

ZORBA

BALLET IN TWO ACTS

Music by:

Mikis Theodorakis

Narrative (based upon Nikos Kazandsakis' novel) and choreography by:

GÁBOR KEVEHÁZI

Sets: Miklós Borsa

Costume Design: Anna Burda, Kálmán Varga

Costumes: Creation VARGAS

Assistant to the choreographer: Blanka Fajth

Two men, apparently different personalities, meet and embark on a journey. They stop at a place, are given a warm welcome, become partners and together begin something big. Life goes on in its usual way: happiness coupled with tragedy, suffering, disappointment. What keeps the two men together is a common trait: they both want to do good. When their big plan falls through, they are able to stand up and start all over again.

The story sounds familiar. Millions around the world have read Kazandsakis' novel 'Zorba, the Greek', and millions more have seen Cacoyannis' film adaptation, starring the dream cast of Anthony Quinn, Irene Papas and Lila Kedrova.

Gabor Kevehazi retells the story in the language of ballet, explains and develops Zorba's philosophy of life in an entertaining way, with music and dancing. The most effective part of the piece is the closing scene, when Theodorakis' syrtaky starts playing. Everyone on stage steps along to this folkloric, temperamental score, alive and dead alike.

‘You cannot present the same things on stage as in a film or a book. I tried to show the important stages and turns of the story as if in a mosaic. Times when it was viable to build up a modern, dramatic ballet storyline using neoclassical techniques are out, it is more up to date to intersperse the ballet with effective, dramatic scenes, for which Ek Matz's works serve as a very good reference. I have tried to use all the knowledge and experience I had gathered as a dancer from the most diverse lot of styles.’

Synopsis

Prologue

The stage is populated with dancers, any of which could be the protagonist. The main characters of Zorba's story - as if predestined by fate - separate from the crowd.

Act I

Zorba takes notice of a wealthy-looking foreign gentleman, the Writer, who has arrived from England. He tries to get near him and make his acquaintance. His efforts prove successful and he offers the Writer his services: Zorba, knowing the ins and outs of local life, is ready to help the foreigner.

Zorba and the Writer arrive in a small village on Crete. Subdued passions characterize the life of the village community under the surface: men court the seductive Widow, who is hopelessly loved by a young man - the Boy. Zorba proves to be an excellent companion: he knows how things work in this part of the world and soon convinces the villagers that the rich foreigner has brought employment and the hope of prosperity. Bubulina, the Madame of the local red-light establishment arrives; she takes a liking for Zorba, and an intimate friendship develops between them.

Headed by Zorba, the men set out to work, unified in their efforts to accomplish the great Job. In order to make their dreams come true, however, they need finances. After work the Writer pays Zorba.

The Writer meets the Widow. Immediately they conceive a passion for each other. No relationship ensues; they do not touch each other, but express their thoughts and emotions in dance. In the meantime, the passion burning in every man in the village is revealed: they all want the Widow. The love-sick boy is mocked and made jealous. Zorba spends lavish sums from the money received from

the Writer on three delightful courtesans.

The Writer and the Widow now unite in love. When learning about it the Boy, who has been ridiculed by the villagers, is driven to suicide by love-sickness, ostracism and solitude.

In the meantime Bubulina yearns for Zorba. In her painful and emotional solo scene she envisions Zorba bringing her a bridal veil and asking her hand in marriage.

The Writer is ridden with torment from love and a guilty conscience. He knows their love cannot be concealed for too long, and sees that it could lead to tragedy. Zorba meets him in this state; he has spent the little money left on a piece of rope to accomplish the great job. The loyal companion readily consoles the Writer, and shows him how to "dance out" the pain from the soul. His euphoric sirtaki is joined by the people of the village.

Act II

The villagers assemble in the church for mass. The Widow and the Writer, openly despised by the rest, also turn up. After the service it strikes the Widow that her life is in danger; the villagers will not forgive her affair with the Writer, and she will pay for love with her life. She bids farewell to life in a melancholic solo, during which the village men surround her, and neither the Writer, nor Zorba can prevent a brutal murder. She is joined in her dance by professional mourners who flagrantly ostracise her.

