

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET

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COPPÉLIA

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Coppélia



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



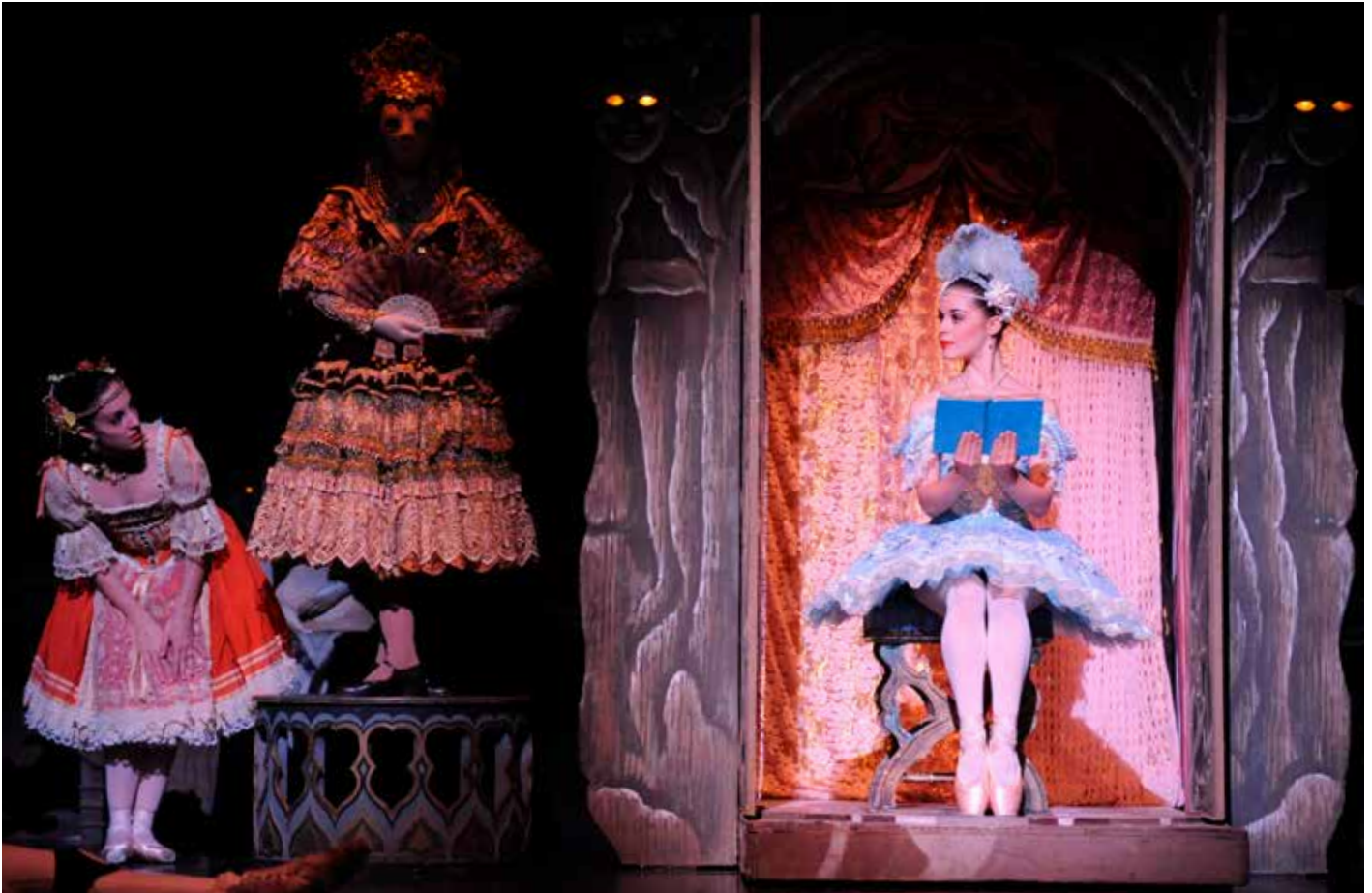
ACT I

A VILLAGE SQUARE IN GALICIA

The villagers are preparing for the Harvest Festival. The official party, led by the Town Councillor, celebrates the gift of a bell by the Seigneur and his Lady. The celebration is momentarily interrupted by Dr Coppélius, whose mysterious “daughter” causes a quarrel between Swanilda and her fiancé Franz. The villagers, after continuing the celebrations with a czardas, disperse to await the Harvest Festival the following morning. Meanwhile, Swanilda and her friends investigate the strange house of Dr Coppélius.



