

### EMERGING AMERICAN DANCE

Dear Educators,

In this Student Performance Series we will perform five works of American dance traveling across a 70-year time span—from a pivotal work from the 1930s to a work just completed in 2008. In this Study Guide and during the performance we will:

- describe each dance work
- look at its place in American history
- suggest activities to further enhance understanding

We will touch on:

- ballet's early years and growth in America
- American dance education

For your ease, this Study Guide is laid out in performance order. While the information contained here is derived from books and the Internet, means that are accessible and usual resources for today's student, it also shares first hand accounts from the School of Oregon Ballet Theatre Director, Damara Bennett, and former Pacific Northwest Ballet Co-Artistic Director Francina Russell who had direct contact with the choreographers. This is the time-honored way that dance education is transmitted, from expert to novice, mentor to student. In America this education occurs in private studios and certain public institutions. For the shows on April 24th and 25th we chose to highlight emerging American dancers, so the

performers will be from the School of Oregon Ballet Theatre and from da Vinci Arts Middle School, a Portland Public school that supports a dance program. While these students may have talent, it is their hard work and dedication in dance class that drives their abilities upward. This is a great thing for your students to see.

As an educator I know that today's teachers are being asked to stretch beyond their expertise area in order to meet students' learning needs, the goal being to offer the very best, well-rounded education to our youth. This can be as challenging as it is enriching. The arts, while being declared essential to education, struggle to exist in schools, especially if taught by artist experts. Dance is the least taught art in schools across the country. To that end we at OBT continue to offer individualized programs of Education Outreach, including Field Trip Tours of our studios, teaching artists for In-School Residencies and our three-times-yearly Student Performance Series. We are very happy to partner with you as you make the extra effort to bring dance education to your students.

Kasandra Gruener, MA  
Director of Education and Outreach

### STUDENT PERFORMANCE SERIES STUDY GUIDE IN PROGRAM ORDER

#### SERENADE

Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky/George Balanchine

*"Dance can be enjoyed and understood without any verbal introduction or explanation. The important thing in ballet is the movement itself, as it is sound which is important in a symphony. A ballet may contain a story, but the visual spectacle, not the story, is the essential element."*<sup>1</sup> - George Balanchine

In the 1930s, Balanchine was invited by Lincoln Kirstein to come to the United States and start a school with the grand goal of building great American dancers. Kirstein stated that the School of American Ballet had been founded for one purpose only: "To provide dancers as well trained as any other technician, whether it be surgeon, architect, or musician."<sup>2</sup> (Continued on page 2)



School of Oregon Ballet Theatre students in George Balanchine's *Serenade*.  
Photo by Dan Carter (Photo 1)

As ballet is a performance art, very soon Balanchine set to work making choreography for his students. He wrote, “*Serenade* was my first ballet in the United States. As part of the school curriculum, I started an evening ballet class in stage technique, to give the students some idea of how dancing on stage differs from class work. *Serenade* evolved from the lessons I gave. It seemed to me that the best way to make students aware of stage technique was to give them something new to dance, something they had never seen before. I chose Tchaikovsky’s *Serenade* to work with. The class contained the first night, seventeen girls and no boys. The problem was, how to arrange this odd number of girls so that they would look interesting. I placed them on diagonal lines and decided that the hands should move first to give the girls practice.”<sup>1</sup>

So it can be seen that *Serenade* is not a ballet that tells a story, but instead shows how ballet movement evokes feelings through the way the dancers perform patterns and execute steps.

The first performance of *Serenade* was by students of the School of American Ballet on an outdoor stage on June 9, 1934. It was rained out partway through and was performed the next day in full. Since that time it has remained in the repertoire of New York City Ballet and comes now to the School of Oregon Ballet Theatre. To prepare this ballet, SOBT advanced dancers met with Francia Russell, former dancer with NYCB under the direction of Balanchine. She used the imagery that Balanchine had given to her as she described certain hand gestures. These young dancers have learned the work in a way that links them directly to the choreographer and to many great dancers who have danced it before them.



Balanchine rehearsing *Serenade*, 1934. (Photo 2)



New York City Ballet in the opening pose from *Serenade*. *Serenade* costumes have changed since 1934, moving away from out-dated dance class attire to costumes that reflect romantic ballets such as *Les Sylphides*. The present costumes were designed by Barbara Karinska in 1952. (Photo 3)

#### FACTS TO KNOW:

- Franklin D. Roosevelt was the U.S. President when *Serenade* debuted.
- Balanchine became an American citizen in 1939.
- Francia Russell is the mother of OBT Artistic Director Christopher Stowell.
- Tchaikovsky’s *Serenade for Strings in C Major Op. 48* can be purchased on iTunes for \$99.

