

## NEWS

For immediate release

# CUBA FLIGHT OF FANCY

## MONTRÉAL PREMIÈRE THE NATIONAL BALLET OF CUBA

### in the apotheosis of romantic ballet : *Giselle*

## A VOYAGE WITH LES GRANDS BALLETS

**Montréal, January 18, 2011** – An exceptional company comes to Montréal! Famed for its splendid staging of the classical ballet repertory, the National Ballet of Cuba under its General Director, Alicia Alonso, will perform for just three nights at the invitation of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal. Since the Cuban company has performed in Canada only once before in its history (in Hamilton), this appearance in Montréal is a truly rare event. *Giselle* is a masterpiece of the classical ballet repertory – a work to entice one and all. This work of pure romance will be presented at the **Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier** of Place des Arts on **February 17, 18 and 19, 2011**.

### ***Giselle***

Dancers and choreographers have found inspiration in *Giselle* for more than 150 years. Giselle, an innocent country girl, is seduced by Albrecht, a prince who conceals both his rank and his betrothal to another woman. When Hilarion, a local huntsman who secretly loves Giselle, reveals the prince's identity, Giselle goes mad and dies. Albrecht and Hilarion visit her resting place in a forest haunted by the Wilis – young women who died of broken hearts after their fiancés abandoned them on their wedding day. The merciless Queen Myrtha, who reigns over the Wilis, condemns the men to dance until they die of exhaustion. Giselle appears from the grave as a Wili in the hope that her eternal love for Albrecht will save him from the queen's death sentence. Albrecht is saved only when dawn breaks, forcing the Wilis to return to their graves.

Alicia Alonso staged *Giselle* in 1948, following the original 1841 choreography by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot to the music of Adolphe Adam. The story by Théophile Gautier, Vernoy de St. Georges and Coralli was inspired by Heinrich Heine's tale based on a popular German legend.

The National Ballet of Cuba's association with *Giselle* began even before Alicia Alonso founded the company in 1948. Madame Alonso, then with the American Ballet Theatre, was called on unexpectedly to perform the title role for the first time at the Metropolitan Opera in New York on November 2, 1943. Her performance followed a period of convalescence during which she was able to rehearse the steps only in her mind. Her *Giselle* became the standard by which the role was judged, especially Act Two, in which the betrayed country girl becomes an otherworldly spirit and "dancing soul", performing as though weightless. On a historical note, Madame Alonso interpreted *Giselle* in Anton Dolin's staging at Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier in 1967 with Azari Plisetski as Albrecht. The two appeared as guest artists of Les Grands Ballets. Nine years earlier, she had left New York to take up permanent residence in her native Cuba. A number of her admirers from New York came to Montréal just to see the "prima ballerina assoluta" perform again.



Photo: Haegeman



Madame Alonso's choreography for *Giselle* achieves a new poetic dimension. The story narrative is tightly linked with the choreography so that the two acts meld dramatically in a homogeneous style. Although Madame Alonso kept the principal roles largely intact, she made substantial changes to the choreography of the corps de ballet.

Madame Alonso's version of *Giselle* along with her interpretation of the title role was awarded the Grand Prix de la Ville de Paris in 1966. Her version entered the repertory of the Teatro Colón ballet in Buenos Aires in 1958, the Ballet del Teatro de Bellas Artes de Mexico in 1976, the Vienna Opera Ballet in 1980, the Ballet of the San Carlo Theatre of Naples in 1981 and the Slovak National Ballet in 1989. From 1972 to 1986, it was the version performed at the Ballet de l'Opéra de Paris. "The *Giselle* of the National Ballet of Cuba is simply one of the most beautiful anywhere in the world." – *The New York Times*. "A choreographic lesson in Romanticism." – *Le Monde*, Paris.

### **The National Ballet of Cuba**

One of the best dance companies on the international scene, the National Ballet of Cuba has achieved legendary fame. From the outset, it has embraced the classical ballet repertory as well as contemporary creative trends while at the same time maintaining its Hispanic-American culture. The company's repertory includes the great classic ballets (*Coppelia*, *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*), works from Diaghilev's Ballets Russes (*Petroushka*, *Afternoon of a Faun*), works by George Balanchine and creations of young Cuban and foreign choreographers. The National Ballet of Cuba's school, which opened in 1950, is a breeding ground for young talent. The company has also made numerous tours in Europe, Asia and North America. "This is a company capable of dancing the romantic style, from fingers to points, and this is, undoubtedly, a rarity and something marvellous." – *The Washington Post*.

### **Alicia Alonso**

Alicia Alonso's remarkable character, both as a choreographer and a star dancer, is indissolubly part of her company and its unsurpassed technical prowess. Madame Alonso began her dance training in Cuba, and then studied in New York with several renowned teachers at the School of American Ballet. After her professional debut on Broadway in 1938, she joined the American Ballet Caravan, an important precursor of the New York City Ballet. In 1943, she began her brilliant career at the Ballet Theatre (later the American Ballet Theatre), where she performed the great classical and romantic roles. She worked alongside George Balanchine, Michel Fokine, Léonide Massine, Bronislava Nijinska, Antony Tudor, Jerome Robbins and Agnes de Mille. In 1948, she founded the Ballet Alicia Alonso in Havana, which would become the National Ballet of Cuba. She divided her time between the American Ballet Theater and her own company until 1959, when the Cuban government officially began giving her company support. Madame Alonso gained further fame for her versions of the great classic ballets *Giselle*, *La Fille Mal Gardée* and *Sleeping Beauty*, which entered the repertory of many world's major ballet companies.

## ***Giselle***

**by Alicia Alonso**

performed by the National Ballet of Cuba

on February 17, 18 at 8 p.m. and February 19, 2011, at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier of Place des Arts

### **Pre-show talks**

Pre-show talks will take place from 1:00 to 1:30 p.m. and 7 to 7:30 p.m. at Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier prior to each performance.

### **Learn about subscriptions**

For information on subscription rates and group packages as well as their benefits, call **514 849-0269**, consult the season brochure or visit **grandsballets.com** where you will also find information on programs, the company and its dancers. You can also subscribe on line. Individual tickets are available at Place des Arts as of September 2010. Box office: **514 842-2112** / **www.laplacedesarts.com**.

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