



TO REACH

OREGON BALLET THEATRE

CHRISTOPHER STOWELL / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

STUDENT PERFORMANCE SERIES STUDY GUIDE

October 19, 2006

CHOREOGRAPHER & COMPOSER

Dear Teachers,

Oregon Ballet Theatre thanks you for enriching your students' academic experience by bringing them to our Fall 2006 Student Performance Series: Choreographer and Composer. This study guide is intended to set your students on a path of discovery, offering artist biographies, descriptions of the ballets, and a few interactive activities to prepare for the performance. Please note that *Content Standards for the Arts* are included to help you link this experience with your academic goals. We are also trying something new by adding extra ideas onto our website for your benefit - check back to the Student Performance Series webpage every now and then for new offerings.

“I feel that music is like an aquarium. It's all around you . . . and dancers are the fish.”
- George Balanchine

We have also included a CD of music by Frederick Chopin. Teachers have told us that they play our CDs often, including during independent work times. Music is very important to dancers. We especially like to dance to it when it is being played by live musicians. Happily, you will experience Chopin and other live music when you come to see us in the theatre!

See you at the Keller Auditorium!

Kassandra Gruener
Director of Education and Outreach

Linda Besant
Dance Historian

Adin (2004)

The Choreographer: Christopher Stowell (1966 –)

Christopher Stowell's parents were both dancers for George Balanchine at New York City Ballet, and they directed Pacific Northwest Ballet in Seattle for 28 years. Stowell says that even as a baby, he saw dancers in pointe shoes. Ballet is an art form that is passed down from generation to generation, and this places Stowell directly in the Balanchine lineage. He became OBT's second artistic director in 2003, after retiring from his career as a principal dancer with San Francisco Ballet. Music is one of his greatest joys in life, and he is committed to having OBT perform to live music whenever possible. He has created ballets to composers as diverse as Maurice Ravel and Cole Porter, including an acclaimed version of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* for OBT in June of 2006.



Christopher Stowell and dancer, Mia Leimkuhler. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.



Anne Mueller and Karl Vakili in Christopher Stowell's *Adin*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

The Composer: Sergei Rachmaninov (1873 – 1943)

Sergei Rachmaninov was one of the greatest pianists of the 20th century, as well as a gifted composer most famous for his piano concerti. He was 6'6" tall, with very large hands that could span 13 keys on the piano. As a student in Russia, he cut class to go skating and flunked many courses until his piano teacher helped him develop self-discipline. He left Russia by sleigh during the revolution of 1917, with nothing but a few books of sheet music. He spent most of the rest of his life in the United States. His compositions reflect his admiration for Tchaikovsky, his childhood idol, and are full of melancholy and nostalgic melodies.



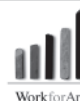
About the Ballet

Christopher Stowell created this ballet during his first season as OBT's artistic director. It was his first work for OBT's dancers; hence, it is called *Adin*—Russian for “first.” The music for *Adin* is four songs by Rachmaninov originally written for piano and voice. Rachmaninov had arranged one of them for orchestra. OBT Music Director Niel DePonte orchestrated the other three songs especially for *Adin*, in the style of Rachmaninov. Students will see the 2nd and 4th sections of the ballet, starting with “The Pied Piper,” which is quick and lively; and closing with “Let Us Leave, My Sweet,” which combines simple, stylized walking with challenging lifts and interesting lighting.

THE STUDENT PERFORMANCE SERIES IS SPONSORED BY



— FOUNDATION —



CHOREOGRAPHER & COMPOSER

The Four Temperaments (1946)

The Choreographer: George Balanchine (1904 – 1983)

When ballet dancers are asked to name the greatest choreographers in the 500-year history of this art, George Balanchine is at or near the top of everyone's list. Born Georgi Balanchivadze in Russia in 1904, he studied ballet at the Czar's Imperial Academy and music at the Petrograd Conservatory as a child. By age 20, he had left Russia and was already making choreography for the Ballets Russes, the most innovative ballet troupe in Europe. He came to the United States in 1933 at the urging of Lincoln Kirstein. They made several attempts to start a ballet company, during which time Balanchine supported himself making dances for musical comedies, Hollywood, and even the circus; their efforts culminated in the founding of New York City Ballet in 1948. Balanchine's love of music and his serious musical training meant he understood music deeply and could communicate easily with composers. In his 425 works, he used old steps in new ways and new steps in unexpected ways, inventing a new language of dance based on the old. This Neoclassical style melded Classic grace and precision with modern speed and energy. Balanchine enjoyed cooking, and was famous for the lavish supper he prepared and served every Easter.



The Composer: Paul Hindemith (1895 – 1963)

Asked to describe himself as a young man, Paul Hindemith wrote, "I was born in 1895 in Hanau. I began studying music in my twelfth year. As a violinist, violist, pianist and percussionist I have thoroughly cultivated the following musical fields: chamber music of all kinds, cinema music, coffee house music, dance music, operetta, jazz band, and military music." He was equally eclectic as a composer. Hindemith left Germany in 1940, after the Nazis had denounced his wife as Jewish and his music as "degenerate." He lived in Switzerland or the United States the rest of his life, and taught music composition, primarily at Yale. As a highly theoretical contemporary composer, Hindemith searched throughout his life for an all-encompassing theory of harmony. He also collected model trains.



