrom to the dancers, to make this happen.

Elizabeth Segerstrom has been incredible in her kindness and empathy for our collective situations. Our desire to dance together again despite being dispersed across the globe (the dancers are flying in from all over the place) touched her heart, and she has made it possible for this idea to become a reality.



JOY WOMACK IN *DON QUIXOTE*. PHOTO BY KAROLINA, COURTESY THE SEGERSTROM CENTER FOR THE ARTS.

What was your motivation for doing the show?

One of my initial reasons for wanting to put this together was to give the dancers the chance to perform and earn money, and to remind them of why we are training and what we are always striving towards: the magic of being onstage. The idea came when many still hadn't been reemployed. Some of the younger members of our group hadn't danced onstage since leaving their jobs behind in Russia until we did our first rehearsal in October. **Some of the dancers had**

to get out of Russia or Ukraine quickly and under difficult circumstances, such as Adrian Blake Mitchell and Andrea Laššáková, who were dancing with the Mikhailovsky Ballet. After their flight out was canceled, they took a taxi to the border of Estonia and crossed over on foot. **What was your escape like?** Yes, flights were canceled to Europe very suddenly, so the only practical way out was by road. I took a bus to the Estonian border a day or two after Adrian and Andrea. We were all in touch with each other throughout that time. It was stressful because things were escalating quickly and rumors that martial law was to be introduced imminently and the borders to be closed were circulating quickly. That didn't happen, but we weren't prepared to hang around and find out.



ANDREA LAŠŠÁKOVÁ AND ADRIAN BLAKE MITCHELL IN *AFTER THE RAIN*. PHOTO BY KAROLINA KURAS, COURTESY THE SEGERSTROM CENTER FOR THE ARTS.

Tell me about the rep you've chosen.

Primarily, I wanted to give the dancers the chance to perform their favorite pieces or something that they maybe hadn't danced but really wanted to. However, there is one that was a surprise. The producer came to me with news that a famous Russian pianist who'd also left Russia wanted to join our team, and he was extremely keen, in fact determined, to play Tchaikovsky's *Children's Album*. The producer wanted us to dance to this music, but of course we couldn't simply improvise! I decided to take the challenge head-on and create something myself. As I thought hard about what to do with this music, it dawned on me that the piano numbers

closely resembled a ballet class, so I set about creating a ballet class which the dancers can perform together side by side. There is some humor and some little stories thrown in here and there.

What do you want the artists and the audience to get out of this performance?

I want the artists to be encouraged and know that even though we've all left a lot behind, there is a future and hope, and my hope is that this will grow into bigger things which we can all be part of. I'm grateful to all who've bought tickets—I'm told we've pretty much sold out—so I simply want our audience to enjoy themselves and partake of the atmosphere of positivity and joy, which we dancers will certainly be feeling as we dance together again!

Big Shows This Week in O.C.



*Dancer Anastasia Demidova will perform in "Reunited in Dance."
Photograph by Karolina Kuras*

Orange County dance enthusiasts are fortunate this week as Segerstrom Center for the Arts presents "Reunited in Dance," a show featuring international ballet

dancers impacted by the war in Ukraine. Artists from Ukraine, Russia, Italy, the U.S., and more will perform works including a world premiere of choreography by Xander Parish to Tchaikovsky and a North American premiere of Ilya Jivoy's "BA//CH" at Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall on Saturday night. "We are overwhelmed at the incredibly positive response to this performance, which exemplifies how the arts can help unite us all," says Elizabeth Segerstrom.

The show is sold out, but a free simulcast of the event will take place on the Julianne and George Argyros Plaza so everyone who wants to can experience this celebration. There are no reservations or tickets required for the plaza viewing. "Making the arts accessible has always been at the heart of Segerstrom Center, and we are pleased to welcome the community (to the plaza) for this unique ballet performance," says Casey Reitz, president of Segerstrom Center for the Arts.



Russia's Boris Zhurilov is one of the artists performing in "Reunited in Dance." Photograph by Karolina Kuras

Forbes

ARTS

Dance For Ukraine This Saturday In Orange County

Tom Teicholz

Contributor

I'm a culture maven and arts enthusiast.

Nov 9, 2022, 06:16pm EST

The War in Ukraine has displaced many, many lives. For those of shared Ukrainian and Russian heritage, or those who are Russian, or have strong connection to Russia, but who oppose the war, many have been forced into exile and to choose sides. This has been difficult for people from all walks of life including those ballet artists who performed with the Bolshoi Ballet, The Mariinsky (formerly the Kirov), and Stanislavsky Theatre. Exiled, the dancers wanted to continue to perform as well as show their support for Ukraine.



Ballerinas Katia Raj, Veronika Selivanova, Andrea Laššáková, Anastasia Demidova, and Jasmine Sophie ... [+]
PHOTO BY BY KAROLINA KURAS

In New York, the choreographer Alexei Ratmansky staged a night of new work in support of Ukraine. And this Saturday night, November 12, in Orange County, California at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts, British dancer Xander Parish, formerly of the Mariinsky, has assembled a **one-night only performance, “Reunited in Dance,”** featuring a cast of international ballet artists. Although the performance is already sold out, the Segerstrom Center is going to LIVESTREAM the event FOR FREE outside the theater in the Argyros Plaza (although the performance begins at 8:00PM, as seating is first come, first served, the Plaza will open at 5:30 PM so people can spread their blankets or place their chairs to enjoy the evening).



Xander Parish in Ballet 101

PHOTO BY BY KAROLINA KURAS

“On this special evening, all these artists, wherever they came from, will become a single remarkable group, not just standing up for what we believe but dancing for it,” Xander Parish said in the press release for the event.

This event is made possible by the generosity of Elizabeth Segerstrom who said, “I know the arts have always had the power to bring people together. I am humbled to be able to play a role in bringing together these artists... to bring unification to us all.”

The evening will feature the World Premiere of *The Ballet Class*, a new ballet choreographed by Parish to Tchaikovsky's *Children's Album*, the North American Premiere of *BA//CH* Solo Choreographed by Ilya Jivoy, as well as Christopher Wheeldon's *After the Rain*, and selections from *La Baydere*, *Swan Lake*, *Don Quixote*, *Raymonda*, *The Nutcracker*, *the Flames of Paris*, *Paquita* and *Le Corsaire*.



Andrea Laššáková and Adrian Blake Mitchell in *After the Rain*

PHOTO BY KAROLINA KURAS

Participating dancers, in addition to Xander Parish, will be Jacopo Tissi (Italy, formerly with the Bolshoi), Svetlana Bednenko (Ukraine, formerly with the Mikhailovsky), Christine Shevchenko (Ukraine, currently with ABT), Andrea Laššáková (Slovak Republic, formerly with the Mikhailovsky), Adrian Blake Mitchell (U.S., formerly with the Mikhailovsky), Boris Zhurilov (Russia, formerly with Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theatre), Ilya Jivoy (Russia, formerly with the Mariinsky), Lizi Avsajanishvili (Georgia, formerly with the Mariinsky), David Motta Soares (Brazil, formerly with the Bolshoi), Jasmine Sophie Henry (Australia, formerly with the Mariinsky), Vsevolod Maevisky (Ukraine, formerly with the Mariinsky), Anastasia Demidova (Russia, formerly with the Mariinsky), Katia Raj (U.S., formerly with the Saint Petersburg State Academic Leonid Yacobson Ballet Theatre), Veronika Selivanova (U.S., formerly with the Mariinsky), Alexis Tutunniq (Ukraine, formerly with National Opera of Ukraine and currently with The United Ukrainian Ballet), Joy Womack (U.S., formerly with Astrakhan Opera and Ballet Theatre), Maxim Zenin (Russia, formerly

with the Mariinsky), and Laura Fernandez (Switzerland and Ukraine, formerly with Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theatre).

Gavriel Heine, formerly of the Mariinsky, is the music director. Special guest artist is the pianist Behzod Abduraimov. Christopher Minev, formerly an international tour producer for the Mariinsky, is the executive producer. The performance will feature digital scenic design created especially for the evening by The Hetteema Group.

Resistance and protest take many forms. For these dancers, to put heart and soul into a performance for a performance that shows they will not be silenced and their art will continue is very meaningful. And the audience by seeing and supporting the performance also plays their role in making a loud statement against what Russia has wrought in Ukraine.

LA Dance Chronicle

Dancers from Russia and Ukraine unite in Costa Mesa, an encore in West LA, a new dance venue debuts in Santa Monica, a Supreme Court decision confronted in Pasadena, new choreography in Santa Monica, Chinatown, Palm Desert, and Culver City, more SoCal dance in this busy week, and a peek at a busy next week.



"Swan Lake, White Swan pas de deux" from Reunited in Dance. Photo by Karolina Kuras

At least dancers get along

Ukraine's forces may be pushing the Russians into retreat in the east while Russia is bombing Ukraine's infrastructure into the stone age, but a reminder of their deep, shared artistic heritage is onstage this week as 18 ballet dancers with ties to Ukraine and Russia perform together in a special one-night only performance under the banner ***Reunited in Dance***. The evening's

artistic director, Xander Parish was formerly with Russia's Mariinsky Ballet has assembled a program brimming with classical ballet's greatest hits from *Swan Lake*, *Le Corsaire*, *Paquita*, *Don Quixote*, and *La Bayadere*, along with a contemporary ballets from Christopher Wheeldon and some new works. While the show is sold out, it will be livestreamed for free in the venue's plaza. The livestream is at 8pm with the plaza open for festival-seating starting at 5:30pm. A complete listing of the dancers, the program, and the event at the website. Segerstrom Center for the Arts, 600 Town Center Dr., Costa Mesa; Sat., Nov. 12, 8pm, \$59-\$79. <https://www.scfta.org/>

Ballet artists affected by the war in Ukraine will perform in Costa Mesa



Vsevolod Maevsky of Ukraine and formerly with the Mariinsky, and Andrea Laššáková of the Slovak Republic and formerly with the Mikhailovsky, rehearse for, “Reunited in Dance,” in Costa Mesa on Saturday, October 1, 2022. (Photo by Mindy Schauer, Orange County Register/SCNG)

By [CHRISTOPHER SMITH](#) | Scarpia54@yahoo.com |

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“You need art in wartime (because) history cannot exist without the discipline of imagination.” — Thomas Jefferson

Creative imagination at its most disciplined and visceral will be on high-flying display on a Costa Mesa stage Saturday night, Nov. 12 as “Reunited in Dance” brings together 18 dancers from the Ukraine, Russia and other countries, in a ballet program spiritually pushing back against the war overseas.

