



Education and Outreach Department's School Matinee Program

# SWAN LAKE

## STUDY GUIDE

For Teachers and Students

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## About NEVADA BALLET THEATRE

Now in its 48<sup>th</sup> Season, Nevada Ballet Theatre (NBT) continues to bring the Las Vegas community closer to the art form of dance. With professional Company productions at The Smith Center for the Performing Arts, where it is the Resident Ballet Company, an affiliated Ballet and Dance Academy, as well as numerous Education and Outreach programs, NBT is at the heart of Las Vegas' cultural landscape.

The vision of a professional ballet company based in Las Vegas was brought to life in 1972 when Vassili Sulich, then the principal dancer with the Tropicana Hotel and Casino's famed Folies Bergere, gathered a group of ballet dancers from the Las Vegas Boulevard entertainment industry and presented a series of dance concerts to an enthusiastic public at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) Performing Arts Center's Judy Bayley Theatre. The overwhelmingly positive reception of the community, combined with the support of UNLV, was such that within two years a volunteer board was established—headed by founding chairman and former dancer, Nancy Houssels. And during the next 25 years, a professional ballet company emerged.

In 1979, the Company established an affiliated Academy in order to provide a premier dance education to young people in Southern Nevada and groom the next generation of dance enthusiasts. After the organization received a major grant from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, and a donation of land from The Howard Hughes Corporation, plans for a world-class home for the Company and Academy began. The Academy is now regarded as one of the top ballet and dance training centers in the city and offers a variety of classes for children through adult. In 1980, the Company expanded its community reach by sharing the art form of dance with students in underserved populations within Clark County. In 1993, it established *Future Dance* in order to provide free in-school dance instruction and scholarship opportunities to students in need. Now in its 26<sup>th</sup> School Year, *Future Dance* is one of the longest running Education and Outreach programs in the state. With all of its Education and Outreach initiatives combined, NBT successfully reaches over 20,000 students a year through these life-changing programs.

NBT's long-awaited residency at The Smith Center for the Performing Arts became a reality on May 5, 2012, during the Company's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. That same year, NBT presented a brand-new and original production of *The Nutcracker* choreographed by James Canfield. Complete with new sets, costumes and full orchestra, it is the first production of its kind built for the Reynolds Hall stage.

With a solid focus on dance education, a versatile Company of professional dancers and a growing repertoire, NBT stands as one of the city's most beloved community treasures. Consistently seeking to engage new audiences and cultivate its national identity, unique dance experiences like *A Choreographers' Showcase* (ACS), NBT's annual collaboration with *Cirque du Soleil*, create avenues of growth for local artists while providing the community with new and original dance works each year. Commanding critical acclaim, ACS recently celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

With an eye on the future, and a reverence for its past, NBT looks ahead to its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and the continuation of presenting outstanding professional ballet and dance productions to the Las Vegas community.

## About THEATER ETIQUETTE

- The matinee performance begins promptly at 11 a.m. and lasts approximately 1 hour
- Let your students know in advance what type of conduct is expected of them. This is a LIVE performance. Unlike television and movies, the performers are physically on stage and performing for your enjoyment, any noise may distract them. The performance will be exciting, but let your students know that they will be required to sit quietly in their seats for a reasonably long time
- School clothes are appropriate attire; however, some students may choose to “dress up”
- Please plan to arrive at the theater at least 30 minutes before the performance, as latecomers may not be seated once the performance has begun
- No food, drink, chewing gum, skateboards, cameras, cell phones or recording equipment are allowed inside the theater. If you plan to bring any of these items, please have your students leave them on the bus until after the performance has ended. There will be no provisions for storing these items at the theater
- It is important to have your students visit the restrooms before the performance begins. It is inappropriate to visit the restrooms during a live performance. At all times, an adult must accompany students to the restroom. Ushers will direct you to the restrooms
- We recommend that you provide your students with some guidelines of things to look and listen for during the performance
- **Students should be encouraged to:**
  - Watch the dancers
  - Listen to the music
  - Look at the costumes and lighting designs
  - Laugh when they see the dancers do something funny
  - Clap to show the dancers that they are enjoying the performance when the dancing has finished. It is also customary to applaud again when the dancers take a bow
- **Students should NOT:**
  - Talk or make noise because they might miss something important
  - Chew gum because it is disruptive to others and makes a mess at the theater
  - Leave their seats before the lights go on because this is very disruptive to their neighbors
  - Bring iPods or video games to the theater because this is disruptive to the dancers and other members of the audience
  - Put their feet on the back of the chairs
  - Text or talk on cell phone

## About **SWAN LAKE**

**Music:** Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

**Choreography:** NBT's version is choreographed by Ben Stevenson



The original production premiered in 1877 at The Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow, to very critical reviews. Peter Tchaikovsky, a well-respected composer of the time, was invited to create the musical score. This original version was choreographed by Julius Reisinger. Later in 1895, the great ballet choreographers and teachers, Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov, choreographed a revival for the Imperial Ballet at The Mariinsky Theatre. All modern day ballet companies base their productions off

of the revival. This legendary collaboration between Petipa and Tchaikovsky also produced *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*.



