

# **DON QUIXOTE**

Full-length ballet in Three Acts

Music: Leon Minkus

Libretto: Marius Petipa

Choreography: Marius Petipa

Sets: Lev Solodovnikov

Costumes: Lev Solodovnikov

Lighting: Marina Borodina

## **Prologue**

*Don Quixote's Study*

## **Act I**

*The Square in Barcelona*

## **Act II**

*A Gypsy Encampment*

## **Act III**

**Scene 1:** *A Forest*

**Scene 2:** *Night in a Village*

*--Intermission--*

## **Act III**

**Scene 3:** *A Tavern*

**Scene 4:** *The Palace*

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## **PROGRAM NOTES**

### **Prologue**

*Don Quixote's Study*

In his library the old nobleman Don Quixote de la Mancha sits over his books, which tell him of distant times of knighthood. Soon he believes himself called to knightly deeds: he appoints his servant Sancha Panza his squire and sails forth into the world to seek adventures in the service of the beautiful Dulcinea, whom he has glimpsed in a vision.

## **Act I**

### *The Square in Barcelona*

On a market-place Don Quixote and Sancho Panza mingle in the colorful bustle of the people. Kitri, daughter of the innkeeper Lorenzo, and her sweetheart the barber Basilio are among them. Their lovers' tryst is suddenly disturbed by the entry of Kitri's father. He puts forward the old, rich Camacho as the bridegroom he has chosen for his daughter. In vain, Kitri and Basilio swear their love. Lorenzo is adamant. Don Quixote, who believes he recognizes in Kitri his Dulcinea, intervenes and helps the lovers to flee.

## **Act II**

### *A Gypsy Encampment*

Kitri (who has disguised herself as a young man) and Basilio have found refuge with a band of gypsies. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza also appear on the scene, and in their honor the gypsies put on a puppet -show. Don Quixote, however, takes the play in bitter earnest and believes himself suddenly menaced on all sides by evil powers, against whom he must protect Kitri/Dulcinea—he destroys the marionette theatre and then charges against some windmills on the distant horizon, which he takes for giants. Don Quixote falls to the ground, where he remains unconscious.

## **Act III**

### *Scene 1: A Forest*

In a dream Dulcinea appears to her noble "knight" as queen of the wood nymphs, who praises him for his courage and his deeds and crowns him with laurel.

### *Scene 2: Night in a Village*

Comacho wakes Don Quixote from his dream and they both go to the Tavern.

**--Intermission--**

## **Act III**

### *Scene 3: A Tavern*

Meanwhile, Lorenzo and Camacho have succeeded in catching the fugitive Kitri again. She is now to be dragged to the altar by force and married to the old man. Basilio is in such despair over this that he is about to do away with himself. However in the nick of time Don Quixote and Sancho Panza appear, and everything turns out well—Kitri can marry her Basilio.

#### Scene 4: *The Palace*

It is fiesta time. Don Quixote watches the dancing. The scene changes to the Palace. Kitri and Basilio with Don Quixote and the rest celebrate their wedding in a Grand Pas de Deux. Don Quixote realizes that he has not yet found his Dulcinea and with Sancho, sets off for more adventures.

The resounding success of *Don Quixote* may substantially have contributed, after Cesare Pugni's death (in January 1870) to Minkus being appointed his successor as first Imperial ballet composer of the Marinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg. After a new version of *Don Quixote*, which was given its premiere on November 9, 1871, in 1872 he composed, as one of his first new tasks, the ballet music to the opera *Mlada*, which the theatre director Stephan Gedeonov had commissioned as a joint composition from Alexander Borodin, Cesar Cui, Modest Mussorgsky and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. The project was, however, never completed, so that Minkus revised his material in 1879 for an independent story ballet. Otherwise, in the following seasons one ballet after another by Minkus was performed in the Marinsky Theatre, all with Petipa's choreography: among others, in 1872 *Camargo*, 1875 *Les Brigands* (in various sources erroneously labeled as a collaboration with Delibes), in 1876 *Son v letnyinyi noch* ("A Midsummer Night's Dream", using Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's incidental music), 1877 *Bayaderka* ("La Bayadere"), in 1878 *Roksana*, 1879 *Frizak* and *Snegurochka* ("The Snow Maiden," after the play of that name by Alexander Ostrovsky, for the first performance of which in 1873 Tchaikovsky had composed the incidental music, and which Rimsky-Korsakov took as the basis for an opera in 1881), 1881 *Paquita* (as a new version of the ballet of the same name by Edouard Delevez and Joseph Mazilier, along with *Soraya, ili Mavritanka v Ispanii* ("The Moorish Girl in Spain"), 1882 *Noch i dyei* ("Night and Day"), 1886 *L'Offrande a l'amour*. And even after Minkus had retired from his official posts in 1891 and returned to Vienna, he remained one of the most popular and most played ballet composers of St. Petersburg. Thus in July 1897, on occasion of the State visit of Kaiser Wilhelm II to Tsar Nikolai, Petipa mounted in Peterhof a pasticcio, *Les Noces de Thetis et Pelee*, which he had arranged from an earlier ballet by Minkus and some musical numbers by Delibes.