As one of the dancers, Ilya Jivoy, a Russian dancer/choreographer who has been in self-exile since Russia invaded Ukraine said, “I am incredibly proud and happy to be part of this exceptional community of like-minded people.

“And I am grateful to everyone who made this project possible.”

In philanthropic leadership, Elizabeth Segerstrom, along with the Henry T. and Elizabeth Segerstrom Foundation, is presenting the performance in association with the Segerstrom Center for the Arts.

“I am humbled,” Segerstrom said in October as early rehearsals took place in Costa Mesa, “to be able to play a role in bringing together these artists, who come from many different countries and backgrounds, to bring unification to us all.”

“Reunited in Dance” sold out quickly. Expanding on the idea of unifying people, organizers created a free opportunity to see the performance outside the venue Saturday (see the accompanying information box).





Ilya Jivoy, a Russian dancer/choreographer, rehearses at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa on Thursday, November 10, 2022 for the upcoming performance of "Reunited in Dance."
(Photo by Leonard Ortiz, Orange County Register/SCNG)

‘A KNIFE IN THE BACK’

As death and destruction inside Ukraine grinds away, tendrils of the conflict quietly stretch in unexpected ways and in many directions, including as far as 6,000 miles to Costa Mesa.

To his surprise, Jivoy recently received an artistic blow he didn't anticipate.

The 33-year-old was born in St. Petersburg and trained at the city's prestigious Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet, founded in 1738. Jivoy was hired by the fabled Mariinsky Ballet, located literally a block away. He appeared in the company's production of "Swan Lake" at Segerstrom Hall in 2012.

In addition to dancing, Jivoy has created both story-length ballets and smaller pieces. His choreographic promise even won him an award, "The Hope of Russia."

"This theater, this city, this, these people ... it was all my home," said Jivoy in an interview this week.

But everything changed when the "aggression," as Jivoy quietly describes Russia's actions. He and his wife, who is half-Ukrainian, with family in an area of Ukraine near the war front, immediately departed.

As he describes in the "Reunited in Dance" program: "We had to leave everything, our families, our jobs, our apartment, friends, we simply packed up anything we could take and left."

Early on in the conflict, Jivoy also spoke out publicly.

"I did a few statements against the aggression and the pressure on my colleagues in the arts," he said.

Recently, his wife was looking at the Mariinsky's web site. Displayed among the 50-plus ballets, including "Swan Lake," in the company's active repertoire is Jivoy's full-length work "The Four Seasons."

She texted her husband the link.

"I'm erased!" Jivoy said. "As choreographer my name is gone away."

"It shows the costume designer, the lighting designer. But who created the dance? Now, nobody!"

Asked how being culturally canceled feels, he paused.

“A knife in the back.”

“Of course, I’m not the most famous choreographer. But it is copyrighted ... how dare they do that? I sent an official request to the company, but silence. No statement, nothing,”

Here Jivoy will dance a solo from his recently choreographed piece, “BA//CH Solo.” Set to music by Bach, the ballet was warmly received at a festival in Switzerland.

He is finding satisfaction in the opportunity. But thoughts of larger concerns remain.

Asked if he thinks of a return to St. Petersburg someday, and how it would feel, he is again subdued.

“It’s a good question. I love my Russia, want to see my family, the city, it’s there, a part of me,” Jivoy said. “But as long as this — the war — goes on, my wife and me, we are totally a freelance couple.

“And maybe the wound from that knife will never completely, totally heal, I can’t know. I’m not that sure I will want to come back.”

THE QUEST FOR BRILLIANCE



Elizabeth Segerstrom, center, poses with the cast of “Reunited in Dance,” a performance featuring dancers from Russia, Ukraine and other countries. (Photo by Marty Robertson)

Russian powerhouse companies like the Mariinsky and the Mikhailovsky in St. Petersburg, and the Bolshoi in Moscow, all have former company dancers in Saturday night's program. These three companies currently perform like nothing is going on, ballet as business as usual almost nightly.

But, first with the COVID-19 shut down and now the war, none of these hallowed organizations has been seen locally, or anywhere else, for some time.

Even if travel is possible, the current appetite of presenters and audiences for having these perhaps now tarnished troupes in Europe and the United States feels at an all-time low.

As a result, in their absence, having this event in Orange County has even greater artistic significance for underwriter Elizabeth Segerstrom.

“‘Reunited in Dance’ is an opportunity to both honor and continue the great legacy of international ballet at Segerstrom Center,” said Segerstrom.

It echoes a challenge posed by her late husband Henry Segerstrom in 1986, who, in a letter to the public tied to the dedication of the then-new performing arts center, cautioned that performances needed to be a focal point.

Henry Segerstrom wrote: “In its use let us all aspire to play our roles so that 100 years from now those who follow after will judge us not by the grandeur of this structure, but rather by the brilliant performances within its walls.”

Asked this week if she felt this event might meet her late husband's criteria for brilliance, Elizabeth Segerstrom responded simply: “I do.”

She expanded, asserting that “Segerstrom Center was created to engage and inspire people with great performances. ‘Reunited in Dance’ is fulfilling Henry's dream of creating a world-class arts center on many levels.”

‘Reunited in Dance Simulcast’

What: A live outdoor projection of a ballet program featuring 18 international dancers inside the adjacent Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall.

When: 8 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 12

Where: On the Argyros Plaza at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts, 600 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa

Logistics: Attendees can set up as early as 5:30 p.m. on the plaza for best views of the projection on the outside of Segerstrom Hall. Blankets, fold-up chairs, and food are allowed on the plaza. No canopied tenting or grills. Food will be available for sale; public restrooms accessible from the plaza will be open.

Admission: Free. The performance in the adjacent venue is sold out

Parking: \$15 in nearby parking structures
Information: 949-556-2787; www.scfta.org



REUTERS

Ballet dancers who fled Russia reunite on California stage

By Rollo Ross







COSTA MESA, Calif. (Reuters) - Xander Parish is a British-born ballet dancer who was a principal dancer at the Mariinsky Ballet in St Petersburg, Russia.

Then, in February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Within a month, Parish had left. Other international dancers based in Russia also fled, leaving behind their lives, jobs and belongings.

Now, for one night, the dancers from the Mariinsky, the Bolshoi and other elite Russian companies are reuniting with a performance on Saturday in Costa Mesa, California.

“Each of us here in this group has an absolutely unique story, but tied together by a thread through this shared experience of leaving Russia and having had what we loved there... but now coming back together. It’s like a full circle,” Parish told Reuters.

American Adrian Blake Mitchell and his Slovakian girlfriend Andrea Lassakova, both formerly dancers with the Mikhailovsky Ballet, also fled Moscow shortly after the invasion. Mitchell said they found themselves in “extremely uncomfortable and worrisome circumstances.” He declined to elaborate.

The shared experiences of the artists will be tangible when they dance together, Mitchell said.

“The group of dancers, it’s just so special, you know. Not a lot of projects have been done like this under these circumstances so that brings such a new layer to it and makes it so much more emotional and so much more meaningful and impactful,” he said.

Christine Shevchenko is with the American Ballet Theatre and based in the United States, but she was born in Odesa, Ukraine, and said it was important for her to be part of the production.

“I’ve always been a true believer that the arts, whether it’s ballet or opera or music, always brings people together,” Shevchenko said.

Although the corps de ballet will be together only for one night’s performance, Parish already has plans for them to do more.

“We sold out in 10 days which is really fantastic so we’re suddenly looking at developing this project and bringing in more repertoire and expanding what we can perform together and showing what we love to more people with more performances in the future,” he said.

“Reunited in Dance” will be performed at the Renee and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa. The venue is inviting a separate audience to watch the show for free via a livestream outside the building.

A Real-World ‘Black Swan’ in Exile

Joy Womack — subject of an upcoming biopic starring Diane Kruger and Talia Ryder — was the first female American dancer to join the Bolshoi Ballet. She was living a fairy tale — until war broke out.

By Seth Abramovitch, November 11, 2022



Joy Womack COURTESY OF KAROLINA KURAS

Joy Womack is speaking to me in a Zoom window as she furiously threads a pair of ballet shoes. “It takes three hours to prepare one pair of shoes,” she says apologetically. “And we go through four pairs a week. So if you’re not sewing, you’re out of shoes.”

At 28, Womack has already gone through thousands of ballet shoes. She was born one of eight children to a middle-class family in Beverly Hills; until 12 she lived in Santa Monica, then moved with her family to Austin, Texas, where her mother enrolled her in a dance school that specializes in the Vaganova ballet technique. That led to a scholarship at the Kirov Academy of

Ballet in Washington, D.C., which led her to apply to the Bolshoi school in Moscow, where she was accepted.

Womack moved to Moscow at 15, graduated top of her class and was accepted into the Bolshoi Company — unheard of for a non-Russian dancer, much less an American. A series of scandals at the Bolshoi led her to quit that company and join the state Kremlin Ballet, based out of the actual Kremlin building in Red Square.

If it all sounds like something out of a movie, it is, as Womack's life has already served as the basis for a 2021 documentary, *Joy Womack: The White Swan*, as well as an upcoming biopic called *Joika* starring Talia Ryder as Womack and Diane Kruger as her instructor Tatiyana Volkova.

