

The Coppelia Project, by Geoffrey Drake-Brockman, 2012
Stage production with four robot ballerinas and cast of human dancers,
Synopsis and Production Notes

Scene 1 – The University

We are introduced to the brilliant cybernetics post-doctoral researcher Dr Coppelius *in his wheelchair*. Dr Coppelius was born with crippled legs.

His is mocked by the athletic, dancing, romancing, fellow-students at the University. He is teased particularly by his academic rival Franz.

All cast are in white lab coats. Seven dancers and extras present.

As a joke, the students place Dr Coppelius in a spherical metal cage and roll him about the stage.

Swanhilda arrives, is shocked to find Dr Coppelius in the cage and insists that he is released and returned to his wheelchair.

The students dance gaily while Dr Coppelius watches. The dancers fling off their lab coats to reveal brightly coloured garments. Swanhilda dances in a pink leotard.

Dr Coppelius attempts to participate by attaching the cybernetic leg callipers that he has invented. He tries to dance with the girls but is ungainly.

Only one girl, Swanhilda, will dance with Dr Coppelius. He is overjoyed and falls in love. But she is only pitying him, her real boyfriend is Coppelius's arch-rival, Franz.

Wretched by this rejection, Dr Coppelius retreats from society to his remote cybernetics laboratory.

Scene 2 – The Laboratory

Months go by with Dr Coppelius in his retreat. Each day Swanhilda visits him, still fond of him, but now engaged to Franz.

Secretly, Dr Coppelius builds cybernetic duplicates of Swanhilda (wearing the same outfit in which she danced with him). He makes four dolls to maximize his pleasure and to ensure he will never suffer a moment without her again.

One by one the four dolls are revealed on stage, rising out of dense smoke and surrounded by arcane instrumentation, with Coppelius in his calipers attending to them.

Perfect but lifeless, the dolls need to be taught to dance to animate them.

Dr Coppelius convinces Swanhilda to teach the dolls to dance. In the process her life force is drained away.

Coppelius is jubilant. The robots dance in unison and individually.

Franz becomes aware of Swanhilda's plight and tries to save her. But he is distracted by the dolls, and dances with them, to exhaustion.

The other students arrive, and they too are enthralled by the dancing robots, and pay homage to Dr Coppelius, their creator.

Emboldened by his success, Coppelius decides to take the next step and transform himself also into a perfect cybernetic being.

He enters the transformation chamber and is converted into a mirror-chrome figure.

The other students however are not interested in animating this Dr Coppelius robot, and he is left frozen, while they make off with the four Coppelia Dolls.

End