



Compiled by JANINE DE VILLIERS
Promotions and Publications

Many an aspiring pint-sized ballerina dressed in pink tights, black leotard with hair pulled back in a tight bun has peeked over the counter in a public library with stars in her eyes requesting material about well-known ballets, famous ballerinas and the great ballet companies such as the Kirov, Bolshoi or Royal Ballet.

This time of the year young ballerinas experience the highlight of the year as hours of dedication trying to perfect their *rond de jambes*, *developpés*, *pirouettes*, *arabesques* and other intricate movements culminate in a much-rehearsed end of the year performance.

Video is a perfect medium that will appeal to these stage-struck little 'artists', as steps can be copied from screen and favourite sequences can be rewind and watched repeatedly.

These videos will, however, also be enjoyed by those who are slowing down after a hectic year and seek relaxation while appreciating this unique form of art and movement set to the strains of music by great composers such as Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, Stravinsky and Minkus.

Enthusiasts can delight in a variety of videos from the Central Collection featuring well-known performers in famous ballets, background information about ballet icons and ballet companies and other ballet-related topics of which a selection is discussed here.

Famous classics

Giselle / director, Preben Montell.

Giselle, a ballet in two acts, is considered to be one of the masterpieces of the Romantic era. Set to music by Adolphe

Adam, it was first performed in Paris in 1841. The choreography, by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot, has survived almost without change, except for some amendments to the first act made by Marius Petipa towards the end of the 19th century. It was in Russia that the importance of the work was first recognised and where, after it had disappeared from the repertoire of every other ballet company, it was preserved.

The story, inspired by a passage in Heine's **De l'Allemagne**, concerns a village girl and her love for the nobleman, Albrecht, whom she believes to be an ordinary peasant. When his duplicity is revealed by a jealous rival, Hilarion, her mind gives way and she dies. She becomes one of the *wilis*, spirits of girls who died before their wedding day, and sustains Albrecht when Myrtha, the queen of the *wilis*, compels him to dance until death.

The Kirov Ballet offers a version that is a direct descendant of the original ballet. Staged by Oleg Vinogradov at the Leningrad Theatre of Opera and Ballet, it features Galina Mezentseva as *Giselle* and Konstantin Zaklinsky as Albrecht, with Tatyana Terekhova as Myrtha and Gennadi Selyutski as Hilarion. The orchestra is conducted by Viktor Fedotov.

The nutcracker / director, John Vernon.

The nutcracker is one of the most popular ballets yet devised and is regularly staged at Christmas time by companies all over the world. Set to music by Tchaikovsky and based on ETA Hoffmann's story **The nutcracker and the mouse king**, it is an enchanting mixture of fantasy and magic. It was first produced on 18 December 1892, at the Maryinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, with choreography by Lev Ivanov. Of the original production only the grand pas de deux of the Sugar Plum Fairy and her prince has survived, but the ballet's loose dramatic

structure has led to many individual adaptations, amongst them that by Konstantin Sergeyev, who produced it in London in 1934.

For this new production, Peter Wright, artistic director of the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet, combined a careful reconstruction of Ivanov and Sergeyev's original choreography with modern stage techniques. The central character is the girl Clara, who is given a nutcracker by her godfather, Drosselmeyer, a creator of magical toys. She falls asleep and dreams that she defends it against the King of the mice. When, after the enemy has been vanquished, the nutcracker turns into a handsome prince, they embark on a fabulous journey to the Kingdom of Sweets, where the Sugar Plum Fairy honours the couple with magnificent entertainment. This grand *divertissement* takes up the largest part of the second act.

This programme is a record of the Royal Ballet's production as staged at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. The overall design is by Julia Trevelyan Oman and the orchestra is conducted by Gennady Rozhdestvensky. The leading roles are danced by Lesley Collier (Sugar Plum Fairy), Anthony Dowell (the prince), Michael Coleman (Herr Drosselmeyer), Julie Rose (Clara) and Guy Niblett (the nutcracker).

Romeo and Juliet / producer, Patricia Foy; director, Rudolf Nureyev.

Shakespeare's tragedy **Romeo and Juliet** has inspired innumerable ballets, many of them set to the music of Sergei Prokofiev. Famous interpretations include those choreographed by Leonid Lavrovsky (1940), Frederick Ashton (1955), John Cranko (1958) and Kenneth MacMillan (1965), the last of which featured Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn in the leading roles. Nureyev himself choreographed the work in 1977 for the Royal Festival Ballet. In this version for the Teatro della Scala, he and the Italian ballerina, Carla Fracci, dance the parts of the lovers, with Margot Fonteyn as Lady Capulet. It was staged at the Palazzo dello Sport in Milan and the production was designed by Ezio Frigerio.

The sleeping beauty / producer, Svetlana Kononchuk; director, Elena Macheret.

The sleeping beauty is the grandest of all the surviving 19th century ballets and is considered to be the supreme achievement of the imperial Russian tradition. First produced in 1890 at the Maryinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, the work has been preserved

in continuous performance by the company that created it. Now called the Kirov Ballet, based in the renamed city of Leningrad, its heirs have remained faithful to Marius Petipa's original choreography. Set to Tchaikovsky's specially commissioned music, his creation is still a masterpiece of ballet-theatre.

