

# Queensland Ballet

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR LI CUNXIN



PRODUCTION NOTES FOR THE CLASSROOM



The Masters Series

# Production Notes for the Classroom

Queensland Ballet presents *The Masters Series* – a breathtaking triple bill from some of ballet’s best choreographers, who are true innovators of our art form. George Balanchine’s iconic *Serenade*, Jiří Kylián’s powerful *Soldier’s Mass* and Trey McIntyre’s intriguing new work create a collective of stunning works, revelling audiences



# Serenade

**Choreographer** George Balanchine

**Composer** Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

**Music** *Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op.48*

**Stager** Jerri Kumery

**Costume Design** Barbara Karinska

(Costumes courtesy of The Australian Ballet)

**Lighting** Ben Hughes,

based on an original design by Ronald Bates

## Synopsis

— *Serenade*, an ode to the female ballerina, is a ballet of beauty, elegance, yearning and freedom. Within four enrapturing musical movements of *Sonatina*, *Waltz*, *Russian Dance*, and *Elegy*, George Balanchine breathtakingly encapsulates the ballerina's labour, vulnerability, love and sacrifices. Alongside these themes, Balanchine wittily pays homage to three eminent Romantic Ballet heroines from ballets *Giselle* (1841), *Swan Lake* (1877) and *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890), rewriting their accounts of suffering to unapologetically transcend need for their betrothed.

## George Balanchine's Production

— *Serenade*, an iconic George Balanchine ballet is pivotal in capturing a moment of history in the development of modern ballet. Set to Tchaikovsky's rousing *Serenade for Strings in C Major, Opus 48*, it consists of four movements.

Opening the American Ballet School in 1933, Balanchine's first work, it artistically mirrors exercise sequences used in daily ballet class (to develop stage technique) whilst formation sizes notably reflect variable class attendance. Events such as a dancer falling over or arriving late to class are also cleverly integrated. Amendments over time include a mesmerizing pas de deux, three salient featured roles and a form consisting of four distinct sections. The final two musical movements of Tchaikovsky's original score are ingeniously reversed, creating a sense of vulnerability yet strength amongst the ballerinas as they walk towards an unknown fate.

## About George Balanchine (Choreographer)

— Born in 1904 in St Petersburg, Russia, George Balanchine (originally named Georgy Melitonovich Balanchivadze) proved himself accomplished in both music (graduating from the Petrograd Conservatoire) and ballet (studying at the Imperial School of Ballet and performing with numerous ballet companies) by the age of 17. As a member of the (Russian) State Ballet Company in 1920, he created his first work *La Nuit*. In 1923, he formed a short-lived company, *The Young Ballet*.

Whilst touring Western Europe with the Soviet State Dancers Ballet Company in 1924, Balanchine and his wife fled from the Russian regime and entered Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes as a choreographer and later Ballet Master. In 1928, Balanchine retired from performing due to suffering a major knee injury, focusing then on choreographing for countless European companies.

Moving to America, Balanchine co-founded the School of American Ballet (1933) with Lincoln Kirstein and Edward M.M. Warburg, in order to create a ballet school and company reflecting his technical proficiency and movement style. *Serenade* was the first ballet created for his school (performed at the Warburg estate on June 10, 1934). His later career included: choreographing for Hollywood musicals, founding short-lived companies and Ballet Master for the New York City Ballet. Balanchine's unique style, vision and technical influence on both the development of Modern Ballet and dance within America was vast. In 1983, Balanchine's career and life ended at the age of 79, a choreographer of over 400 works and an iconic man cemented in Ballet's history.

# Serenade

## Movement

— Reverently standing in two adjoined diamond formations, 17 women create a sense of strength and unity within their solitary poses. They stand with their feet together in parallel, statuesque as their lifted gaze follows their outstretched right hand as if to shield from the lunar light.

