

Ovations pour in for new Swan Lake

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A *Swan Lake*, a new surrealist interpretation of the classic ballet, has proved to be a huge hit for the Norwegian National Ballet (*Nasjonalletten*) and its Swedish choreographer, Alexander Ekman. Staging the production in Oslo's state-of-the-art Opera House meant Ekman could transform the stage into an actual lake. The ballet is completely sold out, and a feature film based on it is in the works.



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A *Swan Lake*, the new interpretation of the classic ballet, has been a triumph for the Norwegian National Ballet (*Nasjonalletten*) and Swedish choreographer Alexander Ekman. The groundbreaking production turns the stage into a lake, with dancers splashing over it, and has attracted global interest. PHOTO: Erik Berg/Den Norske Opera and Ballett

Ekman worked with composer Mikael Karlsson. The show premiered on Saturday, and has attracted international ballet lovers to its sold out run, reported Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK). "If people expect the traditional *Swan Lake* they will be disappointed," said Ekman. "This is a new version which fulfills a function. It's about *Swan Lake* and time. This use of water is very new, something people have never seen before, so it draws attention."

The first act blends theatre, dialogue, humour and contemporary dance, set during the staging of the first *Swan Lake* production in 1877. It references Tchaikovsky's classic music and the original ballet's dances.

The second act is set 137 years later and the long-awaited lake scene is truly spectacular, wrote newspaper *Aftenposten's* reviewer Maren Ørstavik. The water is like a separate actor on stage, both limiting the dancers' movements and providing a whole new means of visual expression. "Ekman makes the water itself more than scenography, the ensemble dances with it, plays with it, splashes, throws punches and pours it around the scene," she wrote.

It's a surrealist production, and not much is recognizable from the classic. Ørstavik wrote that it successfully integrates dance, music, theater, technology and nature.

Film production

A *Swan Lake's* use of props and visual effects caught the attention of a Dutch film production company. "Alexander Ekman is very visual and uses a lot of humor in his pieces, which is unusual in contemporary dance," Adrienne Liron from 3 Minutes West told NRK. "It's going to look fantastic in the cinema."

In collaboration with NRK, the Dutch filmmakers will produce a feature length movie of Ekman's production. Filming will take place over four days in May. The Norwegian Opera has live-streamed some of its shows before, but it's the first time a National Ballet piece has been made into a film.

"We are always looking for visual productions, and thought this was very exciting," said director Jeff Tudor. "We are going to use a crane and film around the dancers and really show the spectacular water scenes. We have worked with Ekman and filmed two of his pieces previously in the Netherlands. They have sold very well. There has also been a big buzz in the ballet world around this production."

Norwegian Ballet Director Ingrid Lorentzen, a veteran dancer herself, said her counterparts have traveled from as far as Boston to see the performance. "It has been a specific goal for me to create flagship works for the National Ballet," she told NRK. "It's a great and positive surprise that this piece is already wanted around the world. That's probably because there is a very big interest in Alexander Ekman's productions, then there's the water, we have not seen that in *Swan Lake* before."

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