THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET EDUCATION

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SECONDARY SCHOOLS

SWAN LAKE
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The Australian Ballet’s current version

Choreography: Stephen Baynes
Original choreography: Marius Petipa
Music: Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Designed by: Hugh Colman
Lighting designed by: Rachel Burke
Projections designed and directed by: Domenico Bartolo (21-19)
SYNOPSIS

PRELUDE: NIGHT. A PALACE TERRACE BY A LAKE

As his coming of age approaches, Prince Siegfried feels the heavy responsibilities of his rank. He grieves, too, remembering the funeral of his royal father that so overwhelmed him as a young boy.
In the busy preparations for the Prince’s birthday, his young friends, fellow officers, and ladies of the court try to distract him from his sadness. His widowed mother the Queen arrives with the Chancellor, who has effectively ruled the kingdom since the King’s death. Four foreign princesses are presented by their ambassadors as potential fiancées for the Prince, but he is more interested in drinking toasts and dancing. As evening falls, he feels the familiar lure of the lake, where he can be alone.
Siegfried is transfixed by the appearance of a swan, which changes before his eyes into the Princess Odette. She and her maidens are prisoners of the sorcerer von Rothbart, and condemned to be swans for all but a few hours of each night. Only a vow of true love and fidelity can break the spell. Entranced, Siegfried gradually woos Odette, and promises her his love: Odette gives him her heart, although she fears the power of the malevolent magician.
A great ball is in progress, and this evening a distracted Prince is expected to choose a future Princess to reign with him. None are aware of his secret love for Odette. The festivities are interrupted by the arrival of von Rothbart and his assistants, as well as his daughter Odile. Strangely resembling Odette, the seductive beauty captivates Siegfried, who allows himself to fall under her spell, and to break his vow to Odette. As von Rothbart triumphs, Siegfried runs from the palace in despair.
The swan maidens, now spellbound forever, gather to protect Odette. Miserable, the Prince begs her forgiveness, which she gives, knowing that they must part. In desperation he drowns himself, but as von Rothbart gathers his body from the lake, the soul of Odette is released. Although she will remain a swan, she is free of von Rothbart forever.
Choreographer’s Note

Creating a new version of this most iconic of classical ballets was a huge and exciting challenge. David McAllister wanted a traditional production to stand alongside Graeme Murphy’s magnificent reinvention of this ballet from a decade ago. There was therefore no question that the choreography for Act II should be the traditional version, but apart from this act and the Black Swan Pas de deux, all the choreography for the other three acts is my own. In Act II I have adhered mostly to the Kirov version, although I have made several alterations, including the choreography for the Lead Swans, which is essentially my own. I have also virtually re-choreographed Odette’s first encounter with Prince Siegfried. For Acts I and III, I wanted very much to do away with any sense of “divertissement”, so I strived to make the various numbers character-driven so they have a sense of purpose within the narrative.

Hugh Colman and I collaborated on every aspect of this production over many months, and more than anything else we have been guided by Tchaikovsky’s immortal score. Like so much of his music, it is steeped in a deeply Romantic aesthetic and it is this fundamental aspect that has driven our vision of the ballet. We both feel that the tragedy at the heart of this tale is as much about Siegfried as Odette, so in order to understand him more, I have tried to give the characters closest to him greater depth. Both he and Odette are essentially people trapped in situations against their will. Siegfried’s pre-ordained destiny of royal and military duty is totally at odds with his sensitive soul, and at an important turning point in his life, he seeks peace and solace by the beautiful lake near the palace – a place which has had great significance for him.

When Odette is revealed to him, he finds in her the embodiment of the truth and beauty he has yearned for and he falls instantly in love with her. But he has to confront the evil which enslaves her, and von Rothbart has the power to awaken a darker side in him. Faced with this, Siegfried succumbs to his human fallibility and Odette is lost to him.

I would like to thank Hugh for the shared experience of bringing this work to the stage and to congratulate him on his exquisite designs. I would also like to thank Rachel Burke and Domenico Bartolo, who have collaborated with us over many months, and whose contributions are an integral part of the production.

Finally, I want to thank the beautiful dancers of The Australian Ballet. I hope the ballet is as rewarding for them to dance as they have made it to create.

