

The Marius Petipa Society

La Bayadère (libretto)

English translation of the 1877 libretto for *La Bayadère*, translated by Prof. Roland John Wiley

ACT 1

Scene 1 – The Festival of Fire

The stage represents a consecrated forest, branches of bananas, amras, madhavis, and other Indian trees are intertwined. At the left is a pond designated for ablutions. In the distance, the peaks of the Himalayans.

The wealthy Kshatriya Solor (a famous warrior) enters with a bow in his hand. Hunters are pursuing a tiger. At a sign from Solor, they run across the stage and are lost in the depths of the forest.

Solor lingers for a time and orders the fakir Madhavaya not to leave this place, that he find occasion to say a few words to the beautiful Nikiya, who lives in the [nearby] pagoda.

Then Solor exits.

The doors of the pagoda open and from the temple the Great Brahmin emerges triumphantly; behind him follow munis (monastic wise men), *rsi* (seers), *bramacarins* (Indian priests), and finally gurus in long linen garments. The priests wear [pendants made of] cords on their foreheads – a sign of brahminesque rank.

From the pagoda also emerge *devadasi* (bayadères of the first rank).

Preparations for the festival of fire are being made. At the sides of the pagoda, and on its galleries, gather fakirs, yogas, and *fadiny* (wandering holy people).

“Where is our modest bayadère Nikiya?” the Great Brahmin asks. “I do not see her here. Order her to be called. She must adorn our spiritual procession with her dances.”

Several bayadères go out after Nikiya. Penitents handle the iron and the fire, touching them to their bodies. Some have daggers, sabres, knives, and other sharp instruments which they brandish; others hold burning torches.

The fakir Madhavaya also takes part in the dance, but in doing so never stops looking for the beautiful Nikiya. At last the bayadère appears, veiled, in the doors of the pagoda. Illuminated by the reddish light of the torches, she attracts the general attention.

The Great Brahmin walks to her, lifts her veil, and orders her to take part in the dances.

Nikiya comes down from the steps of the pagoda and begins to dance.

The dance ‘Djampo’

Then the sounds of the turti (bagpipes) and the vina (a small guitar) serve to accompany the graceful and languorous movement of the bayadère. These movements become faster and more lively, the orchestra positively thunders, and the previous dance is taken up again.

During this time the Great Brahmin does not take his enamoured gaze from the beautiful bayadère. He

walks up to her while she is dancing, and says:

"I love you... I am going mad with love for you... do you want me to protect you?... I will make you first in our temple... I shall force the people to worship you!... You will be the goddess of all India... Only... return my love!"

Nikiya takes from his brahmin's cord.

"You are forgetting who you are!" she says, "Look at this cord!... It is a sign of the high rank which you hold... I do not love you and never will."

She pushes him back in horror.

"Ah!" the Great Brahmin exclaims... "Mark well that I shall never forget this insult!... this terrible offence!... I shall use all my power to take revenge on you!... And my vengeance will be frightful!..."

Nikiya tries to get away. She joins the other bayadères, fills her vase from the sacred pond, and gives drink to weary travellers and those who took part in the dance.

The fakir Madhayava continues his original dance and his fanatical flagellation.

Nikiya goes up to him and offers water to cool him.

The fakir makes use of the opportunity and says to the bayadère:

"Solor is nearby... he wants to see you."

Nikiya is delighted with the news.

"Let him approach as soon as the celebration ends," she answers, "I will be at the window... Knock three times, and I will come out."

"Fine, I understand. Only quiet! They can hear us."

The fakir resumes his tortured dance, and Nikiya walks away as if nothing had happened.

The ceremony ends. The brahmins order the bayadères back into the temple. Everyone leave the stage.

The moon comes up. The windows of the pagoda are dark.

Solor enters with the fakir, sits down on a pile of rocks and anxiously awaits the appearance of his beloved bayadère.

A light appears in one of the windows of the pagoda.

The pleasant sounds of a vina (guitar) are heard.

Solor slowly approaches the window and knocks three times. The window opens and Nikiya appears in it, holding a guitar.

The fakir crawls along some branches and places a plank beneath the window along which the bayadère descends, illuminated by the moonlight.

