

Dear Educators,

Welcome to Oregon Ballet Theatre's 2015-16 season! We are happy once again to offer dance programming that unpacks the art of ballet in a joyful, inviting format, with the hope of giving students a taste, maybe even a craving for art. Our first performance of the season, entitled *Amore Italiano*, will reveal ballet as a living art form, rooted in tradition yet ever-changing and responding to its time and place.



Photo by Joni Kabana

We will present excerpts of three works from the span of the last 170 years—one each from present day, recent past, and long past. Ballet as we know it today is the sum of many evolving parts. During the performance we will take a snapshot look at a few key elements—**the dancer's intention, ways of moving, and the use of music.** One of the most important things to take away is this: Ballet as an art form has been passed down from person to person to today. Its future relevance and survival depends on a teacher/student or mentor/apprentice relationship. While today's technological advances in disseminating information, online learning, and recording of performances are useful, ballet continues to rely on that which a real person in real time can convey with their heart and body from their own

experience. While written forms of ballet curriculums do exist, it can never be taught from a book or video alone. And like the game of telephone where one whispers something in a neighbor's ear and they do the same down the line, ballet has experienced change and refinement across its timeline of teaching, training, and performance. This Study Guide will give you details of the dances we are showing, and some web links and resources. Of special note, I hope that you will read the writing of author Claire Willet, whose blog posts for Oregon Ballet Theatre are extremely informative and a pleasant read. The Study Guide includes a series of **Quotes and Questions** that offer statements by notable writers followed by some open ended questions for students to discuss. Connections to CCSS can be found here. Underlined words are later described in the **Words to Know** at the end of the Study Guide.

All of us at Oregon Ballet Theatre look forward to enjoying ballet with you in the theater.

Kasandra Gruener, MA
 Director of Education Outreach

KEY TO USING THE STUDY GUIDE

 = Academic connections or discussion points

 = hyperlink to more information

Information about the three choreographers:



Beautiful Decay: Nicola Fonte
 <http://www.nicolofonte.com/index.php?m=bio>



The Nutcracker: George Balanchine
 <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/george-balanchine-timeline/530/>



Napoli Act III: August Bournonville
 <http://www.bournonville.com/bournonville13.html>

KEVIN IRVING / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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AT&T
 William H. & Mary L. Bauman Foundation
 Anne A. Berni Foundation

Clark Foundation
 Northwest Natural
 OnPoint Community Credit Union
 Pacific Power Foundation



PGE Foundation
 Wintz Family Foundation
 Juan Young Trust

Samples of the music:

Antonio Vivaldi, Winter, *The Four Seasons*

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZCfydWF48c>

Tchaikovsky *Nutcracker Suite* - 3 'Sugar Plum Fairy'

Volker Hartung & Cologne New Philharmonic

 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ow4t3C_gCCY

Bournonville: *Tarantella, Napoli Act III*

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12QISnvFlk0>



There are multiple OBT blog posts related to *Napoli*, especially Part 2 of *Choreographer's Corner: August Bournonville*, due to be posted on Oct 6, 2015:

 <http://www.obt.org/index.php/blog/>

Beautiful Decay (excerpt)



The first work performed will be a short excerpt from a full length contemporary ballet created in 2013 by American born, and internationally acclaimed choreographer Nicolo Fonte, entitled *Beautiful Decay*. We will discuss this ballet with greater depth during its presentation in our April Student Performance Series, but for now, we look at it as an example of ballet most new. *Beautiful Decay* is built on juxtapositions of elements, such as classically vertical and symmetrical ballet technique with weight shifting, level changing, and athletic dancing. All this atop music first published in 1725—Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*—played with a raw interpretation on period instruments. The dance is performed by three couples—a *pas de six*.

Photo above: Avery Reiners | Photo by Tatiana Wills



Quotes and Questions

"All of Fonte's ballets reveal his superb craft, and the movement is consistently evocative of the score. (There is) thoughtful visualization of the music in which the moving bodies become indistinguishable from the music itself." – Kathy Adams, *Salt Lake Tribune*

 Do the dancers' movements connect or relate to the music? One way to look at this is to notice if the dancers move when the music is sounding or freeze when the music pauses, or to notice the speed of the dancers' movements compared to the speed of the music.

