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## HONOURED ARTIST OF UKRAINE MYKOLA MIKHEYEV: CREATIVE INDIVIDUALITY AND TRANSMISSION OF EXPERIENCE IN THE BALLET ART

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Статтю присвячено творчій індивідуальності провідного соліста балету, заслуженого артиста України Миколи Михеєва, нині – педагога-репетитора Національної опери України. Авторка зупиняється на цікавих біографічних фактах, а також особливостях сценічних образів, створених танцівником. Особливу увагу приділено успішній педагогічній діяльності М. Михеєва та його талановитим учням.

**Ключові слова:** балет, український балет, Національна опера України, Микола Михеєв, творча індивідуальність.

Статья посвящена творческой индивидуальности ведущего солиста балета, заслуженного артиста Украины Николая Михеева, ныне – педагога-репетитора Национальной оперы Украины. Автор останавливается на интересных биографических фактах, а также особенностях сценических образов, созданных танцовщиком. Особое внимание уделяется успешной педагогической деятельности Н. Михеева и его талантливым ученикам.

**Ключевые слова:** балет, украинский балет, Национальная опера Украины, Николай Михеев, творческая индивидуальность.

The paper deals with the creative individuality of the leading ballet soloist, the Honoured Artist of Ukraine M. Mikheyev who nowadays is the ballet trainer at the T. Shevchenko National Opera of Ukraine. The authoress dwells dwelling on several interesting biographical facts, as well as the peculiarities of scenic images created by the dancer. A special attention is paid to both successful teaching activities of M. Mikheyev and his talented disciples.

**Keywords:** ballet, Ukrainian ballet, National Opera of Ukraine, Mykola Mikheyev, creative individuality.

In the ballet art, the individual transmission of experience from a teacher to his students plays a huge role: in such a way, a performing tradition is developed. At the same time, the formation and traditions' growth indispensably presuppose an increase of creative personality and its bearers – artists. Hence, the problem of making a unique creative individuality of those who are charged to improve and extend this experience is emergent.

The task of a teacher is to base the principles of choreographic skills, a so-called school, without which it is impossible to gain proficiency in ballet as a master. V. Denysenko, whose pedagogical system is described in a number of authoress' articles [2], brought up several generations of artists, including genuine stars of ballet. All of them have strong qualifications, being unlike; though everyone is a creative individuality, everybody has chosen his path in the art. The Honoured Artist of Ukraine Mykola Mikheyev has already completed his dancing career and changed his status to a teacher: he transmits his experience and skill secrets to young dancers. M. Mikheyev is a brilliant creative personality, so the analysis of the scenic images created

by him in various performances is important for understanding the process of work on roles in ballet theatre, which is a very urgent fact nowadays.

Mikheyev completed his education at the Kyiv State Choreographic School in 1983. At the beginning, Iryna Bulatova taught him: she has laid the foundation for an excellent school of classical ballet. At last, Mikheyev has been educated in the class of Volodymyr Andriyovych Denysenko. Many of graduates of that year have become true masters of ballet, bringing fame to Ukrainian choreographic art. These are: the People's Artists of Ukraine Vadym Pисariev and Inna Dorofieyeva, the Honoured Artist of Ukraine Dmytro Kliavin, etc. At the graduation concert, Inna Dorofieyeva was Mykola's partner. She stood out among all graduating girls with her refined form, beautiful and melodious lines of her body, academic style of dance (girls' teacher was Varvara Mey, a student of the famous Agripina Vaganova; therefore all the graduates had a high level of training – the influence of the genuine illustrious St. Petersburg school). At the final concert, they danced pas de deux from *The Sleeping Beauty* by P. Tchaikovsky.

