



REACH

OREGON BALLET THEATRE
CHRISTOPHER STOWELL / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

STUDENT PERFORMANCE SERIES STUDY GUIDE

May 3 & 4, 2007 / Newmark Theatre

Dear Teachers,

Welcome to the Study Guide for our final performance of Oregon Ballet Theatre's 2006-2007 Student Performance Series. Often we bring you highlighted excerpts from longer works shown in our public performances, but this time we will be showing two works of choreography in their entirety. The first work, *il nodo*, is by guest choreographer Julia Adam; the second work, *Peter and the Wolf*, is newly choreographed by OBT's Artistic Director Christopher Stowell.

These two works provide the audience with wonderful opportunities to compare and contrast several elements that inform the art of ballet: choreography that is abstract or choreography that is narrative; performers who are students or performers who are professionals; costumes that are pedestrian or character based; and stage set and props that are representational or open for definition. This Study Guide contains biographies, definitions, learning activities and points to discuss as a means to further the discovery process of ballet. All of this information easily links to content standards for arts in education.

Please contact us if you need help with the content of this Study Guide or with arrangements for your morning at the Newmark Theatre. We look forward to performing these two distinctive works of art for you.

Kasandra Gruener
Director of Education and Outreach

Linda Besant
Dance Historian



Christopher Stowell's *Peter and the Wolf*. Photo by Eric Griswold.

"Alone or in concert man dances his 'selves' and his feelings, his knowledge and his intuitions, and his dance becomes a communication as clear as though it were written or spoken in a universal language." - African American choreographer and dancer, Katherine Dunham

il nodo (2004)

The Choreographer: Julia Adam

Julia Adam considers herself "genetically coded" for ballet. Her mother took Julia to see performances and urged her to take dance classes. When Julia began to study ballet at age 10, dance won out over ice-skating and other sports. At 13, she moved away from home to study at the National Ballet School in Toronto. She danced with the National Ballet of Canada, and with San Francisco Ballet from 1988 to 2003.



Julia Adam in rehearsal with San Francisco Ballet

In 1991, Julia noticed that all the people signed up to participate in a choreographic workshop at San Francisco Ballet were men. With encouragement from her mother, she tried her hand at choreography, and she enjoyed it. Julia's choice of music for her ballets is wide open. Sometimes she commissions scores from young composers. She has also made a work for Nashville Ballet set to country music, and another for Houston Ballet that is danced to klezmer music. Julia's ballets are acclaimed for their playful nature. To audiences, she says, "Dance plays on so many levels—the symbolism, the shapes we create, the archetypes and gestures that read immediately, sometimes quicker than words. . . You have to bring part of yourself into it."

The Music: Renaissance Dances

The score for *il nodo* is a medley of 12 dances from the Renaissance period of music history, from about 1400 to 1600 AD. When Julia chose these dances, she looked back to the era of the birth of ballet. Royalty formalized the dances of the common people, adding noble posture and more carefully stylized movement, and increasing the formal symmetry of dance patterns across the floor.



A depiction of Renaissance dancing

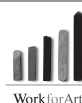
They planted the seeds that have grown to define ballet as a way of dancing.

Renaissance dances were often played and performed in pairs, with the first being a slow, stately dance in a duple meter (two or four beats to the measure), and the second a quick and lively dance with three beats to the measure. Careful listeners will hear that many of Julia's choices for *il nodo* pair up in this way. The use of recorders, sackbuts and shawms (the Renaissance predecessors of our flutes, trombones and oboes) and many kinds of drums, lend *il nodo's* contemporary choreography both a playful and an archaic feel.

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il nodo (Continued)

About the Ballet

Though Julia says, “I make a little storyboard for myself to build a dance,” in the case of *il nodo*, her story remains her secret. We see the fun ways she experiments with props, including yo-yos, elastic rope, and balloons; and elements of playground games like cat’s cradle, tug of war, jumping rope and playing “horse.” From the starting point of these props and games, *il nodo* whimsically explores the patterns and shapes created by the bodies of people at play. “When I work,” Julia says, “I’m most interested in the idea of negative space. I look at the shape of a raised arm, but also at what’s between it and the body.” The intersecting lines created by the dancer’s bodies are echoed in the scenic design and in the name of the ballet—*il nodo*, Italian for “the knot.”



