

ANDRÉ LEWIS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

# GISELLE



## ABOUT Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet



T-B Gweneth Lloyd, Betty Farrally, Her majesty Princess Elizabeth's visit to Winnipeg includes a command performance which introduces her to The Winnipeg Ballet (1951)







Gweneth Lloyd and Betty Farrally founded Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet School nearly 75 years ago. The two women met when Lloyd was running a dance school in Leeds, England and Farrally was her student. They both immigrated to Canada in 1938, and settled in Winnipeg. There they offered dance classes to the community – starting out with only six students in their first year. Word quickly spread, however, and by year two their enrolment had grown and they were able to establish the "Winnipeg Ballet Club."

By 1943, The Winnipeg Ballet was formed with all of its dancers coming from the Club. Six years later, the Company officially became a not-for-profit cultural institution. In 1951, the Company was invited to perform for then Princess Elizabeth during her visit to Winnipeg, just prior to her becoming Queen of England. Following her coronation in 1953, she bestowed The Winnipeg Ballet's "Royal" designation.

Between the Royal Winnipeg Ballet (RWB) School's two divisions of study, there is a place for virtually every type of dance student: from preschoolers to adults, those new to dance and those aspiring to become professional dancers.

## PREPARING To see the ballet

This booklet is designed to enhance the student's experience at Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet's performance of Giselle. The activities and information included are organized to help students prepare, understand, enjoy, and respond to their experience watching the performance.

#### **DURING THE PERFORMANCE:**

Enjoy the ballet! As part of the audience, your attendance is as essential to the ballet performance as the dancers themselves. Prior to arriving at the theatre, discuss proper audience etiquette using the keywords below. These steps will help students handle their feelings and enthusiasm appropriately. It is also very important to arrive on time or even early for the performance in order to allow enough time to settle in and focus on the performance.

**CONCENTRATION:** Always sit still and watch in a quiet, concentrated way. This supports the dancers so that they can do their best work on stage.

**QUIET:** Auditoriums are designed to carry sound so that the performers can be heard, which also means that any sound in the audience (whispering, laughing, rustling papers or speaking) can be heard by dancers and other audience members. Your movement or checking your phone and texting disrupts the performance for everyone, so always ensure that phones and other electronic devices are turned off during the entire performance.

**RESPECT:** By watching quietly and attentively you show respect for the dancers. The dancers show respect for you (the audience) and for the art of dance by doing their very best work.

APPRECIATION: Do clap at the end of a dance (when there is a pause in the music) if you feel like showing your appreciation.

### **AFTER THE** PERFORMANCE:

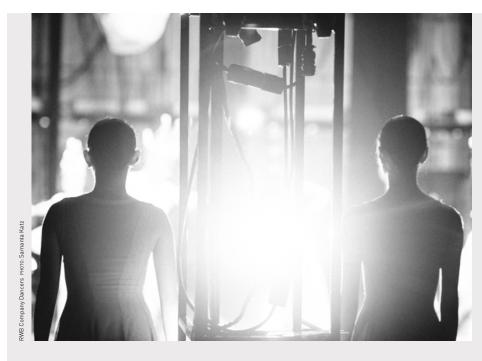
Process and respond to the performance by engaging in class discussions or writing a letter to the RWB. We love to get feedback from our student groups.



#### WRITE TO:

Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet 380 Graham Avenue Winnipeg, MB, R3C 4K2

- **(E)** groupsales@rwb.org
- facebook.com/RWBallet
- twitter.com/RWBallet
- instagram.com/RWBallet
- pinterest.com/RWBallet



### At Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet, our mandate is:

"To enrich the human experience by teaching, creating and performing outstanding dance."

Whether touring the world's stages, visiting schools, offering rigorous dance classes for all experience levels, or performing at Ballet in the Park each summer, the RWB consistently delivers world class dance and instruction to the citizens of Winnipeg and far beyond.

Find out more about us at **rwb.org**.

