

Giselle | Review

By Sade Nyasha

It's the big opening night at the Grand Opera House, Belfast, for English National Ballet performing for the first time ever in Northern Ireland the Mary Skeaping classic romantic ballet first commissioned in 1971 by Artistic Director and current Company President, Dame Beryl Grey. Looking around, the Victorian themed theatre room has golden fixtures and royal red curtains, draped over the stage. Amongst the chattering audience, the murmuring of the orchestra strumming their instruments, plays in the background.

Theatre attendees are a more mature audience with the occasional little girl emulating a young ballerina, her hair in a tight bun. Some of them still in their leotard from ballet practice are here to watch their potential future unfold. As the curtains rise, the orchestra grips your attention with a loud, intense build of their instruments. Silence becomes the audience as they shuffle in their seats, getting comfortable and doe eyed in suspense.

Act I takes place in a small village set in 1838, after the *La Fille du Danube* ballet, with the castle of Prince Courland off in the distance. It is the final day of the wine festival in the village and it is Giselle and her mother's turn to host the festivities. We come to find the gamekeeper is in love with young Giselle; however, her heart belongs to someone else, a stranger. This stranger is Albrecht, Duke of Silesia, to whom she is engaged.

At first a fairy tale story of courtship, the original choreography by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot brought to life every emotion and unspoken word. Every solo, duet and group performance is carried out effortlessly, allowing you to interpret each interaction and conversation. This atmosphere of one's first love was complemented by the warm lights of the stage, bringing back memories of everyone's first crush.

Unfortunately, in a turn of events Giselle is betrayed, finding out her fiancé is not who he claims to be and is engaged to the Prince's daughter, Bathilde.

Music by Adolphe Adam accompanied by musical direction from conductor Gavin Sutherland, gave room for a smooth transition from one mood to the next. One example of this which stood out was the musical depiction of the betrayal and heart break felt, as Giselle begins to lose her mind before dying from her weak heart.

Act II takes place near the graveyard, home of the Wilis, the spirits of young girls betrayed by their fiancés who have died before their wedding day. Any man to come across their path is forced to dance till death by exhaustion, by the Queen of the Wilis. Albrecht, unfortunately captured by the Wilis, is saved by Giselle's spirit. Even though the stage is set in darkness and grief following her death, I did not feel sorrow. Instead you could feel the everlasting love and devotion Giselle had for her estranged fiancé, the glow of her innocence untainted by the afterlife.

As the show came to a close and the curtains drop, the audience roar with applause and praise. Leaving the theatre uplifted, satisfied, I now understand the beauty ballet can bring to a tragic classical love story.

[Mary Skeaping's Giselle | English National Ballet](#)