

Giselle

Giselle

[Carlotta Grisi](#) as Giselle, 1841

Choreographed by	Jean Coralli Jules Perrot
Composed by	Adolphe Adam
Libretto by	Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges Théophile Gautier
Based on	Heinrich Heine 's <i>De l'Allemagne</i> Victor Hugo 's "Fantômes" from <i>Les Orientales</i>
Date of premiere	Monday 28 June 1841
Place of premiere	Théâtre de l'Académie Royale de Musique
Original ballet company	Ballet du Théâtre de l'Académie Royale de Musique Giselle Albrecht Hilarion Myrtha
Characters	Bathilde Prince of Courland Berthe Wilfrid Peasants, Nobles, Wilis
Designs by	Pierre Ciceri (scenery) Paul Lormier (costumes)
Setting	Rhine Valley Renaissance
Created for	Carlotta Grisi
Genre	<i>Ballet-fantastique</i>
Type	Romantic ballet

Giselle; or, The Wilis is a [romantic ballet](#) in two [acts](#). [Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges](#) and [Théophile Gautier](#) wrote the story of the ballet. They based it on a short [prose](#) passage in [Heinrich Heine](#)'s *De l'Allemagne*. They also used [Victor Hugo](#)'s poem "Fantômes". [Adolphe Adam](#) wrote the music. [Jean Coralli](#) and [Jules Perrot](#) designed the dances. [Carlotta Grisi](#) danced the role of Giselle in the first production. The scenery was created by Pierre Ciceri.

The story is set in [Germany](#) during the [Renaissance](#). Giselle is a [peasant](#) girl. She falls in love with Albrecht. He is a [nobleman pretending](#) to be a peasant boy. Giselle is shocked to discover Albrecht is going to marry the princess Bathilde. Her heart breaks. She goes mad (insane, crazy) and dies. One night, she rises from her [grave](#). She wants to protect Albrecht from the

Wilis. The Wilis are the ghostly spirits of dead girls. They force men to dance to their deaths.

The ballet was first [performed](#) in [Paris](#) on Monday 28 June 1841 at the [Théâtre de l'Académie Royale de Musique](#). It was a great success. It was staged almost at once by other ballet companies in [Europe](#), [Russia](#), and the [United States](#). Grisi was declared another [Taglioni](#). Taglioni was the age's greatest ballerina. Ballet historian Grace Robert writes "*Giselle* ... is the [archetype](#) of the ballets of the [romantic age](#)". ^[1]

Story

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Act 1

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The ballet opens on an [autumn](#) morning in Germany. Giselle and Albrecht are in love. Hilarion is in love with Giselle, too. She does not love him though. He grows jealous. He promises to take revenge. Albrecht's gentle manners arouse Hilarion's suspicions. Albrecht is really a Duke. He is pretending to be a peasant. The peasant boys and girls start a [waltz](#). Giselle asks Albrecht to dance with her. Giselle's mother says her daughter has a weak heart. She will die if she does not give up dancing. She is afraid that Giselle will become one of the Wilis. The Wilis are ghostly female spirits. They dance men to death.

A hunting horn is heard in the distance. Albrecht becomes nervous. He hurries away with the peasants. The Prince of Courland, his daughter Bathilde, and their courtiers enter. They are looking for a place to rest after the hunt. Giselle and her mother bring them food and drink. Bathilde takes an interest in Giselle. They each say that they are in love, and soon to be married. Albrecht returns with the peasants. Bathilde says he is her future husband. Giselle is shocked. She goes mad and dies in her mother's arms. Albrecht is chased away by the peasants. ^[2]

Act 2

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[Lithograph \(type of printing\) of a female ballet dancer in a white dress. Small wings are attached to her back and she wears a tiara on her head. She is posing en pointe with her arms to one side.](#)

Grisi as Giselle, 1841

It is [midnight](#) in a dark wood. A pool of water is in the distance. Gamekeepers enter. Hilarion warns them that the spot is haunted by the Wilis. The gamekeepers run away. The Queen of the Wilis rises from the weeds to call the Wilis together. Giselle is about to become one of them. She rises from her grave. She dances. Albrecht enters to pray at Giselle's grave.

He sees Giselle. They dance. The Wilis trap Hilarion. They force him to dance. They throw him into the pool to his death. The Queen of the Wilis wants Albrecht to die too. Giselle does not want this. She wants to save his life. Day breaks. The Wilis disappear. Giselle returns to her grave. Bathilde and the courtiers enter. They are looking for Albrecht. He falls into their arms exhausted.

