

PENNSYLVANIA

BALLET

Angel Corella, Artistic Director

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MAR 7-17 / ACADEMY OF MUSIC

GISELLE

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SUMMARY

This story is about a peasant girl, Giselle, who dies of a broken heart after discovering her lover Albrecht is a nobleman and is betrothed to another. She is summoned from her grave by a group of supernatural women, the Wilis, young women who died before they married. They despise men because their own hearts have all been broken, so they try to force Giselle's lover Albrecht to dance himself to death. Giselle's love for him is so strong that she saves him from his fate.

HISTORY

Giselle premiered in Paris in 1841, making it one of the oldest ballets still performed today. It was hugely popular and was immediately staged across Europe, Russia and the United States. It remains in the repertoire of almost every major ballet company in the world. There have been many versions, but the traditional choreography that survives is primarily derived from the revivals staged by Maurius Petipa during the late 19th and early 20th centuries for the Imperial Ballet in St. Petersburg, Russia. Adolphe Adam composed the music.

SYNOPSIS

Act 1

The ballet is set in vineyards bordering the Rhine. Hilarion, the village huntsman and a gamekeeper to the court, returns from his early morning chores and pauses before a neighboring cottage—the home of Giselle, with whom he is in love. Villagers pass by on their way to the vineyards, where they will harvest the last of the grapes before the Wine Festival.

Count Albrecht arrives with his squire and enters a cottage opposite Giselle's. He emerges dressed as a peasant, submits his disguise to the squire's inspection, and dismisses him. Hilarion has witnessed this exchange and is puzzled that the squire should show such deference to this youth, who is known to the villagers as a fellow peasant named Loys. Giselle emerges from her cottage to dance with Loys, who immediately excuses himself from joining the grape pickers so that he can be alone with Giselle. He swears eternal love, and she takes the traditional test with a daisy - "he loves me, he loves me not." When it appears the answer will be "not," she throws the flower away; Loys retrieves it and by surreptitiously discarding a petal, comes up with the answer "he loves me." Hilarion interrupts, protesting that he, and not Loys, truly loves Giselle. A quarrel ensues, and Hilarion's suspicions deepen as Loys instinctively reaches for the sword that, as a nobleman, he is accustomed to wearing.

The villagers return, and Giselle invites them to join in a dance to celebrate the harvest. Her mother, Berthe, interrupts and warns her that her life may be endangered if she overexerts herself by dancing. She is struck by a momentary hallucination of her daughter in death. She sees her as a Wili, a restless spirit who has died with her love unrequited.

A horn sounds in the distance, and Loys recognizes it as coming from the hunting party of the prince. Loys hastily departs as the party arrives and Hilarion breaks into his cottage. Refreshments are served to the hunters, and the prince's daughter, Bathilde, gives Giselle a gold necklace when she learns they are both engaged to be married. After the royal party has returned to the hunt, Hilarion emerges from Loys' cottage with a hunting horn and a sword, further evidence that the supposed peasant is, in fact, a nobleman.

The villagers return and proclaim Giselle the queen of the Wine Festival. Hilarion interrupts to denounce Loys as an impostor. When Loys denies the charges and threatens the gamekeeper with his sword, Hilarion blows the hunting horn, a signal for the prince to return. Loys is exposed as an impostor when Bathilde reveals that he is her fiancé, Count Albrecht. The shock of learning of Albrecht's duplicity is too great for Giselle's frail constitution. Her mind becomes unhinged, and she dies of a broken heart—her love unrequited.

Act 2

The scene is laid in a clearing in the forest near Giselle's grave. The Wilis are summoned by their queen, Myrta, to attend the ceremonies that will initiate Giselle into their sisterhood. Their love unrequited, the Wilis can find no rest and their spirits are forever destined to roam the earth from midnight to dawn, vengefully trapping any male who enters their domain and forcing him to dance to his death. Hilarion, in search of Giselle, meets his death at their hands. Albrecht arrives to leave flowers on Giselle's grave. He too is trapped and commanded to dance until death. Giselle resolves to protect him. She dances with him until the clock strikes four, at which hour the Wilis lose their power so Albrecht is rescued from death.

