

Mayara Magri

SOLOIST, THE ROYAL BALLET

interviewed by David Bain

Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London, 21 September 2017

At the time of speaking, the Company is three weeks into the new season. 'It's been quite nice.' 'We have Arthur Pita with us.' His piece is called *The Wind*. 'There's a lovely story to it.' They are also dancing with huge wind machines at the side of the stage. Mayara feels 'he's really nice to work with' as well. The Company has started working on Act 4 of Liam Scarlett's new production of *Swan Lake*. It's 'looking really beautiful,' and is 'very, very classical.' Mayara can't give too much away about it, but feels 'the Company's really enjoying it.' Earlier in the day the Company had a stage call for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Mayara will be dancing various roles, including the Flower Waltz, card solo couples, the caucus race and the cat. There is a lot to put together, such as the sets, costumes and choreography.

The week before this talk, Mayara performed in Emma Maguire's gala in Hull. They were opening the new theatre. She replaced Melissa Hamilton, who had hurt her hip. Mayara found out the Friday before the show. She danced the *Concerto* pas de deux with Ryoichi Hirano. She last performed the role at the Royal Ballet School five years ago, yet remembered it well, thinking 'Here I am!' as the music started. It's unbelievable how the body remembers it. They performed on a small, raked stage, which was 'a bit scary.' Ryoichi is 'a really nice, amazing partner.' They danced to a full house, and audience appeared to really enjoy the show, and have a good time.

Mayara spent four days of her summer teaching children in Malta. It was the first time she had taught professionally, and she 'really enjoyed' it. There were three classes, which were all different levels. Whilst doing this, Mayara was rehearsing for her performances of *Giselle* in Brazil with Thiago Soares. 'I learnt so much from him.' Mayara first performed the role when she was 14 years old, but this was the first time she had danced it professionally. Thiago had asked her about two months before the show, which would give them 'enough to get it together.' They did their pieces together in London. There was then a gap, before doing a bit more on tour in

Australia. Thiago then injured his neck rehearsing *The Winter's Tale*, which meant another gap. The next time they saw each other was in Brazil.

Mayara's family in Brazil had not seen her dance for six or seven years, so it was a 'really, really nice' opportunity. The aim of the performances was to bring together Brazilian dancers who are doing really well. Mayara would like to do more of this in the future. Thiago was the impresario of the project. Money is an

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issue in Brazil, with some dancers not getting paid, for instance, but they still performed to full houses. 'They really want us back.' What was performed was 'a bit of a mix' of productions, but Mayara and Thiago performed the Royal Ballet's version together. The version that Mayara performed when she was 14 was La Scala's, and the order of things is slightly different to the Royal Ballet production. 'It's on YouTube! In four parts if you want to check it out.' Mayara approached the role differently at 14 to how she did now. Marianela Nuñez helped her with her performances for Brazil. It felt 'very special' working on it. With the RB, Mayara has been covering Myrthe, but can't tell at this stage whether she will get a chance to perform the role in January. Others have danced Myrthe for years before switching to Giselle, so you never know. After dancing Giselle when she was 14, she went and did a competition. She learned a pas de deux created by a principal ballet master in Brazil on the day.

Mayara got into ballet when she was 8 years old. She went with a school friend to a dance/social project in Rio di Janeiro. She went there for eight years. The dancers there were trained using the Vaganova method. At 12 years old, Mayara started going to competitions. She did the Youth America Grand Prix, the Prix de Lausanne, and other competitions in Brazil. She did the

Youth America Grand Prix when she was 14, in New York, although it was more of a festival, and jazzy. With the Prix de Lausanne, Mayara saw the difference in approach, both in terms of organisation, and in terms of the dancers that were there. There were more European dancers in Lausanne. She did this competition when she was 16, performing a solo from *Coppélia*, and a piece by Cathy Marston. Doing well in a competition in Brazil paid for her to go to Lausanne. Mayara won in Lausanne, which meant she got to choose where she went next. She chose to accept the scholarship to the Royal Ballet School for a year. Gailene Stock also saw her there, saying 'You're coming!' Steven McRae remembered seeing her there, and was encouraging her. Ryoichi Hirano and Yuihui Choe came to perform the *Thais* pas de deux, and Federico Bonelli and Hikaru Koboyashi performed the *Rhapsody* pas se deux. They remembered her when she joined the Company.

