

THE BODY BEAUTIFUL: GREEK MYTH THROUGH DANCE AND ART



Photo by Joni Kabana

The following Study Guide is a resource designed to assist teachers to prepare students for Oregon Ballet Theatre's Student Performance Series entitled *The Body Beautiful: Greek Myth Through Dance and Art*. Along with a brief description of the ballets, the Study Guide will look at two key concepts: collaboration, and elements or devices of

choreography that dance makers use to express ideas. There are movement activities “👉” that will help students notice these components of the ballets. The Study Guide provides links to web articles, blog posts, Youtube videos, and music for the ballets.

Students will see two ballets: *Apollo*, created by 20th century choreographer George Balanchine; and *Ekho*, choreographed by 21st century choreographer, OBT Artistic Director Christopher Stowell.

The opening piece, *Apollo*, was created in Paris in 1928 and is considered pivotal in launching ballet into the neoclassical style. It is Balanchine's oldest work still being regularly performed and depicts the newly born Apollo and his encounter with three Muses. Myth is but one part of the inspiration—Igor Stravinsky's music is the other. Bernard Taper said in the book *Balanchine: A Biography*, that when Balanchine heard Stravinsky's music, “he felt moved to try to make it visible.”

The second work on the program, *Ekho*, is being created in the room right next to me as I write this Study Guide. The ballet is inspired by the story of Narcissus and Echo, two woodland nymphs whose individual yearnings for love lead to tragedy and transformation. *Ekho* is also inspired by the theatrical potential of NW visual artist John Grade's (pronounced grah-day) large scale organic sculpture, which students will see fully manifested on stage.

Both ballets are based on ancient Greek tales and ideals. We see this in a dancer's pose in profile that seems lifted from a Greek vase, in set décor (structures onstage) that make one think of a mountain or of luminous trees in a mythological forest, or in costumes that trick the mind into thinking that a statue of a half-God has come to life or that woodland nymphs have emerged from trees.




Grace Shibley and Brett Bauer in George Balanchine's *Apollo*. Photo by Andy Batt.

You are also encouraged to take a second field trip to the Portland Art Museum to visit the installation of *The Body Beautiful in Ancient Greece*, which explores the human form through exquisite objects from the British Museum's famed Greek and Roman collection. To support that experience we include a bonus set of activities to enrich curriculum that I presented to Portland Art Museum's Evening for Educators in May 2012 and to Portland Art Museum docents in August 2012.

Download “BodyBeautifulKinesthetic.pdf” here:

 www.obt.org/outreach_sps.html

The ideas include kinesthetic activities inspired by modern sculpture from the permanent collection and from the visiting antiquities. I hope you try out these activities and send me pictures! The PAM exhibit runs October 6, 2012 through Jan 6, 2013. For more information:  <http://www.pam.org/>

This Student Performance Series show takes place on October 18, 2012 at the Keller Auditorium at 3rd and Clay St in downtown Portland. It is a one hour performance that begins at 11:30. Doors open at 11:00.

See you in the theatre!

Kasandra Gruener, MA, Director of Education and Outreach

Apollo

MUSIC: APOLLON MUSAGÈTE

COMPOSER: IGOR STRAVINSKY

CHOREOGRAPHY: GEORGE BALANCHINE*

ORIGINALLY STAGED BY: FRANCIA RUSSELL

RE-STAGED BY: LISA KIPP

COSTUMES BUILT BY: OREGON BALLET THEATRE COSTUME SHOP

LIGHTING DESIGN: MICHAEL MAZZOLA

OBT COMPANY PREMIERE: April 27, 2007, Newmark Theater, Portland, Oregon

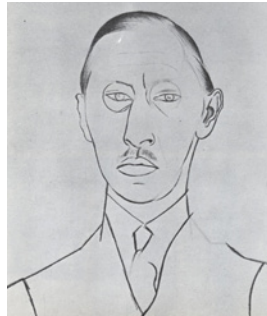
WORLD PREMIERE: June 12, 1928, Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt, Paris, France

Music used by arrangement with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner. Apollo props courtesy of Houston Ballet.

