

Doug Fullington\*

## Pavel Gerdt and the princes' variations in "Sleeping Beauty", "The Nutcracker", and "Swan Lake"

21 dicembre 2022, pp. 161-182

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2036-1599/16069>

Section: Studi [peer reviewed]



Articles are published under a Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial 3.0 Unported licence (Authors retain copyright in their articles, permission to reuse third party copyrighted content is not included).

Email: [danzaericerca@unibo.it](mailto:danzaericerca@unibo.it)

Www: <https://danzaericerca.unibo.it/>

### Abstract

Quando la triade di balletti di Čajkovskij — *La bella addormentata* (1890), *Lo schiaccianoci* (1892) e *Il lago dei cigni* (revisione del 1895) — venne eseguita a San Pietroburgo, il primo ballerino Pavel Gerdt aveva smesso di esibirsi in assoli danzati. Gerdt fu comunque scritturato come protagonista maschile in questi balletti, e i suoi assoli furono assegnati ad altri ballerini, tra cui soliste donne, studentesse *senior* della Scuola di Teatro e un giovane rappresentante della generazione che avrebbe definito una nuova era della danza maschile nel balletto. Le fonti, comprendenti le annotazioni coreografiche stese in notazione Stepanov, consentono descrizioni dettagliate di queste danze. Il risultato di questo approccio per compensare l'avanzare dell'età e i limiti fisici di Gerdt è stata una raccolta biforcuta di parti da *premier danseur* in alcune delle opere più durature dell'epoca.

By the time Čajkovskij's trio of ballets — *Sleeping Beauty* (1890), *The Nutcracker* (1892), and *Swan Lake* (1895 redaction) — came to be performed in St. Petersburg, first dancer Pavel Gerdt had given up performing danced solos. Gerdt was nevertheless cast as the male lead in these ballets, and his solos were assigned to other dancers, including female soloists, senior girl students of the Theater School, and a young man who represented a generation that would define a new era of male dancing in ballet. Source material, including choreographic notations made in the Stepanov system, allows for detailed descriptions of these dances. The result of this approach to compensating for Gerdt's advancing age and physical limitations was a bifurcated collection of premier danseur roles in some of the most enduring works of the era.

---

\* Independent researcher.

Doug Fullington

## Pavel Gerdt and the princes' variations in “Sleeping Beauty”, “The Nutcracker”, and “Swan Lake”<sup>1</sup>

Among the ballerina's dances the *pas de deux* with Mr Gerdt stands out for its virtuoso execution. This *pas de deux* is almost the only dance in which Mr Gerdt still performs, having transferred all his dances to younger dancers. Mr Gerdt in *Sleeping Beauty* dances only a few bars in all, but such beauty! One does not want to believe that Mr Gerdt has served the ballet stage for forty years...<sup>2</sup>.

Today's ballet-goers assess a leading dancer's performance in a nineteenth-century ballet based on a set of expectations. These may include technical competence, musicality, mature characterization, and winning stage presence. One foregone assumption is surely that the principal *danseur* will perform all the elements of the role — acting, partnering, and dancing. Surprising as it may seem, however, this was not always standard practice in the St. Petersburg Imperial Ballet, the company that gave us many of the best-loved nineteenth-century dance works in today's repertory. That is — remarkably enough — leading male dancers sometimes remained in their roles after they stopped performing danced solos. They acted and often partnered the ballerina, but their solo dancing was assigned to younger men or, in some cases, women<sup>3</sup>.

The greatest exemplar of this tradition, both as youthful deputy and aging senior, was also one of the finest male dancers produced by the Imperial Ballet: Pavel Gerdt. Over the course of a career spanning more than half a century, Gerdt rose to early prominence by performing dance roles (or portions thereof) in place of first dancer Lev Ivanov, a thoroughly competent dancer, partner, and mime, whose own gifts nevertheless did not approach Gerdt's outstanding abilities<sup>4</sup>. In his later

---

1. My thanks are due to Kyle Davis, Andrew Foster, Anne Searcy, and Marian Smith for their expertise and advice.

Note: Dates before 1918 are given in Old Style, that is, twelve days behind the Western (Gregorian) calendar in the nineteenth century (through 1900) and thirteen days behind the Western calendar from 1901 through 1917.

2. “Peterburgskaja gazeta”, 9 November 1900, p. 4, quoted in Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, Oxford University Press, New York 1985, p. 187.

3. About this practice, see Bénédicte Jarrasse, *Être et/ou ne pas être? Le danseur dans le Ballet imperial*, in “Slavica Occitania”, n. 43, *De la France à la Russie, Marius Petipa. Contexte, trajectoire, heritage*, Édité par Pascale Melani, 2016, pp. 237–252.

4. About Ivanov's performing career and merits as a dancer, see Roland John Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*,

years, Gerdt himself relinquished solo dancing but remained in many of his *premier danseur* roles and continued as a favorite partner of both veteran and novice ballerinas.

In this essay, I will explore the assignment of Gerdt's dances to other performers in the St. Petersburg premiere productions of Čajkovskij's celebrated trio of ballets — *Sleeping Beauty* (1890), *The Nutcracker* (1892), and the redacted *Swan Lake* (1895). In particular, I will demonstrate that while Gerdt performed the principal male role in each of these ballets, he did not dance the solo variation intended for his character. Rather, the variations were given to other soloists or groups of dancers, both men and women, professionals and students.

Who were these “replacement” dancers and what steps did they perform? Some of these questions are addressed in part by the printed programs that accompanied the performances. However, examination of additional performance-related source material, including choreographic notations of these ballets made around the turn of the twentieth century, yields greater detail and provides more concrete answers. I will examine each variation, describing its cast and choreography, and consider the particular time during which the ballets were produced — a period that saw a dearth of seasoned male dancers capable of performing solo work but was on the cusp of a resurgence of significant youthful talent.

Finally, while Gerdt's advancing age has long been thought to have curtailed his partnering duties in the 1890s — the assistance of Benno in *Swan Lake* most often cited in support of this notion — source material confirms that Gerdt continued as a fully capable partner into the twentieth century.

## **Pavel Gerdt, *premier danseur***

Born in 1844, Pavel Gerdt graduated from the St. Petersburg Imperial Theater School in 1864. Recognized early in his training as a significant talent, he made his stage debut in 1860. Within several years of his graduation, Gerdt was performing as a nameless cavalier in tandem with first dancer Lev Ivanov in the ballets *Le Roi Candaule* (1868), *Don Quixote* (St. Petersburg premiere, 1871), *Camargo* (1872), *The Butterfly* (1874), and *La Bayadère* (1877)<sup>5</sup>. Ivanov portrayed the male lead in these ballets, fulfilling acting duties and likely some partnering responsibilities. Gerdt was assigned danced solos and additional partnering that otherwise would have been part of the lead male role. Roland John Wiley explains Gerdt's growing acclaim and ascent within the ranks of the Imperial

---

Oxford University Press, New York 1997, pp. 33-40.

5. See Roland John Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, cit., p. 39. See also Bénédicte Jarrasse, *Être et/ou ne pas être? Le danseur dans le Ballet imperial*, cit., pp. 248-251.

Ballet under these circumstances:

For a time Ivanov [born in 1834] was protected in this arrangement by his rank and ten years of seniority over Gerdt. In the 1870s, however, containing Gerdt's extraordinary talent for the sake of Ivanov's rank became increasingly untenable. The reasons were plain enough: Gerdt's youth, his talent, and his peak physical conditioning... By the end of the decade, Gerdt had taken over as first dancer in fact and name. Ivanov was thenceforth cast in mimed parts and in character dances<sup>6</sup>.

