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Don Quixote, 1978

Ballet in 3 Acts

Composer: Lyudwig Minkus
Conductor: Alexander Kopylov
Choreography: Marius Petipa, Alexander Gorsky
Performers: Nadezhda Pavlova
Vyacheslav Gordeev
Vladimir Levashev
Running time: 01:52:26

History of the ballet

This ballet is set to the music of L. Minkus, first produced at the Bolshoi Theatre on 14th December 1869 by the ballet master M. Petipa, to commemorate the dancer Anna Sobeshchanskaya. Don Quixote is a ballet originally staged in four acts and eight scenes, based on an episode taken from the famous novel Don Quixote de la Mancha, by Miguel de Cervantes. It was originally choreographed by Marius Petipa to the music of Ludwig Minkus and was first presented by the Ballet of the Imperial Bolshoi Theatre of Moscow, Russia on 26 December 1869. Petipa and Minkus revised the ballet into a far more expanded and elaborated edition in five acts and eleven scenes for the Imperial Ballet, first presented on 21 November 1871 at the Imperial Bolshoi Kamenny Theatre of St. Petersburg.

The two chapters of the novel that the ballet is mostly based on were first adapted for the ballet in 1740 by Franz Hilverding in Vienna, Austria. In 1768, the great Balletmaster Jean Georges Noverre mounted a new version of Don Quixote in Vienna to the music of Josef Starzer, a production that appears to have been a revival of the original by Hilverding.

The most famous and enduring ballet adaptation was created by the choreographer Marius Petipa, unrivaled Maître de Ballet of the Tsar's Imperial Ballet of St. Petersburg, and the composer Ludwig Minkus. By special commission, Petipa mounted the work for the Ballet of the Imperial Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. The production premiered on 26 December 1869 to great success. Principal dancers at the premiere were Wilhelm Vanner (Don Quixote), Anna Sobeshchanskaya (Kitri), Sergei Sokilov (Basil), Polina Karpakova (Dulcinea), Vassily Geltser (Sancho Panza), Leon Espinosa (Harlequin), and Dmitri Kuznetsov (Gamache).

Petipa then restaged the ballet in a far more opulent and grandiose production for the St. Petersburg Imperial Ballet, premiering 21 November 1871. Principal dancers included Alexandra Vergina (Kitri), Timofei Stukolkin (Don Quixote), and Lev Ivanov (Basil). This new production consisted of five acts (eleven episodes, a prologue, and an epilogue) and used the same designs as the first production.

For his productions of 1900 and 1902 Gorsky interpolated new dances. For his 1900 production,

Gorsky added new dances to music by Anton Simon – a variation for a new character added by Gorsky called the Dryad Queen, and a dance for the Dryad Queens's mistresses, as well as an additional Spanish dance for the last scene. When he staged the production in St. Petersburg in 1902, the composer Riccardo Drigo composed two new variations for Kschessinskaya – the famous Variation of Kitri with the fan for the ballet's final pas de deux, and the Variation of Kitri as Dulcinea for the scene of Don Quixote's dream (these variations are still retained in modern productions and are often erroneously credited to Minkus). Gorsky then interpolated the Grand pas des toréadors from the 1881 Petipa/Minkus ballet Zoraiya, a piece that is still included in modern productions of Don Quixote.

The ballet lived on in Russia well after the revolution of 1917, whereas many other ballets ceased to be performed into the Soviet period. As a matter of fact, it became part of the permanent repertoire both of the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre (the most famous productions being those of Rostislav Zakharov and Kasyan Goleizovsky in 1940, which included new music by Vassily Soloviev-Sedoy) and the Leningrad Kirov Theatre (which saw productions by Fedor Lopukhov in 1923, with new choreography for the fandango, and by Pyotr Gusev in 1946, with the scenario modified by Yuri Slonomsky and with new dances introduced by Nina Anisimova).

Miguel de Cervantes' novel revolves around the figure of a dejected knight, Don Quixote, willing to perform any feat or noble act to prove his worth. The ballet, however, sees Don Quixote as a secondary character. The libretto incorporates just one episode from the novel, where Don Quixote performs a good deed in helping young lovers find happiness, in spite of the father's will. The plot focuses on the love story of Kitri and Basilio, who perform their variations in the town square. Skilled conductor Ludwig Minkus was a truly outstanding expert in ballet – his music, sparkling like champagne, brought joy to the ear and instilled in one the desire to dance. This cheerfulness is embodied in Petipa's many Gypsy and Spanish dances.