Anticipation builds until in unison, the women slowly begin a series of measured non-locomotor movements eventuating in the group moving around the stage as one metaphorical woman. Balanchine successfully uses this simple opening to mesmerise the audience, gaining momentum and to enthral through his vast use of subtle contrasts in tempo, symmetrical shapes and kaleidoscopic floor patterns throughout the remainder of the piece. Drawing upon Balanchine's well-developed musicality and real-life contextualised inspiration, he meritoriously utilises: dynamic movement; sloping arms; diagonal lines; effective canons; and cascading levels to elicit every facet of Tchaikovsky's score. Off-centre arabesque lunges, up-side down lifts, drags, falls, and loosened hair creatively evidence Balanchine's movement away from the constrained, set positioning of traditional ballet (also subtly referencing Aurora, Odette and Giselle's suffering) toward the development of Modern Ballet. Although few male dancers perform, Balanchine adeptly aims to symbolise these men in a way that magnifies the ballerina's trajectory, transcending their male counter-parts.

## Music

— Romantic period Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, wrote *Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op 48* in 1880, attempting to improve the common compositional structural issues prevalent within the previous century's European compositions. Tchaikovsky pragmatically educated composers through his four movements of: *Pezzo in forma di sonatina; Valse; Élégie; and Finale.*

Slowly introducing audiences into the piece through a glimmering, soft melody, then moving to a striking allegro of violins and violas, the first movement *Sonatina* impersonates Mozart's musicality and style. Continuing the theme throughout the piece, this 36 bar introduction is reiterated again finalising the end of the movement. Reminding audiences of the elegant atmosphere created, a variation of the initial 36 bars reappears in the coda of the final movement, drawing the entirety of *Serenade* to a close. Balanchine however, shrewdly disrupts this flow of continuity within his ballet by exchanging the fourth movement with the third, creating the illusion of seamless musical movement integration and then finishing the work on an uncertain tangent.

## Costume

— Originally quite transient due to Balanchine's continual revisions of *Serenade* and relative intents, the costume designs differed immensely with hats even being included in one season.

The most famed and still celebrated design, due to its simplicity and delicacy, is a light blue, romantic ballet tutu with a gossamer-like skirt that floats with each movement. No adornment on the hair, face or tutu allows for focus on both the choreography and natural beauty of the women. The men proudly wear royal purple, long-sleeved unitards with gold brocade adorning the neckline, asserting their privileged backgrounds (whether in reality or in story). Costumes are courtesy of the Australian Ballet.

## Set

— The staging for *Serenade* is stark with lighting being the only element of staging utilised.

A simplistic, blue wash of light covering the stage creates the diaphanous illusion of moonlight. This light is not allowed to seep into the wings, therefore alluding to mystery within their depths. In the final moments of the work, the lighting begins to fade toward darkness, signalling the finality of the dancers' path.





The Masters Series

# Soldier's Mass



**Choreographer** Jiří Kylián  
**Composer** Bohuslav Martinů: *Polní Mše* (1939)  
**Costume & Set Designer** Jiří Kylián  
**Lighting Designer** Kees Tjebbes  
**Assistant to the Choreographer** Roslyn Anderson  
**Technical Adaptation (Sets & Lights)** Joost Biegelaar

## Synopsis

— Jiří Kylián's *Soldier's Mass* explores the horrors of war through the eyes of young soldiers. Designed for male dancers only, it celebrates the youth and vitality of young men as they go off to war and face adversity as comrades in arms, supporting and buoying each other through the trials of war.

# Soldier's Mass

## About Jiří Kylián (Choreographer)

— World renowned choreographer Jiří Kylián (born in Prague, 1947) started his dance training when he was nine years old at the ballet school of the Prague National Theatre. From the age of 15 he studied at the Prague Conservatory and then, in 1967, he continued his training at the Royal Ballet School in London. It was here that he expanded his training to include contemporary dance as well as ballet.

