

LA BAYADÈRE

WITH THE
PBT ORCHESTRA



April 17—19 , 2015

Benedum Center for the Performing Arts

PITTSBURGH BALLET THEATRE

Audience Production Guide

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Choreography by Marius Petipa

Staged by Terrence S. Orr

Music by **Ludwig Minkus**

The Benedum Center for the Performing Arts

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The Synopsis

Act I, Scene I: In India, a Sacred Temple in the Forest

Led by the warrior Solor, a group of young men are on a tiger hunt. Breaking away from his friends, Solor persuades the fakir Magedaveya to arrange a secret meeting later that night with the bayadère Nikiya, one of the dancers who serves the temple. The High Brahmin leads a solemn procession from the temple, a sign for the fakirs and bayadères to begin the ritual fire dance. Nikiya, who has been consecrated lead bayadère, performs. Although he is leader of the temple's priesthood and has taken a vow of celibacy, the High Brahmin confesses to Nikiya that he loves her and promises her wealth and power if she will come away with him. Nikiya is shocked by his declaration and tells him she can never love him, for he is a man of God.

As Nikiya and the other bayadères carry water from a sacred pool to the fakirs, Magedaveya quietly conveys Solor's message to Nikiya to meet him by the temple walls.

Night falls and the two lovers meet. Solor asks Nikiya to elope with him: she consents and they vow eternal fidelity over the sacred fire. Unknown to the young lovers, the High Brahmin witnesses their oath and seeks to destroy Solor.

Act I, Scene II: In the Radjah's Palace

The next morning, the Radjah, the head of the principality, calls for his daughter, Gamzatti. This is the day she will meet her fiancé, to whom she was betrothed as a child. He shows her a painting of the handsome warrior Solor, and Gamzatti falls instantly in love. Solor, having been summoned by the Radjah, arrives at the palace. He is captivated by Gamzatti's beauty, but as he remembers his sacred vow to Nikiya, he is overcome with confusion.

The High Brahmin enters the palace and urgently requests a private audience with the Radjah. Everyone is sent away, but Gamzatti hides and overhears the conversation. The High Brahmin reveals Solor's love for Nikiya, hoping the Radjah will have Solor killed, but the Radjah orders Nikiya put to death instead. Dismayed, the High Brahmin reminds him that if a servant of the temple is killed the gods will take revenge. The Radjah is unrelenting.

Gamzatti emerges from her hiding place and summons her faithful servant Aya to bring Nikiya to her. When Gamzatti sees her rival's beauty, she tries to get Nikiya to deny her love for Solor. Gamzatti intimidates her and bribes her with jewels but Nikiya, having sworn her love over the sacred fire, will not give him up. In a moment of desperation, Nikiya seizes a nearby dagger and attacks Gamzatti. Horrified at her own actions, Nikiya flees. Her fate is sealed as a furious Gamzatti resolves to destroy Nikiya.



Act II: The Betrothal of Gamzatti and Solor



Many guests arrive at the Palace Gardens to celebrate the betrothal of Solor and Gamzatti. There are dances of celebration and a blessing of the union. Nikiya has been ordered to dance for the betrothed couple and as she does, she cannot conceal her despair. Solor can only watch with sorrow. As Nikiya tries to leave Aya presents her with a basket of flowers—supposedly a gift from Solor. With hope in her heart that Solor still loves her, Nikiya takes the basket, but as she dances a venomous snake strikes out and bites her. Nikiya soon realizes this is Gamzatti's revenge. As Nikiya lies near death, the High Brahmin offers an antidote to the venom if she will be his. But even as she sees Solor leave with Gamzatti, Nikiya is faithful to him and chooses to die.

