

CHRISTOPHER STOWELL'S SWAN LAKE

Dear Educators,

In the season opening show of Oregon Ballet Theatre's *Student Performance Series (SPS)* students will be treated to excerpts from *Swan Lake*. It is a quintessential ballet based on a heart-wrenching fable of true love heroically won and tragically squandered. With virtuoso solos, an achingly beautiful score, and a majestic *corps de ballet* in brilliant white, it is emblematic of the opulent grandeur of the greatest of all 19th-Century story ballets. This study guide is designed to help teachers prepare students for the performance.



Yuka Iino and Ruben Martin in Christopher Stowell's *Swan Lake*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

In this Study Guide we will:

- Provide the synopsis for Christopher Stowell's *Swan Lake*, consider some of the stories that inspired the ballet, and touch on its history
- Learn some facts about the music for *Swan Lake*
- Consider the way great dances are passed on to future generations and compare that to how students come to know other great works of art or literature
- Describe some ballet vocabulary, steps and choreographic elements seen in *Swan Lake*

At the performance we will:

- See slides of *Swan Lake* productions past and present and meet Portland's own *Swan Lake* celebrity
- Listen to and identify a *leitmotif*
- See Act II and other excerpts from *Swan Lake*!

For those of you who are regulars at our *Student Performance Series*, you will note that this particular performance is at 12:00 noon instead of the usual 11:00am. We have done this for a specific reason—to provide enough time for the dancers to warm-up for the demanding physicality of *Swan*

Lake while still being able to fit the show into a school day schedule. Be sure to tell us how you feel about this schedule change in the "comments" section when you fill out our survey after the ballet at:

www.obt.org/outreach_sps.html

In order to provide affordable programming for the *Student Performance Series (SPS)* we are supported by generous funding from donors who are concerned about education for youth. As well, OBТ is mindful to keep *SPS* costs lean. This means that often *SPS* performances are done to recorded music instead of the live music performed for the public. This places a challenge before us—how to find recorded music with the right tempos and qualities for the dancers who are used to the inspiration of live music? This season we have been given a wonderful solution to that problem, one that is a testament to the OBТ Orchestra's commitment to educating the students of Oregon and Southwest Washington. We are being allowed to use a recording from a 2006 performance of *Swan Lake* at the Keller Auditorium for our *SPS* show. For this one performance the musicians are suspending a rule in their contract that normally does not allow performance recordings to be replayed *for any reason*. We send big thanks to the musicians for this gift.

See you at the Keller Auditorium!

Kasandra Gruener, MA
Director of Education and Outreach



Oregon Ballet Theatre's production of Christopher Stowell's *Swan Lake*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

SWAN LAKE SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Prince Siegfried's courtiers and subjects gather for an impromptu party celebrating his 21st birthday. The queen arrives to remind Siegfried that he will one day be king and must prepare to accept adult responsibilities. The next evening at the ball commemorating his coming of age, he is to choose a fiancée. However, Siegfried has yet to meet someone that touches his heart and is saddened that he will lose his freedom. At the party's close he departs with his mother's birthday gift—a crossbow—to hunt in the solitude of the forest.

ACT II

Deep in the forest Siegfried discovers a swan gliding across a moonlit lake. As he draws his crossbow, the bird is transformed into a beautiful woman. She is Odette, the Queen of the Swans. She and her maidens have been doomed by the evil sorcerer Von Rothbart to be swans by day and are allowed their humanity only from midnight to dawn. With gentle patience Siegfried softens the terror of the Swan Queen and her flock. She tells the Prince that only the love of a man who swears eternal fidelity can break Von Rothbart's spell. Siegfried now understands perfect love and vows to marry Odette. As dawn approaches, Von Rothbart rises out of the shadows. His magic draws Odette from Siegfried's arms and summons the maidens back to Swan Lake.

ACT III




Guests arrive at the palace for Prince Siegfried's birthday ball. The queen has invited six beautiful princesses as prospective brides. Siegfried dances courteously but indifferently with each of them—his heart is pledged to Odette. As his mother insists that he choose among the princesses, two uninvited guests appear dressed in black. They are Von Rothbart, transformed into a stately count, and his daughter Odile, who has been magically disguised as Siegfried's beloved white swan, Odette.

After dancers from Spain, Italy, Russia, and Hungary entertain the court, Odile exerts all her wiles to beguile the prince and trick him into believing that she is Odette. A vision of the true Swan Queen appears at the palace window to warn of the deception, but the Prince is mesmerized by Odile and joyously declares that she will be his bride. Triumphant, Von Rothbart reveals the treachery. Leaving the court in an upheaval, Siegfried flees in search of his true love.

