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opening extract from

Barefoot Book of Ballet Stories

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THE BAREFOOT BOOK OF

Ballet Stories



Written by Jane Yolen and Heidi E. Y. Stemple

Illustrated by Rebecca Guay

Barefoot Books
Celebrating Art and Story

Coppélia: The Girl with the Enamel Eyes

Introduction

Coppélia is ballet's most famous and best-loved storybook comedy. Set in a Polish village at the end of the eighteenth century, the ballet is based on a fairy tale by E. T. A. Hoffman, written two hundred years ago. Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffman, a German author born in 1776, wrote many fantasy stories, which were often eerie and sinister. Several of Hoffman's tales have been made into great ballets, the most famous of which are *Coppélia* and *The Nutcracker*. Hoffman worked as a lawyer and wrote at night using a pen name. But he was found out and punished when he parodied his co-workers in one of his novels.

Almost fifty years after Hoffman's death, his story 'The Sandman' became the inspiration for *Coppélia*. The ballet's music was written by French composer Léo Delibes and choreographed by another Frenchman, Arthur Saint-Léon. Before the ballet had its premiere at the Paris Opera on 25 May 1870, there were some problems in casting the lead role of Swanilda. Léontine Beaugrand was chosen by the ballet's producers to dance the part, but she was rejected by the directors of the ballet, who preferred the more famous ballerina Adèle Grantsova. However, Grantsova had to return to Russia, and her place was taken by fifteen-year-old Giuseppina Bozzacchi, an Italian ballerina. She danced beautifully and the ballet opened to rave reviews. Tragically, Bozzacchi died of smallpox soon after the opening, and Léontine Beaugrand finally got to dance the part of Swanilda.

In the original production of *Coppélia*, a woman danced the male lead, the reluctant lover, Franz. This casting made it impossible for Franz and Swanilda to perform an elaborate *pas de deux* like the one that is danced today by the couple at the ballet's conclusion. Soon after *Coppélia* was first performed, the original third act was dropped entirely. This meant that the ballet was shorter, with just two acts, which made it perfect for young children. Later the great American choreographer George Balanchine created a new version of the final act, with a magnificent wedding scene.

On 8 November 1884, a one-act version of *Coppélia* staged by A. Bertrand opened at the Empire Theatre in London — thirty-six years before a full-length production was staged there. In 1887 the ballet was produced in America and in 1910 the famous Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova made her US debut in the role.