Act III, Scene I: The Temple of the Golden Idol

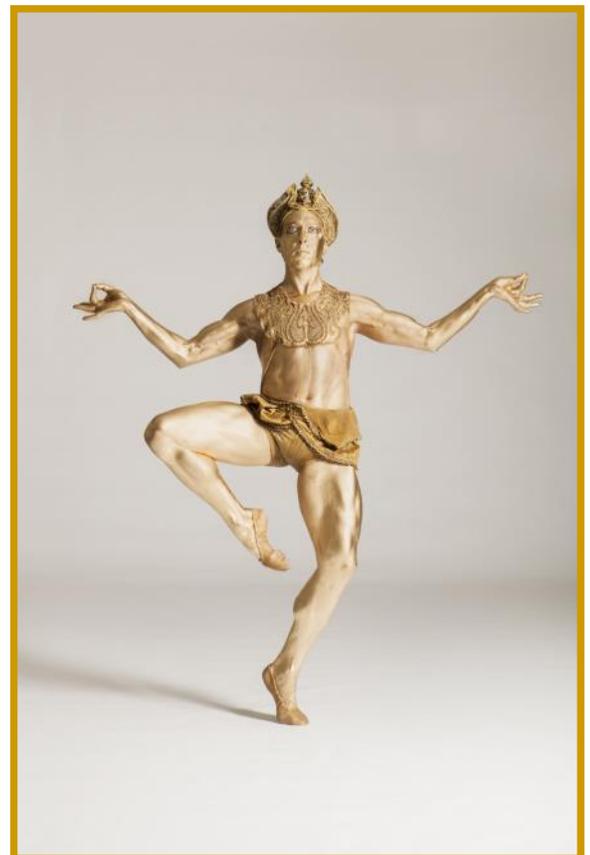
The Radjah, Gamzatti, the High Brahmin, and Solor arrive at the temple on the wedding day. At the altar, Solor is distracted and distraught. He feels the presence of Nikiya. As the Golden Idol dances the ground suddenly begins to rumble, signaling the wrath of the gods over Nikiya's death. Solor flees the temple.

Act III, Scene II: Solor's Quarters

Solor escapes to his quarters, haunted by the vision of Nikiya and tormented by grief. Magedaveya consoles him, offering him opium to help him rest. Solor sinks into a world of dreams and memory.

Act III, Scene III: The Kingdom of the Shades

Solor finds himself in the Kingdom of the Shades, ghosts of bayadères. They appear out of the shadows, descending in a long procession from the mountain cliffs. Among them he sees Nikiya. There is no more reality for Solor, and as she beckons, he follows the shadow of his fair Nikiya.



The Choreographer—Marius Petipa



[Picture source](#)

Marius Petipa, the “father of classical ballet,” was born in Marseilles, France in 1818. He began dance training at the age of 7 with his father Jean Petipa, a French dancer and teacher. Marius was educated at the Grand College in Brussels and also attended the conservatoire, where he studied music. In 1831 he made his debut in his father’s production of Gardel’s *La Dansomanie*.

Jean Petipa became the Maitre de Ballet at the theatre in Bordeaux, and it was here that Marius completed his education. At sixteen he became premier danseur at the theatre in Nantes, where he also produced several short ballets. He toured North America with his father and in 1840 he made his debut at the Comedie Francaise, partnering the famous ballerina Carlotta Grisi in a benefit performance. He spent a few years dancing in Spain and Paris: in 1847 left for Russia. He had signed just a one-year contract but was to remain there for the rest of his life.

Considered an excellent dancer and partner, his acting, stage manners, and pantomime were held up as examples for many generations. In 1854 he became an instructor in the Imperial Theatre school, while continuing to dance and restage ballets from the French repertoire. Sources differ on the first original work he staged for the Imperial Theatre, but all agree that his first great success was *The Daughter of the Pharaoh*. This work resulted in his 1862 appointment as Choreographer-in-Chief—a position he held for nearly fifty years—and in 1869 he was given the added title of Premier Ballet Master of the Imperial Theatre. The value of his accomplishments is inestimable: he produced more than sixty full-evening ballets, including *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker*, *La Bayadère*, and *Don Quixote*, as well as many other works. He is considered to have laid the foundation for Russian ballet and for ballet itself in the 20th century. Petipa died in 1910.

La Bayadère Timeline

- 1877 *La Bayadère* premieres at the Mariinsky Theater, St. Petersburg, Russia
- 1961 The Kirov Ballet brings The Kingdom of the Shades scene to the Palais Garnier in Paris, the first glimpse of the ballet in the West. Rudolf Nureyev dances the role of Solor. He defects from Russia soon thereafter.
- 1963 Rudolf Nureyev stages The Kingdom of the Shades scene for the Royal Ballet, London.
- 1974 The Kingdom of the Shades scene premieres at American Ballet Theatre, New York. This is the first time any part of *La Bayadère* is performed in the U.S. It is staged by Natalia Makarova.
- 1980 The first full-length production of *La Bayadère* is staged in the U.S., again at ABT by Makarova. Makarova designed the title role of Nikiya for herself. She was injured in the first act, and an ABT principal dancer took over for her for the rest of the performance. The dancer was Marianna Tcherkassky, PBT’s ballet mistress. Watch part of her performance, [here](#).
- 1992 Rudolf Nureyev stages *La Bayadère* for the Paris Opera Ballet. It is his last ballet, created on the same stage where he first danced in the West. It is also the capstone of his career and his life, before his death from AIDS a few months later.

What does “bayadère” mean?

