

# Swan Lake

Rudolf Noureev

OPÉRA  
NATIONAL  
DE PARIS

BASTILLE · GARNIER · 3<sup>E</sup> SCÈNE

Drawing on ancient Slavic and Norse mythology where destiny is often born out of the mysterious forces of nature, *Swan Lake* has become a legend in its own right. Tchaikovsky's first ballet score is imbued with a deep sense of nostalgia, echoing the composer's own experience of love as elusive as it was impossible. However the work remained misunderstood until 1895 when Marius Petipa undertook his own choreographic interpretation. With the help of Lev Ivanov, Petipa created majestic figures for the female corps de ballet and breathed life into the swan-dancer. In Rudolf Nureyev's "Freudian" version, conceived for the Paris Opera Ballet in 1984, Prince Siegfried, manipulated by the evil Rothbart, shuns the realities of power and marriage to take refuge in dreams where a magic lake symbolizing idealised love appears to him. Nureyev elevated the role of the prince to that of the heroine by giving him a deeper psychological dimension whilst opting to give this masterly action ballet a tragic denouement more in tune with its musical substance.

**Presented by Aurélie Dupont,  
Director of Dance at the Paris Opera**

Ballet in four acts

Libretto: Vladimir Begichev, Vassili Gueltzer

Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

**Choreography:** Rudolf Nureyev

After Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov

**Sets:** Ezio Frigerio

**Costumes:** Franca Squarciapino

**Lighting design:** Vinicio Cheli

**Conductor:** Vello Pähn

Paris Opera Orchestra

Étoiles, Premiers Danseurs and Corps de Ballet

Duration: 2hr 35mins approx. plus interval

**Film Director:** François Roussillon

## ACT I

Prince Siegfried's birthday celebrations are underway. Wolfgang, the Prince's tutor, introduces the guests. The Queen, Siegfried's mother, enters accompanied by knights, and exhorts the guests to rejoice with her, for the Prince is soon to be married and is to choose his betrothed from the girls whom she herself has invited to the ball. Pensively, the Prince dreams of an ideal love, and for this reason, the Tutor tries to bring him down to earth and to remind him of the duties that await him. Siegfried however seems deaf to reason. His spirit seeks to escape the reality that surrounds him and to take refuge in dreams.

## ACT II

The Prince, absorbed in thought, sees a white swanwoman appear, her head adorned with a crown. Bewitched, Siegfried approaches her. The swan confides to him that she is a princess named Odette, and that she has been turned into a swan along with other maidens who, like her, are the victims of a spell cast by the wicked Rothbart. The spell can only be broken if a man will swear eternal love to her. Struck by this confession, Siegfried promises to rescue Odette. Despite the intervention of an enormous bird of prey (Rothbart) which disturbs their sweet encounters, Odette and Siegfried exchange a pledge of love. Odette's girl-swans shield the two lovers with their bodies against attack from Rothbart. Siegfried invites Odette to the ball which his mother, the Queen, is giving the following day and during which he must choose his bride. He insists that Odette attend the ball because he wishes to ask for her hand in marriage. Odette replies that this will be impossible, since she must remain a swan. Siegfried then declares that he will not marry and swears eternal love to Odette. As dawn breaks the apparitions fade away. The Prince is perturbed.

## ACT III

At the palace, the master of ceremonies starts the celebrations. The Queen accompanies Prince Siegfried, who seems however to care about nothing as if estranged from the world around him. After the divertissement of folk dances from different countries, the young girls aspiring to marry the Prince are presented to him. He, however, rejects them all, until a mysterious creature who looks incredibly like Odette enters the palace... As if rapt and subdued by this image, Siegfried has eyes only for her, for this creature in whom he believes he has glimpsed his beloved white swan. But the swan that resembles her so closely is none other than Odile, Rothbart's daughter, whom her father has transformed by magic into Odette's double. And the Prince, blinded by love, asks for her hand in marriage. Rothbart triumphs. Siegfried is about to perjure himself. Odette can no longer be saved.

## ACT IV

Siegfried, now increasingly aware of his error, is in deep despair. The vision of the lake returns. At the centre among the swans, Odette weeps her lost love. All hope is extinguished, even though Siegfried's betrayal has been involuntary. Consumed with remorse, the Prince beseeches Odette to forgive him, but too late. Rothbart removes Odette from the Prince for ever. His dream ends.

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