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## Tulsa Ballet's 'Dracula' has female leads excited for acting-heavy roles

BY JAMES D. WATTS JR. World Scene Writer  
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Madalina Stoica is very familiar with the story of Dracula.

The real Dracula, that is - the man known as Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia, who earned the nickname Vlad the Impaler for his way of dealing with those who crossed him. Dracula was a family name.

Stoica, who joined Tulsa Ballet as a senior soloist this season, is a native of Romania, where Vlad Dracula is considered a kind of folk hero for his victories in battle.

"Dracula is part of history," she said. "It is the story about what he did for people ... and to people, as well. The real story is nothing like what (people) in America think Dracula is. Here it is almost a love story."

"Almost" being the operative word. The Dracula of popular culture may be a dashing figure who pursues certain women obsessively, but "happily ever after" isn't how the story ends.

Stoica has one of the two female lead roles in Tulsa Ballet's production of Ben Stevenson's "Dracula," which opens Friday at the Tulsa PAC.

She has the role of Svetlana, the daughter of the village innkeeper who, in the midst of her 18th birthday party, is stolen away by Dracula.

Principal dancer Sofia Menteguiaga dances the role of Flora, another villager whom Dracula has already added to his bevy of undead brides.

"I love this character - I always enjoy roles that involve acting," Menteguiaga said. "And Flora is very different because she's not a romantic role, like Giselle or Manon or some other classical part. Flora even has a mad scene that's as much acting as it is dancing, and it's a thrill to get to do that."

"All little girls who want to be ballerinas dream of playing princesses and fairies," she said. "I had those same dreams, but I've done a lot of princesses. It's not often that you get to play someone who is evil - or has an evil side to her."

The character of Flora has another dimension that Menteguiaga has never had the chance to explore before now - namely, she's able to fly.

It's through the help of the same special effects that will send a number of dancers in "Dracula" soaring up off the stage, and that add an extra, other-worldly aura to "Dracula."

"I'm really looking forward to doing the flying," Menteguiaga said. "Heights aren't a problem - I've done bungee jumping, so this should just be fun."

Stoica had no idea that a ballet about Dracula existed before she came to Tulsa and was cast in this production.

"The companies I have danced for mainly do classical ballets, although they have very recently started doing some pieces by (George) Balanchine and (Jiri) Kylian," she said. "So this ballet is very interesting and challenging, because it's full of movements I'm not used to doing."

"If someone had shown me this ballet two years ago, I would have said there was no way I could dance it," Stoica said. "And I was very nervous when rehearsals began. But once I started learning it, I realized that I could do more than I thought."

One aspect of Stevenson's choreography that Stoica finds the most demanding is how expressive it is.

"Classical ballet is very much technique - the steps are more important than the story," she said. "But here, the steps are what really tell the story. You still need a very strong technique, but you use it for a different purpose. It's more difficult, but it's also kind of liberating."

Flora falls victim to Dracula early in the ballet, but when she finds her position as "favored wife" challenged by the arrival of Svetlana, she performs a demanding solo that is a kind of excavation of the character's psyche.

"It's very hard to do," Menteguiga said, "because the choreography is very difficult and you have to convey all these thoughts - she starts to remember when she was human, what Dracula has done to her. But that's the fun of it, because you have to do all this difficult movement while making the feelings very clear."

For Stoica, the character of Svetlana is a bit easier to portray.

"She is a lot like me," Stoica said. "She is a little shy but has lots of energy. And when something frightens her, she tries her best to be brave about it."

"That's like me, too," she said, smiling. "I like scary movies, but whenever I watch one, I don't sleep for the next two weeks."

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## 'DRACULA'

*Presented by Tulsa Ballet*

**When:** 8 p.m. Friday, 3 and 8 p.m. Saturday, 3 p.m. Sunday

**Where:** Chapman Music Hall, Tulsa PAC, 101 E. Third St.

**Tickets:** \$20-\$95. 918-596-7111, [tulsaworld.com/mytix](http://tulsaworld.com/mytix).

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**Associated Images:**



**Alfonso Martin sinks his teeth into the titular role during a dress rehearsal "Dracula" from Tulsa Ballet. CORY YOUNG / Tulsa World**