

EDUCATION OUTREACH PROGRAMS OF OREGON BALLET THEATRE

WHERE DANCE AND ACADEMICS MEET

STUDENT PERFORMANCE SERIES STUDY GUIDE: *BEAUTIFUL DECAY, ACT I*

Wednesday, April 20 & Thursday, April 21, 2016
Newmark Theatre | Noon - 1pm | Doors open at 11:30am

HELLO FROM OREGON BALLET THEATRE!

Hello! Soon you and your students will attend Oregon Ballet Theatre's Student Performance Series at the Newmark Theatre. We will present Act I of *Beautiful Decay*. The following information is designed to be a resource that helps you and your students prepare for the show. There are internet links and questions to discuss. I encourage you to familiarize students with the music, try out some of the activities and talk about the ballet afterwards. Questions are always encouraged—email them to outreach@obt.org



Photo by Joni Kabana

Beautiful Decay, choreographed by Nicolo Fonte, is a richly textured tapestry of a ballet—the interwoven sum of several parts: dancers, choreography, music, stage set, lighting design, and costumes, initially inspired by the decaying beauty of a flower frozen in time in a photo. The two-act ballet explores the ongoing progression of time, the effect of time's passage on a dancer's body and memory, and the inter-relationship between people of different generations. Mr. Fonte incorporated older dancers with OBT's company dancers (they are 40 years apart in age) specifically choosing dancers to reflect a broad span of time. Mr. Fonte describes the ballet as a



"shout for life and celebration."

Thanks for celebrating with us!

Kasandra Gruener, MA Ed
Director of Education Outreach

KEY TO USING THE STUDY GUIDE



= Academic connections or discussion points



= Activities designed to get students up and moving



= hyperlink to more information

BEAUTIFUL DECAY: ACT I

The Student Performance Series will present Act I of *Beautiful Decay*. The flow of the first act progresses only in one direction from stage left to stage right because, as Mr. Fonte puts it, "time only moves in one direction." It begins with Spring where the choreography explores the energy of new life. In Summer the choreography heats up and intensifies. Autumn is the beginning of decay while Winter is the time of greatest decay and death as well as the hope of regeneration. Throughout the ballet there is an interplay between the young dancers who travel the corridors of time and the older dancers, who at one moment seem to be watching their own past or perhaps reliving their memories. In turn the young dancers may see their future selves in the older dancers.



BalletX performs Nicolo Fonte's *Beautiful Decay*. Photo by Alexander Iziliaev.

KEVIN IRVING / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

KASANDRA GRUENER, MA / DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION OUTREACH

THANK YOU TO OUR FOUNDATION AND GOVERNMENT PARTNERS!



OREGON ARTS
COMMISSION
OBT is supported in part
by a grant from the
Oregon Arts Commission
and the National
Endowment for the Arts



The Regional Arts &
Culture Council, including
support from the City of
Portland, Multnomah
County, and the Arts
Education & Access Fund



Work for Art, including
contributions from more
than 75 companies and
2,000 employees

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

OnPoint Community Credit Union
PGE Foundation
Starseed Foundation
Wells Fargo
Wintz Family Foundation

BEAUTIFUL DECAY, ACT I, Continued

Candace Bouchard and Guest Artist Gregg Bielemeier in rehearsal for the company premiere of Nicolo Fonte's *Beautiful Decay*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

✋ After the performance, discuss the use of dancers of different ages and what impact that had on the ballet. Think of other situations where inter-mixed generations

work together, like pick-up basketball games, or events that benefit our community like the Susan G. Komen "Race for the Cure" or SOLVE. What is it like to work with someone of a different age? (See Appendix 4.2016 A)

Stage directions such as Stage Right (SR), Stage Left (SL), Downstage (DS) and Upstage (US) are taken from the perspective of the dancer as they look out into the audience—SR is to their right side and DS is "down" toward the audience. The idea of Downstage and Upstage comes from a time when stages were built at a slant so that the audience could see what was happening on the elevated back of the stage. Such stages are called raked stages. Nowadays most theaters are built with the audience seated on a rising slant so that they can see the action on the stage which is now flat. Think about the challenges of dancing on a raked stage!

👉 Try balancing on one foot on a tilted surface like an ADA curb ramp on a sidewalk corner.