Background

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The [French Revolution](#) (1789–1799) created a French [middle class](#). These people did not like tastes and values of the [aristocracy](#). These tastes and values had influenced French art and literature since the reign of [Louis XIV](#).^[3] The power of the aristocracy had ended with the Revolution. Thousands of aristocrats had died on the [guillotine](#), or in massacres. Many died in prisons, or had fled France for safety in other lands.

After the Revolution, French ballet directors and designers turned their attention to stories based on the [Greek](#) and [Roman mythologies](#). The aristocracy liked these stories. The directors and designers however turned instead to the stories the middle class liked. These stories were based on real life, real places, past times, everyday people, and the [supernatural](#).^[4]

Two ballets with such stories caused great excitement in Paris in the 1830s. In November 1831, [Meyerbeer's opera](#) *Robert le diable* had its first performance. It included a short ballet called [The Ballet of the Nuns](#). In this little ballet, dead [nuns](#) rise from their graves. They dance in the moonlight. The public loved this ballet.^[4] In March 1832, the ballet *La Sylphide* was performed.^[4] This ballet is about a beautiful sylph ([fairy](#)). She loves James, a young Scotsman. Tragedy occurs. James accidentally kills the sylph.^[5]

This ballet brought [Marie Taglioni](#) before the French public. She was the first to dance [en pointe](#). She did this for artistic reasons rather than spectacle. She was also the first to wear the white, bell-shaped, calf-length ballet skirt. This skirt is now considered an essential feature of the romantic ballet.^[6] Poet and [critic Théophile Gautier](#) attended the first performance of *La Sylphide*. His ideas for *Giselle* would show touches of *La Sylphide* ten years later. It would be set in a real place and in the past, for example, and would be about everyday people and supernatural women.^[7]

Story development

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[Portrait sketch of the upper half of a man with pale skin and short hair. He is wearing a dress shirt, waistcoat and jacket.](#)

Vernoy de St. Georges, date unknown

In an 1841 news article announcing the first performance of *Giselle*, Théophile Gautier recorded his part in the creation of the ballet. He had read Heinrich Heine's description of the Wilis in *De l'Allemagne*, and thought these evil spirits would make a "pretty ballet".^[8] He planned their story for Act 2, and settled upon a verse by Victor Hugo called "Fantômes" to provide the inspiration for Act 1. This verse is about a beautiful 15 year old Spanish girl who loves to dance. She becomes too warm at a ball, and dies of a chill in the cool morning.^[9]

Heine's prose passage in *De l'Allemagne* tells of supernatural young women called the Wilis. They have died before their wedding day and rise from their graves in the middle of the night to dance. Any young man who crosses their path is forced to dance to his death.^[10] In another book, the Wilis are said to be [jilted](#) young women who have died and become [vampires](#). This is assumed to be the reason that they hate men.^[9]

Gautier thought Heine's Wilis and Hugo's fifteen year old Spanish girl would make a good ballet story.^[11] His first idea was to present an empty ballroom glittering with crystal and candlelight. The Wilis would cast a spell over the floor. Giselle and other dancers would enter and whirl through the room, unable to resist the spell to keep them dancing. Giselle would try to keep her lover from partnering other girls. The Queen of the Wilis would enter, lay her cold hand on Giselle's heart, and the girl would drop dead.^[12]

Gautier was not satisfied with this story. It was basically a succession of dances with one moment of drama at its end.^[12] He had no experience writing ballet stories so he called upon Vernoy de St. Georges, a man who had written many stories for the ballet. St. Georges liked Gautier's basic idea of the frail young girl and the Wilis. He wrote the story of *Giselle* as it is known today in three days,^{[13][14]} and sent it to Léon Pillet, the director of the [Paris Opéra](#).^[12]

Pillet wanted to present a beautiful young Italian dancer named Carlotta Grisi to the public. He considered *La Sylphide*, but [Adèle Dumilâtre](#) reminded him that the role had been promised to her. A ballet in preparation, *La Rosière de Gand*, was suggested, but Grisi objected. The role was too long and the story was not suitable for dance.^[15] Pillet needed a good story, and he found it in *Giselle*. Grisi liked the story as much as Pillet did, so *Giselle* was put into development at once.^[16]