#### MOBILE

Aram Khachaturian/Tomm Ruud

AND

#### MANDOLIN DANCE FROM ROMEO AND JULIET

Sergei Prokofiev/Michael Smuin

*Mobile* and *Mandolin Dance* are extremely different from one another, reflecting the wide diversity of dance in America. *Mobile*, an abstract ballet, offers us a chance to be amazed by dancers’ strength while teasing us into thinking about limitless space. *Mandolin Dance*, an excerpt from the ballet *Romeo and Juliet*, also wows us with dancers’ athleticism, while requiring the dancers to portray a character in a story. Both choreographers grew up dancing in America, their roots coming from America’s oldest institutions of ballet.

*Mobile* was choreographed in 1969 to Aram Khachaturian’s *Gayane Ballet Suite*, one year after the music caught peoples’ attention in the popular film 2001: A Space Odyssey. More than twenty companies worldwide have performed *Mobile*. It is a dance that explores balance and space. Three people puzzled together rotate and tilt like the inner workings of a slowly spinning mechanical structure. At times each dancer must counterbalance the movements of the other, relying heavily on their understanding of their own center of gravity. In the rare moment when their bodies disconnect they still seem held together by the pool of light surrounding them.

“Mobiles” are kinetic sculptures composed of several interconnected pieces that hang together in balance. “Stabiles” are similar, but instead have connected pieces which balance atop something that is grounded. The movements in *Mobile* bear resemblance to a stabile and also a dance form that evolved in America in the early 1970s called Contact Improvisation. In this form, students play with leaning and holding the weight of one or several partners. It takes cooperation and trust.

#### ACTIVITY

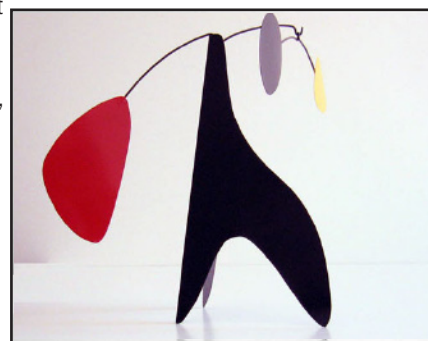
Ask your students to try this out: In pairs, stand back to back a little bit



Teddy Walters and Roy Ellis in their 1928 Adagio Vaudeville act. (Photo 4)



Example of contact improvisation. (Photo 5)



Custom Metal Table Stabile: The Alexander. (Photo 6)



apart, then lean in to each other's backs. Try to sit down slowly at the same time. What body adjustments need to occur? Try to return to standing with backs together.

Michael Smuin created *Romeo and Juliet* when he was the Co-Artistic Director of San Francisco Ballet. Its television debut was June 7, 1978 on PBS' *Dance in America*, earning Smuin an Emmy Award. But previous to the filming, *Romeo and Juliet* had a precarious beginning. As can still be true with dance companies in America, San Francisco Ballet was struggling financially. Damara Bennett, who was an original cast member, tells us that for the first stage performances the company only had enough money to create the costumes—there were no sets. Sets came later and then finally, the film, revealing to America the artistry and tenacity of San Francisco Ballet.

*The Mandolin Dance* is an excerpt from Act 2. We will see two dancers dressed as Italian street entertainers hoping to earn a few *lire* (Italian unit of money.) The *pas de deux* (French, meaning a dance for two) is full of difficult turns and jumps.

#### THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT TOMM RUUD:

- He received a BA and MA in Dance from University of Utah.
- He then joined SFB as dancer/choreographer in 1975 under the direction of Michael Smuin.
- While at SFB, he performed in Smuin's stage version of *Romeo and Juliet* but was not cast in the film version. He later danced the ugly sister in the ballet *Cinderella* for PBS' *Dance in America*.

#### THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT MICHAEL SMUIN:

- During his freshman year of high school in Missoula, MT, he lettered in Boxing.
- He first studied tap dancing, but fell in love with ballet after seeing a live performance of the Ballets Russes, a company that, at one time, included George Balanchine.
- In 1953, at the age of 15, he received a scholarship to study ballet at the University of Utah.

#### OBT'S CONNECTION TO MICHAEL SMUIN AND TOMM RUUD:

- School of Oregon Ballet Theatre Director, Damara Bennett, danced with Tomm Ruud at SFB during the Michael Smuin years.
- OBT's Artistic Director Christopher Stowell also danced for Smuin at SFB.
- Christopher's father, Kent Stowell, studied with Smuin in Salt Lake City and both joined SFB at the same time.

