

Swan Lake...

(a Dance with Romance)



Elegant and ethereal, tragic with a generous sprinkling of magic – that is what most people would think of when the classical ballet “Swan Lake” is mentioned. Many might even consider it a little dated, and would thus think it more interesting to watch deconstructed or re-imagined versions featuring an all-male cast of swans (as fashioned by Matthew Bourne) or maybe even a parody of the piece at various pantomimes or revues. But look beyond the evergreen music that this performance is set to (Tchaikovsky’s score is probably familiar to many who have taken even the slightest fancy to orchestral music), and you will find many relevant themes and elements that have been well-repeated signposts in modern films and drama serials.

“Swan Lake” was initially staged in 1877, at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, as “The Lake of the Swans”. While there

are many incarnations of this production, most companies base their stagings both choreographically and musically on the 1895 revival of Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov. This will also be the version that Singapore Dance Theatre’s performance, at the Esplanade Theatre from 17 to 20 December 2009, takes after.

The plot twists are basic enough: Odette, a delightful but doomed princess, is kidnapped by a wicked sorcerer named Rothbart – well-known for his predilection for “fowl” play – and added to his deviant collection of swooning swans. She resumes human form only at dusk and on a particularly starlit evening, is chanced upon by a prince. Prince Siegfried, (no relation to the animal trainers who perform with white tigers) falls head over heels for Odette, but oblivious to the conniving tricks of Rothbart, is duped into professing his true love to Odette’s lookalike – Rothbart’s

daughter Odile – during his grand birthday party at the palace. All seems lost for the ill-fated lovers, and the audience has to stay till the final act, where Siegfried makes a final bid to save Odette in a tooth-to-nail fight with Rothbart, to know if there will be a “happily-ever-after”...

As a dramatic ballet that is performed without dialogue, it is inevitable and necessary that certain aspects of the characterization are conveyed through colour, costumes, and even musical cadence. For instance, the roles of Odette and Odile are usually played by the same ballerina, and the audience is reminded of the fact that these are very different characters through the contrasting hues of their bodices and tutus – virginal white for the pristine princess Odette and midnight black for the tempestuous temptress Odile. Tchaikovsky’s music also provides viewing bookmarks for the

audience, allowing them to identify selected tunes with segments of the performance.

Coupled with lavish sets and elaborate costumes, “Swan Lake” is a major ballet production that will help usher in the festive mood of December for all arts-lovers. ♦

Singapore Dance Theatre presents “Swan Lake” from 17 to 20 Dec 2009, 8pm at the Esplanade Theatre. Tickets from \$30 to \$110 are available from SISTIC. For details on family packages and special discounts, please visit www.singaporedancetheatre.com.



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