



# REACH

# OREGON BALLET THEATRE

CHRISTOPHER STOWELL / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

## STUDENT PERFORMANCE SERIES STUDY GUIDE

March 8, 2007

## ARTIST AS INSTRUMENT

### Dear Teachers,

Welcome to the Study Guide for Oregon Ballet Theatre's *Student Performance Series: Artist As Instrument!*

Recognizing the challenge of providing ongoing meaningful dance experiences for students K-12, OBT proudly provides three uniquely focused performances across the school year for students from public, private, alternative and home school settings. This Study Guide for the March 8, 2007 performance intends to support teachers' efforts to guide students to a greater understanding of ballet and the joy and relevancy of dance in our lives. The Study Guide includes artist biographies, descriptions of the dances, and activities that relate to nationally agreed upon standards for dance in education.

There is so much that can be explored as we consider the works included in this performance—it is a challenge to narrow the field of our focus! We have chosen to study the idea of the *artist as instrument*. A dancer is to the choreographer just as a guitar is to the musician—all are instruments that embody and express creative vision. Our performance includes excerpts from *Blue Rose* by Helgi Tomasson, *Ash* by Peter Martins, and *Through Eden's Gates* by Kent Stowell. The Study Guide

will explore *Blue Rose* and *Ash*, including a look at the influence of ballroom dancing on the choreography, and what goes into "dancing together." *Through Eden's Gates* is a World Premiere—as of our print deadline, it still resides in Kent Stowell's imagination—so we will need to be patient and wait until March 8 to learn more about it! One important feature of this performance is that all of the choreographers and composers are acclaimed artists, actively working today.

The Study Guide usually includes a music CD, but our composers are so contemporary that we are unable to purchase a single CD that would represent this performance and benefit your class. Instead we direct you to some online music sources to enhance your experience (see back page). We've also enclosed an envelope of fabric samples from costumes for this program. The Study Guide is offered to provoke thinking about ballet. We know this will enhance your students' experience of the performance.

Welcome to the dance!

Kasandra Gruener  
Director of Education and Outreach

Linda Besant  
Dance Historian

## Through Eden's Gates (World Premiere)

### The Choreographer: Kent Stowell (1939 – )

Kent Stowell was born in Idaho and first studied ballet at the University of Utah Dance Department. After dancing with San Francisco Ballet and New York City Ballet, he worked in Germany, dancing in Munich and then co-directing Frankfurt Ballet with his wife Francia Russell. They were appointed artistic directors of Seattle's Pacific Northwest Ballet in 1977, and shared that position until retirement in 2005. Stowell was simultaneously principal choreographer at PNB, where he created 30 repertory ballets and seven full-length ballets – more than any other American artistic director of a major ballet company. He is noted for interesting collaborations, as with acclaimed illustrator and children's book author Maurice Sendak on *The Nutcracker*, and five ballets with composer William Bolcom.



### The Composer: William Bolcom (1938 – )

Seattle native William Bolcom was a child prodigy, studying composition and piano at the University of Washington at age 11. He credits his parents for limiting that study to one day a week. "Had I not been required to deal with regular school the other four days of the week," he says, "I suspect I would have had much greater difficulty today with the world's daily problems." Bolcom has been called a "genre-hopper extraordinaire"—with his wife Joan Morris, a mezzo-soprano, he has recorded twenty albums of show tunes and popular songs from the early 20th century; he also performed with American ragtime composer Eubie Blake. Like the other composers on this program, Bolcom has written all forms of concert music, operas, and film scores. His setting of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* won the Pulitzer Prize and three Grammy Awards. He is a professor of music composition at the University of Michigan.



### About the Ballet

When a ballet company commissions a world premiere, there is electricity in the air for weeks leading to the first performance. The choreographer studies the music until every phrase is engraved in memory, and may diagram floor patterns or try out movement ideas in front of a mirror. But the fact is, the ballet does not really begin to exist until the choreographer and the dancers meet in the studio on the first day of rehearsal. For *Through Eden's Gates*, that day was February 5, 2007,

the deadline for this study guide. We know that Kent Stowell wants to use many dancers in the piece. Will that change as the creative process evolves? You will see when you come to the theater. We know that the musical score is unusual, and we challenge your students (see the activities section) to imagine what the music and the movement it inspires might be like.

