

OREGON BALLET THEATRE
KEVIN IRVING / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

EDUCATION OUTREACH PROGRAMS OF
OREGON BALLET THEATRE
WHERE DANCE AND ACADEMICS MEET

OREGON BALLET THEATRE'S STUDENT PERFORMANCE SERIES 2016-2017

GIANTS: THE EVOLUTION OF BALLET

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Welcome to a new year of Oregon Ballet Theatre's Student Performance Series. The 2016-17 season opens with, *Giants: The Evolution of Ballet*. We could have titled this, *The Revolution of Ballet*, because the three excerpts that we are presenting illustrate ballet strongly rooted in its tradition, while boldly advancing onto new ground. Those who are familiar with ballet may notice connections or movement references that each choreographer makes to our dance heritage. But, knowing those references is not essential for savoring these pieces – they stand on their own as delicious morsels of ballet.

The excerpts in this Student Performance Series derive from two acclaimed masterworks that have been performed abundantly around the globe since their inception: George Balanchine's *Serenade*, initially performed on an open air stage in White Plains, New York in 1934, and William Forsythe's *In The Middle, Somewhat Elevated*, first performed in Paris, France in 1987. The third

You must go through tradition, absorb it, and become in a way a reincarnation of all the artistic periods that have come before you.

George Balanchine

excerpt is from a world premiere choreographed this year for Oregon Ballet Theatre by OBT Resident Choreographer Nicolo Fonte, entitled, *Giants Before Us*. We are doubly lucky that the music for *Giants Before Us* will be played live on stage!

These three ballets do not tell a story. Yet they create an atmosphere, and a feeling in the viewer's gut. The ballets explore how we interact in space and time and how women and men can express their inner selves while they execute highly refined movement. Each is called ballet and each is different. The order of the dances will be announced at the theater.

This study guide will include: links to music and internet resources, photos that can be projected in the classroom, and ideas to spark student preparation for, and reflection of, the show.

We look forward to seeing you in the theatre!

Kassandra Gruener



Photo by Joni Kabana

Would you like to further expand your students' experience with dance? OBT teaching artists go out to local schools and dance with students, linking dance with other academic topics -- like science, math, language arts, or life skills! We bring the "A" to "STEM!" YAY STEAM! We have several types of Dance Residency programs that explore ballet along with other genres of dance --even hip-hop! Dance is something everyone can do.

THE BALLETS: SERENADE

Choreography: George Balanchine® The George Balanchine Trust

Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *Serenade in C for string orchestra, Op. 48*

Costume Designer: Karinska

Lighting Design: Michael Mazzola

Ballet Master: Lisa Kipp



Balanchine rehearsing Serenade, 1934

In the 1930s, Balanchine was invited by Lincoln Kirstein to come to the United States and start a school with the grand goal of building great American dancers. Kirstein stated that the School of American Ballet had been founded for one purpose only: "To provide dancers as well trained as any other technician, whether it be surgeon, architect, or musician."

As ballet is a performance art, very soon Balanchine set to work making choreography for his students. He wrote,

"Serenade was my first ballet in the United States. As part of the school curriculum, I started an evening ballet class in stage technique, to give the students some idea of how dancing on stage differs from class work. Serenade evolved from the lessons I gave. It seemed to me that the best way to make students aware of stage technique was to give them something new to dance, something they had never seen before. I chose Tchaikovsky's Serenade to work with. The class contained the first night, seventeen girls and no boys. The problem was, how to arrange this odd number of girls so that they would look interesting. I placed them on diagonal lines and decided that the hands should move first to give the girls practice."

The first performance of *Serenade* was by students of the School of American Ballet on an outdoor stage on June 9, 1934. It was rained out partway through and was performed the next day in full. Since that time it has remained in the repertoire of New York City Ballet.

So it will be seen that *Serenade* is not a ballet that tells a story, but instead shows how ballet movement evokes feelings through the way the dancers perform patterns and execute steps. The choreography highlights unison sequences (moving in the same way at the same time) as well as canon (like the tune Row Row Row Your Boat).



THE BALLETS: *SERENADE* (CONT.)



Pennsylvania Ballet in the opening pose from *Serenade*. The present costumes were designed by Barbara Karinska in 1952. Photo: Alexander Iziliaev

George Balanchine

Learn more about Balanchine. Visit this interactive timeline of his life.

[🔗 http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/george-balanchine-timeline/530/](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/george-balanchine-timeline/530/)

Visit The George Balanchine Foundation to read his biography:

[🔗 http://balanchine.org/balanchine/01/bio.html](http://balanchine.org/balanchine/01/bio.html)



Serenade costumes have changed since 1934, moving away from out-dated dance class attire to costumes that reflect romantic ballets such as *Les Sylphides*.