Gerdt's career would proceed in much the same way as Ivanov's<sup>7</sup>. He appears to have begun giving up dancing roles in his mid-forties (that is, by the end of the 1880s). On 22 October 1889, just weeks before the premiere of *Sleeping Beauty*, Stanislav Gillert (not many years Gerdt's junior) danced the role of Albert in *Giselle*, replacing Gerdt, who had performed the role regularly since 1870 and as recently as earlier that year when he partnered the Italian ballerina Elena Cornalba<sup>8</sup>. Nadine Meisner, in her biography of Marius Petipa, notes that after the 1891 premiere of Petipa's ballet *Calabrino*, the critic Nikolaj Bezobrazov "lamented the fact that Gerdt in the title role had renounced dance, restricting himself to adroit partnering"<sup>9</sup>. Gerdt's goddaughter, the ballerina Tamara Karsavina, suggested age was not the only factor at play with regard to Gerdt's move away from dancing. Recalling the 1894 season, her first year as a student in the Theater School, she wrote of Gerdt: "At this stage of his career he did not dance much owing to recurring trouble in his knee, but he supported the ballerina and acted principal parts"<sup>10</sup>.

Thus when Čajkovskij's three ballets entered the repertory of the St. Petersburg Imperial Ballet in the early 1890s, Gerdt remained the beloved first dancer of the company, but one whose dancing duties were beginning to be relegated to others.

The primary source that will allow us to determine with the most certainty who replaced Gerdt in his solo dances and what steps were performed is a set of choreographic notations made in the Stepanov method in the 1890s and early years of the twentieth century. The notation system, developed in the early 1890s by the dancer Vladimir Stepanov, uses Western musical notation to depict rhythmic movements<sup>11</sup>. Accompanying ground plans show the dancers' position and trajectory on

6. Roland John Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, cit., pp. 39-40.

7. About Gerdt's career, see Nadine Meisner, *Marius Petipa: The Emperor's Ballet Master*, Oxford University Press, New York 2019, pp. 175-176.

8. See Irina Boglačeva (edited by), *Peterburgskij balet. Tri veka: chronika. Tom III. 1851-1900* [*The Petersburg ballet. Three centuries: A chronicle. Volume III. 1851-1900*], Academy of Russian Ballet named after A. Ja. Vaganova, St. Petersburg 2015, pp. 282-283.

9. Nadine Meisner, *Marius Petipa*, cit., p. 175.

10. Tamara Karsavina, *Theatre Street*, Dance Books, London 1981, p. 61.

11. See W[ladimir] I[vanovitch] Stépanow, *Alphabet des mouvements du corps humain; essai d'enregistrement des mouvements du corps humain au moyen des signes musicaux*, Impr. M. Zouckermann [Librairie P. Vigot], Paris 1892. The system was published in Russia as *Tablica znakov dlja zapisyvanija dviženij čelovečeskogo tela po sisteme artista imperatorskich S.-Peter-*

stage<sup>12</sup>. The system was approved for use in the St. Petersburg Imperial Theaters and School, and over the course of some twenty years much of the ballet repertory was notated in varying degrees of completeness. Most examples of Stepanov notation are preserved as part of Harvard Library's so-called Sergeev Collection, named after the *régisieur* Nikolaj Sergeev, in whose hand the large majority of extant notations were made<sup>13</sup>.

Taking the choreographic notations together with printed programs, cast lists in librettos, and other sources allows for a close look at the principal male variation in each of the Čajkovskij ballets.

## “Sleeping Beauty”

Pavel Gerdt was forty-five years old when he created the role of Prince Désiré in *Sleeping Beauty* in 1890 (fig. 1)<sup>14</sup>. Reviews and memoirs refer to a minimal amount of dancing he performed in the ballet. For example, as Petipa's daughter Vera remembered, “Gerdt's entrance with the ballerina in the duet of *Sleeping Beauty* was distinguished by sculptured lines and deft supports, and his brief danced numbers, thanks to his elegance, were always accompanied by applause”<sup>15</sup>, and writing about *Sleeping Beauty* in *Naš Balet*, Aleksandr Pleščeev referred to “the short little *morceau* [piece] Mr. Gerdt dances in the last act...”<sup>16</sup>.

---

*burgskich teatrov V.I. Stepanova* [Table of Signs for the Notation of the Movements of the Human Body According to the System of the Artist of the Imperial St. Petersburg Theaters, V. I. Stepanov], St. Petersburg n.d. A copy is preserved as part of the Sergeev Collection. See MS Thr 245 (269), Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University. An English translation by Raymond Lister is available as *Alphabet of Movements of the Human Body*, Golden Head Press, Cambridge U.K. 1958.

12. For a discussion of the Stepanov system, see Sheila Marion — Karen Eliot, *Recording the Imperial Ballet: Anatomy and Ballet in Stepanov's Notation*, in Melanie Bales — Karen Eliot (edited by), *Dance on Its Own Terms*, Oxford University Press, New York 2013, pp. 309-340.

13. *Nikolai Sergeev Dance Notations and Music Scores for Ballets, 1888-1944*, MS Thr 245, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University. The collection includes choreographic notations of ballets and opera ballets, violin rehearsal *répétiteurs*, piano reductions, orchestral scores and parts, printed programs, libretti, and miscellany, including photographs and drawings, relating to the repertory of the St. Petersburg Imperial Theaters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For a description of the collection and a discussion of Sergeev, see Roland John Wiley, *Dances from Russia: An Introduction to the Sergeev Collection*, in “Harvard Library Bulletin”, vol. XXIV, no. 1, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 1976, pp. 94-112.

14. *Sleeping Beauty, ballet-féerie* in three acts, with prologue, libretto by Ivan Vsevoložskij, music by Pëtr Čajkovskij, and choreography by Marius Petipa, was first performed at the Mariinskij Theatre on 3 January 1890, with Carlotta Brianza, Pavel Gerdt, Marie Petipa, and Enrico Cecchetti in leading roles. For an English translation of the libretto, see Roland John Wiley, *A Century of Russian Ballet: Documents and Eyewitness Accounts, 1810-1910*, Oxford University Press, New York 1990, pp. 360-372. See also Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, cit., pp. 102-192, 327-333, 354-370, and Nadine Meisner, *Marius Petipa*, cit., pp. 224-229.

15. Quoted in Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, cit., p. 187.

16. Aleksandr Pleščeev, *Naš Balet (1673-1899)* [*Our Ballet (1673-1899)*], 2nd, supplemented edition, F. A. Perejaslavcev and A. A. Pleščeev, St. Petersburg 1899; Music Planet, St. Petersburg 2009, p. 411, translated in Tim Scholl, *“Sleeping Beauty”: A Legend in Progress*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2004, p. 200.



Figure 1: Pavel Gerdt as Prince Désiré with Carlotta Brianza as Princess Aurora and two student pages in formal dress for the opening of Act Three of *Sleeping Beauty*, St. Petersburg, 1890.

In the final act of *Sleeping Beauty*, Petipa's initial plans for a wedding *pas de deux* for Aurora and Désiré, roles first performed by Carlotta Brianza and Gerdt, were revised<sup>17</sup>. A *pas de quatre* replaced the *pas de deux*, a change made clear in the printed libretto, in which the dance is listed in the following way:

	<i>Pas de quatre</i>	
Aurora		M <sup>lle</sup> Brianza
Désiré		M. Gerdt
The Fairy of Gold		M <sup>lle</sup> [Claudia] Kulichevskaya
The Fairy of Sapphires		M <sup>lle</sup> [Maria] Tistrova <sup>18</sup>

Two questions arise: Why were the Fairies of Gold and Sapphires included, and to what music did they dance? First, the casting choice. Their inclusion is likely owed to the removal of the Gold and Sapphire variations from the jewel fairies' *pas de quatre* earlier in the act (fig. 2) but also to the apparent need for Désiré's variation to be danced by someone other than Gerdt. (More questions follow: Why was the variation not simply cut? to maintain the integrity of the formal *pas de deux* structure? to give Brianza a rest between the adagio and her variation?) The Gold Fairy variation had been transferred to the second act where it replaced the variation Čajkovskij had composed for Aurora

17. Petipa's instructions to Čajkovskij identify the dance as "No. 8 *Pas de deux*. Aurora and Désiré" (Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, cit., p. 358).

