

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET

EDUCATION

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Coppélia

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The Australian Ballet's current version

Devised and directed by George Ogilvie

Original choreography Arthur Saint-Léon

Original choreography revised by Marius Petipa and Enrico Cecchetti

Additional choreography Peggy van Praagh

Set and costume design by Kristian Fredrikson

Lighting design by Francis Croese

Coppélia

ACT I: A VILLAGE SQUARE



The people in the village are preparing for the Harvest Festival. A gift of a bell is given to the village by The Lord and his Lady.



Dr Coppelius and his mysterious “daughter” cause an argument between Swanilda (one of the girls in the village) and her fiancé Franz.



The villagers go home to bed, while Swanilda and her cheeky friends sneak into Dr Coppelius’ house.



Coppélia

ACT II: INSIDE DR COPPELIUS' HOUSE



Swanilda and her friends look for the girl they saw earlier on the balcony. Dr Coppelius returns and finds the girls; he chases them all out of the house. All except Swanilda, who is able to hide! Franz also sneaks into the house.



Swanilda pretends to be Coppélia, Dr Coppelius' doll.



Dr Coppelius is tricked and thinks his mechanical doll has come to life.



When Dr Coppelius discovers Swanilda has tricked him and his doll has not come alive at all, he is left broken-hearted.

Coppélia

ACT III: THE CHURCH



Swanilda and Franz are married at the church. The entire town celebrate by dancing and enjoying the Harvest Festival.





CAST OF CHARACTERS

Dr Coppelius is a lonely old alchemist who lives in a two-storey house on the edge of the village square. He is regarded by the villagers as a sorcerer, someone who conducts strange experiments in his laboratory and of whom they are afraid.

Coppélia is his “daughter”, a mechanical doll who is so life-like she is able to fool the villagers into believing she is alive. Doctor Coppelius is so enamoured of this doll that he tries to use magic to bring her to life.

Swanilda is one of the most beautiful girls of the village; Swanilda loves life and her fiancé, Franz. She and her friends are to be married at a mass wedding during the Harvest Festival on the following day.

Franz is engaged to marry Swanilda; he causes her a great deal of dismay when he notices the beautiful “new girl” in the village, Coppélia, throwing kisses at him. Not realising that she is only a mechanical doll, he is determined to discover whether she really loves him or not by breaking into Dr Coppelius’ house, where he finds himself in great danger.

The Official Party
 The School Teacher
 The Priest
 Villagers, Dolls, Attendants

The Creatives

GEORGE OGILVIE (1931 –)

Director

George Ogilvie's distinguished career began with the Canberra Repertory Theatre as an actor. Since then he has established a prestigious list of credits, firstly as an actor, and, from the early 1960s, as a teacher and director for theatre, television and film.

In 1965, he returned from training, teaching and acting in England and Europe to take up the position of Associate Director with the Melbourne Theatre Company. He was with the MTC for six years, where he directed some 23 plays while continuing his workshop training for actors. During this period he won the Melbourne Theatre Critics' Award for Best Director three times. During his time with the Melbourne Theatre Company he developed his renowned workshop training with actors and taught drama at the Australian Ballet School, using mime and gesture to teach students of dance.

He spent 1972-1975 as Artistic Director of the South Australian Theatre Company before becoming a freelance director, working with The Australian Opera (*Don Giovanni*, *Lucrezia Borgia*), The Australian Ballet and various Australian theatre companies. His teaching continued during this period with NIDA, the Eora Centre and other drama schools. His television credits as a director include *The Dismissal*, *Bodyline*, *The Shiralee*, *Princess Kate*, *The Battlers*, and *The Feds*. Film credits include *Mad Max II*, *Short Changed*, *A Place at the Coast* and *The Crossing*. Most recently George Ogilvie has directed plays for Playbox Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, Q Theatre, and the Ensemble Theatre

"I have approached the ballet of Coppélia with a definite idea in mind. The main theme, both in the music and story, is that of celebration, the celebration of life in a simple rural community. The most important celebration in country life is the Harvest Festival - when the year's work comes to fruition - and the designer Kristian Fredrikson and myself have planned the ballet to be the preparation for and celebration of this festival.

"This is no arbitrary decision, as the score gives us very definite ideas. The first act, which takes place on the day before the Festival, celebrates the gift to the village of a new church bell by the Seigneur. Such a gift is always given during the Festival and rung on the day of the Harvest.

"In legend, and in fact, the most auspicious time for marriage is at Harvest and, of course, the ballet celebrates the marriage of Franz and Swanilda. We have included the marriage of Swanilda's six friends as well.

"A mixture of pagan and Christian ritual leads the Festival to the door of the church in the third act and, blessed by Hymen, the god of Harvest, the celebration takes place.

"For me, Dr Coppélius represents the dark side of life; for instead of celebrating life, as the village does, he attempts to create life by transferring the soul of a human being into a doll of his own making. His rejection of the community and his solitary twisted life form the contrasting drama to what is essentially a joyous expression, through dance, of life and its rewards for past effort and hopes for the future."