Source: ABT Archives ; Wikipedia

STAGER

ANGEL CORELLA

Regarded as one of the finest dancers of his generation, Angel Corella was appointed Artistic Director of Pennsylvania Ballet in August of 2014. 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. 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. Corella retired from 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: abt.org/education/archive/choreographers/stevenson_b.html

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 Ballet Master 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 upon their return went to Paris. The following year he made his debut at the Comedie Francaise, where he partnered with Carlotta Grisi in a benefit performance. He continued his studies with A. Vestris, and became a principal dancer back in Bordeaux. In 1845, Petipa went to Spain to work at the King's Theatre; while in Madrid, he studied Spanish dance and choreographed several ballets with a Spanish flair. Petipa then 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 Russian debut), *Giselle*, *La Peri*, *Armida*, *Catarina*, *Le Delire d'un Peintre*, *Esmeralda*, *Le Corsaire*, and *Faust*. Considered an excellent dancer and partner, his acting, stage manners and pantomime were held up as examples for many generations of dancers. In 1854 he became an instructor in the school, while continuing to dance and to re-stage ballets from the French repertoire. 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. His last years were filled with bitterness and disillusionment because his beloved theatre had been taken away. He died in St. Petersburg in 1910.

Source: http://www.abt.org/education/archive/choreographers/petipa_m.html

COMPOSER

ADOLPHE ADAM

French composer Adolphe Adam was born in Paris on July 24, 1803. He was the son of a musician who did his best to dissuade him from following the same career; but he was eventually allowed to enroll at the Paris Conservatoire, where he studied under Boieldieu. After helping Boieldieu orchestrate the overture to his opera *La Dame Blanche* in 1825, he came to the notice of the Opera-Comique and had his first one-act opera *Pierre et Catherine* produced there in 1829. His brother-in-law, Francois Laporte, was musical director at Covent Garden and through him a couple of Adam's works were staged in London in 1832. Until then he had written in the conventional opera-comique style, but in *La Chalet* (1834) he wrote what is considered to be the first true French operetta, light and frivolous with music nearer to the popular vaudeville idiom. However, the opera which established his reputation and has been most frequently performed is *Le Postillon de Longjumeau* (1836): the aria "Mes amis, écoutez l'histoire" has remained a tenor favorite.

In 1844 he was elected a Member of the Institut and in 1849 he became a full professor of composition at the Conservatoire. He died suddenly seven years later on May 3, 1856.

His reputation during his lifetime was not limited to his own country. He wrote ballets for London, Berlin, and St. Petersburg. The ballets which brought him some of his greatest successes were *Faust*; *La Fille du Danube*; *La Jolie Fille de Gand*, and especially *Giselle*.

Adam attempted four kinds of dramatic composition: (1) grand opera, in which he utterly failed; (2) ballet, in which he produced some charming melodies; (3) comic opera, the one and only real domain of his talent; (4) incidental music for nearly thirty plays, which is ephemeral. He also wrote church music, pianoforte pieces, and songs.

Source: ABT Archives

FUN FACTS

- The idea for the story of *Giselle* was inspired by early 19th century ghost stories, including a poem by Victor Hugo.
- *Giselle* is often considered the Hamlet of ballet; it is a very challenging role, and many fans choose to watch different versions of it throughout their lives.
- The “Wilis” in *Giselle* are ghostly spirits of dead girls jilted on their wedding day.
- They force men to dance to their deaths – a real “case of the wilis!” Some have traced “Wili” to a Slavic witch-spirit associated with water; the name is a cognate of the Scandinavian *Valkyrie* of Opera fame
- The name “Giselle” is derived from the Germanic word “gisil,” meaning “hostage” or “pledge.” This name may have originally been a descriptive nickname for a child given as a pledge to a foreign court.

Source: Some “fun facts” reprinted with permission of Kansas City Ballet

LESSON PLAN 1 | GRADES 11 - 12

- *Giselle* was first performed in Paris, France in 1841; what significant events were taking place in France 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 1841? Do you see any similarities? What are the differences?
- How would you relate the movement of the dancers to the historical context?

LESSON PLAN 2 | GRADES 9 - 12

- *Giselle* draws heavily from Eastern European folklore. What are some similar tales from that region that are still shared today?
- Why were folk tales important in pre-technology eras?
- How were folk tales shared between cultures across Europe?
- Do you see any similarities between the story of *Giselle* and any more modern works of fiction or media (television, movies, video game stories)?
- How does technology help to promote history? How does it inhibit?