

THE CLASSICAL BALLET *LE CORSAIRE*

Researched by George Kurti Plohn



Alina Cojocaru and Vadim Muntagirov as Medora and Conrad of *Le Corsaire* - English National Ballet

Le Corsaire (the Pirate), a ballet in three acts, was inspired by Lord Byron's epic poem, *The Corsair*, which sold ten thousand copies on the first day of publication. This is a swashbuckling, romantic tale of pirates, slaves and oriental intrigue and is typical of the exotic and ambitious ballets created in Russia during the Tsarist era. This ballet was originally created by the French choreographer and ballet master **Joseph Mazilier to music by Adolphe Adam**. It was first presented in Paris, France in 1856.

During the mid to late 19th century Adolphe Adam's score for this ballet acquired a substantial amount of additional music, and by the turn of the 20th century the ballet's score credited **contributions from also six other composers**.

This ballet has many celebrated passages which are often extracted and performed independently; the most celebrated is the *Le Corsaire Pas de Deux*, in Act 1, which is among classical ballet's most iconic and performed excerpts.

It was first introduced to the West in 1962 by Rudolf Nureyev after his defection from the Soviet Union the previous year when he first performed it with the great British Prima Ballerina Assoluta Dame Margot Fonteyn.

The plot in a nutshell

Le Corsaire is a swashbuckling spectacle about the adventures of the chief corsair, Conrad, who saves his beloved beautiful Medora from being sold to Seyd, the Pasha of the Isle of Cos, by her guardian and master of the bazaar, Isaac Lankendem. Medora's attempts to make Conrad a better man than the pirate he is are nearly thwarted by Birbanto, his first lieutenant, who aids Lankendem in selling Medora to the Pasha. Luckily, with the help of Gulnare, the Pasha's favorite slave, Conrad succeeds in freeing Medora from being married off to the Pasha when Gulnare switches places with her as the Pasha's bride.

Synopsis

Prologue

A group of Mediterranean corsairs (i.e. pirates), led by Conrad, Birbanto, and the slave Ali are caught at sea in a fierce storm as they navigate towards the Ottoman Empire on a mission to rescue Medora, Conrad's love, from the hands of the slave trader Lankendem.

Act I

Lankendem, the slave trader of the bazaar, heads off with his new slave girls to sell them.

Conrad and the other pirates after docking their ship are looking for Medora. Suddenly he spies her peering from a balcony. Medora throws Conrad a rose and Conrad becomes even more determined to save her.

The governor of the citadel, the Pasha, arrives with his wives and servants and Lankendem presents three young women he wants to sell to him. When all are rejected, Lankendem quickly presents his enigmatic, dark-eyed lady, the slave girl Gulnare, and the Pasha buys her on the spot.

Suddenly Lankendem realizes that Medora has been freed by Ali, Conrad's slave, and that she is about to escape. As he tries to prevent this, the Pasha peering under Medora's veil, faints at the sight of her beauty, and then insists that she dance for him. Lankendem reluctantly accepts, as Medora is his favorite girl and he doesn't want to sell her.

As Medora dances, everyone is entranced by her beauty, the Pasha cannot resist such temptation, buys her as well. But Conrad, consumed with love, instructs his slave Ali to steal Medora from the Pasha. Conrad commands his pirates to raid the village and in the confusion the Corsaires also take the slave dealer Lankendem captive.

Act II

In the Corsaire's Cave, their hideout filled with captured treasures, it is where Conrad and his fellow corsairs take Medora and her fellow maidens. At the height of the celebration Medora and Conrad declare their love, and Ali vows to be Medora's devoted slave. She asks Medora to intercede on their behalf so that they may be released. Conrad promises to free them, but Birbanto and his friends protest, and a fight breaks out. Conrad keeps his word and releases the woman. Lankendem, who has witnessed the conflict, strikes a deal with Birbanto and his friends - in exchange for his freedom, he tells them of a potion that, when sprinkled on a flower, can immediately induce sleep. Birbanto and his friends agree. Conrad and Medora return, relishing in the chance to be alone together. Lankendem then offers Medora a bouquet of flowers to give to Conrad. Conrad smells the beautiful flowers and falls asleep. Soon, Lankendem the slave dealer, Birbanto, and their cohorts capture Medora. Conrad finally awakes, and he and Ali vow to save her once again.

Act III

Scene 1: In the Pasha's harem Gulnare is being celebrated by the Pasha, and she is enjoying it. Lankendem, the slave dealer, soon arrives and presents the Pasha with three woman of ideal beauty to entertain the harem. Soon Lankendem carries in the greatest prize - Medora. Though she is very sad at having been captured once more, her spirits are lifted when she is reunited with Gulnare.

Scene 2: In the Pasha's palace, Medora, Gulnare, and the woman of the harem join together to dance a fantastical Grand Ballabile in which they celebrate beauty, grace,

and harmony in a garden filled with flowers and magic fountains, while Conrad and his pirates enter in disguise.

Scene 3: Their true identity is soon revealed, and chaos erupts, they take revenge on the Pasha, his men, and Lankendem. They rescue Medora and Gulnare. Medora exposes Bribanto as a traitor and Conrad shoots him.

Medora, Gulnare and Conrad escape, they flee to the ship, chased by Lankendem, the Pasha and his assistant.

Scene 4: Safely on board, Medora, Gulnare, Conrad and Ali sail on the calm sea. Suddenly a fierce and violent storm erupts with lightning illuminating the darkening sea. Severe winds shred the sails and a lightning bolt snaps the ship's mast in half. The ship sinks.

Scene 5: The wind subsides and the sea calms to reveal a shipwreck. A man slowly emerges; it is Conrad. He reaches out and brings Medora to him. They embrace.

And so ends this rather fairy tale-like beautiful ballet.

This DVD is a 2015 recording of the English National Ballet of London.

In the main role of Medora is the 36 years old **Alina Cojocaru**, a by now famous Romanian-born ballet dancer. She was a principal dancer with the Royal Ballet of London. As of 2013, she is a principal dancer with the English National Ballet company. Cojocaru lives with her ever present partner on the stage who is also her partner in life, the well-known Danish ballet dancer Johan Kobborg. In May 2011, Cojocaru was making a guest appearance at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City, but her dance partner was injured so Kobborg flew over unexpectedly to fill in and surprised Cojocaru when he proposed to her on her 30th birthday.

In May 2017, Cojocaru announced that she and Kobborg are expecting their first child. In the role of Conrad, the corsaire, is the 27 years old Russian Vadim Muntagirov, a principal dancer with the Royal Ballet.

The duration of this ballet recording is 100 min. (1:40).

Pictures on the next page.



Alina Cojocaru at a curtain call during a performance by the Royal Ballet



Johan Kobborg and Alina Cojocaru in "Romeo and Juliet". The American Ballet Theater at the Metropolitan Opera in 2012.