

PENNSYLVANIA | BALLET

Angel Corella, Artistic Director

RO
MEO &
JUL
IET



OCT 11-21 / ACADEMY OF MUSIC

ROMEO & JULIET

PRESENTED BY



An Exelon Company

SUMMARY

This ballet brings to life Shakespeare's famous tale of family feuds and star-crossed lovers. Set to Prokofiev's soaring score the ballet is set in Verona, Italy where an ancient family feud between the Montagues and the Capulets divides the townspeople. The children of the opposing families, Romeo and Juliet, meet at a ball and fall deeply in love. Knowing their love is forbidden, they marry in secret. Soon bliss turns to grief when Romeo kills Juliet's cousin Tybalt to avenge his friend's death and is banished. To prevent her parents arranging her marriage to another – the nobleman Paris – Juliet turns to a Friar for help. He gives her a vial of a sleeping potion to mimic death and promises to send Romeo a message to explain she is not dead. Unfortunately, Romeo never receives the message and, believing her dead, drinks a deadly poison himself. Upon waking from her fake death, Juliet sees Romeo is dead in her crypt and takes her own life.

HISTORY

There are many different ballets based on the Romeo and Juliet story – this one was choreographed for London's Royal Ballet by Sir Kenneth MacMillan and premiered in February of 1965. For “bureaucratic reasons” the reigning English ballerina of the day, Margot Fonteyn danced the opening night with the recently defected Russian star Rudolph Nureyev, much to MacMillan's disappointment. Fonteyn and Nureyev's performance had a rapturous reception, with 43 curtain calls and almost forty minutes of applause. Fonteyn and Nureyev brought new life to the characters, as did the lavish set and costume designs by Nicholas Georgiadis. Fonteyn, considered to be near retirement, embarked upon a rejuvenated career with a partnership with Nureyev.

SYNOPSIS

Act 1 Scene 1

The market place, Verona. Romeo, son of Montague, tries unsuccessfully to declare his love for Rosaline and is consoled by his friends Mercutio and Benvolio. As day breaks and the townspeople meet in the market, a quarrel develops between Tybalt, a nephew of Capulet, and Romeo and his friends. The Capulets and Montagues are sworn enemies, and a fight soon begins. The Lords Montague and Capulet join the fray, which is stopped by the appearance of the Prince of Verona, who commands the families to end their feud.

Scene 2

Juliet's anteroom in the Capulet house. Juliet, playing with her nurse, is interrupted by her parents, Lord and Lady Capulet. They present her to Paris, a wealthy young nobleman who has asked for her hand in marriage.

Scene 3

The bedroom. That evening, Juliet agrees to marry Paris, but the next morning, when her parents arrive with him, they find her apparently lifeless on the bed.

Scene 4

The Capulet family crypt. Romeo, failing to receive the Friar's message, returns to Verona stunned by grief at the news of Juliet's death. Disguised as a monk, he enters the crypt and, finding Paris by Juliet's body, kills him. Believing Juliet to be dead, Romeo drinks a vial of poison. Juliet wakes and, finding Romeo dead, stabs herself.

Sources: American Ballet Theatre and Wikipedia

CHOREOGRAPHER: KENNETH MACMILLAN

Kenneth MacMillan was a leading ballet choreographer of his generation. Born of a poor Scottish family, he had a burning sense that ballet theatre should reflect contemporary realities and the complicated truths of people's lives. He became director of The Royal Ballet and created some of the outstanding dance works of the twentieth century. He was born in Dunfermline, Fife in Scotland on December 11, 1929. His father, a former coal miner, was gassed in a World War I battle and could only find occasional work during the Depression years of the 1930s.

When Kenneth was 11, he won a scholarship to the local grammar school. The Second World War had begun and his village was repeatedly bombed by the Luftwaffe. The school was evacuated to Retford in Nottinghamshire and it was here that he first discovered ballet. He had already learned tap and Scottish country dancing, and taken part in entertainments for soldiers at American air force bases. In Retford, he took tap lessons from a local dance teacher, who encouraged him to try ballet. He was soon obsessed.

A local dance teacher became, in effect, his surrogate mother after his own mother's death. She taught him for free and, shaped his ambitions. At the age of 15, MacMillan won a scholarship to the Sadler Wells Ballet School.

But MacMillan was increasingly troubled by stage fright; and this was an important reason why he turned his hand to choreography. In the 1960s MacMillan proved his mastery first with the high theatricality of *The Rite of Spring* and then in 1965 with his definitive version of the Shakespeare/Prokofiev *Romeo and Juliet*, the work by which he is best known today.

Kenneth MacMillan was knighted in 1983 and in 1984, while remaining chief choreographer of the Royal Ballet, he became associate director of the American Ballet Theatre for some five years.

Kenneth MacMillan died at the Royal Opera House on a night when Birmingham Royal Ballet was presenting his *Romeo and Juliet* in Birmingham.

Source: KennethMacMillan.com

COMPOSER: SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Prokofiev, a Ukrainian-Soviet composer was born in Sontsovka, Ukraine on May 5, 1891 and died in Moscow on March 5, 1953. He wrote much ballet music, including the full-length *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella*, two of the best-known ballet scores in the world. His first ballet, *Ala and Lolly*, was written in 1914, a commission from Diaghilev, although it was never performed (it had to wait until 1927 when Terpis staged it at the Berlin State Opera). He wrote several other ballets, perhaps the best known is *The Prodigal Son*, choreography by Balanchine and first performed by the Russes de Diaghilev in Paris in 1929

A musical child prodigy, he wrote his first opera at the age of 9 and a few years later his mother enrolled him the conservatory in St. Petersburg. In 1914 Prokofiev became acquainted with the great ballet impresario Serge Diaghilev, who became one of his most influential advisers for the next decade and a half.

Prokofiev travelled extensively throughout Europe and the United States, eventually returning to Russia in the mid 1930's where he continued to engage in an antagonistic relationship with the Soviet authorities until his death in 1953.

Source: Oxford Dictionary of Dance and Wikipedia

FUN FACTS

- MacMillan originally decided to choreograph a *Romeo and Juliet* ballet when he was told that the popular Russian version was forbidden from traveling to London by the Soviet Government.
- The original leads were Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev, widely considered to be one of the most legendary dancing pairs of all time.
- A film version of the ballet was released in the United States the year after it debuted in London

LESSON PLAN 1 | GRADES 8-10

- MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet* debuted in London in 1965. Students should look into the cultural events and changes taking place at that time and place.
- Do you see ways in which the environment at that time was reflected in this ballet?
- Are there comparisons to be made between 1960s London and at the end of the 16th century?
- Do you think that they are still relevant lessons today, hundreds of years after Shakespeare told the story? How about in the decades since MacMillan told it?

LESSON PLAN 2 | GRADES 6-8

- MacMillan's life was impacted tremendously by war, having been raised by a father badly wounded in World War I, and growing up himself during World War II. Do you see the impact of these conflicts reflected in the ballet version of *Romeo and Juliet*?

- Why or why not?
- Can you draw parallels between how culture was impacted by those wars, and how it is now by American involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan?