



Audience Guide

Choreography by Lew Christensen

Staged by Leslie Young

Music by Pyotr I. Tchaikovsky

The Benedum Center for the Performing Arts

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Artists: Colin McCaslin, Marisa Grywalski | Photo: Duane Rieder

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The Origins of *Beauty and the Beast*



When it was published in 1740, *Beauty and the Beast* was a new take on an centuries-old canon of stories, fairy tales and myths, found in all cultures of the world, about humans who fall in love with animals. Maria Tatar, author of *Beauty and the Beast: Classic Tales About Animal Brides and Grooms from Around the World*, notes that these stories - about love, courtship, romance, marriage - give "a vivid, visual grammar for thinking about abstractions: cruelty and compassion, hostility and hospitality, predators and victims."* They explore issues that are "as old as time:" the layers, complexities and contradictions at the heart of relationships. Just a few of these stories include:

- *Cupid and Psyche* - Ancient Rome
- *The Grateful Crane* - Japan
- *The Girl Who Married a Snake* - India
- *The Swan Maiden* - Sweden
- *The Piqued Buffalo-Wife* - Blackfoot Nation
- *East of the Sun, West of the Moon* - Norway

Image: [East of the Sun, West of the Moon, by Kay Nielson, 1914](#)

French author Madame Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve gave the world the most beloved animal bride and groom story in 1740 when she wrote *Beauty and the Beast* (*La Belle et la Bête*). A fairy tale, it was originally meant for adults - at the time just as many fairy tales were published for adults as for children. The novella-length fantasy, among other issues, explores love, marital rights and a woman's control over her own sexuality and destiny.

In 1756 Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont reworked Villeneuve's story, made it much shorter, removed many of Villeneuve's details and published it in an instructional manual for children. This version was translated throughout the world and ultimately inspired Disney's films, Lew Christensen's ballet and numerous adaptations. De Beaumont's story was intended to be a didactic tool to



teach manners, good behavior and moral and character lessons: Beauty's sacrifice of her freedom for that of her father is seen as selfless and virtuous; Beauty's sweet, generous disposition (her "beautiful" behavior) are contrasted with that of her jealous, mean and materialistic sisters (their "ugly" behavior). De Beaumont also eliminated many of Villeneuve's mature elements and replaced them with tamer situations. In Villeneuve's version, the Beast comes to Beauty every night with the question, "Will you sleep with me?" De Beaumont changed the question to "Will you marry me?"

In 18th-century France (as in many cultures before and since) girls and young women have faced the prospect of arranged marriages - unions agreed to by their families for economic, social or other reasons. Often marriages were to men they had never met and /or who were much older. In *Beauty and the Beast* de Beaumont sought to provide a pathway to deal with the anxiety of leaving home and entering the fearful, "monstrous" unknown of a new marital and sexual relationship. In the story, that fear is transformed / conquered with empathy. It is Beauty's capacity for empathy that allows her to see beneath the Beast's monstrous exterior to his humanity, and empathy is the avenue through which she learns to love him. In addition, Beauty's love has the power to change the Beast - to allow his humanity to be fully realized.

After 250 years the story has never lost its appeal, inspiring countless adaptations in literature, film and theater many times over.

*Maria Tatar, "Beauty and the Beast: Mythical and Primal," [Breezes from Wonderland](#), 2017

Image: [Beauty and the Beast, by Walter Crane, 1874](#)

Select List of *Beauty and the Beast* Adaptations

1740 Original fairy tale (for an adult audience) by Madame Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve.

1757 Fairy tale for children by Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont (an adaptation of Villeneuve's story). This version becomes known the world over.

1841 Theatrical premiere at Covent Garden, London. The first of many adaptations for the stage through the 19th and 20th centuries around the world.

1946 Film, *La Belle et la Bête*, by Jean Cocteau, French poet and filmmaker.

1952 Film, *The Scarlet Flower*, a Soviet animated feature film.

1958 Ballet, by Lew Christensen, San Francisco Ballet.

1987 Television series, in which the Beast lives in the sewers of New York City and Beauty is an attorney.

1991 Animated film, by Walt Disney Studios. Disney repeatedly attempted and scrapped animated versions of the fairy tale (they noted the difficult storyline) in the 1930s, 1950s and 1980s.