Kester Cotton and Larke Hasstedt in Julia Adam's *il nodo*

Peter and the Wolf (World Premiere)

The Choreographer: Christopher Stowell

Since Christopher Stowell became artistic director of Oregon Ballet Theatre in 2003, he has made several kinds of ballets for the company. *Adin*, which appeared on the fall Student Performance Series, creates a romantic mood but doesn't tell a specific story. He has also choreographed narrative ballets like *Swan Lake*. This program finds him again in story-telling mode with his brand-new *Peter and the Wolf*. Christopher's parents were both dancers for George Balanchine at New York City Ballet, and they directed Pacific Northwest Ballet in Seattle for 28 years. Christopher says that even as a baby, he saw dancers in pointe shoes. He studied at Pacific Northwest Ballet School and the School of American Ballet, and danced for 16 years with San Francisco Ballet. Music is one of Christopher's greatest joys in life. He has created ballets to composers as diverse as Maurice Ravel and Cole Porter.



Christopher Stowell in rehearsal

The Composer: Sergei Prokofiev (1891 – 1904)

Sergei Prokofiev was born in the Ukraine, where his father was an agricultural engineer. His mother was a fine pianist, and he wrote of falling asleep each night as she practiced the music of Beethoven, Chopin and Tchaikovsky. Prokofiev began to write his own music at the age of five. He called his ideas “little puppies” and kept them carefully in a notebook. For years he used his “little puppies” in later compositions. At age 13, Prokofiev was the youngest student ever admitted to study at the Conservatory of Music in St. Petersburg. He became known as the “*enfant terrible*” of the music world because his modern rhythms and harmonies were so shocking to audiences and critics.

In 1918, Prokofiev left Russia, torn as it was by revolution and world war. For nearly two decades he criss-crossed Europe and the United States, still delighting some and infuriating others with his compositions. In 1935-36, he composed his score for *Romeo and Juliet*. It remains among the most respected scores in ballet history. Prokofiev returned to live in Moscow in 1936, where he worked as a prolific composer of concert music and ballet, opera and film scores, all under the thumb of Soviet ideology, until his death in 1953.



Portrait of Prokofiev by Picasso

About the Ballet

Soon after Prokofiev returned to Moscow in 1936, he was asked by the Central Children's Theater to write a symphony that would cultivate “musical tastes in children from the first years of school.” In only four days, he completed the story and the music for *Peter and the Wolf*. A specific instrument and a musical theme called a leitmotif represent each character in the story: Bird—flute, Duck—oboe, Cat—clarinet, Wolf—French horns, and Peter—string instruments.

Christopher Stowell created his version of the story especially for the School of Oregon Ballet Theatre, and some fifty students dance in the production. Christopher exercised his choreographer's prerogative and slipped in a few changes. His story is set in New York's Central Park in the 1960s. Christopher was born in New York in 1966 and discovered the mysteries and adventures available in Central Park, although he never came across a wolf. The tale is told as breaking news. Even the scenery comes to life, with a dancing fence, a dancing meadow, and a pond that turns into a fountain. Watch carefully, Christopher has changed the ending too.

To read Prokofiev's story for *Peter and the Wolf*, go to www.dsokids.com/2001/dso.asp?PageID=442

Your school may have a CD of Prokofiev's music. If not, you can find an inexpensive CD at Music Millennium or on iTunes.

Exploring The Standards for Arts in Education

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

Words in bold are defined as they appear in the text.

This symbol 🍷 indicates an activity for students to get up and try or dance! 🍷Y is aimed for younger students and 🍷O is for older students.

IS THERE A STORY OR NOT?

There are varied approaches to ballet choreography; two types are **NARRATIVE** or story-ballets, and **ABSTRACT** ballets, works that don't have a definable story as their theme. Often the **PLAYBILL**, the program the audience receives, will help you know what type of ballet you are about to see by including a little paragraph about the dance. But sometimes the playbill only tells you the title. Then going to a performance is like opening a beautifully wrapped mystery present—you just do not know what you are about to receive. Maybe you still won't be able to put it into words once you have seen it!

Peter and the Wolf is a traditional story-ballet where all the choreography inspires the audience to see the story. Just like the actors in a movie, dancers pretend, without words, to be their part in the ballet. The audience understands the emotions of the characters because the dancers move in ways that the audience can relate to—shivering if fearful, puffed up when angry. Some of the parts are actually abstract in that the dancers are pretending to be something that is not living, maybe a water fountain or a fence. But the audience understands this as they follow the fantasy story along.

🍷Y Read aloud an expressive story full of action and emotion. Tales like *The Three Little Pigs* work well for younger students. Students can practice using their bodies in silence to express emotions.