### ABOUT

### Ballet

#### The First Ballet

In 16th century France and Italy, royalty competed to have the most splendid court. Monarchs would search for and employ the best poets, musicians and artists. At this time, dancing became increasingly theatrical. This form of entertainment, also called the ballet de court (court ballet), featured elaborate scenery and lavish costumes, plus a series of processions, poetic speeches, music and dancing. The first known ballet, Le Ballet comique de la Reine, was performed at court in 1581 by the Queen of France (and her ladies) at her sister's wedding.

#### The Sun King

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the popularity and development of ballet could be attributed to King Louis XIV of France. He took dancing very seriously and trained daily with his dance master. Pierre Beauchamp. One of the King's famous roles was the Rising Sun which led him to become known as the "Sun King." King Louis also set up the Academie Royale de Danse (Royal Academy of Dance) in 1661, where, for the first time, steps were structurally codified and recorded by Beauchamp. • These are the same steps

that have been handed down through centuries. and which now form the basis of today's classical ballet style.

#### The First **Professional Dancers**

At first, ballets were performed at the Royal Court, but in 1669 King Louis opened the first opera house in Paris. Ballet was first viewed publicly in the theatre as part of the opera. The first opera featuring ballet, entitled Pomone. included dances created by Beauchamp. Women participated in ballets at court, but were not seen in the theatre until 1681. Soon, as the number of performances increased. courtiers who danced for a hobby gave way to professional dancers who trained longer and harder. The physical movement of the first professional dancers was severely hindered by their lavish and weighty costumes and headpieces. They also wore dancing shoes with tiny heels, which made it rather difficult to dance with pointed toes.

#### Revealing Feet and Ankles

in Paris, the ballerina, audiences by shortening and allow the audience to see her intricate footwork and complex jumps, which often rivaled those of the men. Ballet companies were now being set up all over France to train dancers for the opera. The first official ballet company (a collection of dancers who train professionally) was based at the Paris Opera and opened in 1713.

#### The Pointe Shoe

By 1830, ballet as a theatrical art form truly came into its own. Influenced by the Romantic Movement, which was sweeping the world of art, music, literature and philosophy, ballet took on a whole new look. The ballerina ruled supreme. Female dancers now wore calf-length, white, bell-shaped tulle skirts. To enhance the image of the ballerina as light and ethereal, the pointe shoe was introduced, enabling women to dance on the tips of their toes.

#### Classical Ballet

Although the term "classical" is often used to refer to traditional ballet. this term really describes a group of story ballets first seen in Russia at the end of the 19th century. At this time, the centre of ballet moved from France to Russia. In Russia. the French choreographer Marius Petipa collaborated with the Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky to create the lavish story ballet spectacles such as Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty and The Nutcracker. Today, these ballets still form the basis of the classical ballet repertoire of companies all over the world.

#### One Act Ballets

In 1909, the Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev brought together a group of dancers, choreographers, composers, artists and designers into his company, the Ballets Russes. This company took Paris by storm as it introduced, instead of long story ballets in the classical tradition. short one act ballets such as, Schéhérazade, Les Sylphides, The Rite of Spring, Firebird and Petrouchka. Some of the worlds greatest dancers. including Anna Pavlova (1881-1931), Vasslav Nijinsky (1889-1950) and choreographers Mikhail Fokine (1880-1942) and George Balanchine (1904-1983) were part of Diaghilev's company.



Marie Camargo, shocked •her skirts to just above the ankle. She did this to be freer in her movements



#### DID YOU KNOW ... ?

Dancing ballet puts a lot of wear on a dancer's shoes. Some dancers need to get new shoes every week!



#### SEE FOR YOURSELF!

Do a search for images of ballet dancers throughout the ages. Can you notice the differences in costumes over time? What do most dancers wear today?



### THE LIFE OF A DANCER

The career of a dancer is relatively short and it is not unusual to spend more years training than dancing professionally. As in Olympic-level sport, the movements demanded of the human body in ballet are very specific and require great precision and care. For that reason, the physique must be prepared for a professional ballet career at a young age.

