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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Living Legacies: Tradition in Motion

Vienna State Opera, 29.09.2026 [ENA]

The Vienna State Ballet's Living Legacies is an intelligently curated triple bill that treats ballet tradition not as a museum object but as a living, evolving language. Bringing together George Balanchine's Divertimento No. 15, Christopher Wheeldon's Within the Golden Hour and Frederick Ashton's Rhapsody, the programme traces several generations of classical and neoclassical choreography.

It reveals the distinctive musicality of each creator. Balanchine's Divertimento No. 15, set to Mozart, opens the evening with crystalline elegance. Its apparent refinement should not disguise its formidable technical demands: balances must remain poised, footwork articulate and transitions effortlessly musical. Balanchine turns classical vocabulary into visible counterpoint, allowing groups and individuals to emerge from the structure much as instrumental voices rise from Mozart's orchestral texture. Karinska's costumes complement this aesthetic beautifully, framing the dancers without overwhelming the choreography.

The Vienna ensemble responds with clarity and disciplined lightness. Particularly impressive is the dancers' ability to preserve individual character within Balanchine's exacting architecture. Occasionally one might wish for still greater daring—a stronger sense that speed and equilibrium are being negotiated at the edge of possibility—but the overall impression is one of polished sophistication.

Christopher Wheeldon's Within the Golden Hour changes the atmosphere completely. Created for San Francisco Ballet in 2008 and inspired by the light and golden colours of Gustav Klimt's paintings, the work unfolds to music by Ezio Bosso and Antonio Vivaldi. Jasper Conran's costumes and Peter Mumford's lighting envelop the stage in bronze, amber, ochre and fading rose: a painterly palette suggesting bodies caught in the final radiance before dusk.

Here, Wheeldon's choreography is at its most seductive. Three principal couples move through a fluid community of dancers, their encounters shifting between intimacy and separation. Classical positions soften into curved torsos, suspended lifts and intricate, interlacing arms. The dancers appear to paint the stage in real time, and the physical dialogue between the couples communicates tenderness without becoming sentimental. The work's beauty lies in its transience: formations bloom, dissolve and return in altered form, like light moving across a landscape.

Frederick Ashton's Rhapsody provides a brilliant finale. Set to Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody on a Theme of

Redaktioneller Programmdienst: European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

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Paganini, it combines aristocratic elegance with exhilarating virtuosity. Ashton's choreography, created around a dazzling central male role, demands speed, elevation and immaculate épaulement, while the surrounding ensemble creates a ceremonious frame for the soloist. Natalia Stewart's reconstructed costumes and Ashton's own stage design preserve the ballet's theatrical splendour, while Peter Teigen's lighting sharpens its jewel-like colours.

Under David Coleman's musical direction, the orchestra gives each ballet an appropriately distinct character: Mozartian transparency, contemporary lyricism and Rachmaninoff's sweeping romantic momentum. The programme's achievement lies in making these contrasting worlds feel interconnected. Balanchine purifies classicism, Wheeldon reshapes it into sensuous modern poetry, and Ashton crowns it with wit and bravura. Living Legacies is therefore more than an attractive gala programme. It demonstrates how choreographic inheritance survives: not through imitation, but through dancers who continually rediscover its possibilities. The result is an elegant, radiant and technically accomplished statement from a company impressive performance.

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Redaktioneller Programmdienst: European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
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