

The Renaissance

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DANCE THEATRE

Romeo & Juliet *Feb. 12 & 13, 2010 8:00*

Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet is a ballet by Sergei Prokofiev based on Shakespeare's tragic love story. Prokofiev composed the music in 1935 or 1936 for the Kirov Ballet. The incredible ballet score has inspired many great choreographers to try their hand at Shakespeare's story.

Many people believe that Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet is the greatest ballet score ever written. The ballet consists of four acts and ten scenes, with a total of 52 separate dance numbers. The version most well-known today was first presented in 1940 at the Kirov Theater in Leningrad, with choreography by Leonid Lavrovsky.

The ballet begins with feuding between the Capulets and the Montagues. Wearing a disguise, Romeo Montague crashes a party at the Capulet house, where he meets Juliet Capulet. He falls instantly in love with her. The two secretly proclaim their eternal love for each other, on the balcony.

Hoping to finally put an end to the family feud, Friar Laurence secretly marries the couple. But the feuding continues: Juliet's cousin Tybalt kills Romeo's friend Mercutio during a fight. A distraught Romeo kills Tybalt in a fit of revenge and is sent into exile. Juliet turns to Friar Laurence for help, so he devises a plan to help her. Juliet is to drink a sleeping potion to make her appear dead. Her family will then bury her. Friar Laurence will then tell Romeo the truth; he will rescue her from her tomb and take her away, where they will live together happily ever after.

That night, Juliet drinks the potion. When her distraught family finds her dead the next morning, they proceed to bury her. The news of Juliet's death reaches Romeo, and he returns home desperately grieving. (He never received the message from Friar Laurence.) Believing that Juliet is really dead, he drinks poison. When Juliet awakens, she sees that Romeo is dead and stabs herself.

Other Adaptations of Romeo and Juliet

At least 24 operas have been based on Romeo and Juliet. The earliest, Romeo und Juliet in 1776 omits much of the action of the play and most of its characters, and has a happy ending.

*The play influenced several jazz works, including Peggy Lee's **Fever**, and Duke Ellington's **Such Sweet Thunder** contains a piece entitled **The Star-Crossed Lovers** in which the pair are represented by tenor and alto saxophones.*

*The most famous musical theatre adaptation is **West Side Story** with music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. It debuted on Broadway in 1957, and became a popular film in 1961. This version updated the setting to mid-20th century New York City, and the warring families to ethnic gangs.*

*Other musical adaptations include Terrence Mann's 1999 rock musical **William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet**, Gérard Presgurvic's 2001 **Roméo et Juliette, de la Haine à l'Amour** and Riccardo Cocciante's 2007 **Giulietta & Romeo**.*

*Romeo and Juliet may be the most-screened play of all time. The most notable theatrical releases were George Cukor's multi-Oscar-nominated 1936 production, Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 version, and Baz Luhrmann's 1996 MTV-inspired **Romeo + Juliet**. The latter two were both, in their time, the highest-grossing Shakespeare film ever.*

***Romeo and Juliet** was first filmed in the silent era by Georges Méliès, although his film is now lost.*



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The First Romeo and Juliet - Pyramus and Thisbe

Romeo and Juliet reflects the plot of this Roman myth. In the Ovidian version, Pyramus and Thisbe is the story of two lovers in the city of Babylon in the Middle East who occupy connected houses, forbidden by their parents to be wed, because of their parents' rivalry. Through a crack in one of the walls, they whisper their love for each other. Frustrated by their pitiable state, they arrange to meet near at Ninus' tomb under a mulberry tree and state their feelings for each other. Thisbe arrived first, but upon seeing a lioness with a mouth bloody from a recent kill, she fled, leaving behind her veil. The lioness drank from a nearby fountain, then by chance mutilated the veil Thisbe had left behind. When Pyramus arrived, he was horrified at the sight of Thisbe's veil, assuming that a fierce beast had killed her. Pyramus kills himself, violently thrusting a sword into his groin, and in turn splashing blood on the white mulberry leaves. It is Pyramus' blood that stains the white mulberry fruits, turning them dark. Thisbe returned, eager to tell Pyramus what had happened to her, but she found Pyramus' dead body under the shade of the mulberry tree. Thisbe, after a brief period of mourning, stabbed herself with the same sword. In the end, the gods listen to Thisbe's lament and forever change the color of the mulberry fruits into the stained color to honor the forbidden love.