



QueenslandBallet

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR LI CUNXIN

Sir Kenneth MacMillan's

Romeo & Juliet

Proudly presented by Suncorp

PRODUCTION NOTES FOR THE CLASSROOM

Contextual Information

Choreographer Sir Kenneth MacMillan
Composer Sergei Prokofiev
Conductor Nigel Gaynor
Music performed by Queensland Symphony Orchestra
Stager Julie Lincoln
Fight Director and Stager Gary Harris
Costume & Set Designer Paul Andrews
Lighting Designer John B Read

Overview

— The most famous love story of all time, Sir Kenneth MacMillan's *Romeo & Juliet* is based on Shakespeare's play. Set in Verona, Italy in the 1500s, this is a story of young lovers caught in the midst of an ongoing dispute between their families, the Capulets and the Montagues. It is a romance filled with passion that ends in tragedy, told through the combination of emotional pas de deux, sword fights and spectacles.

Audiences worldwide have been witness to MacMillan's *Romeo & Juliet* masterpiece. The musical score, choreography, costumes, lighting, sets and props are recreated to preserve his original and unparalleled version. An approved répétiteur is also required to stage MacMillan's ballets.

History of MacMillan's Production

— In 1956, The Bolshoi Ballet brought Leonid Lavrovsky's *Romeo & Juliet* to The Royal Opera House in London for the first time.

The ballet received a powerful reaction from the public, therefore Royal Ballet Artistic Director Ninette de Valois decided the Royal Ballet needed this piece in their own company repertoire. Eight years later in 1964, the Royal Ballet finally staged their version choreographed by newcomer Kenneth MacMillan, in association with Shakespeares 400th Anniversary. MacMillan had less than five months to create his first three act ballet. Starting with the pas de deux in each act, he choreographed and built the ballet around these three key moments. It was announced that Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev would premiere in the lead roles which placed a huge significance on this version. MacMillan's *Romeo & Juliet* soon became a signature work of the Royal Ballet's repertoire, and was later remounted for the Royal Swedish Ballet, American Ballet Theatre and Birmingham Royal Ballet.

Queensland Ballet's restaging of *Romeo & Juliet*

— Queensland Ballet was the first company in Australia to stage MacMillan's *Romeo & Juliet* in 2014. For the 2019 production, Julie Lincoln returns in the role of répétiteur, approved by the MacMillan Estate to teach the original choreography.

To ensure the preservation of the original choreography and intention of works, as they are re-staged for companies all over the world, some MacMillan ballets have been notated and/or recorded. *Romeo & Juliet* choreography is taught from Benesh Notation.

Benesh Notation is a written system for recording movement. Similar to a score of music, the movement is written on a stave which enables a common language other than notes or film to accurately teach and learn repertoire.

Created in the 1950s by Joan and Rudolf Benesh, this way of recording movement preserves ballets in the exact form they were created in. The head, body and arm positions are written on the stave. Included is the quality of movement noted above the stave, and the relationship between dancers noted below.

Without this notation system, traditional ballets from Sir Frederick Ashton and Sir Kenneth MacMillan would be lost forever.

Synopsis

ACT I

Scene 1: The Marketplace

Romeo, the son of the Montague family is comforted by his friends Mercutio and Benvolio after Rosaline rejects his advances of love. A new day brings new beginnings as the townspeople mingle in the marketplace. A belligerent Tybalt (the nephew of Capulet) engages with the high-spirited Romeo and his friends. The ongoing feud between the Montagues and the Capulets becomes evident as the first of many dramatic sword fights takes place. The Prince of Verona commands both sides to lay down their swords and end the scuffle.

Scene 2: Juliet's ante-room in the Capulet house

Lord and Lady Capulet introduce Juliet to a wealthy suitor, Paris. Apprehensive, a childlike Juliet seeks comfort in her nurse who will later show her that she is now becoming a woman.

Scene 3: Outside the Capulet house

Guests arrive at the ball which is a celebration of Juliet's imminent womanhood. Hiding their identity behind masks, Romeo and his friends enter the ball in pursuit of Rosaline.

Scene 4: The Ballroom

During the festivities of the masquerade ball the romance begins to unfold between Romeo and Juliet. Despite the continued advances by Paris, the first breathtaking pas de deux between Romeo and Juliet is performed, but quickly interrupted when Tybalt learns the masked figure is Romeo. He is ordered by Tybalt to leave at once, but Lord Capulet welcomes him to stay.

