



*Performance Practice of Three Tchaikovsky Ballet Cadenzas:
A Discussion of the Current Editing Practice
of the Waltz of the Flowers, White Swan and
Rose Adagio Harp Cadenzas*

by Sara Cutler

THE three major harp cadenzas composed by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky for *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty* ballets are of interest not only to those harpists who regularly perform for ballet companies, but to all professional harpists. They are often performed on symphonic concerts and appear on the repertoire list for nearly every orchestral audition. As originally written, they are either unplayable or, in places so unidiomatically written for the instrument as to prove ineffective. In this article, the *AHJ* will explore how four harpists, affiliated with the resident orchestras of the most renowned ballet companies dancing today, perform them. Barbara Allen, Principal Harp: American Ballet Theatre Orchestra, Emmanuel Ceysson, former Principal Harp: the Paris Opera/Ballet Orchestra (and current Principal Harp: the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra), Maria Krushnevskaya, Solo Harpist: Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, (former Solo Harpist: Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra) and I, Sara Cutler, Principal Harp: New York City Ballet Orchestra, will offer up and discuss the choices we have made in realizing these three cadenzas. In some cases, our performances are based upon tradition. In others, we have the freedom to make our own choices. In still others, choices are made for us. In all situations, however, we must respect that ballet is a living, breathing art form that evolves with each performance.

The first question that arises when considering these solos is why they are not written more idiom-

atically for the harp. Fast, contrary motion gestures and grand simultaneous two-handed arpeggios, written in intervals, abound. Reference works do not seriously address this question, but one possibility is that Tchaikovsky knew he could rely on the talents of the harpist who first performed them, Albert Zabel,¹ to take the originals and create something from them that would be idiomatic and also true to Tchaikovsky's intent. Zabel was the first harpist to change the "contrary, simultaneous arpeggiated chords" of the "Waltz of the Flowers" cadenza to all descending flowing arpeggios.²

Whatever the reasons for leaving these cadenzas in a somewhat unfinished state, it is understood by performers that certain adaptations are necessary and that some of these adaptations might even be dictated by the needs of a given ballet company.

The collaborative nature of composing a score for ballet is well noted. The freedom of the composer is limited by the needs of the choreographer and, usually, the two will work closely together throughout the process of creating a ballet. For Tchaikovsky, his first foray into this process, with *Swan Lake*, both excited and worried him.³ He feared he would be

1 Albert Heinrich Zabel (1834-1910) was a German harpist who spent much of his career performing in Russia with the orchestra of the St. Petersburg Imperial Theatres and served as the harpist for the premieres of Tchaikovsky's ballets.

2 Cynthia Price-Glynn, "Ballet and the Harp" (*American Harp Journal*, Vol. 26, No.1, 2017), 25.

3 Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 40.

regarded as a “specialist” composer, like Delibes, Adam, or Drigo.⁴ These composers created ballet scores with pretty melodies and simple accompaniments that were easily adjusted when coupled with the choreography. Their scores were often considered vulgar and lightweight—“easy listening” music according to the critics of the day—and often dismissed as lacking depth. Tchaikovsky’s “gift to be simple without being simple-minded” had the effect of elevating the standard of ballet music and ultimately reshaped the traditions of the genre.⁵

What is often ignored is that the collaborative nature of ballet extends beyond the composers and choreographers to the performers themselves. It requires contributions from everyone involved to bring a score to life and ensure that it works to integrate the music and dance. But it is equally important that the music have a life of its own. As an experienced New York City Ballet orchestra player said, “[Balanchine]⁶ recognized that if you put the orchestra in a straitjacket, you don’t get a good musical performance.”⁷ It is this goal of combined integration and independence that justifies many re-workings of scores by the musicians performing them; this is especially true of edits to the harp cadenzas of Tchaikovsky’s three ballets. A re-staged production curated by an idiosyncratic ballet master or a newly choreographed production may require a harp cadenza to be shortened or lengthened, played slower or faster, or have its integral parts rearranged. A harpist must be flexible enough to realize Tchaikovsky’s intent while accommodating external realities.

4 Leo Delibes (1815-1910), Adolphe Adam (1803-1856) two nineteenth century French composers known for their ballet scores and, Riccardo Drigo (1846-1930), Italian born Music Director of the Imperial Ballet of St. Petersburg, Russia

5 Wiley, *Tchaikovsky’s Ballets*, 277

6 George Balanchine (1904-1983) was the founder and Ballet Master-in-Chief of the New York City Ballet and was recognized as one of the great ballet choreographers of the 20th century.

7 Interview with Principal Horn of the New York City Ballet Orchestra, Paul Ingraham, in Katharine Teck, *Music for the Dance, Reflections on a Collaborative Art* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989), 204.