18. See Roland John Wiley, *A Century of Russian Ballet*, cit., p. 364.

in the vision scene. The Sapphire variation was cut<sup>19</sup>. Although the Fairies of Gold and Sapphires performed in the jewels *pas de quatre*, they nevertheless were also cast in the later *pas de quatre* with Aurora and Désiré, as though to make up for the loss of their solo variations.



Figure 2: (front) Elsa Krüger as the Fairy of Silver; (back, left to right) Klavdija Kuličevskaya as the Fairy of Gold, Anna Johanson as the Fairy of Diamonds, and Marija Tistrova as the Fairy of Sapphires in *Sleeping Beauty*, Act Three, St. Petersburg, 1890.

Second, to determine the music to which the fairies danced, we can examine two notations of a dance for two women that are part of the choreographic notation of *Sleeping Beauty*<sup>20</sup>. Annotations in both versions indicate the dance was performed after the adagio, thus suggesting that the women performed to the music of Désiré's variation and therefore replaced Gerdt in what would have been his solo dance. The version filed after the notation of the adagio is labeled clearly, "Dance after *Pas de deux* / Adagio / Two ladies are dancing" (fig. 3)<sup>21</sup>. The second version has a similar heading: "Piece after *Pas de deux* | Adagio | Dance [of] two ladies"<sup>22</sup>. Both notations are marked "6/8", the time

19. See Doug Fullington, *La notation Stepanov et "La belle au bois dormant": Des productions historiquement documentées et de quelques particularités*, in Tiziana Leucci — Pascale Melani (édité par), *À la recherche de Marius Petipa II: entre romantisme, orientalisme et avant-garde*, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine (MSHA), Pessac, forthcoming.

20. Wiley dates the choreographic notation of *Sleeping Beauty* around 1903. See Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, cit., p. 165.

21. MS Thr 245 (204), seqq. 204-205, online: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:12330610?n=204> (Accessed 9/13/2022).

22. MS Thr 245 (204), seq. 117, online: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:12330610?n=117> (Accessed 9/13/2022).

signature of the Prince's solo but also that of the earlier entrée. That the fairies danced to the music of Désiré's variation, as the choreographer Aleksej Ratmanskij has suggested<sup>23</sup>, rather than the entrée of the *pas de deux-cum-pas de quatre* seems likely for several reasons. First, the entrée is cut in two of the surviving performance-related musical sources and heavily truncated in another<sup>24</sup>. Second, the notated choreography, made up primarily of small jumps, suggests the faster tempo of the Prince's tarantella, and when set to music, the steps fit perfectly with the structure of the variation and its number of bars. Third, no other piece of music is identified in the notations; no annotation directs the reader to another part of the score, as is the case with the Gold Fairy interpolation in Act Two<sup>25</sup>.

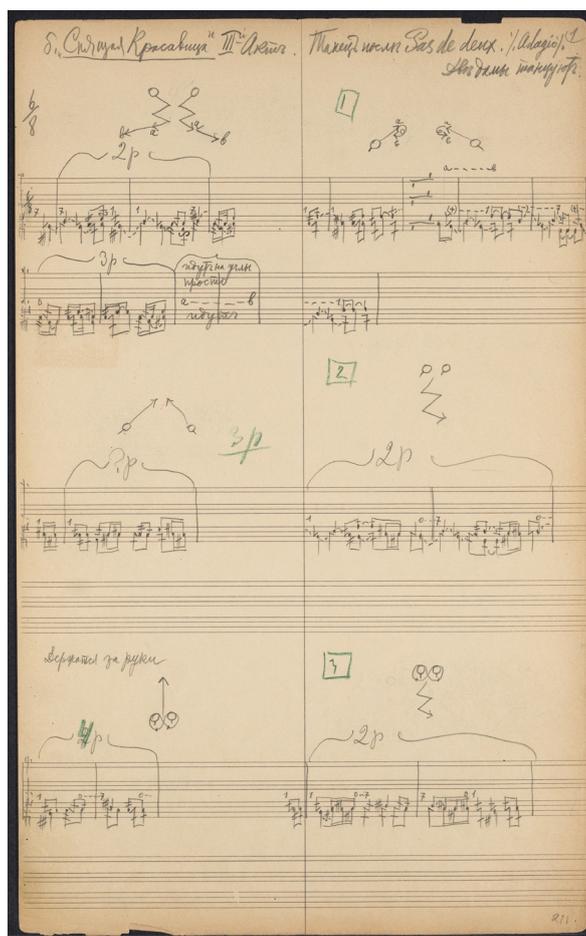


Figure 3: The first page of choreographic notation of the dance performed by the Fairies of Gold and Sapphires to the music of the variation composed for Prince Désiré in *Sleeping Beauty*. MS Thr 245 (204), seq. 204, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

23. See Aleksej Ratmanskij, *Petipa P.S.* [Princess Aurora and Prince Désiré *pas de deux* from *Sleeping Beauty*. Reconstruction of the choreography of Marius Petipa (1890) according to the drawings by Pavel Gerdt (1894) and the notation of Nikolaj Sergeev (1903-1906)], 2018, online: <http://oteatre.info/petipa-ps> (Accessed 9/13/2022).

24. See Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, cit., p. 409.

25. See Doug Fullington, *La notation Stepanov et "La belle au bois dormant"*, cit.

### *Description of the music and choreography*

The music of the variation comprises a repeated opening theme (A section), a B section with a transition to a return of the A section, a change of meter accompanying another iteration of the A section, and a coda<sup>26</sup>. The introduction of each musical section features a change in choreographic pattern and steps.

In the following description of Petipa's choreography, one "count" equals a dotted quarter note; thus, two counts equal one bar of music. In both notated versions, the steps for the dancer on stage right are notated<sup>27</sup>.

Introduction: A minor, bars 1-3.5 (2.5 bars)

The dance begins with the fairies placed side by side, performing their steps in mirror image of each other. They begin upstage center from a preparation pose in *tendu croisé devant*.

Section A: A minor, bars 3.5-11.5 (8 bars plus 8 bars repeated)

The fairies perform a 4-count *enchaînement* of two steps forward followed by *jeté rond de jambe* to *tendu devant effacé* four times to alternate sides as they travel downstage in a zigzag pattern (8 bars). They continue with a 2-count *enchaînement* of *glissade, jeté battu* six times to alternate sides traveling to opposite downstage corners (6 bars). An annotation describes the end of the section: "Go to the corners | just walk" (2 bars).

Section B: E major, bars 11.5-24.5 (13 bars)

Traveling up the diagonal with a 4-count *enchaînement*, the dancers perform *temps lié en arrière on pointe, assemblé, sissonne ouverte en demi-arabesque fondu* twice (4 bars) then take three steps, turning, into *demi-cabriole derrière* three times to alternate sides (6 bars). Continuing backward on the diagonal, they perform *pas de bourrée on demi-pointe, temps levé développé de côté* three times to alternate sides (3 bars).