One year later, John Cranko, a major choreographer of this period and director of the Stuttgart Ballet, offered him a dancer's contract and allowed him to begin creating his own dance works. His first work, *Paradox*, was created in 1970 whilst he was at the Stuttgart Ballet for a workshop to encourage young choreographers. Later, Cranko asked him to begin choreographing works for the main company. In 1973 — following a first choreography for Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT) — an artistic relationship developed between Kylián and the well-known Dutch company, bringing about the creation of almost 50 dance productions for this group.

NDT's audience subscription was in decline when Kylián first began working with the company. Kylián's *Sinfonietta* (choreographed to the music of compatriot Leos Janacek, performed internationally at the 1978 U.S. Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina) changed this. That same year Kylián was named as Artistic Director for NDT. The years after, established Kylián's reputation as one of the most ingenious choreographers with production of dance works including *Symphony of Psalms* (1978), *Forgotten Land* (1981), *Overgrown Path* (1980), *Svadebka* (1982), *Stamping Ground* (1983), and *l'Enfant et les sortilèges* (1984).

Kylián has created a unique and very personal choreographic style over the course of his career that blends elements from many sources. Fluent sculpture of movement is his overriding trademark. In 1999, Kylián retired as artistic director of NDT, working as a resident choreographer until the end of 2009. More than 40 companies across the world have staged Kylián's works, including Queensland Ballet.

## Movement

— While all of Jiří Kylián's works are very personal to him, *Soldier's Mass* truly stands alone as a tribute not only to soldiers across the world but also to male dancers whom Kylián feels are often “underprivileged in their position in the dance world”.

As a ballet for 12 men, performed in not a typical ballet style, this epic work really accentuates the strength of the male dancer showing off their technical ability and power. Through a stunning combination of fast moving formation changes that cover the entire stage space and unique pas de deus, Kylián presents the audience with a dramatic work that is highly respected in the world of contemporary ballet. His mix of folk, ethnic, ballet and modern dance, combined with elements of children's games and his distinct quality of movement makes his choreography incredibly difficult for dancers to perform but extraordinary to watch.

The piece begins in a typical Kylián pose with the 12 dancer's backs to the audience before the dancers begin moving en mass in canons covering the entire stage space, (a signature of Kylián's works). Break out duos and trios occur at rapid intervals throughout the piece as the dancers move in an ebb and flow between formations with smooth, effortless transitions that defy logic. His use of juxtaposition between Martha Graham styled floor-work and spectacular lifts in the breakout trios leave the audience wondering where to cast their eyes next.

The centre of Kylián's work is the stunning musicality that is involved in his incredibly difficult choreography. There are exceptional solos, both in the choreography and the music, where soulful baritone voices blend effortlessly with powerful, masculine movement. His fast-paced choreography is always unique in its interpretation of the music and this piece is no exception, with both the music and movement unambiguously protesting against war.

The lack of a narrative structure to this piece does not detract from its message about the ravages of war and the impact on young men. As the dancers sing with the recorded choir near the end of the piece, the audience cannot help but feel the intense feelings of those 12 men on stage as they call out for God's protection.

# Soldier's Mass

## Music

— Consisting of beautiful baritone solos, men's choral accompaniment and a small wind orchestra with harmonium, percussion and piano, the score *Soldatenmis* (or *Field Mass*) was written in 1939 in Prague by Bohuslav Martinů.

Set to the liturgical text of *Jiří Mucha*, written in the Czech language, this piece is a moving mass consisting of men asking for God's protection and calling for ultimate victory in war. It is no surprise that this piece, written on the eve of WWII, was created as a call for resistance to the Nazis to stop them from invading and occupying Czechoslovakia.

Although quiet, the opening of the work is quite powerful with the sounds of trumpets, drums and altar bells chiming connecting the themes of military, war and religion simultaneously. Military fanfares dominate much of the piece giving it an authentic context. The tolling of the funeral bell before the final prayer for salvation brings this piece to a breath-taking conclusion.

