

BALLERINA

a documentary film by
Bertrand Norman

77 minutes, color, 2006
Russian, English & French w/English subtitles



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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SYNOPSIS

In the grand tradition of the *Ballet Russes* comes Bertrand Normand's portrait of five Russian ballerinas from the Mariinski Theatre, formerly known as the Kirov. Behind any great ballerina lies the discipline and rigour that comes from decades of training and practice; and Russia's pre-eminent dancers - superstars such as Nijinsky, Baryshnikov and Pavlova - established the reputation of Russian dancers as the best in the world. The dancers profiled in *Ballerina* are uniquely individual - tough, insightful and exceptionally talented; onstage they reveal no hint of the sweat, pain and hard work of the rehearsal studio. From Swan Lake to Romeo and Juliet, from the backstage studio to performing on stages around the world, *Ballerina* captures the sublime beauty of ballet, in all its resplendent glory.

The classic ballerina exercises an art that is becoming rare, a profession as demanding that it is not well known. She fascinates because her fate seems so fragile. But there is a country where she still shines as resplendently as ever, Russia. Land of absolutes, the cult of beauty, wideness and nostalgia, also the land of a forgotten femininity: Russia is the land of the ballerina *par excellence*.

Director Bertrand Normand, director and lover of ballet, has for a long while been impressed by the singularity the Russian Ballerinas. He went to St Petersburg looking for what makes these dancers unique. Through his personal research, he has found a new vision of classical ballet, its world and the power it exercises on the audience.

BALLERINA is about going through the curtain which separates the audience from the artist on stage. Norman's quest has taken him to the Mariinski Theatre, formerly called Kirov. This theatre has seen centuries of the world's finest choreographers and interpreters. There Norman meets Alina, Ulyana, Evgenia, Svetlana and Diana, who are the principal personalities of the film. Women with very different characters, young dancers beginning their careers or world famous stars, they illustrate together the steps and fundamental issues of a ballerina's life. Norman followed and filmed them over a period of months, onstage, during rehearsals and at home. He found for each one of them a challenge for the future. Whether it is the beginner leaving school to begin a new career, the injured star who must make her come back, the rising star leaving her theatre to blossom somewhere else, they embody the many different aspects of the Ballerina.

The story of a ballerina is the story of a permanent metamorphosis. Whether it is at different moments of her career or at different moments of the day, from the young girl suffering at rehearsals or the one who shines with grace on stage, or the one who goes back to a common social life, the ballerina changes constantly and her beauty appears in this transformation.

Though the art of ballet is to appear graceful and light, this is the product of exhausting and painful work for the dancers. Watching these artists, ballet becomes more than mere aesthetics, it conveys to the audience deep emotions. The artist can transcend the repertoire to create something new, never seen before. That's what happens when stars like Diana Vishneva, Svetlana Zakharova, and maybe even more Ulyana Lopatkina, are dancing.

But it is while filming young dancers like Alina Somova ou Evgenia Obraztsova evolving and growing that the director can show the viewer the mystery of the metamorphosis that characterizes the life and art of the "ballerina."

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHY

Bertrand Normand was born in 1972. Before devoting himself to film, he studied management at EAP, l'Ecole Européenne des Affaires, in Paris, Oxford and Berlin. After a year and a half he left for the Philippines to do his military service as audio-visual attaché to the Ambassador of France.

At age 25, he attended the Vancouver Film School in Canada where he directed his first films. When he returned to France, he studied at the Studio Jack Garfein.

Normand has directed two short films, LE GENIE DE L'ASPIRATEUR and L'ILLUSION, in which he held one of the main roles, and AMOROUSLY, as well as three documentaries, MENTEURS, THAMANYA, UN ESPOIR POUR LA BIRMANIE, and BALLERINA, which was shot in Canada, Burma and Russia.

He's currently working on a new documentary on the historical reconstructions of the Napoleonic era in Russia, SOLDATS DE L'EMPEREUR, and is beginning work on a new short film, LA VOIX. Additionally, he has written two feature length film scripts.

Normand occasionally works on films other than his own. He was the Production Assistant on Ildiko Enyedi's SIMON LE MAGE, and second team director and artistic advisor on Cedric Klapisch's LES POUPEES RUSSES.