ACT IV

Deep sadness descends upon Swan Lake. In a frightening storm created by the evil sorcerer, Siegfried finds Odette and begs her forgiveness. She forgives him, but nothing can be changed. He has broken his vows and Odette is doomed to remain a swan forever.

KEY TO USING THE STUDY GUIDE

-  = Academic connections or discussion points
 = Concepts for older students
 = Activities designed to get students up and moving

Underlined words are defined later in the Vocabulary List.

HISTORY OF SWAN LAKE: THE STORY

The story of *Swan Lake* includes ideas and themes found in several age-old tales and myths. The idea of bird-women and the theme of our search for enduring love are two such concepts to look at. Swans in Greek mythology were connected to wisdom and creativity and were associated with the Nine Muses. The beautiful voice of the half-bird half-woman Siren in Greek mythology could woo men off their course. Hindu's swan-maiden goddess Saraswati, whose name means "one who flows," is linked to purity, beauty, and the arts and is dressed in pure white. And closer to home, in Native American culture, the famous Sacagawea's name means Bird-Maiden.



Statuette of Sirena de Canosa, a half-bird, half-woman from Greek mythology

At the time of *Swan Lake* people would have known of the *Tales of the Thousand and One Nights*, in which there is an account of Hasan of Basra, who visits the place of the bird-maidens. When they take off their feather garments, they become beautiful women. They might also have known the Russian story by Alexandre Pushkin, *Tzar Sultan*, which is the story of a prince who saves the life of a wounded swan who later reappears as a woman to




Painting depicting Lohengrin






Hans Christian Andersen's book, *The Wild Swans*

marry him, and as well the German folktale by Hans Christian Andersen called *The Wild Swans*. Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, the composer of the music for *Swan Lake*, was likely influenced by Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*, the story of a heroic Swan Prince, a man with a mysterious past who arrives on a magical swan-boat. Because threads of these historical tales touch on universal experiences of longing for true love and the consequences of our actions, *Swan Lake* strikes a note of familiarity in the viewer even though it is a fantasy ballet.

 Look up and discuss stories of bird-maidens as noted above.

 At the performance, watch to see if the swans move like "one who flows," and if their movements express purity and beauty. Notice how the dancers tell the story with their body and facial expressions.

 Tell a Story! Ask students to try to tell a favorite story, something that the whole class is familiar with, using their bodies and the expression of their faces. Have fun!

  People have long marked their lives in seven year increments—by age seven one's permanent teeth are in and toddler-hood is over, by fourteen adolescence is in full swing, and the 21st birthday is seen as a rite of passage to adulthood. Act I of *Swan Lake* opens with townspeople preparing for Prince Siegfried's 21st birthday party at the castle. Ask students how 21st birthdays are celebrated in the 21st century in America or around the world? For Prince Siegfried it signified the end of his carefree days as a bachelor. Being 21 meant that he would need to choose a girl to marry whether he loved her or not and take on the responsibilities of an adult man. Ask how it might feel to be told by parents that this was what you must do?



Ruben Martin (as Prince Siegfried) in Act I of Oregon Ballet Theatre's production of Christopher Stowell's *Swan Lake*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.



Ruben Martin (as Prince Siegfried) and Damara Bennett (as the Queen) in Act III of Oregon Ballet Theatre's production of Christopher Stowell's *Swan Lake*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

HISTORY OF SWAN LAKE: THE CHOREOGRAPHY

Countless versions of *Swan Lake* have been performed since Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov set the choreographic template in 1895. Preservation of their choreography has relied mostly upon the ballet equivalent of oral tradition—passing the dance from seasoned artist to the next generation of performers. The choreographer who envisions a historically representative *Swan Lake* is faced with thousands of decisions. Dance historian Linda Besant interviewed OBT's Artistic Director Christopher Stowell in 2006 asking him how he came to settle upon his version of *Swan Lake*. He said, "I've done a huge amount of research, traveling to see several productions, studying video, reading ballet masters' notes and all sorts of history. There's no way to know exactly what Petipa and Ivanov did... Wherever possible, I'm using choreography considered to relate to the original, for example, with the *pas de trois* in Act I. In the second act, the step that all the swans do coming on stage is the same everywhere. Then you have to set the patterns, depending on the number of swans you have and the size of your stage, so it works out geometrically with the music. Everything else is from scratch. We simply don't know what the original fourth act was like, which leaves me license to match the emotion and drama in the music."