Scene 5: Outside the Capulet house

The guests leave the ball and Mercutio and Benvolio stop Tybalt from chasing after Romeo.

Scene 6: Juliet's balcony

The most famous of scenes — Romeo seeing Juliet for the first time alone on her balcony, as they confess their love for each other.

ACT II

Scene 1: The Marketplace

At the marketplace, Romeo is distracted by thoughts of Juliet. Juliet's nurse delivers a letter to him — she has agreed to their marriage.

Scene 2: The Chapel

Friar Laurence and the nurse are witnesses to the secret marriage of Romeo and Juliet.

Scene 3: Marketplace

Tybalt antagonises Romeo who is unwilling to fight him. Mercutio steps in and is ultimately killed by Tybalt's sword. His death is avenged by a troubled Romeo who is then exiled.

ACT III

Scene 1: The Bedroom

Another breathtaking pas de deux between Romeo and Juliet takes place as the sun rises. Romeo must leave, and embraces Juliet as Lord and Lady Capulet arrive with Paris. Juliet continues to refuse to marry Paris and her angered parents leave with Paris.

Scene 2: The Chapel

In desperation, Juliet visits Friar Laurence who can help her escape her forthcoming marriage to Paris. The plan is for Juliet to drink a potion that will induce a death like trance. Her parents will then discover her motionless body, and believing she is dead, will bury her in the family tomb. Meanwhile, Romeo will be warned by Friar Lawrence and will return under darkness to be reunited with his love, Juliet.

Scene 3: The Bedroom

Lord and Lady Capulet return with Paris continuing to pressure Juliet into marrying him. She reluctantly agrees. That evening, Juliet drinks the sleeping potion and appears to be dead when her parents arrive the next morning.

Scene 4: The Capulet family crypt

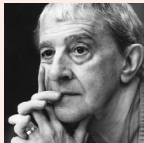
At the tomb where Juliet now lays, Paris is confronted and killed by Romeo, whom is unaware of Juliet's plan. In complete devastation, Romeo drinks a deadly potion. Upon waking, Juliet discovers his lifeless body and takes her own life so they can be reunited forever in death.

About the Choreographer

Sir Kenneth MacMillan

— Born in 1929 Scotland to a poor labouring family, MacMillan won a scholarship to a local grammar school in England. During World War II the school was evacuated to an inland town where MacMillan was exposed to classical ballet for the first time.

At the age of 15, MacMillan discovered ballet and, unknown to his parents, wrote to Ninette de Valois requesting an audition at Sadler's Wells School (which later became the Royal Ballet School) in London. His audition was participating in a class with the company where he stood between Margot Fonteyn and Beryl Grey. It was noted how terrified he was standing between the greats of ballet. He was successful and joined the school on a full scholarship. Up until this point, MacMillan felt like an outsider and kept his passion for dance a secret. This personal experience fed his ideology when creating future works, as most of the heroes and heroines in his ballets were outsiders too.



MacMillan toured and performed with the company, but soon developed difficulties controlling stage fright which led to performing no longer being an enjoyable experience. Choreographing became a way to still be involved in dance and the company. In 1953, MacMillan choreographed his first work *Somnambulism* which officially established him as a choreographer.

In 1966 MacMillan was invited to direct the Deutsche Opera in Berlin where he created new works which were considered to be some of his finest. During his three years in Germany, he choreographed ballets such as *Swan Lake*, *Anastasia*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*. After this, MacMillan returned to London to direct the Royal Ballet following Sir Frederick Ashton's retirement. He began to miss choreographing and so MacMillan stepped down to a new position within the company as Principal Choreographer, where he stayed for 15 years.

MacMillan was knighted in 1983 after having choreographed musicals, full-length ballets and short works both at home and overseas.

Macmillan died of a heart attack backstage at the Royal Opera House during a performance in 1992. That same evening, his *Romeo & Juliet* was scheduled to be performed in Birmingham. Six weeks following his death, The National Theatre's *Carousel* opened featuring MacMillan's choreography. This was his final work.



MacMillan's production

Movement

— Each act of the ballet is built around a pas de deux. The first is representative of Juliet's naivety.

