

TOP POSTS



STAȚIA DE METROU EROILOR 2 A FOST REC



# Ballet Magazine

DESPRE NOI

INTERVIU SI OPINIE

LUMEA BALETULUI

FILE DE POVESTE

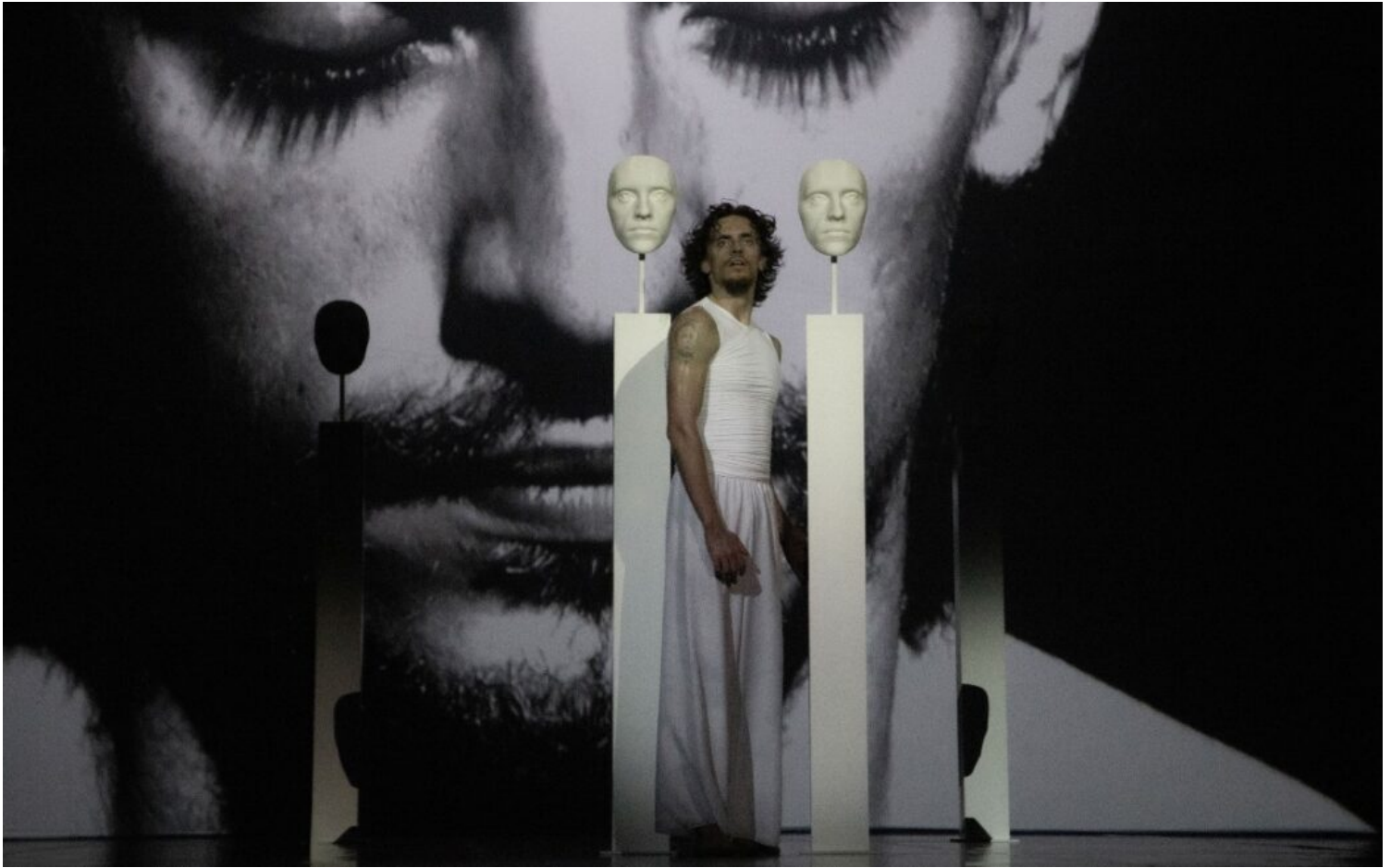
SANATATE SI ARMO

English Section [◇ Lumea Baletului](#)

## Letters from London by Graham Watts! Finding Paradise w Polunin: Jiří Bubeníček on choreographing for Sergei

Ravenna Festival will celebrate 700th anniversary of the Italian poet Dante Alighieri with a solo performance of world ballet star Sergei Polunin. *Metànoia* is a new creation of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and will have its premiere on the 01.-05.09.2021 at the Teatro Alighieri.

