
ID: 43241

'Giselle', 1991

Ballet in 2 Acts	
Composer:	Adolphe Adam
Libretto:	Théophile Gautier and Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges
Choreography:	Jean Coralli, Jules Perrot and Marius Petipa
Choreography edit:	Yuri Grigorovich
Production Designer:	Simon Virsaladze
Musical Director and Conductor:	Alexander Kopylov
Performers:	Nina Ananiashvili Giselle Victor Barykin Albert (maybe?) Ruslan Pronin Interpolated pas de deux
Running time:	1:53:50

History of the ballet

Giselle is a ballet in Two Acts with a Libretto by Théophile Gautier and Jules-Henri de Saint-Georges, music by Adolphe Adam and choreography by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot. It is thought that the librettist gained inspiration for the ballet from a poem by Heinrich Heine, one of the most noteworthy German poets of the 19th Century.

The ballet follows the story of a peasant girl named Giselle whose ghost, following her premature death, seeks to protect her lover from the reprisal of a group of malevolent female spirits named 'Wilis' (supernatural beings).

In the libretto, the prevalent atmosphere of the ballet was indebted to the works of Heinrich Heine, Victor Hugo (one of the most significant French Romantic writers) and the ballet critic Théophile Gautier (an ardent of Romanticism and a widely esteemed writer). The librettist Vernoy de Saint-Georges was first engrossed towards Hugo's *Orientales*, with its recreation of a ballroom where dancers were sentenced to dance all night, and to Heine's *De l'Allemagne* and its intrepid illustration of the 'Wilis', Slavonic supernatural beings who lured young men to death by dancing. Thus, the libretto of Giselle is based upon two separate stories, both inflicting the notion of eternal suffering and death by supernatural beings – evoking the imagery that there is a battle between good and evil, one must surpass the 'Wilis' to become a sublime being.

Plot summary

The ballet is set in the Rhineland of the Middle Ages during the grape harvest. In the first act, Giselle and her mother are living opposite Duke of Albrecht of Silesia, a nobleman who has disguised himself as a peasant named Loys, in order to propagate a few wild oats before his marriage to Bathilde, the daughter of the Prince of Courland. Albrecht, against the advice of his squire Wilfrid, begins to flirt with Giselle, who completely fall in love with him. Giselle refuses to listen to Hilarion, a gamekeeper who is also in love with Giselle, who is warning the girl against trusting a stranger. Albrecht and Giselle dance a love duet but are interrupted by Giselle's mother, who is worried about her daughter's fragile health, escorts the girl into their cottage.

A hunting party comes along; amongst them are Bathilde and her father. Giselle dances for the celebration and receives a necklace from Bathilde. When the party departs Loys reappears with the grape harvesters and a celebration begins once more. Giselle and the harvesters dance merrily but Hilarion, who is brandishing the Loys' sword and horn, halts the celebration. Hilarion sounds the horn, to which the hunting party returns and the truth about Loys (Albrecht) is learned, Giselle is infuriated and dies as a result of her weak heart.

The second act is introduced with Hilarion mourning Giselle's death. He is startled away from the glade near Giselle's grave by the Wilis; female spirits who, rejected before their wedding day, rise from their graves at night and seek revenge upon men by dancing them to death. Giselle is summoned from her grave and is welcomed by the supernatural creatures. Albrecht goes in search of Giselle's grave and stumbles upon her ghost. Begging for her forgiveness, Giselle whose love is undiminished, willingly forgives him and the two begin to dance.

Hilarion once more appears and is pursued by the Wilis, who throw him to his death into a nearby lake. The Wilis then turn their attention to Albrecht and condemn him to death. He begs to be spared but Myrtha, Queens of the Wilis (who has ultimate power over the magical sisterhood), refuses. When Albrecht is forced to dance by the Wilis, Giselle protects him. When daybreak comes, the Wilis retreat to their graves. Giselle's irrevocable love, a form of protection for Albrecht, has saved him. The Wilis are defined by feelings for vengeance and hatred, by not yielding to these emotions; Giselle is freed from their clasp and returns to her grave to rest in peace.

Performance history

The ballet was first performed on June 28th, 1841 at the Salle Le Peletier (Opera Le Peletier) by the Ballet du Théâtre de l'Académie Royale de Musique (Paris Opera Ballet) choreographed by J. Coralli and J. Perrot. The leading cast included Carlotta Grisi as Giselle, Lucien Petipa as Albrecht and Jean Coralli as Hilarion. The scenery was designed by Pierre Ciceri (leading French set designer of his era) and costumes by Paul Lormier. This performance was immensely successful with raving reviews in the press. The Opera Le Peletier staged 'Giselle' for an entire month. In the year of 1841, there were 26 productions and the Paris Opera Ballet held 150 'Giselle' performances over a span of 18 years.

On March 12th, 1842 the ballet was first presented in England at Her Majesty's Theatre, London once more with Carlotta Grisi and with Jules Perrot in the principle roles; as well as Louise Fleury as Myrtha. On December 30th, 1842 a year after the Parisian premiere, Giselle had reached the shores of St. Petersburg and a little while later the show had come to the stages of Moscow, with Elena Andreyanova as Giselle. Giselle has ceased production of the Paris Opera Ballet in 1867 and did not return to the stage until the Russian Ballet performed Petipa's definitive version in 1910 at the Palais Garnier.