Filming on *Joika*, for which Womack served as choreographer and consultant, wrapped in Warsaw almost hours before Russia launched its assault on Ukraine. The war has turned Womack into something of a ballet refugee, unable to return to Russia for having spoken out against the war, and without a company to call her own.

On Nov. 12, she will perform at Segerstrom Center for the Arts in *Reunited in Dance*, organized by British-born Xander Parish, former principal dancer at St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Ballet, and featuring an all-star company of international dancers impacted by the war in Ukraine.

Womack took a break from an intensive rehearsal schedule for a fascinating conversation with *The Hollywood Reporter* about dance and diplomacy amid the horrors of war.

Had they never taken an American ballerina at the Bolshoi before?

There was an American woman — she was half-American, half-Russian in the 1960s. She grew up in the Soviet Union. That's what I've been told. But in the new Russian Federation, there had never been an American woman in the company before.

I assume you had to work with translators?

No, I had to learn Russian. I learned Russian at school, so I speak fluent Russian.

So on top of all your ballet commitments, you had to learn how to speak Russian?

My teacher said she was going to throw me out of the class if I didn't learn Russian in three months. So I learned Russian. I would get up at five in the morning and practice my Russian. I learned it super quickly.

And how are you treated as an American?

I mean, honestly, that's one of the things that I love about Russia. Yes, I was the American girl, but I feel like I earned my stripes, if you know what I mean. By the end of my time in Russia, I was treated pretty much like everybody. I ended up getting my Russian citizenship last year. So I think they saw that. They appreciated that I had a huge love for their culture and love for their school, and love for their tradition. I wanted to be Russian after I was there for a year. I wanted so badly just to be like them.

Were you performing for Putin and all his officers?

Yes.

What's that like?

It was a big honor. I mean, this is before [the war]. I was really proud to be part of diplomacy and the fact that Russia takes a huge pride in their classical ballet. And so they fund it well, and the dancers have great opportunities, and we are ambassadors for arts and culture. I believe that arts, culture and dance is an organic bridge between nations, and the way that we should do diplomacy. I don't think that we should involve politics inside of our diplomatic arts policy. And so being an American, working for the Kremlin, I thought, was a natural reflection of how we create relationships between countries.

So for me, it was a big honor. When I was 17, I got to represent the Bolshoi school when they came to the Kennedy Center and I danced as a soloist. I was the best soloist in that production. And I felt like that was a huge statement. I was so proud to represent Bolshoi Academy as an American. And then when I would go on tour with the Kremlin Ballet, or when I would dance, I felt part of it. Where, I'm sure you can ask Xander Parish or any one of the dancers here. We were really proud to be part of that tradition.

And it's really sad what's happening these days because more and more we're becoming polarized in spaces that were never polarized before. And sadly, it is true the Russian government does fund the arts there. So I personally didn't feel comfortable remaining in Russia and receiving a government salary when I wasn't OK with what was happening.

And then what about on the American end? Did you ever get any suspicions from, I don't know, the CIA that you might be a spy or something?

I can't comment on that, but I do know that it was a very weird place to be. I can't comment on that, but I think people have this idea of "big bad Russia." I understand why now, but before, I feel like I lived in a golden era in Russia where it was becoming more and more international, and people were having a career dancing. Because in the United States, we don't have the funding for arts like we did in Russia. We were literally dancing a different ballet every night. You can't do that in the United States. You have a block of performances and then everybody rehearses for three months. And in Russia, my season would go from September to July and then I'd have a paid vacation for a month. In the U.S. you have to go on unemployment when

you're not working as an artist. We have very far to come as a nation in the U.S. if we want to talk about cultural diplomacy or cultural superiority. We have no cultural support to speak of. The National Endowment for the Arts is \$250 million.

Meanwhile, we're giving \$40 billion of aid to Ukrainians, which that's awesome, we have to give that aid. But why can't we support our own arts programs in the United States? Why are dancers who are in the United States feeling like they have to go overseas to get health care, to have support, to be able to have a career, to be respected? I will not tell you how many times in my life I've been asked by my American family, "When am I going to get a real job?" Whereas in Russia, I'm respected. I was. Now I feel like a persona non grata.

You must have been quite a celebrity there for being the only American in the Bolshoi, and you were dancing leads in things like Swan Lake.

I feel like there was a notoriety around my name. I don't know if I was a celebrity, but I do feel like I always had work, and I could perform where I wanted. And certainly later I felt like I had the ability to choose my projects, which was nice. I think especially since the start of the war, I've kind of mourned that in some way. I was going a certain way. I was kind of the token American in some ways. And I felt like I was opening the door for Russia to be a space that was more popular amongst foreigners. So overnight that whole platform disappeared. And I didn't feel comfortable. I know there's several of my friends who I personally helped them find their first jobs in Russia who are still there.

And it breaks my heart. There's a moment where there's a line in the sand. I know that a lot of the dancers that have decided to stay, but it's because they have no other option. They can't find employment in the West because it's extremely competitive and very, very difficult. Doesn't matter how great of a dancer you are, there're no contracts. Companies in the West can't take you. Whereas in Russia, there's a company in every city, and performances, and there's an audience, and the government supports the arts. So maybe you're not making a huge salary, but you can make a living dancing in Russia.

You mentioned that you feel like a persona non grata now. What do you mean by that?

Because I've made the statements that I have. And by leaving Russia, if I ever went back, I would have to stay. And I would have to probably say some things — that I agree with the position of the Russian government, etc. And that's very sad to me. Because I have always stood for the fact that ballet can be diplomacy for the world. So I would prefer not to focus on the political, if you don't mind. I really don't want it to be about that. I know that maybe that's the buzz thing right now, but I feel like it can really be something that burns bridges down the road.

Maybe I've already lit the fire behind myself, but I really love the people that I worked with. And I think that there's this naive idea we have as Americans that like, "Oh, well, if we punish them, they'll rise up." But no, there's no possibility for that. Russians will live. They have no choice. They have to be OK with the government that they have because they don't have any

power. So to penalize the people for something that somebody does in the leadership is not fair for the regular man there. And I have the dearest family friends that I have experienced nothing but kindness from, ordinary people that are in Russia who love me, who've given me space.

For example, my friends in Astrakhan, they literally have all of my stuff. They've not asked for a dime to take care of my things when we left. It's so easy to demonize a people group and not understand where they're coming from. Most of the people I know are not OK with the fact that a war is going on, but they can't say that loud. Or they've been brainwashed by what they watch.

And we certainly are not immune from that over here, either.

I mean, we just had Election Day. Think about how polarized the United States is. Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones. We're all human.

Have you been vocal at all about your position on the war?

Very much so. I worked in the South of France after I left Russia. I was super afraid to make any statements because I was afraid for my friends. And then I realized that I couldn't stay silent. So I released a statement on my social media officially, because I felt like it was the right thing to do before starting in another place. And I received so much backlash from friends and from people that I worked with. And on the other hand, I received a lot of support. So I do feel like I have to follow my conscience and my conviction. I always have. In my career I always felt like I have to follow what my heart says is to be true, even if that closes doors in front of me.

But at least at the end of the day, I can have an honest conscience. I have suffered in my career because of that. Because people don't want somebody who speaks their mind or is an advocate for themselves, especially in the dance industry. They want somebody who's beautiful and does what the company says. They don't want somebody who speaks out or exposes things. So I think I've kind of had that branded onto me ever since I spoke about what was going on in the Bolshoi in 2013. So I've had to navigate that and make peace with the fact that I've lost out on a lot of opportunity. But at what cost comes celebrity, at what cost comes notoriety? I'm not chasing the fame. I love what I do, I love the art, but I don't want to be given opportunity because I've become complacent with something that compromises my morals.

Let's talk about Joika a bit, because it sounds really cool. Diane Kruger's in it. And it's your life story. How did that come together?

It's kind of a crazy ride. There was a New York Times article about me when I moved over to the Bolshoi. I think it was my first or my second year in the school. And a writer found that plot really interesting and they kind of wrote a treatment and then it got shopped around Hollywood. I grew up in L.A., so everybody around me was trying to get famous and be in a movie and I could have cared less. So I literally thought that people were high on crack trying to make a movie about my life. That's never going to happen. And even to this day when I talk

with James [Napier Robertson], who's the director, I tell him I'll believe it when I'm sitting at the premiere.

The only thing that I asked when James said that it was happening was like, "Look, I just want the dance to be good in it." I want ballet to have its day. We had Black Swan. I think that the only way to repopularize the art form in the United States is to have more things like that. So that's the reason I said yes to the project is because I want there to be more movies about ballet in the limelight.

And you wrapped at the very last possible minute before war broke out?

I think if we had pushed the shoot by a week, we would have been stuck. It was filming in Poland. But the problem is, when the war started, refugees started to pour into Warsaw. So all of the hotels were being filled up with refugees. There was nowhere to stay. The movie company, they're like, "Well, you can't go back to Russia. Literally they can't get you flights back in." Then we kind of were nomads around Europe.

For two months I tried finding a job. I worked temporarily in the South of France, but I had never faced as much rejection in my life as I faced after the war. I auditioned for over 100 different places and received rejection from each one of them.

So what did you do?

I holed up in a tiny apartment in Paris and I just trained every single day. And I did as many auditions as I could and kept getting no's. And then I passed the Paris Opera audition and I just waited for an answer. I'm not allowed to talk about it yet. I can talk about it in January. Then I went back to the States and started to get a ton of invitations to perform and collaborate.

So you're kind of a ballet refugee?

Yeah, well, which is what Reunited in Dance is. Xander gave us a place to work and an opportunity to perform for the audience again, which is really kind. My family's flying in for the performance, which is really exciting because I think I've performed for them a handful of times in my life. They've rarely gotten to see me actually perform because I spent the bulk of my career in Russia, and it's kind of hard to get to Russia.