"...the dancers had absorbed the blend of contemporary and neo-classical movement into their very bones, and that showed." – Martha Ullman West, *Art Scatter*

 Are the dancers trying to hide the energy it takes to do the movements?

 Do the dancers want the audience to see their energy and the effort it takes to do the dance?

 What words about energy or the shapes the dancers made would describe what you saw?



Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker* *Sugar Plum Fairy* (excerpt)

The second work will be an excerpt of Russian born George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker*. Mr. Balanchine, heralded as the father of American ballet, brought to the United States traditions of his Russian training while infusing his choreography and teaching with the energy of his adopted home. Mr. Balanchine's specific interests and aesthetic preferences found their way into the growing movement vocabulary of ballet in America. An example of this is in slight shifts of hip placement, stretched out fingers, and a straight (not curved) shape of the arms that make his ballets look "jazzy" at times. His ballets did not have to tell stories, and were often sparingly costumed, pointing his audience away from movements that symbolized a story or an idea, to an emphasis on the singular beauty of the body alone doing ballet movements in interesting spatial formations with music that complimented the whole.

Even when Mr. Balanchine choreographed a ballet like *The Nutcracker* that harked back to the traditions of his Russian upbringing, he also incorporated his newer style of elongated, open movements. He created this ballet in 1954 using the plot based on the Alexandre Dumas, père, version of E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* (1816). The work has been performed continuously by New York City Ballet since its premier. Oregon Ballet Theatre also performs Balanchine's full length version of this holiday classic—this year opening on December 12, 2015. *The Sugar Plum Fairy* variation is a technically challenging piece of solo choreography. The ballerina executes the steps with precision and vibrancy to a hauntingly magical melody by Pyotr Illyich Tchaikovsky that has become part of the fiber of our winter holiday soundscape.

Quotes and Questions



Alison Roper | Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.



"Someone once said that dancers work just as hard as policemen, always alert, always tense. But I don't agree with that because policemen don't have to look beautiful at the same time." – George Balanchine

👏 Does the ballerina look like she is working as hard as a policeman? Explain your response.

👏 Do you think she dances as if she is a fairy? What is one movement that you remember seeing the ballerina do? Describe it with words and try to do it too!

👏 Compare *Beautiful Decay* to the *Sugar Plum Fairy*. Describe differences and similarities in movements, costumes, and number of dancers, type of music or the thoughts that came to your mind as you watched the dance.

"See the music, hear the dance," – George Balanchine

👏 How does the choreography relate to the music? Does it feel "right" to you?

👏 Do you like the music?

Napoli Act III



The final work of the day will be by Danish born August Bournonville—the grand master of Danish ballet and the Bournonville style of ballet technique. OBT will be doing the final act of *Napoli*, also known as “*The Fisherman and His Bride*.” While this is an excerpt of a [full length story ballet](#), Act III is often performed around the world as a stand-alone work, being comprised of a string of exuberant dances that celebrate the wedding of the fisherman Gennaro and his bride Teresina, near a great bridge at a seaside village. The ballet closes with a vibrant dance called a [tarantella](#). The work was imagined during a long carriage ride back to Copenhagen, after a trip to Naples, where he had observed people in their daily tasks by the sea. This work was first performed in 1842, and has been in performance ever since—over 170 years and over 700 performances. *Napoli* preserves the movement style developed by Bournonville in which dancers move with lightness and seemingly natural grace.

Unlike Mr. Balanchine, who said that “ballet is woman”—meaning that the woman’s role was to be supported by the work of the male dancer—Bournonville set an equality for the roles for men and women, giving importance and physical challenges to both, as befitting their role. The dancers are tasked with very difficult steps, but must execute them as if the steps are effortless. An audience member might even think that the dancing is painlessly easy—but far from it. The slow and quick articulated steps of the feet, shape of the arms, placement of the palms of the hands, directions faced, and *épaulement* are all coordinated in the blink of an eye. The energy that the dancers express in *Napoli* is intended to inspire uplifted joy and zest for life in the viewer.

Quotes and Questions

As Bournonville stated in his writing, *The Choreographic Credo*, “**The height of artistic skill is to know how to conceal the mechanical effort and strain beneath harmonious calm.**”

👉 Do the dancers look as if they are working hard or do they make the dancing look easy?



