

TCHAIKOVSKY THE SWAN LAKE

London Symphony Orchestra

PIERRE MONTEUX

STEREO



PHILIPS

PETER ILICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

Swan Lake Ballet

(highlights)

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PIERRE MONTEUX, conductor

STEREO 835 142 AY ¹⁰

(also playable on mono)



SIDE A:

Act I: Introduction Scene }
Waltz } 13:27
Scene (Dusk falls) }
Dance of the Goblets }

Act II: Scene of the Swans }
Dances of the Swans } 13:34
Dance of the Queen }
of Swans }
Dances of the Swans }

SIDE B:

Act III: Scene (Fanfares) and }
Waltz } 15:17
Spanish Dance: Bolero }
Hungarian Dance: }
Czardas }
Pas de deux }

Act IV: Dances of the Little }
Swans } 11:55
Final Scene }

TCHAIKOVSKY COMPOSED THREE FULL-SCALE BALLET—*Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *Nutcracker*. Opinions vary as to which is musically the most subtle, but *Swan Lake*, the earliest of the three, is the most haunting and moving to watch. The story is richly romantic and the music, full of atmosphere, is certainly a match for it. But the ballet is seldom performed in its entirety. It has long been fashionable to stage only the second act, and as for concert performances, these are usually confined to half a dozen extracts arranged as a suite. On this record, however, Pierre Monteux has extended the suite to fourteen numbers, mingling the well-known with the lesser-known to give a finely balanced impression of the ballet as a whole.

Although nowadays regarded as one of Tchaikovsky's most attractively melodious scores, *Swan Lake* has not always had it so good. At the outset, it suffered the fate of a number of his other works: on March 4, 1877, it received what was apparently a dismal première at the Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow, before an unresponsive and uncomprehending audience. The choreography was incompetently devised by Julius Reisinger, the costumes and scenery were inadequate, and the conductor was an amateur who admitted that he had never before had such difficult music to contend with. The leading ballerina, it seems, was of a similar standard, and as much as a third of Tchaikovsky's score was omitted on the pretext that it was undanceable and was replaced with extracts from ballets by other composers.

With characteristic lack of confidence in the worth of his own music, Tchaikovsky largely blamed himself for the disaster and vowed to revise the work as soon as possible. But the composition of *Eugen Onegin* and the Fourth Symphony intervened, and a year later he was content to dismiss *Swan Lake* as being "poor stuff" compared with Delibes's *Sylvia*. It was not until after his death that Marius Petipa, a more gifted choreographer than Reisinger, took a look at the score and decided that it was, in fact, eminently stage-worthy. The necessary revision was made, the cuts were reinstated, and the complete ballet was performed at the Maryinsky Theatre on January 27, 1895. It was enthusiastically received, and since then has gone from strength to strength.

THE STORY IS BASED ON THE TEUTONIC LEGEND *Der Schwannensee*, which had long fascinated Tchaikovsky and which, indeed, he had already used for a short ballet in 1871. When commissioned to write the full-length ballet four years later, he salvaged the earlier music and also incorporated a love-duet from his youthful opera *Undine*, which appears in *Swan Lake* as Odette's adagio in Act II. Some material from another early opera, *The Voyevoda*, is also used.

There are four acts, set in and around the castle of Prince Siegfried and his mother. The ballet opens in a forest glade in the grounds of the castle. The prince enters and is welcomed by assembled courtiers and villagers, who presently dance a dazzling waltz which, with its luscious main theme and delicate woodwind tracers, has long been one of the most popular numbers in the score. The prince's mother enters and chides him for wasting his time on bachelor frivolities when he ought to be finding himself a wife. She reminds him that a ball is to be held next day in honour of his coming-of-age, and she demands that he pick a bride from the selection of princesses who have been invited to attend. The mother now retires from the scene, the merry-

making starts up again, and dance follows on dance, culminating in the festive and splendid *Danse des couples*, a polonaise of the utmost brilliance. The sky darkens, a flight of swans passes over, and the young prince and his friends decide to go on a hunting party.

Act II takes place by the lakeside and brings Siegfried face to face with Odette, the Queen of the Swans. She is really a princess who, along with her companions, has fallen under the spell of a wicked magician, Von Rothbart. He has changed them all into swans, and only by night can they regain their human shape. The spell, however, can be broken by a lover who has never pledged his faith to another woman. If he is willing to die for her sake, the evil Rothbart can be destroyed. Odette explains all this to Siegfried, who promptly falls in love with her and vows to kill the magician. The act opens with the expressive and poignant melody associated throughout the ballet with Odette. First stated gently by oboe over a haze of tremolo strings and harp arpeggios, it builds up to a big climax, then subsides. Next comes a chain of dances, including the lovely slow one from *Undine*, with its long harp introduction and its duet for solo violin and cello.

Complications arise in Act III. It is the following day, and the prospective brides are presented to the prince in the castle ballroom. He reveals no interest in them, but is later hoodwinked by Rothbart's daughter Odile, who arrives disguised as Odette. He duly asks her to marry him, and at that moment the real Odette, in the shape of a swan, appears plaintively at the window. Rothbart and his daughter vanish, and Siegfried, realising that he has been fooled, dashes out into the night in quest of Odette. Much of this act is taken up with sumptuous ballroom music, including a number of national dances performed by foreigners invited to the ceremony. In the last act, the scene returns to the lakeside, where the swans are awaiting the arrival of their queen. To while away the time, they perform the delicate *Danse des petits cygnes*, at the close of which Odette enters and tells them how Siegfried has been duped into breaking his vow. Siegfried himself now arrives, asking forgiveness. They embrace for the last time, then Odette jumps into the lake, followed by Siegfried (in some productions he stabs himself), thus breaking the magician's spell. The lake disappears and the lovers are united in human form, while the orchestra hammers out a grandiose statement of Odette's theme, now effectively transposed from minor to major.

THE ARTISTS

Pierre Monteux, born in Paris in 1875, fully deserved the title Grand Old Man of Music. He was one of the most distinguished and enterprising musicians in the world, and always had a particular flair for conducting dazzling ballet music. (It was he who conducted the memorable first performance of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" in Paris in 1913.) He was conductor of Diaghilev's Ballet Russe and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and was in charge of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra for nearly twenty years. He was principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra at the time of his death—July 1, 1964.

The London Symphony Orchestra, one of London's four main orchestras, was founded in 1904 by a group of musicians who broke away from the now defunct Queen's Hall Orchestra after a disagreement with the conductor Sir Henry Wood. Through the years, it has performed for a variety of world-famous conductors.



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