*This performance of *Apollo*, a Balanchine© ballet, is presented by arrangement with the George Balanchine Trust and has been produced in accordance with the Balanchine Style© and Balanchine Technique© Trust service standards

"The composer is my floor. Without the composer, what can I do." - George Balanchine

The ballet depicts Apollo, the young god of music, who is visited by three Muses: Calliope, Muse of poetry, whose symbol is a tablet; Polyhymnia, Muse of mime, whose symbol is a mask that represents the power of gesture; and Terpsichore, Muse of dance and song, whose symbol is a lyre. Each dances a solo for Apollo, thus instructing the young God in their respective arts. Terpsichore becomes Apollo's favorite. Composer for the ballet, Igor Stravinsky said, "Terpsichore, combining in herself both the rhythm and the eloquence of gesture, reveals dancing to the world and thus among the Muses takes the place of honor beside Apollo." In the central part of the ballet Terpsichore and Apollo dance a duet called a *pas de deux*. At the end of the ballet Apollo and the Muses regally ascend Mount Parnassus.




Pablo Picasso Portrait of Igor Stravinsky 1917

George Balanchine rehearsing *Apollo* with Patricia McBride.



"When I was at New York City Ballet, Apollo was, in a way, sacred, partly because Mr. Balanchine always rehearsed it himself. To be chosen to dance one of the leading roles was a great, great honor. I don't think there was anything else that was as much of an honor as being chosen to be Apollo or one of the Muses." - Francia Russell

To read more about Francia Russell's experience learning *Apollo* go to:  <http://oregonballettheatre.wordpress.com/2012/09/19/learning-apollo-from-the-master-a-conversation-with-francia-russell/>

COLLABORATION

It is said that *Apollo* marked the beginning of perhaps the most inspired artistic collaboration in the history of modern ballet: that of Stravinsky and Balanchine." Dance Magazine's John Gruen stated, "As collaborators and friends, they brought ballet into the twentieth century, placing their extraordinary artistry in the service of dance, melding music and choreography to produce unexpected yet inevitable masterpieces."




Evolution of the costumes for *Apollo*: Left - original costumes; Right - costumes by Chanel's atelier.


The costumes for *Apollo* have evolved over the years, starting with the opening weeks of the ballet. Each successive change was a paring away of layers, until finally the most simple costume remains—one that resembles what a dancer wears for their daily technique class.


In an April 1981 Dance Magazine article, John Gruen quoted Balanchine's words about the Muses costumes:


"Diaghilev found the most lousy costumes for the girls. All the girls in *Apollo* were dressed like old bags. Then he covered their hair with some wigs that looked like rows of easter eggs. Coco Chanel was there, and she saw. Afterwards she came running to Diaghilev. 'Serge, how can you do this to those poor girls!' So, on the next day we all went to Chanel's atelier, and she dressed the girls . . . it was haute couture! . . ."


To hear the music for *Apollo*:

 www.youtube.com/watch?v=TX3CwVRg7EE

To see pictures and learn more about Apollo and the Muses go to:  <http://oregonballettheatre.wordpress.com/2012/10/03/the-myths-and-muses-of-body-beautiful/>

To learn about the original production of *Apollo* visit the George Balanchine Foundation's website:  http://balanchine.org/balanchine/display_result.jsp?num=84

To see pictures and learn what instructions Balanchine gave to the men who danced *Apollo*, go to:  <http://oregonballettheatre.wordpress.com/2012/09/20/becoming-a-god-balanchines-advice-to-his-apollos/>

To see an interactive timeline of George Balanchine's career, including that he stopped ballet for a time due to the Russian Revolution and later in Paris changed his name from Balanchivadze to Balanchine:  <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/george-balanchine/career-timeline/530/>

ELEMENTS OF DANCE TO LOOK FOR IN *APOLLO*

Repeated shapes: Throughout the ballet, the dancers create pyramid or triangular shapes. The pyramid was a sacred Greek symbol and we can see it pointing up and pointing downward created by all of the dancers or by just one.

Levels in space: Ballet is three dimensional—bodies exist in space. Choreographers design traveling movements and poses to the extent of a dancer's range—from lowest level to the highest.

Canon: A canon is a phrase in dance or music that is performed in overlapping sequence—think of the song “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”

Weaving: Balanchine created ballets using compositional elements from the full spectrum of dance forms, including traditional folk dance. We can see this when dancers do intricate weaving patterns. They hook parts of their bodies together, often hands or linked arms, and seem to twist in and out of knots.