Containing an opulence that is unrivalled in his other works, it is no wonder that *Soldatenmis* is considered to be Martinů's masterpiece.

## Costume

— All 12 male dancers wear matching Khaki trousers with beige shirts and Khaki socks and shoes to represent the traditional uniform of a soldier.

The use of this simple costume assists in making the dancers as one, a faceless mass of young men joined by their common fears and angst.

## Set

— Consisting of a black cyc with a fluoro strip at the bottom lit with ultra violet light to represent the horizon, the simple set allows the audience to enter the bleak world of the battlefield at sunrise unrestricted by superfluous additions to the stage.

With such a dark set, colour washes have been added across the stage with side light to pick up and define the dancers movements. This use of light adds a bleak atmosphere to the piece as the sunrise disappears and reappears each day as life continues in the abyss of loss and desolation that is war.



# A New Work by Trey McIntyre

**Choreographer** Trey McIntyre  
**Composer** Jimmy Scott  
**Costume & Set Designer** Thomas Mika  
**Lighting Designer** Ben Hughes

## About Trey McIntyre (Choreographer)

— Born in 1969 in Wichita, Kansas, Trey McIntyre developed a love for ballet, training at North Carolina School of the Arts and Houston Ballet Academy. In 1989, he was appointed to a specifically created position for him, Choreographic Apprentice to Houston Ballet, rising to Choreographic Associate in 1995.

In 2005, McIntyre founded part-time touring company, Trey McIntyre Project, establishing itself as a full-time company in 2008 due to the popularity of McIntyre's intriguing concepts personified onstage. In 2014 McIntyre announced the closure of his company due to his desire to explore other art forms (specifically film and the visual arts) whilst remaining a freelance choreographer. During his career, McIntyre produced over 100 works, collaborating with companies such as Queensland Ballet, New York City Ballet, Stuttgart Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Smuin Ballet and San Francisco Ballet. Recipient of numerous awards such as a Choo San Goh Award for Choreography and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Society of Arts and Letters, McIntyre propelled Contemporary Ballet forward with each new production.

# Q&A with Thomas Mika

## Costume & Set Designer

### What is your creative process for designing costumes and/or sets for a new work?

It's always a different approach depending on the collaborators. In modern abstract choreographies sometimes it is a word of the choreographer which starts the design process, sometimes the music gives the initiation. When designing a story ballet of course the story is the main inspiration by setting the time, mood and character of the design.

### How would you describe your style of costume and set design? Are there particular themes, colours or textures that you regularly use?

In general I try not to use too many different textures within one ballet. That depends of course on the structure and movement of the choreography. I like to focus the audience's eye on the main subject of a ballet — the dancer and the emotion. Therefore, I like to reduce all unnecessary items taking that focus away.

### Have you worked with Trey McIntyre before?

No, this will be the first time.

### Can you describe the relationship between different creatives on a new work (ie choreographer, composer and designer)?

I like it within a creative team if the original idea of a piece is enriched by everyone's thoughts and feelings about the given subject. It's most satisfying to weave all these different threads together to a whole!

### What are the challenges and/or considerations when designing costumes for dancers?

The physicality of movements are the most challenging aspects in designing for dance. How to make a costume last is the main question, but that question should never define the design process. It is a question to be considered in the creation workshops.

### What is the timeframe/timeline for this production?

One year from the start of the design process.

### Can you explain how you portray different characters and/or portray a particular theme through the design or costumes and/or sets?

For this production, Trey didn't want to have individual costumes on stage. Only the idea of a sort of ballroom elegance is the main picture. The room is very abstract in that sense! I focused mainly on shaping the room into an infinite room to achieve space for the dance but as well space for the audience's thoughts to live in my set design.



# Queensland Ballet

For more information about how Queensland Ballet supports students and teachers, or to discuss ways to get involved with us, please contact:

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This Production Notes for the Classroom was developed in collaboration with Queensland Ballet's Education Ambassadors Leisa Cooper and Charlene Millmore.