Section A: A minor, bars 24.5-32.5 (8 bars); meter changes to 2/4 at bar 32

Meeting upstage center at the return of the main theme (A), the fairies dance in unison (that is, on the same leg), tracing a zigzag pattern as they travel downstage with a 4-count *enchaînement*: three steps forward, *jeté en avant, pas de bourrée on demi-pointe* four times (8 bars).

Section A: A minor, bars 32.5-39 (7.5 bars)

Linking arms and joining hands, they travel backward directly upstage with a 2-count *enchaînement*: *jeté pas de cheval, temps levé* (bringing the extended foot to *cou-de-pied derrière*) seven times to alternate sides (the notation calls for eight repetitions, but the music appears to allow for only seven, which would result in a subsequent *temps levé petit battement*) (7.5 bars).

Coda: A minor, bars 40-51 (12 bars)

Still having arms linked, the fairies return downstage in a zigzag pattern with a 4-count *enchaînement*: *temps levé développé devant, pas de bourrée on demi-pointe, tendu effacé devant fondu, fifth position plié* four times to alternate sides (8 bars). Finally, the fairies let go of hands and travel directly downstage with *glissade, jeté battu* to each side (2 bars) and *soutenu* to the knee, finishing *en face* (2 bars).

26. Pëtr Čajkovskij, *Sleeping Beauty*, orchestra score, edited by Anatolij Dmitriev, *Complete Collected Works*, vol. XIIB, Muzgiz, Moscow 1952, Act III, pp. 236-247; piano reduction, arranged by Alexander Siloti, P. Jurgenson, Moscow n.d. [1889], pp. 195-196, online: <https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/9/9d/IMSLP247445-PMLP26902-Tchaikovsky-Op66.Zps.pdf> (Accessed 9/13/2022).

27. My main source for step terminology is Gail Grant, *Technical Manual and Dictionary of Classical Ballet*, 3rd edition, Dover, New York 1982.

Why was the dance given to two women rather than to a male dancer? The reason may be that an adequate successor to Gerdt had not yet been identified within the St. Petersburg Imperial Ballet. While a crop of young male dancers would soon come into their own and take on major roles in the repertory — including Nikolaj Legat (graduated 1888), Aleksandr Gorskij (graduated 1889), Georgij Kjakšt (graduated 1891), and Sergej Legat (graduated 1894) — by 1890 these men had either not yet graduated from the Theater School or were just embarking on their dance careers<sup>28</sup>.

Gerdt likely danced alone only during the opening bars of the coda. Alexandre Benois' recollection, "In the last act, Gerdt performed a short variation [...] lasting less than a minute", recorded decades after the premiere of *Sleeping Beauty*, may easily have been in reference to the coda<sup>29</sup>. The coda of a late-nineteenth-century *pas de deux*, usually following directly after the ballerina's variation, often began with a solo entrée for the cavalier. Benois referred elsewhere to "Prince Désiré's solo which opens the final dance"<sup>30</sup>. Here again, "final dance" may be a reference to the coda, the final dance of the *pas de quatre*. An annotation, "Coda | Legat" (Nikolaj Legat was Gerdt's successor in the role of Désiré)<sup>31</sup>, is preserved in the choreographic notation at the end of Aurora's variation<sup>32</sup>. This appears to confirm that the coda began with a passage danced by Désiré at least by the time Legat took over the role in 1904 and likely when Gerdt danced it as well<sup>33</sup>.

A variation for Prince Désiré, possibly danced by Nikolaj Legat, is preserved in the choreographic notation, suggesting the *pas de quatre* reverted to a *pas de deux* at some point after Gerdt gave up the role<sup>34</sup>. That being said, printed programs from 25 October 1915 and 11 October 1922 Petrograd performances of *Sleeping Beauty* continue to list the dance as a *pas de quatre* that included

28. About these and other men who made up this cadre of young talent, Wiley has written: "By the end of the century, Gerdt's elegance as a classical dancer, Christian Johanson's class of perfection, and Enrico Cecchetti's infusion of acrobatic technique had produced a renaissance of male dancing in Russian ballet" (Roland John Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, cit., p. 40).

29. See Alexandre Benois, *Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet*, translated by Mary Britnieva, Putnam, London 1941, p. 129.

30. Quoted in Roland John Wiley, *A Century of Russian Ballet*, cit., p. 388.

31. Nikolaj Legat made his debut as Prince Désiré on 21 January 1904. The date marked the one hundred and first performance of *Sleeping Beauty* by the St. Petersburg Imperial Ballet. Act Three continued to feature a *pas de quatre* for Aurora (Matil'da Kšesinskaja), Désiré (Nikolaj Legat), the Fairy of Gold (Apollinarija Gordova), and the Fairy of Sapphires (Ol'ga Čumakova). See "Ežegodnik Imperatorskich Teatrov" ["Yearbook of the Imperial Theaters"], St. Petersburg 1903-1904, p. 118. In an apparent error, the Yearbook lists Čumakova here as the Fairy of Silver, while earlier in the same paragraph Čumakova is listed as the Fairy of Sapphires (with Elena Makarova listed as the Fairy of Silver).

32. MS Thr 245 (204), seq. 209, online: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:12330610?n=209> (Accessed 9/13/2022).

33. The choreography, while not notated, may have been the same set of character steps shown by Konstantin Sergeev in a seminar in Leningrad in the 1980s during which choreography from older ballets was demonstrated. See Alastair Macaulay, *Further Annals of "The Sleeping Beauty": A Questionnaire*, in "Ballet Review", vol. XLIII, no. 4, Winter 2015-2016, pp. 82-109, in particular pp. 107-108.

34. MS Thr 245 (204), seqq. 206-207, online: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:12330610?n=206> (Accessed 9/13/2022).

the Fairies of Gold and Sapphires, demonstrating that the practice of including the fairies continued into the third decade of the twentieth century<sup>35</sup>.

With *Sleeping Beauty*, Petipa was willing to cast Gerdt as the lead male in a newly created ballet and assign the variation intended for Gerdt's role to other dancers. Similar circumstances seem to have rendered the same result several seasons later with *The Nutcracker*.

## “The Nutcracker”

Of the three ballets under discussion here, *The Nutcracker* requires the most sleuthing to determine who danced the variation intended for Prince Coqueluche in Act Two. Because Gerdt appears not to have danced Désiré's variation in *Sleeping Beauty* nearly three years earlier, a reasonable assumption can be made that he did not dance a variation in *The Nutcracker*, either. After all, he was forty-eight when the ballet premiered on 6 December 1892 (fig. 4)<sup>36</sup>. But if not Gerdt, then who?



Figure 4: Varvara Nikitina as the Sugar Plum Fairy and Pavel Gerdt as Prince Coqueluche in *The Nutcracker*, St. Petersburg, 1892.

35. See program for 25 October 1915, MS Thr 245 (247). Program for 11 October 1922 courtesy of Robert Greskovic.

36. *The Nutcracker*, *ballet-féerie* in two acts and three scenes, libretto by Marius Petipa (borrowed from the stories of E.T.A. Hoffman), music by Pëtr Čajkovskij, and choreography by Lev Ivanov, was first performed on 6 December 1892 at the Mariinskij Theatre, St. Petersburg, with Antonietta Dell'Era and Pavel Gerdt in leading roles. For a digitized libretto, see online: <https://vivaldi.nlr.ru/bx000008414/view/> (Accessed 9/13/2022). For an English translation of the libretto, see Roland John Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, cit., pp. 240-246; see also pp. 132-149; and Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, cit., pp. 333-337; see also 193-241, 371-382. See also Nadine Meisner, *Marius Petipa*, cit., pp. 229-233. The question whether Petipa choreographed some of the first act appears unresolved. See Roland John Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, cit., pp. 136-137.