Music

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[Portrait sketch of a short-bearded man with cropped hair. He is wearing glasses and formal wear.](#)

Adolphe Adam about 1835

[Adolphe Adam](#) was a popular writer of ballet and opera music in early 19th-century [France](#).^[17] He wrote with great speed. He completed *Giselle* in about two months.^[18] The music was written in the smooth, song-like [style](#) of the day called *cantilena*. This style is well known to music lovers from [Bellini's](#) opera *Norma* and [Donizetti's](#) *Lucia di Lammermoor*.^[19]

Adam used several [leitmotifs](#) in the ballet. A *leitmotif* is a short musical [phrase](#) that is [associated](#) with a certain character, event, or idea. Adam's leitmotifs are heard several times throughout the ballet.^[20] A leitmotif is associated with *Giselle*, and another with Albrecht. Hilarion's motif marks his every entrance. It suggests the Fate theme in [Beethoven's](#) *Fifth Symphony*. Another leitmotif is associated with the "he loves me, he loves me not" flower test in Act 1. This leitmotif is heard again in the [mad scene](#), and in Act 2 when *Giselle* offers flowers to Albrecht. The Wilis have their own motif. It is heard in the [overture](#), in Act 1 when Berthe tells the story of the Wilis, and in the mad scene. It is heard again in Act 2 when the Wilis make their first entrance. The [hunting horn](#) motif marks sudden surprises. This motif is heard when Albrecht is exposed as a nobleman.^[21]

The music was completely original with Adam. A critic noted however that Adam had borrowed eight bars from a romance by a Miss Puget and three bars from the huntsman's chorus in [Carl Maria von Weber's](#) [opera](#) *Euryanthe*. In addition, two pieces by [Friedrich Burgmüller](#) were put into the ballet. One was a waltz called "Souvenir de Ratisbonne". The other music was a group of dances performed by *Giselle's* friends. It is unknown who put these pieces into the ballet.^[22]

One dance historian writes:

By no stretch of the imagination can the score of *Giselle* be called great music, but it cannot be denied that it is admirably suited to its purpose. It is danceable, and it has colour and mood attuned to the various dramatic situations ... As we listen today to these haunting melodies composed over a century ago, we quickly become conscious of their intense nostalgic quality, not unlike the opening of a Victorian *Keepsake*, between whose pages lies an admirably preserved Valentine—in all the glory of its intricate paper lace and symbolic floral designs—which whispers of a leisured age now forever past. For a brief space the air seems faintly perfumed with parma violet and gardenia. The music of *Giselle* still exerts its magic.

— Cyril W. Beaumont, *A Ballet Called Giselle* (1996), p. 58

Dance and pantomime

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[Black-and-white photograph of a female ballet dancer in a white dress, standing en point with her arms mirroring the position of her legs.](#)

Jocelyn Vollmar as Myrtha posing *en arabesque* in a dress typical of a "white" ballet (1947)

Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot designed the dances for *Giselle*. Perrot and Carlotta Grisi were lovers, and Perrot designed all of Grisi's dances and all of her [pantomime](#).^[23] Everyone in the Paris dance world knew that Perrot had designed Grisi's dances, and Coralli said so, but Perrot was given no [official](#) credit in the printed materials such as posters and programs.^[24] This was most likely done to prevent Perrot from collecting royalties (money, profits) on the ballet.^[25] Perrot liked bold touches and planned several rapid aerial swoops on wires in Act 2 for *Giselle*. Grisi was afraid of these swoops. A stage hand was brought in to test the swoops. He crashed face-first into the scenery. The swoops were [abandoned](#).^[26]

Cyril Beaumont writes that *Giselle* is made up of two elements—dance and mime. Act 1 features short mimed scenes, he points out, and episodes of dancing which are fused with mime. In Act 2, mime has become fused entirely with dance. He writes that the choreographic vocabulary is composed of a small number of simple steps:

- Movements: *develloppe, grand rond de jambe*
- Poses: *arabesque, attitude*
- Gliding steps: *chasse, glissade, pas de basque, pas de bouree*
- Hopping steps: *ballone, temps leve*
- Turning steps: *pirouette, petit tour, tour en l'air*
- Leaping steps: (vertical) *ballotte, entrechat, sisonne, rond de jambe en l'air saute*, (horizontal) *cabriole, jete, grande jete, soubresaut*

