



Queensland **Ballet**

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR LI CUNXIN

La Bayadère

PRODUCTION NOTES FOR THE CLASSROOM

Contextual Information

Choreographer Greg Horsman, after Marius Petipa
Music Ludwig Minkus
Conductor & Musical Arrangement Nigel Gaynor
Music performed by Queensland Symphony Orchestra
Set and Costume Designer Gary Harris
Lighting Designer Jon Buswell

Overview

— First performed in 1877, *La Bayadère* (*The Temple Dancer* in English), is an early classical ballet, based on the Indian poet Kalidasa's play *Sakuntala*.

In the original production, Prince Solor, a son of the Maharajah of Cooch Behar, pledges his undying love to the beautiful Nikiya, a bayadère. When his father forces him to marry the Governor-General's daughter, Gamzatti, a string of tragic consequences is unleashed.

Arguably, the ballet is best known for *The Kingdom of the Shades* scene in which Prince Solor has an opium-induced vision of Nikiya and a group of shades (bayadères who died for love), dressed in identical white tutus. The simple and structured choreography of this scene radiates a serene detachment from reality and has preserved its freshness throughout history, becoming one of Petipa's most celebrated compositions.

Considered a classic in Russia, *La Bayadère* was almost completely unknown in the West until 1961 when it was first performed outside of Russia. Since then, the production has been restaged and rechoreographed by companies around the world.



The original production

— *La Bayadère* was first created by dramatis, Sergei Khudekov, and St Petersburg Imperial Theatres' Maître de ballet (Ballet Master in English), Marius Petipa, to the music of Ludwig Minkus. In 1877, the Imperial Ballet premiered the production at the Imperial Bolshoi Kamenny Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia.

While the production was created especially for the benefit performance of Yekaterina Vazem, St. Petersburg Imperial Theatres' prima ballerina, she and Petipa conflicted over aspects of the choreography, with the former creating her own entrance to the final act at the exasperation of the latter.

The original production involved five set designers — Mikhail Bocharov, Matvei Shishkov, Ivan Andreyev, Heinrich Wagner and Piotr Lambin. Each designed the lavish sets for individual acts and scenes of the production, contributing to the complexity of the collaboration.

Other notable productions

— In 1900, Petipa revived *La Bayadère*, resetting *The Kingdom of the Shades* scene from an enchanted castle in the sky on a fully lit stage, to the dark and rocky peaks of the Himalayas. Petipa also altered the choreography of this scene, increasing the number of dancers from 32 to 48, enhancing the illusion of the shades descending the mountain peak.

In 1941, Kirov Ballet's Ballet Master, Vladimir Ponomarev, and premier danseur, Vakhtang Chabukiani, revived *La Bayadère*, becoming the definitive ballet from which many subsequent productions were based. Example changes to Petipa's original production include choreography for Nikiya's variation where virtuosic petit and grand allegro movements were added to the grand coda.

Two other notable productions that derived largely from Ponomarev and Chabukiani's 1941 version are Natalia Makarova's 1980 production, performed by the American Ballet Theatre in New York City, and Rudolf Nureyev's 1991 production, performed by the Paris Opera Ballet in France.

Horsman's Production

— Greg Horsman's *La Bayadère* is a co-production between Queensland Ballet, West Australian Ballet and Royal Winnipeg Ballet. In 2018, Queensland Ballet will premiere the production at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Brisbane.

Horsman's choreography is based on Petipa's 1877 production, including the choreography of *The Kingdom of the Shades* scene, Nikiya and Prince Solor's pas de deux, and Edith (Gamzatti in the original production) and Prince Solor's pas de deux. However, Horsman has altered aspects of the storyline so that it reflects a more authentic and historically accurate representation of the Indian setting.

Horsman has set *La Bayadère* in Cooch Behar, a princely state in India, south of the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan (present-day West Bengal). The production is set in 1855, two years prior to the 1857 Indian Rebellion. At this point in time, the English had already been present in India for over 200 years, through the East India Company, an English joint-stock company enabling trade with the East Indies. By 1855, the East India Company had become powerful enough to rule large areas of India with its own private armies.

Horsman has included these British influences in the general premise of the narrative — the British Governor-General and Cooch Behar Maharaja have been fighting and seek to resolve their dispute through wedding their children, Edith and Prince Solor.