In the meantime Bubulina is also living her very last hour. The villagers have been looking forward to her death. No sooner has she passed away than her neighbours pillage her home.

Life goes on after these mournful events. The priest consecrates the building the villagers, once again united, are constructing. At the end of the working dance everything collapses, quite literally: the building falls down. The Writer and Zorba are smitten by failure. They had sought to bring prosperity to the village, but their arrival has only brought death and complete disaster.

The tragedies have forced the Writer to learn from Zorba the skills of living, of keeping his head above water. Now he asks Zorba, his companion who is indebted to him for the loss of his entire fortune, to teach him the dance that kills pain and teaches how to start anew again and again. The two men dance the sirtaki together. The entire company accompanies them: all living creatures come on stage and join in, including those who had met their death during the story. The dance of the Living and the Dead: sirtaki is life itself.

The Hungarian National Ballet

Ballet art has a more than 200-year-old past in Hungary. As early as in the 18th century ballet performances had already taken place in the theatres of aristocratic castles. In the 19th century companies were formed, performing both on foreign and Hungarian stages, soon finding a constant background in the Budapest National Theatre.

The year 1884 brought a major development: the Hungarian Royal Opera House was opened and became the home and heart of the Hungarian ballet art. Today Hungary is known to have several distinguished ballet ensembles, but Hungarian National Ballet, the ballet company of the Hungarian State Opera, well-known and acknowledged all over Europe, is still regarded the leading one among them.

Back in 1884 the ballet company looked quite different to what it is now. The corps de ballet included 60 artists: 30 female dancers along with 30 regularly performing students. The company was led by two Italian and four Hungarian soloists. The opening Opera House had only female artists except for one single male dancer coming from Milan.

The early development of ballet art in Budapest was determined by three main factors. While the Italian school dominated technique and teaching, Vienna served as a model for the formation of stage taste. In addition to these two – and right from the very beginning - a special claim was raised: that of developing our own and typical Hungarian national art.

It took, however, a very long time for the Hungarian national ballet to take shape. It was only possible through the contribution of an outstanding and exceptionally talented artist, Gyula Harangozó, whose work, in fact, founded what we regard now the Hungarian national art of ballet. His first stage piece, the *'Scene in a country tavern'*, performed in 1936 was then - and still is - a milestone in the history of our ballet art. He choreographed a great number of one-act pieces as well as full-evening ones, successfully combining elements from Hungarian folk dance with classical ballet. His essential sense of drama got the audience involved, and proved how very suitable stage dance is for portraying various characters. His best pieces, such as *'Coppelia'*, *'Tricky Students'*, *'Sheherezade'*, *'Promenade Music'*, and the one-act, choreographed to Bartók's music, never ceased to be part of the repertory of the Hungarian National Ballet. *'The Miraculous Mandarin'*, the most famous of them all, has also been performed and admired in a number of significant ballet theatres in Europe.

From the 1950s, besides Hungarian traditions it was the Russian school that started influencing Hungarian ballet, which, although due to political causes, turned out to be highly profitable for our

ballet art. Traditional Russian classical ballets were included into our repertory. The training system turned to follow the Russian example, which resulted in a growing number of young ballet artists equipped with excellent technical knowledge and capable of deep artistic interpretation.

The art of the Hungarian National Ballet today is being determined by four main factors: the national traditions based on Harangozó's work, the influence of the classical Russian school, the impact by Hungarian choreographers from after the so called 'Harangozó period', and finally: the contemporary, modern European and American art.

After the 'Harangozó period', Seregi László took over the leading role in Hungarian choreography. The premiere of his ballet '*Spartacus*' took place in the year 1968 and brought immense success. The Seregi ballets feature all the four main characteristics of today's Hungarian ballet art: based on classical traditions, they are intertwined with Hungarian folk elements, but also influenced by contemporary styles as well as the Russian school. But above all, it is Seregi's susceptibility to companion arts what makes him unique. His choreographies are characterized by excellent dramaturgy, musicality, a very fine art taste, strong dramatic effect and an excellent sense of humor. His works are being performed all over the world, from Chile to Germany, from Australia to Hong Kong, from Canada to Finland. His main works comprise '*Sylvia*', '*Romeo and Juliet*', '*The Midsummer Night's Dream*', '*The Taming of the Shrew*' and a fabulous one-act work, '*Variations for a Nursery Song*'.