Although the published cast list for *Sleeping Beauty* (and, as we will find, for *Swan Lake*) includes the names of dancers who are obvious candidates for having performed to the music for the prince's variation, the *Nutcracker* cast list offers no such direct clues: only Antonietta Dell'Era, the first Sugar Plum Fairy, and Gerdt are listed as participants in the *pas de deux*<sup>37</sup>. The balance of the casting for the second act includes the other divertissement participants, assorted "confections and sweets" that inhabit Confitürembourg, various pages and soldiers, the "sisters of Prince Nutcracker", and eight fairies. These last named were performed by "girl students of the Imperial Theater School" who represented fairies of "melodies, flowers, pictures, fruit, dolls, nights, dancers, and dreams"<sup>38</sup>. They are listed directly below the five named roles in Act Two — the Sugar Plum Fairy, Prince Coqueluche, Clara, Prince Nutcracker, and the Major-Domo.

An examination of Ivan Vsevoložskij's costume sketches for the eight fairies, designated as the "suite de la Fée dragée", confirms their function as the Sugar Plum Fairy's entourage (fig. 5)<sup>39</sup>. (The Lilac Fairy in *Sleeping Beauty* also had a retinue of eight women who danced)<sup>40</sup>. A comparison of the sketches of the fairies with Vsevoložskij's drawings of characters that were intended to be performed by children in the ballet's opening scene (drawings labeled "Clair et ses amies" and "Fritz et ses amies") confirms the former were envisioned as adults and therefore likely performed by senior students of the Theater School<sup>41</sup>.



Figure 5: Sketch by Ivan Vsevoložskij of the costumes for the entourage of the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*. St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music, GIK 1463/1-20, nos. 39-46. Courtesy of Peter Koppers.

37. See Roland John Wiley's translation of the original cast list and libretto in *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, cit., pp. 240-246.

38. *Ivi*, p. 241.

39. St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music, GIK 1463/1-20, nos. 39-46. Vsevoložskij's sketch includes a "Fée pantins", or Fairy of puppets, rather than a fairy representing dancers, as listed in the program.

40. See Roland John Wiley, *A Century of Russian Ballet*, cit., p. 361.

41. St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music, GIK 1463/1-20, no. 23.

How did these fairies participate in the ballet? The choreographic notation of the Sugar Plum Fairy's initial entrance near the beginning of Act Two includes six women (rather than eight), who flank her on either side, interact with her, and then form a semicircle around her<sup>42</sup>. Wiley, assuming the women are the fairies who comprise Sugar Plum's suite, despite the discrepancy in numbers, describes the relevant action:

At the beginning of the scene the Sugar Plum Fairy and her prince are at the back of the stage. As they come forward he lifts her and supports her in turns. Six women (*doubtless part of her retinue*), three on each side, show deference to their mistress as she makes her way to the front. Once there she is surrounded by this group as she circles around the prince on *pointe*. The six form a broad semicircle as the Sugar Plum Fairy addresses them in mime: "You listen to me. A young girl is arriving here. All of you must bow down to her. I wish it"<sup>43</sup>.

Though no choreography is documented for the fairies during the scene just described, the notation makes clear that they are participants in the *mise-en-scène*. Their placement on stage in close proximity to the Sugar Plum Fairy and their interaction with her suggest an association. That the notation includes only six women in this scene does not negate the possibility that they represent the fairy entourage; perhaps only six of the eight took part in the action documented here by Sergeev.

How the fairies were otherwise involved in this act may be deduced by examining the single notated dance that is not clearly connected (by title, tempo marking, or other annotations) with a particular musical number. Comprising two pages, the notation bears the heading "Dance | Girl students | 2nd Act" and includes a cast of eight women who dance on *pointe*, a number that corresponds to the eight fairies of the Sugar Plum Fairy's retinue (fig. 6)<sup>44</sup>.

The notation is marked with a meter of 2/4, which, at first look, does not accord with the only dance for which the identity of the performer is in question: the variation "pour le danseur" in the *pas de deux*, a tarantella in 6/8 meter<sup>45</sup>. However, because the bulk of the Stepanov notations tend to be descriptive (the scribe wrote what he saw *and heard*) rather than prescriptive (in which case the scribe would prepare a finished, definitive document), the possibility exists that Sergeev notated the dance in 2/4 meter because that is the way he heard and counted the music. Indeed, a fast 6/8 is regularly counted as two beats per bar. Although notation of a dance marked with a meter different from the musical score is, in this author's experience, something of an anomaly within the extant Stepanov

---

42. MS Thr 245 (197), seqq. 147-148, online: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:10178404?n=147> (Accessed 9/13/2022). Wiley surmises the choreographic notation of *The Nutcracker* was made during the period spanning 1902 to 1909. See Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, cit., p. 311, note 48.

43. *Ivi*, p. 214, emphasis added.

44. MS Thr 245 (197), seqq. 134-135, online: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:10178404?n=134> (Accessed 9/13/2022).

45. Although the dances for the *Bouffons* and *La mère Gigogne et les polichinelles* are not notated, their casting is made clear by the printed program: a male soloist and boy students for the former and a male soloist and girl and boy students for the latter. See Roland John Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, cit., p. 242.

notations, other metrical irregularities occur more frequently. For example, a waltz is occasionally notated in part as though it is in 2/4 meter during passages in which the feet make contact with the floor only on beats one and three; and choreographic phrases in partnered adagios are regularly notated as a succession of unmetred movements.



Figure 6: The first page of choreographic notation of the dance likely performed by the fairy entourage of the Sugar Plum Fairy to the music of the variation composed for Prince Coqueluche in *The Nutcracker*. MS Thr 245 (197), seq. 134, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

### *Description of the music and choreography*

The ultimate question is whether the notated dance fits the music of the variation, which is in ABA form with an introduction<sup>46</sup>. The choreography includes three primary *enchaînements* followed by a brief section at the end to set up the entrance of the Sugar Plum Fairy, who dances next.

In the following description of Lev Ivanov's choreography, one "count" equals a dotted quarter note; thus, two counts equal one bar of music.

46. See Pëtr Čajkovskij, *The Nutcracker*, orchestra score, P. Jurgenson, Moscow n.d. [1892]; first edition reprinted, Broude Brothers, New York 1952, pp. 446-450, online: [https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/0/09/IMSLP515595-PM-LP8586-TchaiNutcrackerOverture\\_\(etc\).pdf](https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/0/09/IMSLP515595-PM-LP8586-TchaiNutcrackerOverture_(etc).pdf) (Accessed 9/13/2022); piano reduction, arranged by Sergej Taneev, P. Jurgenson, Moscow n.d. [1892], pp. 152-153, online: <https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/8/86/IMSLP30803-PM-LP08586-Tchaikovsky-Op71PRtan.pdf> (Accessed 9/13/2022).

Introduction: B minor, bars 1–2 (2 bars)

In preparation for the dance, the fairies stand in two rows of four in *tendu derrière en face*.

Section A: B minor, bars 3–18 (16 bars)

Dancing in place again, the fairies begin with an 8-count *enchaînement*: *coupé dessous, rond de jambe sauté* to *demi-attitude devant*, three *demi-emboîtés devant, assemblé, relevé en demi-arabesque, fondu* (4 bars). This *enchaînement* is performed three more times to alternate sides, and a *glissade* is added at the end to begin the next *enchaînement* (12 bars).

Section B: D major, bars 19–34 (16 bars)

The dancers form pairs within their rows. Those who are upstage hold inside hands and travel forward with a 4-count *enchaînement* performed twice: *piqué en demi-arabesque, fondu, coupé dessous, glissade* (4 bars). Letting go of hands, they turn away from each other and circle back upstage with four *pas de basque*, each performed in two counts (4 bars). The downstage pairs begin with the four *pas de basque*, circling upstage, and continue with the *piqués en demi-arabesque enchaînement*. Each group repeats both *enchaînements* and substitutes *bourrée* on *pointe* for the final *glissade* (8 bars).