NICOLO FONTE, OREGON BALLET THEATRE RESIDENT CHOREOGRAPHER

Often ballet companies have a short time to work with a choreographer—perhaps only six weeks in which to meet the new choreographer, rehearse the work and perform it. Sometimes, when the work was created elsewhere but is to be added to OBT's repertory, the dancers might not even meet the choreographer, because someone else teaches the ballet to them. There is a distinct advantage to building a relationship with a choreographer, especially if he or she is creating new work on your company, because that process really helps artistic growth. The dancers of Oregon Ballet Theatre are fortunate to be able to work with Mr. Fonte who is a highly creative, energetic, warm-spirited artist. We see him in this photo teaching the ballet to principal dancer Chauncy Parsons with guest artist Gregg Bielemeier.



Read about the establishment of Mr. Fonte as OBT's newest Resident Choreographer:

👉 <http://www.nicolofonte.com/index.php?m=news>

MUSIC

Act I is choreographed to music by Antonio Vivaldi. It opens with a movement from a concerto grosso and continues with a set of four violin concertos entitled, *The Four Seasons* (1723). *The Four Seasons* is Vivaldi's best-known work. The texture of each of the four concerto, titled *Spring*, *Summer*, *Autumn*, and *Winter* is varied, energetic, and full of tempo and mood changes, expressive of our planet's ever turning cycle of seasons. The music is among the most popular pieces of Baroque music—so popular that it has been used in a wide range of media, from TV commercials to science films. Mr. Fonte found an interpretation of the work that feels alive and energized while also using period instruments.

Listen to the opening music, *Concerto grosso in G minor, Opus 3/2, RV 578- 3. Larghetto*

👉 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00xoc6EKOEM>

Listen to *The Four Seasons* by Europa Galante with Fabio Biondi conducting:

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

Go to iTunes or purchase the recording here:

👉 <http://www.amazon.com/Vivaldi-The-Four-Seasons-Antonio/dp/B00007KMRW>

Here are two different commercials, one for a bank and the other for a computer that use the same selection of music—*Summer* (Presto) 3rd movement (See Appendix 4.2016 B)

👉 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhqKbw7BT2s>

👉 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLQ5LIDrN1E>



Thomas Baker (right) and Guest Artist Gregg Bielemeier in rehearsal for the company premiere of Nicolo Fonte's *Beautiful Decay*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

CHOREOGRAPHIC CONCEPT—FOLLOWING

At times during the ballet, dancers follow each other—like the game, Follow the Leader. During the *Autumn* section one young man follows the older man. The older dancer improvises some of his movements, which means he makes the movements up as he goes along. Therefore the younger dancer must really watch the older one in order to follow him as if in unison.

👉 Students could pair off and practice following each other. Suggest that students use arms only in slow motion and try to do it while walking one behind the other. (See Appendix 4.2016 C)

Try it with the music below.

🎧 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twWCAQR4yio>

Go here or to iTunes to sample and purchase the track *Concerto No. 3 in F major Op. 8 No. 3 RV 293, 'L'autunno' from 'I quattro stagioni': II. Adagio-Presto:*

🎧 <http://www.amazon.com/Vivaldi-The-Four-Seasons-Antonio/dp/B00007KMRW>

At the end of Act 1, *Winter*, all the younger dancers filter in and follow the older man and woman. In thinking about Mr. Fonte's theme of aging and the interplay between older and younger dancers, Mr. Fonte said, "As a culture we are so disrespectful and so indifferent to aging. We don't see it. Here the dancers come out and follow them (the older dancers). It's a good conclusion for me, to tie it together. A celebration of not only physical prowess, but real respect for their accumulated wisdom."

👉 Before or after the performance students might have a conversation about their experience of people older than they are. Do they think that older people have something to teach them? Are there certain people in their lives that they look up to? How do they show respect for older people? Do they give their seats to older people on the bus? If they could ask an older person one question, what would that be?