Other notable differences include the change of Nikiya's death from snake bite to a dagger at the hands of Edith, and the performance conclusion changing from an earthquake caused by gods displeased by Nikiya's death, to Prince Solor being shot by British soldiers and falling through the window to his death.

Greg Horsman

— After training with Peter Dickinson in Geelong, Greg Horsman continued his ballet studies with Anne Woolliams at the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School. In 1982, he joined The Australian Ballet and in 1987 was promoted to Principal Artist. While there, Horsman performed classical and contemporary productions, working with choreographers including Kenneth MacMillan, Glen Tetley, Maurice Béjart and Jiri Kylián.

In 1994, Horsman joined English National Ballet (ENB) and created roles in Derek Deane's *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Nutcracker*, and Michael Corder's *Cinderella* and performed as Romeo and Mercutio in Rudolph Nureyev's *Romeo and Juliet*.

In 1998, Horsman was appointed Artistic Director of Ballet Central at London's Central School of Ballet and since 2001, has held the position of Ballet Master at Northern Ballet Theatre in Leeds, ENB, the Royal New Zealand Ballet (RNZB) and Queensland Ballet (current).

Horsman has choreographed ballets for QB, ENB, RNZB and Ballet Central, with his *The Sleeping Beauty* (2011) winning critical acclaim.



Horsman's Production

SYNOPSIS

Prologue

— The armies of Cooch Behar and the British East India Company have been at war. The Cooch Behar Maharajah and the Governor-General of India decide to bring an end to the war with a treaty, that includes the arranged marriage of the Maharajah's son, Prince Solor, and the Governor-General's daughter, Edith.

Act One

SCENE ONE

THE JUNGLE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF COOCH BEHAR

— Prince Solor is training a group of soldiers when the Maharajah's envoy arrives to tell him to return to the palace. Prince Solor agrees, knowing he will be able to stop at the Temple of the Golden Idol where his beloved Nikiya is a bayadère (temple dancer).

SCENE TWO

THE TEMPLE OF THE GOLDEN IDOL

The Governor-General and his advisers are escorting his daughter, Edith, to Cooch Behar for her engagement to Prince Solor. They stop at the Temple of the Golden Idol where the High Brahmin greets the party and summons the bayadères to provide water and entertainment. Nikiya, the leading bayadère, concludes the performance. The Governor-General offers generous payment for the bayadères to perform at his daughter's engagement party.

Prince Solor's soldiers arrive. He sends his troops and the envoy to the palace, while he remains hoping to see Nikiya. The bayadères emerge from the temple and Nikiya lingers outside to meet Prince Solor. When Prince Solor proposes, Nikiya agrees and they arrange to run away together.

SCENE THREE

THE MAHARAJAH'S PALACE

Returning to the Palace, Prince Solor is informed of the arranged marriage between himself and Edith. He insists it cannot go ahead, but he is met with the Maharajah's anger. Prince Solor grudgingly complies, knowing he intends to elope with Nikiya.

SCENE FOUR

THE PALACE BALLROOM

Later at the engagement party, Prince Solor agrees to dance with Edith but rebuffs her affection. The Dance of the Golden Idol is performed and then Nikiya, unaware she is at her beloved's engagement party, begins to dance. Unable to resist, Prince Solor joins her dance and they kiss, exposing their love for each other. They are met with outrage. Edith stealthily removes a soldier's dagger and plunges it into Nikiya's back. Nikiya dies in Prince Solor's arms.

Act Two

SCENE ONE

AN OPIUM DEN IN THE HIMALAYAN FOOTHILLS

— Heartbroken, Prince Solor enters an opium den. The owner seeing Prince Solor, a man of obvious wealth, senses an opportunity for profit. He guides Prince Solor to a bed and offers him a pipe of opium.

SCENE TWO

THE KINGDOM OF THE SHADES

Under a cloudy opium haze, Prince Solor becomes utterly lost in his dreams of Nikiya's shade among the star-lit mountain peaks of the Himalayas. Shades descend from the mountain in a long file. The lovers meet amidst the supreme order of the shades, before dissolving and Prince Solor waking from his dream.

After some days, the Maharajah's envoy discovers Prince Solor, and he is escorted back to the Palace.

