# Kyiv’s National Opera premieres Ashton ballet in bold rejection of Russian cultural dominance



The National Opera of Ukraine in Kyiv has taken a bold stand against the propagandist influence of Russian culture by premiering Sir Frederick Ashton’s "La Fille mal gardée"—a move that signals a rejection of Moscow's cultural dominance. This landmark performance, attended by a packed house, embodies Ukraine’s determined effort to sever ties with Russian artistic legacy, which has long been used as a tool to bolster Kremlin propaganda amid ongoing conflict.

Funded through extensive efforts led by exiled Ukrainian ballet star Ivan Putrov, and supported by prominent figures seeking to bolster Ukraine’s cultural independence, this production is a rallying cry against the cultural appeasement that has allowed Russia to wield soft power across Europe. The choice to reimagine Ashton’s "La Fille mal gardée," a piece deeply rooted in English ballet tradition, highlights the Ukrainian pursuit of reclaiming cultural sovereignty rather than kowtowing to Russian influence.

The Ukrainian government’s cultural boycott, a bold response to Russian aggression, seeks to dismantle the long-standing narrative that celebrates Russian composers such as Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, and Stravinsky—works that have historically been used to romanticize Russia’s imperial ambitions. This stance was galvanized after a disgraceful incident in 2022, where Russian-occupied territories displayed pro-war symbols, igniting outrage and underscoring the need for Ukraine to reject Moscow’s cultural imperialism.

Yet, not everyone in Ukraine’s ballet community agrees with this boycott. Dancer Daniil Silkin voiced his frustration, arguing that Russian composers and their works belong to a shared cultural heritage that should transcend political conflicts—a naive perspective that dangerously overlooks the manipulative use of art by Russia to promote its geopolitical interests. Conversely, others within the arts community believe it’s essential to stand firm until Russia abandons its imperialist narrative.

The forced exclusion of Russian works has compelled Ukraine’s national institutions to diversify their repertoire, featuring contemporary choreographers from abroad, like Hans van Manen and Alexei Ratmansky, further distancing the country’s cultural scene from Moscow’s insidious influence. These efforts demonstrate Ukraine’s resolve to establish an independent artistic identity, even amidst the chaos of war.

Practical challenges continue to shadow these cultural efforts, with air raids disrupting performances and forcing audiences into emergency shelters. Putrov highlighted how Ukraine’s conflict has deeply affected the artistic workforce, with many called to military service, yet the resilience of the Ukrainian cultural spirit remains unbowed. The staging of Ashton’s ballet serves as a testament to Ukraine’s refusal to surrender its cultural soul to Russian propaganda—an act of defiance in the face of ongoing hostility.