Solor falls at her feet, then embraces her. They are happy.

"I love you," Nikiya says, "you are courageous!... What grief it is that we cannot see each other often!..."

"I cannot live without you," Solor answers, "you are the air I breathe... my life!..."

"Yes, but what is to be done?... Look at these garments, I am a bayadère! I must keep order in the pagoda. I was destined for this calling since childhood. I cannot give it up... You are my only consolation in life."

The Great Brahmin appears in the doors of the pagoda. He sees the lovers embracing. In a burst of jealousy and wrath he wants to run to them but holds back, promising vengeance. He hides and listens to their conversation, then exits.

"I know a way we can find happiness," says Solor. "Let us flee. In a few days, I shall come for you... I am rich... You have only to agree!..."

"I cannot refuse you... I agree! Only swear to me before this temple that your heart will never belong to anyone else but me, and that you will love me your whole life!..."

"This I swear to you, and I call on Brahma and Vishna as witness, that I shall remain true to you my whole life!..."

"All right then, remember your vow... If you forget it, all possible misfortune will pursue you."

"Look though, it is beginning to dawn; we must part."

At this moment the fakir runs in with the news that the hunters are returning.

The doors of the pagoda open, and the bayadères come out to the pond for water. Unnoticed, Nikiya hurriedly enters the pagoda, and Solor watches as she appears at the window again. Having heard the girls approach, Solor hides among the trees.

In triumph the hunters bring in a tiger they have killed. The Kshatriya Toloragva tells Solor how they brought down the wild animal, but Solor listens distracted, and looks pensively at his beloved's window. Finally he orders the hunters to return home and goes with them, planning to return soon. Nikiya throws Solor a kiss from her window, and begins to play the same melody as before on her instrument. The Great Brahmin appears in the doors of the pagoda again. He calls on the gods as witness to his future vengeance.

ACT 2

Scene 2 – The Two Rivals

The stage represents a magnificent hall in the palace of the rajah Dugmanta.

The rajah is sitting on pillows on a tiger skin. He orders that bayadères be called to entertain him, and proposes a round of chess to one of the kshatriyas. During the rajah's game of chess – a *divertissement*. After the dances, the rajah sends for his daughter Hamsatti, who enters with her girlfriends.

"Today, my child," says Dugmanta, "the day of your wedding to the brave warrior Solor will be set. It is time for you to marry."

"I agree, father... Only I have to yet to see my bridegroom... and I am not sure if he will love me."

"He is my subject... He is obliged to fulfil my commands!... Call him!"

In a few moments Solor appears. When he enters, the rajah's daughter covers her face with a veil.

"It seems you have been long aware," the rajah says, turning to him "that your marriage to my daughter will soon take place."

"But sire," Solor answers, embarrassed, "I am not yet prepared to do this."

"In childhood you were proclaimed Hamsatti's bridegroom, and now you must marry her. Come here, my daughter!"

She goes to her father, and he removes her veil.

"Behold, Solor!... Is she not beautiful!... The finest pearl in the universe!.. I am sure you will be happy with her."

Solor looks and is struck by the girl's beauty, but recalling his beloved bayadère, to whom he has sworn eternal love, he suddenly turns away.

"You are a brave kshatriya," the rajah continues. "I entrust to you the fate of my lovely child, and am certain that you, as no other could, will carry out your duty in relation to your future wife, marriage to whom shall be your happiness."

Solor is deeply troubled by the impending marriage.

Perplexed, the rajah's daughter watches her betrothed, wondering what is causing his grief.

"He does not love me!... I do not please him," she says. "But he will nevertheless be my husband... Not for nothing am I a rajah's daughter... My will must be done!..."

"Sire," Solor says, quietly, approaching the rajah, "the news which you have announced to me is astounding. I openly confess that I cannot fulfil your desire."

"What!? You make bold to disobey your rajah's command!?... I repeat my order to you: in three days you shall marry my daughter. Do you understand?"

Solor realises that the rajah cannot be propitiated, and feels devastated by this fateful command.

A sudra (servant) announces the arrival of the Great Brahmin.

“Let him enter,” says the rajah.