## **SYNOPSIS (The Story)**

### **Act I**

#### **THE LAKESIDE**

Princess Odette is gathering flowers by the lake one day when the sorcerer Von Rothbart appears and transforms her into a swan.

#### **THE COURTYARD AND CASTLE**

Festivities are underway to celebrate the coming of age of Prince Siegfried. His mother, the Queen, enters and drinks a toast to her son, reminding him that he will soon be King. The Prince is dismayed by the thought of the responsibilities being forced upon him. The Queen presents him with the gift of a crossbow which excites him greatly. As he is left alone to contemplate his future, he suddenly sees white swans soaring overhead, and taking his crossbow, the Prince follows them into the night.

#### **THE LAKESIDE BY MOONLIGHT**

Discovering the swans by a lake, the Prince watches with amazement as one swan approaches and is transformed into a beautiful maiden. The maiden tells him that she is Princess Odette, and the spell cast upon her by Von Rothbart can only be broken by someone who swears his love for her.

Von Rothbart suddenly appears, and Siegfried attempts to shoot the sorcerer. Odette explains that if he succeeds, the sorcerer's spell can never be broken. Siegfried swears his vow of eternal love to Odette. She warns him that if he breaks his vow, she is doomed to remain a swan forever. At dawn, Odette returns to the lake and becomes a swan again.



### **Act II**

#### **THE BALLROOM OF THE CASTLE**

As the Prince dances with princesses from countries around the world at the ball, his mind is filled with thoughts of Odette. Two uninvited guests arrive, Von Rothbart and his daughter Odile, disguised as Odette. Siegfried believes Odile to be his swan princess, and Von Rothbart forces him to swear that Odile is his chosen love. As Von Rothbart and Odile return to their true forms, the Prince realizes he has been deceived. Odette and her maidens appear as Von Rothbart destroys the castle.

#### **THE LAKESIDE**

Odette forgives Siegfried for his unwitting betrayal, and they agree to remain together until death. In his rage, Von Rothbart raises a storm, but the love of Odette and Prince Siegfried proves stronger than his magic. As the couple throw themselves into the lake, Von Rothbart too is destroyed.

## About THE ARTISTS

### Choreographers

#### **Victor Marius Alphonse Petipa (1818 – 1910)**

Petipa was a French and Russian ballet dancer, teacher, and choreographer. He is considered one of the most influential ballet masters and ballet choreographers who ever lived. Petipa was born in France on March 11<sup>th</sup> 1818. His mother was an actress and drama teacher and his father was a ballet master and teacher. Petipa is most noted for his long career as the Ballet Master of the St. Petersburg Imperial Theatres from 1871-1903. He created over fifty different ballets including *Sleeping Beauty*, *Don Quixote*, and *Raymonda*. Most of these ballets have survived with choreography that is either inspired by the original or slightly adapted for today. He was married to a ballerina and they had six children together. Petipa lived to be ninety-two years old.



#### **Ben Stevenson O.B.E.**

Ben Stevenson served as artistic director of Houston Ballet from 1976-2003, raising the company from a regional troupe of twenty-eight dancers to an internationally acclaimed ensemble of over fifty artists.



For his contributions to international dance, Mr. Stevenson was named an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) by Queen Elizabeth II in the New Year's Honors List in December 1999. In April 2000, he was presented with the Dance Magazine Award. In July 2003, he was appointed artistic director emeritus of Houston Ballet, and the company's affiliated school was renamed Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy.

Mr. Stevenson, a native of Portsmouth, England, received his dance training at the Arts Educational School in London. He appeared with the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet and English National Ballet where, as a principal dancer, he performed leading roles in all the classics.

In 1967, English National Ballet asked him to stage his first, and highly successful, production of *The Sleeping Beauty* which starred Margot Fonteyn. In 1968, Rebekah Harkness invited him to New York to direct the newly formed Harkness Youth Dancers. After choreographing *Cinderella* in 1970 for the National Ballet in Washington, D.C., he joined the company in 1971 as co-director with Frederic Franklin.

Mr. Stevenson has received numerous awards for his choreography, including three gold medals at the International Ballet Competitions of 1972, 1982, and 1986.

In July 2003, Mr. Stevenson assumed the artistic directorship of Texas Ballet Theater in Fort Worth, Texas.

