

Last Night I was in Moscow at the Bolshoi Ballet

by Phyllis Chesler



Of course, it was afternoon on the east coast but the performance was live from Moscow. The ballet, *Giselle*, was phenomenal; the dancers, prima ballerina Olga Smirnova and principal dancer Artemy Belyakov, were extraordinary. *Giselle* is an operatic, tragedy: An aristocrat dallies with a simple peasant girl who goes mad when she discovers his betrayal (he is either already married or engaged)—and so she dies, after which Giselle joins a corps of ghostly, similarly betrayed maidens who torment and destroy men like Albrecht, the nobleman. Although dead, Giselle's love still saves him. She forgives him, he is remorseful, the tale is very Christian.

Oh, how unexpectedly moving it was: the music, the choreography (Alexei Ratmansky's), all the dancers, the ballet

corps, the superb other-worldly acting, but above all, the dancing, the heart-stopping leaps, the beauty and power of such superb dancers to move an audience to tears and to a non-stop ovation.

And this from the girl who was thrown out of her ballet class when she was six years old. The teacher, a wise woman, told my mother that "this child wants to make speeches. She does not want to dance." Ah, but this child, grown, is utterly captivated by ballet at its best.