1994 Broadway musical, by Disney and based on the animated film, running until 2007.

2017 Live-action film, by Walt Disney Studios, based on the animated film.

About the Ballet

Beauty and the Beast was created in 1958 by Lew Christensen, artistic director of San Francisco Ballet. It was so popular that the company performed it alongside *The Nutcracker* as its holiday fare for years. It was refurbished by Christensen in 1982 with updated choreography and new sets and costumes. PBT bought the production in 2014 and refurbished it; it premiered in Pittsburgh in 2015.

Synopsis

Act I

In a dark and beautiful forest, stags, nymphs and other mysterious creatures dance and fly through the night. Here there is an enchanted garden that belongs to a Prince, but who long ago was cursed to be a beast.



Beauty and her father wander into the magical garden. Beauty's father innocently plucks a rose for her. The Beast appears and is enraged - Beauty and her father are terrified. The Beast chases the father from the garden and holds Beauty captive.

Beauty dances alone in the garden; she aches with fear and sorrow. The garden Caryatids and Rose Bushes try to comfort her. The Beast sees her and his heart is full. He finds himself falling in love with her, but he looks at himself in despair; he knows she could never love him. He tries to give her a rose to show his love. At first she feels his presence but cannot see him. When she finally notices

him she is terrified and runs from him.

The Beast tries to brighten Beauty's spirit by showing her his love. He summons his court to entertain her. Simians burst into the garden with acrobatic dancing and spectacular jumps. They present Beauty with gifts from the Beast: flowers, birds, jewels and a crown. They build her a golden throne and help her into a sparkling new gown. Magic Flowers and charming Bluebirds also dance and entertain her.

In spite of these wonderful gifts, Beauty is still unhappy. The Beast again offers the rose, but Beauty is terrified. She breaks free from the castle guards and flees from the palace. The Beast is grief-stricken; he collapses in his garden and dies of a broken heart.

Act II

Beauty finds her way back to her home and reunites with her father and sisters. Her sisters are jealous of her beautiful dress and the other gifts the Beast gave her.

Later that night, she thinks about the Beast and realizes that he was trying to show her kindness and love. After she falls asleep, the stags from the Enchanted Forest appear at her house. They toss a rose into the cottage. She wakes up and realizes that this is a sign that the Beast needs her. She hurriedly follows the stags back to the palace.



Back in the Beast's garden a funeral procession is underway. Beauty arrives and finds that the funeral is for the Beast and she is devastated. She knows now that she loves the Beast. Beauty runs over to him and begins to sob. Suddenly, the Beast stirs - slowly, he rises. He tears away his clothing

and fur and is miraculously revealed to be the kind and gentle Prince he once was. Beauty's pure heart and true love have broken the curse.

The Prince graciously greets his servants. He again offers the rose to Beauty, and this time, she accepts it. Everyone in the kingdom rejoices. The Prince and Beauty get married in a magnificent wedding celebration in the palace. The Courtiers dance and the Roses perform a beautiful waltz. Beauty's father and sisters attend, too. Beauty and the Prince dance a thrilling and romantic *pas de deux* and live happily ever after.

Photos, top to bottom: Nurlan Abougaliev, Joseph Parr, Amanda Cochrane; Alexandra Kochis, Alejandro Diaz and Artists of Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre. Photos by Rich Sofranko.

The Music

The score for *Beauty and the Beast* is a compilation of excerpts of works by Pyotr I. Tchaikovsky, which were arranged by Earl Bernard Murray when the ballet was created in the 1950s. The works include Symphonies Nos. 1, 2, and 3; Orchestral Suites Nos. 1, 2, and 3; and *The Storm*, Opus 76.

While the music for the *Beauty and the Beast* was not composed as a ballet, the music works seamlessly together and has the effect of a ballet score. In his lifetime Tchaikovsky composed just three scores for ballets, all of which are masterworks of the genre: *Swan Lake* (1877), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890) and *The Nutcracker* (1892). Learn more about Tchaikovsky online at [Encyclopedia Britannica](#).

