

Dear Educators,

Thank you for stretching your students' aesthetic "muscle" by bringing them to see Oregon Ballet Theatre's Student Performance Series. Oregon Ballet Theatre will perform excerpts from two works—a world premiere entitled *The Stravinsky Project*, and a work from 2004, entitled *Firebird*. The performance is fully produced, complete with costumes, lighting, and scenic décor, providing students a stimulating arts experience of music, story, and dance. Both works are set to scores by ground breaking Russian-American composer, Igor Stravinsky.



Photo by Ioni Kabana

This Student Performance Series Study Guide (SPS SG) includes:

- Student Performance Series program notes—a listing of what will be seen
- The story that OBT's *Firebird* is based on
- A look at the process of **collaboration** that occurred in the making of the two ballets
- Listing of key **dance elements** that can be seen in the ballets
- Questions and activities sprinkled throughout, designed to cultivate **aesthetic awareness** and develop **critical analysis**, correlating with Oregon Department of Education's Arts Content Standards and national best practices in learning about the arts.
- Links to **internet resources** such as a vintage YouTube excerpt from Disney's *Fantasia* set to music from *Firebird*, playlists of Stravinsky's music, and more!

As always, I encourage students and teachers to give feedback regarding their experience at the *Student Performance Series*. Letters from your class and online surveys help me to create meaningful programming and provide our generous donors, who are so helpful in keeping our performances affordable, clear insight into OBT's educational impact. A link to the **teacher survey** is listed in the Internet Resources section.

I also encourage you to consider inviting **OBT into your school!** We have highly trained teaching artists who would love to dance with your students in a residency with your class. AND, we still have some dates available in May, for our popular in-school performance assembly, *Ballet Stage by Stage*, complete with audience participation! Give me a call or email me for more information.

See you at the Keller on March 3rd!

Kasandra Gruener, MA
 Director of Education and Outreach

THE Stravinsky PROJECT



The Stravinsky Project in rehearsal. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

THE STRAVINSKY PROJECT (excerpt)

Music: Igor Stravinsky

Tango

Romanza from Serenade en LA

Waltz pour L'Enfants

Etudes for Piano: Andantino

Sonata for Piano: Adagietto

Les cinq Doigts: 8 pièces très faciles sur 5 notes: Andantino

Les cinq Doigts: 8 pièces très faciles sur 5 notes: Larghetto

Sonata in F sharp minor: Vivo

Electronic Music Composer: Heather Perkins

Choreography: Rachel Tess, Anne Mueller, Jamey Hampton / Ashley Roland

Costume Design: Morgan Walker

Lighting Design: Michael Mazzola



Steven Houser in Yuri Possokhov's *Firebird* (2004). Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

FIREBIRD

Music: Igor Stravinsky, *Firebird Suite*

Choreography: Yuri Possokhov

Design: Yuri Zhukov

Additional Costumes: Sandra Woodall

Lighting Design: Michael Mazzola

THE STORY TOLD IN OBT'S FIREBIRD

While wandering the countryside, a handsome young man named Ivan chances upon a mysterious garden resplendent with golden apples. There he encounters the mythical Firebird, who flashes and soars like flame. Intrigued, Ivan captures the Firebird, but soon senses that her magic will wither in captivity. Though he sets the Firebird free, she lingers, for Ivan has awakened feelings of love in her heart. Realizing that love between them can never be, the Firebird thanks Ivan for his kindness with a magic feather that he can wave to call for help in times of danger.

The Firebird vanishes, and a court of princesses appears. They are captives, for this is the garden of the evil Kaschei, who has bewitched them with his power. Among the princesses, Ivan finds his true love, and they dance in happiness. Their joy enrages Kaschei. He bursts into the garden with his minions—Ivan and the princesses are overwhelmed. With his magic feather, Ivan calls the Firebird to save them. In the furious battle that ensues, the egg where Kaschei hides his soul is shattered. Kaschei's evil spell over the people of the land is lifted, Ivan and his princess are united, and the Firebird flies free.