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After graduating, Mikheyev with his classmates V. Pysariev and I. Dorofiyeva started to work at the Donetsk Opera and Ballet Theatre, since the theatre stood in need of young soloists. There Mikheyev began dancing short solo parts; however, he decided to return to Kyiv to be auditioned to the metropolitan Opera and Ballet Theatre. At that time, the troupe's chief choreographer was V. Kovtun who has conceived a liking for a gifted dancer; yet, Mikheyev has been first enlisted into the corps de ballet. The artist endeavoured very much, and all the teachers noticed it and treated him with sympathy. He had an ability to learn ballet text quickly, to orientate in ensemble dances, and so he has been engaged in almost all the performances – both in ballets and operas. At the time free from general rehearsals, Mykola improved his technique and rehearsed solo parts: at first alone, thereupon – with teachers – Volodymyr Andriyovych Denysenko, Valeriy Petrovych Kovtun, and Mykola Danylovych Priadchenko. The latter still danced and looked for young talented disciples to whom he could transmit the secrets of his mastery. In 1994, Mikheyev took part in the Second Ukrainian Ballet Competition in Donetsk, and although there was no reward for him, his performance in the ballet variation from A. Adam's *Le Corsaire* was noted by colleagues. It was impossible not to take notice of the young artist: he attracted attention even in the mass dances with his almost childlike spontaneity, emotion, and irresistible desire of dancing.

Mikheyev's career evolved not as quickly as he would like: at that time in the troupe, there were many excellent leading dancers of elderly and mean age, such as M. Priadchenko, S. Lukin, V. Vidinieyev, V. Yaremenko, as well as a whole cohort of talented creative young people, among which a graduate of the Moscow Choreographic School, the future world-known dancer and choreographer Oleksiy Ratmansky was distinguished. Oleksiy started to attract Mykola Mikheyev to his early creative experiments. In spite of partial occurrence of these experiments, the communication with such a gifted personality as O. Ratmansky has brought many benefits to everybody who participated in those sta-

gings, including Mikheyev. O. Ratmansky, for instance, initiated concerts of creative youth, elaborated their programmes and produced by himself some ballet miniatures on the stage. M. Mikheyev with the graduate N. Ivanova danced adagio from the ballet *Swan Lake* by P. Tchaikovsky. The People's Artist of Ukraine I. Lukashova who was the teacher-tutor of the young artist, has chosen the very Mikheyev because he had a good school of duet dance, as well as a natural sense of partnership and nobleness of manners required in classical ballet duet. Unlike some venerable artists, Mikheyev gladly stayed after hours to rehearse, since he always looked for opportunities to learn. The artist dreamt to dance leading classical parts, and he carries this love of ballet classics through his entire creative life. Even upon completing his dancing career, he said: *I do not feel my age. I feel like a Prince, not a King!*

Choreographer V. Lytvynov has noticed a comic talent of the young artist and entrusted him with the Alain part in *La Fille mal gardée* by F. Hérold. At the T. Shevchenko Kyiv Opera and Ballet Theatre, this performance was staged by O. Vinogradov from St. Petersburg: a complex choreography built in a fine technique of classic dance was interwoven with vivid grotesque mimic scenes and character dances. The image of rural dim-witted Alain is one of the principal roles in the ballet. For its incarnation, only the actor's skills are insufficient: the part has many purely technical dance fragments, masterly variations. Mikheyev's debut as Alain was very lucky: he has performed the part at a high technical level, and the audience has remembered this affecting image. The artist was especially expressive in rendering a scene where the hero is preparing to commit suicide after learning that his bride has jilted him and is immediately consoled by receiving a new horse figurine.

Gradually, the artist has grown to be entrusted with more serious parts, and in a little while, he started to dance ballet princes as well. Initially it was a King's Son in the ballet *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* by B. Pavlovsky, then – Prince in *The Nutcracker* by P. Tchaikovsky. In this performance, Mikheyev has danced almost all parts, ranging from the