The Brahmin enters and bows down before the worldly sovereign.

“I know a great secret!... I must tell you about it in private,” he whispers to the rajah, looking at Solor with hatred.

“All leave!” the rajah orders, “And you, Solor, see that you do not forget my command.”

All exit; the Brahmin and the rajah remain alone, except for the rajah’s daughter, who hides behind the portiere and listens to their conversation.

In a lively narrative the Great Brahmin describes what happened the night before. He declares that Solor does not love Hamsatti, but adores the bayadère with whom he is seen every night, and wants to run away with her.

Indignant at his future son-in-law’s behaviour, the rajah tells the Great Brahmin of his intention to destroy the bayadère. The Brahmin, wishing only Solor’s death, is frightened at the thought of the serious danger to which he has exposed his beloved bayadère, and tells the rajah that her death will anger the god Vishna and set the god against them.

The rajah, however, will not hear of this and announces to the Brahmin that tomorrow, during the celebration in honour of Badrinata, Nikiya will, as usual, dance with flowers. In one of the baskets of flowers a serpent will be concealed which will crawl out, frightened at the dancer’s movements and bite her, causing her death.

At these words the Brahmin’s whole body shudders.

Hamsatti, who has heard everything from behind the portiere, wants to see the bayadère, and sends her slave girl to fetch her.

The rajah, completely satisfied with the vengeance he had planned, exits with the Brahmin.

Hamsatti sobs and cries in sorrow. She wants to hear from the bayadère herself that Solor adores her.

The slave girl runs in with word of Nikiya’s arrival.

Bowing, the bayadère approaches the rajah’s daughter. Hamsatti looks at her and finds her beautiful.

She tells Nikiya of her impending wedding and invites her to dance in her presence on that day.

Nikiya is flattered by such an honour.

Hamsatti wants to see the impression it will on the bayadère if she knows the identity of her betrothed, and points to a portrait of Solor.

Nikiya all but goes mad with grief. She declares that Solor swore eternal love to her, and that his marriage to the rajah’s daughter will never take place.

Hamsatti insists that Nikiya renounce Solor.

“Never!” answers Nikiya, “I would sooner die!”

Hamsatti offers her diamonds and gold, and tries to persuade her to go off to another land. Nikiya seizes the jewels that the rajah’s daughter is offering her and throws them on the floor.

Hamsatti beseeches the bayadère to let her have Solor, and then to leave. With these words Nikiya takes a dagger which has happened into her hand, and rushes at her rival. The slave girl, who has anxiously followed the bayadère’s movements and intentions, defends her mistress with her body. Nikiya, meanwhile, disappears from the palace.

Hamsatti gets up and says: “Now she must die!”

Scene 3 – The Bayadère’s Death

The stage represents the façade of the rajah’s palace from the side of a garden, with masses of huge flowers and broad-leaved trees. In the distance – the tower of the large pagoda of Megatshada, which reaches almost to the heavens. In the background, the light blue of the heavens themselves. The Himalayas are thinly covered with silvery snow.

At the rise of the curtain the great procession of Badrinata is in progress. Brahmins pass, then four

classes of bayadères (*devadasi*, *natche*, *vestiattrissi*, *kansenissi*), finally pagoda servants, various Indian castes, and others. Penitents enter with burning hot irons. The rajah, his daughter, Solor and other rich Indians are brought in on palanquins.

The rajah takes his place on a platform and orders that the festival begin.

At the end of the dances, the rajah commands the beautiful Nikiya to come in, and orders her to entertain the public.

Nikiya comes out of her crowd with her little veena. Her face is covered by a veil. She plays the same melody she played in Act 1. Solor, placed near the rajah's throne, listens attentively to this harmonious melody and recognises his beloved. He gazes at her lovingly.

Hardly able to conceal his wrath, the Great Brahmin watches him with suppressed malice.

During the bayadère's dance the rajah's jealous daughter uses all her strength to conceal her state of mind. Smiling, she comes down from the balcony and orders a basket with flowers to be presented to the graceful Nikiya. Nikiya takes the basket and continues to dance, admiring the pensive Solor.

