

FACT SHEET

Ballet Music: Suite from *Coppélia*

Delibes (1836-1891)

Composed: 1870

Genre: Comic Ballet

Length: 24 mins

First Performed: 25 May 1870, Théâtre Impérial de l'Opéra, Paris

History:

Coppélia is a sentimental comic ballet with original choreography by Arthur Saint-Léon set to a libretto by Saint-Léon and Charles Nuitter. The thirty-year-old Delibes was assigned to collaborate on *Coppélia* with Nuitter and Saint-Léon with whom he had already worked creating *La Source* (1860), his first ballet composition. *Coppélia* was a breakaway from the sad, Romantic ballets of the day and was an immediate success with its humor, vigorous national dances and brightness. It was created at a time when Paris was slipping from its position as the dance capital of the world, and the popularity of ballet was declining.

Coppélia was based upon a chilling story by E.T.A. Hoffmann entitled "Der Sandmann" ("The Sandman"), published in 1815. The story of *Coppélia* revolves around the mysterious inventor, Doctor Coppélius who has created a life-size dancing doll. It is so life-like that Franz, a young man from the village, is infatuated with it. He sets aside his true heart's desire, Swanilda, who takes her revenge in Act II by dressing up as the doll and pretending to come to life.

The ballet premiered May 25, 1870 at the Théâtre Impérial de l'Opéra, with Giuseppina Bozzachi in the principal role of Swanilda. Its first flush of success was interrupted by the Franco-Prussian War and the siege of Paris, but eventually it became the most-performed ballet at the Opera Garnier, with over 500 performances given.

Performers:

Vladimir Jurowski *conductor*
Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment

Structure:

Act 1: Prelude
Mazurka.
Valse
Czardas Danse Hongroise
Act 2: Scene
Musique des Automates
Act 3: Galop Final

The Music:

Not only is *Coppélia* notable as Delibes' first complete ballet score written on his own, but it's also noted as a work that moved ballet music forward in a major step. Delibes provided a generous amount of expressive character in his music - a new idea at the time - to produce music that is a descriptive tone poem. Delibes blended classical composition with folkloric, dance-music styles (*Coppélia* is the first ballet to contain a czardas, a complicated Hungarian folk dance). The trend of the time toward nationalism in music probably influenced the composer's decision to include a number of national dances in the ballet score. Delibes had traveled to Hungary with Jules Massenet to transcribe folk music, and the experience contributed to the authenticity of his "ethnic" compositions. Choreographer Saint-Léon was also a folklore enthusiast; he sent ideas about the music for *Coppélia* to Delibes, along with popular songs he heard in his travels. Delibes' score was musically advanced: the melodies were more lyrical than those used in prior ballet compositions, and Delibes built on the use of leitmotif to identify character and atmosphere, a practice begun by Adam (with whom Delibes studied and who is one of the composers who appears in our programme this evening) in *Giselle*. Swanilda has a bright and graceful waltz, Dr. Coppélius a dry counterpoint, and a canonic device is applied to the music for his doll Coppélia. Franz has two themes, the first four notes of each sharing the same melodic shape. There was no solo male variation written for Franz, as the role was originally portrayed by a woman.

The extracts from *Coppélia* that are being performed this evening have been selected by the conductor Vladimir Jurowski.