

AN AFTERNOON OF BALLETS

Presented by George Kurti Plohn



Maya Plisetskaya in 2011 at age 86

Today I have the pleasure to present you a treasure chest of four shorter ballets. They all have a common denominator, namely in all we'll have the same ballerina as soloist, and she is the fabulous *ballerina assoluta* **Maya Plisetskaya**. About Maya I have spoken to you in more details three weeks ago on the occasion of the *Carmen Suite* ballet performance. I just would like now to repeat one sentence about her, which says it all, when she so famously said: "I approach ballet as I would do with an opera if I would be a singer, so as a ballerina **I will sing it with my body.**"

Our first ballet is called **ROMANTIC ENCOUNTER**, after the novel *Spring Torrents* by Ivan Turgenev – music by Peter Ilitch Tschaikowsky, interpreted by Maya Plisetskaya and Anatoly Berdyshev. Choreography by Valentin Elisariev.

A couple of words about **Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev** (1818 –1883). An eminent Russian novelist, short story writer, and playwright, he was one of the giants of the XIXth century's Russian literature personalities, alongside with Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Pushkin and Gogol.

This novel was inspired by events of Turgenev's life during a tour of the German States, at age 22, when he visited the city of Frankfurt. The story centers on a young woman of extraordinary beauty who suddenly emerged from a tea-room to plead for help in reviving her brother, who had fainted. This then evolved into a love affair, which however was suddenly brought to its end by a side trip to another town, when our hero, in the novel called Sanin, is seduced by another woman, who then disappears from Sanin's life, following which he, crushed by these events

returns to his native Russia. The novel was written by Turgenev when he was in his fifties, that means much later than it happened, and it is considered to be of autobiographical nature.

A one-and-a-half hour movie based on this novel was released in 1989 starring Timothy Hutton, Nastassja Kinski and Valeria Golino.

This novel is significant in revealing of the author's life, thoughts, and most intimate emotions, and the ballet version does the same.

What a good theme for a ballet...

So much so that Tchaikovsky, the famous composer, loved it so much that he set it to music. And to what a beautiful music!

The duration of this is 20 min.

The second piece of ballet is **THE SLEEPING BEAUTY**, a ballet originally in three acts. The original scenario is based on Charles Perrault's *La Belle au bois dormant* [French for 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods'] of 1696. The music again is by the great Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

The premiere performance took place at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1890. **Sleeping Beauty** is Tchaikovsky's longest ballet, lasting nearly three hours without intermissions, but it is nearly always cut. At the premiere Tsar Alexander III invited Tchaikovsky to sit with him in the imperial box.

Sleeping Beauty is the timeless tale of the beautiful Princess Aurora, her dashing Prince Désiré and the **triumph of good over evil**, which has delighted audiences for so many years. Originally created by the legendary choreographer Marius Petipa, *Sleeping Beauty* remains a treasured ballet classic. The work has become one of the classical repertoire's most famous ballets.

Today we will have an excerpt lasting only 5 minutes, namely the '*Grand Adage à la Rose*' [French for: Grand Adage with the Rose].

There's nothing in classical ballet to compare with this Grand Adage with the Rose, where Aurora balances precariously *on pointe* as she is supported by each of her four suitors in turn. It's a coming-out party for the 16-year-old princess, her chance to show she's a royal in deed as well as in blood. It is one of the most notoriously difficult sequences in all of ballet. And our prima ballerina assoluta reigned supreme, and her court sparkled as well.

Our next piece of ballet is "**LA ROSE MALADE**" [French for the Sick Rose] known in English as *The Death of the Rose*.

For the first time, after decades of prohibition, the leading ballet troupe of the Soviet Union invited in 1978 a foreign choreographer—possibly the greatest France ever had, Roland Petit from France. An admirer of Maya Plisetskaya (born 1925), the prima ballerina of the Bolshoi Theater, Roland Petit brought to the Moscow stage for her a fragment from his ballet *La Rose Malade* set to the music of the fourth movement of the Fifth Symphony by Gustav Mahler. Roland Petit turned the duet of the two heroes, Rose and Youth, into a new independent work, *Death of the Rose*. It is breathtaking!

Duration: 12 minutes

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And finally, our last work on our program is "**AVE MAYA**", recorded in the year 2000, with music by Bach/Gounod entitled **Ave Maria**, a popular and much-recorded setting of the Latin text *Ave Maria*, originally published in 1853 under the title **Méditation sur le Premier Prélude de Piano de J. S. Bach**. In this piece, the French Romantic composer Charles Gounod (well-known for his opera *Faust*) was inspired by the Prelude No. 1 in C major, BWV 846, from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* by J.S. Bach, written 137 years earlier, in 1722.

On the other hand, there is also another *Ave Maria*, a song composed by Franz Schubert, dating back to 1825, which has no connection whatsoever with the Bach/Gounod *Ave Maria*.

Alongside Schubert's *Ave Maria*, the Bach/Gounod *Ave Maria* has become a fixture at weddings, funerals and quinceañeras. Quinceañera is a celebration of a girl's fifteenth birthday in Latin America's culture. Opera singers, such as Nellie Melba, Franco Corelli and Luciano Pavarotti, as well as choirs have recorded it hundreds of times during the twentieth century.

We all know this melody...it is like a celestial music.

Maya Plisetskaya at the time of this recording, which was in year 2000, was 75 years old! Unbelievable, but it is true.

The duration of this ballet is 5 minutes. The choreography is by the French Maurice Béjart.