Act Three

SCENE ONE

THE GREAT HALL, GOVERNMENT HOUSE, CALCUTTA

— While still grieving for Nikiya and riddled with opium, Prince Solor submits to his duty and proceeds with his arranged marriage.

At the wedding reception, the newly-married couple dance for the guests. Edith, enjoying all eyes upon her, is oblivious to Prince Solor's distant, dazed mood. He mistakes a wine servant for Nikiya and swiftly drinks the first of many glasses. Prince Solor begins to dance around the hall, much to the surprise and enjoyment of all. However, feeling the effects of the wine, Prince Solor collapses into the table with their wedding cake. Edith is mortified and the Maharajah is disgusted.

SCENE TWO

PRINCE SOLOR AND EDITH'S ROOM

Confused and intoxicated, Prince Solor is taken to his room. He imagines Nikiya in his arms again and he collapses on the bed. Edith decides to put her anger aside and seduces him. However, when Prince Solor rejects her, she is incensed and screams that it was she who killed Nikiya. Blinded by rage, Prince Solor strangles her. As soldiers run into the room, the now deranged and violent Prince Solor is shot and falls through the window to his death.

APOTHEOSIS

Nikiya and Prince Solor's spirits enter the Kingdom of the Shades where, at last, they are reunited in eternal love.

Horsman's Production

Movement

— Choreography of Horsman's *La Bayadère* is based on Petipa's 1877 production, focusing on a classical ballet vocabulary. Specifically, the choreography for Nikiya and Prince Solor's pas de deux, and Edith and Prince Solor's pas de deux emphasise order, control, balance and harmony, and include arabesques, pirouettes, temps levés and jetés. Similarly, *The Kingdom of the Shades* scene promotes the use geometric floor pathways and group formations, creating symmetry akin to the classical ballet historical style.

Horsman also uses movements to convey the differences between the two cultures — British and Indian — as well as personalities. The choreography for Nikiya incorporates épaulement (slight twist in the torso from the waist upwards) and aspects of Indian dance which place emphasis on her wrists. In contrast, Edith's movements reflect a British classical ballet aesthetic which is academic, conveying her repressed and uptight personality.

Music

— Ludwig Minkus was an Austrian composer, conductor, violinist and teacher, who was the Residential Composer of Ballets for the St. Petersburg Imperial Theatres of Russia during the 19th century. Of the many ballet scores he composed he is best remembered for his collaborations with Léo Delibes on *La Source* (1866), *Don Quixote* (1869), and *La Bayadère* (1877).

The music for Horsman's production has been arranged by Queensland Ballet's Music Director and Principal Conductor, Nigel Gaynor, and has been reorganised to enhance the use of motifs (tunes) representing key characters and central themes.

Nikiya's first entry features the *Fate* theme, a hauntingly beautiful yet melancholic tune that alternates major and minor chords — as though caught between happiness and sadness. This theme reappears throughout the ballet, building to a climax in Nikiya and Prince Solor's pas de deux in the final act. Prince Solor's own motif features a plaintive clarinet tune which expresses his pain to be separated from Nikiya.

Additionally, and consistent with the Indian setting, Gaynor has included Indian instruments in the score such as tabla (drums) and a sitar (though the sitar sound is played on a keyboard). These exotic sounds paired with Minkus' beautiful themes help transport audiences to a dramatic and romantic Indian setting.

Set

— Designed by independent freelance designer, Gary Harris, the *La Bayadère* sets reflect 1850s India. Act One commences behind a gauze, depicting Queen Victoria on a geographic map of India. The following scene depicts the Temple of the Golden Idol, in the hills above the city of Koch Behar. The backcloth is a printed projection screen of a glorious sunset/sunrise, surrounded by rich foliage. Act One, Scene Three portrays the different rooms of the Maharajah's palace including a private study filled with books and atlases, and a guest bedroom. ***The Palace Ballroom* scene is set in the grand ballroom of the Maharajah's Palace, which opens onto the palace gardens and the sunset beyond.**

In Act Two, Scene One an opium den at the base of mountains is portrayed by a large tent, filled with divan beds for customers. Act Two, Scene Two's set depicts the Himalayan mountains, consisting of a series of pathways descending the mountain peaks, under a full moon.