Beaumont speculates that the simple steps were deliberately planned to allow the "utmost expressiveness."^[27]

Parts of *Giselle* have been cut or changed since the ballet's first night. *Giselle*'s Act 1 pantomime scene in which she tells Albrecht of her strange dream is cut. The peasant [pas de deux](#) in Act 1 is cut back a bit. The Prince of Courland and his daughter Bathilde used to make their entrance on [horseback](#), but today they walk on. In the original production, the Prince and Bathilde were present at *Giselle*'s death, but now they leave the scene before she dies. The [machines](#) used to make *Giselle* fly and to make her disappear are no longer used. A trapdoor is sometimes employed to make *Giselle* rise from her grave and then to make her sink into it at the end of Act 2.^[28]

At the end of Act 2, Bathilde formerly entered with the courtiers to search for Albrecht. He took a few unsteady steps toward them and collapsed into their arms. This moment was an artistic parallel to the Act 1 finale when the peasants gathered about the dead *Giselle*. Now, Bathilde and the courtiers are cut, and Albrecht slowly leaves the stage alone.^[29]

Ethnic music, dance, and costume

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Sketch on the title page of a music sheet called Valse Favorite de Giselle. The sketch is of a pair of dancers, the male partially dipping the female in his left arm.

Grisi and Petipa on "Valse favorite de Giselle", a sheet music cover

Ethnic music, dance, and **costume** were a large part of romantic ballet. At the time *Giselle* was written, people thought of **Germany** when they heard a **waltz** because the waltz was of German origin. Giselle makes her first **entrance** to the music of a waltz, and the **audience** would have known at once that the ballet was set in Germany. Adam wrote three waltzes for *Giselle*: two for Giselle and one for the Wilis. Adam wrote that the "Giselle Waltz" in Act 1 has "all the German color indicated by the **locality**." People agreed. One critic wrote: "A lovely waltz ... in the Germanic spirit of the subject".^[30]

At first, Gautier thought that some of the dancers in the Act 2 waltz for the Wilis should dress in ethnic costume and dance ethnic steps. Adam put bits of **French**, **Spanish**, German, and **Indian** -sounding music in the waltz for this purpose. Gautier's "ethnic" idea was dropped as the ballet developed however, and it has not been picked up by modern **producers**. Today, Act 2 is a *ballet blanc*—a "white" ballet in which all the **ballerinas** and the *corps de ballet* are dressed in full, white, bell-shaped **skirts** and the dances have a **geometric** design.^[30]

Original designs

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Costumes

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Sketch, with notes, of a male wearing red and white, Renaissance-style clothes, with tights and a black feathered hat.

Albrecht by Paul Lormier

The historical period for *Giselle* is not indicated in the story. Paul Lormier, the chief costume designer at the Paris Opéra, probably consulted Gautier on this matter. It is also possible that Pillet had the ballet's budget in mind and decided to use the many **Renaissance**-style costumes in the Opéra's **wardrobe** for *Giselle*. These costumes were said to have been those from **Rossini**'s *William Tell* (1829) and **Berlioz**'s *Benvenuto Cellini* (1838). Lormier certainly designed the costumes for the principal characters. His costumes were in use at the Opéra until the ballet was dropped from the **repertory** in 1853.

Giselle was revived in 1863 with new costumes by Lormier's assistant, Alfred Albert. Albert's costumes are closer to those of modern productions than those of Lormier, and were in use at the opera until 1868. The ballet was revived again in 1924 with scenery and costumes by [Alexandre Benois](#). He wanted to revive the costumes of the original production but dropped the idea, believing the critics would charge him with a lack of imaginative creativity.^[31]

Sets

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[Pierre Luc Charles Ciceri](#) was the chief set designer at the Paris Opéra from 1815 to 1847. He designed the sets for the first production of *Giselle*. Gautier was not specific about the ballet's locale, but placed it in "some mysterious corner of Germany ... on the other side of the Rhine". This would have been the eastern side.