SET DESIGN

The stage set, designed by Mimi Lien, continues to describe the idea of time in the form of five light-permeable metal framework walls with door-like passage ways repeating across the stage. The set gives the impression that time can be marked off, like tick marks on a time-line or that time can be defined in incremental units or sets. As the dancers travel through the doorways, whether fast or slow, we can imagine time passing. Lighting for the ballet further enhances the exploration of time, sometimes holding the dancers in place between the box-like walls, as if time stands still. As Ms. Lien and Mr. Fonte discussed the set they hit upon the idea that the first signs of aging is deterioration of the skin. In an interview with our dance lecturer, Brook Manning, Mr. Fonte said, "So we wanted something that referenced skin. Like it looked like skin. And that's why you can see the structure underneath the fabric of the set. The aluminum structure is like we're looking at veins or bones underneath."



Photo by Bill Anderson

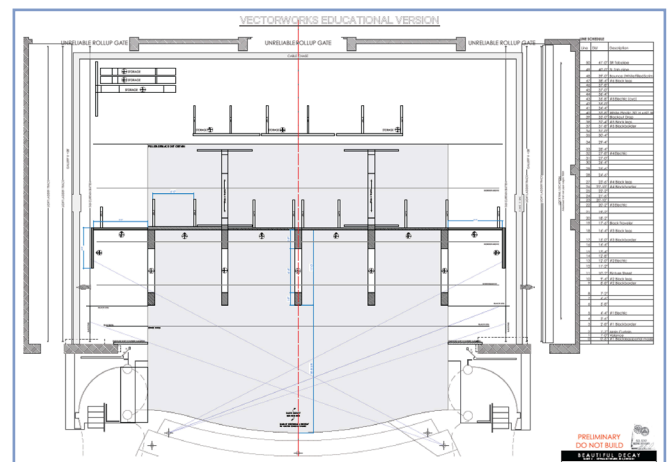
OBT crews welded the structure together in our warehouse. The architectural rendering of the stage set shows math in action!!

Mimi Lien is the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship. Read about MacArthur Fellows here:

🎧 <https://www.macfound.org/fellows/939/>

Read an article about how she got news of her MacArthur fellowship:

🎧 <http://www.crainsnewyork.com/article/20160302/ARTS/160309975/this-designer-sets-the-stage-for-genius>



LIGHTING

The lighting was designed by Drew Billiau, a freelance lighting designer based in Philadelphia. He is also the resident lighting designer for BalletX, the company that *Beautiful Decay* was created on. He is also the Technical Production Manager at Opera Philadelphia and an Associate Designer with the corporate/industrial lighting firm Fine Design Associates, inc. He lives with his dog named Jake.

Visit this website to see a gallery of Mr. Billiau's work

🔗 <http://drewbilliau.com/dance.html>



BalletX performs Nicolo Fonte's *Beautiful Decay*. Photo by Alexander Iziliaev.

CHOREOGRAPHIC CONCEPT—SHADOWING

During a section of *Winter*, the music is very full and large feeling. The dancers are lit in a striking way which creates moving shadows of their bodies onto the set. In a recent interview, Mr. Fonte said that he wanted that section “to feel larger than life, for it to be powerful. And I wanted the audience to have a choice: to watch the dancers or the shadows. Either works. Mostly you can absorb both, but some will only watch the shadow.”

👉 Shadows are created when an object is between the light source and a background. Students could play with shadow movements using a flashlight in a darkened space. Explore what happens when the object gets closer or farther from the light or the background while listening to the music for this section: Vivaldi, *The Four Seasons*, *Winter RV 297 Fabio Biondi Europa Galante*

🔗 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SrEOVNoNNY>

Here is the same music used in a video production by NASA's Goddard Space Center entitled “Mars Evolution”

🔗 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uqp7qJfCsoA>

Here is another dance company—Pilobolus—that uses shadows and body shaping to tell a story

🔗 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ned6eeCGI4A&nohtml5=False>



COSTUME DESIGNS

Notions from the past can make their way into the future—so the dancers' costumes take inspiration from Baroque fabric colors (see picture above) and Baroque clothing design in an abstract, modern form.

See pictures and read about the costumes designed by Martha Chamberlain at OBT's blog:

🔗 <http://www.obt.org/index.php/2016/04/07/the-sets-and-costumes-of-beautiful-decay/>



Example of *Beautiful Decay* costumes. Photo by Brook Manning.