The professional training period usually consists of at least seven years of intensive, precise work. Ideally, girls and boys should begin their professional training by age ten. Training is a very progressive process. The young professional student begins with daily classes, practicing the basic ballet positions and movements, learning body placement and how to move through the space with balance and artistry. As the student progresses, time spent in classes each week increases, as do the difficulty and extensiveness of the skills taught. In addition to daily class in classical technique, students also receive instruction in variation (solo) work, pointe (dancing on the toes), pas de deux (a dance for two), character (ethnic), jazz and modern dance.

Prior to the introduction of pointe work, a number of criteria must be considered. These include the amount of previous training, a dancer's strength and ability, as well as age as it relates to the bone development in the dancer's feet. Pas de deux and repertoire (the collection of different ballets a dance company performs) are introduced only when the student has adequate strength, ability and training.

Students who graduate to a professional ballet company usually begin dancing as a member of the corps de ballet (ensemble). After a few years, corps de ballet members whose artistry, technical ability, musicality and ability to communicate with the audience set them apart may be promoted to first or second soloist. Finally, the highest achievement in the company, the position of principal dancer, is attainable by only a few select dancers.

#### **ESTABLISHING DANCE IN NORTH AMERICA**

Almost all contemporary ballet companies and dancers are influenced by Diaghilev's Ballet Russes. The first visit by this company to North America in 1916-1917 stimulated great interest in ballet. Dancers from the Ballets Russes were instrumental in furthering this new interest in ballet. For example, dancer George Balanchine went to the United States and founded the New York City Ballet (originally called the American Ballet). He became renowned for perfecting the abstract ballet and for establishing neo-classicism through his choreographic masterpieces such as Serenade, Agon and Concerto Barocco. Ninette de Valois and Marie Rambert also went on to found, respective, England's Royal Ballet and the Rambert Dance Company. It is from these English roots that two English Women, Gweneth Lloyd and Betty Farally, founded the Royal Winnipeg Ballet in 1939 (the oldest ballet company in Canada). Celia Franca also came to Canada and in 1951, she founded The National Ballet of Canada in Toronto. Some of the worlds greatest dancers, including Anna Pavlova (1881-1931), Vasslav Nijinsky (1889-1950) and choreographers Mikhail Fokine (1880-1942) and George Balanchine (1904-1983) were part of Diaghilev's company.

# GISELLE Synopsis

CHOREOGRAPHY: Peter Wright
AFTER: Jules Perrot, Jean Coralli and Marius Petipa
STAGED BY: Catherine Taylor

MUSIC: Adolphe Adam
SCENIC & COSTLIME DESIGN

SCENIC & COSTUME DESIGN: Peter Farmer LIGHTING DESIGN: Nicholas Cernovitch



They seek rest in Berthe's cottage and Bathilde, charmed by Giselle, gives her a necklace. The Duke orders a hunting horn to be left so that his courtiers may be summoned in due course and this provides Hilarion with proof of Loys' identity as he compares the crests on the horn and on a sword he has found in Loys' cottage. Just as Giselle is crowned Queen of the Vintage, Hilarion reveals the truth about Loys. When Bathilde returns and claims Albrecht as her fiancé, the shock unseats Giselle's reason. In her madness she relives her love for Loys and seizing his sword, she kills herself.

#### **ABOUT GISELLE**

Hailed as one of the greatest of all ballets and a supreme achievement of the Romantic era, *Giselle* has captivated audiences worldwide since its premiere in in Paris in 1841. *Giselle* is often referred to as the Hamlet of ballet due to the complexity of the title character.

Set in the twilight spirit world of the Wilis, the German legend tells the story of a young peasant girl's love for a nobleman and her ultimate betrayal at his hands. Giselle's heartbreak and despair lead to her tragic demise, but she and the other jilted village girls seek their revenge from beyond the grave as irresistible spirits of a deathly dance.

#### **ACT I - A RHINELAND VILLAGE**

Count Albrecht loves Giselle, a peasant girl, though she knows him only as a villager named Loys. Giselle's mother, Berthe, hopes that her daughter will marry Hilarion, a forester devoted to Giselle, and warns her against Loys. But Giselle disregards Hilarion, and joins with her beloved in the celebrations that mark the end of the grape-harvest. When Albrecht's squire secretly warns his master of the approach of a hunting party, Hilarion observes them and manages to break into Loys' cottage, seeking to learn the secret of Loys' identity.