The Nutcracker "Waltz Of The Flowers" Cadenza

@ New York City Ballet

In the best known of the three cadenzas, the “Waltz of the Flowers” from *The Nutcracker*, there is one obvious problem that must be resolved (Example 1). In the original, Tchaikovsky wrote thirteen bars of contrary-motion sixteenth note arpeggiated chords that follow a melody line up the harp and then back down to an ascending, two-handed, four-octave, dominant seventh arpeggio written in sixths. While it all is, in the strictest sense of the word, playable, it will never sound anything but clunky and certainly never brilliant. As previously mentioned, Zabel fixed this by eliminating the contrary motion and playing the arpeggios as thirty-second note descending right-left arpeggios. The melody line stays in the right thumb (as in the original) allowing that melody to lead the section. This is how most arrangements of this cadenza solve this problem. But questions remain. How and when to end these arpeggios? How to play the ascending arpeggio at the end? Here is where versions differ. At the New York City Ballet, the descending arpeggios end with the right hand playing a descending root position A⁷ starting on third octave G and ending on fourth octave A (with a small *rallentando*). Then the left hand begins the ascending A⁷ arpeggio on the fifth octave A proceeding hand over hand until reaching first octave A (Example 2, bar 12).⁸ It is then played as written to the end. This allows for a smooth and clear transition from the melodic arpeggios to the ascending one and avoids forcing the right hand to play below where it might be comfortable.

There is one further edit used at New York City Ballet. It is found in the opening arpeggios leading into the cadenza proper. As written, the third of the A-Major chord appears on the second and penultimate notes of the two arpeggios (Example 3). This C-sharp falls on a sixth octave wire string.

8 In all excerpts, where possible, note stems above the notes denote the use of the right hand and note stems below the notes denote the use of the left hand.

While it is certainly playable and falls in the fingers nicely, it has the unfortunate effect of muddying the harmony and making the entrance of the harp difficult for the ear to parse. Omitting that note at the beginning and end of each arpeggio allows for an A-E fifth to “announce” the harmony decisively and cleanly in a way that would be impossible with the third interpolated into the mix. Further help in defining the chord comes from placing that missing third on the third sixteenth of the arpeggio (an octave above the original third) and leaving out the repeated fundamental fifth octave A (Example 4). I use this technique in all three of these cadenzas wherever there are similar arpeggios.

A final, personal note about phrasing and rubato in this cadenza at New York City Ballet. While I am left to make my own decisions about how much time to take where, and how much to stretch or push, I find that I tend to do a little more rubato with each season. The temptation to play with the phrasing after so many years and performances of *Nutcracker* is often irresistible. City Ballet does a six-week *Nutcracker* season every year beginning at Thanksgiving and, without fail, every four or five seasons, I will get a note from our ballet mistress asking “Sara, can the cadenza go faster?” I understand that she doesn’t really mean that the tempo is wrong, merely that I have stretched it too much for the dancers’ needs. That always brings me back to a straighter interpretation, with less rubato—at least for a few seasons.

@ American Ballet Theatre

Barbara Allen’s version of the “Waltz of the Flowers” cadenza for ABT is like NYCB’s, but she does not use Zabel’s fix, instead maintaining the contrary motion in the melodic arpeggios section. However, she plays the hands consecutively, right hand \blacktriangledown , then left hand \blacktriangleright until reaching the top B on the last beat of the 8th measure (Example 1). At that point both hands travel downward consecutively to the ascending arpeggio before the chordal passage.

@ The Bolshoi Theatre Ballet

Maria Krushnevskaia followed Russian performance practice traditions during her tenure at the Bolshoi

when playing all three of Tchaikovsky’s cadenzas. For the “Waltz of the Flowers” cadenza, this means using the Zabel version as arranged by the great Russian twentieth-century harpist, Vera Dulova.⁹ This version maintains the basic structure and length of the original and uses the same descending arpeggio arrangement that Zabel introduced to replace the contrary motion passage, but continues further than the NYCB version. There is a low A octave added at the beginning of the cadenza proper underneath the first melodic arpeggio. Adding to the brilliance of the cadenza is the enharmonic A⁷ glissando near the end that replaces Tchaikovsky’s long ascending arpeggio (using a D-flat and an F-flat). And the final broken chord has a sixth octave A added for a little extra gravitas (Example 5).

@ Paris Opera/Ballet

When Emmanuel Ceysson was a member of the Paris Opera/Ballet Orchestra, he played a version like the others discussed here, with one difference. Of the four of us, Ceysson seems to be the only one who played the printed melodic arpeggios all the way down to the ascending A⁷ arpeggio. Then he played a straight A-Major arpeggio ascending to the final chords (instead of the written A⁷ arpeggio), while maintaining the 3/4 metric structure. Maintaining that structure meant playing the A Major arpeggio beginning on sixth octave A and ending on the next downbeat on a first octave A as fast (and as *fortissimo*) as possible (Example 6).

