



Los Angeles Ballet: "Giselle"

By Victoria Looseleaf

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Men. You can't live with 'em and you can't let 'em die. At least that's the thinking in *Giselle*, the Romantic gold standard of any traditional ballet company in which the heroine falls for the wrong man, goes insane, dies and is reborn as a Wilis, a vampire-like creature that takes revenge on her fraudulent beau, only to let him live in the end.

Los Angeles Ballet, the troupe co-directed by husband-and-wife team Thordal Christensen and Colleen Neary, showed its mettle by closing its fifth season with the beloved classic (production from Louisville Ballet), choreographically tweaked by Christensen after Coralli, Perrot, and Petipa.



Allyssa Bross and Christopher Revels in Act I of Los Angeles Ballet's *Giselle*. Photo by Reed Hutchinson. Courtesy LAB.

Was it spectacular? Not exactly. Was it heartfelt? Absolutely. Alyssa Bross, 19 and dancing the title role for the first time, was innocence incarnate, managing her Act I hops on pointe with requisite poise. Her mad scene was all wide-eyed incredulity—how could this prince disguised as a peasant betray me, poor village girl—while her frenzied turns morphed into a believable death-by-despair tableau set to the melodically familiar score of Adolfe Adam (alas, heard on tape).

As for that rapsallion Prince Albrecht, a dutiful Christopher Revels made up in ardor what he lacked in noble bearing, his partnering skills occasionally shaky. But after an unfortunate landing in the second act during which he looked fatigued, Revels bounced back, literally, launching a laudable series of hummingbird-like entrechats.

Giselle, with its coterie of jilted damsels in the moonlit graveyard act, must have a solid, though sylph-like corps in order to project the otherworldliness of the Romantic masterpiece. Happily, the females of Los Angeles Ballet did not disappoint: From their graceful unison footwork to their lovely held arm positions, these were eminently watchable Wilis. As Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis, Kate Highstrete was a no-nonsense study in nastiness.

Chohon Wespi-Tschopp, as Hilarion, made easy work of his intense, danced-to-death spins, while Allynne Noelle and guest artist Kenta Shimizu captivated in the Peasant Pas de Deux. Displaying chemistry and unfettered exuberance, the pair soared together and in their variations, Shimizu particularly commanding. Neary, as *Giselle*'s mother, Berthe, was in fine fret-and-stew mode, the mime aspect of the work enhanced in this staging. Also notable: Britta Lazenga as a haughty Bathilde, Albrecht's betrothed; and Christopher McDaniel as a most gallant peasant.

With *Giselle* now under its dance belt (as well as an increasingly impressive repertoire of Balanchine and recently-commissioned works), Los Angeles Ballet, at five years and counting, is gaining a much-needed, well, toehold, on the cultural landscape of this city. Bring on the tulle!