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Olga Smirnova on why dance matters and leaving Bolshoi Ballet

Royal Academy of Dance's Why Dance Matters podcast celebrates its 50th episode with this moving conversation



Image credit: Alex Gouliaev

Today the Royal Academy of Dance's **Why Dance Matters** podcast celebrates its 50th episode in conversation with one of the world's great ballerinas, Olga Smirnova.

The 50th episode, released today, comes in advance of Olga Smirnova performing in the title role of ***Giselle***. **Dutch National Ballet and Pathé Live** are bringing Rachel

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Beaujean and Ricardo Bustamante's staging of **Giselle** to cinemas worldwide on 21st January.

Smirnova joined Dutch National Ballet in 2022 after making headlines with a courageous, life-changing decision to leave Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In a wide-ranging and thoughtful conversation on the Why Dance Matters 50th episode, she discusses her momentous decision to leave Russia and her profound sense of why dance matters.

As a young girl, Smirnova had no dream of becoming a ballerina. However, she did go to dance classes, and was then accepted into the famous Vaganova Ballet Academy in St Petersburg. On completing her training in 2011, she joined the Bolshoi Ballet, starting immediately as a soloist and shining not only in the classics, but also in new and modern works. In 2016, she was promoted to prima ballerina, but when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Smirnova – strongly opposed to the invasion – decided to leave her homeland, making the transition to Dutch National Ballet.

Highlights from the 50th episode include the following reflections by Smirnova:

On leaving Russia, *"The decision was obvious for me, so this made it easier. But of course it meant huge changes. I never lived in a foreign country before. A new language, new country, new traditions, new company – all of that was a big challenge. But I was lucky to find great support at Dutch National Ballet and from the director Ted Branson. I can confidently say that Dutch National has now become my home."*

Contact with former Bolshoi colleagues, *"No, not many, just with a few people. I think they feel weird not to be able to tour or share their experience with the world, or have many choreographers coming to work with them. But people don't want to talk about it, or might be afraid to share their honest opinion."*

Why does dance matter? *"I like to think about my body as a tool, which helps to reveal and express different emotions and share these emotions with the audience. And I believe that the more people share their emotions with one another, the better they come to understand one another, which helps create a better and more harmonious world. Art helps us find the inspiration to exist – I just want to share this inspiration with the world."*



The 50th episode of Why Dance Matters podcast is available on all major streaming platforms. Visit our podcast page to find out more: [United Kingdom | Podcast \(royalacademyofdance.org\)](https://royalacademyofdance.org/podcast)

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Giselle is in cinemas around the world on 21 January
<https://www.giselleballetcinema.com/>

-ENDS-

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Notes to Editors

About the Royal Academy of Dance

Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) is one of the most influential dance education and training organisations in the world with a strong global membership in 85 countries. Established in 1920 to improve standards and re-invigorate dance training, the Academy helps and encourages its teachers to perfect their teaching skills and pass on this knowledge to their students. There are currently over 1,000 students in full-time or part-time teacher training programmes with the Academy and each year the examination syllabus is taught to thousands of young people worldwide, with around a quarter of a million pupils per year going on to take RAD exams.

About Why Dance Matters podcast

Why Dance Matters is a series of conversations with extraordinary people from the world of dance and beyond. It traces the impact of dance on their lives and asks why dance matters to them – and why it might matter to us all. The RAD inspires the world to dance, and we hope these insightful personal conversations – hosted by David Jays, editor of Dance Gazette, the RAD magazine – will delight and even surprise.

About David Jays, host

David Jays writes for the Guardian and Sunday Times, and is editor of Dance Gazette, the Royal Academy of Dance magazine. @mrdavidjays

About Sarah Myles, producer

Sarah Myles is an award winning podcast producer with nearly 10 years of experience in audio. Previous podcasts include Fearne Cotton's Happy Place, UK Youth's Are You Convinced?, How to Own the Room with Viv Groskop and The Week's podcast The Week Unwrapped.