Plot summary

Prologue

Don Quixote, having read his fill of romances about knights and chivalry, decides to set off on his travels in order to achieve great feats, which will bring glory to his name. As his sword-bearer, he chooses the loyal Sancho Panza, a man of sober outlook who is not prone to dreams.

Act I

In Barcelona there is festive animation in the air. Kitri, daughter of the innkeeper, is flirting with Basilio, the barber, who is in love with her. Finding them together Lorenzo, Kitri's father, chases Basilio away: the barber is no fit match for his daughter. Lorenzo intends Kitri to marry Gamache, a rich nobleman. Kitri refuses outright to submit to her father's will.

At the height of the merry-making, Don Quixote appears in the square, accompanied by his sword bearer, Sancho Panza. Catching sight of the innkeeper, Don Quixote mistakes him for the owner of a knight's castle and greets him with respect. Lorenzo responds in like terms and invites Don

Quixote into the inn. Sancho Panza is left in the square. But when some young people start to mock Sancho, Don Quixote immediately hurries to his sword-bearer's rescue.

Seeing Kitri, Don Quixote thinks she is the beautiful Dulcinea whom he has seen in his dreams and chosen as 'the lady of his heart'. But Kitri disappears. She has run off with Basilio. Lorenzo, Gamache and Don Quixote set out to look for her.

Act II

Scene 1

Kitri and Basilio are hiding in a tavern. Here they are found by Lorenzo, Gamache and Don Quixote. Lorenzo wishes to make an immediate announcement of the betrothal of Kitri and Gamache. But Basilio, by agreement with Kitri, pretends to take his life. Kitri sobs over the body of her sweetheart. Don Quixote overcome by noble indignation accuses Lorenzo of hardheartedness and, threatening him with his sword forces him to agree to his daughter's marriage with the barber. Basilio jumps to his feet. There is no point in him pretending to be dead any longer.

Scene 2

In the glade by the windmills is a sprawling gipsy encampment. Here too is a puppet theatre. Don Quixote and Sancho soon appear on the scene. The owner of the puppet theatre invites Don Quixote to watch a show. Don Quixote follows the performance with rapt attention and, forgetting it is theatre, rushes on to the stage, sword in hand, to defend those who need his protection. He breaks down the stage, sends the puppets flying and, catching sight of the windmills, mistakes them for evil magicians whom he has to get the better of. Grabbing a mill sail, he is first lifted into the air and then falls to the ground.

Scene 3

The wounded Don Quixote and Sancho Panza find themselves in a forest. To Don Quixote, the forest seems to be full of monsters and giants. Sancho Panza settles Don Quixote down to sleep, while he runs off for help. In his dreams, Don Quixote sees Dulcinea, 'the lady of his heart', surrounded by Dryads and fairies. Sancho Panza comes back with the Duke and Duchess who have been hunting in the forest. He begs them to help the dreaming Don Quixote. The Duke and Duchess invite the wandering knight to visit them in their castle.

Act III

The Duke's castle. All is ready for the reception of Don Quixote.

Having heard from Sancho Panza the happy story of Kitri and Basilio's love, the Duke and Duchess have kindly agreed to allow them to hold their wedding in the castle. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are invited to occupy the seats of honor. A solemn procession files past. Catching sight of Kitri, Don Quixote again mistakes her for 'the lady of his reveries'. But the Duke and Sancho Panza manage to persuade him that she is the very same innkeeper's daughter whom he helped to unite with Basilio, her sweetheart.

The festivities continue. All thank the valiant knight and his faithful sword-bearer.

Performance history

Don Quixote is counted among the brightest and greatest creations of ballet and is the only old classical ballet which was born in the Bolshoi Theatre. Over the years, it has repeatedly been renewed, updated, restored and has taken on an incalculable number of divertissements. The glitter and charm of this ballet magically attract new generations of dancers to the Bolshoi Theatre.

In the West, a shortened 1902 Gorsky version of the ballet, Don Quixote, was produced by Anna Pavlova's company in 1924. In 1966, Rudolf Nureyev produced his version for the Vienna State Opera Theatre. Nureyev also produced a screen version with an Australian ballet in 1973. 1980 was the year Mikhail Baryshnikov produced his version of the ballet which runs in many theatres around the world, including the Paris Opera.

Don Quixote is a ballet full of cheerful and other various dances. It is endowed with bright scenic imagery and has enjoyed a long life on the ballet stage.