

Ballet: La Esmeralda

Choreography: Jules Perrot

Composer: Cesare Pugni

The Story

A beautiful Romani girl named Esmerelda is engaged to a poet, Pierre Gringoire. Though Pierre is madly in love with Esmerelda, she doesn't feel the same for him, and is only marrying him to save him from death at the hands of the Romani king. But Pierre isn't the only one who is infatuated with her. Claude Frollo, the archdeacon of the Notre Dame cathedral, is dangerously obsessed with Esmerelda, and orders his hunchbacked henchman Quasimodo to kidnap her! Esmerelda is saved just in time by soldiers, led by the handsome captain Phoebus. Phoebus captures Quasimodo and is going to torture him, but Esmerelda, moved by compassion for the humpback, begs Phoebus to let him go. Quasimodo and Phoebus are both deeply touched by her kindness. Phoebus becomes enchanted with her, and Esmerelda falls in love with Phoebus.

The next day, a woman named Fleur de Lys hosts a big party in honor of her engagement. Esmerelda is invited to perform for the guests, but when she sees that Fleur de Lys' fiancé is none other than Phoebus, she is heartbroken! Fleur de Lys, seeing that Phoebus is distracted with Esmerelda, realizes that he has fallen in love with her and angrily calls off the engagement. Phoebus and Esmerelda leave. Once they are alone, they declare their love for one another. But the archdeacon Frollo is eavesdropping on them! In a jealous fury he steals a dagger from Esmerelda's room, sneaks up behind the lovers, and stabs Phoebus! Phoebus falls down unconscious. Frollo calls the authorities and shows them Esmerelda's knife, lying that she was the one who killed Phoebus. Esmerelda is taken into custody and sentenced to death!

The next morning, Esmerelda is about to be hanged for murder. Her friends and Gringoire bid her a sad farewell while the jealous Frollo looks on in triumph. Suddenly, Phoebus arrives, alive and well! He survived the stabbing, and announces that it was really *Frollo* who tried to murder him. Esmerelda is proven innocent! Before Frollo can cause any more harm, Quasimodo wrests the dagger from Frollo and uses it to kill him instead. Esmerelda and Phoebus are happily reunited as lovers.

The History

A colorful ballet with vivid characters and a dynamic story, La Esmerelda contrasts love with dangerous infatuation in a dramatic Parisian setting, staged in three acts and five scenes. La Esmerelda was inspired by Victor Hugo's hugely successful novel "Notre-Dame de Paris" (known in English as "The Hunchback of Notre-Dame"), written in 1831. It was first presented by the Ballet of Her Majesty's Theatre in London on March 9, 1844, with Carlotta Grisi performing the lead role of Esmerelda, Jules Perrot himself as Pierre Gringoire, Arthur Saint-Leon as Phoebus, Adelaide Frassi as

La Esmerelda

Fleur-de-Lys, and Antoine Louis Coulon as Quasimodo.. The ballet enjoyed enduring popular appeal. Additional dances were added by legendary choreographer Marius Petipa, and several revivals were staged throughout the 1800s to feature various famous ballerinas, including one Prima Ballerina Absoluta! Today, the complete ballet is performed only in Russia and Eastern Europe and two companies in the United States. Most Western companies perform only variations from the ballet, and La Esmerelda variations are commonly performed by students at ballet competitions.



Carlotta Grisi debuting as La Esmerelda.



Miko Fogarty performing a variation of La Esmeralda at a modern day ballet competition.