Once settled, the ballet has never really parted with the Russian stage. It would acquire the most outstanding performers for the lead role; notably it was the famous Carlotta Grisi's (for whom Théophile Gautier created the role) performance that surpassed the fame of Giselle. At the Bolshoi Theatre, the party of talented ballerinas had adorned the repertoire of almost all leading dancers. In the last century, some of the most accomplished dancers of 'Giselle' include Anna Pavlova, Marina Semenova, Galina Ulanova, Marina Kondratieva, Ekaterina Maximova, Natalia Bessmertnova and Ludmila Semenyaka. The role of Giselle is one of the most sought after in ballet. It demands technical perfection, as well as outstanding grace, lyricism and great dramatic skill. In the first act, Giselle has to convey the innocence and love of a country girl and the heartbreak of being betrayed. In the second act, Giselle must seem otherworldly, yet loving. The disparity of emotions portrayed by the most prominent ballerinas is truly remarkable and deserves acclaim. Some of the famous Albrechts include Lucien Petipa, Vaslav Nijinsky, Rudolf Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov.

Giselle is a strikingly sentimental story about the betrayal of love, from this notion it had evolved, throughout its performances, into a story where truth is abandoned and love shines through to be stronger than death.

On the stages of St. Petersburg and Moscow, Giselle was continually being improved and enhanced. The first to implement changes was one of the authors of the ballet – Jules Perrot; following him Marius Petipa had also left his signature on the ballet. In their modifications, they had cut from the performance all irrelevant secondary material, in order to divert emphasis onto the idealistic essence of the drama itself. The magnitude of love that cannot be destroyed and the purification of man, both portraying an exalted and enlightened feeling, became the main themes in 'Giselle'. Once the ballet achieved this pinnacle in its performance, it became untouched and remained intact; as it was clear that 'Giselle' had reached a perfect combination of dramaturgy and choreography.

Nevertheless, the unified 'Giselle', although serenely perfect, over time came to vary according to shifting tastes and attitudes. Given the progressive nature of choreography, invariably many sought to emphasise 'Giselle' on more than one nuance. In doing so, one had to be wary not to destroy a piece of choreographic art that has been ingrained throughout the century.

At the Bolshoi Theatre, 'Giselle' was recurrently shown from 1944. The editing author of classical choreography at that time was Leonid Lavrovsky. It is very difficult to imagine a country that had not heard of, or seen a performance of, 'Giselle', filled with slight changes and new portrayals of its running themes. It was only a few decades later, in 1987, when Yuri Grigorovich had dared to touch upon a new and edited version of 'Giselle' – which remains popular to this day.

Résumé of scenes and dances

Act I

no.1 *Introduction*

no.2 *Scène première*

no.3 *Entrée d'Albrecht*

no.4 *Entrée de Giselle*

no.5 *Scène dansante*

interpolation - *Pas de deux pour Mlle. Maria Gorshenkova* (Ludwig Minkus; 1884; this piece was only included in Imperial-era productions)

no.6 *Scène d'Hilarion*

no.7 *Retour de la vendange*

interpolation - *Pas de cinq pour Mlle. Carlotta Grisi* (Cesare Pugni; 1850; only included for Grisi's performance)

no.8 *Valse*

no.9 *Scène dansante*

no.10 *Le récit de Berthe*

no.11 *Scène: Le chasse royale*

no.12 *Scène d'Hilarion*

no.13 *Marche des vigneron*

interpolation - *Variation pour Mlle. Elena Cornalba* (aka *Pas seul*) (likely composed by Riccardo Drigo, c. 1888)

interpolation - *Pas de deux pour Mlle. Nathalie Fitzjames* (aka *Peasant pas de deux*)

Fashioned from *Souvenirs de Ratisbonne* by Johann Friedrich Franz Burgmüller, c.1841 –

a. *Entrée*

b. *Andante*

c. *Variation*

d. *Variation*

interpolation - *supplemental female variation* (Mariinsky Theatre staging) (Riccardo Drigo; from the ballet *Cupid's Prank*; 1890.)

e. *Variation*

f. *Coda*

- no.14 *Galop générale*

- no.15 *Grand scène dramatique: La folie de Giselle*

Act II

- no.16 *Introduction et scène*

- no.17 *Entrée et danse de Myrthe*

- no.18 *Entrée des Wilis*

- no.19 *Grand pas des Wilis*

- no.20 *Entrée de Giselle*

- no.21 *Entrée d'Albrecht*

- no.22 *L'apparition de Giselle*

- no.23 *La mort d'Hilarion*

- no.24 *Scène des Wilis*

- no.25 *Grand pas d'action* —

a. *Grand adage*

b. *Variation de Giselle*

c. *Variation d'Albert*

interpolation - *Variation pour Mlle. Adèle Grantzow* (likely composed by Cesare Pugni; 1867)

d. *Coda*

no.26 *Scène finale*