THE STUDENT  
PERFORMANCE SERIES IS  
SPONSORED BY



— FOUNDATION —

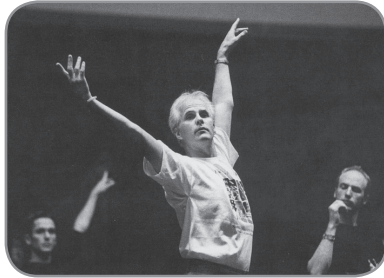


# ARTIST AS INSTRUMENT

## Blue Rose (2006)

### The Choreographer: Helgi Tomasson (1942 –)

Ballet took Helgi Tomasson away from his birthplace in Iceland when he was only 15 years old. He moved first to Denmark and then to the United States to study, and began dancing with the Joffrey Ballet in 1962. During 15 years with New York City Ballet, performing principal roles in



works by both George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins, Tomasson's dancing was praised by critics as "elegant and dignified yet decidedly modest." He retired from his brilliant career as a dancer in 1985 to become artistic director of San Francisco Ballet. Under his leadership, SFB has become one of the leading ballet companies in the world, noted for strong, versatile dancers and a diverse repertoire. Tomasson has choreographed more than 40 works ranging from full-length classical ballets like *Swan Lake*, to *Chi-Lin*, a ballet based on the music of Chinese composer Bright Sheng. Speaking about both training dancers and making choreography, Tomasson says, "Freedom of movement for me, it's always been very, very important. And, of course, the joy of dance."

### The Composer: Elena Kats-Chernin (1957 –)

Elena Kats-Chernin began composing when she was eight years old. "My interest in music began when I was about six," she says. "My mother used to drag me along all the time to operas and to concerts, especially piano concerts." Now Kats-Chernin composes for concerts, films, ballet and opera, and wrote music for the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia in 2000. She moved to Australia with her family from her native Uzbekistan when she was 18. She also studied and worked in Germany for 13 years. Kats-Chernin describes her creative process this way: "Even if I simply sit at the piano and don't touch a note, I get ideas. I try to write every day, because I think today I'll write this way and tomorrow I'll absolutely think differently, and I have to catch that day. I start from a single idea and let the rest follow. At some point it breaks down and gets its own life . . . and I start changing things and breaking my own rules. I'm never really telling a story, I'm telling emotions." Her work is performed by musicians ranging from major symphony orchestras to Bang on a Can All-Stars.



### About the Ballet

When *Blue Rose* premiered at San Francisco Ballet on February 14, 2006, it was greeted by critic Janice Berman as "a lighthearted but intensely crafty Valentine made up of an international patchwork of alluring rags, a tango and a waltz." Tomasson discovered Kats-Chernin's CD *Ragtime and Blue* while on a country retreat focused on finding music for new ballets. He chose ten tracks from the CD for a work that he knew right away would be named *Blue Rose*. Kats-Chernin's style in these pieces has been called "Slavic Scott Joplin." Tomasson responds with choreography that integrates social dancing and ballet movement vocabulary, which, wrote critic Toba Singer, makes "for great entertainment when buffed up to a high gloss by ballet technique." *Blue Rose*'s many *pas de deux* embellish ballroom dancing with elaborate and decorative lifts. "Brothers," the duet for two men that comes near the end of the ballet, crosses into friendly competition. Critic Berman called it "a funny challenge dance full of dueling feet and derring-do, and the simple joy of trying to out-dance each other."

