SWAN LAKE

HISTORY
Based on a German legend, Swan Lake tells the story of the beautiful Princess Odette, who has been enchanted by the evil sorcerer, Von Rothbart in a spell that leaves her a woman by night and a swan by day. When Prince Siegfried discovers the lake, he falls in love with Odette and there is at last hope that the spell will be broken. But all hope vanishes when Siegfried is tricked into pledging his love to Von Rothbart’s daughter, Odile, disguised by magic as Odette. With no other option, Siegfried and Odette throw themselves into the lake and are united for eternity in the afterlife.

This season Pennsylvania Ballet premieres a traditional Swan Lake, based on Petipa’s classical choreography, complete with the evil Von Rothbart presiding over his flock of maiden swans in a dark glen by the lake. Perhaps love doesn’t conquer all...

Source: The Marius Petipa Society and Pennsylvania Ballet

SYNOPSIS

Prologue
Long before our story begins, Odette, a beautiful princess, falls under the spell of von Rothbart, a wicked sorcerer.

Act I - The Prince’s Birthday Party
It is Prince Siegfried’s twenty-first birthday and he is celebrating with friends. The Queen Mother arrives to give him his present, a crossbow, and reminds him that, as he is to become King, he must choose a bride at the ball the next evening. She leaves, bidding him to enjoy himself, but reminding him again to think about his royal obligation to be wed. Siegfried, realizing that his carefree days are at an end, leaves the party at the height of the festivities to seek the solace of the woods. Benno, his friend, finds him and suggests they go hunting. Siegfried declines, preferring to be alone.

Act II - Some hours later, by the Lake
Prince Siegfried enters a moonlit clearing in the forest and sees a magnificent swan in flight. He carefully takes aim, but, to his astonishment, the bird transforms into a breathtakingly beautiful girl, and he withdraws into the trees to observe her. Unable to resist his curiosity, he steps out, only to startle and frighten her. He assures her he will do her no harm and asks her to explain the marvel he has just seen. Impressed by his gentleness, Odette unburdens the story of her plight. She tells him she is a Princess of high birth who fell under the spell of an
evil sorcerer, and now her fate is to be a swan; only in the hours of darkness may she assume her human guise. Indeed, this very lake is filled with her mother's tears. She tells him she is condemned for eternity unless an innocent youth swears eternal fidelity to her and marries her – only then can she find release. Only then can the spell be broken. But if he should forswear her, then she must remain a swan forever. At that moment the sorcerer appears. The Prince, in his passion, reaches for his crossbow, but Odette immediately protects the sorcerer with her body, for she knows that if he is killed before the spell is broken, she too will die. The sorcerer disappears, and Odette slips away into the forest. Siegfried realizes his fate is now entwined with hers. Dawn approaches and Odette is compelled by the spell to return to her guise as a swan. Siegfried is left awestruck.

Act III - The Great Hall
Heralds and trumpets announce the start of the ball. Eligible young princesses from all over the world arrive to be introduced to Prince Siegfried so that he may choose a bride. They present their national dances for the entertainment of the Prince and the Queen Mother. The prospective brides dance for them, and the Queen Mother reminds Siegfried that he must choose one for his wife. As Siegfried struggles with his responsibility to marry, his mind remains with Odette and he cannot choose. Trumpets announce an uninvited guest. It is von Rothbart with his daughter Odile. Siegfried is seduced by her, as von Rothbart holds the court in thrall. Siegfried announces his intention to marry Odile. Von Rothbart asks Siegfried to swear fidelity. He realizes too late that he has been the victim of a terrible plot. The scene darkens; Odette is seen at the castle door, weeping. Grief-stricken, Siegfried rushes to the lakeside.

Act IV - The lakeside
A great storm rages. Siegfried, bursting into the glade, discovers Odette and begs her forgiveness. Odette tells Siegfried she must kill herself, or she will forever be a swan. Siegfried, knowing that his destiny is forever changed, declares he will die with her, thus breaking von Rothbart’s power over her. As dawn approaches, von Rothbart appears. The lovers answer his threat by throwing themselves into the lake. Von Rothbart is vanquished and his power ended.

