



LA SYLPHIDE

by Pierre Lacotte, based on the work of Filippo Taglioni
by the **Guangzhou Ballet**

18, 19 and 20 February, 2010
at Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier, Place des Arts

PRESS KIT

THE GUANGZHOU BALLET

Founded in 1994, Guangzhou Ballet is led by Artistic Director Zhang Dandan, a former principal dancer with Central Ballet of China who has risen to national fame. The company boasts the most talented graduates of Beijing Dance Academy, including Fu Shu, Sun Xin, Huang Jing, Wang Zhiwei, Huang Yi and Huang Junshuang. The principal dancers, from all over China, have shone in numerous national and international competitions.

Over the years, Guangzhou Ballet has developed a rich and varied repertoire. Since its beginnings, the troupe has introduced Chinese audiences to a number of ballets from the Western classical and contemporary repertoire, including *Coppélia*, *Anna Karenina*, *Swan Lake*, *La Traviata*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *La Bayadère (The Temple Dancer)*, *Don Quixote*, *Cinderella*, *Giselle* and *The Nutcracker*, as well as George Balanchine's *Allegro Brillante* and *Theme and Variations*. It has also created original ballets based on themes drawn from Chinese culture, and has participated in major collaborations with National Opera of China and China National Symphony Orchestra with works such as *The Celestial Phoenix*, *Mei Lanfang*, *Turandot*, *Little Blue Flower*, *Yellow River* and *Butterfly Lovers*, to name just a few.

Guangzhou Ballet has toured Russia, Spain, France, the United States, Germany, Britain, Australia and Canada, and has garnered awards in the Paris, Helsinki and Moscow international dance competitions. In tandem with Xinghai Conservatory of Music, Guangzhou University and Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, the company has founded a school, thus actively participating in the training of young dancers who want to pursue a ballet career. The youngest of China's five professional ballet troupes, Guangzhou Ballet is evolving rapidly, making an important contribution to its home city's cultural scene and helping to promote Chinese ballet worldwide.

ZHANG DANDAN
BALLET MISTRESS AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Zhang Dandan began her professional dance training at the age of 13. At 19 years old, she entered Peking Dance Academy to study ballet. Following that, she entered China's Central Ballet Ensemble, and in the 10 years that followed, she performed the principal roles in many works from the company's repertoire, including *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *Don Quixote*, *La Fille mal gardée*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Lin Dayiu*, *Mermaid of the Sea*, *Red Detachment of Women* and *Royal Concubine Yang*. During that time, she won the Performance award and Prize for outstanding artists issued by the Chinese Ministry of Culture, the Prize for outstanding contributions issued by the State Council, and a special government subsidy.

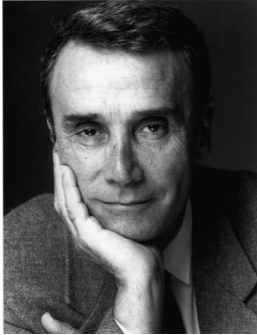
In 1994, at the peak of her performing career, Zhang left the stage of the Central Ballet and came back to Guangzhou, her hometown, at the invitation of the Party Committee and the city government to establish Guangzhou Ballet. The following year, the troupe won all the ballet awards at the National Dance Competition, and, among others, was recognized at the Paris International Ballet Competition and the International Dance Competition in Vienna.

In addition to holding the role of Artistic Director for the company, she has served as head administrator, ballet mistress and mentor. But her performing career has never subsided. Among others, her performances of *Anna Karenina* and *La Traviata*, in which she danced the principal roles, won her numerous awards.

In 2002, Zhang Dandan took the position of the Headmistress of Guangzhou Art School. She was elected Vice-Chair of the Guangdong Provincial Association of Dancers, Chair of the Guangzhou Association of Dancers, Director of the Guangdong Council for the Promotion of International Exchange, Director of the Research Center of World Culture and Art and Director of the American Association of Overseas Artists. She was awarded the titles of Middle-Aged and Young Artist of Guangdong Province and Excellent Expert of Guangzhou, and her name was entered into the *World Who's Who* and *Famous Females in 21st Century*.