From the 1970s the Hungarian National Ballet continued promoting the Hungarian and Russian traditions, becoming at the same time quite open to the modern American and European styles. Significant works by Balanchine, Béjart, Ahston, van Manen, Ailey, Kylian and North were - among others - included in our repertory.

Since 1996, Gyula Harangozó Jr. has been directing the ballet company, who, like his predecessors, regards it his duty to keep constantly developing our uniquely varied repertory. For this reason such excellent choreographers as Myriam Naisy from France, Judith Jamison from the USA, Renato Zanella from Italy, Hans van Manen from Holland and Jiří Kylian from the Czech Republic have recently been invited to Budapest. Hungarian choreographers are also given the opportunity to stage and perform their works. Let me just mention that Lilla Pártay's most well-known full-length piece, '*Anna Karenina*' has been on our repertory for years, or that Attila Egerházi regularly appears with new one-act choreographies.

Beside that, the repertory of the Hungarian National Ballet also features such classics as '*The Nutcracker*', '*Giselle*', '*Don Quixote*', '*Swan Lake*' or '*The Sleeping Beauty*'.

The greatest success of the season 2001-2002 was the premiere of John Cranko's '*Eugene Onegin*'. The season 2002-2003, in its turn, was more concentrated on Hungarian choreographers. In November 2002 we had the premiere of a quadruple bill under the name '*Hommage à Dohnányi*', composed of the following one-act pieces: '*Variations on a Nursery Song*' by László Seregi, '*Heavy Wings*' by Attila Egerházi, '*Symphonic Minutes Op. 36*' by Lilla Pártay and '*Six Dances*' by Jiří Kylian. Another premiere - and a loud success at that - was a new Hungarian full-evening ballet by Lilla Pártay to Mozart's music, under the name '*Wolfgang AMADEUS Mozart*', on 8th June, 2003. The revival of Gyula Harangozó's evergreen Coppélia in October was the highlight of autumn 2003. The spring of the year 2004 is marked by a very special premiere: that of Sir Kenneth MacMillan's Mayerling. Representing an age in which Hungary was part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, this piece has strong connections with our history.

Since its creation in 1976, this choreography was only performed by The Royal Ballet and the Swedish Royal Ballet. It is a great honour to Hungarian National Ballet that out of so many renowned ballet companies all over Europe applying, we are the one that has now been granted the rights to stage Mayerling.

KEVEHÁZI Gábor

Kossuth Prize Winner Outstanding Artist

Born in 25 February 1953.

After finishing his studies at the *Hungarian Dance Academy*, he continued his studies at *Vaganova* ballet school in Saint-Petersburg.

From 1972 to 1993 he worked as member of *Hungarian State Opera*, from 1973 as principal dancer.

From 1988 to 1992 he held the position of the director of *Hungarian National Ballet* (the ballet company of the Hungarian State Opera)

From 1972 to 1990, as ballet-dancer, he performed all male leading roles from the repertoire of Hungarian National Ballet, in Budapest as well as at the international tours of the ballet ensemble.

As guest artist, he appeared on almost every dance-stage of the world: *Covent Garden* in *London*, *Milano Scala*, *Bayerische Staatsoper*, *Berlin*, *Bolshoi Theatre* in *Moscow*, *Kirov Theatre* in *St.*

Petersburg, the Opera Houses in Prague and Warsaw, Fenice in Venice, St. Carlo in Naples; he danced many times in the USA (Houston, Chicago, Dallas), in Canada (Montréal, Toronto), in Mexico, in Cuba, in South-Corea, and in Japan. He also appeared as a guest soloist in France (Marseille, Lille, Nancy, Aix-en-Provence).

He won numerous gold and silver medals at international ballet competitions.

He was awarded the most prestigious Hungarian prizes, such as *Kossuth Prize, Outstanding Artist Prize, Liszt Prize.*

For ten years he worked as choreographer.

From August 2001 he has been the director of Ballet Pécs, and from 1st August 2005 he has been appointed Ballet Director for *Hungarian National Ballet*, the ballet company of the Hungarian State Opera.