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corps de ballet of mice and soldiers to Waltz of Roses, solo quartet of the same waltz, then – the Oriental dance, and finally – Prince himself. The last part, according to the artist, has become his favorite one. He had a delicate feeling of stylistic features of this play, emphasizing them with exquisite preciosity. Mikheyev has paid a special attention to filigree work of foot, replenishing the lines of his dance with a particular charm. The actor spent much time in front of the mirror, adjusting every posture and gesture, looking for different ways to improve his technique. Mikheyev was interested in dance manner and its method of teaching at the school of the Paris Grand Opera, looked through the records of R. Nuriyev, M. Baryshnikov, N. Makarova and foreign ballet stars, which were rare at the time, and analysed them. Mikheyev applied new gymnastic drill for developing flexibility, plasticity, elasticity of foot, as well as the combinations of French exercises, nuances of the classical variations' performing which he had caught from foreign masters of scene. As the artist started to dance the leading roles and got the opportunity to order costumes after his own sketches, he was guided as well by the best examples of Western ballet fashion: for example, for the play *The Nutcracker* he has ordered for himself a jerkin after R. Nuriyev style to show his waistline to the best advantage. Mikheyev toured very often both as a soloist of the National Opera and with other ballet companies. The cooperation with the A. Solovyanenko Donetsk Opera and Ballet Theatre and its artistic director V. Pisariiev who invited him to participate in numerous concerts, festivals, the troupe tours was of particular importance for his artistic career. Over 12 years, Mikheyev participated at the International Festival *World Ballet Stars* carrying out under the patronage of the President of Ukraine. He danced with famous ballerinas, such as the People's Artists of the USSR Nadezhda Pavlova, Liudmila Semeniaka from the Bolshoi Theatre (Moscow), with leading soloists of the National Opera of Ukraine, the People's Artists of Ukraine Hanna Kushnirova, Tetiana Borovyk, the Honoured Artist of Ukraine Iryna Zadayanna, the ballet soloist Kateryna Kozachenko, etc. The performan-

ces at these festivals helped the artist grow in creative plan, acquire stage experience and increase his prestige in the ballet world. It is just during tours that Mikheyev has danced the premieres of some performances.

The artist also happened to work abroad: in particular, in Maribor (Slovenia). It was in the early 1990s when Ukraine was forming as an independent state. The economic situation in the country has worsened and many talented artists went to Western ballet companies to realize themselves, and some of them have stayed there forever, making a career abroad. Mikheyev also got such proposals, but eventually decided otherwise: *Throughout my long creative life I have gone through many stages in the development not only as an artist but also as a citizen. I am a patriot. I love my country and my land. And above all, I want to note that the Ukrainian land is an inexhaustible source of talent, inspiration and innovation.* In addition, the actor understood clearly that the National Opera was a very high-level theatre where he would find the best teachers and the best traditions of performing art, by which he would be guided in his creative activities. M. Mikheyev started to dance more, being much supported by leading teachers of the theatre – M. Priadchenko, V. Kruglov, and E. Stebliak. These choreographers drew him to their new productions where he performed solo and leading parts. One of creative successes of the artist was the Ivan Tzarevych part in the ballet *The Firebird* by I. Stravinsky staged by V. Lytvynov. With the revival of K. Khachaturian's ballet *Cipollino* by H. Mayorov, Mikheyev acted very successfully as Viscount Ciliegino. In this part, he not only demonstrated the high technical level (the play has three virtuoso variations requiring classical mastership, and the *grand adagio* with strengthened lifts), but also created a vivid humorous image, enriching it with his actor's nuances. Sometimes the artist happened to get into his role to the degree that he started to sing during dancing, emphasizing every movement by his facial expression.

The repertoire of M. Mikheyev consisted of very diverse roles. In *Swan Lake*, he acted as both Prince Siegfried and the evil knight von Rothbart, as well as he danced the Hun-

garian and Spanish dances, in *Carmen Suite* by G. Bizet – R. Shchedrin – as Don José, Escamillo, and Zúñiga, in *The Nutcracker* – as Prince and Mice King, with dancing the Oriental dance, in *Don Quixote* – Espada, in *The Sleeping Beauty* – Cat, Grey Wolf, and Prince Désiré, in *Romeo and Juliet* by S. Prokofyev – Count Paris, Signor Capulet and Prince of Verona, in *Paquita* by L. Minkus – Lucien d'Hervilly, and many others. The artist also successfully performed modern choreographic numbers. He participated at the S. Lyfar First International Ballet Competition in Kyiv and International Ballet Competition in Varna (Bulgaria).