That despite this multitude of works and lasting successes Leon Minkus fell so completely into oblivion essentially has to do with function of ballet composition and the way in which it is handled. "While in Russian opera from the time of [Catterino] Cavos and [Alexei] Verstovsky the composer was specially named as author, in the ballet in the 60s and later, the ballet-master was considered the author, designed the choreographic *mise-en-scene*, and he first commissioned a composer who had to follow all his specifications -- from the number of musical movements and their character to the concrete tempi and metres, according to the type of dance. The ballet-master had the right to insert new numbers with music by other composers and generally to make any alteration that seemed necessary, without asking the composer's consent. Moreover, the composer was creatively hemmed in by a plethora of rules that laid down how he had to write ballet variations, duets, ensembles and character and action dances. These rules were at that time considered not only almost immutable, according to the laws of ballet aesthetic, but were also

fixed in the theatre contracts (E.M Levashyova, quoted in Dorothea Redepenning: *Geschichte der russischen und sowjetischen Musik*, volume 1, p. 350: Laaber 1994).

One of the first composers to revolt against this practice was Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky—after he himself had come to feel its consequences, as George Balanchine related in his interview with Solomon Volkov: "Anna Sobeschanskaya, a prima in the Bolshoi Ballet in Tchaikovsky's day, danced in the mediocre Moscow production of *Swan Lake*. In order to liven up her benefit performance Sobeshchanskaya asked Petipa to create a *pas de deux* for her, and she inserted it in the third act of *Swan Lake*. She wasn't worried that Petipa had done the *pas de deux* to music by Minkus! Learning this, Tchaikovsky protested, "Ballet may be good or bad, but I alone bear the responsibility for its music." Tchaikovsky offered to write a new *pas de deux* for the ballerina, but she did not wish to change Petipa's choreography. So, taking Minkus's music Tchaikovsky wrote his own *pas de deux* which fitted-measure for measure the dance Sobeshchanskaya had already learned."

Minkus's *Don Quixote* was, for Petipa and later choreographers, also a kind of musical "quarry" from which they could help themselves as required, in which they arbitrarily did as they pleased, having the right here to wrench out a chunk of rock, there to add an ashlar. Thus the score, forming the basis for the present recording, can scarcely any longer be judged by criteria of autonomy and aesthetics as Leon Minkus's composition: far more does it represent a practical performing state of the work as it has become stylized after more than 120 years. (If it is borne in mind that between 1926 and 1978 alone in the Soviet Union -- Moscow and Leningrad/St. Petersburg not included -- *Don Quixote* was staged 44 times, it can be estimated how much the score must have been changed since its first performance!)

After the revision by Petipa himself (for the Marinsky Theatre in 1871), which must have been made in close collaboration with Minkus, in 1887 Alexei Bogdanov presented in Moscow the first new production of *Don Quixote* that came into being without consultation with the composer. Crucial changes to his score, customary to the present day, were made by the choreographer Alex Gorsky in 1900, again for the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow: thus, for example, in Act I he inserted a scene of eight bullfighters and the dance of a street dancer, for which he utilized music from Minkus's 1882 ballet *Soraya*. For other scenes, which he supplemented or replaced for dramatic reasons, he had recourse, for example, to music by Anton Simon. What was right for Gorsky in 1900 was only fair for Rostislav Zakharoff 40 years later when he produced *Don Quixote* anew for Moscow and in doing so interpolated musical numbers by Vassily Solovyev-Sedoy.

Leon Minkus allowed these and all the other alterations to which *Don Quixote* and his other ballet scenes were subjected, if unjustly, without demur; he himself was so very practical a craftsman that he would never have claimed works to be sacrosanct—they were the raw material from which the choreographers created their productions, while the composer remained modestly in the background. And yet the ballets of Saint-Leon or Petipa would scarcely have been accorded such brilliant and lasting successes if they had not been able to light the firework of

their ideas at this model music.