Music

Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for Strings in C Major Op.48*

IMSLP: [🔗 http://imslp.org/wiki/Serenade_for_String_Orchestra,_Op.48_\(Tchaikovsky,_Pyotr\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Serenade_for_String_Orchestra,_Op.48_(Tchaikovsky,_Pyotr))

Youtube: [🔗 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pm0B0sWsWM0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pm0B0sWsWM0)

iTunes: [🔗 https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/tchaikovsky-serenade-for-strings/id375822848](https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/tchaikovsky-serenade-for-strings/id375822848)

THE BALLETS: *GIANTS BEFORE US*

Choreographer and Stage Design: Nicolo Fonte

Pianist: Hunter Noack

Music: Franz Liszt, Franz Schubert

Costume Designer: Christine Darch

Lighting Designer: Michael Mazzola

Ballet Masters: Lisa Kipp and Jeffrey Stanton



Nicolo Fonte in rehearsal for the world premiere of *Giants Before Us*. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert

OBT will present three movements from the ballet *Giants Before Us*. Mr. Fonte's choreography is also firmly rooted in the technique of ballet while pushing contemporary physicality (men and women on equal footing) and inviting theatricality into the mix. While he is not telling a story, he seems to pose a question about the idea of "giants". Are giants the great people that lived before our time? Are giants the scary things we can't face? Is a giant something inside ourselves?

In creating the ballet, Mr. Fonte worked closely with the award winning pianist Hunter Noack. Often when the music is played live for a ballet, the musicians are in a place below and in front of the stage – the pit – so that the audience can hear the music, but so that the musicians do not distract from the dancing. In *Giants Before Us*, the music of Franz Liszt and Franz Schubert is prominently incorporated, as pianist and piano share the stage with the dancers. There is a warm camaraderie between the dancers and the musician as if communicating with each other in a special language.



Nicolo Fonte

Read about the choreographer and the places his choreography is being performed--including Cuba!

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

Hunter Noack

Visit Mr. Noack's website to learn more about him and to listen to his playing:

<http://www.hunternock.com>

THE BALLETS: *GIANTS BEFORE US* (CONT.)

Music selections (in performance order)

Franz Liszt, *En Rêve, Nocturne*, S. 207

Franz Schubert, arr. By Franz Liszt, *Ständchen* (From *Schwanengesang*, D957/4)

Franz Liszt, in *Etudes de concert No.3 D-Flat Major, Un sospiro* S. 144/3

Many musicians play the work of Liszt. Below are two versions of *Etudes de concert No.3 D-Flat Major, Un sospiro* S. 144/3

The first is played by concert pianist Lang Lang and the second is played by a 10 year old girl:

Lang Lang

<https://youtu.be/Qe5kTui3nqc>

Momoka Chiba (at 10 years old)

<https://youtu.be/U0eBhYwLP0A>

FACTS TO KNOW

Franklin D. Roosevelt was the U.S. President when *Serenade* debuted. Balanchine left Europe in late 1933 during politically turbulent times. Earlier in that year Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. Balanchine became an American citizen in 1939.



Jacqueline Straughan and Peter Franc rehearsing Nicolo Fonte's world premiere *Giants Before Us*.
Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert

THE BALLETS: *IN THE MIDDLE* *SOMEWHAT ELEVATED*

Choreographer: William Forsythe

Music: Thom Willems

Lighting & Technical Supervisor: John Hoey

Ballet Master: Jeffrey Stanton



William Forsythe

We will see 16 minutes of the ballet starting from its opening moment. The dancers are clad in simple dancewear, highlighting the focus on the clarity of pure movement--the viewer can really see the dancers' articulated poses, fleet motions, and shifting facings. While there is no story here, as is true in *Serenade* and *Giants Before Us*, the feel of the piece evokes sensations of controlled power and bursting energy. There are observers and copiers--dancers who seem to follow each other and then outdo each other. Roslyn Sulcas wrote in a Nov 3, 2014 New York

Times dance review that, "Mr. Forsythe took Balanchinian precept — the off-balance extensions of academic positions; an athletic, no-nonsense virtuosity; the focus on clarity and speed — and then pushed them all further. Every aspect of ballet convention is explored: What if movement is generated by a shoulder or knee rather than the center of the body? How does partnering work? What happens if conventional positions are extended? How far can an off-balance position go before a fall?"



View this video to get a sense of the electronic music and to see a pas de deux (dance for two) by Sylvie Guillem and Laurent Hilaire:

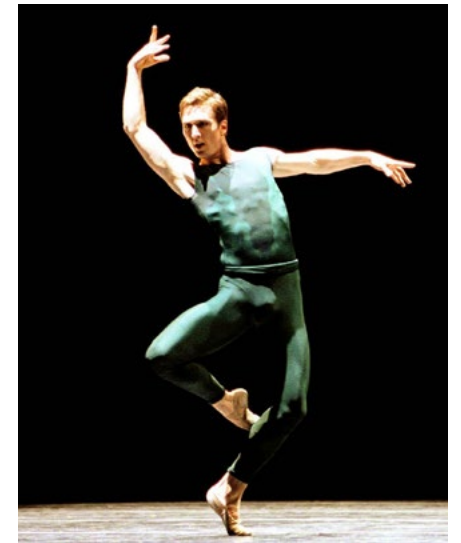
<https://youtu.be/HqS4Gh1IMGA>

Listen to an interview of Mr. Forsythe explain what the title means:

<http://www.sadlerswells.com/screen/video/25141629001#>

A Ballet Master teaches daily ballet classes and rehearses the dancers.