Romeo and Juliet declare their love for each other in the second pas de deux (the balcony scene) performing literal gestures, movements that are intertwining and connected, a variety of held lifts and moments of stillness. Lyrical movements suggest tenderness and intimacy. The final pas de deux is the last time the young lovers will see each other alive.

Throughout the ballet, the considered stylistic elements of a simple walk quickly introduce and establish characters. During the ballroom scene, movement is reminiscent of a promenade with simplistic, rigid choreography. Slow, direct strides in symmetrical lines create the notion of restrictions and order. Stillness is used to create moments of dramatic tension throughout.

Literal sword fighting containing swift stabbing advances, travelling back and forth and fast swinging defensive sword movements capture the violent brawls of Verona society. Relationships of time are evident in unison, repetition and simplistic canons.



MacMillan's production

Music

— Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953) is one of the great Russian composers and pianists of the 20th century. His compositions include seven ballets, eight operas, seven symphonies, five piano concertos, two violin concertos and two cello concertos.

Prokofiev explored harmonic dissonance, but often with jaunty attractive rhythms, wilful humour and eccentricity. It's very tuneful, though the melodies often take unexpected directions, with surprising harmonic changes in tow. His unique style is distinctly Russian in its power and intensity, though unpredictable and unconventional.

Prokofiev's masterpiece ballet score *Romeo & Juliet* was inspired by William Shakespeare's play. It was composed in 1935 after being commissioned by the Kirov Ballet in Stalingrad. However, the Kirov administration rejected Prokofiev's altering of the story to a happy ending, and delayed the production while demanding changes. A new agreement for the work was made with the Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow, but the dancers thought it 'undanceable'. The premiere season was in 1938 at Mahen Theatre Brno, in today's Czech Republic.

After adaptations were made to the score, not all with the approval of Prokofiev, the Kirov performed the ballet in 1940. There have been many newly choreographed versions since this time. In Queensland Ballet's production, each character in the story has a motif or theme, which develop as the story unfolds. A central theme to the story is Juliet's transformation from a carefree young girl, into a woman passionately in love. Her theme begins with a simple joyous abandon, but once she has met Romeo her music becomes increasingly emotional and complex. The famous 'Dance of the Knights' music amply portrays the power and arrogance of the wealthy Capulets. The 'Masks' music for Romeo and his friends Mercutio and Benvolio captures three mischievous young friends on their way to slip into the Capulet's Ball. It's fun, reckless, and full of character, while hinting at the dangers to come with sudden harmonic changes of direction to darker moods.

Set and Props

— Similar to the guidelines of costuming a MacMillan production, the set must be a replica of the original ballet. This has been sourced from the Uruguay National Ballet and arrives approximately one month before the performance season opens. The set of *Romeo & Juliet* is substantial and takes approximately five days to bump in to the theatre.

Renaissance architecture contained tombs, chapels, and courtyards within the palace walls. The cloth backdrop establishes this traditional setting by including imposing gates at the entrance of the palace, an extravagant ballroom filled with columns, an open courtyard and a grand bedroom in the palace. The set is suggestive of a Renaissance painting. Cane baskets, bird cages and pennants (banners) contribute to the period setting.

In Juliet's ante-room, the doll is a key symbolic prop that implies her innocence and childlike manner. Swords, mandolins and brooms are incorporated into the choreography to accurately reflect the time.

Lighting

— *Romeo & Juliet* is a large-scale production requiring 13 lighting bars to adequately reflect the original lighting design (many ballets require as few as five). Lighting creates the appearance of a vaulted ceiling and lights the extravagant borders of the set. To achieve a replication of MacMillan's ballet, Queensland Ballet's Technical Director consults with the John B Read (the Lighting Designer) of the show.

A challenge of keeping lighting cues true to the original is the advances in technology around LED lights, now commonly used in theatres. These lights do not create the same warm colour tones of the colour spectrum, particularly evident when dimming lights. As technologies continue to advance, it is a challenge for the Production Team to continue to reflect the original lighting designs whilst using modern equipment.

MacMillan's production

Costume

— Being a staged ballet from the MacMillan's Estate means that costumes must be reflective of his original *Romeo & Juliet* production. Queensland Ballet has sourced costumes from Uruguay National Ballet who have previously produced this version of *Romeo & Juliet*.

