

“FROM the HEART” renews a 20-year promise

by AMY E. TUCKER

PHOTOS BY AMY E. TUCKER



Yuka Sato, Katia Gordeeva, Victoria Sinitsina, Kristi Yamaguchi and Meryl Davis perform to “Kalinka.”



Scott Hamilton introduces his son Maxx. Father and son performed a short duet.

On Dec. 30, 2015, while the world made plans to usher in a new year, thousands of skating fans poured into Lake Placid’s 1980 Rink, Herb Brooks Arena, for the sold out, one-night-only performance: “Ekaterina Gordeeva: From the Heart.”

Two decades earlier, Gordeeva lost her husband and longtime skating partner, Sergei Grinkov, on that same ice when he collapsed from a fatal heart attack during a Stars on Ice rehearsal. Gordeeva and Grinkov won the Olympic pairs title in 1988 and 1994.

On Feb. 27, 1996, three months following his death, Gordeeva skated alone for the first time in front of 15,000 fans and her Stars on Ice skating family in Hartford, Connecticut. The emotional tribute celebrated Grinkov’s life and their illustrious reign in pairs skating.

This time, “Katia” reunited with current and future skating champions and old friends for an evening of fun, family and friendship to thank her fans for 20 years of love and support.

Gordeeva’s eldest daughter, Daria Grinkova, hosted the event with Scott Hamilton. The pair shared touching and humorous stories of Grinkov as father, athlete and friend.

Always the showman, Hamilton roused the crowd asking, “Is there a greater surface of ice anywhere in the world?” He quoted the Russian proverb, “You live, as long as you’re remembered,” then read aloud a tribute letter from Grinkov’s longtime friend, Viktor Petrenko, that closed with, “My friend, Sergei, will always be found in my heart. ...”

Skaters representing Gordeeva’s past included World champion Yuka Sato, Olympians Paul Wylie and Kristi Yamaguchi and Gordeeva’s second husband, Olympic champion Ilia Kulik.

Both Sato and Wylie performed in the original Hartford tribute, but for Wylie, this moment was especially poignant having suffered an eerily similar cardiac arrest in April, 2015.

“I’ve never forgotten that day,” Wylie said. “It was such an important part of my life. Sergei was such a great person.”

Representing present-day skaters were World and Olympic medalist Patrick Chan, Olympic champion David Pelletier, and World and Olympic champions Meryl Davis and Charlie White.

The field of up-and-coming skaters included Russian ice dancers Victoria Sinitsina and Nikita Katsalopov, who skated to Chopin’s “Andante Spianato in G Major” choreographed by Gordeeva’s longtime coach, Marina Zoueva.

Canada’s 2015 pairs silver medalists

Lubov Iliushechkina and Dylan Moskovitch had only been skating together since June 2014. The duo performed their 2015-’16 free skate to Rachmaninoff’s “Symphony No. 2 in E Minor.”

Daria Grinkova described growing up with her close friend, Israeli champion Daniel Samohin, who skated to “Swing Sweet Pussycat” by The Atomic Fireballs. Samohin also paired up with the 2015 U.S. junior champion Andrew Torgashev for the traditional Russian sailors’ dance, “Yablochko.”

“We grow up. We grow old. And, the Stars on Ice family has continued to grow,” said Hamilton as a 7-year-old with a frock of bright shiny hair stroked his way to center ice.

The audience cheered as Maxx Hamilton served up a charismatic surprise performance, including a few jumps and a brief duet with his dad — proving the apple didn’t fall too far from this family tree.

Gordeeva’s youngest daughter, Elizaveta Kulik, helped round out a future generation of skaters. She skated to “A Thousand Years” by The Piano Guys, a number choreographed by her coach and father.

“This show commemorates the passage of time,” Wylie said. “We surrounded Katia then, so she could pick herself up and move on with her life.”

Twenty years ago, Hamilton closed the original tribute to Sergei with a promise to Katia: “For as long as you need all of us, we’ll be there for you.”

Two decades later, her fans and the skating community are still making good on that promise.

