Matthew Bourne’s *Swan Lake*

Tuesday, December 3, 2019
Ahmanson Theatre
Downtown Los Angeles

**KNOW BEFORE YOU GO**
- *Swan Lake* is one of the most beloved works in the classical ballet repertoire.
- This production is a twentieth-century reimagining of the ballet by British choreographer Matthew Bourne.

**SWAN LAKE**

*Swan Lake* is one of the most popular ballets of all time. Composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky in 1875–76, it was first performed by the Bolshoi Ballet in 1877. That first production was a critical failure, with most critics deeming the music too complicated and the choreography boring. But the audience loved it, and so the company continued to perform it, and *Swan Lake* has remained an audience favorite around the world for more than a century.

The traditional plot, in which a princess who has been turned into a swan can only be saved by the singular love of a man, was probably inspired by Russian and German folk tales, though there is not a clear direct source.

Most ballet companies base their choreography on an 1895 production by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov for the Imperial Ballet at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia. It was for this production that the libretto was changed by Tchaikovsky to the *Swan Lake* audiences know best: the fairy swan became a cursed woman, the villain changed from her stepmother to an evil sorcerer, and the tragic ending assumed its full tragic proportions.

San Francisco Ballet was the first American company to stage a complete production of *Swan Lake*, in 1940.

**PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY**

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893) was a Russian composer of symphonies, concertos, operas, ballets, chamber music, and religious choral music which contained elements of both Russian and western European musical traditions. He is considered a master of the late Romantic period, with an exceptional ability to express intense emotion through melody. Several of his works—including *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, and the 1812 Overture—are among the most popular pieces in the history of classical music.

**MATTHEW BOURNE**

Matthew Bourne is a British choreographer. He has won eight Olivier Awards and is the only British director to have won Tony Awards for Best Direction of a Musical and Best Choreography (for *Swan Lake*, in 1999).
Bourne’s all-male Swan Lake premiered at Sadler’s Wells Theatre in London in 1995 and opened on Broadway in 1998. It has since been performed all over the world, and is the longest-running ballet on both London’s West End and Broadway. The production is best known for replacing the traditionally all-female corps de ballet with an all-male ensemble.

Bourne is known for creating updated versions of classic works, including Nutcracker! (1992), Cinderella (1997), My Fair Lady (2001), and Mary Poppins (2004).

Bourne was awarded a knighthood in 2016.

**CENTER THEATRE GROUP**

The nonprofit Center Theatre Group is one of the largest theatre companies in the United States, offering year-round programming at the Mark Taper Forum, the Ahmanson Theatre, and the Kirk Douglas Theatre. The company has been producing theatre for more than 50 years, and regularly programs award-winning revivals as well as world premieres.

**THE AHMANSON THEATRE**

The Ahmanson Theatre opened in 1967 with a production of Man of La Mancha. The theatre has since hosted numerous world premieres, including six by Neil Simon.

The building is named for Caroline Leonetti Ahmanson, a philanthropist and the wife of Howard F. Ahmanson, Sr., who founded the insurance and savings and loan company H. F. Ahmanson and Co. The venue underwent a major renovation in 1994.

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**VOCABULARY CORNER:**

**corps de ballet**: Literally translated as “body of the ballet,” this French term refers to the group of dancers who are permanent members of a ballet company and who are not soloists.

**SWAN LAKE IN FILM**

Music from Swan Lake is often used as a score for the silent film Phantom of the Opera (1925)

The Swan Lake theme was used in the credits for the classic films Dracula (1931) and The Mummy (1932)

Barbra Streisand performs a spoof of Swan Lake in Funny Girl (1968)

Darren Aronofsky’s 2010 film Black Swan, starring Natalie Portman and Mila Kunis, contained sequences from Swan Lake.

South African choreographer Dada Masilo remade Swan Lake in 2010 with a production that brought together ballet and African dance.

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Matthew Bourne  
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Matthew Bourne replaced Swan Lake’s traditional female corps de ballet with an all-male ensemble. How did this alter the show?
- Have you seen other productions of Swan Lake? If so, what other differences did you notice in Bourne’s version?
- Why do you think tragic love stories have such enduring power?

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- Performances at the USC Kaufman School of Dance
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- Glorya Kaufman Presents Dance at the Music Center
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