The Royal Ballet School was very different to what Mayara was used to in Brazil. There were now fewer in a class, compared to a lot more in Brazil. Dancers she remembers from the same project in Brazil who are now in London are a 16 year old boy at the Royal Ballet School, who is being taught by Valeri Hristov, and Leticia Dias, who is now dancing with the Royal Ballet. The method at the Royal Ballet School is more 'proper,' and contained than what she was used to, so she ended up with 'a bit of both' of going for it, and being more restrained when she joined the Company. Mayara now understands why she needs to have both styles. You have to go for it more as a gypsy, but be more contained as a fairy. Does Mayara prefer being a fairy or a gypsy? 'Oh, a gypsy!' The Company seems to be pushing her more towards those roles anyway.

Why do so many Brazilian dancers have that strong technique? They throw you out there 'for you to lose the fear.' Mayara was performing different stuff every week. Mayara's teacher 'really pushed' for her very early on. Mayara was en pointe by 11 years old, and performed her first full length at 14. She lost that fear. Mayara would do ballet in the evenings, having done a day at school. Her mum would drive her there at 1.30pm, then drive back home at 10.30pm. It meant a lot of hours! Doing ballet all day at the Royal Ballet School was much easier for her. They rehearsed all year for the end of year performances. Mayara knew about her contract with the Company in January 2012, and joined that August.

The Two Pigeons was 'really nice' to dance. Mayara enjoyed working with Christopher Carr. He has worked with the Company for 50 years, and has worked with every single director. He was really emotional about it. The Company gave him a frame to mark the occasion. He's 'really amazing.' He worked on *The Two Pigeons* for a year in order to piece it all together. He prepares you really well. He's tough, but Mayara felt it was a good thing for her. She's used to that. She danced the Gypsy

Girl, with a lot of 'shimmy' in it. She put a lot of herself into the role, with that freedom and confidence to be on the stage. Mayara also likes to be 'fearless' on the stage. There wasn't so much acting taught at the Royal Ballet School. There was a little bit taught in Brazil, 'but it comes from you.'

In *Don Quixote*, Mayara danced Mercedes. It's a very technical, demanding role, with the attitudes and pirouettes, for instance. Mercedes is very confident on the stage. Carlos Acosta is 'really great.' With *Carmen*, there were lots of studio calls. It was very full on. Mayara took it really seriously. Carlos is very easy to work with. Does she see herself dancing Kitri? 'Maybe next year. We'll see.'

When Mayara first joined the Company, she danced in *Swan Lake*, *Requiem*, and went on as the 'hanging girl' in *Las Hermanas*. It was 'quite fun actually.' She also went on as the 'dead Mary,' who gets put in the coffin in *Mayerling*. Whilst at the Royal Ballet School

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and in Brazil, she was dancing solos. Now as a member of the Company, she found herself doing corps de ballet work, but that is part of the job. 'I had to come down, and start from zero.' It's 'important' to do that, and she appreciates it now. Her first solo was as a handmaiden in *Apollo*. 'It was something' to meet Pat Neary! She's scary, but 'an amazing person.' Mayara had been late for a rehearsal, and got shouted at. Pat Neary is Mayara's idol, along with Monica Mason. She always wants to make things better. Mayara sprained her ankle during a rehearsal once. Pat Neary went to the physio room with her, demanding to know what was happening. 'She's my girl! She's going to be fine!' She was also in class, en pointe, doing her exercises, watching the Company. For *Rubies*, Marcelino Sambé's name was up on the board by itself. Mayara went to Kevin O' Hare to find out what was happening, and he told her 'well, you're down to cover. It's up to Pat Neary to decide.' Eventually, Pat told her 'Mayauri! Go with Marcelino! You're doing it with him!' Pat Neary is very honest about what she sees, and if she's not pleased! 'Oh my God! It's horrible!' After Mayara's stage call, the response was 'Oh my God! You're going to be FIERCE! Mr Balanchine would LOVE you!' Mayara and Marcelino were also performing corps roles in *Jewels* at the same time. She hopes to focus solely on the principal stuff next time. 'I had a really great time with her last season.' Pat Neary is naturally blonde, so it was something of a shock when she appeared wearing a ginger wig at an insight evening. She also wears bright red lipstick, and 'she's such a character. She's an amazing

person.’ ‘She has a lot of love to put into it still.’ She makes you love it, as Monica Mason also does. The Company isn’t doing any Balanchine next season. Pat said ‘Oh my God! I might not even be alive next time!’