Apocalypse - The lovers are united in life after death.

Source: American Ballet Theatre Archives
WHO'S WHO

Choreographer: Angel Corella

Regarded as one of the finest dancers of his generation, Angel Corella was appointed Artistic Director of Pennsylvania Ballet beginning with the 2014-2015 Season. Corella’s talent, technique, and passion have brought him wide acclaim around the world.

Born in Madrid, Spain, Corella joined American Ballet Theatre in 1995 and was quickly promoted to principal dancer. In his 17-year career with ABT, he established himself as one of the greatest male dancers of his time. Corella excelled in a wide range of repertory and has danced such iconic roles as Prince Siegfried in Swan Lake, Romeo in Romeo and Juliet, and The Nutcracker Prince in The Nutcracker. He has also appeared as a guest artist with the Royal Ballet in London, the Kirov Ballet in Russia, and New York City Ballet. He has received numerous awards, including First Prize in the National Ballet Competition in Spain (1991), the Prix Benois de la Danse (2000), and the National Award of Spain (2003). Corella has danced for Queen Elizabeth II, Queen Sophia of Spain, and United States Presidents Bill Clinton, George Bush, and Barack Obama.

Corella's onstage talent and passion translate wholly to his behind-the-scenes career. From 2008-2014, he served as director for his own company, the Barcelona Ballet (formerly the Corella Ballet), in his native Spain, where he is regarded as a national treasure. It was the first classical ballet company established in the country in 20 years. Corella retired from the ABT in June 2012 but continued to dance with his own company.

A passionate teacher and mentor to young professional dancers, Corella has taught at various summer programs and leading dance schools including the Royal Ballet School in London.

Source: Pennsylvania Ballet

Choreographer: Marius Petipa

Marius Petipa, the “father of classical ballet,” was born in Marseilles, France, in 1818. He began his dance training at the age of seven with his father, Jean Petipa, the French dancer and teacher. Marius was educated at the Grand College in Brussels and also attended the conservatoire, where he studied music. Although he disliked dancing in those early years, his progress was so great that he made his debut in 1831 in his father’s production of Gardel’s La Dansomanie. In 1834 Jean Petipa became Maitre de Ballet at the theatre in Bordeaux and it was here that Marius completed his education. At the age of sixteen, he became premier danseur at
the theatre in Nantes, where he also produced several short ballets. In 1839 Marius left Nantes
to tour North America with his father, and on their return visit went to Paris. The following
year he made his debut at the Comedie Francaise, where he partnered Carlotta Grisi in a
benefit performance. He continued his studies with A. Vestris, and became a principal dancer
in Bordeaux. Petipa next went to Spain in 1845, to work at the King’s Theatre. While in Madrid,
he studied Spanish dance and choreographed *Carmen et son Terero, La Perle de Seville, L'Aventure
d'une fille de Madrid, La Fleur de Grenade*, and *Depart Dour la Course des Toureaux*. Petipa
returned to Paris as a principal dancer, but in 1847 left for Russia. He had signed a one-year
contract with the St. Petersburg Imperial Theatre, but was to remain there for the rest of his
life. As a principal dancer, Petipa often appeared with Fanny Elssler, and was much acclaimed
for his performances in such ballets as *Paquita* (which he restaged and in which made his
Considered an excellent dancer and partner, his acting, stage manners and pantomime were
held up as examples for many generations of dancers. When *Giselle* was revived in 1850, Petipa
made some changes in the Wilis scenes, which became the *Grand Pas des Wilis* of 1884. In 1854,
he married Maria Sourovshchikova, a student in the graduating class of the Imperial School,
who later danced in many of her husband’s ballets. (Petipa’s second marriage was to Lubova
Leonidovna, a member of the Moscow Ballet, in 1882.) In 1854 he became an instructor in the
school, while continuing to dance and to re-stage ballets from the French repertoire. Sources
differ on the first original work he staged for the Imperial Theatre: Some state it was *The Star of
Granada*, others that it was *A Marriage During Regency*. But all sources concur that his first great
success was *The Daughter of Pharaoh* (staged in six weeks), which resulted in his appointment
as Choreographer-in Chief in 1862 -- a position he held for nearly fifty years. In 1869 Petipa
became Premier Ballet Master of the Imperial Theatre. The value of his accomplishments
is inestimable. He produced more than sixty full-evening ballets and innumerable shorter
works, and is considered to have laid the foundation for the entire school of Russian ballet.
Those who felt the dramatic content of ballet should be strengthened began to oppose Petipa
toward the end of his career. His noble classicism and consciousness of form was considered
old-fashioned, and in 1903, at age 84, Petipa was forced to retire from the Imperial Theatre
as a direct result of the failure of his ballet, *The Magic Mirror*. His last years were filled with
bitterness and disillusionment because his beloved theatre had been taken away. He died in
St. Petersburg in 1910. Marius Petipa is considered one of the greatest choreographers of all
time. He researched the subject matter of the ballets he staged, making careful and detailed
preparations for each production, and then worked closely with the designer and composer.
His classicism integrated the purity of the French school with Italian virtuosity. Petipa elevated
the Russian ballet to international fame and laid the cornerstone for 20th Century ballet.