Coppélia



ACT II

INSIDE DR COPPELIUS' HOUSE - THAT EVENING

Swanilda and her friends search for the girl they saw earlier on the balcony. However, Dr Coppelius returns and chases them – except for Swanilda, who hides – from his house. Franz arrives and Dr Coppelius wickedly endeavours to take his spirit from him and put it into the body of his “daughter”, his most prized possession. Coppelius is fooled by Swanilda and thinks his mechanical doll has come to life. The lovers are reunited and flee back to the village and Dr Coppelius is left broken-hearted as he discovers Swanhilda's deception and that his daughter Coppélia is still a doll.



Coppélia



ACT III

OUTSIDE THE CHURCH - THE NEXT MORNING

The day of the celebration has arrived and the couples are married. Led by the child-god Hymen, the gathered villagers celebrate the pageant day with joyous dancing.





CAST OF CHARACTERS

Dr Coppélius 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. They are afraid of him and ridicule him.

Coppélia is his “daughter”, a mechanical doll who is so lifelike she is able to fool the villagers into believing she is alive. Doctor Coppélius 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; Swanhilda 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 Coppélius’ house, where he finds himself in great danger.

The Official Party
The Seigneur and his Lady
The Town Councillor and his Wife
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 Basilio*. 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 *Lakmé* 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 Coppelius. 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 Coppelius' dark intentions towards Franz (he intends to extract his life-force).



Interestingly the Coppélia 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 *Coppélia* costumes.

The Music



We have grown accustomed to thinking that Tchaikovsky virtually single-handedly legitimised and invigorated ballet music, and it's all too easy to overlook the trail blazed by his illustrious predecessor, the Frenchman Léo Delibes (1836-1891). Delibes' introduction of the symphony orchestra into the ballet medium earned him the reputation as the "father" of modern ballet, which may make Tchaikovsky his prodigious "son". One of the more successful and enduring 19th-century light comedy ballets, Delibes' *Coppélia*, or to give it its full title, *La Fille Yeux d'Email (The Girl with the Enamel Eyes)*, was the composer's first full-length work.

Delibes served his apprenticeship under Adolphe Adam – of *Giselle* fame – at the Paris Conservatoire. In 1866 he attracted critical attention when, in a collaboration with León Minkus (who was to become the last Official Composer to the Imperial Russian Ballet), he outshone his more credentialed partner. The two men shared the compositional duties for *La Source* and it was Minkus who suffered by direct comparison. A critic in *La France Musicale* was direct to the point of being brutal: "Minkus' music has a vague, indolent and melancholic character ... that of Delibes' is fresher, more rhythmic and more complicated in orchestration." Another critic wrote: "The whole of the score could have been entrusted to the young composer, and this will doubtless be done on another

occasion." And so it was. *Coppélia* was lauded as a quantum leap forward for French ballet music, eclipsing even Adam's score for *Giselle*. Until Adam, ballet music was more often than not a potpourri of popular tunes and blatant borrowings from the concert music repertoire. It was the dance that audiences came to see, and the music was regarded as secondary – at best a kind of sonic wallpaper, at worst a distraction. While *Giselle* hinted at other possibilities, *Coppélia* made them a reality. Writing soon after the May 1870 Paris premiere, a critic in *Le Figaro* captured perfectly the music's defining qualities: "M. Léo Delibes has composed for the three scenes of *Coppélia* a distinguished, piquant, and colourful score, excellently orchestrated ... It is very difficult to write for dancing with a little artistry, taste and style ... M. Delibes has succeeded in avoiding the commonplace." Given that the composer was still working on the score when rehearsals began, he would doubtless have agreed that it was very difficult to write with "artistry, taste and style". The music moves easily and tunelessly between passages for dance and narrative asides, and does so in a way that is witty without being flippant. As Tchaikovsky was to do so effectively, Delibes in *Coppélia* makes the music integral to the story unfolding. Like Tchaikovsky, Delibes was also a master orchestrator. The prelude with which the first tableau opens

The Music

gives the first indication of the composer's sublime instrumental colourings as the spotlight moves freely and effortlessly from horns to strings, and finally to short woodwind cadenzas. The tableau proper begins with an elegant waltz as Swanilda tries to attract the attention of a doll sitting in the window of Dr Coppélius' house. The doll's response to Franz's furtive kiss is mirrored in a rhythmic, deliberately ungainly passage for woodwinds. The sheer elegance of Delibes' melodies comes to the fore in a Hungarian inflected ballade for solo violin as Swanilda tests Franz's fidelity with a rattling wheat stalk. She remains unconvinced. Following a series of Slavonic-styled set pieces as Swanilda and her friends make merry, the tableau ends with rhythms that recall the doll's music, recast in a darker, minor key as if to hint at the mysteries that lie in wait at Dr Coppélius' house.