M. Mikheyev obtained recognition: he got a lot of admirers both among spectators and colleagues. The general director of the National Opera P. Chupryna has given the personal characteristic of the artist: *Mykola Mikheyev is one of the brightest representatives of modern Ukrainian choreographic school... Mikheyev's creative style is marked with organic combination of lyricism and expressiveness, thorough mastery of dance techniques, deep psychological insight into the images created on stage, subtle sense of partnership.*

In 2002, Mykola Mikheyev was awarded the Gratifying Letter of the Ministry of Culture and Arts of Ukraine for weighty contribution to the development of Ukrainian ballet, national culture achievements propagation and high workmanship.

At the end of the ballet career, the artist tried himself in a much unexpected role. While the theatre's chief ballet master Viktor Yaremenko was performing the play *The Marriage of Figaro* to music of W. A. Mozart, he gave Mikheyev the role of Marcellina. In ballet, men very often perform comic or characteristic female roles: Fairy Carabosse in *The Sleeping Beauty*, evil sorceress Old Madge in *La Sylphide*, Marcellina in *La fille mal gardée*. R. Nuriyev in his production of *Cinderella* at the Paris Grand Opera not only engaged a male dancer with the role of Stepmother, but also made him to dance on the tip of toe. In *The Marriage of Figaro*, Marcellina dances on points as well, and this dance is used as director's means to emphasize the romanticism of her nature: in a dream, she sees herself surrounded by young

boys and girls (among them is Figaro, whom she loves) and feels like an unearthly creature, allowing her to jump easily and do some pirouettes on points as prima ballerina. *For me, her reluctance to part with youth and love is understandable. Of course, from an outsider's viewpoint it might seem unreasonable, so ridiculous,* – related the artist [1, p. 18]. For his performance of Marcellina, M. Mikheyev received in 2007 a diploma of the theatrical prize *Kyiv Pectoral* in the nomination *For the Best Female Supporting Role Performance*. This play has become the last one in the creative career of the artist: at his benefit performance, he danced Marcellina in *The Marriage of Figaro*. On July 3, 2008, M. Mikheyev was awarded with the dignity *Honored Artist of Ukraine*, by the Decree of the President of Ukraine. In 2010, M. Mikheyev left the artistic career and since then he has run the class of ballet as a tutor at the T. Shevchenko National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre of Ukraine, and as a teacher-tutor at the Serge Lyfar Kyiv Municipal Dance Academy.

M. Mikheyev always felt a vocation for teaching: *I feel the strength and the need to transfer the skills, ability and experience to the younger generation. I have always been not indifferent to the fate of people, especially – to the talented dancers. That is why I am a Teacher. I am acquainted with the ins and outs of ballet; I try to give my students what I, perhaps, have received less.*

In 1998, he graduated from the Ivan Karpenko-Karyi Kyiv State Institute of Dramatic Art with specialty of teacher-choreographer and ballet master. He is lucky for being studied by such teachers as Valeriy Kovtun, Tetiana Akhikian and others. In 1997, on the stage of the Lesia Ukrainka National Academic Theatre of Russian Drama, M. Mikheyev acted as the choreographer of the play *Royal Games* by G. Gorin.

While working as a ballet dancer, M. Mikheyev has made the first attempts of pedagogical activities. He danced and taught at Japanese ballet schools, afterwards worked at the Serge Lyfar Kyiv Municipal Academy of Dance as a duet dance teacher. He has become a coach of the National Opera and quickly assembled a circle of talented disciples.

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In 2011, M. Mikheyev trained, for the S. Lyfar International Ballet Competition (in Donetsk), his five disciples: three – in senior age group, two – in a junior one. The *grand prix* of the contest was gained by a young ballet soloist Andriy Pisariiev (the son of Vadim Pisariiev, a laureate and winner of many international competitions, who works at leading ballet companies in Ukraine and abroad, particularly – at the National Opera of Ukraine). Oleksandr Stoyanov (senior group), who now is the leading ballet dancer at the National Opera, got the second prix. Oleksandr Skulkin (junior group) gained the prize of Yu. Stanishivsky (he has graduated from the S. Lyfar Kyiv Municipal Academy of Dance and now is a soloist of the National Opera of Ukraine). Owing to outstanding results demonstrated by his disciples, M. Mikheyev was awarded with the first prize and the title of laureate of the VIIth S. Lyfar International Ballet Competition as the best teacher of the contest.