Section A: B minor, bars 35–51 (17 bars)

Dancing in place again, the fairies perform a 4-count *enchaînement* six times to alternate sides: *tendu de coté fondu, relevé en demi-arabesque, bourrée* on *pointe* (12 bars). After the final repetition, they continue to *bourrée* as the group splits at center and moves out toward the wings, four dancers to each side (7 counts); arriving, they step to the side with the outside foot and make a three-quarter turn toward the wing while making a low *demi-grand rond de jambe en l'air en dedans* with the inside foot (1 count); they complete the turn and pose in *tendu effacé derrière* facing the opposite upstage corner (2 counts) (5 bars). The formation of the group resembles an inverted V with open space at the upstage apex.

The notated choreography thus fits the music, both in overall structure and phrase by phrase. Moreover, the final pose, with the eight fairies on either side of the stage expectantly facing upstage, suggests the dance functions as an introduction to what will follow: the variation of the Sugar Plum Fairy, who will enter upstage left. The short, benign tarantella, already a repurposed number when transferred to Act Two from Act One's aborted suite of national dances, ultimately served as an introduction to the Sugar Plum Fairy rather than providing an opportunity for the cavalier to demonstrate his dancing prowess<sup>47</sup>.

What Gerdt may have danced in the coda of the *pas de deux* is not notated. Neither is any further choreography notated that may have been danced by the eight fairies. A reviewer praised Gerdt's "positively unfading youth and incomparable gracefulness" in *The Nutcracker*, but these accolades do not assist us in knowing what he did or did not dance<sup>48</sup>.

The notation also does not include, as does the notation of *Sleeping Beauty* for Prince Désiré, a later variation for Prince Coqueluche that may have been performed by Gerdt's successors in the role. Gerdt was replaced in *The Nutcracker* as early as the 1893–1894 season by Aleksandr Oblakov, another dancer featured primarily in partnering roles at this time (for instance, he performed the role

47. To what extent Petipa or Ivanov contemplated this outcome is not suggested by the sources available to me. About the expunging and repurposing of the Act One dances, see Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, cit., pp. 199–200.

48. Quoted in Roland John Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, cit., p. 140.

of Benno in the 1895 *Swan Lake*).

Indeed, it appears that the variation continued to be danced by the fairies long after Gerdt gave up the role of Prince Coqueluche. Printed programs from early twentieth-century performances support this notion. For example, consider the program for 28 December 1909 featuring Julija Sedova and Samuil Andrianov, just fifteen days after the premiere of the most recent revival of *The Nutcracker* staged by Sergeev<sup>49</sup>. The dances of the Act Two *pas de deux* are listed as follows:

- 7) Pas de deux: M<sup>lle</sup> Sedova and M. Andrianov
- 8) Variations: M<sup>lle</sup> Sedova

Although "Variations" is plural, only Sedova's name is listed, suggesting that at least one other variation was performed by dancers whose rank did not warrant printing their names in the program, such as the students who performed the roles of the Sugar Plum Fairy's retinue. That the fairies remained part of the cast list for the revival supports the likelihood that they continued to dance the variation intended for Prince Coqueluche<sup>50</sup>.

The assignment of Coqueluche's variation to the retinue of the Sugar Plum Fairy resulted in a significant minimization of the lead male role in *The Nutcracker*. Unlike Désiré in *Sleeping Beauty* and Siegfried in *Swan Lake*, Prince Coqueluche serves no narrative function. The loss of his variation rendered him strictly a *porteur* outside of the few bars that he likely danced at the beginning of the coda to give Sugar Plum a brief rest before she returned to dominate the stage. Nevertheless, the music for his solo dance remained in the ballet. To leave it out would have been a disruptive violation of convention — a greater violation, apparently, than assigning the variation to other dancers, a practice that by 1892 had become de rigueur.

## "Swan Lake" (1895 redaction)

In October 1894, the young dancer Nikolaj Legat replaced Gerdt in the role of Prince Charming in a performance of the Petipa/Ivanov/Cecchetti *Cinderella*, which had premiered the previous year. As Petipa was planning the revival of the complete *Swan Lake* that premiered on 15 January 1895<sup>51</sup>, he may have considered casting Legat in the leading role of Prince Siegfried but

49. The printed program is preserved in the Sergeev Collection, MS Thr 245 (247). About the 1909 revival, see Roland John Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, cit., pp. 147-148.

50. Another program that is part of the Harvard collection, this one for a performance on 9 January 1911 featuring Karsavina and Andrianov, includes the same details. See MS Thr 245 (247).

51. *Swan Lake*, ballet in four acts, libretto by Vladimir Begičev, music by Pëtr Čajkovskij, and choreography by Wenzel Reisinger, was first performed on 20 February 1877 at the Bolšoj Theatre, Moscow, with Polina Karpakova and Victor

ultimately opted for Gerdt (fig. 7). Wiley has noted that Petipa's sketches for the Act Two ballroom scene list "Mr Gerdt or Legat" in the role of Siegfried<sup>52</sup>. The *pas d'action* in this act, known today as the "Black Swan *pas de deux*", included a male variation that would serve as Siegfried's solo dance in the ballet.



Figure 7: Pavel Gerdt as Prince Siegfried in *Swan Lake*, St. Petersburg, 1895. "Ežegodnik Imperatorskich Teatrov", 1894-1895, p. 207.

The printed program for *Swan Lake* makes the casting of the *pas d'action* clear: Pierina Legnani (Odile), Pavel Gerdt (Siegfried), Alexej Bulgakov (Von Rothbart, a mimed role), and Aleksandr Gorskij<sup>53</sup>. Gorskij participated as a nameless cavalier chosen, presumably, by Petipa to perform the male variation in place of Gerdt, now fifty years old (fig. 8).

Gorskij had begun to dance minor featured roles as early as the 1892-1893 season. He led the

---

Gillert in leading roles. The ballet's second scene was performed in St. Petersburg, with choreography by Lev Ivanov, on 17 February 1894 at the Mariinskij Theatre. The complete ballet was first presented in St. Petersburg on 15 January 1895 at the Mariinskij Theatre, with music revised by Riccardo Drigo and choreography by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov, with Pierina Legnani and Pavel Gerdt in leading roles. For an English translation of the 1877 libretto and affiche, see Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, cit., pp. 321-327 and 342-344; see also pp. 25-91; for an English translation of the 1895 libretto, see Roland John Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, cit., pp. 259-264; see also pp. 170-183; and Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, cit., pp. 337-341; see also pp. 242-274. See also Nadine Meisner, *Marius Petipa*, cit., pp. 239-243, and Sergej Konaev — Boris Mukosej (editors), *"Lebedinoe Ozero", balet v 4-ch dejstvijach: Postanovka v Moskovskom Bol'som Teatre 1875-1883: Skripičnii repetitor i drugie dokumenty* ["Swan Lake", ballet in 4 acts: Staged at the Moscow Bol'soj Theatre 1875-1883: Violin répétiteur and other documents], Kompozitor, St. Petersburg 2015.

52. Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets*, cit., p. 257.