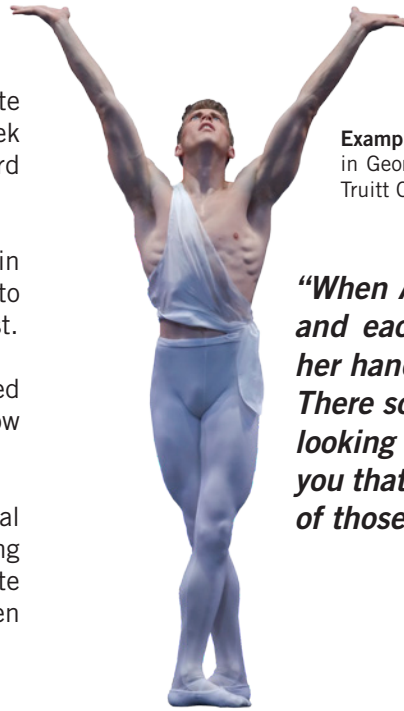


“The moment where the muses raise their legs to different heights as if from a single nucleus, like the spokes of a wheel . . .” - George Balanchine

Edward Villella, Suki Schorer, Patricia McBride, Carol Sumner. New York City Ballet Photo: Martha Swope 1964.

To see a video clip that shows “the spokes,” a canon, intricate weaving and an example of varied levels in space, go to:

 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUNQjjbozF8>



Example of repeated shapes: Ronnie Underwood in George Balanchine's *Apollo*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

“When Apollo reaches out and over, and each Muse lifts her toe up to her hand, and then he reaches over. There something about it that is like looking at a great painting. It gives you that rush of joy. The ballet is full of those moments.” - Francina Russell



Example of levels in space: Oregon Ballet Theatre's production of George Balanchine's *Apollo*. Alison Roper and Ronnie Underwood. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

STUDENTS CAN TRY ALL OF THESE CHOREOGRAPHIC DEVICES.

Be sure to give time to let students see the work of their fellow classmates.

- **Shapes:** Divide students into groups of three or four and explore shapes created in various parts of the body or as a group. Verbal prompts like, “How might you create a triangle with your legs.... whole body...with two other people?”
- **Levels:** “How might you do that same shape at a low, middle or high level?”
- **Canon:** Wake up the right and left brain with this activity! Ask a group of three or four students to make up a phrase or sequence of movements that they can all do at the same time (unison) and be able to repeat it again and again. For example: stand tall, arms reach to the side, spin around, touch

the ground, repeat!) Now have the students stand near each other and do the phrase one after the other in canon. It helps to do it to a beat. The example works well by tapping 2 beats to each part, 8 cts total. Students start the phrase after every 2 beats. This phrase works if you sing “Row, Row, Row, Your Boat” while dancing, you can get the phrase in two times. Try doing it with the students far apart from each other and ask the class how that changes the canon.

- **Weaving:** Challenge students to hold hands and find unique ways to move around each other without letting go. (It is hard to hold on when you are laughing!)



Christopher Stowell in rehearsal for the world premiere of *Ekho* with Lucas Threefoot and Brian Simcoe. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

Ekho

MUSIC: *SINFONIA NO. 3 IN C MAJOR*, Mvt. 2 Adagio (CPE Bach); *CONCERTO IN G MAJOR*, Wq. 169/H. 445, Mvt 3, Presto (CPE Bach); *SINFONIA, ALLEGRO FROM LE CINESI* (Gluck); *ALLEGRO FROM DON JUAN* (Gluck); *DANCE OF THE BLESSED SPIRITS* (Gluck); *SINFONIA, ANDANTE FROM LE CINESI* (Gluck).

COMPOSERS: CARL PHILIPP EMANUEL BACH AND CHRISTOPH WILLIBALD GLUCK

MUSIC COORDINATOR AND ARRANGER: NIEL DEPONTE

CHOREOGRAPHY: CHRISTOPHER STOWELL

SCENIC DESIGN: JOHN GRADE

COSTUME DESIGN: CHRISTOPHER STOWELL AND JOHN GRADE

COSTUMES BUILT BY: OREGON BALLET THEATRE COSTUME SHOP

LIGHTING DESIGNER: MICHAEL MAZZOLA

WORLD PREMIERE: October 13, 2012, Keller Auditorium, Portland, Oregon

To hear a selection of the music from *Ekho*:

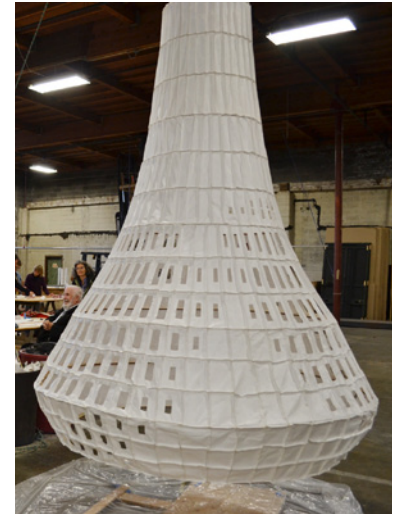
 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TDnv4CMRX0>