Musical Highlights

Beauty and the Beast is structurally framed with Tchaikovsky's [Orchestral Suite No.3 in G](#), which has been called "one of the jewels of Tchaikovsky's mature orchestral writing,"* containing beautiful, moving melodies and dazzling orchestrations. The ballet not only begins and ends with sections of the Suite, but pieces are used throughout the ballet to create a musical throughline. If you've seen choreographer George Balanchine's *Theme and Variations* ballet, you may recognize some of the music in *Beauty and the Beast* - Balanchine's ballet is set to the final movement of the Suite.

A few excerpts to listen for:

Overture: The ballet opens with the [Suite's Movement I: Élégie](#), known for the sweetness of the melodic line. It starts out gently and becomes increasingly passionate as the forest of the ballet begins to come alive.

The Enchanted Forest - giving us an auditory picture of the stags, nymphs and other forest creatures: [Symphony 1, III Scherzo](#)

Beauty's Variation (solo) in the Garden, expressing her sorrow and despair: final movement, [Orchestral Suite No. 3](#) (begin at 35:40)

The Transformation (when the Beast transforms back into a Prince): ["The Storm," Opus 76](#) (the first minute or so).

The Wedding of Beauty and the Prince: [Symphony No.2](#)

*laphil.com

Highlights of the Choreography

Beauty and the Beast Choreographer Lew Christensen is considered the 20th Century's first great American-born dancer and choreographer. He was artistic director of San Francisco Ballet from 1951 to his death in 1984. He created *Beauty and the Beast* in 1958.

A few moments to watch for:



The Forest Nymphs' *grand jetés*: *grand jeté* means "big throw." It is a big jump where the dancer performs a split high in the air, throwing one leg out to the front and the other out to the back. In the beginning of the ballet, the Forest Nymphs *jeté* back and forth across the stage - the jumps make them look like they are flying through the night sky.



The Beast and Beauty's first dance: In this *pas de deux* (dance for two) the Beast's costume presents significant challenges. The idea in this scene is that Beauty has a sense of the Beast's presence, knows he is there, but does not see him. The dancer portraying the Beast has to keep out of her line of vision, so has to partner her from behind while she balances and turns in arabesque. He holds her waist with one hand (normally it is two hands) and in addition cannot feel her waist because his hand and arm are

covered with the heavy fur of his costume. This is a difficult and tricky maneuver.

The Stags and Bluebirds: Christensen's choreography for these characters is very clever, mimicking the real creatures' positioning, movements and movement patterns, though with an exaggerated and abstract flavor.



The Lead Simian: This character is not on stage for long, but his is a virtuoso role. Watch the dancer's turns in the air (*tour en l'air*). He starts in fifth position, then *pliés* (bends his knees), jumps straight up, turns 360° in the air and lands again in *plié*, with feet reversed. Dancers sometimes just call it a "*tour*." The choreography calls for double *tours*, which is two 360° revolutions in the air! These turns are also incredibly fast. Note that in order to jump as high as possible, the first *plié* is very deep to harness the strength of the dancer's legs.



The Wedding *Pas de Deux* (dance for two): This thrilling culmination of the ballet packs in a lot of technical difficulty with daring lifts (the Prince tosses Beauty into the air) and powerful jumps. In his solo, the Prince performs a series of rigorous *entrachats* - as he jumps into the air he beats his legs together at the calves, first to the front, then to the back, multiple times.



Characterization: Because the Beast is heavily costumed we cannot see his expressions, so his movement is incredibly important. Movement alone has to convey the turmoil he feels, so even the tilt of his head or the positioning of a hand has to signal meaningful emotion. This choreographic depth and detail is key to the story and to the audience's understanding of the Beast's character.

Image Credits: Artists of Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre; Nurlan Abougaliev, Amanda Cochrane; Diana Yohe, Gabrielle Thurlow; William Moore; Mashiro Haneji; Alexandra Kochis, Alejandro Diaz. Photos by Rich Sofranko.