Giselle was two months in [rehearsal](#). This was a very long rehearsal time for the period. Even so, Ciceri did not have enough time to design sets for both acts and focused on the second act. The sets for the first act were actually those designed for the 1838 ballet, *La Fille du Danube* by Adam. An illustration from *Les Beautés de l'Opéra* of 1845 shows Giselle's cottage with a roof of straw on the left, and Albrecht's cottage on the right. The two cottages are framed by the branches of two large trees on either sides of the stage. Between the two cottages, in the distance, appears a castle and slopes covered with vineyards. Although this scene was not designed for *Giselle*, it has remained the model for most modern productions.^[32] Ciceri's set was in use until the ballet was dropped from the repertoire in 1853. At that time, Gautier noticed that the sets were falling apart: "Giselle's cottage has barely three or four straws on its roof."^[33]

Act 2 from *Les Beautés de l'Opéra*

The Act 2 illustration from *Les Beautés* shows a dark wood with a pool of water in the distance. The branches of aged trees create an arch overhead. Beneath these branches on the left is a [marble](#) cross with 'Giselle' written on it. From one of its arms hangs the crown of [grape leaves](#) Giselle wore as Queen of the Vintage. On the stage, thick weeds and wildflowers (200 bulrushes and 120 branches of flowers) were the undergrowth. The gas jets of the footlights and those overhead suspended in the flies were turned low to [create](#) a mood of mystery and terror.

A circular hole was cut into the backdrop and covered with a transparent material. A strong light behind this hole represented the [moon](#). The light was occasionally manipulated to suggest the passage of clouds. Gautier and St. Georges wanted the pool to be made of large [mirrors](#). Pillet rejected this idea because of its cost. In the 1868 revival however, the mirrors were acquired for this scene.^[34]

Adam thought Ciceri's backdrop for Act 1 was "not so good ... it is all weak and pale" but he liked the set for Act 2: "[Ciceri's] second act is a delight, a dark humid forest filled with bulrushes and wild flowers, and ending with a sunrise, seen at first through the trees at the end of the piece, and very magical in its effect." The sunrise also delighted the critics.^[35]

First performance

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[Boldlettered type of an announcement from the Academie Royale de Musique on 28 June 1841: La premiere representation de Giselle ou les Wilis, ballet-pantomime en 2 actes.](#)

Original poster

The balletomanes of Paris became very excited as the opening night of *Giselle* approached. News reports kept their interest alive. Some reports said that Grisi had had an [accident](#). Some reports said that the conductor was ill with a tumour. Still others said that the stage hands feared for their safety.^[36]

Hopes that the ballet would be ready in May were dashed. Opening night was postponed several times. Grisi was absent for a few days and her return was delayed to protect her health. Lighting, [trapdoors](#), and scene changes needed further rehearsals. Cuts were made in Grisi's role to spare the dancer's health. Instead of returning to her tomb at the end of the ballet, it was decided *Giselle* would be placed on a bed of flowers and sink slowly into the earth. This touch preserved the romantic mood of the Act 2 finale.^[37]

Ballet in the Salle Le Peletier in 1864

At last, on Monday 28 June 1841, the [curtain](#) rose on *Giselle* in the [Salle Le Peletier](#).^[38] Grisi played *Giselle* with [Lucien Petipa](#) as her lover Albrecht, M. Simon as the [gamekeeper](#) Hilarion, and [Adèle Dumilâtre](#) as Myrtha, the Queen of the Wilis.^[39] Typical of the theatrical practices of the time, *Giselle* was preceded by an excerpt from another production—in this case, the third act of [Rossini](#)'s opera, *Moise*.

In spite of the chief machinist shouting orders to his crew that could be heard by the audience, *Giselle* was a great success. Grisi was a sensation. Ballet-goers regarded her as another [Taglioni](#), the greatest ballerina of the period.^[40]

Characters in the first performance

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[Drawing of a crowd of costumed dancers dancing around a stage beneath a large tree. Atop the stage is a lone female dancer.](#)

Giselle is crowned Queen of the Vintage in an illustration from 1845

- Duke Albert of Silesia, in the attire of a villager
- The Prince of Courland
- Wilfride, the Duke's squire
- Hilarion, the [game-keeper](#)
- An Old Peasant Man
- Bathilde, the Duke's fiancée
- Giselle, a peasant girl
- Berthe, Giselle's mother
- Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis
- Zulmé, a Wilis
- Moyne, a Wilis^[41]

