

Swans in Love: In Appreciation of Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake*

A review
by Hugh Coyle



Gone are the ballerinas prancing across the set en pointe. In their place Bourne gives us crew cuts and war paint — and a sexual force to be reckoned with.

Cross-gender adaptations of famous works have become something of a cliché in the art world in recent years. While some continue to consider such productions the cutting edge in queer arts, others see them as attempts to exploit the community for either profit or some coveted “alternative” status. The productions are often

predictably amusing, nudging the audience gently in a “wink wink” kind of way. Romeo’s Juliet suddenly becomes Julio, and the mere substitution of woman for man supposedly turns what was once the classic heterosexual love story into a gay parable.

The problem with such adaptations is fairly obvious. Rather than break new ground, more

often than not they merely lay down Astroturf over grass. Despite its intended subversion, the implicit heterosexuality remains and neither side — homo nor hetero — benefits greatly from the exchange.

Then along comes something truly stunning like Kenneth Bourne’s theatrical remake of the Tchaikovsky ballet *Swan Lake*.

An import from London that just finished a successful stateside run in New York City, the production casts men in the traditionally female roles of the swans. Bourne made the cross-gender decision not out of some simple desire to stir up controversy, but rather in

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