## Ash (1991)

### The Choreographer: Peter Martins (1946 –)

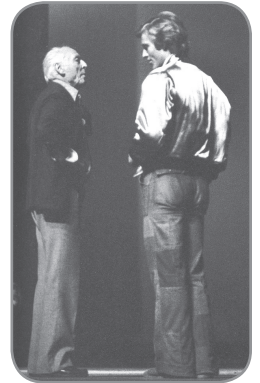


Peter Martins as a young dancer

Peter Martins was born and trained as a dancer in Denmark. He achieved international fame with the Royal Danish Ballet before coming to the United States at the invitation of George Balanchine, where he joined New York City Ballet in 1970. As a dancer, he could encompass rigorous classical demands, bravado, elegance, boyish charm, and cool passion. He was described as having "a movement style that was both masculine and elegant, and could range from expansiveness to quick precision." He was named Ballet Master in Chief of New York City Ballet in 1990, and still holds that position.

Martins first choreographed in 1977. Since then he has crafted nearly 80 ballets to music of composers as diverse as Tchaikovsky and Winton Marsalis. Of course, as director of New York City Ballet, Martins has to preserve the choreography of George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins, and to set versions of the classics such as *Sleeping Beauty*, but most of his own ballets, like *Ash*, are abstract. He has also choreographed for Broadway musicals, and for the animated movies *Barbie in the Nutcracker* and *Barbie of Swan Lake*.

George Balanchine and Peter Martins



### The Composer: Michael Torke (1961 –)

Like Kats-Chernin and Bolcom, Michael Torke was something of a musical prodigy. He began piano lessons at age five and started composing soon afterwards. He graduated from the Eastman School of Music with degrees in both piano and composition, and also plays bassoon. His works fuse ideas from classical and contemporary pop music, and are described as having "a characteristic personal stamp that combines restless rhythmic energy with ravishingly beautiful melodies."

Torke often envisions musical impulses in terms of color. His works include *Ecstatic Orange*, *The Yellow Pages*, *Bright Blue Music*, and *Black and White*; and works named for materials with specific colors and textures, such as *Copper* and *Ash*. Several of the world's most respected choreographers have used Torke's compositions for dance. His current projects include a commission by the Metropolitan Opera, and a tap concerto for Savion Glover.



### About the Ballet

Peter Martin's *Ash* takes its structure directly from Michael Torke's music. The score drives along relentlessly, and Martins' responds with non-stop movement that has been described as "a study in speed-demon virtuosity." Repetition in the music leads to repetition and echo in the movement vocabulary. If the aerobic demands of *Ash* are not enough, it also requires the dancers to count carefully. While most of the music ballet dancers perform can be counted in regular measures of three or four beats each, *Ash* has no such dependability. For example, phrases are counted in measures of 12, 8, 9, 15, 8, 8, and 12 beats. As she performed the demanding Sugar Plum Fairy role during *The Nutcracker* last Christmas, OBT dancer Alison Roper said, "I just think of what we have to do in *Ash*, and this doesn't seem so hard."



## Exploring The Standards for Arts in Education

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

#### Words To Know!


[Standard A1: Identifies compositional principles that are common across various art forms]

Following is a list of vocabulary words that refer to compositional elements especially noticeable in *Ash*, but also seen in *Blue Rose*.


(Teachers! This symbol  means: try this out—get up and dance!)

**unison:** To perform movements in the same way at the same time. Sometimes unison movement is repeated facing in different directions or at different speeds.

 Make up a short dance that everyone learns and does at the exact same time.

**repetition:** To do steps or individual gestures over again in order to bring attention to the movement. Sometimes movement repetition is used to contrast or highlight the accompanying music.  Using the previous unison dance, pick one move and repeat it several times before moving on to the next part.

**echo:** A compositional form where one dancer performs a movement or a phrase of movements and one or several dancers do the same movement soon after. Echo is a combination of unison and repetition.

**design and pattern:** One type of floor pattern is a design created by the placement of dancers on the stage such as one dancer performing in the middle of the stage while other dancers stand or dance in lines on the sides of the stage. These designs affect the audience's experience of the dance.  Students could create a design by choosing where to stand while doing the previous dance. Try this several different ways such as close together or far



Even the earliest ballet dancers in the 1500s made patterns on the floor.

### Standard E: Analyze and critique artistic work

[Standard E2: Examine how an artistic work affects an audience...considering personal response to a work of art.]

