

If originally, in 1948, the ballet opened with the curtain only partially raised, allowing us to peep at a class of small children, or *petits rats*, under the guidance of a ballet mistress complete with her traditional stick, today we are given a glimpse of ballerinas in black tutus: they are performing typical exercises at the barre, with something of a novel touch. Only the lower halves of their bodies are lit up, the rest of the stage is in total darkness. The effect is that of a kaleidoscopic view of two dozen bodiless limbs performing with precision classical ballet steps. The studies at this black barre may appear easy, but the coordination necessary in synchronising them is something else. The only way to render them perfect is to keep repeating them at the required rhythm: simple, double, triple; canon and fugue movements follow leading to the unison in a coda in which all the legs bend into an “L” shape giving an effect of triumph. The ballet continues with a larger brightly lit space and the entrance of a dozen ballerinas in white tutus. As they gradually leave the barre to move to the central area, the exercises become increasingly more complex. Twelve male dancers in white join their colleagues. One ballerina with two partners performs an adagio before the arrival of the Etoile who, wearing a knee-length tutu, a tiara and puffed sleeves in tulle – the simplified costume worn in *La Sylphide* – performs her romantic solo. With this, she adds a necessary touch and, thanks to the



FOTOGRAFIA DI Andrea Tamoni

following all-female trio, a quartet and, above all, a *pas de deux* with her partner, pays tribute to the Romantic ballet of the Danish or French versions. August Bournonville created the classical tradition in Copenhagen with this same ballet (1836), inspired by the original Parisian version that Filippo Taglioni had created in 1832 for his daughter, Maria. The inclusion of the romantic piece – surrounded by black drapery giving it a dreamlike air or making it appear like a vision that is destined to vanish – highlights the extent to which this choreography, in its didactic abstraction, is art, not only pedagogy. It is unnecessary, however, to refer back to Lander’s original style, or to “Bournonville”, much favoured by George Balanchine. What is

important for today’s performers is knowing the steps, the music and the positions of the arms. When the curtain rises again, we are presented with an evocative black and white diagonal line formed by all the dancers. Variations and adagios alternate with a succession of *déboulés*, *échappés*, *batteries*, *entrechats*, *grands jetés*, *pirouettes*, *fouettés*, all at an accelerated rhythm and in a breathtaking crescendo of difficulty. This masterful show of academic technique is obviously structured in order to contain a large number of steps in just forty minutes. Even the finale, in its overwhelming chain of rapid and dizzying twists and leaps, is confirmation of the spectacular sight of pure dance, not of a high degree of training in the ballet.