

# Ballet combines 'Russian spirit and Spanish passion'



Photo provided

The Russian National Ballet Theatre will dance composer Leon Minkus' adaptation of "Don Quixote" on Saturday at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.

Russian National Ballet Theatre to perform 'Don Quixote' at LMC's Mendel Center

By **JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO**  
HP Features Writer

**BENTON HARBOR** — Don Quixote, the Spanish nobleman with a penchant for chivalry, started out as an early 17th century novel by Miguel de Cervantes. His exploits have since inspired multiple spin-offs and incarnations.

The Russian National Ballet Theatre will dance composer Leon Minkus' adaptation of the tale Saturday at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.

"Don Quixote" will be performed in the classic Russian style, combining modern ballet elements from around the world in this retelling of a story that focuses on battling danger, both real and imagined.

"The story of 'Don Quixote' is timeless," Alexander Daev, ballet master

## IF YOU GO

**What:** The Russian National Ballet Theatre presents "Don Quixote"

**When:** 4 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

**How much:** \$34-\$45

**Contact:** 927-1221 or [www.lmcmainstage.org](http://www.lmcmainstage.org)

and assistant artistic director for the Russian National Ballet Theatre, says through a Russian-to-English translator. "Its universal themes of love, money, happiness, strife and madness are as relevant to the human spirit today as they

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were when the ballet was created.”

Daev, who has danced the role of love-struck Basilio a number of times but will be assisting in directing this specific production, adds that this particular staging brings a lightheartedness to the classical ballet, making it a favorite among dancers.

“The most compelling thing about the story is that it is not serious,” Daev says. “Classical ballets are not usually as light and funny as ‘Don Quixote.’ Everyone has fun with it, the dancers and audience alike.”

The ballet, based on episodes from Cervantes’ original book, published in two volumes in 1605 and 1615, had its world premiere at Moscow’s Bolshoi Theatre in 1869. It is set in Barcelona and that Spanish influence is evident throughout – from the costumes to the music to the set design.

“With Russian spirit and Spanish passion, the combination works beautifully,” Daev says. “Part of the standard Russian classical ballet training is to learn different forms of character dancing, which includes basic steps from Spanish dancing. The Spanish style is so distinctive that when we put on our costumes, add our fans and the music plays, we



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**ALEXANDER DAEV**

Ballet master and assistant artistic director for the Russian National Ballet Theatre

naturally dance the steps.”

The story begins as aging nobleman Don Quixote, who is absorbed with tales of chivalry, transforms his servant, Sancho, into a trusty squire to save distressed damsel Dulcinea, whose image Quixote conjured in his dreams.

The opening scene has Quixote and Sancho mingling with people in a market square. Among them are Kitri, the daughter of innkeeper Lorenzo, and her lover, Basilio. When Lorenzo arrives he introduces the old, rich Camacho as the husband he has chosen for his daughter. Kitri and Basilio are steadfast in their commitment to each other, though, and Quixote, who believes Kitri to be Dulcinea, intervenes to help them flee. A hilarious quest ensues that finds Quixote leading a charge against imaginary enemies, fighting invisible rivals, battling puppets and even dueling with a windmill.

“My favorite role is Basilio because he reminds me of myself as a younger man,” Daev says. “Basilio

has no money. Kitri’s poor father wants her to marry a man with money. All are full of fire and love, just like the story of young people today.”

The Russian National Ballet Theatre was founded in Moscow in the late 1980s at the height of perestroika’s transitional period when many of the great dancers and choreographers of the Soviet Union’s institutions were exercising their creative freedom by starting new companies.

Since 1994, the company has been directed by Elena Radchenko, a former Bolshoi ballet prima ballerina, whose mission of preserving Russia’s rich ballet tradition and sharing it with a worldwide audience is reflected in a repertory that features the full works of famed choreographer Marius Petipa, including “Swan Lake,” which Russian National Ballet Theatre performed in 2013 at LMC.

The Benton Harbor production of “Don Quixote” features Dmitry Romanov as Don Quixote; Aleksandra Krukova as Kitri; Aza-

mat Askarov as Basilio; Dmitry Kholodniy as Sancho; Evgeniy Rudakov as Lorenzo; Anton Baglikov as Camacho; along with a supporting troupe of dancers.

“‘Don Quixote’ is part of the classical ballet heritage, but is not as well known to the general public as are other classical ballets, which makes it special,” Daev says. “Our version is a small part of Cervantes’ story. Besides Leon Minkus’ music, there are also some parts in it composed by Cesar Pugni. Also, Yuri Vetrov, a former Bolshoi dancer who danced with our founder Sergey Radchenko, did some of the staging for this performance. It is a pleasant change for us from other more regularly presented ballets. It makes everyone feel good. We enjoy dancing it and the audience always loves it.”

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