

# Chicago Tribune

## With Trocks, Ballet is Glorious Drag

By Sid Smith, Special to the Tribune  
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Svetlana Lofatkina, nicknamed "the Chernobyl Cherub," is not the daintiest of dancers to tackle the lead in "Swan Lake."

She has a tendency to break stride and take on a walk not unlike that of a truck driver.

Her fluttering arms, frantic in their reproduction of the wings of a bird, can't quite distract your eyes from her telltale hairy chest, peeking up not so subtly from her bodice.

Lofatkina, of course, is a fictional star of that ever amazing troupe, Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, which is able to spoof ballet so keenly because they perform it so well.

Amid the drag-drenched slapstick, from deliberate spills to campy come-ons, the all-male Trocks inject subtle dance satire too. Their version of a 19th century chestnut, Arthur Saint Leon's "La Vivandiere Pas de Six," has a prim preciousness not that removed from the original.

That's true even as it's taken up a notch — quite a notch — by the grotesque pairing of a gargantuan ballerina, blessed with a hillbilly smile, and a tiny mite partner who happens to be Asian. When the group forms one tableau, their legs aimed in various directions in a doomed attempt at lovely geometry, the hapless tiny mite sticks his head underneath his ballerina's leg — the only way his face can be seen. (The amazing Joshua Grant and Long Zou are the actual couple.)

Wednesday's sold-out program at the Harris Theater was a marathon, though never a wearying one. **George Balanchine's** "Stars and Stripes" was tossed in as an extra, along with the usual "surprise" announcement of "The Dying Swan," danced with brittle tragedy and rubbery legwork by Ida Nevasayneva, who's really Paul Ghiselin. The only "Dying Swan," by the way, who actually molts.

In Trock-land, the **John Cage**-like accompaniment to the **Merce Cunningham**-like dance involves zithers, pots and pans and even paper bags blown up and popped.

In various works, the goofball corps de ballet crash to the floor, run like madcap track athletes to finish a circle and preen like teens on prom night.

But there are ferocious whipping turns, daredevil leaps and breakneck speed.

As the Trocks prove with their bravura "Majisimas," a straightforward salute to Cuban ballet, no matter its one unintentional tumble Wednesday, the best parody hails from expert discipline and a not-so-hidden love of the target.