ARTHUR SAINT-LÉON (1821 – 1870)

Choreographer

Saint-Léon is best remembered as a phenomenal performer for his time and as a choreographer of great popularity and influence.

Aided by his musicality and choreographic instincts, Saint-Léon adeptly created intricate and exciting variations and divertissements, especially in his masterpiece, *Coppélia*. Saint-Léon crafted many successful vehicles for his wife Fanny Cerrito, and for a succession of protégées, including his muse Adèle Grantzow.

Folk and national dances, an element of Romantic ballet, were Saint-Léon's specialty. He popularised ethnic dances and popularised their incorporation into the classical repertory, influencing his successor as ballet master at the Russian Imperial Theatres, Marius Petipa.

Recognising the fallibility of human memory, the evanescent nature of ballet, and the need for dance to find a written language, Saint-Léon invented a system of dance notation. Although several methods had been developed in the previous century, his visually based stick-figure technique, outlined in *La Sténochégraphie, ou Art d'écrire promptment la danse* (1852), was the first to record upper-body movements instead of general floor patterns.

The system which recorded the dance from the audience's perspective was adequate for its time but was limited in its ability to notate technical intricacies. He notated a portion of *Giselle's* Peasant Pas de Deux, the Pas de Quatre from Antonio Guerra's *Le Lac des fées* and his *Il Basilico*. But unfortunately, he left his own major works unrecorded.

LÉO DELIBES (1836 – 1891)

Composer

Léo Delibes (born February 21, 1836), was a French opera and ballet composer who was the first to write high-quality music for the ballet. Delibes studied at the Paris Conservatoire under the influential opera composer Adolphe Adam.

He became accompanist at the Paris Opera in 1863 and a professor of composition at the Conservatoire in 1881. He composed the ballet *Coppélia* in 1870, and *Sylvia* in 1876.

He composed many operas in his time, most notably *Lakme* in 1881.

The Creatives

PEGGY VAN PRAAGH (1910 – 1990)

Additional Choreographer

Peggy van Praagh's career in England spanned a period of over a quarter of a century, from the pioneering days of British ballet's infancy to the full flowering of the Sadler's Wells and Royal Ballet companies. From humble beginnings in balletic interludes arranged by Anton Dolin for revues at the London Coliseum, her professional career as a performer progressed via increasingly important roles with the Carmargo Society and Rambert's Ballet Club, to her position as one of the principal dancers in Antony Tudor's London Ballet (1938) and as a member of the Sadler's Wells Ballet in the early 1940s.

In spite of a somewhat difficult physique, van Praagh was a very strong technician as well as an expressive artist of great distinction. The breadth of her dramatic range as a dancer is exemplified by two of the very contrasting roles for which she is particularly remembered: An Episode in His Past, in Tudor's *Jardin aux lilas* – a study in emotional conflict – and Swanilda, in *Coppélia* – a sunny soubrette of a role, requiring a virtuoso technique.

Although Peggy van Praagh had an enviable reputation as a teacher and examiner of the Cecchetti method, it was as ballet mistress and eventually as assistant director of the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet company that she was to make her greatest contribution to British ballet. Peggy van Praagh's departure from the British ballet scene was to become Australia's gain. After being invited to take over the direction of the Borovansky Ballet on his death, she settled permanently in Australia, becoming the first director of the newly formed Australian Ballet, where her greatest achievements were probably the development of international standards of performance and in her restaging of the 19th-century classics.

“Ever since the early forties, Coppélia seems to have been part of my life. I did not expect to dance Swanilda when I first joined the Sadler's Wells (now Royal) Ballet in 1941. I was not even the understudy for the role. In June 1942, London was subjected to severe air raids. One of the company's ballerinas, Mary Honer, was at the Café de Paris when it received a direct hit. She was lucky to escape serious injury, but suffered severe shock and was unable to dance for several weeks.

“Dame Ninette de Valois, the company's Artistic Director, telephoned to inform me that I was to dance Swanilda in Oxford in four days' time and that I should come immediately to rehearse the role. Robert Helpmann, who was to partner me as Franz, could only attend but one rehearsal of the pas de deux. The rest of the company was on tour and I was unable to rehearse with them. So one evening in June 1942, it was a very nervous Swanilda that took to the stage.

“Later I grew to enjoy the role which I danced many times before I left the company in 1946 to become Ballet Mistress of the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet. It then became my fate to teach Swanilda to other dancers and to be finally entrusted with the production of the complete ballet when it was added to the repertoire of the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet in September 1951.

“My next production was for the Borovansky Ballet in Melbourne during October 1960 with Kathleen Gorham and Robert Pomie, together with Algeranoff as Dr Coppélius. This production was revived in November 1962 during The Australian Ballet's inaugural season in Sydney, with Sonia Arova, Erik Bruhn and Algeranoff dancing the principal roles.”

KRISTIAN FREDRIKSON (1940 – 2005)

Designer

Kristian Fredrikson is one of Australia's most notable designers. For eight years he was resident designer for the Melbourne Theatre Company, designing among other productions *War and Peace*, *Three Sisters*, *Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Devils* and *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*.

