

*Rebecca Davis – Journey in Russia*  
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**The Ballet Stars of Russia:  
A Magical Night at The Theater**

In Russia, New Years is the most celebrated holiday of the year. However, my holiday present came on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2005, when I had the opportunity to attend one of the best dance performances I have ever seen in my entire life: *The Russian Ballet Evening* (Вечер Русского Балета) of *The Arts Square Festival* (Площадь Искусств). This was a once in a lifetime opportunity.

**The Arts Square Festival: Making Winter in St Petersburg a Little Brighter**

Every summer, St Petersburg is home to the world famous *White Nights Festival*, a carnival-style celebration of the days of 24-hour sunlight. Six years ago, the city decided to organize an opposite festival during the winter called *The Arts Square Festival*. It consists of classical music, ballet, and theater performances.

This year, the evening ballet concert was a collection of solos and pas-de-deux performed by some of the most famous ballet dancers in the entire world. The stars came from *The Bolshoi Ballet* (Moscow), *The Mariinsky Ballet* (St Petersburg), *The Royal Ballet* (UK), and *The Prague National Theater* (The Czech Republic). No question about it, this cast was outstanding, and the concert was destined to be one of the best nights in the theater.

**Who Gets To See The Best Dancers in The World?**

How was I lucky enough to see this concert featuring some of the most famous stars of ballet? The cheapest ticket was 900 rubles (about \$35US). No student discounts were available. If I was buying a theater ticket in the US, \$35 for a great ballet would be a bargain. (Just the online transaction fee is up to \$7.) However, my situation here is a little different. I am “rationing” my scholarship funds to pay for living expenses and tuition while trying to fit in as much theater-going as possible. Thus, the circumstances of the buying decision were complicated.

Yet, precisely here is where “my present” came in. This concert happened to be held at *The Mussorgsky Theater*, one of the three theaters where I am training. What is the significance of that? It means that I have backstage access to all performances – including access to one of the best performances of the year! But, of course, it is also a good idea to “be friends” with the coat check lady and the head usher of the theater. (Having friends in Russia never hurts.) In the end, I was able to see this amazing performance for free. (Yes, I had to stand for the duration of it, but it was worth it. I would have been on my feet applauding for most of the evening anyway.)

**On Stage: The Best Ballerina in The World – Ulyana Lopatkina (Ульяна Лопаткина)**

The highlight of the evening was the final solo performed by *Ulyana Lopatkina*. Some people would argue with me, but much of the ballet world considers Lopatkina to be the best ballerina in the world right now. She is famous for her portrayal of “The Dying Swan” from Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake*. She performed this piece at the concert.

I could try to describe the technical perfection of Lopatkina’s movements and the sensitivity of her dramatic interpretation, but my words would not do her justice. Instead, it is better to come to Russia and see Lopatkina perform in person. And, as my special New Year’s present to you, I will show you the backstage entrance from The Mussorgsky Theater!