About the Ballet

George Balanchine loved avant-garde music and visual art as well as contemporary dance. In the early 1940s, he found himself with a little extra money from choreographing Broadway shows. He commissioned Paul Hindemith to compose a piece for piano and a few strings that he and friends could play at his music salon. Hindemith wrote *The Four Temperaments* based on the medieval physiological idea of personality types.

Kurt Seligmann, an avant-garde designer of the time who created the original costumes, explored the medieval idea of "cardinal fluids." His costumes were described as "theatrical to the hilt." The Phlegmatic costume was likened to a mushroom. With mittens, breastplates and headdresses, the costumes interfered with dancing, and were soon abandoned. *Four Ts*, as dancers affectionately call it, became one of Balanchine's "black and white ballets," performed in dark leotards and light tights.

Four Ts is one of the ballets that launched Balanchine's Neoclassical style. He thrust steps that had been danced on-balance into off-balance positions, and placed dancers in asymmetrical patterns on the stage, in ways that feel as contemporary today as they did when *Four Ts* first appeared in 1946. Critic Arlene Croce found the choreography "full of elementary particles, jostling, caroming, crisscrossing space . . ."

The Concert (1956)

The Choreographer: Jerome Robbins (1918 – 1998)

Like Balanchine, Jerome Robbins showed aptitude for music and dance at an early age. Born in New Jersey to a family which ran a corset manufacturing company, Robbins studied modern and all sorts of folk dance, and cleaned window blinds at his ballet teacher's studio to pay for his lessons. He performed in Yiddish theater and summer-stock musicals, danced on Broadway, and was a soloist with Ballet Theater en route to his ultimate calling as an all-around theatrical choreographer. He choreographed 14 Broadway shows, among them *Peter Pan* and *West Side Story*, and worked alongside Balanchine at New York City Ballet as co-Ballet Master in Chief. His 54 ballets almost always dealt with human relationships, and integrated all kinds of dance idioms with classical ballet. Violette Verdy, a dancer who performed the works of both Balanchine and Robbins, said Robbins' choreography was "crooning . . . rather than opera singing. It's a different way of using dance . . ." Robbins received many awards for his choreography, including Kennedy Center Honor.



The Composer: Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849)

By the age of 20, Frédéric Chopin had studied at the Conservatory of Music in his native Warsaw and received critical acclaim for his piano polonaises and mazurkas. He moved to Paris in 1831, where his artistic mystique endeared him to high society—he was handsome, sensitive, and suffered frail health due to tuberculosis. As a composer, he devoted himself almost entirely to the piano, improvising lavishly, then laboring endlessly to write down and revise his ideas. He invented expressive melodies, supporting them with harmonies that were surprisingly adventurous. When Chopin passed away at the young age of 39, 3000 people attended his funeral.



About the Ballet

Jerome Robbins created serious ballets to Chopin piano pieces, but first, he chose some of Chopin's best-loved works as the basis for *The Concert*, a comedy-ballet about the way people's minds wander as they listen to a classical music performance. When *The Concert* premiered in 1956, critic Walter Terry wrote, "Here was a dance joke, defying literal description, which had the audience shrieking and choking with laughter . . . its best scenes are as funny as anything to be found in the theater of dance."

Robbins had very good theatrical instincts and more experience in musical theater than most ballet choreographers. He understood comic timing, and had a sympathetic feel for human foibles. This shows up clearly in the sections of *The Concert* that students will see. "Carry" is pure comedic schtick, and "Mistake Waltz" pokes fun at the relentless symmetry of ballet. Someone is always landing out of line, leaning the wrong way, or putting her arms in the wrong position. In essence, the ballerinas are doing a dance about making mistakes. For fifty years, dance companies all over the world have found that *The Concert* makes people laugh, no matter their culture or their age.





The Four Temperaments, performed by New York City Ballet

Exploring The Standards for Arts in Education


"Surprise is important"
- George Balanchine


Standard A: Understands elements, principles, and process in the arts

Words that make us move! (This symbol  means to get up and move)
[Standard A1: Recognize, examine, and understand the elements and principles that are common across various art forms or disciplines.]

flex: To bend at a joint.  Try bending all your different joints, one at a time.
point: To extend and stretch the leg, foot and toes to make one straight line.

 Try it!

symmetry: To be the same on both sides of a central dividing line. To be balanced.  Make the letter T with your body- Stand up straight, both arms stretched out, pointing to the side.

asymmetry: To be uneven, where one side does not mirror the other side. To be off-balance.  Make the number 4 with your body- Stand tall, one arm down at your side the other arm stretched out to the side and flexed at the elbow.

 Now "dance" the 4 and then the T, one after the other.

Dancers often speak of the ballets that they do with shorter nicknames. *The Four Temperaments* is often called "4 T's." Be sure to look for symmetry and asymmetry in this dance. You can see it in the dancers bodies and in the way the dancers are placed on stage. Sometimes there will be 2 people in one corner of the stage and 4 people in the other corner. Is that symmetrical or asymmetrical? To practice seeing asymmetry and symmetry, name as many symmetrical and asymmetrical things that you can.