I must say, I find you fascinating. Not just your life story, but your point of view.

We need to remember that we need to love and have compassion for our fellow man. And it's so easy to demonize another person. But we're just like people who throw bombs if we use our words in a way that excludes another people. So the only thing we can do is do the best we can every day. Find something that you love and hope that thing that you love can touch other people. And that's the way we make our world a better place.

British-born ballet star unites Russian exiles in a dance of defiance

Xander Parish, who fled St Petersburg in March, talks about his performance this weekend with Russian and Ukrainian artistes



Xander Parish: 'I wanted to gather us all, to be able to reunite us in our love of dance.' Photograph: Sophia Evans/The Observer

When the dancer Xander Parish made his return to the London stage in *Swan Lake*, visiting Covent Garden five years ago as a member of a renowned Russian ballet company, it was a moment of triumph. [The Yorkshire-born star](#) was, after all, the first Brit to have been accepted by the [Mariinsky Ballet](#) – known as the Kirov in Soviet times. And after the curtain came down the company promoted Parish to the status of principal dancer.

How times change. This March Parish turned his back on his new home in St Petersburg. He and his Russian wife, the dancer Anastasia Demidova, fled the country in protest at the invasion of [Ukraine](#) in February. On 12 November, Parish was due to take a further stand.

The 36-year-old drew together a one-off company of leading ballet dancers with links to Ukraine and Russia to perform *Reunited in Dance*. A special performance staged in Costa Mesa, California, it was to mark both the sorrow and the solidarity of the exiled dancers on stage.

“My wife and I left because we do not support the invasion,” Parish told the *Observer*, “but this weekend we all celebrate dance together, with other dancers who have trained in the Russian ballet tradition, which we still love. It is one of the richest things [Russia](#) has and I still believe in it.” Designing the programme for the show, he combined some of his favourite pieces of Russian and western choreography. “I wanted to gather us all, to be able to reunite us in our love of dance,” he said. “The whole bunch of us are so grateful to be back working again.”

Like Parish, many of the other performers have left prominent Russian ballet companies, including the Bolshoi, the Mikhailovsky [Ballet](#) and the Stanislavsky Theatre, in response to the invasion. Their appearance together at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Orange County has been backed by the arts philanthropist Elizabeth Segerstrom. Parish said he is grateful to her, and to all participating dancers, when personal circumstances make these decision risky.



Xander Parish and Iana Salenko in *La Bayadere* at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in September 2022. Photograph: Tristram Kenton/The Observer

“There’s a big pressure on Russian dancers to condemn what is happening, understandably, but it is tricky. I am uniquely placed to speak, really, as a westerner coming out of Russia,” he said. “I can see both sides of this picture. I also see how difficult it is to get the balance right.

“On the one hand you would not want to find yourself employing someone in favour of invading a neighbouring country. On the other hand, you know the arts must keep some degree of separation from politics. It is a fine balance for dancers too, if we want artistic freedom, because you also don’t want to find yourself performing alongside someone who stands for things you don’t agree with.

“Lots of people don’t want to speak out if they have family in Russia. That is for their own conscience to deal with. Our performance is for those of us who’ve left the country and still want to perform.”

After fleeing to Estonia, Parish missed his regular stage performances. “I had to go through a long period of not dancing, which was extremely frustrating and difficult. In the same way race horses need to race, dancers need to dance. Anything other than that is not great, although you can train where you can. Performance creates a self-fulfilling, virtuous circle. It keeps your skills and your stamina going.”

The dancer, who was born in North Ferriby and first danced in Hull before winning a coveted place at the [Royal Ballet](#) School, said his decision to leave Russia was not immediate.

“When the invasion began it wasn’t clear exactly what was happening, as Russia had been playing territorial games for a while. It became more apparent when flights from Europe were suddenly cancelled and it was prudent to get on the other side of the border.”

Other dancers have since shared harrowing escape stories with Parish. “Although we were fairly safe, it was difficult for my wife and I in Estonia. We weren’t allowed backstage in some theatres simply because we had come from Russia, even though we left because we disagreed.”

In September Parish joined the Norwegian National Ballet in Oslo. The artistic director there, Ingrid Lorentzen, had followed his career and invited him to join them.

He does not regret his original decision to travel to Russia 12 years ago. “I had the most amazing adventure of the kind I could never have guessed at,” he said. “I’d expected to stay for about six months, maybe a year, to get some experience with a different kind of teaching and tradition. I wanted to learn. My only desire was to improve myself as a dancer, and then return to London.”

Now Parish has said farewell to a city that had become home. “I can’t go back in the foreseeable future. Of course, I miss the Russian countryside and the culture. There are a million things I love,” he said.

Selections from *La Bayadère*, *Swan Lake* and *Le Corsaire* were chosen for the programme, as well as *Paquita*, a Russian staple, and Christopher Wheeldon’s *After the Rain*. Parish has also choreographed a piece performed to Tchaikovsky’s *Children’s Album*. “This is a big reunion for us to have that feeling of comradeship and bringing us back together to perform as a family again,” he said.

Elizabeth! OC arts patron honors exiled Russian ballet dancers in Segerstrom gala

By Debra Levine, November 15



“**Reunited in Dance**,” was a gala so glorious, so glamorous, so *grand* that it would normally take a village to produce. But perhaps you haven’t met [Elizabeth Segerstrom](#). A Polish-born, Russian-speaking dynamo who holds a doctoral degree in psychology, she is an accomplished entrepreneur and published author. Elizabeth (everyone calls her that) threw a ballet party and invited the town. It came off swimmingly.

Alarmed by the dance world despair and chaos she was sensing, and hearing about, Ms. Segerstrom did so much more than cut a check. She created an outlet to perform for 18 racehorse ballet dancers—top dogs, all exiles from Russian-based dance companies, whether the Bolshoi, Mariinsky, Mikhailovsky, or Stanislavsky Theatre. Fashioning a program of warhorse greatest hits interspersed with select contemporary

ones, Ms. Segerstrom did all the groundwork of staging "Reunited in Dance," right down to commissioning marvelous animated backdrops to transform the concert-hall setting.

In the above photo, she is surrounded by her gathered troupe of 'ballet nomads'; whether indigenous or expatriates, each led a career interrupted by the chaos brought on by the war in Ukraine. Some are in costume, others in their funny warm-up clothes. But for a stretch on Saturday night, they brought their art, and their pedagogy, to a stage of **Segerstrom Center for the Arts**.

It all took place, not in **Segerstrom Hall**, which is The Center's standard-bearer for dance presentation, rather, it was in the neighboring, somewhat more glittering **Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall**, which, on occasion, but not often, presents dance. In a nice community gesture, the program was live-streamed onto a huge screen set up in the Plaza outside the theater, as the fully sold-out program could not accommodate all. But before we describe the program, hey, what about that party?



Prior to the performance, on the ramps, staircases, and balcony of the Concert Hall lobby, Ms. Segerstrom entertained a who-is-who of invited guests, a list that felicitously included members of the press. The bold, brassy, and fun-loving OC social-whirrr was in high gear. It was on view in the fresh flowers bedecking the arrival walkway; it bubbled up in flutes of champagne; it was buried beneath mounds of caviar

in tubs so enormous they were surely wheeled in. Russian caviar! On teensy blini! With enough sour cream to harden your arteries on sight. Steak-ragout! Risotto! Red wine! And chocolate bon-bons to get you through the weekend.



Thus fortified, the audience filed into the hall for the world premiere of director Xander Parish's ballet classroom handbook, *The Ballet Class*, impeccably delivered by a cast of twelve. From plies and tendus to just about everything, both at barre and at center, the 'ballet ABC's work aptly displayed the dance prowess that would be put to good use later in the program. One felt pleasure in the room at seeing the dancers go through their training paces; alas, the work went on too long.

The next stop of interest was Christopher Wheeldon's much-trod *After the Rain* duet, in a careful and tender performance by Andrea Lassakaova and Adrian Black Mitchell, who not only seemed to understand their choreography, they actually owned it, and were present for each other in the nicest unforced manner.



vsevolod maevsky, boris zhurilov and alexis tutunnique in raymonda

Want ballet classics? We had *The Dying Swan*, the *Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake* (the White Swan pas de deux sumptuously danced by ABT Principal Dancer Christine Schevchenko), and that whole shebang was topped up by the pas de deux from *Le Corsaire* in which Jacopo Tisi did this:



jacopo tisi, le corsair

The evening was very grand, as mentioned, but it was also very human and touching. The performance opened with a montage of video testimonies about the trauma and dislocation the dancers have undergone, having uprooted from their homes, and their daily, dependable routines, which is something that dancers need. We have published the words of Jacopo Tissi, whose marvelous leap is in the above photo. Read his story [here](#).



The dancers were troupers. Uplifted by the opportunity to perform, if not a tad out-of-joint having been dormant for months and months, they bent over backward (well, sometimes that was in the choreography) to honor the audience, their art form, Mother Russia in her better days, but mostly, Elizabeth Segerstrom, whose enthralling vision it was to stage this one-night-only extravaganza.

The performance had artistic direction by British dancer **Xander Parish**, former principal dancer at the Mariinsky Ballet. Ms. Segerstrom' executed her passion project in collaboration with the Henry T. and Elizabeth Segerstrom Foundation in association with the Center.



an honor to be photographed with elizabeth segerstrom

Jacopo Tisi nails grand jete in 'Corsaire,' part of 'Reunited in Dance'

By Debra Levine, November 15



That's a grand jete that packs a wallop. Just sensational. Every element of the Italian-born *danseur noble* **Jacopo Tisi**'s position is proper. His legs are equally rotated outward in his hip joints; his feet are fully stretched; the arcing curve in his spine that finishes at the top of his head is sublime; his arms beautifully hit the midnight and nine-pm points of his 'body clock.' He is cantilevered toward the ground, which indicates he is not even at the peak of his leap but in its resolution. That means 1) he either leapt really high and is on his descent, or, 2) they tricked us and dropped him down from the ceiling.