Act Three, Scene One is set at the Governor General's mansion, which reflects a British Colonial interior — large windows which open onto the gardens, a tented ceiling and awnings, and the Royal Coat of Arms. The final scene is set in Prince Solor's bedroom, comprising of an oversized bed, a large window and a dresser. In contrast, the Apotheosis consists of an empty stage, opening to an expansive sky, with Prince Solor and Nikiya uniting in eternal love and happiness.

Costume

— Designed by Gary Harris, the costumes of *La Bayadère* mark the contrast between the Indian and British cultures. **The Indian costumes represent the colour and freedom of Indian dress, with the Maharajah's opulent costume featuring luxurious fabrics, drapes, pearls, diamonds and jewels.**

In contrast, the British costumes represent the uptight, staid and corseted style of mid-1800 England, consisting of high collars and long sleeves, no doubt highly inappropriate for the heat and humidity of India.

In *The Kingdom of the Shades* scene, the shades wear white classical tutus with bare midriffs and long white veils attaching from their headdresses to their wrists, echoing the temple dancers from Act One.

Q&A with Greg Horsman

Ballet Master and Head of Artistic Operations

— Tell us your history with *La Bayadère*.

La Bayadère was not a ballet that I had grown up watching as it was not commonly performed in Western countries. *La Bayadère* was not part of The Australian Ballet's repertoire until 1987, when a production of *The Kingdom of the Shades* scene was staged by Magdalena Popa (National Ballet of Canada's Ballet Mistress at the time). I performed the role of Prince Solor in this production, which was my first role as a Principal Dancer. Unfortunately, due to injury, I only ever performed the role once, but I enjoyed the ballet as the production focused on choreography rather than other elements such as characterisation and narrative.

— Describe your choreographic process for *La Bayadère*.

First, I researched various versions of the production. In particular, I watched Makarova's and Nureyev's renditions of the ballet. I then listened to the music scores of the different versions. The only complete recording I could find was a piano score reduction that was a collation of different scores which ballet masters and pianists had used throughout history. This became the basis from which Nigel began arranging and composing the Queensland Ballet production. Once I started listening to the music I began forming my own narrative, collaborating with Nigel to edit the music to accommodate my vision.

Simultaneously, I researched India's history, deciding to anchor the ballet in India in 1855. This date was important, as it was two years before what became known as the first Indian mutiny — a semi Indian uprising against the British to claim independence. This required me to research further into the historical context surrounding the first mutiny and the relationship between Indian and British cultures during that time.

I then developed the broad brushstrokes of the production. By using Petipa's choreography, which I taught to the dancers verbatim, I was then able to start to test and trial.

In the character and narrative focused scenes, I had an idea of their structure, but not necessarily the content. When working on these scenes, I would express to the dancers what I wanted to achieve. We then would physically explore different movements to achieve that vision. By working with multiple casts, I was able to receive different feedback from various dancers performing the same movements. This allowed me to identify how I wanted the movements to be performed, and I could use the individual dancers to demonstrate this sense of movement to the other casts.



Q&A with Greg Horsman

Ballet Master and Head of Artistic Operations

— This is your third full-length ballet production that you have choreographed. How has your choreographic practice developed between choreographing each of these ballets?

My ultimate aspiration for the ballets I choreograph is that anyone, regardless of their prior ballet experience, could watch and be able to understand the narrative while enjoying the performance.

For me, ballet choreography has always been about storytelling. Through choreographing *The Sleeping Beauty* (2011), *Coppélia* (2014) and *La Bayadère* (2018), I have been able to hone this craft. The prospect of choreographing a full-length ballet has also become less daunting while processes have become smoother from a logistical perspective.



— Has there been any sections of *La Bayadère* that you have particularly enjoyed choreographing and why?

The whole process has been enjoyable, but I would have to say I've really enjoyed choreographing sections which have a comedic element to them. In Act Two, Scene One, there are some great characters in an opium den in the Himalayan foothills including a group of thugs who rob their customers after taking opium. There's also a couple of moments with Edith throughout the ballet where her abrupt personality shines through. She deliberately throws items on the floor to be picked up by her servants.

— What do you see as being the key themes in *La Bayadère*?

I think the most dominant theme of the ballet is love always triumphs — Prince Solor and Nikiya's love is so powerful that it transcends death, and reunites them in the afterlife. There is also political tension throughout the ballet due to the historical context of 1850s India. This is reflected in the power struggles between the British and Indian people, providing opportunities to communicate themes of jealousy and revenge.



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