

# Opera audience goes under stage

***The opening production at Den norske opera's new home at Bjørvika in Oslo is an evening of dance from the international choreographer, Jirí Kylián. But before the performance starts, Kylián takes the audience on a journey through the building's interior.***

Published 27 May 2008

It was planned that the opening production on Den norske opera's main stage was to be a new Norwegian opera, but as it was not ready in time, this has now been postponed until next season. So the task of blessing the new house in creative terms was given to dance. And it certainly does! With a fantastic evening of dance signed by the world's leading choreographer, Jirí Kylián.

The performance is called "Worlds beyond" and includes brilliant choreographies such as "Wings of Wax", the technically tight "27'52", which has never been performed anywhere other than on Kylián's stage in Amsterdam, the infectious "Fallens Angels" for female dancers in elastic bathing suits, a new chamber piece for four dancers called "Creation" and as a finale, the large-scale "Arcimboldo" with 50 dancers in gold dresses, set to Franz Schubert's funeral music and Tchaikovsky's insanely jubilant orchestral fireworks. All performed by Nasjonalballetten with aching beauty and to the highest international standards.

But before all this, Kylián invites us backstage for a journey through the "Underworld", created by Karine Guizzo, [choreographer, costume designer]; an installation of sound and movement that leads the audience deep into the bowels of the new opera house and sets the tone for the whole evening.

In a kind of initiation rite, the audience encounters the inhabitants of the house in a mystical dimension, a dreamtime where everything is part of creation; an ancient and distant creation where sound and movement, bodies and instruments, are in a state of original transition. And where the possibility of what is dance and what is music is truly astonishing. Among other things, a mythical skier who is also a harpist, as his skis extend backwards in a wonderful curve that feeds into strings.

Sound and movement fill the darkened conduits between the pipes and cables that feed into technical hubs. Every now and then we encounter creatures that block our way so we have to squeeze past them. In other places we catch a glimpse a crowd of people singing to themselves or fleeing some unknown danger. "We are now under the stage", we are told as we enter a vast room that opens out like a glade in a forest of faintly-light machinery.

A hush falls and the air is filled with trembling expectation. Because the journey is about to end, we are at our final destination: we emerge onto the main stage and are met by the members of the audience who set off before us and who are now watching us from the illuminated auditorium. We have seen the new opera house from a completely new and unfamiliar angle and understand that at that moment we all carry in us a movement that started we know not where and will lead to somewhere equally unknown.

The population of mythical creatures emerges onto the stage **before** the start of "Wings of Wax", a piece that blurs the boundaries between what is possible and what is impossible in virtuoso movements. One of the smallest children moves slowly to the front of the stage and starts to sing, but is then frightened into silence, before being comforted and finally carried, singing, into the audience. I don't think I have ever experienced such a gripping start to an evening at the opera.

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