In conclusion, Kyiv’s decision to embrace this emblematic ballet amid ongoing conflict is not merely about art but about asserting national sovereignty and cultural independence. This bold step underscores Ukraine’s broader refusal to be subsumed by Moscow’s historical narrative and highlights the resilience of its defenders—both military and cultural—in the pursuit of true freedom. The revival of Ashton’s choreography symbolizes Ukraine’s fight to preserve its identity, proving that even in wartime, culture remains a powerful tool against tyranny.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/09/kyiv-english-ballet-la-fille-mal-garde-russian-repertoire-boycott> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/09/kyiv-english-ballet-la-fille-mal-garde-russian-repertoire-boycott> - The National Opera of Ukraine in Kyiv is set to perform Sir Frederick Ashton's 'La Fille mal gardée' for the first time, replacing traditional Russian ballets like 'Swan Lake' and 'The Nutcracker'. This decision follows Ukraine's cultural boycott of Russian works, including those by Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, and Prokofiev, in response to the ongoing conflict. The production, running for at least five years, was funded through efforts by former Royal Ballet dancer Ivan Putrov and sculptor Antony Gormley. The ballet's owner, Jean-Pierre Gasquet, waived his fee to support the initiative. Originally a French ballet by Jean Dauberval, Ashton's 1960 choreography has made it a beloved English classic, featuring slapstick humour, a maypole, and traditional folk dance. The Ukrainian government has urged cultural institutions to avoid Russian composers and choreographers, citing concerns over cultural exploitation by the Russian government. Nobuhiro Terada, artistic director of ballet at the National Opera of Ukraine, highlighted the sensitivity of the issue, noting a turning point when dancers in Russian-occupied Donetsk performed the 'Z' symbol, associated with pro-war sentiments, in autumn 2022. Terada stated that after this incident, the Ukrainian Minister of Culture declared a halt to performances of Russian works, emphasising the need to respect the sentiments of those affected by the war. The decision has sparked debate among performers; for instance, Daniil Silkin, who plays Alain in the production, expressed his disagreement with the boycott, suggesting that Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, and Prokofiev belong to a different era and should not be associated with current political conflicts. Terada acknowledged the challenges posed by the boycott but viewed it as an opportunity to explore diverse productions, citing international assistance that has led to performances of works by Hans van Manen, John Neumeier, and Alexei Ratmansky. He emphasised the importance of using this period to bring the best from the world to Ukraine, as the global community is eager to support the country during the war. The production also addresses practical challenges, such as providing shelter during air raids, and highlights the resilience of the Ukrainian arts community amidst the ongoing conflict. Putrov, who organised fundraising events in London to finance the new production, expressed optimism about the impact of 'La Fille mal gardée', describing it as a 'beautiful blockbuster' that embodies the spirit of the Ukrainian people and their fight for their way of life.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_fille_mal_gard%C3%A9e> - 'La Fille mal gardée' is a comic ballet first performed in 1789, choreographed by Jean Dauberval. The ballet is inspired by Pierre-Antoine Baudouin's 1765 painting 'La réprimande/Une jeune fille querellée par sa mère'. The original score was a pastiche of popular French airs. The ballet has undergone numerous revivals and adaptations, with notable versions by Alexander Gorsky in 1903 and Frederick Ashton in 1960. Ashton's version, staged for the Royal Ballet, is particularly celebrated and remains a staple in the ballet repertory. The ballet's enduring popularity is attributed to its engaging narrative, lively choreography, and incorporation of folk dance elements.
4. <https://ukraine.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/presenting-ballet-classics-time-war-todays-lviv-national-ballet> - The Lviv National Ballet in Ukraine continues to perform classic ballets despite the challenges posed by martial law and the ongoing conflict. Ballet master and director Serhii Bondur has restaged Jean Dauberval’s 18th-century ballet 'La Fille mal gardée', also known as 'The Wayward Daughter'. The ballet was inspired by Pierre-Antoine Baudouin’s 1765 painting 'La réprimande/Une jeune fille querellée par sa mère', depicting a mother reprimanding her daughter in a hay barn. The original score was a compilation of popular 18th-century French dances and songs. The Lviv National Ballet's commitment to presenting these classics underscores the resilience of Ukraine's cultural institutions amid the ongoing war.
5. <https://www.wgbh.org/news/international-news/2022-12-09/ukraine-is-calling-for-a-boycott-of-the-nutcracker-ballet-companies-arent-budging> - In December 2022, Ukraine's culture minister called for a temporary boycott of Russian artists and composers, including Pyotr Tchaikovsky, in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The minister argued that Russian culture was being used as a tool by the Russian government to advance its agenda. This call for a boycott has been met with resistance from some Western ballet companies, which have continued to perform works by Russian composers. The debate highlights the complexities of cultural diplomacy and the challenges of balancing artistic heritage with political considerations.
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Ballet_of_Ukraine> - The National Ballet of Ukraine is the principal ballet company of Ukraine, based in Kyiv. In January 2023, the company issued a statement clarifying that independent Ukrainian ballet troupes touring Europe under similar names were not official affiliates. The statement specifically referenced 'Kyiv City Ballet' as a group that does not represent the National Opera and Ballet Theatre of Ukraine. The National Ballet of Ukraine emphasised its boycott of works by Russian composer Tchaikovsky, including 'The Nutcracker' and 'Swan Lake', due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This position reflects the broader cultural response within Ukraine to the ongoing conflict and the use of culture as a form of resistance.
7. <https://petipasociety.com/la-fille-mal-gardee-ou-la-precaution-inutile/> - 'La Fille mal gardée, ou La Précaution inutile' is a notable version of the ballet staged by Marius Petipa in 1864. This production is significant in the history of the ballet's evolution and has been the subject of scholarly interest. The Marius Petipa Society provides detailed information about this version, highlighting its contributions to the ballet's legacy.