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Bolshoi Ballet Guest Lecture

As a former board member for 18 years of the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet, a student-professional dance company, I had the opportunity to work with talented dancers from around the world. One such person is Ilze Liepa, principal dancer for the Bolshoi Ballet and Russian movie actress. The Moscow Company has been heralded as the finest dance troupe in the world. Responding to her invitations, I attended dance classes and spoke to her colleagues at the Bolshoi Theatre about nutrition, strength training and back pain. In September of 1994, I also traveled to recently popularized Yekaterinburg, the City of Katherine The Great near Siberia. Remember the legendary Russian Czarist couple Nicholas and Alexandria? I held a similar discussion with their dance company, The State Ballet Theater.

First a little background. Ballet is revered in Russia. Government backing allows most dance companies to hold classes, rehearsals and performances in their own facilities. On the contrary, American dance companies struggle to exist, especially after 911's shifting of Federal funds for the performing arts to national security, as done especially during recessions. Most rent studios and theaters which adds to their already compromised financial situations. Owning their own theaters are privileges seldom realized.

In The Rehearsal

Before class the dancers greeted each with solemn nods to their fellow dancers and the dance captain, respectfully acknowledging their presence. Having been to many professional dance troupe rehearsals, it only took five minutes into their routines for me to realize that I was in the presence of some of the most talented dancers in the world. From the warm-up to the last sequence, high levels of concentration and intensity were visible in their faces and movements! At the end of the class, in spite of profuse perspiration, smiles were exchanged and the long-standing tradition of standing in line to shake the hand of the teacher was performed. Attending a Bolshoi dance class is a privilege given to few and well worth the nine hour flight. It is analogous to witnessing close-up a practice session of a professional football team during Superbowl week!

At The Lecture

My lecture/demonstration emphasized ballet techniques which can prevent foot, ankle, knee, hip, low back and neck injuries and remedies they can employ while

touring – advice I often convey to patients here. Ilze translated (I was most appreciative of her efforts. She is from a famous Russian ballet family headed by her father, Maurice, whose name is more recognized in Russia than Michael Jordan was in America!). Although she keeps a busy schedule of international performances, she found the time to make sure her colleagues got the most out of my talks. Afterward, the dancers expressed their gratitude with a short burst of applause and asked questions about their many injuries. Then, I was handed two best-seats-in-the-house tickets by Ilze for that night's performance and invited to visit her and her publicist (manager) backstage after the performance.

I have been treating dancers, and have come to know many, for years and know their aches and pains. Being a long-time ballet enthusiast and supporter, seeing the actual performances at times is not as exciting as attending classes and rehearsals. I am proud of the artists I have worked with and always look forward to their performances like a parent. I respect Bolshoi dancers greatly because they attain the highest possible level of expertise, sacrificing for many years with a single purpose, i.e. focusing on one form of dance and maintaining a high level of intensity throughout.

The Performance

The evening's performance was Casanova, which starred Russia's most famous ballerina, Ilze Liepa. One of the men I met in class earlier that day had danced the lead. I whispered to Ilze after the show that she made a great lover look like a little boy!

In Health,

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