

# Designing costumes for “La Bayadere”

ballet in two acts by Ludwig Minkus  
State Opera Ruse

Yana Dvoretzka, PhD

## ABSTRACT

The extended summary "Designing costumes for “La Bayadere” contains a description of the process of designing and making the stage costumes for Ludwig Minkus' ballet presented on the stage of State Opera Ruse in April 2021. The text has a volume of 59 pages, divided into nine chapters and contains 62 images that include the original artist drawings and photos from the premiere performance.

The introduction contains the personal motivation of the author, whose education and professional development is in the field of fashion design, to turn to the creation of stage costumes. There are numerous examples of famous fashion designers "tempted" by the theatre, opera and ballet art who contributed profoundly to the stage, and the result of their work is often original, provocative and carries a distinct spirit of modernity.

The second chapter describes the characteristic features and challenges in designing a ballet costume. Of all the types of stage costume, the ballet costume presents the greatest challenge, as it has the highest structural and technological requirements: the design of a ballet costume piece must first work within the specific framework of the choreography; every detail of it must be subordinated to the free movement of the dancer; some of the details are practically invisible due to the great distance between the viewer and the dancer; the original colours are often changed by the lighting, which is a key instrument in the scenographic project and the director's concept. The difficulty in introducing non-traditional solutions is also important to note. The opera-ballet scene, especially in Bulgaria, is quite conservative territory and it is extremely rare for the costume designer in a classical ballet performance to be allowed to give their original point of view. Last but not least is the purely practical side of producing a ballet costume, which is complex, multi-layered and requires a lot of time, manual labour and technical skills.

The third chapter describes the history of the exotic ballet "La Bayadere", which is among the most typical representatives of stage performances from the Romantic era, as well as one of the eternal ballet classics of the Minkus - Petipa tandem.

The fourth chapter contains a list of the characters and synopsis of the ballet, which in its original version consisted of four acts and seven tableaux (scenes). In the stage version of prof. Kalina Bogoeva - director of the play - the acts are reduced to two, in order to adapt the performance to the contemporary audience attitude and to present the plot in a minimal vibe with a focus on the artistry and professional level of the performers.

The fifth chapter describes the costume designer assignment in the light of the aforementioned director's concept. As in the set design of the great Bulgarian stage designer Ivan Tokadzhiev, the idea of a modern and understandable visual language is embedded in the costumes, too. This approach aims, on the one hand, for an intense experience of the today's impatient audience, and on the other hand, it makes possible the difficult task of staging a ballet of such a scale, which requires enormous financial and performing resources.

In the sixth and seventh chapters, the process of designing the costumes of the main characters and the ensembles is discussed in detail. The inspiration for the look of the characters is both from the history of Ancient India and the original Indian ethnic clothing, as well as from the classical ballet aesthetics of Romanticism. Also described are the transformations from the initial design to the final finished costume, associated with various obstacles of a financial, practical and other nature. The original drawings are juxtaposed with photographs of the completed costumes, making it possible to trace these transformations.

In the conclusion, a summary is made of the creative process of designing and making the costumes for the ballet "La Bayadere" - 76 costumes in the extremely short period of two months, which requires both a certain ingenuity and the serious efforts of the technical staff that was responsible for the production.

Chapter nine contains a bibliography and image sources.