

Romantic debut for Swan Lake



By [Debbie Hathway](#)

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Cape Town City Ballet (CTCB) opens its Swan Lake season on Saturday with Laura Bösenberg in the dual roles of Odette/Odile and Thomas Thorne as Prince Siegfried. In the alternate casts, Daniel Szybkowski partners Angela Hansford (Odette) and Kim Vieira (Odile) while Jesse Milligan partners Kirstel Jensen (Odette) and Mami Fujii (Odile). Star performances are expected from The Royal Ballet guest artists, first soloist Hikaru Kobayashi and principal Federico Bonelli, who appear only twice at the end of the season before swanning off to London to dance the lead roles in *The Sleeping Beauty*.

Swan Lake is the most famous of classical ballets and portrays the story of Odette, who is turned into a swan by the evil sorcerer, Von Rothbart. His spell can only be broken by true love. Odette finds it in Prince Siegfried, but he's tricked into falling in love with Odile, Von Rothbart's daughter. The ending varies depending on the company performing it.



"You have to have a certain sensitivity for this kind of storytelling," says Bonelli. A principal with the company since 2003, he's well versed in the role of Prince Siegfried, but he's had to apply some choreographic and dramatic changes for this season. The Royal Ballet production casts the prince as a bit of a playboy in the first act, but CTCB's version is melancholic. "There's something missing in his life. He doesn't want to get married until he finds the right person," says Bonelli. "What's missing is the swan - the idea of a woman - when he sees her, he falls in love."

Here, the spell is broken

He likes the challenge of "playing it slightly differently. We are dancers but we like to think we are actors. In London the ballet ends in tragedy (they both jump off a cliff), but here the spell is broken and they live happily after."

Both he and his wife, Kobayashi, have developed great classical technique, but they would like to be noted for their dramatic interpretation. "How we tell the story is what sets dancers apart from, let's say, an artistic gymnast. We have a very strong technical and physical element, but at the same time we're telling a story, and communicating emotions," he says.

This season of Swan Lake heralds their debut as a partnership and Kobayashi's first time dancing the full-length ballet. They're excited and their passion for each other and for their craft could blow audiences away. "We understand each other," says Kobayashi. "We talk a lot, but some things we don't need to explain. We sense it and that's fantastic."

Bonelli says it's easy to work together. "I love Hikaru but I have to be careful. Because I always want the best for her and for us, I have the tendency to be a bit of a perfectionist and that never helps when you work. If it doesn't work perfectly today, we'll do it tomorrow, and we'll get it there by the performance."

He says she is his most trusted coach. "If I can't do something, or if I have a doubt, I ask her to have a look - and she's usually right."



Trained in Japan

Kobayashi fell in love with ballet at the age of three, when she watched Swan Lake on television. She trained in Japan before joining the Paris Opera Ballet School while Bonelli trained at the Turin Dance Academy, under Italian and Cuban teachers.

They met while working at Zürich Ballet. They both moved to Dutch National Ballet before joining The Royal Ballet in 2003.

Kobayashi guest starred with Cape Town City Ballet in Raymonda in 2012 and is happy to be back in the Mother City during the company's 80th birthday celebrations. "I've been watching many videos to prepare for this role, but I like Natalia Makarova's white swan interpretation," she says. "I take in what I like in the black swan from different ballerinas."

She says the delicacy and innocence required for the white swan poses the biggest challenge: "She is half-human, half-swan. This is very difficult [to portray]." However, her training at The Royal Ballet has taught her to bring more drama to her performance, a greater expression of movement. "England is theatre country," she says. "They want to see real characters."

Following the correct diet is also part of the couple's preparation. "You have to keep carbohydrates and minerals in your body constantly. Also sugar, otherwise you can't finish the ballet," says Kobayashi. "Then we rest and make sure we get

enough sleep." They snack during the day and drink plenty of fluids, including a sports drink used by Olympic athletes. "If you're burning a lot of calories, you need to consume a lot of calories. It's about balance," says Bonelli.

Swan Lake is on at the Artscape Opera House from 5 to 20 April. Tchaikovsky's incredible score will be played by the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra, under the baton of Graham Scott, at all except one performance on 13 April. Book at [Computicket](#) on 0861 915 8000 or Artscape Dial-a-Seat on +27 (0)21 421 7695. Tickets range from R100 to R320.

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