The hunting party arrives, led by the Duke of Courland and his daughter Bathilde, Albrecht's future bride, who are staying at Albrecht's castle.

#### **ACT II - GISELLE'S GRAVE IN THE FOREST**

As midnight sounds, Hilarion keeps vigil by Giselle's grave, which lies in unhallowed ground by a forest lake. This is the time when the Wilis materialize - ghosts of young girls who have been jilted and have died before their wedding day; now they avenge themselves by dancing to death any man whom they happen upon during the hours of darkness. Myrtha, their Queen, summons her Wilis; and next Giselle is called from her grave to be initiated into their rites. When Albrecht enters, bringing flowers for Giselle's tomb, Giselle appears to him. The Wilis pursue Hilarion, whom they drive to his death, and then fall vengefully upon Count Albrecht.

Myrtha condemns him to dance until he dies, and though Giselle urges him to the safety of the cross on her grave, Myrtha commands Giselle to dance and lure Albrecht from the cross. Giselle tries to sustain him, but as the night wears on, his dancing becomes more and more exhausted. Just as his death seems imminent, dawn breaks. Daylight destroys the Wilis' power and the ghostly dancers fade away; Giselle, too, melts away, leaving Albrecht sorrowing and alone.



#### DID YOU KNOW ...?

Act 2 of *Giselle* is a ballet blanc or "white" ballet in which all the ballerinas are dressed in white and the dances have a geometric design. Other white ballets include *Swan Lake* and the snowflake scene from *Nutcracker*.

### GISELLE

### Characters



#### GISELLE

A young peasant girl. Though shy and unworldly, Giselle draws the attention of Count Albrecht, who is mesmerized by her innocence, carefree spirit and vitality. It is important to remember that Giselle suffers from a weak heart and therefore cannot work in the fields with the other girls.



#### ALBRECHT

The Count of Silesia, Albrecht is a young nobleman who is destined to lead an aristocratic life. He is engaged to Bathilde, a noblewomen. But Albrecht is bored and restless with high society, so he assumes a disguise as the peasant Loys.



#### **BATHILDE**

Daughter of the Duke of Courland, fiancée to Albrecht. Bathilde meets Giselle in the first act when her hunting party takes refreshments in the village.



#### HILARION

A hunter of simple means, who is in love with Giselle. Hilarion is jealous and suspicious of Albrecht. He is determined to find out the true identity of the stranger.



#### **MYRTHA**

Queen of the Wilis who rules over the Wilis of the forest. The Wilis are ghosts of girls betrayed in love. They seek their revenge by casting spells on men who wander into the forest and make them dance to their deaths.

### **GISELLE & ALBRECHT**

The longevity of *Giselle* is credited not only to its historical value but to the universality of its tale - a story of love, class distinction, betrayal, remorse and forgiveness. Like *Romeo & Juliet*, *Giselle* is a story of lovers separated by the artificial barriers of society. For both dancers and audience members, the roles of Giselle and Albrecht prove a fascinating challenge, as they allow for multi-faceted psychological character development.

The role of Giselle is unique, from its costuming to the complexity of its character makeup. At the time of its creation in 1841, *Giselle* was one of the first ballets to introduce the female dancer in pointe shoes, a device that allowed her wider possibilities of movement. The result was that she seemed light, ethereal and otherworldly on stage. The introduction of calf-length, lightweight tulle dresses with tight bodices also allowed for greater freedom in leg movements and the appearance of softer, "romantic" arms.

The contrasting thematic concerns of *Giselle* also lent themselves to the Romantic fervour of the period. While many ballets dealt either with an idealized peasant life or the fantastic, *Giselle* incorporated both. The ballet is set in two locales, which are set off in sharp contrast. Act I takes place in the peasant village, which is contrasted with the moonlit forest glade of Act II. As well, the realism of Act I is contrasted with the fantasy elements of Act II. The first act incorporates bright and lively mime and musical leitmotifs that develop the drama. Before the end of Act I, Giselle's mad scene begins the transition to Act II, in which the demonic world of the wilis is represented as dark, somber and melancholic.

