

GEORGINA BUTLER

WRITING. DANCING.

Dance Resources BY GEORGINA BUTLER

'RAD GRADE 7 BALLET: THE ROMANTIC ERA'





GEORGINA BUTLER

WRITING. DANCING.



The music for the Royal Academy of Dance Grade 7 Ballet Syllabus is taken from three ballets by the Danish choreographer August Bournonville (1805 - 1879).

Most of the pieces used come from the Romantic Era ballet *La Sylphide* (1836), a tragic tale of love, passion and revenge set in the Scottish Highlands.

La Sylphide means 'The Sylph'. A sylph is an otherworldly, ethereal winged creature; a fairy or a spirit.

The score for '*La Sylphide*' was written by composer Herman Severin Løvenskjold (1815-1870).

The following RAD Grade 7 Ballet exercises are set to musical extracts from *La Sylphide*:

Pliés: [Act 1, Scene 1](#)

Battements tendus & battements glissés: [Act 1, Scene 3](#)

Battements frappés: [Act 2 \(Sister sylphs dance around James\)](#)

Ronds de jambe en l'air: [Act 1, Scene 6 \(Sylph's solo\)](#)

Adage study: [Act 2, Scene 1 \(Pas de deux\)](#)

Grands battements & battements en cloche: [Act 1, Scene 7 \(James' solo\)](#)

Coupé fouetté raccourci: [Act 1, Scene 7 \(Springdans\)](#)

Port de Bras - Female: [Act 2 \(Sylph's dance\)](#)

Pirouette enchaînement: [Act 2 \(Sylph's solo\)](#)

Adage - Female: [Act 2 \(Sylphides enter\)](#)

Adage - Male: [Act 1, Scene 6 \(James alone\)](#)

Petit allegro: [Act 1, Scene 3](#)

Allegro: [Act 1, Scene 3](#)

Grand allegro: [Act 2, Scene 2 \(Sylph's solo\)](#)

Dance, classical - Female: [Act 1, Scene 1](#)

Dance, classical - Male: [Act 2 \(Pas de deux, James' solo\)](#)

Classical révérence - Female: [Act 1, Scene 1](#)



GEORGINA BUTLER

WRITING. DANCING.



The Romantic Era

The Romantic Era was an artistic, literary and intellectual movement that originated in Europe towards the end of the 18th Century. The period was partly a reaction to the Industrial Revolution and was defined by its focus on humanity, emotion and individual expression – alongside a desire to improve social and political conditions.

Many Romantic thinkers were fuelled by an ambition to express a higher, truer reality than that which people experienced day to day. Consequently, they were inspired by nature, spirituality and the supernatural when formulating ideas and creating their works.

The most well-known Romantic ballets are: *La Sylphide* (1832; 1836), *Giselle* (1841), *Napoli* (1842), *Pas de Quatre* (1845) and *Conservatoire* (1849).

Ballet's beginnings

Ballet began in the courts of Renaissance Italy, as a form of both pleasant entertainment and a system of training that developed poise and elegance.

When an Italian noblewoman named Catherine de' Medici married Henri II of France in 1533, she introduced this form of entertainment to France. The court ballet flourished as successive generations of her family ended up being enthusiasts (including her grandson Louis XIII and great-grandson Louis XIV).

Eventually, the focus shifted from the royal court to the theatre and dramatic works began featuring ballet alongside opera. This meant there was a need for professional dancers. These dancers were directed by the court ballet master Pierre Beauchamp (credited with inventing ballet's five positions of the feet).

By 1760, ballet masters were lobbying for dance to be regarded as a distinct art and dancers were making breakthroughs in technique, performance and popularity. Of note is Jean-Georges Noverre, a French ballet master and dancer who wrote *Lettres sur la danse et les ballets* – an impassioned plea for dance to be used to tell emotive, narrative stories through movement alone, thereby elevating dance to an equal status to that of the other dramatic arts.