STEPHEN BAYNES
2012
CAST OF CHARACTERS

Prince Siegfried, heir to the throne
The Queen
The child Siegfried
A babushka, Siegfried’s childhood nurse
Her husband
Ladies in waiting to the Queen
The Lord Chancellor
Baron von Rothbart, an evil magician who presides over the lake by the palace
Benno, an officer and close friend to Prince Siegfried
The Duchess
The Countess
Foreign princesses, prospective brides for Prince Siegfried
Princess Odette, a captive of von Rothbart
Lead Swans

Cygnets
Odile, daughter to von Rothbart
von Rothbart’s entourage – Spanish dancers, Russian Princess, Cossacks
Officers and ladies of the court, Ambassadors, Swan maidens, Guards, Serving women
The Creatives

STEPHEN BAYNES
Choreographer


In 1995 Stephen was appointed The Australian Ballet’s resident choreographer. Since then he has created 20 works for the company. In 2005 Unspoken Dialogues received the Helpmann Award for Best Choreography and both Molto Vivace and Constant Variants received the Betty Pounder Award for Best Choreography at the Green Room Awards.

Stephen has had works commissioned by New York City Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Sydney Dance Company, the Queensland Ballet, West Australian Ballet, and the Hong Kong Ballet.

PIOTR ILLYICH TCHAIKOVSKY
Composer

One of the outstanding composers of the late 19th century and the best known of all Russian composers, Tchaikovsky had a genius for creating melodies, a mastery of musical structure, and a highly developed sense of musical drama that enabled him to reach directly into the hearts of his listeners.

Tchaikovsky was born in Kamsko-Votinsk, in the Ural Mountains of European Russia in 1840, but when he was ten his family moved to St. Petersburg where he went through traditional schooling, studying law. At 19 he became a clerk in the Ministry of Justice.

At this point in his life, Tchaikovsky realised that he wanted to be a musician. For a while he studied music theory and composition at a music school founded by Anton Rubinstein, although still continuing with his job. Then to the surprise of everyone he resigned to concentrate on music. In 1865 he graduated from the music school and won a position as teacher at the Moscow Conservatory, though his aims remained more compositional than pedagogical.

Though Tchaikovsky wrote only three ballets, almost all his music is imbued with theatricality and the qualities of dance, especially in its rhythmic energy, vivid melody and emotional clarity. His symphonies, concertos, tone poems, orchestral suites, chamber music, and even songs have all made fine ballet scores.

In 1875 the Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow, commissioned Tchaikovsky to compose the music to Swan Lake. This was Tchaikovsky’s first professional ballet score, though there is no doubt that he suggested the story, as he had some six years earlier composed and played on the piano the score for a one act ballet-pantomime, The Lake of Swans, especially for his sister’s children and their friends.

He began composing enthusiastically and wrote the first two acts in three weeks. The orchestral score was finished on 22 April, although the ballet was not premiered until the February/March of the following year, 1877. But the premiere was not a success: the music was above the heads of the Moscow ballet audiences of the time. The original choreographer Joseph Reisinger cut some numbers and replaced them with pieces from other ballets by more “rum-ti-tum” composers.

After 1883 the ballet was not given in full in the composer’s lifetime, although at the end of a concert conducted by him in Prague in 1888 (by which time he had been transformed from a little-known, underpaid junior professor to a world-famous musician) a special performance of Act II was presented for him.

Tchaikovsky died in 1893, aged 53, and to honour his memory Petipa, in collaboration with the composer-conductor Riccardo Drigo, set about reshaping the forgotten Swan Lake. This version, the basis of every version since, had its first performance at the Mariinsky Theatre in January 1895.

HUGH COLMAN
Designer

Hugh Colman is an honours graduate of Melbourne University and trained as a designer with the Melbourne Theatre Company. He has been a resident designer for that company, as well as for the State Theatre Company of South Australia. The major part of his career since 1970 has been working as a freelance designer.

With close to a50 production credits, he has worked for most of the major theatre, dance and opera companies in Australia. These include The Australian Ballet, Opera Australia, Victoria State Opera, and State Opera of South Australia, Melbourne Theatre Company, Sydney Theatre Company, State Theatre Company of South Australia and various commercial enterprises.

In 2006 Colman won the John Truscott Award for Excellence in Design. Previous Green Room Awards were for The Australian Ballet’s productions of The Sleeping Beauty (1984) and Snugglepot and Cuddlepie.
The Creatives

RACHEL BURKE
Lighting Designer

Lighting Designer Rachel has worked as a freelance lighting designer for Australia’s leading arts companies, including The Australian Ballet, Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne Theatre Company, Sydney Theatre Company, Company B Belvoir Street and Playbox, for over two decades.

She is the recipient of six Green Room Awards for Outstanding Lighting Design and was nominated for a Helpmann Award and a Sydney Theatre Award in 2005 for Malthouse Theatre’s Black Medea.