👉 Download one of the Stravinsky playlists from the Internet Resource page or find a cd on iTunes or at a music store. Read the story aloud to students.

- Ask students to listen to Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* and imagine how the music and the story work together.
- Other versions of the story can be found at the library or bookstores. Compare and contrast the story in OBT's *Firebird* with other versions or other folktales, identifying key elements and characters.
- Students might enjoy doing a fun Word Jumble related to this story which will be available for download at www.obt.org/outreach_sps

THINKING ABOUT AESTHETIC CHOICE

From the very beginning of his time with OBT, Artistic Director Christopher Stowell has intended that the company develop a repertoire of works "to scores written specifically for ballet. For the initial effort in that direction," he says, "I asked Yuri Possokhov to choreograph Stravinsky's *Firebird* in 2004. He felt a bit confined at first. He had never thought of attempting it, and didn't even like the music much at that point." "Yes," Yuri elaborates, "I want to say I never liked the music before. Now I love it. When you listen to music and say immediately you don't like it, it doesn't mean anything. When you know it well, you have the right to say you love it or hate it." (Excerpt of an article by OBT Historian Linda Besant)

👉 Ask students to think what Yuri meant when he said, "When you listen to music and say immediately you don't like it, it doesn't mean anything. When you know it well, you have the right to say you love it or hate it." Ask students to think about a time that they changed their opinion about something once they learned more about it.

FIREBIRD 1910

One hundred years ago, a ballet company called *Ballets Russes* emerged to change the world of performance art. Visual artists, composers and choreographers joined forces in order to create new works of art. Resident choreographer Michel Fokine worked with 27 year old composer Igor Stravinsky to create *Firebird*, premiering it in Paris in 1910. (Stravinsky was paid 100 rubles for the score, about the price of a Diet Coke in St. Petersburg these days.) *Firebird* would be the start of Stravinsky's long and groundbreaking career as a composer for ballet. An artist steeped in his time, Fokine was influenced by concepts from a revolutionary dance form sweeping Europe, entitled *modern dance*. His *Firebird* choreography included bare feet and inwardly rotated legs along with traditional ballet steps. In *Firebird*, Russian folklore of old came to life with bold movement, fresh scenic choices, and Stravinsky's score, reflecting sensibilities of the time, yet pushing ballet to the future. Dance companies, like OBT, continue to enlist current choreographers to create new versions of *Firebird*, so compelling is the music and story.



Original production of *Firebird*



Stravinsky and Fokine in collaboration

COLLABORATION 1910

Historian Linda Besant wrote in a recent OBT Playbill article that Stravinsky and Fokine worked closely together on the ballet, weaving together elements from several Russian folk tales into a story with old symbols but a new outcome—total liberation from evil. Fokine described their collaborative process, improvising and refining toward the finished score and choreography, playing off of each other's ideas: "Stravinsky visited me with his first sketches and basic ideas, he played them for me, I demonstrated the scenes to him . . . When Ivan appears at the garden wall . . . Stravinsky played, and I interpreted the role . . . substituting the piano for the wall. I climbed over it, jumped down from it, and crawled, fear-struck, looking around my living room . . . Stravinsky, watching, accompanied me with patches of the melodies . . . playing mysterious tremolos as background."

👍 Imagine that long ago scene: Stravinsky at the piano with Fokine jumping off of it as he creates movement responses to the new music he hears. Both artists were inspired by the work of the other.

- Play music from *Firebird*. Find the downloadable Playlist in the Internet Resource section, or use any orchestral music. Imagine movements that fit the sound. Fokine eventually settled on certain steps to tell the *Firebird* story, but first he improvised, interpreted, or made up movements to the music he heard. Push back the desks and try it out!