Kristian has had a long association with Graeme Murphy and the Sydney Dance Company, for whom his designs include *Daphnis and Chloé*, *Poppy*, *The Selfish Giant*, *After Venice* and *Schéhérazade*. He has also designed *The Firebird*, *Swan Lake*, *Tell me a Tale*, *Winter Garden*, *A Servant of Two Masters*, *Jean Batten* and *Cinderella* for Royal New Zealand Ballet.

Designs for opera include: for Opera Australia, *Il Seraglio*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *The Merry Widow*, *Don Giovanni*, *Falstaff*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Otello*, *Turandot*, *Salomé* and *Les Troyens*; for the Victoria State Opera *Don Carlos* and *Carmen*; and *Macbeth* for State Opera of South Australia.

Drama designs include: *Pericles* for Sydney Theatre Company; *Death of a Salesman*, *Boswell for the Defence* and *Day After the Fair*. Film and television credits include costumes for *Undercover*, *Vietnam* and *Dirtwater Dynasty*; and production designs for *Sky Pirates*, *Short-Changed* and *The Shiralee*.

In 1999 Kristian Fredrikson received the Australian Dance Award for Service to Dance.

He was one of the specialised team of designers who worked on the ceremonies of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. His design for The Australian Ballet's *Swan Lake* earned him a 2002 Helpmann Award and yet another Green Room Award to add to his collection.

The Design



In Act I you can see a harvest design theme reflected in the wheat motifs of the costumes and the autumnal colours of rust, cream, yellow and ochre.



Within Act II there are darker greens and greys to reflect Dr Coppélius' dark intentions towards Franz (he intends to extract his life-force).



Interestingly the Coppelía doll stands out in beautiful blue in contrast to all the other colours used and this is what draws Franz to notice her.



By the time the ballet moves into Act III the cast are in bridal colours of cream and gold, with the reapers in ochre colours. Dawn is in pink to represent the sunrise and Prayer is in a peaceful creamy white.

READ

Annie Carroll on the refurbishment of the beautiful *Coppelía* costumes.

The Music



Orchestra Victoria is a wholly owned subsidiary of The Australian Ballet, and its performance partner.

Orchestra Victoria is also the performance partner of Opera Australia and Victorian Opera.

The Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra accompany The Australian Ballet during its Sydney seasons.

Did you know?

An orchestra consists of four sections of instruments.

- The **string** section consists of violins, violas, cellos and string basses
- The **woodwind** section consists of flutes, bassoons, oboes and clarinets
- The **brass** section has several trumpets, French horns, trombones and one tuba
- The **percussion** section has all sorts of instruments, **especially** those that you can **hit, rattle** or **shake**

A full-scale orchestra playing a symphony contains at least 90 musicians, while a smaller orchestra might range from 15 – 45 members. There are over 45 musicians in Orchestra Victoria, as well as a Concertmaster and a Deputy Concertmaster.

THE CONDUCTOR

A conductor directs all the musicians in the orchestra, using a stick called a baton. The conductor decides how loud or fast, soft or slow a piece of music should be played. The conductor for most of The Australian Ballet's performances is Nicolette Fraillon, the company's Music Director and Chief Conductor.

👁️ READ

Jessica Thompson on the mischievous hero and heroine.

Helen Elliot on the dramatic depth of The Australian Ballet's production.

Curricular activities

RESPONDING

In the ballet we see Swanilda, a girl from the village, impersonate the doll Coppélia. Swanilda takes on the characteristics of the doll in order to trick Dr Coppélius into believing that she is his doll brought to life.

Ask students to discuss the different ways Swanilda dances as herself and when she is mimicking Coppélia.

After completing a warm-up, bring the class into a circle on the floor. Students can select one person to watch in secret, carefully studying the position of their body, placement of the limbs and their posture. Look for habitual movements such as breathing, scratching and fidgeting.

Students can begin to imitate the other person's position and movements. Students can switch the person they watch a few times to explore different characteristics and movement traits.

The same observation/imitation task can be conducted with the class walking around the room so that they can study and copy the locomotion movements of that person.

MAKING

In pairs, one person will be the leader and the other the follower. The leader will begin to improvise movements, acting as the Coppélia doll, and the follower will try to copy these movements. When the follower sees a movement they like the pair should stop, review and rehearse this particular movement. Continue with the task until students have collected four to six movements.

The pair can swap roles and the leader will improvise moving in a way that reflects Dr Coppélius watching his doll come to life. Students could show emotions such as disbelief, joy, excitement and finally sadness when they discover their doll isn't alive after all.

Using the movements of both the doll and Dr Coppélius, the pair can design a duet where the audience sees the movements of the doll coming to life and Dr Coppélius's reaction. The movements might alternate between the doll and the reaction, or be arranged in any order to express the interaction between the characters.

CRITIQUING

How did Swanilda dance, first as a girl and then as a doll? How did Swanilda change her movements to become more doll-like?

Ask the students to evaluate the many different ways the person they watched was moving. Was it difficult to keep track of their movement traits?

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