The term bayadère means Indian or Hindu temple dancer. The word is similar to the Portuguese word for temple dancer, bailadeira. In India, the term is devadasi. Devadasis were first mentioned in works by the great Indian poet Kalidasa in the 5th century AD. A devadasi was a girl or woman who was consecrated to worship a deity or temple for the rest of her life. Dance and music were an essential part of temple worship. Devadasis, or bayaderes, were.....

Cultural Origins of the Ballet

La Bayadère, like any ballet, is a product of its time and place in history. In 19th century Europe, Romanticism was a dominant cultural and intellectual force and Romantic Era ballet style reflects Romantic ideas and ideals. Another cultural wave that spilled across Europe was Orientalism. Tied to Romanticism, Orientalism stemmed from a feeling among the European intellectual elite that European culture had worn itself out, and that the cultures of the East offered fresh and vibrant ways of looking at the world and of living life. (The “Orient” or “East” in 19th century Europe meant all of the Asian and Middle Eastern nations.) These locales and their inhabitants—so exotic to the typical European—became the subject of artwork and literature. Architecture and clothing even reflected “Oriental” styles.

In 1838 a troupe of Indian bayadères toured Europe. Their appearance and style of dance caused a sensation. Thèophile Gautier, a French novelist and arts critic (and, who, in 2 years, would co-write the libretto for the Romantic ballet triumph, *Giselle*), expressed the public’s fascination with the women:

The very word bayadère evokes notions of sunshine, perfume and beauty..... Imaginations are stirred, and dreams take shape. There is a sensation of dazzling light, and through the pale smoke of burning incense appear the unfamiliar silhouettes of the East..... This scented poetry that--like all poetry--existed only in our dreams, has now been brought to us.

It was inevitable that ballet would also turn to the East, and to bayadères, for inspiration.

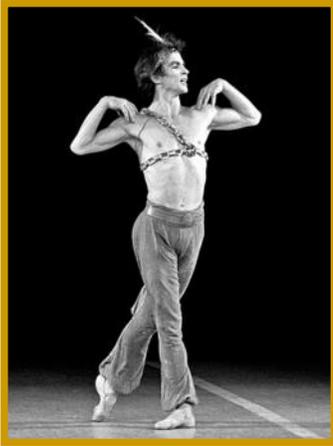
La Bayadère Precedents



Le Dieu et la Bayadère, 1830

An opera with a ballet divertissement. This is the first known ballet with character who is a bayadère. It’s based on the 1797 ballad, “Der Gott und die Bajadere” (“The God and the Bayadere”) by the renowned German writer and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The bayadère was danced by Marie Taglioni with choreography by her father, Filippo Taglioni. Marie and her father would rise to fame with *La Sylphide* in 1832, the work that ushered in the Romantic Era in ballet.

Marie Taglioni in *Le Dieu et la Bayadère*.



Le Corsaire, 1856

Original choreography by Joseph Mazilier (later revived and made famous by Marius Petipa) with music by Adophe Adam. Based on a Lord Byron poem of the same name. The story is set in Turkey and is about a pirate, Conrad, and his love for the Turkish odalisque (slave) Medora. Petipa himself danced in the role of Conrad in 1858. (PBT will debut *Le Corsaire* in April 2016.)

Rudolf Nureyev as Conrad in *Le Corsaire*, not dated

Sacountala, 1858

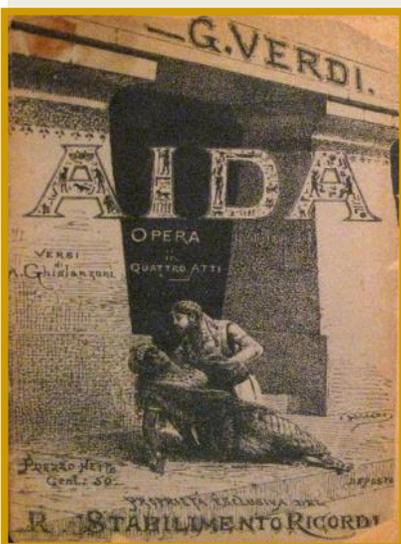
A ballet choreographed by Lucien Petipa, Marius's brother, and based on a 3rd century Sanskrit play about a bayadère by the famed Indian poet, Kalidasa. The libretto was by Thèophile Gautier (see his quote on page 6). This would be a source from which Marius Petipa drew when creating *La Bayadère*. In fact, the name of the character Gamzatti, the evil princess in *La Bayadère*, comes directly from *Sacountala*, which took the name from the centuries-old Kalidasa play.