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### Composer

#### **Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)**

In 1892 when Tchaikovsky composed his third and last ballet, *The Nutcracker*, he was already famous. He had finished six symphonies, piano and violin concertos, *The 1812 Overture*, tone poems, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Francesca da Rimini*. Only the *Pathetique* Symphony remained to be written. Two of his operas, *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades* had been huge public successes. And, his first two ballets, ***Swan Lake*** and *Sleeping Beauty*, captivated audiences in Moscow and St. Petersburg.



The Director of the Bolshoi Ballet, Begichev, commissioned the score of ***Swan Lake*** from Tchaikovsky in May 1875 for a rather modest fee of 800 rubles. There was not much of a collaborative process between him and the original choreographer, like there was for other ballets he had composed. Tchaikovsky drew on previous compositions for his ***Swan Lake*** score. By April 1876 the score was complete, and rehearsals began. Soon the original choreographer began taking out pieces that he deemed to be un-danceable. Tchaikovsky protested and his pieces were reinstated. The version that is most frequently performed today is an edited one and does not use all of the original score.

## DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ACTIVITY SHEETS

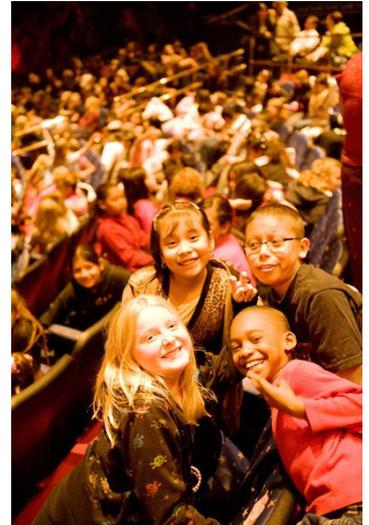
### Movement:

#### Pre-Performance Discussions:

Ask your students how different emotions make them move. Have them get up and show you how you move when you are sad, excited, or upset! Each ballet has different movements to show an emotion. For example **Odile** has strong and fierce movements, ask the students what emotion they think that would be.

#### Post-Performance Discussion:

Ask questions about each scene and how the movements made them feel, and have them act out those emotions. Ask how the movements were different in each scene and how they were the same, do they think the movements were effective at getting across what the choreographers wanted the audience to feel.



### Costumes:

#### Pre-Performance Discussion:

Costumes help the audience to feel the emotions and characteristics of each ballet. Based on what the students know about the ballet now what do they think the costumes will look like?

#### Post-Performance Discussion:

Did the costumes help your students feel the mood of the ballet? Do your students think the costumes are the right design? If not have them draw what they think the dancers should have worn and why their design would help the audience to better understand the ballet. Have the students tell you what colors they would use and what fabrics or materials.

### Music:

#### Pre-Performance Discussion:

Talk with your students about how music is the only thing that you hear during a ballet. Ballets are not like the movies, and plays, the dancers do not speak. They show their emotion through movement and pantomime. If you have access to the music you can even play parts of it to the students. Also play different types of music like classical or even hip-hop and ask them how it makes them feel and then have them act out that emotion with the music!

#### Post-Performance Discussion:

Did your students like the music, what was their favorite part? Do they think it helped to show the emotions that the choreographer wanted the audience to feel?

Set:

Pre-Performance Discussion:

In Act I the set and scenery looks like a lake in the forest. Ask your students to look for different details that help create the feeling the feeling of being by a lake in an enchanted forest.

Post-Performance Discussion:

Have your students tell you the difference in each set and how it made them feel. Did they like the lighting and the scenery? How would they design the lighting and the sets? What colors would they use for lighting? Do they think the set helped to show the emotions of the ballet to the audience?

More Post-Performance Questions:

If your students where the choreographers, how would they create the ballet? Have them go through every aspect of creating a ballet; would they keep some things the same?

Overall did they enjoy the ballet, what were their favorite parts?



# Create a Bird Dance!



- What kind of bird would you like to be? A swan, a bluebird or even a duck?
- If you don't want to be a real bird, you can create a mythical bird!
- After you decide what bird you would like to be, go online and look at their movements. How do they move their heads, neck, and their wings? Do they make quick and sharp movements or soft and slow movements?
- Decide on what kind of music sounds like your bird. Something fast or something slow, high pitched, or deep with a lot of base?
- Lastly put together everything you learned about your bird and make it come to life through dance!

## **Additional Resources**

### Resource Credits

- Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Ilyich\\_Tchaikovsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Ilyich_Tchaikovsky))

### Further Study

- You Tube: "Peter Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake"
- *Tchaikovsky: Swan Lake*, by Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, London Philharmonic (Feb 18, 2011)