Swan Lake "White Swan" Cadenza

@ New York City Ballet

City Ballet diverges from the norm quite considerably in this cadenza. Mr. Balanchine disliked the connection between the introductory arpeggios preceding the cadenza proper and the descending F-minor⁷ arpeggios that normally begin the cadenza (Example 7). So, he switched the beginning around.

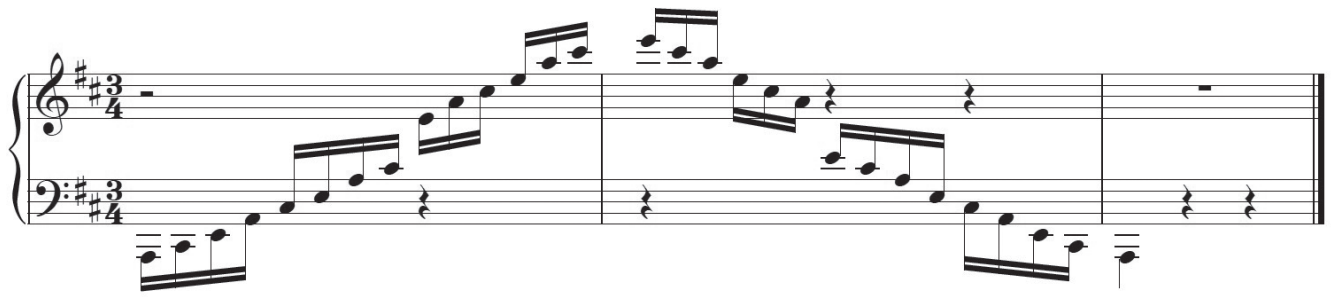
⁹ Vera Dulova (1909-2000) was a Russian harpist, student of Maria Korchinska, Solo Harpist for the Bolshoi Theatre and generally acknowledged as one of the great harpists of her generation.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano cadenza. The first system is marked *Arpa ff* and includes the instruction *cadenza ad libitum*. The second system is marked *Arpa*. The third system is marked *Arpa* and includes the instruction *riten.* The notation consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef, featuring intricate arpeggiated patterns and melodic lines.

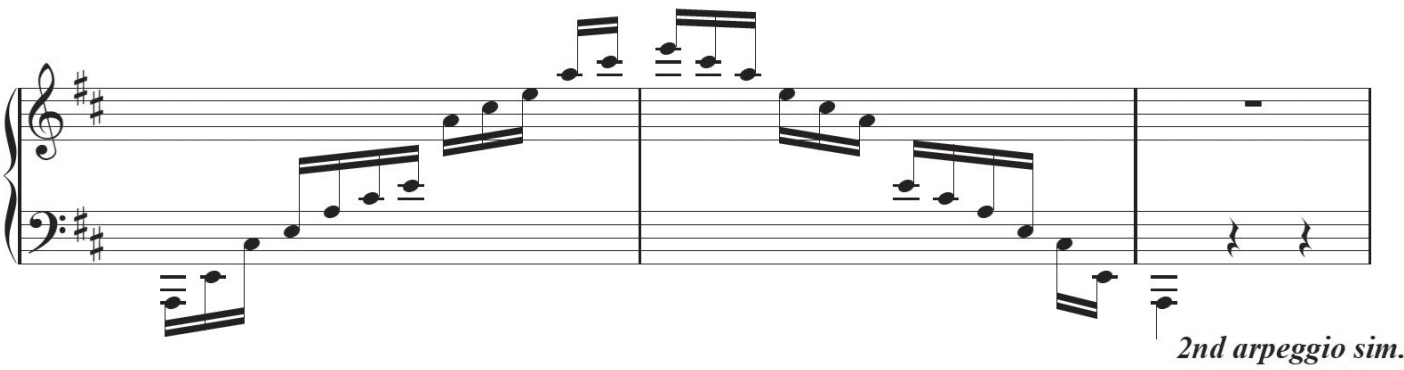
Example 1. Tchaikovsky's original cadenza for "Waltz of the Flowers."

The image displays a musical score for a harp cadenza, consisting of six systems of music. Each system is written for a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The first five systems feature intricate, flowing sixteenth-note passages in both hands, with some systems showing a more active bass line. The sixth system begins with the instruction *rall..... a tpo* and concludes with *rit...*. The final section of the sixth system is characterized by dense, vertical chordal textures, likely representing a final cadence or a decorative flourish.

Example 2. NYCB "Waltz of the Flowers" cadenza.



Example 3. Tchaikovsky's original opening arpeggios in the "Waltz of the Flowers" cadenza.



