

Plisetskaya—Sublime Prima Ballerina, superb at 62

by Phyllis Chesler



I chanced on Beauty and Splendor quite by accident—there she was, dancing the dying swan and doing so with such grace and power, such fluidity and expressiveness, such dramatic dignity as Odette-Odile, the tragic swan as she dances her death, set to Camille Saint-Saens's soaring, mournful music. I am describing the Prima Ballerina assoluta of the Bolshoi, none other than Maya Plisetskaya, a Soviet era dancer, a Lithuanian Jew, who never defected but who appeared all over the world. Here, at the age of 62, Plisetskaya is stunning an audience in Boston. If this is how she could dance at 62, what was she like in her teens and twenties?