How Dancers Learn a Ballet

Ballet is an art form that is taught in person, through demonstration, from one dancer to another. While a ballet company also uses videos of other companies or their own past performances, ballet is still largely handed down through demonstration and instruction by a *répétiteur* (from the French verb *répéter*—to repeat—one who teaches the steps and roles of a ballet to a company of dancers). They often have an intimate connection with a particular choreographer's work. Many choreographers (or their trusts) have a corps of *répétiteurs* who travel to ballet companies to teach and rehearse their works.



The *répétiteur* for *Beauty and the Beast* is Leslie Young, a former dancer at San Francisco Ballet for 19 years (where *Beauty and the Beast* originated). Among other pursuits she is a caretaker of Lew Christensen's works and strives to recreate them as he originally intended.

Image Credit: Artists - Luca Sbrizzi, Gabrielle Thurlow. Photo by Aimee DiAndrea.

Costumes and Sets



The sets and costumes were designed by Jose Varona, a noted opera, ballet and theater designer, in the early 1980s when the ballet was refurbished at San Francisco Ballet. When Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre purchased the *Beauty and the Beast* production in 2014, the costumes had not been touched in nearly 30 years. They had collected years of dust, and here and there bits and pieces had deteriorated with time. The PBT costume shop took on the monumental task of refurbishing the ballet's 104 costumes. They hired a free-lance costume craftsman to tackle the elaborate masks and armor, which are a feat of design and engineering.



Costume Fun Facts!

When PBT purchased the production, the fancy dress that the Beast gives Beauty was nowhere to be found. There was no pattern or even a photograph of what the dress was supposed to look like. The costume shop did some digging and found an original black and white costume rendering at the Museum of Performance and Design in San Francisco. They also came across some very grainy video from a 1984 performance that gave a hint of the original lavender color. Armed with those two clues, PBT staff created an entirely new dress - in a couple different sizes to fit different dancers in the role.



The Costume Shop created new gold tutus for Beauty to fit different ballerinas. Because of the layering, hand-stitching and beading, constructing the tutus took an entire month of work.



The Simians' unitards are hand-painted; their fur is actually sheer fabric that's been frayed to look like animal fur.



The Beast's ornate cape is made of screening and leather, which are appliqued, painted with layers of color for texture and depth, and glittered. There is boning in the collar to make it stand up. The cape is a unique and beautiful work of art unto itself.



The Stags' heads are made of leather, which has held up over the years much longer than a synthetic would have. They are sprayed with Lexall, a product used on car interiors, to keep them supple.



The Statues' masks, headpieces and armor are made of screening and fabric, which are then soaked in plastic to harden. Couch foam is used to give three-dimensionality to the facial features. The interiors are coated with liquid rubber.

Image Credits: Artists - Amanda Cochrane (first 3 photos); Masahiro Haneji; Alejandro Diaz; Artist of Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre. Photos: Rich Sofranko; Duane Rieder; Kelly Perkovich.

Disney Version vs. Ballet Version

The ballet version of *Beauty and the Beast* was created before Disney's animated film (1991) and is closer to the Villeneuve / de Beaumont story than Disney's. Disney also produced a live-action *Beauty and the Beast* film in 2017, which largely parallels the animated movie. Here are just a few differences you might notice between the ballet and the movies:

Disney versions

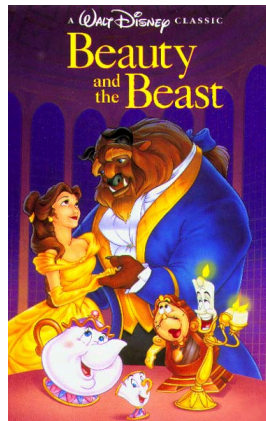
Dialog.

Musical, with songs.

The main character's name is "Belle".

Belle is an only child

Household items come to life characters and help Belle.



Gaston tries to win Belle's affection.

Belle willingly takes her father's place as a prisoner.

The rose symbolizes the Beast's life (the falling petals count down to his death).

Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre's version

No talking!

Classical music score.

The main character is called "Beauty".

Beauty has two sisters.

Simians and bluebirds entertain and help Beauty (found in the original version)

No Gaston!

Beauty doesn't volunteer to be a prisoner.

The rose symbolizes the Beast's true self, and his heartfelt love, which he tries to give / show to Beauty.