Example 4. New York City Ballet's opening arpeggios.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano cadenza. The first system features a series of arpeggiated chords in both the treble and bass staves, with a '8va' marking above the treble staff. The second system includes a 'gliss. ad libitum' instruction with a wavy line on the bass staff, a circled 'D₄ F₄' in the treble staff, and a 'rit.' marking. The third system shows a series of chords with 'rit.' and 'D₄ G₄' markings, and a final chord with 'G₄' and 'rit.' markings. The number '10613' is printed at the bottom center of the page.

Example 5. Bolshoi Ballet "Waltz of the Flowers" cadenza, last eight bars.

The image shows a single system of musical notation for Ceysson's arpeggio. It consists of a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The bass staff begins with a bass clef, the same key signature, and time signature. The piece features a series of arpeggiated chords that ascend in pitch across the system.

Example 6. Ceysson's arpeggio.

Cadenza

p

ritenuto molto

Example 7. Tchaikovsky's original "White Swan" cadenza.

The cadenza, as performed there, begins with the ascending D-flat Major chords that start in the sixth/fifth (left/right) octaves and travel, spiraling, up the harp to the second/first octaves. Only after those are played do we hear the descending F-minor⁷ arpeggios (Examples 7 and 8). Another quirk in the City Ballet version is the last note of the quasi-grace note arpeggios found in Example 7 on the fourth and fifth systems. In most scores, these gestures end on a first octave C-flat (Example 7, last system, fermata note). At the City Ballet, I play a D-flat on that last note. While I cannot say why it's done this way (it pre-dates me), I believe it is the right thing to do. Ending on the root of the dominant chord, D-flat, just makes sense, especially when the next series of arpeggios begins on that same first octave C-flat. After doing it this way for so many years, it is always jarring to my ear to hear others play a C-flat there.

The most difficult part of this solo comes before the cadenza even begins. It is the four bars of arpeggios that introduce the cadenza (Example 9). At City Ballet, it always goes faster than I'd like and it can sound confusing and unclear coming out of the repeated woodwind notes, even when perfectly played. As with the opening to the "Waltz of the Flowers," I drop the third out (the second and penultimate note of each arpeggio) in bar 2, 6 and 7 of the introduction. Here, too, it allows for a clearer presentation of the harmony while avoiding the muddiness of *forte* bass wires being played at breakneck speed. In bar 4, I re-spell the arpeggio to make a D - F-sharp - A-flat C-flat-seventh chord. It is not, technically, necessary. One needs a G-flat for the upcoming Pas de Deux anyway, but the even spacing of the root position seventh chord makes it possible to grab the right strings every time with barely a thought. (Krushnevskaia also used this spelling at the Bolshoi.) I also eliminate the final descending left hand C-flat - A-flat -F-sharp in bar 4 leading into beat 3 in order to avoid the turnaround and play a strong low D on that third beat. The tempo is fast enough that those notes are not missed.

@ American Ballet Theatre

The ABT "White Swan" cleaves quite closely to the original Tchaikovsky version, with two notable ex-

ceptions. The spiraling D-flat chords that follow the opening F⁷ arpeggios in the original are eliminated, shortening the whole by quite a bit. Their printed part also does have the D-flat at the top of the quasi grace note section instead of the original C-flat found in most scores.

@ The Bolshoi and Mariinsky

At the Bolshoi, this cadenza also sticks close to the original. Maria Krushnevskaia says that she had, on occasion, left out some iterations of the spiraling D-flat chords to avoid the considerable repetition. She also followed a tradition at the Bolshoi that calls for replacing the last descending arpeggio, just before the cued grace note octaves, with a glissando (adding an E-sharp, G-sharp and B-natural) (Example 10).

However, Krushnevskaia reports that the "White Swan" cadenza she plays at the Mariinsky Theatre is very different, indeed. This version was approved by Tchaikovsky himself and is by Albert Zabel. It bears so little similarity to the original that it appears to be an entirely different piece. There are too many variances to mention here. The music will have to speak for itself (Example 11).

@Paris Opera/Ballet

This cadenza is normally played as written at Paris Opera/Ballet. Ceysson reports that they do use the same D-flat at the top of the quasi grace note section as at City Ballet. However he says that, depending on who was dancing, the D-flat spiraling chords could be truncated, leaving out much of it. If it was the case that less time was needed than usual, Ceysson would start that section on the last ascending series, playing only the last twelve chords of the original (Example 12).

The *Sleeping Beauty* "Rose Adagio" Cadenza

@ New York City Ballet

Example 13 shows Tchaikovsky's original cadenza preceding the "Rose Adagio." As in the "Waltz of the Flowers" cadenza, there is a section of contrary mo-

CADENZA

The musical score is written for piano in G-flat major (three flats) and 3/4 time. It is a cadenza, indicated by the word "CADENZA" at the top. The score is divided into five systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system begins with a *sim.* (piano) dynamic marking. The second system features an *8va* (octave) marking above the treble staff. The fourth system also has an *8va* marking. The fifth system concludes with a box labeled "cued....." in the bass staff, signifying a cue for the next section of the piece.