written by Graham Watts | August 31, 2021



*Photo credit: Otto Bubenicek*

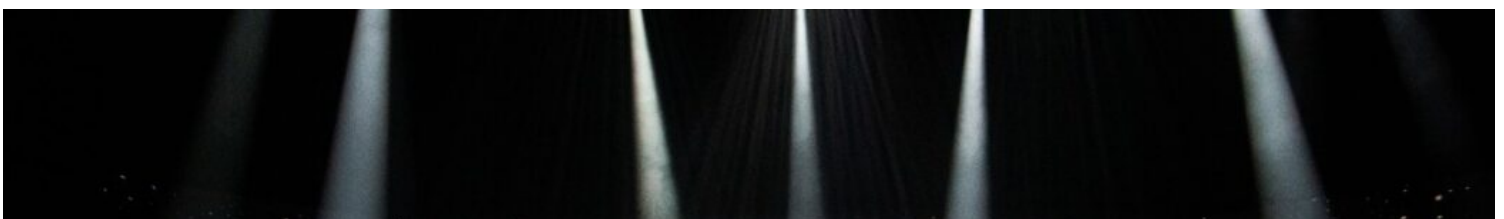
When I spoke to [Jiří Bubeníček](#) by Zoom from his home in Dresden, he was preparing to travel to the Itali Ravenna to help stage his choreography for the world premiere of *Paradiso* as the final solo in *Dante Met*, Sergei Polunin's contribution to the Ravenna Festival.

The full work is a triptych that follows the three parts of *Dante's Divina Commedia*, opening with *Inferno*, choreographed to original music by Miroslav Bakoby, Ross Freddie Ray, Polunin's good friend and CEO of production company, Polunin-ink; followed by *Purgatorio*, which has been created by Polunin himself.

*Also read*

*Manuel Legris, artistic director La Scala Theater: "All ballet companies have their own history an*

*Famous dancer Sergei Polunin is coming to Romania for the first time as a special guest at TIFF 20*





*Photo credit: Otto Bubenicek*

Bubeníček explained that his intention was to give Polunin a different movement language. “He is an amazing dancer with a body that is built for classical ballet,”

“*Paradiso* is only eleven minutes’ long,” explained Bubeníček, “and it comes at the end of an evening that is a solo for Sergei. There were supposed to be more dancers but then Corona came and it was logical for Sergei to dance the whole evening alone.” Despite Ravenna being the site of Dante’s tomb (next to the Basilica of San Francesco in the city centre), the choice of the *Divina Commedia* for the Festival was an eerie coincidence since Polunin was initially unaware of this spiritual connection to the great medieval poet.

The choice of Bubeníček as the third choreographer on *Dante Metanoia* came out of the blue. “Before this I had never met Sergei. I only knew him from his work, like everybody else,” explained the choreographer Jiří, who came through his twin brother, Otto, who created the stage design for Polunin’s *Rasputin* and also the show’s choreographer, Yuka Oishi. “Yuka had worked with both brothers at Hamburg Ballet and she likes them a lot,” explained Polunin’s Artist Manager, Tatiana Tokareva.

At the end of July, Polunin danced a full programme at **Bánffy C** in Transylvania. In mid-August – Polunin was performing in Buc

The preparation of *Paradiso* was impacted by coronavirus and the dancer's hectic schedule. At the end of the year, he danced a full programme at Bánffy Castle in Transylvania and throughout the summer he was performing across Europe; at the time of our interview – in mid-August – Polunin was performing in Budapest before heading to the Russian city of Nizhny Novgorod. “I wished I had more creative time with Sergei,” explained Bubeníček. He came to Dresden for five days at the beginning of August and we worked happily together in the studio.

The score for *Paradiso* was commissioned from the Russian pianist, Kirill Richter – the composer of *Rasputin* has been described as ‘a star in ascent’ by [classicalnext.com](https://www.classicalnext.com).



However, Bubeníček and Polunin only had a fragment of Richter's work from when they met in Dresden. “Not having all the music started was a problem,” explained Bubeníček with a smile to suggest an under-statement! “Initially we had only six minutes’ of music and Kirill’s condition was that he was not happy with all of it and at least half had to change! So, I had perhaps three of the eleven minutes’ to work on the music that Kirill sent was so inspiring we were able to imagine the direction he was taking. His vision of Dante’s journey to Heaven gave me a feeling of being surrounded by something like glass. And now that I’ve heard all of the music, I’m very happy that it will work well.”

Bubeníček explained that his intention was to give Polunin a different movement language. “He is an amazing dancer with a body that is built for classical ballet,” he explained. “When we first met, we talked about creating a movement that was counter-intuitive to his natural style; more earthy and down to the ground and so I went more in that direction, inspiring him to move differently from the language that he is used to dancing. He was very open to this and absorbed everything so superbly. It seems to me that Sergei left the structure and set of his major ballet company in order to “own” his career and to experiment with different styles of dance. And that is also my goal. I hope that I have succeeded. The performance will be difficult for Sergei because he will already have danced the whole evening before he gets to our final section!”

Bubeníček has thoroughly enjoyed the experience of working with Polunin. “He is this huge international dancer and there is none of that in the studio. From the first day, he was very humble and accepted every idea. It has been a great collaboration and the choreography for *Paradiso* should follow on very well from Sergei’s own choreography in *Purgatorio*.”



