

From Don Quixote to Rudolph Nureyev

Choreographer Johan Kobborg is on a roll

By [Galina Stolyarova](#)

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A rehearsal for Johan Kobborg's "Don Quixote," set to premiere in St. Petersburg on Dec. 14. **Press Service Leonid Yakobson Ballet Theater**

“What a wonderful twist of fate!”

This is how Johan Kobborg, the former principal dancer of the Royal Danish Ballet and Royal Ballet in London, regards the almost mystical chain of events that brought him to Russia this year.

Just a year ago Kobborg told himself that he needed a long break from ballet. In his mind, he'd bid farewell to the stage. But destiny had a different plan for Johan. Today, his life is full of ballet once again — and this time, in many more different forms than before.

A New Don Quixote

On December 14, Kobborg's production of "Don Quixote" for the Leonid Yakobson Ballet Theater in St. Petersburg will premiere at the Bolshoi Drama Theater. With more than 10 years of experience as a choreographer under his belt, Kobborg has been enjoying the rehearsals with the company. He was invited to put on this ballet by the troupe's artistic director, Andrian Fadeyev, the former principal of the Mariinsky Theater, whom Kobborg has known for more than a decade.

"It is a very young company, and it has so much vitality and young energy, and it perfectly suits 'Don Quixote'," Kobborg told *The Moscow Times*. "I think that any serious ballet company should have 'Don Quixote' in its repertoire. Dancers, even if they come from the same schools, have different personalities, different energy, different approach, and they reveal themselves on stage. So my job is to take the idea, turn it into a concept, and make it work best for the individuals."

More than a decade ago, Kobborg, already an established dancer, threw himself another challenge and tried out as a choreographer: in October 2005, the Royal Ballet in London opened a new season with his edition of the "La Sylphide" by August Bournonville; very soon, Kobborg went on to produce a string of shows for other ballet companies internationally. In the 2007/08 season, his rendition of "La Sylphide" was added to the Bolshoi Theater's repertoire.

The most important thing for the choreographer with "Don Quixote" is to balance light and shade, Kobborg said. "You cannot possibly be firing on all cylinders all the time, and you should never be bored," he said. "Timing is everything for me — the timing of two people dancing together, timing of the acting, timing of the running of the performance."

Nureyev, Fiennes and Kobborg

In the summer 2017, with plans to stage "Don Quixote" already underway, Kobborg got to work on his first movie as a choreographer — also in St. Petersburg. And he was working with a crew that was a dream team. "The White Crow," a film about Rudolf Nureyev's escape to the West, is being directed by Ralph Fiennes and will be released in 2018.

Getting to know Ralph Fiennes was especially meaningful for Kobborg. The renowned British actor and director had unknowingly been one of the people who once inspired Johan Kobborg to believe in himself and create what the dancer regards one of his best roles in ballet, Yevgeny Onegin.

"What tradition does, you see, is that it puts everybody in a box: this is how Onegin looks, this is how the Swan Queen looks, this is how Prince looks, etc.," Kobborg said. "So when I was given Onegin to dance, I had only seen one dancer do the role. He was a very tall guy who was 40 years old and could not dance anymore. I was in my early thirties then, and I had danced Lensky — the other lead — for many years, and was disappointed and frustrated that the role was being taken from me, with all those turns and pirouettes I am so good at. I did not believe in myself, but then I saw Ralph Fiennes in the film, and something clicked inside me. I found

my way. So finally meeting him and working with him was a wonderful twist of fate.”

Don Quixote will premiere at the Bolshoi Drama Theater on Dec. 14 at 7 p.m. For tickets online, see [Kassir](#).

The White Crow, directed by Ralph Fiennes and starring Oleg Ivenko as Rudolph Nureyev, is slated to be released in 2018.

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