

# The Eifman

By Katia Bachko

Boris Eifman celebrates  
30 years with his company.

Whatever preconceived notions you may have about Russian ballet and Russian ballet dancers, Boris Eifman will simultaneously confirm and shatter them. As the founder and artistic director of the Eifman Ballet of St. Petersburg, Eifman draws on the rich Russian ballet tradition, while creating a style that is all his own. His dancers have the famed, flawless technique you expect, but they also deliver charged dramatic performances. His ballets center on historical and literary figures, but he exposes their perversions and demons, rather than glorifying them. In *Red Giselle*, Eifman captures the emotional anguish of ballerina Olga Spessivtseva, while in *Tchaikovsky* the legendary composer is portrayed on his deathbed.

This year, the company celebrates its 30th anniversary with an American tour and a new ballet, *The Seagull*. Based on the play by Anton Chekhov about the tangled romantic web between theater actors, the ballet is set to music by Sergei Rachmaninoff. From early March to late April, the troupe will perform in California, Minnesota, New York, Illinois and Massachusetts. In NYC, Eifman will also appear at the premiere of Alexander Gutman's documentary *Boris Eifman: Work in Progress* at the Directors Guild Theater April 3 and 6. Before traveling abroad, the choreographer spoke to *Pointe* this January from his apartment in St. Petersburg to accept our congratulations, reflect on his achievements and tell us what to expect in the future.

**Happy anniversary! Did you ever expect that you might one day celebrate such an occasion?**

When I created this troupe, I didn't think about such an anniversary. At that time, I only thought about getting an opportunity to realize my ideas and to have a chance to work creatively every day. Now, of course, time has flown by very quickly, and it was filled with political, artistic and financial obstacles that had to be overcome. But I am happy not only that we are marking this anniversary, but that we are celebrating it artistically. We have created a

Valeriy Baranovsky

# Experience



Dimitry Fisher in *The Seagull*



Don Juan

new ballet, *The Seagull*, which is vivid proof that our company is a living, artistic organism that has spent 30 years in the constant pursuit of new ideas.

**For your new work, why did you choose Chekhov's *The Seagull*?**

I was always drawn to this play because it contains all the timeless problems of the theater, be it dramatic or ballet. It contains the problems that always concern artistic people. These are the problems of new forms of art and old ones, of generations in art and the transition between these generations. These problems interested Chekhov more than 100 years ago, and these problems have also affected the ballet. Today, they are remarkably relevant to me and my dancers, and we recognize them as closely familiar topics, which we live through and worry about. We created a ballet about Chekhov's characters and about artists in general, and also about ourselves.

**So is this really Chekhov's *Seagull* or Eifman's *Seagull*?**

I think this is *The Seagull* of our company, because we have taken it into a different sphere. In this world, Chekhov's text is gone, but there is a choreographic text. The emotions that drive Chekhov's characters also drive the characters in my ballet, but most importantly we have created our own language, so this is a completely separate work that is inspired by Chekhov's play.

**For those who may not be familiar with the play, what will they take away from the production?**

Audiences will see that that they are watching a ballet production where they can understand everything. Those who don't know Chekhov's play won't be comparing. They will be immersed in the world of this ballet, of these characters and their problems and struggles. And they'll take away their own emotional impression of this absolutely independent work of art. For those who know the play, I would advise that they not compare, but simply immerse themselves in this new world in which they will find an understanding of the philosophy contained in this ballet.

**For many people who see your ballets in America and around the world, you may represent their only interaction with contemporary Russian culture. What does this mean to you?**

I think our company does represent the Russian ballet in the 21st century. In our company you can very clearly see the evolution and develop-



Hamlet



Don Quixote

Photos: Dmitry Sobolev, except where noted

**“In our company you can very clearly see the evolution and development of the traditions that exist in Russian ballet.” —BORIS EIFMAN**

ment of the traditions that exist in Russian ballet. We not only respect these traditions but also build on them, and this heritage from Petipa and Grigorovich is visible to the naked eye. This is invaluable because the best qualities of Russian ballet are preserved in our company, but also they take on a modern form. This is truly a Russian ballet company at the beginning of the 21st century, which does not resemble any other company in the world. And this makes it most valuable.

**Could you describe how your company and your style have changed over the past 30 years?**

Our company is always moving forward and creating new works. We hope that each ballet will be different from the previous one. The company definitely has a recognizable style, but at the same time, we are trying to grow and not repeat ourselves. No one knows what awaits us tomorrow and what new ideas and new forms we will pursue. There is always the unexpected and the inclination toward innovation.

**What are your plans for the next 30 years?**

As the saying goes, “Man proposes, God disposes.” I won’t guess what the future holds. We will always engage in artistic pursuit, striving toward the artistic ideas that we have been reaching for during the lifetime of the company.

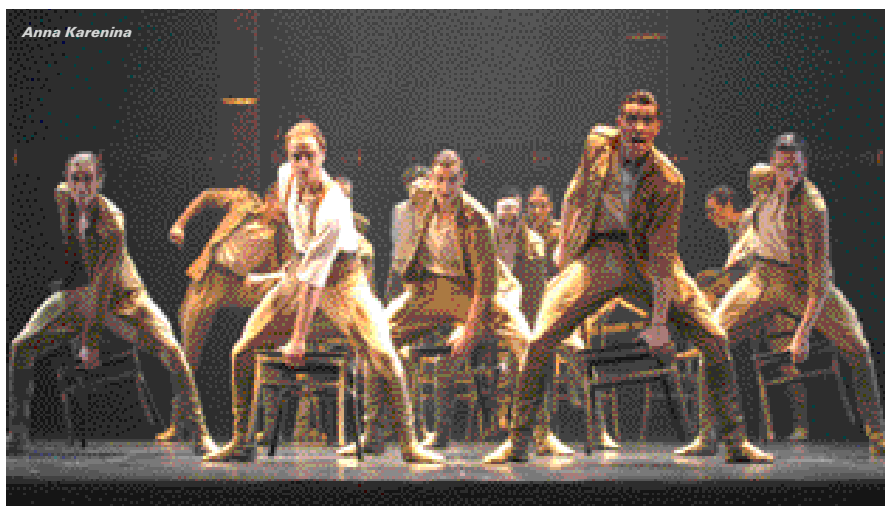
**How do you feel that the political and social atmosphere in St. Petersburg influences your work and your company?**

I am happy that my company was founded in St. Petersburg and that we are part of this cultural scene. We are spiritually nourished by it. We feel partly that our company belongs to the world, a company that was created for the world’s audiences. We do not limit ourselves to Russian audiences. We understand the responsibility and the mission to be a company for the world. This is a very dear and important feeling to us. When we create a work, we always consider our American, European and Asian viewers. We always strive for our contact with these audiences to be very constant and alive. As we prepare for our tour to the United States, we are excited to meet our favorite American audiences. I am a n x i o u s because we are bringing a new, unknown ballet, and I hope very much that audiences will u n d e r s t a n d and appreciate this ballet. □



Maria Abashova in *The Seagull*

Yury Belinsky



*Anna Karenina*