

## Biography of the Composer Peter I. Tchaikovsky

- 1840: born in Wotkinsk (Russia) on 7 May.
- 1850: enrolled at law school in St Petersburg.
- 1855–1858: took piano lessons, though without general musical instruction.
- 1859: employed as a clerk at the Ministry of Education.
- 1863: encouraged by a friend to develop his talents in music. Left the civil service and studied at the Conservatoire in St Petersburg (studied composition by Anton Rubinstein).
- 1866–1877: taught music theory at the Moscow Conservatoire.
- 1869–1875: composed a series of works in the Romantic style; first notable music critic review in *Russkiye Vedomosti*.
- until 1876: music critic for the *Russkiye Vedomosti*.
- 1877: married a student of the Conservatoire; separated after just a few weeks.
- 1878: Supported by the pianist Nadeshda von Meck, who provided him with 5000 rubles a year, he was able to devote himself to composition.
- from 1878: Tchaikovsky worked for much of the time, concerned primarily on his work as a composer.
- 1880: gained international recognition through works and performances at the Crystal Palace.
- 1881: awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Cambridge.
- Tchaikovsky died in St Petersburg on 6 November.

### History of the work: **Swan Lake**

- First performance: 20 February 1877 at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow.
- Libretto: by Vladimir Begichev and Vassily Geltzer, but frequently altered and adapted, resulting in various versions, some of them with a different ending.
- Choreography: Wenzel Julius Reisinger, working with the prima ballerina Pelagaia Karpakova. The version now regarded as standard was first performed on 17 February 1895 at the Marinsky theatre in St Petersburg. The choreography was by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov.

# Swan Lake

## The story

### Act 1

A grand ball is held in honour of Prince Siegfried in the gardens of the palace (Waltz). His mother tells him that it is time to begin his adult life and that he should choose a bride at the ball the following day (Pas de deux).

Suddenly a flock of swans appears in the lake at the palace (Scene). Prince Siegfried decides to go and hunt the swans.



Following his hunt, the moon is shining on a lake in the forest when Siegfried reaches the lake with his friends. A group of swans flies over the water. The friends disperse, looking for the best place for hunting. Siegfried remains behind alone when Odette, the queen of the swans, appears before him.

She is able to take on human form between midnight and dawn. The magician Redbeard has turned her and her companions into swans. The spell can only be broken by a man who is entirely devoted to her.



Odette tells Siegfried this and, as the two embrace, the magician Redbeard suddenly appears. Siegfried is about to shoot him with his crossbow, but he is too busy to do so.



The other swans, who have also taken on human form, are dancing by the lake when the Prince's friends come rushing in (**Dance of the swans, Dance of the cygnets**).

Siegfried orders them not to hurt the swans. He invites Odette to come to the ball the next day, where he wishes to present her as his bride.

