

# Russian Ballet Master in the Philippines

A Russian Ballet Master in the Philippines : Promoting the  
Arts Through Dance

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A group of young girls are sitting on the floor, some stretching, some putting on their toe shoes. One girl says, "Papa, just give us a step, then we'll do it." They call him papa as they discuss ideas on how to pose for the photo shoot. "You know, all my dancers, they call me papa," says Russian ballet master Anatoly Panaskuyov. "It's nice because they are my children. I love them. I love everybody. If you are working with me, if you dance with me, if you come for my training... For me, everybody is important."

Anatoly Panaskuyov first came to Manila in 1995. It was his Russian friend, Valentina Kozlova, the principal dancer of the New York City Ballet at that time, who convinced him to come. Valentina had just returned from the Philippines where she danced *Swan Lake* with Ballet Philippines. Valentina informed him that Ballet Philippines was looking for a Russian teacher for the company.

"I didn't know the country, the people of the Philippines," Panaskuyov recalls. "I was staying in New York. I didn't like to come because I came from Russia (and was) planning to work in New York. I said 'no.' The second time, again I said 'no.' After the third time, Valentina told me, 'Ok you go. Just work there one year, then you come back.'" He went, thinking he would stay

only for one year. But he has been here now for over 15 years.

"I like the country (and it has a) nice climate for me," he says. "Actually, I'm a fan of summer, not really winter. Every time I go to Russia for vacation, I go during summer time, in June and July." He goes for vacation every other year "because I have only one sister in Russia," he explains. "My daughter is here. She came to the Philippines six years ago. She was a model. She had many friends from show biz. She met a Filipino guy." They now live in Tagaytay with their two children. "They are beautiful, my grandchildren," Panaskuyov says. Unfortunately, he does not get to see them as often as he'd like to. Even on weekends he has shows.

"Everybody knows ballet is a discipline," Panaskuyov says. "It looks easy when the dancers dance, but it's a very hard job. Every day (it's the) same training. Every month, for how many years? For those who want to dance ballet they can start "at least seven or eight years old, not lower," says Panaskuyov. He started at eight years old. When he was 10 years old, he auditioned for the Bolshoi Ballet when the company was looking for someone to play the role of a boy in the taverna of Kitri's father in *Don Quijote*, and he was accepted.

"I saw the beautiful principal dancers of Bolshoi," he relates. "I wanted to dance like them."

He finished his professional training when he was 19 years old. Part of his experience was a tour in the US. After working with Bolshoi Ballet for three years, Theatre Stanislavski invited him to be a demi-soloist. He danced there for seven years. He then had a chance to dance as soloist with the Moscow Classical Ballet, the last company where he danced for 15 years.

Panaskuyov believes that it's important for a company to have a school. "First, it helps the company with dancers for the future. They will grow here," he says. "It also helps the company financially."

"You first need to be a dancer to be a good teacher," Panaskuyov says. "If you don't know, don't teach." But he recognizes that there can be some dancers who are stars but cannot teach. On the other hand, there can be dancers who "dance ordinary roles but become good teachers," he says adding, "It's natural, plus it's your passion. You have to love and know your job."

In teaching students, Panaskuyov says, "I want to give them what I know. I want to give them more information about ballet:



how to dance, how to move. I want to teach movements, combinations." He says some teachers teach only basic combinations, simple combinations that dancers may find boring. In his case, he is constantly thinking of new combinations. Before going to sleep at night, he says, he thinks of his next class, of the next combination. "I want a good class that people will enjoy."

He finds satisfaction when he sees his students grow. "Students grow during performances," he says, as it was his experience when he was exposed to the Bolshoi Ballet as a young boy. He believes that students should be given the opportunity to dance with a professional company and with principal dancers.

From the point of view of the audience, he says, "It's easy to appreciate ballet. If it's a really good show—a good story ballet, good quality dancers—you can always remember. You watch ballet one time, you always try to come again." Unfortunately, Panaskuyov observes, "The mentality of Filipinos here is that ballet is for rich people only. For me, you have to destroy this mentality."

There are many ways to make ballet more accessible. Prices of tickets vary. There are discounts for students. "If you really want to know ballet, you have to watch ballet," says Panaskuyov. "Just go. Watch." □