#### FALSE-FANTASIE

Mikhail Glinka/George Balanchine

Balanchine admired the music of Mikhail Glinka. Well known by Balanchine from his student days, Glinka, thought of as the Mozart of Russia, composed *Valse Fantaisie in B minor* in 1839. The ballet displays Balanchine's musicality and his interest in dancers' expression of rhythm and nuanced accent.

The dance is a brisk, perpetually moving waltz. Dancers keep track of where they are in a dance by counting. A waltz is counted in threes (1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3) with an emphasis on the down beat—the number "1" beat. In order to stay together dancers count the music in sets (1 2 3 2 2 3 3 2 3...) remembering that certain counts cue certain movements. There is a lot of counting going on!

#### ACTIVITY

Go to iTunes and do a search entering the words "*Glinka Valse Fantaisie in B minor*." You can listen to 30 seconds for free or buy a version for \$.99. Try to find the beat and count it. You can do this with any waltz music. Try to walk or run to the beat of the waltz. If you don't have access to waltz music, you can beat out a waltz rhythm on a drum. Hit the drum loudly on "1" and softly on 2 and 3. Change the tempo. The faster the tempo, the more one feels like flying!

#### DR. DA VINCI'S UNDERSEA ADVENTURE

Various composers / Anne Mueller



This work carries forth ballet's tradition of telling a story through movements, music, lighting, costumes, and props—all without words. The enclosed program includes a synopsis of the story about a scientist's strategy to rid the ocean of pollutants. Young students will enjoy this ballet for its fun costumes and playfulness. Older students will discern the story's message and should also be encouraged to notice that this work, performed at the Newmark Theatre before nearly 1700 people over two days' time, is being carried out by students near their age.

This piece is a combined effort between the School of Oregon Ballet Theatre and da Vinci Arts Middle School using nearly 50 dancers. The ballet features colorful and creative sets and costumes as well as a whimsically eclectic mix of musical compositions from artists such as Mark Mothersbaugh of Devo, the experimental Icelandic music group Múm, and South African composer Abdullah Ibrahim. It shows that dance and academic subject matter can merge to the benefit of both.

The choreographer, Anne Mueller, who once studied at School of American Ballet, is a principal dancer with OBT. Kristan Brayson and Claire Olberding, da Vinci dance teachers, worked with Anne on this collaboration.



A Pre-1950 Undersea Ballet by Florence Rogge at the Radio City Music Hall. (Photo 7)

## PHOTO NOTES IN ORDER:

Photo 1: OBT archive

Photo 2: Taper, Bernard. *Balanchine a Biography*. (1960). Macmillan Publishing. New York

Photo 3: [http://www.nycb.org/uploadedimages/Company/Repertory/Rep\\_Notes/serenade.jpg](http://www.nycb.org/uploadedimages/Company/Repertory/Rep_Notes/serenade.jpg)

Photo 4: 25 Years of American Dance. (1954). Dance Magazine. New York. Picture dated 1934

Photo 5: Contact Improvisation image from: <http://homepage.mac.com/theplayground/Personal8.html>

Photo 6: [www.nova68.com](http://www.nova68.com)

Photo 7: 25 Years of American Dance. (1954). Dance Magazine. New York.


## TEXT RESOURCES

1. <http://www.balletmet.org/Notes/SERENADE.HTM>

2. <http://www.sab.org/school/history/1934.php>

The performances of *Serenade* and *Valse-Fantaisie*, **Balanchine® Ballets**, are presented by arrangement with **The George Balanchine Trust®** and have been produced in accordance with the **Balanchine Style®** and **Balanchine Technique®** Service standards established and provided by the Trust.

## WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION

 [www.obt.org/home.htm](http://www.obt.org/home.htm) - Click on OUTREACH -> PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH -> STUDENT PERFORMANCE SERIES and scroll down to the curriculum at the bottom of the page.

## 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. (AR.05.HC.03, AR.08.HC.03, AR.CM.HC.03) PASS Criteria: Standard B.3

*Aesthetics And Criticism:* Respond to and analyze works of art, based on essential elements, organizational principles and aesthetic criteria. (AR.03.AC.01, AR.05.AC.01, AR.08.AC.01, AR.CM.AC.01) PASS Criteria: Standard A.1

## 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, Russia, Albania, and different areas within the United States. There are dancers from Nebraska, California, 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 yell "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 at intermission or 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.

Please direct any questions to:  
Kassandra Gruener, Director of Education & Outreach  
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 **REACH**