When Tisi performed "Le Corsaire" onstage during *Reunited in Dance* at Segerstrom Center for the Arts on November 12, 2022, he, as well as his fellow cast members, all who fled their positions in Russian ballet companies at the onset of the Ukraine war, had more on his mind than nailing his grand jete.

Here is Tisi's evacuation story from Russia:

Jacopo Tissi has worked at the Vienna State Ballet and La Scala in Milan, but moved to Moscow to join the Bolshoi in 2016. He danced much of the classical repertoire, rising to principal dancer in 2022, one of the few foreigners to reach this position in the Bolshoi's history. He left in March of this year, announcing that he had made the difficult decision to leave the Bolshoi, which he credits with helping him become the dancer he is today, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In the days before Russia invaded, Tissi was in the process of rehearsing a new work by Alexei Ratmansky, based on Bach's *The Art of the Fugue*. Ratmansky, who is half Ukrainian, left Moscow the morning after the invasion and over the ensuing days, Tissi made the difficult decision to follow. "It was such an unexpected and abrupt change" Tissi recently told *Pointe* magazine. "There was a sense of worry. We could see something was happening, but we couldn't be sure what. The escalation was very fast. I could see the situation wasn't improving, and felt a change in the atmosphere around me, and that's when I made my decision to leave."

"When the Italian government began encouraging its citizens to leave Russia, and I saw that borders were beginning to close, I realized it was time to go. When you live somewhere for five years, you form bonds, with friends, teachers, the theater. The idea of making such a sudden life change—a change that is forced upon you—is not easy. I flew to Istanbul, and from there to Rome, and from Rome to Milan. But I can't complain. Colleagues crossed borders on foot, fleeing the war in Ukraine."

"I worked for five years with Alexander Vetrov, who was my coach in Moscow. With him, I significantly improved my jumping technique, and he helped me to grow artistically. Working together, every day, he transmitted the Bolshoi style to me. This way of working is so unique. The Bolshoi has this amazing system of transmitting knowledge from teacher to student. This is how the style is passed down. I will miss my teacher, [artistic director] Makhar Vaziev, Svetlana Zhakarova [his main ballet partner], my friends. It's not easy, not knowing how long we will be apart. The wound is still fresh. But I know that it is also important to look ahead and move forward."

As well as appearing with *Reunited in Dance*, Tissi has returned to La Scala in Milan as a guest principal dancer during the 2022–23 season.

Great work here, as well, by photographer Tiffany Rose/Getty Images for Segerstrom Center for the Arts.

Los Cerritos News, News Media Group

Dancers Fleeing Russia and Ukraine are 'Reunited in Dance' in Orange County on the Segerstrom Stage



The Reunited in Dance cast takes a bow. Photo by Tiffany Rose, Getty Images for Segerstrom Center for the Arts

By Lydia E. Ringwald • November 16, 2022

I first met Principal Dancer Xander Parish in Orange County several years ago when he performed in a lead role for the Festival Ballet Theater Gala.

At an event celebrating the performance, Xander expressed his delight at being accepted at the famous Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg and described with wry humor his efforts to learn how to speak Russian.



Principal Dancer Xander Parish.

The next time I would see him would be in the 'Reunited in Dance' performance at Segerstrom Center in November this year, after fleeing from Russia at the outbreak of the Ukraine war.

Xander Parish had a cultivated successful career in Russia and was lauded by audiences at the Mariinsky for his stunning performances. He married the talented Russian ballerina Anastasia Demidova, also a dancer in the Mariinsky Ballet.

But suddenly, in early 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine, his life and career changed dramatically. Horrified by the onslaught of a brutal war, Xander Parish realized that he and his wife would have to leave Russia immediately.

Although it was emotionally wrenching to leave the Mariinsky theater, whose history they honored, but there would be also unacceptable political implications and consequences if he stayed. Rather than be used as an example, as an English citizen who would appear to tacitly approve of the war if he remained in Russia, Xander realized that they must act quickly.

Flights were full. Many Russians were fleeing while they still had an opportunity to leave. The only way out was by bus into Estonia. Xander and his wife Anastasia packed a few suitcases and fled, leaving their belongings behind and still fresh food in the refrigerator.

Other Mariinsky dancers and musicians who suffered the same dilemma and had to also flee secretly. Then came opportunity to be welcomed in Southern California and perform at Segerstrom Center, reunited with other dancers also forced to flee.

Support for the 'Reunited in Dance' performance was overwhelming. Tickets to the show in the theater were soon sold out, so Segerstrom Center also set up free streaming of the live performance for audience overflow onto the giant screen at Argyros Center.

The dancers received heartfelt support in standing ovations after their stunning performances and also at the party after the show.

Elizabeth Segerstrom, whose charitable foundation sponsored the performance, appeared at the events surrounding the performance to honor dancers and greet enthusiastic theater attendees.

Also attending the reception and afterparty was Salwa Rizkalla, Director of Festival Ballet, who had originally engaged Xander Parish earlier in his career to perform in Orange County for the Festival Ballet Theater Gala.

In one spectacular evening, we are all 'reunited' again.

Xander Parish, who had performed in Orange County at a Festival Ballet performance many years ago, returned to Segerstrom Center again in the 'Reunited in Dance' to be reunited with the other refugee dancers who fled from Russia in protest of the Ukraine invasion.

Although still stunned by the rapid turn of events and concerned for the safety of family and colleagues still in Russia, these dancers have been welcomed to their second home in Southern California, where they may find peace and a place to dance again.

“REUNITED” SHARES THEIR HISTORY AND GIFT OF DANCE

Posted by [Joanne DiVito](#) | Nov 21, 2022



On November 12 at [Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall](#), surrounded by crowds of ballet lovers, Klieg lights crossed the evening sky announcing the much anticipated **Reunited in Dance**. This event managed to do what politically seemed an impossible task; to bring together Ukrainians, Russians, Americans, the world, in what is a vital combining of art and artistry.

The evening began with a montage of dancers speaking (a moving moment in a non-speaking art form). They told their stories of leaving loved ones, frightening escapes, homelessness, and courage. One could not stop the feelings, understanding the savagery of what war does to the gifts of history and beauty. These young performers did not know each other as labels of conflict but as artists working together to present this 400+ year old artform. It united the members of this brilliant family tree and reminded us of their shared gifts.



Act I: The Opening introduced **The Ballet Class** which was a kind of prayer at the barre to ready the dancers for the evening. **Xander Parish** (Mariinsky/United Kingdom), *Artistic Director* of **Reunite in Dance** built the program beginning with a ballet class, reminiscent of *Etudes* (1948 Landers – Royal Danish Ballet) with the music of Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Children's Album* played by the masterful pianist, Behzod Abduraimov (Uzbekistan and U.S.). And so the evening began...



Throughout, there was a series of solo pieces and classic traditional pas de deux, trois and quatre, highlighting the personal dynamics and mastery of each dancer. It began with *The Ninth Wave*, an exquisite contemporary solo piece performed by **Jacopo Tissi** (Italy, formerly w/ Bolshoi), and choreographed by **Brian Arias** using the music of *Mikhail Glinka* and *Nikolai Rinsky-Korsakov*. Tissi's contemporary-classic style that bridged by the beloved *White Swan Adagio* from *Swan Lake*. A backdrop of the moon-shimmering lake behind the elegant virtuosic strength of **Christine Schevchenko** (Ukraine, currently w/ ABT) shown her as the true ballerina she is. With such ease and effortless elan she collaborated with her devoted partner **Xander Parish** and it was clear Schevchenko was bequeathed Lev Ivanov's genius in the tradition of the greats that had come before her.



A *BA//Ch Solo* – choreographed and performed by **Ilya Jivoy** (Russia, formerly w/ Mariinsky) to the music of J.S. Bach. Jivoy's piece allowed him to show not only his classic technique but his contemporary pluck, easily stepping away from the traditional. It was followed by the well-loved Don Quixote Pas de deux by Marius Petipa, to Minkus' unforgettable score. The lovely saucy **Lizi Avsajanishvili** (Georgia, formerly w/ Mariinsky) flirted with the appreciative crowd; while the dynamic **David Motta Soares** (Brazil, Formerly w/ Bolshoi) excited the spirit with his soaring leaps and superb line to end the first half and beckon to the audience come back for more after their glass of wine.



To begin Act II, three dazzling young male dancers graced the stage in courtly white with gold trimmed jackets. A rendering of a grand ballroom set the scene behind the elegant **Vsevolod Maevsky** (Ukraine, formerly w/Mariinsky), flamboyant **Boris Zhurilov** (Russia, Formerly w/ Stanislavsky & Nemirovich-Danchenko Ballet) and princely **Alexis Tutuniqu** (Ukraine currently w/ National Opera of Ukraine & United Ukrainian Ballet). Their styles were distinct yet melded when working together, a challenge to be sure for these premiere danseuse who were exciting individually with their own personal magnetism and prowess on stage.

Mikhail Fokine's classic *Dying Swan*, originally choreographed for [Anna Pavlova](#) was poignantly interpreted and performed by **Veronika Selivanova** (US, formerly Mariinsky Ballet), her fragility and artistry was palpable and the piece took on new meaning appearing as a kind of metaphor for the struggle to survive in these times.



A gorgeous highlight of the evening, ***After the Rain***, Choreographed originally for New York City Ballet by **Christopher Wheeldon**, was haunting with its pulsating legato musical lines by **Arvo Pärt**. This stunning choice revealed the work of the ethereal **Andrea Laššáková** (Slovak Republic, Formerly with Mikhailovsky) and powerful **Adrian Blake Mitchell** (U.S., formerly Mikhailovsky Ballet). The lyrical movements, the off-balance effortless lifts, the slow release to the ground made this journey an unearthly meditation that appeared to change the breathing in the room and encouraged a standing ovation at its end.