Zhang Dandan was named one of the "Greatest Intellectuals in the 21st Century" by the *British Dictionary of International Biography*.

**PIERRE LACOTTE
CHOREOGRAPHER**



Pierre Lacotte, born in 1932, trained in dance at École de danse de l'Opéra de Paris. He joined the corps de ballet in 1946 and was promoted to principal dancer in 1951. One of his first choreographies, *The Night is a Sorceress*, was lauded by Belgian television in 1954, which led him to leave the Opéra to devote himself to choreography. In 1955, he founded his own company, Ballets de la Tour Eiffel, whose brief existence came to an end in 1959. From 1959 to 1963, Pierre Lacotte pursued his career as an independent dancer. He was invited to dance at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City with Melissa Hayden, in London with Violette Verdy, and in the Benelux, Germany and Switzerland.

Numerous festivals also commissioned his works: *Such Sweet Thunder* in Berlin (1959), the choreography of *Hippolyte et Aricie* for the Festival du Marais (1960), and *Le Combat de Tancrède* at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence (1961). From 1963 to 1970, he directed Les Ballets des Jeunesses musicales de France, where in seven years he created *Bifurcations*, *Hamlet*, *Penthésilée* and *La Voix*, the latter in collaboration with Édith Piaf, among others. During that same time, he began to work with dancers Michaël Denard, as well as Ghislaine Thesmar, whom he married in 1968. After teaching at Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse de Paris and at Opéra de Paris, in 1985 Mr. Lacotte was appointed Co-director (with Ghislaine Thesmar) of the new Ballets de Monte-Carlo, which he left in 1988 to work with Verona Opera Ballet. He then served as Director of Ballet national de Nancy et de Lorraine from 1991 to 1999.

While writing a book on Romantic ballet in 1968, he found documents on Filippo Taglioni's *La Sylphide*, which he restaged in 1971 for French television, featuring Ghislaine Thesmar in the title role and Michaël Denard. The restaging project gave his career a new direction. Since then, he has devoted himself to restoring the forgotten repertoire of the 19th century using period documents and oral traditions. He has restaged an impressive list of Romantic and academic ballets all over the world, among them *Coppélia* and the pas de six from *La Vivandière* (Arthur Saint-Léon); the pas de deux from *Le Papillon* (the only choreography by Marie Taglioni); *Giselle* by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot; *Marco Spada* from Joseph Mazilier; the Taglioni ballets *The Daughter of the Danube*, *Leda*, *the Swiss Milkmaid* (or, *Nathalie ou la laitière suisse*), *La Gitana*, *L'Ombre*, *Le Lac des fées*; the Marius Petipa works *Swan Lake*, *The Pharaoh's Daughter* and *The Nutcracker*, and lastly *Paquita* (by Mazilier) in three acts at Opéra de Paris. He has also restaged the Mikhaïl Fokine works *Les Danses polovtsiennes du Prince Igor*, *The Firebird* and *Le Spectre de la Rose*. A Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres in France, Mr. Lacotte is also the author, with Jean-Pierre Pastori, of a book on ballet titled *Tradition* (Éditions Favre, 1987).

PREAMBULE

1832. In his age of romanticism the public desired fantasy and a ballet *La Sylphide* was to embody the aspirations of the times (attraction for the supernatural, idealisation of love, desire for the infinite), making lyricism and poetry a part of dance.

Not only the subject (a young man in love with a winged woman) and scenery and costumes (the action takes place in Scotland) echo the tastes of the day, but also the choreography and dancers take the audience further than they had been until then: the dancers seem to fly!

Marie Taglioni, in front of an audience which couldn't believe its eyes, crossed the stage on the tips of her toes keeping her balance and leaping away so lightly she seemed to be weightless.

It is her father, Filippo Taglioni, who was responsible for the choreography: rapid, pirouetting dance made aerial by the leaps transforming the ballerina into a shadow which the hero, James, follows hopelessly, never able to hold.

