

MATTHEW BOURNE'S  
**SWAN  
LAKE**

## SWAN LAKE: SIMILARITIES & DIFFERENCES

The original sources of the story of *Swan Lake* have long been disputed. The general outline for the plot of the ballet is thought to have been taken from a tale by the German author Johann Karl August Musäus, 'Der geraubte Schleier' (The Stolen Veil). The Russian folktale "The White Duck" also bears some resemblance to the story of the ballet and may have been another possible source however, there is no clear consensus.

Another theory is that the original choreographer, a bohemian Czechoslovakian called Julius Reisinger, created the story. Some suggest it was Vladimir Petrovich Begichev, director of the Moscow Imperial Theatre, who was responsible for the creation of the story of Swan Lake. It was Begichev who commissioned Tchaikovsky to write the score, for the sum of 800 rubles in May 1875. Based on a basic outline of the requirement of each section of the dance, provided to him by Reisinger, Tchaikovsky completed the work within a year. The Moscow world premiere was performed at the Bolshoi Theatre in March 1877.

It is however, Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov's successful revival of *Swan Lake* at the Marinsky Theatre in St Petersburg in 1895 – which included a revision of Tchaikovsky's score by Riccardo Drigo - that is often thought of as the most notable and best-known of the early performances of this classic ballet.

There have been countless reinterpretations and redesigns, including many performances of *Swan Lake* featuring alternative endings, ranging from tragic to romantic and whilst every production has made some departure from the original, whether it overt or discreet, the 1895 edition is still seen as 'the' traditional *Swan Lake*, and is the version upon which most stagings have been based. Below we explore some of the similarities and differences between this version and Matthew Bourne's version.

<i>Swan Lake</i> by Petipa & Ivanov	Matthew Bourne's <i>Swan Lake</i>
<b>CHARACTERS</b>	
<b>THE PRINCE</b>	<b>THE PRINCE</b>
<p>The Prince, known as Siegfried in this version, falls in love with Odette (the White Swan). Odette tells Siegfried that if a man pure of heart pledges his love to her the evil sorcerer's spell will be broken and she and the other swans will return to human form. Siegfried promises to be true to her forever but betrays her by accident unwittingly pledging marriage to Odette, the sorcerer's daughter, who tricks him into thinking she is Odette. Realising this Siegfried finds Odette and overcomes the evil sorcerer and his wicked daughter.</p>	<p>Known only as The Prince he lives a closed and stifling life with his mother the Queen. Whilst she is keen for him to take his royal responsibilities seriously The Prince craves a life of freedom. Lured away following a vision of a flying swan, he flirts with the idea of a 'normal' life, but his notoriety as a prince prevents him from doing so. As his mental health deteriorates, he once again is visited by a Swan who represents everything the Prince isn't – powerful, masculine, and free. When he confuses a Stranger at the royal ball with the Swan who has captured his heart and mind, his life begins to unravel further. Haunted by the notion that he will never lead the life he wishes for, The Prince, as well as those around him, begin to question his sanity. Under house arrest at the palace, The Prince is again visited by 'his' Swan who appears to be his protector amidst a flock of angry and vicious swans.</p>