Standard B: Interpret art from various cultures and historical perspectives.

Long ago in Europe, medieval science and medicine taught that a person's mood, or temperament, came about as a result of the mixing of the four main fluids within the body. These temperaments were: melancholic (sad, depressed), sanguine (cheerful, hopeful), phlegmatic (sluggish, indifferent), and choleric (angry, irritable). Hindemith composed the music and titled the various sections after the four temperaments. Balanchine choreographed the dance after he heard the music. He wanted the movements to express his thinking about the music. When you see the dance you will notice that the dancers do not make mad faces to show their anger, or sad faces to show their sadness. Instead they move their bodies sharply to represent anger, and slowly and heavily downward to describe sadness. Think about how you move when you are sad, cheerful, angry, or in a "oh well, who cares!" mood. Try moving sadly or cheerfully.



The Phlegmatic costume for *The Four Temperaments* premiere in 1946.


Standard C: Understand the role of arts in society.

[Standard C1: Examination of the Arts in Society. Understand the role of arts in empowering people and enriching their lives...recognizes and discusses influences of various art forms and disciplines.]

{ "Everything old is new again"
(This is an old saying. We wonder who said it first?) }

In our effort to include technology and to expand your dance experience we ask you to look online at a wonderful site from the Kennedy Center: "ArtsEdge." We direct you to a page that is about a Russian Folk Dance called the "Troika" (www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2152). While the whole lesson is rated for 5th

– 8th graders, one aspect, "Performing the Troika" can be explored in 1st - 4th grade lesson plans. Please go to the site and try to do the Troika dance.

In the "Troika" ("sleigh" in Russian) dance three people hold hands.  The center person and the one on the left hold up their hands to form an arch. The person on the right, without letting go, travels in front of the center person, under the arch, around the back and all the way to the starting place. (The center person makes a complete turn in place.) Everyone faces forward again. This takes 8 counts to complete. Then the person on the left goes under the arch. This also takes 8 counts to complete.

This idea of holding hands and weaving under and around is found in many folk dances. It's great when it all works out. This movement idea is also found in Balanchine's *Four Temperaments*. Mr. Balanchine would have likely seen or danced this dance as a child in Russia. When Jerome Robbins choreographed *The Concert* he also included a section of holding hands with people weaving in and out, similar to Mr. Balanchine, but he did it in a humorous way. We will show you at the theatre.

Look at this cartoon. This is a cartoon about *The Four Temperaments* created by the artist who also painted the scenery for the final piece on our program, *The Concert*. The artist is Edward Gorey. He has written several humorous books and he was a big fan of ballet. We will show the scenery drops to you at the performance. *The Four Ts* plays with symmetry. You will understand why this cartoon is funny after you see *The Four Ts*. Do you think the dancers are symmetrical or asymmetrical?



"One of us is no longer with the music."

Questions to consider:

Older Students

4T's was created in 1946. What else was going on in the world at that time?

The first costumes were elaborate but were replaced after a few years by simple dance clothes. Do the costumes make a difference to how we understand the dance? Think about this in terms of your favorite movie - what if the costumes/clothes worn were entirely different. Would it change the meaning of the film?

Younger Students

In one part of *The Concert* it looks like the dancers keep making mistakes and then they try to fix it. What do you do when you make a mistake?

In another part of *The Concert* the ballerinas hold their bodies very stiff like the mannequins that stand in department store windows. How long can you stand still in a "model's" shape? Could you hold the shape while someone picked you up and carried you somewhere else?

What does Rachmaninov's escape from Russia have in common with the Troika folk dance we explored for Balanchine's *Four Temperaments*?



Opening scene of *The Concert*, performed by New York City Ballet in 1956.

Words To Know!

[Standard A3: Appropriately uses concepts and terminology particular to a chosen art form or discipline.]

choreographer: a person who creates dances

ballerina: a leading female ballet dancer

premier danseur: a leading male ballet dancer

composer: a person who creates musical compositions

musician: a person who plays music

conductor: a person who directs the musicians helping them to stay together

ballet: a form of dance for men and women that requires training to perfect and has specific steps. Women turn and balance on their toes in pointe shoes. Men perform difficult jumps and gracefully lift the ballerinas into the air.

folk dance: a form of dance done by people of a certain country or heritage, often done for fun at gatherings, but also for performance

Go to www.obt.org to find a word game about our performance!

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 ballerinas 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 made by hand 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 are called story ballets, like *The Nutcracker*. 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 it 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, Canada, and different areas within the United States. There are dancers from Alabama, 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

DO dress neatly as a sign of respect to the artists and the theater.

DON'T wear over-powering perfume, big hats (people behind you might have trouble seeing the stage), or jingly bracelets (the noise can be distracting during the performance).

TAPES, CAMERAS, & WALKMANS

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 CD or tape recorders or cameras into the theater. The noise and clicking can be distracting to your neighbors, and camera flashes can be dangerous to the dancers.