Previous lighting designs for The Australian Ballet include Dark Lullaby, Intersex, El Tango, Imaginary Masque, Unspoken Dialogues, Molto Vivace, Ballet Imperial, Scuola di ballo and Stephen Baynes’ Swan Lake.

Rachel was Senior Associate at Electrolight Pty Ltd from 2007–2012 and her exterior architectural lighting design for the Arts Centre Hamer Hall Victoria won the IES National and State Award of Excellence 2005. Major projects with Electrolight include the façade lighting for AAMI Park; Lonsdale Street Dandenong Revitalisation RCD; the Legislative Council Chamber, Parliament House Victoria; and the commissioned permanent foyer art works for Hamer Hall, with Robert Owen.

She presented a paper on Light and Health in Madrid for the PLDC Conference October 2011 and for the Melbourne IES in April 2012.

DOMENICO BARTOLO
Projection Designer and Director

Domenico Bartolo is an international designer/director and the co-founder of 21-19, a design and communications agency based in Melbourne.

In his 16 years as a designer/director, Dom has dedicated himself to the art of moving image. His work is highly rewarded and respected. He consistently wins major awards every year, including the coveted Best of Show at the BDA Promax Awards for his opening title sequence for the SBS drama series Going Home. His branding work for the international airline Qantas was awarded the highest honour: the Pinnacle Award at the Australian Graphic Design Association Awards.

More recently, his short films have found audiences in European contemporary art galleries; his short film The Reality Project was selected to feature at the 10th anniversary of the prestigious onedotzero Moving Image Festival at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London. His animated film In Motion was shown at the British Film Institute in London.

Endeavouring to explore visual communication, Domenico is dedicated to promoting creativity within the Australian design community. He is a founding member of the popular design web site The Australian INfront.

Relentlessly optimistic, he is driven by an overwhelming passion for design and creative excellence.
Hugh Colman’s designs for Swan Lake are set in the Victorian era. The scenario he worked from was intercultural marriage, seen in both the English and Russian royal families. The King dies, and with her son being too young to rule, the Queen is at a loss. With her husband gone, the Chancellor manipulates her.

Military references run through the ballet. Hugh Colman’s designs also reference the children of royal families.

The costumes of the Queen in Act III are inspired by photos of Queen Victoria’s clothes, with their sashes, borders and opulent decorations.

At the opening of the ballet we see the child Siegfried and his distraught mother at the funeral of his father, the King. The Kings’ body is brought across the lake and the child Prince is terrified by the mysterious boatman who accompanies the funeral barge.

The set design includes the use of projected images which appear sparingly in the second and third acts. The purpose of the projections is to emphasise the omnipotence of Rothbart.

The swans in Stephen Bayne’s Swan Lake are women, not birds. The costumes reflect this; they lack the feathers seen in other versions. The bodices have appliqué and the skirts are made of nylon net.
The Australian Ballet Education

Artistic Director David McAllister, Musical Director Nicolette Fraillon and Choreographer Stephen Baynes are interviewed by Rose Mulready.

**Rose:** Swan Lake has been called “the most massacred ballet score in history”. How did we arrive at the version we use today?

**David:** There are pieces of music that people use and pieces of music that they don’t. If you listen to the whole recording, it goes for something like four hours, and so in every production there are things that are included or discarded.

**Nicolette:** There isn’t an original, hand-written Tchaikovsky score, or even a score from the very first performance in existence; no one’s been able to find one. From the moment it was first performed, various people mucked around with the order of the piece and added extra pas de deux for different dancers. Some people have attempted reconstructions, and one of the best sources for that has been the posters that advertised the performance, and which list the numbers in order. Posters from the original performances exist, and they show how quickly the order changed. However, given that the score was still being written even when rehearsals were starting, who knows if the order of those first performances reflects Tchaikovsky’s intent?

**David:** When Ivanov and Petipa took it on, after Tchaikovsky had died, that’s when it really got jumbled, as they started playing around with the order.

**Stephen:** What I find amazing, whether it’s intentional or not, is how much understanding Tchaikovsky seemed to have for the ballet genre, for someone who was not at all experienced. He wrote to a friend along the lines of “I’m quite interested in this ballet thing, I thought I’d have a go at writing it – someone’s asked me.”

**Nicolette:** He’d seen quite a lot of ballet performances, and his writings do show that he actually really loved the genre and he loved the idea of doing it, but still, he agonised over it. At that time, ballet composers were thought of as pretty second-rate.