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ODETTE	THE SWAN
<p>Also, referred to as the White Swan, or the Swan Queen, Odette is a beautiful young princess who has had a spell cast on her by the evil sorcerer, Rothbart. During the day, she is condemned by the hex that has been put upon her to appear as a swan - only returning to human form at night. She is the subject of the Prince's affections yet, she is devastated when the Prince proposes to Odette, Rothbart's daughter. Once she is convinced of the Prince's story – that it was a case of mistaken identity brought about the sorcerer's attempts to have him marry Odile instead of her – she forgives the Prince. Odette represents truth and goodness.</p>	<p>The Swan is a physical representation of everything the Prince craves. Yet, unlike in the Petipa / Ivanov version it is left to the audience's own interpretation as to whether The Swan is real or a figment of The Prince's tormented mind. The Swan is alluring, beautiful and full of intrigue. The interest, tenderness and affection that The Swan appears to offer to The Prince is in stark contrast to his reality at home within the palace, where he is constantly tormented by a lack of maternal love that he craves so readily from the Queen.</p>
ODILE	THE STRANGER
<p>Known as the Black or 'Evil' Swan, Odile is Rothbart's daughter. Her part is often played by the same performer as plays Odette to help with the telling of the story, for Rothbart's sorcery enables his daughter to look exactly the same as Odette except for her black, rather than white outfit. (A trick that is carried out to confuse the Prince and cause him to pledge his love to the wrong woman.) Though common this is not the case in all versions of <i>Swan Lake</i>. Odile represents falsehood and evil.</p>	<p>Clad in black leather, an intoxicating stranger, who appears to be unknown to all the other guests, makes a grand entrance at the royal ball. With his good looks and his air of confidence he attracts the attention of all the women there, including – to the Prince's torment – that of the Queen. The Prince is convinced that this man is in fact the Swan, in human form and now feels betrayed not only by his mother, but also by 'his' Swan. The Stranger denies any knowledge of having ever known the Prince and a fight breaks out resulting in the accidental shooting of one of the women at the ball.</p>
THE EVIL SORCERER	THE PRIVATE SECRETARY
<p>Rothbart is an evil sorcerer who wishes to trick the handsome young prince into marrying his daughter, Odile, instead of Odette the woman he has fallen in love with. Rothbart uses sorcery, trickery and cunning to try to lure the prince to his daughter, whilst also ensuring that other potential suitors (including Odette) are kept out of the prince's way by turning the young women into swans by day, returning to human form at night. Rothbart is rarely seen in human form, except once in the third act when he appears with his daughter Odile. During the second and forth acts he appears in the guise of an owl. When Siegfried and Odette throw themselves in the lake, since they would rather be dead than not be with one another, Rothbart's powers are overcome and he is destroyed.</p>	<p>Known only as The Private Secretary this character does not possess the same kind of magical powers that Rothbart has but uses cunning tactics to try and affect The Prince's behavior and to bring about his downfall. The Private Secretary is fiercely loyal to the Queen and whilst his meddling in The Prince's life is far from appealing there is a sense that he feels it is his duty to protect her reputation. He is at times a very dislikeable character and is only seen in human form, unlike Rothbart.</p>



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SCORE	
Tchaikovsky died on the 6 <sup>th</sup> November 1893, just as plans to revive <i>Swan Lake</i> were underway. Riccardo Drigo undertook the revision of the score and there are major differences between the two. Not all, but most, versions of <i>Swan Lake</i> since this time have used Drigo's revision.	Uses the original 1877 score that Tchaikovsky wrote for the original Moscow staging. Whilst it has several musical re-orderings, it has fewer of them than most versions of <i>Swan Lake</i> . In particular, Act Four uses only the music that Tchaikovsky wrote for it.
ERA & LOCATION	
With its roots in European and Russian folklore, there is no exact location given, yet the names of many of the characters have distinctly German origins. Its magical, mythical, treatment means it is unlikely set in a particular era either, rather it is synonymous with the styling of other fairy-tales of the 19 <sup>th</sup> century.	Set in London, various scenes draw inspiration, particularly in relation to Lez Brotherston's costume designs, from the 1950's – especially the Royal Family; the 1960's – the seedy club known as the 'Swank Bar' in Act One Scene 6, as well as from modern day.

## ACTIVITIES

### Discuss

Are there any other similarities or differences between Bourne's *Swan Lake* and any other versions you may have come across? You might like to look at various aspects such as the structure of the storyline, the choreography, the set and costume design, or the characters.

### Written Task

Create character overviews for your own version of *Swan Lake*. Write a brief description to explain the physical appearance and personality traits of your own:

- The Prince
- The Queen
- The Swan / Stranger
- The Private Secretary
- The Unsuitable Girlfriend

First explain briefly in which era and in what location you are setting your version. For example a futuristic interpretation of the story, set in the year 3,000 on a newly discovered planet. Or, a 1920's cabaret version set in 20<sup>th</sup> century Berlin. Be as creative as you like.



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Your characters would need to reflect the period of time, as well as the geographical situation you will be placing them into.

Research other films, books or plays, in which a key object is used either as a metaphor for something happening in the storyline and/or as an item that is essential in some way to a key character.

**SOURCES/FURTHER READING** 

[https://courses.lumenlearning.com/musicapp\\_historical/chapter/swan-lake/](https://courses.lumenlearning.com/musicapp_historical/chapter/swan-lake/)

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius\\_Reisinger](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Reisinger)

[https://villains.fandom.com/wiki/Von\\_Rothbart](https://villains.fandom.com/wiki/Von_Rothbart)

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Matthew-Bourne-Adventures-Dance-Conversations/dp/0571235883>

<https://petipasociety.com/swan-lake/>

<https://ballethub.com/question/who-is-odette-swan-queen/>