Example 8: NYCB "White Swan" cadenza.

The first system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of sixteenth-note chords and single notes. The lower staff is in bass clef with a common time signature (C). It begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth-note chords and single notes.

The second system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and begins with a measure number '4'. It features a melodic line of eighth notes with various accidentals (sharps and flats). The lower staff is in bass clef and features a bass line of eighth notes with various accidentals.

The third system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and begins with a measure number '5'. It features a melodic line of eighth notes with various accidentals. The lower staff is in bass clef and features a bass line of eighth notes with various accidentals.

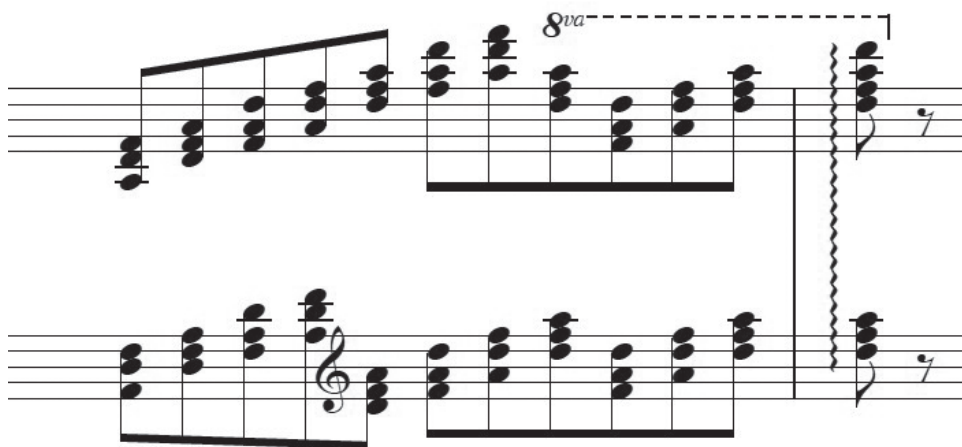
The fourth system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and begins with a measure number '7'. It features a melodic line of eighth notes with various accidentals. The lower staff is in bass clef and features a bass line of eighth notes with various accidentals. There are two instances of an 8va (octave) marking above the upper staff, each enclosed in a dashed box.

Example 9: NYCB intro to "White Swan" cadenza.

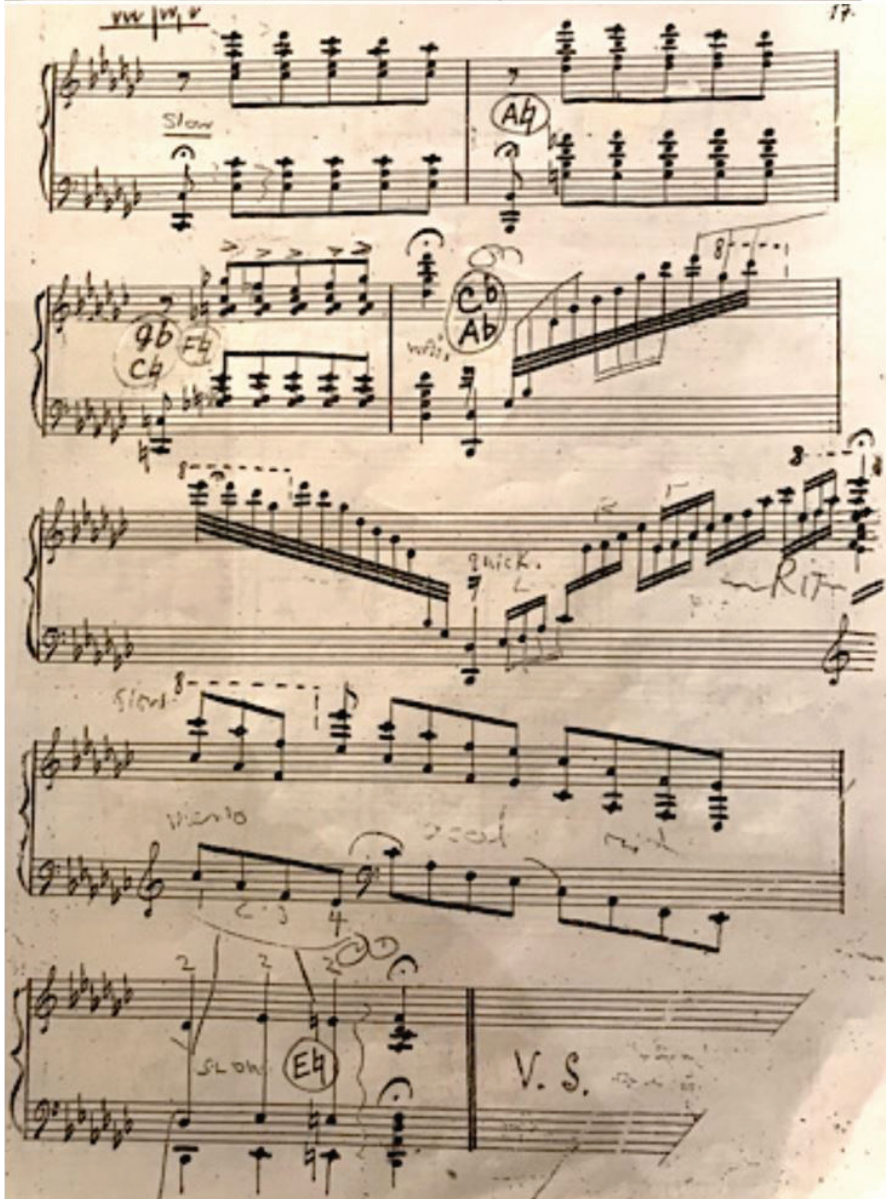
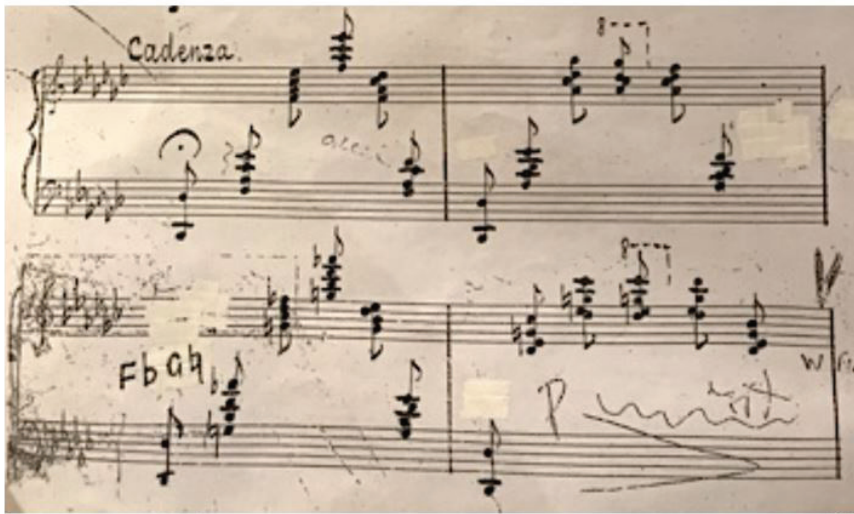