The impression of immateriality was reinforced by the costumes which Eugène Lami created for the ballerinas in white gossamer chiffon (the "tutus"), and by the machinery which made use of trap doors in the floor allowing the sylphids to move in space flitting from tree to tree. The pale glow of the gas lighting recently installed at the Académie Royale de Musique outlined the ghostly silhouettes.

From the very first performance on March 12, 1832 at the Opéra, then situated in the rue Le Peletier, the public fell in love with the work and the lead dancer.

Women dressed in white, wearing light silks known as sylphids. A flower was given the same name as well as a fashion journal, turbans and a new model of barouche. Taglioni was everywhere.

The public was to see all sorts of dreamlike creatures: fairies, sprites, elves, not to forget the wilis in *Giselle* (1841).

The Dane August Bournonville, who saw and loved the ballet on its creation, was inspired on his return to Copenhagen to create his own version of *La Sylphide* (1836) to a new score commissioned from his compatriot Herman Lovenskjold, having failed to obtain Jean-Madeleine Schneitzhœffer's original.

Performed in London, Milan, Vienna, St. Petersburg and New York, Taglioni's ballet was abandoned after the death of Emma Livry, Marie Taglioni's pupil, and disappeared

from the repertory of the Opera in 1863. It is Bournonville's version, preciously conserved since its creation at the Royal Theatre of Copenhagen, which survived. It was only in 1972 that Taglioni's original ballet "reconstructed" by Pierre Lacotte was seen again.

LES GRANDS

BALLETS CANADIENS DE MONTRÉAL

GRADIMIR PANKOV DIRECTEUR ARTISTIQUE
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

LA SYLPHIDE

(Length: 2 hours with intermission)

Choreographer: **Pierre Lacotte**, after **Filippo Taglioni**
Set Designer: **Pierre Lacotte**, after **Pierre Ciceri**
Costume Designer: **Pierre Lacotte**, after **Eugène Lami**
Music: **Jean-Madeleine Schneitzhœffer**

Ballet in 2 acts

Work created for the Opéra de Paris in 1972.

**World premiere by the Guangzhou Ballet at Huang Hua Gang Theatre, in
Guangzhou (China), on April 28, 2007.**

**North American premiere at Théâtre Maisonneuve of Place des Arts, in Montréal,
on February 18, 2010.**

ARGUMENT

Act I



In a Scottish cottage, James, dozing in an armchair near the fireplace, awaits the dawning of the day of his wedding to Effie. Standing by him is a winged spirit, a sylphlike creature, who gazes at him lovingly and wakes him with a kiss. James tries to grasp the vision, but the sylph flies away.

Effie, her mother and the neighbours arrive to prepare for the wedding, along with Gurn, who is hopelessly in love with Effie.

An old woman, a witch perhaps, comes to tell their fortunes. James rejects her, but Effie holds out her hand. The young girl learns to her sorrow that her fiancé does not really love her, too absorbed as he is with his dream of the inaccessible beauty, and that eventually she will marry her suitor Gurn. James chases the witch away in a fury.

The witch swears vengeance.

Alone again, James sees the sylph appear: she charms him and the young man avows his love. Gurn, who has witnessed the scene from a hiding-place, hurries off to warn Effie of James' betrayal. But the sylph remains invisible to the wedding guests; only James can see her. In the middle of the celebrations, he is torn between Effie, present in the flesh, and the impalpable spirit of the sylph. The sylph manages to tear from James' hand the ring destined for his fiancé, and flees towards the forest.

James follows her, leaving Effie in tears.

Act II



The witch who visited the cottage is now with her sisters, dancing in the moonlight in the forest. The old woman busies herself at a cauldron from which she draws a diaphanous scarf.

In the clearing strange creatures fly from tree to tree. James appears, like a madman, looking for his sylph. The witch deceitfully offers him the scarf: it is a magic veil which will allow him to take hold of that elusive being. James has found the object of his desires amongst the fluttering creatures.

The sylph shows the young man her sylvan world in which she cares for the nests of birds and invites him to join in the dances of her winged friends.