Mayara danced the Sugar Plum Fairy pas de deux from *The Nutcracker* in Ipswich with Lukas Bjørnboe Brændsrød. This was for Gary Avis’s gala. She is also the cover for the performances over Christmas. Kevin apologised for not giving it to her, but explained the reasons why. ‘I’ll be working on it.’ It’s a difficult part of the job when someone has to be injured for you to get a role sometimes. You want the roles, but not for someone to get injured. Mayara hopes to perform the role one day. In *The Sleeping Beauty*, Mayara has danced lots of fairies. It is Monica’s production, so she has a say. Hikaru Kobayashi coached Mayara for her role as the Fairy of the Enchanted Garden. Hikaru is ‘a really great coach.’ She will be doing some more coaching this season. Mayara also danced the Florestan pas de trois, including for the filming.

Mayara danced in *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude* at the end of last season. ‘That was really fun. That’s my kind of thing.’ The music is so fast. You have to go to your extremes, and ‘push it through.’ You just collapse at the end. Kathryn Bennets is a really good coach, and she spots everything. Mayara also danced Sarah Lamb’s performances too. Mayara had trouble with her toenail, so missed one performance of *Symphonic Variations* at the end of last season, which she also danced whilst still an artist. Wendy Ellis Some coaches it. She is very particular and proper. She will dance it, doing it with you as she shows what she wants. There was lots of discussion in the studio as to what should be done now, and what Ashton did or didn’t want. People get very passionate about it. When Mayara first did *Symphonic Variations*, she was replacing Emma Maguire. It’s a 20 minute piece, yet you never leave the stage. Initially, Mayara was worried about getting through it. She had never had a full run through before the rehearsal, always being at the back. She ‘felt the role’ more this time around, and really enjoyed it. Mayara missed two days because of her toenail, but it was the ‘highlight of my career so far. It’s just so special.’ Christopher Carr sees her as an ambitious dancer, and pushes her. Perhaps he likes her personality? He likes it when he can get something out of a dancer. He will also go on about bending, when you feel your head is already on the floor.

Mayara performed the entertainer variations in *The Invitation*. It was a good opportunity, but it wasn’t her favourite role. Gary Harris who staged the ballet is very lively. Mayara also performed one of the sisters Tatiana with Lauren’s cast in *Anastasia*. Again, Gary Harris staged it. The other sisters in her cast were Claire Calvert and Emma Maguire. It is ‘such a beautiful ballet’ and Viviana Durante is around again now to coach *The*

Judas Tree, as she was for *Anastasia*.

Whilst Mayara was a first year soloist, she still had to perform a lot of corps de ballet roles, but this is not so much the case now. She has also danced The Rose Fairy in *The Nutcracker*, and roles in *Wolf Works*, including Virginia’s lover in Mara Galeazzi’s cast. Nicol Edmonds went off, so Ed Watson ended up performing in all the shows. It ‘really was nice dancing with him.’ Mayara’s first time working with Wayne McGregor was with *Multiverse*. It’s much better to be the first cast with him. You have more of a feel for what he wants, as he changes stuff so much. The second cast are always catching up a bit. In *Carbon Life*, Mayara has performed the Lauren pas de deux with Lukas Bjørnboe Brændsrød. You perform a three minute solo wearing a mask, making it difficult to breathe, and meant she had a pointy thing poking into her. This left her with a bruise. What is rehearsing with Wayne like? ‘He loves talking.’ He’s really clever, and has lots of ideas. It’s something different too. Mayara is glad he likes using her, as he tends to use the same people.

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Mayara has also worked with Liam Scarlett in the first cast of *Symphonic Dances*. She worked with Christopher Wheeldon on *Aeternum* and *Within the Golden Hour*. ‘He’s doing a piece this season’ as well.

Mayara is involved in the first cast of the Twyla Tharp piece coming up, although they haven’t started anything on it yet. Mayara isn’t sure what she is dancing in *Sylvia* yet, but would like to cover it. ‘We’ll see what comes up.’ Last time with *Swan Lake*, she was covering the pas de trois. Beatriz Stix-Brunell was injured, so Mayara asked Kevin if she could have a matinee performance. ‘Of course’ came the reply, ‘Beatriz is injured.’ ‘It must be hard to manage 95 careers.’ Yuhui Choe and Melissa Hamilton were also injured, so Mayara ended up doing 10 shows back to back. Kevin was glad she had gone to his office about it, but it’s up to him next time.

Why did Mayara choose to go to the Royal Ballet School? It was very much her decision. Her teacher, who had been a soloist with Stuttgart Ballet, wasn’t so keen on the idea. Mayara watched some DVDs of *La Bayadère* amongst other things, and had a ‘thing’ about it. Mayara also learnt a lot at the school, and was happy to work on things.

David thanked Mayara and suggested that all present were greatly looking forward to following the rest of her career.

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