Igor Stravinsky



Michel Fokine and son Vitale posing in 1910



The Stravinsky Project in rehearsal. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

THE STRAVINSKY PROJECT 2010

For *The Stravinsky Project*, Christopher Stowell conceived a work that would explore Igor Stravinsky's unique musical styles in three sections, each choreographed by local artists, who would select additional local talent to further collaborate on the music, costumes, décor, and lighting design. This resulted in 7 artists coming together to create *The Stravinsky Project*—choreographer Rachel Tess, from Rumpus Room Dance, a company based in Sweden and Portland; Anne Mueller, Oregon Ballet Theatre's Artistic Coordinator and a principal dancer; Jamey Hampton and Ashley Roland, Artistic Directors of Portland based BodyVox; composer Heather Perkins, whose music has been used by many local dance companies; Morgan Walker a visual artist and teacher at Pacific Northwest College of Art; and Michael Mazzola, internationally acclaimed lighting designer and a member of OBT's Production department.

Work began in summer of 2010. Anne chose two Stravinsky piano pieces on which to base her choreography. Jamey and Ashley chose six piano scores, while Rachel initially chose to work in silence and with composer Heather Perkins, who brings an electronic manipulation of Stravinsky's music to the process. Some dancers in the piece work with all the choreographers—some do not. Heather's music, the costume and set designs, and the lighting choices interface with all of the choreographic work, and impact artistic choices. Since work began last summer, each artist has worked separate of the others, while maintaining contact, ultimately making choices about how to weave the piece together into a whole. As OBT's artistic coordinator, Anne has paid attention to practical details, seeing that each choreographer has time to work with their dancers, that the costume designer has time for costume fittings, that cds of the music get to the right people, and so much more.

☺ A collaborator is someone who works together with others in the group toward a common goal. A coordinator is someone who is in charge or responsible for keeping a project or group on track. What challenges could Anne have as a collaborator, choreographer, and a coordinator?

☺ *Gesamtkunstwerk* is a German term that means a "total work of art." A *gesamtkunstwerk* can be the result of a collaborative process where talented artists work in close collaboration, gaining inspiration from each other, creating something greater than each individual could produce.

PRACTICING COLLABORATION AND REFINEMENT FOLLOWING THE CPR* MODEL (CREATE, PRESENT OR PERFORM, REFLECT)

Students can practice the process of collaborating and refining (aesthetic choice making). While any curriculum idea could be explored, following is one example of a tableau activity from a class studying plant life cycle:

- **CREATE:** Working in a group of 3-4, students brainstorm on aspects of the plant life cycle and then choose an aspect to "be." Students create a body shape representing that part of the plant life cycle. Students then put their personal "plant cycle shape" together with others in their group to make an interesting snapshot—a tableau. A volunteer is chosen to be the "refiner." She steps out of the group and sees if it represents their group's idea, suggesting changes to the group. She returns and they practice their reworked idea. Another "refiner" can be chosen to determine how they will begin and end their tableau.
- **PRESENT:** To complete the activity, students can show each other their plant life cycle tableau.
- **REFLECT:** Students then reflect on what they saw. Great reflections are based on focused observation, clear descriptions, and thoughtful imaginings. If students need help with their observations, remind them of the Dance Elements. It is important that the reflections are about true observations, not inferences—what was actually seen—"I saw a curled up shape," "I saw Joe lying on the ground." Students might then speak about what they wondered when they observed—"I think I saw a seedling." "I thought Joe looked like a dead leaf," avoiding comments such as, "Joe looked cool!"
 - **OBSERVE:** an open, fresh, active experience of the thing, noticing best done in silence
 - **DESCRIBE:** actual observations, what happened, "I saw..."
 - **WONDER:** imaginings, inferences, thoughts about what might have been going on

*"CPR," "Observe," "Describe," and "Wonder" are tools and best practice methods for integrating the arts in student learning adopted by Portland Regional Arts and Culture Council's program, the *Right Brain Initiative* (RBI), of which OBT is an arts provider.

