

Dear Educators,

On March 1, you will experience the beauty and romance of *Giselle*, a ballet that has fascinated audiences since its opening night in Paris on June 28, 1841. The Student Performance Series showing of *Giselle* will include a narrated synopsis of Act I, followed by a fully produced Act II. The doors to the Keller Auditorium open at 11:15. The performance begins at 11:45 and will last one hour. When students enter the theatre to find their seats, they may see a few dancers on stage practicing difficult passages one last time before they put on their costumes, or stage crew cleaning the floor, moving scenery, or focusing lights. Students are encouraged to watch the stage transform into a forest clearing where Giselle's tombstone rests.



Photo by Joni Kabana

This Study Guide includes information that will assist students' understanding of the ballet—the story, how to identify the characters, and some descriptions of the ballet movements. Included are several internet links to OBT blog posts and YouTube videos that give you and your students' historical context and inside information direct from the artists producing and performing the work you will see.


While it is important for students to “know before they go,” it is also important to take time to reflect after the performance. *Giselle* is a story-ballet that explores timeless themes: love, revenge, heartbreak and forgiveness. Included are post-performance questions and activities designed to get students thinking about what they saw and how it relates to their own lives.

All of us at OBT are thrilled to be able to offer significant work for the eyes of children for such an affordable rate. We are able to do this because of the generosity of donors and patrons who join us in the belief that young people need the arts in order to be fully educated. OBT Education Outreach sponsors are listed below. We encourage you to send us student and teacher reflections about the Student Performance Series presentation of *Giselle* so that we can assure our donors that OBT is important in the education of our young people.

See you in the theatre!  
Kasandra Gruener, MA  
Director of Education and Outreach

## LEARN ABOUT *GISELLE* ON OBT'S WEBSITE!

Listed below are web addresses to OBT Blog and OBT YouTube sites. Short descriptions give you an idea of the content.

 Go to [www.obt.org/outreach\\_sps.html](http://www.obt.org/outreach_sps.html) for clickable links to all of the content below.

## OBT ON YOU TUBE

 [www.youtube.com/oregonballettheatre](http://www.youtube.com/oregonballettheatre)

Look for 2 videos:

- Christopher Stowell and Lola de Avila talk about “Giselle”
- Yuka Iino In Rehearsal for “Giselle”



## OBT'S BLOG

 <http://oregonballettheatre.wordpress.com/>

Click on “Behind the Scenes” and look for the following blog posts:

- **BACKSTAGE PASS:** “Giselle” Costume Fittings
- **BACKSTAGE PASS: A Sneak Peek at the “Giselle” Set** (Please note: SPS performance will only include the scenery from the second act)



Click on “Now Playing” and select “Giselle” for the following blog posts:

**Meet the Romantics**—a 4-part series that offers a snapshot of European art and culture that existed during the time *Giselle* premiered.



- **Meet the Romantics, Part I: Capital-R Romantic**
- **Meet the Romantics, Part II: The Composers**
- **Meet the Romantics, Part III: The Painters**
- **Meet the Romantics, Part IV: The Authors**
- **Opening Night of Giselle: Society, Current Events and Fashion**—a blog post that asks the reader to imagine what it would have been like to see the first *Giselle*.

# GISELLE

Adolphe Adam / Lola de Avila (after Petipa/Coralli/Perrot)

Yuka Iino. Photos by Andy Batt



**COMPOSER:** Adolphe Adam

**CHOREOGRAPHY:** Original choreography by Petipa  
after Coralli and Perrot, staging and  
additional choreography by Lola de Avila

**ADAPTED FROM:** Giselle (or The Wilis), story by Jules Henri  
Vernoy Georges, Théophile Gautier and Jean Coralli

**MUSIC COORDINATOR/ARRANGER:** Ludwig Minkus (1884)

**ARRANGEMENT:** 2012 OBT version created by Lola de Avila,  
published by Lars Payne

**LIGHTING DESIGNER:** Michael Mazzola

**SCENIC DESIGNER:** Raffaele Del Savio

**PREMIERE:** World premiere (Coralli/Perrot): 1841, Paris; Russian  
premiere (Perrot): 1842, St. Petersburg;  
Revised version (Petipa): 1884, St. Petersburg

All sets and costumes courtesy of the  
Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Foundation.

