



photos by Rosalie O'Connor

BALLET
ARIZONA
IB ANDERSEN ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Student Matinee Study Guide
SWAN LAKE

Story

Act I, Scene 1

Prince Siegfried and his friends are celebrating his 21st birthday in the palace gardens when his mother, the Queen, arrives to present her son with a crossbow as a gift. The Queen reminds Siegfried of his duty to choose a bride and marry, but he replies that there is no one with whom he is in love. The Prince's mother and friends leave him in a melancholy mood. He is heartened when a flock of swans flies overhead, and he gives chase.

Act I, Scene 2

Siegfried is hunting in the forest when he encounters Von Rothbart, an evil sorcerer who is the ruler of this enchanted place. Frightened, Siegfried prepares to shoot when Odette, Queen of the Swans, arrives in time to come between him and Von Rothbart. Odette explains how Von Rothbart has transformed her and her friends into swans, except between the hours of midnight and dawn when they resume their human forms. The only way to break this evil spell is if a man promises to marry her and never love another. Siegfried swears his faithfulness. After affirming their love, Odette and Siegfried are interrupted by Von Rothbart. It is dawn and Odette and her friends fall under the spell of the wicked sorcerer, leaving Siegfried alone in the forest.

Act II, Scene 1

The Queen has arranged a ball in honor of her son in the hopes that he will choose a bride from among the royal guests. After dancing with several prospective brides, Siegfried tells his mother he will not marry any of them since he only loves Odette. Von Rothbart arrives with his daughter, Odile, whom he has transformed into the likeness of Odette. Rothbart hopes to trick Siegfried into promising to marry Odile, thereby keeping his spell on Odette unbroken. The guests from foreign lands dance a Spanish dance, a Hungarian czardas, a lively Neapolitan dance and a Polish mazurka. While dancing with Odile, Siegfried is enchanted by Von Rothbart's creation. As Siegfried swears eternal love to Odile, a vision of Odette appears, but it is too late. The Prince's oath is Von Rothbart's triumph, and the scene ends with Siegfried tormented by the agony of guilt.

Act II, Scene 2

In despair, Odette arrives at the lakeside to tell her friends of Siegfried's betrayal. Siegfried finds Odette among the swans and begs her forgiveness. Although Odette forgives Siegfried, she realizes that their love is doomed. Von Rothbart gathers a storm in hopes to separate the lovers, but Odette breaks away to leap into Siegfried's arms for one last embrace. Torn between her love for Siegfried and the power of Von Rothbart, Odette ultimately succumbs to the powers of evil. Faced with the reality that Odette will forever remain a swan, Siegfried collapses, brokenhearted.

The Music of Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (May 7, 1840 – November 6, 1893), was a Russian composer of the Romantic era. He began his musical education at age 5 with piano lessons. Even though music had always fascinated him, law was selected as a career path. He did not make his passion of music a livelihood until later in life. At 19, Tchaikovsky graduated with the rank of titular counselor, a low rung on the civil service ladder. Three years later, Tchaikovsky changed career paths to pursue his passion of music. He enrolled at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory where he flourished in his studies. His first public showing was of a work titled "*Characteristic Dances*" on September 11, 1865. He later composed the ballet *Swan Lake* in 1875–1876. This ballet, initially done in four acts, was based upon Russian folk tales. Tchaikovsky received 800 rubles for payment which was considered a small fortune in his day. 800 rubles is about 23 dollars in today's world. The original premiere of *Swan Lake* was not well received. The critics of that time claimed that the music was too complex to be a ballet piece. History has overruled their criticisms as *Swan Lake* is now thought to be one of Tchaikovsky's most valuable and memorable pieces.

(1875–1876): *Swan Lake*, Op. 20. Tchaikovsky's first ballet and was first performed (with some omissions) at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow in 1877.

(1888–1889): *Sleeping Beauty*, Op. 66. Tchaikovsky considered this work one of his best. Its first performance was in 1890 at the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

(1891–1892): *The Nutcracker*, Op. 71. Tchaikovsky himself was less satisfied with this, his last ballet. It was only in his last years, with his last two ballets, that his contemporaries came to really appreciate his qualities as a ballet music composer.

Find out more about Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (www.wikipedia.org).

Take-Aways

- What do you think is the relationship between dance and music?
- A writer has a toolkit full of devices for communicating: words, literary elements, rhyme, figurative language, punctuation, structure, etc. What tools do you think a composer has to communicate through music?
- If the music is described as lively, what do you think is the tempo (speed of the beat or pace of the music)? What pitch (high or low register) might you use for a character as small as a mouse or as big as a giant? How do you think volume (loud or soft) and tempo can contribute to the plot of the story? What instruments would you use to mimic a thunderstorm and why?
- How is the composer's music described? Listen to a selection of the composer's music and discuss your observations in support or against the description.