The character of Giselle also goes through a transformation, from light-hearted peasant girl to crazed woman and, finally, to a ghostly vision. Giselle is a challenge for ballerinas who must combine dramatic ability and technical brilliance to bring about a convincing performance in a role that is both physically and emotionally exhausting.

One of the most powerful scenes in the ballet is Giselle's death. Does she die of madness or of a broken heart? Or does she commit suicide when she thrusts Albrecht's sword toward her heart? Should the ballerina seem to thrust the sword into her heart or not? Since early documentation proves inconclusive on the subject, the scene has been dealt with in various ways by

### GISELLE

### Characters

#### **GISELLE & ALBRECHT CONTINUED**

dancers, producers and choreographers. The only clear fact is that Giselle is not buried in a graveyard but in the depths of a forest in unhallowed ground. Only a suicide would warrant such a burial. Peter Wright has said he believes Giselle kills herself, but in his own productions dancers have changed the scene to suit their own interpretations. In the late 1800's in Russia, during Marius Petipa's tenure as ballet master of the Imperial Theatre, suicide was not accepted on stage, so Giselle was invariably shown as dying from madness.

Theophile Gautier's original conception of the mad scene was written with poetic flair, but was rather vague as to what actually took place. Gautier wrote: "Her strength is soon exhausted, she staggers, sways, seizes the fatal sword brought by Hilarion and would have fallen on its point if Albrecht had not turned it aside with quickness born of despair. Alas, the precaution is in vain; the blow has struck home; her heart is pierced and Giselle dies; consoled at least by her lovers's grief and Bathilde's tender pity."

The role of Albrecht provides male dancers with one of ballet's most interesting and complex characters. Far removed from the porteurs of most classical works, who simply carry the ballerina, Albrecht is a fully rounded character capable of standing on his own and holding centre stage. He is also very much a modern man, which makes him very accessible for today's interpreters and audiences.

There is no right or wrong way to portray Albrecht. Because Albrecht is a nobleman in disguise, it might be assumed that he wishes to be freed from his elevated social position. It is also possible that he has grown alienated from his wealth and is seeking a more spiritual, simple and authentic existence. Or maybe he is a restless dreamer who seeks a quaint diversion among the peasants. Within the village setting, Albrecht meets a young girl, Giselle. In falling in love with Giselle is Albrecht a cad? Is he a thoughtless nobleman and idle flirt? Or is he truly in love with Giselle but simply naïve about the social implications of their liaison? Whether or not he is concerned with the consequences of his actions, he is nevertheless soon confronted with them.

Already engaged to be married, Albrecht is prevented by his duty to his aristocratic family to fulfill his love for Giselle. Giselle's madness and subsequent death not only awaken Albrecht's

moral sense, but also brings to the fore his emotions, primarily love and guilt. Through Giselle's love and forgiveness in Act II, Albrecht gains a new awareness, humility and a sense of responsibility. He is also made aware of the gulf between reality and his ideals, and his inability to merge the two. He must fight for his life in this act, at the mercy of the powerful wilis, whose supernatural powers compel him to dance to his death. This second act is for Albrecht both a dream of ideal love, in his sublime moments with Giselle, and a frightening nightmare, in his encounter with the wilis. Two aspects of sleep are revealed, following the Romantic's philosophy that the ideal is to be found only in dreams and art.

At the end of the ballet, Albrecht is left on stage, a solitary figure. Dancer's interpretations vary in these final moments, sometimes walking into the distance, away from the audience or toward it; sometimes carrying a lily, the only tangible link with Giselle, at other times allowing the flower to fall to the ground; others end the ballet reaching out for the illusive dream. In the original production, this scene was taken one step further, with Bathilde, Albrecht's betrothed, returning to his side. The audience would have concluded that although he had savoured his ideal (Giselle), he was reconciled to return to reality.



#### DID YOU KNOW ... ?

After 160 years it's still widely disputed if Giselle's cause of death was from madness causing a broken heart or committing suicide.



#### DID YOU KNOW ... ?

The origin of the word 'willies', meaning a feeling of creepiness or fear, comes from the German folklore of 'wilis' (pronounced wil –eez), spirits of jilted brides that haunt the forest at night.