SELECTED PRESS

[4/4 stars] "Enchanting... a chronicle sure to mesmerize anyone with an obsession for the relentlessly rigorous, conventlike world of classical ballet." –Heidi Weiss, *Chicago Sun-Times*

Critic's Pick "A striking lesson in ballet's rigorous aesthetic alchemy." –Michelle Orange, *The Village Voice*

Critic's Pick "A beautiful snapshot of ballet life, Russian style...those passionate about ballet will need no encouragement to experience." –Kenneth Turan, *LA Times*

"Even folks who don't know their right foot from their left will find inspiration in the lives of these devoted dancers." –V.A. Musetto, *The New York Post*

"A perfect complement to *Ballets Russes!*" –Ronnie Scheib, *Variety*

"Dance aficionados will be sent over the moon by this compelling documentary." –Michael Phillips, *Chicago Tribune*

"A striking lesson in ballet's rigorous aesthetic alchemy." –*LA Weekly*

"Highest rating - four hats. It's like having a front row seat at some of the best ballet you'll ever see. A wonderful insight into ballerinas. Beautiful, stunning, fascinating filmmaking. Makes you appreciate the ballet, even if you've never seen one. If you can't afford or don't have time to get to the ballet, this is a great way to enjoy it. A superb film." –Jan Wahl, *KCBS Radio, San Francisco*

"Telling...fascinating...has captured the fragility and ferocity of five Mariinsky ballerinas. A surprisingly intimate portrait of what it means to be a ballerina." –Gia Kourlas, *Time Out NY*

"An admirable look into the venerable St. Petersburg company ...The footage of the dancers in performance, rehearsal and the studio is beautiful, and all the subjects are worthy interviews." –Leba Hertz, *San Francisco Chronicle*

"*Ballerina* parts the curtain on a rarefied realm where the bodies of young girls are stretched, twisted and sent floating on air according to the dictates of a severe and beautiful cult...The world it reveals — elegant and harsh, glamorous and grinding, classical and obsolete — proves rich in exquisite contradictions." –Nathan Lee, *The New York Times*

"Sublime performances...a skillfully written and entertaining documentary that is also a clever investigation into the professional lives of the world's best dancers." –Maria Garcia, *Film Journal International*

"A revelation." –R.M. Campbell, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

"A fascinating portrait of these artists where audiences rarely see them — off stage." –Kim Brown, *Tulsa World*

"Excitement and verbal expressiveness is brought to the stage with such emotional force as to bring tears to a dance-lover's eyes." –*Cinema Signals*

Flick Pick! "Fascinating, intriguing, miraculous ...a celebration." –Michael Roberts, *Westword Denver*

"A fascinating glimpse... an indispensable treat." –Sally Kline, *The Washington Examiner*

"Jewel of a documentary... the camera tells a deeply moving story...artfully filmed...eye-opening scenes..."

–Sarah Kaufman, *The Washington Post*

“Elegant cuts, gorgeous, graceful performances ... Even those skeptical of ballet will likely be entranced ... mesmerizing.” –Tricia Olszewski, *Washington City Paper*

“Ballet lovers should adore.” –Roslyn Sulcas, *The New York Times*

“A spectacular peek into the lives of five ballerinas.” –Nicole Campoy-Leffler, *Fine Arts LA*

CREDITS

A film by
Bertrand Normand

Voice over
Alain Ghazal

Camera
Bertrand Normand
Franck Laniel
Isabelle Saunois
Edward Oleschak
Igor Yurov
Alexandre Filipov
Frédéric Podetti
Dominique Collin
Thierry Maisonnave

Editing
Antonela Bevenja

Sound editing
Sandrine Henchoz

Mixing
Raoul Fruhauf

Additional sound
Victor Smirnov
Cyril Moisson

Online editing
Fanny Piquet

Color timing
Arnaud Sentenac

Special effects
Thierry Maisonnave

Production coordinator
Igor Moyceyev

Production managers
Diane Baker
Edward Oleschak

Produced by
Frédéric Podetti
Yann Brolli

Production assistants
Laurence Milon
Antonio de Oliveira
Francesca van der Stay

Production secretaries
Cindy Engoulevant
Betina Chokroun
Marion Moretto

Translations
Nadia Riquarto-Lvoff
Inna Yasman
Nelly Rosso
Elisabeth Kulazenkova
Daria Moudrolioubova
Valentin Nassonov
Anna Skochilenko
Larissa Onoprienko
Inna Andreeva
Kristina Spitz