Ekho is based on the story of Narcissus and Echo. The old story has many variations. Narcissus is a woodland nymph whose standards for love are unattainable, he cannot fall in love with anyone—he is so vain. He is thoughtless of others because he is so wrapped up in himself. At one point the gods decree that Narcissus will finally fall in love, but with someone that is impossible for him to have. Echo is a bubbly and chatty nymph dashing amongst the forest's trees. Even so, she angers the gods who determine that she will only be able to repeat the last words she hears, never able to speak with her own words. At one point Echo comes upon Narcissus. She falls in love with him, but he will not have her and she dissolves into the earth only to become the repeating echo we hear in the distance. Narcissus then sees his own reflection in a stream and falls deeply in love with

the mirror image of himself. Of course this image is an illusion, splashed from the stream when he tries to touch it. Narcissus is unable to possess his reflection and he dies and transforms into a beautiful white flower.

COLLABORATION

More than 2 years ago OBT's Artistic Director Christopher Stowell and Portland Art Museum's Bruce Gunther sat down in a room together and



talked about the future—a seed was planted that is flowering today. PAM would be showing an exhibit called *The Body Beautiful in Ancient Greece* in Fall of 2012. Christopher knew of ballets that would align with Greek ideals, so out of that meeting OBT's Fall 2012 *Body Beautiful* program at the Keller Auditorium emerged. Christopher decided to create a new work for this program. Portland Art Museum curator Bruce Guenther introduced Christopher to NW visual artist John Grade, resulting in a multi-layered collaboration: one that occurred between the artist and the builders of the trees, and one that occurred between Christopher, the choreographer, and John, the visual artist. In order to build the trees, hundreds of volunteers came to OBT's warehouse to fold and glue together thousands of pieces of strong but light fabric called tyvek, constructed over wooden hoops. As the trees were created Christopher created the ballet, often thinking about how the trees and the dancers would relate to each other and what the combined effect of dancer, costume, set, lighting and music would be. It is a lot to think about! Meanwhile the Education departments of OBT and PAM also got together, resulting in dance ideas entering the art museum's docent-led tours, and new lesson plans for school educators.

The result: Students can look at ballet in a theatre and art in a museum and discover the beauty, power, expressiveness, grace, athleticism, and history of ideal views of the human body. This is how collaboration between two art organizations makes for a fertile learning process!

To see a chronicle of how the trees for *Ekho* were built, go to this site:

 <http://oregonballettheatre.wordpress.com/2012/09/11/building-ekho/>

ELEMENTS OF DANCE TO LOOK FOR IN *EKHO*

Mirroring: This occurs when a dancer does the same move in reflection of another dancer. In *Ekho*, this may be done in different levels, either near or far from each other. Sometimes the reflection is distorted as if in rippling water.

Unison: This is when dancers do the same thing at the same time. It is often exciting when a large group of dancers does something in unison.

Focus: Dancers pay attention to the way they extend their focus. We in the audience can tell where a dancer is looking because of the concentration that the dancer must employ. You will see this in *Narcissus* as he pays attention to his reflection (another dancer) and does not focus on Ekho.



Example of Mirroring: Grace Shibley and Artur Sultanov in Christopher Stowell's *The Rite of Spring*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.



Example of Unison: Oregon Ballet Theatre in George Balanchine's *Stravinsky Violin Concerto*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.



Example of Focus: Lucas Threefoot and Brian Simcoe in rehearsal for Christopher Stowell's *Ekho*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

👉 STUDENTS CAN TRY THESE ELEMENTS OUT!

- **Mirroring:** Start by asking the whole class to mirror your movements as you stand in front of them. Ask them to notice what makes this easy or difficult. Most will notice that quick moves are hard to follow. Ask students to divide into partners and practice leading and following, each person taking a turn to lead. Ask students to choose which role they enjoy more—leading or following? Try doing it to different types of music and see if that changes the types of movements students choose.
- **Unison:** Ask students to think about times in their lives that they have seen unison movement. Possible replies: marching band, army drills, bird flocks in flight, dolphins leaping (although they often leap in canon formation), people doing tai chi, etc.
- **Focus:** Play a game! Invite students to choose something to look at and have others guess what it is. A more advanced activity can be created by “looking” with other parts of the body. Ask students to “look” to the side, up, or backward with their elbow...knee... ear, etc. Ask students if that feels different than just putting the body part in that direction.

CONTENT STANDARDS

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

Create, Present and Perform: Apply ideas, techniques and processes in the arts.

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.