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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Giselle

Wiener Staatsoper, 29.04.2026 [ENA]

At the Vienna State Opera, Giselle remains one of the most moving expressions of Romantic ballet, and this production confirms once again why the work continues to hold such a central place in the repertory. Few ballets combine poetry, dramatic purity, and technical refinement with such effortless authority. What makes Giselle endure is not only its famous plot of love, betrayal, madness, and redemption, but also the extraordinary way it transforms those emotions into movement that seems to float between earthly life and the supernatural. At its best, the ballet feels less like a performance than a vision, and this staging clearly understands that delicate balance.

The first act depends on freshness, innocence, and dramatic spontaneity, and here the ballet's success lies in how vividly the village world is established before the tragedy strikes. The choreography must appear natural, almost conversational, while still maintaining classical precision. When done well, that combination creates the emotional foundation on which the whole ballet rests. The character of Giselle is especially crucial: she must seem open-hearted, impulsive, and genuinely alive to the joy of dancing, yet never merely naïve. Her descent into madness only has power if the audience has already felt her radiance.

In a strong performance, the role becomes a study in vulnerability rather than sentimentality, and that is precisely what gives the ballet its tragic weight. Albrecht, too, must be more than a handsome deceiver. He is a role that depends on refinement and control, but also on emotional contradiction. The best interpreters of the part suggest both privilege and remorse, both seduction and unease. The audience must believe that his love for Giselle is real enough to make the betrayal heartbreaking. When that tension is present, the first act acquires real dramatic force. Hilarion's confrontation with Albrecht, Bathilde's entrance, and Giselle's final collapse all come into sharper focus, creating an emotional chain that feels inevitable.

The second act is where Giselle becomes one of the great masterpieces of the ballet canon. Everything here depends on atmosphere, line, and silence as much as on movement. The Wilis must move as a collective vision: weightless, disciplined, and eerily unified. If the corps de ballet is strong, the result can be one of the most haunting images in classical dance. This is the realm in which the Vienna State Opera can excel, because the theatre's scale and traditions favor precisely the kind of clear classical style that Giselle demands. The moonlit atmosphere, the sense of distance from human life, and the ballet's refusal to over-explain its own magic all contribute to its rare emotional intensity.

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What is especially beautiful in Giselle is the transformation of the title character in Act II. She is no longer the girl of the village, but a spirit of forgiveness and transcendence. Yet the role must retain emotional continuity with the first act; otherwise the transformation loses meaning. The greatest interpreters show that Giselle's love has not disappeared, but changed into something purer and more selfless. That is why the final confrontation with Albrecht is so affecting. It is not only a test of endurance and balance, but an act of compassion. In good performances, this scene becomes one of ballet's most moving meditations on mercy.

Musically, the score remains one of the supreme achievements of the Romantic repertory. Its melodic grace, rhythmic delicacy, and ability to move from village freshness to spectral suspense are essential to the ballet's success. A performance that respects these qualities allows the dancing to breathe and the drama to unfold with dignity. The Vienna State Opera's presentation of Giselle appears to do exactly that: honor the score's lyricism while preserving its dramatic pulse.

What ultimately makes Giselle so unforgettable is the way it unites technical beauty with emotional truth. It is a ballet of soft jumps and hovering arabesques, but also of grief, memory, and forgiveness. When performed with conviction, it touches audiences deeply because it speaks to both the fragility and the resilience of love. This Vienna performance clearly belongs to that tradition. It offers not only elegant dancing, but a serious artistic encounter with one of ballet's most enduring masterpieces.

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