

### **Analysis of Dance Performances from the United States to Italy**

Ballet, although a global phenomenal art form, differs based upon style, technique, director, company, and country. Analyzing the cultural and artistry of different ballets expose similarities and differences. Noticing and understanding these differences is an integral part in appreciating the arts, especially dance, further.

After growing up and training in America for classical ballet, I have experienced many different American ballet companies and styles. As I am comfortable and confident discussing the similarities and differences of ballet in America, I wanted to expand my ballet knowledge into Europe. Recently, I used the Miller Arts Mini Grant funds to experience a famous ballet performance in Rome, Italy and again in New York City, USA. The additional money went towards transportation to and from the destinations (i.e. parking, train, Ubers, and taxis). I am overjoyed that the Miller Arts Scholars Program was able to fund my journey to experience two ballets in order to analyze similarities and differences of the full experience.

#### ***Swan Lake* - The Orchestra and Corps de Ballet of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma's performance:**

Finally, the evening of January 3, 2019 in Italy had arrived and I was able to experience the magic of the Corps de Ballet of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma's performance of *Swan Lake*. I called a cab and in broken Italian told the driver my destination of the theatre. Since the Teatro dell'Opera is such an impeccable and well known theatre, the cab driver knew exactly where to take me.

Arriving at the Teatro dell'Opera was an experience in its own; a long red carpet ran from the edge of the side walk to the welcoming front doors. As I walked in, the ballet attendees were dressed fancifully for the upcoming ballet. The red carpet inside the theatre matched the one from the outdoors and led me down to the entrance of the seating. Unlike in America, the Italian ushers did not hand out any programs to explain the ballet company, performance, plot, or dancers. Luckily due to my prior knowledge and having physically performed many ballet performances, I knew the plot line of *Swan Lake*, and had an idea of what I was about to see.

In addition to the lack of programs, I found it peculiar that the seating at this theatre was not done by individual seats, but instead by six possible sections in which each attendee was randomly assigned a particular seat. Unknowingly, I had extreme luck and had a front row seat, A6. From this seat, I had perfect view of the stage and the maestro that led the orchestra.

The maestro took a step upon his platform, the audience erupted in applause, and the overture began. By the end of the overture, the ornate red audience rose and uncovered the stage. Act I's set was a ballroom completely decorated in blue and sparkles. Members of the court burst on to the stage dancing alone and with one another. The eight sets of couples successfully transferred the audience members back in time to Prince Sefried's castle.

Golden chandeliers hung from the ceiling of the stage and magnificent robin-egg blue colored curtains circled the stage. The shiny swirls throughout the curtains and backdrop carried my eyes across the whole stage taking in every tiny detail. Although I absolutely adored these decorations and background of the ballroom, the other performances of *Swan Lake* that I have seen and the *Swan Lake* that I performed in had a much different opening scene. Instead of being

in the castle's ballroom, many other opening acts of *Swan Lake* take place outside the castle in a garden or courtyard. This is not to say that one is right and one is wrong, however, it was very interesting to note this artistic difference from American *Swan Lakes* and this Italian *Swan Lake*.

Of course, the background decorations are a huge part of making a ballet beautiful, but the dancers are much more important. I was astonished by the craftiness and labor that would have been required to sew such elegant costumes. Since I was so close to the stage, I was able to see each detail much closer than other audience members could. The ladies' dresses were a combination of white and blue satin fabric embedded with jewels and sparkles throughout that radiated across the whole theatre. Exactly matching these luxurious long dresses, the male dancers' jackets were made out of the same blue satin fabric and were bejeweled. To top it off, the prince and queen entered with a spotlight calling upon not only their importance and status, but also their even more elegant costuming.

In comparison to other *Swan Lake* performances, the choreography was much different. Some ballets have couples dancing together for this act like this Italian ballet did, however the *Swan Lake* I performed in, only had females dancing in this act along with a court jester (there was no Court Jester). However, despite the different choreography, the style and technique of the classical ballet performed looked very similar to my own training (a mix of the Cecchetti style and the Royal style).

The transition from Act I to Act II was similar to what I expected; Prince Segfried retreated to the lake nearby the castle with his cross bow in hopes to go hunting. As he was hunting, he stumbled upon a radiant white swan, Odette, whom he fell in love with. Act II, my favorite act of *Swan Lake*, consisted of 32 swans (corps, little, and big) and Odette, the white swan. The choreography during this scene is always pretty similar, because it follows the original historical Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov choreography, regardless of the company performing. My favorite part of this Act was when Odette entered the stage to perform her solo, which I performed 5 years ago. As I was watching the phenomenal ballerina, Alessandra Amato, I was transported back to when I performed it and was following along with the choreography in my head. Her emotion, physicality, and flawless nature was mesmerizing to watch.

