

MATTHEW BOURNE'S

SWAN LAKE

THE NEXT GENERATION

LEARN & EXPLORE

ABOUT NEW ADVENTURES

New Adventures is an iconic and ground-breaking dance-theatre company. Since 1987, we have been known for creating works that have altered the public perception of what is possible when it comes to telling stories without words. The company is led by celebrated choreographer and director, Sir Matthew Bourne.



AN INTRODUCTION TO SWAN LAKE

First staged in 1995, Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake is renowned for its audacious, rule-breaking reinvention of Tchaikovsky's masterpiece, which caused a sensation when it premiered almost 30 years ago. Thrilling, bold, witty and emotive, the genre-defining performance is still best known for replacing the female corps-de-ballet with a menacing male ensemble, which shattered convention, turning tradition on its head.

The upheaval of the traditional gender roles seen in the classic ballet enabled Matthew to creatively explore the feral, wild nature of swans, inspired by the strength, agility and endurance of the dancers. The result is a darker ambience for the production that simultaneously conveys beauty as well as a different kind of masculinity on stage, a far cry from the elegant, calm romanticism that the birds as well as a ballerina typically conjure up.

Today the imagery associated with the production – the bare-chested, feathery legged, black smudged faces of the swans – has become iconic. The show is still heralded as an original interpretation of a classic for contemporary audiences and the piece which inspired a generation of young dancers.



KEY THEMES

Despite revisions to the plot, which is typical of Matthew's approach to reinterpreting a classic, the traditional themes of Swan Lake remain very much central to New Adventures' adaptation but with a modern twist. At its heart, Swan Lake has all the ingredients of any fast-paced, prime-time TV thriller – there's longing, betrayal, jealousy, dominance, power, temptation, hope and despair. What makes Matthew's version most appealing, perhaps, is its relatability. By setting the story in 21st century England, we feel intensely connected to the piece and the characters in it.

Here are some of the key themes explored in the production:

- **Family and Duty**
- **Power and Class**
- **Isolation and Connection**
- **Desire and Jealousy**
- **Loss and Hope**
- **Good vs Evil**





THE PRODUCTION

To put on a show like *Swan Lake*, we rely on the skills of lots of talented people. Before and during the rehearsal period, a creative team works closely together to determine what the show will look, feel and sound like, including:

- **Director & Choreographer** – Sir Matthew Bourne OBE
- **Composer** – Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky
- **Set & Costume Designer** – Lez Brotherston OBE
- **Lighting Designer** – Paule Constable
- **Orchestrator** – Rowland Lee
- **Video & Projection Designer** – Duncan McLean
- **Sound Designer** – Ken Hampton
- **Associate Artistic Director** – Etta Murfitt OBE
- **Resident Director** – Neil Westmoreland
- **Rehearsal Associate** – Dominic North

[Watch the week-by-week *Swan Lake* Rehearsal Room diary to find out more about the role of the Associate Artistic Director and how the production was staged](#)



SHORT SYNOPSIS

The plot of *Swan Lake* revolves around a Prince, his relationship with his distant mother, the Queen, and his desire to transcend the stifling constraints of his royal life and its conventions. A troubled and isolated young man, the Prince struggles to find his place in the world. He longs for affection, tenderness and approval from his mother but is consistently rebuffed.

Upset and alone he finds himself by a lake and encounters the Swan. Enchanted, the Prince is drawn in by the beautiful and alluring figure of the Swan and his flock who seemingly represents all he desires. The chance encounter leads the Prince on a fevered quest for the passionate intensity and freedom his own life lacks so desperately.

[Read about the story in more detail](#)

CREATIVE TASK – ‘BECOMING A SWAN’ PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

[You can research some images of swans and use the production images on our website to support you in this task.](#)

Thinking of the physical characteristics and qualities of swans, create a movement that signifies each of the below:

- **Wings**
- **Beak**
- **Flight**
- **Landing**
- **Glide**

Now put your five actions into an order of your choice to create a phrase of Swan movement. Consider using different levels and facings in the room. Can you repeat or freeze a movement?

Next consider what qualities your Swan is bringing. Some examples could be:

- **Territorial**
- **Graceful**
- **Defensive**
- **Powerful**

Can you think of some other words to describe the qualities of swans?

Choose a word and see how it changes the dynamic or focus of your phrase.

If you are in a group, you can work in pairs to learn each other’s movement and extend your Swan phrase to make longer phrases.

Can you find a way to fly into the space and a formation in which to dance your swan motif?

How different does it feel to dance in a ‘flock’ or solo?

Fly and enjoy!

FIND OUT MORE

- [Meet the dancers](#)
- [Learn more about the plot](#)
- [Watch the trailer](#)
- [Find out about careers in theatre](#)
- [Learn more about New Adventures](#)

If you are affected by any of the themes in the show, please reach out to the following organisations for support:

- [Mind](#)
- [Samaritans](#)
- [Young Minds](#)

NEW/ADVENTURES



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**