

Ballet: Cinderella

Choreography: Rostislav Zakharov

Composer: Sergei Prokofiev

The Story

In a land far, far away there lived a young woman named Cinderella with her stepmother and two stepsisters. Cinderella was kind and beautiful, but her stepmother and jealous stepsisters were cruel, and forced her to act as a servant in her own home. Cinderella only had rags to wear and had to sleep by the kitchen fireplace.

Cinderella's story begins as she helps her stepfamily prepare for the Spring Ball, at which it's rumored the Prince will choose a bride-to-be! The house is a flurry of activity, the stepsister's bicker and argue while the stepmother orders Cinderella to do a seemingly endless list of chores.

During the preparations, a beggar woman arrives asking for shelter. The stepmother tries to chase her off, but Cinderella offers the beggar a place by the kitchen fire. The beggar woman thanks her for her kindness and departs, and preparations for the ball resume. At last the stepmother and stepsisters set off for the ball, leaving Cinderella behind.

Lonely at first, Cinderella cheers herself by dancing around with a broom, imagining that she's dancing at the ball with the Prince. Suddenly, the beggar woman reappears, but this time she casts off her beggar disguise and transforms into Cinderella's Fairy Godmother! She has come to grant Cinderella's wish, and summons the fairies of Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter to help her. She turns Cinderella's rags into a beautiful dress, shoes into glass slippers, a pumpkin and mice into a carriage and horses, and grasshoppers and dragonflies into a retinue of footmen.

As she is about to leave, the Fairy Godmother warns her that the enchantment will only last until midnight, then the spell will break, and everything will return to its original form. Only the glass slippers will remain as a gift for her kindness. With this in mind, Cinderella leaves for the ball.

Meanwhile, at the Spring Ball, guests from all over the kingdom are arriving to dance, and many young ladies are hoping to capture the Prince's attention and become his bride-to-be. The Prince, however, is reluctant to marry without love, and declines to dance with any of them, especially in the case of Cinderella's obnoxious step sisters.

When Cinderella arrives, the Prince is swept away by her beauty and charm, and for the first time he asks for a dance. As the evening continues, the Prince and Cinderella become inseparable, sharing dance after dance. Cinderella is soon beloved by the whole court because of her grace and charm. Even Cinderella's stepmother and stepsisters, who don't recognize her without her soot-covered rags, are captivated by this beautiful stranger. The Prince then takes Cinderella for a walk in the

royal gardens where they proclaim their love for each other. In her happiness, Cinderella forgets all about the time. Just as they are returning for the next waltz, a clock begins to chime midnight and Cinderella remembers her Fairy Godmother's warning!

Frightened that everyone will see her as just a servant in rags when the spell breaks, Cinderella flees from the ball, much to everyone's astonishment. The Prince tries to follow, but Cinderella vanishes into the night, leaving behind one glass slipper. The Prince is heartbroken to have lost his love, but once he sees the glass slipper he vows not to rest until he finds her!

The next day the Prince summons every shoemaker in the kingdom to the palace, but when none of them can tell him who made the shoe or to whom it belonged, he searches the whole land, trying the glass slipper on every young woman.

Back at home, Cinderella wakes the next morning thinking it was all just a dream. She dances around the house, reliving her dream in a happy daze. But when she finds the other glass slipper, she realizes it was all true! At breakfast, while her stepsisters argue over who made a bigger impression on the Prince, the stepmother receives news that the Prince is on his way, desperately trying a glass slipper on every girl he encounters!

Upon his arrival, he tries the slipper on the two stepsisters, but their feet are too big. The stepmother demands to be given a chance and tries to force her foot into the shoe, ordering Cinderella to help her. When Cinderella bends down to assist, the remaining slipper falls from her pocket and the Prince finally recognizes her! Cinderella successfully tries on both glass slippers, and the Prince is overjoyed to be reunited with her.

Her stepmother and stepsisters, ashamed of the way they have treated her, beg for her forgiveness. Out of a kind and gracious heart Cinderella forgives them. She and the Prince are then transported to a secret garden by the fairy godmother, where they confess their love for one another and are happily married.

The History

The Cinderella ballet has had a long and varied history, appearing first on the Imperial Mariinsky Theater stage in Russia in 1893, with the lead role of Cinderella performed by an Italian ballerina named Pierina Legnani, music by Lev Ivanov and choreography by Enrico Cecchetti. The audience was enchanted with Pierina's dancing and incredible technique. Pierina was the first to perform 32 consecutive fouettes in the ballet, and it became an audience favorite to count each fouette in all her ensuing performances of Cinderella. She went on to dance the role many more times until her farewell performance in 1901.

The Cinderella ballet we know now, though, is the one popularized by Prokofiev's composition. In 1945, Cinderella premiered at the Bolshoi Theater in Russia, with choreography by Rostislav Zakharov. The melodious music Prokofiev composed for the ballet was instantly popular and went on to inspire many more choreographers down to our day. The lead role in Prokofiev and Zakharov's ballet was played by Russian ballerina Galina Ulanova, who is said to be one of the greatest ballerinas in history!

Cinderella became popular for its jubilant music, lush scenery, and the comic roles of the stepmother and the two stepsisters (which are sometimes performed in travesti; male dancers playing female roles or vice versa). Soon after Prokofiev's Cinderella, Frederick Ashton created his own version and added a more comedic layer, even playing the role of one of the stepsisters himself!

A more recent interpretation of Cinderella was premiered by Christopher Wheeldon in 2012, a co-production of both San Francisco Ballet and Dutch National Ballet. Wheeldon's version drew inspiration from Cinderella's oldest sources—both Charles Perault's original fairy tale and the darker Brothers Grimm story.

With every performance of Cinderella, impressive sets, lavish costumes, and lots of special effects are the common thread that gives this fairy tale ballet its magical aura.