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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Swan Lake

Hungarian State Opera, 25.04.2026 [ENA]

At the Hungarian State Opera, Swan Lake emerges as a performance of exceptional beauty, technical discipline, and emotional refinement. The production reminds us why Tchaikovsky's masterpiece remains the supreme test of classical ballet: it demands not only immaculate classical line and precision, but also atmospheric sensitivity, psychological nuance, and the ability to sustain a long dramatic arc without ever losing poetic tension.

What is most striking here is the production's commitment to style. The dancers move with a clarity that honors the architecture of the choreography, yet nothing feels rigid or mechanical. The corps de ballet, in particular, creates the visual splendor that Swan Lake requires: the famous white acts unfold with serene unity, each line balanced, each gesture cleanly articulated, each formation shaped with elegant musicality. There is a real sense of ensemble intelligence, which is crucial in this ballet, because the work's emotional power depends as much on collective presence as on star individuality.

The role of Odette/Odile remains one of the great dual challenges in the repertory, and this performance treats it with exceptional seriousness. Odette must be fragile without becoming weak, mysterious without becoming vague; Odile must dazzle without becoming merely showy. The ballerina in the leading role meets both demands with admirable control. As Odette, she conveys a haunting inwardness, her arms drawing the air with lyrical delicacy, her upper body soft and responsive to Tchaikovsky's sighing phrases. As Odile, she transforms completely: sharper, brighter, more controlled, and thrillingly self-assured. The contrast between the two characters is not simply visual; it is dramatic, and that makes the evening far more compelling.

Equally impressive is the Prince Siegfried, who brings nobility and melancholy to a role that can sometimes seem passive. Here, the character feels deeply human: youthful, searching, and vulnerable to illusion. His dancing is clean and expansive, but more importantly, he projects the emotional bewilderment that lies at the heart of the ballet. The prince's journey is not just a sequence of formal acts; it becomes a tragic process of emotional awakening. That clarity of characterization gives the performance unusual depth.

The supporting roles are also handled with care. The court scenes have energy without clutter, the character dances are sharply observed, and the production avoids the common pitfall of treating the divertissements as decorative interruptions. Instead, they are integrated into the larger dramatic flow, giving the ballet a

**Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency**

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

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sense of social texture and ceremonial elegance. This is one of the production's great virtues: it understands that Swan Lake is both intimate and public, personal and ceremonial, dreamlike and courtly.

Musically, Tchaikovsky's score receives the kind of orchestral attention it absolutely requires. The conductor shapes the music with flexibility and drive, allowing the dancers room for phrasing while preserving the score's cumulative tension. The famous themes are never over-emphasized; rather, they emerge naturally from the musical fabric, which lets the ballet retain its emotional freshness. The slow passages feel suspended and poetic, while the larger climaxes arrive with real power. That balance between lyricism and sweep is essential to making Swan Lake feel alive rather than merely familiar.

The production design also deserves praise for its atmospheric intelligence. The lake scenes have a cool, nocturnal beauty, while the palace scenes possess a richer, more ceremonial grandeur. The visual contrast between these worlds helps clarify the ballet's central opposition between reality and enchantment, social duty and inner longing. Yet the design never overwhelms the choreography; it supports the dancing rather than competing with it. That restraint is a mark of confidence and taste.

What makes this Swan Lake especially successful is that it never loses sight of the ballet's emotional core. Beneath the virtuosity, glittering ensembles, and the iconic imagery, it remains a story of innocence, betrayal, longing, and irrevocable loss. The performance allows these themes to breathe. By the final moments, the tragedy feels earned, not imposed, and the emotional impact is all the stronger for that honesty. In the Hungarian State Opera's hands, Swan Lake becomes not merely a beloved classic, but a living work of art—graceful, deeply musical, and dramatically persuasive. It is the kind of ballet evening that satisfies both the connoisseur and the newcomer: technically impressive, visually beautiful, and emotionally affective.

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Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
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