Contemporary reviews and comments

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Giselle was a great artistic and commercial success. *Le Constitutionnel* praised Act 2 for its "poetic effects".^[35] *Moniteur des théâtres* wrote that Grisi "runs [and] flies across the stage like a [gazelle](#) in love".^[42] One [critic](#) made a detailed [analysis](#) of the music in *La France Musicale*. He thought the Act 1 waltz "ravishing", and noted that the scene of Berthe's [narrative](#) was filled with "quite new" harmonic [modulations](#). He praised other moments in Act 1 (especially the mad scene), and was in raptures with the music of Act 2, singling out the entrance of the Wilis and the [viola](#) solo played through Giselle's last moments. He thought the [flute](#) and [harp](#) music accompanying Giselle as she disappeared into her grave at ballet's end "full of [tragic beauty](#)".^[43]

Coralli was praised for the Act 1 peasant [pas de deux](#) and for the "[elegance](#)" of Act 2. Coralli followed a suggestion made by Gautier and picked the most beautiful girls in the company to play the peasants and the Wilis. One observer thought the selection process cruel: the almost-beautiful girls were turned away without a second thought.^[44]

Grisi and Petipa were great successes as the tragic lovers. Gautier praised their performance in Act 2, writing that the two dancers made the act "a real poem, a choreographic [elegy](#) full of charm and tenderness ... More than one eye that thought it was seeing only [dance] was surprised to find its vision obscured by a tear—something that does not often happen in a ballet ... Grisi danced with a perfection ... that places her in the ranks between [Elssler](#) and [Taglioni](#) ... Her miming surpassed every expectation ... She is nature and artlessness personified."^[35]

Adam thought Petipa "charming" as both dancer and actor, and that he had "rehabilitated" male dancing with his performance. Of Dumilâtre he wrote, "... in spite of her coldness, [Dumilâtre] deserved the success she achieved by the correctness and the 'mythological' quality of her poses: perhaps this

word may seem a little pretentious, but I can think of no other to express such cold and noble dancing as would suit [Minerva](#) in a merry mood, and in this respect [Dumilâtre] seems to bear a strong resemblance to that goddess."^[35]

Giselle made 6500 [francs](#) between June and September 1841. This was twice the amount for the same time period in 1839. Grisi's [salary](#) was increased to make her the top earner among the dancers at the Opéra. Souvenirs were sold. Pictures of Grisi as *Giselle* were printed, and [sheet music](#) arrangements were made for social dancing. The sculptor Emile Thomas made a [statuette](#) of *Giselle* in her Act 2 costume. A silk [cloth](#) was [manufactured](#) called *façonné Giselle*, and Madame Lainné, a [milliner](#), sold an [artificial](#) flower called 'Giselle'. The ballet was [parodied](#) at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal in October 1841.^[45]

Early productions

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[Romantic Ballets](#)

[Sketch of a female ballet dancer posing en pointe in a mid-length, white dress; her hair and bodice are covered in orange flowers](#)

[The Ballet of the Nuns](#) (1831)

[La Sylphide](#) (1832)

[Giselle](#) (1841)

[Napoli](#) (1842)

[Pas de Quatre](#) (1845)

[Paquita](#) (1846)

[Coppélia](#) (1870)

- [v](#)
- [t](#)
- [e](#)

Giselle was performed in Paris from its debut in 1841 to 1849. It was then dropped from the repertory. Grisi always danced the title role. The ballet was revived in 1852 and 1853, but without Grisi. The work was dropped from the repertory after 1853. It was revived in 1863 for a Russian ballerina then dropped in 1868. It was revived almost 50 years later in 1924 for the debut of Olga Spessivtzeva. This production was revived in 1932 and 1938.^[46]

Giselle was produced by other ballet companies in Europe and America almost immediately after its first night. The British had their first taste of *Giselle*—not with the ballet— but with a drama based on the ballet called *Giselle, or The Phantom Night Dancers* by William Moncrieff. He had seen the ballet in Paris the same year. The play was performed on 23 August 1841 at the Theatre Royal, Sadler's Wells.^[46]

The actual ballet was first staged in London at Her Majesty's Theatre on 12 March 1842 with Grisi as Giselle and Perrot as Albrecht. The dances were credited to Perrot and one Deshayes. It was revived many times, once in 1884 with a Mlle. Sismondi in the role of Albrecht. This production was received with little enthusiasm. It was preceded by the [operetta](#) *Pocahontas*.
[47]

The ballet was staged by [Diaghilev's Ballets Russes](#) in 1911 at the [Royal Opera, Covent Garden](#) with [Tamara Karsavina](#) and [Nijinsky](#) as Giselle and Albrecht. [Anna Pavlova](#) danced Giselle with her own company in 1913. Alicia Markova danced the role with the [Vic-Wells Ballet](#) in 1934, and [Margot Fonteyn](#) took the role in 1937 when Markova left the company. The English loved *Giselle*. In 1942, for example, three different companies were dancing the ballet in London.
[48]