53. See Roland John Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, cit., p. 261.

Chinese dance with Maria Anderson at the premiere of *The Nutcracker*, and on 28 July 1894 he created the role of Aquilon in Petipa's one-act ballet *The Awakening of Flora*. In 1896, he succeeded Stepanov as notation teacher for the Theater School after the latter's untimely death. Gorskij refined Stepanov's system in 1899 in two publications, *Table of Signs for the Notation of Movements of the Human Body According to the System of the Artist of the Imperial St. Petersburg Theaters V. I. Stepanov* and *Choreography: Examples for Reading*<sup>54</sup>. In the second publication, Gorskij included a notation of the male variation from the *Swan Lake pas d'action* for which he credited himself as choreographer<sup>55</sup>. The same variation, bearing Gorskij's name, is preserved in the manuscript choreographic notation of the entire *Swan Lake*<sup>56</sup>.



Figure 8: Aleksandr Gorskij.

54. Aleksandr Gorskij, *Tablica znakov dlja zapisyvanija dviženij čelovečeskogo tela po sisteme artista imperatorskich S.-Peterburgskich teatrov V.I. Stepanova* [*Table of Signs for the Notation of Movements of the Human Body According to the System of the Artist of the Imperial St. Petersburg Theaters V. I. Stepanov*], Imperial St. Petersburg Theater School [n.d], and *Choreografija: primery dlja čtenija* [*Choreography: Examples for Reading*], Imperial St. Petersburg Theater School. Installment I, 1899. See MS Thr 245 (268), online: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:38092792> (Accessed 9/13/2022). Published in English translation as Alexander Gorsky, *Two Essays on Stepanov Dance Notation*, translated by Roland John Wiley, Congress on Research in Dance, New York 1978.

55. Aleksandr Gorskij, *Tablica znakov dlja zapisyvanija dviženij čelovečeskogo tela po sisteme artista imperatorskich S.-Peterburgskich teatrov V.I. Stepanova*, cit., pp. 38-40. MS Thr 245 (268), seqq. 68-70, online: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:38092792?n=68> (Accessed 9/13/2022).

56. Nikolai Sergeev *Choreographic and Music Scores for the Ballet "Swan Lake"*, 1905-1924, MS Thr 186 (11), seqq. 153-154, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, online: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:4890062?n=153> (Accessed 9/13/2022).

Does this notation of the variation choreographed by Gorskij represent what he danced in 1895? Likely, yes. Gorskij was developing his skills as a choreographer in the 1890s. His ballet *Clorinda*, choreographed for the students of the Theater School, premiered on 11 April 1899<sup>57</sup>. After his transfer to Moscow in September 1900 to lead what is now the Bol’šoj Ballet, he became a choreographer of note. We know from Nikolaj Legat that Petipa did not excel at choreographing male solos and sometimes delegated the task to others<sup>58</sup>. Although Wiley refers to the *pas d’action* variation as “a variant which Alexander Gorsky, who danced this part, made later as a choreographer”, no evidence has come to light suggesting that a different variation was danced than the one preserved<sup>59</sup>.

### *Description of the music and choreography*

The waltz variation used in 1895 is a revision of Čajkovskij’s original composition, which formed a section of the Act One *pas de deux* in the 1877 Moscow premiere of *Swan Lake*. The *pas de deux* was refashioned as a *pas d’action* and moved to Act Two in 1895<sup>60</sup>. The waltz music is in AABA form, with the two-part B section based on hemiola rhythm<sup>61</sup>. The published choreographic notation includes music (a two-violin arrangement, likely drawn from a *répétiteur*) for the first six bars and final six bars of the variation (fig. 9)<sup>62</sup>.

The steps are notated with clarity. In the following description, one “count” equals a dotted half note (one complete bar).

Introduction: B-flat major, bars 1-2 (2 bars)

The cavalier begins at center stage from a preparation pose in fifth position *croisé*.

Section A: B-flat major, bars 3-18 (16 bars)

Dancing in place, the cavalier performs *entrechat quatre*, *entrechat six* twice (4 bars); *sissonne ouverte en arabesque*, *assemblé* twice (4 bars); *entrechat quatre*, *entrechat six*, *entrechat quatre*, *sissonne ouverte en demi-arabesque* (4 bars); and two *temps de flèche derrière* traveling downstage left (4 bars).

57. About *Clorinda*, see Irina Boglačeva (edited by), *Peterburgskij balet. Tri veka: chronika. Tom III. 1851–1900*, cit., p. 357. See also Alexander Gorsky, *Two Essays on Stepanov Dance Notation*, cit., p. xv.

58. Legat wrote, “For men, he was unable to compose effective dances. We almost always had to modify or develop them to suit our style...” and “At Petipa’s request I set a good many such *pas de deux*, *trois*, *quatre* in his later ballets”. Quoted in Mindy Aloff (edited by), *The Legat Legacy*, University of Florida Press, Gainesville 2020, pp. 35 and 43, respectively.

59. See Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky’s Ballets*, cit., p. 266.

60. See *ivi*, pp. 252-253.

61. See Petr Čajkovskij, *Swan Lake*, orchestra score, P. Jurgenson, Moscow n.d. [1895], pp. 147-151, online: <https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/b/b1/IMSLP535915-PMLP09904-Tchaikovsky-Op20.FSJ.pdf> (Accessed 9/13/2022); piano reduction, arranged by Nikolaj Kaškin [first made for P. Jurgenson, 1877], *Complete Collected Works*, vol. LVI, Muzgiz, Moscow 1858, pp. 40-41; piano reduction, arranged by Eduard Langer, representing the 1895 version, arranged by Riccardo Drigo, P. Jurgenson, Moscow n.d. [1895], pp. 134-135, online: <https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/a/a4/IMSLP04089-Tchaikovsky-Op20pf1895.pdf> (Accessed 9/13/2022).

62. MS The 245 (268), seqq. 68-70, online: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:38092792?n=68> (Accessed 9/13/2022).

Section A with transition: B-flat major, cadence in D minor, bars 19-36 (18 bars)

Traveling backward on the diagonal, he continues with a 4-count *enchaînement* of *chassé*, *cabriole derrière*, *assemblé*, *sissonne ouverte en arabesque* three times to alternate sides (12 bars). Changing direction and traveling downstage right, he performs *temps de flèche derrière*, *assemblé de côté* and continues in place with *entrechat quatre* and *entrechat cinq* landing in *demi-arabesque* (6 bars).

Section B: C major, modulation to F major, bars 37-52 (16 bars)

He crosses the stage with a 4-count *enchaînement* of *tombé*, *coupé dessous*, *jeté de côté*, *chassé en tournant*, *entrechat cinq de volée* (4 bars). This is repeated two more times to alternate sides (8 bars) followed by three *jetés de côté*, separated by *balancés*, traveling backward upstage and a preparation in *tendu croisé devant* (4 bars).

Section A: B-flat major, bars 53-68 (16 bars)

At the return of the opening melody, the cavalier travels downstage right on the diagonal with a 4-count *enchaînement* consisting of *cabriole devant*, *cabriole derrière* twice (8 bars). He continues with *cabriole devant*, *assemblé*, *entrechat quatre* and finishes the variation with a preparatory *relevé degagé de côté*, *plié à la seconde*, and three *pirouettes* to *tendu derrière*<sup>63</sup>.