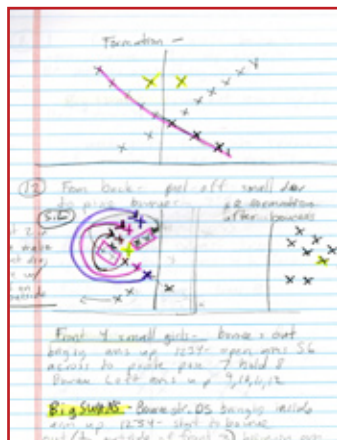
Drawings from the late 1800s depicting an early version of the *Swan Lake* story



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Even though historically there are special written methods which record dances and more recently there are films taken of ballet choreography, a dance is best learned from someone who has danced it before, especially if the teacher has learned the dance from the creator—the choreographer. In literature, it is as if an author tells the reader what he meant in the writing of a certain passage. Consider and compare how "knowledge" is passed down in school for such subjects as science, history, and math to that of the great dances.



Choreography notations for *Swan Lake* by Oregon Ballet Theatre's Ballet Master, Lisa Kipp

SWAN LAKE: FROM RUSSIA TO AMERICA

Although *Swan Lake*'s first version occurred in 1877, the version seen today as the standard of the ballet, the Petipa/Ivanov version, premiered in St. Petersburg, Russia on January 27, 1895—113 years ago.



Photo from Petipa and Ivanov's 1895 production of *Swan Lake*.

Due to political reasons, St. Petersburg has changed its name several times:

May, 1703 - August, 1914	St. Petersburg
August, 1914 - February, 1924	Petrograd
February, 1924 - July, 1991	Leningrad
July, 1991 - Present	St. Petersburg

Citizen's lives were affected when each of these names changed. Access to arts and education reflected the changing times. Students might find it interesting to research the impact of politics on education and the arts.

Swan Lake danced to Tchaikovsky's score is one of the major artistic exports of Russia. A two act version of the ballet was seen in Scandinavia and Germany in 1908. In 1909 a more extensive tour of a three-act version was seen in Europe, in 1910 in London and in New York in 1911. But, the first full-length American production of *Swan Lake* was produced for the San Francisco Ballet by William Christensen after Petipa and Ivanov' in September 1940. At OBT's SPS performance we will get to meet **Jacqueline Martin Schumacher** who, at the age of 19, performed Odette, the Swan Queen, in that first *Swan Lake* in San Francisco, California. She will tell us about her experience and why the full-length ballet *Swan Lake* came to America at that time in that place.



Jacqueline Martin and Lew Christensen in San Francisco Ballet's production of *Swan Lake*.

What was going on in the 1940's when *Swan Lake* was first performed in full by Americans? The US President was Franklin D. Roosevelt, and politically, the US Congress passed the Burke-Wadsworth Bill (the Selective Training and Service Act), which provided for the first peacetime draft (conscription) in the history of the United States. Meanwhile Hitler's army was marching in Europe and immigrants were moving to the US for safety. Check out the "Bound For Glory" online photo exhibition of images of America in the 1940's.

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/boundforglory/glory-exhibit.html>

SWAN LAKE: THE MUSIC

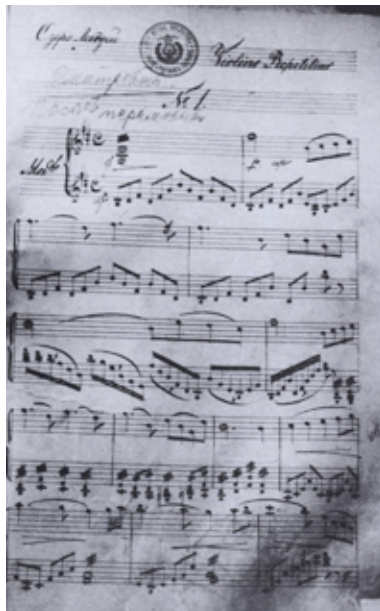
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky risked ridicule from his colleagues when he accepted the commission for *Swan Lake* from the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow in 1875. At that time, ballet scores were composed by specialists who worked according to a choreographer's dictates. Music made for ballet was not considered to be substantial in its own right. But, as a life-long devotee of ballet, Tchaikovsky had "long cherished a desire to try my hand at this type of music." He proceeded in spite of the disdain of those who judged ballet scores as trite and without inspiration.

Students might consider times when they created something simply because the idea appealed to them.

The story of *Swan Lake* appealed to Tchaikovsky's romantic nature. He had previously composed a little ballet for his niece and nephew in 1871 called *The Lake of the Swans*. He brought the musical theme, or *leitmotif*, that represents the Swan Queen from that earlier family entertainment into his composition for *Swan Lake*.