Giselle was first performed in [Russia](#) at the Bolshoi Theatre, [St. Petersburg](#), on 18 December 1842. Gedeonov, the Director of the St. Petersburg Imperial Theatres, sent his [Ballet Master](#) Titus to Paris to find a new ballet for ballerina Elena Andreyanova. Titus picked *Giselle*. The Ballet Master then staged the work completely from memory in St. Petersburg.
[49] Perrot produced *Giselle* in St. Petersburg in 1851. He made many changes to the ballet in his years of service to the Imperial Ballet. In the 1880s, Ballet Master [Marius Petipa](#) made many changes to the Perrot production.
[50]

Giselle was first staged in Italy at [Teatro alla Scala](#) in Milan on 17 January 1843. The music however was not Adam's, but that of one N. Bajetti. The dances were not the original either, but those of one A. Cortesi. It is possible, but unknown if, the ballet was first staged in the provincial theatres.
[51]

In 1844, American ballerina [Mary Ann Lee](#) arrived in Paris to study with Coralli for a year. She returned to the United States in 1841 with the directions for *Giselle* and other ballets. Lee was the first to present *Giselle* in the United States. She did this on 1 January 1846 in [Boston](#) at the Howard Athenæum. George Washington Smith played Albrecht. Lee danced *Giselle* (again with Smith) on 13 April 1846 at the Park Theatre in [New York City](#).
[51][52]

Modern productions

[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

[Black-and-white photograph of a costumed male dancer posed on half-toe, left arm raised upward, right arm extended backward.](#)
Nijinsky as Albrecht, Paris 1911

[Nijinsky](#) was going to dance Albrecht for the first time in St. Petersburg in January 1911. The [Czar](#) and his family would be present. [Diaghilev](#) wanted Nijinsky to wear the Renaissance-style costume he had worn in Paris the same month. It was easier to dance in than the thick pants of traditional

Russian Albrechts, but his [genitals](#) (though covered) could be detected. He was ordered not to wear it. Nijinsky said that he only wanted to dance well. According to [Stravinsky](#), Nijinsky wore not much more than the tightest [tights](#) and a [padded athletic supporter](#) (jockstrap). The next day, the angry director of the Imperial Theatres ordered Nijinsky to [apologize](#). Complaints about the dancer were collected here and there. Nijinsky knew Diaghilev would give him work, so he resigned. On 24 January 1911 he was officially dismissed from the Imperial Theatres. ^[53]

Structure

[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

Act I

- no.1 *Introduction*
- no.2 *Scène première*
- no.3 *Entrée d'Albrecht*
- no.4 *Entrée de Giselle*
- no.5 *Scène dansante*
- interpolation - *Pas de deux pour Mlle. Maria Gorshenkova* (Ludwig Minkus; 1884; this piece was only included in Imperial-era productions)
- no.6 *Scène de Hilarion*
- no.7 *Retour de la vengeance*
- interpolation - *Pas de cinq pour Mlle. Carlotta Grisi* (Cesare Pugni; 1850; only included for Grisi's performance)
- no.8 *Valse*
- no.9 *Scène dansante*
- no.10 *Le récit de Berthe*
- no.11 *Scène: Le chasse royale*
- no.12 *Scène de Hilarion*
- no.13 *Marche des vigneron*
- interpolation - *Variation pour Mlle. Elena Cornalba* (aka *Pas seul*) (likely composed by Riccardo Drigo, c. 1888)
- interpolation - *Pas de deux pour Mlle. Nathalie Fitzjames* (aka *Peasant pas de deux*)

Fashioned from *Souvenirs de Ratisbonne* by [Johann Friedrich Franz Burgmüller](#), c.1841 -

- Entrée*
- Andante*
- Variation*
- Variation*

interpolation - *supplemental female variation* (Mariinsky Theatre staging) (Riccardo Drigo?; from the ballet *Cupid's Prank*; 1890.)