Source: http://www.abt.org/education/archive/choreographers/petipa_m.html
Composer: Peter Illyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Born in Votkinsk, Russia, Pyotr Illyich Tchaikovsky is widely considered the most popular Russian composer in history. He trained at an elite primary school and began study at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1862 as a full-time music student. He taught harmony at Moscow Conservatory beginning in 1866, and served as music critic for a Moscow paper from 1872-1876. He toured as a conductor domestically and abroad until 1887.

Tchaikovsky’s more than 200 musical works include The Maid of Orleans (1878-79), The Queen of Spades (1890), Swan Lake (1876), The Sleeping Beauty (1888-89), The Nutcracker (1891-1892), and Romeo and Juliet (1869). His work varies from operas, ballets, symphonies, suites, concertos, and cantatas.


ACTIVITIES

Fun Facts

- The first production of Tchaikovsky and Petipa’s Swan Lake was performed in 1895.
- Tchaikovsky passed away before the choreography was completed; the first partial performance of Swan Lake was done at a memorial for the composer. That partial ballet would eventually become the second act of the full ballet.
- The famous feathered headband often associated with the Swan costume did not appear until a production in 1903. It has been a standard in nearly all versions of the ballet since.
- In the 1895 production of Swan Lake the character Odile was not a “Black Swan” – she was just simply Von Rothbart’s daughter, an evil enchantress. The tradition of “Black Swan” and “White Swan” would not emerge until the 20th century.
- There are a total of 32 fouettes-- a particular type of pirouette-- done in succession in the Black Swan pas de deux.
- Stories of the swan-maidens date back to ancient Greek times when the Greek god Apollo was born with swans flying above his head.
- The first American production of Swan Lake was performed by the San Francisco Ballet.
- Matthew Bourne choreographed his own version of Swan Lake with a cast of all male dancers.
- Swans are often a symbol of love or fidelity because of their long-lasting, monogamous relationships.
Lesson Plan

- *Swan Lake* was first performed in Moscow, Russia in 1877; what significant events were taking place in Russia at this time?
- When viewing the ballet, do you see any influences of the events taking place? Why or why not?
- How would you describe the similarities between the narrative on stage and the historical context?
- What was happening in the United States in 1877? Do you see any similarities? What are the differences?
- How would you relate the movement of the dancers to the historical context?

Lesson Plan

- Ballets are passed from generation to generation through documents, notation, video, and personal experiences; what stories or information do you know from your family, and how was this given to you?
- What is the easiest way to transmit information to one another?
- How would the ballet be different if technology would have been able to capture the original choreography?
- How does technology help to promote history? How does it inhibit?