Example 10. Bolshoi Ballet "White Swan" cadenza, end.

Example 11. Mariinsky Theatre "White Swan" cadenza (next page). ▶▶



Example 12. Paris Opera Ballet Shortened D-flat chordal passage.



Example 11. Mariinsky Theatre "White Swan" cadenza

The image displays a musical score for a piano cadenza, consisting of six systems of music. Each system is written for a grand piano, with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/8. The score is marked with a forte dynamic (*ff*) at the beginning. The first system contains measures 10 and 11, with a *ff* marking. The second system contains measures 12 and 13. The third system contains measures 14 and 15, with a *ff ad libitum* marking. The fourth system contains measures 16 and 17. The fifth system contains measures 18 and 19. The sixth system contains measures 20 and 21, with a *ff* marking. The score features various musical notations, including slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Example 13. Tchaikovsky's original *Sleeping Beauty* cadenza.

tion sixteenth note arpeggios. It is dealt with in the same manner as in the *Nutcracker* cadenza.

But, again, harpists must decide how to end the section and make a smooth transition back to the B-flat⁷ arpeggios. As in the *Nutcracker*, I end the section with a right hand, four-note descending arpeggio beginning on fourth octave D and ending on fourth octave F, with a small *rallentando*, into a strong attack on the low B-flat that begins the next section (Example 14). So, I leave out entirely the two measures of arpeggios that repeat the melody notes (six beats of D followed by six beats of B-flat).

The only other adjustment made is at the beginning. Tchaikovsky wrote five B-flat⁷ arpeggios as an introduction to the cadenza proper. I play only the last two. The City Ballet version of this work is condensed into two acts (instead of three). Everything is performed faster than at other companies and much has been cut. The choreographer wanted a much shorter version of this cadenza and the solution was to leave three of the opening arpeggios out. Naturally, as soon as we made this cut, the choreographer thought it was about a second or two *too* short. But he did not want to replace any of the missing arpeggios. This time, the solution we tried was to play the second set of B-flat⁷ arpeggios more deliberately than the first set. The choreographer was thrilled.

@ American Ballet Theatre

At the American Ballet Theatre, Barbara Allen plays the “Rose Adagio” cadenza using the original opening and then the same (as at City Ballet) descending melodic B-flat⁷ arpeggios to replace the contrary motion arpeggio section. The only other place she deviates from the original is at the end of the descending arpeggio (Example 15). She adds one more arpeggio than I do to make a smooth transition to the low B-flat and the return of the opening arpeggios. Finally, exactly as I do in my versions of all three cadenzas, Allen omits the first statement of the third in all the grand arpeggios in both directions.