Suddenly a snake crawls out of the basket and strikes the bayadère in the heart. Its bite is deadly.

Continuing her dance, the beautiful girl appeals to Solor for help, and he embraces her.

"Do not forget your vow," she gasps. "You are sworn to me... I am dying... Farewell!"

The Great Brahmin runs up and offers the dancer an antidote. But Nikiya refuses the flagon and throws herself once again into Solor's arms.

"Farewell Solor!... I love you!... I die innocent!..."

These are the bayadère's last words, after which she falls and dies.

The rajah and his daughter triumph.

As through mist a shade is seen, behind which follow will-o'-the-wisps. It grows pale and vanishes among the icecaps of the Himalayas.

ACT 3

Scene 4 – The Appearance of the Shade

Solor's room in the rajah's palace.

As the curtain rises, Solor is walking around the stage like a madman, now slowly, now in wild haste.

He seems to be trying to remember something. Then he falls, exhausted, on to a divan.

The fakir Madhavaya watches him with a look of profound pity, then orders snake charmers brought in (a man and a woman), to drive the evil spirit from Solor's body. (*Comic Dance.*)

Solor orders the fakir to dismiss them.

There is a knock at the door. The fakir opens it. Hamsatti enters, the rajah's daughter, with a number of women retainers. She is magnificently dressed in gold and pearls. She turns to Solor with reproaches.

The fakir informs her that he requires healing, not quarrels, whereupon Hamsatti wants to divert him, and is extremely amiable. She sits down next to him, caresses him and tries in every way to attract his attention.

Solor at last revives, and takes her hand. At this moment the melancholy strains of the bayadère's song are heard. The shade of the weeping Nikiya appears on the wall. Solor trembles.

"Oh! Now my misfortunes will begin," he says, "I forgot my vow! Remorse will pursue me my whole life."

"Calm down!... What's the matter?" Hamsatti says, and tries to console him.

"I beg of you... leave me... Tomorrow we shall see each other again!... Tomorrow is our wedding... I feel unwell just now... I must rest!..."

Sorrowful, Hamsatti withdraws, bidding him farewell until the morrow.

Solor goes over to the wall, but the shade is gone; it appears only at moments when his imagination is inflamed.

“You forgot your vow, unhappy man!” – it is as if the shade were speaking to him – “You plan to marry Hamsatti, and so to disturb my peace beyond the grave! But I still love you!”

In vain Solor tries to catch Nikiya’s elusive shade. “And I love you,” he answers. “I have not forgotten you and love you as before.”

The shade at last disappears. Solor falls unconscious on the divan. A dream comes over him and he falls asleep, never ceasing to think about the shade.

Clouds descend.

Scene 5 – The Kingdom of the Shades

An enchanted place. Soft harmonious music is heard.

Shades appear while this music sounds – Nikiya first, then Solor.

Dances
Plastic groupings

“I died innocent,” says Nikiya’s shade, “I remained true to you. Behold everything around me. Is it not splendid!... The gods have granted me all possible blessings. I lack only you!”

“What must I do in order to be yours?” Solor asks her.

“Remember your vow! You promised to be faithful to me!... The melody that you now hear will protect you..., and my shade will guard you... I shall be with you in misfortune.”

“If you do not betray me,” Nikiya continues, “your spirit will find rest here, in this kingdom of the shades.”

A large concluding dance of the shades.

Clouds descend.

Scene 6 – Solor’s Awakening

Solor’s room, as before.

Solor is lying on his divan, in a troubled sleep. The fakir enters, pauses next to his master, and looks at him sadly. Solor awakens suddenly. He thought he was in Nikiya’s embrace.

Servants of the rajah bring in expensive gifts and tell Solor that all preparations are completed for his wedding to the rajah’s daughter.

They exit.

Obsessed with his thoughts, Solor follows them.

ACT 4

Scene 7 – The gods’ wrath

The stage represents a large hall with columns in the rajah’s palace.

Preparations are underway for the ritual of sipmanadi (marriage) of Solor and Hamsatti. Warriors enter, together with brahmins, bayadères, and others. Hamsatti appears, followed by her father with his

retinue. When the young warrior Solor appears, the rajah orders the festival to begin.