DANCE ELEMENTS

At the writing of this SPS Study Guide and probably up until opening night, *The Stravinsky Project* will be in the process of creation. We will all be surprised at the theatre! Dancers learn steps that the choreographers show, and sometimes the choreographers ask a dancer what movement/step feels “right” to do at that moment in the dance, allowing the dancer to be a collaborator in the creative process as well as being its performer. The choreographer may or may not use the dancer’s idea, but eventually something will spark, and another section of the dance is created. The idea of making choices about what to do in a work of art, the notion of making aesthetic choices, deciding what is “right” in a dance, takes lots of practice, and awareness of the possibilities.

To better understand the dances in the SPS, students should become familiar with some of the aspects or elements of dance. This will help students as they observe the ballets and with reflections after the show. Learning about the elements of dance assists students to develop their own aesthetic preferences.

The basic elements of dance can be remembered using a simple mnemonic created from the first letters of the words—Body, Energy, Space, and Time—BEST. *RBI* offers this tool for arts learning in its professional development. Below is a partial listing of descriptions to help teachers and students see, think and talk about dance elements.

BEST**BODY**

- Individual parts, or combinations of parts in motion or still—arms, legs, torso, feet, neck, face
- Shapes- symmetrical/asymmetrical, angular, rounded
- In balance or off balance

ENERGY

- The combination of force and weight. Easily described with adjectives such as sharp, twitchy, restricted, floating, sudden, smooth, loose, purposeful

SPACE

- Place- where the focus is
- Size- range, large/small, wide/narrow
- Level- high/middle/low
- Direction- forward/backward/sideways, up/down, front of stage/back of stage, on diagonals
- Relationships- occurring within the body or between groups of people, such as in lines or randomly placed. Described with prepositions such as, near to, above, leaning, over, under, around, through. Antonyms such as, near/far, meeting/parting, mirroring/shadowing, solo/group
- Pathway- a floor pattern or design, such as feet tracing a diagonal path on the floor or arms tracing a curving path in the air

TIME

- Tempo- the speed from slow to fast
- Rhythm- the way that time is divided up—in recognizable patterns and dynamic variations, or the underlying pulse
- Duration- segments of time or the entire work
- Music- time experienced through melody or sound

THEATRICAL TOOLS

- Props- items used to further the impact or add to the symbolism of the piece
- Lighting- the way the stage is lit to further the intention of the piece
- Costume design- the way the dancers are dressed to further the intention of the piece
- Set designs- the way the stage is “dressed” to support the piece.

Combinations of these elements combine with compositional forms to produce dances.

While the elements above (and more) can be seen in the SPS, it is certainly not important to notice them all at one performance. But, students should be able to go to a ballet and notice and talk about what the body was doing, how it did what it did, where it was on the stage, and wonder and speak about why things happened as they did.

INTERNET RESOURCES:

To download playlists of Igor Stravinsky’s music:



www.obt.org/season_program3_music.html

Check out 5 cool facts about Igor Stravinsky!



<http://oregonballettheatre.blogspot.com/2011/01/5-fun-facts-about-igor-stravinsky.html>

Watch a clip from Disney’s animated classic, *Fantasia*, featuring music from *Firebird*:




<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FWq17CT6Cs&feature=related>

Watch Igor Stravinsky conducting *Firebird*:




<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tGA6bpscj8>

For a scholarly explanation of the Russian *Firebird* myth, its genesis with Ballet Russes, and Stravinsky’s creative rise as a composer of 20th century ballets read “Stravinsky and the Russian traditions: a biography of the works through Mavra ..., Volume 1” By Richard Taruskin. Online excerpts of the book, beginning on page 555, found at  www.google.com

To learn more about the work of Jamey Hampton, Ashley Roland and their dance company, **BodyVox** go to their website:



www.bodyvox.com

To learn more about the work of Rachel Tess and Rumpus Room go to:  www.rumpusroomdance.org/founders.html

Teachers are encouraged to adapt the SPS SG information to grade level, correlating with Oregon Department of Education's Oregon Arts Content Standards in two arts standards:

CREATE, PRESENT AND PERFORM: Apply ideas, techniques and processes in the arts.

