

## **‘Chroma’ helps bring Bolshoi back into fashion**

August 04, 2011

MOSCOW - A modern ballet with music by cult U.S. rock band The White Stripes has enthralled audiences at the Bolshoi Theatre and helped it shake off its conservative image ahead of a planned move back to its historic home.

“Chroma,” British choreographer Wayne McGregor’s 2006 exploration of the influence of mind over movement, is very different from the 19th-century narrative ballets that have traditionally made up much of the Bolshoi’s repertoire.

Set to a dissonant score of songs by The White Stripes, as well as original music by British composer Joby Talbot, “Chroma” demands from its 10 performers a new vocabulary of dance. As such, they frequently find themselves entwined in intricate couplings while the set, which resembles a gigantic white box, has an open back that changes color throughout.

Dancers eschew tutus and tights for thin drapes that merge with their bodies, and inhabit a quite different universe from the ritual formality seen in “The Sleeping Beauty” or “Don Quixote.”

However Moscow audiences have not been put off.

“For the Bolshoi Ballet, ‘Chroma’ is a breakthrough into a new era,” wrote Tatyana Kuznetsova, ballet critic of the Kommersant newspaper. “The troupe has jumped into the 21st century.”

McGregor, who came to Moscow to organize rehearsals, was astonished at the skill level of the dancers. He is now set to choreograph a new version of Stravinsky’s “Rite of Spring” for the Bolshoi in 2013.

“It’s a fantastic time for the Bolshoi to be experimenting with very modern choreography,” he said. “They have these incredible dancers who can really do anything, so why not explore it?”

“The dancers have great proportions, amazing limbs and they can do

extraordinary things with their bodies - they have a real kind of elasticity, which is something that I really love.”

Artem Ovcharenko, one of the soloists in *Chroma*, said: “You hear the first chords of that music standing in the wings [and] you start to burn. You want to get on stage and dance to this.”

The success of “*Chroma*” has come at a crucial time for the Bolshoi company, which has in recent years been criticized for being straight-jacketed by its own traditions.

On October 28 the troupe will resume performances at its former home, which closed in July 2005 for urgent restoration work, the completion of which has been delayed by one year.

In the interim, the company has performed at its New Stage theater nearby, although the smaller proportions have frustrated some of its stars.

The Bolshoi Ballet, which the authoritarian Yuri Grigorovich ran for three decades from its Soviet heyday until 1995, has experienced a rocky patch since the 2008 departure of director Alexei Ratmansky, who served as a modernizing force.

Ratmansky allegedly left because he fell out with the pro-Grigorovich old guard, and the company appeared to tread water after his departure. This year a top candidate to become the new artistic director became embroiled in a dark campaign to smear him using pornographic images.

But the Bolshoi then scored a coup by appointing former dancer Sergei Filin as ballet director. Filin earlier turned Moscow’s Stanislavsky Musical Theatre into a rival of its more famous counterpart by promoting innovative dance performances.

The one-act “*Chroma*” is coupled in an evening of dance with the 1978 “*Symphony of Psalms*” by Jiri Kylian, another new Bolshoi acquisition, and “*Rubies*,” by George Balanchine.

AFP