Although Act II was comparable to what I have seen and performed, Act III was a bit different. There were still the same roles, however the choreography and origin was not. During Act III, four different groups come to perform for the Queen and Prince as the Prince is on the search for a princess. Generally, these groups represent different countries, however in this Italian version there were no major tell-tales that denoted what country each would have come from. Their costumes and choreography were unique but not enough to portray a particular country. For example, in other performances there is an obvious Spanish dance, Hungarian dance, Mazurka dance, and a Neapolitan dance, however here I was unable to decipher them.

The music darkened and became more powerful as the evil Odile, black swan, and her companion Rothebart, sprinted into the ballroom. Odile tricked Prince Segfried into thinking she was the lovely white swan Odette and caused chaos for the castle. Alessandra Amato that performed as Odette was doubling as Odile. This is an absolute triumphant feat for any ballerina to ever perform both roles in one showing. The athleticism and emotion needed for one of these roles, let alone both roles, is absurd and not many people have the ability to succeed. However, this Italian ballerina, who in my opinion is one of the greatest ballerinas I have ever seen live, executed both roles flawlessly with such conviction that deserves high praise.

Act IV brought the audience back to the lake where Prince Segfried frantically retreated in hopes to find the correct swan, Odette, and win her back. This act was packed with emotion and clean ballet technique – every arm and head was in the same line and looked identical. Like Act II, Act IV consisted of similar choreography and story line until the very end. At this point,

Prince Segfried and Evil Rothbart were fighting over Odette and normally love triumphs all, Segfried wins, and Rothbart dies. However, in this version there was a massive plot twist that I have never experienced before. The director choreographed Odette to slowly and dramatically dance over to the corner of the stage atop a rock, of which the other swans, Segfried, Rothbart, and the audience had a perfect view. Slowly the life was draining from her movements and facial expressions. I was confused at first because I was expecting her to overcome the evil and prevail, however, she continued to deplete and slow down. Then, as she was nearly lifeless, her delicate body rolled off the rock to her death, leaving evil Rothbart and Odile to win.

Attending this Italian ballet performance was culturally immersive. I was able to see, experience, and understand the artistic culture in a different country more fully. Prior to attending the performance, I had no idea as to what may be alike or different, other than knowing I would most likely fall upon some. The major differences I found were in how Italian theatre works and runs, the costuming and staging, and the ballet's ending. Although at times the choreography was different, there were enough similarities that I wouldn't consider choreography to be a major difference between American and Italian ballet. I thoroughly enjoyed being able to attend *Swan Lake* in Rome, Italy and analyze the differences through my American ballet background.

### ***The Sleeping Beauty* - New York City Ballet's at the Lincoln Center for Performing Arts Performance:**

New York City, a city of magic and art, is home to George Balanchine's New York City Ballet company. NYCB, having rehearsed for multiple weeks, performed the enchanting *Sleeping Beauty* at Lincoln Center for Performing Arts on February 16, 2019, originally choreographed by Marius Petipa and later Peter Martins. Within Lincoln Center, NYCB performs at the massive David Koch Theatre that seats a large number of people. As I entered into the theatre there were sets of stairs leading me up to my seat on the second tier where an usher handed me a thick program and showed me to my seat.

My ticket was prime seating as it was the first row of the second tier. The lights dimmed and applause broke out as the maestro introduced himself. Following his first bow, the long overture began and set the scene for Act I, Princess Aurora's christening. Projections of the castle, its gate, and courtyard flashed on the closed curtain to transport the audience into Aurora's world. The curtain pulled up releasing a scene of lavish and colorful costumes, props, and sets. The king and queen of the castle were adorned in so many different bright colors and sparkles that I had trouble focusing on anything other than the what they were wearing. The other members of the court had similar costumes, however, they were not nearly as elegant as the king's and queen's ensembles. Following the royal entrance, came the six fairies (Fairy of Tenderness, Vivacity, Generosity, Eloquence, and Courage) in sparkling different colored tutus. Each fairy had a solo, which had identifiable features of Balanchine's ballet style, and ended by blessing the baby Princess Aurora.

All the happiness and celebration was followed by dark music and flashing lights to introduce the evil and jealous fairy, Carabosse. She made her entrance on an elaborate and withered carriage carried by her four creepy creature minions. This carriage brought more attention to Carabosse and was by far the best option for an unforgettable entrance. Carabosse threatened the royalty and their new daughter Aurora, only to be suppressed by the Lilac Fairy. The choreography of this act was similar to what I have seen in the past, however it was obviously very much influenced by George Balanchine's style.