#### Younger Students:

Before the performance, ask younger students what they know about dance: What types of dances are there? (social, folk, hip-hop, breakdance, etc.) Why do people dance? (to have fun, to win a competition, to make art, etc.)

#### Older Students:

Some people go to see shows because they have read a review of the performance in the newspaper. Go online and read the 1991 New York Times review of *Ash* by Anna Kisselgoff. (see below) After viewing the OBT performance of *Ash*, decide if you agree with the reviewer. Did you see "formal strictness and patterns...[and]...playful spirit"? If you were the reviewer, what would you say about the ballet?

To read the 1991 New York Times review of *Ash*, google:  
New York Times Kisselgoff Ash  
From the list, choose the site entitled "Review/CityBallet; New York Herald's Optimism And Youth"

apart. Consider the different way that a dance feels when you dance it in different spatial placements. Notice this when you watch *Ash* and *Blue Rose* at the Keller Auditorium.

[Standard A2: Understanding the creative process]

Choreographers, composers and the dancers who express their work collaborate in varied ways. One inspires the other. Pictured here is a section of the musical score for the piece of music for *Through Eden's Gates*. It reveals the composer's intentions for performing the piece. How do you think this will sound and what movement do you think will happen?



A sample from William Bolcom's score

#### What about competition?

**Activity: Dancing Words!** Dip, slide, ball change, twirl, do-si-do, jump, the worm—these are just a few words that describe dance movements. List as many dancing words as you can think of from many types of dance. *S t r e t c h* your vocabulary! Try to move your body to match the words. *S t r e t c h* your body!

Teachers may email [outreach@obt.org](mailto:outreach@obt.org) with their classes' total number of words by Tuesday, March 6, 2007. Teachers may also include a few class-favorite words in the email. The name of the class with the greatest number of usual and unusual words will be announced at the performance.

*Dancing Words!* is an example of a type of competition. In this activity, students may try to outdo each other by thinking up a greater number of words. In the ballet *Blue Rose*, we show a duet done by two men. They seem to be trying to outdo each other with fancier moves and higher jumps. Their competition is friendly and only occurs between each other. *Ash* also shows a form of competition, but in this case it is the individual dancer in relation to the work of choreography and to his or her own personal endurance. *Ash* is a very challenging ballet for the dancers to do because it is fast moving, technically exacting, and requires a lot of concentration. *Ash* could be compared to running in a race as fast as you can for 13 minutes. It takes a well trained dancer (a finely tuned instrument) to perform these works.

We can see competition in other dance forms as well—for example in ballroom dancing. *Blue Rose* and *Ash* both do movements that derive from ballroom dancing, but *Blue Rose* is the most recognizable. Ballroom dancers who practice very hard participate in competitions all around the world. The ongoing popularity of ballroom dancing is confirmed by recent television shows and movies. Students might enjoy seeing excerpts of "Mad Hot Ballroom," (found at video stores, often for free to teachers who are using it for their class). It is a movie that documents the hard work of 5th graders in New York City schools who learn, and compete in a citywide ballroom competition. Ballroom dances such as the waltz and the tango that are seen in that movie form the inspiration for some of the dances in *Blue Rose*.

### Technology and Ballet meet in the Classroom

If you have access to *iTunes* on the internet, you can download to your computer individual tunes for \$.99 each, or if you do not want to purchase the tune you can sample it for 30 seconds to get a taste of the music. *iTunes* and other internet sites have opened up the opportunity for choreographers, musicians and composers to find and inspire each other.

*Ash* is on a CD entitled *One* released Sept 8, 2004. Although you cannot sample *Ash* itself, you can hear 30 seconds of related works.

Music for *Blue Rose* is on the CD *Ragtime and Blue* by Elena Kats-Chernin. It was released August 16, 2005.

### 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

**pas de deux:** the French ballet term for a duet, literally a dance for two  
**ballet:** a form of dance for men and women that requires training 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.

**ballroom dance:** a form of social dance where couples learn very particular partnering steps to specific styles of music such as waltz, fox trot and tango

### 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

**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.