As you can see, the beginnings of ballet were very much informed by the nobility, grace and dignity of the royal courts.



GEORGINA BUTLER

WRITING. DANCING.



The Romantic Ballet

Ballet evolved significantly during the Romantic Era and the earliest ballets that are still danced today in anything like their original form are those from the 1830s and 1840s.

This was the era when the ballerina took centre stage and pointework became established. The lead female dancer would defy the laws of gravity as she portrayed a fairy, a sylph or a spirit.

Three 19th Century innovations facilitated the ethereality of the ballerina: gas lighting; the tutu and the pointe shoe.

Gas lighting atmospherically set the scene to suggest moonlight and the supernatural. The long, gauzy, tulle skirts worn by ballerinas gave them a fragile, airy and unearthly quality. These elements combined to facilitate the *ballet blanc* – the famous ‘white ballet’ passages which occur at dusk or night-time (as found in ballets including ‘*Giselle*’ and ‘*Swan Lake*’).

The pointe shoe gave us ballet as we know it today. In the early court ballets, the pointed foot was used to show off the ribbons and buckles on the shoe. In the pointe shoe, the foot itself becomes the object of admiration – the high arch (developed by dancing *en pointe*) is a desirable feature of ballet line.

Marie Taglioni (daughter of choreographer Filippo Taglioni) became a much-admired dancer because her use of pointework was elegant, subtle and integral to her dancing (rather than used as a mere acrobatic feat). She was exquisitely graceful and is regarded as being the first dancer to establish “toe-dancing” akin to the pointework we recognise today.

Marie Taglioni was one of the five most important Romantic era ballerinas. The other four were: Fanny Elssler, Fanny Cerrito, Carlotta Grisi and Lucile Grahn.

The Romantic ballet was characterized by an expressive, modest dance quality and capitalised on female dancers’ allure. Romanticism in ballet demands gracefulness, softness and an otherworldly weightlessness from female dancers and an easy, moderated poise from male dancers.

‘*La Sylphide*’ is the archetypal Romantic ballet.



GEORGINA BUTLER

WRITING. DANCING.



La Sylphide

A poignant story of impossible love.

Woken on his wedding morning by a beautiful, winged sylph, the Scotsman James is utterly bewitched...



Queensland Ballet dancers Shane Wuerthner and Meng Ningning in Peter Schaufuss' 'La Sylphide'. Photography by Georges Antoni.



GEORGINA BUTLER

WRITING. DANCING.



The story

La Sylphide is a compelling tale of unattainable love which sees the human realm and the supernatural realm collide with tragic consequences.

On the morning of his wedding, a young Scottish farmer called James wakes up very early and discovers that the beautiful winged sylph from his dreams is sat at his feet. She flies around his farmhouse, always remaining just out of his reach. He is fascinated and chases after her but she vanishes up the chimney.

James wakes his companions but none of them have seen her. Gurn, who is in love with James' bride-to-be Effie, realises that James has become infatuated with someone else.

As the wedding preparations begin, an old woman slips in to warm herself by the fire. James tries to throw her out but Effie begs him to let her stay and tell their fortunes. The old woman, Madge, declares that Effie will marry Gurn. A furious James threatens Madge, who curses him.

Torn between the Sylphide and Effie, James soon finds himself ditching his fiancée to pursue the captivating Sylphide. He follows her into the moonlit forest where she and her sister Sylphs dance for him. However, the Sylphide continues to evade his embrace and flies away from him.

Madge's quest for revenge sees her produce an enchanted scarf. She convinces James that if it is placed around the Sylphide's shoulders, the magical creature's wings will fall off and she will be his forever.

The Sylphide reappears and James applies the scarf. However, this proves to be fatal: the Sylphide's wings drop off, she loses her sight and she dies an agonising death in front of him.

As he kneels, heartbroken, the wedding procession for Effie and Gurn (James' love rival) passes. James is left with nothing and Madge triumphs over him.