The dramatic second tableau is preceded by an entr'acte that literally sets the scene – a paraphrase of the foreboding doll's music tells us that we have arrived at the doctor's house, while a repeat of Swanilda's waltz makes it clear that she is there, too. The curtain rises to muted, staccato violins that reflect the girls' trepidation as they enter the room where Dr Coppélius keeps his puppets. As Swanilda and the girls explore the room and set the puppets in motion the score springs to life with the tinkling "Musique des Automates" (Music of the Automaton). The intrigue that follows is mirrored in the music: the scene where Dr Coppélius drugs Franz with tainted wine is set to a number reminiscent of a German drinking song; Swanilda's emergence as Coppélia ushers forth the exquisite interplay between flute and strings in the "Valse de la Poupée" (Waltz of the Doll). Dr Coppélius' attempt to pacify Coppélia by placing a fan in her hand is accompanied by a bolero and then, in a moment of creative whimsy, a Scottish jig. The music reaches fever pitch as Swanilda makes good her escape and rescues Franz.

As was to be the case in Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* (which, like *Coppélia*, was based on a story by E.T.A. Hoffmann) the final tableau carries little dramatic action and is instead a series of divertissements celebrating the nuptials of Swanilda and Franz.

These short set pieces confirm Delibes' easy traverse of a range of musical stylings, the culmination of which is the pas de deux for the betrothed couple, with its elegantly crafted viola melody. The success of *Coppélia* encouraged Delibes – who was described by a friend as "restless, fidgety, slightly befuddled, correcting and excusing himself, lavishing praise, careful not to hurt anyone's feelings, shrewd, adroit, very lively, a sharp critic" – to concentrate on large-scale works. These included another ballet, *Sylvia* (1876), and the opera which is generally regarded as the culmination of his life's work, *Lakmé* (1883). All of these works are blessed with Delibes' musical gifts of charm, wit, elegance, taste and, possibly above all, a craftsmanship that is rarely laboured and seldom bettered.

Dr Mark Carroll is a Professor at Adelaide University
Dr Mark Carroll©

Curricular Activities

RESPONDING: TALKING POINTS

No ballerina is more closely associated with the role of Swanilda than Adeline Genée. She captivated audiences across Western Europe, Great Britain and America with her delicate charm, strong technique and, as one critic described them, “twinkling feet”. She introduced *Coppélia* to Australian audiences on 21 June 1913 at Her Majesty’s Theatre, Melbourne, during her Imperial Russian Ballet season. More than a quarter of a century passed before *Coppélia* was staged again professionally in Australia. In 1940 the Original Ballet Russe presented a two-act version at Sydney’s Theatre Royal with Tatiana Riabouchinska and Tamara Toumanova alternating as Swanilda; both were partnered by Michael Panieff and the production was by the company’s ballet master Anatole Oboukhoff.

The first “original” Australian production was presented by the Borovansky Ballet in Melbourne during 1946 with Edna Busse as Swanilda, Serge Bousloff as Franz and Borovansky as Dr Coppelius. Laurel Martyn produced and danced in the Victorian Ballet Guild’s two-act version of 1951 and three years later Valrene Tweedie produced the first three-act version of *Coppélia* to be seen in Australia for the National Theatre Ballet.

The Royal Ballet included a full-length *Coppélia* in its repertoire for its 1958 visit. Robert Helpmann made his first ballet appearance in his homeland for more than 25 years when he appeared as Dr Coppelius at Sydney’s Empire Theatre.

Following the death of Edourd Borovansky, his company was directed by Peggy van Praagh, herself a memorable Swanilda with the Sadler’s Wells (now Royal) Ballet during the 1940s. Not unnaturally, one of Peggy van Praagh’s first tasks was to produce a new three-act *Coppélia*. She commissioned Australian artist Kenneth Rowell to design the costumes and scenery. The opening night of 22 October 1960, at Her Majesty’s Theatre, Melbourne, featured Kathleen Gorham as Swanilda, Robert Pomie as Franz and Algeranoff, a former member of Anna Pavlova’s company, as Dr Coppelius.