AESTHETICS AND CRITICISM: Respond to and analyze works of art, based on essential elements, organizational principles and aesthetic criteria.

CONTENT STANDARDS

This *Student Performance Series* and Study Guide provide opportunity for engaging in Oregon Content Standards for the Arts, especially:

Historical and Cultural Perspective: Understand relationships of works of art to their social, historical, and cultural context, and the influence of arts on individuals, communities and cultures.

Aesthetics and Criticism: Respond to and analyze works of art, based on essential elements, organizational principles and aesthetic criteria.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BALLET

Why do the guys wear tights?

Almost every activity requires a special uniform of some kind. Just as football players, wrestlers, and baseball players wear stretchy material to help them move with flexibility and speed, ballet dancers often wear stretchy tights so they are able to leap, kick, and stretch as they dance. Another reason tights are worn is so the audience can see the incredible leg muscles that allow them to jump so high.

How do the ballet dancers stand on their toes?

Female ballet dancers wear special shoes called "pointe shoes" to help them achieve dancing on the tips of their toes. Pointe shoes are hard at the ends, and are handmade with layers of satin, glue and leather. Dancers must take several years of ballet lessons before they are allowed to wear pointe shoes. With hard work and good training to develop strong ankles and feet, most young ballet students begin working *en pointe* at age 11 or 12.

This ballet has no plot! Or does it?

Some do, and some don't. Ballets with plots, like *The Nutcracker*, are called story ballets. There are also abstract ballets, with a focus on movement instead of a specific story. Abstract ballets are meant to evoke ideas or emotions, and the audience can interpret them many different ways.

How old are the dancers?

Oregon Ballet Theatre's professional company members range in age from 18 to 34, but most are in their early-to-mid-20s. A few of the apprentices, however, are still in high school. All of the dancers began studying ballet when they were children, as it takes many years of dedication to become a professional ballet dancer.

How often do they practice?

Ballet dancers take class every morning for 1.5 hours, and then they rehearse all day. They have Sundays and sometimes Saturdays off, and they have a lunch break. Dancing is their full-time job.

Where are the dancers from?

Oregon Ballet Theatre dancers come from all around the world: Japan, Moldova, and different areas within the United States. There are dancers from California, Texas, Massachusetts, South Carolina, New York, and several who grew up right here in Portland.

APPLAUSE

DO clap after a really spectacular movement. Laugh if the situation onstage is funny. Applaud and say "Bravo!" at the end.
DON'T boo, whistle, hiss or make noise during the performance. It is distracting and disrespectful of the performers and to your neighbors in the audience.

FOOD

DO eat before you get to the theater if you think you might get hungry before the performance is over.
DON'T bring food or gum into the seating area. It makes noise, trash, and distractions.

TALKING

DO wait. Make a note on your program or a piece of paper if you want to remember something. Tell your friend after the ballet is over.
DON'T whisper or discuss things with other people during the performance. Your friends may want to listen to the music or pay attention to the dancers' movement or the story.

DRESS & BACKPACKS

DO dress neatly as a sign of respect to the artists and the theater.
DON'T wear over-powering perfume, big hats, or jingly bracelets. Leave backpacks at school. If you must bring one, you'll be asked to leave it in the lobby.

CELL PHONES, CAMERAS, IPODS, MP3 PLAYERS, ETC.

DO relax when the lights in the house (seating area) get dark. Sit back and enjoy the live performance with your eyes, ears, and imagination.
DON'T bring electronic devices into the theater. The noise and clicking can be distracting to your neighbors, and camera flashes can be dangerous to the dancers.