With the participation of :

Mariinsky Theatre

Valery Gergiev
General and Artistic Director

Makhar Vaziev
Director of the Ballet Company

Ulyana Lopatkina
Diana Vishneva
Prima ballerinas

Evgenia Obraztsova
Alina Somova
Coryphees

Andrian Fadeyev
Igor Zelensky
Principal dancers

The ballet company and the orchestra of the Mariinsky Theatre

Ballet masters and teachers
Olga Chenchikova
Galina Kekisheva
Olga Moiseyeva
Gennady Seliutsky

Vaganova Ballet Academy

Altynay Asylmuratova
Artistic Director

Ludmila Safronova
Teacher

The students of the Vaganova Ballet Academy

And

Svetlana Zakharova
Prima ballerina of the Bolshoi Theatre

Manuel Legris
Principal dancer of the Paris National Opera

Cédric Klapisch

Pierre Lacotte

Special thanks to

Diane Baker
Catherine Barré
Eric Haenel
Cédric Klapisch
Brigitte Lefèvre
Olga Mchanskaya
Edward Oleschak
Nadia Riquarto-Lvoff
Anne Salmon

Frédéric Mitterrand
David Richard
Louis David Delahaie
(TV5 Monde)

Linda Ortholan
(Cityzen TV)

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Rachel Daniels
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Vera Dorofeyeva
Isabelle Fokine
Elena Goncharova
Yury Grigorovich
Mikhail Lavrovsky
Jaqueline Lebrun
Brigitte Lefèvre
Bruno Lévy
Judith Lionnet
Seamas Mc Swiney
Arif Melikov
Alisa Meves
Leonid Nadirov
Françoise Normand
Jean-Michel Normand
Vera Obolenski
Adam Peck
Marian Peck
Yugana Pfatseyeva
Inès Piovesan
Galina Pogojeva
Jacques Royer
Sonia Schoonejans

Maria Seguinell
Julia Siegern Korn
René Sirvin
Gustavo Solis Moya
Galina Solovieva
Ellen Sorrin
Janine Stanlowa
Julia Telepina
Oksana Tokranova
Sergey Vikharev
Olga Volkova
Sonya Yadchenko
Anton Yakovlev
Tatiana Yermolayeva
Victoria Yevdokimova

The French Institute of Saint-Petersburg
Saint-Nicholas Cathedral

Judi Morr
Timothy Dunn
(OCPAC)

Valentina Ivanova
Elena Tarasova
(RAO)

Alys Holden
(Kodak Theatre)

Lisa Lukovsky
(Renaissance Hotel of Los Angeles)

Extracts from

Paquita
Choreography : Marius Petipa
Music : Ludwig Minkus
Conductor : Valery Ovsyanikov

Swan Lake
Choreography : Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov
Music : Pyotr Tchaikovsky
Conductor : Boris Gruzin, Mikhail Sinkevitch

La Bayadère
Choreography : Marius Petipa
Restaged by Sergey Vikharev
Music : Ludwig Minkus
Conductor : Mikhail Sinkevitch

Rubies
Choreography : George Balanchine
© The George Balanchine Trust
Music : Capriccio for keyboard and orchestra, Igor Stravinsky
Conductor : Mikhail Agrest

Diamonds
Choreography : George Balanchine
© The George Balanchine Trust
Music : 3rd symphony, Pyotr Tchaikovsky
Conductor : Mikhail Agrest

Schéhérazade
Choreography : Mikhail Fokine
Restaged by Isabelle Fokine and Andris Liepa
© The Fokine Estate Archive
Music : Nikolai Rimsky Korsakov
Conductor : Mikhail Agrest

Romeo and Juliet
Choreography : Leonid Lavrovsky
Music : Sergey Prokofiev
Conductor : Pavel Bubenikov

The legend of love
Choreography : Yury Grigorovitch
Music : Arif Melikov
Conductor : Boris Gruzin, Vag Papyan

1st symphony « Winter Dream », Pyotr Tchaikovsky
Swan Lake, Pyotr Tchaikovsky

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Filmofond Lenfilm Studio

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A l'Unisson

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