Following such artistry came ***Ballet 101***, the base upon which ballet is built. It was an entertaining spoof on the complicated love-hate relationship to the vocabulary and actions of the art, with choreography and amusing voiceover by **Eric Gauthier**. This hilarious piece effortlessly demonstrated by the impish Xander Parish was a perfect segue from good humor to the traditional holiday Snow Pas de deux from *The Nutcracker* performed by the diminutive **Laura Fernandez Gromova** (Switzerland and Ukraine, Formerly with Stanislavsky and Namirovich-Danchenko Ballet), and outstanding **Boris Zhurilov** with his strong overhead lifts, cabrioles, triples tours.



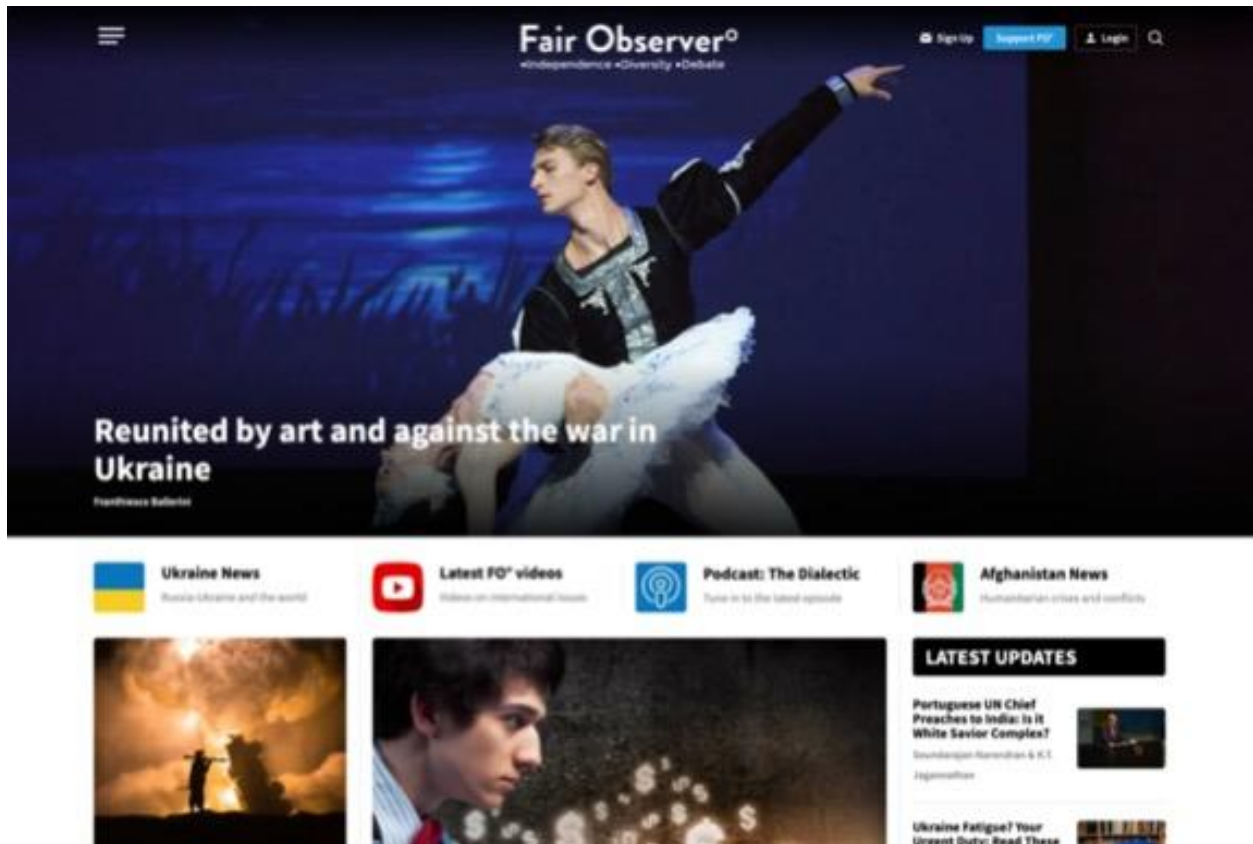
Flames of Paris Pas de Deux, with its fiery backdrop of Paris burning was based on the songs of the French Revolution, with choreography by [Vasily Vainonen](#), and music by Boris Asafyev, premiered at the Kirov in 1932. The spirited and soaring performances of **Joy Womack** (US, Formerly w/ Astrakhan Opera and Ballet) and **Vsevolod Maevsky** (Ukraine, formerly w/Mariinsky) so mirrored recent history living in these performers today.



Selections of ***Paquita*** with short variations from *Humpbacked Horse*, *Sylphide*, *Dulchina*, *Pavlova*, and a male solo performed by Jasmine Sophie Henry, Katia Raj, Lizi Avsajanisvili, Veronika Selivanova and David Motta Soares. Moving quickly to the final pas de deux, *Le Corsaire*, Music by *Adolphe Adam*. **Christine Schevchenko** and **Jacopo Tissi** bid farewell to the West Coast audience and the marvelous evening of dance as they performed their rousing finale. In response was a standing ovation with dancers and audience clapping with each other expressing a huge thank you for those who made this important evening of collaboration possible. It could not have been done without the care and talent of so many.



Once again, the cast of courageous and astonishing dancers included:
Xander Parish – Artistic Director/Choreography (Mariinsky/United Kingdom), Lizi Avsjanishili (Georgia, formerly Mariinsky), Svetlana Bednenko (Ukraine, formerly Mikhailovsky Ballet), Adrian Blake Mitchell (U.S., formerly Mikhailovsky Ballet), Anastasia Demidova (Russia, Formerly Mariinsky), Laura Fernandez Gromova (Switzerland and Ukraine, Formerly with Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Ballet), Jasmine Sophie Henry (Australia, formerly Mariinsky Ballet), Ilya Jivoy (Russia, formerly with Mariinsky), Andrea Laššáková (Slovak Republic, Formerly with Mikhailovsky), Vsevolod Maevsky (Ukraine, formerly w/Mariinsky), Katia Raj (U.S., Formerly w/Leonid Yacobson Ballet), Veronika Selivanova (US, Formerly w/ Mariinsky), Christine Shevchenko (Ukraine, currently w/ ABT), David Motta Soares (Brazil, Formerly Bolshoi), Jacopo Tissi (Italy, formerly w/ Bolshoi), Alexis Tutunniq (Ukraine currently w/ National Opera of Ukraine & United Ukrainian Ballet), Joy Womack (US, Formerly w/ Astrakhan Opera and Ballet), Boris Zhurilov (Russia, Formerly w/ Stanislavsky & Nemirovich-Danchenko Ballet).



Reunited by art and against the war in Ukraine

Ballet stars who fled Russia after the invasion reunite on a stage in California to celebrate art and oppose Russian President Vladimir Putin's war.



Andrea Laššáková and Vsevolod Maievskiy in *Swan Lake* by Karolina Kuras

By Frantjesco Ballerini, November 22, 2022

When war separates people, arts reunite them. That was the goal celebrated last Saturday in Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa, California, where dancers impacted by the war in Ukraine danced together for the first time since the invasion, on February 24th. The one-night-only special ballet performance, *Reunited in Dance*, was simulcasted for visitors in the plaza in front of the concert hall because tickets were sold out in a matter of days. “This is an artistic, not a political event, but of course it’s impossible to separate the two, especially because ballet is Russia’s most powerful factor of soft power.

The stories behind this special reunion are as touching as the performance presented at René and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall. Xander Parish is a British dancer responsible for the choreography. A year ago he married a fellow dancer, Anastasia Demidova. Together they made the decision to leave everything behind without saying anything to their friends in the Mariinsky. “If I had stayed in the Mariinsky Ballet, it would mean things were fine but they weren’t, even if I love

my mentors and colleagues there. It's sad when politics has that kind of effect on art", says Xander. "It was very hard for every dancer. We are all against the war, but at the same time, we are all grateful to Russia for all it taught us in arts. But it was scary to leave by bus across Finland and Estonia, when airplanes prices charged by Turkish airlines were an extortion" Parish explained.

Texas-born Adrian Blake Mitchell went on to dance six seasons at the Mikhailovsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, together with the world-famous ballerina Polina Semionova. When the Russian invasion of Ukraine took place, flights were canceled and Mitchell found that it was impossible to cross borders with his small dog, Beau, either by train or bus. He took an Uber-like service to cross the Bridge of Friendship, as the border from Russia to Estonia is familiarly referred to. But the FSB agents (Russian security) realized he was American and asked him about his politics, his thoughts on Russia, where he worked and the countries he had traveled too. He broke out in tears when he finally managed to get to the other side of the bridge.

Ukrainian dancer Vsevolod Maevsky, formerly with the Mariinsky Ballet, says he has lost all emotional balance in the present and no plans for the future. "All I want is that my sister and nephew, who decided to stay in Kiev because she didn't find any jobs elsewhere, may survive, although I get very angry that she didn't listen to me when I advised her to leave. I feel a lot of contradictory emotion now. I think politics is all about nothing but the money. They don't care about people. How can we build a new world if we put money and nationalities above people?" Maevsky complained.

Swiss-born Laura Fernandez Gromova is Ukrainian on her mother's side. Before joining the Mariinsky, she won three top prizes at the Prix de Lausanne ballet competition. She was in Moscow when the war started, but part of her family is in Mariupol, which suffered some of the deadliest bombardment. She still wonders if they are alive. She was advised not to show her Ukrainian passport. After leaving Russia, she thought her career might be over, until she received an invitation to dance at the Georgian National Company.

