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Swan Lake: A fairy tale based on real emotion

Canada's Ballet Jörgen brings the ballet classic to Halifax's Rebecca Cohn Auditorium in a version choreographed by company artistic director Bengt Jorgen based on Petipa's 1895 choreography and set at the Fortress Louisbourg.

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a day ago by: Andrea Nemetz



1 / 5 Swan Lake, by Canada's Ballet Jörgen, is set at the Fortress of Louisbourg. The Toronto company performs at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium in Halifax April 7 to 9. (KEVIN VAGG)

Tchaikovsky was not happy with the score he created for Swan Lake, says Bengt Jörgen.

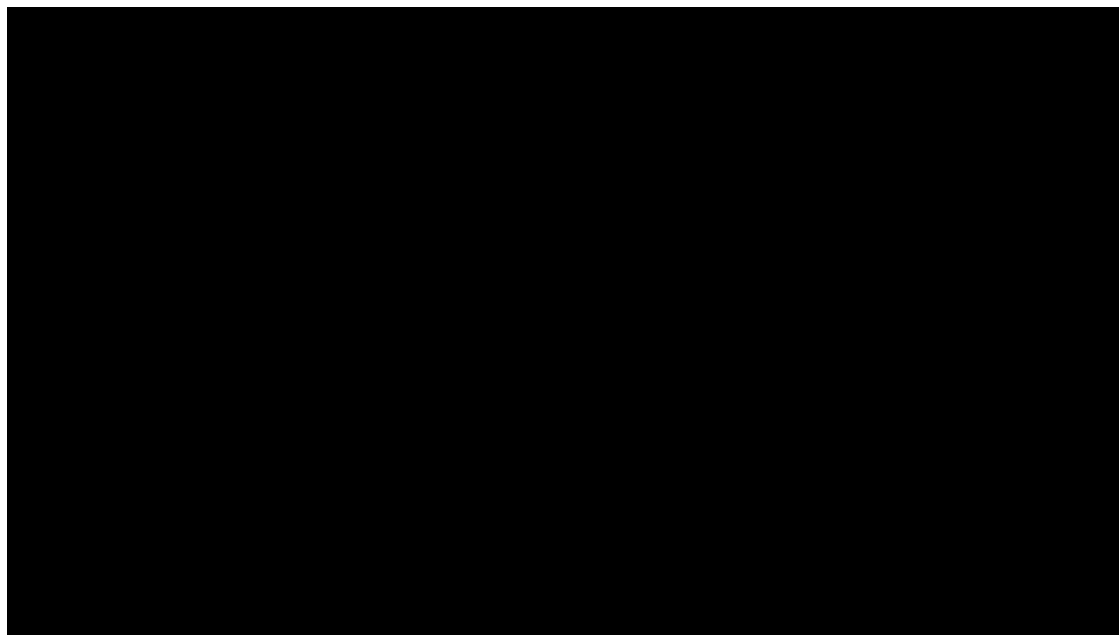
"But it works. It speaks to the heart and without the music you wouldn't have Swan Lake," continues the artistic director of [Canada's Ballet Jörgen](#) which is presenting the classic ballet Friday to Sunday, April 7 to 9 at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium in Halifax.

[Ballet Jörgen's Swan Lake](#), set at the Fortress of Louisbourg, was created for the Toronto company's 25th anniversary in 2012 and was performed at the Cohn in April 2013.

The first production featured recorded music, but this time around Symphony Nova Scotia, conducted by Bernhard Gueller, will provide the accompaniment for the 24 company dancers and 21 local performers aged 10 to 16 who will portray ballroom attendants, ladies-in-waiting, servants and more.

"The music adds an extra element," says Dartmouth native Hannah Mae Cruddas, who is in her sixth year as a company member.

"It heightens the experience for us and hopefully for the audience. Some of our tempos are different than what typically would be in the score. We sent in a recording so they would get a sense of what we're doing and the Symphony has been really accommodating."



The 23-year-old, who danced Clara in the Halifax Dance-Symphony Nova Scotia Nutcracker in December, loves the Swan Lake score.

"It suits the emotion of the dance so well. The movements are strong but delicate. Some are filled with absolute despair. Others are hopeful and bright. It is so telling, it gives us all the cues we need."