🍷O Create a Mad Lib story where the students fill in the blanks with descriptive words for emotions. Then act out the nonsensical story.

il nodo is an abstract ballet. There is no absolute story being told. Some people say that even an abstract ballet causes us to think about storyline when we watch it because human beings are always trying to make sense of what they are seeing. People say to themselves, "What is going on? What does this mean?" It can be challenging to watch an abstract ballet because we instinctively make up stories in our heads when we see things that are familiar. For example, when two people are dancing together, we might ask, "Are they friends, or strangers? Are they walking on a tightrope or are they at the beach? Is that supposed to be funny?" Such open-endedness is what makes abstract ballet so exciting. Each viewer is free to enjoy the dancers' interesting shapes, to take pleasure as the ballet unfolds without needing to "get it." If something seems funny we shouldn't worry if it is a joke or not—let the dance tickle us.

🍷O Sit silently for five minutes in any place where there are a lot of people doing things around you, like the mall. Sit and watch the show! Afterwards ask yourself what you saw and what you felt. This activity is a great way to practice observation skills. You could make up a dance using some of the **PEDESTRIAN**, or ordinary, day-to-day movements you observed.

COSTUMES AND PROPS

Anything worn in a ballet is a **COSTUME**. This is true for our two ballets. Costumes are important to expressing the point of the choreography. All costumes for dancers must be made so that the dancers can move freely. While some costumes look like street clothes, the details and the masks help us to know that these are characters in a story. Costumes can present challenges for the dancer. On the cover of this Study Guide is a picture of the Wolf in *Peter and the Wolf*. Imagine what it would be like to dance in that costume! The costumes

were designed and constructed by OBT's Wardrobe Manager Kathy Scoggins and her assistants, in collaboration with Christopher Stowell's ideas. They have incorporated special parts to the costumes so that the dancers look their roles, are safe, and can really move.

🍷 Before and after the performance we will have masks on display in the lobby. Please do not touch!



Susi Jenkins tests the Wolf mask she built for *Peter and the Wolf*.

🍷 Design a mask for a favorite character. Create it if you have time!

il nodo has costumes that are like street clothes too, but they are simpler, to match the piece. Each costume is slightly different but all seem to go together. This is done with fabric type, color and shape.

🍷 Think about what you are wearing. Is it a costume?

The use of props is especially interesting in these two ballets. In the theater, a **PROP** is a moveable article used on stage. A prop supports the role of a character or the action of the piece. There are some famous props: the Jedi light-saber from the *Star Wars* movies, the ring from *The Lord of the Rings*, and the witches' cauldron from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* are but a few. When you see that prop, you know what it means, and it has the same meaning throughout the story. As you watch *Peter and the Wolf*, notice the props that are used! One prop is even part of the stage set.

il nodo also has props, but they are used in a different way. In *il nodo*, a prop can change its meaning. One such prop is a rope. In the ballet, the rope is used in different ways, evoking different images. It can seem like a fence, a lifeline, a trap, a pathway, even a game like Cat's Cradle. Watch for all the ways that the rope and other props in *il nodo* are used.

🍷 Using a long length of ribbon or a jump rope, work together in small groups to create three interesting shapes that either connect to or relate to the rope. Try to memorize the three shapes so that you can move from one shape to the other smoothly. Perform your Rope Dance for each other. Notice how many ways one object can be used.

Exploring The Standards for Arts in Education, Continued

IS THE STUDENT AN ARTIST OR IS THE ARTIST A STUDENT?

Yes. A dancer remains a student throughout his or her career. **PROFESSIONAL DANCERS** are artists who dance as their work. Here at OBT, the dancers have such a high level of skill and artistry that Christopher Stowell has hired them to dance in the company. Still, they take class everyday, asking themselves to bring fresh attention to their skills. Likewise, **STUDENTS** who are yet to become professionals must practice the fullness of their art form, which includes performance. **APPRENTICE DANCERS** are midway between the two, like trees about to explode with bloom. At the Newmark Theatre you will see the efforts of dancers who are at all stages. *il nodo* is performed by the professional company members. Students from the School of Oregon Ballet Theatre and dancers from OBT's Apprentice Program perform *Peter and the Wolf*. SOBT students are fortunate to study under the guidance of School Director Damara Bennett, and lucky to have a ballet created especially for them by renowned choreographer Christopher Stowell. This enhanced learning

experience is testimony to Christopher's dedication to inspiring and training dancers.

👍 When you come to the ballet, notice that even the youngest dancers behave like professionals on stage. Can you recognize how young dancers' skills develop with years of hard work?

Words To Know!

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

The following words are found scattered throughout the text

abstract ballet	narrative ballet	props
apprentice dancer	pedestrian	professional dancer
costume	playbill	student dancer

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, 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, 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 & 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.

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.

Please direct any questions to:
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