When The Australian Ballet was formed in 1962, Peggy van Praagh’s production was taken into the new company’s inaugural repertoire. This first version of the ballet for The Australian Ballet saw many of the company’s earliest stars portray the principal roles. The part of Swanilda was danced by Sonia Arova, Kathleen Gorham, Marilyn Jones, Barbara Chambers, Patricia Cox, Robyn Croft, Elaine Fifield and Alida Belair. Franz was danced by Erik Bruhn, Garth Welch, Caj Selling, Robert Pomie, Jonathan Watts, Karl Welander, Alan Alder, Walter Bourke and Kelvin Coe, and the role of Dr Coppelius originally had five interpreters: Algeranoff, Barry Kitcher, Robert Olup, Robert Helpmann and Ray Powell.

The current production by George Ogilvie and Peggy van Praagh premiered in 1979 with Anne Jenner as Swanilda, Kelvin Coe as Franz and Ray Powell as Dr Coppelius.

Coppélia was born in the aftermath of Romanticism and was created in Paris as France was losing its predominance as Europe’s dance capital. With ballet’s popularity declining,

fewer ballerina stars were available, and women “en travesti” usurped the male contingent. *Coppélia* starred an unknown child prodigy, Guiseppina Bozzacchi, partnered by Eugène Fiocre (who reportedly looked fetching in male attire), and featured a mechanical doll, rather than an ethereal creature, as the “other woman”.

Although local colour provided by the robust peasants still tied the ballet to the Romantic formula, its artistic cohesion and inventiveness foreshadowed classical ballet of the late 19th century. The individual contributions of composer Léo Delibes, choreographer Arthur Saint-Léon, and scenarist Charles Nutter, commissioned by the Paris Opéra director Emile Perrin, formed an integrated work, proportionally combining music, dance and story.

Choreographically, Sain-Léon - who built his reputation upon his strong sense of rhythm, his ability to mould choreography to the star’s talents, and his aptitude for assimilating ethnic material - developed a sparkling divertissement, charming solos, refined ensemble passages, and an ingenious set of national dances, notably the Hungarian czardas. Ironically, the very choreographer who devised a system of dance notation did not record his own choreography for *Coppélia*. Enconced in the Paris Opéra’s active repertoire, interrupted only by the Franco-Prussian War and the temporary closing of the theatre, Saint-Léon’s choreography has in some form been preserved in the house’s production.

Coppélia’s dramatic elements are entrusted to Doctor Coppelius, the ballet’s most complex and paradoxical character. Because he is often portrayed as a doddering old fool, eccentric, absent-minded, and ridiculous, there is a tendency to gloss over the sinister, dark facets of his personality. Coppelius may be a lonely man, aching for reciprocal affection, but his modus operandi is psychologically warped. Scientist, master mechanic, and sorcerer, he consciously attempts to steal a young man’s life force in order to humanise his creation. Despite his selfishness, he must propel the ballet’s comic premise.

Of the three main characters, the most underdeveloped, both conceptually and mentally, is Franz, whose comic heritage descends from commedia dell’arte through *La Fille mal gardée*. Shallow, self-satisfied, easily duped, and fickle, Franz is unequivocally a fool.

Swanilda, on the other hand, is unsophisticated but clever. She should be saucy and mischievous, not overbearing and cruel. Like her ancestor from *La Fille mal gardée*, Lise, she is playfully unruly and coyly manipulative. The role requires a capable technician and an accomplished comic actress.

Coppélia owes its longevity to its inspired, very danceable score. But the ballet is also remarkable for its perennial appeal and for its historical significance as Romanticism’s grand finale and classical ballet’s prologue.

READ

Jessica Thompson on the mischievous hero and heroine.

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

Curricular Activities

DISCUSS

Coppélia started a trend for ballets in which dolls come to life. *The Nutcracker* has several dolls which come to life and dance in the first act. *La Boutique Fantasque* does too. Piocchio is another example of a story in which a doll plays an important part.

Can you think of others or modern day stories and genres in which dolls come to life?

- What time of day is it? How did you know?
- How many dolls can you see in the room?
- Why do you think the girls are so scared?
- What makes the dolls “dance”?
- How did Franz enter the room?
- Why does Dr Coppélius offer him a drink?
- Why does Swanilda pretend to be Coppélia?
- When does Dr Coppélius think she has finally come to life?
- Does the scene have a happy or sad ending?

CRITIQUING



David McAllister talk about the choreography of *Coppélia*.

Can you identify any choreographic structures within the choreography?

Coppélia has a number of motifs that are repeated – can you identify them?

MAKING

Create a motif based on a mechanical movement action.
develop this motif by applying

- Action – what are you doing, where and how can you modify this?
- Quality – is it the same, faster, slower, heavier in quality/lighter?
- Space – are you repeating the same pattern or is it different in size, level, extension, pathway or body shape?
- Relationship – how do the changes you make to your original motif change the overall relationship to all of the motifs as you begin to build a solo?

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