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DANCE | For Injured Bolshoi Director, a Time to Judge

For Injured Bolshoi Director, a Time to Judge Sergei Filin Discusses His Recovery From an Attack

By MICHAEL COOPER APRIL 8, 2014



Sergei Filin at the N.Y.U. Skirball Center for Performing Arts, where he was a judge of the Youth America Grand Prix dance competition. Ruby Washington/The New York Times

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Sergei Filin, the artistic director of the [Bolshoi Ballet](#) who was partly blinded last year in a brutal acid attack that stunned the dance world, paused for some eye drops then put on his brown-tinted wraparound sunglasses before making his way to the theater.

There he took his seat as one of the judges of the Youth America Grand Prix dance competition on Monday afternoon at the N.Y.U. Skirball Center for the Performing Arts, where he was greeted with the kind of ovation — complete with hoots and hollers — that is more commonly given on such occasions to a precocious young dancer's pirouettes than to a judge.

The lights dimmed, and Mr. Filin removed his dark glasses and began watching as boys 12 to 14 from all over the world danced, using a yellow pencil to fill out evaluation forms with 29 categories on their technique, their artistry and the general impressions they made.

Earlier that day, in a wide-ranging interview about his recovery, the scandal that rocked the Bolshoi and his goals for one of the world's most storied ballet companies, Mr. Filin, 43, said that while his eyesight was now good enough for him to judge, it remains extremely hampered.

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Sergei Filin, the Bolshoi's artistic director, in New York.
Ruby Washington/The New York Times

Mr. Filin said that the sight from his good eye, his left, fluctuates but hovers around 50 percent, and that his doctors are still working to try to save his right eye after 27 surgical procedures in Moscow and Germany. “We have great expectations and hopes that not only can the right eye be preserved, but that it will also gain some sight,” he said, through an interpreter.

Mr. Filin had reached one of the pinnacles of the dance world — artistic director of the Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow — when he became world famous for all the wrong reasons last year after a pair of attackers [threw acid in his face](#) on the night of Jan. 17, 2013. A disgruntled soloist with the company was [later convicted](#) of ordering the attack, which

pulled back the curtain on the festering atmosphere of bitter rivalries, factions and politics that had long plagued the Bolshoi.

Asked if the Bolshoi had begun to heal in the year since his attack, and since a slew of bitter charges and countercharges about everything from casting to pay surfaced in its aftermath, Mr. Filin said, “It’s primarily myself who has to heal, because I bore the main blow myself.”

“I think it’s not the Bolshoi Theater that needs some kind of remedy or healing,” he said. “I think it’s those people who were creating this atmosphere for all these months which finally resulted in this terrible attack. The theater itself is quite healthy.”

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But noting the “hatred and hostilities which precipitated the attack,” Mr. Filin expressed hope that the outrages of the last year could help strengthen the Bolshoi by clearing the air. “If my being the victim could help remedy the situation, I would say it’s a good result,” he said.

Mr. Filin lamented that the scandals had distracted people from the most important thing about the Bolshoi: the artistry of its dancers, and its attempts to preserve a rich heritage, including the works of Yuri Grigorovich, the Soviet-era choreographer who dominated the theater for decades and still oversees some productions there, and newer works by Alexei Ratmansky, a more recent former artistic director there who is now one of the world’s most sought-after choreographers.

“One of the major aims of the Bolshoi Ballet is to keep the right balance between the heritage — the heritage of the Soviet period, the heritage of what is called the golden age of Soviet Ballet and the classical versions of that period — and also to bring in works by outstanding contemporary choreographers,” Mr. Filin said.

Since the attack, he has divided his time between Germany, where he is receiving treatments, and Moscow. He went on tour with the Bolshoi earlier this year to Paris, where the company danced Mr. Ratmansky’s [“Lost Illusions,”](#) and to Norway, and said that he intends to accompany it to New York this summer when it plans to dance “Swan Lake,” “Don Quixote” and “Spartacus,” one of Mr. Grigorovich’s best-known works, at the [Lincoln Center Festival](#).

Under Mr. Filin, the Bolshoi has drawn dancers not just from its own school but from elsewhere in [Russia](#) and the world. He said that he was delighted with the way David Hallberg, who became the [first American star](#) to enlist permanently with the company, had become “a great Russian dancer” and a partner of Bolshoi stars, especially [Svetlana Zakharova](#).

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He praised many of the troupe's recent arrivals, including [Evgenia Obraztsova](#), a former dancer with the Mariinsky Ballet in St. Petersburg who joined the Bolshoi in 2012, and [Olga Smirnova](#), who joined the Bolshoi after graduating from the Vaganova Academy in St. Petersburg in 2011 — calling her “one of the most interesting, most unusual young talents in the world of ballet.”

Ms. Smirnova is scheduled to dance in New York on Thursday as part of a gala performance at the David H. Koch Theater for the 15th anniversary of [Youth America Grand Prix](#), a competition that awards scholarships to young dancers, and which was recently featured in the documentary film “First Position.” Mr. Filin is expected to participate in a discussion on Friday night before a [closing-night performance](#) featuring many prominent dancers.

As he left his first round of judging, Mr. Filin said that he thought the boys had danced well for their age. “The most important thing is they have a lot of desire and drive,” he said. “They are really, really driven.”

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