Special thanks to the Portland Opera Association, Oregon  
Children's Theatre, Ken Hick and Resources Northwest.

## GISELLE SYNOPSIS

**ACT I** is set in the Rhineland of the Middle Ages on the day of the grape harvest festival. When the curtain rises, the cottage of Giselle and her mother Berthe is seen on one side, while opposite is the cottage of Duke Albrecht of Silesia, a nobleman whom the villagers believe is a peasant named Loys. Albrecht comes to the village in disguise before his marriage to Bathilde, the daughter of the Prince of Courland. Against the advice of his squire Wilfrid, Albrecht flirts with Giselle, who falls completely in love with him. Hilarion, a gamekeeper, is also in love with Giselle and warns her against trusting this other suitor, but she refuses to listen. Albrecht and Giselle dance, and she plucks the petals from a daisy to divine his sincerity. The couple is interrupted by Giselle's mother, who, worried about her daughter's fragile health, ushers the girl into the cottage.

Horns are heard in the distance and Albrecht retreats from the scene. A hunting party enters and refreshments are served. Among the hunters are Bathilde and her father. Giselle is entranced by the nobility, and receives a necklace from Bathilde. When the party departs, Albrecht reappears with the grape harvesters. A celebration begins. Giselle and the harvesters dance but the merriment is brought to a halt by Hilarion who, having investigated Albrecht's cottage, now brandishes the nobleman's horn and sword. Hilarion sounds the horn and the hunting party returns. When Giselle learns the truth of Albrecht's deception, madness overwhelms her fragile heart and she dies.

**ACT II** is set in a moonlit glade near Giselle's grave on the night of her burial. Hilarion is grieving Giselle's death. He is frightened from the glade by Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis, female spirits jilted before their wedding day who rise from their graves at night and seek revenge upon men by dancing them to death. Giselle is summoned from her grave and welcomed by the supernatural creatures, who then quickly disappear. Albrecht enters searching for Giselle's grave, and her spirit appears before him. Overwhelmed by remorse and grief for the girl he grew to love, he begs forgiveness. Her love undiminished, Giselle readily forgives him. The scene ends with Albrecht in pursuit of Giselle as she disappears into the forest.

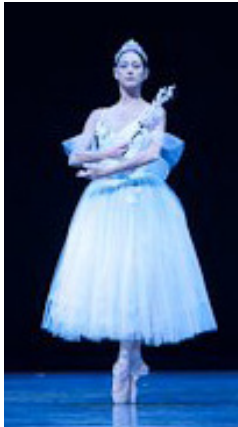
Hilarion enters pursued by the Wilis, who throw him to his death in a nearby lake. The Wilis then surround Albrecht and sentence him to death. He begs to be spared but Myrtha refuses. Giselle protects Albrecht from the Wilis as they attempt to dance him to exhaustion. Day breaks and the Wilis retreat to their graves, but Giselle's love has saved Albrecht. By not succumbing to the feelings of vengeance and hatred that define the Wilis, Giselle is freed from any association with them, and returns to her grave to rest in peace.

## GISELLE, ACT II

Cast of characters in order of appearance:



**Hilarion:** He is a huntsman, dressed in his best peasant clothes. We first see him at midnight as he mourns the recent death of Giselle at her grave. He is frightened away, for he senses that the Wilis are nearby.



**Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis:** She is the guardian of the Wilis, and is tall, stately, stern and ethereally beautiful. She glides on the tips of her toes—*en pointe*—rapidly executing a series of tiny steps—*bourrée*—that make it seem as though she is floating. She commands the Wilis to awaken from their deathly sleep and dance in the moonlight. Her dancing is precise and she often dances by herself, as befits a queen. She is attended to by two of her most trusted Wilis who often dance as if mirroring each other. They lead the other ghostly maidens in precise order.