The story is based on one of Charles Perrault's fairy tales, in which the wicked fairy, Carabosse, furious at not having been invited to attend the christening of the Princess Aurora, announces that one day the girl will prick her finger and die. However, the Lilac Fairy, who has not yet bestowed her gift upon the child, is able to ameliorate the curse and promises that the princess shall not die, but sleep until a prince comes to awaken her with a kiss. This version, staged by the renowned Konstantin Sergeyev, features the brilliant Irina Kolpakova as Princess Aurora, Sergei Bereznoi as Prince Desire, Lubov Kunakova as the Lilac Fairy and Vladimir Lopukhov as Carabosse. The orchestra of the Leningrad Theatre for Opera and Ballet is conducted by Viktor Fedotov.

More delights

Don Quixote - music by Minkus, choreography by Petipa

Ivan the Terrible: a ballet - music by Prokofiev, choreography by Grigorovich

Manon - music by Massenet, choreography by MacMillan

The merry widow - music by Lehár, choreography by Hynd

Raymonda - music by Glazunov, choreography by Petipa

Swan Lake - music by Tchaikovsky, choreography by Petipa and Ivanov

Tales of Beatrix Potter - music by Lanchbery, choreography by Ashton.

Renowned companies

Ballet black / producer and director, Stephen Dwoskin.

Ballet Negres was Europe's first all black dance company, founded in London by Berto Pasuka in 1946. Born in Jamaica and trained in classical ballet, Pasuka brought together West Indian dancers and Yoruba musicians to create original works based on black folklore, Caribbean life and the colonial experience. The fusion of Afro-Caribbean dance, classical ballet and mime was unique at the time and the company provoked an enthusiastic response, reaching the height of its popularity between 1948 and 1950 before finally

disbanding in 1952. Stephen Dwoskin's film recalls the history of the Ballet Negres through contemporary accounts and the reminiscences of members of the original company, filmed at a reunion some 35 years later. Photographic stills and some surviving archival material is intercut with footage of a group of young dancers rehearsing and performing a new production of one of Pasuka's most notable works, **They came**.

The magic of the Bolshoi Ballet: past and present

Founded during the second half of the 18th century, the Bolshoi Ballet has long been regarded as one of the world's premier dance companies. Since the 1930s, many of their performances have been captured on film and this videorecording presents a series of extracts featuring a wide range of artists, from the early days of Marina Semyonova to the new stars of the 1970s and 1980s, such as Vladimir Vasiliev, Ekaterina Maximova and Nina Ananiashvili. Also featured are Olga Lepeshinskaya, Galina Ulanova, Raissa Struchkova, Maya Plisetskaya, Lyudmila Semenyaka and Natalia Bessmertnova amongst the women, and Nicolai Fadeychev and Alexander Vetrov amongst the men.

There is a variety of archival footage, but most of the extracts come from **The sleeping beauty**, **Romeo and Juliet** and **Don Quixote**. Also included are excerpts from a 1983 gala performance in which many of the company's principal dancers paid tribute to the great ballet master, Asaf Messerer. The programme was compiled by critics Mary Clarke and Clement Crisp.

Be sure not to miss the brilliant work of the ballet companies featured in

- **American Ballet Theatre at the Met**
- **Dance Theatre of Harlem**
- **The magic of the Kirov.**

Dancers

Dancing for Mr. B: six Balanchine ballerinas / producer, Anne Belle; directors, Anne Belle and Deborah Dickson.

Russian-born George Balanchine came to the United States in 1933 and went on to become one of America's greatest choreographers and ballet teachers. In the process he created a number of marvellous female dancers and in this film six of them pay tribute to his memory. In order of appearance they are Maria Tallchief, Mary Ellen Moylan, Melissa Hayden, Allegra Kent, Merrill Ashley and Darci Kistler, who between

them span 40 years of Balanchine's life. Their reminiscences are intercut with extracts from archival footage of ballets in which they and other ballerinas like Tanaquil Leclercq and Suzanne Farrell perform in a wide selection of Balanchine-choreographed works. All of them, including his ex-wife, Maria Tallchief, speak of him with great affection and shed interesting light on his creative genius. At least four of them are now teaching, continuing the Balanchine tradition.

Fonteyn and Nureyev: the perfect partnership / director, Peter Batty.

Margot Fonteyn was already a legend by the time Rudolph Nureyev defected from the Kirov Ballet in June, 1961. Though she was twice his age, they were to form an artistic partnership that would delight ballet enthusiasts all over the world. This film presents an overview of their work together, until Fonteyn's retirement in 1979. Compiled from archival footage, still photographs and comments from people who know them, it analyses the effect they had on one another and recalls their impact upon audiences in many countries. Amongst those interviewed are Dame Ninette de Valois, biographer Keith Money, dancer Wayne Sleep and critic Clement Crisp, and there are generous extracts from ballets like **Le Corsaire**, **Les Sylphides**, **Marguerite and Armand** and **Romeo and Juliet**. The film is narrated by actor Robert Powell.

Another title worth watching is **Bolshoi ballerina Ludmila Semenyaka**. This versatile dancer is renowned for her technical purity and dramatic subtlety which equipped her for classics such as **Raymonda**, **Swan Lake** and **Sleeping Beauty**, as well as for the more expansive roles like Phrygia in **Spartacus**.

The dancers in your community will certainly take a bow in appreciation of your efforts to bring these gems to their attention in a display. Start with the ever-popular Christmas ballet **The nutcracker** and combine the theme with the Christmas display and decorations in your library. Ballet lovers are sure to pirouette home to join Clara on a fabulous journey to the magical world of dance.

Source

Craine, D. **The Oxford dictionary of dance**. 2000.

Note: Reviews by Freddy Ogterop, Film/Video/DVD Selector.