Daughter of the Pharaoh, 1862

Marius Petipa choreographed this ballet for the Mariinsky Theatre. It was his first ballet with an “Oriental” theme. Based on a book by Thèophile Gautier, *Le Roman de la Momie* (*The Story of the Mummy*), the ballet is about a European officer who falls in love with a mummy—a deceased Egyptian princess—whom he encounters in a pyramid. Petipa himself danced the role of the officer. This was a

huge hit for the Mariinsky; as a result, Petipa was appointed 2nd ballet master of the Theatre.



Aida

Opera's famous Orientalist work was Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida*, set in Egypt, which premiered in 1871. Marius Petipa choreographed the ballet sequences for the Russian premiere of the opera in the mid 1870s, just before beginning work on *La Bayadère*. We can see *Aida's* influence on the ballet, both in the grand processional scenes and the love triangle relationships.

The Choreography

La Bayadère is a ritual, a poem about dancing and memory and time. Each dance seems to add something new to the previous one, like a language being learned. The ballet grows heavy with this knowledge, which at the beginning had been only a primordial utterance. . .

Arlene Croce, *The New Yorker*

By the time Petipa began to work on *La Bayadère* he was in his late 50s. He had danced and choreographed in the fullness of the Romantic ballet era for decades, with its ethereal beings floating on pointe, melodramatic storylines, and the idea of fantasized, idealized womanhood, symbolized by the ballerina. We begin to see a shift in his style with ballets like *Don Quixote* (1869) and its emphasis on technique and etched proportions. But it is in *La Bayadère* that the heart of Petipa's emerging classical style begins to reveal itself.

Petipa's new "brand" is seen in the complexity of *La Bayadère's* structure. He includes a great variety of choreographic styles, including character dances, mimetic passages, comedy, pure romantic ballet moments, as well as precisely structured sequences that begin to define what we now recognize as classical ballet.

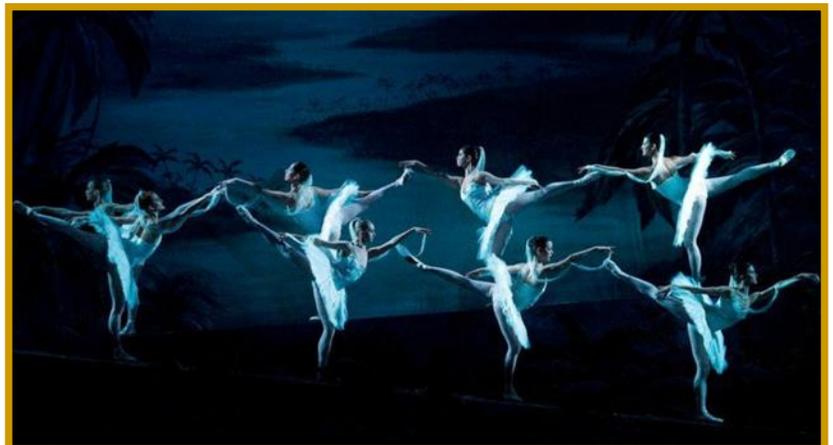
La Bayadère becomes a link, a bridge, between the Romantic Era and the Classical Era in ballet. Petipa's new style actually was reminiscent of the French court ballets of the 16th and 17th centuries, but reinvented with a grand and noble Russian bearing. He demanded movements that were clear and elegant and emphasized the beauty of a dancer's line. He choreographed with geometry



in mind—in triangles, circles, squares, and straight lines of dozens of corps de ballet dancers. Pointe work was straight-forward, with a much more precise quality than that of Romantic style. Petipa ups the ante in *La Bayadère* with pure dance.

Petipa's classical vision is most completely realized in The Kingdom of the Shades scene in the ballet. Called "one of the choreographic glories of the world," the look of the scene was inspired by Gustav Dore's illustrations for Dante's *Paradiso* (left).

According to ballet historian Cheryl Epstein, the subject of the scene is "classical ballet itself, and the beauty of its structure and form. How the dancers are arranged on the stage, and the steps they do within that arrangement, reflect the ideals of beauty and harmony in which everything is clear, balanced and symmetrical." Epstein notes that this scene stands alone, without any reference to the story, and becomes a precursor to the plotless ballets of the 20th century, in which story and setting are abandoned and the focus is on formal, abstract beauty.



The Benedum Center



The Benedum Center for the Performing Arts is the crown jewel of the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust and the Cultural District in downtown Pittsburgh. It was renovated in 1987 and is on the National Register of Historic Landmarks. The 2800 seat theatre used to be the Stanley Theater, still visible on the lighted marquees outside. It has the third largest stage in the United States measuring 144 feet wide by 78 feet deep. The Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, Pittsburgh Opera, and Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera all use the Benedum for their performances.

[Learn](#) more about the Benedum Center. [Investigate](#) the Stanley Theatre's role in music history here in Pittsburgh.

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