In some ways, Swan Lake is like two different ballets, maintains Jörgen, who choreographed this version of the beloved ballet, first performed in Moscow in 1877. He will also dance a small role.

"In scenes one and three it is light, bubbly and easily accessible. And in acts two and four, it is haunting, serene and beautiful."

The core of Jörgen's choreography is based on the well-known 1895 choreography by Marius Petipa.

"We're one of the few companies that do purely classical work," Jörgen says, noting the show is so popular the company could perform it every year.

"This production is classical but it has a sense of vibrancy that makes it interesting. It bridges a gap to engage people with the ballet."

Swan Lake is the story of a young man — Siegfried, the son of the Governor of New France, who is required to get married so he can carry on the kingdom — explains Jörgen. He doesn't want to marry so he goes into the forest to hunt and blow off steam. There he meets Odette, a beautiful creature who is half swan, half human, and falls in love. Odette has been turned into a swan by the evil sorcerer Von Rothbart and can only be released from the spell when someone swears true love to her.



Siegfried goes to a party where he rejects all the eligible ladies and meets a creature who looks very

Bengt Jörgen choreographed a version of Swan Lake for the 25th anniversary of Canada's Ballet Jörgen in 2012. The production returns to the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium April 7 to 9. (IAN DONALDSON)

much like the White Swan, but is very sexy and is, in fact, the Black Swan Odile.

Siegfried thinks the Black Swan is the same person he met in the forest and swears his true love, but he has

in fact sworn his true love to the wrong person so he can't have the White Swan.

In most productions Siegfried goes into the forest to kill himself and live happily ever in the after life with the White Swan. But Stalin preferred a happy ending, says Jörgen, noting his production takes a balanced approach.

"It deals with the weakness of man and his efforts at redemption and the sacrifices he makes. These classics work not because they are fairy tales but because underneath there are enduring human emotions, which make them great, powerful stories."

There are four Halifax performances including a school show on Friday. Dancing the lead roles are Saniya Abilmajineva and Daniel Da Silva, alternating with Taylor Gill and Kealan McLaughlin.

"They are completely different. It doesn't look like the same production because each dancer has different qualities. There is also a lot of rotation among the soloists," says Jörgen.



Dartmouth native Hannah Mae Cruddas, 23, shown here with Adrián Ramírez Juárez was dancing a Spanish Dance in Swan Lake before she was injured. When Canada's Ballet Jörgen brings the classic ballet to Halifax's Rebecca Cohn Auditorium April 7 to 9, she will be dancing in the corps and as a countess. (KEVIN VAGG)

In 2013, Cruddas was a corps swan. She's now a soloist and while touring Swan Lake before Christmas she was dancing a Spanish dance, a pas-de-trois and learning the Swan Queen role, which she calls incredible. But after suffering four stress fractures in one foot, she's returning to the corps and dancing The Countess "more of a walk-on role that is less traumatic on the foot."

Swan Lake is "quintessentially all about the Swan corps," says Cruddas, who started dancing at three and trained at the Maritime Conservatory of the Performing Arts in Halifax and the Leica Hardy School of Dance in Dartmouth before heading to Toronto and the National Ballet School.

"It wouldn't be Swan Lake without the swans on the side. They frame the scenes in a beautiful, cohesive way and they add so much without the audience realizing it. We are the baseline to the melody.

"There is a wonderful dynamic to the corps de ballet. It feels like we are working as one bevy of swans."

She says with this remount of Swan Lake, the dancers from corps members to principals have become more cohesive and more confident with the extremely difficult technical steps so they can emote more.

And the setting of Fortress Louisbourg in the 1700s, an era of French excess, allows the company "to create a gorgeous production that rivals anything of a made-up world or a Tudor European setting," says Jörgen.

"It also speaks to who we are and we came from. The Fortress of Louisbourg was part of New France and now there is an English presence there. It has the duality of founding languages French and English.

"As an organization, we want to reflect the Canadian identity. The Fortress of Louisbourg is a heritage site for Nova Scotia, it helps us to talk about our culture."

Tickets for Swan Lake range from \$35 to \$72. Click [here](#) to purchase.

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