**Wilis:** Young women who die of broken hearts before marriage are doomed to be spirits called Wilis. Unable to rest in their graves, they float in the air dressed in a fog of wedding white. Like elegant vampires, they haunt the forests at night, seeking to destroy men, not by draining their blood, but by dancing them to exhaustion and death. You could say that the Wilis' secret power is their phenomenal dancing.

**Giselle:** We first see the delicate Giselle when she is called from her grave by Myrtha.



**Albrecht, Duke of Silesia:** Wearing a cape to protect his fine clothes and to warm him in the cold night air, Albrecht enters the forest clearing carrying lilies to lay at Giselle's grave. He stands with noble stature and his dancing shows that he is powerful, yet filled with sadness and love for Giselle. He braves the threat of the Wilis' revenge just to be near Giselle, dreaming to dance with her once again...

Photo credits on final page

## OBT INHERITS GISELLE FROM LOLA DE AVILA



Lola de Avila and Candace Bouchard. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

The choreography for *Giselle* was originally created in 1841 by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot in France. From that time forward, *Giselle* has been passed down from dancer to dancer. Lola de Avila is the choreographer in charge of staging *Giselle* on Oregon Ballet Theatre.

Lola De Avila was trained in Zaragoza Spain by her mother Maria de Avila, and went on to study in Cannes; Cologne, Germany; and Paris. At the early age of 15 she made her soloist debut with the Claude Giraud Ballet and throughout her stage career she performed a wide variety of repertory, including *Corrida*, *La Sylphide*, *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *Raymonda*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and Lifar's *Suite en Blanc*. As a dancer, de Avila performed with a number of companies including the Royal Chamber Ballet of Spain, Ballet of Madrid, and Teatro De La Zarzuela.

Ms. De Avila has restored and staged ballets in Europe and the United States and has served as ballet mistress and director of prestigious ballet schools, passing on her knowledge of ballet to the next generation of dancers. She is presently the Associate Director of San Francisco Ballet School.

Most recently, de Avila was awarded the 2010 Gold Medal for Merit in the Fine Arts—one of the highest distinctions in the arts given by the King of Spain and the Minister of Culture. The award honors individuals and organizations that have excelled in artistic creation, cultural promotion, and the conservation of artistic heritage.



## GISELLE AND THE TELEPHONE GAME

The Telephone Game is a game that reveals how carefully we observe or hear others or how articulately we express ourselves. The game is simple—one person in a circle of friends whispers a sentence into the ear of their neighbor. That person passes it on to the next person and so on around the circle. The



retelling of the sentence can often be hysterically different from the original. Passing on dances to the next generation could be like the Telephone Game, resulting in a ballet that is nothing like it was originally. This could be especially true for a ballet that is 170 years old! But dancers have been diligent, retaining original passages of steps and qualities of movements while also incorporating the increased skills of modern day dancers.

Lola's approach focusses on passing on what she was taught, and originally danced, and subsequently gleaned from close study of the original French style of *Giselle*. This style incorporates softly curved arm gestures that seem to radiate out from the center of the torso, punctuated by articulate and expressive movements of the feet with very soft landings from jumps. It is very challenging to move with both power and gentleness. The controlled softness of the upper body allows the audience to see the dancers' dynamic changes of facial expressions—so important for telling the story without words, using only movements of the body.

**TRY THIS:** Play the Telephone Game with movements! Stand in a circle and start by doing a simple movement or a short pattern of movements (like two arm gestures and a 3 or 4 step pattern) and see how it goes after it has gone around the circle. Make it trickier by facing out of the circle so you can't see the original movement. Do it in groups and see which group can end up closest to the original.

**REFLECT:** How do you learn best? What of the 5 senses (hear, see, touch, smell, taste) do you most depend on to be successful in this game?

**REFLECTION AFTER SEEING GISELLE:** It took the dancers 6 weeks of rehearsals to learn *Giselle*. Some learned several different parts. Discuss what strategies the dancers might have used to memorize the ballet.