@ The Bolshoi

The Bolshoi version of this cadenza varies considerably from Tchaikovsky’s original (Example 16). It

was composed by E. Walter-Kühne¹⁰ and arranged by Vera Dulova. Interestingly, it begins just as City Ballet’s version does, with only two bars of B-flat⁷ arpeggios. Unlike at City Ballet, the next three bars are not dropped, but substantially changed, combining B-flat⁷ arpeggios and chords in the third and fifth bars and introducing a new harmony in bar 4. Then, instead of Tchaikovsky’s descending B-flat⁷ arpeggios, Walter-Kühne and Dulova use shifting harmonic arpeggios that switch direction and finally end in a series of increasingly loud and brilliant glissandos that lead back to the chords that end Tchaikovsky’s original. This is a longer and much more virtuosic version of this cadenza than is performed elsewhere. As Krushnevskaia says, these changes make the solo much more “varied and interesting” and the glissandos at the end give her a chance to really “show off” (from emails between Krushnevskaia and the author).

@ Paris Opera/Ballet

Ceysson played this one very much as written, replacing the contrary motion passage with consecutive descending arpeggios. The only edit he would make, and only if asked for less length, was to leave out those two measures of repeated descending arpeggios (Example 13, eighth and ninth bars). When asked to do this, he used a mechanism similar to Barbara Allen’s at ABT: a final arpeggiated B-flat descending chord in the left hand which lands on the sixth octave B-flat at the start of measure 10.

Head for the Fermata ☺

A few words about phrasing and rubato when playing Tchaikovsky cadenzas. The rule of thumb is that if it works, it’s good, tempered with a dollop of less is more. In comparing the performance practice of these cadenzas among the four companies, I find all four of us do make similar phrasing choices, leading me to think there may be an industry standard. We all seem to agree that the *accelerandos* and *rallentandos* we use must be measured and without

¹⁰ Ekaterina Walter-Kühne (1870-1930) was a Russian harpist, composer, and student of Albert Zabel.

Example 14. New York City Ballet Sleeping Beauty cadenza, bars 6 – 11.

The image shows two systems of piano music. The first system consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with a key signature of two flats. The treble staff features a series of eighth-note chords, with three instances of an octave sign (*8va*) indicated by dashed boxes above the notes. The dynamic marking *fff ad libitum* is written below the first staff. The second system also consists of two staves with the same key signature, featuring similar eighth-note chords. The dynamic marking *rall.* is written above the final measure of the second system.

Example 14. New York City Ballet Sleeping Beauty cadenza, bars 6 – 11.

Example 15. ABT "Rose Adagio" transition to long B-flat 7 arpeggios.

The image shows a single system of piano music with two staves (treble and bass clef) in a key signature of two flats. The treble staff contains a sequence of four chords, each with a long, sustained note in the upper register. The bass staff contains a sequence of four chords, each with a long, sustained note in the lower register. The music concludes with a final chord in the bass staff.

Example 15. ABT "Rose Adagio" transition to long B-flat 7 arpeggios.



Example 16. The Bolshoi Sleeping Beauty cadenza (page 1).

The image shows a page of musical notation for a piano cadenza. It is divided into five systems, each with a treble and bass clef. The first system includes markings for 'cresc.' and 'poco accelerando'. The second system also includes 'cresc.' and 'poco accelerando'. The third system features 'cresc.' and 'poco accelerando' markings, with chord labels C3, H4, and G4. The fourth system has a 'p' marking. The fifth system includes 'p' and 'rit.' markings, with chord labels Bb D4 and G4. The score is written for piano with treble and bass clefs.

Example 16. The Bolshoi Sleeping Beauty cadenza (page 2).

exaggeration. A low arpeggiated section will begin slowly and speed up as it ascends the instrument, with a tiny slow-down at the top followed by a mad rush back to the bottom. All phrases move toward the fermatas, sometimes rushing towards them and sometimes slowing down into them. We all acknowledge that these cadenzas, lovely and fun to play as they are, have limited harmonic interest when played in their (close to) original form. It is often tempting to add more rubatos than we should, but it is important that we be guided by the lines of the phrases and any melodies that appear. Too much rubato will distort these, making the unchanging harmonies seem stagnant, and must be avoided. The goals are brilliance and flow. If the rubato interferes with either of these goals, it is too much.

Dynamics depend on many factors. Ceysson reports that, at Paris Opera/Ballet, only in *Sleeping Beauty* is everything expected to be played *forte* or louder and that the harpist has more dynamic freedom in the *Swan Lake* and *Nutcracker* cadenzas. At City Ballet, everything is played *forte* or more and shades of dynamics must be very nuanced and minimal, as we have a 3000-seat hall to fill with sound and the creative teams want to hear as much harp as possible.