We will listen to examples of *leitmotif* (pronounced light-mow-tif) at the Keller Auditorium. A *leitmotif* is a musical theme that recurs to evoke a particular feeling related to a character or situation or to signal that the character is present. A *leitmotif* is often the melody that you hum in your head when you leave the performance.

The score that ultimately grew from that earlier seed was well ahead of its time. The choreographers and dancers who first tackled Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* in 1877 were bewildered by the complexity of its melodies and its lush orchestration; they declared much of it not danceable. From today's perspective, it is clear that Tchaikovsky advanced music for the ballet in quantum leaps, and continued to do so with *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. Ever since, dancers have gloried in his ballet scores.



Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* score

Listen to a recording of *Swan Lake* by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, paying special attention to Act I and Act II. Ask students if the music feels "danceable." At the theatre, students will see a *pas de trois* excerpted from Act I and all of Act II.

In Act II, the swans enter the stage with a series of steps that are repeated over and over again. The resultant floor pattern brings to mind a vision of swans swimming urgently across a lake in a serpentine path. The steps that they repeat include *arabesques* and *attitudes*. In preparation for the theater, ask students to watch for the designs made by the swans. There will be diagonal lines, straight lines, pairs of lines, crossing lines, circles and more.

Make a Floor Pattern! It is a mathematical problem to work out the music's phrasing with the number of steps needed to create the designs. Students could try to draw a design on paper and make up their own walking path to go with it, deciding how many steps it takes to get to their destination and what path they will take to get there. Students could work in groups and show their floor pattern work to each other.



Image depicting a floor pattern from an earlier Sadler Wells production of *Swan Lake*.



Oregon Ballet Theatre's production of Christopher Stowell's *Swan Lake*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

VOCABULARY LIST OF BALLET STEPS AND OTHER TERMINOLOGY EASILY IDENTIFIED IN *SWAN LAKE*.

Arabesque – To stand on one leg with the other leg extended to the back in a 90° angle from the hip. This can be done with a straight or bent standing leg or *sur les pointes*.



Anna Pavlova demonstrating an arabesque in a 1909 production of *Swan Lake*.

Attitude – Standing on one leg, such as in arabesque, with the lifted leg bent at a 90° angle and well turned out. The leg may be lifted to the front or back.



Natalia Makarova performing a bourée

Bourée – Whether done *sur les demi-pointes* or *sur les pointes*, it is a traveling step done with legs crossed and ankles close together.

<http://www.abt.org/education/dictionary/index.html>

Click on “Pas de bourrée couru” (pah duh boo-RAY koo-Rew) for a short video demonstration.

Corps de ballet – The company artists who perform as an ensemble. The choreography in *Swan Lake* is very challenging for the swans of the *corps de ballet* because the women must dance in

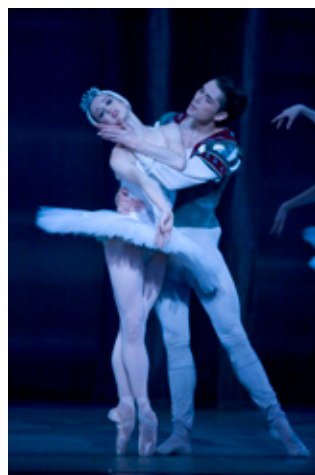
unison, striving to mirror one another’s every move. They must also stand on stage, perfectly still, in specific poses for long periods of time and then at just the right moment in the music dance with great energy again.

Floor pattern – The spatial design made by the actions of the dancers. In *Swan Lake* the *corps de ballet* creates many symmetrical and asymmetrical designs on the stage.

Pas de deux – A dance for two people. At the SPS we will see Odette and Prince Siegfried dance a *pas de deux* while the *corps de ballet* frames them on the stage.


Pas de trois – A dance for three people. At the SPS we will see a *Pas de Trois* from Act I of *Swan Lake*.

Sur les demi-pointes – To dance on the balls of the feet with the heels lifted as high as possible from the floor.



Alison Roper and Artur Sultanov perform a *pas de deux* in Christopher Stowell’s *Swan Lake*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

Sur les pointes – To dance on the tips of the toes. Women wear special shoes called pointe shoes. DON’T TRY THIS WITHOUT POINTE SHOES AND TRAINING.