### THE METHOD & THE MADNESS

Madness and death have long played well in art. both as themes and as devices. In the Romantic era, they often made the production.

As one of the greatest Romantic ballets, Giselle took madness and death to new heights of expression. Bedeviled by lost love for the duplicitous Albrecht, the shy young peasant woman of the title goes insane before the end of Act I. which closes with her death - either from the strain on her weakened heart or, more contentiously, by impaling herself on Albrecht's sword. In Act II the dead Giselle has a spectral half-life in the company of the wilis vampirish women who were denied their promised weddings in life and now rise from the depths at midnight to wreak their revenge on men by dancing victims to death.

With emotions writ large, Giselle is one of the most challenging roles for a ballerina. In the passage from exuberance to madness to death, the dancer must negotiate the transition from the corporeal to the spiritual, and furthermore keep melodrama at bay. Such were the challenges of the Romantic era.

United with such disparate 19th century figures as Ludwig van Beethoven and Alexandre Dumas, Romanticism eludes crisp definition. In essence, however, it has its font in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's essay, The Social Contract. Writing in the spirit of the French Revolution, Rousseau argues that the healthy response to materialism and greed is a return to nature - not as a location but as a state of mind that favours pastoral life, mythology and the supernatural to realism, and emotions over the intellect. One result of this was a nostalgia for the rural life, such as the Austrian village where Giselle takes place.

### **WOMEN AND ROMANTICISM**

Romanticism also promoted an outsize view of women that we understand today as the virgin/ temptress axis, with women representing either the ideal of heavenly purity or diabolical darkness. This dovetailed neatly with the fascination for fantastic worlds (and underworlds). At about the same time there was a growing interest in Europe with psychology and the exploration of uncommon states of mind. For artistic purposes, moreover, madness was the most convincing step between the real and the supernatural worlds.

Ballet brought those ideas to life. The art celebrated the idealism of the female form as ethereal, almost weightless, not of this world. The illusion was enhanced by the development of pointe shoes - Giselle was one of the first ballets in which the female dancer wore them and lighter costumes, and a new sophistication in lighting and staging techniques for enhanced stage effects, all of which helped introduce a fantastic sisterhood of witches. angels, sylphs, et al. The first significant Romantic ballet is The Dance of the Dead Nuns, from Giocomo Meyerbeer's 1831 opera, Robert le Diable, which takes place in a graveyard and is steeped in suitably occult airs. In La Sylphide, a tragic ballet that opened in Paris the following year, a Scottish nobleman falls in love with a female elf.

The rising ballerinas of the age found their own places in the Romantic template. Slight, pale and vestigial, Marie Tagliani was nicknamed "The Christian" for her angelic turns. At the other end of the purity scale there was Fanny Elssler, whose earthy, saucy work ensured plenty of pagan roles. In Carlotta Grisi, Giselle co-writer Théophile Gautier claimed to find the "perfect blend of both."

In Giselle, those ideas were crystallized. Gautier was taken by Heinrich Heine's 1835 novel, *De l'Allemagne*, with its story of the wilis. While drawn from Slavic lore and related to the roots of vampire mythology, these dancing women - graceful even in the afterlife, compelling in their mad need to dance to assuage their broken hearts - personify the Romantic image of the 'other' woman. (Such dramatic madness tends to be a female domain. Think of Medea in the original melodrama, or Ophelia and Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare. The hysterical stereotype has a strong parallel in Victorian times in Charles Dickens' Great Expectations, with the eerie Miss Havisham as the bride-to-be who was jilted before the altar.)

Richard Wagner was one who was taken by the first performance. Writing in Dresdner Abendzeitung, he enjoyed the "opportunity the wilis' sinister desire to dance offers for staging the most incredible pirouettes, the most wonderful leaps!"

The role of Giselle was written with the rising Grisi in mind (choreographer Jules Perrot was her favourite creative partner). Lithe and graceful, Grisi put her signature on the ghostly Giselle of Act II. Elssler was by far the more dramatic dancer, and when she took her turn at the role she emphasized the delirious Giselle of Act I. Elssler's command of the mad scene was so persuasive with audiences that Grisi eventually dropped the dead Giselle from her repertoire.