My story about the “Waltz of the Flowers” at City Ballet is not, I believe, unusual. The difference between one year’s performance and the next may be all of one or two clicks on a metronome added to, or subtracted from, the whole solo. Eventually it will be enough to distract the dancers and we therefore accept that consistency is a necessary constraint when playing for dancers. We may chafe at this demand for consistency at times, but we accept it. In her position with the Kennedy Center Orchestra, harpist Susan Robinson has performed all these cadenzas for many different visiting companies. Her description of playing the “White Swan” for the Mariinsky Ballet when they have appeared at the Kennedy Center will resonate with orchestra players everywhere: “...having played the Mariinsky’s *Swan Lake* a number of times, I can say that it seems NOTHING makes my colleagues more happy than to hear a different cadenza! During those weeks, there’s always lots of shuffling and many compliments, but I think it has more to

do with the thrill of something new than my brilliant interpretation!” Robinson may have the luxury of the chance to perform different versions of these cadenzas with different companies, but, nonetheless, she must play them as each company is used to hearing them at home.


Looking at the two versions of *The Sleeping Beauty* cadenza (from the Bolshoi and from the New York City Ballet) or the three versions of the *Swan Lake* cadenza (from the Bolshoi, Mariinsky and Paris Opera), one can only guess why such different traditions arose, but one possibility is that the choreographers at City Ballet have historically used harp cadenzas not as vehicles to showcase a star ballerina, but as the underpinning for the corps de ballet to enter and take positions prior to the main musical number that follows. There is rarely any real dancing on stage during harp cadenzas. So, simplicity and speed are the bywords at City Ballet. Other priorities rule the other companies. Krushnevskaya reports that the choreographic situation at the Bolshoi is similar to City Ballet’s but has the opposite effect. Because there is no dancing of importance accompanying harp cadenzas, the harpist is free to take as much time to show off her or his virtuosity as the player desires. Another possibility: in Russia, going back as far as Tchaikovsky himself, the harpist was always considered a “soloist” with all the rights and privileges associated with the word. This offered harpists the freedom to improvise a cadenza or rewrite it entirely. This is not usually the case in American ballet orchestras.¹¹

In the end, whether the harpist is a soloist or a tutti orchestral player, he or she must appreciate that ballet, in general, and these cadenzas, specifically, are living forms of art and have been changing and evolving since the day they were composed. How these cadenzas are performed rests not just on the preferences of the harpist or music director. The needs of the choreographers and dancers always

11 This may be changing. In the recently concluded season at the Metropolitan Opera, Emmanuel Ceysson played a different cadenza at every performance in a run of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Apart from the impressiveness of this feat, it was telling that the Met allowed and encouraged it. The Met is, of course, an opera orchestra, not a ballet orchestra, but perhaps a new tradition is burgeoning.

inform the choices a harpist makes in determining the performance practice of these solos. But those choices are myriad and the variety of versions included in these pages shows there is no one right way to play them. As harpists, we each have individual strengths and weaknesses. What may be easy for one harpist to play may not be so easy for another. This is a consideration that should be given weight when deciding how to play each gesture. Individual notes are far less important than the qualities of brilliance and musicality and the active collaboration with all the other elements of ballet. Together, these create a whole that transfigures the art form and any choice that furthers this magical transfiguration is a good choice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sara Cutler is Principal Harp of the Orchestra of St. Luke's, the New York City Ballet Orchestra, and the American Symphony. She is on the faculty of Bard College Conservatory of Music. Her latest CD, "Dancing Day," was recorded with the Boys Choir of St. Thomas Church, NYC. She is a member of the editorial board of the AHJ. 



THE WEBSITE for GREAT HARP MUSIC

LATEST COMPOSITIONS
SOLO & ENSEMBLES
PEDAL & LEVER, ALL LEVELS

Print, Download, CD, MP3

sheetmusicbyfatrock.com

LIKE US ON FACEBOOK

and see our Latest Composer
and Publication News

Email: sales@fatrockink.com



SALES · MUSIC · RENTALS · LESSONS · ACCESSORIES

EXPERIENCED
PROFESSIONALS SERVING
THE HARP COMMUNITY
SINCE 1997



VIRGINIA HARP CENTER
www.vaharpcenter.com



ATLANTA HARP CENTER
www.atlantaharpcenter.com



QUALITY · COMMITMENT · SELECTION · SERVICE

Haddonfield, NJ 08033 | 856-428-1430
newjersey@vaharpcenter.com

Midlothian, VA 23113 | 804-378-3761
virginia@vaharpcenter.com

Alpharetta, GA 30009 | 770-619-2920
info@atlantaharpcenter.com