GEORGINA BUTLER

WRITING. DANCING.



The background

La Sylphide was originally choreographed by Filippo Taglioni to music by Jean Schneitzhoeffter and based on a libretto by Adophe Nourrit. It premiered in 1832 in Paris and starred Marie Taglioni as The Sylph and Joseph Mazilier as James.

Marie Taglioni's apparently effortless dancing was the result of hours of gruelling practice. She had rounded shoulders and unusually long arms so she and her father worked to find poses that would flatter them. These poses are the Sylphide positions we are familiar with today – with the torso softly tilted and the arms gently bent.

Tailor-made for Marie Taglioni, Filippo Taglioni's original *La Sylphide* made the most of her modest dance quality, expressive arms and soft, weightless elevation (or "ballon").

In his 1836 version of *La Sylphide*, Danish choreographer August Bournonville took the ballet - a tale of an unfortunate man's infatuation with an unattainable creature for whom he abandons everything – and made more of the male dancer's role. He reworked the ballet, creating choreography for his star pupil, Lucile Grahn, as The Sylph and himself in the role of James.

Filippo Taglioni's original 1832 staging has not survived. It is August Bournonville's 1836 production, set to music by the Norwegian composer Herman Severin Løvenskjold, which has endured.

This version remains in the repertoire of the Royal Danish Ballet to this day and has achieved international acclaim since the second half of the 20th Century, influencing subsequent restagings.



GEORGINA BUTLER

WRITING. DANCING.



Queensland Ballet dancers in Peter Schaufuss' *La Sylphide*.
Photography by David Kelly.





GEORGINA BUTLER

WRITING. DANCING.



Something to read

This [review](#) provides further insight into *La Sylphide* and demonstrates the continued relevance of Romantic ballets to today's ballet repertory.

- Review of Queensland Ballet's *La Sylphide* at London Coliseum (written by Georgina Butler):

< <https://georginabutler.co.uk/2015/08/05/review-queensland-ballets-la-sylphide-london-coliseum-august-2015/> >

Something to watch

This [video](#) shows the *La Sylphide* Act 2 *Pas de Deux* (with Tamara Rojo as The Sylph and Steven McRae as James).





GEORGINA BUTLER

WRITING. DANCING.



A final musical note

The remaining tracks used in Grade 7 are taken from the Bournonville ballets *The Legend of Thrym* (1868, with music by J.P.E Hartmann), and *Napoli* (1842, with music by Edvard Helsted).

The following RAD Grade 7 Ballet Syllabus exercises are set to music from *The Legend of Thrym*:

Ports de bras - Male exercise:

Act 4, No. 19: Gimle 21

Classical révérence: Male:

Act 4, No. 19: Gimle 24

Study with use of cloak – Male:

Act 4, No. 18: Lokes Staff

The following RAD Grade 7 Ballet Syllabus exercises are set to music from *Napoli*:

Study in stillness and gravity:

Act 1 No.6. Marionetspilleren høres komme 23

Study for upper back:

Act 1, No. 3 25

Dance Free Movement:

Act 3, No. 1

All the music for the Grade 7 Character Dance settings is from *Napoli*



GEORGINA BUTLER

WRITING. DANCING.



Acknowledgements and References

This resource was created for revision purposes and is intended as a helpful guide.

It was compiled using the following publications:

Anderson, Zoë (2015). *The Ballet Lover's Companion*. Yale University Press. Print.

Bull, Deborah, and Jennings, Luke (2014). *The Faber Pocket Guide to Ballet*. 2nd edition. Faber & Faber. Print.

Homans, Jennifer (2010). *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet*. Granta Books. Print.

Royal Academy of Dance (2018), *Specifications*. Online.

< https://www.royalacademyofdance.org/media/2019/01/20163710/20181009Specifications2018_EN-1.pdf >

Royal Academy of Dance (1993), *Higher Grades Syllabus: Grade 7*. Royal Academy of Dance Enterprises Ltd. Print.