In making that role her own, Elssler may have instigated a major change to the book as well. Rumour holds that Elssler insisted on the removal of a closing scene in which Bathilde, Giselle's rival for Albrecht's affections, discovers her lover by Giselle's grave. With the deletion of that scene there was less chance that Albrecht would find happiness with another woman.



# MELANCHOLIA AND THE INFINITE SADNESS

Long before the advent of modern medicine and mental health care, mental illness was believed to be caused by 'humors' – semi-magical excretions of the organs which would cause unwanted moods. Amongst these was melancholia, a condition of profound despair from contemplating the tragedy of the human condition. This idea was 'romanticised' by artists of the Romantic era and appears pervasively in art and literature.

Tragically, one Giselle found life imitating art all too well. Ballerina Olga Spessitvtseva's dramatic understanding of Giselle's torment was inspired mightily by her own troubles. Shy by nature, disappointed repeatedly by men, she suffered increasing stretches of depression. In 1934, while dancing Giselle, she had one breakdown too many. With her career finished, Spessivtseva spent the rest of her days in an institution in New York.

Between today's deeper understanding of mental illnesses and an enduring, if ghoulish, fascination with troubled souls - witness the attention paid to Pink Floyd founder Syd Barrett or Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys, both of whom suffered most public meltdowns - the fascination with mental health issues persists. As a dramatic art form, however, it changed and faded as Romanticism gave way to more realistic modes of expression and a championing of physical technique over dramatics.



# MONSTERS OF THE ROMANTIC ERA

The Romantic period saw a surge of monster stories, many based in folklore, which arose out of anxiety over the Scientific Revolution and the breaking the natural order – think of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Other stories originated at this time, including John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), and *Grimms' Fairy Tales* by the Brothers Grimm (1812). These stories went on to influence modern and gothic authors like Bram Stoker and H.P Lovecraft.



#### DID YOU KNOW ... ?

*The Boy Who Wanted the Wilies* is a Brothers Grimm fairy tale in which a boy named Hans joins a circle of dancing skeletons.

## CLASSROOM Activities



The trouble with honesty – Hilarion is the 'villain,' but what would you do if you were in his shoes? Is Albrecht really a hero, or a selfish boy? Write character analysis comparing Hillarion and Albrecht.

Albrecht visits Giselle's grave on 'unhallowed ground.' What does this mean, and why do you think she was buried there, instead of in a graveyard?

Myths of evil female spirits abound in many cultures, often with common themes. Many stories tell of women who break cultural norms and are transformed, as a result, into monsters. Research female monster myths from around the world and consider what they say about the role of women. Here are a few to start with: witch, selkie, and banshee.

To understand *Giselle*, you should be familiar with terms related to the Romantic era. Research the terms below and discuss their meaning in relation to the ballet.

- Romanticism
- Melancholia
- Pastoral
- Realism
- Sublime
- Vanitas
- Hysteria
- Feudalism
- Rhineland

What was people's understanding of mental illness in Europe during this era? How did that inspire this story?



Love, betrayal, forgiveness - these ideas are found everywhere in music. Pick your own songs to make a sound track for Giselle.



Giselle makes for great drama. Pick your favourite scene and write it into a short screenplay. You can set your adaptation in the original time period, or another of your choosing. Who would you cast as each character?



Research art from the Romantic era - consider the colors, mood, and use of light. Then, draw or paint a self-portrait of yourself as a character in Giselle using the style of the period.

#### **GO DFFPFR**

Delve further into the passion and mystery of the Romantic era by exploring these works of art:

In the Hall of the Mountain King, Edvard Grieg (music)

The Ring, Wilhelm Richard Wagner (opera)

Der Erlkonig. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (poetry)

La Belle Dame Sans Merci, John Keats (poetry)

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus. Mary Shelley (novel)

The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters, and The Black Paintings, Francisco Goya (visual art)

The paintings of Caspar David Friedrich and John Mallord William Turner (visual art)

The Social Contract. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (philosophy)