Approximately two to five months prior to the performance, costumes arrive at Queensland Ballet and the wardrobe department begin fitting and altering the costumes to fit dancers. Ballet costumes often have quite expansive seams allowing costumes to be altered for a greater variance in size and shape of dancers.

Renaissance period costumes reveal heavy layers of rich reds and orange colour tones to represent the Capulet family. Romeo and his friends are contrasted by blue tones and at times, adorning masks to hide their identity. During the pas de deux, Romeo and Juliet wear complimentary colours. Unlike many traditional ballets, *Romeo & Juliet* is a dramatic story that sees many dancers performing in character shoes, never wearing a tutu. Secondary characters perform many promenade style dance phrases as costumes are heavier and bulkier. The principal characters of Romeo and Juliet are costumed in more traditional ballet performance attire to allow for a full range of movement.



Q & A with Stager, Julie Lincoln

What led you to becoming a stager of ballets?

When I decided to retire from performing, at the age of 35, it happened to coincide with Dame Merle Park taking over the Royal Ballet School. She invited me to join the school with her to become Ballet Mistress, a new position she was creating. So it was a very smooth transition from being a dancer as I moved from one end of the building to the other. I remained in that role for 11 years and in that time I was responsible for teaching the repertoire of the Royal Ballet to prepare students for the company. It was very natural to me.

I then transitioned to staging works by choreographers I had worked closely with, Dame Ninette De Valois, Sir Frederick Ashton and Sir Kenneth MacMillan.

As a stager I am responsible for overseeing all aspects of the production — that is quite a responsibility!

What is the process you go through before stepping into the studio and teaching MacMillan's choreography?

Well it varies depending on the ballet and the company. I studied Benesh notation (a form of notating and documenting dance) in order to use it alongside my memory and knowledge of the ballet. My Benesh notation notes go everywhere with me and it is a great reference. Prior to going to a company I revise the ballet, particularly if I am teaching a ballet from scratch with a company who has never done the work before.

I do not believe in having a tape or video in the studio for the dancers to learn from as I want to ensure the production is as accurate as possible in replicating the intention of the original version.

Do dancers have any prior knowledge of choreography, or is it better for them to have no prior knowledge of the choreography?

That is quite difficult – I have the version directly from MacMillan and hope I am as loyal as possible to his works. There is nothing wrong with dancers watching the ballet in its entirety before the stager arrives, to understand the overall production or a role they will be performing. However, not to learn the steps in advance as often online videos can incorrectly reflect the original intention and therefore this would be counterproductive.

Q&A with Fight Director and Stager, Gary Harris

In this ballet there is sword fighting, is this performed exactly the same as MacMillan's original choreography, or is there some creative licence?

When I first started teaching the fights, I looked at as many video recordings as I could lay my hands on, right back to the original Fonteyn/Nureyev production. There has been some changes over the years, but basically the fights are pretty much the same as when the production was first performed. Any major changes would have been made during Kenneth MacMillan's lifetime. There is some creative licence, depending on the number of men available, different set design and space on stage, but the essence of the fights remains the same as when the ballet was first created.

Have the dancers had to participate in additional sword fighting training?

No. Most dancers would have had some experience in sword fighting, and the choreography and motivation is very clear. In other productions (not MacMillan's) there has been instances where a professional stunt coordinator is brought in to coach, but usually the dancers learn the moves and put their own interpretation and drama into the fight. With the principal characters (Romeo, Tybalt, Mercutio and Benvolio) the choreography and motivation is very clear within the story.

What additional safety considerations have you had to consider?

I always give a safety briefing before the start of any fight rehearsal. Things like not playing with swords, not leaving them laying on the floor, reporting any mishaps etc. Some companies are very strict about having a safety briefing before the start of any fight rehearsals using weapons.

Has anyone been seriously hurt during rehearsals and/or a performance?

Sometimes someone gets hurt. Usually in the heat of the moment during a performance. I've seen dancers get cut, stabbed and one nearly had their eye poked out and ended up in hospital. Usually nothing too serious. Swords can snap and go flying off, swords have gone into the orchestra pit and even the audience. But these occurrences are extremely rare... hopefully!

Queensland Ballet

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This Production Notes for the Classroom was developed in collaboration with Queensland Ballet's Education Ambassadors Amy Fittock and Cindy Ambridge.