War's heartbreak and the humanity of the arts

David Motta Soares left Brazil at the age of 12 to join the Bolshoi Ballet Academy. Living in Russia since that age, he says the decision to leave Russia was one of the hardest in his life, especially after European dance companies started to ban Russian dancers. "That's sad and impossible. Every major dance company in the world has some Russian artists. Also, we don't do politics. We bring people joy and happiness. We need to embrace, not exclude people," says David, who booked an urgent flight to Turkey after the invasion and wrote on his Instagram account, a few days later, that he had quit the Bolshoi, "the place I called home for many years". He describes the reunion with other dancers in Costa Mesa. "It was a fairytale to meet my colleagues in California and bring some joy in such a difficult moment. Art and sports have that responsibility, to put forward the human side of this war," says the dancer, who is now in Germany, but with no long-term plans for the future.

The idea for *Reunited in Dance* was born a few months after the invasion of Ukraine and it was sponsored by Elizabeth Segerstrom and the Henry T. and Elizabeth Segerstrom Foundation. It premiered *The Ballet Class*, a new ballet choreographed by Xander Parish to Tchaikovsky's *The Children's Album*. The program included Christopher Wheeldon's *After the Rain*, Eric Gauthier's *Ballet 101*, and Ilya Jivoy's *BA//CH*, closing with selections of *Swan Lake*, *Le Corsaire*, *Paquita*, *Paquita*, *Don Quixote* and others. Although *Reunited in Dance* was designed to be a one-night celebration, dancers were so excited with the project and happy with the long and warm applause of the audience that some of them have plans to join again soon. Parish, for instance, is thinking about forming a ballet company that embraces talents in exile. He explained why. "I believe that the spirit of that place, what we know, what we learned, who we became and who we are, can be preserved, and can be reunited."



+ Conflicto entre Ucrania y Rusia lesiona a la danza

Bailarines padecen los estragos de la que llaman la crisis más grande del ballet: han sido desplazados o viven boicots de las compañías; EU los congregó en Reunited in dance



El bailarín ucraniano Vsevolod Maevsky con Andrea Laššáková, interpretando el ballet de El lago de los cisnes.

CULTURA | 22/11/2022 | ⌚ 02:00 | Jesús Díaz | Actualizada ⌚ 09:14 |



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El joven de 24 años entiende que parte de su disciplina implica aguardar, aunque le estén cortando las alas. Semanas atrás, había elevado esos 1.91 centímetros de altura y 81 kg de físico, al punto de retenerlos en el mítico Teatro Mariinsky, en donde le aplaudieron su interpretación del príncipe Sigfrido en el "Lago de los cisnes". Era el sueño cumplido: actuar en libertad dentro de una de las compañías de ballet más importantes del mundo, frente al público de San Petersburgo.



escuchó al presidente ruso, **Vladimir Putin**, hablar de la llamada “operación militar especial”, una avanzada militar que se llevaba a cabo en ciudad de Donbás, en Ucrania, el país en donde nació.

Bailarines, ante un futuro incierto por hacer carrera en Rusia



“Todavía estoy un poco perdido, sabes”, se sincera con **EL UNIVERSAL**, mientras recuerda el momento en el que supo que la nación que lo acogió atacaba el sitio en el que había nacido. Las explosiones tomaron su patria y terminaron con la vida de muchos connacionales, incluidos algunos que admiraba, como Oleksandr Shapoval, bailarín de 47 años, solista de ballet de la Ópera Nacional de 2013 a 2021, condecorado como Artista de Honor en Ucrania y asesinado en septiembre pasado en Mayorsk, en la región de Donetsk, tomada finalmente por los rusos el fin de semana pasado.

“Me es muy difícil concentrarme ahora porque hay tantas cosas que cambiaron y tan rápido”, retoma el joven, todavía con ropa de ensayo. “Llevaba cuatro años en esa ciudad (San Petersburgo) y extraño muchas cosas, porque ahí tuve mucha ayuda de mi director, de mis entrenadores, de mis amigos. Y soy de Ucrania”.

Maevsky nació en Kiev, desde los cinco años destacó en bailes de salón y, a solicitud de su madre, entró al ballet. A los 12 fue descubierto por V. V. Pryanichnikov quien lo guió a la Escuela Coreográfica Estatal de Kiev, esto le llevó a estudiar un año en Nueva York, en el Ellison Ballet. En 2018 logró su sueño de entrar al Mariinsky.

Luego vino la pandemia, una lesión y ahora la guerra. “Siendo honesto, no tengo un equilibrio. Conversé con mi exdirector y me dijo, ‘¿cuál es tu plan?, ¿cuál es tu meta?’. Y yo estaba como... ‘no sé’, porque creo que para los ucranianos y para los rusos todo en este momento es simplemente sobrevivir. No es una queja cualquiera, en verdad no hay planes. Sólo este mes sé lo que haré, por ejemplo, como en noviembre, en diciembre. Eso es todo”.

Desde que la guerra estalló, el ucraniano se estableció primero en Berlín y el fin de semana pasado subió a un escenario en Costa Mesa, California, como parte del evento “**Reunited in dance**”, realizado por la filántropa Elizabeth Segerstorm en el centro cultural que lleva el apellido de su familia.

En dos actos, de casi dos horas de duración, una docena de colegas de distintos países que se vieron afectados por el conflicto bélico mostraron estar unidos por esta disciplina. Tanto organizadores como artistas reiteraron, en varias ocasiones, que “Reunited in dance” no fue una presentación política. No obstante, muchos de los integrantes saben que eso no es posible.

Confiesan que procuran cuidar las formas, porque muchos de ellos sueñan aún con regresar a Rusia, pero describen la situación de cientos de sus compañeros, los desplazados y de las propias compañías ancladas en Ucrania o Rusia, como “alarmante”. Esto, aunado a los estragos del cierre pandémico, ha llevado a una crisis sin precedentes en esta disciplina que quieren que se advierta.

“La guerra ha desatado un sentimiento antirruso”, dice Xander Parish, el coreógrafo principal de “Reunited in dance”. Él es británico, establecido desde hace 12 años en Rusia también como parte del Mariinsky, en donde su incursión, siendo inglés, se consideró excepcional. Meses antes de la guerra, el nacido en Yorkshire, al norte de Inglaterra, contrajo nupcias con una bailarina rusa, Anastasia Deminova.

Ambos viajaban en un tren de San Petersburgo a Moscú cuando escucharon de la invasión; la minimizaron de inicio,



cruzarán la frontera, harán ruido y regresarán'. Luego todo fue tan repentino, tan impactante", relata.

Instigados por la familia de Xander en Reino Unido, con el miedo de la cancelación de vuelos y la amenaza de bloqueos, la pareja se presentó por última vez en el Mariinsky para protagonizar "Las cuatro estaciones", bajo la coreografía de Ilia Jivoy. Esa noche tomaron un autobús rumbo a Estonia –los vuelos a Turquía eran muy costosos-- y abandonaron todo con la idea siempre de regresar; el británico recuerda incluso un detalle: dejaron comida en el refrigerador.

"No podría considerar quedarme cuando mi estadía podría interpretarse como respaldar lo que estaba pasando. Y no puedo respaldar lo que está sucediendo. Me encanta Rusia, el país, pero no puedo apoyar esto de invadir a un vecino. Extraño mi vida, extraño mi casa, extraño a mis compañeros y a Mariinsky, amo profundamente a la gente, pero esto es otra cosa", dice Xander.

Desde ese momento, no les ha sido fácil encontrar un lugar, en especial para Anastasia, su esposa, pues al ser rusa se ha enfrentado a un alud de trámites burocráticos y, considera Xander, se le ha segregado de algunas producciones que no quieren arriesgar contratando a bailarines de grandes compañías rusas.

Leer más: [Muerte, vida y exilio en la escritura de Claudia Ulloa Donoso](#)

Antítesis de un cuento de hadas

La apuesta de llevar a esta docena de bailarines a Estados Unidos es considerada por el brasileño David Motta Soares como un acto antibélico enclavado en un "pequeño cuento de hadas", es decir, una suerte de escape escénico que contrastó con lo que sus compañeros y él viven en la realidad.

"¿Cómo puedo explicarme? Todos estamos (emocionalmente) en un lugar al que no queremos ir, pero tenemos que ir", se explica. El 7 de marzo, el bailarín tuvo que publicar en su Instagram lo que consideraba impensable días antes, que renunciaba al sueño más grande que él y miles pueden tener: formar parte del Ballet Bolshoi.

"Estoy profundamente triste de anunciar que dejo en el Teatro Bolshoi, a mis maestros, mis colegas, mis amigos, mi familia, el lugar que llamé hogar durante muchos años, nunca olvidaré a cada uno de ustedes que me apoyaron se quedaron conmigo en momentos difíciles y buenos en mi vida y carrera", escribió.

"Pero no puedo actuar como si nada estuviera pasando, simplemente no puedo creer que todo esto esté sucediendo de nuevo. Pensé que habíamos pasado por esto y aprendido con el pasado. Tengo muchos amigos con sus familias en Ucrania y no puedo imaginar ni de cerca lo que pueden estar pasando ahora y luchando con toda esta situación, ¡mi corazón se queda con ellos!"

La presentación del sábado 12 de noviembre, en el Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, en el condado de Orange County, fue la primera de Motta Soares frente al público estadounidense como profesional --sólo había estado ahí en 2007 como parte de un concurso juvenil--. El brasileño fue uno de los más aplaudidos al interpretar el Pas de deux de "Don Quixote", el mismo número con el que se graduó de la Academia del Bolshoi en 2015.

"Moscú fue un lugar donde crecí, donde comencé mi vida laboral, mi carrera. Especialmente a mis mentores, a ellos los llevaría para siempre conmigo, pero es un paso que tuvimos que dar. Y claro que vivir esto no es algo fácil. No digo sólo para mí, supongo que para todos los bailarines, aunque sabemos que no es nada comparado con lo que está



Maevsky sabe bien esto último: su familia ha resentido los estragos más crudos del conflicto. Su madre huyó de Kiev, pero su hermana sigue ahí junto con su sobrino. “Mi madre se fue con mi hermano a Turquía, él está ahí desde hace seis años. Y mi hermana sigue en Ucrania porque trataron de salir cuando la guerra estaba por comenzar, pero fue difícil, no encontraron ningún trabajo y decidieron regresar”.

