

Tschaikovsky *Pas de Deux*



WHAT YOU'RE WATCHING

Upon the unearthing of Tchaikovsky's lost music, George Balanchine created this "eight-minute display of ballet bravura and technique," as described by New York City Ballet. Originally created on New York City Ballet dancers Violette Verdy and Conrad Ludlow, the ballet opens with both dancers joining hands, leading to a beautiful adage, which ends in a classic "fish dive." In true grand pas de deux form, a high-spirited male variation follows with a rigorous female variation shortly after, closing with both dancers coming together for their final dance.

WHAT YOU'RE LISTENING TO

Disappointed with the choreography for her 1877 *Odette/Odile Swan Lake* premiere, Anna Sobeshchanskaya requested new material for Odile in Act III. The new choreography, set by Marius Petipa, used music written by Ludwig Minkus. Upset upon hearing this new addition, Tchaikovsky – the original *Swan Lake* composer – composed his own version for the prima ballerina, careful to match Minkus's structure so the choreography could stay the same. Since the piece was not included in the original *Swan Lake* score, the pas de deux was lost for more than 70 years. It was accidentally discovered in 1953 in the Bolshoi Theater's archives and came to the attention of George Balanchine, who preserved the piece in his *Tschaikovsky Pas de Deux*.

“A virtuosic ballet, *Tschaikovsky Pas de Deux* is brief, beautiful, and beloved – an adrenaline rush for both dancers and audiences.”

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

FIRST POSITION

BALANCHINE CRASH COURSE



Affectionately hailed as the Father of American ballet, George Balanchine is renowned for his profound influence on the art form, shaping it into what it is today.

CHILDHOOD

Born in 1904 in St. Petersburg, Russia, Balanchine began studying music at the early age of five years old. Music was an integral part of his life, with his father being an opera singer, composer, and co-founder of the Georgian Opera. Balanchine trained at Imperial Ballet School, where he performed in productions at the Mariinsky Theater, and began choreographing his own works as a teenager.

BALANCHINE IN AMERICA

Founded in 1934, one year after Balanchine arrived in America, The School of American Ballet was born. A collaboration between Balanchine and arts patron, Lincoln Kirstein, The School of American Ballet continues to operate to this day, training young promising dancers from around the world. In 1948, Balanchine became Artistic Director of New York City Ballet, where he choreographed most of the productions the company performs today.

CONTRIBUTIONS

During his lifetime, Balanchine choreographed a total 465 works, beginning with a pas de deux in 1920 (*LA NUIT*), and ending with a solo in 1966 (*Variations for Orchestra*). Not only does his extensive repertoire circulate the most prestigious ballet companies around the world, but his ballet technique also stands as one of the most prominent styles in ballet training.



EN POINTE

Ballet Bravura

Discover the unfolding of George Balanchine's *Tschaikovsky Pas de Deux* with quotes from the original cast, Violette Verdy and Conrad Ludlow

The Making Of

In the world of ballet, certain partnerships transcend the stage to become legends. One such pairing was Violette Verdy and Conrad Ludlow, whose performances of George Balanchine's *Tschaikovsky Pas de Deux* left an indelible mark on the art form. Originating the roles in 1960, Verdy and Ludlow were both cast as understudies, while Principal dancers of New York City Ballet, Diana Adams and Jacques d'Amboise were intended to debut these roles. However, due to a foot injury, Adams was unable to continue rehearsals, which caused Balanchine to better suit the choreography to the strengths of Verdy and Ludlow. In terms of partnering, Verdy and Ludlow complimented each other in more ways than one. In an interview featured by George Balanchine Foundation, Verdy said, "many partners were boyfriends, Conrad was a husband...who is going to take care of you, make you look good, and give you confidence and tenderness." Ludlow viewed Verdy with the same fondness, he recalled, "[Balanchine] really liked what Violette did," gesturing to Verdy he continued, "he mentioned your phrasing is wonderful and the way you handled the music."

The Evolution

Since Balanchine created multiple versions of his works, there isn't a single official version of his choreography. Instead, those who teach and stage his works focus on maintaining high performance standards. They aim to reflect Balanchine's technique and style accurately while ensuring the steps are performed correctly, guided by their own interpretations and priorities. And after nearly 65 years of *Tschaikovsky Pas de Deux* being performed by various dancers, a fascinating phenomenon emerged, where the male role developed many different versions of choreography, while the female role remained relatively the same as the original. In the George Balanchine Foundation interview, Ludlow said, "with women's variations, [Balanchine] really loved to choreograph. With the men's, he didn't find that the finesse was quite there to do what he wanted, so he would say, 'what can you do?' So if someone could turn well, like I turned, he just gave me turns." When asked about the evolution of women's role in the pas de deux, Verdy said, "the girl's version has survived almost untouched...the version for the girl is really more or less consistent, much more so than the men's solo moments." ●