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İstanbul to host ballet competition in autumn

September 2008 will be a cornerstone in the short history of ballet in Turkey, when the State Opera and Ballet Directorate General unveils the first-ever İstanbul International Ballet Competition. The competition, to be held once every two years, is designed to make Turkey's name heard globally in the art of ballet, organizers say.

Speaking yesterday at a news conference in İstanbul to promote the competition, State Opera Director Rengin Gökmen said the competition would bring a new dimension to the overseas promotion of Turkish ballet, which only has a 60-year history.

The first ballet school of the Turkish State Opera and Ballet was founded in 1948 in İstanbul with help from Irish-born ballerina Dame Ninette de Valois (1898-2001), who was also the founder of London's renowned Royal Ballet.

Nuri Çolakoglu, the executive board chairman of the "İstanbul: European Capital of Culture for 2010" project, said the competition would be a very important occasion that would prove to the entire world "that the art of ballet does exist in Turkey in addition to the international recognition Turkish dancers who follow in the footsteps of Ninette de Valois have gained."

The competition is scheduled for Sept. 8-13 at the Cemal Reşit Rey (CRR) Concert Hall in İstanbul. Nilay Yeşiltepe will serve as artistic director and coordinator of the competition, which will welcome the great retired Russian ballerina Maya Plisetskaya as its guest of honor. Charles Jude, the artistic director of the National Ballet of Bordeaux, will preside over an international panel of judges that will also include retired ballerinas Meriç Sümen Kanan, the former head of the Turkish State Opera and Ballet; and Evinç Sunal, former chief choreographer with the Turkish State Opera and Ballet.

The big prize at the competition will be the İstanbul Grand Prix, which will come with a cash prize of 6,000 euros. Details about the competition can be found at www.istanbulballetcompetition.org. İstanbul Today's Zaman