## BALLET VOCABULARY

Ballet steps and positions are described by a vocabulary of French words. Below are a few important ones to know when you see *Giselle*.

**Arabesque:** A standing pose, balancing on one leg with the other leg extended straight to the back. The arms reach forward. If you drew an imaginary mark from the tip of the finger to the toe of the lifted leg you would trace a smooth line.

**Arabesque penchée:** An arabesque that tips over toward the floor—the torso lowers while the lifted leg reaches to the sky.

**Bourrée:** A rapid series of tiny even steps done *en pointe*. This step, done with legs crossed and feet close together requires strong, supple ankles and makes the dancer appear to float across the stage.

**En pointe:** Only women dance on the tips of their toes in specially made shoes, called pointe shoes.

**Pas de deux:** A dance for two dancers such as *Giselle* and Albrecht. You will see a famous *pas de deux* in *Giselle* when she saves Albrecht from the Wilis' dance of death.

**Port de bras:** Carriage of the arms.



Julia Rowe and Javier Ubell. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

## Try This: Reflection after seeing *Giselle*:

**DANCING:** Try to do some of the movements you saw on the stage including the vocabulary words above. The Wilis hold their arms in very specific shapes. Hold your arms in the same shape! Small groups of students could create a frozen tableau of poses they remember from the ballet.

The Wilis were able to dance together in unison, ending in straight lines on the stage's diagonal, on both sides of the stage, or in star patterns. Try to move in unison while keeping the same relationship with other students. Students could stand in a line facing the front of the room and all students move sideways together at the same time. Make it fancier by creating two lines on opposite sides of the room and ask students to try to cross the room, passing through the line to the other side. This requires unspoken cooperation. Students must travel and pay attention to the person in front of them, neither beating their friends, nor lagging behind. It helps to play some music to dance to.



Alison Roper. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.



Candace Bouchard. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

**WRITING:** Students could think and journal about the storyline of *Giselle*. Here are some possible starting questions:

- Where is the story taking place? What makes you think that?
- How do we know that Myrtha is the Queen?
- If *Giselle* died because she went mad from the awareness that Albrecht was untruthful to her (hiding his real identity and already engaged to be married) why would she forgive him and save him from dancing to death?
- How does *Giselle* dance to make us think she is a ghost?
- What other ways could the story have ended?
- Is there a character that you liked more than another?
- After seeing the ballet, make a chart that lists the characters with words that describe their movements and role in the story. Create poems from these words. Following are two possible poetry forms and examples:

**ACROSTIC**—the letters of a word establish the first letter of each line of the poem. Following are two examples, using the words “*Giselle*” or “*step*”:

### GISELLE

Ghostly maidens gliding  
In the night forest are  
Spirits called Wilis.*Giselle*  
Ever doomed to mourn a  
Love that cannot be,  
Leaves her Albrecht to live, and to  
Examine the life he has remaining.

### STEP

Spirits  
Travel  
Everywhere...  
Pouncing!

- Students might brainstorm nouns, verbs, adjectives or phrases that describe the ballet. From those words they could create *cinquin* poetry.

**Cinquains** have five lines

Line 1: Title (noun) - 1 word

Line 2: Description - 2 words

Line 3: Action - 3 words

Line 4: Feeling (phrase) - 4 words

Line 5: Title (synonym for the title) - 1 word

An example:

Wili  
Powerful queen  
Swirling, pointing, demanding  
How cold her heart  
Myrtha

**CREDITS**

OBT's Dance Historian, Linda Besant, and Grants and Contents Manager Claire Willett contributed greatly to the content of this Study Guide.

**PHOTO CREDITS**

Page 3 from top to bottom: Hilarion, Ballet de l'Opéra National de Paris; Maria Chapman as Myrtha, Photo ©Angela Sterling; Yuka Iino as Giselle, Photo by Andy Batt; Chauncey Parsons as Albrecht, Photo by Andy Batt.

**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.