Act II was the celebration of Aurora's 16<sup>th</sup> birthday when she accidentally pricks herself with evil Carabosse's poisoned spindle and falls asleep for 100 years only to be awakened by true love's kiss. The ballerina that performed the role of Aurora, Lauren Lovette, was an energetic, technical, and tiny little dancer. Although she was small all of her movements were executed powerfully including one of the most difficult sequences of all classical ballet's, Aurora's Rose Adagio. During this adagio, Aurora must stay on the tip of her toe while each prince takes his turn rotating her for a full 360 degrees. This not only takes a lot of strength, but also requires the ballerina to be focused and calm. Having performed this role in high school, I can appreciate Lauren Lovette's execution and hard work more than the majority of the audience.

Again, the choreography during this act did not venture away from the general set choreography besides the Balanchine flares of wider arms, sharper jumps, and smaller foot work. A couple astonishing features of this act that were unlike anything I had seen before were the usage of stage elements to tell the story. For example, the Lilac Fairy arrived on stage by a rising platform through a fountain to make it look as though she came through the fountain's water. In addition to the fountain element, when the whole castle fell asleep for 100 years, multiple sets of vines entered the stage to create a sensation that the castle was falling asleep and becoming overgrown.

Act III brought the audience into the vision scene where the Lilac Fairy found a wandering prince and helps him see and find Princess Aurora to wake her up. The vision pas de deux between the prince and Aurora was beautiful, smooth, and mesmerizing. These two dancers worked perfectly together and really made the audience believe the story through their movements. The corps dancing in the back ground didn't take any attention away from Aurora, however complimented her movements very well. Additionally, similar to the other acts, the choreography was familiar however did have the Balanchine flare as expected. Besides the backdrop, there were no additional props or sets that made this act special.

The 4<sup>th</sup> and final act, the Wedding, was full of more luxurious costumes and decorations. Chandeliers hung from the ceiling and golden details adorned the stage. The wedding guests included Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf, Blue Birds, Jewels, Jesters, and Puss and Boots. They all entered the stage in theatrical ways to tell their own stories while celebrating Aurora and her prince's wedding. Towards the end of the act, Aurora and her prince performed their final dance together which resembled their marriage. Following, the Queen and King took off their ornate crowns and placed them on the head of Aurora and the prince to signify their coronation. As the rest of the cast separated at the middle of the stage and quickly walked to their ending position, Aurora and the prince elegantly and slowly walked towards the center top of the stage to show off their royal power in an impressive final pose. I truly found NYCB's *Sleeping Beauty* was compelling and exciting not only due to the beautiful technique of the dancers, but also due to the costumes and extravagant stage details.

### **Comparison:**

Comparing both the Italian *Swan Lake* and the American *Sleeping Beauty*, I found there to be both similarities and differences. Looking only at the dancing technique, I found the Italian ballet dancers to be objectively cleaner, smoother, and overall better. Alessandra Amato, principal and Odette/Odile of the Italian production, was by far one of the best ballerinas I have ever seen live. Lauren Lovette, principal and Aurora of NYCB's production, was an excellent dancer, however she did have some slip ups that flawed her performance. Additionally, the

Italian corps dancers were always in sync and together while I found there to be a handful of moments that the NYCB dancers were a bit off. The style of ballet between the two were contrasting as well; Italians were definitely Cecchetti trained while the NYCB were trained primarily under George Balanchine. Due to my experience with ballet, I am able to identify different ballet styles just by watching.

Another major difference was the staging and setting. The Italian ballet had enough backdrops and sets to tell the story sufficiently. However, NYCB went over the top. They incorporated digital projections along with a multitude of sets/props that were unnecessary to tell the story. In my opinion, all of these extras took away from the actual dancing at times. Of course, they were all beautiful, however I would have rather there been less extra details so that I could have focused on the ballet more.

Although there were those differences between the two performances, the main similarity that I found between the two was the professionalism and overall experience. Both theatres and events were well planned out and orderly. Additionally, all of the dancers and orchestra members were composed and ready for a night to entertain. I left both performances excited and pleased with the performances. Anyone traveling to Rome or New York City should definitely take time to see a ballet performance for a chance to experience and immerse themselves in culture and art.

**Rome, Italy – January 3, 2019**  
**New York, NY – February 16, 2019**



**Expenditures:**

<i>Swan Lake</i> Ticket (Rome)	\$112~
(Converted from Euros to US Dollars)	
Taxis in Rome to Theatre	\$30~ (Converted from Euros to US Dollars)
Train Ticket Round-Trip to NYC	\$100
<i>The Sleeping Beauty</i> Ticket (NYC)	\$162
Parking at Train Station for 48 hours	\$72
<u>Ubers in NYC to Theatre</u>	<u>\$30~</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$506</b>

