

Youth Outreach Understanding Dance

A joint initiative between Canada's National Ballet School
+ The National Ballet of Canada

Repertoire 09-10

Swan Lake Pas de Six

This dance for six people comes from the third act of *Swan Lake*. This act celebrates the announcement by Prince Siegfried that he will marry the Swan Princess, Odette. Odette has been transformed by the evil sorcerer Rothbart so that she is a Swan during the day, and a woman by night. This transformation will only be undone if Odette marries a man who never breaks his word to her.

Rothbart intends to trick Siegfried into breaking his word to Odette by having him marry his own daughter Odile. So Rothbart disguises his daughter, Odile, so that she looks like the Swan Princess, Odette. Rothbart arrives at the celebration with a great retinue of entertainers to distract Siegfried from realizing that Odile can not be Odette, because Odette takes a woman's form between midnight and 4 AM, and the celebration begins just as the sun is setting.

The entertainers know, of course, that they are meant to make Siegfried so eager to pledge his love to Odette that he will forget she can not arrive till midnight. The men are arrogant and competitive, goading Siegfried to see who can make the most extravagant declaration of love. The women are proud and seductive, reminding Siegfried of how beautiful Odette is, and how long he has waited to find a woman he can marry.

We will not show, in this short excerpt, how Siegfried succumbs to their trickery, pledges his love to Odile, and brings tragedy on his entire household. You will be able to understand, though, that the entertainers make Siegfried feel that they understand the secret of what makes a woman agree to marry a man, and at the same time suggest he will never know it. This is, for Mr. van Dantzig, who choreographed this dance, the root of the tragedy of *Swan Lake*. He believes that Siegfried didn't have the courage to follow his heart, and instead listened to the arrogant statements of people who like to tell other people how to love. This makes *Swan Lake* very much a ballet about the choices people face today, in a culture where people are famous for being beautiful and attractive, even though they never succeed in turning that beauty into something loveable.

Swan Lake Pas de Deux Act II

This pas de deux (a dance for two people) shows the meeting of Siegfried and Odette the evening before Siegfried announces that he will marry Odette. This pas de deux shows how Siegfried convinces Odette that she can trust him, and that he will be able to break the spell that forces her to live as a swan. Often, she tries to fly away, but as she has been restored to human form for the night, Siegfried is able to restrain her. Gradually, she believes his love for her, and ends by surrendering to her hope for a better life. In the final moments of the pas de deux, she performs a movement which suggests that she is crying in his arms as the relief of finding happiness washes over her.

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Bach Concerto for Two Pianos

In traditional cultures of all kinds, art works have a beginning, a middle, and an end. In a story, this is the introduction of the characters, the actions those characters take, and the resulting change in those characters. In an art work that has no narrative, the same sense of movement from beginning to end is achieved by presentation of an idea, looking at the idea from a different angle, and returning to the original point of view to see what change has taken place.

Johan Sebastian Bach, who wrote this piece of music in the 18th century, felt that this process was in fact about change in us, the listener. By hearing from a different viewpoint, and realizing that we in fact understand better when we hear again, Bach felt that we became aware of our humanity. Dance has the same ability to remind us that we have an extraordinary ability to see patterns, and to make sense out of sensory information. Essentially, this is what we do every time we have a conversation. This work is a conversation between the music and the dancers in which each must listen to the other to understand what the patterns are, and how they fit together.

New Works Giocanda Barbuto and members of the YOU dance program

Each year, dancers from the program make new works for each other to practice and understand the differences in being choreographers, who ask other people to use their bodies as their voices, and dancers, who ask other people to give them ideas to express with their bodies. We then present one or two of these works on each program, and ask you to tell us what you would say back to the choreographer, or suggest other movements that could have conveyed what the choreographer thought, or how you would describe the work to someone who hadn't seen it.

This is similar to writing a review for a movie, or interpreting a poem, or telling someone how to play a game. You have to decide what the point of the movie or the poem or the game is, and describe it so that other people can understand why the thing you care about is important. There is no one most important thing, even though many people will choose similar elements of the work to explain. For example, if two people explain the same game, one might say that the most important thing is winning, and another might say that having a good time is most important. Both are right if both believe what they are saying.

Some common things that people find interesting about dance works are the difficulty of the movement, and how well the dancer meets that difficulty, the relationship between the dancers, the relationship between the dancers and the music, and the emotional response of the viewer to the work. There are many, many, more. See how many things you can think of that could be help you describe why you like a movie or a book that you know well.

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Mad Hatter's Tea Party

This is an excerpt from Roberto Campanella's full length *Alice in Wonderland*, which he is re-choreographing especially for YOU dance. At the Mad Hatter's tea party, Alice meets the Mad Hatter, the Doormouse and the March Hare. Nothing about this party follows the usual rules of a proper English afternoon, which is exactly why Alice enjoys it. At the same time, Alice is frustrated by the fact that nothing follows the expected rules of conversation. The March Hare, is of course, as mad as a March Hare, even though the story takes place in May and the Hatter asks her to solve a riddle (why is a raven like a writing desk), to which he has no answer. The Doormouse is similarly frustrated, as he begins a story, but falls asleep before he can answer any of Alice's questions about it. How lucky it is for Alice that all of this takes place in a dream, and she can wake up to the reality of a warm summer day, and the reassurance that her sister has watched over her as she slept.

Tarantella from Napoli

Every year, we include a work that emphasizes how important it is for us to live together, in spite of coming from different places and backgrounds. Dance has always provided a way for a group of people to invite others to join them, and for a group of people to practice an activity that celebrates communal activity. Dances which began this way are now usually called folk dances, or character dances when they are performed on stage.

The dance you will see is the Tarantella from Auguste Bournonville's *Napoli*. This is an Italian dance, which began as a religious celebration during the time of the Roman Empire. The people that performed the dance were actually immigrants from Greece, and they brought this ecstatic dance with them as a way of bringing the community closer together, and closer to their gods. The religious aspect disappeared during the time that Catholicism was the state religion in Italy, and it has been replaced with the idea that the intensity of the dancing is to drive out the physical poison of a Tarantulla, rather than the spiritual poison of transgression against the gods.

In any case, the dance is physically very demanding, and has always been accompanied by clapping and tambourine playing to encourage the dancer to maintain the speed and intensity necessary to sweat out the poison of the spider, or to eliminate the physical barriers to communion with the divine. You will be asked to provide some of that encouragement. The hosts at your performance will show you how to do that before the dance begins, and help you along while the dancers are performing.