**Stephen:** They composed to order, didn’t they? “We need eight bars of mazurka!”

**Nicolette:** They did, and he did, even for The Sleeping Beauty. It was still “I want eight bars of this, and I want a happy number here”. They were a bit like advertising jingle writers or film composers. He was pretty much given a brief. He certainly thought hard about it, and whether it would be bad for his reputation if he did it, but he decided he would, and thank God he did, because he changed the world of ballet music for ever.

He demonstrated that you could still write to a brief but create music that went way beyond that.

In his great ballet scores, and Swan Lake was the real trend-setter for this, he understood that there are places where the dancers need to show off, and that the focus needs to be on them, so the music doesn’t detract from that. Then there are really symphonic moments where the music, through use of keys and rhythm and orchestration and complexity, takes over the storytelling.

**Rose:** Can you give an example of when that happens in Swan Lake?

**Nicolette:** From the moment the curtain goes up, even the overture encapsulates the kind of story it will be. Up until then, overtures were happy little dancy numbers which were about getting the audience settled. They might have had a bit of a theme, but they were mostly giving the audience the chance to stop talking, to pack away the picnics or whatever.

Swan Lake starts with this really dramatic theme, firstly in an oboe. It’s actually an inversion of the famous swan theme that comes at the end of Act I and at the start of Act II, and which comes to its final tragic resolution at the end of Act IV. It already sets the scene for something really sad, really mournful. You immediately know we’re not in for a happy little ballet, just from the way Tchaikovsky uses every musical device, from tempo to melody to harmonic changes.

It’s totally miraculous, this score, in the context of ballet music of that period. It’s one of those moments in artistic history that virtually came from nowhere. And the ballet community of the time recognised that genius, even while reviewers were torn. It was like, “We can give a brief to Minkus (who was the court composer at the time), and end up with a lovely score that musically doesn’t move us. Or we can give a brief to Tchaikovsky and get this.” Swan Lake was responsible for the sacking in Russia of all of the tenured ballet composers, and the commissioning of big-name symphonic composers like Glazunov.

David: Yes, then that beautifully segued into Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes.

**Nicolette:** We wouldn’t have had Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes without Tchaikovsky’s work. Swan Lake set it off, and that led to The Nutcracker and The Sleeping Beauty. Diaghilev and Stravinsky talked of the impact that The Sleeping Beauty had on them, and Tchaikovsky was also Prokofiev’s inspiration.

Without Swan Lake we wouldn’t have The Rite of Spring, we wouldn’t have Romeo and Juliet. Tchaikovsky made ballet music respectable; he demonstrated what musical genius could do in this genre, and inspired generations.

**Rose:** What kind of decisions have you made in putting together your version of the score?

**Stephen:** The last act is actually the most difficult, because there are only about 15 minutes of music that Tchaikovsky ever wrote for that act. That’s the one that’s been fiddled with a lot, because every choreographer feels there needs to be a pas de deux there – and there sort of does, really – so everyone’s had an idea of where that music should come from. There’s a variation from one of the set pieces which is very often used for that pas de deux, it’s in The Royal Ballet version. I’m in fact using that music. The [1977 Anne Woolliams’ version for The Australian Ballet] uses some incidental music from Tchaikovsky’s Hamlet, which fitted very well, and I liked it very much, but my
problem with it was that it has a very dramatic middle section, which didn’t fit in to what I wanted to do. Also, it’s just nice to know you’re presenting a score which is Swan Lake and no other music. I think we were fairly keen to do that.

**Nicolette:** I love the Woolliams, but the Hamlet piece I find horrific because it’s a completely different set of parameters in every sense that suddenly interjects into the fourth act. That fourth act is only 15 minutes, but for me it is better than any symphony Tchaikovsky wrote. It’s dramatically, structurally, and musically perfect as he wrote it and it doesn’t need anything else. I understand why it does in a balletic sense, and why over the years people have put other music in. Of the options, what we are doing is the best.

**Stephen:** Over the years, the ballet has taken on a life of its own; it has become iconic, and there are expectations, which you shoot yourself in the foot if you ignore. But the biggest challenge theatrically is that fourth act. It’s an incredibly long, Wagnerian climax that sustains over more than 64 bars, and that’s terribly hard to sustain theatrically, so you usually see it drastically cut in every version. And we’ve set ourselves the very difficult task of trying to not cut it, so fingers crossed!

**Rose:** Nicolette, you’ve said that Tchaikovsky made it easier for conductors to play with music, to stretch it. What makes that possible?