During the dances the shade pursues Solor and reminds him of his vow.

Hamsatti, meanwhile, does everything in her power to please her bridegroom, who grieves the whole time, and never stops thinking of Nikiya.

Four girls present a basket to the bride exactly like the one given to the bayadère, from which crawled the snake that bit her. Hamsatti rejects the basket in horror, as it reminds her of her rival – the cause of all her unhappiness.

Recalling the basket revives the image of the poisoned bayadère in Hamsatti's mind. The shade appears before her, the spectre of the bayadère appears to Hamsatti's troubled mind.

The rajah's daughter flees from it and rushes into her father's arms, begging him to hasten the wedding.

The rajah orders the ceremony to begin.

The Great Brahmin takes bride and groom by the hand.

As the ceremony begins, the sky darkens, lightning flashes, there are peals of thunder, and it begins to rain.

At the very moment when the Brahmin takes the hands of Solor and Hamsatti to join them, there is a fearful thunderclap followed by an earthquake. Lightning strikes the hall, which collapses and covers in its ruins the rajah, his daughter, the Great Brahmin and Solor.

Apotheosis

Through the rain the peaks of the Himalayas are visible. Nikiya's shade glides through the air; she is triumphant, and tenderly looks at her beloved Solor, who is at her feet.

Résumé of scene and dances from the 1900 revival:

Act 1, scene 1

No. 1 Introduction

No. 2 Scène première et entrée de Solor

No. 3 L'entrée du Grand Brahmane, les prêtres, et les fakirs

No. 4 *Danse des prêtresses*

No. 5 Scène dansée des fakirs

No. 6 Entrée de Nikiya

No. 7 *Variation de Nikiya*

No. 8 Scène dramatique du Grand Brahmane et Nikiya

No. 9 Scène mimique de Solor et Madhavaya

No. 10 Scène de Nikiya et le Veena

No. 11 Scène de Nikiya et Solor

No. 12 Scène mimique de Nikiya et Solor

No. 13 Scène

Act 1, scene 2

No. 14 Introduction et scène

No. 15 *Danse d'jampe*

No. 16 Entrée de Gamzatti

No. 17 Scène mimique du Grand Brahmane et le Raja

No. 18 Scène dramatique et final de Nikiya et Gamzatti

Act 2

No. 19 Grand cortège

Grand Divertissement

No. 20 Danse des esclaves

No. 21 Valse éventails

No. 22 Valse des perroquets

No. 23 Danse pour quatre bayadères

No. 24 Danse manu

No. 25 Pas indien

No. 26 Coda générale

No. 27 Scène dansée de Nikiya

No. 27a *Danse de Nikiya*

No. 27b *Danse panier*

No. 28 Scène et final – La morte de Nikiya

Act 3, scene 1

No. 29 Introduction et scène

No. 30 *Danse du charmeur de serpent*

No. 31 Scène de Gamzatti et Solor

No. 32 Entrée de Nikiya et scène

Scene 2

No. 33 *Grand pas classique des ombres*

- (a) *Entrée des ombres*
- (b) *Valse*
- (c) *Entrée de Solor*
- (d) *Entrée de Nikiya*
- (e) *Grand adage*
- (f) *Variation I*
- (g) *Variation II*
- (h) *Variation III*

- (i) *Variation de Nikiya*
- (j) *Grand coda*

Scene 3

No. 34 Scène et final

Act 4

No. 35 Introduction et scène

No. 36 *Danse des fleurs de lotus*

No. 37 *Grand Pas d'action*

- (a) *Entrée*
- (b) *Grand adage*
- (c) *Variation de Solor* (Variation pour M. Nikolai Legat)
- (d) *Variation de Gamzatti*
- Interpolation – *Variation de Nikiya* (Variation pour Mme. Matilda Kschessinskaya: music by Riccardo Drigo)
- (e) *Grand coda*

No. 38 La destruction du temple

No. 39 Apothéose – la résurrection de Nikiya et Solor

Sources

- Wiley, Roland John (2007) *A Century of Russian Ballet*. Alton, Hampshire, UK: Dance Books Ltd

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