 **Try It!** Try to do some of the steps described above.



Oregon Ballet Theatre’s production of Christopher Stowell’s *Swan Lake*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

REFERENCES

Bird/woman references (Image of a Sirena de Canosa):



 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Sirena_de_Canosa_s._IV_adC_\(M.A.N._Madrid\)_01.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Sirena_de_Canosa_s._IV_adC_(M.A.N._Madrid)_01.jpg)

Image of Lohengrin

 <http://www.stanford.edu/~rtracey/IHUM/images/lohengrin1.JPG>

Statue of Sacagawea at Lewis and Clark College:


(website on Sept, 19, 2008)

 <http://www.geocities.com/impurplehawk/sacagawea.html>

Swan maiden references:

 http://www.khandro.net/animal_bird_swan.htm


Entrance of the swans and their formations in Act II:

 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLkiB8gcx9U&feature=related>

For further study about *Swan Lake* go to BalletMet’s website:

 <http://www.balletmet.org/Notes/SwanHist.html>


Information about Portland Parks and Recreation in 1940:

 <http://www.portlandonline.com/parks/index.cfm?a=95957&c=39473>

Article about early ballet in Portland by Carol Shults and Martha Ullman West c. 2000:

 <http://www.ochcom.org/dancing/>

Online dictionary of ballet steps:

 <http://www.abt.org/education/dictionary/index.html>

Linda Besant, 2006 and 2008, Feature articles in Playbills, Oregon Ballet Theatre archive.

CONTENT STANDARDS

This *Student Performance Series* and Study Guide provide opportunity for engaging in Oregon Content Standards for the Arts, especially:

Historical and Cultural Perspective: Understand relationships of works of art to their social, historical, and cultural context, and the influence of arts on individuals, communities and cultures. (AR.05.HC.03, AR.08.HC.03, AR.CM.HC.03) PASS Criteria: Standard B.3

Aesthetics And Criticism: Respond to and analyze works of art, based on essential elements, organizational principles and aesthetic criteria. (AR.03.AC.01, AR.05.AC.01, AR.08.AC.01, AR.CM.AC.01) PASS Criteria: Standard A.1

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BALLET

Why do the guys wear tights?

Almost every activity requires a special uniform of some kind. Just as football players, wrestlers, and baseball players wear stretchy material to help them move with flexibility and speed, ballet dancers often wear stretchy tights so they are able to leap, kick, and stretch as they dance. Another reason tights are worn is so the audience can see the incredible leg muscles that allow them to jump so high.

How do the ballet dancers stand on their toes?

Female ballet dancers wear special shoes called "pointe shoes" to help them achieve dancing on the tips of their toes. Pointe shoes are hard at the ends, and are handmade with layers of satin, glue and leather. Dancers must take several years of ballet lessons before they are allowed to wear pointe shoes. With hard work and good training to develop strong ankles and feet, most young ballet students begin working *en pointe* at age 11 or 12.

This ballet has no plot! Or does it?

Some do, and some don't. Ballets with plots, like *The Nutcracker*, are called story ballets. There are also abstract ballets, with a focus on movement instead of a specific story. Abstract ballets are meant to evoke ideas or emotions, and the audience can interpret them many different ways.

How old are the dancers?

Oregon Ballet Theatre's professional company members range in age from 18 to 34, but most are in their early-to-mid-20s. A few of the apprentices, however, are still in high school. All of the dancers began studying ballet when they were children, as it takes many years of dedication to become a professional ballet dancer.

How often do they practice?

Ballet dancers take class every morning for 1.5 hours, and then they rehearse all day. They have Sundays and sometimes Saturdays off, and they have a lunch break. Dancing is their full-time job.

Where are the dancers from?

Oregon Ballet Theatre dancers come from all around the world: Japan, Russia, Albania, and different areas within the United States. There are dancers from Nebraska, California, New York, and several who grew up right here in Portland.

APPLAUSE

DO clap after a really spectacular movement. Laugh if the situation onstage is funny. Applaud and yell "Bravo!" at the end.

DON'T boo, whistle, hiss or make noise during the performance. It is distracting and disrespectful of the performers and to your neighbors in the audience.

FOOD

DO eat before you get to the theater if you think you might get hungry before the performance is over.

DON'T bring food or gum into the seating area. It makes noise, trash, and distractions.

TALKING

DO wait. Make a note on your program or a piece of paper if you want to remember something. Tell your friend at intermission or after the ballet is over.

DON'T whisper or discuss things with other people during the performance. Your friends may want to listen to the music or pay attention to the dancers' movement or the story.

DRESS & BACKPACKS

DO dress neatly as a sign of respect to the artists and the theater.

DON'T wear over-powering perfume, big hats, or jingly bracelets. Leave backpacks at school. If you must bring one, you'll be asked to leave it in the lobby.

CELL PHONES, CAMERAS, IPODS, MP3 PLAYERS, ETC.

DO relax when the lights in the house (seating area) get dark. Sit back and enjoy the live performance with your eyes, ears, and imagination.

DON'T bring electronic devices into the theater. The noise and clicking can be distracting to your neighbors, and camera flashes can be dangerous to the dancers.