

The Story of Coppelia ***“The Girl with the Enamel Eyes”***

The ballet *Coppelia* was based on a story by the German writer and composer E.T.A. Hoffmann, who also wrote the story after which the Nutcracker Ballet is based. The *Coppelia* ballet, which was first performed by the Paris Opera in 1870, combines two stories: the love of Franz and Swanhilda and the ambitions of the old puppet and toy maker Dr. Coppelius, whose desire is to make a living doll.

As the story opens in Act One, we are in a village square outside the home of the lovely young maiden, Swanhilda. She lives across the road from the strange and aging toy maker, Dr. Coppelius. His finest creation, the beautiful life-like doll Coppelia, sits at the window forever reading a book. Believing she is a real person, Swanhilda admires her beauty, and tries to befriend her, only to be completely ignored by the life-like doll, Coppelia. Swanhilda enjoys dancing and visiting with her friends and the other village maidens, and is also in love with a handsome young man named Franz. Franz loves Swanhilda, but he also notices the lovely Coppelia reading her book at the window of Dr. Coppelius' house. He tries to win the attention of the lovely and beautiful Coppelia, but she does not return his flirtations. The village maidens and harvesters dance to a hearty Mazurka, and are joined by the gentlemen and beautiful ladies for a lively Hungarian Czardas when the Duke arrives to announce that there will be a betrothal gift: a dowry offered by the Count to all young lovers who plan to marry.

Swanhilda and Franz are anxious to marry and receive this gift, but Swanhilda doubts Franz's intentions and becomes jealous over his flirtatious ways. She tests his faithfulness with a sheaf of wheat. If it rustles when shaken, then Franz loves her and only her. If there is no sound when the wheat shakes, then Franz does not love her. Swanhilda finds that the wheat test proves that Franz loves another, and is unfaithful to her. Franz and Swanhilda dance with their friends, and Franz pleads his faithfulness to only Swanhilda. But alas, Swanhilda and her friends happen upon Franz flirting once again with the pretty Czardas dancers, and Swanhilda promptly slams her door in Franz's face.

Dr. Coppelius leaves his house to venture toward town, and happens upon some young boys playing. Innocently, their lively activities cause the old toy maker to accidentally drop his key to the toy shop on the ground. Shaken, Dr. Coppelius chases the boys away and proceeds into town. Swanhilda and her friends emerge from Swanhilda's house, and discover the key on the ground. Swanhilda is terribly curious and jealous of the beautiful young Coppelia in the window, so she convinces her friends to take the key and enter the home and workshop of Dr. Coppelius while he is out. As the girls are entering the house, Franz decides to see the beautiful Coppelia who sits in the window himself. He moves a ladder to the window and attempts to sneak inside to see Coppelia, and profess his love to her.

As Act Two opens, we find some beautiful dolls dancing in the toy shop. Swanhilda and her friends enter the shop, and look for the beautiful Coppelia in the window. Swanhilda gathers enough courage to meet Coppelia in person upon the prodding of her friends, and they are amused to find that Coppelia is only a doll. They wind up some of the toys in the shop and are delighted to see them dance. Soon, Dr. Coppelius returns to find his home broken into, and the young girls in his shop. Angrily,

he shoos them out. A few hide, but he finds the girls and chases them away---except for Swanhilda, who manages to hide in the window where Coppelia was sitting and reading. Swanhilda changes clothes with the doll, and pretends to be the beautiful doll, Coppelia to play a little trick on the aging toy maker.

Franz has climbed up the ladder and now enters through the toy shop window to find the beautiful Coppelia. Dr. Coppelius spies him entering, and this ensues a chase. Franz apologizes, and Dr. Coppelius forgives him, but decides he will get revenge on the young man. He offers Franz some wine with a sleeping potion, and together they drink with Franz falling quickly into a deep sleep at the table. Dr. Coppelius is determined to make his beautiful doll, Coppelia come to life, so he pulls out his book of magic spells. He tries to transfer the body movements from Franz to his doll, and Swanhilda plays along, moving on cue. Dr. Coppelia is not entirely happy with her doll-like movements, however and attempts to transfer the heart and soul of Franz into Coppelia so she can become real. Swanhilda plays along, impersonating Coppelia and pretends to come to life. She has so much fun at the old doctor's expense that she playfully gets the other dolls to dance...

During Act Three, we find the village preparing for a new bell for the town square. Everyone prepares for the celebration to commemorate the new bell, and the village is joined by the Dance of the Hours and the Dawn of a new day. There are dances to illustrate the uses to which the bell will be used: the call to prayer, work, the announcement of a marriage, the call to arms, and most important, the declaration of peace. Swanhilda and Franz reunite; their quarrels are now forgiven, and there is peace. The Duke arrives to present dowries to all the betrothed in the village. A special dowry is presented to Dr. Coppelius for his troubles, and now Dr. Coppelius has forgotten all the mischief at his expense. He discovers that his mystical powers really have worked. Swanhilda and Franz receive their dowry, and the village celebrates their harvest, their new bell, and the pending marriage and love of Swanhilda and Franz.