- Variation*
- Coda*

- no.14 *Galop générale*
- no.15 *Grand scène dramatique: La folie de Giselle*

Act II

- no.16 *Introduction et scène*
- no.17 *Entrée et danse de Myrthe*
- no.18 *Entrée des Wilis*
- no.19 *Grand pas des Wilis*
- no.20 *Entrée de Giselle*
- no.21 *Entrée d'Albrecht*
- no.22 *L'apparition de Giselle*
- no.23 *La mort de Hilarion*
- no.24 *Scène des Wilis*
- no.25 *Grand pas d'action* —

a. *Grand adage*

b. *Variation de Giselle*

c. *Variation d'Albert*

interpolation - *Variation pour Mlle. Adèle Grantzow* (likely composed by Cesare Pugni; 1867)

d. *Coda*

- no.26 *Scène finale*

Notes

[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

1. ↑ [Robert 1949](#), p. 156
2. ↑ [Beaumont 1996](#), pp. 39–45
3. ↑ [Beaumont 1996](#), p. 9
4. ↑ [4.0 4.1 4.2 Balanchine 1975](#), p. 459
5. ↑ [Kirstein 1984](#), p. 147
6. ↑ [Beaumont 1996](#), p. 16
7. ↑ [Beaumont 1996](#), pp. 13–14
8. ↑ [Beaumont 1996](#), p. 18
9. ↑ [9.0 9.1 Beaumont 1996](#), p. 19
10. ↑ [Smith 2000](#), pp. 170–72
11. ↑ [Smith 2000](#), pp. 172–74
12. ↑ [12.0 12.1 12.2 Beaumont 1996](#), p. 20
13. ↑ [Smith 2000](#), p. 174
14. ↑ [Beaumont 1996](#), pp. 202–03
15. ↑ [Guest 2008](#), p. 145
16. ↑ [Smith 2000](#), pp. 172–73
17. ↑ [Beaumont 1996](#), p. 53
18. ↑ [Smith 2000](#), p. 173
19. ↑ [Beaumont 1996](#), pp. 55–56
20. ↑ [Beaumont 1996](#), pp. 55–58
21. ↑ [Kirstein 1984](#), p. 146
22. ↑ [Beaumont 1996](#), p. 57
23. ↑ [Kirstein 1984](#), pp. 150–51
24. ↑ [Cordova 2007](#), p. 116
25. ↑ [Guest 2008](#), p. 148
26. ↑ [Guest 2008](#), p. 149

27. [↑](#) [Beaumont, 1996](#) & pp. 85–86
28. [↑](#) [Guest 2008](#), p. 354
29. [↑](#) [Smith 2000](#), p. 176
30. [↑](#) [30.0 30.1](#) [Smith 2004](#), pp. 191–95
31. [↑](#) [Beaumont](#), pp. 64–67.
32. [↑](#) [Ashton](#), p. 36.
33. [↑](#) [Beaumont](#), pp. 59–60.
34. [↑](#) [Beaumont](#), pp. 60–61.
35. [↑](#) [35.0 35.1 35.2 35.3](#) [Guest](#), p. 351.
36. [↑](#) [Cordova 2007](#), p. 113
37. [↑](#) [Guest 2008](#), p. 349
38. [↑](#) [Balanchine 1975](#), p. 192
39. [↑](#) [Robert 1949](#), p. 169
40. [↑](#) [Robert 1949](#), p. 160
41. [↑](#) [Smith 2000](#), p. 227
42. [↑](#) [Guest](#), p. 353.
43. [↑](#) [Beaumont](#), p. 58.
44. [↑](#) [Guest](#), pp. 353–354.
45. [↑](#) [Guest](#), p. 357.
46. [↑](#) [46.0 46.1](#) [Beaumont 1996](#), p. 126
47. [↑](#) [Beaumont 1996](#), pp. 126–27
48. [↑](#) [Beaumont 1996](#), pp. 126–28
49. [↑](#) [Beaumont 1996](#), p. 128
50. [↑](#) [Beaumont 1996](#), p. 130
51. [↑](#) [51.0 51.1](#) [Beaumont 1996](#), p. 129
52. [↑](#) [Robert 1949](#), p. 163
53. [↑](#) [Ostwald 1991](#), pp. 45–46

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[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

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Other websites

[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

- Media related to [Giselle](#) at Wikimedia Commons
- ["Fantômes"](#) Hugo's original poem in French
- [The Earliest Russian Giselles](#) - discusses the first interpreters of the role of Giselle in imperial Russia
- [Some dance history of Giselle](#) by Suzanne McCarthy for the Royal Ballet Archived 2003-12-10 at the Wayback Machine

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