CLEVELAND BALLET

IN CONVERSATION WITH *ROMEO AND JULIET* CHOREOGRAPHER ROBERT WEISS AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TIMOUR BOURTASENKOV



Robert Weiss



Timour Bourtasenkov

ROMEO AND JULIET IS ONE OF THE MOST ICONIC BALLETS IN THE CLASSICAL REPERTOIRE. RICKY, WHAT WAS YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS AND INSPIRATION FOR CHOREOGRAPHING _ROMEO AND JULIET_? DOES YOUR INTERPRETATION DIFFER FROM OTHERS?

RW: "I really wanted to tell Shakespeare's story through the lens of Prokofiev's music. When creating ballets, the choreographer and the composer would work together to create themes for each character or each relationship. Of course, I couldn't go back and work with Prokofiev himself, but I thought about the different themes in the score - like the love theme - and heard how it's reintroduced throughout the ballet to let that guide the choreography. Let the music tell you what to do and how to 'say' it."

THIS BALLET IS NOT JUST ABOUT THE DANCE, IT'S STORYTELLING AT ITS FINEST. HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT THE EMOTIONS AND ICONIC STORY ARE TRANSLATED CLEARLY TO THE AUDIENCE?

RW: "Story ballets often involve quite a bit of mime work, but I've cut that out to let the dancing tell the story. We have some incredibly talented dancers, and they are more than capable of acting out the storyline. We'll stop rehearsal to ask 'why,' 'why are you doing this,' and 'what are you saying by doing this movement?'

We also use the text from the play in rehearsal. There are iconic moments we show that are directly from the text. Juliet, standing on her balcony saying 'Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?' through her motions, is just one example."

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TIMOUR, YOU WERE THE ORIGINATOR OF RICKY'S ROMEO, AND NOW AS THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR PRESENTING THIS BALLET, WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT BRINGING ROMEO AND JULIET TO CLEVELAND BALLET AND PLAYHOUSE SQUARE THIS SEASON?

TB: "Nostalgia, of course, and that this is a great production to be proud of. 'Romeo and Juliet' is a standard for ballet companies, but this show puts the choreography at the forefront. It's a difficult ballet, and I'm excited to see our dancers take on the challenge."

WHAT DO YOU HOPE OUR CLEVELAND AUDIENCES WILL TAKE AWAY FROM THE PERFORMANCE?

RW: "Of course, I hope they'll be moved by it! Even though the audience may be familiar with the story, I hope this adaptation makes them appreciate the story even more."

F YOU COULD EACH DESCRIBE THIS BALLET IN JUST THREE WORDS, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

RW: "Tragic, romantic, and exciting."
TB: "Drama, love, and death."