A DANCER'S AGE

Oregon Ballet Theatre's advertisements state that *Beautiful Decay* embodies Mr. Fonte's theme that we carry all of our ages inside ourselves at all times. This ballet provides a wonderful opportunity to talk with students about the marching on of time, stages of life for humans and all living things, what happens to us as we age, and how memory of our experiences are affected by the passage of time.

Like those in other highly physical and mentally strenuous careers, dancers are very aware of age as it relates to physical prowess and career timing. While not true for all styles of dance, most professional ballet dancers begin their training at a young age, taking one class a week when they are between 5 and 8 years of age, progressing to six or more classes weekly plus rehearsal sessions by the time they get to high school, advancing to a junior company or apprenticeship around 18 years of age. They must send out resumes that include photos and videos, and attend auditions as the means to apply to be accepted into a company. By the time they make it into a company, they might have been dancing



Guest Artists Susan Banyas and Gregg Bielemeier in rehearsal for the company premiere of Nicolò Fonte's *Beautiful Decay*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

twelve or more years! While being a professional dancer sounds exotic, the pay is often very low for dancers in their first years of being in a company, so they must augment their income with extra jobs, like evening restaurant work after long days of practice and rehearsal. If ballet dancers do not become a professional by the time they are in their early 20's, they often feel aged out, meaning they are not likely to be asked to join a company. This seems very young when compared to other trades and professions, especially those requiring advanced college degrees.

An average professional ballet dancer's career may last into the mid to late 30's, but injuries may shorten a dancer's performing career. Few ballet dancers perform at a later age. There are exceptions, such as Sylvie Guillem, a ballerina who just retired at 50 years of age.

<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/dec/30/ballerina-sylvie-guillem-bows-out-bolero-japan>

Some dancers retire from ballet performance but do not leave the arts. Read about the famous dancer, Mikhail Baryshnikov, who at 68 has branched into dramatic productions as well as being the founder and artistic director of the Baryshnikov Arts Center.

<http://dancemagazine.com/views/baryshnikov-a-dancer-forever/>

Like all people, dancers grow older and change daily. While it can become increasingly challenging to keep strong, flexible, injury free, and technically accurate, there is one aspect that benefits as a dancer gets older—the ability to use one's body efficiently to express intention, to have riveting stage presence. To be wise as a dancer at any age is a multipart recipe made of impressive, gutsy, leg-high-in-the-air skills that being young offers with a confident, qualitatively rich, I-own-the-stage presence that being a seasoned performer brings. *Beautiful decay* is a great exploration of that concept.



Emily Parker (being lifted) with (left to right) Adam Hartley, Avery Reiners, and Brian Simcoe in rehearsal for the company premiere of Nicolò Fonte's *Beautiful Decay*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

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. Some examples of CCSS and National Dance Standards are given in Appendix 4.2016.

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 *Romeo & Juliet*, *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 use cell phones and other electronic devices in the theater. The noise and clicking can be distracting to your neighbors, and camera flashes can be dangerous to the dancers.

APPENDIX 4.2016

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and National Core Arts Standards (NCAS) Dance

A: CCSS “Before or after the performance students might have a conversation about their experience of people older than they are...”

Here is a standard that might relate:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

That is a first grade standard, which comes from this broader college-readiness idea with regard to **speaking and listening**:

To build a foundation for college and career readiness, students must have ample opportunities to take part in a variety of rich, structured conversations—as part of a whole class, in small groups, and with a partner.

Maybe students could interview a person of a different age, then have a conversation in their classroom about it...

B: CCSS “Here are two different commercials...”

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.9

Compare and contrast one author’s presentation of events with that of another (e.g., a memoir written by and a biography on the same person).

Students might wonder what is it about that music, *Summer (Presto)* that made both commercials use it?

C: NCAS Dance “Choreographic Concept-Following”

DA:Cr3.1.K

- a. Apply suggestions for changing movement through guided improvisational experiences.

Students could pair off and practice following each other. Suggest that students use arms only in slow motion and try to do it while walking behind the other.

DA:Pr4.1.3

- c. Change use of energy and dynamics by modifying movements and applying specific characteristics to heighten the effect of their intent.

Source:

Robyn Ulibarri, Oregon Ballet theatre Teaching Artist

 www.corestandards.org

 <http://www.nationalartsstandards.org>