*Photo credit: Silvia Lelli*

## Sergei Polunin is a huge international star ... but there is none of the studio!

Otto Bubeníček has designed the set for *Paradiso* and Jiří explained that “we have all been inspired by the sentences in Dante’s poem and, in particular, the idea of the human soul becoming one with God’s love”. (the design are nine masks, which correspond to the nine celestial spheres in Dante’s vision of Heaven; all are depicted by the face of Polunin. “I have been trying to find symbols in Dante’s final journey to Heaven explained Bubeníček, the choreographer. “The triangle is important because the number three is powerful sense. There are three parts to Dante’s journey and three divisions in Hell and also in Heaven. In the end collects all nine masks and they become one as he finally enters the paradise of Heaven. Dante’s journey to Heaven is guided by Beatrice (the poet’s ideal embodiment of a woman) and it is Richter’s music that takes of her voice.

Bubeníček had been a very busy choreographer prior to the pandemic and he did very little for a year. “It was very good for me,” he explained. “I had time for my family (he married the designer, Nadina Cojocar and they have two children) and I could slow down. Four days after my daughter was born, I had to go to and I’m so glad that I have now had this special time with them. It’s time that I didn’t want to miss.” He has been able to concentrate on studying for his Masters degree in Choreography at the University of Dresden. It s

that one of the world's leading choreographers should still be concerned with learning. "It is always good knowledge," he explained. "I like to teach and the degree has given me so much information on such things as pedagogy and dance physiology. I'm also studying the course in English which has been really helpful."

But, the enforced break from choreography is now well and truly over! In addition to the *Paradiso project* in *Ravenna*, Bubeníček has had two other Italian jobs. Earlier this summer, he was invited by Manuel Legris to contribute to an *Evening of Four Choreographers*. His Canon in D Major (to the ubiquitous music by Pachelbel) was performed by a male trio that premiered at Teatro Alla Scala, in June, alongside work by Legris, Alexei Ratmansky and András Lukács. Brother Otto not only designed set and costumes but also augmented Pachelbel's music. It is to be part of La Scala's repertoire for five years.

## Internationally sought-after choreographer Jiří Bubeníček enjoys enormous acclaim over his almost 25-year career as one of the world's top ballet dancers

His last work prior to the pandemic was *Cinderella*, created in December 2019 for Compagnia Nuovo Ballet in Florence, which has already been revived in an Italian tour that started on 27 August and will run throughout 2021. "This was a work that I really enjoyed because the dancers were contemporary and really brought a different non-classical style so I was able to try things on the floor and be more modern in my choreographic approach. I was so inspired by them that I made it in four weeks," he recalled.

In December, he will contribute the choreography for seven dance videos about how to reconnect after the pandemic in *Tanzgedichte aus der Stille* (Dance poems out of Silence), a project that was conceived by his company for transmission online and at a Dresden cinema.

Bubeníček is also preparing his own interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* – his first attempt at choreographing Shakespeare – for the Croatian National Theatre, to be premiered in Rijeka on 28 April 2022. "I always try to find a new way of doing something differently and although I won't start to create the work until November, I'm already attracted to the conflict between the two families. The nature of being divided in two lies in so much of human experience – for example, in the age of coronavirus, it is to be vaccinated or not vaccinated – everything is in flux. So, I am already thinking about the ways that I can express this."

Bubeníček's full-length ballet, *Processen (The Trial)*, based on Franz Kafka's eponymous novel, which was first performed by the Royal Swedish Ballet in May 2019 will be taken up by the State Theater of Košice in Slovakia in October 2022. A new contemporary version of *Spartacus* has been commissioned for the Slovenian National Ballet, to premiere in Ljubljana on 23 January 2023; and around the same time he will make *L'heure Bleue* for Tokyo City Ballet.

He is also very excited to be scheduled to make a work for the Prague Chamber Ballet, which is planned for November 2023. “This is the company of the late Pavel Šmok and it is very famous in the Czech Republic,” explained. “It is the company that inspired Jiří Kylián and so I am really happy to be able to work with a company that is so important to Czech heritage.” On the day that we spoke, Bubeníček received an email from another company inquiring about his future availability and so it would seem that he is now going to be fully occupied in the foreseeable future!

[Dante Metànoia – Teatro Alighieri – 01 to 05 September at 9pm](#)

To subscribe to a newsletter about the work of Jiří Bubeníček visit [www.jiribubenicek.com](http://www.jiribubenicek.com)

BUBENÍČEK

METANOIA

POLUNIN

RAVENNA



#### GRAHAM WATTS

Graham Watts is a freelance dance writer and critic writing regularly for Dancing Time, Shinshokan Dance magazine (Japan), Bachtrack.com and DanceTabs.com. He has written a biography of Daria Klimentová (The Agony and the Ecstasy) and contributed chapters on the work of Akram Khan to the Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Ballet and on Shobana Khajuria for the third edition of Routledge’s Fifty Contemporary Choreographers. He is Chairman of the Dance Section of The Critics’ Circle and of the UK National Dance Awards and regularly writes dance writing and criticism at The Royal Academy of Dance and The Place. He was nominated for the Dance Writing Award in the 2018 One Dance UK Awards and was appointed OBE in