M. Mikheyev narrates on his disciples with undisguised pride: *With my students, I have already made many leading parts in the repertoire of the National Opera. It is a very interesting and significant work for me. It's pleasant to feel that my students are the best ballet dancers of the theatre and the whole country. Many of them make tours around the world participating both in performances and concert programmes. At the moment, my disciple Oleksandr Skulkin has gone to the International Ballet Competition in China, where he was awarded with the second prize in senior group.*

Another M. Mikheyev's disciple Oleksiy Tiutiunyk, who, during the first year of his work at the National Opera, has successfully danced Espada in *Don Quixote* and Prince in *The Nutcracker*, works now at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg; he has been already noticed in several successful debuts.

The creative path of the artist of the National Opera Anatoliy Bakhmat just commences; nevertheless, he is undoubtedly a very gifted dancer, what he has proved with his performances in the Oriental dance from *The Nut-*

*cracker* ballet, in *Bolero* from *Don Quixote*, in *The Youth* part in Maurice Ravel's *Boléro* (A. Shekera's creation). O. Bakhmat studied at the school-studio of P. Virskyi and envisaged to become a dancer of folk dance ensemble; and thanks to M. Mikheyev, who had discerned his choreographic ability, he joined the ballet troupe of the Ukrainian superior ballet.

*The greatest joy in life for me is giving, creating and doing good, carrying warmth, putting my heart and soul. The good always wins in fairy tales and I am sure that if you really believe in it, the tale becomes reality, the life! This is the great essence of all art in general and ballet in particular!*

*The Nutcracker is a Prince! Who will dispute?*

M. Mikheyev retains belief in fairy tale throughout all his life, though a number of trials have fallen to his lot to be endured. In his life, the artist always smiles; in classes and at rehearsals, he is always enthusiastic. M. Mikheyev never sits still: he shows exercises, makes comments in a very emotional way, and does not allow artists to relax. Even acting as a teacher, he continues to be an artist. By the way, recently in one of the New Year's *The Nutcracker* performances, M. Mikheyev has appeared on the stage again, this time in the part of counselor Dr. Stahlbaum, and successfully as usual!

So, the creative way of M. Mikheyev demonstrates the dialectics of talent, school and capacity for work in the development of an artist. The preparation of a ballet dancer becomes the foundation, without which it is impossible to identify his comprehensive capabilities, meanwhile the training has its own results being based only on endowments as well.

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## SUMMARY

The leading ballet soloist, now the trainer of the National Opera of Ukraine, the Honored Artist of Ukraine Mykola Mikheyev was born 52 years ago, on May 12, 1965.

M. Mikheyev had worked as a soloist dancer at the National Opera for more than 20 years and has created a gallery of brilliant scenic images of several types. The most remarkable roles of the soloist are the images of Prince Siegfried and Von Rothbart in *Swan Lake* by P. Tchaikovsky; José and Escamillo in *Carmen Suite* by G. Bizet – R. Shchedrin; Mice King and Prince in *The Nutcracker* by P. Tchaikovsky; Espada in *Don Quixote* by L. Mincus; Alain in *La fille mal gardée* by F. Garold; Ivan Tzarevych in *The Firebird* by I. Stravinsky; Grey Wolf and Cat in *The Sleeping Beauty* by P. Tchaikovsky; Viscount Ciliegino in *Chipollino* by K. Khachaturian, and others.

In 2007, M. Mikheyev was granted a diploma of the theatrical premium *The Kyiv Pectoral* in the nomination *For the Best Female Supporting Role Performance* for the role of Marcellina in *The Marriage of Figaro* by W.-A. Mozart.

In 2010, M. Mikheyev gave up his dancing carrier: since then he has been engaged as a ballet trainer at the Taras Shevchenko National Opera of Ukraine.

Among his disciples, there are some well known dancers, real ballet stars: the Honoured Artists of Ukraine A. Pisariev and O. Stoyanov, as well as several young talented ballet dancers.

In 2011, M. Mikheyev was granted the First Prize and Laureate's Title of the VIIth International S. Lyfar Competition as the best ballet trainer within this competition.

**Keywords:** ballet, Ukrainian ballet, National Opera of Ukraine, Mykola Mikheyev, creative individuality.