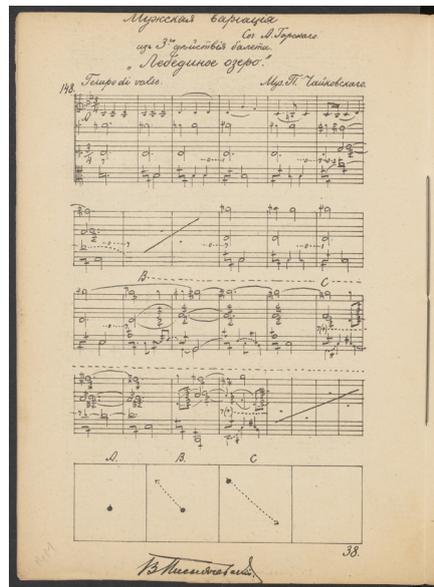


Figure 9: The first page of choreographic notation of the variation choreographed (and likely performed) by Aleksandr Gorskij during the Act Two *pas d'action* in the 1895 *Swan Lake*. MS Thr 245 (268), seq. 68, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

What Gerdt may have danced in the rest of the *pas d'action* in 1895 is unclear. The manuscript choreographic notation of the *entrée*, *adagio*, and *coda* documents later performances of Vera Trefilova and Nikolaj Legat<sup>64</sup>. The *entrée* includes one diagonal sequence of *temps de flèche derrière*

63. The manuscript choreographic notation calls for seven *pirouettes*. See Ms Thr 186 (11), seq. 154, online: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:4890062?n=154> (Accessed 9/13/2022).

64. MS Thr 186 (11), seq. 147-151, 158-159, online: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:4890062?n=147>

for Siegfried; otherwise, no steps are recorded for the male partner. To my knowledge, how long the additional cavalier remained part of the *pas d'action* has not been determined<sup>65</sup>.

With *Swan Lake*, a younger male dancer, Aleksandr Gorskij, fulfilled a dancing duty in the *pas d'action* that would otherwise have fallen to Gerdt as part of the role of Prince Siegfried. Moreover, Gorskij appears to have performed his own choreography. Although Petipa may have considered casting Nikolaj Legat in *Swan Lake's* lead male role, he once again chose Gerdt, whose strengths as a partner and mime and overall marvelous stage presence were clearly deemed sufficient despite his paucity of dancing.

### Gerdt's roles following "Swan Lake"

The practice of replacing Gerdt in danced numbers continued after the 1895 *Swan Lake*. In the following year, Gerdt was again cast as the romantic male lead in a new ballet, this time Ivanov's *The Mikado's Daughter*. Gerdt performed the role of Ioritomo, opposite Matil'da Kšesinskaja's Gotaru-Hime, but the young Georgij Kjakšt, who is listed as a nameless cavalier among the cast of the Act One *pas d'action* and again in the adagio and the variation (*Danse de Formosa*) of the Act Two multi-movement *Bakemono azume (Les fantômes d'Orient)*, likely provided the male solo dancing in Gerdt's stead<sup>66</sup>. In Petipa's revival of *Le Corsaire* in 1899, Gerdt made his debut in the role of Conrad (having previously danced nameless cavalier roles opposite Ivanov's Conrad in the 1870s and 1880s), but again it was Kjakšt who partnered and danced with Pierina Legnani as Medora in the *Grand pas des éventails* during the ballet's second scene<sup>67</sup>.

The next year, Petipa revived *La Bayadère*, with Gerdt as Solor (reprising a role he had first danced in 1884), Kšesinskaja as Nikia, and Ol'ga Preobraženskaja as Hamsatti. In the final scene, Nikolaj Legat appeared as a nameless cavalier in the *pas d'action*, dancing with both Kšesinskaja and Preobraženskaja. Perhaps surprisingly to us, Legat was on stage with Gerdt (who performed his own share of partnering with both women) in a sort of role sharing, which allowed each ballerina to simultaneously be supported by her own cavalier<sup>68</sup>. That the audience tolerated this forced suspension of dramatic continuity seems attributable to Gerdt's ongoing popularity with the

---

(Accessed 9/13/2022).

65. A printed program for a 19 April 1917 performance of *Swan Lake* featuring Tamara Karsavina and Samuil Andrianov does not include an additional cavalier in the Act Two *pas d'action*. See MS Thr 245 (247).

66. See Roland John Wiley, *The Life of Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, cit., pp. 271-272.

67. Printed program for performance on 13 January 1999 courtesy of St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music.

68. MS Thr 245 (105), pp. 124-141.

ballet-goers of St. Petersburg and confirms the strength of his seniority within the ranks of the company.

Records of Gerdt's partnering activities into the early years of the twentieth century raise a final matter: Gerdt has long been thought to have forgone strenuous partnering duties along with solo dancing. This assumption is primarily based on the participation of the secondary character Benno in the *pas de deux à trois* of the first lakeside scene in the 1895 *Swan Lake*, wherein Benno shared the partnering of Odette with Siegfried<sup>69</sup>. However, the choreographic notation of *La Bayadère*, which is based on Petipa's revival of December 1900, shows Gerdt to be a fully capable partner. In the ballet's celebrated Kingdom of the Shades scene, Gerdt partnered Kšesinskaja in overhead lifts, side lifts (during which Gerdt held Kšesinskaja against his hip with one arm while walking backward), and supported *pirouettes*<sup>70</sup>.

Nevertheless, by the late 1890s, Gerdt was increasingly taking on new leading roles consisting mostly of mime and acting, with minimal partnering or dancing required. In addition to the role of Conrad in *Le Corsaire*, these included the titular role in Petipa's 1896 *Bluebeard* and Abderrakhman in his 1898 *Raymonda*, roles Gerdt created, and Hans (as the character Hilarion was called in St. Petersburg) in the 1899 revival of *Giselle*. In 1904, he transitioned from the role of Désiré to that of King Florestan XIV in *Sleeping Beauty*. In 1908, at age sixty-three, Gerdt was still performing as Conrad, this time for Tamara Karsavina's debut as Medora. The ballerina remembered her milestone success and stalwart partner fondly: "Gerdt, my darling Conrad, in the passionate embrace of the concluding scene, in a ventriloquist whisper, conveyed: 'Well done, god-daughter'"<sup>71</sup>.

After fifty-six years on the Imperial stage, Pavel Gerdt retired in 1916 at the age of seventy-two and died the following year. His long career included the creation of many leading roles whose dance content began to be reduced around 1890 and distributed among a disparate group of dancers, first to female soloists and senior girl students of the Theater School and then to a group of young men who would define a new era of male dancing in ballet.

The result of this creative and practical (albeit patchwork) approach to compensating for Gerdt's advancing age and physical limitations was a bifurcated collection of *premier danseur* roles in some of the most enduring works of the era, among them *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Swan Lake*. We can add *La Bayadère* and *Le Corsaire* to this list, noting that the minimal dancing performed by Solor in the former work can be traced back to an aging Lev Ivanov in 1877 and that the lack of danced numbers for Conrad in *Corsaire* was due originally to the powerful miming abilities of the

69. See Roland John Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov*, cit., p. 39.

70. See MS Thr 245 (105), pp. 82-114.

71. Tamara Karsavina, *Theatre Street*, cit., p. 216.

Italian dancer Domenico Segarelli, who created the role in Paris in 1856.

Despite his towering presence in the St. Petersburg Imperial Ballet and his popularity with audiences and critics, documentation of one major component of Gerdt's artistry eludes us: his dancing. He left detailed drawings describing partnered adagios in several now-canonical ballets (including *Giselle*, *Paquita*, and *Sleeping Beauty*)<sup>72</sup>, and he figures prominently in extant choreographic notations made in the Stepanov method. But that system was developed only after Gerdt began to pass his dancing duties on to others, so while his documented roles are many, they feature mime and partnering but virtually no actual dancing.

The notation of a *pas de deux* from the St. Petersburg production of Jules Perrot's ballet *Faust* that bears Gerdt's name offers a rare and tantalizing example of dances he may have performed during his younger years<sup>73</sup>. The fleet footwork of these dances suggests a young, nimble, and enormously talented Gerdt on the cusp of what would be an extraordinary career.

---

72. Numerous examples are preserved in the A. A. Bachrušin State Central Theatre Museum (Moscow), fond 336 (Pavel Gerdt archive).

73. See MS Thr 245 (246).