👉 Think of something that you do that is really physically challenging—carrying heavy packages from the car, hiking up a steep hill, or working out at the gym. Have you ever tried to do that with the intention of keeping the difficulty or strenuousness a secret by doing the task as if it is very easy? Does that make the task easier or harder? Try it out.

As Bournonville also stated in his writing, *The Choreographic Credo*, “**It is the mission of art in general, and the theatre in particular, to intensify thought, to elevate the mind, and to refresh the senses.**”

👉 How do you express joy? How do you find joy? What does joy look like in the people you see around you? Write a sentence, poem or list of words that describe what joy looks like.



Kelsie Nobriga and Chauncey Parsons
Photo by Yi Yin



The Origin of Ballet

Ballet's origin as an art form is attributed to 15th century Italian courts. It spread to the courts of France when politics of the time brought the Italian noblewoman and lover of ballet, Catherine De' Medici to France to become Queen. Later, during the long reign of Louis XIV in France, ballet began to establish a standard of technical style and a vocabulary of terms—hence the reason that wherever in the world ballet is taught now, the steps have French names. Throughout the decades ballet, with its European roots, has wandered the world. Its teachers, choreographers and performers have migrated, taking their craft with them, just as they are also influenced by their new home. Bournonville studied in France and returned to Denmark, Balanchine studied in Russia and settled in

the United States, and Fonte, reflective of today's world, is based in the US and has produced work in more than 9 countries, and counting.

While ballet may be an “old” art form, it is simultaneously in a state of change and growth as young dancers learn and bring their own dancing bodies to the techniques. Six OBT dancers traveled to Copenhagen to study from the great masters of the Bournonville technique.

Check out OBT's blog posts: **Postcards from Copenhagen #1-4.** (You will need to scroll down a bit.)

<http://www.obt.org/index.php/blog/>

Words to Know!

choreographer: The artist who composes dances

choreography: The steps and patterns that make up a dance composition

credo: A formal statement of beliefs

ensemble: A group of dancers

épaulement: [ay-pohl-MAHN] Fr. Shouldering or the placing of the shoulders. A term used to indicate a movement of the torso from the waist upward, bringing one shoulder forward and the other back with the head turned or inclined over the forward shoulder.

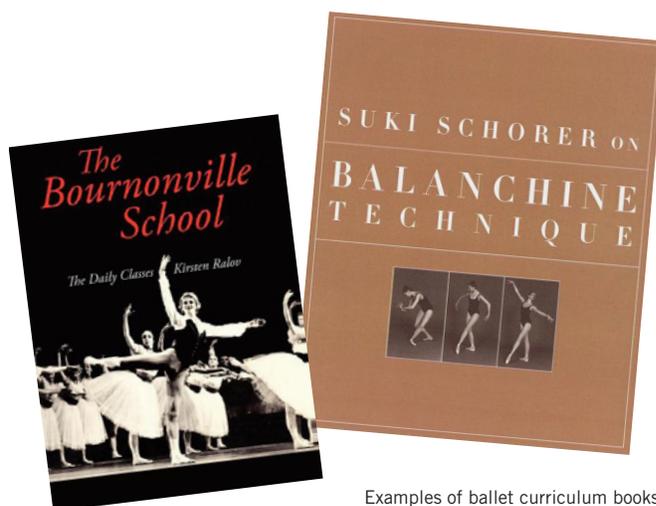
full length story ballet: A composition of movements designed to tell a story that is longer in duration, perhaps having several sections, or acts, like a play.

pas de six: [paw duh SEES] Fr. A dance for six dancers

père: [pear] Fr. Father

solo: A dance for one person

tarantella: A lively Italian folk dance style, with a fast upbeat tempo, often accompanied by tambourines



Examples of ballet curriculum books

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.

Common Core State Standards: Attending the SPS gives students practice in building literacy across subject matter as suggested in the CCSS. Students notice key ideas central to the work, elements of the craft and structure of the work observed, and make connections or integrate this work (dance) with other curriculum.

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* or *Swan Lake* 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 39, but most are in their early-to-mid-20s. 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, China, and different areas within the United States. There are dancers from California, Washington, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, New York, and several who grew up right here in Oregon.

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.

PLEASE DIRECT ANY QUESTIONS TO:

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