## Act 3

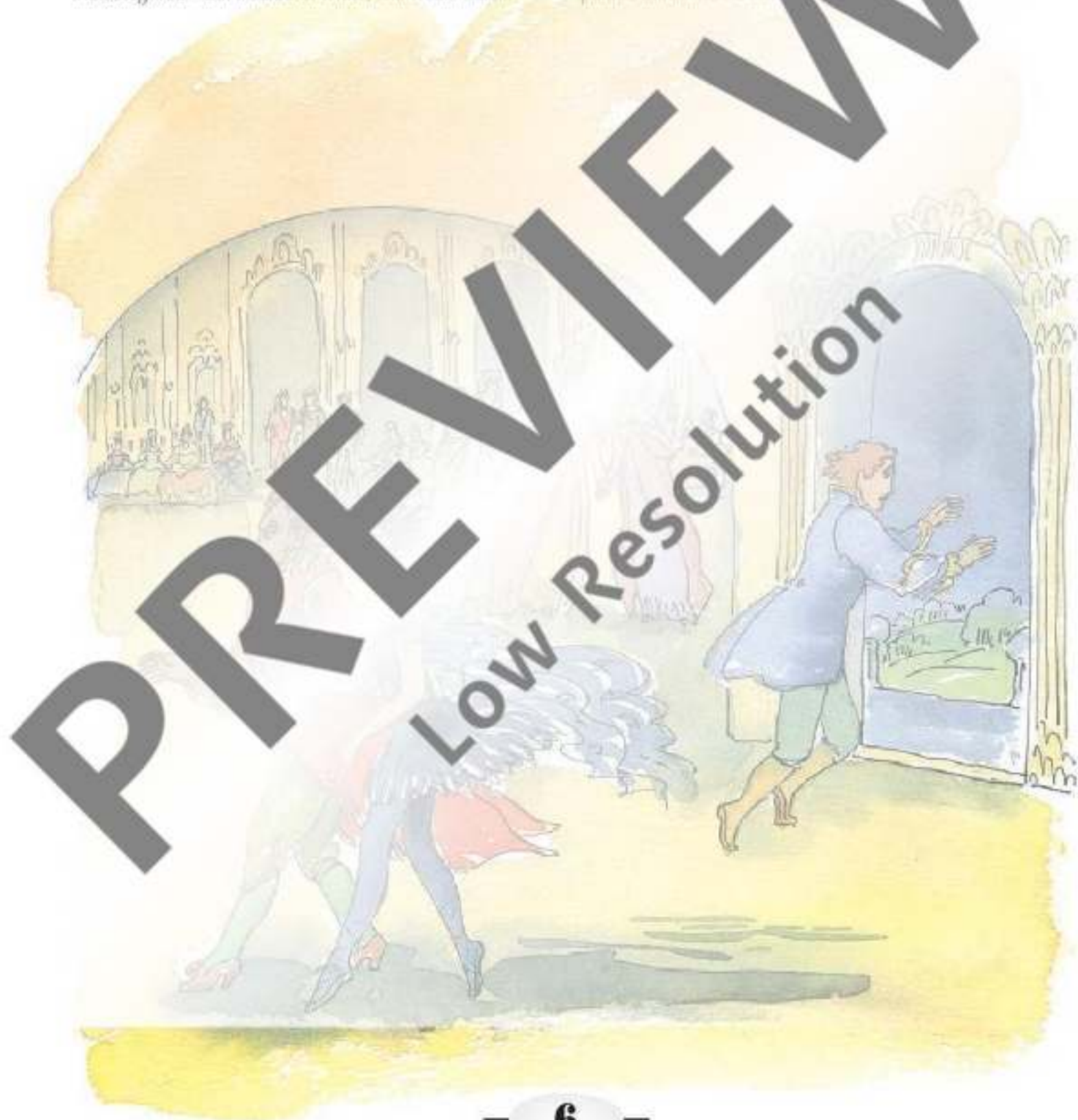
Siegfried and his mother greet the guests. Ambassadors from various countries have come to the hall and each present a bridal candidate.

A stranger appears: it is the magician Redbeard, accompanied by his daughter Odile, who also has magical powers (Scene). She has taken on the shape of Odette in order to trick Siegfried – but instead of white, she wears black.

Siegfried thinks he is looking at his beloved and dances with her (Waltz). Then he announces that he wishes to marry her.

Redbeard leaves the hall in triumph with his daughter.

Now Odette can never be released from the lake. Siegfried is dismayed at having been tricked. He returns to his parents' palace to look for Odette.



## Act 4

The swan maidens dance while they wait for Odette to return (**Russian Dance, Neapolitan Dance, Mazurka**). She returns in despair. Siegfried follows her breathlessly and explains to her that he was tricked by Redbeard. Odette forgives him. Redbeard will not give up and makes the lake overflow its shores. The swans have just taken on the form

of young girls and he wants them to drown. Siegfried, however, is prepared to die with Odette and her friends and he takes them to safety on a log. His willingness to sacrifice himself breaks the spell and Odette and her friends are able to return to human form for good.