Enticing her near to him, he succeeds in wrapping the scarf around her shoulders so that she will no longer be able to escape from him. But on contact with the veil, the Sylph's wings weaken and fall off, as if the life were slowly draining from her supernatural body. She collapses in the arms of the young man. James realizes, too late (this is the witch's revenge), that he has just killed the one he loved.

While Effie and Gurn, accompanied by the wedding guests, are vainly searching high and low for the unfaithful fiancé, a desperate James watches the sylphs gather up their lifeless companion and fly away with her.

PRINCIPAL DANCERS

Fu Shu

Shu Fu was awarded the Gold Medal in the Junior Division at China's National Ballet Competition in 1994, The Silver Medal in the Senior Division at the 9th French International Ballet Competition in 2000, as well as the Silver Medal in the Senior Division at the 21st Varna International Ballet Competition in 2004.

She performs principal roles in Swan Lake, La Sylphide, Don Quixote, La Bayadere, The Nutcracker, Cinderella, Mei Lanfang, Giselle, Dream of Red Chamber, Romeo and Juliet, The Yellow River, The Butterfly Lovers and Human Sentiment, and Balanchine's production of Theme and Variation and Serenade. She has toured to the USA, Germany, Australia, Canada, England and France, as well as the regions of Hong Kong and Macao.

Jing Huang

Jing Huang was awarded the Excellent Performance Prize in the Women's Senior Division at the Helsinki International Ballet Competition in 2005, and the Bronze Medal in the Women's Senior Division at the Seoul International Ballet Competition in 2007.

She regularly performs soloist roles in Swan Lake, La Sylphide, Don Quixote, La Bayadere, Mei Lanfang, Giselle, Dream of Red Chamber, Romeo and Juliet, The Yellow River and Human Sentiment, and Balanchine's production of Theme and Variation and Serenade. She has toured to the USA, Germany, Australia, Canada, England and France.

Xin Sun

Xin Sun was awarded the Excellent Performance Prize in the Women's Senior Division at the Moscow International Ballet Competition in 2005, and won the Silver medal in the Senior Division at the 8th Seoul International Ballet Competition in 2007.

She performs principal roles in Swan Lake, La Sylphide, Don Quixote, La Bayadere, Cinderella, Mei Lanfang, Giselle, Dream of Red Chamber, Romeo and Juliet, The Yellow River and Human Sentiment, and Balanchine's production of Theme and Variation and Serenade. She has toured to the USA, Germany, Australia, Canada, England and France, as well as the regions of Hong Kong and Macao.

Junshuang Huang

Junshuang Huang was awarded the Special Prize at the Varna International Competition in 2008, and the Gold Medal at the Helsinki International Ballet Competition in 2009.

He performs lead roles in Swan Lake, La Sylphide, La Bayadere, Mei Lanfang ,Giselle, Dream of Red Chamber, Romeo and Juliet, The Yellow River and Human Sentiment, and Balanchine's production of Serenade. He has toured to the USA, Japan, Canada, England and France .

Yi Huang

Yi Huang most recently won the Silver Medal at the Varna International Ballet Competition in 2008. He was also won the Gold Medal at China's 2006 National Ballet Competition ,and the Bronze Medal in the Seoul International Ballet Competition in 2007.

He performs principal roles in Swan Lake, La Sylphide, La Bayadere, Mei Lanfang ,Giselle, Dream of Red Chamber, Romeo and Juliet, The Yellow River and Human Sentiment, and Balanchine's production of Serenade. He has toured to the USA, Germany, Australia, Canada, England and France.

Zhiwei Wang

Zhiwei Wang was awarded the Silver Medal in the Senior Division at the 21st Varna International Ballet Competition in 2004. and the Silver Medal in the Senior Division at Moscow International Ballet Competition in 2005.

He performs principal roles in Swan Lake, La Sylphide, Don Quixote, La Bayadere, Cinderella, Mei Lanfang ,Giselle, Dream of Red Chamber, Romeo and Juliet, The Yellow River, The Butterfly Lovers and Human Sentiment, and Balanchine's production of Theme and Variation and Serenade.He has toured to the USA, Germany, Australia, Canada, England and France , as well as the regions of Hong Kong and Macao.