

Ballet: Pharaoh's Daughter

Choreography: Marius Petipa (original), Pierre Lacotte (reconstructed)

Composer: Cesare Pugni

The Story

"Pharaoh's Daughter" is an opulent ballet set in Ancient Egypt, inspired by the French writer Theophile Gautier's novel "Le Roman de la Momie". The story begins with a young Englishman, Lord Wilson, who is transformed by a magical artifact into an ancient Egyptian hero, Ta-Hor.

In the second act, Ta-Hor rescues the Pharaoh's daughter, Aspacia, from a lion and they instantly fall in love. However, Aspacia is already betrothed to the Nubian king. Unwilling to marry someone she does not love, Aspacia flees with Ta-Hor, pursued by the Nubian king and her father's soldiers.

In the ensuing chase, Aspacia and Ta-Hor take refuge in a sacred cave. Their solace is brief as they are discovered by the Nubian king. In the ensuing struggle, Aspacia jumps into the Nile to escape but is declared dead by the Pharaoh.

Unbeknownst to all, Aspacia is saved by the gods and reunites with Ta-Hor. The Pharaoh, in his grief, agrees to cancel Aspacia's betrothal to the Nubian king. When Aspacia and Ta-Hor return, they are happily wedded and the ballet concludes with a grand celebration.

The ballet is renowned for its splendid scenery, elaborate costumes, and the fascinating fusion of romance and adventure. Its performances offer a spectacular depiction of the exotic Egyptian landscape and culture, truly encapsulating the spirit of the romantic era of ballet.

The History

"Pharaoh's Daughter" was first presented on 18 January 1862 at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. The original concept and libretto were created by Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges and the famous French writer Theophile Gautier, while the choreography was done by Marius Petipa and music by Cesare Pugni. Despite its initial success, the ballet gradually disappeared from the repertoire due to the complexity of its staging.

In 1898, Alexander Gorsky, the then director of the Bolshoi Theatre, decided to revive "Pharaoh's Daughter". He brought a fresh approach to the ballet, enhancing its theatricality and dramatic content. Yet, his version did not gain the same popularity as Petipa's original and was eventually disregarded.

"Pharaoh's Daughter" then remained virtually forgotten for almost a century. However, in the early 21st century, Pierre Lacotte, a renowned French choreographer, became interested in reviving this

lost gem of ballet history. Using the original scenario by Saint-Georges and Gautier as his base, Lacotte painstakingly reconstructed the ballet's choreography.

Premiered in 2000 at the Bolshoi Theatre, Lacotte's revival was a resounding success. It brought the ballet back into the limelight, capturing the audience's imagination with its vibrant choreography, beautiful music, and captivating story. Today, "Pharaoh's Daughter" is considered a staple of the classical ballet repertoire and is performed by major ballet companies around the world.