Del lado ucraniano, detalla el bailarín, algunos colegas están atrapados en medio del conflicto y quienes pudieron huir no han encontrado un trabajo seguro. Maevsky tuvo que buscar ayuda económica para un compañero muy cercano, quien debía sostener a su madre, hermanas y abuelos; hoy ha encontrado un espacio en otro país. “Estoy feliz de que él ya esté fuera de Ucrania, en algunos tours”.

Están también los colegas varados en Rusia o los que huyeron de ahí: “No sabes lo triste que es esto, porque creo que el ballet ruso es de muy alto nivel y ya está pasando a mis amigos, entrenadores y muchos bailarines que se quedaron que todavía están viendo cómo luchar. Ellos no pueden ir a hacer giras y bailar en todas partes.

“Mi mejor amigo del ballet Mariinsky que se fue de Rusia conmigo y está en un momento realmente difícil, intentó hacer audiciones en diferentes compañías y muchas de ellas simplemente le dijeron: ‘oh, no queremos aceptarte aquí, no queremos aceptar gente rusa’. Es tan injusto”.

Mesura ante un futuro incierto

“Reunited in dance” intentó romper con este efecto al integrar gente de distintas nacionalidades que han desarrollado su carrera en Rusia, afectados por el conflicto. La presentación del sábado 12 de noviembre estuvo dividida en dos actos, que incluyó varios clásicos como “Raymonda”, “El Cascanueces” y “El lago de los cisnes”, pero también la premiere mundial de “The ballet class” (La clase de ballet) del propio Xander Parish.

En el número, los 12 bailarines recrean una tarde de ensayos en una ciudad rusa, gastando bromas, lejos del dramatismo, pero con un final nostálgico al despedirse, mientras se apagan las luces, en una referencia al último día en el que estuvieron juntos.

“Traté de ser lo más apolítico posible porque muchos de nosotros tenemos familia en Rusia”, reconoce Xander. “No queremos causarles problemas. No queremos tener problemas nosotros mismos para poder vislumbrar el futuro, aunque eso parezca imposible a final de cuentas”.

Maevsky es más abierto, para él la lesión ha sido tan honda en la vida de gente que ama, tanto en Kiev como en San Petersburgo, y en especial en su profesión, que se debe levantar la voz. Es una herida que, considera, afecta a la disciplina artística más importante de la cultura rusa, como si olvidaran de pronto su principal herramienta de “poder blando”, es decir, la incidencia que el ballet ha tenido para mostrar el aspecto más humano de esa nación al mundo.

“Me siento tan molesto, tan enojado”, concluye. “Siendo honesto a los políticos no les importan las personas, ni el arte, y es muy triste porque la gente simplemente está muriendo por algo estúpido. Si miras esta situación en realidad todo un tema bastante estúpido.

“Ojalá y se dejara de pensar tanto en el dinero y simplemente nos amáramos sin importar la nacionalidad. Es la única manera que podemos reconstruir un mundo diferente”, concluye Maevsky.



Comentarios

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El bailarín ucraniano Vsevolod Maevsky con Andrea Laššáková, interpretando el ballet de *El lago de los cisnes*.

Conflicto entre Ucrania y Rusia **lesiona a la danza**

Bailarines padecen los estragos de la que llaman la crisis más grande del ballet: han sido desplazados o viven boicots de las compañías; **EU los congregó en *Reunited in dance***

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Entre las piezas que interpretó el bailarín brasileño David Motta Soares, quien pertenecía al Bolshoi, destacó su protagónico de *Don Quixote*.



El bailarín británico, que estaba en el Mariinsky, Xander Parish, en su interpretación del *Ballet 101*; además fue el coreógrafo principal de *Reunited in dance*.

EL DATO

Reunited in dance, se realizó el 12 de noviembre en el Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, en el condado de Orange County.

JESÚS DÍAZ Enviado
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Su herida sería más grande, mientras se recuperaba de esa lesión en Turquía, escuchó que el presidente ruso, Vladimir Putin, hablaba de la "operación militar especial", una avanzada militar que se llevaba a cabo en Donbás, en Ucrania, su país natal.

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Desde que la guerra estalló, el ucraniano se estableció primero en Berlín y el fin de semana pasado subió a un escenario en Costa Mesa, California, como parte del evento *Reunited in dance*, realizado por la filántropa Elizabeth Segerstorm en el centro cultural que lleva el apellido de su familia.

En dos actos, de casi dos horas, una docena de colegas de distintos países que se vieron afectados por el conflicto bélico mostraron estar unidos por esta disciplina. Organizadores y artistas reiteraron, en varias ocasiones, que *Reunited in dance* no era una presentación política. No obstante, muchos de los integrantes saben que eso no es posible.

Confiesan que procuran cuidar las formas, muchos de ellos sueñan con regresar a Rusia, pero describen la situación de cientos de compañeros, los desplazados de las propias compañías ancladas en Ucrania o Rusia, como

fotogalería

Ante la guerra logran *Reunited in dance*



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Bailarines del Mariinsky y Bolshoi enfrentan un futuro incierto por hacer carrera en Rusia



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VSEVOLOD MAEVSKY

Bailarín ucraniano

"Para los ucranianos y para los rusos todo en este momento es simplemente sobrevivir. No es una queja cualquiera, en verdad no hay planes"

XANDER PARISH

Coreógrafo y bailarín británico

"Me encanta Rusia, el país, pero no puedo apoyar esto de invadir a un vecino. Extraño mi vida, extraño mi casa, extraño a mis compañeros y a Mariinsky"

"alarmante". Esto, aunado a los estragos del cierre pandémico, ha llevado a una crisis sin precedentes en esta disciplina, que quieren que se advierta.

"La guerra ha desatado un sentimiento antirruso", dice Xander Parish, el coreógrafo principal de *Reunited in dance*. Él es británico, establecido desde hace 12 años en Rusia también como parte del Mariinsky, su incursión, siendo inglés, fue excepcional. Meses antes de la guerra contrajo nupcias con una bailarina rusa, Anastasia Deminova.

Ambos viajaban en un tren de San Petersburgo a Moscú cuando escucharon de la invasión; la minimizaron de inicio, era un juego político: "No esperaba que sucediera. Quiero decir, lei los periódicos

y en la prensa británica se hablaba de tropas que se acumulaban en la frontera. Quizás fue ingenuidad mía, pero todos estábamos: 'bueno, es Rusia: cruzarán la frontera, harán ruido y regresarán'. Luego todo fue tan repentino, tan impactante", dice.

Instigados por la familia de Xander en Reino Unido, con el miedo de la cancelación de vuelos y la amenaza de bloqueos, la pareja se presentó por última vez en el Mariinsky para protagonizar *Las cuatro estaciones*, con coreografía de Ilia Jivoy. Esa noche tomaron un autobús rumbo a Estonia —los vuelos a Turquía eran muy costosos— y abandonaron todo con la idea siempre de regresar; el británico recuerda incluso un detalle: dejaron comida en el refrigerador.

"No podría considerar quedarme cuando mi estadía podría interpretarse como respaldar lo que estaba pasando. Y no puedo respaldar lo que está sucediendo. Me encanta Rusia, el país, pero no puedo apoyar esto de invadir a un vecino. Extraño mi vida, extraño mi casa, extraño a mis compañeros y a Mariinsky, amo profundamente a la gente", dice Xander.

No les ha sido fácil encontrar un lugar, en especial para Anastasia, su esposa, al ser rusa se ha enfrentado a un alud de trámites burocráticos y, considera Xander, se le ha segregado de algunas producciones que no quieren arriesgar contratando a bailarines de grandes compañías rusas.

Antítesis de un cuento de hadas

La apuesta de llevar a esta docena de bailarines a Estados Unidos es considerada por el brasileño David Motta Soares como un acto antibélico en un "pequeño cuento de hadas", es decir, una suerte de escape escénico que contrastó con la realidad que viven él y sus compañeros.

"Todos estamos (emocional-

mente) en un lugar al que no queremos ir, pero tenemos que ir", se explica. El 7 de marzo, el bailarín tuvo que publicar en su *Instagram* lo que consideraba impensable días antes, que renunciaba al sueño más grande que él y miles pueden tener: formar parte del Ballet Bolshoi.

La presentación del 12 de noviembre, en el Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, en el condado de Orange County, fue la primera de Motta Soares frente al público estadounidense como profesional —sólo había estado ahí en 2007 como parte de un concurso juvenil—. El brasileño fue uno de los más aplaudidos al interpretar el Pas de deux de *Don Quixote*, pieza con la que se graduó de la Academia del Bolshoi en 2015.

"Moscú fue un lugar donde crecí, donde comencé mi vida laboral, mi carrera. Especialmente a mis mentores, a ellos los llevaría para siempre conmigo, pero es un paso que tuvimos que dar. Y claro que vivir esto no es algo fácil. No digo solo para mí, supongo que para todos los bailarines, aunque sabemos que no es nada comparado con lo que está pasando el pueblo ucraniano".

Maevsky asegura que del lado ucraniano colegas están atrapados en medio del conflicto y quienes pudieron huir no han encontrado un trabajo seguro. Están también los colegas varados en Rusia o los que huyeron de ahí: "Ellos no pueden ir a hacer giras y bailar en todas partes.

Reunited in dance intentó romper con este efecto al integrar a gente de distintas nacionalidades que han desarrollado su carrera en Rusia, afectados por el conflicto. "Ojalá y se dejara de pensar tanto en el dinero y simplemente nos amáramos sin importar la nacionalidad. Es la única manera que podemos reconstruir un mundo diferente", concluye Vsevolod Maevsky. ●