We are fortunate that OBT's Ballet Master Jeffrey Stanton could share his previous experience with *In The Middle Somewhat Elevated*.



Pacific Northwest Ballet. Photo by Angela Sterling

CHOREOGRAPHY AND THE DANCER

Works of dance art are created by people called choreographers. A choreographer is like a chef who plays with the ingredients available to him or her to construct a mouthwatering dish. Chefs take the same ingredients, use them in different proportions and ways of combining to create new dishes. It is the same for making new ballets. While there are many components that a choreographer may or may not work with, the main ingredients are the dancers – men and women with varied levels of technical skill and emotive capacity – music, costumes, lighting, and stage design.



Chauncey Parsons with OBT dancers rehearsing Nicolo Fonte's world premiere *Giants Before Us*.
Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert

Dance can be enjoyed and understood without any verbal introduction or explanation. The important thing in ballet is the movement itself, as it is sound which is important in a symphony. A ballet may contain a story, but the visual spectacle, not the story, is the essential element.

George Balanchine

You can't divorce the properties of water from waves. You can't divorce the properties of dancers from the dance.

William Forsythe

<http://www.theartsdesk.com/dance/qa-special-choreographer-william-forsythe-over-time>

[Ballet] is a great living, breathing, human artform that I think really truly has to be experienced.

Nicolo Fonte

<http://abcspla.sh/m/2169329>

MEN AND WOMEN DANCING



The seeds of ballet in court dances

It is hard to pinpoint the exact date that the art of ballet came to be, as it evolved out of European court dance and folk dance forms of the 15th century. But during its evolution to the present day, ballet moved away from the social dances and festivals of the nobility, to emerge as a performance art form.

In early days, men were the main dancers but over time, the place of women in ballet grew to prominence as they began to dance on the tips of their toes – appearing otherworldly. Fast forward to the early 20th century, when Mr. Balanchine began making dances in America, he is quoted as saying, “ballet is woman.” For Balanchine, the female dancer, beautifully graceful, quick and light on her feet, strong without being athletic, was the description of feminine. But, in an ever changing culture, the definition of feminine has expanded. By the 1980’s, when Mr. Forsythe created *In The Middle, Somewhat Elevated*, the view of woman as a dancer had changed. Now women and men both danced together as equals, even competitors, expressing their raw, innate strength, fluid grace, and powerful athletic potential. The cast is mostly male in *Giants Before Us*, revealing a thrillingly expansive range of physicality and individuality from each performer—suggesting that, In *Giants Before Us*, “ballet is man.”

LIGHTING

Lighting is integral to creating a magical experience in the theater. In *Serenade*, the stage is lit dimly with hues of blue. Throughout the ballet the lighting changes very subtly. We have been asked “How does the crew know when to make changes in the lighting?” In *Serenade* the stage manager (the person who runs all the technical aspects of the performance) watches the dancers do certain movements that are the cues to call the lighting changes. In *The Middle, Somewhat Elevated*, has a unique lighting design in that there is only one light cue, meaning that once the lights go on, that is the way they stay until the end of the ballet. It is like walking into a room and flipping the light switch to ON. *Giants Before Us* also employs interesting lighting, but, like any good magician, we will not give away the secret to the effects that will be shown...for that you must see the ballet!



Lighting Technician

EVALUATE AND REFLECT

What do you think of when you hear the word ballet?

What type of movements do ballet dancers do?

What is choreography? Who is a choreographer?

What type of dance do you like to do or to watch?

Is ballet the same today as it was 400 years ago?

Think about the titles of the ballets. What do you think the names mean, if anything?

Which ballet do you remember the most?

Which ballet would you most like to be a part of?

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.



Oregon Ballet Theatre's Peter Franc and Xuan Cheng rehearsing William Forsythe's *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated*.
Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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.

UP NEXT

Thursday, February 23, 2017

At 12 pm, Keller Auditorium

Evil sorcerers, spell-bound swan maidens, the stage a swirl of white tutus... be sure to register early for this visually stunning and very popular ballet!



TERRA

Wednesday, April 19 at 11:30 am &

Thursday, April 20, 2017 at 12 pm

Newmark Theatre

Three excerpts of ballets from our public performances, including a world premiere work by Helen Pickett. (You may remember her work *Petal*, which we performed in 2014.) The underlying contemplation is on the relationship between earth

ONLY \$2 A SEAT! [CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)