**Nicolette:** It’s simplicity. In variations, where the dancers are showing off, you need to adapt the tempi for them. You need music that can be played slower, faster, that can move on and still make sense and it doesn’t feel like you’re making a mistake. There aren’t 25 different rhythms and multiple cross-melodies happening all at once so that if you change tempo you’re likely to have a train wreck in the pit. These pieces aren’t formulaic, they’re still exceptional pieces of music, but they’re relatively simple: there’s a melody and an accompaniment, and that simplicity makes it quite flexible. The genius of Tchaikovsky is that he was one of the best melody writers in history. His use of orchestral colour also comes into it. In Swan Lake, with something like the Dance of the Cygnets, it’s a really simple melody – everyone can sing it – with a bom-bom-bom underneath; but the orchestration of it is brilliant. There are oboes, then he adds bassoons and flutes; there’s an evolution.

**Stephen:** For me the greatest example of this is The Nutcracker grand pas de deux, which is one of the most sublimely uplifting pieces of music, and it’s just an octave scale descending.

**Nicolette:** You can pick any of the Tchaikovsky ballets and they’ve got those moments, those absolute gems. As opposed to, say, a Minkus variation, which is just supporting the steps, every single Tchaikovsky variation you could play on its own and say “Wow – that’s beautiful.”

*Rose Mulready is The Australian Ballet’s Content Expert*
Overall Vision

David McAllister wanted a "traditional" production of Swan Lake for the repertoire - a version that would adhere to the classic scenario. Stephen Baynes agreed, but suggested some changes to strengthen the narrative.

It was imperative that Act II remain largely intact; however, Baynes completely rechoreographed the remaining three acts. This was challenging because all of the acts needed to sit well together aesthetically. Baynes wanted the drama to be increased in Acts I and III and he did this by discarding such characters as the jester and the tutor but developing key supporting characters who expand our knowledge of the Prince.

In this version the Queen is a significant character, there is a nurse who has taken charge of raising the Prince and a powerful, manipulative Lord Chancellor. All of these character choices seek to place the Prince within the context of his court surroundings - a hierarchal, aristocratic, nationalistic and military environment. Within this court the Prince struggles to fit in.

In Act III von Rothbart and Odile arrive with a retinue, which gives a reason for the national dances. In the Russian dance he bewitches the melancholy Queen by reminding her of her homeland and by the end of Act III he and Odile have seduced both Siegfried and his mother.

Most importantly, Baynes wanted to emphasise the profound Romanticism of Tchaikovsky's score, not only within the choreography but also by setting it in the late 19th century as opposed to the medieval period, where it is frequently set.

Choreographic Structures

The most iconic and arguably the most perfect part of Swan Lake is in the second act. Baynes has drawn from the recent Mariinsky productions and an older version by The Royal Ballet. However, he makes changes to Odette's first encounter with the Prince, von Rothbart's entrance, and also the Lead Swans' dance. Act IV is all Bayne's own choreography, which had to appear stylistically consistent with the second act. As Tchaikovsky only wrote about 15 minutes of music for the last act, Baynes added some music from the third act for the pas de deux between Odette and Siegfried and the Lead Swans' dance.

Stylistically, the corps de ballet's movement reflects birds in flight, particularly in the final dramatic storm. Baynes departs from the tradition of divertissement, in many ballets dancing for the sake of it, and seeks to tell a story that is driven by the narrative and the characters. This can be seen in the first act where Benno, the Countess and the Duchess, and their attempts to cheer up the Prince, motivate many of the numbers which are usually divertissements.
Curricular Activities

RESPONDING
Discuss how Baynes’ choreographic and character choices compare to other more traditional versions of Swan Lake. You may like to compare this version with those of companies overseas.

Discuss which elements of the narrative seem to underpin Baynes’ Swan Lake and how this is reinforced by the design and choreographic choices.

MAKING
Style and meaning go hand-in-hand with choreography. Often the choreographer has a strong intention about the meaning they wish to convey to an audience, in comparison to the contemporary choreographer who may work in a more abstract way and allow an audience to draw their own conclusions.

The style in which you choose to create a work create boundaries around how you make movement and in turn impacts on the meaning.

Identify particular movements from the choreography. Adopt the Baynes style of movements and improvise a sequence of movement.

Now identify a different choreography and use the same movements but apply that particular style.

How different does the movement look? How does this change the intended meaning for the audience?

CRITIQUING
Can you identify some of the choreographic structures such as motif, canon, symmetry, pathways, repetition? Where do they appear and for what reason (e.g. to emphasise what)?

What do you particularly observe that creates meaning for you when you watch the work?